

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER X.—CONTINUED

Mary gave a little chuckle as she surveyed the scene. "Now, then, you two!" she cried. "What about a cup of tea?"

Nurse Seelye stirred and yawned, then as she saw Mary pouring out the tea, she gave a sigh of contentment.

"Oh! Mary, you jewel!" she said, "I was just parched! You know, I never sleep much after a dance."

Her lovely dark hair was loose on the pillow, for she had only taken out the pins and not troubled to comb or plait it, so tired had she been on her return from the dance; the sleep was still heavy in her eyes and her moulded arms showed prettily from the short sleeves of her lacy night-dress.

Mary thought that a pretty picture she made as she handed her the tea.

"Well, and how did you enjoy yourself?" she asked, "but, indeed, Seelye, I'm sure you had a good time anyway—you always do!"

"Oh, yes, it was all right. There was quite a decent crowd there, and everything went all right," replied Nurse Seelye; and Mary, with half-curious eyes surveyed Mary with a malicious gleam, even as she took the welcome cup from her.

Here a very different picture met her view. Nurse Lenehan was a plain, sallow featured young woman, whose very scanty locks, of a nondescript yellow hue were tightly screwed up in hair curlers.

She wore a severely useful flannel night-dress, and her small foxey eyes surveyed Mary with a malicious gleam, even as she took the welcome cup from her.

"You should have been there anyway, Miss Carmichael," she said, with a keen note of enjoyment in her voice. "I can tell you that Dr. Delaney had a good time there. He danced four or five times with Nurse Ormsby—everyone remarked it. But don't go and get jealous now!" She finished with an unkind little laugh.

Mary had turned her back and professed to be occupied with the breakfast tray, but the hands fumbling amongst the plates were not very steady. Then she heard Nurse Seelye laugh and say gaily, "Yes, Mac, dear, Theo was there. But he didn't come especially to the dance—some medical club to which he belongs gave a St. Patrick's night dinner at the Gresham, and he just looked into the ballroom afterwards to see what was going on."

"Just looked in?" repeated Nurse Lenehan spitefully. "Well, his looking in took up a couple of hours anyway! And he spent most of the time looking at Nurse Ormsby, if you ask me!"

But by this time Mary Carmichael was herself again and she laughed in her own gay fashion as she answered: "My dear Nurse Seelye, surely you don't think that I begrudge the poor man a few hours' pleasure, do you?—even if it is spent away from my very charming society! And as for Julie Ormsby, she's a dear, and lovely too, and I wouldn't wonder at Theo or any other man dancing as often as he could with her! Don't you know that she is one of my own particular pals, and if I was a mere man I would have run away with her ages ago!"

Nurse Lenehan looked rather shamefaced, while Nurse Seelye laughed.

"You were always crazy over Nurse Ormsby's looks, Mac," she said, "but do you know she didn't look as pretty as usual last night!"

"Oh, well, she couldn't look plain if she tried," said Mary. "No more tea, ladies? No?—All right then, I must run off now—duty calls you know," and she went downstairs humming gaily to herself. But although she had shown such a brave front to the others and laughed matters off, still in her heart of hearts Mary Carmichael was a little sick and sore at the thought that Theodore Delaney should have gone to the Nurse's dance without her. He knew quite well that she would not be there, and it would have been quite as easy for him to have gone straight home after dinner as it was for him to "stroll" into the ballroom, even if it was only for a look round. And as for Julie Ormsby—well, he needn't have danced four times with her anyway! And for the first time since she had known Dr. Delaney, Mary Carmichael felt a sharp pang of jealousy stabbing her to the very heart.

She dressed and went out on her rounds, but she had finished her first few cases before she began to feel "normal" again. Then just as she was beginning to take a more cheerful view of the matter she almost ran into the arms of Mary Blake as she turned a corner with her mind far away. Two laughing exclamations sounded simultaneously, and then Mary Carmichael said—

"Oh! Mary, I was just thinking of you! Do come along and let us have tea somewhere. I do so want to talk to you and your tea and scones!"

And over their tea and scones Mary Blake listened to her friend's tale of woe.

At its close she laughed heartily. "Well! Mary Carmichael!" she said then, "I wonder—I do wonder at you! But I suppose all things

must be given to the victims of the tender passion!" Then as the other Mary flushed and looked almost offended, she leaned forward and laid her hand on hers.

"My dear!" she said softly, "don't—don't be foolish! Don't you know Theodore Delaney even yet? Why you should know him better than anyone else, and yet you are doubting him—actually doubting his faith and honour! Why dear old girl, haven't you realized that in Theodore Delaney you have an honourable, truthful gentleman—one who could never stoop to deceive a woman in anyway—especially the woman he cares for!"

Mary Carmichael smiled across the table through a mist of tears.

"Oh, Mary," she sighed, "I am a wretch. Of course I know that Theo is all you say and more, but—

Just for the moment—

"Just for the moment you felt horribly jealous—and of your own special friend too! I'm ashamed of you!" and Mary Blake laughed at her friend's discomfited face.

"Oh! Mary, don't, like a dear, tease me any more! But, tell me now, how you are all at home, and how is Clare?"

"And the subject was changed and the two friends chatted away on various other matters as they finished their tea. And Mary Carmichael kneeling later on before the Tabernacle wept tears of remorse that she should ever have doubted, even for one moment, the unsullied truth and honour of he who was her king amongst men.

Holy week came and the Catholic Church entered upon her days of fasting and penitence—of prayers and ceremonies. Clare Castlemaine went with her cousins to see some of the Altars of Repose in the city churches, and in one of them she saw Mary Carmichael. She was kneeling a little way off, her eyes were fixed on the altar and her lips moved in silent prayer. Clare watched her curiously, and thought she looked pale and thin.

"Killing herself fasting, I suppose!" she said to herself. "Oh, dear! what a strange religion it is altogether, and yet what an extraordinary hold it has over the people!" She gazed around the church, noting the ever shifting crowd of worshippers passing and re-passing towards the Altar of Repose, ablaze with lights and fragrant with flowers.

The Blakes went from church to church, untiring and untired, until poor Clare felt that she should faint from exhaustion, and the day, too, was very warm and oppressive for the time of year. And yet, as she reminded herself several times, she was not even fasting, and for the last few days she knew well that a very real abstinence—with the exception of herself—had been observed in the Blake household.

It was Shamus who noticed her pale face presently.

"You look just done up, Clare—I vote you and I make tracks for home! I can finish my visits in the evening."

"Oh, don't bother coming with me—please!" cried Clare. "I am tired, but I can easily get home by myself. And you—if you have more churches to visit—oh, get them over now for you must be dead beat!"

But a gay laugh was the only reply, as Shamus piloted her towards a passing tram.

Two years later Clare Castlemaine recalled the sunny afternoon of that Holy Thursday, and saw again through a veil of burning tears the handsome face of Shamus Blake and seemed to hear again his gay and tender voice.

Good Friday dawned, and Dublin's Catholic thousands fasted and mourned, and the churches were crowded with worshippers from morn till night. And Clare Castlemaine, stumbling to her seat in what appeared to her almost terrifying darkness as she went with Tom and Shamus to the Three Hours, found herself wondering again over this strange and mystical, yet wonderfully living Faith.

And on Good Friday night Mary Carmichael stood, pencil in hand, and drew it through the last day of her fast and penitence.

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" she breathed to herself with shining eyes. "Oh! I cannot believe it! To think that at last I can count the very hours! and not so long it was weeks—then days, and now—now it is only hours! Oh! for nine o'clock tomorrow morning! I do hope there won't be many other rings at the 'phone just then, for I will be thinking that each one is 'the ring!' Oh! I hope I'll go to sleep at once, so that the morning will come the more quickly."

Needless to say this is what she did not do, for it is indeed a mere truism that the more we woo Morpheus the further he flies from us, and the other way about. So she tossed and turned for hours, going over and over in her imagination the meeting with Dr. Delaney the following evening—what he would say and what she would say—whether he would admire her new coat and tricky little velvet cap which every one said suited her so well, but which he had not seen yet. And she wondered would he tell her how he had missed her, and wondered too which of them had felt the separation most.

But at last her tired brain composed itself, and Mary Carmichael fell asleep.

Breakfast the next morning was like a dream to her. This meal was generally finished by half-past eight

—it was short if not sweet—but this morning it seemed to Mary an almost interminable repast. How the nurses did dawdle! Would Nurse Lenehan never finish that third piece of bread and butter!

And then Matron, who usually, had little to say at the first meal of the day, became quite chatty, meandering along about some meeting at the Mansion House to which she had been a few days ago.

But at last—at last it was over, and Mary free to race upstairs. She had decided to dress at once in her outdoor uniform and be ready to leave the Home for her work as soon as her chat at the 'phone was over—for that would certainly take a little time. Oh! but the sound of his voice over the wire would be music in her ears! It was only now—now when her penance was over and she was to meet him and talk to him as of yore—that Mary realized how hungry she was for the sight of his face and the sound of his dear voice.

She was pinning on her bonnet when Daisy Ray entered the room with some letters in her hand.

"Here is your post, Mac," she said. "It was late this morning. I'll leave them on the bed here for you as Matron wants me in the office."

"All serene!" cried Mary gaily, and having arranged her bonnet to her satisfaction she turned to look at the letters.

Two from the Blakes—she recognized Angel's scrawl and Mary's neat caligraphy; three from nurse friends in London, probably with Easter wishes, and then—then one in his familiar handwriting.

Before she opened it some feeling of coming sorrow gripped her heart. A moment she stood rigid, looking at the envelope in her hand, then dropping the others anywhere on the floor, Mary sat down on the bed and opened Dr. Delaney's letter.

And this is what she read:—

"Dear Miss Carmichael,

"How are you these times? It seems ages since we met, and I do hope that you are as fit as ever, and have not been overworking yourself. I suppose you expected a call over the 'phone this morning? However, I am writing instead, as for various reasons I will not be better. I am afraid I will not be able to arrange a meeting with you for this evening, as I am exceptionally busy at present; but, doubtless we shall meet somewhere before long."

"With kind regards and all good wishes for Easter-tide.

"I am,

"Very faithfully yours,

"THEODORE J. DELANEY."

Outside in the city square cars and taxis were rushing past, and the noise of the trams sounded every few minutes. Through St. Columba's itself doors banged and nurses called to each other as they got ready for the morning's work. But inside the bedroom was a dead silence—the woman on the bed sat rigid and still with the letter clasped tightly in her hand. Fully ten minutes were ticked away by the little clock on the mantelpiece and then the silence was broken by a stifled moan, and Mary Carmichael lay prone, her hands looking at the bedclothes in agony, her eyes wide open and terror-stricken.

Two inquisitive city sparrows hopped on the window-sill and looked curiously into the room, but the next minute they flew away again. They had not liked the picture they had seen, there—and yet it was an everyday occurrence—only a woman passing through all her gethsemani, and treading it—as we all must tread it—alone.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE DAY IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

It was nine o'clock on Easter Sunday morning, and the Blake family, having returned from early Mass, were assembled around the breakfast table. Bride was absent, as she always helped at one of the Free Breakfasts on Sunday morning, and having been at seven o'clock Mass she had rushed home for a cup of tea and then was off to that part of the city where the breakfast for the poor was given.

She would be home again about half-past nine or a little later, for even on Sundays Bride lived the strenuous life, and indeed would not have been happy otherwise.

Clare Castlemaine had not gone to Mass with her cousins that morning. The services and ceremonies of Holy Week—to which she had gone more or less out of curiosity—had attracted her strangely, and almost alarmed at the effect which they had had upon her, she had made up her mind to go to no more.

"Bride is not back yet, of course?" said Mary, as she poured out the tea. "However," glancing at the clock—"she won't be long. I hope she will remember to tell Mary Carmichael to be sure to come early tonight." Mary Carmichael also helped at the Free Breakfasts in the same building as Bride, and the latter had promised to give her a message from Mary Blake.

"Talking of Mary Carmichael," said Nora suddenly, "I saw Dr. Delaney last night when I was coming home from confession. And who do you think was with him? There was a general laugh round the table, and more than one voice answered her gaily. "Who! why Mary of course! Ask us another Nora darling!"

"Wrong! Wrong! all of you!" responded that young lady. "If wasn't Mary Carmichael at all that was with him!"

"Not Mary Carmichael?" repeated her eldest sister in rather puzzled tones. "Who was it then, Nora? His mother or sister, I suppose?"

"No, then! 'Twas neither his mother nor his sister—or his aunt or cousin or any relative! It was Julie Ormsby, looking as pretty as a picture in a Christmas number—so there!" and Nora looked round the table, feeling rather proud to have been able to impart such unexpected information. There was a puzzled silence on the part of the others, and Mary and Tom especially looked bewildered and rather worried.

"But Pat only laughed as he remarked,

"Well, if Dr. Delaney happens to meet Julie Ormsby—or any other girl for the matter of that—going probably the same way as himself, is there any reason in the world why they shouldn't walk a few yards together? That is likely what happened. Oh! Nora, jewel, you have got a bee in your bonnet—or rather under that sweet little hair of yours!"

Before Nora could reply the door opened and Bride entered in her usual quick, alert manner. Drawing off her gloves she took her place at the breakfast table, remarking as she did so that she was rather later than usual on account of having such a big crowd for the Free Breakfast on that morning.

"Did you give Mary Carmichael my message?" asked Mary. "She wasn't there," was the reply. "Never turned up, and that made us all doubly busy, for Mary is so good at the work that she is worth two of the others. I can't think what happened here for she so seldom fails us, and she knew that we expected an extra crowd this morning. I certainly think she might have managed to come, and I shall tell her so tonight."

But as it happened, Bride had no opportunity of doing so, for Mary Carmichael did not pay her promised visit to the Blake family that evening.

WEAK WINGS

By Helen Moriarty in Roary Magazine

Even on a bright day the high stone walls of the big prison cast a gruesome, significant shadow across inside spaces where monotonous buildings and stereotyped walks speak no less sternly of irrevocable tasks than the walls and their shadows speak of irrevocable detention.

It is conceivable that the majority of the prisoners accepted the walls as they accepted their destiny, with the dullness of defeat and something, it may be, of the silliness of the trapped animal.

Also like the trapped animal, some, at times, snapped and bit at the restraint; but these soon discovered that they might as well try to bite a piece out of the iron dog on the front lawn outside, a fitting symbol of the impregnable force that had them in its power. In other words, though they could hate, and evade, and outrage their sworn enemy, the Law, once it had caught them they could neither shatter nor loose its long and menacing arm. That this same arm could be swiftly foreshortened was a lesson they learned, too, for prison punishment was no less grueling than prison discipline. A grizzly lesson, this, reacting on different temperaments in various unhappy ways. On the free, lawless temperament of John Selfridge,—"Sneaky" to his intimates of the outside world,—it had the natural effect of accentuating his bitterness and renewing the spirit of smouldering hate which obsessed him. Serving a first term for burglary, he was by no means a grizzly lesson in deserts, and the resentment that consumed him was not so well concealed as he feared.

"He's an ornery pup," the guards who knew him best agreed. And one said to Father Durkin, by way of a joke.

"That fellow'll stand a lot of religion, Father."

Father Durkin said curtly: "He won't stand any. Religion should have been applied to his case about thirty-five years ago."

"Why, he's only about thirty—" began the guard.

"I know—I know. I mean his parents," explained the priest. "If some one had knocked a little religion into them thirty-five or forty years ago, this fellow might have some chance. But as it is—the priest shook his head and walked away, forgetful of the guard, who grew very angry and vaguely reflective. "I guess that's right."

This drew a half-smile, half-ironical smile from Father Durkin, and, try as he would to dismiss it, the vision of the—to him—pathetic figure of the spiritually defrauded Selfridge kept haunting him the rest of the day.

Sourly would Selfridge have resented the knowledge that Father Durkin was worrying about him or even presuming to give him a thought. Let them take care of themselves. . . . Let them leave him alone. After he got out—this wouldn't last forever—he could look out for himself all right. That he was here now was only an accident—an accident that would never happen again. He would see to that, for after this he would travel alone. No partner for Sneaky Selfridge, never again! If it hadn't been for that condemned dog of a Heddon . . . but, you

wait! He was free, Heddon was. Outside . . . happy . . . running around wherever he pleased. Only wait, Buddy, Your day is coming. Thus Selfridge, hugging his hate, savoring it, living week after day and week after week, tormenting with it his chained and chained spirit. Small wonder that he ignored the few friendly overtures that came his way, he who had been betrayed by a friend and who all his life had distrusted strangers much as does a wandering cur. Hard, dark, secretive, shifty, a thief by choice as well as by force of circumstances, he knew nothing but contempt for the fellow who "went straight" and also a marked disbelief in the number of those who did. "They're all crooked, but they ain't caught," was the basis of his own crooked philosophy. Similarly, he had only contempt for preachers.

"No, I ain't got no religion," he had stated coolly both to the Protestant chaplain and to Father Durkin; and he remained dumb to all subsequent questions. Selfridge soon became aware that many prisoners professed religion simply to get away on Sundays from the ghastly dreariness of their cells, but he scorned the subterfuge as well as the profession, just as he sneered at the apparent ease with which the bluff carried. So, distrustful even of his fellow prisoners, Sneaky Selfridge kept to his cell, aloof way, fending off by his surly manner all friendly approaches, stolid, dull, embittered, lonely. But he did not know that he was lonely until one day a young sparrow fell across his path.

Up in the eaves of one of the shop buildings a pair of adventurous sparrows, blithely unconscious of binding walls and prison atmosphere, had built themselves a nest. Out of this nest by chance—or by the designs of Providence, who shall say—fell one morning a small fledgling. Sneaky Selfridge, sent on an errand across the short, well-guarded distance between two sheds, felt a soft impact against his shoulder, and though he jerked back, mechanically his hand went up in time to catch the hurtling object. His first impulse was to cast the thing down, and then a glance at it stayed him. The poor, shivering little tike! Look at it, would you, with its mouth open and not a feather to its back!

"You're outa luck, Old Timer," he muttered grimly. "You didn't know what you were fallin' into, or it's a cinch you'd a held on like a good fellow!" With the early acquired prison stealth he slipped the bird into his pocket and went stolidly on his errand. It gave him a queer, uncomprehended thrill to hold his hand over the tiny bundle of bones that seemed to struggle appealingly against the enfolding palm.

Selfridge had no idea what he would do with it, but he fished some bread at noon time and amused himself throwing softened bits into the gaping maw. He was amazed at the bird's capacity for food. "For the love o' Pete!" he gasped. "Don't you never shet them jaws?" They it occurred to him that perhaps the little fellow was thirsty and he experimented with a few drops of water. Well, if that wasn't the funniest thing!

"That's about all we get, Old Timer," he gibed, distaste of prison fare being another of his active resentments. "But I'll see that you get your share if you wants stick it out with me until—"

He stopped and stared at the small object in his hand, for the strangest contraction had come into his throat at the thought of the bird flying up and away, away, into the free air beyond the gray walls, and he, still imprisoned and helpless, left behind. Never in all his life had Selfridge wasted on himself anything so frittering and futile as pity, but something was stirring in him now, a disconcerting new emotion, perhaps a far, faint call to the sin-bound spirit from its earthly prototype, nesting in the convict's nervous hand. Uneasily his other hand stole up to a throat that had never acted this way before.

"Why, Old Timer!" he breathed jerkily, still staring at the bird.

"Why, Old Timer!"

For obvious reasons prison discipline does not hold with pets, but the habit of walking softly which had earned for Selfridge the alternative title of "Sneaky" served him now in excellent stead. "If they ketch onto us, Old Timer, you're a goner," he would whisper to the bird, who soon began, as Selfridge said, to sit up and take notice, and whose rapidity in putting on feathers was equalled only by his continuous and clamorous demand for food. The convict chuckled over this constantly, informing his growing guest that he had a man's size appetite all right, all right. As the days went on he became so interested in the little creature and its care that for the first time in his prison career he began to experience a certain measure of contentment. Less accentuated was his sullen demeanor, and his step took on a resiliency that it long had lacked. No one noticed it, of course. A negligible unit in a miserable aggregate of three thousand souls, who was to care whether or not life for him had assumed a less saffron hue, or that in his secretive breast his heart felt less like an unpleasant piece of cold lead?

But when, actuated by a desire to give the bird a breath of fresh air, Selfridge appeared at the Catholic

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