

Hard Times in New York For Struggling Writers

Onoto Watanna Tells Humorous of Days When Unknown And Friendless. She Lived in Dingy Rooms, with Roommates As Penniless and Improvident As Herself, But Managed to Extract Some Fun Out of Life—One Used to Stake the Other. Except When Both Were "Broke" at the Same Time—Eventually Bombarded Her Way to Success.

One of the most pleasing features of the recent Women's Institute convention was the reading by Mrs. Francis Reeve of the following story of her early struggles in trying to make a living with her pen.

I shared a dingy room on the third floor of a house on East Sixteenth street with two other girls. My roommates were as penniless and improvident as I, but we managed to exist and even squeeze a measure of fun out of life. Each staked the other when the other was broke. That worked very well, except when we were all broke at the same time, when we had much ado to make two ends meet.

The first of my room-mates was a dark-eyed girl from Tennessee. She was studying vocal culture—or rather she studied it when she had the price. She would hire a piano for \$5 a month. At the end of the month the piano people would begin to dun and they would keep on dunning for another month, at the end of which time, they would take the piano, but at that rate she had the piano for two months at the price of one, and showed no compunction in the matter, as she fervidly believed that a God given gift was hers, to which the world owed a contribution.

Jocelyn, Jossy as we called her, was an outlaw from home because of her operative aspirations, of which her family heartily disapproved.

Anna Andison, my other room-mate, was an overwhelmingly beautiful girl of Danish birth. She had milk white skin, dead gold hair and eyes as blue as a Danish lake, big, friendly, trusting eyes they were—simple and empty, the kind men—some men—plunge into. Anna was built on a grand scale, and her hands and feet were fashioned to match her great graceful body. I had discovered Anna. She was holding down a perfectly respectable position as waitress at Bambergers when I assured her she was destined for greater things. I knew a man who knew a man who knew a stage hand who knew the manager of Weber & Fields theatre. To this man I piloted my willing Anna. The thing worked like a charm, Anna secured her first job in the chorus. From that day she had but one ambition in life. To remain in said chorus. Unfortunately, her aspirations were not shared by the managers for whom she worked, and for two causes Anna was fired from one musical show after another. The first was her utter inability to move with the speed and agility of the chorus girl race, and the second the heaviness of her hand which resented familiarity from those in authority above her.

When I first brought my great Dane home, Jossy, who was somewhat of an aristocrat—was speechless over my find, which filled considerable of the limited space of our room.

"Where in the name of heaven did you find it?" she demanded, utterly unmoved by the guileless friendly smile of the fair Anna.

"This is my friends, Anna Andison," said I defensively. "She looks like a picture I once saw of the daughter of a Vi-king, and I'm going to make her famous. I know a man who knows a man who—"

"I thank you," said Anna with touching gratitude.

"Where are you going to put it?" demanded Jossy. "I want that space where she's standing for my piano that's coming today."

"I set on dar bed," said Anna with her friendly smile and proceeded to do so, causing that rickety affair to creak alarmingly.

Jossy's attitude was similar to that she had taken the day I came in from the street with a half frozen kitten. I had found shivering in our doorway. Jocelyn declared there was no room in our room for cats or dogs. Anna, however, was no kitten in point of fact; she more nearly resembled a great blonde bear.

However, she justified the value of her addition to our family, the very first night.

Our landlady was extremely stingy with bed clothes, and the two near woolen blankets on our bed never really kept us warm. Anna was a human furnace. She was better than any hot water bottle or bag ever invented. Snuggled up against her warm back or front I slept as snug as the proverbial bug in a rug. That first night I slept between my two friends, a sort of dividing link, but the following morning, dilating upon the exquisite warm sleep I had enjoyed the night before, the silvering Jocelyn—as before stated she hailed from the Sunny South and had never been able to accustom herself to the chill and humidity of the New York climate, declared that I was a pig to keep a good thing all to myself. So that night Anna slept between us, and I never heard Jossy after that complain about her presence in our home.

So there we were, the three of us, making two ends meet on practically nothing. Youth and bright wits are a combination hard to beat. It is true that some of the means we resorted to when hard pressed to get a square, or half or even a quarter of a square meal, though ingenious, they might not have been considered ethical by our more affluent sisters, but then poverty is in a way a state of warfare and to use Jossy's favorite expression—she was convinced that we were all children of destiny to whom the world owed a living. "The end justifies the means."

For instance, on our parlor floor abode a man of whose wealth, generosity and susceptibility toward the

fairer sex we had heard much from our garrulous landlady. He had made sufficient inquiry concerning the fair Anna to cause said landlady to climb the three flights of stairs to our room. I, alone in the room at the time, thought when I heard her ascending that she was up for the rent. So I hid under the bed. There I stayed for half an hour, while Mrs. Mueller proceeded to examine our belongings and read our correspondence, and there no doubt I would have remained a longer period had I not, upon Jossy's advent into the room, intent on hearing our affluent lodger's opinion of Anna, as retailed by Mrs. Mueller incautiously come too far to the edge of the bed, and Jossy, whose ankle I touched thought I was a mouse, and screamed alarmingly. Then as I retreated to the wall, Mrs. Mueller poked under the bed with a broom and I came forth, to soothe the hysterical Jossy and smoothe down the suspicious and angry Mrs. Mueller. But from that day I never could reinstate myself in my landlady's regard. She suspected me of the blackest crimes, and mourned over the association of a perfect lady like Jocelyn with a suspicious character like I.

However, Mrs. Mueller's call upon us was not for the purpose of demanding overdue rent, but to convey a pressing invitation to our Anna from aforementioned affluent boarder, to accompany him to a dinner and dance that night at Schultz's on Third avenue.

Now it may be mentioned here, in parenthesis, that for some days the three of us had been subsisting on a few cents worth of crackers and boiled dog meat—you could get dog meat for a couple of cents a pound and the bones were thrown in free—as we were all out of a job. That is, Anna was out of a job. Jocelyn had no visible means of livelihood save an occasional \$5 or \$10 sent to her surreptitiously by an old colored mammy who had been her nurse, and whose heart was softer than the family who banned the girl's theatrical aspirations. I, on the other hand, was eking out a sort of living by writing, and I may say here that few and far between, in those days, were the stories accepted by the toy-hearted editors who sat in judgment upon my scripts. It will therefore be seen that the three of us were up against it, and we hailed this pressing invitation to a regular dinner with joy and thanksgiving.

However, there now arose the question of a dress for Anna. She possessed but one, and that hardly of a kind calculated to charm a desirable suitor, nor suitable for a dinner and dance at Schultz's. Accordingly I proffered her my own sole party frock. It was a pink and fluffy, and I was then small and dark. I weighed at that time about 100 pounds. Anna tipped the scales at a royal 185 pounds. However, Jossy was a genius with the needle. She let down that dress at least half a foot. I then took Anna in hand, and attaching her by her corset strings to the bed, I bade her pull. She pulled as hard as only a great Dane could.

Finally, firmly encased in that fluffy pink frock, we lead her with true maternal pride down to her waiting man.

She had given us her solemn word of honor—crossed her neck, crossed her heart, hoped she might die if she didn't, that she would order without stint at that dinner and that she would stow away in her ample insides only one-third of that dinner. The remaining two-thirds she would confide to the capacious bag with which we had provided her.

That evening Jossy and I spent in discussing the things we liked best to eat. I was partial to lobster, hot dogs, chop suey, pickles, French pastry, spaghetti, Welsh rarebit, pancakes and dumplings. Jocelyn said that the mere thought of a rare porterhouse steak entirely surrounded by onions made her teeth water, and as for green corn—at that very moment she was prepared to give up her operative career to bite upon a Tennessee ear. I talked her out, or rather back to her career, though she gulped and sobbed a bit. Talking over these matters only aggravated our condition, and as it was now 10:30 and no sign of Anna, Jocelyn suggested that we should go after her. She said that it was not proper for a young and innocent girl to be out alone at night with a man. They never did such things in Tennessee.

Accordingly we two sallied forth and arrived duly at Schultz's which was above a restaurant on Third avenue. We had some trouble at first in locating our Anna in the crowded ball room as she was backed up against a wall surrounded by a solid mass of admiring males. I could see at once that my dress had made a hit. Upon approaching her nearer however, I recognized certain signs in Anna that loudly bespoke distress of mind.

Whenever Anne was unduly moved by emotion or excitement she would forget the exquisite French accent that I was painstakingly teaching her, and would lapse into a sort of English version of her mother tongue. Now as we pushed our way through the mob surrounding her, she leaned to my ear and whispered hoarsely:

"I ban busted!"

"You ban what?" I whispered back, also hoarsely.

"I ban busted. I ban busted on dam corsets and I ban busted on dam dress on dam back."

I know that backless evening gowns are now the vogue in high society but it was not so in my young days, and I realized at once the impending disgrace that would befall us should Anna turn around.

Jocelyn the resourceful and practical in all crises, sprang into the breach and hissed at Anna:

"Faint! Faint! Faint! Faint, you big slob. Fall over, I say. Pretend to die!"

When at last it percolated through Anna's skull that a swoon might save the day she fell back with such a crash that I am sure she nearly broke the arm of the man from the parlor floor who nobly sprang to her rescue.

There she lay in a dead faint on the floor, her rosy face upturned, and her ruby lips apart as she breathed through them stertorously.

So enchanted was I with the picture she presented, that I could not resist doing my bit in the drama of the moment. Dropping upon my knees by her side, I entreated her to

WON MUSIC HONORS



MRS. REGINALD McLEAN
Who passed with honors in the Advanced grade, local centre examination for singing, of the Associated Board of The Royal College and The Royal Academy of Music.

Mrs. McLean was also successful in the written examination of Rudiments of Music.

COMING EVENTS AND NOTICES OF MEETINGS

Notices for this column will receive better attention, and be more certain of correct reproduction, if written out and sent to the editor of the Woman's Page than if telephoned. All such notices must reach the office by 11 a.m. Any received after that hour will not appear until the following day.

TONIGHT

Captain Merton Smith at the Public Library, at 8 o'clock, the first of eight lectures on "The Covenant God Has Made With Man." Showing Great Britain in prophecy. 24-1—Adv.

Dance tonight, Western Assembly Hall. The best dance in town. Admission: Gents, 50c; ladies, 25c. Williams orchestra. W. Wright, M.C. 24-1—Adv.

The Social Hop Club will hold its weekly dance tonight at Central Academy, 1209 First street west. W. Barker, M.C. 24-1—Adv.

SUNDAY

St. Mark's Masonic Lodge are attending the evening service in St. Mark's parish church, tomorrow at 7:30. The service will be taken by the Rev. Brother H. H. Wilford and the address will be given by the Rev. Canon Brother Gale.

La Societe St. Jean Baptiste invite all French-Canadians of the city to attend a special mass at St. Mary's Cathedral at 10 o'clock. Sunday morning, in honor of their patron saint. The usual gathering will be held in the afternoon at Shouldice Park. 24-1—Adv.

MONDAY

Yorkshire Society is holding whist drives and dances every Monday night in Central Academy, First street west, at 8:30 o'clock, where the best prizes are given, and the best dance music in town. Come and have a good time. 24-1—Adv.

THURSDAY

The Women's Guild of the Pro-Cathedral is holding a lawn social at the home of Mrs. E. Thorne, 544 Eighteenth avenue west, Thursday, June 29, from 3 to 6 p.m.

FRIDAY

A delightfully pleasant afternoon is being arranged by Knox church Ladies' Aid Society to close the half year's activities, by means of a tea, on Friday, June 30, 3 to 6 p.m., at the new home of Mrs. J. T. MacDonald, 1409 Shebourne avenue, Killarney.

Speak to me, to speak to me once, once only, dear, dear Anna. So well did I play my part that that big simpton upon the floor, who loved me, patted my hand reassuringly with her own big white one as the furious Jossy pulled me to my feet and named me all kinds of a fool.

Fortunately, soon after this the German delicatessen man down our street fell passionately in love with Anna, and for a time we lived upon the fat of the land. I made up a rhyme which we sang to the tune of "Just Before the Battle, Mother." Jocelyn would sit at the head of the stairs, when Anna's beau was calling below, and she would sing in her deep heartreaching contralto:

Don't forget the cheese and butter,
Don't forget the bread and jam,
Don't forget the pickles, Anna,
And the piece of ham.
Goodbye, Anna, we shall never
Eat a little bite till you get back.
But you'll not forget us, Anna,
When you fill your little sack.

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