AMBITION'S CONTEST BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XII-CONTINUED

THE OLD, OLD STORY OF WOMAN'S HEART

The vast assembly room was fullso full that it appeared to the startled gaze of the three frightened women who stood on the threshold like a sea of forms, swaying backwards and forwards in tumultuous agitation. But on the speakers' stand, at the farther end of the room-that prominent feature in the apartment which had so impressed Ellen on her first introduction to the place-was a young man haranguing; the same whose loud voice had penetrated to Ellen's apartments. It needed not Vinnette's smothered betrayal of his name, to tell to Ellen and Anne Flanagan that he was the Mr. Bronson who had so strangely lit the lamp in the study Both recognized the face—the wonderful eyes—a face so transparently white that the rays from the pendant lamp above him seemed to shine through the skin as they would have done through alabaster; and eyes so thrilling in their glances, that an involuntary shudder convulsed the forms of the three feminine beholders.

The sight of the females in such an assembly occasioned some commotion amid those who stood directly near the trio; but the speaker it was evident he also saw them did not pause for an instant, but continued to thunder his treasonable sentences to make them quiver in the hearts of his hearers. No motion was made to eject the intruders, probably because all attention was directed, immediately after their entrance, to some commotion taking place in the upper part of the room, near the orator's stand - a commotion which appeared to be caused by men attempting to force their way to the speaker, and being opposed by some equally deter-mined party. The speaker—the rapid, eloquent speaker - saw the commotion, but he only spoke with more force and eloquence—with an ex-pression settling into his face which told of his determination to achieve some purpose or die in the endeavor; and above the din of French oaths and expostulations, which in a few moments ensued, sounded his startling voice, rapidly, as if aware that but little time was left him to make desired effect, but with every word increasing in fire and eloquence.

They neared him-the men so desirious of reaching him at last clustered about him—and all was clamor and confusion.

As one in a dream Ellen knew that Vinnette had left her, and was bounding forward between the swaying arms, and sometimes almost over the very heads of the excited throng, in order to reach the young orator who was still speaking-speaking, till a thrust from a weapon in the hands of one of the gendarmes, who had seemed only to enter now at the opportune moment, pierced his breast and threw him back on the velvet cushions, with his life-blood streaming about him. Another body of men entered the room headed by a man in official dress, tall, and stern, and stately; his gesture was suffialready seized the wounded Bronson, relinquish him to some of the members of the club who had hurried to official was accompanied by one whose form was familiar to the affrighted gaze of both Ellen and disper room of all nearly save the members of the club, a couple of gendarmes, Vinnette, who had at last reached the wounded man, and the two frightwild eyes had so long been seeking; perchance the cloak which he wore, effectually disguising his other dress, touched: and the cap descending so low upon his brow, had prevented a previous recognition, but now he passed her on his way to the stand so close that his hot breath fanned her face, and she might have caught his cloak but for Taggart who interposed - Taggart with his false smile and white teeth, the former broader and the latter showing more repulsively than His form came so quickly between brother and sister that Flanagan's side.

latter, having at last recovered her sick man's own, and her face deeply

That Howard is in danger," an swered Ellen, breathlessly, and waiting not for further comment, she hurried after her brother. But ere she could reach him, she felt her hand grasped by some one, and looked up to meet Malverton Gros-

venor. Do not be alarmed," he said, " nothing will happen your brother

pressing closely after Taggart, heard the words and turned to view motion, and met Taggart's glance; instantly his manner changed from the tender, compassionating attitude with which he had bent to Ellen, to a harsh, stern air.

How much has your treachery availed you?" he said to Taggart.
"Those whom you sought to ruin

are saved.

smile. For the first time since Ellen time to be found in the gay capital, knew him he seemed to let his face wear its natural expression--an expression which betrayed the bad passions in his nature — which appallingly of baffled malice told rage. He muttered something that evinced his bitter disappointment, but then, as if doubting Malverton's tement, he turned aside again to

follow Howard. The strange official confronted im, and divining by his dress that he was no member of the club, ordered him without the apartment. When he reached the door, to which a gendarme in obedience to an order escorted him, he turned to look of undisguised rage at Ellen Courtney and her companion; but the glance was unheeded, for the two latter were hastening to the stand. Howard Courtney had reached the wounded man, and almost rudely pushing Vinnette aside, supported Bronson's head himself. Too excited to evince much surprise at his sister's appearance, he looked up as she reached him, saying quickly:

"We must take him to your rooms Ellen; there is no other place to bear him for the present."

The young men immediately prepared to convey him, and Ellen, turning to Anne Flanagan, who also made one of the surrounding group, ccompanied the latter to prepare a bed for the wounded man's recep-

Vinnette walked at the head of the motley procession. She had not once relinquished her hold of Bronson's hand, though even before he had lost consciousness he had not seemed to recognize her. They placed him tenderly on Ellen's bed, and made way for the physician who had been hastily summoned.

Then, for the first time, Ellen Courtney was afforded an opportunity of closely beholding every member of the society. They were gathered in her own private parlor, waiting in solemn silence the physician's verdict. There were more than the four whom she had been told on her first arrival composed the association-more than a score, and men of every age; from beardless youths, like Howard's self, to those having beard and hair gray alike.

The grim police maintained guard without, and the high official, with Howard, Malverton, and Vinnette, whose piteous entreaties to remain with young Bronson were at length granted, were in the sickroom. Ellen and Anne Flanagan waited just without the door for Howard's coming. He came at last, accompanied by Malverton and the strange official. The latter said to Ellen: "You had better go within, Miss

Courtney-that poor young creature will want comforting. The wounded man cannot live till morning."

He turned with Howard to mingle with the group of waiting members. Poor Bronson lay so white and still that both mistress and maid on their entrance thought him dead; but the physician standing above him, watch in hand, made a motion to Miss Flanagan for that lady to suppress the exclamation he divined was about to burst from her lips. Vinnette knelt beside him, never turning her eyes from his face, and so motionless that her very breathing seemed as faint as was that of the still form on the bed. Ellen sought by quiet endearments to draw her cient to make the gendarmes who had away—at least to rouse her from that apathy of grief, but she was impervious alike to whisper remonstrances and quiet caresses, only shaking her his assistance; and this all-powerful head and pointing to the white face

beneath.

The group without was evidently sounds of their steps Anne Flanagan — Malverton Grosvenor. The latter accompanied the strange official at every turn, and the sickroom—but neither Howard seemed to prompt the issue of such nor Malverton returned till Bronson orders as effected in clearing the had opened his eyes and muttered some incoherent sentence.

The sound of his voice produced some strange emotion in Vinnette; stand and was bending over the she rose suddenly from her knees, lifted his head in her arms, and lookened women in the doorway. Then ing into his unnaturally bright eyes, Ellen saw Howard, for whom her said in a voice, so low and musical and fraught with tenderness, that even the physician appeared to be

"Louie, speak to Vinnette; one word, to say you no angry because

But the wild eyes had not even recognition in their depths, and the fevered head turned impatiently from her grasp. Mon Dien." she said, in the same

low, sweet tones, placing his head on the pillow, and clasping her hands with all the energy of a desperate woe, "he no know—no speak! Tell latter was forced to fall back to Anne me" turning suddenly to the physician - "if he die to-night?" What does it mean?" said the eyes were as dry and bright as the flushed from excitement, but medical man could not turn from the desperation in those eyes, could not refuse to answer the broken-hearted pleading in her face. He replied

softly in French: 'I fear so. There is little hope for him now.'

The flush died out of her cheeks, and she was silent for a moment, as if trying to subdue some violent emo-Then she asked if he would die without recovering his senses Howard, still showing his white teeth, and on hearing that it was very probable he would have a lucid interval, the speaker. Malverton saw the though the latter might be brief, she hiding myself in dark places in the put her hand into one of Ellen's, whispering:

Catholic like us — and if you pray he | Thinking that it might serve somemight want priest."

following her example. Vinnette would have the prayer repeated aloud saying, when Ellen's maidenly bash fulness naturally shrank from such

a proposition : Perhaps Louie hear it, and den he

get senses. The young girl by an effort controlled her repugnance, and began one of the prayers for the dying she had learned when her brother had been so dangerously

Malverton, the only Protestant in the room, bowed his head as a token respect, but Howard remained standing. His sister did not perceive the wanton disrespect, till her prayer was nearly finished, and then, ah! keener than the agony which was breaking Vinnette's heart, was that which thrilled Ellen's soul. Her prayer involuntarily turned into an impromptu petition apparently for the dying man, but in reality for her apostate brother. So earnest, so thrilling, did it become, so full of the woe which was in the speaker's own heart, so convincing in its simple yet strong terms of the utter nothing. ness of everything which did not contribute to the welfare of the soul, that Anne Flanagan was sobbing when they rose from their knees and even Malverton had turned his head aside as if to conceal some emotion, but Howard was apparently

unmoved. The lucid interval which the physi cian had predicted came to Bronson. He became conscious of everything even that it was Vinnette's hand which was wiping the damp perspiration from his forehead. He it in his feeble clasp, and turning his burning gaze upon her, muttered

Poor child !" for woman's weak, weak Alas, heart! which, not alone will do and suffer much for so little return, but which with one single word of tenderness is won to self-censure for the mental accusation it may at any time have made against loved object. It was so with the well-nigh started. poor French girl; she bitterly rehad shed during her attendance upon face and hair.

Poor child !" he muttered again, striving to reach her face that he might wipe the tears away; child, to think so much of a foolish

But it was not of her own repulsed affection that Vinnette was thinking now. Feeling that his end was very near, she was thinking about the last rites of the Church which, as a dying man, it was requisite for him to have and, bending over him, she said with inimitable tenderness of voice Louie, you are dying! You

must have a priest.' Bronson raised his head; but the pain which the effort cost him fright-

fully distorted his countenance.
"Priest!" he said, in a voice that sounded weird and hollow—"a priest to me? I, who have scorned all the teachings of my faith-who have Bronson was no more. defiled even the counsels learned at my mother's knee; who talks of priest to me? And now-now when it is all over-when the years with gone-when I cannot recall even a speech which may have done harm to others-when I can undo nothing when I have not even longer time to live, that I might try to make atonement!"

He had essayed to gesticulate, but his hands dropped feebly upon the bed, and so he only continued to make his hollow voice sound with such pathos and fervor that it thrilled ante of his splendid eyes flashed as they had innette-Vinnette who hung tearfully above him with clasped hands and agonizing gaze—as if only at that moment comprehending all the devotion which the girl bore him, all her hopeless, unpaid affection of years. His voice sank to a tremuous, tender tone-tender as her own

had been, and equally beseeching: "Vinnette, get for me one week of life-your great love may do it for You have faith in prayers—the faith I lost so long since—use that faith for me now. Pray that I may get one week, one day to make reparation. But no! it is too late, too late!" he shrieked the last words,

looking wildly around him. She caught his trembling, wandering hands, and by the thrilling earnestness of her look forced him to turn his gaze upon her. She had evidently forgotten the presence of other hearers — was oblivious to everything but that he to whom she had given her love unsought was listening to her and looking at her. She spoke in French, every one in the room, save Anne Flanagan, understanding the import of her words:

knows how dearly. I have watched for you only God knows how well. When, perhaps, no one in the club dreamed of danger to it, I knew; because in the very houses where I went to sell my work I heard them say strange things about it - heard them describe the treason it fostered to the government. I watched closely for your sake-came here nights when no one knew that I came, passage-way outside the room where you all met, to hear what I could of "Pray for him den, Mam'selle, dat he have senses to die good. He but enough to confirm my fears." time in some way to have a key for Ellen knelt, the French girl, Anne that,"—she pointed to the door which

and took the impression. A key was made, and I have carried it with but never used it till tonight. Where I went this morning, people talked of this club, and how its members stood in danger; but I did not think the danger so near till this evening, when so many people came here. I watched them from my dark corner, and I saw one face that told me all the company were not friends to the club—for that face belonged to a Looking up and seeing M He man who is high in authority. was in civilian dress, but I knew him, for I had seen him in people's houses where I went to sell my work I grew faint—too faint to leave my corner without falling; and after a while more men came — men in officer's dress. Then I knew the worst was going to happen. I rushed here to Miss Courtney and told her then I opened the door with the key that I had caused to be made and reached you in time to be with you when you fell. But now, Louie speaking with less rapidity, "all is over—you are dying fast—grant my

last request, and have a priest." The very name seemed to make im furious. With a last effort of his dying strength he wrenched his hands from her grasp, crying :

'Don't speak of priest to me again I, who have abjured my faith-what could I do now at this last moment ? placing his hands in hers, voluntarily he lowered his husky voice, and continued in that affectingly beseeching tone which he had used before: Vinnette, I would give all the talent possess, all the learning, and whatever fame I may have gained, for one week, one little week to make my peace with Heaven. They praised me for my splendid mind—what does it avail me now? I am going down to eternal misery, for I tell you I am lost !

He was writhing in a lent paroxysm: Vinnette's strength availed nothing to keep him down, and even from the physician's and Howard Courtney's united clasp he well-nigh started. He was shrieking poor French girl; she bitterly re-proached herself for every doubt she said waited for him, and shrinking had ever entertained of Bronson's appalled from the angry face of God, and tears, the first she which he insisted he saw; then a one instant begging for a moment of the sick man, dropped fast on his life, the next he was piteously re counting some one of the lessons of piety which he had learned when a child from his mother's lips. Vinette's tears rained on his face and In vain each in turn besought hair. her to retire ; she was deaf to every entreaty, replying in a broken voice He will not last long now-and when he goes Vinnette will go." They had scarcely the heart to urge

her further. The sudden accession of strength to the dying man spent itself, and white and unconscious he slipped from their arms to the pillow again. Everything became deathly quiet; all were waiting for the last moment, physician having made a sign that it was fast approaching. was a slight heaving of the breast, a kitchen. Presently she glanced quiver of the lips, a sudden change the countenance, and Louie

Vinnette sank on her knees with a low, moaning cry. She took his head upon her breast, and bent to his lips as if watching for another breath every one of their evil works have but the rigid manner in which his mouth had fallen, with the ghastly pallor that overspread his face, left no hope.

It is all over !" she wailed, " and no last word for Vinnette!" TO BE CONTINUED

THE UMBRELLA MAN

Miss White sighed again and again been wont to flash when numbers hung upon his words. He turned to must be confessed that she was in a bad humor. When she agreed to leave her home in Kentucky and go - to keep house for her priest brother, she had not realized how lonely she would be in the big, strange city; how much she would miss her flowers, her old one-horse carriage, and the friendship of her lifelong neighbors; it had occurred to her as possible that the with whom her brother had borne for years would one day take a sudden departure, muttering her manifold grievances, and walking after an uncertain fashion which would have aroused not unfounded suspicions in a breast less guileless than was Miss White's. All these were weighing on her spirits things -and her temper—as she dusted the room, and afterward stood at a window, drumming fretfully on the sill, and feeling very sorry for herself.

Presently she raised the window and looked listlessly into the street. What she saw there was not enlivening. It was a chilly April afternoon. wind was high, and for hours a fine rain had been falling. The shabby houses opposite looked shabbier than usual—neither bright "Louie, I have loved you only God ened by the kindly sunlight nor hal-The lowed by the more kindly dusk. people who passed, walking swiftly, with their umbrellas held at an angle against the wind, seemed to be uncomfortable, and some looked cross as well. A thin, worn young woman hurried by, dragging a whining child by the hand. Two toil-stained men, who argued angrily, were close behind her, and a little girl, and a fat, slatternly negress. A feeble old woman muttering querulously to herself, was rudely jostled by one errand boy and laughed at by another. Afterward, for a long minute, no one passed, and in the unwonted stillness Miss White heard Those whom you sought to ruin resaved."

Ellen kneit, the French girl, Anne gave ingress to the assembly room—Roman Catholic, and one of those the English serving man ceased to reserve graphs. The English serving man ceased to reserve graphs and the physician, also a gave ingress to the assembly room—Roman Catholic, and one of those few good professional men at that Miss Courtney, put wax on the lock smiled involuntarily, and leaned fordistinctly a low but merry voice

ward to see who was coming.

The singer proved to be a man, fifty-five or sixty years of age, miserbushy white eyebrows and a round was tucked a loosely tied, conglomerate bundle of umbrella handles and sticks and ribs; and he carried an umbrella so worn that it afforded

Looking up and seeing Miss White's interested face, the man cut short his song; and, going close to window, asked coaxingly with smile as joyous as his music had been

'Haven't you an umbrella in need of repair-one that wants a bit of attention inside or out ?"

Perhaps it was because she was onely that Miss White found the smiling old face singularly attractive; and it was with real regret she was about to say that she had no broken umbrella when she remembered that a few days before her brother had discarded an automatic one, plaining that it had the unpardon able habit of collapsing unexpected-

'Yes, there is one !" she exclaimed. My brother thinks it worthless, but perhaps you can do something with

Miss White opened the door-the back door and led the man into the kitchen. A moment afterward she was sighing ruefully over the big footprints his muddy shoes had made on the floor, laboriously mopped but an hour earlier; and when she could not find the broken umbrella, she began to be sorry for having brought man into the house. Through closets and cupboards she search upstairs and downstairs, finding it at last behind the door of her brother's study. Hastening back to the kitchen, she surprised the man standing at the window, looking across the soaked grass at the church. He was singing again, very softly. Words and air sounded familiar; she Words thought they were part of an old hymn to our Blessed Mother-or they from a popular song were This last seemed the more probable. 'Can you do anything with this?'

she asked, after having explained what the trouble was. The man laughed, his eyes twink-

ling with merriment. "I can mend it, but probably it will break again. They are no good, those patent umbrellas, except to make fun for the people behind-and that's not a bad use in a gloomy world.

"Well do the best you can with it," Miss White told him-not that she had much faith in the result, but because she was glad to give him work. His clothes looked as if he needed it.

Being one of those people who are persuaded that to be wretched is to steal, Miss White did not leave him again, even for a moment, but, tired as she was, busied herself about the across the room to the corner in which he was at work, and saw that again he was laughing to himself. Her feeling of ill-humor dissipated for a few minutes, had returned with new intensity, and she envied him his light-heartedness. Other lives were happy, she thought: must hers always be dull and wearisome and

hard ? Why are you laughing?" she asked, after having watched him curiously for a few minutes.

"Was I laughing?" he said. "It must have been because I have been thinking how good my supper will taste.

Miss White was puzzled. 'You mean—surely you can't mean that you are very, very hungry!" she exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, pretty hungry. You see, I had a little supper last night, but haven't had breakfast today; so something to eat will taste good You know how it is when you don't eat quite regularly."
"But is this the first work you have

had today ?" "No, no! I made a quarter this

morning. Instantly Miss White was suspicious. He had wasted those 25 on drink. The more she cents thought about it the more certain she became. No doubt he was half

drunk that minute. What did you do with the money you made this morning?" she sudden-ly asked, determined to make him confess his weakness that she might give him the lecture he deserved. The man laughed again, a little shamefaced.

"Why, I happened to-that is there was a child—a ragged little mite of a girl—who had lost the change her mother had given her to buy meat. I chanced to see her and to ask what the matter was-she was crying as if her little heart would Of course she would have been punished, and it was exactly quarter she had lost. I thought I could earn another in a few minutes. But I didn't. I was fooled, you see. It's wonderful how well made most umbrellas are in these degenerate times!" And he laughed again with

keen enjoyment. Smiling still, he worked for a few minutes longer, and she watched him, wondering whether he had told the truth. He finished; and, having quickly opened and closed the umbrella two or three times as proof that it was in good condition, he rose stiffly and reached for his hat. But Miss White would not allow him to

"No, no!" she said, yielding to a generous impulse which she had been trying hard to stifle. "No! You must have something to eat. is terrible to think that you are really laughing, to speak to them, and did

And, in a flutter of good-will, she got cold meat, fruit, bread and butter sufficient for a dozen hungry men and set them all before him; then, sitting on the opposite side of the table, she plied him with questions Her curiosity, never long latent, was thoroughly aroused. Who was he, this ragged man, apparently fairly well educated, wretchedly poor, hungry, but so happy that joy overflowed his

heart and sang on his lips and beamed in his eyes? What was his secret? "Why, you are wet?" she said, observing that his threadbare coat was soaked.

'Yes; but I should be the last man in the world to complain of that. Rainy weather is good for my trade or it's supposed to be.'

His eyes twinkled merrily as he spoke. He was eating ravenously, but sparingly, of the bread and butter Miss White was still looking at his

vet sleeve. "I hate to be damp. And it's chilly today," she said, talking to herself rather than to him. After a pause she asked: Are you married ?"

"My wife is dead. She died long His smile did fade then, but only for a moment. An instant afterward he looked at her, his eyes bright through their unshed tears, and added tranquilly: "It is better so. She had a hard, hard life; and, as it is, she's been in heaven for have that to be thankful for every hour of the day.'

"And you have no children!" Miss White could hardly have explained why she took for granted that it was

Very quickly he contradicted her. Yes, I have three—the finest children! I wasn't able to give them a start in life; but they are well off now, every one of them. The finest children!" He laughed once more, as if he could not but be merry in so happy a world.

'How can you do it ?" Miss White asked, almost irritably. "Do what, Miss?"
"Laugh like that. Everything is

-do you feel like it ? "Feel like laughing?" He laughed again, much amused. "It's all I can do to keep my face straight even in church—and atfunerals. Sometimes I can't-I really can't—when they ing the Gloria, for instance. know how you feel then. How can man help laughing when he thinks about heaven, and how near it isjust around the corner, so to say !"

Miss White asked no more ques but watched him curiously tions, thoughtfully, and a little suspiciously When he was done he said that his dinner had been more than sufficient pay for his work; but she would not have it so. She gave him half a dollar; and when he was gone, stood at the window and looked after him as, struggling against wind and rain he limped down the street, singing softly to himself.

A few minutes later Father White came home, and at once she showed him the mended umbrella.

"Fifty cents wasted!" he said teasingly.
But, not heeding, Miss White hurried to tell about the man who had repaired it. She described his appearance; she reported all he had said, and marvelled anew over his laughter and the song ever on his

lips.
"What do you think, Father John?"
"Is he she asked, in conclusion. "Is he a fool or crazy or—or only—" Father White shrugged

shoulders. "A fool or only—a saint?" he sug-

His sister stared at him amazed. after a moment's thought, laughed lightly. "You can be so silly sometimes, Father John!" she

sister. Father White laughed, too. He was not greatly interested in the

said, with the air of a wise elder

'Well we'll say he is a fool, if you prefer. Peace at any price! Besides, you saw the fellow: I did not." Before Miss White had time to say more the bell rang and he went to answer it. He came back almost in

stantly, grave and in a hurry. dent, and the man is asking for a

priest!" In a moment he was gone, but Miss White questioned the messenger to learn the awful details-a boy taciturn or dull, and she gathered little

"A beggar, I guess," he reported carelessly. "Looked like one, any-way. He's just about cut to pieces may be dead by this time.

With this Miss White had to con tent herself until her brother's return. From her station at the window she saw him coming at last. walking slowly and looking serious and abstracted.

'Was it really very bad?" she asked, the moment he entered the "The boy who came for you house. said that the—' "The man is dead!" Father White interrupted. He dropped his hat on the nearest chair, sank into one

beside it, and said not another word for some minutes. She knew that would explain in time, and waited with what patience she could com "It was your umbrella man Father White said, at length. He did not seem to see that his

sister threw up her hands in horror, or to hear the breathless questions she asked. It was quite a minute before he continued "It appears that some boys followed him, hooting at him. He turned,

not see an automobile which was

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