

# Kind Friends and Death at Dawn

*Willie Keane*

BARNEY HACKETT was a bachelor who lived alone among the hills of South Leitrim. His income was minimal—a few store cattle and his wage from helping local farmers in the busy seasons. His hunting and fishing ability was legendary; he could bring down a hare at forty yards with his blackthorn and fish seemed to flock to his bait!

His cousin Mary Kane lived across the hill from Barney and he visited regularly. Mary was the life and soul of the party with her singing, step dancing and lilt. On reaching Mary's house she heard the opening gate and immediately commenced her favourite lilt. Barney, for his part, danced to her music on the doorstep, a fitting reunion for two lifelong soul mates.

He made his weekly journey to visit his friend Mary Costello at Drumliffen cross-roads on Friday nights. The one drawback for Barney was passing the "Little Wood" right beside Sheemore caves. The wood was reputed to be haunted and Barney had heard and believed implicitly the numerous ghostly sightings and weird happenings which nightly passersby experienced.

Often when stories were told in olden times around the fire at night, a likely start would be thus: "I was coming home late one cold and frosty night from visiting my uncle at Gowel and, as usual I came by the back of Sheemore". This road skirts a long deep valley stretching from the Gowel road to the gates of Keonbrook, with the woods and caves of Sheemore rising high on its western flank. Drumliffen Glebe, where the hazel and alder grow dense, presses close to the road and encloses the Eastern side. Out

in the valley, within a stones throw of James McWeeney's home, is Dooloughan, the small "bottomless" lake abounding in pike, roach and eels. This enclosed scenic area becomes, on a dark night to the traveller on foot, dark and brooding, conducive to ghostly thoughts.

My story is of a time when people were obliged to travel on foot if the journey was really necessary. Rambling houses were everywhere and frequently full, for card playing, stories and occasional feats of strength. The events occurred in the area described and on the roadway which separates the "valley" from the Keonbrook estate. This wooded area, dark and mysterious, has had its ghostly encounters, which have been recounted again and again around warm hearths.

Barney made a visit to his friend Mary Costello on the night of New Year's Eve and, as always, waited to welcome in the New Year before starting for home. When he arrived Mary had a special New Year's meal almost ready. She was expecting Barney and as usual he didn't disappoint. Mary was known for her hens and fine fat chickens. Tonight the aroma of chicken soup and its ingredients filled the kitchen.

"Go mbeirimid beo ag an am seo arís," said Barney as they sat down to eat. They said grace, being of a generation who were grateful to God for his bounty.

They ate in silence, each absorbed in their own thoughts and appreciation of the wholesome food. Rice and a mug of tea completed the meal. Then Barney talked of the many times he had visited his cousin Mary on New Year's Eve. At midnight they recited the rosary and

prayed for departed friends. Mary checked the weather, while Barney prepared for his longish journey back to Sheffield.

His friend knew the routine so she put on her heavy coat and walked with Barney past Keonbrook gates and on to the Little Wood. The night was dry but chilly with a slight frost. Mary was aware of Barney's beliefs and fears, but she was enjoying the short walk after their meal and her special treat, a hot whiskey for herself and Barney. Barney seemed in good spirits but unusually quiet.

They reached the small wood and Mary encouraged her friend by wishing him a happy New Year and safe home. She would wait until he was on the far side of the trees and then he was on his own. To be helpful she occasionally called out "Are you by yet Barney?"

While this was happening Michael Keaveney was at Keonbrook gates on his way home from a card game. Hearing the voices up ahead he was not surprised, but knew exactly the situation. He stepped a short way into the avenue so as not to intrude on the drama or Mary's return. This happened quickly—the lady didn't tarry, but passed on home humming a tune without a care in world.

Fear was an emotion Michael rarely felt. Now, as he walked past the ghostly wood and the ambush and dual scenes, his mind was not on the ghostly but on the grim reality of being taken hostage by the soldiers as they withdrew from "Sheemore Ambush" in 1921. He was a young man working on his brother's farm. When the firing ceased he started to milk the cows. Three Crossley Tenders coming from the

ambush came to a halt. Two soldiers jumped from the front lorry and ordered him to go outside and get on the lorry. They carried guns and had grim expressions. Michael moved fast and took up a position he was shown, standing against the cab of the front vehicle. Two more lorries stood close to the front one. As Michael was climbing on he saw six soldiers sitting facing in the second vehicle and,

on their knees lay a wounded man, bandages on his head, with a seventh soldier resting the head on a greatcoat on his knees. The atmosphere was tense with guns everywhere and soldiers on the alert.

Then Michael knew real fear: he could see the wounded man—Lieutenant Wilson—was either dead or dying, and

maybe he would be next if the circumstances changed. Happily he survived after going on a Crossley Tender to Carrick on Shannon, being returned and taken to Kilnagross, where he was released. The story is true and was told to me by Michael Keaveney himself. He was a quiet working man who, lived happily alone beside his brother's home, at the foot of Sheemore.

## LEITRIM'S MUSIC CONNECTIONS

*Michael Birmingham & Bláithín Gallagher*

### Kodaline

The connection—Padraic Prendergast who lives outside of Mohill is the father of Mark Prendergast, a member of Kodaline.

Originally known as 21 Demands, Their first single "Give Me A Minute" made Irish chart history by being the first independently released song to reach number one in 2007. The Dublin based rock band changed their name to Kodaline in 2011 and became a quartet in 2012. In this year, the BBC nominated the band in the poll for 'The Sound Of 2013'.

Their album "In A Perfect World" was released in 2013. "All I Want" from the album was used as background music for 'Googles : 2012 year in review' and also featured in an episode of 'Grey's Anatomy' and The 'Vampire Diaries'. In addition to this the song was used in the 2014 film 'The Fault In Our Stars'. Other songs from the album "Pray" and "High Hopes" are featured in trailers for the upcoming films 'Horns' and 'Love, Rosie'. They won the EBBA People's Choice award in 2013, an award also won by The Script in 2009. Every year the European Border Breakers Awards recognise the success of ten emerging artists or groups who reached audiences outside their own countries with their first internationally released album in the past year.

### Little Green Cars

The connection—Adrienne O'Regan (nee Birmingham), formerly of Mohill. Her son Adam founded and is a member of Little Green Cars.

The Indie rock band Little Green Cars trace their roots back to a former band, The Revolts, founded in the mid 2000s in Dublin, Ireland. Adam O'Regan and Donagh Seaver-O'Leary (as well as former LGC member Ustav Lal) played with this band which subsequently grew on to become Little Green Cars upon its dissolution. With the addition of band members Stevie Appleby, Dylan Lynch and Faye O'Rourke the line-up was complete. Since signing professional terms with Island/Glassnote records, the band has toured America and the UK extensively, released three singles and supported Jake Bugg on his UK tour. The US portion of the 2013 tour included a live performance of their single "Harper Lee" on Late Night With Jimmy Fallon. In addition this song was memorably featured on Ireland's Late Late Show with a full choir backing. The 2013 album 'Absolute Zero' was a number one hit in Ireland and the band has played at major international festivals including California's Coachella and Chicago's Lollapalooza. In addition, the anthemic "The John Wayne" has been a staple part of their concerts to date. The band are currently writing and recording new material for their second album.

### The Strypes

The Connection—Ross Farrelly's mum is Noelle Canning from Cloone!

The Strypes are an Irish four piece blues influenced rock band that hails from Cavan. Band members are Ross Farrelly (lead vocals/harmonica), Josh McClorey (lead guitar/vocals), Peter O'Hanlon (bass guitar/harmonica) and Evan Walsh (drums). In 2010, the then unknown band debuted on that year's edition of The Late Late Toy Show, leading to the launch of their career.



The band ages range from 17 to 19 years with their music showing a remarkable maturity for such a young group. Sir Elton John was so taken by their sound he signed them to his Rocket Music Management company. Subsequently after several labels chased the band they signed with Mercury records.

The band have grown a huge fan base in Ireland have been very well received abroad in the UK, France, The Netherlands and beyond. Their debut album Snapshot reached number 2 in Ireland and number 5 in the U.K. They have also built a fan base in the U.S where in March 2014, The Strypes played their biggest U.S TV appearance to date. They performed "What A Shame" on The Late Show with David Letterman. Letterman enthusiastically ends the show with "The Strypes—that's all you need to know!"