

Jinny the Witch – story

Retold by Sue Woolley

Have you ever wondered who Jinny the Witch was? Well, she was a real person and I'm going to tell you about her....

Her real name was Joney Lowney and she lived about 300 years ago in a cottage on the Ballaglonney back road (near where the Mount Murray Country Club is today) and she had six children.

Now Joney was poor and she used to go around the neighbourhood begging for food.

'Can you spare a drop of buttermilk and some bread?' she would ask. Sometimes, the farmer's wife would give her something, but other times she was shooed away empty handed:

'Go away – we don't want the likes of you around here', they would say.

Soon it was noted though that bad luck often fell on those who had refused her:

'The cows would dry up

The horse would go lame

The hens wouldn't lay

And Joney got the blame'

But Joney was also known for doing good deeds. She gathered herbs in her apron and made potions with them. Farmers would come to her cottage to ask for a cure or a charm for a sick animal and she always obliged. And once, a farmer and his wife, came to her in desperation. Their baby son had fallen ill and the doctor had given him no hope. Joney went with them to their house and spent the night tending to the child. Next morning he was right as rain. Her lived to a ripe old age, married and had 12 children!

With each curse or cure, Joney's reputation grew.

One night, a traveller was making his way along the Ballaglonney road towards Union Mills. It was getting dark, the wind was getting up and it began to rain. He knew he should find shelter for the night. He walked on until he saw a little cottage, half hidden by undergrowth, with a dim candle burning in the window. He made his way through the nettles and brambles until he reached the door.

Half hoping there would be no-one at home, he gave three timorous knocks.....The door creaked open and there stood Joney.

'Come in out of the storm', she said, ushering him into the kitchen where a low fire was glowing in the hearth, casting shadows on the whitewashed walls. Joney offered the man some supper and made up a bed on the floor.

'You can sleep there – but you must sleep with your face to the wall,' she instructed him.

The traveller climbed under the covers, weary after his long walk. All he could hear was the soft snoring of the children and the mewing of a cat at the window.....

As he drifted off he saw strange shadows on the wall. He fancied he saw Joney stepping stealthily into a big basket on the floor, he heard the door creak open.... and with a Whoosh! the basket, with Joney in it, flew out of the door.

Thinking he was dreaming, the man was soon asleep and he slept soundly til dawn when he heard the door creak open and Joney return with a Whoosh! He peeped over the covers and saw her step out of the basket, which was full to the brim with fresh herring.

Soon the story was all over the neighbourhood. Joney's reputation as a witch, able to get her own way by magic, began to spread. She seemed to enjoy her fame. Another traveller told how he was on his way home one dark night and seemed to sense someone's presence.

'Is there anybody there?' he whispered.

'Yes, it is I, the Great Witch!', cackled Joney.

But she went a step too far when she upset one of the most powerful men in the Island....

She had gone along to the Bishop's Mill at Ballaughton, Saddle Road, Braddan where the Bishop's miller, William Corrin, was distributing sacks of flour to the poor. Joney had gone along for her share, but when she saw the poor quality of the grain being used, she rebuked the miller in front of a large crowd of people.

'You should be giving the best to the poor, not that rubbish!' she shrieked. At those words, the mill machinery stopped dead and no-one could get it going again – ever.

Joney was arrested and charged with practising witchcraft. She stood trial before Bishop Wilson and other members of the clergy. She was found guilty and up in Peel Castle for 14 days. She was also fined the sum of £3 and was ordered to stand at the Market Cross of the four main towns – Castletown, Peel, Ramsey and Douglas, dressed in a long white sheet with a notice pinned to her chest saying 'For Practices in Sorcery and Witchcraft' in big letters.

Her punishment might sound harsh, but in fact Joney got off very lightly. If she had lived in England or Scotland she could have been hanged or burnt at the stake.

After her release, she returned home and as far as we know lived quietly ever after.

Now to finish – a Riddle:

On my head I wear a hat,

My eyes are shiny like a cat,

My teeth are pointy, like a shark

And I glow gently in the dark

What Am I?