

## CRY

Aoife tiptoed across the cell. She didn't have to though, for hardly anything could be heard in the thunder of Uncle Pot's snore. She called him Uncle Pot, 'Pot' as in 'potato', for he looked much like an oversized potato halfway through its transformation into the human guise – if there existed such a magical potato, that is. Every time Aoife saw him, she couldn't help wondering what a real potato tasted like. This plant seemed to be what people around here grew and ate most. Not Aoife.

Uncle Pot fell asleep as soon as he filled Aoife's clay bowl with her daily share of water, and downed his own bottle of mead. She knew the water was not fresh; it must have been stored in a pot somewhere for a week at least, and she could only be grateful it hadn't stunk of rat droppings. She had sniffed it and sipped it. She had never complained. They had done enough nasty things to her even when she had only been obedient.

Even Uncle Pot, despite his generally simple mind, could do a nasty thing or two. But Aoife rejoiced whenever he was on shift – considering his men tried to arrange the rota so he had as few as possible – especially when his shift fell on a full moon night.

That night was not the best full moon night of the season. The best one was the night before, and Aoife was very frustrated she missed it. She couldn't dream of sneaking out, however, when Uncle Sid was the one on the night shift. Uncle Sid was a tad older than Uncle Pot, but he held a much higher rank. He had the wits of a ghost chili, as she once overheard someone's remark. Aoife had never seen a ghost chili, but since it was worthy of a comparison to Uncle Sid, she had decided she was not keen on the idea of discovering its taste. And since it was silly to name people after things you knew nothing about, plus 'Uncle Ghost chili' did not quite have a nice ring, she called him Uncle Sid.

Aoife grabbed the cell bars, closed her eyes and whispered, pleading them to let her through. The bars were made of iron, which means they wouldn't give in as easily as wood or stone, but Aoife dare not slipping through the wall of the cell. There were always guards on the ground.

It took a while but at last she found herself on the other side of the bars. The dancing flame of the torch on the wall made her shadow look like it was waving at her inside the cell. She went to the wooden door, pressed her ears against it to check before phasing through. She dashed along the short corridor towards the spiral stairs, but immediately back down. Footsteps. Aoife crouched down to hide in the shadow of the pillar.

A man was coming down from the watch room above her cell, at the very top of the tower. Aoife could tell from his shadow that apart from the spear and the bucket, he was carrying something else. He stopped on the landing just on the other side of the pillar to adjust the items. Those few seconds felt like a good few hours to Aoife; opposite her, framed by a small window, beckoning, was a piece of night, veiled by mountain fog almost glimmering in the moonlight.

Finally, the man moved on. Once his footsteps had disappeared a floor below, Aoife hurried up the stairs, into the watch room. She knew she had but a few minutes.

She scanned the room. There was only one chair in the room. Last time, she recalled, there had been two. One was not tall enough to help her reach the hanging beam. She tried the windowsill; it was of no use either.

Aoife could hear footsteps coming up the stairs on the other side of the door. She bolted across the room. Her foot hurt; she had just stepped on something quite tough on the floor – a piece of wood, a piece of the leg of a chair.

The next watchman entered the room. Aoife backed against the wall. The door covered her, for now. She held her breath. She looked up to pray for a beating less painful

than last time she failed to escape. And she had to put a hand on her mouth to mute a gasp. Her eyes widened at the sight of an unexpected way out.

She rolled the broken piece of the chair towards her with her toes and picked it up. She gulped – one shot was all she had. She threw it over the man’s head. The minimal sound it made was enough to make him turn around just in time to miss Aoife’s bare shoulder. Swift like a squirrel, Aoife swung herself on top of the door – it thankfully didn’t shake under her weightless body – and hopped onto the beam. She pressed her palms against the roughness of the roof. There were iron nails, but thankfully they only made up a small part. She felt the wood and hay’s approval around her, and one blink, she felt the night air on her velvet skin.

There it was, hanging in the sky, her beloved full moon. It had been so long since she last bathed in its silver stream. She reached up.

All of a sudden, her eyes could see only red. Blood red. “No...” Both her hands flew up to pin her lips together.

Visions filled her head, and pain, in its purest form, filled her heart. She doubled up. She choked. Her nails cut into her lips. Her shoulder trembled. Her whole body shook. She tried to wipe the blood from her eyes with her flowing white hair, but once the flow had started, it couldn’t be stop. It was a banshee’s duty. So she cried.

Her cry was higher than the howling wind, and wilder than the rustle of the pine trees.

Her cry echoed in the waters, and echoed in the clouds.

Her cry filled the valley.

She cried for the family at the foot of the mountain, who just lost their lives to the savage blades of Uncle Sid and his squad.

She cried for the baby whose blood soaked the crib.

Below, someone said, “It’s here”. And the people in the huts around the tower also cried, their spasmodic cry of ecstasy.