

STORIES ABOUT JOAN GROGAN

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Scéal i dtaobh [a story about] Joan Grogan

In the townland of upper Athea near the boundary between Limk & Kerry, Joan Grogan was born in a small house. As a girl she did not seem to be in any way different to others. She was gay and lively.

When a young woman, she with other girls and boys were on their way to a wake. It was after nightfall and the party came to a stream which they should cross.

Some crossed over and hurried on and then the others crossed. No one noticed that Joan was not among them. Those in front thought she was with those behind and the second party thought she was with the first. When they all met again (at the wake) they missed Joan but concluded that for some reason or other she had gone home or had gone to some other place.

The following morning, they heard a queer story and the reason why Joan was absent from the wake. She had no recollection of anything from the time the whole party were about to cross the stream on the way to the wake until she awoke out of a sleep and found that she was sitting on top of her own house, near the little chimney. The thing was treated as a strange joke.

Then she began to get epileptic fits and during these fits she had "second-sight," thus she knew things that normally she should not nor could not know. She then began to be dreaded and became like a witchdoctor and was able to prescribe cures for various diseases. Her fame spread and people came from afar to get her help. She cured several people when doctors had "given them up." The priests of the parish were annoyed at the things she did. Everyone believed that she invoked the powers of darkness to aid her and she did things contrary to the laws of church and religion.

She was excommunicated by Fr. John Ryan, who was P.P. [parish priest] in Athea from yr. 1828 to 1870 and is buried in Athea chapel.

Many stories of her cures are handed down. This one is one of the most striking.

A man who lived south of Newcastle West had a nephew who lived with him. This boy fell sick, and the uncle as a last resource went to Joan. About evening he called to Joan's house. Joan who heard the stranger's voice said loudly, "What does the man from the place of skulls want?"

The visitor lived beside a churchyard where the bones unearthed by the gravediggers were piled on the monastery ruins.

The man told his story and Joan told him his nephew would live if he did exactly what she told him. He must go on the Friday night following the next full moon after 12 o'clock to the ruined church and take home with him a skull. He must scrape off the skull a certain amount of bone dust and put these shavings on a small saucepan of water on the fire to boil. While doing this, he must name the person whom he wished to die in the place of his

nephew. He must repeat the wish seven times. With the cognizance of his son he named his son's wife as the person he wished to die.

We are told that the nephew recovered and died 80 years afterwards, an old man.

The uncle died suddenly on the anniversary of his evil wish and the son years afterwards died in the same way.

This was told by an old man—Sheahan, Monagea to—

Wm. Danaher,
Gortnagross,
Athea.

About 33 years.

Sheahan knew Joan Grogan and was over 80 yrs when he told the story.

When the little boy saw his father, he stretched his hands towards and gave three “jerks” from the man's knees to go to him.

Patsy Culhane went down to bed and didn't go near the kitchen until morning. He went out to America after to his wife, taking his children with him, and died there.

Another story in connection with the “good people” [i.e., fairies] was also told to me by Michael Connolly who gave me this information.

Daniel Culhane of Baranigue Carrickerry had a cousin named Mulchair, living in Turraree, Glin. This Mulchair man fell sick. He was very bad, and they sent one night for Daniel Culhane to be with them. They sent for Joan Grogan, who used to “cure” sick persons at that time. It seems this Joan Grogan was able to set a charm by which those “good people” would be prevented from bringing the sick person away.

Joan Grogan came. She worked herself into a fit, something like the “falling sickness.” She continued in that fit for a considerable time and then as she was coming out of it, the “murder” commenced outside round the yard and house. Joan told them that “they” were coming for Mulchair, the sick man.

The terrible fight went on outside and at length Joan Grogan said: “Now your friends are doing great work. They have the day gained.” She told Daniel Culhane to go to the door, that there was a man, a friend of his, who wanted to shake hands with him outside. Daniel went to the door and put out his hand and it was grasped and shook by someone outside. He returned into the kitchen and the print of four fingers in blood was smeared on his fingers.

The Mulchair man recovered and lived for many a day after.

Michael Connolly, who told me this, said that he heard it from the lips of Daniel Culhane himself, often, and that he was a man whom a person could believe.

Another story of the same class I got from Michael Connolly.

Peg Behan, of Clonleharde, who lived in the house now owned by her grandson, Thomas Behane, Knockdown, Athea, was married to old Patsy Behan. She was an aunt to Michael Connolly's mother.

One evening Peg Behan and her daughters were milking in the "Bawn" [from the Irish *bábhún*, or cattle enclosure]. A bucket of milk was kicked and spilled by a cow. Old Peg commenced to complain and scold about the loss of the milk. She continued to complain for a long time. It happened that that evening, or soon after, one of her sons got a blow of a bucket in the head He took to the bed and got very bad.

They sent for Joan Grogan to cure him. Joan came. She was not long inside when she "worked" herself into this fit or whatever it was. As she was coming from the fit, she told them that she had nothing to do for him; that Peg Behan did too much complaining over the spilling of a bucket of milk in the Bawn, that the good people were passing just at that time and wanted the milk.

The son died in a day or two.

Michael Connolly, aged 69, Bauraneag, Co. Limerick

A woman in Co. Kerry died and she left a big family after her. The people told the husband to send for Joan Grogan, who lived in the village of Athea, and he did. She came and remained with him and the others in the house without ever speaking to any one of them. At the end of the week, she told the dead woman's husband, who was Mr. Joy, to come with her to a certain gap in his land and he did.

As they were going near the gap Joan Grogan told him that a lot of horses would pass through the gap and that people would be up on them and that his wife, Mrs. Joy, would be up on the last horse, and she said that if he made a dive at her and caught her he could keep her. All the horses came towards the gap and Mr. Joy saw his wife up on the last horse, but he did not catch her as he was seized with fear, and she went away with the other people.

Mrs. Dillane, aged 68, Tulligoline North, Co. Limerick

Joan Grogan had a knowledge of herbs. A neighbor's daughter was ailing with some lingering disease. Her parents did not like to ask Joan to cure her for they knew she used to be with the good people. However, when they saw that the girl showed no signs of recovering, they sent for Joan. Joan told the father of the girl to go to the door that night at nightfall and hold out his hat outside the door. "There will be herbs put into your hat," she said. "Put these down in a saucepan of water on the fire and give your daughter the juice of the herbs, and before one week your daughter will be up and around."

Maureen Lynch

There lived in Knockaderry a woman named Joan Grogan; she used to cure people. When she would be going to the house of the sick person, if she came to a stream across the road (there were no bridges there at that time) she would roar for help and whoever would be with her should hold her. Then when she would have crossed the stream, she would get all right again.

Miss K. Begley, Gardenhill, Co. Limerick

Joan Grogan was in league with the devil, and if you want to know about a first-class rogue, here she is R.I.P. She used to be always telling stories of dead people. One day she was telling a story to a woman about her daughter who was dead. "I won't believe a word of it unless you will bring me some token from her," said the mother.

Later on, Joan brought a glove which the dead girl slipped from her hand and gave to Joan saying, "My mother will know those are the gloves myself and Mary Kearney bought going to my brother John's wedding."

Ellen Woulfe, aged about 80, Cratloe West

Mary Ahern from Lurga was very sick one time, and Joan Grogan went to the house where the girl was sick and went into the room to the girl. She told her to put on her clothes and her apron and then to go outside the door and hold out her apron. She did so and what should happen to fall into it but a piece of boiled bacon. Joan told her to eat it and she did, and she became well, and she lived to be an old woman.

Andrew Cusack, Cratloe West

Story about Joan Grogan was told by Mrs Ahern Parkana, Upper Athea.

She is living, is now 74 yrs.—a farmer's wife—who was born in Dirreen and knows all the relatives of Joan Grogan. Some of them live in Upper Athea

The oldest man in the parish—living—96 yrs is Tom Guina, Upper Athea, a small farmer, born and reared in the townland, knows Joan Grogan well.

(Can speak Irish but cannot read or write it.)

There was a man there long ago and he went by the name of the “Fear bán” [meaning white man]. He was living in the townland of Lorga in the parish of Athea. This man was chiefly engaged in the making of butter. One day he started churning and could not make any butter. He knew at once that some person had done some pisseogs [from the Irish *piseóg*, or a kind of folk magic, often dark in nature] him. He went to the parish priest and told him what had happened. He asked him would he come and say Mass in the house. The priest said he would, and the next morning he came and said the Mass in the house and blessed the whole place. The following week the fear bán went making his butter again and it failed him. He went again to the parish priest and asked him to come and say Mass a second time. The priest came and said Mass, and all was no good. He went a third time to the priest, but the priest said he had no more to do for him. The fear bán said to him that there was a woman in the parish whose name was Joan Grogan and she was great for restoring things that were carried [off]. He asked the priest to know would he go for her. The priest told him to go for her. “What one devil took away another devil might bring it back,” he said. The fear bán came home and went for Joan. Joan was a witch and could restore anything that would be carried. She came the next day and restored the butter, and from that day to the day he died he had no more trouble in the making of his butter.

About a hundred years ago there lived an old woman, Joan Grogan, in Upper Athea. She worked charms for people that could not make butter from their milk. There was a parish priest, Father Ryan, in Athea at the same time. He kept cows, but the maid in charge of the house could not make butter from the milk. She spoke to the priest one day about sending for this woman that she could make the butter, but the priest said, “I am afraid she is invoking the devil.” The story goes that she came and made the butter. This woman traveled several counties curing the sick. She could do nothing until she would get into some kind of fit, and when she was in this fit, two people should hold her and then the cure would be performed.

Bridie O'Connor, aged 66, Clash North, Co. Limerick

There lived once a woman whose name was Joan Grogan. She lived in a little house near the wood, at the Barracs in Athea. She cured people who were ill, and she knew where articles were hidden; she could also foretell things to come.

Once she attended a sick person, she told the woman of the house to go to the door and to hold out her apron; she did so as she was told and immediately it was filled with herbs. Joan took the herbs and boiled them on the fire. She then went home, but before leaving the house she told the woman of the house to watch the herbs well, for, she said, if they turned green the sick person would be cured, and if they turned brown the sick person would die.

On another occasion there was a wedding in Glenalappa, on the same day Joan was attending a sick person. They told her that they would like to get some of the fresh meat from the wedding. They hardly had spoken when a big dish of fresh meat appeared on the table.

A man in Athea whose name was Daniel Grady suddenly got very ill. His wife sent for Joan. When she came, she ordered the people of the house to leave the room. She came down after a short while and said that he had but a poor chance of reviving. Joan then gave them some herbs to give to the sick man to eat; she then went home. Next morning when the sick man's wife went out in the yard, it was full of blood. They consulted Joan and she told, "Fort Loin," which means the fort for the blackbirds. There was a man riding on horseback riding a gray pony with a black star on his forehead; his name was "Star Gazer." When passing the fort [and] hearing of the old superstition that fairies used appear in forts, he gazed half reluctantly into the fort and to his surprise he saw a leprechaun putting a taoibhín [a patch] on top of a bróg [shoe]. The horseman who happened to be a hunchback saluted the leprechaun bidding him good day which was returned by the leprechaun by "Mind your own business." The hunchback not being satisfied with this rebuke inquired about a pot of gold, where it would be found. The leprechaun, getting angry, said, "I will repay your impertinence by tripling your malady," with the result that the hunchback came away with three humps.

Mrs. H. Goulding, aged 94, Kealid, Co. Kerry

Years ago, there was an old woman by the name of Joan Grogan travelling around the country. She was noted for what she had known about the dead people, and it was said that she used to be around with them at night. She would relate about battles that would be fought by the good people on certain nights. She would travel the greater part of Kerry, but principally around Duagh and the district. She told a man whose name was John Kane where there was a treasure hidden, and Kane being such a bold, fearless man agreed to go to the place, and he carried with him six other brothers and Joan with them. They also carried spades and shovels, and a pickaxe, and the place was Kilmaney. When they came to the spot, Joan told them where to dig. They went with all the energy and determination that they were possessed of. When they were coming near the treasure a shower of blood fell upon them, and Joan was roaring at them to stop, but the men were so brave that they held

on digging until the hole they had made was filled with blood, and not until then did they give up the work. Joan afterwards told them that they were right on the treasure, but that the other party—the good people—were too strong for them and that a terrible battle had been fought about them, so that ended the search for this treasure.

Patrick Sheehy, Ballyduff, Co. Kerry

He prepared her for death. The house at the time was full of people. Before he gave her absolution, she confessed publicly to all present, that all the piseógs and works done during her lifetime, were done by the power of the devil. Stephen Danaher—who afterwards was parish priest of Loughill, and who died there in “Fairy Lawn,” the house in which Gerald Griffin was born—told of Joan Grogan’s death. Her grandchildren lived in this district.

Biddy Early who lived in Clare worked piseógs too. A man from Carnagh, Jim Cosgrave’s father went to visit her. Cosgrave’s brother was seriously ill, so he walked from here to Clare. When he arrived in Clare, he enquired of some road men as to where Biddy Early lived. They refused to give any information; as the priests in Clare at the time, had been loud in their condemnation of her practices. Finally, he met a workman who had pity for him, after his long journey and who told him to go in that mountain road, and on the side of the mountain in a thatched hovel she lived. Cosgrave did so. On his arrival, she immediately told him what brought him. “You are late,” she said. “Your brother died yesterday.” When he came home, he found that his brother had died at the time she said.

It is said that if you go into a house, and that the churn is being made, you should take a hand in the churn, and say, “God bless the work.”

In the locality, cream was put into the churn apparently all right, and no butter was produced, giving to the fact that it had been evilly interfered with by some ill-minded neighbors.

Margaret Ferris, Moneymohill, Co. Limerick

A certain priest spoke off the altar about a woman named Joan Grogan and that she was in league with the devil. When the people went home from Mass, they told Joan about it.

This night the priest was on a sick call, and at a certain part of the road his horse shied and would not go. When the priest arrived at the house of the sick person, he was hardly there when the clock fell off the wall. He stayed at the house that night, and when he was going in the morning, he met Joan.

Joan saluted him, but the priest never returned the salute. Then Joan said to him, “What did I ever do to you that you should speak off the altar about me?”

“Do you remember last night at a certain part of the road, that your horse shied, and it was I that carried the horse to the sick person’s house? And do you remember when the clock fell off the wall, it was I did that to let you know I was minding the sick person also.”

Mrs. Ryan, aged about 75, Abbeyfeale, Co. Limerick

My Grandfather was a native of Knockanure. He used to tell stories about a woman name Joan Grogan of Knockanure. This woman used to be "out" with the good people. One night they were on their way to Castleisland to decide whether a girl there named Brosnan was to be taken away or not. On their way they called in to my grandfather's aunt, the wife of Michéal Ruadh Kirby of Behins, and took her snuff box as a joke. Michéal Ruadh's wife met her a few days after at the big fair in Listowel (13th May). Joan asked her did she miss her snuff box on such a morning, and she said she did. Micheal Ruadh's wife told her she heard them laughing in the kitchen that night.

Muiris Ó Loingsig