

# OUR STORY TELLER



## DAVID MARLE'S STORY.

I NEVER quarreled with my brother John until we came to settle up business in the year of 1855. We had been partners ten years, ever since we had been West, indeed, but some changes made it at length advisable that we should separate. He had made his fortune and wanted to return East. I, also, was able to live with less care, and so we sold every acre of our landed property, and were settling up the books, when there arose dissension. John was married and had had a family to support, while I was unmarried. His expenses had been three times as much as mine. Moreover, I had taken the burden of the labor and responsibility—this having been tacitly agreed upon, I being the youngest man. While he had lived comfortably with his wife and children among the farms, with horses, men and money at his hand, and absolute control of the farming interests, I had been beating about over the country, from the Denver to the Florida glades, buying and selling land, timber and stock—living anyhow, and sacrificing all personal comfort to our mutual advantage. It is rough traveling in the West. Twice I had swam the Missouri when every stroke endangered my life; once I had been captured by hostile Indians, and escaped by strategy. I was overtaken by a prairie fire and nearly burned to death, when taking up claims in Nebraska, and my periods of weariness and discouragement were indescribable. I grew gaunt and pale, and hard, making money, while John waxed fat and merry. I had all the hardships, and I had decided I ought to have more than half the profits, taking everything into consideration. John refused this; and it was true, as he said, that this had not been the contract.

"John Marle," said I, "look at the difference between us. All the trouble you have had in getting this money is to take it from my hand. You have never lost a night's sleep in getting it; you have had full sway in making these farms as profitable as you please, and when you have made a miscalculation in a tenant or a crop, I have never blamed you. You have had a comfortable roof over your head, while I have languished with yellow fever in the South and sickened with ague from exposure in the West. Two-thirds of this money is justly mine. You have spent more than I, and you have a right only to one hundred thousand dollars."

"I will have one hundred and fifty," he said, doggedly.

"You never shall!" I answered.

I had the books. They were in the office of a life insurance company, for whom I was agent. This business had been privately my own. I had worked it in with other pursuits and it paid me well. I had dealt in it only for the last year, but during that time I purchased for myself, out of its profits, a fine library, and had made several valuable presents to a favorite old maid sister, living in the East. These expenses were in the books of the firm—four hundred dollars for books, fifty for maps, seventy for a set of furs for Margaret, and forty for an easy-chair for her. I knew I must take these off the books before John saw them, or he would claim that they had been paid for out of the general fund. As I have said, they were in my private room of the insurance company's building, in St. Joseph. When I left my brother's house in Kansas I started directly for this point; but at Atchison a dispatch met me requiring me to wait there until I received further directions from the directors of the Phoenix. I saw no actual danger in waiting, and so remained in the city nearly a week. I received some policies then to be carried into the country. As soon as they were delivered to the specified parties I returned to St. Joseph.

I hurried to the office; somehow, I felt as if something was wrong. As I unlocked the inner door Major Hawley looked up from his newspaper and said:

"By the way, Marle, your brother came yesterday and got some books from your desk."

"Some books?" I said. And I felt myself growing pale.

"Yes, Ledgers, you know. I knew he was your partner, and so I let him take them. Nothing wrong, is there, Marle?"

"No," I said, and went into my office and shut the door. My first movement was to open my desk hurriedly. Yes, they were gone. John had the books. I denounced him for a villain.

After a while I grew cooler. I was very much surprised at what he had done. It was not like him. It was plain that he thought I meant to cheat him in some way.

Nor was I inclined to trust him. I

did not believe that he would make charges against me on the books, but I knew he would reckon that five hundred and sixty against me on the general account, nor believe my story that these outlays were never made with his money, or moneys on which he had a claim. Nothing burns up confidence like the love of gold. John and I had never before had a word of difficulty or a hard thought, and now here we were, ready to call each other thieves and liars.

In the first place, I felt insulted by his suspicion. I meant no injustice; I merely wanted what I considered my right—what I thought I had well earned. Then this movement of his, which had the look of outwitting me, I mentally anathematized. It was a mean, sly thing to do.

Of course he would transfer the accounts to his own possession and return me the books. There were five of them. If he had worked all the night before, he could not have thoroughly examined more than one. This private account of mine was entered on the latest. So the thought came to me, finally, to regain immediate possession of this one at least.

It was not the mere five hundred and odd dollars I cared for the loss of; it was the right which gave John to infer that I spent more than I acknowledged, and that my personal expenditures were not so inferior to his that I could claim more than half the contested profits; and more, it was the disagreeable idea of being defeated.

That very night I started for Marleville. I arrived the next day. I went straight to John's house. He received me alone, his face set in unusual lines, and his eye meeting mine burning.

"John Marle," said I, "you have done a mean thing. You have insulted me."

"You refer to my taking the books in which our accounts have been kept?" he said, quietly.

"I do."

"But you had no right to see them if I wished," he said.

"But you had no right to come like a thief in the dark and take them, until I told you they were prepared for you to examine."

"What preparation did they need?" said he with a sneer.

This was too much. Before I knew what I was doing I struck him. He was a large man, but he reeled and clutched at the piano to save himself from falling. His aim missed and he grasped only the rich crimson cloth, and he dragged it with him as he dropped into a seat. He was very pale. I was almost ready to beg his forgiveness when he looked at me with such a gaze of hatred that I turned instead and walked out of the room, kicking an embroidered stool out of my way as I went.

This interview had not been satisfactory, and I was at a loss what to do next. An amicable settlement of the matter was now out of the question.

I was passing the house that evening when I saw the family carriage, containing my brother, his wife and his four children, drive away from the gate. I decided instantly that they were going to evening meeting in the town two miles distant. Then the house was left alone, comparatively—and the books—were they there? Could I not enter, find them, and take possession of them as unceremoniously as John had done?

It was growing dark. There was no light in the front of the house, but I saw one gleaming from one of the lower ones at the back. It was the family sitting-room. I approached it and looked in.

It was a large, comfortable apartment, with a fire upon the hearth; and before the fire sat a young lady rocking an infant.

The child was probably the last-comer, the little nameless one I had not before seen, and which John wrote me a month before was to be called David. If I approved. But who was its nurse?—this sweet-faced girl who handled it so dexterously, feeding it from a silver porringer, and then laying it over her shoulder and patting its back with her pretty, ringed hand, to make it go to sleep, as she rocked back and forth before the dancing blaze? I could see the gloss on her braided hair, and the glittering buckle upon her little slipper.

The child seemed uneasy. It wailed, and she rose and walked the floor with it, soothing it in a low, cooling tone of endearment, now and then singing a lullaby. At last it was asleep, with its bit of a face hidden in her neck, and she sat down again before the fire. I stood and watched her; indeed, I had forgotten all else.

She had soft brown eyes; I don't know any other word to use; they were

tender and quiet. She looked quite happy in a silent way. As she swayed back and forth, the lamplight and then the firelight touched her forehead, and cheek, and sweet mouth, and white neck, with their different tinting—the firelight making her rosy and radiant, the lamplight showing the lovely face in a paler guise. I thought, "What if this were my home? What if that was the darling wife I had longed for all these years, and that my child? What if I might move now, and she would turn her head and listen for my step?"

The thought made me tremble. I retreated to the road, and walked back and forth there, trying to think to some purpose. Of course I could not enter the house, though it would probably not be difficult to do so. I might get the books with little difficulty, for that young girl was probably all the person under the roof; but somehow I did not want them; the current of my mind had changed. I walked half a mile down the starlit road and came back. Once more I went to the window.

The child was awake and crying. She was walking the floor with it again. I forgot to be cautious, she was so unconscious, and quite leaned on the stone sill as I stood. Turning in her walk, she happened to glance toward the window, saw my face as the light fell upon it, and uttering a scream of terror, fell to the floor.

I rushed to the door; it gave way to my hand, and I went in and raised her. She was quite senseless, but she still clasped the child, who screamed frightfully. I laid it in its cradle and tried to revive her. She scarcely seemed to breathe before she broke into hysterical sobbing.

"Don't cry, don't cry!" I said, awkwardly. "I did not mean to frighten you. Look up! I am David Marle. You must have heard of me. I meant no harm in the world. I was only looking at you because you looked so pretty."

She did not seem to see the ludicrousness of this explanation. She caught her breath and looked at me with dilated eyes and the utmost anxiety for some time.

"You are Uncle John's brother?"

"Yes. And then I knew who she was—Aurelia May, a favorite niece of my brother's wife, whom I had never seen."

"I was very foolish to be so frightened," she said at last; "but you looked like a ghost."

"Shall you tell them?" asked I.

"Uncle John and Aunt Susan? No; and don't you," she said, with a blush.

She had taken the poor baby from the cradle, and as it soon hushed its cries, we concluded that it was not hurt. Before the family returned, Aurelia had regained her natural color and composure, and I had reason to be thankful that it was so.

John started when he saw me, and looked bewildered when I arose and offered him my hand; but he took it, and bade me sit down again, cordially. Perhaps some good word which he had heard in the house of God had softened him; certainly the pure face of that girl had changed my heart. We sat together, a pleasant party, that evening, and the next day John and I entered into calm discussion of our business. He was finally willing and even anxious to give me two-thirds of the money, but I would not accept it.

"No, no, John," said I, "we will divide evenly, and, if you want to do anything more for me, just try to make Aurelia think that I'm not a monster."

"Aurelia?" repeated John. "Why, she don't know that there has been a word of trouble, and doesn't dream of such a thing. If you want her, go in and win; the coast is clear, and may God bless you!"

I was not much used to women, but she liked me, and finally I got her. It frightened me to think how wretched I should have been if I hadn't. I have only to add that she is just as good as I thought she was when I first saw her through the window; and if God prospers us, I may, before another year, see her rocking a baby that is mine, the firelight and the lamplight again on her sweet face.—Pennsylvania Gilt.

An Editor's Correspondence.

Editors especially know how heavily the tax bears upon one's strength and time. In earlier days, when the etiquette of correspondence demanded a good deal of circumspection, the writing of a letter was often a formidable task. N. P. Willis, the poet, and one of the founders of this paper, abridged this task by inclosing in his hurry-graph letters the following printed explanation of their brevity: "Men in this land of never-let-up are ever laden with labor in as many different ways as there are vocations by which they get a living; but to an editor the 'last ounce which breaks the camel's back' is the writing of a private letter. Not that his brain is drugged beyond a sense of the luxury of writing for one reader (on the contrary, the value of it is enhanced by rarity); but he looks upon it as the leg-weary postman looks upon the luxury of an evening walk. Now, here is your letter to answer. Either a cheerful and appropriate letter to you or an article for my paper would be as much of a morning's pen-work as would be agreeable; but both together would dwindle the latter of the two into flat-footed plodding. In choosing between those which to neglect, you see, of course, that it is a choice between minding my business and writing to you; and you will forgive me, therefore, if in the least words possible I jot down what must be said, and trust to this printed explanation to explain my brevity."—New York Home Journal.

Charlie—What makes you look so glum, Harry? Harry—Maud Sweetser has thrown me over. Charlie—Oh, I wouldn't mind that; a woman never hits where she means to when she throws.—Boston Transcript.



## BY A WOMAN'S WRIT.

"Oh, no! It was only Mr. Winton's fancy. There is nothing really the matter with me."

As soon as Mrs. L'Estrange with Bea and her governess had departed, after an early luncheon, Nora took a book and a comfortable corner of the sofa, determined to think only of the story, which was interesting and well told. She felt unaccountably weary, and was not at all surprised that Winton should have thought her looking ill. What an ungrateful, unaccountable creature she was! How happy most girls would be, in her place! But she was going to read, and not think about herself. So, with an effort, she fixed her attention on the page before her. She had not read long, when the unexpected announcement of "Mr. Winton" made her heart stand still. Why—why had he come so early? She started up in haste, and went to meet him, reading in his observant eyes the same questioning expression which had struck her the evening before.

"I am afraid Helen will not be in just yet," said Nora, with a friendly smile. "Yes, I know I am rather early, but, if I don't interrupt you, I will wait," returned Winton, speaking more rapidly than usual. He drew a chair near her sofa, laying his hat on the floor, but still holding his stick, with which he seemed to trace the pattern of the carpet. "How is your cold—better?"

"Yes, thank you."

"When do you return to Brookdale?"

"Our plans are very uncertain," returned Nora, coloring, for she knew it was Marsden's wish they should remain in town and have a very quiet wedding.

How she wished some one would tell him she was engaged to Clifford! There was a pause while Nora sought in vain for something to say.

"Did Mrs. L'Estrange tell you I was inclined to go off straight to India with Colonel and Mrs. Romer?"

"Yes, she did."

"But I felt I could not go without trying my luck in London. May I tell you why?"

"He is going to confide in me," thought Nora.

"Certainly, Mr. Winton," she said very kindly. "Perhaps I have some idea why already."

Winton looked at her steadily, with surprise.

"You may have, though I doubt it." Another pause, then with an evident effort Winton began, growing more composed and collected as he went on. "You may think me a presumptuous ass, but I will not lose the faintest chance for any false pride. Miss L'Estrange, though we have always been good friends, especially when I first knew you, I acknowledge you have never given me any hope that you would ever let me be more than a friend. And lately I have imagined, or rather felt, that you were changed in some way; perhaps that ought to have been enough to silence me, but, you see, when a man's future hangs on 'Yes' or 'No,' it is hard to be content with uncertainty, and there is a degree of sympathy between us on some subjects. In short, I cannot leave without asking if there is any hope for me, for," looking straight at her with solemnity, "I love you well."

"Me!" exclaimed Nora, who had listened in increasing amazement. "Are you sure you mean me?"

"Who else could I mean?"

"Mr. Winton," rising to her feet in the agony of that terrible moment, and white even to her lips, "I have promised to marry Clifford Marsden in February."

Winton also rose and stood before her, a grim, dark expression gathering in his face.

"I never anticipated this," he broke off abruptly. "Then I have only to apologize, which I do most humbly, for having intruded myself and my feelings on you. I shall trouble you no more."

There was a moment's silence.

"I am grieved to grieve you," said Nora, in a voice so low and trembling that she scarce heard herself.

"I believe it, you have a kind, true heart. I was presumptuous in hoping to win it. Do not grant Marsden any more happiness! None can wish you all possible prosperity more warmly than I do. Pray forget that I have momentarily distressed you." He paused, and looked at her intently. "Nora, you are faint? You tremble, you can hardly stand."

He made a movement as if to catch and support her.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "You must go—you must leave me!"

"I must indeed," returned Winton, who took and gently kissed her hand, said softly, "I will never intrude on you again. Good-by, dear, good-by!" seized his hat, and was gone. Then Nora sank upon the sofa and buried her face in her hands, her heart filled with the blackest despair. If he had come but three weeks, even a fortnight ago! What was to become of her? Was there no escape? Could she bring him no comfort? The pain in his voice still vibrated on her ear. Even if she could break with Clifford—he, too, loved her well, and she would not willingly hurt him; but oh! how her heart ached for Mark Winton! There was no music in his voice, but what a ring of truth and sincerity! His words were few and simple compared to Clifford's eloquence; but what earnestness they expressed! How did she come to believe so implicitly in Winton's attachment to Helen? Surely Clifford Marsden, who knew both before Helen was married, he ought to know the real facts.

Could Mark Winton have forsaken Helen for her? No; that was impossible! And various important trifles, indicative of his interest in herself from the very beginning of their acquaintance, recurred to her painfully excited memory. Why—why did she allow herself to be so easily misled? How did Clifford come to be so deceived? Did he indeed believe what he asserted? Was he not base, to suspect her affianced husband of trickery because she was miserable herself? And if, as she believed only yesterday, Helen was attached to Winton, the round of wretchedness would be complete! Why had she been so precipitate? Turn which way she would, she was hemmed in by the misery she had caused others. How was she to bear her life? She must let Winton believe in her indifference to him, her love for Marsden. After all, her duty and consideration ought to be for the man she had promised to marry, when she

thought another was preferred by the man she loved! Where could she turn for counsel or comfort? None could give it to her. Her wisest, justest course, would be strictest silence as to Winton's amazing avowal. Then there would be no disturbance. Helen would remain on the same friendly terms with Winton, perhaps he might learn to love her. At any rate, she had always heard that men never suffered long from such disappointments.

It was all, all too cruel! To think that through a mistake so slight, so easy to have avoided, she had missed the road that led to happiness—happiness full, complete, soul-satisfying—and made him she loved so well suffer as bitterly as she did herself!

It was an hour of intense, blackest despair, a night of anguish to which there would be no succeeding dawn. To the sorrows, as to the joys of youth there are no to-morrows. In grief it indignantly rejects the idea of consolation, of being so heartless as to forget, while the suggestion of prudence in pleasure, lest dark days may come, is resisted with scornful certainty of permanent bliss. To Nora the only possible mood that could succeed her present suffering would be the numbness and indifference of mental death! In the bitterness of her remorse for her own hasty action, she wrung her hands, and the splendid engagement-ring, which Marsden had placed upon her hand in addition to the signet he still wished her to wear, fell to the ground unnoticed.

At length she tried to think what she had better do to hide herself from the kindly inquiring eyes of her step-mother. She could think of nothing more original than the inexhaustible excuse—headache; but it would not do to lie down in the safe solitude of her own room. No; she dared not so indulge herself. She would go out and shop. There was plenty to do in that way. She rang and called for the ever-ready Watson, and explained that she thought the air would do her good, and called forth, leaving a message for Mrs. L'Estrange to the effect that Winton had called and could not come to tea.

It was dusk when she returned, feeling utterly worn out.

"My dear Nora," cried her step-mother, "here is a letter from Mr. Marsden. I wonder what he would say if he knew that you had let the beautiful ring he gave you drop, and had not taken the trouble to pick it up?"

"Did I?" with a bewildered look.

"Yes! Bea trod on it as she came in. It is fortunate she is so light."

"Ah! my fraulein, it is not a good omen!" cried the little German governess. "Oh! we must not talk of omens! How did Bea behave at the dentist's Helen?"

"Like a little heroine," cried Mrs. L'Estrange, proudly, "and she has chosen a proportionate reward—a monstrous Noah's ark, with the most accurately correct animals ever made out of wood, and fur, and papier-mache. But, Nora, were you wise to go out?"

"Yes, quite. My head ached fearfully, now it is better."

"It may be; but you look wretched. I do not know what Mr. Marsden will say to me when he comes back. I wish you would read his letter. I am anxious to hear what Lady Dorrington says."

"Nothing very pleasant, I fear," said Nora, with a sigh.

"Why couldn't Mr. Winton come this afternoon?"

"Oh! he was obliged to go somewhere else. I imagine he is going away to see his uncle to-morrow."

(To be continued.)

CHAMPION SWEARER.

He Was Cured of the Habit by a Simple Stratagem.

Among the outre characters of Ayr more than 100 years ago there was none so remarkable as a little oldish man who was ordinarily called the "evil Almightly." He had acquired this terrific sobriquet from an inveterate habit of swearing, or rather from that phrase being his favorite oath. He was no ordinary swearer, no minor of dreadful words, no clipper of the King's curses. Being a man of violent passions, he had a habit when provoked of shutting his eyes and launching headlong into a torrent of blasphemy, such as might, if properly divided, have set up a whole troop of modern swearers.

The custom of shutting his eyes seemed to be adopted by him as a sort of salve to his conscience. He seemed to think that provided he did not "see" with his eyes open" he did not sin at all; or it was perhaps nothing but a habit. Whatever might be the cause or purpose of the habit it was once made the means of playing off upon him a most admirable hoax. Being one evening in a tavern along with two neighboring country gentlemen he was, according to a concerted plan, played upon and irritated. Of course he soon shut his eyes, and commenced his usual tirade of execration and blasphemy. As soon as he was fairly afloat and his eyes were observed to be hard shut his companions put out the candles, so as to involve the room in utter darkness.

In the course of a quarter of an hour, which was the common duration of his paroxysms, he ceased to speak, and opened his eyes, when what was his amazement to find himself in the dark. "How now? Am I blind?" "Blind," exclaimed one of the company; "what should make you blind?" "Why, I can see nothing," answered the sinner. "That is your own fault," coolly observed his friend; "for my part I can see well enough; and he drank a toast as if nothing had happened. This convinced the blasphemer that he had lost his sight, and to add to his horror it struck him that Providence had inflicted the blow as a punishment for his intolerable wickedness. Under this impression he began to rave and cry, and he finally fell into praying, uttering such expressions as made his two companions ready to burst with restrained laughter.

When they thought they had punished him sufficiently, and began to fear lest his mind be affected if they continued the joke any longer, one of them went to the door and admitted the light. The old blasphemer was overwhelmed with shame at the exhibition he had been compelled to make, which had such an effect that from that time forward he entirely abandoned his abominable habit.—Kilmarnock Standard.

It is said that good musicians exercise their music, while bad ones murder it.