

Many years ago, the Chief of Clan MacLeod was a handsome, intelligent man, but none suited his fancy. One day, he met a fairy princess, a bean sidhe, one of the Shining Folk. She fell madly in love with him and he with her. When the princess appealed to the King of the Fairies, for permission to marry, he refused, saying that it would only break her heart, as humans soon age and die, and the Shining Folk live forever. She cried and the King relented, agreeing that she and the Chief could be hand-fastened for a year and a day. But after that she must return to the Fairie and leave behind the human world. She agreed, and she and young MacLeod were married.

A strapping son was born to the happy couple. However, soon a year and a day were gone. The King led the Fairie Raide down the end of the great causeway of Dunvegan Castle, and there they waited for the Lady MacLeod to keep her promise.

Lady MacLeod knew that she had no choice and ran from the castle tower to return to the land of Fairie. However, she made her husband promise that her child would never be left alone, and never be allowed to cry, for she could not bear the sound of her son's cries.

The Chief was brokenhearted with the loss of his wife, but he kept his promise. However, the Laird of MacLeod grieved for the loss of his lady. The Clan decided that something must be done, and on his birthday, a great feast was proclaimed. The Laird had

always been a grand dancer, and at long last he agreed to dance to the pipers' tunes. So great was the celebration that the young maid assigned to watch the infant Laird left his nursery and crept to the top of the stairs to watch the folk dancing. So enraptured was she that she did not hear the young Laird awaken and begin to cry.

His crying was heard all the way in the Land of Fairie, and when his mother heard it, she immediately appeared, took him in her arms, and comforted him, wrapping him in her fairy shawl. She whispered magic words in his ears, laid her now-sleeping son in his crib, and was gone.

When the young lad grew older, he told his father of his mother's late night visit, and that her shawl was a magic talisman. It was to be kept in a safe place, and if ever the Clan faced mortal danger, the Fairy Flag was to be waved three times, and the Knights of the Fairie Raide would ride to the defense of the Clan MacLeod. There were to be three such blessings, and only in the direst consequences should the Fairie magic be used. The Chief placed the Fairy Flag in a special locked box, and it was carried with the Chief wherever he went.

Hundreds of years later, the fierce Clan Donald besieged the MacLeods in battle, and the MacLeods were outnumbered three to one. Just before the Donalds last charge, the Chief opened the box, and placing the fairy

flag on a pole, waved it once, twice, and three times. As the third wave was completed, the Fairy magic caused the MacLeods to appear to be ten times their number! Thinking that the MacLeods had been reinforced, the Donalds turned and ran, never to threaten the MacLeods.

On another occasion, a terrible plague had killed nearly all the MacLeod's cattle, and the Chief faced the prospect of a winter of starvation for all his people. Having no alternative, he fetched the Fairy Flag, and waved it once, twice, three times. The Hosts of Fairie rode down from the clouds, swords drawn, and rode like the wind over the dead and dying cattle. They touched each cow with their swords, and there stood healthy and well-fattened cattle, more than enough to feed the Clan for the winter to come.

There remains one more waving of the Fairy Flag and it is on display at Dunvegan Castle. It is said during World War II that young men from the Clan MacLeod carried pictures of the Flag in their wallets while flying in the Battle of Britain, and not one of them was lost to the German flyers. In fact, the Chief of Clan MacLeod had agreed to bring the Fairy Flag to England and wave it from the Cliffs of Dover should the Germans attempt to invade Great Britain.

At one point, there was a great fire in the castle and it is said that as the folk carried the box wherein lies the Flag from the castle, as the box passed the flames, the fire was extinguished.

The Bull's Horn Cup

The MacLeod crest displays a bull's head with the motto 'Hold Fast.'

This originates from Malcolm, the 3rd Chief (1296-1370) who, while returning from a clandestine visit to the wife of Fraser of Glenelg, was confronted by a mad bull. Armed only with his dirk, he slew the beast and kept one of the bull's horns as a memento of his bravery. To this day, each male heir has to drain the horn filled with claret (over one and $\frac{3}{4}$ pints) "without setting down or falling down" to prove his manhood during the celebration of his 21st birthday. The current chief practiced drinking vast amounts of water in order to be prepared for his ascension.

MacLeod's Tables

Alasdair, Chief of MacLeod and his clansmen were at a dinner with King James V. One of the lowland lords snidely commented that the Highland chief surely had not seen anything to compare to his Kings' castle and dining room with its silver candle sconces and stone ceilings. In response, Alasdair assured this lord that on Skye there was a nobler hall, a finer table and more costly candlesticks than those he saw before him. The journey home was long and his clansmen were wondering why Alasdair was so despondent. The Chief said that he wished that he had never gone to Edinburgh and made this boast.

The King had accepted his offer of hospitality and was coming to dine at the MacLeod stronghold. Alasdair's foster brother assured him that he could entertain the King on a table lordlier than any other in Scotland and explained his thoughts on this grave matter.

Then followed months of activity, gathering clansmen to the castle and preparing for the King's visit. The great night came and the King was escorted to the mountains near the castle. The dinner was at sunset with surrounding guards holding torches aloft to light the tableau; God's panorama of stars above on the mountaintop called MacLeod's Table.

He asked the king if he had made good on his boast, if indeed the strong arms of his clansmen were not more valuable than any silver, if the stars above were not more beautiful than any lofty ceiling and if his hall which encompassed the mountaintop was not grander than the hall in Edinburgh. The King's reply, "by my troth I have never seen such a hall, I have nothing to compare to this in Edinburgh." When he asked the Lord who had prompted him to this boast in the beginning, the courtier asked the Chief to pardon his hasty words. And the celebration lasted until daybreak.

The Fairy Flag of Dunvegan

*and other stories of
Clan MacLeod.*