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Second Best

What Ann Said and What She Did

By LOUISE OLNEY

Ann Mark's eye flashed. Direct as her name, she refused to marry Henry Jasper. He stood before her a little awkwardly, but yet a man that most women would have considered kindly. He was not forty, well off for the simple community, highly respected, and his wife, Caroline, had been dead three years. Being a mere man, how could he know that Ann, his old schoolmate, had suffered agonies when as a young man he had courted and married her cousin?

No one knew why Ann had not married. She never wore her heart on her sleeve. Now, in spite of herself, her heart softened to him, noting how his hand ruffled his hair as it always did when he was puzzled and unhappy.

"I never did think I could be second best in any man's life," she went on rather cruelly. "And I don't see how at my age, thirty-five, and I don't care who knows it—I don't see how I can begin playing mother to another woman's child. The boy will hate me, as all children do a stepmother. No; ask some other woman." The man flushed angrily.

"Don't insult me, Ann. You know I don't want any other woman. I've always—you know I can't tell you what I always thought of you. It wouldn't seem fair to Caroline, who did her best by me."

The world knew she had been a weak, fretful, untidy woman, jealous, thriftless, her baby beauty gone in a few years. And it knew of his loyalty. He could not tell this woman how in the years she had been about his house helping Caroline his heart had gone out to Ann's cheery strength, her wholesome, healthy kindness. He tried one word more.

"Ann, if you knew how I needed you in every way you would come. Do you think I have forgotten how to love?" Still she shook her head. He turned slowly away, climbed into his buggy and drove to his own farm. Ann sat thinking, for she remembered many things. She finally rose and went into her sister Molly's house, where she was visiting.

In the crisp September morning Ann started out for a walk. She went over the hill where she used to play with Molly and with Henry and Caroline. Reaching the top of the hill, she sat down in the falling leaves, pushing the heavy dark hair back from her face.

Down in the valley she could see Henry Jasper's house and barnyard. He was hitching the bays to the buggy, and presently he drove away. A sudden temptation assailed her. She had heard Molly say his most recent housekeeper had left. Should she go and have a look at things? She did not see the boy about. Probably Jimmy was at his grandmother's. She rose and walked across the stable.

The door was locked, but she found the key under the mat and entered. She could have groaned at sight of the kitchen—dishes unwashed, floor ditto, disorder rampant. The sitting room, the bedroom, everything was a sorry sight. Things had been bad enough in Caroline's time, but now they were impossible.

She had no compunction about entering. She had always been in and out before she went to the city. He would not care. She looked at the clock and calculated that he could not get back from town under two hours. Then she rolled up her sleeves and skirt and went to work—dishes first, then the floor, then sweeping, dusting and making beds. Before she knew it three hours had gone and it was noon. She found a bite to eat and decided to go on even if he caught her at it.

She had decided that she would keep at work as long as possible and then slide out the back way when she saw him coming, but it was not to be. About 4 she suddenly was aware of a wailing in the yard and from the door beheld Jimmy, fish pole in hand, limping along and crying at every step. He was a boy of ten, like his father as one pea to another. She ran to meet him and saw that his foot was cut and bleeding. She picked him up and carried him in, washed his foot, dressed it and put him on the sofa, where she fed him. As she came to take away the plate he suddenly, in the most unboylike fashion, snatched her about the neck and kissed her. Then he fell asleep.

By this time she had no thought of going back till the child's father came. She moved about the kitchen

and dining room in her orderly, effective way—a way businesslike, eminently womanly and good. The waste apparent everywhere annoyed her thrifty soul. She set the table with a fresh cloth and put a good supper to cook on the stove she had blackened. It was nearing 6 o'clock.

After a little Jimmy awoke and without warning began to cry, refusing to tell what troubled him, but denying that it was his foot. Finally Ann got a low rocker, took the child in her arms and began to rock him. Great boy that he was, he snuggled to her, his unloved little heart accepting the comfort, trusting this soft voiced, smiling, mother armed woman who called herself Aunt Ann.

As she sat thus, her attention quite absorbed, Henry Jasper came wearily to the kitchen door, his arms loaded with groceries, his face hopeless. He had been wondering where to look for Jimmy, who had been allowed that morning to go to a neighbor's.

Then with unbelieving joy he saw the clean room, the spread table, the new air of comfort, and, best of all, in Ann Mark's kind arms he saw his sleeping motherless child—a child nearly as unmothered before his own mother's death as after it. She looked up at him and smiled.

"He cut his foot and came home crying. I came over, and when I saw so much to do, I went to work. I knew you wouldn't mind, Henry."

Mind! The hard thing was that she should come just to go again; that she should give him a taste of this calm comfort, let him see her like this and deny him a continuance of it. He was very miserable in his gratitude.

"Put your packages on the sink," she commanded, "and when I have laid Jimmy down I will put them away. Will you open the oven door and look at the biscuit?" He obeyed her, then stood looking while she deftly put everything in its place. The milk pail shinningly waited for him to take it and go out to milk, but he lingered. And Jimmy awoke and wanted to tell his father about the enormous fish that nibbled at his hook and got almost caught and how he had cut his foot on the broken bottle and found Aunt Ann to bind it up.

"Supper is ready, and you had better eat before you do the rest of the chores, Henry," she said, helping the boy to limp to his place.

They ate joyfully, talking, laughing, the man wondering how many minutes would pass before she rose to go. The future yawned empty. She was asking him about his housekeepers, what he paid them, advising him what he should do. Finally when she rose he rose too. They stood facing each other, and her clear eyes smiled.

"You are— Oh, Ann, you have been good!" he said awkwardly. "Shall I hitch up and drive you home, or will you walk?" So he had taken her at her word. It was evident that he had no thought of anything permanent in all this. But the woman had. She saw her place, her opportunity. The old hurt and anger had passed, and she was again at heart the simple girl who had loved in secret this man who was at last hers.

"I'll wash the dishes up first, and then after you have done the chores you can walk back with me." Jimmy set up a sudden wail from his chair, where he still sat at the table.

"I don't want you to go away," he cried, "and I won't stay alone while papa goes with you!" Ann went behind his chair and put her arms around him. She did not look at the child's father.

"Listen, Jimmy. Auntie must go tonight, but if you will be good till papa comes back I will come again."

"When will you? How long will you stay?" he demanded, with the definiteness of childhood. No uncertainty for Jimmy! She did not hesitate.

"I will come back—in the morning—and I will stay always—if papa says that I may!"

Jimmy, forgetting his foot, jumped at her neck like a little boy constrictor. But his father set him down, wanting her himself just then.

"Are you going to let her stay, papa?" Then Henry Jasper laughed, and the burden of unhappy years rolled from his shoulders.

Drowned Fish.
 They have a curious way of catching fish in some parts of Japan. Herbert E. Ponting in his book on "Lotus Land Japan" describes some traps which he found in one of the rivers of Fuji. "They were set in artificially dammed up narrows and consisted of long, conical bamboo baskets tied to poles. The fish bount downstream rush headlong into these traps and, being unable to return or even turn around, are speedily drowned. Curious as this may seem, it is yet but a matter of a few minutes to drown a fish held head downward to a swift current."

MUSHROOM TESTS.
 Not One of Them is Absolutely Safe, Declares an Expert.

"There is no absolutely safe, general or single, popular test which can be applied to mushrooms growing wild," writes Riley M. Fletcher Berry in the Scientific American. Mr. Berry ridicules the popular belief in the usual test whereby poisonous toadstools can be distinguished from edible mushrooms.

It is not true, he says, that a silver spoon placed in a vessel in which they are cooking will discolor if poisonous fungi are present and remain bright if all in the pan are edible, for the deadliest of mushrooms if freshly gathered will discolor a spoon, while the most innocent will discolor it if decomposition has set in.

Neither is it true that if a mushroom has a pleasant odor and taste or if the stem be solid or the skin readily peeled from the flesh it is edible, and the salt water test is equally valueless, for the deadly amanita will be unaffected by salt. Again, some of the deadliest of toadstools have the same pink gills as the innocuous field mushroom.

It is especially in the "button" stage that it is difficult to distinguish poisonous from edible mushrooms, for the most deadly amanita rarely reveals its poisonousness in this stage.

"There is," according to Mr. Berry, "but one form of mushroom which can safely be recommended to the world at large, to the unthinking who recognize no danger, the puff ball. And even this should not be gathered at either extreme of its existence, since in its button stage it may be infested with maggots too tiny to notice until they have made the enter ill."

"It is true that one may not heed warnings and yet possibly live after eating poisonous mushrooms if one soaks them lengthily in brine or vinegar and pour this off before cooking. This, however, destroys the delicate flavor of the mushroom which makes it the coveted morsel centuries of epicures have declared it to be."

But the wise man, says Mr. Berry, will either make a serious study of fungi or will rely on the judgment of a trained mycologist or will avoid wild mushrooms entirely and grow his own.

An Only Child.
 Being "an only child" is usually regarded as a piece of good luck. Recent investigations show that it is just the opposite. Of nearly 300 "only children" that the investigators examined only twenty were pleasant, normal boys and girls. The trouble with most of them was that they were selfish and ill tempered, and either because they were unwilling to make concessions or did not know how to make them they were unable to get on pleasantly with their playmates. Their parents had spoiled them. The moral seems to be for fathers and mothers rather than for children.—Exchange.

Notaries Public.
 Notaries public are said to have been first appointed by the leaders of primitive Christians for the purpose of collecting data for the lives of the first century martyrs. It was a long time before the office had to do with legal employments, such as attesting deeds, wills, etc., and establishing their authenticity in any other country. There was much irregularity in the law concerning notaries until the year 1801, when statutes were passed in England and other countries fixing their duties.—New York American.

His Observation.
 "While it is quite true that you cannot raise flowers with last year's sunshine," said J. Fuller Gloom, "I have often observed that it is perfectly possible for persons of the most mediocre qualifications to exalt themselves to fairly high positions in social or political circles on the strength of their relationship to their ancestors or their resemblance to the grand old statesmen of the past."—Judge.

Retiring From Business.
 Young Woman (blushing violently)—Are you the gentleman who has charge of the advertising department of the paper, sir?
 Clerk—Yes, miss. What can I do for you?
 Young Woman—I—or—want to advertise—a secondhand typewriter for sale. I shall have no further use for it.—Exchange.

The Case Altered.
 Brown—Is it correct to speak of a man as "of the male persuasion"?
 Jones—Yes, if the subject is not married.

"What has that to do with the matter?"
 "Why, when he is married his wife persuades him."

CURIOUS NAVAL ATTACK.
 Some Queer Tanks to Which Warships Have Been Assigned.

Not all the tanks warships are called on to undertake have to do with war and the destruction of human life and property.

A couple of French warships were sent out into the Mediterranean some years ago to wage war against a school of porpoises which were doing an immense amount of damage to the fishing industry in those waters. After three days' hostilities, during which quick firing guns were used with considerable effect, the vessels returned to port triumphant, having practically annihilated the enemy.

A year or two ago a warship of Great Britain's Australian fleet was given the strange job of capturing or destroying a mysterious sea monster which had been reported off the Falkland islands, the scene of the recent German naval defeat.

It is pretty safe to say that the officers, if not the crew, entertained grave doubts of the actual existence of the frightful creature which had been described. It was too terrifying, hideous, gigantic and ferocious.

But shortly after the ship arrived in the waters where the monster was supposed to lie in wait for vessels the officer of the watch described a strange looking beast making toward his ship, and it was immediately guessed that this must be the substance of all the alarming tales. And a pretty good substance it proved too.

An attack was made upon it, and after some hours' fighting with harpoons and quick firers the mysterious monster, which proved to be a sea elephant between thirteen and fourteen yards long, was slaughtered and taken aboard.

Some years ago the Norwegian government sent out a powerful little fleet of warships armed with mines, torpedoes and quick firing guns to exterminate a vast horde of seals which was denuding the sea on the northwest coast of all fish life.

But the government had reckoned upon tens of thousands of seals, whereas there were millions. So unending was their number that the fleet had eventually to admit itself defeated, with the loss of one man and two slightly wounded owing to an accident and to "retire in order," having exhausted its entire supply of ammunition.—New York American.

Irritation and Pain.
 A sharp distinction should be drawn between irritation and pain. Irritation is not pain, but only a frequent cause of it. Thus a crumb lodged in the larynx near the vocal cords produces violent irritation and prolonged coughing, which often results in actual pain. So, too, a speck of dust in the eye sets up violent irritation and inflammation, followed by actual pain. Of the surface of the body the finger tips and the end of the tongue are most sensitive—for instance, a burn on the fingers is much more painful than one on the back would be, while one on the tongue would be more painful still. Deep wounds are not painful, as a rule, save as regards the surface injury.

The King Snake.
 To the rattlesnake and to every other dangerous snake, large or small, the king snake is a terror. The poison of a rattler has no more effect on him than so much moonshine. Instinctively the rattler knows his match and at sight of a king snake tries to escape if possible. In fight the king snake relies wholly upon his incredible speed. If the movements of an ordinary snake seem quick to the human eye, the movements of a king snake would seem instantaneous. In a twinkling the long, lank fellow has wound himself about the throat of an antagonist and, his sinewy coils closing about the other's throat, chokes the wind out of him.

The Rose in Ancient Days.
 Old Greek writers extol the rose above all other flowers. The Romans appreciated this flower equally as much as the Greeks, and, according to Athenaeus, Cleopatra had the floor covered with roses a foot and a half thick, and Nero is recorded as having spent some thousands of pounds in roses at one feast alone. Anacreon relates how the breath of roses used to perfume the bowers of Olympus, and the Graces loved to twine themselves together by a band of these queenly flowers.

Accidental Discharge of a Pen.
 A capital pun may arise by pure accident, as recorded in Bucke's "Book of Table Talk."
 "A Mr. Alexander Gun was dismissed from a post in the customs of Edinburgh for circulating some false rumor. The dismissal is said to have been thus noted in the customs book at the time, 'A Gun discharged for making a false report.'"

It Was Familiar.
 Dan Beard, artist and naturalist, enjoyed the personal friendship of Mark Twain. In the days of the old Aldine club, when it was located next to the old Kensington hotel, at Fifteenth street and Fifth avenue, New York, and before it had merged its identity with the Up-town association, Dan was entertaining Twain in the club, and afterward they strolled up Fifth avenue, stopping to chat on the corner while Twain was waiting for a Fifth avenue bus.

A man who was a total stranger to Mr. Clemens approached them, slapped Mr. Clemens on the back and cried: "Hello, Mark! How are you?"

Mr. Clemens turned slowly, gazed at the intruder and drawled, "I can't recall your name, and your face is entirely unknown to me, but your manner is strangely familiar."

Fun in the Class.
 The late Professor Key, when head master of a large London school, was one of the most genial gentlemen that ever filled that position. He was fond of encouraging fun in his boys and was not averse from recounting occasionally during class time, when anything prompted it, the manners and customs of countries he had visited. On one occasion he was telling his class about Spain and said:

"Do you know, boys, that when a man attains to eminence there he is not called 'sir,' but is given the title of 'don'?"

One of the boys here called out: "Then, I suppose, sir, they would call you Don-Key?"

The gravity of the class was completely upset for the remainder of the afternoon.

Bridge Expansion.
 Bridges expand or get larger in the sun or in the daytime or in the summer and shrink in the shade or at night or in the winter. The rule is that heat makes everything expand and cold makes everything shrink. Cold is nothing but absence of heat. So we may say that everything contracts or expands according to the amount of heat in it. Metals have a most noticeable way of changing their size under the influence of heat. So when bridges are built of iron and steel the engineer has to allow for the change in the bridge's length. After he reckons on the amount of expansion he builds the bridge so that it has room to grow a little longer in the summer.

Highest Tides.
 Navigators state that the highest tide in the world is in the bay of Fundy, between Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The tide there sometimes rises to the height of seventy-one feet, and the increase is occasionally as much as a foot every five minutes.

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