

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XVII—CONTINUED

Dick Monahan searched every source which might be likely to afford some comforting news for his mistress, but his efforts were vain, and the faithful fellow's heart was fast beginning to lose all hope.

Ellen delayed the letter which was sometime due to her mother. How could she write and withhold what had happened, yet how could she write and reveal it? How could she state that Howard was well, who she knew not, and when her own fears were picturing him almost fatally ill from prison hardships; yet how could she tell, when such a relation must include her own dire suspense, and crush further the already breaking heart at home.

Malverton came that night. He hardly waited to be announced, but strode into her presence with the air of one who has some desperate and unhappy purpose at heart. She sprang to meet him, then tottered and clung to a chair for support.

"Speak!" she cried, his prolonged hesitation cruelly trying her; "in pity, do not keep me in suspense."

"My efforts with my father have failed, but he has expressed a wish to see you. You must go and see to him for your brother."

"When shall I go?" she asked huskily.

"Now, if you are sufficiently strong to go through such an ordeal. He attends no levee to-night, and will probably see you if you call. My escort is at your service."

"You will be brave," whispered Malverton, pressing her hand. She bowed slightly—her white lips could not then have spoken—and departed with the servant.

Lord Grosvenor was seated at a small table engaged in writing when she was ushered into his spacious apartment, nor did he pause in his work when her name was announced. He waited for some moments after the door had quite closed upon the lady, and Ellen, uncertain whether to advance, remained in trembling embarrassment where the domestic had left her.

The peer turned at length, and, rising, came forward to meet her—not exactly with the graciousness of a few weeks past, nor yet with quite the cold exterior she had anticipated.

incurred the duty which, as a crown officer, was his to exact the enforcement of the utmost rigor. She had paled and shuddered enough while he was speaking to show the effect of his words, but she did not yet attempt to reply. She was gathering her strength, as it were, for an effort that must move him to mercy, and he, after a moment's pause, resumed:

"There is but one way in which your brother can be saved—the blood rushed suddenly and hotly into her face,—"and that is by a sacrifice on your part."

He waited for a reply; she was more powerless than ever to render one. The hope implied in the first part of his speech had seemed to send a lump into her throat which choked her utterance; while the fear and uncertainty caused by the latter part, though it somewhat curbed her swell of feeling, had left her equally powerless to speak.

"Something like a declaration of love, I understand, has been made to you by my son. He had reason to imagine it was reciprocated, or that it would be in the future when happier circumstances would render it more suitable. Having come of age, he is already in possession of an ample fortune; at my death he will succeed to my title, and with it to the whole of my wealth."

"I consent to it all," she faltered. He again seemed surprised by her prompt acquiescence, as if he fancied that he had mistaken her regard for Malverton, and that after all her affections were not so deeply involved.

"Remember, Miss Courtney, what you are sacrificing—a title—"with a slight touch of sarcasm in his tones. "That is little to forego for Howard's safety," was her reply.

"But there is more, Miss Courtney—a heart that loves you."

"If he had desired proof of how much the sacrifice would cost her he had it then; the realization of what Malverton would suffer swept across her mind, and her blanched cheeks, and quivering lip, told how the iron had at last entered into her soul.

"My brother is first," she answered. "Enough, Miss Courtney, our compact is made; your brother shall be liberated. He will probably be obliged to leave the country, but he shall have time to return to you and effect whatever arrangements he may desire. And now, I think I may say that I know enough of your character to believe that your promise will be inviolably kept, despite the suffering it may entail."

He rose, summoned a servant to attend her, bade her a graceful farewell, and turned to his writing. "Is it success?" whispered Malverton, when she joined him. She bowed her head.

He could hardly wait till they were seated in the carriage, and on their return to Ashland Manor, to give vent to his joyful emotions.

"Bright times are approaching, Miss Courtney," he said, in his own imitatively tender way. "Howard may have learned a salutary lesson from this last rash work, and he may be induced to forego forever his wild, ambitious schemes. At all events since my father's word is passed, your brother will soon be with you, and God grant that he shall ere long become all that you desire to see him, Farewell till to-morrow."

He did not notice the mournful significance of her farewell, and little did he dream, as he hurried back to the carriage of the fiery suffering through which he would pass ere he should again look on the face of Ellen Courtney.

That same night the heart-broken girl penned to her mother the letter, so long delayed—a full and exact account. Now that the danger had been averted, she felt that she need no longer hesitate to tell the worst. She could not state further about the future than that, as Lord Grosvenor had told her, Howard would be obliged to leave Ireland, and in that case, of course, she would bear him company.

"Oh, my God, if it might be! If my children would only come home!"

The very next morning after Ellen's interview with Lord Grosvenor, the latter dispatched his son to England on some commission, the execution of which would require a month or more; and upon such a speedy departure did the peer insist, that Malverton had only time to indite a brief note to Ellen, which he dispatched to her by his own valet.

"I have no reply to give," she said to the man who had received instructions to wait for such.

CHAPTER XIX THE STRUGGLE OF FAITH AND INTELLECT The peer's word was punctually kept. Howard was liberated, but in a manner which was infinitely more mortifying and bitter to the young man than the infliction of an extreme penalty would have been. There was no opportunity for fine speeches, and bursts of sentiment which must immortalize his name. There was not even a chance for a fearless bearing of Lord Grosvenor, for that gentleman did not once deign to permit his august person in Howard's sight. He was simply treated as a hot-headed youth who had been released too soon from his nurse's care, and while he was enjoined to leave the country within a fortnight, he was cautioned to refrain from a foolishness which could only bring ridicule upon himself.

The whole proceedings of his release were so quiet and commonplace, and set him down to a level to which, in his own imagination, he had never before descended, that it was with thoroughly mortified, abashed, and humble feelings that he found himself at last free to return to Ashland Manor; and when he arrived there he was in no mood for the frantic welcome of his sister. He even grew impatient under her prolonged embrace, though he had still sufficient manhood to conceal that feeling. But it was with an air of intense relief that he broke from her at length—that he hurried away from the extravagant welcome of Dick, and the quieter demonstrations of Anne Flanagan, and shut himself in his own room.

The news of his return was soon promulgated by faithful Monahan, and his friends speedily made their appearance in order to tender their congratulations. Howard refused to see them. His impatient, fiery spirit chafing under the humiliation he imagined he had received could not endure the sight of faces, the sound of voices, and he spent the whole of that long day—it had been early morning when he returned—securely closeted with his unhappy thoughts.

No one of the loving pretenses which Ellen invented could induce him to admit even her, and when the night came on and grew apace, and he still refused to open to her, she sank upon her knees outside his door, and prayed in the utter anguish of her heart. Something wrong the position about from her lips—it went up, the cry of a heart broken with useless sacrifices, and it fell on the ears of the unhappy youth, striking through the contending passions of his soul—it laid bare at last a cord that vibrated to the

plaint of her voice, the depth of her prayer. He rose suddenly, and, unlocking the door, stood before her with pallid face and wild eyes.

"Still on her knees she lifted her hands to him. "Oh, Howard, when is this to end? Will nothing touch you—nothing change your course?"

"It was a cry so desperate that even he thrilled at the sound. He bent to her. "Come in, Ellen, and we will talk of my plans for the future."

She obeyed, clasping his arm while he locked the door to prevent further intrusion, and sinking on her knees beside him, instead of taking the chair he proffered. She could not listen to his plans for the future; she must make the appeal with which her soul was on fire, and she burst out at once with:

"To what further lengths must your ambition lead you, before you will stop? You have served it so faithfully, and how has it rewarded you—how much fruit of all your aspirations, and hopes, and plans, do you hold tonight? Oh! Howard, which is the nobler cause—the paltry, fleeting, ignoble world, or the Being who has made that mind for which you claim such noble endowments?"

Howard rose when she had concluded, and walked to the window. The midnight sky was alight with its thousand gems, the silent world a figure of peace and quietness: something in the calm exterior wooed him to a communion with himself where strength then that appeal. In all his lore he could not have found the like of this; his boasted philosophy paled before the light of her religious wisdom; the splendor of his mind dimmed before the dazzling radiance of the purity of hers, and his ambition waned before the simplicity of her heart.

"It's a queer way to run a guild," Mrs. Ryan remarked for the hundredth time. "U—m—m," was Mrs. Rochford's comment.

"It should have had a name long ago," Mrs. Ryan went on. "Pins in her mouth and her mind obviously set on the hem she was turning, "U—m—m" was again the only reply Mrs. Rochford had to offer. At which Mrs. Ryan's crisp temper gave way.

"Um—m" all you like," she burst out wrathfully, "but I know very well you think the same as I do. And when I think anything I say it!" A fact which there was no contradicting.

"Dear Ellen,—Once more forgive me for the suffering which I am about to cause you—it is the last blow I

hope ever to inflict on your affectionate heart. Your words last night sank into my soul as nothing else has ever done, and I am about to act upon the change your influence has effected. I cannot tell you what I intend to do, for I dare not trust myself to fully execute my purpose—only rest assured that my plans tend no more to the old wild course. I have done with that now, I hope forever; but if I should be stirred to the old paths again, if my old passions should resume their sway, I pledge myself to return to you ere I set on the first wild step. Of your future, during the time that I may be absent, what shall I say? It is cruel to keep you longer from mother—but oh, Ellen, in this hour when you seem dearer than you ever did before, my heart thrills from telling you to return to New York. That would be placing so many miles between us; for I shall be somewhere on the continent, and during our separation I shall want to feel more than ever that you are not so very far away. We have been nearly five years from home—perhaps mother could now be induced to forego her singular determination and come over to you, when together you could wait my return. But if she should still refuse, there are warm and true friends here with whom you can make a home, and who will gladly assist you to beguile the tedium of my absence. But that would be condemning you to a cruel exile; no, Ellen, I will not ask it—unless indeed your own heart prompts you to make the sacrifice, and mother fully consents to it. Ask my mother to trust me this time as perhaps she has not trusted me since we left home. Beg of her to institute no inquiries for me, for again I pledge myself, ere I take one step towards a course which would not meet her approbation, to return to you, should you remain in Ireland; to write should you have gone home. I can hardly promise that were I to be again swayed by ambition I would go home then. Do not expect to hear from me until you see me, unless I should be attacked by an illness; in that case you shall know immediately so that you may come to me. Dick will accompany me to London, when I shall send him back to you. God bless you, and pray for me as you have ever done.

"Howard"

Silent and rigid, as though every pulse had stopped, every faculty had suspended its work, Ellen stood on the perusal of that epistle. Amid the bewildering emotions which crowded upon her one feeling stood out intense and cruel—Howard had voluntarily separated himself from her; and it required minutes for the hope contained in the letter to work itself through the sea of bitterness that accompanied that thought. But when the hope did make itself understood, when the tortured mind gathered at last from the missive that the writer had probably gone to endeavor to seek the path which he had so sadly strayed, to bury himself in study, perchance—but certainly not study of a dangerous character judging from the tone of his note—her heart bounded with joy. If that were the object of his going, gladly would she endure the separation, and she hastened to her knees to pour out her thanksgiving and pray anew for her brother.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE GUILD LADIES ARBITRATE

"It's a queer way to run a guild," Mrs. Ryan remarked for the hundredth time. "U—m—m," was Mrs. Rochford's comment.

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"Dear Ellen,—Once more forgive me for the suffering which I am about to cause you—it is the last blow I

A ludicrous sense of the truth of this lit up Mrs. Ryan's eyes with an answering gleam.

"Well," she admitted, shamefacedly enough, "do you blame me?"

The room in which the conversation took place was evidently consecrated to the uses of the needle. It was large, and bare of anything except three and several small ones. On these latter were piled large quantities of clothing neatly arranged and ready to be distributed; and one of the long tables was partly filled with articles to be made—infants' and children's clothes, wrappers and gowns of all sorts. There was plenty of work for any number of busy fingers, and if there was anything the guild had a monopoly on it was busy fingers. And, perhaps, busy tongues. But as busy as the tongues were they had never yet been able to suggest a name for the guild, now five months old, wholly and entirely acceptable to all concerned.

The ladies had done splendid work, there could be no question of that. Not only had they provided warm and comfortable clothing for innumerable women and children, but they had looked after the wants of the sick—and lounded their husbands, sons and friends generally, to secure some kind of temporary work for the idle men. It was admirable work, and they did it well; and, since the guild had proved to be such a power for good, it was decided to continue it, even after the strike ended, the steel mills opened up, and prosperity reigned once more in the populous West End.

At various times various names had been suggested for the guild. The Italian ladies from St. Angelo's parish had wanted it called St. Anthony's Guild; the German ladies leaned to St. Christopher; the ladies of the exclusively American parish of St. Ann wished it called St. Rose; so appropriate, you know—an American saint; and the few Polish ladies who came in timidly each week, held out firmly but hopelessly for St. Hedwig. In the beginning Mrs. Ryan had made a tentative suggestion that the sewing society be called St. Brigid's Guild, but her suggestion had been so quickly and energetically put down—"entirely too Irish, you know," seemed to be the unanimous opinion—that the organizer and chief worker became deeply offended, and set her face resolutely against giving her sanction to any other name.

This matters stood on the day which chronicled the foregoing conversation. Mrs. Ryan and Mrs. Rochford had gone early to the guild room to do some cutting out, and the matter of the name having received its usual discussion, Mrs. Ryan had put her ingenious question: "Well do you blame me?"

"Jane Rochford!" she exclaimed, kept reproach in her tone. "I never—"

"We're both to blame," Mrs. Rochford hastened to explain. "I just as much as you. Some one must give in, and why not we who really organized the work and are responsible for bringing these women together? They are all nice women—splendid women, some of them—"

"But so pigheaded," Mrs. Ryan interjected plaintively. "I never met such an obstinate crowd. I don't believe, if we should give in, that the rest of them could agree on a name."

"We might try," Mrs. Rochford suggested boldly. "Why not take a vote on it?"

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