

## The Magpie's Nest

(Continued from page 15)

When she finished her drawing, they did play cards, but at ten o'clock she declared she could sit up no longer. First she rubbed out two wrinkles on his forehead, but they came back as soon as he was out of her sight. She heard him speaking to Mrs. Hassard for a time, though their words were indistinguishable. Very wearily and slowly she crept into bed. The thought of going out in the morning for breakfast was wearisome.

It was no more cheerful to contemplate when morning came and she waked from a long heavy feverish sleep. So she lay still, watching the shadow shift on the blind. She was not in the least hungry. Why not wait for lunch? Someone knocked.

"Here's your breakfast," said Mrs. Hassard. "And Mr. Carter said to tell you not to go out to-day, and he'll come up and see about your dinner."

"What?" said Hope stupidly. Mrs. Hassard repeated her remarks in a matter of fact tone. Hope blinked, and tried to think. Nick and dinner appeared with evening. She was dressed, she meant to scold him, but forgot. Her head was heavy, and it was so delightful to have him. He made her feel comfortable. She tried to remember that this would not last. She was in love; and she knew the end of that, by experience. But it did not seem to matter. Only by and bye, she managed to ask:

"What do you suppose Mrs. Hassard thinks?"

It was not that she cared for anyone's opinion for itself, but she was in Mrs. Hassard's house. Nick only remarked soothingly:

"I wouldn't worry about that; I talked to her." He added to himself: "Mrs. Hassard won't think at all, as long as she gets paid promptly."

### CHAPTER XXIV.

AND it was true that so far as it could be avoided, Mrs. Hassard did not think. What milk of human kindness had not dried in her long since in the arid wastes of "furnished rooms" went out to Hope when she perceived her lodger was really ill. But this was probably because no active exercise of benevolence was required of her. Nick took it off her hands, and Mrs. Hassard was glad to let him do it. And Hope did not look very ill. Mrs. Hassard thought her lucky.

She could get about most of the time, when her fever was at the ebb. When it burned up higher, the flush it lent her concealed her growing thinness. She spent most of her time lying, banked up with pillows, on her meagre couch, with a rug over her feet, her eyes half closed, her thoughts shuttling between her old day dreams and flickering visions of an equally fantastic future. Sometimes she would doze, and wake again feeling hot and oppressed, with a reminiscent touch of dread, as if some black pit had opened at her feet in a dream. She had time enough to weigh her affairs, perhaps to be sorry; but she did neither at first. Perhaps the fever would not permit her to think coldly, though none of her fancies even verged on delirium; it was only her old inconsequence and impracticality of mind. So one day after another went by, in a curious timeless manner. She dieted on milk because it saved the trouble of eating; she pretended to read sometimes, and would close the book in the middle of a sentence. And every few days she would steal out of doors, and come back weakly, with a defeated look, unable to face the cold and the barren inhospitable streets.

After awhile, though the lassitude grew on her, her mind began to struggle with it, in the manner of one gagged and bound when freedom is an immediate necessity. Being ill was a kind of release from a troublesome world, at first. It grew to be an imprisonment.

She had never been ill, or at least not helpless, in her life. It appeared to her in the light of a cowardly stratagem, robbing her of her legitimate weapons. Life had no conception of immediate justice, so far as she could see; it might be immediately cruel, or boundlessly generous, but always unfair from the standpoint of to-day. She had said in her heart that she could do without the world, without anyone or anything; in the end, of course, she expected to do without love too, and therefore without Nick. This was as if some mocking power should hold her and say, "Yes, but first taste and see if you like the brew." It is easier to reject the world than to have it reject oneself. She wanted her work, anyway! And where was her independence of Nick, and of to-morrow? She could not walk, and he carried her in his arms, metaphorically; as he had done literally. So her thoughts fretted about in a circle.

And as the days stretched into weeks, and the New Year came and went, the oppression that haunted her in dreams

(Continued on page 47)

# Those Letters from the Front

And Other Matters Dear to the Hearts of Mothers

By JEAN BLEWETT



HERE is going to be great rejoicing when the victory is won and Johnny comes marching home, but how we are going to miss those letters from the front! "Oh," says one mother, "we will have our boys, we won't need letters, a boy in the arms is worth a dozen letters on the way." All the same, we are going to miss the "nearness" of those epistles, the heart to heart confidences, the love making, the tenderness, which only absence and danger can evoke in a real boy, the tip-toe expectancy with which we waited for them, the strange seriousness, the touch of concealed pathos and homesickness, the freedom, the fun. And they are fond of fun, these sunny subalterns of ours.

A letter just received from one who was allowed to spend his holidays in Paris has this joke: "I met a wealthy American in the lobby of the hotel who told me the City of the Seine was the greatest place for tipping he had yet been in. 'This hat,' said he, 'has cost me ten dollars in tips already. When I hear people discussing what is or is not the most important event in the history of Paris I don't say anything out loud, but I tell myself that so far as financial prosperity is concerned, I should say the discovery of America by old Christopher Columbus was the making of this here City on the Seine.'"

The echo of the lad's laugh reached all the way here—just as the echo of all he does or says reaches here. There is a jubilant chant, set to an hilarious air, and mothers only dare to sing it in their hearts. But it rings gloriously out in that sacred quarter.

"When Johnny comes marching home again, hurrah! hurrah! The old church bells will peal with joy, You're welcome home, my own dear boy! And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home!"

### Mother's Birthday Present

DAD and Boy were on a shopping expedition. So was the Man who owned the earth. It just happened that the pressure of the crowd made the three neighbors for a short space. Dad had been too busy earning his ample (!) wage of fifteen dollars a week to get acquainted with his employer, but Boy knew him at a glance—Boy knew lots of things that Dad didn't.

"Hang on to your pay envelope," he chuckled, "the man that owns the earth is on your trail."

But they wasted no time on him. With the nicest woman in the world to be provided with a worth-while birthday present, and only the noon hour in which to do the purchasing, they were a busy pair.

"I've got sixty-five cents saved up," crowed Boy. "Put this to your dollar eighty and we've how much, Dad?" The bigger boy (which was exactly what Dad was), counted on the fingers of his right hand, from which he had drawn a clumsy mitten that the coast between him and his calculations might be quite clear. "Two dollars and forty-five cents," he announced proudly.

"Great on figures, ain't you, Dad? Hope I take after you."

"Just so—so," in a burst of modesty. "But, I say, what'll we buy for your Ma?"

"Seems to me a brooch'd be just about the proper caper," hazarded Boy.

Dad disagreed. "How about a little cute shawl for her shoulders? Our kitchen ain't any too warm nights and mornings, and—"

"Silk shawl, of course," interrupted Boy quickly.

"Silk's chilly stuff," argued Dad gently, "no wear in it either. I was thinkin' a neat black wool or—"

"Red's a nicer color," cried Boy, "and warmer."

Dad noted the tremble of disappointment. "All right, sir, red it is," he agreed cheerily. "And if Ma ain't took completely by surprise, I miss my guess."

"She'll be proud 's a peacock. I tell you, Dad, if she had fine dresses, and beads and back-combs, and such, wouldn't she be a peach, eh, what?"

Doing a little dance of triumph he trod upon the man who owned the earth. "Now that there's two of us earning wages," up went his head, "it looks to me as if everyone must be envying us—even the man that owns the earth." Then in what he vainly thinks is a whisper, "There he is, take a squint at him, Dad. Grouchy looking piece, if you ask me."

Dad indulged in the fleetest, most furtive of glances. "Peevish," was his summing up. "Seems to me if I knowed our little home was clear of debt, that sick or well there was no mortgage on my day's work, so to speak, I'd be kicking up my heels like a colt."

A picture of docile Dad cavorting around in such manner made Boy laugh till he cried. "You're such fun!" he gasped, "keep my ribs sore giggling."

"Comes natural as breathin' to me," boasted Dad and laughed too.

The man that owned the earth scowled at them. They did not know, how could they, that as he followed them to the shawl

## St. Patrick's Day

There's an Isle, a green Isle set in the sea,

Here's to the Saint that blessed her!

And here's to the billows wild and free

That for centuries have caressed her!

Here's to old Ireland! Fair, I ween,

With the blue skies stretched above her!

Here's to her shamrock warm and green,

And here's to the hearts that love her!

JEAN BLEWETT.

counter he was envying them their comradeship, that as he stood there, prosperous, successful—but alone, he was telling his other self, his human self, "Money isn't everything. It must make a man feel big to have a boy of his own prancing at his heels, pulling him seven ways for Sundays, telling him all he knows and more too, laughing at him and with him. 'Now that there's two of us,' that's what the young beggar said. Life must be worth while to the man with a boy of his own. I'll raise his wages, yes I will, you needn't argue. Mind's made up."

"It ain't as if we hadn't good times to look forward to," Dad's jubilant voice came floating back, "heaps of 'em." All undreaming of one good thing coming to him, the thing he had craved but never dared to hope for, "a raise," he laid a mittened hand on Boy's shoulder and drew him toward the door.

The crowd parted deferentially to let the man who owned the earth pass out. "You lucky beggar!" he muttered, his eyes on Dad. "You lucky beggar!"

### Mother's Girl—At the Awkward Age

HAS it ever struck you that we mothers can be mean, downright mean, to our girls who are at the ugly duckling stage of development?

"I'm not making Ruth a new dress for spring. What's the use? Nothing looks decent on her now that she has reached the awkward age."

Thus Ruth's maternal parent addresses her friends, careless of Ruth's presence and of her visible embarrassment.

I dislike the term "awkward age" and make no apology for saying so. "All hands and feet, she's at the awkward age, poor girl!" says one. "This is Jane. Her brothers call her 'Skinny,'" was the way her mother introduced her thirteen year old daughter to a caller. Adding, as the child's distress made itself evident, "There, there, you can't help it, my dear, we have all been through the awkward age."

There is no awkward age for anything so sweet and dear as these young growing things. Self conscious girls of twelve, thirteen, fourteen may be, but their bashfulness is becoming. If they seem

awkward, it is because we have allowed them to be criticized, have laughed at them, teased them until they, sensitive, self-distrustful, feel like hiding their tender immaturity out of sight.

We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. We will be very proud of them when they grow into lovely swans, but we seem to take it for granted that in the meantime we may discuss their shortcomings callously. One of these poor wee women poured out her woes—real woes they were—to the Auntie she loved best.

"Awkward age! I hate it," she cried, "hate myself for being homely and long legged and muddy skinned and—and all that. I don't want the birthday party they're giving me. Jimmy Neal says I look a scarecrow, and I know I do in that awful short blue dress—anybody would!" Here the tears choked her.

Auntie let her have her cry out, then sought the mother. "I've come to tell you I'm giving up my Mother's Meetings for the poor women of the ward and intend forming a class among those of our own circle."

"What do you mean?" laughed the other.

"I mean business," came the answer. "I was at the so-called awkward stage myself, not so long ago, and know how unhappy a girl can be in the interim between childhood and girlhood. If you mothers haven't refinement enough to show your blessed growing babies every consideration, someone ought to take you in hand."

In this case, things turned out beautifully. The mother took to studying the fledgling with such good results that we pass the story along just as the maternal parent told it.

"First of all I disarmed her by showing how precious she really was to all of us, to me especially, being 'mother's last little girl.' By the time I had changed her fashion of hair dressing, drawn the straight locks out of her eyes and braided them into a pigtail, she was improved. She has beautiful brown eyes. Her complexion was still muddy, but seemed to clear as she grew happy and free. I paid attention to what she wore, and that helped. I gave the skimpy blue frock away and made her a soft one in cream, another in rose. Her duskiness made yellow, almost any shade of yellow, becoming. I cut out brown, which calls for creamy skin and dark eyes. Before long the Auntie who had read me the lesson was complimenting me. Better still, we have become chums, my little girl and I, and best of all she is happy as the day is long."

In a home near us is a dear little thing who blushes if you look at her. She is sullen in her sensitiveness, but loveable if let alone. She gave a garrulous visitor something to think about.

"Poor Gwendoline!" the visitor laughed. "I can remember how I used to squirm and wriggle when folks looked me over as if wondering at the size of my feet, plainness of my face and the general know-nothingness of my few remarks. You would like to skip the awkward age, wouldn't you?"

"I'd like to skip the people who keep talking about it," came the retort on the instant.

These daughters of ours, dear at any time, dearest of all perhaps when they begin to realize that they are growing into girlhood—and to glow at the thought!

### A Royal Practitioner

QUEEN ELIZABETH of the Belgians is a fully qualified Doctor of Medicine. Some years ago she took her degree, after the usual course of hard study prescribed.

"Why give so much time and application to a profession which any other woman of ability can fill? Is it not enough to be a Queen?" enquired a close friend.

"I will answer your last question first," returned Queen Elizabeth. "To be a Queen is to be the mother of many people—and a perfect mother should be wise in all that goes to make her children happy and healthy. So I have become a doctor. Also I have asked the University not to term me the 'Queen-Doctor,' but the 'Doctor-Queen.'"