

The Goats of Inisheer

“CRAICEANN”

“Lock up your Goats”!



*Inis Oírr International Bodhrán
Summer School*

For many years now there has been an annual summer school on the island of Inisheer, which is the smallest of the three Aran islands situated in Galway Bay off the west coast of Ireland. This event specifically caters for bodhran players of all abilities and in the evenings there are lively trad music sessions taking place in the pubs.

The bodhran is a circular frame drum which traditionally uses a goat skin as the membrane. The summer school goes by the name of Craiceann, (pronounced like ‘cracken’) the Irish word for skin, and has the strap line: *Lock up your Goats!* Presumably this is intended to warn goat herders that their goats are at risk of being taken for the manufacture of bodhrans. But, what if it was the other way around? What if the goats were kept locked up to prevent them from molesting the Bodhraneers?

This strange tale has been inspired by the shape-shifting mythology found in Celtic folklore, such as the Silkie that transform from seals to human likeness. Often this results in sorrowful or unexpected outcomes. In this case a goat takes on human form as part of her daemonic and vengeful life cycle, to the cost of the young man taken in by her charm - or possibly not...

Rocky reefs and silver strands endure Atlantic breakers
In stone-walled fields some goats, some that talk in whispers.
An old man says he's heard them conversing late at night
The young folk take the mickey, they think he's not quite right.
His dog looks up and whimpers, knows its no illusion
Some goats smell of goat, but others smell half human.



In Lunar Leap years at Beltane a fiendish transmutation
No longer goat but fine female form, sculpted to perfection.
Like salmon to a spawning stream, they come from far and near
And make their way across land and sea, back to Inisheer
To mingle sweetly with Bodhraneers, charming they are to some
On whom they'll seek vengeance for the goat skin on the drum.



Her chosen's borrowed bodhran she holds against her breast
She plays the rhythms both soft and raw, better than the best.
Titian hair across her face, her cheeks are moist with tears
In memory of slaughtered kin, skinned for Bodhraneers.
“Gave her just one bodhran but sounds like she's got a herd!”
Now doubly doomed by his remark she had overheard.

He sees her sorrow, takes her hand, a gentle kiss to console
Those sweet tears his lips have tasted will grant her full control.
With melded mind she leads him through boreens in the gloaming
Lucky lad he thinks. Oh, so oblivious to what's coming!
Then, reaching the ancient place for ritual reproduction
She exploits his body, drains his soul, bleats in exaltation.

In the morning he awakes in stone-walled field alone
His eyes are strangely goat like, on his arse a tail has grown!
A futile dunk in seaweed pool leaves him wet 'n chilly
Needs another type of weed and the power of something holy.
The church he enters quietly, two women see his eyes
One crosses herself on repeat, the other nearly dies.



“Father I’ve sinned, with a girl, or perhaps a goat just a bit.
My mind was numb, the fields dark, I don’t recall the half of it.”
“They’re different species! Both so charming; so I’ve been informed.
Drunken mixups not uncommon, you young men I have warned.”
“But look see these goat like eyes, what penance for my redemption?”
“None my son, to conceal your sin dark glasses your salvation.
A donation, of course, may help and attend all my masses.”
Said the priest behind the screen, behind his dark glasses!

Then, voices as from far away and a touch upon his arm
“He’s here! Wake up, thank God you’ve not come to any harm.”
Looks up, a familiar face, titian hair ‘gainst the amber sun
Was that a nightmare or premonition; should he fecking run?



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