

A RAY OF SUNSET.

LOVE BEFORE RICHES.

It was a day without a soul. Not once had the cheerful sun shone through the clouds. There was neither warmth nor light in the sky, rain fell and the earth, numbed by the cold, damp air, was devoid of gladness. Nature was repressed and unsympathetic.

Near the window of a stately mansion was an old man, whose life was typified by the dreary day. Seated in an invalid's chair, his head propped by pillows, he wearily watched the rain descend. He had a hard, bony face, a firm mouth, thin lips tightly drawn over his teeth and eyes to which the softer feelings were evidently strangers. His aspect, grim and repelling, was a physical revelation of his character.

Muttered sternly, his thoughts ran thus: 'My decision is final. I will speak to her once more. I will give her one more chance. If she yields, and she must yield unless totally lacking in common sense, I will leave my property to her; but if she still persists in braying my authority I will disinherit her; I will not leave her even a penny.'

'What did you say, grandpa? Did you say you would not leave even a penny to me?'

It was a remarkably sweet voice, through which quivered a note of pain.

The old man was a little startled when he learned that his soliloquy had been overheard, but quickly recovering himself, he turned his head fiercely.

A lovely girl stood beside him. Her presence seemed to give light and warmth to the dark room. She was to this room what a ray of light, if it could have broken through the clouds, would have been to the dismal day. Her face was as mobile, as responsive to the influence of the nobler emotions, as the face of her grandfather was rigid and cold. June and December had met, it would seem as if the effect must be the same as an occasional warm breeze from the chill of winter, but December had only harsh greetings for the gentle summer guest.

'You heard aright,' cried the old man in tones that were energetic in spite of his extreme feebleness. 'That is my decision unless you will agree not to marry Edward Browning. It rests with you whether you will live in poverty or be the most wealthy heiress in the State. You are like your father, impractical and visionary. If there were any of myself in you, you would not hesitate for a moment as to the course you ought to pursue.'

Elijah Pendergrass closed his lips grimly, and there was a look in his face that showed that the consciousness of his own superior wisdom gave him much satisfaction.

Tears stood in the eyes of Laura, his granddaughter. Her heart was so good that she could not feel sympathy for this selfish, cruel man, and the knowledge that her devotion received no proper recognition from him wounded her tender soul deeply. She alone had cherished the faith that somewhere in the heart of Elijah Pendergrass there still remained a little human feeling that might be cultivated. Now she almost despaired of its existence, but she resolved to make one more effort, as much for the sake of her lover as for herself.

'Are you certain, grandpa, that it would be better for me were I more like you?'

Mr. Pendergrass was surprised by the question. He had expected that Laura's first remark would be to beseech him to yield to her wishes.

'My great success in life sufficiently answers you,' he replied with the egotism of one who thinks that what he has said has left no opportunity for further argument.

'You really think that you have succeeded?'

Laura's tone was slightly sarcastic.

Mr. Pendergrass was still more surprised. He frowned.

'Of course I have succeeded. Why do you talk so childishly?'

'I beg pardon if I have irritated you, but I feel that what I am asking is important. And now, if you will please tell me, I would like to know what you regard as success?'

Mr. Pendergrass was very much surprised, and at first it seemed as if he might petulently refuse to gratify his granddaughter. But after thinking a moment he resolved to comply with her request.

'To succeed is to make a good living, to accumulate a handsome property and to allow no one to get the better of you in any transaction. I have always maintained that a level-headed man would not cheat himself.'

'Do you think you have never cheated yourself?'

'Hardly that. I never knew a man that did not make some mistakes; but my errors have been few, I am thankful to say.'

'I do not share your confidence, grandpa. I think you have cheated yourself.'

Mr. Pendergrass was astounded. He had not supposed that Laura could be so audacious.

'I will tell you,' continued the girl, 'why I think you have cheated yourself. For the sake of making money you have deprived yourself of the greatest blessings. You have abstained from doing kind and generous acts, consequently you have grown hard and selfish and have cheated yourself of the much joy that comes to one who endeavors to benefit his fellow-men; you have not cultivated a love for reading and have cheated yourself of much interesting knowledge and intellectual pleasure; you have not cultivated a love for the beautiful in art or nature and thus have cheated yourself of something of inestimable value that can be obtained without money and without price; you have not cultivated any friendships and you have cheated yourself of the satisfaction of knowing that men regard you with affection and esteem, and above all you have never known the Heavenly joy experienced by one who loves deeply and is loved as deeply in return.'

Laura forgot the fear of her grandfather which she customarily felt and spoke with enthusiasm.

The old man noticed her glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes with a troubled look in his face. Could it be that he was impressed by what she had said? Could it be that he acknowledged to himself that the truth had been spoken? Laura, who watched him narrowly, began to experience hope, but the next instant her spirits were dashed.

'I have heard enough,' he cried sternly. 'I am more than ever convinced that you lack good common sense, and that it would be foolish for me to leave my property to you. Your father was just like you; he talked the same way. He would persist in becoming an artist, and I told him that he must leave me. He claimed that he succeeded. His pictures were much praised by the newspaper critics, but he never made more than a living. He was like his mother. She never knew the value of money, but if she had lived I might finally have taught her something. Well, your father and his wife died. You were left without any one to care for you, and out of pity I took you and brought you up. I hoped you would be sensible. I believe you did have a little sense until you met this young newspaper reporter Browning. He read poetry to you and turned your head. He does not know how to make money or how to take care of it.'

'If he does not know how to make money he does not know how to make love, and that is more than you can do,' cried Laura, thoroughly provoked.

'You are impudent and foolish. I suppose Browning is still waiting for my decision. If so, tell him to come in and I will soon make myself understood.'

Laura went to the parlor and immediately returned with Browning. He was a strongly built young fellow, with a bright, intellectual face, and was manly in his bearing.

'I have sent for you,' said Mr. Pendergrass, looking at him scornfully, 'in order to tell you briefly and bluntly just what the situation is. If you and Laura marry I shall not leave her a cent. I have arranged everything. Several years ago I made a will in her favor, but recently, having discovered her foolish infatuation for you, I had attorney Andrews draw up another will, which provides that my property shall be left to her only on the condition that she has not married you or does not marry you; for if at any time after receiving the property she shall marry you she shall forfeit all further right to the possession of the property and to its use. If she cannot wisely be intrusted with the property, then it will go to the foreign missionary society. As I am a religious man, I have always taken a great interest in the heathen, and I hope the money may be the means of converting many of them.'

'I myself feel more interest in your granddaughter than in the heathen,' said Browning gallantly, although he was very pale, 'and I certainly do not wish to promote the missionary cause at her expense. But I wish you and her both to understand that I am no fortune hunter, and that if she loves me more than she does the money I love her enough to marry her without it and to rejoice then.'

'Spoken like my own true lover,' cried Laura, her heart swelling with pride and affection.

She ran to Browning and he clasped her in his arms.

'Mr. Pendergrass,' the young man cried, 'here is something money cannot buy, that is worth more than your whole fortune. It is pure, disinterested love.'

The old man gazed at the young couple in astonishment.

'Is it possible that you value what you call love more than all of my money and the power it would confer on the possessor of it?'

'It is,' they cried together and then looked fondly at each other.

The old man at last was touched and the scales fell from his eyes. He realized the truth of what Laura had said in regard to his having cheated himself of the greatest blessings of life. He comprehended that his life had been a failure, and that he had cheated himself in spite of all his precautions. This young and unworried couple possessed the secret of happiness which he had never found.

He became greatly agitated, and the effect upon him in his weakened condition was very serious. He put his hand to his side and cried:

'A spasm is coming. I believe I am dying. Run to Lawyer Andrews and tell him to bring forth both of my wills.'

Laura hesitated.

'Do as you are bidden,' said her grandfather sternly. 'I have done wrong, but I may be able to leave the property to you yet.'

Laura obeyed him. Fortunately Lawyer Andrews lived in the next house and was at home. He rushed to his safe, took from it a bulky envelope and followed the frightened Laura to her home.

Mr. Pendergrass was sinking fast when the lawyer arrived.

'Have you both wills?' the dying man asked eagerly.

'Yes.'

A look of great relief came over Mr. Pendergrass' face.

'Then tear up the last will that discriminates against my granddaughter and retain the will made several years ago that leaves the property to her unconditionally.'

The lawyer handed Mr. Pendergrass the will that was to be destroyed. The old man looked at the date of the manuscript and saw that it was his last will. He handed it to Andrews and the latter tore it to pieces.

As Laura bent over her grandfather, tears streaming from her eyes, he gasped the word 'Forgive.'

She pressed his hand and he was dead.

At this moment a ray of sunshine for the first time that dreary day burst through the clouds as the great orb sank beneath the western horizon and the general gloom was slightly relieved. There was a little soul in the day after all, and so there had been a little soul in the hard, selfish man who lay in the embrace of death.

In vain Theodore remonstrated. In vain Rosine wept. The old gentlemen were not to be moved by the unhappiness of the children. All the deeds that had been drawn up were cancelled. The little house which had been furnished for the bride and bridegroom was let to an Englishman sojourning in the place, and the lovers were forbidden to speak another word to each other as long as they both lived.

Perhaps it was worse for Theodore than for Rosine. She was permitted to weep as much as she chose. It was only natural that she should be found sitting disconsolately under the pear trees, and she could eat no dinner, and refuse herself to callers. Her mother felt great sympathy for her, and her father felt grieved that he could not make her happy.

But Theodore, whose feelings were probably stronger, and who felt the injustice of the old man's conduct more poignantly because he was not so used to consider his parents' word law, was forced to attend to business, to talk to his father's customers, to appear in every way as usual, and was not allowed a moment of private conversation with the old gentleman. Rosine grew sad, but Theodore grew angry. She gave up all hope; he began to plan a meeting. At last, having bribed Rose's maid to keep his secret, he confided to the hands of the girl a letter to her mistress, in which he begged her to steal from the house that night and wait under the pear trees beside the garden wall until he should come to her.

Rosine, who had never disobeyed her parents in her life, felt as guilty as though she were about to commit a murder when she stole out of the little side door to keep the rendezvous; but nevertheless her heart beat high with hope at the thought of meeting Theodore once more. And when at last she saw a form rise above the wall, stand upon it for a moment and proceed to ascend by means of a rope which was fastened on the other side, she with difficulty refrained from screaming aloud.

'Theodore!' she whispered; oh, Theodore! my Theodore! that it should be wrong for me to meet thee; that we, who were once betrothed lovers, should come to this.'

But the next moment he had caught her hands and kissed them, and she forgot all but that they were together.

This was the first meeting, but it was not the last. Night after night, when the old people were asleep, and in his own chamber, a mile or two away, M. Thibault snored peacefully, Theodore and Rosine sat by side in the garden under the pear trees, while Nannette, the maid, kept watch without the little side door.

All this had been going on for some time, when one night Rosine took her usual place to wait for Theodore. She heard the stealthy step as usual. She saw the lithe form mount the wall and stand in full relief against the golden moon, just at that moment rising. Then a faint cry of horror fell upon her ear, and it vanished from her sight. There was a dull thud upon the earth without, a groan and silence.

Theodore had slipped and fallen to the ground. For some moments he remained insensible. Rosine, nearly mad with terror, stood wringing her hands within the garden.

Her maid, who had seen all, hurried down the path. Neither of the girls knew what was best to do. At last Nannette, a stout young peasant girl, clambered up into the largest pear tree and managed to get her chin on a level with the wall. She could not see anything below, but she heard a movement.

'M. Theodore,' she whispered, 'speak if you can. My mistress is nearly frightened to death.'

A faint voice replied to her:

'Give my love to your mistress. I am not much hurt, but it will be the best for me to go home now. I think there has been some noise.'

And then the two girls ran indoors, Rosine in a terrible state of agitation. She knew that Theodore had been more injured than he would confess. And this indeed was true. He had broken his arm and felt a deadly faintness creeping over him. His one hope was to manage to get far enough from the house of old Michael to prevent any suspicion of the manner in which he had met with his accident; and at the first turning he left the street and hurried on, hoping to procure some assistance before he lost the power of speech and motion.

At last, amidst the darkened windows, he saw one in which a light burnt. Drawing nearer he saw that the door stood open, and heard some noise within. His strength was nearly gone. He made use of what remained to stagger under the doorway, and fell prone at the foot of the stairs just as an old man in a night gown, with a candle in one hand and a poker in the other, rushed down them, shouting at the top of his voice 'Thieves! murder! help! police, police!'

This old man was Pierre Blanc, a reputed miser, who had just before awakened to find two masked men in the room, one of whom held him while the other plundered his cash box. After much struggling he had succeeded in dealing one of the rascals a heavy blow with a cudgel which he always kept

under his pillow, and had been knocked senseless in return. When he came to himself he was in perfect darkness and it had taken him some time to strike a light, but to his great joy when he had done so, he found, as he supposed, one of the robbers lying wounded on the floor of his house.

The old man's shouts soon brought assistance, and he told his story, as people usually do, in a manner which reflected most credit upon himself.

He declared he had defended himself against both robbers and wounded one; and there he lay, the rascal, before them.

'But this is Theodore Thibault, the son of old Monsieur Thibault,' cried one of the assembled group. 'He is no robber, monsieur.'

'Nevertheless it is all as I said,' declared Pierre Blanc.

And on his word the poor wounded Theodore was carried to prison.

It was some time before he understood the charge that had been made against him, but when he did he at once formed a noble resolution. Suffer what he might, shame, imprisonment, whatever it might be, he would guard Rosine's honor. No one should ever know that it was in endeavoring to meet her alone at night in the garden of her father's house that he had met with this accident.

The day of his trial came at last. The court was crowded. Pierre Blanc was ready to swear to his story. The policeman and neighbors were witnesses to the fact that Theodore had been found lying insensible at the foot of the miser's staircase on the night of the robbery.

The prisoner himself had only his position and good character in his favor. Not a word would he utter in his own behalf save a simple assertion of his innocence. Old M. Thibault was weeping like a child. M. Michaud, who had always liked the young fellow, and whose heart even softened to his old friend in his affliction, was very much moved. The prisoner only was calm.

All was over. Nothing more could be said. The final proceedings were about to be taken, and none believed that the prisoner could possibly escape the sentence of the law, when suddenly there was a stir near the door and the crowd parted to admit to persons who forced their way toward the bench on which the justice sat.

One was a lady closely veiled. The other a peasant girl, evidently her maid.

At the sight of the pair old Michael started to his feet. Before she threw her veil back he recognized his daughter Rosine.

The prisoner also uttered a low cry; regarding them both the girl advanced toward the justice, whom she knew by sight. Ignorant of all forms of law, she thought of saving Theodore, whose motives for silence she quite understood; and fearful lest she should be too late, she spoke once.

'Sir,' she said, 'I have come as a witness for Theodore Thibault. I know how he met with his accident and I know the motive for his silence. It is for my unwelcome sake that he allows himself to be judged. It was to meet me in my father's garden that he climbed the stone wall which he fell. I saw him fall—I and maid Nannette—and we are ready with testimony.'

Old Michael gave a cry and started toward old Thibault also uttered an exclamation as he sprang to Michael's side.

'We might have known,' he said, 'were young once.'

The miser, re-examined, owned to the fact of having been insensible for some time confessed that he did not see the faces of the robbers, and Theodore Thibault free again. But now that he was free now that she had done her duty, the consequences of her disobedience awaited Rosine. She stood trembling at her father's side, he did not look unkindly on her.

'Sir,' he said to old Thibault, 'what we may think of each other your son is a brave and loyal gentleman.'

'Sir,' said Thibault, 'I cannot but deem the father of so brave and chaste a young lady.'

'There is but one thing for us to do,' said Michael.

'But one,' said Thibault, extending his arms.

Thereupon, in good old French fashion the two men embraced each other, and went home together to Michael's house, where the marriage contract was once made out and signed and an early day for the wedding of Rosine and Theodore.

Why We Should be Happy

Now, children, said the Sunday teacher, how many of you are really this bright Sunday morning?

All hands up.

Can any of you tell me, after you see the green trees and feel the warm sun, why we should be so happy?

Same business.

Well, little fellow at the end there, are you happy?

Two circuses comin' this summer.

He—Miss Sharp has a very fine

She—No wonder. She grinds it so