11. John of the Goats.

Once upon a time a long time ago, there was an old woman who had a son who was known by his neighbours as John of Goats, as he was wont to travel everywhere with his herd of goats including into the woods.

On his way to the woods this particular morning he was looking to get something for breakfast. He went as far as the well so he might fill his tin can to make stirabout ; and there on the surface of the well he spied a nice little trout. He was manoeuvring the tin can around the trout until he slipped it under it and caught the trout.

The trout woke. “Leave me be” said the trout “it is not worth your while catching me”.

“Indeed I will not” said Seán “I will get a fine breakfast from you”

Very well. So it was. Seán was taking the trout to him.

“Ah, release me” said the trout “and there is no request that you will ever ask of me that I will not grant you, if you ask in God’s name and on the word of this trout.”

“I am satisfied so” said Seán “you can have your freedom.”

He released the trout and went his own way.

While on his way with his herd of goats, having had his breakfast, he was walking past this big house, when he noticed a young lady looking at him through the window, as he walked past the big house. It was his practice to ride on his puck-goat and his head turned backwards. By dad, be that as it may, when the young woman spied Seán with this tack, she burst out laughing and Seán saw her at the window.

“I appeal to God” said Seán “and on the word of the trout, that such a laugh makes you heavy” So be it. Seán went about his business with his herd of goats until it became afternoon; and this happening repeated itself for three seasons.

On my word, with the passing of three seasons, didn’t the young woman become pregnant and her father recognized her to be so, and he could not account for it to be so.

So be it. There was an old druid living in the house of this gentleman and he questioned him on how this could have occurred.

“Now” said the old druid “it is best for you to wait until the child is born and when that happens it will be easier to answer. Put a call out, and gather all the young men of the region around you, and put the little child in the middle of the ring, put an apple in its

hand, and let it go around to all. When it is going around to each of them and when it comes upon the father of the child it will offer him the apple. Do that and there you have the father of the child."

That was how it was until the day the call went out and the child was born.
The young men of the region were gathering. They were coming in bits, and as some of them were on the road they came upon Seán and he about his business with his herd of goats. He never came across such a gathering as they approached him. Some of the men met him.
"Walk with us Seán, to the assembly." said the boys to him.
"Where is the assembly?" said Seán.
"It is around here somewhere" they said.
"Where exactly?" asked Seán
"Down there in the big house" said one of the boys to Seán "and there is a young lady there who has a child, and if the child offers you an apple, you are the father."
"I have to look after these goats" said he "so if that's the case, when I have looked after them I will follow you" All was well. Seán went on his way and left the goats in Uch Dara and when he had left them there he turned on his heels and came back.
When he came back the assembly was too big, and he was unable to go into where the young lady and the child were. He was walking around forever until he managed to get into where they were. The men there were big and Seán was small. He stuck his head between the two legs of a man there, looked up, and did so while the child was passing by, and he offered him the apple into his hands and immediately poor Seán was caught.
So be it. They were both apprehended then - (he and the young lady) - and then the young lady's father again went to the druid.
"What are we to do with him now? "asked the father.
The old druid said:
"When there is nothing else for it" he said " but let ye construct a strong sturdy wooden box with two sides to it and a plank through the middle and put one of them on either side and cast the box out into the ocean."
So be it. What the druid ordered was done. When the box was made the young lady and the child were placed on one side and Seán on the other. They were cast out into the ocean. They were going hither and thither, up and down, everywhere on the sea

until they landed on an island called Sheep's Island. When they landed on that island called Sheep's Island there was one man on the island looking after it, and he got up this morning and looked down on the beach. What did he see below but the box? He went down and pushed up the box as best he could. There was a great weight to the box as the two were inside - and a third, while I'm at it. He had not gone too far up when he took the lid off one side and the young lady and child were inside. He became overjoyed because there was no one else but himself there and he saw that he had a young lady and a child. He was getting them out.

"Open the other end" said the young lady "there is a young man in there and he might make a great companion for us one day"

"By dad, but that is good," he said.

He turned to the box again and opened the other side, and took out Seán. He took them to his own house and they passed the day like so until night came. Well, readied himself and Seán was sitting next to his woman and the child.

"What way are we sleeping tonight?" said Seán.

"Oh, on my word" said the island man "that the woman is to be mine tonight".

"Well, I am satisfied," said Seán " but let us make a little bargain."

"What is the deal?" said the island man.

"If you sleep three nights with her" he said "she is yours, but if not, then she is mine"

"I am happy with that" said the island man, as he was so sure of himself.

That is how things were until the island man was going to bed, himself and the young lady; and Seán was a heap in the corner. By gor, if he was he decided to give the door a slap. The island man had forgotten to put the bolt on it and there was a draft blowing in. He went up to the door to put the bolt on it and Seán saw him going up.

"I appeal to God and to the word of the trout" he said "that you spend the night putting the bolt on the door."

So be it. The man of the house and the bolt were rattling together until morning, and he was not able to put the bolt on it.

So be it. When the man of the house and the bolt were in a battle together Seán went up to the young lady. He stayed there.

"Well, I won last night." he said.

"You did," he said "but you won't win tonight."

"I will accept it" he said "if I don't."

He stayed like that until the second night came, and when that second night came the island man promised that nothing in the world would keep him outside the door.

It was not long until that came to pass. That night when he was thinking of going to bed, Seán noticed that the man of the house had geese outside and a fox was among them and he set them all over the yard. Then the man of the house heard them. He went out.

“It will not take me long to bring the geese in” he said “and they will not be gone from me in the morning”

He went out with the thought of bringing the geese in. Seán saw him going.

“I appeal to God” said Seán “and to the word of the trout that you will be putting the geese in until morning”

So be it. The man of the house was putting the geese in until morning, and by morning they were not all in. He had to give it up. Seán was that night where he had a right to be.

All was well until the third night came, and as that third night came and he was going to bed, by gor, he had not set about washing himself properly. He went outside the door, and he was not long outside he was preparing water - “with all your permission”. If he was, Seán saw him.

“ I appeal to God, and to the word of the trout” said Seán “that you may be washing until morning.”

“Where were you all night?” said Seán.

“Oh, where ever I was does not matter, the young lady is yours.” said the man of the house.

“Yes,” said Seán.

“What will we do now? said Seán.

“Put us back in the place we were before, myself and my woman, and when that is done, cast the box out into the ocean.”

So be it. He did accordingly, and he put them into the trunk. He cast them out and they were not long out at sea when Seán got a grip of himself.

“I appeal to God and to the word of the trout” said Seán “that I may be in my mother and father’s house in no time.”

The words were not out of his mouth when Seán was home in his mother’s house, himself, his wife and child.