

A Woman's Prayer

God grant thee strength, dear heart,
today

To bear thy pain,
I do not for tomorrow pray—
Each day is gain.

It is not much for which I ask,

Nor selfish prayer,
Just life itself, a single day,
Oh, Father, spare!

And yet—my woman's heart rebels

Against the word,
And silenced not by fear or shame,
Will yet be heard.

Not for one day, Thod Pitiful,

But all the years,
Grant him renewed, rejoicing strength
To mock my fears.

Nor this alone I ask for him;

But, every day,
All blessings that Thy love may hold—
For this I pray.

D. G.

MARTHA.

"Make room for this lady, please."

The man turned slowly from the car window where he seemed but a moment before to have found something of absorbing interest. Then more slowly he arose, picked up the bundles lying in the seat beside him and placed them in the rack overhead. The woman sank into the seat made vacant for her and the conductor passed on down the aisle.

She was a little, plump, motherly-looking woman and when she had disposed of numerous bundles and baskets of all sizes felt of her bonnet with its dodging pink rose to assure herself that it was preserving its proper equilibrium, and smoothed out the velvet strings which seemed to have lost themselves in the folds of her chin, she turned her attention to the man.

Her glance changed from one of inquiry to one of deep sympathy and interest when she saw the band of black which encircled his hat. The man, however, continued to gaze out of the window and, as it is impossible to make the acquaintance of a stranger when you have only their shoulder and profile, she satisfied her curiosity for the time being by studying the profile.

It was by no means a handsome profile. The nose was large and prominent. The upper lip protruded and the chin receded. There was a long crease down the side of the mouth and the cheek was thin and sunken. A fringe of long sandy hair tinged with gray showed beneath a stiff black derby.

The man's lack of beauty became, in some way, associated in the woman's mind with the black band on the derby and a great wave of pity swept over her. Clearly he was in need of consolation. She cast about in her mind a sufficient excuse for opening a conversation.

"I can't ask him to lower the window," she said to herself, "because its shut already, and I can't ask him to open it because it's as cold as cold outside. I can't ask him if he's a widower. That might harrow up his feelings too much. And it might look rather insinuating and me a married woman with a man of my own."

She meditated thus for some minutes and then her eyes lit upon a basket at her feet half covered by the other baskets and bundles. She gave a little start and almost chuckled. "The very thing! And to think of me not thinking of it before and me with my Jerry and four big boys at home."

She stooped over and extricated the basket from the midst of the bundles which took advantage of the occasion to roll out into the aisle, whence they were restored by a small boy seated across from her.

When the bundles have been disposed of in a tottering pyramid with the incline of the tower of Pisa, but lacking its stability, she raised the cover from the basket and after some fumbling produced from its depth a large red apple and doughnut. These, with a smile, she held out to the small boy. The boy, who had up to this moment, been looking on with open-mouthed interest, now put his finger in his mouth, hung his head, and being prompted by his mother from behind,

advanced, received the doughnut in one hand, the apple in the other and fled back to maternal protection.

The woman set the basket in the aisle. Then she took from it a small white towel. This she placed upon her knee. Then she proceeded to spread out upon it a tempting array of sandwiches, doughnuts, apples and fried chicken. When everything was ready for beginning the conquest she hesitated a moment, then with reddening cheeks she gently nudged the man with her elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sair," she said, "but I was just going to take a little lunch and I thought maybe you'd be liking some. A person does get so hungry traveling, you know," she added apologetically.

The stranger turned a pair of light-blue eyes upon the feast and immediately fell into the snare laid for him. He moved a little closer.

"Well, I don't care if I do," he said. "This air does give one a powerful appetite."

Without further pressing he fell to and they ate in silence, she touching little and placing the most tempting dainties where he might the more easily reach them. When the towel had been cleared with the exception of a few crumbs and apples cores, the man pulled down his waist-coat, wiped his fingers on a black-bordered handkerchief and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. "Mighty good lunch. Cook it yourself?"

She nodded modestly. "My wife wasn't a very good cook," he resumed. "Never seemed to care much about cooking, somehow."

She was quick to take advantage of the "was."

"Is your wife no longer living?" she asked gently.

The man shook his head lugubriously. "Died last week. I'm just coming back from her funeral."

The woman was all sympathy in a moment. "Laws; you don't say so? How sad! And you weren't there when she died?"

"No, she was down in Alabama with her folks and I live up here in Nebraska."

A woman who has lived thirty years with one man and has reared from infancy four others knows when to keep silence. This was one of those particular occasions.

The man threw one arm over the back of the seat and crossed his knees. "We weren't living together," he said. "Haven't been for almost a year."

"Oh!"

"No; we didn't seem to get along very well together. Didn't from the start. It's quite a story and I suppose I might as well tell you about it."

The little woman folded her hands and assumed a look of profound interest.

"She was a mighty pretty girl, was Martha, when I first knew her. She was one of these timid, yielding sort; just like a woman ought to be according to my notion. I thought she would make a good wife and be easy to manage. She was lots younger than I was but she took my fancy and I generally get what I want in the end."

"There was another fellow handing around after her and Martha hadn't eyes for anyone but him. There's no accounting for tastes, you know. I never took to him from the first, but most folks, especially woman folks, made a big fuss over him. He was tall and straight and young and all that, and that counts for a good deal with them. For my part, I always thought he had too much assurance and he was conceited. I never could endure a conceited person. Anything but that."

"Well, they kept getting thicker and thicker and they never went any place but what they were together and I couldn't get anywhere near her. Folks said they were engaged and I guess they were. I tell you things began to look slim for me, but I didn't give up. That's one of my characteristics. The boys at school used to call it stubbornness, but I call it perseverance, and perseverance generally wins out in the end."

"My chance came at last. The young fellow, the one that was making love to Martha, you know, had relatives over in the old country, and one of them died and left him considerable property. Well, the lawyers over there wrote him that he had better come over and look after his interests. Martha didn't want him to go at all. Folks

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said she made quite a fuss about it. But it was finally decided that he was to go and that they would be married just as soon as ever he got back.

"But he didn't come back, at least not when he was expected. News came home that the ship he was crossing in had gone down with all on board."

"Martha was sick for quite a spell after that, and it was some time before she was up and around again. When she did get out she was sort of white and peaked looking, and didn't take much interest in nothing. It was about this time that a mortgage came due that I had on her father's store. He was a merchant, you know, and had seen better days. But he had been sick and his wife had been ailing and things had gone against him generally, and he had been forced to mortgage. I never was one to let an opportunity slip by me. I didn't want the store anyway. The building was small and poorly located and the stock was old and behind the times. But I knew what I did want and I saw my way clear to get it."

"I went to Martha and made her a proposition. I told her that if she would marry me I'd cancel the mortgage I held. And in order to influence her in the right direction, one has to use a little force with a woman, you know—and they generally like you all the better for it in the end—I told her I'd foreclose tomorrow if she didn't agree to marry me. She looked sort of white and dazed and I tried to take hold of her hand to reassure her, but she drew back and just then her mother came into the room and Martha slipped out."

"The old man was just the right sort. He grabbed at the proposition eagerly. Said he had always liked me and preferred me to anyone he knew for a son-in-law. The old lady, Martha's mother, you know, was more difficult to manage. She said that Martha shouldn't be forced into marrying a man she didn't want for all the stores in the world. She didn't like me, you know, and I can't say that I ever liked her."

"Well, we finally prevailed, her pa and I. He worked upon her feelings a good deal, I guess. Martha was real sympathetic. She couldn't hold out when he told her how he had been an honest man all his life and how he would have to end his days in the poorhouse. She gave her consent at last. I remember the very words she said: 'Nothing matters very much now, and I suppose I might as well marry you as anything.'

"We were married and Martha broke down and cried at the wedding. I knew

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