

Two stories for Samhain 2015 compiled by Marion McCartney

Two Clans

Once upon a time, long long ago, there were two clans who farmed in the same valley. The blue eyed farmers worshipped a blue-eyed god, and the brown eyed farmers worshipped a brown eyed god. And of course each clan believed that they were the chosen people of the one true God and reared their children to believe it too, for fear of the blue-eyed bogeyman or the brown eyed banshee, who would be sure to get you if you didn't believe what you were told and obey your elders and betters.

The blue-eyed bogeyman and the brown eyed banshee were said to lurk in the dark wood alongside the old graveyard. The graveyard was, and had been from time immemorial, the only tract of common land in the valley, but even here the clans were divided: blue-eyed graves in the north east, brown eyed graves in the south west.

Occasionally it happened that funerals from opposing sides of the valley took place on the same day, and on one of these days a girl of the blue-eyed tribe sang a lament over the graves of her ancestors, and a boy of the brown eyed tribe played a dirge on his flute over the grave of his ancestors.

And they couldn't help but look across at each other as they did so, for her singing and his music soared together like they were both singing the same song, and their eyes only met for a moment for they knew it wasn't allowed, but that moment was enough for them to fall in love.

And after the funerals were over, they waited until all the other mourners had left and they walked towards each other. She held out her hands and he took them in his. Her blue eyes looked long into his brown eyes, and they smiled when no monsters appeared from the dark wood: no bogeyman, no banshee, no nothing.

And they knew, without having to say it, that the stories they'd been told all their lives were a lie to keep the children of the two tribes apart.

As they lay down together in the dark wood they promised each other that in a year and a day they would meet in that place once again to be married for ever after.

And a year and a day passed, and on the day the sound of a flute playing and a voice singing were heard all over the valley and everyone rushed to the dark wood where the sound was coming from, and they found the bodies of the two lovers with their throats cut.

Needless to say, each clan denied all responsibility, and blamed the other side for the atrocity.

"Your blue-eyed bogeyman murdered our flute player!"

"Your brown eyed banshee murdered the singer of our songs!"

And each clan took the body of their own and declared it a martyr for the cause.

The girl with the beautiful singing voice was buried in a shrine in the north east of the old

graveyard.

The boy who played the flute was buried in a shrine in the south west of the old graveyard.

Pilgrims of separate persuasions worshipped at their separate shrines.

And it turned into a sort of competition as to which shrine had the most pilgrims, the fanciest flowers, the greatest gifts; and the storytellers of the clans tried to outdo each other with tales of wondrous visions and miraculous cures and the like.

And another year and a day passed.

And on that day the sound of a flute was heard at the singer's shrine and the sound of singing was heard at the flute player's shrine.

"It's the blue-eyed bogeyman!" screamed the brown eyed pilgrims.

"It's the brown eyed banshee!" screamed the blue-eyed pilgrims.

The music soared. The pilgrims fled.

The flowers on both shrines shrivelled and blackened and died as if they'd been poisoned.

And the poison spread slowly across the graveyard, over the whole valley.

The leaves fell off the trees, the wood crumbled to dust; the crops in the fields rotted and died; the animals on the farms sickened and died; bloated fish floated on the surface of the stagnant rivers. Famine and pestilence reduced the people to skin and bone. The very old people died first, and then the very young. And the few survivors fled that place, never to return.

And by the time another year and a day had passed no one lived there any more -- except for the lovers in the old graveyard, who, according to legend still sing and play the flute together on the anniversary of the year and a day that they were to be married but were murdered instead.

The End - or is it?

How would you end this story?

Sally Bracewell and Billy Martin

A story from June Peters

Billy asks Sally to dance. They dance perfectly. People watch them.

Billy asks Sally: "Will you marry me?"

In a low but clear voice she says: "I will."

After a year there's a fall at the pit where Billy works.

Three men are missing. Two bodies are found.

Billy's mother identifies his broken body but Sally refuses to believe that he's dead. She refuses to go to his funeral.

After some time Sally's friends insist on her getting out of the house and take her to the local dance.

She sees Billy coming towards her.

They dance – through the hall, down the stairs, out of the door, down the street and into the graveyard.

He kisses her -- and his lips are cold.

She screams; she's seeing him for what he is -- a skeleton with rotting flesh. When he opens his mouth she can see maggots crawling around. She also notices for the first time the open grave into which he is urging her.

Looking sadly into her eyes he says, "Since you won't let me go and I can't live with you, then you must needs live with me. I'm not where I ought to be. I feel it when worms go through me. And so since you won't let me go and I can't live with you, then you must needs live with me."

She screams: "Let me go!"

He replies: "The point is, will you let me go?"

And for the second time in her life, in a low but clear voice she says: "I will."