

CARROLL O'DONOGHUE

CHRISTMAS FABLE
 Authors of "A Mother's Sacrifice," etc.
CHAPTER LIV.
 FATHER AND SON

The journey to Dublin was made with all the speed of moderate steam travel, but the little party, each of whom was earnestly wrapped in his or her anxious and wished that the speed was increased—Nora, because of the fears of being delayed from Carroll; Father O'Connor, from a certain anxiety to know what would result from the journey; and Dennier, owing to a wild desire to learn at once on what business Lord Heathcote wished to see him; he questioned not how his lordship knew the very address to which to send his summons—he deemed it the result of accident; and when he looked at his two companions, reading with pain the care and grief marked in their countenances, he fancied he knew the cause of their mysterious journey to Dublin—that it was to beg Lord Heathcote to use his influence for some mitigation of the sentence of the beloved prisoner, yes, he was sure that such was the object—the silence of both regarding the cause of their journey, the refusal to permit Clare to accompany them, all tended to prove the truth of his conjecture, and he almost sickened as he thought how worse than useless would be their effort. Having arrived at the capital, they repaired to one of the hotels for refreshment and a brief rest, in order that pale, tired Nora might be somewhat recruited. The afternoon was far advanced, but Father O'Connor would make the effort to see Lord Heathcote, unseemingly as might be the hour.

"You are not too fatigued to make a visit with me?" he said kindly to Nora.

"No, my anxiety lends me strength; but surely you can tell me now where we are going."

The priest flushed slightly.

"Fardon me, Nora, if even yet I must refuse to gratify you; it seems cruel to keep you in such suspense, but I am bound—I have given my word, and I cannot break it; and this affair, so mysterious and harrowing to you, is equally so to me."

There was such a quiver of sadness in his voice that the gentle girl's heart was at once touched; she put her hand upon his arm with the old fond familiarity of their early childhood, and answered: "Forgive me, Charlie, and I shall repress my curiosity—I shall not ask a single question more, but simply do your bidding."

How the young priest quivered at her touch; how he yearned to strain her to him, and to tell her that that paternal affection which had always existed between them was theirs by right—that he was her brother! but the time had not yet come, and he turned away to meet Dennier, who had just returned from his room, where he had made a careful toilet for his visit to the castle—a visit which his impatience would not allow him to defer.

"Are you going out?" he asked; "to what part of the city? perhaps it lies in my direction; and as I am rather more familiar with the streets of Dublin, I may be of some service as an escort."

The priest seemed a little nonplussed, but a moment's reflection enabled him to answer: "Mr. Dennier—it had been the young man's earnest request to affix no military title to his name,—for certain reasons I have refrained from speaking of the immediate place of our destination, but I may tell you now it is Dublin Castle."

"Ah!" young Dennier's countenance brightened, and he seemed about to burst into some impetuous statement; but he evidently controlled the impulse, for the light died as suddenly out of his face, and he was silent for a moment. He was more than ever convinced of the truth of his surmise, and he had, during that instant that his face shone, burned to tell how he guessed the import of their mission, and how he would fain disengage them, knowing that the only result would be failure and bitter humiliation, but it was so delicate a matter, and they had been so silent about it, that a second thought prompted him to restrain his speech. He said instead after that moment's silence: "Permit me, then, to be your escort to the castle,—being somewhat familiar with the place, perhaps I can facilitate your interview with the party whom you wish to see."

"But your own visit to the castle—our going now may interfere with, or delay it," said the priest.

"No," answered Dennier, "there is sufficient time for me; I beg you to allow me to perform this service."

Father O'Connor seemed to accept gratefully, and Nora, despite her promise to repress her curiosity, looked the latter feeling from her beautiful eyes. The three repaired to the castle, and there, just as they were about to enter, the priest admitted that it was Lord Heathcote he wished to see, Dennier expressed no surprise, but Nora started, and she could scarcely restrain the exclamation upon her lips; yet, true to her promise, she did not question, and the young officer having accompanied them to the room in waiting, whence Father O'Connor dispatched his name to the nobleman, he took a kindly leave. The answer was almost

immediately returned, that his lordship would see the Reverend Father O'Connor.

"You will not fear to wait my return here?" he whispered to Nora.

"Oh, no," she answered, striving to accompany her words with a smile, but her surprise and anxiety were too painful. She was not left long alone; in a comparatively short time Father O'Connor returned:

"Lord Heathcote desires to speak quietly, but his manner betrayed more agitation than she had perceived ever before. She rose to accompany him, but her limbs trembled so that she was obliged to cling to him for support.

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked; "you have nothing to fear."

"I do not know why I should feel so," she answered; "but oh! Charlie, this dreadful mystery oppresses me."

Her looks gave evidence of the truth of her statement—her cheeks were flushed to the deepest crimson, her eyes sparkling with strange excitement, and the small chiselled mouth parted to emit the labored breathing; but all only enhanced her beauty, which, despite the plainness of her garb, never had been more striking nor brilliant.

"Pray!" whispered the priest.

She did pray all during the ascent to Lord Heathcote's apartments, and even for the first moment after her entrance into the presence of the nobleman, her lips moved with the closing of her favorite petition, the "Hail Mary."

His lordship did not look at her at first—he sat in his invalid chair with his hand before his face; and it was only when his visitors stood fully within the room, and the usher had withdrawn, that he dropped his hand, and rising, stood before them.

What strange feeling was it which came over poor bewildered Nora, as she met the earnest, unveiled gaze of those dark, stern eyes, as she looked into that worn and prematurely aged face, bent now upon her with so singularly watchful an expression? What wild emotion was it which, threatening one moment to stifle her, the next left her pale and faint, clinging to Father O'Connor's arm? But the eyes were withdrawn from her, and a cold, careless voice was saying:

"I have heard that both of you favor the prisoner who is under sentence of death in Tralee—are you aware that this is treason upon your part to the government?"

And the stern eyes were again fixed upon Nora, as if an answer was expected from her. But she only clung the tighter to her companion. His lordship resumed, still looking at Nora:

"I have been told that you are the affianced of this young man; you then love him, I presume?"

He spoke slowly, as if he took pleasure in the agony which the words seemed to cause her: "You would then suffer with him, I suppose—you would even suffer for him, perhaps?"

Nora never knew by what impulse she was prompted, but the nobleman's last words passed his lips, nor could she ever explain how it had occurred, but she suddenly found herself on her knees at his feet, wildly imploring Carroll's life.

"Oh, my lord!" she said, "no thought beyond the wild, uncontrollable feeling of the present moment, if it is in your power, do not let me lose your influence that they may not take his young life—spare hearts that are already wretched, and which this stroke must surely break—do this, my lord, and the life-long prayers and gratitude of many shall be yours!"

"Rise, young lady; you ask of me what is not consistent with my office," he turned away, as if he would not witness the priest's efforts to raise Nora and quiet her.

"Take me away," she moaned—"I am fainting—ill!"

"Will your lordship excuse us? we must retire," Father O'Connor said, deeply agitated.

The nobleman returned: "Yes; and tomorrow I would see you alone,"—speaking to the priest.

Father O'Connor bowed, and the attendant, entering in response to Lord Heathcote's summons, conducted them out. In the waiting-room, whither the young clergyman paused to allow Nora to recover the strength of her tottering limbs, a servant entered, saying he was sent by Lord Heathcote to see that the young lady received any attention she might require; but Nora only pleaded the more eagerly to be taken back to the hotel, and there, when alone in her room, having assured the priest and Dennier, who had met them on their return from the castle, that she only needed rest, she gave vent to the anguish which had been so cruelly renewed by the failure of her impulsive plea.

Dennier, from a feeling of delicacy, still restrained all utterance of the thoughts which burned all the more to break into speech since Nora's disturbed manner gave such vivid color to his suspicions.

CHAPTER LIV.
 THE SUMMONS TO DUBLIN

Dennier had not long to wait for his interview with Lord Heathcote—almost immediately that his name was dispatched the summons came for him to repair to his lordship. He was not prepared for the altered appearance of the nobleman—the hair which he had left but sparsely streaked

with gray, was now as white as if the snows of eighty winters had frosted it; the strong, stern face, bearing little mark to indicate that it had more than passed a manly prime, bore painful evidence of premature age; and the form, so erect, so firm, so full of the vigor of its best days, was now bowed and tottering. Contrary to his usual custom, he was standing when Dennier entered, and as the latter marked with painful surprise all the evidence of the mysterious decay, there came into his heart, with the strange feeling which the sight of Lord Heathcote always caused, a pity akin to filial tenderness for the nobleman.

Beyond the respectful greeting of the visitor, to which his lordship responded by a slight bow, there was not a word spoken for some seconds, and the young man was beginning to feel a painful embarrassment. But Lord Heathcote spoke at last.

"I have sent for you, Dennier, to give you a final chance. Youth is ever impetuous, and perhaps even now you regret the hasty action of your resignation; a position, wealth and in the future perchance, a title await you; there is but one condition required upon your part: the severing at once of every attachment you may have formed in this country."

"I cannot, my lord,—not if a kingdom lay at my feet!" The voice was low, but unmistakably firm.

"Who is the object of this loyal attachment of yours?" Lord Heathcote asked hurriedly.

"The only sister of the prisoner who is to be executed in Tralee two weeks from tomorrow," was the unhesitating answer.

"And there is an engagement between you?"

"On the contrary, my lord, no hint which might be construed into affection upon either side has ever been dropped—the esteem, the love which from the first I have borne this estimable girl, I was compelled to keep within my own breast because she was the bound upon her brother's path, becoming finally his captor; she was noble enough to resent the friendly feeling I fain would have expressed, pointing out its inconsistency with my profession. Since, however, it is no longer my duty to be her enemy, my heart rests itself in the satisfaction of being near her, to render what little service may be in my power when the blow given by her brother's execution shall have lost some of its pain, and when I shall have asserted my manhood by devoting myself to some humble toil; then, should she refuse to reciprocate my regard, I shall still remain near her to give her such protection as may be in my power."

Lord Heathcote did not answer for a moment; then he spoke hurriedly, and with painful agitation: "Dennier, you are the son of one near and dear to me, but his heart was broken by the perjury of an Irish wife—she abandoned her husband for an earlier love; and the deceived man, from that moment in which he was so ruthlessly dishonored, in which all his wild affections for his young wife was so cruelly betrayed, shut himself within the recesses of his own wretched heart—his pride would suffer him to inflict no punishment on the guilty ones; it would not permit him to blazon to the world the defamation of his honorable name. His Irish marriage had been a well-kept secret from his English friends—would throw the veil of secrecy more profoundly about it."

"He took back to England with him the child which the guilty mother had left in the home she had deserted, and he put it away from his household, and gave to it another name; and though he provided for it, and took extraordinary interest in its career, people never dreamed of the secret motive of all that singular concern."

"Honors and a title came to the unhappy father; peers sought him for an alliance with their daughters, the favor of the very court and the wealth and influence showered about him—but his heart remained the cold, proud, aching thing it had become on the wreck of his early happiness. He could not marry—with all his pride and sternness, with all the guilt of her who had so miserably fallen, he could not shut her entirely from his heart. He wore her picture—he had given it to him in the days of betrothal, and, oh, bitter confession! he loved her still."

"The son grew up to win honor and distinction by the rectitude of his conduct, and the father was secretly proud of him, for secretly he well loved him; but that son now refuses to comfort a heart so long in sorrow!"

Dennier could no longer control himself—the face, the voice, the manner of the nobleman thrilled him too earnestly, and too strangely, for him to doubt longer the suspicion which had entered his mind soon after the nobleman had begun his last remarks. He bounded forward:

"This story is your own, Lord Heathcote—you are my father!"

The nobleman's arms opened, and Dennier was clasped within them—heart to heart, face against face.

TO BE CONTINUED

Make great account of your precious trials, interior and exterior; it is thus that the garden of Jesus is adorned with flowers—that is, with acts of virtue.

AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

By Mary Mabel 'Viries in Rosary Magazine

Three men sat in the "Bachelors' Corner" of the K. C. clubrooms, and watched the surging crowds of Christmas shoppers mauling one another in the streets below.

"Christmas—" remarked Frank Donnelly as he flipped the ash from his cigar, "is decidedly a bore."

His neighbor on the left surveyed him quizzically.

"I am not," announced said neighbor, provokingly, "exactly a bore, but it gives me a queer feeling to hear a Catholic speak thus of Christmas."

"Oh, hang it all!" exclaimed Donnelly petulantly, "you know I don't mean anything derogatory to the day. It's the modern observance of the day to which I object. I'd like a thrilly, old-time Christmas—'Angels We Have Heard on High' around the tree on Christmas Eve, and a whistle in the toe of my stocking in the morning." He ran his fingers ruefully through the fast-greying hair that belied the youth of his eyes. "I'm too old for that stuff, I suppose." He sighed.

"We used to sing, 'O Tannen Baum,'" reflected August Schneider, the third member of the trio. "And the house smelled of kaffee-kuchen and sugar cookies—red and blue and green and purple elephants and pigs and things—for a week beforehand. The double doors leading to the parlor were kept closed all day the twenty-fourth, and we always heard the jingling of the bells of St. Nicholas while we were at supper. Ah! But it was great!" In moments of emotion August occasionally lapsed into his mother tongue.

McGrath hummed "Silent Night," and tapped an accompaniment on the window pane with his fingers before speaking. His mournful blue eyes were thoughtful, and his whimsical mouth dropped at the corners.

"I'm invited to spend Christmas with Pat, my married brother, in Cleveland," he said.

"Has he any kids?" demanded Schneider.

"Four of them, ranging in age from twelve to twenty," exclaimed Donnelly, enviously. "Imagine spending Christmas with a bunch of kids! It would almost make me young again."

McGrath smiled wearily.

"No, with this bunch, Tat-Ankh-Amen," he demurred ironically. "I've been there before. They all go out on Christmas Eve, to a show or dance. The two older kids are usually scheduled for one of these new-fangled house parties, and the younger ones are so sleepy they get up in time for the last Mass on Christmas morning. Guess old Pat's forgot we are supposed to hear three on Christmas. Then we have dinner—the usual Christmas gorging—with an artificial tree ornamenting the center of the table. Immediately after the eats the kids tie themselves to an Afternoon Party, where some one plays jazz records on the victrola and they can dance. Then Pat's wife and her mother begin to compare the prices of the gifts they gave to So-and-so with the apparent value of the gifts they received from said parties, and Pat and I sneak away to the library and talk about the stock market and the prohibition question. O 'yez!" he grinned cynically. "Christmas at Pat's is a grand institution."

Donnelly dropped the stub of his cigar into the nearest ash tray and stared disconsolately into the street where the lights were already beginning to glimmer through the snow that fell dispassionately.

"Well," he said, "Even that kind of Christmas is probably better records on the victrola in a bachelor apartment is a dull proposition. Down there the kids probably call you 'Uncle Mac,' and give you silk socks and books."

"Wrong again," denied McGrath, amusedly. "They call me 'Old Top' and give me cigar-holders and slippers. My rooms full of 'em. Tell you what—he dropped his bantering and became suddenly earnest—"Let's have an old-fashioned Christmas, Frank—you and I and Gust here—Christmas with a tree and carols, kids and cookies. Let's have it in your rooms."

Schneider leaned forward eagerly, his eyes shining.

"And kaffee-kuchen and St. Nicholas, eh?" he inquired of Mac.

"A go. Where do we get the kids?"

"That's easy," Donnelly's tone was enthusiastic. He rose to his feet and stretched his well-knit form to its no mean height of six-foot-two. "We'll arrange the feast and the party first and then we'll go out and gather them in from the highways, byways and hedges. It's a great idea, Mac. Let's start."

They started at once. It lacked a week until Christmas, and a week was none too long for the reckless orgy of shopping into which they plunged. Each night found them bundling in armloads of what Mac dubbed "junk"—candy canes and tree trimmings, for which they braved the terrors of the heretofore shunned "Five-and-Ten," toy wagons and wax dolls, an engine that tooted and a pig that squealed, stuffed stockings and holly. To gether they went to the curbstone market and wrangled with one another over the respective merits of some hundred trees, compromising finally on the largest one and hauling it merrily homeward, only

to find that it wouldn't go in the tiny apartment house elevator. They each berated the others soundly, insisting that by the (berating one) had no voice in the selection, hence this contretemps. Finally, too breathless to argue farther, they dragged it up eight flights of stairs, while the other tenants of the building poked curious heads from their doorways, wondering, no doubt, if "Birmam Wood" was "come to Dunsinane."

It was all great fun. August was radiant when he found his kaffee-kuchen and his animal cookies in an obscure little German bakeshop, the fragrant odors from which filled him with homesick memories. Mac triumphantly carried home a bunch of misletoe which he draped from the chandelier, declaring that he meant to have "one kiss from Gust" before Christmas was over. Frank waxed vain over his cranberry-and-pocxon stringing ability, and bragged mightily. And at last Christmas Eve was at hand. At 4 p. m. they put the finishing touches to their handiwork and stood back to survey the result.

The tree was a thing of beauty. It filled the corner of the room and towered to the ceiling. At the top a gold star glowed. At the base August had painstakingly erected a miniature crib, wreathed with lights. There was very little in the way of toys with which the tree was not laden, nor had they forgotten clothes—wool stockings and mittens, sweaters and caps. Across a chair in one corner was draped a regulation Santa Claus uniform, ready to be donned by August when the time should come.

All-1-1 right! Mac heaved a sigh of relief and admiration. "Now for the byways and hedges. We'll be back at 6 with the gang, Gust. It's up to you to see that this room is kept locked and that the caterer serves dinner in the adjoining one at the proper time. Don't let him miss a thing. This is going to be great dope."

He parted with Donnelly at the corner—Donnelly bearing a cross-town car for the East side and the home of the Rosettis, an Italian family, one diminutive and undernourished representative of which sold papers at the corner by the State Bank. Mrs. Rosetti was a widow and it required the combined efforts of herself and the two older boys to keep the bodies and souls of the family of six together. Frank had become interested in the twelve-year-old Giovanni about a year before and had helped the lad in innumerable kindly ways. Soon after the launching of Mac's Christmas project Donnelly had made the boy's great eyes more luminous than ever before by the promise of "genuine," bang-up all-American Christmas," bang-up all-American Christmas."

McGrath had no such settled destination. He was literally going to pluck his children from the "byways," and he had a vague idea of finding them somewhere on Clovis Street. Clovis Street serpentine in its grimy, sordid way alongside the fishy, silty banks of the old Canal, and its houses were festering sores on the bosom of the city. Grim and untidy, they spumed forth their greasy garbage cans, painted women, uncouth, sour-breathed men, and dirty, half-clothed children. Surely on Clovis Street dwelt children who would appreciate an old-fashioned Christmas—God help them! Perhaps they had never heard of the birthday of Our Little Lord. Another man might have shrunk from the thought of gathering up children from this unlovely community, but there was nothing fastidious about Larry McGrath. He felt Christmas, and he swung along whistling—and, even as he turned the corner into the lane of the unclean, he found that which he sought. Rather, it found him—for he was in the midst of a hustling, jostling, jabbering, cursing crowd—a crowd that was held back from the entry of one of the hovels by two stalwart policemen, while a third husky guardian of the law descended the corner into the lane of children clung to him, and a third was clasped in his arms. Down the street sounded the clang of an ambulance bell.

"Get back there, you blithering idiots!" shouted the cop who bore

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