

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER XV

THE MANOR

Ashland Manor was, as Dick Monahan had described it, a comparative ruin. The once elegant grounds were a complete waste of weeds and wild shrubbery, and the spacious road which wound from the gatehouse to the mansion bore sad evidence of the time which must have elapsed since a vehicle had rolled along its grass grown surface. The gatehouse bore scarcely as much evidence of the general decay, owing probably to the fact that it was not uninhabited—for a cleanly, though poorly dressed old woman issued forth as the conveyance which had brought the little party having stopped, and Dick was about to alight in order to swing back the gate that stretched across the carriage road.

"Arrah, ma bouchan, an' are you this way again?" the old creature joyfully said, extending her hand to Mr. Monahan, which member was very cordially grasped by that gentleman as he answered:

"Yes, Granny, and I have visitors that would like to see the place."

She approached cautiously to the window of the vehicle, and having wily peered in, she fell back with the half-smothered exclamation:

"It's ladies you've got."

Anne Flanagan protruded her head, and looked closely at the strange creature; but there was nothing in the good-humored old face to reward her scrutiny. She sighed, and murmured audibly:

"There's no one of them I used to know—no one—no one!"

Ellen also looked forth, wondering if the stranger, like Dick, had known her mother, and she was almost tempted to make the inquiry; but Monahan, having swung the gate back, was mounting the vehicle, and in a moment they were going up the grass-grown avenue. Then the prey which time had made of the place became fully visible—sad decay had indeed intruded everywhere. They arrived at the house—that which had been the home of the Ashlands—only to find there also the same palpable and painful evidences of neglect. It was a square, stone-mad building, low, but containing numerous apartments in each of its two stories, two or three stone steps led to its front entrance, and a couple of pillars supported the roof of the porch which jutted out from the doorway. Panels of glass were broken in the windows, and the whole exterior of the house was suggestive of some grim warrior who strives to maintain his stern front when his companions have fallen about him, and his own armor has been rent. Every apartment was destitute of furniture, and the very sound of the footsteps of the party as they traversed the empty rooms seemed weird and ghost-like.

"Which was my mother's room, Anne?" Ellen asked, when they had visited the first suite of apartments.

Dick Monahan paused abruptly as if to catch the woman's reply. She answered in a husky tone:

"Follow me," and turning, she ascended the dusty oaken stairs which led from one side of the spacious hall. Dick softly followed.

Here, too, were dust and space, and "nothing more"—not a trace of the habitation which had been. The maid ushered her young mistress into a spacious apartment, and said with a strangely sounding voice:

"This was Mary Ashland's room."

The young girl was too absorbed in her own deep, tender thoughts to notice the unwonted familiar manner in which Anne Flanagan had spoken of her mother; but Dick Monahan's face assumed a strange expression—he stepped into an adjoining room, and closing the door upon himself, he shook his head and muttered softly:

"I'm afeard that the old feelings are in her heart still."

Anne Flanagan, also, as if unwilling to betray in Ellen's presence the emotion which she could not restrain, returned to the hall, and the young girl, glad to find herself alone for a moment, closed the door and sank on her knees. Here, in her mother's room, she fancied a prayer for Howard must be more speedily heard, and passionate from its very fervor was the petition which rose from her bursting heart.

When, at length, she sought the hall, she found Anne Flanagan bearing pitiful traces of her recent emotion.

Ellen hurried to her, and though the woman appeared to recoil, the young girl flung her arms about her:

"Dear Anne," she said, "don't feel so sad; but I like you the better for it, for I think you must love my mother dearly when the sight of her former residence affects you so much."

"Don't!" Miss Flanagan almost screamed, striving to unclasp Ellen's arms. "Don't talk to me like that; you kill me when you do."

Ellen started back in alarm, and the woman also alarmed for the effect of her words, hastened to say:

"Forgive me, Miss Ellen, but I'm so excited with strange feelings that I'm not myself to-day, and I don't know what I'm saying." And Ellen, though still hardly recovered from her wonder and alarm, accepted the explanation.

Dick Monahan soon joined them, to tell them about the hamper he had stowed in the conveyance, and to ask in which place Miss Courtney would prefer to have the lunch prepared. Ellen left the matter to Dick's own

decision, and the pleasant-tempered fellow, quick to contrive and perform, had, in a very short time, transferred a table from the gate-house to one of the rooms on the lower floor of the deserted dwelling, spread upon it a snowy cloth which his careful forethought had also provided, and had set out a very tempting little cold repast.

Ellen, as she took her place at the strange board, felt almost happy—as if the mere being in her mother's former home seemed to bring her almost within reach of that dear mother herself; even the thought of Howard and his wayward course had partially ceased to disturb her. The long drive, combined with the succeeding excitement attendant upon visiting this most interesting of places, as Ashland Manor was to her, had given a vivid color to her cheeks, and as she sat at the head of the little table, her hat removed and her hair clustering in pretty disorder about her face, Dick Monahan thought he had never seen so lovely a being.

Already a bond of attachment existed between Ellen and her brother's servant. The latter was so good-humored, so respectful, so anxious to oblige, and above all, his gentle girl put into her heart when she addressed him a kindness which went straight to Dick's heart, and made him more anxious to serve her than he felt even to please Howard. So he answered readily all the queries which she put during their brief meal—described Ashland Manor as it had been in its prosperous days, which description tallied with that her mother had given of it, and he gave the history of the old woman who dwelt in the lodge. That history satisfied Ellen, that Granny Cleary, as Dick termed the old creature, did not know her mother, had never seen the latter, in fact, for Granny came from the south of Ireland years after Mrs. Courtney had left the country. She had one son, Tim, and he had somehow obtained the privilege of dwelling in the gatehouse without being charged for it, as Dick expressed it. They had lived there now some years—Tim working for the neighboring farmers, and his mother keeping house for him.

Thus ran Monahan's story, and Ellen was still laughing at the humorous manner in which he had told it, when the sound of wheels made all three start and hurry to the windows, two of which looked out on the carriage road. A vehicle similar to their own drew up before the front entrance, and in a moment Howard and Malverton Grosvenor alighted.

There was an exclamation of wonder from Anne Flanagan, and a cry of delight from Ellen, in whose cheeks the color became more vivid than before, while Dick Monahan hurried out to conduct the gentlemen to Miss Courtney. Soon Malverton stood before Ellen, extending both hands, and smiling his old, warm, affectionate smile. She placed her trembling hands in his without reserve, and her delight at this unexpected meeting was evident in every lineament of her blushing face.

Miss Flanagan addressed some caustic remark to Howard about the sudden change from his determination of the morning, but the latter was evidently in too good humor to heed her, for he turned from a laughing survey of the table to Dick, to inquire if the thoughtful provider could furnish anything for two tired travelers.

Dick was equal to the emergency, and he speedily contrived to obtain from remnants in the hamper sufficient to spread a second time a very respectable repast.

Many inquiries crowded upon Ellen's mind, but she deferred them, and at length her brother and Malverton rose from the table, and Howard proposed a stroll through the grounds to shake off the mustiness, which, he said, clung to him from the empty and slightly chilled apartment. Ellen invited Anne to bear her company, but the maid, having determined on a private stroll of her own through the rooms kindly declined. So, while Dick cleared the debris of the meal, Ellen with her brother and Malverton walked through the deserted grounds. Her first question was, when did Malverton arrive, to which the young man replied, laughingly:

"This morning, a short time after you had left."

Her next query was about Vinnette—poor, suffering Vinnette—whom she thought of always as she had last seen her, kneeling dumb, white and tearless from very anguish.

The young Englishman's face grew sad at once.

"I trust she has found peace," he said, in a low tone. "She has entered a convent to atone for the past and to offer ceaseless prayers for Bronson's soul. She gave me this for you."

He drew from his pocket a little silver case and handed it to Ellen. The latter opened it and found a small ivory rosary within. She closed the case reverently. Malverton resumed:

"Poor girl! she said you would understand, when you received this, all that she would convey—that you would pray for her." He bent to Ellen, and said in a still lower tone:

"And pray for me, Miss Courtney."

"I always do," she replied softly; and then all three walked on in silence for some minutes.

"The club?" she asked, tremulously, when Howard had got a little in advance of them.

"Has quite disbanded; nor will they be any that ever organize again. All are safe save the one who so rashly met his fate. You may rest assured that there will be no further danger from that quarter."

When the three returned to the old mansion, Howard and Malverton withdrew to hold a private conference, the result of which was speedily made known to Ellen. She was summoned to join them, and she found Malverton eagerly talking, while Howard listened with every evidence of utter dissatisfaction. Her heart bounded with hope and joy when she learned the proposition which young Grosvenor so warmly advocated, and to which her brother strongly dissented, was to make Ashland Manor their home for the present. Malverton promised to undertake the removing of every obstacle that might now exist to the adoption of his plan, insisting that a sufficient number of rooms could speedily be rendered habitable and pretty, and Howard at last yielded an ungracious assent. Before the little party left the old place, Malverton found an opportunity of again speaking to Ellen alone.

"You divined my reason for urging this as a residence?" he asked.

"I think I did," she replied: "to save Howard from plunging into fresh temptations, was it not?"

"Partly; and to win him, by means of the solitude, unbroken save by your companionship, which I think this place will afford; to reflection on the course he seems still bent on pursuing, and possibly to a change in his hopes and desires. The life will be a dull one for you, but if it accomplishes that for which you hope I know you will gladly endure it."

She lifted her glowing face.

"You are so kind my friend—I know not how to thank you."

The young man flushed; words of more tender import than he had ever spoken sprang to his lips, but he repressed them as not befitting the time, and resumed:

"Your discovery of this old residence was fortunate. On my way to Dublin to meet your brother I was puzzled to know what advice to give him regarding his choice of a temporary abode. He had declared to me before leaving Paris that he would not return to America; but this place is the very thing. Here, Miss Courtney, I hope your influence will at last reclaim your brother." There was no mistaking the heartfelt sincerity in the latter part of his speech and Ellen again thanked him in her own sweet, tender way.

It was late when the little party returned to the hotel, and Malverton declined the invitation to enter warmly pressed upon him by Howard and Ellen, saying, as he extended his hand to each in succession:

"I fear I must make this 'good-night' also a farewell for the present, but I will arrange for your residence in Ashland Manor, and leave the necessary orders for its fitting up." He bent to Ellen: "Do not forget to continue to pray for me," he whispered, and in another moment he was hurrying up the street.

CHAPTER XVI
"LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM"

Malverton Grosvenor had little difficulty in obtaining the Manor for a residence for his friends. A suite of rooms were speedily fitted up—the kind thoughtful of the young Englishman supplying a library from which Ellen might select as well as Howard—and thither the brother and sister, with their two attendants, repaired.

Anne Flanagan, disliking the advent of a stranger, immediately volunteered to take charge of the culinary department, and Ellen who was beginning to feel a housekeeper's anxiety on that point, gladly accepted.

So the routine of a new and strange life began for the gentle girl. With the rare faculty which she seemed to possess of suiting herself to all circumstances and places, she at once gracefully adapted herself to this mode of existence; while Howard, petulant from restlessness and discontent, seemed a very burden to himself. If it were not for her gnawing anxiety about the white, Ellick brother, she might have been happy; but even as it was, the every room; that she dwelt where every room was redolent with memories of her mother's girlhood—where she knew, from the poverty-stricken appearance of many of the people whom she happened to see, that there would be opportunities of doing good—sent her about her simple, housewifely duties with a smiling face, and made her first letter from Ashland Manor the brightest missive she had written for months.

Mrs. Courtney, on receiving the letter in New York, hastened with joyful impatience to place it in Brother Fabian's hands:

"Rejoice with me," she said, ere she gave him time to open the missive; "my children have made a temporary home in Ashland Manor—there where I was once innocent and happy. May I not think it a bright omen?"

He looked long and sternly at her, as if he would veil, by that very sternness, some emotion which was visible in the sudden flush that rose to his cheeks, in the tremor of his hands.

"Woman, why ask me to rejoice? I have long been dead to that emotion."

His tones had a peculiar significance—his stern face a strange expression.

Mrs. Courtney seemed to understand both.

"Will you never cease to harrow me?" she said, passionately. "Have not I, also, suffered, and more keenly? You have no cruel separation to

deplete; you have no children to hunger for their presence; you—"

"Hush!" he sternly interrupted; "this language is unseemly!"—and turning shortly away, he pursued the letter.

"Well?" she asked, tremulously, when his eyes again met hers. "May I not think that my hope may yet be realized?"

He did not answer but murmured softly, as if his words were not meant for her hearing:

"Oh, woman! great is thy faith."

Then, raising his voice he said rapidly:

"Yes, hope. It is not in my heart to destroy thy one consolation. And if Howard Courtney should be reclaimed from his vain ambition—if thy hope be realized, then—"

Without completing the sentence he hurried to the door, from which he turned, and waving a cold adieu, he retired from the apartment.

Mrs. Courtney went slowly home, her joy sensibly lessened by the Brother's last remark—it seemed so like a prophecy that her hope would never be realized.

The seclusion which Malverton Grosvenor had imagined, and Ellen Courtney had fondly hoped Ashland Manor would afford, was speedily intruded upon. The neighboring gentry, some of whom had visited at the Manor in its palmy days, hastened, when they discovered the identity of its present occupants—which fact had become known through the proud loquacity of Dick, who had lost no time in enlightening the neighborhood as to who his young master and mistress were—to pay their respects, and to tender the hospitality of their homes to the brother and sister. Contrary to Ellen's expectations, Howard accepted many of the proffered attentions and insisted that she should do likewise. She hesitated at first, fancying that her work—the which had offered her whole life as a sacrifice for one end, ought to be amid the poor, relieving their wants by her purse and her own tender ministrations—she was reluctant to mingle with the gay society which willingly opened its ranks to receive her. But Howard commanded and she feared to rouse his anger by a refusal. Many a sigh and many a tear it cost her. She had, no sympathy with light laughter and frivolous gossip which sometimes frightened the air of the homes into which she was compelled to enter, and many a time when beauty, and music and mirth, waved their enchanted wands about her, the spell was dissolved by the imaginary sight of a famished face, whose owner had that morning blessed her for her tender relief, and by the thought of a gaunt, starving man, who had knelt by the roadside to pray for his benefactress.

Howard plunged into the light and life of the gay company by whom he was so frequently surrounded with a zest as surprising as it was novel. It was not always simply a gay company—men of mind mingled with it; and among these Howard Courtney, now a few years and in the first conscious strength of attained manhood, shone in the full might of that genius which thus far had been so sadly misdirected. Witty, without pretending to a reputation for the same; courteous, with that trifle of reserve which at once enhances the charm and the dignity of politeness; and clever, with an originality that startled even while it excited to admiration, he was soon in a position where his ambition could have as wide a sway as ever, and where Ellen's gentle influence ceased more and more to reach him.

No one had a keener appreciation of Howard's talents than did his sister, and few saw as clearly as she did the quicksands upon which those very talents must ere long sink him. What the world called noble independence, love of freedom, she termed by their right names—sinful defiance, vain ambition, and silent and hidden tears were her only applause.

Howard had by no means relinquished his books; he closely applied to the latter by day, sometimes with the wild spurts of his genius dashing off brilliant articles, which he sent anonymously to the magazines. The latter published them with laudatory comments, and the young man had an additional stimulus to his vanity in the fact of hearing his productions discussed, by men who themselves occupied a high place in literary circles.

Malverton, and even Lord Grosvenor, were sometimes at these gatherings. The latter held a high official position now in Ireland—one which afforded full scope for the display of his prejudice towards the dreamers of liberty for their unhappy country—and the stern nobleman advocated high and haughty measures. With the prestige of his former political fame, with the power which his influence had already won for him, and with the advantage of an exterior which was always grand, calm, and self-possessed, he had little difficulty in tightening the grasp of a tyrannical government, and in making his own name a hated sound in the ears of the Irish poor.

Ellen, when she first learned that a meeting with Lord Grosvenor would be inevitable, had looked forward to it with some anxiety, and even dread. She was not certain of her brother's feelings—whether manhood had dissipated or matured the revengeful tendencies of the boy; but if the latter were the case, Howard betrayed it only by a

haughty bow, and a slight, cold touch of Lord Grosvenor's hand. To Ellen herself, the nobleman was exceedingly gracious, bending from his haughty height, and putting into his manner the delicate courtesy which flatters while it charms.

Malverton, deeply regretting the unexpected course which Howard was pursuing, but, powerless to effect or even suggest a remedy, could only tender his sympathy to Ellen.

Amid these assemblies, composed as they were of the very bulwarks of adherence to the English throne, moved some who still clung in secret to the hopes for Ireland which had already set in gloom and despondency. To such Howard Courtney, by his fearless expression of sentiments which were other than his own, would hardly be permitted to pass as the mere impulsiveness of genius, at once commended himself, and he was cautiously introduced to the company and aspirations of a few of the many hearts about him. His soul was at once fired. The object for which his services were sought appealed alike to his manliness, and his American love of freedom, and he imagined his thoughts and feelings to be nobler than any by which he had yet been actuated. But it was not the noble spirit of patriotism, pure and self-denying, which animated Howard Courtney's mind; it was only sordid ambition, which with wilder speed than ever, was hurrying to its doom.

He entered into the schemes of his companions with more enthusiasm than they themselves brought to their councils, and he influenced them by his own fiery ardor.

Ellen regarded his proceedings with new terror. He was unaccountably absent, and at such unusual times. He was engaged in so much secret writing, and, frequently, his manner was so strangely excited. Strange gentlemen came often to the Manor, and on business of which Howard refused to speak. Then there were articles, which Ellen from the style fancied she recognized as her brother's, flying through the press, and about which the very peasantry, through the more educated of their class, were enthusiastically discussing as fire-brands that must not only fall of the effect intended, but must bring ruin on their projectors.

She seized the first opportunity to ask Howard what it all meant. He attempted to put her away as one would a troublesome child; but she persisted for an explanation, and when the touching and solemn earnestness of her manner compelled him to reply, he answered:

"I would I could tell you, Ellen, why seek to understand my acts? They are not even subject to my own control; I cannot restrain myself. Oh, Ellen!"—seizing her hands—"I would that I could listen to you, but there is a feeling here"—tapping his breast—"which will not let me be at peace."

He darted away from her, and always after, when he fancied that she was about to approach the same subject he prevented her by leaving the room.

She poured forth her fears to Malverton when he came, and he, too, she was about to approach the same subject he prevented her by leaving the room.

Margaret laid the evening paper on her lap, and let her slim, white hands fall upon it, while her eyes sought the western window, showing the flush of sunset. Then she said:

"I see a French nobleman is to be buried from the Cathedral to-morrow morning."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "It is singular that I should miss such an item in the paper. Read it please!"

She took up the paper, and with the flicker of a smile, read:

"Charles Andre, suddenly, aged sixty-seven years. Funeral from Cathedral, 7 a. m."

Then she again laid down the paper and looked at me, with a whimsical gleam in her eyes. I began to comprehend. Margaret is a district nurse, and her discoveries make the reading of novels uninteresting. Afterward I observed:

"Your nobleman was not given any of his titles in the death notice."

"I think he got them in heaven, when the angels announced his coming," she said warmly. "If I were the editor of a paper, do you know what I would do? I would send a sympathetic reporter on the trail of a visiting nurse; and the heroism, the love, the loyalty, the devotion, the virtue, he would find among her cases, and not the follies, the scandals, and the crimes of the idle and the rich, which would be the feature of my paper. Take M. Andre!"

I was a probationer when I met him; and I climbed five flights of stairs to find his wife, who was our patient. I wish I could show her to you as I saw her, in her wheeled chair by the window! If you could give a radiant human soul to those adoring angels of Hiram Powers in the Cathedral you would have her face. There was not a sign on it of the twenty years she had been a helpless invalid, suffering at times great pain. It was when she was suffering that the district nurse would be called; otherwise, her husband cared for her at morning and night, and a neighboring woman saw that she wanted for nothing during the day. As her hands were helpless she could not sew or knit or read. I was not so used to suffering then, and the thought of the waking hours of those twenty years appalled me. I could not keep back the question, and she replied:

"Lonely? Oh, no, Mademoiselle! I have le bon Dieu!"

"I felt like dropping on my knees. God seemed to become an actual presence. She knew without my telling her that I was a Catholic, and

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