

Michael Peinkofer

Gryphony: In the Spell of the Griffin

(Translation pages 5 – 39)

Prologue

*Many hundreds of years ago,
during the dark ages ...*

In the sparse moonlight that shone through the clouds, the ring of stones was barely visible to any human eye. The sight of the griffin penetrated the darkness of that night. As soon as he spotted the target, he pulled round into a swing and went into a dive. Only shortly before reaching the ground did he spread his wings again to slow his fall. The night wind tugged at the Griffin and his rider, as he landed lightly on his feet inside the circle. The knight patted the animal's neck as he got out of the saddle. His armor clanked softly, his cloak fluttered.

"Malagant!" The knight cried out, but the wind carried his words away, without answer.

The griffin snorted and threw back his head uneasily as he shuffled his claws. "All right," said the knight, soothingly to the great beast, which had the body of a lion and the head and wings of a bird of prey. "It's all right, old girl."

Suddenly there was a noise outside the stone circle. The knight and his mount looked round immediately.

"Who's there?" Asked the knight in the dark. No answer, but as if the shadows of the night were alive a figure dropped silently between the stone blocks. Was the knight surprised by this? Not at all. The servants of Chaos had power over many dark arts. The foreign visitor wore a robe of black cloth. The hood hung far down, hiding his face, but the knight knew well, with whom he was dealing.

"Malagant," he growled. "So you do have the courage come here."
The stranger threw back the hood. His haggard face was like death. From the deep-set eyes flowed an ominous dull glow.

"You forget that this meeting was my idea," he disagreed, revealing his teeth.

"What, then, do you want?"

"To talk with you," said Malagant. "Have you ever thought about how long to continue this unfortunate battle between us?"

"Often," admitted the knight.

"Once we were many - now there are only the two of us. We are the only ones that are left, the last knights of the air. "

"I am the last knight", disagreed the griffin rider. "You're bound to the wrong path. Look what has become of you! "

Malagant threw back his cloak, so that the black armor underneath appeared. "It is true: we are on different sides," he admitted. "Nevertheless, the struggle must not go on like this forever. It could end this very night. "

"What do you suggest?" Asked the knight carefully. "A truce?"

"Peace", Malagant replied simply.

"How will that work?" The griffin-knight shook his head. "Light and darkness are mutually exclusive, as you well know."

"Maybe," Malagant conceded. "But do we have to fight? Why do we not let the people decide which way they wish to go? For so many years we have been fighting against each other, and look where that has got us! Many of our fighters have paid with their lives - brave warriors like you and me. Are you not longing to reach an end and rest yourself? Your sword finally lain down? "

"Desperately", the knight had to admit.

"Just like me. That is why I offer you a peace agreement. "

"Why should I believe you, Malagant? Did your side not start this war? "

"And now it is time to end it," persisted the man in the black armor. "Otherwise it will go on forever and eventually destroy humanity!"

"That's also true," the knight could not deny.

"So let them off! In the future, let the people decide their fate. We have done enough for them. All you have to do is drop your sword. Just see what I mean." With these words Malagant drew his sword, its blackened blade barely visible in the darkness, and he rammed it down deep into the ground. Then he stepped into the middle of the stone circle, raising his hands. "What now?" He asked. "Will you follow my example?"

The knight hesitated.

He looked around to the griffin. The animal had become more restless, shaking its head violently. It could not believe Malagant, not after what the black warrior had done to the griffins. But did the knight have a choice? He had done nothing to prevent future bloodshed. Should he now turn down an offer of peace?

Even though the creature protested loudly with a high-pitched screech sent far into the night, the knight drew his sword and thrust it, likewise, into the ground. Then he too went into the center of the stone circle.

"Let us give the word that no more blood shall flow," he said.

"A word among brothers," confirmed Malagant. Then they stood facing each other.

The Griffin Knight and the Dragon Warrior.

"Let's give our hands and seal the peace," suggested the knight and wanted Malagant to seal the deal - when he heard a horrible sound. There was a hiss, hoarse and dangerous rising slowly upwards behind the stone circle. And with it, immense and ominous, a black shadow with a long neck and eyes that glowed fiery red in the darkness. A cloud of steam billowed up and the stench of smoke and sulfur was suddenly in the air. Then the knight saw the grin in Malagant's bony face. "How gullible you are," Malagant said while the creature behind him grew to its full gigantic size. It spread its wings, and it was as if something had swallowed the moon. So suddenly it was dark.

"You ... have tricked me," exclaimed the knight.

"No," contradicted Malagant. "The war will end, even in this night, and then there will be peace. But not the peace that you have imagined. "

The dragon stomped into the circle. Where his scaly twisting body bumped against the upright stones, the stones fell or were broken. The griffin screamed deafeningly. The knight tried to drop back to retrieve his sword - but it did not work! He could not take a step.

"You seem surprised!" Malagant threw his head back and laughed. "I have made arrangements!"

"W ... what have you done?"

Only now the knight saw the signs that were carved into the ground – runes, magic runes, which laid a circle of spells around him. They made sure that he could not defend himself.

"And this is the moment I have been waiting for," said Malagant and turned to the huge dragon standing behind him. "Devorax, explain to our friend why his struggle is over. Tell him why we have won the war."

With a horrible whistling the dragon welcomed the cold night air into his lungs, then the hiss of the flame that blazed in his chest roared. The next moment he breathed out fire and turned the stone circle into a sea of flames.

Happy Birthday!

Her name was Melody.

Melody Campbell. Admittedly not an ordinary name, but her parents could not help themselves when naming her so, passionate as they were about music and especially melodies. However, her parents died tragically in a ferry disaster when she was still very young. Since then she had lived with her grandmother Fay. "Granny". Everyone simply knew her as "granny" – living in the old Stone Inn down the main street. The Stone Inn was an inn. Tourists from the mainland dropped in whenever they came to the island for mountain hikes or rock climbing. But nothing exceptional ever actually happened there.

When the morning alarm beeped and Melody hopped out of bed, she knew pretty much what the day would bring: get up, school, homework - and in between lots of trouble. They really had no reason not to live on an island. She loved to be down by the sea when the wind was roaring across the cliffs and throwing up waves on the beach. If only, thought Melody, there could be some variety.

And so it was this morning, Melody did not feel that anything out of the ordinary or special would happen. She got up, as usual, went into the bathroom, as usual, and looked at herself in the mirror, as usual.

Glossy red hair.

Green eyes.

Pale skin.

Freckles around the nose.

Whilst all of the other girls in her class had model figures - especially Ashley McLusky - Melody's body looked more as if it had been borrowed from a boy. So she never tried to change the way she looked. At school, she wore black trousers and

sweater as did everyone else. But at home she preferred colourful, checked, flannel shirts with jeans and boots. Granny always said that they made her look a bit like her father had when he was her age. And for Melody that was pretty cool even if it did not make her the most popular girl on the island.

As for friends, well, she actually had only the one. He lived a few doors down and was called Roddy McDonald. His parents had a small pet shop in the town. Brodick was a small harbor town, where everyone knew everyone else. This was sometimes good, sometimes bad, depending on circumstances. In emergencies neighbours helped each other out - just as they had done last year when the entire island was without electricity.

Rumours, however, spread across the island like wildfire, especially if they were bad. And just lately there had been quite a few bad ones about Melody and Granny Fay.

The Stone Inn had been in Melody's family for four generations. But the business it had once had was not enough and now it was as good as broke. Granny Fay had a huge pile of debt, not with the bank, but with a man named Buford McLusky, a rich land owner who already owned half the island.

Now he also wanted the Stone Inn. He planned to tear it down and replace it with a brand new hotel. To say the least this made Melody angry, but for her poor Granny it was heartbreaking.

Nevertheless, Granny welcomed Melody cheerfully this morning as she came into a kitchen smelling of hot butter, syrup, oranges and lemons.

"Good morning, dear!" trilled Granny Fay smiling as only she could. When Melody was younger she believed in elves, and, to her, her grandmother was always a wise old witch with rosy cheeks and her hair tied up in a white bun. "Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thanks, can't complain," said Melody.

"Happy Birthday!" Granny said, squeezing her tightly, and as always Melody smelled her familiar smell of peppermint and lavender. "May all your wishes come true."

"Thank you, Granny."

"I made you your favorite pancakes." Granny pointed to a delicious pile of them waiting warmly on the table. "I have no other birthday present for you this year, unfortunately. Well you know – for the want of money ... ". The smile vanished from her face, her eyes were moist.

"Don't worry, Granny," Melody said. "It will be all right. The Bank is bound to give us the money, and then we won't be thrown out by McLusky. "

"If you say so." She sighed. "You're a good girl, Melody. And how much you've grown! Your parents would be so proud if they could see you now. "

"Yes? You think so? "A little perplexed Melody looked down at herself.

"Certainly." The smile returned to Granny's face. "Now sit down," she said to Melody and began piling lots of goodies onto the old kitchen table so that it was almost overflowing. There were pancakes with sugar, orange juice, lemon juice, butter and every kind of jam and her very fine hot chocolate – a drink to die for.

So it was, happy and well fed, that Melody calmly acknowledged that her bike had another flat tire, and that she would have to mend it before she could go to school. Her birthday was just a day like any other, she thought.

She still did not know how wrong she was, thinking that.

Ashley

Roddy was waiting at the crossing.

Apart from the fact that he was rather nervous he was really okay. As he and his parents lived just a bit further up the road, he had known Melody for ages. The two of them had been friends ever since they first played together in the sandpit. But that was not the only reason they were friends.

Roddy was smaller than most boys his age and he was a bit chubby. He had thick glasses and hair that looked as if it had been styled in an electric chair rather than at the barbers'. Just like Melody he was most happy when he was safe at home with his nose in a book devouring words like other children devoured potato chips. With the other boys in the school he was about as popular as Melody was with the girls, so they actually had a lot in common. These things made them kindred spirits, somehow.

"Good morning, Melody," Roddy greeted her as she approached, a beaming smile all over his pale face. "Happy Birthday!"

"Have you remembered?" Melody put on her brakes and jumped off her bike.
"That's sweet of you!"

"Of course," said Roddy. "And I've got a present for you!" With these words he opened the saddlebag of his bicycle and rummaged around in it as if he was searching for something. Then, like a conjuror, with a grand gesture he lifted out a gift wrapped in

colorful paper. It was a bit crushed and the fancy loops in the ribbon round it were rather crumpled, but Roddy's enthusiasm could not be curbed.

"For you!" he announced excitedly.

"Really?"

He nodded eagerly.

Melody took the gift and unwrapped it. The surprise was a woolen scarf, purple with orange red stripes.

"Your favorite colours," Roddy said. "I even knitted it myself! Mam showed me how to do it." A proud smile flitted across his round face. Then he suddenly became serious. "Do you like it?"

"Do I like it?" Melody could not help but hug Roddy. "This is the best birthday-present I have ever had. Thanks, Roddy! "

"Phew," sighed Roddy wiping the sweat from his forehead. "I'm really happy. I was a bit worried ... "

"It's beautiful," assured Melody and put the scarf around her shoulders. She did not care that the scarf did not match the school uniform. It did not bother her. Quite the opposite in fact - it was fluffy and soft and cozy and warm.

Then the two of them cycled off, on their way to school. They were already quite late. The Arran High School was in the high street in Lamlash, the neighbouring town. In the morning the school yard resembled an insect colony with all the pupils rushing hither and thither, until finally the bell rang for lessons to begin.

The journey across the school yard was like running the gauntlet for both Melody and Roddy. They never knew if they would be accosted by someone. This morning it seemed as if everything was going to be fine. But for Melody Campbell it wasn't. It was not going to be her day despite it being her birthday, for there, blocking the doorway to the classroom, was Ashley McLusky.

Ashley was by far the most popular girl in school, a blond dream on two legs - or a nightmare, depending on how you saw it. All the lads thought she was great, even those who made out they were not interested in girls yet. And the girls all admired her and wished that they could be more like her. Ashley always had the latest clothes and the most expensive mobile phone. She had a small poodle with pink colored fur, who, appropriately answered to the name of Pom Pom. She dragged it around everywhere, even into school, although animals were supposedly prohibited.

But on the other hand no one said anything. For Ashley's father was Buford McLusky - the man who owned half of Brodick, the man who wanted to demolish Melody's home, the Stone Inn.

"Well, well, girls! What's this?" Ashley smirked to her two best friends, Kimberley and Monique, who were always circling her like satellites round the Earth. "This is, probably, the absolute rage in the latest designer studios!"

Melody took a moment to understand that Ashley was talking about the scarf that Roddy had given her.

"Really, Campbell," Ashley teased further. "We all know that you have absolutely no dress-sense what--so--ever, but now look at you! Stripes with your school uniform, and in this hideous colour, which is really not in at the moment! And who-on-Earth knitted this thing? A one-armed blind man? Dropped stitches are the in-thing this year, I presume!"

Monique and Kimberley giggled gleefully. Roddy blushed, crimson. Anger burned in Melody's head like a sugar rush, but she decided to keep her mouth shut. Ashley McLusky's cutting remarks were really like a dripping tap - in the beginning they had been absolutely annoying, but over time you got used to them. Added to which, if Melody tried to retaliate the conflicts always ended up with Ashley rushing to the teachers and Melody finding herself awarded with detentions and visits to the Rector for a telling-off. And she did not want to spend her birthday in a detention, so she wordlessly pushed past Ashley into the classroom, but that was not enough.

"Didn't you hear me, Campbell?" she called after her. "I'm talking to you!"

"I heard," Melody admitted. "But I'm not talking with you."

Hoping that would be enough to settle the matter Melody slid herself onto her bench at the back of the classroom. But it was to be a tiresome day.

All the while Ashley was whispering with her friends, and Melody could see them writing little messages and passing them around. This of course made her hot and flustered and Melody knew full well that this was their intended goal. She decided to keep her guard, even if that would ultimately be of not much use.

The whole thing exploded in the last hour. The girls had just had sport with Mrs Brown and were entering the changing room when Ashley appeared with her two side-kicks.

"Hey, Campbell!"

Melody looked up.

"Good, I have your attention at last," said Ashley, who was standing in front of her, her Poodle in her arms looking at least as poisonous as she herself. "You are so out of fashion and you have no idea how far out you are. So, we have decided to give you a little help." She nodded to Kimberley who unceremoniously grabbed the scarf that Melody had been given from Roddy earlier that day.

"Hey!" Cried Melody. "What are you doing? Give it back right now!"

"What?" Ashley pouted as she stroked Pom Pom. "Are you really so hung-up on that piece of rag?"

"It was a gift," said Melody.

"Of course it was. Nobody in their right mind would buy such a thing!" Ashley shrugged. "Who actually knotted this ugly thing together? Probably, your senile grandmother? Or was it your moronic friend, the ferret? "

The other girls laughed, not only Monique and Kimberley, but also the rest of the class who had gathered with curiosity, around them.

"Give the scarf back!" Demanded Melody. "This minute!"

"You can have *it* back again," soothed Ashley. "But the way this *thing* looks, you can't wear it like that - impossible. Purple and orange do not go well together. You are in such desperate need of a lesson in... "styling". Black *is* in vogue, did you not know? "

Monique stepped forward and put something on the floor. There was a pot of pitch-black paint. The three bullies had most likely stolen it from the caretaker's workshop. Kimberley and Monique ceremoniously took the lid off – and, the next moment, were about to dip the scarf into the paint!

"No!" cried Melody and wanted to jump. But she was held by a few other girls who wanted to shine in front of Ashley. Above all Sondra Lucklin, by far the largest in the girls' class. Melody tried to fight her restraint, but against Sondra she had no chance. And so Melody had to watch helplessly as Roddy's gift was stuffed into the paint pot. And all around was the friendless noise of cruel laughter.

Tears sprang to her eyes. Roddy had taken so much trouble to please her. But now his work was nothing but a black cloth.

"So," Ashley said, satisfied. "So you can see how much better it is now! Try it on again!"

Using two fingers Kimberley held the scraps up and stepped cautiously towards Melody. And at that Melody realized that she had to leave immediately. In her distress she stamped her foot and Sondra howled like a banshee, apparently Melody had caught her toes. She felt Sondra relax her grip. The next moment she had broken loose and plunged headlong out of the changing-room.

"After her! Drag her back here!" She heard Ashley call.

As fast as she could, Melody ran down the corridor. It was not so easy to run fast because she was still out of breath from the gym class. Nevertheless, she managed to get out of the school building without being caught. But where to now?

To her bike? No chance because that would mean running straight back into the arms of her pursuers. Better to get into town. Look for a place to hide somewhere.

She ran past the school and down the street. The other girls were catching up as they screamed and chased after her. Suddenly Melody darted into a side street, then shot into a narrow alley lined with old stone houses and then the same again into another - and suddenly she found herself standing in front of the door with the inscription:

Clue's Curiosities

Melody could not tell if it was pure chance which had led her there, or whether, in her desperation, she had simply taken her usual route. But one thing was clear: The antique shop of old Mr. Clue was her salvation. And so, she stormed up the stairs and burst into the shop.

The wind-chime above the door greeted her with a warm tinkling sound. Then she slinked into the soothing darkness that was permeated with the smell of old paper and gnarled leather. Only now in the silence Melody noticed how loud her beating heart.

Through the dirty glass of the front door she could see her pursuers rushing past outside, wild screaming girls and the dirty scarf waving like a trophy. Apparently they had not noticed Melody's disappearance. The shrieks subsided.

Melody sighed with relief.

For now, she was rescued.

"Good afternoon", said a deep voice behind her.

The ring

Startled Melody span round - and saw someone facing her. Head bowed he stood looking down at her. Mr Clue was almost six feet tall, towering above her, and he was saying something. His wrinkled face, framed by white hair, hovered over her. She stared into his gray, intelligent eyes.

No one on the island knew exactly how old Mr Clue was. Some said, he had come to Arran in the late seventies, others swore tooth and nail that he had always lived there. In fact, he was a pretty funny old chap, about whom there were the craziest rumours.

Even his clothing was very unusual. The velvet dark green dressing gown that he wore over the tatty uniform of an Oxford professor – worn corduroy trousers, white shirt and tie – was probably the same age as himself. Pockets and seams were frayed, and in some places had clearly been tasted by a school of moths. Yet he had never separated from the old thing, and he wore it inside and outside the house. Some people claimed, therefore, that he was not quite right in the head, but that was not true. In any case Melody did not know anyone who was even remotely as clever as Mr Clue. He had read more books than Granny Fay, and certainly he was smarter than all her teachers put together.

"Melody!", exclaimed Mr Clue. She had clearly surprised him, and his already long face grew even more in length.

"Hello, Mr Clue", greeted Melody and twitched a little with an embarrassed shrug.

"What brings you here at this time? Should you not be in school? "

"Well, yes, actually ..." she admitted, somewhat embarrassed.

"Are you, once again, on the run?"

Melody nodded the affirmative. If she had learned one thing, it was that there was no point kidding yourself when Mr Clue was around.

"The same old gang," he ranted and walked to the glass door to send them off with a glare. But of Kimberley, Monique and the others there was nothing more to see. "When will they stop making your life difficult?"

"On the day when I finish my degree," Melody said with a shrug. "Before then, probably not."

Mr Clue chuckled, and it sounded like an old sofa creaking. "Your sense of humor you appear to have retained," he said. "This is very important. Especially on a happy day like today. "

She looked at him in surprise. "You know ...?"

"Of course," he interrupted her, grinning at the words. "Congratulations on your birthday."

"Thank you," Melody replied, puzzled.

"Whatever you want to have, it's yours," Mr Clue added to her surprise.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You are allowed whatever you want from my shop," he said and pointed with a sweeping gesture to the full to overflowing shelves, cupboards and cabinets.

"W ... whatever? Really?"

"What's the matter with you today, Melody?" He cocked his head and put his skinny arms out wide. "You're not normally so slow on the uptake!"

"No," Melody said, nodding. "I mean, yes," she corrected herself and shook her head. She was completely taken by surprise. Amazed, she stood in front of all the treasures that were piled up in Mr Clue's store. Melody was clear that many people - and especially adults - considered all this stuff was unnecessary junk. But that was a mistake, because Mr Clue's shop of Curiosities was a real treasure chamber in which everything the heart desires could be found. You just had to find it.

Firstly, the souvenirs were of course there for the tourists. These were being sold all over the island - from postcards and cheap T-shirts, beer glasses with the island motif to keyfobs and small replicas of the Celtic stones that stand on Arran.

Much more interesting were to Melody the many books crowding the shelves - ancient, leather-bound tomes, many of which were written in Latin. Or in Gaelic; that was the age-old language that had once been spoken in Scotland. A few people still had the power of that language. Granny Fay had taught Melody a few words, so she knew for instance, that leabhar meant "book" and ribhinn meant "girl".

Melody had always been interested in the past. She had read countless stories that dealt with daring fighters and dangerous trips of discovery. And she loved to deal with old things. It was a bit like getting into a time machine and going on a great adventure. In Mr Clue's store there were plenty of such finds, and every single one of them seemed to have a story to share: There was rusty armor and jagged swords and a

battle-ax, which had allegedly belonged to none other than the Scottish national hero "Braveheart" William Wallace. There was a collection of antlers on the wall and a stuffed wolf, who looked like he wanted to pounce at any moment on the unsuspecting customer. Here was a display case, which was filled to the top with mussels and rare fossils, semi-precious stones and with different sized fragments of pot, derived from the Celtic and Roman ruins. Over there were rows of jars, in which lizards, snakes and other reptiles swam dead in a yellow liquid. Here and there were old vases in all shapes and sizes, some with Chinese characters on them and countless wooden boxes with large and small curiosities within. Somewhere there was an old typewriter that had at least a hundred years under his inky belt. And there were a great many other bits and bobs, things and tools whose purpose was as yet unknown and Melody had not even glimpsed some of these. And over all lay the dust and the patina of a bygone, mysterious time.

With all this wealth the choice for Melody was not going to be easy. For a while she flirted with an old map of the island, before she fell in love with a mirror that was decorated with a strange carving reminiscent of a labyrinth. Then she came up with the idea of taking a Chinese vase as a present for Granny Fay, but Mr Clue said the gift was intended exclusively for herself. So she carried on looking. She crept into the darkest, tightest and most dusty corner, where it smelled musty and oily and you needed a lamp to ever see anything at all.

And that's where she found it. In an old wooden box.

Brooches and fibulae were in it. And a few medals from the time of Napoleon were there too. Suddenly, however, there appeared in the mess something that flashed turquoise blue. Melody rummaged around in the box trying to locate the source of the light - and eventually she held a ring in her hand.

However, it was not a ring you would ever find in a jeweler's shop. It was quite smooth with a pattern in the form of an eye. In the turquoise stone was engraved a symbol - a hand or claw, so far as she could tell.

Although the silver band around it was tarnished black and Melody really had very little interest in jewelry of any kind, she somehow found herself fascinated by this thing. And her decision was made: This should be her birthday present!

Carefully, she returned to the light. As Mr Clue saw the ring, he raised an eyebrow. "Hm," his only remark. His wrinkled face darkened.

"Is something wrong?" asked Melody. "You told me I had a free choice."

"Why do you have to have this ring?" asked Mr Clue outright. "If you believe that it is particularly valuable, I must disappoint you."

"I'm not worried about that," assured Melody. "I think the ring is just perfect. And also..."

"Yes?", Mr Clue asked.

"Well, I just had the impression that the stone flashed briefly," she replied.

"Maybe it was just the reflection of the flashlight, but it seemed to me as if ..."

"Like what?"

"Well," Melody said, a little embarrassed, "it was a bit, as if the ring was calling me."

"Indeed?"

Melody nodded. "Of course, I know that's nonsense, but I ..."

"Some people," Mr Clue cut her off, "would not recognize a miracle if it happened before their eyes. I think you should keep the ring. "

"Seriously?"

"Of course! Cassander Clue is always true to his word," said the old man and closed her hand around the ring. "May you enjoy using my gift."

"Thank you, sir," Melody said - and bowed spontaneously. Why she did this, she could not have said, it seemed simply to be the right thing to do, and her grandmother had taught her to trust her feelings.

"You're welcome." Mr Clue winked at her under his snow-white eyebrows. "And now you should make your way home. We don't want to end up making your grandmother worried. She has more than enough on her plate as it is these days. "

"Too true", Melody had to admit - and at the same time she felt ashamed that she had forgotten all about Granny Fay and the Stone Inn.

She put the ring on her right index finger where it seemed to fit just right. Then she went to the door and peered out cautiously.

The air seemed to be pure.

"Goodbye, Mr Clue and thank you!" And out she slipped, accompanied by the sound of ting-a-ling-ing wind-chimes.

Melody crept back to school hesitantly. Fortunately, Ashley and her horde were not there to be seen, so she grabbed her bags and books together, having left them scattered about in her haste to escape, and this time she took her bike.

She had not even reached the main road when a heavy downpour of rain began to fall.

It really was not her day.

Discovery in the Night

She felt light-hearted and free.

In no time she was dashing over the hills and through the valleys, into the forests and round the bogs and all the while under the snow-covered slopes of Goat Fell, which towered over the island like a giant stone guardian. Then she rushed at breakneck speed down the valley and along the river and again uphill before lurching suddenly down deep into the depths.

Melody saw the ground approaching upwards towards her, the brown earth and the patchy grass. But she was not afraid, because in the next moment, the fall was slowed down and the wild flight went on. She felt the need to scream with joy, she felt so relaxed ...

"Melody!"

Someone called her name. The familiar voice came to her from far away, but she acted as if she hadn't heard it. She did not want the flight to end, she wanted to continue the slide through the air ...

"Melody!"

The voice cried out again, this time even louder. Reluctantly Melody blinked - and was awake in the next moment.

To her disappointment, she was not high up in the air, but at home in her bed, in the little garret of the Stone Inn, where she lived.

It had been but a dream.

But what a dream! This was not one of those dreams that tormented you when you had over-indulged yourself with cheesy-pizza at dinner or watched a late-night horror movie. No, this dream had been a joy and as clear as if she had really experienced the wild flight. Melody had felt the wind in her hair. And even now, as she sat wide awake and upright in her bed, she had some of the feeling, and the spicy scent of forests and bogs in her nose.

Suddenly she remembered the voice which had called for her. Had it been in the dream? Or had it been real? Had the voice awakened her?

Heart pounding Melody listened in the dark silence of her room, but nothing could be heard except the ticking of the alarm clock on her bedside table. Then Melody noticed something else.

The ring from Mr Clue, lying next to the alarm clock. It was shining!

First Melody believed that their senses were playing tricks on her, so she rubbed her eyes properly. And when that did not help, she pinched her arm.

But the light remained.

Melody crawled to the bedside to look at the stone more closely. Despite the light coming from the ring she could feel no heat from it at all. She held it easily in her hand. So she had not been deceived: The ring had actually lit up at the shop and then its light had been extinguished. But why was it shining again?

Strange ...

For a moment Melody thought about waking Granny Fay. But she dismissed the thought quickly, not wanting to worry or disturb her grandmother. Did the mysterious voice have something to do with the light? Melody shivered. Carefully she put the ring back on the bedside table and lay down again, but of course was not going to think of sleeping. Again and again she blinked at the glowing blue stone.

"Melody!"

"Yes?" She was startled.

Had she dropped back to sleep again briefly and fallen back into her dream? Or had she actually heard the voice? It seemed to have come from outside ...

Melody rapidly swung out of bed. It was cold in her room and it was freezing in her nightgown. Nevertheless, she darted to the window and peered out. While almost all of the rooms for the tourists had views of the sea, her own room and her Granny's looked out onto the land. In the moonlight, Melody could see the hills behind the house, near the edge of the forest and ...

"That's impossible!" She exclaimed.

What was that over there, over the ridge of the hill? Was that a blue glow? Melody rushed to the bedside table and pulled out the ring. It shone more intensely, and ever more as she approached the window with it in her hand. What did it mean?

Melody knew that on the other side of the hill there were the remains of an ancient Celtic stone circle. She had heard many creepy stories about it. She shivered, and at the same time felt a thrill of excitement. Her curiosity was piqued.

At this moment, the ring became dull again.

"Hey," complained Melody and shook the ring like a torch whose batteries had become weak.

But it did not help.

And outside behind the hills there was only the dark night sky again. What on Earth was going on?

Melody stayed awake that night. An answer had to be found.