

The Free Press Short Story

A SONG FROM THE HEART

By MARIE MORSE

The rusty old car jolted up the hill, down it, and started up another. The engine spluttered...

The driver mumbled back his answer, "Not very far now."

At first he had tried to talk to Jeanne Berthels. When she had climbed into his car, printed out at the junction as a taxi, he had begun asking questions.

With each turn of the wheels Jeanne vowed, "I shall never enter a radio studio again. I shall never sing. No one in this town shall know I even know a note of music. I never—"

The car gave another lurch and stopped dead still. Practically Jeanne clutched the seat. While she straightened her hat and made her position more secure, the old man climbed out of the car and went to look at the motor.

While he examined it, Jeanne smuggled closer in the great Scotch blanket Gordon had given her as a parting present. The events of the last week passed in a long, dreary procession through her mind.

After that Jeanne and Gordon had chatted happily together while she waited for the manager's verdict. They were planning for a happy future as friends, planning evenings at lectures, concerts, parties at the lake when the warm days of summer should come.

They had hardly noticed the manager's secretary was in the room until she had spoken a few terse sentences; then both had sat speechless. Right now, the secretary had told them, the program at the studio was so full the manager felt he could not add her to their roster of entertainers.

Gordon had not known of the other failures, the other stations Jeanne had visited and at which she had sung. He did not know of her songs to the leader of a large choir or the ones she had sung for the manager of the Chautauque Company.

Jeanne could not tell him about this, nor about how little money she had left. Gordon was too successful to have much use for a failure. Jeanne was sure of that. Later that evening, however, she made her way back to the studio and begged for a little talk with the manager.

After she had told him about her other failures, she tossed a heartbroken question at him. "What's wrong with my voice?" Madame says my notes are perfect. But I can't get an engagement. What's wrong?"

The manager's bored look suddenly changed to one of interest. The man leaned forward. "My dear," he said kindly, "the notes you sing are perfect. But there are many notes missing. Those are the notes in your heart. Most of our listeners, as you know, are in homes. Evening programs are their favorites. For these they want the kind of music mothers sing to their children in sweet crooning voices with heartbreak love and laughter in them. You're too remote, too far away from people for that. Pardon me, but I must tell you that singing is too mechanical too much of an attempt to sing perfect notes and not to move people's hearts.

"Come back when you've learned to sing the hidden notes in your heart as beautifully as you do the others; and I'll offer you a salary which will stagger you."

Jeanne was once more murmuring the vow she had made. "Up in this village no one shall even know I have a singing voice."

"That's heartless up on that hill just beyond the town." The driver was talking again. "It looks old, but it's not. The old doctor has steam heat and a sun parlor and everything nice for his daughter."

Jeanne looked at the little houses on each side of the crooked street down which they drove, the large consolidated school, attended by the children of the workers in the clay plant and the mine, who made this town their home. Beyond a pretty little white church building was the doctor's office. The old-fashioned sign hanging from the veranda announced the place.

Heartsease was a rambling, comfortable building with a sign, which was a counterpart of that at the office, hanging from two posts in the front yard. Evergreen trees around the house and hills back of it added to the beauty of the place. Jeanne liked it more and more as she neared it. Here she would start a new life.

Here she would read the novels Gordon would come to see her. She had told him when she said good-by that their friendship was over. Better far never to see Gordon again than to let him know she was a complete failure. Tears sprang to her eyes while she lived over again the parting with Gordon.

Inside the physician's home Jeanne had to forget everything, even Gordon, to greet Doctor Beverly, a slender scholarly man in the early fifties, and his daughter, a young girl of seventeen, she reached up a beautiful hand to Jeanne. In a silvery voice filled with delight she exclaimed, "Oh, you're young, too, very young. What wonderful evenings we can have together!"

"Don't ever let Miss Fay know if you feel sorry for her," the old housekeeper told Jeanne when she had shown her to her room. "She thinks life a happy adventure."

Their dinner was interrupted by a call for the physician, so the two girls were alone when they re-entered the living room with its pretty faces of books, its radio, its great pictures, its attractive furnishings. To herself Jeanne thought, "What a wonderful father the doctor is! He's done everything to make this home so lovely and perfect his daughter won't miss walking so much."

Aloud she said, "You have the loveliest home I've ever lived in."

Fay was radiant. "That's great! Father says it's perfect, but he likes everything I do. What I've needed since I made over this funny house was some one who didn't want to flatter me to tell me it's ok. Her blue eyes grew earnest now. "You see it's intended to be a place where Father can relax and be happy."

Jeanne's hands grew tense. This girl, who lived her days in a wheel chair, had planned this house. It had not been furnished for her, as Jeanne had thought.

After that came the busiest days Jeanne had ever known. Her mornings were spent in the physician's office. Here she learned to give first aid to the wounded, encouragement to the sick of heart. "We must give them cheerfulness and courage even if we give them pills and powders," Doctor Beverly often told her. "These people have troubles. You and I, who have none, must try to help them with their problems."

Weeks had passed before Jeanne saw the physician depressed. He came into the living room with dragging feet one evening. "Sam Dempsey's dead, Fay," he said. "And those seven little children and that sick wife are left to struggle on without him."

Jeanne was the one who coaxed him to the lounge, covered him with a light blanket, and went to the kitchen to bring him hot milk. While she was gone, Fay fussed with the radio, switching from station to station. "I can't get anything but jazz orchestras," she sighed when Jeanne was in the room again.

The doctor disliked jazz orchestras. He liked old-fashioned songs. Now he murmured, "I'd give a fortune if one of them were only singing 'Sun of My Soul, Be-A-Bide-With Me'."

Jeanne clenched her hands until they hurt. Oh, she could not sing now and bring back all the jagged tearing heartaches! She told herself this until she noticed that the physician's face was twitching as though with pain. Rising, she walked to the old-fashioned piano. Softly she touched the keys, and still more softly she began to sing one of her favorite songs. "The Long, Long Trail."

She was not singing perfect notes now. They had been forgotten. She was crooning as she sang; not for beauty, but to bring healing to the man who was suffering for the patient he could not cure. The family he could not hold together.

When the song was ended, the physician was asleep. Fay had left the room to meet with the boys of her Americanization class in the big comfortable kitchen, so that her father would not be disturbed. Jeanne joined her there to tell that her father was resting. "We were listening to your music," she told the girl in the wheel chair with a glorious smile. "And Benito wants you to teach him those songs. He wants to come tomorrow evening for his first lesson."

Two dark pleading eyes looked into Jeanne's brown ones. A youth in broken Italian voiced his own plea. There seemed nothing Jeanne could do but agree to Fay's plans for the next evening.

Jean heard the shrill mine whistles in the quiet of the night and sprang from her bed. They told just one fact, an accident at the mine. She dressed and in the hall met the rest of the family, their faces grave and uneasy. "Could you go with me?" Doctor Beverly already had Jeanne's coat. "We'll need all the help we can get if this is a serious accident."

The whistles continued until they were at the mine, around the shaft of which flickered mine lights. Jeanne heard with bated breath of the explosion. Forty-seven men were entombed in the mine. The rescue crew was ready to go down.

Through that night Jeanne sang to these women songs they loved although they did not understand the words. She sang until some of them dropped to sleep.

Bulletins came from the rescue crew, but these were not brought to the office until one came which said that the imprisoned men had tapped out the roof of their level to the rescue crew working above that they were alive. Hours later came the word that the men had been reached and the first cage of them was coming up.

The waiting women rushed outside with little cries of joy and bursts of laughter. Jeanne followed them. Suddenly in the crowd she ran face to face with Gordon Barnes and an array of other newspaper men. She did not realize that she was beside her, so anxious was she to reach the tipple to see if the doctor was safe and not too tired. Gordon was with her, too when the cage reached the top, when the men were helped from it, when dark-eyed Benito, weary and weak, was helped from the cage.

The Italian searched the crowd near him until, his eyes lighted on Jeanne. He waved his weak hands toward her. "I sing to them," he called. "I sing them the songs you teach me. I sing and they quit swearing and listen to Pierre say the prayer."

Even Benito was in the crowd at the little station when Jeanne left the junction. Like the old doctor and Fay, he said, "You come back soon. We'll always be looking for you."

The entire week had been a hurried one for Jeanne. At first she had refused to see the manager of the radio station, brought to the little town in the hills by the newspaper stories about her night of song, about Benito's singing to the miners. "I can't go back and sing just to entertain people," she told the doctor. "It's such an idle life. What if I have the missing notes in my heart? They may leave when I'm away from the people who brought them."

"They will never leave," the physician returned. "The life isn't idle. You'll be singing to millions, your heart crying out messages in those songs, messages that will make the sorrowful smile, that will even lead the unbelieving to God."

On the day the accommodation train she waved and waved as it steamed and purled away. She waved until the station became a speck; then she wiped away a few tears and tried to smile. After a time she was the old eager Jeanne again. The conductor had brought her a telegram.

"I have the train at Brocton," it read. "I'm motoring there to meet you stop the interview. I want isn't for my paper, but for Gordon Barnes alone."

Attractive Curtains: The purpose of windows, of course, is to let light and air into a room and to let people inside look out; and the reason for window curtains is to soften the light coming in and to add a decorative note which makes the windows more pleasant.

In softening the light, the curtains should not shut the light out. Such transparent materials as marquisette, net or gauze are most suitable. They are gathered on a rod and should hang either from the top of the window frame to the bottom of the apron, or from the top of the glass frame to the window sill, covering the woodwork at the sides and a few inches of the glass. Only when complete privacy from neighbors or the street is wanted should the curtain cover the whole window. Cream color or gold, both of which are neutral, are usually best, but when color is wanted without draperies, such shades as green, blue or peach are often good.

In a small room over-draperies are not necessary; if they are used, the type that hangs to the floor without a valance, gives an impression of height. With high ceilings, long draperies may be used. Plain, striped or flowered material may be used; the heavier fabrics such as chintz, cretonne, satin or linen are preferable. Draperies should be regarded as part of the wall, and should not be conspicuous as to either color or design.

Teach Appreciation: Gratitude of children is sometimes a matter of pure goodness of spirit, but mostly it is the result of careful training and preparation.

"But, ah," you say, "I never want any reward for what I do for my children. I don't expect thanks from a child."

Oh, don't you? Maybe not now, but as the years travel and these little folk grow into men and women, most mothers crave some appreciation for the work and sacrifice lavished without thought of self in the not-so-far past.

Teach children to give you things, to do things for you, and to deny themselves once in a while, for your sake, just as you would teach them industry or honesty. The ration of what you do for them and what they do for you is important. Try to school yourself to expect enough to install a habit in them. If it sounds selfish or mercenary, comfort yourself with this thought. It is one of the kindest things you can do for your John or your Mary.

THE BOSS'S GOOSE: Canada has many kinds of wild geese, and throughout the greater part of the Dominion they are highly migratory. One of the earliest signs of spring is the winging northward of these conspicuous birds to their nesting grounds in the far north, and a sure sign of the onset of winter is their southward flight. Their unerring instincts in travelling the skyways has intrigued man from the earliest times.

One of the least widely known of the wild geese of Canada is Ross's Goose. It is a small white goose no larger than a wild Mallard duck. It winters in California and in migration travels along a narrow line which takes it across the Rockies to Montana, northward through Great Slave Lake or Great Bear Lake it flies off into the unknown to nest no one knows where.

The Biological Survey of the United States has announced that one of its waterfowl observers may attempt the solution of this last waterfowl mystery of the continent, and others are known to be interesting in solving the mystery. The Department of Mines and Resources, through the National Parks Bureau and the Northwest Territories administration has helped the investigators by issuing permits, and the race is to the swift. Meanwhile, the nesting-places of Ross's Goose remains one of the mysteries of the Arctic.

HIGHWAY TOLL LOWER IF DRIVERS GO SLOW: Do you want to save money over Civic Holiday week-end? Increase your tire mileage? Cut-down your oil bills? Get more miles to the gallon of gas? Such questions may seem far removed from accident prevention programs, but in appealing to automobile operators through their pocketbooks, the Industrial Accident Prevention Association is pointing out, in a special report just issued, that "when you keep your speed down you save lives," since lower speeds give greater control of the car and help avoid accidents.

At high speeds, oil is consumed faster than at reasonable speeds; tire wear is greater; gasoline consumption is much greater; and there is a greater wear and tear on the car itself when running at unreasonably high speeds.

Excessive speed increases the cost of operating a car, whereas the thinking motorist who drives at a reasonable rate of speed is not only reducing his costs but obeying the law in his consideration of all who are travelling on the streets and highways.

This is something to think about, the report concludes, "drive at a reasonable speed and save money—and save lives."



Farmer Wants Bride With \$2,000



Well, girls, here's your chance. Gordon Sharp, 28-year-old farmer, who lives near Pontypool, Ontario, is in search of a wife, but not any wife will do. Gordon offers prospective brides a healthy life on a comfortable farm plus the love of an ambitious young Canadian, so his standards are quite high. The would-be Mrs. Sharp must have at least \$2,000 in cash, be a good housekeeper and healthy; she can be a widow or single, and anywhere from 18 to 36 years of age. In return Mr. Sharp states he has 100 acres of land to share with his bride, a cow, a horse, chickens and other stock and a barnful of hay. The lady's \$2000 is needed for the farm. For the inspection of interested ladies, Gordon submits this picture of himself and his faithful horse.

Large advertisement for Carrolls' Groceries, featuring a variety of products like COCOA, TEA, CHEESE, OLIVES, WHEAT, JUICE, PRUNES, RASPBERRIES, TOMATOES, and CLEANSER, with prices and promotional offers.

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