



PATRICK, LOVE-SLAVE TO IRELAND

A Heaven's Library Story From Beyond
Taken from his Own Story: "Confessions,"
and Messages Received in Prophecy.

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A Heaven's Library Story
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Prologue

My name was Maewyn Succat, but you probably know me as St. Patrick. I have to laugh when people call me a saint. Please don't you be calling me that. Call me a sinning saint, if you like. Truthfully, I was just like you— empowered by God. We each can be saints if we are obedient to the heavenly calling. Just remember that anything that we accomplish is only by God's grace. You can only receive power from on high to work miracles.

Many of you who are reading this are at a crossroads in your life, like I was many years ago. May the Lord not have to put you through the kind of suffering that I went through before I changed. He really had to shake me up before I realized where I was going wrong.

I partied, I caroused, drank, and made merry, for I thought, What else is there to live for? When I was 16, I committed a terrible sin. Now, I imagine some of you are wondering what was this bad thing I did. I don't want to be bringing out my dirty laundry and airing it all about, but it was like a strong stain on your clothes that doesn't want to come out in the wash. I needed some pretty strong cleansing power. The Lord had to do some serious scrubbing in my life to get me clean enough so He could use me. That's what this story is all about.

I did not choose to believe in the true God. I turned away from Him, and did not keep His commandments of love. I knew not how to choose the good and eschew the evil. I was still looking for something to follow and I was too self-indulgent to see what was following me.

I was unloving to my brother and to my parents. I used vulgar language. I teased my peers, bickered with them and made their lives miserable; sometimes I purposely exposed them to danger.

Neither did I listen to or obey our priests, who used to remind us of our salvation. I resented any authority and blamed them for my problems. My grandfather, who was also a priest, tried to teach me the ways of the Lord, but I would not take heed.

I became lax in my duties at home and at school. I was slow in my learning due to my lazy and lethargic spirit, so that I was not able to read and write well until my old age. The scholars still make fun of some of my poor Latin. I was of slow understanding, for I had not a mind to learn and didn't think it important. I would rather

watch a wrestling match or a gladiator game than learn. It was my sins that prevented me from understanding what I had just read many times before on the slate*. [*slate: a stone slab used as a writing tablet]

Enough of this. I don't want to burden you with my sins and try to convince you how bad I was. I would rather talk about Jesus and His goodness. Suffice it to say that I loved the world and the things that were in the world to excess. My sins surely would have ruined me. It was God's mercy that I was captured and made a slave. Had I not been chastised and humiliated with daily hunger and nakedness, I might have just gone on with my wickedness.

Let me tell my story that it may glorify the Lord. When I see so many of you battling hard against the Wicked One, I cannot be silent about the great miracles that the Lord did for me. Perhaps it can help you in some way to gain a great victory in your life.

May my story only exalt and praise His wonders before every nation under Heaven.

CHAPTER 1 — Captured

After waking up with a bad hangover from partying the night before, I walked out of the house through the meadow to clear my head. I was on my way to watch the sunrise over the waves, when suddenly, I found myself surrounded by a band of Scoti* brutes. Powerful rough hands shoved my face down into the dirt, twisted my arms, and tied my hands behind my back with a coarse rope that burned my wrists. Their foul smell was nauseating because they rarely bathed. Some of them had teeth missing. They looked like hideous creatures that had come from Hell. [*Scoti: Roman name given to one Irish tribe, which means “raider”]

I looked back to the house to see if it had been broken into. I thought if they took me, they would leave my mother. My father was away on duty at the time, so thankfully he was spared from the violence.

The raiders could not carry any more booty, so they took me and left our house intact. I breathed a sigh of relief. Taking old people for their service was not worth the trouble. Because of the strenuous work slaves would have to endure, older people would soon die. They would not fetch much of a price.

I was pushed and shoved and prodded with a sharpened staff till we arrived at the shore. I was in the depths of despair. I thought, Now I am being judged for my sins. My worst fears have come upon me.

The marauders were greatly feared throughout the region. I knew not what would happen to me. Stories were commonly told of the Scoti. It was said that monsters, giants and dragons that devoured children inhabited their land. I would soon find out for myself if these myths were true or not.

The Roman Empire was falling. At the height of the Pax Romana*, such raids seldom occurred. But now barbarian mercenaries made up a large portion of the army, and they would only fight a battle if they could get something out of it for themselves. They were not motivated by anything but greed. This left many regions defenseless. When I was taken captive, it was at the beginning of an era of chaos throughout the empire. [*Pax Romana: era of Roman peace]

I was surprised by the number of prisoners they had captured. There they were on the shore, first chained and then loaded onto black ships. I looked down the beach to see at least a hundred of them. A beautiful young girl with long brown hair and a finely woven tunic was roughly handled. A Scoti warrior tore off the silver earrings she wore and put them in his belt. She cried out in pain. Her ears were bleeding. A rusty iron clamp was opened and fastened around her delicate neck. A rope was threaded through the clamp and then onto mine.

We were shoved and pushed into the water in the direction of the waiting boats. The girl slipped and fell. She lay there helplessly. I wanted to say something. I wanted to defend her. What could I do?

“Let her alone! Give her time to get into the boat,” I yelled at the beast.

I was knocked on the side of the head with a staff and was grunted at in some strange language that I understood to mean that I was supposed to shut up. We were loaded onto the boats with seven other prisoners, two other guards, and one helmsman. The leather sail was unfurled and the oars pulled me further away from my home. My land soon became a thing of the past—a distant memory that was too painful to think about.

I looked down at my tunic.—It’s funny the little things you remember. I pictured my mother giving me that hand-woven gift for my birthday. She had worked for weeks on it as a true labor of love. It was now ripped and soiled from rough treatment. I didn’t want to feel the guard’s staff anymore, so I resigned myself to my fate. I slouched down in the boat and was silent. I closed my eyes, hoping that it would all go away like a bad dream.

A fierce wind blew our small craft and the waves were up to three meters high. The man at the helm did not seem to fear, but many of the prisoners were vomiting and cried out to God for mercy. The air was filled with the stench of human filth, which only made us sicker.

The sun was setting when our boats hit the pebbled shore of Hibernia*. I felt like the sun of my life was also being extinguished. In this new land I knew not what the future would hold or even if I would survive. [*Hibernia:

Latin name for Ireland]

One of the guards leapt out and pulled the boat further in. Another guard told us to get out. With cramped legs and broken spirits, we

pulled ourselves out of the boat. Although I had many fears, I was glad that God had safely brought us to dry land again.

I knew my life would never be the same as it was before. Before my capture, I was thinking about what toga I would wear to the banquet. My mind was filled with petty thoughts. Now I was thinking of how I would survive in a strange new land.

My fears ran wild. Perhaps I will be used as a human sacrifice for an evil deity. Whatever awaits me is sure to be unpleasant. Who will my new masters be? Will they be cruel or kind? What has become of my loved ones I left behind? My life, plans, hopes—all shattered the moment I was captured. All the little things that I used to worry about seemed so unimportant now.

I pictured my mother and father grieving for me. They would have known about the raid in which I was kidnapped. I knew not what had happened to them. Were they still well? What of my brother? I didn't see him on the shore. Hundreds were taken. He might have been among them. Basically, my whole life was destroyed, like a shattered glass. It would be impossible to put the pieces back to their original shape.

Many of the prisoners shared similar feelings. The stress of it all was too much for some and their nerves snapped. Two young men shrieked and cried out uncontrollably, losing all sense of reason.

I recognized the two, as I had gone to school with them. The name of one was Marcus. We had sometimes played sports, gone to the baths and banquets together.

He was crying out "God! O God, O God. Damn these heathen! Burn them in fire, Lord!" He went on for several minutes cursing his captors. Although the guards did not understand the words, they knew that he was making some kind of supplication to his God. He was wearing a cross around his neck, which they tore off, spat on, and threw far into the ocean. He was then released, brought before us, and made an example of for all to remember. The barbarian lifted high his battleaxe and with one stroke my friend was dead. The other boy became silent. There were no more outbursts after that.

I grieved for Marcus. Oh, that I could be free of my chains! Then I could wreak vengeance on these monsters and put them all to the sword. What can I do? Every idea my mind could devise to escape

was futile. I, like the other captives, sunk into silent resignation. It was the only way to survive.

I did not expect God would help me, as I had turned my back on Him. Yet, though I had shunned Him, Jesus in His mercy spoke to my heart. “I was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and I opened not my mouth. There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Now is the time for you to be silent.”

The Lord had always been speaking to me, but I never stopped long enough to listen. Strange, but now, in the depths of my misery, His voice was somehow clearer. I did not believe at first, but His Word continued speaking to me. “He gives wisdom to all men and sends the rain on the just and the unjust. I will give wisdom to you also, if you will ask.” His love overpowered my doubts.

The urge to survive is so strong, put there by God. If somehow I could just keep alive, God might do a miracle and change things for the better. I realized I had a choice to be driven by faith, or by hatred and revenge. I had nothing--no money, no position. I could not lean on my father's reputation as a decurion*. There was no reputation for me to uphold. I was truly naked and stripped of any dignity. The only thing they couldn't take away was my faith. Weak as it was, it was now just being born. Before my capture, faith didn't seem so important. If I prayed or not, my life would still go on. Faith or no faith, my life would continue as normal. Now it was my only possession. I was like a gardener with a seed of faith that springs to life after lying dormant for many years.

[*decurion: a minor Roman official*]

CHAPTER 2 — Sold

We were herded up the steep rocky trail and thrown into wattle* cages. The small enclosure was hell. Guards surrounded us and paced back and forth, waiting for anyone to make an escape attempt. The cage was not high enough to stand up in, so we sat on the ground packed tightly. [*wattle: a structure of interwoven sticks used as material for fences or walls]

The ground was cold and hard, and we were packed in so tight that it was hard to breathe. It was better to become oblivious to the pain, the chains, the hunger, fatigue, and stress that we had to endure. We, the fine proud citizens of Rome, had lost our identity and had become part of the seething mass of humanity. We had become less than human—creatures of suffering.

I tried to sleep but this was impossible. The face of Marcus ranting and calling out to God kept haunting me. “Why did You let him die? He believed in You. Why didn’t You save him?” All that night I battled with God. I was bitter. “Why didn’t You take me? I am worthy of death.” I felt revenge, total despair, and hopelessness. I was tested with many dark thoughts and feelings. Finally, I made a commitment to give God a chance to work a miracle in my life. I decided to pray for the girl that I had been chained to. She had been led away earlier and I feared for her life.

That night I heard the voice of the Lord so clearly. Marcus was taken by fear. Fear has torment, but there is no fear in love. For perfect love casteth out all fear. The Lord told me to try and calm the people next to me and reassure them the best I could and so I tried.

Early the next morning, my prayers for the girl I had been chained to were answered. She was brought back, but had been sorely mistreated. She looked disheveled and broken. My heart went out to her. I spoke to her and tried my best to comfort her.

I pointed to the butterflies that were fluttering playfully overhead and smiled at her. She lifted her head up and after some time smiled back. Several prisoners smiled at the butterflies also. The symbolism was so obvious. Where in nature does one creature take captive of its own kind and use it for its own purpose? Only man’s inhumanity to man was capable of such things.

God was speaking to us and seemed to say, “Where hope is, there is life.”

I thought more about the butterflies. They, like us, have but a short life and then they are gone. Even when I was free, I was bound by the confines of time just as much as I was now, after my capture. Then I thought of how the butterflies, though their life is short, bring joy to our lives. I must be like them.

Prospective buyers came early in the morning to see us. We were taken out of the cages and made to sit down in a circle. We were fed a piece of worm-eaten bread and a portion of meat that tasted strongly of charcoal.

We were very thirsty and begged for water. A man came among us with a skin bag to quench our thirst with a little water. He had so many prisoners to go to that he did not let anyone drink too long.

Some of the Scoti came to jeer and make fun of our misery. We felt like produce at the market, or a herd of cattle. Occasionally, a prospective buyer would come and feel a muscle, or look in our mouths at our teeth, or feel our bones to make sure that none were broken. We were roughly handled. They avoided looking in our eyes for fear that they might see our humanity.

I remembered the slaves on our estate. When I was in Britannia, I had never even stopped to think of what it was like to be a slave, as it was such an accepted part of daily life. Now I truly understood the suffering they had to endure.

We were put in two rows back-to-back so the buyers could choose the slave they wanted by touching the tops of their heads. The Scoti didn't use money, but bargained for the price of slaves using livestock as a means of exchange. A cheap price for a slave would be a goat or a pig. A valuable slave could fetch the price of a cow. The girl was purchased for two goats and a sheep.

I promised God that I would try to believe in Him if only He would save and protect her. I never saw her again, so I know not what became of her.

After several people were bought in this manner, it was my turn. A chieftain, who I later learned was named Milchu, bargained for me. He got me very cheaply—only two goats. I guess it was because I was not very strong, being the son of a nobleman. Next to him were his son and his daughter. She stood at a distance and giggled at me. Oh, how I hated them all. My chain collar was taken off but my hands remained bound. I was paid for and then tied to the back of

their cart. I felt like one of the Children of Israel who were led away captive in a strange land because of their sins.

As they drove off down the sliagh* (pronounced “shle’a”), I had to run to keep from falling and being dragged over the stones. Milchu’s son was watching me from the back of the cart. He chewed on a grass stalk, oblivious to my suffering. Doesn’t he know I am a noble son of Rome? Again the thoughts of revenge came into my mind and I devised different ways I could avenge my wrath on my captors. But then the words of Christ soothed my hatred like a healing oil. Love your enemies, do good to them that despitefully use you and great will be your reward in heaven. These words helped me to bear the pain. I realized how futile any attempt at revenge would be.

[*sliagh: a roadway for carts and chariots]

After a long journey of several hours, my feet were bleeding from the rough rocks. One sandal broke and I had to discard it. I tried to walk more heavily on the one foot that had a sandal. My neck was sore from the chain I had worn before. My wrists were bleeding from the rope that pulled me.

When we arrived, the people in the rath* came out to greet Milchu. They didn’t seem to sense my hatred for them. They looked at me as if I were a new animal—then went inside and ignored me. [*rath: a farmyard and its associated dwellings, outhouses, and protective palisade]

I was given some water, for which I was thankful. When you are thirsty, a cup of water becomes such a precious thing. I thought of how many times I took water for granted. Now, I was thankful for any small pleasure that was afforded me.

I was unloosed from the cart and taken to the slave quarters, which was called the baile* (pronounced “byle,” rhymes with “pile”) This was to be my home for the next 6 years. [*baile: collection of huts where slaves lived]

I thought my life was over, but it had just begun.

CHAPTER 3 — Hope

Comoros, one of the older workers (another name for slaves) who had been there a long time, greeted me. “Welcome to your new life as an earthworm,” he said sarcastically. “Being the oldest here, I’m supposed to tell you what your duties are and help you to survive. If you follow what I tell you, you can avoid trouble—usually.”

“That ‘usually’ doesn’t sound very good,” I said.

“Don’t expect too much good here.” He paused for a moment to return to his routine talk to new workers. “Yes, well, here it is: Wake up before the master wakes up. I’ve gotten a few beatings for not doing that. It is best to tune into the master’s moods. On the days that he seems particularly grouchy, it is best to work extra diligently. If he is away on a raid, things loosen up a bit. But don’t take anything for granted. Things can change at any time. Sometimes we go for days without food. Autumn is the best time. Winter and spring there is little food. The best time is the festival of Samhain* (sow’an). There will be lots of feasting and leftovers then. That will be in two months. Oh, only eat in the baile, never in the master’s house.” [*Samhain: revered by Celts as the god of the dead]

“What are my duties?” I asked. “Collect corn for grinding, take the herds in, give fodder to the animals. ... Oh, yes, animals are very important. You see there are three of us? There used to be four,” Comoros said.

“What happened to the fourth?” I asked.

“Last winter was quite severe—the second in a row. Our rath was almost brought to ruin. We couldn’t reach the pens where the animals were kept because of the snow. So most of the animals died. They ate the weakest of us so they could survive. The master bought you to replace him. It is to your advantage to work hard.” Comoros was interrupted by another worker, “Yes, you will probably be the next to go. You look the weakest among us,” he said, as the other workers nodded in agreement.

I gulped and said nervously, “I was never a farmhand. I never did this kind of work.”

Comoros tried to reassure me, “Don’t worry, you will soon learn. It is easy enough to pick up if you submit to the master. If you are faithful, after many years the master may give you a woman and

you can move out of these quarters to your own hut. Though I have never seen it happen here, others have said it has been done.”

“What else do I need to do?”

“You need to set the charcoal fires and keep them burning. You see that salmon in the pot? You need to gut them and prepare them for dinner.”

The next few months passed in daily routine. I felt as if I were a bird living in a cage doing tricks for its master. I never thought I would fly again.

I was given a new name, Cothraige, and with it I was given other responsibilities. After it was found that I could be trusted, I was given the job of a shepherd on the mountains of Slemish in County Mayo. As Abraham, Moses, and David learned to hear the voice of the Lord by watching their flocks, so did I. As I talked with God, He talked to me and showed me great and wonderful things that I never knew of before. I asked Him questions and He answered. I had no one else to talk to, except the sheep so I wouldn't be so lonely. At least there weren't any distractions.

I prayed for everyone I could think of. I prayed for the girl that was taken captive. I prayed for the soul of Marcus. Perhaps, I thought, he is helping me now. I prayed that my parents would be comforted from their grief.

One day, I was picking up a stone that had fallen in the mud and lifted it up on top of the wall. The Lord said, This is what I will do with you. I will lift you up out of the mud and will place you on top of My wall. From this I knew that He would someday take me out of that situation and give me a better life, and put me on the wall as a building block to hold up other stones in His Kingdom. I learned to listen to the still small voice of God. He also encouraged me with different stories I had learned—like that of Joseph, who was also made a slave and became second in all of Egypt.

At night, after the day's work, all of the workers would gather around the campfire and talk. Some had become very bitter about their captivity. There was talk of hope, plans, and bitter despair. We also had many conversations about our faith.

Comoros was always the pessimist, “We are like branches that were once part of a proud tree, but have now fallen to rot on the forest floor and become food for worms.” He seemed to always relate our lives back to worms, as it was the lowest form of life he could think of.

I tried to cheer everyone up, “When I was being sold as a slave, we saw these butterflies flying overhead. Although they looked free, they were also captives of time as we all are. Our lives are short, so we must enjoy our lives and make the most of what we have.”

“Enjoy? Don’t talk to me about the word ‘enjoy,’” Comoros scoffed. “Where there is life, there is hope. Perhaps our lives will change. God has spoken to me that He will take me out of this mud hole,” I said hopefully.

“You talk about God. If God were protecting you, He wouldn’t have let the Scoti capture you.”

“It was through my bondage that I found Him in a way I never knew before. The tears of suffering have watered the seed of faith and it has grown,” I explained.

“I cannot believe all of that. I will not believe until I have seen God working with my own eyes. You talk of voices and strange visions. These are the products of your confused imagination. We should just resign ourselves to our fate.”

“What? Give up all hope? I pray for you that God will shine a light into your heart, Comoros.”

“Save your breath. There is no God to pray to,” Comoros said sarcastically. That was the end of our conversation that night.

The next day, there was a commotion and shouting. A young Briton was brought to the center of the rath and tied to a post. We were all called to the spot to witness his punishment.

The foreman said in a threatening voice, “This worker has tried to escape the service of his master. Let this be a warning to any of you who might try to do the same thing.”

He was beaten and whipped without mercy until he slumped down, unconscious. We cut the ropes, took him down from the post, and dressed his wounds. He was more dead than alive. After many weeks he was able to walk again, and then he was chained to the back of a wagon and was led off to be returned to his former master, no doubt to receive another beating or worse.

This incident fueled the despair of the workers. But I did not give up hope. How would God fulfill his promises if I did not escape? The voice spoke to my heart, Faith believes what man cannot.

Our lives for the most part were miserable, except for an occasional bright moment. As Comoros had said, autumn was the best time of the year, for there were lots of fruits, vegetables, and berries as the festival of Samhain approached. Only the best bulls and cows were left in the herd. The rest were slaughtered for the festival. Any extra meat was salted and stored in underground caverns for the hard winter that would surely come.

Samhain was a welcome relief to the monotony of the year.

Hunters were welcome if they could bring some geese for the feast. There were chariot races, running, games, and throwing of spears. The older men played board games. There was music from harps, typan*, and the laughter of children. [*typan: musical instrument like a tambourine]

We were kept busy serving plates of boiled beef, baskets of berries, honeycombs, mushrooms, baked bread, crabs, shellfish, salmon, and trout.

We rolled out huge vats of ale and mead* for everyone to drink to their heart's content. The women prepared dough from the newly harvested grain to bake bread and cakes. [*mead: alcoholic drink made of fermented honey]

And there were stories.

The Scoti's favorite stories came from the Lebor Gabala*. The main storyteller of the evening began to get everyone's attention by walking around in circles. Life jumped into him as he took on a new personality. First he pointed to skulls, fetishes, and shields on the wall and exaggerated the great exploits of the host by comparing them to mythological heroes of the past. He began slowly and gradually and built up the intensity, acting out each part of the story. [*Lebor Gabala: book of Celtic mythology]

“The Tuatha Dé Danaan lived in the northern islands of the world where it was always winter. They were tired of the cold and so they rode south to our land on cloud chariots to find a warmer climate. Led by their king Nadhu, they fought valiantly against the Fir Bholg at the battle of Magh Triredh.”

The story teller whirled about, sometimes bending low, then jumping up into the air. Our mind traveled with him to this distant battle. He continued: "The battle was fierce, but they could not be defeated, for Nadhu wielded the sword and spear of the warrior god Lug which cut down any who tried to resist him." The storyteller paused, waiting for his audience to beg him to continue. "But his right arm was cut off and so he could no longer be king, for the king must be whole in every way to rule his people. Bres, who was a monstrous giant, took his throne and Nadhu was exiled. Bres was cruel and merciless, so that his people hated him. Dian Cécht, the healer, wished for Nadhu to return to the throne, so he gave him a new silver arm so that he could again be king and rule his people. Bres would not yield, however, and so their forces fought. There was such a terrible slaughter on both sides, that it was decided that the battle could not be decided in warfare. "So the magic stone of destiny, called the Lia Fail, was brought forth. Everyone knew that this stone would cry out when the true king touched it. When Bres touched the stone, nothing happened. Then, as all eyes watched, Nadhu touched the stone. The stone responded by breaking out into singing. Nadhu was restored as the true king and Bres and his followers retreated to Tir na n-Og, a distant subterranean land of eternal youth. There they live to this day.

"Sometimes the king of that land allows them to return to watch us, but only as invisible fairies. But if you turn quickly to one side, you might see one. If one is seen, he must give you anything you wish."

The audience cheered wildly. I thought how wonderful it would be if I could tell stories as well as he did. The slaves would also tell stories, but I complained that their tales were ridiculous fables made for gullible

children. One time I went to sleep while they were telling a story. "Wake up," one of the workers said as they shook me, "Going to sleep during one of our stories, eh? That must mean that you have a better story to tell."

"No, I don't have any stories that you would like. And besides, I can't tell them like you do." "But you said our stories are stupid and unbelievable. What stories do you know?"

"I have a story, but you probably won't like it." "What is it about?"

“I know about Roman history and wars.” “We don’t want to hear about those dogs.” “Well, at least they are true.”

“From your point of view. You don’t know how much suffering the Roman legions caused.” “All right, I have a story that was taught to me by my grandfather.”

“That’s better, something traditional. Go ahead.”

“Once there was a baby born in a faraway place, who was destined to be a king. He was born with the animals because there was no room for Him anywhere else.”

“What kind of king was that?” one of the workers asked. “He must have been a very weak one,” another added. “Did He slay many in battle?”

“Well, no, you see ...” “Then what did He do?”

“Quiet, give him a chance. Go on,” Comoros urged.

I could see I was not getting off to a very good start. I continued, “He grew up to become very wise and helped many people.”

“How could He help anyone if He was so poor?” one worker asked. “I don’t know exactly. He was very powerful, being the Son of God. Anyway, the leaders didn’t like some of the things that He said and so they had Him killed,” I went on.

“Probably because He was too poor to pay His tribute money,” another laughed. “What a stupid story. You are right--we don’t like your stories.”

“And you don’t know how to tell them like we do.” Everyone laughed at my feeble attempt and would not listen to me any longer. They soon forgot about me as their attention was drawn to a new storyteller who got up and began to weave his magic. They hung onto every word of his story, for he uncovered the mysteries of the underworld and made real the spirits of the Siadh. Anything became possible in his stories. Legendary creatures existed of half animals and man, and foxes flew.

Later a fellow worker captured in a raid near my home came to me and tried to encourage me, “Don’t mind them. Next time think out your story, put more details and feeling into it like you would fatten a pig. Practice it and feel what the people in your story feel.

Don't give up. Remember, you are a Roman! Romans never give up."

I tried to follow his advice and I practiced telling stories to my sheep as they were grazing. They were a very good audience and never seemed to mind my stories. After much practice I learned how to tell a better story and told a few to the other workers. Life continued in a dreary routine cycle. Little changed from day to day. Tribal feuds were constantly erupting to threaten the peace of the land. But the Ard Ri, or central monarch, who ruled Hibernia from the hill of Tara, would make sure that no fight would get too out of hand. A chief selected from each important family governed each clan, but judges, called "brehons," resolved disputes and made sure that the laws were kept.

The Ard Ri made sure that the brehons stopped any fighting that would upset the stability of the region. It was to everyone's interest that all of the chieftains would fight their enemies, and not each other.

The hope of getting my own hut seemed very distant. I wondered what it would be like to take one of the workers for wife and try to have a family. I saw a worker named Fiona who caught my interest. Her mother was a slave, and her father, her master. She knew no other life than one as a slave, having been born in captivity. Here is a woman, I thought, I can cultivate for my future wife. I used to love to watch her go about her duties. How could she be so unaware of her dazzling beauty? My eyes would feast on how the strands of her auburn hair tossed in the wind. I watched her from a distance and tried to make conversation with her when I could. She was quiet with me, but lively when she was with her friends. It was good to be around her.

All my hopes were smashed when one day as I was about to approach her, a strong tall man came from behind and put his arms tenderly around her neck. I was expecting her to push him aside or act indifferently, but she stroked his arms lovingly in return. He said something in her ear and she laughed. I could see that they were more than good friends. What chance did I have in competition with such a handsome man? After that I gave up hope of getting close to her.

I realized that my youth was slipping through my fingers. Would I spend my whole life in this wretched place serving the heathen? I challenged God to free me. Could not my Lord, whom I had grown

to love, in His mercy free me? I became more fervent in my prayers to be released. I fasted to find His will. Was it His will for me to remain a slave the rest of my life? Or did He have a greater plan for me?

CHAPTER 4 — Escape

One night I heard a voice in a dream saying to me: It is well that you fast. Soon you will go back to your own country.

I awoke startled. I knew it was the Lord speaking to me. When I went back to sleep, I saw a picture of a small ship loading cages of animals and the voice added, See, your ship is ready.

I questioned, “But Lord, I will not find the way. The shore is a great distance away. I have never been there before. I know no one to guide me.”

Go in My strength. I will direct your way. Fear nothing. You will come to your ship, the Lord answered.

I wondered about the message I had been given. I turned the sentence over and over again in my mind. I searched each word for significance. Your ship is ready for you. But any way I looked at it the message kept saying the same thing: Escape now.

I thought, “My” ship must mean that there must be a ship somewhere right now that would take me home. The message said, “Your ship is ready for you.” “Is” means now. Will my ship be ready for me to escape next year? That I don’t know. The voice did not say next or last year. It said “is.” Is means now. Should I risk my life by following a dream? What do I have to lose? Surely death would be no worse than life as a slave. “It is ready.” When will it be ready? Will it leave without me if I am not on time?

I thought of the Briton who had been caught trying to escape and was whipped without mercy. Would that be my fate too? I took my burdens and thoughts to the Lord and He answered me.

If I am for you, who can be against you? With Me everything is possible. I will make a way where there is no way. I will lead you out of bondage into freedom.

Great confidence filled my heart. I knew I could not go wrong by following that voice. The only mistake I could make would be to ignore it.

I signaled to a good friend of mine that I wanted to talk to him by moving my staff in a certain way. Workers in each rath developed secret signals to communicate with each other. A bag over a shoulder not usually used, a staff waved in a certain direction, or a motion of the leg could be a signal. In this way the workers could communicate to each other even in front of the master without him knowing what we were talking about.

My friend, whom we called Shagrin, saw my signal and came running. We had become very close. We often confided in each other and shared each other's deepest feelings, thoughts, hopes, fears, and dreams. I felt compelled that he should know.

"What is it?" he asked, panting.

"The Lord has spoken to me in a vision of a dream and has told me that my ship is ready. I believe that I have to go and follow that dream," I told him excitedly.

"What? Are you going to try and escape?"

"I don't think that the Scoti will just let me return home and pay for my passage now, will they?" "I understand. But what if you are captured? Then your life will be worse."

"God has told me that He will protect me from all harm. I must believe this. Why don't you come with me?" "I can't take that risk, no. The master foreman said that I have a very good chance of getting my own hut

and is considering getting a woman for me if I keep working hard."

"Isn't your freedom more important than all those trinkets of slavery? They are just like bones being thrown to a dog."

"You said that you had a dream. Fine, go! But I didn't. Cothraige, I am not like you. It is harder for me to believe things that I cannot see."

"I shall miss you. Pray for me as I will for you," I said to him.

"I will. May God fulfill your dream."

We embraced for the last time. I was to think of him many times in the years to come. I left him with a joke, "Don't forget to wake up before the master does."

I would have to make my way alone to the coast. I kept repeating the sentence to myself for my encouragement. It was my guiding light in the days to come. Your ship is ready for you. I was afraid not to obey the voice. If I hesitated the doubts would begin. I would lose my courage and give up this adventure. But having put my hand to the plow, I decided not to look back. I threw myself at the mercy of God and set off. My heart was pounding wildly.

I thought about what I should take with me. I took a piece of metal and a fishhook that I found. I decided not to take any more. It would be faster to travel light. The voice spoke, Look at the birds. I take care of them. Don't you believe that I love you more than them?

I was torn between staying and going. To stay would mean just another form of death. Better to have tried and to fail than never to try at all, I thought.

It was near nightfall when I left. I just left my sheep in the field. I knew my friend would find them and take care of them. The first part of my journey would be the most dangerous, as it would be easier for them to find me. But even if I were captured in another tuath*, I would be returned. I had to avoid anyone seeing me, so I traveled at night and kept off the main roads. During the day I slept nestled in the arms of a tree, covering myself with leafy branches to avoid being seen. [*tuath: a territorial division]

I knew I had to go to the southeast to reach the shore. At first it was easy to travel, but as I continued on it became more difficult as I ran into some bogs and dense undergrowth. I would have to travel in the daytime to see my way, which made it more likely that I would be caught. I lost a lot of time going around large lakes. The sun was covered in haze so I could not find my direction and I became lost. I could not ask any Scoti I saw, because they would know right away that I was an escaped worker.

I passed a warrior on a small path. A large hunting hound was at his side. He glared at me. I tried to look calm, like I knew where I was going. If he asked me a question I wouldn't know what to answer, so I avoided all eye contact and tried to look confident that

I was on some duty. The dog started barking at me, which distracted him long enough, and gave me an excuse to run away from him. Further down the road, I saw a group of hunters who were being led by barking dogs.

Are they looking for me? My blood was pumping furiously. Perhaps this escape had been a big mistake. I should have planned my escape better. My mind was flooded with conflicting thoughts. Maybe I shouldn't have just followed a dream, but it is too late now. Maybe the warrior had told them of me and suspected that I was an escaped slave. I'm not going to stay around here long enough to find out.

I took off running into the woods, hoping they had not seen me yet. My body was badly scratched from the hawthorn branches that cut me. I was concerned that my wounds would make it easier for the dogs to pick up my scent. I ran, hoping to put more distance between my pursuers and me.

The next day was also overcast, so it was hard for me to know my directions. The following day the sun came out and I realized that I was going the wrong way. I had to backtrack the same way I had come. It was for my good though, for my master would have assumed that I would have traveled southeast and would have looked for me in that direction. It was the Lord's protection on me that I was lost. It would mean though, that I would have to go near my rath for the second time. I heard dogs barking again, and I ran to a fast-flowing river. I got on to a large log and floated down river until the rapids near the falls made it impassible. I hoped the water would make it difficult for the dogs to pick up my scent.

The fish I caught and whatever nuts or berries I could manage to gather strengthened me. I found an abandoned cooking fire and fanned some of the charcoals until I had a fire and roasted my fish on it.

As I was fanning the embers to life, I thought of my friend Shagrin, whom I had asked to go with me. Perhaps, if I had fanned the flame of faith in his heart more he might have come, too. I stopped to pray for him as I had promised.

I sharpened a stick with my piece of metal so I could spear salmon or small game. I had learned what wild plants were edible from the other workers. It was a matter of survival in lean times to know what was safe to eat. We had to use anything that God had provided for food in nature.

I could feel the weather getting colder. Perhaps winter was setting in. I would have to quicken my pace to cover more distance in one day.

I continued on for another week. By figuring how much I could walk in one day, I knew I had walked over 200 miles.

At last, I caught sight of the ocean. It was a sweet sight indeed. I would follow the coast until I found my ship. My ship! The one that was waiting for me. It must be somewhere near.

It took faith to believe in His promises though, because all I could see was a vast expanse of empty shoreline. How will I get across the sea to my home? Surely, God would not lead me this far to abandon me on this deserted coast. Somehow, I knew He would make a way.

To the south I could see other islands. Seabirds were diving for fish. I waded out to an island and climbed the summit to get a better view. I saw no boats in any direction. I would have to try again by going further south. I was very weak after not eating for two days.

I found an abandoned hut with grass growing on the roof, where I found shelter for the night. I wondered, Where are the owners? Will they return? The next morning I heard voices coming towards the hut and I feared the owners could be coming back. I made an opening in the back and quickly ran out into the field in the direction of the sea.

In the woods I bumped into something that made me draw back my hand in disgust. It was a human skull atop a post decorated with strange symbols. A putrid smell of rotting flesh filled the air. Several dead birds were suspended from branches. There were heaps of bones and upright sticks carved with a variety of symbols in honor to Beal*. A stone slab marked a place of idolatry and of unspeakable rituals that I had witnessed in Milchu's rath where I lived. I ran towards the shore in fear. [*Beal: revered by Celts as the god of fire]

I kept running until I came to the top of a steep cliff. If I had been running any faster I would have fallen over the high precipice and perished on the rocks below. Far below on the shore, I could see a boat. Around it the crew was loading cages. I heard the voice in my heart say again, This is your ship. It is ready for you.

I made my way down to the shoreline with joy. The crew was spread out over the beach, loading goods and mending nets preparing to launch. I approached one of them.

“Is the captain of this vessel here?” I asked.

“Over there, the one loading the cages. He goes by McNally,” one of the crew gruffly said as he pointed behind him.

I approached a muscular man of large build with a wild bush of red hair that hid his small face.

“Is this your ship?”

“Yes. What business is that of yours?” “Could I go with you to Britain?”

“We are going to Gaul first to sell our hounds before going to Britain.”

“That’s fine,” I answered, trying to hide my elation. Anything to get out of this place of danger, I thought. “Where are you from?” the captain asked me.

“Over there,” I pointed beyond the hill. I was thankful that he did not ask for the name of the rath. “How did you get here?” the captain asked.

“In another boat.”

“No doubt, in an iron collar.” One of the crew who was listening added gruffly, “I smell the blood of a worker. Let’s take him captive and he can be our slave.”

The captain was always ready for some good business, “Maybe he has gold. To come on my ship will

cost you. What will you give me for your passage?”

“I have nothing of value with me right now. But my father will pay you well when we get to Britain.” “And who might your father be—the Caesar no doubt.”

“He is a decurion.”

“It will take several months to collect your debt. I have no time for that.”

“I can work for you on the ship. All I ask is enough food to keep me alive. As God is my witness, you can trust me to work hard. My word is my bond.”

“Your word is pig shit to me. Kneel down and swear that I am your god.”

I was so desperate I considered for a moment. Surely, the Lord will forgive me in this situation. How else am I going to convince the captain to take me? This might be the last ship of the season and then winter will set in. Hungry wolves will roam the countryside. It will only be a matter of time before I die from starvation or am captured by the Scoti and returned to my rath to meet a bitter fate. But, then some things are worse than death. How could I deny everything I believe in?

“I said I would work for you, sir. But what you ask of me I cannot do.” “You will do as I say or there will be no voyage.”

“Your price is too high.”

“What do you mean? I ask of you no gold.”

“You are asking for my soul and everything I believe in. Please don’t ask me to do this. I promise to work hard for you.”

“You sound desperate. What if I do what my crew suggests? I have a mind to put you in chains right now.” The crew was ready to pounce on me at his command. McNally thought for a moment and then made his decision, “I admire a man with courage, so I will let you go, but don’t expect any favors from me to go on my ship.”

“I said I give you my word. It should be enough for you that I will work hard. If you don’t take me, you will gain nothing. If I come, you will have one more free worker. You cannot lose by taking me.”

“Then do what I say.”

“What you ask me to do is impossible. I have made an oath with my God, to put Him first and to worship only Him.”

“I have heard about this God. Who is He?”

“I’d like to tell you more about Him but I can see that you are busy. The boat voyage would be a good chance to explain more to you.”

“What makes you think that I’ll take you? I’m listening--you can tell me right now.” “I know that God is love.”

Those listening broke out in laughter. One of them said, “A God of love? I think your God is weak. It must have been created by women to keep men at home from war.”

Some of the crew jeered, “God of love! Ha! Imagine the idea. Begone! May you and your God perish.”

I could see that it was no use to cast my pearls before swine, so I returned to the hut where I had stayed the night before. I had been afraid that someone might come to my hut, but now, I would welcome them. Perhaps I could beg for work and survive somehow. Maybe someone would show me mercy.

I knew God had brought me this far. Surely, I would not have to do obeisance to this heathen. If this were my ship—as He had told me—He would not ask me to worship the devil in this captain to get on it.

When I went back to my hut, I had a strange peace in my heart. Somehow, things would work out. My natural reasoning told me that this was the last ship of the season, there would probably be no more this year as winter was setting in.

I refused to doubt, but decided to stand strong in my conviction. I remembered that was one thing that my master in slavery could not take away from me, my faith. Would I give up my faith in times of freedom when I had kept it during my slavery? What I could not accomplish in words I tried to win in prayer. You could change the captain’s heart. You changed me. Please make a way across this ocean to my home. Do a miracle and help him to take me on his ship.

I was deep in prayer when two boys interrupted me. They called out to me, “Come down! Hurry up! We will sail at the next tide. McNally told us you are to come with us. You can make your bond any way you wish.”

I followed them, praising God for answering my prayer so quickly by working in the hearts of the heathen. I found out later that one of the crew had died from fever and they would need extra help.

CHAPTER 5 — Voyage

Soon we shoved off and set sail, powered by a cool evening breeze. Our boat swayed from side to side and up and down gently, as it crept past the green islands.

I thought, I am forever out of the grasp of my pursuers. They will never catch me and bind me again. God has won a victory. My life is in His hands now. There will surely be new dangers to face, but God can deliver me out of them, just as He has led me this far. My faith was increasing as I saw God working.

Our boat was not large, so we could not take much with us. After three days at sea we were running out of food and water. The hounds had eaten all of the small animals that had been brought in the cages. As we approached the shore, we looked up at the sea gulls flying overhead. My heart was overflowing with joy, at seeing the fulfillment of my dream and I wanted to screech for happiness like those sea gulls. Though my stomach was empty, my heart was full.

A strong eastern wind had blown us off course. When we had tried to correct our direction, we landed on a shore that the captain was unfamiliar with. It was decided that I would go with the captain and some other men and try to find the village we needed to go to, to sell the hounds. It would take at least a week to do that and for them to buy more merchandise to bring back to sell in Hibernia.

After walking through the wilderness for two days we found the village that we were supposed to go to, but it had been burned by raiders. Seeing the terracotta roofs and mosaics on the floor of the abandoned houses filled my mind with memories of my own home that I had left six years ago. We traveled to the north for two days, but saw only a few huts that were empty. We returned to the place where our boat had been docked, but it was gone.

“They must have abandoned us. Those dogs! I’ll make them pay if I ever find them again,” the captain said as he waved his fist toward the deserted beach.

We had no other choice but to go back into the forest and find some signs of life, a place to sell the hounds. We continued wandering for several days. It was now the second week of our journey. It was getting colder, for winter was fast approaching. We concentrated our energy on finding a town, and did not take the

time to hunt. Even if we had, there was little game in that area. The small birds that flew about were hardly worth the trouble of roasting. The dogs we had with us were also becoming weak with hunger.

When we stopped to camp that night, the men were particularly restless. To our dismay, we found out that we were camping at the same place where we had been before. We had been walking in circles.

One of the men growled, “I tell you, all of our misfortune is because we took this worker and his strange god with us. We are suffering because we have broken the geiss* (pronunciation rhymes with mace). There is only one way to lift the curse of the Siadh” (pronounced Sheadh). [*geiss: taboo; *Siadh: spirits of the underworld]

All eyes turned to me. They blamed me for all of their problems and would have set on me right then to sacrifice me, had the captain not held them back that night. Both he and I knew that he could not save me another day. They could turn on him if he denied them their wish. He would soon have no control over them. Hunger had become their new master.

That night McNally came to me and said, “Now is the time for you to put your faith to the test. If what you say is true about Him, He will give us food and we will not starve. It will have to be tomorrow or I will have to let the men have you.”

I remembered the promise about the birds that the Lord had given to me on my journey. If He cared for them, of course He would care for me; and for all His children who believe in Him.

I replied, “True, my God hears the prayers of those who love Him. If you would become His child, you must worship Him and give your heart to Him. Then He will supply our needs.”

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“I will do as you say. But, I know not how to worship your God. Where is He? Must we build an altar and offer some sacrifice?”

“He is everywhere, all around you. All you have to do is ask and He will answer you. The only sacrifice He asks is for you to give your heart—to be sincere in your belief in Him. For He has told me that

whatever you ask in faith, believing, you will receive. Nothing is too hard for Him.”

“If your God is true, I will be His warrior. We have prayed to our god and are still hungry. Now it is your turn, but know this: Your life depends on it.”

He managed to keep the men off me for that night. The next day we came across a herd of wild swine. Even though the men were weak, the boars were clumsy and were easily caught. We feasted there for a few days. Also the men found a hive of wild honey.

The captain believed, but some of the other men were unconvinced and thought that their god had delivered them. To please them, the captain let his men offer up the honey as a sacrifice to their god. I ate none of it, for to do so would be a sign to them that I also believed in their god and was weakening in my faith.

I should have been really victorious, since everything was going so well, but that night Satan gave me some terrible nightmares. I know now that he was trying to discourage me and destroy me before I started serving the Lord. I'll never forget this attack, as it was a turning point in my life. I learned that I had to actively fight the Evil One. As it says, resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

The vision was of an enormous stone that was squeezing the life out of me, making it impossible for me to breathe. I couldn't move at all. I called out to Elijah, for I remembered his strength against the idol worshipers of his day. I remembered how he had appeared to Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration. I could have called out to Jesus, but for some reason I thought of Elijah. As it says, “He that receives a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.”

As I cried out, I could see the dawn as I looked out of the space between the rock and the earth. I screamed louder, “Elijah! Elijah!” The sun got brighter and brighter and the rock exploded into a thousand pieces.

I awoke sweating, but happy that the nightmare was over. I knew the Lord had strengthened me to overcome the Evil One.

Sometimes even when we are too weak to speak, the Spirit makes intercession for us.

After 10 more days of traveling, we saw smoke wafting skywards from the houses in a village. We all cheered, for this was the end of our wanderings in the forest. We were welcomed in the village, as it was late harvest time and the extra laborers were needed. We

would find work and our way home—I to return to Britannia, and the crew to return to Hibernia when the ships would sail again next year. It was time to part from the crew.

McNally approached me and placed his hands on my shoulders, “Cothraige, I want to give you this brooch in appreciation for telling me about your God and praying for me.”

“I can’t take it, captain, but give it to some needy soul. Perhaps it will save their life in time of hunger. I don’t wish for any presents from you. I only wish that you will stay true to the faith.”

“I will follow Him the best I can.”

I told him how to pray and parted with a prayer for his protection and usefulness.

I approached an outpost of Roman soldiers and gave them a message to send to my father in Britannia. They said that they would make sure that it was delivered because he was a Roman official.

I worked as a farmhand as I waited for my father to respond. The pay was not good, but it was enough to live. Although the work was hard, I praised God for being free.

One day as I was tending the field, I saw a column of smoke rising. At first I thought it might be someone burning stubble from the fields, but then I saw that the smoke grew larger until it blackened the entire sky. Soon the hillside was covered with horsemen. Someone came running in my direction, “The Vandals are sacking the village and taking everything they can. Run!” Before he got much further, he was cut down by a warrior’s arrow.

I fell to my knees, expecting to die at any moment. A Vandal approached me on horseback, wearing a fearsome helmet adorned with animal horns. I looked in his eyes, hoping for mercy.

He drew out his sword as if he were about to strike. I prayed for the Lord to speak to his heart. I held up my hands as if to accept his mastery over me. I thought that he probably did not understand me, but I had nothing to lose so I spoke in my language of Latin. “Please take me prisoner. I am willing to be your slave. I am willing to help you and work for you. Please don’t kill me.”

He understood and motioned me to follow him. He took me to his camp, where I worked as his servant. I went with him wherever he went, as we traveled to the south.

I should have been totally discouraged, but the first night I stayed with my new master I heard a divine message in my heart which said, You will be with these people for two months.

I counted the days faithfully, to see if the vision would come true. When the sixtieth day dawned, I was

eagerly waiting for something special to happen. And it did!

On that day, we were set upon by Roman soldiers. I did not wait to find out who the victors were. I

escaped in the confusion of battle and ran through the forest. It was getting colder, so I would need to find refuge before night. I approached a large building. There was a high wall around it covered in moss and vines. I

knocked on the large wooden door. A slit was opened in the door and an eye peeked out.

“Who goes there and what is your business?” called the voice from within. “I am seeking shelter.”

“Have you no home?”

“I am escaping slavery from the Vandals. Please help me.”

The door was opened and I was led into a small room where I was given some bread and hot soup. I slept in a house nearby provided for travelers. That night at dinner, I found out that I was in a monastery at Auxerre*. I was introduced to everyone. They asked me lots of questions about how I got there and who I was. I answered them the best I could and related to them all of my adventures. [*Auxerre: a town just south of Paris]

As was customary, the harp was passed around and each person had a turn at reciting a poem, singing a song, or playing a ditty. They also told riddles. It was their sport. One monastery sent another monastery a riddle. One of the riddles they told went like this:

Plucked from the back of a white wisp of air,

I change the world with many strokes of my hair.
Dipped in a black pool of night,
I shower the world in light.

Can you guess the answer?

If no one could guess the riddle, another clue would be given till it was guessed.

The brothers who lived there looked happy serving the Lord and living together. They tried to make me feel welcome. They let me live in the traveler's guesthouse. In exchange for my lodging, I helped them with their daily chores. My plan was to stay there until I could get a message back from my father.

The monasteries were meant to be an island of peace in a sea of confusion, an oasis in a desert of death. This is where the seeds of learning were kept, preserved for future generations. To them their monastery was their ark. Even if the world destroyed itself in its madness, the world could be rebuilt again from the knowledge that they kept.

As they laboriously wrote down all of the known learning, and primarily the Scriptures, they preserved the Word against the onslaughts of the Enemy, who relentlessly tried to destroy it. Originally, monasteries had been built to harbor Christians during the Roman persecutions, and then they developed into havens from the attacks of other enemies. As the Scriptures say, we are to be in the world, but not of the world.

Some monks went to extremes. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight. Some people lived on top of pillars for many days trying to prove their holiness. But such extremes were not the case in Auxerre.

When I had told the brothers about my misfortunes and adventures, they begged me to write down my story. I agreed it would be a good idea, but I was a poor reader and even worse at writing. A monk named Germanus offered to teach me. I agreed. I became his pet project. Although I was slow, he did not give up on me. I started to make considerable progress. Through his patience and love I developed a love for the Scriptures.

I enjoyed my stay there. It was a peaceful life. Though it did take me awhile to break some of my habits that I had acquired as a worker, like eating on the floor cross-legged and gobbling my food

down in fear that someone might take it from me. But thanks to their patience I soon got over that.

I tended the garden, washed the clothes and dishes, cooked, and helped in any way I could. They were dedicated to the Lord as you are. Their monastery was a lot like your Homes, but of course they did not have as much fun as you do. They lived communally and shared everything they owned. The Lord seemed to be supplying their needs through their own hard work and gifts from those that they ministered to.

After a year of living there, the long-awaited message arrived from my father and I began my journey back to Britannia. On my return voyage, I realized that I was no longer the man I used to be. It was funny that when I was captured as a slave and was leaving my home, my heart was full of fears about what my new life would be like as a slave. Now that I was returning, I was also fearful of what my new life in freedom would be like.

The Roman Empire was falling; the established System was dying. Life was filled with uncertainty. I remembered the butterflies and how they reminded me that life is short. I was now at the prime of my life. At 25, I would probably never be any stronger than this. What would I make of it?

CHAPTER 6 — Home

As I approached my home my senses were flooded with memories—the stacks of hay I used to play in as a child, the lime trees I picked fruit from (I can still taste that delicious lime drink going down my thirsty throat), the smooth flagstones that I had so often stepped on, the smell of freshly cut grass, the chestnut trees whose nuts I had roasted and eaten with relish, the cypress trees that stood like guards over our estate, the walled garden that I pretended was a place of magic, and the large pool that reflected the moon and that I used to make wishes to. It was all still there, as it was when I had left.

When I knocked on the door, Carius, my household servant who had tended to my needs since childhood, was the first to meet me. I didn't recognize him at first, nor he me. It had been a long time. So much had changed.

“Who is there?” my father asked Carius from inside the house. “It is ...” Carius paused to ask me, “Who are you, sir?” “Carius, don't you recognize me?”

“Uhh, Maewyn?!”

We embraced, and the noise of our salutations drew my father to the door out of curiosity to see who this strange visitor might be.

After my father recognized me, he quickly hugged me and held me tightly for a long time. My mother saw me next and quickly broke down weeping as she embraced me in joy. They had almost given up hope of ever seeing me again, and now here I was alive, as one that had come back from the dead. After the euphoria of seeing me again had died down, in the days that followed, I soon settled back into my former routine.

I was like a bird that had been in the cage for so long that when it was set free, it flew awkwardly. I needed time to readjust. For a while, I lapsed back into my old habits.

For the next few mornings I took great pleasure in the simple joys of living—a clean garment, a bath, a fine meal. But such joys are short-lived.

A banquet was held in my honor. All of the people from the neighborhood were invited. The atrium* was decorated with flowers and bunting*. It was a sumptuous feast with every delicacy the heart could desire. It reminded me of when the Prodigal Son

returned to his house and a feast was held in his honor. The difference was that my journey, unlike his, had not been of my own choosing. [*atrium: central room of an ancient Roman house, open to the sky at the center; *bunting: patriotic and festive decorations]

Dracheous, an old retired senator, approached me with a serious expression. He wished to talk.

“I’d like to say to you welcome back to a land of peace and prosperity, but I can’t. No one knows how much longer we will all be free with the barbarian hordes on the loose. There are the Vandals, the Saxons, and the Visigothi*, with the Huns at their back. Why we call them the good Goths, I don’t know! Ha! Good at stealing grain and destroying everything in their path, I say.”

[*Visigothi: low Latin for Visigoths. They were called the “good Goths.” A western division of the Goths, after sacking Rome in 410 AD, they formed a kingdom in southwestern Europe, maintaining it in south Gaul until 507 and in Spain until 711.]

His young cousin Linneaus, known for his hedonistic* ways, interrupted, “Come on, don’t spoil the party with your gloom. We are here to have a good time. Maewyn, let me tell you a joke instead.” [*hedonism: devotion to pleasure and self-gratification as a way of life]

“Oh no, cousin, not another one of your stupid tax collector jokes. It’s true that they are sucking the provinces dry with their high taxes for the armies, but must you add insult to injury?”

Linneaus seemed not to notice his older cousin’s chiding, “A senator and a tax collector were at the baths. “You missed a spot,” said the senator condescendingly.

“Where?’ asked the tax collector. “Right between your ears.’

“I don’t see it,’ the tax collector said as he looked in a mirror.

“How can you?’ the senator replied, ‘It’s your dirty little brain, that cannot be cleaned, always thinking up new ways to tax us.’

“Thanks for the idea. How could I have missed that one? I’ll now have to charge you my latest tax: an insult tax.”

With that, Linneaus began laughing uncontrollably at his own joke, oblivious to the silence of his listeners. After Linneaus’ laughter had died down, one of the guests countered with, “Someone should charge a bad

joke tax from you, Linneaus; that would help the Empire's financial problems."

"It's fine for you to joke, living in comfort and oblivious to the fact that our whole world is crashing around our ears!" Dracheous said somberly.

"You exaggerate, dear cousin."

"Exaggerate, do I? Maewyn, have you heard the latest since you came back from your trip? Have you heard what has been happening in the Empire?"

"In the monastery we were well informed, but I have been traveling for a few months now and many of the people I met didn't speak my language. Those who did kept to themselves and didn't want to talk much."

"We have not been able to find buyers for our grain. We can no longer guarantee that it will not be stolen before it reaches the markets. We certainly can't depend on the people's militia to protect us. The Saxon mercenaries maraud through Gaul at will. As we speak, Alaric the barbarian and his scoundrels are looting Rome."

"You mean Alaric, the king of the Visigoths? I thought he was defeated by General Stilicho in Italy and that then he joined forces with the Roman army to fight the Eastern Empire."

"Yes, that's the devil! One year we are fighting him and the next we are giving him a prefect to govern. He's like a dog you have to feed well or he will turn on you for his next dinner. Well, he is hungry for conquest again. And there are no more bones to feed him. He was furious when the plans to conquer the Eastern Empire were abandoned. He demanded a huge ransom to not destroy Rome. He asked for four thousand pounds of gold, can you imagine? "

"Will they pay?" I asked. "At first they agreed to pay, but soon afterward Caesar Honorius abrogated* the agreement. Alaric's men are surrounding the city, burning, looting, scalping, and taking everything they want. Ah Rome! I once served it proudly. The eternal city, now a garbage dump being picked over by vultures!"
[*abrogate: to abolish or annul by formal or official means]

Linneaus interrupted, "As I was saying, uncle, let's not hear any more of this gloom. Today is a day to make merry. Come with me, Maewyn. I have someone I want you to meet."

"Go with him. This might be the last celebration you will enjoy," Dracheous said despairingly.

A strikingly beautiful girl with thin lips and luscious bright blue eyes held out her hand to greet me. I held her graceful hand as if I were holding the stem of a delicate rose. Her shiny black hair was artfully put up in a bun that emphasized her strong neck and well-proportioned figure. She introduced herself as Lucella.

"So this is the daring man I have heard so much about," she said coyly. "I didn't really do anything but run away."

"Come now, don't be overly modest. I want to hear every little detail of how you defied those Scoti barbarians," Lucella's soft voice purred.

"Well, I don't know, I have many guests to attend to and ... "

"Perhaps you could visit me at my estate. I live just a few miles down the road."

I wanted her so much. She carried herself elegantly, like a Grecian sculpture of Aphrodite. The Capua* scent she had liberally applied was working its intended magic on me. [*Capua: a town in South Italy]

"I will do that," I said. "I'll be waiting."

She flashed a smile that fascinated me, then touched my hand gently.

I kept my promise of visiting her and our friendship quickly grew. We took long walks together. We loved. We laughed together as young lovers do. Soon we were talking about marriage and beginning a new life together. Her parents were happy that I was getting serious. I was just the type of boy they would want their girl to marry, one with lots of land and a family name with a good reputation to inherit.

I became absorbed in the duties of the farm. I tried to become more concerned about improving the welfare of our servants, as I now understood their plight, having just been delivered from being a slave myself. Under my diligent hand, our estate prospered. I repaired and built new barns, planted new orchards, and increased

the flocks in the expectancy of giving Lucella a comfortable life. It looked like I would settle down and become a happy father of a wealthy family.

Then I saw a vision in the night which would change my life. And not just my life, but the lives of the Scoti and, ultimately, Europe and the world.

CHAPTER 7 — Vision

The dream came late one night after a day cluttered with a thousand routine details. Such a life-changing revelation could only have come while I was sleeping. I was too busy with my own plans and ideas in the day. I had to be totally still and cease from my own musings before God's thoughts could come through.

A hole burned in the sky. Another dimension opened up—the spirit world. I saw a man flying closer and closer holding scrolls in his hand. Behind him in a blue mist followed a multitude of barbarians dressed in rough animal fur skins, wearing thick brass bracelets around their muscular arms. They watched in silence.

I asked the man who led them, “Who are you?”

I am Victoricus—a man who was once like you.

“Why have you come to me?”

I have come with letters, many letters.

“Who are they from?” I asked.

Victoricus raised his finger and pointed to the letters he held high in his other hand as he said, Each of these is a plea from a tribe that wishes for you to go to them. Behind me stand the spirits of their people—waiting, hoping that you will go to them and show them God's love. They yearn for their children to know the truth. Each of these people will someday be a great nation. Your choice will change the course of their history. Choose carefully.

I could not see the mass of faces distinctly at first because of the mist that enveloped them, but I felt exactly what they were feeling. It was fear—a fear of dying, a fear deep down that all the things they believed in were false, fear of being lost in a barren wilderness forever.

In the vision, I reached out and took one of the letters. It was addressed to me. I read the title: “The voice of the Scoti.”

As they came out of the mist, I could see their faces more clearly. There was Milchu, the chief who owned me. I saw his sons and daughter. More familiar faces stepped out of the mist. There were Captain McNally and his crew; Comoros; my slave master; Fiona, the girl I had hoped would be my wife. Then many more came closer to plead with me. Some I knew, and others I saw for the first time.

They said with one voice: We beg you, man of God, come and walk among us once more. The rest I understood not through spoken words but by looking in their eyes and reading their thoughts.

You understand us and know our language and our life. Forsake us not. We will be grateful for your love. We are waiting for you to show us an example of the love of your God. Surely you will not refuse us if we call for you. We wish that our children be set free. We are waiting and ready. Will you not come?

As the voices ended, I could read no more from the scroll and awoke. The dream faded as when the last ember of a flame burns out and only the smoke reminds us of the great fire it once was. The vision lingered in my thoughts for all that day, yea, and even to the end of my days. Every detail was so clearly etched in my mind that I knew it was a miracle from God. I had been given a gift of understanding their heart cry. Yet the dream disturbed me. It deeply troubled me.

The Scoti did not ask for baptism or preaching, or that I would bring civilization or religion. They only asked that I would live among them as Christ's witness, that I would be a sample of God's love to them. It was a dream that would be as a bright sun melting my doubts whenever I would be tempted to leave my plow, or to look back.

Early the next morning, as a crimson sun poked its head above a muted violet sea into the sky, I mounted a horse and rode and rode, trying to clear my troubled thoughts.

I retraced the steps I had taken—the field where I was abducted, the trail leading to the beach that I was dragged along, the shore where I was forced into the black ships. I looked out across the sea as if looking for the faces in my dream. Only the relentless sound of

the pounding surf answered me. I cried out to the Lord. Should I go back to Hibernia? Why did I escape and come all the way here, to go all the way back again? To be made a slave again? Would I have to endure that life of bondage once more? Is that what You are asking of me?

If I do go, how will I get there? How will I pay for a ship? And once there, how will I live? How will I avoid imprisonment and recapture? Will I be looked on as an invader or a preacher of a strange religion that seeks to destroy their gods? And what of those I will have to leave behind? What of my parents? Could my mother stand losing me a second time? What of Lucella? Do I really want to leave her and my friends? The questions were out like a letter posted. I waited for the reply.

The Lord didn't answer me right then, but somehow I knew He would soon.

In the days that followed I dared not tell anyone yet of this mad scheme until I had more courage. I began to take long walks. I was hoping I would find some clue to solve my dilemma.

I came upon a humble cottage. On the thatched roof there was a straw shutter that was opened to allow more light to enter. As I stepped through the open doorway, I saw a ray of light streaming in from this opening and lighting up a potter at his wheel. His body was so smeared with clay that he looked like he had been formed out of the clay himself. There was smoke in the air from a cooking fire, which made the ray of light stand out even more.

"Hello, good man. I was just passing by and I ..." "Potter."

"Pardon me?"

"Potter. My name is Potter."

"Oh ... yes," I said awkwardly. "Do you mind if I watch you?"

"I don't mind if you watch, but it will cost you one of my pots," the potter said without looking up from his work.

"Of course, I will buy one. Would you be telling me how you make your pots?"

He began, "First, I find the right kind of clay. It cannot be too hard to begin with. I beat out any air bubbles. Then I roll it and beat it again. I place it carefully in the center of the wheel and then mold it with my fingers like this." He demonstrated as he explained. "If you don't mind, I'll take the pot you are working on," I said. "I was making it for one of the Roman captains, but since I heard all of the brave legionaries are pulling out and going back home, I guess he won't be needing it."

"Oh ... and could you put the initials M.S. and L.M. on the bottom?" I asked. "A love gift, is it? I'm guessing that you are M.S. And who might L.M. be? "She was going to be my wife but ... " "But things don't always work out as we plan, do they?" "No, they don't."

Now that he knew what a special gift it would become, he labored all the harder to bring it to its desired state of perfection. When he had finished baking it in the kiln and painting it, it was a true work of art, decorative and elegant. I thanked the potter for his skill. After a few days I returned and carried my new treasure to Lucella's house. On the way I thought about the potter and the clay. I wondered if I would be yielded like the clay in the hand of my potter, or would I be too hard, too full of imperfections, of fear, pride, and stubbornness to make anything of my life. On my way to visit Lucella, I was flooded with thoughts. We had been like two children playing house. We had loved and planned for our future life together, but there had been something that was not right. Something was calling me away from her. It was hard to let her go. I balanced on one side all of the many reasons why I should not go. On the other side of the scale there was only one reason—my dream—but it was so much heavier. My doubts were like a bag of feathers on one side, and the vision I had was a single bar of lead on the other.

When I reached Lucella's house I handed her the pot. She took it thankfully. She read the initials on the bottom, smiled, and placed it on an alabaster pedestal in the front of the house. Then she looked in my eyes and sensed that something was troubling me.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Nothing. ... It's just that ... " "Go on."

"Well, I love you very much. In fact, too much."

“Too much? I don’t understand.” She sensed what I meant but hoped I would not say it.

“It is my love for you that forces me to be honest. I know I can trust you with my deepest feelings.”

“Of course,” she said coldly. Her delicate mouth contorted and quivered in a sour expression. I wanted to place my arms around her shoulders, but something held me back. A fear that I wouldn’t have the courage to continue.

“I had a dream from God. It called me to go back to Hibernia.” She looked stunned, “What? Why would you want to go back to that terrible place?” “To show them God’s love. I feel that I must do this.”

I came closer and tried to comfort her, but she pushed me away. “Leave me alone,” she sobbed.

“I hoped that you would understand,” I pleaded with her. “I understand. You don’t love me anymore.”

“I do love you! I love you very much! That is why I am telling you this. I don’t wish to cause you greater pain than necessary. If I didn’t love you, I would just hide my feelings from you. There are many men who are more worthy of your beauty. I’m sure you will find someone special that will love you the way you need.”

“How can you do this to me? We have loved so passionately. I have put all of my hopes in our future. I had hoped for a family. I believed that if you settled down, you would no longer be restless. But now all our plans will be shattered.”

“It is a very difficult decision to make. Don’t you realize the Creator of us all, God Himself, has called me? How can I refuse Him? How can I argue with God?”

“Are you sure that I cannot change your mind?” Lucella asked. “It is not my mind that cannot be changed.”

Lucella looked in my eyes in one last desperate attempt to regain me. But she saw something in my eyes that told her that it was futile to try and convince me.

What could I say to comfort her? “Thank you for being my friend. May I give you one last kiss to remember me by?”

We lingered in our last embrace.

“I can’t keep this,” she said, as she handed the vase back to me. Somehow it slipped out of my grasp and shattered into a million pieces. We looked at each other, knowing we would never see each other again.

I hid all of my pain in my heart and told no one. I wavered in my faith once more. Whoever heard of anyone returning to prison of their own free will? What would drive a slave back to his captors? Am I mad?

I struggled many days in a terrible state of indecision. For several nights, I heard their voices again. Sometimes it did not come in a dream, but while I was praying. The Scoti called me not with words, but in groans. I felt their torment and longing to be delivered. I prayed for their souls, that they would be set free. At the end of my prayer, I awoke full of joy. He was making His Will clear to me by His Spirit that spoke to my heart:

You have been called and chosen to go to Hibernia, but you must be fully persuaded in your own heart that it is My will for you. You must know beyond a shadow of a doubt, or you will never have the strength to overcome the great battles ahead of you. Now you must choose which fork in the road you will go down. Will you heed My call to love the lost, those who are dying and are in need of help, in need of My words? Or will you answer the call of comfort, the hope of an easier life, the hope of not having to struggle?

Know that the life of comfort you think you will have here could disappear in a moment in these perilous times. What I will give you can never be stolen, for it is of eternal value.

As you look to Me in all your ways, I will direct your paths. You will be fulfilled, protected, and strengthened. When you are doing My will, My Spirit will always go with you.

I was so in awe at these words that I could no longer doubt what I should do. It now remained only to do it. It was time to face my parents.

I told them simply, “God has told me in a dream that I must return to Hibernia and bring the Lord’s love to them.”

My father’s reaction was understandable; any levelheaded father would think the same way.

“Son, you have responsibilities to our villa, responsibilities to me, to your mother, to your fiancée, to your country, but you have no responsibility to follow a dream. How can you throw away all of your opportunities with this ... this ...?” He could not finish his sentence.

“I’m sorry father, all I know is that I cannot be disobedient to the heavenly vision He has given me. Please forgive me.”

My mother tried to appeal to my emotions, “Son, you’ve suffered a lot of hardships. Please don’t leave us. We love and need you to stay with us here. I couldn’t bear to lose you again. You could be a help to your own people here in Britannia. Then maybe you can go for a visit in a few years, when travel is less dangerous.”

“Mother, that will never work. The pull on me to return is too great. I will have to cut all my ties with my former life. I will have to become totally dedicated. Perhaps I will have to become a priest.”

“But son, think of your future. Lucella is such a beautiful girl. Think of how happy you would be together. How could you think of leaving her?”

True, I thought, how can I leave her? Beautiful Lucella, in the full blossom of her womanhood, just waiting for me to embrace her. But no, I can’t turn back now.

“I have made up my mind. I’m going to Auxerre to study. Then, when I have learned what I need, I will make the journey.”

My father tried one last time to convince me, “With the situation so volatile, no place is safe anymore, but it is especially foolhardy to travel. Those barbarians could recapture you. This idea of yours is complete madness!”

“Father, it is not my idea but God’s.”

I tried to comfort them as much as I could, hoping they would not worry about me. It was harder for them to trust the Lord for my

safety than it was for me. They had no revelation to strengthen their faith, only their fears that fed their worries about me. When I told other relatives and friends they scoffed at how preposterous the idea was.

I talked to a priest, thinking that surely a man of God would understand such a heavenly calling. But instead he told me, “You would just be wasting your time. Christ’s message will never be understood by savages.”

“But, I saw a Scoti change and become a Christian. He was the captain that gave me passage on his ship,” I argued.

“That I cannot believe,” the priest said with finality.

Listening to all of these doubts weakened my faith. For a few months I stayed at home. I fixed up the farm and put all my energies into it. But it all seemed so pointless and futile. The villa was becoming a heavy shackle that kept me bound to this earth when I wanted to fly.

I turned the plans over in my mind. I went back and forth, first thinking I would leave tomorrow, then putting it off till spring, and then thinking I would not go at all. But this indecisiveness was driving me crazy.

An unlikely source of wisdom was Linneaus. You would think that being the hedonist that he was, he would have been the last one to encourage me to launch out on my holy adventure. When pouring out all of my doubts and fears to him, he told me, “Decide what you really want. Follow your dream. Don’t make decisions to make others happy but do what you know you have to do. You can’t live just to please others.”

“Thank you, friend, for hearing me out and being so patient with me.”

Linneaus felt uncomfortable receiving this type of appreciation, so he cautioned, “But then again, maybe you’re just feeling pity for the Roman slaves taken captive like you once were.”

“That is the strange thing—I haven’t seen any Romans in my visions. It has been a cry from the Scoti.”

“Go then, and follow your dream. At least you are sure to not die from boredom as we might. Besides, there are no tax collectors in Hibernia,” he chuckled.

That night when I was praying, the Spirit spoke again to me, giving me direction.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. Do you not think that My messengers of the past have not had this struggle, the battle to choose between staying with friends and relatives and their own people who are easy to communicate with, or going to the mission field? But they heard My call and they went.

I am cracking open the door to Hibernia. At this time it is only a crack and it is so, so dark behind that wall. It is a tiny, tiny crack but it will open wider as I send many of My people there—those who will listen, and those who will heed My call.

But you must be ready before you go. There are things that you must learn and prepare to reach this country.

There are hardships, but there are many blessings there, happiness, and many, many souls.

Victoricus has called you to places that you would never venture to go. But he had the faith that you could do it. Now it is up to you to keep that pioneer spirit and to not let it die. It is up to you to answer the call of the Spirit as I speak to your heart.

This was it. God's Spirit had strengthened my will. The best way to serve the God I knew was to

become a priest. That is the way I had seen it done.

I remembered the happy life of the priests I saw at the monastery. Yes, now I will become a love slave

to Christ! I would learn all I could.

You may ask how I could leave my sweetheart Lucella. Well, I was like a soldier going out into battle that must forsake all, leaving everything behind that he holds dear. I was going to the battlefield and was facing the Enemy face-to-face in some of the darkest parts of his kingdom. Any ties to earthly affections would only weaken my resolve.

I told my family of my final plans of going first to Auxerre to prepare for the mission to Hibernia. By this time, they were

gradually beginning to accept the idea, after seeing how determined I was.

I began my preparations to go to Gaul and join what I called my “Family of Prayer” at the monastery in Auxerre.

That night I had a dream that I was naked and climbing a mountain. I called to Lucella but she did not hear or see me. Instead she stumbled away from me, weighed down with a heavy bag that I understood to mean the cares of this life she was carrying.

The next morning, after saddling up my horse, I bid farewell to my parents and friends for the last time. My mother cried as I expected. Her love for me was only equaled by my determination to go.

My father held me firmly, then said, “I was going to give you this present for your wedding. But seeing that will never happen, please take it now. You can use it to make your dream come true,” as he handed me a sack. In it was a pound of gold.

CHAPTER 8 — Shadows of Things to Come

If anyone wanted to go somewhere, in my time, they had to really want to go there badly. Travel was uncomfortable, time-consuming, and dangerous. Many people walked wherever they went, even on long journeys. Can you imagine if it took you months of walking or riding to reach your destination? With the collapse of the Roman Empire, the roads, which were falling into disrepair due to lack of maintenance, were no longer safe. Outlaws made a living by preying on helpless travelers, but nothing could stop me now. I knew I was in God's service doing His will. Surely He would keep me from all harm. I felt freer than a bird, so as I journeyed I sang at the top of my lungs a funny little ditty I had learned at the monastery.

In the days of my journey, my vision sustained me. I felt a sense of freedom that I had rarely experienced before. Joy filled my heart, for I knew I was fulfilling my destiny. I realized that my trials and afflictions had just been the furnace to refine me in preparation for this mission.

What did Victoricus say? I tried to recall his exact words. Yes, that was it: Each of these people will someday be a great nation. Your choice will change the course of their history. Choose carefully. My heart told me that I had made the right decision.

God kept me safe, and after traveling a few months I reached the monastery of Auxerre. When I arrived, Germanus swung open the door and was so happy to see me that he picked me up, twirled me around like I was a doll, and gave me a bear hug till I started choking.

When I told him why I had come, he laughed with joy. He called all of the brothers, "Hey, everyone come here! Maewyn has decided to live with us again, but this time as a brother!"

Soon I was being smothered in a wave of hugs and warm friendship. I felt that I had arrived at my real home. It became my "Family of Prayer" for the next ten years or so as I prepared for my main mission in life.

The months that followed were full of learning and prayer; of dedicating myself to the Lord. Life in the monastery followed a simple routine of work and prayer. There was sufficient food, though very simple and often the same. But as a consolation, there was plenty of good wine.

Like the marking of a burning candle that regulated our day, there was a time for every daily duty: gardening, cleaning, tending to livestock, study, copying manuscripts, and prayer. All was done in joyful spirits as unto the Lord.

As a monk, I made three vows upon entrance into the monastery: obedience to the Lord and the authority in the monastery, unity with the other brothers, and conversio, a change of my normal habits. Part of conversio was the vows of poverty and chastity. Since I have been in Heaven, I have more than made up for the years that I lost in being celibate. I wouldn't necessarily recommend poverty or chastity now unless the Lord showed you to do that for some reason. It's definitely not for everyone. But we considered it necessary at that time to get the job done.

When we put on our simple clothes and wore our particular haircuts, it was like putting on the uniform of a soldier. The Lord has different methods for His people to use at different times. Dressing simply was something that the Lord showed us to do. Our clothing was a sign that protected us and gave respect and supply to our mission. Over the years that uniform has gotten a bad reputation. It brings certain images to people that it did not at that time. Times and people change, and so each generation must find what works best for their situation.

As was customary, when I became a priest I chose a new name, "Patricus." When I later went to Hibernia I changed it to Patrick because that was a common name of the Scoti. The name "Patricus" was too Latin and brought to their mind the hated Roman conquerors. Changing my name to Patrick was necessary to become one with the Scoti people. In fact, I became so like them that today most people think I was Irish.

I kept the vision of my mission to Hibernia alive by studying all I could on the Celts' religion from Greek and Latin writers such as Poseidonius, Lucan, and Julius Caesar. Also I gleaned some useful information about their beliefs from their sagas and myths. My Latin was very poor and my Greek was even worse, so I had others help me with difficult words. I looked for points of similarity and ways that I could witness and relate to them better.

But most of all I studied the Scriptures. Here too, I needed much help from others, for it was a struggle to link sentences into ideas. I tried the patience of all of my teachers except for Germanus. I was especially touched that he would take the time to teach me,

because now he had become the abbot of the monastery since his predecessor Amator had died. Sometimes it was so hard for me to learn to write that I would throw away my stylus* in frustration. But Germanus, despite his other responsibilities, relished the challenge of teaching me and helped me to pick it up again and keep on trying. [*stylus: pointed instrument used for writing on clay or wax tablets]

One day I was reading and some verses jumped out at me: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.” And “I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Mark 16:15; Acts 13:47). It became my revelation and my song. When I read this verse and realized its meaning, I jumped up and began to dance for joy. Jesus was commanding us to reach the heathen no matter where they were, even in Hibernia, which was the end of the earth as far as we were concerned.

I waited for the time to be ripe before presenting my plan, for a time when I knew I had won the confidence and trust of my elders by being faithful in the little things. I tried not to talk about the mission to Hibernia too much at first, because I knew I had to learn the basics. A good builder first lays a foundation for his house. I knew there would come a time soon when it would all fall into place. But soon I was so full of my subject it came bubbling out of my heart onto my lips, and I could not help but speak of the vision of reaching Hibernia.

One form of entertainment, besides the passing of the lyre and riddles, was debating current issues. As the new abbot*, Germanus encouraged lively discussion as a means of sharpening our wits. After dinner we had endless discussions on celibacy, original sin, grace, the nature of the trinity, predestination, etc. [*abbot: head of an abbey, a church associated with a group of monks]

I didn't participate much. I was not interested in theological hairsplitting. I only wanted to talk about the need to reach the Scoti. Some of the other brothers also caught the vision. I gave them language lessons in preparation for the day when we would go there.

But not everyone was convinced of my vision. Many thought of the barbarians as somewhat less than human. This was a commonly-held belief in that day. Paul the apostle had a similar problem with convincing other Christians to witness to the

Gentiles, but at least the Greeks were considered “civilized” people, with culture and education. The barbarian tribes were considered incapable of understanding the truths of the Gospel, but God sees so much differently than we do. Also, some thought I was not educated enough to lead such a mission. But what I lacked in my poor Latin I made up for in my fervor.

I prayed that the Lord would touch my elders’ hearts once I shared the vision with them. I prayed that they would realize that since God was with this venture, no man could stand against it. But more than that, I prayed that other men would stand with the mission and be willing to lay down their lives to reach the Scoti. I knew I couldn’t win Hibernia single-handedly.

I still remember the day that I submitted my plan to Germanus. The sun shone so brightly through my window that it cast my silhouetted shadow on the wall in a clear profile. I thought how just as the shadow is a glimpse of a much greater reality, so were my preparations in the monastery only a shadow of the great things to come in Hibernia. This encouraged me that all of our preparations were not in vain.

Germanus told me, “Such a venture will have to be approved by the Pope. It will have to be well planned. You can’t just jump in a boat and hope it will work out. It will have to be thought out and prayed for to ensure that the mission will be successful.”

“You shouldn’t hope for too much. There are a lot of considerations at this time. The Pope wants to rebuild the Justinian basilica* that was destroyed when Alaric the barbarian sacked Rome. Also Celestine is absorbed with constructing another new basilica in honor of Santa Sabina.” [*Justinian basilica: an early Christian or medieval church]

He saw my disappointment and added a ray of hope, “But write down your proposal in more detail and I will see to it that it is delivered to Pope Celestine.”

I thought to myself, Could the destruction of this religious edifice have been a sign from God that we should not lay up our treasure on earth where thieves could break through and steal? Would not the winning of a people to the Lord be of greater worth than all of the temples built to honor Him?

As Germanus had told me to do, I laboriously wrote down my proposal for the mission in more detail, with a lot of help from my friends. In my missive, I gave all the reasons why this mission would be beneficial. I tried to make it hard for Celestine to refuse

by suggesting that to begin our mission we could raise some financial help from the families whose members had been taken as slaves, but after we had become established in Hibernia, we would become self-sufficient from indigenous converts who would sustain the mission there. We were to find out later that God would supply all of our needs for our mission as a sign of His blessing. The letter was sent by courier and I waited for what seemed like forever for a response. Then after many months, something happened that tipped the balance and made the mission to Hibernia a reality.

There was a controversy started by a Romano-British monk named Pelagius, a learned man known to be stern and intolerant. He had recruited many followers to his false doctrine that people could attain righteousness by their own efforts without the grace of God. In short, it was a works religion devoid of the power of God. You can still see the remains of this wolfish heresy around today, disguised under the modern sheep's clothing of "humanism"*. You see, such false ideas have been around a long time. [*humanism: any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate, especially an ethical theory that often rejects the importance of a belief in God.]

Pelagius was making a lot of converts in southern Italy, Sicily, and Britannia. Pope Celestine I sent Germanus from our monastery at Auxerre around Britannia to win Pelagius' converts back to the true faith. The mission to Hibernia was approved, because the church leaders also wanted to get there before the heretics did. Winning Hibernia to the right way would discourage the Pelagianists from spreading their false beliefs there. Also we were sent to minister to the slaves who were there from Britain, although that was not my main focus.

There was a race between the Lord and these false beliefs for the souls of men. We found that instead of trying to fight the darkness in our own strength, it was better to chase away the darkness of heresy by letting the light in. New converts could be trained from the very beginning in the faith instead of trying to change people who were set in their ways. As Jesus said, "You must put new wine into new bottles." We had to find those new bottles-- people who were empty inside and were thirsty for the wine of His truth. When people have heard the truth and have hardened their hearts, it is

time for you to move on to new, more receptive fields where God is guiding.

This was actually the second mission sent to Hibernia. The first one had been sent a year earlier. It was located in the southeast, about a half-day's ride from the coast. Palladius, the leader, had built a church and lodgings on land that he bought from the chieftain Nathi, but the mission did not make much headway. After a year he had not won any converts and was merely surviving in the midst of a heathen land. He failed because he did not understand the people or have a real love for them.

To succeed we had to look at the Lord and not at the waves. But God gets all the glory for all that was accomplished. Without Him we would have failed also.

Those who would go on this mission would have to be men of vision. The way of the pioneer requires men of stubborn persistence. We had to find such men. It was decided to send six men first and then if the mission went well, we would send six more. The first six would be like a fleece to see if the Lord was blessing our adventure.

Also, six would be much easier to house and feed than twelve. A small team would not seem so threatening to the Scoti.

Some of the people we chose had contact or some experience with the barbarians like I had. We had to choose our team from those who really had a burning desire to go. The mission was so dangerous that we did not have many volunteers to begin with. No one could guarantee that they would come back alive. After our team was chosen, we focused all of our energy on preparing. I was chosen as the bishop of this adventure--to lead the most unusual mix of characters you have ever imagined.

I thought of the Lord's twelve. Why did Jesus pick fishermen, unlearned and ignorant men, and even a tax collector to be His disciples? Perhaps it was because they would be a good balance and would represent every type of character and aspect of society. Their weaknesses would encourage others that God can use anyone to be a disciple.

There was Daire, the Stern. We called him that for the serious expression he always wore. When he was thinking deeply, his thin lips would tighten and he would scrunch up his eyebrows, making ridges on his forehead.

His fading auburn hair set in his receding hairline, his prominent cheekbones that protruded from his skull, and his thin figure caused by frequent fasting, all added to his gaunt appearance.

Some would call him a pessimistic doubter; others might call him a practical realist. He was the scholar of our group. He jumped at any chance to debate an issue. For every argument he could give two verses for either side. He was the “brakes” for our venture and made sure that we never were too foolhardy.

Corc was so broad and heavy set that he earned the nickname of Cargo, after a cargo ship. But he could have just as well kept his name, as he was so like a cork. No trouble could keep him down for long before he bounced back again. He was as round and jocular as he was happy. He never missed a chance to make a joke. He was our optimistic, thoughtful friend that you could pour out your heart to. To say he had a good sense of humor would be an understatement. Not only was he an expert carpenter, but also a skilled blacksmith.

Ross, who we called Rabbit for his protruding teeth and peculiar narrow head, was the shy, silent type, with a lot of child-like faith. He spoke in a singing lilt. He often got into trouble when he acted without foresight. He was a bit eccentric, so sometimes he was the brunt of jokes played on him. To be honest, he wasn't chosen for any great talents, but simply because he really wanted to come. God likes to choose willing volunteers. And what would our team have been like without Benen, the psalmist, the poet, singer, and artist. He was a man who was always following a dream. Music ran through his spirit like his blood. He thought in verse and was always working on a new song or ballad. He was often scribbling down a few phrases, and then hummed what he had written and plucked his lyre. Like this one:

The Call of Hibernia.

In a night vision of a dream Given by the Lord's Love Supreme
Stood Scoti with letters in hand--

The cry of a wild needy land. "All of us who call you here stand!
Come, man of God and save our land! Teach us to live in love and
peace, To build on faith and to increase. Come, we wish to hear
what you say. Show us the truth, the life, and way." Now six have
answered Scoti's call; Sent from the Lord we will not fall.

Then there was Ferghus, nicknamed "The Wise." As you may have
guessed from his name, he was a wise old man, with a lot of
experience witnessing to barbarians. When he was young, his
parents had died and he was taken in and raised by a barbarian
family, which helped him to understand their ways. It was his
heart's desire to do something special before he met the Lord. He
looked like a prophet or sage, with his full gray beard and long
hair.

Each person's character could be clearly seen in the last meeting
we had before our journey. Benen began and ended the meeting
with his ballads.

Daire asked our group, "Are we sure we brought enough food and
gifts for trading and to give for presents?" as he checked off his list
of things we needed for our journey.

I answered, "Aye, we have all that we will need for several months,
and we will trust the Lord that He will supply our needs the rest of
the time we are there."

Corc slapped his back, "Now, don't you be worrying. You will see,
we won't lack for a thing, although you may have to develop a taste
for the barbarian's mead beer instead of the fine wine you are used
to."

Ross sat quietly through the meeting and after all the business was
finished stood up and said, "I hope the barbarians will be kind to
us."

Corc jested, "And even if they're not, I won't let them touch you or make rabbit stew of you, I promise." Daire said, "You are making jokes, Corc, but remember who we are dealing with, with ... with ... wild

barbarians. It won't be so easy to change them."

Ferghus remarked, "Well, we're in the miracle business. Remember how the Roman Empire tried with all of their might to crush the Christians, but the faithful took over the empire. Faith can change any difficult situation."

I said, "Let's dedicate our mission to God in prayer and ask Him to speak to us."

Everyone agreed and so I prayed, "Lord, I feel honored that You have chosen us to win the Scoti. Show us how to win them."

Then I felt the Lord's voice speaking to me.

When you return to Hibernia, remember to treat the barbarians with the respect due to them, for they will become a great people that will be a key in winning other barbarian tribes. Never doubt for a minute that I will empower you to do the job I have given you. You will banish forever the ghosts of their past and the fears that haunt them. When they see a sample of My love through you, they will believe and become My children.

At last my dreams were coming true. The vision given to me so many years ago was about to be fulfilled. On the day that we left the monastery, Germanus came to me holding a peculiar-looking stick in his hand

that was to become a symbol for me.

"One of the men found this hooked staff in the forest. It reminded us of a shepherd's staff. I wanted to give it to you. Moses had one when he led his people out of bondage, so why shouldn't you? It will remind you that we will always be praying for you."

"Thank you, Germanus," I said as I took the staff, and then fondly embraced him. "I will always remember what you have taught me when I carry it."

We said farewell to those that remained. They would have their adventures another day, but now it was our turn.

It was finally time to shove off. We boarded our ship and threw the mooring rope back to the dock. It would be the last time that my feet would ever touch Roman soil.

I had a sense of freedom that I had never known before. Oh, the trip was such a welcome break from the daily routine of the monastery.

Before, I had made this same journey in bondage; now I was making it in freedom. On my first voyage in chains, I dreaded every stroke of the oars that brought me further away from the land that I loved. Now it was the opposite; I could not wait to land in Hibernia.

The voyage itself was a real thrill. There was the excitement of pitting our small vessel against the huge waves of the sea. Not many thrills in this life can compare to the exhilaration of the salt air whipping against the sails and blowing in your face, carrying you on the wings of the wind to an unknown destination.

I thought, Ships are not meant to tie up safely in port forever and neither are we. Life is full of taking chances, risking all to follow a dream. Without a vision we die.

When I caught the first sight of land, my heart leapt with joy.

CHAPTER 9 — Hibernia Revisited

March, 432 AD

Our plan was to first go to the mission that Palladius had started and see where to go from there, but the Lord led us in a different direction.

When we reached the southeast coast of Hibernia, the chief, Nathi, was waiting there to meet us. He stood on a hill overlooking the beach with his arms crossed, surrounded by his armed men. We got out of the boat and approached him, laying our gifts of friendship at his feet.

“Greetings, Chief Nathi. We wish to visit our brother Palladius,” I said respectfully with bowed head. “You cannot go inland,” he said firmly, which made it clear that the subject was not open for discussion. “Why not?”

“We are at war with Laoghair, king of Tara, and do not want foreigners around. You do well to leave, and quickly. Before I change my mind.”

I thanked him for his mercy and our team huddled to pray and discuss the seeming setback and to find our new direction. The chief looked on to make sure that we left.

“Maybe we should turn back. It looks like we arrived at a bad time. We don’t want to get caught in the middle of a civil war, do we?” Daire the Stern said doubtfully.

“Praise the Lord. Perhaps He is closing this door to open another one,” Ferghus countered.

I agreed, “I think I know where that open door lies. Where better to begin than the place where I was a slave? I know the land and the people there best.”

“But what if they capture you again?” Ross the Rabbit asked. “Yes, and us along with you,” Daire added fuel to his doubts. “I know their traditions. I have a plan to avoid that.”

“That’s the spirit! No barbarian can stop the will of God, I say!” Corc shouted, punching his hand as if he were fighting the Devil himself.

After praying about it, we decided to go to my former home, to the land that I was familiar with. It was also where the center of government was located. If we could win that area, the rest of the country might follow their example. I persuaded some of Nathi's men to send a message to Palladius, telling him about our plans. We would send another message later when we had news from our new location.

I ordered our boatmen, "Sail due north ... and stay far enough from the shore to avoid trouble." They nodded and we let out our sails to catch the wind.

It only took us a day to reach our northern destination, as the Lord gave us favorable currents and a strong breeze to push us along.

* * *

Off the coast of Drogheda, Ireland. 40 km north of Dublin.

The sun was setting in the mist as a bright orange ball until it hid behind the clouds again. The sight reminded me again of the multitude who had appeared to me out of the mist in my dream. I knew that I had not made a mistake by coming here. As it was fast getting dark, the ritual fires could be more clearly seen now.

As we approached the shore, we heard the beating of drums, blasts from the carnyxes*, and all kinds of other strange instruments. From my past experiences in this land, I knew right away what that meant. [*carnyxes: war trumpets]
"Ferghus?" "Aye, Patrick."

"You said that we are in the miracle business." "Aye."

"Start praying for one," I said to him and to all on board. "Why? What are they doing?" Benen asked.

"Before going to battle it is customary for the Druid priests to offer sacrifices to win the favor of Esus," I explained.

"Who's this Esus?" Corc asked. "Their spiritual Lord and Master."

"It sounds like Jesus without the 'J,'" Corc said in jest. "Believe me, he's nothing like Jesus," Ferghus added.

“You said sacrifices? Just animal sacrifices, I hope,” Ross said fearfully. “Aye, animal ... and human.”

“I knew it! We haven’t even landed yet and we are already being confronted with their evil occult rituals! Maybe this was all a mistake!” Daire complained.

“What did you expect when you came here? The Scoti know nothing of Jesus. That’s why we’ve come,” I said, trying to stay calm.

As we were speaking, the music and shouting grew louder as our vessel pulled closer to the source of the noisy confusion.

“Should we find another place to land?” The boatmen asked. “No, this is perfect,” I said confidently.

“Perfect?!!” Daire couldn’t believe I had just said that.

“The best way to win a war is to attack the enemy when he is distracted,” I explained. My conviction seemed to give them more courage for the moment.

Benen instinctively began plucking on his lyre and sang to calm our fears. As it was a song we all knew well, we joined in with him as loud as we could to drown out the ugly noises coming from the oak forest near the coast. Benen sang the first part and we answered with the second phrase.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,

Christ behind me, Christ before me,

Christ beside me, Christ to win for me.

Christ to comfort and restore me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,

Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love me,

Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

AMEN

As we sang, I stood on the bow of the boat, holding high my staff to symbolically claim this land for Christ. The Scoti saw our boats

coming, so the chief Laoghair, druid priests, and warriors came to meet us. Laoghair was a charismatic elderly man who had to lean against one of his warriors to support himself. His proud appearance commanded respect. His eyes were meditative, serious, and melancholic but could pierce your soul with one astute glance. He was surrounded by his hefty spearmen. Behind him his chariot waited. In it, the driver held the reins that led a pair of sturdy ponies.

The warriors looked like some fierce creatures from the netherworld with their faces painted blue and red. Around their necks were brass torques*. [*torque: neck ring]

Little did we know that they were talking to each other at that very moment, trying to decide what to do about us. Word had spread quickly that we were coming and they were ready for us.

One of the druid priests stepped forward. Luceat Mael was a wizened, decrepit man. Around his neck dangled a necklace of beads and odd bones. He held a staff in his hands that he gesticulated with often to emphasize his point. His fiery eyes and bony fingers made people make room for him out of fear. He said in his squeaky voice, "This is an evil omen! He has broken the geiss by coming during our time of sacrifice. We must kill them."

But Dubhthach, one of Laoghair's most trusted and youngest Druids, spoke up for us.

"I say, do not harm these men. For three nights in a row I have dreamt that I walked among our people in a dark mist. We were calling for someone to come and give light to us that we might see our way. A man came carrying a torch. He was carrying a crooked staff like this man does." Dubhthach said, pointing to me standing at the bow of our boat. The priest continued thoughtfully, "Somehow I knew that he would come during our sacrifice."

One of the elders nodded his head in agreement. "It is wise to take heed to such dreams, for that is often how Esus speaks to us. Also I have heard that a prophecy has spoken thus:

Men shall sail from the east over the angry sea. As an axe shapes the raw timber into a useful vessel,

so shall they make of you a great people.
They shall wear hooded cloaks and carry crooked staffs. They will
all answer: Amen.

By this time, we had landed on the shore and made signs of peace
and that we wished to talk to them. I leaned on the staff that
Germanus had given me as I strode confidently towards the head
chief and said, “We come in the name of Jesus, the God of Love.”

When the warriors saw me approaching chief Laoghair, they
became restless. Aod, the chief’s champion, was ready to attack.
His skin was ruddy. His long red hair was well combed. He wore
thick copper bracelets on his muscular arm. A leather belt with a
bronze buckle straddled his waist.
“You say these men are like an axe, eh? I’ll give them an axe and
be rid of the lot,” Aod said as he lifted high his battleaxe to hack me
to pieces. The chief looked on, curious to see what I would do.

I responded by looking in the warrior’s eyes and praying
desperately. I knew that I could not show the slightest bit of fear or
he would attack us for sure, just as a dog is emboldened to attack
when it senses fear. Something made him hesitate to strike me. I
smiled, made the sign of the cross and said in the language of the
Scoti, “The Lord Jesus Christ loves your soul.”

Aod had never hesitated to kill anyone before, but now some
strange force held his hand back. The words that I spoke caused
him to flash back to a raid he had been on to a monastery in
Britannia* many years before.

[*Britannia: ancient Roman name for Britain, especially the
southern part where the early Roman provinces were]

He spoke haltingly, “Another man ... spoke those same words to
me ... and made that sign—a priest. Those were his last words ...
before I killed him. I keep seeing his face.”

It was his remembrance that made our attacker hesitate. That
priest had not died in vain.

The men watching were amazed that we were not dead yet, but
some were not quite convinced that we were a good thing.

“What do you want from us?” Laoghair asked gruffly.

“I hear the drums of sacrifice. There is no need to offer sacrifices to appease the gods. It is a waste of life. There is one who has given His life as a sacrifice for all of us. He has done this once and forever. His name is Jesus Christ.”

“Our god is Esus.”

“Jesus is much greater, though His name is only one letter longer. I wish to tell you more about Him.” Now curious, the chief wanted to know more, “Why did you come here?”

“I had a vision that your people were calling me to come from a mist. I have answered that call and so I have come.”

The druid priests began talking to one another. They were divided as to how to treat us. But my vision, which was similar to the one that Dubhthach had, was a strong argument in our favor.

All of this discussing was making one of the warriors restless. He looked like he wanted to finish what the other warrior had not the heart to do. He lifted his sword ready to use it, but the chief raised his hand, calling for restraint.

With eyes of hate, the warrior sputtered, “You should go back to Britannia, priest, and take your God of love back with you. Our gods make us strong in war. Yours will only make us weak.”

I tried to ignore his ravings. Then the Lord gave me a sudden inspiration. I turned to the chief, “Let me buy those who are to be sacrificed. I’ll pay a pound of gold for them.”

“What do you want with them?”

I explained, “We could use their help in our teaching.”

“And what is to stop us from taking your gold away from you,” Laoghair threatened.

I took a few steps backwards into the sea and held the gold ingot high in the air. The surf swept around my feet as I shouted, “Then I will throw it far into the ocean and you will never see it again.”

The chief talked to his men for some minutes. I knew I would have to get a promise from them or they could take the gold and then kill us.

“But you must give me your word that you will not harm them or me. I know a Scoti chief’s word can always be trusted. Your promise is better to me than gold.”

Chief Laoghair pondered for a moment before making his decision, “All right then, take them. I promise no harm shall come to you ... today,” the chief said as his warrior snatched the ingot from my hand and motioned to his men. He turned and walked away as the warriors climbed the hill to the nearby oak forest. They cut the ropes, which bound the victims inside their wicker baskets.

Daire was not sure I had done the right thing, “But Patricus ... ” “Would you please be calling me Patrick instead? The Scoti hate Latin and what it stands for, remember?” “Yes, of course. But tell me, why did you buy their freedom? It won’t make that much difference. The Scoti

will just find some other poor prisoners to sacrifice. You can’t buy every captive’s freedom.”

“No, I can’t buy everyone’s freedom. But I could buy theirs. It made a difference to them.”

The captives I had freed were two men and two women in the prime of life. The warriors brought them still bound in their ropes to us. They fell at our feet groveling, expecting to die at any moment. I drew my knife to cut their ropes. Not knowing my intentions, they begged for mercy, thinking that they had escaped one death only to meet another.

I knelt down and held their hands in mine. I said in their language, “Don’t be afraid. I have bought you to set you free. You are free to go,” as I cut their ropes that bound them.

They looked startled. I was afraid that they might be recaptured again if they were free, so I offered, “But if you wish you can work with us in our mission.”

“We are indebted to you for saving our lives. I give my service whole-heartedly to you,” the tallest man said. “And I, too,” said the other man.

The two women talked to each other a moment and then said meekly, “And we will be in your service also.” These were our first

converts. I had redeemed them from the fire just as Christ had redeemed us from

death.

That night we spent on the beach huddled around a fire we built on the shore. We went to sleep with the sound of drums still in our ears as they prepared for war.

Early the next morning, a young man stood in our midst. He was one of the sons of Chief Laoghair. He had watched the drama that had unfolded on the beach the day before with great interest. He was short and stocky with an abundance of black hair both on his head and on his face.

“My name is Fedhlim, son of Laoghair. I want to offer you a room. I was going to build a temple to Esus, but now ... after what I saw yesterday, I am not sure that is what I should do. I want to hear more of the things you spoke of.” He looked thoughtfully to me as he said, “I have heard you once, but this is not enough to answer all of the questions in my heart.”

“We would be happy to speak to you more about these things. Tell us, where is this place you offer us?” “It is a day’s journey from here, in a place called Ath Truim. It used to be a storehouse. You will have to

renovate it and make it livable, but it will be a beginning for you anyway.”

“Thank you,” I said, “When can we go?” Any place sounded better than the beach at that moment, with a band of restless warriors nearby.

“Come, I’ll take you there now.”

* * *



Ath Truim—a place near Slane, Ireland, on the banks of the Boyne River

Our humble mission station was born. Great things spring from small kindnesses.

The four souls we redeemed were to become a great asset to our mission. We would not have made it without them. In the days that followed we learned more about those that we had rescued.

Cairneach the Just was well educated and was a son of a chieftain who had rebelled and had fallen into disfavor. His sacrifice was meant to send a message to any other chiefs that might try to rebel. He knew their laws and traditions well. After we had been there a few weeks, a servant arrived at our home carrying a message from Cairneach's father that he should return to his tuath.

But Cairneach decided to stay because he wanted to learn all he could from us first. The messenger also handed Cairneach his sword, which his father had sent to him.

Toutamael, the other male victim we had saved, had been a warrior who had not followed orders. He had refused to kill women and children who were captured on a raid that he had gone on. He was

very friendly and easy-going. He would talk to anyone--woman, child, maid, or chief--with equal friendliness. One day a stray dog wandered into our camp wagging his tail, panting excitedly. Toutamael quickly adopted him and they were always seen together from that moment on.

Both of the girls, Cribri and Lasara, the fair daughters of Gleaghrann, helped us to wash our clothes and do our cooking. They helped in all the ways that only a woman can do so well. They were particularly skilled at making mantles.

The next few months were spent busily transforming the barn into a comfortable home we could dwell in, that we affectionately called "The City of Faith."

Building our house helped us to unite as one family. The success of our mission was dependent on our working together as one. We found enough wood from the nearby forest to cut and shape the timber to build the rooms and furniture. By trading we were able to get the other supplies we needed from villagers nearby. Corc was a skilled carpenter and he taught the rest of us. Necessity made us good students. Besides the hard work, we had fun too. It was just as important for everyone to be inspired as it was to get a lot done. We danced to Benen's tunes, each of us taking turns dancing with the daughters. We sang praises to God. We went around in a circle and each person sang a line of six syllables of what they were thankful for. It went something like, "For love's simplicity" and everyone answered in unison, "We give thanks."

We played games. One of our favorites was called "Shepherds and Sheep." Three "sheep" are blindfolded. Making sure no one is peeking, one person comes in the center that is the "shepherd." The sheep move around until one of the sheep bumps into him. Then the shepherd asks the sheep a question about some fact or to quote a verse. If the sheep gives the right answer, he or she gets a treat of a hunk of honey bread, some fruit dangling from a pole on a long string, a drink of wine, or milk. The "sheep" has to eat or drink his reward while still blindfolded. If someone does not get the answer right they are the new shepherd. Watching people try to eat and drink blindfolded was half of the amusement.

Fedhlim often visited us. As we ministered unto him spiritually by feeding him the Word, he helped us with many of the supplies we

needed. Every day he was growing in the Spirit. As newborn babies really desire milk, so did he drink in the Word of God that we fed him. The Lord showed us that he was like a small stone that would set off a landslide by influencing others. We wondered how many in this land would be as receptive as he was?

One night I could not sleep so I wandered out alone into the hills to look at a night sky full of bright stars. I thought, So much darkness ... and yet the stars shine so much the brighter for it. How can we be like those stars to these people?

The Lord spoke to me as I continued looking up in the night sky. Just as a wick will keep burning if it is soaked in the oil and is tightly twisted together, so must your team be united and well soaked in the oil of My Spirit.

You will speak to many pagans who have different ways than yours, but look inside their hearts, not at their outward appearance. Remember, within them are hearts beating with as much goodness as yours. They know not for what they seek but you have what they seek for. Teach their leaders, teach their teachers, teach their mothers, teach their warriors, teach their druids, and I will help all of your efforts to succeed.

So that I would not be considered a criminal and recaptured, we set off to the land of my former master to pay for my freedom. I was concerned that perhaps some of my enemies among the Druids would bring this up to the chief and he then might be forced to recapture me. I bought two horses and set out with Corc for the land of Milchu, which is about 160 km west from Slane in what is today the County of Mayo. When we were a few kilometers away from our destination, we bought an ox to offer as payment for my freedom to my former owner. We tied a rope to him and he followed slowly behind us.

There was excitement in the air as we approached the familiar countryside. The fog lifting was like a curtain going up to reveal this land that was so special to me. It was my furnace of affliction that had tried and purified my faith. It was here that through death to my former life, I came alive. I pointed out to Corc the different places where I had lived.

“That’s the hill where I shepherded goats and sheep,” I said, pointing to a clump of green hillocks.

“And now you are returning as a shepherd again, but this time as the shepherd of their souls,” Corc said with a smile.

“Tis true. The first soul that I tried to shepherd here was my best friend. His name was Shagrin. I tried to get him to come with me.”

“What happened?” Corc asked.

“He didn’t want to take the risk. I wonder where he is now?”

Corc tried to give me some hope, “God only knows. Perhaps we will meet him again.”

We rode a little further through bush-lined fields. I pointed to a part of the forest that was special to me, “I escaped through those two trees there.”

We were now approaching the brown palisade that enclosed the main huts with their conical roofs. Behind them was the baile where I lived with the other workers. Two rowan trees that my master had told me to plant for good luck were still outside the entrance of the main house. The trees were almost twenty years old now and had grown to twice my height.

The whole scene seemed quieter than what I had remembered it to be. I wondered where everyone had gone. Only a few servants were nearby tending the fire, collecting wood, and preparing the meal.

The animal skin door of the hut opened and a blind man stepped out when he heard us coming. He was a sorry sight, with his hair matted and unkempt. Only a few of his teeth were remaining. It was my former master Milchu.

“Who are you?” he asked suspiciously.

“I am Cothraige. I have come back to pay for my freedom.”

Milchu paused a moment as if leafing through the book of his memories, “Give me proof,” he demanded. “I escaped from this tuath many years ago. I was a terrible storyteller, you remember?”

“Yes, but practice made you improve ... or so I was told. Go on.” “I planted these two rowan trees as you told me to.”

“Son of Beal!* It is you then!” Milchu exclaimed, as he felt my face to try and picture me. “How long did it take you to realize that I had gone after I escaped?” I asked.

“It wasn’t until late that night that we realized that you had fled. By then it was too late to chase you. Why did you come back? It is a brave act ... yet strange.”

“You will hear of stranger things yet from me.” “Why did you come here?”

“My God has commanded me to.”

“That is strange—a God that tells you to go back to the land of your former enemies and buy your freedom that you have already won with your bravery.”

“I would like to speak more to you later of my God, but now I would like to hear about you. How did you become blind?”

“It was in a tribal war. My jealous brother pulled out my eyes so that I could never be chief.” “I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. I will soon die anyway. Being blind helps me to relive the happy moments of my life better. That is all that an old man has—distant memories.”

Just then the ox made a lowing noise that attracted his attention.

“What is the ox for?” He asked. “I have come to buy back my freedom. Equal in value to what you paid for me. It is yours.”

“An ox? But I only paid two goats for you.”

“Yes, but I was a lot of trouble to you by escaping.” “That you were.”

He walked over to inspect the animal with his groping hands. He touched the ox’s flank and felt its muscle. “It is good. I accept your price. Stay with me. Eat and drink and be merry and we can talk. Perhaps I could find a pretty wench for your amusement. Come in, not as a worker but as a freeman.”

“I would love to stay with you. But don’t bother about the girl. You see, I have dedicated myself totally, soul and body, to my God.”

“You are right. You are telling me stranger things.”

He ordered a wild boar to be killed and the finest meal that he could muster up to be prepared. At the meal I asked him of many things, “Tell me about Shagrin. What became of him?”

“I am afraid that he killed himself. He was very gloomy after you left. It seems that life did not go the way he expected it to. The girl that he fell in love with and hoped to marry died of an illness,” Milchu explained matter-of-factly.

To him it was just another worker he had lost. But to me he was much more. I was deeply moved to pray for his soul. I hoped that he was in a better place now, free from his pain.

Milchu went on, oblivious to my feelings, “You were never so gloomy. I remember you did your duties well and without resentment. I liked that in you. You seemed to have more to you than most. I cannot explain it.”

“That was the Spirit of my Lord shining through me. You can have His Spirit too if you wish.” “Such things are foreign to me. I am an old man. It is hard to change my ways.”

“Perhaps you will in time as they become less foreign to you. Tell me, what became of all of your children and the others who stayed here?”

“It is spring now. A time we go on the raids. Some of them are off, probably to get more slaves—the kind that don’t run away,” he joked.

“My daughter has married and has moved away to join her new husband. And the others who left ... well, it doesn’t take much to care for an old blind man does it?”

We stayed there for three days. He continued to try to ply us with mead and women and was continually surprised that we turned down his offers. I tried my best to share our faith with him, but it was too hard for him to receive such new ideas from his former worker just then.

We parted as friends and returned to Ath Truim, our “City of Faith.”

CHAPTER 10 — Light of Bealtine

When we arrived home everyone was in a whirl of activity, doing all the things that must be done in order to survive. After a hearty meal cooked by the daughters, we all sat around the table for fellowship.

“How has it been going?” I asked Ferghus the Wise. I had put him in charge while I was gone. He was a logical choice, being the most levelheaded in the group.

“Fedhlim has brought a few people by and a few others have come, curious to see what we are about. We tried to share our faith with them, but they left without saying too much. I think it will be slow progress,” he explained.

“It will take time. They must see that we are here to stay and that we love them.”

He nodded in agreement and then added, “But to give you some hope, Toutamael has told us of an interesting prophecy that he has heard from the Druids.”

“The one that Fedhlim told us that he had heard of the people who would come that would be like axes?” I

asked.

“No, this is another one. It says: There shall come a day when one who carries great knowledge will climb the peak of the sacred Reek* beside the sea of the setting sun. After this, the light of understanding will shine over the whole land.” [*Reek: a mountain in Ireland]

“Maybe the Lord will lead us to climb that mountain someday. But we must wait till the right time. If we did it now, it would mean little to the Scoti.”

“What we need is another miracle—a big one!” Ferghus suggested. “The kind of miracle that will break the power the Devil has over this land! Somehow we must show that Jesus is more powerful than Esus or any of their pack of demon gods,” Corc added.

“How can we do that?” Rabbit asked.

“I believe we must lay down a challenge, to give the Lord a chance to work, just as Elijah did. And to do that we need a place where

the most important people of the land are gathered. Any ideas?" I asked our new converts.

"Well, at the hill of Tara, all of the kings, generals, nobility, and druid priests will be attending the pagan feast of Bealtine," Cairneach said.

Ferghus saw some of the puzzled looks from Ross and Corc and offered an explanation, "May 1st is the festival of Bealtine, which just so happens to fall on Easter day this year. It marks the beginning of summer for the Scoti. On the eve of the festival the head chief of the land, which would of course be Laoghair, lights a bonfire."

Just then the Lord gave me an inspiration, "We also light a fire at Pascal*. If we light the fire first it would be the challenge we need."
[*Pascal: Easter]

"But isn't it also the custom that if any one dare light a bonfire before the king, they must be put to death?" Daire asked squeamishly.

"If the Lord is with us, no harm will befall us. With divine guidance we can do it," I reassured him.

"We will challenge the Devil at his stronghold. It is the seat of the king. If we win there, the whole land could be won to Christ!" Corc thundered. "Let's get packing!"

"But that is in three days. How will we ever get there in time?" Rabbit asked. I answered him again with, "The Lord will help us if it is His will."

I turned to our Scoti brother, "Well, Cairneach, what are our chances?"

"If we take the curragh*, we'll be paddling against the current on our way there, but if we put up our sail and the wind is blowing right, I think we can make it if nothing goes wrong." [*curragh: a boat made of wooden ribs covered with animal hide]

"And what if it does?" Daire asked.

"Then we'll find a way around it with God's help," I suggested.

"Will we be able to navigate the boat in the river water? Will it be deep enough?" Ferghus asked him. Cairneach thought for a

moment and then explained, “The spring snows have begun to melt, so the water should float the curragh, but what you need to worry about are the rapids.”

We discussed it until early in the morning. Everyone agreed with the plan, as did the Lord. He told us, Be bold! Command Me and I will do it. This is a venture of faith and it is all or nothing at all. This meant that if we were to win Hibernia to Christ we must reach its leaders.

As we were reading the verses about those who overcame (Rev.12:10,11), God spoke to our hearts. We were attacking the Enemy’s stronghold. The treasure we sought to take from our Enemy was the souls of the Scoti. We would succeed, because with Christ, we had the strength to overcome. We had decided to send two teams and meet up at the castle of Tara. One team would sail the curragh that Cairneach and Toutamael had built for us, up river. The other team would ride two horses and follow the boat from the shore as close as they could in case anything went wrong. Toutamael begged to come. I thought that since he was a Scoti, it would be good to take him. Corc and Rabbit would also come along. The four of us would go in the curragh.

Cairneach and Benen would ride the horses. That left Daire and Ferghus to stay at the mission with the daughters.

We made preparations that night to leave early the next morning. That night I had a dream. In the vision the whole island was infested with snakes. I lifted up my staff and began walking from the north to the south, starting at the hill of Tara. My brothers and sisters were walking with me. As we walked, we drove out the snakes by calling on the name of the Lord. Just as Christ cast many evil spirits out of a demon-possessed man and these same spirits went into the pigs and were drowned in the sea, so were these evil snakes drowned. I told this dream to others to encourage their faith, but as they told it to others over the years some thought that it actually happened and so the legend began that I drove all the snakes out of Ireland. Even though there have never been snakes in Hibernia, there were plenty of evil spirits that we had to drive out.

CHAPTER 11 — Race to Tara

We talked about the race as we ate a generous breakfast. We wanted to make sure that we enjoyed this one, as it would be a while before we tasted the daughters' fine cooking again.

"We have less than three full days to make it to Tara and light the first fire. The distance seems so great and the time so short. Do you think it will be possible to make it in time?" Daire asked Cairneach between bites.

Ferghus interrupted with, "Aye, it seems impossible, but that is the kind of situation God loves to work in. If God wants us to succeed, nothing can stop us. If He doesn't want us to get there in time, worrying won't help any." "The worst thing that could happen is that we are too late this year. But think of it this way; we'll be early for

another chance next year," Corc joked.

"If we are still alive next year," Daire said pessimistically.

"Stop being so gloomy, would you? I don't know which is worse, being captured and tortured by the Scoti or listening to you complain all the time," Corc answered.

"I'm sorry, I guess you are right. I have been a bit of a cold wind."
"A bit?!!! More like a blizzard, I say."

"Stop fighting amongst yourselves. We will never be able to win this race if we are not united," I said, trying to be the peacemaker.

They made up and our teams set off. We slid the curragh into the Boyne River and set out the small sail to catch the breeze. We traveled upstream, making good time as the wind was in our favor.

When dusk began to fall, we paddled over to the shore to eat and rest. That night as we made camp, we felt that many eyes were watching us. We could hear rustling in the bushes. We expected that at any moment the Scoti would appear out of the shadows to pounce on us. We prayed desperately for protection, for we were totally at the mercy of the Lord to keep us from harm by the heathen.

Still there was no sign of the other team. We waited for them for a while, but our time was running out. We decided to set sail again, glad to escape the gaze of our unseen observers.

We struggled on for several hours. It was more difficult to sail and paddle upstream now as the current was much swifter than it was the day before.

“Look at those rapids up ahead! They are running too fast! We should carry the boat around this part of the river,” Toutamael shouted.

I agreed. “Right! Paddle for the shore then.”

When he saw our danger, Rabbit started to panic. He lost his balance and fell into the cold river. He started floundering in the water and yelling, “I can’t swim! Help me!”

We tried to pull the curragh near him so he could get a grasp on the side. Rabbit pulled a little too hard, which threw everyone off balance. The boat shot off from under us and hit a rock that made a hole in the hull. Soon we were all in the water helping each other the best we could to reach the riverbank. The stronger ones dragged the weaker ones onto the shore, gasping for air. It was a struggle that I would not like to relive.

We made camp there early for the night and tried to dry off by the fire. We were busy trying to make repairs on the boat as best we could when we saw a group of dark figures approaching our camp. Hounds bounded out first, followed by at least fifteen young warriors holding high their drawn swords. A handsome bearded man who wore a finely woven cloak with intricate gold embroidered Celtic patterns on its borders led them.

I tried to appear calm, held out my hands in friendship, and said in the Scoti tongue, “Greetings! We are Christians traveling to Tara to attend the festival of Bealtine. We have an important message for your good king Laoghair that he will be most happy to hear.”

Hearing about our mission made the chieftain cautious. He did not care to risk the wrath of Laoghair if what we said was true. He was silent as he walked around me several times, looking me up and down suspiciously. I felt like he was the cat and I the mouse caught in his claws. He seemed to be playing with me. He was in no hurry, as he clearly held the advantage. His warriors poked us with their swords and taunted us to see our reaction.

He looked inside the pot that contained our dinner stew and then kicked the cauldron, spilling its precious contents. To my horror I saw that in full view next to the pot was our bag, which contained our valuables for bartering.

Oh, Lord don't let them take that. If they do, we won't have any way to trade. We will be worse than beggars!

I saw him going for the bag of our treasure, but someone moving behind a tree distracted him. He drew his sword and ran right past the bag in the direction of the figure he had seen. I used the opportunity to hide the bag. It was none other than Rabbit, who had hid himself behind a tree, hoping to avoid capture. His curiosity had gotten the better of him. He had peeked too far out in the open, hoping to get a better view. Thinking he was a threat, the chieftain grabbed Rabbit by the hair. Rabbit jerked away in a natural reaction, which made the Scoti leader more intent than ever on capturing him.

Before we could say much, he shouted a command to his men and they marched Rabbit away, leaving us in shock that we had just lost one of our team. Two warriors remained in our camp to see what we would do.

With Corc and Toutamael close to me, I whispered so that the Scoti guards could not hear us, "We need to keep calm, but we need to decide what we should do about Rabbit."

"Maybe we should just leave and try to get him back later?" Corc suggested.

"That might be too late," I said. "Lighting the fire in time is important, but I know God won't bless us if we forget our responsibility to Rabbit."

Toutamael offered some advice. "They are waiting for you to give in. They are testing you to see how much you will give. You should bargain for his release, but don't appear that you are too interested in getting him back or else you may never see him again."

We all turned to God in prayer that He would touch the chieftain's heart to release Rabbit. I asked the men to bring their leader back as I wanted to do some trading with him. They appeared uninterested, but after asking them a few times they went to get

him. In a few hours, the chieftain came striding proudly into our camp. I could not see Rabbit anywhere in the darkness.

“I have to be in Tara before the first fire is lit, which is tomorrow night. If I do not arrive on time my Master will not be pleased. I am His trusted messenger. I hope I will not have to tell Him that I could not fulfill His will because of you delaying me.”

“Who is this Master that you speak of?”

“He is the God of the Siadh. He is the creator of all things small and great. There is no greater than He, for He rules all, from the lowliest worker to the mighty king.”

“Where does your Master dwell?”

“On every rath and reek and in the heart of those who seek Him. He is the Spirit and power of love. He can even live in your heart if you will but open the door to Him.”

He thought for a moment before deciding what to do with us. Finally, he thought it better not to risk the wrath of such a mighty God. “You may go, but you must leave your servant here as a ransom for entering my land.”

“He must also come with us, that we might fulfill our mission. But do not think that I am ungrateful. I wish to pay for you letting us pass through your tuath. I would like to trade him for a silver lamp that is very precious to me. It will give great pleasure to you on many a dark night.”

I pulled the silver lamp out of my bag. I filled the lamp from a jar of oil and lit it to show him how it worked. “It is not enough,” the chieftain said as he made an unpleasant face. But his eyes betrayed his interest in

the lamp, and he watched with fascination as it glowed.

“It is my most valuable gift. I was saving it for a present for the great king, but please ... you take it,” I said as I handed it to him to look at.

He felt the chain and each part of the lamp thoroughly, trying to discover where it received its mysterious power. He had never seen such a fine lamp before.

I thought I might try a different angle, “Be careful with it or its power will leave. There is a geiss on it. It bestows great power on

the owner so that he can see where he goes when others stumble. It will be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your way.” I never thought I would use that verse to sell a lamp. But it seemed to work.

“But what happens when its oil runs out?” he asked, bringing us back to the hard reality of trading.

I sensed that he needed more assurance, “When I get the boy, I will give you more. And when my friends come from Gaul again I will tell them to bring you more.” I added.

He seemed satisfied and called to his warriors. They led Rabbit into our midst still bound. He stumbled and fell and they cut the ropes off of him. The chieftain left with his precious gift in hand. He was clearly pleased with the trade. His new treasure had cost him nothing.

We left at first light in case the chieftain changed his mind. We carried the repaired curragh around the rapids and found ourselves lost, if finding yourself lost is possible. As we followed a large path that could be called a road, we saw two figures galloping towards us on horseback.

“Heh! It’s us!” they yelled as they waved their hands in greeting. It was Cairneach and Benen on the horses. We ran to them as they rode towards us. Joy filled our hearts as we met.

“We looked long and hard for you, but the road wandered far from the river. We asked a chieftain that we met and he told us that you had passed by here last night. He seemed to have been happy to meet you,” Benen said.

“Happy to have got a fine silver lamp for nothing, I should say,” Corc said.

I decided to change the subject, “Praise the Lord for bringing us together again!” I said as I embraced him.

After explaining to Cairneach and Benen what had happened to us, we discussed what to do next. Toutamael suggested, “We are running out of time. Patrick, why don’t you go ahead to Tara with

Cairneach? He knows the way and we will try to follow soon. At least someone will reach there in time.”

In prayer, the Lord confirmed this plan. We prayed we would not be detained any further. We had only a few hours left before the fire of Bealtine would be lit.

I mounted the horse and bade the others farewell. A steady rain began to fall, making visibility difficult. “Thank you, my brothers. Pray for us, that we will make it in time.”

CHAPTER 12 — The Challenge

“Follow me. I know a shortcut,” Cairneach said as he reigned in his horse and took off down a smaller path through the woods. I chased after him the best I could and finally caught up with him. In an hour we came over a wooded hill that brought us close to our destination.

“There it is—the castle of Tara!” Cairneach said as we came out of the dense clearing. He turned to me and asked, “Well, Patrick, where would you be wanting to light this fire?”

“We will have to find a place where the fire can easily be seen by both the castle and the valley below.”

“I think I know just the place. Let’s make to that brae* over there,” Cairneach said as he pointed to a distant prominence. [*brae: hill]

The slope of the height was steep. It had become especially slippery after the rain, but despite the difficult climb, our horses reached the top, though panting heavily from exhaustion.

I summed up our next hurdle, “There is not a stick of firewood on top of this hill, just grass. And everything is damp from this rain.”

“How are we going to be lighting a fire without dry wood?” Cairneach asked. “That I don’t know. But I do know that we did not come all this way to give up.”

As had become our custom, we cast our cares on the Lord, “Lord, we have gone out on a limb for You. Please send us help now.” The rain finally stopped. Sunset was fast approaching when the fires would be lit.

I looked on the rough path that wove its way over the hills and spied a friendly sight. “Look at that man, there!” I said excitedly. “Where?”

“Can you see what that angel is carrying on his back? A load of firewood!”

We rode as fast as we could to catch up with him, which wasn’t too hard since he was walking slowly, stooped over with his heavy load.

“Sir, may we buy that load of firewood that you are carrying?”

The woodsman paused a minute to answer us gruffly before going on his way again, “I think not. I’ll be needing it for the festival fires.”

We followed him, “Perhaps, good man I can change your mind,” I said as I turned to Cairneach and held out my hand, “Give me your sword.”

“But surely, Patrick, you would not harm him,” Cairneach whispered to me. “Trust me! Give me your sword!”

Reluctantly, he handed me the sword. It was a fine weapon with a silver hilt with intricate designs worked into the scabbard. “Please be careful with it then. It was handed down to me from my father from his father.”

“I would like to trade this weapon for the bundle of firewood,” I said to the woodsman, pointing to his burden.

“Surely, you must be joking,” the Scoti said in disbelief. “Yes, surely you must be joking, Patrick!” Cairneach added. “Not at all, but may I have it quickly? I need it urgently!”

“Well, if you are sure. Take it then,” the woodsman, said as he put his heavy load down and reached out for the sword in one motion before I had a chance to change my mind.

I could tell that Cairneach was deeply hurt that he had to forsake his heirloom, but he tried to be brave. I had not much time to comfort him, but simply said, “God will greatly bless you for your sacrifice.”

We quickly grabbed up the bundle and rode off to the summit once more. Under a rocky overhang we gathered what tinder we could find that was still dry. I sheltered Cairneach from the wind with my mantle as he struck his flint and lit the fire. Ever so carefully, we added a few twigs to the fire to make it burn. Then we placed the precious branches on one by one until the fire was raging. I prayed, lifting my staff over the valley and turned towards the castle.

“I light this Pascal fire for your glory, Lord! With this light, I banish forever the forces of darkness in this land!”

When we looked in the direction of the castle we saw that the fire of Laoghair was already lit.

Cairneach put his hand on my shoulder, “We are too late. I’m sorry, Patrick. Perhaps the Lord will make a way for us next year.”

My disappointment was not easily comforted. I tried to relive the past few days to see how I could have shaved off a few moments here or there to change this unhappy outcome. Little did I know the drama that was unfolding in the nearby castle of Tara.

The pyre atop the castle roof had just been lit. Before it stood King Laoghair, his guests, and his counselors. They stared in disbelief at the fire that was already burning brightly across the valley on the distant hill.

"Sacrilege!" cried Laoghair. "How dare anyone light the fire of Bealtine before me?"

“Let the earth open wide its mouth and swallow the man that has lit this fire!” hissed the druid sorcerer, Luceat Mael, as he swayed, cursing us.

Laoghair motioned with his hand to summon his advisors, wizards, enchanters, soothsayers, and teachers. He asked them, “What must we do?”

Dubhthach, one of the leading druids, warned, "O great king, know this, that there is a geiss on this fire." “What geiss?”

“That the fire must be put out tonight. If these flames are not extinguished before the dawning of the morrow’s light, the person who lit the fire may someday rule our land.”

"This shall not be so!" shouted the king to his warriors. "Harness up 27 chariots! We shall drive there tonight and capture this criminal."

Within the hour, the chariots and horses were ready. They were filled with the Druids, chiefs, and others. The procession drove hard for Patrick's fire. Although the distance was not far, there were several bogs surrounding the hill that hindered them. The heavy chariots got stuck in the bogs, made especially damp by the recent rains. The warriors heaved and pushed with all their might to free the wheels, but the chariots only sunk deeper into the bog. The heavy chariots would have to be abandoned. The king, however, would not be so easily defeated. The horses were freed from the chariots and mounted separately. There were not enough horses for everyone, so some people had to walk back to the castle.

Laoghair commanded the captain of his warriors, "Find out for me who has kindled this fire and bring him to me. But you must find him and put out his fire before the first ray of morning's light. This is very important. Do you understand?"

The captain was distracted a minute by the sight of a large herd of deer that passed near them. He lost his footing and stumbled into the mud. When he stood up, he was totally covered in the mess.

Embarrassed at his comic appearance, the captain tried to regain his dignity as he said to his master, "Yes, O great king, we will do as you command."

The warriors rode on, but they had to go around the bogs. As it was dark, with no moonlight, it was a long time before they found the route to the summit where we were still keeping our fire alive. While I kept the fire burning, Cairneach rode to the forest to search for more wood.

The sun was just peeking over the horizon when we found ourselves surrounded by Laoghair's warriors. Against our protests, we were knocked down and tied like bundles of wheat on the back of their horses.

When we were closer to the castle we were thrown on the back of a cart and put in chains.

The people from the valley of Magh Berg had seen the fire. Now before them were the villains who had defied their tradition. They

shouted, spat, and punched wildly at us, as we were driven towards the castle. Our captors told us nothing.

We were led to a field surrounded by elevated wooden tiers, on which we were unceremoniously dumped. Many people had gathered to watch our trial. The king had not yet arrived.

In a moment when the guards were distracted, a kind slave held a cup of cool water to our lips. We were chained and were helpless. After taking a few swigs, the cup was rudely knocked out of his hands by one of the guards and our thirst remained.

Seizing his opportunity to take center stage, Luceat Mael began prancing around us, shaking his talismans at us, “Who do you think you are to challenge our ancient traditions?”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“Fools! Why do you pretend not to know? The fire! The fire! You lit the first fire of Bealtine!” I looked at Cairneach in joy, “Then we were on time!” I shouted.

Cairneach’s elation was more subdued. “Now we can die happy,” he said with a note of sarcasm in his voice, as he looked at the mob about to lynch us. The demon-possessed priest was shaking in convulsions, casting his spells on us.

A welcome sight changed Cairneach’s mood. He nodded his head in the direction of the crowd and whispered, “I saw our brothers in the crowd disguised as Scoti herdsmen.”

After looking hard I saw them too. It gave me great courage to know that our brethren were right there with us, upholding us in prayer.

The bystanders watched us with a strange fascination. We should have been terrified as we awaited our punishment, but instead we were rejoicing. This seemed to bother the Druid, as he hoped to see us squirm.

“Do you put yourself above the wise men and the Druids? Do you think the powers of your god are greater than ours?” Luceat Mael hissed.

He was not expecting my answer, “Yes, actually we do.”

He was taken back for a moment and then continued in his tirade, “Have you not heard what happens to those who disobey the chosen ones who keep men and the Siadh in harmony?”

“It couldn’t have been good,” Cairneach joked.

Ignoring us, he turned to his audience, pointing to each item as he spoke of it, “Unless we purge the air of their breath, the ground of their footprints, and even this drinking cup of their mark, a great darkness shall descend upon the land.” To punctuate his speech, he picked up the cup, which had been given us, threw it violently on the ground and then stepped on it as though he were squashing a hated insect. He had not finished, “They must die very slowly and in the worst pain we can inflict upon them. Only in pain can the evil they have done be put away from our midst. If we fail to do this, our cows will not give milk, our bulls will become infertile, our calves will be stillborn, the grass will wither, the water will become undrinkable, the rivers will dry up, the sun will not rise, and the rains will not fall.”

He paused for a moment and then turned back to us. He threw his hands towards us, as though hurling all the curses he could think of at us in one last dramatic gesture, “Let no fires be lit or meat eaten until they die!”

The crowd grew restless and called for our destruction. A tall man broke through the crowds, waving his staff, and shouted, “By Taranis*, let me be the first to strike a blow at them!” [*Taranis: revered by the Celts as the god of thunder]

A guard held him back, “No one may touch the prisoners until judgment has been passed by King Laoghair.”

Silence ruled as King Laoghair entered and sat on his high seat, which was covered with furs. We were roughly handled and cast at his feet.

The guard who had brought us in addressed the king, “These foreigners have lit a fire before the official fire of Bealtine. Let their judgment be as you decree, O King.”

“What do my wise men suggest?” The king asked the priests and other counselors encircling him.

“May I advise that they be allowed to explain their actions so that we can judge them better,” Dubhthach the Druid said.

Luceat Mael pointed his bony fingers accusingly at me. “There is nothing to explain. They were captured at the forbidden fire. Unless this violation is punished swiftly and severely, the Siadh will lay our land waste. I tell you, they have evil powers. Be rid of them before they trap us in their magic spell.”

The tall Druid spoke, “We must know what magic they have worked so that we can know how to break their magic charms.

What magic have they done?”

“They trapped the chariots that were pursuing them, did they not?”

Luceat Mael said in his usual accusing

tone.

“Perhaps it was only the rain that made the ground too soggy,”

Dubhthach suggested.

“And how can you explain the herd of deer that came close to the king’s company and caused his chief warrior to fall flat on his face? Through their enchantments, they transformed themselves!” the sorcerer ranted as he pointed at us.

“And why would they want to change themselves into a herd of deer?” Dubhthach asked sincerely.

“To confuse and defeat us, but his power was weaker than ours, for he could only postpone his capture, not escape it.”

I could not resist the chance to say, “I can promise you, good king, that never at any time were we deer.” The crowd roared in laughter.

“See! Their magic is so strong that they don’t remember it themselves.”

Dubhthach consulted the other druids and then they whispered their advice to the king.

Laoghair spoke, “A grave act of disobedience has been committed. The geiss of Laoghair has been violated. But we still have not heard from these men themselves. Let them now come forth and speak.”

The time that I had waited for had come, but I now felt totally weak and incapable. I was so exhausted it would have to be His strength working in me. I called upon the Lord to give me the strength to be a testimony for Him in spite of my weakness.

Cairneach nodded to me to let me know that he was praying for me also.

I began, "I was once a worker to the Scoti, until the day that God delivered me from my captivity, and by a dream guided me to my home." There was murmuring among the crowds, for all knew the harsh punishment required and meted out for escaped workers. "If you were a worker as I once was, how would you feel towards your former masters?"

The murmuring rose to a high pitch as everyone discussed among them how they would answer this question.

"Of course, you would hate the ones who took you. But I feel nothing but love for you."

Luceat Mael called out to the crowd, "I warn you, do not fall under this man's magic spell. We know what we must do to escaped workers!"

Laoghair held up his hand calling for order, "Let him speak."

I bowed my head to thank the king, "I have since returned to my master and bought my freedom. But please let me continue my story without interruption."

The king waved his hand, signaling for me to continue, "After I had arrived safely home, God spoke to me in another vision of the night. Your people were pleading with me to walk among you and tell you the message I have for you today."

"Who is this message for?"

I was fighting against the pain and exhaustion brought on by the chains that had bound me tightly. It would have to be the Holy Spirit speaking through me, "This message is for the men, the women, the champions, the weak, the children, the slaves. It is for all people that live upon the earth."

"What is this message you wish to give? Give it now, for it is forbidden that any messenger be denied the right to give his message," the king said, trying to be just. He then ordered that my chains be taken off me.

"Thank you, King Laoghair. Far, far to the east is a tuath where men live who are much like you—they tend flocks of sheep and cattle, and grow wheat in abundance. Because there is little rainfall and the sun burns with exceeding heat, the land is often very dry.

"On the hills of this country one night, spirits appeared to herdsmen in a great light and sang a wondrous song. They told

them that a baby of the God of all gods had been born in an animal stable nearby.”

Some people in the crowd laughed at this idea. “You may wonder why He was not born in a castle as most kings would be. It was because He would not be as other kings. He left the splendor of Heaven and came to earth in lowliness and humility. It was to show that His Father is the God of love to all men, rich and poor. Great wise men also traveled from far to give Him precious gifts for they read of His coming in the stars.

“The king of the land where this baby was born was named Herod. He was filled with jealousy when he heard that there was another king born in his tuath. He was worried that this child would one day grow up and take over his kingdom.

“Herod sent his warriors to find the child and kill Him. He was so cruel that just to make sure that the baby king was dead, he ordered that all males up to two years old in all the raths nearby should be killed. But God, knowing all things, was smarter than he, and had a plan to save His Son.

“Before they could carry out his orders, the boy’s mother and His father were warned by the spirits in a dream to flee to another land to the south. They obeyed and stayed there until the jealous ruler died in great pain for the evil he had done.

“In time, most people forgot about the birth of the boy they called Jesus, but God had not forgotten. “The boy grew up like any ordinary boy. He was not a warrior, nor a champion, nor had anyone imagined

Him even as the leader of the tuath. They knew Him as His earthly father’s helper in his carpentry business. But His mother knew He was special, for He had not been conceived by man, but by the Spirit of God. Others also knew that He was special because of the prophecies that foretold of His coming.

“The true heavenly father of the boy Jesus was the highest power in the upper realms. The Father and the Son were one.”

“How could that be?” asked the king.

I realized that it would be a challenge to explain such a deep idea to these simple and often superstitious people. I looked at my feet and there was a shamrock. I got a sudden inspiration and held the delicate grassy weed between my fingers. Little did I know that it would one day become the symbol of Hibernia.

“It is like this shamrock. One leaf is like the Father. One is like the Son. And the third one is like His mother, the Spirit of God. Although they are three leaves—yet they are one.”

Several people nodded their heads in approval. I could tell from the crowd’s reaction that they had understood.

“After fighting all of the temptations that the evil forces hurled at Him, Jesus, then 30 years old, began His work. Followers gathered about Him to learn more from His teachings. He instructed them how to live in order to come into His kingdom. But not everyone understood His instructions, for He taught of peace and love. I will give you an example. Imagine if some warriors came from Laighin* and stole some of your cattle, what would you do?”

[*Laighin: located in south Ireland]

One man cried out, “We would tear them apart!” “We’d kill them!” came another reply.

“Jesus would instruct you not to do such things. Instead He would tell you to forgive your enemies. Give him water, clothes, and food to eat. If your enemy strikes you on the left cheek, turn the other one to them.”

“Why would you want to do that?” asked the king.

“To show him love. Of course everyone shows love to his or her family and friends, but by showing love to your enemies, you help them to change.”

“You mean, you help them be able to steal more cattle and then take away our homes!” one man shouted in the crowd.

“No, by showing love to even the least or the weakest, you are showing love to the Highest Power. He regards all men, women, and children. But some people found this idea hard to believe.”

“We also find it hard to believe,” Laoghair said sincerely.

“That is understandable. Even His followers were slow to learn that love is the better way. But to help them believe, He did many miracles like raising the dead, stilling storms, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and giving sight to the blind.

“Can He do such miracles for us?” someone cried out in the crowd.

“He can, if it is His will,” I answered. “But may I be allowed to finish my story about Jesus? The best part is still to come. Some of

the leaders of their religion turned against Him because they, like King Herod, were jealous of His power.”

I could tell that this might be a sensitive point for the king because he also might be worried that another faith might overthrow his kingdom as well, and so I said, “They did not have to worry though, because Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. He rules in the hearts of those who have received His love and rules forever the spirits of those who have left this world.

“Nevertheless, Jesus was imprisoned and brought to trial, at which time even the greatest of His friends

deserted Him. Jesus foretold that by the time the bird of the morning had called out three times this friend would deny that he ever knew Him. His followers felt lonely and afraid that they might be captured and killed next.”

Dubhthach asked, “If He was such a great king, why didn’t He call upon the spirits to rescue Him?” “That is what many people also wondered. It was because His Kingdom was not of this world yet. As He

was born in humility, so did He die in humility. That is how it was supposed to be. He was to die to pay the price for our sins, a price too great for us to pay, but He took it on Himself, and in so doing, forgave us our debt of sin.

“Jesus was spit upon, whipped, and was nailed to wooden beams until He died. He had so much love that even in His death He cried out, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

“Later, when His followers went to the grave they found it empty. A great miracle had happened. He appeared to them alive again in the room. Death had no power over Him.

“Still, not all of His followers believed and so He showed them signs and wonders. He even let one of the doubters see and touch His wounds to help him believe.

“You may ask yourself. ‘What does the story of Jesus have to do with me?’ I will tell you. By believing in Him anyone can also overcome death and live forever in the land of eternal youth. You will be subjects of a great kingdom, the greatest that ever was or

will be. Jesus will say to you, ‘You are home! Unyoke your chariot horses.’”

I could tell that the king was listening but not ready to believe just yet. I could tell that his traditions were standing in the way. He said, “These are strange sayings to our ears. We have many gods of the things that we see, but you speak of things beyond our understanding.”

“It is not so strange, O king. For do you not believe that the Tuatha De Danaan were banished from heaven because they had too much knowledge? So it is written in our holy book, the Bible, that the first couple, Adam and Eve, ate from a forbidden Tree of Knowledge and were cast out of the Garden of Paradise. Do you not believe that the Children of Llyr* struggle with the children of Don*? So has it been from ancient times until this day. All I ask of you and your people is to join with me in this struggle against darkness. [*lyr: darkness; *don: light]

“Do you not believe that the King of Dyfed lives in a beautiful land with his magic cauldron of plenty? I invite you to this land today. Take this gift of Jesus’ love in your heart and find a joyful life forever. For He is like your ‘Gwydion,’ the master of magic, poetry, and music. And like Gwydion, Jesus will one day go forth to battle on magical white horses that fly to defeat all the evil in the world.” “If the words you speak are true they are wonderful, indeed. But how do we know that you speak the truth?” asked Laoghair.

Luceat Mael saw his chance to spew forth his venom, “Wisely spoken, O king. As I said, this man is full of enchanting words. But what have we seen him do? Only defy our traditions.”

The Lord showed me a picture of Elijah challenging the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, I took the cue, “If you give the Lord a chance, He will show you.” I turned to Luceat Mael and said defiantly, “I challenge you to show the power of your gods on the morrow. Conjure all the magic you can. I will follow on the next day. The god who performs the greatest miracles—He is the true God.”

“This charlatan only stalls for time. I say end his blasphemies now or our land will agonize in great pain!” the sorcerer screamed.

Suddenly Luceat Mael rolled his eyes and went into a trance and began his false prophecies, “I see this man burning to ashes in the fire. I see his life ended in three days for he has incurred the wrath of Esus, our true Lord and Master, Taranis*, Teutates*, and most of all Bael*. He has spoken against our gods and they cry out for justice, that he and his companion die a thousand deaths! If we do not kill them now, it will be the end of us!”

[*Taranis, the thunderer; *Teutates, the god of the people; *Bael, god of fire]

I remembered the story of how Paul cursed the sorcerer Elymas who spoke against them, so I prayed that God would judge this child of the Devil that others would believe the Word of the Lord.

The king raised his hand to give his judgment, “It shall be as you, Patrick, have requested. Tomorrow Luceat Mael and any of the other Druids who wish to help him will call upon our gods and they will show their power. The next day you, Patrick, will call upon your mysterious God who was born in an animal pen and died in shame to come to life again. Let the truth be known to us that we may believe the right way. Both of you must prepare. This trial is ended today and will resume again at the end of the challenge.”

Luceat Mael looked crestfallen. It was not as he had planned. No one had ever challenged his power before. He cast an evil eye in my direction in utter contempt. Cairneach and I were led away.

Early in the morning, Luceat Mael ascended a hill that had a shrine and altar to Bael on its summit with his helper to call down miracles from his gods. A gentle snow began to fall on the land that grew to a blizzard. It was not totally unheard of that snow fell in early May, but very strange that it snowed so much. Then large hailstones began to fall. Many crops that had just been planted were destroyed, some cattle died, and travel became near impossible. Although he cried out to the gods to do other miracles, nothing happened. Cairneach and I, as well as the other brothers who were still in hiding, were praying desperately that God would somehow show His power.

The next day dawned when it would be our turn. A bright sun came out that melted most of the snow. Instead of climbing on a hill hoping for a showy display, the Lord showed us to walk among the people as He did when He was on earth. Four guards followed us

wherever we went to make sure that we would not attempt to escape.

A father dressed in dirty-ragged clothing came to me after hearing my words before the king. He clutched my cloak and said in desperation, "If your God is able to do miracles, then heal my sick boy from his fever. Come into my house."

He took my arm and led me through the village to his hut. The boy was lying on a cot. His whole body was shaking violently. I felt his brow. It was burning and he was sweating profusely.

I looked to the father and said, "I cannot promise that my God will heal him. But I will ask. Sometimes He says yes, and sometimes no, and sometimes He answers later. But I have seen Him do many miracles in my life."

I prayed for the boy and he showed immediate signs of recovery. Several others came to us and also asked for us to pray for their loved one's healing that day. We also talked to some that were discouraged or had lost a loved one. We prayed and held them in our arms and comforted them. One man we talked to was totally despondent, for he had lost his family to a fatal disease. He wanted to end his life, but the words of the Lord gave him hope to pick up the broken pieces and start over. By the end of the day, we had seen the Lord work in the lives of many needy hearts.

The next day we were gathered together and a storm was brewing. Dark clouds on the horizon floated ominously in our direction. A bolt of lightning struck the hill where Luceat Mael had called upon his gods. Many of the villagers ran to the hill to see what had happened. Before them lay the altar of Bael destroyed. The stones were thrown down and all that was wood had burned up. One of the keepers of the altar had been killed, burned to death.

A few hours later, King Laoghair entered and judgment was set. The events of the two previous days were read by one of his scribes. He discussed with his advisors a long time before deciding.

"The magic of Luceat Mael was strong."

The sorcerer looked proudly at the crowd that was cheering wildly for him. Laoghair continued, "Yet, his magic brought no good to our land. The snow and hail destroyed our crops and our cattle."

“But ... but ... but ... Patrick performed no miracles on his day! It did not even rain!” Luceat sputtered. “It was a nice day. O, king that is something to be thankful for is it not?” I said cheerily.

The king and his advisors seemed amused that I remained lighthearted in spite of the seriousness of the trial. “Luceat Mael...you are wrong. There were miracles done on the day of Patrick. The sick were healed, the sad were comforted, and those who had lost hope found courage to keep living. The priests have read in the signs that the lightning that struck the altar of Bael was a message from the Siadh. It signified the end of our old traditions and the beginning of a new day in our land. For does not a man choose to give up his bronze sword when he can use a stronger one of iron? I decree that Patrick and his mission be not harmed, for he truly is a messenger of the upper realm.”

There was restlessness in the crowd from those who did not agree that the foreigners should go unpunished. One warrior tried to strike out at me, but a guard held him back.

Dubhthach raised his voice to the crowd, “Let no man question the ruling of King Laoghair. The geiss of Laoghair forbids anyone from harming these men.”

“Let the wrath of the underworld fall on me then,” one of the men in the crowd yelled, as he waved his sword threateningly.

“Break the geiss and you destroy the power of your king,” Dubhthach said as he ordered the man be taken in a prison cage.

“Because they have already been tried and found innocent, the punishment that was to be given them cannot be done without something worse happening to our land. Because we would have cut them with a sword, no metal must pierce their skin. We would have burned them; now no flame must touch them. Because we would have chained them, no chains or lock must detain them. They must be able to speak freely because we would have silenced them.”

Benen, Ross, Toutamael, and Corc came out of the crowd and embraced us.

*

We returned as quickly as we could to Ath Trium. There we had a happy reunion, and rested until our next adventures.

As we were relaxing one night, I said to Benen, "Play us music now, with all of your skill." "With pleasure!" said Benen.

He took his harp, tuned it, and plucked its strings, releasing a sweet strain of music in praise of the King of Heaven. He also sang of our adventures. His playing was truly inspired. When he was done, he asked me, "Can I ask you a favor?"

"What were you thinking of?"

"I don't ask for anything for myself, but I ask that you would bless all those of my art in future generations who shall live in Hibernia."

"All right then, I will pray a blessing for them." I looked over and saw the daughters painting a lovely picture and one of them dancing. I didn't want anyone to feel left out, so I included them in my blessing as well. "May the art of music be one of the three arts by which a man can make a living all the days of his life in Hibernia. May no man who plays the harp lack any good thing."

And so, all Irish musicians who glorify the Lord have been blessed with a special anointing until this day. After that Benen put his harp away.

"That was good music you gave us," said Toutamael.

"It was good indeed," I said. "I never heard anything closer to the music of Heaven."

"Well then, Patrick, if there is music in Heaven, why shouldn't we enjoy music on earth too?" Benen said with a smile.

"Right you are."

It was not long before we were traveling all over the island. Our goal was to win the chieftains to the faith. Even though we had been given permission to speak, even the king's power was limited. Traditions were deeply entrenched and would need a lot of uprooting.

Luceat Mael was so discouraged at the king's ruling in our favor that he departed in disgrace. He and other sorcerers who had defied us traveled to another tuath far away, hoping to regain their reputation. I found later that after speaking against us to some

chieftains, one dark night he fell over a cliff near the sea and died. His death caused those who had heard of our duel to believe more in our message.

I traveled around the country witnessing to the chiefs with Corc, Toutamael, and Benen. I had a vision of winning the second generation of the rulers. They would be the next chiefs. I hoped that they would be more flexible to change and accept a new faith. Many of these rulers-to-be who I won to the Lord accompanied me on my travels. I gave gifts to them for coming with me, and also to their fathers for receiving us, as was their custom. These gifts were not a form of bribery or payment for accompanying me, as they were often very small gifts. It was more a matter of becoming one with the people and showing my appreciation for their help. These young Scoti were very helpful in teaching us the customs of the land, and their traveling with us also made our mission more accepted in the eyes of the rulers and people of the land.

We no longer dressed in priest's clothing, but in rough tunics and leggings as was their custom. We did this to become one with this people. We found that by keeping their customs, we also kept our heads. We also learned to have lots of patience, like waiting for God to move in their hearts and not forcing our beliefs on them. This showed them that we had no bad intentions.

But even though we did all we could to become one with them and win their hearts, there were some chieftains who captured us, as they were greedy of gain. They took everything we had, and eagerly wished to kill us, but every time the Lord delivered us from their power, for our time to leave this world had not yet come.

One time, a king who had heard slanders about us from Luceat Mael and some of his false prophets put me in irons. But after two weeks they set me free and even returned our belongings. The Lord touched their hearts to free us, and also I must give credit to our friends in king Laoghair's court who spoke on our behalf.

Every day was an adventure for us. We knew not if we would be murdered, robbed, or captured, but we feared none of these things, for we looked forward to the promises of Heaven. We placed ourselves into the hands of Him who rules everywhere. As the apostle says, "Cast thy troubles upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." The Lord never failed us for He always forewarned us of dangers by giving us a divine message.

It wasn't my great wisdom that I heard from Heaven. Anyone can! It was a great gift to know God and to love Him, so helpful,

practical, and beneficial in every way. The Lord had mercy on us thousands and thousands of times, getting us out of dangerous situations when we didn't know what to do. I was just following God. I was His man in His place in His time. I would have been happy to shed my blood for His name, but that was not His will.

The time came for Benen and me to go west to the wild country and climb the sacred Reek beside the sea of the setting sun. The Reek had a peculiar cone shape, which commanded reverence from the Scoti. On its steep slope the wind had sculpted the bushes into strange shapes.

We would need to walk from its seaweed rock base at the water's edge to the cloud-topped summit. We avoided the low soggy ground and twisted our way upwards among the grass and rocks of hillocks to the top of the sacred Reek. On its summit, I lit a large fire and lifted my staff over the land, claiming the souls of Hibernia for His glory.

We had fulfilled the prophecy. Now we would descend from the sacred Reek and continue to bring the people of Hibernia to the Light.

We were invited to the yearly meeting of the Druids in the rath of Dubhthach. We decided to attend, for these men were the spiritual leaders of Hibernia and could effect great change in the people if they willed to. Soon after we arrived at the sacred spot, Dubhthach began to question me more about what he had heard me say at the trial. I tried to answer the best I could by being led by the Spirit and from His Word. At first the discussion was tense, but when they saw that we did not threaten their authority, but had come as friends, they lightened up.

He said to me, "I find nothing wrong with you. You seem sincere and kind. We have gained more from listening than acting rashly and killing you." He turned to his fellow priests and said, "If the highest power is with these men, if a great spirit is on their side and we harm them, we will surely come to grief. Let us receive them as friends."

We talked more informally as food and drink was offered to us. We were wary of being poisoned, as the Druids were known experts at making medicines and potions for every occasion, both beneficial

and sinister. We only ate the food that Dubhthach had sampled first.

As a token of friendship, they offered us girls for our pleasure. Despite our protests, a man in disheveled appearance came to us with a group of girls giggling and pushing each other, following close behind.

Rabbit broke out into a nervous sweat.

“For the boy we have the fat one,” the man said, hoping we would be pleased with his selection. “I’m sorry, but we cannot accept your gift.”

“What is the matter? Don’t you like them? I can get boys if you’d rather.”

Trying to hide my disgust, I said, “You have much to learn about the ways of Jesus. Men and women who follow Him decide to be with each other in good and bad times until they are divided by death. Some of us who dedicate ourselves completely to the service of Jesus do not take companions.”

“Incredible!”

From his reaction, I could tell this concept was truly foreign to them.

I said good-bye to Dubhthach and his priests. It was time for us to make the long journey home.

He bade me a fond farewell and said, “We are amazed at how your God has protected you. You have walked unscathed through the many snares that your enemies have laid for you. We will watch the progress of your mission carefully.”

“Do that! Our Master told us that you could know a tree by its fruits. A good tree cannot bear evil fruit and an evil tree cannot bear good fruit.”

“Perhaps we too will one day believe, if we can continue to see the truth of what you say in our lives.” “That is good. All He asks is that you give Him a chance to work. Thank you for hearing us and opening

your hearts to our faith.”

Many of these Druids became the poets, historians, and judges of the Christian Ireland that it became in their lifetime.

Epilogue

Just as has happened to you, I had people tell lies and attempt to destroy my work. One of them was my former friend from thirty years before. I had told Designatius some of my secret sins and he brought them up at a time when he thought it could do me the most damage. He was jealous of how the Lord was using me. He had joined the Pelagianists and hoped to take over the work that we had begun. This terrible sin that he revealed was so shocking to some in the church that it cast doubt on my ability to carry on as a shepherd of God's people, and even the right to remain a priest.

Some other people also accused me of getting rich. I had to laugh at that charge. The only thing I ever was rich in was faith. I knew that some people might accuse me of this, so I was very careful about personal gifts to me. When Christian brothers and sisters threw some of their jewelry on the altar in a flashy display or tried to give me gifts to impress me, I returned it to them, even though they might take offense. I told them to instead give it to the poor.

The night I heard about these slanders I was deeply worried. My sleep was restless. I was depressed. I saw the scroll with the charges against me. The Lord appeared and said, "We in Heaven are not pleased that these accusations have been brought against you. Let no man lift a hand against you, for he that touches you touches the apple of My eye.

My accusers asked me to return to Britannia to face trial, but I refused. For I, like Nehemiah, was too busy building a wall and could not come down to answer their petty disputes. Instead the Lord showed me that I should write down my defense. In this way, the Lord brought a victory out of defeat. Being the poor writer that I am, I might not have taken the time to sit down and write the story of my life if I wasn't compelled to.

Nothing came of the accusations, which I thank the Lord for. He strengthened me in the faith and did not allow others to frustrate my work, which I had learned from Christ my Lord.

But I felt sorry for Designatius, that after being my friend and even suggesting that I be elected bishop, he turned against me and aired the same dirty laundry that Christ had already cleansed. These who spread lies about those who are working for the Lord are the real

ones to be pitied, for they will face the shame of facing the Lord some day and answering for every false word they spoke.

But I was too busy with the Lord's work to worry about such men. For thirty years I tramped the roads and forded the rivers of that emerald isle to see men and women reborn in God and come to know the Christ that we love so much.

I walked the earth as a poor and a simple man, as you do. It took death to make a grand memory of me. You never can know if the poor, the simple, and the weak ones of today may be the heroes of tomorrow, so keep a kind word for all and a gentle hand. Be a sample of the good Lord's love. Fish diligently and spread your nets far so that a great multitude might be caught for God. If you do these things, you are sure to be a hero in His book.

The End