

How We Got Ned to Sign.

We just had a dreadful time at our house this morning. Papa looks so stern and yet so sorry, and mamma was sick, and Cousin Clare's eyes were all pink with crying.

May and I didn't know what it all meant, only we guessed that brother Ned had been doing something very, very naughty, for he didn't come to breakfast till we were almost through and then papa was so angry at him though he didn't say much.

Ned just drank a cup of coffee for his breakfast, and as soon as he could get away he was off for a ride.

After a while Cousin Clare told us to put on our things, and we would take a walk together. She wasn't a bit like herself that day, for she walked along so quiet and solemn and only said "yes" and "no" to what Mary and I said. Pretty soon Ned rode up behind us, and got off his horse and walked along beside Cousin Clare.

May didn't pay much attention, she's a little thing—only six and a half; I'm eight, and I listened to what they were saying, and I tell you 'twas terrible! I heard Ned say:

"I want to know just how it was; I want to get at the bottom of this thing." She just bit her lips as if she were trying to keep from crying but she, kept still till he said:

"Let me feel that I know the worst." Then she spoke up very firm, though her voice trembled:

"Aunt and I were sitting up when we heard a noise of tumbling and shuffling, and then the bell rang. When the door was opened you were held up by two or three men, all of them tipsy; and when you got inside you fell down."

"Say it out," said Ned, much excited. "I was dead drunk, or beastly drunk—whatever you call it."

Clare kept still, though the big tears kept dropping to the ground.

"And—how—did—mother—take— it?" as if every word hurt him.

"She thought at first you were hurt or sick, but when she found it was— worse, she clasped her hands and looked as if she wanted to die."

"Well he said I hadn't any idea that I was taking more than usual, but I suppose I did, and made a fool of myself."

That's just what he said, truly. My! but I did feel badly! I told May when we got home, and we just cried and cried. Then we went to Cousin Clare, and had a long chat with her about it.

She told us then that the wrong was in taking it at all. May and I were surprised at that, for didn't papa have his glass of sherry every day after dinner? But Clare said that if no one ever tasted it, no one would ever be a drunkard.

We both said we'd never, never touch it and she wrote out a pledge, and we put our names down, and so did she. I like Cousin Clare; I'm going to be a young lady just like her when I grow up.

All at once May looked at me, and I looked at her. We both thought the same thing.

Why couldn't we try to get papa and Ned to put their names down too? We took the paper to mamma's room and she kissed us and said we might try.

But before we went, we had to kneel down with her, and she prayed that God would save her boy and help us to do right.

I tell you that we felt solemn. We almost wanted to give up—that is, I did, but May said she was going to go anyhow, and I felt ashamed to have a little thing like that beat me; so we waited till after dinner, and went to the dining-room when everyone was gone and papa was alone with his bottle and glass of sherry. He looked astonished when we walked in and laid the paper and pen and ink before him, and then we thought he was angry, he looked so for a minute. I wanted to run, but I said—

"It's to save brother Ned, papa."

Then he put his head down on the table and cried, and said, so dreadful like, just as if his heart was breaking—"Oh, my son, my son! I would to God I had died for thee!"

We would have gone away, but he hadn't signed yet. My kept her arm over his neck and stroked his hair, and petted him lots—she's the loveliest little thing!

By-and-by when papa raised his head and put his arms around us, I said again: "Papa, please, and then we can ask Ned."

He took the paper and read it all over again; and then he put us down and walked up and down the room for the longest time; and there was a glass of sherry he hadn't tasted yet.

At last he went to the table, took up the glass—and we felt so disappointed for we thought he was going to drink it; but he took it and threw it—smash! right into the grate, and the bottle after it.

"There" he said "I'll see if you'll stand between me and saving my boy!" and then he reached for the pen and wrote "Herbert Standish" in those great letters of his.

We didn't stay long only to kiss and hug him, and then we skipped upstairs where mamma and Clare were sitting so white and anxious. They could hardly believe it, but there it was—papa's name.

They consulted us for a while, and then they decided that, as we had had such good success with papa, we might try alone with Ned.

We heard him practising the

violin in his room, but when we knocked hard he said: "Come in."

Well, we were even more scared than when we went to papa, but he took the paper and read it, and when he saw papa's name he whistled right out: "Wh-o-w!"

Then his face began to work, just like May's does when she is going to cry, and he walked to the window and blew his nose hard. May took the pen and paper to him, and said:

"Please brother Ned, won't you write your name here?" And then she told him, so sweetly, about papa's feeling so bad and throwing the wine into the grate. He trembled a little, but he said:

"Yes, I will. I'll keep it, too, God helping me. If father can, I can."

And that's how we got Ned to sign, and we are all so happy now.

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