

IN THE Clutch of Rome.

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CHAPTER XVII—Continued. A DANGEROUS CONFESSOR.

The eyes of the young priest fell at length on the form of the girl before him, with the glow of the fire falling on her light, chestnut hair, and showing the blue veins in her thin hands; and he noted with sorrow the thinness of her cheeks, which, from the formation of her face, should have been round.

"Flora," he said very gently, "do you remember our conversation at the fair?"

She had evidently been deep in thought. She looked up at him with something of reproach in her eyes.

"Do I remember, Father? Do you think I can forget that you, a holy man, as far above me as the bright sun, told me that you drew inspiration from my voice at the singing of the mass?"

Fabio was startled. Was this young, imaginative girl making a saint of him?

"It's very natural that the impressive words of the Sacrifice should be rendered more impressive when a voice, with such depth of feeling in it as yours possesses, sings it. I said other things to you, Miss Flora; I told you that I must have the meaning of your sad words and altered looks explained."

"You told me, Father, that the church could help me. She has helped me, for you are a part of the church, and if my singing inspires you—"

"Flora," the priest interrupted, "you attach too much importance to those words of mine."

"Did you not mean them, Father," she asked very earnestly.

"Yes, my daughter, from the very bottom of my heart, but I do not want you to give undue importance to them, and I want you to tell me what it is that makes you unlike other girls of your age. Remember, I do not ask from idle curiosity, but as your pastor."

The girl's head dropped and her face grew crimson.

"I—I do not think I know just what it is, your Reverence."

The priest looked at her attentively a few minutes. This girl and her trouble, whatever it was, required the most delicate handling. Of one thing the young priest felt certain: no guilt, as the world knew the meaning of the word, had a place in the girl's heart.

"How do you occupy your time, Flora," he asked abruptly, "during your sister's absence?"

The girl's head dropped and her face grew voluble.

"Oh, I am never idle, Father, I rise early and prepare our breakfast, then I do house work, next I practice my singing for an hour, I also paint. Two days out of the week, I go out and take a lesson in singing and painting. Then in the evening we sew or read. Sometimes we go to a place of amusement."

"Always with your sister?"

"Always, your Reverence. I would never think of going out in the evening without her."

"That is one of your paintings, I suppose," said the priest, pointing to a painting on an easel.

"Oh, yes, Father, all the pictures you see in the room are my work. Would you care to go into my studio, Father?"

The priest arose. "It would give me great pleasure."

Flora led the way through the hall and the small dining room, with its simple, refined appointments, and pushing aside the crimson folds of a portiere, they entered a fair-sized room, one side of which was almost entirely of glass. This room Margaret had built for a conservatory, but when her young sister had shown unmistakable talent as an artist, she had converted it into a studio. The floor was covered with India matting, with here and there a pretty rug. The walls and ceiling were done in pale blue and pearl, as was also the woodwork. The furniture was simple, and the room was devoted to artist materials. Some Narcissus were blooming in pots on a stand, and a great jar of terra cotta stood in a corner with growing palms in it, whose feathery fans swept the ceiling.

Resting on easels or against the wall were flower pieces and landscapes, and many beautiful little creations of her own fancy; but Father St. John noticed with some surprise that the majority of her pieces were copies of Biblical scenes. Father St. John was an admirer and also something of a critic, of art, and he was surprised at the unmistakable talent displayed by so young a girl, as he looked critically at a rose-crowned St. Cecilia, and an exquisite copy of the Madonna and child. Finally, his attention was attracted to an easel in a distant corner, with a large canvas on it almost hid by a drapery of crimson silk. He walked up to it, saying:

"What holy of holies do you keep hidden here?"

With a bound the girl reached his side and laid her hand against the folds of the silk. Father St. John, with the instinct of a gentleman who would not insist on the disclosure of what a lady wished to conceal, turned from the picture, saying:

"I respect its exclusiveness, Flora, show me something else."

"Oh, your Reverence, excuse my silly action. I thought—perhaps, you might not like it. I really forgot about the picture being here. Come and look at it, Father," she flung back the silk with a quick, resolute movement. Thus admonished, Father St. John went back to the picture.

It was a painting of St. Michael. The warlike angel stood tall and clad, with a sword in one hand and holding a shield with a red cross upon it in front of him. His folded wings, so perfect was the work of the young artist, had a silvery gleam upon them. On the bottom of the pedestal, on which he stood, she had painted in small violet letters, "Sub Tota Michaelis, Pax in Terra, Pax in Coelis." (Neath St. Michael's is given. Peace on earth, and peace in Heaven.)

The face of the angel was a perfect likeness of Father St. John. The priest looked at the girl standing before him, pale and drooping as a lily withered by a hot sun, waiting his verdict of the right or wrong of her work, and he turned sick at heart. Could the words of Ida Olney be true? Did this young innocent and gifted girl love him with the love of a woman for a man? Banish the thought; she was only a child. His face had taken her artistic fancy, and she had given it to her angel, as she would have given it the face of any chance stranger that had taken her fancy.

In her childish awe of him as a priest, she had been afraid of his displeasure. He placed his hand in a brotherly way on her shoulder, and said, laughingly:

"You have done me a great honor, Miss Flora, and if our worthy St. Michael of blessed memory be not offended, I have no cause to be."

Like a drooping lily refreshed by drops of dew, she lifted her head under the light touch of the priest's hand and his reassuring words.

"Miss Flora," he said, as he turned from the picture, "this is a pleasant place to linger in, but my time is about up; come, will you not tell me why you veiled that picture?"

"I hardly know, Father, unless, it was not quite dry, for I only finished it this morning."

The most truthful of all women will prevaricate, when questions touching ever so lightly on her love secrets, are asked. In the painting of St. Michael, Flora had known all the pleasure, and had forgotten all the pain of her love idyl. To a chance observer, the picture was a copy of a painting of an historical saint, with an inscription from an old latin hymn under it. To the girl, it was the man she loved and idealized, and she had thrown the silken veil over it, with the instinctive secretiveness of love.

The parlor regained, the priest did not resume his seat by the fire, but remained standing near the mantel, and he had become all the priest again.

"My daughter, I have not urged your confidence to-day, I think your trouble is of a more serious nature than I at first thought. Is your sister in your confidence? Does she ever remark on your altered appearance?"

"O, yes, Father; she really at times annoys me with her anxious questionings, but I always protest there is anything wrong with me; and indeed, your Reverence, I am better than I was. I think my unhappiness was half imaginary. I pray, Oh, so earnestly, to the holy virgin to keep my heart pure within, and to heal the infirmities of my body and soul, and you know she always helps those who supplicate her."

"The virgin is, indeed, a harbor of safety in the troubled waters of life," said the priest. "But tell me how long it is since you have been to confession?"

"Not for more than a year, Father St. John."

Father St. John shook his head in stern disapproval.

"How old were you then?"

"Not quite sixteen."

"Then you are now?"

"I was seventeen last month."

"Tell me, Flora, why you have neglected to perform this most sacred duty? Do you not know that in ignoring this great command of the church, you are sinning very deeply?"

Like the child she was, she knelt at the priest's feet, and in trembling tones that expressed the agony of her heart, she said:

"O, Father St. John, forgive me. You would if you only knew."

The priest raised her, and in brotherly tenderness held her two hands in his, and said earnestly:

"My daughter, so far as it lies in my power to forgive, I do, with all my heart. I begin to fear that some great matter that needs a close investigation has entered into your life. Promise me to come tomorrow afternoon to confession."

A gray pallor settled in the face of the girl, and she withdrew her hands from the tender grasp of the priest.

"Is it possible for me to avoid this command, Father?"

"It is impossible, my daughter. The sacrament of confession is instituted by divine command, and it is absolutely necessary to your salvation. Come to the footstool of God, as you would go to a tender mother. I might have better said, with tenderness more assurance than you would go to a mother, for it seems you cannot tell the secrets of your heart to your sister who is the only mother you have known."

"Ah, my sister. If you only knew her pure womanly life. I think she has her sorrows, too, for sometimes she is sad, but her religion does not ask her to confess her secrets, and she taught me, when I was a little child, that God could read our hearts as we can read an open book. And is not her God our God?"

"It is not for me to judge your sister or her religion, Flora. I believe her to be a good, true woman; but you and I must obey the commands of God according to the church to which we both belong. And above all, my child, remember that there is no trouble that can come to you that the church cannot in some manner cure or mediate." The girl looked up at him with clear, earnest eyes. "I never thought of it in that way before, Father."

The closing of the front door startled the priest and the penitent a little, and Margaret came into the room. She acknowledged the priest's salutation a little coldly. Flora hastened to relieve her sister of her lunch basket and wraps, and Father St. John, declining a rather formal invitation from Margaret to take dinner with them, left the cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII. HER LOVE FOR A PRIEST.

It was with an undefined feeling of reluctance that Father St. John entered the confessional on the following afternoon, to await his young penitent. His experience with the passions of the human heart was, owing to the short time of his pastorate, slight, but his keen insight told him that he had to deal with no ordinary sinner.

Flora, as the hour drew near for her to go to the church, knelt before her crucifix with her rosary in her hand, and said many aves to the virgin. Then she went to her sleeping room, where she had carried St. Michael, and stood long in contemplation before it. She was going to a real St. Michael soon, and the lines of the hymn, as she read them over, gave a promise of peace.

"Yes, 'neath St. Michael's watch is given peace on earth and peace in Heaven." True to her promise, at the appointed hour she entered the confessional. It is not for us to pry into its secrecy. Suffice it to say, under the careful questioning of the priest, and by what she believed to be a duty to her Creator, she confessed to Father St. John that love for himself was the joy and pain of her life. Her confession filled the priest with dismay. He brought all the force of reason to bear upon the girl. He tried to show her in such strong terms as her delicate mind could bear, the sinfulness and danger of her regarding him, a priest, with other love than that of a child for a father.

"The knowledge that this love is sinful and utterly hopeless is what is killing me, Father. O, Father St. John, why do you and the church force this shameful confession from me? It was my secret, mine and the virgin's. I told her all, and in time she would have helped me, for my heart was beginning to glow lighter in my bosom; but now, O, Father St. John, never again, I think, can I sing the mass, so covered with shame am I."

"You have washed away much of your sin, my child, by obeying and unburdening your heart to the church. I told you she would help you, and she will."

And after a few comforting words, and the absolution—for Father St. John felt that this young creature had, in her anguish of heart, suffered penance enough to expiate the sins of a dozen worldly women—he pushed the slide down over the grating and left the confessional. His first impulse was to wait for the girl, and assure her further of his friendship, and his respect for her secret. Then, judging her sensitive nature by his own, he hurried out of the church, purposely walking with heavy footfalls, that she might know when he had gone.

Soon after, Flora left the church with her veil drawn closely over her face. Flora had learned to love the handsome young priest with a woman's love, by slow degrees; at fourteen, he was the God she worshiped at the altar in the ceremonies of the church; at seventeen, he was a God no longer, but the man whom she still worshiped as a being whom God Himself had sanctified, but whom she also loved—alas! she well knew helplessly—with those undefined sensations, a mixture of absolute purity of thought and physical attraction, which a woman can never experience but once, and never after she has left her teens; love that is so hard to keep in subjection, because it has all the boldness of innocence. A love that is born with the individual and develops rapidly and silently, ready to burst forth at touch of a certain hand, or the glance of an eye, like a folded flower bud, that unconsciously waits for the ray of sunlight to unfold its fragrant petals.

Flora had struggled hard with this love of hers, but she was too young to conquer her sweet and secret sin, which had become part of her life, though she was old enough to know that it was eating her life away, and was as absurd as it was sinful.

After a while she grew calmer. She told herself she was better, after all, for her confession, for she no longer bore the burden alone. He knew, her

real Saint Michael, and he would help her fight and conquer her sin.

Father St. John had listened to the confession of Flora Hume and had tried, to the best of his ability, to show her the absurdity of allowing her life to be embittered by her girlish fancy for himself. He had told her she was too young to know the meaning of love as relating to the sexes; that she had nursed her imagination until it had become diseased; that he was no saint for any one to worship, but a simple priest trying to impart the light he had received from Heaven to those under his care. He had even suggested that she repaint the face of her Saint Michael.

"Don't ask me to do that, Father," she had pleaded, "the real Saint Michael fought and conquered sin; you have promised to help me fight and conquer sin. Then, why ask me to destroy that which will help me to remember this?"

Then he bade her do as she pleased with her picture. In the semi-darkness of the confessional, when the flattering words of the girl, with all their dread meaning, fell on his ear, the image of Ida Olney seemed to stand before him and her words, "Your priestly career will be ruined by a woman, yet," rang in his ears as he listened to what he feared to hear, and to what he vaguely felt it would be his sad fate to listen to, when he had hidden the girl open her heart to God.

The next Sunday Father St. John listened for her bird-like voice to respond to him in the mass. Without an instant's delay, it rose clear and sweet, but with an earnest pleading in it that only he heard. After the elevation, he glanced up to the choir gallery; he could not see her. She had knelt in the shadow of the organ. Flora had schooled herself to continue singing in the choir, but with what a bitter struggle only God and herself knew.

Days sped on. Father St. John visited the sick and dying, and said masses; visited Mrs. Maxwell from time to time, according to his charge, and had the assurance from her, that nothing on earth could again make her forget her duty to the church, and that by prayers and supplications she hoped to gain her husband's consent to have their union consecrated by the church; and she gave large sums of money from time to time for masses to be said for the soul of the abbess. The priest assured her that without much doubt the unhappy condition of the abbess was most mediated by the exemplary life she had led of late by the baptism of her children. The priest, also, had bade her hope with certainty for the climax of her reformation, and for the eternal happiness of the abbess. Father St. John knew that Rome had other arguments than prayers and supplications to bring to bear on her husband, to make him consent to almost anything the church might demand.

But the salt had lost its savor. Father St. John performed the offices of his priesthood with the grim obedience of a slave under the eye of a master. The image of a young girl with truthful violet eyes, light chestnut hair, and a bird-like voice, with small, deft fingers that could prepare food, and perform household duties, and was proud of being able to work; and entering a dainty studio, could, with those same skillful fingers, bring into the sweet imagery of her mind, banneted the young father in all his comings and out-goings.

At first he sought to banish the ghost by calling up to his mind the daily duties of his life, and by laying plans for future labors; but the ghost, with a soft, appealing look, would glide quietly among these thoughts and they would flee. Then he boldly took to reasoning with it.

"You are nothing to me. I do not feel even a semblance by what you of the world call love, and which I am by solemn vows never to know. I have no regrets that I am so bound. Paint your pictures and grow famous, or marry and devote those housewifely qualities of yours to making a husband's home happy. Bear children and teach them to fear the Lord, and to be faithful followers of the true faith, and leave me, who have no wish to know aught of such a life, to my own."

Then this persistent ghost would look at him with truthful, violet eyes, and his argument like a little mound of soft snow, would melt away. Then, he no longer struggled against it, but let it take full possession of him, hoping to breed the contempt of familiarity.

As he ate his meals, the pretty ghost sat opposite him, in dainty, morning robes or closely fitting, afternoon gowns of soft tints, and poured out his tea and coffee, with those small, gifted hands; then, when the labors of the day were over, his library walls melted away into a long room with filmy, white draperies at the windows, and the floor was carpeted with a thick, soft carpet with rich subdued tints in it; and the walls around him were decorated with the creations of a mind and body, which could neither conceive nor execute a semblance of guile; and the faint, sweet scents of heliotrope and mignonette came to him from their home in the embrasure of a window; and his leather-covered chair was a dainty, wicker rocker, with pale blue ribbons woven in its meshes, and his head rested against a soft, blue velvet cushion; and the fire-

light fell on a girlish form, with a pale, sweet face, framed in chestnut hair, sitting near him, on a low ottoman, in a childish attitude, with downcast eyes and clasped hands, or knelt at his feet, asking in anguish of heart, for his forgiveness for neglecting the commands of the church.

Then again, he would follow the dainty form, and she would hold aside the folds of a crimson curtain, and he would find himself in an artistic studio, looking at a likeness of himself in the guise of a saint, with his sweet young worshiper by his side. Very often now, the ghost sat in the fire light, smiling and happy, with cheeks round and pink, and the look those beautiful eyes gave him, was not that of a penitent, nor a girl struggling to keep down a hopeless love, but the honest, all-sufficing affection, which never comes from any eyes, he they ever so beautiful, but those of a loved, loving and honored wife; and with that look the neglected breviary would fall from the priest's hands on to the floor, with a dull thud, the drowsy fire would flare up a warning, and the dream would vanish; and the substance of this spirit, which was playing such havoc in the priest's life, still performed her dainty tasks, painted her pictures, practiced her singing, prayed to the virgin, as she had been taught; but the last thing her eyes rested on at night before she put out her light, and the first thing they rested on when she opened them in the morning, was Saint Michael, and the refrain of all her prayers was the consoling words of the hymn.

(To Be Continued.)

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MARIA MONK.

The Nun Who Escaped From the Hotel Dieu, Montreal, Canada. Fresh Developments.

In the winter of 1890 and 1891 the celebrated Chas. Chiniquy, commonly called Father Chiniquy, and now probably the most famous ex-priest in the world was in Washington, D. C. Here he delivered a course of nineteen lectures on Romanism. He was then in his 82nd year, being now 1895, he would be 86 years old.

It fell to my lot to serve as his assistant and I was with him daily for about three weeks. Being one day alone with him in his room, I asked whether he knew anything about the story of Maria Monk and her famous book, Awful Disclosures. Chiniquy was about 26 years old at the time of Miss Monk's escape, in 1835; and I knew that he had been much in Montreal where the Hotel Dieu is situated. He replied that he did, and that one occasion, when he had become too ill to continue his arduous labors as a priest and "Apostle of Temperance," as he was often called, his bishop sent him to that very hotel to take some needed rest, saying to him: "The sisters will give you a room, and nurse you tenderly, and you will soon recover your usual health." While he was there a very old nun often came into his room to minister to his wants; and one day he asked her whether she knew anything of the story of Maria Monk. She replied that she was well informed on that subject, and had read her book, "Awful Disclosures." "Well now," says Chiniquy "were you here during the time when she claims to have been here?" "Yes," she said, "I was here and I know her well." "Then," says he, "I wish you would tell me whether the awful statements she has made of deeds done in this nunnery were true."

Upon this question, the old nun was greatly agitated and begged to be excused from answering; but on being pressed for an answer, consented, provided he would promise never to reveal anything she said until after her death. He promised, and she then stated that Miss Monk's statements in that book were true; and says she, "I have seen worse things done here than anything that she has told."

My attention was again turned to the Maria Monk affair, by seeing a little pamphlet recently published in London, Eng., by a Catholic house, endeavoring to prove that Miss Monk's Awful Disclosures were a fraud. I read the pamphlet through; but it does not seem to me to disprove any part of her story. Besides, this statement of the Rev. Chiniquy is a direct confirmation of the truth of Miss Monk's story, new evidence, which I have never before seen published.

But I have just received, most unexpectedly, some very interesting and very reliable statements from another source.

While Friend Traynor, State President of the A. P. A., was in this city recently, he gave me the name of a Rev. gentleman now living in New York City, from whom valuable information concerning Miss Monk might be obtained. I wrote to him, and received substantially the following: That it was his mother, who first protected Miss Monk, when she arrived in that city after her escape from Montreal in the year 1835.

He says: "It was extremely difficult to select a refuge with any promise of safety, as spies were alert and numerous, and danger of discovery was increasing." The name of this protectrix was Mrs. Sarah W. Reeves, famous for her beauty, breadth of mind, dauntless courage, and sublimity of character,

combined with such lovable traits and womanly graces as commended her for this charge in a time of great peril. Her love of justice, hatred of wrong and unflinching devotion to humanity decided the question, and watchman Hogan seized a favorable opportunity, and secretly hurried Maria Monk to Mrs. Reeves's residence where she and Mrs. Hogan welcomed her at midnight. She was immediately secreted on the top floor, previously prepared for her, which she occupied for months, where, when restored to health and strength, she wrote her famous book, Awful Disclosures."

"The truths it contained were terribly emphasized by the subsequent excitement, and flood of vituperation with malignant persecution, coupled with threats of assassination."

"It is idle folly to attempt to discredit her book in the face of the venomous fury aroused, and the consternation which forced the leading minds of the Roman Catholic church into the controversy."

"Maria Monk at length tired of her captivity, and one day incautiously approached a window, and was recognized."

"That night a mob besieged the house, demanding her immediate surrender." "They were dispersed, and another mob appeared the next day."

"The third day, Fifth street from Avenue D to Avenue C was filled by a frenzied mob of howling fanatics (Roman Catholics), who threatened to raze the house to the ground, unless Miss Monk was surrendered at once. Mrs. Reeves preferred to take chances rather than surrender. So the neighbors rallied and guarded the house until Miss Monk was safely conducted to other quarters three days later. My mother often repeated this story, but had I received your inquiry five weeks sooner, I could have given some startling details," for his mother died just five weeks ago.

"The words quoted are as I received them from the son of this heroic mother. If Miss Monk was not an escaped nun, why did the priests stir-up Romish mobs to recapture her? And if those convents are not places of lewdness and wickedness, why did Pope Innocent VIII. publish a bull demanding reformation in monasteries and other religious places, and declare that "members of monasteries and other religious houses lead a lascivious and truly dissolute life."

Why is it that all escaped nuns tell the same story of those prisons? For my part, I should deem it truly wonderful that these escaped women should all agree so well, though wholly unknown to each other, and living in widely different times and far remote from one another. Every lawyer accustomed to sift and weigh evidence, knows well that witnesses cannot so agree in all the essentials of a story as these escaped nuns do, unless they are telling the truth.

This book should be in every family in the world. The boy or girl who has read it, will not be likely to be beguiled into the dens of Romanism.

Yours truly, CHAS. ROYS, 631 F ST N. W., Washington, D. C.

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