

Introduction: When the time comes, the father doesn't want to give his son to the seamaiden. At his son's request, he asks the blacksmith to make a sword.

With the sword and his father's black horse, the son ventures out into the world. On his way, he meets a black dog, an otter, and a falcon, arguing over the carcass of a sheep. After the young man has divided the prey for them, they all pledge¹ their help to him when needed. The son becomes a cowherd² for the king, but the land where he grazes the cows belongs to two giants.

On the next day he went grazing with the cows; and at last he came to a place exceedingly grassy, in a green glen, of which he never saw the like. But about the time when he should drive the cattle³ homewards, who should he see coming but a great giant with his sword in his hand? "HI! HO!! HOGARACH!" says the giant. "Those cattle are mine; they are on my land, and a dead man art thou." "I know not that," says the herd; "there is no knowing, but that may be easier to say than to do." He drew the great clean-sweeping sword, and he neared the giant. The herd drew back his sword, and the head was off the giant in a twinkling⁴. He leaped on the black horse, and he went to look for the giant's house. Into the house went the herd, and that's the place where there was money in plenty, and dresses of each kind in the wardrobe with gold and silver, and each thing finer than the other. At the mouth of night he took himself to the king's house, but he took not a thing from the giant's house. And when the cattle were milked this night there was milk. He got good feeding this night, meat and drink without stint, and the king was hugely pleased that he had caught such a herd.

1. swear **2.** someone who keeps the cows **3.** *bétail* **4.** *en un clin d'oeil*

1. Then the princess played again, and stopped till the sea-maiden put him up to the waist. Then the princess played and stopped again, and this time the sea-maiden put him all out of the loch, and he called on the falcon and became one and flew on shore. But the sea-maiden took the princess, his wife.

2. The king's daughter was now mournful¹, tearful, blind-sorrowful for her married man; she was always with her eye on the loch. An old soothsayer² met her, and she told how it had befallen her married mate. Then she told her the thing to do to save her mate, and that she did.

3. "In the island that is in the midst³ of the loch is the white-footed hind⁴, and though she be caught, there will spring a hoodie⁵ out of her, and though the hoodie should be caught, there will spring a trout out of her, but there is an egg in the mouth of the trout, and the soul of the sea-maiden is in the egg, and if the egg breaks, she is dead."

4. She took her harp to the sea-shore, and sat and played; and the sea-maiden came up to listen, for sea-maidens are fonder of music than all other creatures. But when the wife saw the sea-maiden she stopped. The seamaiden said, "Play on!" but the princess said, "No, not till I see my man again." So the seamaiden put up his head out of the loch.

5. Her man was mournful, tearful, wandering down and up about the banks of the loch, by day and night. The old soothsayer met him. The soothsayer told him that there was no way of killing the sea-maiden but the one way, and this is it:

6. They were now married, and everything went on well. But one day, and it was the namesake of the day when his father had promised him to the sea-
maiden, she came and took him away to the loch without leave or asking.

1. sad 2. *devin* 3. middle 4. *biche* 5. cape

1.

Faeries, come take me out
of this dull world,
For I would ride with
you upon the wind,
Run on the top of the
dishevelled tide,
And dance upon the
mountains like a flame.

W.B. Yeats, "The Land of Heart's Desire"

2.

A mermaid found a swimming lad,
Picked him up for her own,
Pressed her body to his body,
Laughed; and plunging down
Forgot in cruel happiness
That even lovers drown.

W.B. Yeats, "A Man Young and Old"