

soluble bond that had once united her to him was whole and inviolate once more.

Suddenly Mr. Vorst remarked to Phileas:

'You have been so good, so helpful to me in all those troubles! No money can ever repay you for your delicate consideration, your thousand and one kindnesses, as well as your able settlement of these intricate affairs.'

'I was very glad to be of use to you,' said Phileas, with a sincerity and warmth that went to his listener's heart.

'If I had a son of my own,' continued John Vorst, 'he could not have been kinder to me than you have been. You have far, far exceeded all that your professional duties required.'

There was a considerable pause again, when John Vorst said:

'Will you forgive an old man's freedom? But I had sometimes fancied, with regard to Isabel, that there had been something more than friendliness.'

He stopped; and Phileas, painfully embarrassed, knew not what to say.

'You see,' the old man went on, 'I already love this dear niece of mine as a daughter. I have no desire to intrude upon your private feelings; but the circumstances of this case are peculiar, and I had thought with gratification, that there might be something between you.'

'Mr. Vorst,' said Phileas, flushing to the very roots of his despised red hair, 'I will not conceal from you that there was, and is, a great deal more than friendliness on my part. I was thrown by circumstances very constantly into Miss Ventnor's society, and I lost my head and judgment. From the first she attracted me; before many weeks had passed I was deeply and truly in love with her.'

The old man nodded and smiled. 'I am not surprised,' he said. 'She is an unusually charming girl.'

'There was one excuse for me,' said the attorney, following out his own train of thought.

'What excuse should you need?' asked Mr. Vorst. 'I think the better of you that you are not one of the cold, cynical type of young men that seem to abound in these days.'

'I fell in love, as I said,' Phileas went on sternly, as though he were judging another: 'and I had the presumption to tell Miss Ventnor of the fact. I have just been begging her pardon for that folly.'

'It is a folly that most women will forgive,' replied the old man, smiling. 'But was there so very much to pardon?'

'Under ordinary circumstances, not so very much. I grant you; and I made that declaration in all good faith, believing her to be a companion. When I discovered the truth I was bitterly ashamed of my conduct.'

'When you acted in good faith, why should you be ashamed?' said John Vorst. 'You see, it pleased Martha to keep up a certain mystery concerning Isabel. When her mother died abroad, I was notified of that circumstance; but, in answer to my inquiries concerning the surviving child, I was merely informed that she had been adopted by a wealthy lady—a devoted friend of her late mother,—had returned with her to New York; for it chanced that Martha was on the Continent at the very time that Isabel lost her mother. My subsequent inquiries failed to elicit any further information, since Martha had purposely arranged to keep her secret. It was not until my visit, with you, to my former home in Monroe street that I discovered the truth.'

'It was exactly the same with me,' Phileas declared; 'but my position as attorney, as confidential adviser to the deceased, would inevitably leave me open to the gravest suspicions. It might be readily inferred that I had known of Miss Ventnor's prospects and her true position even before she was aware of them herself.'

For a moment John Vorst looked thoughtful.

'Yes, I see,' he assented; 'that might be the world's verdict.' Then he leaned forward and laid

a kindly hand on Phileas' shoulder. 'But we are living in Elysium here,' he said. 'We have got rid of the world, its pomps and vanities, and its misconceptions. I trust you fully and unreservedly. I know that if you love Isabel, it is solely for herself. To my mind, there is only one point to be considered. Does my niece return your affection? Has she given you any encouragement?'

'The whole matter was left in abeyance, owing to the late event. And when I spoke to-day, it was to apologise for my mistake and to withdraw my petition.'

'If it be true that she responds to your sentiments,' said John Vorst, slowly, 'I should regard it as the most honest and straightforward course for you to proceed as though circumstances were such as you had believed. For, after all, what do you or I care for the opinion of a world that we know to be, in great measure, base and heartless? A true affection, a real union of hearts, is one of those gifts which life but rarely bestows, and ought to be sought eagerly, and securely grasped when found. My span of life can not be very long. I want to see Isabel married to a good man, and above all a practical Catholic, who will make her happy, and in whose hands I can confidently leave her future. I shall have to go back after a time to the old house and live there, according to Martha's dying request, and I shall sorely need company. You have been so much identified with its latest developments that, somehow, you will seem to have a place there. And meantime,' the old man said, smiling into the young man's embarrassed but radiant face, 'what so delightful a place to spend a honeymoon as here in Westchester? It would seem to bring back the past, in so far as I am concerned, and make me feel happier than anything else could now do to know that two whom I love as my own children were happy in this house as once I was.'

Looking keenly at his friend to see the effect, the old man went on:

'You might be married at once, always providing that Isabel sees matters as we do, and that on your part nothing more than a scruple stands in the way. Father Van Buren, who is your enthusiastic friend, and has told me all about you and your family, could perform the ceremony. You two could spend the autumn here, and rejoice me at the old place before the holidays. And you see, my dear boy, that would be the final settlement, in love and happiness, of the famous case of Spooner vs. Vorst.'

Phileas had meanwhile turned red and pale, and pale and red again: the light of a great happiness shining out of his eyes, and surging up in his heart so as to sweep away all those obstacles which pride and conventionality still opposed.

'Will you promise, my friend,' said John Vorst, affectionately, 'to realise this waking dream of mine,—to become the strong staff of my old age, and the guardian of my new-found treasure?'

'God knows,' cried Phileas, in a voice hoarse with emotion, 'it would be too great a happiness, if Miss Ventnor is willing to throw herself away upon a struggling attorney, and if you think it right!'

'Right!—right! Why of course it's right!' said the old man. 'The finger of Providence is in the whole business. But there is Isabel down yonder, walking beside the water. Run and overtake her, and find out if she is really fond of you and will consent to be your wife.'

'But,' Phileas stammered, 'I have just told her that I should never again intrude upon her with such confession.'

'“At lovers' perjuries they say Jove laughs.”' quoted John Vorst, now all eagerness and animation for the success of his scheme. 'If she cares for you, my dear boy, she will overlook the inconsistency; and if she does not, things will be no worse than before.'

And so Phileas went, all on fire with this new resolve, his blue eyes flashing like steel, as when he had a difficult case in the law to overcome. John Vorst, watching him, smiled to see him leaping fences, and, as it were, clearing away obstacles between him and the object of his attachment.