My Lagan Love

My Lagan Love
(lyrics by Joseph Campbell, aka Seosamh MacCathmhaoil)

1) Where Lagan stream sings lullaby
There blows a lily fair
The twilight gleam is in her eye
The night is on her hair
And like a love-sick lennan-shee
She has my heart in thrall
Nor life I owe nor liberty
For love is lord of all.

2) Her father sails a running-barge
'Twixt Leamh-beag and The Druim;
And on the lonely river-marge
She clears his hearth for him.
When she was only fairy-high
Her gentle mother died;
But dew-Love keeps her memory
Green on the Lagan side.

3) And often when the beetle's horn
Hath lulled the eve to sleep
I steal unto her shieling lorn
And thru the dooring peep.
There on the cricket's singing stone,
She spares the bogwood fire,
And hums in sad sweet undertone
The songs of heart's desire

4) Her welcome, like her love for me,
Is from her heart within:
Her warm kiss is felicity
That knows no taint of sin.
And, when I stir my foot to go,
'Tis leaving Love and light
To feel the wind of longing blow
From out the dark of night.

5) Where Lagan stream sings lullaby
There blows a lily fair
The twilight gleam is in her eye
The night is on her hair
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She has my heart in thrall
Nor life I owe nor liberty
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From Songs of Man, Luboff and Stracke, (NY: Bonanza, 1965)
Note: According to Luboff & Stracke, the tune is from Ulster and the words early 20th century. I would guess that it is a "parlour" song that has passed into tradition on the strength of the tune more than the words.

In Scottish Gaelic a "leannan-sidhe" is a Faery Lover. This type of Faery Lover often takes a person's love and then leaves. He or she goes back where they came from (Faery Land?) leaving the human pining for their lost love. The poor mortals in the tales of leannan sidhe often died of sorrow. DS,BG"

You may be quite certain that it is the river that flows through Belfast. The song was first published in "Songs of Uladh" [Herbert Hughes and Joseph Campbell] published in Belfast by William Mullan and Sons, and in Dublin by MH Gill, 1904. Hughes' preface says: "I made this collection while on holiday in North Dun-na-n Gall in August of last year." My Lagan Love is on page 32. The note says, "I got this from Proinseas mac Suibhne who played it for meon the fidil. He had it from his father Seaghan mac Suibhne, who learned it from a sapper working on the Ordnance Survey in Tearmann about fifty years ago. It was sung to a ballad called the "Belfast Maid," now forgotten in Cill-mac-nEnain." [This pretension in spelling etc is typical of the Gaelic Revival flavour of this book - it is also embellished with "celtic knots" and fanciful derivations of half uncial script.]
There are four stanzas but sung as five with the repetition of the first one....

Lambeg is a village between Lisburn and Belfast and the Drum is the site of a bridge across the river and the canal that was made beside it, which eventually diverged from the river and entered Lough Neagh. There
for the sake of scansion! " - JM

To quote from Mary O'Hara's notes on this song, from her book "A Song For Ireland", - "The leánan sídhe (fairy mistress) mentioned in the song is a malicious figure who frequently crops up in Gaelic love stories. One could call her the femme fatale of Gaelic folklore. She sought the love of men; if they refused, she became their slave, but if they consented, they became her slaves and could only escape by finding another to take their place. She fed off them so her lovers gradually wasted away - a common enough theme in Gaelic medieval poetry, which often saw love as a kind of sickness. Most Gaelic poets in the past had their leanán sídhe to give them inspiration. This malignant fairy was for them a sort of Gaelic muse. On the other hand, the crickets mentioned in the song are a sign of good luck and their sound on the hearth a good omen. It was the custom of newly-married couples about to set up home to bring crickets from the hearths of their parents' house and place them

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