

# The Black Hole of Knockfierna



Once upon a time there lived a strapping young fellow out of Connaught named Carroll O'Daly, who was known in his own country as "Devil Daly."

Carroll O'Daly used to go roving about from one place to another, and the fear of nothing stopped him. He would as soon pass an old churchyard or a regular fairy ground, at any hour of the night, as go from one room into another, without ever making the sign of the cross, or saying "Good luck attend you, gentlemen."

It so happened that he was once journeying in the county of Limerick, towards "The Balbec of Ireland," the venerable town of Kilmallock. Just at the foot of Knockfierna he overtook a respectable-looking man jogging along upon

a white pony. The night was coming on, and they rode side by side for some time. Not much conversation passed between them further than saluting each other very kindly. At last, Carroll O'Daly asked his companion how far he was going.

"Not much further," said the farmer, for so he was dressed. "I'm only going to the top of this hill."

"And what might take you there," asked O'Daly, "at this time of night?"

"Why then," replied the farmer, "if you want to know, 'tis the Good People."

"The fairies, you mean," said O'Daly.

"Shhhh! quiet!" whispered his fellow traveler, "or you may be sorry for it," and he turned his pony off the road towards a little path that led up the side of the mountain. He wished Carroll O'Daly a good night and a safe journey.

"That fellow," thought Carroll, "is about no good tonight. I would swear my Bible oath that it is something else besides the fairies, or the Good People as he calls them, that is taking him up the mountain at this hour. The fairies!" he repeated. "Why would a strong man like him be going after little chaps like the fairies? To be sure, some say there are such things, and more say not. But I do know this—I wouldn't be afraid of a dozen fairies, or two dozen, for that matter, if they are no bigger than what I've heard."

Carroll O'Daly, while thinking of the Little People, had fixed his eyes steadfastly on the mountain, behind which the full moon was rising majestically. Upon an elevated point that appeared darkly against the moon's disk, he beheld the figure of a man leading a pony, and he had

no doubt it was that of the farmer with whom he had just parted company.

A sudden urge to follow him flashed across O'Daly's mind with the speed of lightning—both his courage and curiosity had been worked up by these mysterious fairies. And muttering "Here's after you, old boy," he jumped from his horse, tethered him to an old-thorn tree, and started up the trail!

He followed as best he could the direction taken by the man and the pony, sometimes guided by glimpses of them ahead. After climbing for nearly three hours along a rugged and sometimes swampy path, he came to a green glade on top of the mountain, where he saw the white pony grazing freely, as quietly as might be. O'Daly looked around for the rider, but he was nowhere to be seen.

However, nearby the pony he did discover an opening in the mountain like the mouth of a pit, and he remembered a tale about the "Poul-duve" or Black Hole of Knockfierna. According to the story, the Black Hole was the entrance to the fairy castle which was deep inside the mountain. The legend told of a man named Ahern, a land surveyor in that part of the country, who had once attempted to fathom its depth with a line, but had been drawn down into the hole and never heard from again!

"But," thought O'Daly, "these are old women's stories, and since I've come so far, I'll just knock at the castle door and see if the fairies are home."

No sooner said than done. And seizing a large stone bigger than his two hands, he flung it with all his strength down into the Poul-duve of Knockfierna. He heard it bounding and tumbling about from one rock to another with a terrible noise. He leaned his head over to try and

hear if it would reach the bottom, when what came flying out of the hole but the very same stone he had thrown in. It hurtled out of the hole with as much force as it had when falling down and gave O'Daly such a blow full in the face that it sent him rolling down the side of Knockfierna, head over heels, tumbling from one crag to another, falling much faster than he had climbed up.

In the morning Carroll O'Daly was found lying beside his horse. The bridge of his nose was badly broken (an injury that would disfigure him for life), his head was cut and bruised, and both his eyes were swollen closed and blackened.

Carroll O'Daly was never again bold in his rides alone at dusk near the haunts of the fairies, but small blame to him for that. And if ever he happened to be riding at night in a lonesome place, he would make the best of his way to the journey's end without asking questions or turning to the right or to the left, for fear of meeting once more the Good People, or any who kept company with them. ¶

# Conan mac Morna



**T**here was once a man called Conan mac Morna. He was big and bald and unwieldy in manly exercises, but his tongue was bitter and scurrilous. No brave deed was done that Conan the Bald did not mock and belittle. It is said that when he was stripped he showed down his back and buttocks a black sheep's fleece instead of a man's skin, and this is the way it came about.

One day when Conan was hunting in the forest along with other members of the Fianna, they came to a state-ly *dūn*, white-walled, with colored thatching on the roof. The men entered it to seek hospitality and found no one there—only a great, empty hall with pillars of cedar-wood and silken hangings like the hall of a wealthy lord. There

# Irish Lore and Legends

*Selected and Edited by*  
**S. M. W. Dunitz**



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