

Blood Pudding

by Rachel Jennings

Not even Welsh or Scotch-Irish as lore would paint me, I was an Appalachian Sassenach* who knew nothing of Celts or Catholics but entered Irish studies on a whim at The University of Texas. After the Galway conference on nationalism and outsiders, my companions and I traveled east by train in time for breakfast at a Dublin diner. I craved the blood pudding that came with two fried eggs, fried potatoes, and pinto beans. The round patties reminded me of the breakfast sausage, Tennessee Pride, that my mother used to serve on melamine plates. Crisp, savory, the plump disks melted on my tongue,

enlivened me after a sleepless night on a railway car.

Inheritors of Vatican II, Fighting Irish Catholic schools, Clancy Brothers rebel songs, and melodious Irish names that were one-way tickets to Ph.D.'s in postcolonial theory, my fellow travelers were aghast—made nauseous by fried blood that they knew to be even worse than kidneys or intestines. Disgusting. Ugh. I could hardly hear their wails over Patsy Cline's "Crazy" keening+ on the radio. Poking a morsel with my fork, I only wished for a bigger portion. By now, the milky tea had gone straight through me, so I stood to find the bathroom.

When I returned, a stack of dark patties lay piled on my plate. I heard my friends laughing: "She will eat them." And I did. Not much of a proposal to finish off five or six modestly sized slices of blood pudding.

*Anglo-Saxon; gringa.
+wailing to express grief.



Rhiannon -for Sid Hall



Non-sexist language and feminist exegesis of Judges or Genesis did not—could not—assuage my anger.

Weeping fits in church meetings, meltdowns in the parking lot, polemics on Facebook and Twitter were my only weapons. How I burned.

A pantheon of preacher men had ascended singly as on wings into the pulpit. I never saw a woman.

Nothing reached me. Nothing worked to quell the rage, newly aflame, in this middle-aged, menopausal self.

Fathers, brothers, clergy had betrayed me.

How could I have known, Reverend Jones, Methodist druid healer

of thinning black hair, that in your mild-mannered pastoral wisdom, you would post a YouTube video of Stevie Nicks' appearance on *Midnight Special* in '76?

Thank you, Reverend Jones, Facebook friend who has fixed his mind to another time.

In gauzy black scarves and feathered hair, Stevie sings about the old Welsh witch, Rhiannon.

Her contortions are Pentecostal, her shrieks fire-and-brimstone. She gives all she has and is. Her eyes melt inward.

A rustle of wings, a bird that flies. I am taken into the air.

*Ruah. Ruah: The Hebrew word for breath or spirit.

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