

THE RETURN OF MARY O'MURROUGH

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CHAPTER XII—CONTINUED
"WHY WOULDN'T IT BE A COMFORT TO HIM TO SEE HER?"

After this welcome Mary made the nursing of Owy her daily occupation, such tender charity to the lonely old man filling a great vacancy and hastening the slow-footed hours. Every day she took the uphill path to the little farm, which was already showing dolorous signs of its master's absence, and returned in the evening to sleep at Mrs. Dermody's. Growing bolder, she seized the opportunity when Owy slumbered from weakness, to walk about the yards and fields, observing the things that were going wrong, and striving to discover whether she herself might or might not make an effort towards putting them right. At favourable moments she gathered from Owy information as to the requirements of the season for land and beasts, and quietly took the direction of such matters into her hands, and animals were properly housed and fed as Shan would have had them, the fences were mended, the turf was cut and put to dry, the manure for the potatoes was gathered and stored. People passing by the Sullivan's holding remarked that Owy was "managin' wonderful" without his son, considering his age and illness, and that it was worth for him to have Mary O'Murrough to carry out his orders.

In the late hours of the evening she was helpful with knitting and sewing, her superior cleverness and experience giving her a power admired and appreciated by the Dermody's. At the same time, her singing of the old songs treasured in her memory during the years of absence was an attraction to her neighbours, and many a one came dropping in for an hour before bedtime to hear Mary O'Murrough lilt the "Poor Croppy Boy" and the "Boys of Wexford." Owy's praise of her and Shan's words of delight in it, let fall by the old man, had given her courage to exercise this gift left to her still, though her beauty might be gone. If Owy's failure to give her the ability to criticize her looks, the keenness of his other faculties had enabled him to bestow on her this courage and comfort. As the people grew accustomed to her altered appearance, and became acquainted with her in her new character, the painful consciousness of change in herself was less acute, and the cheerful spirit of hope which was natural to her was steadily striving to reassert itself. She ceased to fear absolutely that the lover's messages which came from Shan were received by one who was in reality a stranger to him. Faint expectation of a return of joy was stirring in her heart when the young year stepped over the stone archway, and in the April, with feet still rosy from cold, and wet dew, with gleaming in golden sandals of intermittent sunshine.

One evening, when spring seemed to stand a-tiptoe on the blue-grey hills watching across the world for the coming of summer, with wings half spread ready to fly to meet her, Mary came slowly through the fields after her day's attendance on Owy. Nearing the gap in the fence which would lead her by a "short cut," she came on Bess and Miles sitting together on the other side with their backs toward her, their heads just above the level of the "ditch." Thinking to speak to them as she passed through the gap she was arrested by a few words from Miles in the suddenly raised voice of one who is uttering a warning which maintained against all contradiction.

"Of course, it is only to save herself from more sorrow that Shan is keepin' her away. Why wouldn't it be a comfort to him to see her?" Mary stood still, gazing with eyes that did not see, and ears that heard no more. After a minute's interval she turned on her steps, and went across the fields by another foothold.

A storm of passion was in her heart, remorse for her own stupid obedience, disgust at her cowardly patience, anger even at Father Faby's mild, misunderstanding counsels. Would the night ever pass, and the morning come, so that she might start at once to bring comfort to Shan in his prison? O wicked meekness! O mistaken submission to a sentence which she had accepted as cruel only to herself, but which in reality was punishment of another already so undeservedly afflicted.

The barriers erected by her patience against the eagerness of her desire had been swept away by a word, and next morning at cock-crow would have seen Mary on her way to the County Gaol, had she not remembered that on one certain day of the month only could Shan be visited. The day was near, but a further pause in her present state of mind appeared unendurable.

On the evening before the longed-for morning, she went to look for Father Faby, and found him walking up and down the road before his cottage, reading his breviary.

"To-morrow's the day for visitin' Shan, Father. I've made up my mind to go to see him."
"No, no, child. Don't go back of your word. Didn't you promise me you wouldn't?"
"I see now that he wanted to save me the trouble and the pain. It

couldn't be that he wouldn't find comfort in seein' me. I'll make him feel that it was far more pain to me to have to stay away, and that it'd glad I am to see him, if he was in a worse place than a prison."
The old priest looked at her, and saw that some change had taken place in her. Here was passion instead of patience, energy for action instead of passive fortitude. No use he thought, in striving with her further.

"May I go with you, Mary?"
"No, thank you, Father. I'll go by myself. I want you to tell me the way to go, and the hours, and the rules, and all about it."
The Father shut his book and took her into his house, and wrote on a piece of paper all the directions needed for her journey and her visit.

"I'm going to see Shan tomorrow," she said to the Dermody's next morning early. "Father Faby knows."
"God bless y', an' I'm glad," said Mrs. Dermody. "It's too hard they were on y' when they were keepin' y' here."
"She's wonderful cool over it," said Bess to Anne Bridget after she had gone. "If it was me goin' to see Miles after all them years, I think I would be in bigger excitement."
"Few words says most," said Anne Bridget, going on with her knitting. "I wish to God she was back, out of it."

The white heat of Mary's passion carried her swiftly over the miles she had to walk, and a short railway journey brought her to her destination.

CHAPTER XIII

"IT'S SOMEBODY THAT'S COME IN HER PLACE"
Shan, sitting in his prison cell wept in gloom as informed that a visitor wanted to see him.

Doggedly obeying the summons, he followed the warder, expecting to see no one but the priest, and stared with surprise at the strange face and figure of a woman awaiting him.

Disappointed and resentful at such intrusion on his cruel privacy, he stood before the unwelcome intruder, his shaven head, a dark, hard-faced man his bitter silence declaring misfortune.

A sob rose in Mary's throat, and was checked. They gazed at one another for half a minute, he without recognition, she striving to see in him the joyous, happy-go-lucky lover of her early years.

Unable to speak, she stretched out her hands towards him.

"It's good of you to come to see me," said Shan, "but I disremember ever seeing you before. Will y' kindly tell me who you are?"
"Shan!" cried Mary; and at the sound of her voice he started.

"Shan, do y' mean that you don't know me?"
"mean that I don't. In the name of God, who are you?"
"Shan!" cried Mary again, dry lips, and the sweet voice strained out of tune, "am I that changed? Is there nothing of me left at all—that you wouldn't know Mary O'Murrough?"
There was dead silence. The warder whose business it was to be present during the visits paid to the prisoner, and who was a sympathizer with, and a believer in Shan, here moved a little further away and turned his face to the wall. He knew the story of the lovers, and understood the tragedy that was being enacted.

touching some vibrating chord in his heart. He held the hand tightly for a moment, and allowed his averted eyes to wander round and fix themselves hungrily on this new face looking for love. Something in the pleading blue eyes reminded him of her of the vision, and the courage on these brows appealed to his manliness for admiration. His face softened and he began to tremble, and a man's tears began to rain on their locked hands.

"Forgive me, Mary," he said. "I believe it's you. I'm a nice fellow to be denyin' you, an' you never faultin' me in my felon's clothes. But oh, Mary, what did they do to y' over there?"
He dashed the tears aside and threw back his head, gazing at her with a long dazed look. She saw the scars beginning to come back to his eyes; and at the same moment the warder with his face to the wall called out gently:

"Time's up!"
"I'm goin'," said Mary, and loosened her fingers from Shan's still clinging hand.

"Good-by now, Shan, and remember whatever comes, you're a free man. If Mary had been drowned goin' to America you would have remembered her kindly, an' it's what you have to do now is to remember her that way still."

The warder was at her side, and she was gone.

Her body was out in the cool spring air again, but her spirit was walking through fire.

Everything of late had tended to make her think less poignantly of her changed appearance, the kindness of the neighbours who, after the first surprise, had accepted her in her new character and taken her into their affections with a fresh impulse; the reception given to her by the blind Owy, for whom her voice and hand were enough without a feature of her face; and, not least of all, the encouragement of Father Faby, who had never seemed to expect that Shan's love would be killed at first sight of the worn face which was now as the face of a strange woman.

In the sudden rush of feeling and swift action following on the suggestive words of Miles Donohoe she had forgotten herself wholly, eager only to bring comfort, and to make amends for apparent indifference.

Now she was wildly aware that a weird and awful thing had happened; that they two who had lived apart in vivid life and faith so long were stricken by incredible death of the heart in the moment of their meeting. She fled along the primrose paths, as if hurrying away from under the cloud of doom which she felt to be descending on her, obeying the mysterious ruler and timekeeper within the brain, that leads hither and thither, presenting order in the absence of the higher intelligence, and which now carried her to the railway station, seated her in the train, and put her on the road to Killeleagh. Piping of mated birds, bleating of lambs newly yeasted, were unheard by her; the gold wheel of the evening star turning in a river of faint green light that almost drowned the lower hills on the horizon, she did not see; the gathering night cloud on the brow of Mangerton, threatening a storm, had no existence to her consciousness. But, by the fall of the dusk she knew, somehow or other, that she was back at Killeleagh.

Anne Bridget was at the door watching for her, and spoke over her shoulder to Bess when she saw her coming. "I was right enough when I wished her well back. Here she's comin', an' I'm feared all isn't well with her!"
Mary came in without speaking, and the look in her face struck the sisters dumb. A startled glance passed between them, and then Bess put a hand on Mary's shoulder and said softly:

"Let me take off your hat; an' sit down now. Y' walked a lot, an' not a bit to eat since mornin'." Anne Bridget, will y' make a cup o' tea."
Anne Bridget was already preparing a meal, and Mary, rousing herself, thanked them, and made an effort to eat a little, while Bess went out to look for her mother and to utter to herself by some expressions of her pity.

"What happened at all, at all?" she asked. She was well enough made up in her mind what it would be like to see him in prison.

"There's nothing like seein' a thing to make y' feel it's true," said her mother. "I hope he was glad to see her. She's some through enough, poor creature, without more!"
Meanwhile, Anne Bridget was trying to salve a wound without knowing where the blow had fallen.

"It was hard on y' goin' to see him there. Y' ought to be biddable to the priest. Shan wouldn't be like Shan, in that place. An' 'twould make a man wild to be there to meet y' comin' home, an' he doin' nothin' to deserve it."
"He didn't complain," said Mary, finding her voice.

"No, he wouldn't. He's a man," said Anne Bridget. "An' oh, but I'm sure he was terrible glad to see you."
Anne Bridget went on, encouraged to say cheerful words. She had become so fond of Mary that her altered looks were forgotten, and no inspiration as to the true state of things had warned against the danger of stabbing where she meant to heal.

When she said "he was terrible glad to see you," the agony that leaped into the white listening face shocked her; and Mary, seeing the

shock, got up suddenly and went quickly out of the doorway.

Darkness had fallen, the clear dark of a spring night with radiant constellations moving westward, and a mysterious promise of glory to come in the east. The air was sweet with the breath of hidden growing things increasing in young joy, the burgeoning leaf preparing for the flower, a thymy fragrance exhaled from the invisible bog where myriads of tiny exquisite, long dormant, were exulting in returning animation, kindled only yesterday by the sun.

Where she went in that dark hour Mary herself hardly knew, and no one dared to follow her. When she came back the Dermody girls chafed her hands at the fire, and took her shoes off and bathed her cold feet in warm water. She said nothing, but looked her thanks. Then they, one at each side of her, helped her up to the little loft, she putting no objection, but slipping out of their hands on her bed, and turning her face away from them to the wall.

"I think her heart is broke somehow," said Bess, crying, and she and Anne Bridget set over the fire wondering as to what had happened. "I think I never could be like that as long as Mike was fond of me."
"Why wouldn't he be fond of her?" Anne Bridget, "after all the long years they stry to get one another."
"Oh, why?" said Bess; and her thoughts went back to the words Miles had spoken at the forge, about the change in Mary's looks, when she said: "A young man would care, and her own heart had rebelled against such possible consequences of a many-years-long engagement."
The next morning Mary was unable to rise, and for many days lay prostrate. She made no complaint of body or of mind, but the Dermody's were alarmed and sent for Father Faby.

Shan's lyn' there as white as chalk, Father Faby can't make use of any food. There's fever on her, but I think myself she's worse out," said Anne Bridget.

The old man climbed to the loft, and Mary's eyes kindled with gratitude when she saw him stooping his tall head to come in at the little low entrance to her nest under the rafters.

"Now, Mary child, what's this?" he said taking her limp hand. "You haven't all the strength you pretend to have. And you don't talk enough. How did you find Shan?"
He had set down on her American trunk beside her. It was not medicine she wanted, he knew, but an opening for some outpouring of the heart's bitterness. She had told none of her friends where the ailment in her lay. She would tell the priest.

She turned her face towards him, and the old courage came into her eyes as she looked at him.

"He didn't know me, Father. He couldn't believe it was me. He doesn't want me."
"He's feared the feared, the thing he had hoped to save her from by trying to keep her from going to see Shan in prison; thinking that after a time of rest reinvigorated health might restore something of her old self in outward appearance, might revive the flower aspect so sweetly important to a woman, the comely look which the eye of another beholds to look upon. The blow had fallen, and this creature—was she wounded unto death?"

He would try her courage further. "Now, Mary, don't be talkin' nonsense. Of course, neither of you could be the very same that you were when you parted. It's not in nature. And Shan's downhearted, and no wonder! You must give him time to come round, the poor fellow! Not want you indeed? If a man ever wanted a woman in this world, doesn't he want you now?"
A little colour came into Mary's face as she looked wistfully, eagerly, at this comforter.

"And take my advice, child, and get up and walk in the mountain air, and eat and drink everything you can. Goat's milk will make you strong, and that will do more good to Shan than all your fretting. Goat's milk, remember, Mary—and pray to the good God that made you both—"

Down he went on his stiff, rheumatic knees, and Mary's pale lips moved as she followed the suppliant words of his prayer for her. His blessing and his hand on her head at departure scathed her wonderfully, and after he was gone she fell asleep.

In a few days she was found to be much better, and was soon at work again, nursing Owy, and looking after the Sullivan's little farm.

THE IDOL OF AVIATORS

No one has yet appeared among the heroes of the air to whom the dauntless Gynemer has been forced to take second place. His name is still uttered with unconcealed reverence by American aviators no less than by his own countrymen. Nor is his incomparable record in disposing of seventy-five enemy planes the only reputation that his admirers dwell upon. A young American who aspires to emulate the late "ace of aces" writes to his parents in this country: "I am acquainted with a Christian Brother here who knew Gynemer well. He said that he confessed every week and would never fly until he had first uttered a prayer. The French priest here preached an excellent sermon over him. The life of Gynemer

reads like that of a saint; he has had Paris in the palm of his hand. The children in the streets throw flowers after him; he was an honored guest in the most exclusive homes. He had every medal that his country could award. He was decorated by every Allied King, yet it was the picture of the 'Ave Maria' that he wore closest to that boyish heart that never changed."
If those who choose the daring line of duty in which the French hero gained so envied a name will but strive to fashion their loyalty to God as well as to Country on Gynemer's example, the war's list of heroes will grow sparse.—Catholic Transcript.

Agathe was interested at once, and her father tried to be. The officer paused, staring thoughtfully at the gravel walk, before he began, very, very slowly:

"Our regiment—the Ninety-third—lost heavily in the Battle of Marne and along the Aisne, and among the men sent to fill the gaps in our ranks was one whom I had known at college, a brilliant, attractive fellow, the son of an old and aristocratic house. I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw him, for he—you see, he had been a lieutenant in the artillery, and—and we who knew him could hardly believe it when we heard that—at the very beginning of the Battle of the Marne he played—coward—and deserted."

"How he managed to slip away and to keep himself hidden I can't imagine. But he did. Every one in our division heard the story, so you can understand my amazement when, a year later, I recognized him among the new privates in our regiment."
"He saw that I knew him—as of course I did, since we had studied and fought and larked together for years at college! He came straight to me, and said bluntly:

"Well, are you going to give me up? There's a price on my head, you know."
"Not if you behave. What do you take me for?" I answered gruffly. I am afraid."

"I don't know why I spoke as I did, unless because he, who had always been gay and pampered, looked so worn and sad that somehow it was all I could do to keep from making a baby of myself. We should have hated anything like that."
"After a time he told me, little by little, how at the prospect of going under fire he had been so terrified that he had lost his wits—hardly knew what he was doing. Afterwards, heart-sick and disgraced, ashamed to hold up his head, he thought of giving himself up. He had disgraced his people, and knew that they would never forgive him."

"He could not forgive himself. He foresaw that as long as he lived he could never be anything better than a fugitive. But he came to the conclusion that it would be braver to do what he could for France than weakly to take the line of least resistance. So he offered himself for the army. Said he was an American. He spoke English abominably, but the recruiting officers did not speak it at all, so that made no difference. He was accepted and assigned to our regiment."

"The old Count was listening now. A private he did something for France," he echoed.

"Yes, and he bore himself like a hero—fought with all his might and apparently with no thought of danger. He offered himself for every hazardous bit of work and did it coolly. But he wasn't the boy I had known. He was changed—changed! He had become quiet and reserved, and seemed to prefer to be alone. With me he was always offish, in spite of all I could do to show how deeply I respected him. Our chaplain was his only friend, and I imagine that he, too, knew the whole story. Jean liked priests; he was always pious. It was all very strange—and very sad!"
The soldier stopped, considering his story finished, but the Count was not satisfied. After a thoughtful silence, he said: "And now? Where is he now?"
"He was fatally injured while helping to rescue some wounded men who were exposed to the enemy's fire and died before we could get him to a hospital. We buried him in the little military cemetery at Rheims, and—and I hate to think that I can never tell. I promised him that I would not. I helped to lay him to rest, and I myself marked the little cross above his grave. I marked it. 'Our boy.' That is what his mother had always called him. I knew, because I used to see her letters when we were at college. She died three years ago, so she never knew." He had forgotten Agathe for the moment, but suddenly the girl hid her face on her father's shoulder, and sobbed uncontrollably.

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