

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN O'SHEA
adapted from W.B. Yeats, "The Countess Kathleen
O'Shea,"

Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*f*

f;A long time ago in Ireland, two strange men appeared in a country town. They were dressed in silken coats, and they wore gold bands around their dark hair, but they seemed to be very old. They were not from Ireland, but they were able to speak Irish. They each had a large bag of gold, and they sat in the window of their inn counting each shiny piece over and over again.;One day the woman who kept the inn said to them,"Gentlemen, you seem to have a great amount of gold. Do you know that people here are poor and very hungry? Why don't you help them with your wealth?";"We would do that, good lady," said one of the men, "but we don't want to help those who only pretend to be poor.";When the news went around that there were men with bags of gold in the town, the poor came to the door of the inn. Some were not ashamed to ask for money. Others were very shy because they were poor.;"We are not going to give money to you," said one of the rich men, "but we will buy from you.";;"We are too poor. We have nothing we can sell.";;"You can sell your soul. We are buying souls for the devil. We will give twenty gold pieces for old souls. We will give fifty gold pieces for souls of grown people. And we will give one hundred gold pieces for the souls of the very young because they are the freshest and purest.;The Countess Kathleen O'Shea heard of the mens' offer to buy the souls of the poor. She was always very good to the poor and she thought of a plan to help them without losing their souls.She called one of her helpers.'

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only my house and my garden. Give the money from the sale of my wealth to the poor." Patrick sold the gold, jewels and land and he gave the money to the poor to buy food. The rich men stayed on at the inn. "The money will run out soon, and then there will be souls to sell. The king has promised that food will be coming from across the sea, but it won't come for another month." The men were right. The poor people had money for three weeks, but when their money was gone, there was still a week before the food would arrive. "We still offer to buy your souls," said the men when the poor gathered around the inn. The poor were very hungry and began to think that they had no choice but to sell their souls. Suddenly, a woman in a black cloak appeared among them and went to the door of the inn. When the men appeared, she drew back her hood revealing the beautiful face of the Countess Kathleen. "Gentlemen," she said, "I have a very special soul to sell, but it will cost you all of your gold pieces."

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of the Countess Cathleen would be a prize for the devil. ii"How much do you want for your soul, beautiful lady?" ii"Two hundred thousand pieces of gold. It will be gold enough to feed all the poor until food arrives from over the sea."ii"The money will be yours if you sign this paper."iiThe men gave the Countess a paper edged in black and fixed with a big red seal. The Countess looked at the paper sadly for a while. Then she grabbed the pen from one of the men and signed her name quickly. The men counted out two hundred thousand gold pieces, and the Countess wrapped her cloak around her and left. She spoke to no one until she returned to her home. She called Patrick and spoke to him sadly.ii"Please give this money to the poor. It will buy them food until the food arrives from over the sea. The poor will not have to sell their souls. I am going to my room now. Do not let anyone enter my room. Good©by now, Patrick, and thank you."ii The Countess went to her room and locked the door. She did not come out again. After three days, Patrick and her other helpers unlocked the room. They found that she had died of sadness.iiWhen they heard that the Countess was dead, the rich men came to her home with the paper that she had signed to claim her soul. Before they could take her soul for the devil, two angels appeared and carried off her soul.ii"She sold her soul," said the angels, "but she sold it to save her people. She will have a special place in heaven."iii` `