



*I*

*All along the flat east coast of Ireland are lots and lots of towns and villages.*

Some are big and famous, like the old, grey city of Dublin; while some are so small that few people even know their name.

But most are neither very big nor very small, just somewhere in-between and if you visit them you'll find that they all look much the same.

Each of them has a few shops, an old church, maybe a Garda Station and long lines of houses that go on and on.

Every day the people who live in these houses get up early, quickly gobble down some breakfast and then rush out the door.

The mums and dads jump into their cars and drive to work along motorways packed with many more cars carrying lots more mums and dads.

The young students cram themselves onto packed trains and speed past the beaches and bays of Meath and Wicklow, yawning all the way to college.

And finally children just like you, lift heavy bags onto their backs and walk slowly in little gangs on their way to school.

It all looks so normal.

But it was not always like this.

Close your eyes. Imagine if you could go back in time and see these places before people lived here. What do you think you'd find?

Well, if there were no people, that means there were no houses, no roads, no trains and no schools.

What would be there instead?

I'll tell you.

Look outside.

Maybe today you can see a parked car or a garden wall. But imagine that way back in time a massive chestnut tree grew there instead, its crooked branches hanging with green moss and pointing in all directions. Everywhere back then was covered with trees. Thousands of trees of all shapes and sizes spreading away into the distance like a lumpy green carpet.

Where your school is now a huge beech tree used to stand reaching way into the sky, its leafy head rustling in the wind.

Where the shops are, imagine thousands of acorns falling each autumn as the oak trees that stood there dropped their fruit.

And there were other things to see too. Stranger things.

Past the oak trees, you might notice some gaps in the forest.

Wide spaces & deep holes where trees used to grow but

where someone - or something - had knocked them down.

That's when you'd feel it.

A deep booming in the ground, like a huge drum being

beaten with a heavy stick. Stronger and stronger it would

grow until soon you would be bouncing up and down as if

on a trampoline.

And then you'd know why.

Striding in from the deep forest, brushing aside the oak trees

as if they were grass, a huge giant whose great feet crashed

against the earth with each step.

The giant's name was Dorn Mór and he used to live right

here in Dublin.

Dorn was as tall and as strong as a mountain. His shoulders

bulged with muscles and thick blue veins ran down his arms

like rivers. A long mane of red hair hung around his face and he looked out onto the world with round dark eyes.

But, it was his hands that were most striking of all.

Each finger was as thick as a tree and his skin was rougher than sandpaper. These hands were made for tough work. It was Dorn's job to build up all the islands along the east coast of Ireland. Islands like Lambay, Rockabill, the Saltees and more.

There were many giants in Ireland at that time. Like Dorn, it was their job to build the country for people like you and me who would come later.

Every day they would pile enormous rocks together to build up the mountains or dig deep holes to fill as lakes.

For hundreds of years they worked, creating the land that we now call home.

Because he worked alone, Dorn's job was more difficult than most. While the island giants of the west worked in teams to build new land for Aran Island, in the east there was only Dorn.

At first he practiced by building a few small rocky islands, like those at Skerries. But even that was difficult.

Each morning as the sun rose up, Dorn would swim far out to sea and dive deep beneath the waves to find the boulders he needed to build his islands. These he carried back to the shallows and stacked together in huge piles near the shore.

When he had collected enough rocks for a whole island, he would then climb on top and beat the stones down with his enormous fists. This was to make sure they would be set firmly in place and not washed away by the sea.

And that is how Dorn earned his name. Dorn Mór means 'Big Fist'.

Dorn's work was not easy and he often grew very tired. Yet, he carried on, trying to make sure his islands were as good as any in Ireland.

As he laboured, the sweat would roll off him like rain and to cool down he would often dip his head into the water below. That is one reason why the Irish Sea is so salty.

After many months Dorn finished his work at Skerries and was ready to start something bigger. In fact, he had already picked the perfect place for his next island. Nestled between the growing hill of Howth and the long beach at Portmarnock, Dorn chose a spot for a new island he called Ireland's Eye.

By now, Dorn was used to his work and despite his tiredness he enjoyed it very much. He especially loved the long swims out to sea each morning. There he could refresh his tired body and play with the huge whales that lived beneath the dark waves.

The whales would welcome him each day with great splashes of their tails, to which he would answer by slapping the water with his enormous hands. Together they would then plunge deep into the cold sea to swim and play.

Sometimes a whale would signal to Dorn to grab hold of her tail. Then she would pull him down into the deepest parts of the ocean to help him uncover the best stones for his new island.

Day after day Dorn piled up heaps of rock and after many months, the top of the island started to rise above the waves. But still Dorn heaped on more and more until it reached high in the air. Only when it was as tall as he was himself did he leave the water to prepare to hammer the new island into shape.

Pounding the stone with his fists, Dorn shaped all the lumps, bumps and hollows of Ireland's Eye. This island was much bigger than that at Skerries and he was proud of it.

As he worked he was watched by another giant whose job it was to build the nearby hill of Howth. Sometimes that giant would rest from his own chores and stretch out on the grass to gaze at Dorn at work. Listening to the sounds of Dorn's hands striking blow after blow, the Howth giant was amazed at his strength.

Dorn knew the Howth giant was watching him and so he put extra energy into his work. He also did something else. Dorn wanted to make fun of the giant who lay down while he was working and even today, if you look closely at Ireland's Eye you'll see that Dorn made it into a special shape.

It is the shape of a giant lying on his back asleep.

In the evening after work was done, Dorn would gather with the Howth giant and many others on the wide plain of the River Liffey near where the Phoenix Park is today. A great

fire of hundreds of trees would be lit and all around it the giants would sit to talk and eat. The food they ate was a stew of whatever each giant could bring. Dorn usually brought great handfuls of fish which he threw into an enormous pot for everyone to enjoy.

After their meal was finished, the giants would stretch out on the grass by the Liffey and dip their tired feet into the flowing river. Gazing up at the clouds passing low overhead, they could see the glow of distant campfires made by giants in other parts of Ireland.

From the north, a deep red shine came from fires in Armagh and Down where sturdy and silent Ulster giants built many rugged hills and hidden coves.

In the midlands, dark turf fires burned from giants who were best at digging the deep lakes and wide channels needed for the mighty Shannon river.

And far in the south, massive flames shot up from the fires of Kerry giants, whose work on the biggest mountains in Ireland made them so boastful.

Eventually all the fires would die down and one by one the giants of Ireland would drift into a deep sleep. Soon the only thing to be heard in the dark night would be the sound of their snoring echoing like thunder.

Usually the giants were so tired they would not wake until the sun rose up behind the clouds over Dublin bay. However, there was one thing that could disturb their slumber - and that was rain. When it rained, water would collect in cold ponds in their ears and on their bellies and waken them from their sleep.

Sometimes, if the rain was light the giants would crowd into a big group to blow the clouds away. Together they would puff out a great gulp of air, sending the clouds far out over the sea.

But if the rain was too heavy there was nothing they could do, and because they were all so big they could not find any shelter to stay dry. Instead they would just huddle together in a sad, wet bunch and wait for the clouds to pass.

## II

*After years of effort, the work of building Ireland was well underway and giants from many other parts of the world came to see the wonderful things that had been made.*

From the arctic north came the ice giants of Norway to admire the tall cliffs of Clare that look out over the dark Atlantic ocean.

From the east, huge blue-eyed giants from Russia journeyed long distances to see our wide sparkling lakes, that seem so big in Ireland but are so small when compared to their own.

And from the south, black giants from the vast deserts of Africa came to see our long beaches and to share with us a gift of fine, smooth sand.

To make the sand, the giants would take special rocks out of the heavy sacks they carried with them and crumble them to

dust between their enormous hands. Then filling their cheeks with great gulps of air, they would blow out a great gale of yellow sand to cover the long sea shore.

After travelling all around Ireland, the sacks of the desert giants were empty and so they rested in Dublin for a few days before starting their long journey home.

In thanks for their wonderful work Dorn and his friends prepared a large meal in their honour, including spicy fish stew, lots of sweet honey cakes and huge barrels of bubbly, brown beer.

But just as they all sat down to eat, the clouds overhead burst open and cold rain started to fall in torrents. Dorn and his Irish friends groaned in disappointment and scrambled to cover their food; and as they did an amazing thing happened.

The dark desert giants sprang up and started to laugh and shout. The Irish giants watched in amazement as their

African friends turned their faces to the sky and danced with happiness as the rain poured down.

When it had all passed, one of the desert giants explained why they were so excited.

“Where we live we can wait for 100 years and see only one hour of rain. You are so lucky here. In all our time in Ireland we have seen so much water. It is a wonderful thing! We dance because we want to remember the feeling of cool rain falling on our faces before we return to the hot desert.”

The Irish giants could not believe their ears!

“Lucky!?” they laughed, “This rain that stops us from sleeping? This rain that makes cold lakes in our bellies and pools in our ears? Please, gather up these wet clouds and take as much rain home with you as you like!”

“Oh, thank you” cried the desert giants, “We hoped you would say so!” They then reached up into the sky and began

to sweep up lots of grey, swirling clouds into their empty sacks to carry back to Africa.

As they gathered up the wettest clouds they could find they asked "If you are so unhappy, why do you not change this sky? We have seen you Irish giants. You are tall and strong. Build a new sky! Tear away these clouds and open up to the sun?"

"But how can we do that?" the Irish giants asked. "When we blow away the clouds, more simply rush in to fill the gaps."

"Ahh, come with us then" replied the black giants. "Come to Africa, to our great desert. Come and see our wide sky - a blue dome where rain falls only in 100 years. We will give you pieces of our sky to fill the gaps between your clouds. Come and we will climb to the top of our highest mountains. There you can stand on our shoulders, reach up and take as many pieces of sky as you like. "

Over the next few days the Irish giants talked about this idea.

If they went to Africa and took back some pieces of blue sky, they could use it to push away the dark rain clouds and perhaps be dry while they slept. But who would be willing to go on a such a long journey?

Soon it was the day for the desert giants to leave and they gathered on the beach at Portmarnock to bid farewell to their Irish friends.

Before they left they asked one last time “Will anyone come with us to see our desert, our brown mountains and our sky, so blue and wide?”

All of a sudden, Dorn stepped forward.

“I will go” he said. “I have done much work here and have more to do. But before I finish my islands I am ready to see some of the world.”

“I will go to Africa to see the broad sandy desert and there I will gather new pieces of sky to bring back to Ireland,” and with that, he strode over to stand with the black giants at the water’s edge.

“Good for you, Dorn. You are tall and full of strength. But remember, this is a long journey. We must swim for many weeks through storms and rough seas with no land for rest. Are you sure you are ready?”

In answer Dorn declared “Each day I swim with whales and carry heavy rocks from the sea. My arms are strong and I want to do this so that I and my friends can rest from our work without being disturbed by rain. So come, let me help you carry those sacks filled with Irish clouds back to your desert.”

Turning around one last time, Dorn waved goodbye to his Irish friends and set out with his new companions. Together

they stepped into the dark cold water and began the long swim to Africa.