

Pseudonym	Dialect Zone	Provenance	Sex	Age	Educational Level	Religion	Ch.7 Text No.
Cuchulainn (CN)	SUE	Derrylin, Co. Fermanagh	M	70	PG qualification	C	7.3.2

CN: As I was wa... *[laughs]*. That was one of the stories I told on Radio Four now, you know, and I got a lot of nice letters about it too.

KPC: Yeah. And what about other stories about you growing up?

CN: Ach, well, actually there's... I don't want to bore you now with...

KPC: No, I'm not bored at all. I'm amuse... I'm finding it very good fun.

CN: No, but there were, there were some sad stories, you see. There were...

KPC: So tell us a sad one to compensate.

CN: No, the one that made... got the biggest impact, and I got letters from all over about it. I got letters from the Orkney's, and from the Scilly Isles, and from the middle of England, and everything, and it was turned into a play and it toured England, and it toured here, and it was very good. And there's a woman writing a film script about it now, at the minute.

KPC: Right.

CN: That is right. No, but it is about that I used to go up to get buttermilk, you see. I was sent up to get buttermilk off this woman who lived by herself in an old broken down house, you see...

KPC: Right.

CN: ... with the roof of the house falling in. And, eh, it was always a bit of an adventure because there was a bull in one of the fields, but you went up a short way, over a foot stick, over a river, and eventually came to the house. And the roof had fallen in at one end, and she was always... eh, she wore a kind of a man's hat and her hair was grey and sticking out through the hat, and her face was like a coalminer's face, you know. It was... from living in a house where there was a lot of smoke, you know.

KPC: Yeah.

CN: But she always was very gracious, and whenever she took the four pence, she would thank me, and she would... eh, had a... this air of graciousness about her.

KPC: Aye.

CN: And one day when I approached the house, I heard her singing. And I stood near the doughal - that's the dung hill – and I listened. And she was singing a song that my... an aria from one of the operas, *I Dreamt That I Dwelt in Marble Halls*. Do... you don't know that song, do you?

KPC: I do, yes.

CN: Beautiful song, 'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls with vassals and serfs by my side'. So I went up to the door, and I looked in over the half door, and she was standing... she was facing the empty hearth, and she had her hands out like that, and she was singing to the empty hearth. She was... looked like she'd... a woman would be singing to her lover on the stage, you know. So I stood back a few steps and I coughed, and the singing stopped. Then she came to the door, and the black of her face was smudged where she had wiped it with this bag apron that she wore, you know, and she gave me the buttermilk without a word, and I took it, and she never mentioned it again, and I never mentioned it to anybody ever.

KPC: Uh-huh.

CN: But then I began to pick up things about her that in her youth she had been the belle of the countryside, quite beautiful, and she used to go to church where everybody would stop to look at her going in her pony and trap, dressed always in the latest fashion, and she had elocution lessons, a piano in the house, carpets on the floor, everything. And then that her father had died, and her mother and her brother started to drink, and he became an alcoholic, and he had drunk the place into bankruptcy, and it had deteriorated into the present state.

KPC: Mm.

CN: And, eh, and, and that was it. And the years passed by, and I went away to college, and younger sisters and brothers went up to get the milk, but I was told that she always asked about me...

KPC: Oh right.

CN: ... and how I was getting on. And I always intended to go and visit her, but you know, when you're young, you forget.

KPC: I know.

CN: And I never went, and the next time I went up, it was to attend her wake because she had died in her sleep.

KPC: Ah.

CN: And somebody had whitewashed... I remember clearly, it... somebody had whitewashed one of the... just the, the room off the kitchen, and it smelt of the wh... fresh whitewash.

KPC: Aye.

CN: And she was lying in the bed, and there was a small window, and I remember it was a sunny day, and there was a wh... white thorn bush outside the window and the wind was blowing it to and fro, and there were... this tracery of shadows was moving back and forward over her face, you know, this poor face that had once turned all the heads on a Sunday morning, you know.

KPC: Aye.

CN: There she was lying there. And her funeral was a eh pathetic affair; there was very few people turned up. There was nobody to carry the coffin, and myself and a neighbour...

KPC: Aye.

CN: ... helped to carry the coffin, and he had dug the grave. And nobody waited besi... behind in the graveyard, but I stayed to help to fill in the clay around...

KPC: Aye.

CN: ... the coffin of this poor woman that I should have visited. And at the end of it all when we had filled in all this clay and eh arranged the sods in a nice rectangle, the man starkly took off his coat, or his, his cap, and he wiped his brow, I remember, with his cap, and he says, 'Hard to imagine,' he says, 'that there was one time, there was one time when that woman could have had her pick of any man of the country.' And I said, 'Well, so, so why did she not get married?' And he told me.

KPC: Yeah.

CN: He told me about her one big love affair with a tall handsome policeman at the local barrack, and he had been promoted to Sergeant and transferred to another part of the country. And he had written to her...

KPC: Right.

CN: ... asking her to come and marry him.

KPC: Yeah.

CN: And she had written back saying that she would, and she'd given the letter to her brother to post, and he had torn it up...

KPC: Huh!

CN: ... and thrown it over a bridge, just the bridge near the house, into the river. And I remember, I wrote the sentence about that 'her words of love had floated away in a hundred pieces o'er the brown water...

KPC: Yeah.

CN: ... and disappeared forever into the depths of Lough Erne.' And then I knew, you know, as I was standing there in the graveyard, remember, I could just sort of hear in my mind her sweet quavering voice, and I knew then that she was singing that time that she'd seen in the hearth the handsome face...

KPC: Yeah.

CN: ... of her young policeman, when I had heard, heard her singing all those years ago.

KPC: Yeah.

CN: You know, when she was singing. I remember the verse she was singing, 'I had riches too great to count, could boast of a high ancestral name, but I also dreamt, which pleased me most, that you loved me still the same...'

KPC: Ah.

CN: ... that you loved me, you loved me still the same.'

KPC: Ah.

CN: And that was it, you know. I've wri... it's written better, sort of, than I'm telling it to you, but...

KPC: Yeah. Oh no, it's lovely story.

CN: But that was... aye. Aye, it was. Ach, it got the loveliest letters. You know, one woman said, 'I, I cried into my scrambled egg,' she said, 'as I listened to it', you know.

KPC: *[laughs]*. You'll have me crying in a minute.

CN: Aye. *[laughs]*. It was... ah, but, eh...

KPC: It's a very sad story.

CN: ... it's... a lot of people cry, you know...

KPC: Mm.

CN: ... wh... wh... when they hear it, because it is, you know, and it was the story of, of lost love. It really was.

KPC: Mm. And do you think that that was to do with the fact that, em, because she was a Catholic and perhaps he wasn't?

CN: Ah no, I wouldn't think so.

KPC: No? It was just spite, do you think, on the brother's part?

CN: Oh, the broth... no, the brother wanted a housekeeper, that's it basically.

KPC: Oh.

CN: He just wanted a housekeeper because he was a drunkard.

KPC: Wanted to make her stay at home?

CN: He was a drunkard, yeah. Although, funny enough, when the guy wrote... made it into a play, he sort of put that twist on it, that the brother didn't like her associating with a policeman.

KPC: Mm.

CN: But, no, it was the story of, of life in those days for women. It was awful. I remember having to get up to serve mass for a wedding at half past six in the morning because he wanted her home in time to help with the milk.

KPC: *[laughs]*. And they say it's the bride's day.

CN: It is. I remember another... another couple got married, and for their honeymoon, they went in on the quarter past nine bus to Enniskillen, and he went into the pub, and she walked the streets of Enniskillen for the whole day until the twen... the twenty five past six bus in the evening.

KPC: Charming.

CN: And that was it.