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Love Gives Itself

THE STORY OF A BLOOD FEUD

BY ANNIE S. SWAN.

"Love gives itself and is not bought."—Longfellow.

CHAPTER XXVII.—(Cont'd.)

"They've been wrapped in cotton-wool—all of them," observed Fordyce airily. "And some of it wants stripping off. I hear Margaret Tenderden and Madox are going to make a match of it. Some think they are married already."

"You may take it from me that that isn't true," said Jean, with considerable emphasis.

"She might do worse for herself, and what chance has Rankine? She's a peerless creature, and I hear on every side that her reserve maddens the men who meet her. She can have her pick, you bet; and, personally, it wouldn't surprise me if she never left America except on a pleasure jaunt."

Jean smiled a small inscrutable smile, which slightly nettled Fordyce.

"Now what does that mean? Tell me exactly."

"It might mean that you would keep her in America," admitted Jean. She was surprised to see his face redden.

"Oh, no, thank you! I've never spoken to the woman; and though I think she's a striking good actress, she isn't the sort to appeal to me."

"Well, she can't marry you or anybody, for she's married to Rankine," said Jean on the impulse of the moment. "Please don't tell anybody, for I believe I'm the only person in the world who knows it. Miss Rankine doesn't, and why I told you, goodness knows! You will keep it secret—won't you?"

"Sure thing," said Fordyce, with uplifted brows or so.

Then after a moment he leaned forward a little and looked her quite squarely in the face. "Say, have you an idea why I've come here to-night?"

"None—and I don't remember ever having asked you," she answered frankly.

"You never have, though I've waited, hoping you would. Well, I'll tell you—I want you to marry me."

Jean grew as pale as death. Why? Because her heart gave such a leap that she knew just what had happened.

She loved this man and had not known it until the moment when, looking into her eyes, his own quite earnest with feeling, he put the momentous question which meant weal or woe to a woman's heart.

"I—to marry you!" she stammered. "But why?"

"For the usual reason—because I want you," he answered steadily. He rose just then and took a step nearer to where she sat, with her head dropped on her hands.

"Look here, dear woman. I'm not going to embroider the facts or make use of a dictionary. You know a good deal about me, I know—some things that are true and some that aren't. I haven't played the game in some directions, but I could, perhaps, clear myself if I set out to do it. I hadn't a chance with the woman who mar-

ried me for my money, caring for somebody else. I had a rotten time, and I lost grip, and let myself go. That's the head and front of my offence. I hated and loathed myself all the time, and never had a moment's happiness or peace. I've pulled up stakes in that particular country, and I'm looking—metaphorically speaking for a better one. When I saw you that day at the Dormer House, I knew that you were in it, and could show me the way! I want a home, Jean Dempster; a kind, good woman to care about me, and keep me in the way I should go; and if it please the God I've served so ill, little children about my knees, who can thank God for their mother! That's my case, and if it appeals to you, why then, say the word and I'll do by best. I don't promise miracles, but I'll run straight, Jean, and do what one man can to make you happy."

If it appeals!

"Oh, God!" said Jean Dempster under her breath. What would she not give to be able to take him at his word?—nay, to lay her head on his breast there and then, and go forth into the light of happiness and home!

She rose too, trembling very much, and still as white as death.

"You—you don't know—there is an obstacle! I'm not—I'm not all you think me. I too have had a dark page in my life. I did wrong—but I was wronged. Will you go away now—yes, now! this moment! And to-morrow morning you'll receive the whole story! Then then—I will wait."

If he were disappointed he made no sign, but took up his hat quietly, without seeming to protest or ask for explanations which he saw she could not give.

He went out and Jean was left alone. She sat till near midnight writing, pouring out her heart on the page; then tore it up and began writing again, this time stating only the bare facts of the story that had sent her an exile from her home. Then, on the stroke of midnight, she stole out into the quiet street and dropped the letter into the pillar-box with a prayer.

She had no sleep that night, and it was a heavy-eyed and pathetic woman who dragged her tired limbs up Broadway next morning to the Dormer House.

None would ever know how strongly Jean Dempster had been tempted to keep silence! Had it only been Harry Fordyce's money that tempted her, she might have done so, and trusted to luck to see her through.

But she cared for the man. Something in his honest nature appealed to hers mightily, and the idea of building up, of helping to reconstruct a life that had been in ruins, was a work after her own heart.

But she had acted fairly and squarely by him; keeping back nothing, glossing nothing over. Nor did she hide from him in one brief sentence at the last, wrung from the depths of her womanly heart, that she cared.

And now she had to wait—wait, probably, as the women at the Holland House were waiting, in silence!

She thought as she went mechanically through the morning's mail, what power men had in their hands, how they could wreck—and did wreck—the peace of women's lives, yet how dear and necessary they were to the whole scheme of things, how empty every woman's heart where some image did not dwell.

She was thinking this when the door of her room opened about eleven of the morning, and he came in.

"I got your letter, and I've just one question to ask," he said.

She rose, trembling, and whispered, "What?"

"Was that true at the end—that you would come to me if I hadn't a penny in the world?"

"Yes! Oh, yes!" she cried, and next moment was enfolded to his heart.

So the future of mother and Mamie and the little house at Hunter's Quay was assured.

Just for once in a grey, prosaic world, a woman's dream came true.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CRISIS.

Judith Rankine, attired in a very

pretty afternoon frock of old rose velvet, was entertaining a small and select party of friends at tea in the drawing-room of the little flat at Queen Anne's Gate, which was now possible to the combined means of Claud and herself.

Claud, as private secretary to a Cabinet Minister, may be said to have embarked upon his political career. He was extraordinarily clever, and possessed certain qualities, other than purely intellectual ones, which commended him specially to a man in high power who required tact, discretion, and, above all, foresight in the helper at his elbow.

Claud possessed the diplomatic sense, and he was both successful and happy in his work. Certainly his remuneration was far from princely, but his advancement in the world of politics was merely a matter of time. Already he was becoming favorably known as a speaker, and had acquitted himself well on certain emergency occasions when he had had to take another man's place on short notice.

Judy and he shared a home. Stair was still let, and a year had elapsed since the American tour. In that year nothing had been heard of Alan, and both Judy and Claud had arrived at the conclusion that he was dead.

Not so Carlotta. She had ceased talking about it, but Judy was quite well aware that she still clung to her belief in his safety. The silence was bitter and inexplicable, but her faith still held on. Judy loved her for it, though in secret she wept and likewise marvelled at the fealty that had stood fast through temptations such as come in the way of few women. She still lived the austere, almost cloistered life with her parents in Brunswick Square, spending little, working hard, perfecting her art and, apparently, living for that alone. From one triumph to another she had gone, and Judy knew that she had made immense sums of money, and that she was husbanding it carefully, though for what purpose she had not an idea.

She was expecting Carlotta that afternoon, but the time passed and she did not come. The ladies dropped away one by one. They were chiefly political ladies, and the topic of conversation had been a certain crisis that had arisen in public life, and in which Judy herself was intensely interested.

The Government was going out, and it was, of course, a problem what would become of Claud in the next administration. About a quarter to six he came in and only two ladies remained. He chatted gaily to them for a few minutes.

Claud had developed into a very self-possessed, capable sort of young man, never at a loss in any circumstances. He had none of Alan's diffidence. Judy often compared them in her mind and wondered that they could be brothers.

"Thank goodness they're gone!" he said when the door closed on the last of them. "Did any of them give the show away?" he asked with a touch of the boyish slang which he reserved for home an intimate occasions.

"What show?" asked Judy. "They're all talking about the General Election, of course—and Carlotta didn't come."

"Didn't she? I know why. She was in the House this afternoon, and Lord Clitheroe took her to tea."

"Oh!" said Judy, with a little snap. "She promised to come here. He's always following her about—isn't he?"

"Pretty well, and we couldn't blame her—could we, Judy?—if she listened to him, for, after all, there isn't much hope, is there, now? I think she has been jolly good to be true as long as she has been, with the kind of life she leads, and the men who would marry her if she would give them the chance."

"She says Alan is alive still, Claud. Even when I tell her we've given up hope she just looks away with far-seeing eyes as if she dreamed dreams and saw visions. Of course it's her temperament, and such patience and faith, I fear, are not possible to common or garden folks like us! The only one who shares it with her is Christy. She believes solemnly and positively that we'll see him again."

"I wish I had their assurance," said Claud, his kind, clever face shadowing, while the eyes behind the glasses grew suspiciously dim. "Well, I've great news for you. They've given me the Dublin appointment, and I enter on my duties next month."

"Oh!" said Judy with a gasp. "How perfectly splendid! How much salary?"

"Twelve hundred. The only fly in the ointment is that I shall be muzzled politically, for a servant of the Crown is supposed to have no politics."

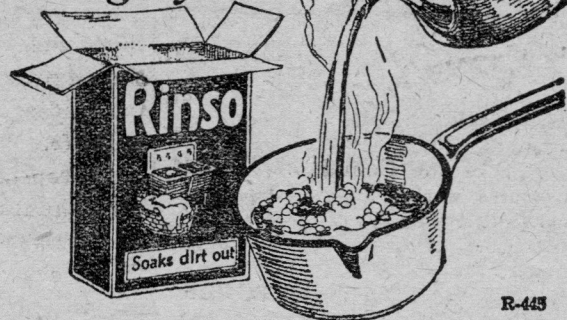
"Never mind. What are politics anyway?" inquired Judy in high scorn. "Just a game people play! When I was listening to all these women grumbling this afternoon I couldn't help wondering that the country is so well off as it is under the present legislation."

"But you kept a civil tongue in your head, Judy?" inquired Claud, much amused, as he helped himself liberally to the last remnant of the teacake.

"Oh, yes. I quickly enough learned that the person who can hold her tongue gets all the information she wants. But they're sorry, every one of them, to go out of office. Won't you miss it frightfully?"

"Oh, yes. I shan't like office routine, but I can't afford to chuck it. Some day, perhaps, the ship may come in and I shall be able to go back to politics. Why knows? I might stand for a Division of Ayrshire. You'd like that, Judy?"

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"I suppose I would. Well, you'll be able to marry Cicely now, Claud."

"Yes, I'll take her to Dublin. But you'll come too, Judy."

Judy had no answer ready, but seemed to find something interesting and absorbing in the light from a somewhat stormy sunset, coming through the gable window, which gave character to that queer little London drawing-room.

Once more she was to be laid upon the shelf, or to find herself the superfluous woman, the odd unit in a household of three. A strange, swift wave of rebellion rose up within, threatening to engulf her.

"There is no use talking about it now, Claud," she answered in a voice which only a tremendous effort kept perfectly steady. "It will be time enough, when other things are arranged."

"Time for details. But the big fact has to be settled, old girl, here and now. I won't marry at all unless you'll fall in."

"And what about Cicely?" asked Judy, whose acquaintance with her future sister-in-law was of the slightest, though she had no fault to find with her.

"Cicely is of the same mind absolutely. We've often talked about it. There could be no other arrangement so long as things are as they are with us, and there's always Stair—"

(To be continued.)

Non-Stop Lives.

There are twenty-four hours in a day, and the ideal division recommended is—eight hours' work, eight hours' sleep, and eight hours' play.

That sounds all right, but, even if it were the established rule, would it not hold the law of being a "non-stop" day? If we weren't sleeping we would be working or "playing," and the latter, while it covers and includes all forms of recreation from the very mild to the extremely strenuous, does not provide for a "stop."

It might be argued that lying in a hammock and reclining on a garden sea are "stops." In one sense yes, in another—the real sense—no. There is a great difference between "resting" and "stopping!"

What do you want to do occasionally is to stop and think of yourself. That's called introspection—looking into yourself to see how you are getting on mentally, morally, and spiritually.

All of us can recall the names of financiers who have crashed and ultimately found themselves behind prison walls. Perhaps, if they had "stopped" and taken stock of their inner selves, they might have seen their own moral depreciation and saved themselves from the dock.

"To see ourselves as others see us!" is doubtless a great help, but to see ourselves as we really are is of still greater importance.

That's why we ought to "stop." The "non-stop" life of work, sleep, pleasure, recreation—the filling of every hour with this, that, or the other interest, is the wrong sort of life.

In the biographies of many of our great men, it is extraordinary how often it is revealed that they "stopped!" Lord Kitchener "stopped" daily to take stock of himself. So did Gladstone.

What about yourself? You cannot know how you—the real you—are getting on, if you don't now and again stop to look at yourself. If all is well, you go on content; if something is wrong, you put it right.

Marvels of Nature.

A London girl on a visit to the country came to a pond whose shallows were full of tadpoles—thousands and thousands of little black tadpoles flopping about in an inch of mud and water.

"Oh," she said, "look at the tadpoles! And to think that some day every one of the horrid, wriggling things will be a beautiful butterfly!"

A Parent.

First Scientist (viewing monkeys in cage)—"It is apparent to me—"

Second Scientist—"Ah! I did not know you claimed so close a relationship."

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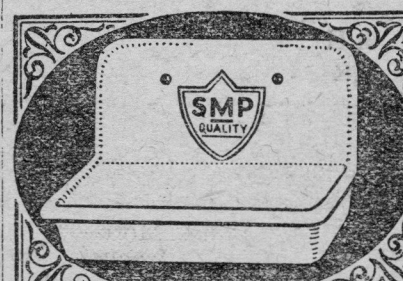
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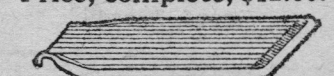
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