

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XXIX. THE FRUIT OF FAITH

Sunday morning broke bright and beautiful, emblematic, Ellen imagined, of the course which her brother was that day to begin, and deep and varied were the emotions with which mother and daughter knelt in the old family pew in the Cathedral, and lifted their eyes to the altar on which the son and brother were so soon to appear.

The organ tones—grand, glorious—swelled through the edifice. The venerable Archbishop himself in full robes, came on the altar, but amid the clergymen by whom the prelate was attended, Ellen's eyes beheld only Howard.

The Mass begun. Never had Ellen Courtney's soul bowed itself in such ecstatic fervor and joy—never had prayer ascended so swiftly and so eloquently from her heart. The gospel was read—fervently as the young priest himself in surplice and stole, at the foot of the altar, was praying for grace and guidance, was Ellen uniting her petition to his that Heaven might direct his words. Knowing her brother's talent, she feared for his humility—she was not aware of the course of discipline to which Howard had already subjected himself in order to subdue any remains of his vanity.

Perchance for the moment that the young clergyman surveyed the congregation before he began to speak, his mind reverted to the time when he addressed other audiences—when he sought to inculcate principles whose reverse he was this day to proclaim—for his face wore a strange expression, and his manner, for a moment or two, was that of one who is partially absorbed in a melancholy reverie.

He began. There was no straining after oratorical effect; there was no desire to captivate the senses by brilliant declamation; there was no startling, splendid rhetoric, but there was an appeal which touched the hearts of all present as they were rarely wont to be touched; there was a flow of eloquence which darted into their souls, and opened up to new life the springs of repentance for lukewarmness in the faith for a compromising with maxims opposed to the spirit of the Church, and there was a drawing of pictures of the various infidelities of the soul which brought the tears to many eyes.

How every word had burned into his sister's soul! How she had drunk in his presence, and hung, as it were upon his very gestures! She could listen now and admire and applaud; and, as in the years gone by tears had been her applause for his efforts so now, also, were tears her applause; but they were happy tears.

The Mass was concluded, and all too soon to satisfy the entranced hearts of mother and daughter. Their peans of praise and gratitude would have continued long after the last devotional strain had ceased. There was one equipage beside the Courtney carriage which continued to wait near the Cathedral after the congregation had dispersed. It was occupied—for a head was frequently thrust from one of the windows, and anxious glances directed towards the church door.

Howard, reprieved from attendance at the Archbishop's residence till the following day, was free to return home with his mother and sister, and he sent to apprise them of that fact while they still knelt in prayer. So they waited for him to leave the vestry, and the three came down the church steps, and entered the carriage, which rapidly drove off. Then the other equipage, as if it also had only waited the coming of the Courtneys, departed, but more slowly, taking the same direction, and arriving at the old house on the Battery a little after the mother and her children had entered. Two gentlemen alighted from the carriage—both remarkable from their personal appearance; the one because of his fine form and face, the other because of the peculiarity of his looks; and one of them gave the bell a sharp, loud ring.

The master of the house had returned!

CHAPTER XXX. THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

The master of the house had returned. The heart which had so long hungered for his presence was having its fill now—for a wife so long deserted lay upon her husband's breast, her heart beating against his own, her arms tightly clasping his

neck. Son and daughter had withdrawn. They deemed that meeting too sacred for even their presence. No word broke the silent but passionate tenderness of that embrace. Mrs. Courtney's heart was too full to speak or to reply, had any loving murmur from her husband's lips reached her ear, and she could only clasp him as if never again would her arms encircle him. The time seemed unusually long to the two burning hearts which waited in the adjacent apartment; but at length the door was flung back, and father and mother stood on the threshold. It required no introduction—it required no bidding to excite to the embraces which followed.

Ellen, with her own generous self-denial, lingered behind her brother that he might be first clasped to his father's heart; but Howard, with equal generosity, drew her forward with himself encircled both.

"Do you recognize the stranger whom you met in the grounds of Ashland Manor?" Mr. Courtney asked of Ellen.

"Perfectly," she answered. He turned to his son: "I heard your sermon to-day, my boy, and—his voice trembled slightly—"I am proud of my son."

"Then you also were in the church?" asked Mrs. Courtney, who had again taken possession of his arm.

"Yes," was his reply, "your message yesterday was faithfully delivered to me. From that I learned that my son would preach to-day in the Cathedral, and I waited to hear him ere I would permit myself to meet him."

He extended his hand, and once more the young priest grasped it in all the fulness of filial love. Then Mr. Courtney turned as if searching for some one whom he had only then missed.

"Cawnor," he called, and in a moment the singular garbed form presented itself in the doorway, having emerged from some portion of the hall to which he had retired unobserved, in the first excitement of the meeting. His eyes were glistening as they had done the day before, as if he also sympathized with the joy of the occasion.

Mr. Courtney approached him, and seizing his hand drew him forward. "My faithful, faithful servant," he said, "to whom I owe more than one debt of gratitude. You can speak now, Cawnor, there will be no necessity to be dumb any more."

The sparkle in the stranger's eyes increased; he bowed to Mrs. Courtney, and with a smile that seemed to transform his features and make them almost handsome, he said: "Me hope Missec forgive me for no speak before. The sahib"—with a gesture towards Mr. Courtney—"no permit; but now me wait to do all the commands that Missec have said."

His speech was somewhat startling to Ellen, but to Howard it at once proclaimed the Hindoo origin of the stranger. Mr. Courtney desired his immediate introduction to the help, and for that purpose, as well as to gladden the old man's heart, Mrs. Courtney rang for O'Connor, admitting him when he came, without any previous information to her husband's presence.

The poor old domestic, in his joyful bewilderment, cried like a child. "Oh, Mr. Courtney!" he said, "that I've lived to see you home again—that you're not dead after all—and that the mistress can leave off her mourning. Oh, I am so happy!"

"Thank you, my faithful old fellow," was the warm reply—and the master of the house shook repeatedly the withered hands in his grasp.

Anne Flanagan was then summoned to meet the returned master. Perhaps the woman feared the return of unholo feelings when she should again behold him who had once been so unhappily loved, for she hesitated slightly, even when Mrs. Courtney herself ushered her into the presence of her husband. But there was no occasion for fear. Honest love, which Owen Renehan's generous faithfulness had begotten, had excluded every other passion, and she clasped the master's hand and looked into the master's face with only the purest feelings in her soul.

The Hindoo, at once recognizing in Anne the woman whose pursuit he had evaded in Florence, and checked in the suburbs of Dublin, began, as soon as Mr. Courtney had ceased speaking to her, to make her a grave salaam, and to signify to her that he desired now to be friends. But Anne was too much embarrassed to interpret his motions aright, or, indeed, to pay marked attention to them, until, in company with him and O'Connor, she had descended to the servants' hall.

Mrs. Courtney spoke of her brother-in-law, and of the sacred life he had assumed. Her husband started, and a sudden flush overspread her countenance. She told further of her promise to acquaint Brother Fabian when the master of the house should return, and she asked if she should then transmit the news to the religious. Mr. Courtney bowed his head, but did not speak, and a messenger was dispatched to the Brother.

The wife's heart panted to say, to ask so much, and to answer questions which she fancied should be asked, but her husband constantly directed the conversation so that Howard was compelled to maintain the flow. Certainly it was right and natural

thorn which has probably stung you to leave her; I, Mrs. Courtney—unable to conquer my unhappy passion, brooding over my outraged affections, maddened by the sight of another enjoying the love which had once been pledged to me, poured into your husband's ear the story of your broken troth." Mrs. Courtney's face grew as white as the snowy handkerchief about her neck. "I showed him your tender, passionate letters, and I repeated the vows you had made to me. I did not tell him that you had pledged me to free you from your promise because he possessed your best and truest love; I left him to infer that you had ruthlessly broken your engagement without warning to me, or scruple upon your own part, and that, rather than mar his happiness, I had borne my pain in silence and secret. The poison entered his mind. His wife had been false to her lover—could she be true to her husband? I was to tell him that which fed his jealousy was but the outpouring of your gratitude to me. You imagined that I still nobly kept your secret, and you were but striving to be grateful, while your heart was as fondly your husband's as even that deluded husband could wish.

Heavy drops of perspiration stood on Allan Courtney's face, and his eyes, which sought his wife, had the wild stare of one who has just awakened from some horrible dream. "I left this house in order that excitement abroad might allay the restlessness of my unhappy soul, but every pleasure, as soon as I grasped it, turned to ashes and bitterness. In one of my travels I encountered a saintly old priest. He seemed to have some strange power of reading people's hearts, for he read the wild unrest, the misery in mine, and something about him calmed and soothed me as no other companionship, no other influence had ever done. He urged me to become a monk, and I determined to renounce all kin—to be dead to everything in my past life; this was the reason that you ceased to hear from me. I was transferred with some of my associates in religion to one of our schools in this city, and there, one morning you came with your son. I thought by your mourning dress that you were a widow, and I could not repress a certain anxiety to learn about your husband's death. I heard your story; it conveyed more to me than you imagined; from it I felt that the reason which your husband had assigned to you for his separation, was not the true one—that that separation sprung from the misery with which I had filled his mind. It was sufficient to make me watch Howard, to mark the bent of his young mind, to look for inclinations which might justify your hopes, with an interest to which I imagined I had been wholly free. Then sprung up a carnal affection for a young, compelling me to obtain permission to visit him in his illness, and it stung me into sharp anxiety when that illness seemed to take a fatal form.

"You deemed me stern, unfeeling, and desirous to harrow you by remembrances of your broken troth. Woman!"—his voice sank to an indistinguishable pathos—"it was the struggle to repress emotions which the sight of your anguish, of which I felt I was the cause, and the evidence of your devotion to a husband who had apparently so cruelly deserted you, caused to bubble within me for fiery vent. I had imagined that I was wholly dead to ties of kindred, to every living joy before you crossed my path again. I had then to learn that man dies not so easily to himself, and that I, having proudly presumed on acquiring in a short time that which in others had taken long lifetimes to accomplish, had miserably failed in the very first lessons. My heart once more ran riot with passions that ragged the better, because my will kept them back.

"In the depths of my unhappy soul I questioned the very justice of Almighty God, who permitted you to suffer while He tore not the mask from me—while He punished me not for deferring to proclaim the part I had taken in poisoning your husband's mind—and I dared to doubt that He would reward in this world long suffering and patience.

"When I refused to encourage the hopes you entertained of Howard, when I sought to perplex and to cause you to be hopeless, I did it to test your faith. Mine—I, who wore the very garb of religion—was not as strong as yours, and it needed more of the mysterious workings of Him Who mercifully condescends, even when His creatures presume to question and doubt—for a moment he lifted his eyes with an awe-inspiring reverence—to convince my heart of its errors. I was appalled at the strength of your wifely affection. I refused to believe that you would still adhere to the pledge you had given your husband, when such adherence must involve a parting with your children, and I obtained per-

mission to visit the pier on the day that they sailed, to see if your mother's love would not yield at the last moment. Because of that pledge, you forbore to join your children abroad, even when I counselled you, under pain of retribution for neglect of duty, and from that stern adherence, from that unconquerable devotion, my miserable soul drew this lesson: If poor, perishable humanity could be thus strong to suffer, thus patient to wait, thus hopeful to confide, that its desires might be accomplished—if human love could endure so much, and be so true, what must be the Divine love, which I had hitherto so imperfectly known and so blindly resisted? And that Divine love—his voice sank to tender an accent that for a moment it seemed tremulous with tears—"manifested itself to me. Almighty God, in His own inscrutable way, has rewarded, even in this world, faith and patience and human love. Your happiness"—he bowed slightly to Mrs. Courtney—"was at hand. I asked to be apprised of your husband's return, that I might come and make this late atonement." He turned to his brother: "As I once led you to believe that your wife's heart was not yours, so I now proclaim that never were wife's affections more fully her husband's than were Mary Ashland's yours, Allan Courtney. It"—he straightened his form to its noble height—"my tale has closed within your embrace which gushed up on my entrance; if there are any among you"—turning his eyes rapidly from one to the other of his listeners—"who shrink from and condemn me, as one whose life and thoughts were not in accord with his sacred vocation, let such remember that He"—once more he reverently raised his eyes—"has not administered His justice yet, but has graciously given me time for atonement, and let that mercy induce others to forgive and forget."

He ceased, the flush caused by the excitement of his words fading slowly from his countenance, and his eyes looked wistfully, as if they would fain beseech a renewal of the advances which he had himself repulsed.

His brother approached him: "It is not you, Francis, who have sinned, but I in listening to and brooding over my jealous thoughts. I who owe reparation to her who I have so long and so cruelly tried, I who move forgiveness for my cruel desertion."

He turned and extended his arms to his wife. She tottered to him rather than walked, and with a great passionate sob she sank upon his breast. Ah! that embrace was more tender and more passionate than any he had yet bestowed. The too-loving wife felt that the cloud which had threatened to overcast her joy was beginning to disappear.

With one arm continuing to encircle the loved form, Allan Courtney extended the other hand to his brother: "You who have also suffered," he said, "I forgive freely, fully."

They clasped hands long and lingeringly; then with a touching air of humility, and with that same low, pathetically tender voice which he sounded as if tears were in it, he asked Mrs. Courtney's forgiveness. It was readily and tearfully granted, and he crossed hurriedly to where Ellen stood.

"God bless you, child," he murmured; "you who have been the faithful guardian of your brother, aye, and God will bless you."

His voice had a singular emphasis, as if it was uttering a prophecy.

He turned to Howard. Then the tenderness which had not broken forth when he clasped his brother's hand, when he looked into the tear-stained face of his sister-in-law, or read in Ellen's countenance an equally intense emotion, gave way; he strained the young priest to him in a passionate embrace, and tears gushed from his eyes.

All present wept, nor were his own eyes quite dry when at length he disengaged himself from his nephew and retired from the room, accompanied by his brother and Mrs. Courtney. In the hall he paused a moment, as he had done on the occasion of his visit to Howard ten years before, and murmured, though inaudibly: "Then I wondered when next I should stand here—now it is for the last time."

He hurried his farewell, as if he had some strange distrust of himself; and they watched him go down the stoop, and up the street, loth, as it were, to lose sight of him, though they knew not then that it was the last time their eyes should ever behold Brother Fabian.

TO BE CONTINUED

INCESSANT SLAUGHTER MAY BRING EARLY PEACE

In the four years of our Civil War the total number of Northern soldiers killed, wounded and taken prisoner was only 400,000, yet the whole nation was crushed there before the South was defeated for the cessation of hostilities, says the Ave Maria. Europe has suffered losses twenty-fold greater. It may well be that, in face of national ruin, the soldiers and civilians of one or another of the countries in conflict may compel their ruler to make sacrifices which at the beginning of the War would not for a moment have been considered, and to accept terms which at any later period would have been rejected with scorn.

IN THE SUNDAY PROCESSION

Sheila had been in America three years, long enough to have become used to American ways, but not long enough to have lost her Irish roses or her love for Irish hills and the gay strand her feet had known so well. The spring always set old desires and old yearnings tugging at her heartstrings—yearnings she felt would forget and which most resolutely she kept down during the rest of the year. But when the grass took on a vernal brightness and the birds began to sing, it was Irish thrushes she saw flying over the white thorn hedges and wistful Irish skies arching above the dear and homely hills. Under such skies and beside just such blooming hedges she had walked with Terence when life seemed to promise nothing beyond those kind familiar scenes she felt would forget and which most resolutely she kept down during the rest of the year. But when the grass took on a vernal brightness and the birds began to sing, it was Irish thrushes she saw flying over the white thorn hedges and wistful Irish skies arching above the dear and homely hills. Under such skies and beside just such blooming hedges she had walked with Terence when life seemed to promise nothing beyond those kind familiar scenes she felt would forget and which most resolutely she kept down during the rest of the year.

It was a Saturday in May, the busiest day possible for the army of clerks in the big Market Grocery where Sheila worked. The store was crowded all morning. People about the counters besieging the jaded, nervous hurried clerks with their orders, and impatient at the slightest wait. Sheila, nimble of foot and hand and with a ready quiet smile, was a favorite among the customers and was always trying to supply the wants of two and three at a time. She was waiting on Mrs. Glenn, a regular customer whom she knew pretty well, and who had asked for something in the way of prepared ginger which was kept in the rear of the store. Discussing the relative merits of the different jars brought out for inspection, Sheila glanced idly toward the front, where disappearing through the door she saw a figure that had a strangely familiar look. Her hand closed tightly on the jar she held, as the man paused as though waiting for someone, looked back into the store an instant, and then stepped slowly out of her sight. How much he looked like Terence! How much! She was quite pale as she turned to Mrs. Glenn.

"Aren't you well today, Miss Sheila?" the latter asked kindly. "Oh, yes, thank you, Mrs. Glenn," the color coming back in a hot flood. "You're tired then," the customer insisted. "This is a hard day, I know."

"I'll have a good rest tomorrow," the girl answered smiling. Mrs. Glenn looked at her more keenly. She looked fragile, the poor child, and it was a hard life—she took a quick look at her watch, and "Why not come to me tomorrow, Miss Sheila?" she asked. "You have promised to come some Sunday, you know. I shall be alone and will be very glad to have you."

"Oh, Mrs. Glenn!" Sheila's eyes shone with delight. "I'd love to come. The lonesome thoughts come over me sometimes, and—"

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Glenn said softly, as the girl paused. "But we'll have a nice time together. I'll send after you to-morrow, and to-morrow we'll go to High Mass at the Cathedral. Good-bye, my dear," and she was gone leaving Sheila with a warm glow about her heart and a new impetus to prosecute her work with dispatch and earnestness.

It was late when she reached her boarding place and she was very tired. There, however, refreshment more than food awaited her in a letter from a girl friend "at home in Ireland," a long letter full of news and pleasant gossip, and something rather startling at the close. "I'll send you up a postscript," that Terence Ward went to America after all, and not to Australia as it was given out when he went away. They say it's in California he is. I suppose it isn't the way you would be meeting him at all?"

Sheila devoured the words again and again. Terence in America—Terence not so far away as she had thought him! It could not be possible! Then a quick memory assailed her—what familiar figure in the morning—could it be? But of course not—didn't the letter say he was in California? And she knew, if her correspondent did not, that California was almost as distant, at least as far as she was concerned, as was Australia. Still he was here—here in America! Her heart began to beat suffocatingly and she hurried to the window and threw up the sash, leaning far out that the breeze might cool the flame in her hot cheeks. The insistent noises of the street rushed up to her—the roar of traffic, the cries of children playing, and curiously enough almost instantly stilled the loud clamor of her heart.

"What if he is?" these alien noises appeared to ask; "what if he is? He is nothing to you, near or far—"

And remembering their parting Sheila was constrained to admit that this was true; but all night her dreams were confused and troubled, and all night in the midst of them a lost footsteps walked beside her own.

It was quite a different view which met her eyes when she opened them in the morning from that which usually greeted them. The bright pleasant room with its gay hangings and pretty curtains was a happy contrast to the dingy walls of her small bedroom which crowded against her little cot. The dainty, appetizing

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