

CARROLL O'DONOGHUE

CHRISTINE FABER
Author of "A Mother's Sacrifice," etc.
CHAPTER XXXIV.
RICK'S DISCOVERY

The hour which Rick had named to Nora as the extent of his absence had lengthened itself to two, and she had begun to be somewhat anxious for his return. She felt so strange, so desolate, so forlorn, as if only then, when left for the first time quite alone in a strange place, that the full force of the sacrifice which she had made rushed upon her. She could hear the sound of voices, and the clink of glasses, and the tramping of feet below, and from the windows of the apartment, dimly she caught a glimpse more than her first passing glance, she might have witnessed the noisy confusion of street traffic; but all only served to remind her more bitterly of the quiet home, and lovely country surroundings which she had lost. She threw herself upon the bed to endeavor to sleep, for her eyes had scarcely closed the night before; but the excited tenor of her thoughts drove all tendency to repose away, and at length, having forced herself to partake of the inviting little repast which kind Andy Hoolahan had dispatched to her room, she sat down and yielded herself to a crowd of wild and melancholy thoughts.

There was such true, homely sympathy in the tones, and such honest kindness in the clear, earnest eyes, so different from many of the tones and looks the poor wretch was wont to meet, that his heart was suddenly and mysteriously touched. He caught Tighe a Vohr's extended hand, bowed his head over it a moment, and when he released it and turned away, there glistened upon it a large warm tear. "And you, Tighe, what are doing here?" questioned Nora, kindly, as Tighe a Vohr was about to depart. "At the old thrade,—mesel' an' Shaun gentleman's sarvints to Captain Dennier in the barracks." And shaking hands with them both he departed, turning into a secluded street, that he might have a chance to relieve his feelings by a few remarks to his faithful companion. "The loike o' that, Shaun, bates Bannagher, an' they say Bannagher bates the devil. Rick o' the Hills her father: sure it's enough to make a man shiver the moon was med o' green chase, an' the world was hung on an lilliput's back, to believe the loike o' that! faith, I can't reconcile mesel' to it at all—thim two, that are as on-loike ache other as the grizzly bears that Tom Connolly speaks o' havin' seen in Ameriky, an'—Tighe experienced his usual difficulty in finding a simile, but he thought of one at last: 'an' a noightinale; thim two to be such close blood relations. Oh, but Providence must be given to playin' divartin' tricks whin He does the loike o' that! An' the young mather—it'll break his heart completely; begorra, I'm glad I'm not the one that's to tell him, an' I hope Father Meagher will have sense enough not to tell him anyther. He has enough to bear widout addin' insult to injury in that way." And feeling somewhat relieved, Tighe turned back into the more crowded thoroughfare, in order to pursue his way to the barracks.

Rick and Nora had arrived at the home of which the former spoke—it consisted of plainly furnished, but comfortable, apartments in Mrs. Murphy's neat little two-story house; and Mrs. Murphy herself, stout and good-natured looking, was present to assure Nora that she should want for nothing in the way of simple comfort. Nora responded to the assurance in her gentle, winning way, at the same time kindly signifying her desire to be left alone with her father. "Do you like it?" asked Rick, in a despondent tone, as if he knew and feared what her answer would be. She surprised him by her cheerful reply. "Certainly I do; it is quiet and plain—just what I should choose; and I think Father Meagher and Clare will be well pleased when I describe it to them."

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Years glide so quickly as days emerge into months and slip away. The mischievous, light-hearted boy of yesterday is the over-burdened man of today, bowed beneath the nerve-racking strain of meeting the wants of his pampered, extravagant family. Tomorrow he will be out of the game, surprised, resentful, discontented, magnifying his mistakes, counting as naught the numerous blessings, cringing with fear at the approach of that inevitable scythe in the hand of Father Time. All is well only with him, who from youth to age has held steadfast to the true anchor of Faith. He, and he alone, can face the future trustfully, almost gladly—the years on earth having been but an exile, a mere preparation for a true and better home.

She sank to a bench in the corridor and motioned the man to sit beside her. With a wave she dismissed the nun who had accompanied him through the building. "Tell me how you happened to come back," she queried softly. "I don't know why I came here," his voice faltered, as he looked into the aged, saintly face of the Sister and realized how far he had wandered from her good teachings. "I don't know why I came back to the scenes of my boyhood. I'm sick. I won't live long." "Why should you not come back?" the sweet voice trembled in sympathetic understanding. "It was here you were born, here you lived with your good mother, here you went to school, here you served the Priest at Mass." "There are some things I find little comfort in remembering," the man shuddered. "Sister, I haven't been inside a Catholic Church in thirty years."

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