

O'CONNOR CASTLE

Written specially for The

Western Home Monthly.

Two centuries had elapsed since the O'Connors fell heir to the estate. Lord Michael O'Connor, a bachelor in his sixties, was in possession at the beginning of this story. He was an ideal landlord and had the respect and love of all his tenants, who occasionally made bold to suggest that he ought to marry and keep the estate in his own line of descent. At such times, Michael jokingly replied:

"When I'm older I may find a sweetheart to my liking and marry her."

"We want O'Connors of your type to be landlords of this estate forever," said the tenants.

The fact is, he was seriously considering marrying Eileen McCarthy, a characteristic Irish beauty, of pure soul, high purpose and noble family. Before retiring, one night, he wrote a note, seemingly for no purpose, unless prompted by some premonition. It was as follows:

"If I should die before the morning breaks, I pray the next heir to O'Connor Castle, whoever he may be, if unmarried, will wed Eileen McCarthy and thus unite two noble Irish families. May none but true born Irish ever possess this estate.—Michael O'Connor."

"P.S.—What nonsense to write! I'll certainly marry her myself before many months.—M.O.C."

He threw down his pen and rang for his servant. "Bring my night lunch," he said. "Been writing to his lady love," repeated the servant to himself as he glanced at the note on the table.

The sun was far up in the heavens the next day and the lord of O'Connor Castle had not rung for his servant. Fearing something was wrong, he entered his master's bed-chamber and at first glance thought he was sleeping. Nearing the bed, with noiseless tread, the death-like pallor and pinched features alarmed him. He laid his hand on the face—it was cold and stiff. He started back with a shriek. Turning to give the alarm, he saw the note, written by his master the evening previous. He placed it carefully in the drawer with other papers which he knew were of importance, locked the drawer, put the key in his pocket, and ran out of the room.

Amid great lamentations, the body of Michael was laid to rest.

Who will be the next heir? was asked on all sides.

The news of Lord O'Connor's death reached the lowly cabin of his nephew, Cass O'Connor, in a remote part of Ireland.

"Sure," said he, to the woman who lived with him, "I'm glad enough he's under the sod."

"It's not becoming for a nephew to speak in that manner," she replied.

"Be jabbers! I don't care, continued Cass. "He cheated my father out of his rights; now I'll get them back with interest, be gorra! The dead cannot kick, so we'll live in style, and no mistake."

"Was your father the rightful heir?"

"No, but he owned some fine property adjoining the estate, which my uncle always coveted. My father got in debt and borrowed money from my uncle, who took a mortgage. It came due one month before my father was able to meet it. The mortgage was foreclosed, the property taken, and we were penniless. When my father got the money, he refused to give him back the property. He brought his family down here—only one child—and died when I was a lad. Mother soon followed. A neighbor took me to share his poverty and brought me up in comparative ignorance."

"Have you seen the castle?"

"I do not remember it, and never wished to go there while my uncle lived."

"I'll be glad," replied the patient little woman, "to leave this miserable cabin, where pigs, dogs and donkeys enter at will."

Anxious to make a favorable impression, Cass donned his blue stocking snuff-colored corduroy knee-breeches, blue velvet vest, swallow tailed coat, and black slouch hat. Arriving at the Castle, he announced to the dignified, liveried porter that he was the new master.

"You cannot enter here," he replied, "till your heirship has been proven."

"How dare the like of you question my right to take possession of my own? I'll cause you to regret your insolence," sputtered Cass, as he made an effort to pass the porter.

"Go slow," said he; "you're not of the castle born type of O'Connors. I have my orders, and none but rightful heirs shall enter the castle."

"Here's my proof," roared Cass, as he pulled an old family Bible from one of the long tails of his coat. The porter examined it.

"It has the appearance of being genuine," said he, "but you look like a fake, so be off with you!"

In great wrath and with many bitter threats, Cass left.

Other claimants were soon on the scene, but the courts finally pronounced Cass O'Connor the lawful heir.

On the triumphant return of the new master, the porter was so humble and respectful—that he was retained in his

relationship, and those few were now bribed to secrecy.

The porter came back promptly, and was appointed superintendent of affairs, while Cass went abroad to prepare himself for his new position.

"Lord of O'Connor Castle" was passport into the society of the rich and noble. By what seemed mere chance, he met Miss McCarthy and her father in England and was invited to come to their home on his return. His stay abroad was short, and he visited the McCarthy's in due time an engagement was brought about—against the wishes of the young lady, it was whispered.

Before the close of the year, as Cass had prophesied, he brought Eileen McCarthy to the castle as his bride.

With the passing of years, he grew impetuous and tyrannical with his servants, indifferent and inconsiderate toward his wife. At night he wandered through the castle like one demented. No one was allowed out of his room between midnight and dawn. His three sons were nearing manhood and he wished to get them away from the castle.

One evening, as he was sitting with his wife in the library, he said:

"Eileen, we must take our boys and leave this country for a time; a change might benefit me."

"Where do you propose to go?"

"To Canada."

"There is a secret entrance into it, known only to me. It is in a dilapidated condition and requires repairing. Come this way."



Daisies in the Field.

The upper part can be reached from this hall. Press your hand on that spot and the entrance to the stairway will open. From the inside this door can be slid at will. Follow me."

Cass entered at the opening, but not without first placing his hand on his hip pocket to be sure he had his pistols.

"What was the purpose of this tower having a secret entrance?" asked Cass, after going through dingy passages and up several flights of stairs.

"As a place of safety for those in the castle in case of any uprising of the people. Large quantities of ammunition and arms were once stored here, but removed when your uncle took possession of the estate. This is where the repairing is needed, or the stone-work will soon give way."

"You are right. I'll have it attended to immediately. Capital!" he muttered to himself. His mind had not been idle while inspecting the tower. "This place will exactly serve my purpose. Arrah! I shall marry Eileen McCarthy before twelve months pass."

The porter was given two months' vacation with full pay. During his absence the work in the tower was rapidly pushed to completion. A new secret entrance was made and the old one walled up. The flat next to the top was made into two commodious rooms. They were furnished in luxurious style and provided with every commodity for comfort and good ventilation.

Cass returned to his old cabin and took the woman who had lived with him there to the castle. But few knew their true

relationship, and those few were now bribed to secrecy.

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"Where do you propose to go?"

"To Canada."

"Do tell me what you mean by the place being haunted, and the curse."

"I hope you'll never know. Perhaps after we go to Canada the spirit will depart and be at peace."

The next time we saw the O'Connor family they were on a farm in the backwoods of Canada. The expression of patient sadness on the face of the high-born wife and mother told of many trials endured.

The father and sons had been killing hogs and were preparing the meat for market.

"Why don't you go back to Ireland, Father?" asked the eldest son, Patrick. "I'm sick of working on this horrid farm, when we have enough to live the life of one's choice. I'd like to go on with my education and make more of myself than a clod-hopping farmer."

"Education be hanged! Life on the farm is good enough for you," angrily replied the father.

"Think of poor mother—too, living a lonely, sad life. I'll tell you right now I'm done with the farm. I'm the next heir to the O'Connor estate and will go there and get to the bottom of an old man's folly."

"I swear you'll never go while I live! You've no more right there than the other boys."

"That's so! Not a bit more!" voiced the brothers.

"You'll see whether I have or not," reiterated Patrick, as he turned to leave the barn.

"Where is Patrick?" asked the mother, when he did not come to supper.

"Gone to town with a load of meat," was the reply.

"How very foolish," she said, "when he knows the danger of being attacked by wild animals at night."

Days passed and Patrick did not return. The mother's intense anxiety was made unbearable by the stolid indifference of the father and brothers. She expressed her fears to the neighbors, who proved that Patrick did not leave for town. Not a horse was missing from the stable or a sleigh from the shed. The father and brothers were arrested. No trace of Patrick or his body could be found by the authorities, and the prisoners were about to be released.

"Have you searched on the hill?" inquired the father, appearing to be anxious to find his son.

The search was renewed. In a rough box, buried deep on the hillside, overlooking the O'Connor farm, they found the body of poor Patrick.

The prisoners confessed their crime and were sentenced to be hanged. Later the father was liberated because he was an old man and had not struck the fatal blow, and two to die for one was thought enough.

The grief-stricken mother returned to Ireland with her criminal husband, intending to leave him when within reach of her own people.

They once more entered the castle together. What a change!

"I cannot live with you any longer, Cass," said Eileen. "You have slain my sons, blighted my life, broken my heart! All for what? I know not. This day I go forever from you and all you possess."

Cass opened the drawer of the table in which he had found the note written by his uncle, and put something in his coat pocket.

"Eileen, you say 'all for what? I know not.' If you wish to know, follow me. I'll not harm you. Nothing matters to me now."

He walked toward the door leading into the upper hall of the castle. Tremblingly she followed. He opened the secret panel and they entered the passage leading to the last tower. Silently, solemnly, fearfully they ascended one flight of stairs after another till they reached an iron door at the top of what seemed the last flight of stairs.

As Cass turned the key in the lock, it made a hollow, ringing sound. The door flew open, and a stifling, musty odor floated out. They entered and glanced warily around. The room was in perfect order, with the exception of some bits of writing paper scattered on the floor.

"This way," said Cass, as he drew aside the rich draperies, which separated the first room from the second. "There is the cause of all our trouble," he said, pointing to a bed.

Horror of horrors! There lay the skeleton of a woman in a black silk gown, hands clasped as if in prayer.

"Here lies all that is left of the wife of my poverty," he said, as he drew nearer. "I brought her from the cabin and imprisoned her here to marry you. When we went to Canada I left her to starve. I visited her every night before we went away and supplied all her wants. I need not tell you how those visits nearly crazed me. I did it all for you and your money. The devil told me that was the road to happiness and I believed him. The poor thing loved me, too. My cruelty has had its reward in this life—no joy—no happiness—the despair of the lost possessing me. I am now done with it all and shall leave you to follow out the holy ambitions of your life, which have been a constant rebuke to me."

Eileen stood as one transfixed, gazing upon the robed skeleton. Cass' words were to her like sounds afar. A pistol shot brought her to her senses, and she beheld the body of Cass O'Connor fall lifeless in the prison chamber of his murdered wife. Thus ended the first tragedy of O'Connor Castle.

"The love of money is the root of all evil."