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ELLEN AHERN;

OR,

THE POOR COUSIN.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

'Oh yes, dear Father; thank you for suggesting what I, in my confusion and distress, might have forgotten. The very thought calms me and makes me strong.'

'I will go, my Father,' said Don Enrique, rising, 'and light the candles on the Altar.'

'Go, my son—you are always thoughtful of what should be done,' said Father McMahon returning to Ellen after having closed and secured the door: and after he had put on his stole, he took his seat in an arm chair, while she knelt beside him, and poured into his ear the history of her inner life—its failings, its needs, its defects, its sins, its griefs—after which, having admonished and consoled her, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and held his aged hands over her head, while he gave the holy absolution. 'Make the acts of Faith, Hope and Charity, my dear child, make them fervently, and follow me into the Chapel, where I will give you Holy Communion, which you must offer in gratitude and adoration for your truly providential escape; and may He whom you are going to receive, be your guide, your best friend, your counsellor and comforter; and do not forget to pray for your old Father.'

And then rising, he opened a door that led into the Sanctuary, for the Chapel was without a sacristy, and it was here he always vested himself for the sacred service of the Altar. There was something inexpressibly solemn to Ellen Ahern in this midnight scene, after all that had preceded it. Strange, wild and fearful in the character of the events, as had been the history of the last week of her life, she felt almost as if she were about to receive the adorable Viaticum, so solemn and still, so hushed and holy had the agitated emotions of her soul become; all the past seemed to fade before that overwhelming Presence, who was coming to strengthen and console, ere she went forth, homeless and friendless, into the untrodden path before her; and give her a promise of future aid in whatever need she might know. Rapt in such musings, while waiting for the mystical union of her soul with Divinity, she did not observe that Don Enrique was kneeling by her side, ready to partake with her of the Heavenly Banquet; she only heard the words of the solemn rite—only saw the flash of Father McMahon's alb—only beheld 'the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world,' and only knew that in another moment He was resting in her heart! Resting, did we say? He entered in—as He always does—not to rest, but to seek out the weak places to give them strength—its wounds, to heal them: its fears, to assuage them; its doubts, to assure them; its bitter springs, to sweeten them; its frozen desires to warm them into new life: its proud reluctance and spirit of resentment, to calm and eradicate them from the abode that He had chosen for His Tabernacle. Oh, He is ever a gentle guest; a loving, restless, busy friend; a mighty and princely Benefactor, this pure and veiled Saviour, who comes to abide in the hearts of His creatures, and transform them into Him, and Himself into them, while He is their guest! Indescribably comforted, Ellen Ahern now felt equal to the emergencies of her situation; and after her thanksgiving, which was heartfelt and fervent, was over, she arose with a firm step, and followed Father McMahon, who made her a sign to do so, back again into the room they had left a short time before.

'My dear child,' said the holy man, 'I do not wish to alarm or hurry you more than is needful; but whilst you kneel before your Altar, I heard the furious tramping of horses, urged at hot speed by their riders, go by up towards Fermanagh, and make no doubt but that Lord Hugh Maguire is retreating; and if he should discover your escape, will leave no stone unturned to find you. Rest here, therefore, a little while, partake of some refreshment that I am going to prepare for you, and then, in God's name, accompany Don Enrique Giron—the horses are ready—until you meet a public conveyance going South.'

'But, Father! a stranger!' said Ellen, her nice sense of delicacy causing her to shrink from being thrown so entirely on the protection of one whom she had known but a short time.

'My dear child, Sir Eadna and I, know and trust him. He is a Christian gentleman, sans peur, sans reproche—indeed, I do not think there is a purer or warmer nature on earth. He thinks of returning to Spain, and will embark at Cork, after placing you in safety.' As Father McMahon went out, Sir Eadna Ahern, feeble, and shaking in every limb, came in, and sank down on the sofa beside Ellen.

'They have come. I met them,' he said. Lord Hugh Maguire and his friends have just gone by on their way to Fermanagh. Come hither, my dove—put your arms about me, and let my old, white pow (head) rest on your shoulder again, ere I lose you; ere you go out on the

wild wastes of life, seeking dry land whereon to rest your tired wings. I can hardly spare you, a *suitish*, I am so old, and so near the grave, but you must go—yes—there is no help for it.—But this is no way to comfort you. Aileen, my birdie,' he said, wiping the hot tears out of the deep furrows of his cheeks. 'I must think less of myself and more of you. Take this purse, you will find in it seventy or eighty pounds in Bank of Ireland bills—would that it were more, but it will keep you from dependence until you can fall on some plan to support yourself. Ah, my child—my little ewe lamb! he cried, bursting into a fresh gush of grief; 'how can I send you from me? What is to become of you among strangers, in the cold world into which you are so ruthlessly driven!'

'Cousin Eadna,' said the girl, lifting her sweet face to his, 'are we not Christians? Is not God everywhere alike? Has He not promised to be the Father of the fatherless, and the Comforter of the afflicted? I fear nothing.—Why should I, after having escaped from the hidden snare that was laid for me so wonderfully?'

'Oh rare and beautiful faith!' said the old man, laying his hand on her head. 'I stand rebuked, my child. Yet be not scandalized at my want of trust, for, alas! my soul has been embittered, and almost turned to stone, by the adverse events of my life—the galling injustice of my fate—the perpetual disappointment of every scheme. These moods pass away sometimes, and I see Him who in the depths of my soul I love, walking on the stormy waves, and He lifts me up ere I sink and perish. But we must part, Aileen—you will find a friend and a shelter with Father McMahon's sister in Cork.'

'Cousin Eadna,' said Ellen Ahern, who was deeply moved, 'there is one thing—this money. I cannot take it all—only a portion of it is all that will be necessary.'

'Not another word. Would you deny me this gratification, a *suitish*—the thought that, with a portion of the last remnant of my fortune, I had softened and made easy some of life's rough ways to you?' said the proud spirited old man.

'Come with me, then!' cried Ellen, throwing her arms around him, and bowing her head on his breast. 'Come with me.'

'Alas! behold these trembling limbs, my child—these feeble arms! Why should I go among strangers to die? I confide you to one whom you may trust. Don Enrique is in every way, worthy of your confidence and esteem.—He came here on a secret and private mission, in relation to the Barony of Fermanagh and the estate of Glenraile. He is in possession of information which may result in the restoration—but I cannot enter into particulars; he is endeavoring to trace a certain clue which is of essential importance to his success.'

Father McMahon now came in with a bowl of fragrant tea, which he had been brewing over the almost defunct kitchen fire; a muffin and a slice of cold ham, which Ellen knowing how necessary the preservation of her strength was to meet the emergency of the case, heartily and thankfully partook of. It was now nearly four o'clock, and Don Enrique was waiting for her. We will not describe the parting scene between Ellen Ahern and her two old and tried friends; it was fraught with feeling, and trying to each one, but it was at last over; and, leaning on Don Enrique's arm, she went with the fervor of their blessing resting on her heart and head, out into the darkness. There was not a word spoken. Her tears fell like rain over her face, as Don Enrique assisted her into her saddle, and folded her shawl closer around her; after which he sprang on his horse, and in another moment all that Ellen Ahern loved—the home of her childhood—the graves of her kindred—the humble and faithful people who had known her since her birth—the aged priest and her ancient friend—were left behind, only to be seen again for many a weary day, in dreams. As they galloped at full speed across the country, towards the mail road, Ellen Ahern thought at intervals, that she heard rapidly pursuing footsteps following close behind her, but the darkness was impenetrable: it was the black hour just before day: and full of terror, she commended herself to the care of her good Angel, and touching her horse lightly on the flank with her riding whip, he broke into a run, and sped along over the uneven ground with the swiftness of wind, but still the same distinct, rapid footsteps pursued her course. Don Enrique could scarcely keep pace with her, but she did not relax her speed until the day dawned; when, glancing furtively over her shoulder, she saw by the faint light, Thela, bounding at the horse's heels. Her heart grew full, and tears started to her eyes, when she saw the faithful animal, and she could not wonder how he got there. But escape had been a matter of little difficulty to Thela, who, when he saw the panel in the picture gallery suddenly close on him, ran down stairs, leaped through a broken window, carrying a part of the frail modern sash

with him, and went by the guard at the rocky pass without let or hindrance, nor halted until he came to St. Finbar's, where he watched patiently at the threshold of Father McMahon's door for the coming of his mistress. The sun rose clear and unclouded over a beautiful and picturesque country. A broad river, looking like molten gold in the early sunbeams, flowed in the distance, while afar off, mountains, whose rugged peaks were wrapped in crimson-tinted clouds and mists, bounded the horizon. Cultivated fields, and here and there a snug dwelling, bespoke prosperity and plenty. Ellen Ahern could account for it. Here were no Catholic tenants to be drained of their last farthing to sustain a Church by law established, as well as their own—to be oppressed to the extreme of human endurance, simply because they were Catholics, and ground down to the dust by drivers and middlemen, for dues on false pretences of justice, until they were starving; they had been hunted away long ago to the roadside, the beggar's bag, or the work-house, and Protestant tenants tilled the soil at a fair price for Protestant landlords, and gave only a tithe of their substance to support only one creed.

Halting under a clump of trees by the roadside, Don Enrique dismounted, and asked Ellen if 'she did not feel disposed to rest a little while, and partake of some refreshment?'

'I do not feel too much fatigued to keep on,' she replied, 'but the horses need rest.'

'The coach will pass soon, I think. Let me assist you to dismount, Miss Ahern; here is a mossy bank, just underneath this old tree, where you can rest, and here is an old friend—even Thela—to assist me, and protect you.'

'Did you not see Thela before. His footsteps close behind me all the way, made me fear that we were pursued, until daylight enabled me to discover the faithfullest of friends,' said Ellen Ahern, laying her hand caressingly on the dog's head.

'He is worthy of your affection, Miss Ahern. When I providentially discovered the base plot against you, I endeavored in every way to have a letter conveyed to you, but every plan was baffled and unsuccessful, so closely were you guarded, until last evening. I was at Father McMahon's, endeavoring to devise measures with him and Sir Eadna for your deliverance, all three of us dejected and desponding, when Father McMahon said, "that all human means had seemed to fail, suppose we say a *Haill Mary*, for succor," a suggestion too truly good to be neglected, and forthwith we knelt and united our hearts in one strong appeal to Her for assistance, when, lo! in walked Thela. But how he was to help us, or even that he could do so, did not at the moment occur to me, until the strange behaviour of the dog—who appeared in great distress, and seized hold of Sir Eadna's coat, and in the effort he made to pull him away tore a piece out of it—suggested to my mind the possibility of sending you a letter concealed in his collar. I determined at once to do so, and leave the issue to Divine Providence. I knew of the subterranean way—how, it is unnecessary to say, and twice did I venture to explore it, in the hope of finding you, but each time I heard the voices of Lord Hugh Maguire and Fahey, in the gallery, and hurried back. I dared not leave a billet there, lest it might be discovered, and frustrate my plans. But Thela proved a safe messenger.'

'How can I ever thank you, who are almost a stranger to me, for such generous solicitude?' said Ellen.

'Try some of this wine, Miss Ahern—it is genuine Falernian—and one of these biscuits; there, that looks comfortable, and I can feel that you are not a dream, while I see you eating like a mortal. I ask no thanks, believe me—there were reasons which made such solicitude nearly selfish, but I do beg your confidence. I would have you think of me, not as a mere adventurer, but as an honorable, right-thinking man, whose thoughts and sentiments towards you are of the purest nature, and who would act a brother's part in your behalf,' said Don Enrique, fixing his clear, penetrating eyes on hers.

'You have proved yourself too much my friend, Señor Giron, for me to withhold what you ask. I will think of you as you wish—how can I do otherwise?' said Ellen Ahern, to whose mind, however, that scene she witnessed between herself and Lady Fermanagh, recurred in spite of herself.

'Thank you. Your trust is not misplaced, believe me,' he said earnestly.

'Thela is an argument which would convince me of it, if any were necessary,' said Ellen pointing to Thela, who had crouched panting at Don Enrique's feet, and rested his shaggy head on them. 'But will you not tell me how you discovered the strait I was in? I feel a deep and curious interest in knowing?'

'It was a romantic incident—such as one reads of in novels, but which in this case is nevertheless true. I have a room at the Fermanagh Arms, which hostelry is, as you know, only a dilapidated, ricketty place, with only board partitions, papered over between the rooms, instead of walls. One evening—it was twilight—I was sitting alone in my room, musing somewhat despondingly on the ill success that had so far attended my efforts in regard to the business that brought me from Spain. I did not observe that night had come on—in fact, I was in such a mood, that the light of even a rush would have been intolerable to me—until I was arrested from my abstraction by a murmur of voices in the adjoining room. My first impulse was to get up and stir about, that whoever they were speaking, might know they were in danger of being overheard; but an instant after I recognised the voice of Lord Hugh Maguire, and heard him pronounce your name distinctly, and in a manner which led me very justly to suppose, that he was planning some evil against you. I remained perfectly silent, for, believe me, Miss Ahern, I had sufficient reason to distrust that man in relation to yourself. Then I overheard the outlines of a vile plot; their schemes were cunningly spread, and you were to have been the victim. I thought, and could scarcely restrain myself, that I would face him—charge him with his base designs, and chastise him as he deserved, but for certain reasons, my hands were tied, and I could do no more than warn you. You know the rest.'

'I could not believe in such wickedness. I thought such things were to be found only in plays and romances, and I was incredulous and doubtful, until subsequent events confirmed what you had told me,' said Ellen Ahern, with quivering lips.

'And now, Miss Ahern, while we rest here a moment longer, I will lift the veil of mystery that envelops me, so far as to confide to your sacred keeping a secret which will astonish you by its strangeness. You have heard of Desmond Maguire, who, it was said, had died in a foreign country. I mean the step-brother of Lord Hugh.'

'Yes! What of him?' cried Ellen Ahern, with almost breathless interest.

'Desmond Maguire, Lord of Fermanagh, and Baron of Glenraile, is at this moment living.—I am his friend, and have vowed to give myself no rest until I succeed in discovering the two agents who were employed to effect his destruction, so that his step-brother, the present lord, would fall heir to the title and estates. It depends on their evidence, whether or no, he will be able to establish a legal claim to his inheritance.'

'Merciful God! Thy ways are past finding out!' exclaimed Ellen Ahern, whose countenance had become irradiated with a sudden and joyful glow. 'And have you succeeded, Señor Giron?'

'No. I am almost hopeless of doing so. I have traversed Ireland in hopes of finding these two people, but hitherto all my efforts have been fruitless: and I am now on my way back to Spain, to consult with my friend, whose heart seems of late, more than ever set on regaining his name and estates. Meanwhile, Miss Ahern,—excuse my egotism, which may seem to you, perhaps, mingled with somewhat of vanity—it will please me hereafter, when I am far distant from you, to have you think of me in connection with my friend, as his equal in birth, and sprang from as noble and princely a stock, albeit my ancestors were Spanish and his Irish. This much for myself, and now, lady, no Palladin of olden times ever guarded treasure committed to his keeping, with more devout care, than I will guard you, until I consign you to those who expect you, after which, I shall re-commence my wanderings.'

'May the saints speed and succor you, Señor Giron!' said Ellen Ahern, in a low voice, while the color faded from her cheeks. 'I thank you immeasurably for confiding these strange tidings to me. Much that perplexed and troubled me is now explained. I cannot tell you how heavy a load is lifted away from my heart—for you know,' she added, fearful that she had betrayed the interest he had awakened in her heart: 'if my cousin should regain his inheritance, the poor people of Fermanagh would at last find justice, and everything would be restored to a better state. Oh, I shall hope, and pray without ceasing, for its accomplishment! it will brighten up the ways of my life even to think of it—but, perhaps—is he—you say you know my cousin Desmond—will he realise my *beau idéal*? Is he worthy of his name and race? would he be apt to remedy existing evils?'

'Yes!' said Don Enrique, deliberately and earnestly, 'you may have faith in him for that. He has been harshly schooled, and his trials have taught him the science of self-command, of charity, and many other things, which it is absolutely necessary for those to know, who are to have the government of the interests and welfare of others in their hands.'

'You seem to love your friend with no common love?'

'I do. He is very dear to me, and I regard his honor as my own. But now we must on, although I would, like a miser, prolong these moments, if I dared peril your safety so far, for you will not be safe from pursuit, until we are beyond the boundaries of Ulster; and a hostile meeting with Lord Hugh Maguire would be ruinous to my plans and Desmond's prospects.'

An hour's rapid travel brought them to the regular mail-coach road, and to the inn where the coach changed horses, where Don Enrique hired a trusted person to take the horses back to Fermanagh, the day following. Ellen had scarcely recovered from her fatigue when the coach came along, and they were obliged to resume their journey. Travelling day and night, they arrived at Cork sooner than Ellen had anticipated; and it was with no small degree of interest that she looked out on the various buildings and other objects of attraction, as the coach passed through the streets of the city that she supposed was to be her future home. They took a cab at the hotel, and drove to the address of Father McMahon's sister, but they were informed by a servant who came to the door, that the good lady had died suddenly three days before, and was just buried, and she couldn't invite them in, because she was left in charge of the premises until the heir—a grandson—arrived. And the woman shut the door.

'What do you wish done, Miss Ahern? I am at your service,' said Don Enrique, in a tone of respectful sympathy, as every lineament of Ellen's face indicated the struggle and shock that were contending together in her heart.

'It is God's holy will, I humbly believe,' she said, at last. 'I have been thinking of it for weeks. Drive down to the quays, Señor Giron, and let us inquire if there is an American vessel, homeward bound, there.'

'What do you mean, Miss Ahern?' he asked, in bewildered astonishment.

'Just what I say. I shall go to America,' she replied, with a quiet air of determination, which left no room for hesitation. 'There I shall find a safer shelter—at least until better times. My determination is unalterable, and is guided, I believe, by a Divine Providence, for some good end.'

'But what friends have you there, in that strange land?' he said.

'Almighty God and our Blessed Lady are in the New World, as well as here. There I shall find churches, altars, and holy men and sacred cloisters, whose inmates will pity and befriend me. Oh never fear—the Catholic can find safe and true friends wherever his Faith flourishes,' she said, with a look of sunshine. 'I shall certainly go.'

Unwilling to aid in what he considered so wild a plan, yet feeling that he had no right to restrain her, Don Enrique could only do her bidding, and proceed to the quays, at one of which he found a vessel, the 'Sea Mew,' bound to Baltimore, taking in cargo, which would sail in an hour's time, as the wind was fair, from her moorings. The accommodations were good, and one or two respectable females had engaged passage in her, and were already on board. The captain was a man past his prime—a regular Yankee—with his eyes about him, and up to everything in his profession, and out of it, who assured Ellen that he would spare no pains to make her voyage pleasant, and inquired 'if her baggage was aboard?'

'I am going for it now, and will return in a half hour,' was her ready reply. 'You know,' she whispered to Don Enrique, with a merry laugh, 'that I have none. You must tell the cabin man to drive to a linen draper's. I must do some shopping.'

'Can I not dissuade you, Miss Ahern? You have yet time?'

'Impossible. My course is marked out, as wild as it may seem to you. May I beg the favor of you, to write to my relative, Sir Eadna Ahern, and to Father McMahon; tell them whether I am bound, and give my heart's best, truest love to them.'

'Have you no message for your kinsman in Spain?'

'My love. Tell him, too, that I shall pray constantly for his entire success; and when I hear of his taking possession in his own right, of his estates, I shall come back.'

'Yes; undoubtedly you shall,' said Don Enrique, in a low tone; 'but here is a shop. Allow me to assist you out?'

CHAPTER XII.—A NEW HOME IN THE NEW WORLD.

It was near the close of a bleak November day. A cold, misty rain had been steadily falling since early in the morning, and everything had been saturated with moisture, and wore a dismal aspect. Pedestrians shivered as they hurried by, wrapping their cloaks and shawls more closely about them; and a group of the forlorn children of the street, looking very miserable in their rags; and beggary, sought shelter under some trees that lined the sidewalk; from