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@BobCarneyGTR

BOB CARNEY



## The Dearg Due

Vampire stories are abundant in Celtic folklore, and Ireland has its share of them. They've been around a long time, long before Fanu gave us *Carmilla* or Stoker introduced us to *Dracula*. It's very possible that these old stories influenced Ireland's horror writers.



The following is my version of the story of the Waterford vampire, as I shared it with my granddaughter and accomplice in all things horror. It is a tale of love, betrayal and revenge.

In the actual tales, our vampire is not named, but the circumstances that made her so are similar. Even the Irish name for the vampire varies but translate to the same meaning, Red Thirst.

*Bhí sé in Eirinn fadó.* It was long ago in Ireland, in the area now known as Waterford, that an overly ambitious chieftan lived. He was a greedy little man, who craved wealth and power above all else. He was feared by his men and his family.

His wife was dutiful but beaten

down, resigned to her life with her tyrant of a husband. They had five sons and three daughters. The children were all raised by their mother with very little interaction by their father.

Mairenn was the eldest daughter, with deep red hair and sparkling green eyes. Her outward beauty paled compared to her inner beauty.

She was generous and kind and loved and respected by all in the village. She was always eager to help and was put up as a role model to the children in the village.

Mairenn was sought out by all the young men in her own village, as well as neighboring young farm workers, but her heart belonged to a young man named Bran. Bran was a simple farm laborer, strong and full of muscle from a life of hard work.

Mairenn and Bran courted in the way that was customary. They would walk in the rolling hills and meadows, making plans to marry one day soon. They spoke of the small farm they would share and of the children they would raise together, teaching them songs and telling them stories of their ancestors.

Arranged marriages were quite common in early Ireland, and Mairenn's father had no interest in his daughter's happiness, only in the fortunes she might net him. He had agreed to send her to marry a much older, wealthy clan chieftan, in exchange for gold and land for himself.

Mairenn was devastated when she was told she was to be sent away and married off to an old man. Her mother pleaded with her husband, but to no avail. Mairenn was sent away, leaving the two young lovers brokenhearted.

Mairenn's new husband was a very cold and cruel man. He treated her horribly, treating her as a possession and showing her off as one might a prized horse.

Often he would beat or cut her, just to hear her scream or watch her bleed. Then he would lock her away in one of his castle's towers until she healed. She was mocked and humiliated whenever she was not locked away by her husband and his band of cutthroat men.

At first Mairenn would hope and pray that somehow Bran would find

her and rescue her, but day after day he did not come. Bran had tried to find her, but was told that Mairenn was happy in her new life and he needed to let go of what was never meant to be, to let her live happily.

During the time Mairenn was locked up, sometimes for weeks or months at a time, she began to change.

The hate in her grew, and she thought of many morbid ways of revenge. She vowed that her husband, the old man with ice cold hands, would never touch her or hurt her again.

The old man didn't care, he had lost interest in her and amused himself with other young women. Locked away in the tower, Mairenn simply gave up. She stopped eating, stopped drinking, she simply stared at the wall until she slipped into a sleep she never awakened from.

The family came to collect the body of the beautiful Mairenn to take home for burial. Bran and all the villagers were saddened by her death and stood silently as she was laid to rest under what was known as Strongbow's Tree.

For months after, Bran would start his day visiting with Mairenn, speaking to her as you and I are now. He would head off at first light to work in the fields until dusk, and then return to his love until he could no longer stay awake.

No one that knew Mairenn before her father sent her away could have imagined the hatred that had burned in her soul before her death, or what would happen next. You see, the lust for revenge had consumed her entirely. She was no longer the sweet Mairenn, but had become a thing, pure evil, a predator focused on exacting that which consumed her.

On the anniversary of her death, in the darkest hour of the night, she pushed herself up from the earth and went to her childhood home. Her father was sleeping alone in his bed when Mairenn entered the room.

His eyes opened when he felt her lips upon him and he saw her beauty as he had never seen it before. Her red hair was ablaze with color and her piercing green eyes shone like polished emeralds.

He felt the life being drained from him and tried to scream out, but could not.

Mairenn's corpse made it's way to her husband's castle and she found him in a drunken stupor, with three young maids in his chambers.

She hissed at the girls and sent them running from the room. Her husband's drunkenness would not allow him to resist and he too was soon a bloodless carcass of flesh and bone.

There were many stories about what occurred that night. They spread through the village, but in the months that followed, the talk subsided. The deaths were largely forgotten.

But Mairenn, or more accurately what she had become, a *dearg-dililat*, a drinker of blood, had developed such an overwhelming blood thirst, that on the anniversary of her death, in the darkest hour of the night, she leaves her resting place. Her targets are mostly young men, whom she lures with her striking beauty and sensual dancing, before draining them of their blood.

The villagers tried to stop the Dearg Doe's killing by placing heavy stones atop her grave. It worked for a time, but as those who knew first hand grew old and passed away, the practice stopped. Time has forgotten exactly where Strongbow's Tree stood, or if it even stands yet today.

There is an ancient oak that stands in a graveyard close to Reginald's Tower and some believe that this may be where Mairenn lies. To this day, some locals pile stones upon the grave in its shadow, just in case she decides to make a visit one night, in its darkest hour.

Happy Halloween! ●

*Bob Carney is a student of Irish history and language and teaches the Speak Irish Cleveland class held every Tuesday at PJ McIntyre's. He is also active in the Irish Wolfhound and Irish dogs organizations in and Cleveland. Wife Mary, hounds Rian, Aisling and Draoi and terrier Doolin keep the house jumping. He can be reached at [carneyspeakirish@gmail.com](mailto:carneyspeakirish@gmail.com).*

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