

## Bath Time



I haven't seen such a sight since my childhood days in Ireland: a young mother bathing her newborn infant out-of-doors. It stopped me in my tracks and I was flooded with memories, some my own and some far more ancient than mine. I wondered if I should just pass by, but I couldn't. I was utterly fascinated. The mother was in her teens but with the kind of face that morphs continually, now with the aspect of an innocent child, now with the aspect of a vibrant teenager, then with the aspect of a sedate matron and, finally, with the aspect of a wise old woman. A shock of thick, red tresses tumbled down her back, beyond her waist. She was kneeling beside a stone tub, in which she was carefully and ever-so-gently washing her newborn boy-child. He had the mesmerizingly blue eyes of his mother but with a mop of curly black hair.

The mother's own locks were floating in the water and these were the washcloths with which she bathed her babe; silky fibers that caressed his pink body and brought a toothless smile to his ruby-red lips. I said, "Bail ó Dhia ar an naíonán" (the blessing of God on your infant.)

She turned her sky-blue eyes on me and replied, “An bhail chéanna ort” (the same blessing be upon yourself.) In an instant I knew whence she was; she was a woman of the Tuatha Dé Danann, and her infant was a faery child. Immediately, I understood what had *really* happened fifteen minutes before.

Kayla, my dog, and I had been climbing down the steep hillside, following a rocky ravine which was channeling the excess water from the rains of the last few weeks. We had come to a particularly tricky place, very steep and very rocky. I had thought long and hard about proceeding. It would be a difficult and dangerous route ahead, but the alternative was to climb back up and undo the work of the last hour. I opted to try my luck. I was hampered by the fact that while I had my sturdy walking stick in my right hand, my left hand was dedicated to carrying a deer skull with huge antlers, which I had found on the hillside about twenty minutes before. I wasn't willing to abandon it.

At this point, the two slopes of the opposing hillsides had vectored into a V-shape, through which the water was cascading with quite some force. Holding my stick and the antlers, I used my elbows, one against each wall, to lower myself into the crevice. When I set my feet on the bottom, it was so narrow that one foot got jammed. I had a fleeting vision of being found next year - a human skeleton holding a big-antlered deer skull and a walking staff. I managed to wrestle my foot free. The water was mid-thigh and the pool about fifteen feet long. I half-waded, half-elbowed my way to the end. There it dropped off into a six-foot-high waterfall. As I was trying to figure out a way down, I heard Kayla crying. When I looked back, I saw that she was spread-eagled, two legs on each rock face, sliding and scraping and getting no purchase.

She was freaking out, unable to either proceed or reverse. I tried to encourage her to come to me, but her nails just scored the rock and she continued to slide, sometimes slipping under the water. So I set aside the skull and the stick and waded back into the pool. I grabbed hold of her collar and pulled her after me; all the way to the end. Then we found a way down the waterfall - but only to be met with a surprise. The next level contained exactly the same setup, except now the water was *waist* deep. Having retrieved the stick and the skull I elbow-waded my way to the end of the second pool only to discover that, once more, Kayla was stranded and crying pitifully. Again, I laid aside my baggage and went back to rescue her. She resisted and I had to really pull hard to get her moving. We did it. Now the way forward was relatively simple, but that was when she grew *really* fearful. It was then, having rounded a corner, that I saw the mother and child. Only now did I understand that most of Kayla's fear was that she had detected, long before I had, that we were about to jump dimensions, to step through the veil into a "Caol Áit."

The bathtub, in which the faery mother was bathing her infant, was another rock pool set in the crevice of the hillsides. I knew that she was as ancient as the mountain itself. She reached out her hand and stroked Kayla, who had been cowering by my side. It worked. Kayla started to wag her tail, then she licked the woman's hand and, finally, began to lick the baby's face. The baby, the mother and myself, all broke into huge grins.

She only said one more thing to me, before she vanished, "treat this mountain as lovingly as you've seen me wash my infant." It wasn't only a message *for* me, it was a message *through* me.

Then, like a cloud that changes contours in the sky, finally teasing itself asunder and disappearing, mother and child began to shape-shift until they completely dissolved. The Portal closed. Kayla and I were alone once more.

I sat by the pool for a long time trying to emblazon their features on my mind's eye, and their message on my soul.

Namasté,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seán". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Tír na nÓg  
March, 2014