

HER IRISH HERITAGE

BY ANNIE M. P. SMITHSON

AUTHOR OF "BY STRANGE PATHS"

CHAPTER VI—CONTINUED

And taking no notice of the old lady's asseverations that she "didn't know the taste of it!"

The latter drew in a breath of the cold air, as she said in accents of relief. "Oh! Miss Carmichael! I am so glad to be out of that place!

They entered the "top front" of a house overlooking Patrick's Park. It was an untidy but not dirty room, the walls of which, in the usual tenement style, were pasted over with all sorts of pictures.

"Well, Jimmy," she said, with a smile, "and how are you today?" "I'm grand, Nurse, thank you. Me mother is at the market, but she left the kettle on, and the basin and the cold water are there beyant."

A bad tubercular abscess of the hip had to be dressed here, and as she went about her work Mary gave Clare an outline of the case. The mother was a widow with five other children, all of school age.

"Yes, Mrs. Keogh, ma'am, she is, and another lady with her." "I was thinkin' I heard another footstep," said the blind woman, "have you all you want Nurse?"

"Yes, everything, thank you, Mrs. Keogh," said Mary, and after a few minutes the old woman went out as quietly as she had come in.

"She is living on the Old Age pension," said Mary, as she fastened her bandage with skilful fingers, "and is very good to Jimmy here when he is all alone. Isn't she Jimmy?"

"She is, Miss," with a soft shy smile—a smile which grew bigger and brighter as Mary produced an apple and some chocolate from one of her many pockets.

CHAPTER VII

"THE LIGHT THAT NEVER WAS ON SEA OR LAND!"

Mary Carmichael was buttoning her tweed coat and settling her little fur cap becomingly on her wavy hair. Supper at St. Columba's was just over, and she was going out for a while with Nurse Seelye.

It was the last week of November and the nights were clear and frosty, and from her window high up at the top of the great house, Mary could see the street lamps shining on the frosty pavements.

"Oh! Miss Carmichael! I am so glad to be out of that place! What awful people! And so dirty. But I suppose they are very poor?"

"Not so poor as you think," said Mary quietly. "They are of the class that will always manage to live from hand to mouth somehow or other. There is, probably, not a charitable organization in the city of any denomination which they don't know and of which they don't make use from time to time."

"He is, Miss—come in please. The last patient has just gone in and so he will be disengaged now in a few moments."

"And how are you, Miss Beckett?" asked Mary Carmichael, as they entered the small waiting room with its gas stove, couple of chairs, and benches round the wall.

"Well, now, I can't say that I am well, Miss—for I am not. I do get a terrible pain in me back and chest—but, of course, I mustn't complain. We have been very busy lately," Miss Beckett always spoke of the doctor and herself as "we"—and it has been terribly late at night before we got finished sometimes. Still, as I said before, its no use complaining."

"No, a bit, Miss Beckett," said Nurse Seelye, smiling, while Mary listened in quiet amusement—she always enjoyed Miss Beckett's views on life and things in general.

"And how are you, Miss?" that lady now enquired turning to her, "you have not been to see us lately—I hope you have been well?"

"Oh, just the same old six and eightpence," said Nurse Seelye, laughing. "What would you expect? I would have been here sooner only for Miss Carmichael here—I had to wait for her to put on her best bib and tucker!"

Dr. Head leaned back, and surveyed Mary with a critical eye. "Well I must say the result is very becoming," he announced, adding, "I'm only sorry Delaney won't be here tonight."

Mary Carmichael said nothing, but the red flag mounted to her cheeks, and Nurse Seelye laughed. "Don't tease her, Doctor," she said, "she pretends to be so shy—she and Dr. Delaney are just friends, you know—nothing more."

"Gad! I never met such a pass in my life," said the doctor, and giving his shoulders a characteristic shrug, he suddenly turned and looked at Mary squarely in the face.

"Look here, my lady," he asked then—"do you, or do you not care for Delaney?"

"Ah! what nonsense are you talking?" exclaimed Dr. Head. "Friendship!—queer friendship when a man can talk of nothing but one girl all the time—enjoy nothing if she is not with him—yarns by the hour about her manifold perfections—and so on."

"Friendship where are you—now do you care for him or not?" Mary flushed again, but this time she raised her eyes, and looked her questioner straight in the face.

"And if I did, why should I tell you?" she asked proudly. But Dr. Head leant forward and placed his hand on hers. "Because I want to see him happy—that's why," he said quietly, and the bantering tones left his voice and he went on, "he's a man that could be happy with a good woman—and I know you are that—and he wants someone to live him up, for you know how often he gets melancholy and downhearted—all about nothing. His digs are comfortable enough but after all they're only digs, and Delaney is the type of man who would enjoy home life. The worst of it is he is so decidedly shy and reserved. Come now! Why don't you help him? Don't you ever give him a bit of encouragement at all?"

Mary said nothing, but Nurse Seelye interposed. "Encouragement, indeed she doesn't, Doctor. Why she often snubs the poor fellow for nothing, and is as cold as an iceberg when he's near!"

"There you are now," he cried "and you should just put your arms around his neck and tell him that you love him!"

without first knowing for certain that he loved her was simply out of the question and yet—if he really cared and was only holding back after all through reserve or uncertainty as to her feeling—in that case should she not encourage him a little? He was as proud as herself and very reticent, and disliked to display much emotion or feeling at any time—an intensely sensitive man in every way. She knew all this, but still she shrank involuntarily at the very thought of letting him get a glimpse of her feelings.

Let him but speak and tell her that which she was hungering to hear and she was ready to pour forth the love of her heart to him without shame or reserve. But that she should make the first advance—no, the thing was simply not possible to her.

"But I wish I knew—oh! I wish I knew!" she said over and over again as she tossed about in useless efforts to settle to sleep.

Then a sudden thought struck her. She would start a Novena for the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th, and leave everything in Our Lady's hands.

"It's all I can do!" she thought. "Our Lady will help me—she never failed me yet! I will not bother one bit more myself, but start the Novena in the morning—it's the 29th, and then I will leave everything to her."

And so, feeling more at peace, Mary dipped her finger into the little font of holy water beside her bed, and making the sign of her redemption with a sigh of relief, she composed herself at last to sleep.

A few evenings after this she was visiting the Blakes. Mary Blake met her in the hall and took her upstairs to her own special sanctum for a little chat before they joined the others. The "two Marys" were inseparable friends and really attached to each other.

"Well, dearie, and how is the working going you? And are you doing well, thinking of every-one except yourself, as usual?" asked Mary Carmichael, as she drew out her hatpins, and stood for a moment arranging her hair before the mirror.

"Yes, I'm just as usual," she said, "it's all very well to talk my dear, but if I didn't look after the house and the inhabitants thereof, I wonder who would?"

"All the same," replied the other, "you spoil them Mary—however, I don't suppose you would be angry if you hadn't them to spoil! And how is the English cousin getting on?"

lending to her. There's no excuse for anyone being as shiftless as she is. She wasn't always that way. The next time she asks to borrow something from me I am going to refuse her—at least, I think now that I will."

"Mary and I were talking of her before you came," Mrs. White said. "We were complaining that her borrowing has come to be an annoyance. For a time it was a joke between us, but when a joke is repeated day after day, and week after week, it begins to lose its freshness." It was not often that Mrs. White spoke so sharply, but she had been annoyed that day, because Mrs. Delany had borrowed the last of her tea, and she and her daughter had none with their luncheon.

Miss Allen was about to endorse what Mrs. White had said when Mrs. Beck opened the gate. As soon as the first greetings had been exchanged Miss Allen told her how persistently Mrs. Delany was borrowing at her home, and declared that she would refuse the next time she asked for anything.

"You won't refuse her. You won't have the heart, unless you are made of sterner stuff than I. Again and again I have determined to say no to her, but when she came and asked in her timid, apologetic little way, although I longed to say, 'Buy your own tea or coffee,' what I did reply was 'Why, certainly, Mrs. Delany! How much do you want?'"

Mary White had been listening in silence, but at this point she laughed gleefully in a way which her mother knew to mean that some mischief was brewing in her pretty head. "I have a plan!" she cried. "There's only one way to break Mrs. Delany of the habit of borrowing, and that is to borrow from her. Let's do it—every one of us! I'll go to her door early tomorrow morning to borrow something; and you, Mrs. Beck, could go about ten o'clock and get—anything at all; and in the afternoon, Miss Allen could need sugar for jelly and feel quite unable to telephone to the grocer for it; and mother, you could close the day by borrowing back a pound or two of the coffee that we have loaned her."

"Now, Mary, that wouldn't be kind," her mother objected. "It would be as kind as it is for her to borrow from us nearly every day," Mary saucily defended herself.

"I think so, too, Mary," Miss Allen said quickly. "I'll do my part if the others agree to do theirs. Sooner or later we must teach Mrs. Delany a lesson. In my opinion we have already waited too long. What do you say, Mrs. Beck?"

"Well, I—I'll do it if Mrs. White does," she replied hesitatingly, feeling that the plan was cruel, but willing, in her admiration for Mrs. White to follow her lead in anything.

"Now, mother dear, please don't spoil the whole lovely scheme," Mrs. White pleaded. "You know you are tired of lending to Mrs. Delany. Because we're just across the street she comes here oftener than they're willing. If we give her a taste of being borrowed from—well, I imagine that a taste will be enough for her. Besides, it would be so much fun."

"I suppose there's no harm in our doing it," Mrs. White said doubtfully; and at once Mary began to plan the matter enthusiastically as if it had received whole-hearted approval.

"Don't laugh. I am sorry that I went—I wouldn't go, if I were you, Miss Allen," Mrs. Beck said. "Indeed I'll go! Mrs. Delany owes me sugar, and I am going to get some of it if I can."

Like Mary White, Miss Allen made no pretense of calling, but at the door said crisply, "Mrs. Delany, I am out of sugar; will you lend me a little? One pound would do or even a half a pound."

"I have no sugar in the house, Miss Allen. I used the last I had in my coffee this morning, and I have not gone to the grocery today." Her sensitive face had grown red once more, but this time in anger, rather than in shyness or embarrassment.

At three o'clock it was Mrs. White's turn. She went reluctantly, feeling ashamed of the part she was to play, but not brave enough to refuse to do as the others. She was weary of lending to Mrs. Delany, but liked her, and would not have hurt her feelings for the world. Like Mrs. Beck she went into the little parlor, where she and Mrs. Delany chatted so pleasantly that she was in danger of forgetting her errand. It would have escaped her mind if she had not chanced to glance from the window and see Mary seated on the veranda, awaiting her return.

"Oh, Mrs. Delany, will you lend me a spool of darning cotton? I meant to buy some yesterday when I was down town, but forgot it." Mrs. Delany did not reply at once, and the silence was making Mrs. White uncomfortable before she turned to her, and said, very quietly: "I understand. I did not suspect anything until Miss Allen came. I—had not thought that you are one of them. I suppose I deserve this from all of you, but I could never have believed that any of you could be so cruel." She paused; then rose, and in a dignified way said: "Come with me. You shall see for yourself."

Feeling like a murderer, Mrs. White meekly followed Mrs. Delany into the room behind the parlor, which she found to be bare of furniture, through a bedroom in which there was nothing more than a narrow bed, and one shabby chair; into the kitchen, where there was a stove, a very old table, and two older chairs. "I have sold everything else," Mrs. Delany explained.

Mrs. White was forced to glance into a closet where one dress and one coat hung, and into a cupboard whose shelves were empty of everything except a loaf of bread, about half pound of coffee and a can of condensed milk. "I had a little tea, too, but I gave it to Mrs. Beck," Mrs. Delany said.

She led the way back to the parlor, where she faced Mrs. White and said, with pathetic dignity: "I thought you all understood. You have known how the younger teachers have won my pupils from me, one after another. You know, too, that I have none left. You know, too, that my small means was lost in the Perkin's failure. I thought you understood that when I borrowed I was—begging. I am too old to undertake new work, and I can't get music pupils. I haven't ten dollars in the world. I will go to the poorhouse tomorrow. It would have been better if I had given up the struggle long ago."

Mrs. White's eyes were full of tears. "You'll do nothing of the kind!" she said emphatically; and having kissed Mrs. Delany's cheek she hurried away without another word.

First, she went home and scolded Mary, as that pampered young lady had never been scolded before, and afterward ordered her carriage and went to the bank to speak to her husband, and to the Mercantile Realty Company to see Mr. Beck. She called on a number of friends in the fine new West End, and on her way home stopped to talk to Mrs. Beck and Miss Allen; everywhere telling the same story, and making the same plea.

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AND THE GREATEST IS CHARITY

In its day Benton place was the most fashionable part of Springfield, but as the city spread westward and finer avenues were laid out, where the newly rich and the smartest of the old set built more and more elegant homes. So, little by little, Benton place lost prestige. The homes which the rich deserted were rented for boarding houses, and soon looked so shabby that the people on either side of them felt compelled to move away. However, Mr. White, the banker, remained where he was. Benton place was good enough for him, he said; and his wife was certain that a new house would never seem homelike to her. Mr. and Mrs. Beck did not move because they could ill afford a change for the better, and Miss Allen, whose father had built the first house in Benton place, had no desire to go elsewhere. Mrs. Delany was the only other representative of Springfield's old families who still lived there. She was a widow, an aristocrat, so her finger tips, who for several years had given music lessons, but when people spoke of her none of these facts was ever mentioned. It was as an inveterate borrower that she was known among her neighbors. Whether she would have been willing to lend, in her turn, no one knew, for the only woman who had ever gone to her to borrow anything had somehow come away without mentioning her own need, but having promised to lend Mrs. Delany a new dress pattern and a few postage stamps. Mrs. Delany borrowed tea and coffee and sugar and flour; umbrellas and gloves; cooking utensils and thread and yarn and needles. She borrowed, not from time to time, but almost daily and the worst of it was that she never returned anything to well-to-do neighbors, and but tardily to poor ones.

It happened, one summer evening, that Mrs. White and her daughter were sitting on their veranda when Miss Allen joined them. Mrs. Delany's house was directly across the street, and as they chatted she came out and passed down the street, Miss Allen watched her until she turned the corner, and then said indignantly: "She borrowed sugar from me yesterday and tea today. I'm tired