

A WINTER'S TALE

BY HOWARD CHASE

Upon a mountain's crest I stand
And look upon the world below;
The landscape is a silver land
Of wave-like dunes and melting snow.

A misty cloud floats o'er the sea
And drops in snow-pearls softly down
Into the vale in front of me
And hides from sight the little town.

The skies grow bright, the sun appears
An arc of phosphorescent fire;
Mine eyes grow dim with unshed tears,
My heart is pulsing with desire.

Each distant mount is getting dim,
The valleys look like shadow-bars;
The sun drops o'er the ocean's rim,
And night comes on, the moon and stars

Seem like pale specters of the air
That are by turns both dim and bright,
And this grand scene so richly fair
Has vanished in the mist of night.

KIMBLEY, IOWA.

A TERRIBLE SECRET

OR

The Curse of the Morelands.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER I.

WHY DID SHE REJECT HIM?

T cannot be, Vance! I love you—oh, so tenderly! I shall love you always and forever, but I cannot marry you! I would sooner die!

What strange words were these to pass from a beautiful young girl to her lover, and with what wild energy of despair and grief were they uttered!

And he to whom she was speaking? Ah, it was here that was seen how singular was her decision.

Scarcely three-and-twenty, yet old in thought and study, as grave as gentian, with a face as expressive of kindly feeling as of intellectual dignity, and a form that was a model of manly beauty, surely it seemed as if he could have in no wise deserved to hear those burning, withering words which had so unexpectedly fallen upon his hearing.

How astonished, not to say horrified, was the look he gave her!

He could hardly credit the evidence of his senses, and stood as if petrified, unable to give order and sequence to the troubled ideas and impressions crowding upon him.

Then he advanced and took the girl in his arms as tenderly as a fond mother takes a weary child to her bosom.

Surely she must be ill—as she looked. He could think of no other explanation of her singular demeanor.

"Oh, never, Vance, never," she continued, shrinking away from the arms that enclosed her so gently and firmly, and even averting her eyes from the loving glances bent upon her, as if she dared not trust herself to meet them. "I cannot marry you. I have been weak and wicked not to tell you this sooner, but, oh! I was so happy. I have always known that there is a barrier between us. But the end has now come. Sooner death than marriage. Do not press me for my reasons. This must be our last meeting, Vance—the very last."

How the lover again looked at her, as she struggled further to escape him.

A vague sort of comprehension began dawning upon him.

He recalled the deep gloom in which he had often found her, and the traces of tears he had frequently seen on her cheeks, when he had presented himself unexpectedly to her. He remembered how she had again and again seemed to desire to fly from his presence without being able to do so.

"And yet," he cried impetuously—"and yet you love me, Jessie!"

"Love you!"

Oh, how her arms inclosed him! Again and again, as if she could not control herself, in the wild agony of that moment, did she rain kisses upon his cheeks, eyes and lips, with a tenderness and fervency which attested how completely she had given her heart to him.

And then, with a startled and almost guilty air, she tore herself away abruptly, and placed herself behind the chair she had previously occupied, bowing her head upon its high back and sobbing as if her heart were broken.

A look of terror appeared in the eyes of the lover, as he contemplated the weeping girl a few moments, and then, with a sigh of mortal anguish, he dropped into the nearest chair, covering his face with his hands.

What a dismal abyss human life had already become for him!

From a cheat and snare were all the fond hopes he had been cherishing.

From his boyhood up to that hour, Vance Weyville's lines had been cast into pleasant places, and he had hardly known a care or a sorrow.

Left an orphan in early infancy, he had been reared by a childless uncle, who had made a great pet of him, and taken all the pains in the world with his education.

Naturally gifted and energetic, it had been easy for Vance to secure the first

that it might mercifully be the last!

Vance Weyville was startled by the wild, gloomy impetuosity of the girl's speech, and when her eyes and face glowing with passion as he had seen in the past, he had been on living coals of fire!

"No, Vance, I can never marry you," she resumed, in a wailing voice, but one that nothing could be more stern and determined. "In this awful hour—the last we shall ever pass together—I have candidly avowed that I love you, but there it all must end. There's a gulf between us which can never be crossed. As dearly as we love each other, I must persist to the end in this 'strange refusal.'—I do not dare marry you. A marriage between us, darling," and her voice became low and broken, "is wholly out of the question. I love you too well to wrong you. I love you too well to wreck your happiness. To me, the memory of the last few months will be like the memory of a lost Eden. To you they need appear only as a brief, joyous dream. Go, and forget me."

"I must go, of course, if you insist upon it," returned Vance sadly, "but I can never forget you. Believe me, darling, these last few months will always be as sacred to me as to you. Not as a dream, as you suggest, but as the most glorious reality with which my life has been blessed."

"So be it," prayed Jessie. "But for you there is a future. A future wherein the arms of a loving, dutiful wife can be clasped around your neck, and wherein the prattle of joyous, beautiful children will have their place. God grant it!"

She was silent a moment, her bosom rising and falling stormily, as if with thoughts for which she had no language, and then she resumed, hurriedly: "I come to my last requests, dear Vance, of which I have two. The first is that you will forgive me for allowing our acquaintance to go so far. I knew from the first hour of our meeting—oh, only too well!—that I had no right to encourage your attentions, since I was foredoomed never to marry! But it was so sweet to be loved! The flutters you caused my poor heart were so delicious! It was such a delight to meet you! You had so much to say that thrilled me! You will forgive me for not breaking off the acquaintance sooner, dear Vance?"

"Forgive you, darling? I will bless you to my last breath for having given me this great happiness!"

"I knew you would be generous, Vance," and she kissed him with solemn tenderness. "My second and last request is that you will order your future life precisely as if you had never met me. The only thing now wanting to crush and kill me is to feel that I have blighted your life. Such is not the case, Vance?"

"No, darling. On the contrary, you have glorified and ennobled it!"

"Then let it be a grand success, Vance. I want you to be honored and happy. The world is full of sweet, good girls, and you are one of those worthy and gifted men who readily attract them. I shall hope to hear of your marriage in due course, and then—"

The poor girl had assumed too much. She broke down, and sobbed piteously. "Nothing that you can reasonably ask of me, darling," assured Vance, seizing her cold, trembling hands, "shall be refused. But my heart is no longer mine, Jessie. I cannot reclaim it. I feel, too, that there is no adequate reason for this banishment. I will go away now, but I must come again; and I must know more about the 'curse' of which you have spoken."

"No, Vance; we must not continue this acquaintance. We must separate now and forever. Forgive me for all the pain I am causing you, but do not seek to change my decision. Be sure it is none the less irrevocable because I have delayed about announcing it. Judge of my pain by yours, and be merciful. Farewell, dear Vance. One last kiss."

"But, shall we not meet again, Jessie?" asked the young physician, caressing her as tenderly as sadly. "At least once more?"

"Oh, do not doubt it, darling!" and her eyes kindled as if the music of the spheres had already fallen upon her hearing. "Oh, yes. By-and-by, Vance, when this mortality shall have put off its fetters and earthly infirmities, and we shall have exchanged the thorny paths of this vale of tears for the everlasting radiance of the starry plains above us, then we shall meet again, dear, dear Vance!"

A moment longer she hung upon his breast and lips, as if upon the verge of insensibility, as indeed she was.

And then, with a final swift return of the wonderful strength lent her by despair, she tore herself from the arms of her lover and burst into the house, with a men so agonized, so terribly indicative of suffering, that he did not venture to detain her or to pursue her.

She had fled from love and all that love had to offer.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING VIEW OF THINGS.

Describe the chaos of thought and feeling to which Jessie left Vance Weyville is simply impossible.

His consternation was such that its first full effect was very much in the nature of a stunning blow.

As bewildered as pained, he stood silent and motionless a few moments, staring at the door which had closed between him and the object of his affections.

Some vague idea of refusing to accept his rejection evidently traversed his mind, for he took a hasty step or two towards the entrance.

A burst of sobs from within arrested this movement, causing him to realize that an intrusion at that moment was entirely out of the question.

He must wait in patience for the present, coming again on the morrow.

Facing about abruptly, he descended the steps of the veranda where the interview had taken place, crossing the lawn towards the adjacent meadow, with the air of a man walking at random.

As he did so, he suddenly became conscious that the shades of evening were beginning to gather around him.

How thankful he was for the friendly

well thus thrown over his sorrow.

Darkness and night were just what he wanted at that moment.

His one necessity was to have time to think, that he might form some plan of conjuring the dire calamity which had destroyed his present happiness and was menacing his entire future.

In what a dazed state he was! He could not even form a coherent theory as to the motive or reason underlying Jessie's rejection of his suit.

He did not doubt the reality of the 'curse' of which she had spoken, or rather her entire and earnest conviction of its reality, but he could form no conception of its actual nature.

Yet he made the attempt, then and there, as was natural, asking himself all sorts of questions, and passing in review all sorts of conjectures.

To begin with, he knew from the confidences of Mrs. Moreland and Jessie, as casually presented during nearly a year of friendly relations with them, that the head of their family, Mr. Walter Moreland, had been a good husband and father, and a man of excellent character and reputation, whom they had lost when Jessie was a mere baby.

He had received some hints, too, in the course of his conversation with the mother and daughter, of the existence and character of a man named Radd Moreland, an unworthy and dissolute brother-in-law and uncle who was in some way troubling their existence.

And finally he had heard both Mrs. Moreland and Jessie speak repeatedly of a kindly and generous brother, Col. Barton Ridley, an East Indian merchant millionaire who had done so much to brighten the lonely lives of his sister and niece that they could never tire of talking about him.

There had been nothing secret or misleading, therefore, in the dealings of the mother and daughter with the young physician upon all these points, and hence there was not the least reason to suppose that the action of Jessie had been based upon the existence of any disreputable family history, disgrace or connection.

Even if some misfortune of that sort had existed, Mrs. Moreland and Jessie were both too sensible to have any false shame about it.

By a single swift mental reference to what he already knew concerning the two ladies, therefore, the young physician was able to decide that the rejection of his hand was in no wise based upon anything in their family history or connections.

To the contrary, the motives which had influenced Jessie's conduct had been of a strictly personal nature.

In other terms, she had rejected Vance because of some attribute, characteristic, or circumstance peculiar to herself. But what was it?

Did she refer to some incurable malady of the body, or some dreadful infirmity of the mind?

Was her affliction entirely beyond a wise and loving treatment, or could it be cured or mitigated by a judicious resort to the vast resources of modern science?

Was it wholly real or partly imaginary?

Vance recalled in this connection that Jessie had never made any complaints, and had always seemed to be in the best of health.

Then what could be the 'terrible curse' of which she had spoken?

In any case, it was an inheritance of Mrs. Moreland as well as her daughter, inasmuch as the latter had spoken of it as having existed in her family for many generations—a fact which was in itself enough to show that it could be perpetuated.

Might it not be in their blood, and something in the nature of one of those scrofulous taints which are so common?

In that case, however, why had they not made every possible effort to get rid of it, and why had they failed to take the young physician into their counsels, after all the great cures he had already effected?

Was their affliction not more likely to be some dreadful form of epilepsy, which no art can cure, and which is liable to strike down its victim at any moment, with every circumstance of torture, disfigurement and horror?

But just what could it be?

This was the query that kept presenting itself constantly to the puzzled young doctor.

From the mere fact that all his attention was given to this inquiry, at the very moment of the rejection of his suit, it will be seen that he did not take his dismissal very seriously to heart.

Not for a single instant did he regard the interview he had just had with Jessie as a finality.

If the lover had indeed been temporarily eclipsed, it had only been to give way to the physician.

He could only regard Jessie as ill, and it was no more his intention to remain away from her than if the painful interview he had just had with Jessie had never taken place.

In good truth, this interview had deepened his love for the afflicted girl immensely.

The fact that she loved him so intensely could not have possibly failed to call forth all the ardor of his own passion.

How tenderly and sorrowfully his entire soul went out to her!

How her grief and despair were duplicated in his own heart!

"Nor walk along the drive to the lawn after hitching them?"

The young doctor shook his head vigorously.

"Nor saw me sitting on that horse block near the house?"

"No, I didn't."

"I was none the less there, my dear nephew—near enough to see and hear why you were so oblivious of my presence."

"Ah! you saw—"

"That Jessie rejected you, as I always supposed she would," interrupted the uncle, in a tone that was at once cheerful and sympathetic, as he drew the arm of his nephew within his own, and put the young physician and himself in motion for the highway. "I was too near, you see, not to become enlightened."

"But how came you here, uncle?"

"How? Well, that's a good one! Didn't you invite me to take tea here with you, and I told you I would come if we could get that hay into the barn in time?"

"Certainly."

"Well, we had some delay, so that I was unable to drive into town to your office and come here with you, but I fancied it would do just as well if I drove direct to the house."

"Why, of course, only—"

"Oh, yes, I understand the matter! I see there has been a hitch in the proceedings! But here we are!"

He climbed the fence with the agility of a school-boy, and proceeded to unhitch a pair of fine gray horses which awaited him there in front of a handsome top buggy.

"Tumble in," he added brusquely.

The couple were soon seated in the vehicle and jogging quietly in the direction of the city.

"Will you smoke?" suddenly asked the uncle, producing an elegant cigar case.

The young man assented, with a kindling eye.

To light a cigar was the uncle's usual preliminary to a conversation, and Vance was anxious to talk.

By the rays thus cast momentarily upon the face of the uncle, he could have been seen to be a fine-looking, genial-hearted and kindly eyed man of some fifty years.

Erastus Weyville was, in fact, one of those superior men who are every year getting more common, and who are farmers and workers without ceasing to possess all the instincts and sentiments of the best class of gentlemen.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

WELL, DID YOU EVER!

Why Doesn't This Young Lady Declare Her Identity?

An advanced young woman, says the Argonaut, writes as follows: "I shall never, never be satisfied until I have been permitted to make love to a man according to my own sweet will. Beginning at the very first meeting, I want to enjoy the novel sensation of telling a young man how I admire him; how his large, gray eyes fascinate me; how I was struck by his graceful figure, his fine, open countenance, bronzed to a soft brown and lighted by such a calm and thoughtful smile. And then, not with downcast eyes, but looking him straight in his fine, honest face, I want to take his hand and say: 'Mr. Thomas, I am none of your gushing so-lazy girls, with no thoughts above maroons glaces and pretty-faced actors. I am a young woman of sense, and ripe, wholesome sentiment. May I have the pleasure of meeting you again?' I should want to taste in small mouthfuls of bliss that soft and gentle gardient which leads to the telling of one's love in English, with no hems or haws, but straight to the point. Something like this: 'Dear Tom, how grandly handsome you look to-night. Nay, my dear Tom, don't blush, you can't help it; I have heard it said that your father was an uncommonly handsome man; it's a matter of inheritance, dear Tom; pedigree, don't you know. My hair is naturally curly. Don't be afraid of disarranging my bangs. You may kiss this hand of mine if you choose, Tom. The boys all tell me it's very white and pretty, but I haven't let any of them hold it. I've been waiting for you, dearest Tom. Might I sit beside you? Don't be frightened, Tom; there's no rice powder to rub off on your coat. Thanks again. You really like me, don't you Tom? I love you with all a true woman's heart and soul. Can't you see it in my eyes? Isn't it visible on my very lips?' And so on through the whole gamut, until at length, with sweet coyness, his love burst the bonds of his collegiate bashfulness, and he whispered that he was my own."

THERE are innumerable ways of being useful in the world, and each man has his peculiar gifts and qualifications. Each man will walk in the path best adapted to him; but there is no reason why every path should not lead toward the benefitting of men in general. Good principles are just as good for the artist as for the artisan, for the poet as for the plowman, for the man of business as for the clergyman. It makes no difference what you do, as long as it is just, and you are honest and diligent in the doing of it.

KIND thoughts will often suggest a silence which has not been demanded. The suggestion that it might be better not to repeat something is one that should never be disregarded.

OF course it will occur to everybody that the appearance of small-pox in Sing Sing Prison will give the prisoners a chance to break out.

