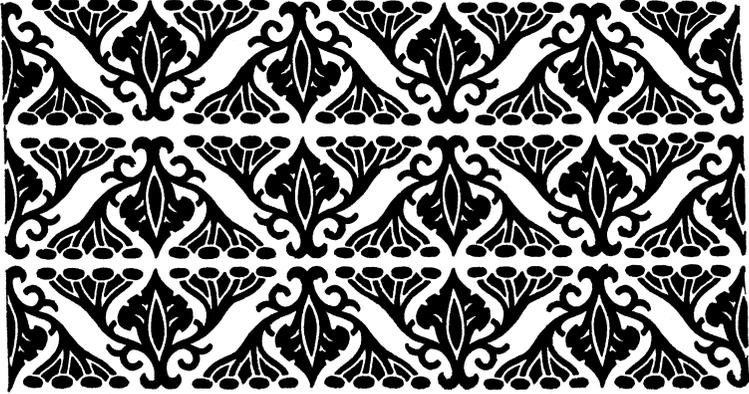


The Plaisham



ANCY and Shamus were man and wife, and they lived all alone together for forty years, but at length a good-for-nothing wastrel of a fellow named Rory, who lived close by, thought what a fine thing it would be if Shamus would die, and he could marry Nancy, get the house, farm, and all the stock. So he up and said to Nancy:

‘What a pity it is for such a fine looking woman as you to be bothered with that ould, complainin’, good-for-nothing crony of a man that’s as full of pains and aches as an egg’s full of meat. If you were free of him the morrow, the finest and handsomest young man in the parish would be proud to have you for a wife.’

At first Nancy used to laugh at this, but at last, when he kept on at it, it began to prey on Nancy’s mind, and she said to young Rory one day:

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‘I don’t believe a word of what you say. Who would take me if Shamus was buried the morra?’

‘Why,’ says Rory, ‘you’d have the pick of the parish. I’d take you myself.’

‘Is that true?’ says Nancy.

‘I pledge you my word,’ says Rory, ‘I would.’

‘Oh, well, even if you would yourself,’ says Nancy, ‘Shamus won’t be buried tomorrow, or maybe, God help me, for ten years to come yet.’

‘You’ve all that in your own hands,’ says Rory.

‘How’s that?’ says Nancy.

‘Why, you can kill him off,’ says Rory.

‘I wouldn’t have the ould crature’s blood on my head,’ says Nancy.

‘Neither you need,’ says Rory.

And then he sat down and began to tell Nancy how she could do away with Shamus and still not have his blood on her head.

Now there was a prince called Connal, who lived in a wee sod house close by Nancy and Shamus, but whose fathers before him, ere their money was wasted, used to live in a grand castle. So, next day, over Nancy goes to this prince, and to him says:

‘Why, Prince Connal, isn’t it a shame to see the likes of you livin’ in the likes of that house?’

‘I know it is,’ said he, ‘but I cannot do any better.’

‘Botheration,’ says Nancy, ‘you easily can.’

‘I wish you would tell me how,’ says Prince Connal.

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‘Why,’ says Nancy, ‘there’s my Shamus has little or nothing to do, an’ why don’t you make him build you a castle?’

‘Ah,’ says the prince, laughing, ‘sure, Shamus couldn’t build me a castle.’

Says Nancy: ‘You don’t know Shamus, for there’s not a thing in the wide world he couldn’t do if he likes to, but he’s that lazy, that if you don’t break every bone in his body to make him do it, he won’t do it.’

‘Is that so?’ says Prince Connal.

‘That’s so,’ says Nancy. ‘So if you order Shamus to build you a castle an’ have it up in three weeks, or that you’ll take his life if he doesn’t, you’ll soon have a grand castle to live in,’ says she.

‘Well, if that’s so,’ says Prince Connal, ‘I’ll not be long wanting a castle.’

So, on the very next morning, over he steps to Shamus, calls Shamus out, and takes him with him to the place he had marked out for the site of his castle. He shows it to Shamus, and tells him he wants him to have a grand castle built and finished on that spot in three weeks’ time.

‘But,’ says Shamus, says he, ‘I never built a castle in my life. I know nothing about it, an’ I couldn’t have you a castle there in thirty-three years, let alone three weeks.’

‘O!’ says the prince, says he, ‘I’m toul’ there’s no man in Ireland can build a castle better nor faster than you, if you only like to, and if you haven’t that castle built on that ground in three weeks,’ says he, ‘I’ll have your life. So now choose for yourself.’ And he walked away, and left Shamus standing there.

When Shamus heard this, he was a downhearted man, for he knew that Prince Connal was a man of his word and

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would not stop at taking any man's life any more than he would from putting the breath out of a beetle. So down he sits and begins to cry, and while Shamus was crying there, up to him comes a Wee Red Man, and says to Shamus:

‘What are you crying about?’

‘Ah, my poor man,’ says Shamus, says he, ‘don’t be asking me, for there’s no use in telling you, you could do nothing to help me.’

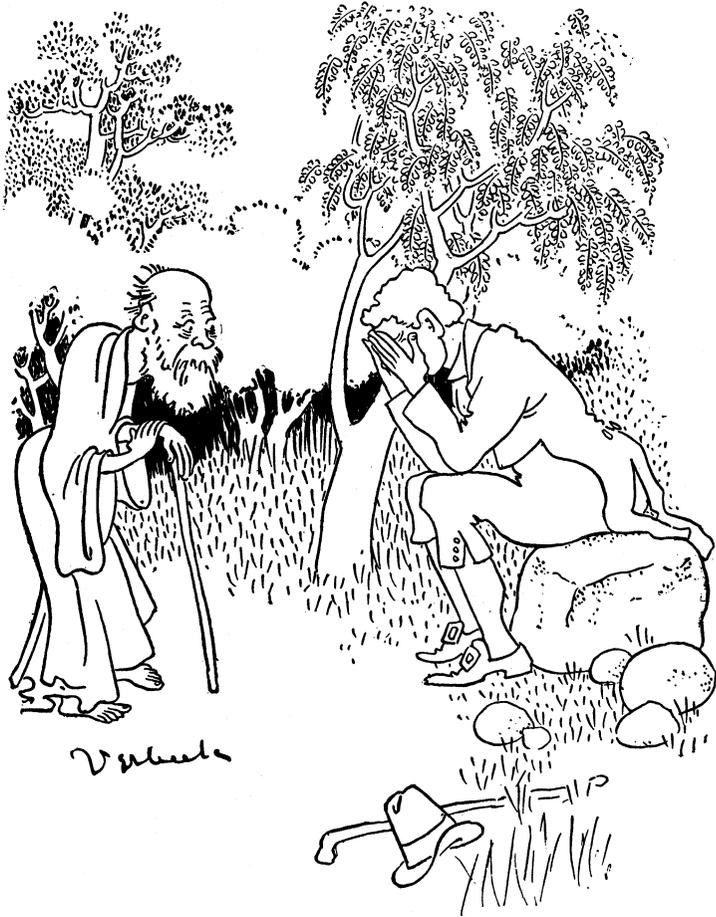
‘You don’t know that,’ says the Wee Red Man, says he. ‘It’s no harm to tell me anyhow.’

So Shamus, to relieve his mind, ups and tells the Wee Red Man what Prince Connal had threatened to do to him if he had not a grand castle finished on that spot in three weeks.

Says the little man, says he: ‘Go to the Fairies’ Glen at moonrise the night, and under the rockin’ stone at the head of the glen you’ll find a white rod. Take that rod with you, and mark out the plan of the castle on this ground with it. Then go back and leave the rod where you got it, and by the time you get back again, your castle will be finished.’

At moonrise that night, Shamus, as you may be well assured, was at the rockin’ stone at the head of the Glen of the Fairies, and from under it he got a little white rod. He went to the hill where the Prince’s castle was to be built, and with the point of the rod he marked out the plan of the castle, and then he went back and left the rod where he got it.

The next morning, when Prince Connal got up out of bed and went out of his little sod hut to take the air, his eyes were opened, I tell you, to see the magnificent castle that was standing finished and with the coping-stones on it on the hill above. He lost no time till he went over to thank Shamus for building him such a beautiful castle, and when Nancy heard that the castle was finished, it was she that was



The Wee Red Man came up to Shamus as he was crying.

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the angry woman.

She went out and looked at the castle, and she wondered and wondered, too, but she said nothing. She had a long chat with Rory that day again, and from Rory she went off to Prince Connal, and says she:

‘Now, didn’t I tell you right well what Shamus could do?’

‘I see you did,’ says Prince Connal, ‘and it is very thankful to you I am. I’m contented now for life,’ says he, ‘and I’ll never forget yourself and Shamus.’

‘Contented!’ says she, ‘why, that place isn’t half finished yet.’

‘How’s that?’ says Prince Connal.

‘Why,’ says she, ‘you need a beautiful river flowing past that castle, with lovely trees, and birds singing in the branches, and you should have the ocean roaring up beside it.’

‘But still,’ says Prince Connal, says he, ‘one can’t have everything. This is a hundred miles from a river and a hundred miles from an ocean, and no trees ever grew on this hill, nor ever could grow on it, and no bird ever sang on it for the last three hundred years.’

‘Then all the more reason,’ says she, ‘why you should have all them things.’

‘But I can’t have them,’ says Prince Connal.

‘Can’t you?’ says she. ‘Yes, you can. If you promise to have Shamus’ life unless he has you all those things by your castle in three days, you’ll soon have all you want,’ says Nancy.

‘Well, well, that’s wonderful,’ says Prince Connal, says



Their eyes were opened to see the magnificent castle that was standing there.

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he, ‘and I’ll do it.’

So he sets out, and goes to Shamus's house, and calls Shamus out to him to tell him that his castle was very bare looking without something about it. Says he:

‘Shamus, I want you to put a beautiful river flowing past it, with plenty of trees and bushes along the banks, and also birds singing in them, and I want you to have the ocean roaring up by it also.’

‘But, Prince Connal,’ says Shamus, says he, ‘you know very well that I couldn’t get you them things.’

‘Right well I know you can,’ says Prince Connal, ‘and I’ll give you three days to have all them things done, and if you haven’t them done at the end of three days, then I’ll have your life.’ And away goes Prince Connal.

Poor Shamus, he sat down and began to cry at this, because he knew that he could not do one of these things. And as he was crying and crying he heard a voice in his ear, and looking up he saw the Wee Red Man.

‘Shamus, Shamus,’ says he, ‘what’s the matter with you?’

‘O,’ says Shamus, says he, ‘there's no use in telling you what’s the matter with me this time. Although you helped me before, there’s not a man in all the world could do what I've got to do now.’

‘Well, anyhow,’ says the Wee Red Man, ‘if I can’t do you any good, I’ll do you no harm.’

So Shamus, to relieve his mind, ups and tells the Wee Red Man what’s the matter with him.

‘Shamus,’ says the Wee Red Man, says he, ‘I’ll tell you what you’ll do. When the moon’s rising tonight, be at the head of the Glen of the Fairies, and at the spring well there

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you'll find a cup and a leaf and a feather. Take the leaf and the feather with you, and a cup of water, and go back to the castle. Throw the water from you as far as you can throw it, and then blow the leaf off your right hand, and the feather off your left hand, and see what you'll see.'

Shamus promised to do this. And when the moon rose that night, Shamus was at the spring well of the Glen of the Fairies, and he found there a cup, a leaf, and a feather. He lifted a cup of water and took it with him, and the leaf and the feather, and started for the castle. When he came there, he pitched the cup of water from him as far as he could pitch it, and at once the ocean, that was a hundred miles away, came roaring up beside the castle, and a beautiful river that had been flowing a hundred miles on the other side of the castle came flowing down past it into the ocean. Then he blew the leaf off his right hand, and all sorts of lovely trees and bushes sprang up along the river banks. Then he blew the feather off his left hand, and the trees and the bushes were filled with all sorts and varieties of lovely singing birds, that made the most beautiful music he ever had heard.

And maybe that was not a surprise to Prince Connal when he got up in the morning and went out. Off he tramped to Shamus' to thank Shamus and Nancy, and when Nancy heard this she was the angry woman.

That day she had another long confab with Rory, and from him she went off again to Prince Connal, and asked him how he liked his castle and all its surroundings.

He said he was a pleased and proud man, that he was thankful to her and her man, Shamus, and that he would never forget it to them the longest day of his life.

'O, but,' says she, 'you're not content. This night you'll have a great gathering of princes and lords and gentlemen feasting in your castle, and you'll surely want something to amuse them with. You must get a plaisham.'

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‘What’s a plaisham?’ said Prince Connal.

‘O,’ says Nancy, ‘it’s the most wonderful and most amusing thing in the world. It will keep your guests in good humour for nine days and nine nights after they have seen it.’

‘Well,’ says Prince Connal, ‘that must be a fine thing entirely, and I’m sure I would be mighty anxious to have it. ‘But,’ says he, ‘where would I get it or how would I get it?’

‘Well,’ says Nancy, ‘that’s easy. If you order Shamus to bring a plaisham to your castle by supper time this night, and promise to have his life if he hasn’t it there, he’ll soon get it for you.’

‘Well, if that’s so,’ says Prince Connal, ‘I’ll not be long wanting a plaisham.’

So home went Nancy, rejoicing this time, for she said to herself that poor old Shamus would not be long living now, because there was no such thing known in the whole wide world as a plaisham, and though Shamus might build castles, and bring oceans and rivers and trees and birds to them, all in one night, he could not get a thing that did not exist and was only invented by Rory.

Well, off to Shamus went Prince Connal without much loss of time, and called Shamus out of his little cabin. He told him he was heartily well pleased with all he had done for him.

‘But there’s one thing more I want you to do, Shamus, and then I’ll be content,’ says he. ‘This night I give a grand supper to the lords, ladies, and gentry of the country, and I want something to amuse them with, so at supper time you must bring me a plaisham.’

‘A plaisham! What’s that?’ says Shamus.

‘I don’t know,’ says Prince Connal.

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‘No more do I,’ says Shamus, ‘an’ how do you expect me to fetch it to you then?’

‘Well,’ says Prince Connal, says he, ‘this is all there is to be said about it—if you haven’t a plaisham at my castle door at supper time the night, you’ll be a dead man.’

‘O, O,’ says Shamus, says he, and sat down on the ditch and began to cry, while Prince Connal went off home.

‘Shamus, Shamus,’ says a voice in his ears, ‘what are you cryin’ about now?’

Poor Shamus lifted his head and looked around, and there beside him stood the Wee Red Man.

‘O!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘don’t mind asking me,’ he says, ‘for it’s no use in telling you what’s the matter with me now. You may build a castle for me,’ says he, ‘and you may bring oceans and rivers to it, and trees and birds, but you couldn’t do anything to help me now.’

‘How do you know that?’ said the Wee Red Man.

‘O, I know it well,’ says Shamus, says he, you couldn’t give me the thing that never was an’ never will be!’

‘Well,’ says the Wee Red Man, says he, ‘tell me what it is anyhow. If I can’t do you any good, sure I can’t do you any harm.’

So, to relieve his mind, Shamus ups and tells him that Prince Connal had ordered him, within twenty-four hours, to have at his castle door a plaisham.

‘But,’ says Shamus, says he, ‘there never was such a thing as that.’

‘Sure enough,’ says the Wee Red Man, ‘there never was. But still, if Prince Connal wants it, we must try to get it for him. This night, Shamus,’ says the Wee Red Man, says

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he, ‘go to the head of the Glen of the Fairies, to the sciog bush [Fairy thorn], where you’ll find a bone ring hanging on a branch of the thorn. Take it with you back home. When you get home, young Rory will be chatting with your wife in the kitchen. Don’t you go in there, but go into the byre [cowshed], and put the ring in the cow’s nose. Then lie quiet, and you’ll soon have a plaisham to drive to Prince Connal’s castle door.’

Shamus thanked the Wee Red Man, and that night he went to the head of the Glen of the Fairies, and sure enough, he found the ring hanging from one of the branches of the sciog bush. He took it with him, and started for home. When he looked in through the kitchen window, there he saw Nancy and Rory sitting over the fire, chatting and confabbing about how they would get rid of him, but he said nothing and only went into the byre. He put the ring into the brannet cow’s nose, and as soon as the ring went into it, the cow began to kick and rear and create a great hullabaloo of a noise entirely. Then Shamus got in under some hay in the corner.

It was no time at all until Nancy was out to find what was wrong with the brannet cow. She struck the cow with her fist to quiet her, but when she hit her, her fist stuck to the cow, and she could not get away.

Rory had come running out after Nancy to help her, and Nancy called:

‘Rory, Rory, pull me away from the cow.’

Rory got hold of her to pull her away, but as he did so his hands stuck to Nancy, and he could not get away himself.

Up then jumped Shamus from under the hay in the corner.

‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the



We found the ring hanging from one of the branches of the sciog bush.

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plaisham.’

And out of the byre starts the cow with Nancy stuck to her, and Rory stuck to that, and heads toward the castle, with the cow rearing and kicking, and Nancy and Rory yelling and bawling. They made a terrible din entirely, and roused the whole countryside, who flocked out to see what was the matter.

Down past Rory’s house the cow went, and Rory’s mother, seeing him sticking to Nancy, ran out to pull him away. But when she laid her hand on Rory, she stuck to him, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

So on they went. Rory’s father ran after them to pull the mother away, but when he laid his hands on the mother, he stuck to her, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

On again they went, and next they passed where a man was cleaning out his byre. When the man saw the ridiculous string of them, he flung a graip [pitchfork] and a graipful of manure at them, and it stuck to Rory’s father. ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’ But the man ran after to save his graip, and when he got hold of the graip, he stuck to it, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

On they went, and a tailor came flying out of his house with his lap-board in his hand. He struck the string of them with the lap-board, the lap-board stuck to the last man, and the tailor stuck to it, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

Then they passed a cobbler’s. He ran out with his heel-stick, and struck the tailor, but the heel-stick stuck to the tailor, and the cobbler stuck to the heel-stick, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

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Then on they went, and they next passed a blacksmith's forge. The blacksmith ran out, and struck the cobbler with his sledge. The sledge stuck to the cobbler, and the blacksmith stuck to the sledge, and 'Hup, Hup!' says Shamus, says he, 'drive on the plaisham.'

When they came near the castle, they passed a great gentleman's house entirely, and the gentleman came running out, and got hold of the blacksmith to pull him away, but the gentleman stuck to the blacksmith, and could not get away himself, and 'Hup, Hup!' says Shamus, says he, 'drive on the plaisham.'

The gentleman's wife, seeing him stuck, ran after her man to pull him away, but the wife stuck to the gentleman, and 'Hup, Hup!' says Shamus, says he, 'drive on the plaisham.'

Then their children ran after them to pull the mother away, and they stuck to the mother, and 'Hup, Hup!' says Shamus, says he, 'drive on the plaisham.'

Then the butler ran to get hold of the children, and he stuck to them, and the footman ran to get hold of the butler, and stuck to him, and the cook ran to get hold of the footman, and stuck to him, and the servants all ran to get hold of the cook, and they stuck to her, and 'Hup, Hup!' says Shamus, says he, 'drive on the plaisham.'

And on they went. When they came up to the castle, the plaisham was a mile long, and the yelling and bawling and noise that they made could be heard anywhere within the four seas of Ireland. The racket was so terrible that Prince Connal and all his guests and all his servants and all in his house came running to the windows to see what was the matter, at all, at all. When Prince Connal saw what was coming to his house, and heard the racket they were raising, he yelled to his Prime Minister to go and drive them off with a whip.



Everyone that got hold of it stuck to it.

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The Prime Minister ran meeting them, and took the whip to them, but the whip stuck to them, and he stuck to the whip, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

Then Prince Connal ordered out all his other ministers and all of his servants to head it off and turn it away from his castle, but every one of the servants that got hold of it stuck to it, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

And the plaisham moved on still for the castle. Then Prince Connal himself, with all his guests, ran out to turn it away, but when Prince Connal laid hands on the plaisham, he stuck to it, and when his guest laid hands on him, they stuck one by one to him, and ‘Hup, Hup!’ says Shamus, says he, ‘drive on the plaisham.’

And with all the racket and all the noise of the ranting, roaring, rearing, and kicking, in through the castle hall door drove the plaisham, through and through and out at the other side. The castle itself fell down and disappeared, the bone ring rolled away from the cow’s nose, and the plaisham all at once broke up. When Prince Connal looked around, there was no castle at all, only the sod hut, and he went into it a sorry man.

All the others slunk off home, right heartedly ashamed of themselves, for the whole world was laughing at them. Nancy, she went east, and Rory, he went west, and neither one of them was ever heard of anymore. As for Shamus, he went home to his own little cabin, and lived all alone, happy and contented, for the rest of his life, and may you and I do the same.

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