

THE MARRIAGE FAIR.

And How an Irish Girl's Will Undid the Matchmaking.

It was the last Thursday in Epiphany, and fair day in Gurteen.

The one and only street the village boasted of was thronged with folks laughing and chattering as none but an Irish crowd can laugh and chatter; indeed, so great were their numbers that to get along at all you had to turn aside and scramble through the shingle, where the boats laid within shouting distance of their owners' doors. But there was little buying and selling that day in the tiny hamlet on the ocean's edge, for all men knew that "match-making" was the real business of today, the last fair day before Lent, and so the last great chance to make a match.

While Blind Larry "ris jigs" for the fair a party of four people were taking solemn counsel in a little shanty by the beach. This was Andy Lyneham's forge, and Andy himself was in the midst of the conclave. Not that he took any part in it; he had nothing to say, as a rule—and now he listened sullenly while his old mother was making a match for him with the daughter of Terence Flannigan, who, with his wife, completed the number of conspirators.

"Andeed, Mrs. Lyneham, ma'am," Mrs. Flannigan was saying as she threw back the great hood on her long cloak, "andeed, ma'am, 'tisn't like as if me dater Kattie hadn't ne'er a boy at all after her; there's whips av thim waitin' her."

"There is that!" corroborated her husband, emphatically.

"But ye see, ma'am," she went on, "me an' me husband wants some one that have a thrade; times is so bad wid the land."

"Thru fur ye, Mrs. Flannigan, ma'am," said the other woman with garrulous politeness. "Thim as has land is robbed intirely these times. 'Tis well fer ye, Terence Flannigan, that ye've been puttin' by a bit av money thim thirty years," she added cunningly.

"Little enough, ma'am, little enough, said Terence; "but I'll give Kattie's man a hundred poun' the day after the marryin'—divil a pinny more."

"Faix, thin, 'tis no great match after all," said Mrs. Lyneham, gathering her heavy cloak closer about her as if it go.

"Look at that, now!" cried the other woman, flaring up; "may be ye wouldn't get an offer like it so handy again. Where would the likes av ye git a hundred poun', or half av it?"

"An' where would ye git a fine, hearty lamp av a boy like my Andy? The best smith that ever dhrave a nail in a shoe!" cried Mrs. Lyneham, fairly dancing with rage.

"Howld ye're whisht, mother. Ye've a dale too much chat out av ye," said the bone of contention, rising from the anvil where he had been sitting, chewing a long straw in silence. "I'll take the girl, Terence," he went on; "the owld woman wants help in the house; and 'tis time I tuk some one, I suppose."

"'Tis sure," said Terence. "Give me a howld av ye're hand, Andy. There, now," shaking the blacksmith's fat heartily, "I won't break me word to ye about the money."

"I believe ye," said the blacksmith, lounging out of the door.

"Well, there, now, the match is made," said Mrs. Lyneham smoothing back her gray hairs under her snow-white mutch, "an' divil a steadier boy there is in Gurteen than Andy. 'Tis the lucky girl ye're darter is this day, Mrs. Flannigan."

"Faix, ma'am," answered Mrs. Flannigan, bridling, "I know thim as would give golden guineas to be matched with Kattie; though, andeed, ma'am,"

she added, softening, "I have no word to say again Andy."

"Deed, he minds his business well, an' never touches a sup o'dhrink," said the fond mother, proudly. "Only if he wouldn't spend so much time foosthering about with thim little hins, bad luck to thim, that lays an igit no bigger than a marble," she added, reflectively, as the trio started down the village street.

The "little hins" alluded to were the one extravagance, the sole form of dissipation that the burly smith allowed himself, and were a thriving family of hantama that he loved as his life. With his own hands he had made a wire enclosure for them behind the forge, that none but himself might feed them. His thrifty mother had a huge contempt for his "little owld chickens," as she called them, for by their fruits she valued them, and Julia Brannigan at the corner shop gave only four-pence a dozen for the dainty eggs.

But while the plotters plotted in the grimy forge, the victim of their machinations was out on the green demurely footing it opposite Patsy O'Rourke, her partner in that "Pattern."

She was a tall, slim maid, with the jet-black hair and exquisite gray eyes seen so often in the south; he was an immense young fellow, red-haired and freckled like a wren's egg, with eyes that looked as innocent and simple as a child's. When at length the trippings to and fro, the "linking partners" and mad whirls in the middle of the floor, and the stately courtseys came to an end, Kattie whispered to her big partner as he handed her cloak to her: "Come here, beyant, a minnit."

Patsy's eyes danced with joy at the prospect, and seeing an air of mystery in the girl's matter, he assumed such a knowing expression on his guileless countenance that made him look more like a very wicked baby than anything else. Soon the pair had wandered away up the hill behind the gray old chapel, and stood by the wishing well, where a thousand little rags of all colors and texture fluttered from the boughs of the hawthorn bush, each the record of some wish accomplished by the good St. Bridget for one who drank from her holy well in perfect faith. Then they halted; the girl sitting on the low wall that went half way round the edge of the water, while her companion stood awkwardly by, with a dumb adoration written in every line of his simple, manly face.

"Tuesday is Shrove," said Kattie suddenly, intently watching the fall of a pebble into the clear water.

"Eh?" said Patsy, mystified, and he bent over to watch the rings that formed where the stone had fallen, looking from them to Kattie's face in a vain endeavor to see how her speech applied.

Kattie gave a short sigh and tried again.

"I've see the chapel below?" looking down herself to where it leaned against the hill.

"I do that," answered Patsy, with relief, feeling that he had failed miserably before.

Then there was a pause.

"Well?" said Kattie, a little crossly, flinging a whole handful of pebbles into the water.

Patsy's face fell again. He thought it easy to look down at the chapel, but he evidently had not done all that was expected of him.

"'Tis a mortal nate roof," he hazarded, looking inquiringly at his companion: "Twas Paddy Cullough's father-in-law put the slates on it."

Kattie blushed to the tips of her pretty ears, and her lips trembled, while Patsy, who, dense as he was, saw her distress, looked piteously around him for inspiration, finally blurting out:

"I'm almost sure he was his father-in-law."

Another silence, and then Kattie, bending her head very low, said, hardly above a whisper:

"I'll be there—in the chapel—Tuesday mornin'."

"Will ye now?" cried the unfortunate Patsy, his honest face lighting up. "Goin' to see the wedding? Sure, I'll be there, too."

"'Tis to be married meself I'll be goin'," cried the girl, looking up with burning cheeks.

"Ye—ye to be married?" gasped the man, so white that the freckles seemed to increase and multiply to an alarming extent.

"Yes, me," cried Kattie, beginning to grow cool as soon as he lost his head.

"Be the holy ——" burst out Patsy.

"Whisht! Ye mustn't curse," said she, quickly.

"An' who to?" he asked in a choking voice.

"Andy, the smith."

"I have no word against Andy," said he, slowly; "only—oh! Kattie, asthore!" stretching out a great, brown hand.

"Why didn't ye say that long ago?" said Kattie, stealing a glance with eyes full of tears as she laid her hands in his.

"Kattie, dear, why would ye marry him?" said Patsy, looking the picture of abject misery.

"Maybe nobody else would have me," said she, with a mischievous smile.

"Nobody else!" almost shouted he. "Sure, wouldn't I —?"

"Be aisy, will ye," warned Kattie, with the common sense that rarely deserts her sex on these occasions. "Be aisy; ye needn't tell the whole parish. Listen to me," she went on quickly; "'tis only to-day the match is making, but well I know that Andy's owld mother won't let the chance pass. And Andy himself, dacint boy, don't care who he gets to redd up the house for him. So ye'll see me married to him 'a Tuesday if ye don't —"

"Don't what?"

"If ye don't be said by me."

"Sure, I will. Only tell me what to do."

"Faith, ye wan't some one badly to mind ye; 'tis little since av ye're own ye have," said Kattie, looking with love in her eyes at the eager face that confronted her.

"Well, I'll be said by ye," said Patsy firmly. "Only spake the word."

"Well, thin," said the girl, looking down, "be nixt to me over right the altar 'a Tuesday, an'—an' bring—a ring wid ye."

"Ay, faith, will I," said Patsy emphatically; "an' what will happen thin?"

"Lave that to me, ye omadhaun," said Kattie, giving his hand the tiniest squeeze as she turned to go. But Patsy laid his hand on her arm, and, with his honest face full of joy, asked in an incredulous tone:

"An' is it me ye want, Kattie dear?"

"Divil another," said Kattie, looking up fondly.

"Look at that now!" exclaimed Patsy delightedly; "an' ye love me?"—as if it were too good to be true—"me? An' the red head av me an'—all?" he repeated.

"Ay, do I! Have conduct, now, will ye?"

But it was too late, and there was nothing to do but to smooth her hair as she walked on by his side.

A bright March sun shone on the little gray chapel on the morning of Shrove Tuesday. Everybody was on the green. Little Timsey Dwyer had come all the way from Berehaven, wearing the whole of his wardrobe—four waistcoats and three coats—which was his conception of a gala costume. He was the merriest soul on the countryside, as ready for fun as many a man at half his age, and now he was

come, by special invitation of the bride-elect to see Terence Flannigan's daughter married.

He came to meet Kattie with a series of curvets like a rather staid but highly mettled steed, at the same time waving his hat round his head. He soon put an end to this display and turning him sharply around, led him away among the people. When they appeared again the girl's eyes were full of eager expectation, while Timsey's comical old face was screwed up to an expression of intense enjoyment. Then there was a general movement toward the chapel, for the all important hour had come.

With jokes and laughter the crowd slowly crushed itself in through the open door until the building was densely packed—but with a dull-roted congregation from that which a few minutes before had chattered outside, for in his church the Irish peasant is the most devout and reverent of worshippers. As she entered, Kattie had called Patsy to her side with a look, and now he stood close behind her at the altar steps, while behind him Terence Flannigan and his wife were helping Mrs. Lyneham to lead her son forward.

Timsey Dwyer had disappeared.

Presently the ceremony began, and the priest, a stranger doing duty for Father Murphy—who was in Macroom, marrying his sister's daughter to a policeman—began at one end of the row of couples before him. Kattie stood trembling, and casting glances of agonized expectation over her shoulder toward the door; Patsy still kept his position behind her, watching her intently, and by her stood Andy, but he seemed to listen to something outside. Father Gallagher had come within two couples of her, and was putting all-important questions to the man in his rich Kerry brogue. In another minute it would be for him who was to marry Kattie Flannigan to express his willingness to receive her as his "lawful wife according to the rite of the holy mother Church."

One last despairing glance over her shoulder. Ah! her face brightens at last, and her pale cheeks glow once more, for there is a movement in the crowd that packs the aisle, and little Timsey Dwyer forces his way to where Andy Lyneham is standing; he gives a tremendous wink, that completely obliterates half his face, at Kattie, then, standing on tiptoe, whispers in Andy's ear. As he did, the lazy black smith seemed roused from his lethargy at last, and, muttering, "Sure, I thought I heard thim," turned inconspicuously from the altar and fairly plunged through the people down the aisle, followed by Terence and Mrs. Flannigan, who brought him in loud whispers to come back, and pulling his mother after him, who, with great presence of mind, had firmly grasped the tails of his coat. Meanwhile Father Gallagher had reached the spot where the truant had stood, and while he paused for the little tumult to subside, Kattie quietly motioned her Patsy to the vacant place next her; so when the crowd closed behind the struggling quartet he found a demure-looking maiden and a man of 6 feet 2, with red hair and a face like a child in surprise, awaiting his services.

"Ye're name, me good man?"

"Patsy O'Rourke, ye're reverence," answered the bridegroom, who had darted a look at the bride, for directions. Then the ceremony proceeded.

"Are ye, Patrick O'Rourke, willing to receive Kathleen Flannigan, here present, as your lawful wife, according to the rite of the Holy Mother Church?"

"I beg ye're reverence's pardon!" said Patsy.

"I will, I will," whispered Kattie, jogging him with her elbow.

"I will, I will," echoed Patsy, loudly, and turned to her again for further instructions; but she was listening while the priest put the question to her, and