

Fionn Mac Cumhail was very pleased with himself. He was taking a little gentle exercise – jumping over trees, diving from mountain-tops, smashing great stones with his bare hands.

“Ooooooh, Fionn!” giggled the women, “you’re wonderful, so strong and brave and handsome!”

Fionn swaggered and smiled.

“It’s nothing!” he said. “I just like to keep myself fit, that’s all.”

His wife, Bláithín, didn’t like it.

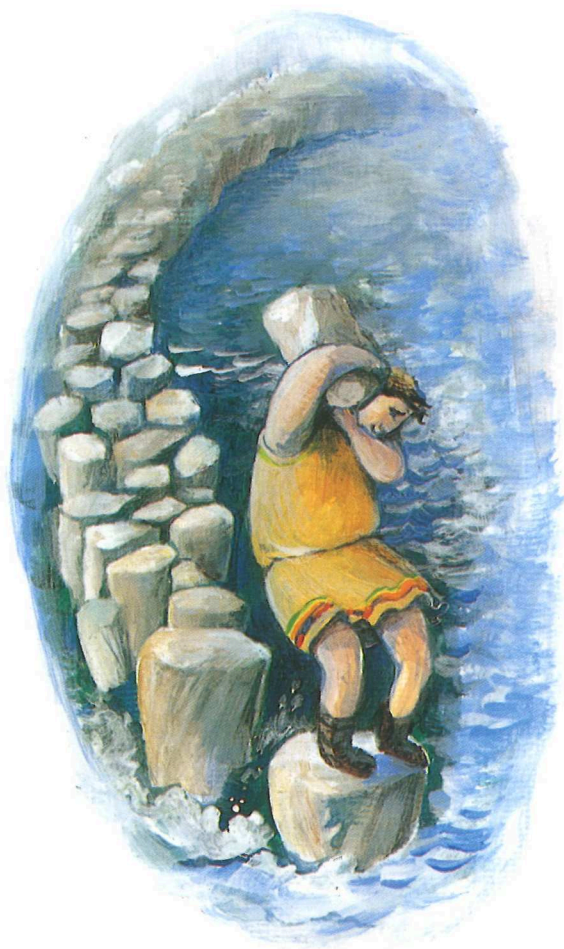
“You’re always bragging and boasting,” she said to him. “Some day it will land you in big trouble.”

Fionn laughed.

“Don’t be daft,” he said. “Don’t you know – I’m strong and brave and handsome! Now give me a kiss for I’m off to Antrim. Myself and the Fianna are building a bridge to Scotland. There are giants over there that I’m longing to conquer.”

Bláithín sighed, but kissed him tenderly.





Fionn was in cheerful mood as he set off for Antrim. It was a pleasant walk. Haws reddened the hedges, sunlight dappled the sleepy glens. He felt so happy that he could not help singing a little tune:

“Fol the dol day ro,  
only a fool  
would dare pick a fight  
with the bold Fionn Mac Cumhail!”

It sounded so good that he sang it over and over.

In no time at all, Fionn and the Fianna were in Antrim. They never stopped till the blue-green swish of the sea rolled restlessly before them.

Building the bridge was play to Fionn. He worked quickly and easily, splitting the stones into splendid pillars and columns. Further and further they stretched out into the ocean.

Now and again he thought of what the women said and wandered over to a rock pool to look at himself. Yes, it was true – he was strong and brave and handsome. Around him the Fianna were respectfully silent as he sang his song:

“Fol the dol day ro,  
only a fool  
would dare pick a fight  
with the bold Fionn Mac Cumhail!”





From time to time, there came a distant rumble.

"Is it thunder?" asked the Fianna, but they went on working. Then one of their spies came ashore, tired and gasping.

"I've just been to Scotland!" he said. "There's a huge giant there called Fathach Mór. He's doing long jumps in the Highlands – you can hear the thumping!"

"How big is he?" asked Fionn.

"His shadow stretched all across the Highlands," the spy replied.

'Hmmm,' thought Fionn, 'that big! Maybe this bridge is not such a good idea after all.'

But he could not admit that he was nervous so he kept on building.

A few days later, there came a distant whistling.

"Is it the wind?" asked the Fianna, but they kept on working.

Just then another spy came ashore, stuttering and trembling.

"You won't believe what I've seen!" he stammered. "It's the giant Fathach Mór – he has a magic little finger with the strength of ten men! He's in training for the long jump to Antrim – you can hear him whistling!"

Fionn's face paled.

"The strength of ten men!" he thought. "I'll never fight him. What will I do? He'll squash me into a pancake!"

But he could not admit that he was



nervous, so he said to the Fianna, "I've just had a message from Bláithín. I must go home at once – you can all take a holiday."

He set off by himself and never did a man travel faster through the glens of Antrim. There was no mention now of "Fol the dol day ro". He shook with fear at every footstep, thinking he heard a mighty breath behind him. But it was only the North Wind practising for the winter ...

Bláithín was surprised to see him.

"You're welcome!" she cried, kissing him. "And is the great causeway finished already?"

"No indeed," replied Fionn, "but I couldn't bear to leave you for so long."

Bláithín was delighted. She roasted a leg of venison in celebration – but Fionn didn't eat any. When night came, he kept sitting up in bed, listening.

He couldn't fool Bláithín.

"Fionn Mac Cumhail," she said, "I've known you for a long time. It was more than love for me that brought you home in such a hurry. Now, out with it! What's the matter?"

So Fionn told her.

"What will I do, Bláithín?" he asked. "There's the strength of ten men in his magic little finger. He'll squash me into a jelly!"

Bláithín laughed.

"Is that all that's troubling you?" she asked. "Just leave him to me – I'm well able for any man!"

She got out of bed and sat by the fire, twisting her plaits with her finger. At last she smiled.

"Get up, Fionn," she said. "Stoke up the fire and fetch me the sack of flour. Then go outside and find nine flat stones."





Fionn did as he was told, though she wouldn't reveal her plan.

She worked all night making ten oatcakes. In each she put a large flat stone, all except the last. This one she marked with her thumbprint.

It was dawn now and the house floated with the smell of baking. Bláithín turned to Fionn.

"Go and cut down some wood," she said. "You must make an enormous cradle."

Fionn worked all morning, smoothing and shaping. The cradle was just finished when there was a mighty rumble and the dishes shook on the dresser!

"It's him!" squealed Fionn.

"Don't worry!" said Bláithín. "Put on this bonnet. Now into the cradle and leave me to do the talking."

Fionn was scarcely ready when a knock outside set the house rattling. Bláithín opened the door, but all she could see was a pair of knees.



"Does Fionn Mac Cumhail live here?" boomed a great voice above her.

"He does," said Bláithín, "though he's away at the moment. He's gone to capture the giant, Fathach Mór."

"I'm Fathach Mór!" bellowed the giant. "I've been searching for Fionn everywhere and I've come to kill him."

Bláithín laughed. "Did you ever see Fionn?" she asked. "Sure you're only a baby compared with him! He'll be home shortly and you can see for yourself. But now that you're here, would you do me a favour?"

"What is it?" asked the giant.

"The wind is from the east today," said Bláithín, "and it's blowing straight in the door. Could you turn the house around – I forgot to ask Fionn."

"Certainly," said Fathach Mór, as he spun the house with his little finger.

Fionn gulped and Bláithín's plaits trembled, but she merely smiled.

"Thank you," she said. "Now I've one more thing to ask. The well has run dry and Fionn was supposed to lift up the mountain this morning. There's spring water underneath it. Do you think you could get me some?"

"Of course," shouted the giant as he scooped out a hole in the mountain, the size of a crater.

Fionn shook with fear in the cradle and even Bláithín turned pale. But she thanked the giant graciously and invited him in.

Stooping and grunting, he struggled through the door. The earth shook, mugs and platters clattered to the floor. Bláithín wiped a chair for him and set it by the table.

"Though you and Fionn are enemies, you are still a guest," she said. "Have some fresh bread." And she put the oatcakes before him.









Fathach Mór began to eat. Almost at once he gave a piercing yell and spat out two teeth.

"What kind of bread is this?" he screeched. "I've broken my teeth on it!"

"I'm sorry about that," Bláithín said. "Fionn always eats it!"

Hearing this, the giant took another bite.

"Blood and thunder!" he roared. "There's two more gone! Those cakes are as hard as stone!"

"How can you say such a thing?" asked Bláithín. "Even the child in the cradle eats them!" And she gave Fionn the cake with the thumbprint.

"Goo gaa gaa," gurgled Fionn, eating every crumb.

For the first time, Fathach Mór looked at the cradle.

"Whose child is that?" he asked in wonder.

"That's Fionn's son," said Bláithín.

The giant was silent for a moment.





"And how old is he?" he asked then.

"Just ten months," replied Bláithín. "He's a fine healthy lad. When he grows up, he'll be just like his dad."

"Can he talk?" asked the giant.

"Not yet, but you should hear him roar! Fionn can't bear to hear him. He'd kill anyone who upsets him."

At once, Fionn began to yell.

"Quick, quick!" cried Bláithín. "Let him suck your little finger. If Fionn comes home and hears him, he'll be in such a temper."

With an anxious glance at the door, the giant gave Fionn his finger to suck.

Crinch! Crunch! Snap! Fionn cracked his teeth through the bone and bit off the giant's magic little finger!

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHHH !!!!!!" screamed the giant as he slithered to the floor. Screeching and roaring, he bolted from the house.

Fionn leaped from the cradle in bib and bonnet and danced his Bláithín round the kitchen.



The Giant's Causeway was never finished. It stands there to this day, its huge stepping-stones stretching towards Scotland. And maybe Fathach Mór wanders there still, crying and moaning and screeching for his finger. But it's probably just the North Wind practising for the winter ...

