

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

The Decision

by Mary Brannigan

This was a make or break holiday for Evelyn. She had been going out with Brian for eighteen months when she discovered she was pregnant. They'd not really discussed the idea of marriage as Evelyn was only eighteen and living with someone was a distant prospect, with the responsibility of being a housewife not entering her happy go lucky young mind. Brian's parents had thrown a party with a marquee in the garden for about sixty family and friends when he'd turned twenty-one in May. He was quite young for his years and the gap in their ages was barely noticeable. They both felt they were just setting out on the road of life and enjoying their salad days.

Nonetheless, the young man had a well paid job in the treasurers department of the local council. So when Evelyn informed him of her condition he at once proposed marriage, saying they'd get a two bedroomed flat and Evelyn could return to work while his mother baby sat during the day. His parents were not exactly overjoyed at the news of this early grandchild, but agreed with Brian's plan. After all, the girl had not set out to trap him. They knew Evelyn better than that.

In all this Evelyn said very little, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with her boyfriend, merely stating that she would think about it. Then one evening as the pair were returning from a day out she suggested that they go away together for a long holiday to see how they got on with only each other for company. Thus they found themselves in this seaside resort where they'd hired a caravan, with the idea of experiencing the day to day life of cooking and cleaning with no one to either help or interfere. Evelyn felt that a month together in this way would be a good indication of whether they stood a chance of making marriage work. The caravan was situated on its own in a woodland area away from the main centre of the holiday resort, and was surrounded by garden kept well planted with seasonal flowers and shrubs. The weather was sunny almost all the time and after breakfast they retreated to the garden until lunch time. They cooked a light meal before shopping for supplies in the town, which left them the rest of the day to enjoy the peace and quiet of their surroundings.

In the beginning the days passed quickly, taken up with the novelty of it all, and Brian felt he'd be happy to live his life with this lovely girl. Evelyn seemed content with this trial marriage and he took it as a sign she'd agree to his proposal. Then halfway through the month things seemed to slow down and they began to cast around for some diversion. Brian went to the tourist office, bringing back brochures detailing local attractions. One of these was a stately home open to the public. Boarding a coach in the town they headed for Bayview Manor, an hour's journey away.

Arriving at their destination the pair made their way up a long avenue to the Jacobean mansion. Their tickets included a tour of the house and grounds. Having taken in the splendour of the manor and its contents they made their way to the gardens, finding a secluded spot among the magnificent trees. Benches were sited here and there and they decided to sit and eat their sandwiches.

This part of the garden was empty except for a red book, which lay sunning itself upon the gravel path. It was Evelyn who spotted it first and she was curious as to its contents. On opening it she found herself reading a diary dating back some seventy five years, and it soon became obvious the writer had been a woman. The first entry stated, "Arrived home late last night, mamma not very happy to see me. This morning I had to tell her the truth, for soon it will clear for all to see. My dresses already feel too tight, yet I cannot ask the local seamstress to loosen them. For now my plight must be restricted to family eyes only. Jonathan is the only other person privy to our secret and he is away at the war. I wish he could be with me when father hears my news". As Evelyn read she became aware of Brian growing restless.

"What's it about?" he asked. She handed him the book and while he read she was itching to know more about this woman from another time.

"How ironic," he said as he took in the opening entry, "sounds like she was in your situation".

At this moment Evelyn, looking at her watch, saw it was almost time to catch the coach for their return journey. They would not have time to hand the book back at the manor house, so they decided to take it home. After all, they could post it back, and she so wanted to read the rest of the entries. As they boarded the coach the girl tucked the red book into her large handbag, relishing the prospect of continuing its perusal.

That night as Evelyn prepared their supper of sardine salad, she and Brian chatted animatedly about the likely outcome for the diary's owner. They both loved a mystery and the book had spiced up the prospect of their remaining days in the caravan. We seem to enjoy so many of the same things thought Evelyn, before drifting off to sleep. Next morning they took the diary into the garden after breakfast and together they followed the story, forgetting about lunch till they realised it was past three. It transpired the author's name was Emily and she was twenty two at the time of writing. She had been correct in her dismay at the thought of her father's reaction on hearing his daughter's news.

"He will be made to marry you!" he thundered.

As Emily quavered that Jonathan intended to do just that on his return from the war, he replied " oh no my girl, he will do so before this child is born. My grandchild will be born within wedlock, or it will never be my grandchild. I know General Havelock and he will get your beau back to do the deed within the week. I will not have this family disgraced".

True to his word her father got the young man a weeks leave, and he was due home the following Friday. Emily was over joyed, and a special licence was arranged to facilitate the wedding. By Wednesday Emily Had a hastily bought wedding trousseau, and a reception was organised to take place in the manor house. All would be well, she wrote as she thanked the fates for her father's influence. " Just one more day" she wrote on the Thursday morning.

The next entry was written at ten that night, " The telegram arrived at six o'clock this evening, Jonathan's ship sunk with the loss of all on board. My love is dead". The next words in the red book were dated three weeks later. " I am to be sent aunt Julia in Scotland till my baby is born, at which time it will be given for adoption and I will see it no more. I have lost my Jonathan and soon I will lose our child. My heart is broken". Here the diary entries ended with nothing to indicate what became of the young woman whose story they'd read.

That night Evelyn and Brian clung to each other with tears in their eyes. Next morning the decision was made, she would marry Brian. They had been given the chance denied to the lovers all those years ago. Their time in the caravan by the sea had given them cause to believe they stood a good chance of being happy together in the years ahead. They had come through the test set them by Evelyn.