



THE future destiny of the child is always the work of the mother.—Bongarte.

The Second Chance

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NELLIE L. McCLUNG
Author of "Sowing Seeds in Dancy"

CHAPTER I.

MARTHA
In the long run all love is paid by love.
The undervalued by the hosts of earth.

The great eternal government above
Keeps strict account, and will redeem its worth.
Give thy love freely; do not count the cost;

So beautiful a thing was never lost
In the long run.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

THOMAS PERKINS was astonished beyond words. Martha had asked for money! The steady, reliable, early-to-bed, early-to-rise Martha—the only one of his family that was really like his own people. If he could believe his senses, Martha had asked for two dollars in cash, and had distinctly said that due bills on the store would do it!

If Martha had risen from her cradle twenty-five years ago and banged her estimable parent in the eye with her small pink fist, he could not have been more surprised than he was now! He stared at her with all this in his face, and Martha felt the ground slipping away from her. Maybe she shouldn't have asked for it!

She went over the argument again. "It's for a magazine Mrs. Cavers lent me. I would like to get it every month—it's—it's got lots of nice things in it." She did not look at her father as she said this.

Thomas Perkins moistened his lips. "By George!" he said. "You youngsters never think how the money comes. You seem to think it grows on bushes!"

Martha might have said that spring frost must have nipped the buds for the last twenty-five years, but she did not. Ready speech was not one of Martha's accomplishments, so she continued to plait her apron into a fan and said nothing.

"Here the other day didn't I send thirty-nine dollars into Winnipeg to get things for the house, and didn't I get you an eighteen-dollar wallaby coat last year, and let you wear it week-days and all, and never said a word?"

Martha might have reminded him that she was watering and feeding the stock, and saving the wages of a hired man, while she was wearing the wallaby coat, but she said not a word.

"You get a queer old lot more than I got when I was a young shaver, let me tell you. I've often told you young ones how I left home, when I was nine years old, with the wind in my back—that's all I got from home—and with about enough clothes on me to flag a train with. There wasn't any of these magazines then, and I don't know as they do any good anyway. Poor old Ann Winters sent away her good, hard-earned dollar to some place in the States, where they said: 'Send us a dollar, and we'll show you how to

make fifty: light employment; will not have to leave home; either ladies or gentlemen can do it.' She saw this in a magazine and sent her dollar, and what she got was a pretty straight insult. I think. They wrote back, 'Put an advertisement like ours in some paper, and get fifty people like yourself to answer it.' There's a magazine for you!"

Martha looked at him helplessly. "I promised Mrs. Cavers I'd take it. She's making a little money that way, to get a trip home this Christmas," she said, looking and unlocking her fingers, the rough, toiled joints of which spoke eloquently in her favor; if the old man had had eyes to see them.

"You women are too easy," he said. "You'll promise anything. For poor grandmother let a man put a piano in the shed once when it was raining, and he asked her to sign a paper sayin' it was there, and he could come use the shed any time he liked, and by Jinks! that's the fellow come along in a few days wantin' her to pay for it, and showing her her own name to a note. She wasn't so slow either, for she puttin' out her hand to sign the paper, and got near enough to make a grab for it, and tore her name off; but it gave me father such a turn he advertised her in the paper that he should not be responsible for her debts, and he never put his name to paper of any kind afterward. There was a fellow in the old Farmers' Home in Brandon that asked me father to sign his name in a big book that he showed up in front of him, and I tell you it was all we could do to keep the old man from hittin' him. Of course, Martha, if ye didn't put it down in writin' she couldn't have puttin' it down is the deuce altogether."

"But I want to give it," Martha said slowly. "I want the magazine, and I want to help Mrs. Cavers. Now, Martha, look at here," the old man said, "you're a real good girl, and very like my own folks—in the way you handle a hoe yer just like my poor sister Lizzie that married a peddler against all our wishes. I mind well, the night before she ran away how she kissed me, and says she: 'Good-bye, Tommy, don't forget to shut the henhouse door,' and in the mornin' she was gone."

Lizzie's bereaved brother wiped his eyes with a red handkerchief, and looked dreamily into the fire.

Martha, still plaiting her apron, stood awkwardly by the table, but instinctively she felt that the meeting had closed, and the two dollar bill was still inside.

She went upstairs to her own room. It was a neat and pretty little room, and the pride of Martha's heart, but to-night Martha's heart had nothing in it but a great loneliness, vague and indefinite, a longing for something she had never known.

A rag carpet in well-harmonized

stripes was on the floor; a blue and white log-cabin quilt was on the bed; over the lace-edged pillow covers there hung embroidered pillow shams. One had on it a wreath of wild roses encircling the words "I slept and dreamed that life was Beauty," while its companion, with a similar profusion of roses, made the correction: "I woke and knew that life was Duty." Martha had not chosen the words, for she had never even dreamed that life was beauty. A peddler (not the one that had beguiled her Aunt Lizzie) had been storm-stayed with them the winter before, and he had given her these in payment for his lodging.

She sat now on a little stool that she had made for herself of empty tomato cans, covered with gaily flowered cretonne, and drawing back the muslin frilled curtains, looked wearily over the fields. It was a pleasant scene that lay before Martha's window—a long reach of stubble field, stretching away to the bank of the Souris, flanked by poplar bluffs. It was just a mile long, that field, a wonderful stretch of wheat-producing soil; but to Martha it was all a weariness of

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the flesh, for it meant the getting of innumerable meals for the men who ploughed and sowed and reaped thereon.

To-night, looking at the tall elms that fringed the river bank, she tried to think of the things that had made her happy. They were getting along well, there had been many improvements in the house and out of it. She had better clothes than ever she had; the trees had been lovely this last summer, and the garden never better; the lilacs had bloomed last spring. Everything was improving except her self, she thought sadly; the years that had been kind to everything else were cruel to her.

With a sudden impulse, she went to the mirror on her dressing-table, and looked long and earnestly at her image there. Martha was twenty-five years old, and looked older. Her shoulders were slightly bent, and would suggest to an accurate observer that they had become so by carrying heavy burdens. Her hair was grayed and broken. Her forehead and her eyes were her best features, and her mouth, too, was well formed and firm, giving her the look of a person who could endure.

To-night, as she sat leaning her head on the window-sill, Martha's thoughts were as near to bitterness as they had ever been. This, then, was all it came to, to all her early rising and hard work, all her small economies. She had not been able to get even two dollars when she wanted it. She sat up straight and looked sadly into the velvet dusk, and the tears that had been long gathering in her heart came slowly to her eyes; not the quick glittering tears of childhood, that can be soon chased away by smiles—not that kind, no; but the slow tears that could wither, the tears that make one old.

It was dark when Martha lifted her head. She hastily drew down the blind, lit the lamp, and washed away all traces of her tears. Going to a cupboard that stood behind the door, she took out a piece of fine embroidery and was soon at work upon it.

Hidden away in her heart, so well hidden that no one could have suspected its presence, Martha cherished a sweet dream. To her stern sense of right and wrong it would have seemed improper to think the thoughts she was thinking, but for the fact that they were so idle, so vain, so futile, so hopeless. It had all begun the fall before, when, at a party at one of the neighbors', Arthur Wenyas, the young Englishman, had asked her to dance. He had been so different from the young men she had known, so courteous and gentle, and had spoken to her with such respect, that her heart was swept with a strange, new feeling, that perhaps, after all, there might be for her the homage and admiration she had seen paid to other girls. In her innocence of the world's ways, good and bad, she did not know that young men like Arthur were taught to reverence all women, and that the deference of his manner was nothing more than that.

Martha fed her heart with no false hope—she never forgot to remind herself that she was a dull, plain girl—and even when she sat at her embroidery and let the imagination of her heart weave for her a golden dream, it was only a dream to her, nothing more!

When Arthur loughed Jim Russell's quarter-section and began farming independently, the Perkins were his nearest neighbors. Martha baked his bread for him, and seldom gave him his basket of newly made loaves that it did not contain a pie, a loaf of cake, or some other expression of her goodwill, all of which Arthur received very gratefully.

He never knew what pleasure it gave her to do this for him, and although she knew he was engaged to be married to a young lady in England, it was the one bright evening of the week for her when he came over to get his weekly allowance.

Martha had never heard of unrequited love. The only books she had read were the Manitoba Readers as far as Book IV, and they are noticeably silent on the affairs of the heart. In the gossip of the neighborhood she had heard of girls making "a dead set" for fellows who did not care a row of pins" for them, and she knew it was not considered a nice thing for any girl to do, but it came to her now clearly that it was not a subject for mirth, and she wondered why any person found it so.

As for Martha herself, the tricks of coquetry were foreign to her, unless flaky biscuits and snowy breads were so called; and so, day by day, she went on baking, scrubbing, and sewing, taking what happiness she could out of dreams, sweet, vanishing dreams.

CHAPTER II. THE RISING WATSONS

There is ever a song somewhere, my dear.

There is ever a something sings always:

There's a song of the lark when the skies are clear.

And the song of the thrush when the skies are gray.

—James Whitcomb Riley.

While Martha Perkins was weaving sweet fancies to beguile the tedious hours of her uneventful life, a very different scene was being enacted, a few miles away, in the humble home of John Watson, C.P.R. section-man, in the little town of Millard, where John's wife and family of nine were working out their own destiny. Mrs. Wat-