

THE RETURN OF MARY O'MURROUGH

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND
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CHAPTER II
AT THE FORGE

Tom Donohoe, as well as any other, delighted in looking on at the dance, but his work was never done, for no body could tell when a horse might arrive to be shod. While Mrs. Dermody was coming round a corner of the Cross-roads, slowly considering what she had to say (Tom's temper being hot and hasty as his own anvil and hammer), the blacksmith was talking to Shan Sullivan, a farmer from higher up in the hill-country.

"Shan had come so far on his way to the morning's early market at Ballygolin, and his cart stood near the forge while Tom was delaying rather than preparing to put a slipper on the little mare." For Tom was as good as a newspaper to the district, and nobody brought him more reliable news of all that was going on, from the kingdom of Kerry to the battlefield of Westminster, than the tall, lean, dark-browed man of grave aspect, with whom he was now in the grip of a political argument. Not that there was much to differ in the opinions of Donohoe and his client, but there will always be little points of question that must be thrashed between friends into downright agreement or disagreement.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Dermody!" said Tom in a disappointed tone. "Good night, Tom; good night Mrs. Dermody," said Shan, turning his face to the moonlight and raising his soft round felt hat; an American hat.

"God bless y', Shan, I'm glad to see you. An' when did y' hear from Mary?"

"Yesterday," said Shan, with a smile surprisingly sweet on so serious and rather unkind a face. "She's well, I hope, an' as han' some as ever? Shure, how could she be else?"

"Shan tossed his head with a slight laugh, as pleasant as his smile, which seemed to say that it was waste of time putting words to such a foregone conclusion.

"When will she be comin' home to y'?"

"Soon, I hope," said Shan. "Tom Donohoe, will y' put the slipper on the mare an' let me go?"

"Why aren't you up at the dance while your business is doin', Shan Sullivan?" said Mrs. Dermody. "You're a young man yet, an' Mary wouldn't be jealous, over in America."

"I did my dancin' more'n fifteen year ago," said Shan, "an' it takes me to be trampin' now."

The mare was shod, an' Shan led her away to the cart. Tom stood in the doorway of the forge, looking after him, a big brawny figure himself, suggesting a picture of Lucifer, black with the fire behind him.

"That's a man!" he said, as Shan mounted and moved away, while the jog of the loose wheel of the Irish market-cart grated on the road, and man, horse, and cart rose on the hill to titanic dimensions against the sky, dropping gradually out of sight, Shan's head the last to sink as he drove, seemingly straight into the moon.

"Thus for you; an' there isn't too many," said Mrs. Dermody. "It's him that has held the grip tight, an' Mary'll be a lucky girl comin' home to him. D' y' know if old Owen has brought the farm?"

"There's delay yet, I believe," said Tom. "If I'd been Shan, I'd ha' married Mary in the teeth of it all. The years is countin' up. Thank God, I own no land. I'd rather ha' my strong arm nor all your fields, Mrs. Dermody."

The visitor smiled a superior smile. At that moment she looked the living realization of Mangan's "Woman of Three Cows." It was never her way to quarrel, however.

"It's a good thrade y' have, Tom Donohoe," she said. "But everybody that's outside on the ditch hasn't it?"

"Well now, Mrs. Dermody, what can I do for y'? It's never yerself, is it, that wants to be shod?"

"It's a little private word I have to say to you. I want you to call off your son Miles, an' disallow him to be hantin' round my Bess."

Tom Donohoe blew a slight whistle. "Oh, that's it, is it? An' what have I to do with a son that's as much a man as I am myself? I've no lan' to be bullin' him about. If he's on the ditch as y' say, so am I, an' his arm is as strong as my own."

Tom brought his hammer down on the anvil to make a loud amen to his statement. "Y' can all him your mind," said Mrs. Dermody meekly, for though she knew there was no real violence in Tom, except when iron was to be conquered, yet the bang of that hammer made her feel that he was a man not to be trifled with.

"Y' can tell him not to be injurin' the prospec' of a harmless girl."

"Is he injurin' her? Is she harmless, or only foolin' him? How do I know anything about it? Is he fond o' her? Maybe he is, and maybe he isn't. It's his own business. If y' want to know what I can do for him, he's one o' ten an' as far as money is concerned I wash my han's of him. I giv him his good health an' his five wits, an' that's as much as any man need look to his father to do for him."

"Run home, child, run home, and we'll talk about all this another time."

The priest marched Miles away with him, and Bess went home, and put her face cautiously in at the door.

"Anne Bridget was sitting alone at the fire. "Come in, Bess. My mother's gone to bed. She says she'll have something to say to y' in the mornin'."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Bess. "I never see her so knocked about," said Anne Bridget.

CHAPTER III
A WOMAN OF THREE COWS

Mrs. Dermody's one-storeyed house was roofed with a snug tight thatch, and contained three rooms, with a loft for a farmer's boy in the months when he might be necessary. Long ago she had banished the manure heap from her door, and relegated the animals to a yard behind, backed by brown and yellow walls of turf-sack and hayrick. The space in front was paved with cobble stones, and planted at each side with a clump of dahlias, presented by a friend who was a gardener in a gentleman's demesne some miles away.

In the yard stood a low-backed car and a railed market-cart; and housed near was a good horse and a "jinnik," a couple of cows, and a litter of pigs. Behind lay the fields; one for potatoes, another for cabbage, turnips, and mangolds, while a good piece of the ground grew the tender grass that makes the butter sweet. At the corner of one pasture stood an old grey willow, hinting at the nearness of running stream or deep-sunk virgin well, and two great bulwarks of hawthorn guarded the primitive wooden gate leading from the grass meadow to the plough fields.

On the other side, a range of elder trees tossed their white plumes against the blue sky and the dark mountain; wan blossoms, described by a young native poet, who died in America, as ghostly faces of souls prisoned in the trees, with leave for one month in the year to look out on the beloved pastures, and on their kindred coming and going where they themselves once came and went. Within the house was the kitchen, with wide fireplace and big crane for pots and kettles, and a farm against each wall at the side of the fire, the chosen seat at evening for the family and their friends. Rusted hooks in the ceiling for "ditches" showed that this was no newly tressed up dwelling, and on the well-packed dresser stood, among common cups were platters, a few pieces of old Irish lustre-ware, jugs, and basins such as collectors are now considering worthy of their attention.

On the morning after the Cross-roads dance, Bess Dermody was in the yard, feeding her chickens. With the full sunshine upon her, she was comely rather than beautiful, a round, fair, freckled face, tipped nose, eyes grey, green, or blue as the light might decide on the moment, and plentiful lacy hair. Her figure was swathed in a large apron, and her shoes were neat. Altogether Bess was a wholesome and homely creature, with changeful expressions of countenance promising much humor though threatened occasional impertinence; and dowered with sundry girlish attractions such as descriptive words must toil after in vain.

Anne Bridget came into the yard seeking her. The elder sister had once been remarkable for the kind of beauty that vanishes after a very few years. Though gentle and amiable, she had a delicate air, spoke sprightly and in a minor key.

"Come in, Bess. Mother wants to speak to y'."

Bess emptied her bowl of food among the chickens, and stepped across the yard as briskly as if she thought her mother brought her a ribbon from Ballygolin market.

"Come in here, Bess, an' you, Anne Bridget. I've somethin' to say to both of yez."

Bess deposited her bowl lightly on the dresser, an' turned a pair of shining eyes on her mother.

"Go on, mother, we're here!"

"Y' needn't be lookin' at me that way, Bess!"

"What way will I be lookin' at you?" asked Bess laughing.

The likeness between the two was striking at the moment. Bess was a match for her mother in pride and obstinacy as well as in many virtues. Anne Bridget had retreated into the ingle corner. She was more like Matthias, who had been gentle, and who had departed.

Mrs. Dermody was feeling a difficulty that was familiar to her in dealing with Bess. She had a mind to conquer, but that shining glance from the eyes of the girl frightened her as much as did the bang of Tom Donohoe's hammer on the anvil, and she forgot the insinuating words with which she had intended to convey her wishes and intentions. While Bess stood looking at her, obediently waiting, but sweetly defiant, the good woman stumbled into the communication which she had determined to approach with discretion.

"I was talkin' to Pether Flynn last night," she began.

"I seen y', mother!" said Bess. "At your time o' life! I was wonderin' at y'."

Mrs. Dermody stared.

"Oh, what does a mother rare childer for? Are y' darin' to turn your father's widow into ridayence, Bess Dermody? What I want to say is that Pether Flynn is thinkin' o' marryin' an' he's comin' here to-night to see which of yez girls will hold out a hand to him. He'll take you, Bess, without a penny; but if

it's to be Anne Bridget—I'll have to sell out some stock to give a fortune with."

"He needn't come, mother," said Bess.

"It isn't your house, Miss Impudence, to be shuttin' him out! An' you'll think twice before y' refuse to settle yerself in one o' the best farms in the townland. An' now will y' let Anne Bridget speak?"

"It's not me he wants," said Anne Bridget, "an' if it was, I'm not goin' to be bought, an' a sold that way, mother. I'm worth my bit to y'."

"You're a pair of unnatural childer," said Mrs. Dermody. "To do well for y' is all my thought, night, noon, an' mornin', an' y' talk to me as if I was the rent day or a gobsemmen. Howsomdever, Pether Flynn 'll be here to-night, an' y'd better see that y' behave yourselves."

She turned out of the door, and, knitting in hands, went down the fields to make her usual morning inspection of the little farm.

"Pether Flynn, Pether Flynn! Oh, I'll die of laughin'!" cried Bess, holding her sides, her little nose tilted to an angle of delighted amusement.

"It's not much to laugh at," said Anne Bridget. "My mother's taken it in her head. But I'm glad it's y' he's set on, for y' can fight. If my mother could get rid of me without sellin' stock, I wouldn't have a chance."

"I'm goin' out to ask company," said Bess. "If we're to have Pether Flynn here, we'll get some fun out of it."

Meanwhile Mrs. Dermody made her survey of the fields, examining the condition of the various growths, looking her cows well over, and patting them approvingly, the animals pushing forward for the fostering touch of the toil hardened hand. Then, after these duties were over, the mother of Bess and Anne Bridget said to herself:

"I may as well make short work of it, an' take a look at what Pether has got."

It was only a half mile to Flynn's holding, and she was soon counting the shws on Peter's grass, and peering through a hole in the hedge at his tillage.

"It's all in the best of order, God bless it!" she said. "He's the safe, warm man, is the same Pether!"

She got into the yard, and was met by a company of hens, headed by a regal cock, in coat of tawny and orange, tail feathers of green black, and crown and lappets of crimson, pointing one toe as he stopped like a dancing-master, and erecting his head with gentlemanly impudency.

"Oh, it's Bess will know how to admire yez all!" said Mrs. Dermody. "Sure every beauty in creation is here: black wid the gold sprinkles, an' you buff, an' you brown, an' you red, an' you every color! Good luck to y', white one, for it's yourself knows how to lay, I'll swear to it!"

An here's the pigs! Now, what does he feed them on at all, at all? Such ditches as is on the sides o' that fat one!"

She pursued her way into the house, and found a very old woman with lean bony arms moving from one pot to another above the fire.

If it's the masher y' want, he's gone to the market since 4 o'clock this mornin'."

"I've business with him," said Mrs. Dermody, "but as he's not here, I'll rearr myself a while an' go home again."

She passed without more words into Peter's little parlor, aware that the old housekeeper had no love of mothers with daughters, seeing that if the master were to make a change, there was nothing before her but the workhouse.

Oh, now, it's a back gone place, I don't deny," said the visitor, looking around at stained walls and curtainless window. "Everythin' were out, an' not a symptom of a woman to make things nice since his mother died forty years ago an' the sixthers went to America. Not a picture on the wall longer nor Dan O'Connell, an' him nearly blotted out wid the damp; both the eyes of him gone into his head. Not a ghost or a sketch of Parnell. Two or three saints that black wid smoke y' wouldn't know whether 'twas St. Patrick or St. Bridget y' were lookin' at!"

"Ah, well, Bess 'll know how to make all right, seein' there's money in the bank, an' stock in the fields."

Mrs. Dermody said nothing to her daughters about this visit, and they were careful not to tell her that they knew where she had been. In the evening she went, as usual, down the fields in the direction of the graveyard to say her rosary and pray for Matthias; and when she came back, the company invited by Bess had already arrived—half-a-dozen "boys," including Miles Donohoe, and as many girls, all "insinuated into" the fun of "old Pether Flynn comin' courtin' Bess Dermody."

Hospitality would not allow Mrs. Dermody to object to the presence of invited guests, and she hung up her cloak and submitted silently to the annoyance of seeing Bess handing a cup of tea to her objectionable lover.

"At your time o' life! I was wonderin' at y'!"

Pether was a little man with sharp features and a knowing glance, which had gained for him the pseudonym of Foxy Flynn. Though only fifty years of age, he was said to look "as old as anything you'd like to name." It would seem as if the violence done to Irish nature by the production of a "nagur" must inevitably result in something abnormal even in appearance. Not that Pether was decrepit, or without his due allow-

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SUCCESSFUL SURGEON AND SISTER ANGELA

Mary H. Kennedy in Rosary Magazine

He had quizzical, black eyes topped by long grey hair and dark brows habitually raised in a questioning, half-scowling expression. A humorous clean-shaven mouth, a wonderfully young complexion for his middle-aged years, and he had been, until now, but an occasional visitor at the Emergency Hospital. However, with a patient of his—a paralytic, victim of an automobile accident—seemingly permanently housed in Sister Angela's ward, he was calling daily, and becoming, much to the gentle little nun's amazement and chagrin, one of her greatest crosses. His manner was unobtrusive and quiet in the extreme. Professionally, he demonstrated no annoyance, although the tide in this particular case was evidently going against him; and he never, in word or action, complained at the frequent and inevitable busy hospital regimen.

"Therefore was Sister Angela astonished and ashamed.

"I can't understand my feelings in regard to him," she confided to Sister Teresa.

The older nun smiled. "Some day, perhaps, you will discover the reason."

But Sister Angela cocked her head to one side in a puzzled, meditative mood.

He is absolutely perfect in his manner, and the children adore him." (The "children" were Sister Angela's charges.) "It is I who am the one at fault, Sister dear. Why should I always be seeing things that are not there?"

"Too much coffee," suggested Sister Teresa.

The little nun laughed gaily. "I never drink any. . . No, I am too

critical and I intend to be so no longer."

Nevertheless, the Surgeon's presence in her ward was the cause of Sister Angela immediately placing herself upon guard—and a constant source of uneasiness to her. He came more often, the paralyzed patient having steadily grown worse. There was no need for worry over the spiritual condition of the patient, —a splendid Catholic, he was well prepared to die. His lingering as a mental sufferer—for he was yet in his early forties, of excellent physique and the father of a large family—was what tried the little nun's heart.

"There is no possible cure for him?" she asked the Surgeon one morning, as she met the latter in the corridor off the ward.

The dark brows lowered a perceptible fraction of an inch. "Haven't I heard that you always desire your patients to die?"

Sister Angela flushed. "I want what I think heaven wants. The patient in this case, I feel sure, will attain heaven eventually and he is needed very badly here for a while. Isn't there any hope for his recovery?"

"I never say die," returned the Surgeon.

"Then there is!" Sister Angela's lovely face gleamed. "I have prayed so hard!"

"Prayed! Humph!" The eyebrows went up to their highest position.

"You believe in prayer, don't you?" the startled little nun demanded briskly.

"Hardly."

So this was the solution of her puzzle! Almost with a touch of pride Sister Angela realized that her attitude in regard to the Surgeon was not a biased one. Then a great wave of wonder and compassion engulfed her sensitive soul.

"Oh," she ventured tremulously. "Oh, doctor, surely you believe in God?"

The Surgeon shrugged a patient shoulder. "Hardly."

There was nothing more to be said, Sister Angela knew. The Reverend Mother's wishes respecting argumentative questions among any members of the staff and the nurses were only too well understood.

"I shall pray for you," replied the little nun sadly.

Suddenly, on his way toward the elevator the Surgeon turned.

"I would like to believe, Sister Angela, but—but I can't." And he walked on.

With passionate devotion Sister Angela commenced her bombardment of the heavenly citadel for the surrender of the Surgeon's atheism.

There was no further word upon the subject exchanged between them, but a comradely spirit hitherto un-existent, and in the past considered a most impossible thing by Sister Angela, pervaded the meetings of the two. Soon the little nun learned that behind the nonchalant exterior of the Surgeon was a nature as sensitive as her own, an indomitable nature, too, and one that refused all idea of disappointment and failure.

"I never have lost a case," he said to her one day.

"Perhaps it would have been better for you if you had," Sister Angela replied.

"I think not. My reputation stands in a great measure, if not entirely, upon my unbroken record of success. If I should lose a case I would never again have as strong faith in myself—nor would my patients."

"Your faith in God would cover this difficulty."

The Surgeon did not laugh at the little nun, but he smiled broadly. "All the faith I have is bound around my own self; when it fails me, I suppose I shall have to place it elsewhere."

"I trust that it fails you," Sister Angela said impulsively.

"It won't," he replied stubbornly. There germinated in Sister Angela's mind as a result of this conversation the persistent idea that to lose a case would be the best possible good for the Surgeon's soul. And despite her knowledge of the condition of the paralytic patient's family and its total dependence upon him, she forbore to pray for his particular need, and petitioned heaven instead for the Surgeon's spiritual conquest at any cost!

The verdict of the consultation of the staff's physicians, however, preceded her ultimate resolution. The conference of doctors was called because the Surgeon was great enough to solicit the advice of others and because he was afraid to lose a patient! Yet the death of this one was expected momentarily now by every one. The man's spine, punctured in a terrific automobile crash, had become totally paralyzed and the brain was seriously threatened with a like affliction. When that occurred death would follow instantly.

"There is just one chance," was the unanimous verdict. "An operation. But it's a chance in a million." Not one of the Surgeon's conferees but refused flatly to take the chance. It would require the nerve and hand of a master to perform the miracle.

"So?" queried Sister Angela.

"I shall operate," said the Surgeon calmly.

"And you think that you can perform the miracle?"

"With—" he hesitated, then said abruptly: "I will try."

The little nun had never faced quite so puzzling a situation. There, on the one hand, was the patient—a