

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED

Then complete silence fell upon them, and they walked twice round the square without exchanging a word. But time was passing—it was close on eleven o'clock, and Mary knew that she dare not be any later entering the Home.

So they stopped by tacit consent at the usual lamp-post and the woman spoke first, wistfully, sadly, all the love of her heart looking out of her grey eyes, as she glanced up at the man beside her.

"Will you miss me during the coming weeks?" she asked, the words almost a whisper. "You know I will," he answered, and then added abruptly, "Mary, is your mind really made up on this matter? Are you resolved that we are not to meet at all till Easter?"

"Yes, Theo. You know I am." "Well! Look here—you are running a risk, you know?"

"Running a risk?" And Mary repeated the words in a sort of stupid wonder. "Running a risk? What on earth do you mean?"

Dr. Delaney laughed uneasily. "Oh, well, you see," he said, "I mightn't want to be friends again after Lent! Six weeks is a long time you know!"

Mary stared at him for a moment, and then she laughed. It was Theo's teasing way of course—he was such a great tease.

He laughed also, but added, half jokingly, half seriously, "But suppose that this absence was to cause a change of feeling with me—would you still adhere to this resolution of yours?"

For just a moment Mary hesitated. Then she lifted her head a little proudly. "I would!" she answered, "for a friendship that could not remain unchanged through a six-week's separation would not be worth the keeping."

Dr. Delaney laughed again, but not very naturally. "Well, remember that I've warned you—that's all!" he said.

And Mary, taking it all as a huge joke, laughed back, and said that she would certainly remember.

A few minutes more and they had separated. Just a lingering hand-clasp, a long look into each other's eyes, and then Mary was stumbling up the stone steps and feeling for her latch-keg with trembling fingers.

She thrust it into the key-hole and entered the Home, without trusting herself to give one backward glance towards the tall figure in the street below.

Oh, but the hundred stairs up to her bedroom seemed very long and weary that night, and when she reached her room at last she was thankful to find that Nurse Jackson was in bed and sound asleep.

Mary undressed with shaking fingers, and kneeling down before her little picture of the Sacred Heart she tried to pray. But she was overwrought, and had to give up the attempt—still she knelt on for some time looking up at the Divine Face through a mist of tears.

"Oh, Sacred Heart!" she breathed again and again. "Help me to bear it! Help me to bear it! Not to see him!—not to speak to him!—not to know nothing of him except by hearsay—for six weeks, six weeks!"

Oh, how will I do it! How can I bear it! And then, again, more tenderly, more lovingly, "Dear Lord, it is for Thee!—it is for Thee!" And so at last, sadly and wearily she crept to bed.

Of course the next morning her first waking thought was—"I won't see him today!" and her next, "nor tomorrow, nor the next day, and oh, not for weeks and weeks."

Then she made the Sign of the Cross and an Act of Contrition, and during Mass she prayed, really earnestly that she might not think too much of him during that day, and all the following days of Lent, but bear patiently her self-chosen cross.

It was a gloomy, dismal day, and the faces of the nurses gathered round the breakfast table that morning seemed to be in unison with the weather. Dry toast and black tea, no matter how spiritual we may be, are not conducive to gaiety or good spirits.

Mary Carmichael detested "black" fast days; indeed she had found it rather hard to fast or abstain at any time, not having been brought up to it. Not that she was a large eater or cared much for elaborate meals, but as she used to say laughingly, "I like a little and often!"

Of course she couldn't bear the food at St. Columba's, and had her own special tea shop in her district where she could get a dainty little tea if time permitted her to break her morning fast. But alas, she remembered that there could be no such indulgence in these luxuries today—she could take nothing until she came back to the dry fish dinner at two o'clock.

It was when she was returning from her evening visits about six o'clock that she saw him—and strange to say she never saw him again during Lent. And yet it was hardly so strange either, for both of them knew each other's haunts and would be pretty certain to keep away from those places where they would be likely to encounter one another—for so much "was in the bond."

But on Ash Wednesday night Mary saw him quite unexpectedly. She was seated in a tram going

idly out on the wet pavements, shining under the street lamps. The street was, of course, very crowded at that hour, principally with people homeward bound to the various suburbs and trying to board trams and get cover from the heavy rain.

Mary's tram was coming down Dame Street, and at the corner of South George's Street, Dr. Delaney was standing. Her heart gave a sudden sickening throb as she saw him, and the tram stopping for a moment to take up a passenger, she was able to observe him fairly closely, and she noticed how sad and utterly weary he looked, staring straight in front of him, but as one whose thoughts were far away.

If Mary Carmichael lived to be a hundred years old, she would never forget the pain at her heart, and the unutterable, overwhelming desire she experienced to leave the car and cross over to him, to slip her hand through his arm in the dear old way, and to say to him—"Theo, I'm here; I can't go on with this thing—I can't do without you, even for six weeks. Let us give it up!"

She almost rose from her seat and had to exert all her will power not to get out. The next moment the car was moving on, and the temptation had passed, but it had left her so physically sick and weak that she feared she would faint.

She saw a gentleman on the opposite seat looking keenly at her—she knew him by sight as a medical man—and with a tremendous effort she pulled herself together and managed to shake off the deadly faintness that had been stealing over her.

She was wretched in mind and body when she reached St. Columba's.

"Oh, God forgive me," she thought drearily, "but I don't feel spiritually minded at all—just the very opposite. I'm cold and hungry and miserably unhappy—and I'd like all kinds of things which I can't get, and oh! I want him! I want him!"

The Lent that followed was long and dreary to Mary, but no day in it was so black or so long to her as this Ash Wednesday. After a comparatively short time she became more reconciled—or rather more accustomed—to that terrible blank in her life which only one person could fill, and soon came the cheerful thought that every day that passed was slowly but surely making her time of penance shorter.

Each night as she went to bed she would stroke off the date on her calendar and count the remaining days, till Easter, and after a couple of weeks as they began to get less and less, so in proportion did Mary's spirits rise higher and higher.

For the self-sacrifice had been very great, and after all the woman was only human. Still she did try to keep Lent well. Every morning saw her receiving Holy Communion, and sometimes during the day, no matter how busy she might be, she would manage to find time for the Stations of the Cross. She prayed earnestly before the Blessed Sacrament, she meditated, she denied herself in many little ways—such as giving up all sweets and cakes, and similar small luxuries.

And so the fifteenth of March arrived and Mary Carmichael remembered with a little thrill of joy that on that day she would receive the prayer-book which Dr. Delaney had promised to send her.

She found it on the hall table where she returned from Mass on that morning. It was wrapped in soft tissue paper and carefully packed in a square card-board box—and her heart leapt within her as she recognized the dear familiar hand-writing.

All through breakfast it lay beside her place and her eyes were drawn to it again and again, much to the secret amusement of Daisy Ray. Immediately after breakfast Mary fled with her treasure upstairs. Reverently she untied the string and took off the paper covering, reverently and lovingly, for had not his dear hands touched it—handled it? When at last the wrappings were all off and the book lay disclosed to her view she could hardly see it for the rush of tears that came unbidden to her eyes, but she laid it gently against her soft cheek, as she murmured again and again, "Dear little book, dear little book, I wonder does your sender know how much I really love him?"

That was Mary's "half-day" and she started off about five o'clock in the afternoon to pay a visit to a convent in the suburbs, where lived the Sister of Charity who had instructed her in the doctrine of the Church and had prepared her for her Reception into the true fold. This nun had always remained one of Mary's best and truest friends—in the real sense of the word—and Mary tried to see her pretty frequently. However, it was now some months since she had seen her last, but on this day she would not have missed a talk with Sister Joseph for a good deal.

It was a lovely day, with a real feeling of spring in the atmosphere to which Mary was quick to respond. The birds were singing in the trees of the long avenue which led up to the convent, and her heart was singing with them.

The Sister was seated in her special little sanctum, where she saw "her girls" in the evenings.

"Ah, Mary," she said, as her visitor entered, "I was expecting you this evening—and just thinking of you."

"Did you remember what day it was, Sister?" Mary asked happily. "Of course, I did, my child. Do I ever forget it? But how well and happy you look. God bless you, dearie, and send you many happy anniversaries of this day," and the Sister took the smiling face between her hands and kissed her, nun fashion, on both cheeks.

"And now sit down, and tell me all your news," she said, and the next moment Mary was chatting away with real pleasure, for she had a very deep affection for Sister Joseph.

"By the way, what about your Novena for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception?" asked the nun. "I meant to have asked you about it several times, but I always forgot. You promised to tell me if you obtained what you were praying for—although you would not let me know what those intentions were."

Mary's face crimsoned in spite of all her efforts to keep cool, as she said, "Oh, Sister, I got my intention. Such a wonderful answer came to my prayers. Some day you will know all, but it is a secret just yet—a secret between myself and one other."

The Sister smiled, and glanced at Mary quizzically over her glasses. "Suppose I know who the other person is?" she queried, and then as Mary sat in dumb surprise, she added quietly, "Dr. Delaney was with me this morning."

Mary caught her breath sharply, and it was a minute or two before she could speak, then she asked shyly, "Did he tell you, Sister?"

Sister Joseph nodded her head briskly. "Not that I needed much telling, dear," she said. "Do you suppose I have been blind for the last two years?—knowing you both as well as I do I could hardly fail to see how things were going. My own wonder is that everything wasn't settled long ago."

"Oh, Sister," breathed Mary, "did you really guess? Why didn't you know myself until he spoke to me—in fact I didn't dare think of such a thing."

"My dear child—why not?" she queried, and then she said, "Oh, just because I—I thought it would be too good to be true, the happiness would be too great. I could not believe that such a thing would ever come to pass in this sorry old world." But the nun only smiled as she said, "Well, you see, dear child, that it has come to pass. And I am so glad, Mary. I can't tell you, dear, how thankful I am that God has been so good to you. But you deserve it all—yes, every bit," as Mary lifted a protesting hand, "—every bit, dearie—for you are a good woman and, please God, you will make a good and loving wife."

Mary's eyes were misty, as she stretched out her hand and laid it for a moment on Sister Joseph's.

"He always said you would be the very first to know it," she whispered.

Then the ice being broken, she opened her heart to this old friend of hers, and told her some of her hopes and fears for the future, of her gratitude to God, and of her Lenten penance.

"But Lent is passing quickly now, Sister!" she added, in tones of such heartfelt relief that the nun had hard work to keep from laughing—for Sister Joseph understood poor human nature and was never severe on its limitations. Mary rose to go shortly afterwards, and the Sister went with her to the door. She paused for a moment on the threshold and put her hands on Mary's shoulder.

"Mary," she said, "don't make an idol of Theodore Delaney. From a mere worldly point of view it is unwise for a woman to make too much of any man—no matter how near perfections she may consider him. And then, well, dear, even he—precious as he is to you—must not come before your Divine Lord."

And then before Mary could reply she kissed her softly and closed the door.

Mary walked down the convent avenue as though she trod on air—a little bird was singing in her heart and his song was louder than that of any of the feathered songsters, thrilling out their evening hymns all around her.

So he had spoken to Sister and told her the great news, yes, he had always said that Sister Joseph should be the first to know. As for the nun's warning to her not to make an idol of this man she loved Mary only smiled to herself. He was her idol, and she knew it. But she could not help worshipping him as she did, and besides—there were no clay feet, and her idol.

On the top of the tram she encountered Tom Blake.

His face lit up at the sight of her. "Why Mary, where have you sprang from?" he inquired, as they shook hands.

"Oh, Tom," she cried happily, "is it you? I was only up at the convent seeing Sister Joseph. Isn't it a glorious evening? Spring has come already."

"Yes, it's a ripping evening," Tom assented quietly, "and how are you, Mary? I haven't seen you this good while."

"No—you were out the last time I was in Rathmines," said Mary, "and then I haven't been going out much—Lent you know. But I'm quite well, and as fit as a fiddle, thank you," smiling at him with dancing eyes.

"You look it," said Tom, "although I think you've got a trifle

thinner than you were. Don't overdo it, Mary, and kill yourself altogether."

Mary laughed gaily. "No fear," she said, "life is too wonderful for one to want to leave it yet awhile."

Tom smiled, rather sadly. "How transparent she is," he thought, "one could imagine she was a girl in her teens, she seems so young and joyous these days."

"I suppose you are not indulging in much gaiety either, Tom?" she asked presently. "Will you be at the Nurses' Dance on St. Patrick's night?"

"No," he said, "I don't dance in Lent—but I hear it's to be a very big affair?"

"Yes, we have sold nearly four hundred tickets. Of course most of the nurses in the Home are going—all of them in fact, except Daisy Ray and yours truly. We are going to be the sensible ones and stay at home. Well, Tom—I must get down here. Good-bye and give my love to all at home, and with a gay wave of the hand, Mary ran down the steps and got off the tram. She turned to wave to him again from the road, and then she disappeared round a corner, and for Tom the spring atmosphere went with her, and only a cold, grey March evening was left behind.

RECONSTRUCTION

Eleanor Rogers Cox in Rosary Magazine

At the time when she first saw him, she was so satisfied with herself and all the world besides that she was inclined to resent his presence as an intrusion on the placid realm of her content. Not that she phrased it that way, even to herself, for she had still enough of the war-felling of a few years back left in her breast to recognize that a man bearing the visible sign of knightly service in that overseas crusade of her country's bravest and best was well entitled to the regard of his neighbors. But there was no denying it that somehow his presence there, with his crutches, on the stoop of the third house from her own, she called it that every though her share in it was only a second-story hall bedroom—did cast a pensive shade over the bit of sidewalk she had to negotiate each late afternoon on her way from the cars.

Though with the "nice girl" reticence that she was inclined to pride herself on she had never glanced directly at him, yet from observations taken from her own window she had first seen him there, she knew that even in that short time he had grown a little thinner, a little paler, a little older. That he had a family connection of some sort in the house that formed his background was entirely probable. But that they troubled themselves in any way concerning him was not visible to the neighborhood eye. Such was the entire sum of Mollie Carrington's observations of him. She did not know his name, and though not herself of New York origin, was sufficiently to her manner born not to put herself to the trouble of inquiring. Anyhow, such an inquiry would have been rather out of her role as "nice girl."

She was very well-off in those days. That is, in her capacity as "assistant to a busy executive"—which any one knows is a much more inspiring title than that of competent stenographer—she had earned an income which met all her wants quite happily, and left a tiny margin for the wet day whose very probable coming no one in New York business life can ever wholly ignore. Pretty, well-dressed, just as plump as fair young one-and-twenty should be, she couldn't help a touch of impatience when forced to face the fact that all the world about her didn't share in the same contented mood. And any one could see that her impatience melted away, whether based on newspaper ads or agency assignments. Once, returning from such a "No Thoroughfare" quest, she actually believed she saw a look of concerned sympathy in the eyes of the man with the crutches. She tilted her chin a bit at the time; but some how the next day, when she sat during the long eventless hours at the type-writing agency, awaiting a non-materializing "job," the thought of the wistful, friendly brown eyes would obtrude itself unpleasantly. But all the same she resolved it would never happen again. Never!

It was that thought that was occupying her mind so wholly to the exclusion of all other things, as she turned from the Avenue into her own street that afternoon, that she

almost tumbled over a harrassed bridled dog whose one thought just then was escape from his comet-tail of hallooing boys-pursuers. Instantly she stopped. She was hardly so angry on the dog's account as she was sorry for him. She had no gift of wrathful words. What she did say, waving a neatly-gloved baring hand against further pursuit, was: "Why, boys, you wouldn't hurt that poor creature! Don't you see that he's just hungry and homeless? Suppose it was one of yourselves now—how would you like to be hunted?"

The little appeal to their natural sense of justice struck home. "Honest, lady, we was only just havin' a little fun with the poor mutt." Their candid boyish eyes backed up that perfectly untruthful assurance; but Mollie accepted both at their surface worth, and seeing that the bridled dog had disappeared, smilingly walked on.

"I say! Some little speech that!" Mollie turned abruptly, a little red running up her cheek, as her glance met that of the Man with the Crutches. Jim Darlington's face flushed a bit, too. In fact, the unexpectedness of his own words now stirred him a trifle shockingly. In the matter of nice girls he too had his own code of etiquette.

But Mollie rose gaily to the situation. "Oh, it wasn't anything," she answered lightly. "I said the first thing that came into my head. I'm only astonished they paid so much heed to it as they did."

"I'm not. It's always the kind word goes. Mine wasn't—I called them a set of little cruts. I shook that old crutch at them, too,"—he grinningly pointed to where it had fallen on the second step; "and the only notice I got from them was: 'G'wan! It ain't none o' your funeral!'"

"I'm glad you did, just the same," said Mollie, picking up the crutch and handing it to him. "I've known you a long time, even if we haven't spoken—"

"Same here," interpolated Jim. "And it's nice to know that we think along the same lines, even if we don't express it the same way."

There, now, she had bungled her whole code of young ladyism! Thinking along the same lines—well, what did he think of her now? And as yet she didn't even know his name! But—there was just this much sure. His face was not pallid now, nor the light in his eyes wistful.

"Do you know," he said, "that's the very nicest and kindest little speech I have heard for months—for ages now it seems to me. We used to hear lots of them. But, there—she sternly repressed the implied complaint, "I have no kick coming."

"No," said Mollie, with sentimentous New York philosophy, "a grouch never gets anybody far. Not but it seems to me you have a pretty good right to one. For myself, now, though we have been almost next-door neighbors for ever so long, I don't even know your name."

But I know yours—Miss Mollie Carrington. Mine's Jim Darlington.

So, for another minute or two they chatted, and separated with a promise on Jim's part to tell her later how he had come by the detested crutches.

But, as Mollie learned when their next opportunity of speech came, Jim Darlington's loss had gone much deeper than physical wounds and the fell necessity of going about among his fellows a palpably maimed man. His had been the loss hardest of all to bear for the returned soldier—his mother. She had died while he was still in France. Hence the fortune which had made him glad enough to accept upon his return his married cousin's offer of a home. He was now, as he said with cheery grimness, being "reconstructed." The Federal Reconstruction Board was giving him a chance to acquire a knowledge of linotyping that would later—if that old shoulder would only stop wrenching—enable him to draw a nice little pay envelope once more.

Mollie had cares and frets of her own these days. Her slender savings-bank account was beginning to show a vexatious shrinking. Still, she believed she had quite sufficient control over her expression never to have betrayed to any mortal eye a hint of her inward anxiety. Sometimes, on Sunday, and the girl lamed by economic conditions would take their way to the cheery open spaces of the little neighborhood park. It was a troubled twisted way for Jim, but once arrived there and comfortably seated, the disdained crutches cast aside, he would sometimes at Mollie's earnest request recount to her the hazards and lighter phases of his one Great Adventure.

Something, too, he told her of his friends—the good old "buddies" now scattered far and wide. One of them a brother corporal in the same regiment, came in for a special lot of mention, always of a whimsical admiring kind. That he had been a "bird," a "corker," and "one grand old bud" there seemed no reason to doubt; and Mollie, listening, shared quite sympathetically in Jim's grouch against the fate which, upon their regiment's demobilization, had sent Beverly Waters ("Some class to that name,

eh, Mollie?") to his home town in Virginia, while he himself perforce remained in New York to share the thin hospitality of his cousin's hearth and table.

"To tell the truth," Jim confided on one of these occasions, "well as I knew him, I could never quite make him out—never be quite sure that he wasn't just kiddin' me. He was college-bred and all that—you could see that at an eyelid. But there was one story of his that sure was an Arabian Night. It was about an old grand-aunt of his, somewhere down there in Virginia, who owned a great big place—sort of place you'd read about in an English novel—and as the other kin and heirs had all died off, it only remained for him—Beverly—the minute the old lady had said her last good-bye to Virginia, to step in and be high lord of the manor. Jelly-fish sort of story wasn't it? Just the same he'd swear to it on forty Bibles!"

Mollie's sweetly sympathetic smile did not quite efface the look of sharp anxiety that was gradually becoming the perceptibly dominant one in her blue-grey eyes. Jim, whose own eyesight was remarkably good, was poignantly aware of that expression, but with a natural delicacy shrank from putting his apprehension into words. Presently, however, after a little disjointed chatter, he brought forth a somewhat dingy looking note-book, and soon was deeply and as Mollie thought, rather impolitely engaged in certain pencilled calculations that required some intricate figuring.

"Good gracious, Jim Darlington," she cried at last, "what are you doing? A lovely way, I'm sure, to spend the Sunday afternoon, watching you writing down and crossing off a lot of tiresome old figures. But, there—I won't disturb you. I'll go back to my room—and look at the Sunday supplements!"

"No you won't! You'll sit right here and help me figure this thing out. What I'm trying to get at is this: Suppose a fellow at the present time is receiving from his old Uncle Sam a salary of twenty a week, and that things being as they are—"

"What things?" "Landlords—and—"

"Jim Darlington, what have you to do with landlords?" "A whole lot—maybe. I was just wondering—just sort of figuring a bit—though I know it would be a terrible hard pull on you—if, somehow, we both of us couldn't manage on that old twenty per—"

"Oh!" Mollie, her face all one glowing carnation pink, arose. Dismay darkened her eyes. So she had shown this wounded boy so plainly her need that she had driven him to this unthinkable idea of sharing with her, as his wife, his little Government gratuity! Ah, and had things been otherwise, how appealing that picture of a little mutual dovenote might have been! But now—oh, whatever happened, she must not again impose another atom of care on the boyish shoulders already so burdened with their own load!

Their brief, troubled good-bye that afternoon was their last for some time to come.

For Fortune smiled in the next day's way upon Mollie the left-hand at the typewriting agency. It chanced that the superintendent of an up-State public institution "required the services of an expert stenographer" and the response had been limited, owing to the distance of the institution from the city and the lack of social and amusement opportunities implied by its location. Mollie, only anxious to get away from the once delightful but now hateful town, gladly responded to the chance, and without word or note of parting to Jim, started off to the fulfillment of her new duties.

The institutional office was trim and bright; her room bigger and better than the one she had left behind in New York; the meals an infinite improvement on those she had been lately permitting herself. So she was probably just as unreasonable as she believed herself to be in growing restive, as she did, during the advancing weeks. The sameness of the eventless days palled upon her; the very noiselessness of the nights oppressed her. She could not get interested in the new friends she might have acquired.

Suddenly she made up her mind. She would go back to the little Indiana town—to her aunt's home—whence she had come three years ago—even if her doing so implied defeat.

So the last day of that month found her checking her suitcase in the Grand Central Station, preparatory to starting on the longer trip, and a half-hour afterwards saw her turning with desperate resoluteness into the long-familiar street. At first she had told herself it was merely to take one good last look at the well-remembered neighborhood, but by this time she knew perfectly well that it was the hope of being able to say some explanatory, even if futile, word to Jim Darlington about the silence she had so stubbornly adhered to since that fatal Sunday.

All life's chances had gone so forlornly against her of late that she had little hope of this last one's accomplishment, so it was with a sense of joy that was the measure of her previous depression that her first glance down the row of high-stopped houses showed Jim's figure

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