

CARROLL O'DONOGHUE

CHRISTINE FABER

Author of "A Mother's Sacrifice," etc.

CHAPTER LI.—CONTINUED

"Young Berkeley came, as Carter had anticipated—came with all the incredulosity of a devoted and entirely untrusting affection. He found the proofs of the horrid tale in his deserted household, in Carter's apparently distracted demeanor, in the account given by the servants, in the excited gossip of the place. Horrified, sickened, he seemed after the first dreadful shock to shut himself within a stern pride and reserve. What his feelings were no one knew. When Carter would propose pursuit of the fugitive, and at least recapture of the children, the young husband answered sternly: "She has staid my name; let her infamy shroud her and hers!"

"He paid and dismissed the servants, bade Carter a short farewell, and engaging a nurse for his remaining child, departed with it to England. In the interval Sullivan, passing as the husband of Marie, and the father of her beautiful baby, journeyed to the place designated by Carter; but in a village near Tralee the poor young mother became unable to proceed. They were in an inn, and Richard, in deep distress, knew not what to do; the kind landlady called the attention of the Catholic pastor to the case, and he in turn, strangely interested, brought it to the notice of one of his wealthy and estimable parishioners, Mrs. O'Donoghue. She immediately removed the little family to her own spacious home, and there cared for the sick lady with all the tenderness of a mother. Sullivan was interrogated upon his past history; he shrunk from maintaining the false pretenses he had been inured to assume, and he felt that he had met with true friends, who would aid in rescuing his unhappy charge; but he feared to change his line of conduct without Carter's sanction, and as there was not time to communicate with the latter—before satisfying his questioner, he determined for the present to adhere to his falsehood, and after, when he should have acquainted Carter with the whole, he would retract his statement, giving reasons for the same which must prove a sufficient excuse. So he told an apparently straightforward story—a truthful one so far as Marie's early life was concerned, adding that in her unprotected state her dying father had consented to her union with a man who was her inferior in everything save honesty. Illness after the birth of her child had unsettled her reason, and they were on their way to friends who would care properly for her. Sullivan also produced the marriage certificate, and thus convinced Mrs. O'Donoghue and Father Meagher of the truth of his tale. But Richard had no opportunity of retracting his story; his account to Carter brought back immediate directions to maintain the part he had undertaken, that he, Carter, would explain why when he joined him, as he speedily intended to do. All the tender care availed naught; Marie died, clasping her baby, but giving no other sign of returning reason; and Mrs. O'Donoghue, charmed with, and strangely attracted to, the beautiful infant, proposed to Sullivan that she should adopt it. Poor unhappy Sullivan, too glad to be rid of a charge which galled him to care whether this proceeding on his part would please Carter or not, eagerly consented, and when they would have continued to call the little one Marie Sullivan, he begged them not to say that now, as the child was provided with such a home as it should have been her mother's right to grace, and as her future would be one better than the lady mother's culture, that he would not mar her prospects by thrusting himself, comparatively uneducated as he was, and so inferior as he felt himself to be, in her path,—he would rather that his identity be concealed from her; let her think that her parents had both died, and he would be happy in knowing that she was as well provided for—in being occasionally near her when she would not know of the fact. For that purpose he wished her name changed. His wishes were gratified, though the kind people wondered much at an affection which, seeming to be so deep, could thus make an entire surrender of its beloved object. That arrangement had been little more than completed when Carter arrived in the neighborhood, bringing with him little William Berkeley, whom he had taken from the convent in which he had temporarily placed him. To Sullivan's dismay, he did not bring the latter's child; and then for the first time the poor fellow discovered how sadly he had been the dupe of Carter's nefarious jealousy and hate of young Berkeley, his unrequited passion for Marie, the successive steps by which his plot of villainy had been executed—all were bare, and Sullivan discovered for the first time that the fury which had refused to spare its two hated objects would henceforth relentlessly pursue him, unless he yielded implicit assent to every future scheme. It threatened him with disclosure of the murder of the abduction of the little one which was to Sullivan as the apple of his eye; and when the poor, duped man, appalled, despairing,

and desperate, sought for some outlet from his dreadful situation, Carter mockingly bade him remember that he was a wretched culprit,—on every side were proofs of his horrible guilt, and that did he set foot within the place from which he had taken Marie, it would only be to fall into the merciless hands of those whom young Berkeley had employed to avenge his wrongs; and Carter threatened further to remove Sullivan's little daughter, Cathleen, whom he had already abducted, to some place utterly beyond her unhappy father's reach; but he pledged himself, if Sullivan remained true to him, to take the most tender care of her, and in the future, when all fear of discovery of Carter's villainy should be removed, to restore her, rich, educated and accomplished—he promised, however, that in the event of her dangerous illness, her father should be conducted to her.

The meshes of that web of villainy were too intricately and skillfully woven about the wretched man to permit him to make an easier ascent to his evil plot. Convinced him that any attempt he might make to expose Carter's guilt would be futile because of his inability to produce proofs of the same, and that perhaps such endeavor on his part would only result in more suffering to himself, even perpetual separation from his child, he became the unresisting tool of Carter. Entirely abandoning his once steady habits of employment, he tried to drown his wild longing for his child, and his dreadful remorse, by indulging in a growing appetite for liquor. Under that influence he was still weaker to oppose schemes of evil, and Carter, speedily becoming aware of that fact, plied the poor wretch with drink in order to induce a reader assent to his evil plot. Thus Sullivan sunk until he became at last so wandering a beggar, rarely remaining two consecutive days in the same place, and taking mostly to the mountains, that people gave him the sobriquet of "Rick of the Hills." Everybody knew him because of his wandering habits, and while most persons were repelled, because of the repulsive exterior which his hard-won, wretched life had given him, no one feared him. It was not known that he was intimate with Carter, for it was a part of the latter's policy to conceal that fact. With the little boy he had in charge, Carter had taken up his residence in the immediate vicinity of the O'Donoghue homestead; he had sufficient means to live in a style which must proclaim to the simple country folk a person of no mean birth nor breeding, and as he was a regular attendant, and in time a generous benefactor, of the little parish chapel, he won the favor of the kind-hearted clergyman. Giving out that his youthful charge, whom he continued to call by the name in the baptismal certificate which he had so fraudulently obtained, was the orphan child of dear deceased friends, he hired a nurse for it—a woman of the neighborhood whose gossipy character was in itself a recommendation to the wily Carter. He managed so that she should repeat incidents of his daily life and instances of his charity which must win for him the esteem and trust of the entire neighborhood. He succeeded; not even Cairn O'Donoghue, the head of the O'Donoghue homestead, and a man whose virtues were written on every heart that ever knew him, was regarded with more favor than Mortimer Carter eventually received.

His unrequited love for Marie had transferred itself with as wild an ardor to Marie's daughter. In the youthful lineaments of the child was a growing reproduction of her mother's face, and each time that Carter saw her, which he frequently did, through opportunities of his own making, he yearned to hasten the time in which, with Marie of marriageable age, he intended, by fair means or foul, to make her his wife. He was not well pleased that Sullivan had surrendered possession of her, but with his usual confidence in his own ability, he doubted not, at the arrival of the time, to be able to devise a scheme which should place her within his power. "One day he was afforded an opportunity of saving the life of the youthful heir of the O'Donoghues—Carroll, a baby, who, springing from his nurse's arms, had fallen into the stream, on the bank of which little Marie, now known as Nora McCarthy, and Carter's little charge had been playing. Carter, who was present and witnessed the accident, saved the child. The boy's parents sought every means of testifying their gratitude; Carter and his charge became constant visitors, and former, in his business conference with Cairn O'Donoghue, evinced so much financial ability, as well as shrewd judgment in other matters, that the intimacy culminated in Carter making his abode with the family, and his youthful charge receiving the same care and attention as the children of the house.

"During this time the unhappy, wandering Sullivan—wandering always with the hope of somewhere meeting with his little one, and of whom he never could conceive that she was other than the infant who had been snatched from him,—frequently sought Carter by stealth to beg the whereabouts of his child; but the answer was always the same; the child was well, and well done for, but the time had not come

to give her to her father; and then the wretched threats were repeated, and the liquor used, and "Rick of the Hills" sunk again into his miserable cowardly state. "Mrs. O'Donoghue, as beloved as her husband, died in giving birth to a girl two years the junior of the heir of the house, and the little family, now comprising the brother and sister, and the adopted girl and boy, were as fond and united as though really bound by the ties of kindred. When the boys became old enough, they were sent to college; it was the first separation among the young people, and it was sorely felt. But a greater trouble was to visit them; before the education of either was completed they were recalled to the death-bed of him who had been so true a father to them all. Cairn O'Donoghue died, appointing Mortimer Carter the legal guardian of his children. The boys returned to college, the girls lived daily lives of edification and blessing, while Carter apparently was so exemplary in his conduct that he had the entire trust and affection of his wards. "On the completion of Carroll's collegiate course, and when he came home in the full vigor of his buoyant manhood, Carter perceived what he had feared would happen—an affection springing up between Carroll and Nora; but he would do nothing just then to prevent it; he preferred to wait, feeling that before the affair would reach its climax, a scheme which he had already devised would prove an effectual bar. Accident favored him. The Fenian rising was in agitation, and Carroll, of the very temperament to be allured into the movement, participated with heart and soul in all its measures. Then was Carter's time. He was the idol of the impulsive young fellow—to him Carroll confided everything; and to Mortimer, now believing that the latter was as devoted an adherent of the cause as he was himself, he repeated all that he knew of the secrets of the organization. It was easy then for Carter to connive at Carroll's arrest and conviction, and the young man was transported to Australia, and the ancient O'Donoghue homestead, with its broad, beautiful lands, encumbered by debt, owing to the expense of Carroll's trial, and other causes, passed from possession of his heirs, and was put into the market to be sold.

Carter exulted that so much was accomplished; then, providing a moderately comfortable, but humble, home for the two girls, he proposed for the hand of Nora McCarthy; that was the first revelation which his ward had of his true character; he was scorned, and the favor with which he had been regarded was changed to indignation and contempt. "Then his passion for revenge became active. He threatened them with eviction from the very shelter which, with pretended kindness, he had provided, unless Miss McCarthy consented to be again espoused, and the two unprotected girls took refuge in the home of their life-long friend, the pastor of the village. All of Carter's transactions, feigning to be one in heart with the Fenians, and cloaking the free access which he was permitted to Tralee garrison under the pretense of securing information for the adherents of the Irish cause, were fully understood by poor Rick of the Hills; his wandering life enabled him to learn various items of news, and he was shrewd enough to fathom more of Carter's secrets than the latter desired him to do. Carter's sincerity was beginning to be doubted by others also; various reports were circulated about him, but with all that, he had sufficient powers of artifice to maintain, not alone his reputable standing, but the unreserved confidence of those partisans of the Irish cause who were most influential in his neighborhood. He had turned secret informer for the sake of the reward.

TO BE CONTINUED

EXQUISITE PORCELAIN

The members of the Vogel family were united in the feeling that mother was a trial.

"She bosses so!" sputtered Fred, the only son of the house. "You'd think I was a kid."

"She's old-fashioned," protested Othilia, still smarting from mother's criticism of her latest gown. "Old-fashioned and prudish! You'd think I was a nun, the clothes she wants me to wear."

"It's not so much," added Flavia, "what she wishes me to wear as what she insists on wearing herself that bothers me. She's ridiculous in our cast-offs—and she's needed a new suit ever since I can remember. If we were poverty-stricken—but we're not. Her hair, too—she has the prettiest hair, but just look how she combs it! Strains it straight up in back, and straight back in front, and twists it into an ugly 'washerwoman knot' that resembles nothing so much as a hunk of binder-twine."

mother had her grievances, too—and voiced them frequently. Fred "ran around too much." His so-called "shiek hair-cut" aroused her mirth because it reminded her of an ancient picture of grandpa Sawyer, taken when he was sixteen; she was unkind enough to mention the picture in the presence of two of the "fellows" who also affected the new style. She had no patience with Othilia. She would slave for hours over a new gown for her and then criticize it unmercifully. She derided Flavia's "high-flown" notions, and insisted on putting tooth-picks on the table when there was company, and serving full-size cups of coffee when Flavia wanted demitasse. An actually sensitive soul, mother knew that her family found her lacking, and it but served to make her more resentful. They were ashamed of her! Very well! She would make them more ashamed of her! That was her attitude, and even mother did not know just why she assumed that attitude. There were days when she hated herself, and always she was genuinely worried by the strained relations existing between herself and her family. There were times—Saturday afternoon when she knelt in the dim coolness of the church after Confession—when she sorrowfully promised her Lord that she would not be irritable and fault-finding; that she would be a wise and gentle mother; that she would defer to the girls' wishes in the little things they asked of her—like that about the toothpicks, though goodness knew how she could get along without them, she was so used to them; and that she would "set her foot down" about Othilia's low-necked dresses, and helped her to plan dresses that were just as pretty and so so delicate. Othilia was so sweet when you made a confidant of her, and didn't domineer over her. Alas for resolutions! At the first hint of friction mother was off at a tangent, and more of a trial than ever.

Now it was August—sweltering, blue-blasting August. To father in the morning, mother remarked that she didn't know when she had "felt the heat" as she did this year, and this afternoon, after an extremely tiring day she felt as though she could not take another step. Othilia, Fred and their "crowd" had been playing tennis up at the River End courts, and had all come trooping in, tired, hot and dusty. In spite of mother's querulousness, the Vogel home was a gathering place for the young folks. Mother could always be depended on for a cooling bowl of punch or lemonade, generously supplemented by cakes and sandwiches. It was astonishing how much food and drink young people could consume. Mother, wholly unlovely in a faded Mother-Hubbard, her hair twisted in the inevitable knot, had just returned from the kitchen with the third plate of cookies, when a remark of Othilia's caught her ear. She was talking to Alice Ormsby.

"I think you have the loveliest mother, Alice," she was saying. "She is like exquisite porcelain. I always think that she has just stepped from the fragrant pages of a romance. It must be wonderful to have a mother like her."

A spasm of pain crossed the face of Mother Vogel, and she raised a quivering hand instinctively, as though to ward off a blow. Othilia's comment had been entirely sincere. Real envy had been in her voice. Mother set down the plate of cookies and hurriedly left the room.

All the afternoon it rankled—that chance remark of Othilia's. "Exquisite porcelain!" Mother looked at her own face and figure in the glass and nodded wryly. She held out her stained and toil-worn hands and inspected them severely. Times without number she addressed her own image accusingly. "Exquisite porcelain!" she exclaimed acridly. "Common clay, that's what you are. Not good enough to be the mother of your daughters. Kate Ormsby is the exquisite porcelain—she who has nothing to do from morn till night but fuss with her face and her hair, 'Exquisite porcelain,' indeed!"

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