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ELLEN AHERN;

OR,

THE POOR COUSIN.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

'I was just thinking of you, Therese. I have been thinking of you all day.'

'Have you, papa? I am very glad you have been thinking of me.'

'And why?'

'Because, sir, it is a sign that you love me.'

'No, it is not a sign of that, little one. I think much oftener of things and people that I hate, than of those I love!' he said bitterly.

'I hope you do not hate any one then, sir, because I should think it would make you very, very miserable,' she replied, lifting a pair of great, soft black eyes to his.

'Well, it does make me miserable, because the thoughts of them come like troubled ghosts, haunting me day and night, and I can neither choke, shoot, nor grapple with them.'

'Oh, papa! But I know what it is. Grandma says you are never well, and are always imagining things.'

'No, I am never well, sage one. But how is your grandmother, to-day?'

'She has had a bad turn, to-day, and talked strangely. I think her pains make her crazy, don't they, sir?'

'I fear so, child. But what have you been doing all day?'

'Nothing. She sent me away, and locked her door, and, as I am forbidden to go down into the kitchen, I moped from one end of the house to the other, looking for something to amuse me, until I got scared almost out of my wits.'

'At what, Therese?'

'Sounds. I could see nothing, but sometimes little nimble feet would seem to be running round and round. Oh, how they pattered!'

'Mice in the wall,' he said, with a grim smile.

'Then, suddenly, sir, something would come plunging down, *plum*—then fell a rattling like hail, followed by a tiny squalling, and such a scampering, that I expected to be carried off bodily. What do you think it was, sir?'

'A rat breaking up the mouse party, I suspect,' he said curtly. 'What else?'

'I don't think it was that, sir. I think it was the 'good people,' that I have heard grandmother talk about.'

'Good devils!' he said, laughing, 'but go on.'

'And when they had all gone, voices seemed to come down the chimney, and sometimes they said such dreadful words. Oh, my! I had a dreadful time, sir.'

'It was the echo of voices from the streets.'

'No indeed, sir. I really think the house is haunted. Did you know that a man had once hung himself from the rafters in the garret?—The servants say so.'

'That is said of every old city house that I ever heard of,' said the merchant, smoothing her hair back from her forehead. 'Had you no other visitations than mice, rats and echo?'

'Oh, sir, if you had only heard how the carts and horses clattered up and down the sides of the house, after all, when I peeped out I couldn't see a thing.'

'Echo, child, echo.'

'And at last it got night, and I was afraid to come down to have the lamps lit, because every place was dark, and I was in dread that something would seize me. But when I heard you come in, papa, I shut my eyes tight, and folded my arms—so—and ran down three steps at a time, and, oh me! I am so glad you are here!' said the girl, again kissing the merchant's sallow cheek.

'Child, you are very foolish. I did not know that you were such a coward. You must not be so much alone. I have been very much in the wrong to permit it, and that is what I have been thinking of all day. I have put an advertisement in the paper, for a lady, competent and willing to take charge of a motherless little girl.'

'And then, papa, suppose she should be a great, grim, brown woman, like an Ogress, who would tweak my ears if I do not know my French verbs, and rap my knuckles if I played a false note?' asked Therese, in a solemn way.

'I don't know but that I should feel called upon to interpose in such a case. You must have an associate and friend, to take the place of the hobgoblins and fairies that your brain is crammed with, and guide your studies, pursuits, and fashion your manners. I hope your fears are groundless as regards the Ogress, Therese.—I don't think I should fancy having one in my house. Ring the bell now for Cato, and let us have lights and tea.'

'I don't like the notion, sir, of having somebody to be forever watching me,' said Therese, after she had pulled the bell cord.

'Nor would I, simpleton. That would not do, any more than your present condition. I wish to procure for you one who will be to you a friend

and companion—who will cultivate and improve your mind, and counsel you wisely, my inexperienced and neglected child. You have no mother, and we must supply the deficiency as best we may,' said the merchant with a quick, sharp sigh.

'I have a grandmother, sir. You forget,' urged the girl, intent on preserving her free agency intent.

'True, but your grandmother is old and ailing, and does not like the trouble. Sometimes, you know, that she is altogether—that is—she forgets, and wanders very much in her mind, as if it were unsettled; and even becomes violent, then you do not see her for days and days together. Let us say no more now, Therese; and remember, I shall expect you to be docile and obedient to whoever comes.'

'If I can, sir, I will,' replied the girl, while tears flashed in her dark eyes. 'I suppose, though, I shall never be allowed to go out on the roof of the house, to watch the beautiful clouds when the sun is setting, and see the vessels going out to the bay, rocking like live swans on the shining waters. Oh my!' she murmured softly.

A day or two after this, a lady, with a thick veil over her face, stood on the door steps of the pastor's house attached to the Catholic Chapel of St. Stephen on Mulberry street, and rang the bell. She was simply dressed, in dark, rich colors, but her shawl fell in such graceful folds around her, and there was in her whole air so much dignity, and such a look of high, gentle breeding, as more than made amends for the absence of ornamental and more costly attire. A staid, sober looking colored man answered the bell, and to her inquiry, 'if Father Weston was at home?' informed her that 'he was in the church baptizing an infant, but would be in presently, if she would please to walk into the parlor, and wait a little while.'

She went in, and having found an interesting book on the centre table of his little parlor, she was soon lost to everything but the interest that its finely written and well conceived sentiments elicited, and did not observe the entrance of a gentleman—whose garb bespoke his character—who stood regarding her abstraction with a countenance whose dignity was tempered by a genial, pleasant, but withal, a grave smile.

'I wondered what had become of you, Ellen. I am glad to see you, my child. How are you?' he said, lifting his *bonnet-carre* from his white head, and laying it on a table.

'Excuse me, dear Father Weston,' said the lady, closing her book, and rising to return his greeting. 'I am as well as youth, energy, and letters from home can make me.'

'Letters from home! Full of the scent of the shamrock and heather, I'll venture to affirm. Did they bring you good tidings my child?'

'My friends are living and well, Father, and there has been no change at Fermanagh, for better or for worse,' replied our old acquaintance, Ellen Ahern, who, having landed in Baltimore two months previously, had been seeking, and inquiring without success, for a situation as governess. One or two had offered; her qualifications were pronounced all that was necessary, in both cases, and a liberal salary was agreed upon, when the fact of her being a Catholic—which she took pains to inform them of—put an end to any further negotiations, and she was politely dismissed, after being informed by one lady, that she was a Presbyterian, and by the other, that she was a Low Church woman, who had a great horror of the idolatries and seductions of Rome. Her funds were getting low, and the necessity of finding something to do was urged on her strongly; but how, and where to accomplish her wishes, was more than she could discover, until one morning, on glancing her eye rapidly over the column of 'wants' in the daily paper, she saw an advertisement which she had lost no time in responding to. It was about this that she had now come to take counsel with Father Weston.

'I have heard of a situation, that I wish to speak with you about, Father.'

'Ah, I'm truly pleased to hear it, my child.—How did it happen?'

'I saw an advertisement in the paper yesterday morning, and immediately after breakfast, Mrs. Haverly went with me to see the gentleman, whose name is Wardell.'

'Hold, my dear child! Have you said Wardell?'

'Yes, Father, that is his name.'

'Where does he live? The reason that I ask is, that there are two or three persons of that name in Baltimore.'

'He lives in the old fashioned mansion in Exchange Court.'

'The same. He is one of the wealthiest merchants in Baltimore, and one who—although he is considered somewhat eccentric—is without reproach. He is extremely liberal to the charities of all denominations, and especially so towards Catholics. Why, it was only the other

day, that he sent two hundred fifty dollars to each of our orphan asylums; and when we have a church to build, his name generally heads the list with a princely sum. And what is stranger than all, he never enters a church of any kind; in short, Mr. Wardell is a good, moral, liberal-minded Pagan gentleman,' said Father Weston, laughing; 'but if he escapes the thousands of prayers and Masses, that are offered for his conversion by the recipients of his charities and alms, I shall be surprised.'

'He must be a singular person, indeed. It is a pity that religion cannot fully develop so many noble qualities, and elevate and sanctify them, because of his want of faith,' said Ellen Ahern.

'Would you advise me to go there, Father?'

'How many children has he?'

'Only one—a daughter, some fifteen years old. His mother lives with him.'

'Of course, my dear child, I advise you by all means to go. The circumstance of his mother's living there, and his own age and standing, make it very prudent and suitable for you to go there. What are his terms, and what does he expect you to do?'

'He offers me five hundred dollars per annum, to teach her all the branches of education that I am mistress of, and to superintend whatever studies or accomplishments that masters will have to be required to impart. He was kind enough to say that he wished me to hold the position of an elder sister to his daughter; that she needed a friend and companion more than she did a governess. 'I wish you,' he was good enough to say, 'to hold an honored place in my household, young lady, and feel perfectly independent and free, to carry out your own views in my daughter's education and training. I know but little of books, and can give you no help, beyond my authority and money, both of which I will give you *carte blanche* for, if I find you and Therese getting on together. I wish her to be accustomed from the first to look up to you, and be influenced by you; but that cannot be accomplished all at once, perhaps.' It is a mistaken idea this thing of giving a governess a secondary place in the household; they have the formation of the minds and characters of our children, and, if not treated with all courtesy and respect as equals, their pupils—always as imitative as monkeys—take their cue, and the influence of their teacher, if not gone, is sadly impaired.—These are some of my notions, young lady, and you need dread nothing, except the trouble you will have with a crude, neglected mind, and a will which, without culture or discipline, is restive and somewhat unmanageable. But, be good enough to tell me, if you belong to any religious body or sect, or whatever else they are called, for the child must not grow up a heathen.'

'I do belong, sir, to a Body, whose head is Christ,' said I, looking up with as much determination and firmness in my countenance, as if I expected to hear him the next moment order me to be thrown to the Lions, or at least to begone.

'I am a Roman Catholic, sir.'

'And Irish, too, I judge from your name. I knew people of that name once—who. Are you from the North or South?' he asked me, with a very strange troubled look, twisting his sharp features.

'From the North, sir,' I replied, thinking 'now it is finished,' but I was silent, and waited with some curiosity to hear what he would decide on, and how he would inform me of it. At last he said:

'Miss Ahern, I'm glad that you are a Catholic. My wife was a Spanish woman, and of course a Catholic; and I—though next kin to a heathen—don't want my child to be like me.—Your letters please me, and your manners please me; and you can make my child a Catholic—but you mustn't talk Irish to her, nor put Irish notions in her head; that is the only thing that I insist upon, and it my wishes are not regarded on that point, it will prove the rock on which our compact will split. I hate the Irish! he said with venom.'

'I am ashamed to say, sir, that I do not speak Irish,' I responded, with an old Maguire flash; 'and I am very sorry that you should feel hatred towards a people about whom you know nothing. That's unjust; and the Irish are a noble and generous race, however much you have been scandalized by individual cases.'

'That's right, Miss Ahern,' he exclaimed, 'quarrel with me about it. I like your spirit. Of course I do not know anything about your country, how should I? The only restriction I impose upon you is, not to talk on the subject to my mother who, like me, has her own reasons for hating it, and is very infirm, or to my daughter.'

'And yet,' said Father Weston, who appeared quite diverted by Ellen's account of the interview, 'that man sent two vessel loads of grain to Ireland last year, at his own cost. He is a strange, inconsistent being.'

'If occurred to me that he has had some bitter griet in his lifetime, or may be, done some

one grievous wrong,' said Ellen Ahern; 'only one or the other could produce such effects on so originally noble a nature. Then he wished to know if I had any friends on this side the water, upon which I referred him to you, Father, at which he seemed perfectly satisfied, and said, 'You can come in the morning, Miss Ahern; and I should like you to feel that you are coming to the house of a kinsman instead of a stranger's, although you'll see precious little of me after you do come, for I am but little at home. I live at my warehouse, where I am engaged from Monday morning until Saturday night—aye, sometimes on Sundays too—in sending commissions to every part of the earth to rear altars to Mammon.' Then he rang the bell, and desired the servant who answered it to request Miss Wardell to come to him. 'I wish you to see Therese,' he said, turning to me.—Very soon she came in, a shy, pale girl, awkward and apparently frightened almost to death, as she stood by her father's side, looking earnestly at me, out of a pair of preternaturally large and bright black eyes.'

'Here is the lady, Therese,' he said, 'who is to be hereafter your friend and companion. She does not look like an Ogress, does she?'

'I held out my hand, when she came very slowly towards me and merely touched with her cold fingers, but I could see through her dress bodice, how her heart fluttered and trembled, and pitying her, I put my arm about her gently and said—'

'We shall be good friends, I trust, Therese.'

'I'll try,' she whispered.

'That is all I ask at present,' I replied, as I rose to come away. 'Now, Father, shall I or shall I not go?'

'Go! Of course you must go. I will see Mr. Wardell, who I know very well, and let him know that I am your friend and counsellor.—There is no telling what good you may do to that neglected child, who was baptized a Catholic in her infancy, but has been sadly left to grow up without religious culture.'

'I feel the responsibility of my charge, and beg your prayers, dear Father, that I may be assisted by Heaven,' said Ellen Ahern, while a thoughtful gravity pervaded her countenance.—Just then the Angelus Domini tolled from the church steeple, and they both knelt to recite it, Ellen Ahern feeling that it had come just at that moment as a sign of Heavenly approbation and promise, while Father Weston offered it to the Queen of Heaven, with fervent and tender devotion for her, that her undertaking might be rich in its fruition. After a few more pleasant words with Father Weston, she took leave, and went into the Church to visit the Blessed Sacrament, and committed herself and all her acts to the Divine protection of Him—the Lord Saviour—who dwells therein; after which she hastened homewards to write letters to Ulster.

And so it turned out that Ellen Ahern, led by a train of what seemed to the human eye, simply natural events, became an inmate of the rich and eccentric merchant's house. By degrees she won the confidence of Therese, and organised a systematic routine of study, suitable to her capacity and her peculiar tastes. She found a wilderness of tangled growth, intermingled with rich and rare flowers in the young girl's mind, amid which, like snared birds, struggling for freedom and sunshine, were solemn and beautiful thoughts of God and Heaven, and discovered daily that the task she had assumed was one which required such constant and patient effort, that she sometimes felt afraid that she would faint by the way. She had been there two weeks, without having seen any one except her pupil and the servants, one of whom came every morning with punctilious regularity to the school-room door, with Mr. Wardell's compliments, to inquire how she was—if she had any letters to mail, or if there was anything that he could do for her in the city.

One morning she was giving Therese her music lesson as usual, in the bleak, cheerless drawing room, when he walked suddenly in, bowed to Ellen Ahern, threw open the window-shutters, and let in a flood of winter sunshine, then sat down to read the newspaper he had brought in with him. He gave vent every now and then to muttered expressions of impatience, as Therese's unskilful fingers pounded away on the tuneless old instrument, making anything but harmony. When the lesson was over he crossed the room, and after informing Therese that 'she deserved hanging for making such a noise,' asked Ellen Ahern 'if she thought it possible that his daughter could learn music on such an old rattletrap as that.'

'It will answer very well, sir, while she is learning the rudiments of music; but I doubt if she will take as much pleasure in it, as if she had a finer instrument. When she progresses a little further, she will require a scale of two octaves more.'

'It is not necessary to wait for that, Miss Ahern. Did you know that this confounded

thing stands exactly over the spot where I sit to study over my accounts in the Library, and if there were a thousand pigs up here having their tails piched all at once by a thousand schoolboys, it couldn't be worse. I can't stand it another day.'

'I am sorry that our music disturbs you so, sir, but what is to be done? Therese must go on with her lessons.'

'Music, never disturbs me, Miss Ahern. Of course, Therese must go on with her lessons.—As to what's to be done, that is easily answered. Go up to North Eutaw street, and walk into the Piano Manufactory of my excellent old friend, William Knabe, and order hence the handsomest and finest-toned instrument in his ware-house.—I don't care what you pay for it. Therese give that one to your washerwoman.'

'Are you in earnest, Mr. Wardell?'

'Dreadfully in earnest, Miss Ahern. Let that thing be got out of this house before tomorrow morning; and, by the way, now that I think of it,' said the eccentric old man, looking around him, 'this is a faded, musty looking room—the furniture is threadbare, and it seems to me that the carpet is worn out. Miss Ahern, you will oblige me extremely if you will select some new things for this place.'

'That is quite out of my line, sir, and I beg that you will excuse me. It seems to me that it does very well.'

'And it seems to me that it don't, young lady. Young folks ought to be surrounded by pleasant associations, bright colors, pictures, flowers, and all that. But I don't know how to act about getting them. What shall I do, Miss Ahern?'

'Buy them, sir, if you are determined. I suppose there are people who attend to such matters.'

'And see here; I haven't time to potter about after beggars. I have them driven from my warehouse, because I belong to the City Council, and don't like to set a bad example by encouraging paupers; but I want the child there to get into the way of being kind to the poor.—Mayhap she may heal some heart that I have wounded; so here, Therese, here is a purse full change which Miss Ahern will teach you how to spend.'

'All this for me, papa?' exclaimed Therese, opening the purse and looking in.

'Not one dime of it. You are to give it away, miss.'

'Oh!' said Therese with a disconsolate air.

'I will take great pleasure in directing Therese how to invest her funds, sir.'

'Very good. Lose no time in going up to William Knabes, mind you, I'll have no other, and get the piano. I shall send one of my porters up there to let him know you are coming. By the way are you comfortable here, Miss Ahern?'

'Quite so, sir, and am happy to say that my pupil is docile and obedient.'

'That's brave. Good-bye: I shall not see you again perhaps for a month, but if anything should be wanting, write it on a piece of paper and drop it into the box at my library door.—Therese, your grandmother is so much better you may take Miss Ahern up to see her this afternoon.'

'Yes, papa, but let me tell you before you go away, for you don't know how much delighted I am, and obliged to you,' said Therese, with flushed cheeks.

'I have no time to be kissed. Three of my vessels sail to-day,' he replied, going out.

'That is just the way with papa,' broke out Therese, while tears flushed in her great black eyes, 'sometimes he is like a cross old bear.'

'You should not say so, my dear, when all of the thoughts that he can spare from his business are devoted to your comfort and improvement,' said Ellen, gravely: winding her arm gently about Therese as they went up stairs together to put on their hats and shawls to go out.

CHAPTER XIII.—HOW THEY LIVED AT MR. WARDELL'S.

A fine-toned rosewood piano was selected by Ellen Ahern and her pupil, which in the course of the afternoon was sent home. Ellen was not there when it came, and Therese, with a natural genius for music, without much proficiency in it as a science, lingered beside it, touching the ivory keys, and running her fingers over them, enchanted with the rare, sweet tones she evoked, until twilight stole in, and darkened the quaint old drawing-room.

'Therese, are you there?' said Ellen Ahern—who had just come in—as she stood on the threshold of the drawing-room door.

'Yes. I cannot bear to go away. Come here, Miss Ahern, and listen how solemn and sweet it sounds!' said Therese, touching an octave at each extremity of the scale. 'It seems to me, that nothing would suit it so well as those hymns that I heard last Sunday evening: at Vespers, when I went with you to the Cathedral.'

'Let us try one of them, dear,' said Ellen