

## “The 3 Cow’s Days / Laethanta na Bo Riabhach”

The arrival of the month of April brings with it, one hopes, longer, brighter days and encouraging signs of Spring growth. So too, on most occasions at least, warmer, more settled weather. This is particularly pleasing for the farmer, who knows that livestock, having possibly endured a long winter spell with all of the hardships that that may bring will soon be at an end. But it is not always the case, spare a thought for the immortalized tale of fate, of one of the most ‘sacred’ of farm animals, the cow, and how her endurance of winter’s bitter grip, ultimately led to her death!

The 3 Cow(s) Days / The Borrowed Days / The Days of the Brindled Cow, all stemming from Irish language descriptions - Laethanta na Bo Riabhach etc., are but some of the slight variations of title of this legendary folk tale. Some descriptions of this story are very detailed, for example, a curious version from Northern Ireland mentions a blackbird and a stone chatter. Others offer an accompanying rhyme when describing the days; ‘The first of them was wind and wet, the second of them was snow and sleet, the third of them was such a freeze, it froze the bird’s claws to the trees’. Others too, mention specific dates with April 12th supposedly being the first of the borrowed days, all however, involve the poor, unfortunate animal - the old (‘auld’) cow. So, what on earth does the story entail, if you will pardon the pun! Well, the story itself is ultimately a tale of revenge, an attempt at subduing ‘one-upmanship’. It is primarily weather related, having close links to the changing seasons of the traditional Irish Spring months, - February, March and April and it is still held in some regard in terms of respecting nature and the elements. It purportedly teaches the lesson that complaints, especially about bad weather, are made at ones peril.

The basic story goes as follows, an old grumbling cow, was constantly complaining about the ongoing harshness of the weather of the previous month of March, in particular, its latter cold, wet, windy days. She boasted to the other cows in her fellow herd, that even in the face of such tough struggling, she would not be outdone and would certainly survive to see it through. The at first, uninterested March, gradually took umbrage at this and became more and more angry at the old cow and her complaining, it was time to take action. March begged and subsequently borrowed, three days from a generous April and using these three days with redoubled fury (of weather), killed off the old cow!

This story is found as mentioned, in different versions throughout Ireland and even in Europe. Amongst other online locations, it is written about in the Irish National Schools folklore compilations from the 1930’s. Indeed, so ingrained it is perhaps within the folk tradition (of Ireland), that in his play ‘A Thief of a Christmas’ the Tuam playwright Tom Murphy, even makes reference to it when one of his characters, whilst speaking and laughing of triumph over misfortunes having befallen her, exclaims: “Ah, the old cow is still in it Mister!”

Remember the fate of the old cow, be thankful for fine weather and enjoy the Spring sunshine!