

Ireland's Owl

O'BRIEN
www.obrien.ieShort Story Competition
for Younger Readers

The World Underneath The Mountain

By Cairah Beckham (age 12, Co. Meath)

Winning entry age 10-12 category

LEAH TRAILED her feet in the river's silvery current as she thought about school that day. It was horrible – social media had infected her life.

School was made wretched by those people who laughed at her for reading. They constantly took selfies, and jeered at Leah for not being on social media.

She stroked Tabby's ears and looked in the river and gasped. Two cat-like purple eyes stared back at her. They blinked once, and then the owner of those eyes hauled itself out of the river.

It had four strong legs, each with four silver talons on top of claws. Its head sloped into a long snout with two arched nostrils, and gold horns on its head.

Two huge sopping wet wings were folded at its sides, and the creature was covered with ivy green scales.

"Hello Leah," the dragon said, "I would like to show you something."

"Huh, what...who?" Leah stammered.

"I am Greenfir," he said calmly, "are you coming?"

The next thing Leah knew, she was on Greenfir's back.

He launched himself into the air and with a few mighty beats of his wings they were powering upwards.

"Bye Tabby!" Leah called and she laughed at the cat's astonished

face. Flying was the most magnificent thing she ever experienced.

Up there it was just her, Greenfir and the wind.

"WOO HOO!"

she yelled, streetlights glittered like jewels set into the city. Lights in houses slowly died as they flew on later into the night, and the sights gradually changed from crowded city to sprawling countryside.

A range of huge mountains loomed in front of them.

Suddenly, Greenfir snapped his wings to his sides and dived for the mountainside. Leah screamed, they were going to crash!

She closed her eyes and braced for impact, but it never came.

She opened her eyes. They were inside the mountain!



It was a humongous cavern studded with glowing diamonds and deep caves.

Children played, and adults sat around campfires, telling stories.

Everyone read, and sketched. Not one phone was in sight.

CHILDREN LAUGHED and talked and danced. Sounds of joy echoed through the mountain.

"That is what life used to be like," he told her, "people walked, and had fun."

Leah was silent.

"If you are having a tough time, remember this," Greenfir said, "remember the people under the mountain and their ways. I will always be there for you if you need me...remember."

Without a sound, he dropped Leah in her bedroom window.

The next day, she was braver, more equipped to cope with modern life because she knew she could always return to the world under the mountain. ■