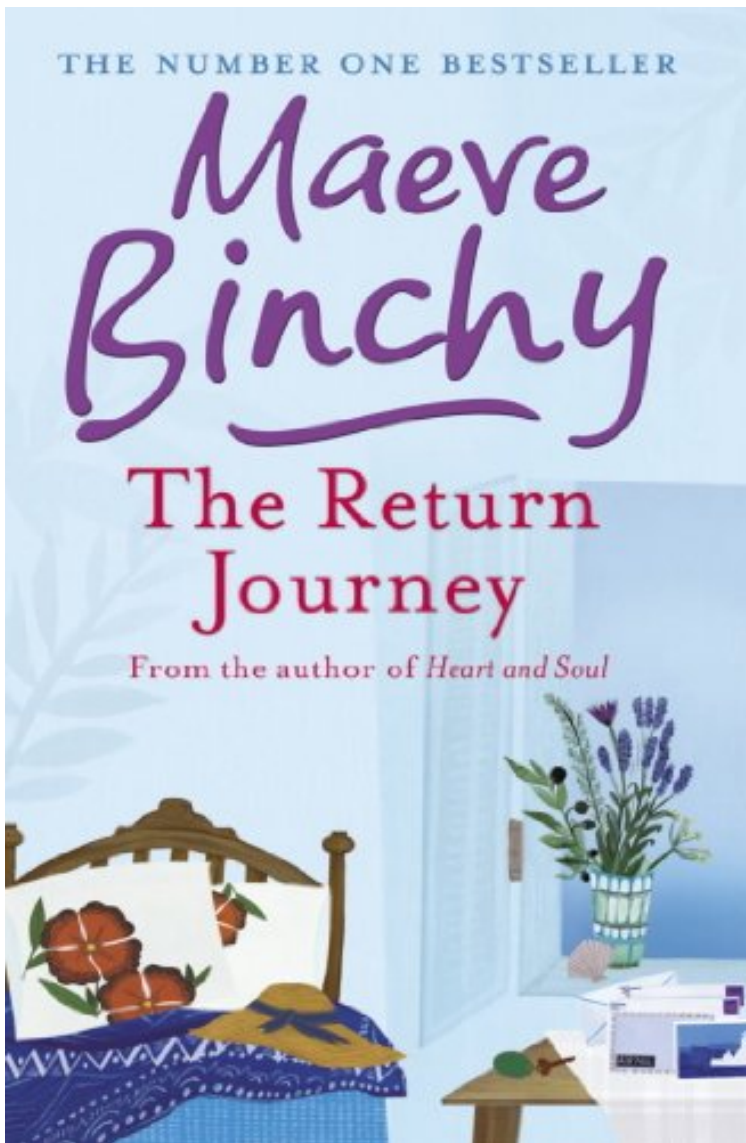


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The Return Journey (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSpellbinding stories of love, loss, revelation and reconciliation from the No. 1 bestselling author of A FEW OF THE GIRLSA secretary's silent passion for her boss meets the acid test on a business trip; a man and a woman's mutual disdain at first sight shows how deceptive appearances can be; an insecure wife clings to the illusion of order, only to discover chaos at the hands of a house-sitter who opens the wrong doors; a pair of star-crossed travellers pick up each other's bags, and then learn that when you unlock a stranger's suitcase, you enter a stranger's life. These and many more poignant, ironic, often humorous stories - unforgettable slices of life - show why Maeve Binchy is one of the world's favourite storytellers..comThe Return Journey is a collection of 14 short stories of life, love, and learning that enables the most harried reader to enjoy a well-told tale in its entirety before checking on the kids or folding the

clothes. In the tradition of Binchy's classic tales *Circle of Friends* and *Tara Road*, this consummate summer beach book introduces readers not to models of literary and romantic indefectibility, but to folks just like us, who have bad hair days, runs in their hose, and freckles both physical and metaphorical. The title story paints a portrait of the embattled relationship between a mother who left her home in Dunglass, Ireland, and her daughter, who has traveled to Ireland to find her history and finds love, as well. Through weekly correspondence, mother and daughter repair the damage to their relationship, laying to rest ghosts of an earlier mother-daughter relationship gone irrevocably wrong. And Binchy's "Victor and St. Valentine" renews faith that truly romantic men do exist and are often overlooked, their motives suspect in an increasingly self-reliant world. No one can accuse Binchy of overtelling a tale; she has perfected the art of leading her readers to the verge and then allowing them to loose their imaginations as they see fit. A wonderful and thoroughly engaging read. --Alison Trinkle Extrait

The Wrong Suitcase Annie checked in early. She had come out to the airport in plenty of time. None of this was going to be a hassle. Once she had taken her boarding card and seen the smart new case trundle off with its little tag telling it to go to London Heathrow, she sighed with relief; it was all happening now, nothing could stop it. She was going to have the luxury of really looking at the things in the duty-free shop for once, and maybe trying out a few of the perfumes on her wrist. She might even look at cameras and watches--not buy, but look. Alan was late; he was always late checking in. But he had such a nice smile and looked so genuinely apologetic, nobody seemed to mind. They told him to go straight to the departure gate, and he did--well, more or less. They couldn't expect him to go through that duty-free without buying a bottle of vodka, could they? He had no sign of fuss or confusion; he slipped onto the plane last, but somebody had to come in last. He settled himself easily into his seat in executive class. With the ease of the frequent traveler, he had stowed his briefcase and vodka neatly above, fastened his safety belt in a way that the air hostess could see it was fastened, and he had opened his copy of *Time*. Another business trip begun. Annie smiled with relief when she saw her case on the carousel at London Airport; she always half expected it to be left behind, like she expected the Special Branch men to call her in and ask her business in England and the Customs men to rip the case apart looking for concealed heroin. She was of a fearful nature, but she knew that and said it wasn't a bad way to be because it led to so many nice surprises when these things didn't happen. She took her case and went unscathed through Customs. She followed the signs for the Underground and got onto a train that she thought must be like a lift in the United Nations building: There were people of every nationality under the sun, and all of their suitcases had different little tags. She closed her eyes happily as the train rushed into London. Alan reached out easily and took his case as it was about to pass by. He helped a family who couldn't cope with all their cases arriving at once. One by one he swung them off the conveyor belt, and when he took one that wasn't theirs he just swung it easily back again with no fuss. The woman gave him a very grateful smile. Alan had a way of looking better than other people's husbands. He bought an *Evening Standard* in the paper shop and settled himself into a taxi. He had already asked the taxi driver if he could have a receipt at the end of the journey; some of them could be grumpy, always better to say what you want at the start and say it pleasantly. Alan's motto. Alan's secret of success. It was sunset; he looked out briefly at the motorways and the houses with their neat gardens away in the distance. It was nice to be back in London where you didn't know everyone and everyone didn't know you. The train took Annie to Gloucester Road, and she walked with a quick and happy step to the hotel, where she had stayed many times. The new suitcase was light to carry; it had been expensive, but what the hell--it would last forever. It was so nice, she had bought two of those little suitcase initials and stuck them on. "A.G." At first she wondered if this was a dead giveaway, wouldn't people know that they weren't married if they had different initials? But he had laughed at her and patted her nose, telling her that she was a funny little thing and had a fearful nature. And Annie Grant had agreed and remembered that most people didn't give a damn about that sort of thing nowadays. Most people. The taxi took Alan to Knightsbridge and the hotel, where they remembered him or pretended to. He always said his name first, just in case. "Of course, Mr. Green," the porter said with a smile. "Good to have you with us again." Alan folded the receipt from the taxi driver into his wallet and followed the porter to the desk; his room reservation was in order. He made an elegant and flattering remark to the receptionist, which left her patting her hair with pleasure and wondering why the nice ones like Mr. Green didn't ask you out and the yucky ones slobbered all over you. Alan went up to his room and took a bottle of tonic from the minibar. He noticed it wasn't slimline, so he put it back and took soda. Alan was careful about everything. Annie opened her case in the small hotel bedroom where she would spend one night. She would hang up her dresses to make sure the creases fell out. She would have a bath and use all those nice lotions and bath oils so that they

didn't look brand new tomorrow. The key turned and she lifted the lid. There were no dresses and no shoes. Neither the two new nighties nor the very smart toilet bag with its unfamiliar Guerlain products were in the case. There were files and boxes and men's shirts and men's underpants and socks, and more files. Her heart gave several sharp sideways jumps, each one hurting her breastbone. It had happened as she always knew it would happen one day. She had got the wrong case. She looked in terror and there were her initials; somebody else called AG had taken her case. "Oh my God," wept Annie Grant, "oh God, why did you let this happen to me? Why? I'm not that bad, God. I'm not hurting anyone else." Her tears fell into the suitcase. Alan opened his case automatically. He would set his papers out on the large table and hang up his suits. Marie always packed perfectly; he had shown her how at an early stage. Poor Marie had once thought you just bundled things in any old how, but, he had explained reasonably, what was the point of her ironing all those shirts so beautifully if they weren't to come out looking as immaculate as they went in? He looked at the top layer of the case in disbelief. Dresses, underwear--female underwear neatly folded. Shoes in plastic bags, a flashy-looking sponge bag with some goo from a chemist in it. God almighty, he had taken the wrong case. But he couldn't have. It had his initials: A.G. He had been thinking that he must get better ones, these were a bit ordinary. God damn and blast it, why hadn't he got them at the time? For a wild moment he wondered if this was some kind of joke of Marie's; she had been very brooding recently and wanting to come on business trips with him. Could she have packed a case for herself? But that was nonsense; these weren't Marie's things, these belonged to a stranger. Shit, Alan Green said aloud to himself over and over again. What timing. What perfectly bloody timing to lose his case on this of all trips. It took Annie a tearful seventy minutes on the telephone and many efforts on the part of the airline and of the hotel to prevent her from going out to the airport before she realized that she would have to wait until the next morning. Soothing people in the hotel and in the airline said that it would certainly be returned the following day. She had only discovered an office address for Mr. Bloody Green, typed neatly and taped inside the lid of the case. An office long closed by now. Tomorrow, the voices said, as if that was any help. Tomorrow he would have arrived expecting her to be in fine form and to have her things with her. They were going to go for a week's motoring holiday, the first time she was going to have him totally to herself. He was flying in from New York and would hire a car at Heathrow; he had told his boss the negotiations would take longer, he had told his wife . . . Who knew or cared what he had told his wife? But he would not be best pleased to spend the first day of their holiday in endless negotiations at the airport looking for her things. Was there no way she could find out where this idiot lived? If she phoned his home, even maybe his wife could tell her where he was staying. That was if his wife knew. If wives ever knew. It took Alan five minutes to find the right person, the person who told them that there was no right person at this time of night, but to explain the machinery of the morrow. Yes, fine for those who hadn't arranged a breakfast meeting at seven-thirty a.m., before the shops were open, before he could get a clean shirt. And what was the point of a breakfast meeting without his papers? God rot this stupid woman with her cellophane bags and her tissue paper and her never-worn clothes. Her photograph album, for heaven's sake, and pages and pages of notes, a play of some sort. Hard-to-decipher writing, page after bloody page of it. But there was one page where it revealed the address of Miss Prissy A. Grant, whoever she was, and he was sure she was a Miss, not a Mrs. A letter addressed to her had "Ms." on it, but Alan had always noted that this was what single, not married, women called themselves. Unfortunately it had no address, or he could have sent for an Irish telephone directory and found her mother and father and got the hotel that their daughter was staying at. That's if she had told them. Nutty kind of girls who carry photograph albums, unworn clothes, and plays written in small cramped writing probably told their families nothing. The man who ran the small hotel near Gloucester Road was upset for nice Miss Grant, who often came to spend a night before she went on her long trips to the Continent; she was a teacher, a very polite person always. He took her a pot of tea and some tomato sandwiches in her room. She cried and thanked him as if he had pulled her onto a life raft. "Look through his things. You might discover where he is staying," he advised. Annie was doubtful. Still, as she ate the tomato sandwiches and drained the pot of tea she spread all the papers out on the small bed and read. She read of the plans that Mr. A. Green had been building up over the last two years. Plans which meant that by tomorrow he should be able to take over an agency for himself. If things went the way he hoped. Mr. A. Green would return to Dublin at the head of his own company. The arguments were so persuasive that the overseas client would be very foolish not to accept A. Green's offer. There were photocopies of letters marked "For Your Eyes Only" . . . there were files with heavy underlining in thick felt pen, "Do not take to Office." A great deal of the correspondence was organized so that it showed A. Green's present employers, the people who were paying

for this trip to London, in a very poor light. Annie sighed; she supposed that this was the world of business. At school you didn't go plotting against the geography mistress or getting the headmaster to lose confidence in the art teacher. But it seemed a bit sneaky. Sometimes there were copies of letters his boss was shown pinned to those he had not been shown. It was masterly filing, and if you read the whole anthology, which up to now had presumably been for Alan Green's eyes only, it made a convincing case. Annie decided that A. Green was a bastard and he deserved to have lost his case and his deal. She hoped he would never find either. But then how would she get back what was hers? And God almighty, suppose he had read her diary. Alan Green decided to hell with it, he couldn't bear the flat taste of the soda. He opened a calorie-packed tonic water from his minibar and decided that he would do this thing methodically. Look on it as a business problem. Right. He had left his name with the airline, if she called. Of course she would call. Stupid girl, why had she not called already? Stupid A. Grant. She was probably in a wine bar with an equally stupid teacher talking about plays and how to write them in longhand at great length and maximum stupidity. What kind of play was it, anyway? He began to read it. He read of her romance. . . . It wasn't a play, it was the real thing. This was a diary. It was more than a diary, it was a plan of campaign. It was dozens of different scenarios that could take place on this holiday. There was the scene where he said he couldn't see her anymore, that his wife had given him an ultimatum. This creepy A. Grant had written out her lines for that one, several times over. Sometimes they were casual and see-if-I-care. Sometimes they were filled with passion, or threats: she would kill herself, let him wait. She had written the whole thing out as if it were a play, even with stage directions. Alan decided that A. Grant was a raving lunatic and that whoever the poor guy she was going to meet was, he deserved to be warned about her. He felt glad that she had lost this insane checklist of emotional dramas and how to play them; he was glad that all her finery had gone astray and that she would have to meet the guy as she was. He realized that she had probably done some kind of repair job and washed her tights and whatever just as he had washed the collar and cuffs of his shirt and the soles of his socks. Then he remembered with a lurch that she might have read his dossier on the company. Annie suddenly remembered she hadn't told the man in the airport where she was staying. She had been too upset. Suppose Mr. Conniving Green had rung in with his whereabouts; they wouldn't have been able to contact her. She telephoned them again. Had Mr. Green called? He had. This was his number. He answered on the second ring. He would come right around with her case. No, please, gentleman's privilege. Very simple mistake, must be a million AGs in the world. He'd come right away. He held the taxi. She was quite pretty, he saw to his surprise, soft and fluffy. He sort of remembered seeing her at London Airport and thinking that if she was in the taxi queue he might suggest they share. Remembering the revelations of her diary, he shuddered with relief at his escape. She was surprised to see that he looked so pleasant; she had expected him to look like a fox: sharp-featured, mean pointed little face. He looked normal and nice. She thought she remembered him on the plane up in executive class laughing with the air hostess. "I have your case here," she said. "It's a bit disarrayed, for want of a better word. I was hunting in it to see if I could find out where you were staying." "Yours is a little disarrayed too." He grinned. "But none of those nice garments you have fitted me, so they're all safe and sound." They grinned at each other almost affectionately. He looked at her for a moment. It was only eleven o'clock at night; in London that meant the evening was only starting. She was quite lovely in a round soft sort of way. . . . She wished he didn't have to go. Maybe if she said something about why not go and let's have a bottle of wine to celebrate the found suitcases . . . She remembered how he had described his boss as bordering on senility and how he had given chapter and verse to prove that the boss was a heavy drinker. He remembered how she had proposed threatened suicide with attendant letters to some guy's wife, his children and his colleagues. They shook hands, and at exactly the same moment they said to each other that they hadn't read each other's papers or anything, and at that moment they both knew that they had.