

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER
CHAPTER XIV

A SLIGHT GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

A singular spirit of silence and gloom seemed to have settled on the little party, which did not abate during the voyage. Howard, wrapped in his dark thoughts, would sit for hours apparently watching the sailors, or would pace the deck with folded arms and downcast head. Ellen rarely left the cabin, and only for a few moments at a time, when accompanied by her maid, she sought the deck for sake of the invigorating breeze. Anne herself, once so voluble, had little to say. The polite, merry captain endeavored in his own fashion to make the voyage pleasant to the dispirited little party; striving in his spare moments to engage Howard in conversation, notwithstanding the monosyllabic replies of the latter. Even to Miss Flanagan, whose ignorance of the language he had at once comprehended, he tried to make his good intentions known by a series of bows and expressive gestures, all of which to that lady were as unintelligible as his words would have been. For Ellen's entertainment, he brought from the bottom of a great sea chest a number of French books. Many of them were dusty and partly moth-eaten, but they were novels, and because of that fact, he doubted not their acceptance by the young lady. The latter, divining the kindly motive which prompted the offer, took the books, and thanked the delighted captain with a smile and sweetness of tone which made him anxious to bring her something else, that he might be again rewarded in the same charming manner. But when he had bowed himself out of the little cabin, Ellen turned wearily from the books to a sheet of paper on the table before her; she had already inscribed on it the date and "Dear Mother," and now sat painfully thinking how much it would be requisite for her to tell of the events that had occurred since the last writing—she was so anxious to spare pain to that tender heart at home. Raising her head suddenly, she looked at Anne Flanagan, who was sitting opposite, apparently in deep and unhappy thought, then asked: "Did Howard tell you, Anne, to what part of Ireland we were going?" "No, nor did I ask him," was the brief reply, without raising her head.

Ellen put down her pen, and went out on deck to seek Howard. He was standing, apparently so interested in the unbroken view of sea and sky as not to heed her approach. She asked quietly: "To what part of Ireland are we going?" He turned in evident surprise. This was their third day out, and Ellen had not once previously referred to their destination. From her continued silence he had supposed that Anne Flanagan had not told her; and though he marvelled slightly at the seeming abatement of an interest which was wont to be so vivid, he was too much engrossed by his own dark thoughts to particularly care. He answered as quietly as she had spoken: "Why are you so anxious, just now, to know where we are going?" "I am writing to mother, and must tell her where to direct her reply."

His brow darkened, and he answered impatiently: "Defer writing till we are settled." There came into her pale face an indignant expression, from which Howard half shrank. "Howard," she said, "you have already done that which will almost break your mother's heart when she knows; yet, now you would give a last cruel blow by this indifference to her anxiety. Can it be that, not content with abjuring your religion, you are trying to destroy even your natural virtues? The lower animals have affection for their kind—would you sink beneath them?" His brow grew darker still.

"I will have no comments upon my conduct—once in Ireland, you and your maid can make preparations for an immediate return to New York." She placed her hand on his arm. "Is regard for your promises also going? You cannot break the contract we have made to remain with each other without avowing yourself to be unprincipled. Is this the character which is to win such renown, and leave a record to be envied by future generations?" There was no trace of sarcasm in her tones—Ellen Courtney could never wield such a weapon—but her words stung her brother; he was angry with himself, with her, with the world. He flung her hand off, and began excitedly to pace the deck. Ellen waited, with her eyes turned seaward, and her lips inaudibly syllabing a prayer for strength and grace. The rough sailors threw many glances at the pair, and the captain, covertly watching, called Howard hard French names under his teeth. The angry youth ceased his hurried walk. "I intend to go to Dublin," he said speaking rapidly; "there to remain till some further arrangements can be made."

"What arrangements?" she asked. "I do not know myself, yet. I am only certain of one thing—the determination to achieve that to which every energy of my mind has been directed since—since—"

"Since you have forsaken your God," she mournfully interrupted. His better nature was once more touched by the despairing sadness in her tones, the indescribable expression of sorrow and reproach in her eyes.

"No, Ellen, no? The hasty speech which led you to form such a conclusion was inadvertent and wrong. I believe as firmly as you can wish in His existence—"

"but I refuse to bow in the blind obedience which our faith demands; my reason and my knowledge alike tell me it is wrong, and every faculty of my soul rises up to protest against a subservience which is degrading to the intellectual powers of man."

"Can obedience, which is at once the mark of the soul's highest and noblest virtue, humility, ever be degrading? Of what use is it to acknowledge His existence, when you only do so to defy His teachings and commands? Rather is the blind presumption and wretched vanity of the creature, who dares to question the authority of his Creator, low and degrading indeed."

He was stung to the quick. The very calmness, the very tone of her reply, in such marked contrast to the passion and impetuosity of his own speech, irritated him. He turned away shortly, and began to pace the deck, the unhappy feelings under which he chafed visible in his lowering brow and flushed cheeks. Ellen slowly and sadly retired. It required an effort before she could resume her pen, and begin again her letter to her mother. She strove, as was her wont, to write cheerfully; but when, after recounting the events which had transpired ere their departure from France, and the assistance which Malverton Grosvenor had so nobly rendered, she would speak so of the disbanding of the club as something from which—delaying, as it must do, Howard's ambitious schemes—her mother and herself might imbibe fresh hope with regard to his ultimate conversion, her fingers refused to guide her pen. His last speech, rank with sentiments the most prejudicial to his faith, had well-nigh completely shattered her hopes—how then could she deceive that expectant heart at home. True, Howard had retracted the statement which led her to believe that he had sunk into the slough of atheism, but only to make an avowal which removed him as far from the pale of salvation. Her hand dropped on the paper, and she sat in sad uncertainty, mournfully gazing on what she had already written.

Some of the youth's better impulses had returned, and, half ashamed and half penitent for the manner in which he had turned from Ellen, he sought the cabin; but even when he stood beside her, gazing also on the half-written letter, his pride prevented the apology he would fain have uttered. Unconscious of the feelings which struggled in his breast, she looked up wearily, asking: "Will you not add a few words—you have not written in so long a time?"

He seized the pen she proffered, and, taking the seat she vacated, he seemed about to obey her request. But in a moment he threw down the pen, and started up without having written a word. "Mother would not care for anything I should write," was the only explanation he vouchsafed, and he returned abruptly to the deck. Poor Ellen's eyes filled as she resumed the seat to finish the missive. She made no excuse for Howard's failing to write, for, alas! her mother was accustomed now to this omission of filial duty on his part.

At length the tedious voyage—for it was tedious, despite all the efforts of the kind-hearted captain to render it otherwise—was ended, and one bright afternoon the little vessel cast anchor about half a mile from a picturesque shore on the eastern coast of Ireland. Ellen could see the sparkling strand where barefoot children were at play, and the row of fishermen's cabins just beyond, and seemed to perceive the scene that she could have looked for hours. But the sailors were signalling to one of the numerous little craft plying about the water, and when it came sufficiently near, owing to the ignorance of the French seamen of the English language, Howard himself was obliged to negotiate for the conveyance of his party to the little village in sight. The arrangements concluded, preparations were at once begun for the transfer of the ladies into the row-boat. The polite captain had many bows for Ellen, and many kind wishes for her welfare. Even to Anne Flanagan, impelled by his natural courtesy, he made some complimentary speech, though conscious that his listener did not understand one word. But Anne endeavored to look as if she comprehended it all, and she waved her adieu, as Ellen did, when at length all were seated and sturdy rowers began to shove away from the fishing-smack.

Approaching the land of her mother's birth was the only thought which filled Ellen's mind, and, for the first time for dreary days, something akin to happiness stole into her heart. Anne Flanagan also seemed engrossed by peculiar emotions, for her eyes were strangely turned, and her face had a softened look. Howard plied the oarsmen with rapid questions: What time would it require to reach Dublin, to arrive at a certain hotel which he named, and whether it would be possible to procure a male servant in the village which they were

approaching? One of the rowers slackened his work a little in order to reply to the queries. He was a sturdy, bronzed fellow of forty-five or more, with luxuriant black whiskers, and eyes of the same color. He had cast many furtive glances at Ellen and her maid, but particularly at the latter, and an expression as if he were striving to recall something had come into his face, which remained even while he replied to Howard.

Howard's Irish nationality apparent, but it seemed to add to the richness of his voice. The children who had been playing on the strand, and some of the women who had been watching from low doorways, gathered into little groups on the beach as the party landed. Suddenly, Anne Flanagan, who was waiting with Ellen a little distance apart while Howard arranged some matter with the boatmen, put her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbed almost aloud.

Anne, dear Anne," said Ellen in alarm, "what is the matter?" Miss Flanagan was too overcome by emotion to reply. Ellen's exclamation had been overheard by the blackbearded rower; he turned and looked at the weeping woman, while a strange expression flitted into his face—as if some doubt which he had entertained had gone, leaving in its place clear, convincing proof. He turned back, and waited till Howard had concluded speaking to the other boatmen; then he approached, doffing his hat, and saying: "Your honor was speaking of a servant. I'd like to engage with you, if your honor would think I'd suit."

Howard surveyed the man for a moment, unconsciously smiling at the odd figure he presented in his rough boatman costume. The latter so nobly rendered, she would speak so of the disbanding of the club as something from which—delaying, as it must do, Howard's ambitious schemes—her mother and herself might imbibe fresh hope with regard to his ultimate conversion, her fingers refused to guide her pen. His last speech, rank with sentiments the most prejudicial to his faith, had well-nigh completely shattered her hopes—how then could she deceive that expectant heart at home. True, Howard had retracted the statement which led her to believe that he had sunk into the slough of atheism, but only to make an avowal which removed him as far from the pale of salvation. Her hand dropped on the paper, and she sat in sad uncertainty, mournfully gazing on what she had already written.

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There was little communication between the party that night. Each one seemed too much engrossed with his or her own particular thoughts to care even to begin a conversation; but the next morning at breakfast, Ellen broached to Howard her desire to visit Ashland Manor. "It cannot be a great distance from here," she said. "Do you not remember mother speaking of her frequent visits into the city of Dublin?"

Howard answered impatiently: "For Heaven's sake, Ellen, do not intrude those whims of yours upon me now. Go where you will; I can spare Dick—motioning to his re-entrant engaged servant, who stood behind his chair—" to attend you and your maid, but do not include me in your arrangements!" and he turned to some written memoranda which he had placed beside his plate.

Anne Flanagan had lifted her head at the mention of Ashland Manor, with a startled, eager look; but nobody, save Howard's servant, seemed to notice it. Ellen did not reply, but the flush which dyed her face was evidence of the pain she suffered from her brother's speech.

Immediately after breakfast, Dick presented himself at the door of Ellen's room. "The master told me I was to be at your service to-day," he said with a not ungracious bow. Ellen turned to her maid, who was unpacking a few requisite articles. "Where shall we go, Anne?"

Dick advanced a little further into the room. "If I might make so bold, Miss, I think I heard you speak of Ashland Manor; I know the way to the place if you'd like to go."

Anne Flanagan turned and looked sharply at the speaker; but finding no reply, she ventured to approach, softly asking if the lady was sick, and if she would like to be taken to one of their homes until she should recover. But Anne subdued her emotion, and, drying her eyes she thanked the women for their offer, and walked along the strand with Ellen and Howard. The latter did not question the cause of the sudden grief—regarding Anne Flanagan as an eccentric old maid, he wondered little at her peculiarities.

In an incredibly short space of time the bronzed rower returned, looking like a different man, in corduroy breeches, buckled at the side, low shoes, also buckled, cloth vest and coat, and a beaver hat. "Have you nothing to take with you—no luggage of any kind?" asked Howard.

The man laughed, and answered in a tone in which mirth and pathos strangely blended: "It's not much the likes of me has to take; but never mind, master—I don't know your name yet—I'll serve you as well as those that would have more perhaps," and he doffed his hat.

Something in the words themselves or the manner of the man, touched Howard Courtney. He said, in a kinder tone than Ellen had heard him use for a long time: "Perhaps you have been too hasty in your proffer, and I also have been too hasty in accepting your services. You may be entering a position which you will not like so well—one which may remove you from your family."

The man laughed again and replied with the same mixture of mirth and pathos in his tones: "I have no family, your honor. I'm free as the wind that's blowing about us from the kiss of wife or children;" and then, as if fearful of further inquiries, he led the way to the conveyance which he had engaged during his brief absence.

Ellen Courtney had never since she left her American home felt such a sense of peace and security as there seemed to descend upon her that first night in Ireland. As she stood by a window in one of the apartments which Howard had temporarily secured in the hotel, she wondered whence her strange feeling, that was almost happiness, came—concluding, at length, that it must be because she was in her mother's native land. Something in the very air of the place seemed to wait for her mind conjectures of the events which must have been in her mother's early life; and then her busy fancy travelled to the particular spot in which had been her mother's early home. Ashland Manor had been the title of that home in those bygone times, but it had passed into other and more careless hands since Mary Ashland's marriage and Ellen had heard her mother frequently say that its appearance must be much changed. "I will persuade Howard to visit it," she said to herself, and then her thoughts turned suddenly and sadly to her erring

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AN OLD WOMAN'S GRATITUDE

A TRUE STORY OF A HOSPITAL WARD

By B. S. Lyne

"'Twas 10 o'clock, one wintry night, in dreary, dark December; When at my window came a tap, Remember, love, remember."

So sang my friend in a clear, sweet voice, as we sat around the fire in the drawing room of my little suburban villa, some two or three years ago, and listened to the howling of the storm outside. It was a terribly cold winter, and this particular evening was about the worst I had ever known, for the snow, which had been falling in thick flakes all day long, lay a foot deep in the streets.

Large hailstones beat against the panes of the windows as though they would break them in, while the storm, as it swept round the eaves and gables of the roof, literally shook the house in its fury, shrieking and wailing like a host of departed spirits.

Inside all was bright and cheerful enough. The lamps were lighted, the heavy crimson curtains tightly drawn, and the pine-wood fire, blazing up the chimney, cast a pleasant glow on the fair face and golden hair of my visitor, who laughed merrily at the shudders with which I drew nearer to the warmth, and sang the words of that old song in order to cheer me, so she said, out of a fit of the blues.

She was a lady nurse—a fair, sweet woman of some forty years of age, though looking considerably younger, whose whole life had been spent in doing good to others, and who had come to spend her Christmas with me, and take a short rest before beginning work again.

Nothing seemed to make her melancholy; the hard life of a hospital nurse had but toned down the exuberant spirits she possessed in her youth into a kind of cheerful gaiety, which though she could look serious enough when occasion demanded it, she seemed ready to burst forth at the slightest provocation.

"I cannot think how you can be so merry," I said, half inclined to be cross; "just listen to that storm."

"Listen to it!" she cried, laughing; "I can hear it without listening. Isn't it splendid?"

"It's enough to blow the roof off the house," I replied moodily. "Not it," she answered cheerfully; "we ought to thank God that we are in this comfortable room instead of being out at sea, or in some other dreadful position. God is so good to us."

"God help the poor!" I murmured. "God think what they must be suffering."

In an instant the bright face became clouded, and a look of infinite pity stole into her eyes. "Ah, yes, God help the poor!" she replied. "And may He open the hearts of the rich and charitable to do something for them this Holy Christmaside."

"I cannot think," I repeated, "how you can be so cheerful, living as you do amongst so much misery and wretchedness. The sight of human suffering always makes me miserable, knowing as I do how feeble and futile are our best efforts to alleviate their condition."

"Feeble, but not futile," she responded, "at least so far as hospital work is concerned; and when one thinks what a great privilege it is to serve our dear Lord in His suffering creatures, how can one help being gay? Next to being a religious, it is the grandest vocation on earth!"

win souls to Him and bring back our unhappy country to her allegiance to the Church."

"God will not work miracles," I replied moodily. "Oh, yes, He will," she cried, "sooner than a soul that trusts in Him should be neglected or lost. I have seen many an instance of this during my hospital life, and I know what prayer can do. You are morbid tonight, my dear Marion—suppose I tell you some of my hospital experiences? They are not at all doleful, and will help to cheer you."

I jumped at the idea. "Oh, by all means," I exclaimed. "I should love to hear them. But at first let us stir the fire and throw on some more logs. Then we will try and forget those warring elements outside."

"You may forget, but I never shall," she said, as a beautiful smile irradiated her face, and her eyes shone with rapturous light. "Nor would I wish to forget; they speak to me of the infinite goodness of God, and of His loving kindness to these who confide in Him. But to my story:

"One very cold night in December, 1883, a poor old Irish woman was admitted to M. Ward in one of the larger city hospitals, to which at that time I was attached. She was suffering from bronchitis and complications, but though very ill, was not sufficiently so to receive the last Sacraments, for which she was asking most earnestly. However, as both priest and doctor were in the ward when she came in, the doctor very kindly examined her again, and then assured the priest that there was not the slightest danger.

"Under those circumstances I cannot possibly administer the last Sacraments," said the priest. "No," replied the doctor decidedly, "I cannot say what turn the disease may take in the course of a few days, but at present there is no danger."

So the good priest sat down by the bedside, heard the old woman's confession, and tried to comfort her as best he could with the hope that she might soon get over this attack. But the old woman shook her head.

"Ah, yer Riverence, but you'll never leave me without the Holy Sacraments," she cried, imploringly. "It's this blessed night I'm going to die, and sure I cannot die without the rites of the Church."

"I cannot, dare not give them to you, my child," he replied compassionately. "The doctor declares you are in no danger of death, and I must not go against his opinion."

"But what would a Protestant like him know about it, at all, at all?" she exclaimed indignantly. "I know it's dying I am. For the love of Heaven yer Riverence give me the rites of the Church."

"Not now," he replied, as gently as he could, "but I'll come and see you first thing in the morning, and then—"

"I shall not be alive in the morning," she sobbed piteously. "You'll never be so cruel as to leave me without the anointing and the prayers that will help me on my way. Ah! wirra, wirra, yer Riverence, but it's breaking my heart you are."

"I was present at this scene, for the agitation and talking brought on fits of coughing, during which I was obliged to hold her up, and it made my heart ache to hear how, amidst the paroxysms, she prayed and pleaded for what was far more than life to her, the means to help her on her journey to the eternal shore."

"The priest stayed with her as long as he could, and then left, promising to come directly if he were sent for."

"I myself stayed a long time by her bedside, trying every means I knew to induce her to lie quiet, but she was restless beyond measure. 'It's no use, acushla,' she said. 'It's dying I am this blessed night and they will not believe me. It's the Holy Mother of God herself must help me now for I've none on earth to do it.'"

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Know how to list, and you will profit even from those who talk badly.—Plutarch.