

STORY NO. 1—INSTALLMENT NO. 1

WHO PAYS?

Story No. 1

The Price of Fame

By EDWIN BLISS

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III.

Ann shivered again under something she read in Madame Holmes' eyes. She had felt it even before the woman crossed the threshold, had been feeling it in ever increasing volume while de Retzky and her husband outlined plans for his operatic studies abroad. The great singer had been silent, strangely silent since it was she who was doing the financing of that voice. And now the wife knew that Madame was about to speak and with her eyes pleaded to the celebrity—as woman to woman—for pity, for charity. And Madame shrank before that look, even while her lips tightened.

"Of course," she said slowly, "I shall provide for your wife while you are abroad, Mr. Merwin."

Though she had been expecting a blow, though she had prepared herself for the worst, Ann could not repress the little cry of incredulous pain that leaped from her lips. Her hands sought her heart gropingly, the hands that still gripped the unfinished shoe.

"You mean—you mean that I am not to go—that Henry is to go alone—to leave me and—"

"A student should have no distraction in his studies."

Ann felt something go dead within her. Something that had been alive and pulsating before turned to a sudden leaden and cumbersome. Knowing the futility of it, she could not resist looking at de Retzky for confirmation of the sentence but he turned away his head. Her hands went out in groping fashion toward her husband.

"Henry you—you want to leave—"

She could not finish for the great, choking sob constricting her throat, suffocating her.

He whirled upon her fiercely.



Good News.

plunged into a rage of his own creating, but Madame flashed him a warning look as Ann sank back in her chair.

"My dear," in the great soprano's voice were all the tones that had quickened the hearts of audiences throughout the world, "you must not make it any harder than it is already. Don't you know that I understand; that I am a woman, and that I understand your pain at parting with him? She moved closer, placing her hand upon Ann's shoulder and turning upon the two men.

"You have your choice, Mr. Merwin—milkman or a Voice. I had the choice and Voice won. It has brought me fame, wealth, honor, glory; it has lost me all that my heart would have clung to did I consider happiness alone. I do not say that it is always so but the price of fame is often misery. The price of fame must be paid and fame is a hard bargainer."

Ann looked up eagerly, timidly, yet with a strange ferocity to catch the impression upon her husband. What she read upon his face filled her with swift self-reproach.

"I think I understand," she whispered softly. "I want the fame for him."

The singer stooped and picked up the little worsted shoe, turning it over and over in her hands. "Yes, the price of fame is great, but I would be a artist did I permit, without giving him his opportunity, the voice of your husband to remain where it is. He will pay the price; others will pay the price; but that is the lot of the artist."

IV.

Years that seemed interminable, years of goading desperation, discouragement self-sacrifice, endurance stretched behind Henry Merwin as he halted a moment at the stage door of the New York Grand Opera House to allow one of the stars to enter. A bitter smile curved his lips, lips that had tightened since the days when the milk route alone oppressed his mind, as he slowly man-up in the male dressing room for a peasant in the opening act of "Pagliacci." He was a chorus man—only a chorus man.

From below he could hear the strains of "Cavalleria Rusticana" which preceded "Pagliacci" and the voice of Cabosso, greatest of all tenors. Cabosso, who stood where the ignorant, young milkman had dreamed of standing; Cabosso, the announcement of whose singing was sufficient to pack the great house.

The soul of the artist within him struggled impotently at his situation, the difference between the dream and the reality. Cabosso singing Canto, the bitter, disillusioned pantaloone, when everything that life could hold was his; and he, Henry Merwin, with a voice no less than that of the star, sang among the peasants. Unconsciously he threw himself into the role of the man, compelled to amuse the public with his antics, compelled to don grease paint when he wished to smear his face with the blood of rival and unfaithful wife. His lips opened and the tenor aria at the close of the first act poured from his throat.

He stopped abruptly as a hand fell upon his shoulder, biting his lips in mute embarrassment as he looked up into the eyes of the stage manager. It dawned upon him that he was transgressing the rules of the house in singing, that, in all likelihood, he would be discharged. And suddenly he was seized with a vast, overwhelming desire to hold this position that a moment before had roused all his resentment.

"Are you up on the role — on Canto?" The words were crisp, brittle, mandatory.

PRESBYTERIAN CLERGYMEN AT SILVER SPRINGS MEETING

Presbyterian clergymen of Harrisburg and vicinity attended the regular annual meeting of the Silver Springs, Pa. Presbytery at Silver Springs, Pa. The Rev. T. J. Ferguson,

For a moment he did not understand, then a quick flush marked his cheeks at what he took for sarcasm. A hot answer was on the tip of his tongue, checked only in time as he read upon the faces about him that the man was really in earnest. He rose swiftly, his hand gripping at the lapel of the stage manager's coat even as the man fairly dragged him down the narrow, iron stairway toward the director, who raged about in the wings, his face the picture of misery.

He laughed ironically as his underling whispered to him, sizing the chorus-man up and down.

"Canto!" he laughed. "Substitute for Cabosso! What is your training? Who coached you?"

"Sprengle, Lampert!"

"But who coached you in Canto?" Though his interruption was harsh,



The Woman or the Wife?

Merwin could see a light of interest in his eyes.

"De Retzky — Jean himself, coached."

"Make up—quickly," the director decided sharply. He turned away, lifting his hand to the assistant stage manager and slowly the curtain rose. As he darted to the dressing room behind the stage manager, Merwin caught the creak of that curtain and knew that he would never get the sound from out his ears.

He heard nothing of the stage manager's instructions, was numbly conscious of getting into the costume of the director's instructions as, in a cold perspiration, he waited for the baritone to finish with the prologue.

Fear was upon him, cold, dank fear. Could he have run from the place, could he have put a finish to every ambition he had pressed so closely to his very soul, could he have thrust it all aside at that moment, he would have done so rather than suffer the fiery heat alternating with icy cold that seized his body, be tortured by the pricking fingers at his spine, the harsh grip at his heart.

"Don't mind the whispering and talking while you sing. They do it with everyone but Cabosso —"

He heard no more but those words seared themselves in letters of fire upon his brain. His teeth clicked shut with an audible sound. Suddenly all the stage fright disappeared before an anticipatory rage. They SHOULD NOT whisper and talk while he sang; they SHOULD treat his voice with the same respect they treated that of Cabosso. He was the equal of the great tenor.

Unconscious of his audience, of the stir of curiosity at his appearance instead of the familiar Cabosso, regardless of everything save overweening desire to win Henry Merwin, he realized he was upon the stage before the curtain stared him in the face, the curtain which formed a barrier against the tumultuous applause of the audience at his performance, and shut him into the other world behind the scenes, the world of fellow-singers who made him realize the tremendous impression he had created.

He suddenly felt himself very weak, felt his impotence. He needed help, sympathy—needing help.

Swiftly he discarded his costume, but illy wiping the grease paint from his countenance. But in his eyes glowed something of happiness, growing from more than fame as, half an hour later, he re-read the message he has just written before passing it to the agent.

Ann Merwin, Los Angeles, Cal.: Come to New York at once. No more poverty. HENRY.

V.

He waited in the library, listening to the sounds of delight from Ann's room.

In the week he had tasted the fruit of success and laughed at the fear he had entertained of it. To be sought out by the great director and placed under a contract at a figure he had only vaguely dreamed of ever earning; to be the toast of town and press, to be invited into the very heart of society's most sanctified circle; to know that the great director would know that he had deserved—thursly they were fools who had told him the price to be paid for fame was heavy.

And now Ann was here, was so close to him he had but to tap upon the adjoining door to see her, so close to him he could hear her delighted exclamations over the gown he had bought for her to wear at Mrs. Van Roppe's reception that very night; so close he could hear her protests as the maid coiffed her hair; so close he could hear the prattle of his baby's voice, could still feel the rosebud lips pressed against his own, the baby he had never seen but that was his. Could anything add to his happiness—

Slowly a frown creased his forehead, a perplexed and anxious frown. Ann—would Ann be able to live up to the position he had created for her; would she fit into the niche; would she be accepted as a suitable wife for the great tenor? It had taken time and years abroad to make of him the Henry Merwin of today, while she remained where he had left her—the country girl who married a milkman.

Pretty, fresh, wholesome—yet she was obviously uncomfortable in her dress. He stopped abruptly as a hand fell upon his shoulder, biting his lips in mute embarrassment as he looked up into the eyes of the stage manager. It dawned upon him that he was transgressing the rules of the house in singing, that, in all likelihood, he would be discharged. And suddenly he was seized with a vast, overwhelming desire to hold this position that a moment before had roused all his resentment.

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CONTINUED TOMORROW.

of that place, was in charge. The majority of the Presbyterian pastors in this city were present. The Rev. C. B. Eggleston, of Gettysburg, was the principal speaker of the session.

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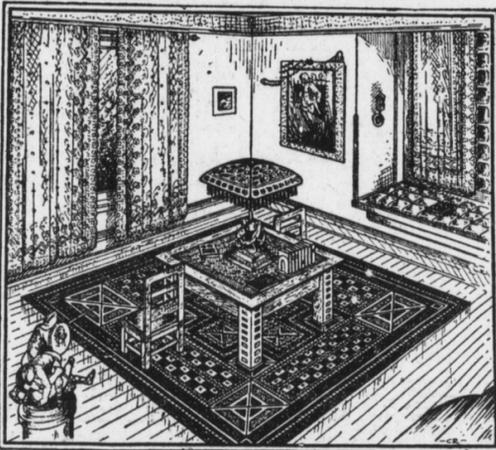
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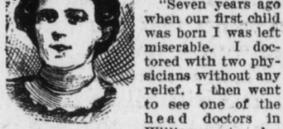
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