

Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for pre-intermediate learners. The name of the story is *The Last King of the Britons*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last). That's [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last). There, you can also download the episode as a PDF.

A few months ago I entered a flash fiction competition. I've talked about flash fiction on the podcast before—it's stories that are less than a thousand words long. Anyway, this competition was run by *Reflex Fiction*, and I won second place!

My story was called [*I Bet I Could Taste It*](#), and it's... kind of hard to describe. Generally, I could say it's a post-apocalyptic story, which means it takes place in a world after a big nuclear war. But as with most flash fiction, it's more about the feeling it gives than having a complicated story. If you'd like to read my piece, you can Google 'Reflex Fiction I Bet I Could Taste It', or come over to the transcript at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Last) where [I've left a link to the story](#).

Just remember this story is aimed at native speakers, so it might be a bit difficult to understand! I will probably do a version of the story on the podcast, changing it to intermediate or advanced level and adding some details to make it easier to understand.

Anyway, today's story is a traditional Celtic story. The Celts were a group of people who lived in Europe, and still do. However, while the Celts originally ruled many parts of Europe, they stopped ruling in the first century AD.

When someone **rules** a country, they are the leader, king, president and so on. For example, the Queen rules the United Kingdom, although really the Prime Minister has more power. In the past, empires ruled many parts of the world.

Anyway, the Celts were divided into many groups. For example, in the UK the Celts were called Britons, spelt B-R-I-T-O-N. Confusingly, it's pronounced the same as the name of the country, Britain. Today, we still consider people from Wales, Scotland, Cornwall and Ireland to be Celtic. But of course, very few people today speak Celtic languages, like Welsh or Scots Gaelic. In France, there was a group of Celtic people called the Gauls—you might know them from the comic series *Asterix and Obelix*, which is about Gauls fighting the Romans.

The Romans weren't the only people the Celts fought. After the Romans left Britain, in the fifth and sixth centuries the Saxons began to attack the Celts. The Saxons spoke Old English, a Germanic language, and it is Old English which became Modern English that we speak today. The name 'England' comes from the Saxons, because it was originally called *Engla land*—'land of the Angles'. The Angles were one of the groups which joined with the Saxons to make the Anglo-Saxons, who ruled Britain after the Celts and the Romans. In this story, I call them 'Saxons'.

You probably don't need to know all the history to enjoy this story, but I think it is very interesting. The history of the UK is a history of fighting. Of course, there were many battles and wars after the Anglo-Saxons came.

So it is a bit strange for modern Brits, because we often feel a connection with the history of our country, a connection with the Celts, but of course most of us aren't related to them at all. Most Welsh, Scottish and Cornish people don't speak the old Celtic languages

these days, either, although many people are trying to revive them, to bring the old languages back to life.

OK, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

When you are trying to do something very difficult, and you cannot do it, you might **give up**. That means you stop trying to do it. For example, if you are playing a very difficult video game, and you keep dying on one level, you might just give up. You'll stop playing and go do something else. Or, if you're reading a really long book and you get bored, you might give up. Hopefully, you won't give up on your dreams! But of course, there's nothing wrong with giving up sometimes. We can't always finish everything.

Dismount means to get off a horse. If you are riding a horse and stop somewhere, you will dismount, get back on the ground. If you are not used to riding a horse, mounting and dismounting can be very difficult!

A **banquet** is a big meal held for lots of people, like a feast or a party. In the past, kings and queens often had banquets to show how much money they had, and how much amazing food they could eat. Actually, in the past in England, it was common for kings to eat so much at banquets that they threw up, vomited, and then they would eat more.

Honour is when you have great respect for someone, you think they are great and you treat them like a king. If you **do someone an honour**, you do something to show that you respect them. For example, if a very famous musician wants to show that they respect you, they might do you the honour of performing a private concert for you. Of course, for them to do you this honour, you'd probably have to be a president or someone quite famous!

A **faerie**, also spelt **fairy**, is a magical creature. Faeries have wings and can fly around, and faeries can do magic. Sometimes, faeries are very small, like the size of your hand. But sometimes faeries are as big as people. In old stories, we often talk about the **faerie folk**. 'Folk' means people, so the faerie folk are all kinds of people who had magic. Not all of the faerie folk are the small kind of faeries who can fly.

Dwarves are a kind of magical creature. Dwarves are very short men, and they usually have big beards and live underground. The most famous dwarf is Gimli from *Lord of the Rings*. Of course, dwarves don't really exist, but in stories they often have great treasure.

If you take a **risk**, you do something dangerous. For example, if you climb onto a roof of a house, you are taking a risk, because you could fall off and hurt yourself. If you **risk your life**, you are doing something really dangerous and you might die. Hopefully, none of you are risking your lives regularly!

A **deal** is an agreement between two people. For example, maybe you say to your friend, 'If you give me five pounds today, I'll give you six pounds next week.' That's **making a deal**. When you make a deal, you have to be careful, of course, especially if you're making a deal with someone you can't trust.

When you drop something, it might not fully break, but it might get a **crack** in it. A crack is when something has almost broken but not quite. If you have a crack in a glass, you can't use it because the water will fall out through the crack. If you have cracks in the walls of your house, then it'll probably get cold. Some people believe that it is bad luck to walk on cracks in the street. They say, 'Step on a crack and you'll break your back.'

A **shepherd** is a person who looks after sheep. Shepherds often use dogs to help them move sheep. Shepherds carry big sticks and walk a lot with the sheep, moving from one place to another. They have to keep the sheep safe from wolves.

When two people are **reunited**, they have not seen each other for a long time and finally can see each other again. These days, immigrants, people who move from one country to another, are often apart from their families for a long time. For example, there are many

Polish people who come to work in the UK and send money back to their family in Poland. When they can come home and be reunited with their family, it is a very emotional time. Or, for example, maybe you have a school reunion where you invite all the people you went to school with, and you're reunited with people you haven't seen for years.

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A big thank-you to my new patrons: Ricardo Jorge Marques, Hien Nguyen, RUSLAN ENGLISH, Ilona Lyabakh and Martina Dimoska.

And a special thank-you to my Teacher's Pet patrons: Vera Kaufmann and Rüdiger Richter.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

The Last King of the Britons

Long ago, when the Celts still ruled Europe, there was a brave king of the Britons called Herla. He **ruled** with kindness, and he never **gave up** in a battle.

King Herla was engaged to a beautiful woman called Rhiannon. When they celebrated their wedding, it was a huge event, and people from all the country around were invited. So the king was not surprised when a group of men rode in who he did not recognise.

'Hello, friends!' he cried. '**Dismount** your horses, take off your riding clothes and come join the **banquet**. But first, **do me the honour** of knowing your names and where you come from.'

When the strange men dismounted, it became clear that they were very short. In fact, they were so short that they couldn't be regular men. They were of the **faerie folk**. Around the room, people began to talk about them. The faerie folk held great magic, and they were dangerous, but they also gave amazing gifts. Many people would **risk their life** to get a present from the faeries.

'Hello, King of the Britons,' said the leader of the faeries. 'I am Brogr, King of the **Dwarves**. I come only for the dwarves, and not the other faerie folk. But know that we come in peace.' He smiled. 'Let us **make a deal**. We shall join your wedding banquet, and when I get married, you and your men will come to my wedding.'

The king was very happy. It was an honour to be invited into the land of the faeries. At first, he thought it might be a trick, as everyone knew faeries loved tricks. But if the King of the Dwarves wanted to trick him, he would invite him alone. With his men, he would be risking nothing, as they had fought and killed many Saxons. He did not fear men as short as Brogr.

'Your deal is a wonderful idea,' said Herla. 'Come, join the banquet!'

After the partying was over, when the king sat in bed with his wife, they spoke of the faerie folk and their deal.

'Are you sure this is a good idea, my king?' said Rhiannon. 'In my country, they tell stories about the faeries. They can trick anyone, they can—'

'Don't worry, wife,' said Herla. 'He may never get married. But let's hope he does! Because I am sure we will get great gifts from them. They might give us magic which can help us destroy the Saxons. If they try to trick us, our men will kill them. What can those little dwarves do in battle, really?'

A year passed, and Herla ruled. He fought many battles with the Saxons, and won every one. One day, Brogr and his men came to visit the king, to tell him that his wedding was taking place. So the king said goodbye to his wife, took his best men and rode off to the land of the dwarves.

They came to a big mountain, and Herla wondered if they were going to climb over it. But then a **crack** appeared in the mountain, and they rode through it. At first, it was dark and cold, and the king and his men could see nothing. But then, finally, they came to a place of light and music. The land of the dwarves was beautiful, and the wedding banquet was great fun. They ate and drank and sang, and the faeries gave the men many gifts.

Still, the king was worried. He did not want to stay away from his country for too long, as the Saxons often attacked it. But whenever he tried to tell Brogr that they were leaving, someone put a drink in his hand and danced with him. So in the end, they spent three days at the dwarves' banquet.

When they finally left, Brogr gave the king one more present.

'This hunting dog is the best I own. I am giving it to you to guide you home, but be careful. Do not dismount your horses until the dog dismounts by himself.'

The king thought this was strange, but thanked the dwarf for this one last gift. So they rode out of the crack in the mountain, and when the king turned around, the crack was gone. They rode for a while, and the land looked different. The king couldn't understand. They had only been gone for three days, hadn't they? But something had changed.

The first man they saw was a **shepherd**.

'Hello, shepherd!' said the king. 'Bring me news of my queen, Rhiannon.'

The shepherd looked at them strangely, and spoke in a different language.

'Hwelcan ġepēode spricst pū?'

The men were surprised, and very worried. The man did not speak Celtic, but Saxon.

'What is happening?' said the king. 'How is a Saxon man a shepherd here in Britain?' He spoke a little Saxon, so he asked the man, 'What happened to Rhiannon?'

The shepherd listened slowly, and seemed to understand a little. In very slow Saxon, he told them, 'Rhiannon is dead. She existed a long time ago, but not now. Now, the Saxons rule this land. We have ruled for 200 years.'

Herla could not believe it. The Saxons had won the battle, and Britain was theirs. Some of his men were so shocked that they fell from their horses. However, Herla remembered what the dwarf had said. When the men touched the ground, they turned into dust.

'We will ride on!' said the king. 'We will find Rhiannon, because I cannot believe that she has died. If the faeries took us away, perhaps they took her as well. And remember, until this dog dismounts, do not place a foot on the ground!'

So the king and his men began their journey. At first, they rode in the day, but the Saxons did not like this, and often attacked them. So they started to ride only at night. People thought they were ghosts or faeries, and kept far away from them.

They travelled very far, but they never found the queen. And still, the dog did not dismount. They lived their whole lives on the horses, hunting and eating without dismounting. All the king wanted was to be **reunited** with his wife.

Herla told himself he would never give up. He had never given up during the battles with the Saxons. But he could not keep his hope. Britain was lost, and so was his wife.

Finally, they came to the River Wye. The king did not tell his men what he was doing, but he did not need to.

The river was long. If the waters carried his dust away, perhaps he would one day be reunited with Rhiannon.

So the king walked into the river and all his men followed him. The last king of the Britons and all his men turned into dust, and the river carried them away. When all the men were gone, the dog finally dismounted, and began its long journey home.

Some say that King Herla and his men never found peace, that they travel the rivers like ghosts. But others say that Rhiannon was taken by other faerie folk, those who live under the sea. They say that King Herla and his men travelled the waters for years, and the two lovers were reunited.

Who can say? This knowledge has been lost to time, just like the Celts lost to the Saxons. But remember, if a faerie offers to make you a deal, you could be risking more than just your life...

THE END

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