

By Tim Linscott

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I am reminded of one of my favorite Halloween traditions that is embedded in the Irish culture and my very own family: story telling.

My father was a master story teller and I enjoyed hearing everything from his boyhood experiences to myths and folklore.

I have tried to carry on this tradition with friends and family and telling a very old fable is something I enjoy.

For generations there have been legends, myths and folklore inherent to the Irish culture and as Christianity became prominent on the Emerald Isle, the legends began to carry different meaning.

The Sidhe (pronounced 'shee') were mischievous or bad spirits. They would eventually evolve into demons and did the work of the devil. Legends tell of the Banshee being both good and evil. She was a beautiful maiden that told of death coming for a family member with her sorrowful cry. Death came in the 'Coiste Bordhar' or the 'death coach.'

The Pooka was a goblin that could take different forms. The Pooka would watch over crops and if he did not receive his share, bad luck would befall a family. If he received a share of the crop, he would leave the family alone.

Over the years, the Pooka became synonymous with harvest, in particular Oct. 31, Halloween. On this day all crops should be put away in preparation for winter and the coming holy time of the year.

The Pooka would transform himself into an old man and stop to chat with people, never saying goodbye. His form of choice, however, was that of a black horse with yellow eyes. He would stop and pick up men who had too much to drink at the pub and offer to take them home, usually giving them a wild ride, leaving them scared and not wanting to drink anymore.

I want to relay a story now for Halloween. This is a story I have read countless times and it changes a bit with each book or telling. This is my own version.

"Daniel O'Rourke was a good man.

He worked hard in the fields every day and when the day's hard work was done, he'd retire to the pub for one...maybe two pints.

Daniel had many a family member taken by the deeds of the devil as they strayed from the path of the church and the very path that led from the fields to the town, something the Sidhe hoped for, to give their master more souls.

It was close to All Hallows Eve and Daniel had his work complete just as the sun was setting. As he began to gather his things to head home he noticed Mr. O'Brien from the nearby cottage standing along the side of the road.

'Ay, Paddy O'Brien, it is I, Daniel O'Rourke. Tis late, you should be at home with the Mrs.'

Paddy did not turn around, in fact, he stared ahead, arms to his side, stiff as a board.

The sound of thundering hooves came about in a great clamor and the 'Coiste Bordhar' slid to a stop before Paddy. A dark, shrouded figure motioned to Paddy and the door swung open. The six black horses made not a sound as Paddy climbed inside.

The sound of their mighty hooves cut through the air and Daniel's heart skipped a beat in fright, only to be soothed by the sight of the black carriage carrying Paddy upwards.

'Well, I must visit Mrs. O'Brien and tell her of the news. She will take glad that her beloved

Paddy took the Coiste Bordhar to the heavens,” Daniel said, stepping on to the road.

It was night now and a strange fog consumed Daniel. The Sidhe was at foot! Daniel rushed to the direction of the O'Brien house to protect Mrs. O'Brien and tell her of the news but his eyes filled with a dense green-hued fog. Daniel turned and saw the devil standing as a shadowy figure no more than a stones throw from him.

Daniel began to run as fast as he could, but the fog made it impossible to see. He could not feel the road under his feet anymore, but felt wet grass. Not wanting to be caught, Daniel ran faster until his weight became like air and he fell into nothing.

With a splash Daniel found himself in the river. He swung his arms and kicked his legs to reach the side. After nearly all his breath was gone he reached a small hill in the center of the river, one of which he'd never seen before.

On the back of his neck Daniel could feel hot breath and the soft bristle touch of hair. Turning in fear he came face-to-face with a black horse with glowing yellow eyes.

At this moment the Pooka himself had come to claim Daniel.

'Ay, Daniel O'Rourke, I see. 'Tis out late, aren't we?' the Pooka asked.

'The devil, he chases me as I tried to tell Mrs. O'Brien of her dearly departed Paddy,' Daniel spat out.

The Pooka snorted, 'Daniel O'Rourke, no trickery from you this night. You be a devil yourself? On this night I take only those who have too much to drink back to the parish where they belong.'

Thinking fast, Daniel lowered his eyes and said in a slurred tone, 'Tis right good, sir. I am ashamed that on this good eve where I should be at mass I am here crawling back home, too full of ale to know my own whereabouts.'

After thinking a long while the Pooka said, 'It is improper you drink this night, but I know you Daniel O'Rourke, you are a sober man, who tends mass well and leaves me a share every harvest. So get up on my back, and grip me well for fear you'd fall off and I'll fly you out of the river.'

Daniel jumped up on the back of the Pooka and in a single bound the horse reached the bank of the river. The two raced away up the hill. Daniel looked back to see the devil on the small hill in the river, shaking his fist in the air, knowing he'd been tricked out of another soul.

Flying down the road so fast that the fog cleared a path for the Pooka and Daniel, the wild horse would jump fences, race through thickets and narrowly miss trees before coming back to the road, all to sober Daniel O'Rourke.

Daniel closed his eyes tight and held on to the wild steed. When Daniel opened his eyes he was sitting in a pew at the church. Father Michael approached him after turning away from two simple coffins.

'Good to see you Daniel O'Rourke. Paddy and Mrs. O'Brien passed last night, she before him. I understand you stayed late to help with Paddy's harvest. Blessings to you,' Father Michael said.

Daniel said a prayer for the two and went outside, being met by the sunshine. He walked to the O'Brien house where an elderly gentlemen sat on the right side of the bench just outside the front door.

'Daniel O'Rourke. I hear a good deed you did last night for the family of this house. Many blessings to you,' the man said, taking a toke from his small pipe.

'Thank you. They were a good family that never had children. I thought myself to be like a son,' Daniel said.

'Ay, lad, you were. I knew Mr. O'Brien well. He held much gold in his possession. As being the

only son they knew, it is yours,' the little man said as he tapped his pipe out on his shoe.

Stunned, Daniel shook the man's hand and began to run home to tell his wife.

'One more thing Daniel...tis not nice to trick the Pooka,' the little man's voice carried across the road.

Daniel turned back and the little curious man was gone."