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*presents*

H E A R T  
*to*  
H E A R T™

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*Stories*  
*for*  
*Moms*

*compiled and edited by*  
JOE L. WHEELER



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC.  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc. 1465 Kelly Johnson Blvd., Suite 320 Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Heart to heart stories for moms / compiled and edited by Joe L. Wheeler.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-8423-3603-6 (sc)

1. Mothers—Fiction. 2. Mother figures—Fiction. 3. Short stories, American. I. Wheeler, Joe L.  
PS648.M59 H43 2000 99-052555  
813'.01083520431—dc21

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Printed in the United States of America

05 04 03 02 01 00  
7 6 5 4 3 2



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BEAUTY  
FOR ASHES

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*Anna Brownell Dunaway*

*To red-haired, freckle-faced, green-eyed Bea Rainey, plainness—nay, worse than plainness!—was a curse almost impossible to endure. The last straw, however, was having to suffer through the senior class beauty contest, knowing full well she was the homeliest of all. So it was that she fled to her mother, imploring answers.*

If only Great-Aunt Lydia Fain had not wished her looks on me!” sighed Bea, thrusting hairpins into her red topknot. “Red hair, freckles, green eyes—I’ll never be killed for my beauty.” She snapped her barrette and continued plaintively:

“If I might only cover up a few defects with rouge and all that. But Daddy and Mother are so old-fashioned—there, stay down, you ugly things, you!” She gave a vicious stroke to her eyebrows. “I’d like to pluck ’em, like the girls do, every one out by the roots—”

“Bea—” It was her father’s voice at the door, following a quick knock. “Can you hurry down this morning? Your mother has one of her blinding headaches.”

“I’ll be right down, Dad,” called Bea cheerfully. She shook a small fist in the direction of the mirror. “For shame, whining about your looks with Mother sick. Just because tonight’s the senior reception and you know you’ll be a wallflower—there are the twins, at it again!”

She burst into the kitchen to find the twins engaged in a rough-and-ready tumble over the warmest place. Her father was halfheartedly putting on the teakettle. Ben was scowling over an obstinate necktie. The kitchen, bereft of Mother’s customary presence, emanated gloom.

“Cheer up!” cried Bea. “If the sun has set, it will, as someone once observed, rise again. Now, I’m going to open some peach jam and make muffins. And there’s gingerbread—”

“Hooray!” exulted Ben. “*Gingo, gingere, gingi, gimmesum.*” His scowl had vanished before a sunny smile.

The twins, who stood nearby, giggled admiringly.

“He asked for gingerbread in Latin,” marveled Belva.

Ben threw out his chin haughtily. “Latin is my middle name,” he explained with condescension. “It is my mother tongue.”

Everybody laughed. The teakettle sang. The table, laid out in its blue cloth, was inviting. From the oven came a tantalizing odor. Bea flew about with scarlet cheeks. Everyone drew up to the table merrily.

"You're your mother's own daughter, Bea," said Mr. Rainey, splitting a muffin. A look of relief had replaced his worried frown. "Do you suppose, Bea, you could run over to Aunt Sheby Buffalo's before school and get her to come and stay with Mother?"

"Of course," laughed Bea. "Aunt Sheby's heart's in the right place even if she does murder the King's English. The other day she called Mother's saliva 'saliva.' She—"

"Say, Bea," broke in Ben explosively, "I got to cram for an English exam. Can you give me a good example of enumerative inductive syllogism?"

"Let me think," murmured Bea distractedly. She was here, there, and everywhere, tying the twins' ribbons, hunting for mislaid books, wiping up milk that had been accidentally spilled. "Let me see, enumerative inductive—"

"Oh, Bea, the old cap's come off my shoestring," wailed Elvy.

"Wait, honey, I'll dip it in glue and dry it."

"My arithmetic!" cried Belva with tragic afterthought. "She gave us ten long problems; I forgot 'em. Bea, won't you work this one for me? I don't understand it."

"*Tempus does fugit*," announced Ben. "Leave it, Belva; you're out of luck. Better hurry, Bea." He grabbed his cap and was off with a rush, as usual.

"I'll have to take the car," murmured Bea. She was hastily stacking the dishes, brushing up crumbs, getting things in order. At the last possible minute she gathered her books and ran across to Aunt Sheby's.

"You hadn't ought to run that way, Child," expostulated Aunt

Sheby when Bea had stated her errand. "You look as done out as a wilted spittoonia. I 'lowed to go over to the Aid dinner at the Disposition Building. They got contention tables extributed all over it. But then, lawsy, it's no matter. It don't make me no difference. I'll run right over and look after your ma—"

"Oh, thank you, Aunt Sheby," called Bea. She was already at the gate, signaling her streetcar. It was passing, and she caught it just as the doors closed. Two girls in the seat ahead of her were talking animatedly. They were very much rouged, and their ears were hidden under elaborate earmuffs. Bea recognized them as two sophomores.

"The seniors are going to hold their class election after school. I hear Beulah Gordon is to be put up for class beauty."

"For class beauty!" Bea repeated the words to herself with a little stab of pain. She remembered that today was the senior election as well as the class reception. And Beulah Gordon was to be accorded that great honor! She pictured Beulah, pretty, graceful, flaxen haired. To be acclaimed the prettiest girl—Bea sighed.

"These elections are all cut-and-dried affairs," the voice went on. "I hear Velma Doran is slated for the wittiest girl and Anne McConnell for the most charming and Mayme Bedford for the most artistic."

"Mere sops to disappointed beauty candidates," laughed the other, "consolation prizes, as it were. Here's where we get off."

Bea followed in their wake, nodding as she passed them in the hall. In the locker room, from the other side of the tier of lockers, she heard their frank comments.

"Isn't it too bad Bea Rainey is so plain—"

"And so old-fashioned. My dear, did you ever see such long skirts? They are positively to her ankles."

The first voice replied condescendingly. "If she'd dab a little rouge on those freckles and use a lipstick—"

They moved away, giggling. Bea, like an ostrich protruding its head, emerged from her locker with tears of humiliation in her eyes. Every vestige of color had left her face, and in the semi-darkness the freckles stood out like little golden flecks of light.

"If I could only be beautiful," she sighed with a half sob. "Oh, Aunt Lydia Fain—"

"Why, there's Bea!" A merry group of girls bore down, literally surrounding her. "Say, Bea, class election's at three o'clock sharp."

Bea nodded, winking back the tears.

"And, Bea, Bob Anderson's going to bring his city cousin to the senior reception," cried Velma Doran. "Just think, an East-erner from New York!" Velma adjusted an imaginary monocle. "Think how this Midwestern burg must look to him. There goes the warning bell. Hurry, Bea, help me with this translation."

"How doth the little busy bee," broke in Anne McConnell. "Hold, minion—" she waved a haughty hand in Velma's direction—"I have a message to deliver. Bea, Mrs. Pitts wants you in the auditorium after English VIII. She needs you to take Jane's part in the chorus; seems Jane's got the mumps. And Miss Oliver wants you to referee the sophomore basketball game."

"My translation," urged Velma.

"If Latin were my long suit," declared Bea, laughing.

"Everything's your long suit," declared Velma. "It's Bea Rainey this, and it's Bea Rainey that."

"First in war," chanted the girls in jubilant chorus, "first in peace, and first in the hearts—"

The clanging of the last bell scattered them. Bea's spirits rose

subtly under their loving banter. But they fell again as she recalled the locker-room episode.

*I will not go to the class election, she said to herself with a firm little set to her chin. I'll run along home. Mother's illness is a good excuse.*

So at closing time, she donned her wraps hurriedly. Catching up her handbag, she fairly flew through the hall to avoid meeting the girls.

When she arrived home, her mother was resting easy on the lounge, Aunt Sheby in charge.

"You are home early, Little Dame Burden." Mrs. Rainey smiled.

Bea sat down soberly beside her. "Mother, why did I have to look like Aunt Lydia Fain?"

"Why, Bea—what is it?" For the tears were trickling in little rivulets down each side of Bea's nose.

"Mother, Mother—" It was out now, the burden that had suddenly grown too heavy to carry. "Mother, why did I have to look like her? Homely and freckled and gooseberry-eyed—and—with eyebrows that meet and a mouth like a catfish—"

"Aunt Lydia Fain," Mrs. Rainey broke in musingly, "once took the prize at a beauty contest. Everyone thought her beautiful. It was the beauty that shone from within. She had the oldest of beauty formulas found between the covers of an old Book—'to give unto them beauty for ashes.' And you are like her, Bea. We wouldn't trade those freckles for a king's ransom. And your eyes—they are limpid like a green sea."

"But, Mother, if you had overheard—" Bea's voice caught in her throat.

Mrs. Rainey was of the understanding kind. She guessed intuitively the hurt of careless speech. "No woman is beautiful," she said gently, "unless born so. Even then, without the soul, it is like frozen music. Anything can destroy beauty of features—illness, accident—"



Aunt Sheby Buffalo put in her head. "The cat," she imparted solemnly, "has took a fit and run up the viscera vine and fell in the system."

"She means in the cistern," gasped Bea and went into gales of laughter.

"It was a good honest cat," reproached Aunt Sheby, "as ever."

"There now, I'm over my doldrums," declared Bea. She wiped her eyes. "I'll rescue the cat and set the table. After that I don't mind donning the garments of mourning and being a wallflower at the senior reception. And when I'd decided not to go, too. But you positively can't pity yourself when you've laughed till your sides ache."

"No more you can't," agreed Aunt Sheby. "When I'm downheartedlike, whether I want to or not, I go 'round grinning like a Jessy cat."

"It's better than lipstick," averred Mrs. Rainey.

Later in her room, Bea slipped into her filmy green party gown.

"All it lacks is a train," she said whimsically. As she reached for a pin among her scattered belongings, her eyes suddenly encountered something strangely unfamiliar.

"Beulah's vanity case!" she gasped. "I must have picked it up by mistake! The very idea!" She opened it curiously, and an array of articles fell out. There was a bottle of liquid powder and a tiny box of rouge. Half guiltily, she moistened her finger with the liquid powder.

Recklessly she dashed the liquid powder on her face, and with an artistic eye rubbed some of the rouge into her cheeks, her lips, the lobes of her ears. She looked older, insincere. Bea could not imagine that artificial person laughing at the antics of a cat.

"Bea—" it was her father's voice from the hall below—"some girls are here for you. Are you ready?"

"Ye-es, Father," she called and took a long, searching look in

the mirror. Above it, Aunt Lydia's pictured face seemed to gaze down in gentle reproof. Bea rushed into the bathroom and began scrubbing and splashing. With a laugh of relief, she caught up her coat and ran downstairs.

"Bea Rainey! The idea of your staying away from class election! But it didn't do you any good. You were elected the best all-around senior in Central High. Unanimously. And a reporter from the *News* is coming out to take a picture of you."

"Of *me!*" stammered Bea.

"Can you feature that?" exploded Ben.

Bea, glancing back as they danced out, saw him bumping the twins' heads together in an excess of delight. She had a composite picture of her father's proud smile, her mother's eyes, and Aunt Sheby's important air.

The reception was in full swing when they entered. Bea found herself presently ladling out fruit punch to thirsty friends. Between whiles, behind a huge palm, she tried to look with cheerful animation at the fairylike scene.

"Did you see Bea Rainey in that green gown?" The words drifted to her. Bea ducked her head quickly. "I saw her serving punch," the voice went on. "Do you know, I never knew anyone who could carry off red hair and freckles as Bea does. She is positively pretty."

They moved away. Bea's eyes followed them. "Can you—'feature' that!" she mused.

"Are you too busy to serve some more punch?" inquired a voice at her elbow.

Bea started. The immaculate youth before her was none other than the fabled New York cousin. She cheerfully extended him a cooling drink.

“Oh, no,” she offered calmly. “I am only walking a slack rope across Niagara Falls.”

The youth laughed, and Bea laughed, too.

“I’m Jimmy Boyd,” he said. “Do you mind my saying that I didn’t know there was a girl like you left? I see plenty like them—” he flipped a thumb in the direction of the games—“but you—and Mother. She’s—well, you know, sort of old-fashioned. Mother says I’ve been looking for your sort in the wrong places. That they’d be bending over cots in hospitals, paring potatoes, and—and—”

“Blooming as wallflowers,” supplied Bea.

Jimmy Boyd laughed.

“A fellow gets sort of fed up on the other kind,” he said and drained his fifth cup.

Several hours later, Bea blew a kiss in the direction of Aunt Lydia Fain’s portrait. “So much,” she whispered jubilantly, “for our fatal gift of beauty. You win, Aunt Lydia, even if your formula is as old as Holy Writ.”



One of the most frustrating aspects of story anthologizing is that you fall in love with a writer, often on the basis of only a story or two, then discover that virtually everything else that person ever wrote has apparently disappeared from the face of the earth. In my case, this has been true with Anna Brownell Dunaway; other than three short stories and one book, I have met with a solid wall. Other than learning that she also wrote greeting-card messages prolifically, I have met with just as solid a wall there too. But I shall not give up! This has long been one of my all-time favorite stories. Aunt Sheby’s malapropisms alone make the story a classic!