

And added: 'There are some thoughts that lie not only too deep for tears, but too deep for words. Do you cherish any such? If so, can you not find a flower that will express them as I hoped to have mine revealed by the unfolded rose?'

Ethel handed him a leaf plucked from an oak geranium, and quietly but firmly replied: 'Flowers are often kind messengers, and spare us from telling our friends things that seem cruel. But it would be far more cruel to deceive them. You remember the line:

"I must be cruel, only to be kind"?''

Frank said a sad good-bye, and left the house. He loved Ethel devotedly. He had not doubted that his proposal would be accepted, and it was not until the bit of geranium had been given him that his hope vanished. Placing the leaf in his pocket-book, he drove home, not yet willing to abandon his suit.

Christmas dawned brightly for the little ones at Mrs. Blandford's. They went to early Mass, and were then given the presents, most of them Ethel's handiwork. During the day a letter came for her from Frank, with a valuable present. He asked that the leaf of geranium might be exchanged for a rose leaf, so that Christmas might not pass without giving him a ray of hope.

Ethel replied to the note and returned the present. To do so caused many tears to fall upon her cheeks, for she now realised the fact that she loved Frank. But he was an agnostic, and with her unbelief was a sin. She was fully determined never to marry an infidel. She knew how dark had been her mother's life because of her husband's infidelity, and how sharp was the arrow that pierced her heart when he died without the last preparation for the long journey into eternity. She did not tell Frank why she had declined his request to exchange the symbol of friendship for one of hope, but she made it quite clear to him that she would never alter her decision.

That evening Frank called at Mrs. Blandford's and urged Ethel to become his wife. His protestations of love were in vain, and when he forced her to tell him the cause of her refusal she kindly informed him that she would never marry an unbeliever, although she admitted that she loved him.

Frank received his refusal as thousands of others have done and will do until the end of time. The light of his life had suddenly been extinguished, and he never expected to enjoy another happy day.

A few days later he left town, scarcely knowing where his wanderings would take him. After spending a few days in New York, without for a moment forgetting the weight that crushed his energies and robbed him of peace, he sailed for Europe, determined to drown his sorrow in the gaieties of Paris.

One evening about the middle of January, Mrs. Blandford called Ethel to her room and told her many things concerning the family that she had never heard before. Finally she informed her that the little pittance saved from her once handsome fortune had been spent, and that the mortgage on her little home was about to be foreclosed by a Mr. McGregor, a Scotch money-lender. Ethel tried to console her mother, and said she would seek employment as a clerk in a store or as a school teacher, and if she failed in these, she would become a housemaid or make any sacrifice to save her mother and the children from actual want.

'Ethel,' replied Mrs. Blandford, 'you can do better than that. You can save us this house, and by renting a few rooms I can take care of the children until James is old enough to help us.'

'Tell me how, mother, and I'll do it quickly.'

'Not only can you help us, but you can secure an elegant home for yourself,' added Mrs. Blandford, sorrowfully.

'I care nothing for an elegant home, mother,' responded Ethel, becoming alarmed, as she imagined her mother intended to insist upon her marrying Frank Marshall. 'But tell me how I can save this house for you. Don't keep me in suspense a moment longer, please.'

'I will tell you, my daughter,' commenced Mrs. Blandford; 'but in the first place let me assure you that I do not wish you to do anything that is disagreeable to you. But for your own comfort, and for the comfort of the children, I'll let you read this letter and decide for yourself. Here is a letter from Mr. McGregor.'

Ethel took the letter and read it, while the blood surged to her cheeks. It was short and business-like, saying: 'The mortgage is due and must be paid. However, I wish to marry, and if your daughter will become my wife I'll cancel the indebtedness.'

A few minutes passed before Ethel could control her emotions.

If you think it is for the best, mother,' she said, 'I'll marry this man, but, of course, you must tell him that I shall never love him.'

No, my child, I would not have you do so for the world unless you are satisfied. I think it would for you to accept his offer, but if you are not willing I'll write Mr. McGregor and tell him his offer is declined. He is an honorable man, and calls himself a Catholic. You might bring him back to the Church, and thus help him as well as ourselves.'

Ethel placed her arm around her mother's neck, and between her sobs said:

'If it is the will of God, I will marry him, for grace will be given me to bear the burden. Write to Mr. McGregor and tell him that I do not and probably never shall love him, but that, trusting in heaven, I consent to become his wife and will do my duty.'

So deeply was Mrs. Blandford troubled on account of her financial embarrassment that she did not realise what it cost her daughter to make the sacrifice. In fact, she thought it was really for Ethel's happiness, as well as for the comfort of the other children that she had permitted Mr. McGregor's offer to be even considered. She wrote the money-lender that his offer had been accepted, and that Ethel would name the day for the marriage, which must take place in the church.

Ethel spent many hours before the Blessed Sacrament, laying her sorrows at the feet of Our Lord, and begging the protection of the Blessed Virgin.

When Mr. McGregor called at Mrs. Blandford's and asked for Ethel, the poor girl, with an aching heart, entered the parlor, fearing her strength would not be sufficient to enable her to endure the fearful ordeal.

The money-lender, finding his reception so cold, did not tarry long. He, in a business-like manner, told her he had come to ask her to name the day for the marriage, and to make any arrangements that were necessary. He told her they would have no unnecessary expense, and that they would be married in the church, as he was a Catholic.

Ethel was so nervous that she could not talk to the old gentleman, and asked him to give her a week to decide. He was so infatuated with her beauty that he was willing to promise almost anything she asked, and soon took his departure.

Ethel was truly a heroine, for she was making a sacrifice not for a few weeks or months, but probably for life. She was brave, but not strong enough to carry the load she had taken up. She was willing to suffer to spare her mother and her sisters and brothers from suffering, but, in spite of her willingness, her cheeks faded, her eyes grew dim, and she became ill. Her mother was alarmed, but still did not read the secret buried in her daughter's heart, on which filial devotion had laid a load heavy enough to crush it. Six months passed, and Ethel had not yet named the day for the sacrifice. Finally, when Mr. McGregor would wait no longer, she referred him to her mother.

'I will,' she said, 'fulfil any arrangement she makes, but I must tell you I love another. You have been told more than once that I did not love you, and that I only consented to the marriage to save my mother and the children from want. Do you still insist upon my keeping the engagement?'

With the indifference that he would have ordered his attorney to close a mortgage and sell a house or farm, he insisted that Ethel observe her promise and become his wife. I she did not marry him within a month, he declared, he would sell the house, even if the family were turned out of doors.

The day was then named, but before it came Ethel was taken with typhoid fever, and the family physician said she would probably die, which would be better for her than a recovery, as the fever had so burned her brain that she would be insane, even should she recover physically. When McGregor heard this he sold the house, which was purchased by an old friend, who permitted Mrs. Blandford to occupy it at a nominal rent. She was given, through sympathy, the position of teacher in the village school, and was thus enabled to make an humble living for the family.

Ethel lived, but reason had fled, and for a few years she was kept at home a harmless imbecile. Then she was taken to an asylum in New York by the parish priest. 'The physician in charge said her case was almost hopeless, although he had known of a few persons in the same condition as she was who recovered. He promised to have everything done for her that science could do, and added: "We are expecting an expert in insanity from Paris, who has made some wonderful cures there. He has attracted the attention of the medical fraternity in Europe by his writings. When he comes I'll bring this case to his attention."

Frank Marshall wandered over Europe for some