

Idele's Trial

by Caroline Conrad

A party of three were walking in the garden. Madame Fanshawe came first. She was a very little old lady, and would have made you think of a fairy, with her gold headed cane, her glittering puffs of white hair, her black eyes, bright as diamonds, her long hooked nose, her sharp curving chin.

The young lady with her had a face like some rich-hued tropical flower; the lips scarlet and sweet; the lovely dark eyes shining. She had a yellow rose in her black hair, and another at her belt.

The third person was a gentleman about twenty-eight, rather pale, but very handsome and haughty looking.

The three had just left the breakfast-table, and come out together for a stroll in madame's lovely rose garden.

The young gentleman was madame's son; the young lady was her adopted daughter. The son by blood, and the daughter by adoption, were to be married in a few weeks.

Madame was not pleased that it should be so, but her son was his own master; and, after all, though she did not know who her parents were, Idele was a girl to be proud of. So she submitted with seeming good grace.

Madame was the first to discover something unusual and strange in the path ahead of them, and hastening on with the aid of her gold-headed staff, reached it before the others, who were gazing into each other's eyes, came up.

What madame had discovered was the body of a youth of perhaps fourteen, terribly deformed, but having a beautiful face and fair, curling hair. He was clothed in a gay velvet suit, trimmed with lace, and wore scarlet hose, and handsome shoes, with shining buckles.

He lay upon his side, and a knife was sticking in his back, whose carved handle of silver proclaimed it to be no common weapon.

Close by was a summer house overgrown with roses, honeysuckle and sweet briar.

Madame bent down to look closer; then she uttered a scream and started back.

"Phillip!" she cried. "Phillip, come here. It is Cock Robin; some one has killed him. Look at the knife in his back."

Phillip Fanshawe stepped quickly between the girl he loved and that ghastly sight.

But some fascination drew Idele forward. She looked once. It was enough. With a stealthy, shuddering movement her white hand crept, first to the flower in her hair, then to the one at her belt, and tearing both out, dropped them, crushed, in the path.

The real name of the murdered boy was Bobby Reese; but some one had dubbed him Cock Robin one day, and the name had stuck to him.

He was what is called half-witted, and was the only child of a favorite servant of Madame Fanshawe's. He was a sort of pet with madame, one of whose whims it had been to deck him in such finery as this he wore now.

"You had better go into the house, mother," said Phillip; "you and Idele, and send Biddie to me. This is no place for you."

"Who's to tell his mother?" cried madame, shrilly. "Nora'll go mad—"

"Tell her yourself. Wait—here she is now. She has missed him."

A woman was coming toward them with her apron to her eyes. She was crying.

"I can't find my little lad, Madame," she said, as soon as she was near enough. "His bed's not been slept in all night. I'm sore troubled for the boy."

And then, though Phillip and Madame Fanshawe had stepped between her and poor slain Cock Robin, she caught a glimpse of his blue velvet jacket, and flung herself past them like a mad creature.

Idele turned and ran suddenly from the sound of those frightful screams, going straight to her own room and locking herself in. She had not been there long when Madame Fanshawe came.

"Let me in quickly, Idele," she called, in an imperative tone. "I must speak to you instantly— instantly, do you hear?"

Idele opened the door. Her hair was tumbled, her eyes were red. She was trembling.

"Did you wish to speak with me, Madame?" she asked, looking down.

And then Madame Fanshawe pulled something out of her pocket and flashed it before her.

It was a string of carbuncles, each bead joined to its fellow by a golden link.

Idele glanced at them indifferently.

"I had not missed them," she said. "Where did you find them?"

Madame advanced into the room and shut the door.

“I found them in the summer-house near which poor, murdered Cock Robin lies,” she said, in a shrill whisper, and smiled to see the flower-like face blanch at the words. “No one saw them,” she went on. “No one knows where I found them. Go away at once. Leave my house without seeing Phillip again, and hide yourself from him from this day, and I will keep your secret. Stay, and I will publish it to the winds and help hunt you to your doom.”

“And only yesterday,” said Idele, with quivering lips—“this morning even, you called me daughter.”

“But I never let you call me mother. I am glad of that now.”

“Madame, do you believe that I killed him? I?” questioned Idele, haughtily.

Madame tossed the chain of carbuncles upon a dressing-table.

“I have warned you.” she said. “Stay now at your peril. Exchange but one word with Phillip, and I will very soon let you know what I believe.”

She left the room.

It was no part of madame’s plans that Idele should really be suspected. She only wanted to separate her from Phillip.

When she found her room vacant, she concealed her absence at first on a pretence of illness, and then after a time gave out that she had gone to visit a relative of her own.

Phillip, however, had to be told something nearer the truth. So she told him where she found the string of carbuncles, and how Idele looked when she showed them to her. But not a word more.

“It is very strange,” said Phillip, wonderingly. “I shall scold her well for having secrets from me, when I find her.”

“You will never marry her after this?” madame asked, with looks of horror.

“Why not?”

“She must know something about the killing of poor Cock Robin. Perhaps she had gone to the summer-house to meet a lover, and the boy saw her.”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“I never thought she was so much in love with you as you with her.”

Phillip’s eyes flashed.

“I will search the world over but that I will find her,” he said.

Madame leaned on her gold-headed cane and looked at him with a grim face. “Find her if you can,” she thought, but did not say.

Three years passed. Phillip had sought in vain for Idele. The mystery of her disappearance, and the mystery of who killed poor Cock Robin, were mysteries still.

One night a gang of desperadoes tried to rob Fanshawe Hall.

They had got into the house, and were trying to get the door of the plate closet open, when Nora Reese, who slept near, heard them, and went, as still as a mouse, and waked her master, and some of the men-servants.

The robbers had got inside the plate closet, and were piling the silver into a bag they had brought with them, when Phillip and his men burst in upon them. A general rush and scramble followed, and some shots were fired. The villains all escaped but one. He was wounded, but he would scarcely have got away if he had not been; for Nora Reese had sprung upon him at first, and clung to him like a wildcat.

“It’s the man that killed my Bobby, and I know it!” she screamed.

The man fought her a little at first, but when she said that he stopped, and leaned against the wall, gasping and staring with starting eyes, while the blood dripped from his wound upon the floor.

“What do you mean?” he said. “How do you know I killed him?”

“I heard the others call you Carlo, and Carlo was on the knife. I know it was you!”

“You mean the softy?” he said. “Yes. I did kill him. I’ll own up, for I believe I’m dying myself now.”

Phillip Fanshawe sprang forward and caught him as he was falling, and they laid him gently down upon the floor.

“It was the cruellest thing I ever did,” he went on, in a regretful tone.

“It was,” said Phillip, sternly. “Why did you kill him?”

The man stared at Phillip.

“Why, you’re the fellow Idele was to have married,” he said. “Do you love her yet?”

“I shall love her till I die!” Phillip answered, setting his lips. “What were you to her?”

“I belonged to the gipsy band who stole her from her father’s house a babe. I was present when the madame took a fancy to her, and paid the band money to give her up to her. When I heard she was going to marry you, I thought I saw my way to make some money. I pretended to be her father, and got her to meet me in the summer-house that night, and talk it over. She didn’t believe me, but she said she would think about what I had said. And then she picked some yellow roses, and told me if I passed near the next morning, and saw her wearing some of them, I might know she still refused to believe me.

“After she had gone I went out and found the softy there listening, and I killed him, partly in temper, partly because I was afraid he would tell what he had heard. Poor Idele! The sight of that dead boy convinced her I had told the truth, or I would not have killed him to keep it from being known; and she fled from you to avoid betraying the man she supposed to be her father.”

“Do you know where she is now?” Phillip asked, his face darkening in spite of him.

“She is living with her own mother as lady’s companion. Her mother is the widow of Lord Tulliver. They are fond of each other, but they do not guess the truth. They are at Tulliver Park in Yorkshire now.”

Such was the substance of Carlo’s story, omitting the many interruptions, the long pauses, caused by his weak and dying condition.

He died the next day. But he lived long enough to complete and attest, by solemn oath, all these statements, as well as to tell where other witnesses to their truth might be found.

Phillip lost no time in seeking his lost love, and brought her back to Fanshawe Hall as his wife, with as little delay as possible.

Madame, his mother, was very glad to see her.

“I always liked you, my dear. You know I was as fond of you as I could be till Phillip wanted to marry you,” she said coolly to Idele. “But I had followed you to the summer-house that night, and Cock Robin was not the only listener there. I wonder if that wretch would have killed *me* if he had found me. *I* believed him when he said he was your father, and you know I could not let Phillip marry the daughter of a man like that—a murderer, too.”

The New York Ledger, September 22, 1877