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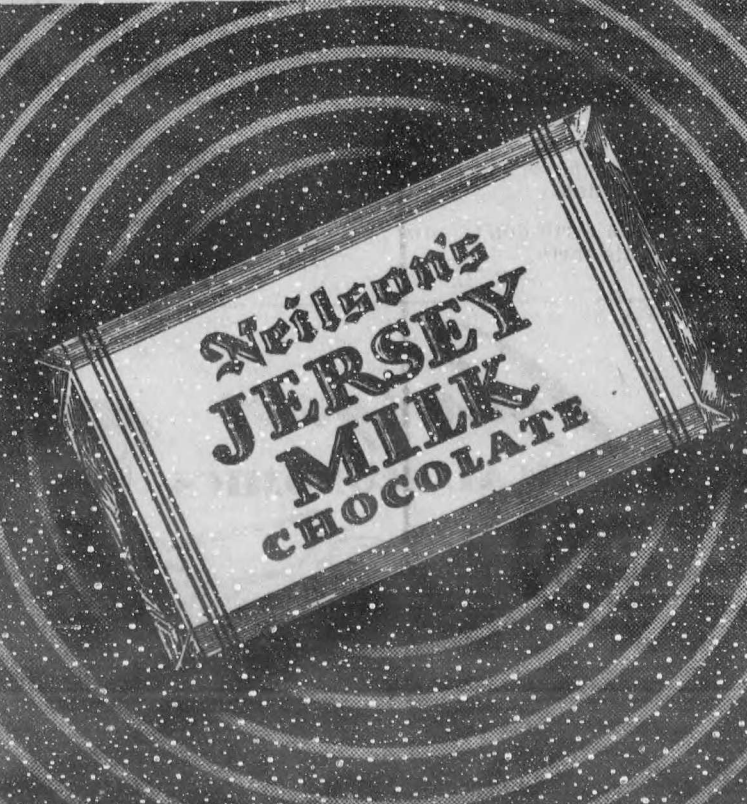
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**TO KISS THE CROSS**

(Continued from last week)

"They wanted to cut my ears off, Mummy. Don't let them do it, please. Don't send me back to school," pleaded Timmy, beginning to cry again.

Well, how did it happen that such things were allowed to happen at school? Or did Miss Mevin know anything about it? A fine, upstanding generation of barbarians the community was rearing. They might as well be members of the Hitler Youth Movement! Young werewolves, they were. No... Name calling would not help. She must get to the bottom of this. But what more did she need to know. They had frightened Timmy and he had run home. Jim was reaping in the back field and would not be in until supper time, thank heaven! Time, she needed time. She must persuade Timmy to go back to school tomorrow. Probably he had lost caste already, but if he could stand it for a day or two... maybe things would get better. Maybe. She must not tell Jim about this, unless she herself could not persuade Timmy to return to school. He would probably create a scene and thrash Timmy soundly for what he would consider cowardly behavior. He did not understand how dreadfully real it all seemed to a child living only in the present. "A child will believe anything until he finds out through experience that it is untrue" murmured Mary to herself. That was from her latest book on child psychology. Experience. Bitter experience. But she had always tried to tell Timmy the truth. There had been arguments with Jim, like the one over Santa Claus, but he usually gave in with something like, "Well, I suppose those psychologists, as you call them, are smarter than I am, Mary, so you're probably right." And that would settle it.

But what if her modern methods of child training were not as effective as the way in which grandma brought up her brood? Perhaps Timmy was unable to meet the demands of school because of her training. Had she failed as a mother? Let that pass for the moment. Jim must never know or he would be furious. How to get past the next few hours? She felt guilty hiding things from Jim. Timmy would have to be hidden this time. He could be put to bed with a very light supper, even though he was not really sick. He

was very pale, nevertheless. That was a capital idea. At least she would prevent an emotional storm. Jim always felt embarrassed in the sick room, and, being assured that it was not serious, would go out to do the evening shoes, leaving Mary to take care of Timmy. No. That was not the solution. It would be silly, unutterably silly. It was too late to take Timmy back to school. That created another problem. Would Timmy go back tomorrow?

Suddenly she realized that Timmy was standing beside her, staring at her, his face white with fear. Mary reached out and drew him to her side. Reinforced by the comfort of his mother's arm, and relieved after having told his story, Timmy gazed up into Mary's face and asked, "Will I have to go back to school Mummy?"

"Yes, dear—now don't worry, things will be all right." How flat the words sounded.

"If I have to go back—I won't! I won't!" cried Timmy passionately.

"What will Daddy say, dear?" Mary asked. It was not a fair question. In fact, it was a clear threat. The very question which had been troubling her could not be solved by her son.

Leaving Timmy to digest her last words along with an egg-nog, she went about her afternoon work.

Supper time came far too soon. Timmy was still determined never to go to school again. Jim was too tired to do much talking. Mary kept asking questions about the work, the size of the crop and anything she could think of to distract his attention. But a crisis could not be avoided. Jim finally asked the fatal question, "Well, son, what do you think of school?"

Timmy shifted uneasily in his chair and said nothing. The silence was becoming awkward. Mary could endure it no longer. "I think," she burst out, "that Miss Mevin is a good teacher, but she seems strange to all the young children. I'm sure Timmy will like her in a few weeks. You learned a lot of things today... didn't you Timmy? Tell Daddy how to spell cat."

"C-A-T," said Timmy slowly, with some hesitation. (As a matter of fact the morning had been spent on pictures, and Mary herself had coached Timmy in spelling this word.)

The effect on Jim was encourag-

ing. He leaned back in his chair, well pleased with himself, his son and the world. The crisis had been averted, temporarily at least.

Mary thought it wise to put Timmy to bed early. "Now say your prayers, dear," she whispered to her angel in striped pyjamas. When Timmy had finished, Mary said, "Timmy aren't you forgetting something? You're going to school now. What about Mia Melvin and all the boys and girls at school?"

"No, Mummy," he whispered fiercely. "I'm not going back, so why should I think about them." "Timmy, love, you are going back," said Mary firmly.

Half an hour passed in reasoning and expostulation. Finally Mary made her last plea before saying "Goodnight."

To her amazement, Timmy responded, "All right, Mummy, I will!" he murmured sleepily.

Mary sighed gratefully and lifted her rosary. "Ave Maria, plena gratia, ora pro nobis..." The words were full of peace and comfort. As Timmy's eyes closed and his head sank back on the pillow, she bent tenderly, almost fearfully to kiss the cross.

Love is like an onion,  
You taste it with delight;  
And when it's gone you wonder  
Whatever made you bite.

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