

Home as Empire of the Heart in *The Home Front Girls* by Rosie Goodwin

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Abstract

The paper aims to bring out the best in the three female protagonists during a crisis in the novel *The Home Front Girls* by Rosie Goodwin. Charles Darwin's concept of "survival of the fittest" is the looking glass through which the lives of the trio are assessed in this paper. The courage, determination and strong will of these women make them overcome seemingly insurmountable circumstances. With the imminent war lurking within and without, living each day becomes an ordeal for all irrespective of class, race and gender. These women prove that all is not lost and that one just needs the grit and perseverance to move on in life, despite the odds.

Keywords: Home Front, Indomitable, Insurmountable, Memory

1. Introduction

In the novel *The Home Front Girls*¹ by Rosie Goodwin, the three principal female characters are truly heroines in their own little world. Annabelle, the richest among the three tries to rediscover herself in a war-torn world by enlisting herself in a war zone as a nurse. Dotty whose identity is a mystery, unravels herself through her vocation as a story writer, thereby venting her hidden emotions. Lucy, with her maternal instincts, attends to her family and to her little one, in particular, and is preoccupied with domestic commitments at home. Initially, all three of them meet at a Departmental Stores for work and then part ways.

2. The Space Called Home

Home is not only a place where a person lives but also where his heart is. It is a place where people share their feelings and emotions. It is a place most people look forward to easing themselves at the end of the day. It is a place of understanding. It is a place of hope yet at the same

time it is not always a place of comfort and happiness ironically. It can be also a place where identities have to be proved. However, a real home resides in the heart. When the going gets tough and when familiar things fade into oblivion, when homes are razed to the ground during catastrophes, there is only one thing that matters - the indomitable heart.

The novel, *The Home Front Girls*² by Rosie Goodwin is set against the backdrop of Hitler's tyranny and his impending invasion of London. The story revolves around the fortunes of three girls whose future is seemingly uncertain and fraught with dangers. Despite the hazards of life, the three of them, Annabelle, Dotty and Lucy meet as employees at Owens, a Departmental Store, Owens. It turns out that Annabelle belongs to a well-to-do family unlike the other two. However, all three are bound by one common factor - they all have an untold story which needs an outlet.

Life went by as usual despite the war and the daily routine was disrupted by occasional bombings and threats of war. As the days went by, the three girls meet each other

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in their respective homes. As the acquaintance grew, so did their love for each other. It was strange to hear Lucy talk about Mary, her five-year old sister and Joel, her older brother about whom she was very protective. It was also weird to see her silent about her parents as she did not wish to talk about them. As for Dotty, she was an orphan, and she could not wait to meet both her parents. As far as Annabelle was concerned, it looked as if all was well. But it was not meant to be that way. Annabelle's parents had nurtured her very lovingly and she lacked nothing in her life. For Dotty, Miss Timms, the caretaker of the orphanage was the only woman she knew and she was very close to her heart.

There was nothing to look forward to, as far as the girls were concerned. With the dangers of war looming large at the threshold, the prospects of leading a normal life were quite bleak. The three girls seemed to face an uncertain future in the midst of the war. It was as if they were having a miniature war in their daily lives with uncertainties, sickness, loneliness, despair etc. Life was difficult and challenging. In the dismal and conflict-ridden world, these three girls were willing to battle it out and carve a niche for themselves.

As it turned out later in the story, Annabelle was a foster child and she was quite dismayed over it. As for Dotty, she came to know that Miss Timms was her own mother who had to hide her identity for personal reasons. Lucy had hidden the fact that her own father had mistreated her and in a bid to protect herself and her brother she had accidentally killed him. She also disclosed that her little sister was her daughter and not her sister. So for all three of them, there was this identity issue which had to be sorted out. They were determined to prove themselves as strong-willed people who could stand tall amidst a turbulent world.

Annabelle enlisted herself in the forces as a nurse and was deployed to treat the ailing soldiers. She chanced upon Joel (Lucy's brother) and attended to him. Dotty's writings got the attention of a publisher, Roger through which she regained her identity. Lucy left for a different town to introspect her life in seclusion and to get back to normal life after a really traumatic experience.

The tough experiences of the war brought out the best in the three of them. They moved towards new frontiers with fortitude and newfound hope. The home they grew up in had an unforgettable impact on their lives. Home is not as easy for them as it could be for all. It brought back

memories, both good and bad. This shows that though memories are nurtured, loved, and cherished, sometimes they are dispelled to avoid revisiting unpleasant truths and poignant realities.

"Autobiographical memory is the core of identity. To a large extent, we are the stories we tell about ourselves"². As far as the recollection of the past is concerned, a lot of subjectivity goes into it. Here in this novel, Annabelle was brought up in an affluent family as a foster child and she knew nothing of the hardships that a person goes through in life. She had been cherishing the pleasant memories of the past which turned bitter when she came to know that she was actually adopted. She would rather have loved to own an identity which was proprietary and not borrowed. The realization propelled her into a nursing venture where for the first time, she worked to earn her livelihood and prove her skills. Sadly, that deepened her alienation from her foster parents who had kept her identity hidden for long. The foster mother's efforts to assuage her fears were of no avail initially and it was much against the former's wishes that she took up the nursing venture. It was in this workspace that she accidentally chanced upon, Joel, Lucy's brother, fell in love with him and finally got married.

As for Lucy, she had a painful past and she hated to tell her story to others until one day she revealed all that was in her heart. "As we tell and retell stories of our experiences with others, and others evaluate and interpret our experiences with us, we create a sense of who we are in the world"². Lucy was trying to find meaning in her life after all that had happened. Her father sexually abused her and as a result of this incestuous relationship, a child was born to her. She felt she should go out of the city and find comfort and solace in the arms of a mentor who could bring sanity into her life. She needed compassion and love to keep her going. She did find a mentor who gave her the moral support she needed.

Dotty was not aware of life outside her orphanage because she was born outside wedlock to Miss Timms and ever since then Dotty grew up under the watchful eye of Miss Timms who manages to get employed as a warden in the same orphanage. Dotty knew her real identity many years later and her long cherished dream of getting to know her mother was fulfilled at last. It was with the support of well-wishers and friends that she emerged as a leading short story writer who finally made it to the top. She also found the man of her life who served as a big support to her writing career.

3. Conclusion

From the experiences of the characters in the novel, the dynamics of families can be perceived. Everyone does not have the fortune of being cared for by a loving family. Home is not always a place of comfort and happiness. Each person has to work towards his destiny. All three characters in *The Home Front Girls*¹, Annabelle, Dotty and Lucy fought against their destinies as they were women of fortitude and tenacity who would not give up. They proved that women need not be just homemakers. They can go beyond the limits set by society. The female condition in this novel is analogous to the warriors in the war front where the three protagonists carve identities of their own confronting the home front.

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