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# A Changed Sequel

By DOROTHY BAIRD

"THE Editor will be pleased to consider a short story about two thousand words in length. It should be brightly written and end happily."

Mabel Lorimer put the note beside her plate and sighed. It was a ray of hope in a very sad world. She would get three guineas at least for the story when it was written, and three guineas would buy ever so many things for the invalid in the next room. Already her busy brain was working out to a fraction what was to be spent on food and what on comforts.

But the story had to be written first, and therein lay the rub. She did not find it easy to write, cooped up in this dim little lodging, which looked out upon a most depressing vista of smoky chimneys and murky sky. It had been so different in the old days. Thoughts had flowed freely to the accompaniment of the surge of the distant breakers and the sigh of the wind in the pines behind the house. When she grew tired of writing, and wanted rest for brain and eyes, a moment spent at the window, looking out over fresh green turf to the sea beyond, would always send her back to her work with mind refreshed and vigorous.

There had been no need for her to write in those days. She had done it for pure love of writing; all the money she earned had gone in helping the fisher-folk in the village. Then, when the crash came, and she lost father and fortune at one blow, and when her invalid mother became practically dependent upon her, the gift seemed to desert her. Her writing grew monotonous, there was no point or brilliancy about it, and she was not surprised that all her MSS. came back. It would be the same with the story she had to write to-day.

She rose and went to the window. An April sky, blue and white and grey, showed dimly through the smoke, and roofs and chimney stacks dripped from a recent shower. Was it only a year ago since last April? It seemed centuries—aeons away.

Only last April she had been bridesmaid to Averil Moore, the Squire's daughter, and she had been so happy, so excited over the event, so disappointed that the day proved showery.

But later in the afternoon the rain had cleared away, and Mabel went out into the garden. It was hot and stuffy in the house where the guests were jostling one another round the tea-tables and the costly array of presents, but outside all was sweet and fresh and pure with the scent of newly-wetted earth and the coolness after rain.

And then Hugh Solway had found her, and they had walked together up and down the path between the golden crocus borders. And the glory of the afternoon entered into his soul and made him say many things which he had not meant to say. He had not meant to say them because he was only a poor journalist, and could hardly hope to be in a position to marry for many years to come. As it was, he did not say that he loved her in so many words, but he simply told her of his appointment as War Correspondent to the "Observer," and asked her if, should he be spared to come home, he should find her still at the old house by the pines.

There was no mistaking his meaning, and Mabel raised her eyes to his.

"Yes," she said simply.

"I may reckon on it?"

"You may reckon on it."

That was all, but their hands met in a long clasp that seemed to seal them to one another, and the sunlight on sea and rain-drops and golden crocuses took a richer radiance for them both.

A month later her own trouble came, and she had to leave the house by the pines for good. Hugh Solway was lost to her. Should he go to her old home he would find no trace of her, for they had wandered a good deal since they left, sinking lower and lower in poverty, and no one in the village knew their whereabouts. Her pride would not permit her to communicate with him through the office of the "Observer."

He might only have been amusing himself with her; she hardly believed it possible, but there was the chance, and she would not risk lowering her dignity.

Well, it was no good thinking of the past; it was only saddening. With a long-drawn quivering sigh she turned away from the window and fetched her writing materials. For a long time she sat with her face buried in her hands, thinking—searching through her brain for a subject about which to write. But nothing would come save the memory of that April afternoon, and the sunlight on the crocuses and in the eyes of the man she would never see again. No effort would beat it from her mind, it seemed to throb through her whole being to the exclusion of all else.

Suddenly an idea flashed across her, an idea which filled her with dismay. There was her own life-story, why not write that? She could put her whole heart into it, and it would be instinct with life and force—perhaps it would fetch more than three guineas. Bitter as the thought was to her, she knew it to be the only way. She must not allow her own feelings to stand in the way of her mother's comforts—nay, necessities.

By night the story was written. She had shed many tears over it, but she knew it was good, and she signed her nom-de-plume with a feeling of pride.

"I could not make it end happily," she wrote to the Editor. "A story, if it is worth anything, comes to an inevitable conclusion, and we writers cannot alter it."

SHE expected an answer almost by return. The "News-Letter" was prompt in dealing with MSS. and making payment, but two days dragged wearily by without bringing the familiar blue envelope. On the evening of the second day the little maid-of-all-work came up to her with an unusual air of importance.

"It's a gent wantin' to see you, Miss," she announced. "Says he comes from the 'News-Letter' or some sich nime."

Mabel looked up in surprise—such a thing had never happened before.

"Show him up," she said.

Feverishly she arranged some of her papers which were strewn upon the table. With beating heart she listened to the manly step struggling with the intricacies of the ill-lighted stairway under the little maid's slipshod guidance. Then the door opened and she lifted her eyes.

For a time they faced one another without speaking, then with a quick movement the newcomer closed the door on the gaping little servant, and strode across the room.

"At last," he said. "At last." And taking Mabel's listless hand, he drew her towards him and folded her in his arms.

There were some yellow crocuses in his coat, and presently Mabel stroked them lovingly.

"I went there two days ago," he said, "and found my bridesmaid gone."

She laughed from sheer happiness.

"How did you find me?" she asked.

For answer he put his hand in his pocket and drew a long, familiar envelope.

"I have just joined the staff of the 'News-Letter,'" he said. "This was almost the first MSS. that came under my notice. I knew there was only one person who could describe the crocus-bordered path beside the sleeping sea, where the bridesmaid and the journalist clasped hands in mutual understanding."

Again a silence fell between them.

"It was hard to write it," said Mabel at last. "But I wanted the money so badly, and I could think of nothing else. I am glad now," she added with a smile.

"But I think you must consider it 'returned with thanks'—the ending will have to be different," he said.

For answer she tore the MSS. in two. "We will keep these memories to ourselves," she said. "I will write another story for the world."

And the tale she wrote was the best that had ever come from her pen. For with her happiness, her talent returned with redoubled force and power.

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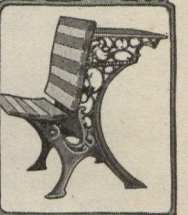


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