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**THE MARRIAGE VOW**

\*\*\*\*  
"FOR BETTER FOR WORSE, UNTIL DEATH DO US PART"  
\*\*\*\*

BY CATHERINE SOUTHERN

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

Looking up Ross Dyer's eyes rested upon an object that drove away unpleasant thoughts, light footsteps came quickly to him two arms were twined around his neck, a sweet face was very close to his own "my, dear Ross where have you been so long? and what have you been doing to your self." Clarice said as she stepped back to survey him.

Uncle told me you were here, the sweet voice continued and that we are to dine alone so make haste Ross it is getting late.

Run away Clarice I will be ready soon. Ten minutes later he entered the dining room and found her waiting for him and some how his heart felt lighter.

Ross had been home several days and Mr. Dyer had not improved. Ross spent many hours in the sick room talking and reading to the invalid but the subject of the marriage had not been mentioned again.

On this day Ross had spent more time in the sick room than usual as Mr. Dyer seemed to be weaker. When the sick man had fallen asleep Ross went out in the air, he took off his hat and raised his face to the evening sky.

"Thank God for the pure air" he said after the heated atmosphere of that room, he walked on quickly, little heeding where he went. He reached a wide walk that led to the woods. Tall elm trees grew on both sides of the walk their heavy branches and thick foliage throwing strange shadows over the wide walk.

At the foot of one of the trees Clarice sat, her fair face clouded in thought, her hands clasped tightly as though her thoughts gave her little hope.

Ross went quietly up to her. "What is it Clarice?" "why are you so sad?"

Over the girl's face stole a light almost divine at the sound of his voice.

No, Ross continued, do not rise I will sit here by you.

There was unutterable love and wistfulness in the eyes raised to his.

Clarice you are my one gleam of sunshine if it were not for your friendship the gloom would be insupportable I have some very sad memories.

She touched his hair lightly with caressing fingers and said "what are they Ross?" "tell me your troubles" why are you so different she asked bravely.

"Different" he echoed.

"Yes, you are kind. You speak the same way to me and yet since you have been away this last time you are different."

How Ross longed to tell all but then the thought came what is the use, drew nearer to her and said Clarice do you love me? will you be my wife?

"Love you Ross she said simply, why you are all the world to me, every wish I have is centered in you and of course I will be your wife" and the sweet face colored with a leaping flush.

Ross held her closer and as the strain on him broke the tears streamed his face, his voice broke as he said "some day Clarice fate will smile upon us. I will make you happy, do you believe me Clarice?"

She looked up at me and answered "why should I not believe you Ross."

He became suddenly aware of the warm throbbing of her heart, to her arms clinging to him, her eyes closed in the rapt whiteness of the moonlight and he bent his cold lips to her's that were warm with sweet and thrilling fire.

Very early the next morning Ross was awakened by someone knocking at his door "what is it" Ross called as he sprang out of bed.

The nurse, Mr. Dyer your uncle, is very low please come at once.

Ross dressed hurriedly and entered his Uncle's room. Clarice knelt beside the bed the nurse and doctor stood at the other side. The door opened again and the minister

entered.

A cold shudder seized Ross a calm hand seemed to clutch his heart as he looked at his Uncle's white face, for to him Mr. Dyer had been neither cruel or unkind. He was simply a man without sentiments, looking upon love as nonsense, believing marriage to be a means of extending one's family connections or increasing one's fortune.

The only love he ever knew was for the poor fragile girl who was the mother of his child, but not his wife, to whom now he was trying to make amends by leaving the child his name and fortune.

As the minister entered the room a smile seemed to hover on the dying man's face when Ross knelt beside Clarice and for the second time in one month took the marriage vow.

"For better for worse until death do us part."

Ross tried hard to forget the past, but at every turn the lovely face of of Ruthe looked up at him. For many week after he would awaken with a bitter cry on his lips.

But not one word did Ross tell Clarice of the brief sad story of his wedded life. For to Clarice life was wonderful. Ross would often smile in sympathy at her gaiety of heart but the shadow was always on his face.

On a lovely morning in September Ross was seated on the lawn reading when Clarice leaning lazily from the upstairs window.

"Did you notice the grapes on the arbor are getting black and the peaches so big and rosy, they will soon be ripe."

Ross threw aside the papers and answered "you little lazy bones, aren't you coming down."

"I'll come down if you promise not to rumple my dress it is perfectly fresh. "If you don't come this minute I'll come up" I'm coming and a few minutes later she seated herself beside him saying "now Ross don't muss my dress" but she nestled closer to him.

So October day passed by like a procession of golden lights passing in magic amid the trees of red and yellow.

Then came November and fires have become necessary in the house Clarice and Ross spend the evening's in the library beside the open fire. He with his books, she with her sewing on soft white material at which she is very busy.

Snow came in December and and Christmas followed. The young couple kept the mystic festival alone, Clarice had a tiny tree and that Xmas was the most wonderful the girl could ever dream of.

February was a month of ice and snow which lasted well into March. One snowy evening Ross came home from from his office and a starched and immaculate nurse met him at the door with a look of understanding before Ross had time to accend the stairs the door bell rang again and the doctor entered. He and Ross went up the stairs together when Ross reached the bed Clarice smiled, then the nurse told Ross he had better wait in the library.

For hours he had been walking the floor, the house was very quiet. At last the doctor came down the stair silently and asked Ross to go up.

At the head of the stairs he met Mrs. Mills the housekeeper sobbing and crying with a soft bundle in her arms. He caught a glimpse of a flower-like face and tiny hands. He could see nothing plainly but groped his way into the room and bent over the lifeless form of Clarice.

Next morning advertisement appeared in the New York papers "wanted net nurse for new born baby."

Early that morning Sister Mary had just sat down at her desk when a girl entered the room. She was wearing the same coat and hat that she wore when she came in.

"I have come to say good bye. You have been wonderfully kind to me here these last three week I will

(Continued on Page 7)

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