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## GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE

BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER XXVI.

On a bright August afternoon, two days after Lady Hunter had written her letter, the sun was streaming into an apartment in the Hotel—in Paris, where a young man sat alone, heeding not and scarcely hearing the gay, busy sounds which were incessantly wafted through the open window, as the closed blinds were gently stirred by the summer breeze. His head was bowed down upon his arms as he leaned on the table before him, and an open letter lay there near him.

"My God!" he said at last, almost aloud, as the table on which his head rested shook under his strong agony, "was this needed to make me yield? without this should I have gone on still resisting, still fighting against Thy grace granted to her prayer? Grace and prayer—empty words to me so long; but seen now to be true as any physical science—nay, truer; perhaps alone true! Why until now have I resisted these strange impulses which at all times and in all places have seemed to move me, in the little village chapel as in stately domes, in busy cities as in the wild solitudes of the mountains, calling on me sometimes, as with Thy very voice, my God, bidding me believe and worship—telling me, in my pride, that the kneeling *contadina*, whom I have pitied and despised so often for her simple faith, was yet nearer to truth than I? Were not these all Thy grace calling on me, the grace given in answer to her prayers—her whose heart I have broken? Why only now I am able to say, 'I will arise and go to my Father, and say to Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no longer worthy to be called Thy son'? Must the blow that lays me prostrate at last before Thee be the one that robs me of the one creature dearer to me than life, spite of the sternness and pride which have made me her murderer? My God! must she die, gaining for me by her very death what her sweet living example was unable to accomplish? Proud, blind sinner that I have been, resisting all these months, trying not to hear the voice which has been calling me ever since that night I saw her leave me, carrying with her the cold words that have done their work on the tender heart I trampled on in my jealous hatred of the religion she could not forsake for my sake—the religion that I must love and yield to from this hour, whether she lives or dies? Am I not punished too heavily, that the pride which would not yield to her gentle example and the force of her earnest prayers must bow down now in the very dust to kiss the rod which has struck me at last, bringing with the force of its blow the light and grace which I dare not resist, which I see now as never seen before, which I must embrace with a strength equal to that of my long rejection? And it is through her prayers, sweet saint, whom I have murdered, that God *forces* me to accept His grace, haughty scroffer that I have been! I, who all this time, in my wretched presumption, have told myself that she should yet be mine on my own terms; that she—not I—should yield; that if she really loved me I should win her whenever I chose to return with my cruel temptation to the heart that would be weakened by the yearnings for the love it so bravely renounced before!"

Then with one last, powerful effort the evil spirit strove still for the mastery—the demon of pride, which would not be driven out without a further and a terrible struggle.

"It is impossible!" whispered the tempter; "how can you do it—you, Stanley Graham, how can you bow your intellect to the dictates of a religion you have so long despised? How can you bear the jeers of a world which until now has courted and flattered you, to be treated by you in turn often with lofty disdain? How can you, who are so haughty, so impatient of contradiction, how can you kneel at the feet of a man like yourself, to own your sin and receive admonition and advice in the confessional you have so abhorred and scoffed at? How can you ever bring yourself to obey and submit to others— you who have so loved to rule always, who wished to tyrannize even over her who was loved as you have never loved another creature; you who would have had her *think* only as you directed, and because she could not yield, broke her tender heart! And for what would you do it? what would it gain for you? Would it give her back to you? would it restore her fading life and win her again for yourself? would it make her your wife? Is she not *dying*? could you not seek her equally well, and implore her forgiveness without embracing her religion? If you kneel by her death-bed to pray for forgiveness and permission to stay by her to the last, would she refuse her pardon because you had not yet become of the same faith as herself? Would even her father, bitter as he may feel against you, refuse to receive you, if you could bring a minute's greater peace and joy to his dying child? How, without her sweet presence, will you bear scorn and contempt, and even

slander, through long future years, from those who now court your very name, many of them not only your inferior in intellect, but in everything?"

But with a terrible effort Stanley strove to drive away the tempter, as he rose from his bowed position and paced the room, at intervals throwing back his dark, disordered locks with a quick gesture.

"It is God or—hell! I must choose between them!" and he paused a minute in his agitated walk; "there is no medium. Against my will or not, due perhaps to her prayers, the full light has come to me today; and if I reject it, it will be with my eyes open—blind no longer, as I have let myself be so long! The struggle I once occasioned to that tender heart has come to me now in turn; but while with her it was—deadly pride! With me it is pride—deadly pride! What she was strong enough to do and die for shall I weakly turn from, when God is calling me so strangely, showing me by one clear vision, and the force of her example, what years of instruction and persuasion might have failed to do? If I resist today, may not God abandon me, proud sinner, who have earned this grace, not of my own merit, but by his pure mercy and her sweet prayers?"

Then, as if to another Xavier, the words seemed to whisper, as the pale image of death seemed to rise before him—Death, which must come so surely to him in his pride as to the meanest creature:

"What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?"

And kneeling down by the table, he buried his face again upon it.

"O my God! how have I deserved Thy grace—I, who would have lost, not my own soul merely, but would have tempted Thy young, tender creature to her eternal ruin with me!"

Then he knelt, his soul too, as it were, lay prostrate before his God, accepting the life, devoid of human joy, which must be its portion on earth—earth from which she was going who would have made it all bright, she whom his pride had slowly murdered! And ambition too must go now, at least such ambition as he had often dreamed of that of winning, after his restless, useless life, a great name in his country's service as statesman and author, the powers of both being felt within himself, and the wealth at his command which makes such ambition easier to fulfill and satisfy. This too must be sacrificed—this hope, which might have made his loveless existence less dreary in the future; for as a member of God's One Church must not his ambition be a lowly, despised one in this world's eyes—that of repairing for his past hatred and injuries by devoting his time and intellect to defence of the religion vouchsafed to him today as if by miracle?

He rose at last, his face pale and fixed, and left the room as with some sudden resolve; and a minute later he had taken his hat and was in the street, walking quickly among the gay throng, heeding nothing, scarcely seeing or hearing anything, utterly absorbed in his own thoughts. On he went, until he came to the street in which is situated the celebrated church of Notre Dame des Victoires—the church which had often and particularly been a mark for his scorn and contempt on account of the especial faith which he had heard animated the prayers offered up therein, and to which he now directed his steps, as the first beginning of his reparation, to offer up to God at this shrine of His Mother the victory just granted him over himself and the devil, and to pray for strength to persevere even amid the pain and bereavement which were rending his heart.

He entered the church, and taking a chair in a quiet corner, knelt bowed down motionless for some minutes, feeling at first only an overwhelming sense of the difference between this evening and the last time on which he had entered this holy place, when he had come to scoff politely with an acquaintance at the prayers which were being offered up, to tell himself in his bitterness that Gertrude Manning was a charlatan, and that he preferred all this to the pure intellectual religion he would have taught her as his wife. And now, yielding to the grace which had so long been whispering to his heart, he knelt here with the rest, with a faith as lively and perhaps more humble, acknowledging himself a sinner, rebelling not against the faith which was robbing him of the sweet treasure of which he had been unworthy.

TO BE CONTINUED

It is no use of us to be afraid of anything except error and cowardice.—Lacordaire.

Read your religious paper for the good you may find in it, for the help it may give you for the strength it may impart, for the faith it may inspire, the hope it may breathe, the charity it may spread, and for the benefit of your growing and susceptible children.

It is a great truth, wonderful as it is undeniable, that all our happiness—temporal, spiritual and eternal—consists in one thing; namely, in resigning ourselves to God, and in leaving ourselves with Him to do with us and in us just as He pleases.—Madame Guyon.

## "RECOMPENSE"

Miss Rita Harrick mounted the stairs slowly, crossed the carpeted hall, and entered her room. She closed the door softly, then drew a comfortable chair to the wide west window. After drawing the curtains back, she sat down wearily. Instinctively her eyes sought the beautiful picture of her mother on the opposite wall. She beheld it only momentarily, however, for her vision was soon blurred by tears. Only a few hours before, her dear mother, the very center of her life, had been laid to rest, by the side of her husband, who had preceded her to the grave twenty-five years before. Rita dried her eyes and turned her gaze to the beautiful park-like lawn. Everything bespoke mirth and gladness on this lovely April afternoon. Happy little birds chirped and fluttered from tree to tree; early spring flowers, in their gay-colored dresses, delightfully nodded their pretty heads to each other, as the gentle April breeze swept over them.

But Rita's mood did not blend with the gay atmosphere about her. Reminiscences of the past came trailing up in her mind; she thought of her childhood days and of the times when she played with her sister, Genevieve, on that spacious lawn before her. Then came memories of their happy girlhood days, spent at the Convent Our Lady of the Snow, which Rita saw nestled among the trees in the distance. It was there that both had received their education. How well Rita remembered their graduation days; as she thought of them now a faint smile spread over her sweet face. It faded almost instantly, and in its stead a shadow of anxiety and worry settled on her gentle features, when she thought of the eventful vacation that followed Genevieve's graduation. She had gone with a classmate to spend the summer at the seashore. Alas! how fatal that summer had been to Genevieve, for it was there she met Warren Hilton.

That season was an exceptionally brilliant one, with a continual whirl of dances, parties, and other social events. Genevieve was so pretty and had such charming ways that she was one of the principal figures. Gradually she grew indifferent in the matter of religion, and little by little her fervor was frozen by the icy currents of inordinate worldly pleasures.

When Genevieve returned home, Mrs. Harrick was sadly shocked to find her so changed. Many were the kind, motherly remonstrances Mrs. Harrick made when she saw the intimacy that was rapidly growing up between her daughter and young Hilton; but Genevieve only tossed her pretty head and said:

"Why, mother, you just don't know what a fine fellow he is."

"But Genny dear, you know he's not a Catholic, and it would break my heart for you to marry one who is not of our faith. There are many fine Catholic boys—"

"Yes, and there are many splendid young men who are not Catholics," Genevieve interrupted. "You have said it yourself, mother," she added with a triumphant air.

"You misunderstood me, Genny. Of course there are good non-Catholic gentlemen, but they are not for our Catholic girls to marry."

Warren continued to call frequently to escort Genevieve to a ball, the opera, or dinner. Indeed, he did seem to be a perfect gentleman, was extremely courteous to Mrs. Harrick and Rita. But the mother's quick, experienced eye soon perceived that Warren's smooth manners were only a veil which concealed his mercenary character from Genevieve. She doubled her prayers and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, for she had well-founded fears of the ultimate culmination of Genevieve's familiar associations with Warren.

How soon these fears were realized! When Warren announced that urgent business affairs necessitated his immediate leave from the city, and offered Genevieve a share in his heart, home, and fortune, she readily and eagerly accepted, in spite of her mother's and sister's tearful entreaties.

"Rita, you're worse than mother," was Genevieve's reply when Rita fairly begged her to reconsider her step. "What is it to you and mother if I want to marry the man I love? You certainly shouldn't begrudge me this happiness."

"Are you sure you'll be happy, Genny?" Rita inquired.

"Why shouldn't I be? I'll have a lovely home and friends of the highest social standing."

"I don't see how you can stifle the voice of conscience so easily, Genevieve, after all the years of solid instruction at Our Lady of the Snow. You certainly must know that it is very sinful to attempt marriage out of the Church."

Warren had positively refused to be married by the priest, saying that after they were married, Genevieve could go to church all she wanted to.

Genevieve flushed slightly at the mention of conscience. It seemed to her as if Rita was reading her soul, for she was having a little trouble just then to hush the little voice that kept saying: "It is wrong, very wrong."

She soon succeeded, however, with the thought: "We'll see about doing better later;" a thing she had practiced so, long that it could now be done with remarkable ease.

Eight years had passed when Mrs. Harrick became aware of the fact that she was the victim of an incurable heart disease. True, she had often felt sharp pain near the heart, but fearing she would alarm Rita, had said nothing until necessity demanded the attention of a physician.

Rita hurriedly called the best specialist in the city.

"You may as well know the truth now as later," he said, "the case is hopeless. You may live a few weeks, a few months, or possibly a few years; I can't say exactly. But you'll never be strong again. All I can do is give you something that will ease the pain and possibly prolong your life."

The doctor's words were true—Mrs. Harrick lingered only two months, when one lovely evening, just as the priest finished the last prayers for the dying, her much tried soul entered eternal glory.

Rita had lived for her mother, and now that she was done, she was all alone.

The sound of the Angelus ringing from the convent in the distance, broke in on her thoughts, and she sat up with a start. She wiped away the tears that were trickling down her cheeks, and kneeling, she recited the Angelus.

She had barely finished, when a soft knock was heard at the door. In answer to Rita's "Come in," Margaret, the cook, entered.

"I just thought I'd be comin' up to see what I could fix for your supper, dearie," coming over to Rita and placing her arm round her chair, affectionately. Margaret was on very familiar terms with both Rita and her mother, having been in the family since Rita was a small child. She seemed like a second mother to her, and was loved as such.

"I don't care for anything, Margie. You need not make anything. Thank you for your thoughtfulness."

"Come now, darlin', you know you'll take a bite of somethin'—maybe coffee and sandwiches—or cookies, I have some nice hot ones, just made—you might like tea—or—" She paused, trying to get a hint from Rita as to what she would prefer.

"You may bring tea, Margie, please, and the cookies, I know they're good, since you made them."

Rita said at last, knowing Margaret would be displeased if she refused to take something.

"Here, now, I knew you would," Margaret said as she left the room. She hurried downstairs, and returned a few minutes later with a lunch that would tease even the most languid palate.

"Here, now, dearie, see what I've brought," placing a tiny table at Rita's elbow and setting the tray on it. "And I'm going to eat up here with you, if I may, Miss Rita."

"You certainly may, Margaret, I'll be glad to have your company. I feel rather lonely this evening."

The late evening had settled into twilight when Margaret rose. After rearranging the table, she left the room.

"Now I'll be going and let you rest. Good-night, Miss Rita, and sweet dreams," she said, cheerfully.

"Good-night, Margie, a thousand thanks."

"The dear old soul! Wonder what I could do without her!" Rita murmured to herself as the door closed. She really felt very tired, so decided to go to bed. She knelt to recite the rosary for "mother and Genny."

Maureen was seated on the top step of the dark, rickety old stairs, waiting for Harold to come. In a few minutes he appeared.

"Oh, Harry, I'm so glad you came. Mamma is so tired tonight, I think she feels worse than last night. She won't eat much and she didn't eat anything."

"I think mamma is sick; maybe she would eat if she had something better'n bread—something that's nice, like's in the stores," Harold said with a wistful look at the few coins he held in his hand.

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