

Our Second Prize Story.

Mabel Bethune;

OR,

THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE.

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"COME, Fred," said Harry Nobleton to his companion, "this is Maying Day. Ho, for the woods!"

They were soon wending their way across the meadow and into the lane which led to the old and familiar path that meandered through the flowery wood. They hoped to join the young people who had set out before them, but they were out of sight and sound. Fred proposed going to a beautiful little lake, which lay a short distance to their left and spend their time fishing (they had fishing tackle with them) till the picnic party returned. As they moved off they heard a very sweet voice in the direction of the woods addressing some one in a pleading but reproving tone. "Meredith I cannot. Why will you grieve me by your persistence, when you know my reason for not linking my fate to yours is just? I thought you were gone or I would not have come here to-day. You told me last evening you intended leaving for Europe this morning."

"That was my intention."

"What then brought you here?"

"I could not go without again visiting this loved haunt where we wandered so often in childhood."

"Do not speak of childhood's happy hours. I wish you were as fetterless now as in those days. Alas! how you have changed since you left your country home for the city. You have learned to trifle with one of Satan's worst devices—intoxicating liquor—fair Canada's black plague. Is there no arm to protect, hand to guide, or eye to watch over the young and innocent who enter our cities? Temptation assails them at every step, clothed in glittering garments underneath which is concealed a death dagger. Meredith, I warned you before you went, so leave me to cast your memory into oblivion. If you truly love me you will not wish me to become the wife of one who will certainly become a drunkard unless he speedily reforms."

"You bid me go! Well, I'll go. But promise me you will meet me here three years from to-day. God helping me I shall return a hater of the accursed cup."

"I'll come, Meredith."

"Good-bye, Mabel; may you be true!" was quickly uttered and Meredith was gone.

Harry and Fred forgot their fishing as they half reluctantly listened to Meredith and Mabel. They saw Meredith go away and walked on. Mabel heard footsteps and drew into the shade that she might not be observed. After they had passed she stole back to her home.

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In the sitting-room of a large hotel in London, Meredith Bethune sat nervously turning the pages of the *Toronto Globe*. He looked pale and haggard. He was having some conflict between right and wrong. What was it? Thirst for liquor and love for the girl in Ontario. Which shall gain the mastery? His motive in boarding at an hotel was to come face to face with the enemy and to bravely withstand every temptation. The poor fellow was too weak to combat such a powerful foe and was completely overcome a few days ago and lost to self and all surroundings in a debauch. There was a

fitful glare in his sunken eyes, and his countenance was sad and anxious. He was conscious of his fall. A sudden light came into his eyes as he walked across the room, laid the paper down, took up his hat and went out. He determined to get another boarding place and try again to conquer his evil habit. He found a home with a happy Christian family which proved to be a great blessing to him. He grew strong under their protecting influence. He realized that it must be total abstinence or complete failure. He sighed and prayed that our land might be legislated free from the blighting scourge. May he never fall again, but ever be strong in the strength which God supplies!

He returned to Ontario. His three years of self-banishment were over. He had been firm to his resolve that "though the cup should be pressed to his lips not a drop should pass the portal."

The following morning he expected to meet Mabel in the woods where he said Good-bye. He had heard through friends that she was still at home. The sole echoes of his heart seemed to be "will she be there? will she be there?" This was to be her token of faithfulness.

He wandered to the dear old scenes of his sunny boyhood. Almost before he was aware he was nearing Mabel's home and in the act of mounting the broad stone steps, which led up to the entrance of that stately residence, that he might perchance catch a glimpse of the fairy form within, when he heard approaching voices in the hall. He stepped quickly aside and as a number of persons passed out and down he recognized one to be Mabel. She was robed in pure white artistically wreathed with beautiful flowers. Flowers encircled her fair brow, which made her look fairer and more beautiful than ever.

Meredith's heart sank within him as he beheld her so full of grace and beauty. Can it be, thought he, that some one is claiming her on the very eve of our promised meeting?

No, Meredith; you are wrong. The "Twin Sisters" is to be performed to-morrow evening. Mabel has been chosen Queen and is going to the rehearsal in company with her father and some friends. How Meredith longed to step forward and speak to her and tell her all! But no, not yet.

Mabel did not forget her promise. She rose early next morning. Meredith rose earlier and was first to reach the appointed place of meeting. He saw her coming down the lane and took a position where he would not be observed. She reached the trysting place, glanced around as if to see Meredith, but no, no. She sat down, her eyes resting on the grass and flowers about her feet. Tears welled into her eyes making themselves visible on her lashes. She sighed half regretfully and wished she had not sent him away, but persuaded him to stay where she could have helped to guard him from evil. Those relentless words had gone forth and she feels she must bear the consequences. "Love is woman's existence, deprived of which, life would be a burden." Mabel realized the truth of these words as they fitted through her mind.

Meredith saw all. Mabel was suddenly aroused from her reverie by a hand being gently laid upon her shoulder, and a voice saying, "Mabel, why, Mabel, I have come, though you were inclined to doubt me." With joyful surprise Mabel started to her feet. It is unnecessary to describe their happy meeting, but we know a promise was fulfilled.

The next May they were married amid the congratulations of many friends, and Mabel Lathorn went to be Queen of his opulent home in Ontario. Their smile was courted by all who knew them. Friends gathered around them and prosperity made them more prosperous.

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A change came. They had been married but five short years, when Mabel saw the clouds of sorrow gathering. Meredith was growing cold and indifferent toward her. Was their sun of happiness to set so soon? Yes it was slowly sinking, sinking. Was there no help at hand? His outside engagements were becoming so numerous that he left his home nearly every evening at an early hour and did not return till the night was far spent. When she entreated him to remain with her, or asked him where he was going he would answer her so impatiently. One night she determined to go in search of him and found him, to her horror, in a gambling saloon, half-intoxicated. "Am I yet to become a drunkard's wife?" she cried. "Oh, God save him!"

Poor Mabel was overcome with grief at the sight, and the sickening thought of the future that loomed up before her. She entreated him, for the sake of his children, if he no longer regarded her, to come home and go to Satan's ante-rooms no more. He arose and with closed hand struck his once adored wife, and ordered her to go home. Was it Meredith who dealt the cruel blow? No, but the demon who lurked within, who can cause men to sever their dearest earthly ties.

She returned to her beautiful home which she saw decaying at the very foundation. The light was going out, and life proving a mirage. The hand of cruelty had been laid on her by the dearest one on earth.

The years passed on, and in a broken-down looking house in one of our cities Meredith Bethune's family were in a state of extreme poverty. It was winter. The cold coming through the crevices intensified the misery of their wretched home. What a change! Mabel arose from a low ricketty chair, on which she had been sitting for a long time, her head lowered with grief, her face buried in her hands, and walked to the window. As she stood peering through the drifting and falling snow into the distance and shivering with cold, her temples throbbing from hunger and grief she exclaimed in a frenzy of despair, "will he come home to-night, or will he stay away?"

The little ones were fast asleep. Mabel looked at them and thanked God there was such a thing to silence the cries of hunger in the absence of food.

The shades of night fell thick around yet, Meredith did not return. Mabel, weary with watching and weeping, closed the blinds, threw herself on her miserable excuse of a bed and soon became unconscious of her grief as in dreams she wandered through many scenes of her youthful days. Let her rest, for the hope and joy of her heart have been extinguished and return only in dreams.

She was always an affectionate wife. She loved her home and was there content to remain, her chief ambition being to make home the most attractive spot on earth and her family the happiest of families. In return she received cruelty and injustice at the hands of the one who vowed before God and man to cherish and protect her.

Mabel was aroused from her sleep by a knock at the door. And what should meet her gaze but her husband's bleeding body borne home by strangers. Her eyes grew sightless, her head swam and she sank upon the floor senseless.

When consciousness returned she learned that as Meredith was leaving a saloon, intoxicated, he fell down several steps upon the ice-covered pavement, and received injuries, from which there was slight hope of his recovery.

Mabel sent for her father, who came and took them to his home and cared for them. Everything possible was done for Meredith's recovery.

But he was gradually slipping away from earth in spite of all human skill. His last words were, "Oh! Mabel, forgive me all, and train our little ones to hate the thing which has caused my sun to set so soon." He was buried in the beautiful shade where Mabel consented to be his wife.

To look upon this picture of blighted hopes and woe could not fail to touch the chords of pity in every truly manly heart, and cause him to vow never to make an aching heart by touching intoxicating liquors. Then they would take up the avenging sword and march through this broad Dominion crying "Down with the liquor traffic! Down with the traitor, King Alcohol! Dethrone him, banish him, even slay him!" Then happiness, peace and prosperity shall encircle and cover this promising land.