

The Suitors of Sarah Brown

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The head librarian was startled to hear a loud outburst of shouting emanating from the reading area of the library. Looking up from the budget request she was preparing, she could see through the glass pane, three students in heated conflict. A girl was trying to keep two young men apart with little success. The student clerk from the front counter was already on her way to quiet the trio but Belle knew she would need assistance and so she was up and through the door to her office as quickly as she could.

With her arrival, the two students acquiesced to authority and quickly gained control of themselves, physically that is, but it was obvious from their faces that the anger persisted. Belle asked the nature of the problem and each young man blurted out that Sarah was his girl friend and the other was trying to break them up. Belle decided it was time to take names, which she did, and to decide later whether to take more serious action. Then she asked the very upset Sarah Brown for her side of this story. Sarah conceded that she had an admiration for both Bill Page and Joe Stevens but neither could lay claim to being her "boyfriend". She was not keeping steady company with either. However, she had received notes from each which were derogatory to the other. When she had confronted each, suggesting that it was not a kind thing to do, both men denied sending any such notes.

Sarah had been in the library when Joe had come in and they engaged in conversation. Later Bill came in, seeing them together. That is when the argument started. Another young man approached, asking Sarah if he could be of assistance. Belle asked who he may be and he replied that he was Sarah's brother, George. At that, Belle suggested that he leave with his sister and detained the other two until Sarah and George had exited the building. She then chided them for their childish behavior and sent them on their way. Belle considered the matter closed, at least as far as she was concerned.

But the matter did not close. It did as far as the library was concerned but in the university community it escalated. The faculty members began to discuss the situation as it came more and more to their attention and of course the

rumors and gossip reached the ears of our librarian. It seemed that several days after the incident in the library, Bill Page was accused, anonymously, of cheating on a chemistry examination. It was out of character and indeed unnecessary for him to do that and, in fact, it was not substantiated. Shortly after that, the school's mascot, a stuffed raccoon kept on display in the student union building, disappeared. Joe Stevens, anonymously, was accused of the theft. Again no proof was forthcoming and it was discovered to be hidden in a storage room. But incidents such as this reoccurred, one after another. Rumors abounded that the two students had a vendetta and were creating incidents and trying to place blame on the other. At the same time each denied complicity.

After months of these shenanigans and when it was becoming intolerable to the teachers and staff as well as a source of hilarity to the student body, it came to a head. Both students were summoned to a disciplinary tribunal made up of students and certain staff members. Several days before the scheduled tribunal, Professor Brown of the Mathematics department came to the library looking for a copy of *Mathematical Problems - A Lecture delivered before the International Congress of Mathematicians at Paris in 1900, By Professor David Hilbert*. When he could not find it, he asked Miss Fenton if a copy could be obtained for him. She, of course, would do her best to find one. As he was about to leave, Belle asked if he was related to Sarah Brown and that opened a flood of conversation about her, her embattled suitors, and the tribunal soon to take place. He was eager to speak to someone about this unfortunate family controversy as his wife was now deceased and there was no one else in whom to confide. A long conversation ensued. Belle offered him sympathy which was all she could do and apparently an attentive ear was much appreciated by the professor. He was upset that Sarah had become enmeshed in the controversy.

Belle became aware of some interesting facts during their discussion which included family history, past and present. Professor Brown also confessed to be completely baffled at the behavior of these two young men who, from his observations, seemed to be quite upstanding young men, seemingly incapable of the actions of which they were suspected.

Belle reviewed all the facts that she had accumulated and the day before the tribunal, approached the dean of students and asked if she could be invited to present some information that may have a bearing on the situation. Knowing

that Belle would not have even made the request if she did not believe she had something pertinent to contribute, he granted her request.

At the appointed time, all were assembled, including Sarah Brown and Professor Brown, who insisted on being there to protect her interests ... that is all except one who Belle considered to be important to the matter. She made a whispered request to the Dean of Students that he invite the person she had seen outside the room to come in as an interested witness. In a few moments, George Brown, Sarah's brother, was ushered into the room. He was obviously pleased to have been invited.

All the incidents were reviewed, and when Bell, politely brought it up, the incident in the library was introduced, adding to what was officially known. Both young men were questioned and each denied, not only committing the wrongs but also denied trying to blame the other. When all arguments had been explored in depth, the Dean of Students proclaimed, "Gentlemen, at least one of you is not telling the truth. One or both of you is the victim of an psychotic jealousy in the pursuit of the affections of this young lady." To which Bell replied, "Sir, we have not heard all the facts." When asked if she had something to add, Belle replied in the affirmative and related the following.

"Sarah is, not the daughter of Professor Brown, but actually the daughter of his second cousin, Edward Brown, and she was the professor's ward since the death of Edward and his wife in a tragic fire when Sarah was only six years old. She and the professor's son had been raised as brother and sister and both were aware of the true relationship." Belle continued, "There is, I believe, a third suitor, ... one George Brown." All were shocked at this suggestion including Bill, Joe, and Sarah ... but not George, who, jumping to his feet exclaimed, "Finally it is out! I am recognized! Sarah always loved me until these two came along." Belle, responded, "And, you had to dispose of them, if not by discrediting them in Sarah's eyes, then by trying to get them expelled from the university." "They didn't deserve her." was the response from George Brown.

Sarah Brown, again in tears, softly said, "Yes, George, I always loved you ... as a brother ... and I would have liked to love you that way all my life." George's face fell as he slumped back down into his chair, dejected and rejected.

Bill Page and Joe Stevens received apologies from the Dean of Students and from each other and, in return, offered forgiveness in acknowledging that no apologies were needed under the circumstances. The two subsequently became fast friends and retained a friendship with Sarah even when she started keeping company with Albert Connors. Since Sarah had attained the age of independence, and to preclude added complications, Professor Brown provided her with a generous allowance and she moved into a flat near the University. George Brown resigned from the student body to avoid being expelled and the embarrassment expulsion would have brought to him and, more importantly, his father.

Sarah is now Sarah Connors and her four children are often lovingly entertained by their "uncle" George who is now a prominent politician and apparently well suited to the profession.