

A FAIR EMIGRANT

BY ROSA MULLHOLLAND
AUTHOR OF MARCELLA GRACE: "A NOVEL"
CHAPTER XXXVII

Escaped
If Bawn had cherished a faint hope that Mave Adare might yet regain strength of mind and body, and that from her she might learn something profitable to her enterprise, she was doomed to disappointment. The poor creature, all whose energy seemed to have been spent in her desperate struggle with lonely suffering in the ruin, had, now that now she was in comfort and at peace, collapsed into a state of chronic lethargy from which she only awakened on occasionally to declare her belief that she was in heaven. All Bawn's gentle ministrations failed to win any demonstration from her except the whispered assurance to Peggy that in her absence she was tended by an angel.

"That is why I know I am in heaven, Peggy; and I am always going to ask about some one I wanted to meet here, but at the right moment I forget. The angel has a voice like his, and that is why I forget, because when the angel speaks I think it is Arthur himself, and I am content. But it is not himself. And I wonder he does not come to me, for I know he must be here."

Bawn, watching for those gleams of the spirit from the poor worn-out clay, and listening to the wild words, concluded that the invalid had recognized Desmond's tones in his daughter's voice, and she resolved to endeavour to gain some advantage from this fact. One night, sitting alone by Mave's bedside in semi-darkness she reflected on the means that might best be taken to coax some admission from her patient's lips; and as she watched the last vestige of the landscape without disappearing from beyond the window, an idea came to her and she repeated aloud, softly but distinctly:

"Arthur Desmond! Arthur Desmond! Arthur Desmond!"

There was a movement in the bed, the waxen face turned towards her, and the eyes unclosed.

"Where is Arthur Desmond?" asked Mave Adare in a voice that sounded quite sane and conscious. "I have been looking for him everywhere and I cannot find him. Yet I know he must be here."

Bawn replied, almost without thought, so naturally did the words come:

"How can you expect to see him here, you who believed him guilty?"

And then she held her breath, fearing a burst of excitement or some wandering, meaningless reply; but to her great surprise the answer came distinctly and reasonably:

"Because I have expiated my sin, through the mercy of my Redeemer, by long years of suffering, and both God and my beloved have forgiven me. I know you are an angel and I deserve your reproach, but there are thoughts between God and the soul which even angels do not see."

Bawn's heart melted within her at the strange, solemn, comforting words.

"You are right," she said. "You shall see Arthur Desmond presently. You are not in heaven yet, but in a place of peace that is close to it. In the meantime will you tell me why you ever believed him guilty. Who told you he committed that crime?"

The dying woman shuddered. "Luke said he saw it," she said. "Luke thought he saw it. But Arthur's spirit came to me in the night, one of those terrible nights when he was innocent and in heaven. That is why I have been willing to suffer; that is how I am so content."

She dropped back into her slumber and Bawn was left in possession of the truth she had spoken. Luke had said he saw him do it. Then her instinct had not been at fault, and it was with Luke only she should have dealt. She sat for half an hour thinking intensely of her being able to make any use of the knowledge she had just acquired. When and where could she expect to penetrate to the conscience of Luke Adare? Was there any hope that the tongue that had now uttered so important a revelation might yet direct her further? Suddenly feeling a desire to continue her thinking in the cool night-air, she rose softly, and, placing a small lighted lamp behind the bed so that the light might not disturb the sleeper, she went out of the room and out of the house, and felt the breeze quiet her pulses and brace her excited nerves. Having lingered a short time on the verge of the orchard slope, she had returned and was about to re-enter the house, when her step was arrested by the sight of a moving shadow, visible through the window, flitting across the walls within the invalid's room.

She had believed that Betty was in bed. Could that good woman have heard Mave Adare cry out in pain, and have got up to attend to her? Bawn went close to the window and looked in.

Then followed curses, stamping on the floor, and an unequal struggle; but suddenly the intruder, man or fiend, dropped his prey and stood listening. In doing so he turned his face now toward the door, now towards the window, and revealed to Bawn the same awful countenance that had looked at her through the pane a few nights ago. It was Luke Adare who had come to recapture his sister. Before Bawn had time to move Betty was in the room in answer to the patient's cry, and Luke, seeing his attempt was baffled, skurried away past her like a startled wild animal, and fled from the house.

The next minute Bawn was following him swiftly down the path to the orchard, calling him in a voice clear as a silver trumpet.

"Luke Adare! Stop! I have something to say to you!"

She expected he would fly the faster for her call, but he stopped, he stood still and waited for her.

"What do you want with me?" he asked roughly.

"I want you to come back and have some supper. You have allowed your sister to be my guest. Will you not accept my hospitality for your self? It is late at night and you have far to go. It is not friendly of you to take leave of us like this."

"Curses on your falsehood!" he said savagely. "You did not get my permission to take her away and expend your insolent charity upon her. You were suffering to have the pleasure of her company for a carriage drive, and no more. Why did you not bring her back to her ancestral residence?"

Bawn could see but dimly the expression of the hideous face which matched with the contemptuous fierceness and ludicrous pomposity of the creature's tone.

"It was late," she urged, "and your sister was tired, and there are reasons why I was proud and glad to receive her under my roof—reasons which I will tell you some day, if you will allow me to see you again."

"What are your reasons? Cannot you tell them now?"

"It is too late, for, since you will not come into my house, I must bid you good-night. But, believe me, you would be interested in hearing something I could tell you."

"It is false!" he shouted furiously. "I know you were a coward and an impostor from the first moment I heard your voice. How dare you go about mimicking the voice, the very tones of—"

"Of whom?" asked Bawn, with a sudden leap of the heart.

"Of a reprobate long in my grave, no doubt, but who will not lie there always. Tush! do you think I am afraid of spirits? A man who lives with rats is not much in fear of ghosts. All I have got to say to you is this; don't dare to meddle further with the Adares than you have done. Tomorrow I will make arrangements for bringing my sister home. And, after that, come no more to the Hollow at your peril!"

With this he turned from her, and the gray face, just gleaming with a diseased indistinctness through the darkness, vanished, and she was alone, realising with difficulty that she had held her first interview with Luke Adare—her first but not her last, as she assured herself in spite of his threats. She remembered with exultation how his conscience had already betrayed him. The vibration of her father's tones which was in her voice, which had perplexed without enlightening Gran, which had acted like a charm on the diseased imagination of Mave Adare, had evidently caught the ear of this wretch and aroused his hatred—a hatred for which there was no reason, but that it sprang from injury done by the later to its object. Horror of the memory of the man he had ruined accounted for his hatred of herself. Oh! if Mave Adare would but live, and prove a link between her and this monster!

Reminded by this thought of the position in which she had last seen the suffering woman, she went quickly back to the house and entered the sick-room on tip-toe. As she did so she was instantly aware of a new state of things. Betty was on her knees by the bed, praying aloud, and the rigidity of the figure in the bed struck her fearfully as expressive of a ghastly change. The little spark of vitality that had lingered in the wasted frame of Mave Adare had been rudely quenched. The long suffering soul was released and at rest.

"Och, mistress, sure she's gone!" sobbed Betty, rising from her knees. "The villain just frightened the life out of her!"

Next morning a scrap of ragged paper was found under the door, and on it was scrawled:

lowed the little procession unperceived in the darkness, and to whom it was probably a satisfaction that the ancient glory of the Adares was thus properly maintained in his sister's case to the last.

CHAPTER XXXVIII
Ruin
Rory, having resolved that he would speak plainly to Bawn, made one more endeavor to learn something positive concerning her past, was yet undecided as to the means he would take thus to try to obtain her confidence.

Thinking it all over, he came through the Hollow one wet, windy autumn morning, and was startled to see her standing under the beech-trees in front of the ruin, her shawl folded tightly round her, her eyes raised to the shattered windows, and an expression on her face and in her whole figure and attitude of deepest and sternest despondency.

Her presence here on such a morning struck him as strange and inexplicable. Mave Adare was dead. In her she had expressed a deep interest, and on her she had expended her charity. What further did he seek in haunting this uncanny hole? How did she expect to reach and influence the half-savage old man who hid among these mouldering walls?

What could she hope to gain by coming in contact with them? Why need she concern herself about them, and their sins, and misfortunes?

With his mind full of such questions he approached and saw her start of surprise, and her involuntary shrinking from him when she suddenly became aware of his presence.

She had just been realizing the extreme unlikelihood of any ultimate success for her romantic enterprise. Autumn-gales, the forerunner of winter storms, had already set in, and she had hastened here this morning fearing to find the ruin reduced to a heap of rubbish and at last become Luke Adare's unholy grave. That the end had not yet come seemed a miracle. Tomorrow, next week, would this miraculous delay be still prolonged? In the meantime his hatred of her presence and his suspicion of her identity would certainly keep him carefully concealed from her.

Was there any hope left of refuting that calumny which had blasted her father's life, and was now darkening her own by raising an insuperable barrier between her and the man she loved?—for, without further effort to ignore or deny the truth, she owned to herself now freely, that she loved him.

For that very reason she was bound to keep out of his way, to do him as little injury as possible, to force him to feel more and more assured that there never could be a marriage, that it was not natural there should be any friendship between them.

And so, suddenly seeing him beside her, she shrank from him. He saw the movement, and it hurt and angered him.

"Miss Ingram, forgive me for interrupting your meditations. I did not expect to find you here this wild morning."

"I can believe that," said Bawn, recovering her self-possession; "but the fascination of the place is too much for me. I cannot keep myself from coming."

"Are you not satisfied with the work you have done? What further do you imagine you can do?"

"There are other lives in danger in yonder."

"What are they to you? How can you expect to influence two obstinate old men? You cannot kidnap them as you kidnapped their sister."

"I fear not. That is what I fear."

"Why should it be so much to you?"

"Ah!—why?"

"I have reason to fear. This is what I want you to understand. I thought I had made you understand it on board ship, but you have seemed to forget it."

"I have forgotten it. I will forget it again, if you will let me."

"I must not let you. You must keep away from me and think of me no more. If you knew who I am you would turn away and never ask to see me again."

"That I will not believe till you tell me what you mean, till you give up talking in mystery, till you explain the exact meaning of your hints—your probably misleading hints. Girls have often exaggerated ideas of things. I myself must judge of your case. As for what others think or say of you, that is nothing to me so that you are personally what I believe you to be. If you tell me you are not good I shall conclude you are mad."

Bawn gave him a startled look and coloured faintly.

"I do not think I am very good—not good enough for you," she said; "but yet I believe there is no wickedness in me so great that you could not forgive it. Yet the barrier remains, as you will one day admit."

"Why not give me an opportunity this day, this hour?"

"I cannot. On the day I tell you I shall go. I will not wait here to see you turn from me."

"No! no! You must not come near me. There is something that stands between. You must not look at me so!"

"I will not even ask to touch your hand, if you will not fly from me. But, however all this may end, Bawn, will you say to me just three words: 'I love you?'"

"To my sore sorrow I do love you."

"After that I will not lose you. You cannot dare to leave me."

"After that I must leave you all the more surely, but not until—"

She stopped and involuntarily cast an eager glance at the dripping ruin before them.

"Till what?"

"I cannot tell you; not now. I have already said too much. If you love me at all, let me go. Think of me as dead."

She turned away with a quick step, and he remained standing where she had left him. He felt it useless to pursue her. In this mood she was impracticable, and he feared to press her too far, to scare her to a longer flight, out of his neighbourhood, out of his reach for evermore. He had lost her once; he would not lose her again, if he could help it.

He remained pacing up and down the Hollow, reflecting on all her enigmatical words and looks. Flora, even Gran, would consider that he ought to be quite satisfied with her admissions, quite sure that she was one whom he could never think of as his wife. She had spoken of a stain upon her name which could never be wiped out, yet she had hoped to see it wiped out. How could that hope have any connection with her coming here? Had she come merely to hide, and from what? Was she waiting for tidings of some kind, and, if she had, she had seen that she was not to be disappointed. In expectation of an investigation, in expectation of somebody's death? The longer he pondered the more puzzled he became. Of one thing he felt sure; he must let things drift as they were drifting, unless he meant to drive her out of the little harbour in which she had anchored. She had said, and she was capable of keeping her word, that on the day on which she told him the story of her antecedents and circumstances she must quit this spot and be seen by him no more. He would not push her to that alternative. At all costs he would be patient and wait for her to speak.

between the two wretched old men in the ruin, and that he had accidentally come within hearing of the sound, while out of reach of the meaning of what was said. As he could distinguish no word he did not feel that he was eavesdropping, and listened with a keen appreciation of the mingled grotesqueness and fearfulness of the situation. Presently he began to perceive that there was only one voice, and that its owner, if quarrelling, was quarrelling with himself. Now a loud harangue was poured forth in sonorous, arrogant-sounding tones, and then after a silence came snarling remarks, and groans, and sharp, short cries. The listener was aware that miserable solitaires will sometimes talk aloud to their own hearing alone. No doubt Luke Adare—sure, he thought it must be Luke rather than Edmund—was uttering the bitterness of his soul in the hideous solitude to which he had condemned himself.

He had just turned, disgusted and pitying, to go on his way when the voice was raised again, this time with a shriller clearness which carried a few words to his ear, an utterance with shape and meaning. Only two of the words remained in his mind the next moment when the voice had ceased, and so strange were they that though they rang through his brain, he could scarcely believe he had really heard them. Yet how could his imagination have suggested them?

"Desmond's daughter!" were the words, angrily and contemptuously spoken, which started his ear like the blast of a trumpet.

Where did they come from? What did they mean? Why, even if they had been uttered by Luke Adare in his savage ravings, should they bear any particular meaning for him. Somewhat? Why should he consider them as of the slightest importance? While he reflected thus they came towards him again, loudly and gruffly spoken, as if the speaker had drawn nearer to the aperture in the wall and was striving to drive some one, or something, forth.

"Desmond's daughter! Begone, begone! Desmond's daughter, come to spy and persecute—"

And then a loud laugh ending in wrathful growling and muttering.

Fingall came close to the window and listened with all his ears and with all his brain; but that last burst had ended Luke's outpourings (could the speaker be any one but Luke?), and complete silence had settled once more upon the ruin, while the wind, which was rising, howled round the tottering chimneys and lashed the trees against the streaming gable.

Released from the strained tension of listening, Somerled's mind began to work on the ideas suggested to him by those few wild words. Ravings—yes, they might be ravings, but what was the fancy that had run through the ravings? Desmond's daughter? Who was Desmond's daughter?

"Desmond's daughter, come to spy and persecute." Why, Bawn!

With a flash of understanding, of recognition, Fingall saw Bawn, her circumstances, her enterprise, her dream, in the lurid light of the truth. She was Desmond's daughter. Her intention in coming here had been to learn, on the very scene of her father's crime, that there had been no crime at all. In this she had failed. She was the daughter of the man who had murdered his uncle.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE NARROW ROAD

All hope of recovery was over—the man lay very still, while the irrevocability of the fact slowly sank into his consciousness. Swiftly and unexpectedly had this strange thing come upon him: a moment of perfect physical health, and the joy of life that goes with it; in the next the terrible choice, the wild leap, and oblivion. Many days later he had wakened here at the hospital, to learn that science had saved his life. Skillfully the broken bones had been knitted, his bruises healed, and the wandering mind called back from the pleasant fields of delirium. Had life must be a feeble thing, without its purpose, or ambition which had been its mainspring; he who had dreamed of unlimited fame and fortune, must exist on a brother's bounty; for this had science saved him; that he might be a beggar. Well clothed, and well provided for, but still a beggar. Was it just? Was it reasonable? Was it right? He paused on the feet of the man who seemed to hold to day a new high meaning; and vaguely understood and acknowledged that somehow it was right. A life must be saved at all costs, whether or not there is room or desire for that life. A higher Ruler than science has issued that decree which science herself obeys, but comprehends not. Something of sternness came into the man's face; what would the future hold for him, in this strange new life of his? Pain would be his daily portion; and therefore he must learn patience; and it must be a lonely life and silent; lest he cry out and be pitied by men.

A light step sounded near, and the nurse stood at his bedside. "There are visitors for you," she said gently, "your brother and a young lady; do you feel equal to seeing them?"

The man caught his breath sharply; sooner or later he must forgive; it was what the bright-faced young priest had said when he had tried to inspire him with resignation, but could he seem to do so now?

"Wait," he said hoarsely, "give me just a few minutes, and then I will see them."

He closed his eyes, desiring to shut out a last, haunting memory; but the scene came back to him the more vividly; a quiet country road along which he was proceeding in his machine, when rather suddenly the way narrowed. He remembered looking up at the tall cliffs on one side, and down at the deep gorge on the other, then with only a slightly anxious feeling he perceived a machine coming down the hill in front of him. He sounded his warning at once; the occupant would of course slow up, and allow him to reach a wide part of the road before attempting to pass him, though by careful manoeuvring they might manage it where he was; but the thing came on swiftly, lurching dangerously, but keeping to the centre of the road. Only when it was close upon him did he see that the girl, who was its only occupant, had no control over the machine. His own was in her way, so he plunged it into the gorge, making a leap for his life as he did so; a bruised and broken piece of humanity; and now he must forgive his brother's betrothed. Though, in response to her question, John had given Alina a few instructions in regard to running a machine, even allowing her to handle the steering wheel, he had sternly forbidden her attempting to run the machine herself. But, upon this particular day, the machine had been handy and John was not; so she had perched herself on a schoolboy to crank the machine, and had gone on her willful way. The speed of the machine increased as it went down the hill; and panic seized Alina, while in selfish terror she was heedless of anyone who might be in her way.

He had not seen her since the accident, and she hesitated now on the threshold before following the brother into the room. The quick eyes of the man noted the change in her at once; her frivolity had dropped from her as a pretty, useless ornament. She laid the white roses she was carrying on his bed, and seating herself beside him, stroked his bandaged hand in silence.

"Well," he said at last with a smile, and his voice was very gentle, "one must not expect strength with the fragrance of white roses." He had forgotten how sweet she was to look at, and how frail she was to him, and stood at the foot of the bed, with anxious eyes on the girl.

"I made John bring me," she said at last, her childish hands clasping and unclasping. "I know you must hate the sight of me, but I thought perhaps you would try to get used to it gradually; and maybe at some time—I do not dream of asking it yet, but some time, away off in the future—you may manage to forgive me."

"What do you think?" John interrupted. "Our wedding has been put off."

The eyes of the man on the bed turned swiftly to the girl. "Why?" he asked sharply.

"Could I think of a wedding with you like this?" she replied with repressed passion.

The man's face grew thoughtful; only that morning he had overheard the doctor say that he would be an invalid for life; waiting for his recovery meant the engagement was broken.

"It seems I am of more importance to your wedding than you are," he said to his brother lightly; and then there was a brief silence, while the man questioned within himself; was it any affair of his, if this girl who had wrecked his life, should choose also to wreck her own? If she who had caused his sufferings should also suffer? His turned his head impatiently; was it so always with temptations? Did they come to others with such swiftness—such unexpectedness—even as had come to him that choice on the narrow road? Well, he had not failed there, and he must not fail here.

"John," he said briskly, if you want to see Doctor Grey before he leaves the hospital, I shall be better hurried somewhat in the meantime, I'll endeavour to get ready, but I am somewhat bewildered, but comprehending what was required, John obediently left the room. Then the eyes of the man, clear, as expressing some of the old life's fire, as well as the new life's courage, sought the gray eyes of the girl, sorrowful, downcast, tearful.

"Do you mean you have broken your engagement because of this accident?" he questioned.

She nodded.

"Well, listen a moment and I think I can convince you how foolish, how absolutely foolish, you are, Alina."

A faint flush of anger mounted to the girl's cheek, but she did not answer.

"You see," he went on more gently, "it was simply an accident."

The anger leaped now to her eyes. "An accident," she repeated scornfully, "how can you call it so? I, a responsible human being, forgot all save my own selfish terror there on that narrow road. Is it just that you only should suffer the consequences of my willful carelessness?"



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