

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, Dec 20, 1890 to May 30, 1891)

### A Waif And Her Fate

An old lawyer sat at his desk in the gloaming of a summer evening when a young woman abruptly entered. Her dress was fashionable, rather flashy and a little faded, her face intelligent, and her manner agitated. Being seated and having recovered her breath, a colloquy ensued substantially as follows:

She – “Are you a lawyer?”

He – I am.

She – Do you know (here she spoke the name of a well-known member of the Cincinnati bar – an old bachelor who lived in recluse and was reputed to be very rich – We shall call him Samuel Crane)?

She – Do you know Samuel Crane?

He – I do, but not intimately.

She – I have no mother. I never had a mother. I have been raised by Mr. Crane, whom I call uncle, but he is my father, I have always lived with him in his rooms adjoining his office, except when I was away at school. I have been at nearly all the boarding schools in the county and I have been turned out of all of them but one. I don't know how to behave and nobody cares for me, but one lady to whose school I have last been sent. She is Mrs. Dr. Wright, who keeps the Quaker School at Middleboro. Mrs. Wright loves me and I love her; and I want to go back to her, but my uncle won't let me.

Now I want to know if I can't compel him by law to let me go there.

He – What is your age?

She – I am seventeen. I will be eighteen in about five months.

He – Is your uncle your guardian by appointment of a court?

She – I don't know anything about that. He has always bossed me, and never let me have any friends.

He – How does he treat you?

She – He pets me and dresses me well, and yet he is always abusing me. He curses me nearly every day; and sometimes he strikes me with his cane. He never lets me go out

except when he goes along. Now I have run away from him, and I will never go back. I want to go to Mrs. Wright and I want to know if I can't compel him to pay my way in Mrs. Wright's school.

He – What is your name? (She gave her name – it was not Crane – but for this narrative we will call her Ellen Crane.)

He – Miss Ellen, there is no law to compel Mr. Crane to do as you wish; and you must go back to him, and submit to his control. You must not provoke him. I think I see the situation. He is responsible for your existence; and he has withdrawn from the world and devoted his life to making money. He has kept you near him, and done what he thought was best to educate you, and to make a woman of you; and he will leave you rich. You could not inherit his property at law, if he should die. He knows that, and I have no doubt that he has his will made in which he leaves his money to you. Now if you break away from him he may burn that will; he may die, as the lawyers say, intestate; and in that event all his property would go to his brother and sisters, and you would be left without a cent; and with no home, no friends, no means of earning your living. You had better be dead than to be in that fix. He is a coarse, rude man; but it is clear he thinks more of you than of any other living person, and, rough though he is, he would be miserable if you should never go back to him.

You must return to him this evening.

She – I won't do it! When I was a little girl I could live with him in his back rooms; but I am a woman now, and I can't sleep on the cot in the office. He don't see the difference. He thinks I am yet only a baby. I can't stand it any longer and I won't.

He – What then will you do tonight?

She – my grandmother is an old woman who lives in Covington. She makes her living by taking in washing. I will go to her. She will give me a bed. But I have no money to pay my way over the bridge. He never gives me a cent. Could you give me ten cents?

He – Yes, I can give you ten cents, but you must go back to your uncle. He will be miserable tonight if you do not go back. And you will have to go back sometime; or starve, and the sooner you go, the easier it will be.

She – I won't do it. I will go to my grandmother, and work at the tub along with her. I can earn what I eat, and she will not turn me out.

He – Then if I give you some money to enable you to get over the river will you come in to see me in a day or two, and let me help you make up with your uncle?

She – I will come see you tomorrow. You must help me get a place at Shillato's or some nice store, if I can't go to Mrs. Wright's, I can earn my living. I won't ever go back to my uncle. He is a beast!

She took a little money and went. The next afternoon she returned, and the matter was talked over with the same result. She returned to her grandmother and this was repeated for several days; when she asked for a little money with which to buy some necessary change of garments for decency's sake. This was furnished, and the next day she brought the old grandmother with her. She was suffering for the use of her clothing, and mostly in the hope of getting some she finally consented to go alone to her uncle and try to make up.

She was gone about two hours, when she burst into the lawyer's office in a frenzy and despair.

She said that after long effort, she had ventured to go to the old man, and that he had seen her approach and had seized his cane and dashed at her with frightful oaths and had driven her away forever.

The situation was becoming dramatic. The old man was irascible and vulgar! And yet there was little doubt that he had spent his life, according to his best lights, to do for that girl – and as for her, her earthly salvation dependent on making up with him.

She went for some days more to Covington and lived with her grandmother; but then returned to the old lawyer and proposed to find a situation in a store. The lawyer took her to the Home at no. 100 Broadway which is managed by the Woman's Christian Association, and secured her quarters, guaranteeing her board; she was there but a few days however, when she visited her old friend and told him that her uncle had been to Covington in search of her, and left word that if she would come back to him, he would make up.

He – then you must go at once, you must bear with his roughness and do your best to soften him by your good behavior. You must try to please him in every way – and perhaps he will send you back to Mrs. Wright's.

She -- No— he will not do that— He knows I love Mrs. Wright; and he don't want me to love any body but him.

He – Well, that shows that he loves you. He has a poor way of showing it, but there is no doubt at all that you are the only creature in the world that he cares for; and he loves you with all his rude old soul. And in his safe in the back office, his will is waiting to make you his sole heir when he is gone.

He is softened now. He has become lonely without you, and you will be welcomed to him again. Don't fear – Go at once.

She – If I go, I can never give you back the money you have loaned me. He never gives me any; and he will never allow me even to come to see you.

He – That is nothing. If you will be a good girl, you will begin now to be a blessing to

him and make him a better man – and you will be very happy when you find that you can influence him to be more gentle. Where does he go to church?

She – Church! I have never known him to go near a church and he would never allow me to go to a Sunday School. He always says that people who go to church are the worst people in the world. I never was at church except when I was at boarding school. He says that churches are nothing but damned frauds!

He – I am sorry he feels that way. It would be well for you to go to some church, if for no better reason, just to have some lady friends and some social life. I hope, now that you are a woman, he will change on that point and allow you to go even if he won't go with you.

She – But he won't. He would lock up my clothes and keep me in bed, if he thought I wanted to go to any church.

He – Nevertheless, you must go to him. He is an old man now. Do all you can for him. Take the best care you can of yourself, and if you need or can avail yourself of any aid from me,, freely. I will help you all I can.

With many protestations of gratitude and many honest tears, she took her departure; no doubt believing that it was a final parting. Four days thereafter it was announced in the papers that Samuel Crane had died at the Cincinnati hospital; and after three days more the door of the Third Street Law office opened and in came a lady so hung with black as not to be recognizable. The old man rose and led her to a chair, and she, throwing aside the veil which swept the floor, disclosed Ellen Crane. She spoke not a word.

He – Miss Ellen, I have seen in the papers that a serious event has happened in your life. You must tell me about it. You know that you have my sincere sympathy.

She arose and threw her arms and her face upward, while great tears rolled from her eyes as she almost screamed out, “I would give the world to have him back!”

He – Yes, I know how you feel. Your heart is broken. You have met with a great loss, but you must not yield to despair. I am your friend and I will see that you have more friends. But tell me about Mr. Crane. What carried him off so suddenly?

She – When I went back, he was kind to me; and I was very happy. But in the middle of the second night after I saw you last, he was taken very ill. I ran as fast as I could for Dr. Murphy, who came, and gave my uncle medicine; and the next day he had him taken to the hospital. I saw him in the daytime, but I had to go back to the office to sleep. One night Dr. Murphy came for me and said my uncle was going to die, and that I must be with him, and tell him, so that he could make such preparation as he might wish. I could not bear to tell him what Dr. Murphy said, but I finally succeeded in doing so. All he said was for me to tell Dr. Murphy to go to hell; that he would be well in a few days – and he compelled me to return to the office. But he died before morning and Dr. Murphy came

and told me.

He – what did you then do, Miss Ellen? Why did you not send me word?

She – I went straight to the Hospital and got my uncle's keys from his pants pocket, and I went back to the office and opened the safe and hunted for that will you spoke of and I found it.

He – Was it sealed? I hope you did not tear it open.

She – Yes it was sealed up in a large envelope, and I opened and read it.

He – And did you understand it? What was it?

She – It was dated a way back when I was only two years old; and it says that all his property must go to his friend Judge Mansfield (we shall call him) for him to take care of it and manage it for me. It says that all the rent and income shall be given to his dear Nice, Ellen Crane.

He – Did he not give anything to anybody else?

She – Not a cent. It all comes to me.

He – What did you do with the will?

She – I put it back where I found it, and locked the safe and here is the key.

He – Where was he buried, and who attended the funeral?

She – At Spring Grove. He had a lot there; nobody was at the funeral but Dr. Murphy and me. Judge Mansfield is away from home.

He – I suppose Judge Mansfield will be notified and he will come at once and take charge both of the property and of you.

She – Dr. Murphy said he would write him.

He – And where are you staying now?

She – I am staying with a family who live across the street from the office. The lady came over, and said that she would not allow me to be there alone, and so she has taken me into her house. She is very kind; all the family are very kind. It is like heaven. I was never in the family before in my life, and I feel very strange there. I don't know how to behave. Once I heard the little boy ask his mother if I was not a gypsy.

He – you are all right there. I know the family. They will take care of you until Judge

Mansfield comes and if at any time, you really don't know how to behave, ask the lady. She knows that you never had a mother, and how you have grown up. She will tell you how and what to do. She will be a mother to you. She will open a new world to you. Do everything just as she tells you.

In the course of a short time, Judge Mansfield had the will probated. The estate amounted to sixty thousand dollars, in good shape; yielding a net annual income to miss Ellen, of over three thousand dollars. He kept her in school a year or two longer, when she met her fate, and was married; and when last heard from she was the mistress of a happy home in which in the care of her two little children, she was giving forth and blessing others with its depth and sweetness, that which Fate had denied to her – a mother's love

Theo Kemper

[January 31, 1891]