

The Farmington Enterprise

FORTY-FIRST YEAR—No. 7.

FARMINGTON, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN, THURSDAY, DEC. 20, 1928

5c a Copy; \$1.50 a Year

The Christmas Present



WRAPPINGS and wrappings and wrappings! Marian Garnet wondered if she would ever find out what her Christmas present was. At last she paused, a tiny box in her hand, and glanced at her fiancé. Austin Browning's latent frown cleared, and a faint smile passed between them. Then she opened the box, gasped a little, and slipped a ring on her finger.

"Oh, Austin!" she said, and flung her arms about him. "A diamond! A real diamond! And I've wanted one for ever so long. It's just beautiful!"

"A very happy Christmas, dear," he answered, and kissed her.

For a long while they sat talking. Every few minutes she spoke of the ring. How had he measured her finger? Now she had a really truly cost much? It must have been awfully expensive. Where did he get the money?

"Why do you want to bother about that, honey?" he asked her.

"Well, Austin," she pouted, "I have a right to know, haven't I?"

"Of course, dear." He paused.

"You remember when my grandfather died, last October?"

"Old Mr. Browning? Yes."

"They read his will last week."

"Oh, and he left you something?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Just a very curious." He seemed about to say more, but thought better of it.

"Please tell me, Austin."

"Oh, about—that is, it was—five hundred dollars."

"Why, Austin! That's splendid. But you didn't have much left over after you got the ring, did you?"

"No," he answered. He was studying a design in the rug. It was not long before he rose to leave.

"Remember, Austin, you're coming over for supper tonight," Marian reminded him. "Our out-of-town relatives will be gone by then, and we can have the evening to ourselves."

"Fine," said Austin, and kissed her good-by.

Marian sat very quietly at dinner. Now and then she thumped the ring on her finger, just to assure herself that it was still there.

She watched the group at the table, with their animated faces and jovial laughter. There was "company" today—her cousin Frank, cool and bolsterous, and his liquid wife; her maiden Aunt Margaret, with thin face and tired eyes; her Aunt Alice and her husband, John; and there, at the foot of the table, sat Grandpa Garnet, eating slowly and carefully, so that he should not spit his food. He seldom looked, for he was deaf, and so the conversation went on without him.

"Yes," said Aunt Margaret, "I suppose Grandfather Garnet has outlived

his time."

"I don't mean that, Aunt Margaret. I mean they had to support him for so long. He went broke at sixty-five and the children have taken care of him ever since. There wasn't even any insurance for Austin Browning paid all the funeral expenses."

Marian clutched her fork, afraid to speak and afraid not to. "You mean Austin's grandfather?" she asked.

"But, didn't he leave a will?"

"If he did, it wouldn't matter. All he had in this world was a few old books he had saved."

Strange that the conversation should go on! Strange that she could go on eating, when every bite seemed ready to choke her! At last she found a chance to slip away and seek relief in tears.

It seemed hours before Austin came that evening, and yet, when he did come she had not decided what to say.

She opened the door for him without a word, without even a smile. But Austin did not notice. He kissed her ardently, and chatted as he took off his overcoat.

"I met Jimmy Tilton and his mother on my way over here. They say the Wheelers have a new baby—born on Christmas eve! Jim thought it was a girl, but he wasn't sure. Say, what's the matter?"

"I've just been thinking, Austin. I'm not sure what to say; it seemed she had been thinking terrible things. 'About that will of your grandfather's—'

"Well?" Austin leaned back carelessly, but Marian had noticed a sudden flicker of his eyelids.

"I heard this afternoon that—that he couldn't have left you five hundred dollars because he didn't leave even enough to pay for the funeral."

"Who told you that?"

"My cousin Frank said so at dinner."

"I suppose you told him about the will, and he jumped at a chance to make trouble."

"Well, Austin," she pouted, "I have a right to know."

Marian began to listen.

"Well, it was about time the old boy was working on." Cousin Frank took

all his friends, now that old Mr. Browning's gone."

"How much?"

"Just a very curious." He seemed about to say more, but thought better of it.

"Why do you want to bother about that, honey?" he asked her.

"Well, Austin," she pouted, "I have a right to know, haven't I?"

"Of course, dear." He paused.

"You remember when my grandfather died, last October?"

"Old Mr. Browning? Yes."

"They read his will last week."

"Oh, and he left you something?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

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a grant him or refuse. "De got to be a mighty big care on them."

"For pity's sake, Frank," said Aunt Margaret, "if you don't think father is a care, too, I'd like to tell you different."

The old man looked up, and for a moment it seemed to Marian that he had heard every word.

"I don't mean that, Aunt Margaret. I mean they had to support him for so long. He went broke at sixty-five and the children have taken care of him ever since. There wasn't even any insurance for Austin Browning paid all the funeral expenses."

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"I suppose you told him about the will, and he jumped at a chance to make trouble."

"Austin! How dare you! I didn't say a word to him about it."

Marian wondered whether it was her imagination, or if Austin really was relieved.

"All right," he said. "But, even so, you prefer his word to mine?"

"Oh, Austin, don't talk that way!"

"Then you do trust me?"

"I want to, Austin, but you aren't telling me the truth, and I can't help

said.

"Marian, aren't you making a mistake? Would it matter that much?"

"You won't trust me."

"Nor will you trust me."

She turned from him, stood for a moment looking out the window, and then suddenly threw herself on the sofa, sobbing.

"Marian, Marian, don't cry! I'm sorry, dear. I'm a brute! Please!"

The sob continued. "I've been a coward, Marian, but nothing worse. And that was only because I love you so! I'll tell you everything. Won't you listen, dear?"

She raised her head and he sat down beside her and took her in his arms. "You were right, dear, my grandfather didn't leave me any money. In fact, the money I had saved for your present all went to pay for the funeral. But I knew you wanted a ring, so I got you the best one I could afford. I was so afraid you wouldn't like it I came near not giving it to you! Then I thought I'd wrap it all up big as a sort of joke."

"I didn't mean, then, to tell you anything wrong, but when you looked so happy and started asking all those questions, it seemed I couldn't tell you the truth, much as I wanted to. So I made up that story about the will, just because I couldn't bear to disappoint you. That's only an imitation diamond. The whole ring only cost ten dollars."

Marian spoke jerkily. She was still crying, but she was laughing, too.

"Oh, Martin I'm so glad!"

"Glad?"

"I've spent such a wretched afternoon. Wasn't I foolish? But I was so afraid!"

"I can't tell you how ashamed I am, Marian."

"That's all right, Austin. It was silly of me to dream those awful things. But if I didn't love you so I wouldn't have cared."

"And you do love me, Marian?"

She did not answer him in words, but with her eyes and lips.

"Even if I couldn't give you a decent Christmas present."

"That isn't so, Austin. You have given me—and yourself, too—the most wonderful Christmas present we could receive: a confidence in each other that nothing will ever shake again."

"There" was all she

wondering what it is you are trying to conceal."

"What do you suppose I'm trying to conceal, as you put it?"

"Austin—There was a catch in her voice. She looked at him pleadingly.

"Was that ring stolen?"

His face blanched as at a blow.

"You—do believe that?"

"I don't know what to believe," she answered miserably.

"If I swear to you, Marian, that I have stolen nothing, and that that ring was my own property when I gave it to you, will you believe me?"

"You do swear it?"

"On my honor, dear."

"Then where did you get it?" Why did you tell me your grandfather left you that money?"

"Please don't ask me to explain. It was wrong to deceive you, I admit, but I said the first thing I thought of to keep you from asking questions."

"But why won't you tell me, Austin? I won't tell a soul."

"Please, dear."

Marian took off the ring and held it out to him. "There" was all she

said.

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CITY STREETS ARE ABOVE AVERAGE IN STATE, SAYS GRANT

Superintendent Of Public Works Says Farmington Thoroughfares Are Among Best

With the closing in of winter the street labor force should be cut down to a point just sufficient to take care of snow removal, thereby relieving the strain on the city's exchequer, was a suggestion given a nod of approval, by the Farmington City Commission at its meeting last week.

According to a statement made by Superintendent of Public Works Grant, Farmington stands at the very head of the column among Michigan communities in regard to general street conditions. In a recent trip through the State he made it a point to ascertain actual conditions in the village and cities visited. Knowing the tendency of many communities to stage Queen Anna Main Street appearances with Mary Ann back streets just around the corner, he made several right and left hand turns as he progressed through these communities and found the side streets, as to maintenance and improvement, far from equaling those of his home city.

In a communication from a pump manufacturing company a request was made that their engineer be permitted to make a survey of Farmington's water supply plant and conditions here with a view to conclusively demonstrating that a saving of 50 per cent can be made in the cost of pumping. The survey to be made without cost or obligation on the part of the city. The company will be granted the privilege.

Malayans sneer at white teeth, use betel nut to blacken their own, and even chip the teeth of their children to hasten the darkening.

A Christmas Greeting

Each year for the past ten, we have extended to our friends and customers a Christmas greeting—a message of good cheer and good will, for Christmas and the New Year. But we have tried, too, to go a bit beyond the mere expression.

It has been our earnest endeavor every day to serve you well, to place at your command a large and expert organization, ready to care for your needs in the all-important matter of transportation.

To greet you cordially at Christmas-time, and serve you well throughout the year, is the pleasure of every member of our organization.

OLIN RUSSELL

Ford Sales and Service

FARMINGTON