

Martha's Day of Days

A Lovely Prophecy, Made to Her in Childhood, Came True on New Year's Day.

BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON

The air was heavy with the odor of stale suds and wet linen. Martha slammed her iron down on the stand and straightened her tired back. She was a big, rugged woman with the beauty of strength about her. The year that was drawing to a close had brought cares and sorrows but she had squared her shoulders to the burden, as she had squared them throughout all the years past. In repose her face was cold, her mouth stern and hard but the coldness vanished in the radiance of her smile, a rare, difficult smile that melted the armor of aloofness and showed that Martha had a beautiful heart.

She busied herself about the preparation of the evening meal and presently her son came in, quietly, as usual. He hung his hat on the nail back of the door then crossed the room to his mother and kissed her. Stephen was a silent boy and undemonstrative; his caresses were very precious. Martha smiled.

"Tired?" she asked. The boy pulled out his chair and sat down at the table. "Yes," he said. Something in his tone made the woman look up but she made no comment.

Stephen barely touched the warmed-over stew. He drank two cups of strong black tea, then leaned back and stared morosely at the pattern of the red cotton tablecloth.

Martha cleared away the supper and washed the dishes, glancing at Stephen now and again as she worked. How broad his shoulders were as he sat there, hunched in his chair; she noticed that his coat was growing shiny.

For several days Martha had been worried about Stephen. Something had been troubling him, something she did not understand. She longed for his confidence; a hundred times she had been on the point of asking him to open his heart to her but each time she hesitated, repulsed by his sullen eyes.

Now she tapped him gently on the shoulder. "Come over by the stove, son, the room is getting cold but I don't want to make any more fire. I'll just mend your old gray trousers then I'm going to bed."

Stephen moved his chair and sat with his chin in his hands, absently watching his mother thread her needle.

Martha sewed for some minutes in silence then made an effort at conversation. "Did you work very hard to-day?" she asked.

"Yes. We're always busy around the holidays."

Martha sighed. She hated to think of this boy of hers tied to a clerk's desk for life, adding up interminable dollars—other people's dollars.

"Another year almost gone by! It's good to think that, at this rate, in five more years we'll be clear of the debt and then we can start all over again."

"Five years!" groaned Stephen and clenched his hands.

"As we are doing now it will take five years. But you may get promoted and perhaps I can find another family to wash for." Martha rocked as she sewed.

"It was a man's debt and it ought to be paid by a man," Stephen scowled. "I hate to have you work."

"It's mostly the women that pay—one way or another," said Martha. "I suppose five years does seem a long time to you; it doesn't to me."

"That's where we're different," said the boy. "I don't see anything but the days of work—and you look beyond them."

"I suppose I do. To-morrow is a fine word, Steve. My mother taught me that long ago and it's helped me—often."

"Tell me about it," urged the boy. He seemed to want to get away from his own thoughts, whatever they were.

"It was the day she died," said Martha, pleased by Steve's attention. "I was only nine and I was crying. She called me to the bed and stroked my hair. 'You're young, Martha,' she said. 'My going will be a great sorrow to you but—I'm going happy. You'll struggle and suffer like the rest of us but you'll have your Day. Remember this, Martha,' she said, 're-

member that to everyone there comes a Day of perfect happiness and it makes up for all the sorrows. Always keep hoping that to-morrow will be the Day—no matter what happens, don't give up hope.' She made me repeat it after her: 'Whatever happens, I shall have my Day.'"

"And it never has come?" asked Stephen.

Martha smiled. "Not yet," she said.

The boy left his chair and began pacing the floor. Silence fell between them, both were busy with their thoughts.

Martha looked back along the years. Her mother's words had made a vivid impression on her and at first she had thought constantly about her Day. She had imagined all the wonderful things that might happen: the fairy prince, the coach and four, the rich gentleman who would adopt her and take her to his palace. Every morning she had awakened wondering if it would be to-day; every night her last thought had been: "Will it be to-morrow?"

As she grew older, the dreams had become more practical. At one time, she remembered, a silk dress had been her idea of happiness, then a garnet ring. This phase passed and romantic dreams began; her Day would surely come, she thought, when she found her man—

Hers was a sad little romance. There was nothing of the fairy prince about Jim. He was drunk on their wedding day and reeled through their married life, shattering her illusions and dragging her to misery and misfortune. When at last he died, he left a heavy debt as his only legacy.

Martha faced the world with a firm lip and steady eye. "To-morrow" was her slogan. She no longer dreamed of what her Day would bring but the idea grew to be her philosophy. She had struggled and suffered as her mother predicted but her faith was unshaken—the Day when it came would make up for it all.

As she watched her son prowl restlessly up and down the room, Martha yearned toward him, longed to share with him her hope and faith.

"Come, Steve," she begged, "sit down for a while and rest." The boy turned, tossing back his head with a characteristic gesture. "I can't. I'm going out to walk," he said, and so left her.

Martha slept little that night. She listened until Stephen came in and then lay thinking until dawn came and she rose to another day.

Breakfast was begun in silence. A letter came for Stephen; an occurrence so unusual that it disturbed the routine of the meal. The boy read it at the window, with his back to the room. For a long time he stood there and when he turned his face was white.

Martha waited in vain to be told what news the letter contained and tried to stifle the fear that crept into her heart. When Stephen passed his cup for more coffee, the cup clattered against the saucer. Martha frowned; something was very wrong. If she might only understand!

The boy took his hat from the nail, then stooped and kissed her. His lips were hot and dry. Martha caught him by the wrist.

"Steve! Are you sick?" she demanded.

He snatched his hand away. "I'm all right," he muttered. On the threshold he hesitated. "Don't worry about me," he said with an effort, and closed the door. Then she knew, as mothers know, that there was cause for worry.

Martha went about her duties mechanically and with a heavy heart. As she moved the table to make room for the ironing board, she found a sheet of paper under Stephen's chair. Hastily she averted her eyes and folded the paper; he had not wanted her to know. She would trust him.

For several hours she worked and the thought of the letter tortured her. The fear in her heart was all the more terrible because she knew not what she feared. Twice she started toward the shelf where the paper lay, then drew back. Finally she stilled her conscience—maybe she could help Stephen—maybe it was her duty to know.

She unfolded the paper. It was the last page of the letter, evidently, for it held only a few typewritten words: "—it's only a little thing I ask. All you have to do is to say 'No' instead of 'Yes'—hardly a lie. It will mean big money for you. If you won't agree to back us up, you'll be fired. I'm not afraid of you; everyone knows your father's record. Jobs are hard to find this time of the year. Think it over."

The woman stared at the words for a long time. Then, gradually, a vague certainty of their meaning dawned upon her. Her boy! Her son! His father!

Slowly she refolded the paper and tucked it away behind the clock; then went back to her work. Now she understood why the boy was worried. She yearned over him.

Martha had never quite understood Stephen. Even as a baby he had been difficult; he had never come to her to be petted, never held up a hurt finger to be kissed. Perhaps it had been her fault; she was shy of emotion and self-expression was hard for her. She adored her child in secret and had often stood by his bed in the night, gazing over the beauty of him. As he grew older, he became the centre of



New Chief of U.F.O. W. A. Amos, elected president of the United Farmers of Ontario, to succeed R. W. E. Burnaby.

A NEW YEAR'S WISH

The Old Year is gone, with his pleasure and pain,
We hasten to welcome the New Year again;
We hail him our friend and we cannot refrain
From giving a cheer.
For the gift of Old Time is a gift to us all.
May his woes never kill, may his joys never pall,
And may we ne'er spoil him, whatever befall—
Our gladsome New Year.

May all of his paths lead to plenty and peace,
May all from grief's bonds find a joyous release,
And may all the discords of enmity cease.
In every sphere.
May goodwill o'er all the earth brood like a dove,
May we speak words and do actions prompted by love,
And may every blessing from Heaven above
Come with our New Year.

May each one act kindly, forgetful of self;
May hatred and malice be placed on the shelf;
And may he bring plenty of pleasure and pelf
To all we hold dear.
May each of his days, as they come to an end,
Be filled with the will, help to others to lend;
And may each new day prove to each a new friend—
This gladsome New Year.

her existence; she lived in and for him; he was her world. She had striven for his good opinion. How she had treasured his little acts of kindness! Steve had always been a thoughtful son.

Because of their mutual troubles, a comradeship had sprung up between them. They were both shy and undemonstrative; theirs was a silent affection. Yet Martha had been content; she had her son and he was fond of her.

Now, when she realized what a small part of Stephen's life she was, she blamed herself. She had been able to give him so few ideas and ideals—even her love was inarticulate.

Perhaps Stephen thought she wouldn't understand.

She remembered one day, when he was a little boy, she had come upon him suddenly in the street below. Half-a-dozen boys were teasing him and he stood with his back to the wall, eyes blazing and fists doubled to defend himself. A new idea diverted his tormentors and as they ran hooting away, Steve hid his face in his arm. Martha knelt by the child, her heart overflowing with tenderness. "Tell mother!" she whispered but he pulled away from her kisses and comfort. "You wouldn't understand," he said.

Could not she understand now? She had never asked or accepted sympathy and now she wondered if it was hers to give. Had her courage, her hope, caloused her? Yet without that hope and courage, without her belief in the Day, how could she have lived? Long ago she must have fallen by the wayside, given up the useless fight. Of disappointments and sorrows she had borne more than her share but with each blow she had held her head higher—the Day would have to be very wonderful, a veritable Day of Days but it would come—it must! In her soul of souls she believed her own philosophy—till now, for the first time, a doubt crept into her mind. Suddenly she knew that she cared more for Stephen's honor than for anything in the world. If he fell a victim to temptation, what could ever happen that would have the power even to dull her grief?

A dozen times she took the letter from the shelf. The words glared at her: "hardly a lie—big money." Money! Steve had always longed for money to clear them of their debt. What had he said last night? "It's a man's debt and should be paid by a man." His pride had spoken there; the idea of his mother being forced to work had always hurt him. Martha was proud of Stephen's pride but—might it not be his undoing? Would it cause him to say No instead of Yes? To take his first step on the downward path?—the path, every turn and trap of which, she had observed so well? Just so had his father chosen the easy way. Oh, she could understand, Steve! she could understand—

The dreary days dragged by, woefully alike. Every evening Steve came home—a tired, sullen Steve, who made even an attempt at consecutive conversation impossible. The holiday spirit seemed to have passed him by. Martha would watch him with tragic eyes, looking for some sign to give her hope. Had he decided? She longed to put her arms about him, to pet and comfort him. One smile, one tender look from him would have opened the floodgates of her heart and have broken down her reserve for always. But he made no sign and his mother sat, with muscles rigid, her eyes on her work—waiting.

How long, she wondered, would she have to wait? Christmas came and went uneventfully, scarcely marking a change in the daily routine. The days passed and, with their passing, a dull fear grew in her heart. Perhaps there was nothing to wait for! Perhaps Stephen's manner could mean only one thing; that he had chosen—the left-hand path.

New Year's day came to Martha much the same as any other day. Stephen had gone as usual to the office. He was always busier on the first of the month than at any other time and the first day of the first month of the year brought heavy duties. Vague rebellion tinged Martha's thought, as she contrasted his lot with

that of others to whom January First meant a holiday, or even, perhaps, the opening of a new era of advancement and success.

Footsteps on the stairs. Children's footsteps that clattered past the door and echoed down the hall; heavy footsteps that stumbled at the turn; halting footsteps that paused and then limped on again. The day was nearly gone and merry-makers and toilers alike were returning; Stephen would soon be home.

Supper was ready and Martha sat by the stove waiting for her son. When he came in, her eyes sprang to meet him but still he made no sign.

"It's snowing," he said as he kissed her and his cheek felt cool and wet against her face.

"Take off your shoes and put them back of the stove," Martha said as she placed the food on the table. And then, "You're late," she ventured and handed him his plate. "Were you kept at the office?" She searched his face with eyes filled with mother-love.

"No," said Steve. Martha stifled a sigh and looked away. She was not to know yet, it seemed.

Another meal was eaten in the heavy silence of reserve. Once Stephen raised his head as though about to speak and his mother caught her lip between her teeth but the moment passed and no word was spoken.

Steve pushed back his chair. "I'm going to wash the dishes," he said. "You're tired."

Martha gave way readily enough and sat to watch him at the work. He was careful to do things as he knew she liked to have them done. He hung the dishcloth in its proper place and put the china on the shelf; then, with hands thrust in his pockets, he began to pace the floor. Martha pretended to be busy with her sewing but no movement escaped her.

For a time the boy stood at the window, looking at the scattered snowflakes that found their way into the narrow court.

Suddenly he spoke. "Mother!" he began, then stopped as if it were difficult to go on.

"Yes?" his mother's quiet voice encouraged.

"I—I was just wondering—would you like to go away—start the year somewhere else?"

Martha leaned forward; her hand went out across the table toward her son and the suffering of all the mothers in the world was in her eyes. Did Steve, her Steve, want to go away because he'd made "big money"?

"Steve!" she pleaded. The boy flung himself into a chair, his elbows on the table.

"I want to get away from it all, to get out into the open where I'll have a chance. I meant to tell you several days ago but I didn't want you to worry. I—I've lost my job. This was my last day." He choked and turn-



Appeals to King Chief White Elk, head of the Indian tribes of British Columbia, who is on ances of B.C. tribes before the King.

ing his face from her hid it against his arm.

Martha was stunned. Lost his job? "If you don't agree you'll be fired—!" She dared not think just yet what Stephen's words might mean. Surely there was only one meaning?

Slowly she rose and went around the table to him. Her shy hand stole out and rested on Steve's head; his hand reached out and tremblingly closed over hers.

"I'm sorry," he said brokenly, trying to control his sobs. "I'm sorry, Mother, for you—"

Then Martha knew. "I'm glad!" she whispered. "Oh, Steve, I'm glad! It means—!" and then she stopped—Steve must not guess.

But Steve was quick at guessing. He raised his head and his eyes met hers squarely for the first time in many days.

"You're glad?" he questioned. "Oh, then I guess you understand. How, I wonder? Well, I'll tell you. There was dirty work going on down there and when I found them out, they tried to force me to go in with them. I'd never thought of it until that night we talked and you told me of your Day. You'd waited so long and there didn't seem much chance—those five years seemed so long, and this scheme would have made me rich."

"Oh, Steve, I tried so hard to help you!" breathed his mother.

"Help? You saved me! In the end, it was the thought of the Day—the Day that's bound to come to everyone, that kept me straight. And then your pluck—you'd waited all these years—that kind of shamed me for wanting to give in. And then—"

"Yes, then?" urged Martha, drinking in the words.

"Then I thought of what you'd said about hoping: 'Never give up hoping,' you said. That helped me to decide. And then I was afraid to tell you that they'd fired me—because it'll be longer than five years now, before I can give you your Day."

Her Day! Martha's eyes shone radiant with unaccustomed tears. The years of struggle and sorrow were indeed forgotten; their shadow only made the light of happiness more dazzling. With the dawning of the New Year had come her Day of Days. It was a bigger, brighter, more perfect Day than she had ever imagined.

She smiled down into her boy's troubled eyes. "We will go away and you shall have your chance," she said with the confidence of prophetic vision. "I know, dear, because my Day is here—the most glorious Day that any mother ever had. And you have given it to me, Son—it is your New Year's gift to me. * * * My Day is here!"

The Halifax, N.S., Philharmonic Society are this year conducting musical contests between choirs of boy scouts, girl guides, public school pupils and church choir members. The aim of the contests is to stimulate choral and community singing in Halifax.

To graduate "cum laude" a girl well might be required to have among her credits a record of service in the home of some overburdened young mother. To act as a "mother's helper" is one of the most useful and wholesome things that a high-school girl can do.



GREAT-GRANDSON OF QUEEN VICTORIA Master Alexander Ramsay, the only child of Princess "Pat," now Lady Patricia Ramsay, pays a visit to Queen Alexandra to present her with a bouquet of flowers on her birthday.