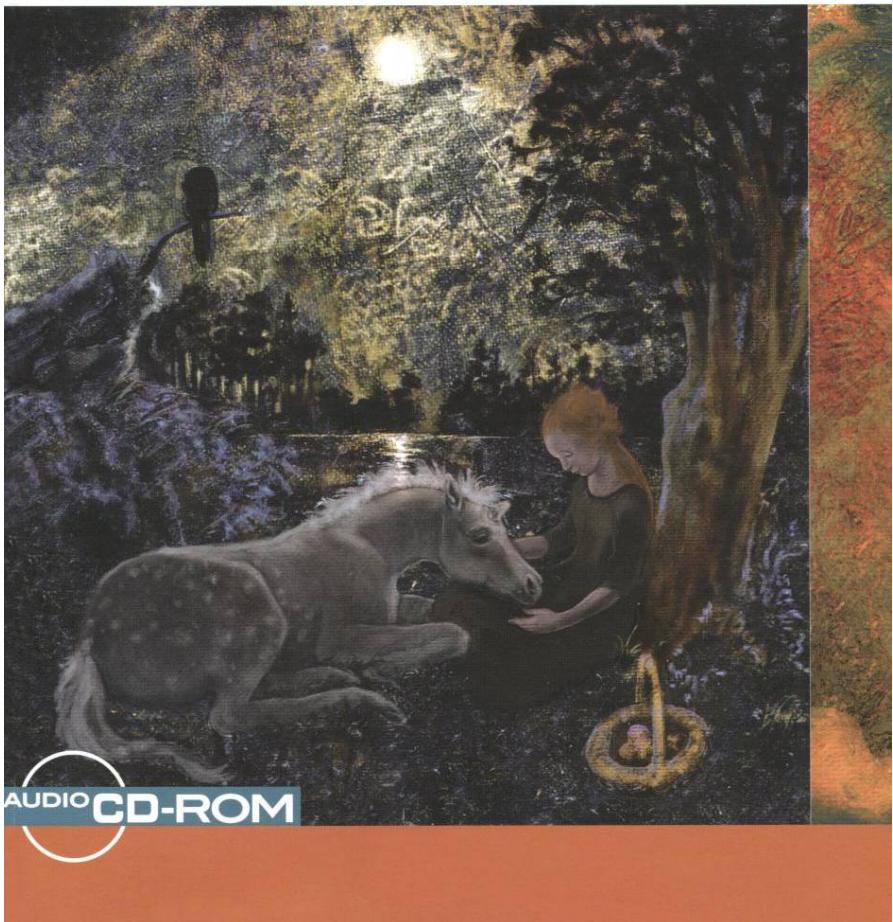


Legends from the British Isles



THE LEGEND OF THE UNICORN

A legend from England

Chapter 1

Sir Brangwyn

Rhiannon lived in the days of King Arthur and his knights in the part of Britain which is now England. She was twelve years old and had long red hair and green eyes. She lived with her mother and father in a small village near Sir Brangwyn's castle. Sir Brangwyn was the lord of the castle and the village, and everyone was afraid of him. He was a big, fat man with black hair and cold, black eyes. He was bad and greedy. He always wanted more taxes from the poor people of the village.

Simon Grimstone was Rhiannon's father, and he was brave and kind. He was a tall, thin man with blond hair and kind brown eyes. The people of the village liked Simon because he always helped them. He was not afraid of Sir Brangwyn.

One day Sir Brangwyn and his knights rode to the village and stopped in front of Simon's house.

'Simon Grimstone!' cried Sir Brangwyn. 'You killed a deer in my forest! No one can go into my forest! My men are taking you to prison.'

'That's not true!' said Simon. 'I didn't go into your forest and I didn't kill a deer.'

'Take him to prison!' said Sir Brangwyn to his men.

'You want to put me in prison because I'm not afraid of you!' said Simon. 'You're a greedy man. The people of this village are hungry because you take all their money.'

'Be quiet!' cried Sir Brangwyn angrily. You'll be quiet in prison, Simon Grimstone!'

Simon's wife, Marian, was standing behind her husband and started crying.

'Take his wife too,' said Sir Brangwyn. 'She can work in the castle kitchen and pay for the food her husband eats.'

'Oh, please don't take me away from my daughter,' said Marian, crying.

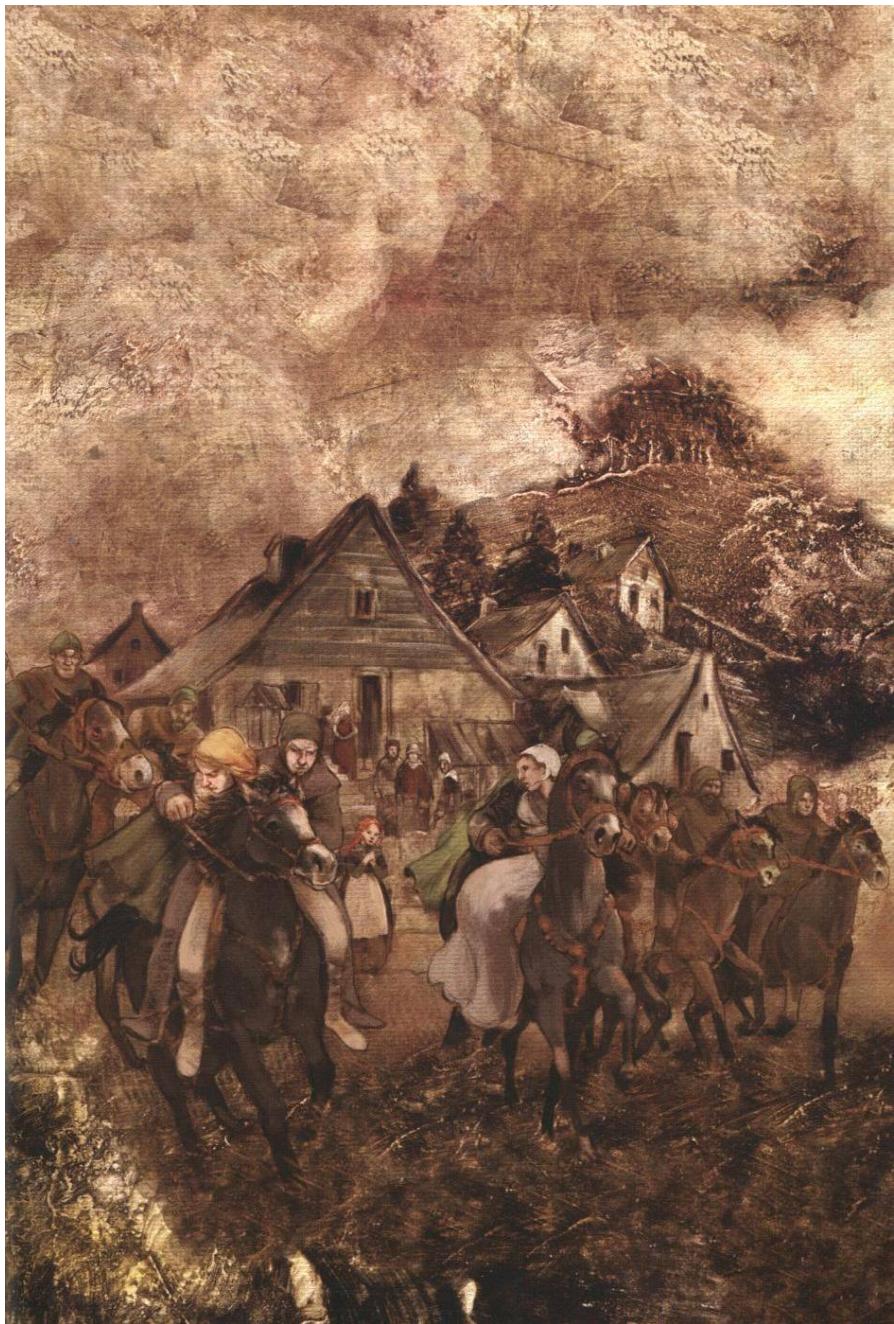
'There's no one who can look after her. She'll be alone!'

'Please, don't take my mother away!' cried Rhiannon.

But the Lord's men didn't listen to Rhiannon and took her parents away.

'When can I see my parents again?' she asked, crying.

The Lord's men laughed and rode away. The villagers were angry but they could do nothing.



After that day they called Rhiannon 'Sir Brangwyn's orphan'.

Rhiannon went inside her house and sat by the small fire in the cold room. She was very sad and lonely. 'What will I do without my parents?' she thought. 'I must find a job.'

Sir Brangwyn liked eating all kinds of food, but truffles were his favourite. It was very hard to find them because they grew under the ground, on the roots of trees.

Rhiannon decided to look for truffles for Sir Brangwyn. Now she had a job.

Every morning Rhiannon went to the forest with a big basket. She looked for truffles all day long. At the end of the day she looked in her basket but she saw very few truffles.

'I only found three truffles today,' she thought sadly. 'And Sir Brangwyn wants lots of them for his dinners! He'll be angry. How can I find more truffles?'

At night she always thought about her poor father and mother.

Sir Brangwyn liked hunting in the forest with his knights. He often rode through the forest when Rhiannon was looking for truffles. He and his men always made a lot of noise and scared the animals.

The villagers said there were strange animals in Sir Brangwyn's forest... like unicorns and dragons.

Chapter 2

The Little White Horse

Rhiannon continued looking for truffles in the forest every day for a year.

One afternoon she heard a noise behind her. She turned around and... what did she see? A beautiful little horse! It was white, and it had a lovely mane and tail.

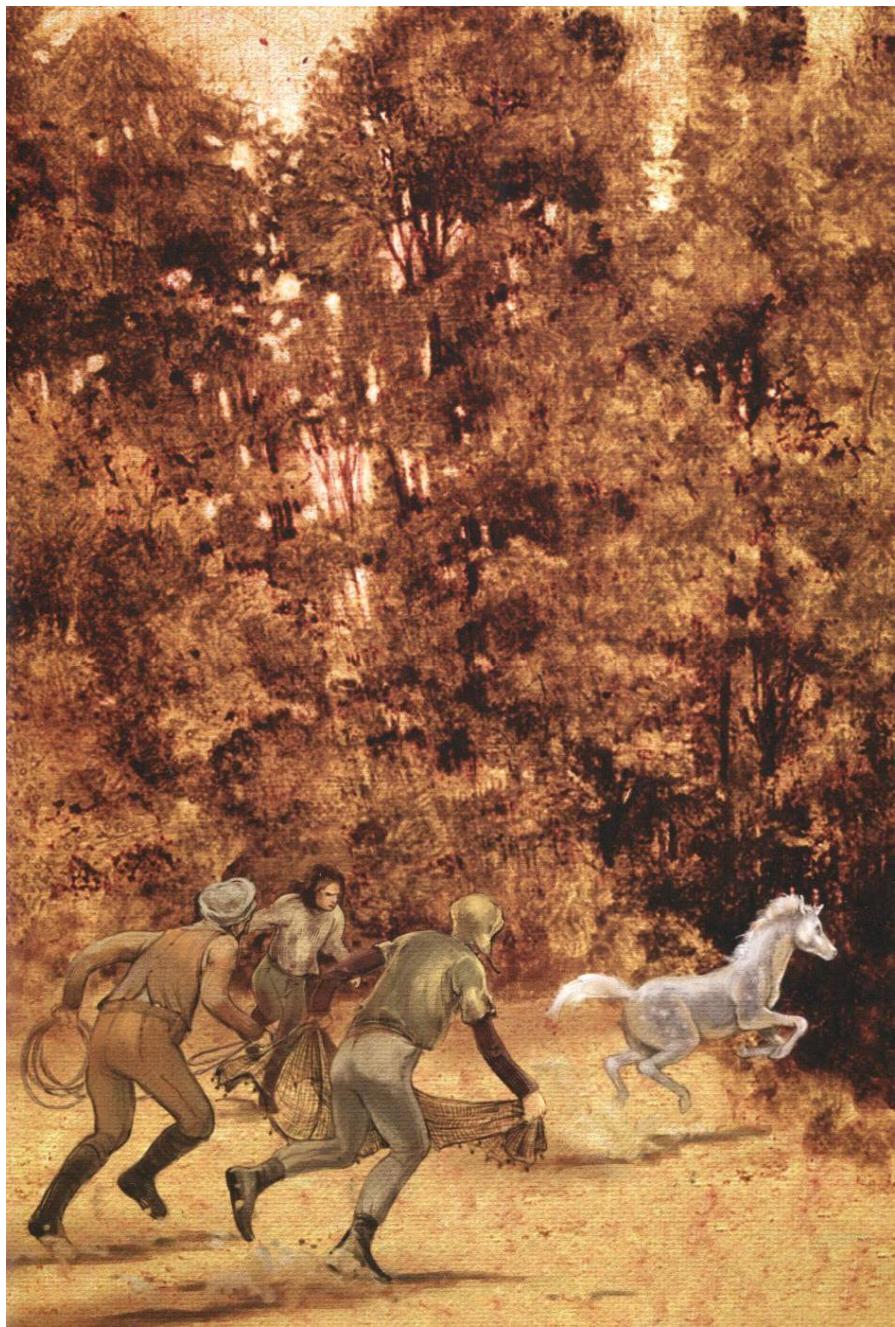
One of the villagers saw the beautiful little horse that evening and he told his friends.

'I saw a young white horse in the forest and it was following Rhiannon,' he said. 'It was a very beautiful animal. Perhaps we can catch it and give it to Sir Brangwyn.' 'And pay less taxes!' said a young man. 'That's a good idea!' said an old woman.

The next day the men from the village tried to catch the little white horse but it ran away into the dark forest. That evening Rhiannon came home with a basket full of big truffles.

'Where did you find those big truffles?' asked one of the men of the village.

'A friendly little horse helped me find them,' said Rhiannon happily.



'Did you hear that, Richard?' said the man to his friend. 'The little horse helped her find the truffles!'

The next morning everyone in the village went to the forest to look for it.

'If we find lots of truffles we can use them to pay our taxes to Sir Brangwyn,' said a young man.

'Yes, and we'll have money to buy food!' said a thin young woman with two hungry children.

They looked everywhere in the forest but they could not find the beautiful little horse. It was hiding in a secret place. When they went back to the village the little horse came to see Rhiannon. She followed him and found a lot of truffles for her basket. The beautiful little horse liked Rhiannon and wanted to help her.

Day after day, Rhiannon's basket was always full of truffles for Sir Brangwyn.

Soon the servants at the castle started talking about the baskets of truffles and the strange little horse.

One of Sir Brangwyn's knights heard them and decided to follow Rhiannon into the forest. He hid behind a big tree and waited for the little white horse.

That evening he returned to the castle and talked to Sir Brangwyn.



'Now I know why Rhiannon finds lots of truffles!' said the knight happily.

'Oh, really?' said Sir Brangwyn. 'Tell me!'

'I was in the forest today and hid behind a big tree,' said the knight. 'Then suddenly I saw...'

'What did you see?' said Sir Brangwyn. 'Tell me, quickly!'

'There's a strange little horse that lives in the forest and Rhiannon follows him. Then he stops and smells the ground. That's where Rhiannon looks for truffles — and she finds them!'

'What!' said Sir Brangwyn, surprised. 'A little horse that finds truffles?'

'Yes,' said the knight. 'And when the girl's basket is full she sits under a tree and rests. The little horse sits next to her and she sings sweet songs to him. But there's one strange thing about him.'

'What?' asked Sir Brangwyn.

'He has a lump between his eyes,' said the knight.

'A lump... then it's a young unicorn!' cried Sir Brangwyn. 'Soon that lump will grow and become a horn! It's a unicorn — a magic creature!'

'A unicorn!' said the knight, surprised. 'I didn't know there were unicorns in the forest.'

Sir Brangwyn called the best hunters in the village to his castle.

'You are the best hunters in the village,' said Sir Brangwyn. 'Now listen carefully. You must go to the forest and find the little white horse,' said Sir Brangwyn. 'Then bring him to me. There's a prize for the hunter who finds him — a big prize. Now go!'

The hunters went to the forest and looked for the beautiful white unicorn. They looked for days but no one could find him. Sir Brangwyn was angry and the hunters were afraid of him.

One afternoon an old knight who lived in the castle went to see Sir Brangwyn.

'Do you want to find the unicorn, Sir?' asked the old knight.

'Of course I do!' said Sir Brangwyn.

'Then you must send the young girl into the forest alone,' said the old knight. 'Alone? But why?' asked Sir Brangwyn. 'When the unicorn sees her he'll go and sit next to her. She'll sing to him and he'll fall asleep. Then the hunters can catch it.'

'That's a very good idea,' said Sir Brangwyn. He called his knights and said, 'Go to the village and get Rhiannon. I want to see her immediately!'

The knights went to the village and looked for Rhiannon everywhere. When she saw them she was afraid.

'What do they want?' she thought.

'You must come with us to the castle immediately,' said one of the knights.

'Why must I come with you?' asked Rhiannon.

'Sir Brangwyn wants to talk to you,' said another knight. 'Get on this horse, quickly!'

Rhiannon got on the horse and went to the castle with the knights.

Chapter 3

Rhiannon's Secret

The knights took Rhiannon to the castle. Sir Brangwyn was sitting at a long table with his friends. They were laughing and eating all kinds of food. 'Young Rhiannon,' he said smiling, 'you must help me catch the beautiful white unicorn of the forest.'

'The white unicorn?' asked Rhiannon, surprised. 'Yes, that little white horse is a young unicorn,' said Sir Brangwyn. 'Then it's a magic creature!' said Rhiannon.

'When you are in the forest, you must call him,' said Sir Brangwyn. 'He will come to you.'

'Oh, no!' said Rhiannon, 'The little unicorn is my friend. He loves me — I can't do what you ask.'

'You must do what I ask!' cried Sir Brangwyn. 'I'm your Lord! If you don't listen to me I'll kill your father and mother!'

Rhiannon started crying and couldn't stop. What could she do? She felt terrible.

'Tomorrow morning we're going to the forest to catch the unicorn!' said Sir Brangwyn angrily.

He looked at one of his knights and said, 'Take this girl away. She can sleep in the hall. I want to finish my meal now — bring in the roast chicken and the truffles, quickly.'

Poor Rhiannon did not sleep all night. Early the next morning Sir Brangwyn and his knights took her to the forest. Sir Brangwyn and his men hid behind some trees and Rhiannon sat on the grass. They waited all day and all night. When the moon was high in the sky, the young unicorn came and sat next to Rhiannon. He looked at her with his big eyes and put his nose next to her cheek. He was happy when he was with his friend.

But Rhiannon could not sing, because she was afraid and unhappy. Suddenly Sir Brangwyn came riding through the forest on his big black horse. Rhiannon jumped onto the unicorn, put her arms



around his neck and quickly rode away. Sir Brangwyn followed them.

The knights and the hunters waited for their lord to return with the unicorn. It was very dark in the forest and they couldn't see anything. But they heard the sound of horses and then a loud cry. They waited a long time but their lord did not return.

Very early the next morning the knights and hunters started looking for Sir Brangwyn.



After many hours they found him in the forest.
There was blood everywhere.

The blood came from his heart.

'He's... dead!' said one knight.

'But who killed him?' asked another knight.

'I don't know,' said a young hunter.

Everyone looked at Sir Brangwyn's body but no one was sad. His son Sir Ivor was the new Lord. He was a kind, friendly young man and everyone liked

him. He helped the villagers and the men in prison were all free.

Rhiannon's parents finally went back to their home and she was very happy.

'Rhiannon,' her father asked, 'who killed Sir Brangwyn? You were in the forest that night.'

'It's a secret, father — it's my secret,' said Rhiannon, smiling. 'All I can say is this: unicorns have parents too.'

THE KING OF THE WIZARDS

A Legend from Scotland

Chapter 1

The Juggler

A long time ago a man called Hamish lived in a town by the sea in Scotland. He and his wife, Catriona, lived happily in a small white house. Hamish was a fisherman and he went out to sea in his boat every day. He usually caught a lot of fish and Catriona sold them at the fish market.

One day Hamish was out at sea. It was late in the afternoon and it was time to go home. He started pulling his net out of the water.

'The net is very heavy today,' he thought happily. 'Lots of fish... .' When he pulled the net onto his boat he saw a wooden box. He was very surprised. He opened the wooden box and found a little baby boy inside!

'Oh, a baby boy!' he cried. 'This is wonderful! We don't have any children and Catriona will be very happy! She loves babies.' He went back home and showed Catriona the baby boy.

'Oh, Hamish, what good luck!' said Catriona happily. 'What a good-looking baby! We must keep this child and look after him. Let's call him Calum.'

'Yes,' said Hamish, 'I like the name Calum. He's our son now. We'll look after him and give him all our love and teach him to fish!'

Calum grew up and was a kind, friendly boy. He loved Hamish and Catriona and they loved him a lot, too. Hamish taught him to fish and he learnt quickly. They went out in the boat together every day but not on Sundays. On Sundays Hamish worked in the garden and Calum went to the port to look at the sailing ships.

When Calum was seventeen a big sailing ship arrived in the port of the town. It was a beautiful sailing ship. The sails were new and white, and the masts were golden.

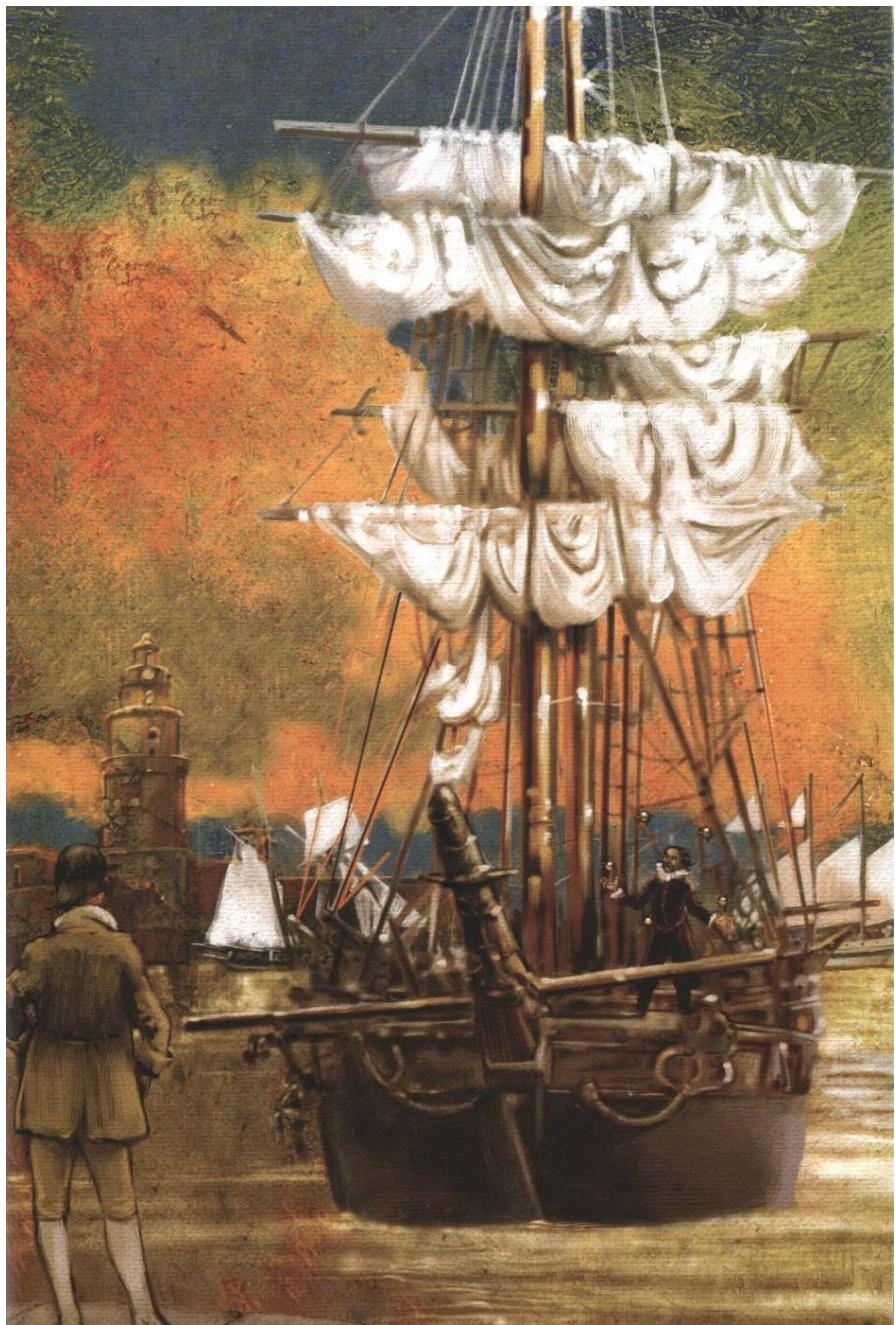
A tall, good-looking man stood on the deck. He had dark hair and dark eyes, and he was wearing a beautiful black suit. He had balls with spikes in his hands. He was juggling the balls very fast, without hurting his hands on the spikes. Calum watched the juggler with great interest. Then the juggler got off the ship and continued juggling the balls in the air.

'Do you like juggling, Calum?' asked the juggler.

Calum was surprised that the juggler knew his name.

'Oh, yes!' Calum said. 'It's wonderful!'

'Do you want to become a juggler too?'



'Yes, I do!' said Calum, smiling at the juggler. 'I want to learn how to juggle those balls. It must be difficult.'

'Very well,' said the juggler, 'take me to your parents. I want to talk to them.'

Calum took the juggler to his little house by the sea.

'Father, mother,' said Calum, 'this man wants to talk to you.'

Hamish and Catriona were happy to meet the juggler.

'We love Calum dearly,' said Hamish. 'I found him at sea when he was a baby.'

'At sea?' asked the juggler. He was suddenly very interested in Calum.

'If Hamish found him at sea, then Calum is a fairy child — a magical child,' thought the juggler.

'Give me your son for a year and a day,' said the clever wizard, 'and I will teach him how to juggle. Then when he comes back home he can be a juggler. Jugglers make more money than fishermen.'

Hamish and Catriona looked at each other. They did not know what to do.

'We must do what is best for our son,' said Catriona, looking at Calum.

'Do you want to be a juggler, a good juggler, Calum?' asked Hamish.

'Yes, father, I do,' said Calum.

'Very well,' said Hamish, 'You can go away for a year and a day. And when you come back you will be a good juggler. Is that right, sir?' He looked at the juggler's dark eyes.

'That's right, Hamish,' said the wizard. 'Your son will become a great juggler and he'll make a lot of money. I'll teach him a lot of things.'

Calum said good-bye to his parents and left his home with the juggler. For a year and a day Calum sailed everywhere on the beautiful sailing ship. He saw a lot of new and interesting places. And he learned all about juggling.

Chapter 2

The Fourteen Pigeons

After a year and a day the juggler brought Calum back to his home in Scotland. Calum was now an excellent juggler. He could juggle seven spiked balls and he never hurt his hands with the spikes.

Hamish and Catriona were very happy when Calum arrived. They thanked the juggler.

'Now your son is a good juggler,' said the man.
'If he stays with me for another year and a day he
will become the best juggler in the world.'

'How wonderful!' said Hamish. 'Yes, Calum can
go with you again.'

Calum left for another year and a day but at the
end of that time he did not return to his home.
Hamish and Catriona were worried. They went to
the port to look for the beautiful sailing ship but it
was not there. They asked a lot of people but no one
knew anything about Calum or the juggler.

'Catriona,' said Hamish sadly, 'I must go and
find Calum.'

'Please be careful, Hamish,' said his wife, 'and
bring Calum home quickly.'

'Don't worry, dear,' said Hamish, kissing his
wife on the cheek.

Poor Hamish did not know where to look for his
son. He walked through the forests, up the hills and
mountains and crossed a lot of rivers — but he did
not find Calum. One night Hamish was very tired
and hungry. He saw a little old house in the forest.
There was a light in the window.

'Perhaps the person in this house can help me,'
thought Hamish.

'Hello!' said Hamish. 'Is anyone home?'

A very old, kind wizard opened the door. He had bright blue eyes and a kind smile.

'Welcome to my home! Please come in,' said the friendly old man. 'You must be very tired. Sit down and rest.'

Hamish sat down near the fire. The old man gave him some hot tea, bread and butter. Hamish ate the bread and butter, and drank the hot tea. After eating he felt better and told the old man about his long journey.

The old man listened carefully and was suddenly sad.

'Your son's in the hands of the evil King of the Wizards!' he said. 'Everyone here knows about the wizard and his terrible magic. But don't worry; I'll help you. You must rest now and we'll talk about it tomorrow morning.'

He gave Hamish a warm red blanket and he fell asleep near the fire.

Early the next morning the old man gave Hamish some breakfast. Then he said, 'Today you must go to the King of the Wizards. He lives in a dark castle on a high hill. When you get there you must talk to the king immediately. Tell him you want your son. The king will take you to his tower where there are fourteen pigeons. The king has magic powers and can change a person into a

pigeon! If you recognise your son, you can take him home with you.'

'But how will I recognise my son?' asked poor Hamish. 'Pigeons all look the same.'

'Remember this: Calum is the pigeon with a tiny black feather on its head,' said the old man. 'Look at all the pigeons slowly and carefully. Then choose that one, and you'll have your son again!'

'You're a good friend,' said Hamish to the kind old man. 'Thank you for your help. I'll always remember you.'

'Good luck to you, Hamish!' said the old man.

Hamish followed the old man's instructions. He crossed a dark forest and a big river and then started walking up a high hill. The wizard's dark castle was on top of the hill. There were a lot of towers all around it. The sky was dark and cloudy, and suddenly the wind started blowing.

'What an ugly place!' thought Hamish, looking at the castle and its towers. 'My son is in one of those towers.'

He got to a black wooden door. He rang a big bell and waited. After a few minutes a man opened the door.

'I want to see the King of the Wizards,' said Hamish.



In a moment the juggler in the black suit was standing at the door of the castle. Hamish was scared when he saw the evil wizard.

Chapter 3 In the Tower

The King of Wizards immediately recognised Hamish, and he was not happy to see him.

'What do you want?' the wizard asked angrily. 'I want my son, Calum,' said Hamish. 'You promised to bring him to us after a year and a day.' The wizard was silent for a moment.

'I can give you anything you want: beautiful clothes, a fast horse, a new fishing boat, a big house, a jewel for your wife — but let me keep your son,' said the wizard.

'All these presents are nothing to me and my wife,' said Hamish. 'We want our son, Calum!'

'You're foolish!' said the clever wizard. 'You can do a lot of things with a new boat or a fast horse. And your wife will be happy with a big diamond.'

'I don't want your presents,' said Hamish angrily. I want my son, now!'

'You're very foolish, Hamish,' said the wizard. 'Take all the presents you want but leave your son here with me!'

'Never!' cried Hamish. 'I want my son immediately!'

The wizard looked at Hamish with his cold, evil eyes and started laughing.

'Follow me to the tower!' he said laughing. They climbed the steps up to a dark tower. In the tower there were fourteen pigeons.

'Now Hamish,' said the wizard, 'choose the right pigeon and you can have your son, Calum.'



'This fisherman will never choose the right pigeon,' thought the wizard, 'and his son will always be mine!'

Hamish walked around the tower and looked at all the pigeons carefully. Then he saw one with a tiny black feather on its head.

'I'll choose this pigeon with the tiny black feather on its head,' Hamish said.



Suddenly Calum was standing in front of his father.

'Father!' said Calum happily.

The wizard was very angry and cried, 'Get out of here! One day I'll come back!'

Hamish and Calum ran down the dark stairs and out of the castle. Then they ran down the hill and into the forest. They stopped at the old man's house in the forest and thanked him. Then they went home.

Catriona was very happy when she saw Hamish and Calum. She could not believe her eyes.

'Calum, my dear boy!' she said. 'I'm very happy to see you. Thank you for bringing him home, Hamish.'

'Oh, mother,' said Calum, 'I don't want to go away anymore. I want to work here, in my town. Now I'm the best juggler in the world. The King of the Wizards taught me a lot of magic tricks. People will come to see me.'

Calum became the town juggler and magician. The people in town always enjoyed his tricks and his juggling. His hands moved very fast and everyone was surprised. People from his town and other towns came to see him. The children liked Calum a lot. He became famous and made a lot of

money. Now Calum and Hamish only went fishing for fun.

The beautiful sailing ship with the big white sails and the golden masts never came to the port again. But on stormy nights the people of the town told scary stories about the King of the Wizards, who lived in the dark castle on the hill...

GELERT

A Legend from Wales

Chapter 1

The Wolf

A prince called Llewellyn once lived in a big stone castle in Wales. He had only one baby son. His beautiful wife died when the baby was born. Llewellyn loved his son more than anything in the world. Prince Llewellyn was rich and important. He had a lot of brave soldiers and loyal servants. He also had an old, loyal dog called Gelert. Gelert always travelled with the prince and fought with him in a lot of battles. He was the bravest dog in Wales and the prince's most loyal friend. Gelert loved Llewellyn's son very much and always protected him.

'You're my best friend, Gelert,' the prince often said. 'I trust you more than anyone in the world. Only you can look after my son.' Gelert was always happy when the prince spoke to him.

One sunny day there was a big hunt on Prince Llewellyn's lands. There were a lot of hunting dogs and hunters on their horses near the castle. Llewellyn heard the hunting horns and got ready for the hunt.

'I must go hunting today, Gelert,' said the prince. 'It's the first hunt of the season and it's a beautiful day.'

Gelert looked at his master and barked happily. He liked hunting and wanted to go too.

'No, Gelert,' said the prince. 'You must stay by my son's cradle and protect him until I come back.'

Gelert looked up at the prince and listened carefully.

'Protect my son with your life,' said the prince. 'I trust only you, because you're my most loyal friend. I know you understand me.' He patted Gelert lovingly and the dog wagged his tail happily.

The prince's son slept in the wooden cradle in his bedroom. Gelert went to the cradle and looked at the sleeping baby. Then he lay down on the floor next to the cradle and put his nose between his paws. Prince Llewellyn was ready for the hunt and looked at the cradle again before leaving.

'Sleep well, my dear son,' said the prince, smiling. 'You're safe with old Gelert. He'll look after you until I come back.'

Then Prince Llewellyn left the castle with the other hunters.

Everything was peaceful and silent for some time in the baby's bedroom. But after a few hours Gelert heard a noise. Something was standing

outside the door and was trying to get in. Gelert knew there was danger because he could hear growling.

He got up quietly, went to the door and saw a wolf looking at him. He was much taller than Gelert, but he was thin. He was very hungry because it was difficult to find food at the end of winter. He smelled the baby inside the room and he wanted to eat it.

Gelert looked angrily at the wolf's eyes. They stood at the door for a few minutes growling at each other. Then suddenly the hungry wolf jumped towards the cradle.

Chapter 2

The Fight

Gelert jumped on the hungry wolf and pulled him away from the cradle with his strong teeth. He did not want to wake up the sleeping baby. The black wolf was a strong fighter. He bit Gelert's neck and legs but the old dog continued fighting bravely. Nothing could stop Gelert. It was a long, terrible fight. But the baby slept peacefully and did not wake up.

Suddenly the cradle turned over and the baby fell onto the stone floor, but still he did not wake



up. During the fight both animals were hurt and there was blood on the floor, on the walls and on the baby's white blanket.

Gelert was badly hurt but he did not stop fighting. He knew he had to protect the prince's son. He bit the wolf's throat very hard, and suddenly the wolf was silent. He slowly went to a dark corner of the room and died.

Gelert went to the sleeping baby and looked at him. He took the white blanket with his teeth and pulled it over the baby. Then he lay down and fell asleep. He was very tired after the long fight, but he was happy because the baby was safe.

That night Prince Llewellyn returned from the hunt. He immediately went to see his son. When the prince walked into the room, Gelert got up and went to him.

The prince saw the empty cradle.
'What happened here?' he cried, looking at Gelert.

Then he saw the blood on the walls, on the floor, on the white blanket and on the baby's face. But he did not see the dead wolf in the dark corner of the room.

'Oh, no!' cried the prince. His face was red with anger. 'Gelert, what did you do? You killed my son — my only son! And I trusted only you!'



He took his sword and raised it high above the dog's head. Gelert jumped up and barked happily. He wanted to play. He wanted praise because he saved the baby's life. He looked at the prince with his big, brown eyes, trying to tell him something. But the prince was very angry and killed Gelert with his sword. The poor dog fell at the prince's feet.

Suddenly the baby woke up and started crying. He was on the cold, stone floor and he was hungry.

When Prince Llewellyn heard the baby crying his sword fell on the floor. He was alive! He looked around the room and saw the dead wolf in a dark corner. Then he understood.

'There was a terrible fight in this room between Gelert and the wolf,' he thought. 'The wolf wanted to eat my son and Gelert protected him... .'

'What did I do?' he cried angrily. 'I killed Gelert. Oh, what a terrible mistake!'

He put his face in his hands and started crying. He could not stop.

He looked at Gelert's body and saw the bites of the wolf. He slowly took the dog's body in his arms.

'My great and loyal friend!' said the prince, crying. 'You fought bravely against the wolf and saved my son's life. But I didn't understand — I'm very sorry, Gelert!'



Prince Llewellyn looked at his dog and said, I'll always remember the first time we went hunting. And all the battles we fought together... Oh, what will I do without you, Gelert?'

Prince Llewellyn could never forget that terrible day. He decided to bury Gelert in the graveyard of the village. On that day people from the castle and the village were there. Everyone was very sad.

Every morning Prince Llewellyn brought beautiful flowers to Gelert's tomb and said, 'Good morning, old friend!'

If you visit the graveyard of Beddgelert in Wales today, you can see the old tombstone and read Gelert's story there.

A ROYAL SECRET

A legend from Ireland

Chapter 1

Brian's Promise

Long ago there was a king in Ireland called Labraiddh. He had a lot of red hair. It looked like a red bush.

During the day he could not keep his crown on his head. Sometimes it fell to the floor. At night he could not sleep well because his hair was a problem. In the summer his head was very hot and he scratched it a lot.

One morning in May the king woke up and said, 'I want to cut my hair immediately. I think I have fleas! Call a barber!'

'Your Majesty,' said his adviser, 'Why don't you wait until July?'

'I can't wait,' said the king. 'Fleas are eating my head! Call a barber!'

'Very well,' said his adviser, 'I'll find a barber.'

All the barbers in the country heard the news and they were frightened. No one wanted to cut the king's hair.

'The last barber who cut King Labraiddh's hair disappeared,' said a young man.

'All of King Labraiddh's barbers disappeared,' said an old man. 'I remember poor Finn and young Gawain and others.'

The king's men found a young barber named Brian. They took him to the castle and gave him a pair of scissors. The king took him to a small secret room and shut the door. Then he sat down in a big chair in front of a mirror.

'Start cutting my hair,' said the king, 'but be very careful.'

'Yes, Your Majesty,' said Brian.

Brian took the scissors and started cutting the king's red hair. King Labraiddh looked at Brian's face in the mirror in front of him.

'This young barber will soon be very surprised,' thought the king.

And the king was right. Suddenly Brian saw the king's ears and he cried out. His scissors fell to the floor.

'Well,' said the king, 'what did you see?'

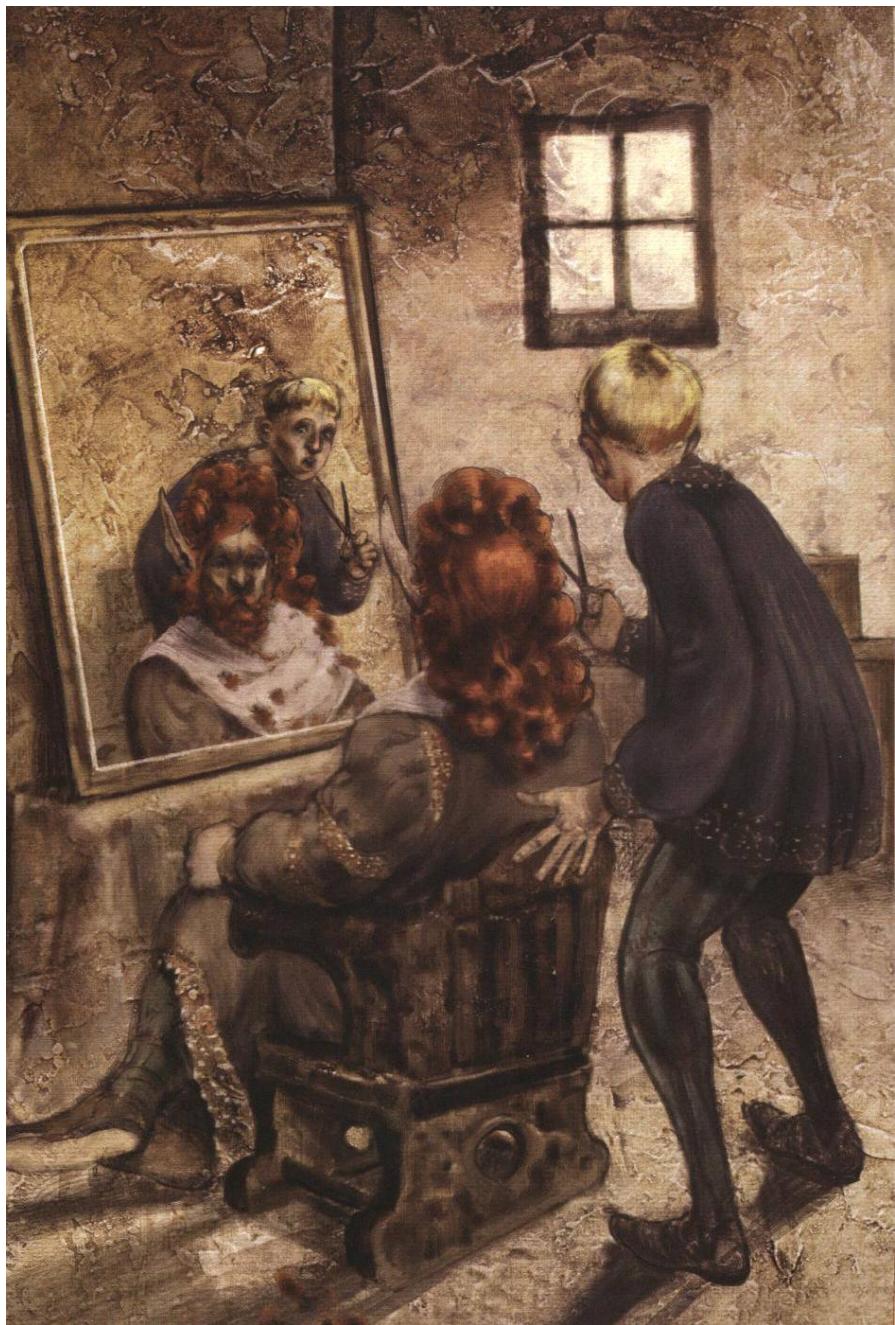
'N-no-nothing, Your Majesty,' said Brian quietly.

'I'll ask you again,' said the king. 'What did you see? Answer me!'

'Well, I... I saw your ears,' said Brian.

'And what are they like?' asked the king.

'They're like the ears of a horse!' said Brian.



'Yes, I have ears like a horse,' said the king.
'Now finish your work. Then my men will take you away because you know my secret.'

'But I won't tell anyone,' cried Brian, who was very frightened. 'I promise, Your Majesty, I'll never say a word to anyone!'

'I'm sorry,' said the king, 'but my people mustn't know my secret. If they do, they will laugh at me. Finish cutting my hair, and then take your scissors and go with my men. We'll send you to a lovely island far away and you'll be very happy.'

'But I don't want to go far away!' said Brian.

When he finished cutting the king's hair, the king's men came and took poor Brian to prison.

That evening an old woman went to see the king. He sat on his throne with a big hat on his head.

'Good evening, Your Majesty,' said the woman.
'I'm Brian's mother. I'm very unhappy because you took my son away. Brian is my only son and he helps me with my work in the house and on the farm. My husband is dead and I am alone in this world. Please don't take Brian away from me.'

The king was a good man and he listened to the woman with interest.



'Are you a good king or a bad king?' asked the woman. 'We love our king, but does he love his people?'

He smiled at her and said, 'Very well, let me think about this.'

The next day King Labraiddh went to see Brian in prison.

'You're free, Brian!' said the king, 'But you must never tell anyone about my secret — no one! Do you promise?'

'Yes, Your Majesty,' said Brian, 'I promise.'

Chapter 2

The Willow Tree

Brian was happy when he went home. But he always thought about the king's secret — day and night. He became sad and tired, and he ate very little. Soon he was weak and could not work. His mother called a doctor.

The doctor listened carefully to Brian's story about the secret. 'Young man,' said the doctor, 'you must tell me the secret, or you won't get well. This secret is too big for you.'

'You don't understand,' said Brian, 'I promised the king to keep the secret. I can't tell anyone.'

'Well,' said the doctor, 'then take your secret to the forest. Stand by the old willow tree and shout your secret. No one will hear you... only the trees.'

Brian listened to the doctor. The next morning he went to the forest. He stood next to the willow tree but he could not say a word. At last he whispered, 'Our King Labraiddh... he... has... , he has... ears like a horse!'

Suddenly Brian felt well. He was happy and jumped up and down in the forest. Then he shouted, 'He has ears like a horse! Great big horse's ears! KING LABRAIDH HAS HORSE'S EARS!' Brian laughed loudly. He was a new person and went back home.

After a few months there was a strong wind in the forest. The leaves of the willow tree whispered something. Then the grass and the flowers whispered something. The people listened to the wind.

'Listen,' said one woman to her friend, 'the wind is saying something.'

'You're right,' said her friend. 'It's saying, "The king has horse's ears, the king has horse's ears".'

'I can hear it too,' said a little boy and he laughed. He looked at the woman and her friend and they all laughed together.



The secret was out and everyone knew it. But no one told the king.

King Labraiddh liked music. But one day his favourite musician broke his harp.

'There's going to be an important banquet soon,' thought the musician. 'I need a new harp. I must go to the forest and find a good piece of wood for my new harp.'

The musician went to the forest and looked at all the trees.

He stopped in front of the willow tree. 'This is the perfect wood for my new harp,' he thought.

He cut a piece of wood from the willow tree and made a new harp. On the day of the banquet the musician began playing it. The music was lovely and the king was pleased. Everyone listened to the sweet music of the new harp.

But there was something else in the music — a strange whisper. It said, 'The king has horse's ears, the king has horse's ears...'

The people at the banquet heard this and were very surprised. Suddenly they all started laughing and laughing, and they could not stop. Some people fell to the floor and could not stop laughing.

'What's happening here?' shouted King Labraiddh angrily. He was very angry because everyone was laughing at him and he did not know what to do.



'Well,' thought Labraiddh, 'I can laugh with them, or I can cry alone.'

He decided to laugh with his people and everyone was happy.

After the day of the banquet King Labraiddh called all his advisers to the great hall.

'I want to change some things in this country,' said the king.

His advisers were surprised and looked at each other.

'First, all the barbers who are in prison can go home,' said the king. 'Second, there will be no secrets. I want my people to know the good news and the bad news. I want to be a good and honest king.'

King Labraiddh became a great king and his people loved him. When he saw the children in the town he stopped and talked to them. Then they ran home and shouted happily, 'We'll have good luck because we saw the king's ears.'