



CHAPTER 23

IN THE BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY 1870 I WAS MARRIED TO MISS OLIVIA L. Langdon and moved to Buffalo, New York. Tomorrow will be the thirty-sixth **anniversary** of our marriage. My wife passed from this life one year and eight months ago in Florence, Italy, after an unbroken illness of twenty-two months.

I saw her first in the form of a small statue in her brother Charley's room on the steamer Quaker City in the Bay of Smyrna in the summer of 1867, when she was in her twenty-second year. I saw her in the flesh for the first time in New York in the following December. She was slender and beautiful and girlish—and she was both girl and woman. She remained both girl and woman to the last day of her life. Under a grave and gentle **exterior** burned lasting fires of sympathy, energy, devotion, enthusiasm and absolutely limitless affection. She was always delicate in body and she lived upon her spirit, whose hopefulness and courage were beyond destruction.

She became an **invalid** at sixteen through falling on the ice and she was never strong again while her life lasted. After that fall she was not able to leave her bed during two years, nor was she able to lie in any position except upon her back. All the great physicians were brought to Elmira one after the other during that time, but there was no helpful

result. In those days both worlds were well acquainted with the name of Doctor Newton, a man who was regarded in both worlds as a **quack**. He moved through the land in state; in majesty, like a king.

One day a relative of the Langdon family came to the house and said; "You have tried everybody else—now try Doctor Newton, the quack. He is downtown at the hotel, practicing upon the wealthy at war prices, and upon the poor for nothing. I saw him wave his hands over Jake Brown's head and take his **crutches** away from him and send him about his business as good as new. I saw him do the like with others. They may have been hired and there for publicity purposes, and not real. But Jake is genuine. Send for Newton."

Newton came. He found the young girl upon her back. Any attempt to raise her brought sickness and exhaustion and had to be abandoned. Newton opened the windows—long darkened—and delivered a short and fiery prayer; then he put an arm behind her shoulders and said, "Now we will sit up, my child. "

The family were alarmed and tried to stop him, but he was not disturbed, and raised her up. She sat several minutes without sickness or discomfort. Then Newton said, "Now we will walk a few steps, my child." He took her out of bed and supported her while she walked several steps; then he said, "I have reached the limit of my art. She is not cured. It is not likely that she will *ever* be cured. She will never be able to walk far, but after a little daily practice she will be able to walk one or two hundred yards, and she can depend on being able to do *that* for the rest of her life. "

His charge was fifteen hundred dollars and it was easily worth a hundred thousand. For from that day when she was eighteen until she was fifty-six she was always able to walk a couple of hundred yards without stopping to rest; and more than once I saw her walk a quarter of a mile without serious exhaustion.

Crowds gathered around Newton in Dublin, in London and in other places. This happened rather frequently in Europe and in America but the grateful Langdons and Clemenses were never among the crowd. I met Newton once, in after years, and asked him what his

secret was. He said he didn't know but thought perhaps some form of electricity proceeded from his body and caused the cures.

Perfect truth and perfect honesty were qualities of my wife's character which were born with her. Her judgments of people and things were sure and without error. Her instincts almost never deceived her. In her judgments of the characters and acts of both friends and strangers there was always room for charity, and this charity never failed. I have compared and contrasted her with hundreds of persons and my feeling remains that hers was the most perfect character I have ever met. And I may add that she had more dignity than any person I have ever known.

She was always cheerful; and she was always able to pass along her cheerfulness to others. During the nine years that we spent in poverty and debt she was always able to reason me out of my despairs and find a bright side to the clouds and make me see it. In all that time I never knew her to utter a word of regret concerning our circumstances, nor did I ever know her children to do the like. For she had taught them and they drew their bravery from her. The love which she gave to those whom she loved took the form of worship, and in that form it was returned.

She had the heart-free laugh of a girl. It came seldom, but when it broke upon the ear it was like music. I heard it for the last time when she had been occupying her sick bed for more than a year and I made a written note of it at the time—a note not to be repeated.

Tomorrow will be the thirty-sixth anniversary. We were married in her father's house in Elmira, New York, and went next day by special train to Buffalo, where I was to be one of the editors of the *Buffalo Express* and a part owner of the paper. I knew nothing about Buffalo, but I had made my household arrangements through a friend, by letter. I had instructed him to find a **boarding house** of as respectable a character as my light salary would command. We were received at about nine o'clock at the station in Buffalo and then driven all over America, it seemed to me. I became very angry at that friend for securing a boarding house that apparently had no definite locality. But there was a plot—and my bride knew of it, but I was in the dark. Her father had bought and furnished a

new house for us in a fashionable street, and had hired a cook and housemaids and a bright young coachman, an Irishman, Patrick McAleer—and we were being driven all over the city in order that a group of these people would have time to go over to the house and prepare a hot supper. We arrived at last, and when I entered that splendid place my anger reached high-water mark, and without any reserve I delivered my opinion of that friend who was so stupid as to put us in a boarding house whose terms would be far out of reach. Then Mr. Langdon brought forward a very pretty box and opened it and took from it a deed of the house. So the joke ended and we sat down to supper.

The company departed about midnight and left us alone in our new quarters. Then Ellen, the cook, came in to get orders for the morning's marketing—and neither of us knew whether beefsteak was sold by the barrel or by the yard. We confessed this fact, and Ellen was full of Irish delight over it. Patrick McAleer, that bright young Irishman, came in to get his orders for next day—and that was our first glimpse of him.

It sounds easy and swift and smooth but that was not the way of it. It did not happen in that comfortable a way. There were three or four proposals of marriage and just as many declinations. I was traveling far and wide giving lectures, but I managed to arrive in Elmira every now and then to renew my pleading. At last help and good fortune came from a most unexpected quarter. It was one of those cases so frequent in the past centuries, so infrequent in our day—a case where the hand of Providence is in it.

I was ready to leave for New York. A wagon stood outside the main gate of the Langdons' house, with my trunk in it, and Barney, the coachman, was already in the front seat. It was eight or nine in the evening and dark. I said good-by to the grouped family on the front porch, and Charley and I went out and climbed into the wagon. We took our places back of the coachman on the remaining seat, which was toward the end of the wagon and was not fastened in its place; a fact which—most fortunately for me—we were not aware of. Charley was smoking. Barney touched the horse with the whip. He made a sudden spring forward. Charley and I went out over the back of the

wagon. In the darkness the red bud of fire on the end of his cigar described a curve through the air which I can see yet. I struck exactly on the top of my head and stood up that way for a moment, then fell down to the earth unconscious. My head just happened to strike a dish formed by four stones which met along the edges. The depression was half full of fresh new sand, for they had been repairing the road. This made a useful pillow. My head did not touch any of those stones. I was not even shaken up. Nothing was the matter with me at all.

Charley was considerably damaged, but in his worry over me he was almost unaware of it. The whole family ran out. It was very pleasant to hear the pitying remarks being made around me. That was one of the happiest half dozen moments of my life. There was nothing to spoil it—except that I had escaped damage. I was afraid that this would be discovered sooner or later. I was such a dead weight that it required the combined strength of Barney and two others to carry me into their house, but it was accomplished. I was there. I recognized that this was victory. I was there.

They set me up in an armchair and sent for the family physician. Poor old creature, it was wrong to get him out but it was business, and I was too unconscious to protest.

When the old doctor arrived he went at the matter in an educated and practical way—that is to say, he started a search for cuts and wounds and swellings and announced that there were none. He said that if I would go to bed and forget my adventure I would be all right in the morning—which was not so. I was *not* all right in the morning. I didn't intend to be all right and I was far from being all right. But I said I only needed rest and I didn't need that doctor any more.

I got a good three days' stay out of that adventure and it helped a good deal. It pushed my suit forward several steps. The next visit completed the matter and we became engaged conditionally; the condition being that the parents should consent.

In a private talk Mr. Langdon called my attention to something I had already noticed—which was that I was an almost entirely unknown person; that I was from the other side of the continent and

that only those people out there would be able to furnish me a character reference—in case I had a character. I gave him some names, and he said I could go away and wait until he could write to those people and get answers.

In due course answers came. I was sent for and we had another private conference. I had referred him to six distinguished men, among them two churchmen (these were all San Franciscans), and he himself had written to a man who worked in a bank who had in earlier years been a Sunday-school **superintendent** in Elmira and well known to Mr. Langdon. The results were not promising. All those men were frank to a fault. They not only spoke in disapproval of me but they were quite unnecessarily enthusiastic about it. One churchman and that former Sunday-school superintendent added to their black lies the statement that in their belief I would fill a drunkard's grave.

The reading of the letters being finished, there was a good deal of a pause and it consisted largely of sadness and gravity. I couldn't think of anything to say. Mr. Langdon was apparently in the same condition. Finally he raised his handsome head, fixed his clear and honest eye upon me and said, "What kind of people are these? Haven't you a friend in the world?"

I said, "Apparently not."

Then he said, "I'll be your friend myself. Take the girl. I know you better than they do."

Thus happily was my fate settled.

The date of our engagement was February 4, 1869. The engagement ring was plain and of heavy gold. That date was engraved inside of it. A year later I took it from her finger and prepared it to do service as a wedding ring by having the wedding date added and engraved inside of it—February 2, 1870. It was never again removed from her finger for even a moment.

In Italy, when death had restored her vanished youth to her sweet face and she lay fair and beautiful and looking as she had looked when she was a girl and bride, they were going to take that ring from her finger to keep for the children. But I prevented this. It is buried with her.