

# The Interrogation of Giovanni de Martiato

By

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## Synopsis

### ACT I

It is dawn and the customers of the Sack and Sow inn are rousing themselves from the previous night's debauchery. Among them is Fergal deCourcy, defrocked friar and town drunk. He is also the town dentist, barber, letter writer and chess partner of Rice, the town's mayor. It is 1588 and the countryside is just recovering from years of famine. The English are in charge and must not be angered (especially Rice) because any hostility toward the English will plunge the country into another famine.

Tomas MacCarthy, a member of the local garrison, an Irishman with a very weak sense of loyalty to anyone or anything, arrives at the inn with a half dead, near-naked boy on his back. Tomas claims to have found him on the beach. After some interrogation, the motley crew of drunks in the inn determine that this boy is a survivor of the Spanish armada ship that foundered off the beach that very morning. When he comes to, the boy asks after his father who was on the ship with him.

There is in force an order that all Spaniards coming ashore off an armada ship were to be considered invaders and captured. This, despite the obvious fact that the wretches coming ashore for weeks up and down the coast were half dead from starvation and battle wounds. The order further stated that such prisoners be questioned and, if they had no perceived ransom value, be executed.

Some in the inn are for hiding the boy but most are for handing him over to the castle for summary justice and possible reward so the drinking can continue. Among the latter is Fergal (defrocked friar and main character). To help in their decision, they decide to interrogate the boy to see if any possible ransom might be larger than any possible reward. During his mock trial, Giovanni defends himself by demonstrating (fraudulently) that he was a valuable gunner aboard the stricken ship and he should be spared. Fergal warms to the boy especially when Blaitin (little flower) a 55+ hag and innkeeper, suggests that the boy looks like Fergal's younger brother who was killed along side Fergal in battle with the English under circumstances that Fergal has never been able to contemplate let alone discuss. The suggestion is that Fergal deserted the fight and in his guilt became a monk only to lose his faith under the weight of alcohol.

Meanwhile, outside a scaffold is being erected to hang any survivors.

Meanwhile, the foundering of the ship has spurred Rice to action. He sends to Cork for reinforcements convinced that the suspected second armada is about to land on his

beach. he also recalls the soldier-of-fortune, Gwynn, to interrogate any survivors. [In fact, Giovanni is the only survivor of 300].

Meanwhile, in the middle of his mock trial, Giovanni hears the sounds of hanging from outside and, believing that it might be his father on the rope, he rushes outside only to run smack into Gwynn on his way to the castle. Giovanni is locked up in the castle dungeon.

## ACT II

Gwynn interrogates Giovanni. The boy lies about the son of the king of Spain being aboard his ship. This would be a propaganda coup and Rice orders Giovanni's execution stayed until all possible information is extracted from the boy. Fergal makes failed attempts to intercede for the boy that only culminate on Gwynn's raping Giovanni (not portrayed on stage). Fergal's rage intensifies but the task of rescuing the boy falls to Catalina, the wife of a Portuguese wine importer. Catalina and Fergal are having an affair and plan to return to Spain together as soon as her husband returns from Portugal with a wine shipment. Catalina promises that her husband will reward Rice well on his return if Rice will only stay the boy's execution until then. Catalina had previously lost her only son and sees Giovanni as a replacement to help restore her marriage.

This is agreed upon but when the reinforcements arrive from Cork, Rice is forced to reinstate the execution order. Her husband's ship has been sighted and will land on the morrow so Catalina now offers Rice her favors in exchange for delaying the execution once again. Rice agrees.

The ship docks and a letter is delivered to Catalina. Her husband is not aboard. He is in Portugal suing for a divorce from his wayward wife. Fergal now offers himself in place of the boy. Rice accepts based on his desire to win Catalina for himself on Fergal's demise. Rice has tasted her wares and considered them more enticing than the friendship or usefulness of his chess partner, Fergal.

Catalina and Giovanni escape to go aboard her husband's ship to flee this insane place. Fergal readies himself to die at the hands of O'Shea, the crippled gaoler and husband to Blaithin, who delights in hanging papists. Catalina reappears to plead with Fergal to save the boy. Rice has removed Giovanni to the scaffold for execution. O'Shea asks did they think that Rice would renege on his duty to the crown and allow a prisoner return to Spain to report on the total lack of defences on the Irish coast.

Catalina and Fergal hear again, from outside, the sounds of hanging.