

The Free Press Short Story

THE WORD OF A WOMAN

—BY VIRGINIA T. VAN DE WATER

YOUNG people do not appreciate how cruelly anxious older people can be.

Mrs. Derrick spoke the words decidedly, though gently. Her daughter, Eleanor, uttered a protest. "Older people should not worry so much," she said.

"I do not feel that a daughter or a son who does what she can to prevent a parent's anxiety is encouraging her in a habit of worry," she declared.

"Of course she might have taken it for granted," Mrs. Derrick admitted. "But my contention is that Ruth's love ought to be great enough for her to put herself in imagination in her mother's place."

"The daughter got up and going around the table, kissed her mother tenderly. "Such a little worrier as you are!" she chided.

"I am sure you will not," the mother said confidently, laying her hand for a moment against the strong, young shoulder.

For an instant a qualm of nervousness assailed the girl. Suppose the trains did not run this afternoon? Of course they would. If they did not, she could telephone her mother.

"The rain was falling steadily when, after a while, the pair went into the library across the hall where a fire was burning on the hearth and they settled down by it with signs of contentment.

"Some night," he exclaimed, greeting mother and daughter. "And the evening paper says it is going to keep up for a couple of days more."

"I must go, no matter how a storm, besides, what harm can the rain do me on a railroad train?" Eleanor spoke quickly.

"None of course," the man agreed with a laugh. "I suppose I am fussy."

"You and Mother are a great pair of worriers," the girl teased later when Mrs. Derrick had left the room.

"Please, Ray, don't talk like that," she murmured. "All right," he agreed. "I won't just yet. But sometime I'm going to tell you a little of what you mean to me."

"Very well. If you mean to do a thing, you'll do it, of course, no matter how anxious it makes others."

"I shall drive as far as possible in my car. And when I cannot drive any farther, I shall walk or walk. He tried to smile reassuringly. "You must know," he added solemnly,

in an awful state. I wouldn't be willing to risk it."

The staggering truth was plain to Eleanor Derrick. If she was to get to her home today—and she must, to save her mother anxiety, she would have to walk.

The shortest way was along the railroad tracks. Going back to the station, she started forth, her books swung from a strap on her arm, her head bent against the gale.

A half mile from the station was the railroad trestle. For an instant she caught her breath in timidly. The river was tearing under the trestle, the yellow foam dashing up in huge spurts.

"It sounds like a train of cars always coming and never arriving," Eleanor said lightly. "So long, Mother dear! It will probably clear by noon."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" Eleanor exclaimed. "So long as the train is here I'm safe."

"Yes," he admitted dubiously. "That is, if the tracks don't get washed so bad that we don't dare run trains."

"Mrs. Derrick was standing at the window of the library when she saw Doctor Roy Edmunds coming up the front walk, she ran to open the door, thankful for a chance to voice her anxiety to a sympathetic listener.

"Oh, Roy," she greeted the young physician, "I am glad to see you! I have been worrying about Eleanor and the idea of her coming home in this storm. Why, what is the matter?"

"I came to tell you," he said, "that the dam is gone. It broke an hour ago. The lower part of the village is flooded, and no trains will be able to arrive today."

"Not unless she can get word to me," the mother insisted. "Oh, Roy, I remember exactly what she said to me this morning—her very words were, 'If you do not hear from me you may expect me, even if I have to swim.'"

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"How could you know what would happen?" the doctor soothed. "If I believe you are right," he said for Eleanor promised to do a thing for her, she would do it. She was taking to come home. And, dear lady, taking her trembling hands in his, "I shall do my best to get her here safely."

"But how," she gasped. "I shall drive as far as possible in my car. And when I cannot drive any farther, I shall walk or walk. He tried to smile reassuringly. "You must know," he added solemnly,

"How dear Eleanor is to me. Some time she may know too—and perhaps may care a little for me. I am telling you this only to make you understand that you may trust me to bring her home safely. But you must try not to worry too much."

"If there were only something I could do!" the mother moaned. "There is!" was the cheery response. "You can pray." Then he hurried from the house.

The March day was dawdling to a close. The heavy clouds darkened the sky and the rain continued to pour down in torrents. Mile after mile Eleanor trudged alongside the railroad tracks. The mud was so deep that she lost her galoshes before she had gone more than two miles, but she did not try to recover them.

It was almost dark when at last she turned the curve in the road that had it been light, would have brought her in sight of the village in which she lived. Only a mile more she reflected, even as she wondered how she was to traverse that distance. There she stopped in dismay. What had happened?

Ahead of her stretched only an expanse of water! In the gathering dusk she could see it shimmering. The awful truth flashed upon her. The dam was broken! The village was flooded!

"She remembered with a spasm of gratitude that the residential section was on a hill. Her mother was safe. This reflection was swallowed up by the dreadful realization that she could not reach her mother, and that her mother would think she was drowned.

"I must get to her!" she said through clenched teeth. "Oh, God, help me! I'll do my best, but please help me!" With a shudder, she walked forward into the water. If only it did not come up too high she would wade through it. If it did come up too high—she recalled her words—"Even if I have to swim!"

The muddy water crept up to her ankles, then to her knees. Her feet sank through clenched teeth. "Oh, God, help me!" she said through clenched teeth. "Oh, God, help me!" she said through clenched teeth.

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Put Technique In Lowly Stew

Members of Women's Corps Travel Around Britain Advising on Wartime Food

LONDON, (CP) A new job for women in England is that of technical advisers on food problems. The Ministry of Food is sending out experienced, motherly women to all objects with food problems to advise women how to provide most nourishing meals from the products available at the smallest cost.

How they will direct their approach is left to the discretion of the women. Some like a stall in the market place, others set themselves up in a shop window while some have mobile kitchens and hold mass demonstrations.

The lowly "stew" which combines meat and vegetables to make a most nourishing dish has developed "class" and an "in mode" title in warring England. Stew is cheap to make, but full of food values—so it has been entitled in one food-program. "Stick to stew and stop invasion."

NATIVES CO-OPERATE

LONDON, (CP) Clues brought by native patriots enabled the Royal Air Force to make a smashing blow on secret Italian airbases in Abyssinia. This reflection was swelled up by the dreadful realization that she could not reach her mother, and that her mother would think she was drowned.

NO FRIENDLY MOSQUITOES

BRISBANE, (C.P.) Australian scientists are skeptical of the report of a discovery in Queensland of mosquitoes that don't bite. It is explained that they may be "male" mosquitoes who never bite, leaving it to the female of the species.

BOMBAY, (CP) Sri Aurobindo Ghose, famous Indian spiritual leader, commended, and increased the Madras War Fund "as an expression of our entire support of the British people and the Empire."



G. Herbert Lash, Director of Public Information, was in Winnipeg for the inaugural broadcast of "Canadians All," the series of broadcasts now being presented over the CBC National Network on Wednesday at 10:30 p.m. E.D.S.T. He is seen admiring the colorful national costumes of Poland and Norway as worn by Frances Galdzinski and Marion Kummern, young Canadians who trace their ancestry to those countries. On Wednesday, April 2, "Canadians All" will salute Finnish Canadians.

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Wheat Alcohols Very Difficult Two Bushels of Wheat for One Gallon is Rate of Production

OTTAWA, March 23 (CP) Production of alcohol from wheat is scientifically possible but economically difficult, Ottawa sources stated in discussing this suggested means of raising Canada's wheat surplus. Officials of the Trade and Commerce Department, which has the problem of a surplus, and the National Research Council, which has conducted studies of new uses for wheat, agreed there were major difficulties in the way.