



'Thrilling and engrossing'
Sunday Tribune

CHRISTY KENNEALLY

The Remnant

The Pope lies dying . . . and deep within the Vatican,
ambition and intrigue seeth beneath the surface

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THE REMNANT

By the same author

Second Son

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The Joseph Coat and Other Patches

A collection of poems published by Gilbert Dalton, Dublin.

Out Foreign and Back

A collection of poems published by Gilbert Dalton, Dublin.

Strings and Things

A collection of poems for children published by Paulist Press, USA.

Miracles and Me

A collection of poems for children published by Paulist Press, USA.

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The New Curate

A memoir published by Mercier Press, Cork.

Life after Loss

A handbook on bereavement published by Mercier Press, Cork.

Christy Kenneally is also a scriptwriter and presenter of the television series *Heaven on Earth* and *The Lost Gods*.

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Christy Kenneally

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*The Remnant is dedicated
to my wife, Linda, who is the heart of my life,
and to my sons, Stephen and Shane, who are its joy.*

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Kennedy Airport, New York

'This is as far as we go, sir.'

Michael Flaherty started from his reverie, surprised at the empty seats beside him and the line of gaping lockers overhead.

'You were somewhere else?' the flight attendant added, reluctant to detach: the dark man in the lived-in jeans and rumpled pullover was a possible antidote to the boredom of a three-day stopover in New York. He reached up to rescue his travel bag, and mentally Helen ticked a few more plus signs: six foot something, bare ring finger, firm in all the right places.

The flight director's honeyed tones eased into her ear. 'Helen, would you be a sweetheart and

check the bar inventory?’ Sarah’s smooth black face smiled at her with that infuriating ‘girl, I know what you’re doing’ look.

Helen stomped away to the galley, venting her frustration on tiny bottles until she sensed her colleague hovering at her shoulder.

‘Helen, you remember that training course we had on cultural awareness? Always choose a culturally appropriate form of farewell: *le’chaim*, *hasta la vista*, have a nice day. Right?’ Sarah lowered her voice and leaned in conspiratorially. ‘I guess the Irish version goes, “Are you staying over in New York? Maybe we could meet up for a drink...” Tell me when I’m getting warm, honey.’

Despite herself, Helen laughed. ‘Ah, Sarah, you have to admit he had potential.’

‘So that’s what they call it now, huh? Potential?’

Sarah scanned her clipboard, pink tongue peeking mischievously from the corner of her mouth.

‘Doesn’t say anything about potential here,’ she drawled. ‘Flaherty, Michael. Caucasian male, six feet three inches. One hundred and sixty-eight pounds. Distinguishing marks: scar front and rear of left shoulder. Unmarried, travelling on an Irish passport. So far, so good; definite potential. Three little items of interest, though, honey,’ she said quietly, and Helen’s smile wavered at her tone.

‘What?’

‘You see his eyes?’

‘His eyes?’

‘I guess you were looking elsewhere. Well, he had the kind of look my brother had when he came back from Nam. They call it the thousand-yard stare.’

Helen swallowed. ‘And the second item?’

‘He’s a Catholic priest.’

‘Shit.’

‘Tut and tut. Go wash your mouth with holy water, you good Catholic girl, you.’ Sarah slipped her arm around Helen’s waist and squeezed comfortingly.

‘Three?’

‘Say what?’

‘You said three items.’

Sarah blew out a long breath before replying.

‘Distinguishing marks, scar front and rear of left shoulder, you remember?’

Helen nodded dumbly.

‘Bullet wound,’ Sarah said bluntly, all humour fled.



Passport Control was idling in the backwash from the 747, and the lady flicked cursory eyes from Michael’s passport to the screen before pushing it back at him. Instinctively, he checked the arrivals hall for Mal. He felt relieved when he failed to find him. That particular tête-a-tête would come, but not now. His eyes fastened on a small, elderly

Chinese man, made huge in a deer hunter's parka that pulsed with the same dayglo intensity as the baseball cap shading his eyes. The old man's hands, swaddled in heavy mitts, bookended a small card. It had 'Michael Flaherty' printed on it.

'I'm Michael Flaherty.'

'I know.'

'How?'

'Process of elimination,' the little man said, casting a meaningful eye at the empty hall. He swept Michael's bag over his shoulder and led him at a brisk pace to the car park. A half-truck squatted under the diluted warmth of a sodium lamp in the disapproving glare of chrome all around; a solitary shovel lay on a sheet of tarpaulin in the back. It looks like a burial detail, Michael thought wryly. Now we drive to the New Jersey marshes and Fu Manchu whacks me with the shovel. *Arrividerci*, Flaherty.

'What's so funny?'

'Oh, nothing. Just thinking.'

'You look younger when you smile.' The driver reached under the dash and snagged a stiff white envelope. 'Maybe you should read this while you're still happy.'

The envelope, Michael saw, carried the logo of the Archdiocese of New York. The single page of notepaper crackled expensively as he spread it open. The scrawled signature at the bottom was indecipherable. Should've been a doctor, he

thought, dropping his eyes to the printed version. 'Monsignor Patrick J. Dalton, BA, BD.' Mal's pal in another life. Mal had once suggested to this particular titled cleric that he do something proctologically impossible with the archdiocese.

Mal. Mal, who had given Michael a home when he had first come to the States after his brother drowned; who had tutted about him joining the Marines and then tutted even more when he swapped their uniform for a clerical one. Mal, who Michael had discovered was his 'minder', who had assured the debriefing brass that Michael Flaherty – the only survivor of a mission gone bloodily wrong in South America – would not divulge what had really happened. At that thought, his left shoulder twinged, and he swept his head in a slow arc. No sign of Mal, the retired cop who wasn't really retired; Mal the friend, who wasn't really... His mind baulked at that and automatically filed it in the Scarlett O'Hara folder: stuff to be thought about tomorrow. Read the goddamn letter, he exhorted himself.

Dear Reverend Father,

His Eminence instructs me to inform you that you will take up residence at the Benedictine Monastery of the Resurrection, Carmel, New York State. This office will notify you in due course as to the time and date of your interview with His Eminence to review your situation.

He folded the letter and stuffed it into his inside pocket. It was, he considered, a typically bloodless letter: no reference to the murder of his brother Gabriel, or to the two people who had died violent deaths on his Island home, or to the man clubbed to death in the sea by the oars of vengeful Islanders.

The protest of the gearbox, the truck squealing on the slick tarmac, brought him back. He noted how the amber sunlight tinged houses and high-rises sepia as they traversed the city to catch the loop that would loft them upstate. The colours flared to ochre as the truck nosed through the wooded suburbs, then umbered to darkness as the sun flared and died.

He was instantly awake and alert when the hand touched his elbow.

‘Come.’

Michael stumbled behind the bulky outline, dimly aware of the cloisters that bordered the courtyard. A door winked open before him, spilling a warm oval light on the cobbles. Inside, he stood in a large spacious hallway, letting his eyes caress the rich furnishings and the gleaming staircase that melted up and into the gloom of a gallery.

His companion rustled out of his many layers in a small closet underneath the stairway, and emerged in a sober grey shirt, grey slacks and dayglo-pink bunny slippers. His eyes tracked Michael’s gaze. ‘You like them?’

‘Eh, yes. Very colourful.’

'A young lady made me a present of them. Damn feet always cold.' He offered no explanation for the cotton gloves that masked his hands. 'Hungry?'

Michael's stomach growled in reply.

'Ah, good. Follow me.'

The kitchen was all stainless steel, state of the art. The man motioned him to a small table covered with a gingham cloth, already set for two, and he sat wearily in the cushioned chair, the static of the drive tingling through his feet to the tiled floor. Briskly, his companion magicked food to the table, whisking away plastic covers to reveal a range of healthy options.

'Eat.'

He himself did not eat. Methodically, he positioned various containers within Michael's reach, until Michael sat back, sated.

'Thank you. Quite a place you've got here.'

'Yes, a man with lots of money and no kids found his conscience and left all this to the cardinal. The understanding was, of course, that there would be an annual mass offered for the happy repose of his soul, however much of it still remained. All this' – he gestured vaguely with a gloved hand – 'is just another form of fire insurance.'

He stood and moved to a cupboard, reaching up to take two tumblers and a large bottle of whiskey from the interior.

'Would St Benedict approve?' Michael asked,

smiling, raising his glass to match the other man's salute.

'Benedict is dead,' his host replied simply. 'We're alive. Cheers.'

'You work here?'

The old man laughed silently, placing his glass before him. 'I'm the abbot. Now you're wondering what sort of monastery has someone like me as abbot.'

'No. I'm wondering what sort of monastery is instructed to take someone like me.'

'Not instructed,' the abbot corrected mildly. 'The cardinal said "Please".' He stretched his pink-bunnied feet on the tiled floor, sighing with relief. 'I can call you Michael?'

'Yes, please.'

'My Chinese name would tangle your tongue. My name in religion is Raphael. Michael and Raphael – two archangels.'

There was an Archangel Gabriel, Michael thought suddenly. Gabriel my brother, who couldn't fly.

Silently, the abbot refilled the tumblers.

'Why am I here, Raphael?'

The abbot swirled the liquid in his glass and downed a good third of it before replying.

'There are five men here, including me. I'm the only Benedictine, so names are changed to protect the innocent... well, the residents. You'll meet them around the house or the farm, and they'll ignore

you. You'll do likewise. Should your paths ever cross in the outside world, you will give no sign of recognition.'

'You haven't answered my question.' It came out sharper than Michael intended, but the abbot only smiled.

'So impatient, for an archangel. Old men have the right to meander, Michael. Now, where was I? The other four, yes. Father Tobias is a Rwandan priest, a Hutu. The archdiocese had sponsored him to do a course in Columbia University, all arranged, and then the writs arrived from The Hague. It seems Father Tobias may have been involved in certain actions against his Tutsi brethren. While the lawyers discuss extradition, Father Tobias lives here as the guest of the archdiocese. Brother Jonas is a Basque Franciscan friar, who may or may not have carried a suitcase, which he may or may not have packed himself, to Barcelona. He was fortunate enough to travel to New York before anyone caught up with him. His extradition papers are also before the courts. Fathers Anthony and Anselm are priests of the archdiocese with a penchant for certain websites. Alleged penchant. The case is pending.'

He reached for the bottle, relaxing again when Michael waved a warning finger above the rim.

'And you?'

'Ah, yes. I was a Professor of Archaeology at the University of Beijing. Archaeological digs in China are marvellous places, Michael. A person can find