

THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND
(LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER XXIX THE AMPHITHEATRE

By night Kevin and Honeywood would sit together on the summit of the amphitheatre in the moonlight, and their talk was of the great poet and exile whose footprints are all over Verona.

Said Kevin, "If we could call the spirit of Dante to our presence, there would be no more fitting place than this. Imagine the glorified vision rising from the circular, almost fathomless pit of shadow into these upper rings of light, with a gleam from paradise on the strange, strong brow—all harsh lines of pain and bitterness smoothed away for ever."

"You feel sure it would be a glorified vision?" said Honeywood.

"I do, I feel sure that he has long since passed through that fire which purifies, which purifies, yet consumes nothing but sin; and that he is safe in the fields of bliss."

"In all that I have read of him lately," said Honeywood, "nothing struck me so forcibly as his description of the shock of inward relation, by which the soul in the Purgatorio became suddenly aware that it was thoroughly pure and fit for the presence of God. Enough had been suffered, the trial was ended, and the last soil of sin having vanished, had left the spirit free to perceive its own perfection and the immediate happiness awaiting it—without voice from above or below to convey the blessed news."

"It is believed," continued Honeywood, "that the spectacle of this amphitheatre, seen as we see it now in the moonlight, suggested to Dante the plan of the Inferno, with its ever-narrowing and descending rings: light circling round the top, getting gradually lost in an all but bottomless pit. It is easy to imagine the sad exile, with his proud, sore heart and burning imagination wandering about here by night, when the great nobles, his patrons, were either feasting noisily or sleeping off the effects of their dissipation. We are told that Can Grande said to him one day, with a savage rudeness that seems to belong to his rough name, 'How is it that you who are so inspired and so learned amuse the Court of Verona less than the buffoon who is just now delighting up?' And Dante answered, in his own lofty, seething way, 'People are usually pleased with those who resemble themselves.' After such a little passage of bitterness as this between him and the rude man whom he loved and whose bounties he accepted, he may have turned on his heel, and, scaling these solemn heights, have plunged into the depths of his Inferno, there forgetting the pains of this world in the more intolerable woes of another."

"Then you think Can Grande was not a real friend?" said Kevin.

"Truly his friend, but the Mastinos were a savage race; and when the Great Dog barked, doubtless, Dante writhed in his dependence. I am glad to find, however, that there is one writer of modern days (Ampère) who refuses to believe in the cruel play upon the word 'scala' in the sad lines:

"Thou shalt by trial know what bitter fare
Is bread of others; and the way
How hard
That leadeth up and down another's stair."

Doubtless, Dante, in his weary wanderings, hurried down from his high place, separated from 'each beloved thing,' banished under pain of a fiery death from his adored Florence, found the bread he ate bitter, and the road he travelled hard. The way ever up and down another's stair must be at times a sad pilgrimage even to the meekest feet, and Dante was not meek; but I for one am glad to agree with the thoughtful and eloquent writer who denies that a great soul could revenge itself on a benefactor by means of the malediction, and plant covert sting in the hand that had shielded him."

"How these two cities, Florence and Verona, are bound to the name of Dante," said Kevin. "Verona was the one beloved by him, and yet it seems to me that the mark of his presence is more impressed upon Verona."

"I feel with you, Florence had him in his youth, in the days of his love-dream; the mystical atmosphere of the Vita Nuova surrounds him there. She also possessed him in the days of his political life, in the hours of his triumph and power. But the Dante we best know, the sad, strong face, seamed with suffering and crowned with laurel, haunts Verona, and is more visible here than anywhere else in the world. This is the spot that knew him in the zenith of his great fame, when Florence cruelly rejected him. Had he remained in his high place in Florence, who can say whether the Divina Commedia would ever have been written?"

"Was it not begun before his exile?"

"Begun, but tossed aside in the storm of active political life. Five years of turmoil in banishment had passed when his nephew found in an old family receptacle a scroll of some few cantos, the beginning of the Divine Comedy, and sent it to

the exile. Receiving it, all the poet awoke in his passionate, disappointed heart, so torn by worldly strife, and, as if called by Heaven, he threw himself into the task and accomplished the real work of his life."

"Are we not told that he wrote the Inferno among the hills of Lunigiana, at the castle of the Baron Malaspina?"

"He may have written part of it, have finished it there; but I believe that the plan of it was conceived in Verona. The hills had their share in supplying the scenery, I dare say. Take this moon-gilded amphitheatre and lose it in some strange, lone, hollow wilderness of Nature."

"Within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway
had been lost."

and you can gain some idea of the first suggestion of that desert slope at a mountain foot where the firm foot ever was the lower."

Said Kevin: "Long before I ever heard of Dante, when I was an almost unlettered boy on an Irish mountain side, I knew by heart the strange tale of the voyage of St. Brendan, a saint of my land, 'a holy man of Ylondra' who sailed in search of an island peopled by the souls of the blessed, and who met with strange adventures upon islands of Purgatory and islands of the damned. Many a time I lay in the heather, looking earnestly along the sea-line for a glimpse of Hy-Brasil, the Island of the Blessed, which our people believe is sometimes visible for a moment in the evening light. I was also familiar with the stories from St. Patrick's Purgatory, having learned them of course in the Irish language. All those Irish visions, beautiful, poetic, and sublime as they are, as well as those of other countries on the same supernatural theme were doubtless, well known to Dante from his childhood. What his genius had to do was to build up a perfect and splendid arch, which should span all time, out of the exquisite rainbow fragments that were floating round his head."

"What strikes me as very remarkable," said Honeywood, "is the difference in matters relating to the spiritual world between our Irish and all other nations. No one thought of believing that Dante had really seen the visions he relates so questioningly, but your people made a reality of the legend of St. Patrick and staked their faith and devotion on its circumstantial truth. Nay, they do so still, as you have told me yourself, when a child, performed devotions at this spot."

"It is true that with our Irish faith in the unseen is a passion which is as strong as it is indescribable. Neither sin, pleasure, sorrow, nor affliction can root it out of us. We have been called 'a poetic nation,' to whom credulity is easy, and long may religion hold its sway over our souls. But remember that St. Patrick was a saint of God. Dante, a mighty poet, was no saint. The legend of what St. Patrick saw was of an earlier age and had been accepted as truth by simple and unquestioning Christians. At this present day God alone could tell us how much foundation of truth was at the bottom of the tale, or from what mysterious source came the first of those poetic rumors which later went to build up our Dante's fame."

"What sort of place is St. Patrick's Purgatory now?"

"At present a few bare white-washed buildings stand on an island, one of which is a humble church, the rest are lodgings, the most barren species of lodgings, for visitors. The pilgrims bring their fast with them, as the poor say, and a very scanty measure of bread and water is all they taste while they stay. Their sleeping place is the bare rock, but some keep vigil all the time, a very few pace it off, to defray the expenses of the pilgrimage. No one lives on the island, except during the period of the pilgrimage, which is performed once a year."

"This island in its lonely lake, is it surrounded with beautiful scenery?" asked Honeywood.

"The lake is set in the midst of a wilderness of heather, locked among dreary, moorland hills. The rugged forlorn landscape, such as it is, seems to me to suit the strange history that hangs around it."

"And the people go, you yourself have gone, a child, to fast and pray in this desert region, painfully, because your saint may have seen visions on the spot."

"Because they feel themselves there in the track of holy feet, and think they breathe an atmosphere that draws them nearer to God."

CHAPTER XXX HIGH REGIONS

Herr Harfenspieler could not rest in his bed, nor sleep the sleep of the just. At daylight of the summer morning he arose, and, taking his violin, went to soothe his soul with music in the solitude of the woods. Along the rose-wreathed terrace walk was a little glade, a well of deep green shadow, dim and solemn as a sanctuary, and here throwing himself on a mossy trunk, he poured out floods of mournful music on the air. After a time the signora, taking her morning walk, floating along the terrace like a streak of grey mist, with her silver ringlets and colorless dress, heard his strains and found her way to the spot whence they came.

"Maestro!" she cried, clasping her hands, "how is it all to end?"

"Well," said the Harfenspieler, "Kevin has proved a friend after all. Our Fanchetta will not leave us to marry Captain Rupert."

"But if we should meet with this Kevin?"

"Signora, you do not rightly understand our pupil. She has the ideal mind that is always seeking to fix its eye on something nobler and greater than itself, than the ordinary run of mortals. Life will torture her with disappointments; one after another her idols will cast themselves down before her eyes. As soon as she meets this Kevin, who has till now been her ideal, because unseen and unknown, she will begin to perceive flaws in him which now she could not believe to exist. Her imagination will pass over his head and fix itself on some noble abstract being; and so it will be with her, till through suffering and in all humility she will come to acknowledge that such ideal cravings are not to be satisfied on earth; and she will eagerly follow the voice of music, which alone can assuage the sorrows of the soul, by expressing its yearning after the unseen. Behold the narrow and painful track which our Fanchetta's feet have got to travel through! And therefore she will not fail us; tomorrow she will be with us in Italy."

"Tomorrow?"

"As soon as we can arrange to start. Let us go to Lord Wilderspin and talk about it."

Lord Wilderspin was in the library when the musicians appeared before him.

"Yes, it is a beautiful morning," said the professor; "but we have come to speak about our pupil. Take her to Italy at once, my lord, and she will be ready to make her debut in a few weeks hence."

"Are you not aware, sir, that I have other views for this young lady?" said the old nobleman, getting very red and angry.

"She will not carry out those views. Let us go back to our original intentions regarding her."

"Here comes the person who must answer you," said Lord Wilderspin, as his nephew entered the room.

"Rupert, you must tell us whether or not my ward has consented to go on the stage."

"I know nothing more of the subject than you do, uncle," said Rupert, coldly.

"You do not mean to say, sir, that you are jealous of the child's Irish affection for her foster-brother?"

Rupert was silent.

"I will not allow you to shake her off, sir. My daughter and niece she shall be if she wishes it. We will decide this matter at once." And he rang the bell and sent for Fanchetta.

She came in, looking pale and frightened.

"Come here, Fan," said the old man, kindly, "and don't look so scared. We are not plotting to make away with Kevin. Now tell me frankly, my little girl, whether you will be my nephew's wife, mistress and lady of Wilderspin, with all the happiness a husband and father can provide for you; or will you (with a sudden fierce change of manner) go with this pair of musical owls, to sing on the stage and make a show of yourself to the world?"

"Lord Wilderspin," said Fan, trembling a little, "you have brought me up and trained me for a particular purpose. I wish to fulfil that purpose."

The signora and the Harfenspieler advanced, and each seized one of her hands. She broke from them and followed Captain Rupert who had turned to the door.

"Do not be vexed with me," she said. "You never could have been satisfied with me. As the lady of Wilderspin I should have been a troublesome failure."

"I was willing to take the risk," said Rupert, and looked as if he would say something more; but, instead, dropped her hand and left the room abruptly.

"Off to London without his breakfast," growled Lord Wilderspin, looking after his nephew with an amount of sympathy which he had never before felt for the younger man—a sympathy which was destined to lay the foundation of thorough good feeling between the two men for the remainder of their lives. Thus much good had Fan's little involuntary mischief-making brought in its train.

"A nice dance you have led us, you minx," grumbled his lordship, scowling at the girl, who stood with pale cheeks and two great tears in her eyes gazing at the door through which her lover had gone. "Serve you right for being such fools. Never will I think to understand a girl again. Now, run away, you impertinent monkey, and pack your trunks for Italy."

"In a very short time after this the signora, Herr Harfenspieler, and Fan were on their way to Milan, where Lord Wilderspin was to join them a few weeks later."

Seated between her two triumphant instructors, Fan, in the beginning of the journey, was sad enough. She was leaving the good home that had sheltered her for years, having grieved and disappointed each one of the kind friends who had cherished her. True, she had enjoyed the supreme pleasure of hearing news of Kevin and of seeing her benefactors forced to acknowledge that he was as worthy as noble as she had ever believed him to be. But with this had come no certainty that he remembered her or was seeking for her. And

she had no clue to his whereabouts, no means of reaching him, or recalling the fact of her existence to his mind.

As they proceeded on their beautiful way, however, she gradually awakened from her dull, uninterested state of disappointment to the consciousness of new life; the strange world of the Alps excited and amazed her. Even at its very entrance, her heart began to beat fast, and as valley after valley was traversed, and still higher regions of beauty opened above her head, a glad light began to shine in her eyes again, and the bright blood began to glow in her cheeks. The perpetual mustering and shifting of great heights fascinated her; mountains that met, soared, and parted again to make way for yet greater than they, to allow giants still more mighty to mount and climb nearer heaven upon their shoulders. Always peering on before towards dazzling vistas, opening as if from the clouds, she gradually lost sight of self with its burdens, and entering the Via Mala, seemed to tread upon the wings of the wind.

They left their carriages, and walked along the narrow road. The mountains, no longer opening their arms to receive smiling valleys into their bosom, now became locked together in an iron embrace, making ramparts of almost infinite height and depth, through which water, sunshine, and human will by its spray, the pines planted their roots, and rising towards the light, clothed many a terrible gap and fissure with the long, sweeping draperies of their dark-green, emerald mist-laden boughs.

Looking down into this narrow, almost bottomless hollow, one is overwhelmed with awe at the grandeur that Nature has piled within its depths and up its sides, the luxuriance of vegetation and the magnificence of color enriching its gloom; looking up, one grows giddy with joy at the glory that wraps the spires and crowns of mountain, crag, and pine. Now passing through dripping caves tunnelled in the rock, now carried over the awful gulph by a bridge, the road winds on, a triumph of the ingenuity of man; and the traveller, following it, feels at once his own personal insignificance, and the astonishing power of the human race which has thus penetrated into the secret fastnesses of Nature.

"Mamzelle," said Fan, suddenly lowering her gaze from the glories above her head, "why are we ever unhappy in this beautiful world? God, and so much loveliness, ought to be enough for us."

"How enraptured you look, my darling! To me there is gloom as well as joy in all this grandeur. Walking here on this dim path, midway between gigantic heights and depths, I am forced to think of Dante's conceptions. Above our heads is the Paradise—look how like a group of angels you golden cloud hangs over that highest, darkest cluster of pines—below our feet is the Inferno; and we are travelling with trembling hearts amid the shades of the Purgatorio."

"What a strange fancy, Mamzelle; and I can see such beautiful things down yonder!"

Higher and yet higher they kept wending. Every half-hour brought them into a new and cooler region. The sunset intensified in glory, the tips of the pines grew darker in the rosy light, and a deeper purple was folded among their branches; golden veils of cloud hovered round the amethyst peaks, and the blinding glory from above cast more appalling shadows into the gorges below.

TO BE CONTINUED

AGNES

By Leo Wetzel in the Missionary

"I am getting tired of this," mused Mr. Reynolds to himself. "I don't understand how the Church can assume the authority to put limits around a man's free will. She is unreasonable with her authority—narrow-minded! She tells me that I must not reason; that she will reason for me, and that I must take her conclusion as Gospel truth. Absurd! What guide have I other than reason? I'm stupid if I accept her authority without reason. I can't stand this any longer," he said, walking across the room to the window, to ease his scrupulous conscience.

"But what am I to do? Accept and be pinned down to a life of mediocrity, or give it up and make something of myself?" Such questions as these had been running through the mind of Mr. Reynolds for some time, and on this Sunday morning, as he sat in his comfortable chair smoking a good cigar and reading occasionally a few lines from his daily paper, the situation seemed to be more exasperating than ever before.

Mr. Reynolds was the junior partner of the law firm, Marks & Reynolds, a Catholic and the only Catholic lawyer in town. He was a young man, and had only six years of law experience. He was very determined by nature, and quick to seize every opportunity. In fact, it was determination that

had made him what he was; he boasted playfully of his ability to surmount difficulties. It was this that had enabled him to work up to his present position. He found himself a member of a prosperous firm, with unlimited possibilities before him. Yet he was not satisfied. In his present situation he had more obstacles, and he saw in the future more and greater ones. He was a Catholic.

What could a Catholic do if he kept himself away from those who could "make" him? Those who could make him were Masons; Moore, his partner in business, an elderly man, was a Mason and much respected by everybody who knew him. Practically every lawyer in the city was a Mason, and as far as could be seen from the outside, none the worse for the fact that they were Masons. These men had their clubs, and their social meetings. They associated and knew each other. Yet Mr. Reynolds had been keeping away from them. He felt that the Church obliged him to avoid everything Masonic. He was getting to where he could stand that longer. He wanted to mix with the Masons to join their order, and to make himself known to people worth while.

He had discussed the point with Father John, but had received only disappointment. It was then that Reynolds began to investigate the authority of the Church, and began to consider the above difficulties in his legal mind.

"The Masons are all right, and no one can deny it: I know dozens of them right here in this city. They are self-respecting, honest, law abiding, and the best of citizens. If it were only possible for me to become a Mason!" he soliloquized. "My future depends upon it; I shall be a success or failure and my course now shall determine which it shall be. My colleague, my friends, those with whom I work are Masons. They are all right, and there is nothing about them contrary to the belief of the Catholic Church."

Mr. Reynolds put his cigar down, and fumbled the paper again. He re-read the headlines of some reported crimes. "Ah! if I could only get cases like that, I should make a fortune and a name," he said, reading hurriedly the first few lines to see what it was all about. But that is impossible; that's a big case, and the Masons have control; they are united and I haven't a chance," he said, turning the pages. "Umh," he laughed, "here is a job for me. A poor man has been run over by a Ford; perhaps he wants a lawyer and will pay me with thanks!"

"Hurry, daddy, and get ready," said Mrs. Reynolds to her husband, "we must soon be going to church. It's getting late and you haven't begun to get ready; what's the matter?"

"Well, you take Agnes and go on to church. I guess I'll be along a little later. I am feeling a bit lazy this morning; I worked late last night, and don't feel much like getting ready. You and Agnes run on, and don't worry about me."

"Of course, you are going to get ready and come along; you know Agnes will feel awfully hurt if you are not present for her first Holy Communion," said his young wife, pleading earnestly with him, for she began to fear that he intended to remain away from Mass.

"Oh, go on Maggie, I guess it makes little difference to Agnes whether I am there or not. You had better run on and get yourself and her ready. I am too tired to go to church this morning, besides I promised to meet a friend here at 10 o'clock to figure in a big deal, which makes it impossible for me to go. I'm not going to church this morning."

Mrs. Reynolds' face clouded; she left the room speechless, for she never heard her husband talk this way before, and in a matter so important. She had been married to Reynolds nine years, and this was the first time that he had acted so strangely. She went to her room where Agnes was waiting to be dressed, and took the child in her arms and whispered tenderly, "Daddy says he isn't going to church with us this morning; he's too busy. But we must not be angry at him, Agnes; we must pray hard for him, and you must offer your first Holy Communion that he will not miss Mass any more."

"Mother, let me go and ask him, I think he will go," said the child comfortingly. She had never feared to ask him anything, so she ran from her mother's arms toward the small little sitting-room where her father sat staring with a vacant look at the pages of a ragged-edged book.

"Isn't mother getting you ready?" said Mr. Reynolds harshly to the child who had stopped timidly in the doorway, afraid to speak.

It was a queer feeling that crossed the mind of the child; she felt afraid of her good father the first time of her life. She ran back to her without having said a word to him.

"Mother," she said, all out of breath, "I couldn't ask him; I never saw him look that way before. Do you think he is angry at us, mother?"

"Well, don't cry," said Mrs. Reynolds, drawing the child close to her, "he isn't angry at you, he just doesn't want to go to church this morning. He'll be all right after a while."

This little break in the family left each ill at ease. Mrs. Reynolds

feared the outcome. She knew that her husband had been talking about joining the Masons for a long time, and she had heard him say that the Church could not prevent him from becoming a Mason. She had tried in vain to reason with him, and for some time had been fearing a rash step on his part. About this, she had said nothing to little Agnes, who was, of course, too young to know what it was all about. Mrs. Reynolds felt no fears for her husband, but she realized that the break which had so long threatened had finally come. She knew her husband's determination to fight everything to a finish, and for this reason she had not argued with him when he emphatically decreed that he would not go to church that morning. They had talked over the situation before, but no harsh words had ever been used. Mr. Reynolds had always broken down her objections playfully: "Oh, you would make a good woman lawyer, you plead so earnestly." And again, "Well, I don't think the Catholic Church was made for men anyway, it's all right for you and baby Agnes."

Mrs. Reynolds felt doubly bad over the situation this Sunday morning because it happened to be the day of Agnes' first Holy Communion. She had always remembered her first Holy Communion day with joy; and now little Agnes' first Communion day would be clouded! But she tried to prevent showing her real feelings to Agnes that the poor child might be kept as joyful as possible.

For some unknown reason, Agnes felt afraid of her father; she had never feared him before, but her childish instinct told her that something was wrong. And her father would not be present to see her make her first Communion; she wished in her heart that he would be there. She knew that she would look pretty in her new white dress and wished that he might be there to see her.

When Mrs. Reynolds and Agnes were ready to leave they had to pass through the sitting-room, where Mr. Reynolds still sat rather glum and silent. He felt different from what he had ever felt before, still he had no quarrel with his wife; he had told her plainly that he was not going to church. But this had its effect on him. He was anxious for them to leave; he dreaded the parting; he wondered how they would part as he sat there. They had never parted before with strained relations; he had always kissed his wife and child whenever he left the house or whenever they left. And he wondered, and dreaded the moment, for he felt himself a rascal in the eyes of his loving wife and baby daughter.

But they passed by him and went to the door indifferent to his presence. Agnes cast a glance at him as a parting good-by. This made him more miserable, but did not lessen his determination to see the thing to a finish.

"I may not be in when you get back, but don't worry," he said rather boldly. "Mr. Jones is due here pretty soon; we are going to see old Sharp about that property."

Nothing else was said; the woman and child walked out and left him sitting alone.

Mrs. Reynolds and Agnes had little to say as they walked hurriedly toward the Catholic Church. Agnes inquired concerning the disposition of her father, but she was too young to know all yet. Mrs. Reynolds could not make it all known; it would upset the child and make her unhappy at Mass. She merely explained that father was very busy, too busy to go to church that morning.

"But I wish, mother," Agnes said several times, "that he would be there to see me make my first Communion."

"But don't worry," Mrs. Reynolds said consolingly, "just remember what I said, and when you receive our Blessed Lord this morning for the first time, tell Him, that daddy did not come to church, and ask our good God to give him grace to be prompt at Mass hereafter."

When Mrs. Reynolds and Agnes had gone, Mr. Reynolds settled back in his chair and rested comfortably. "Well, I'm glad that it was no worse than it was," he said to himself; "she could have made a lot of trouble for me. Guess I am going through with this all right after all." And he enjoyed thinking of the courage that he had displayed in breaking away from that Sunday morning habit of going to Mass. This had puzzled him. He had wondered how to begin, and now that the breach had been made, and very successfully, he rested easily.

"Some people may not like this," he thought, "but why should I care? Father John doesn't stand responsible for my future; he doesn't feed my baby; nor does it make any difference to him whether I ever amount to anything or not. Why should I fear him? He's all right in his way, but I don't need him, and he doesn't need me. Some of my Catholic friends may not like my action, but I can't stop for that. They don't buy my food and clothing. I must become a Mason or leave my law office; that's settled! Let my wife say what she will; I know she doesn't like it, and I didn't expect her to like it, but she will get over that all right, when she understands that I am running this little place. She can go on

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