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FATHER CONNELL; A TALE.

BY THE O'HARA FAMILY.

CHAPTER XXX.—(Continued.)

Darby Cooney rose up from a large stone, on which he had been seated; half limping, half running, he passed Moloch, and bending his head forward, glanced searchingly into the face of the other man, Finnigan. In evident alarm Finnigan stopped working.

"An' what do you say?" queried Darby.
"Faith, an' I hardly know what to say."
Darby Cooney very slowly altered his position: stepping a few paces back, he stood firmly on his outspread legs, and propped himself with both hands upon his stick. The two men quailed before his regards. The Babby—we give him his new appellation—came close to his side, and folding his arms hard, contemplated his old preceptor, with the same steady and studious look he had worn, when watching the death-throes of the gibbeted hen. A pin could be heard to fall, where just before there had been a din of rasping, and hammering, and sawing.

"Do ye remember the oath that ye took, and that I took, and that she took, as well as the rest of us? Answer me that question. Do ye remember it? Paul Finnigan, do you remember it? Dinis Keegan, do you remember it?" Each of the men answered his question affirmatively.

"An' the oath was, that each, by the hands of the rest of us, was to fall upon any traitor or informer among us, wasn't that the oath—wasn't it? Answer to me again—wasn't it?" This question also was assented to.

"An' isn't she a traitor, an' an informer—ain't she? Isn't she?"

"If she was a traitor," answered Moloch, alias Dennis Keegan, speaking, however, in a wavering tone; "if she was a traitor, the spies would be on us by this time; I don't think she is a traitor, poor young creature."

"Bee the black devil, bud she is, Dinis Keegan. Didn't she sell my life—ay, my own life? Didn't she put the cord upon me? Didn't she bid him to hold me fast, an' to keep me fast? Ay, ay—she did; and since I am here, wasn't she a traitor to every one or ye? While I was in that place abroad, didn't I send the Babby to watch her? Tell him what you found out, Babby."

"I had her tellin' th' old woman every-thing she know; I was listening to her wid my ears, and I was looking at her wid my eyes," importunately answered the Babby.

"Isn't she a traitor then? Isn't she, isn't she?" demanded Darby Cooney, in a grim and deadly triumph; "and though for the last nine months or more, she was left to herself, an' had her own way, mustn't she be talked to at last—mustn't she?"

The imperfect jury were obliged to admit the crime committed against their fraternity. "Poor young soul!" sighed Moloch, as he gave in his unwilling verdict, "poor young soul! 'tis all over with her."
"To-morrow evening week then, you promise to meet me at the close of the day; do ye promise? do ye?"

The men gave the promise required; Moloch stipulating, however, "if you don't want us very much intirely, we'd like not to put our hands to the work."

"I could ye before," replied Darby Cooney, "that if the Babby an' myself can do it, we won't ax your help; but he near us at yer peril—ay, at yer peril. Ye know I have other heads to work fur me; an' take care how ye put me to it, or ye'll rue the day. Meet me afther the nightfall, to-morrow evenin' week—ye know where—an' I say again, at yer peril."

Darby Cooney's features quivered spasmodically, and even his head had a momentary shaking fit, as he held up his stick to eke out his threats. Without another word, he then hastily limped out of the workshop, silently and gravely attended by the Babby.

The next morning, the people of the neighborhood found the materials of the temporary hospital, near the gateway of the avenue, scattered about in every direction.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The bridal party proceeded homewards from Father Connell's house; and a strange bridal party it was. Scarcely a word was interchanged between the three persons of whom it was composed. And their silence was not of that nature which is the result of an infelicitous and content, too great for expression by words; it was the silence of apprehension for the present, and fear for the future; misgivings of having done wrong, and a dread of overtaking punishment.

Edmund shrunk from contemplating to what he had exposed Helen, should her father discover their clandestine marriage. He trembled, too, at the bare thought of what such a discovery must entail on his beloved and beloved friend, Father Connell; and his conscience now continually asked him—"have I not been too precipitate, and too selfish, in hurrying Helen into this irrevocable step? Should I not have indeed taken chance for what the probable

changes, of two or three days, might bring about?"

He felt his young bride shudder, as she leaned upon his arm. Cheerfully he tried to speak to her, but in vain. The sentences came cold from his lips. She shivered again. Was she so cold? he asked. No, no, she was not at all cold—it was a fine night enough, Helen answered. But still the wretched shuddering recurred. "My father's curse!" was the intercalated thought which caused it. "I know he will drive me from his door—that will not be much—but oh! he will curse me too! My dear—and after all, my dearly loved and loving father! And do I not deserve it, even for my unmaidenly and undignified conduct, do I not deserve it?"

Helen did not indeed deserve quite so much; she soon had her punishment, however.

The only person of the party who had no fear for the future, was Miss Bessy Lanigan. True it was, she felt in common with Edmund and Helen, a great terror of Gaby McNeary; of his public exposure of her amongst her numerous circle of little genteel friends; of his furious anger; of his horrid abuse; almost of his stick. But then, Mr. Q. O. unexpounded! Was there not consolation in the very utterance of his name? They arrived at Miss Lanigan's hall-door. Lounging against one of its jambs, his hands in his cuffs, and turning up one eye and one side of his face to the young moon, stood Tom Naddy. On the arrival of the party, he saluted each in turn, and then, without a word, knocked at the door for them.

"What brings you here?" asked Edmund.
"You have been sent here by my father to summon me home?" demanded Helen, much agitated.

"That's id, sure enough, Miss," answered Tom Naddy, composedly. "an' this isn't the first time to-night he sent me either; no nor the second time; he's like a mad bull intirely, rampagin' about the house, an' cursin' an' swearin', that when he lay houl on Miss Lanigan—"

"I vow and protest," interrupted that lady.
"My God!" cried Helen. "Conduct me home at once, Miss Lanigan—or no, upstairs if you please, for an instant. Edmund," she continued, when they had all arrived in the miniature drawing-room—"Edmund, good-night—and farewell too—and do not start or ginsay me in what I am going to advise, for both our sakes. I must appear at once before my father, so that good-night is best said at once—and the word that is made use of, even for a longer parting, must also be said at once; we part, indeed, here—on this very spot, to await, wide asunder, better and happier days, for our re-meeting. You will not, I know, be selfish enough to tempt an immediate exposure of all that has happened this evening, by accompanying us, or following us to my father's—I know you will not! Nor will you, by your appearance in this town, to-morrow, run the same risk—so, good-night, dear Edmund!—and not a word, I pray of you again, for the present; I will write to you, and you will write to me—and in perfect confidence we will consult each other on the best thing to be done, for the terrible future; dear Edmund, I implore you, if you love me, to comply with my wishes in another respect. Return this moment to your old priest's house—tell him what I recommend you to do, and see if he will not agree with me—and again and again, good night, dear Edmund!"

He stood stunned before her by his great affliction; seeing this, she fell on his neck, and added, in a trembling voice, and with sudden tears—"Dearest Edmund, farewell—dearest, dearest Edmund! My husband—farewell!"

One most tender, and almost despairing embrace, the young pair interchanged; the next moment, Helen had nearly dragged Miss Bessy Lanigan down her own stairs, and out of her own house. Edmund sat alone for some time. At length, he started up and walked rapidly in the direction of Father Connell's dwelling.

Arrived on the steps before Gaby McNeary's hall-door, the ladies, when the door was opened, bid each other good-bye; in fact, Miss Bessy Lanigan would not, for the present, face Gaby McNeary, if she got a thousand pounds for it, she said; and only leaving her best regards and compliments for him, hurried home, minding her steps, and patting along the streets, as rapidly as a little rheumatic stiffness in her joints enabled her to do.

Helen McNeary flew into the parlor, where she knew she should find her father, almost wild with agitation and terror. Without allowing him time to utter a word, she flung herself on her knees, and clasping her hands, cried—

"Dear father, do not be angry with me, and forgive me! neither Miss Lanigan nor I noticed how the evening wore away—but I know I have been out of the house too long—forgive me, oh, forgive me! Never again will I give you cause to be displeased with me, in thought, word, or deed! And am I to go to my room again, this moment? I will do so willingly, father, oh, most willingly!"

Gaby McNeary was startled at this unexpected energy and passion; it was quite disproportioned to the occasion. He looked at her steadily. She was not weeping; but her beautiful face was ghastly, almost haggard; her eyes were distended, and her shining gold

hair, was wildly dishevelled. Had she indeed taken such a dislike towards her suitor, Mr. Stanton, that this effect was produced by it? He brought to mind, too, that upon leaving home that evening her step had been heavy, her hands and limbs trembling, her farewells with him hurried and incoherent. Gaby McNeary was now more than startled; he was frightened and alarmed for his child. Again he looked studiously at her. Her dry, glittering eyes, as she still knelt, glanced every other moment over her shoulder, towards the open door of the parlor.

"Am I to return to my own room?" she continued, "oh, yes, sir—do, do, let me go!"

"What's all this, Helen?" said Gaby, holding out his hand to her—"get up, child—get up out of that, you young jade. Sit on that chair, near me now—there. Blur-an-ages! what's all this about? Tell me at once, you baggage—good child, I mean—don't go on frightening the life and the liver out of me.—Did you see a ghost, or Dicky Stanton?—By Gog alive, there is little difference between one and the other; bring your chair closer to me; closer, child, come closer to me."

She obeyed her father's command, but did not utter a word, only shivered through every limb. Gaby felt that the hand he held was like death's, clammy cold. He put his huge, fat arm round her little delicate neck; laid her head on his shoulder, and fondled her cheek with his hand, or twisted her golden curls round his finger, and resumed, in a voice exceedingly gentle for him—

"Helen, you d-d little hussey, don't you know you're the pet of the house, and the mouse of the cupboard—eh? Don't you know that, Helen?"

This show of affection, uncouth as it was, she was wholly unprepared for, and it went through her heart. She remained still unable to speak, but turning her head on his shoulder, until her eyes were hidden in it, she wept and sobbed most miserably.

"Damn the blood of it, girl, don't cry that way, or you'll make as great a fool of me as yourself; there, there now, girl, give over now, I tell you," he gave her a father's kiss.

"Oh, dear, dear father," Helen could have said, "do not curse me when you know all; but she only muttered these words within herself, twining at the same time her arms around him.

"Blug-a-bouns! girl, you'll put my shoulder out of joint, and I told you you'd make a fool of me," and he shook his head indignantly, but he also shook with the motion two large tears from his eyes, which fell into Helen's bosom; "be d-d to it! but I never thought this would happen to me; why, Gog-alive, I'll turn you out of the house, if ever you make a fool of me in this way again, you young baggage."

"Oh, no, no, no, you will not—I am sure you will not—I am sure you never, never will do that!" she united her hands, and looked with brimming eyes fully into his.

"Well, I won't, poor girl, I won't."
"Never, never, sir!"
"Well, never, never, then, and be damned to it."

"God bless you, dear father, God bless you."
"But, blug-a-bouns! I don't see what's the matter with you yet, at all, at all." Gaby became grave and contemplative: "oh, ay, I forgot," again he ruminated; "tell me, Helen, hasn't that ship-in-porridge, that Dick Stanton a letter of yours, in answer to one of his, in which you accept him as your lover and future husband?"

"No, indeed, sir, he has not. On the contrary, sir, he has only a foolish note of mine to him, in ridicule of a long, strange letter which he wrote to me; but instead of that note encouraging him, it is a decided refusal of him."

"Blood-an'-thunder-an'-ages! let me see his letter."

Helen quickly ran up stairs for it, returned in an instant, and placed it in her father's hands: he read it over rapidly.

"Oh, Gog-e-blug-a-bouns! The sneaking mutton-headed ass! and does he call this riddle-me-ree a love letter! If I don't twist his long nose for him, the devil may box punch. Oh! ha! Dick Stanton, you were putting your finger in my eye, were you? Oh! tare-an-ages!" And Gaby McNeary snatched up his last solitary glass of wine, emptied it in a jerk, and stamped down the empty glass on the table, thereby breaking off its shank. "Oh! of all the chaps in Christendom, that herry-long-legs of a fellow, that's neither fish nor flesh, nor good nor herring—to try to humbug me, in my house! Oh!" and Gaby flung the broken glass into the fire place—"Hah! there's his rap at the hall-door—but don't be afraid, Helen—hold up your chin, my girl, and look merry—blur-an-ages! 'twas no wonder for you to get the jaundice, which I see you have—the notion of such a starved spider creeping after you! Get out of the room now for a moment—first give me another kiss, and don't cry any more, I tell you—run away now—oh, blood-an-fury! Dicky Stanton, to think he could humbug me to my face! off with you to me, you little baggage, and leave this jockey to me."

As Helen left the room, Gaby McNeary

flourished his arm over his head. The hall-door having been opened, Mr. Stanton's boots creaked across the hall, and entered the parlor. Mr. Stanton had come to supper, on a most express invitation.

"Well, sir! do you want me?" began Gaby McNeary.

"Sir—the-a—the-a—" and Mr. Stanton stood and stammered, the picture of surprise.

"The-a—the devil, sir!" continued Gaby, "so my gentleman, you came into my house to play your asses' tricks on me, did you?"

"Mr. McNeary—sir—the-a—I—the-a—really—don't understand you, sir."

"If you don't then, I'll soon make you.—You told me you had a letter from Helen, accepting you for her husband?"

"And so I have, sir—the-a—"

"Let me see it this moment!"

"I will, sir; I have it here, sir, lying next to my heart—in the-a—the-a—"

"Well, pull it out of the—the-a, and hand it here to me."

From a pocket on the inside of his waistcoat, made expressly for the treasure by his own hands, Q. O. unexpounded drew forth the answer to his letter, from G. O. unexpounded. Gaby McNeary snatched it from him, and read it twice over.

"And what the devil do you call this hodge-podge? Is this the letter, accepting you as a husband, that you told me you got from Helen?"

"Yes, sir—the-a—the-a—that is the very letter."

"Phu! phu!"—this expression, or rather sound, of ineffable contempt cannot, we fear, be at all translated: "phu! phu! get out, you stupid brute! Oh, Gog-alive! what a party fellow to come cooing into any man's house! And you had the damn'd assurance to tell me that you had a letter from my daughter, accepting your proposals?"

"And sir, isn't that the-a—"

"No, it isn't! No, it isn't, you poor, creeping, crawling, own-shluck! No—but it is a note, refusing you to your teeth, and laughing at you to your face, you poor stuttering animal. Get out of my sight, this moment, and let me never hear your sugara-candy boots screeching within my doors again!"

"Mr. McNeary—"

"Mr. Tom the devil!—go home, I tell you!" and Gaby bounced up and seized his stick; Mr. Stanton would have expostulated, but as his late friend strode towards him he prudently retreated, shutting the parlor door between himself and his host, and holding its handle on the outside. Gaby, still threatening and exclaiming, reseated himself by the fire. In a few seconds the door slowly opened again, and Mr. Stanton half entered in.

"Mr. McNeary—" he began, when whirl and smack went Gaby's stick against his shins: the door was then quickly reclosed, and Mr. Stanton's boots were heard as quickly creaking a retreat out of the house.

Gaby rang the bell. Tom Naddy answered it; and, indeed, this was no great trouble, as he had not been far out of the way.

"Tell Miss McNeary to come here, you brat."

Tom shouldered off. Helen soon appeared.

"You needn't be much afraid of that creeping bug-a-bow any longer, Helen; I don't think he'll show his nose here for some time to come. But what the devil is this over again? Why you look as if you wanted to get him back! What's the matter with you now, girl?"

"My dear, dear father, I am thankful to you beyond what I can say."

"Why, then, a damned queer way you have of showing it. Why don't you look glad, if you are glad?"

"My dear good father, don't be angry with me."

"Blood-an-fury-an-ages, girl! I thought you'd be ready to dance cover-the-buckle for joy; havn't you even thanks to offer me?"

"Indeed I am most thankful, sir—"

"And if you are most thankful, why do you look as if you were going to be hanged? Do you want to drive me mad again? Damned well for Stanton to get rid of you, I believe—oh, may the man that tries to do good to a petticoat, whoever may wear it, or whatever she may be to him—may that fellow be cursed by act of Parliament, I say!"

Gaby McNeary was stamping off to bed; Helen called out after him to return, and say God bless her, before they separated for the night. Gruffly enough, he acceded to her request, and then left her alone. She looked round the cheerless parlor, clasped her hands, and whispered shudderingly to herself—"Oh, I am punished already—oh, had I but waited one day! And my father has yet to know all!"

Trying to escape from her own thoughts, she also hurried to her bed-chamber. And thus ended Helen's bridal night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

When Nelly Carty first announced to the beggar-girl, under her own roof, among the shower of houses, that she was her mother, Mary felt delighted at the disclosure. The novelty of finding herself claimed by any human creature, was grateful to her previous

sense of utter loneliness in the world. The woman's zeal and energy, and indeed success, in saving her from the effects of Darby Cooney's visit, naturally aroused her gratitude also.—But Nelly Carty, by telling her that she had yet to make sure of the fact of her parentage, caused to arise in Mary's mind a doubt, which helped to chill the further growth of these feelings. She afterwards instructed her to conceal, for the present, the whole matter from Father Connell, and the doubt grew stronger.

Mary went to live with Father Connell; and for some time hearing or seeing nothing of Nelly Carty, and gradually becoming inspired with new affections, to say nothing of her dwelling constantly on an old and an overmastering one, almost allowed the circumstance to pass out of her thought. Time still went by, and she grew indifferent to it; and by degrees, as the improvement of her mental and moral habits progressed, Mary nearly wished that she might never hear anything more about it. In fact, she now felt a repugnance to being proved to be the child of the unfortunate Nelly Carty. She had had opportunity afforded her, of knowing what good people were, and of being loved and protected by good people, and her misgivings and her recollections told her, that the potato-beggar was not one of the good.

In about three months, as Mary knelt on an evening, with crowds of other persons, in the dusk of the little chapel, preparing to approach the confessional, she felt her cloak plucked gently by some one who knelt close behind her, and was turning her head, when in a very cautious whisper, almost at her ear, she was thus addressed:—

"Don't stir, or say a word, *ma-colleen-beg*, but only listen well to the words you'll hear. I am Nelly Carty, your misfortunate mother; an' I could you I'd make you an' all the world sure that you were my child; an' ever since you set eyes on me last, sure I was out of this town, far away, roamin' here an' there, to try an' come across the man that is the only creature on the face of the earth can do it; but I couldn't larra tulo or tidin's ov him; he's at none of his old quarters, within thirty miles of us, any how; bud he's off, a great way intirely, this time, fur a reason he has, I'm thinkin'."

Well, *amairneen*, don't be afraid but that I'll make him out for you, sooner or later; an' until I do, I'll never come an' disturb your peace an' quiet in the priest's house. An' *amoch!* unless it was to see you as my child, that I'd come, to the old priest's door, little business I'd have there. I'm not a good woman, my *cushla*, an' thould man wouldn't let me next or nigh you; an' I'm kneelin' here to-night, not fur the confession, or fur the prayers—the Lord look down on me an' help me!—bud only that I may have this talk wid you, unknown to him, and to everybody. Ah, now the Heavens be wid you, *ma-colleen-beg*; I'll soon be on the thramp agen, after that man, an' if mortal wit can do it, I'll make you sure, sure, sure."

Mary now heard Nelly Carty arise from her knees behind her, and walk, in her heavy, hob-nailed brogues, out of the chapel.

This incident once more disturbed, for a time, the quiet of the beggar-girl's lot; she feared every day the return of Nelly Carty, with the full proofs she seemed so confidently to promise. But time still passed away; and the potato-beggar not appearing, and Mary being now more and more occupied, and more and more beloved by her new friends, again suffered the matter very seldom to occupy her mind. It was not till the very day of her first communion, that she caught another glance of her self-called mother; Mary was just arising from her knees, before the railings of the altar, when the poor woman appeared, squatted, Turk-wise, among the crowd, straight before her, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes fixed on her supposed child, and streaming tears, and her lips wide apart—agape in fact, with the great admiration and interest which will give to the human mouth that expression.

"God bless you, *cushla-machree*," hoarsely whispered Nelly Carty, as Mary made her way through the crowd, to pray prayers of thanksgiving in a secluded corner.

"Amen—an' the same to you, good woman," answered Mary, raising her own moist eyes upward.

The next day, and the next, and the next, Mary again experienced disquietude, anticipating Nelly Carty's appearance at Father Connell's door. But she need not have been so troubled.

A second time the potato-beggar had indeed returned to her town, after a vain search for Robin Costigan. True, she had succeeded in ascertaining that he, and his gang, had recently been hovering about the old mansion, twenty-five miles off; but she had also made sure that none of them were at present in its neighborhood, nay, in itself—not even excepting its most secret vaults. And whither Robin Costigan had slipped away, she had no clue to conjecture. Upon the chance that he might be found in Joan Flaherty's hovel, she had come back to the shower of houses, though not to her own old tenement. She was still at fault.

But an occurrence, totally unconnected with him, now absorbed her whole mind and soul. She heard of Edmund Connell's re-appearance.

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