

The Dagada's Sidhe  
by Brandon M. Dennis

We rarely flew back to Ireland to visit the folks, so that is why this trip was going to be so special. It was a few days before Thanksgiving; the trees were all bare and the ground was carpeted. Mom and dad loaded up all our luggage and then we drove to the airport. My brother Gordon was as excited as I had ever seen him. This would be his first time on a plane, and my second. We were flying in a rather large plane and mom was a little scared, but whenever she became too nervous or closed her eyes, my dad would reach out his arm and grasp her shoulders and comfort her as only he could.

I, however, was not scared; in fact I was almost as excited as Gordon, which was distressing to my mom. She thought I should be quiet and refined, but I was in no mood to wear a pink dress and drink tea from fine china. My dad just laughed when he saw me play or heard the things I said. I was his "little sparkler".

The plane ride was quick and painless (mainly because we all slept) and we arrived in Ireland without further ado. Dad went down and rented a car, and we helped him load all the luggage. It was a three-hour drive from the airport to reach our destination, which really isn't that bad, but when you are in a foreign land and are waiting excitedly to reach the road's end, the drive seems like an eternity.

Finally we arrived. The paved road had long ago turned into gravel one, and it slowly crept up a grassy hill. As the car climbed to the top, the shape of a large house swiftly came into view. It was about three stories high, but it was not square and it did not have sheer sides like many houses in the States. Rather, it seemed to be sprawled out all over the face of the hill, one level being this wide and another level being that wide. Some levels had porches and large windows and others were windowless. There were stairs connecting all levels with each other and stairs that connected the porches and earth with the sheds and attics. It looked like a labyrinth of lumber, somehow forged into an abode. An unpainted wooden fence surrounded the house and crowned the hill, and the gate was open, welcoming us.

As soon as we entered the gate, our relatives poured out of the house. I recognized my grandmother and grandfather and that was about it. They all ran up to the car and

fussed over us, covering my face with kisses and slapping my father on the back. A few strong lads came and took all our bags into the house in under a minute, and I found myself standing in the middle of a circle with Gordon, as my relatives observed us.

“Ah, and aren’t they quoinite the loveliest things ye ever did see?” cried a robust woman, my aunt, as I recall. She reached down and pinched my cheeks.

“I aint lovely nothin!” said Gordon, and the relatives all laughed.

“Why look at his stroang fraem, and his stoardy jawr! This lad will be quite the man, let me tell you!”

“And look at our fair couleen! She has the look of ‘er mother when she was that age, I can tell ya that.”

“Oh hush now you people!” said my grandmother from the porch. “You will bore them to death! Come inside and eat some of this food; I didn’t make it all for me!”

We followed everyone inside. The house wasn’t like anything I had ever seen. At the entrance I could look up and see the top of the third floor, for a stairwell wound about, up and up, to the very top. Strait ahead there was a long hallway with chambers and antechambers left and right. I saw stairwells leading down and stairwells leading up, and arches and entrances and elevated floors and sunken floors. It would take me a while to learn this place! But for the moment, Gordon and I just followed the crowd, and ended up in a fine, warm hall. There was a large fire burning away at the north end of the room and the walls were covered with pictures and paintings and tapestries and hangings. In the middle of the room was a long dining room table, and the family had all seated. There was a place for Gordon and myself, and we quickly sat down.

It was a jolly meal, and dad told the family of all his business ventures that he was working on and mom told them of a new project she was working on. She could make photo albums, very pretty ones, with a soft cushion cover and lace all around. She would sell them online, and had already doubled her profits in the last month. Then it was our turn, and Gordon and myself told the family what we were doing in school and how we liked it. They were all curious about whether I had a boyfriend or not, and I shook my head vehemently, and they laughed. Afterwards, I helped my aunt with the dishes and Gordon went out with his cousins to get firewood, and then we all returned to the living room to hear one of grandfather’s stories. The living room was larger than the dining

room and had many different seats of all kinds. Some were rugs and cushions on the floor near the fire, others were big easy chairs, some leather and some wool. Grandfather told us a story about three swans that, supposedly, still swam in a nearby lake. Long ago these swans had once been human, and were the children of a mighty king. But the wife of the king, who was not the mother of the children, did not want the kingship of the kingdom to fall to her stepchildren, so she tricked them into following her to the lake and promptly turned them all into swans, and they are still swans to this day. It was a good story, but soon everyone began to yawn, and we all promptly went to bed.

There is a problem when you feed a child and then expect her to be able to sleep immediately afterwards. It's impossible. I couldn't sleep a wink, and neither could Gordon. We were in a large strange house, far away from our homes, and we were still too excited to even think about sleep. So at about midnight when all the lights were out and I heard snoring from every room near me, I crawled out of my bed, put on my slippers and crept out of my room. My room was only one out of many, lining a long hallway. I did not know where they had placed Gordon and I hoped that I could find the right room. I crept by softly, trying to not let the old timbers below my feet make any sound. Soon I saw a dim light coming from under one of the doors at the end of the hallway. That must be Gordon's room.

I came to the door and slowly opened it. There was no one in the room. I let the door open all the way and stepped inside. The bed in the center of the room was empty. Two candles on either side of the bed were lit, and flickered suddenly. The door shut behind me and I spun around.

"Oh, its you!" said Gordon, looking at me relieved. "I saw the door creek open and I became frightened!"

"*You* frightened?" I said angrily. "Just look what you did to me! Slamming a door behind me... I almost died of fright!" He winked.

"That's my job, to be your tormentor and to always keep you on your toes. But what are you doing here?"

"I couldn't sleep. You?"

"No, I couldn't either. All I could think about were chambers and rooms. How about we go explore?" I was just about to suggest the same to him. We opened the door

and walked down the hallway. A flight of stairs led to the bottom floor and to the entryway where we had come in. From there we turned left and walked down a long hallway where there was little light, but at the end we found a study, or parlor. A large painting of some long forgotten man in a uniform adorned the northern wall. A desk was sitting on the floor right under it, as well as a thick leather chair. The walls were covered with tapestries, and we went to examine them.

“Look here!” said Gordon, walking over to a tapestry on the left wall. “This one looks rather new. Here is a horse, and a hill, and a barrow of some sort. And look! A star is fixed over the barrow, and it looks to be glowing!”

“Hah! I found a better one,” I said, looking at a tapestry on the right wall. “Look at this Gordon! This one looks rather old. It has a green hill, and a hole in the hill, and two shining men standing on either side. Look at their swords! A golden trail leads to the hole in the hill, and the clouds are parted above it. Isn’t it fantastic? And the men’s swords look so sharp...” I reached out and touched the swords that were woven into the fabric.

“Ouch!” I cried, recoiling from the tapestry.

“What is it Beth?” said Gordon as he rushed to my side.

I couldn’t believe it. I looked at my finger. It was cut! There was a gash in it and it was deep. I looked at the tapestry; the sword that I had touched had blood on it. And the owner was looking right at me.

“Well isn’t that queer,” said Gordon, but I was too afraid to be light hearted. Those eyes... they were not men’s eyes. They were royal and sad and sharp and fearsome. And they penetrated me. “I wonder,” said Gordon as he reached out his hand.

“No, don’t!” I said, but not in time. He touched the hole in the hill, and immediately we felt a rumbling beneath us.

“Gordon...” I said and I clutched my bleeding finger. The wall behind the tapestry slid away, and the tapestry rolled up on its own accord. Beyond was a gaping hole, and a stone stairway leading into the earth. The rumbling stopped.

“I think we should go now,” said Gordon, but I shook my head.

“No, we shouldn’t go now. Not after we have made such a discovery. Think about it! We will forever regret not climbing down these stairs if we turn back now.” Gordon

looked at me and nodded, and his jaw became firm. He was not about to seem weaker than his younger sister.

“All right then,” he said and he took my hand. “Down we go.”

The stairs were hard, cold and dusty. They seemed to have never been traveled before. As we went downwards, the sounds of our steps were muffled and all I could hear was my heavy breathing. Gordon’s hand was trembling as he clutched mine hard, but neither of us were quite ready to turn back now. On we walked, down and always down. The stairs never seemed to end. Now they started to turn, and seemed to spiral, and now they straightened up and led us down in a line. Soon a bluish glow appeared far below us, and as we crept closer we saw that it was a door, and a blue light was escaping from all its edges. We got to the bottom of the stairs and stopped.

“Well...” said Gordon, “I got the last one. You open it.”

“Me? But my finger is cut.”

“Oh fine then,” he said and he reached with a quivering hand for the wooden handle. With a grunt he pushed on the door and it swung open with a creak. Clouds of dust swirled violently and then settled to the floor in layers.

The chamber was cool and dank. The walls were all earth, as was the floor. Roots from trees and plants far above dangled from the ceiling. The room was circular and domed, and frost graced the walls. To the right and left were piles of gold and jewels, and other things that I could not rightly identify. I saw aged and corroded swords and armor and trays with stale or rotten food. More frightening were the many bones that littered the place, full skeletons of horses, still in riding gear. The blue light was coming from an elevated hole in the middle of the room, and slowly I felt my feet walking towards it. Gordon and I, still holding hands in fright, tiptoed over to the hole and leaned over.

“Well, look at that!” said a voice from inside the hole. I blinked, but could see nothing except a blue light. “Who might you children be?” said the voice.

“My name is Beth,” I said, and I was surprised to find that I was no longer shaking.

“I am Gordon!” said Gordon and he leaned closer to the hole. “But I can’t see who you are, for all I see is this bright blue light.”

“Ah! I’m sorry, let me bring the coals down,” said the voice, and suddenly the blue light disappeared and was replaced by warm firelight. Gordon and I were looking into a hole that led to yet another chamber far below. A smokeless fire was raging in a corner of the room, and many people were sitting around it. A man with a harp was standing nearby playing and singing, and everyone near were either singing along or clapping. There was a low table in front of the fire that had the remnants of a meal on it, and a few horses were standing lazily to the sides of the table. The room, as I soon learned, was enormous, for I was staring at only one wall and no matter which angle I chose I could not see the other three walls. Grass grew down there, short green turf, and the horses grazed as well as a few sheep and cattle that I could hear off in the distance, far below me and to the right. A face suddenly popped up from the hole and Gordon and I jumped back with a scream.

“No need to be frightened!” said a cheerful voice, coming from the face that had just emerged from the hole. It bore a striking resemblance to the sword-wielding man sewn into the tapestry we left behind. “You have entered the sidhe of Dagada, and we are very pleased to see you!” After we regained our composure, Gordon cocked his eyebrow at the grinning face.

“Sidhe?” he asked, and the Dagada nodded.

“Yes, my sidhe, or my home, rather. There are many sidhes all over Ireland, and you just so happened to bump into mine! What brings you two children down to my home?”

“Well... we were exploring an old house... up there,” I said, and I pointed up the stairs, “when we stumbled across this, er, sidhe of yours.” The Dagada looked at me surprised.

“There is a house built over my sidhe? How remarkable! But I guess that should be expected when you have been underground for a few thousand years. A house on my house!” He chuckled and shook his head. Just then a new round of music was loudly being played, and I caught shadows and movement from the other people below. They were dancing.

“Ah! The dance has started! Forgive me for being a hasty Dagada, but I must leave you be! I wouldn’t want my lady to dance alone. But no one can say that the

Dagada is a poor host! Here...” he said and he waved his hand. The room we were in suddenly lit up, and the horse bones were no longer bones but live horses, and the gold was no longer tarnished but it was polished, and the swords and armor were no longer rusty but new. “Take something from my treasure room, for this is the room you have stumbled upon first, and then go on your merry way. Take something please, as a gift from me, and be silent about it. No one can say that the Dagada is a poor host!”

With that, his head dropped back down into the merry room below, and Gordon and I explored the Dagada’s treasure room. Gordon chose a small, sheathed dagger, and I chose for myself a silver brooch with an emerald in the center. We examined each other’s things in awe, but then the warm light from below faded into a blue light, and the gold nearby became tarnished, and the swords and armor swiftly rusted, and the horses became bones again. We grew afraid and ran up the stairs with much clattering. When we got to the top, the wall behind us slid closed and the tapestry unrolled itself. The blood on the keen-eyed-man’s sword disappeared and my wound sealed.

“I think I am done with adventures for the night,” I said, and Gordon laughed.

“I do not blame you! And I think I can sleep now, although it might be a sleep fraught with many dreams. Back to our rooms we go! And do as the Dagada said – let us never speak of this to anyone.”

And we never did.