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THE WIDOW'S WEDDING.

Some half dozen miles from the coast of the County Antrim, and opposite to the Bay of Ballycastle, rises, from the stormy ocean of the north, the island of Rahery. It is seldom visited now, in consequence of the wild turbulence of its rough shores, exposed on all sides to a rude surf, and the irregular tides which ebb and flow around it. It commands a wide extent of coast, and is the first land seen by vessels coming to our northern shores. The inhabitants are a poor simple race of people, and their island is not very productive. Rahery was a long time the resting place of the Scots in their expeditions, and their place of refuge in danger; it was also the place of assembly for the great northern chieftains, before making their descents on the Scotch or English coast. There are the ruins of a very old castle here, called Bruce's castle, from its being the retreat of the famous hero, Robert Bruce, during the disturbances in Scotland at the time of Balaol. About the middle of the sixth century, the patron saint of the north, Columbus, otherwise Colum-kille, founded a religious establishment on the island of Rahery, which was destroyed by the Danes. In the year 973 they also plundered this island, and barbarously murdered St. Feradach, the abbot. The Scots held possession of it in 1558, but were attacked and driven out, with great slaughter, by the Lord Deputy, Sussex. The people of the coast and the island are all expert seamen, and at one time were famous smugglers. The Irish cobbles of wicker-work, covered with a tarred and pitched horse-hide, were much in use here of old, and even still are sometimes seen skimming along, with their one or two conductors, in fine weather. And though I have said that the island is seldom visited, I did not wish to be understood as saying that there was not a constant communication between its inhabitants and the main shore; there is a kind of friendly intercourse subsisting between them, and even in the most tempestuous weather, boats to and fro, are seen passing, despite of danger and difficulty. In the island of Rahery there resided a farmer, named McCaban. He was one of the most wealthy men in the little district, being possessed of a very large farm and two fishing boats. He had one daughter, the flower of the island, and the pride of her parents. Many suitors came to gain young Mary from her father's house, as she had the largest portion of any maiden in Rahery. Her father and mother were anxious that she should choose one from among the young men of her little native isle, or the surrounding coast, but she continually declined entering into any engagement with any of them. Neither was it from coldness or caprice that she refused to comply with the wishes of her parents—her heart had been smitten by the manly form and pleasing address of Kennedy O'Neil, the son of a widow who resided on the mainland, near the cliff of Ballycastle. She was in the habit, during summer weather, in company with a number of the young women and men of the island, to visit the opposite shores, and join in the dance with the villagers; in this way she first became acquainted with Kennedy, mock na bointhee, or, the widow's son. His frank, obliging, and manly manners won upon the unsophisticated heart of the simple, yet tender and faithful islander. Kennedy was fondly attached to Mary, and the dance on Sunday without her, appeared the most monotonous and pleasureless spot in the world. The mother of Kennedy was one of those beings which are to be found in many parts of the country, even in this enlightened era—a believer in, and a practiser of, spells and charms, or, what is commonly called, a fairy woman.—She professed the curing of all unaccountable and uncommon diseases, and which are attributed to the waywardness or malignity of that imaginary class of spiritual beings called fairies.—Cattle suddenly taken ill, and children in a decline, or with pains or swellings, were taken to her, from a great distance, to "try her skill on," but whether she was successful in all her operations or not is more than can be said at present. She was feared and respected in the neighborhood, and, at the same time, was considered one of the most useful personages within many miles of Ballycastle. She perceived, with delight, her son's attachment to Mary McCaban, and encouraged it with all her soul; and being, as she boasted, of the "rale ould anshint race," and having a small farm in her possession, she had, she imagined, every hope that Kennedy's suit would be successful with the father of the fair Mary. Ensured of Mary's affection, and incited by his mother's approbation and wish on the subject, he took an opportunity of waiting on the farmer, and claiming her as his bride; but met with a decided and insulting refusal. This was a shock which his young and ardent nature was not prepared to meet, and which the proud heart and revengeful disposition of his mother could not brook. Mary was equally unprepared to meet it, for she had cherished hopes

which were suddenly blighted; and her lover had pictured such warm scenes of domestic felicity, in the anticipated enjoyment of their homely fireside pleasures, that a second paradise of happiness had been opened to her young soul. Still hope, and promises of mutual affection, to be fairly and firmly kept "for ever and a day," helped to reconcile them to what they considered the hardships of their situation. Months glided by, and McCaban was anxious to have his daughter married to some of the very respectable young men who proposed for her, but Mary modestly, yet firmly, resisted every effort made to induce her to forego her promise to the mock na bointhee. "Where are you going the day, dear?" said the widow O'Neil to her son, as she perceived him fitting his tackle for the water one fine Sunday. "Just over right to the island," replied Kennedy. "Stay at home, Kennedy, dear then, this day," said the mother. "Didn't I send word over to Mary McCaban that I'd be over to the sport this evening?—through did I," said Kennedy. "There's a storm to the north-west this evening," then, said the mother; "an' though fine the sun shines above us just now, God help the sail it catches atween Rahery and the cliffs this evening, when he looks his last over the waters, with the black clouds afore his face." "Why, it looks a little grey and misty, to be sure, an' that where it ought to be brightest, too, the foot of the win'; but, then, it's goin' round it is, an' not coming for'ad—it's a shiftin' fresher, you see, and that's all mother." His little bark was soon in trim and at sea, and soon the cliffs of Rahery, with all their bleak and wave-washed caverns, frowned upon his skiff as it flew, like the dark-sided gull, silently and swiftly along. The day was passed in a round of pleasure, for Kennedy was a general favorite, and the young men of the island endeavored to entertain him in the best possible manner; and, as evening was closing, he had the happiness to "meet wi' and greet wi'" his true and faithful Mary. Therefore, it was late before he thought of returning, and the sun was setting in the ocean before he stepped into his little "skimmer of the waves." The forebodings of the storm pointed by his mother, were now increased into actual threatenings, of the very worst description. The wind had veered, and was sounding over the ocean, in the distance, like the moanings of a coming spirit, on an errand of misery and sorrow to mankind, while the ocean heaved and swelled, and the waves rolled heavily and forcibly to the shore, giving certain indications of the fury of the storm that was raging in the distance. Notwithstanding all these terrible omens, he launched his boat, and turned its tiny prow to the rising billows, and steered for the cliff of Ballycastle. The wind was partly against, and the tide, in its usual rapid manner, was rushing to mid-ocean; still Kennedy set his sail, and, taking a sweeping tack, stood away from the point of Rahery. Though appearances were very disheartening while in the shelter of the shore, yet as he stood far out, before the breeze, he trembled for the consequences of his rashness, and was sorry that he did not take the advice of his companions, and not have ventured out to sea that evening. But his pride would not allow him to think of returning, for as he had the name of being the best sailor round the shore, it would fix itself as a stain on his character, should he fly to the land, after having put to sea against their wishes. In the mean time the gale increased, and the waves became too fierce and high to leave almost a hope that his light frail bark could ever reach the shore; still he held on, keeping her head to the foaming billows, upon which it rose like the wild bird, who dwells amid the storms. The winds now bellowed like the voices of many spirits, and the agitated deep, roused by their calls, answered by tossing its many crested waves to the clouds, and roared its responses to the furious element in tones of destruction and power. Kennedy, in taking in his small sail, lest his little bark should be overturned even by its breadth of canvass, was cast out, by one tremendous gust, into the howling waters; but, with the steadiness, firmness, and presence of mind, of a man used to meet danger and to combat it, he soon grasped the side of his dancing boat, but in attempting to regain his position, her side was turned to the coming wave, which cast her over, and there she lay, in the trough of the sea, with her keel upwards. Even here Kennedy's native courage and hardihood did not forsake him; he dived, and rose again just beside his upset and shivering vessel, upon which he seized with that desperate force which the fear of death supplies to the man in jeopardy. He clung to the keel with the tenacious grasp which one should lay upon their last hold of life, determined, while strength remained, to use every effort to preserve his existence. It was now dark night, and as

his wreck would rise high upon the back of the yelling billows, he could discern the lights on shore, faint and dim in the distance, fainter and more dim than ever he had remarked them before—and the dreadful thought came across his mind, that the boat was driving out to sea, and that, if not swallowed up by the devouring waves during the storm, he would be left to perish, through weakness and excess of toil, far out in the ocean. Yet even still he determined to hold on, and trust in the goodness of that Almighty Being who caused the winds to blow, and the stormy waves to rage around him. Towards morning the wind abated, and the waves subsided by degrees, though now and then fierce gusts and mountain billows came, like the bursts of passion which break abruptly from the bosom of the angry, after their violent fit has poured the full rage of its wrath. The morning dawned, and when the harassed and terror-stricken Kennedy looked around him, the land was in no place visible. He was alone, riding on the back of his upturned bark, a solitary living being amid the waste of waters. Despair filled his bosom; and, after having out-lived the terrors of the night-storm, he was about casting himself headlong into the deep, sooner than die a death of lingering and protracted agony; but hope, the ever-dweller in the human heart, came again to his aid, and the thought of meeting some vessel coming from, or going to Belfast, or any of the northern ports made him resolve to preserve his life as long as possible. Nor was he disappointed, for towards evening a distant sail appeared coming in the direction in which he lay. Various hopes and fears now thronged heavy and quick upon his mind—she might be going in a contrary direction—he might not, even if coming any way near her, be able to make himself observed. He took off his coarse blue jacket, and stripped off his shirt and red neck cloth, both of which he held as high as his hand would allow over his head; and when one hand would tire, he would hold it in the other. On she came, and at length he was perceived, and a boat lowered, into which he was taken, exhausted and gasping. The ship belonged to a merchant in Belfast, and was taking a large cargo of fine linens and other goods to the West Indies.—They were some leagues away even from the sight of land, and Kennedy had no other alternative but to make the voyage with them—a thing the master appeared to be very proud of, as he found, after leaving Belfast, that his complement of hands were too few to work the vessel. In the morning the mother of Kennedy despatched a person to the island to inquire for her son; but no other account could be given, but that he had put to sea at night-fall, just as the storm was beginning. All round the bay of Ballycastle was explored, even for his corpse, but not the slightest vestiges of him or his boat could be discovered. He was given up as lost, and the unfortunate mother was wild and loud in her grief and lamentations; nor were the sorrows of the faithful Mary less, though not so noisy; deep in the inmost recesses of her heart, she deplored the loss of Kennedy, and the big tear rolling down her cheek, while pursuing even her household affairs, told plainly of— "The secret grief was at her heart." She pined, and the rose fled from her cheeks. She shunned the usual amusements in which she delighted, and gave herself up to melancholy.—Her father and mother became anxious about her health, and wished, when it was too late, that they had given her to Kennedy O'Neil. They did every thing to rouse her, in which, after some months, they succeeded; and she became more resigned and composed. Again they urged her to marry a very wealthy young man from the opposite shore, who had proposed for her hand, even before the supposed death of Kennedy. She gave a passive consent, and after some time they were married. She was any thing but happy; she did her best to please and make her husband as happy as she could, but still there was a coldness and apathy in her manners which she could not banish; and though she did her best to be cheerful, yet still, in the midst of her efforts to appear gay, a chill would creep over her, and the thoughts of Kennedy mock na bointhee, and how he lost his life in coming to see her, would mar with sadness every attempt she made to please others, or appear happy herself. Four months after her marriage were scarcely elapsed, when her husband, who had been out fishing, quarrelled with one of his companions as they were returning, and commenced fighting, even in the narrow boat. The other two men endeavored to separate them, but without effect; and while the confusion reigned, the boat struck against a sunken rock, and the four men were ejected into the ocean, at the same time that the husband of Mary received a violent blow on the head with a boat-hook. The boat heeled with the shock, and immediately filled with water, and settled down beneath the wave as three men rose to the surface—but the husband of Mary never rose; stunned by the

blow, he was unable to struggle when precipitated beneath the waves, and became the victim of his own rash and quarrelsome habits. Mary was now alone in the world, and possessed of, comparatively, a comfortable independence, and she determined never to marry again. Several proposals were made, but all rejected, with a firmness that told the solicitor that it would be useless to apply a second time. She remained in this state for nearly six months; and one evening in the month of October, as the shortening autumn day was closing, a sailor, with a short stick in his hand, and a bundle slung on the end of it over his shoulder, made his appearance at the door, and addressing the servant-maid, who was preparing the supper, requested a drink, and liberty to light his pipe. "Walk in, sir," said Mary, who was employed at the other end of the house, with her back to the door. The sailor started, and drawing back a few steps, surveyed the house from roof tree to foundation, and from end to end. "Won't you come in, sir?" said the servant girl. "No, no," said he, "I thank you—I want nothing from you now;" and his tone was hurried and agitated, and he turned away from the door, and ran like a man who had beheld some frightful, devouring monster, and from which he was trying to escape. It was Kennedy O'Neil, mock na bointhee, who, after a variety of adventures during ten months, had returned to his native land with some little money, and high in the hope that he would find his Mary faithful, and ready to reward all his sufferings by becoming his wife. "It is her," said he to himself, after turning from her door, and when he had gained a sufficient composure to arrange his thoughts. "It is her—I could not be mistaken in her voice or form—but I could not bear to look on her: and did she so soon forget me? not a twelvemonth gone, yet she is married, dear knows how long. What's the use in my coming home?—I may as well turn back this moment, and go to the Indies again;" and he stopt, as if to return on his path: "but I must see my poor mother, and give her what I have gathered after my hardship and danger. Yes, she deserves it better from me than the false-hearted and the forgetful—the breaker of promises, and the betrayer. And is it of Mary McCaban that I'm obliged to say all these shameful things? Well, it's no matter: 'man proposes, but God disposes;' if she's happy maybe it's better for both her and me, for surely a stronger arm than poor mortyual man's separated us in the beginning; and there's a fate in marriage; but after all—all that passed between us—all that she promised me, and all that I promised her; and all the vows and hand an' words that she give me. However—what is to be, will be; and there's no contending against a body's luck; but Mary McCaban, if I never knew you it would be better for me—that I know to my cost, anyhow." In such soliloquies and reflections was his mind occupied until he reached the cottage of his mother. It was dark and chilly; and mournfully the breeze blew from the sea with a wailing sound, and the booming of the distant ocean, intermingled with the hoarse and dashing noise of the breakers on the shore, served to add a gloom of an additional shade to his melancholy. His mother was sitting alone by her now desolate hearth—the last embers of the dying turf-fire were flickering faintly from between two "sods of turf," which were placed over them to inspire a renovated life into them, in order to preserve them for 'the morrow.' She also held communion with her heart. "It was a curious dream," she said, thinking alone; "and why should he come in that way to me, as if there was a joy to visit my old and withered heart, after the dark waves concealed him for ever from my sight. The dead can come no more to give gladness to the living; nor can the fallen tree ever be set upright amongst its companions in the thickwood, to bear green leaves and young branches; and why should he come to me in the disguise of joy, even in my dreams. He was not fond of tormenting or crossing me, and I know he would not wish to break my heart now entirely." Here a rap of a particular kind at the outside made her start from her reverie.—"Ha! my God! that rap! Oh, if it's a warnin' for me it's welcome—I hope I am prepared to go; but maybe it's some of the good people who want to catch me uddin'—let them knock again;" and she listened with impatience, strongly mingled with superstitious fear, and again the knock was repeated more markedly than before, and again she became pained and agitated. "I never in my life heard any thing so like; but it's only to desave me the better; so the sorra a latch I'll rise, or a bolt I'll draw till it raps again, anyhow;" and again the rap was repeated with a certain degree of impatience, and she then approached the door with a cautious, stealthy step, and demanded who was there?

"Friend," was the laconic reply; to which was added—"isn't it a shame for you not to let a poor man in this hour of the night?" "Oh, gracious, it is his very voice. Speak—who are you?" she exclaimed, "for the love of goodness speak, and tell me who you are?" "Who am I? Well but that's a queer question to ask a man at his own mother's door—who he is?" "She uttered a loud scream, and endeavored to spring to the door; but her emotions overpowered her, and her limbs refused to do their office, and down she fell upon the floor. Kennedy hearing the cry, burst open the door, and made every exertion in his power to reanimate the corpse-like figure of his mother, which he after some time effected. The meeting of the mother with the son, whom she now found, after believing him buried deep within the secret depths of the sea, was truly affecting. It is impossible to describe a scene of this kind; but a man will feel the pleasure which such a sight must impart to the benevolent heart. The mother cried in frantic joy, and lung upon his neck, and wept over him. After the first paroxysm had abated, he described to her his wonderful and miraculous escape; and she thanked heaven for restoring to her her only child. "But, mother," said he, "there's a great many changes have taken place since I left this." "It's yourself that may say that, dear," said the old woman, "and not one of them for the better." "It's you I believe, mother," said he; "I have not seen any improvement since I left it." "No, dear; there's the miners' tearing up the earth at the ould head to look for coals; and there's the polish (police) placed all round for fear we'd get a pinsworth from the say (sea) and there's the ould castle there going to be levelled with the rock, for fear it id hide a bale, or a cask, and—" "There's Mary McCaban married, mother," said he convulsively. "Yes, agra," replied the mother; "there's no depending upon any one, or upon any thing in this deceiving world." "Well, mother, I'm only come just to see you, and bring you a little money to keep you comfortable, and then to bid you good bye, and then to go to seek my fortune again." "And are you going to leave me after all, when I thought that God had pursued you just to be the comfort of my old days?" "I could not live here now, mother; every thing is strange, and cold, and changed, and every thing looks worse than ever I saw it before—even you, mother, are sadly worn since I left you." "And am I to loose you again? Why did you ever come to me, when my mind was settling after your loss, and God was making me reconciled to your death?" "But Mary McCaban, mother, to forget me so soon; not one year till she got married to another;—would I do so? No, never." "Yes, an' it's little comfort she had; for she did not long enjoy him; she was but four months married till he was killed." "And is she a widow now, mother?—ah, God help her! and who killed her husband?" "I did," replied the mother. "Could I bear to see another where my son should be? No. I went to the stream three nights, and I made a float of the flaggers. I took from its grave, in the middle of the night, the skull and left hand of a child that never was christened. I dressed it up, and christened it by his name. I then put it into the float, with the hand tied to the rudder, and sent it down the stream, under the quiet moon and all the stars; 'twas racked (wrecked) at the fall of the rocks—'twas I done it—afore that day month he was murdered." The son shuddered as the mother concluded her horrifying recital, but he said nothing; he was accustomed to hear such things, and he firmly believed in their efficacy and power. However, his thoughts had undergone a material change since he heard that Mary was a widow. He promised to remain with his mother, for a while at least, and they retired for the night. Nothing could exceed the surprise and astonishment of the neighborhood when the news was spread abroad the next morning, that Kennedy O'Neil was returned, and some would not believe but that it was his mother who had redeemed him from fairy-land. All his old acquaintances flocked to see him, and hear his wonderful story, and every one had some news or another to tell him about Mary McCaban. Week after week passed away, and he never made an attempt to see her, nor she to see him. At last, one evening as he was returning from the dance in the neighboring village, a little warmed with the exercise, and heated with liquor, some strange sailors, belonging to a vessel that took shelter in the bay, for the purpose of refitting, had joined in the amusements, and had left the scene of gaiety some time before him. As he walked on