

### Coincidence

Knapsack on back and cane in hand, Glenn O'Shaughnessy trudged up the hill towards the group of cottages which formed the hamlet called Winslow. The sun was high in a cloudless sky, everything was still. Not a twig stirred, not a leaf trembled. The only object in motion was the traveller, toiling along, raising little puffs of dust with every step. He surmounted a sharp rise, turned to the left, and was in the village. Here, by contrast with the road, it seemed almost cold. Tall trees kept out the burning rays of the sun. Here and there, between the branches, sun-beams reached through, flecking the brown road with bars of bright gold. Trees dominated everything, dwarfing the cottages almost to insignificance. With the exception of the trees, the highest object in the village was a white church, whose slender steeple shot up until the cross on the top was almost hidden among the leaves.

Glenn looked sharply about, expecting to see one of those neat signs which announce that "Teas" are to be had. But no such signs were in evidence, evidently Winslow was one place which tourists had not as yet discovered. He was almost abreast of the church when he met a small boy. He hailed him.

"Hello, there! Can you tell me where I can get something to eat?"

The youngster stared at him with sombre eyes, appraising him from tattered hat to dust-covered hiking boots. Then he pointed to a small house a few yards away from the church.

"There!"

With a word of thanks, Glenn walked on. Reaching the gate of the house, he stopped a moment. The house was painted a snowy white. The windows had ornamental shutters of green. The shades were partly drawn, each exactly on a level with the others. The garden impressed the observer as a marvel of mathematical precision. On each side of the small porch was a trellis. That on the left was almost hidden with white roses, that on the right with red. The grass was shorn close, the flower-beds had been calculated to a hair's-breadth. Around the whole garden was a low box hedge, trimmed to a nicety.

After brushing most of the dust from his clothes,



Glenn pushed open the gate, walked up the white gravel path, and rapped on the door. It was opened by a tall, spare woman dressed severely in black. Hat in hand, the knocker began, "I was told that I—"

"Who's this? Who's this? Come in here, young man, until I have a look at you."

A huge form seeming to block up the whole hall, had appeared behind the woman. She fled, and the visitor was left face to face with the master of the house. The form stretched forth a large hand and drew Glenn into the hallway. Piercing blue eyes gazed at him intently. Glenn's eyes had not yet accustomed themselves to the dimness of the hall, but he was able to discern that he stood before a priest, a tall, bony priest with a tremendous breadth of shoulder and white, silky hair. The young man began again. "I'm afraid I'm intruding, father. I thought meals were sold here. I was told—"

The old priest broke into a chuckle. "There are no meals sold in Winslow. I hold the monopoly on the meal trade. I was just about to start luncheon. You are just in time to join me. Martha! Another place!"

After a hasty wash and brush-down, Glenn sat down at the table with the priest. There was scarcely any conversation until the tea was brought in. Then the host broke the silence.

"Been hiking very long, young man?"

"Over a month now. I've come a long way, from Harding."

"Your features seem familiar. Aren't you one of the O'Shaughnessy's there?"

"Yes, my name is Glenn. Mother's, before she married, was Downey."

"Hmm. In that case, I know your grandmother, who was Mary Clive."

"You know—ah—indeed? I'm afraid I have sad news for you. My grandmother died three weeks ago."

"Mary dead!"

"Yes, she died suddenly. Everybody mourned for her, even the young men. She had captured every one of their hearts."

"I can well realize that. Mary was a great heart-capturer."

"She certainly was that. Have you ever heard of her girlhood romance, father? How she was courted by three men at once?"



"Perhaps I have; but tell me about it."

"There was really nothing strange in the fact that grandmother had three suitors. From her school-days on she was the sweetheart of the village. In a short time, however, the race narrowed down to three men. One of these just an ordinary man, but the other two were truly giants. Naturally, attention focused on these last two, the other man remained more or less in the background."

"But he emerged, finally?"

"Yes. To return to the other two, one was called Burke and the other Mulrooney. As they were by far the biggest men in the village, a rivalry sprang up between them. When Mary Clive came along, matters were brought to a head. Burke was a thoughtful, quiet sort of chap, but Mulrooney was in every way the opposite. He had a temper that was easily aroused, and his fist was respected and feared for miles around. He put no curb on his tongue, and told his two rivals that the home of Mary Clive was not healthy for them. Burke stated, very quietly and calmly, that he would visit the Clive home as often as he pleased. The small man said nothing."

"Afraid of this Mulrooney, was he?"

"Not a bit of it. That very evening he went to see Mary. A few minutes later Mulrooney walked in, trembling with rage. He took the other and threw him into the road. But he soon discovered that meekness does not always go with short stature. The small man rose and came back like a miniature whirlwind. Then Mary stepped between the two men, sent her guest into another room, and, in a few well-chosen words, told this Mulrooney just what she thought of him. He left the house with burning ears. He brooded over the matter for days. Finally he managed to down his rage, and determined to apologize."

"Did Mary forgive him?"

"I didn't reach that part yet. He entered the house, full of humility and contrition. What was his surprise to find Burke there! At that the last hold on his temper snapped. He rushed for the other man like a wolf. Burke stood up to meet him. Mary could do nothing to stop this fight. For once Burke's reserve was broken, and he became as angry as Mulrooney. Each was bent on killing the other. When they were both nearly exhausted, they were finally separated by a group of neighbors."



"I suppose Mary was very angry, was she not?"

"Yes, indeed. She told both men never to see her again. She would accept no apology. And worst of all, the whole affair was due to a mistake. I don't think Mulrooney realizes, even to this day, that Burke had called on Mary to tell her he was leaving for the seminary. It's a strange thing, he seems to have disappeared. It is known that he was ordained a priest, but he has never returned to Harding, and nobody knows where he is located."

"And Mulrooney?"

"Well, Mulrooney never saw Mary again. He stayed around for a short time, expecting forgiveness, I suppose. But soon he, too, disappeared."

"And Mary married—?"

"The third man, my grandfather. And that, father, completes the story."

Glenn cast a glance at the clock. "I think it's about time I was on my way." He rose.

The old priest stood up before him.

"Glenn, I am a big man, almost a giant, am I not?"

"You are one of the biggest men I have ever seen."

"And I once knew your grandmother," continued the priest softly. He gazed at his guest with twinkling eyes.

All at once the truth rushed upon Glenn. He held out his hand. The priest locked it in a firm clasp. "I must be going. Good-bye, Father Burke!" The priest broke into a rumbling laugh.

"Good-bye, Glenn O'Shaughnessy. Don't forget to close the gate!"

He conducted his guest to the door, watched him pick up his pack and cane, and then stood looking after him going down the path.

Glenn swung open the gate, stepped outside, and looked back. The old priest was still standing in the doorway, looking after him with a strange smile. "The gate, Glenn, don't forget to close the gate."

The young man nodded reassuringly and pulled the gate shut. As he bent down to lock the catch, a sunbeam fell on the upper bars. There was a brass nameplate, and on it Glenn O'Shaughnessy read

Rev. Dennis Mulrooney, P.P.

R.S.W., '35