

The Power of Sympathy

By ESTHER VANDEVEER

When the Spanish-American war broke out Ralph and Edgar Townsend, brothers, enlisted in the same regiment of sharpshooters and were assigned to the same company. One day they were out on the picket line sniping for the Spaniards. Their position was behind a stone wall, its continuity broken here and there. Ralph was on one side of a gap, while Edgar was on the other side, the opening between them being eight or ten yards.

Edgar concluded to make a dash to join his brother. He had passed safely over all but a couple of yards of the distance when Ralph saw a Spanish sharpshooter taking aim at his brother. Ralph had just emptied his piece or he would have shot the Spaniard. As it was, he sprang between him and Edgar and received a shot which, grazing the spine, paralyzed his lower limbs. He was discharged from the service and sent home, where he submitted to an operation that partly restored his locomotive powers, but he was in a measure crippled for life.

As soon as the war was over Edgar Townsend rejoined his brother, resolving to devote the rest of his life to him. Ralph was twenty years old, Edgar twenty-two. Ralph would not admit that he was crippled and was very sensitive at the mention of his being so. As for Edgar making any change whatever in his life's plans on his account he would not hear of it, nor did Ralph seem to realize that he had sacrificed himself for his brother. He considered what he had done simply in the line of his duty as a soldier. Edgar, on the contrary, was impressed with the idea that his brother had taken a burden which he should have borne himself.

Nevertheless as soon as Edgar saw that Ralph was averse to such an interpretation of the status between them, he refrained from any mention of it, and wherever it was possible to conceal any sacrifice he made for his brother he did so. He soon came to studying Ralph's wishes, and wherever they conflicted with his own, made pretense that what Ralph wanted was distasteful to him.

Then came Edith Payne into the lives of the brothers. She was sympathetic with Ralph, but her heart went out to Edgar. The one she loved as one who needed her, the other she loved as one she needed. Edgar, noticing that his brother was daily growing more dependent on her, refrained from paying her any marked attention.

As time went on Edgar perceived that Edith was growing to be a necessity to Ralph. Moreover, he noticed that while Edith was devoted to Ralph, there were indications that her heart was setting toward himself. One day when he and Edith were speaking of Ralph Edgar said to her:

"I feel it my duty to say to you, Edith, that I have seen what perhaps has passed unnoticed by you. Ralph loves you."

The girl paled, and she had cause to pale. She loved Edgar and she knew that while his brother held this view, Edgar was lost to her. He would never stand between his brother and her.

"I hope," she said presently, "that you are mistaken."

"And I hope," said Edgar, "if you think you cannot respond, that you are mistaken. Our attentions to those dependent upon us often draw us to them with far greater force than we realize."

Edith sighed. She knew that the man she loved was endeavoring to persuade her to give herself to the man she only pitied. But she said nothing more. She knew what Edgar would have her do. She did not know his feelings toward her, but she surmised that he had no desire to possess her himself. Even if he had he would give her up to his brother.

Soon after this brief dialogue Edgar went away for a time, leaving Edith and Ralph together. Before his departure he said to Edith, "I hope when I return to find that you have decided to make Ralph happy."

It was thus that Edith was led to bear a part of the burden of the man she loved by giving herself to the man she did not love. She considered what he had said to her a command, and she would not disobey. When Edgar returned she told him that she and Ralph were engaged.

She looked Edgar in the eye when she made the announcement, hoping to see him wince. If it was a shock to him he concealed it so well that she was deceived. From that time she gave herself up more and more to Ralph's companionship, and when the wedding day came went with him to the altar a martyr.

Then Edgar, feeling that his brother no longer needed him as before, spent much of his time away from him. Some said he did not dare trust himself near his brother's wife.

As the years sped on Ralph Townsend grew more and more helpless, his wife more and more devoted to him. Ten years after his marriage he died. Those who knew of the sacrifice that had been made supposed that Edith and Edgar would quickly come together. They have been disappointed. Four years after Edith became a widow she and Edgar had not married. It is said that she illustrates Edgar's words to her years before, "Our attentions to those dependent upon us often draw us to them with far greater force than we realize."

Edgar is still a bachelor.



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