

A Lawyer's Story

Told by Himself

ABOUT THIRTY YEARS AGO I was a young lawyer with nothing but my profession and two very strong aspirations. The first was to succeed and make a great name at the bar; the other to be able to marry the lady of my love.

One morning I went down to my office, which my boy had just opened, and found awaiting me there a letter which gave me the greatest pleasure. It announced, in the first place, the death of my grand-uncle, who, with my grandfather, had cruelly turned my mother out of doors when she was a girl; and in the second place it informed me that my grand-uncle, touched by remorse, had left me a legacy of five thousand dollars. The writer of the letter, Martin Drew, who was my uncle, requested me to come to Tyndale at once to get my money, and expressed much affection for me, and said his family were all anxious to see me, and many other such things which excited my suspicions.

That afternoon I called at the widow Curtiss's to inform her daughter Laura of my good fortune, and to ask the dear girl to "name the day." Laura was quite ready to comply with my wishes; but her mother said we'd better wait until I got back with my money—predicting that "something would be sure to happen," and asserting that the Drews were "mighty slippery fellows," and that no Van Buren, (my name) that she had ever heard of, ever had any luck. Not finding myself comfortable in the Widow's parlor I soon withdrew, and went slowly back to my office.

The next morning I mounted my horse, and with light heart pursued the road to Tyndale. I was two days upon the way, and slept the second night at a little country tavern, a few miles distant from my *pseudo* uncle. I had intended to reach his house that evening, but the heaviness of the roads prevented. The next morning I was early astir, and rode up to Martin Drew's door, just as he, with his family, was seating himself at the breakfast table.

I was welcomed with great show of cordiality by the various members of the family, all of whom, save the eldest son, George, were present. I might have believed myself among warm friends had not the memory of my mother's sufferings in that house saved me from entire reliance upon the professions of these demonstrative relatives. Little by little, my reserve melted before their kindly words and manners. The girls were pretty and fascinating, the young man, Martin, frank and agreeable. I never could resist genial manners, and before the morning hours had waned I found myself on decidedly pleasant terms with the young people, and confessing to myself that I could see nothing objectionable in their elders.

I had intended to transact my business with all speed, and if possible to avoid breaking bread beneath this roof; and by all means to leave it before nightfall. But, on one pretext after another, and willingly, I must confess, I was detained until long past midday. At last, however, the business had been transacted, the money in my hands, and my receipt in those of Martin Drew, and I began to insist on going, at least as far that evening, as the tavern where I had passed the preceding night.

How they gathered round me then, with smiling, entreating faces, and clinging hands. No, they said, one and all, I must not go until George came home. He was expected every hour, I must remain until morning and see George; he would be sadly disappointed else. And besides, it was hardly safe to stop at that roadside tavern with such a sum of money, the people there were prying and curious, and had, without doubt, learned before this, that I had come to receive my legacy.

Of course I stayed, and a pleasant evening I had with those merry young people, and cordial old ones.

The chamber assigned me was what, in country parlance, is usually called the “spare bedroom,” a large, pleasant room upon the ground floor, opening from the best parlor, and, with that apartment, separated from the rest of the house, by a wide entrance hall. Martin Drew and his two sons, (for George had returned) in their excess of hospitality, had entered with me to assure themselves that all was comfortable for me, and above all, as they said, safe for my money.

There were ill-conditioned people in the neighborhood, they said, and my business was well-known, so that though it was hardly possible that any one should attempt to enter the house to steal my money, it was well to be careful. “There were hooks to hang my coat and waistcoat upon, but I had better not leave my money in their pockets, perhaps it would be safer under my pillow, or had I not better lock it in a drawer of the bureau?”

This over anxiety seemed somewhat annoying, but if there were suspicious people in the neighborhood, it was but natural. Still it occurred to me that it would be well to say nothing of the place where I intended to bestow my money. When I was at last left alone, I began to hasten my preparations for repose. The two windows of the room were closed and secured by heavy shutters, but there was no lock upon the door. I placed a chair against it. I then finished disrobing myself, and having decided to put my pocket-book between the mattress of my bed and beneath my head, I had just placed it there when a slight noise caused me to turn.

George Drew had entered so noiselessly that he had nearly reached my side unheard.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, laughing at my frightened face. “I only came back to inquire if you would like to be wakened in the morning. You did not hear my knock.”

He was gone as soon as answered, and again placing a chair against the door, and laying something upon it which I thought would fall with a noise if the chair were disturbed, I extinguished my light and went to bed.

It seemed as if I had but closed my eyes, though I now know that I must have slept two or three hours, when I was suddenly wakened by a sound as of a door softly and cautiously shut, yet slightly creaking on reluctant hinges. I sprang up. In the intense stillness, I thought I distinguished a faint tread in the adjoining room. I thrust my hand beneath my pillow, but though it touched my watch, which I had placed there, my pocketbook was gone. At the same instant I distinguished another sound—the opening of the outer door.

I sprang from my bed and shouted for help. In the darkness I could not at first find the door. But in less than a minute I stood in the parlor, faintly lighted by the embers of the expiring fire. At that instant the hall door closed, and steps were heard upon the gravel outside. I shouted again, and in a moment Martin Drew and his younger son hurried in, and before my story was finished were joined by George. The hall door was ajar, as the robber had left it, but before we had time to put on the necessary clothing, he had two or three minutes start of us. We all plunged out into the pouring rain, and the darkness that seemed almost palpable, but a search of fifteen minutes was without reward; as we could trace the robber's steps only to the gate which led to the high road. We then all returned to the house, except George, who mounted his horse and rode off to the village to give the alarm.

I remained two days longer in Tyndale, aided by my relatives, in my attempts to regain my money, with extreme kindness and interest. Unfortunately for them, the very extremity of this kindness aroused, or more properly strengthened suspicious that had commenced the moment I discovered the absence of my money. And thus all their endeavors to assist me but provided me with fresh evidences against them, and I left them on the morning of the third day, as fully convinced that the five thousand dollars had returned to Martin Drew's hands, as if I had seen them there.

It was with great difficulty that I found an opportunity, on the morning after the robbery, to write, and enclose, and afterward to post, advertisements to the county papers, and notices to the banks stopping payment of the bills I had received and secretly marked. On my way homeward I went to the county town and left such information with the magistrates there as put them upon the alert, and then, satisfied that I had done all in my power for the recovery of the money, I pursued my course, and, on the second evening, entered the village, rode past the Widow Curtiss's house, and stopped at my office door.

I tarried only to partake of my frugal supper, before I bent my steps to the home of my divinity, otherwise my Laura. She, dear girl, gave me as warm a welcome as if I had returned with my pockets as full as they were empty. But the widow! I will not repeat her stunning abuse. I survived it all—the smoke and roar of battle died away, and, in the list of wounded was but one young man “damaged in feelings,” while Laura's smile consoled me in the endurance of my wounds.

Two months later I received a very different welcome from the widow, when I came to announce the recovery of my money, and the indictment of Martin Drew and his sons as the robbers. All was smiles and praise then from the widow, and Laura cried joyful tears upon my bosom, and named the happy day.

Young Martin had attempted to pass, when partially intoxicated, one of the marked notes, and several others had been found in his possession. Search of the homestead, and the person of his father and brother, had brought to light the remainder, and my legacy was once more in my hands. Martin, the elder, and his son George were sent, for a long term, to the State Prison. The younger Martin went for a shorter period, and as soon as he was released, removed the family to

the West. There, probably, the father and brother joined them, when at liberty, for from that period they never reappeared in their old haunts.

As for me, I am a tolerably rich and very happy man, a little past middle life. Laura has been my wife for many a year, and sons and daughters are growing up in health, and beauty, and goodness around us. My legacy founded my prosperity, and my wife my happiness.

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