

# MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

By Gene Stratton-Porter

(Continued From Yesterday.)

"And I believed you were the hermit singing!" she said.

"But you fooled the bird," said the boy. "Close here it answered you."

"And near me it called you," said Mrs. Minturn. "Your notes were quite as perfect."

Malcolm straightened and seemed reassured.

"Why mother?" he exclaimed. "When did you study bird music? Have you just come back?"

"I've been away only two weeks, Malcolm," she answered, "and if it hadn't been for learning the bird notes, I'd have returned sooner."

"But where have you been?" cried the boy.

"At home. I returned my suite!" she answered.

"But mother's all torn up, and pounding and sick people, and you hate pounding and sick people," he reminded her.

"There wasn't so very much noise, Malcolm," she said, "and I've changed about sickness. You have to suffer yourself to do that. Once you learn how dreadful pain is, you feel only pity for those who endure it. Every night when the nurses are resting, I change so no one knows me, and slip into the rooms of the suffering little children who can't sleep, and try to comfort them."

"Mother, who takes care of you?" he questioned.

"A very sensible girl named Susan," she answered.

"The boy went a step closer.

"Mother, have you changed about anything besides sickness?" he asked.

"Yes, Malcolm," said his mother. "I've changed about every single thing in all this world that I ever said or did, or loved, when you knew me."

"You have?" he cried in amazement.

"Would you were that dress and come to the woods with us now, and do some of the things we like?"

"I'd rather come here with you and sing these bird notes than anything else I ever did," she answered.

Malcolm advanced another long step.

"Mother, is Susan a pounding, beating person like Lucette?" he asked anxiously.

"No," she said softly. "Susan likes children. When she's not busy for me, she goes into the music room and plays games, and sings songs to little sick people."

"Because you know," said Malcolm. "James and I talk it over when we are alone, we never let father hear because he loved Elizabeth so, and he's so fine—mother you were mistaken about father not being a gentleman, not even Mr. Dovesky is a finer gentleman than father—and father loved her so; but mother, James and I said, 'We believe if it had been the other way, it would have made us sick, too, and we're so ashamed of what we did; if we had another chance, we'd be as good to a little sister as father is to us. Mother, we wish we had her back so we could try again.'"

Nelle Minturn shut her eyes and swayed on her feet, but presently she spoke in a harsh, breathless whisper, yet it carried, even to the ears of the listening man.

"Yes, Malcolm, I'd give my life, oh so gladly if I could bring her back and try over—"

"You wouldn't have any person like Lucette around, would you mother?" he questioned.

"Not ever again, Malcolm," she answered. "I'd have Little Sister back if it were possible, but that can't ever be, because when we lose people as Elizabeth went, they never come back; but I'll offer my life to come as near replacing her as possible, and everywhere I've neglected you, and James, and father, I'll try to make up there is in me, if any of you love me, or want me in the least, or will give me an opportunity to try."

"Mother, would you come where you

are? Would you live as we do?" marveled the boy.

"Gladly," she answered. "It's about the only way I could live now. I've given away so much of the money."

"Then I'll ask father!" cried the boy. "Why I forgot! Father is right back here." Father! Father! Father! came quick! Father it wasn't the hermit bird at all, it was mother! And oh joy, father, joy! She's just changed and changed, till she's most as changed as we are! She'll come back, father, and she'll go to the woods with us, oh she will! Father, you're glade, aren't you?"

When Nelle Minturn saw her husband coming across the meadow, his arms outstretched, his face paint-rouged, she came swiftly forward, and as she reached Malcolm, Mr. Minturn caught both of them in his arms, crying: "My sweetest! My beautiful sweetest, give me another chance, and this time I'll be the head of my family in deed and in truth, and I'll make life go right for all of us."

### CHAPTER XIX.

#### Establishing Protectors.

"I'm sorry now," said Mickey. "First time I ever been late. I was helping Peter; we were so busy that the first thing I knew I heard the hum of her gliding past the clover field, so I was left. I know how hard you're working. It won't happen again."

Mickey studied his friend closely. He decided the time had come to watch. Douglas Bruce was pale and restless, he spent long periods in frowning thought. He aroused from one of these and asked: "What were you and Peter doing that was so very absorbing?"

"Well about the most interesting thing that ever happened," said Mickey. "You see Douglas, I'm one of the grandest men who ever lived; he's so fine and doing so many big things, in a way he kind of fell behind in the little ones."

"I've heard of men doing that before," commented Douglas. "Can't you tell me a new one?"

"Sure!" said Mickey. "You know the place and how good it seems on the outside—well it didn't look so good inside, in the part that counted most. You've noticed the big barns, sheds and outbuildings, all the modern conveniences for a man, from an electric lantern to a stump puller; everything I'm telling you—and for the nice lady, isn't her work table faced a wall covered with brown oil cloth, and frying pans heavy enough to sprain Willard, a wood fire to boil clothes and bake bread, in this hot weather, the room so low and dark, no ice box, with acres of ice close every winter, no water inside, no furnace, and carrying wash tubs to the kitchen for bathing as well as washing, as good—"

"I certainly do," agreed Douglas, "and yet she was a neat, nice-looking little woman."

"Sure!" said Mickey. "If she had to set up housekeeping in Sunniss Alley in one day you could tell her place from anybody else's. Sure, she's a nice lady! But she has troubles of her own. I guess everybody has."

"Yes, I think they have," assented Douglas. "I could muster a few right now, myself."

"Yes!" cried Mickey. "That's bad. Let's drop this and cut them out."

"Presently," said Douglas. "My head is so tired it will do me good to be questioned."

"Not ever again, Malcolm," she answered. "I'd have Little Sister back if it were possible, but that can't ever be, because when we lose people as Elizabeth went, they never come back; but I'll offer my life to come as near replacing her as possible, and everywhere I've neglected you, and James, and father, I'll try to make up there is in me, if any of you love me, or want me in the least, or will give me an opportunity to try."

"Mother, would you come where you

think about something else a few minutes. You were saying Mrs. Harding had trouble; what is it?"

Mickey returned to his subject with a chuckle.

"She was 'bout ready to tackle them nervous prostrations so popular with the swell dames," he explained, "because every morning for 15 years she'd faced the brown oilcloth and pots and pans, while she'd been wild to watch sunup from under a particular old apple tree; when she might have seen it every morning if Peter had been on his job enough to saw a window in the right place. Get that?"

"Yes, I get it," conceded Douglas. "Go on."

"Well, I began her work so she started right away, and before she got back in comes Peter. When he tackled Ma Harding and her sunup, and then he thought out a way to furnish entertainment and all the modern comforts right there at home."

"It's a wonder he didn't break your neck."

"Well," said Mickey judiciously, "as I size Peter up he'd fight an awful fight if he was fighting, but he ain't much on starting a fight. I worked the separator steady, and by and by when I summed up the argument, as a friend of mine says, I guess that cream separator didn't look any bigger to Peter, set beside a full house and two or three sheds for the stuff he'd brought to make his work easier, than it did to me."

"I'll wager it didn't," laughed Mickey.

"No, it didn't," cried Mickey earnestly. "And when he stood over it while that big iron stove made his kitchen, where his wife lived most of her day, seem 'bout as hot as my room where he was raving over Lily a friend of mine says, I guess that brown oilcloth and the old iron skillet for a few minutes of silent thought, he bolted at about two."

"What did he do?" asked Douglas.

"Why we planned to send her on a visit," said Mickey, "and cut that window, and move in the pump, and invest in one of those country gas plants, run on a big tank of gasoline away outside where it's all safe, and a breadmixer, and a dishwasher, and some lighter cooking things; but we got interested."

"How Mickey?" interestingly inquired Douglas.

"Remember I told you about Junior coming in to hunt work because he was tired of the country, and how it turned out?" said Mickey.

"Yes I recall perfectly," answered Douglas.

"There's a good one on me about that I haven't told you yet but I will," said Mickey. "Well when son came home, wrapped in a comfort,

there was a ripping up on the part of Peter. He just hurled back the enemy, and who do you think he hit the hardest?"

"I haven't an idea," said Douglas. "In your shoes, I wouldn't a-hand one either," said Mickey. "Well, he didn't go for Junior, or his Ma, or me. Peter stood Mister Peter Harding out before us, and then didn't leave him a leg to stand on. He proved conclusively he'd used every spare moment he'd had since Junior was in short clothes, carrying him to Multipolis to amuse him, and feed him treats, and show him shows; so he was to blame if Junior developed a big, summing appetite for such things. How does the argument strike you?"

"Sound!" cried Douglas. "Perfectly sound! It's precisely what the land owners are doing every day of their lives and then wailing because the cities take their children. I've had that studied out for a year past."

"Well Peter figured it right there for us in detail," said Mickey. "Then he tackled Ma Harding and her sunup, and then he thought out a way to furnish entertainment and all the modern comforts right there at home."

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"Of course it will," agreed Douglas. "Once the country folk get the idea it will go like a landslide. So that's what made you late?"

"Well connected with that," explained Mickey. "Peter didn't do a thing but figure up the price he'd paid for every laborer he ever bought for himself, and he came out a little over \$6,000. He said he would not have wanted Ma in a hardware store selecting his implements, so he guess he wouldn't choose hers, she just drew a check for what he said was her due, with interest, and put it in on the north side of Multipolis to cut loose and spend it exactly as she pleased."

"What did she do?" marveled Douglas.

"Well she was tickled silly, but she didn't lose her head; she began investigating what had been put on the market to meet her requirements. At present we are living on the threshold floor mostly, and the whole house is packed up when it is unpacked, there'll be a bathroom on the second floor, and a lavatory on the first. There'll be a furnace in one room of the basement, and a coal bin big enough for a winter's supply. We can hitch on to the trolley line for electric lights all over the house, and barn, and outbuildings, and fireless cooker, iron and vacuum cleaner, and a whole bunch of conveniences for Ma, including a washing machine, and stationary tubs in the basement. Gee! Get the picture?"

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"Well a new kitchen on the other end of the building where there's a breeze, and a big clover field, and a wood, and her work table right where it is in line with her private and

particular sunup. There's a big sink with hot and cold water, and a dish washer. There's a breadmixer and a little glass churn, both of which can be hitched to the electricity to run. There's a big register from the furnace close the work table for winter, and a gas cook stove that has more works than a watch."

"What does the lady say about it?" "Mighty little!" said Mickey. "She just stands and wipes the shiny places with her apron or handkerchief, and laughs and cries, 'cause she's so glad. It ain't set up yet, but you can see just standing before it what it's going to mean for her. And there's a chute from the upstairs to the basement, to scoot the wash down to the electric machine to rub them, and a little gas stove with two burners to boil them, and the iron I told you of. Hanging it up is the hardest part of the wash these days, and since they have three big rooms in the basement, Peter thought this morning that he could put all the food in one, and stretch her lines in the winter for the clothes to dry in the washroom. The furnace will heat it, and it's light and clean; we are going to paint it when everything is in place."

"Is that all?" queried Douglas.

"It's a running start," said Mickey. "I don't know as Peter will ever get to 'all'. The kitchen is going to have white woodwork, and blue walls and blue linoleum, and new blue-and-white enameled cooking things from start to finish, with no iron in the

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"What did she do?" marveled Douglas.

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"Well a new kitchen on the other end of the building where there's a breeze, and a big clover field, and a wood, and her work table right where it is in line with her private and

particular sunup. There's a big sink with hot and cold water, and a dish washer. There's a breadmixer and a little glass churn, both of which can be hitched to the electricity to run. There's a big register from the furnace close the work table for winter, and a gas cook stove that has more works than a watch."

"What does the lady say about it?" "Mighty little!" said Mickey. "She just stands and wipes the shiny places with her apron or handkerchief, and laughs and cries, 'cause she's so glad. It ain't set up yet, but you can see just standing before it what it's going to mean for her. And there's a chute from the upstairs to the basement, to scoot the wash down to the electric machine to rub them, and a little gas stove with two burners to boil them, and the iron I told you of. Hanging it up is the hardest part of the wash these days, and since they have three big rooms in the basement, Peter thought this morning that he could put all the food in one, and stretch her lines in the winter for the clothes to dry in the washroom. The furnace will heat it, and it's light and clean; we are going to paint it when everything is in place."

"Is that all?" queried Douglas.

"It's a running start," said Mickey. "I don't know as Peter will ever get to 'all'. The kitchen is going to have white woodwork, and blue walls and blue linoleum, and new blue-and-white enameled cooking things from start to finish, with no iron in the

bunch except two skillets saved for frying. Even the dishpan is going to be blue, and she's crying and laughing her feet before her trying to lift and white wash curtains for the windows. All the house is going to have hardwood floors, the rooms cut more convenient; out goes the old hall into just a small place to take off your wraps, and the remainder added to the parlor. All the carpets and the old heavy curtains are being ground up and woven into rugs. Gee, it's an insurance! Ma Harding and I surely started things when we planned to dose Junior on Multipolis, and let her view the landscape o'er."

You can tell by her face she's seeing it! If she sniffs into the port-

of glory looking more glorified, it'll be a wonder! And Peter! You ought to see Peter! And Junior! You should see Junior planning his room. And Mickey! You must see Mickey planning his! And Mary and Bobbie! And above all, you should see Lily! Last I saw of her, Peter was holding her under her arms, and she was showing her feet before her trying to lift them up a little. We've most rubbed them off her with fine sand, and then stuck them in cold water, and then sanded them again, and they're not the same feet—that's a cinch!"

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are? Would you live as we do?" marveled the boy.

"Gladly," she answered. "It's about the only way I could live now. I've given away so much of the money."

"Then I'll ask father!" cried the boy. "Why I forgot! Father is right back here." Father! Father! Father! came quick! Father it wasn't the hermit bird at all, it was mother! And oh joy, father, joy! She's just changed and changed, till she's most as changed as we are! She'll come back, father, and she'll go to the woods with us, oh she will! Father, you're glade, aren't you?"

When Nelle Minturn saw her husband coming across the meadow, his arms outstretched, his face paint-rouged, she came swiftly forward, and as she reached Malcolm, Mr. Minturn caught both of them in his arms, crying: "My sweetest! My beautiful sweetest, give me another chance, and this time I'll be the head of my family in deed and in truth, and I'll make life go right for all of us."

think about something else a few minutes. You were saying Mrs. Harding had trouble; what is it?"

Mickey returned to his subject with a chuckle.

"She was 'bout ready to tackle them nervous prostrations so popular with the swell dames," he explained, "because every morning for 15 years she'd faced the brown oilcloth and pots and pans, while she'd been wild to watch sunup from under a particular old apple tree; when she might have seen it every morning if Peter had been on his job enough to saw a window in the right place. Get that?"

"Yes, I get it," conceded Douglas. "Go on."

"Well, I began her work so she started right away, and before she got back in comes Peter. When he tackled Ma Harding and her sunup, and then he thought out a way to furnish entertainment and all the modern comforts right there at home."

"It's a wonder he didn't break your neck."

"Well," said Mickey judiciously, "as I size Peter up he'd fight an awful fight if he was fighting, but he ain't much on starting a fight. I worked the separator steady, and by and by when I summed up the argument, as a friend of mine says, I guess that cream separator didn't look any bigger to Peter, set beside a full house and two or three sheds for the stuff he'd brought to make his work easier, than it did to me."

"I'll wager it didn't," laughed Mickey.

"No, it didn't," cried Mickey earnestly. "And when he stood over it while that big iron stove made his kitchen, where his wife lived most of her day, seem 'bout as hot as my room where he was raving over Lily a friend of mine says, I guess that brown oilcloth and the old iron skillet for a few minutes of silent thought, he bolted at about two."

"What did he do?" asked Douglas.

"Why we planned to send her on a visit," said Mickey, "and cut that window, and move in the pump, and invest in one of those country gas plants, run on a big tank of gasoline away outside where it's all safe, and a breadmixer, and a dishwasher, and some lighter cooking things; but we got interested."

"How Mickey?" interestingly inquired Douglas.

"Remember I told you about Junior coming in to hunt work because he was tired of the country, and how it turned out?" said Mickey.

"Yes I recall perfectly," answered Douglas.

"There's a good one on me about that I haven't told you yet but I will," said Mickey. "Well when son came home, wrapped in a comfort,

tailed by Peter. And you'll see that it will work, too!"

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