A FAIR EMIGRANT

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND

AUTHOR OF "MARCELLA GRACE: A NOVEL"

CHAPTER I

ALONE IN THE BUSH

Arthur Desmond, an Irish gentleman, left his native country under unhappy circumstances, in the year 18—, and found his way to Minnesota, where, following as far as white settlers had then ventured, he took land, built himself a wooden house, and began life in solitude. Though quite a young man, a grey look of blight on his countenance and a dejected droop in his walk told plainly that whatever might be the mainspring of the energy that kept him labouring from morning till night, and from night almost till morning again, with little sleep and no recreation, hewing down the woods and turning up the virgin soil for future harvests of gold, there was at least no hope in his toil. Young though he was, he was a broken man, who, with a canker in his heart that could not be cured, had isolated himself voluntarily from the society of his fellow men.

Hope put out of the question, the motive for his persistent labour was not far to seek. A man of keenly sensitive organisation, of fine rather than strong brain, he was well aware that for one like him a load of unsurpassed mental agony is not to be borne except face to face with nature alone in some of her magnificent solitudes, and under the yoke of such bodily toil as leaves little leisure for consecutive thought. Obeying the instinct for self preservation, he had taken hold of the only means that could save him from the doom of insanity.

He had brought nothing with him to the backwoods but his workman's clothes and tools, the miniature likeness of a woman, and a packet of letters which he wore sewn round his neck till they began to crack in the folds and fray at the edges, and, later, deposited in a small box of pine-wood carved rather skillfully by himself. He never looked at the miniature and he never read the letters, but when he came in from work his first glance was towards the casket, and at night it was placed with his revolver by the side of his lonely bed.

His beard grew long and untrimmed, and white hairs began to creep in among his dark locks. He held little intercourse with men, yet whenever a human being passed his way, whether white traveller going to or from St. Paul, or Indian straggler from far out on the prairie that stretched from his door to the horizon, the wayfarer was sure to receive kindly hospitality from the lonely squatter in his log-built home. The cries of animals, the songs and calls of birds, and the ring of his own axe were often the only sounds he heard for weeks. Sometimes the concert of the woods and the murmured, exquisite music which Nature makes for herself in her great solitudes charmed the grey look of blight from his face, or the sumptuous colouring of the primeval scenes around would fascinate his eye and smooth away the furrow that agony had already dug deep between his brows. And it was these momentary relaxings of too taunt a string, these almost unnoticed yieldings to the great mother's power to soothe, that saved his reason and enabled him to give continuity of purpose to his work.

Whatever may be the motive of long and determined devotion to labour, it is generally rewarded by a harvest of success. Arthur Desmond saw his work begin to prosper and its profit to teem upon him before he had realised that any other result was to be expected from his toil than the dulled state of memory which had enabled him to keep sane. All that he had touched seemed to turn to gold, and, as he saw it pour into his hands, he asked himself bitterly: "Of what use is this to me? What am I going to do with it?" He flung it into the earth again and forgot it, but when another year had passed it returned to him doubled and trebled. Again he buried it in his wider and wider-spreading meadows and fields, and again it found its way back to him with an increase that made it more burdensome than ever.

Master of a vast and fertile territory, he still lived in his log-house, content with that rude harbour for his own person, while his granaries and farm-buildings multiplied and extended. No comfort came to him with his success, no joy in his riches, nor hope for happiness in his future years. To his farm-servants he was a liberal and kindly employer, to those with whom he dealt in business, upright and fair, but no man grew intimate with him or called him friend.

At last an event occurred which made a change in Desmond's forlorn life. Returning one evening after a solitary day with his gun in the woods, he found two travellers at his door waiting to ask his hospitality for the night. They were father and daughter, had come from St. Paul, and were on their way far out into the Indian country. The man was a travelling merchant, who had dealings with the Indians, and the girl was his only child. Both had evidently seen better days, were refugees from more civilised lands, belonging to the large class whom folly, wrong, or misfortune reduce to beggary every day. The girl was beautiful, with that peculiar, delicate beauty which speaks eloquently of gentle blood. Arthur Desmond, seeing her standing at his door, with the setting sun burnishing her golden hair and lighting up her pale face, was struck by her loveliness, but only as he was struck daily by the grace of the flowers that sprang up through the grass on the prairies. Had the heart within him not been dead he might have fallen in love with her. As it was, he looked at her with interest, and his melancholy brow unbent as he led her into his home.

She was ill with weariness, quite unfit for the journey she had undertaken rather than remain behind her father in the city of St. Paul. Next morning she declared herself able to proceed; but the two men, looking at her, saw that if she did so it would probably be at the cost of her life. The father was deeply distressed and uncertain what course to pursue, but his host came to the rescue.

"Leave her here," he said, "and she will have time to rest and recruit her strength while you are away. Your journey accomplished, you can call for her as you return. The wife of one of my most trusty servants shall wait upon her, and she shall have every care so rude an establishment as mine can afford."

This seemed the only reasonable solution of the difficulty, and though the girl wept and clung to him, her father insisted on her accepting Desmond's hospitality. Promising to return soon, he mounted and travelled away across the prairie, looking back and waving his hand to her till he was out of sight. And then the girl crept trembling to her seat at Desmond's fireside.

The delicate courtesy with which her host treated his young guest proved that he had been born for other scenes than that of the wild prairie and the backwoods-man's hut; and as the girl gathered strength and was able to walk a mile, hoping to meet her father returning from his journey out West, and as week followed week and the father did not appear, Desmond forgot his own sorrows in devising means to occupy her mind and keep her from observing the unexpected and unaccountable length of his absence. It was long before the terrible likelihood dawned upon her that he had met his death among the Indians, and that she should see him no more. At last passing travellers from the Indian country brought certain news that he had been killed by some of the savages, whom he had been imprudent enough to offend.

After the first agony had exhausted itself, the desolate creature raised her head and proposed to set out with her broken heart for St. Paul, there to seek a livelihood for herself, but as little as a dove is fit to fight among hawks, so little able was she to carry out her gallant intention. So thought Arthur Desmond, looking on her stricken face and transparent hands; and yet he knew not what to advise. She could not stay with him, and there was no woman to whose care he could think of confiding her.

On the night before her proposed departure for St Paul, as she sat opposite to him at his fireside for the last time, with her slight hands folded in her lap and a look of patient determination on her child-like face, a strange trouble for her came down upon Desmond and a sense of remorse, as if he alone were driving her out into the dangers and miseries of a hard world from the safe shelter of his home. Violently agitated, he rose up and went into the woods, where he wandered all night, a prey to the most unhappy thoughts, beset by intolerable memories, torn with the struggle to cast off the claims of a cruel past, to free himself from the power of its dead hand, which, after so many years, still clutched murderously at any pale hope that might venture to spring up in his heart. Flinging himself on the earth, he sobbed in the solitude and darkness, not even a star to witness or a bird to overhear, nothing to intrude on the sacredness of a strong man's secret agony. At dawn he rose up with the marks of the conflict on his face, and went slowly back to his dwelling where at the door stood already the conveyance which was to take his visitor back to St. Paul.

"My dear," he said, taking her by the hand, "I cannot bear to see you go. There is one way by which you can stay with me, if you will. I am a careworn, broken man, and you are a young, fresh, and lovely girl, but we are both lonely and unfortunate. Can you make up your mind to marry me?"

The young wife bloomed across her husband's desolate life like a wind flower in the fissure of a rock; and though she could not bring him actual happiness, yet the sweetness of her nature and her tender adoration of him comforted his starved and frozen heart, and his gratitude for her love and faith in him amounted to passion. She knew little of his early life, and understanding that the subject was painful, did not press for further information. With a woman's instinct she had divined that some other woman had broken the heart of which the noble wreck was her own; but that any darker cloud than that cast by a cruelly disappointed love had ever rested on him, she did not live long enough to find out. After one happy year she bade good-bye to the forest shades, the sunny prairies, and her idolised husband—leaving an infant daughter in her place.

When Bawn, the child, was ten years old, Fate made another raid on Desmond's small store of hard-earned happiness. For his girl's sake he fell into one of those sad blunders which men in his position so often stumble upon. At a distance of some miles from his own possessions a family of French settlers had established themselves, and of the group was a middle-aged spinster of bustling and active turn, who soon showed a lively interest in Desmond and his motherless daughter. Looking on his far spreading fields and teeming granaries, the thrifty Jeanne quickly resolved to share that extraordinary prosperity which seemed so little appreciated by the melancholy Arthur. How she managed it is needless to relate, but in a very short time after she had made up her mind, she became stepmother to Desmond's little girl.

Desmond soon discovered that in his solicitude for his child he had been led into an irretrievable mistake. Jeanne was a masterful woman, and rather than fight with her, the man of hapless fortune was fain to let her have things her own way. The wooden home which had satisfied him and his girl was deserted, and a fine new dwelling-house was built. All the ways of life were changed for father and daughter. Servants were scolded and well looked after, abuses corrected, waste was put an end to, and peace for ever banished from the Desmond fireside. A governess was engaged for Bawn—not a day too soon, certainly—all the prairie maiden's pretty wild ways were condemned, and a good education was energetically administered to her.

In submitting to the new state of things Bawn was influenced by her all absorbing love for the father, whose sole consolation she knew herself to be. She was now a woman, emancipated from her stepmother's control, yet living on the most friendly terms with her father's wife. Within the big house Jeanne reigned paramount, and every one bowed to her will; but deep in the wild woods, lost in the lonely wilderness of the forest, father and daughter held their meetings and their councils, and were as happy as Desmond's recurrent fits of melancholy occasionally permitted them to be.

CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF A LIFE

"Bawn! Bawn!"

Mrs. Desmond was calling loudly in her deep contralto tones to her stepdaughter from the front door, shading her eyes with her hand from the strong sunlight that flooded the land—light that intensified the beauty of everything, suggesting corn, wine and oil, overspreading flowers, teeming fruits.

"Where can that girl have got to, and her father out of the way as well? I don't know what would have become of Arthur Desmond's goods if I had not taken them in hand! Shouldn't wonder if she was over in the log-house encouraging him as usual, in his whims."

Jeanne crossed the flower-laden sward towards the old wooden house, smothered in bloom, which still stood at an opening of the woods some distance from the new house with its gardens. Jeanne, though quick and energetic, was plump and portly, with a swarthy skin, keen black eyes, and intensely black hair. She was dressed in a calico wrapper of red and white stripes and a large Holland morning-apron with pockets, in which she jingled her keys, and looked neat, thrifty, active and aggressive.

"Coming, Mother Jeanne!" cried Bawn from within the log house, where she was busy arranging her father's books, weapons, and various belongings, and beautifying the place in a way of her own. Desmond had forbidden the old wooden home to be swept away, disputing on this one point the will of his wife; and he used it as a sort of den, his only substitute for a club.

"A pretty state of things!" panted Jeanne. "Here is a man from St. Paul about wheat, and nobody to speak to him but myself. I'm sure if I did not work myself to death I don't know what would become of us all."

"Is not the stewart to be had?"

"Oh! of course, if you leave it to servants. Give me the man who looks after his own business."

"Father labored long years, and now his hair is white," said Bawn, with a pathetic vibration in her voice. "I think we may sometimes manage without troubling him."

"Well, I'm sure it's not my own benification I trouble!" snapped Jeanne, who having all her life been accustomed to French on one side and English on the other, often unintentionally coined words of her own to suit her momentary convenience. "And pray, is it by your father's ordeal that you spend so much time in this old hutch?"

Bawn laughed. "Come, now, Mother Jeanne, look at these exquisite roses. Smell!"

"It's no kind of use talking to you, Bawn. Here is a question of so much for wheat, and—and there you are offering me roses to smell, as if nothing was needed in this world but a rose! but you are too old now for my tuition."

"The business is done by this time, I warrant," said Bawn, placing the despised roses in a glass on her father's reading-table, where amid a litter of his favourite books, stood the old wooden casket which he had fashioned and carved so many years ago. "And you know, Jeanne, even if sixpence a bushel less than possible is had for the wheat, we can well afford the loss—better, perhaps, than the dealer who buys it."

Mrs. Desmond drew back a step from her stepdaughter and eyed her with contempt.

"I do believe," she said, "that you are at heart a Communist, or a Vincent de Paul, or something of that kind. You don't know how to grasp your own and hold it tight when you have got it. You would let anyone be as rich as yourself. You seem to think whatever you have got more than you actually need must have been taken from somebody else, and that you are bound to restitute it."

"Jeanne, Jeanne! I can't help laughing. Fancy what you would do to me if you caught me at it! But seriously, dear, you know we are actually rolling in money."

"And if we are, how much of it is owing to my care? Not, I'm sure, that I want it for myself. I've no children to think of, and it is only for your father and you I need toil. From morning till night I wear the flesh off my bones ———"

Bawn bit her lip to hide a smile. A good deal of the said flesh still adhered to the framework of Mrs. Desmond's abundant person, but Jeanne could not have been happy without her chronic grievance of perpetual overwork.

After her stepmother had bounced away Bawn went on smilingly with her occupation, and, when it was finished, set out to meet her father on his return from the forest, where he had been wandering alone since morning. This had been one of Desmond's bad days, when the ghost of his past—a ghost that would not be laid—dogged his steps, voices none but himself could hear tormented his ears, and faces long unseen pursued him, gazing on him with eyes of hate or turning away from him in loathing. On such days all the old agony grew young again within him, a cruel mist rose all round him and cut him off from his actual world, blotting out even Bawn's comfortable countenance. His gun and dog were the only companions he tolerated at these moments, and, ranging the woods from morning till evening, he did battle in solitude with his foes.

Now, toiling homeward through the forest, he carried the marks of the conflict on his face and in his gait, in the dull pallor of his skin. the sunken dark eye, the fine-drawn lines of pain hardening a mouth naturally sweet the pinched look of his features. Yet even with this blight upon him he had a peculiar air of nobility all his own. The snow white hair waving over a forehead which was that of an idealist, and the dense darkness of his eyes and brows, would alone have given him distinction in a crowd.

Coming slowly through a long aisle of shade, he looked up and saw Bawn waiting for him in the full sunset light at the nearest opening.

"Thank heaven!" he sighed to himself, feeling like a man who, having toiled all night through stormy breakers, finds that he is suddenly in sight of shore.

"My darling, I almost took you for a goddess of the woods, what with that white gown, your May blossom face, and all this shining hair!"

"That comes of reading poetry and romanticising in the forest, Daddy dear," said the girl, giving him a loving hug. "I wonder is there a goddess of Matter of fact among their deityships? Look here!" And, linking her arm through his, she drew him forward.

A fire had been kindled on the ground, and a steaming gipsy kettle was slung above it. On a little stand near were cups and saucers and a dish of newly-baked cakes.

"Your favourite cakes, sir, and the tea is just made. Now sit down and give an account of yourself, you unsociable, rambling, unaccountable darling of an old Daddy!"

"Give me your tea first. Thank heaven for tea! No, I cannot tell you where I have been. So many miles away, my girl, that you never could follow me."

"Ah!" said Bawn quickly. "if you would only try me."

Desmond looked at her in surprise, and the hues of life that had stolen back to his face paled away again. It was the first time Bawn had ever hinted at a desire to intrude on his secret.

"No, no, do not mind me," she cried seeing the effect of her words. "I would rather break my heart than give you one extra pang."

"My little girl! my poor little girl!" said Desmond, startled at her passionate tones. "You break your heart! That would be the worst thing that Arthur Desmond, with all his ill-luck, was ever guilty of."

"My heart is pretty strong," said Bawn stoutly. "It could bear a good deal, if a good deal were laid on it. Emptiness is the one thing that could hurt it—like Mamsey's boiler, that cracked with heat because it was not kept properly filled."

Desmond rose and paced up and down for a few moments, a flush on his thin cheek and a strange excitement burning in his eyes. Bawn went up to him presently and put her arms round his neck.

"You shall not tell me anything if it distresses you," she whispered.

Desmond clasped her in his arms and looked fondly in her eyes.

"My only joy and comfort! there is much I would willingly confide to you, if I thought my confessions would not damp and blight the young glory of your life. You are still so young—"

"I am twenty," she said quickly: and I feel so old that I cannot believe I shall ever grow any older. Trust my ripe age, father—at least if it will help you, as I often think it might, to share your painful memories with another. As for damping me—why, I am not easily crushed. Jeanne says I am like an india-rubber ball: the harder you try to put me down the higher I spring up again."

"I have always intended you should know my whole story, Bawn—after my death. You know the wooden box that stands on my table?"

"Yes."

"It contains papers that will be yours when I am gone; letters belonging to my youth, a portrait which you will cherish, and a statement written out in my own hand—my history, jotted down from time to time on sleepless nights. If you strongly desire it you shall have that statement to-morrow, and after you have read it we will talk the matter over, if so be you do not shrink from or suspect your old dad."

"Father!" flinging herself into his arms. "Shrink from you! Suspect you of anything but what is noblest and best!

"Ah! Bawn, there were others who loved me, and yet cast me out."

"Fiends!" muttered Bawn, tightening her soft arms round his stooping neck.

"No, not fiends, dear. Staunch, true men, and a sweet, soft woman like yourself."

"Are they still alive?"

"I think so. I hope so; yet for my own sake I ought not to wish it, seeing that released spirits may, perhaps, know all truth."

"Is there no way of making it known to them before their release?"

"None. And if there were I would not seek it now."

"But I would."

"You?"

"Do you think," said Bawn, unclasping her arms from his neck and linking her hands behind her back, while she leaned forward and looked into his face—"do you think I could live in the world for the fifty years or so I may possibly stay in it, without finding out those people and making them ashamed of their conduct? If there be a lie against you living in the world, I will take it in my own hands and strangle it."

She laid her white, firm palms together as she spoke, and knotted her fingers as if she were in reality wringing the life out of a viper.

Desmond smiled his sweet, melancholy smile.

"Now, who could think there was so much passion in my smiling Bawn? My dear, you speak of an impossibility. The error went too deep; has strengthened its roots in the soil of time. There are lies, Bawn, that will walk up to the judgment-seat clothed like truth, and only at the crack of doom shall their faces be unveiled."

Bawn looked away into the depths of the twilight forest with an obstinate light of determination in her deep grey eyes.

"Daddy," she said presently, putting her hands on his tall shoulders and bringing her face close to his—"Daddy," kissing him, "what do they call the thing that you were accused of? Don't"—kissing him again—"be afraid to tell me. I can't wait till to-morrow."

"It was murder," said Desmond, with a blanching face.

"Oh the fools!" cried Bawn, holding her warm cheek firmly against his. "The fantastic idiots! To think of a man like this in connection with such a crime!"

"No, Bawn, none of them were fools."

"Then there was a villain among them," insisted Bawn.

"May be so, my dearest— may be so. But all that lies among the mysteries that will never now be solved."

"Why?"

"Because death is always sealing up the lips of truth."

"Are all the actors in your story dead?"

"I told you just now, my daughter, that I do not know. For long years I have not had the heart to make an effort to inquire. Very long ago I used to receive, from time to time, letters from one who promised to send me word if anything in my favour came to light. As his letters ceased, I believe him to be dead. In the course of thirty years death will have reaped a big harvest from every inhabited land of the earth. He will not have spared the spot where the tragedy of your father's life was enacted."

They walked up and down together, Bawn with her cheek against his shoulder and her hands clasped over his arm. The round, yellow moon rose above the darkening tips of the trees and cast a misty radiance over the distant prairie. Odours of cultured flowers mingled with the sweets of hay, the breath of cattle stole towards them at times, and the low, burnt out fires of the sun smouldered and died in the forest thickets.

"I know all this happened in Ireland, of course," said Bawn. "It was not in your own south, where you were born? Was it in those beautiful northern glens you have sometimes told me of?"

"It was there. On an evening as lovely as this, in the midst of scenery far more beautiful, more picturesque, in the flush of my youth—a youth full to the brim of happiness and hope—my bitter doom came down upon me. But ask me no more to-night, my darling. To-morrow everything shall be told."

TO BE CONTINUED

To get a wrong thought out of the mind, put in a noble one. To dispel darkness let in sunshine. To drive out bad temper, teach self-control. These are good old rules that many people never seem to reach or understand.

God planted us just where we grow, and blossom and fruit must be drawn, not from the meadow on the other side of the road, or from the mountain beyond the valley, but from the soil now about our roots, and the air and rain and sun above us playing on our leaves and branches.—Edward Berdoe.

CHRISTMAS ROSES

By the Author of "Paradyse Terrestre"

"I have been hearing the most wonderful stories about this house, and about Father Forester—and about you, too, Mary Florence," I remarked to the faithful servant on the occasion of my second visit to the little presbytery on the Yorkshire wolds which had once been called the Chalice Farm. Father Langdale was out for the day—I had ridden over from my friends' house some ten miles away without warning; but Mary Florence, good housekeeper and typical North-country servant as she was, had made me welcome, and had insisted on my sitting down to a big Yorkshire "tea;" of which the principal features were new-laid eggs, the sweet cured ham for which the country is famous, home-made bread and hot tea cakes of her own baking, country cream, and a big dish of fragrant late raspberries. Protest was useless. "I shall have to dine in less than three hours!" I cried, as Mary Florence begged me to take just one more cup of tea and some Yorkshire cake. "But you've got to get back first, miss, and it's a long way, and this is hungry air," replied Mary Florence as she filled up my cup.

Now we were sitting out in the porch at my request; the old servant knitting, and I drinking in once more the peaceful beauty of the blue and white garden, not yet touched by the breath of autumn, though it was mid-September, and the white roses were nearly over. Beneath the railing of the terrace which ran in front of the old house the thick trees which clothed the precipitous slope and jutting grey rocks of the crags were here and there lightly touched with orange and russet, rolling out of sight, a leafy avalanche, down to the hidden valley below A bracken-fringed rock blocked out all but the topmost curves of the winding path; one yellowing frond uplifted clear against the pale blue haze between the slender tree-trunks. Miles away to the south rose the smoke and lofty chimneys of a little factory-town, perched on the shoulder of the opposite wold. Far down below, in a hidden farm in the valley, a cock crew clear and shrill. It was a perfect afternoon in early autumn. Here and there on the distant moors the heather—a royal carpet—caught the westering rays of the sun, and blushed rosy-purple. Beyond the grey wall of the garden a long stretch of stony field flamed with the gorgeous yellow of ragwort—a sure sign of poor soil and bad farming, but too beautiful for me, at least, to criticise.

"What is this like in winter?" I asked suddenly.

Mary Florence lifted her pleasant brown eyes to mine, but the needles still clicked in her busy fingers. "Well, I'm not much of a one to judge," she said, smiling. "You see, I've lived here all my life, summer and winter. I can't see myself anywhere else. But I expect a Londoner would find it very dull." Mary Florence spoke pityingly, as of a race wanting in resource and appreciation.

"It depends a good deal on the 'Londoner,' doesn't it?" I asked, laughing. But Mary Florence was following out her own train of thought.

"You see," she said presently, "townsfolks would be 'fast' here for things they were used to. There are no shops; and if there were the roads are so bad you couldn't get to them half the time. Then we are often snowed up for days together. Not so much now," she went on reflectively. "as when I was young. I remember when I was a girl of fifteen the snow drifted six feet deep between this house and the church. It took four men to dig a pathway through it—Father Forester was one of them. For three Sundays nobody could get to Mass, because it froze, and the drifts didn't melt. Even the well froze, and hundreds of sheep died in the snow on the moors; and when the thaw came they found two of the shepherds, as well, who had been buried in the snow. It was the worst winter we ever had. We don't seem to get such deep snow now; but ten years ago—the year Father Forester died—it was very bad again."

"Tell me," I said; for that was the very subject on which I wanted to hear Mary Florence talk.

I had heard, as I had told her, more than one strange story of what had happened on that winter night of mystery on which the holy old priest had died; when the snow was so deep that it was impossible to bring him the last sacraments. And yet again another friend had shaken her head gently when I asked the truth of the matter, telling her what I had heard. "It seems so sad," I had said, "that after he had founded the mission on the moors, and built up the Church in this district altogether, that he should have died without the sacraments, at the end of that beautiful life. It must have been hard for him!" And my friend had smiled and shaken her head, but would say nothing except: Ask Mary Florence. She can tell you—if she will."

Therefore I had not been altogether disappointed when on arriving that afternoon I found Father Langdale out, and Mary Florence of necessity my hostess for an hour or two. She was too typical a Yorkshire woman to be expansive on the subject of herself—already I had learned that much—nor indeed was she a great talker at any time, but still—I hoped. Here was the time, and the place, and the very person I wanted. "Please tell me, Mary Florence," I coaxed.

She laid the gray sock she was knitting down on the folds of her stiffly starched snowy-white apron, and looked up at me with keen, dark, eyes. There was not a thread of silver in the neat bands of black hair which lay so smoothly beneath her picturesque frilled cap. I thought of the strange story of the "white witch" who was her great grandmother, to whom the farm had once belonged, and of the day that Father Forester, when a very young seminary priest, had found her crooning "Hail Mary" over a tiny sick baby—this very Mary Florence who sat beside me, in whom Father Forester used to say he had founded his mission. "I have heard so much about him—every one in the dales seems to know at least his name," I urged, "that I am longing to hear more from you, because you have lived here all your life, haven't you?"

"Fifty five years next Christmas," said Mary Florence gravely. "You know my father and mother sold this very place to Father Forester? It used to belong to my family in times gone by. Father Langdale told you that, I expect? Yes, well, after five years my father died, and my mother was left a widow, with me. They had both become Catholics—they had gone to live in Lancashire you know—and of course I had been baptized by Father Forester. My father had left a little money, and my mother wasn't poor, for there was the purchased money the priest had paid for this place—Chalice Farm—still untouched in the bank. But she wanted to come home. You know we moor people, we think there's no place like home! We love the country we were born in, and my mother longed for the hills and the crags and the smell of the heather, and the sandy paths through the bog—she has told me so a hundred times—and she hated the town to which they had moved. So she made up her bundle one day, and took me in her arms—she was a big, strong woman, not like me—and with a lift she got in a carrier's cart she made shift to walk the twenty miles across the hills, and she came and asked the priest if there was no work, house or field, she could do about the old place; and if there wasn't a cottage empty she would lodge somewhere near till there was.

"As it happened, the priest was in trouble about his housekeeper. He wanted a Catholic woman, and in the neighborhood there was no one suitable to be had. He had a good many converts already, but all the women were married, with houses and children of their own, and he had had to get one or two housekeepers from the south. But they said it was so dull and lonely they were afraid to stop, so he was 'fast.'" ("Fast" was a favorite expression of Mary Florence's, and as I soon learned, it is a provincialism for "in a difficult position"—only much more expressive!) "So when my mother came he was right down glad to see her; for she knew all the ways of the house, and how to milk and bake bread and cook. You know even now the baker's cart doesn't call within two miles of this place. We still have to make our own bread. The priest had been all alone for a week, and not liking to trouble any one, he had tried to shift for himself. Often have I heard my mother say there wasn't a crust of bread fit to eat in the house when we came, and she believed he had lived for the best part of a week on tea and boiled eggs."

"Then he had been 'fast,'" I remarked.

"Yes, indeed, the poor Father," said Mary Florence. "Well, my mother, she soon changed all that. She got his permission to send for her young sister, who had opened the door to Father Forester the first time he came—my Aunt Elizabeth, she was; and she looked after me, and helped my mother, and my mother looked after the house, and the cow, and cleaned the church—she was a hard working woman, and she would have cut off her right hand for the priest. And she trained me up to be the same. After a bit Father Forester started the school. There were only five or six children at first, and he did all the teaching himself. It was before the days of school boards, and all that rubbish" she continued with deep scorn. "Now the children learn what they call botany, and drawing, and some of them, mathematics—and what good does that do a man when he goes to work in a mill, or a woman who has to scrub floors and bake bread? What he taught was very different, and there was no teaching like his. I went to school as soon as he started it, and in a few years a Catholic mistress came from Blackbarn, for the parish was growing and so was the school, and it took all of one person's time. But he always taught catechism himself: and I know there isn't one of Father Forester's children who will ever forget his lessons."

"There was a long pause. "Then you never left the place?" I asked gently.

"Never. I've not slept a night out of this house since I was five years old, and I shall be sixty-one next July. My mother died when I was thirty. My Aunt Elizabeth had married long before — she lives down there in the valley still, but she is an old woman now—older than I by twelve years. And when mother died I took her place as well as I could. I had a girl to help me, and there was always a man ready to come in and do any heavy work, like sawing wood, or carrying water in from the spring. I wasn't so strong as my mother, and Father Forester never allowed me to do that.

"People talk about saints very easily," said Mary Florence. "I mean by that, I've heard say—yes, and seen it in printed books, too—'so and so is a real saint.' Or 'it is like living with a saint.' I don't hold with such talk, myself. But though saints