

Chapter 8 – Muiroigh

Vinny decided to set off along the beach, and walked towards the north. It was still twilight, but he could see enough to walk quickly and without fear of encountering any unexpected obstacle.

He had walked for about twenty minutes and daylight had crept in when he saw a piece of blue amber! He bent and picked it up, slipping it into his pocket.

The sand gave way to a shingle beach. Turning a bend of the seashore, he found himself in a narrow sheltered bay. A small stream flowed down through a gully in the cliff-face.

He clambered over a ridge of rock to reach the stream. He collapsed onto his knees, and with his hands scooped up the pure, fresh water and drank voraciously. He lay down for a few minutes on a section of green turf adjacent to the stream to regain his strength. While he lay there, he heard a noise. He listened intently to the sound of a melancholic song. *There are two of them*, he thought, *and both voices are female. I wonder who they are.* Then the song stopped and he heard them talking. *They're coming closer.* He rose to his feet and took shelter behind a rock.

The next moment, two beautiful young girls shot out from behind the ridge, one chasing the other. They were both naked, one dark-haired with brown skin, the other of fair complexion with blonde hair. Vinny skirted around the rocks above the stream, keeping well hidden from the strangers. He watched the second girl catch up with her friend and the pair of them collapsed in a heap on the sand, giggling. His curiosity aroused, he moved closer. Then he noticed what appeared to be two sealskins lying on the shingle at his feet.

He bent to pick up one of the skins to examine it. Just as he did so, the girls caught sight of him, screamed out, and ran to get possession of the skins. One girl, the blonde, seized the skin that remained on the ground, quickly donned it, and ran towards the sea. She stopped to pick up a small red cap made from feathers, then plunged into the water. She glided off like a seal and soon disappeared from sight.

The other girl wrung her hands and cried, "Please, give me my skin back."

Although she was naked, it was her face that drew his attention. It had an unearthly beauty with smooth olive-brown skin complemented by the deep colour of

her eyes and her long dark hair. Then he noticed her hands and feet had webs between the fingers and toes.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“My name is Muiroigh. I am a Silkie.”

“That’s a beautiful name. What does it mean? Where do you come from?”

“It means ‘Sea maiden’ and I come from Tir fo Thoinn, the Land beneath the Waves. I am a seal by day, but at night I become a woman. My friend, Selchie, and I were just about to change back to seals when you disturbed us.”

Vinny looked out to sea and saw Selchie swimming close to the shore watching them.

He spoke again to Muiroigh. “You are a very beautiful woman.”

“What do you want of me?”

“I’m sorry if I frightened you. I wish you no harm, and don’t need anything from you, unless you can help me to find my way back to my friends.”

“Who are your friends and where are they?”

He explained to her how he had become separated from the others at Cluritown, and described his imprisonment by Millikane.

“You’re a stranger to these parts. What are you and your friends doing here in Luchor?”

Vinny didn’t want to tell Muiroigh too much about the quest, so he said guardedly, “We’re on our way to meet the high lord at Trevin’s Keep. He wishes to have counsel with one of our company, a man by the name of Squire.”

“Squire? Our legends tell of a man called Squire and his daughter, Sohan. Many years ago, my people rescued Sohan. She was visiting the Silkie on Merrow Island when an enormous subterranean volcano erupted nearby causing the island to sink below sea level. That’s how it became ‘The Land beneath the Waves’.”

“My friend is not the same Squire that you knew, though he bears a close resemblance. The ancient prophecy tells of his coming to the Land and of the important part he is to play in our quest.”

“I can help you, but first I must ask you to return my skin. As long as you hold it, I remain under your power and must do whatever you tell me.”

Vinny reached down for the skin and passed it to her. It felt oily to the touch.

“Here,” he said. “I release you of any service. Now, can you help me?”

She started to pull the skin over her legs. “Do you want to be my husband? I am wealthy. I have gold. I got it from ships wrecked on the rocks surrounding my home.”

He looked at her sympathetically. “No, Muiroigh, I cannot be your husband. You and I are of different races, and I must rejoin my friends on the quest.”

Muiroigh looked relieved. “I am glad,” she said. “If you took me as your wife, then I would have to stay here as a woman, and wouldn’t be able to return to Tir fo Thoinn. Walk north from here. Follow the beach until you reach the port of Luchafen. The walk will take you most of the day. From there you can take the road north to Trevin’s Keep.”

“I’m afraid of the man and Cluricauns that brought me here. They might be following me and try to recapture me.”

“Don’t worry. Selchie and I will swim close to the shore and keep watch over you. If you meet any trouble, then we will call upon Kelpie to help you.”

“Who is Kelpie?”

“He’s Selchie’s brother. He’s sitting out there on the rocks.”

Vinny looked in the direction that Muiroigh pointed. He hadn’t noticed the third Silkie before. Kelpie sat on a rock silently watching events on shore. His eyes also scanned the sea, as if looking for any contraband lost from wrecked ships. He had a green body, with a red nose, green hair and teeth and wore only a red hat. He had eyes like a pig, and scaly legs and arms resembling fins.

“He’s a bringer of good luck,” said Muiroigh.