

## THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND  
(LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER XX—CONTINUED

The next morning Captain Rupert sauntering about the grounds and smiling to himself at the adventure of the night before, came upon a little group that took him by surprise. The two ladies seated under a tree in the shrubbery, at a part which commanded a fine view of woods and distant sea, were so unlike what he had expected to see that for a moment he did not identify them. With broad-leaved hats tipped over their eyes they were both engaged in needlework, while an open book lying on the grass at their feet, and others half concealed in a bag close by, showed that they had provided themselves with a variety of occupation. At first sight he took the signora for a child, and was startled when she turned up her little wistful, weather-beaten face, and he saw that the floating ringlets contained as much silver as gold. And it was with no small difficulty that he recognized her companion as the heroine of last evening's adventure.

Where was the flowing mantle of hair that had so enhanced the beauty of the small gleaming face? It was all braided away into the one heavy plait, and her fresh carnation cheeks were sheltered only by the shade of her coarse straw hat. Her plain untrimmed linen dress, short enough to show the small foot, was the garb of a school girl; and extreme youth and unstudied candour were in every line of her figure and attitude.

Apologizing for his accidental intrusion, Captain Rupert introduced himself. The signora was too simple in her nature to feel very much impressed by his unexpected appearance, too unconventional in her ways to think of putting on the primness of the duenna; and Fan, after the first moments of surprise, smiled on him in artless good-humour, noway dissatisfied with the chance that had brought them into pleasant company.

"It is long since I have seen ladies working in open air," said Captain Rupert. "In India they are obliged to do their stitches indoors. I see you are fond of reading," taking up the open book. "Well, I confess Shakespeare is a little too much for me. Are you fond of poetry?" with another critical glance that tried to find a resemblance in the simple young girl before him to the bewitching performer of last night.

"Yes," said Fan, "but not of all I meet with in books. I like the kind that one lives in one's own life. I think the best of it never gets written at all."

"I agree with you exactly," said Captain Rupert, tossing away the book, and smiling at the naive manner in which Fancha delivered herself of the above sentiment. "Why waste a morning like this reading another person's description of just such a morning while skies and woods in their reality are under your eyes; or a rhapsody on some one's mistress's eyebrow (that has been mouldering in the dust a hundred years), while a lovely face still unsung, is blooming in all its freshness by your side? Do you not agree with me, signora?"

"Perfectly; and yet—there are inner beauties which the poets help us to discern. When we lift our eyes from the book, the landscape is more lovely for the subtleties of meaning that the poet has discovered in it, the tender conceits with which he has coloured it; and the most charming face is more lovable to us when we have heard of the goodness that lurk behind it. What Nature gives to us we are grateful for and delight in, but what Nature gives to the poet he returns to her and to us a hundred-fold."

The signora spoke with a slight quiver in her voice and vibration of her whole small form which always accompanied the utterance of some of her most earnest thoughts. Under other circumstances Captain Rupert would have said to himself that the little elderly lady was talking platitudes; but now he was not attending to her at all, only looking at a new expression that came into Fan's eyes while she reflected that neither of her companions had followed her thought. The poetry she had meant to indicate was such as could not be explained or described in a well-turned sentence to make pleasant conversation for a summer morning's lounge. It involved all the subtle mysteries of life, and because it brought with it meanings which she could only half understand, and which caused her infinite wonderment, therefore it was that the thought of it brought that shade under her eyes which attracted Captain Wilderspin's attention. The strange poetry which she found in life was associated in her mind with strong ties of love broken, which somehow or other would have to be mended, with an island-strewn ocean over which the white birds flew like brilliant thoughts, and which was sailed by the creations of a fancy that somewhere, even now, was enriching the world, where she knew not, but in some place whither she must go. Her poetry was knit up with music, exile, pain, despair, hope, peace, order and harmony; and to it belonged both her future and her past. As the shadow of her

thought deepened under her eyes, the soldier, who was tired of everything, found himself more interested in her than he had been before; and while the signora's little speech about poetry quivered away on the breeze unheard, he was saying to himself that this child with the peach-like cheeks and eyes of Irish blue, now frank, smiling, and eager to talk to him, and now retiring visibly into a dream of her own, was going to prove even more delightful than the fascinating songstress of the picture-gallery.

"The signora and I have both been talking wide of the mark," he said, catching her eye as she looked up from her work. "Tell me what sort of poetry you were thinking of?"

"I could not unless I knew you better. It would be very difficult for me to explain what I mean to anybody; but with a stranger I could not attempt it."

"If I should ever come to be looked on as a very old friend, do you think you would tell me then?"

"I should do my best, if you had not forgotten to want to hear," said Fan, laughing.

At the sound of her gay laugh, Captain Rupert was forcibly reminded of the close of last night's scene, and felt a sudden renewal of his desire to discover whether she had really been aware of his presence or not.

"You sing?" he said, abruptly, with a keen glance which he thought capable of detecting any subterfuge.

"Oh, yes," said Fan. "Do I not, Mamzelle? I came into the world to sing. I get up in the morning to learn to sing, and I go to bed at night that I may get old enough and strong enough to sing what I have learned. To sing is the purpose of my life."

"If you always sing as you did last night in the picture-gallery, your purpose is attained."

Fan threw back her head and gave him such a look of wide-eyed consternation that all doubts of her ignorance vanished from his mind.

"Did you hear me?" she asked, while the color slowly deepened in her cheeks and rose to her forehead.

"Pardon me; I was an unintentional eavesdropper. I had strayed into the place to say good-evening to a certain great grandmother of mine who was my earliest love. Until you began to sing, I took you for her ghost."

Fan drooped her head over her work in silence, while a look of trouble settled on her face.

"Pray do not be vexed," said Captain Rupert, regretting that he had spoken, calling himself a bear for having so rudely enlightened her, yet gratified at sight of her confusion.

"Oh, it is not that," she said, snatching off her hat with a child-like movement, and fanning her glowing face with it, while the wind ruffled the light rings of hair that made her like the boy-angel in Raphael's picture. "But I shall never be able to do it."

"Sing before a living crowd."

"My dear!" put in the signora. "You must never be asked to do it!" cried the soldier, with an energy that took him by surprise. "Sir—Captain Wilderspin, I beg you will not put such ideas in her head!" urged the signora. "She is a child yet; but she will soon have to do the work of a woman. Another year or two will make a difference in her ideas."

"They may—make a confounded difference," muttered the Captain, looking at Fan's clear eyes opened wide with surprise at his heat. "She will never disappoint your good uncle, his lordship," continued the signora, all her ringlets quivering with excitement. "My uncle is a fool!" said Captain Rupert, quite forgetting himself.

"Fancha, it is time for our luncheon," said the signora. "Captain Wilderspin, we will wish you good morning."

The gentleman helped them to pick up their books and work-bags, bowed his farewell; and when they were gone he strolled down a shady alley, and, forgetting to light his cigar, smiled at the idea of his having been actually in something like a passion. And all about a little girl and her goodness.

CHAPTER XXI  
ONE SUMMER MORNING

Lord Wilderspin was making one of his erratic tours abroad, and was expected to return to the Park in a fortnight; and Captain Rupert decided on remaining at the Hall to await his return, rather than pass the intervening time in London. Already the fresh breezes of the country were telling upon his health and spirits. The days passed pleasantly; a long ride through the sheltering woods, and over the sunny downs; a lounge in the library, dipping into old favorite books; and occasional conversations with the signora and Fan, furnished him with sufficient amusement and occupation. Surprise at the simplicity of his own tastes enhanced his enjoyment of the novelty of this unwonted way of life, and he was happier than he had been for many years.

Aware that he was looked on by the signora as a dangerous person, likely to undo some of the difficult work done in Fan by increasing her dislike to public exhibition, and discouraging her to lower her aspira-

tions to the level of those of ordinary commonplace mortals, he was careful to choose wisely his subjects of conversation, and to propitiate the enthusiastic little Italian. But Fancha's music was her least attractive charm in his eyes; neither was it altogether her beauty that fascinated him, though that was pleasant to look upon as a rose in June. Never had any girl so near womanhood treated him with so much of the cordial simplicity of a child. It was the joyous transparency of her character that delighted him.

Not a great lover of books, it yet pleased him to read to the ladies under the shelter of the trees, of a morning, while Fan performed the tasks of needlework which the signora considered a necessary part of the education of a gentlewoman. The signora's embroideries were works of art, such as hang on walls in dusky corners of old Italian palaces; and Captain Rupert professed an interest in their daily growth. But Fan's fresh comments on the tale or poem he recited to her were more to his taste than the most wonderful tapestries in the world.

Finding that he did not return to unpleasant subjects of conversation; that he invariably spoke with respect of Lord Wilderspin, and that he was careful never to intrude upon their society beyond the most reasonable limits, the signora forgot the pang of distrust and displeasure she had felt at the close of their first interview, and made Captain Rupert welcome to share their walks and their hours of outdoor recreation. Herr Harfenspieler came and went without even seeing the gentleman, and Fan's industry at her studies was no way decreased.

Fan felt kindly to their new companion from the first, because he had sympathized with her dislike of the career to which she was destined; but she wondered why he held opinions so different from those of her other friends. Her own dread of public exhibition was instinctive; but she could see no reason why a stranger should object to see her fulfilling her vocation in life.

One morning the signora, more easily tired than younger people, had sat down to rest, and Fancha and Captain Wilderspin had wandered a little further into the wood.

"May I ask you about something," said Fan, "something that has been in my mind? Why were you displeased at the idea of my going on the stage?"

Captain Rupert was startled at the directness of the question, and paused a moment before answering, asking himself whether he had any right to interfere with the future of this young creature; but, looking at her eager face, he felt that the question in her eyes must be met with the truth.

"Because I do not think a public life is a desirable one for a lady."

"But I," said Fan; "am I a lady?"

He glanced at her in surprise. Had she been other than she was, he would have thought the question sounded like asking for a compliment; but he knew that Fan meant what she said. Was she a lady or not? In her spotless white gown, with her delicate, blooming face and spiritual eyes, had she really any doubts about her own ladyhood? He had learned to expect nothing but what was unconventional from her, and waited, as he often did, till she would give him the clue to her thought.

Fan's was a long thought, as she stood, fingering with one raised hand the leaves of the sheltering tree above them, and looking with absent eyes away into the depths of the wood. There was no self-consciousness in her face; she was not thinking of her own breeding, appearance, education, when she asked her question; her mind had gone back to one point that seemed unmeasurably far away in time and space, when her feet were upon a sea-washed mountain side, and she was carried up and down rugged braes, and in and out of a fishing-boat by Kevin. She was well aware that this elegant person beside her would not call Kevin a gentleman, and therefore, did she want to be a lady? She knew the advantage of all that had befallen her, and yet the fidelity within her looked back, and claimed a right to be of the rank of her early friend.

So long was her thought, that Captain Rupert at last believed she must be waiting for his answer, and said:

"I think you can hardly be in earnest; you must know that you are a lady."

"I might have known by your eyes that you were a daughter of the emerald isle."

"Why, are my eyes emerald?" said Fan, with a flash of merriment.

"No; blue, like the sea."

"The English sea is blue; I see it out yonder always, a bluish line. But our sea was green like your emerald; green, with clouds of foam."

"Who is it that is always looking for you?"

"Kevin."

She pronounced the name as if the utterance was some part of the weaving of a spell, and looked out to the horizon with lifted face, as if she half expected the sound might be carried afar, and overheard from the deserts, or other distant regions of the earth. Then catching at an overhanging branch, she stood on tiptoe and peered forward into the purple dimness of a hollow opening in the wood. But no figure started up on the narrow brown path; no wanderer appeared with staff and bundle, descending the mossy bank.

Captain Rupert observed her with a curious thrill of interest.

"I half think you are a changeling," he said. "Is that what you mean to convey? Are you looking to see your fairy kinsmen coming riding on the wind?"

"No," said Fan, sadly; "the fairies have nothing to do with me, or they might have put everything right."

"The postman is the fairy who generally puts everything right in such a case. Have you never written to your home?"

"I have written, but my letters were not answered; and so I know that Kevin is not there. I knew he could not be there. He went out over the world to look for me."

"Is he your brother?"

"Oh, no; but he has the care of me."

"A care which appears to sit lightly upon him. The signora is performing his duties by proxy. I suppose," said Captain Rupert with a slight accent of contempt; "adding mentally, 'The old rascal, dozing tipsily in his shanty, while he allows the child to slip through his fingers.'"

Fan looked at him questioning, with a dangerous light in her eyes.

"I mean," said Captain Rupert, "that the old man ought not to have allowed you to get lost."

"What old man?" said Fancha. "Kevin."

Fan broke into a peal of delicious laughter. Her laugh was almost as musical as her song, and the birds, hearing it, began to sing.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Captain Rupert, finding all this gaily contagious, and contributing a smile to it.

"He is but twelve years older than me."

"Then he was young enough to be more wide awake."

"He was away about some business of his father's, and it was all my fault, for I went where I ought not to have gone. The gipsies are cunning, and they wanted me."

"Then you have been roving with gipsies."

"Oh, yes."

"I should not wonder. That is why you are so unlike tame people."

"I am tame now," said Fan, folding her hands, with a little sigh.

"Then I should like to have seen you when you were wild. How long have you been caged in this Park?"

"Nearly seven years."

"And you suppose that Kevin has been searching for you all this time?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful faith of a child. Happy belief in the fidelity of human nature. And your only proof of this is the fact that he has not written?"

"Don't?" said Fan, as the accent of sarcasm again touched her quick ear. "I will talk to you no more."

"You look on me as a wicked unbeliever?"

"It is a matter not of believing but of knowing. And you do not know. I am not angry, but I have said enough."

"But I would like both to believe and to know. I promise you to do both if you will tell me some more."

"The signora is coming," said Fan. "Perhaps I may tell you more another time. The signora would not listen to me if I were to talk as I want to talk now."

"I have forgotten myself," said the signora, coming towards them with the look of a person who has waked from a long sleep.

"What have you found in Tasso to make you forget the world?" asked Captain Rupert, glancing at the book in her hand.

"Much, much that has spoken to my soul," said the signora, "with her silver ringlets trembling. 'The poet has stirred me on a subject that is next my heart. I am anxious to take Fan into Italy, Captain Wilderspin.'"

"Would she like to go?"

"Yes," said Fan radiantly; and Captain Rupert knew she was thinking of the likelihood of meeting with the imaginary wanderer, her friend.

"Her musical education is to be completed there," said the signora. Herr Harfenspieler has done good work in her; but the sun of Italy will be needed to ripen her genius."

"In this there will be a pleasure for you, signora. Is it long since you have seen your native land?"

"Many long years, Captain Wilderspin. These elf locks of mine were pure gold in the Italian sunshine. They have grown grey in your chillier atmosphere. Alas! no glow on earth will ever transmute them into gold again."

As she spoke, the little woman's wistful eyes, gazing from under her deep brows encircled by their silvery aureole, saw, not the grey, gleaming shafts and bowery undulations of the Sussex green-wood, but azure mountains surrounding narrow, deep-coloured streets full of heavy shadows and yellow sunshine, in which her own soul had walked, as a girl glorified within and without by illusive dreams.

TO BE CONTINUED

## THE CRY OF THE LOONS

### THE STORY OF ONE MAN'S LOVE AND ANOTHER'S HATE

By Anna T. Sadler

Michel stood waiting upon the shore. Before him stretched the broad expanse of incomparable blue, that lake in the waters whereof the Indians sought medicinal virtue. Suddenly he started. A light rippling sound of laughter reached his ears. Then he laughed himself and shrugged his shoulders.

It was merely the call of the loons. He saw the great birds rising from the sedges, winging their flight over the distant hills.

"She is late," he muttered. "Soon the sun will set, and the waning moon will not rise early."

As he thus complained a light step came through the wooded path, as a young girl emerged from the brushwood and seeing the figure upon the shore, came towards it with quick and eager pace.

"Mon ami," she said, "I am here, and you shall take me in the boat."

"It is ready," Michel answered, and the girl settling in the stern, he pushed the boat off. She gave a sigh of contentment.

"It is so good to be here with you, Michel!"

The man smiled back at her as he reproached her:

"I had to wait a whole hour."

"Ah!" cried the girl. "That was too long."

"I would have waited twelve for this," declared Michel emphatically.

A wave of color rushed to the girl's cheeks, her eyes danced. After all, this was life and happiness, even if she had never gone away as she used to wish, from the lakeside, and had never but once seen the town. Truly this was paradise, and Michel, it was plain, felt the same though he had no gift of expression. Nor was the girl exacting. She felt that love was encompassing her, breathing from those beautiful woods where she had gone nutting with Michel, or walked by his side when he had first begun to court her. Soon those woods would be robbed of their gay coloring, but the love with which Michel had beautified her life would last forever.

The water was dyed deep with the iridescence of the setting sun, and Michel said regretfully:

"Rozanam, it is late. Our time on the water must be short. There is not even a moon."

"If there were, it would be better for me," said Michel, "as if there could be anyone but you—I detest him!"

"But he can say fine things," said Michel. "And I have no words for my thoughts."

"That is what I love," said Rozanam. "You are so honest, and you need no words to tell me what I already know."

"Ah, but it is concealed, my little one, my pigeon, my beautiful bird!" cried Michel grown suddenly eloquent. "I will speak at once to the grandmere. My prospects are good. I have the money to buy the shop, and with what I can earn in a month in the shanties we will be well. Do not fear."

"As if I feared," the girl cried, "as if I could not work with you, as did my mother. She and my father were very poor and lived in the forest. That is what I should like."

Michel looked uneasily at the girl's glowing face.

"But that is not common sense, my little one," he declared; "it is not better that I can give you what is necessary?"

"My poor Michel," said the girl, "thinking always of me. But was it not beautiful when my father got the land from the Government, and cleared it himself. He built their house, too, my mother helping him all the time."

"But you see," said Michel, "she wore out her health working so hard. You must not do that. It will be less difficult to help me in the shop."

"That is true," said Rozanam, not wishing to insist farther upon what was in her mind lest she should hurt Michel. But her eyes wandered pensively over the vast expanse of water upon which the boat, urged forward by Michel's strong arms, seemed a mere speck. Her imagination still played about the idyll of love.

Those two, who worked so hard side by side, till the husband had been killed by a falling tree. The wife had not long survived. Rozanam had come, then, to live with her grandmother, a sturdy type, who, having taken her share of the roughest work, was still vigorous enough at forty-eight to think of re-marrying. Presently Rozanam changed the subject.

"I love to hear the loons laugh like that!" she said, laughing sympathetically, as she watched the flight of the birds upward, through the blue ether and brilliant sunshine, while their cry was like nothing so much as foolish, irresponsible laughter. Michel glanced up, too. He did not often heed them, since they were so much a part of his ordinary life.

"Listen," said Rozanam, putting up her finger and bending her head. "It is so pleasant to hear them, they are so gay! But at night it is different. Oh, how they terrify me sometimes!"

"There is nothing to cause terror, ma belle," said Michel, indulgently, "though their night cry is different for sure."

"Specially on dark nights."

"In the moonlight, too, have I heard them," said Michel, "when it is cloudy, or even clear."

No one in the parish was surprised when M'sieu le Curé, after the Gospel at High Mass, called the banns of Michel Bruneau and Rozanam Labelle. There was one, however, who heard them with rage and a despair that gnawed at his heart. After church he hurried away and hid himself in the depths of the bush. The trees, lightly murmuring as they shed their variegated foliage, seemed like voices mocking him, and the wind which rose in gusts and eddies, as the afternoon waned into night, sent forlorn whistlings through the dry leaves, like the moans of pain.

"She loves this cursed Michel!" he cried, throwing himself prostrate on the ground, "and I have lost her!"

That was the cry of his despair, scarcely varied, but ever repeated, while his heart ached as from a physical wound. When he raised himself at last it had grown dark. A fitful moon emerged from scudding clouds and sent uncertain beams down into the forest, while upon the ear fell the night cry, weird and dreary, of the loons. They came from the far distance, over the waste waters, and reflected the human agony.

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