

THE RETURN OF MARY O'MURROUGH

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND
Author of "The Tragedy of Chris," "Nanno," "Onora," etc.

CHAPTER IV
NOT ASLEEP, BUT DREAMING

When Shan Sullivan disappeared over the brow of the hill, driving straight at the moon, his thoughts were as far away from Killelagh as if he had been travelling the unfrequented hill paths of that sphere of silver.

He had some Irish miles to go with his cart of turnips and mangolds before reaching the market of Ballyorglin, which meant a night journey of the loose-wheeled cart with its slow, monotonous jog-yog, no hindrance to the slumber and dreams of a man who knows how to lie among his sacks, and has confidence in the prudence and sagacity of his horse.

More than half the journey was made before Shan relaxed his limbs in rest, and meanwhile he sat erect, driving steadily at the moon, not asleep, but dreaming.

He took a letter out of his pocket, kissed the outside of it, and put it back again. "What's the harm o' the foolishness! There isn't a soul to see, or not a star in heaven will pass a remark."

"Oh, it's you that'll come at last, Mary, an' time for y'! I'm feared to look into it an' see how many years young gone, an' the farm not bought out yet, but soon to see it. An' if there's much of more delay, by the Almighty that made us we'll wait no longer. 'When will she be comin'?' says one, an' 'how soon is she comin'?' says another, an' all o' them givin' it in to y' that there never was the like o' y' seen around Killelagh or Killynery or Ballyorglin. Not a girl at the Cross-roads tonight could compare with y'.

"The moon was now lost behind a wrack of clouds, a grey haze overspread the heavens, keeping earthward, and blotting out the bluish lights and soft rich shadows that had limned the lovely features of the landscape. It was the chill and ghostly hour before dawn, when light and color are no more, and a cold and deathlike world is depressingly visible. Shan's dream had dissolved away under its influence, and he slipped from his upright position in the front of the cart, and slumbered among his sacks, while the old horse plodded on accustomed to every up and down, and turn and twist of the road to Ballyorglin.

After an hour's sleep he awoke in the full glory of the midsummer sunrise, crimson and gold on the horizon, hills freshly dipped in dewy purple, fields sweetly young in their green, with that look of primeval innocence which is only seen on the face of the untilled earth. The dream of the night was gone, but before him now was the splendor of morning, the reality of coming day, hope for the future at his feet.

Another year, or maybe half year, and Mary would be home. As the cart rose on a hill and the lakes came in view, afore with the sunrise, Shan stood up and gazed at them across the landscape and raised his hat.

Shan remembered that he wanted to cut their names on this tree, and how Mary would not allow him to injure it, pointing out Nature's lovely ornamentation of the stem, which is richly carved as by a sculptor's hand, and is made still more rarely beautiful by its marvellous colouring, dark mossy green interwoven with purple, tinged with ruby red, softening and brightening to a rose-tint.

Under this mystic tree he could see Mary standing where he ground is thick sown with reddish and purple seeds, falling from the network of spreading branches overhead, and forming a carpet, smooth, delicate, sumptuous, which Mary would scarcely dare to tread upon.

The place was so still, the arched lanes so solemn and dark, the little court was so rarely roofed and mystically lighted, they had almost held their breath while they stayed in it. Up and down the winding stone stair they went, to the two upper chambers remaining of this home of saints, and then out in the open again, hand locked in hand, with their vows spoken.

"An' that was the solemn promise, Mary, on the saints' ground, with the angels listenin'!" Here a heavier cloud shrouded the moon, and the sweetness of Shan's dream was broken upon by a memory of harsh voices: mother weeping, and father threatening; questions of the land to be lost, or the land to be held; his own angry rejection of a wife with fortune; and Mary's pleading to be allowed to go to America to earn money by her own industry till he, by his strivings, should pull things to rights on the farm.

"How did I ever let y' go without me, Mary? God knows it was only to have the little place before y' comin' back, workin' as hard here as y' were workin' there, an' my father swearin' he would not no bar between us when things were got straight. My mother's in heaven now, an' thanks to you, Mary, she didn't die in the poorhouse: an' my father's sittin' at his own fireside in his old age, an' him not long for this world. All the same, the years has been slippin' over us, asthoreen; an' for all the promises, the farm isn't bought out yet."

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"God bless y', God bless y', Innisfallen! Dinah island, Glena! God keep the angels about y', Muckross! 'An' now, gee-up out horse and leave your dhramin'! Head into Ballyorglin with yer wits about y'!"

CHAPTER V
SHAN'S FIRST BAD MARK
Ballyorglin is one of the small towns in Ireland, where on a market-day you will see strings of little asscarts drawn up along by the side-path of the main street, usually in charge of a cloaked and hooded hill-woman, or a little girl with bright eyes shining from under the roof of a shawl that projects over her brows and covers her shoulders. The one big shop and the little shops are all alive with gossiping and bargaining, as the country people sell their produce, or purchase a weekly store of tea, and sugar, and bread. Shan, who was one of the more important of the market frequenters of Ballyorglin, was a big man as he contributed his quota to the day's business, and that he was a favorite was easily seen by the lighting up of faces at his approach, and the thrusting forth of hands, and the rattling of Irish words of greeting and welcome about his ears.

Jegging down the street, he took off his hat passing the chapel gates, and turned aside his face from the three stalwart "pols" who were lounging shoulder to shoulder outside the barrack. "Oh, an' it's a pity yez hadn't somethin' to do!" he said, turning his head again, and looking back at them. An' it's another pity that we hadn't the price of yez in sheep an' cows!"

of a young man before him on the road, and called: "Is that you, Jakes? How's the father? Jump in!"

The tall youth addressed wheeled round, vaulted into the cart, and went jogging on with Shan.

"What are y' goin' to do with yourself?" asked Shan. "It's what I'm thinkin' about—Serjeant Hourigan wants me to join the polys."

"The devil, he does. But you're not goin' to do it?" "Why wouldn't I? I'm just the highth, an' there's no gettin' work here, an' the pay's good."

"Pay to beat in your father's head any day if the Serjeant bids y'!" said Shan. "I wouldn't say that," said Jakes. "Or to swear your friend into prison."

"Ah, what's the use o' talkin'?" There's no work, an' I don't want to go emigratin'. An' I'm just the highth."

Shan looked at him with contempt and was silent. After a few minutes he said: "Y' won't get in. There're goin' to reduce the force. There's nothin' for the polys to do."

Jakes looked knowing and shifted his position in the cart. "He says things is lookin' up."

"What do you mean?" "He has wind o' disturbances comin'. An' the force isn't goin' to be reduced."

Shan laughed a bitter laugh. "Y' young spalpeen. Don't y' know what that means?"

"No, I don't. It's no business o' mine. If I join the force I'll be paid for doin' my juty. My father's in a hobble with the rent, an' my mother's sick."

"What does your dacint father say to y'?" "It's what I'm on my way to talk to him about."

"Oh, then, if I was in his shoes I'd whip y' with a sally rod," said Shan brandishing his whip, and Jakes shifted his legs again, to be ready to spring from the cart in case Sullivan's next action should be suited to his last word.

"Y' needn't be afraid," said Shan contemptuously, seeing the movement. "I'm not goin' to give y' the lucky chance o' somethin' for Serjeant Hourigan's note-book. Here's your dacint father's house now, an' get out o' my cart with y'!"

He cracked his whip within an inch of the youth's shoulders, and Jakes scrambled out, not quite sure whether he had felt the lash or not.

Returning to Ballyorglin the next morning, Shan left his cart standing in the street and went about seeing friends and making a few necessary purchases, chiefly the usual tea and sugar, and as he was passing the barrack Serjeant Hourigan was standing at the little gate leading up to it.

"Hello, Sullivan! You're a Killelagh man, aren't you?" "I am Serjeant. A bit beyond Killelagh for that matter."

"Do you know anything about this outrage?" "Shan turned on his step, and stood and fixed his eyes on the policeman. "No, Serjeant. What's the outrage?"

The Serjeant took out his note-book. A knot of people had gathered around them. "A man called Peter Flynn was taken out of his bed last night, dragged all round his place, cut and bruised, two of his ribs broken, and one of his eyes put out, and was left lying in the ditch for dead."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Shan. "Oh, I suppose not," said the Serjeant, putting up the note-book, "but we have got the man that did it."

"Who have you got?" said Shan. "Miles Donohoe, the blacksmith's son, a fellow who has been wanting to get Flynn's farm."

Shan threw back his head and laughed and laughed; shook, and bent his knees with laughter. "It is Miles. It is Miles! Oh, peeler, honey, y' might have hit a likelier man. Yersel, or Jakes Finucane, for instance. Where have y' got him?" he added fiercely, with a sudden change of voice and countenance.

"In the barrack, an' if you say more you'll be there along with him."

"It's where I want to be," said Shan. "I want to see him. He didn't do it. The thing never happened."

"It's reported already to Dublin Castle, anyhow," said the Serjeant, and the man will be before the magistrate to-morrow mornin'. There's a padrole sent to Killelagh to examine the place and the injured man, and take notes of the affair. I wouldn't say but what y' were in it yourself. I'm puttin' y' down for reasonably suspected. Shan burlied scornful defiance at him; and went through the town gathering particulars of the event of the day. A "padrole" of police had brought the news from Killelagh early in the morning, and Miles, who had been only a short way before them on the road, was seized on the way to his work at Ballyorglin. Unable to get access to Miles, Shan finished his business and hastened his return to Killelagh. He overtook the police at the entrance to Flynn's little farm, and shouted to him: "What's up? What are y' skir-mishin' after?"

the gate-post and joined the "peelers."

They were making for the little house when a head appeared above a fence, and Foxy Flynn demanded to know what the polys were doin' on his bit of land.

"We want to see the injured man—'ter Flynn."

"Sure here he is!" "Are you Peter Flynn?" "I used to think I was, anyway," said Peter, "but if y' tell me I'm not, I wouldn't like to go again 'ter the law."

"Come on, Foxy," said Shan, "an' let us see which of your eyes is out, an' what you've done with the ribs that are broken in y'?"

"What are y' jokin' an' jibin' me for?" asked Foxy. "Come over the ditch an' show us the whole o' you, Foxy!" cried Shan. Flynn scrambled over the bank, and the policemen eyed him up and down.

"Whereabouts are you hurt?" asked one of the policemen. "I think it must be in my feelin'," said Flynn, "for I have neither break nor scratch on me body or bones."

"Did not some one come into your house last night, take you out of bed, drag you all round the place, and leave you lying for dead in the ditch?"

"Not that I know of," said Foxy. "Come sir, speak to the point."

"I have spoken to the best of my knowledge," said Flynn; "but, as I told you before, I wouldn't like to go again 'ter the law."

The policeman examined him all over, and then went into the house, making a strict investigation into everything in and out of the place. The old housekeeper was called and questioned, but all the answer she vouchsafed was an uncanny laugh.

"There is something under all this," said the policeman, and made an entry in his note-book to the effect that an alarming secrecy was maintained as to this mysterious outrage, evidence being refused by the parties concerned in it.

When the polys had departed, Bess came across the fields to thank Peter Flynn for keeping silence as to what had really happened when Miles had risen up and expelled his rival from her mother's house.

"No thanks to me!" said Foxy. "We'll go to make a show o' myself, an' a laugh for the country? Did he ask me any questions about that thraxation at all, at all? An' don't I know very well I deserved what I got. You're an honest girl, an' success to you an' him! Did I want to be puttin' between yez? Sure I want neither you nor your sister. My thime's past, an' only for Father Faly through Tom Donohoe an' his sons an' daughters at my head, I wouldn't have took act o' part in the regard o' lookin' for a wife at this time o' day. Go home now, my girsha, an' be aisy in your mind. I'm better widout y' than wid y', an' Miles 'll have to be let out when there's nobody to say a word of a cause again' him."

"God bless y' Pether Flynn," said Bess. "An' will y' say that much to my mother?"

"Oh, that's a differ of a thing," said Foxy. "Sure it's her that has the hungry eye on my bits of grass and my two-three sheep an' cows. It's better for me to keep out of her way!"

Miles was "let out" the next morning, as there was no evidence to go before the magistrate, Shan Sullivan standing to him for bail. He was dismissed with a caution, and retained his name and his name and Shan's had gone forward to Dublin Castle with a bad mark attached to them. Bess met him at his father's forge that evening, and he walked across the fields to shake hands with Peter Flynn.

TO BE CONTINUED

TWO MOTHERS

Father O'Leary had visited both mothers, and he carried away some strong impressions. The attitudes of the women differed intensely.

It was for their sons that the priest had spoken—Eddie Lee and Barney McManus. Charming and alert boys they had been from the day Sister Dorothy took their tiny hands and led them into the vestry. They were so small then that her scissors and skill were sore-trying to cut down a couple of scarlet cassocks to a suitable appearance and fit. Since then, they had been faithful servers at Mass, and, from the original little cherubs, had developed into good-sized, good-looking youths of fifteen.

They were now thinking of the future, and had made up their minds. They wanted to be like their pastor. They wanted daily to draw down the Holy One with the mighty words of Consolation. They wanted to be priests.

Father O'Leary had been watching them with loving interest for some time. He liked the straight clear light in their eyes—the quality that Hoffman put in the gaze of his "Boy Jesus at the Age of Twelve." Their reverence for the Blessed Sacrament was deep. Their ringing laughter at and in the proper time and places was proof sufficient of a good conscience and a keen enjoyment of life. To the careful and discerning priest, they were just the kind of aids to be moulded into excellent ministers of God—normal, cheerful, pious. He was not surprised, but much pleased, the day they told him, in the holy calm of the confessional, about Jesus' whispering to their souls the sweet invitation, "Come, follow Me." He congratulated them,

and promised to do all in his power to help them. They requested him to approach their respective families and gain the parental consent.

It was the Lees to whom Father O'Leary went first. Here was a household with ambitions. Within the past year, real lace curtains had been achieved by the parlor windows, an ell added onto the kitchen, and a new porch was attached to the front of the dwelling. Mr. Lee was now receiving fair wages as bookkeeper in Almy's Haberdashery, and Mrs. Lee could be little better than fair manager. They would have been comfortable long before this, were it not for sickness. Mr. Lee's lungs were not of the strongest, and Mrs. Lee's "nerves" frequently necessitated a dismal period abed. But at present everything was as smooth as green. Not for months had the old cough bothered the husband, nor the nerves the wife. Several entries had been made in the bankbook. Heaven was in sight until—Father O'Leary darkened the doorway.

Mrs. Lee was a tall, handsome woman, with disappointment written in light wrinkles on her forehead. She had been fond of the world in her day, and often marvelled to herself and her intimate friends that, out of many sparkling suitors, she should have chosen Richard Lee, the one least fitted to shine in business and society. She was frank in her admission that her supposed love for Richard was mere girlish folly. But the affection which she withheld from the father, was lavished on the son. It spoke wondrously well for Eddie that she had not succeeded in spoiling him.

The morning Father O'Leary called, Mrs. Lee was seated in a rocker on the sun-swept porch, reading a "best-seller." It was Monday, but of late the lady consigned her cares to the wet-wash and a hired girl.

"Time that I should get a little ease out of life," was her sharp opinion. She rose with a show of dignity, gave her hand to the priest, and motioned him to the opposite chair.

"I have come to see you with regard to Edward, Mrs. Lee," explained Father O'Leary. "He's a good boy, and—"

"Indeed he is, Father. So superior in so many ways to his father I really don't know what I'd ever do without him, he's such a comfort!" "Could you give him up, if—"

"Of course I couldn't give him up! Why do you even suggest it?" "Wouldn't you yield him over even—to God?"

"What nonsense are you talking, Father?" said Mrs. Lee in tones of thinly veiled irritation. "Your son wishes to be a priest."

The woman's face blanched. For a second her fist clenched and the knuckles were white. Then, with a toss of the head, she expressed herself: "Edward's duty is to me, Father O'Leary. I risked my life to bring him into the world. I reared him. And now that he's old enough to be a help and comfort to me, I'm not going to allow an idle whim to draw him away from me. Every youngster who ever served at the altar wanted, at one time or other, to be a priest. Merely a boy's enthusiasm, Father, that's all!" She snapped her fingers. "God wants my boy to do his duty by me, his mother. Surely, as a priest, you can recognize this plain fact."

"How about your boy's duty to his Father—his heavenly Father?" suggested Father O'Leary mildly, though a line of pain and perplexity was on his brow. "Like Christ, he should be about his Father's business. And like Mary, should you not keep all these things patiently in your heart? True, you have rights, Mrs. Lee, and cannot help feeling them. But God has deeper ones; and, before His, yours cease. He gave up His only begotten Son. Dare we rebel at the call of sacrifice?"

Mrs. Lee's finger-tips played with the hem of her sleeve. Her eyelashes flickered, and a pout came to her rather pretty lips: "I—think it's cruel of you, Father O'Leary, to come here and— and bully me with religion, she protested. "True religion was meant to heal hearts and not to break them. Christ spent His life in bringing consolation to men. You, as His representative, should do the same."

The color slightly mounted to Father O'Leary's cheek. He was piqued at the woman's inaccurate idea of the Christian dispensation. Christianity without a cross—that was evidently her desire and belief. But there is no Christianity without a cross. The priest shook his head: "I came not to bring peace, but the sword," he slowly quoted. "If anyone will come after Me, let him take up his cross and follow Me. He who loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

Mrs. Lee gathered up her book hastily, and rose: "Kindly pardon me, Father," she requested icily. "My head is aching. And, really, you—er—Scriptural onslaught is too much for me. Good morning."

Father O'Leary sighed and started to go. But his love for Eddie, and his desire to do his best for the boy, inspired him to make one last attempt: "If you give your boy to God, Mrs. Lee," he spoke as gently as he could, "He will give him back to you—a priest."

It was no use. She had turned away from him. The priest was quivering with indignation: "Good morning, Mrs. Lee." "Good morning."

But the brightness had gone out of the morning for Father O'Leary. He was chilled at the unreasoning and unreasoned selfishness of the woman. He was pained at the thought of the disappointment which the news would give Eddie. For the son fully returned the mother's extravagant affection, and, for him, her slightest wish had always been law.

Main street was bright and fragrant with springtime. From the many orchards on both sides, a rosy rain of apple blossoms would fall with every gentle swoop of breeze, and birds fluttered busily in every direction. But the priest's eye, well trained to perceive and appreciate the beauties of Nature, did not see now, for his heart was sad.

Into one of the meaner little cottages down the street he turned. It had no lace curtains on the parlor windows, nor an ell to the kitchen. It needed paint badly, and a new roof worse. But a chestnut tree, snowy with bloom, hung lovingly over it and the sound of childish mirth tinkled gaily through it. It was the McManus household.

In response to the priest's knock, a dark-haired child with a Tipperary twinkle in her eyes and a Tipperary tilt to a mile of a nose, opened the door and sprang, with a cry of gladness, into the arms of the priest, the eldest daughter of the family of eight; and she was only twelve. The rest of the McManus children were in the back yard or on the stairway. The lady of the castle—stout Mrs. McManus herself—was too busy to bother where. There was no wet wash nor hired girl for her. Out in the kitchen her capable arms were at present up to the elbows in soap-suds and the honest sweat was beading her red face.

"G' mornin', father!" greeted the voices from the stairway, as four pairs of young feet scampered down towards the victor.

In a flurry, Mrs. McManus dried her hands in her apron and, as full of apologies as excitement, hurried to the entry: "Oh, the cut of me, yer reverence!" she cried. "But 'tis Monday mornin', and up to my eyes in work I am! You'll pardon my looks, Father."

"Of course, child," smiled the priest. "I'd have my own opinion of you, Eileen McManus, if you weren't busy on Monday mornin'." He was thinking of the languid Mrs. Lee. "Won't ye be havin' a cup of tea, Father O'Leary? Here, Patsy, run to the store for a pound of sugar. Mary, dust off that chair for his reverence."

With a sigh of satisfaction, the clergyman seated himself near the window. This was home, humble but satisfying to one of simple, homely tastes. Father O'Leary was a people's priest. He loved the least of his children the most.

"It's about the boy, Barney, I've come," he announced. "Has he got into any mischief, now, Father?" the mother asked quickly. "No, indeed, He's a very good boy, Eileen."

"Yes, that's true, Father. But ye never can be telling nowadays—" "Oh, you Irish mothers!" laughed the priest. "If your sons were veritable angels, you'd want them to be yet a little more angelic."

"'Tis more of the devil than the angel that the young ones do be havin' in them these days, Father. Mickey, stop pulling Moira's hair, and all of yez cut crowdin' around his reverence so—"

"Eileen, you've had rather a hard struggle with life, haven't you? I remember when you were an apple-cheeked, laughing-eyed little colleen over the sea, with never a care in the world. Let her how bravely and well you have borne all the trials that have come to you since then. And now I'm going to call on you to make one last big sacrifice—"

"What, Father—" "Your boy, Eileen?" "Barney?" "Yes, Eileen. God wants him. Barney wants to be a priest!"

The mother's eyes stared wide, and a trembling hand sought her breast, grasping the folds of her cheap calico wrapper. Suddenly she dropped into a chair, flung her apron over her head, and shook with deep sobs.

The priest was struck with pity. He rose, and softly patted her on the heaving shoulder: "I didn't think you'd take it so hard as this, Eileen," he confessed with sadness. "I know it would be hard for you to give Barney up, now that he's old enough to get a job and lighten your labors for you—"

"Tain't that 'tain't that, Father," stammered the mother through her emotion. "Tain't grief at all that's—that's hurtin' me. The thought of it—the thought of it! My baby—my boy! standin' at the Altar of the Lord, sayin' his first Mass! Oh, Father, what hurts me and makes me blubber away like—like an old fool—ain't anything but pure joy—and thankfulness!"

Father O'Leary's eyes were wet. The sun shed a shaft of powdered gold through the kitchen window. The birds, hopping on the fragrant blossomed boughs, filled the morning with a fairy melody. To the priest, the beauty of the day was richly restored. He had found a mother perfectly assured with her Maker— one who, like the greatest and sweetest of Mothers, Mary, bowed her head in an ecstasy of thrills and wonders at the Divine Will, saying, "Be it done unto me according to Thy word." Unlike Mrs. Lee, Eileen McManus was amazed to be chosen, and delighted, even at any sacrifice,

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