

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER
CHAPTER III—CONTINUED
THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF THE STRANGE VISITOR

"Mamma, why these solemn commands? Surely my love for him would make me do all these things without the asking; but since you wish it, I promise to make any sacrifice, no matter how great, which may help him to become the good man you desire to see him."

"God bless you, my darling—my comforter!" The mother's hand rested in benediction on the fair, drooped head, and the mother's kiss sealed the sweet lips which would have promised further.

In the servants' hall that same evening a kind of partying carnival had been held, to honor the departure of O'Connor; and grim Anne Flanagan, Mrs. Courtney's maid, who was to accompany Miss Ellen, participated in the festivities.

O'Connor for thirty years had been a domestic in the Courtney family. Eighteen years before he had headed the phalanx of servants who were drawn up in the hall, to pay due deference to Allan Courtney's young bride, the present Mrs. Courtney, and from that time he seemed to exercise potent authority among his fellow help.

But at length the ominous preparations for the removal of the gangway began, and the hands of O'Connor and Anne Flanagan, to hastily kiss Ellen, who had thrown herself sobbing on a cushion in the cabin, and to press Howard passionately to her bosom, when the utmost limit of her stay was reached, and she was obliged to hurry down the already loosened gangway. She retained her calmness, looking quietly from the pier where she stood, on the preparations, which, to her, seemed to proceed with undue haste, only glancing sometimes, as the creaking of the timbers and the straining of the cordage sounded above the din of bustle on the wharf.

Howard had left the cabin, and now stood on the deck amid a group of men who waited to wave a farewell. His eyes sought that one figure, which stood in the half-drooping attitude on the very verge of the dock, and the steady gaze of mother and son into each other's face continued, till a sob from a poor woman standing near, whose daughter was on board, caused Mrs. Courtney to withdraw her eyes.

When she looked up, the ship was moving majestically out; the hats of the group on deck were doffed—Howard's also—but his head was bowed, and he did not look up until the vessel had glided far past the dock. But his mother looked with burning eyes which would fain have viewed the whole of that long ocean track, while upon her heart was being imprinted that parting scene, with one figure standing out in startling distinctness—the boyish form with its bowed head.

The vessel disappeared from sight at last, and she was about to turn to the carriage in waiting, when a familiar voice whispered in her ear: "You have borne the parting bravely."

She turned, to behold the monastic cloak and low-crowned sombrero of Brother Fabian disappearing amid the crowd.

Sympathizing friends would fain have accompanied Mrs. Courtney home, that they might at least cheer her loneliness for a time, but she gracefully waived their proffers, and returned alone to the great house, whose rooms seemed as desolate as though death had taken one of its inmates. In Howard's apartment, with her head leaning on the bed which she found had so lately pressed, she gave full vent to the anguish so long restrained. While she sobbed, with her hair hanging in disordered tresses upon the pillow, and her cheeks flushed and tear-stained, a domestic came to the door. Receiving no response to his knock, the man turned the knob. Mrs. Courtney started at the sound, and, evidently unconscious of her disordered appearance, at once admitted him.

The strange gentleman, ma'am, is waiting," he said, handing her a white, embossed card, on which was written, in a peculiarly masculine style of penmanship, one word—"Morte."

Forgetful of the curious servant-eyes, which were eagerly noting the singularity of her appearance, she pressed the card to her lips in an eager, passionate way, that at once betrayed the existence of a mystery, which would form but too fruitful a theme of gossip for the servants' hall. Waiting not to arrange her dishevelled locks, nor remove the tear stains from her flushed face, she descended at once to the parlor, followed by the domestic, who, as he passed, glanced sharply through the open doorway, muttering to himself: "It's always the same one that comes."

for a moment he seemed powerless to speak; then endeavoring to reassure his wroth dignity, he rose a little unsteadily, pressing down his peculiarly combed forelocks, as he tremulously replied: "This to me! A fool! I who have been in the family for thirty years, while she has been here only eighteen."

"Long enough to teach me how to hold my tongue!"—and Miss Flanagan, with a prim courtesy walked stiffly from the room.

The old head servant looked after her, shook his head dolefully, and sank into his chair with a very woe-begone expression of countenance. His fellow help sought to make him resume his wonted spirits, but in vain; the convulsions of the ensuing hours were lost upon him, and when he retired he was heard to mutter as he ascended to his room: "O'Connor is only an old fool after all."

The next morning dawned with a heaviness in the atmosphere, which broke at length into heavy, pouring rain, and the chill unpleasantness of the day served to increase the gloom which oppressed the spirit of the Courtneys. A few privileged friends accompanied them to the steamer, and in their presence Mrs. Courtney refrained from betraying aught of the grief which was pressing about her heart like a vice. But at length the ominous preparations for the removal of the gangway began, and the hands of O'Connor and Anne Flanagan, to hastily kiss Ellen, who had thrown herself sobbing on a cushion in the cabin, and to press Howard passionately to her bosom, when the utmost limit of her stay was reached, and she was obliged to hurry down the already loosened gangway. She retained her calmness, looking quietly from the pier where she stood, on the preparations, which, to her, seemed to proceed with undue haste, only glancing sometimes, as the creaking of the timbers and the straining of the cordage sounded above the din of bustle on the wharf.

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He repeated to his fellow servants, when he went below, all that he had seen, upon which the cook, with a very knowing shake of the head, replied: "It was three what the good man, O'Connor said, about the quare people comin' to the house. May God defend the mistress, for she's a lady born and bred."

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"Tell," she said tremulously, "that today has seen, in part, the completion of the sacrifice to which I pledged myself—that my children have sailed for foreign shores, and I have not accompanied them—that I have not seen me distracted with grief, torn with apprehension for the unprotected future of my darlings, and broken-hearted because of the sorrow which has clouded my life. Tell faithfully and truly; omit not a circumstance, even of the outward surroundings; the rain, which made desolate the gloom of the dreary pier upon which I stood. Tell him, must dwell for the coming twelve months or more—the fear of Howard dying in those distant climes. Tell all, and ask if farther proof is required of my endeavor to fulfill the attestations of that solemn pledge."

The stranger answered not. He simply looked, with his expressive eyes, an intelligent assent to her desire, pressed his finger on his lips, to show that the silence which he had maintained on his previous visits might not be broken now, bowed again, in his former deferential manner, drew the cloak, which was fashioned in a foreign mode, closer about his shoulders, and signified his readiness to depart. She accompanied him to the door, waiting on the covered stoop while he descended the steps, and hurried, with his peculiar gliding gait, to the lighted thoroughfare beyond.

It was night when the staunch ship floated into the Liverpool dock, and the darkness increased the confusion of the hurry and bustle of landing; but the lady, who had been waiting with interest for the brother and sister, though the latter's little timid heart throbbed anxiously as she clung to Howard's arm.

Miss Flanagan had wrought herself into a state of excitement about securing the baggage, and her voice more than once sounded in shrill altercation with some official on board. In her breathless anxiety she thoughtlessly clutched O'Connor's arm, appealing to him for some intervention on his part; but the old man replied in his cool, sarcastic manner: "I wonder at you, ma'am, to ax me anything. You must be forgettin' that I'm a fool!"

The irate lady was speechless with rage for a moment. When she recovered her voice, it was to scream into his ear in tones hoarse with passion: "So you are; only more of a fool now than you ever were!"

"Well, I hope you'll not be forgettin' it again, ma'am!" and turned away with imperious coolness, quietly superintending all arrangements about the baggage, and making his Irish wit and forethought supply his lack of knowledge of the manner in which such business should be transacted. And that same Irish coolness and sagacity secured the desired ends of the party as well and quickly as a keen knowledge of such affairs accomplished like results for the other passengers.

Even much-offended Miss Flanagan found herself at length comfortably lodged in a sumptuous hotel, with the tickets requisite for the delivery of her baggage in her careful possession.

The "Grosvenor House," to which the children's English letter of introduction was addressed, was situated in the aristocratic West End, London, and bore upon its imposing front unmistakable evidence of the wealth and grandeur of its inmates. There was an air of the English baronetcy about the coat-of-arms which surmounted the elaborately adorned portico; a reminder of the English party in the very domestic who conveyed the Courtney name to the fair mistress of "Grosvenor House," while about the darkened reception-room, into which the brother and sister were ushered, was an oppressive air that might have been derived from the massive grandeur of the furniture. Into this state apartment, with its courtly appointments, glided, in a few minutes, Lady Grosvenor, the lovely mistress of "Grosvenor House." Her beauty was of that indescribable type which seems to derive little from the adornment of dress, and though thirty-five years had left slight traces of her care on her brow, she still retained the lightness and delicate grace of early youth. Her white, jewelled fingers hurriedly unfolded the introductory missive, and her kindly eyes glanced over the brief contents, which touchingly referred to the friendship of by-gone days.

"Oh," she said, on concluding the gracefully-written epistle, "the dearest one of my girlhood's friends transmits to me the care of her treasures," and placing an arm about Howard's neck, she drew him to her with almost as loving a pressure as her mother might have given.

"You are her counterpart," she said to Ellen, kissing again and again, the latter's white brow.

"Long ago we were dear and intimate friends; your mother, who was Mary Ashland then, and I—yes, twenty years ago," transferring the arm, which rested about Howard's shoulders, to the closer support of Ellen's slight form, "your mother was but little older, and little taller grown than you. We have not met since her marriage, but we have been faithful in writing to each other, and now at last an opportunity has arrived for the redemption on my part of early friendship pledges."

Her tender, kindly words were but the heralds of kindlier, more loving deeds, and Howard and Ellen Courtney soon found themselves as much the petted inmates of the English domicile as they had been the cherished darlings of their own American home. There were two other members of the Grosvenor family—the stern, haughty Lord Stanwix Grosvenor, whose demeanor never relaxed its stiffness save when in the presence of his wife, and the only son and heir to the Grosvenor title and estate, Malverton Grosvenor. The latter was a lad about Howard's

age, with his mother's face, save that the delicacy of feature was strengthened by a manly contour, and with much of his father's courtly reserve. One would almost have inferred from the grave demeanor which usually characterized his actions, that manhood's modicum of sense and thought had already enriched his youthful mind. On his introduction to the young strangers, he had bowed with his father's courtly grace, smiled his mother's rare, peculiarly beautiful smile, clasped their readily extended hands with an affectionate grasp, and allowed his fine eyes to rest an unwonted time on the lovely, blushing face of Ellen Courtney.

It was not a difficult thing to win at once from each member of the family the affectionate friendship which was eagerly bestowed, and the great state rooms were opened with brilliant eclat for the reception of the guests who might contribute to the pleasure of the youthful guests. The brother and sister enjoyed the novelty of English modes and pastimes, and were charmed with the interesting and varied sights which they were shown each day, though Howard's appreciative mind delighted more in the scenes to which history has given a vivid and touching interest. Ellen was happy, because her watchful eyes detected in her brother signs of rapidly returning health and strength; the spiritual look was vanishing from his countenance; he no longer grew tired so soon when he walked, and was already strong enough to spend part of the afternoon in the fine park attached to the mansion, engaged in some athletic game with Malverton. She wrote home glowing accounts of these joyful tokens—accounts that sent Mrs. Courtney to her knees, while she offered such thanksgivings to God as made her tremulous with their fervor.

That loving little heart in the courtly English home was not to be drawn from its promised allegiance by all the splendor which Lady Grosvenor gathered about her. English society spoke of the beauty of the youthful American heiress as something which promised to be exquisite, of her mastery touch on the piano as extraordinary in one so young, of her pure, fresh voice as something which even connoisseurs pronounced marvellous, and the flattering comments reached Ellen Courtney's ears, but her very being was so engrossed with that of her brother that she regarded the complimentary speeches as things which were spoken of another than herself, and her naive modesty lent a new and additional charm to her winning demeanor.

Lord and Lady Grosvenor were strict and high church Protestants, but each Sabbath the costly family equipage conveyed the children of their friend to the Roman Catholic place of worship.

TO BE CONTINUED

MOTHER'S HOLIDAY

SHOWING HOW SELDOM CHILDREN REALIZE THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO MAKE SATURDAY A HOLIDAY FOR MOTHER

Geraldine Ames in Extension Magazine

It was really a very lucky thing that Father broke his leg. We did not think so at the time, for we knew it meant extra steps for Mother, and we were so anxious about Mother. But when Father had improved so that he could hobble out of bed and sit in the big green leather-bottomed chair, with his leg propped up on a pillow, we made the discovery that it was a fortunate accident.

I was down stairs early last Saturday morning—and my sister Millie came down soon after. Of course, Mother had been downstairs for ages. She was baking the bread and setting the table when we got there. Millie works in the box factory in the village and she was primped up something unusual for Saturday.

"Mother, dear, put me up a nice lunch with some hard-boiled eggs, will you? We girls are going from the shop right down to the lake grove for a picnic and some dancing in the pavilion for our half holiday."

"Yes, dear," said Mother, and she got out extra eggs and set them to boiling and began cutting thin slices of bread and slicing some cold meat for sandwiches. Then she made a little quick frosting to put on the sponge cake to make it look good. Being Saturday, of course, I didn't have to go to school, and I was planning to take my wheel and go into the country for some botany specimens, so I naturally asked Mother to make up two lunches while she was about it.

When Bobbie came downstairs he sounded like a whole class letting out for recess. He was dragging his baseball bat thump-e-ty-thump on the stairs and shouting at the top of his voice. Mother rushed to the kitchen doorway and opened the door.

"What is it, Bobbie?" she asked, looking worried and flushed with her baking. She was trying to get breakfast ready for Millie to go to work. "Is breakfast ready? Ma, is breakfast ready?" Bobbie was calling.

"Just a minute, dear," Mother replied, and I noticed that Father had hitched his chair over rather close to the sitting-room door.

"The Comets is going to play a double-header with the Bridge team," Bobbie informed us. "I'm catcher for the Comets and I've got to hurry to practice. It's going to be a great game. Say, Ma, where's my mitt? I left it right there," and he gave a broad sweep with his hand.

"Where, dear?" asked Mother, pausing, as she tested a loaf of bread with a broom straw.

"O, right round here somewhere," said Bobbie. "Say, I can't never keep anything. Where is it, Ma?"

Mother looked behind the kitchen table and in the wood-box and finally found it in the shed where Bobbie had tossed it the night before, then Bobbie sat down at the table and kicked the chair impatiently. Millie also sat down and looked impatiently at the clock, while Mother hurried as best she could, and served the oatmeal.

"Say, Jerry"—Millie always calls me Jerry—"say be a good kid and let me take your school lunch-box, will you? Mine doesn't look fit to take out to a picnic, anyway, I've lost it."

"I should say not," I exclaimed, indignantly. "I'm going to take my lunch, too, to-day, you heard me ask Mother to get up my lunch, didn't you?"

"But, Jerry, this is a picnic and you don't want me to go with a dinner-pail, do you?"

"I'll hunt up something for you," Mother said to me. She found a little pasteboard box, but she had to go to the attic to get it.

"Aren't you ashamed, Jerry, to let Mother climb those two flights of stairs?"

"I didn't think," I protested. "You never do."

"Nor you either."

"Shs, quarrelling children!" Mother expostulated, as she came into the kitchen. "There, you can throw it away after lunch and not have so much to bother with."

"And Mother," broke in Millie, "would you have time to do up my white waist this afternoon, I want it to wear to church tomorrow?"

"I'll try, dear," was mother's reply. "And say, Ma, I haven't got a clean blouse, have I, for Sunday?" piped up Bobbie.

"Of course you have, Bobbie," said Mother.

"I meant the one with brown stripes, I want to wear my brown suit tomorrow because I'm going to Eddie Well's after church for dinner."

"I'll wash it out and iron it for you this afternoon," Mother promised, as she cleared away the oatmeal dishes and put on the eggs, bacon, and biscuits and poured the coffee.

"I can't go to church tomorrow," I said.

"Mercy, why not, child?" asked Mother.

"Because I haven't a decent hat. You said you would put that blue ribbon in my hat and line it."

"I—I'm afraid I've been a little busy," said Mother, flushing, "but you shall have it, Jerry, in time for church."

"Heavens, look at the clock," shouted Millie. "Please hurry, Mother, with my lunch, and where's my pocketbook?" Mother went in the sitting-room and found Millie's pocketbook on the mantel, but the lunch in my school lunch-box, and sighed. Millie grabbed it and with a "goo-ty" dashed out of the house. Bobbie got up and looked at the books behind the kitchen door.

"Where's my cap? My baseball cap with the red and gray stripes on it?" Say, Ma, where is it?"

"I don't know, child," said Mother, but arose from the table—she hadn't taken a bite yet—and went into the sitting-room, then out in the shed, back into the pantry, and finally found it behind the sewing-machine, on the floor.

"All ri, I'm down in Smith's field all day, be back for dinner, though. Don't forget my brown striped blouse, and Bobbie in his baseball cap, dragging his hat, and flourishing his mitt, ran out of the house, slamming the door as he went. Then Nellie came down. She's the baby, only six, and Mother started to comb her hair, but stopped to hunt up the oil-can for me as I wanted to oil my wheel. Then she found some stouter string and tied up my lunch. She promised to iron my blue hair ribbons to match my hat. When I left she was lifting Nellie up to the table. Mother was very careless about eating, for she hadn't stopped to eat a thing. But I got out my wheel from the front hall, and went away for the day. That was last Saturday week.

Yester-day was Saturday, too. I was awakened by Father shaking me. By this time he could get about very well on his crutches. "Hush," he said, "dress and come downstairs right off and be quiet about it." He commanded Millie to likewise. I tell you we were scared. We got down into the kitchen and Bobbie was there, yawning and rubbing his eyes and complaining. I commenced to cry because the first thing I thought was that Mother had died in the night. There was no fire in the stove and the table wasn't set. I never before in my life came downstairs in the morning and found no fire nor the table set.

"Where—where's Mother?" asked Millie, and she was very white. I guess she was scared, too.

"Mother's asleep," said Father firmly, sitting down in the kitchen rocker. We stared at him, then at each other, then looked at the clock. It was only half past five.

"O, she'll be right down," said Millie. "She's always down by half-past five."

"No, she won't," said Father, sternly. "I made her promise not to get out of her bed until seven o'clock this morning."

"Goodness, I've got to be in the box-shop at half-past eight," said Millie.

"I wanted to get started for Florie's by seven," I said, "we were

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