

# WILLIE NELSON

## From *The Four Winds of Eirinn* by Ethna Carbery

He wakened at the blackbird's song and flung his casement wide -  
The drowsy East shot shafts of gold across the countryside;  
His young keen eye swept up the heights and down the quiet glen -  
'Twas time to warn from wood and brae the stern United Men.

And who will be the messenger to tell the fight's at hand?  
And who will bear the signal word to rouse the sleeping land?  
And who shall win a glorious name that time cannot destroy?  
Oh! who but Willie Nelson – the widow's blue-eyed boy.

He has many a lonely mile to wend before his goal be won,  
And many a danger to withstand ere yet his task be done,  
But there is never a fear in the boyish heart as out from his mother's  
door

He speeds with the tidings that call the brave to the trysting at  
Donegore.

There are gallant steeds to pick and choose in the stable at Redhall,  
And lightly does he tread his way – alert – from stall to stall.  
“Ho! Bonny mare, our course lies far through vale and over hill,  
To tell the faithful waiting ones there's life in Ireland still.

“McCracken has given the word at last, and there will be joy this  
day,

When pikes are drawn from the smoke-browned thatch, where  
bright and secure they lay.”

Then all alone, in the dewy dawn, the dauntless lad rides forth  
With a message of hope and a rallying call to the sentinels of the  
North!

They will muster strong from Magheramorne, Mallusk and  
Ballyclare;

And Island Magee has stalwart sons eager to do their share;  
And from the Bann's broad sedgy banks will troop the fishers brown  
To strike a blow for Ireland to-day in Antrim town.

Hurrah for Willie Nelson! as around the good news flies,  
The news so dear to rebel hearts and rebel memories.  
Hurrah! And hurrah! That the waiting's past – and long has the  
waiting been  
To the marching men with their shining pikes and their floating flag  
of green!

Well, God be praised! the pikes were red before the sun went down -  
And God be good to those who fell that day in Antrim town,  
Let no one deem, though sad her fate, heart-wrung and tempest-tost,  
When such brave blood cries for revenge our country's cause is lost!  
There was wailing from Moylena's banks to Carrickfergus Tower –  
And by Carnmoney's desolate hearths the sad-eyed widows cower –  
And the few who came to tell the tale long shuddered o'er that scene,  
When Irish pikes crossed English steel on the Bridge of Massareene.

But where is he who roused the land and bore the signal-word  
That nerved at length the patriot hand to wield the patriot sword?  
The captain and his yeomanry have sought him far and wide,  
And they find the weary lad at last by his mother's ingleside.

They've taken Willie Nelson from his weeping mother's arms -  
Alas! no kindly voice is nigh to soothe her wild alarms,  
As, with his brothers twain, he turned in spite of oaths and jeers  
For a last look at the loving face, half-blinded with her tears.

In Carrickfergus hard shall be his prison bed to-night,  
And morning with its singing-birds shall yield him no delight,  
It brings the stern commander's frown – the redcoats' grim array,  
And the blue-eyed boy before them all – a traitor's part to play.

“Come, tell us, lad, the leader's plans, and tell the rebel lair,  
And not a churlish hand shall touch one gold lock of your hair.”  
But firm he closed his childish lips, and never a word spake he,  
Though threatened with the cruel lash, and then the gallows tree.

“Come, tell us where McCracken hides.” He thought of Slemish then,  
And the ruined hopes of as true a chief as ever led marshalled men

Or fired their souls to heroic deeds; and the pale boy calmly heard  
His captor offer the traitor's gold, but never he spake a word.

They've tied a rope around his neck and brought him home to die,  
To Ballycarry's strand, where of the watched the gulls wheel by,  
When, hark! a cry soul-wrung and wild, and sudden from the wood -  
Anear, his frantic mother rushed, and in their pathway stood.

"Oh, spare him, spare my dearest son," she cried. Kerr's angry brow  
Grows darker that the wild appeal disturbs his progress now.

"Just fifteen years" - Still on he rode. "Up, woman, or I spur  
My horse upon you." Nought availed that piteous prayer of her.

They've screened his blue eyes from the sun; he flings the bandage  
far -

"Why should I fear to meet my doom and go where heroes are?  
But grant my brother's liberty, and let my death suffice,  
Since mine the will to break your laws, then mine to pay the price."

They've hanged him to the clefted tree against his mother's door;  
His swinging shadow comes and goes upon her cottage door;  
They've gone their way with brutal jest, and left her with her dead,  
Her thin hands lifted up to heaven, her vengeful curse half-said.

All through that dreary night she sat - her dead boy on her breast,  
His golden curls across her arm, to her's his cold cheek pressed -  
Without the tramp of the yeomen guard, who watched till the morn  
broke clear

O'er the widowed mother - the murdered son - fell on her tortured  
ear.

Remember Willie Nelson at the Dawning of the Day,  
When Freedom beckons from her height, and we have found the way  
That brave men fought and died to find on many a battle field,  
And taught us how to fight and die - but *never* how to yield.

Oh! Irishmen, when the signal comes again be ye gathered there,  
Be ye as ready to take your stand as ever your fathers were;  
Facing your foemen for Ireland's sake, sweep like a torrent down,  
And strike them a stronger, *surer* blow than that day in Antrim town.