

ALBERT STUMP

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Way up within a stone's throw of the Junction House, and separating goose nibble commons and the Big Four Railroad by a thoroughfare of mud and slush, runs Haw Street, a classic avenue not down on the map, but probably named and christened by Patrick McMannis, the Mill Street groceryman, and it was through a driving, soaking deluge of rain that a Star reporter plodded along Haw Street late Thursday afternoon in search of a family by the name of Baker. An hour's inquiry among the residents of Goose Nibble, brought to light as astonishing list of Bradys, Braders, Brakes, Brackets, in fact the Bs on Haw Street seemed innumerable, but no Baker About giving up the reporter aught sight of a good old Irish woman, airing herself about the lawn of her residence, and in answer to the inquiry shouted above the clatter of her flock of canary birds picking upon the commons: "Bless yer soul, to be sure O'I know the Bakers. Do yez see the bit of shanty over the way? That's the place and bedad they're a happy family this day; so they are." Following the direction of the good lady's comfortable index finger the weary pedestrian sighted a little tumble down, unkempt and unpainted structure, situated but a few yards from the railroad stock pens. A rap at the door of the uninviting little cabin quickly brought to sight a woman; a matronly looking person, she was, with a careworn face that had begun to show the ravages of old age.

"You are Mrs. Baker?"

"Yes."

And the woman who has found a long lost son?

"Aye, that I am, and he's inside this very minute." She spoke in tones full of gladness and at the same moment a weak childish voice from the inside piped out an invitation to come in.. The exterior of the Baker home was sadly out of keeping with the inside of the neat, though humble sitting room while the reporter was invited to enter. No cheery natural gas fire sparkled in an elegant grate, nor was there a polished base burner among the furnishings of the room, but instead a carefully blacked family heater, into whose capacious door Mrs. Baker chucked a big knot and in a moment the cheerful light flashed through the damper and about the room, its uncertain rays lighting up in the dusk as comfortable and snug-like scene as one would wish to see. Stretched upon a bed of pain was a youth of perhaps 23 years, of delicate frame and whose pallid face and dark eyes shown unnaturally bright in the glimmering fire light. This was Albert Stump, the eldest son of Mrs. Baker by a previous marriage, and a youth whose past seven years has been a romantic period, and to his mother has been as a disagreeable dream.

These people have their little history and mother and son united in stating it in their plain way, and with little hesitation, so great was their joy and thankfulness. Sixteen years ago at what is known as Sulphur Springs, Fountain County, Mary Stump and her dissolute husband lived in

poverty and distress, with a large family of small children. Albert the eldest son was a bright boy seven years of age. The husband it seems was a bad lot and his wife, concluding that he was an eye sore to the family, got rid of him, though his absence did not lessen the cramped financial condition of the Stumps and the wolf was not long in gaining an entrance into their home. The result was the old story of a separated household – a daughter bound out here and a son there on and finally it became evident that the poor farm was their inevitable end, at least it proved so for Albert and in our county house the child found a home. Not long however for his bright face and attractive manners caught the fancy of Mr. Foster Payne, a well-to-do farmer of Clark Township and Albert Stump was soon a member of the Payne family, where he remained until he was 16 years old. From his own story it appears that his life was of a pretty rocky kind after farmer Payne took to himself a second wife. The lady had no particular love for the homeless lad and in fact made things hot for him.

On the eve of the Fourth of July, after he had lived with the Paynes eight years (the boy did not remember the year) Albert was promised by his master that he might go to Michigan City on next day's excursion and on the morning of the Fourth the lad came to the city to take the train, Payne accompanying him. Boy like he purchased some popping crackers of Wampler just to have some fun. In firing the crackers, one of them, entirely by accident, exploded in close proximity to a lady's skirts and she immediately raised a yell like a Commanche, and the result was that young Stump was arrested and jailed, as he claims, at the instigation of Payne. He was confined overnight in the bastille and next day liberated and told to go hoe and in future pay heed to the mandates of his adopted parents. Now the youth had a temper of his own and it began to boil. What he had done to merit this peculiar sort of treatment he could not understand, nor could he get an explanation from the Paynes. However he went to work in the harvest field and bound his share of the grain for two days, but the disgrace and humiliation he had suffered galled him sorely, so much so in fact, that the evening of the 7th of July found him a passenger on the tracks of a freight train, spending in the direction of the setting sun, a homeless wanderer, broken both in pocket and spirit and with no thought or care for the future. St. Louis, the Mecca for many a wandering young man, caught our young friend in that busy metropolis, and it was not many days ere a friendly brakeman on an Iron Mountain freight, touched by the appealing looks of the friendless lad, had him safely ensconced in a box car, enroute for Texas; and it was in this land of the steer and lawless man that 16-year-old Albert Stump began life on his own account without hope, friends or experience. On an immense cattle ranch the boy found employment, but a day's ride across the plains on a galloping pony was too much for the delicate constitution of the boy and he was compelled to resign. Then followed several years of continual rousting about from one part to another.

Thrown up against the hard side of the world, Albert began to think of his mother and home as things that had never existed. In all these years of wandering he saw but one familiar face, and that belonging to an escaped prisoner from our county jail. Finally he drifted into the city of Texarkana and became connected with a variety theatre in the capacity of scene shifter and call boy. Surrounded by the roughest of characters and nightly living in an atmosphere permeated

with the vilest of intoxicants, young Stump spent four of the seven years in Texas. At last he fell ill and sought the hospital. His disease, the doctors said was a very dangerous one and only careful nursing could bring him about again. Kind hands administered to his wants but he grew no better and when he expressed a desire to return to his Indiana home again, his case was taken up by the philanthropic people and he was sent north. Arriving here weak and ill he found no friends to receive him and he made his way back to the county house he had left 14 years ago – the county poor farm. He sought the poor farm last fall and since that time he has suffered intensely, though he had received medical attention at the hands of the county physician.

The boy told the story of his life most pathetically, and at its conclusion was almost exhausted. "Mother, you know the rest," he said with a sigh, and fell into a soft doze while Mrs. Baker proceeded as follow: "I've been living in this city for several years and have been married to Baker about two years. I thought Albert was dead, for we had heard he had been killed in a railroad accident . You see I used to work out at the poor farm and the folks out there knew that I had lost a son. Some of the old inmates remembered when he had been taken away farm there years ago, and when he came back were sure he was my son. Last Sunday I went out there to see the folks and you can imagine ow I felt when they told me my son was lying upstairs sick. I couldn't believe it but it was true. Don't ask me what occurred when they took me to his room, for I don't know, but I knew it was Albert though I hadn't seen him for fourteen years." Then she stepped softly to the bedside and tenderly resting her hand on his brow hot with fever, murmured: "My poor boy, we are going to have yu well again; mother's with you now." The slight form moved uneasily and the lips piteously exclaimed: "I do with the doctor would come ;I'm suffering so."