

Their Treasures Here Below By Elizabeth Jordan

They Were Not Used to Giving, So They Practiced by Giving Away Everything They Had.

MISS DEBORAH WARREN fixed her brown eyes unwaveringly upon the face of her sister Anne, and Miss Anne Warren, after an obvious effort to avoid the gaze, finally raised her own eyes and met it with a look of humble appeal.

But Deborah, though she had thus far triumphed in the contest of wills, was not sure of her ground. Deborah was the active and bustling type of New England spinster, plump, brisk, high colored, and, as she was fond of proclaiming, "modern" in her firmly expressed viewpoints. Anne, two years younger and eighty pounds lighter in weight than Deborah, was as unlike her sister in character as in appearance. Deborah's gray hair had been dark, like her eyes; Anne's was a pale ash; Deborah's snapping, birdlike glance saw everything in its line of vision; Anne's faded gray gaze was as vague as her gentle expression, her slow, indeterminate movements. Deborah had never known a day's illness and shamelessly bragged of the fact. Anne was a chronic sufferer from bronchitis.

In the big old house in which many generations of Warrens had lived and died and where the sisters now dwelt alone Deborah was the moving spirit and apparently the ruling and irresistible force. But occasionally that force came up against an obstruction which shattered it—and this obstruction was a surprising and deep rooted opposition in Anne which manifested itself in varied forms.

As a rule Anne followed willingly enough where her active sister led. The lead was usually wise, and Deborah's brisk decisions saved Anne the mental effort of deciding things herself. At long intervals, however, Anne discovered that it was no trouble to make a decision—that, in some strange way, the decision had been made for her in the mysterious recesses of the possession to which she respectfully referred as her "mind." When this phenomenon occurred another promptly followed it. Anne, the gentle and the yielding, became Anne the manager or Anne the immovable. Of such a condition Deborah stood in dread now. If Anne had "one of her stubborn streaks" the project on which Deborah's heart was set was doomed.

As yet Anne's wavering impulses had not hardened into decision. She was playing for time, listening to Deborah's arguments, uncertain, bewildered, and subconsciously panic stricken. The last fact was the one thing she was sure of. She was afraid of Deborah's plan.

What she was most afraid of was its finality. It meant complete uprooting and transplanting. It meant, moreover, that if the sisters made a mistake in this transplanting they could hardly hope to retrieve it. They would, so to speak, have burned their bridges behind them. Most of all, she was appalled by the knowledge that this was not an issue to be settled by "a stubborn streak." One could not carry a stubborn streak throughout one's future life, and this was an issue which, unless it was settled once and for all by some drastic method, Deborah would certainly reopen and reargue year after year.

"All I got to say," Deborah now defiantly declared, "is that it's for your good and you know it. I ain't sayin' I won't enjoy the change, for I will. I ain't sayin' I won't be glad to drop the burden of housekeeping in these times, for the Lord knows it would be the biggest kind of a relief to do it. I'm wore out by it. But 's far as I'm concerned I could live and die in Warrenville the same as all our folks has done. It's you that suffers from these New England winters. It's you that needs the climate of California. Yet here you be, lookin' 's if I was doin' some thing against your interests when I say we got to move to California and live there."

Anne fetched an abysmal sigh. It was a sad sound, which should have evoked the sympathy of a loving heart; but as she heard it the snapping eyes of Deborah brightened. There was still hope then. Anne did not sigh when her mind was made up. She merely sat still and tightened her lips into a straight line. In the relief of her discovery Deborah spoke more gently.

"You feel you ought to go, don't you?" "I s'pose so." The other's voice was flat with the distaste of the admission. "But I can't see why we need to go for good," she quavered before her sister could pick up the words. "I don't see why we don't go jest for a spell, till we find out whether we like it, an' then come back if we don't like it."

"Yes, you do, too, Anne Warren," Deborah coldly reminded her. "You see it all as clear 's I do, only you ain't willin' to look at it. You know we got the best chance we ever had to sell the place. You know if we leave it vacant two years it will go to rack and ruin and we'll sell it for less'n half what we'd get now, 'n't to speak of havin' it on our minds the hull time and worryin' about what's happenin' to it. You know another winter here, if it's anythin' like this last one, ain't goin' to do those tubes of yours any good. So what's the use of settin' there and tryin' to act like you was bein' abused?"

"But to sell the old place—where we was born—and where father was born—? Anne gulped childishly.

Home, Sweet Home.

DEBORAH'S eyes turned to the broad windows of the big sitting room and the restful panorama that lay beyond them—the long, wide sweep of old fashioned garden before the house, the glimpse of open high road in the distance, the masses of blue hills shouldering one another toward the horizon line, and the glory of early spring sunshine flooding the entire picture. Her expression softened.



"I'm goin' to give you grandmother's risin' sun quilt," announced Anne.

"I ain't sayin' it wouldn't suit me to live and die here," she admitted, "if we could do it together. But it wouldn't suit me to lay you in the cemetery an' live on here alone, Anne Warren, and that's flat."

"I guess I ain't 's bad off 's all that," Anne spoke with a sharpness designed to hide emotion. "I guess I got a few years left in me yet."

Deborah made no reply beyond a slight sniff, and Anne's thoughts took another tack.

"It'll seem funny to sell off all the furniture if we go," she mused aloud, "and to see the neighbors lookin' over our things to decide what they want." At a change in Deborah's expression a sudden memory came to her. She went on with the hardness a gentle nature can show when aroused. "Susan Rose wants your four poster," she mentioned dispassionately. "She asked me yesterday to see that no one else got it."

The plump jaw of Deborah took on a firm line. "Susan Rose ain't goin' to get my four poster," she announced.

"What's the difference who you sell it to?" The voice and manner of Anne were casual. She resumed the hemming of some napkins she had dropped when Deborah began her attack. Her thoughts seemed to have turned away from California.

"I ain't goin' to sell it to any one. I'm goin' to give it to Jennie Chase!"

"Oh!" For a moment Anne was dazed. Her needle remained suspended in her fingers. "So you got it all planned," she said at last in a new tone.

"I planned what I'll do with one or two of my own things," she coolly admitted. "I guess I got a right to do that, if I've a mind to. And you can't complain. You like Jennie Chase 's much as I do."

"Your four poster won't do Jennie Chase any good." Anne spoke with a regret that was half for Jennie and half for the four poster. Things were moving rather too fast for Anne. If Deborah had already reached the point of giving away one of her most precious possessions the exodus from the old home seemed assured. Anne felt dizzy. In an effort to divert her sister's mind from the main issue she added a comment Deborah was sure to resent.

"If Robert Warick had half as much spunk as Jennie's got he'd make his uncle pay him what he's worth. An' then perhaps he could marry her some day. As 'tis—she plied her

needle again with steady hands—"I guess they ain't goin' to need any four poster for a good long time to come."

The criticism was so unexpected that Deborah stared at her gentle sister with as much concern as annoyance.

"What Robert ought to do is to get out of this town," she conceded. "There ain't much chance for a young man here anyway. But since he's the only relation his old miser of an uncle has got and since his uncle won't let him leave town and won't pay him enough to support a wife even here, I don't see but Jennie must keep on teachin' school and eatin' her heart out for Bob till she drops. But one thing's sure. It ain't her fault an' it

ain't Bob's. An' I'm goin' to give her my four poster anyway," Deborah ended with increasing heat.

Anne's expression brightened, as if she had suddenly thought of something pleasant. In her interest she again suspended the operation of the needle and leaned forward in her chair.

"Why, Deborah," she declared warmly, "I think it's a good idea. It kinda startled me at first—it was so sudden. Why don't you give her your sewin' table, too, and Aunt Hannah's davenport and Aunt Jane's little rockin' chair? They'd jest about furnish a bedroom for her. And since we can't carry 'em with us—if we go," she hastened to interpolate, "I feel jes' the way you do. I'd rather give than sell."

Deborah looked startled. Her sister's conversion to her viewpoint was gratifying, but this whole souled giving away of effects was in the nature of a shock, especially as all the effects mentioned were Deborah's. But Deborah Warren was no quitter.

"Mebbe I will," she said noncommittally, and carried the war into the other's camp. "What you goin' to give her?"

Anne considered the question.

"I'm goin' to think about it," she eagerly promised. "Of course, if we go to California I'll give Jennie some things. I'd rather give my best things away to Jennie and Robert than sell 'em to folks I don't like. But we ain't decided yet that we are goin', you know," she guardedly qualified.

Young Romance.

THE sisters fell into a brooding silence in which, while they worked, their household goods mutely ranged themselves before them. Both were conscious of an odd depression, shot through with excitement. Suddenly a cheerful voice came to them through the open window.

"Hello!" it cried. "Visitors welcome?" The spinsters looked up, startled, and the young man out on the veranda who stood smiling in at them, his arms resting on the window sill, chuckled over their surprise.

"You were both thinking so hard you wouldn't have heard Gabriel's trumpet," he laughed. "Jennie here yet?"

"No. Come in, Robert."

Young Warwick swung himself easily over the window sill, bringing into the big, rather prim room a surprising effect of vitality and some of the atmosphere of the jocular day. He was a fine, upstanding chap, with a smooth, boyish, likeable face and a lovable nature.

He had run in and out of the Warren

home since the days, more than twenty years ago, when the sisters had lured him, a lonely and motherless youngster of seven, into their kitchen to feed him with hot cookies. Since then he had done them many a neighborly turn, but always so easily and unobtrusively that neither sister realized the extent of her dependence upon him. Now the same reflection came in the same moment to each. If they went to California they would sadly miss Robert!

"Jennie promised to meet me here at two," he explained as he selected a rocking chair facing the garden. "We're going for a tramp, as we always do Saturday afternoons. She's late."

"If jest came to me when I was layin' awake last night," she said, addressing Jennie, "that when you and Robert get married you could use a couple of my things real well." She was absently leading them across the big room toward the four poster, but on a sudden reflection she turned aside, while the pink color in her fresh cheeks deepened. "I'm going to give you this old davenport an' one of my sewin' tables," she ended.

The young couple exchanged an eager glance, and then looked delightedly around the room. It was a big square corner chamber, through whose four wide and open windows the spring breeze-bore the perfume of the hyacinths below. In its prim way the room was as fresh and lovely as the garden, and the eyes of the lovers glowed appreciatively as they took in the polish of its old mahogany, the luster of its brass, and the austere dignity of its atmosphere.

"I've never been in your room before, Miss Deborah," Jennie said impulsively. "It's lovely, and some way it's just like you—just the kind of room I should have expected you to have."

Robert added his word. "How can you bear to leave it?"

The pink cheeks of Miss Deborah grew pinker. "Anne's room is jest across the hall," she said, leading the way to that retreat. "I think it's prettier 'n mine."

In a way it was, for Miss Anne Warren had "gone in" for chintz and old china and a few unusual pictures. Her room had the immaculate freshness of her sister's, with the added charm of color and variety. Both the guests exclaimed over it and wandered around in it like happy children, pausing before pictures and book shelves and touching bits of china.

"Think of having rooms like these!" said Robert with unconscious longing, while Jennie repeated her first refrain.

"And think of having to leave them!"

And now Deborah Warren's brown eyes, which took in everything, saw the shadow her slower but more sympathetic sister had already observed in the faces of their friends. It was an oddly pathetic shadow, for beneath it lay a look of hopelessness. It brought a moment of realization such as Deborah had not known before, of the tragedy of the two young lives that in these past years had become dear to her. They loved each other, Rob and Jennie, and they wanted each other. For five years they had drugged and waited, and the five years had brought their marriage no nearer. Everybody knew why. Old James Warick was not only a miser but a woman hater as well. At heart, though he could find no fault with his nephew's choice, he did not intend that Robert should marry. He would defer that marriage as long as he could, if not by fair methods, by unfair ones.

It was a tragedy—how great a tragedy Miss Deborah had not realized till now, when she saw that look on their faces and heard the hopeless note in their voices. Every one loved the young couple. Half a dozen leading citizens of Warrenville would have given Bob Warick a better job than his miser uncle offered him; but every one knew that Robert had promised his dying mother to "stand by" her brother and the bank during the miser's lifetime. And "old Warick," as he was called, was only a little more than sixty, and had bragged that he would see eighty at least.

That Miss Anne's thoughts had taken the same direction as her sister's was shown a few moments later when she suddenly spoke to Jennie.

"I'm goin' to give you grandmother's risin' sun quilt," she announced in her gentle, precise way. "I want you should have it. And if you'd like this chest Uncle Matthew brought home from China, you can have that, too! It's a beautiful place to keep linen in."

The lovers cried out together. Their faces brightened, and the optimism of Robert asserted itself.

"That's almost too good to be true," he said. "Why, Jennie, with what Miss Deborah has promised us two, and with what we've got ourselves, we'll have enough to furnish a couple of rooms. I can see just how they'll look. Can't you?"

The eyes of the girl who loved him were tender and a little amused. Watching her, the spinsters felt the throbs of sympathy and understanding which, after a lifetime of repression, was driving them into what began to seem an orgy of gift giving.

"You can have my bureau, too," Anne hurried on, as if eager to follow her impulse before it cooled. "It was Great-aunt Anne's. I was named for her. And there's no reason, is there, Deb, why they shouldn't have grand-father's big easy chair—the one with the carved dog's head on the arms? It's down in the sittin' room. It's the most comfortable chair in the house. I want that chair should be yours, Robert."

Young Warwick slipped an arm across her thin shoulder and gave her a boyish hug.

A Division of Treasure.

ANNE WARREN rose with unusual decision. There was something in the expression of those two young faces that pulled

at her heart strings. She felt an urgent impulse to banish the look, and at once.

"Deborah and I have about made up our minds to go to California," she announced, disregarding the dazed look her sister's pink face took on at the words. "So we got to decide what to do with some pet furniture we can't take with us and don't want to sell. They're things that have mem'ries and associations, an' you know how one feels—"

They were following her up the stairs now, and she was glad to observe that Deborah, though still somewhat stunned, was at the tail of the little procession.

"Take 'em in here first and show 'em what you got, Deb," she warmly invited, stopping at the door of her sister's room. Deborah almost stumbled across the threshold and then recovered herself.

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His voice when he answered was actually husky.

"I can't begin to thank you," he said, "as I won't try. It's all too amazing. It begins to make things seem possible. If Uncle James comes around next year, and if we can find a little house— You know, there isn't a house in town to rent this year even if we were ready—" He stopped.

"Seems to me there's a good many 'ifs' in your program, Robert," Miss Deborah pointed out brusquely but not unkindly. She was feeling the need of a reaction against the emotional tension of the occasion. "But you c'n have the things when we go, if you got any place to put 'em. Have you?"

The young man's expression changed to one of chagrined remembrance that was almost grotesque.

"Why—that's so," he muttered. "I don't know what we'd do with them till we—got settled." His boyish face flamed. The humiliation and disappointment of the moment were scorching his soul and he showed it. Jennie came to his relief.

"Perhaps Mrs. Weed will let us put the things in her barn loft till we're ready for them," she hopefully suggested. "I'm almost sure she will. You know the loft is clean and empty."

The owners of the furniture exchanged horrified glances. To picture their possessions in a new and happy home was one thing. To visualize them accumulating mildew in the Widow Weed's barn was another. A chill fell upon them. The eagerness had left the faces in which Miss Deborah indicated her gifts when she led them back to her room. It had also left the voices in which they made their acknowledgments. They were still grateful, but they were again hopeless. The shadow had returned to their faces when they said good-by and went off for their tramp in the woods.

Worry.

LEFT alone on the second floor of the old house, the sisters looked at each other self-consciously. With a muttered suggestion of "something to do" Miss Deborah went back to her own room. When she had entered it, she shut and locked the door, slowly and in turn she visited each article of furniture she had just given away—standing a long time before it, recalling its part in the associations of her life, touching it with loving fingers, even absently adding to the luster of certain pieces by giving them a "hand polish."

All the time she was on the alert. She did not care to have Anne appear and discover that the door was locked, so she finally retracted the bolt. Neither did she wish Anne to enter and find her mooning over the furniture she had given away. That was not the way to give, and though she had had little experience in giving, it was not normally her way. She told herself this, but she could not control her new and deepening depression. Again she made the rounds of the furniture which was no longer hers, pausing guiltily before each piece with an ear cocked for the sound of Anne's footsteps. But she need not have been apprehensive. Just across the hall, in her own room, Miss Anne Warren was standing in turn before a Chinese chest, an antique bureau, and a rising sun quilt, vainly endeavoring to see the outlines of those loved and lost objects through a mist of tears.

That night Miss Anne, staring wide eyed into the dimness of her familiar room, heard a tap on her door. Her sister entered.

"You asleep, Anne?"

"No."

"May I get in with you for a spell?"

Anne moved without comment to make room, and the visitor crept between the heavy lavender scented linen sheets.

"I feel sort of upset," Deborah bluntly confessed.

"You mean you're sick?"

"No, I ain't sick exactly. But I'm worried."

"What you worried about? Those things you give away?"

For a long moment Deborah was silent. Then:

"I don't like to think of those things bein' kept in a barn," she blurted out. "Don't you feel that way about 'em?"

"Yes, I do," Anne's quiet voice was in cool contrast to her sister's excited tones. "But it ain't right that we should feel like that," she went on. "It shows we ain't as used to givin' as we ought to be. We ain't either of us ever given away anythin' in our hull lives that was a real sacrifice." The words came out of the darkness like an arraignment, and such an arraignment from the gentle Anne was amazing.

In the darkness Deborah blushed under it. "That sounds pretty bad," she admitted.

"It is pretty bad. It shows it's high time we begun to think of some one besides ourselves, Deborah Warren."

"I s'pose it does," Miss Deborah conceded faintly. "It shows something more, too," added the implacable Anne. "It shows there's just one thing for us to give things away, we must learn to do it my practis'. We must give away more!"

Under the simple majesty of this conclusion Deborah Warren faintly thrilled.

"I guess you're right," she said after a long silence.

"Of course, I'm right." It did not seem to be Anne who was addressing her, but some new force. "Go to sleep now and get your rest. Tomorrow morning you and I will go