

MARTHENA'S DUTY

It Did Not Prove to Be a Sacrifice

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Marthena Judd locked the school-house door with a little sigh of relief and walked slowly down the village street toward home.

There came a clatter of hoofs on the road, and Lionel Forbes rode gallantly around the bend and pulled his big black horse to a standstill beside Marthena.

"How do you do, Miss Judd?" he asked, smiling down at her from his brown eyes.

Marthena's eyes were dazzled by Lionel Forbes and his too evident beauty. The sudden interest of Sharon's richest young man in the humble schoolteacher was flattering. Marthena Judd was pretty in a pale, delicate way, but one always thought that she gave promise of greater beauty when she could have a rest from teaching the robust youngsters of the village school.

While Marthena smiled and blushed under the bold glance of Lionel Forbes, Miss Myra Finney, who kept the postoffice, peered from an unobstructed corner of the window and made comments to her sister Susan.

"If I had a child in Marthena Judd's school I would put my foot down about one thing!" said Myra after Lionel and Marthena had walked slowly on.

"What's that?" asked Susan lazily.

"I'd put a stop to her flirtation with Lionel Forbes. It sets a very bad example to the children. Why, Susan, she's all took up with him so's she's forgotten to come for her mail, and here's a letter from her brother Henry way out in Wyoming. He don't write very often. I wonder if there is anything the matter."

"Marthena writes to him every Sunday," remarked Susan. "Let me see—Henry lost his wife, didn't he?"

Marthena blushed and then paled when she read her brother's letter.

Dear Marthena—I am wondering if you can't take pity on me and come out here and keep house for me. You needn't do any real hard work; Lee Sing, the Chinaman, does that, but it does need a woman's hand out here, and I'm plain lonesome for you. It was different when Ida was alive, but you know how it is. I'll pay you what you get for teaching the Sharon kids, and you'll have a horse to ride and anything else in reason that you want. Do come. Send me a telegram and I'll meet you at Bitter Tree whenever you say. Your loving brother, HENRY.

Marthena's face paled as she read the letter. It was so plainly her duty to go to poor Henry, but her dawning love for Lionel Forbes held her back. If she went away now his too flicker heart would seek another. Yet, knowing this, she yearned after him. He had opened the rosy doors of romance to Marthena Judd. He would forget her if she went. And yet it was her duty to go to her brother.

She would let Aunt Hepsy decide. Aunt Hepsy was a large, capable woman who ruled her family of grown sons and daughters with an iron hand. She had spared a small gabled room for Marthena Judd, her orphaned niece, and Marthena's board money paid for music lessons for the three girls.

Aunt Hepsy read the letter and then settled her gold framed spectacles on her nose.

"Marthena, it's your plain duty to go to Henry," she said. "He's doing splendidly out there on the ranch. He's getting rich, so Larry Barnes wrote to George. You know Larry went out there, and Henry gave him work on the ranch. Seems Larry's a foreman or something out there. I s'pose you've forgotten all about Larry Barnes now that Lionel Forbes is sweet on you; but, Marthena, you can't place any dependence on Lionel. He's a butterfly, always running after some pretty girl, and—now, don't get mad—you asked my advice and—"

Aunt Hepsy looked after Marthena's flying form with disapproval in her eyes.

"Don't it beat all!" she asked of the empty air, "how folks will ask your advice and then fly all to pieces if it don't suit their ideas?"

It was a heavy hearted Marthena who packed her trunks and bade farewell to the little Maine village where she had lived all her days.

The train left Sharon and the old life far behind. While the ache of parting was still in Marthena's throat the novelty of travel interested and comforted her. Five days later Marthena entered upon the rolling prairie land that to her eastern eyes seemed like a dust colored sea bounded by the purple hills rising and melting away against the horizon as they sped on.

At Bitter Tree her trunks were dumped out on the platform, and the train went on into the golden glory of the sunset, while Marthena stood there feeling strangely small and forlorn until Henry's big voice and Henry's strong arms greeted her.

She looked at him with wondering eyes. Henry Judd had gone forth from Sharon village a tall, lanky New Englander dressed in ill fitting store clothes. The man before her was big and stout, and his cowboy hat and shirt and his corduroy trousers tucked into high heeled boots gave him the look of a stranger. But the old merry look was in his eyes as he put his lit-

tle sister into the buckboard and took his seat beside her.

"Hold on to your hair, sis," he advised. "These bronchos are walking on their hind legs today."

Marthena Judd never forgot that wild ride across the prairie. The ponies actually pawed the air as they started forth, and then in a spirit of recklessness they galloped madly for miles and miles, while Marthena held her breath and Henry laughed as he put one arm around her and drove the ponies with the other hand.

"Home!" cried Henry as he turned in between two rail posts and with a last clatter of hoofs and scattering of sand and gravel the ponies stopped at the broad porch of a pleasant ranch house that overlooked the Bitter Tree valley with a glimpse of the shining river at the bottom and the everlasting hills beyond.

Henry made her go straight to bed, and he carried her supper to her in the little room that he had furnished for her with all of a man's clumsy tenderness.

"Larry Barnes went to Choco with me, and we picked out the stuff. Larry said he remembered that blue was your favorite color, so we got everything blue and white. Larry chose the pictures. He said the one of St. Cecilia there looked like you. Great fellow, Larry! Now, you close your eyes and go to sleep. Get up when you like and order what you want for breakfast from Lee Sing. Good night."

With Henry's kiss on her brow Marthena went to sleep with a little smile on her lips and awoke to the glory of a perfect morning.

After she had leisurely dressed she went down to the veranda, where Lee Sing, with many polite gestures, invited her to breakfast. While she sat there she heard the mad clatter of hoofs and saw a horse galloping around the yard. From the distant corral came a shout as one, two, three, more horses leaped the gate and followed the first untamed animal. Three cowboys mounted on horses pursued the runaways, with lusty shouts and lariats held ready for action.

Marthena wondered vaguely if Larry Barnes was one of these cowboys who rode so fearlessly and so gracefully.

She went to the edge of the veranda and waved her table napkin at the vicious black horse that pawed the steps, and he scuttered away to fall a victim to the lariat of the most graceful rider of them all, a bareheaded giant with blue-black hair and a skin bronzed like an Indian's.

Then Marthena, when it was all over and the horses had been driven back into the corral, realized that she had displayed unvoiced enthusiasm. She had not only waved her napkin frantically at the victorious riders, but she had cheered them on to greater efforts, so that she went back to her seat with scarlet cheeks and shamed eyes.

A step sounded behind her and she looked up to see the graceful, brown cheekee rider who had flashed white teeth at her as he captured the black horse.

There was a strange familiarity about him that puzzled her.

"Don't remember me, Marthena?" he asked, holding out a big hand.

"Oh, Larry—Larry Barnes!" cried Marthena. "What have you done to yourself? I didn't recognize you."

"I hope the change is for the better," said Larry gravely.

"It is. Oh, it is!" cried Marthena, with such evident admiration in her tone that both of them suddenly laughed outright in the pure joy of youth and perhaps in the discovery of something that both of them had lost.

"Henry's gone to Choco," said Larry, sitting down on the railing of the veranda, "and he has delegated me to give you your first riding lesson. Cherry is the prettiest little pony you ever saw, Marthena, and Henry and I picked out the saddle the other day, and—"

"Thank you for helping Henry choose the things for my room," said Marthena gratefully. And she wondered why Larry blushed so furiously and changed the subject. She felt very kindly toward him.

"Well, sis," said Henry that night at supper, "you look as rosy as can be. How do you like the sagebrush?"

"It's heavenly!" cried Marthena so heartily that Henry laughed aloud, and Larry, who had been invited to supper, blushed deeply.

"Then you don't want to go back to Sharon?" teased Henry.

"Never!" exclaimed Marthena. "I'll tell you when I do, Henry."

"I'll wager that will be never," said Henry, but he said it to himself so that no one could hear. He had read the signs of reawakened interest in the betraying eyes of his sister and Larry Barnes, and he was very glad. Larry was a capital fellow, and Aunt Hepsy's letter about Lionel Forbes had been disquieting.

Three months afterward Marthena and Larry came in from a long ride with the glory of perfect happiness shining in their faces. Henry, standing on the veranda smoking his pipe, smiled tenderly as they came up the steps.

"Blessings, my children!" he said heartily, for he had read that day in a paper from Sharon that Lionel Forbes had married a girl from the city, and he knew that Marthena would receive the news with indifference.

Marthena, standing in her little bedroom that night amid all the pretty blue and white furniture chosen by the two men who loved her devotedly, smiled through her tears as she knelt down to say her prayers.

"It's wonderful!" she murmured. "It's marvelous how the path of duty leads one to love and happiness!"

He Needed Credit

By EDWARD L. BARKER

Jim Follansbee and I were in London waiting for a remittance that didn't come. What was the matter I did not know, but I didn't get the money. Jim was strapped and depending on me to help him out. I had arranged for certain sums to be sent me periodically, and they had come all right except this last one.

Were you ever in a strange land without money or credit? Well, it's a mighty mean feeling. We hired a room, which we paid for in advance for a week, and this left us 12 shillings for meals for that period. I expected surely that my draft would come within seven days at most, and then I should have all I needed for both of us. But the mail steamers continued to come in one after another and no remittance. I put off the person who rented us the room, but I couldn't induce any one to trust me for a meal. Jim and I both got so lean and hungry that our own mothers wouldn't have known us.

One evening when we were pretty near starved I said to Jim, "Jim, I'm going to have a bang up good dinner."

"I'd like to know where you're going to get it," said Jim.

"And I'm going to take you in too."

"That's very good of you. Only I don't want any Barmecide feasts just now. I'm hankering after the real thing."

"Shut up and listen."

I developed my plan to him. I reserved for myself the leading role, and Jim didn't like playing a low down part, but he was hungry enough to steal a baby's bottle. So he consented.

About 7 o'clock I went into a nice little restaurant on a side street where "bobbies" weren't very frequent and, hanging up my overcoat, sat down at a table and ordered pretty nearly everything on the bill. I ordered turtle soup, fried sole, a cut of South-down mutton—English mutton's jim dandy, you know—and I just told the waiter to bring me all the entrees—there were six of 'em—and a quart bottle of ale. You see, I was so hollow that I needed all these dishes to fill me up.

That was a dinner I've never forgotten. Every time I get awfully hungry I eat it over again—in imagination. When I'd got through with the substantial I topped off with an English plum pudding, washed down with some real port—the real stuff that the nobility drinks—and ordered a cup of coffee.

Having satisfied a hunger that had been accumulating for a week, I strolled up to the cashier's desk, where the proprietor himself sat behind a cigar counter. I had picked out a shilling cigar and was cutting off the end preparatory to lighting it when I heard a voice close beside me say:

"Mr. Marston, this is the luckiest meeting for me in the world."

I turned and there was Jim beaming on me as happy and as innocent looking as a six-year-old boy.

"You have the advantage of me, sir."

"You haven't the advantage of me. I know you for Edwin Marston, head of the firm of Marston, Plunkett & Co., bankers, Wall street, New York. I once kept an account at your house. My name's Follansbee—that was the only truth in the whole tale—and I repeat I'm lucky to meet you, for I've spent all my money and am waiting for a remittance. You must help me out."

"I don't remember you, sir," I replied, "but I'll not see a fellow countryman in a strange land in need of friends. How much do you want?"

"Oh, £50 will do. But, I say, I haven't dined and I need a sovereign for a dinner right off."

"Go right over there to that table and order what you like."

Jim sat down at a table, and I don't think he left anything on the menu unordered. If he did it wasn't anything more succulent than a herring. I stood by the landlord puffing my cigar.

"When he has had his dinner," I said, "just make one bill of it all." Then I went on to tell him that our firm did such a large business that I couldn't remember everybody who dealt with us or who knew me. I sometimes got swindled, I admitted, by people who said they knew me and whom I didn't know, but I'd rather get stuck for £100 now and then than refuse one of 'em.

The landlord had dabbled a little in "Americans" and asked me about several railway companies in which he had shares. I didn't happen to know about any of them, but I told him so much about each one that Jim had plenty of time to eat his dinner. I was leaning over the counter with my back to my friend, the landlord facing him. Suddenly the landlord cried out to me:

"That fellow's going out!"

I was bound to finish what I was saying. There was Jim near the door.

"He's stealing your overcoat!" cried the landlord as Jim unhooked the coat.

With an imprecation I ran to save my coat and down the street after the thief.

We met later in our room much refreshed. But we didn't have any more deprivation, for the next morning I received my remittance. I went around to the restaurant and paid for the two dinners. All I had wanted was a little credit. I am aware that to get it I practiced a trick worthy of a jailbird. But was there any harm so long as I was good for the amount?

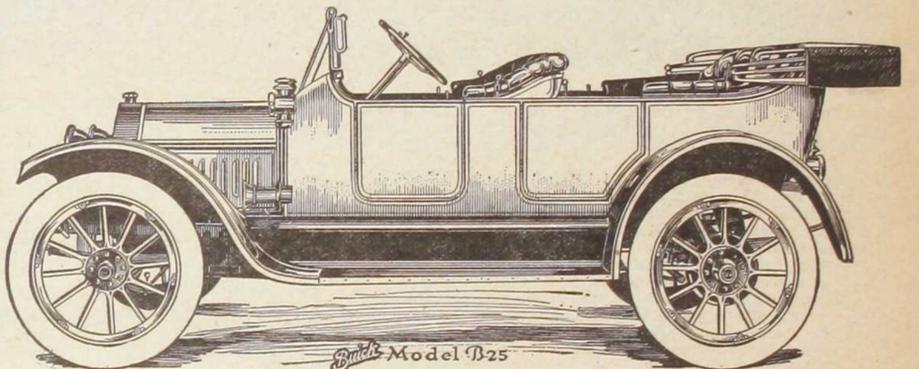


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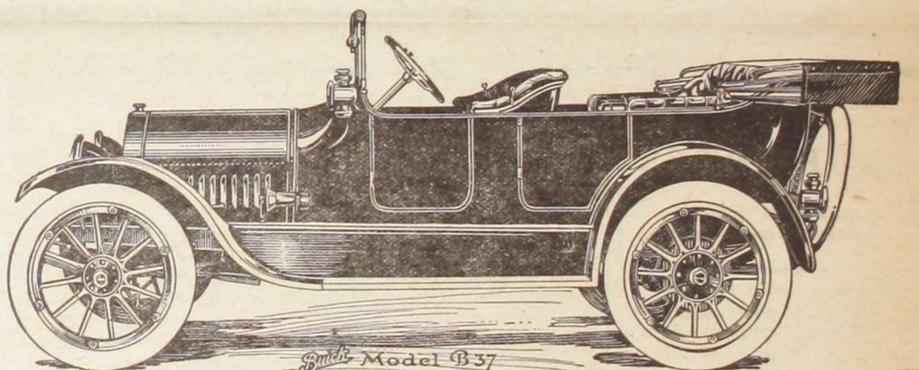
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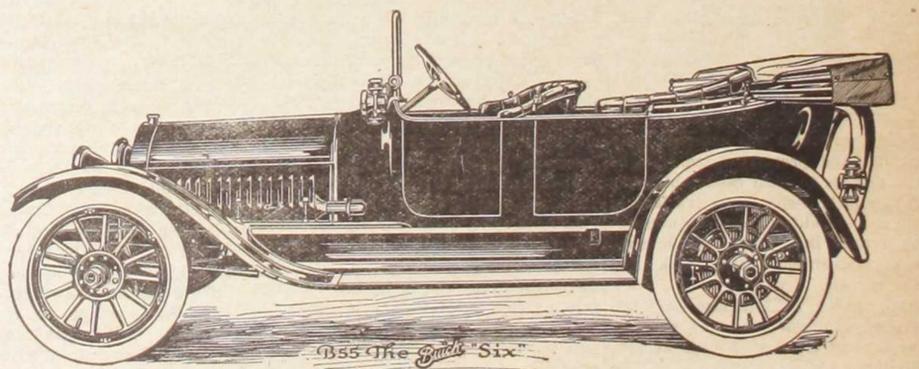
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