

Suffering in Silence, or For a Brother's Life.

Ma Gray was an orphan living with her sister's family in a Western village.

Completed the time that a great trouble fell upon that peaceful household.

Herbert Blotson had had some trouble with a notorious character named Cain.

Blotson found his cattle dying off by poison, and one day when he heard that Fallin had shot his pet dog Juno in malice.

"I'll settle Fallin if I catch him."

Ralph felt alarmed, knowing his brother's temper, and soon followed him to see what happened.

The next day as the family were all sitting down to breakfast the Sheriff of the county appeared in the doorway and announced that he had come to arrest Ralph Blotson.

The man Fallin had been found murdered and something of Ralph's near by. A curious pipe that had been given him by his troy, his betrothed.

"May I speak to my brother a moment," asked the prisoner, and the Sheriff, who disliked his task, readily consented to give the permission.

Ralph drew his brother aside and said: "For God's sake keep still about last night. You're a family and I haven't I'll bear the punishment."

"But why should you, neither one of us should suffer for the crime. In a few days you will be a free man!" and there was no fear in his face.

Ralph looked wonderingly at the other's face as he was led away.

He had resolved that he would make no defense in the case, and maintained silence throughout his trial.

The jury brought him in guilty, with a recommendation to mercy on account of his hitherto blameless character.

He was sentenced to imprisonment for life instead of hanging.

When the prison walls closed about him, in all probability for the whole of his remaining days, it can be imagined that there was deep mourning within the family circle at the farm house, of which he had been the light and adornment.

Ida—his betrothed bride—had one secret hidden within her heart which kept her from sinking entirely under the blow.

To her alone had Ralph broken his resolute silence; but it was under a promise of secrecy which she would have died rather than break.

"I will ease my heart by telling it to you, Ida, because, out of all the world, you are the one who has a right to know the truth. I am as innocent of the crime as you are, but I choose to suffer in place of the real offender; and if you are the loyal little woman I think you to be, you will abide unquestionably by my decision."

And Ida raised by his confiding belief and trust in her to the lofty plane of self-abnegation upon which Ralph himself stood, made no outcry.

She accepted the situation in the same light as Ralph, and if any suspicion as to the identity of the real sinner ever entered her mind, it went no farther.

She with the remainder of the afflicted family, went on in the round of daily duties quietly and uncomplainingly.

Sheriff Kendell was not satisfied with the result of the case, and he did his best to try and find a way to help the prisoner.

A few weeks after Ralph had entered his prison a burglar in a neighboring town was shot down one night. The Sheriff was given charge of the man's effects.

What was his delight to find in an old portmanteau a paper from which had been torn the gunwads found near the spot of Fallin's murder, and the amber mouthpieces of the pipe.

There was little delay in making out the paper to set Ralph free, and then Kendell went to him with the good news that the real murderer had been found, and that he was declared to be innocent, and was no longer a prisoner.

Ralph listened to him in a dazed sort of way at first, and then he astonished Kendell by exclaiming:

"Then Herbert did not kill Fallin after all? How I have misjudged him! I, in my way, have been as unjust to him as my fellow-men have been to me."

"Then that was where the trouble lay, was it?" said Kendell. "You sacrificed yourself for Herbert, did you? Well, no one need to tell me there is no affection in the world, after this. But come, we will go and carry our glad news to Herbert and to the rest."

After the first rejoicing at Ralph's return were over, he turned to his brother.

"Herbert," he said, "I must make a confession before I rest contented. I thought you gave Fallin his death-blow. Will you forgive me for mistaking you so cruelly?"

"You have as much to forgive as I have, Ralph, for I thought you had taken revenge upon him for killing Juno. And, instead, you allowed yourself to be stamped a criminal to shield the brother you thought guilty. How can I repay you, Ralph?"

"By cheering up and trying to look like yourself again. Herbert, you have grown ten years older since I have been in prison."

"I shall grow young again now, Ralph. For I feel so lumpy and light-hearted, at seeing you again that it takes me back to my boyish days."

"An I, Ida, come here and let's to me. I want my natural little girl to promise me one thing. Will she?"

"What is it, Ralph?" asked Ida, blushing and trembling at the way in which she knew her situation were to follow.

"Let us celebrate the happy day of my release by another event which in its great importance to my happiness, let us be married as soon as we can upon the minister. Let this be our bridal day."

"Be it as you will, Ralph," said Ida. And they were married accordingly all their neighbors turning out to give aid to the joyous event.

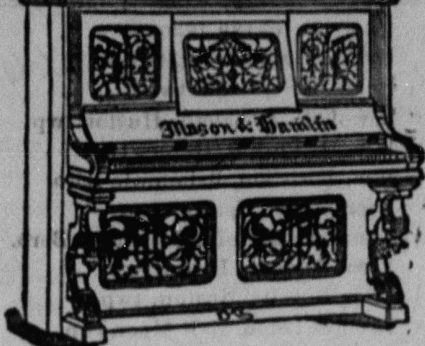
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