

Last Testament

Building castles in the air? No, twenty year old Travis Ingram was not thinking of the future. His thoughts were wandering absurdly into those unhappy years behind him, years filled with heartache because his was the lot of a crippled, twisted boy who craved understanding. Drifting lifelessly away from the extravagant garden in which he reclined in a hammock, Travis' mind slipped back to his early childhood. He saw a group of healthy, unscrubbed little boys playing marbles on a park pavement. More clearly, he remembered jerking away from his nurse, hobbling on braces toward the youngsters, and joyously exclaiming, "I know this is one game I can play with you." He also remembered the jeers of the children as they ordered him away. At the time he had hated them, and he was certain that they were cruelty personified. Remembering them now, he knew they had been too young to realize that crippled boys are human beings. It was odd that now as his physical suffering was more intense than ever before these memories should flood his mind.

Other incidents crept into his mind. He thought of the times, as he grew older, that the fellows he knew had spoken to him in a quite friendly manner. His heart had yearned in vain at the prospect of making friends. They, thinking their missionary duty completed, had continued piously on their way. Travis re-lived these little heartaches a hundred times now.

Nothing was more distressing to him, however, than the treatment he had received from his parents. They were never harsh or unkind. With their wealth and lofty ideals they gave him what they considered to be everything his heart desired. They continually reminded him of his helplessness and caused him to develop a pitiful case of uselessness.

Only one person had ever made him feel secure and wanted. His

thoughts lingered on pink clouds at this point. Eileen had been lovely. He remembered her now as that precious girl whose father had been caretaker of the Ingram estate. She had won his friendship in the very garden in which he now dreamed of her. Eileen's goodness and sincerity had won more than his friendship; his love, too, was hers. He smirked as he thought of his surprise when she told him, "Travis, you are wonderful, and I love you with all my

cility, but I have a few abilities. I can think, and I can record my thoughts. Twenty years of my life have been wasted. If God will but let me live a little longer, I will give something to the world. Although my knowledge is limited, my skill, minute, I have an inspiration which I can present to this universe of mankind. I shall write a poem that comes from the depths of my heart. My poem will not be patterned after the rules of world literature. but by the laws of my heart. I shall do this as a tribute to God, my Creator, and Eileen, my inspiration."

By
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heart." His surprise had turned to supreme joy. Sadness replaced joy two days later when he overheard Eileen's parents as they decided that they would have to leave immediately to prevent a continuance of Eileen's love for "that helpless crippled boy." He realized then what a burden he actually was to the world. This had happened six months ago, but the incident had crushed and defeated every inch of him.

Defeat was a harsh word. Eileen once had told him that there was no such thing. He wondered if she still did not believe in it. Her life was beautiful because she overcame hardships with smiles. How long had it been since he had smiled?

"Travis Ingram, you are a fool," his heart screamed at him. "You love her and you cannot have her. You should at least profit by her example."

Her example? She had given to the world when it seemed that there was nothing left to give. Her life was a continuous process of building. "I am a fool," he thought. "I do not have every giving fa-

For two days, Travis worked without ceasing on his poetic production. He felt a certain glow of contentment that he had never before experienced. Mr. and Mrs. Ingram became very deeply concerned about him. Travis did not explain his complete ambition. He only said that he was pressing toward a mark, and he had an indescribable feeling that it must be reached within a limited length of time. It was as if he had just realized a goal that he should have been striving to attain ever since his birth.

Finally his masterpiece was completed at twelve-thirty on the most beautiful night he had ever seen. Being exceptionally fatigued, the twisted body managed to slip under a cool, fresh-smelling sheet. Above the sheet, a bony hand clutched a tattered piece of paper. As sleep brought relaxation, the paper dropped to the floor.

Mrs. Ingram entered Travis' room the following morning. Spying the paper, she decided to read it before awaking her son. This is what she read:

Beauty? Oh, what is it? A lesson harshly learned?
Life in sorrow wasted? A heart in sadness turned?
Man will love his brother and kill him with a smile.

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