

THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND (LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER X—CONTINUED

One evening, after the contents of the caldron had been consumed, and while the gipsies lay about around the fire, a quarrel of extraordinary fierceness broke out among them.

She walked on, driven by the thought of her train and her business waiting for her at home; but she felt certain satisfaction in observing that the little girl was following pretty closely on her heels.

After walking another half-mile they reached a railway station. An early train was about to start, and the woman got her ticket and took her seat. To her surprise Fan followed her into the carriage and seated herself on the bench by her side.

The woman said nothing, but watched her with some wonder and amusement. "Tickets, please!" said the ticket collector, looking in at the carriage-door.

"I haven't got anything. What is a ticket?" said Fan, opening her empty hands as the man addressed her. "Come out of this, young'un, and run home and ask your mother what a ticket is!"

"O, let me stay!" cried Fan, imploringly, holding by the seat; "I want to get away from the gipsies."

"Poor thing! that's her cry," said the woman. "There's something, I'll be bound. Couldn't you let her go, Mister?"

"Don't be afraid, my girl; we'll stow you away somewhere. Time's up; look sharp, and come out."

But Fan stood firm with her hands locked in entreaty. "Let me go!" she said, "and indeed I'll pay you back, I can sing and earn money—I can."

"A young woman?" asked Rachel, while the maids at a table near pricked up their ears and listened with rounded eyes for the young man's story.

"No, madam, only a child; a child who will one day be a woman." "Is she thy sister?"

"No; but her mother when dying left her to my care." "And thou hast quitted thy home and thy country to seek for her?"

"Yes, madam. It is two months since I left our mountain, and I have been walking through England for many weeks. I have had work here and there for a few days, to earn a little money to bring me along; but I cannot stay long in any place. I must travel the world until I find her."

"Thou dost interest me very much," said Rachel Webb, noting the ring of simple pathos in the young man's voice, and the stern reality of the look of care on his face. "Thou hast done well to tell me thy history. I will think over thy case, and meantime thou canst have lodging for the night."

Rested and refreshed, Kevin was sent for next morning to join his new friend in her garden. "Thou shalt work with me here as many days as thou wilt, she said, and while we work we will talk about thy pilgrimage."

Kevin fell to work with hearty good will. When Mrs. Webb met the eager eyes of her new servant, and saw him spring forward to meet her slightest suggestion, she thought, "I have got a young Nathaniel; an Israelite, in whom there is indeed no guile."

Rachel Webb managed her own farm in her peculiar way, allowing the greatest possible number of people to live and support themselves on the ground that she owned. A thorough lady in all her personality she made herself the friend and companion of those who lived by and served her.

"Come in here, Nathaniel," she said one day, "I would speak with thee privately. Nay, I know it is not thy name; but bear with me; I mean thee well."

"Right you are!" they would say to him. Or, "that's the stuff, old timer—give it to 'em good, while you're at it!"

Or, again, "You have the makin' of a good leader in you, Jimmie." Only they made the mistake of taking Jimmie's vapors to be like those of nine-tenths of the laboring population, who excrete conditions but go comfortably on with their work, since it is the only work they have, and they were far from dreaming that Jimmie would eventually become a leader—but a leader among the radicals!

It seemed to him in a moment that had she known where Fanchea was to be found she ought not to have taken him in, fed and housed, and set him to work, but sent him flying along the road in unbroken pursuit. The thought flashed through his mind in half a second, but Rachel saw the blaze of it in his eyes.

"Nay, she said, smiling, "my ways are not thy ways, Nathaniel. Thou must learn patience, or all thy simplicity and thy truth will not avail thee. Yes, thou hast had a sort of patience in thy determined search; but thine is rather the endurance of passion than the reasonable coolness and meekness which succeeds. But I will try, thee no longer."

"You have the right," said Kevin; but I am in pain until you tell me what you mean. "I shall tell thee. A short time ago a troop of gipsies encamped in our neighbourhood. I have a dislike of the life led by these wandering people, but yet I feel an interest in them. They bear scriptural names, and when I hear of their Naomis, their Rachels, their Nathans, I cannot but feel that they are the lost sheep of a royal fold. But I must not keep thee in suspense. I went to see the wives and mothers of this troop, among them I found a little girl who struck me as in no way belonging to them. She was nursing a baby, and singing with a voice of extraordinary sweetness and power."

"Well, I'm not sure that I know what a proletariat is," said Martin, grimly, "but if I'm one of 'em, I'm right here to say that I do more for the greater good than any red radical when I support my family and help to look out for my mother!"

Jimmie turned pale at this. "I look out for Mother," he pronounced coldly. "You don't need to—"

"Not after this you don't! Mother has always lived on honest money. We'll take care of her and you can go your way—"

"Oh, no, Martin dear!" Mrs. Abram broke in, weeping. "Don't say that! I can't turn Jimmie away."

Well the Abram family was successfully disrupted. In their hearts the old folks did not blame their mother for sticking to Jimmie, but they were not ready to acknowledge this yet. They were angry and sore-hearted, and their humiliation was increased daily by newspaper references to the activity of Jimmie Abram, now openly spoken of as a prominent young radical.

They were not, they averred, going to encourage their mother in her mistaken loyalty. If she chose Jimmie, why, she could have him; Jimmie, why, she could have him; but that way, no way to bring him to time. That they were not able to come forward with a better way only irritated them the more. Well, she could disown him, couldn't she? If he didn't behave himself.

But, of course, that was one thing that Mrs. Abram could not and would not do. Jimmie's meals were as prompt and palatable as always, and his welcome as sincere as in his happy days when he used to come running gaily in from school. Indeed, the only relief she experienced was when he was at home, which was the chief reason why she never said a word no matter what strange companions he brought with him. Regard them with dread and repulsion she might, but she never told Jimmie so. Her maternal intuition whispered to her that brook now her misguided son would just now her interference either with his friends or his mode of life. Still, being an Irish mother, she hoped and prayed, building her

hopes on the memory of Jimmie's youthful piety and tractability. "Prayer, dear, will do wonders," she said to Nora Creedon, who tonight was helping her to wash the supper dishes after Jimmie's departure.

"Yes, I know," answered Nora absently. "But wasn't there a saint who said—let me see, and she wrinkled her brows. "Oh, yes, now I know," her face clearing. "He said if you wanted anything you must work as if everything depended upon work, and pray as if everything depended upon prayer. D'you see what he meant, Mrs. Abram?"

Mrs. Abram shook her head. "Sure, I'm praying night and day, Nora," she said sadly. "And I know you pray, too, dear." "Yes, of course, but that's it. We're just praying, you see. We're not doing anything—working, you know, like the saint said."

"But what could we do?" Mrs. Abram wanted to know plaintively. "You don't want me to nag at the boy, Nora, and Father Callahan says the scolding will do no good at all. So what's left us but prayer?"

It seemed reasonable enough, but Nora had been thinking about the saint's words. "I wish I could do something," she said at last, musingly. "I wish there was something—"

She looked at Mrs. Abram doubtfully. For only the night before a strange and rather terrible idea had come to her, and she wondered if she dare unfold it to the poor worried mother. She had been slipping in, as was her nightly custom, to sit awhile with Mrs. Abram, and as she entered the narrow front hall she heard Jimmie's voice in the dining-room. She paused, about to withdraw, as nowadays she was careful to avoid the young radical, when she heard her own name.

"Oh, no, don't have Nora," she heard him say. "I'd rather she wouldn't come in contact with some of these fellows. Good chaps, all right," he added hastily, "but in some ways they're a little queer. They think the world of you, Mother, but at that I don't care to have you at them!"

This was true, but as Mrs. Abram declared stoutly that she did not mind, it had come to be an accepted thing for her to prepare a lunch on meeting nights. "And, sure, they're as hungry as hounds, the whole pack of them," she often told Nora.

"Besides," Nora heard Jimmie go on, "Nora'd probably poison the coffee, on principle. She hates and despises the people I associate with—and me, I suppose, by now."

Vaguely Nora heard Mrs. Abram's protest, and just last night she said that you were right in some things.

"Of course, Nora's keen enough to see that. Nora slipped out, closing the door noiselessly, the germ of an idea even that instant giving her a certain malicious pleasure. "I'm too good for that crowd, am I, Jimmie? Well, I'm glad you still have sense enough to see that. They haven't spoiled all your finer instincts. But what would you say, I wonder,—her lips twisting into an ironical smile—"If I took up some of your favorite tenets and out-radiced even you?"

The more she thought about it the more the idea appealed to Nora. She had known Jimmie Abram all her life. They had gone to school together and Jimmie had always been her friend and defender. The Abram family, and owing to his friendship for Nora the freedom of David Creedon's watch, repair shop had been Jimmie's, a privilege denied to other boys, exacerated for their "mischievousness" and lawless propensities. He was Nora's great-uncle, and by the time she was twenty-five and Jimmie Abram a year older, she was the old jeweler's sole surviving relative. She kept house for him in the neat rooms above the store, and he helped her sometimes with his customers. But the shop, with its old-fashioned cases and array of cheerfully-ticking watches, knew Jimmie no more. He had other fish to fry.

When Jimmie was nineteen he told his mother that when he was twenty-one he was going to marry Nora, but before two years had passed Jimmie was riding his radical hobby full tilt, and Nora had insinuated, none too politely, that she chose her company. Jimmie had said himself that it was just as well, for the present, for though he was still fond of Nora—oh yes!—he realized that there were far more important things in the world than getting married. That so many of the important things appeared to be set for him to do caused him occasional fits of depression. Of course, a man had to make sacrifices for the "cause," but it was highly unfortunate that his own family, and Nora as well, should have such narrow-minded ideas. At first Nora had appeared to understand and sympathize with his so wonderful plan to "emancipate the laboring class, but . . . oh, well, he could get along without them all, if that was what they wanted!"

Nora, wiping the last dish carefully, and casting her mind back over the past few years, took a sudden decision. "Listen, Mrs. Abram," she said, tensely, "I think there is something I can do. There's just a bare chance—and it might cure Jimmie—he is worth saving—" all this rather incoherently, though he hasn't sense enough to see that

those Bolsheviks are just using him! But you'll have to help me. . . . Have you seen Nora lately?" Jimmie asked his mother one night about a month later.

Mrs. Abram shook her head sadly. "No, I haven't, then." "How come? I thought she kept a motherly eye on you," jestingly. "She hasn't been here in a long time. You haven't seen her, I suppose?"

Jimmie answered the look she gave him more than the question. "No, of course not. Where would I see her?" "I didn't know," but her son thought she sighed as she turned away. His eyes narrowed on the slight drooping figure and a queer presentiment shook him. Several times in the past couple of weeks he had seen a girl in the audience at some big meetings who had reminded him of Nora. Though she was in the rear of the hall and he could catch only fugitive glimpses of her, he knew it couldn't be Nora from the crowd she was with. But she did look like her. He kept watching for the girl after that and he felt annoyed and curiously uneasy every time he saw her. He knew it wasn't Nora, and yet . . . he certainly did hate to see a girl like that mixing up with the unsavory crowd at the end of the hall. That sort of a girl didn't belong, somehow. Now he drew in his breath sharply, too horrified to be amazed at his own emotions. So it had been Nora all the time! That was why he had been so bothered, so—so worried!—he knew it—he felt it, though he refused to acknowledge the grisly truth. Nora, of all people! Oh, God! he groaned inwardly, had he been the cause of dragging her into this—this—

"When did you see Nora last?" he demanded of his mother hoarsely. "About a month ago, I think it was," said Mrs. Abram with visible reluctance. "That Mr. Kolinsky called for you and you were gone, so he stayed talking to Nora. The neighbors tell me that he comes to see her and that she goes with him to these meetings of yours. I dunno," sighing heavily, "for she hasn't been next or near me since. God help us!"

Jimmie could hardly contain himself while his mother was speaking. "That beast!" he burst out, clenching his hands. "That unspokeable Kolinsky—how dare he take Nora to those meetings—how dare he! I'll see her—I'll tell her a thing or two!"

"Jimmie!" gasped his mother, honestly alarmed at the storm she had evoked. Then, diplomatically, "What's wrong with Mr. Kolinsky? Sure, I mind when you used to tell Nora he was the finest man in the world. And you're always together, the two of you."

"That's different," impatiently. "He's all right as far as his knowledge of the work is concerned, but he isn't the kind of a man for Nora to be seen with. Why didn't you tell me this long ago?"

His mother turned on him a look of plaintive surprise. "But I thought 'twas your doing, Jimmie," she said. "Yourself, you used to try to talk Nora over."

"My doing?" indignantly. "Do you think I'd drag Nora into that crowd—that—that—"

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NORAH FINDS SOME WORK TO DO

By Helen Moriarty in Rosary Magazine

"The Lord betune us an' harm 'im!" murmured Mrs. Kennedy in accents of acute distress. "Sure, I never heard the like in all me born days!"