LEGENDS OF THE PHOOKA

Editor's Introduction

In the beginning of the 19th century, a man by the name of Thomas Crofton Croker set out to gather stories and understand the traditions of his home town. Croker was born in Cork Ireland in 1789. After his apprenticeship to a merchant, he developed a taste for anthropology. He wrote *Memoir of General Holt, Popular Songs of Ireland,* and other various tales. But it was Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* published in 1825 that made the biggest splash. Croker's 1844 edition of the book included forty stories with woodcuts by William Henry Brooke (as seen above). What you will find below is an adaption of three of these legends, as they are the only ones that depict the Pooka (or as Croker spells it, Phooka). I have added a few notes about modern adaptions as well as annotations for scholarly benefit.

The Pooka is known by many names, cultures, and spellings. At the heart of the tales, the Pooka is a devilish creature. But as the story has evolved through many a re-telling the Pooka has come to not only incite horror; but delusion, mischief, fun, and companionship. A well-known

rendition of Pooka in Mary Chase's *Harvey* depicts the spirit as a giant rabbit. Only some can see this creature named Harvey, and he's a friend to those who are kind towards him, but mischievous against those who want to cause him harm. Since 1844, The Pooka has appeared in the 1959 Disney film *Darby O'Gill and the Little People,* multiple fantasy novels including *The Spiderwick Chronicles,* numerous movies, TV shows, video games, and even a hurling club (the Irish equivalent of cricket) in Pennsylvania named the Pittsburgh Pucas.

The following legends are told simply by the Irish peasantry. They have been passed down from generation to generation until they have reached you today. While not modern, any story descended by word of mouth will contain adaptions and changes. Traditionally, the Pooka is associated with the Irish. However, the exact origins of the story are impossible to trace, as it is hard to say which people passed down the story, and what culture or country these people came from. Croker's retelling of these stories in his *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* was a sensation and likely led to much of the Pooka's appearance in culture today. As you read these legends, you will see that the traditionally devilish Pooka takes the form of a horse, an eagle, and in the last legend, a creature with hooves.

While these stories can shed some light on Irish and Celtic culture, these Fairy Tales are not a history. Legends such as these come from storytellers that provide humor and credulity to the ordinary and mundane. I invite readers everywhere not just to note historical annotations, but to get lost in the magic, fright, and intrigue of "the Phooka."

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A Note from T. Crofton Croker

[The following note Croker placed at the end of his three Pooka stories. He gives a short explanation of the Pooka, and references other authors that call back to this devilish spirit pre-1844. — EMJ]

The Pouke or Phooka, as the word is pronounced, means, in plain terms, the Evil One. "Playing the puck," a common Anglo-Irish phrase, is equivalent to "playing the devil." Much learning has been displayed in tracing this word through various languages. Commentators on Shakespeare derive the beautiful and frolicksome Puck of the Midsummer Night's Dream from the mischievous Pouke. — *Vide* Drayton's *Nymphidia*.[1]

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[1] Michael Drayton was an English poet who came to prominence in the Elizabethan era. *Englands Heroicall Epistles,* written in imitation of the style of Ovid's Epistles, were his most popular work. J.R.R. Tolkien provided commentary on his *Nymphidia*. "Drayton's *Nymphidia* is

This Puck seems but a dreaming dolt,
Still walking like a ragged colt,

In Golding's[2] translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*[3] (1587) we find, "and the countrie where Chgmæra, that same Pooke, Hath goatish bodie,"

> The Irish Phooka, in its nature, perfectly resembles the *Mahr*; and we have only to observe, that there is a particular German tradition of a spirit, which sits among reeds and alder bushes; and which, like the Phooka, leaps upon the back of those who pass by in the night, and does not leave them till they faint and fall to the earth.
> — THE BROTHERS GRIMM.[4]

LEGENDS OF THE PHOOKA

Ne let house-fires, nor lightnings' helpless harms,
Ne let the *Pouke*, nor other evil spright,
Ne let mischievous witches with their charms,
Ne let hobgoblins, names whose sense we see not,
Fray us with things that be not.

SPENSER

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considered as a fairy-story one of the worst ever written. The palace of Oberon has walls of spider's legs…The knight Pigwiggen rides on a frisky earwig, and sends his love, Queen Mab, a bracelet of emmets' eyes, making an assignation in a cowslip-flower. But the tale that is told amid all this prettiness is a dull story of intruge and sly go-betweens."

[2] Arthur Golding, born in 1536, was an English translator of more than 30 works from Latin into English.

[3] Publius Ovidius Naso, known as Ovid, was a Roman poet who lived during the reign of Augustus. He is often ranked as one of the three canonical poets of Latin literature, with Virgil and Horace. His *Metamorphoses* is an 8 AD Latin poem, comprising over 250 myths. It is one of the most influential works in Western culture, inspiring many authors.

[4] The Brothers Grimm are among the best-known storytellers of folk tales. This definition of the Phooka could have come from their German dictionary, a whole 32 volumes, completed in 1960. Crokers *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* was translated into German by the Brothers Grimm in 1826.

[Edmund Spenser was an English poet born in 1552. He is best known for *The Faerie Queene,* an epic poem celebrating Elizabeth I. Spenser's poem was so great he chartered a new style of poetry; the Spenserian stanza. Each stanza contains nine lines in total: eight lines in iambic pentameter followed by a single alexandrine line in iambic hexameter. The excerpt above is taken from Spenser's poem *Epithalamion,* an ode written to his bride Elizabeth Boyle on their wedding day in 1594. — EMJ]

THE SPIRIT HORSE.

[This first story is an account of Morty Sullivan's run in with a Pooka. As Morty seeks atonement for his sins, he becomes lost and discovers a frightening old woman. The woman eventually summons a jet-black steed, the Pooka, for Morty to ride. This story depicts the eminence of Roman Catholicism in Southern Ireland, the tradition of the O'Sullivan name, and of course, the strength of whisky. — EMJ]

The history of Morty Sullivan ought to be a warning to all young men to stay at home, and to live decently and soberly if they can, and not to go roving about the world. Morty, when he had just turned of fourteen, ran away from his father and mother, who were a mighty respectable old couple, and many and many a tear they shed on his account. It is said they both died heart-broken for his loss: all they ever learned about him was that he went on board of a ship bound to America.

Thirty years after the old couple had been laid peacefully in their graves, there came a stranger to Beerhaven[5] inquiring after them — it was their son Morty; and, to speak the truth of him, his heart did seem full of sorrow when he heard that his parents were dead and gone; — but what else could he expect to hear? Repentance generally comes when it is too late.

Morty Sullivan, however, as an atonement for his sins, was recommended to perform a pilgrimage to the blessed chapel of Saint Gobnate,[6] which is in a wild place called Ballyvourney.[7]

This he readily undertook: and willing to lose no time, commenced his journey the same afternoon. He had not proceeded many miles before the evening came on: there was no moon, and the star-light was obscured by a thick fog, which ascended from the valleys. His way was

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[5] Castletown-Bearhaven is a town on the coast of Southern Ireland today in County Cork. Remnants of headstones in churchyards for James O'Sullevan in the Irish city of Waterford denote there was once an "ancient race of Beerhaven."

[6] Pilgrimage was at the heart of the medieval Celtic church. This was considered not only as a journey to a shrine, but more broadly as a spiritual journey.

[7] Saint Gobnate or Gobnait is the name of a medieval, female Irish saint whose church was later in the village of Ballyvourney (Irish: Baile Bhuirne, meaning "town of the beloved"), County Cork in Ireland.

through a mountainous country, with many cross-paths and by-ways, so that it was difficult for a stranger like Morty to travel without a guide. He was anxious to reach his destination, and exerted himself to do so; but the fog grew thicker and thicker, and at last he became doubtful if the track he was in led to the blessed chapel of Saint Gobnate. But seeing a light which he imagined not to be far off, he went towards it, and when he thought himself close to it, the light suddenly seemed at a great distance, twinkling dimly through the fog. Though Morty felt some surprise at this, he was not disheartened, for he thought that it was a light sent by the holy Saint Gobnate to guide his feet through the mountains to her chapel.

And thus did he travel for many a mile, continually, as he believed, approaching the light, which would suddenly start off to a great distance. At length he came so close as to perceive that the light came from a fire: seated beside which he plainly saw an old woman; — indeed, his faith was a little shaken, and much did he wonder that both the fire and the old woman should travel before him, so many weary miles, and over such uneven roads.

"In the holy names of the pious Gobnate, and of her preceptor[8] Saint Abban,"[9] said Morty, "how can that burning fire move on so fast before me, and who can that old woman be sitting beside the moving fire?"

These words had no sooner passed Morty's lips than he found himself, without taking another step, close to this wonderful fire, beside which the old woman was sitting munching her supper. With every wag of the old woman's jaw her eyes would roll fiercely upon Morty, as if she was angry at being disturbed; and he saw with more astonishment than ever that her eyes were neither black, nor blue, nor gray, nor hazel, like the human eye, but of a wild red color, like the eye of a ferret. If before he wondered at the fire, much greater was his wonder at the old woman's appearance; and stout-hearted as he was, he could not but look upon her with fear — judging, and judging rightly, that it was for no good purpose her supping in so unfrequented a place, and at so late an hour, for it was near midnight. She said not one word, but munched and munched away, while Morty looked at her in silence.

"What's your name?" at last demanded the old hag, a sulphurous puff coming out of her mouth, her nostrils distending, and her eyes growing redder than ever, when she had finished her question.

Mustering[10] up all his courage, "Morty Sullivan," replied he "at your service;" meaning the latter words only in civility.

"*Ubbubbo*!" said the old woman, "we'll soon see that;" and the red fire of her eyes turned a pale green color. Bold and fearless as Morty was, yet much did he tremble at hearing this

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[8] A preceptor was historically in charge of a preceptory, the headquarters of an orders of knights, such as the Knights Hospitaller or the Knights Templar. In this instance however, this preceptor likely means teacher. A preceptor is also a teacher responsible for upholding a precept, a certain law or tradition.

[9] Saint Abban is the alleged brother of Saint Gobnate.

[10] Original text read *Plucking.*

dreadful exclamation:[11] he would have fallen down on his knees and prayed to Saint Gobnate, or any other saint, for he was not particular; but he was so petrified with horror, that he could not move in the slightest way, much less go down on his knees.

"Take hold of my hand, Morty," said the old woman: "I'll give you a horse to ride that will soon carry you to your journey's end." So saying, she led the way, the fire going before them; — it is beyond mortal knowledge to say how, but on it went, shooting out bright tongues of flame, and flickering fiercely.

Presently they came to a natural cavern in the side of the mountain, and the old hag called aloud in a most discordant voice for her horse! In a moment a jet-black steed started from its gloomy stable, the rocky floor whereof rang with a sepulchral echo to the clanging hoofs.

"Mount, Morty, mount!" cried she, seizing him with supernatural strength, and forcing him upon the back of the horse. Morty finding human power of no avail, muttered, "O that I had spurs!" and tried to grasp the horse's mane; but he caught at a shadow; it nevertheless bore him up and bounded forward with him, now springing down a fearful precipice, now clearing the rugged bed of a torrent, and rushing like the dark midnight storm through the mountains.

The following morning Morty Sullivan was discovered by some pilgrims (who came that way after taking their rounds at Gougane Barra)[12] lying on the flat of his back, under a steep cliff, down which he had been flung by the Phooka. Morty was severely bruised by the fall, and he is said to have sworn on the spot, by the hand of O'Sullivan[13] (and that is no small oath), never again to take a full quart bottle of whisky with him on a pilgrimage.

Nulla manus,
Tam liberalis
Atque generalis
Atque universalis
Quam Sullivanis.[14]

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[11] As Morty had offered her his service, he was likely afraid of how the woman would put him to use.

[12] A church in County Cork, Ireland.

[13] Could be reference to James O'Sullevan and this "ancient race of Beerhaven." The O'Sullevan name is filled with tradition in ancient Ireland. Modestia Victrix, meaning victory through moderation, is the O'Sullevan family motto.

[14] Latin: "There is no hand so generous, and general, and universal, than a Sullivans." Sullivans were known to be recklessly hospitable.

DANIEL O'ROURKE.

[This second story is a comical, frightful, adventure. Daniel O'Rourke drinks too much and travels through bogs, on the wings of an eagle (or pooka), and eventually gets kicked off the moon by the man who lives in it. He finally sees a way home as a flock of geese fly by, but falls to the bottom of the sea. The story opens with T. Crompton Croker's introduction. As the text denotes, Croker knew Daniel O'Rourke and had the story told to him on Jun 25th, 1813. — EMJ]

People may have heard of the renowned adventures of Daniel O'Rourke, but how few are there who know that the cause of all his perils, above and below, was neither more nor less than his having slept under the walls of the Phooka's tower![15] I knew the man well; he lived at the bottom of Hungry Hill, just at the right hand side of the road as you go towards Bantry. An old man was he at the time that he told me the story, with gray hair, and a red nose; and it was on the 25th of June, 1813, that I heard it from his own lips, as he sat smoking his pipe under the old

[15] There is not much written about where or what this tower might be. In Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Ultor De Lacy: A Legend of Cappercullen* (1861), the children in the book see a Pooka's tower. However, Croker offers no further insight on what this might be.

poplar tree, on as fine an evening as ever shone from the sky. I was going to visit the caves in Dursey Island,[16] having spent the morning at Glengariff.[17]

"I am often *axed*[18] [asked] to tell it, sir," said he, "so that this is not the first time. The master's son, you see, had come from beyond foreign parts in France and Spain, as young gentlemen used to go, before Bonaparte or any such was heard of;[19] and sure enough there was a dinner given to all the people on the ground, gentle and simple, high and low, rich and poor. The *ould* [old] gentlemen were the gentlemen, after all, saving your honor's presence. They'd swear at a body a little, to be sure, and may be, give one a cut of a whip now and then, but we were no losers by it in the end; — and they were so easy and civil, and kept such rattling houses, and thousands of welcomes; — and there was no grinding for rent, and few agents; and there was hardly a tenant on the estate that did not taste of his landlord's bounty often and often in the year; — but now it's another thing: no matter for that, sir; for I'd better be telling you my story.

"Well, we had every thing of the best, and plenty of it; and we ate, and we drank, and we danced, and the young master by the same token danced with Peggy Barry, from the Bohereen— a lovely young couple they were, though they are both low enough now. To make a long story short, I got, as a body may say, the same thing as tipsy almost; for I can't remember ever at all, no ways, how it was I left the place: only I did leave it, that's certain. Well, I thought, for all that, in myself, I'd just step to Molly Cronohan's, the fairy woman, to speak a word about the bracket[20] heifer that was bewitched; and so as I was crossing the stepping-stones of the ford of Ballyasheenough, and was looking up at the stars and blessing myself — for why? it was Lady-day[21]— I missed my foot, and souse[22] I fell into the water. 'Death alive!' thought I, I'll be

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[16] Almost a peninsula, Dursey Island is separated from the mainland by about 884 feet of ocean. Most people go to the island to bird watch. Dursey Island is in County Cork.
[17] Glengarriff is also in County Cork, though it is about 30 miles up the coast from Dursey Island, North East.
[18] The Italics, consistent with Croker's 1844 edition of the book, emphasize the pronunciations of the story-teller. The brackets following the words contain the modern reading.
[19] This refers to the Grand Tour that upper class young European men would undertake. It served as an educational rite of passage, as the young men would glean important information in their travels across Europe.
[20] In the 1800s among workers in timber, a bracket was an angular wooden stay in form of the knee bent, to support shelves and scaffolds. Its Hebrew origin signifies the knee, or bend at the knee. It's not clear what this has to do with a bewitched heifer.
[21] Lady-day commemorates the visit of the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, during which he informed her that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. From 1155 to 1752, Lady-day was New Year's Day (with the new year beginning on 25 March) in England, Wales, and Ireland. In Ireland specifically however, Lady's Day means 15 of August, the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, and is a day when fairs are celebrated in many towns.
[22] This word has two possible meanings. Souse means to soak or drench in liquid; to pickle. It is also a term for a drunkard.

drowned now!' However, I began swimming, swimming, swimming away for the dear life, till at last I got ashore, somehow or other, but never the one of me can tell how, upon a *dissolute* [desolate] island.

"I wandered and wandered about there, without knowing where I wandered, until at last I got into a big bog. The moon was shining as bright as day, or your fair lady's eyes, sir, (with your pardon for mentioning her,) and I looked east and west, and north and south, and every way, and nothing did I see but bog, bog, bog; — I could never find out how I got into it; and my heart grew cold with fear, for sure and certain I was that it would be my *berrin* [burying] place. So I sat down upon a stone which, as good luck would have it, was close by me, and I began to scratch my head and sing the *Ullagone*[23] — when all of a sudden the moon grew black, and I looked up, and saw something for all the world as if it was moving down between me and it, and I could not tell what it was. Down it came with a pounce, and looked at me full in the face; and what was it but an eagle? as fine a one as ever flew from the kingdom of Kerry.

"So he looked at me in the face, and says he to me, Daniel O'Rourke,' says he, 'how do you do?' 'Very well, I thank you, sir,' says I: I hope you're well;' wondering out of my senses all the time how an eagle came to speak like a Christian. 'What brings you here, Dan?' says he. Nothing at all, sir,' says I: 'only I wish I was safe home again.' 'Is it out of the Island you want to go, Dan?' says he. 'Tis, sir,' says I: so I up and told him how I had taken a drop too much and fell into the water; how I swam to the Island; and how I got into the bog, and did not know my way out of it. 'Dan,' says he, after a minute's thought, 'though it is very improper for you to get drunk on Lady-day, yet as you are a decent sober man, who 'tends mass well, and never flings stones at me nor mine, nor cries out after us in the fields — my life for yours,' says he; 'so get up on my back, and grip me well for fear you'd fall off, and I'll fly you out of the bog.' 'I am afraid,' says I, 'your honor's making game of me; for who ever heard of riding a horseback on an eagle before?' 'Pon the honor of a gentleman,' says he, putting his right foot on his breast, 'I am quite in earnest; and so now either take my offer or starve in the bog-besides, I see that your weight is sinking the stone.'

"It was true enough as he said, for I found the stone every minute going from under me. I had no choice; so thinks I to myself, faint heart never won fair lady, and this is fair persuadance: [persuasion]— 'I thank your honor,' says I, 'for the loan of your civility; and I'll take your kind offer.' I therefore mounted upon the back of the eagle, and held him tight enough by the throat, and up he flew in the air like a lark. Little I knew the trick he was going to serve me. Up-up-up-I know not how far up he flew.

"Why, then,' said I to him, — thinking he did not know the right road home— very civilly, because why? – I was in his power entirely; 'sir,' says I, 'please your honor's glory, and with humble submission to your better judgment, if you'd fly down a bit, you're now just over my cabin, and I could put down there, and many thanks to your worship.'

"'*Arrah*, Dan,' said he, 'do you think me a fool? Look down in the next field, and don't you see two men and a gun? By my word it would be no joke to be shot this way, to oblige a

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[23] Irish: a cry of sorrow: dirge.

drunken blackguard that I picked up off of a *could* [cold] stone in a bog.' 'Bother you,' said I to myself, but I did not speak out, for where was the use? Well, sir, up he kept, flying, flying, and I asking him every minute to fly down, and all to no use. 'Where in the world are you going, sir?' says I to him. 'Hold your tongue, Dan,' says he: 'mind your own business, and don't be interfering with the business of other people.' 'Faith, this is my business, I think,' says I. 'Be quiet, Dan,' says he: so I said no more.

"At last, where should we come to, but to the moon itself. Now you can't see it from this, but there is, or there was in my time, a reaping-hook sticking out of the side of the moon, this way, (drawing the figure thus a on the ground with the end of his stick.) "Dan,' said the eagle, 'I'm tired with this long fly; I had no notion 'twas so far.' 'And my lord, sir,' said I, 'who in the world *axed* [asked] you to fly so far— was it I? did not I beg, and pray, and beseech you to stop half an hour ago?' 'There's no use talking, Dan,' said he; 'I'm tired bad enough, so you must get off, and sit down on the moon until I rest myself.' 'Is it sit down on the moon?' said I; 'is it upon that little round thing, then? why, then, sure I'd fall off in a minute, and be kilt and split, and smashed all to bits: you are a vile deceiver, so you are.' 'Not at all, Dan,' said he: 'you can catch fast hold of the reaping hook that's sticking out of the side of the moon, and 'twill keep you up.' 'I won't, then,' said I. 'May be not,' said he, quite quiet. 'If you don't, my man, I shall just give you a shake, and one slap of my wing, and send you down to the ground, where every bone in your body will be smashed as small as a drop of dew on a cabbage-leaf in the morning.' 'Why, then, I'm in a fine way,' said I to myself, 'ever to have come along with the likes of you;' and so giving him a hearty curse in Irish, for fear he'd know what I said, I got off his back with a heavy heart, took a hold of the reaping hook, and sat down upon the moon; and a mighty cold seat it was, I can tell you that

"When he had me there fairly landed, he about on me, and said, 'Good morning to you, Daniel O'Rourke,' said he: 'I think I've nicked you fairly now. You robbed my nest last year,' ('twas true enough for him, but how he found it out is hard to say,) 'and in return you are freely welcome to cool your heels dangling upon the moon like a cockthrow.'[24]

"'Is that all, and is this the way you leave me, you brute, you?' says I. 'You ugly unnatural *baste* [beast], and is this the way you serve me at last? Bad luck to yourself, with your hooked nose, and to all your breed, you blackguard.' 'Twas all to no manner of use: he spread out his great big wings, burst out a laughing, and flew away like lightning. I bawled after him to stop; but I might have called and bawled for ever, without his minding me. Away he went, and I never saw him from that day to this— sorrow fly away with him! You may be sure I was in a disconsolate condition, and kept roaring out for the bare grief, when all at once a door opened right in the middle of the moon, creaking on its hinges as if it had not been opened for a month

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[24] An old sport of throwing sticks at a cock tied to a stake popular especially at Shrovetide (the three day period before the beginning of Lent.)

before. I suppose they never thought of greasing 'em, and out there walks— who do you think but the man in the moon himself? I knew him by his bush.[25]

"'Good morrow to you, Daniel O'Rourke,' said he: 'How do you do?' 'Very well, thank your honor,' said I. 'I hope your honor's well.' 'What brought you here, Dan?' said he. So I told him how I was a little overtaken in liquor at the master's, and how I was cast on a dissolute island, and how I lost my way in the bog, and how the thief of an eagle promised to fly me out of it, and how instead of that he had flew me up to the moon.

"'Dan,' said the man in the moon, taking a pinch of snuff when I was done, 'you must not stay here.' 'Indeed, sir,' says I, 'tis much against my will I'm here at all; but how am I to go back?' 'That's your business,' said he, 'Dan: mine is to tell you that here you must not stay; so be off in less than no time.' 'I'm doing no harm,' says I, 'only holding on hard by the reaping-hook, lest I fall off.' 'That's what you must not do, Dan,' says he. 'Pray, sir,' says I, 'may I ask how many you are in family, that you would not give a poor traveller lodging: I'm sure 'tis not so often you're troubled with strangers coming to see you, for 'tis a long way.' 'I'm by myself, Dan,' says he; 'but you'd better let go the reaping-hook.' 'Indeed, and with your leave,' says I, 'I'll not let go the grip, and the more you bids me, the more I won't let go; — so I will.' 'You had better, Dan,' says he again. 'Why, then, my little fellow,' says I, taking the whole weight of him with my eye from head to foot, 'there are two words to that bargain, and I'll not budge, but you may if you like.' 'We'll see how that is to be,' says he; and back he went, giving the door such a great bang after him (for it was plain he was buffed), that I thought the moon and all would fall down with it.

"Well, I was preparing myself to try strength with him, when back again he comes, with the kitchen cleaver in his hand, and without saying a word, he gives two bangs to the handle of the reaping-hook that was keeping me up, and whap! it came in two. 'Good morning to you, Dan,' says the spiteful little old blackguard, when he saw me cleanly falling down with a bit of the handle in my hand: 'I thank you for your visit, and fair weather after you, Daniel.' I had not time to make any answer to him, for I was tumbling over and over, and rolling and rolling at the rate of a fox-hunt. 'Now help me,' says I, 'but this is a pretty pickle for a decent man to be seen in at this time of night; I am now sold fairly.' The word was not out of my mouth, when whiz! what should fly by close to my ear but a flock of wild geese; all the way from my own bog of Ballyasheenough, else how should they know *me*? The *ould* [old] gander, who was their general, turning about his head, cried out to me, 'Is that you, Dan?' 'The same,' said I, not a bit daunted now at what he said, for I was by this time used to all kinds of *bedevilment*, and, besides, I knew him of *ould*. [old] 'Good morrow to you,' says he, 'Daniel O'Rourke: how are you in health this morning?' 'Very well, sir,' says I, 'I thank you kindly,' drawing my breath, for I was mightily in want of some. 'I hope your honour's the same.' 'I think 'tis falling you are, Daniel,' says he.

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[25] "The bush" is a term mostly used in the English vernacular of Australia and New Zealand where it is largely synonymous with *backwoods* or *hinterland,* referring to a natural undeveloped area. "I knew him by his bush" could simply mean that he knew the man by his habitat: the moon.

‘You may say that, sir,’ says I. ‘And where are you going all the way so fast?’ said the gander. So I told him how I had taken the drop, and how I came on the island, and how I lost my way in the bog, and how the thief of an eagle flew me up to the moon, and how the man in the moon turned me out. ‘Dan,’ said he, ‘I’ll save you: put out your hand and catch me by the leg, and I’ll fly you home.’ ‘Sweet is your hand in a pitcher of honey, my jewel,’ says I, though all the time I thought in myself that I don’t much trust you; but there was no help, so I caught the gander by the leg, and away I and the other geese flew after him as fast as hops.[26]

“We flew, and we flew, and we flew, until we came right over the wide ocean. I knew it well, for I saw Cape Clear[27] to my right hand, sticking up out of the water. ‘Ah! My lord,’ said I to the goose, for I thought it best to keep a civil tongue in my head any way, ‘fly to land if you please.’ ‘It is impossible, you see, Dan,’ said he, ‘for awhile, because you see we are going to Arabia.’ ‘To Arabia!’ said I; ‘that’s surely some place in foreign parts, far away. Oh! Mr. Goose: why then to be sure, I’m a man to be pitied among you.’ ‘Whist, whist, you fool,’ said he, ‘hold your tongue; I tell you Arabia is a very decent sort of place, as like West Carbery[28] as one egg is like another, only there is a little more sand there.’

“Just as we were talking, a ship hove in sight, scudding so beautiful before the wind: ‘Ah! then, sir,’ said I, ‘will you drop me on the ship, if you please?’ ‘We are not fair over it,’ said he. ‘We are,’ said I. ‘We are not,’ said he: ‘If I dropped you now you would go splash into the sea.’ ‘I would not,’ says I: ‘I know better than that, for it’s just clean under us, so let me drop now at once.’

“If you must, you must,’ said he. ‘There, take your own way;’ and he opened his claw, and indeed he was right — sure enough I came down plump into the very bottom of the salt sea! Down to the very bottom I went, and I gave myself up then for ever, when a whale walked up to me, scratching himself after his night’s sleep, and looked me full in the face, and never the word did he say, but lifting up his tail, he splashed me all over again with the cold salt water, till there wasn’t a dry stitch upon my whole carcass; and I heard somebody saying— ’twas a voice I knew too –’Get up, you drunken brute, off of that;’ and with that I woke up, and there was Judy with a tub full of water, which she was splashing all over me; — for, rest her soul! though she was a good wife, she never could bear to see me in drink, and had a bitter hand of her own.

“Get up,’ said she again: ‘and of all places in the parish, would no place *sarve* [serve] your turn to lie down upon but under the *ould* [old] walls of Carrigaphooka?[29] an uneasy resting I am sure you had of it.’ And sure enough I had; for I was fairly bothered out of my senses with eagles, and men of the moon, and flying ganders, and whales, driving me through bogs, and up to the moon, and down to the bottom of the green ocean. If I was in drink ten times over, long would it be before I’d lie down on the same spot again; I know that.”

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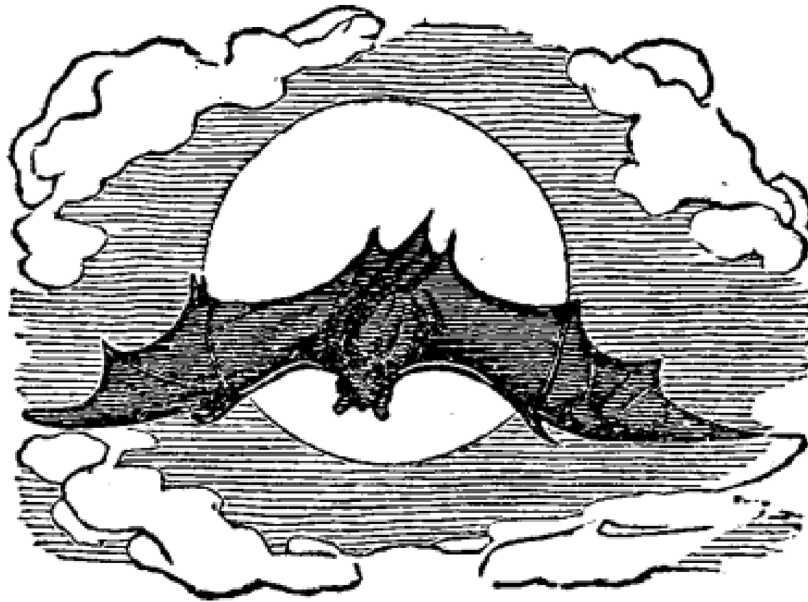
[26] Hops are the flowers of the hop plant. The plant dies back in winter and then grows very rapidly from its base each spring. Hence, “as fast as hops.”

[27] Cape Clear is an Island in County Cork. It is 30 miles South East of Dursey Island.

[28] Carberytown is 5 miles East of Cork.

[29]A city in Southern Ireland near the coast.



THE CROOKENED BACK.

[And finally, *the Crookened Back* features somewhat of a “Just so” story. Peggy Barrett’s tale is an explanation of how she gained her hunchback. The story captures the mystery and excitement of May-day, as the small black goat-like Pooka makes an appearance. Croker sets the scene, but it is Peggy tells the tale. — EMJ]

Peggy Barrett was once tall, well-shaped, and comely. She was in her youth remarkable for two qualities, not often found together, of being the most thrifty housewife, and the best dancer in her native village of Ballyhooley.[30] But she is now upwards of sixty years old; and during the last ten years of her life, she has never been able to stand up right. Her back is bent nearly to a level; yet she has the freest use of all her limbs that can be enjoyed in such a posture; her health is good, and her mind vigorous; and, in the family of her eldest son, with whom she has lived since the death of her husband, she performs all the domestic services which her age, and the infirmity just mentioned, allow. She washes the potatoes, makes the fire, sweeps the house (labors in which she good-humoredly says “she finds her crooked back mighty convenient”), plays with the children, and tells stories to the family and their neighboring friends, who often collect round her son’s fire-side to hear them during the long winter evenings.

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[30] Today Ballyhooly is a small village in County Cork Southern Ireland, near the coast.

Her powers of conversation are highly extolled, both for humor and in narration; and anecdotes of droll, awkward incidents, connected with the posture in which she has been so long fixed, as well as the history of the occurrence to which she owes that misfortune, are favorite topics of her discourse. Among other matters, she is fond of relating how, on a certain day at the close of a bad harvest, when several tenants of the estate on which she lived concerted in a field a petition for an abatement of rent, they placed the paper on which they wrote upon her back, which was found no very inconvenient substitute for a table.

Peggy, like all experienced story-tellers, suited her tales, both in length and subject, to the audience and the occasion. She knew that, in broad daylight, when the sun shines brightly, and the trees are budding, and the birds singing around us, when men and women, like ourselves, are moving and speaking, employed variously in business or amusement; she knew, in short (though certainly without knowing or much caring wherefore), that when we are engaged about the realities of life and nature, we want that spirit of credulity, without which tales of the deepest interest will lose their power. At such times Peggy was brief, very particular as to facts, and never dealt in the marvelous. But round the blazing hearth of a Christmas evening, when unbelief is banished from all companies, at least in low and simple life, as a quality, to say the least of it, out of season; when the winds of "dark December" whistled bleakly round the walls, and almost through the doors of the little mansion, reminding its inmates, that as the world is vexed by elements superior to human power, so it may be visited by beings of a superior nature: — at such times would Peggy Barrett give full scope to her memory, or her imagination, or both; and upon one of these occasions, she gave the following circumstantial account of the "crookening of her back."

"It was, of all days in the year, the day before May-day,[31] that I went out to the garden to weed the potatoes. I would not have gone out that day, but I was dull in myself, and sorrowful, and wanted to be alone; all the boys and girls were laughing and joking in the house, making goaling-balls and dressing out ribands for the mummers next day.[32] I couldn't bear it. 'Twas only at the Easter that was then past (and that's ten years last Easter—I won't forget the time,) that I buried my poor man; and I thought how gay and joyful I was, many a long year before that, at the May-eve before our wedding, when with Robin by my side, I sat cutting and sewing the

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[31] May Day is the first day of the month in May, celebrating the beginning of summer. It is rooted in the pre-Christian festival of Bealtaine. It's a time that marks fire and fertility, and the return of new life to the earth. Legend is that around this time the veil between the worlds thin, leaving the possibility of contacting spirits and Fae far more likely. Some Irish dairy farmers hung a garland of green boughs over their door at Bealtaine. This would bring them great milk production from their cows during the summer. Some would go out at sunrise on Bealtaine and gather the morning dew to wash their face. This would give them a perfect complexion.

[32] Some May Day traditions include the start of summer hurling and May poles. May poles consisted of a pole decorated with ribbons and flowers. Dancing and sport centered around the pole. In reference to "goaling-balls," in some parts of Ireland it was custom for the women to gift men with new hurling balls on May Day.

ribands for the goaling-ball I was to give the boys on the next day, proud to be preferred above all the other girls of the banks of the Blackwater, by the handsomest boy and the best hurler in the village; so I left the house and went to the garden. I stayed there all the day, and didn't come home to dinner. I don't know how it was, but somehow I continued on, weeding, and thinking sorrowfully enough, and singing over some of the old songs that I sang many and many a time in the days that are gone, and for them that never will come back to me to hear them. The truth is, I hated to go and sit silent and mournful among the people in the house, that were merry and young, and had the best of their days before them. 'Twas late before I thought of returning home, and I did not leave the garden till some time after sunset. The moon was up; but though there wasn't a cloud to be seen, and though a star was winking here and there in the sky, the day wasn't long enough gone to have it clear moonlight; still it shone enough to make every thing on one side of the heavens look pale and silvery-like; and the thin white mist was just beginning to creep along the fields. On the other side, near where the sun was set, there was more of daylight, and the sky looked angry, red, and fiery through the trees, like as if it was lighted up by a great town burning below. Every thing was as silent as a churchyard, only now and then one could hear far off a dog barking, or a cow lowing after being milked. There wasn't a creature to be seen on the road or in the fields. I wondered at this at first, but then I remembered it was May-eve, and that many a thing, both good and bad, would be wandering about that night, and that I ought to shun danger as well as others. So I walked on as quick as I could, and soon came to the end of the demesne wall,[33] where the trees rise high and thick at each side of the road, and almost meet at the top. My heart misgave me when I got under the shade. There was so much light let down from the opening above, that I could see about a stone-throw before me. All of a sudden I heard a rustling among the branches, on the right side of the road, and saw something like a small black goat, only with long wide horns turned out instead of being bent back wards, standing upon its hind legs upon the top of the wall, and looking down on me. My breath was stopped, and I couldn't move for near a minute. I couldn't help, some how, keeping my eyes fixed on it; and it never stirred, but kept looking in the same fixed way down at me. At last I made a rush, and went on; but I didn't go ten steps, when I saw the very same sight, on the wall to the left of me, standing in exactly the same manner, but three or four times as high, and almost as tall as the tallest man. The horns looked frightful; it gazed upon me as before; my legs shook, and my teeth chattered, and I thought I would drop down dead every moment. At last I felt as if I was obliged to go on and on I went; but it was without feeling how I moved, or whether my legs carried me. Just as I passed the spot where this frightful thing was standing, I heard a noise as if something sprung from the wall, and felt like as if a heavy animal plumped down upon me, and held with the fore feet clinging to my shoulder, and the hind ones fixed in my gown, that was folded and pinned up behind me. 'Tis the wonder of my life ever since how I bore the shock; but so it was, I neither fell, nor even staggered with the weight, but walked on as if I had the strength of ten men,

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[33] A demesne or domain was all the land retained and managed by a lord of the manor under the feudal system. In Ireland, demesne lands were often demarcated with high stone walls. Today, 24 townlands in Ireland bear the name of "Demesne", and many others contain the word.

though I felt as if I couldn't help moving, and couldn't stand still if I wished it. Though I gasped with fear, I knew as well as I do now what I was doing. I tried to cry out, but couldn't; I tried to run, but wasn't able; I tried to look back, but my head and neck were as if they were screwed in a vice. I could barely roll my eyes on each side, and then I could see, as clearly and plainly as if it was in the broad light of the blessed sun, a black and cloven foot planted upon each of my shoulders. I heard a low breathing in my ear; I felt at every step I took, my leg strike back against the feet of the creature that was on my back. Still I could do nothing but walk straight on. At last I came within sight of the house, and a welcome sight it was to me, for I thought I would be released when I reached it. I soon came close to the door, but it was shut; I looked at the little window, but it was shut too, for they were more cautious about May-eve than I was; I saw the light inside, through the chinks of the door; I heard 'em talking and laughing within; I felt myself at three yards' distance from them that would die to save me; — and may the Lord save me from ever again feeling what I did that night, when I found myself held by what couldn't be good nor friendly, but without the power to help myself, or to call my friends, or to put out my hand to knock, or even to lift my leg to strike the door, and let them know that I was outside it! 'Twas as if my hands grew to my sides, and my feet were glued to the ground, or had the weight of a rock fixed to them. At last I thought of blessing myself;[34] and my right hand, that would do nothing else, did that for me. Still the weight remained on my back, and all was as before. I blessed myself again: 'twas still all the same. I then gave myself up for lost: but I blessed myself a third time, and my hand no sooner finished the sign, than all at once I felt the burden spring off of my back; the door flew open as if a clap of thunder burst it, and I was pitched forward on my forehead, in upon the middle of the floor. When I got up my back was crookened, and I never stood straight from that night to this blessed hour."

There was a pause when Peggy Barrett finished. Those who heard the story before had listened with a look of half-satisfied interest, blended, however, with an expression of that serious and solemn feeling, which always attends a tale of supernatural wonders, how often soever told. They moved upon their seats out of the posture in which they had remained fixed during the narrative, and sat in an attitude which denoted that their curiosity as to the cause of this strange occurrence had been long since allayed. Those to whom it was before unknown still retained their look and posture of strained attention, and anxious but solemn expectation. A grandson of Peggy's, about nine years old (not the child of the son with whom she lived,) had never before heard the story. As it grew in interest, he was observed to cling closer and closer to the old woman's side; and at the close he was gazing steadfastly at her, with his body bent back across her knees, and his face turned up to hers, with a look, through which a disposition to weep seemed contending with curiosity. After a moment's pause, he could no longer restrain his impatience, and catching her gray locks in one hand, while a tear of dread and wonder was just dropping from his eye-lash, he cried, "Granny, what was it?"

The old woman smiled first at the elder part of her audience, and then at her grandson, and patting him on the forehead, she said, "It was the Phooka."

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[34] This is making the sign of the cross.