

TALLY'S STORY

By Mark Cornell

He was found in a leather sack, bobbing in the silver foam of the shore, his mother Carrie, caste him from her womb into the belly of the sea. The body was found in a weir of the Dovey River by Elvin who'd been out in the water all day to catch diddly squat. The sun plunged into the redwaters of Pea Soup beach; he was just about to head home, when he noticed the unusual round object making its way into the shallows. Elvin waded thought the undertow to grab the sack. It was unusually warm for an object that had been in the waters for some time. The fisherman untied the sack's rope to discover a live baby boy inside with a golden brow; he decided to call the boy Taliesin. After a story his Welsh Grandfather had told Elvin was a little tacker.

A sorrowful Elvin cried as he gently carried the baby home. How his parents could have done such a thing to this most beautiful child? A childless Elvin barely eked out a living from the sea for him and wife, Sarah, and prayed to the god he didn't believe in for a miracle. He was oblivious to the burning summer stars, the songs of the tide and the whispers of the coastal breeze. The cooing child was as light as a feather in his arms. Sarah greeted both of them with great loving and tenderness.

Tally, like a morning summer sun; brought much joy and warmth to Elvin and Sarah. As a toddler he could imitate all the coastal birds; the warbling of a magpie, the mad shrill of the corellas, the gargling of the moonbirds, the chatter of the wrens. The neighbours were never sure if the nearby song was a bird or the young boy. Tally's skin was the colour of the white fleece of a summer cloud, his hair the shade of a golden autumn leaf, his eyes as blue as the March sky. He had a red birth mark on left pointer finger. His favourite toy was a possum puppet. Tally slept with it every night, rumour has it he still sleeps with it today. His favourite game was to climb the family oak tree and pretend he was a singing bird.

Tally wrote poems and stories at school. The teacher used to make him come up to the front of the room where his classmates laughed along to his words. The people of New Brae were amazed by the transformation of Elvin; who'd changed from a stooped, mumbling, hunchback into a straight back, ever smiling man, who called his son, 'his sunny sailor boy.' Elvin took

his son out into the waters every weekend. Tally studied the seas moods, from the angry dark purple mountains to the tranquil royal blue plains. The different colours of the winds, from the death like red north wind to the silver indifference of the south wind. Tally sensed the constellations were alive and pictured the magical beings behind them. The boy refused to fish, arguing that no man had the right to take the life from a fellow soul; he saw the seals and dolphins as his brothers.

When Tally met Morgan; the two became inseparable, they both played guitars and spent many a day composing songs. The boys used to point their guitars together to bounce off melodies and words to each other. Tally was a 'Molly Duke,' a left hander, Morgan was right handed. Tally specialized in words; Morgan's skill was with song, together they built up a vast catalogue of music. Sarah adored both boys, and loved the way they constantly threw ideas at each other. She kept them well fed with tea and home cooked meals. Morgan told Tally he should go by his real name Taliesin, because it sounded so dignified, Tally thought it sounded rather wanky.

Tally saw the ads on the rare moments he watched television. 'If you turn seventeen this January you must register for National Service.' Tally and Morgan had a regular gig at the Drumcondra Hotel. They gave the money they earned to their parents. As they'd walked down to the pier after each show to see the faraway silver light of Anglesey reflect off the black waters of the Straight, the bitter war in Asia seemed half a world away.

Anna saw both boys playing down at the Drumcondra, her school hood friend, Sally Greendale, the head bar maid, had nagged her friend to come out and see the boys perform. Anna with her long Saxon dark hair, and shy deer-like face, nervously sipped red wine by herself in a corner of the pub. She was instantly drawn to the music; it was folksy, joyful and uplifting. Despite herself she tapped her toes. Sometimes Morgan and Tally stomped for what seemed forever as they both disappeared into a higher realm. 'I told you they were good didn't I?' shouted Sally above the din of clinking glasses, shouts, grunts and guitars. Tally sang the last song of the set;

The Bard

I was in many shapes before I was released:

I was a slender, enchanted sword...

I was rain-drops in the air, I was stars' beam;

.I was a word in letters, I was a book in origin;

I was lanterns of light for a year and a half;

I was a bridge that stretched over sixty estuaries;

I was a path,

I was an eagle; I was a coracle in seas.

‘Anna! Haven’t seen you for donkeys!’ shouted a sweaty Tally.

‘No I don’t get out much these days that was beautiful. Where did it come from?’ muttered Anna as she stared down at the ash stained, cat piss smelling carpet.

‘Good to see you my love! Thank you. ‘Tally pecked her on the cheek, then patted his heart. ‘I got it from there.’ He jumped back on the stage. Tally hardly saw her at all during his short life. Anna had gone to the local purple uniformed Catholic School of St. Brigit’s. Tally was a blue uniformed government school man. St. Brigit’s preached the paralysis of sinful Dark Age learning, whereas New Brae High focused on the Renaissance. On the rare occasions that they’d met, Tally was always drawn to her humbleness; she was so unlike the rowdy girls of his High School.

Although born in Anglesey, the long winters of the Baltic Sea pressed down hard down on Anna’s shoulders. Tally was drawn to Catholics, believing they were people of the book who tackled the big issues when young and therefore didn’t talk about the everyday. It took a long time to convince Anna to go out with him. He enjoyed the philosophical discussions with her and pretty soon they were walking hand in hand along the dunes at night as the thousands of moon birds blocked out the stars to then silently settle into nests they’d built the year before. One night as they lay half naked and golden below a full moon, Anna gently beat Tally on the chests and started to cry.

‘What is it my love?’ Tally stroked her thick dark Saxon hair.

‘Oh Tally I’m a murderer,’ Anna covered her naked breasts with her arms.

‘What are you talking about Anna?’ Tally patted Anna’s luminous brow.

‘I had an abortion. I killed a child. I’m a murderer Tally. You don’t want to have anything to do with a murderer do you?’ Silver trails of tears trickled down her checks.

‘Don’t be ridiculous my love. There’s no such thing as death you’ll find, that little soul is now up in the sky nestling within the stars firmament. It will return when it’s ready.’ Tally pointed up to the white spray of stars above them.

‘Do you really believe that Tally?’

‘I know it Anna,’ Tally gently opened Anna’s arms and drew her to him. He was reborn that night, and wrote songs to her;

Woman of the Quiet Sun

*Lying below the backbone of night
glowing within the golden moonlight,
webbed ocean spray glides
above the sandy mountainside.*

*Your watery breath
blows upon the embers
your white arms stretch,
to greet this thawing dawn.*

*You fall back by my side
our bodies are chafed with love,
sustained by that gleam in your eye
we float once more above
mere living with its dues,
its grey early morning blues.*

*Pale companion of my long nights
come into my arms entwine in wine,
cleanse away your fear of my flight
lay atop of me let your desires be mine.*

Anna

*She murmurs faintly,
below the crimson sheets of dawn.
star embers crackle at her feet,
as she wades in sleep's pale shore.*

*Anna wakes with a start
tossed from a phantom storm of night
she presses against my heart,
morning light reveals that curve of her side.
Anna's nails tingle my backbone
her watery eyes mirror long slept desire.
Her sea breathe laps in the afterglow,
I stroke her eyelids, listening to those curious sighs.*

Then Tally's number was drawn in the lotto of death and he was ordered to attend the military training base at Anglesey. The first thing they did was shave off his long golden locks and throw him into an itchy uniform. Like an uprooted plant he had to quickly adapt or die. He refused to shave off his facial hair and tended to pout and play 'Blerwm, blerwm' with his fingers on his lips when the officers prattled on. Soon enough after several heated arguments, the officers left him alone. His long white hands which had created beauty were calloused by a throbbing black machine gun.

It was the mud and the humidity that first hit him, then the sleepless nights, the jungles; where death lurked behind the next bush or nestled in the shadowed canopies above. Tally ran like a hare, the enemy became a greyhound and pursued him; Tally waded through the rivers like a fish, the enemy turned into eels and chased him through the water. He watched the fighters swoop overhead like hawks; the sky gave him no rest. Then Tally learnt how to become invisible, as if the earth had swallowed him up. He was determined not to go home in another body bag.

He wrote many letters home. Sarah advised him to keep his pretty head low. Elvin blessed his son. Anna prayed for him to come home in one piece. The sleepless nights continued, until

the daylight hours became a blur. Tally was exhausted but couldn't find peace. The army doctors gave him drugs but they only worked for a short time. The song writer couldn't compose anymore. Tally sharpened his army knife. He cried at the drop of a hat. The young man cut himself but was pulled out of the war by a newly elected Labour government. Tally was placed in the Repatriation Hospital in Melbourne, and spent most of his time planning on how to jump off the roof, or pacing until he made tracks in the carpet.

He scribbled letters to Anna demanding that she no longer wait for him to return to New Brae as he had turned into a monster. Sarah and Elvin visited, Sarah read his songs out to her son, to emphasize he had a gift. Tally smiled until they left.

When they gave Tally EST, he dreamt of his real mother Cassie. He recalled how she brewed the cauldron of inspiration and science for her son; it had taken her over a year, gathering herbs from the surrounding forest of New Brae. He remembered the anger in her Hag like face when she discovered three drops of the charmed liquor splashed out of the cauldron and fell upon the young boy's finger and due to the burning he put it into his mouth, and foresaw everything that was to come. Tally packed his possum puppet and civilian clothes then hitch hiked back to New Brae.

Sally Greendale and her daughter Ceri looked after the poet. They told him Anna had disappeared months ago and her parents were evasive when asked about their daughter's whereabouts. Tally who knew where she was, borrowed Sally's car and flew to Anglesey. There was a Catholic "guest house" on the outskirts of town. It was a sombre built structure built for Catholic girls who had children out of wedlock. Tally stormed through the front doors, explored every cell until he found Anna slaving away in the laundry with a child sitting by her side with a cleft palette and lips. Tally muttered;

*'Anna, I will protect you, have no fear,
I'll comfort you whenever there's a tear.
We'll stay in our cabin forevermore
to the outside world we close the door'.*

The poet gently placed his hand over the Mother Superior's face, nodded to the boy and said, 'So much for your Christian compassion eh? Be silent woman, you're faith has only been on this planet for two thousand years, mine has been here since the dawn of time. There are many teachers beside Jesus,' Tally took up his son and kissed his bright brow. 'I see you've returned from the stars firmament. Welcome.' He led Anna with his other hand out of this most medieval institution. The poet had lost his youth, but the light came back to his sea blue eyes when he found himself back in Anna's pale arms. Their cabin on the outskirts of town; is completely covered in trees now, planted by the family. Sometimes young Adair is seen frolicking naked through the trees. Because of the great trauma the boy underwent with operations upon his face, he developed an aura of invincible joy and was to become a great teacher. But for now it's time to leave the family in their patch of Eden by the river Dovey beside the South West Shore. And allow the sea haze to turn them into a chimera.

Bio

Mark is of Irish ancestry. As a child he grew up listening to stories; either in the form of tall tales told by his extended family or the lyrics of his favourite songs on the radio. He started writing poetry when he was seventeen. He has travelled to Ireland twice and during one of these visits was married to Kimberly in a Registry Office in Dublin. Mark has been writing Short Stories and Novels for a number of years. He took family leave for three years to look after his son Thomas. He now works as a Conciliator with Consumer Affairs.