

A FAIR EMIGRANT

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND

AUTHOR OF "MARCELLA GRACE: A NOVEL" CHAPTER V A WILFUL WOMAN

The next day Bawn made a journey into St. Paul to consult her guardian. Dr. Ackroyd had been her father's oldest friend in Minnesota, and the only man who had ever approached to anything like intimacy with him. At a time when the doctor had been hardly pressed by pecuniary troubles, Desmond's generosity had laid the foundation of his ultimate prosperity—a fact which he had never forgotten.

"Doctor," said Bawn, walking into the snug room where she and his wife were sitting. "I have come to talk to you on business. You know I am a woman of business capabilities now—twenty-one years of age last month."

The doctor nodded. "Yes, yes; she has found it all out. I was her guardian a month ago, Molly, but now she will be for taking the bit in her own teeth, no doubt."

"I have a pretty good fortune, haven't I, Dr. Ackroyd?"

"As pretty a fortune as any young woman in America, I should say at this time," said the doctor, "and that is saying much. Come, now, what do you want to do? Trip away to Paris, and all the rest of it?"

"And quite natural too, Andrew, at her age, and with such a fortune and such a face!" said Mrs. Ackroyd, a motherly old lady, with whom Bawn was a favourite.

The same thought was present in the minds of husband and wife as they looked at Bawn's fine, fair face, with its grave sweetness and a certain majesty of womanly dignity which in her most thoughtful moments sat on her brow. At such moments her coil of golden hair looked like a royal crown. Now, as she gazed into the fire, seeing something which they did not see, they easily fancied her in brilliant rooms, shining in white satin or some such raiment, with crowds of adoring hovers round her. They knew the sort of thing that happens well enough. Many a lovely young heiress sails from America and gets turned into a countess or a marquise before many summers have poured their choicest showers into her lap.

"Yes, I have been thinking of going to Europe," said Bawn, "though not to Paris."

"It is the gayest place and the prettiest," said the doctor. "Of course there are the summer resorts—"

"I was not thinking of gaiety, nor even of prettiness," said Bawn, "though the place I mean to go to is, I believe, beautiful enough. But if it were the ugliest place on earth, and the dirtiest, as it probably is, I should want to go all the same."

She spoke musingly and looked into the fire, seeing in the burning wood fairy glens, and mountains with giddy paths from which a false step might hurl a man in an instant—mountains with lonely hollows of their own, and secret paths dark enough to overshadow a human being's life.

The doctor gazed at her in astonishment. "Come," he said, "I give it up."

"Doctor," said the girl suddenly, looking at him straight, "did it ever strike you that my father had had a great trouble in his life, one that must have been more than the ordinary kind of trouble?"

The doctor's face changed. "I always thought it," he said gently. "Bawn turned red and then quite white. "It is true," she said; "and the journey I want to make has reference to that trouble."

She paused and hesitated. "My dear," said Dr. Ackroyd, "if you have anything to say to me in confidence, my wife will go away."

"No," said Bawn firmly, stretching out her hand to the old lady, who was regarding her with deep concern. "I can trust you both, if you will bear with me."

Mrs. Ackroyd stirred in her chair with good natured emotion and a little curiosity, and, wiping her spectacles with the hand that was not in Bawn's grip, put them on, as if they would help her to see well into whatever was going to be said before her.

Bawn went on speaking, white to the lips, but with firm voice and calm eyes: "My father left his country, you know, as a young, quite a young man. Well, he left it under a cloud. Some enemy had whispered away his good name and blighted his life. He had friends, and there was a woman who had loved him and was to have married him; and they one and all—good God! can you believe it?—they one and all cast him out of their lives, withdrew their faith and their friendship from him, and sent him across the world with a broken heart and spirit—poor heart that nothing could ever heal; noble spirit that is free from pain at last!"

Grief brimmed over Bawn's sad eyes as she finished. She suddenly covered her face and sat drowned in tears.

Her friends did not worry her with questions and consolations, only suffered the floods that had opened to wash themselves away; and the girl said presently:

"There, that is over. You are very, very good to listen to me."

"Now," she continued, with a light leap into her eyes and determination straightening the quiver of her lips, "I know that he had an enemy who slandered him, or all this could never have happened. He himself

believed that he was the victim of circumstances, but I do not believe it. Certain notes and papers have been put in my hands to read, and I have formed my own conclusions from them. I shall never rest till I have sifted the matter to the bottom—in as far as it can be sifted," she added, wistfully, "at the end of thirty years."

"Ah! that is it," said the doctor with a smothered sigh. "And, my dear child, I don't want to contradict you—I feel with you intensely—but how, if at the time he found it so impossible to clear himself, how do you dream of being able to do it now?"

"Not by walking into the country, into the houses of those people, and saying, 'You are my deadly enemies. I am Arthur Desmond's daughter, and you calumniated my father. Confess your sins, or I shall—I shall go back crestfallen where I came from!'" said Bawn, with lips relaxing into a little smile. "No; that is not my plan. I think I have been studying to acquire the guile of the serpent during the last few days, and I have laid a little plot which I cannot put into execution without the assistance of a friend."

"Well?" said the doctor looking at her inquiringly. "Continue."

"I intend," pursued Bawn, "to go to the place—a secluded spot it was; and I believe, I have been told, it is not the sort of place that changes much—a glenny and mountainy place such as we read about but do not see here."

"I know," said the doctor, nodding, and instantly seeing pictures in his memory; for he, too, was an exile and loved Scotland.

"I shall go there," said Bawn, "not in my own name and character, but as the orphan daughter of a farmer, an emigrant, who, from what she has heard from her father about his native land, has taken a fancy to see it and live in it. She has brought her small fortune—say five hundred pounds, her father's savings—to invest in a little farm such as a woman can manage. In this way I will settle down among those people, as near them as possible, and, without exciting their suspicion or putting them on their guard, will try to get to the long-hidden secret, strive to unearth the too long buried truth. When I succeed I shall disclose my identity, pour out the vile of my wrath upon the false or good-for-nothing friends, shake the dust off my feet—and come back here to you."

"A pretty romance, my dear, but about as wild and impossible as pretty."

"Do not say so."

"What do you propose to do if you find it beyond your power to get at that long lost truth?"

"Come back here all the same, only worse," said Bawn; "but it will be long before I confess myself beaten. A number of people must be dead first."

"And if you find them all already dead?"

"That is not likely," said Bawn, quickly. "Not in such a healthy country place, where the people live long. I have thought it all out, and the chances are with me."

Dr. Ackroyd was silent. Wild as the girl's scheme was, he saw she was completely in earnest, and he knew her long enough and well enough to have had experience of a character indicated by the shape of her broad, fair brows and certain expressions of her clear grey eyes and good-tempered mouth. There had always been a simple and intelligent directness about her intentions and a robust fearlessness in carrying them out that made such a proposal from her somewhat different to what it might have been coming from any ordinary impulsive, romantic girl, who would be pretty sure to give up her plan in disgust and dismay after a first tussle with a few uncomfortable obstacles. He admitted to himself that, if any girl could carry out such an enterprise, no better one than this could be found to undertake it. But of what was she thinking? All the strength of his influence over her must be exerted to prevent her entering on such a wild and uncertain path.

He was sufficiently a man of the world to know what had never entered into the saddest dreams that ever flitted through Bawn's golden head—to be well aware that there existed a possibility, if not a likelihood, that Arthur Desmond had been really guilty of whatever crime or transgression had been laid to his charge. During all the long life that he had spent in this new country Dr. Ackroyd had met with a great number of men who in their youth had blundered into evil, and had either come out here of their own free will or been sent by their indignant friends to begin life afresh where their past was unknown. And why might not Desmond have been one of these? He would prefer to believe, with Bawn, that the man who had lived here so stainless a life and suffered so deeply had been guiltless from the beginning, and the victim of malice or a mistake. But the entire faith of Bawn's heart could not make its way into his. Not only did he see the probability of failure for her enterprise, but feared that she might be met by some overwhelming testimony to his guilt—guilt long expiated, and perhaps ever forgotten had not her rash and loving hand rooted it out from the past which had buried it. Might not even a bright and strong creature like this be fooled by such a blow?

These thoughts trooped quickly through his mind, and Bawn watched the changing expressions of his face. "Well," she said quietly, "you are not going to oppose me?"

"My dear," he said, "I will oppose you with every argument, with all the persuasion, I am capable of compelling to my aid. Had this occurred some time ago I should have been in a position to forbid you absolutely to carry out so wild an intention. As it is, you are your own mistress. I cannot control your actions. I can only beseech you to take an old man's advice, and let the dead rest in peace. Your father is at rest; the waves of time have rolled over his sorrow. You need never come in contact with any one who knows anything of his story. In any other plan for your life, in any indulgence you can imagine, I will help you to the best of my ability; but I cannot see you set in a way which I believe would be the ruin of every prospect you have in the world."

"I have no prospect," answered Bawn, sadly. "What could I do with my life while this shadow rests on it?"

"Your idea is overrated. By and by you will form new ties—"

"Never!" said Bawn, solemnly. "Even if I wished it, and it were likely, never could I till this cloud is cleared away."

The doctor was startled and silent. He had not been told what was the nature of the wrong thing of which Desmond had been accused, and the look in Bawn's eyes at this moment suggested that it was something even worse than he had imagined. But he spoke cheerfully.

"Fool!" he said, "you are in a morbid humor. Put off the consideration of this matter, for a time at least. You will change your mind; you will give it up."

"I will never give it up," said Bawn, her soft lips closing and tightening with resolution. "The wish has gone too deep. There is nothing else to live for in my life."

This was the beginning of a struggle which lasted for two months between Bawn and her ex-guardian, and at the end of that time Dr. Ackroyd felt himself obliged to lower his colours and let the girl have her way. Rather than allow her to follow it without help or protection of any kind, he was forced to yield and take the affair into his own hands. Step by step she gained upon him; bit by bit she got all her will. His first concession included the proviso that he was to be allowed to take her across the ocean himself, and that, before he suffered her to go seeking her fortune in that unknown spot towards which her desires were carrying her, he was to pay a visit to the place as a tourist, take note of how things stood there, gather information about the people, and make up his mind as to how far her plan for coming among them was safe and practicable. To all this Bawn ungrudgingly consented at first, fearing much that such protection and precaution might excite attention and frustrate her aims. Fate in the end decreed that she was to go her wilful way and perform her pilgrimage according to the programme she had at first marked out for herself. A dearly loved child of Dr. Ackroyd's was discovered to have fallen into a dangerous state of health, and he deemed it impossible to leave her. Bawn must either go alone or not at all. She chose to go.

"You can put me on board and give me in charge to the captain," she said; "and when I land, if I find any difficulty, I can telegraph to you, and you can telegraph to your English friends, whom I will not go near if I can help it. This will surely be protection enough for a steady young woman like me, of the class to which I shall belong. Nobody will mind a simple farmer's daughter. How many poor girls come out to America every day to earn their bread under circumstances so much worse than mine! If I were travelling with you I should be always betraying myself; and if, as you say, the world is so small, somebody would be sure to see me who might meet me afterwards and find me out."

Her friends felt themselves unable to restrain her. After all, their own child was their first consideration, and Desmond's daughter was impatient to be away. Jeanne was married, and Bawn felt herself pushed bodily out of her home. There was nothing more for her to do here except to procure an outfit of very plain clothing to suit the station of life she had chosen, to make some money arrangements transferring a few hundred pounds to an Irish bank, and leaving her fortune in Dr. Ackroyd's hands, to say good-bye to the dear old home and to the beloved grave where peacefully her father slept.

CHAPTER VI

A FLOAT

"I was a madman to let her go," muttered the doctor, taking off his hat and wiping his troubled brow. "I ought to have had her committed to a lunatic asylum first."

"I don't see how you could, dear," said his mild, literal wife, "as she is not mad. People would have thought you were plotting for her money."

The doctor groaned. "There is no help for it," he said. "So wilful though so sweet a specimen of womankind I never knew. She has turned me round her finger like a skein of worsted. God send it may not yet be the breaking of our hearts; for if anything happens amiss to Bawn we can never hold up our heads again."

That triumphant young woman, having looked her last through tears at her rooding native shores, had now seated herself in a convenient nook on deck with her face ocean-

wards, and was regarding the boundless, glistening vista before her with strange and solemn delight. It was her first introduction to the sea. Most of us behold that great wonder first from afar off, then we make acquaintance with it placidly; some like sea-sickness becomes dear to us, or we learn to worship it from purple cliff, with the gulls riding on the green waves beneath at our feet. But Bawn had suddenly been lifted from her forest and prairie, and flung, dazzled and amazed, upon this limitless world of waters. As the view became wider, and the ocean became more and more alluring, all-absorbing presence to her mind, regret, courage, hope, loneliness, confidence, all of which had been shaking her and inspiring her by turns, alike vanished and were forgotten, and she sat breathing in long, deep draughts of salt air and delight, enjoying her young existence with the joy that is the inheritance of sea-birds.

She had planted herself in a corner, so that her back was to the other passengers on board, whose tramp and tramp as they took their walk up and down the deck, and the occasional sound of whose voices, fell on her ear but did not disturb her privacy. She was right in the front of the vessel, all her being going willingly forward with it, her face set outwards towards the horizon of sea and sky behind which lay the secrets she had tasked herself to penetrate and the lands she had never seen. The books with which the doctor had supplied her were untouched. Who could read in a world of such ever shifting, ever shimmering enchantment?

Leaning well forward, her firm, white chin set in the pink hollow of her hand, she let the hours go by without once turning her head to see how it fared with the humanity behind her. The only person who for a minute engaged her notice during those first morning hours was a man who had got further even than herself into the very end of the vessel, and, mounted on a heap of ropes, gazed for some time out seaward through a glass. She observed that it was a straight, well-built figure, and that the profile had a clean-cut outline. Long before he had done gazing through his glass Bawn had forgotten him and was again looking out, out far, with fascinated eyes at the glittering, ever-shifting boundary lines of the realms of light towards which the great heart of the steamer was straining and panting. As he turned to spring from his vantage ground of coiled ropes the man glanced towards the figure that had sat so persistently motionless during all the first hours of the voyage—hours when people are generally so full of fidgets and so eagerly speculating among fellow-passengers. Evidently this man, young or old (her back had looked young, though muffled in a shepherd's plaid scarf and broad-brimmed black straw hat), desired to become acquainted with no one, for she deliberately set her face from all. It was not for the purpose of seeing what that face was like that he had scaled the height of the rope-heap, but, having glanced at it once, he stopped a moment, gazing, and so eagerly speculating among fellow-passengers. Evidently this man, young or old (her back had looked young, though muffled in a shepherd's plaid scarf and broad-brimmed black straw hat), desired to become acquainted with no one, for she deliberately set her face from all. 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