

. . . A lady charmingly tells about her adventures with the writing bug . . .



... THE PEN and I

by ANNIE RATCLIFFE

FROM A LITTLE ALCOVE in my room, I gazed in rapture at the wonderful drama unfolding before me, so rare to human eyes. One could see that Mother Nature was in her best humor. The blue sky, with its spotless clouds lazily floating by, afforded wonderful backdrop to the objects below. The lawn was carpeted with the greenest and lustiest bermuda grass while the roses, the dahlias, and the african daisies bordering it were displaying proudly their varicolored buds and full-bloom flowers. Gay butterflies, big and small, hovered here and there. In the middle of the lawn, my eyes fell on a fish pond populated by water-lilies shyly baring their beauties to the world. A ripple now and then would playfully disturb the mirror-like water in its tranquil rest. In a nearby guava tree, an oriole chirped melodiously. The cool, soft breeze, as it danced through the garden and off to far-off places, sang with the rippling river as they both joined the vast blue sea. There was music in the air and poetry everywhere. But I was not a composer and neither was I a poet. So I sat there, oblivious of the time and the wonderful book that lay unopened by my side. Here was the power that inspired most men to do deeds of valor. What a pity to see it wasted before me. As I pondered over this, an inspiration took hold of me. It sent my blood pulsating through my veins and brought a warm flush to my cheeks. I could feel my spine tingling with excitement in anticipation of what I was about to do.

Why not, I thought. I heard a friend once say that writers are not born. They're made. A little pluck, a little imagination, a little humor, was all that was needed to write a story. In my exhilarated state of mind, I thought writing a book was just a cinch. Visions of fame

as a great authoress floated through my mind that, in no time at all, I found myself shakily holding a piece of paper and a pen. With my face towards the inspiration, I began to assemble my wildly scattered thoughts. Now, what am I going to write, I asked myself. A novel, a fiction, an autobiography, a detective story perhaps or a romantic one? Then, wouldn't it be much more interesting to write about one's own life story; one's own faults or secret dreams? So I began to scribble what was fairly a story of my past. In the midst of my reminiscing, I stopped abruptly as if jolted to reality. I didn't want the whole world to know that I was once such a naughty, stupid little girl. It might cast a dark light on my person and thus shatter all my hopes of becoming an authoress. But on second thought, wouldn't it be quite an achievement for one to become a great author from such a very poor past? People simply adore those who grow from rags to riches although in my case it was from sheer stupidity to becoming a near genius. But I found writing my past a very uninteresting task so that, with the crumpling of papers on which I had written some paragraphs of my unflattering past, I abandoned the whole idea of writing my autobiography.

To write a novel woven around two romantic souls next caught my fancy. I started it with quite a flourish all my own. But when I came to the part where the lovers whispered sweet-nothings to one another, I found myself writing passages that seemed familiar to me. Didn't I read it somewhere in one of Loring's books or was it the fictional lovers of Oliver Curwood's

who said those words? I sat frozen in terror. Among writers, plagiarism is a grave offense not to be slightly thought of. Would I want to be branded a plagiarist? No—never. But every sweet phrase that came to my mind seemed to have already been uttered by some heroine in somebody's book. So, instead of taking the risk of being called a plagiarist, another bright plot came fluttering down to be silenced by the crumpling of a number of freshly written paper. I've always loved mystery stories and writing one charmed me thoroughly. So, I started on another fresh sheet of paper, a story, which I vainly thought, would surpass all the Sherlock Holmes and Erle Stanley Gardner stories put together. Writing it, I had the thrill of imagining myself in all sorts of predicaments. I once read a great author say that the more complicated the plot of a story is, the more the readers like it. So engrossed was I in entangling my hero in one scene after another that I did not know I had simply gone too far, weaving a web around him from which to my dismay, there was no salvation. (Neither was there a way out for him). The long hours I spent on writing was already telling on me. So what I did was to do the best thing: I sent it to its doom after a brisk crackle of crumpled paper. My poor hero? I wonder if he'd ever come out of it a whole piece.

I started to take another fresh sheet of paper to renew my attempts. By then, the sun was already a blazing disc in the sky. Although the soft breeze was still dancing in and out of my room, nevertheless I felt damp and warm;

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THE PEN AND I

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little beads of perspiration came trickling down my forehead. I was getting furious at myself for not being able to write a whole story yet. I had racked my brain for another new plot; but it seemed I was spent. I looked out to the spot where a while ago had moved my heart and hand hoping that its beauty might re-captivate me again. What I saw was the final straw. Nowhere was the bird that was chirping a soothing song a while ago. The flowers were now drooping under the stinging heat of the sun. A butterfly or two could now be seen flying lifelessly. The lilies had slowly and completely shied away from the sun. The fishes kept to the bottom of the pond. They too, were escaping the heat of the noon-day sun. The wonderful backdrop was no longer pale blue but a glaring blue which made me squint. Where was the music, the poetry and a hundred other little things which had fooled me into thinking that I could be a great authoress someday? Instead I felt warm; and in no time I lost my temper. I gathered the crumpled bits of paper strewn carelessly on my desk and burned them mercilessly. . . until the last flame flickered and died. With it, my visions of fame and fortune as an authoress died too. I hated myself for having been such a miserable failure and I hated my friend who said writing a story was just nothing at all. Maybe in a way he was right—it was nothing at all. Writers are made—not born. Indeed? Just wait till I meet her. I'll give her a piece of my mind.

—oOo—

"My husband talks in his sleep—does yours?"

"No. He's terribly annoying—he just chuckles."

—oOo—

"Of course I'm not married," said she. "I'm nobody's fool."

"Then," said he, hopefully, "will you be mine?"

—oOo—

Girl (arriving late at game)—

"What's the score, Larry?"

Escort—"Nothing to nothing."

Girl—"Oh, goody!! Then we haven't missed a thing!"



wits & jokes

Dancing the rumba is a way of waving goodbye without moving your hand.

—Galen Drake (CBS)

Each time Frank Murphy drove his car over 80 miles an hour, the motor set up a terrific knocking. He finally took it to a garage for a check-up.

The mechanic looked the car over carefully, but couldn't find a thing wrong with it. "At what speed did you say the car knocks?" he asked.

"Eighty."

"Nothing wrong with the car," the mechanic stated flatly. "It must be the good Lord warning you."

As we packed for a vacation trip through Canada, I recalled what a friend who had visited there recently had told me.

"We'll have to take different clothes than usual," I remarked. "They say nobody there wears jeans."

My junior high daughter, looking incredulous, asked: "Not even the girls?"

—Mrs. B. de Boer in PEN

Relax. Don't worry about the job you don't like. Someone else will soon have it.

—Herald-Advocate

A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains.

Dutch Proverb

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow ye diet.

William Gilmore Beymer

The empty vessel makes the greatest sound.

Shakespeare

Noise proves nothing. Often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as if she laid an asteroid.

Samuel L. Clemens

Everything comes if a man will only wait.

Israeli

What is this Thing . . .

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beast. . . a mere heap of shapeless, pulseless matter."

Just what have we accomplished by all these? We can't say we have done something monumental to make the world sit up. . . that's glaringly obvious. Neither can we say we didn't try our best. At any rate, this should make man look upon woman with a more tolerant eye and accept her as she is. Moreover, this proves beyond all doubt what we have said at the beginning: Woman is a most inexhaustibly fascinating subject, just as she shall always be for milleniums to come. Hargrave clearly sums up the whole argument in these words: "Women are the poetry of the world just as the stars are the poetry of heaven. Clear, harmonious, and light-giving, they are the terrestrial planets that govern the destinies of men."

Come to think of it, why do they call it a man's world?

"Invitation to Yesterday"

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strange mixture of dread and longing. But did he, when he first spoke his first tender word to her? Did he understand the weakness that numbed his frame then? Did he understand the breathless thrill when her fingers first accidentally touched his?

The old woman saw him close the door, gently. Wondering and surprised at the sudden soft ease of the same slam-happy hands, she whispered to herself: Now, I wonder why he didn't! She leaned out from a window. She saw him cross the street, and shoving aside the swinging doors, entered the drug store.

She could not hear him say to the operator: 998-R please? Nor heard his hesitant, guarded query of the crooning, girlish voice that answered, nor hear his voice in hal-lowed conversation tremble, for if she had, she wouldn't have asked herself; she would have understood the sudden mildness in him; and would have known the poignant tale behind those three numbers and the letter "R" that adorned his bed-side wall.