

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## An Easter Solo

(Emma Huntington Nason, in 'Forward'.)

'I cannot help it, mother. I am bitterly disappointed. I have worked so hard on my singing lessons this winter, and have put so much money into them, expecting to have this position in the choir; and now Mr. Graham has given it to Alice Thompson; and you know, mother, that, although I was not actually engaged, it was understood that I was to have the soprano's place this spring. Alice Thompson doesn't need the position—she has money enough—and Mr. Graham only gave it to her to please her father who pays the most of Mr. Graham's own salary as leader of the choir.'

Tears of disappointment and humiliation filled the eyes of the young girl as she spoke; and she threw herself dejectedly into an easy chair, while the mother, controlling her own feelings, endeavored to comfort her daughter.

'I know, Eleanor,' she said, 'that you had reason to expect this position, and we do need the salary; but if the place is given to Alice, we cannot help it now. Alice has a sweet voice, and I hope she will do well.'

'But just think, mother, she is going to sing my solo, which I have been studying with Professor Harding for this very service. It is too humiliating. How can I bear it? I am too angry and indignant to go to church at all.'

'Eleanor,' said Mrs. Deane, gently, 'I know how you are suffering, and I feel your disappointment very keenly, but this is Easter Sunday, and we should rejoice, with the world, that Christ is risen, even if there are dead hopes in our own hearts. Let me leave you, dear, for a few moments alone with this thought of Easter.'

Mrs. Deane bent and kissed the forehead of the young girl, as she lay listlessly back in her chair, and then quietly left the room.

In a few moments Eleanor came into the hall with a look of resolution, if not of serenity, upon her face. Her mother saw that the battle was not yet won.

They stepped out together into the sunshine of the early spring morning. The spirit of the resurrection, in the natural as well as in the spiritual world, was everywhere apparent; but Eleanor was only conscious of the discordant elements within herself.

As she entered the church the glorious tones of the organ greeted her ears, but her heart made no response to the Easter choral, 'Christ is risen!' She silently took her old place with the chorus, and the service began.

As the newly organized quartette, under the leadership of Mr. Graham, arose to sing the opening anthem, Eleanor observed that Alice was very pale.

'Is she faint, or is she frightened?' thought Eleanor. 'She must be frightened. I've heard her say that she sometimes felt "stage struck" when she was expected to sing alone; and she has never sung before so large an audience before.'

The quartette opened with a tenor solo by Mr. Graham; then Alice was to sing.

Mr. Graham inclined his head slightly toward his new soprano. Eleanor watched her closely. Alice was deathly pale.

She opened her lips, but could make no sound.

Was she so frightened that she was going to fail? The tenor's own face blanched. The great congregation, with the opening strains of the anthem still lingering in their ears, awaited the voice of the soprano. She could not utter a sound.

Eleanor saw it; and a guilty feeling of triumph surged through her heart. The leader saw it, with horror and despair; for he alone was responsible for the success of this Easter music. Great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. In his desperation he glanced at Eleanor, and the color came back to his face. This girl knew the music.

'Sing!' he said, almost fiercely.

It had all happened in an instant; but in this brief time a momentous struggle had taken place in Eleanor Deane's soul.

Should she come to the relief? Should she save Alice and the leader from inevitable failure? She alone could do it. A sense of the injustice from which she had suffered and the voice of injured pride clamored on the one hand, while the consciousness of what the Christ-spirit demanded, pleaded on the other.

Alice Thompson sank into her chair and turned her white face imploringly to Eleanor. Her lips were mute; but her eyes said:

'Sing!'

Eleanor's heart almost stopped beating; then it suddenly thrilled with the nobler instincts of her pure and generous girlhood.

'For our transgressions hath he died!'

began Eleanor, in tones of emotion that stirred every heart in the great audience below.

'For our redemption, He is raised;  
And with Him, the world, though dead,  
Is risen—is risen!—'

rang out the clear, pure voice in joyous, exultant melody.

'Gloria in Excelsis—in Excelsis Deo!'

It was a paean of victory. Every soul who heard it felt the triumph of life over death—of the Christ-love over self and sin. But no one, except the happy mother, ever knew how the Easter miracle was that day repeated in the life of Eleanor Deane.

Eleanor Deane stood looking out of the hall window, her thoughts busy with many things.

The door bell rang suddenly.

'Why, Alice, is it you?' exclaimed Eleanor. 'How glad I am to see you. I was just starting for the choir rehearsal. A moment later I should have missed you.'

'I am very glad, too,' replied Alice. 'I intended to come earlier, but was delayed on the way. I want to talk with you a little, Eleanor, before we see Mr. Graham to-night,' and Alice smiled a faint, tremulous little smile, as Eleanor drew her into the cosy cushioned recess near the hall window.

Eleanor, dear,' said Alice, 'you know I have already tried to thank you for saving me from disgrace by singing my Easter solo for me, last Sunday, when I was so frightened I could not utter a sound; and Mr. Graham assures me that nobody

in the congregation could have noticed the trouble at all, you came in so promptly, and—yes, dear, I shall say it—so generously, like your own magnificent self. There's not another girl in the world that would have done it for me, or for anybody, who had selfishly taken the place in the choir that had rightfully belonged to her.

'Oh, Alice!' began Eleanor.

'Please don't interrupt me,' begged Alice, with a pretty flush of embarrassment upon her face; 'I know I'm mixing my sentences all up, but my mind is perfectly clear on the subject. I have been thinking about it all the week. The place of soloist in the choir belongs to you, Eleanor. Mr. Graham intended that you should have it, and only gave it to me as a matter of policy, to please papa, because he has contributed so largely to the music fund; and I knew it all the time, but papa didn't—poor, dear papa—who has been so proud of my little gift for music. He never suspected what a dismal failure I should prove. It makes me faint now to think how suddenly I was overcome by that nervous fright when I rose to sing. And now, to-night, I am going to resign the position, on condition that it is restored to you, who should have had it in the first place. Come, we must hurry. It is late now.'

'Alice Thompson!' exclaimed Eleanor. 'Sit down again on that cushion! Sit down, I say, and listen to reason. You are not going to resign your position on any such condition.'

'But I wish to—really and sincerely, Eleanor. I truly, with all my heart, desire to give up the place to you; and papa and mamma approve. They both think I am doing right.'

'But in the face of such an overwhelming majority, I assert that you are doing very wrong. Alice, dear,' added Eleanor tenderly, 'it is very sweet and lovely in you to wish to do this; and it makes me feel very grateful and very humble, but I cannot accept such a great sacrifice. You must sing now. It is due to yourself to keep the place, and prove that you are able to do so. With your beautiful voice, and all the culture it has had, it would be simply wicked in you to be—forgive me, dear—a permanent failure.'

'But suppose I should try again, and have another panic?'

'Believe me, Alice, you never will. And if you will let me say it, I truly think that your nervousness last Sunday was chiefly caused by your troubled thoughts of me.'

'I know it was,' said Alice.

'Well, then, everything is all right between us now; and to-morrow you will sing beautifully. You must, you know. You owe it to yourself, to your father, to Mr. Graham, and'—this Eleanor added imploringly—'to me.'

'Do you really think it is my duty?'

'I am sure of it,' asserted Eleanor.

'Then, I will try once more,' said Alice.

That evening, at the rehearsal, both girls sang unusually well; and if the leader of the choir had any misgivings in regard to the future success of his soprano soloist, they were, in a measure, dispelled when Alice, with modest determination, said to him, 'Mr. Graham, I shall not fail again.'

And here let it be said, she never did.