

CARROLL O'DONOGHUE

CHRISTINE FABER
Author of "A Mother's Sacrifice," etc.
CHAPTER XLIII.—CONTINUED

Captain Dennier arose; he could no longer control the excitement under which he labored—it betrayed itself in his vivid flush, in his trembling enunciation. "The paper given into my hands I delivered safely into the possession of Captain Crawford—he can testify to that fact, having read the document himself the instant it passed to his charge. For the other accusations which this hireling, Carter, makes against me I consider the source from whence they spring too low for my notice or denial; does your lordship deign to give them weight, however, I shall attempt no refutation of them."

He stood with so stately an air, his head slightly thrown back, and his dark, splendid eyes alight with noble feeling, that an expression akin to admiration flashed for an instant across Lord Heathcote's face; but it was suddenly gone, and receiving no answer, Captain Dennier resumed: "Had your lordship's summons not reached me, I should myself have sought you to learn the truth of the strange intimation which this man, Carter, dropped; my heart tells me that you, Lord Heathcote, possess the entire story of my birth and early life. I conjure you, by your honor as a gentleman, to tell me who I am!" His voice quivered painfully.

"Who you are?" his lordship repeated in a somewhat bitter tone. "By what right do you demand from me more knowledge of your origin than you already possess?" "By the right of your strange interest and patronage; by the right of a mysterious impulse within me which impels me to you—speak, your lordship, and end a suspense which is crushing my manhood!" He bent forward in his eagerness, every fiber of his form vibrating.

"You are dreaming, boy; your imagination has deceived you—you are simply what you have been told to believe of yourself. The innocents of this man, Carter, were perhaps invented for some purpose of his own."

He spoke so lightly, almost mockingly, a scornful curl upon his lip while, that the young officer sickened for an instant from the bitter disappointment. He turned away, unable to speak.

"Dismiss these vague, morbid fancies," continued the nobleman, "they ill befit a soldier, and concentrate your energies upon the stern duties of the life which lies before you."

"I intend to do, my lord," the young man had turned slowly back, and was facing the nobleman with all the eagerness and determination of some violently aroused energy; "I feel that too long I have been the willing dependent on perhaps a misplaced bounty. I stifled energies which cried for outlets in other directions than those proposed by your lordship—I struggled against feelings that told me of my utter inability to cope with circumstances which appealed alike to my heart and my judgment; but I did it all to prove my gratitude. Now, however, the time has come when my manhood refuses to be longer crushed; it will assert itself by choosing a life in which duty, principle, inclination shall unite; and it is for the purpose of announcing to you that decision that I am here this morning; but, before I resign a career which has been so eventful to me, I would fain learn who I am. You have failed to convince me of the falsity of my suspicions; you have failed to lift from my mind the crushing weight of a cruel conjecture!"

Lord Heathcote half started from his chair, but the movement seemed to give him pain, for his brow contracted, and his head fell slightly back. "That conjecture?" he asked.

Captain Dennier paused for an instant, as if he would summon strength to make his intended announcement; then, while the vivid color mounted to his forehead, and his breath came and went in gasps, he answered: "That I am your illegitimate offspring."

The nobleman bounded from his chair, but with a half-stifled cry of pain he sunk into his cushions again, while an expression of agony broke over his face which the young officer could not bear to look at. He asked hoarsely: "Did this man, Carter, hint at such a possibility?" "No; it is my own surmise, formed from reflections upon your singular interest in me, together with the strange innuendo from Carter that I was not what I seemed."

"Dennier," the nobleman was again partially erect, but his jeweled hand covered his face, as if he would hide his expression of suffering—"If I tell you that you are the legitimate son of one who was near and dear to me, but that the circumstances of your birth are such as to compel perpetual secrecy, what will be your decision with regard to your future mode of life?"

"The same, my lord; but I could kneel to you in gratitude for having taken from my mind its horrible weight. Legitimate!—then I can face the world with an honorable birth-right. I ask no more; I seek not to penetrate the secret you would hold. I have gained all I

craved, and I thank your lordship for the favors of the past, as well as for the happy tidings of the present."

"By resigning your commission," resumed the nobleman, retaining his hand to his face, "you will forego all right to a property which will one day be yours—you will lose the prospect of a magnificent alliance which is already contemplated for you."

He spoke very slowly, as if each word in the utterance was receiving new deliberation in his own mind. The young officer replied: "I am willing to forego all; for I could accept the former of your inducements only at the expense of my principles, the latter at the cost of my affections."

Lord Heathcote looked up, his hand at last removed, and the lines and careworn look of his face standing out with painful prominence. "Then your affections are already engaged?"

"They are, but hopelessly!" "May I ask to whom?" "No, my lord; I cannot tell you—her name has never passed my lips—it is my own unhappy secret."

"But why unhappy?" persisted the nobleman; "does the lady not reciprocate your regard?" "Unhappily for me, she does not."

"What is the obstacle?" and Lord Heathcote seemed to take a malignant interest in thus pressing his visitor.

"I am the hated foe of her country—a soldier in that service whose boast it is to enslave and to crush her people."

He spoke with unusual warmth, apparently forgetful of everything save his own impatient ardor. "Ah! I understand,"—and the nobleman's mouth curled with disdain—"a pretty girl is the motive power of all these heroics; I might have surmised before the cause of your wish to resign; but you are now, by your own avowal, averse to the cause you have professed to serve, and you are amenable to arrest."

He paused, his searching look reading Captain Dennier through.

"Be it so," said the young man, slightly inclining his head; "give your order, my lord, and I shall be far happier in a prison, knowing that my conduct is consistent with my heart and my judgment, than holding the highest place of honor with every hour bringing some conflicting duty!"

"No, Captain Dennier," responded Lord Heathcote; "I shall treat you with more magnanimity than you deserve—allowing for your youth, and the natural impulsiveness of that manly period, I shall pass over your imprudent admissions. Neither shall you resign your commission; retain your command, sir, and bury in your own breast all that has been said during this interview."

"I thank you, my lord, for your great leniency, but pardon me, I must demand that my resignation be accepted. I cannot, I shall not, longer retain my commission in her Majesty's service."

"Be it so, then!" said the nobleman sternly; "but remember by this headstrong conduct you waive every right to your future inheritance."

The officer bowed. "And may I ask," the speaker continued, "what is to be your first movement?" "I shall remain in Dublin for three or four days; then I shall go to England, from whence I intend to seek a home in America."

Lord Heathcote touched the silver hand-bell on the table at his side, and when the attendant entered he waved Captain Dennier away with out any further adieu. The young man would have fain had a more kindly parting, or at least one which would have evinced more gratitude upon his part, but the sternness of the nobleman's manner deterred him. He passed out, and Lord Heathcote rung again, saying to the attendant who entered: "Send Curry to me."

The order was obeyed, and Curry, a small, slender-formed, and sharp-visaged man, stood before his titled master.

"Watch Captain Dennier—dog him secretly day and night, and write to me, or telegraph, information of his whereabouts, and what he may be doing. Do not lose sight of him wherever he goes, be it to England or America. You shall be supplied with ample funds, but let your work be secret. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, my lord."

"That is all," and the nobleman leaned back with an air of relief, while Curry bowed low, and departed to begin immediately his espionage of Captain Dennier. That gentleman had repaired to Captain Crawford's apartment.

"You look brighter, old fellow," was the salutation of the latter: "your conference, then, has been satisfactory?"

"Yes, in so far as relieving me of a dreadful suspicion—and I have succeeded in my purpose to resign. I shall send in the written form of my resignation this evening, and from that time I shall consider myself no longer in her Majesty's service."

"By Jove! I am sorry, Walter!" and for an instant something like emotion showed in the working of Crawford's face, but he recovered himself, and resumed: "We have had some pleasant hours together; but when do you go?"

Dennier did not reply immediately, as if he were reluctant to do

so; then, as if he had overcome some secret scruple, he said: "I shall return to Tralee for a day or so—I confess to some interest in the approaching trial of the young prisoner, O'Donoghue."

A peculiar expression broke into Crawford's face: "By Jove! Dennier, but I begin to have very strange suspicions—well, never mind, old fellow! I shall not press you on the subject—I know that some of these Irish girls are deuced witting and handsome, and if you have been so desperately caught, it won't be the first time a poor fellow has had his principles and his creed upset by a pretty face. Only I can't help feeling sorry for you; you are renouncing a glorious career, and you are giving way to impulses which the sober judgment of more mature manhood will certainly change."

"It may be so, Harry, but at least I am acting in accordance with my convictions now, and I am the happier for it."

He turned away with a careless air to prepare for the evening dinner to which he had promised to accompany Captain Crawford.

CHAPTER XLIV. CARTER REPULSED

The eventual day of Carroll O'Donoghue's trial arrived. Father Meagher and Clare left Dhrumacool in the earliest mail-car, and reached Tralee an hour before the opening of the court. They went in immediate search of Nora, only to learn from Mrs. Murphy that the young lady and her father had sought another residence three weeks before, and the good-natured woman was unable to tell them where. With blank faces, and heavier hearts than they had borne thither, they retraced their steps in order to seek places in the now crowded court-room.

All the wealth and fashion, together with the rank and influence of the town, was represented; the gallery was crowded with ladies, the bench filled with lawyers, the body of the house thronged with a medley of tradesmen, mechanics and farmers, thickly interspersed with the military, while the uniform of the police showed in sufficient numbers to warrant the preservation of order. Every face expressed interest, and many of the countenances, even among the grave visages on the bench, evinced an anxiety that might be construed into secret sympathy with the prisoner.

Clare, her veil down, and her person somewhat shielded by the large form of Father Meagher, who sat slightly in advance of her, was seated directly opposite the prisoner's dock.

On the outskirts of the crowd, yet where, when openings occurred in the latter, she could see the accused, Nora was stationed, her face heavily veiled, and her person shielded by the stooped, shambling form of Rick of the Hills.

Breathless interest prevailed when the prisoner entered. Firm, erect, with his wonted noble poise and fearless look, he took his place in the dock; but when he faced the concourse the ravages of his confinement and anxiety could be plainly seen—the intense pallor, the transparency of his face, the lines in his features, the unnatural luster of his large eyes, all were painfully disclosed.

Clare raised her veil in answer to his gaze, that wandered searchingly over the court room, and immediately succeeding the glance of joyful recognition which he gave to her and Father Meagher, came one of weary disappointment; both the priest and his young companion sadly divined the cause—it was the absence of Nora, and they read in his continued frequent and anxious glance the alarming conjectures which filled his mind.

Nora, too, had raised her veil, and bent forward to obtain full view of the prisoner; she saw his gaze wandering over the court-room, the expression of disappointment which came into his face, and she, too, divined the cause. She fell back, pulling her veil down, and for one whirling moment, while her heart seemed bursting with renewed agony, she murmured: "My God! that I were dead!" but the next instant, in deep remorse for her rebellious expression, she added: "Not my will, but Thine, be done."

The trial was fairly opened, and as it progressed, more developments in favor of the prisoner were produced than had been generally anticipated. Direct proof of his connection with the I. R. B. organization was wanting, owing to the abstraction of the paper by Tighe a Vohr; and his counsel cited, as one of the points in the defense, the fact of the accused refusing to escape when every door which separated him from freedom had been secretly opened for his release. Faces brightened, and Clare's countenance flushed with excited joy as she heard point after point made in favor of her brother. Nora also breathed freer, and more than once in the ardor of her feelings she forgot herself and threw aside her veil, only, however, to drop it, abashed, when she caught some curious eyes fixed upon her. But there was one in the thickest of the crowd to whom the progress of the trial afforded only disappointment and bitterness—Morty Cart; his scowling, empurpled face, empurpled from his secret rage, betrayed plainly the purport of his feelings.

The case was at length adjourned until the following day.

Rick and Nora hurried out, mingling with the crowd which pressed about them until they could find an opportunity of turning down one of the obscure side streets that led to their home; while Father Meagher and Clare, loth to return without some information of Nora, again sought Mrs. Murphy, thinking to glean by further questioning some clew which might lead them to her whereabouts. But this visit was as fruitless as the former one had been; the kind-hearted landlady had nothing more to communicate than a glowing eulogium on Nora's sweetness of manner, her own reflections on the contrast presented by the father and daughter, and upon their apparent poverty. She was about to reveal, as she had already morning, how the young lady had been obliged to dispose of some of her wardrobe, but she remembered in season her promise of secrecy regarding that matter—a promise which Nora, probably foreseeing this visit of her friends, had exacted. So the two anxious inquirers with very sad hearts turned their faces toward Dhrumacool, which they would leave again for Tralee on the next morning. Father Meagher anxiously thought what forces he could exert in order to find Nora. He fancied he knew the cause of her silence, and her mysterious disappearance—that both were due to the wretched haunt to which Rick had gone, and to which she, in her noble devotion, had accompanied him. His heart burned with indignation for a moment against Rick; but the next instant his anger softened, for the image of the poor creature, as he had looked when kneeling in the study pleading his love for his child, rose before him, and the tender-hearted priest murmured a prayer for Nora's protection, and for poor, miserable Rick's conversion.

Nora was alone, thinking of the trial of the morning; every word of the evidence seemed burned upon her brain, and though her fingers rapidly plied the needle which formed such shining stitches in her skillful work, her industry was entirely mechanical—her thoughts were so distant from her employment, and in alarm and heretofore their little frugal meal, which her hands had prepared, to seek the pittance that he sometimes earned, and she had full scope for all her unhappy reflections. She was suddenly startled by a rap; no visitors ever came to them, and with a wildly bounding heart she answered the summons. It was Morty Cart. He was smiling, fulsome, and arrayed in such elegance as his own vulgar taste dictated. Nora shrank from him in alarm and heretofore their little frugal meal, which her hands had prepared, to seek the pittance that he sometimes earned, and she had full scope for all her unhappy reflections. 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