

His Easter Gift

Written for the
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By S. JEAN WALKER.

WONDER if it is because to-day is Good Friday that my sketch, which I had planned to be humorous, should be serious and develop into a sermon in spite of all my efforts to the contrary? Am I tired, homesick, despondent, or is it—?”

She was interrupted in her soliloquy by a servant with a message that Mr. Fordyce was in the parlor, and would she “spare him a few minutes of her time.”

Her face brightened perceptibly when she heard this, for his conversation always rested and cheered her. It was to him that she owed much of her success as a writer. Over two years ago she had come to the city poor and friendless, and offered some of her literary wares to the magazine of which he was editor. He saw by the writings submitted for his criticism that she had wonderful literary ability, and from his conversation with her later, that she did not realize what gifted powers she possessed. He assumed a protective care over her from the first. It was rather unprecedented that he should, yet he became her friend, counsellor and guide. He criticized her work, directed and stimulated her energies, until he became so essential to her that she rested contentedly in his great, strong friendship, and was surely attaining a high place in the line of successful authorship. He seemed by some strange intuition to have a key to her character, to understand every varying mood and deal correctly with each one as it came.

As she entered the parlor of her boarding-house he observed the half sad look in her brown eyes, that were always a true index of her feelings; yet she welcomed him pleasantly, saying as she sat down in the chair he moved forward for her: “Have you called to tell me to write no more for your magazine or to suggest some new line of work? I warn you, I am in a very contradictory mood to-day.”

“I called for neither of those reasons, and am not afraid of your warning,” he replied, with an inscrutable smile. Then asked, “What are you writing now?”

“A magazine article which I intended should be humorous, but it will not arrange itself satisfactorily. It is developing into a sermon, so I am quite annoyed with it.”

“Don’t be,” he said, soothingly. “Let it be a sermon. It may be a message you have to give, or a lesson you have to teach.”

“Your old theory again. You make writers have a heavy responsibility,” she said, half irritably.

“I would certainly have them believe so, then write accordingly,” he said thoughtfully, yet amused by her slight petulance. “But I did not call to talk about magazine articles, nor yet on a writer’s responsibility. Are you not curious to know my errand?”

“I am, indeed. Yet it must be something pleasant, for I have never had a disagreeable visit from you,” she frankly replied.

“Thank you,” he answered gravely. “Your kindness gives me courage.” Then with his

characteristic straightforwardness said: “I came to ask you to be my wife.”

“Your wife?” she echoed. “I could never be that.”

She had risen in her excitement, and now sat down again wearily, as if the whole matter were disposed of and nothing more need be said.

“I think you could, if you care for me,” he said persuasively. “Do you, Marjorie? I feel assured we would be very happy together, for I love you dearly. You are the only woman I have ever wished to make my wife.”

As he spoke, the eager, tender pleading of his voice seemed to vibrate through her being, touching the very inner recesses of her heart. She was mute with astonishment. This grand, intellectual giant, this man of world-wide reputation asking for her love. Surely it was an exaggerated dream. No, there he sat with the intensity of his love, the earnest desire of his life changing his whole aspect.

He came closer to her, but did not touch her. She was not his yet, and was too sacred in his eyes to be touched with the faintest degree of familiarity. “You are confused. I have been too sudden. You were not prepared for the transition of my friendship into love. I shall give you until Monday to consider your answer.” He bent above her until his lips touched her hair, no more, then whispered low, “God grant, dear, it may be favorable.”

She did no magazine work that day, nor yet on the following one. Her mind was in a most chaotic state. She endeavored to reason calmly with her heart, reflecting on the past and all he had been to her, then trying to realize what her future would be without his counsel and protection. Then, as if summing up the whole, said wearily: “I cannot do without his friendship, yet I dare not become his wife and give him only that, for he is worthy the best love of a woman’s heart. I wish I could more fully understand him, and myself too. What is it I want, I wonder.”

She was early at church on Sunday morning, and sitting there she recollected that Mr. Fordyce had told her a few weeks before that his mother had promised to visit him at Easter. He had said nothing about it on Friday, but then another thought was engrossing his mind. She hoped his mother would be with him to-day, for then he would not walk home with her as usual. Somehow she did not care to meet him with the restraint of his unanswered question between them. Presently, as if in answer to her thoughts, she saw him enter the church with his aged mother on his arm, whom he guided to a pew with gentle, chivalrous devotion; then deftly assisted her to remove some outer wrap, his whole bearing indicating the most devoted love and honor.

Marjorie watched him with a tender glow in her eyes, in a way she had never dreamed of doing before, and breathed low her thoughts: “My loving, tender-hearted genius, you are not all intellect. My brave, true knight, I have no fear now.”

A few of the violets he had sent her the previous evening were fastened on her coat. She looked down at them and whispered, as if they were his messengers, a faint, glad “Yes.”

A peaceful, satisfying calm replaced the vague restlessness that had troubled her, and she felt her heart thrill with hope and joy.

As she listened to the beautiful, expressive Easter service, her soul rose with thanksgiving to the risen Christ for the blessing that had come into her life.

After the service she sought to hurry home to muse over the wonderful revelation that had come to her, but many friends and acquaintances detained her with words of kind greeting. When at length she reached the steps she saw Mr. Fordyce assisting his mother to his carriage, then arranging her to his entire satisfaction, he whispered something which caused a smile of loving sympathy in answer. He bade the coachman drive on, then he came directly to the side of the woman he loved so well. He greeted her with his same old friendliness of manner, while his eyes noted the violets on her coat and considered it a good omen. A sudden impulse prompted her to give him his answer, yet at the thought of it she felt a shy restraint creeping over her, and knew that she would have to tell him at once or very soon she would be unable to do so at all.

“Mr. Fordyce,” she said very timidly, “you know you gave me until Monday to answer you.”

“Yes, but it is not Monday yet,” he said, gently looking down at her with a world of love in his eyes.

“I am ready to tell you now, and I always like to get through with a duty as soon as I can.” A wild fear took possession of him. Her answer would not be a favorable one, and he dimly felt how barren his life would be without this fair, winsome woman, who had crept unknowingly to herself into his great loving heart, and built there a throne on which she would reign forever.

Her voice seemed to come to him from a distance as she said: “The answer came to me like a revelation this morning. It was your tender, reverential, loving care of your mother that took the veil from my eyes. Oh, help me say it.” She looked at him pleadingly. He had helped her often before, why could he not now? His very silence urged her on. “I—love—you with all my heart.”

Easter Sunday morning on a crowded street was a strange place for such a declaration, but love has ever laughed at obstacles and found way to surmount them, and will to the end of time.

His answer was like a prayer, benediction and *Te Deum* gloriously blended and mingled into one. “God bless you, my brave, womanly darling. I thank Him I have won you, my precious Easter gift.”

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The Pioneer.

His chest and arms are hairy, his hands are brown and rough,
His countenance is rugged, his muscles large and tough.
His home is in the clearing, which he himself has made
By hewing, burning, digging; the price of all full paid
In honest thought and labor in winter rain and snow,
And scorching summer noontide with axe and saw and hoe.

He who fells the giant Douglas while he sweats from every pore;
He who turns the virgin furrow where no man has ploughed before;

He who reaps the golden grain
Where the elk and moose have lain
He it is who adds to empire, by the grace of one loaf more.
L. R. FITZ G. C.