

A NOTE OF WARNING.

There had never been a beginning—at least that we could remember. Since we had known ourselves Ruth and I had known and loved each other, together we had played on the sands when we were so little that each one was a cure to the other.

And when I left for the university there had been no coquetry, no doubt. "God bring you back to me, Ralph," said Ruth as she stood within arm's reach of me on the point of the pier.

Each day of the four years, varying as it did in storm and sunshine, heat and cold, was constant in this single joy—a letter from Ruth to me and a letter from me to Ruth.

And when I returned with my degree, and we sailed south over the rolling bar, beyond the dark, shadowy waters of the bay and out on the broad ocean, until our island home was but a smudge like a sea seal on the horizon, every wave which embraced us and lifted us up seemed to say, "It was yesterday that we greeted you, and tomorrow we shall greet you again."

All through that summer we sailed over the trackless water whose paths were well defined to us. We were both expert, but Ruth was the better sailor, as she was my superior in all respects. I was apt to be indifferent, unmindful, wrapped up with dreams, but there was an instinct of Ruth's whose every impulse was timely and complete.

How we talked over our future, for there never had been a time when that future had been ours. I was to go to the city in the autumn and enter the law school. How faithfully I would work and how learned I would become. And then when I had established myself in my profession we were to be married and buy a cottage, with surrounding grounds, in the suburban university town whose shades I loved so well, and Ruth did, too, because I did, and ever after we were to be happy, as we ever had been, together.

We each had a little money, small enough in aggregate, yet we believed that it would keep us until my success came. My success! What a brilliant and likable of mine we drew! I was to be a great advocate, of course, a dread to all designing men, but a tower of strength, especially to the weak and the unfortunate.

How I loved to see her, to see her face, to see her eyes, to see her smile, to see her quick hand on the sheet had served to me from capsize. Perhaps I was the more careless since I felt that wherever Ruth was there also was peace and security.

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ture which was enshrined in a blue cabinet on the mantel of our study, just as I did. Ruth knew all about him too. Why, my letters and our talks had been full of him for years. Was that not natural, since he was my hero, as she was my darling?

Besides they had met and were such good friends. Ruth had attended events at the university, and during the past summer Frank had visited me at our island home and had sailed with us over the bar and through the bay and out on the broad seas. Of all our happy days those when Frank had been with us were the happiest. How versatile, how brilliant, how charming he had been! For once he had tried all his gifts to their utmost, out of loyalty to me, his friend.

And yet Ruth had written this note of warning. Could she be jealous? I thought at the thought. Ruth was Ruth. Besides, if such an impossible emotion had entered her dear little heart, perfect love would have cast it forth immediately. No, there was no explanation. It was simply a misapprehension, a mistake. I kissed the note and laid it away in my pocket case, resolved never to think of it again.

Should I lend it to her? No, my faith is so shattered that I would even come to doubt love also!

I reached the city station at eventide, and there was Frank awaiting me, quiet, self-contained as ever, but, oh, so glad to see me!

"My dear boy, what happiness to have you with me again!" he exclaimed. "And how brave and buoyant we've grown, to be sure. Right-foot forward and on to success, hey? Well, well! Oh, fortunate youth!" And tears shone in Frank's eyes. I, too, was moved. Who wouldn't be misled by such manifest affection?

"Some of the fellows are around at Blaine's," said Frank. "A nice, quiet place, most respectable. We might join them for awhile and renew old times."

Agreed. We went and spent such a jolly evening of song and reminiscence and good cheer! But the next morning when I awoke with such a dizzy head there was Frank, cool and alert, peering away at his desk.

"I must do it," he said apologetically. "Thank your stars you're not a toad and take another dose."

The next day I started briskly at my studies, determined to master the law. For weeks Frank and I worked steadily side by side—weeks of contentment for me, for I felt I was doing my duty, and for him, for he was doing his duty.

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mind, too weak for any exertion, a prey to worry. My gay companions were gay no longer. In the face of the approaching examinations they were throwing up earthworks of desperate diligence. Yet when I tried to dig also I found I was absolutely ignorant. Where now was my intuitive knowledge of the law, where that judgment so accordant with equity? Alas, I comprehended that I had risked everything on a single cast, and I dared not think what the everything might include.

Then it was that I noticed a singular change in Frank.

"Just look at my furs," I said to him one day anxiously, holding up a mass of bills and letters. "It seems impossible that I could have been so reckless. Why, I must have been crazy!"

"Yes, certainly have had an agreeable faculty of ignoring such little matters."

"But what shall I do?"

"Do? You have money, haven't you?" "Gone, all gone."

"Phew! You have been going it, haven't you, in spite of precept and example? Oh, well, your precious 'Alvarado' will do everything, I guess," and Frank laughed.

It wasn't a pleasant laugh, nor did it sound like Frank, but I was so troubled that I scarce appreciated it then.

"Do you really think so?" I questioned eagerly.

"I mean what I say. It will settle everything, you included. But doubtless I leaped to my feet in a rage. Frank, contented me for an instant with cold sarcasms; eyes; then he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and left the room.

I sank in a chair, trembling and gasping. What did it all mean? Was I held by a horrible dream? Such words, such looks from Frank, my friend, my Delgado, my mentor! Could it be that he had changed, that I had changed, that the future was a void, that the past was a sham and that nothing was real except the present debt, the approaching examination, the impending disgrace?

I opened my pocket case. I read the note of warning. Frank said so long unheeded. Again I couldn't comprehend it, but I did thoroughly realize that whatever she said should have been observed with a true lover's fealty.

For hours I sat pressing my throbbing head within my hands, trying to shut out the discordant visions which flashed before me. Then came a knock at the door. I never remembered to it in my daily letters. My present course seemed its best answer. After awhile, though, came interruptions. Our merry friends of the first evening began to drop into our rooms.

I believed that most of them were not prudent companions, and I told Frank so.

"You're afraid," he replied. "Still, they're such good fellows. A little recklessness, but it's more froth, and beneath is worthy substance. Because we are fixed we mustn't be pharisaical, Ralph. We owe a duty to our old comrades, don't you think?"

I did think and with shame. How open and manly Frank was in every way! So true and so full of life, so full of joy, so full of suggestions of spirit as Frank, until suddenly he would clutch his hair with mock gravity and shout:

"Now clear out, you fellows, every one of you. Ralph can go with you. He takes to the law like duck to water, but I am the plowman who must plow his way way." And off we'd go, at least quite sorry for Frank.

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