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## ELLEN AHERN; OR, THE POOR COUSIN. CHAPTER V.—Continued.

'My dear and beautiful cousin, upon my honor I appreciate every word that you say, and admire your enthusiasm, but really, Fahey is the man to talk to. I know nothing on earth about the people and their affairs, and he does. Speak to him. I dare say he will do what is right. But I must say good morning. It is precisely ten o'clock, and my horse is waiting for me,' said Lord Hugh, returning his watch to his pocket, and kissing his hand to her as he went out.

'The bone factory will be set up, *Aileen avourneen*,' said Sir Eadna Ahern, with bitter emphasis.

'Sir Eadna Ahern, has justice and humanity no surer footing than this on earth?' said Ellen, from whose cheeks the flush of indignation had scarcely faded, as she stood before him.

'My own experience, and what I know of the history of men, has made me a skeptic on that point, a *sulphur*. We do not serve the prince of this world, therefore we are weak to contend against those who do. Have your pony brought round and take a gallop in the bracing air, it will do you good,' he replied, smoothing the soft brown curls away from her forehead to kiss it.

But Ellen Ahern went out amongst the flowers—she needed quiet and soothing influences after having her faith in the general humanity of man so suddenly shaken—and having gathered enough to replenish the vases, she arranged a bouquet, and sent it with her compliments to Lady Fermanagh's room; after which she retired to her own apartment, to finish some sewing she had on hand, and to think. But after a little while spent in this manner, the silence became irksome to her, her thoughts became harassing and despondent, nor could she shake them off; her cotton knotted, her work puckered, and defied her ingenuity to fix it according to the pattern, and finally her needle snapped in two, with a click that made her start and scream, then feel ashamed of her weakness.

'I think the faculty would declare that I also am troubled with nerves,' she said, folding the work deliberately up; 'and Lady Fermanagh has reason to be confirmed in her opinion, that I never set a stitch in my life, if they could only have seen me this hour past. I'll don my riding habit and cap, and let Gazelle carry me just wherever his fancy may lead him. Perhaps the sunshine and air may do something for me.'—And having arrayed herself for a ride, she sent a servant to have Gazelle saddled and brought round, and went herself in search of Thela.

Once more in the saddle, with the soft sea air and sunshine playing together amidst her curls, and wooing the roses to her cheeks, she threw care to the winds, and giving her pony the reins, he bore her swiftly down along the rugged *ba-leagh* towards the ravine, where a single narrow, perilous pathway skirted the angry torrent. Impelled by some wild, uncontrollable spirit of daring, she guided her horse's head towards it, but Thela, as if apprehending danger, attempted to drag her back by the skirt of her riding habit, and a quick, reiterated warning bark; but her spirit was up, and she could not see why Gazelle should not carry her along this narrow ledge, as safely as he had often before carried her along the very verge of the cliffs on the sea shore.—Thela, finding all remonstrance useless, led the way, as if to pioneer the undertaking and be at hand to rescue her if she fell. The great massive rocks, which arose towering up to a great height on each side, from whose interstices many a luxuriant vine, and an infinite variety of mosses hung like fantastic draperies, almost shut out the sunlight; but here and there a ray fell slanting down on the dark waters, and lit them up with a strange and fitful brilliancy. A bitter, startled cry from its nest, flew shrieking over her head, and echo repeated the notes, until the whole ravine seemed full of fiendish laughter. Ellen Ahern saw her peril when it was too late to turn back; and sat pale and silent, watching every footstep of her pony, whose fine instincts led him to place his hoofs in the surest and safest spots. But near the point where the ravine opened on the grounds of *Catha-guira*, and the stream, accelerated by a slight descent, plunged around an angle of the rocks into it, the force of the torrent had worn away the loose soil and stones, leaving a chasm of about five feet wide in the path. Ellen Ahern saw it with consternation, and reproaching herself for having so thoughtlessly placed her life in jeopardy, committed herself to the care of Divine Providence. Gazelle and Thela discovered the danger as soon as she did; and while the pony, with dilated nostrils, ears bent back, and every fibre and nerve strained to secure a sure footing, picked his way cautiously along, the dog leaped along the uneven, rugged path, uttering every now and then a sharp, quick note of warning or encouragement. The

precipitous rocks on each side, frowning down in solemn grandeur; the dark, rapid torrent, foaming along with a deep, reverberating roar; the danger ahead, and her utter loneliness, made the moment a terrible one to Ellen Ahern. She thought how terrible it would be to fall, full of life and health, with life's morning sunshine around her, down into those mad, turbid waters, to be dashed from one rugged rock to another, until all semblance of humanity was stricken out; and she felt the blood flowing away from her lips to her heart, while every instinct and feeling became concentrated and vivid in its conceptions for the impending peril. She was calm, chilled and rigid—not a nerve trembled—not a sinew relaxed—it was for life or death. If it was for life, she felt how necessary it was to retain her self-possession—if for death, she desired still more to be recollected and have the command of every faculty, that her last act and her last thought might be an earnest offering of faith, contrition, humility, adoration and hope to the Lord and Giver of Life. She raised her eyes at this moment, and at some distance off she saw Lord Hugh and Don Enrique standing on the nearest point to her they could possibly reach, with looks of astonishment and terror depicted on their countenances. They could not help her; had they attempted it, they would not only have imperilled their own lives, but her's, also. She had now reached the chasm. Thela leaped it without difficulty, but the pony halted—quivering in every limb—the loose stones gave way under his hoofs, and in another moment he would have lost his footing. 'My trust is in Thee, my God!' was the strong cry that went up from Ellen Ahern's soul, as feeling that, humanly speaking, everything depended on her, she urged the frightened animal to leap—closed her eyes—commended her spirit to Him who had given it, and the next moment found herself in safety on the other side.—The rest of the way was comparatively safe and easy, but she felt her strength failing her—objects swam before her eyes—a shadow seemed to gather over her vision, and Thela's excited barking sounded far off and dreamy. She noted all this, and, by a strong effort of will, nerved herself up, quickened the pace of her pony, as the path widened, and urged him across the shallow ford of *Catha-guira*, where the two gentlemen met her, lifted her from the saddle, and placed her weak and almost insensible, on a broken tomb. Don Enrique, without an unnecessary word, untied the strings of her hat, and, taking a small flask from his pocket, placed it to her lips, saying: 'A few drops of this will revive you, Miss Ahern. Go, my Lord, to yonder hut, and procure a vessel of some kind, and fill it with water as speedily as possible. I'm afraid she is fainting. How do you feel now, Miss Ahern?'

'Better,' she said, trying to smile, while she put her hands to her forehead and looked around her with a bewildered gaze. 'Thela, a *bouchal*, where are we? The dog gave a low whine, and looked wistfully in her face, then laid his head on her knees.

'I fear you are ill, Miss Ahern. I wish she could shed a few tears. You are quite safe, and with friends.'

'Friends!' she repeated, in a plaintive tone.

'A friend who will be unto you a brother,' said Don Enrique, with earnest emphasis.—'Rouse yourself, Miss Ahern. The danger is over. You had a narrow escape,' he said, while he chafed her hands, and again moistened her lips from the flask of *eau de vie*; but nature had been overtaken—her eyelids drooped and she fainted, and would have fallen but that his strong arm maintained her, and her head sunk heavily on his shoulders. The long, glossy ringlets fell back from her temples, and her face, as white as Parian marble, looked more pure and beautiful than any ideal ever dreamed of by Phidias or Angelo. But had she been the shrined image of some saint, he could not have regarded her more reverently; or had she been his sister or wife, more pityingly. Lord Hugh Maguire now came towards them with a pewter can of water in his hand, which he had taken from the rude hut that leaned tottering and dilapidated against the Abbey wall.

'Hilloa!' he cried, 'not fainted! Egad! but she's beautiful.' Thela placed himself couchant, and snarling, before her. Don Enrique, with his direנגed hand, sprinkled her face, and let a drop or two of water trickle between her lips.

'Take my cloak, my Lord,' he said, in that quiet tone of command which seemed natural to him, and spread it over that little mound. Miss Ahern will recover more quickly if she is in a recumbent position. Untasten the clasps.'

Lord Hugh unclosed the short Spanish cloak which Don Enrique usually wore to conceal his deformity, and arranged it awkwardly enough over the little, half sunken grave; when Don Enrique laid her gently down, and knelt beside her to administer the only restoratives in his power. Consciousness presently returned—a delicate rose hue dawned on her cheeks—her eyes

slowly and languidly unclosed, and she looked about her with an inquiring expression.

'How are you now, my pretty cousin?' said Lord Hugh, who was seated on one of the old tombs, where he amused himself by switching his boots with his short riding whip.

'I fear that I have given you a great deal of trouble. Did I faint?' said Ellen Ahern, endeavoring to rise, while an eloquent blush suffused her face.

'Be quiet a few minutes longer, Miss Ahern. You have not sufficiently recovered your strength to stand,' said Don Enrique.

'I say, Miss Ahern, what the deuce brought you over that break neck path? I wouldn't have given a bubble for your life when you got to that chasm. 'Pon my honor, I shut my eyes fully expecting to see you go down, and the mischief of it was, I could not help you,' said Lord Hugh, all unconscious of the *bull* he had perpetrated.

'It was terrible!' said Ellen Ahern, with a shudder. 'I remember it all now distinctly. I am thankful, though, that friends were at hand to aid me when I most needed assistance. It was a daring, reckless adventure, and I am properly punished.'

'I feel some curiosity to know, Miss Ahern, what sentiment predominates, when you glance back at the imminent peril you were in a short half hour ago?' said Don Enrique.

'A sentiment that will govern me while life lasts,' said Ellen Ahern fervently, while she clasped her hands, and lifted her eyes suffused with tears towards heaven. 'Whenever human aid seems to fail me in the difficult straits of life, and when those dark hours come, which all mortals know more or less, in which all earthly hope is abandoned, I shall cast myself with childlike confidence, nothing doubting, on the strong arm of that Divine Providence that this day succored and delivered me from an untimely death. Oh, I can never forget this lesson of trust in God, as long as I have breath.'

'I should say,' observed Lord Hugh, who had listened to her with a singular blending of admiration and sarcasm expressed on his countenance, 'that your pony over there ought to come in for a small portion of your gratitude. Had he been less surefooted, you would not be sitting there now singing psalms.'

'And how is poor Gazelle after his fright?—Where is he, my Lord?' said Ellen Ahern, as she rose up, assisted by Don Enrique, and looked around her.

'Gazelle didn't faint,' replied his lordship, 'but has been, like a sensible brute, cropping the rich grass hereabouts, ever since he landed on *terra firma*. And, sure enough, through an arch of the old ruin, she saw him enjoying his repast as quietly, and in as matter-of-fact a way, as if he had not been an actor in what had like to have been a sad tragedy.'

'Gazelle is sensible,' replied Ellen with a smile, 'but the same power that guides the wild bird to the pathless realms of air, upheld and directed his feet along your rugged ledge. Do not seek to cast a shadow over my Faith, for it is life's sunshine, my Lord.'

Just at that moment a shadow fell across the group, and a low, gibbering sound caused them to start and turn quickly round, when an object scarcely looking human, met their wondering gaze.

It was an old and decrepid woman, whose skin, as yellow as parchment, was drawn tight over the bones of her face. Her eyes, small and sunken, buried like two fierce coals, far back in their sockets. Her hair, white and dishevelled, hung in tangled mass around her fish face and bent shoulders. She was toothless, and her livid lips were puckered and sunken. Her hands were long, and her fingers looked like talons. She was bent almost double, and clothed in rage, over which an old scarlet kirtle was thrown.

'Hilloa, there!' shouted Lord Hugh, tossing her a shilling, 'begone back to your den. Is she a witch or a banshee, Miss Ahern?'

### CHAPTER VI.—THE BANSHEE'S CRY.

'Speak gently, my Lord, her story is a sad one,' said Ellen Ahern, in tones of commiseration.—'In the troubles, or, as it is called by some, the Rebellion of '98, her two strong, handsome sons were shot down before her eyes, and her dwelling burnt to the ground by English soldiers: after which she was hunted away from the scene of bloodshed and ruin at the point of their bayonets. She became dumb and idiotic from that moment, retaining no trace of human feeling except love for her dead. They were buried there under the Abbey wall, and she, with her own hands, reared that rude hut over their graves, where she has lived ever since. Roots and herbs, and the waters of pander torrent, supply her with all she needs, nor will she partake of any other sustenance.'

Ellen Ahern then took the hand of the unfortunate creature, and spoke soothing, kindly words to her, but she seemed regardless of them, and

stood, scanning with a wild and startled gaze, Don Enrique's features; then suddenly springing forward, she grasped his arm in her talon-like fingers, and pointing to an old moss-covered tomb on which lay an effigy of one of the ancient Barons of Fermanagh, led him towards it. He, full of human sympathy for so miserable and wretched a being, yielded himself to her guidance. Ellen Ahern and Lord Hugh Maguire, surprised at her singular movements, followed her until she reached the tomb, where, stooping over, she wiped away the green mould from the marble features with the corner of her kirtle, and passed her fingers carefully over them, as if to ascertain their exact form; then, by a quick movement, she rose up, and touched the forehead, nose and chin of Don Enrique, and turned again gibbering and weeping towards the effigy.

'What can she mean, Miss Ahern? How can I aid her?' asked Don Enrique.

'You cannot aid her; but her meaning is very perceptible to me. She has discovered a strong resemblance between that effigy of one of the chiefs our house and yourself.'

'Egad!' exclaimed Lord Hugh, 'I see it myself. I see it myself. If you were not a Spaniard, Don, I should say you were connected in some way with us.'

'Strange!' replied Don Enrique, 'and flattering as strange. That is a far nobler face than I could ever boast of: but it pleases the unfortunate creature to think there is a resemblance, let her faith remain unshaken.'

'Did you say the old hag lived there?' said Lord Hugh in evident disgust, pointing towards the hut over the graves.

'Yes. The hotel has been kept in repair by the people of Fermanagh, who watch their opportunity, and come while she is away in search of roots, to put a little thatch and plaster here and there. Sometimes she disappears for two or three days at a time, no one can tell where.'

'I suppose she would make a terrible rout if graves, but all should have to be removed?'

'It is to be supposed she would; and I can assure you, my Lord, that such an act would stir the depths of other hearts besides old Nora's.—We are peculiar in our views about disturbing the resting places of the dead in this region,' replied Ellen Ahern with emphasis.

'Just to the very line—' said Lord Hugh in a musing tone. 'It will have to be done. Miss Ahern, shall I have the honor of attending you home?'

'Thank you, my Lord. I would not for the world, grieve Thela to-day, by accepting any other escort. Besides which, I am going farther up the valley, to visit a sick person.'

'I feel complimented by your choice, I must confess,' said Lord Hugh, whose self-love was evidently touched. 'May I presume to help you to mount your pony?'

'Only see, my Lord, how ridiculous any assistance would appear,' replied Ellen Ahern, springing into the saddle with a light laugh, while the pony, which had been led to her by Don Enrique, neighed and tossed his mane, as if in joy and congratulation at her safety.

'Thou art the very prince of ponies, Gazelle!' she said, as she leaned over and smoothed and patted his glossy shoulder. 'I thank you both, gentlemen, for your timely assistance to-day, and wish you good morning.' They lifted their caps, and stood for a moment looking after her as she rode away; both admiring her beauty and grace, but each of them governed by sentiments and feelings so widely different, that if their hearts could have been laid bare for inspection, one might have been excused for wondering whether or not they belonged to the same species.

'I'm heartily glad that girl's living at Fermanagh. She'll amuse me!' said Lord Hugh, switching off the nettle tops with his riding whip.

'Miss Ahern amuse you, my Lord,' said Don Enrique in an indescribable tone of reproach and indignation.

'Yes; or otherwise I should die of *ennui*.—She's a handsome, spirited creature, and it's a pity she is without fortune or other advantages.'

'The very defencelessness of her position should make all men her brothers and protectors!' said Don Enrique, with something of the lofty chivalry of a Spanish *corde* in his manner.

'Miss Ahern is with friends, sir!' said Lord Hugh, a little nettled.

'With strangers just now—' replied Don Enrique, quietly.

'You seem interested in Miss Ahern?'

'As I am in everything that is noble and good. I think Miss Ahern a gem of the finest water. Probably though, the true point of attraction is, that her position and my own bear, in many respects, a close resemblance to each other,' replied Don Enrique. 'But, my Lord, the matter I wish to discuss with you at present

is of quite another character. I wish to make you an offer for these lands of Cathaguira. I am rich, as my letters of credit and introduction will show, and am willing to pay a liberal sum for them.'

'They are not for sale, sir. The lands that are advertized lie farther up in the valley, and are much more productive than these.'

'Could no inducement tempt you to dispose of the Cathaguira lands?' persisted Don Enrique.

'I think not. I have certain plans, you understand, that I could not effect anywhere else on my estate. My revenue from this Barony is meagre, and I intended to establish a manufactory just on the edge of that stream, which, people who are acquainted with such matters, assure me will prove quite a source of wealth, and at the same time improve the habits of the people, who are an indolent, thriftless set.'

'Have you ever lived amongst them, my Lord?' inquired Don Enrique carelessly.

'No; but Fahey never writes that he does not tell me of the immense difficulty he has in getting my rent-roll balanced. It is true that he manages to do it, but it is, as he asserts, at the peril of his life. Fahey is my agent.'

'And do you not wonder, my Lord, when you look at the sterile region around you, and the meagre resources within their reach, how they contrive to pay even a moiety of the demands of this agent,' said Don Enrique with noble indignation. 'Has it ever occurred to you, that they must have deprived themselves of the simplest necessities of life to do it? Pardon me! I am a stranger, but the peasantry of this country, for whom there seems so little justice, interest me deeply.'

'It is all a mistake, sir—they have more justice than any other people on the face of the earth,' said Lord Hugh Maguire, looking at his watch.

'In one sense, they have doubtless,' replied Don Enrique with quiet sarcasm. 'But my Lord, my Lord, I beg the favor of you, to think over my proposal about these lands.'

'I don't know what good it would do, because I am determined, and have made all my arrangements to carry out my plans—but come up and dine with me to-morrow evening, Don—perhaps I may be able to oblige you, and at the same time go on with my own scheme. There come those fellows now!' said Lord Hugh, as Fahey, with his arm in a sling and his face bandaged up, made his appearance, leaning on the arm of a lank, solemn looking individual, who wore gray small clothes and a Scotch bonnet, and who was no less a man than the Factor engaged by Lord Hugh Maguire, to superintend the building of the spinning factory. 'I shall expect you to-morrow evening, Don.'

'I shall come without fail,' replied Don Enrique, as he turned away from the spot, and went to look for his horse which was cropping grass somewhere near. He had but little expectation of realizing what he wished when he accepted the invitation to dine at Fermanagh, but he hoped to be able to tempt Lord Hugh Maguire's greed for gold, by offering a sum far beyond the real value, for the Abbey and lands of Cathaguira.

The next morning, Lord Hugh Maguire, wrapped in his dressing gown, was walking backwards and forwards on the terrace which we have before described, smoking a cigar, and looking around him with a careless, indolent eye when his attention was attracted by a motley crowd of men and women coming towards him. Most of them were dressed in patched garments; the women were dressed in red kirtles, and the men in blue and gray cotamores, which they wore about their shoulders, as much to conceal the scantiness and shabbiness of their garments, as for any warmth they offered. As soon as they perceived they were observed by Lord Hugh, they bared their heads and shouted in stentorian chorus: 'Long live the Maguire!—Long life to your Honor! May your Lordship reign over us forever!' Lord Hugh, startled and surprised at a spectacle so new to him, bowed haughtily in return to their heartfelt greeting, and as soon as their '*cead mille faltha*' had subsided, he asked them 'What they wanted?'

'We came up to welcome your Lordship to the old barony, and beg pardon for the *scrimmage* we got up around your Lordship's carriage, all by rayson of being in too great a hurry to show how glad we was to see one of the old stock back amongst us,' said Patrick McGinness in his very best English.

'What is your name?' asked his Lordship, while he puffed a cloud of smoke from his lips.

'Patrick McGinness, your Honor!' he replied bowing.

'Patrick, you can tell those people that I am obliged to them, and hope they will be industrious and thrifty, for I intend to have no idlers or loungers on my estate.'

'Is it inauspicious and thrifty, your Lordship?'