

The Storyteller.

BRIDGET'S EXPERIMENT.

'If they would only read the stories,' sighed Bridget, looking ruefully at half-a-dozen manuscripts that lay before her on the table, 'they might have a chance.'

'That is what Larry says.'

'Oh, Larry's a better judge of a pig than a story,' Bridget answered with a comical expression. 'Literature is not his forte—and I am beginning to think that it is not mine either. If you only knew how I long for a scamper over the bogs, Morna, or a stroll with Larry across the fields, as I sit in this dining-room, listening to the squeak, squeak of my quill, instead of the gay caroling of the lark.'

Morna laughed.

'My dear sister, you surely do not think that you have the monopoly of such feelings. I assure you I suffer in exactly the same way as I listen to the perpetual click of the typewriter. It is a noise less musical even than the squeak of the quill, and our office is every bit as dingy as this room. But there's no use grumbling. You must write and I must type—'

'And the sooner it's over the sooner to sleep. It doesn't rhyme—but no matter. Things are becoming serious, Morna. I must earn some money.'

'But you sold a story lately.'

'Yes; one in six months. That's exhilarating. I'll change my pen for a broom, Morna, and slip out and sweep a crossing.'

Morna pressed her sister's hand.

'You must have patience and work on a while longer, dear. You'll soon marry and—'

'Marry?' Bridget sighed heavily. 'Alas! No. Things get worse with poor Larry. The farm is small, the rent large, the family numerous and helpless. His American uncle will do nothing for him unless he leaves home and country and marries some heiress he has found for him in America.'

'And Larry refuses!'

Bridget looked reproachfully at her sister, and her colour rose.

'Of course he did. He loves his home. And,' softly, 'he loves me. So, naturally, he refused.'

'Things do seem rather hopeless. But don't lose heart. And, I tell you what, Brid—, I'll type your next MS. That might help.'

'I'm afraid not. But it's worth trying.'

'Then I'll do it. And now, good-bye. I must be off to my work.' And she hurried away.

Bridget and Morna Sullivan had come to London believing that there they would find more opportunities for earning their bread than in the quiet town in Ireland where they had been born and brought up. Their father had died suddenly, leaving his wife and daughters practically penniless. The shock of his death and horror at their poverty-stricken condition so preyed upon Mrs. Sullivan's mind that she fell ill and in a few weeks followed her husband to the grave. Then Bridget and Morna resolved to go forth and look for work in London.

With a sad heart Larry O'Beirne saw his promised wife set out to face a hard-working life in a strange land. But his hands were tied. His mother and sisters were dependent on him, and times were bad. Till some wonderful change should occur he must not think of marriage. So when Bridget insisted upon going he could only bow his head and hope for the best.

Arrived in London, Morna quickly determined to learn typewriting and shorthand, and as she was clever and industrious she soon found a post in a solicitor's office at a salary of thirty shillings a week.

Bridget began as daily companion to an elderly lady. But the position did not suit her, and rearing from it in a hurry she made up her mind to become an author. Here again she was unfortunate. Her work brought her but small remuneration, and she was worried and disappointed.

'Better to scrub or to sew,' she cried one day when even the typewritten MS. was returned from the *Scarlet Runner*. 'I'll write no more. I'll—but what shall I do? I'll go for a walk and think it out. Do something that will bring me in a few shillings a week. I will and must.' She pulled on her jacket and pinned on her hat, resolute and determined. 'There's nothing too menial.'

The door opened and the landlady hurried in, flurried and excited. Her parlourmaid had gone off in a temper just as a rich lodger was arriving to take possession of the drawing-room floor. The good woman was in despair.

'Let me take her place,' cried Bridget impulsively.

'Law, Miss, would you?'

'Certainly. Give me a cap and apron, and you'll see what a fine servant I'll make.'

'That you will. And Mr. Gilliman always liked a pretty face and a nice manner—'

'Mr. who did you say?'

'Mr. Theobald Gilliman, from New York, Miss.'

'Larry's uncle,' murmured Bridget, her eyes sparkling. 'What fun. Now if I—' Then turning to Mrs. Murdock she said gaily, 'We'll make the old gentleman so comfortable—wait on him so well that he'll never leave us. And when he dies,' with a wave of her hand, 'he'll bequeath to us all his vast wealth.'

'Law, Miss, I do hope you won't let the dear gentleman guess that we ever thought of such a thing. He'd be up and away like a shot if—'

'You dear, good, matter-of-fact, taking-everything-in-earnest lady, of course not. It was only a joke,' laughed Bridget. 'But come, let us set to work. I can dust and sweep splendidly. And I'll get some flowers, and a piece of old embroidery of my mother's to throw over the sofa.'

'He won't see flowers or embroidery. He likes his meals quickly served, his bell answered at once.'

'He'll have all that, and the flowers and embroidery into the bargain. But you'll promise one thing, Mrs. Murdock?'

'Yes—anything you please.'

'Don't tell Mr. Gilliman who I am, or where I came from.'

'Of course not, Miss.'

'And call me Biddy.'

'Yes, Miss,' laughing, 'I mean Biddy.'

'Now,' laughing, 'I must don the sign of my profession—or my trade-mark—perhaps we should call my cap.'

And putting away her hat and jacket, Bridget followed the landlady downstairs.

On coming home that evening Morna was shocked and annoyed when the hall-door was opened for her by her pretty sister dressed as a parlourmaid.

'Bridget!' she cried, 'why are you masquerading like this?'

'Masquerading, my dear? nothing of the kind,' Bridget cried, kissing her. 'I wanted something to do, and Mrs. Murdock wanted a parlourmaid. So I thought I'd make an experiment and see how I'd get on. And now, a wonderful chance has come my way. Larry's uncle, Mr. Gilliman, has arrived as a lodger in the drawing-rooms, and I have made up my mind to win his affections and make him help the dear fellow.'

Morna shook her head.

'What an absurd idea. How on earth could you do such a thing?'

'I hardly know yet. I have not thought it out. But if he liked me—'

'He will never look at a lodging-house servant, little silly.'

'I flatter myself, my sweet but discouraging sister,' cried Bridget, her lovely eyes sparkling with fun, 'that I am a somewhat unusual servant, and,' laughing merrily, 'most assuredly Uncle Gilliman is an entirely original and unique gentleman—if I may call him that. He's plain in face and speech. He's short and, to put it mildly, a little burly. But I guess, mimicking the American's voiced accent, 'we'll be downright friendly. He's going to have a "bully" time here, and then goes to Ireland. Before he departs for the Emerald Isle he'll hear a good deal about a young farmer in Wexford, a near and ought to be dear, relative of his own, one Larry O'Beirne. I told him I was Irish just now and he was delighted. When I took up the tea he met me at the door and insisted on carrying in the tray himself.'

'That was a most unusual proceeding,' Morna said gravely, her eyes upon the girl's animated, attractive face. 'You must keep him at a distance, dear. Is he young or old?'

Bridget laughed.

'Larry's uncle, Morna? Of course he's old. Quite forty-five, I'm sure. So don't be uneasy, alanna. My girlish heart is in no danger. He would never have attracted it even had my dear, good Larry never been born.'

Things went on quietly and pleasantly for some weeks. Mr. Gilliman spent most of his time sight-seeing, and as he was out all day and often all evening too he required but little attendance. That he liked Bridget and was pleased to have her about him was evident. And anxious to make him comfortable and keep him as long as possible as a lodger, Mrs. Murdock implored the girl to pay him all the attention she could.

'I wish he wasn't such a gad-about,' Bridget would say. 'He's always on the go. He loves to talk to me about Ireland. But the moment I mention farming and a young man in Wexford called O'Beirne, he changes the conversation and is up and off. It's really provoking.'

Morna laughed.

'You little goose, leave him alone. How could you expect to make him do anything? He is fond of his money, you may be sure, and doesn't care a straw for Larry. Besides, he's angry with him just now.'

'Yes, true,' sighed Bridget, 'but all the same I will move his hard heart or, in tragic tones, 'die in the attempt. Oh, Morna! If only something would happen to keep the dear thing at home for a while.'

'You might be very sorry, my dear. And glad to get him out again.'

'I don't think so. And I might then get the chance I sigh for.'

The very next day Mr. Gilliman caught a chill, and the doctor ordered him to stay in the house. Here was the opportunity Bridget had longed for, and she determined to make the most of it. So she waited upon him assiduously, talked to him by the hour, and even read to him. Upon hearing this, Morna took alarm, and warned her sister that she was going too far. But Bridget only laughed and told her she was becoming a prim, old maid.

'I'm nothing of the kind,' Morna answered hotly, 'but the idea of a girl—a parlourmaid—reading stories and papers to a gentleman lodger is too absurd. Don't do it, Brid, or I am sure you will be sorry.'

'I won't, then, since you make such a fuss. But there's his bell, I suppose I may answer that?'

'Since you have foolishly engaged to do so,' coldly, 'you must.'

'Dear! How tragic. The poor man won't eat me.' And Bridget flounced away.

As she entered the drawing-room, Mr. Gilliman looked up, his rubicund face beaming with pleasure.

'You rang, sir?' the girl said from the door.

'Yes. The fire is low. Come and make it up. I like a blaze.'

She went across, and kneeling down upon the hearthrug began to put some sticks into the grate. In a few moments the fire was blazing and crackling right merrily.

'In Ireland now,' she said, gazing at the leaping flames, 'in the part of the country I come from, they burn turf. And oh! it makes a glorious fire.'

He smiled and moved to the very edge of his chair.