

Nancy

Lawrence Landrigan, '39

The sun buried himself in an elongated pile of fluff behind Sleive Aughty, and the late winter afternoon gave place to twilight without a struggle. The last of the changing color vistas in the evening sky faded away. Darkness drifted in from the sea and settled quickly over the island and the bay. A keen wind off the ocean swept landward, chilling as it passed. Lights began to twinkle from the windows of cozy kitchens along the bay road and on the island. To the north-east the island lighthouse flashed its warning seaward. Night set in.

From his vantage point in the bay window of the hill-top home of the Flannigans, Uncle Dan commanded an excellent view of the bay, the mainland, and the island. It had always been a source of pleasure for Martha and him to watch the day go, the night come, and their neighbours, far and near, light their lamps. But Martha was no longer at his side. The moan of the wind in the eaves reminded him of the Holy Souls, and he whispered a fervent "God rest them."

The heat of the kitchen and the evening quiet were making him drowsy until the patter of little feet behind him and two, cool, chubby hands smelling of scented soap covered his eyes with difficulty. Then, with a rather unsuccessful attempt to falsify a six year old treble came a querulous, "Guess who!"

"Paddy McCrea, the tailor from Cork," cried Uncle Dan.

The hands flew off. From behind the chair came a gale of childish laughter and over the arm appeared a mass of curls, a wrinkled nose and a pair of eyes as blue as Our Lady's cloak.

"Is it yerself that I see, Paddy? T'be shure ye've changed since last I saw ye. If I didn't know yer voice (giggles from the arm of the chair) I'd be afther sayin' ye were the local Princess, Eleanor Flannigan o' the House of Flannigan" (more giggles).

"'Tis meself of the House of Flannigan," said the figure in the voluminous night dress as she dropped a curtsy to the head of the clan and raced for his knee.

"Up ye come then. Rest yer head. Shure 'tis yer

hair that looks like a bundle of sunbeams that the fairies caught and curled. But I suppose it's a story ye'd be afther wantin'." This last in a whisper and back came the whispered answer.

"Yes, yes, about fairies."

The old man reached for his T. D. on the window sill. The erstwhile Princess jumped for a tinder, lit it, and brought it back crackling to light the pipe. The ritual concluded, the tinder extinguished, she of the hair-of-gold settled herself on Uncle Dan's knee, and the yarn was in the spinning.

"It happened," began the Grandfather, "the year me father, God rest his soul, built the new barn. 'Twas jist like yerself I was then, macushla, not much bigger than a fly and twice as active.

There was a pause as the storyteller puffed great clouds of smoke into the air.

"It's as clear to me now as the sun that shines," he went on. "Me grandfather, the Lord have mercy on him, was there wit his auld blackthorn, thinkin' he was the boss, givin' orders, an' goin' around cross enough to bite, because nobody minded him the littlest bit. But 'tis the barn I'm tellin' av and not the Auld Man.

"Me father got Dinny O'Toole, carpenter, mason, blacksmith, and plasterer, a great man intirely, to work wid him at the barn. Dinny came av a Choosday wid his tools, and for days the two av thim worked like Trojans until they had the walls up; thin they spent wan whole day gettin' the rafthers up an' ready for the thatch. The next mornin' 'twas meself who was up the first to light the fire and put the praties on to bile. Whin I wint out to milk I looked at the barn and I saw —

"Would ye be afther gettin' me a light like a good girl?" the raconteur interrupted himself. The youngster fairly leaped at the task. There were mischevious wrinkles playing around Uncle Dan's eyes. The little one returned with the light, lit the pipe, destroyed the tinder, and flew back to the waiting knee with the query, "And what was it you saw, grandfather?"

"The rafthers were down. 'Twas a strange thing intirely and Dinny sich a carpenter too. I raced for the house to tell thim and I met me father in the door. 'In the name of St. Patrick, sez he, 'what is it that ails ye?' 'The barn,' sez I, 'the rafthers av it are down.' 'They're not,' sez he, and tears off to see for himself. He was back in a minute

shoutin' to Dinny. Well Dinny an' the Auld Man came out about the same time. Dinny av coorse couldn't see through it at all, at all. The Auld Man could though. 'Ye arn't carpenters at all,' sez he, 'I told ye it was wrong.' And he went around grumblin' and growlin' to himself the rest av the day, havin' a grand time intirely. A cause they could not find. There wasn't a breath av air all night. And agin 'twas strange me mither didn't hear thim fall.

"Well that day was spint puttin' the fallen rafthers up agin. Ye may be shure it was solid they were e're nightfall. The nixt mornin' 'twas mesilf who was up first and out to the barn. Lo' and behold if the rafthers weren't down agin. I turned around; there stood me father, his face blank with amazement. Dinny was behind him lookin' kind av funny and the Auld Man brought the rear gloatin' agin. 'Carpenters,' sez he with a snort, 'builders,' another snort, 'ye couldn't build a pile av peat.' "

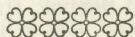
"Well they turned to agin and put thim up fer the third time. All day it took thim, and the next mornin' 'twas the same. The rafthers were on the ground.

"The grandmother said the place was bewitched. The Auld Man was weakenin' too. Dinny was in a bad way about his reputation. Me father wanted to get finished so's he could get at the peat. But what was to be done none av thim knew. They were sittin' ther wonderin' whin Auld Moira, the beggarwoman, came up and gave thim the time av the day. We children were a little timid whin Moira came. 'Twas said she had the Evil Eye; although her eyes looked like everywan else's. 'Is that' sez she, 'the way to finish yer barn, Pat Flannigan.' Me father told her the whole story and whin he finished, the old beggar sez, 'Arrah and isn't a rath av the little people that is on the hill ahind ye and yer barn? And did ye not see the hill ferninst ye. The rafthers av yer barn, Pat Flannigan,' sez she, 'is in the track av the fairies whin they'd be afther jumpin' from wan hill to the other. 'Twas thim who knocked yer rafthers down. Ye had betther be movin' yer barn and now, in God's Holy Name, give me a bite to ate.'

"Well they moved the barn, Princess, and the rafthers stayed up. But it's yerself who won't be stayin' up much longer because the fairies are pourin' sand in yer eyes. Where is me pay for the story? "

The little one placed cherubic lips on the old man's cheek, smiled a sleepy "Good night" and was lifted to the floor. With one hand rubbing fairy sand from her eyes, the

other in the pocket of mother's apron she started upstairs and answered Uncle Dan's, "Where is it yer at now, me fine Princess," with, "Half way up the wooden hill, me noble Lord."



We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught:
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

—*Shelley.*

Gie me ae spark o' Nature's fire,
That's a' the learnin I desire;
Then, tho' I drudge thro' dub an' mire
At pleugh or cart,
My muse, though hamely in attire,
May touch the heart.

—*Burns.*

