

MacCodrum o the Selkies

Lang afore the first sailors turnt the bous o thair ships out ti sea ti discuiver whit lay ayone the wattir, the Keing an Queen o the Seas wonned down ablo the swaws in peace an blythness. Thay haed monie braw sea-bairns, broun-ee'd an strecht o spaul, an pat in thair days playin wi the ramsh sea-horses, an soumin throu the bourachs o purpie sea-anemones at growes on the sea-bed. Thay war aye makkin muisic, thir fowk that bade in the sea, an whaurever thay gaed, the war a sound o liltin lyke the souch o the swaws.

But ae day a gret dule cam ti the Keing o the Sean an his bounless bairns, for the Queen thair mither fell seik an died, an wes beirit wi mukkil wae amang the coral weims o thair kinmrik. An whan she wes gaen, the war naebodie ti tent the sea-bairns, ti kaim thair sheinin hair an sing thaim ti sleep wi saft sea-muisic. An whan the Keing saw thair unkaimed hair hingin down owre thair shouthers lyke tousilt seaweed, an haird thaim tossin an tummlin throu the nicht whan thay coudna git ti sleep, he thocht til himsell:

“Ah dout it’s mair nor tyme Ah fand anither wyfe ti tent til ma bairns.”

Nou in the derk sea-forest, bade an unco sea-wutch, an she wes the ane the Keing spiert for ti be his new wyfe, for aw he didna loue hir, wi his hert aye beirit alang wi his deid Queen. But the sea-wutch thocht whit a graundlik thing for hir ti be Queen o the Sie an ring owre sic a gret Kinrik; an sae she gried gledlie ti mairrie the Keing, an becum the guidmither o the sea-bairns. But she wes an ill guidmither, for whan she saw the bonnie broun een an strecht spauls o the bairns, she wes unco jaeluss o thair bewtie, an taen ill out at oniebodie bonnier nor hirsell soud byde in the sie.

Ae day she gaed back til hir derk sea-forest an poued the laithsum yallae berries o the sea-grapes at grew thare. Frae thir berries, she maskit a fell puzzin, an kuist an unco glaumerie on the sea-bairns. She wusst at thay soud tyne thair strecht spault maiks an be chyngit inti selkies.. An as selkies, she wusst at thay wad soum throu the sea foraye, binna the ae day i the year, whan thay micht kyth in thair ain richt maiks frae dayset ti dayset.

This ill-gien guidmither cam owre the sea-bairns as thay joukit amang the ramsh sea-horses an wannert amang the bourachs o purpie sea-anemones at growes on the sae-bed. Aw at aince, thair bodies coursent an tint thair maik; thair gentie airms war turnt inti hochlin flippers; an thair skins becam cuivert wi selkie coats o gray an gowden broun. But thay keepit aye thair saft broun een.

Whan thair faither fand out whit haed befawn thaim, he wes that roused wi the sea-wutch, he fleimit hir ti byde in hir derk sea-forest foraye. But he coudna unredd the ill she hae wrocht. Syne the waesum selkies at haed aince been sea-bairns, sang thair coronach at thay docht na byde nae mair wi thair faither the Keing, in the steid whaur thay hae aince been blyth thegither. An wi a geyan sair hert, the auld Keing stuid an watcht thaim soum awa.

For a lang, lang whyle, the selkies, traivelt ferr atowre the seas. An aince i the year, frae dayset til dayset, thay wad finnd a forelaund unkent bi mortals, an here thay wad shauchil aff thair selkie skins o gray an blek an gowden broun, an staup out in thair bonnie richt maik. But thay coud never byde lang divertin thairsells on the forelaund, an i the gloamin o the saicont dayset, thay buid pit on thair selkie skins again an slip back intil the sea.

The'r ae storie at the selkies first cam til the Outer Hebrides as trokers frae the Courts o the Norse Keings o Lochlan. Whuther this is true o no, the'r nae dout at thay suin grew ti lyke this haarie wastern coast, an the fowk at bydes in the Hebrides suin lairnt at ae day ilk year, a bodie nicht faw in wi thaim divertin thairsells on the forelaund.

The war a fisherman bi name o Roderic MacCodrum, o the Clan Donald at leived his lane on Berneray, in the Outer Hebrides, at haed haird this yairn. An ae day he wes daunerin along the saunds near his boat whan he haird the soun o liltin cummin fae a curn rocks nearhaund. Sae he crasp up tentilyke, til the rocks an keikit owre the tap o thaim, an thare afore his een, wes a whein sea-bairns divertin thair sells or the sea gaed doun for the saicont tyme. Thair lang hair spraingilt ahint thaim as thay played, an thair een skinkilt wi delyte. But as he turnt awa, he gat sicht o a haep o selkie skins—gray an blek an gowden broun—lyin on a rock whaur the sea-bairns haed laid thaim. Sae he liftit a gowden broun ane at wes the brawest o thaim aw, thinkin it the verra thing ti tak hame til his sheilin bi the wattirsyde. An whan he wan hame, he dernt it abuin the lintel o his houss dure for ti keep it sauf.

Nou nou lang eftir dayset that forenicht, as Rodric wes fettlin his fishin net bi his ingil, he haird an unco waesum maen outby the houss dure. An whan he luikit out, thare stuid the bonniest wumman he haed ever seen. She wes strecht o spaul, an hir een war broun an saft. She wure nae cleidin on hir whyte bodie, but hir gowden-broun hair hung doun afore hir

“Ai help iz, help iz, mortal man\” she pled on him, “for Ah im a dochter o the sea an Ah hae tint ma selkie skin, an canna win back ti ma brithers an sisters binna Ah finnd it again.”

An even as he wes askin hir owre the houss dure an giein hir his plaid ti hap hirsell wi, Roderic kent at this lassie belanged the gowden broun selkie skin at he haed stown frae the tyde that mornin. He haed nae mair adae nor rax up ti the lintel, tak doun the selkie skin, an she wad be free ti soum awa free an finnd hir brithers an sisters in the sea. But Roderic hae a guid luik at hir as she sat hirsell doun bi the ingil, an he thocht hou pleisant his lyfe wad be gin he coud hae this wumman til hirsell as his guidwyfe. Sae he said:

“Ah canna help ye ti finnd yeir selkie skin. Ah dout sum man cam by an stale it frae the tyde, an bi nou he wul be ferr, ferr awa. But gin ye wad lyke for ti byde here wi me an be ma guidwyfe, Ah wul loue ye aw ma days.”

At that the Sea Keing's dochter's een filled wi saut tears, but she liftit hir heid an luikit strecht at him

“Atweill, an ma selkie skin is stown an gaen, an gaen for guid, Ah maun byde wi ye an becum yeir wyfe,” she said. “Ah durstna byde in the mortal warld ma lane, an Ah can howp for nae greter kyndness nor ye hae shawn me.”

Syne she secht for the lyfe o the sea at she thocht she wad never ken nae mair.

“Ai, but Ah wad fain be back wi ma brithers an sisters o the sea. Thay wul shuirlic be wunnerin whit haes befawn me an wul be cryin ma name aw airts bi nou.”

Roderic wes rael vext for hir, but he wes that taen up wi hir bewtie, he kent he coud never lat hir gang.

Syne, for monie a lang year, Roderic MacCodrum an his bonnie selkie wyfe bade in the shielin bi the forelaund, an monie bairns war born til thaim: bairns wi gowden-broun hair an saft vyces for the liltin. An the fowk thareabouts cawed Roderic, ‘MacCodrum o the Selkies,’ kis he haed taen a selkie wumman ti be his guidwyfe, an his bairns war cawed, ‘the bairns o MacCodrum o the Selkies’.

But aw this whyle, the Sea Keing's dochter myndit aye hir ain dule. She wad dauner dowie hir lane bi the wattir-syde, tentin the *ceol mara* at is the muisic o the sea., an the *gait na mara* at is the lauchter o the swaws. An whyles she wad hear hir freins cryin hir name ferr awa—owre an owre again. An she greined ti be wi thaim again wi aw hir hert.

Syne thare cam a day whan Roderic set out for ordnar for the fishin, eftir takkin leave o his wyfe an bairns. But here on the road til the boat, did a mawkin no rin forenent him—a shuir taiken o ill-chaunce? He wes in twa mynds whuther ti turn back hame eftir this, but he haed a luik at the lift an said til himsell:

“Wi aw that rack up thare it wul be a whein wundie wather an at wul be ma ill-chaunce the-day,” sae he gaed on his wey for aw.

He haedna been gaen lang whan the wund did blaw up. It skraicht owre the sea, an it skellocht round the sheilin on the forelaund whaur his wyfe an bairns haed been left ahint. The yungest bairn wes out on the saunds, pittin shells til his lug ti tent the sie-muisic he loued ti hear, sae his mither cryit him inby. Juist as he set his fuit owre the houss-dure the wund gied a byordnar roust, an the dure clasht tae, wi a dird that set the haill biggin dirlin. An hinnerlie, doun frae the hydie-hole cam the selkie skin at belanged Roderic's selkie wyfe.

Never a wurd she spak agin the man at haed hauden hir agin hir wull for aw thae lang year. But richt awa, she taen aff hir mortal's claes an claucht the selkie skin til hir. Syne she said fareweill til hir bairns an gaed doun til the wattir's edge. An thare she cled hirsell in hir gowden-broun skin an soumed out athort the wattir.

Syne she turnt round ti tak ae lest luik at the wee sheilin whaur aiblins, she'd kent a whein blyth days, for aw she'd never wantit ti byde thare. An alang the whyte faemin landbrist at rowed in even on frae the Atlantic, she saw hir waesum bairns staunin begrutten on the forelaund. For a blink she swithert, but the pul o the sea wes owre mukkil for hir. It wes mair strang nor the cry o hir mortal bairns, an ferr awa she soumed, singin wi delyte as she gaed throu the swaws.

Ai, but whan Roderic MacCodrum cam hame frae his day's fishin, he fand an open dure on a sheilin sair wantin a wumman's haund, wi nae sign o a gleid in the ingil ti walcum him hame. An unco dreid grippit his hert, an he raxt up til the lintil abuin the houss dure. An whan he fand that the selkie skin wes gaen, syne he kent at his bonnie wyfe haed gaen back til the sea whaur she belanged. An gret wes the dule on him as his greitin bairns telt him hou thair mither said fareweill ti thaim an left thaim thair lane on the forelaund.

“Blek wes the day at a mawkin ran forenent me as Ah gaed til ma boat,” maened Roderic. “For the wund wes strang, Ah haed an ill day at the fishin an nou this sair mishanter haes befawn me!”

Roderic saw his bonnie selkie wyfe nae mair, but murned hir the lave o his days. The war nae end til his coronach. An his bairns, an thair bairns eftir, myndin aye at thair mither haed been a selkie wumman, aye taen tent never ti fash or herm onie selkie thay nicht see, An the faimlie cam ti be kent as the Clan MacCodrum o the Selkies, kent in North Uist an aw ower the Outer Hebrides, as a sept o the Clan Donald.