



"Fionn, Fionn, come quickly – there's someone to see you!"

Fionn groaned. He had just been enjoying an afternoon snooze and didn't feel like visitors. He stretched himself and yawned.

A foreign ship floated in the bay and along the beach strode a stranger. He was dark-skinned and handsome, with gorgeous clothes and a richly jewelled sword.

"Who are you and where do you come from?" asked Fionn.

"My name is Caol an Iarainn, Prince of Greece," the stranger replied, "though my name in Greek is a much finer one."

"And what is your business?" asked Fionn pleasantly.

"I have come to conquer your finest soldier," said the prince. "I will be king then, and all your people will pay me taxes."

Fionn laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," he said. "I've never met a man yet who could beat any of my soldiers."

"You're a fool to talk like that!" snapped Caol an Iarainn. "Not one of



you could defeat me. But I'll have mercy on you – if I lose, I'll return to Greece and that's the last you'll hear of me."

"It's a bargain!" declared Fionn. "Now what test of skill shall we decide on?"

"You may please yourself," replied the prince. "I am champion of Greece in fighting, wrestling and running."

"Let us settle on running," Fionn said. "Our best runner is at the High King's fort in Tara, but I'll fetch him here myself."

Fionn set off at once. He was not too worried about the cocky prince. After all, his best runner darted like an arrow ... He whistled merrily as he strode through the woods.

Suddenly he halted. Something rustled in the trees. What was it? A deer? A boar? Fionn waited. A tall, skinny man stepped out before him. His scruffy grey coat was spattered with dirt. Mud plastered the hem and sticking out from under it was a pair of enormous feet. Each shoe was the size of a boat, and at every step a slather of mud squelched around him.

Fionn was so surprised that he couldn't speak. But the man didn't seem to notice. "Good day to you, Fionn Mac Cumhail," he said cheerfully, "and how are you this beautiful autumn evening?"

"How do you know my name?" asked Fionn.

"Oh, everyone knows the great Fionn Mac Cumhail, leader of the Fianna," replied the creature.

"And who are you?" asked Fionn.

"I am someone and no one," replied the man. "I'm not much to look at but I can run like the wind."

"How strange!" cried Fionn, and he told the story of the prince from Greece.







The man looked serious.

"I know this fellow you speak of," he said, "and he's quite right – not even your best runner could beat him. But don't worry, I'll be your runner! Leave him to me. I'll give him a race to remember!"

Fionn looked doubtful. Could he really trust this man? He didn't even know his name, though Bodach seemed to suit him. People often used this name for someone clumsy and dirty.

Should he keep going on to Tara for his own man? He thought of the handsome prince with his haughty face and perfect clothes. Suddenly, he grinned.

"Right!" he said. "You shall run for the Fianna, though how you don't trip in those huge shoes is a mystery!"

They returned to the beach before the sun went down. Caol an Iarainn was waiting with his servants.

"Here is your rival," Fionn said.

Caol an Iarainn looked the Bodach up and down.

"I am a king's son!" he gasped. "Do you expect me to race against that ... that ... thing?"

All the Fianna burst out laughing.

"Nobody laughs at me!" he screeched. "I will race this fool tomorrow. Then you will be my slaves and I will have your kingdom!"



"Well," said the Bodach to the prince, "we'd better find shelter for the night. Will you help me build a hut to sleep in?"

"I will not!" snapped Caol an Iarainn. "My servants will hang a hammock for me in the woods."

"Very well," said the Bodach, "I will build one myself."

In no time at all, he had woven a hut together.

"Caol an Iarainn," he said then, "will you help me hunt for some food?"

"I will not!" snarled Caol an Iarainn. "My servants will feed me with the best meats."

"Very well," said the Bodach, "I will go hunting myself."

Soon he returned from the woods with a wild boar which he roasted over a fire. Then, folding his cloak about him, he curled up to sleep. So strong were his snores that the ground shook, and Caol an Iarainn spent the night falling out of his hammock.

Dawn came. The eastern light fell on Caol an Iarainn's face and woke him. He was cranky and tired after his disturbed night. He stepped across to the Bodach's hut to find him still sleeping. Not wishing to be called a cheat, Caol an Iarainn woke him.

"It's time for the race to begin," he said.

The Bodach rubbed his eyes.

"It's scarcely morning," he said, "and I'm not finished sleeping."





You go ahead – I'll catch up with you later." And, rolling over, he was soon snoring again.

'This man is a fool!' thought Caol an Iarainn to himself as he set off running.

An hour later, the Bodach awoke. He finished off the roast boar and, wrapping the bones in his coat, off he went.

In no time he had caught up with Caol an Iarainn. "You look tired already!" he called as he darted past. "Did you not sleep well? Never mind, here are some bones to chew on." And he threw them to the prince.

"I don't need your rubbish!" yelled Caol an Iarainn furiously. But the Bodach was already out of sight.

On went the Bodach through bog and forest. It was now almost midday and he was hot and thirsty. Away to the left swept a wild rough valley, knitted and knotted with bush and briar. Clusters of blackberries glistened in the sunlight. The Bodach halted and tore them off in





bunches. Then, leaning against a rock, he ate till he was satisfied.

Along came Caol an Iarainn.

"Your coat is torn!" he called as he hurried past. "There's a piece of it caught in some thorns beyond the last mountain!"

The Bodach looked down to see a large hole.

"So it is!" he said. "I must go back." And he turned around at once.

"What a fool that man is!" laughed the prince to himself as he galloped into the distance.

An hour passed before the Bodach found the missing piece of cloth. He sat down on a tree stump and sewed it back on. Then, lazily stretching himself, he set off on the race again.

He soon caught up with Caol an Iarainn.

"You'd better hurry!" he called cheekily as he trotted past.

Caol an Iarainn was raging. He forced himself to run even faster but the Bodach was already far ahead.



Evening came and the Bodach was hungry again. Eventually, he saw another clump of blackberries – bigger and juicier than he had ever eaten. He stuffed himself till his hands and face were dark with their juice. Taking off his coat, he filled it up with millions of blackberries – he could not bear to leave the remainder. Then, throwing the load over his shoulder, he set off again.

The sun was setting. It rippled in golden frills across the ocean. Fionn was getting restless. He sent out a scout to see if the runners were coming. The scout returned, breathless and frightened.

“I see a dark man approaching!” he gasped. “He’s still running and there’s a great grey bundle on his shoulder!”

“It’s Caol an Iarainn,” Fionn groaned. “Only he has such dark skin. He must have killed the Bodach and carries the dead body on his shoulder!”

The Fianna were filled with gloom. They had liked the cheerful, scruffy stranger. Now he was dead and all their kingdom was in the hands of a foreigner ...

At that moment the dark man trotted into the camp.

“Why are you all so sad?” he asked. “Give me a drink quickly and some meal to mix with these delicious blackberries.” And he threw his coat full of fruit on the floor.

How the Fianna laughed at the scout’s mistake! The Bodach was indeed as dark as the prince – from eating blackberries!

Seconds later Caol an Iarainn came storming in.

“You cheat!” he screamed, lunging forward with his sword.

In a flash, the Bodach snatched a ball of blackberry mash and flung it at the prince. The blow was so hard that Caol an Iarainn’s head was turned back to front. The Bodach picked him up by one leg and ran







outside. Then, leaning over the cliff, he dropped the king's son, head first into his ship.

"Caol an Iarainn!" he roared, "the Fianna will spare your life. But you must promise to send Fionn Mac Cumhail every penny of taxes collected in Greece from this day on!"

"I promise!" blubbered the prince.

Then the Bodach kicked Caol an Iarainn's ship with his enormous shoe – and sent it twenty leagues in one sweep!

Fionn and the Fianna clapped and cheered. But all of a sudden a mighty wind whirled around them. There was a clap of thunder and a swirling bubble of light. The Bodach was transformed! He was no longer a scruffy stranger but Manannán Mac Lir, the sea-god. He had come to help the Fianna in their hour of need.

With great joy they prepared a splendid feast. It went on for days and everyone ate three bowls each of the wonderful blackberries.

