

## MARA.

By CHRISTIAN BURKE.

## CHAPTER III.

"There's green fields, flowers, and cresses, in the place where I was born,  
And you hear the waters of the sea a-sounding night and morn—  
But London City is dismal work——"



HE winter that followed Dennis Hamilton's return was a hard and dreary one in Providence Yard. Suddenly Mara's splendid vitality seemed to fail her. She grew thin, and flagged at her work; yet she would not admit that anything was wrong, and toiled on with stony persistence until she was completely laid aside by a sharp attack of pneumonia. Elizabeth nursed her through it with unwearied gentleness, acting as breadwinner for both during the day, and spending restless, broken nights by the sick girl's side.

For although Mara endured the visits of Elizabeth was forced to be away, she would not suffer anyone else to approach her at other times. There were days, also, when she was too ill to be left at all, and their little hoard of mutual savings diminished with alarming rapidity, so that Elizabeth looked forward with many an anxious foreboding lest it should not hold out. Youth and a magnificent constitution triumphed at last; Mara once more had to take up her life, and again began to move in a listless way about the tiny house; and her friend, with a lightened heart, toiled on for both.

During these trying weeks nothing had been seen nor heard of Dennis. Once, in the crisis of the illness, Elizabeth had all but sent for him; but the girl had discovered her intention, and had worked herself into such a tremendous state of excitement that the doctor had peremptorily forbidden any step to be taken for the present. Two or three times, as she came home in the short, dark evenings, Elizabeth fancied she had caught sight of a shadowy figure moving away through the gloom. The glare of a lamp once fell on a strangely-familiar face; but before she could speak it was lost in the yellow fog. On another occasion, a chance meeting with Sarah Hamilton, Dennis's sister, brought her the information that he had kept

his word and was still at home. But the former was, perhaps not unnaturally, deeply resentful of his wife's refusal to have anything to do with him, and laid the blame for what had happened on the girl whom she had always considered beneath her brother's notice, so that the interview between the two women was too painful to be repeated.

One Saturday afternoon in early February, Elizabeth had just finished her vigorous cleaning, which kept the poor little house as "neat as print," in the popular phraseology. She was sitting down to her needlework, and Mara was listlessly leaning against the window-sill. She had flung up the sash, and, heedless of all remonstrance, was drinking in the fresh, damp air. The day had been unusually mild, and, after a passing shower, the faint blue sky was reflected luminous and clear in the pools of water that embellished the ill-paved court. The sunlight quivered and sparkled through the drops that fell from the roof, and a thoughtless sparrow was twittering bravely under the mistaken idea that it was certainly spring-time at last. All too soon the charm was broken by the sound of voices. Little Alice's father came staggering home, singing a drearily hilarious song, having spent at least two-thirds of his week's wages at the Red Cow at the corner, and his wife, from her doorway, was upbraiding him, poor soul, in shrill and unavailing remonstrance.

Mara flung down the window in a sudden gust of anger.

"Oh, I'm sick of it all!" she cried, stretching her thin arms above her head. "Elizabeth, can't we go away? There used to be country once, when I was a child. I remember it when I was a little toddling thing; and now I dream and dream of it of nights. I can't rest here; it isn't even fit to die in, this hole of a place! I'll never even stay quiet in my grave unless there's grass and daisies growing over me."

She threw herself down by Elizabeth's side, and, burying her head in her lap, burst out into a passion of sobs and tears that shook her frame from head to foot. Elizabeth was fairly frightened. Mara had not wept even when her child was laid in its tiny coffin; and this tempest of grief alarmed her. There was a wasted look about the beautiful face that struck her with a fresh pang. What if she was not really getting well, but only recovering so far just to fade and slip out of life, with all the best hopes of it unfulfilled, and with a burning hatred, devouring all that was noblest in her, still raging in her heart?

She stroked the dark head with a rough yet tender hand, and soothed her as a mother might a wayward child, and when the sobs at last grew silent, she said with a well-feigned cheerfulness—

"Well, that's a grand idea! What is there

to hinder us? There must be work to be done in the country as well as in towns. Suppose we go, you and I, and seek our fortunes?"

Mara smiled wanly. Perhaps it was the restlessness of illness, or the faint stirring of the gipsy blood in her veins which made her long to be on the move, but it was the first smile which Elizabeth had seen on her lips for many a week, and she determined that, cost what it might, she should have her way.

As they talked and planned together as to how the thing might be managed, there suddenly rose up before the elder woman's mind the recollection of a half-brother of her mother's living in an out-of-the-way little village high up among the Cotswolds. She could recollect his visits when she was a small child: a big burly countryman with leathern gaiters and a rough coat and dusty wideawake, from which no amount of brushing could ever banish the fine white flour which he called his "trade mark." She had a dim impression of huge hampers of country cheer that used to come to them, and great bunches of old-fashioned country flowers. She had not heard of him for years; her mother had died, her father married again, and they drifted about from place to place, so that the very existence of her distant kinsman had almost faded from her memory. Now, as she recalled his kindly, brown, weather-beaten face, she determined to write to the old mill-house. He might still be alive and living there, and if so he might be able to tell her what chance there would be for their finding some kind of employment in the neighbourhood. She had vague recollections of certain small pin factories in the vicinity, and at the worst, living, she knew, would be cheap. Their small savings were not quite exhausted; they could yet compass a week or two's holiday which might be new life to the sick girl.

Mara could not rest until the fateful letter was written. "I feel as if I could breathe again away from London," she said with a tired sigh, but the cloud came over her face again as she spoke.

Elizabeth's heart was heavy, too, for she knew that it was the knowledge that she was so near to her husband that was gall and bitterness to the proud spirit, which resented even the unenforced claim on her life. Sometimes she marvelled at the generosity Dennis Hamilton had shown, that he had never hinted even at the legal right which he undoubtedly had, and she wondered if Mara were as unconscious of it as she seemed. At times she feared that all capacity for forgiveness had died out of the girl's nature, and that not even death itself could part more effectually these two, whom God had made one, than the iron wall of an implacable hate.

(To be concluded.)

## "WHOLE FLAKE FISH-PIE."

TAKE a shallow pie-dish and fill it one-third full of boiled potatoes mashed with a fork, add pepper and salt and about one teaspoonful of soy. Take what is left from dinner of any flaky fish such as cod, turbot, hake, etc., remove the flakes carefully from the bone and skin, care being taken not to break the flakes or in any way injure them.

Lay them in order over the potatoes. Cut some tomatoes into slices, fry them until they are brown, place them in layers over the cod (or other fish) and pour over them the butter from the pan. Chop up finely a small quantity of onion and sprinkle it over the tomatoes.

Place about a dozen small lumps of butter,

each about as large as a bean, over the whole, grate breadcrumbs and lay them over the whole about half an inch deep, place over the breadcrumbs five or six lumps of butter, each as big as a nutmeg; pepper and salt over all. Bake in a quick oven for about half an hour and serve up in the pie-dish. Mushrooms can be used instead of tomatoes if preferred.