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**GERTRUDE MANNERING**

A TALE OF SACRIFICE  
BY FRANCIS NOBLE

CHAPTER XXVI.—CONTINUED

It was the eve of the Festival of the Assumption, and seeing that the priests were in their confessional, Stanley rose and quietly placed himself outside of that one—though as yet he knew it not—renowned for his humble sanctity and learning. And as Stanley knelt there among them, people wondered who he was, this young man, with his pale face of such singular beauty, who looked so stern and troubled, and who yet thanked them with such a winning courtesy as they let him pass, guessing somehow as they did so that he was not French, but an Englishman. He entered the confessional, and, as he did so, for a minute pride rose again in his heart, and strove to shame him back; but, away in England on her peaceful death-bed, Gertrude Mannering was praying for him with her untiring hope, and pride was driven back as Stanley placed himself on his knees before a man like himself, but who, he at last believed, was there taking God's own place, with his power to hear and pardon sinners. And then and there he gave the history of his life to the priest in a kind of general confession; and as the minister of God listened, he marveled at the singular purity which had been observed by this young, attractive man amid the temptations of his age and evident position, for even at Oxford Stanley had been by his companions nicknamed "Bayard," from his persistent abhorrence and avoidance of anything approaching to immorality or even coarseness. The one deadly sin of his life, the cause of all the others he had committed, had been the pride which he now was so hard upon in his confession to the holy priest, who was saying inwardly to himself the while:

"God must have great mercies, great designs in store for this young man, who, while so long His enemy, has been so specially preserved from all sins of grossness and impurity; his very pride and intellectual refinement having doubtless appeared to the world as the means which were his preservation—the world that knows not God nor His ways!"

There was no task of argument or still further persuasion to be gone through in Stanley's case; no remaining doubts to be solved; with him it was the whole faith or none, the Catholic Church or infidelity; for a soul like his there was no middle course or hesitation, from the instant grace had conquered in his heart. He had told his confessor at the outset that the outward work of his conversion could not be finished here where he had begun it by this preparatory confession, as he must start in the morning for England; and then as he rose at last from his knees, the priest, knowing now the outward at least of the circumstances which called him thither, promised many and earnest prayers as he bade a kind, fatherly adieu to the stranger who had interested him so wonderfully.

With an entirely new peace in his heart, spite of its tribulation and abiding self-reproach, Stanley left the church slowly when he had finished the task which his stern will, assisted by God's all-powerful grace, had made him accomplish thus early. At once he went back to his hotel, glad that the dinner-hour was long past, so that he need not partake of some refreshment, which he ate quickly and mechanically, and then shut himself in his bedroom to face the further task, painful yet soothing, of writing to her who was dying for his sake, as it were, to tell her, in terms which must as little as possible excite the poor little-out heart, the news that would cause her such joy and wonder, and to crave permission to come to her bedside, there to hear the words of forgiveness from her own lips.

"Gertrude, my darling (let me call you thus once more, unworthy as I am)," he wrote, "they say you are dying, and I—who must feel as if your death will lie at my door, for whom, if it is only too true, all thought of earthly joy shall be forever past—Stanley Graham, who was unworthy of the love I treated so cruelly, entreat that I may come to your side, there to kneel and ask your forgiveness, and through it, perhaps, dare to look to be received, if but coldly, as I deserve, by your father whose home I have saddened ever since I won your heart, my darling, to treat it so harshly, telling myself that you did not love me, in my mad pride and jealousy of its every feeling. Gertrude, on my knees I wish to retract every word I said to you that day of our last meeting—every bitter, cruel word, to the final one with which I let you leave me, when, unmoved as I looked at the last, my heart and brain seemed on fire, my darling. Every word of temptation (and let me tell you this gently, my sweet injured one) with which I strove to lead you to what I now know would have been eternal ruin, I retract on my knees, and have tonight confessed with sorrow and remorse to God's minister; for, my darling, what your gentle pleadings and noble example failed at the time at once to accomplish has been worked within me today by the blow that brought me the yet scarcely

realized news of your hopeless illness. I am a Catholic, Gertrude, from henceforth: whether you receive me to your side or not, my life must be from today as devoted to defending, as it has until now been too morning and maligning, God's holy Church. Ever since that night, Gertrude, I know now, I have been fighting against grace, against the ever-present force of your sweet example, well-nigh breaking my own heart to, rather than yield to the mercy which surely is due to your prayers, my darling, for I have never deserved it. Without book or sermon or instruction, though in secret I have read much, and have abroad here attended at the churches, all at once God brought me to His feet, I scarcely yet understand how, and I cannot go back; I am a Catholic in heart and faith, soon, if God gives me life, to be one in reality and practice. Am I not punished, my darling, that the divine gift which I rejected when it could have given you also to me with itself, I must receive with such eternal gratitude now when it can bring me no earthly joy? for even this last sad one I crave—of kneeling by your bedside, of being near you, at least sometimes, during the days that are left—would not have been refused, I know, by your gentle heart, if I had asked in my agony, even had I been still averse to your holy religion, for myself. I must not write too long, my own Gertrude, through fear of agitating you, through fear of hastening what they tell me is so imminent, though I cannot realize it—the death of her who, in return for my sternness and cruelty, has been my sweet saviour, whose bright example has at last brought me to God, never, with His grace, to do aught but serve Him through the Gift Shoppe and there was such a beautiful pair of candlesticks in the window that I went in to price them. They were quite beyond my reach, so I didn't buy them, but that is where Aunt Hetty's first conceived the idea of giving me this one. Dear Aunt Hetty! Just because her candlestick happens to be old she thinks it is valuable. She doesn't realize that many old things are little more than rubbish. We mustn't hurt Auntie's feelings, at this rate, Bob. We'll endure the presence of the candlesticks in preference to that and I do like the sentiment she attaches to it and hope our little home always will be a place of happiness and contentment."

Accordingly, the hideous green candlestick was given a place of honor on the mantle, an incongruous spot among the dull blue and brown tones of the Gray's tastefully furnished living rooms.

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For the past few years Bob had been steadily forging ahead in his chosen vocation. Just now he was after the biggest thing that had ever loomed upon his horizon. On the edge of the city lived Mrs. Meade, a very wealthy and very eccentric old lady. Having been reared in God's open country, under blue skies and surrounded by trees and birds and flowers, in her heart she pitied the children housed in crowded apartments, and it was her pet ambition to build a row of cottages out in the suburbs, at least a few of these children might know the joy of a childhood spent out of the city. Nor were these cottages to be built alike, for, to Mrs. Meade, that smacked too much of the institutional manner of doing things and did not foster individuality. It was Bob Gray's hope that to him would fall the task of designing and computing the cost of these homes.

Mrs. Meade had talked the matter over with him a number of times, but had never definitely given him the assignment. Two days after he and Rose had quietly passed their wedding anniversary, he called upon the austere Mrs. Meade at her request. He felt certain that this afternoon she would award him the contract, yet when he left her a little later, he was not at all sure it was to be his.

When he reached home Rose met him on the verandah. "How goes it, Bob, old dear? Did Mrs. Philanthropy Meade deign to patronize her humble servant, Robert Gray?"

"She did not. By the way, Rose, she's coming out here to supper, tonight."

Rose gasped, "What do you mean?"

Bob looked up in surprise. "Just exactly what I said, Rosie. Philanthropy Meade is coming out to supper."

"You mean that you asked her?"

"Of course."

"Whatever possessed you to do a thing like that? A note of dismissal crept into her voice. "I haven't a thing baked except gingerbread. Mrs. Meade of all people! She's one of the wealthiest women of the city. Oh, Bob, how could you?"

"I can't see anything so terrible in the fact that she is coming. What difference does it make if she is wealthy? I dare say she won't turn up her aristocratic nose at our cosy nest. If you must know how I happened to invite her, it was like this: I went down at her request to talk over the plans for the houses. The matter of bathrooms came up and I tried to give her an idea of

"Paris, 14th August, 18—"

Then he folded up the letter, in which he enclosed the ring, and placed it within a slip to Lady Hunter, on which he wrote as follows:

"Dear Lady Hunter: I cannot thank you sufficiently until I may do it in person. Will you see that the enclosed is given as gently as possible to your cousin, or read to her, if that would agitate her less?"

"Yours gratefully,"

"STANLEY."

He then also enclosed his address in London, giving the name of the hotel to which he would proceed at once on his arrival there; and having made up the small packet and directed it to Lady Hunter, laid it ready to be posted early the following morning, and began to make preparations for departure, dreading to seek rest in his agitation, trying not to listen to the fear that would whisper to him of the cruel complaint that might end all too quickly, even before he could reach her, that sweet life, to save which he would freely have laid down his own.

**THE GREEN CANDLE STICK**

Rose Gray gave the finishing touches to the salad and whisked it into the refrigerator, slipped out to the front verandah of the bungalow. She had heard her husband's cheery whistle as he turned the corner down near the creamery, and she wanted to be sure to meet him. She usually did meet him, for that matter, but there was a special reason for doing so tonight, since this was the first afternoon she would award him the contract, yet when he left her a little later, he was not at all sure it was to be his.

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the arrangement of ours. She expressed a desire to see it for herself, so what was there for me to do but extend her the privilege?"

"I see; all we can do is to offer her the best we have, and no one can do more than that."

Rose hustled about the blue and white kitchen. While she had been educated to become an interior decorator the housewife arts had not been neglected. Aunt Hetty, who had reared the motherless Rose, had seen to it that she was a fairly efficient housekeeper. Her little house fairly shone in cleanliness so she did not need to feel anything save pride concerning it. As she flew about from stove to table, from table to stove, thoughts of the green candlestick invaded her mind. She sick at heart, she a silent reminder of her forgotten intention.

Mrs. Meade was a tall, erect woman crowned by a halo of snowy hair which she kept becomingly coiffed. At first glance her faded blue eyes appeared a bit steely, yet there was in their depths a certain veiled expression of kindness that was beautiful to behold. At first Rose stood a little in awe of her, but as they wandered through the well-kept bungalow and Mrs. Meade exclaimed over the cohesiveness and serviceability of the various rooms, Rose found herself liking her immensely.

"It's ideal, my child, ideal!" Mrs. Meade commented. "And this room, where they were in the blue and brown living room, so fairly breathes rest and hospitality. Then her eyes fell upon the offending candlestick, the one jarring note in the otherwise flawless furnishings. She fairly stared at it, but offered no explanation. Rose grew sick at heart. Why had she forgotten to remove it? Why need her guest single it out and stare at it so?"

At this moment Bob suggested that they make a trip to the basement to see the arrangement there, a plan to which Mrs. Meade readily acceded. It was while they were coming up the steps again that the front door of the bungalow was unceremoniously opened and a voice cracked and high-pitched, inquired "Anybody at home?"

When the Grays reached the hallway they found Aunt Hetty North on the threshold. Her little black hat was very much awry, her hair in wild disorder, but her cheeks were very pink and her brown eyes very bright.

"Bless you my children, I'm here at last," she began.

Rose flew to her open arms.

Aunt Hetty dear, what a pleasant surprise! But you should have phoned so that I might have met you at the station, or at least taken a cab. Think of walking that distance with all this luggage. You must be fagged."

"Now, see here, when I'm not able to take care of myself I'll have enough sense to stay at home. Just think of what I'm in the world? Aunt Hetty's eyes grew wide in astonishment. She was looking straight at Mrs. Meade. A moment later the two old ladies were shaking hands and kissing each other, and crying.

Rose was sending telegraphic messages toward Bob for enlightenment. He was shaking his head in reply. He was not understanding the situation any more than as she. "Please," Rose interrupted, "would you mind telling us how you happen to know each other?"

Aunt Hetty gave a mirthful cackle.

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"Of course; but I didn't know then that you were her aunt. You see I never happened to see Rose while she lived with you. Hetty North, will you ever forget the day your father gave each one of us one of those candlesticks?"

"Never! My, my, seems to me now that I can see the winter yet, nothing but snow, snow, snow, and the bitterest poverty. How long at Christmas time there wasn't to be any gifts, and at the last moment Father traded a bit of fur to a peddler at the inn for those candlesticks. You lived a stone's throw from us then, Martha. If you recollect, and when Father found you crying because you wanted a Christmas gift he up and gave you one of them."

"I have it yet. When he gave it to me he stuck a lighted candle in it, and set it on the table. I'm a hope that candlestick will soon see better times, accom' to you, Martha," he said. I never forgot that little speech, and after that hard time, things did go better and we always looked upon that candlestick as a symbol of better things to come."

On and on they talked, of days long since dead save in the hallowed space of memory. When the bronze clock struck the hour of ten, Mrs. Meade arose in surprise.

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"It's from Banbury, so it must be something from Aunt Hetty." Together they stripped off the wrappings. Inside, swathed in cotton and tissue paper, they found a single green candlestick. But such a candlestick? Rose lifted it and looked at it in dismay. An uglier thing could hardly be imagined. Made of glaring green glass, it was further cheapened by a scrawling green vine that wound from the base to the top, every leaf a tawdry dab of gilt paint.

Disappointment crept into Rose's eyes and voice. "I wonder how Aunt Hetty ever happened to send a thing like this." Then, inside the candlestick she found a scrap of paper. It proved to be a note written in Aunt Hetty's funny scrawl.

Dear Children: As a little gift I'm sending you my old green candlestick. I remember hearing Rose remark she wanted a pair of old-fashioned ones for her mantle. Personally, I like the newer one better, but everybody has a right to their own opinion. I'm only sorry that I haven't another one like this to send to you, but it was never my fortune to own a pair of them. This candlestick has been in my possession for years. It has seen me pass in to pass in my home. Place it on the mantle in your cosy living room, my dear, and let it again view the delights, comforts and happiness of its occupants.

With love,  
AUNT HETTY.

Rose slowly folded the paper again. "I understand now, Bob," she said, softly. "Aunt Hetty went shopping with me when she was here last winter. We passed the Gift Shoppe and there was such a beautiful pair of candlesticks in the window that I went in to price them. They were quite beyond my reach, so I didn't buy them, but that is where Aunt Hetty's first conceived the idea of giving me this one. Dear Aunt Hetty! Just because her candlestick happens to be old she thinks it is valuable. She doesn't realize that many old things are little more than rubbish. We mustn't hurt Auntie's feelings, at this rate, Bob. We'll endure the presence of the candlesticks in preference to that and I do like the sentiment she attaches to it and hope our little home always will be a place of happiness and contentment."

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Aunt Hetty dear, what a pleasant surprise! But you should have phoned so that I might have met you at the station, or at least taken a cab. Think of walking that distance with all this luggage. You must be fagged."

"Now, see here, when I'm not able to take care of myself I'll have enough sense to stay at home. Just think of what I'm in the world? Aunt Hetty's eyes grew wide in astonishment. She was looking straight at Mrs. Meade. A moment later the two old ladies were shaking hands and kissing each other, and crying.

Rose was sending telegraphic messages toward Bob for enlightenment. He was shaking his head in reply. He was not understanding the situation any more than as she. "Please," Rose interrupted, "would you mind telling us how you happen to know each other?"

Aunt Hetty gave a mirthful cackle.

"I've got a good land, Rose, I've always known Martha. We were children together."

"I thought that green candlestick looked familiar," Mrs. Meade was saying. "I nearly came right out and asked little Mrs. Gray where she got it."

"I gave it to her," Aunt Hetty replied.

"Of course; but I didn't know then that you were her aunt. You see I never happened to see Rose while she lived with you. Hetty North, will you ever forget the day your father gave each one of us one of those candlesticks?"

"Never! My, my, seems to me now that I can see the winter yet, nothing but snow, snow, snow, and the bitterest poverty. How long at Christmas time there wasn't to be any gifts, and at the last moment Father traded a bit of fur to a peddler at the inn for those candlesticks. You lived a stone's throw from us then, Martha. If you recollect, and when Father found you crying because you wanted a Christmas gift he up and gave you one of them."

"I have it yet. When he gave it to me he stuck a lighted candle in it, and set it on the table. I'm a hope that candlestick will soon see better times, accom' to you, Martha," he said. I never forgot that little speech, and after that hard time, things did go better and we always looked upon that candlestick as a symbol of better things to come."

On and on they talked, of days long since dead save in the hallowed space of memory. When the bronze clock struck the hour of ten, Mrs. Meade arose in surprise.

"Where has this evening gone? I had no idea it was so late!"

"It's rather late for you to return

the arrangement of ours. She expressed a desire to see it for herself, so what was there for me to do but extend her the privilege?"

"I see; all we can do is to offer her the best we have, and no one can do more than that."

Rose hustled about the blue and white kitchen. While she had been educated to become an interior decorator the housewife arts had not been neglected. Aunt Hetty, who had reared the motherless Rose, had seen to it that she was a fairly efficient housekeeper. Her little house fairly shone in cleanliness so she did not need to feel anything save pride concerning it. As she flew about from stove to table, from table to stove, thoughts of the green candlestick invaded her mind. She sick at heart, she a silent reminder of her forgotten intention.

Mrs. Meade was a tall, erect woman crowned by a halo of snowy hair which she kept becomingly coiffed. At first glance her faded blue eyes appeared a bit steely, yet there was in their depths a certain veiled expression of kindness that was beautiful to behold. At first Rose stood a little in awe of her, but as they wandered through the well-kept bungalow and Mrs. Meade exclaimed over the cohesiveness and serviceability of the various rooms, Rose found herself liking her immensely.

"It's ideal, my child, ideal!" Mrs. Meade commented. "And this room, where they were in the blue and brown living room, so fairly breathes rest and hospitality. Then her eyes fell upon the offending candlestick, the one jarring note in the otherwise flawless furnishings. She fairly stared at it, but offered no explanation. Rose grew sick at heart. Why had she forgotten to remove it? Why need her guest single it out and stare at it so?"

At this moment Bob suggested that they make a trip to the basement to see the arrangement there, a plan to which Mrs. Meade readily acceded. It was while they were coming up the steps again that the front door of the bungalow was unceremoniously opened and a voice cracked and high-pitched, inquired "Anybody at home?"

When the Grays reached the hallway they found Aunt Hetty North on the threshold. Her little black hat was very much awry, her hair in wild disorder, but her cheeks were very pink and her brown eyes very bright.

"Bless you my children, I'm here at last," she began.

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