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THE WOOING OF THE DOORLEY

by

A.A. Azariah-Kribbs

In the days when cities were towns and towns were villages and villages were little farms, there was a farmer, Coinneach de Barra. His crops grew timely and rich, and his livestock were healthy and happy. For miles around and some, there was no farm like De Barra's. Folk would travel from miles to his door to buy butter, which tasted like the best butter a cow could give and a wife could churn.

Few grudged Coinneach de Barra his luck. He was generous and kind. But it was common knowledge that his plot of land, which was rough for a farm and not promising to look at, was blessed. Coinneach and his wife Mary always gave a pat of their best butter and bread to the Doorley.

The Doorley lived in a little house in the lea of a tree. The house was built for him by Coinneach and Mary. The day after they had met the Doorley at the forest's edge (and a black daunting forest it was, too), the farmer and his wife put their heads together and built him a little room. It was one room with a door.

"This is a home for me," said the Doorley.

Now the farmer made the fairy's help no secret. He and his wife were proud of him and fond as if he were their son. He was only just small and slender and handsome as any young man, with only a little strangeness in his eyes. On his shoulders folded a pair of beautiful raven wings that the farmer's wife brushed till the black feathers shone almost blue.

Talk of the Doorley spread. People began to want a Doorley for themselves. Many

schemes were hatched to catch the Doorley. Folk promised him riches and some would have taken him by force. But the Doorley's magic was quick. He laughed at the potions and charms meant to bind his magic, and cast an enchantment to make his home invisible. Because he was a little wicked, the Doorley liked to play mean but harmless tricks on neighbors and those who wandered too near him in the wood, confusing them with strange sights and sounds.

For all that, the Doorley's mischief at others' expense was not to last. For all that, *she* came.

She was a young woman in blue. Her name was Iona. She wore a belt around her waist with a leather pouch on it and carried a knobby, rude-looking stick over her shoulder. Her feet were bare and dusty. When she reached the Doorley's tree she didn't know it because of course, his house was invisible, but down she sat to rest in the soft green grass. The wind was cool and soothing and she fell asleep.

The Doorley saw her dirty feet and dress and for once, his mischievous heart was softened. When the birds sang he hushed them to let her sleep, and she woke to his hushing.

When she saw him she gasped. He was startled himself, and vanished before her eyes.

Iona picked up her stick and went on. She couldn't sleep after that. When she reached the farmer's house she bowed in greeting and after an introduction, offered the farmer and his wife a fine gold bracelet.

"Ah," said Mary, sadly, "you have come

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to buy our Doorley.”

“Not at all,” said Iona. “I’ve come to buy your farm. Perhaps he will not mind new tenants.”

“Perhaps not,” said Coinneach. “But perhaps you do not understand him. Over the years he has been our friend and like our own child. What will you do if he should follow us and leave you in this hard place?”

The young woman hung her head. All she had ever owned was in her pouch, and the golden bracelet was all her fortune. She remembered the poor parents and siblings she had left with a promise of better fortune. The farmer and his wife kept her to dinner, but she could not bear to stay the night.

The moon was high in the sky when she saw the Doorley standing by the road.

“You have something dear,” he said. “Let me see it.”

She reached in her pouch and took out the bracelet.

“Not that,” he said. “Something else.”

She looked at him in surprise. She reached again in her pouch and, hesitating, gave him a wooden toy.

“My little sister gave it to me,” she said. “She made it.”

The Doorley stood with the toy in his hands. His strange eyes took it in.

“Yes,” he said. “For this I will give you gold.”

Iona was tempted. But she shook her head.

The fairy returned the toy.

“Aye,” he said. “This is far more than silver or gold. Go to your loved ones and never leave them.”

Iona remembered what the farmer had said about the fairy being a son to them. In an instant, she thought she understood.

She returned to her house but could not forget the Doorley. That brief moment of understanding left her more lost than ever before.

“I know how to win the Doorley,” she said

to her parents at last. “I’m going back to try.”

This time Iona did not bring the bracelet or any gold. She brought her sister’s toy, her father’s fiddle, her mother’s *Old Book of Poetry*, and the family’s *Alphabetical Guide to Wisdom*.

The next day she stood in the place where she had slept in the woods. Iona still did not know that she was outside the Doorley’s house, but she remembered she had seen him there.

She sat down and read aloud from the *Old Book of Poetry*. It was not long after beginning that she realized she was not alone.

“What are you doing?” asked the Doorley.

“I’m reading,” she said. “Listen.”

And she read a tender poem written by one of the greatest poets who ever lived, about love.

The fairy laughed.

“Is that why you’re here?” he asked. “For love?”

His question made her turn a significant red. “Of course not,” she said. “I thought you might like it.”

“I don’t,” said the fairy. He looked past her to the dark green wood. It was early morning and the night crickets were still singing. “Listen,” he told her, “their music is more natural. It is their own. That is what I like.”

He turned to go.

Iona raised her father’s fiddle. The tune she struck was moving enough to make the fairy stop and listen. His strange eyes misted with dreaming and tenderness, and he sank on his knees in the grass, listening to her.

She stopped playing and he raised his head.

“Listen,” he said.

He snapped his thumb and finger, and there was a little harp. Bending to the instrument, he played. Iona forgot herself for the beauty of his song; by the finish she was crying like a baby.

“You see?” he said. “You and I are

appealing to the Spirit of Free Wind, and passion. It's a magic beyond either of us."

She leapt at his reply. "Do you want to know the wind?" she asked, opening *The Alphabetical Guide to Wisdom*. There were maps of water and wind currents, diagrams of the movement and names of the stars. Iona was so intent that she did not stop reading until the Doorley put his finger on her lips. To her surprise, he looked at her in pain.

"No more," he said. "I'd rather not know."

"Why not?"

"There is no wonder in it," he said.

"But there is." She moved closer to show him. "Have you ever seen anything like it?"

He followed her hand. His face softened.

"No," he said. "I haven't."

And before she could speak again, he was gone.

Iona was hurt. She did not know why he had left her. Now she felt foolish as well as sad, for thinking she had understood him when she hardly understood herself. She picked up her fiddle and books. She did not realize that the farmer, Coinneach, was watching.

"You came back," said the farmer.

His smile was kind. Iona hung her head in shame.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Don't be sorry," he replied. "I saw you both and you were wonderful."

"But he doesn't like me."

"How is that important?"

She looked at him with wide eyes.

"When you came here last," said the farmer, "you wanted the farm. Now it seems you will take our Doorley after all."

She started to shake her head. "No, I don't—"

"If he is willing," the farmer interrupted, "I see no harm in it. But what made you think of it? Fiddles? Poetry? Learning?"

Iona took out her sister's toy. She told the farmer what the Doorley had said to her. "He loves you," she said. "You are his as he is

yours—you are family. And he made me prove to myself, that there are things worth much more than wealth. Fiddles, poetry—they are poor men's bread, but my parents, my brothers and sisters, are rich as kings living and dreaming to them. Now he makes me think there are other things worth dreaming as well. Like—like crickets."

The farmer listened. "Come in and eat with us," he said. "I'd like to hear about the crickets."

The next day Iona sat outside the Doorley's house. She listened to the crickets. She watched the clouds showing white through the knobby green branches. She sang under her breath, an unrhymed song of ups and downs. And while she sang she realized she was not alone.

"Ah," said the Doorley. "Now that is your own."

She reached inside her pouch and held out her sister's rough toy. "Here," she said. "I want you to have it."

He looked surprised. "It is your sister's."

"It's mine," Iona replied. "My sister gave it to me. Now I'm giving it to you."

He took it, warm from her hands. "Why?" he asked. "Do you want gold?"

"Someone offered me gold for it," she said. "I didn't take it. Someone else told me that if I gave it up, I might get something better."

"Who told you that?"

"A hope."

The Doorley's strange eyes flickered. "What will you get for it?" he asked.

"I hope," said Iona, "that I will get a friend."

"You already have a friend," said the Doorley.

She hesitated. She reached for him. In the instant of reaching, he was leaning to her, and they kissed.

Iona and the Doorley pledged themselves one to the other. They returned to the farm and confessed their love to the farmer and his

wife. But when he saw old Coinneach and Mary's tears the Doorley could not bear to be parted from them. They and Iona could see his heart was breaking.

Mary threw up her hands.

"Who talks of parting?" she cried. "Are you mad? What would you do in the world, with wings? You're our Doorley and that's how you'll stay. Girl," she said to Iona, "send for your family. This house has been too quiet, and we could use hands and help. This

is how it will be if it will be.."

And so it was. Iona's mother, father, brothers and sisters, were taken in as family by that kind old couple. With willing help, the borders of the farm expanded and more space was made for pasture and living. They built new rooms to that one room in the wood, where the Doorleys lived in joy and gentle mischief, teaching music and the names of the stars to their own children, all the days of their lives

About This Publication

The Mythic Circle is a small annual literary magazine published by *The Mythopoeic Society*, which celebrates the work of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and other writers in the mythic tradition. (For more information about the Mythopoeic Society, contact Alicia Fox-Lenz, Communications and Social Media Manager, E-mail: correspondence@mythsoc.org)

Copies of the next issue, *Mythic Circle*, #39, scheduled to appear in the summer of 2017, can be pre-ordered through the Mythopoeic Society's website, < <http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle.htm>>. Back issues are available at < <http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/mythic-circle-history.htm> >. Any trouble with the website may be reported to Gwenyth Hood at <mythiccircle@mythsoc.org>.

The Mythic Circle exists primarily for the benefit of writers trying to develop their craft in the Mythopoeic tradition and publishes short fiction, poetry, and artwork (mostly illustrations of stories and poems.) We have, as yet, no hard and fast length limits, but we as a small publication, we must think very well of a story more than 5000 words long to publish it. Shorter stories have a better chance. By editorial policy we favor our subscribers.

Submissions and letters of comment should be sent to: Gwenyth Hood, English Department, Marshall University, Huntington WV 25701, or e-mailed to <mythiccircle@mythsoc.org>. Paper submissions should be double-spaced and should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope. E-mailed submissions are preferred. ---