

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER
CHAPTER VII—CONTINUED

AMBITION'S FIRST WILD COURSE

"Come here, frightened little sister. It's nothing so very terrible, after all—but you shock me with those horrified eyes."

"I know it is a bitter disappointment to you, little heart," he said; "but I could not remain in the Propaganda. I could not sacrifice my ambition to become simply a missionary, and there is such a broad field in the world now for talent to accomplish brilliant aims, that the picture was too bright, the temptation too alluring. Out in the world I can make a name which on emerging from the Propaganda walls I would be heretofore of the power, and perchance the desire to make. I tell you," speaking with the force and earnestness he might have used to many opponents, "that desire for fame which is in my soul would permit me no rest. I plunged into study, winning warm praise for my assiduity, and I strove by religious contemplation to turn my desires heavenward. But all the time the world was beckoning, and I longed for its adulation. Oh! to have part in the reform of nations, and to leave a name to which an admiring people will erect remembrances—this, this is my ambition, my desire, my life. I told all frankly at the college. They wrote to mother, and she replied that she would force me to enter no life unsuited to my inclinations, and desired them to permit my immediate return home. In her letter to me she simply requested that I would call for you. But I cannot comply with her request to return. I am going to remain in Europe to complete my education by a mode of my own. Should she withhold her consent to this arrangement, I will go home only to remain till I am of age, and then bid her farewell forever. I came to England without apprising you, because I did not wish the Grosvenors, particularly Lord Grosvenor to know of my departure from the Propaganda, and I feared that you might betray the knowledge in some manner did I make you my confidante. I have watched three days for this opportunity to speak to you unheard and unseen, and now you must write to mother of my determination, and I will make no further movement till I know her answer."

Ellen withdrew her hands from the affectionate clasp he essayed to wind about them, and rose, saying slowly: "I don't understand you, Howard. I can't comprehend the feelings you describe, and I don't like what you have done. How have you travelled from Rome so unperceived—where have you remained those three days while waiting an opportunity to see me?"

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haughty assumption."

He started, as the clock chimed the hour. "So late! I must hurry, or my lord and his lady will be returning. Conduct me down by some private way."

She clung to him, tearfully. "When shall I see you again?" "I will arrange it! Don't grieve, little heart."

He bounded down the private staircase which the attendant had hastened through the deserted drawing room, and vaulted lightly through the open window on to the lawn. Passing rapidly through some of the lighted thoroughfares, he was stopped for a moment on the crossing of one by the passing of a carriage. In his hasty glance he did not observe the Grosvenor coat-of-arms on the panels, and, gathering his cloak about his shoulders, he was preparing to dart across, when Lord Grosvenor thrust his head out of the carriage window. The light from a street lamp shone full upon Howard Courtney's face, and their glances met, but for an instant only. Then the lad, regardless of his life or limbs, darted directly under the horses' feet and passed safely over—not a second too soon; the spirited animals reared violently—in vain the expert coachman skillfully held the reins; they became unmanageable, dashed backwards and forwards to the imminent peril of adjacent vehicles and finally, in one frightful plunge, knocked the driver senseless to the curb and overturned the carriage. Lord Grosvenor, strangely enough, escaped unhurt; his lady was insensible, and the beautiful form, in its costly wrappings of lace and silk, was lifted from the dirty street and sorrowfully borne homeward. Howard Courtney from the opposite side of the street, witnessed the accident and its result, and he walked thoughtfully and at a slower rate towards his temporary lodgings.

Lord Grosvenor's grief was something terrible to witness—silent, but betraying by its very silence its intensity. He would permit no one to bear her to her room but himself, and his own hands assisted in administering the restoratives which were hastily applied. Two of the faculty had been summoned, but though they assured the peer that no serious consequences might be immediately apprehended, he read in their grave faces the confirmation of his worst fears. Ellen was not apprised of the occurrence for some time after Lady Grosvenor's arrival; then one of the servants communicated the sad news. She flew to Lady Grosvenor's apartment. Lord Grosvenor, despite his own grief, was touched by the heart-broken manner in which she silently wept by the bedside of his insensible wife. She besought him to permit her to share his vigil during the night. He did not refuse, and both maintained a weary, silent vigil for five long hours.

Lady Grosvenor moaned occasionally, but consciousness did not return. Sometimes from a motion, either watcher fancied she desired some special attendance, but every anxious endeavor failed to elicit more than incoherent mutterings. She slumbered when the night was far spent, and Ellen's head rested wearily against one of the posts of the great state bed—slumber unconsciously sealed her eyes, and dreams of home filled her mind. She fancied her mother's hand was fondly placed upon her forehead, and awoke with a start to find Lord Grosvenor standing before her with his hand upon her head.

"Ellen, child," he said, in the tender tones he was wont to use to his wife, "you are very tired—you ought to retire."

"Not yet," she said sadly, "not till we know how Lady Grosvenor feels."

He withdrew his hand, and asked, with a sudden change of voice: "Have you heard from your brother recently?"

She looked up while the crimson tide painfully flushed cheeks, neck and brow, and her heart beat as though it would bound from her form. How could she say deliberate "no," and how could she break the promise given to Howard?

coming exhausted, slumbered at length in the easy chair—so soundly that Ellen's entrance did not arouse her. Nor would the gentle girl awaken her; but, noiselessly seating herself at her desk, began a letter to her mother.

"She will do nothing of the kind; and I will not deliver your message," said Anne Flanagan angrily. "The lad grasped her arm: 'Anne, never, till now, have I condescended to plead for a favor: I beg this one of you—grant it for my mother's sake.'"

"If you recall him, mamma," it continued, "painful as it is for me to state it, I hardly think he will return. If he does, it will be for want of funds to support him in the course of life he wishes to adopt; and, in that case, he says he would eventually leave home to return no more. If you permit him to remain abroad, he may grow firmer in the faith, when more years bring more experience. Allow me to remain with him, for I shall return broken-hearted without him. With him, I can tend him in sickness, and pray for him in health—wait, then, always for you mamma, and perhaps at last the dear, compassionate Jesus may hear our prayers, and restore him to us at least a true Catholic, if not one of the priesthood."

She could write no more—exhausted nature was powerless to longer restrain the pent-up feelings of the past hours—a flood of tears fell upon the page and blistered the written words. An hour afterwards, when Anne Flanagan awoke, she found Ellen's head bowed on the desk in a slumber as deep as her own had been while the open letter lay with its contents fully exposed. Impelled by a sense of honor, the woman turned aside her head; then muttering, "I have a right to know," turned again to the epistle and, leaning gently over Ellen's shoulder, she read the whole of the brief, pathetic missive. On its conclusion she stepped softly back, folded her arms, and stood looking down on the sleeping girl.

"Howard has left the Propaganda," she whispered, as if compelled to give her thoughts expression, "and Mrs. Courtney's trials are far from ended."

She smiled, as if her reflections were productive of some keen delight. The sleeper stirred uneasily—perchance the gaze of the basilisk eyes turned upon her were disturbing her slumber, for she muttered incoherently before she awoke. Turning to Anne, with her eyes still heavy from the combined effects of weeping and watching, she said: "I am glad you are with me, Anne, for I feel so broken hearted—so alone."

She grasped the hands of the maid, and the latter, strive as she would, could not put out of her heart the feeling of pity which stole therein. A week told the utter futility of all hopes for Lady Grosvenor's recovery. Malverton was summoned that the few remaining days of her life might be comforted by the constant presence of her son and husband. Lord Stanwix was hardly a moment from the sick room, and bore upon his careworn face such traces of anguish that even Anne Flanagan, who from the first had disliked the haughty nobleman, sympathized with his evident suffering. Lady Grosvenor, white as if already reposing on her bier, lay without physical pain, but suffering deep, mental anguish. Conscious of her approaching end, she did not rebel at what she accepted as a divine decree, but she grieved to leave her boy without a mother's care, her husband without the love which seemed to be so necessary for his happiness.

Ellen Courtney's gentle tending grew to be requisite for the invalid's comfort, and Lord Stanwix, reluctant as he was to permit any one but himself to perform little offices for his wife, was compelled, because of the latter's pleading, to allow Ellen frequently to take his place by the bedside. He interrogated her no more about Howard, and when Lady Grosvenor spoke regretfully of Ellen's promise given to Rome being so unhappily delayed, the grieving girl would bow her head but make no reply.

Anne Flanagan carefully concealed from her young mistress that she had read the letter dispatched to Mrs. Courtney, and as a consequence, knew of Howard's proximity; but in the evenings when she went abroad, as she sometimes did, on self-imposed errands, she knew that the form of which she twice caught a transient glimpse was Howard's—knew that he thus waited near the house for some opportunity of communicating with Ellen; but when she approached for the purpose of accosting him, he fled precipitately. The third time she saw him thus, instead of flying from her, he called softly: "Anne?" and then he came to her and put his hand on her arm, starting her by the wild expression in his eyes.

"I must leave you a little while, dear Lady Grosvenor. I am going out with my maid."

"Thank you, Anne—thank you! I will not forget this kindness in the future."

He darted away, and was lost in the darkness—the moon again being obscured. Lady Grosvenor wondered next day at the tremulousness with which Ellen performed her accustomed little attentions in the sick room, at the unwonted excitement in her manner, and the manifest impatience with which she so often sought her watch; but she did not comment upon it—not even when Ellen said, as it was nearing the hour of four, with a strange hesitation in her tones: "I must leave you a little while, dear Lady Grosvenor. I am going out with my maid."

"The gentle invalid smiled reassuringly, and replied in the whispering tones she had been compelled to use since the fatal accident: "Malverton will remain with me till Stanwix returns."

Howard, in the park long ere the hour appointed, met his sister and Anne Flanagan on their entrance. In an abrupt manner, which was in unpleasantly striking contrast to the affectionate way with which Ellen greeted him, he returned his sister's salutations, and drawing her arm within his own, he motioned Anne Flanagan to a seat to wait their return. When assured that they had gone sufficiently far to prevent the maid overhearing his remarks, he began in a manner which showed he was most anxious to have the unpleasant communication over: "I want money, Ellen! That which mother sent has all gone. You must procure me some, somehow, till her letter comes."

Ellen paused in the shaded walk, with such a surprised, grieved look upon her face, that Howard, despite the bluntness of feeling he fancied he had learned during the past few weeks, could not bear it, and he averted his eyes.

"I can't understand it," she said, in those slow tones which he dreaded. "I wish you were safely home."

"Home!" he repeated bitterly; "home is no place for me now. I tell you, Ellen," turning to her passionately, "I have committed myself in a manner which you cannot understand, and which if you could I would not explain; but in a little time from now, when I have won for myself a name, even my mother will be proud of me. I have done it all for Ambition's sake, and Ambition will compensate me yet."

His sister had no answer for such a speech; she could only look the abhorrence which his words had caused—could only express by her sorrowful eyes the intuitive knowledge which she had of his soul. And that expression, more than if words had given utterance to the thoughts rapidly passing through her mind, touched the youth, and discovered to him for an instant the abyss to which he was deliberately verging. Swayed by the influence of feelings to which he had been a stranger for months, he drew her arm tighter within his own, and were it not for the attention it might attract from chance observers, he would have thrown his arms about her. As it was, he said in a voice husky with emotion: "Don't forsake me, Ellen—don't join with my mother against me."

In those same slow tones, as if all the bright young life within her was being changed to sluggish age, she answered: "I have promised to remain with you, and I will fulfil my pledge; but—O Howard! Howard!"

"If these can procure you money," she said, "take them. Lady Grosvenor is my banker, and I could assign no reason for desiring money from her now."

Howard turned twice from the proffered gifts, and a suspicious moisture shone in his eyes; but he grasped them at last, saying hurriedly: "I must since there is no other resource; but one day, Ellen, and I will repay all with interest."

She shook her head mournfully. "Well, return now," he resumed, "and I will waylay Anne again, when I shall have arranged the time and place of our next interview."

He kissed her and walked rapidly away. Ellen watched him till his form was lost to sight, and even then was loth to turn from the spot. Tears were coming sufficiently fast now—the glistering drops were apparent even through the veil she drew over her face.

"Oh! Anne," she said, on reaching her maid, "for one sight of mamma now! I want to see her so much."

TO BE CONTINUED

WHITE GARMENTS A TRUE STORY By Rosario Great was the rejoicing in St. M—Convent, when little John Anderson was baptized.

Passing Sister Euphemia's school-room and seeing his beloved teacher there, the boy paused in the doorway: "I suppose you know I've been baptized," he announced with beaming face. "I could go straight to heaven this minute if I died. It's a nice place, heaven is. I wouldn't be left out of it for anything, would you?"

"No indeed," Sister Euphemia responded emphatically, but a shadow of anxiety crossed her face. John was such a little, little child, would he prove faithful to the religion he had chosen for his own when withdrawn from Catholic influence? It was true, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, though Protestants, had shown themselves singularly free from religious prejudice in placing their only child, when expediency demanded that he be sent to school, under the Sisters' care. They had even allowed him to become a Catholic now, though some time before he had expressed his desire to become one. Did they believe in the right of private judgment, even for a smiling little person of seven years, or were they simply supremely indifferent in all religious matters?

From the yard outside came the clamor of boy voices. "It's a ball game," John said delightedly; but just ready to spring away—he stopped abruptly. "Is it all right for me to go," he questioned, "you see I want to be very good now."

perhaps, to some deep and holy feeling, some innermost need of humanity's heart?

From the convent a bell sounded and unhesitatingly the boy dropped on his knees, motioning his mother to do the same; for it was prayer time now instead of play time. Folding his small hands reverently and lifting earnest eyes to the face of the statue, he recited aloud the Angelus. For a moment Mrs. Anderson was puzzled, then she realized he was saying a portion of the Gospel wherein is described the coming of an angel to a Virgin named Mary. As never before, the scene of Nazareth became real to her, and instead of her little angelic son kneeling now before the Virgin's statue, she saw in spirit, the stately angel Gabriel, kneeling to petition a lowly Hebrew maiden that she become the Great Mother. Over the Lily of Israel leamed in gracious love, the Everlasting Father, hushed the Spirit Dove, waited the Eternal Sea. If God's angel could so kneel, to praise and to petition, might not humanity also kneel, praising, petitioning?

As a little later, the boy and his mother returned toward the convent, one of the Sisters joined them. A conversation ensued, in which Mrs. Anderson inquired with interest into many points of the Catholic religion. Then there were other visits to the convent, and other and longer and more anxious questioning. Finally it was decided that she, too, must follow her little boy into the Church.

Six months of study and preparation followed, then, white-robed, John's mother knelt in the convent chapel, to receive the white robe of baptism; and fervently she prayed that others dear to her might come to wear it also. It was of her own mother she thought most prayerfully and anxiously; for if the Catholic faith had brought joy and peace to the daughter, what wondrous consolations would it not hold for Mrs. Murdock, who had been an invalid for two years.

Again, a month later, Mrs. Anderson knelt in the chapel, this time to receive the sacrament of confirmation. She felt that she had urgent need of the gifts, and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Her mother was daily becoming weaker, death was only a question of time. Somehow could the light of faith he brought to that failing life? Or was it, perhaps, too late to trouble Mrs. Murdock now? Would it be right to expect the dying woman to accept without very long deliberation because her daughter desired it—the faith she herself had embraced? At least she had no aversion to Catholicism, and almost hopefully Mrs. Anderson recalled how that years ago her mother had occasionally gone with a Catholic friend to special services at the Cathedral, and had read some Catholic books. She claimed to respect all creeds, but apparently it had never occurred to her to accept any particular one of them. Would it be well to trouble her now with the thought of religion, perhaps, only to disturb her peace of mind? But all these doubts were forgotten when Mrs. Anderson entered her mother's room one morning; she was much worse.

She knelt beside her, "Mother, wouldn't you like to be baptized?" she questioned wistfully, "to have a priest come and tell you how to be a Catholic?"

The answer surprised her, "I would like it of all things," Mrs. Murdock said softly. "I am glad you and your little one are Catholics, for I believe in the aged voice grew stronger" there is but one true Church—the Catholic Church. Yes, send for a priest."

Mrs. Anderson herself went on that errand of love, and in a short while the priest was at the bedside. He saw at once that death was very near, though Mrs. Murdock was still fully conscious. He took her cold hand in his, "I have come to help you," he told her gently, "I am a Catholic priest."

Into the dying eyes flashed the light of joy and hope, how wonderful it was Mrs. Anderson considered—how marvelous the power of the old message, the old faith, ancient and yet forever new. To how many a breaking or despairing heart, had the presence of Christ's eternal priesthood brought hope and consolation. So she thought as with throbbing heart, she beheld her mother yearning for baptism.

"I understand you wish to receive baptism?" the priest continued. "Yes, and to receive (Mrs. Murdock's face grew eager), all that you can give me."

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