

GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE

BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED

Her companion had seen her shy and girlish alarm of himself, and it pleased him to see how soon he had been able to dispel both, and make her quite at her ease with him.

"But you have been here since the beginning of the season, have you not, Miss Mannering?" "Oh, no! not ten days yet. But it seems like ten weeks, because at home I am always so quiet."

"And in London you are so—what shall I say?—unquiet, eh, Miss Mannering?" And he laughed, but so very kindly that Gertry laughed too as she continued:

"Well, for me, you know, I have been very gay, because at home there are only papa and myself, and it is a very quiet, old-fashioned place where we live, where he is quite an event to go out even to a dinner or to a small party."

"Dear me! How ever did you manage to exist?" "Oh! very easily, without any managing at all, Mr. Graham. If you knew how sorry I was to leave it all!"

"How I envy you, Miss Mannering!" And Stanley Graham looked serious again now, as he tossed back the dark, somewhat long hair from his forehead. "I have been trying for the last ten years to find contentment like yours, and have been half over the world in search of it, and have never found it yet."

"Something in his manner made Gertry serious too, and she said rather timidly once more, but with a gentle sympathy in her tone: "Perhaps you go too far; perhaps, if you stayed at home, it would be easier for you to be contented when once you got accustomed to it. I—am sorry for you, Mr. Graham; it must be dreadful for any one to feel like that."

"He looked at her so quickly and suddenly that Gertry was afraid she had annoyed him by seeming to lecture him; but he only said very earnestly: "Thank you, Miss Mannering. You are right, I know; but unfortunately one does not always do what is right at once, until one has tried the wrong. I have only come back to England now from a kind of homesickness, I believe, and because, after all, though I think I am weary of it, London in the season has a charm I cannot always find elsewhere, a charm of its own for me."

"Yes, indeed, I am sure it must be like that for any one who knows it so well and has so many friends here as I suppose you have, Mr. Graham," Gertry replied gently. "Even I see how fascinating it is. I'm getting quite used to it now, and quite fond of it, really."

"Quite hardened in the ways of the world, are you not?" And Stanley Graham smiled once more, as he spoke with that gentle, persuasive voice which stole its way so surely to the girlish heart of his companion. "You have been to the opera, Miss Mannering, of course?" he added.

"No, not yet. I have been twice to the theatre, but we have always had some other engagement for the first part of the evening ever since I came, and this is only my sixth evening out, you know; because for the first two days in London I did nothing but go about sight-seeing with papa, and in the evenings we stayed in to rest. But we are going to the opera tomorrow night, I know, to see 'La Sonnambula.'"

really should not have been out at all tonight, most likely, only that I could not resist the temptation of your grace's card, which I found awaiting me."

The duchess bowed smilingly. "Well, then, I must blame Miss Mannering, I suppose, since you will not bear any reproaches. I assure you, Miss Mannering, you have done what few young ladies are able to accomplish, in keeping Mr. Graham so long at your side in animated conversation."

The duchess spoke merely in jest, or partly so, certainly never intending any meaning which could make her young guest feel uncomfortable for a moment; but poor Gertry in her innocent inexperience fancied there must be something of real earnest in the polite, smiling speech, and she blushed painfully, feeling as though she would have liked the earth to open and swallow her just then. Had she really been guilty of monopolizing Mr. Graham?

Had she kept him there at her side by talking so that he could not escape? Her own conscience acquitted her, for it was Mr. Graham who had sought her, and had drawn her on to talk to him; but still her confusion was hardly the less for the knowledge.

The young man saw her embarrassment, though the duchess did not, and came to the rescue at once, saying with a smile: "Pardon me, your grace. It is I who am to blame entirely, and I must apologize to Miss Mannering for having kept her from the last dance. I am afraid I thought only of my own pleasure, forgetting yours, Miss Mannering."

"Do not say so, please; indeed I did not mind; I did not care about the dance," said Gertry, thanking him with an earnest look of her soft eyes, but wishing the while that she knew just the proper thing to say at such times as these—that she had at hand some of those careless complimentary replies which she heard every night given by girls little older than herself.

"Poor Gertry! Poor little convent flower! Perhaps she would hardly have had such a wish if she could have known that the very embarrassment of which she was ashamed was a fresh charm in the eyes of her companion, who sat down again by her side as the duchess left them.

"Then prove it to me, Miss Mannering; prove your forgiveness by giving me a dance, if you have one to spare. I owe you one, you know, for the one I have robbed you of." And he tried gently to take her card from her hand.

She prevented him a moment, for she knew he had not intended dancing at all tonight. "Indeed I did not mind, Mr. Graham, I assure you, and I do not care at all about having missed it."

"But I care, Miss Mannering, and I am particularly fond of my own way." And he laughed kindly as he succeeded in getting the card, where he wrote his own name in one of the few spare places. Soon again now Gertry was claimed for the next dance, and Stanley Graham left her with a bow.

He came to her promptly when the time arrived, and Gertry's heart beat with that strange new feeling which had been over her for the last hour, making everything seem still brighter and more joyous than before; and still with a kind of restless wonder pervading it all, which clung to her through her dance with Mr. Graham, and which somehow made her rather silent and abstracted during the succeeding ones with her other partners.

She did not see much more of him for the rest of the evening, until the ball was coming to an end, and she left with her cousin and Sir Robert. The latter gave her his arm, and Stanley Graham, who came forward quickly, took Lady Hunter, who said to him as they reached the carriage:

"Then I shall expect you to dinner, Stanley, and you must be our escort to the opera."

give him up as cold and hopelessly unimpressible. He is considered a great catch, you know; for besides being so very attractive, he is very wealthy, and owns a large property in W—shire, where his family seat is situated, a beautiful place, though he is very seldom at it. He was an only son, and it was thought he would marry at once when he came of age, eight years ago; but he is quite an impervious old bachelor, and often drives his friends wild by taking himself off to the Continent right in the middle of the season, and not always coming back to his duty as he has done this time. He is highly intellectual, you see, Gertry, and has never cared for mere pleasure or frivolous amusements; indeed, I think his very pride has always kept him from the vices and follies of most other young men in his position. I hope you liked him, and did not find him formidable at all; for, you see, Gertry, I feel almost a motherly or, rather, elder-sisterly interest in him. I knew his mother when I was a girl, and remember how proud she used to be of her beautiful boy. Poor thing! she only lived until he was eighteen."

"I did not find him at all formidable, just after the first, Julia; he was very kind and polite," said Gertry, stooping a moment to hide the blush which her cousin might have seen even by the dim morning light.

"That's right, dear, for we are sure to have a great deal of his company during the rest of our stay in London. I have asked him to dine with us tomorrow, and be our escort to the opera. But here we are, love, at home, and I dare say you are tired and quite ready for sleep, aren't you?"

Gertry smiled in reply, feeling very far from sleepy, or tired either, just then, as was proved when she was quiet and alone in her bedroom.

She had dismissed the maid as soon as she was divested of her dress and outer finery, and now, instead of undressing further and going to bed as she had done on all previous occasions, she threw a soft shawl about her and sat down on the couch, to dream away another hour or two of the new existence which she had unconsciously begun that night. Without any deliberation in the matter she began to think over the last few hours, until she had gone over again every word of her conversation with Stanley Graham conjuring up his face in her imagination—the pale, beardless face with its piercing eyes and naughty features, and the dark hair thrown back from it, showing its perfect classical outline. As she thought of him and the strange new fascination which had come with his presence, it came naturally to Gertry to wonder what religion he professed, if any at all. Instinctively she knew he could not be a Catholic; she felt that, even from her own slight acquaintance with him, apart from anything her cousin had told her of his history.

"I dare say he has no religion at all, like Julia herself," she sighed. "I could fancy it is so. I wonder what he would have been like if he had been a Catholic. He might have done like Rupert, and have given up everything for God."

Then somehow the thought of her brother roused her from her reverie, and she started up, seeing by the time-piece that it was close upon four o'clock.

"It will never do for me to sit up like this every time," she said to herself, as she undressed hurriedly and knelt down to say her prayers, which somehow were said less heartily and earnestly than usual; not with any wilful carelessness, oh, no! but with a kind of weariness which she fought against, as she did against the ever-recurring image of Stanley Graham which haunted her thoughts. Even after she fell asleep at last, his pale face and rich, low voice mingled with her dreams, not only of that evening's brilliant scene, but of her father and her own quiet home.

TO BE CONTINUED

TO THE RESCUE

The day had begun auspiciously enough. Ernestine was scarcely seated on the ancient braided rug, the one bit of color in a very drab little room, for the more rapid lacing of her shoes, when from somewhere down the street a wheezy piano clicked forth the "Palmis."

The alarming tempo, evidently reflected the renewed vigor in the arm of the grinder, and Ernestine laughed as she vainly tried to pull a lace in rhythm with the offering of this early musician. "Spring has surely arrived," she said with a little glow in her heart.

laughed till the tears came. "The funniest thing in the whole world is a little boy," she said to her happy image in the cracked mirror and with a pang of homesickness for the three younger brothers, still asleep at this hour, in Adrian. But the morning was too bright for regrets of any sort, so she banished even this slight one, as she planned on her close-fitting hat, whose sombre brown was relieved only by a tangle of coral feathery tufts, hanging low on its left side.

It was after 12 o'clock when she came through the swinging doors of the office building, in which she indexed endless cards or answered uncountable calls for what would have been a marvelous salary in Adrian, but in Chicago amounted to an extremely slender wage. Ernestine forgot that she was both hungry and tired, when the breath of growing things floated to her from across the park, where an old man was turning up the soil around the shrubbery. The consciousness, too, of the smoothly folded ten-dollar bill, nestling among a handful of dimes and nickels, induced her to hum the rollicking tune, which had been last in the piano-grinder's repertoire. "I wonder what the matter with Viola now? I hope she doesn't keep me waiting too long. That girl in the millinery was sweet as anything, but she can't keep the hat any later than 1 o'clock. She said she wouldn't dare, with next Sunday, Easter, and so few new models to show," she thought between her humming.

"Oh, there you are," Viola's voice was sulky and the glance she bent on Ernestine from beneath her too dark lashes, though meant to be pathetic, was sulky too. She was a tall, thin girl, overdressed and under-fed. Not the sort of a girl that Ernestine would have chosen for a friend, but whom the fact of their rooming in the same house had rather thrust upon her.

"Oh Viola, I have something to show you," Ernestine cried and then taking in the other girl's unhappy countenance, "What's the matter? You said to be sure and meet you. Don't tell me you have lost your place? That will make the third in six months."

"Thank goodness, no. Come on, let's walk along, there's always such a lot of gossip around this place. Have you had your lunch yet? Let me go over to that new place. Losing my job would be a joke compared to the trouble I have on my hands now," she went on, as they walked close to the fascinating shop windows, a riot of spring coloring.

"Mother is coming on the eight o'clock train tonight! Now what do you think about that?" "Why, how perfectly splendid! I wish my was. To spend Easter with you? Oh won't she love to hear the Easter music with us?" Ernestine clutched Viola's sleeve in an ecstasy.

"Yes, it would be perfectly lovely." Viola's tones were hard and lifeless, "if I had any place in this hateful city to bring her to, tonight!"

"I don't see—what do you mean, Viola? Why can't she sleep with you in that great big bed, or on your couch? Your room is nearly twice as large as mine. I've always envied you in being able to afford it," said Ernestine.

"She can't for the simple reason that I haven't any room, or any bed or any couch." The girl stifled a sob. "I haven't paid my rent for five weeks, if you want to know, and last night old Dawson told me not to come back until I had something for her. She knows I'd pay her if I could, but what does she care? I ten dollars a week for an old dump like that, too!"

"Ten dollars!" gasped Ernestine. "But didn't you know it was that expensive when you took the room?"

"Of course I did, but with a lot of sofa pillows on the bed, I could turn it into a parlor anytime I wanted to have anybody up there, that's what I thought, but I've been going out so much that I haven't used the old place at all, except for sleeping and you can hardly do that on account of the cars."

"And your mother coming tonight—what will you do? Haven't you any money at all?" "Five dollars, and that's got to last me for car-fare and lunches until next Saturday, and besides I did want to use a little of it on mother."

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