

The Suffering – A Tale Untold

Listen. Let this tale be told, a lament
That thought has through suffering birthed.
Amidst the moorlands desolate stands
A bright-painted barn, this day bedecked
With wildflower wreaths and wedding-garlands,
More lovely still for its lack of opulence
Than the gaudiness of grand estates.
Beetle-backed cars, their metal bright-burnished,
In serried ranks stand idle in the fields,
The folk invited have made their arrival,
The threshold thronging, blithely gathered.
This is the place, the site that shall host
The marriage of Finn and the maiden Sive.
A welcome it warmly bestows to the witnesses
Enjoining the guests to take joy in the joining
Of a pair appearing most perfectly matched.
Within the fair-haired Finn stands waiting,
His increasing excitement scarce containing,
As the eddying guests, idly drifting
At last within the rows are seated.
Beside him Brennan, best of men,
To the bride's blushing beauty, yet to appear,
His head the heart already hardening,
Tongue trapped behind teeth
For love of his friend.
Forehead unfurrowed, with smiling face,
The storm unassuaged, silently raging,
A burden his breast shall never lay bare.

*The barn at Heyeroad
receives the wedding-guests*

Finn waits eagerly for the guests to settle

Brennan, the best man, hides his true feelings

Yet there is one who would not withhold:
Grania nurses a hard grievance,
A past that will not let her find rest
With any save Finn, the love forsaken
That still she bears within her burning.
Wrathful she was when knowledge reached her
Of Finn's affections new-found in Sive,
And now the nuptials she means to ruin.
Into the hall with hasty steps she strides
Before her progress can be interrupted,
And in the barn's centre makes certain all eyes
Towards her have turned, a sudden shriek releasing,
Before giving vent to the fury within.
Dire threats and dark designs she discloses,
Auguries of woe, hearts aching in agony,
Feckless Finn and the hussy, Sive
A match of misery the two shall make.
An unceasing sermon, a venomous spate
She unleashes on the unsuspecting,
Her disports a display disquieting
To groom and guests, a grim wedding-gift,
And had they been disclosed to the bride
At the altar standing, attesting her affection,
Then indeed a marred marriage they would sure have made.
Yet Grania has misguessed, thwarted her goals:
The bride has yet the barn's threshold to breach.
Firm hands are affixed to Grania's frame,
The ushers steering her safely from the site,
Her screams at last ceding to blessed silence.
Brennan bestows on his friend a half-embrace,
A comforting arm to assuage Finn's angst;
What was feared has befallen, and Grania's fury

*Grania, Finn's previous girlfriend,
approaches the barn with the
intention of disrupting the wedding*

*Grania threatens the couple and predicts
an unhappy marriage*

Grania is escorted from the premises

Has at last been wasted, her spite misspent.

The guests are settling back in their seats,
And concern to amusement can now be converted,
The day still is saved, and the frisson of story,
At most an anecdote, a titillating tale,
Gives swell to the revelry across the rows rippling.

The ushers return, recount their arrest,
Are praised for their exploits, their apposite speed.

Grania is gone; they heard her car groaning
As into the far-distant moors it sped.

One doughty hero strides to the dais,
And Finn in friendship his hand clasps firmly.

Brennan with a nod the deed acknowledging,
Seeing the cloth-scrap torn in the scuffle,

Snagged from arm of Grania's garment,
Still fast-held in the other's fist.

But hold – they hear within the hall,

The music swelling, the doors open swinging;

The usher swiftly his seat resumes,

As into the barn the bride's party proceeds.

First the flower-girl, nervously pleased,

In unsolemn ceremony her petals strewing.

Then the three maidens, their beauty enthralling,

Yet fast forgotten, for behind them following

Comes one who must this day be witnessed.

Arise for Sive, the sun's bright rays

Framing the form of one so lovely;

Silk-like the sheen of her raven locks,

A cautious curl to the mouth's shapely crease,

The eyes laughing, delighting to look

Upon Finn, their favourite, who gazes transfixed,

Staring as if for the first time seeing

*The guests quickly recover
from Grania's tirade*

*The ushers give their report:
Grania has driven away*

The wedding procession begins

Sive enters the barn

The woman with whom his world he would share.
In ivory white she wends her way,
Each watching eye by the sight entranced,
But, as if bashful, Brennan's head remains bowed
Not trusting his treacherous heart to hide
Its desire, or his face to dissemble,
At sight of such surpassing loveliness.
Light Sive's steps as she walks up the aisle,
The silent spectators on both sides standing,
Phones upheld, the flash of photographs,
As if in amber her appearance preserving,
A second stolen from time's passing stream.
To the altar steps she arrives at last,
A soft word from Finn has her stifled a laugh,
And Brennan his neck no longer can bend.
He looks – locks eyes, the lovely Sive
A sweet smile of friendship upon him bestowing,
His heartstrings rending, tearing afresh,
A new vein of suffering still to be felt.
He wonders, once more, whether she can know –
If from his pain she partakes in some pleasure –
Or else with her soulmate somehow discerning,
The love that has him locked in its shackles.
Both, perhaps, are Brennan pitying,
Secretly sorrowful that he should suffer,
Hopeful that time his grief will soften,
Knowing naught else there is to be done.
The priest now opens upon his offices,
Struggling somewhat in their dispatch,
His bumbling almost a mockery making
Of their import. Yet maybe the mirth
He engenders judiciously produced,

Sive arrives at the altar

The priest begins the marriage ceremony

Valuing levity over solemn gravity,
For who here is not now in fine good humour,
With blithe laughter the barn's beams thronging?
Brennan's spirit alone this service suits not,
Smiles his face is forced to display,
While a wyrm within, a serpent whorl-writhing
Battens upon his belly's sour bile.
Would he could weep, his tears unwithheld,
He might from sorrow receive slim respite;
But no – never shall any sign be shown
Of this secret still safe-kept in his breast.
The ceremony proceeds apace,
The two at the altar plighting their troth,

...

Finn and Sive exchange vows

*Understandably, the giving of rings
is absent, as Brennan is called upon
to perform his duties as best man.*

...

And closing the distance, a delicate kiss,
Sealing between them the bond that they share.
Cheers and applause, celebration resounds
Spirits uplifted at this tender sight.
Bestirred even is Brennan, best of men,
While still woeful, wretchedly watching,
Tries to wrest joy from his jealous heart.
The priest performs his final prayers,
Calling his lord this couple to love –
Yet an agonized shriek in answer is heard,
The barn's doors burst open, the boards vibrating,
A figure white-gowned the threshold frames:
Grania returned, revenge pursuing,
Gleaming metal held firm in her arms.
Swift strides she takes, the aisle ascending,

Finn and Sive's first kiss as man and wife

The priest gives his closing remarks

Finn and Sive walk down the aisle

The steps she had once been certain of taking.

The guests are rising, the panic spreading,

Where now are the heroes who held her fast?

No time – too slowly they travel,

Already the shotgun to shoulder positioned,

Her finger around the trigger curling.

Then bold Brennan, best of men,

Brennan takes his place in the recessional

Placing himself in the path without pause

For Finn, for himself, his death he faces.

Both bores blasting, he takes the brunt,

Bloody his breast, the buckshot tearing,

Laying open to all the life held within.

Before the feet of his friend he falls,

Grateful at last a true smile to wear.

Finn now to his knees behind him sinking,

Begging bold Brennan his life's-breath to hold,

In vain his pleas; for Brennan is gone,

Free from affliction, free from love,

This sacrifice himself saving.

The wedding-party leaves the barn

The bright sunlight causes him to sneeze

As he exits the barn, and his thoughts become more prosaic,

The whole business of the wedding photography taking up too much of his attention

For him to sustain his fantasies. He must return now to his misery,

Amidst the happiness of others, which he wishes so much he could feel, but cannot.

Alone within the crowd, he must bear his shame in secret, a suffering which seems to serve no purpose.

No call for grand heroics, no tragic scenes, nothing but this.

Just this.