

By permission of H. L. Kilner & Co., Publishers, Philadelphia, Pa. GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE

BY FRANCES NOBLE CHAPTER XVI.—CONTINUED

Perhaps Stanley, with his quick observation, saw that the last remark, laughing and kindly as it was, embarrassed Gerty; for he said at once, going nearer to her: "She says she is quite well, Lady Hunter; mustn't we believe her?"

"Oh! if you are going to elect yourself her champion against me, I'll leave you, I think, Stanley," And she moved away with a smile, seeing that the rest of the gentlemen were coming in, and that it would no longer excite remark if Stanley were left to devote himself exclusively as he liked to Gerty.

"Miss Mannering," he said, as she took a seat by her side, "you made me a promise, when we parted in London, to be glad to see me when we should meet again here. You have not told me yet whether your promise is kept—whether you are glad to see me. Let me hear you say so, Miss Mannering."

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Graham," he said, with a shy trembling in her voice, but with the old confidence coming back to her as she grew accustomed once more to his presence. "Thank you; now I am satisfied," he replied, in a tone that again spoke volume to the happy listener.

"I wonder if the last three months have passed as slowly with you, Miss Mannering, as they have with me. Hardly, with a home and father loved like yours. If you knew how long the time has been to me!"

Gerty could not tell him what those past months had been like for her—of their weary yearnings, their doubt and care; of the tacit alienation they brought between her and those so dear to her; she could not tell him that the beloved home of which she spoke could never be the same to her again. She could only smile and turn aside to try to hide her deep blush from her companion, who saw it, however, and began to talk to her freely on all subjects, as he had been wont to do in London, drawing her on to do the same, until every vestige of timidity vanished, and she was charming him again with the merry artlessness with which she abandoned herself in her joy, with no effort in it now, as there had been in it so often, nay, always, latterly at home. She asked Stanley all about his stay in Nice, listening to every little detail, even about his old invalid uncle, with an interest which would have amused him had it not been so very sweet and precious to his proud heart.

"After all, you must have been very quiet and lonely sometimes too, Mr. Graham. No wonder the time seemed so long," she said simply, and then blushing again at her own last remark.

"But Stanley only laughed kindly. "Yes, I was very lonely sometimes, quite home-sick, I assure you; and I feel yet like a school-boy home for the holidays after it. You should have been with us yesterday, Miss Mannering. Lady Hunter was lamenting your absence nearly all day. But you scarcely liked to be away from home on Christmas day, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! I could not have left papa alone, you know, for anything. I feel cruel enough at having left him at all, though he will never let me say so." And Stanley thought he saw her lips quiver slightly as a sad shadow passed over the bright face. "We always go together to midnight Mass, you know, and two or three times to church again afterwards during the day." And she spoke with gentle, instinctive hesitation now. "It would not seem like Christmas day to papa if we were not together for all that, all those—duties, you know, Mr. Graham."

Gerty did not look up quickly enough to see the shade that crossed her companion's face—the frown, half-painful, half-perplexed, that contracted the perfect features, marring their beauty for an instant, but which was changed for a smile, tender though somewhat sad, Gerty thought, when she raised her eyes to meet it, and which was all the reply he made to her last observation. Perhaps for a brief space there arose within her a wish that he had replied more freely and sympathetically, as he did to her every other slightest remark; perhaps that deep-buried fear, forgotten for the last happy hour or two, strove to assert its existence, but only for an instant; both wonder and fear were quickly driven away again, drowned by the inner joyous sound that seemed sounding in her heart.

evidently thought he had devoted himself already too long to Lady Hunter's cousin, pretty and fascinating as she was; so that for the rest of the evening Gerty was fain to be content with watching him when she could do so unnoticed, regarding the noble, graceful figure as it moved about the room, every other looking so inferior—even that of dear old Sir Robert himself—to that of her "knight," her beautiful ideal of some chivalrous crusader of old; content to watch him as he talked to others with his own forcible eloquence, he who had been hearing in talking so long and so absorbingly to her simple little self.

"But when the evening came to an end, then Stanley Graham made his way again to Gerty, for an earnest "good-night," a tender pressure of the hand, more tender still than she had yet known. "Miss Mannering," he said, as he lingered a minute by her side. "Lady Hunter tells me she wants to take us all a very favorite walk of hers in the morning, if this clear weather continues—to a celebrated cavern which is orthodox always to visit when staying at Netherlands." And he smiled as he paused a minute. "Will you let me be your companion during the walk? I have been so often that I am a safe guide, you see. May I look on it as an engagement that you take me for your escort, Miss Mannering?" And though he smiled again, there was an earnestness in his eyes and in his tone that made Gerty's heart beat strangely.

"Certainly, Mr. Graham; you are very kind; I shall be very glad," she found voice to reply. "Thank you, Miss Mannering; you will not forget? Good-night." And he released her hand at last from his lingering grasp, and was gone.

CHAPTER XVII. It was late when Gerty awoke next morning, for she had lain awake for hours during the night, unable to calm her trembling, yet delicious joy; and as she rose quickly she saw that the day was bright and frosty, just what was wanted for the intended walk. Then, as she knelt at her prayers, ere she rose from her knees, she murmured almost aloud, from the very depths of her heart:

"My God! if it is to be as I hope, make me worthy of so much happiness; let me be the means, if it is Thy will, of his coming to know and love Thee and Thy holy Church!" During breakfast she was not near Stanley Graham, but he found a minute to shake hands and wish her good-morning, with an earnest look which she felt was a tacit reminder of her promise. Then she was borne off by her cousin and two or three of the other ladies to Lady Hunter's boudoir, where they stayed chatting until it was time to dress for the walk, for those who wished to go.

"Come down to the hall when you're ready, Gerty; we will wait for you there," her cousin said to her. "I fancy most of the gentlemen are gone on already, and we shall pick them up on the way and make them escort us."

Gerty dressed quickly, wondering where Stanley Graham was, whether he had gone on too, or whether she should find him downstairs waiting for her. She went down to the hall, which she found empty; but in another minute Lady Hunter came down with her friends to claim Gerty as she had promised.

"What, Gerty, all alone, after all! I almost expected to find you carried off; but as no one has taken possession of you yet, you shall honor us, love, at least till we join the rest." TO BE CONTINUED THE FATE OF A SILVER MONSTRANCE One gusty April evening in that halcyon time before the war cloud burst, miser Cummins stood under the tiny gas jet in his shop examining a diminutive clock.

down in the gloom, amongst the osken chests and escriptores, a sonorous voice bayed six reprovingly; but before he had finished a flightily, irreverent soprano above the miser's head sang heedlessly a bar from "Faust," leaving off to hum B flat six times, and then a falsetto from the shop window, as if in mimicry, broke in, and with that came from different quarters a chorus of chimes and strokes, insisting that it was six, which, when they were silent, was further emphasized by a separate hollow bass that seemed to come spectral-like from nowhere in particular.

Quite unaffected by the musical din, old Martin Cummins paced the tiny clock on the shelf behind him. If he were not somewhat deaf he would have heard sounds at the other side of the glass door which would have drawn him there investigatingly, for his suspicions never slept. It was at first a musical chuckle; but, as the chiming in the shop increased, it leaped alive in laughter, so merry and young that it seemed tragic when it changed into a wail as the spectral bass from nowhere boomed. A hushing murmur followed, the wail died into a whimper, and then the knock trembled on the pane again.

"Shove," growled old Cummins from within, and, looking out, he dimly saw a very young face at the glass door. "Shove the door," he directed again explanatorily, and at that the young person shoved, then came in. In her right hand she carried a bulging hold-all; with her left she led something tiny and drooping. She was dressed in black, and was small and slim and round. Her face was pale, for she seemed tired; but her lips were red, her hair was nearly black, except around her brow, where it hung in rich curls.

"Well?" asked Martin Cummins, his bushy eyebrows drawn frowningly over his spectacles, his cold eyes staring at her with no recognition in them. The girl returned his gaze appealingly. "I'm Una Sheerin, sir," she answered. "Oh, aye." His mind had been so afflicted by the thought that he might have secured the little clock at three pounds fifteen, instead of four pounds, but for an interloping bidder, that he had completely forgotten the girl's existence.

Lately, hearing by chance that Una's father—to his mind a worthless journalist—had died, leaving her penniless and homeless, he had invited her to come and be his housekeeper, as he liked having relations or connections in his employ, for he argued that their expectations would keep them honest, and industrious, so as to meet with his approval, and thereby cut a figure in his will. And if they were fools for their pains that was their look out, but his gain. He had not mentioned wages when writing, but she had never met her great uncle—for no other door stood open, and fate was driving her from her own.

When he had received her letter that morning, he at once despatched the char-woman, with whom he had carried on an interminable warfare for years on the subject of soap, coals, candles, and edibles. "Oh, aye," he repeated, shifting his eyebrows upward. "What's that with you, eh? A dog?" "No, sir," replied Una, nervously. "It's Mite, sir."

"Mite!" he echoed. "What's that?" "My little brother Myles, if you please, sir," she answered, staring pleadingly at the miser, and she gripped the tiny hand in her left one. "Oh," he growled, "you have a brother, then." His eyebrows fell down until they hung like a screen before his watery eyes.

"Yes," she returned, "for the past three years, and he's as good—as good"—her voice trembled and vibrated—"as gold." But the miser knew better. No human being was ever a twentieth part as good as gold, or worth one grain of it. Then he remembered that it was just three years ago that his niece died—the fool to marry that beggar, Sheerin!

"But why did you bring your brother here?" he snapped. "I didn't ask him, did I?" "No," the girl answered in a panic, for what would they do if this terrible ogre turned them out? She had only three pounds now in the world. "No, sir; but indeed, indeed, Mite is as good as gold." She could think of no other plea, her heart beat so fast; and Mite's feet danced on the stone floor as, with wide-open mouth and eyes, he tried to see over the counter the big, big man that rattled in his throat like a money-box when he spoke. "I can't feed two o'you," declared the ogre. "I'll give him some of my food, uncle," cried the girl breathlessly. "I don't need much."

Mite must go. I'll never, never, never part from Mite." "Neber, neber, neber!" screamed Mite.

"Um! Drop that noise!" commanded the old man. He saw that he would lose an unpaid servant, and possibly an honest one, if he refused to take the child in. Sighing, he thought of the expense. Still, there was a bright side to this cloud, too. Judging by the kid's appearance he would not be devouring Martin Cummins's substance long. "You can go in, girl," he then said, "and take your brother with you. But you should have told me about him."

"I thought you knew," she returned, trying to restrain her sobs. At the same moment the glass door opened, and a tall young man, who had outgrown his coat sleeves, entered. "That ten minutes of the time I'm paying you for you've filched from me, Michael Conroy," remarked Cummins harshly. "You can sling the hatchet as well as the next."

"Oh," began the youth regardlessly, for his mind was occupied with the dolorous pair before him. "I met Father Donegan, and he gave me a message about the monstrance. "Ugh! I hope he sees how unreasonable he was to expect me to let him have it at what he has offered."

"And he says he hopes you see how unreasonable you are to want nearly double what he has offered, considering the low figure at which you picked it up." "Father Donegan is a cute business man," remarked Cummins, dryly. "The order is poor—you can never carry both."

The last words were addressed to the girl, who had taken the weeping child in her arms, and was struggling at the same time with the hold-all. "Show her in," ordered the miser gruffly, "and hurry out again, and finish fixing that leg on the washstand." In a pitch-black passage beyond the shut door the young man lit a bit of candle, and the girl looked around. There was a chilly, hungry air about the once white-washed walls, and the staircase, gaunt and lanky, springing up several storeys.

"In here," said the young man, and he led the orphans into a disordered kitchen, and fireless. "This is not what you'd call cheerful," said he; "but maybe we'll manage a fire." He placed the stump of candle on a deal table under a window, outside of which cats lurked personalities at each other. "Sit there, please," said he, pointing to a block of wood near the range. Una dropped on it with a sigh of relief, and cuddled Mite against her heart. "The chairs are as you see them," he remarked, diving under the table.

The girl saw the frame of one chair, but the seat was gone. Another leaned drunkenly against a deal dresser. Michael came again to the surface, having retrieved a piece of wood. "This," said he, "is where poor Mrs. Connor, the charwoman, used to hide things. There's a hole in the wall."

"He was giving Una a tip, and now a tamul broke out amongst the felines outside, and from within came a shouted question: "Michael Conroy, what am I paying you for?" "Coming in a minute," laughed the youth, and cracked the wood across his knee. Then, with many cinders and a few coals and bits of paper, he lit the fire, and set a kettle of water over it. "Ah-h," breathed a little voice at his elbow, lully fire. The merry look died out of the young man's face as he gazed at the white-faced tiny thing. "What?" he began, involuntarily.

"He fell, and his spine was injured," replied Una in low tones. "We used to keep a nurse then, and we—father and I—knew nothing about it for a long time; but then the doctor told father that good surgeon could make him straight again." "Did your father try?" asked Michael. "Dr. Brown told father that it would be a long and expensive treatment, and so—"

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