

Bean Nighe
by
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FADE-IN:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

ALINE BURRELL (28) sits up in bed. She GASPS - fights to breathe between contractions.

A middle-aged hand reaches out for hers.

JINNY (O.S.)

That's it, dear hon. Just a few moments now. Let me get the washcloth to cool you down.

Jinny shuffles to the table.

Her pudgy hands grab a towel, basin and pitcher. She sets these on the floor, and takes Aline's hand again.

JINNY

Now, push.

Aline's SCREAMS can be heard, even outside the cottage.

EXT. COUNTRY STREAM - SCOTLAND - CONTINUOUS

A WOMAN stands by a stream, in a hooded green cloak.

Beyond her loom rolling hills. Few houses dot this landscape. It's mostly pasture, and a few lone sheep.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

Here in Alba, there is a legend. It is called the Bean Nighe. Washer woman, in our native Scottish tongue.

The woman holds scraps of fabric in her hands.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

We have been called other things, in other lands. In Ireland, they call us Bean Sidthe or Banshee.

The lady in green washes clothes in the brook.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

No matter the name, the tales tell of a woman in green who is an omen of death. She makes her appearance near streams, washing the clothes of those soon to die. And collecting their souls when they're ready to fly.

The fabric waves in the current like a flag.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE WOMAN IN GREEN AND ALINA

Water trickles from rocks, further upstream.

Jinny pours water into the basin.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

There are few left who remember the legend.

The lady in green lifts the fabric, still dripping.

Sweat pours down Aline's face.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

They move away from the countryside. Down to the towns - and an easier life.

The lady bends down, as if in prayer. Curls of red puff from the clothes.

Jinny's hands wring out the washcloth. Drops of red drip into the basin.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

Every year, the land grows wilder. Some of us stay. We enjoy the peace.

Alina lies down with glazed eyes and rests.

BEAN NIGHE (V.O.)

We cherish our connection to the land. We're born in the countryside. We die here, too. As I did. Over 28 years ago.

Alina SCREAMS again. Louder than before.

EXT. THE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Two men react to the SCREAM with equal amounts of distress.

RICHARD MCKENNA (60) pivots in his chair.

DOUG BURRELL (30) steps towards the entrance - stops when Jinny appears at the door.

DOUG

Let me in. She needs me.

JINNY

Let her be. She needs her rest.

DOUG

It's been eight hours!

JINNY

And it'll be several more. These things are never easy. Ask the old man there - he knows how it is.

She pats Doug on the shoulder as she passes.

JINNY

Let her sleep. While I say a few words to the worried father.

Jinny sits down facing Richard, and lowers her voice.

JINNY

I'm worried, as well. It's been too long.

RICHARD

(anxious)

You're the midwife. Bonnie Craig, down the ways - wasn't she in labor for over twelve?

JINNY

Yes, but this is different. The baby isn't moving right.

She puts a soft hand on bony fingers.

JINNY

I don't wish to alarm you. But I'm getting the same feeling I had with your Lizzie. You need to be prepared for the worse.

RICHARD

Then we need to get her to a proper hospital!

Richard struggles to stand. Jinny holds him down.

JINNY

The trip would kill her. Stay here with Douglas. I'll let you know if anything changes.

Jinny enters the cottage and closes the door firmly behind her. Doug swings on Richard.

DOUG
What did she say?

RICHARD
(smiles thinly)
That everything is going as expected. And
we've a long time to wait.

Richard hobbles to the edge of the porch. He looks out at
the countryside - the sun low in the sky.

RICHARD
Poor bastard.

Richard squints towards the stream. There's a figure
there, in a flowing green robe.

He swallows hard and steps off the porch.

DOUG
Where are you going?

RICHARD
To check on something. Stay here.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - EVENING

Richard crosses the pasture. His movements slow, for fear
of falling. His gaze never leaves the figure in green.

RICHARD
I must be blind. It can't be.

EXT. COUNTRY STREAM - CONTINUOUS

Richard stops near the figure. Close enough to touch,
though he doesn't try.

The robe covers the stranger from head to toe. The
garment is hooded; the face hidden. The body beneath
appears to be female.

She scrubs clothes together with slender, old hands.

RICHARD
Winding sheets, aren't they? You're
washing shrouds.

She wrings out fabric. Blood curls in the water.

RICHARD

You're Bean Nighe. Aren't you? I saw you years ago, when you took my Lizzie. The exact same robe, in this very spot. I thought you were a dream then. But you're not one, now.

The hooded figure rolls the fabric over the rocks.

RICHARD

Deny it, damn you! Tell me I don't speak the truth!

No response from the lady in green.

RICHARD

Why won't you speak?!

BEAN NIGHE

Would it make any difference?

Richard stares at the clothing in the water.

RICHARD

I can't tell the size. Are you here for Alina? Or the child?

BEAN NIGHE

Perhaps both. Only the fates may choose.

RICHARD

Take me instead. Alina is young. She has a husband who loves her. And she's wanted a little one for so very long. I'm an old man. I have no one left - except for her.

The figure lifts wet clothing, tucks it into a basket.

RICHARD

I begged you last time from afar, when you came for Lizzie. When she was pregnant with Alina. Then, you at least let the little one be. Spirit, please hear me now. Take my daughter, and you'll have torn out the second half of my heart.

Richard's face turns red with rage.

RICHARD

I won't let you have either one!

BEAN NIGHE

You have no say in the matter. Nor do I.

She lifts back her hood and looks upon Richard with unveiled eyes.

She's an old woman. Her features hint at the beauty she must have had, in her prime.

RICHARD

Lizzie?!?

BEAN NIGHE

You've grown old. But your eyes are the same. I've missed you, Richard.

RICHARD

It can't be you. Can it?

BEAN NIGHE

Of all people, can you truly ask me that question? You, who know the stories best - and have told so many tales to the children in town? It's we, who die in childbirth, who must wander the earth collecting souls to the end of our natural days. Did you think I would be immune?

A SCREAM comes from the cottage. Distance makes it faint.

RICHARD

You can't take your daughter. Your own grandchild.

BEAN NIGHE

I have no choice.

She looks at Richard wistfully.

BEAN NIGHE

All these years, and you still have no-one?

RICHARD

I never remarried. Never wanted to.

A tear runs down his cheek. A grin plays across Bean Nighe's face.

BEAN NIGHE

You were never an easy man to live with. Perhaps it was for the best.

RICHARD
 (smiles sadly)
 Liz, it must be you. After all these
 years, your tongue's still sharp.

He holds her face in shaking hands.

RICHARD
 For so long, I've asked God to let me set
 eyes on you, one last time. But now, I
 don't think I can bear the price.

Another SCREAM from the cottage.

RICHARD
 How long do they have?

BEAN NIGHE
 Strange. I cannot see clearly. The fates
 should have told their tale by now.

Bean Nighe reaches a pale arm into the water.

BEAN NIGHE
 I feel cold.

Richard looks at his wife. Then at the stream. There's a
 hint of amusement on his features.

BEAN NIGHE
 It's not the water. I haven't felt pain,
 nor heat nor cold since the day I died.

Her eyes search his face.

BEAN NIGHE
 Or fear, either. I feel it now.

She crumples to the ground, body lost in flowing robes.

RICHARD
 Lizzie!!!!

Richard holds Lizzie in his arms.

RICHARD
 You feel real enough to me, now.

BEAN NIGHE
 (whispers)
 Richard, I feel my time has come. I
 couldn't read the fates, because they're
 done with me now. My time is ending.

RICHARD

Alina. She never got to know her mother.

BEAN NIGHE

Perhaps it's best she never does.

Richard looks up at the sky. Tears stream down his face.

RICHARD

I can't lose her twice! What have I done that's so wrong, that you leave me with nothing?

BEAN NIGHE

You do have something, Richard. A daughter and a grandson, who need you to protect them.

(pause)

When I am gone, there will be no-one here to collect.

A baby's CRY issues from the cottage.

Richard looks up, beams with relief.

He looks back to Liz. The smile slips from his face: he's holding empty air.

Another CRY claims Richard's attention. The sound mingles with the WAIL of a Banshee, lost in the wind.

Richard stands up, heads for the cottage.

A green robe floats unnoticed in the brook. It dances gracefully in the water.

The stream carries it towards a wooded area.

It disappears from sight.

A last flash of it is hidden by wind-swept leaves - which land and float on the stream.

FINAL FADE-OUT: