A powerful tale of love and freedom; beautiful, heartbreaking and historic: Of a poet and a perfidious woman, an aristocrat and a great woman, of a people and freedom.

The Fifth Field

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THE FIFTH FIELD

by

Kenneth A. MacIver

Chapter VIII

"Courage, boy, you're a soldier now."

Maccan could never eat tunafish again. The sandwiches distributed by his mother had the oily odor of fish and mayonaise and it made him gag. He wanted to flee, to run from the room where his father lay in the coffin, hands folded on his chest with rosary beads laced in his fingers. "Doesn't he look grand," said the women from the hospital where his mother worked. But he didn't. His father lay in a cheap blue suit, sleeves too short for the long arms that had been so strong. When Maccan looked at the white parchment that had been skin and the sunken, rouged face that had once smiled and frowned, he knew that whatever the thing was that lay in the wooden box, it was not his father. He wanted to walk down by the shore where his father had taken him and look at the little waves. He wanted to get away from perfumed women in dark dresses and wide-brimmed hats and the few men who stood in the kitchen by the icebox, shaking their heads and opening the top lid to see if bottles were inside. And there was the gaunt man in the gray suit that stood by the coffin, silently, chewing his lip, while another man, fat with a badge on his lapel, stared at him. The thin man, called the major, made him uneasy. Once the major glanced at him and he had the feeling that he too forced himself to be there. The men in the kitchen found bottles of ale in the top of the icebox by the ice and began to drink. The women in dark dresses and big hats chatted and nodded and one gray haired lady with a black shawl that Maccan did not know made the stairs shake as she heavily made her way to the tenement. She walked into the room, knelt before the coffin and began to moan and rock back and forth. No one paid attention to her, but her persistent wail made the hair on the back of Maccan's neck rise. She stopped at last and ate a tuna fish sandwich.

Father Gaumont came, took off his black coat and hat, wiped perspiration from his shining head and spoke to Danu with a strong French accent. The priest pulled a long purple stole from his pocket, draped it over his neck and dangled a large rosary. He kissed the crucifix on the beads and murmured "Ave Maria" and women dropped awkwardly to their knees. Maccan's mother took his hand and told him to kneel. Father Gaumont said the first prayer in Latin, switched to French, looked around and then settled into a lingua franca, consisting of a medley of French-Canadian English. The woman who had wailed chanted loudly, "Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death" and when Maccan looked at her painted face, he saw a slight smile.

The small white church on the hill was cold and most of the pews were empty. The major was there, sitting stiffly near the back, and the woman that had keened knelt near the front. A few women from the hospital, dressed in white, sat in the middle pews and scattered here and there, solitary men with sad faces sat quietly and studied the stained glass windows and the three cast iron light fixtures that hung down from the rafters. Father Gaumont walked slowly to the altar, knelt, rose and began to sin in a voice that stunned Maccan with its volume and pure tone. The priest's voice filled the damp church as he chanted the Latin with closed eyes and shining head. For a time confusion and pain seeped from Maccan and he tuned to his mother. She sat stiffly, hands clenched, fingers forming an arch with the set look on her face that had not changed since the police chief had thundered up the stairs and pounded on the door. Lines creased her forehead, her pale lips remained rigid and her eyes had darkened and looked straight ahead. Maccan had not seen her weep but something about the taut mask of her face and her stiff posture made him uneasy and he watched her as if she were a stranger. Once as he studied her face he felt fear. She had gone to a place above him that he could not reach. He turned to the casket and noticed several strands of red hair protruding from under the lid where his father's head rested and he thought he would faint and took deep breaths. Father Gaumont came down from the altar and stood beside the casket and sprinkled holy water. The priest said something in Latin and Maccan's eyes filled with tears and he fought the urge to go to the wooden box and tear open the lid. He stared at the strands of red hair and could not understand why the large man in the casket did not rise up, laugh and walk out of the church. He would be off with the major to the saloon and drink and Maccan wished that some late night he would hear the heavy footsteps on the stairs and smell the sweet-sick odor of drink when the door opened. He peeked at his mother. She stared straight ahead. When the priest turned and said, "Requiem aeternam dona eis," her lips moved and she formed the word "rest." But he, Maccan Foley, would not rest and he looked round the church and it seemed that he dreamed some dreadful disjointed thing and he was out of place, lost and impotent.

At the cemetery, beside the lake, Danu stood alone by the grave and peered down at the casket. The others had stepped back and two gravediggers attempted to be inconspicuous as they leaned on their shovels and watched from behind a grove of white pines. Maccan stood behind his mother and would not look into the pit and when he scanned the faces around him his knees trembled. He had read about death and funerals in his books, heroes mourned and omens in the sky, but he saw no omens. The pines appeared the same as ever. He heard no strange sounds; nothing unusual moved overhead. Just another day, it was and a box went into the ground. His mother whispered something he could not understand, but he recognized the old Irish lament.

"Ochone." That was in a poem somewhere and he heard her say his father's name. "Rory," she whispered and then she turned, lifted her head and took Maccan by the hand. Her face remained set. Father Gaumont patted her on the shoulder, turned to Maccan and said, "Maccan Foley, you are the man of the family now. You must be brave." The priest extended his long delicate hand, patted Maccan on the head and said, "I will make you into an acolyte. You will be an altar boy."

The good thing about being an altar boy was that he left the house and walked up the hill past the library and to the church before Fee Fee, Budsey and Rodney began their morning patrol. The bad thing was dragging himself out of bed and down the stairs and to the cold church. Father Gaumont would let him in, pat his head and say in his French-English that he was the best boy in the Latin. The senior server was named Jerry and with his dark curly hair and graceful movements, he flowed round the altar, bowing and kneeling and pouring the red wine with the grace of a dancer. Maccan stumbled and grew dizzy with the smell of burning candles and thick incense on an empty stomach. When Father Gaumont was not there, Jerry chewed the candles and gulped altar wine while Maccan struggled to get into his cassock and white surplice. But the words of the mass seemed to float in the air and the French priest closed his eyes and gestured gracefully to the two altar boys and the three old women in the pews. Maccan looked up at the wrinkles on the back of the priest's head and struggled with his responses.

"Itroibo ad altare Dei," intoned Father Gaumont and Maccan slowly formed the reply, "Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam."

When he discovered, a long time later, what the words meant, he felt their beauty. "I will go in unto the altar of God." "The God who brings joy to my youth." The French priest never took the time to translate. For the frail Frenchman with the golden voice, it was the sound alone that mattered and there were mornings when Maccan served alone and the sound of Father Gaumont's sweet voice swept through the cold church and time and the world stood still.

Another activity shoved the secular from him. Long hours in the library bent over books, turning pages, struggling to look act the volumes that Marie Sway pulled out of dusty shelves occupied Maccan's free time. He read a story of an Irish warrior and of a woman who loved him. Ceadach was his name and he shared the adventures of a band of heroes called the Fianna. Ceadach was a friend of the mighty Fionn mac Cumhail. He couldn't pronounce the names and the story puzzled him. Two warriors quarreled over a girl and Fionn awarded her to Ceadach. But there was a price. The rival, Lon Dubh, received the strange compensation of a free, undefended blow at Ceadach. They sailed away on a quest and Fionn promised the girl to show a

black sail if Ceadach fell. On the way home, Lon Dubh struck his blow and the two young men fought to the death. Fionn failed to show the black sail and the girl was heartbroken at the sight of her lover's body. Yet, the story did not end in this way. The woman had seen a beautiful white bird circle over the form of its dead mate and the bird had been restored to life. Could there be, Maccan wondered, some magic, was death truly final or could a white bird know the secret of restoration. In the story the girl copied the movements of the bird and Ceadach came to life. Maccan sat for a long time and reflected about the story. He remembered some birds circling over the graves on the morning of the funeral. And there had been a black dog sitting by some trees, but he had seen no white bird, only a few dark pigeons. He put the book down and looked out of the library window. The book intrigued him and he thought there was something he did not understand, that there was magic about death, a mystery and perhaps a white bird held the key.

He read another story about the banshees who wailed at the departure of members of certain families. There had been no female spirit to wail at the death of Rory Foley. And then he thought about the unkempt old woman who had knelt and keened before the body. He returned the book to Marie Sway, who stamped it with a rubber stamp attached to a yellow pencil so he could take it out. He watched her open the desk drawer and pull out the brown bag. He could see the bottle and he knew the nature of the contents. The librarian's breath carried the scent of strong, sweet whiskey. He knew it well, but the manner in which she drank with a sort of casual dignity showed little resemblance to what he had seen at home; yet it troubled him.

When he walked up the hill and past the church, he was still thinking about banshees, white birds and magic and did not see Fee Fee, Budsey and Rodney. Rodney stuck his leg out and Budsey pushed. Maccan tumbled down like grass to a sickle. His glasses flew off and he looked up at three blurred faces, but he could make out the cavities of open mouths and hear shrieks of laughter. His hand touched the glasses and he rammed them on his nose and then turned his head and looked down the hill towards the bridge. No large redhead, walking or weaving on his way home, could be seen. For a moment he forgot his plight but his attackers fully mocked him and knocked him down. While they chortled he jumped to his feet and began run up the hill. The three boys came after him, throwing rocks and laughing. He made to the churchyard before they caught him.

They circled him, panting and pushing, and thin cotton stockings fell from their knickers and revealed scratched and dirty legs. They shouted back and forth in a shrill council of war and then Fee Fee picked up a stick, waved it and the other two took turns, grasping and waving it over their heads. Maccan watched them place their hands on the club as if they were playing ball and choosing up on a bat with clenched fists to see who would hit first.

Rodney extended a back thumbnail and claimed the privilege of striking the first blow and Budsey doffed his cap and spoke to Maccan, "Yous take off your glasses," and Fee Fee laughed and volunteered to hold them. Puzzled by the sudden outburst of chivalry, Maccan paused and then handed over his glasses.

"We'll do like a regular boxing match," said Fee Fee and Budsey agreed.

"Like the one we saw at the carnival."

"Two referees," said Fee Fee and Maccan waited. He wanted to run but the warriors in the books never ran away and besides, he was surrounded. He struggled to find an alternative, tried to speak but they laughed at him.

"Bong," shouted Budsey, "That's the bell," and Rodney posed like a carnival boxer and then punched Maccan in the eye and knocked him to the ground. Fee Fee began to count and Maccan stood up at the count of seven. He stumbled lifted his hands and moved in a circle. He couldn't keep his mouth closed and he began to pant and sway. Budsey shouted "Bong" again and Rodney stepped back for a consultation with his comrades. Maccan blinked and Budsey said the awful word again and again Rodney hit the eye, the same one, the left eye and it began to swell and fill with tears. A blow and a push knocked Maccan to the turf and he sat back while Budsey counted and Fee Fee said if he didn't get up by the count of ten, the contest was over and Maccan would have to fight Budsey. Maccan got up.

Minutes or hours went by; time dragged and so did Maccan's arms. They became dead weight and he could barely lift them, but Rodney seemed to have lost his appetite for battle. "Do you give up," he said when he hit the eye but Maccan ground his teeth and said that he would never give up. But his arms would not stay up and he had difficulty seeing the blurred figure that weaved shadowlike before him and surprisingly he realized that Rodney had lost his zest for battle. "Do you give up?" Rodney asked again and his voice rose and he looked at his two comrades who had turned to each other to discuss some of the finer points of the Marquis of Queensbury rules. "Give up and I won't hurt you nomore," Rodney's voice pleaded, but Maccan was too tired, too weak to do anything but stand, feet spread apart, gasping and refusing to surrender. He wanted to cry and remembered something he had read somewhere, "Death before surrender." Where had he read those words?

Maccan pondered and Rodney lurched forward and swung again and hit the eye again. The sting infuriated and with a loud cry, Maccan threw his right fist and hit his large tormenter in the nose. Rodney stepped back, touched his nose and blinked. The tall boy began to whimper and he and Maccan dragged their feet sideways and warily watched each other. Maccan did his viewing through one eye and Rodney rolled his shoulders, waved his left hand in the air and growled for assistance. Yelping like hungry dogs, the

other two boys joined in the fray. They circled and kicked and stepped back and waited. Shadows turned to darkness and they did not see the door of the church open and the tall black shape that stood framed in the doorway. Father Gaumont stepped outside. His thin face seemed to float on his white collar and his blue eyes blazed. The priest shouted something in French, phrases formed in tones far from golden. The three boys backed away and Maccan called for his glasses.

"Toute de suite, give him the glasses you," roared the priest.

Fee Fee seemed relieved to hand them over, "Just playing at the boxing," he said and his mouth hung open as he gaped as the black cassocked figure who loomed before him. "Me father says you're a mackerel snapping frog," he shouted, ducked and turned and ran.

Budsey attempted to plead his case, "Playing like the boxers in the carnival we was," but Father Gaumont raised his slender hands to the dark sky and shook his head. "My father says you make Protestants stand on their head in the cellar if they marry a Catholic," announced Budsey and he scampered to find Fee Fee.

"Rodney looked at the priest, pushed out his chest and proclaimed that his mother told him that the priest worshiped a "hoer in Rome" and he too ran away.

Maccan watched the three boys run down the hill, knickers flapping, hair streaming behind, cackling, birds in the wind.

"Suffer de children," said the priest and he put a slender finger on the swelling over Maccan's eye and moaned and shook his bald head. "A poet, you, says Miss Dame, not John L. Sullivan you." He leaned over and put his face close to Maccan while he clucked like an angry hen. Father Gaumont pushed him through the door, up the interior steps and to the holy water font at the vestibule. He pulled out a white handkerchief, dipped it in the holy water and wiped Maccan's eye while he muttered in French or Latin that the acolyte did not understand. He understood the next words however.

"Me, I can't allow such a thing. Your father is gone now and me, I'll have to do something about it," said the priest and he moaned again and shook his polished bald head, dipped his hand in the holy water and made the sign of the cross.

The next afternoon after school, Maccan walked over the bridge, past the unpainted house, up the hill, past the library and to the white church. Father Gaumont waited for him under the choir loft, wearing a floppy red sweater with holes in the elbows. The frail, diabetic priest held up his thin arms and demonstrated the left jab and the right cross to Maccan Foley. "De jab in de nose, do it this way," said the priest and his toothpick left arm snapped like a fishing line. In the gloom under the choir loft, Maccan strained through his good eye to see the Father Gaumont began to shuffle and slide

while he whirled his arms in circles and bobbed his bald head. Maccan blinked his good eye and tried to follow the moving form of the priest as he pranced in the obscurity under the choir loft. Suddenly Father Gaumont sagged to the floor and Maccan bent over him. He squinted with one eye at the priest and called, "Father, father, are you dead?" Slow the bald head rose from the darkness and Father Gaumont whispered, "Me, I need a donut, boy."

"A donut, father," said Maccan and he wondered if the priest was teasing or if he had lost his senses.

"For God's sake, boy, sugar I need. Run up to the rectory, you, and get a donut from the kitchen. No, take two, for you one."

Maccan did as he was instructed. He stood in the gloom and watched Father Gaumont chew his donut and then the priest got to his feet, extended his thin arm and said, "Dat's it, you, the jab, see. Use your left."

"Yes, Father."

"Poems better, boy. You write de pretty tings."

His mother wrung her hands and rolled at eyes when she heard about the boxing lessons. "Isn't the black eye bad enough and would you be like Raftery?" she asked. She said the priest's name but would say no more.

"But who's Raftery?" asked Maccan when she held a wet towel to his eye.

"He was a blind poet," she said as and chipped a sliver of ice from the chunk in the icebox, wrapped it in a face cloth and put it on his eye.

"I would like to be a poet," he said as she handed him his glasses.

"And yourself looking like a barroom brawler, a fine poet with a black eye, and your hands, show me your hands?" She held them and shook her head. She turned away for a moment and when she looked at him, Maccan saw that her eyes were moist. "Would you be a common brawler?"

"Was Dad a brawler?" Maccan asked and she dabbed at his eye.

"Your father was no brawler. He was a strong man who used his hands but he was no brawler. And if you would be a poet, poets use pens not fists. Words can do things that fists cannot."

She walked to the sink and he watched her bend over. He knew what she wanted to say, that he was the man of the house now. He stood all the way up to her shoulders now and he would be her man, but he was not sure what that meant but if she told him to be her man, so he would.

In the morning he walked three miles to the big brick school where grades seven through twelve met. He felt like walking right on by. Miss Dame had given him all excellents on his report card and she called on him and told him to read his poetry. But in the big school he felt lost in the hundreds of students and snapping teachers who told him to study geometry. The other students were older and bigger and even the girls looked down on him and in gym class, the grinning instructor made him square dance with big

girls who sighed at him. "Swing your partner," the teacher shouted and Maccan tried but his nose ended in girl's bosoms and they laughed at him as he blushed and stumbled. But his three tormenters had disappeared. Fee Fee quite school and worked in the lumber mill and Rodney and Budsey spent their school time in the shop, running saws and planes while a large square jawed teacher glared and made them cut big pieces of wood into small pieces.

"Big shite," the two boys called at him as he went down the corridors with college preparatory students who talked about a place called Dartmouth. He asked his mother about college but she did not answer.

Friday afternoons were different. The English teacher assigned poems and essays. He liked her class and once she called to the front of the room and to read a poem. Miss McCauley was her name and she had long beautiful legs and slender fingers and her eyes, when she read "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," glowed and sometimes she looked at Maccan and smiled and he smiled back. But she dressed different from the other women teachers. She always wore a tweed jacket, a man's jacket and a tie, an ascot, she called it; it fascinated Maccan for she changed the color each day. One Friday when he walked into her classroom he saw a large fierce woman sitting at Miss McCauley's desk. She glowered at the class. "Miss McCauley will not be back," she said. "Open your books to page one hundred," she commanded, "and read to yourselves. There will be no nonsense from now on."

"She killed herself, you know," students whispered the next day. "With a rope, hanged herself, Miss McCauley hanged herself with a rope."

Maccan cried and they laughed at him and a girl said, "You're so stupid."

Maccan hated that English class after that. Why would Miss McCauley hang herself? Sometimes he imaged that he could see her in the classroom, with her long beautiful legs, and her eyes that glowed when she read "The Lay of the Last Minstrel." He could see the tweed jacket and her polished, flat brown shoes and her ascot with a new color every day. It made him very sad. Miss McCauley liked poetry and somebody said that she wrote poetry. He wished he could read Miss McCauley's poetry because he might understand. The new teacher told him to write a paper called "Who Am I?" He wrote, "I am Maccan Foley and I want to be a poet." He watched the bulky teacher read what he had written and she laughed, looked at him and laughed again. Miss McCauley would not have laughed, but she had hanged herself.

"She was different," you know, one of the girls told him. He asked her what she meant, but she just giggled. It made him angry and he poked at his glasses and turned red.

"I'm different too," he said and she giggled and ran away.

"Maccan's different," she shouted.

After mass the next morning, Father Gaumont took him aside.

"Confirmation class starts next Saturday morning. Tell your mother that you will need a decent suit of clothing. Give her this," said the priest he pressed a fifty-cent piece into Maccan's hand. "And you will need a confirmation name. You will become a soldier of the Lord and you will have a new name.

"But, father, I like my name," he said and the priest smiled.

"Boy, you choose a new name, a middle name. You take the name of a saint to guide you and assist you. A name like Paul or Francis." Father Gaumont nodded, "Francis is a good name for you Maccan, a good Catholic name. Tell your mother that I like Francis."

"But Francis is a girl's name."

The frail French priest rolled his eyes, "Me, I toil in the vineyard," he muttered and when Maccan put his white surplice on the hanger, Father Gaumont came and stood beside him. Nearly every morning for a year, they had been together. Jerry, the older server, had gone off to the mill and there was no other to assist at mass.

"You, Maccan, maybe you have de vocation?" the priest spoke seriously and Maccan looked up in bewilderment as the priest frowned and the flesh over his eyes and up onto his baldhead creased.

It sounded terribly serious and Maccan did not want to say the wrong thing, but he didn't understand. "Tell me, father, what's a vocation?"

"To serve God, boy, eh, God you serve."

"But I serve now, Father," said Maccan and the priest sighed and went to the large wardrobe and pulled open the vestment drawer, smoothed and folded his long white alb and tucked it inside.

"Sure you do, boy, but a priest, boy, dat's a vocation," he said and shut his eyes and said something in French.

"Like you, father," said Maccan and he looked at the gaunt face and slender hands and the frail body that concealed the wonderful voice. "I don't think I could, father."

The priest sighed, "We serve, boy, one way or de other. Each serves le Bon Dieu in his own way. A priest you might be, eh."

"I don't understand, father."

"Run along, boy, don't be late for school—and your mother, you tell your mother about confirmation, Maccan." The priest shook his head. "Tell her you, Francis is good, or Vincent is grand name for confirmation."

"Was he Irish, father?"

The thin priest raised his face to heaven and his bright Gallic eyes closed and then he looked at Maccan. "French, boy, Vincent de Paul was French." He put his hands in the prayer position, "Ma foi, but Francis, even de Irish take his name. Go along, boy."

His mother scoffed. She did not like the name Francis, she told him and then put it more gently, "Tis a good name and the priest himself said so. And what name would you take for your confirmation?" Her voice let him know that she would not suffer foolishness. They stood in the kitchen of the unpainted house and an early spring breeze came off the still frozen lake and ruffled the lace curtains.

For a moment he wanted to tell her that he would take the name Rory, but he could hear her voice telling him that there was no saint Roderick and that's for certain. He wanted an Irish name not an Italian name like Francis or a French name like Vincent.

"Well," she said he told her that he would think.

In the morning he sat at the kitchen table, chewed toast, waited for the right moment and told his mother he would take the name Angus, a good Irish name from way back. He knew that because he had read about him in his books. He waited for the argument because he did not know if a saint had ever carried the name Angus, who was the son of the great Gaelic god.

"Angus," he told her. "I'll take the name, Angus," he announced and she smiled.

"You could do worse, I suppose and didn't my own father call me after a Irish goddess and didn't the priest torment me time and again. The Brugh na Boinne," she said and Maccan gaped. "Angus lived there in my own place and the river that flows through the glen is named after his mother, Boinne, Boyne water that goes by the great hill of Tara and near Drum, through County Meath where I was a girl. Sure, the river is grand when the sun touches it and it is the mother of the green fields and Angus too." Maccan gaped and she looked at him and suddenly smiled, "Oh, I'm sure there was a Saint Angus. Wandering Angus who brought the grace of God with him wherever he went, he simple man with the grace of God. I like the name," she told him and he laughed in surprise.

But the French priest did not like the name. "Me, I don't care if you lead de class with answers. Would I send you before the bishop himself, me? Not me with a heathen name like Angus. You choose, you, a decent Christian name—like Francis or Vincent."

"But I like the name, Angus, Father," said Maccan and he stepped backwards when the priest snorted and showed the temper that he flashed to the congregation if the collection displeased him. Maccan remembered how he stood before the church and shook the basket and then walked to the well-dressed man in the front row and proclaimed, "Not a single copper, you, not a penny put in de basket, you."

Maccan Foley faced the angry priest and told him that Angus was a good name and that his mother liked it.

"She said there must be a saint Angus."

"I'll see your mother in de the rectory. She come to see me, yes," and the skin on the top of his head wrinkled. "Saint Angus," he said and rolled his blue eyes and let his breath out slowly and turned to one of the other students, a girl from Little Canada who had chosen the name Joan. "Joan, dat's a saint's name, mais Angus, dat man works in de mill."

Danu Foley was no Joan of Arc but she would not back down and she told the priest that Maccan had selected the name Angus. "I sure that Angus was a saint," she said.

"Not a real saint, him and me, I'll write to de bishop himself." The roar of the frail priest surprised her with its intensity and he showed Danu the beautifully composed letter, an epistle that any sensible bishop would have admired. But as always, the Bishop of the Archdioceses was Irish. Father Gaumont never showed Danu the response from Manchester. It ended up in his kitchen stove. The priest faced the confirmation the next day.

"Maccan Foley," he called in a weary voice and Maccan wiggled out of the pew where he sat with the other students. The nun, who came all the way from Laconia to teach the class, glared at him as he walked to the priest.

"Angus, you tell de bishop, heathen name it is; tell him Angus when he asks de name you, heathen name it is. Me, did I say how Vincent take the galley slaves from dere oars?" The priest glared at Maccan, who bowed his head. "Last in line, you, wid de heathen name. Francis wrote poetry; talk to de birds him." Maccan said nothing. "Last in line, you. Behind boys wid Christian names them and girls with names like Joan," the priest paused. "Like Joan," he said again and smiled. "After all of them, you, you march down to the bishop, you, and tell him--." He could not say the name. "Last one, you," he said and the skin on the top of head creased and he whispered "Angus" and raised his eyes to the painted dove on the wooden ceiling.

Yeast, leased, feast, what else rhymed with priest? Maccan leaned over the kitchen table with a pencil and a sheet of paper. He wanted to write a poem. Confirm—squirm, he poked at his glasses with the pencil. Angus, perhaps that would be better. What rhymed with Angus? Better do a poem without rhymes. Alliteration, that would do, internal syllable sounds, he liked that. The Irish wrote that way. He began, "Sing the sweet songs oh sad-faced priest." Father Gaumont sang sweetly. What rhymed with Gaumont?

Danu found him there with his head on the paper. She touched the back of his neck and he looked up at her with luminous eyes and then searched the tabletop for his glasses.

"Bedtime," she said and when he left the room, she took up the paper and read the line and for some reason it made her think of the small stone church in the village of Drum. And his eyes, they made her think of something else. Oh yes, they reminded her of Drum too. A wagon rattled

outside in the street. She heard no other sound and sat alone in the dim empty tenement. She made herself a cup of tea and while she sipped it, she looked through the window and watched swallows whirl in the gathering darkness. They were late home and she watched them peel from the gyre and drop one by one into a tall unused chimney of the G.A.R. Hall. An animal jumped on the outside stairs and the sound echoed through the room. She stared at the front door for awhile and then went into the bathroom to prepare for bed. Around midnight she rose and opened the door to Maccan's bedroom and peered in, and then she walked out the front door and onto the porch. Moonlight shone on the lake and she could see the railroad trestle and across the bay, a narrow shadow cast by the Uncle Sam, its white smokestack polished by moonlight. In the distance a long black wave girdled the sky. Hills, like those of County Meath, framed the horizon. The black hills made her think of the suit she would have to buy Maccan for his confirmation. It would mean more hours at work and more time by himself for the boy.

Many mornings she walked the three miles to the hospital to save coach fare. She told herself that it was a good stretch of the legs but some days the hill that she climbed to reach the hospital rose up before her steep as the Mountains of Mourne. One morning her legs stiffened and she stopped halfway up the hill and looked down at them. The heavy things hardly to belong to her and they did not want to rise from the ground. Someone in a passing wagon looked at her and she struggled to make the legs move. They seemed as heavy and deformed as a sack of hospital laundry. They did not seem swollen. They looked as they always did but they felt puffy and enlarged and sometimes she could not feel them at all. She shuffled and then gritted her teeth and struggled up the hill to the front door of the hospital. A doctor in a white coat passed her on the front steps and he turned and watched until the doors closed behind her. Danu had seen him, smiling, looking as if he wanted to speak to her.

The young physician had red hair like Rory and it made her think about her husband. She took a deep breath. The man in the coffin was someone different from the one she had married. Rory Foley had given her a great gift, and a gift to the boy also, and she must remember the young man that had taken her with affection, the strong, smiling one and not the stranger that had been there for the past years. A boy with an arm in a sling walked by her and she thought of Maccan. For some reason she felt like weeping as she pictured his pale face, nearsighted eyes peering at a dangerous world through tilted glasses. She raised her head and back of her neck burned. She rotated her head and it felt as heavy as her legs. The corridor had become as long as a river and she leaned against a wall. She had the boy and she would get him his confirmation suit. Yes and Angus would be his confirmation name. What did Father Gaumont know? How would the French priest know that Aonghus had

been a poet and a harper, a singer of sad songs? She hoped that the songs of Maccan would be happy. Yes, happy songs for him and she leaned against the wall and looked up at a pale yellow light that hung from the ceiling. Yellow, like ripe wheat, she thought and closed her eyes.

Maccan walked past the library and up the hill toward the church. He brushed the sleeves of the black suit again and tugged at the white necktie, hoping no one would see him. He saw Marie Sway's face pressed against the window of the library and he hurried by. Three familiar figures stood at the crest of the hill. Fee Fee, Budsey and Rodney stood in the road waiting. Hot sun beat on him and warmed the black suit and he began to sweat. How could he defend himself or use the left jab that Father Gaumont had taught him while confined in a black suit? But the three boys gaped at him, said nothing and stood meekly as he passed. At the head of the church stairs, he saw the grim face of the nun who had instructed the confirmation class. "You're late," she hissed and motioned him into his seat half way down the aisle, in the rear of the class. The tie choked and he tugged at his collar and took a deep breath. He looked up at the large wooden rafters and the hanging cast iron lamps. The odor of stale incense and heated bodies turned his stomach and despite his perspiration, he grew cold and as he looked up, shadows filled the church. He did not see his mother make her entrance and for a time he felt that he might actually tumble to the floor. But an usher threw open both front doors and Father Gaumont, wearing his finest chasuble and surplice, stood in the opening and then walked slowly down the aisle, hands pressed together, eyes half-closed in devotion, the top of his head red and wrinkled. Behind the priest a big, red-faced man dressed in a red cassock and a huge lace surplice moved through the church as an eagle among sparrows and Maccan forgot his weakness.

"Remember," whispered the nun who sat in the row behind him, "The bishop might question you. Don't disgrace yourself or the parish."

The others went, smugly he thought, one by one to the bishop, and then the nun poked him and gestured for him to go. Maccan bit his lip and walked down the aisle and stood, legs quivering, before the two clerics. Father Gaumont met him with a wave of his beautiful white fingers, wrinkled his forehead and the top of head and grimaced when he announced the candidate as Angus. The large red face of the bishop broke into a smile and he spoke to Maccan in a booming voice.

"You are an Irish boy?"

"I am, Your--"said Maccan and he looked at Father Gaumont for help and the priest sighed. He stared at a large ring on the bishop's finger and then into blue eyes that seemed amused by something.

"Say Your Grace when you speak to the bishop," said Father Gaumont.

"Yes, your Grace."

"Are you prepared to be a soldier of God?" asked the bishop.

"Yes sir," said Maccan and Father Gaumont sighed again.

"An Irish soldier?" asked the bishop and Maccan nodded and the bishop said words in Latin and Maccan recognized the word "Angus."

"Sir," Maccan said and Father Gaumont frowned and shook his head, "Is Angus a saint's name?"

Father Gaumont sighed and the bishop laughed and put a large hand on Maccan's shoulder, "My dear boy, Angus is one of the shining ones. May you shine as he did in art and song."

Father's Gaumont mumbled, "Heathen," and but the prelate smiled and extended his hand with the large ruby ring. He whispered something in Latin and winked at Father Gaumont. The French priest nodded. Maccan genuflected and turned. The nun was staring at him with her mouth open.

He returned to his seat, knelt and sat and listened to the golden voice of Father Gaumont fill the small wooden church as he sang the mass, accented with the booming responses of the red-faced bishop.

Father Gaumont knelt in prayer, turned and led the bishop down the aisle and the confirmation class and everyone walked from the church. Maccan waited for his mother but she did not come and he returned to the empty church to find her sitting quietly in her pew. She looked up at him and spoke softly, "Maccan, I cannot move my legs," she said and he felt the perspiration return to his face. He leaned closer and felt dizzy again when she closed her eyes.

"Mother," he called and touched her on the shoulder. She did not respond and he stood, mouth open, legs trembling. He bit his lip to keep from crying and Father Gaumont came to him and then the bishop joined them.

"Danu Foley," said the bishop and Maccan thought that the big man in the red cassock must know his mother. He touched her forehead and whispered to her and her head fell into his hands. Father Gaumont led Maccan to the sacristy and he stood there until bells rang and a motorized ambulance chugged up the street to the church. Maccan watched through the door of the sacristy as his mother was placed on a stretcher. He pushed by Father Gaumont and ran to her. Her head was rigid and her eyes stared straight up to the ceiling, locked on a pale, painted dove of peace. "Mother," he cried but she did not answer and the bishop put his arm around him and held him as two white jacketed men carried the stretcher down the aisle and out the door to the ambulance. The bishop left him and went to the stretcher and supported Danu's head in his large hands as she was carried to the ambulance. The men shoved the stretcher in the back and Maccan watched Father Gaumont

struggle to get in beside his mother. The ambulance began to move. He watched the red cross painted on the rear door grow smaller as the vehicle went down the hill. Puffs of exhaust came from the back of the ambulance and partially obscured it. Maccan watched it disappear and he did not know what to do. He stood still, hands clenched, white necktie squeezing his throat and then the red-garbed, red-faced bishop walked to him and said, “Courage, boy, you’re a soldier now.” Maccan turned aside and wept.

A powerful tale of love and freedom; beautiful, heartbreaking and historic: Of a poet and a perfidious woman, an aristocrat and a great woman, of a people and freedom.

The Fifth Field