

THE WILD BIRDS OF KILLEEVY

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND
(LADY GILBERT)

CHAPTER V—CONTINUED

The holiday found Kevin and Fan on their way to the island. Fan danced over the hills, and sang her wild songs, and chased the sea-birds till she was tired; and then she was very glad to light a fire and roast the potatoes which they had brought in the boat for their refreshment. No feast was ever sweeter than this "dinner of herbs," which the happy creatures shared between them.

"Kevin, you must tell me a story," said Fan.
"Then you must sing first, and I will listen; and I will tell you whatever story you sing tells me."
"I am going to sing the song of the sea," said Fan joyously, when they had perched themselves on a rock from which they could behold the sun beginning to set rapidly towards the rim of the wide, lone Atlantic, and the long line of the mountains on the coast catching the fire of heaven upon their faces.

She began a winding, fitful picture-song with words, in which her clear ringing voice mimicked all the different sounds of the sea, from the long, slow rise and fall of the waves that broke now at their feet stained red as wine by the sunset, to the hurrying and confusion of the billows in a storm. As she sang, the colour rose in Kevin's cheek and his eyes knitted, and the child herself was carried away by the weird power of her own music, rising and waving her little brown arms in the tempest, and sinking down and rocking her body backward and forward dreamily as the waves subsided into peace again.

When she had finished, Kevin, who had covered his face with his hat, removed it, and gazed at her with adoration in his eyes. Then he took her two slender sun-burnt hands into his own large one and kissed them reverently.

"You liked it?" said the child, eagerly. "Oh, then, quick with your story!"

But before Kevin could reply, a figure appeared which took them both by surprise. A large dark, singular-looking woman was standing before them—a real gipsy of the more respectable class. Her brilliant black eyes and eastern-tinted complexion were enhanced by the varied and glowing colours of her dress, which was so clean and well-arranged as to be vividly picturesque rather than gaudy. Elderly and portly as she appeared, yet there was something brisk and elastic about the whole expression of her figure, and her face was strangely handsome in its setting of scarlet and amber and white.

In most country places gipsies are not an uncommon sight, but in remote Killeevy they were unknown. Strangers of any kind were seldom seen, and the apparition of this foreign-looking creature on their lonely island struck out two simple friends with a surprise which left them breathless. Both sprang to their feet, and Fan slid her little hand into Kevin's.

"My pretty dear," said the woman, with a sort of contralto laugh, which was not unmelodious, "you are not going to be frightened of the gipsy. I have been listening to your singing. When I came over to see this nice little island I did not expect to find a bird among the rocks with so sweet a pipe."

"You startled us," said Kevin, smiling; "for we do not see many strangers. No one comes to this island but our boat," said the gipsy, nodding her handsome head, "and I thought I should startle somebody, for we never have been in this country before. But we are friendly people, and nobody need fear us. When you return in your boat you must come and see the gipsies, my little dear."

"I do not know your house," said Fan, shyly, gazing with fascinated eyes upon the stranger.
"My house!" laughed the gipsy. "No one ever knew it, my pretty. Gipsies have no houses; but they live under the hedges, and in the pleasant green fields. Look yonder, where some white things are shining in the sun, on the slope of the hill, just under the mountains! Those are our tents where we are resting from a journey."

Kevin and Fancha looked towards home, following the gipsy's finger with their eyes, and saw tents gleaming on the hillside, which had not been there in the morning.

"We have music in there," said the stranger, "and dancing and singing, and all sorts of games. People come to see our show and pay us money, but when you come, my little singer, you need not bring anything but your own pretty face."

Music, and singing, and games! Fancha became interested and forgot her shyness. "Oh, thank you!" she said, gladly. "I will be sure to go to see you."

"We are greatly obliged to you," said Kevin, more slowly.
"Oh, I did not promise to refuse your money, young man," said the gipsy, laughing. "Be sure to fill your pockets when you come to our tent."

Kevin blushed. "I did not mean—" he began, proudly, but the stranger nodded her head at him and moved away. They saw her

descend the rocks, where she was met by a man. They entered the boat and put off from the island.

This trifling incident was an event of importance to our inexperienced pair. Neither could forget the stranger, but sat silently watching the retreating boat.

"Kevin," said Fancha, "what are gipsies?"
"People that wander about," said Kevin. "Shawn Rua told me of them."

"You will bring me to see them, Kevin?"
"Yes, but you must hold tight by my hand. They are not always good people, I fancy."

"Oh, she spoke so kindly, I am sure she must be good."

"Are you wishing to come home, Fancha?"

"Home, without your story?"

"Ah, well," said Kevin, "I thought you had forgotten the story." And his slight jealousy of the gipsy melted away. "Indeed, I have almost forgotten it myself."

"But you must try to remember it."

Kevin covered his eyes for a few minutes, and listened to the long roll of the waves breaking on the beach. Fan sat patiently watching the shifting of the crimson clouds until he spoke.

"Once upon a time there was—"
"A brave prince and a lovely princess," said Fan. "That makes such a nice beginning."

"Very well! And the brave prince loved the beautiful princess so well that he became braver every day, and all men were afraid of him in the wars."

"Does loving people do that?" asked Fan.

"Yes," said Kevin, "it can do everything wonderful. It brings out all the good that is in people."

"Go on."

"It was his love that made the world beautiful to him; his heart grew larger every day, and great thoughts poured into his mind. The prince used to think sometimes that the princess had his soul in her hands."

"How could that be? God gives every one a soul of his own."

"I don't know how it could be," said Kevin, wistfully, "but I know the prince felt that it was only by living near his beloved princess and doing everything good to please her he could hope to win in the end the soul she had in keeping for him. When he had won his soul he thought he would do some noble work in the world."

"Well," said Fan, "do make haste, I hope she kept it for him well."

"She did," said Kevin; "but something happened."

"What?"

"The brave prince had an enemy."

"Oh," said Fan, drawing a long breath.

"An enemy who had been overthrown by him in the battle. And this enemy was longing to destroy him. And he thought and thought for a long, long time. At first he intended to kill him."

"Oh, what did he do?"

"He thought of the most terrible thing he could do would be to carry off the princess; and he put her in a ship, and sailed with her away into far distant seas. They arrived at a lighthouse one calm, moonlight night—a tall, lonely lighthouse on a rock in the middle of the ocean. He killed the lighthouse man and put out the light and imprisoned the princess in the lonely tower in the darkness. Then he sailed away and left her."

"Oh, h-h-h!" sighed Fan.

"When the prince found she was gone he became so unhappy that he could scarcely bear his life. However, he thought he must surely be able to find her somewhere in the world; and he set out to search for her all the wide world over. He went from land to land, and from city to city, inquiring if any one had seen his beloved princess; but no one could tell him anything about her. And years passed on and still he could not find her. His heart was always breaking, and his hair grew grey, and still he kept searching and searching. But he never became wicked and fierce, as his enemy thought he would become. If he had left off searching he would have grown wicked and fierce, but he kept on seeking and hoping, and became greater and better as the years rolled away."

"And what was the poor princess doing all that long time in the dark?" asked Fancha, anxiously.

"She was also very unhappy, but she tried to keep hoping that her prince would come for her. She was dreadfully lonely, and only for the little white sails she sometimes saw in the distance, and for the moon and stars at night, I think she would have gone mad from loneliness. On stormy nights, when the waves dashed against the lighthouse windows, it was terrible, and vessels were often wrecked upon the cruel rock; for the poor princess had no light to put in the light-chamber, and she had to sit in the dark listening to the cries of the people who were drowning."

"What did she have to eat all that long time?" asked Fancha.

"Let me see!" said Kevin, rather startled and puzzled. "I never thought of that. Well, I believe there was a good store of provisions left by the poor lighthouse man who was murdered; and then the princess had a very small appetite, you see, and she did not eat very much at a time."

"No, poor thing!" said Fancha, who was accustomed to be healthy hungry.

"And so the years kept rolling on, till at last one night there was a violent hurricane at sea, and the prince's ship was on its way from one country to another seeking as usual for the princess. The vessel was wrecked, dashed to pieces against the rock, and the body of the prince was washed into the princess's arms as she leaned from the lighthouse window. A sudden flash of lightning showed her that it was her prince."

"Yes," said Fan, eagerly, "and what did she do then?"

"She tried to restore him," said Kevin, "but she could not do it, for he was dead. She was herself so shocked to kill her, and she lay down beside him and died. Their souls floated away above the storm together, and they are now living a splendid life far beyond the ocean and the stars and the moon."

Fancha heaved a deep sigh.

"Are you sure that was the end of it?" she said. "I like that, you know, about their souls afterwards; but in the meantime, Kevin, I'd like to have a different kind of ending. I am sure that he was not dead, but that the princess and he got away on a raft and came home to their kingdom. And the enemy was also in the vessel that was wrecked, and was also washed into the lighthouse; only the raft went away without him, and he was left in the lighthouse instead of the princess."

"Kevin laughed. 'Have it as you like,' he said; 'but you oughtn't to have sung of how they died in the storm.'"

"I didn't," said Fan, reproachfully and half frightened. "You put things into my songs that I never thought of."

Kevin took her little brown hand and spread it out on his own broad palm.

"You are my princess, Fan," he said, "and you pour everything that is beautiful and good into my mind. I often feel that you have my soul in your little hands."

"So you?" asked Fan, looking straight into his eyes with her clear gaze. "But I don't feel a bit like a princess. Do you feel like a prince?"

"No," said the youth, laughing, "but I would like to do something great in the world all the same," he added dreamily.

"So you do, and so you will," said Fancha stoutly. "I wonder what it will be. But, Kevin, you won't let any one shut me up in the lighthouse where you never will find me till you are dead."

"God forbid!" said Kevin, heartily. "And at this moment the last burning rim of the sun having quenched itself in the ocean, the two friends agreed that it was time to return to their boat, whence they could see the faint smoke from the cabins on the mountain warning all wanderers that supper-time was near."

CHAPTER VI

THE GIPSIES

The gipsies' tents gleamed in the twilight as our pair of friends climbed the mountain path, glancing back towards the grassy hollow where the wanderers were encamped. The moon rose large and clear over the heights of Killeevy and, out of the shadows beneath, the open-air fire that the gipsies had kindled flared and flickered as dark figures gathered round the flames and formed themselves into a shadowy group. Kevin and Fan were longer than usual on the upward path, so often had they to stop to take yet another peep at the novel picture below.

Arrived at home, they found others besides themselves excited about the strangers. The tents had been perceived from the mountain hamlet, and the glare of the fire had caught many an eye. Brown-legged scouts had been sent flying to ascertain whether this wayside encampment was one of fairies or men, and had returned with eyes widened by wonder. They had peered into the tents and seen enchanting visions. But the people were human, after all; for they were eating their supper of meat out of a pot.

An hour later a thrill passed through the entire population of the mountain. A fountain of music suddenly sprang from that grassy hollow under their feet, and rose higher and higher, filling their ravished ears and making their susceptible hearts throb with ecstasy. Louder, grander, more majestic the melodious sounds swept on till the people held their breath, and tears started in eyes that gazed at each other with wondering questions. The mountains, who worshipped their pipers, their fiddlers, and their occasional speechless harper, were struck sudden volume of melody which made the rocks and valleys ring.

"Good heavens! what can it be?" said Kevin; and the old lame piper who had hobbled out of his cabin, leaving his supper of potatoes untasted, bent down his head and wept outright.

It was the majesty of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus that thus overcame the spirits of a music-loving people; and the instrument which flooded it far and wide upon the night was a large and powerful organ, which, played without hands, was a triumph of mechanical skill.

But the mountaineers had no notion of what this music could be. It might be the voice of a God calling to their souls across the valley of

death. They listened spell-bound, with faces flushed or pale while the mysterious sound floated upwards with the fragrance of the broom and the sea.

Hardly had the music ceased when a hundred pairs of feet were hurrying down the mountain. These strangers, with their music, must be visited at once, lest they should take flight on the instant and be heard of no more.

Arrived at the spot, the bewitched mountaineers found a very ordinary gipsy encampment, with tents containing gaudy pictures, various games, and the wonderful organ; with poles from which swings were hanging, targets for shooting at, and little booths filled with delf and mock jewellery. The young men and women from the mountain poured into the tents, the organ which had enchanted them gave forth its music once more, no longer filling them with sacred strains, but setting their light feet dancing to the gayest of jigs. The tents would not hold the dancers, who overflowed upon the sward; a gipsy with a banjo and another with a tambourine emphasized the time of the dances and drove the dancers wild with their quaint cries and snatches of foreign song. In the intervals of the dance fortunes were told, young men tried their hands at shooting, and thoughtless heads were made giddy in the swings. A sad-looking gipsy woman sang a song to a guitar, but broke down at the second verse and retreated, weeping, into the tent.

"She lost her little girl a while ago," muttered one of the gipsies, looking after her; "a fine little girl that used to sing for us. And she is going on like that ever since."

Among the crowd was Fan clinging to Kevin's hand, her eyes glittering with wonder and excitement at the scene. She had been undressed and just stepping into bed when the astonishing music broke forth upon the night. Her cries of delight had brought Kevin's mother to her side.

"Oh," she cried, "what is it? Is it coming from heaven?"

"I don't think a gipsy's tent is just like heaven," said the mother, grimly. "If all my good man says is true."

"The gipsy," echoed Fan. "Is it she who is making the music? And oh, mother, she asked me to go to see her."

"So you may tomorrow, perhaps. You don't suppose you can go in your night-gown—and after your prayers!"

"Oh, I can put on my things; it is not so late. And you know it will be all the better if I have to say my prayers again."

The mother remonstrated, and Fan began to cry.

"Oh, listen to it, listen to it! as if all the strongest angels were singing and shouting together!"

The mother lectured, but the child's passionate tears prevailed. Trembling with excitement and radiant with joy, she tripped down the mountain in the moonlight by Kevin's side, and she and he together, looking at the pictures, standing before the organ to hear it play, listening to the strange singing, and even touching the banjo with their fingers.

"Oh, I'd like to have a banjo of my own, Kevin," cried Fan. "I could hold it on my knees and sing to it as they do."

"Perhaps we may get one some day," said Kevin.

Will the little darling have her forty gipsy who had startled them on the island. Fan thrust out an eager hand. She would drink this cup of delight to the dregs. She would see all that was to be seen, and do all that was to be done.

"A bonny fortune!" said the gipsy, smiling broadly, as she peered into the child's little palm. "You will travel far from here, and grow up a great lady."

Fan stared and flushed. "That is not pretty at all," she said, "I do not want to go from here."

"'Tis all nonsense, Fancha," said Kevin. And he glanced at the gipsy with no friendly eye.

"Let me tell you yours, young man," said the gipsy, as if in answer to his look. "Bah, it is not so good. You will lose that which you love best in the world, and be a wanderer seeking for it in vain."

"Thank you," said Kevin, quietly, feeling that the woman had only flattered herself for his audacity in calling her predictions nonsense.

Then Fan got a ride on the swing, and they visited the little booths, where Kevin expended threepence (a large sum on Killeevy mountain) in the purchase of a white delf mug adorned with the name of Fan in bright green on the one side, and a "rose-tree in full bearing" on the other.

Not till she had exhausted every delight that the gipsies offered her would the excited little maiden consent to go home.

There was much gossiping among the old women in the cabins that night. Sibbie, Fan's old grand-aunt, who had dowered her with her voice, sat in the doorway with Kevin's mother, and knitting needles and tongue clicked and clacked as they saw the moonlight shining on the tents below, and heard the music echoing along the hill-side.

"The rogues!" crooned Sibbie. "It's myself that knows the sort of them. When I was a girl at service near Dublin, they told me my fortune, and they told it wrong. They said I was to marry a bonny

man with a tawny beard, and I paid them a silver sixpence for the news. But so-a man ever I married, and I owe them the grudge yet."

"Maybe ye were as well without one, Sibbie," said the housewife, with the sage air of one who had a right to know. But this utterance was due rather to her sympathy with the homeless Sibbie than to disloyalty to Connor Mor, who was the easiest of husbands.

"An' while I was gapin' at their stories," continued Sibbie, "they stole the silver spoons behind my back."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE NINE FRIDAYS

By Agnes R. McDonough in Rosary Magazine

Margretta Healey remained after school. Sister Agnes Louise wondered what the child wanted, for she never stayed after the children were dismissed.

"Sister, may I receive Communion on Friday? I want to make the nine Fridays that you explained to us."

"Well, dear, don't you remember that the children receive on Saturday instead of on Friday? Only the girls and boys of the seventh and eighth grades receive on Friday."

The little one's face fell, and the downcast expression betrayed her disappointment. Sister continued:

"Probably Father Fitzgerald will let you go just this once, for next year you will be in the seventh grade and then the privilege will be yours. Do you want me to ask him, Margretta?"

"Oh, yes, Sister. I want something very much. It is not for myself and I think the Sacred Heart will grant it if I make the nine Fridays."

The permission was asked and obtained, and on the following Friday the only one below the seventh grade to receive Our Lord was this little anxious tot who had asked the favor so earnestly. Her attendance in school was rather irregular after that, and Sister Agnes Louise was somewhat concerned about her promotion. She sent several messages to the mother asking her to see that the child came more regularly at least this last month of school, but frequent absences forced her to tell the child that there was danger of her not being promoted.

The last day of school arrived. Mrs. Healey regarded her little girl rather anxiously.

"Of course, if you insist on going to school, I shall let you go, but I feel that you ought to stay home this morning and take some medicine."

"Mother, today is promotion day, and I want to know just where I am to sit in the next room. If I am the only one who does not come, the children will think I have not been promoted. Anyhow, Sister told us all to be there and you know she did not like me to be away from school as much as I was all year. Please let me go, mother."

Mrs. Healey yielded at last to the little one's entreaties, but insisted on accompanying her to school. The session had commenced some few minutes before their arrival, and the child clutched her mother's hand tightly.

"I'm afraid we're late, mother. Hurry."

Sister Agnes Louise answered the knock.

"Oh, good morning, Mrs. Healey. I feared Margretta would not come today."

"Really, she should not have come, but I was unable to dissuade her." Aside the mother whispered: "Sister, she was quite ill all night, and I dared not excite her by refusing to let her come for promotions."

"I wish you had not allowed her to stay at home so often this year. She will go to the next grade, but she is not so prepared as her classmates. Try to consider her interests as well as her health next term."

The mother who had been remiss in her duty in this regard, promised to amend, and said she would wait outside till dismissed. Sister Agnes Louise kept her eye on the flushed countenance of the eager child, and almost decided to send her home, but just then the children were called to the hall, the signal for promotion tactics in grade seven.

Half an hour later, Sister sent a child to the hall to tell Margretta to come to her as she thought it wiser to dismiss her before the regular time. The little one was not there and another student gave the information that she had left the hall, and her mother had taken her off in the car.

That night at eight o'clock the doorbell of the convent clanged. The portress brought the message that Mr. Healey wanted Sister Agnes Louise. Sister went to the parlor to find there the most dejected looking mortal she had ever seen. The man rose as she entered.

"My wife sent me to tell you that our little girl is in the hospital. She was taken violently ill this afternoon, and our physician ordered her to be taken away immediately. I am afraid there is no hope of her recovery."

The man sobbed like a child, as he told of the terrible pain the girl suffered, and of the verdict of the doctor.

"I do not feel that this is so serious as you think, Mr. Healey. You have faith, and you know what power there is in prayer. Wait just a moment till I get you a

Sacred Heart badge. You go right to the hospital and pin it on Margretta."

Sister hurried from the room and soon returned carrying the little emblem. She told of many startling miracles that had been worked through devotion to the Sacred Heart, especially during the year which marked the canonization of the Saint who had done so much to make that Heart loved by men.

The man listened, and then said: "Sister, they will not let me into the hospital now. It is after visiting hours."

"You tell the Sister at the desk that Margretta's teacher sent you to put this badge on her, and I think she will not refuse you entrance."

"Thank you. I shall go," said Mr. Healey as he rose. "You have given me hope."

Off he went on his mission, and Sister returned to the room where were assembled the other members of the community. She asked them for prayers for the child, and lit a candle before the shrine of the Sacred Heart.

Next morning early the mother and the father of the sick child came to report on her condition.

"We have no hope, Sister," said the mother. "The doctors operated last night, even before my husband reached the hospital. He stayed till Margretta regained consciousness, and pinned the badge on her. Jim, tell Sister what she said."

"I hardly knew that she recognized me, but after I had put the badge on, she opened her eyes and whispered, 'This will get me through, daddy.' Then she lapsed off into apparent oblivion. I felt better when she smiled, but the doctors have told us not to hope, for it is quite impossible that she recover."

Sister looked from the mother to the sorrow-stricken man.

"Possibly then God will ask this sacrifice from you. Can you not try to give her up cheerfully? Or perhaps He is asking something else of you. Is there any good deed that you have left undone? Is there any sacrifice you can now make to ask His intervention in this serious circumstance?"

Mr. Healey glanced quickly at his wife, as if to discover her thoughts. She returned his glance, and shook her head. Then as if ridding himself of an immense worry, he answered thickly:

"Sister, I feel that God is treating me as I deserve, and I am not worthy to ask a favor of Him. When I have neglected for sixteen years, I am a convert, and I really tried to be a good Catholic for a time, but then I fell into careless ways and I have not attended Mass or the Sacraments for over sixteen years. When you spoke so directly I thought my wife had been revealing secrets, but now I see that everything points in one direction. I alone am to blame, and if God does take my little one, she is an expiatory offering."

Quietly Sister Agnes Louise led the sad couple to the chapel. There she asked Mr. Healey to promise God that he would atone for his carelessness by a return to the faith. Later, the two, glad in the midst of their grief, hastened to the hospital, there to await the death of Margretta.

All day the child lay quivering with pain; the doctor came in to see her several times, but gave no favorable reports to the anxious ones. Toward evening, she seemed worse, and they began prayers for the dying. Doctor Vernon warned them not to disturb her, and again declared that she would live but a few hours at most. At this juncture, the Divine Physician showed His power. The last struggle left the child unable to move; there she lay as if already her frail body had suffered its last agony. The heart beat faintly, and the spectators held their breath for fear of disturbing her quiet. An hour passed, two, and yet she lived. Doctor Vernon returned at six o'clock that night, and learned with amazement that his little patient had not succumbed.

"Living yet? Ah! I shall go up instantly."

He drew near the bed, and just then the eyelids flickered, and the child tried to say something. No one understood her, however. The physician shook his head as if he had been baffled, and he smiled down at the weary parents.

"I do not want to raise your hopes, but there seems to be the faintest hope that this little one is fighting her way through."

Mr. Healey bowed his head, and he and his wife left to go to the chapel, again to implore God to spare their child if such should be His will.

Slowly from that moment on, Margretta regained her strength. About the first words she uttered were:

"Daddy, when you pinned that badge on me I felt that the Sacred Heart would not let me break my nine Fridays. I knew I would get better and I longed to be able to tell you and mother not to worry. Now, daddy, can you guess why I was anxious to make the Fridays?"

The father shook his head.

"Well, Sister told us that the Sacred Heart so appreciates devotion that Our Lord will grant any favor to one making the Nine Fridays. I knew, daddy, that you should go to Church with us and that you had been a Catholic. One of my schoolmates taunted me with this fact, and though mother had never told me, I sensed that it was

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