

Blossom's Little Pal

By Ethel Barrington

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When John Blossom became blind the mainspring of his life was snapped. Embittered and sensitive, he shunned companionship, his small anxiety sufficing for a cheap lodging and meals at a neighboring restaurant. It was terrible beyond expression to be blind, to be dragged back to life when the fever had so denuded him. Existence was barren, useless, hopeless, and when he prayed it was for death.

One day, tripping as he climbed the stairs, he felt the help of baby hands. "You counted wrong," reproved a childish voice, "I did't ever night in the dark."

"What's your name?" he demanded shortly.

"Dora. Who's you?"

"John Blossom."

"Pretty name. Bend down." Then whispering in his ear, "I shall call you Blossom," she scampered away, singing back mischievously, "Blossom—B-l-o-s-s-o-m."

It was a week before they met again. The man's mood was desperate. "You are frownin' awful, Blossom," piped the shrill voice, "but you can't frighten me."

"If you are not scared come and talk to me a bit."

"Muvver don't low me in lodgers' rooms." Blossom felt the rebuff, and, reaching the top door, stumbled into his room and slammed the door. Seated on his cot he clinched his hands in the agony of his helplessness.

"Come," he cried sharply in answer to a timid rap, whereat some one entered, whom he could not recognize.

"What is it?" he half shouted, his nerves strained to the point of frenzy.

"Just me, Blossom. Muvver says you is axceptions." Then in the silence the child's eyes roved over the room and lighted on the table littered with papers. "Does you write?" Her tone be-ckoned interest. Blossom's hands moved aimlessly. "Write, write? That's precisely what I can't do, curse it!"

There before him lay the work begun in pride and hope, now shattered by a darkness worse than death. He was recalled to the present by the pressure of small arms resting on his knees as the child looked up into his despairing face.

"Poor dear!" she sympathized in an old-fashioned manner.

"It's dark, Dora—never any light. That's why I cannot write." His voice broke with a half sob.

"I'm dreadful sorry. Let me do it for you. I print now, and I learn fast. See if I don't." She tossed the papers aside and climbed into a chair, sucking loudly at the pencil to make it black.

"What will we write, Blossom?" Receiving no answer, she looked up. Her companion's head was pillowed on his arms. His shoulders heaved. Could a man cry even as she sometimes did? Dora scrambled to her feet and hurried from the room, to return a few minutes later flushed and breathless.

"Here's Miss Arabella!" she cried, thrusting a doll into the man's hands.

"When I get cryin' I just hold her tight. She comforts lots. Muvver's callin' her Arabella close, Blossom."

The doll became the first link in a strange friendship, which grew with years. For the child's amusement Blossom brought wonderful tales out of the storehouse of his imagination, frequently in verse that he strung together during wakeful hours of the night. Dora listened and remembered. As she had said, she learned fast. She was barely twelve when she recalled her promise. "I write truly now. Tell me what to write."

Blossom smiled sadly, declaring the desire dead, but she insisted and coaxed until he yielded, repeating some of the phrases that haunted him, and the dormant passion revived. It was new birth to the man, and the girl became his eyes, as the gift that had been smothered in darkness and uncertainty suddenly developed, and the poet came into his own. In time "our poetry," as Dora called it, verses with exquisite rhythm, in round childish chirography, found their way into editors' hands and caused comment.

So the years passed, and Blossom counted each anniversary as it came. "Fifteen today," he said on one occasion, sighing heavily. "I wish so I could see you once—just once."

Dora raised her head from copying; it was unusual for Blossom to chat before the dictation was completed. "How do you look?" continued the blind man, directing his sightless gaze toward her.

"Whose decision shall I render?" Dora laughed deliciously. "Mother says a 'big girl,' Aunt Helen 'gawky,' but Tom insists 'pretty.'"

"Of course Tom is right. Well, here is my remembrance." Fumbling in his pocket, he brought out a little case, disclosing a gold locket with a diamond set in its heart shade.

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"Oh, Blossom, how lovely! But what extravagance. You can't afford it."

"You mistake. I have more money than I need, little pal."

The girl slipped the slender chain about her neck and gave the clasp into his hands; then as he clumsily fitted it together she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. His pulses throbbed riotously at the warm touch of her lips, and he hardly dared trust himself to kiss her in return.

Strangely enough, it was the last caress she offered. From that birthday she seemed to leave childhood behind, and the man suffered in the change. He grew to dread the succeeding years. His pal was growing into womanhood, and so farther away from him. He could have lived luxuriously had he desired, but he clung to the old lodging. Critics and public alike acknowledged his genius, yet the whole world was bound up in Dora to the blind author.

Dora, whose voice was as music, whose step he could distinguish in a million. He encouraged her to talk about her friends, her ambitions, and—yes, he made her tell him about Tom, too—Tom, who had grown to be a man and on whom Dora's mother looked with favor.

"I must be going now," said Dora, after a fruitless afternoon, Blossom having been unable to settle to the task.

"Tom coming?"

"Yes." Her voice was a little tired. Blossom noticed it.

"You have not quarrelled?"

"Tom never will. Blossom, do you want me to marry Tom?"

"Marry! It's beautiful when young people love enough for that. But your mother were better consulted. I am only an old bachelor."

"You are my pal," persisted the girl impatiently. "Mother married young. She thinks I should, but—I don't want to be hurried."

"Quite right," began Blossom quickly. Then, pulling himself together, "Tom's a nice boy. He will make a good husband."

"He is all you say. I suppose I shall take him. Blossom, I know he is going to ask me tonight." The girl hung over the back of her friend's chair, but it was a pity he could not see the look in her eyes. Blossom gripped the arm rests as if for support.

"God bless you both, little pal," he said steadily. "I know you will be a good wife. Tom's a lucky fellow."

"You think I had better take him—You wish me to?" The girl bent still closer; her hair brushed his forehead.

"I wish—only your happiness."

"Dora! Dora!" It was her mother calling. Dora moved hesitatingly toward the door. "We will always be pals—always just the same?"

Blossom lifted his head. "Always," he promised. "Don't think about me. You love Tom."

"I love Tom—yes!" Then the door closed, and Blossom sank back in his chair. Misery showed livid in his face and stooping shoulders. Dora loved Tom! It had come at last. It seemed as if this second loss were greater, more terrible than that of his sight. He was doubly bereft. He had promised the girl they would remain pals, but new ties, new duties would arise; the old must be laid aside; he must school himself to be alone. The sweat broke on his forehead as he clinched his hands; then with a groan he folded his arms on his knees and hid his face. He crouched motionless, taking no notice of the passage of time.

Softly, timidly, some one touched him on the shoulders. The man thrilled; his soul leaped out to meet that other self. Passionately his arms opened and claimed the girlish figure of his pal. He felt her throbbing in response, the trembling of her hands as she clung to him.

"Blossom—Blossom, speak to me!" she whispered. "Tell me you love me."

"Love you? With all my being! Dora, who is there in all the world like you?"

"Why did you make me suffer—why did you make me speak?" she questioned, half sobbingly.

"I thought it was Tom!"

"I love Tom—as a brother." She clung still closer. "Men are so stupid."

"But, child, I fear I do you wrong. I'm growing old; I'm always helpless, blind!"

"I love you, only you. Blossom, just pretend I am Miss Arabella and—hold me close; it comforts—lots."

And Blossom, stooping, kissed her on the mouth.

A Bug Six Inches In Length.

The island of Dominica is the home and natural habitat of the hercules beetle (Dynastes hercules), the very largest known species of the coleoptera or beetle family. Full grown specimens of this gigantic representative of the hard winged bug family average six inches in length from the tip of their pinchers to the termination of the wing covers. It has a long, black horn growing out of a head which is even darker than the horn itself. On its lower surface the horn is covered with a thick setting of gold colored bristles, which the entomologists say are used by the insect in capturing its prey. Another and shorter but more powerful horn grows out from beneath, the two forming a powerful pair of pinchers. The creature has six powerful legs, each armed with claws. The elytra or wing covers are of a dapple gray color and the under parts of the body black. Taken all together, it is a formidable creature, with strength sufficient to catch and hold a bird of the size of the English sparrow.

Why They Wear Hats.

History does not tell, so far as we know, how it came about that members of the English parliament wear their hats. The custom has descended from an age when its proceedings were not recorded, but one may suspect that thereby hangs a tale of sturdy and victorious revolt against privilege, such as broke out at Versailles, could it be recovered. Now and again we find antique allusions to the practice. When the commons voted that every one should "uncover or stir or move his hat" when the speaker expressed the thanks of the house for any service done by a member Lord Falkland "stretched both his arms out and clasped his hands together on the crown of his hat and held it down close to his head, that all might see how odious that fattery was to him."—London Chronicle.

Can You Count a Billion?

The following remarkable calculation on the length of time which it would take a person to count 1,000,000,000 appeared in the English Mathematician: What is a billion? The reply is simple. In England a billion is a million times a million. This is quickly written and quicker still pronounced, but no man is able to count it. You will count 100 or 170 a minute, but let us suppose that you go up as high as 200 a minute, hour after hour. At that rate you would count 12,000 an hour, 288,000 a day or 105,120,000 in a year. Let us suppose now that Adam, at the beginning of his existence, had begun to count, had continued to do so and was counting still. Had such a thing been possible he would not yet have finished the task of counting a billion. To count a billion would require a person to count 200 a minute for a period of 9,512 years 542 days 5 hours 20 minutes, provided that he should count continuously. But suppose we allow the counter twelve hours daily for rest, eating and sleeping. Then he would need 18,025 years 319 days 10 hours 45 minutes in which to complete the task.

Derivation of Phrases.

Next to Shakespeare we draw most profusely from the Bible for terse expressions, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes furnishing the larger proportion from the Old Testament and St. Paul's epistles from the New. Milton, though far behind these two great sources of English speech, gives us more familiar expressions than any other writer after them. From him we have learned to speak of "a dim religious light," of "grim death," "a heaven on earth" and "sanctity of reason," of "adding fuel to the flames," of "tempering justice with mercy," of the "busy hum of men," "the light fantastic toe" (that boon to provincial reporters) and the "neat handed Phyllis." Chaucer, though rich in material for quotation, has given us no pithy phrases, but from Spenser, who sang of him as the "well of English underfied," we get "nor rhyme nor reason," "by hook or crook," "sweet attractive grace" and "through thick and thin."—Chambers' Journal.

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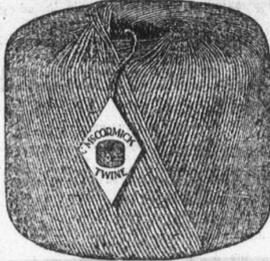
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\$1,000,000 on the 1st July 1926,
\$1,000,000 on the 1st July, 1936,

with coupons attached for interest at the rate of 3 1/2 per cent per annum payable half yearly on the 1st January and the 1st July in each year at the office of the Provincial Treasurer, Toronto. Bonds will be of the denominations of \$200, \$500, and \$1,000, and will be payable to bearer but on request will be registered in the office of the Provincial Treasurer and endorsed as payable only to the order of certain persons or corporations, and on request of holders may be exchanged for Ontario Government Stock bearing the same rate of interest.

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