

* * The Story Page. * *

In the Mubas Foot-Hills.

A Minister's Story.

BY MRS. FINDLEY BRADEN.

I first saw Barton Jerome in the summer of '89. He was slowly dying of consumption in a remote camp out there, and a hardy fellow-miner had brought me to his cot, imploring me to remain with him until the end.

"Bart has something on his mind," he explained hesitatingly. "We all think he has a confession to make, and if you stay it is bound to come sooner or later. I think he'll die happier with the load taken off his conscience. Bart an' me both have a bit of gold saved up, and we can pay you well for the trouble of staying. It won't be long now, anyway. You'll get camp rations thrown in, an' it's as healthy here in the foot-hills as you'd find it anywhere; better stay with Bart, sir, till the end!"

I grasped Rube Sawyer's honest roughened hand. "I will remain on one condition, that you will not even think of future payment. I am out here on a needed vacation, the climate agrees with me, and I can hunt and fish, while at the same time I can help you nurse your dying comrade."

The miner's eyes glistened. "You've got a heart, sir, an' I'm glad of it. Now take a look at Bart, he's as fine a lad as you'd wish to see, or at least he was before this wasting away began."

Together we entered the place, which was part tent, part dug out. On a low cot by the door lay a man still young in years, his face and form bearing the traces of great physical beauty. I remember thinking what he must have been in health and strength, and then suddenly his eyes were turned upon me. They were large, gray and piercing, such eyes as are never forgotten. And he extended a thin, shapely hand in welcome.

"You are the Minister from the East that Rube heard of below and promised to bring me if he could! Well, it was mighty good of you to come. I belong in the East too, you see. New York's my State, and—"

"It is also mine," I interrupted, pressing his long white fingers.

"But you'll get back to it again, an' I won't!" he cried, with a frown. "I've got to die here in the Mubas foot-hills, an' Rube has promised to bury me just outside the camp. I've lain here six months an' over, an' it's a long, long death. Better dead at once an' done with it!"

"You are quite ready to die?" I asked, looking him full in the face. His boyish grey eyes fell beneath my glance. "No, it ain't sir, an' that's why I wanted you to come! I've got a good deal to say, an' something to do before the last chapter ends. I'll read you the book of my life if you've a mind to listen some day. But how long can you stay?"

"As long as you think you need me," I answered. And honest Rube Sawyer seized my right hand in grateful acknowledgment while Barton Jerome feebly grasped my left.

"You resemble my father," the latter said after a pause. "He is a Fulton county Jerome. Must be living there yet, anyway I hope so! Ever been in Albany?"

I nodded in the affirmative.

"I was born and raised there," the young man continued. "I think—"

But a violent spell of coughing came on and I hastily withdrew, fearing he might be tempted to begin talking again.

"Bart's a bad case," said Rube Sawyer, with a sigh. "The valley doctor says he can't live a week! So you won't have long to stay after all."

"Has your friend heard from home lately?" I asked.

"Bart never gets letters from nobody," sighed Rube again. "An' he's got a mother, for he told me so. I reckon she loves him a sight, too. It isn't every mother that has such a son for looks! You should have seen him when he first came to the hills! Straight as an arrow, and six foot tall, if an inch. An' then such bright eyes and curly hair! I liked him at first sight, an' I like Bart yet. But he's got some secret that was eating his life away from the start. Taint the climate! The rest's all sound and healthy. Bart's just fretting his heart out over some past wrong-doing. But he's been the finest fellow in camp, an' the boys all like him. Was always doing a kind turn when well. An' now he's dying! My, my! I hate to think that! There'll be folks in the East as will be awful sorry to hear! He may tell you all about himself, an' then, again, he may not. But Rube Sawyer doesn't care to know. I've nursed Bart like a brother, though I have none myself. I'd do it again just for the smile and kind word he can give."

There were tears in the miner's eyes, and while he brushed them away I turned in to the cot, pretending not to see. Bart Jerome was lying in an uneasy slumber, his clear-cut face turned towards me. I had time then to study it carefully, and I tried to read the story of his

wasted young life. What had he been? What had he done? Why was he dying there alone, content to make no sign? These questions came again and again. There were weak lines on his clean shaven face, telling that he had been easily influenced for good and evil. He must have been brought up carefully and prayerfully. But he had early gone astray! I knew that even then. His hollow cheeks and sunken eyes were surely the ravages of former dissipation and wrong doing. They had not come in a day.

And Barton Jerome spoke aloud as he tossed upon his hard cot:

"I took it, mother, and I've got to go! Father will soon find it out! Don't kiss me! I don't deserve—"

He awoke, with a shuddering sigh, and his large eyes were fixed upon me. "Who are you? Oh, yes, I remember! the minister Rube brought! He thinks I am going to die, and I guess I am. Did I say anything in my sleep? I often do—bad dreams, you see!"

"You spoke of taking something," I replied, firmly.

His thin white face flushed painfully "Ah, yes!" he faltered, "I must have meant my medicine! It's time to take it now? I feel sometimes that it's bound to build me up yet! When the cooler weather comes I'll get more rest, and then—"

"And then?" I repeated, as the poor boy hesitated.

"Oh, I'll get better then!" He added hopefully.

"But you don't believe that, I know! Yet Rube can tell you I've been far worse than you see me now."

I took his hot fingers into my own. "Barton Jerome, have you a mother?"

"Yes," his answer but a whisper.

"And you loved her once?"

"Don't say that! I love her still!" he cried passionately. "But I've got to die without her—without her! O God! it is hard!"

"Why without her?" I persisted.

"Because she does not know my whereabouts—because I dare not let her know! And she could not come to me if I did. It is too late!—too late!"

His white face was buried deep in the rough pillow.

"Suppose we write to her," I suggested. "A true mother can forgive and forget any and everything!"

"No, no!" he gasped. "You must not write! Rube does not know, no one knows it here, but—I am a fugitive from justice!"

I did not say I thought as much; that would have been positive cruelty! But I drew poor Barton Jerome's wasted face to my breast and pillowed it there.

"You are a good man, or you would not do that," he faltered at last. "Mother used to hold me in her arms just so when I was a little fellow. But father was always cold and stern! I couldn't have done what I did if he had been different. I—I want to tell you about it before I go. You can write to mother when all is over—but not now, not now. I might get well and that would not do."

He had another fit of coughing then, and I laid him back on his cot, white and exhausted.

"It won't be long now!" sighed Rube Sawyer, stealing in on tip-toe. "An' wouldn't it nigh about kill his mother to see him lyin' so! After all it's just as well she doesn't know. I'll watch with him tonight as careful as she would herself. You can sleep there in the other bunk. If I need you I'll call."

So I retired from Barton Jerome's cot-side. It proved a long, long night, for I could not sleep. And neither did our patient. He moaned and tossed about, and once he again spoke aloud. Rube and I both caught the words. They were: "Mother, father—forgive."

"I reckon they would," the miner whispered. "Wish they could see him now. What's the boy done, anyhow?"

"He will tell me yet," I answered, "if he lives long enough."

And the next day Barton Jerome rallied. He was even strong enough to sit up for an hour by the opened door. It was then he told Rube and me the story of his blasted life. He kept nothing back, and he did not try to excuse himself in the least. It was, briefly this: He was an only son, and he had been carefully brought up and educated. But soon after leaving college he had learned to gamble. Then he lost heavily, and, to cancel the bad debts incurred, he deliberately opened his father's safe and took therefrom a thousand dollars. After confessing all to his still loving mother he fled from home and did not stop until he reached the Pacific coast. There he drifted from bad to worse until he finally brought up at the little mining camp out in the Mubas foot-hills, where I had found him the day before.

When he finished his not uncommon story I made no comments. They were not necessary. He was young and erring, and he was also dying.

"I want to make restitution," he said at last. "I can do it now, thanks to Rube! He made some investments for us both that have turned out well, and I can pay father back ten-fold. You must send it at once. I will make out a check for all I have. My bank book is in

that coat behind the door. Sorry I put off writing so long! I'm not equal to a letter now! But you can say all I wish him to know. Don't mention my being so ill! It would only worry mother."

"You think that would do, sir?"

"Most assuredly."

He took the pen then and traced the beautiful word in a scrawl. He tried to sign his name but could not. His sudden strength deserted him and he fell back in a faint. Rube and I were a long time restoring him to consciousness. Indeed we once thought he had left us forever. But Barton Jerome lived a full fortnight longer, and I have never regretted my stay in that remote and far-away camp. We had many a precious talk together, and he died at last a thoroughly repentant lad, wholly at peace with his Maker. I wrote to his parents, making the restitution he desired, and also inclosing his letter of one word, "Forgive." For he was never strong enough afterwards to write more. And their loving answer came the very morning he passed away. They gave him their full and free forgiveness, and oh, how they begged him to come home! His dying lips were pressed to the letter again and again. "Forgiven by God, and father and mother too!" he whispered. "Oh, it was too much to hope for, and now to think it is true! You'll bury this letter with me?"

I promised.

"And Rube must dig my grave, just outside the camp."

I promised again.

"Then good-by! All forgiven! Isn't it kind—and—good!"

And with that the boyish head fell back on the pillow and the glad gray eyes were closed forever. Poor Barton Jerome had gone to his long home.

Ah, the way of the transgressor, young or old! Is it not hard indeed?—N. Y. Observer.

A Japanese Fairy Tale.

Once upon a time the King of the Dragons, who had till then lived a bachelor, took it into his head to get married. His wife was a young Dragonette just sixteen years old—lovely enough, in very sooth, to become the wife of a king. Great were the rejoicings on the occasion. The fishes, both great and small, came to pay their respects and to offer gifts to the newly wedded pair.

But, alas! even Dragons have their trials. Before a month had passed the young Dragon Queen fell ill. The doctors dosed her with every medicine that was known to them, but all to no purpose. At last they shook their heads, declaring that there was nothing more to be done. The illness must take its course and she would probably die. But the sick Queen said to her husband:

"I know of something that will cure me. Only fetch me a live monkey's liver to eat and I shall get well at once."

"A live monkey's liver!" exclaimed the king. "What are you thinking of, my dear? Why, you forget that we dragons live in the sea, while monkeys live far away from here among the forest trees on land. A monkey's liver? Why, darling, you must be mad."

Thereupon the young Dragon Queen burst into tears. "I only ask you for one small thing," whimpered she, "and you refuse to get it for me. I always thought you did not really love me. Oh, I wish I had remained at home with my own m-m-mamma and my own p-p-papa-a-a." Here her voice choked with sobs.

Well, of course the Dragon King did not like to have it thought that he was unkind to his beautiful young wife. So he sent for his trusty servant, the Jellyfish, and said: "It is a rather difficult undertaking, but what I want you to do is to swim across to the land and persuade a live monkey to come here with you. In order to make the monkey willing you can tell him how much nicer everything is here in Dragon-Land than where he lives. But what I really want him for is to cut his liver out and use it as medicine for your mistress, who, as you know, is dangerously ill."

So the Jellyfish went off on his strange errand. In those days he was just like any other fish, with eyes, and fins, and a tail. He even had little feet, which made him able to walk on the land as well as to swim in the water. It did not take him many hours to swim across to the country where the monkeys lived, and, fortunately, there just happened to be a fine monkey skipping about among the branches of the trees where the Jellyfish landed. So the Jellyfish said:

"Mr. Monkey, I have come to tell you of a country far more beautiful than this. It lies beyond the waves, and there is pleasant weather there the year round, and there is always plenty of ripe fruit on the trees, and there are none of those mischievous creatures called men. If you will come with me I will take you there. Just get on my back."

The monkey thought it would be fun to see a new country. So he leaped upon the Jellyfish's back and off