

THE PRINCESS AND THE VAGABONE

BY RUTH SAWYER

IF you would hear a tale in Ireland, you must first tell one. So it happened, as we sat in the Hegartys' cabin on a late fall night after a cross-roads dance, that I, the stranger, found myself beginning the story-telling. The cabin was overflowing with neighbors from the hills about: girls and lads stretched tired-limbed beside the hearth, elders sitting in an outer circle. The men smoked, the women were busy with their knitting, and the old gray piper—hidden in the shadow of the chimney-corner—sat with his pipes across his knees, fingering the stops with tenderness as unconsciously as a parent's hand goes out to stroke a much-loved child. From between the curtains of the outshot bed peered the children, sleepless-eyed and laughing. The kettle hung, freshly filled, over the fire; the empty griddle stood beside it, ready for a late baking, for there would be tea and currant-bread at the end of the evening.

I remember I told the legend of the Catskills, dwelling long on Rip's shrewish wife and the fame of her sharp tongue. They liked the story; I knew well that they would, for the supernatural lies close to the Irish heart; and before ever it was finished Michael Hegarty was knocking the ashes from his pipe that he might be ready with the next tale.

"That's grand," he said at the conclusion. "Do ye know, ye've given me a great consolation? I was afther thinkin' that Ireland had the exclusive rights to all the sharp-tongued, pestherin' wives," and he shook his head teasingly at the wife who sat across the firelight from him.

"Did ye, now?" she answered, her face drawn into an expression of mock solemnity. "Sure, was it because ye knew we had the run o' vagabone husbands?"

The children gurgled with appreciative merriment, but Michael pulled me gently by the sleeve.

"I have a tale—do ye know Willie Shakespeare?"

I nodded, surprised at the question.

"Well, ye may not be knowin' this: he was afther writin' a play a few hundthred

years ago which he took sthraight out of a Connaught tale. Like as not he had it from an Irish nurse, or maybe he heard it from a rovin' tinker that came to his town."

"Which play do you mean?"

"Faith, I haven't the name by me handy, just, but your story put me in mind of it. I was readin' it myself once, so it's the truth I am tellin' ye. He has it changed a wee bit—turned it an' patched it an' made it up in a sthrange fashion; but 'tis the same tale, for all o' that. Sure, did ye ever know an Englishman yet that would let on to anything he'd took from an Irishman?"

A joyful murmur greeted the last.

"Tell us the tale," I said.

There was a long pause; the burning turf sifted down into "faery gold" upon the hearth and the kettle commenced to sing. Michael Hegarty smiled foolishly—

"I am afther wishin' ye had the Gaelic so as I could tell it to ye right. Ye see, I'm not good at givin' a tale in English—I haven't the words, just;" and he fumbled uneasily with his empty pipe.

"Ye can do it," said the wife, proudly.

"I can make the try," he answered, simply; and then he added, regretfully, "But I wish ye had the Gaelic."

Thus did Michael Hegarty begin the story of the Princess and the Vagabone. I marveled at first that the poetry and beauty of language should come so readily yet so unconsciously to his lips; and then I remembered that his people had once been the poets of the world, and men had come from far away to be taught by them.

This is the tale as he told it that night by the hearth—save that the soft Donegal brogue is missing, and nowhere can you hear the rhythmic click of the knitters' needles or the singing of the kettle on the crook making accompaniment.

Once, in the olden time, when an Irish king sat in every province and plenty covered the land, so that fat wee pigs

ran free on the highroad, crying, "Who'll eat us?" there lived in Connaught a grand old king with one daughter. She was as tall and slender as the reeds that grow by Loch Erne, and her face was the fairest in seven counties. This was more the pity, for the temper she had did not match it at all, at all; it was the blackest and ugliest that ever fell to the birthlot of a princess. She was proud, she was haughty; her tongue had the length and the sharpness of the thorns on a *sidheog* bush; and from the day she was born till long after she was a woman grown she was never heard to say a kind word or known to do a kind deed to a living creature.

As each year passed, the King would think to himself, "'Tis the New Year will see her better." But it was worse instead of better she grew, until one day the King found himself at the end of his patience, and he groaned aloud as he sat alone, drinking his poteen.

"Faith, another man shall have her for the next eighteen years, for, by my soul, I've had my fill of her!"

So it came about, as I am telling ye, that the King sent word to the nobles of the neighboring provinces that whosoever would win the consent of his daughter in marriage should have the half of his kingdom and the whole of his blessing. On the day that she was eighteen they came: a wonderful procession of earls, dukes, princes, and kings, riding up to the castle gate, a-courting. The air was filled with the ring of the silver trappings on their horses, and the courtyard was gay with the colors of their *bratas* and the long cloaks they wore, riding. The King made each welcome according to his rank; and then he sent a serving-man to his daughter, bidding her come and choose her suitor, the time being ripe for her to marry. It was a courteous message that the King sent, but the Princess heard little of it. She flew into the hall on the heels of the serving-man, like a fowl hawk after a bantam cock. Her eyes burned with the anger that was hot in her heart, while she stamped her foot in the King's face until the rafters rang with the noise of it.

"So ye will be giving me away for the asking—to any one of these blithering

fools who have a rag to their backs or a castle to their names?"

The King grew crimson at her words. He was ashamed that they should all hear how sharp was her tongue; moreover, he was fearsome lest they should take to their heels and leave him with a shrew on his hands for another eighteen years. He was hard at work piecing together a speech made up of all the grand words he knew, when the Princess strode past him on to the first suitor in the line.

"At any rate, I'll not be choosin' ye, ye long-legged corn-crake," and she gave him a sound kick as she went on to the next. He was a large man with a shaggy beard; and, seeing how the first suitor had fared, he tried a wee bit of a smile on her while his hand went out coaxingly. She saw, and the anger in her grew threefold. She sprang at him, digging the two of her hands deep in his beard, and then she wagged his foolish head back and forth, screaming:

"Take that, and that, and that, ye old whiskered rascal!"

It was a miracle that any beard was left on his face the way that she pulled it. But she let him go free at last, and turned to a thin, sharp-faced prince with a monstrous long nose. The nose took her fancy, and she gave it a tweak, telling the prince to take himself home before he did any damage with it. The next one she called "pudding-face" and slapped his fat cheeks until they were purple, and the poor lad groaned with the sting of it.

"Go back to your trough, for I'll not marry a grunter, i' faith," said she.

She moved swiftly down the line in less time than it takes for the telling. It came to the mind of many of the suitors that they would be doing a wise thing if they betook themselves off before their turn came; so as many of them as were not fastened to the floor with fear started away. There happened to be a fat, crooked-legged prince from Leinster just making for the door when the Princess looked around. In a trice she reached out for the tongs that stood on the hearth near by, and she laid it across his shoulders, sending him spinning into the yard.

"Take that, ye old gander, and good riddance to ye!" she cried after him.

It was then that she saw looking at her

a great towering giant of a man; and his eyes burned through hers, deep down into her soul. So great was he that he could have picked her up with a single hand and thrown her after the gander; and she knew it, and yet she felt no fear. He was as handsome as Nuada of the Silver Hand; and not a mortal fault could she have found with him, not if she had tried for a hundred years. The two of them stood facing each other, glaring, as if each would spring at the other's throat the next moment; but all the while the Princess was thinking, and thinking, how wonderful he was, from the top of his curling black hair, down the seven feet of him, to the golden clasps on his shoes. What the man was thinking I cannot be telling. Like a breath of wind on smoldering turf, her liking for him set her anger fierce-burning again. She gave him a sound cuff of the ear; then turned, and with a sob in her throat she went flying from the room, the serving-men scattering before her as if she had been a hundred million robbers on a raid.

And the King? Faith, he was dumb with rage. But when he saw the blow that his daughter had given to the finest gentleman in all of Ireland, he went after her as if he had been two hundred million constables on the trail of robbers.

"Ye are a disgrace and a shame to me," said he, catching up with her and holding firmly to her two hands; "and, what's more, ye are a disgrace and a blemish to my castle and my kingdom; I'll not keep ye in it a day longer. The first traveling vagabone who comes begging at the door shall have ye for his wife."

"Will he?" and the Princess tossed her head in the King's face and went to her chamber.

The next morning a poor singing *sthronshuch* came to the castle to sell a song for a penny or a morsel of bread. The song was sweet that he sang, and the Princess listened as Oona, the tirewoman, was winding strands of her long black hair with golden thread:

"The gay young wran sang over the moor.

'I'll build me a nest,' sang he.

'Twill have a thatch and a weelatched door,
For the wind blows cold from the sea.

And I'll let no one but my true love in,
For she is the mate for me,'

Sang the gay young wran.

The wee brown wran by the hedgerow
cried—

'I'll wait for him here,' cried she.

'For the way is far and the world is wide,
And he might miss the way to me.

Long is the time when the heart is shut,

But I'll open to none save he,'

Sang the wee brown wran."

A strange throb came to the heart of the Princess when the song was done. She pulled her hair free from the hands of the tirewoman.

"Get silver," she said; "I would throw it to him." And when she saw the wonderment grow in Oona's face, she added: "The song pleased me. Can I not pay for what I like without having ye look at me as if ye feared my wits had flown? Go, get the silver!"

But when she pushed open the grating and leaned far out to throw it, the *sthronshuch* had gone.

For the King had heard the song as well as the Princess. His rage was still with him, and when he saw who it was, he lost no time, but called him quickly inside.

"Ye are as fine a vagabone as I could wish for," he said. "Maybe ye are not knowing it, but ye are a bridegroom this day." And the King went on to tell him the whole tale. The tale being finished, he sent ten strong men to bring the Princess down.

A king's word was law in those days. The Vagabone knew this; and, what's more, he knew he must marry the Princess, whether he liked it or no. The Vagabone had great height, but he stooped so that it shortened the length of him. His hair was long, and it fell, uncombed and matted, about his shoulders. His brogues were patched, his hose were sadly worn, and with his rags he was the sorriest cut of a man that a maid ever laid her two eyes on. When the Princess came, she was dressed in a gown of gold, with jewels hanging from every thread of it, and her cap was caught with a jeweled brooch. She looked as beautiful as a May morning—with a thunder-cloud rising back of the hills; and the Vagabone held his breath for a moment, watching her. Then he pulled the King gently by the arm.

"I'll not have a wife that looks grander than myself. If I marry your daughter,

I must marry her in rags—the same as my own.”

The King agreed 'twas a good idea, and sent for the worst dress of rags in the whole countryside. The rags were fetched, the Princess dressed, the priest brought, and the two of them married; and, though she cried and she kicked and she cuffed and she prayed, she was the Vagabone's wife—hard and fast.

“Now take her, and good luck go with ye,” said the King. Then his eyes fell on the tongs on the hearth. “Here, take these along—they may come in handy on the road; but, whatever ye do, don't let them out of your hands, for your wife is very powerful with them herself.”

Out of the castle gate, across the gardens, and into the country that lay beyond went the Princess and the Vagabone. The sky was blue over their heads and the air was full of spring; each wee creature that passed them on the road seemed bursting with the joy of it. There was naught but anger in the Princess's heart, however; and what was in the heart of the Vagabone I cannot be telling. This I know—that he sang the “Song of the Wran” as they went. Often and often the Princess turned back on the road or sat down, swearing she would go no farther; and often and often did she feel the weight of the tongs across her shoulders that day.

At noon the two sat down by the cross-roads to rest.

“I am hungry,” said the Princess; “not a morsel of food have I tasted this day. Ye will go get me some.”

“Not I, my dear,” said the Vagabone; “ye will go beg for yourself.”

“Never,” said the Princess.

“Then ye'll go hungry,” said the Vagabone; and that was all. He lighted his pipe and went to sleep with one eye open and the tongs under him.

One, two, three hours passed, and the sun hung low in the sky. The Princess sat there until hunger drove her to her feet. She rose wearily and stumbled to the road. It might have been the sound of wheels that had started her, I cannot be telling; but as she reached the road a great coach drawn by six black horses came galloping up. The Princess made a sign for it to stop; though she was in

rags, yet she was still so beautiful that the coachman drew in the horses and asked her what she was wanting.

“I am near to starving;” and as she spoke the tears started to her eyes, while a new soft note crept into her voice. “Do ye think your master could spare me a bit of food—or a shilling?” and the hand that had been used to strike went out for the first time to beg.

It was a prince who rode inside the coach that day, and he heard her. Reaching out a fine, big hamper through the window, he told her she was hearty welcome to whatever she found in it, along with his blessing. But as she put up her arms for it, just, she looked—and saw that the prince was none other than the fat suitor whose face she had slapped on the day before. Then anger came back to her again, for the shame of begging from him. She emptied the hamper—chicken pasty, jam, currant bread, and all—on top of his head, peering through the window, and threw the empty basket at the coachman. Away drove the coach; away ran the Princess, and threw herself, sobbing, on the ground, near the Vagabone.

“'Twas a good dinner that ye lost,” said the Vagabone; and that was all.

But the next coach that passed she stopped. This time it was the shaggy-bearded rascal that rode inside. She paid no heed, however, and begged again for food; but her cheeks grew crimson when he looked at her, and she had to be biting her lips fiercely to keep the sharp words back.

“Ye are a lazy good-for-naught to beg. Why don't ye work for your food?” called the rascal after her.

And the Vagabone answered: “Ye are right entirely. 'Tis a sin to beg, and to-morrow I'll be teaching her a trade, so she need never be asking charity again upon the highroad.”

That night they reached a wee scrap of a cabin on the side of a hill. The Vagabone climbed the steps and opened the door. “Here we are at home, my dear,” said he.

“What kind of a home do ye call that?” and the Princess stamped her foot. “Faith, I'll not live in it.”

“Then ye can live outside; it's all the same to me.” The Vagabone went in

and closed the door after him ; and in a moment he was whistling merrily the song of "The Wee Brown Wran."

The Princess sat down on the ground and nursed her poor tired knees. She had walked many a mile that day, with a heavy heart and an empty stomach—two of the worst traveling companions ye can find. The night came down, black as a raven's wing ; the dew fell, heavy as rain, wetting the rags and chilling the Princess to the marrow. The wind blew fresh from the sea, and the wolves began their howling in the woods near by, and at last, what with the cold and the fear and the loneliness of it, she could bear it no longer, and she crept softly up to the cabin and went in.

"There's the creepy-stool by the fire, waiting for ye," said the Vagabone ; and that was all. But late in the night he lifted her from the chimney-corner where she had dropped asleep and laid her gently on the bed, which was freshly made and clean. And he sat by the hearth till dawn, keeping the turf piled high on the fire, so that cold would not waken her. Once he left the hearth ; coming to the bedside, he stood a moment to watch her while she slept, and he stooped and kissed the wee pink palm of her hand that lay there like a half-closed loch lily.

Next morning the first thing the Princess asked was where was the breakfast, and where were the servants to wait on her, and where were some decent clothes.

"Your servants are your own two hands, and they will serve ye well when ye teach them how," was the answer she got.

"I'll have neither breakfast nor clothes if I have to be getting them myself. And shame on ye for treating a wife so," and the Princess caught up a piggin and threw it at the Vagabone.

He jumped clear of it, and it struck the wall behind him. "Have your own way, my dear," and he left her to go out on the bogs and cut turf.

That night the Princess hung the kettle and made stirabout and griddle bread for the two of them.

"Tis the best I have tasted since I was a lad and my mother made the baking," said the Vagabone, and that was all. But often and often his lips touched

the braids of her hair as she passed him in the dark ; and again he sat through the night, keeping the fire and mending her wee leather brogues, that they might be whole against the morrow.

Next day he brought some sally twigs and showed her how to weave them into creels to sell on coming market-day. But the twigs cut her fingers until they bled, and the Princess cried, making the Vagabone white with rage. Never had she seen such a rage in another creature. He threw the sally twigs about the cabin, making them whirl and eddy like leaves before an autumn wind ; he stamped upon the half-made creel, crushing it to pulp under his feet ; and, catching up the table, he tore it to splinters, throwing the fragments into the fire, where they blazed.

"By St. Patrick, 'tis a bad bargain that ye are ! I will take ye this day to the castle in the next county, where I hear they are needing a scullery-maid, and there I'll apprentice ye to the King's cook."

"I will not go," said the Princess ; but even as she spoke fear showed in her eyes and her knees began to tremble under her.

"Aye, but ye will, my dear ;" and the Vagabone took up the tongs quietly from the hearth.

For a month the Princess worked in the castle of the King, and all that time she never saw the Vagabone. Often and often she said to herself, fiercely, that she was well rid of him ; but often, as she sat alone after her work in the cool of the night, she would wish for the song of "The Wee Brown Wran," while a new loneliness crept deeper and deeper into her heart.

She worked hard about the kitchen, and as she scrubbed the pots and turned the spit and cleaned the floor with fresh white sand she listened to the wonderful tales the other servants had to tell of the King. They had it that he was the handsomest, aye, and the strongest, king in all of Ireland ; and every man and child and little creature in his kingdom worshiped him. And after the tales were told the Princess would say to herself : "If I had not been so proud and free with my tongue, I might have married

such a king, and ruled his kingdom with him, learning kindness."

Now it happened one day that the Princess was told to be unusually spry and careful about her work; and there was a monstrous deal of it to be done: cakes to be iced and puddings to be boiled, fat ducks to be roasted, and a whole sucking pig put on the spit to turn.

"What's the meaning of all this?" asked the Princess.

"Ochone, ye poor feeble-minded girl!" and the cook looked at her pityingly. "Haven't ye heard the King is to be married this day to the fairest princess in seven counties?"

"Once that was I," thought the Princess, and she sighed.

"What makes ye sigh?" asked the cook.

"I was wishing, just, that I could be having a peep at her and the King."

"Faith, that's possible. Do your work well, and maybe I can put ye where ye can see without being seen."

So it came about, as I am telling ye, at the end of the day, when the feast was ready and the guests come, that the Princess was hidden behind the brodered curtains in the great hall. There, where no one could see her, she watched the hundreds upon hundreds of fair ladies and fine noblemen in their silken dresses and shining coats, all silver and gold, march back and forth across the hall, laughing and talking and making merry among themselves. Then the pipes began to play, and everybody was still. From the farthest end of the hall came two-and-twenty lads in white and gold; these were followed by two-and-twenty pipers in green and gold and two-and-twenty bowmen in saffron and gold, and, last of all, the King.

A scream, a wee wisp of a cry, broke from the Princess, and she would have fallen had she not caught one of the curtains. For the King was as tall and strong and beautiful as Nuada of the Silver Hand; and from the top of his curling black hair down the seven feet of him to the golden clasps of his shoes he was every whit as handsome as he had been that day when she had cuffed him in her father's castle.

The King heard the cry and stopped the pipers. "I think," said he, "there's a scullery-maid behind the curtains. Some one fetch her to me."

A hundred hands pulled the Princess out; a hundred more pushed her across the hall to the feet of the King, and held her there, fearing lest she should escape. "What were ye doing there?" the King asked.

"Looking at ye, and wishing I had the undoing of things I have done," and the Princess hung her head and sobbed piteously.

"Nay, sweetheart, things are best as they are," and there came a look into the King's eyes that blinded those watching, so that they turned away and left the two alone.

"Heart of mine," he went on, softly, "are ye not knowing me?"

"Ye are putting more shame on me because of my evil tongue and the blow my hand gave ye that day."

"I' faith, it is not so. Look at me."

Slowly the eyes of the Princess looked into the eyes of the King. For a moment she could not be reading them; she was as a child who pores over a strange tale after the light fades and it grows too dark to see. But bit by bit the meaning of it came to her, and her heart grew glad with the wonder of it. Out went her arms to him with the cry of loneliness that had been hers so long.

"I never dreamed that it was ye; never once."

"Can ye ever love and forgive?" asked the King.

"Hush ye!" and the Princess laid her finger on his lips.

The tirewomen were called and she was led away. Her rags were changed for a dress that was spun from gold and woven with pearls, and her beauty shone about her like a great light. They were married again that night, for none of the guests were knowing of that first wedding long ago.

Late o' that night a singing *sthrónshuch* came under the Princess's window, and very softly the words of his song came to her:

"The gay young wran sang over the moor.

'I'll build me a nest,' sang he.

"'Twill have a thatch and a wee latched door,

For the wind blows cold from the sea.
And I'll let no one but my true love in,
For she is the mate for me,
Sang the gay young wran.

The wee brown wran by the hedgerow
cried—

'I'll wait for him here,' cried she.
'For the way is far and the world is wide,
And he might miss the way to me.
Long is the time when the heart is shut,
But I'll open to none save he,'
Sang the wee brown wran."

The grating opened slowly; the Princess
leaned far out, her eyes like stars in the
night, and when she spoke there was naught
but gentleness and love in her voice.

"Here is the silver I would have thrown
ye on a day long gone by. Shall I throw it
now, or will ye come for it?"

And that was how a princess of Con-
naught was won by a king who was a
vagabone.

AROUND THE CAMP-FIRE

BY WILLIAM DE WITT HYDE

WE were in one of those camps
in the Maine woods where
each household or group has
a little cabin; all come together for meals,
and as many as please gather around a
blazing camp-fire after supper to talk with
a frankness unheard of in the towns
whence they come.

One evening, after the sentimental had
paired off in canoes and the frivolous had
repaired to their cabins for "bridge," ten
of us sat before the dying embers—a
stenographer, a boy whom we all called
"the kid," a young lawyer, a reformer,
a teacher, a widow, an artist, a merchant,
a doctor, and a reader.

The last was the leader of our group.
He had been a Methodist minister, but
widening views and a growing family had
proved inconsistent with narrow parishion-
ers and diminishing income, and he had
become a reader and adviser for a large
publishing house.

The instincts of his former profession
remained with him, however, and under
his leadership an evening gathering often
would revert to the class-meeting type.
For, however secular the subject with
which we started, the Reader would
always bring the discussion around to a
spiritual conclusion. One evening he
announced that forty thousand dollars had
come to him from an unexpected source,
and asked us each to tell him what we
would do if we had it. Each of us was liv-
ing close up to his income, yet meeting all
his needs with it, so that this sum meant

to us all what wealth means—power to
direct a considerable portion of the world's
goods; the services of our fellows, and
our own efforts into channels of our own
choosing. Hence, secular and far away
from the Day of Judgment as seemed the
Reader's request, it was really—since
will is the core of personality—a polite
invitation to turn our souls inside out.
The stenographer, happening to be
seated at the Reader's right, was called
on first.

"I would invest it in gilt-edged bonds
which no one should know anything about.
I wouldn't quit my work—that would be
a confession that I hated it, and had
always been a slave in it, and was at
heart as lazy as the idle rich I had pro-
fessed to despise—but I would be inde-
pendent in it. If I did not like one
employer, I would change to another until
I found one who would treat me as a
human being—care a bit for me as well as
for the work he got out of me, and give
me a little share in his work and some
responsibility for it. Then, when he had
come to care for both me and my work,
I would make terms with him—shorter
hours for less pay, a half-holiday every
week, and the right to send a substitute
at my own expense two or three days
every month if I wished. On these
terms I could keep strong and young and
well and happy, and that is all a working-
woman is supposed to want."

Next came "the kid," who, in spite of the
fact that the stenographer was ten years his