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GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER XXVII.—CONTINUED The anguish on the pale, proud face softened somewhat, and Father Walsmsley, seeing it, said very kindly: "Come and see her, Mr. Graham, now at once. You will be better, more able to bear it, when you have looked on her face, so sweet and peaceful in its last sleep." And Stanley followed him quietly, while Lady Hunter remained behind, knowing he would like best to be alone with the priest when he first entered the presence of the dead. They met no one on their way upstairs, as for the first time Stanley trod the passages of the dear old home which Gerry had so loved to describe to him, and silently they went together into the room, her own pretty little room, where she lay in her beautiful rest ready for the grave. For a minute Stanley stood motionless as he gazed at her, at the dead, sweet face which he had last looked upon that night in the library at Netherlands in its life and bloom, when she had torn herself from his embrace, away from his perilous presence. Then he went a step nearer and saw his ring upon her finger, as she had promised him he should see it, and the little crucifix in her hands, which he knew from her letter, that he carried near his heart, to be the one given to him when she should be laid in her coffin. And as he gazed, there was something so pure and holy in the very air about that lovely corpse that, with the anguish softening still more upon his face, he fell upon his knees by the bedside as he whispered aloud: "My God! I was not worthy of her, never should have been worthy to possess her. She was too pure, too ready for heaven ever to be given to me or any earthly spouse."

And already Father Walsmsley felt that Gerry had been right, that it was easier for Stanley to see her again thus, with the pain of parting past, and all of earth for ever over between them, than it would have been if he had even only once more heard her voice and held her in his arms, meeting the old look of love and life.

"Mr. Graham," he said gently, but with solemn earnestness, "perhaps when you have heard what I may tell you now, as I have today told to the rest, you will say so still more; you will be able to thank God even for her holy death; because, as a Catholic now, you know and believe how much merit suffering and self-sacrifice can gain for a human soul. Mr. Graham, the sweet life which has passed today from our midst was offered up willingly and freely for your conversion months since, when her illness was expected only by herself, and then only slightly and at intervals. There was no feeling upon her that God wished and asked for the sacrifice, and she made it joyfully, because now there could be no fear of selfish, earthly motive in her prayer for you. She kept her secret well and humbly; for after she had once told me what she had done, half fearing I might blame her as she did so, she never spoke of it again until she knew her sacrifice was accepted; and yesterday, once more, when the joyful news came to her that the object of it was granted already, that her prayer was heard so fully even while she was yet on earth. And knowing, as you do now, the sanctity to which God must have brought her by his wonderful grace in so short a time, you will start without surprise that, fearing lest aught of earth with its mere human love and yearning should tarnish her perfect resignation at the last, she prayed that the joy of seeing you again might be denied her, and that it might be made easier for you to come and look upon her in death, knowing that I had died reunited to you in heart, than it would have been to part with her in life, as with her cruel complaint must have been very, very soon. And I know, Mr. Graham, that you will not grudge her this last sacrifice, which has already perhaps gained for her her eternal reward; that you would not selfishly call her back to your arms, thereby keeping her longer when she came to die from the presence into which nothing defiled can enter, nothing of earthly stain or imperfection, however small it may be."

Stanley was still on his knees by the bed, with his head bowed, now upon his arms, as he sobbed now with a vehemence that made Father Walsmsley turn aside in his emotion—that painful emotion, which only the sight of a proud man's tears can call forth. He had wept last years ago at his mother's death-bed, but then he had been little more than a boy. Now he was a man, and mingled with his grief were wonder and self-abasement in the presence of such sweet holiness, with an overwhelming sense of unworthiness of the sacrifice which had been made for him—of unworthiness of the innocent, costly price which God had been pleased to accept in return for the precious grace of his conversion.

"My God! what did I ever do to deserve it, that her sweet life should be offered up and accepted for my soul, proud unbeliever as I have been?"

"Mr. Graham, it has made her happy and gained heaven for her thus early; let this thought make you happy too, as you cease to reproach yourself for what has been so plainly God's blessed will." And then Father Walsmsley left him quietly alone with the dead.

And already, as Stanley stayed there, bowed down by her side, the peace and holiness of his lost darling's dead presence seemed to come upon his spirit, as he thanked God for her sweet virginity, safe and secure now with her Lord in heaven, as a voice from out of the future seemed to whisper to him, making already more of heaven than of earth mingle in his love for the dead.

For nearly an hour he knelt there, until a quiet footstep entered, and a gentle voice whispered in his ear: "Mr. Graham, will you come with me down stairs, where my father is waiting to receive you?" And as Stanley looked up he saw a young, almost boyish face, with a sweet, heavenly expression, bent towards him.

"I am Rupert Mannering, her brother, Mr. Graham." And Rupert held out his hand to Stanley, who took it with his firm lips quivering.

"You do not shun me, then? You receive me as a dear friend, for my sake?" he faltered. "Not only for her sake, Mr. Graham, sweet and precious as that is to us, but for the sake too of Him who has given you to us in her stead; who bids us, where there is anything to forgive, to forgive it freely, and remember it not."

Then Stanley rose, and bending for a moment over the dead, kissed the pale forehead gently and reverently, as he might have done that of a saint, as though a closer, more lingering pressure would profane the pure remains.

Another minute, and he had left the room with Rupert, on his way to Mr. Mannering's presence, his proud heart, so changed and humbled now, beating strangely as Rupert softly opened the dining-room door and he saw a bowed, aged figure sitting alone, leaning upon the table.

"That is my father, Mr. Graham," Rupert whispered; and then he withdrew, leaving them alone.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

"That's all, Dillon; get your time!" Tom Dillon, boilermaker in the great railway shops was through. Jim Devine, master mechanic, had spoken, and Jim's word was law. As a boilermaker, Tom Dillon was a success, but a temper as fiery as the flame that rages within the gullet of the giant furnace, had finally rung the curtain down on a picturesque, though not always edifying, career.

Suddenly the youth received Devine's terse dictum. Walking home a few minutes later his anger still simmered within him. In his angry mind he reviewed the entire episode. Sure Haggerty was all right; he was as good a boilermaker as there was in the shops. That meddling foreman had a grudge against Haggerty that was why he had reported him to Devine for sending an engine with a dirty boiler out of the shops. Devine, of course, had fired Haggerty. Then when Dillon had promptly thrashed the foreman, Haggerty happened along and Tom was no longer needed. A fine state of affairs. Fired! He Tom Dillon.

Forgetful, however, was he that Jim Devine was as square a boss as ever had ruled the shop. The many times Devine had generously overlooked his outbursts of temper, he likewise failed to remember. And the fact that Haggerty was somewhat skilled in the fine art of dodging never entered his infuriated mind.

Mechanically he walked on deeply engrossed, but at length he suddenly became conscious of the merry shout of children rushing to play. Looking about, Tom saw that he was in the residential district of Southport, away from the smoke and grime of factories and railroads. It was just the hour that the little tots freed from the mild rigor of books and classroom were rushing into the balmy spring atmosphere. The nearby park resounded with their merry laughter as they romped and ran over the spacious play ground. Dillon walked on a little farther and sank into a deserted bench that invited him to rest and to view the joyous scene.

So contagious was the absolute care-free air that radiated from the scene, that gradually Dillon found himself transported from his cares of an hour ago back to his own childhood days. He saw himself, the tousleheaded Tommy Dillon of yore, in that crowd of boys of old St. Paul's parochial school more trouble than all the other children combined. Good old Father John too, came before his mind, and the old sexton who was forever scolding someone. Tom Dillon smiled in spite of himself.

Then like a flash he heard Father John's parting words, clearly and distinctively, like a thunderbolt from the sky. "My boy, unless you guard that temper it will undo you."

Good old Father John had been right, and Tom Dillon knew it. The man's face clouded. There was his mother too, he had promised her, not a month ago that he would never fight again. Bitterly he berated himself. Why was it that he could not control his temper. It was not because he did not try. It was just because he forgot everything in his rage. How this would hurt his mother.

Gradually the shouts of the children died out of the playground. A light blue blaze stole over the hill and the dusk. In the distance a bell began to toll The Angelus. Tom Dillon arose fists clenched. He would control his temper—he would in spite of everything.

"Now Tom, you sit right down and eat your supper and quit worrying. Of course you didn't mean to get angry." It is a way mothers have of smoothing things over. If Tom's discharge hurt her, Mary Dillon failed to show it. And that night before slumber had made his rounds, the Dillon sky was bright once more with the radiant light of a mother's ceaseless devotion and faith in her child.

A week later Mary Dillon was killed. A devout worshipper on her way from Sunday evening services—a night foggy and dark—an engineer with the throttle of the "Limited" wide open, bent on making up a few lost moments, and we have the tragedy. When they picked her up after the crash, a cruel gash across the temple bore mute evidence of death. In her hand she clasped a rosary.

hunger. Within the walls of the shops another scene was being enacted, one that teemed with sordid realism. In the huge inspection room, a physician was examining the strikebreakers for contagious or dangerous disease. In another corner a pair of burly guards were relieving the men of any weapons they might have. And the search was bearing fruit as a heap of deadly looking knives, guns, knucklers and the like plainly told. A voice boomed out over the room and the scabs turned to hear what Jim Devine, the Jim of old, had to say: "You fellows know as well as I do what you are here for. You'll get three times as much as the men on the outside got and plenty to eat. But let me give you a tip; stay inside these walls. That crowd on the outside is a mean bunch."

Thus it was that Tom Dillon came back to Southport—a scab. Unshaken, hollow-checked and with the eyes dull, he passed by Jim Devine unrecognized. Tom Dillon, the scab, was but a shadow of the man that had been. The ways of the world are hard and here was an example of one who had paid.

Two weeks passed, weeks filled with sorrows and growing hardships for the scab. Then one night as Jim Devine stood gazing at the remains of the midnight's shift's meal his pent up feelings refused to remain silent any longer. "It ain't fair, Bill. Look at that table; better than most hotels serve and many a poor kid on the outside going hungry."

The strain caused by seeing the scabs tear down rather than build up was getting on even the iron nerves of Devine. "Number 55 has a bad engine and is losing time steadily. You are to send engine 5960 to Tarrytown to meet the 'Express' and take it through."

"Huh! it's a wonder to me that they run at all with this crew of wreckers working on 'em. What time is she due in Tarrytown?" "It will be five-thirty or later at the rate she is losing time."

Then to Laird. "Bill, you put a boilermaker to work on 5960. It's going to be a close one if we get that boiler cleaned in time. Have it ready by four-thirty and I'll take it to Tarrytown myself."

Laird departed and fortunately or unfortunately, the first man he met was Dillon. "Just the man I need," exclaimed Bill, "get your helper and come along to the boiler. Devine wants 5960 ready by four-thirty to pull the 'Express' through."

At exactly two o'clock by the clock in the dispatcher's stuffy little office, Jim Devine, as usual, started out to tour the yards and shops. As he approached the huge, awkward shed that housed the massive steel monster, 5960, he was conscious of no sound or light emanating from the structure. Imagine his surprise and anger a moment later when clambering aboard the cab, he saw, by the light of his searchlight, a figure sprawled on the seat fast asleep. With a none-too-gentle shake Devine roused the sleeping one.

"Aw what's eatin' you?" exclaimed the fellow sleepily. "Who are you?" "I'm de honorable boilermaker's helper." "Where's the boilermaker?" "Don't know." "Well you find him and tell him to get to this job and be quick about it." A few glances told his trained eye that very little had been done to the boiler as yet and that unless something was done immediately 5960 would pull the "Express" through with a dirty boiler. Hastily Devine summoned a boilermaker from an adjoining shed and put him to work on the engine. Then he started in quest of Dillon. Devine entered the room hazy with smoke and reeking with the foul odor of perspiration. Under the glow of a powerful light men of every description were gambling as intensely as if their very lives were at stake. As Devine's entrance the men turned to hear what he had to say.

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