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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 hair 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 weak, fretful, untidy woman, jealous, thrifless, 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 grand mother's. She rose and walked across the stubble.

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 waiting in the yard and from the door beheld Jimmy, fish pole in hand, lurching 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 out 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, shiningly 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 emptily. 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 here 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 box constructor. 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 "Fishing Land Japan" describes some traps which he found in one of the rivers of Fuji. They were set in artificial dammed up narrow and consisted of long, conical bamboo baskets tied to poles. The fish bound 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.

A WORLD FAMOUS SONG.

Payne Was Not in Poverty When He Wrote "Home, Sweet Home."

It is more than ninety years since "Home, Sweet Home," was written, but its popularity is still worldwide, and wherever the English language is spoken it is known and loved because it appeals to that deep lying instinct in humanity which is the basis of family life.

Many stories have been written of its origin, most of them more or less inaccurate and tending to distort reality by a mass of pleasing fiction.

Moving word pictures have been drawn of the starving author in his garret, and illustrations have been published of the original "lowly thatched cottage" for which he was supposedly pining, both affecting and interesting, but not in accordance with the facts. Although he had periods of failure and hardship as well as possibly briefer periods of success and prosperity, it was not while suffering from poverty that he wrote "Home, Sweet Home," but during a time when he was living comfortably in Paris in the Palais Royal and having considerable success in his dramatic work.

There is also no evidence to indicate that the "lowly thatched cottage" had any existence outside of the author's brain in spite of the tradition which has been built up about the Easthampton cottage.

Throughout his life Payne had a deep affection for his native land, his friends and his family, from whom he was for many years widely separated. His letters frequently allude to his longing for the society of those he loved and his appreciation of the home and domestic life.

He was only fifteen years of age when necessity forced him to begin his battle with the world, a precocious, high spirited, impulsive, sensitive, ambitious boy, conscious of an intellect above the normal, restless under restraint, quick to take offense at seeming slight.—T. T. P. Luquer, Payne's Grandnephew, in Scribner's.

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 Uptown association, Dan was entertaining Twain in the club, and after ward 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 toward 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 Kay, 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, proper, if 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.