

'Very low indeed,' Dr. Stagg answered frankly. 'It was a nasty collision, two machines head-on at a turn. Mr. Brewster was thrown twenty-five feet.'

A few final directions jotted down, grave bows to Ruth, and she sat alone near the bed, listening to the struggling breaths of the strong man whose life was flickering out. A premature twilight pervaded the room, darkening blackly in the corners. Ruth knew a window was open back of heavy shrouding curtains, but the fumes of ether lingered through all the house.

'It's a horrid day,' Ruth thought, reaching for a limp periodical and fanning away, the approach of unusual, unprofessional faintness.

A door was gently pushed open. Ruth stopped fanning and slightly started at the apparition presented! An old snowy-headed dandy in white waist-coated evening clothes, holding by a cumbersome nail-studded collar a huge Great Dane.

'How's Mass' G'oge, missy?' he queried in the softest tones of his race. 'Pluto, yo' ole fool, keep still!' He cuffed the dog mildly with the fat hand that was free. Every tooth in his head showed in a polite smile at the young lady, but his cheeks were frankly wet with abundant tears.

'He's quite sick,' Ruth whispered. 'Are you Mr. Brewster's man? Oh! don't hold the dog so. He'll choke!' in alarm at the immense brute's efforts to break away from the detaining grip.

'It's his man, Pompey, yes, missy. Don' yo' tech him, missy cose he ain' nebbber like no one 'cep me and Mass' G'oge,' as with one final wrench and snarl, Pluto freed himself and darting across the room crawled under Mr. Brewster's bed. From that point of vantage he ominously growled as Pompey went belligerently after him.

'Let him alone,' Ruth urged. 'I've seen dogs act that way before.'

Pompey, who had gone down upon all fours to peer under the bed, rose with panting difficulty.

'Yo' don' gwine to say Massa G'oge gwine die?' Pompey sniffed piteously, abandoning all attempt at dignity.

'I hope not,' was all Ruth could say.

'He done look pow'ful bad,' said Pompey miserably. 'Ain't dat jes' awful, de way he breathe?'

'That's mostly from the ether,' Ruth consoled. She laid her finger on Mr. Brewster's wrist. Pluto growled forbiddingly as her skirts touched the bed.

Pompey watched her wondering as she gave his master a hypodermic. A weird silence, disturbed only by Mr. Brewster's agitated respiration, settled upon the room. Slowly the minutes dragged by into hours. For an instant Ruth wondered which meal the butler brought her, when he entered with her dinner. Pompey waited upon her attentively. She swallowed what she could. The old servant, and the dog under the bed would touch neither food nor drink. Both grew so silent and motionless as the night wore on that Ruth believed they were asleep. They were not. The devoted human being and the dumb, faithful brute alike waited in tensely alert misery for what would happen to their best friend.

Dr. Stagg lingered long at the next visit. But Ruth knew that he loitered more because he thought the end was very near than because he anticipated any result from his new directions.

'There may still be some change in the morning,' the doctor forced himself to murmur at the door.

Ruth dutifully nodded, biting her lips meanwhile. She wished irritably that physicians would be strictly sincere with their nurses at least. Why the farce of holding out hope when none existed?

It was shortly before the calm, beautiful dawn that Mr. Brewster unexpectedly stirred and opened his eyes. Ruth smiled hopefully into the wide, bright eyes gazing wildly at her.

'You feel better?' she said softly.

'I don't know,' gasped the man distractedly. 'I can't move. What was it? Where am I?'

Pompey leaned forward eager, happy, agonised in one second. Pluto at the sound of Mr. Brewster's voice crawled out from the cramped quarters and pressed his huge head desperately against his master's limp, bloodless hand lying at the edge of the bed.

'Don't worry,' said Ruth, soothingly. 'You must rest very quietly.'

'But what happened to me?' Mr. Brewster persisted in a pitifully weak tone. 'I wasn't sick. I know!' he cried suddenly, and he struggled so to sit that Ruth laid her arm firmly across his chest. 'Don't, Mr. Brewster! You were in an automobile collision and Dr. Stagg operate! upon you. Everything will be all right.' She mixed something hastily in a tumbler. 'I am glad you have come out of the ether so well. Drink this!'

Instantly Pompey was at her assistance, taking the tube and glass from her when she would have set them down.

'Ah, you, Pompey,' breathed Mr. Brewster, but his strength had exhausted itself, and directly he drowsed.

'He ain' gwine die?' begged Pompey, faintly, tearfully.

'I hope not.'

Pluto licked the cold white hand. Ruth watched and counted the quick, noisy respiration. As the morning sunshine stole in between the drawn curtains, Mr. Brewster again returned to full consciousness, but then his breath-

ing had become very, very slow, like long-drawn out heart-broken sighs. He began to talk phrases quickly uttered, but broken because of the choking presently coming upon him.

'You're my nurse? I remember all. It was a straight, clear road—the branches—of the elms—meeting over-head. For a while it seemed to me—I was twenty instead of fifty-five. I was travelling along a straight, clear road—on a day exactly as beautiful. I saw heaven through the clear blue sky—at the end of—that straight clear road.'

Ruth involuntarily started, and, impelled by peculiar curiosity, her gaze left for a second the livid features of her patient. In the lightning-swift glance she sent around the apartment she caught sight of a dim ivory crucifix low upon the wall, beneath a copy of the Sistine Madonna. It bore a new and unexpected significance. Mr. Brewster's eyes had closed. Ruth hesitated. Should she rouse him, should she question? A wave of uncertainty, of miserable confusion somehow involved in her own fate, swept over the girl.

'The beauty of that day—' he spoke more faintly after the pause, and Ruth bent her head to catch the gasped-out words. 'It's unselfish aspirations—and its peace—returned to me—after thirty-five years—of paganism. My God, I am dying—I left the straight, clear road. But it came back—for an instant. I was crazed—with the wonder of it. We sped through the golden way. Every trembling leaf—whispered of—high things to me. Faster, faster. At the horizon—was the glory—of Paradise. The speed was—blinding—but—the way was safe. Then darkness—forgetfulness—and now this agony.' He sank more heavily into the pillow while Ruth wrote frantically upon her card. In a moment he made a supreme effort and raised himself to sit upright without support.

'My God,' cried he in a tone piercingly distinct, 'only once more! Give me—Thy unworthy servant—the straight, clear road.'

Blinded by tears, Ruth pushed Pompey with the hurriedly-written message upon her card out of the room. But she knew as she slipped on her knees beside the shrinking Pluto, that the priest, like herself, could only pray for the departed soul. Before she took the rest of which she had great need, Ruth despatched her letter to her suitor waiting in the country for her decision. The straight, clear road was vividly plain to her now, the alluring mirage of the side-paths having been dispersed by the brightness of a truer vision. The chagrined lover read, in calm, irrevocable terms, that not even to marry the man she loved, would Ruth Meade barter her faith.—*Messenger of the Sacred Heart.*

AUNT LUCY'S LEGACY

'To my niece, Elsie Chapman, my old desk and all it contains, in token of gratitude for her loving kindness to me during many years. I also wish my said niece to have the option of purchasing Rose Cottage and its contents for a sum of not less than four hundred pounds, the money to be the actual property of herself, not borrowed nor raised on mortgage. The rest of all I die possessed of to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.'

As the measured words fell from the lawyer's lips, Elsie Chapman turned pale and red. Tears rushed to her eyes. She turned with a trembling smile and a laugh that was half a sob to her lover, Carew Egerton, and held out her hand to him. He took it and patted it reassuringly.

'The will ought to be broken, Mr. Challoner,' he said.

The lawyer looked at him over his spectacles, compassionately.

'I am very sorry for you and Miss Chapman,' she would not listen to me. I'm afraid it would be of no use to dispute the will. She showed extraordinary acumen about her affairs up to the last—extraordinary business aptitude. She has left less money than I anticipated—'

'To the Society,' the young man broke in sharply. 'There must have been mockery in her mind when she dictated the will. How can Miss Chapman buy Rose Cottage when she has no money?'

'By a codicil my client gives her two years in which to purchase. After that the house and its contents are to be sold compulsorily, the purchase money to go to the Society.'

'The will in itself proves madness,' the young man said, glaring round the low-ceiled room, with Chapman portraits on the wall, treasures of old china and old silver and old engravings, and beautiful old Chippendale and Sheraton furniture everywhere. 'She was always eccentric. None of her other relatives could live with her except Miss Chapman, though she was reputed rich.'

'It is very odd,' the lawyer agreed. 'But I would not advise you to dispute the will. The extraordinary thing is that she spoke so many times in terms of the utmost affection of Miss Elsie Chapman. "Her dear child" she always called her. Judge, then, of my amazement when I was asked to draw up the will. I objected very strongly, but Miss Chapman merely remarked that she could call in another lawyer. In the circumstances I consented to fulfil her wishes. May I ask what you intend to do, Miss Chapman? My wife—'

'Thank you, Mr. Challoner,' Carew Egerton answered for his fiancée, 'we are going to be married at once.'

Elsie stared at him with a mixture of joy and dismay.