

AN EASTER SERMON.

"I'm glad that Easter Sunday's here," said Mrs. Henry Gray.
 "My bonnet new and other gear I'll wear to church today.
 A veil of glory will pervade
 My hymn of praise and prayer.
 For when my toilet is displayed
 How Mrs. Bliss will stare!
 "I hate that horrid Mrs. Brown,
 With all her quirks and smiles.
 Of all the women in the town
 She spies the coarsest styles.
 She bought her bonnet 'way last spring
 And wears it now for new.
 And as for that old Thompson thing,
 I vow I hate her too!
 "I hear Miss Jones, the cross-eyed cat,
 Has bought a new peppy
 And terra cotta Paris hat
 To wear to church today.
 And Helen White has got a dress
 They say is just divine.
 Come, Mr. Gray, and do you guess
 It's half as sweet as mine?
 "There go those awful Billings girls,
 They point and powder too.
 They pad and wear cheap bangs and curls.
 They do—I know they do!
 You needn't laugh, I boldly say
 And stake my honor on it—
 I'll paralyze them all today
 With my new dress and bonnet!"

LOST.

She was a very tiny child on that day when her nurse took her into the great department store. She was so tiny that it was not hard for her—once the firm grip upon her hand was relaxed—to scuttle away, quite unnoticed by her usually vigilant guardian. It was a day of bargain sales—white sales. To Nancy, hurrying along, the whole world seemed crowded with ladies' skirts and ladies' feet. Silk skirts and cotton skirts and cloth skirts. Feet in modish satin slippers and feet in down-at-the-heel kid shoes!

It was fun at first, running away. It was a game—a new game to play with one's nurse. But as the exciting moments passed, another feeling—not a play feeling—began to grow in Nancy's heart. It was a sacred feeling. A lonely feeling. Suddenly Nancy wanted to see her nurse again; wanted to see the slim, smiling mother who sat always in a cushioned chair by the window; wanted to see her kind, preoccupied father. All at once the strange skirts, and the stranger feet, terrified her!

But—even though she was very tiny—Nancy did not cry. She was a repressed child—trained to silence. Even as a baby she had controlled her small griefs. For Mother, sitting in the chair by the window, must neither be worried nor disturbed. Mother was ill! She must be cared for tenderly—must be protected. Nurse had explained.

So Nancy—though she knew that she was lost—did not cry. She wiggled her way past the skirts and the shoes, and never paused until she was close beside a counter. Behind the counter busy ladies pulled out boxes and put boxes away again. Nancy was afraid to speak to them, they seemed so important. Wide-eyed, quivering of lip, she climbed upon a stool in front of the counter. And there nurse found her a half-hour later—frenzied, but with the air of a wee stoic. Her chubby legs dangled tiredly in space, her chubby hands tight clenched and cold.

"But," the busy ladies behind the counter protested—in response to nurse's frenzied questioning, "but we didn't know she was lost! We thought she'd been told to wait. She never said anything!"

Nancy had not said anything! But she spoke on the way home in the taxi which nurse—reduced to hysterics—had commandeered.

"I don't like it—being lost!" she said slowly.

Nurse, who loved her, clasped the straight little body.

"Were you frightened, darling?" she questioned.

"Yes—" said Nancy.

That was all. Her vocabulary was too small, too limited, to give any expression of her sense of fright. She had known black horror at the thought that she might have to sit forever upon that stool—while the unheeding world passed by. There was anguish in the feeling that nurse would never find her. That Mother's hands—slim and white—would never again beckon her to a place beside the cushioned chair.

When Nancy was nearly six—almost three years later, it was—she rescued the white dog. A fuzzy, unkempt dog, with an emaciated body and pleading eyes and a brown spot on his wistful, small face. He had come to the garden gate—even in the city. Nancy's home boasted a wee, handkerchief square of green lawn and a flowerbed. He had come, half begging to be admitted, half afraid to enter. Nancy, who had watched him pick his timid way across the street, between vehicles, who had seen him shudder back from a kick and shrink from a teasing whistle, threw wide the gate and called gently. It hurt her in a strange, poignant way that the dog could not, immediately, recognize her friendship. That he hesitated on the threshold of her home. She called again.

The dog was trembling violently. He had been through a tremendous experience, the grim adventure of being a pariah. All of his small dog soul longed to answer the summons of the loving little voice, but his caution—bred of ill treatment—forbade any recognition of even the tenderest outstretched hand. He would have trotted on, a trembling wraith of a puppy challenging death at every street corner, if Nancy had not appealed to his gnawing hunger. For all at once she thought of a cookie in her pocket. A large cookie, with sugar on it. Eagerly she brought it forth; enticingly she extended it toward the small animal. And when he edged toward her, into the garden,

and made a feeble snatch at the cookie, she closed the gate. And raked kitchenward for a saucer of milk.

Later in the afternoon—when the dog, fed and bathed, was beginning to regain his confidence in the God-of-things-as-they-ought-to-be—Nancy took the small stranger to visit Mother. Mother still sat in the chair by the window, but her smile, though just as frequent, was not as gay as it once had been. And her slim hands had become transparent, rather than white.

"May I keep this puppy?" Nancy asked breathlessly. "May I? He's so sweet!"

Mother, her head lying back against a blue cushion, answered with another question. "Where did you get him, honey?" Mother asked. "Who gave him to you?"

Nancy answered breathlessly, with the pain lying stark in her eyes. "He was lost," she said. "I took him in. It's—it's awful—to be lost!"

Mother's loving arm drew the little girl close. She knew so well the story of that far-away, terrible half-hour!

"Always, dear, we must be kind to little lost things—" she said. "Mussn't we?"

And she kissed Nancy very tenderly. That special kiss lay warm on Nancy's heart for many years!

It was just two months later that Mother and the white dog, playing serenely on the scrap of a garden, saw the doctor drive up hurriedly and dash into the house. But that wasn't a thing of great moment, for the doctor came often, and he was usually hurried. It was rather more surprising to see Father come, a few minutes later, in a taxi. Father was a man of routine; he was not given to stopping home of an afternoon! Nancy wondered, as she tossed a rubber ball to the puppy, why Father was taking a holiday. And then nurse, strangely agitated, came running out of the house with Nancy's hat and the puppy's leash. And they all went for a long walk in the park. It was nearly dark when the three of them reached home.

Nancy, tiredly, asked to say good-night to Mother. Always she asked, and nearly always she was allowed, to go to Mother's room. It was a benediction—almost like saying "Now-I-lay-me"—to kiss Mother good-night. Mother's room was fragrant with flowers, and her hair waved about her white face, and her eyes were brilliant! But this night Nancy was sent directly to the nursery. And later Father came—a thing that she seldom had time to do—and tucked her into bed. And Nancy told herself that she would have thought her father had been crying—if ever men cried!

The next day nurse—strangely silent and red about the eyelids—took Nancy on a shopping tour. An expedition that began in the morning and lasted well into the late afternoon. And Nancy was too weary to notice the air of mystery about the house. Only she could smell a warm, summery scent of roses. Even in the far nursery she could smell them.

"Mother must have lots of flowers tonight," she said sleepily to nurse. "They're sweet—way down here through the hall they're sweet. Can I kiss Mother good-night?"

But nurse turned away her head sharply. "Mother's not so—" she began, and then—"Nancy, dear, don't ask to see your mother just now!"

And nurse bustled away, as if she were very busy—and very tired of questions.

The next day was fair. A blue and gold day. Again nurse, early in the morning, took Nancy from the house that lay so silently behind the square of city garden. Nurse took Nancy to the country in Father's largest limousine. They picnicked in a field that was gay with the green of growing things, and Nancy found some blue violets, late-blooming and lovely. She picked them to take home to Mother. Mother's eyes were like violets!

The ride and the picnic had both been long. Nancy slept, on the way home, with her head in nurse's lap and the blue flowers drooping from her small, moist hand. Father carried her in from the car and tucked her into bed. And his crisp mustache tickled her cheek as he kissed her. But Nancy could not understand why Father hurried from the room when she asked if she might go—in her white, little night-dress and blue felt slippers—to Mother's room.

It was the next morning, as she again played in the scrap of garden, tossing the rubber ball to the puppy, that she heard the ladies. Two ladies who walked past slowly, with long and furtive glances toward the house. Nancy, feeling their eyes upon her, turned self-conscious and stopped tossing the ball toward the waiting small dog. She did not want to listen, but the ladies, though their voices were low, spoke clearly.

"That's the child," said one of them. "Little Nancy Todd * * *

The other woman answered. "Plenty of money, and a lovely home," she said slowly, "but—poor little girl! To lose her mother!"

To lose her mother! Nancy caught her breath sharply. That was why Father had acted so strangely. That was why they had made excuses to keep her from Mother's loved presence. Why nurse had been so strange! Mother * * * Mother was lost! With a quick little rush Nancy turned from her play. Hurried into the house.

"Oh, nurse," she was calling frantically, through the halls—"Oh, nurse—"

Nurse came hurriedly. She stood at the foot of the staircase, an agitated figure in a blue and white uniform. Of her Nancy asked a question. A breathless, frightened question.

"Have we lost—Mother?" she questioned.

Nurse, so crisp in her uniform of blue and white, stared at the child. And then, suddenly, nurse's kindly eyes overflowed with the pent-up grief of the troubled days.

"Oh, my darling," she was sobbing, "we didn't mean to tell you. * * * Yes, honey, your mother is—gone—" Nancy brace her straight, little back. Her mouth quivered, but she did not cry. And then she darted past nurse and was running up the wide staircase to Mother's room.

Somehow the child expected to find that room in disorder. A shaken, unquiet room. But it was just as it had always been. Except that Mother—laughing from her chair by the window—was not a part of it. Except that Mother was gone. The draperies were held back daintily with their wide satin ribbons. The cushions, the down quilt, were as freshly blue as ever. There were flowers in a low bowl. But Mother—Mother was gone. The ladies had been right. Mother was lost!

Nancy had been lost, herself. Looking back across the years, she could remember the loneliness of her vigil as she sat waiting on the high stool. Mother—she could see pretty Mother sitting on just such a stool, waiting to be found. Mother who always lay back, propped up by soft cushions, in her easy chair. Mother's feet in their slippers, would dangle pitifully. Perhaps Mother would cry! Perhaps even worse—Mother would be afraid to cry!

And Nancy was remembering the white dog. How he had crossed the street, hesitant, pitifully terrified. How he had shuddered away from both kicks and caresses. How he had been uncertain when she called to him. How he had been forlorn, hungry. Would Mother—lost—be as terrified in her way as the small, white dog had been? Would she, so fragile, so tenderly cared for, run down streets and over trolley tracks? In her silk bedgown and her lacy negligee?

All at once Nancy turned from the room that, though empty, was so full of Mother's dear presence. She was running down the stairs, past nurse who still crouched, sobbing, upon the lowest step. She was opening the front door noiselessly and hurrying through the scrap of a garden. And the wrought-iron gate clicked to, behind her!

Nurse was not aware of her going. Of that Nancy was sure. She was going—she longed to be alone! She knew that she would succeed where the rest had failed. She knew that she would find Mother!

She hurried down the street, a small, purposeful figure. With wide eyes searching each arway, each space between houses. Perhaps Mother, scared and hungry, would be waiting for her coming in some dark alleyway.

The policeman, at the corner, watched her pass. He did not stop her—the child was so sure of herself, he said later, that he did not dream she was out alone for the first time. She scurried across a car track and a wide avenue. Peering into possible—and impossible—places. Once she called in a frightened, wee voice. Once she saw the white of something waving to her. But though she stopped short, with a great leap at her heart, it was only a curtain blowing from an open window.

Perhaps some of the passers-by noticed the little girl. But Nancy was quite unconscious of the people who crowded in upon her. They were only shadows. Only one reality stood out before her—a white, patient face, with dark hair waving softly back from it. A white face with the smile gleam swept from it. And blue eyes with a great loneliness in them!

It was only when her short legs began to feel tired, when her feet grew heavy and dragging, that Nancy knew fear. Not fear for herself, this time. Fear that Mother had gone so far that there would be no catching up with her! Despite her weariness, the fear lent new strength to Nancy. She began to run, darting, like a funny, little mechanical toy, between knots of people. With eyes that missed no crevice or cranny or possible hiding place.

And then, just when her body was drooping with utter fatigue, just when her chubby legs were protesting against their forced gait, Nancy came upon the door that swung open. A friendly door set in a wide brownstone building. A building with windows done in gold and sapphire and ruby-colored glass. With a tall steeple that pointed, like a finger, to a fluff of white clouds that sailed above the city. There were words printed, in letters of gold, upon the door. Nancy could not read them, but their message must have spoken gently to her heart. "Enter, rest, and pray!" said the letters of gold.

Nancy could not read the words. But something about the open door spoke reassuringly to her discouraged little spirit. The house, inside, looked so dim and cool and restful. Perhaps Mother—hurrying past—had thought so, too. Perhaps Mother worn out from running, had crept into the peaceful silence of the place. Perhaps Mother was there, now! Waiting for some one to come—to fetch her home.

It was with no feeling of hesitation, with no sense of lagging, that Nancy climbed the few low steps of the church. She was not afraid of a strange house, even though it was big! But a sensation that she could not explain came over her, as she stepped through the wide-flung door. A feeling that, in an older person, would have been called awe!

The house was strange. It was one great room, inside, furnished with long benches. Nancy had never been taken to a church, before—she did not quite understand! In the front of the room, barely distinguishable through the dimness, Nancy could see a platform. And in the back of the platform a great cross that glowed and glittered and shone. It seemed to draw her, that cross! As if something comforting lay in the glow of it.

Creeping down the aisle, between the long benches, Nancy felt very much alone. But, strangely enough, she did not feel lonely. She felt something near and friendly. As if somebody else were in the great room. It did not surprise her, all at once, to hear a voice. A deep, shaken voice, speaking aloud.

"O God," the voice was saying, "help me to help others. Give me an understanding heart. Give me a love that will see beyond the little ways of life * * * Give me the faith that I need—"

Nancy, coming forward slowly and silently, could see a figure, at last. It was a man, in black. He knelt in the

(Continued on page 7, Col. 1.)

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