

GERTRUDE MANNERING A TALE OF SACRIFICE BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER XXV.—CONTINUED

That night Mr. Mannering wrote to Lady Hunter a short, agonized letter, telling her all, feeling as he did so what a terrible shock it would be to her; for his last letter from Beachdown, ten days before, had told her that Gertrude, if not decidedly better, was at least no worse, anything like danger never having been mentioned to her. To Rupert he felt unable to write—utterly unable to tell the news that Gertrude was certainly dying; so Father Walsley had promised to do it for him as gently and kindly as possible with a request that he might come home for a few days if his sister should grow suddenly worse, and he should be sent for.

The next afternoon, when Mr. Mannering was sitting by Gertrude's sofa, her little hand laid in his as he tried to read quietly for her from a book Father Walsley had brought that morning, he was summoned from the room by a message that he was wanted down stairs, and having reluctantly consigned Gertrude to the care of the servant who was her especial attendant, he went into the drawing-room. As he entered, he drew back with a start, for Lady Hunter stood before him, dressed plainly and darkly, and looking terribly pale.

"Mr. Mannering," she began at once, as he took her hand, "don't send me away, though I know the sight of me must be painful at first, being as I am the cause, however innocently, of—it all. Let me stay, at least for a time, and help to nurse her, to relieve you a little, though my presence will be but a poor substitute to the poor darling herself. Is it really true, that it is so hopeless? We were so terribly shocked, Mr. Mannering, Sir Robert and I, for you as much as for—her almost."

Controlling his emotion as well as he could, he answered her, still holding her hand: "It is true, Lady Hunter; God help me to bear it—not to repine! Do not call yourself the cause of it all, Lady Hunter, if you do not wish to add to my grief, you who have been so kind to her. It is so very, very good of you to come like this—more than we could ever have asked for or expected. You see, much as I can do for her, much as I seem to grudge every instant away from her—and his voice faltered—

"There are things you will be able to do and think so much better, for you will have to excuse me if there are times when I feel incapable of anything—seem paralyzed, somehow, when I realize—it all."

She laid her hand kindly on his arm. "I am so glad I have come, Mr. Mannering, and so will Sir Robert be—so grateful to you for letting me stay. May I see her now?"

And she looked up with the tears in her eyes. "I will go up first a minute to prepare her, Lady Hunter. It might perhaps startle her to see you without being told you are here, for we did not even observe your cab drive up, as the blind is down in her room." And he went upstairs quickly, already feeling a kind of sustaining comfort in Lady Hunter's presence—the soft yet strengthening comfort which only a woman can really give.

"Gertrude darling," he said, as he entered the bed-room, "there is a lady down-stairs who wants to see you, to stay and help to nurse you."

Gertrude looked up with her old, bright smile: "Not Julia, is it, papa?"

"Yes, my darling." "Ah, how good of her, papa! It makes me so happy, because she will help you like no one else could, and make you take rest when I could not persuade you, papa darling."

A minute or two later Lady Hunter was by her side, with her arms round her neck, and her tears flowing freely but quietly, because she controlled herself with a strong effort for fear of agitating the dear little invalid.

"Gertrude darling," she said, as Mr. Mannering left them alone for a short time, "I cannot believe it even now, scarcely. It seems so soon and find you quite well again. Do they really say it is so—hopeless, darling?"

"Yes, Julia, that is the quiet reply: 'I made them tell me everything. But I knew it before, Julia; I knew long since I should never get better; and so you see, I have grown used to the thought, except—for—papa.'"

"But, my darling, I cannot understand it. It is so strange, so painful, somehow, for one so young and lately so bright to be so little afraid—so willing to die; I cannot understand it, even after—all you have suffered, love."

"Because you do not understand yet what God's grace is, Julia—what it can do, even for one young and weak like I am. Besides, if I did resist, and could not be resigned, would that save me, Julia—make me live one hour longer than God will?"

"But can nothing be done, Gertrude? Is it really God's will, as you say, that your poor father is to lose you? Is there no further remedy to be tried, no change of air and scene that might do good at least

for a time?" persisted Lady Hunter, in her inability to arrive at the resignation which yet awed and impressed her so in the dying girl herself.

"Julia, papa asked them that many a time over, Father Walsley told me; but they say that there is nothing to be done now but to let me be quiet and undisturbed; that, with this other complaint, to take me away again might only do harm, for, you see, I only grew worse at Beachdown. I believe they think that I have inherited mamma's delicacy of constitution, only that it has never shown itself before, because I have always been so well and—happy. They say that even—without this complaint I have now, if a fever or any sharp illness had ever come to me, I might have had from you, love, now—after it has been so much—my doing?"

And Lady Hunter's voice rang with pain. But Gertrude put her hand gently on her cousin's lips. "Don't say that, Julia, don't; it grieves me so, and poor papa too, that you should think that for one instant."

Just then Mr. Mannering came to the room, and Lady Hunter rose to go and take possession of the bedroom which was to be hers during her stay. As soon as the maid left her in it alone, she sat down just as she was, with her bonnet still on, and leaning her head in her hands, stayed there motionless for the next few minutes, as if in deep thought and perplexity.

Then she rose quickly and went to a small writing-case which the maid had already taken out of her trunk for her, and sat down before it.

"It must be right to do it; at least it cannot be wrong. It would be cruel not to let him know—not to save him, perhaps, from a life's remorse, and I am the only one who can do it." And with trembling hand and quickened breath she wrote as follows:

"Whitehall Grange, August, 18—, My Dear Stanley: I do not know whether I am doing right, but I cannot think I am wrong, as, if what I am going to tell you is indifferent to you, no harm will have been done, as no one knows I am writing, and I shall have fulfilled what seems to me only a duty of kindness owed to so close a friend as yourself. Stanley, Gertrude Mannering is dying; I have come here today to help to nurse her, if I can. She has been ailing for months; but though she herself says she felt from the first she should never recover, it is only lately that any one else suspected danger, especially her father, who is, I need not tell you, half paralyzed with grief. It is a decline, they say, which may last for weeks yet; but she has also a heart complaint, which may end her life at any time, if all agitation is not avoided as much as possible. She is very peaceful and calm, and quite willing to die, except for her father's sake; so peaceful as to be painful to see in one so young—at least it is so to me, though it impresses me strangely. I suggest nothing, Stanley, and recommend nothing; but leave all to yourself. Neither to her nor her father shall I say I have written until I hear from you; but I think I may say that, though you are never mentioned, nothing but forgiveness is felt toward you for what may have been stern in your conduct towards the dear child who is dying. I cannot write more. You will forgive abruptness, I know, in this distress."

"Ever your most sincere friend, JULIA HUNTER."

Then she addressed the letter to the hotel in Paris where from his last to her she knew Stanley would now be staying, and going downstairs, quietly put it into the post-bag which they showed her lying in its place in the hall.

TO BE CONTINUED

HER WOMANLY INSTINCT

The man walking slowly along the quiet side street of the town, looked up with interest at the notice in a pretty brick house. "Rooms for rent," he read. "Nice state of affairs, wasn't it?" she said with a final wish of the broom and swing of the dust pan.

"How did it end up?" he asked, as she paused in the doorway for a last critical survey of her work. She smiled grimly.

"He done just what me and her pa and ma knowed he'd do—he he out—between two days—ain't seen hide nor hair of him since, either—and good riddance to bad rubbish," she finished with a snap of the jaws and went her way. The present tenant laughed and then sighed; he thanked his lucky stars he wasn't in the matrimonial market to have his heart strings tugged at by a peering maniac.

While never very intimate with his head of the household, it

"I really don't know—that sign ought to have been taken down—I doubt if there is a room for rent—please step inside and I'll make sure." He stood just within the little hallway while she stepped into an adjoining room; from this there emerged presently, evidently the mistress of the house, still holding the goods on which she had been sewing.

"I'm sorry," she said in a sort of apologetic way, "if you have been misled by that sign; I have another room for rent—but only open it in an emergency."

"If you have anything at all available," he said with a light laugh, "lead me to it. I am not over particular—besides, I rather like the surroundings and this place would be convenient to my future place of business." She pondered that a brief moment—and as she did so he sized her up.

She was of medium build with a rather pretty, sad sort of countenance, somewhat as if she would resent any effort at pity; she seemed on the defensive, and he thought the attitude unbecoming in one evidently so situated as to be forced to gain a livelihood by the means she indicated. She removed the needle she had pressed against her lower lip while she cogitated.

"Well," with a softening of the features that really made her pretty, "if you care to see the room, and again assuring her that he did, she had the servant maid bring the key and they proceeded up stairs for an inspection. Throwing the door open, he stepped inside, aware of her rather deprecating air. He glanced swiftly about the neat interior, noted that it had an outlook on back yards and that the light was consequently, not of the best; but he could see nothing wrong about it.

"This looks all right to me," he said, she seemed relieved. "I am glad you like it, for I have had several roomers here and after a time they made themselves so disagreeable over what they thought its many flaws that I had about decided to keep it under lock and key for the future." He assured her that there was little danger of his kicking on the mere look of the place and after agreeing on the price he established himself in the room. There was nothing wrong about it outside its secluded feature, little sunlight and the back yard noises of all busy towns. But he was too busy about his studies and experiments to think of that. It was isolated enough to fend enquiring and prying eyes and that was its chief merit in his eyes.

The hired girl proved to be of the garrulous type; she began by insinuating the real reason for the lack of desire to keep the room rented. By degrees he gained her confidence enough to have a recital of an affair in the house—delivered while she swept about the room, with him jealously watching her every motion to make sure she didn't disarrange his bits of material.

The room had been rented about a year before; she never liked the tenant, had her suspicions of him all the time, in fact she recognized the symptoms the female happy only in when detecting flaws in everybody else—and said to find that she had detected the flaws. At any rate, the fellow behaved himself precisely as did the other roomers, Miss Pettigrew, the lady who had admitted him, supported her mother and father by renting apartments, helping out with sewing occasionally. They owned the property, were not by any means poor, with the right class of roomers, it made a respectable, easy living.

"But of course," went on the tattletale, sweeping vigorously, and eyeing suspiciously his various tools scattered over the room, "Myrtle—that Miss Pettigrew—had to take an interest in him. He showed he liked it too, although from the first her parents protested. Not that Myrtle was of the easily won kind—not at all—she had lots of chances—yes, sir—but, just does seem a woman's luck to pick the wrong one—after lots of choosing—don't it?" He pretended to agree with that in an amused fashion.

"T'any rate—the fat was in the fire—they'd have been wedding bells on that street only for one thing. Religion. He didn't believe in any; sneered at all, in fact. That cooked him with Pa Pettigrew—yes, sir—he wanted no non-in-law that was too lazy or mean to acknowledge any religion. Of course—you know how it is with women—which he didn't by the way—she's have run off and married him any way if it wasn't that she was a Catholic—and out of the Church she wouldn't be married—and in it he wouldn't be and there you are. Nice state of affairs, wasn't it?" she said with a final wish of the broom and swing of the dust pan.

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manage to have a few quiet chats with her about himself and his aspirations. He was busy perfecting a patented compound and some of his work—the cleanest part—he did in his room rather than take the delicate materials to the laboratory up town. Something of the manner of the hired girl or his guarded queries must have aroused Miss Pettigrew's suspicions, for one evening as they sat before the front room fire talking, she suddenly asked him if Maria hadn't been gossiped. With a laugh, he admitted it.

"Well," she said softly, "there's no use in pretending that I am a martyr, or a saint, because of my attachment for Mr. Robert. I did care a good deal for him—more than a woman ought to care for any man until she feels sure it will be reciprocated. My folks (my mother is dead now) fought the idea with what I may charitably call unusual bitterness. Nothing about him appealed to them; they insisted that his lack of religious belief killed all chances for his making a good husband. To my plea that I would so act as to draw him into our Church after marriage they turned a deaf ear. My father bluntly told me that in a case of that kind the religious one is more than apt to be the converted one. Of course we had some scenes over it; they were wrong, I know that."

"But why did he go away?" she made a gesture of despair. "I don't know. He never told me he was going—he never sent a word why since he's been gone."

"Well, doesn't that tend to confirm your former objections? If he had no reason to go—if he had a reason—why didn't he write and tell you?" She shook her head sadly.

"I suppose he got wind of their objections and in a fit of anger decided to have done with me. I don't blame a man for that," with a wearied sigh. "Yet—and tears stood in her eyes as she made the affirmation—my womanly instinct proves to me that they were wrong—that there was nothing about him to object to—and I still feel that he will be vindicated—of course, that will be too late for me, for I don't care to go over the weary details again—I will care for my father until the end—but I have been wronged," with a slight trace of bitterness.

"Her 'womanly instinct'?" he asked himself, alone in his room, with a laugh. "Well, I've heard of that a good deal—but it doesn't seem to work out in practice. What impresses me most, is the divine institution of caution inherent in every parent when caring for a child." And gave the matter no further thought.

One day he called her to the room; there was a nice shelf over the fireplace that had pulled loose from the wall.

"If you will let me do it," he said, "I will put that shelf back and fix it right—no," as she started to say something, "it won't cost you a cent. I have the cement here and will be glad to do it."

"And I will be glad to have it done, it has been neglected because we have used this room so little in the past year." He went to work leisurely and soon had the marble slab pried up from the wall. Against the wall, behind it, he saw a white paper and taking it out, found it to be a letter. With no qualms of conscience he dusted the soot off and read:

"Dear Bob," it ran, "beat it while the beating is good. Tom just got out of Danemora after doing a couple of years." He had the marble pried up from the wall. Against the wall, behind it, he saw a white paper and taking it out, found it to be a letter. With no qualms of conscience he dusted the soot off and read:

"What was the gentleman's first name who used to have this room—the one you told me about? She studied a moment, setting the bucket down to help the mental process; then her eyes lit with a light of remembrance.

"Bob," she said; "why?" "Just curious," he answered as he went back into the room and dropped the letter into the fire.

"Womanly instinct," eh?" he mused. "I think I'll let her go through life with that delusion," as he watched the flames turn the letter black.—New Freeman.

LONDON, Eng.—The site of the "lost chapel of St. Patrick" has been located in a field at the edge of White Sand Bay, St. David's City, Pembrokeshire. Ruins have been uncovered and antiquarians claim that they are undoubtedly on the site of the original chapel, though they cannot be sure whether the remains are of a chapel built at a later date on the original site.

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