

A FAIR EMIGRANT

BY ROSA MULLHOLLAND

AUTHOR OF MARCELLA GRACE: "A NOVEL."

CHAPTER XXVI

SHANE'S HOLLOW

"Are there any wolves among the trees, Betty? Shall I be eaten up?"

"No, mistress. But sure the place is unlucky; an' if they saw you walkin' about, spyin' at the wreck an' ruin like, they'd be mortal offended maybe. There's the Fingalls themself's daren't let on they know there's anything wrong."

"And yet they were once friends?"

"Och, dear! It was the forbears of these ones that was acquent with them. The only one alive that knewed them is the old mistress herself at Tor; an' her an' them never was any great things of friends. They would not let her come within miles of them now, an' indeed, I think nobody ever had by talkin' of them. You see, they were mixed up with her own trouble—"

"I know, I do. Betty, I shall die of curiosity if I do not get a peep at this mysterious place. I will keep at a distance from the house, and will take care not to frighten the old people."

Andy undertook to drive her up the mountain as far as the road went, and to wait for her at a certain cabin till she should return from exploring the Hollow. About high noon she was going through the mountain-pass on foot alone.

The sunlight irradiated the hills, and the shadows of the high white clouds floated mysteriously along their sides, casting deep, momentary frowns under the brows of the grey and purple crags. Coming to the top of the pass, she saw far beneath her a dark belt of wood out of which a thin streak of smoke was ascending. Down there lay the mystery of Shane's Hollow.

After a quarter of an hour's rapid descent she found herself standing at the top of a steep, woody incline looking sheer down on the broken roof of the dwelling-house; and then, following a path round this hill, she went gradually lower till it brought her to a crazy gate, through which, under the wide spreading branches of the trees she saw the base of the gable of the ruined mansion.

It stood in an oblong hollow of the richest green. Short, close grass, verdant and sumptuous, swept away in velvety undulations under the far-reaching boughs of enormous beech and sycamore trees, which were flung out like sheltering arms, as if trying to protect and hide the wretched dwelling from the scorn and abhorrence of the world. An air of almost supernatural beauty and desolation pervaded the place, and the only sound breaking the charmed stillness was the loud, imperious cawing of the rooks, which seemed to menace the intruder, to warn him from attempting to enter these forlorn and dilapidated gates.

Bawn, however stepped down the grass-grown path which had once been an avenue, and came slowly nearer to the home of the Adares. Three magnificent copper beeches with mossy trunks seven or eight feet in circumference stood right in front of the house, with gnarled, moss-clad roots like the velvet-sheathed claws of some gigantic animal, and with towering crowns of crimson-dashed foliage. Between two of these was an old well, surrounded with a circular wall, lichen-grown and broken down at one side, and attached to this were a bucket and windlass. Seating herself on the crumbling wall of this old well, the stranger from Minnesota surveyed the once handsome mansion of her father's enemies.

It was large, built of massive, dark grey stones, in some parts black, and over one corner of the front were splashes of dark red, as if blood had been flung on the wall. The wide hall-door stood open with a stone placed to keep it so, and the shadows of the door-way, projected by such sunbeams as could reach it, fell and veiled the depths of a hall floored with rotten boards and riddled with holes. The solid coping above the door and the pillars at each side still stood, but the roof of one side of the house was completely fallen in, and the moulding of the drawing-room walls and the fire-places of all the upper rooms were visible through the apertures where the windows once had been. Displaced beams hung by one end, pieces of zinc drooped ready to fall, the ground-floor was piled with wreckage, as could be perceived between the half-closed shutters that still clung to the lower casements; while high aloft an open arch on the drawing-room landing, once, no doubt, shaded by silken curtains, made a striking feature in the general hideousness of this extraordinary interior.

The left wing of the house was still covered, in, but the roof had already given way. From the chimney next to that smoken spot over the hall-door a little cloud of smoke was wavering upward. Almost all along that side the shutters were closed, and no light penetrated except what might enter by a few uncovered panes in the upper windows which had been gradually patched and boarded up in a manner horrible to see. Two of these windows evidently belonged to an inhabited chamber, and, if so, the floor was threatening to give way beneath, and the roof to descend upon whatever living creature might there be unhappily housed. It was clear that this side of the

house must very soon fall in as the other had done. Heavy rains or a high wind might sweep the roof away at any moment.

Behind the house rose that abrupt hill, clothed in softest green, from which Bawn had first looked down on the hollow. In the background, under the hill, lay offices, granaries, out-buildings, all in wreck, but with their mosses and ruins wrought in picturesque with the universal greenness. Away at one end the oblong shaped itself, with crowding trees and moulding lines of gray and olive walls. The carriage sweep was overgrown, all but a beaten cart-track past the door; for occasionally a carter would take the short cut through the Hollow, if it were not late at night, when he superstitiously shunned the spot. From one end the almost obliterated avenue pierced the distance, an irregular tunnel of cool green, down the gate, of which one pillar stood erect bearing a headless animal of stone upon its shoulders. One the traveller was without that gate, he was free of the spell of Shane's Hollow. Immediately beyond lay pleasant, open fields, where red and white cattle grazed, or drank at a sedge-bordered lakelet, which was also invaded by troops of joyous, fluttering, yellow-winged flag-lilies.

All this Bawn took in as she sat on the old well observing the details of this exquisite wilderness and feeling its weirdness to the marrow of her bones. She noticed how the trees all leaned towards the house, spreading their vast branches that way and weaving them together before the windows, as if trying to veil its ruin or to hide some secret it contained. Even on this still summer's day the breeze kept up a continual sighing in the crowns of the great trees, and the rooks clamoured incessantly. Few and faint were the notes of singing birds in the branches on the outskirts of the Hollow; evidently none harboured in the giant boughs near the house. Sometimes a small bird whirled across the hollow as if in a fright, and disappeared; and as the afternoon advanced strong sunshine fell across the great hall-door, and dimming the windows, and half of the bending roof, and threw a deeper, more sinister shadow around the building.

Turning her fascinated eyes from this sight, Bawn changed her seat and sat on the opposite side of the well, with her back to the house, and looked away to where a venerable gray wall, hoary and lichened, marked the vast square garden which sloped gradually from the hollow up a gentle incline. Tall beeches and dark chestnuts stood round it like a sombre guard, but its crumbling, gold-tipped walls were a reservoir of purest sunshine, for beyond and above them shone a world of light, just fringed with the grey foliage of a distant woodland. An old wicket, once a pleasant entrance to the garden, hung in its stone framework split and riven, and letting dazzling shafts of brightness shoot through, just where the shadows at the corner of the wall were blackest. And as her eyes roved aside from here, all around there were trees, trees, trees, weaving their branches across the sod, but leaving a delicious underwood of cool, gold-strown grass, streaked with long, level shadows, sprinkled here and there with lily, ranunculus, and looking as if it might possibly be trodden at times by fairies, but seldom or never by foot of mortal moold.

Again Bawn altered her position. The trees at one side were now literally dripping with gold, the flickering shadows of the branches moving like living things over the great boles of the mighty beeches. One of these, split down within a few feet of the ground, had made itself into two, each of which had flung up three or four great arms, sending forth a hundred branches. Under the sycamores lay the loveliest blue-green shadows, and the roots and boles of the trees were wrapped in the most sumptuous colouring—yellow and amber and tawny brown. What majesty in the heavy draperies of those chestnuts, through which the light tried in vain to filter; what a delicate gleam of silver on those elm trees! Now she turns slowly round towards the front of the house once more. Those lurid boughs of the copper beech stretching and straining towards the guilty house those dark red splashes on the corner stones of the dwelling—what do they mean? Murder? From where she now sits only the lower half of the front is visible, from half the door downwards, by reason of the woof of the tree-branches spread across its face; but the upper part is here and there to be seen through the interlacing higher boughs which form striking arabesques against the chimneys. They are about the chimneys, goblin faces appear in their outlines, pointing fingers, wringing hands, gesticulating arms, all stand forth, and multiply the longer one gazes.

Bawn rises and walks up and down the green, mysterious ward. It is beautiful, solemn, and weird it all is! And this is the living tomb of the woman who forsook Arthur Desmond in his need, of the wretch whose whispered calumnies had been the ruin of a good man's life. Truly it was easy to believe that a curse reigned here. God had been before her with His vengeance. No, Heaven knew, she wished for no vengeance; confession, restitution were all that she was seeking for. Was it possible that a voice could ever be evoked from that mouldering pile? How was she to penetrate into whatever den Luke Adare occupied in that crumbling ruin; seek him in his fastness where even old friends did not dare to intrude upon him; wring from him the truth that had rusted in his soul all through these long, unhalloved years? Even that very night might not a storm arise to hurl down the remainder of the falling roof upon his head and send him to eternity with his secret in his heart? Great Heaven! to think of a woman being housed in that sootting hole, a woman whom her father had loved, the creature whose deflection left that grey, bleak look on his face which she had told herself a thousand times she could never forget if she lived to be a hundred years old! No, it must only be a dream. It certainly could not be!

A girl appeared coming through the trees with a water-pail, and, using the windless, soon filled her vessel and rested it on the wall of the well.

"Are you not afraid to come to this strange place alone?" asked Bawn, watching her.

The girl eyed her, as if she would say, "I might ask you the same."

"The water is good, and it's worth coming for; but I would not be here at night, not for all ever I saw."

And then she shouldered her pail and went her way glancing back occasionally to see if Bawn was still sitting on the well, and gradually becoming smaller and smaller in the distance, till the last flutter of her petticoat vanished among the trees. The place felt lonelier and sadder after her coming and departure, and Bawn experienced a slight shivering sensation in spite of her vigorous physique and the fact that it was still high noon.

CHAPTER XXVII

FRIENDS OR ENEMIES?

Bawn sat for a long time quite still on the edge of the well, overwhelmed by the enchantment of the place, and picturing to herself her father, young, ardent, happy, coming and going by those paths, now overgrown and almost lost, passing in at that dilapidated door to be welcomed by the woman he loved. What kind of place was this wilderness in those days? Lovely and pleasant, no doubt, though with a hint of coming decadence and gloom even then, then folded up in the boughs of these great beeches, already sinister and mighty, and threatening to shut out the light of day from the upper windows. Looking towards the avenue, she started to see a tall man, like the figure she had been picturing to herself, coming quickly through the tunnel of green. As yet he was far off, so that she could not distinguish his features. It seemed to her Arthur Desmond, coming at a lover's pace into the Hollow to look for her who was the delight of his young life. Yielding to this fancy, she watched the figure without asking herself who might in reality be coming to intrude upon her solitude. Well, it was some countryman, who would pass and go out at the other end of the Hollow, as foot-passengers would sometimes do. He would disappear again like the water-carrying girl, and like her also leave the place all the more lonesome for his having passed.

As he came a little nearer something in the height and carriage of the figure struck her as familiar. This was a gentleman, though it was not Arthur Desmond, and on his head he carried a little blue cap which Bawn had seen before. There was no mistaking the air of the man, the turn of his head, his gait, and, as he drew nearer, his features. This was indeed Somerled of the steamer, and, before she had time to think of whether she would put herself out of sight or not, she perceived that she had been recognized. He stopped stood quite still, as if undecided what to do, and finally left the path and came across the greensward towards her. As she watched him coming with long steps across the grass a tremulous feeling came over her, as if at the approach of a vague danger. She realized that now, indeed, she had come to a difficult point in the road of her rash undertaking.

He stopped before her and removed the blue cap. "Miss Ingram," he said, "I know you are fond of solitude, but still I am surprised to find you here, so far from home, by yourself."

She was relieved to hear him speak in so easy and friendly a manner. He looked grave, but not severe and gloomy like Rory of Tor. This was really Somerled, in the very character in which he had first appeared to her.

"I have heard a great deal about this old place, and my curiosity has been excited. I am not so far from home as you suppose, for my little cart is waiting for me on the other side of the pass."

"I am well aware that you are quite able to manage your own affairs. May I sit down beside you?"

"The old well does not belong to me. I suppose any one may sit here. But as I have lingered long enough for one day, I will leave you in possession of the resting-place."

"No stay, only for a little. It is still high noon, and the place, with all its uncanoniness, is lovely. Besides, I have a question to ask which may well be asked now. Bawn, why did you play me that cruel trick?"

He was not looking at her as he spoke, but down the long tunnel of green foliage through which he had come to her, as if he expected the answer to reach him from thence.

Bawn hesitated and collected her thoughts. She had not been prepared for so sudden and open a challenge.

"Was it cruel?" she said; "or rather was it not the best thing to do?"

"Perhaps I ought not to complain. Doubtless you found me very troublesome. Still, we had been friends—for a week—and friend expects a word of farewell at parting from friend."

"I own it looked ungrateful, but I felt no pleasure in paying you. You wanted to get away from me and leave no trace that is about it. And now, by a strange freak of fortune, you have put yourself right in my path again; set up your home and hiding-place only a few miles away, as the bird flies, from mine. Fate has had a strange retribution in store for you."

"Very strange."

"Bawn—"

"Please to call me Miss Ingram."

"Well, then, Miss Ingram, why did you tell me you were going to Paris to be an actress?"

"I did not tell you so."

"You did not tell me so?"

"No; you inferred it, and I did not set you right. I humoured the idea; that was all."

"You humoured the idea, to set me further astray. All in order that you might surely never set eyes on me again."

"That is the very truth."

Somerled breathed a hard sigh.

"Well, it is best to be honest," he said. "And now, having got me into a great deal of trouble, and that you have thrust your hand into the hornet's nest?"

"If you mean was I surprised to see you, why, I was. But then I was not quite sure it was you. Seeing that you looked morose, and behaved to me like a perfect stranger—"

"Both were natural, I think. I was morose, and I had reason to be. And of course I treated you like a stranger. When I ascertained that the person from Minnesota whom they were all raving about was you, after I had verified my suspicions by paying a twilight visit to your place and seeing you standing near your own door—"

Bawn uttered a sudden exclamation, remembering the night after the storm when she thought her imagination had played her a trick.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing. Pray go on."

"When I found you were here, you for whom I had been searching Paris like an idiot, with thoughts—well, thoughts that would not interest so cool and imperturbable a person as Miss Ingram; when I was assured you were indeed come among us, I resolved that I would not subject you to the annoyance of any recognition from me. I would spare you whatever embarrassment there might be for you in any allusion to our acquaintance on board the steamer. That was one reason for my greeting you as a total stranger. Another was—I will be frank and confess it—that for my own part I could not bear to address you upon any other terms. I even thought of continuing to ignore our former acquaintanceship. I was not sure that I would ever refer to it, even should the most inviting opportunity offer, till I saw you a few minutes ago sitting here as lonely and alone, as cool and self-possessed, as completely yourself, in short, as when I first beheld you in your corner on deck, with your face turned away from the world, looking out to sea and the future—this future which neither of us could guess."

"Who could have guessed it? But I am glad you have spoken to me, as my mind is now made up that it is you."

"You were not sure of my identity?"

"I still think of Mr. Rory Fingall of Tor, and Mr. Somerled of the steamer, as two distinct individuals bearing a curious likeness to each other."

"My name is Roderick Somerled Fingall. I own I was in a savage humour that night when I found you sitting serenely in Bartly's cabin, smiling as if you had just newly dropped from heaven, and with apparently no recollection whatever of an experience which had cost so much to me. But do not be uneasy. I am not going to renew a suit of which you gave so practical a proof of your dislike. You are not to suppose that because I went to Paris in search of you, I have the intention of whiling away my time to persecute you. One so self-contained as you will hardly believe me, and yet I must clear myself on this point. The strange and successful deception you had practised on me, whether by false words or, as you say, by allowing me to follow out my own inferences, had filled me with a grave uneasiness as to the future which you might be ignorantly pressing on to meet."

"You found you were gone, what I felt when I while trying to track you to Paris and through Paris. You are not so constituted as to be able to understand it. You think, perhaps, that it was my passion for you that carried my feet over the stones of every quarter of the city I thought likely to harbour you, that strained my heart and gave my face such an expression as caused some one to say as I passed, 'That man is a monomaniac.' No, I will not honour your vanity by leaving that impression on your mind. My love for you, as true a love as ever man felt for woman, was killed stone dead by a blow, crushed to death under your reckless foot as you left that ship, while I slept and dreamed of you. It is gone. Let it go!"

He had risen up and was standing before her. The flash of his eye, the gesture of his hand all denounced her. He turned his face away and was silent for a moment; and then took his seat on the well again, a little further from her than before.

"I went after you as one goes after a weaker fellow-creature whom one seeks to save. That is all."

"I know you are a philanthropist," said Bawn, after a moment's pause to quell the storm in her heart, an agitation that was urging her to cry out and defend herself. "You went after me as you went after the emigrants. When a good man does these things his conscience rewards him. Believe me, I am not ungrateful, although you find this emigrant more safely settled in her new country than you had expected. If you still feel a little interest in me, is not that a thing to be pleased at?"

"I am pleased at that," he said after another pause, during which he had been adding all the meaning of her last speech to the general account of her coldheartedness. "I am pleased to find you safe and well, and so placed that I may possibly be of some use to you occasionally. For in spite of your independent spirit and your business capacity, which fit you eminently to stand alone, you may, even in the safety and solitude of these glens, sometimes need a helping hand from a man. Major Batt will overwhelm you with attentions, but, if I know you at all, you will not let him trespass on an inch of your land. My cousin Alister will promise everything, and with the best intentions, but soon as he gets a book between his finger and thumb he will forget all about you. You may rely on me for service. You need not be afraid that I will ever disturb you with a renewal of my addresses. The past is past, and for the future we are friends."

"I am glad of that."

"With your practical head and cool heart you are exactly suited to be a man's friend. I still get lost in amazement when I think of how cleverly you kept your own counsel all that week, how you denied my pleading, baffled my curiosity, ignored my strong interest in and anxiety for you, determinedly and relentlessly put me aside, and only for this, that even might make with the best intentions, to a quiet spot, bury yourself among hills, and lead the laborious and unexciting life of a woman-farmer. Your mystery which tormented me so sorely was such a little mystery, after all. Bawn, you might have trusted me with your secret."

"Is it not better as it is?"

"Barring my pain, perhaps it is, as you have so completely convinced me that you could never love me. And yet you did not tell me so outright. Therein lay your sin, Miss Ingram. You did not say to me, 'You are utterly distasteful to me; I could not endure such a companion through life.' Nay, you gave me to understand—"

"TO BE CONTINUED"

PAT

Pat was cleaning the church, as he was accustomed to do on Friday morning; or, to be accurate, as he was accustomed to begin to do on Friday morning. Interruptions, more or less voluntary, were certain to delay him. The work, continued at intervals during the afternoon, would have to be resumed after Saturday's Mass and finished with feverish haste just before confession time.

On the first Friday of last October there was a fire in O'Donnell's grocery store, half a mile or less from the church. It broke out about 8 o'clock, was under control by 9, and the last disconsolate boy turned away from the soaked, smoking building before 10, but it was quite 11 before Pat got to work. He commenced with an earnestness truly edifying. Dust flew high in all directions; kneeling benches were overturned and windows raised to the top, with entire disregard for wind and cold. The solitary worshipper fled in self-defense. In short, Pat took vigorous measures to quiet his conscience which approved of fires only in moderation.

About 11:30 o'clock Mrs. Hennessy dropped into the church, but she remained for a moment only, her piety being unequal to the strain put upon it by the discomfort of kneeling on the floor between two open windows amid clouds of dust. Pat, sweeping vigorously near the sanctuary, apparently did not see her, but when she rose to go, he dropped his broom, kicked aside his dust-pan and ran after her so swiftly that he overtook her in the vestibule.

His work was forgotten, his conscience went to sleep, and for fifteen minutes his gray head bobbed close to Mrs. Hennessy's black hat as he talked. She had a woman's willingness to contribute her share to the conversation, but it was a one-sided battle and Pat won. When, at last, she was hurrying away, a boy came, His grandmother had left her prayer-book in her pew. Five or ten min-

utes passed before he started homeward, without the book, but well-informed as to the details of the fire. Some of the details had seen the light on the prosaic premises of O'Donnell's store, more had come suddenly into being within Pat's imagination.

The boy gone, Pat glanced at his big silver watch, and was astonished to find that it lacked but five minutes to 12 o'clock. For an instant he seemed nonplussed, for the morning's work was hardly begun.

"It's not worth while to go back to my sweeping for four minutes and a half," he reflected aloud. "Father Baumgartner, himself, would allow that. And it's too early to ring the Angelus. I'm not one that says it's noon when it isn't noon, just to suit my conveniences, though there's sacrilegious that ain't got no consciences and imposes on people. They make them say their prayers when it isn't the time for praying. I guess"—and his face brightened wonderfully—"I guess I'd better get my dinner in a hurry, and then ring the bell."

With Pat dinner was a duty more sacred than the cleaning of the church or the ringing of the Angelus; one never to be slighted. And he got his dinner at Father Baumgartner's expense; breakfast and supper, provided by his own slender purse, were frugal indeed. So half an hour passed before he dashed out of the kitchen, across the yard and into the church, in the vestibule almost colliding with Father Baumgartner, who had gone in search of him.

"The Angelus, Pat!" the priest said. His tone left no doubt in Pat's mind as to whether or not he was annoyed.

Pat wisely said not a word, but hurried by the narrow winding stairway as fast as his stiff old legs would carry him. Afterward, he lingered for a while, admiring the cloud-bespinkled sky and the panorama below him, reproaching himself for never before having taken time to enjoy the beauties to be seen from the steeple. When he reached the foot of the stairway he found that Father Baumgartner had waited there for him.

"There was a fire this morning," Pat hastened to explain. "I made me a little late getting to work at the week's cleaning. I was just a-going to begin when I saw smoke down yonder and all the engines in town dashing that way. I was afraid the store where your reverence buys his books was the one that was burning. I knew you'd feel bad about it—so I hurried down to see. It wasn't the book store. You needn't worry about that. It was O'Donnell's grocery store. I got back pretty quick, and was working with all my might—your reverence knows how I can work—when in comes a woman and of course—"

"And of course you waylaid her to gossip!" Father Baumgartner interrupted. He was annoyed that the cleaning was but begun and because the Angelus had been rung half an hour after the proper time.

"Gossip! I, gossip! Sure Father, it is you that talks so!" Pat cried, amazed and injured. But perceiving that Father Baumgartner was in earnest he became slightly alarmed. Twice had he been discharged and twice had scorned to pay any heed; he was not certain that he could successfully be scornful a third time. Adroitly he shifted the subject, growing eloquent on the theme of Mrs. Hennessy's manifold trials.

"Poor Mrs. Hennessy!" he hastened to exclaim in his most compassionate tone. "Mrs. Hennessy, it was, that came into the church. It's herself that's got trouble, what with one of her little girls being afflicted, and money none too plenty, and a coal fire that the poor gets little enough of it! And her husband crippled more every day with rheumatism, and me knowing a remedy! Would you be wanting me to keep it coked up tight in my own bosom, you that is so kind-hearted? And but for a little extra advice I gave her at the end she might be letting him get cold. Between ourselves, she's no nurse, though I wouldn't be hurting her feelings telling her so. To think of it, him without ever a potato in his pocket and expecting to get well! It's tempting Providence, and I told her so!"

"Pat," she says, "Pat, there's no one like you for good advice. You have the knack of it! Them's her very words, and her eyes was shining with gratitude." There was a triumphant note in Pat's voice, but perceiving that Father Baumgartner did not yet appear to be mollified, he hurried on.

"And I was getting right back to my work, was just aching to get back, when John Riordan came and I stopped a minute to tell him about the fire. I knew his grandmother would like to hear all about it; and I asked him about the game yesterday, knowing your reverence assessed it and would like to get the details, it being the last game of the season, and you so fond of baseball. There was three men on bases," he reported excitedly; "three men on bases in the ninth inning and the score was a tie, and Hutchins, he knocked a home run and—and—then my dinner. I was that weak from work and hurry, and it was too early for the Angelus. I'm very particular about not ringing too early. You see, it's this way—"

Father Baumgartner cut short the series of explanations. Despite of Pat's talk coming to a natural end he prompted the priest to interrupt him. "Well, now that the fire has been put out, Mrs. Hennessy advised, and John Riordan quizzed, do your work in the church. Don't loiter over it. I do not want your brooms and dust-pans to clutter the aisles during most of the day to-morrow. You may stop for a few minutes at 3 o'clock to come for

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