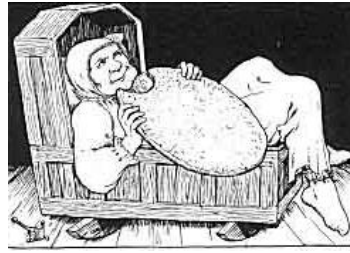


The Legend of Fin M'Coul

(Readers Theatre by Aaron Shepard)



Characters: NARRATORS 1-4 FIN CUHULLIN OONA

NARRATOR 1: Many years ago in the north of Ireland, there lived a giant named Fin M'Coul.

FIN: (*proudly, to audience*) That's my name!

NARRATOR 4: One thing Fin is said to have done was to make a road that crossed the sea from Ireland to Scotland. You can still see what's supposed to be the first stretch of that road. It's called the *Giant's Causeway*, and it's a group of great rocks all fitting together.

NARRATOR 2: Now, this story happened when Fin was *building* his road. At the time we're talking about, Fin was a worried giant. He'd been told that another giant, called Cuhullin, was looking for him to challenge him to a fight, to find out which of them was the strongest.

CUHULLIN: (*growls, to audience*)

NARRATOR 3: This Cuhullin was said to have beaten every giant in Ireland except Fin, and the thought of meeting him face to face made Fin shake in his boots.

NARRATOR 1: Well, when Fin had been working away from home a good many months, he took it into his head to go home and see his wife, a fine woman named Oona. It was two counties away—but sure that wasn't far for a man like Fin.

NARRATOR 4: He pulled up a fir tree by its roots—a *full-grown* tree, mind you—and stripped off the branches to make himself a walking stick. Then off he set, and in no time at all he reached his own mountain and the house he'd built on it, and there was Oona to greet him.

FIN: (*heartily, with arms outstretched*) Oona, me love!

OONA: (*warmly*) Ach, Fin, it's glad I am to see you. I hope you're a bit hungry, for I fixed a little something when I saw you coming.

NARRATOR 2: She sat him down to a grand meal of three whole roast oxen, thirty boiled cabbages, and a pile of her best bread loaves, which she'd just taken from the oven.

FIN: *(starts eating)* A finer cook never filled this great belly! *(keeps eating, but distractedly)*

NARRATOR 3: But Oona could see that her husband was worried about something.

OONA: What ails you, Fin?

FIN: Ach, Oona, it's this Cuhullin.

NARRATOR 1: Fin told her how the dreaded giant was looking for him.

FIN: And every time I suck me thumb, I get more worried about him.

NARRATOR 4: You see, Fin had a magic thumb, and if he sucked it, it would warn him of any danger.

NARRATOR 2: Now, Oona was worried too, but she had an idea.

OONA: Go now, and look across the mountain for his coming. You're sure to see him on his way, and that'll give us time to prepare a welcome.

NARRATOR 3: So Fin MacCool did what his wife bid, for he knew her to be a woman of great good sense. And inside the house, Oona cleared the table and began baking a new batch of bread loaves. These were the big, flat loaves you can see in Ireland to this day. But this was a special batch indeed, for inside each loaf she put a great iron griddle.

NARRATOR 1: Well, at last Fin ran into the house.

FIN: Oona, he's coming, and he's a terrible size of a creature! What can I do? If I run away, I'll be shamed forever! And if I stay here, he'll tie my body in knots!

OONA: Ach, be easy now, Fin. Just do what I say, and before the day is out, maybe his own forefinger will betray him. *(goes to the other room)*

NARRATOR 4: You see, Cuhullin too had a magic finger. All his strength was in the forefinger of his right hand. If he lost that finger, he'd be no stronger than any ordinary man.

FIN: *(looking out the open door)* He's coming! He'll be here in a minute!

OONA: *(comes back)* Now, hold your tongue, Fin, and put on this nightgown of mine.

FIN: *(indignantly)* What?! Me put on the clothes of a woman?! Are you trying to make a fool of me?

OONA: Trust me, now, Fin.

FINN: *(glares at her stubbornly, then gives in with a sigh)*

NARRATOR 2: So, grumbling away, Fin put on his wife's nightgown. Oona put a white bonnet on his head, then pushed him toward a cradle in the corner.

FIN: Woman, what do you think you're doing?!

OONA: *(pushing him into the cradle)* Just lie down there, Fin. And you'll need this baby bottle too. *(sticks the bottle in FIN's mouth)*

FIN: *(opening his eyes wide as he gets the bottle)* Ulp!

OONA: Now, keep yourself quiet and leave everything to me.

NARRATOR 3: Just then, Cuhullin came walking up fast to the house.

CUHULLIN: *(stopping at the doorway and speaking gruffly to OONA)* Good day to you.

OONA: *(coming forward cheerily)* Come in, then, and welcome! 'Twill grieve my husband to know you called when he wasn't here to greet you.

CUHULLIN: *(coming in)* Well, now, that's very civil of you, woman. But it grieves me even more to learn he's not at home, 'cause I was told I'd find him here.

OONA: Well, now, you were told wrong, for Fin is away at his causeway. He went rushing there in a terrible rage. It seems that some giant called Cuhullin has been looking for him, and Fin went off to teach that fool a lesson.

CUHULLIN: Then I'll go and find him there, for I'm Cuhullin, and I won't rest till I've settled any argument about whether he's stronger than me.

OONA: Ach, don't be in such a hurry. Come in and take your rest awhile. You'll need it, if it's *Fin* you're going to fight, for he's twice your size and ten times stronger-looking!

FIN: *(gasps, taking the bottle from his mouth)*

NARRATOR 1: Fin nearly fell out of the cradle with fright.

FIN: *(in dismay, softly to himself)* Oh, why does she have to go and blab like that? Why doesn't she just let him go?

NARRATOR 4: But Oona wasn't so anxious to get rid of Cuhullin.

OONA: Now, just set yourself down, and I'll have a meal ready for you in no time. I've got the bread all baked and a lovely pot of stew on the fire. (*turns to go, then turns back*) Oh, while you're waiting, I wonder if you'd do me a favor. A cold wind blows in at the door, this time of day. Would you be so kind as to turn the house around? Fin always does it for me when he's home.

CUHULLIN: Certainly.

NARRATOR 2: Up he got and went outside. With no bother at all, he picked up the whole house and turned it to face the other way.

NARRATOR 3: Oona was a bit surprised, because Fin himself couldn't have done it—she'd just made that up to frighten Cuhullin. But she didn't let on when he came back in.

OONA: Thank you kindly. There's just one other thing, I'm hoping you won't mind my asking.

CUHULLIN: Ask on, good woman.

OONA: Fin was going to make a new well for me near the house, but he forgot to do it, he left in such a terrible temper. There's water under all that rock for certain—all you need to do is pull the mountain apart.

CUHULLIN: All right, then, I'll see if I can find it for you.

NARRATOR 1: Off he went again. From the front door, Oona watched him put his big fingers into a little crack in the rock. And with a couple of tugs, he ripped open the mountainside so the water gushed out.

NARRATOR 4: Now, Oona had made up that one too, so when he came back, she again tried not to look surprised.

OONA: (*warmly*) Come in now and eat.

NARRATOR 2: She sat him down and put his food before him, with a big pile of bread loaves—the ones she'd made with the iron griddles inside.

CUHULLIN: Now, that's fine-looking bread.

NARRATOR 3: Cuhullin picked up a loaf and sunk his teeth into it.

CUHULLIN: (*bites down, then jumps up, roaring with pain*) Aaahhhhhh! A thousand thunderbolts! Woman, what did you put in your bread?!

OONA: *(acting surprised)* Nothing! What ails you, tall man? That's the bread my husband eats six dozen loaves of, every day!

CUHULLIN: *(dumbfounded)* You mean he eats this stuff?! Sure it is hard as rock, and I've lost one of me good front teeth on the first mouthful!

OONA: Didn't I say you were a poor, weak thing compared to Fin? Ach, you'll regret the day he gets his hands on you.

CUHULLIN: *(pulling himself up proudly)* Nonsense! If *he* can eat this bread, so can I!

NARRATOR 1: He picked up another loaf and dug his teeth into it.

CUHULLIN: *(bites down again, then roars with pain)* Aaahhhhhh! I've lost me other front tooth!

OONA: Man, it's a good job you never met up with Fin! It's more than your two front teeth you'd have lost.

CUHULLIN: You're tricking me! I don't believe *any* man eats bread like that!

OONA: Oh, don't you now! Just wait till you see *this*.

NARRATOR 4: She took one of the loaves off the table and walked over to the cradle where Fin was lying dressed like a baby.

OONA: This is Fin's *son*. Isn't he a fine little lad! *(tickles Fin under the chin)* Just like his daddy.

FIN: *(like a baby)* Goo, goo! Goo, goo!

OONA: *(to FIN, as to a baby, while holding out the loaf)* Here you are, me dove, have a bit of bread.

FIN: *(looks fearfully at the loaf, then questioningly at OONA)*

NARRATOR 2: Now, this loaf looked like all the rest, but Oona knew it was the only one *without* an iron griddle.

NARRATOR 3: She gave Fin a big wink. Then Fin took a bite of the loaf that took away half the side of it.

FIN: *(bites into the bread, then chews while making happy baby sounds)*

CUHULLIN: *(staring at FIN)* That's amazing! And you tell me this is Fin MacCool's child?

OONA: None other! So you can guess what size of man his *daddy* is.

CUHULLIN: (*still staring*) He must have a powerful set of teeth!

NARRATOR 1: Now, this was just what Oona was hoping for.

OONA: Oh, a *grand* set. Just slip your finger in there to feel them. (*to FIN*) Open your mouth now, baby, and let the nice man put in his big, strong finger. (*gives him another big wink*)

NARRATOR 4: So Cuhullin slipped his great right forefinger into Fin's mouth.

OONA: (*to CUHULLIN*) Push it well in, till you feel the back ones.

NARRATOR 2: Cuhullin pushed in his finger as far as it would go.

NARRATOR 3: SNAP!—Fin bit it off, swallowed it, then leapt from the cradle.

FIN: (*whoops with delight*)

CUHULLIN: (*roars with pain and holds up his hand with the forefinger missing, staring at it in disbelief*)

FIN: (*throws off his nightgown, then speaks threateningly*) Now, what did you say you'd do to Fin MacCool?

CUHULLIN: (*stares and roars with anger at FIN*)

NARRATOR 1: Cuhullin made a great swipe at Fin with his fist.

CUHULLIN: (*hits FIN with his right hand, then wails with pain, holding his hand limply*)

NARRATOR 4: But he'd lost his finger, and all his strength with it, so all he did was hurt his hand.

CUHULLIN: (*roars in frustration, then turns and runs off*)

FIN: (*running off after him*) Ach, yes, you'd better run!

OONA: (*calling after Fin and smiling*) Now, Fin, don't be too hard on the poor thing!

NARRATOR 2: Fin chased Cuhullin halfway across Ireland before he let him go.

NARRATOR 3: And after that, he was free to get on with his road.