

Excerpt: Sister of Rogues

Kier O'Reilly watched as the heavy-set matron from the asylum next door half-dragged, half-wrestled what appeared to be a furious she-cat of a female into the foyer of his house. This one looked as unkempt as the other three women housed here. Her dress—what appeared to have been a pale blue, satin ball gown—was torn, wrinkled, and stained. An unruly mass of raven hair as dark as his cascaded over her face obliterating her features, although the feral snarl coming from her throat left no doubt that her face would be filled with rage. Sure and it wasn't surprising, considering the circumstances under which his "guests" usually arrived.

Kier sighed. He was twenty-six years old and held the title of earl, but he had been reduced to housing inmates from the asylum because the damn English had taken away his grandfather's wealth during the Ascendancy, not to mention much more recently that the cleverly diabolical Lady Jane Claire Litton had taken his savings.

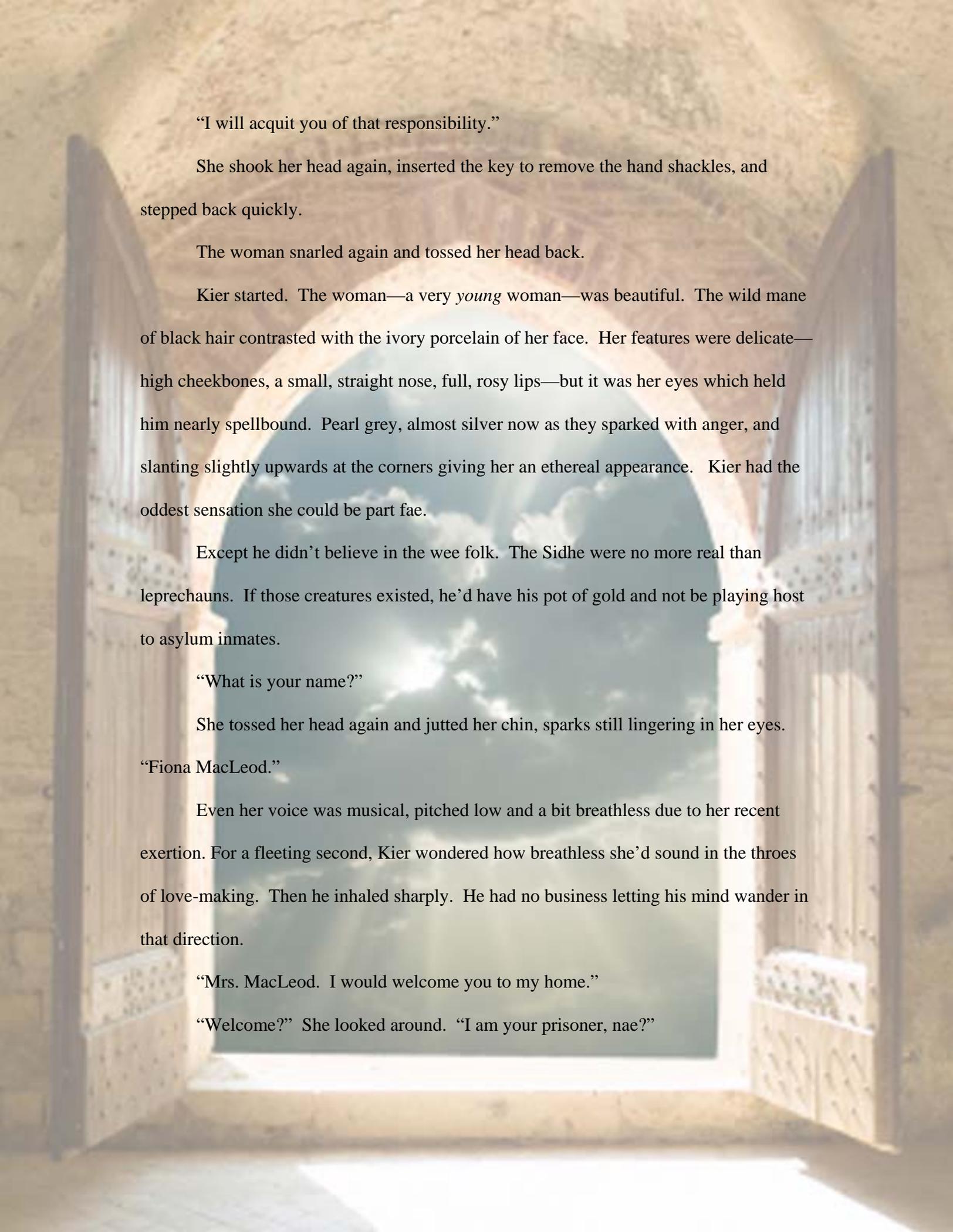
Nor was Kier thrilled to have an armed guard at his front door and an Amazon of a matron in charge of the women, but putting up with them gave him the income he needed. He'd ride into the gates of hell himself before he'd allow a British lord to claim his ancestral home—one that dated back to Strong Bow himself.

"Let her go."

The asylum matron looked at him as though he were the one who had lost his wits. "She'll be wreckin' havoc, that she will."

"Let her go," he said again, "and remove the manacles."

"Ye are daft for certain," the matron replied as she shook her head, "just don't be placin' the blame on me for yer belongings bein' destroyed."



“I will acquit you of that responsibility.”

She shook her head again, inserted the key to remove the hand shackles, and stepped back quickly.

The woman snarled again and tossed her head back.

Kier started. The woman—a very *young* woman—was beautiful. The wild mane of black hair contrasted with the ivory porcelain of her face. Her features were delicate—high cheekbones, a small, straight nose, full, rosy lips—but it was her eyes which held him nearly spellbound. Pearl grey, almost silver now as they sparked with anger, and slanting slightly upwards at the corners giving her an ethereal appearance. Kier had the oddest sensation she could be part fae.

Except he didn’t believe in the wee folk. The Sidhe were no more real than leprechauns. If those creatures existed, he’d have his pot of gold and not be playing host to asylum inmates.

“What is your name?”

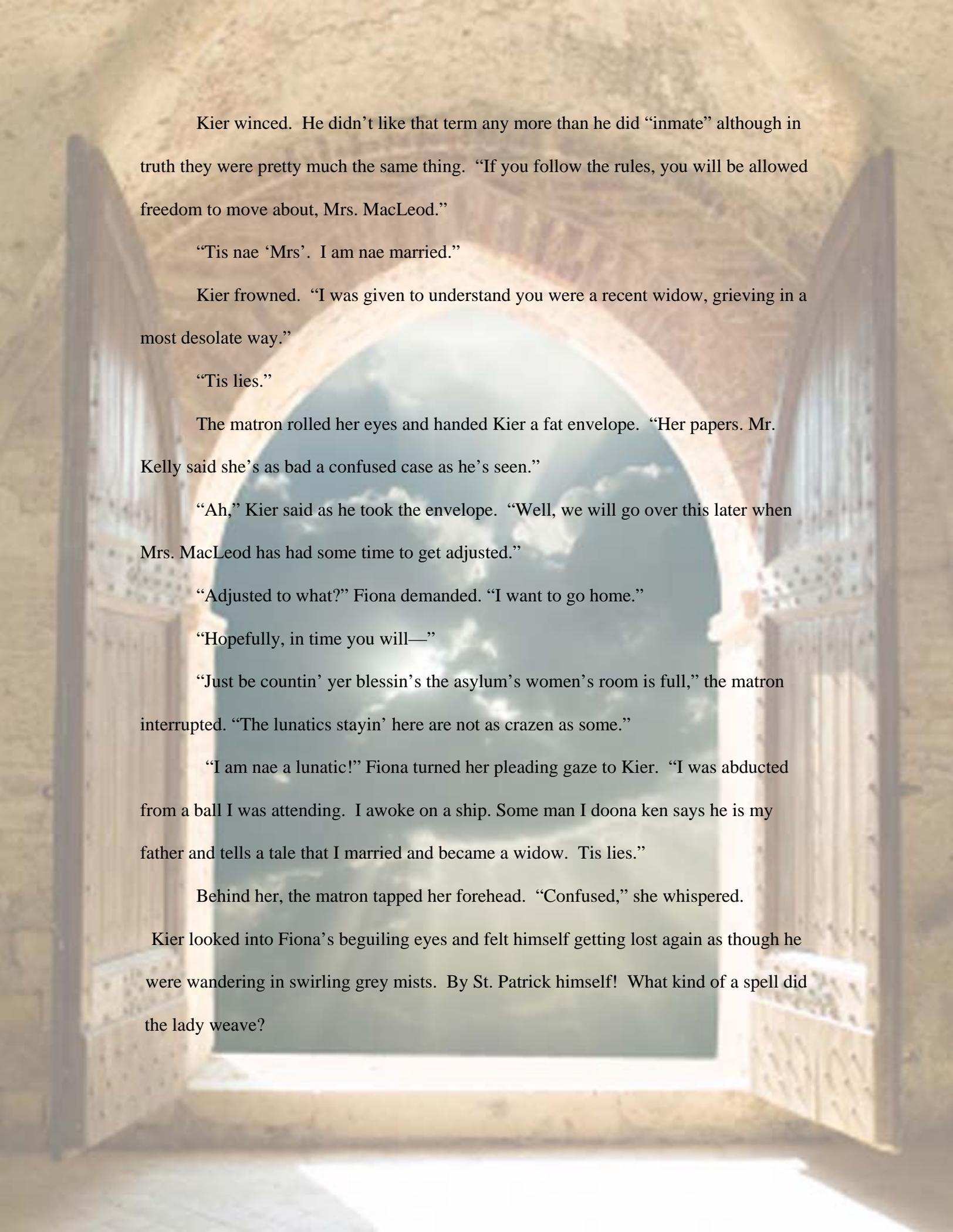
She tossed her head again and jutted her chin, sparks still lingering in her eyes.

“Fiona MacLeod.”

Even her voice was musical, pitched low and a bit breathless due to her recent exertion. For a fleeting second, Kier wondered how breathless she’d sound in the throes of love-making. Then he inhaled sharply. He had no business letting his mind wander in that direction.

“Mrs. MacLeod. I would welcome you to my home.”

“Welcome?” She looked around. “I am your prisoner, nae?”



Kier winced. He didn't like that term any more than he did "inmate" although in truth they were pretty much the same thing. "If you follow the rules, you will be allowed freedom to move about, Mrs. MacLeod."

"Tis nae 'Mrs'. I am nae married."

Kier frowned. "I was given to understand you were a recent widow, grieving in a most desolate way."

"Tis lies."

The matron rolled her eyes and handed Kier a fat envelope. "Her papers. Mr. Kelly said she's as bad a confused case as he's seen."

"Ah," Kier said as he took the envelope. "Well, we will go over this later when Mrs. MacLeod has had some time to get adjusted."

"Adjusted to what?" Fiona demanded. "I want to go home."

"Hopefully, in time you will—"

"Just be countin' yer blessin's the asylum's women's room is full," the matron interrupted. "The lunatics stayin' here are not as crazen as some."

"I am nae a lunatic!" Fiona turned her pleading gaze to Kier. "I was abducted from a ball I was attending. I awoke on a ship. Some man I doona ken says he is my father and tells a tale that I married and became a widow. Tis lies."

Behind her, the matron tapped her forehead. "Confused," she whispered.

Kier looked into Fiona's beguiling eyes and felt himself getting lost again as though he were wandering in swirling grey mists. By St. Patrick himself! What kind of a spell did the lady weave?