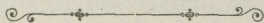


# Exonerated.



IT was the night of the Marson reception and the guests were arriving. In her chamber sat Helen Marson preparing for the occasion. The reception was in her honor and tonight her engagement to Philip Barry would be announced. There came a knock at the door, "A note for you, Miss," said the maid upon answering it.

"From whom?" inquired Miss Marson in surprise.

"The servant did not say," replied the maid.

Helen took the note and read with dismay; "Have escaped. If you still believe in me meet me in the grove as soon as possible."

Your brother Dick.

The note was from her brother who was convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to prison. He had somehow escaped. Should she go? Should she tell her father or her aunt? Her mother was dead. Thinking quickly she decided she would pursue the former course, Her father, his stern pride broken by his only son's disgrace, had disowned him and she did not know what the result might be, if she told him of his escape and his waiting outside to see her,

Despite the fact that her father had turned against Dick, Helen could never believe that her brother with whom she had romped and played in her days of childhood, was guilty of crime and when she heard him declare his innocence, she believed in him.

Yes, she would go, but she must hurry for she would soon be wanted in the reception room.

"My cloak," she said to the maid.

The maid wondering what the note could be that would call her mistress out the night of her reception, and at a time when she was needed in the reception room, brought it, and she slipped it on hurriedly.

"If I am wanted before I return, tell them I shall be back in ten minutes, say nothing more!"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the maid.

She had little difficulty in stealing out by the rear door, and making her way cautiously to the grove of stately trees which ornamented the grounds about the house, where her brother was waiting.

"Dick," she said after their first greetings, "What do you want? I must hurry back. They are waiting for me now."

"All right, Helen, I will not detain you with the story of how I escaped, suffice to say that I am here, closely followed. I cannot go back to prison and am too closely followed to go any farther now. For the sake of your belief in me and for the sake of what we used to be to each other, I want you to let me stay, secretly, in the house tonight."

"But Dick, hadn't I better ask father?"

"No Helen, it would be better not to. No one realizes more than I the frame of mind he is in, and it might only complicate matters. I want to escape and work secretly to prove my innocence and then come back with my name cleared of all stigma of guilt, and claim my place as his son."

He spoke with such earnestness, and conviction that her heart was moved and the old sisterly love predominated and she agreed to shelter him for the night.

"All right, Dick, after the guests are gone I shall unlock the back door. You can sleep in your old room perfectly safe. No one would dream of your being there. I must go now. I have been away too long already."

"What is the reception for tonight?"

"Principally to make a formal announcement of my engagement to Philip Barry," said Helen, walking away.

"Phil Barry!" replied Dick in amazement, "I am not in a position to give advice Helen but as brother to sister I would say, 'Don't marry Phil Barry.'"

Helen did not reply but hurried back to the house with these words ringing in her ears.

She did not know what Dick meant. It was more to please her father than anything else that she consented to marry Barry. He became a friend of her father's and he told her that it would please him very much to have her marry Barry. After his shame and disappointment in Dick, she had not the heart to refuse him



this request and a feeling of resentment rose up in her against Dick for trying to shatter again the hopes of his father.

The reception was a success and her engagement announced. It was late when the guests departed and Mr Barry at the request of Marson remained over night.

Helen in accordance with her promise to Dick opened the door for him.

That night Phil Barry was murdered.

Helen's feelings when she heard the terrible news may be better imagined than described. Going up to Dick's room she found, as she had expected, that he was gone. Try as she might she could not shake from her mind the suspicion that he had committed the crime. What was she to do? The police were baffled and had no clue. Should she tell her father and add further sorrow to his declining years, and also perhaps bring her brother to the gallows? Oh, how she wished for someone to advise her!

At last she decided to tell her father and shift the burden from herself to him and leave it to his judgement. He listened to her story without interruption. He did not even upbraid her for not letting him know of his son's presence.

"All right, my child," he said when she had finished, "Run away now and I will consider the matter"

Very seldom has a man to make such a decision. But Mr. Marson with breaking heart faced the issue squarely. His son was now an escaped convict. He had had a trial and was convicted. Now he was suspected of murdering his sister's affianced husband. If he did commit it, he was a beast of prey upon society at large. If he did not, then he could prove himself innocent and justice would be done.

That day he placed his information in the hands of the authorities.

Months passed and nothing new developed.

Helen never heard from Dick and she gradually became possessed of the idea that without a doubt he was a murderer. Her father who had borne up so well under the first shock lapsed into despondency and Helen felt that instead of loving her brother she hated him. At last word came that Dick was captured and was being brought home for trial. With this news, there burst upon her

the awful realization that it was her evidence that would convict him.

During the terrible suspense before the time of the trial she wished something to occupy her attention. She never went to see Dick but she knew that he professed his innocence.

Knowing now, perhaps for the first time what sorrow and misery were, she wished to help others in distress and now that winter was setting in she set about to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. This generosity she never regretted.

One day, some time later, a woman whom she had befriended brought her news of a dying man who wished to see her. She went immediately thinking he needed her assistance. Imagine her feelings when from him she learned the murderer of Barry and of Dick's innocence of theft. He himself was the murderer and Barry was the thief.

His story was a marvellous one, He confessed that he was a tool in the hands of Barry who was a crook. Barry wished to marry Miss Marson because of her father's wealth. Dick had taken a dislike to him but he ingratiated himself with Mr Marson, so he connived to get Dick out of the way and to fastene the crime of theft upon him.

"Some time later," he concluded, as his voice grew weaker, "we quarreled and parted. I vowed revenge. I saw you meeting him that night in the grove and knew it was my chance to fasten the guilt of my crime on somebody else. I found the door unlocked and you know the rest."

This confession served to clear Dick from both charges and he was released and went with Helen home to his father.

The old man's heart was filled with joy and he was sorry he ever doubted his only son.

"That's all right, father." said Dick, "You were incited against me by Barry without your knowing it, but now that the clouds have rolled by we can all live happy again and I will have greater respect for my dear father and sister who were not afraid to do their duty as they saw it."