

[Mrs. Brown's Diamond Ring]

[No. 2?]

Project #-1655

Rose D. Workman

Charleston County Edited [in?] Columbia

Approx. 2500 Words. [work?] MRS. BROWN'S DIAMOND RING There was a A neat little card [stood?] in the window of the shabby wooden house, but the house itself was below Bank Street, and cards that read:

“ Dressmaking and Alterations .”

are not often seen in windows in that aristocratic section of [?] city the city . “ I (believe I'll get a good story here,” I said to myself, and) turned into). the The entrance, (which) as is common in Old Town, was at the side, looking over a rambling flower garden. There were quite a lot of bells in a row, each with its card. I rang the one that bore the inscription:

“ Mrs. Bette Brown, Dressmaker, First Floor. ”

“Come in,” called a briskly pleasant voice, and I pushed open the door and met Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Silver might have been a better name . [?] for the The shining waves of silver-gilt hair framed a fresh, fair face, from which bright, alert hazel eyes looked out eagerly on life. Her simple, tailored dress of some pale gray fabric, modishly outlined the curves of a “perfect 36.” She (made a [most?] attractive picture as she) greeted me, and introduced her friend, who, dressed in a becoming suit of red, sat in a low wicker chair, knitting.)

Library of Congress

Mrs. Brown's neatly plucked brows rose quizzically as I asked her to tell me something of her life history, but she really seemed pleased with my the request and said we could talk right away. She had 2 caught up with all her work until some-one came for a fitting at five. No, she didn't mind talking before a third person. Mrs. Redmond was her friend and know all about her anyway. [Here?] Mrs. Brown struck a match smartly on the under surface of the table, and started a cigarette . [and began her story?].

"I'll tell you about my diamond ring," she announced, [?] dramatically. [?????]. "

"I'd been coming here on visits off and on for years. I have friends here who have done well, and the season is longer than it is in Florida, where I come from. So, after I'd divorced my second husband, and Jimmie— that's my boy, he's seventeen— got so bad sick, I decided to move up here, get a house, rent out rooms and take in sewing. Between the two things I'd make a living.

"Well, I finally made the break and came away. When I reached this town I had exactly \$5 in cash, and a \$450 diamond ring." Here Mrs. Brown stopped for a moment . and with an An oddly regretful expression shone in her hazel eyes . She looked down at her left hand, upon which gleamed a single narrow band of gold. The diamond ring was missing!

"Ever since Jimmy's father and I separated," she took up her story again, "I'd always used that ring to borrow on. Whenever things were going pretty bad and I felt that God wasn't treating 3 me just right, I'd go down town and get a few dollars on it. Then when things picked up again, I'd go get it back. And that would be that— until next time.

"I didn't have any definite plans in those days. I just lived from day to day. I'd say to myself, 'What God wants you to do, Bette Brown, you've got to do.'

Library of Congress

“Anyway, I came up here, like I said, with the \$5 in my purse, and the ring on my finger. This [?] A lady brought me in her car , [? ?????????] and I stayed at her house for a while.

“I was scared green at what I was planning to do. Suppose I didn't make a go of it? I knew some people here, all right, but they weren't the real old residents—natives we call them down home—. My friends were mostly new people, and I knew from what I'd heard about this place that I had to make a hit with the natives if I was going to be successful. [??] Suppose they didn't like my sewing?

“All the way up I'd keep saying to myself: 'Don't be a fool, Bette Brown. You've nothing to lose but your ring, and you can do without that.

“Well, I got here, and sold the ring outright this time. Got \$182 for it. ([Then?]) I rented this house, and started round to the second hand shops to furnish it. And I bought the stoves and 4 frigidaires on time.

“The house has fourteen rooms. On the third floor I've got one three-room apartment, and a single — 'efficiency apartment,' I think they call it.

“The second floor is arranged just like the third, and on this floor I've got one two-room apartment and this room that I've kept for myself.” [As she directed?] She directed my attention to (it, I noticed) the skillful ingenuity which had made the large room into a perfect “efficiency apartment” itself. Across its length ran a homespun curtain, (which she had)) made in sections, and snapped together for greater ease in laundering. No tailor could have made it better. This cut off the receiving, fitting and sewing room from the living and sleeping quarters. On one side was the full length mirror in which the customers might see themselves as others saw them. Here was the ironing board and electric iron; here was the electric sewing machine. On neat pegs hung many vari-colored and vari-styled garments in the process of being made, or made-over.

Library of Congress

On the other side of the curtain, the side on which we sat, was a gay little green table; a day bed covered with a brightly patterned chintz; several low wicker chairs; a rug or two. She parted still another pair of curtains in a corner to show the small electric stove, provisions and dishes of the culinary department of her home.

5

“Come and have supper with me sometime,” she invited me cordially. “I hate to eat by myself. And I’ll make you some biscuits.” Her eyes sparkled Eyes sparkling with pride , [?] she told how she herself had made the curtains for the many windows throughout the big house, of unbleached homespun, the natural creamy tones of which blended so well with the colorful chintz drapes which she had added. The windows of the room in which we sat illustrated this fact charmingly.

“They last so much longer than the cheap, ready-made ones you buy,” she said. “And I made bedspreads to match. And table covers too.

“I stained and polished the floors and chinked up some of the worst cracks in them. Then I covered them with bright linoleum rugs and if I do say it, you wouldn’t know it for the same place. “[?????],” Mrs. Brown took up the tale (1) after After I had [????????] Inside of a month and a half, I had every apartment rented. [?] When I get ahead a bit I’m going to take the back apartment on this floor for mine. I’d like to have a real place to entertain my friends again.

“And speaking of friends,” [???) she snuffed out a cigarette stub in the china ash tray, already brimming over, “I’ve met some of the loveliest people since I’ve been here. Before I moved to this town people told me: ‘Don’t you go there to 6 live. They’re the damnest, uppiest people that you’ve ever seen.’ But they surely made a mistake.

“I never knew people could be so nice. I just placed that card in the window” - [?] she waved her cigarette towards the sign which had first attracted my attention-“put a little ad

Library of Congress

in the paper, and customers started to come. I had a small dressmaking shop back home, and I do know how to sew. One person tells another, and I'm getting all the work I can do. [?] I'm trying to live entirely off my sewing, and put the apartment money back into the house. That way I'll get ahead.

“Here, take a look at my Customer Book!” Snatching a large blankbook from a table drawer, with one of the swift, sudden movements with which I was becoming familiar, she flicked over the pages, reading out names as she rapidly turned the leaves. Many of them were familiar to me, and indeed she had secured some excellent patrons in the short while in which she had been in business. Mrs. Brown was on the way to success . if I [???]. She was satisfying the right people, all right! At [?] she She suddenly stopped speaking, rose abruptly, and made several quick trips back and forth across the room. I [?] some Some memory had evidently disturbed her , (and so [refrained from speech. For a while the The silence was unbroken save for the quick, staccato rhythm of the tall heels of her shining patent leather slippers upon the bright linoleum floor.

Presently she re-seated herself, and after a moment began to 7 talk again, but in a strangely strained fashion, as if she found the subject difficult.

“Well, I told you I had a boy — Jimmy. He's sick, and the way his sickness takes him is in terrible temper fits. We had just been here about a month when he had one of his spells. He jumped on me, and I thought he was going to strangle me. Then he rushed out of the house, across the street, and broke down the man's fence opposite. Of course, it was pretty rickety anyway, or Jimmy couldn't have done it, but it goes to show that he's getting dangerous now he's growing so big and strong.

“Of course, a crowd of people gathered right away, and one of them was a doctor who lives next door.

Library of Congress

“That night I talked to Jimmy and told him how awful it would have been if he had killed his mother, and he broke down and cried like a baby. But next day the doctor came over and told me he thought Jimmy had better go to a hospital for a while.

“Oh, what a horror I had of his going to a place where I would not be able to see him. I'm awfully nervous . ” [?] she She lit another cigarette . “And I've been under a terrible strain for a long time now, what with Jimmy's father drinking the way he did, and Jimmy having these spells, and the boys teasing him and all. [?] That's the biggest reason I came up here, to get him away from those boys. They'd gather round him and tease him, and he'd most go wild he'd get so mad. [?] You know how boys are. Nasty little fiends!

“I felt I couldn't stand it if they put him some place where he'd be cruelly treated and unhappy!

8

“But when we took him up to the hospital, the buildings and grounds were so lovely, and everyone was so kind, that my horror just melted away.

“I had a nice letter from him yesterday. He said he had only had one temper spell since he got there, but he pretty nearly broke a man's nose that time. Said they took him away and made him stay by himself that night, but the next day they let him go back with the others again.” Then with With a sudden change of mood:

“How do you like this little suit I've just finished?” She held up [???] a trim tailored suit of rough tweed. “I made it out of a suit of Jimmy's. For myself.” Smiling roguishly, one caught a glimpse of what a pretty, merry girl she must have been before adversity laid its heavy hand upon her shoulder,

But trouble had not killed all her jollity of spirit ; for with a little laugh she turned to me and said, and I don't believe she meant it as a compliment:

Library of Congress

“You know, you talk just like a customer I had last week. While I was fitting her— such a lovely dress it was, too; purple taffeta, with little hoops to make it stand away, and a jade green sash— she told me a story about some people she had met at a party. She said:

'Those people sho'ly mus' ha been drunk. And you know you have to drink a lot-a bare (here her laughter trilled again, as she explained the point to me, “She called it 'bare', not 'beer'.) to get drunk. And they parked their cyah right in the gyahden.”

9

Project #-1655

Rose D. Workman

Charleston County And so the The conversation drifted on . to the tune of the clicking needles of Mrs. Redmond, sitting quiet, but attentive in her wicker chair; and to the lighting, and smoking and snubbing of many cigarettes by Mrs. Brown [??] we We came to the question of politics.

“Back home,” said she, a little boastfully, “I was a Democratic Committee Woman. But that was when I was married. Now I'm not especially interested in polities because a working woman has no right to fool away her time like that. If I had a nice income and a husband to support me, I would then take an interest in politics.”

Mrs. Brown mentioned casually that she has a “skip and miss religion.”

“Sometimes I go to church; sometimes I don't most times I don't. “You mean 'most times' you don't,” quietly put in Mrs. Redmond, breaking her silence for the first time. Mrs. Brown laughed in agreement to this statement, and continued:

Library of Congress

“For amusement? Oh, I go driving with my friends. And I like to read about people. I don't like fiction. I've no time for things that aren't true.” Here her Her friend for the second time entered into the conversation, with a sly little innuendo:

“Maybe she'd like some other kind of amusement sometimes.” [?????] I got the [point?] Mrs. Brown is still a young and good-looking woman. Naturally Perhaps she'd like to go to an occasional movie with a “gentleman friend.”

10

Quickly, with another of her roguish smiles, she answered my unspoken thought by [?]:

“I would; But I don't get the chance.”