

Finn MacCool and the Salmon of Knowledge

As told by Bea Ferguson

Have you ever heard of a man called Finn MacCool?

Well, there are many stories to be told about him, but one of the best is the story of the Salmon of Knowledge. When Finn was just a boy he had to leave his home and live with a wise man named Fineagas, who was to be his tutor.

The old man Fineagas was not used to company as he'd been living by himself in a wee cottage by the River Boyne for years and years, but he was happy to have Finn to stay.

But what Finn didn't know, to begin with, was that Fineagas had spent so many years living by himself in that cottage for one very special reason. The reason was that it was rumoured in those parts that a fish called 'The Salmon of Knowledge' swam in the nearby river. It was said that the first person to taste this salmon would receive the gift of seeing into the future and the gift of seeing into the past and would certainly become the wisest in all of Ireland.

So Fineagas had spent many years fishing in that river, hoping that one day he would come across the Salmon of Knowledge.

One day, as Fineagas was giving Finn a Latin lesson by the river, Fineagas noticed an unusual stirring in the water. He took a closer look, only to see a huge, beautiful salmon of the most glorious pink colour swimming in their direction.

'It must be the Salmon of Knowledge!' cried Fineagas, and he quickly ran to fetch his net – and a big one at that, for the salmon really was huge.

Another thing he had to be careful of was to avoid looking directly into the eyes of the fish or he would be put into a deep sleep, so as he struggled with the net he was very careful to avoid looking in its direction.

But suddenly, the salmon leapt out of the water right in front of him and Fineagas could do nothing to avoid looking straight into its eyes. With that, he immediately fell into a deep sleep.

Finn saw all this happening, and so went to Fineagas and shook him awake.

Once awake, Fineagas asked Finn to tie a rag from his shirt around his eyes so that he couldn't see the salmon anymore.

Finn obeyed, and a blind-folded Fineagas and a tenacious salmon quarrelled and fought for the rest of that afternoon, until the fish eventually gave up the struggle. Fineagas had caught the Salmon of Knowledge. He would be the wisest person in all of Ireland.

Now he had successfully caught the salmon, Fineagas was exhausted. He went off to have a snooze and asked Finn to cook the salmon. He made Finn promise not to take even the smallest bite of it.

So Finn took the great big salmon, and cooked it on a spit above a peat fire. After a good while turning the spit (and getting very hot from the fire) Finn thought the salmon looked perfectly cooked, and so he called Fineagas over to taste the fish. But just as he was turning around, a small drop of burning fish-oil splashed up onto his thumb. Quick as a flash Finn stuck his thumb in his mouth to stop it burning.

When Fineagas awoke and came over to check on Finn and the salmon, he immediately noticed a great change in Finn MacCool. There was a light behind his eyes that had never been there before, like that of a flame, and his cheeks were glowing bright.

'Finn, did you eat any of that salmon?' demanded Fineagas.

'I didn't eat any, no,' said Finn.

'Did you taste any of it at all?' asked Fineagas.

Finn thought back, and then remembered about putting his thumb in his mouth when he had been burnt by the hot fish oil. He told Fineagas about this.

Fineagas understood there and then that the special knowledge which came only from that cooked salmon on the spit had been granted to Finn and not him. Despite his loss, Fineagas was happy for the lad, since he knew that he would grow up to be a most wise man and a great hero.

From that day forth, Finn MacCool would be the ablest and most celebrated leader of the Fianna warriors.



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