

## BULL RUNNING FOR GIRLS

caul was said to protect the bearer from death by drowning. Brid had it in a small box on her dressing table; she had never given it away. Why should she? A few sailors had offered a fortune for its protection but she had never parted with it. Brid had meant to give it to her fiancé on their wedding day. Oh why hadn't she given it to him before?

A marriage had been arranged and then put to one side like the wedding dress that hung in her mother's closet. Brid had no need of it anymore. She had been going to marry Benjamin Eskell but he had been lost to the sea a few months earlier. Brid's mother had been muttering on that Brid should have married Tom; Ben's brother, except that Tom was unhelpfully married already.

A cold grey mist crept in from the sea towards the huddled houses of the small village and then wound its way up each street, first to the right along the one terrace, then after the length of it to the left and along again, turning at each bend like a sea dragon searching for a lair, or a lost soul reaching for a forgotten memory. Brid followed the trail to the top of the hill, to the little cottage she shared with her mother. All the way along she was thinking about her lost lover and how she longed to be reunited with him again. Even death held no fear for her, she only wanted reunion. What could be wrong with that?

Once inside the cottage she nodded to her mother, who sat by the fire knitting a jumper. Each jumper served a two fold purpose, the first was obviously for warmth, the second in that each village had a unique pattern. It was how they identified and claimed their dead from the sea. Wives even put mistakes in the garment so that it was particular to a family. When Brid's fiancée had been found, his face had been bitten away by fish and the pattern had proven that he was of their village of Bay Town. Brid could not look at that jumper.

"I'm off to bed."

"That's all you seem to want to do these days Brid. You go to your room and you never talk to me."

"There's nothing much to talk about mother."

"You're young; there will be plenty for you to do in the

The Caul Bearer

future. Sit down here with me Brid. I've hardly talked to anyone all day."

"I need to change out of these wet clothes."

"I suppose," responded her mother. "They look dry enough to me already—where have you been?"

"To the Bay Hotel."

Helen gave her an honest stare that was full of reproach. "We can't afford to squander our money Brid."

Brid felt so wound up, so wanting to let go of her anger.

"Afford, we can't afford anything mother. I'm sick of the work, sick of the poverty. I couldn't afford to lose a man, but I did, and I know you want me to find another one to replace him, so we can afford things."

"It's not my fault that the men in this family either go away or die in the sea," replied her mother.

"No, it's not your fault at all—but if you hadn't driven father to work harder all the time and moaned at him whenever he gave you any kindness perhaps he wouldn't have left."

"He might come back!"

"We both know that will never happen, just as my Ben won't be coming back either!"

Brid's mother was knitting furiously at this point as if every stab of the needle would make a hole in her worries. "There's some fried fish on the table," she muttered in a begrudging tone.

Brid gave her mother a look of disdain, took one of the candles from the shelf next to the fireplace, lit it from the main candle near her mother and left the room. She was tired of fighting, fighting her mother, the cold winter, and her grief.

Her room smelt of the sea and Brid had found some old bits of fishing nets and hung them from the beams. Faded ribbons and cradled mementos, love notes and tokens from the previous year, hung in mid air as if waiting on the unseen hand of her lover to present them once more. That would never happen again Brid knew. She wondered if she would ever find anything interesting to hang in the nets again. She noticed dark pools of water over in the centre of the wooden boards and the curtain