



Patrick and Diarmaid clattered in, hoisted the box onto their shoulders and clomped out to the courtyard. At last, the two boxes were in their power. But the eyes were trying to break out of Fionn's box and he could hear the muffled rattling inside rising dangerously. He held on for his life, wrestling the lid to keep it closed. Only his mighty strength saved him: the eyes tired before he did.

Fionn stood there for a minute, catching his breath, then he went to the fireplace and flung the box into the flames. The lid sprang open for the last time, the two eyes jumped out, into the fire, and a sudden shriek filled the room as if someone's face was being held in the flames. Then, WHHSSHHKK!! a blast of fire and smoke rushed up the chimney and at once Seán na Súil stopped struggling.

Before their eyes he began to change from the big rough man with a bandaged face to a young handsome lad with wavy curling hair and two eyes like any ordinary man.

He gaped up at them all.

'Where am I?' he asked, puzzled.

'Who are you?' exclaimed Fionn in a rough voice.

'Who are *you*?' replied the lad.

Fionn scratched his beard in amazement.



But he was not half as amazed as Patrick and Diarmaid, who were out in the yard listening to what was going on in the room when their box snapped open and people began to climb out of it. They were climbing over each other, frantic, every one of them, to get out into the fresh air now that the spell was broken.



Patrick could only stand and watch, his mouth open. Never had he seen a miracle like this in all his travels.

One of the first to put his feet on the ground was a fine figure of a man, the chieftain of the fort himself. He strode over to Patrick and said, 'You must be the one who saved us from Seán na Súil.'

'Well, Fionn Mac Cumhail, the man that really saved you, is inside there in the room with that ugly fellow,' admitted Patrick.

'Draw every sword you have, men, and we'll face him this time. A reward for the first man to sweep the head off of him!'

They rushed down the corridor but the sight that greeted their eyes was not what they had expected. Before them stood Fionn and a handsome young man.

‘Where’s Seán na Sú?’ cried the chief.

‘Here he is,’ answered Fionn quietly, ‘this young man here. But let him explain it himself.’

The young man began:

‘A good many years ago, my father, the prince of *Leacht Geal*, was having his dinner when this old woman came in looking for something to eat.

‘Whatever ailed my father that day, he had the bad word for her.

‘“Out of my dining-hall with you! We have no need of your likes here! I don’t like the look of you,” is what he said to her.



‘“They’re fine words, and fit for a prince, too,” said she, mocking. “But from this day out you’ll have bitter cause to use the like, because your son will be a changeling, a *malartán*, hee! hee! An’ if you don’t like what you see now, he won’t see anything at all. You have my word for it!”

‘With that, my father fell into a rage, a mighty temper, and he called his guards to throw her out.

‘We forgot all about it, but I was out hunting in the forest one day about three years after when who should I meet but the same woman. She stood in the road in front of my horse and held up her withered out’ hand.

‘“Stop! You’re the young prince, aren’t you?” she called out.

‘“Move out of my way, dear woman,” I said. “Let me go my road.”

“You have no way only my way any more, boy,” said she. “I know you well, and your father even better. I made you a promise years ago, a promise I’m going to keep this day.”

‘With that, she pulled out a wand, touched my elbow, and I was changed into Seán na Súil.

“A *malartán*, indeed,” she cackled.

‘She made me wander the country, looking for people and bringing them back to her island to work for her. She said to me when she sent me out the first time, “The eyes you have in that box, they’re mine, and they’ll watch over you until your task for me is done. And that could take a good many lifetimes. Hee! Heeeee!”



‘When you burned those eyes, Fionn, the spell was broken and here I am now, safe and well.’

‘An’ I wonder what’ll happen to herself?’ said Patrick.

If they only knew it, she was in a bad way. For the rest of her days she was blind and wandered the world, groping along by the walls crying in a pitiful voice, ‘Ohhh! Everything is dark. Where am I going? Where am I going?’

And shortly after, hundreds of people began to come ashore on the coast of Clare, wet and bewildered, but safe. Among them were the children of the old man of Ballyvaughan, and in a few days they were reunited amid great rejoicing.

