

*Sidney's Trust*  
by Anna Sheilds

“I hold that perfect confidence should exist between man and wife. Without mutual trust, there can be no true happiness.”

Sidney Worthington spoke with honest enthusiasm, with a vision of soft brown eyes, a tender smile and sweet, loving voice floating through his mind. His uncle, a grave, middle-aged man, a widower for many years, and the victim of an “unhappy marriage” before that, smiled kindly.

“Ah, my boy,” he said, gently, “may you never have your faith shaken. You are right in theory, but, as in many other cases, theory may give way when you come to a practical test of the unquestioning faith.”

“I can scarcely imagine myself doubting Mattie, *under any circumstances*,” was the quick, emphatic reply.

“She is, I firmly believe, the very soul of truth,” said Mr. Worthington, “and I did not mean to be personal when I spoke a moment ago of woman’s powers of concealment and duplicity. The truth is, Sidney, I am soured by my own disappointed life.”

“Saddened, perhaps,” said his nephew, “but never soured. No one knows that better than I do.”

Then they talked of other matters, chiefly of business, for the firm of “Worthington & Co.” was represented by the two. It was late when they parted, Mr. Worthington to step into the bedroom of his suit of apartments in a fashionable boarding-house, and Sidney to rapidly pass through the streets that separated that boarding-house from his own cosy home.

Not quite six months had passed since he took to his heart and home the sweetest little wife, he firmly believed, who ever blessed a man’s life. She was not marvellously beautiful, but full of womanly grace, pretty, with sweet girlish features, and attractive above all by a frank simplicity of manner, exquisitely well-bred, and yet utterly devoid of affectation. It was this especial charm that first attracted Sidney, and after a brief courtship held his heart firm in love’s bondage.

He believed her when she shyly told him he was “her first, only lover,” though there had been others who only waited a smile of encouragement, as Sidney well knew. It was an ideal match—youth, beauty, ample means, congeniality of tastes, and in the first six months there had been only happiness in the pleasant house Mr. Worthington had furnished and presented to the bride upon her wedding-day.

But when Sidney, on this October evening of which I write, reached his home, Mattie did not come to meet him. It was not late—about half-past ten—and Mattie knew that her husband had gone to settle some business matters with his uncle. It was her custom to consider “poor Sidney”

something in the light of a martyr upon such occasions, and to compensate him for the supposed irksome addition to his labors by extra petting on his return home.

“Are you asleep?” he cried, as he wended his way upstairs.

And then the bedroom door opened and Mattie came hastily forward. But—she had been crying!

“Why, what is the matter? Are you sick?” cried Sidney, aghast.

“No, dear. But I have had a letter from an old friend who is in trouble, and I was goose enough to cry over it. Come down stairs now. I have some hot oysters for you.” And giving him no time to talk of her trouble, she talked herself of everything, rattling on in a nervous, excited way that was unlike her usual cheerfulness as her tears had been.

It worried Sidney. He told himself angrily that he was an idiot to notice it; but he could not rid himself of the impression that Mattie was concealing something. Then he gave himself another mental shake, and wondered where the “perfect trust” of which he had boasted was hiding, and finally dropped into troubled sleep, wondering “what on earth Mattie could have been crying about.”

But there was an important business venture engrossing the thoughts and time of the firm of “Worthington & Co.,” and Sidney had to give it so much of his attention that he was at home very little for three days. On the third he left home in the morning equipped for a trip to New York, and bade Mattie farewell for a few days. As he was leaving the store in the afternoon his uncle said:

“If you’ll wait till tomorrow, Sidney, I’ll run over to New York with you.”

“All right!” was the quick reply; and glad of the delay Sidney hurried homeward.

It was dusk when he opened the front door, and in the half light in the parlor he saw Mattie and a man talking earnestly. No suspicion of harm crossed his mind, but he went into the extension to wait till his wife was disengaged to give her a pleasant surprise.

Every drop of blood in his body seemed to stand still as he heard her say:

“Remember, I will not give you any further bribe. You have promised to leave the country as soon as you receive five hundred dollars for these letters.”

“I’ll keep my word.”

“There are five letters!”

“All right—I have five here. You buy them at a hundred dollars a piece, and mum’s the word. It’s lucky you aint got a jealous husband!”

“We will not discuss that point,” said Mattie, with a haughtiness that amazed Sidney. “Give me the letters, and here is your money.”

Apparently the exchange was made, and the man crossed the hall and left the house. Sidney, watching his wife in a horrified stupor, saw her carefully conceal a package in the drawer of a table, and then go slowly upstairs.

He did not pause a moment. A fury of uncontrollable jealousy and suspicion seized upon him, and he forced the lock of the drawer with his penknife, took out the letters, and looking the door of the extension, opened them. It was too dark to see them, and he struck a match and lighted the gas.

There was no envelope in the package, which consisted simply of five letters in a woman’s delicate handwriting. They were all signed “Martha,” and addressed “My dear, dear Horace.” They were all passionate love letters, the last a plaintive farewell, as the writer was to marry a man chosen by papa, whom she could never, never love, but for whom she must bid her adored Horace an eternal farewell.”

Sidney Worthington raved, was stupefied, and for half an hour was almost insane with anguish. Then he rushed to Mattie’s room, to find it empty.

He recollected she had said she would spend the nights of his absence with her sister, and conscious of his own excited state, resolved to allow her to suppose him in New York.

“I will go, never to return!” he thought. “Never again can I trust a woman who has deceived me so frightfully!”

But, although heroes of romance can seize a carpet-bag and rush to Europe at five minutes’ notice, practical business men find some difficulties in the way. Sidney passed a sleepless night. Morning found him calmer, but resolute to see Mattie no more. He replaced the letters, and stole out of the house before the servants were up, no one knowing he had been at home. Mattie would probably return late, thinking him in New York, and he would write to her.

The day dragged heavily. Mr. Worthington was too busy to notice his nephew’s abstraction, and business hours, Sidney felt, were unfit for personal confidences.

He was sitting in his own office, at a late hour in the afternoon, when Mr. Worthington came in.

“Have you the first contract in your valise?” he asked.

“No, it is at the house. I made a fair copy after we drew up the second one.”

“I think we had better take the original one with us. Can’t you run up and get it, and meet me at the depot?”

“Y-e-es”—very slowly, and then more briskly: “Certainty, I’ll meet you in time for the 7 P. M.”

Should he speak to Mattie? Should he tell her what he knew, or write to her? Perhaps she would not be at home. Did he wish to avoid her, or face her? All these questions and a host of others tortured Sidney as he hurried homeward.

Mattie was at home. He saw her in the parlor again, and some one, he could not see who it was, was with her. Again Sidney played eavesdropper, this time intentionally.

“I have a right!” he said, savagely, as he deliberately paused to listen.

A woman’s voice was sobbing:

“Oh, Mattie, don’t be so hard! I will never forget your kindness, but do not speak so harshly.”

“How else can I speak?” Mattie’s voice answered. “You have deceived your husband, and made me deceive mine, by my foolish promise of secrecy. Some one has read those letters, probably the servant, for there was no one else at home last night.”

“But they would not know who wrote them.”

“You said they were signed ‘Martha.’ Do you forget my name is Martha as well as yours?”

“But you never saw Horace Earle!”

“Very true. Yet the fact that some one forced that lock makes me very uneasy. Suppose the reader, whoever it was, tells Sidney there were love letters in my possession addressed to an unknown Horace!”

“If so, I will confess all, Mattie. But you, who have your husband’s confidence and love, can never imagine the torture I endure from Mr. Potter’s suspicions. He knows I do not love him, that father forced me to marry him, but he does not know anything of Horace. If that dreadful valet who stole the letters had taken them to my husband, as he threatened, I believe he would have killed me. As it is, I must account for five hundred dollars. I suppose I must say I lost it!”

“Oh! Martha, do not tell any falsehoods. Go to your husband and tell him the truth. I wish you would let me tell Sidney, for I know he thinks something is wrong ever since he found me crying over your letter.”

“What did you tell him?”

“The truth, that a friend was in trouble.”

“Did you mention me?”

“No; I had promised to keep your secret.”

“And I hold you to your promise! Good-bye, and thank you again and again.”

Sidney Worthington missed the 7 P. M. train.

But Mattie’s heart was lightened when she found her secret betrayed without her consent, and heard Sidney’s confession of his own suspicions, and promise for the future of a “perfect trust” that had been so hardly strained.

Mr. Worthington good-naturedly accepted the humble apology for a delay until the morning train, but never knew how near destruction had been his nephew’s domestic felicity.

*The New York Ledger*, May 24, 1879