Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

The Ransom of Dond

Written & Illustrated by

Siobhan Dowd

Published by

David Fickling Books an imprint of Random House Children's Publishers UK

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk



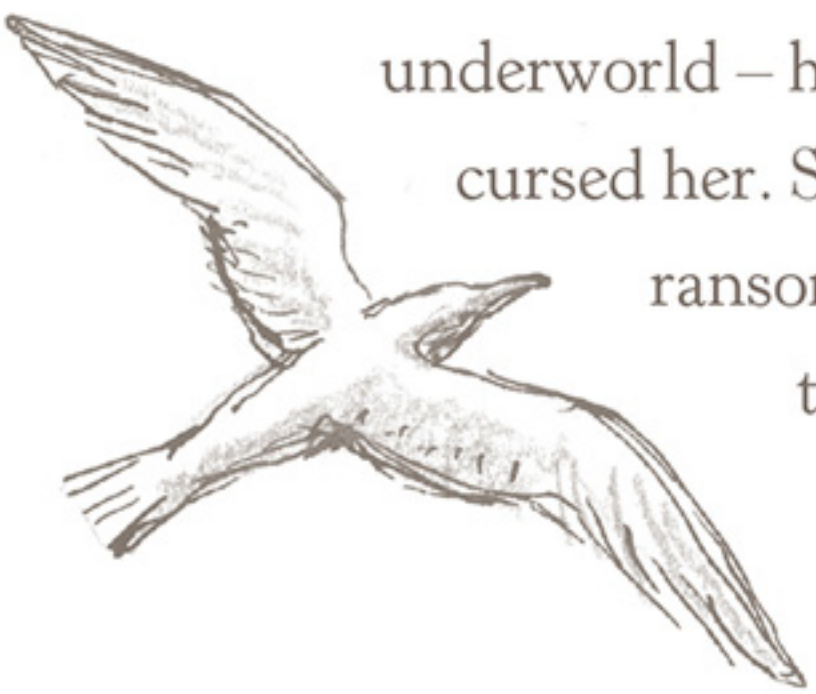
'As we hauled in the creels, Dond came in from the sea, disguised as a black fog. He brought into our hearts the fear of dying and the desire for more. More fish, land, houses. More weapons, arguments, lies. In every man, woman, child, the lust for power was born. He decreed that Inniscaul would be washed away by a great storm if we did not pay his ransom . . .'



Darra read aloud the words of the sacred elders from where they were engraved on the standing stone at the tip of the headland. She'd recited them a thousand times before, but today she faltered at the last part:

'. . . namely, the thirteenth child to a woman born. Any such child should be sacrificed to Dond at age thirteen and thirteen years of good fortune would follow. Otherwise Inniscaul would be no more.'

The words were too close to the bone. Dond – the dark god of the underworld – had both chosen and cursed her. She was the dreadful ransom mentioned in the testament. She was







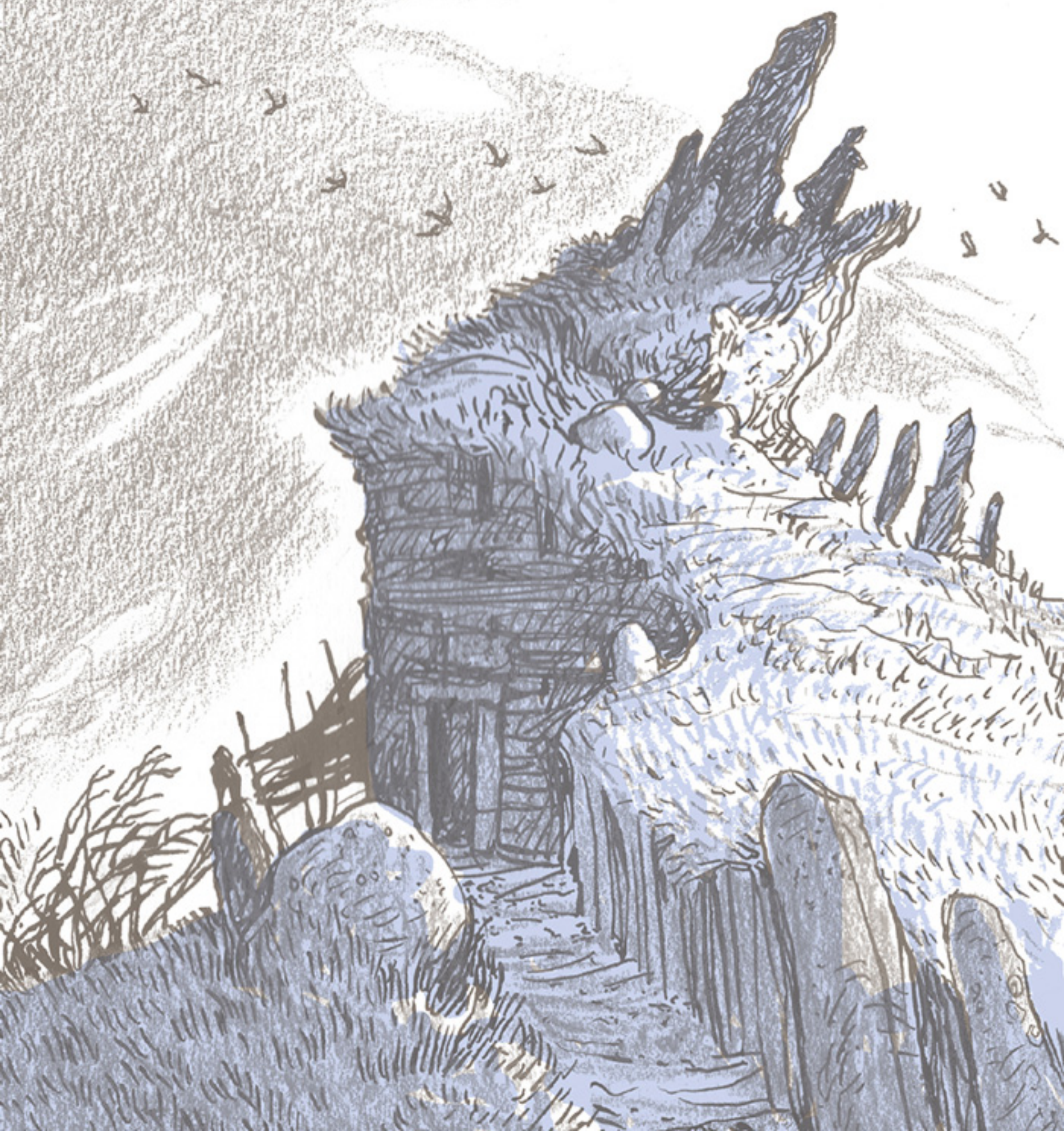
a thirteenth child and tomorrow she would turn thirteen. The fishers would gather at the cove below, and Cail would row her off to sea in a curragh. In full view of the villagers, she would leap overboard with a rock tied to her ankle. She would plunge to the depths of the ocean bed. She would die.

She could think of no worse birthday present.

In living memory, no woman in her village had given birth to a thirteenth child. The mothers knew too well what its fate would be. If they produced as many as twelve babies, they went to Olca, the mountain witch, who sold them a charm so that no more children would arrive.

Darra's mother, Meb, had had eleven children, all girls, who married among

the neighbouring families. When she was expecting her twelfth, she prayed for a son. The gods listened – to a point.



As the old witch Olca reported, Bawn came first, white and wriggling. His little toes and fingers were perfect, his cries piercing and his hair red, the sign of a lucky life. But two minutes later the twin that nobody wanted or expected was born. She was wrinkled, dark and silent. Her mother pushed her away in horror. Olca named her Darra, meaning 'second'.

Cail, the village elder, had taken her in. He raised her in the great stone keep on the headland, apart from the other islanders, and taught her the elders' words: those engraved on the standing stone and others, passed down over generations. She'd known from the day she learned to talk what destiny awaited her.

