

THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND (LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER XI—CONTINUED

"That was Fanchea," cried Kevin. "It was a voice that affected me in a way I cannot describe. The words of her song were in a strange language. The gipsies told me it was Romany; but I know something of Romany, and I did not believe them."

"It was Irish," said Kevin, breathlessly. "I had heard that this girl took a prominent part in their performances for the amusement of the villagers; that she danced and sang and brought them a good deal of money. I was anxious to speak with the child, but noticed a distinct determination on the part of the gipsies that I should not do so. This increased my suspicions that they had not come by her honestly, and I resolved to be very careful. My intention was to learn her history, to rescue her if possible from unworthy hands, and draw her into a more wholesome way of life."

"God bless you, madam," broke from Kevin, who had been struggling to listen with patience. "But the gipsies were very suspicious and more cunning than I. They baffled me by shifting their tents and suddenly disappearing in the night."

"You have lost sight of them. Oh, madam, why have you kept me here?"

"Stay!" said Rachel Webb. "I had a purpose. Thou wert in an exhausted state, and I wished to save thee from illness and death. But I have lost no time. The day after thy arrival I sent a messenger in pursuit of the gipsies, to find out their present quarters, and bring me back news of their whereabouts. The messenger has gone and returned while thou hast been recruiting thy strength."

"You know where they are?"

"Yes; but I am sorry to say that things have taken an unexpected turn. My messenger found the gipsies, but the child was no longer with them. Whether it is a trick or not I do not know. This is what thou wilt have to find out."

"Where are they to be found? Which way shall I go?"

"That I will explain to thee. My messenger shall put thee on the way. But wait till I give thee my advice. If thou dost find the child come back this way that I may see you both, and be of some little use to you. If thou art not a second time lost, and if thou canst not discover any trace of her in the neighbourhood, thy best course will be to make thy way to London."

A girl with so remarkable a voice will ultimately be transported there. Some one will take her up to make money of her. Should it come to that thou wilt suffer much, and wilt have ample need for the patience I have spoken of."

The pain and suspense in Kevin's face mounted to a point of anguish, at sight of which the good lady's measured periods came to an abrupt conclusion. She hastily made some kindly preparations for his journey, and allowed him to hurry away upon the gipsies' track.

Following the directions given him, he easily overlooked them, the more so as they made no attempt to evade his pursuit. The gipsy mother having suffered her own disappointment in losing Fanchea, felt a certain gratification in witnessing Kevin's dismay. She came out of her tent to meet him, and smiled at his excited questions.

"Yes, we brought her with us. She was always a wanderer, you know, and she liked to see the world. Now she is tired of it. She will run away in the night. She will see plenty of the world before she has finished. It is not worth our while to search for her, but you can try it if you like. Ah, you will have me punished, will you? Who will listen to you? Where have you got money for a prosecution? I defy you, you poor creature! You had better have stayed at home in your own poor country. Did I forget that it is your fate. Did I not read it to you off the palm of your hand?"

Kevin turned away sick at heart. He remembered what she had said to him on the island, on that evening which now seemed twenty years ago, when pretending to tell his fortune by the lines of his hand. The recollection made his heart sink lower than ever, so plainly did it prove that the woman had laid her plot from the first moment she had seen Fanchea. "You will lose that which you love best in the world, and be a wanderer, seeking for it in vain." That was what she had said; and as the words came back to him he seemed to see again the wild brown island, the crimsoned waves, Fanchea's little eager face, and the flocks of white seagulls that wheeled and screamed about their heads and disappeared in a trail of glory across the sunset. Even as the birds had vanished, so had she gone out of his life.

He walked away, and leaning upon a roadside gate tried to think the matter out, while his eyes fixed themselves on the distant landscape. It was a mild, damp winter's day; indistinct forms were blotted in softly between the blank grey sky and the fields at his feet; and never

afterwards could Kevin look upon such lines and tints of Nature without seeing in them the expression of a weary despair. As he stood there some one approached him; it was Naomi, whom Fan had named the sorrowful gipsy. "Hush!" she said. "I have been sent to tell you to move away from this; but I want to say something more. The child really ran away. You may not have believed it but it is true. I am only a poor broken-hearted creature, and I have no reason for deceiving you. I liked the child, but she never could have been happy with us. Three of our men have been out searching for her, and they think she must have got away by the train to London. I wish with all my heart that you may find her."

"May God reward you for this kindness," said Kevin. "Can you point me out the road to London?"

"You turn to the right from here," said Naomi, "but that is the very most I can tell you."

CHAPTER XII LONDON

Tramping through wet and cold, faring on whatever food he could afford to buy, sleeping sometimes in a barn, sometimes in some corner of a wood, where the rain had not penetrated, Kevin made his way along the road to the great city. He was a strong, stalwart fellow, and sleeping in open air did not distress him. Having made up his mind that Fan must be in London, he turned on the joy of their meeting in some of the wonderful streets that he had heard so much about. Hand in hand they would walk, and having seen it to their full contentment, they would return together to Killeevy, where they would tell their experience, turn by turn, as they sat round the fire with their friends at night.

Thus having rested his mind upon hope, his thoughts began to take colour from the objects surrounding him. He noticed with the utmost delicacy of feeling the beauty of the country through which he travelled, and contrasted it with the wilder charm of the beloved land from which his exiled feet were each moment carrying him further away. Every short conversation on the road-side, every rest of an hour on the bench by some friendly cottager's door furnished him with a new experience, and widened his grasp of existing things. When the road was lonely he cheered it with snatches of his native song, or repeated fragments of Shaw's Rara Poetia; sometimes continuing a theme according to his own fancy, sometimes sketching scenes and rhythms, which floated away and were forgotten again, as the rain-mists drifted off behind him. And so he reached London long before daylight on a foggy morning.

Like Dick Whittington and others, Kevin had expected a certain glory and splendour to burst upon him as he entered into the great city; and as he threaded the wet, foggy streets his disappointment and surprise were extreme. Was this London? he asked again and again, and was answered, yes, that he was in London. He breakfasted at a coffee-stand with a group of shivering milk-sellers, whom he eagerly questioned about Fanchea. But none of them had seen her. "As well look for a needle in a pottle of hay as look for a child in London," said the owner of the coffee-stand, with a pitying smile.

"But it does not seem so very large," said Kevin, looking around on the narrow street and dingy houses.

"Walk a little further, my young h'emerald," said the man, "and come back next week, and tell if 'our London ain't big enough to please you!"

The day broke, the fog cleared a little, and a sickly yellow light made all things visible. Kevin had pursued his way from by-street to by-street, and from thoroughfare to thoroughfare, and walking up one of the streets leading from the Strand to Bloomsbury, when his attention was caught by a being an old man staggered under the weight of a shutter which he had taken from a shop-window and was hardly strong enough to carry.

Kevin sprang forward, just in time to save him from a fall on the slippery pavement, shouldered the shutter, and put it in its place within the shop.

"Thank you! thank you!" said the old man. "I'm sure I'm obliged to you. I am not used to carrying them, but my assistant has treated me badly; went off last night without notice."

Kevin answered by quickly stripping the window of all its shutters, and leaving an interior lined with multitudes of old books exposed to public view.

"Well you are a strong one, and a ready one, you are," said the bookseller. "I am sorry to have delayed you from your business."

"I have no business," said Kevin, with a little laugh and toss of the head. "I am a stranger in London, looking for work."

"Oh, come now, that would do exactly. But stay; you are a slip of the shamrock, I think?"

"I am an Irishman," said Kevin, quickly. "Not so fast, young man; I'm not one of them bigoted ones that condemn a man for his country. We've done you more harm than you've done us, according to my

way of thinking. I've dipped enough into the old books to lead me to that 'ere conclusion. But who 'ave you in London to give you a character?"

"No one," said Kevin. "I did not think of that."

"It's a difficulty, you know," said the bookseller; "for you'd have to live in my house and take care of my property."

"Yes," said Kevin, "I see. And of course you cannot be sure that I am not a rogue."

"I do not think you are; I do not think you are."

"I am obliged to you for your good opinion; but it is a difficulty which I suppose will follow me everywhere. I trust you may find an honest man. Good morning!"

Kevin turned away with his head erect, and a lump in his throat. To require a proof that he was not a rogue! This was a misfortune he had not anticipated. He had hardly got to the corner of the street, however, before he felt himself plucked by the sleeve.

"Turn back, young man," cried the bookseller. "Let me look again in your face. Yes, I will believe in your honesty. Come into my shop and I will show you what to do."

With a strange feeling of wonder and satisfaction Kevin followed his new employer into the shop. From top to bottom the walls were lined with books, more or less old and shabby. The counter was old and notched, the little ladders for fetching down the books were worn, the floor was mended, the boards dark with age. It was a curious, dingy little den, but Kevin looked around him with interest. The love of books, awakened in him late, had increased upon him rapidly since he had given himself to study. To be employed among books, to dust them and handle them; nothing could be better to his taste.

His new master brought him upstairs and introduced him to a small room at the top of the house, where he was to sleep, and where he now removed his travel-stains, and made himself comfortable. They breakfasted together in a small dark room behind the shop, a sort of reserve store for surplus books which stood in piles upon the floor, barely leaving room for a stove and a tiny table in their midst. The winter daylight could hardly penetrate through the one small window built on a bracket above the stove. Here Mr. Must, the old book merchant, insisted on reading his newspaper in the leisure moments of his day, when he was not busy in his shop or absent attending book sales in the city.

Having received a lesson in his duties, Kevin was left to fit himself to his new position. Customers were not numerous; and as arranged, he made himself acquainted with the names of a multitude of books, their subjects, and their authors. When his task was finished he planted his elbows on the counter and lost himself in a fascinating volume. So the day passed; the dim, yellow light vanished, Kevin lighted the paraffin lamp on the counter, and read again. Now and then he raised his head to listen to the wonderful tramp, tramp of many feet hurrying along the pavement, the most positive outward sign of the vastness of the city which had as yet been forced upon his notice. A clock ticked loudly above his head and looked like the face of time peering out of the accumulated learning and poetry of centuries. Kevin walked to the door and looked with eager interest at the faces of the passers-by, and read them as he had read the books, self how many multitudes of worn and handled books, how many heads were full of their secrets, how many minds were illumined by the light of knowledge they contained? Then back again to the counter, and deep into the subject of his interesting book.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening; his employer had returned once during the day to dine, and had been out about his business all the long afternoon. No one had entered the shop since night-fall, but now Kevin was startled from his book by hearing a quick light step crossing the threshold. A young woman came in, dressed in a black waterproof cloak and a little hat, and carrying a small nosegay of flowers in her hand. Kevin had barely time to wonder at seeing the young woman crossed the shop, and how he asked what he could do to serve her.

The girl stopped, stared, showing a pretty face, pretty in a style that was quite unfamiliar to Kevin. Then she gave a little laugh, and passing inside the counter disappeared, with a backward glance and a smile, into the room. Soon after Mr. Must came home, and Kevin shut up the shop.

"Come this way! Ah, Kevin, my name! You are you not Tom, Dick, or Harry? In the evenings we give ourselves a little breathing space upstairs."

They had stumbled up the narrow, dark staircase, and Mr. Must threw open the door of a comfortable lighted room. Shabby and dingy it was, but what with well-drawn curtains, a blazing fire and lamp, and a neatly spread supper-table, the interior looked most inviting to the poor stranger who was invited to enter.

The girl who had passed him in the shop was in the act of carrying

a dish from the fire, and smiled and nodded at Kevin's surprise. "This is my daughter, Mr. Kevin. I will not attempt your other name." Bessie, this is my new assistant. She works with a florist in Covent-garden Market, and sometimes she brings us a little booky!"

said the father, triumphantly, sniffing at a few slightly faded flowers which had been carefully placed in water on the table.

"He wanted to sell me some of your rubbishy old books," said Miss Bessie, mischievously. "I thought that you were a customer," said Kevin, and then ventured an observant look at this new acquaintance. She was neat and trim in figure, and her black dress was decorated with a scrap of geranium fastened at her collar. Her movements were active and pleasant to look at, though full of unconsciousness. She had that unmistakable town-bred air that cannot be described, but which is conspicuously absent from a country cousin, and as strikingly absent from the appearance of every fresh-cheeked new-comer from the woods and fields. Her hair was yellow, and was cut across her forehead in the conventional fringe.

"We haven't many customers on such a day as this," said Mr. Must. "Bookworms mostly like to grub in their libraries at home this foggy day. But I've done a goodish stroke of business today, for all that. Bought a rare nice lot as cheap as primers."

"Mr. Kevin was one of the bookworms this evening," said Bessie, with a knowing little laugh, and she suddenly planted her elbows on the table and clutched her head with her hands in such a ludicrous way as to make Kevin and her father smile.

"More then you'll ever be, miss," said the latter, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "I did read a good deal," said Kevin. "When I had done all you told me I had nothing else to do."

"I don't object to it," said Mr. Must; "not if the business ain't neglected. My best assistants have always taken a dip into the books. Then that never allows the covers was always the ones as let the books rot, from the damp, and lost me customers through not having the goods in their proper places. The man that reads knows where to put his hand on what is wanted, and it stands to him instead of tobacco and beer."

"My!" exclaimed Bessie. "It takes the roof from over his head—"

"Oh, dear," said Bessie, looking up at the ceiling. "Don't be impertinent, miss; you know what I mean. It creates a h'atmosphere about his head, and that's what makes us booksellers so superior as a race."

"I am glad you do not object to it," said Kevin smiling. "No, I don't; but I'll give you a bit of advice. Sort and classify as you go along. You're beginning to didn't begin young, and I didn't sort nor classify, and though I've been picking and reading up and down for twenty years, yet it has done me no good to speak of. All the knowledge has got mixed somehow, and they're got into a sort of perplexity. If I had all I know properly parcelled out and labelled, Lord! there's no knowing what the positive outward sign of the vastness of the city which had as yet been forced upon his notice. A clock ticked loudly above his head and looked like the face of time peering out of the accumulated learning and poetry of centuries. Kevin walked to the door and looked with eager interest at the faces of the passers-by, and read them as he had read the books, self how many multitudes of worn and handled books, how many heads were full of their secrets, how many minds were illumined by the light of knowledge they contained? Then back again to the counter, and deep into the subject of his interesting book.

Mr. Must leaned back in his chair, and patted his waistcoat while he looked over his spectacles placidly at his daughter and assistant. Kevin smiled and Bessie laughed outright.

"What would you have been, father, if you had your choice? The Emperor Napoleon, or the Duke of Wellington?"

"It's hard to say, Miss Pert. I couldn't have been men that was so long before my time; but I might ha' been something as great in its own way."

"I think I'd take the risk of the happiness," said Kevin, "if I had the chance of doing something great."

"Well, well! it's just as I said. You're young, and you try it. Dip whenever you has time; but sort and classify, or you'll be like one of them books we get sometimes in a mixed lot, without title-page or fims, and with pages over here, and pages out there, through and through, like a riddle of holes. The learnedest work among them won't fetch a price if it's such a condition. But if you has the knowledge in you, and your pages numbered, and your beginning and end in the right places, never fear but you'll be worth a new binding and get a reading as long as there is a eye in the world."

ARMAND

Dark was rapidly approaching and Madam de Lere lit several candles which were on the buffet in the dining room of her home, and carried one into a little room that opened off the living room.

"Mother, dear, it is so hot and my head feels so queer," came a child's voice from the darkness, and Madam de Lere set the candles on a table and went over to a big bed in the corner. Kneeling, she put her arms around a little boy of seven years. She said nothing, but hugged him lovingly. For two

weeks little Armand Jean — he had been so named for the great Cardinal — had been dangerously ill with a kind of fever. The crisis had passed, and, although the fever had abated, the recovery of the child was impossible on account of the weakened condition in which he was left. Madam was spending as much time with her son as her many household tasks would permit.

"Little one, is there anything you want?" she asked slowly with an effort.

"Yes, mother," was the answer. "You remember before I got sick the Abbe was preparing me for my first confession. You told me yesterday that soon I would go in to the dear Jesus. I can't meet Him with all the sins I have committed on the way. I must make my first confession before I go to Him. Will you send for M. l'Abbe?"

Madame stooped and kissed the pensive little face and left the room. As she opened the door she almost fell over an inert little form sitting before it.

"Jacqueline, darling, just the little one I want to see," said the mother, taking the child in her arms. Though her heart was nearly breaking, she could steel herself to outward calm, and she tried to make her little daughter realize that Armand's death would be a joyous rather than a sorrowful event.

"Darling," she continued, "you know that Armand is going soon to meet dear Jesus. Sometimes he has not been a real good boy, and so I came. I must tell the priest what he has done and get absolution, you know. Daddy is sick, mother is unable to go, so I must depend on my little girl to go for M. l'Abbe. Can I depend on you to do it?"

"Yes," answered the child, "I will go right now, mother," and, kissing her mother and catching up her hat and coat, she ran out of the house.

The Paris of the seventeenth century was not like the Paris of today, and although the great Cardinal, Richelieu, had done much to improve it, it still resembled a medieval town.

The little girl tripped along happily. Lights shown from all the windows and there were even a few lights on the street, so it was not entirely dark. Then, suddenly, as she started to cross the street a large carriage drawn by two prancing black horses dashed out of the darkness. Jacqueline started and ran out of the way quickly and fell a few feet from the wheels of the carriage. She tried to rise, but found it impossible. She must have turned her ankle badly.

Just then the carriage stopped and a man in uniform stepped out. He was about middle height and slim and had a long face, part of which was hidden by an imperial. Dark eyes set fairly far apart sparkled not unpleasantly. Quickly he ran to the child.

"My little girl," he said, "are you hurt?"

"O Monsieur, I am afraid so," she replied and began to cry. The man took her in his arms and carried her to his carriage.

"Where do you live, my child?" he asked kindly.

"Rue de Conteur, No. 17," but Monsieur —" and she told him her errand. The stranger's dark eyes kindled and a smile crept into them.

"I am a priest," he said at the end, "and I will go to your little brother. You may call me Father Armand. What is your name?"

"Jacqueline, Father, and my brother's name is Armand, too. He was named after His Eminence. My father and mother are Cardinals. My father was one of the Cardinals' guards when he is well, but now he's sick."

He heard the child's confession, gave him absolution, then for perhaps fifteen minutes talked on the love of God; afterward, telling him he would return in a little while, left the room softly. The next room was more brightly lighted than when he went in. The family and the priest went over and slipped into a vacant chair. No one noticed his coming, for Monsieur du Lere was seated with his head buried in his hands and Jacqueline was standing with her back to her father, hiding her mother from them. The stranger smiled slightly, then laid his hand on the father's shoulder. The man looked up at first stupidly, then amazedly.

"What! Your Eminence, my Cardinal? Here!" he cried, throwing himself on his knees.

"Yes, here," Cardinal Richelieu answered, giving his hand to be kissed.

Madame and Jacqueline, catching the exclamation and name, looked around. The lady, seeing her husband's position, did likewise. Jacqueline limped (for that ankle still hurt some) to her father's side and was caught by the Cardinal to himself. Then he told the parents to be seated, and, still holding the little girl near him, began softly:

"Monsieur and Madame, you must excuse my incognito escapade, but I think you understand. You know that I am a priest, and when your little daughter became my chance companion and told me her errand, my priestly instinct rose — so I came. He stopped a moment, then went on. "I am glad I came. I am on my way home from a very unpleasant political affair. The few minutes I had with your loving child have made me turn from the unhappy things of life to the love and endless happiness of eternity." Again he stopped, and again resumed. "As this little namesake will not be with us much longer. Will you permit me to be present when he goes to meet the 'Dear Jesus'?"

The genuine eyes looked pleadingly from father to mother. The father bowed his head and the mother nodded a little.

Then the Cardinal rose abruptly. "I must go," he said, and still holding Jacqueline's hand, he walked back to the boy's room. Armand smiled a little as he entered, but said nothing. The Cardinal walked over to the bed.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said, "and you will pray for me, for you know I told you how much God loves the prayers of little children who do not offend Him gravely."

Monsieur and Madame entered. Armand was looking up at the commanding authoritative figure. He was smiling.

"I am very glad to see you, Father, and I shall pray for you," he said, and then his eyes closed.

The Cardinal bent and kissed the forehead and then laid his hand in blessing on the brown curls. Then he took his cloak from the chair and left the room. Jacqueline went with him and got a similar kiss, blessing, and admonition at the front door; and the Cardinal, with a parting smile, got into his carriage.

The next morning at the Palais Cardinal astonishment reigned. The footman and coachman told wonderful tales of how the stern statesman had stopped when he thought he had hurt a little girl, how he had driven immediately to her home. Of the scene inside they of course knew nothing, but they could tell how he kissed and blessed the child and smiled when he bade her good-bye. Nothing to say, the Cardinal knew nothing of this. At 7:30 in the evening he ordered his carriage and directed his coachman to go to the same place.

Jacqueline did not at first understand her parents' attitude towards the august stranger, but after he left she waited expectantly. Armand had been sinking all day. "He will not live till midnight," was the doctor's verdict. Every few moments he opened his eyes and seemed to be looking for someone, and then the someone came. There was a knock at the door and when Jacqueline opened it the Cardinal entered. He took off his long coat with a cowl-like hood, displaying a red-silk cassock and cap. On his finger sparkled a beautiful red stone.

"How is my little one?" he asked of Madame, who entered.

"He is very bad, Your Eminence," the mother had tears in her eyes. The Cardinal tried to comfort her.

"Bear up, Madame," he said, as Jacqueline went on before. "Your little son will go to heaven, there to intercede for all of us."

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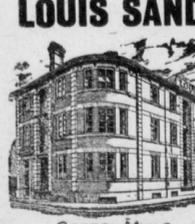
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