

“PAY-DAY—SOME DAY”

With Other Sketches From Life and Messages From The Word

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

AN UNUSUAL BIRTHDAY PARTY

My best birthday was my forty-fifth and, strange as it may seem, was spent in a strange land, among strangers and without the presence of any member of my own family or relatives. The two “invited” guests were two poor little girls who didn’t even know it was my birthday. No one served fancy sandwiches or cake at this party, neither did we have coffee, tea or ice cream, not even a bottle of pop. But it was my best birthday party.

It happened in southern Sweden. I was visiting a farm home for a few days—the home of one of my clerks in Chicago. As I looked over my day-book I noticed it was Friday and the twentieth of August. It was my birthday and I remembered the promise as I left my family in Chicago that no matter where I should be in Europe that day, I should celebrate my birthday, and they would do the same at home. I drove to the nearest city and stopped at several bakeries and bought sugar-biscuits, cookies and what not, until I had several bags filled. I planned to have a real birthday treat for the friends in whose home I was being entertained. I returned in the evening to the home out in the country and noticed that the threshing crew had just left. I walked into a large room alongside the kitchen and at the end of a long table sat two little girls, about ten and twelve years old. These little, underfed and timid darlings seemed a bit bashful as this stranger neared them, but very politely answered my question when I asked them, “You don’t belong here, do you?”

“No, sir,” the oldest replied, “but our papa is dead and mamma has been here all day and helped with the threshing, and she said that if we took care of the home today and the little ones we could come here after the others left and we could eat of the leavings on the table.”

To be poor is hard, to be fatherless is worse, and to have hungry stomachs to a degree that makes one relish what others have left on the plates, as these little tots did, is enough to touch any ordinary heart, so I gave each one of them a bag of my birthday goodies.

While they were finishing the “evening’s meal,” scraped from several plates, and the evening shadows made necessary the lighting of a candle, I kept telling them of my two girls when they were small, and before I knew it that heart of mine had softened up still more and two more bags were given away, and when they told me of the poverty, which was evidenced by their patched clothes, I couldn’t keep any of the cakes and cookies I had planned for my birthday party but divided them between those two little darlings that I had strangely fallen in love with.

Presently I asked them when they were going home.

“Oh,” they answered, “mamma said that when the church bells ring we should come home.”

I kept on telling them stories, which they enjoyed, and they kept asking me a lot of questions about America and my home, when presently the chimes in the far-distant church steeple began to toll the evening monotone, which meant the close of another day of toil. Hurriedly they put on some wraps and bowed so humbly to this stranger for what they had received. As they left the room I noticed that the smaller of the two walked with much effort as she half dragged one of her legs. She was a cripple. I followed them to the porch. Somehow it was hard for me to say good-bye. I wished they had been mine. They were so sweet and they looked as though they needed a friend. And now my heart was overflowing as I noticed the love and care this older one had for her crippled, unfortunate smaller sister as she led her tenderly. They hesitated a bit and tried to adjust their shawls a little closer to protect against the cold evening rain, as they looked down the hillside and towards the dark woods through which they were to travel.

“Where is your home?” I asked them. “You go down this road and through this valley, and then you go up that hill, and down another valley, then up another little hill, when you come to a little trail that leads through the thick woods, and after a little while you come to our cabin in the woods,” they answered.

“Just wait a minute,” I said, and went into my room and came out with my raincoat.

“What are you going to do, mister?”

“I’m going to carry you home, if you will let me.”

“But no one ever carries me,” the little cripple said childishly.

I wrapped my raincoat around that little darling, took her in my arms and she put her slender, undernourished arms around my neck and while the older sister led the way I carried her down the valley and up the hill and through that narrow path that led to that little cabin where mother had a lamp burning in the window, and when I set her down on the steps she wrapped her arms tighter around my neck, pressed her little face against mine and whispered, “I like you, Mister.” I felt richly repaid for my entire trip, just to have the great joy of carrying this little tot home. Listen, my friends, we are living in the last days of this age. Shadows are lengthening. It is getting dark and stormy. Soon they will ring the “golden bells” for you and me. I’m asking you, when that evening of your life comes, are you going Home empty-handed, or are you going to carry someone with you?

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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