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GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE
BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER XXI.—CONTINUED

Looking up, Gertrude saw the terrible expression on her father's face, half bitterness, half tender sorrow, and grew calm again for his sake, disposing of her tears as she whispered:

"Papa! don't look like that; don't take it to heart so dreadfully. You won't when you hear it all, when I've told you quietly all about it." And drawing him to the fire she made him sit in his easy-chair, as, throwing off her wraps, she sat close by his knee on a low stool.

"It was just the first, papa, the first seeing you again after it all, that made me so silly, made me cry so. But I can tell you all about it now quite quietly, papa."

Then taking his hand caressingly, as though its tender touch gave her strength, Gertrude began her story, in a low quiet tone, which yet trembled often—the whole sad story from its very beginning. She told her father, as they sat there together in the flickering firelight, how she had first met Stanley Graham; how he had stolen into her heart and taken it captive before she would allow it to herself even; and how she had been unable, from their earliest acquaintance, to avoid seeing what kind of attention it was he paid her so constantly, what kind of love he meant one day to offer her. She described him to her father, with her heart yearning with that hopeless pain; she spoke of his noble character, of his honor and truth, married only by that terrible, fatal pride; she told of his splendid intellect, of his powerful beauty, which had so fascinated her before he had spoken a word to her, the color rising to her face again at the vivid recollection of that happy, dream-like evening.

"I had never seen a face—like his before, papa, and I—shall never see another like it now. You would not wonder that if you could know him, papa, if it were all different. I had been thinking how well he would look as the model of a knight or crusader, papa, when my cousin brought him to introduce to me, and then—"

She paused a minute, and continued, telling of the winning fascination of manner he could exercise, haughty as he was; and how fond Lady Hunter and Sir Robert, too, were of him. Then it came to the telling of their parting the night before she left London, and of his earnest request that he might see her at Nethercotes, and of the pain of having to come home with a secret she might not yet reveal, a secret which she felt had been partly visible.

"If you knew, papa, what it was like all that time, to be as I was with you, you would forgive me for it."

"My little Gertrude, there is nothing to forgive; nothing except to pity and love you for, more than ever. And the father's arm clasped her round as she leaned against his knee, as though he could never let her go again from that sweet shelter.

"You see, papa, I could not bring myself to speak of—of my love—for him, until I was *openly* sure of his for me, more than ever because he is like he is, you know, an infidel; I felt how hard it would be for you to give me to him, even if he should grant all I should have to ask about religion. And I know now that I had another fear—the fear that has come true, papa—that he might refuse altogether what I would ask, and that I might have to give him up. But I did not dare to think even that I had such a fear; I used to drive it away, and tell myself it would never come to that; that I could not bear it, that God would not ask me."

"And He has asked you, Gertrude; and my little girl has offered Him the sacrifice He wanted, though I thought she would be too weak, though she told me once she was not a bit of a heroine, and was but a poor descendant of confessors and martyrs. But I knew God would make her strong when the need came; that He would give her grace to show the martyr spirit of which I spoke, Gertrude." And Gertrude felt a tear fall upon her hand as she paused.

Then she told him of the meeting again with Stanley at Nethercotes, three days before, on her arrival there; of his proposal to her, and of the joyous interval before she brought herself to the task, so long dreaded, of speaking to him of religion. "During that short, delicious time I used to think so often, papa, how proud you would be of him; how he would grow as dear to you nearly as Rupert, for my sake; of how we would all pray that God would in time send him even the grace of conversion, and of what a glorious Catholic he would be!" And the poor heart quivered again with that aching pain at the thought of the short, blissful dream dispelled so rudely.

But she forced herself to go on and tell her father as she had told her cousin, but more fully, because he would understand it all as Lady Hunter could not; of the struggle with Stanley, of all she said, as well as she could remember; and of his tender though terrible entreaties, ending at last in that stern, truthful explanation of his intentions, and her consequent renuncia-

tion of him. "And it is all over, papa, now, and I am safe back with you; and I shall never want to see him again, only to pray for him."

"And may God give me grace, my darling, to pray for him too!" exclaimed her father solemnly; "to be able to forgive him freely, not only for having striven so hard to make me have to mourn and grieve over an apostate child, but for having stolen her heart at all, only to wish to tyrannize over its dearest feelings; to be willing to break it rather than grant what she asked so solemnly, though her requests could not harm him, though they could not hurt even his outward welfare, though caring for no faith himself, and pretending too to love her, he might have allowed her to practise hers in peace, infidel as he is. Thank God you are saved from him, my darling!"

But Gertrude was sobbing again now as, taking her hands from her father's grasp, she clasped them on his knee. "Papa, oh! don't say that; oh! don't speak of him like that. If you knew him, you would not; if you knew him as I do and as my cousin does, you would know that, while he *does* love me, oh! so much, papa, he yet could not promise to see me, as his wife, practise a religion he hates and which he hoped to win me from. He is so terrible proud, papa, and he was jealous of my love—jealous of sharing it with a religion he despises so. So you'll forgive him, papa, and pray for him too, won't you?"

"My darling, may God forgive me for the harsh judgment which escaped me in my anger against the man who has blighted my little girl's life! I do forgive him, poor ignorant unbeliever; and we will pray for him together, Gertrude. And the day should come when God will show him the truth, and, repenting, he embraces it as he now maligns it, may I be able to give my child back to him, if he comes humbly to ask for her—give her to him without a fear, because she trusts so in his tenderness! Or if that day should never come, but he still repents of his harshness and begs for her, though without himself embracing the truth, may I be able to give you to him, Gertrude, if it is for your happiness and he brings himself to promise all!"

"Papa, that he will never do—that that last you speak of. I have never hoped that for one instant, since last night. And for the other, papa," she added, in a strange, solemn tone, "I do not know, I dare not hope. It seems somehow as if I must not, as if—somehow God would not want him only for that, if He brought him to the truth." And her father started at the strange tone and the painfully solemn manner. Then, quickly, as if to take away the impression of her words, even from herself, she added: "Think, papa what it would have been for him, with his ideas, to have allowed—his children to be brought up as Catholics! And, papa, he has never had any one for whom he cared to try and keep any kind of religion in his mind; for the only one he had, his mother, died just when he left school, before he went to the university. O papa! poor Lady Hunter is so upset about it all, so afraid you may blame her for it, somehow!"

"Poor Lady Hunter! As if I could Gertrude; at least when I came to think how really kind she has been, meaning nothing but kindness through it all, as I know. How could she see how it would be?"

"How glad I shall be to tell her what you say, papa, for she will really believe it then! O papa, do you know I cannot help hoping, and ever thinking, she will be a Catholic yet some day. If you had heard how she asked me to pray for her, just as we parted!"

TO BE CONTINUED

REMEMBRANCE

There was something queer about the little old lady as she made her way timidly—rather wearily, too—through the dress department of the Elite Store.

Miss Nolan watched her for a moment, her keen eyes seeking the reason. For Kathleen Nolan, efficient buyer, was also a student of human nature and a lover of folk, high or low.

"Look at her clothes," she said softly, shaking her wise little head. "They're made for 17, not 70."

The little old lady wore a bouffant frock of blue taffeta, as sweet as a spring romance. And her hat—tilted boastfully to one side, with two large plumes of rose-shade silk. She wore grey satin slippers with rhinestone buckles. Oh, how small and tight. Poor tired feet! As she minced forward, Kathleen noticed that the heels were very high—Louis Quinze style.

"How can I help you this morning?" asked Kathleen softly, looking down at the wrinkled face and snowy hair.

"I want to buy a dress," fluttered the little old lady, "something young. Maybe a rose silk to match this." A worn hand touched the unsteady hat.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Kathleen. "Come right along with me."

The little old lady gazed through the little eyes at a group of young girls modeling the latest Parisian gowns. As she passed them they turned and giggled loudly.

Kathleen opened the door of the ivory and gold salon reserved for the most expensive dresses.

"Sit right down here where you'll be comfortable," she said, pulling forward a roomy chair, soft as velvet.

The little old lady sank into it. "My I'm most pestered out. I've wringed 'em cramp'd toes. She sighed. "Shopping's hard work if you ain't used to it." She was silent a moment. Then: "Father only sold the farm last month; I always called him 'Father' since we was married. We came to the city to see the sights. I never had no togs, so father wanted to buy up all the dresses and hats and things. Said I ought to make up for what I ain't had all these years. Good idea, too, but it just keeps you hustling making up for lost time."

Her kindly black eyes appraised Kathleen's dress.

"My, dearie, that's a real nice dress you got on. Plain, but awful pretty. Cost money, I guess; but—" she added quickly—"money ain't troubling now. I remember days when it was, though—long, drugging days. Ain't such a time ago neither. Yes, yours is a real pretty dress," nodded the little old lady. Her eyes shifted slowly to Kathleen's kindly face, brimming with smiles—and tears, it seemed.

"You just rest here a few minutes, I've got some beautiful dresses I want to show you." Kathleen lovingly patted the little old lady's arm and hurried from the room.

All pestered out. Left alone now, she kicked off the ill-fitting slippers and comfortably wringed her cramped toes. She pulled off the cumbersome hat and smoothed her white hair, folded her arms and sighed contentedly.

Just then one of the youngest models burst into the room.

"Oh, pardon me, I thought Miss Nolan was here," she exclaimed. "Come right in dearie," smiled the little old lady. "I want to look at your pretty dress. Gracious me!" she cried, raising shocked hands, "but ain't it low in the neck—and short, too! When I was a girl we wasn't allowed."

"Times has changed since your day, lady. These times you got to wear 'em like this." The girl danced out.

Kathleen returned, her arms filled with dresses.

"Oh, how pretty your hair is!" smiled Kathleen, putting down the dresses and touching the fine, silken strands. "And how different you look with your hat off! It makes you years younger—and—and so beautiful!"

Another loving wrinkled face came before Kathleen's eyes—a face watching at a window of a certain cottage in Ireland. Five years ago since that face had smiled and wept "goodbye" to her.

Kathleen brushed the vision aside and spread a frail rose silk dress before the delighted eyes of the little old lady.

"I never thought clothes could be so pretty," she exclaimed, her hands caressing the skirt, softer than the petals of a rose. "I guess I always wearing a gingham and wool makes it kind of strange," she said.

"It's so pretty! I like it so. Father will too. He's a great hand for pink. I had a pink wrapper once. Father said it always put- ting me in my cheeks. I wore it to please him, of course—till there wasn't a shred left. Years ago that was. I was just about your age then. The year we bought the Adams house and went to house-keeping." She sighed and was silent. Kathleen watched her, unwilling to break in upon the thoughts of other days.

"Do you think it'll be too gay for me, dearie?" she suddenly asked, a note of longing in her voice.

"Not too gay, but—I've got something even lovelier. Just the nicest dress in the house. Bought it myself in New York this fall. I must have been thinking of somebody just like you—somebody just as sweet and loving and kind."

The little old lady's eyes twinkled her appreciation.

"Ain't you the hand for words, though?" she beamed.

"And father ought to see the roses now," laughed Kathleen.

"He's coming for me at noon. 'Most time now, ain't it?" she asked eagerly.

"Just eleven," replied Kathleen, glancing at her wrist watch.

She put aside her dress and held up one of soft black silk, very simply made. Into the creamy lace at the neck and wrists an artist had woven her dreams.

"It's real pretty sure enough," agreed the little old lady, her head held on one side. "Sort of dark though, ain't it? Father mightn't like it."

"Why not try it on and see? I know it'll look lovely on you."

The little old lady started to get up, then stopped.

"Gracious, I can't get up, dearie! My feet was smarting, so I took my slippers off."

"That's all right," said Kathleen, gently pushing her back into the chair's wide arms. "Can't I get you a little larger pair?"

"Well—yes," reluctantly. "But not too large, mind," cautioned the little old lady. "Just a mite bigger'n this." She held up the foolish satin slipper. "And you might fetch 'long a hat while you're at it. I am just all pestered out. I'll be resting here till you get back. Father mustn't see me tired. He'd fret."

"You just rest all you want," soothed Kathleen, pulling up a new chair and putting the tired feet upon it.

"Maybe I'll catch forty winks," smiled the little old lady.

"Try!" urged Kathleen. "No one'll disturb you while I'm gone. If they do—"

The little old lady's eyes were drooping and her small body relaxing as Kathleen softly closed the door.

"The poor dear," she sighed. "Trying to hold on to youth with all this foolish finery." She glanced at the satin slipper. "Little old lady, I'm going to make you over into some one like my own little mother into some one as rare and as sweet as she is." Kathleen sniffed back a tear. But the smiles in her gray eyes had returned when she hurried into the hat department.

It was difficult finding just what she wanted. A bonnet, a real old-fashioned bonnet with strings that tied under the chin. At last! It was hidden away in a box on a high shelf. A bonnet of pearly gray silk with a small rose resting on one side! And streamers of tulle of the same misty gray!

Kathleen, delighted with her success, entered the shoe department. "I want a pair of shoes three sizes larger than this and of softest leather." She held up the slipper before the clerk. "Comfort, not style, is what I'm after."

"Not much call for them kind of shoes, Miss Nolan," replied the clerk, taking down a box and opening it. They were soft as a glove and fairly brimming over with comfort.

"Just what I want. Thanks." The clerk made out the check.

Kathleen hurried back to the ivory salon and gently opened the door. The little old lady was asleep, the lines of her face almost hidden beneath the sweetness of repose.

"You dear!" breathed the girl. "How sweet you look!" She picked up the hideous hat and shook it off. "When I've finished with you, little old lady, you'll be the correct model for all other old ladies. But there aren't any more old ladies these days," she sighed.

One of the shoes dropped to the floor. The little old lady jumped up with a start.

"Oh, I'm so sorry I woke you up!" apologized Kathleen. "But you've had your forty winks and father'll be here soon. Suppose we get ready for him."

"Yes, I'm all rested up dearie. You've been so good to me. You must come out and visit us a spell."

"Yes, I'll be very glad to. Now, let's try the shoes first."

"Why don't they feel good! Wouldn't know I had a corn, and specially the one on my left toe's been acting up all morning!"

She stood up, tested the new shoes.

"Room to grow in; but they're awful pretty, too. I always had a notion pretty things couldn't be easy. Funny ideas we get." She laughed.

Kathleen stood by, holding the dress. She slipped it over the white head. Its graceful lines fell about the tiny form. The little old lady's eyes brightened, her cheeks filled with faint color.

"Oh, how nice you look!" exclaimed Kathleen, delighted with her success. "Now for the finishing touch—the bonnet."

"Bonnet?" The little old lady hesitated. "Father don't like bonnets. Says they make folks look old."

"Wait and see," smiled Kathleen, putting the little gray bonnet over the white hair. It framed the worn face with gentle lines and made it surprisingly young and pretty.

Kathleen's eyes opened wide.

"You're just like my own mother!" she cried. Impulsively she bent her head and kissed the little old lady. Was there the trace of a tear on the worn cheek?

"Don't dearie, don't cry," begged the little old lady, patting her hand.

"I haven't seen her for five years—my little mother—and you bring back everything to me."

One of the models suddenly opened the door. "Here's an old man looking for your customer, I guess, Miss Nolan."

"Father!" exclaimed the little old lady. "Oh, dear, I hope he won't be disappointed!" She preened herself before a long mirror.

"They told me mother was here," he said, entering hesitatingly.

"Yes, she's here waiting," exclaimed Kathleen briskly.

The little old lady came forward, her face bright, hands trembling.

"Here I am, father."

The old man looked at her.

"Say, mother, you look bully." He picked her up in his arms and kissed her.

"Father! Mind, the young lady's watching!"

"Excuse me, Miss, apologized the old man, abashed. "You see, mother looked just like she used when we was courting—sort of sweet and peaceful. I just had to kiss her."

Kathleen smiled wistfully. Father and mother prepared to leave.

"Now, don't forget, dearie, you promised to come for a visit."

"I surely will!" replied Kathleen, happily opening the door. "Just as soon as I get my vacation in June."

She watched them leave the room and enter the elevator, her eyes still smiling.—Nancy Buckley in Catholic Columbian.

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