

The Free Press Short Story

"FRONT"

MARION FIDELIA WILSON

D. O. Randall, I am not going to that party to-night. I'm tired of parties," exclaimed Diane Ross, as she stepped out of the green roadster, slammed the door shut, and started rapidly up the walk.

"Oh, say, Diane, please go. You always keep the crowd pepped up and doing something," coaxed Randall Alorton, "besides, Helen Ward is planning on having you play for us to show little Miss Ester Coe that there are pianists in Scotland as well as in Chicago."

"Thanks, Ranny, for the compliment," laughed Diane, "but even that cannot make me change my mind. I have given all of you fair warning; this time I mean it." With a determined shrug of her shoulders, she went on toward the house.

Randall watched her until she disappeared inside the heavy door of the massive old brick house. In her jade green sweater and white sport skirt, she made a lovely picture. A well-shaped head, concealing a mass of short auburn curls. She walked with an easy, even stride which bespoke athletic interests. The girl stood in the hallway regarding the whole scene thoughtfully. The furnished rooms were rich and carefully chosen. Everything revealed the influence of wealth and aristocratic tastes. She pulled off her hat, ran her fingers through her hair, and puckered her forehead, a characteristic pose when she was thinking hard.

She was interrupted by Mrs. Briggs, her nurse, who still regarded her as a child and her own special charge. "I'm so glad you have come home, Honey. The delivery boy just brought your new dress, and I want to see that it is all ready for the party to-night."

Diane came to earth with a start. "I'm sorry, Auntie Briggs, but I won't need the dress to-night. I'm not going to the party." As Mrs. Briggs started to protest she flung her arms around the woman's neck and kissed her wrinkled cheek. "I am not sick or crazy, or anything. I just don't want to go. I am tired of parties," explained Diane over her shoulder as she hurried to the door of her father's den and knocked. While waiting for him to answer, she opened the door and went in.

Mr. Ross looked up from his paper and regarded her with an expectant air. He was accustomed to having Diane burst in upon him in this manner. Since her mother's death seven years before, the father and daughter had become great comrades, and he was never too busy to give her all the time she wanted. "Well, Honey, what has gone wrong now? Didn't your dress come, or did Randall beat you at golf again today?"

"Oh, Daddy, don't," cried the girl impatiently. "I'm tired of this kind of life. Everything is a sham. Dresses, parties, golf, something amusing all the time. No one is sincere. I haven't a single friend who likes me for myself," she concluded defiantly.

Mr. Ross looked grave. He was scarcely prepared for this outburst. "Diane, explain this more carefully. I don't understand. I thought you were happy. I have always tried to give you everything you wished, and you are so popular that no party is a success without you. You know that; yet you say you haven't any friends. You will soon be back at Vassar where you will have enough to keep you busy."

Diane seemed not to have heard him, for she burst out. "Yes, I am in great demand. Why? Because my father is the wealthiest man in the city." She spoke bitterly.

Mr. Ross laughed. "What shall I do? Lose my money, give it away; or, have you a better plan?" "Yes, I have. Let me go out West to some college where no one knows me."

"Don't be unreasonable, Daughter. I can't let you go way out there alone. Surely you can find some other way to meet this problem," answered Mr. Ross. He sat quietly watching his daughter. Why was she not content to accept life about her like other girls? What had put this idea into her mind? Why did she question her friends?

Several moments of silence elapsed while Diane racked her brain for some possible and sane way to meet her father's objections. Finally she spoke triumphantly. "I know. You have always said that you would like to go somewhere for your cousin, who is a professor in a college out in Minnesota, but that he was so proud he wouldn't accept anything, send me out there and pay them for keeping me. You will know that I am all right, and everything will be fine. Please, Daddy."

After a moment her father spoke seriously. "You really wish to do this? You have considered it carefully and will not repent after it is too late?" "Oh, Daddy, I have, and I won't change my mind. I want to see just what I am worth with the family background taken away," cried the girl eagerly, her eyes shining with the light of conquest.

to his cousin and made the necessary arrangements. A result Diane spent her last two school years in a small Minnesota college. She wrote glowing accounts to her father of the good times she was having, and the friends she was making. She was proving to herself that she could make good without her father's money to help her. The only matter that troubled her was the attitude which one of the girls took toward her. Diane could not understand why Clarice Hathern was always so antagonistic. They had been in several classes together and played on the same basketball team. Diane had tried to win the other's friendship, but always she was met by a cold, haughty rebuff.

Clarice Hathern had a cold, marble-like beauty. She dressed in a manner to accentuate her type and was an interesting and attractive girl. She had a way of impressing upon a person the fact that she was not to be ignored. She was not as well liked as Diane, but she somehow always managed to be in everything of note. Although no one knew just where the idea had originated, there was a rumor about that her uncle was a very wealthy man, and that she was to be an heiress some day.

Diane was a persistent girl, and since she had set for herself the task of winning the other's friendship, she did not shrink nor despair at the difficulty. With a toss of her curls and a determined smile, she would think up some new advance which she could make. She was spurred on by the feeling that Clarice had many good qualities and would be really charming if one could penetrate that cold, artificial exterior.

"And that daddy had money, she would be nice to me; but just because she thinks I am only a poor relative staying with my professor uncle, she snubs me and tries to keep the other girls from liking me," mused Diane one evening in late spring, as she walked rapidly back to the campus. The big game of the basketball tournament was scheduled for seven-thirty that night, and she had lingered longer than she had planned in the woods which bordered the campus. This was a favorite haunt when she wished to be alone to think and plan. "I am going to mace Clarice like me. I am. I just am," she repeated to herself as she glanced at her watch and hurried on.

Seven fifteen found both teams assembled. The juniors were playing the seniors in their final tilt for the cup. Excitement was high, for the seniors were determined to keep the cup their last year. The captain called them together and said, "Remember that we are going to win this game. To do this we must all work together and not think about personal honor."

Clarice glanced at Diane, who was putting on her shoes and listening to the captain. Both girls played center, and it was yet unknown which would play that position to-night. "Clarice was a temperamental, flashy player, sometimes winning a game by some last-minute dash. Diane, on the other hand, was a steady, reliable player, who carried the team with her."

Clarice wanted to play center to-night. She felt reckless and eager to put her hands on the ball, to dominate the floor, and win the game by spectacular play. She thought of the applause she would win, and the popularity she would enjoy. Suddenly she heard the captain say, "Diane shall play center to-night."

At last all were in their places. The signal was given, and the game was on. The teams were evenly matched and the score was tied. Clarice, playing forward, was not up to her best form. Her mind seemed not to be on the game. During the last quarter she tried some daring throws but her aim was not steady, and she missed the basket. This seemed to make her more reckless. She took the ball whenever she could, and disregarding the rest of the team, tried again and again to make baskets by spectacular throws.

Suddenly, before anyone knew what was happening, Diane and Clarice were in a heap on the floor. Clarice's ankle was sprained, while Diane had a painful bruise on her arm.

The rest of the game and evening was like a nightmare to Diane. The last throw which Clarice had made before her fall had been well-aimed and had given the seniors the lead and finally the game. "What did that matter? What was a game when you were a failure in the one thing you wanted more than anything else to do?" thought Diane, as she dressed and hurried from the gymnasium.

She went straight to Clarice's room determined to make the other girl see that she had not caused her to fall. Clarice, herself, was to blame, for she had paid no attention to where she was going. When Diane came to the door, she saw Clarice, her ankle bandaged, lying on the bed telling the assembled group that Diane had tripped her while trying to take the ball from her. Clarice was saying, "She tried to keep the ball from me. She was jealous because I made the basket. She always tries to boss the whole team."

Diane waited to hear no more. Stealing quietly to her own room, she flung herself upon the bed and wept bitterly. Nothing mattered now. She had failed miserably. "The harder I try to make Clarice like me, the more she dislikes me," she thought. "What can I do? Thinking and planning until late into the night, she finally fell asleep. One day Mr. Ross was very much mystified to receive a telegram saying: 'Send me five hundred dollars immediately will explain later, Diane.' 'What did it mean? Should he send the money.' Finally he decided to do so. In a few days he received a letter from Diane which made him chuckle and say: 'She is doing pretty well without the family background, all right. Some girl! I'm glad I let her have her way two years ago.' Diane had at last found a way to win her heart's desire. She had gone to her favorite place in the woods one day to try to decide what was taking place about her. Whenever she joined a group who were talking earnestly about something, conversation ceased at once, and there was an awkward silence. The girls would exchange glibly looks and appear embarrassed. Fondering upon this, she walked along. Suddenly she stopped and listened. She could hear muffled sobs. Going in the direction from which they seemed to come, she found Clarice lying upon the ground crying. Kneeling down, Diane placed her hand upon the other girl's shoulder and said gently, 'What is the matter? Can't I help you?' Without looking up Clarice shook the hand of her shoulder as though it were a hot brand. 'Go away and leave me alone,' she sobbed. 'Don't taunt me. I know I deserve it, but I won't be here to bother you any more. Please go away.' Diane was puzzled. 'Clarice, what do you mean? Why do you dislike me? I have tried so hard to make you like me. I want to be your friend.' Hesitatingly, Clarice sat up and looked at Diane with eyes red from crying. 'You want me for your friend, you whom everyone loves?' 'No, not everyone, Clarice. Please tell me what is the matter. Perhaps I can help you. Is it exams?' Finally Clarice spoke. 'You will despise me when I tell you, but I am so hurried away to-morrow anyway, and perhaps I shall feel better if I tell you. I have told untruths about you, although it was hard to make any of the girls believe them. I didn't want you to be queen of the spring festival. I was jealous. I saw you had everything that I wanted. I'll tell the girls before I go, and—and I'm sorry. I wish I were dead. I can't go home. Oh, I don't know what to do.' Diane put her arms about the girl and kissed the tear-streaked face. 'Don't go away. Let's forget the past and make the future just the way we want it.' 'I can't. I am expelled. I couldn't pay the bills, and then I became desperate. I was afraid they would write home. The president found out. He was terrible. He said I had to go home, but I just can't do that.' cried Clarice, as she buried her face on her new-found friend's shoulder and cried.

HONEY—THE ORIGINAL SWEET

By Barbara B. Brooks

From the beginning of time man's most important tooth seems to have been his sweet tooth, not his wisdom tooth. He cuts it soon after birth and it remains with him to the grave. Honey is the delicacy which first satisfied the human craving for sweet. It has since been used by all peoples as a staple article of food. In ancient Egypt and Africa, honey was considered so important a food that it was offered to the gods in religious ceremonies and bees were regarded as sacred. The chief attraction of the Promised Land to the Israelites lay in the fact that it was a land "flowing with milk and honey."

"Ancient Babylon claims the origination of the 'honeydew.' When a new sun-dried brick house was built to receive a bride and groom the bricks over the door were smeared with honey. For twenty-eight days after the marriage this sweet aroma clung to the house and from it the man and wife were expected to acquire a sweetness which would temper the remainder of their married days."

"Honey in older days was served with soups, with oatmeal, and with spring onions. The ancient counterpart of the 'apple a day' adage was that he who ate honey and spring onions before breakfast need never worry about his health. Meats were baked with honey, breads made with it, wines flavored with it, fruits sweetened with it. Honey is merely the nectar of flowers. But we are indebted to the bee for extracting it from the blossoms and converting it into the form in which we enjoy it. 'As busy as a bee' really means busy, for it takes an enormous amount of energy to produce one pound of honey. It is estimated that the bee must fly 40,000 miles to make one pound of honey, or make 20,000 trips to the field. The bee loads its honey sacs full of nectar and carries its burden back to the hive. The fanning of the wings of literally thousands of bees, coupled with the temperature of the hive, condenses and inverts the nectar into honey. This natural sweet finds its way onto our modern tables in many delicious combinations."

HONEY-BRAND MUFFINS

3 tablespoons shortening, 1/2 cup honey, 1/2 cup buttermilk

or sour milk, 1 egg (well beaten), 1 cup bran, 1 cup flour, 1/4 teaspoon soda, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon baking powder. Cream shortening and honey. Add milk, egg, stiff bran. Sift dry ingredients and add to first mixture, stirring only until the flour disappears. Fill greased muffin tins two-thirds full and bake in a hot oven (425 degrees F.) about 25 minutes. Yield: 12 small or 8 large muffins.

HONEY STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE

2 cups sifted flour, 4 teaspoons baking powder, 1 teaspoon salt, 3/4 tablespoons butter, 3/4 cup milk, about 2 boxes strawberries, 1/2 cup honey. Make a biscuit dough of the first five ingredients, roll out, cut in rather large biscuits and bake. Mix the honey with the crushed or cut berries, and spread between and on top of each hot biscuit, which has been split and buttered. Serve at once with more honey, if desired sweeter.

HONEY PECAN TOAST

Spread slices of toast with butter, then with paste of honey and pecans and a light sprinkling of cinnamon. To make paste mix 1/2 cup warm honey. The toast may be cut in strips and served cold with fruit salad.

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THE CAUSE

A very thin man and a very fat man had been having an argument and had descended to personalities. "From the look of you," said the fat man, "it's a shame that you should be a fat man."

"Yes," came the retort, "and one look at you would convince anyone that you had caused it."

If Canada wishes to hold her own in the barley export market, says Professor Henry C. Grant, of Manitoba University, it would seem the part of wisdom to forget about growing small quantities of malting barley for export and specialize on the production of high grade feeding barley.

EXAMPLE

"Wife (with magazine)—'This writer says that an artistic cook can express emotion in the dishes she prepares.' Husband—'Has Bridget suffered any bereavement lately?' The toast she serves is always in deep mourning."

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