

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ROMANCE OF LOVE

On the evening of Howard's return a strange scene had occurred in the kitchen of Ashland Manor. Dick Monahan, though delighted at the return of his young master, seemed in a perplexed, and, at times, even grieved state of mind. More than once he had hazarded a remark to Anne Flanagan relative to his own supposition, that the brother and sister would speedily depart for America, but that lady had been too much absorbed in her own engrossing thoughts to do more than reply in a monosyllabic and very unsatisfactory manner; and when she left the kitchen, as Dick supposed to retire for the night, that gentleman disposed himself before the fire, and began singing to a very doleful air, but in a rich and clear voice, a portion of an old Irish song:

"Each bush and tree was dressed in green, And valleys in their prime," Anne Flanagan had not left the kitchen to retire, she had gone to ascertain Ellen would require her again that night; and finding that the brother and sister were closeted in the room of the former, she had returned to arrange some detail of work for the morning.

So absorbed was Dick in the strains of his ditty that he did not hear her entrance, and having his back towards the door he could not perceive her. She paused, as if the melody had some strange attraction for her, and, as if the strain was singularly influencing the singer, his voice became replete with tender feeling; it was no longer a mere song—it was the plaint of a heart which had long borne and long concealed its sorrow.

An indescribable expression flitted into Anne Flanagan's face, as if a host of emotions were struggling together for some visible form, and when his voice rang long and sorrowfully on the refrain with which each stanza closed, she sprang forward, startling him into a sudden and awkward rising from his chair. "I know you at last," she cried wildly. "Owen Monahan."

"I have waited long for you to know me," he said, "but it is only the eyes of love that are sharp. I recognized you when I hired with Master Courtney, and ever since I have been looking for some token that would tell that you remembered me. Do you remember the day, over twenty-eight years ago, that in this house I asked you to become my wife? You refused me; afterwards I understood why your heart was in somebody else's keeping; you gave it to them that were too much above you to care for the gift. Maybe you didn't think that I knew this, but, as I said before, the eyes of love are sharp—it wasn't for nothing that your cheeks would redden and your eyes shine every time that Mr. Allan Courtney would chance to speak to you; it wasn't for nothing that I see you sometimes looking at Miss Ashland in a wild, wicked way."

Miss Flanagan's cheeks were as scarlet as ever they had been in their youth, and her eyes shone as much as they could possibly have done at the time of which Dick, or Owen, as was his name by right, spoke; but it was the flush and sparkle of rage—rage that her weakness and her wickedness should have been so well known. "Hear me out," Owen continued, seeing her evident desire to interrupt him. "Listen to me before you speak—God knows I have kept silent long enough. When you went away with the bride you hated, I said to myself that it was little comfort you were putting in store for yourself. You had refused a comfortable home, and the love of a warm heart, and its not always a woman does well when she slight the offer of an honest man. I might have stayed on in my old place, for the people who were used to live after the Ashlands would have kept me, as they kept others of the servants; but the Manor was no place for me then; it was too lone some with all of you gone. I had friends among the fishermen on the shore—the place where I hired with Master Courtney—and I went down there to try to go out of myself, to forget that it was of a woman I was all the time thinking. I took a hand at their labor; the water, and the wind, and the place itself, suited my rough, wild thoughts. I liked the life, and I stayed there. I used to have a queer longing to come back and look at the place where I had seen the only woman I ever cared for, and when the times would be slack I used to come up and have a sad look at the old house. You see, with all my trying, I couldn't forget. I never expected to meet you again, and I little thought, when our boat answered the signal of the French vessel, who it was I was going to see. I wasn't sure, even when I took long looks at you, that it was really you for you were so old, and so faded, and my memory had you still young and fresh-looking. But when you cried so suddenly upon the beach, something seemed to tell me that it was surely you, and that it was your return to Ireland, after so many

years, that brought the tears from you. I was glad, then, of the opportunity to hire with Master Courtney. I didn't give him my own name, for I didn't want to bring myself to your memory in that way till you'd know me yourself first. But you didn't know me, owing, I suppose, to the way that wind, and weather, and rough fare had changed me. I used to think that my speech would betray me, or that the knowledge I seemed to have of the old times must make me remember me. Sometimes you seemed on the point of knowing me, looking straight into your face when in the hotel in Dublin. I was telling Miss Courtney about Ashland Manor; but even then you didn't recognize me: and as you did not, I thought maybe it was better to keep my secret to myself.

"When I heard that the name of the young master I hired with was Courtney, and that the young lady with him was his sister, I judged that they must be the children of Mr. Allan Courtney, and I wondered if Mr. Allan and his wife. I thought they were, when I saw you so affected the day that we visited Ashland Manor and my own heart grew heavy. I was glad then that you didn't know me. "To-night, when the young master returned, it seemed natural to think that he and his sister would be soon going back to America, and I was puzzled to know what in that case I'd do with myself. If Master Howard would keep me, its willing enough I'd go with him; but if he did not need me, and you were all going away, why then I would have to say all that I have told to-night, because—I have been able to put you out of my heart. Maybe I'm wrong again as I was before when I imagined I could make you happy. Maybe it's a queer thing to be saying all this now, when the saying of it twenty-eight years ago did little good. But it's hard to change some men's feelings, and for the five years past that we have been under the one roof, my feelings have been the same as they were in the long-ago when I asked you to be my wife."

He extended his hand. The passion which the first part of his speech had roused in his listener had rapidly calmed. Touched by a recital at once so generous and so flattering to her woman's nature, springs of feminine feeling, which had long been sealed opened to flow more purely than they had done in the old days, when unholty passions held their sway. She put her hand in his grasp, answering while the tears streamed from her eyes: "I am not worthy of all this." But the matter of her worthiness was of little moment to the faithful fellow whose heart she had so long possessed; he only knew that her words, her emotion argued well for his hopes so strongly renewed; and, with a singular feeling of boyish joy, blending strangely with his sober dignity of fifty years, he could scarcely refrain from attempting a more extravagant expression of his joy than that which conveyed in his warm grasp of her hand. "Think of all I have told you," he said, "and give me your answer tomorrow. I would ask it tonight, but I am afraid this has all come so sudden that maybe you would want time to think over it. If your answer should be favorable, and you'd like to go back to America, I'm willing enough to go, for there's nothing to keep me here. If it's the answer that you gave me twenty-eight years ago, then I'll return to my old trade of fisherman."

The last words were uttered so sadly that the spinster's heart was touched anew, and almost unconsciously she pressed the hand she held. Owen's hopes assumed more fervor and his courage rose. "Maybe," he said bending to her, "maybe you could answer me tonight. Which is it, Anne, yes or no?" With all her years, with all her asperity, the erratic spinster was as powerless as the majority of her sex might have been to withstand such an appeal. The magic power of a love which had been so true to its object was as resistless in her case as it would have been to romantic eighteen, and she answered as Owen desired. Then, as if ashamed of the feminine weakness to which she had yielded, she broke from his grasp and hurried to her own apartment, while Owen, too happy to retire to his rest, resumed his seat before the fire to indulge in blissful meditations. Thus love had come once more to the spinster's life, and her forty-six years were tinged with the golden romance which is usually ascribed only to the lightsome period of youth.

CHAPTER XXV

A SAD FAREWELL

The next morning brought a happy awakening to Ellen; almost before she fully opened her eyes her newly-found joy was flooding her heart. Again and again, even while holding Howard's hands in her morning salute, while replying to his loving inquiries, while looking at him across the cozy breakfast table, she had to think was it all true?—was he really there?—would not his delightful presence vanish in a few moments, and making an empty space where he sat, leave her a prey to the old fears, the old sickening uncertainty? But he was there, smiling, and with as rich a flush upon his cheeks, produced by his happy emotions, as that which burned upon her own. Then the joy of the consultation after breakfast, when the arrangements

for their early departure for New York were detailed; the delight of seeing Howard add to the letter to Mrs. Courtney, which Ellen had left unsealed, a postscript stating the time in which the mother might expect the arrival of her children; the telling to Anne Flanagan, when Owen—or Dick, as he was still to the brother and sister—had gone to post the letter, and Howard had retired to read his Office, the wonderful news of Howard's ordination; it was all happiness well-nigh too sweet to last.

Miss Flanagan was scarcely as much surprised at Ellen's communication as at any other time she herself would have expected to be. After the singular change which had come to her own life, she was prepared for almost any tidings. But she rejoiced with her young mistress, though she forebore, through a feeling of womanly delicacy, from telling what had occurred between herself and Dick, muttering when she was alone in the kitchen:

"It will be time enough to tell her—to tell them all, when we're back in New York."

So Owen still remained as Dick, and the faithful fellow's heart was speedily gladdened by a proposal from his master to attend the latter to America.

"I hardly think my mother will find it difficult to obtain employment for one who has so faithfully served her children," Howard said; and Dick bowed his thanks, and hurried to communicate his good news to Anne.

Every arrangement for departure was completed. Ellen had made her round of farewell visits, which consisted of calls in very humble homes, where the inmates knelt to thank and bless her for her goodness, and where heartfelt tears accompanied the sorrowful adieu. Howard, desirous of keeping his presence in Ireland a secret—both because of his having been obliged to fly the country nearly five years before, which fact might now, if his return be publicly known, be unpleasantly remembered, and because of his own wish to escape all notice—had paid no visits, and had even taken the precaution to warn Dick and Anne to secrecy about him. For the same reasons the departure from the Manor took place in the early morning, and before even Granny Cleary, to whom Ellen had bade farewell the night before, was up, the little party were some distance on their destined way.

Nothing occurred to mar or interrupt their journey to the port from whence they were to take passage for New York, and Ellen's heart panted more wildly, and her joy frequently found audible expression as the different stages of the journey were swiftly passed. They were safely on board at last, and Ellen, fatigued alike from her journey and the swell of emotions which had been so wild and unintermitting for the past few days, had retired to her state-room. She was aroused by Howard's voice, who seemed anxious and somewhat agitated.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said, "but a friend is on board—he has come to bid us farewell." "Though no name had been mentioned, the sudden gaspiness which overspread her countenance, and her suspended breath, told that she had divined the identity of the person of whom he spoke.

"You will at least see him this time, Ellen," Howard continued. "He is an outcast from his father's house; the doors of Grosvenor Mansion, have been, as he anticipated, sternly closed to him. Lord Grosvenor will not only disinherited, but he now disowns him. When I parted with him in London, I told him from what port we should sail for home, but I could not tell him the precise time, not knowing what your arrangements might be, and I gave him a date in advance of this. He has been here waiting for us, waiting for the explanation I had promised him to obtain. Ellen—lowering his voice to a sad and tender key—he is suffering for that faith which is so inexpressibly dear to your heart and to mine; we are on the eve of bidding him, perhaps, a long farewell. Is this, of all others, a time in which to adhere to some, perhaps pious, but mistaken sense of duty? Surely the resolution you have formed cannot preclude a kind good-by—at least give him that."

"Oh my God!" she cried, lifting her eyes, and her clasped and trembling hands to Heaven, "Thou seest my heart and Thou knowest that I cannot." Her tears choked her further utterance. Her brother grew slightly impatient. "What is the meaning of this, Ellen? If a rational cause exists for your acting in this manner, why do you not tell it?" "I cannot," she moaned, "O Howard! in pity cease to press me, for you are only breaking my heart!" The young priest paused in grave and anxious doubt. "I cannot understand you," he said at last. "And since it distresses you so much, I will refrain. But answer me one question; have you no message, no last word for Malverton Grosvenor?" "None a name."

She turned from him and flung herself in an agony of grief upon the narrow bed, while her brother slowly and sadly retired. Wormwood and gall were mingled with Ellen Courtney's cup of bliss. For the first few moments after her brother's departure, it seemed as if

her whole soul almost rose in rebellion against this keen and bitter trial. But prayer, her resource in every sorrow, conquered even here, and though her heart still ached and her eyes were heavy with tears that she would no longer shed, her demeanor bore naught to betray her recent stormy suffering. But the air of the little confined room was stifling. Hearing the bustle of preparation for departure which the ship's crew were making, she ventured to repair to Anne Flanagan's room, and, leaning on the latter's arm, ascended to the deck for breathing space. Fearing to encounter Howard, lest she should find him accompanied by Malverton, she sought a retired part where she could quietly watch the scene on the quay. The bustle and excitement, everywhere so apparent, drew her somewhat away from the painful tenor of her thoughts, and calmly and silently her eyes roamed over the varied view.

The hour for sailing had arrived. Farewells were tearfully spoken. Friends hurried from the vessel, and in a few moments she was moving majestically out. Then Ellen Courtney's eyes suddenly rested on one form amid the many on the pier—a form that stood motionless, and whose face betrayed only too well the grief, the despair with which a noble manhood had been blighted.

"O my friend!" she murmured, forgetful of Anne's presence—forgetful of everything but the cruel grief by which her soul was wrung, "farewell—a long, a last farewell."

She hid her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud. Anne Flanagan was touched, though at the same time very much perplexed. She had not discerned Malverton Grosvenor's form on the quay, and the thought of him in connection with the grief of her young mistress did not once enter her mind. She gently beckoned Ellen to go below, perchance with the hope that the latter would gratify her curiosity; but though the young girl obeyed, it was only to leave Anne in the same state of troubled wonder, for without vouchsafing a word, she shut herself in her room.

Hope so long and so constantly deferred had painfully told on Mrs. Courtney's appearance. Though still bearing traces of a beauty which in younger days had commanded much admiration, her face had a faded and worn look, like that which might be devoted to unceasing good, and, like Ellen, her soul was also often near to fainting on the thorny path it had set itself to travel. But the hope, nay more, the presentiment that an answer to their prayers would some time be vouchsafed, made her still strong enough to abide in the sorrow and loneliness of her desolate home. Few of her neighbors but had transferred their residences to fashionable up-town localities, and gossip was rife as to what charms the old-fashioned house on the Battery could have for its wealthy mistress. The same gossip had long ago exhausted itself with conjectures about the prolonged absence of the Courtney children. But not a hue of the time-worn building, not an inch of the space it occupied, but was sadly and inexpressibly dear to the heart of the sorrowing mother.

For four years she had not entered the presence of Brother Fabian. Sometimes, in the church in which she was so regular and so devout an attendant, she caught stray glimpses of his stern, gloomy countenance, as he entered or left his monastic brethren, but no more.

After intervals, during the four years, had the Oriental-looking stranger made his singular visits—each time presenting the same card, and each time receiving Mrs. Courtney's message to the effect that her daughter was still in Ashland Manor, her son she knew not where—without doing more than making his usual dumb sign that he heard, and would carefully convey all that she said.

But her years of weary waiting were at last to meet their reward. The mail had come, and O'Connor hastened to bear to his mistress the only letter which ever came for her—she had long dropped every other correspondence. It was the old man's privilege, one which Mrs. Courtney herself, because of his long and faithful service, had bestowed upon him, to wait for the reading of the letter in order that he might hear how Miss Ellen was. He had long since ceased to hear more of Howard than a sadly spoken, "I trust he is well." This time, while he respectfully lingered, he was suddenly startled by a cry from his mistress. With the open letter in her hand—with the color to which her cheeks had long been unused rushing in one wild, mad sweep to her face—with her whole form trembling with the intensity of her joy, she rushed to the old man, catching his hands and ejaculating brokenly:

"Rejoice with me—my children are coming home, and Howard—Howard is a priest!" Her heart was too full of its overflowing joy to utter more, and with one great passionate sob she sank on her knees, and, as Ellen had done, lifted her eyes and hands in voiceless prayer.

Poor, bewildered O'Connor!—he was busily, according to his wont, smoothing down his peculiarly-combed forelocks, as if by that action a clearer idea of the singular state of affairs might be induced to enter his perplexed brain. Howard a priest!—Howard, the reprobate, and the cast-

away—Howard, whom the old man had long since, with all charity, regarded as almost beyond the pale of salvation—he could hardly credit it! But when Mrs. Courtney, having recovered her voice, poured forth aloud her burning gratitude to Heaven, he could no longer doubt the statement, and he too raised his eyes reverently, and murmured softly:

"Surely the Lord works wonders." It was the same remark he made to his fellow-help, when, having given to Mrs. Courtney all the evidence that even she could desire of his joy at the glad tidings, he left her to tell in the servant's hall the good news he had heard; and great was the wonder, and great the rejoicing among the warm-hearted, faithful Irish domestics.

Mrs. Courtney's eagerness to reach the religious house in which Brother Fabian dwelt, could hardly restrain itself. She had ordered the carriage for this visit, feeling that her trembling limbs would be unable to bear her, and, though the vehicle was driven at full speed, it seemed to her to be long in arriving at its destination.

The religious, when he saw her, after so long an absence, evidently expected some startling news, for his face flushed slightly, and, as if to gain time to compose himself, he was unusually long in closing the door on his entrance to the reception room. She could not wait his approach to where she stood, but, hurrying to him, immediately that he turned, she proffered Ellen's letter, crying:

"My hope is realized—read!" With unseemly haste he grasped the missive; he appeared even to tear it open in his eagerness to devour its contents; his cheeks flushed holy, and his hands trembled in such a manner that the letter shook visibly in his grasp while he read.

The mother waited, her head bent forward, her bosom heaving, her lips parted in her eager listening for the first word which should fall from the religious. His eyes, when they turned from the perusal, met her face—her glowing, eager face. His own stern countenance softened; an expression akin to pain, and yet bearing all the semblance of a tender and passionate joy, crossed his features. He turned away, and lifting his cap said, with his eyes reverently raised:

"Thy justice never fails—mysterious and inscrutable are Thy ways; Thou hast rewarded the penitent, the patient, and the believing. Blessed, thrice blessed be Thy name forever." He turned back to the waiting woman:

"Since one hope has been so well accomplished, you have little doubt, I suppose, that the other will be equally fulfilled?" "None!" was the trembling reply. "Something seems to tell me that God, who has already been so good"—she clasped her thin hands together—"will grant my one other prayer before I die."

"When will this news reach—" he seemed about to pronounce a name, but, as if checked by some impulse, he uttered after a moment's hesitation—"him?"

"I know not. When next his messenger comes, I will pray for him to come soon." The Brother bent to her: "When that time arrives—when the master of the house once more takes his place as such—immediately apprise me."

She bowed her head, and he, uttering a rapid adieu, went hastily from the room.

In the carriage on her return, Mrs. Courtney drew from her bosom an ivory case, attached to some slender chain. "At last," she murmured, "I may look at it." And pressing the spring, the miniature likeness of a young and handsome man was revealed. Her tears obscured her vision, and, putting the picture to her lips, she pressed wild and repeated kisses upon it.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE UNWELCOME BABY

Never since their marriage had Nan looked so sweet to Ralph. Perched on the arms of his chair she was preventing him from going to the office, her glowing cheeks, resting so cozily against his head that he could not bear to disturb her until she had told him the secret over which she seemed so mysteriously elated.

At last she whispered it, and leaving the chair prouetted across the room fairly alive with joy. "Just think of it, Ralphie! The most wonderful event in the world is going to happen to us. When Dr. Campbell told me I could hardly believe him. I have always so loved them and now to have one of my very own seems too good to be true. Oh, oh!" delightfully, "what if it should be a boy and have black eyes like yours and—"

each other, he reminded himself savagely. And along comes an atrocious baby to muddle things up. Especially when he had planned a jolly house party for September when his frat brothers were leaving Harvard on their journey homeward. He had engineered this affair just to show off his beautiful wife. But now all was off. No dances, no country club dinners. Just long dreary evenings at home. And after the baby came what did it mean but broken rest, anxiety, and many other responsibilities which he did not care to shoulder! Suddenly he recalled what his mother had told him of his infancy. He had contracted every childish disease going, had convulsions with each double tooth, and had the best or the worst pair of lungs on record. Heavens! What about this heredity dope? What if this baby should inherit all those tendencies? The thought was too much. Jumping from his seat, he seized his cap and rushed to the door.

There a hurt voice halted him. "Ralph," Nan held out beseeching hands. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

For an instant he softened. Then a thought sent their spirit apart. He couldn't rejoice and be honest with himself. He kissed her coldly.

"I don't know what to say. The thing can't be helped, of course. But I'm certainly not keen on babies, Nan."

After his departure Nan sensed the meaning of anguish. It seemed unbelievable that Ralph did not want their little baby. Never since her sure knowledge had the secret been so precious to her. Her head lifted proudly. Well, at least he should hear no more about it. She had looked forward to evenings of planning, to chat about its clothes, and whether it should attend Fordham or Georgetown, and deciding on a name, and all manner of beautiful little things. But now—she would look her disappointment in her heart. He should never know how she suffered. A burst of lonely tears followed this brave resolution which were eventually dried on Mother Baring's shoulder when she stopped in on her way to town and had drawn from Nan the reason for her tears.

Dear Mother Baring understood her boy's intolerance and was able by her sweet counsel to soften the bitterness against him in the young wife's heart.

Absorbed in her sweet dream world the months slipped uneventfully by to Nan. Ralph was very kind but at times she saw him watching her with a peculiar look of resentment. They never mentioned the baby, but she knew it was always on his mind, and not pleasantly. Times there were when she had to excuse herself because of this conviction and seeking her room would cry herself to sleep over it.

Later on came the test of her womanhood. The boys began dropping in to carry Ralph away to the club. And though she did not mind this very much it was their attitude toward herself that hurt. They were all boys with whom she had grown up. Boys who had called her "Nan" all her life. Now she was, "Mrs. Baring!" On St. Valentine's Day, Fred Gibson, who formerly acted as escort to all the college affairs, brought her a bunch of violets. But he seemed surprised and embarrassed when she called him "Fred" and took his hand in thanking him.

To be just to him Ralph always pretended that he did not want to leave her alone, but he could not hide his relief when she urged him to go. She suffered over this but never mentioned her feeling to him. Watching her, Mother Baring often reproached herself over the thought of her reluctance to see Ralph marry Nan. She had been such a pampered girl and was so very pretty that Mrs. Baring feared her extravagance would drag Ralph into debt. But here was this young girl exhibiting a far greater womanhood during a trying period than she herself had shown.

Once she mentioned this to Nan and the girl's lovely eyes filled with tears. "But I am not patient. Sometimes I grow so nervous that—that—Well, I shall not dwell on my feelings. There is always the thought of what I owe to my baby and that knowledge brings me strength."

And then came a night when the doctor was hastily summoned and Ralph was roused from sleep to keep his lonely vigil below stairs and shuddering at the very sounds which now and then floated down from Nan's hours. What a cad he had been. If God would only spare his darling Nan to him he would spend the rest of his life making it up to her. He would show her just the kind of husband and—father he could be.

Father! the word stunned him. Why, even now there might be a little tyke above stairs that would soon be able to call him father. Electrified he sprang up the steps and met the nurse coming from his wife's room with a bundle in her arms. Yes, all was over but he could not go in just yet. Listening at the door he heard Nan's voice and a weary little laugh in answer to something the doctor had said. Contented he wandered after the nurse. She had entered his room. He followed her. She was standing near the door with the bundle still in her arms. She started a bit at his entrance.

Without knowing the reason why his heart contracted. Something uncanny seemed to reach out invisible fingers and clutch him. He moved

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