

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XIII

VAIN IS THE SISTER'S SACRIFICE

Malverton Grosvenor approached Ellen, who had been a shocked and silent spectator of the scene recorded in the last chapter.

"You had better retire, Miss Courtney, and prepare for departure; you are to leave with your brother as soon as the day breaks."

"Do not be alarmed," he whispered; "and when you have left this place there will be sufficient time for Howard to explain. That poor girl will be taken care of," observing her glance toward Vinnette.

Nothing could restrain Miss Flanagan's impetuous anger when Ellen, having motioned her to withdraw, acquainted her with what Malverton had said. At the risk of being overheard in the apartment where the dead man lay, she poured forth her vexed feelings:

"Running away from England, and now hunted out of Paris. She was sure it was nothing else, and she knew further that Howard wouldn't stop till he had got them all into danger. His own life deserved to be lost, and for her part, she didn't care how soon his grave had him."

"Hush!" said Ellen, appalled; "not till he is more prepared to die."

Miss Flanagan raised her head from the trunk she was rapidly packing.

"Prepared! He'll never be that! He'll die just as that poor wretch in there died. That confession from him told what they all are; and just as if he had been a Jew, or an infidel, he never bent a knee at your prayer. The Protestant bowed his head, and treated it with respect. I am bad enough, God knows, but I haven't done what it seems most of that society has—given up my faith; and they're enlightened, they know, while I'm only a poor, ignorant creature. Who knows—maybe I'm not so bad after all?"

emotion: "The best, the brightest, the bravest of us all!"

When he stood erect again, there were tears in his dark blue eyes, and his fair, English-looking face wore a pained expression.

"There is no time to be lost," whispered Grosvenor.

With averted face Denbigh extended a hand to Malverton and Howard, waiting while each grasped it with warm and lingering pressure; then turning suddenly, he threw his arms about Howard's neck, and whispering: "God-by, my brother!" passed rapidly over to the other two members to whom he gave a like embrace.

On the threshold he turned to waive his hand; then the door closed on his retreating form, and the club was to know young Denbigh no more.

Vinnette had been a silent, and apparently unconscious spectator of the scene; she seemed oblivious to everything but the dumb watch which she maintained beside the dead. Ellen strove vainly to arouse her—to elicit some response to the tender consolation she endeavored to give; but the French girl only silently turned her sad eyes from Ellen's face to the corpse again; and, when at last the gentle comforter—admired by Malverton's whisper—"The time is up, Miss Courtney"—was obliged to leave, Vinnette passively received her parting embrace.

Dark, impenetrable Howard, who had witnessed apparently unmoved the whole of that dying scene, which had shown no emotion even in his leave-taking with young Denbigh, now gave the same strange embrace to the members who yet remained in the room, with the same coldness of manner, though one of the latter was affected as a girl might have been—but when he stooped for a parting glance of the brother's lips, which she found cold and stiff, he said in a low tone, but Ellen standing beside him heard the words:

"Your death, Louie, has been a noble one. Would that my efforts might be crowned by such an end!"

for the latter's sake, much more than for her own, that she intended, to use her own expression, "to give Howard his own."

The young fellow himself spoke first. Rousing slightly from his recumbent position when the vehicle had whirled through several streets, he said, as if speaking to himself: "This is all Taggart's work."

No one answered him. The time for which Anne Flanagan waited had not yet, in her opinion, arrived, and she feared to open her mouth lest some indignant sentence should issue forth, while Ellen felt too ill to respond.

The bright, sunny morning was beginning to shine through the windows of the cabriolet, and Howard, somewhat surprised at receiving no reply, pushed his cap back to look at his companions; then, as if satisfied with the scrutiny, he pressed it over his eyes again, and resumed his recumbent position. The cabriolet stopped at length on a bustling quay—bustling with the preparations making by the owners of several fishing smacks which crowded the water preparatory to starting on their voyages—with the untiringly on the jargon of the rude sailors, who looked wonderingly at the little party as they alighted from the vehicle, and passed, under the driver's guidance, to one of the larger vessels anchored close to the quay. Miss Flanagan exclaimed in disgust at the smell of fish which so strongly saluted her nostrils, and daintily lifted her skirts from the slimy, slippery way. The party, speeding across some temporarily erected foothold, were quickly on board the craft, where they were met by the captain and his crew, a Frenchman, with all the characteristic politeness of his race, and much higher, apparently, in the scale of education, and refinement than most of his class were considered to be. He was attired in some quaint costume, which was nevertheless becoming to his portly figure, and his pleasant face was indicative of the good humor and fun which are generally supposed to mark the jolly skipper.

The driver handed him a card on which something in French was written. The captain responded, in the same language, to the effect that all was right, and, with another bow and smile, conducted Howard and the ladies to his cabin, while the driver returned to the cabriolet for the trunks. The cabin was a queer little cubby hole. There were nautical instruments lying in all directions; there was a stationary table in the centre, with a half dozen hard-bottomed chairs scattered about it; a queerly constructed little writing desk fastened into the side, and a peculiar sort of hard cloth on the floor that served for a carpet. But, with all the courtesy of the drawing-room, the captain proffered this, his domicile, for the use of the party during the voyage; and, opening a door, he showed another little apartment, containing a sailor-like fashioned bed, and the appurtenances of a rough toilet, which room he offered to the ladies, apologizing for its poverty. Then, turning to Howard, he said, laughing, in French, that for him it would be necessary to make a bed in the cabin each night.

On returning to the cabin, he set before the party the contents of his simple larder—hard biscuit, dried fish, and wine—at which Miss Flanagan stared aghast. But the driver of the cabriolet, aided by some seamen whom he had enlisted in his service, boarded the vessel just then, carrying the trunks and a hazy, which latter had just arrived, having been sent post-haste after them—by whom, Howard knew, and Ellen suspected. When opened, its contents somewhat allayed Miss Flanagan's fear of immediate starvation. The polite captain was invited to share the repast so much needed by the travellers, and despite the heavy heart which Ellen bore, she found herself frequently smiling at the mirthful remarks of the gay Frenchman.

An hour after, and the fishing smack, this time without its usual cargo, bore away; the captain repaired to his duties, and the cabin was left to the party in undisturbed peace. Howard sat near the open door, and the fresh, brisk breeze from the water was wantonly lifting his short, crisp curls, and tossing them into a becoming disorder. He was evidently in no mood to be questioned, and Ellen seeing that, refrained from putting the query which trembled on her lips, to know where they were going.

"He will tell me himself soon, I suppose," she said, mentally; "and Malverton knew, for he said I would be happier."

fact of being Mrs. Courtney's favorite maid, and in the family so long. As soon as her rising passion permitted, she spoke:

"An I beneath your notice, Master Howard?"

The surprise with which Ellen had watched her movements gave place to slight alarm at the angry tone in which the words were uttered; while Howard turned suddenly, and looked at her with indignant wonder.

She gave her tongue full reign then. Forgetting the gulf which wealth and education had made between herself and the children of her mistress, she allowed the passion that she had been nursing for the past hours to have free vent. The coldness, the neglect, the harshness which had shut her out from her light and love, rushed upon her, till her wildly excited mind imagined that it recognized in the person of Howard Courtney one of those who had figured in that bitter period of her life. She reproached him with having fallen from his faith; she taunted him with the disrespect he had shown to Ellen's prayer; and she predicted for him a sudden and untimely end, worse than even that of the "dead wretch" they had left behind—"For you," she said bitterly, "will not have even the likes of the poor French girl to cry over you. But you're only as the rest of them were—flinging away the love that's given you, as if it wasn't worth the keeping, and trampling on the heart that gives it. You could not be otherwise, for you have his mind and his nature."

She paused for want of breath. Howard rose, the flush with which the brisk breeze had dyed his cheeks deepening to the more vivid color of passion.

"I do not understand you," he said, with forced calmness. "I recognize no right by which you dare speak to me thus; henceforth, I will not understand what you mean."

"No right?"—her voice became painfully shrill—"I have the right, which is knowing that, that might make you carry your head lower gives me."

She had not intended to speak as she did, but, in the violence of her passion, she had lost all self control. Now, however, alarm for the effect of what she had said was rapidly cooling her indignation.

soul, but the soul lives only in the deeds we do in life."

Oh! the white, heart-broken countenance which followed his motions and looked into his face when, at last, he turned it towards Ellen. She had no words with which to combat such a speech; she could only look at him with a silence more touching than the most earnestly-spoken entreaty would have been. Something in her pleading face reproached her, to encircle which she knelt in prayer, while she pleaded with him at Sorrento, and had produced upon him, and for an instant he again succumbed to her pure, sweet influence. He said softly and almost tenderly:

"I do not wish to convert you to my way of thinking, for religion upon your character has a sweet and purifying effect—upon all characters like yours; but many minds are too strong for such restraints."

He attempted to encircle her shoulders, but Ellen put aside his arm, and turning her face resolutely away from the kindly expression in his eyes, walked silently to the little room beyond. Closing the door behind her, she sank on her knees to give vent to the anguish with which her heart was breaking. She felt that her brother was gone now—past all recall; that the sacrifice she had made to remain with him had availed nothing; not alone had he abjured the true Church, but he was an avowed atheist.

"Oh, my God!" she moaned; "that neither prayer, nor sacrifice, nor love, can save his soul! Deprive my life of the things I most cherish—of every pleasure, of every human consolation; make it a waste of suffering; but save his soul. Bring him back, oh! my God! Bring him back before it is too late." Overcome with emotion, she pressed her head to the side of the berth, burying her face in the rough coverlet, lest her sobs might be heard in the adjoining apartment.

Both Howard and Anne Flanagan had looked after the grief-stricken girl till she had shut herself from view. Anne Flanagan, confident that the explanation she had given of her unlucky remarks was received had become quite calm, and she spoke sharply in Ellen's behalf. Howard shrugged his shoulders.

"Aye, shrug!" said the indignant woman; "but maybe you won't look upon the secret when she's gone from you, and you know that you've killed her."

The young man smiled. "Both she and you, if she prefers it, shall have the opportunity of returning to New York as soon as we reach our destination, which is Ireland."

than the Sisters who took care of him, and the padricito who used to visit the orphanage and say Mass for the children. The padricito was now pastor of the little church not far from the master's house. Jose's love for Carlotta had its only rival in his love for the padricito. He rather liked his master; but after all, masters can not expect to be liked too well when they are insistent about such a foolish thing as work.

While Jose sat, smilingly rubbing both his ear and lips, the padricito came into the patio in a great hurry. He was very much excited. "Where is the master, Jose?" he asked.

"The master did not return, Padricito. He went to the city yesterday."

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