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ELLEN AHERN; OR, THE POOR COUSIN. CHAPTER III.—Continued.

Ellen Ahern in her distant room had heard the noise of their arrival, and surmising the cause, she lost no time in hastening down to welcome her kinsman.

"Her gentle tap on the door was answered by a stranger—her ladyship's femme de chambre—who arrived a few minutes after she had fled for refuge to her room—who informed her, with great volubility, that 'Lady Fermanagh was too ill to see any one; her nerves had quite given way; and would the young lady please to call again to-morrow.'"

"Certainly," replied Ellen. "I regret very much to hear of her ladyship's indisposition.—Please say to her that Miss Ahern merely called to inquire after her, and congratulate her on her safe arrival."

"I will tell her ladyship without fail," said the woman civilly; and Ellen Ahern returned to her room; but not to sleep.

The next morning she went down to the sitting-room, having arranged beforehand what she would say, and how she would behave to her new relatives, whom she was determined, if possible, to love; and found it occupied by a spruce footman, who was arranging the breakfast table, and the old man, Mr. Ahern, who sat near the window, in the sunshine, reading 'Molyneux's Defence,' as quiet and unmoved as if he alone inhabited the old stronghold and ruled there.

The footman cast an impertinent glance towards Ellen, which she caught in time to draw herself proudly up, and with her eyes turned full on his, to inquire at what hour Lady Fermanagh usually breakfasted.

"My lady takes breakfast in her room, Miss. My lord will be in presently. My lady brought her own cook, as knows all her ways, with her," replied the man civilly.

"Very well," said Ellen, feeling very strange and uncomfortable, as she went and sat down beside Mr. Ahern, and took his shrivelled hand in hers, smoothing it gently, and asked him how he felt.

"I feel as all old people, who have survived every hope, usually do, my child—a stony indifference to what comes next," he replied.

"Do you define resignation in that way, Sir Eadua Ahern? I'm afraid you feel a little embittered this morning. You are too good a Christian to feel—what is the word—callous?"

"Maybe so, *caen-buy-declish*," he replied, turning over a leaf, and reading on.

Ellen Ahern was silent. She seemed braver than she felt; and now that she expected every instant to come in contact with her strange relations, she became conscious of a cowardly fluttering at the heart, which convinced her that she would require much grace to strengthen her for whatever conflicts might ensue. She was looking out—far away towards the wild crags that skirted the troubled sea, watching the flight of flocks of water fowl, which like white winged spirits fluttered up from the rocks, and disappeared in the purple, gleaming mists that hung low over the waves; when she was startled by a loud and not pleasant voice shouting in the hall:—

"Hilloa! William? Where is breakfast?" "Here, my lord!" answered the footman, hastening forward to open the door. "It will be on the table in a moment or two."

Lord Hugh Maguire entered, stared at Mr. Ahern and Ellen, bowed slightly, and taking a newspaper out of his pocket, sat down and opened it. Mr. Ahern did not lift his eyes from the pages of Molyneux.

"Have I the pleasure of speaking to my cousin, Lord Hugh Maguire?" said Ellen sweetly, as she arose and offered her hand.

"Cousin! eh! I am Hugh Maguire, but 'pon my honor, I did not know that I had a relation on earth except my mother. How shall I call you, Miss?" he replied, rising.

"I am Ellen Ahern. My mother and your father were cousins," said Ellen, with a look half shy, half proud.

"So. We must shake hands. Really, you are very pretty, cousin Ellen," he drawled out, while he regarded her with an expression at once bold and admiring. "And that respectable old gentleman over yonder—who I suppose is deaf—who is he?" he inquired in a lower tone.

"That gentleman, my Lord," replied Ellen Ahern proudly, while her eyes flashed, "is an ancient and honored friend and kinsman of our house, who is known to the people and the gentry around us, by whom he is much revered, as Sir Eadua Ahern. His friends choose to forget that by an iniquitous assumption of power, the Government of England deprived him of his title, as well as his estates, because he was one of the heroes of '98, and the friend and colleague of the Maguire, Charlemont and Fitzgerald, and award to him those outward marks of respect which his former rank and present mis-

fortunes entitle him to. He, himself prefers, however, the simple address of Mr. Ahern."

"How are you, sir? 'Pon my word I'm glad to find myself so well provided with guests in this lonesome region. I'm happy to see you, Mr. Ahern!" said the young nobleman who, without offering his hand, resumed his seat and his newspaper, Mr. Ahern lifted his eyes from his book, and bent a long and scrutinizing look on the young man, whose whole attention was now engrossed by a description of the last Derby races in England; but he could discern nothing of the old Maguire type about him except his eyes, which were of a light gray hue, clear and well shaped. His nose was slightly aquiline, and his face might have been pronounced handsome, had not his mouth and chin spoiled its character by their sensual, cruel and sarcastic expression. His hair clustered in short, thick curls all over his head, and he wore a full moustache—a fashion which was but recently introduced into England.

The servant at length announced breakfast. Coffee, toast and eggs constituted the meal.—Lord Hugh then invited Ellen to take the head of the table and offered Mr. Ahern a seat on her right, which the old man took in silence, crossed himself deliberately, in which example he was followed by Ellen, and ate without addressing a word to any one. Ellen knew by the swollen vein in his forehead, that his heart was full. A smile of scorn passed over Lord Hugh Maguire's countenance when they made the sign of the cross on sitting down to their meal, and his face reddened somewhat, otherwise he seemed not to notice it. Just then the kitchen girl came into the dining-room with a *crustaceen* in her hand, which, without ceremony, she put down on the fine silver water before Ellen saying, "It's the crame, Miss Ahern dear, and it's hard work I had to get it for you, by rayson of that outlandish fellow outside, with a white pinaforte on, wantin' it all for *freaksecess*, and *patrys* an' the devil knows what besides."

"Thank you, Judith," replied Ellen, who felt much embarrassed as well as diverted, for she knew by the girl's flaming cheeks and distracted looks, that she had been engaged in no trifling conflict to secure what she considered her rights. "I could have done without it this morning, and do not wish you to trouble yourself to save any more for my special use. You know the family is much larger now, and it cannot be spared."

"It's from your own cow, that Patrick McGinness gave you when it was a yearling, for 'savin' his child's life, an' wouldn't take no denial," argued Judith.

"I will see you by and by," said Ellen quietly and in a soothing tone, "and until I am ready, look into the drawing-room and see how the fire gets on." Upon which Judith, having cast a defiant look at the supercilious footman, hastened from the room. Lord Hugh Maguire had been intent on seasoning his egg to suit his taste, which having accomplished to his entire satisfaction he observed:—

"We seem to have primitive doing here, Miss Ahern. May I ask what that intensely plebeian looking vessel contains?"

"You will learn ere you have been long in Ireland, my Lord, that a rough and homely exterior very often covers that which is precious.—This is what in common parlance, we call a *crustaceen*, otherwise a little pitcher, which contains some of the richest and purest cream you ever tasted," replied Ellen Ahern, pouring out a cupful for him and another for Mr. Ahern.

"This is very nice, Miss Ahern. Your theory is good in a general sense; but there are brutal and villainous designs also to be found under a rough and homely exterior, as I experienced last night." Then he related, with some exaggeration, what we have already described. Ellen laughed, and Mr. Ahern's face relaxed a little of its cold and stern expression.

"I think, my lord, you are under a mistake as to the ill designs of the people who went put to meet you. Mr. Fahey, the agent, purposed to give you a grand reception and triumphal entry into your barony; and has been drilling the yeomanry of Fermanagh for a week past for the occasion. His plans were all well concerted, and it would, no doubt, have been a grand affair but for your having arrived at so late and unexpected an hour; and from the fact, that while our peasants despise a middleman, whom they regard—and with good reason—as their natural enemy, they love their chiefs with a true and loyal service, which cannot, owing to the spontaneity of their emotions, be kept within cold or formal bounds. Hence your surprise last night, and the demolition of Mr. Fahey's fine pageant."

"I did not expect to escape with my life; for 'pon my soul, I thought it was some *peep-o'-day* outlaws intent on capturing and murdering us.—My mother was fainting, her maid shrieking, and the mob which surrounded us yelling and vociferating like savages, while I tried in vain to make myself heard; but finding it to be quite useless, I fired a pistol in the midst of them

and one of my fellows told me this morning that I had shot Fahey himself; while many others were badly bruised by being run over by the terrified horses."

Ellen Ahern did not perceive the least touch of regret or sympathy in Lord Hugh's tone or manner while he was speaking, but rather a feeling of personal annoyance and utter selfishness and indifference.

"If there are people wounded down at Fermanagh I must go to them, Ellen dear, unless Lord Hugh Maguire has a surgeon in his household," said Mr. Ahern, turning with a cold air towards the young man.

"Surgeon? No, faith. I never travel with a death's head. If there is one hereabout, though, I suppose I shall have to engage him to set all the bones my horses have broken," he replied carelessly.

"Give yourself no trouble about them," said Mr. Ahern, with a glance of contempt he took no pains to conceal, as he arose from the table and left the room.

"Hilloa, Mr.—eh—old gentleman! I say—Go after him, William, and ask where I shall find the best shooting hereabouts!" cried Lord Hugh.

"We are too near the sea, for game," observed Ellen, "but beyond the Abbey lands of Cathaguiria it is abundant. Or if you seek only sport you may start a bittern or two, and maybe an owl, in the ravine below the rocks."

The servant came back, saying that, "the only game that was worth hunting, had been driven out by the English a century ago."

"That's a tolerably caustic old chap, I take it," said Lord Hugh.

"He is very old and very sensitive, my Lord, and I plead for a degree of consideration for him, which on no account would he ask for himself," said Ellen.

"I hope the old fellow will bridle his tongue. By-the-by, Miss Ahern, do you walk or ride this fine morning?"

"Neither to-day. I have not seen Lady Fermanagh."

"True. You are right, for you must know that my mother is deuced high, and might resent it. I will ride over to that tumble down Abbey—what is it called?"

"Cathaguiria. You will find there many of the tombs and graves of the heroes and saints of your ancient house," said Ellen, not without a purpose.

"There's a fine water course, too, I'm told.—Please to say to Lady Fermanagh that I have ridden over to Cathaguiria, Miss Ahern; and do your best to make her time pass pleasantly, for she set herself bitterly against coming."

Ellen promised to do so, and went away to the drawing-room, to examine whether the flower vases wanted replenishing, and if everything was in order.

CHAPTER IV.—HOPING FOR THE BEST.

While Ellen Ahern was engaged in picking off the dead leaves and withered sprays from the bouquets in the flower vases, angling in a low tone as she flitted from one to the other, the plaintive air of *Garryone*, she heard a rustling of garments and a soft footfall behind her; and upon turning round she saw a tall, dark-haired woman, with a haughty but handsome face, standing within a short distance of her. Her hair was simply parted over a full, high forehead, and arranged so close to her head as to reveal perfectly the outline of its classic shape. A short full veil of black lace flowed from a jewelled comb, over her shoulders. Her dress, of black brocade, fitted close, and came up high around her throat, where a narrow collar of rich lace relieved its otherwise sombre aspect; but from the waist it flowed in voluminous folds, trailing on the floor and rustling with every movement.

"Lady Fermanagh?" said Ellen, advancing to meet her with outstretched hands. "Allow a kinswoman of your family to welcome you to your home."

"Miss Ahern, I presume," said Lady Fermanagh coldly, as she barely touched the tips of Ellen's fingers.

"I am Ellen Ahern," said the girl, who felt the blood growing warmer in her cheeks at this ungracious reception; but she reined in the proud spirit that prompted a bearing and words as haughty as her own, and added:—

"We have done what we could to make things comfortable, but I fear, that with all our efforts, Fermanagh falls far short of the conveniences and luxuries of a London house."

"Yes," she replied, "of course. But it does very well, and I am obliged to you, Miss Ahern, for your thoughtfulness." So saying, she wheeled a *fauteuil* round to the fire, and sank down with a languid air among the soft cushions.

"I hope Lady Fermanagh enjoys good health," observed Ellen, intent on being civil; and demonstrating the interest she really felt.

"Yes. My medical man assures me so at least. Are the mornings and evenings always so cold here, Miss Ahern?"

"Yes; all the summer we are obliged to have a little fire, morning and evening. We are so near the sea, and having no intervening hills to shelter us, we feel every blast."

"I am really glad to hear it. These black panels, and those dark portraits of mail-clad knights would look dismal without the bright red glow of fire-light on them."

"Whenever Lady Fermanagh feels disposed to explore the old domain, I am at her service," said Ellen, after a short pause.

"I feel but little disposition to do so at present. Indeed I should be glad to cheat myself into the delusion of being anywhere else but at Fermanagh. I came solely with a view to my son's interests. By the way, Miss Ahern, have you seen him? I came here hoping to find him?"

"I breakfasted with him, and he requested me to say that he was going a few miles on horse-back," replied Ellen.

"You are cousins, I believe?" said Lady Fermanagh, fixing her full black eyes for the first time on Ellen's face.

"We are of the same race, but our relationship is distant. I believe we are fourth or fifth cousins. I presume, however, that Lady Fermanagh knows my history," said the young girl proudly.

"Yes. Your mother was a prodigious favorite of my deceased husband. Your father, if I remember aright, fell on the Peninsula."

"He did; and I have been told that he expressed but one regret when dying, which was, that his blood and life were not spent for his country?" said Ellen, with quivering lips.

"Miss Ahern is very patriotic, I perceive," observed the lady, with a cold, glittering look in her eyes that Ellen did not like.

"I should not be worthy of my name, were I not so. I belong to an old historic race, and was born on Irish soil. It would not even be strange if I were a bit of an enthusiast, having been reared here, where reminiscences and traditions of the past have been the aliment for my imagination ever since I was born."

"I believe it is a failing of the Irish to be enthusiastic."

"Yes," replied Ahern, quietly, "otherwise the Land might pass for a dead felon. Even now the spirit of old

"so seldom wakes, The only thro' she gives, Is when some heart indignant bleats, To only tell she lives."

"Do you ever sew, Miss Ahern?"

"Sew! Excuse me, but why should you doubt it, Lady Fermanagh?" asked Ellen, quite taken by surprise.

"I was afraid you were a sort of Boadicea," said her ladyship with a latent sneer. "It is quite a relief to hear that you sew."

"I trust that I shall never fail in aught that is womanly; and God forbid that my heart should ever give a single thro' that is not true to the land of my birth!" said Ellen Ahern, while her cheeks tinged. Then thinking it best to change the subject, she asked Lady Fermanagh, "if she loved music?"

"I have heard no music for years," she replied pressing her hand suddenly on her side, while a dark, troubled expression flitted over her countenance. "But presently recovering, she observed in cold measured tones: 'Let us understand each other, Miss Ahern; it will save us both trouble. I beg that my being here will not place you under the least restraint. I am at home, and can find amusement whilst I am here, after my own fashion. My own woman will attend to my wants. As to my son, he is intent on increasing his rent roll by some plans that he has on hand, after which we shall return to England, where he will marry a young lady of birth and fortune, on whom I have long set my heart as a daughter-in-law. It will not be necessary, then, for you to give yourself any trouble concerning him.' There was a sinister meaning in this which did not escape Ellen, who replied proudly,

"Depend on it, Lady Fermanagh, I shall never obtrude myself on your attention, and I hope that all your wishes in regard to your son may be amply realized."

"There will be no need to seek or avoid me," continued Lady Fermanagh, with an intolerable air of self-importance.

"I am a quiet person, and have no greater horror than excitement of any kind. I believe I have what the faculty call nerves."

"And I have what men call a proud, high spirit; never stooping to aggression, and never yielding to assumption or arrogance!" arose to Ellen Ahern's lips, but she choked back the words; and held the flower vase she was arranging, up close to her face, to conceal its indignant glow and the tears that flashed in her eyes.—She had expected coldness, which she hoped to overcome by assiduous kindness; nor did she look for even a passing interest in herself at first, but this scornful thrusting away of yearning desire for the kindly reciprocities of kindred and

friendship—this deliberate blotting out of her genial hopes, stung her to the heart's core. But resentment was new to Ellen Ahern. Heretofore her life had been like a bright summer's day, with nothing to interrupt its calm, except an occasional outbreak with Fahey, on behalf of some poor unfortunate over whom he exercised the rigors of injustice and cruelty; but who was too much inferior for her: wrath to excite more than a passing indignation in her; but now the case was different. She had in Lady Fermanagh, her equal to contend with, and under circumstances galling to her pride and humiliating to her nature. She was a poor cousin, with only a wealth of love and genuine feelings to offer, and a faithful and honorable friendship, to which selfishness or design were utter strangers; but all had been heartlessly rejected; and she felt that between that cold, proud woman and herself no affinity could ever exist.

The beautiful dream-land fabric she had been for days building up in the midst of all her warm heart, was suddenly dissolved, and disappeared in whirls and eddies of emotion, which almost terrified her by the pangs they occasioned. But there was suddenly born amidst the tempest, a noble and beautiful thought, which, like the rainbow, was the sign of a covenant between her soul and God; a holy thought, which nature having failed her in the trial, divine grace inspired. "I can never love her, but perhaps in some way I can do her good," was the guise under which this axiom of charity, so hard and repulsive to nature to practice, presented itself to the heart of Ellen Ahern; who, having accepted it as the rule of her conduct, felt the cloud passing away, and light and calm flowing gently in together. The scornful curve softened away from her beautiful lips, the troubled lines of her countenance grew serene, and an expression indicative of high and good resolve reigned over it.

Lady Fermanagh had not spoken, while Ellen Ahern's trial was silently passing, but sat gazing into the glowing fire as if forgetful of the presence of any one else, and apparently without a thought beyond the range of her deep reverie.—Ellen thought, as she now observed her closely, that her thoughts could neither be pleasant nor hopeful for there was no relaxation of the hard, relentless expression of her face, no softening light in those stern, piercing eyes, which seemed to burn and flash with troubled and consuming memories. She almost pitied her, as she thought how barren the life of such a one must be of all social and kindred endearments; and could not help wondering if such a spirit ever sought the aid of any power higher than its own haughty self-reliance. But she could not tell, nor did it concern her, beyond the mere common interests of humanity to know. She put the vase of flowers in its place, closed the piano, and as she laid her hand on the door to go out, Lady Fermanagh started, and looking around her with a strange bewildered air, her eyes fell on Ellen.

"Miss Ahern, are you going?" she said, recovering herself with a strong effort.

"If you will excuse me, I have an engagement," replied Ellen.

"Certainly, Miss Ahern. Do not think of me, nor allow my being here to impose the slightest restraint on your movements."

"I shall endeavor to do as you desire me; but if at any time Lady Fermanagh wishes my attendance, she has only to signify it and I will come," said Ellen, with winning sweetness as she left the room.

"She is very beautiful," said Lady Fermanagh "and spirited, too. What if she should frustrate all my plans with regard to my son's marriage. He is not too well inclined even now to comply with my wishes, because, forsooth, the woman I have chosen for him is plain and dull. I must watch this beautiful Ellen—this poor cousin, who will doubtless scheme indefatigably to win my son, and become the Lady of Fermanagh."—And fretted and exasperated at the bare idea of such a thing, Lady Fermanagh walked backwards and forwards with impatient steps; while Ellen Ahern, who had thrown on her hat and sbawl, was hurrying down to the hamlet, to visit one or two sick women, and inquire into the condition of the persons who had been injured the night before. Father McMahon, she learned, had been called away to administer the last rites to a dying man whose house was some miles off; and there had been no one except Mr. Ahern to see them, and he, smarting under old wounds, and indignant at Lord Hugh's manner that morning, had neither words of soothing nor explanation for them, when they related, with much bitter feeling and many execrations, the history of the affray. In truth, he had nothing to say, and not a single pleasing or cheering hope wherewith to comfort them; for without being a prophet, it seemed only too plain to him, that their landlord's coming amongst them, so far from causing any improvement in their condition, would increase their miseries.

"He's a gentleman born, and has his own sor-