

Chapter Summaries for

Newbery Honor: The Wonder-Smith & His Son, A Tale from the Golden Childhood of the World (Ella Young) - about 200 pages

The title of the main character is the Gubbaun Saor, the Master Builder or the Wonder Smith. Young collected stories of the Gubbaun for almost twenty years in Gaelic-speaking Ireland, and drops a few remarks about the tales in the book. She says some of them had to be pieced together and filled in from the little bits she could find, while others were given her in almost the same form they're presented here. Ms Young mentions, "*I have amplified the tales but I have not altered any incident*"

Chapter 1 - How The Gubbaun Saor Got His Trade (pgs. 23-27)

* How our title character became the Gubbaun Saor: a black bird drops a bag of tools by him while he sleeps, and "*As he touched them he knew that he had skill to use them though his hands had never hardened under a tool in his life.*" He walks to the nearest town, and there he hears that in this town, which already has the best buildings in the world, three Master Builders came and set themselves to build an even more amazing building than all the rest; they only required that no one should watch them work. But only this morning, a red-headed woman put her head out of doors and "*set the edge of her eyes on the Three Master-Builders*", who turned into crows and flew away with a screech, taking their tools with them. It's obvious that these are the same tools the Gubbaun now carries. The Gubbaun decides to try the tools for the first time in some other place, "*where there are fewer tongues to wag*", and leaves the town.

Chapter 2 – How The Gubbaun Proved Himself (pgs. 31-33 & 37-41)

* Next we hear how the Gubbaun proved himself as a smith and a builder (apparently these are both parts of his trade). He first befriends a water-pooka, in a lovely passage of epic-poetry-style dialogue; then he goes in his wanderings to a place where a "great chief's dune was a-building"
The men building this "dune" or chieftain's fortress are quarreling over whether the carved image on the lintel of the doorway should honor the laird who commissioned the dune, or the man who will carve the lintel, or the man who built the stone walls of the dune. The Gubbaun asks them for work, saying he is a Master-Builder, but they mock him because he has no experience to his name yet. But while the builders are at lunch down by the creek, the Gubbaun carves on the lintel a Two-Tailed King Cat (with its tails twining behind it in proper Irish scrolly-things) that is so ferocious as to be a good symbol for any war-chieftain, and behind its head the loops of its tails twine into emblems for the Builder and the Carver and the Planner of the Dune and even for the Earth that gave the stone for it. "Is it enough?" says the Gubbaun, and the builders acclaim him a Master Craftsman and ask him to stay with them. But he says "Still water is stagnant" and travels on.

Chapter 3 – How The Gubbaun Saor Got His Son (pgs 45-48)

(Possible tandem telling and flute playing or other music)

He wanders and wanders, sees many things and has a daughter along the way (nothing is explained of her mother). Finally he builds a noble house for her and for himself. "*Aunya was the daughter's name. She had the cleverness of her father, but the Gubbaun's heart was set on a son.*" He is sitting outside in the sunshine, bemoaning how terrible it is that he should have all this cleverness and no one but a daughter to leave it to. And a woman comes down the road, lamenting as well, and they talk a bit and discover that the lady is lamenting because of the son she does have, whom she cannot manage; she says she'd rather have a daughter. The Gubbaun, quite confident he can parent the son better than this woman - offers to trade, and the lady accepts. "*She went away after that and left no tidings of herself: she thought it likely the Gubbaun would rue the bargain.*" But the boy turns out a musician and poet, and he will not learn the Gubbaun's craft at all! So very shortly the Gubbaun is lamenting again - that he traded away his daughter for a random boy.

Chapter 4 - How the Gubbaun Tried His Hand at Match-Making (pgs. 51-53 & 57)

He decides to pick out a wife for his adoptive son, and insists on talking to every prospect himself (rather than listening to her mother's claims about her); he asks them riddles and baffles them with his cleverness, and there is not a girl in the countryside wise enough for his taste.

Then three girls with a great reputation for cleverness come from a distance. He shows them each a room piled full with treasure. The first girl says "there would be good spending in that pile", which is the wrong answer, and she is turned away; the second says she would spend none of it, which is also the wrong answer; and the third girl says, "*Big as [the pile] is, it will be lonesome if it is not added to!*" This is the right answer, but when the Gubbaun tests her to see if she "would have the wit to add to it", she fails. The test is this: she must bargain with him for a sheepskin, which she does, but he must get the money and the skin itself both, in payment. She tells him "May Death never trip you until you get it!", meaning he never will.

Chapter 5 – How The Son of the Gubbaun Met With Good Luck (pgs. 61-63 & 67-69)

(Possible tandem telling and more music and song mentioned as the son travels)

He then sends his son, whose name is Lugh, out into the world, to wander until he finds a woman who can pass this test, hoping that the boy will find Aunya again this way, since she has her father's own cleverness. Anyway, the boy takes his white hound and his father's road-blessing, and wanders through the world looking for a buyer for the sheepskin, but for a very long time he never finds one. Then one day he comes to a green plain covered with red blossoms and one tree, and by the well beneath the tree is a beautiful girl with heavy golden hair, who comes to speak with him. "*The Son of the Gubbaun thought it long till he could change words with her.*" They chat a little bit and he tells her about his struggle to sell the sheepskin, and when she hears the terms of the bargain she says she will buy the skin herself. He names his price, and she plucks the wool from the sheepskin and gives back the skin with the money! "*I have fine pure wool for the price of a skin,*" she says, very pleased with her bargain. So Lugh asks her to marry him, and she says yes. Lugh sends his white hound running home to let the Gubbaun know that he has found a woman who will buy the sheepskin at last.

Chapter 6 - How The Gubbaun Saor Welcomed Home His Daughter (pgs. 73-75 & 79-83)

(1st half is the Gubaun's preparation 2nd half could be tandem)

The hound runs faster than every wind that blows, till he arrives at the threshold of the Gubbaun Saor's home, and the Gubbaun begins to ready the house for the celebration. He strews fragrant branches on the threshold, and builds a fire of magical wood over nine sacred stones, and sets out the riches of his household, and all the time he works, he wonders if Lugh has found Aunya again or if the clever woman he's bringing home is a stranger. When Lugh and his lady arrive, the Gubbaun asks her first what she thinks of the fire, to which she says "*The Wind from the South has more warmth and more strength than all the ceremonial fires in Erin*", and then what she thinks of the building of the house, on which she says that nobody but the builder has the right to say how good a building is. And then he knows that this is his own daughter Aunya, and welcomes her heartily. But Aunya, who has also the gift of prophecy, says that the Gubbaun will one day send her away from his house and tell her never to look back, and she asks him to swear that on that day she may take three armloads of treasure out of the house. The Gubbaun says he will never give Aunya a hard word, let alone send her away, but she presses him and he swears the oath.



Chapter 7 – How The Gubbaun Quarreled With Aunya And What Came Of It (pgs. 87-89 & 93-94)

(Possible **tandem telling**)

Aunya and Lugh are happy together, but the Gubbaun wears himself out trying to work four or five times as hard as he did before Aunya arrived, and eventually he becomes angry at her for being so brilliant he can't outdo her, and sends her away saying:

*"Do not come back to this house by day; Do not come back to it by night;
Do not come back to it by the road; Do not come back to it through the fields;
Do not come back to it with man, woman, or child in your company.
Do not come back to it alone. Go forth from this house."*

So Aunya says she will leave, but reminds him that she gets to take three armloads of treasure out of the house. The first arm-load she takes is the cradle with her baby son in it; the second is Lugh, her husband, the Gubbaun's son; and the third arm-load is the Gubbaun himself! *"The Gubbaun hadn't a word out of him."*

So Lugh and the Gubbaun get ready to wander the world and say goodbye to the house, but Aunya says there is no reason they can't stay if they want to. The Gubbaun asks how she plans to come back to the house without breaking any term of his banishment geis (curse), and she says that she will come back at twilight, walking on the walls by the side of the road, and with Lugh's white hound by her side! So they stay. Because Aunya is the cleverest of all.

Chapter 8 - How the Son of the Gubbaun Talked with Lords from a Strange Country (pgs. 97-101 & 105-111)

The Gubbaun's son is sitting by the roadside in the high summer when emissaries come from the King of the North, the King of Winter, named Balor. They wish the Gubbaun to come and build Balor a great dune / fortress; they tell Lugh to take his choice of the many jewels and treasures they lay before him, as earnest-money, and to entreat his father to go over the sea to Balor's country and build the dune. As soon as Lugh takes the jewels, the whole procession of emissaries disappears. Lugh, very excited about visiting a strange country, talks the Gubbaun into going but when they are on the way and the Gubbaun says, "Shorten the road for me, son," Lugh answers, *"Put a shape of running on yourself and your own two feet will shorten it for you."* The Gubbaun says Lugh is not wise enough yet to be helpful to him in Balor's country, and they return home.

Aunya tells Lugh that story-telling is the shortening of a road, and when the Gubbaun and Lugh set out again the morrow - this time with Lugh making all the proper preparations, washing at the well and asking Aunya's advice for the road and taking a hazel rod with him, which he was too hurried to do the first time - Lugh starts telling a story which is *"sorrowful in parts, but the joyful parts are stronger than the sorrowful parts; and the end is joyful."*

Chapter 9 - The Building Of Balor's Dune (pgs. 115-120 & 125-128)

Lugh's stories last till they come to the northern sea, where two of Balor's emissaries await them. They cross the sea in a demon-driven boat, then ride upon howling winds to Balor's capital. The hazel rods which Lugh and the Gubbaun carry save their lives; when the winds start to dissipate and drop them, they strike their steeds with the rods and the winds re-form into creatures they can ride. Balor commands the Gubbaun to build him a dune the like of which was never built before, and the Gubbaun sets to work. Lugh wishes for his reed flute, but there are no reeds in all of Balor's country; so, nothing daunted, he makes a flute of metal and plays upon it. A woman of Balor's country brings her young son to Lugh and asks his help in curing the child's wasting sickness, and daily Lugh plays music of strength and joy and delight for the boy, and cures him. Finally, as the dune draws near completion, the lady tells Lugh that her son's gift from birth is to hear any sound in the whole world, and that he has heard a whisper that Balor intends to kill the Gubbaun and Lugh when the dune is completed, so that no one will ever raise a dune as majestic again. When Lugh tells the Gubbaun of this, the Gubbaun sits down to think, and all the djinns and other assistants that Balor has provided him sit down and cease working as well. Balor comes to ask why the work has stopped, and the Gubbaun tries to make the excuse that he needs a tool he has left at home, locked in his toolbox, which is bedded into the foundations of the house... but no matter what he says, Balor will not let him leave to fetch this tool himself, but sends a messenger to fetch the whole house or whatever it takes to bring the tool! The Gubbaun says the messenger will not come back; Balor doesn't believe him.

Chapter 10 - How The Djinn Out Of Balor's Country Brought A Message To Aunya (pgs. 131-135 & 139-141)
(Possible tandem telling)

Sure enough, the messenger-djinn and Aunya have, first, a contest of shape-shifting - one becomes fire, the other water, that sort of thing - then when the djinn says they are "too evenly matched" for one to win at that, they go to a rhyming-contest about whether Strength or Wit is better; when Aunya has capped several of the djinn's rhymes, he switches the contest to feats of power. Aunya can both rend a giant yew-tree with a light blow of her hand and make it whole again with a touch; the djinn, hard as he tries, can do neither. Eventually she captures him in the cleft fork of a branch, where he must stay till Lugh and the Gubbaun come home. She tells him that when they do so, she will let him free and give him the length of his ears in two gold earrings for a present, so he settles there and concentrates his power on making his ears a mile long.

Chapter 11 – The Embassy Of Balor's Son (pgs. 145-149 & 153-156)
(Wailing/chanting may lends itself to song & music)

When Balor finally figures out the djinn is not returning, the Gubbaun talks him into sending his son and his vizier to fetch it. They go with their whole entourage, and when the entourage returns, they are mourning and weeping -- for Balor's son and his vizier are locked into the Gubbaun's treasure-house where Aunya sent them to fetch the tool. So finally, the Gubbaun and Lugh ride the winds back to Ireland, and all the land welcomes them in gladness.

Chapter 12 – The Gubbaun Saor's Feast (pgs. 159-164 & 169-171)
(Music, singing and toasting abound)

Aunya gives a great feast to welcome their return, and guests come from the four corners of the globe: the King of the Vikings, the Queen of the South, the Chief Poet of Ireland in his feather cloak, the fairy people, and even a Phoenix out of Tir na nOg. Balor's son and vizier are freed to join the feast, and it is a great feast. At the end of the feast, the Gubbaun passes around a great crystal cup filled with the wine of Moy-Mell. Each guest proposes a toast, and when the cup reaches Balor's son, he says, "*To Balor the Munificent and the noble dune that is a-building!*", and the cup shatters into pieces because it can't be used to drink to a falsehood. But the Gubbaun gathers the pieces in his hand, and states the truth - that Balor is not munificent but treacherous, and planned to kill the Gubbaun and his son when the dune was finished - and the cup becomes whole again. Balor's son complains that the Gubbaun claimed to need a tool, and even taught Balor's son himself the name of the tool in his own language, to request it from Aunya (this was cleverly written in ogham when we saw it during that part of the story); now we see the true meaning of the words the Gubbaun taught Balor's son: "*The Crooked against crookedness, The Twist against a twist, and The Twist against treachery*". That was the tool the Gubbaun needed and the one he used to escape from Balor. When the son and the vizier and the djinn go back, they should carry the message that Balor can finish building his dune himself. But first, everyone dances, even the sun and moon and the stars, and the memory of that party lasts for a thousand years, "*--and to this hour it is laughter in the heart of the hills.*"

Chapter 13 - How the Gubbaun Saor Went Into the Country of the Ever Young (175-180 & 185-189)
(Possible tandem telling and flute or other music)

And this chapter contrasts Lugh's love of life with the Gubbaun Saor's abilities as the master builder slipping away from him. Lugh tries too late to rouse the Wonder Smith's memories so that he can finally teach him his trade but it is too late. Finally, Lugh does what he knows best and plays music for his father as he draws his final breaths.

Chapter 14 – The Great Pist (pgs. 190-191)

The Great Piast, the sea-serpent herself, draws up out of the deep to ask the Gubbaun's son and daughter the great question "Why Do You Mourn?" and that is the end of the Gubbaun's story.