

## DOLMEN LOVE

Grainne was betrothed to Fionn, a renowned warrior much older than she was. At a celebration in her father's house, Fionn the guest of honour, she challenged Diarmuid Ó Duibhne, a younger man and friend to Fionn, to elope with her. This he did, and so began a flight and a pursuit that crossed more boundaries, not all of them natural, than had ever been crossed before.

Some nights, taking refuge with the megalithic dead, they would sleep on dolmens.

Its sixty ton capstone overgrown with a deep bed of heather and bilberry and bracken and grass and lichens and moss, no dolmen so suited and sheltered them as did the one called Labby Rock in Sligo, down hill from Magh Tuired where was fought the great apocalyptic battle of Ireland's Dreamtime, the Tuatha De Danannan, a good people, winning the day against the Fomorians, a recently arrived evil people.

To night more than ever Diarmuid and Grainne are aware of the King and the queen megalithically buried beneath them.

**GR.:** By my count, this is the thirtieth dolmen we have slept on.

**DI:** A lot of sleep on top of a lot of death.

**GR.:** A lot of love on top of a lot of death.

**DI:** I have a secret.

**GR.:** Tell me.

**DI:** Passionately with you, always with you, on thirty dolmens with you, I have discovered a deep and delighted intimacy between love and death. In love to night – there will be love to night – how can there not be love to night – in love to night and every night we aren't only Diarmuid and Grainne on top of dolmen death. Passion cremating us, we are the commingled royal ashes in the burial chamber beneath us.

You speak what I know. What I came to know, the night I first set eyes on you.

**DI:** The surprise of it! The wonder of it!

**GR.:** Tell me. Tell me what I know. What with you I know.

**DI:** Until I met you, until that first night that I lay down with you on that first dolmen, I had thought of death as the end of life. I being a warrior, I had thought of it as the spear-headed, sword-sided end of life. In battle, the bloody end of life. Now I know that it is what lifts love and life off the ground, as this dolmen does, lifting us up not on a bed of limp clothes but on a living springing bed of lichen and moss and mountain grass and bracken and bilberry and heather, the heather in flower and the bilberry in berry.

As soon as we came out of the hazelwood today and we looked and we saw it, I knew it, and you knew it, no dolmen so great a wonder as this one.

Give a poor upland tribe six stones, one of them an impossibly heavy stone of sixty or seventy tonnes, and ask them, or no, on pain of their survival demand of them that they build the most tremendous thing in the world, none so great as it anywhere ever before, none so great as it anywhere ever after, and that is what they did, giving unimaginable dignity to death and to life, the whole thing an eagle taking off into easy flight, or no, an eagle already in flight, effortlessly and unmovingly riding a gentle updraft into higher flight, its own delight its endless destination.

**GR.:** I have a secret.

**DL:** Tell me.

**GR:** At the well the other day I met an old woman.

What, I asked her, is happening in Ireland now?

She looked surprised. So surprised, she looked at me even more surprised.

You standing right here beside me, she said, you standing in Ireland and you mean to tell me that you don't know what is happening right now in Ireland?

Doesn't everyone everywhere know what is happening in Ireland now.

Haven't you heard the hounds in the night? And the hunting horns at dawn, haven't you heard them? Those hounds and horns, tell me about them, I asked. Already all over the country they have been heard, she said. Already it is called the greatest pursuit that ever was in the world, Fionn the old man, Fionn and his instincts, Fionn and his hounds, pursuing the eloped lovers, Diarmuid and Grainne. Already 'tis as big as a folktale, already 'tis as big as history itself, Fionn the old man, when he does sleep, sleeping on the cold, wet earth, but the eloped and still eloping lovers, they sleeping embraced, more than embraced, on dolmens, and every tribe no matter where wanting them to sleep on their dolmen.

Why, I asked her, why would they want the eloped lovers to sleep on top of their dead ancestors?

Something about it being good for the land, she said. Something about it giving life to the land, and to the ancestors. Something about it giving life, giving dolmen life, to the living and the dead.

**DL:** I sense it. There is something you aren't telling me.

**GR:** They will die, she said.

**DL:** Did she say how?

**GR:** She did.

**DL:** How?

**GR:** I saw it in a dream, she said. I saw the boar. When I saw him first, standing so still on a flat topped mountain, I thought it was a dolmen. But the dolmen bristled. Bristled and charged, ripping the man, and news of it ripped the woman.

Fionn and his wolfhounds behind us, a dream-big boar in front of us, and our love-bed a dolmen.

Forget the hounds, forget the boar. Of the dolmen you said that its destination is its own endless delight.

**DL:** There is something you know.

**GR:** Tell me what I know.

**DL:** Having lain with me you know that there is unrestrainable running towards each other in love. In it also is elopement and pursuit.

**GR:** Fionn and his wolfhounds .....

**DL:** No, I am not talking about Fionn and his wolfhounds. Nor am I talking about a boar sharpening his instincts to slaughter. I am talking rather about the frightful impulses that emerge in a warrior in battle. They emerged in me. And if they emerged in me in battle, in the blind passions of battle, why can they not also emerge in love? They frighten me. Only they frighten me. It is why I hesitated when you challenged me to elope with you. I knew we could elope from Fionn and your father, but what of those impulses, could we elope from them?

**GR:** Have we eloped from them?

**DL:** No.

**GR.:** How close behind us are they?

**DI.:** I embrace you with them.

**GR.:** But no harm has come to me. Only the best love I have ever known has come to me. Climbing mountains with you, crossing rivers with you, eating wild roots with you, lying down to night on this dolmen with you, no other woman in Ireland is so much a woman as I am. Look up at them. The shining stars approve of me. They approve of us. I know it. I know it. With you I have never been in danger so great and yet I have never been so safe. Safe at the beginning of passion, in the middle of passion, and at the screaming, collapsing end of passion. It is true what the old woman said. With you, Diarmuid Ó Duibhne, with you on dolmens all over Ireland, with you on bare Pollnabrone, we have been good for the land, we have been good for our ancestors buried with their household things and digging things and killing things beneath us. And to night, Diarmuid Ó Duibhne, my dangerous, safe man, even if to night be the night when our dolmen turns boar and tusks us, to night, before anything else, we will be good for each other, and for the king and queen beneath us. In us the Megalithic and the Celtic peoples are meeting, in love, in dolmen love, in love dying down into this dolmen, dying down into the land. How else can the dead live again? How else, except in us now, can the Megalithic King and Queen live again? How else can the land live again?

For the rest our legend will look after us. Fionn and his wolfhounds behind us, a dream-big boar in front of us, with us something new came into the world, with us death as an enrichment of life and love came into the world, with us dolmen love came into the world. Let it come into it, Diarmuid Ó Duibhne. Let it come into it one last time.