

not die in this place. They died far away. The Kerry nights will never be theirs.

Sara Walsh and most of those she grew up with would never know so dense a world again. No place would ever speak to them as this one spoke. For all its poverty and pain, for all its gossip and small grievances, it would leave them with a sense of loss no matter how good their reasons for leaving. Sara would never be tied so tightly to any place again.

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*I was about [four] years old when my dad went to America.
We were going to lose our land and him working in America
was our only hope of keeping it.*

—Sara, remembering her father's departure

Sara Walsh was three or four (the dates of such things are hardly exact) when the fairies took Richard Mackessy's pony. Richard Mackessy had noticed his pony missing the evening before. The whole family had searched, but they found no sign of it. Richard Mackessy went to bed thinking the pony would be back by morning. But it did not come back, and he resumed the search. That is when he found the pony caught in a tree within the fort. The pony was held fast between two branches.

Why the fairies would put the pony up in the tree, no one said, but the fairies around Ballylongford seemed to have an affinity for horses. In Ahanagran one fear had to be balanced against another, and fear of the bailiffs coming to seize cattle for debts owed landlords or merchants could overcome fear of the fairies, particularly if the bailiffs feared the fairies as well. In an earlier time, some local men had spent the night in Finerty's fort protecting the cattle from bailiffs, but at about two in the morning they heard a great noise and saw a pack of hounds followed by men on horseback. They had ridden all around the fort before galloping off in the direction of another fort and disappearing.

The pony up the tree was, perhaps, a fairy joke, but even if fairies trifled with you, it was best not to trifle with fairies. On the Dees' farm there had once been a servant boy who was fencing a gap in the meadow. He entered the fairy fort to cut bushes. A

thorn pierced his leg. He got blood poisoning and died two days later. People said it was because he had cut the bushes. And at a fairy fort in Beale, two miles from Ballylongford, the father of Thomas Collins had decided to plough up the fort and till it, but when he started to plough, his horses immediately fell and broke their legs. No one interfered with the fort thereafter.

It was roughly a year after the fairies had put Richard Mackessy's pony up the tree that Jack Walsh left for America. "My dad went to America in January 1924 to earn money to save our farm," Sara remembers, "we were not able to pay the rates." Sara was barely four. The rates were the poor rates, the taxes on the land that the Walshes struggled so hard to get and expand. If Jack did not pay them, he would lose his land.

There is no causal connection between emigration and fairies, of course. But there are connections. Both existed in the same place at the same time; both sprang from a common past. And each, in its own way, represented the forked alternatives of Irish country life. A person who left Ireland left behind the Tuatha Dé.

Because the fairies came from the people who had inhabited the country before the Gaels, the fairies of Ballylongford and its surrounding townlands had lived there longer than the Irish. The fairies were embodiments of the past and the place itself.

Emigration, just as much a product of the local past, represented an opposite prospect. The fairies had gone underground into the land itself; the emigrants went out of it. Those who left were absences not lingering presences. They were those who could not or would not stay. Ahanagran produced more emigrants than fairies.

When Jack Walsh left in 1924, his troubles were not unusual. It was a bad year generally in Kerry. In January 1924 the sheriff with a posse of soldiers seized cattle across North Kerry for non-payment of rents, land payments, and rates. The Farmer's Union was reorganizing in Ballylongford. J.J. Galvin was elected chairman. The farmers wanted protection and relief. They claimed, *The Kerryman* reported, that the values set on their land by the Land Commission were "highly unjust and unbearable."

Jack Walsh was the last of his siblings to emigrate. Having no land had caused Jack Walsh's brother and his sisters to leave

Ireland; his hope of keeping the land caused Jack Walsh to leave. The desire to keep farms was part of the great irony behind so much emigration. Jack Walsh carried the secret so many emigrants carry: he didn't leave to change things. His leaving was a desperate attempt to keep them the same. Jack Walsh left for America because he wanted to be an Irish farmer.

To save the farm, he left his wife, Margaret, with one baby in the grave, five young children, and another child growing in her womb. The day Jack left, Margaret Walsh stood crying among her children. She had no idea how long he would be away.

For Sara, a small child, that was for a time the end of it. Seventy years after it happened, she still remembers the leaving and its cause, but the memory is of her mother watching her father leave: "I remember my mom crying the day he left. That is my only memory of that day. I did not remember my dad at all."

The pony the fairies put up the tree and the departure of Jack Walsh happened almost contemporaneously in the same place, or so at least the stories say. These two stories tell of things that once happened alongside each other. Fairies and emigrants existed side by side. Ponies did not end up in trees every day, but then neither did fathers depart for America that often. The things these stories commemorate did not occur in separate realms. People who saw fairies still had to pay the rates.

The past is a set of connections that once ran only laterally or backward. They could not run forward because the future had not yet happened. But remembering the past forges connections among what happened then, what happened afterward, and what exists now. The older connections, the connections of things that simply happened simultaneously in a single place, become attenuated and lost. They are hard to restore. I can only guess at the connections that once existed among such stories. But I think it is necessary to put Richard Mackessy's pony back up that tree.