

NOT LOST.

Let me recount to you a true love story; a story of love pure and undefiled—love as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.

For love is all things in one to us. It is hope and fear and joy and despair; it is truth and it is falsehood; it is anything in short, that you are pleased to call it, and it can represent the brightness of heaven or the blackness of perdition.

"Love is a melting of the soul."

It was late in the afternoon of a dull autumnal day that a group of young people came chatting down the flight of stone steps leading from the door of a cathedral church, in an old Atlantic seaport town. They were members of the choral society attached to the church, and they had evidently been there for rehearsal. Within the great building yawned black and lonely, save in the gallery, where, over the organ, a gas-jet spun rays of light in the gloom, and the sound of softly subdued voices broke through the stillness.

The visible occupants were two, a man and a maiden—young, and with the cabalistic word, "lovers," gleaming, as did the mysterious handwriting of old on the wall, on their foreheads. Robert Field, the organist, was turning over some sheets of manuscript music with an absorbed air, while by his side stood Hester Heathersleigh, her pretty face full of anxious interest as she watched his movements. A little cloud of uneasiness wrinkled her forehead now and then as she saw the rent edges of angry clouds scud by the narrow slit of window giving to the east where the gray sea lay tossing stormily.

"Well, Robert!" she said at last, dropping her slim hand on his shoulder. "Well, Robert, what is it?"

The musician's dark, serious face lighted a moment, gloriously, as he turned and took the little ungloved hands in his.

"I asked you to stay, Hester, because I wished to play for you some passages from my new piece. I shall submit it to the society at Music Hall to-morrow evening, and I want your opinion in advance."

The young girl laughed—a little, rippling laugh of gleeful enthusiasm.

"My opinion! Why, Robert, you know beforehand what that will be. It would be nothing but a form asking it."

Robert raised the little hand tenderly to his lips.

"I know that love makes gentle critics of us all," he said wisely. "But now I want you to forget who is the author of the melody, and to exercise your judgment without stint. Remember, too, that love is the theme; love which, wisely or unwisely, hopes all things, believes all things, and endures all things unto the end." And then he turned to the organ.

He played slowly at first. It was a lonely opening, full of strange, sad chords, as if a soul were waiting somewhere in shadow. Then, as brightness entered, the theme asserted itself. The wonderful tones climbed higher and higher, expressive of a great faith, of a fond, mad triumph, and bewildering joy. On and on the chords swept; it was as if a living chain of light ran round the world.

When he had finished there was silence for a moment between these two. The lingering echoes rolled back and forth till one by one they, too, escaped into stillness. Then Hester Heathersleigh stooped, and, with quivering lips and tear-wet eyes, reverently kissed the bowed forehead of her lover.

"Oh, my darling!" she cried, "it is so beautiful! I am so proud of you. Who taught you to play like that?"

A proud and satisfied smile curved Robert Field's lips as he listened. "My love for you taught me," he answered. "My love for you, which is so great, so all-absorbing, that my music seems to be but a poor expression of it."

Then lifting her head he gazed for a moment, with wistful tenderness into the rose-pink beauty of her small, sweet face. "You think it is a triumph then, dear? Ah, Hester, are you sure you speak for the music itself, or only out of a tender mercy born of your love for me?"

An indignant light brightened the pretty violet eyes out of the drowsy languor of youth's enchanting dreams.

"Tender mercy for you," she repeated. Then her voice changed. "Ah, Robert! if my love can make you write like that now, then your future life shall be full of inspiration, for I shall love you more and more the longer I know you. I shall love you more and more forever."

She wound her arm about his neck, and with tender, maiden sweetness kissed his forehead, and kissed his wavy hair, and kissed the thin, pale hand which lay nervelessly on the yellow organ keys. And then a stillness more fraught with eloquent joy than any measure of golden speech could have been.

While they thus stood hand in hand talking the curtain behind them partitioning off the long gallery parted and a dark face peered through. It was a man's face, handsome but cruel in that purple gloom of gathering shadow. It was no friendly face, either, that with its many changes of hate and jealous anger and furious despair seemed, while the lovers talked, to be playing a dark and stormy accompaniment to the idyl of their love.

A sudden angry burst of wind at the narrow window roused them unpleasantly to a sense of night and the nearing storm.

"Oh, the rain!" cried Hester, with a pale face. "How thoughtless of us to stay, and you have that long, desolate walk over the cliffs in the dark!"

"Never mind!" cried Robert, stoutly. "There are such light and warmth within me that I shall not heed a passing touch of wind and water. I will see you to your door first, and then good night."

"My cousin Conrad promised to come for me," Hester answered. "I wonder what detains him. It is too bad for me to take you all this long way out of your route."

"I like it better so," the young man said, gravely. "I do not like your cousin Conrad, and I am not willing to trust you to his care. Oh, my darling!" he went on, earnestly, "if my music but brings me fame and fortune I can then make you all my own, and there will be no more good nights, no more partings in the storm for us."

They passed down the stairs and out into the street together unconscious of the shadow closing upon them, nearer and blacker. At the door of Hester's home they parted with a lingering good-by.

"My precious music," cried Robert, buttoning his coat closer about him. "No harm must come to that. It represents fame and fortune and love and honour for thee and me, my darling."

Hester lifted a small wet face to peer into the gloom.

"I wish you could stay," she said. "And oh, Robert, be careful of the cliffs—the path is so lonely and dangerous. I

shall come early to rehearsal to-morrow for the sake of knowing that you are safe."

"Do!" he answered. "I shall bring you glad tidings. Success is too near for me to miss it now. Good night, good night, my sweetheart!" and so speaking he passed from her into the shadow of his waiting doom.

After that night of storm the day dawned clear and cool. At St. Paul's the Choral Society, just then in first flush of enthusiasm over a new oratorio, gathered early. One—Two—Three! the great bells chimed the hours and the singers waited impatient for their leader. Something had detained him most likely; he would come soon! The hour struck four and he had not come, and Hester Heathersleigh, with a heart heavy as lead in her bosom, fell on her knees in an agony of prayer.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, reckless of who might hear her. "He is dead. My Robert is dead! He has been lost in the cruel storm!"

Some one, pitying, touched her arm. It was her cousin, Conrad Charteris; he was looking at her with a pale face—a face paler far than that with which he had spied upon her yesterday from behind the gallery curtain. Her piteous cry had touched even his stony heart.

"Hush!" he whispered, "here is news from him—from Robert; come and hear what it is."

A note had been brought by a swift-running messenger, and a shudder ran round the waiting circle of listeners when its contents were made known. It was signed by a leading physician of the city, and stated that Robert Field had been picked up that morning at the foot of the cliffs and taken home for dead. He was now, at the date of writing, lying in an insensible condition, and it was impossible to tell what the extent of his injuries were, or if there were any hope of his ultimate recovery.

A horror-stricken silence followed the reading of the note, broken at last by a low, sobbing cry from Hester Heathersleigh's white lips.

"I must go to him—oh, I must go to him! Who will take me? You! you!" and she caught Conrad Charteris by the arm.

He shrank away from her with a gesture much as if she had pierced him with a knife. His black eyes dilated horribly.

"I? I go with you to see him?" he cried. "What are you thinking of? What do you take me for?" Then noting her astonished look he made a fierce struggle for composure; but his hands shook like withered leaves.

"Why do you wish to go to him?" he questioned angrily. "He would not recognize you—and it is no place for you! Let me take you home."

She snatched up her shawl and bound it with trembling fingers about her shoulders. "I tell you I shall go to him," she answered. "I was to have been his wife and, living or dead my place is now by his side. You can come with me if you like!" And she flew down the steps.

It seemed an age to her, that short time she was on the road leading to the lonely house of Robert Field's widowed mother; and when at last, by dint of her prayers and tears, she was suffered to approach his bedside, she looked down on a very different Robert Field from the one with whom she had parted in such high hope the night before.

The bruises were chiefly about the head, the physician said gravely, and even if he recovered it was doubtful if his mind would ever be sound again. Hester heard him, and with a great sob fell on her knees by the bedside. Where now were the brilliant aspirations, the tender hopes, the gay courage and stout-hearted faith of one short day gone by? Lost! lost! Success so near to him, and yet to fail. Triumph so nearly won, and yet to pass by on the other side.

"Robert, O my Robert! Look up! Speak to me, or I, too, shall die!"

Ah! but love remained. Love unchanged and unflinching. This then was left—the blessing of a love which believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things unto the end.

The drawn white face on the pillow did not change at Hester's cry, but under the half-closed lids the dull eyes gleamed feebly and the slender hand outside on the coverlet groped helplessly. Hester took his hand in hers and then, quick as lightning, by some strange, subtle instinct rather than by any demonstration of his, she felt that the poor, stricken senses were trying to break through the darkness that enveloped them and make their unknown want understood.

"Robert, Robert! what is it?" she cried. "What is it that you want to make us understand?"

The helpless movement of his lips, the helpless groping of his fingers, were enough to make one weep. Hester bent her ear to his mouth.

"What is it, Robert, dear? Tell me—what is it you want?"

The stifled lips strove with a terrible effort to move, and this time one word was feebly articulated:

"Music!"

Hester looked up with a startled exclamation: "Music! he calls for his music. Do you not hear? Where is it? Who knows about it? Is it lost?" she questioned eagerly.

Again that terrible attempt at speech. The dull eyes opened wide, the feeble fingers clenched themselves on Hester's hand, and, with a last mad effort of expiring desperate strength, he raised himself, and shrieked:

"My music! Find it! Save it!" And then he fell back on his pillow like one dead.

"You have killed him," said the physician, angrily, and at the words Hester, with a moan, dropped down insensible.

Not dead! But when, after weeks and months of painful illness, he faced the world again, he looked like a shadow out of the past. But bent and aged, with scarred forehead and whitened locks, the wreck of his body was not the greatest evil that had befallen him; for of the brilliant genius of other days no vestige was left. Saddest of all, the miserable ghost of his lost hopes haunted him, and in the ruined chambers of his darkened intellect he was forever groping, trying to gather up the mystic chords of tuneful thought which no longer vibrated to his magic touch. The lost manuscript music had never been recovered, and though his feeble mind failed to take in the greatness of his loss, the shadow of something beautiful which was to have been, but, somehow, failed to be, lay on him, and gave his face a wistful look, which was sadder far in its mute endurance than any wail of speech could have been.

Music was to him now something akin to the sound of "sweet bells jingled, out of tune and harsh."

One day in early spring he went to the church for the first time, leaning on Hester's arm. The old, familiar look of the place struck him forcibly and roused his dormant wits. He

sat down to the organ and glided his hands over the keys; a few jangling discordant chords followed, wandering and disconnected; then his face changed, and, with a terrible cry, he flung his head down on his arms.

"Oh Hester! tell me what is it I have lost! Sometimes I almost reach it—it is in my mind, something beautiful which I almost grasp, and then it eludes me and fades away. I have lost it now. Hester! Hester! take me home!"

Soon after that they were married. In vain Hester's friends threatened and opposed her. She was quietly determined.

"He loved me when friends and fortune smiled on him," she answered them. "He would have given me every great gift which the world was ready to bestow on him for love of his beautiful genius, and shall I desert him now when misfortune has overtaken him? Perhaps—oh, perhaps some time God may restore to him his lost mind." Tears filled her lovely soft pathetic eyes. "If I dared to hope it—oh, if I but might hope for it, how willingly would I give my life to have it so."

The day before her wedding she received a visit from Conrad Charteris.

"It shall not be!" he cried out vehemently. "Do you realize what you are doing? Why, you had better far die at once, for Robert Field is but little better than an idiot."

"And if he were an idiot," returned Hester, bravely hiding her hurt at the brutal words, "even then I would marry him. I love him, and if not one vestige of his glorious intellect remained I would be Robert Field's wife, and a proud one, too!"

"And, by God, I believe you would," answered Conrad, looking with a fond, mad longing into the small pale face, lifted so undauntedly to his dark gaze. "Hester, you will drive me mad. I would to heaven that Robert Field was dead. Why did he not die that night last winter?" and he struck his hand furiously on the table in a blind frenzy of despair.

"God knows it was for no lack of purpose in you that he did not die," retorted Hester spiritedly.

She spoke at random, but Conrad shrank away with a white face. The idle words evidently hit him hard. They cut close and sharp as steel in their unexpected descent, and wheeling abruptly about he left her and did not seek her again.

They were married quietly, and after that, in the tender security of his modest home, under the fond and cherishing care of his wife, health and strength came slowly back to the shattered frame of Robert Field.

Slowly, too, out of the darkness he began to wrench, one by one, the secrets of his prisoned mind. Old melodies began to shape themselves under his touch, discordant and fragmentary at first, but gradually assuming symmetry and power.

"Not quite a wreck!" he would sigh, wistfully. "Some day some good genius will unlock my prison door and set me free."

In the child that was born to them, a beautiful boy who sang sweet music in every tone of his childish voice, his pride was great. He talked of him, listened to him, watched him, and dreamed of him, predicting a future of which Bertrand was to be the perfect flower, the very golden rose of joy. So the years passed, and sweet Hester Field's fair face grew heavenly beautiful to see, with its tired look of patient waiting. God only knows how her heart failed her now at times; or with what fierce power she wrestled with her growing doubts, and prayed for strength to help her bear this cross whose shadow fell even darker and deeper on her young life.

Had her love, then, been a sacrifice in vain?

But one day the answer came!

Returning one afternoon from a long walk, Robert Field stopped in the hall, spell-bound by the triumphant strains of some new and beautiful melody floating through the rooms. His worn face flashed with the old light of inspired thought; his eyes dilated; his whole form shook with a mysterious emotion.

"What is it? what is it?" he asked of his wife, who came to meet him.

"Bertrand's music!" answered proud mother Hester. "He has been engaged with it a long time. He meant it to be a surprise for you."

Robert Field threw up his arms with a joyful cry.

"It is mine!—mine! My lost music!—the music I played for you that long-forgotten day! Hark, Hester! do you not recognise it now? Oh! to think that it has slept so long and now comes back to me so fresh and fair. This is what I have missed out of my life? This is my treasure which was lost to me after many years. Brought back by a little child! Our child, Hester! Oh, thank God for that!"

Rushing into the parlour he swept Bertrand from the stool and, seating himself at the organ, with one powerful sweep of his hand over the keys he summoned his God-given genius from the tomb of his youth and bade it stand resurrectionised in new life before him. On and on the music swept: not a note was lost; not a chord dropped out of the splendid work. Shoutingly, exultantly the tones leaped forth, "and their name was called Wonderful." On! on! Up and up!

At last, from sheer exhaustion, the musician dropped to the floor, and lying there at Hester's feet he wept tears which were no shame to him.

"It is the very same!" he cried. "Bertrand has written it out note for note, a counterpart of my own work. Is it not an awful thing to think of! My own work, and yet his! Who but God can explain it. And oh, Hester! The darkness is all gone now! Let me thank God for that!"

Then, wrapping his arm about her, Robert Field kissed his wife's pale face and kissed her tender mouth, her wavy hair, and her slim, pale faithful hands.

"My wife! my wife! Oh, what if your love had failed you, Hester? If, in those terrible first hours of my misfortune, your true heart had been one whit less true, then I should have been lying in my grave to-day, a broken and forgotten man!"

So fame and success in the later days of his life came, not unwelcomely, to Robert Field. The world welcomed his famous piece with none the less acclaim for its long delay, and for the strange story which accompanied it. One truth only concerning that fatal night Robert withheld—known alone to his faithful wife. But Conrad Charteris had long ago disappeared from the town, and was seen no more among them. So he and Hester buried the secret in their hearts, contented that it should be so—for God is his own avenger.

They had been taught a wonderful lesson, too, by One who, having lived on earth, knew what the full fruition of earthly life must be, and who gave, ere he passed away from among men, the crowning blessing of His wisdom in a last, new commandment—

Love ye one another!