

Mary Miller

Mary Miller was a quiet, gentle woman in her mid-sixties. As she lay in the hospital bed very ill with pneumonia, she fell to dreaming more and more of the past events in her life. They appeared to her as pictures in a book. Sometimes she dwelled on one picture for a moment or two to get the full sense of identification with it, but other times she had to leaf through the book many times going backwards and forwards until she had the proper details in order.

She moved her hands over the covers as if feeling for something, and finding it, she smiled happily. Her lips moved as if she were saying,

"Harry!". Oh, Harry."

Then she drifted off to sleep again. Two nurses standing by her bedside looked at one another, not knowing quite what to say. Then the younger of the two said slowly,

"Who is that young man standing by the bed holding her hand?"

"What young man?" asked the older nurse.

"He comes in every day and stays until about six. I never see him come in, but he is always here. He smiles and waves his hand as he goes out. She calls him Sam."

"It is about time you had a holiday, dear, your mind is playing tricks on you." said the older nurse, "There is no one there at all."

The little nurse looked thoughtful. Sam.. and Harry..?

"I'll ask Mrs Miller when she wakes up."

She and the older nurse walked out of the ward together.

Mary Miller held the Book of her Life in her hands. Sometimes the pages were bright and clear, some were faded and a little misty, some were black and white. She had to make quite an effort to remember what they represented and how far back they went. On one page was a picture of herself as a child of about four years old, who, with her two sisters and their father, were standing in a meadow waiting for a little figure in a dove grey costume coming dancing along to meet them. This was their mother. She had golden hair and merry, bright blue eyes. Her picture never faded. It seemed to be alive in her hand. There was a great deal of love surrounding these pictures.

There was another picture somewhere if only she could find it. It seemed very important to her. She tried to peer through the mist and shadow. She moved her hands agitatedly and moaned a little. Suddenly it was there! The picture she most wanted to see...Harry!..Harry, in the uniform of an officer in the army. She had met Harry through her brother, also an officer in the army. They had laughed a great deal the day they met, and were so much on the same wavelength, that they knew from the start they would be together for all times. They went dancing and swimming.

Harry borrowed a car from a friend and they had one glorious week end in Sheringham on the Norfolk coast. It was there that Harry had placed an opal ring upon her finger.

"Shall we get married on my next leave?" he asked.

She had looked at him her face aglow with happiness.

"Oh, yes, Harry! Oh, Harry, I love you so much!"

But there was no next leave. Harry, together with hundreds of other young men had left Tilbury Docks on a troop ship for Dunkirk. He was among a car load of soldiers going towards the Docks when a bus with some W.A.A.Cs aboard passed them coming away from the Docks. These joyous young men had called out,

"Hey, there, girls, you are going the wrong way!"

Mary had a letter from one of them some time later. Harry had been left behind at Dunkirk, his dear face buried in the sand.

He had named her as his next of kin, so she had inherited his small cottage in Hertfordshire where he had been brought up, and from where he had gone forth as a soldier. Mary loved the cottage. She felt his presence everywhere. It was something she could not explain to anyone.

After the shock of Harry's death had dimmed a little, she was so calm that people dismissed her as having no feelings. She had not cried since the day she had heard officially from the War Office that he was dead. When two years had passed she became, as the neighbours thought, a little cooler, and a little more detached in her attitude, although she was still quite friendly. They did not know, could not know, that Harry came to see her.

It started one evening as she was sitting quietly in an armchair with her hands in her lap. She became aware of some one standing by the window looking at her. It was so real that she stood up in surprise. As she did so she saw that it was Harry.

"Harry! Oh, Harry!, you've come!"

He smiled at her in his old way, the corners of his mouth turning up and his nose wrinkling up with pleasure. He came towards her, and gathered her into his arms. Mary clung to him saying to him through her tears,

"Oh, I knew you would come if I waited, Harry. I knew you would."

"I shall be near you always," he said. "I shall be near you when you most need me. My last visit will be when I come to take you back with me. It will be so easy for you because I shall know the way. Trust me, my little love, trust me."

As Mary stood there a warmth passed through her body. She closed her eyes for a moment, then felt him slipping away from her. As he did so she heard him say he would be back again, but this time his voice was so faint that she could not hear him say when he would be coming. After that visit, Mary went about her daily affairs with a feeling of calm and joy. She had many friends. Three men proposed to her, but she refused them all. When she was laughingly accused of waiting for a very special man, she would agree that the man she was waiting for was very special indeed.

Mary waited for another year. She was now thirty-four.

One evening nearing Christmas time, she knew he was coming. The fire burned more brightly than usual, her senses were more acute, and the house smelled of lilac, of warm summer evenings, and fresh spring mornings. She had just come in from the garden and was changing her shoes in the kitchen. She lifted her head, sensing something, and there he was, sitting in the armchair, as if he had been there all the time. He opened his eyes very wide when he was looking at her which was a trick he had of doing. She walked quickly to his side, sat down at his feet with her head on his knees. They did not speak, for it seemed as if they had no need for words. They each knew the questions and the answers. Time was meaningless to them.

Then there came the time when she knew he would not be coming again for many years. He told her he had been privileged to have been able to come in the past. This was not granted to many people. He would come back but twice more before the day when he would come to guide her to the Fields of Beyond Time. She went to the window to watch the sun going down and the evening shadows gathering. She felt his hands on her shoulders turning her around to face him. He held her closely to him.

"Come and rest," he said gently. "Come and rest with me. I love you!"

He guided her to the bedroom and as he lifted her onto the bed Mary felt as if she were floating on air as he touched her. She all but fainted with exquisite joy, then he was slipping away from her again.

"Harry, don't leave me! I can't bear it," she cried.

"I'll be back, my love, I'll be back!"

Then she saw through her tears that he was gone.

Christmas came and went. At the approach of Easter Mary knew she was going to have a baby, in the autumn. After the first shock had worn off, her friends rallied round her, comforting her and giving her advice. She told them the father was some one she had known for a long time. The following October she gave birth to a baby boy and called him Sam.

He was a delightful child with fair, downy hair and hazel eyes. Surrounding the hazel of the irises of his eyes was a darker brown circle. He was a happy little boy, not brilliant at school, but he enjoyed the work and was consistent.

A bit dreamy at times, he would sit in the armchair by the fire, his head in his hands with a far away look in his eyes. He would nod his head, or shake it slowly from side to side as if indicating to someone "yes" or "no". Mary first noticed him doing this when he was about four years old. When she asked him if anything was wrong, he looked up at her and said seriously that he was talking to Harry. Then he would leap to his feet and become engrossed in the day to day activities of a small boy. Mary had stood still for a moment holding onto a table for support. How did Sam know the name of 'Harry'? He certainly had no friends of that name. When she asked him about this, another time, he said that 'Harry' was his friend. She told no-one of this, but as he grew older, he told her 'Harry' helped him with his homework.

"What does your friend Harry look like?"

"I don't know, I can't see him clearly," answered Sam, "but he is a soldier, I love him and he loves us."

Us! Mary put her hand over her mouth to stop the sound coming out. A soldier came to see Sam! A soldier who loved us! Mary walked out of the room, then flew upstairs to her bedroom.

"I shall come back, my little love, never fear, I shall come back."

She recalled his voice and the touch of his hand.

"Oh, Harry, I can't bear it! I can't wait. I want you so much. I can't go on without you."

But Mary Miller waited for thirty years. She watched Sam grow up into a very likable young man. When Mary questioned him about particular girl friend, his face would cloud over for a while and he would say,

"I haven't the time, Mum."

He would put arm around her and give her a hug.

"Don't worry about me. Things are working out just as Harry said they would. I'm not spoiling any girl's life if I can help it."

Then, wrinkling up his nose, he smiled at her and the cloud disappeared.

Mary Miller opened her eyes for a moment. She saw the nurses moving about and other patients slowly walking about. She felt so far away and lost.

"How nice," she thought, "if I were going home. I feel so tired."

At two o'clock the doors opened to allow the visitors to come in. She looked at everyone who came in bearing flowers. She saw two nurses standing in the doorway. They seemed to be concerned over her. One of them came over to her bedside with a letter in her hand."

"That is for me, isn't it?" said Mary, "I know what it is. Harry has just told me. Sam will be a little late today."

The little nurse saw that Mary had both hands on the cover as if she were holding something in between them. She murmured softly. The little nurse bent over to hear what she was saying.

"Harry! Oh, Harry!"

The little nurse thought she heard a man's voice speaking.

"I told you I would come back, my little love. This time I have Sam with me. Don't be afraid, I know the way."

Mary Miller smiled, and closed her eyes for ever. Mary Miller's waiting days were over. The older nurse opened the letter and read it.

It said that Sam Miller had been involved in a car accident three days before and had died instantly.