



# McKenna, Keogh & The Lockjawed Wife

**By Timothy K. Egan**

Lovely Ireland. This beautiful country's sons and daughters can absorb the smell of the old, sweet sod thousands of miles away from the land itself. It is a place of legend, both painful and triumphant. And best of all for some, it is a place of lore. A special lore that is historic, poetic, fierce and playful. The enthralling stories range from the deeds of great heroes like Cuchulainn to the haunting wails of the banshees. They have been passed down from generation to generation, from a warming fireside or the edge of the bed before a night's sleep.

From the comfortable pubs, where the Guinness and Jameson's help turn human beings into ten-foot tall warriors who ride horse drawn chariots on top and even below the seas, to the look of belief on the youthful faces in the schoolyard, Ireland is a place of

historic cities and ancient villages. And the lore in these places is much older than the centuries old statues that grace their museums and tourist spots.

But there is one story as fresh as a spring's mist on the glen. The story of, "McKenna, Keogh and the Lockjawed Wife."

James McKenna was as popular as any of the residents of Leighlinbridge, the genteel farm community in County Carlow that boasts of having the oldest operating bridge in Ireland. The weathered structure connects the thriving, green Earth of the banks of the River Barrow and dates back to the year 1320 A.D.



"Jamie" as he was affectionately called, was a good natured pub keeper, but not the most famous son of the tiny village. The worldliest

name to spring from Leighlinbridge was Captain Myles Keogh, a professional soldier with the heart of a glorious warrior. He freelanced his services around the world, first taking part in the Battle of Ancona in Italy. From this Italian skirmish, Keogh found himself fighting for the Union Army in the American Civil War.

After a successful tenure in the American war, Captain Keogh stayed in the country and was appointed to the immortalized Seventh Cavalry of the United States.

"The Seventh" was commanded by one the most talked about military figures in the history of the world, General George Armstrong Custer.

It is well known that the entire Seventh Cavalry met its doom in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, but it is not widely known that Keogh was the last soldier standing in the battle. As a

sign of respect the Sioux Indians, led by Chief Crazy Horse, did not take Keogh's scalp.

That's the story of Captain Myles Keogh and at one time had little to do with "Jamie" McKenna.

"Jamie" was owner and proprietor of the "Whale's Favorite Ale," a rather large pub for such a small town as Leighlinbridge, but this was modern day Ireland and the crowds would come for miles around just to watch football on the only big-screen television in the countryside. It was a wonderful life full of roaring good times at the pub and filled with many friends as well. But his life took a turn the day he had a chance meeting with a patron's cousin from Dublin, Deneen Corrigan. She was a striking lass with a beautiful head of dark, black hair that had a shine of wet silk. On first site, she mesmerized Jamie and laid claim to his heart.

Sure as it is with affairs as such, the couple married. And just as sure, the blessed unity turned into an emotional mugging. A Colleen from a big city, as Dublin is compared to little Leighlinbridge, seldom finds happiness in the country. And when himself spends the majority of his time on one side of the bar in the pub or the other, tensions mount. The honeymoon was over fast and the newlyweds became seasoned combatants in record time.

To coincide with Deneen's nagging ways, was Jamie's indifference. To him it was as

though she had purchased a three-legged dog, then decided she didn't like it because of its peculiar walk.

In time she more loudly voiced her negative opinion of Jamie, his pub, his mates and their gatherings around the large screen television when an international football match was on. And truth be told, that's the only time the "tele" was ever on. This was an Irish pub for God's sake, a place for people to meet and tell lies, not watch the shagging television.

The saddest day in the pub's existence was during the World Cup with Ireland in the semifinals and the score tied against the Italians. With time running down, Gerald Breen was slicing his way through the defense and looked like a "shoe in" for a goal, when buzzing past the crowd and into the television screen was a fine, fist size stone. With a thunderous crash, an electronic fizz and a belch of smoke, the match was over, at least for the patrons of the "Whale's Favorite Ale."

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There was herself with a gut twisting scowl on her face, widened jaw and a wail on

her tongue, "Bastards." And there was your man, behind the bar pouring a pint of lager, for himself.

That night she sat by the fireplace which paled in comparison to the amount of heat her temper was giving off. Life in Leighlinbridge was not for her and Jamie was not the man she wanted. And now was the time to let him know. Just as he walked in the door, she jumped from her seat and proceeded in a curse-ridden monologue that could hush a pub full of sailors and cringe the clergy. As her voice kept getting louder, her jaw seemed to open wider. She screamed and she swore and her jaw tested the boundaries of human dexterity. Then it seemed to end with an eerie quiet.

"I'd rather be dead than live here with you, you baaaass...."

Those were her last words. Her jaw swung as wide as any has ever before and it locked. Her eyebrows raised six inches above her forehead and it looked as if her eyeballs themselves would pop out of her skull. She couldn't breath in her state and though her lungs wheezed for air, her body couldn't function. It was the end for the nagging Deneen.

At her wake, the clergy lay a thin piece of lace over her frozen jaw and penetrating eyes. They didn't want her corpse to scare children, women and the faint of heart. No matter how hard the undertaker tried, he couldn't unlock her nagging jaw.

That was also the end of life in

Ireland for Jamie. He felt somewhat responsible for the passing of his not-so dear wife, just somewhat mind you. He sold off the pub, including the large screen television, after he got it fixed, and headed to America.

In the States, not much changed for Jamie, he opened a pub but now had to turn the television on with a hundred bloody cable stations and a thousand sporting events each night. Mostly, he just tried to forget about the past.

Back at the old "Whale's Favorite Ale," the past would be anything but forgotten. The new owner replaced the big screen with an even bigger television and advertised the upcoming football matches. Not one was ever watched. Mysteriously every television brought into the back room of the pub would break before the match would start.

Many claimed it was a curse of the dead, till one day it was proven. A man, new to the area, came in and asked if the day's football match was on. Everyone in the pub stopped their conversations in mid-sentence and turned to the man.

"Tele's broke," the new proprietor said.

"Well I'm a repairman," says the man, "I'll grab my tools and have it up in no time."

"A T.V. repairman he says," the new proprietor said in a guff and turned to his contingent, "Have at it then. It's in the back room, last door

in the corner."

The back room was dark as the sight of a dead man. No one had been back there in months, since the last time they tried to watch a football match. To the new proprietor and his clients, it was as if the room itself didn't even exist. The lights were never even turned on. The T.V. repairman walked gingerly across the floor, following the illuminated path of his flashlight. As he delicately maneuvered the doorknob, the door creaked open and his flashlight clicked off. As he laid a couple of slaps across the top of the flashlight, a wind with the force of a thousand horses grabbed him by the chest and cast him against the opposite wall. He shook off the shock of the blow and gazed upon a shimmering light perched atop the defunct television.

The jaded spirit's hair was still shiny as wet silk, but its jaw hung down to the middle of her chest. With a spine seizing cackle, the banshee rose and headed for the man on the floor. The man sprang to his feet and broke the mile distance record in Leighlinbridge that day.

"You forgot your toolbox," the proprietor chuckled. But the man just kept running, never to return.

Every time such an instance would occur, the new owner would send a letter over to Jamie in America. He would just shake his head and put the

letters on the side of the cash register to read and laugh about later. Jamie didn't believe in ghosts, until that point anyway.

Then came Captain Keogh. Jamie's first encounters with Captain Keogh were almost unnoticeable. A faint tumult in the darkness, light sounds in rhythm, the first two sort of dull and the next a little sharper. He could hear them at night right after he turned out the lamp next to his bed, but they weren't clanging chains, so he didn't give a tinker's damn. But as his days in America added up, the sounds became more frequent and noticeable to the ear. He didn't just hear them at night anymore, he heard them in the day at his new pub as well.

Then the time finally came for Captain Keogh to make a grand introduction. Just before opening one day, the eerie disorder rang in Jamie's ear louder than anytime before. Two drawn out sounds of iron in a mind-numbing scrape against the wooden floor, then a hollow biting to the tune of rattled tin. The haunting meter startled the otherwise melancholy Jamie as he was yanking the stools off the bar.

The commotion seemed to stop and Jamie could feel a presence right in front of his own nose, so he jumped back and made his way behind the bar. He reached up for the American baseball bat, which sat on a wooden holder with a gold plated engraving that read, "Darlin' Jamie's Yankee Shillelagh."



"Whoever you are, make your presence known," Jamie roared, "or you'll not go out the way ya come in."

The dimly lit bar was suddenly illuminated like never before and Jamie's Yank Shillelagh made a thunderous "whomp" as it fell to the floor.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph," Jamie whispered as he made the sign of the cross. "Is it a ghost ya are? Ya must be coddling, I don't even believe in ghosts."

The illumination dimmed in the middle and a figure stepped through the wondrous light. "I don't care if you believe or not," a gravely and mysterious voice said. "I know what I am and if you don't like it, you can put a pucker on my deceased backside."

"Alright," Jamie said as he retrieved his gusto, "just who in the hell are you?"

The illumination disbanded and there he stood in full U.S. Cavalry uniform, Captain Keogh. From top to bottom, a sharp soldier indeed, with a brightly polished scabbard and thick spurs that clung to his rich black boots and scraped against the wooden floor.

"A soul can't go to heaven until it is returned to its birthplace," Keogh told Jamie, as himself poured a healthy helping of Jameson's. "And in order to get back to Leighlinbridge, I need someone who was born there, take me back."

"What do you mean," Jamie interrupted, "in a shagging

suitcase? Can't I just send you by the post."

"No, No," Keogh shot back, "Hold your gob and I'll tell you how."

Keogh proceeded to tell Jamie that in order for his soul to be released from this earthly purgatory, an object he had on his person when he died must be buried on the land on which he was born.

"Why?" asked Jamie.

"How the hell should I know?" Keogh said in a blasting voice that shook all the glasses and bottles in the pub. "These aren't my bloody rules. Quit asking fecking questions."

"But tell me why you're asking for help and not trying to scare the Jesus out of everybody. You're a good ghost, aren't ya?"

"There are no such things as good ghosts or bad ghosts," Keogh belted out, "you're the same as when you were flesh and bone. If you were a bastard when you were living, you'll be a bastard when you dead."

Jamie looked to the side of the cash register where the letters lay from home in Leighlinbridge. Keogh sure answered a question that lay heavy upon Jamie's mind. Sure, that's why his old pub is haunted and he knew just exactly who was the spook. With a strange, sparkling light shimmering on top of the bar, Keogh explained that Jamie would have to bury his sword and scabbard on the land of his birthplace and if Jamie didn't,

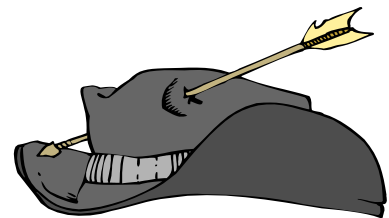
Keogh would forever walk the earth, never knowing a true resting-place.

The shimmering light faded and in its place was his treasured sword and scabbard. With that information, Jamie figured he could help the good Captain and also the poor proprietor of his old pub back in Ireland. He booked passage on a ship bound for "home." So, with sword and scabbard ready for a ceremonial burial, Jamie had to pass the time on the long voyage and did so in conversation with his spirit traveling companion.

"At least I didn't have to pay your freight," Jamie whispered with a smile as he walked up the gangplank. "This little phantom adventure is costing me a fortune. You're an expensive spook, ya are."

When they pulled up anchor, Jamie decided to get a bit inquisitive of the Captain's demise. "So, how did the end come about for you dear Captain Keogh, if you don't mind me asking?"

"A bloody Indian massacre you idiot," Keogh shot back.



"I know that," said Jamie, "Was it a bullet or an arrow?"

"Three bullets and one arrow. I was shot twice in the chest and once in the leg."

"What about the arrow?," asked Jamie.

"What does it matter to you?," the Captain asked back.

"Just passing the day on this long voyage."

"Well, if you must know. It's a place you wouldn't claim if it was your only wound."

"You took an arrow in the arse did ya?," gasped the amazed Jamie. "The shagging Indians were shooting you lads in the arse?"

"Why do you think I'm so anxious to get to the bleeding afterlife?," howled the Captain. "I want to know what in the hell that damn injin was aiming at."

The huge ship made its way across the Atlantic and Jamie kept the conversation going as the waves splashed against the sturdy metal vessel. "Tell me Captain, were ya ever married?"

"No sir, I never took a bride."

"And you call yourself a battle hardened veteran. Those Indians had nothing on a wife. Consider yourself fortunate, you would sure have known pain had you taken a bride."

The voyage by sea was long over and Jamie and his specter accomplice made their way to Leighlinbridge. The Captain was as elegant as a proud military officer should be as Jamie chiseled a hole in the earth for Keogh's sword and scabbard.

"I guess you're off," Jamie said before covering up the glinting shine of the metal in the hole. "Good luck to you, Captain. And save a comfortable spot if you happen to go somewhere where it's a bit too hot."

"Thank you Jamie," Captain

Keogh said with a firm salute. "You're a fine man. May God bless you for your kindness."

"It's a little too late to start praying don't you think."

Captain Keogh's face sported a smile from ear to ear as Jamie began to cover the sword and scabbard. Then his appearance began to break apart and the great Captain Keogh's soul would forever be laid to rest.

But there would be no rest for Jamie, he also came to Ireland to help the new proprietor and his departed wife as well. As he walked through the door of the "Whale's Favorite Ale," he was greeted with warm wishes and slaps on the back. "Your troubles are over lads, I've come to relieve you of your ghost."

Jamie walked to the darkened back room and made his way its middle, remembering every step. Jamie took a broach from a dusty cigar box that lay still for all these years in the floor boards of the "Whale's Favorite Ale." He had hidden the broach there to make sure a part of her was always in a place she despised. He traveled to her family home in Dublin, dug a hole and buried it firm in a patch of grass. "Goodbye ya nasty pain in the arse," he said as he stomped the patch of earth down.

"I hope ya'r happier wherever you're going, than you were with me."

He went back to Leighlinbridge and again was greeted warmly and offered many a pint on the house. Instead, he went to a flower shop and went to Deneen's

grave. He laid the flowers down, with a tear swelling in his eye. After a lively row with the boys at the "Whale's Favorite Ale," which lasted several days, Jamie booked passage on a ship back to the United States. Ironically, as Jamie purchased his ticket, the agent bid him a warning.

"The ship you're about to set sail on, my good man," the seedy ticket agent whispered, "is a haunted vessel. A young sailor can be heard singing about his lost love at all hours of the night."

Jamie shrugged and it was off on the boat and back to America. On the ship one night very late, Jamie leaned against the rail, smoking a pipe.



A faint sound of a sailor singing was followed by small boy who came running up to Jamie. "I was sleeping in my cabin when I heard a ghost sir, please help me."

"Shut up boy," Jamie said, "I didn't hear a damn thing and there's no such thing as ghosts."

*-The End-*

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