

Mountain Thyme

by Maureen Jones

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Love came with wondrous joy, cruelly taken as the soul within her stilled, I bend to hear her whispered words, “Never, never, forsake”, her soft voice fades on a lingering sigh. Wait! My impossible cry, for she is gone, far distanced beyond earth’s wide skies. What once was can now never be. A chill graveyard wind blows. Odours of freshly dug earth and the stark truths of Preacher’s solemnly uttered words penetrate my stricken mind. “In sickness and in health until death brings its final parting, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, forever and forever. Amen.”

Shunning all compassion, what use now, for I am as dead, waiting to die. Giving no backward glance, I begin my journey. Scarcely noticed the dogs follow my shadow. Men’s voices fade yet one, constant, remains, urging me on, strengthening resolve. I can, I must, I will.

The Mountain looms. Here trod the feet of my ancestors, a proud Celtic people, scorned for their language, invaded, uprooted, and scattered, never to return. Only their old heroic traces can lead to my liberation. In a possessed haste I scramble upwards, bruised on rough stony pathways, slighting thirst-quenching streams, buffeted at mist-shrouded peak, to sway and pause at the plunge. Now, now, now, the voice is shouting and I recognise it as my own. Through dancing dampness of swirling mists, an echo responds, never, never, never. It is her voice! The words softly called still my leap and I slump in faint onto hard rocked ground.

Whimpering hounds stir me, an empty belly prompts foraging; the dogs hunt and eat raw A broken man, unwilling to live, a coward soul, afraid to die. Brooding days, rain lashed or sun spilled: bring no comfort to ragged raw senses. Nights long, sky bright or cloud strewn: give no pity to my dark despairing dreams. First frosts find me in cavern’s shelter; a soft mattress of thyme is my bed. Birch branches, painfully gathered, make a meagre fire, mocking warmth that my raw-boned frame craves.

A distant keening. Fox prowling perhaps. It is pitiful weeping, a human presence nears yet undisturbed the dogs lie still. Struggling to rise the touch of a small hand stills me.

I am without voice as a young boy steps out from the grey stoned shadows and trembles before me. Raising his hands he tearfully implores, “Dada, it is me, your boy, sent here this night to find you. Come back Dada, please come back.” His anguished words echo around the cavern, yet the dogs remain quiet and still. Fear filled, I cry aloud, “Dear God, this cannot be, my wife has passed and there is no son.”

His small hands cling as he cries again, “Dada, I am your boy, you must come back, Oh Dada, please come back.” In the fire’s flickering light, I gaze down on the child. Seeing tangled brown curls, brimming blue eyes, features familiar for they are my

own. Senses sent spinning, how can this be, who is this boy? Again, he pleads.
“Dada, come back, I am your boy, Dada please come back.” His voice fails; wracked
with anguished sobs his small body crumbles. Then realisation takes me to my knees.

Beyond mere mortal understanding, known yet unknown, this small child, formed by
the forces of long-past history and brought to me this night, is my own unborn son.
Fixed and founded here on this mountain, past and present are one, time matters not,
this knowledge is sure.

Pressing his sobbing body to me, on a ragged breath I say, “Hush dear lad, your
Dada’s here, hush your tears and hear this pledge, that with tomorrow’s dawn Dada is
coming back. Sleep now my son, do not fear, Dada’s coming back.” His sobs slowly
cease as he whispers “Dada, you are coming back, my Dada.” His breath blows sweet
upon my face, melancholy melts away and heartache is no more.

This boy brings promise of a future; lost hope is restored and I am given back to life.
This truth is absolute; in my end is my beginning.

Cradling my child, I succumb to a deep healing sleep. On waking, he is gone and I
rise renewed to greet this new dawn.