

From Russia with Calf



In keeping with the time of year, many of our articles this issue have to do with heritage and tradition – memories and ghosts. Respect for tradition is not always inward-looking: it can lead to the most surprising connections, as in the case of how this drawing came to me.

It begins with a young Russian who was writing a story set in Ireland, and was seeking a suitable placename for the home town of her hero. The name that caught her eye was – Ballinamallard.

For a writer, the name alone is not enough. She wanted to know its meaning, and what she found led her to send a speculative email to the village website:

My name is Anastasiia, I am very interested in Irish history and culture. According to the site Place Names NI St Columcille placed a curse on the roosters in Ballinamallard in the sixth century. I was very intrigued but could not find any further information. Could you please tell me what was the case if it is known?

In a roundabout way that such things happen in villages, the email came to me.

There is no further information, but that never stops a writer. (By chance, Columcille also features in two other stories in this issue – in the curach that inspired *Row the Erne*, and in a stained glass window by Wilhelmina Geddes). I replied with some background on the Saint's legend. Much as I do with the Brontë's grandfather, I imagined the Saint passing upriver in a currach towards the headwaters of the Strule, on his way into exile on Iona, and perhaps grounding on a gravel bank at cock-crow.

Anastasiia is a graphic artist, working under the name of Lea Daniel. Her portfolio shows influences of Beardsley, Rackham, and Morris yet is

distinctively Russian. (William Morris has his own tenuous connection to Ballinamallard through the family of Rudyard Kipling, but that's another story).

The conversation continued:

Thank you for your wonderful letter! History is full of rumours and unproven tales, maybe that is what makes it so charming and captivating.

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Thank you for your kind words about my art. I dream about illustrating Irish folktales and fairytales (Ireland makes my heart melt though I'm Russian and don't speak or understand Irish Gaelige). I would like to illustrate something. Maybe a series of stories about local saints or heroes? I'm new to all this, I'm at the beginning of my artistic path (I hope, it'll be successful) so if you have any ideas, I'd be glad to discuss them!

In return I set her my story of *The Old Woman and the Calf* which I gave at the Lisnaskea Islander Festival two years ago, and this is the result. My story was an imaginative fusion the name of the Lough in which the Erne rises (Lough Gowna, or Calf Lough) with the the legend of its overflowing from a magical well. A similar legend of the origin of Lough Neagh is found in Lady Jane Wilde's book of 1888 *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms & Superstitions of Ireland*

Such stories may seem insignificant. They are not facts or even history, but they are the reason why this drawing exists. Thanks to Saint Columbcille and people like Oscar Wilde's mother and countless others who listened to such tales and passed them on, you have now been introduced to the work of a young Saint Petersburg artist.

Every story has an echo that defies time and space. If you follow it, who knows where it may lead?

Jenny Brien Editor