

THE RETURN OF MARY O'MURROUGH

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND
Author of "The Treasury of Christ," "Nanna,"
"Ours," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII SHAN'S RELEASE

Killelagh was proved right as to the probable issues of the Hourigan affair. The Sergeant had escaped to America, and was heard of no more. Irish members of Parliament asked to have him returned and put on his trial, offering to save the public exchequer by paying the expenses of his journey to Ireland; but no notice was taken of so unreasonable a request.

There remained the imprisoned man Sullivan to be dealt with, and Killelagh waited in breathless expectation of the time and manner of his liberation. The whole Kingdom of Kerry had been tried, and found guilty; he had not been tried again and found not guilty.

Shan's mind was overcast by gloom. As he stood on the road in the dark, on the night of his release, he felt that he was in the eyes of the world a convict, to whom bounty had now been extended by the powers that had condemned him.

Walking through the streets of Ballyrogin, he saw the last lights extinguished one by one behind the windows, and knew that by knocking at the doors he could fill the street with men, and raise such ringing cheers as would startle the ears of his gaolers. He had no heart for it, however, and walked on solitary through the darkened town, and out along the road to Killelagh.

It was summer now, and the light appeared soon, coldly revealing the hills, till the rose-flame and the gold spears in the east changed to the white, and the old yet ever new miracle of the sunrise was wrought for the revival of hope in the heart of man. Not much more than a year had passed since the night when Shan had jogged along that same road in his cart, facing to the market town, and had lost himself in a doze. The humble little Lakes and the laughing face of his young Mary among the ivies and mosses of McDroos. Now he did not turn his head to gaze across the landscape to catch the enraptured gleam of the waters as the shimmering sunshine touched them. The birds were singing as they will sing in June, hurrying forth their sweetest and most jubilent notes, as if in defiance of the misadventure coming to Killelagh, thought he was still a prisoner in the county gaol. He did not feel in a hurry to surprise them by his unexpected appearance. Let the day go by, while he accustomed himself to the knowledge that he was a free man once more, even with a slur on his character, and let him think of the future, and reason with himself about the duties that now lay before him.

The farm was a little apart from the others around Killelagh, somewhat higher up, and out of the beaten tracks, and it happened that nobody passed near the house that day. The birds were singing as they will sing in June, hurrying forth their sweetest and most jubilent notes, as if in defiance of the misadventure coming to Killelagh, thought he was still a prisoner in the county gaol. He did not feel in a hurry to surprise them by his unexpected appearance. Let the day go by, while he accustomed himself to the knowledge that he was a free man once more, even with a slur on his character, and let him think of the future, and reason with himself about the duties that now lay before him.

Shan stood and looked at his house from a distance. There was no smoke as yet from the chimney; it was too early. The humble little homestead was sweet in the morning sunshine. What had happened to his joy and his pride in it? The fogcloves with their white or crimson bells, as if ranged in order for music, stood up on the green ridge of the ferny fences; there were young lambs in the field with their mother's eyes, and a well grown heifer. The place had not been neglected. O'wney and old Moysa seemed to have been able to manage without him. He had heard it said that there is no man in the world so important but that his place can be easily filled. Till now he had not believed it. He walked over every bit of his holding, and into the yard, where he found things equally in order. He scarcely knew whether he was more pleased or depressed at this desirable state of affairs, so gloomy was his humour.

He sat down on the fence, and called himself a coward and a fool. Of course he would take up his life again, with its broken hopes, and fight the devil of disappointment. But he wouldn't face the neighbours for a day or two.

At last smoke began to curl from the chimney. Moysa opened the front door to let in the sunshine, and cried out when she saw him—

"It's Shan himself, or his ghost! Maybe it's dead in prison he is!" and she clapped the door shut in his face.

"Let me in, will you, Moysa! Ghosts don't come in the daylight," he said, pushing into the house.

"How's my father?"

"Oh, it's well he'll be to see y', but did y' climb the walls, or break the bars, or what?"

"They let me out," said Shan, "for good conduct in the gaol. I didn't beat the warden, nor try to fire to my cell. An' it's hoped that I'll hurt no more cattle."

"Oh, the villain!" cried Moysa. "I could get at their throats!"

"You can't; and they'd get at yours," said Shan grimly.

Old O'wney stumbled out of his little room into the kitchen, and seeing his son, threw himself forward and fell into his arms.

"Easy, easy, old man!" said Shan, half carrying him and depositing him in the straw chair.

"You're not goin' away again, Shan?" said O'wney, trembling and holding on to him. "Are y' back for good?"

"Good or bad," said Shan, with a bitter laugh. "Moysa, will y' get us some breakfast. I can tell y' I'm hungry, father, for I'm on my foot since midnight."

"It couldn't be bad, Shan, it couldn't—have y' back. Myself was afraid I'd be gone before I'd see

it. An' I wouldn't be in it at all, only for Mary!"

"Mary! Did you see her?"

"I can't rightly say that I see anything now. I don't see your face, only the shape of it. But I seen her as much as I see you. Hasn't she been as good as a nurse to me, an' hasn't she worked for you an' me, keepin' the little place together, an' nobody else to do it? An' if I didn't see her rightly, I heard her. Isn't her voice as sweet as the thrush singin', an' the days gettin' long!"

Shan said nothing. His Mary, living and smiling in his heart, was jealous of the strange unhappy woman who had come home. He almost cursed his eyes for showing him the change that his father could not see. At the same moment his conscience smote him. It was Mary's care and cleverness, then, that had kept things straight, and prepared a surprise for him in the unexpected neatness and thrift about the little farm. Would to God he could forget that other face which would keep shining in the glory and the dream among the gold clouds of the morning, above the shimmering waters, and the mossy shores, and the fairy woods of Ballyrogin.

He stayed by the old man all the long summer day. O'wney's straw chair was carried outside the house-door, and Shan sat on a bench beside him with the dog and the cat, both of whom made their welcome known by occasional rubbings and lickings of the feet and hands of their returned friend and master. The two men talked a little at intervals, and smoked a good deal, and O'wney dozed sometimes, leaving Shan to his reflections.

He did not feel inclined to move from home that day. It was hard to forget that this time yesterday he had been wearing a felon's clothes, and that at this moment he had the shaven head of a convict on his shoulders. The people over there in Killelagh thought he was still a prisoner in the county gaol. He did not feel in a hurry to surprise them by his unexpected appearance. Let the day go by, while he accustomed himself to the knowledge that he was a free man once more, even with a slur on his character, and let him think of the future, and reason with himself about the duties that now lay before him.

The farm was a little apart from the others around Killelagh, somewhat higher up, and out of the beaten tracks, and it happened that nobody passed near the house that day. The birds were singing as they will sing in June, hurrying forth their sweetest and most jubilent notes, as if in defiance of the misadventure coming to Killelagh, thought he was still a prisoner in the county gaol. He did not feel in a hurry to surprise them by his unexpected appearance. Let the day go by, while he accustomed himself to the knowledge that he was a free man once more, even with a slur on his character, and let him think of the future, and reason with himself about the duties that now lay before him.

It was then that for the first time that day a figure was seen coming through the afterglow towards the house, a slight young figure, dark in the gold light. Something in the air about the figure startled Shan with a vision of the Mary of his youth; but when the girl came up to the door, she had no resemblance to the creature of his tantalising memory.

"It's little Kitty Donohoe," said O'wney, waking up. "Well, Kitty, jewel, how is all goin' on wid yez at home?"

"Well, sir," said Kitty; "but it's Mary O'Murrough that sent me to know how y' are yourself, sir? My mother isn't so well, an' she wasn't able to come up."

"Oh, that's Mary, an' God bless her. Tell her, an' tell all that it's well I am, for my son's come home to me."

Kitty stared, and said, "God be praised, an' it's glad they be!"

Shan looked at her, and saw that her eyes were big and soft, and her hair yellow like the furze-blossoms. Kitty was a pretty girl, just turned fifteen, with the innocence of the child still shining on her like the reflection of an angel's white wing.

"I've another message from my mother, she said, and went into the house, and came out again with a little can of goat's milk, and said good night sweetly to the men, and went her way home again through the golden light.

After that Shan knew that the news of his arrival home would spread throughout Killelagh, and that his interval of silliness and peace had passed.

The next morning, welcoming neighbours came swinging across the fields and leaping the fences to shake him by the hand; and, in spite of his ill-humour with himself and the world he was glad to see them.

And he promised to be down among them at the forge that evening.

CHAPTER XIX. A DUTY DONE

There was a great gathering at the forge the next evening. Men and women for miles around crossing the fields and threading the boroens to shake Shan by the hand, and either speak their minds, or at least hear gossip and talkers on a burning subject.

Shan looked lean and grim as he walked in among them, saluted by pitying murmurs from the women and cheery greetings from the men.

"Are y' sure it's yourself?—Is it every bit o' you?"

"Oh, God help us, there's nothin' left of him but a rickie o' bones!"

Mary, as one of the group of the Donohoe family, held out her hand and said quietly:

"You're welcome back."

Shan knew that it was Mary's voice and Mary's hand, but he did not raise his eyes to look at her face. He passed into the forge among the men, and the women remained outside, sitting about the banks with their knitting and stitching. There was a great deal of vehement speaking, that evening round Tom Donohoe's anvil. By and by a bonfire began to blaze near the bog and the men turned out of the forge and the women left the banks, and all mingled together within a wide circle round the fire. A mouth organ was produced, and some of the younger people began to dance. Miles and Bess were not among them. Their hours together had become too precious for dancing, and they were sitting behind a cluster of elder bushes, discussing the problem, every day becoming more and more abstruse, of how they were going to get leave to spend their lives together.

As Mary stood with Meg and Kitty at the other side of the fire, Shan raised his eyes and looked at her. Was that Mary? Yes, he had heard some one address her as Mary O'Murrough. That was not the woman with the look of anguish who came to him in prison, no more than it was the Mary of the Lakes; younger than the one; older than the other; a third person and also a stranger. It was a pale, sweet face, expressive of dignity and a certain reserve. Evidently unaware of his observation she was not looking at him or thinking about him.

He went home that night more than ever out of humour with himself and everything around him. There had been a great deal of talk on big subjects—the tyranny of the polis, Home Rule, emigration, lack of employment—and he had been among the loudest of the talkers. His blood had been stirred dancing on the woes of the working man and woman, not only in his own, but in other countries; and yet, as he took the hill path alone at midnight no more was present to his mind but Mary O'Murrough.

He was going to marry that pale grave woman, and he felt afraid of her. He knew he had been cruel and ungrateful, but he had promised the priest that he would marry her, and he meant to keep his word. When was it to be? how was he to approach her? Perhaps she would be more afraid of him than he of her. It was a hard, bitter face that he had seen, accidentally, passing Moysa's little looking glass on the kitchen wall this morning. A woman might well dislike it. Yet she would hardly set him free if he pressed her to marry him. And did he wish it? Could he not get rid of the feeling that in marrying this stranger he was proving false to the Mary of his youth?

Next day he went about his business, keeping aloof from his neighbours; and when he went down to the forge on the following evening, Mary was not to be seen. In the chapel on Sunday he saw the side of her cheek; but her head was bent, and when he looked around him afterwards in the chapel yard she was gone.

After some time he felt assured that she was keeping out of his way, and he told himself that such being the case he need not be expected to hurry. Since neither of them was anxious, there was plenty of time in which to redeem his promise to Father Faby.

One morning, looking for a stray sheep, he passed along the hedge at the foot of Mrs. Dermody's field, and suddenly he heard Mary's voice singing one of the songs that the young Mary used to sing at Killelagh. He stood behind the elder bushes and listened. It was Mary's voice unmistakably, only rounder, fuller, even sweeter than it used to be. He could see through the rents in the foliage a group in the field. Mary, the stranger, with three or four of Meg Donohoe's children clinging to her. That shower of melody falling about his ears acted on him like a spell as he walked round the field outside the bank, and made for the gap. He wanted to see how this woman looked while she was singing like an angel, or like the Mary of his youth at Killelagh. Obeying this impulse, he turned into Mrs. Dermody's field, and walked straight across to meet the group. Mary with a child in her arms, another holding her skirts, and others running on before her.

The singing stopped as he came up, and stood awkwardly bidding her good morning.

Mary returned the greeting and said:

"Is anything the matter? I hope your father isn't ill."

"No," said Shan. "Why did you think he was?"

He lifted his eyes and looked at her there in the full sunshine. It was not such a very pale face now; there was a sweet touch of colour on cheeks and lips, and the thin centours were rounded into something like the winsome curves of old. The dark, smooth hair had broken away into ripples about the forehead, and the breeze blew a light ringlet across the blue of her eyes.

They were very blue, they were undoubtedly Mary's eyes. It occurred to him that every time he had seen this woman she appeared to be a different person. How was he to get accustomed to her, how was he to make her acquaintance?

He noticed how the child clung to her, and laid its little rosy cheek against hers. Was it the contact that had given the fresh rose-tinge to Mary's own cheek? He noticed, too, that the handkerchief knotted round her shoulders was of a pretty light blue, and that it looked nice above her white bodice. Certainly this was not the miserable woman who had wept before him in the prison. It was a person who could sing in the sunshine, and make herself happy in the fields among the children.

She did not look as if she wanted the desperate fulfilment of a promise given many years ago. His had made up his mind to keep that promise for honesty's sake, and to marry the worn, plain, sad creature who had come to claim him. If this had been that woman, he had now a good opportunity to speak to her; but she did not appear to be the person he had been thinking of.

The elder children had run away, and the little ones who clung to Mary were too young to notice anything that was said.

"Why did you think my father was ill?" asked Shan, stumbling on something to say to fill up an awkward pause.

"I thought you looked as if you were comin' to ask me to do something," said Mary quietly.

"So I was," said Shan bluntly. "I had somethin' to say. When are y' goin' to marry me?"

It was said now, suddenly and unexpectedly; a duty done. Mary gave him a quick glance, and looked away beyond him at the blue hills.

"I'm not goin' to marry you," she said. "All that's over long ago. Don't bother yourself about it."

"Did I say I was botherin' about it?" he asked sullenly.

"Some things don't need sayin'," said Mary. "You've had enough trouble in your life, Shan Sullivan, without marryin' a wife you don't care about."

"I don't believe it's your last word," said Shan. "You'll think it over. I'll see you down at the forge some o' these evenin's."

Mary shook her head, but said no more. She moved away alone in the field looking after them, in his heart a wild, angry feeling that he wanted to let loose upon somebody or something.

He forgot about the sheep he had come out to look for, and turned on his heel and went home, and snapped at his father when the old man asked him if he had found the missing animal.

All day the shock of the occurrence of the morning was upon him. He had said to himself that perhaps the strange woman would refuse him. But he had not believed that she would. When she released him from his promise that day in the prison, his impression had been that she cried out under the momentary influence of passion. But there was no passion in her steady eyes as she dismissed him today in the field. If this were Mary, he had lost her affection irretrievably.

He glanced again in Moysa's little looking-glass to see what kind of man it was that the woman's eyes had rested on when that cold look of willing renunciation had come into them. A bitter black face frowned at him out of the bit of mirror on the white-washed wall. What woman would turn to it in expectation of his happiness?

She was evidently satisfied to have nothing to do with him; and of course he was satisfied too. He had not injured her. Apparently ever heart in Killelagh had welcomed her, except his own. She was with friends now, and she was able to make herself happy among them. Even the children seemed to take to her.

One thing dissatisfied him. When he would call up the image of the girl who went to America, the picture so long vivid had become dim, and that other face in the field came between it and his inward gaze, with a curious growing likeness to what had been and was no more; and always that stray dark ringlet was blowing across the blue of the eyes. If only there had been a different expression in those eyes, would they have looked to him more like the eyes of the real Mary?

Busy all day out of doors, he was haunted by these faces. When he returned to the house in the evening, old O'wney set on him with complaints and questions.

"Why don't y' bring Mary up to see me? She isn't here since you came home. It used to be that not a day went past but I seen her."

"You said you couldn't see her," said Shan.

"I seen her well enough to make me glad she was here. An' I heard her. Didn't she talk to me, an' didn't she sing to me?"

Shan thought of the shower of song in the field that morning, before Mary looked at him with that cold denial in her eyes, that were still so blue.

"You'll be goin' down to see her tonight," persisted O'wney. "Tell her I want to see her."

Shan had been hesitating as to whether or not he would visit the forge that night. He had several times vowed to himself that he would not go near the place. Now he made the old man's grumbling an excuse for breaking his resolution.

There was no reason why he should cut himself off from his friends, he said. Mary was among them, and had given him up.

He made a more than usually careful toilet, and went.

It was a glorious summer night; the forge was full of gossip, and the boys and girls were dancing at the Cross-roads. He saw Mary sitting on the bank with little Kitty Donohoe; Kitty's fair hair shining like pale gold in the moonshine, and Mary's cheek rimmed with silver. He looked at them both, but it was on Mary's averted face that his glance lingered. Afraid to speak to Mary, he began to talk to Kitty. He hoped that Mary would join in the conversation. He wanted to hear her voice again.

Mary listened for a while silently, and then got up quietly and moved away to the house, leaving him with Kitty.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEIGHBORS

Florence Olmstead in Extension Magazine

"I think Margaret has a little 'temperature' this morning," said Evelyn Burnham to her husband.

Frank Burnham looked at his only child anxiously and put his hand on her forehead. "Her skin is perfectly cool," he said, "but perhaps I'd better telephone Askew to drop in and see her."

Margaret listened passively to her parents' remarks. She was a good little girl, but life was too circumscribed to be enjoyable.

She scarcely eats a thing," her mother complained. "I think I'll ask Doctor Askew to change her diet."

"I hate those old foods," said Margaret with some show of interest.

"Why, I think they are very nice," said her mother.

"You eat lots of other things besides," Margaret retorted. "I think it was entirely true. Evelyn had a most excellent appetite and was fighting a losing battle with her waistline. Undeniably she was stout, but there was a look of Oriental splendor about her, with her high color and dark eyes, and she was most imposing as the head of Frank Burnham's paintal home. It hardly seemed possible that the pale, thin, straight haired little Margaret could be her daughter."

Frank Burnham, too, thick set and florid, looked the successful man that he was, so that Margaret's physique remained a mystery. Yet it was the hardest reality of life to the Burnhams, and they tended their one blossom with such care that nature had made over to art all responsibility in the matter. Margaret was kept alive by theories and thermometers, and such consideration of each moment of her weary day as would have disabled a child of robust constitution.

Her little back, however, had been fitted to the burden by ten years of sad experience, and she remained at least quiescent in the splendid house where her parents sat, each with a finger or the pulse of her body—or her spirit.

"I wish I had someone to play with," Margaret said suddenly.

"Doesn't Miss Rogers always play with you nicely?" her mother asked.

"I mean a little girl," Margaret replied.

"Well, Dorothy spent the afternoon with you just last week, but I'll ask her mother to let her come again."

"I'd rather go to her house," Margaret declared.

"Better not let her go out while she has that temperature," said her father uneasily, and he picked up his little daughter and put her on his shoulder. "Your legs are getting too long to ride up there, Peggy," he said with a sigh.

Margaret's legs were indeed long—and thin—but she snuggled up to him and patted his cheek lovingly.

"What must I bring you to day?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said sighing.

"Does anything hurt you?" he demanded.

"No, I don't think so," she answered uncertainly.

"The truth is the child is never quite well," he said to his wife when Miss Rogers had led Margaret off to lessons.

"I don't think her glasses suit her," said Evelyn, "and I'm sure we ought to have the operation for adenoids again."

"We'll have to wait until this business of straightening her teeth is over," said her husband. "By the way," he added suddenly, "I succeeded yesterday in buying the lot just below us here, and I'm going to pull down that old rattletrap of a house and plant a rose garden."

"I'm delighted," said Evelyn. "It will be such a good thing to get those children out of the way."

"The man, Perkins came to see me and told a long tale about the house—said his father built it, and all his children had been born there—but I can't help that, we don't want people of that character in this locality. Fortunately Perkins mortgaged the place some years ago, and yesterday I got the chance to take up the mortgage. I knew you would be glad."

"I am, indeed," said Evelyn. "Heaven knows what diseases those children might have. They had whooping cough last winter, and I look every day to see a scarlet fever sign on the door."

"I'll tear down the house at once," Burnham decided.

Doctor Askew didn't seem alarmed about Margaret when he arrived, so Evelyn decided to keep her engagement for bridge. Miss Rogers, too, thought she was mistaken in fancying the little girl feverish—if anything her temperature seemed a shade below normal.

It was a glorious summer night; the forge was full of gossip, and the boys and girls were dancing at the Cross-roads. He saw Mary sitting on the bank with little Kitty Donohoe; Kitty's fair hair shining like pale gold in the moonshine, and Mary's cheek rimmed with silver. He looked at them both, but it was on Mary's averted face that his glance lingered. Afraid to speak to Mary, he began to talk to Kitty. He hoped that Mary would join in the conversation. He wanted to hear her voice again.

Mary listened for a while silently, and then got up quietly and moved away to the house, leaving him with Kitty.

TO BE CONTINUED

NEIGHBORS

Florence Olmstead in Extension Magazine

"I think Margaret has a little 'temperature' this morning," said Evelyn Burnham to her husband.

Frank Burnham looked at his only child anxiously and put his hand on her forehead. "Her skin is perfectly cool," he said, "but perhaps I'd better telephone Askew to drop in and see her."

Margaret listened passively to her parents' remarks. She was a good little girl, but life was too circumscribed to be enjoyable.

She scarcely eats a thing," her mother complained. "I think I'll ask Doctor Askew to change her diet."

"I hate those old foods," said Margaret with some show of interest.

"Why, I think they are very nice," said her mother.

"You eat lots of other things besides," Margaret retorted. "I think it was entirely true. Evelyn had a most excellent appetite and was fighting a losing battle with her waistline. Undeniably she was stout, but there was a look of Oriental splendor about her, with her high color and dark eyes, and she was most imposing as the head of Frank Burnham's paintal home. It hardly seemed possible that the pale, thin, straight haired little Margaret could be her daughter."

Frank Burnham, too, thick set and florid, looked the successful man that he was, so that Margaret's physique remained a mystery. Yet it was the hardest reality of life to the Burnhams, and they tended their one blossom with such care that nature had made over to art all responsibility in the matter. Margaret was kept alive by theories and thermometers, and such consideration of each moment of her weary day as would have disabled a child of robust constitution.

Her little back, however, had been fitted to the burden by ten years of sad experience, and she remained at least quiescent in the splendid house where her parents sat, each with a finger or the pulse of her body—or her spirit.

"I wish I had someone to play with," Margaret said suddenly.

"Doesn't Miss Rogers always play with you nicely?" her mother asked.

"I mean a little girl," Margaret replied.

"Well, Dorothy spent the afternoon with you just last week, but I'll ask her mother to let her come again."

"I'd rather go to her house," Margaret declared.

"Better not let her go out while she has that temperature," said her father uneasily, and he picked up his little daughter and put her on his shoulder. "Your legs are getting too long to ride up there, Peggy," he said with a sigh.

Margaret's legs were indeed long—and thin—but she snuggled up to him and patted his cheek lovingly.

"What must I bring you to day?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said sighing.

"Does anything hurt you?" he demanded.

"No, I don't think so," she answered uncertainly.

"The truth is the child is never quite well," he said to his wife when Miss Rogers had led Margaret off to lessons.

"I don't think her glasses suit her," said Evelyn, "and I'm sure we ought to have the operation for adenoids again."

"We'll have to wait until this business of straightening her teeth is over," said her husband. "By the way," he added suddenly, "I succeeded yesterday in buying the lot just below us here, and I'm going to pull down that old rattletrap of a house and plant a rose garden."

"I'm delighted," said Evelyn. "It will be such a good thing to get those children out of the way."

"The man, Perkins came to see me and told a long tale about the house—said his father built it, and all his children had been born there—but I can't help that, we don't want people of that character in this locality. Fortunately Perkins mortgaged the place some years ago, and yesterday I got