

Home to the Deer

by

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Ripples of anticipation flowed among the Seven Sisters as they awaited their guests. After all these years they could still arouse an air of excitement vying for the attention of visitors, even those who had been fortunate to be with them before. But today there would be somebody new; a young girl named Siobhan from far, far away. The question dancing among them was who would be her honored choice?

For Deerie or Coney who had always been pursued by the majority of suitors, there was still an edge of excitement as they prepared themselves for this new one's arrival. Their choice of presentation for the day was essential. Bold in color, yet balanced with an air of elegance.

Clearly Deerie's height was a major factor in initially attracting someone's notice, especially for the first time. She held herself with such regal bearing that made any guest feel honored in her presence. Her title of Inismore, The Great One, was well deserved and only contributed to her prestige that much more.

Coney, on the other hand, had a more natural grace to her, particularly in her choice of outfits. In addition, every one of her movements flowed as though having been choreographed through endless rehearsals. She was blessed with a style that all the others, including Deerie, envied.

Even though Fin and Lo had some occasional visitors in recent times, for years prior to that they had always been overlooked. As for the others, alas it would appear that...

"Granpa? Granpa? Is this another one of your stories?"

Feeling a sudden air of impatience from his granddaughter, he responded with hesitation, "Well yes, Siobhan. But I thought you liked my stories."

"I do, Granpa. I really do. But why don't you tell them to me when we're going to the island?"

"Well, I thought it would be fun while we're here waiting."

"But what are we waiting for, Granpa? I thought we were going to go as soon as we got to the river."

"I'm so glad you're excited about visiting it, Sweetie. But we have to stay here until Cousin Fenton and his friend, Sam arrive. They're the ones that will take us in their boat. Plus they know much more about the island than I do."

“Have I met them yet? I can’t remember.”

“I don’t blame you. There are a lot of people to remember here, but I think Fenton was at our family party last Sunday. Not for very long though. He’s a busy man because he’s a farmer, and he always has so much work to do. But I’m sure he’ll be right along.

“But I’m positive Sam wasn’t there. I don’t think they wanted him to come because he always gets too excited at parties.”

“That’s not very nice they didn’t invite him. Is there something wrong with him?”

Granpa chuckled while answering her, “Oh no. Not at all. You’ll understand when you meet him. But I’m almost a hundred percent sure you’ll like him.”

“I hope so. Granpa, did I tell you I couldn’t sleep last night? I wanted to make sure you didn’t leave without me this morning.”

“I wouldn’t do that, Siobhan. You’re the number one reason we’re going there today. Don’t you remember the promise I made you on your tenth birthday?”

“How could I forget. I told all my friends I was coming here today with you. Oohh! Where is he? I just hope Fenton gets here soon.”

“It won’t be long now. I called him earlier this morning just to remind him, and he said he’d be here after finishing up some work at home. But this is the time he said would be best for the two of them.”

“Oh, good, good, good.”

It was one of those rare August mornings as they stood at the mooring on the River Fergus in County Clare. The air had been swept clean during the night by a heavy rainfall so that all the surrounding humidity had vanished. There was even a breath of September in the air.

As Granpa looked to the sparkling sky, he mused to himself, “What a perfect time to be going, especially since we’ll be there most of the day. There’s always so much more to see whenever I go, and with her curiosity it’ll be multiplied that much more. As the locals would put it, ‘Indeed ‘tis a grand day coming.’”

Siobhan began to amuse herself as she picked up a handful of stones and threw them one by one into the water. Granpa sat down next to her on the grass remembering the many times he had been here before.

When new people would hear about his interest in going there they would invariably say the same thing, “So, Sean, tell me about this dream island of yours. It must

be quite the place if you keep going back there all these years. All the amazing locations in the world you could visit, and this is the one for you.”

Sean always felt a bit self-conscious when he spoke about it thinking he sounded like a voice-over for a PBS special. “I don't know what else to say, except that it's quite simple and charming. It's one of seven islands linked closely together in the River Fergus that flow into the Shannon, then out to the Atlantic. They're actually called the Seven Sisters, and this one's the largest. Its name is Deer Island.

“The size of it is about five hundred acres covered mostly with grazing pastures across the hills. Down on the west end there's a densely wooded area that once was a rich, verdant forest with a vast array of wildlife, including its namesake, the deer.

“During the Middle Ages it was renowned as an exclusive hunting preserve for the stag. The lords and ladies from their estates on the mainland would travel on to the island dressed for the grand adventure of the chase.

“But today nobody lives on it other than cattle, and they belong to five farmers from the mainland. My cousin, Fenton has a small piece with a fair number of cattle. I'm not even sure how many, but I know he goes over there most every day like all the others. They all have to check on them regularly, and then do the mowing and baling of hay, too.

“I've met most of the farmers over the years, and they're always very welcoming. Always ready with a good story or two they'll tell you anything you want to know about the land and its creatures, which as they put it is “all pure true.”

“In addition they know its history quite well, and can even tell you who lived on it all the way back to the fourth or fifth century. Imagine that. Almost two thousand years ago. Amazing how little it's changed in all that time.”

“It sounds great, Sean. But there's got to be more to it than that. I'm sure there are lots of other islands just like it.”

“Well, that's true. But the most important part about Deer Island for me is it's where my father was born and grew up. The same for all his brothers and sisters.”

Sean would stop there when speaking about it to someone new, not always certain what to say next. Saying it out loud each time always evoked a feeling of such depth that he still wasn't able to find the right words to adequately describe it.

He smiled with a trace of sadness realizing that even though he could create mystical stories and weave fanciful language in describing anything else, when speaking about this island as ancestral home he was at a loss. He could describe its beauty and legacy to people in detail, but for what it evoked within him the words weren't always so ready. But he knew that Siobhan understood how special, even magical it was.

To read more from “Home to the Deer” please visit our web-site to learn where to purchase the book, “Home to Ireland and Beyond.” Thank you.