

The Mutant Pooka of Kildare

By David K. McDonnell (© David K. McDonnell, www.clandonnell.net)

A young man named Feachra, in days gone by, left Dublin to visit his friend in County Kildare. His friend lived near the village of Lullymore. This was a long ride from Dublin, but Fiachra was anxious to see his friend. He hoped to make the journey in a single day.

He left Dublin early in the morning and made quite a distance by late afternoon. He was well into County Kildare and didn't think he was terribly far from Lullymore. He came to a crossroads but then became a bit confused. Should he bear to the left, or should he bear to the right? He had been on this road before, but could not remember which path was correct. The correct path, whichever that was, would take him to his friend before the end of the day. The incorrect path would take him who knows where.

A public house was located just where the road from Dublin met the crossroads. The signs above the door read "Peadar's Public House" and "Visitors Welcome". Fiachra thought it wise to stop for directions and, while he was at it, quench his thirst. His horse needed a rest as well.

Fiachra sat at a table in the public house and Peadar himself brought over a mug of beer, before Fiachra even asked for one. Fiachra said "go raibh maith agat" [thank you], then raised his glass and said "slainte" [health].

Peadar asked: "Where are you heading to, if I might be so bold as to ask?"

“I’m on the way from Dublin to visit a friend who lives near Lullymore. I stopped here since I was not certain which way I should go. Should I take the road to the left or the road to the right?” asked Fiachra.

“You must take the road to the left. It will take you to Lullymore directly,” said Peadar. “The road to the right will not.”

“Thank you for your kindness. I shall be leaving as soon as I finish my mug,” said Fiachra.

“Oh, but you cannot be leaving for Lullymore now,” exclaimed Peadar. “You still have several hours to travel and you will never make it before dark.”

“I’m used to traveling at night and it troubles me not at all,” said Fiachra.

Peadar quickly responded: “It’s not your troubles I be worrying about, it’s your life. There is a pooka in the forest near Lullymore. You best spend the night here at my public house, and leave tomorrow in the daylight.”

“Pooka, you say?” said Fiachra. “You country folk still believe in pookas?”

“Of course we do. At least we believe in the mutant pooka of Kildare,” said Peadar. “You city folk would be wise to believe in her as well.”

Fiachra laughed, but added, “Tell me about this mutant pooka.”

The owner of the pub poured himself a mug of beer, walked over to Fiachra, and sat down across the table from him.

“This pooka is a terrible creature,” Peadar. “It first appears as a beautiful woman. She has long, flowing red hair. Bright blue eyes, with fluttering eye lashes. Shapely figure under a long white dress. You will, no doubt, be enchanted.”

“She will tell you a tale of being in distress,” he added. “You will feel compelled to provide aid, as a gentleman of course should do. But whatever you do, do NOT provide her with any assistance.”

“And why should I not?” asked Fiachra.

“Because it is not a beautiful woman at all!” said Peadar. “She’s a pooka! She preys on men who travel alone in the forest at night. You will place the creature on your horse, either in front of you or behind. If in front of you, she will turn her head completely around. If behind you, she will force you to turn your head to face hers.”

“And when you look at into her eyes, she will transform,” he added. “She will no longer be a beautiful young woman. Her head will grow monstrously large into the head of a horse. Her skin will disappear and you will see nothing but a skull and long, sharp teeth. Each of her fingers will grow into long, sharp claws. The sockets where her eyes once were will burn like hot coals, and her breath will stink like rotting cabbage.”

“The pooka will bite your neck, and her claws will dig deep into your skin. No one has ever survived such an ordeal. Everyone who has encountered this pooka has either died or has become a lunatic from the experience.”

“I’m aware of pooka folklore, but I never heard a story about a killer pooka,” said Feachra. “They can be mischievous, I’ve heard, but your monster doesn’t sound like a pooka to me.”

“Aye, but this pooka is different,” responded Peadar. “She is a mutant pooka. Some say she is the product of the union between an ordinary pooka and a dullahan. A dullahan, as we all know, is quite capable of killing a human.”

“Well, this has been entertaining but I must be on my way,” said Fiachra. “I’ve certainly heard the old folk tales before, but I didn’t realize there were people around who still believed them.”

Fiachra placed a few shillings on the table to pay for the mug of beer, and walked out of the public house. He mounted his horse and began the journey on the road to the left, which he now knew was the road to Lullymore.

Peadar shrugged his shoulders and cleared the table. “There is no way to convince a fool,” he thought to himself.

Within a few hours, Fiachra was deep into forest and not too far from Lullymore. It was now night, and as dark as he could ever remember it being. The moonlight barely came through the dense trees of the forest. Fiachra could hardly see the road ahead. He was also struck by the silence. He occasionally heard the hoot of an owl, but did not otherwise hear a sound over the clip-clop of his horse’s hooves on the stone road.

The quiet was interrupted by the sound of a woman crying. Fiachra then saw a shadowy figure on the side of the road. He slowed his horse and the shadowy figure became clear. It was

young woman. She had long, flowing red hair. Bright blue eyes with fluttering eye lashes. She wore a long, white dress. And she was crying!

“What is the matter?” Fiachra asked.

“I am on the way to see my mother, who is very ill,” the woman said. “I began walking through the forest hours ago and I thought I could make it before it got dark. But now I am so tired I fear cannot make it to any mother’s home”

“Where does your mother live?” asked Feachra.

“She lives in Lullymore,” said the woman.

“Well, I’m on my way there myself, and I can certainly take you there tonight. You will not have to walk another step,” said Feachra.

“You are a wonderful, kind man,” she said.

Feachra got off his horse and helped the woman mount behind the saddle. Feachra then mounted the horse and off they galloped towards Lullymore. Feachra was so enchanted by the young woman, and so taken by her story of woe, that he completely forgot about the warning he received at the public house.

As they rode further away, the young woman whispered something to Feachra. Her whisper was so faint that Feachra could not understand what she said. Feachra turned around to hear her better, and looked directly into the woman’s bright blue eyes.

Suddenly, the woman began to change. Her head grew larger and into the shape of a horse. Her hair fell out of her head. Her teeth grew out of her mouth and became long and sharp.

Her skin fell off of her head and Feachra could only see her gruesome skull. Her fingers grew longer and sharper, and looked more than claws than fingers.

The creature dug her teeth into Feachra's neck, and dug her claws into his arms. Feachra cried out in pain, so loudly that his cry could be heard in Lullymore. He smelled the odor of rotting cabbage as he felt the blood ooze out of his neck and arms.

The horse sensed the demon on its back and charged down the path as fast as it could travel. Feachra held on to the reins as tight as he could, all the while with the creature biting at his neck and digging in with her claws.

In what seemed like an eternity, the frantic horse reached Lullymore, still carrying Feachra and the pooka on its back. Feachra, though barely conscious, could see the lights of the village and could hear barking dogs signaling their arrival.

Soon villagers, including Feachra's friend, came running down the path carrying torches. Seeing the humans approach, the pooka gave out an ear-splitting scream and, in but an instant, disappeared.

The horse continued its gallop towards the villagers with Feachra slumped on the saddle. A man from the village finally stopped the horse, and several villagers carefully removed Feachra from the horse and placed him on the ground.

Feachra could barely hear or speak, but his friend said: "We came running when we heard the dogs barking and some terrible screams." Seeing the blood on Feachra's neck and arms, the friend added: "It looks like something spooked your horse and you ran into the branches of a tree."

“Where is the creature?” whispered Feachra.

“What creature?” asked the friend.

“The pooka,’ was Feachra’s reply.

“Pooka? I think you stayed too long at a public house,” laughed the friend. “There are no such things as pookas. They are from simple stories meant to scare poor country folks.”

“We will take you to my home, tend to your wounds, and you will get a good night’s rest,” the friend added.

The friend thought to himself, as he helped Feachra to his feet: “Why do I smell the foul aroma of rotting cabbage?”

The friend did not believe in pookas. Nor Feachra, before his ride to Lullymore. But now he knew the truth.

And so, now, do you!