

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH

Four years had elapsed since Howard Courtney had left Ashland Manor...

It was the summer time again, the season which Ellen Courtney loved, and which, despite the anxiety that gnawed at her heart, had never failed to convey its sweet and delightful impressions to her...

The simple evening meal was concluded. Ellen was arranging some garments for the poor, on which Anne Flanagan and herself had been employed during the afternoon...

The young girl started up in a fright, but ere she could hurry forth to ascertain the cause of the shriek, the door was flung violently open, and some one—her startled gaze was unable to perceive rightly who—dashed across the room...

Anne Flanagan—whose scream had been occasioned by suddenly encountering the young man in the hall, who, finding the front door unfastened, had not waited to be admitted—now entered the room...

Now she stood watching the embrace of the brother and sister with her own eyes rapidly filling, and when Howard, receiving her, went forward—his arm still encircling Ellen—held out his hand with warm words of greeting, the tears streamed down her cheeks...

"I refrained from speaking to you in the hall, as I desired to," he said, "because I wanted to greet my sister first; but now, Anne, I can tell you how glad"—his voice was tremulous from emotion—"I am to see you."

Dick Monahan, passing through the hall, saw and wondered at the little group in the apartment; the door was still open—till his eyes rested upon Howard. Then, waiving his customary deference, he ventured to enter and approach Mr. Courtney with his welcome...

Anne Flanagan soon repaired to the kitchen to furnish a tempting repast, and Dick followed, not certain but that in Miss Flanagan's present state of excitement, he might be able to assist her very materially—and the brother and sister were left alone...

When his anxious questions about his mother had been answered, Howard seemed eager to impart some special news. He drew Ellen to him to tell it with all tenderness, but she put her hand over his mouth...

"Not one word now! When you have taken the refreshment you must certainly need, and when we are alone in your own room, which has always been kept in readiness for you, then you must tell me all; now I want to look at you—to be quite sure that it is yourself in the flesh who are sitting here, and not some myth that will presently disappear. You know it is almost too good to have you back again."

"She would not mention to him, she would not even permit herself to dwell on the horrible fear which, after the first wild joy of his return, sought to over-cast her rejoicings—the fear that he had only returned, as he had promised in his note to do, should his old passions resume their sway, in order to set out anew on ambition's wild and sinful course. She even fancied that it was to make that painful announcement he was so eager now to speak, and she had interrupted him to defer as long as she might tidings, which must turn her joy into mourning; she would not yet disturb the bliss which his presence afforded, let an hour or two hence bring what dismay it might."

He smilingly obeyed her, content to let her gaze devour him, as it were, with its eagerness. He was still

slight, and, though now somewhat flushed from excitement, his face had the thin and worn look of one who had been much confined. But the evidence that the time which had elapsed had brought some and no unimportant change in his appearance, was the manliness by which his whole bearing was characterized—every trace of the boy, of the youth, had vanished forever.

The hour in which she was to hear the tidings she wished, and yet feared to learn, had arrived. The repast, as well prepared as even solicitous Dick could wish, had been partaken of, and the brother and sister were in the room of the former. Still Ellen found pretence of delay at her whole soul so unshared the blighting of its newly-found happiness—Howard's seat was not so comfortably placed as it might be; the lamp was not shaded rightly; the window admitted too great a draft—till he caught her at last, and forced her into a chair beside him.

"How long do you think my patience is going to brook all these delays?" he asked playfully. "I assure you it has quite given out, and I cannot rest till I have told you my tale. Shall I begin at its beginning, by imparting confidence which should have given before leaving you, or shall I tell you at once why I am here to-night?"

A shade crossed her countenance; she felt that her fear was too well founded, that her happiness would soon be shivered; but, still desiring to avert the approaching sorrow as long as she could, she answered faintly:

"Begin at the beginning."

"He folded his arms and sat erect."

"When, eight years ago, I was won by your influence to enter the Propaganda, I found there in my own class a mind as misguided and as vainly ambitious as my own—that mind belonged to Bronson, the victim of our ill-fated Paris club. We became intimate associates, and instead of the sacred lore it was presumed we were imbibing, we were exchanging the inspirations of our own misguided souls. Our restless desires soon brought us into secret contact with persons equally as misguided, without the college; and then we resolved on leaving the sacred walls and beginning a course which should give full scope to our unholy ambition. Secret societies based on infidelity, and where it was not the latter, direct and intense opposition to the Vicar of Christ abounded. Their members asserted that their principles alone were in accordance with reason and moral law—that the implicit obedience which our faith demands was irrational and degrading—in a word, that while the will of man was so fettered his intellect could never rise. It was brilliant, showy reasoning; it captivated the too easily seduced minds of young Bronson and myself; it flattered our vanity, and we willingly embraced its senseless theories. Though admitted to the right of membership, we were accounted too young to participate in the deeper and more secret work of the society, and somewhat nettled, and imagining that we were as capable of great achievements as our older and more experienced companions, we formed a private league of our own. There were but three beside myself; but these three had ample command of money; they were clever, as vainly ambitious as I was, and the novelty and ever-danger attached to the affair fascinated us."

"France was agitated—the people were seeking for power—and thither, as a field which would afford wide scope for our ambition, we determined to repair. But it was part of our plan to return first to England—private circumstances rendered such a step necessary for each of us. Amid all my wild, vain ambition, I retained my love for you. In the very height of an excitement that sometimes bordered on frenzy, one thought, one desire, never lost their intensity—the thought of your affection for me, the desire to have you near me, with me, if I could. Even when my mother was well-nigh forgotten, you were remembered. In England, when you so readily divested yourself of your jewels that I might have the money I craved, when I realized the unselfishness of your devotion, I could more willingly have been forced to forego all my darling schemes than to be separated from you; and I could almost have poured the whole story of my intended work, my ambition in your ears, but I knew how you would shrink from the hearing of our secret oaths—how your pure soul would be shocked at the turbulent passions in mine."

"In England we concocted our plans—a regime of life from which every luxury was to be debarred, and of strict, hard study—both, we imagined, were requisite to us for the work we intended to perform. One of our number was despatched to Paris to select proper quarters for us; and a little before Lady Grosvenor's death, I followed with my two remaining companions. The object of my going then was to have a home ready for you. Stern objections were raised when I proposed to convert certain apartments to my sister's use. My companions would not have a female, dwelling, as it were, on the very scene of their labors—and it was only by my threatening to withdraw that they yielded to my request. That and achieved, I hurried back to London to conduct you to our Paris home. Even then, fully committed as I was, and almost fairly started on the course I intended to pursue, I could almost have given it all up when I saw your grief, your solicitude for me on the day of Lady Grosvenor's funeral. Though I had left my own

pleasure of being the first to acquaint my mother that her son—her prodigal, foolish son—has returned to all the teachings he ever learned from her dear lips; that won by a sister's influence, my blind and wretched ambition has been conquered, my intellect has ceased to war for the superiority it could never have attained, and my faith has triumphed. Tell her all this, dear Ellen, and send it by the morning post. Then I will write—but we shall be with her almost as soon as she receives my letter, for immediately that your preparations can be made we must start for home."

"Immediately?" she repeated through her happy tears. "When, at length, the wild excess of feeling had somewhat subsided, the particulars regarding Howard's ordination all told, and Ellen calm, though still bearing traces of her recent happy agitation, sat in a quiet too blissful to be broken by her own speech, her brother said:—"

"No, Ellen. The last and perhaps the hardest self-denial I practiced, was refraining from writing to my mother, when at last, I had tidings which must cause her to rejoice. I would not take from you the joy of making such a communication—you, whose letters for nearly ten long years have had the bitter task of recounting my unfaithfulness, my sins—you to whom, under Almighty God, I owe my restoration to all that is truly good and noble, shall now have

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was little, for the fortune in his own right was sufficient for him; he anticipated reproach and obloquy—they were nothing; his Master had borne both before him. But there was one grief, from the bitterness of which his whole soul shrank—your apparent faithlessness. I forebore to speak of all this in the earlier part of the evening, for I would not, in the midst of our joy, seek an explanation which might substantiate all that Malverton so fully believes. I even thought not to intrude this subject till to-morrow; but justice and gratitude to him who has so nobly proved his friendship, demand that I should at least hasten to endeavor to win the explanation which he himself has failed to obtain. Why, Ellen, have you acted in such a manner?"

Her feelings, too cruelly harrowed by an account which could only heighten the affection with which she regarded Malverton, without lessening the breach that separated them, could only find vent in her rapid tears.

"Ask me not," she cried passionately, starting to her feet and clasping her hands in a manner which painfully showed her distress of mind. "I cannot tell you, Howard."

She turned to leave the room. He sprang after her, and forced her to where the light again revealed her countenance.

"Assure me of one thing," he said. "Has your affection for him diminished? Is he less in your esteem, your friendship, your love, than he was when he was first led to believe that he might hope?"

"No, no, no!" she answered earnestly. "Enough," he replied. "I will question you no more at present. Forgive me for the distress I have caused you, and now retire; you need rest."

He pressed her to him, kissed her twice, as if he were loath to relinquish her, and, accompanying her to the door, bade her a tender "Good-night."

With passionate haste Ellen Courtney, having arrived in her own room, threw herself upon her knees, and lifted her still streaming eyes and clasped hands to Heaven. Her first duty, her first prayer, even before she permitted herself to think of the last unhappy subject mentioned by her brother, was her thanksgiving for the unexpected joy which had been vouchsafed her. Too full for words, she could only kneel, silently looking upwards, as if her voiceless gratitude would pierce, by its very intensity, the heights of vocal prayer.

Perchance the beneficent influence which she thus invoked descended with sweet refreshment into her own soul, for even the anguish which the mention of Malverton Grosvenor had caused her abated in the fervor of her ecstatic prayer. Her brother was saved; that priceless gem, his soul, was rescued from the dangers which on so many sides had sought to ensnare it. What, then, was any trouble, any trial which might beset her own life?

"No, no, my God!" she murmured, when at length her voice had struggled through her emotion. "My suffering is nothing—Thou hast saved him, and I am content."

She rose to write the joyful tidings to her mother. She was too impatient to wait for the morning, and while the midnight hour chimed from the clock on the mantel, her fingers panned the sweetest message it had ever been their lot to write. She intended to be careful, not to make her communication too abruptly; but her eager thoughts refused to be restrained; of themselves, as it were, they hastened to be inscribed on the paper, and almost before she was aware of it, the glad tidings were told. Then fatigue, to which she would not before succumb, overpowered her, and she hastened at last to her happy repose.

TO BE CONTINUED

WHITE GARMENTS

A TRUE STORY

Great was the rejoicing in St. M—Convent, when little John Anderson was baptized.

Passing Sister Euphemia's school room and seeing his beloved teacher there, the boy paused in the doorway; "I suppose you know I've been baptized," he announced with beaming face. "I could go straight to Heaven this minute if I did. It's a nice place, Heaven is, I wouldn't be left out of it for anything, would you?"

"No indeed," Sister Euphemia responded emphatically, but a shadow of anxiety crossed her face. John was such a little, little child, would he prove faithful to the religion he had chosen for his own when withdrawn from Catholic influence? It was true, Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, though Protestants, had shown themselves singularly free from religious prejudice in placing their only child when expediency demanded that he be sent to school, under the Sisters' care. They had even allowed him to become a Catholic now, though some time before he had expressed his desire to become one. Did they believe in the right of Private Judgment, even for a smiling little person of seven years, or were they supremely indifferent in all religious matters?

From the yard outside came a clamor of boy voices. "It's a ball game," John said delightedly; but—just ready to spring away—he stopped abruptly and questioned, "you see, I want to be very good now."

"Surely, yes, child," Sister Euphe-

mia answered, but smiling all to herself as she noticed the resolute set of the small chubby chin. "Do you remember the story I told you about the saint and his marbles?"

"Why, yes. He wasn't going to stop playing marbles, because just when it was play time, and our Lord would want him to play marbles in play time."

"That is right," Sister Euphemia approved. "Our Lord is glad for us to have a play time; though we must be careful not to keep on playing after play time is over, when it may be prayer or study time, perhaps."

"Yes, Sister, and maybe I'd better hurry a little," so dutifully bound on making as much as possible of the present play time, the little feet hastened away.

It was Saturday afternoon and from the nearby city, Mrs. Anderson arrived for a visit to her son. Happy though John usually was, the mother noted that he seemed more joyous than ever today. He had much to tell her of the wonderful Sacrament of Baptism which he had received that morning; it had made his soul white, and he meant to keep it white always, he boasted.

Thoughtfully, Mrs. Anderson listened to the boy's prattle; did the "white garment" make all its wearers equally happy, or was it that John was just a happy-hearted child, pleased with something new, apparently beautiful?

Presently he took her outside the house, desiring to show her the charming nooks and places of interest on the convent grounds, and at last, "Now I will show you the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes," he said. She followed him some distance down a straight paved way. At the end was the shrine, arranged among rocks to represent the grotto of Lourdes. Vaguely Mrs. Anderson was aware that the surroundings themselves were beautiful. Tall forest trees murmured and whispered in the background; from a field nearby came the soft rustle of corn—around her was the glory of a June day all perfect—and from the shrine above the face of Mary looked down, compassionate, kind, as if some poet sculptor had almost expressed the dream of his heart of Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Joy.

Mrs. Anderson glanced at her son; with deep devotion he was gazing at the face of the statue, and a feeling of loneliness came over the mother—what joy was this that had come to her boy in which she could have no part? Her own beauty loving nature had been starved by stern Presbyterian doctrine; was it strange that this glad child of hers had chosen instead, the poetic beauty of the Catholic faith? Yet might it not be possible that it held more than mere outward loveliness. Did the face of Mary the Mother answer, perhaps, to some deep and holy feeling, some innermost need of humanity's heart?

From the convent a bell sounded and unhesitating the boy dropped on his knees, motioning his mother to do the same; for it was prayer time now instead of play time. Folding his small hands reverently and lifting earnest eyes to the face of the statue, he recited aloud the Angelus. For a moment Mrs. Anderson was puzzled, then she realized he was saying a portion of the Gospel wherein is described the coming of an angel to a Virgin named Mary. As never before, the scene of Nazareth became real to her, and instead of her little angelic son kneeling now before the Virgin's statue, she saw in spirit the stately angel Gabriel, kneeling to petition a lowly Hebrew maiden that she become the Great Mother. Over the Lily of Israel, leaned in gracious love, the Everlasting Father, hovered the Spirit Dove, waited the Eternal Son. If God's angel could so kneel, to praise and to petition, might not humanity also kneel, praising, petitioning?

As a little later, the boy and his mother returned toward the convent, one of the Sisters joined them. A conversation ensued, in which Mrs. Anderson inquired with interest into many points of the Catholic religion. Then there were other visits to the convent, and other and longer and more anxious questioning. Finally it was decided that she, too, must follow her little boy into the Church.

Six months of study and preparation followed, then, white robes, John's mother knelt in the convent chapel; and fervently she prayed that others dear to her might come to wear it also. It was of her own mother she thought most prayerfully and anxiously; for if the Catholic faith had brought joy and peace to the daughter, what wondrous consolations would it not hold for Mrs. Murdock, who had been an invalid for two years.

Again, a month later, Mrs. Anderson knelt in the chapel, this time to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. She felt that she had urgent need of the Gifts and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Her mother was daily becoming weaker, death was only a question of time. Somehow could the light of faith be brought to that failing life? Or was it, perhaps, too late to trouble Mrs. Murdock now? Would it be right to expect the dying woman to accept without very long deliberation because her daughter desired it—the faith she herself had embraced? Mrs. Anderson recalled how that years ago her mother had occasionally gone with a Catholic friend to special services at the Cathedral, and had read some Catholic books. She claimed to respect all creeds, but apparently it had never occurred to her to accept any particular one of them. Would it be well to trouble her now with the

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