

MY BELOVED MOTHER

AS A
GIRL
OF FIFTEEN
SEES HER.

I ADORE my mother.

She is very beautiful and because she likes to wear white, even though her dark hair is turning gray, she comes to meet me in a white frock, and takes my two hands in hers and lifts her face—her dear, tired face—to me to be kissed. That is one thing I wonder about my mother—if ever she kissed anyone. Always she waits for me to kiss her.

There are a great many things girls never know about their mothers. The reason is that always they think of them as their mothers, never that they were girls, never that they are women, or even persons, but just that they are "mother." That is really very selfish and wicked of them. Mothers are to blame for this, although no one ever blames them because that is what it is to be a mother.

When I think about my mother as if she were another person—some one who wasn't my mother—she seems even more wonderful. She lives just for others; tirelessly she serves other people. When our family rise in protest—for even our family is not all selfish—mother just patiently waits for our protests to die away—and goes on just the same.

This sounds as if I thought my mother the most wonderful mother in the world—and so I do. Her strength never fails; her self-control is as marvellous as her endurance. Yet she is as shy as a girl and blushes pink at compliments. Although she is always gracious and polite to people who may be in our house, her reticence is so great that it extends over a great deal I should like to know.

My grandmother was like this, too. When I tell my mother how wonderful I think she—my mother—is, mother smiles and says, "My mother" (meaning my grandmother) "was the best woman I have known." That is exactly what I think now of my mother, and if this chain has continued far enough back, I think there must have been some woman some time who came from heaven—think how very perfect she must have been.

But she knows people, although she doesn't always express her opinion. She has let me blunder on with people I liked, wisely, I suppose, letting me find out for myself how worthless they were. And all the time if I had noticed I might have known what she thought, for if mother can't praise she says nothing. However, I have heard her say to father that he shouldn't trust this man or that. Dad, with his blundering masculine wits wanting to know why, mother would just shrug her shoulders. There's no reason, but mother is always right, as both Dad and I have found.

Her wit and humor I don't know much about, although she is witty and bright and gay, for her love of fun was one of the sacrificial offerings made to my father's sense of sobriety and the fitness of things. Why? Why? Oh, why? But, then, of course, we live to-day. And besides, this sounds too much like criticism.

She settles questions very quickly in the feminine way of applying an immediate remedy to a particular case. Workmen working in our house are always given hot tea and coffee and the use of the kitchen stove. I have never known my mother to attend a temperance meeting, but she accounted for the hot drinks by saying briefly, "They can't drink both hot coffee and liquor at the same time." Which is sense.

Our house is managed in the same quiet, efficient way. Mother settled the servant problem by never having maids except when there was so much to do she couldn't do it all. She said servants were more bother than they were worth. But then, of course, her standard of house-keeping is rather high,—so high that I am afraid she classes me with the maids.

Two other characteristics mark her household management: there is never any gossiping or any disputing. Gossip I never hear except at other girls' houses and not much there, for I don't like it—it really makes me uneasy. In our house, if visitors attempt to talk scandal or waste time in gossip, mother stops it before it begins in some way or manner she has.

As for disputing, of course we have perfectly awful rows—do you know any boys or girls who don't? But as far as my father and she are concerned, my mother never could see any occasion for disputing—consequently no question is ever raised.

It's quite nonsense, I think, about the modern woman being new; I believe all women who have done things or got things done in the world are the same. Think how clear-headed my mother is about my education. My brother used to say, "Can't Helen do this or that for me?" Mother would say, very firmly, "Helen has no more time for housework than you have. She has to work exactly as you do; her studies are the same. She is not to be hampered by doing housework." That is what famous women who have educated girls have written in books on education, but my mother worked it out for herself.

Can you guess what flowers my mother likes best? Of course, sweet-peas, mignonette and all the sweet old-fashioned flowers that grow informally in gardens. As for her other tastes, one has to dig to find what they are, so completely does she efface herself. She has always liked best what Dad or we wanted. But I know that she prefers Louis XV. furniture and chintz to den stuff and leather. In dresses, she likes to wear gray and mauve besides the white. We have such fun at the dressmaker's for I like to plan my mother's frocks now. Mother listens patiently and lets herself be fitted no end, and then says quietly, "Is this your revenge for my having got your dresses for fifteen years?" Then we laugh and mother modifies the style.

As for us—pouf! It's very hard on us to have to admit it but it is an open laughing secret in our family that mother likes us better grown up and half grown up than she did when we were babies. I think she is so strong she doesn't like weakness in any form. But as for care, all our relations, not to mention the family doctor—rise up and chorus, "Such healthy children." My Aunt descends on us and says to me, "You let your mother do too much for you. You must stop it." "What can I do, Aunt?" I protest. She says, "Your father should stop it." Then I giggle at the idea of anyone—even my father—getting my mother to change her mind once she had made it up. All I can do is be grateful for all the devotion and sacrifice, the patience and sympathy my mother has put into my life—for what would it be without these? And so, I worship my mother.

AS A
BOY
OF FIFTEEN
SEES HER.

POOR MA!

Come to think of it now, she had a pretty tough time raising me—of all the family to have caused mamma all the anguish and despair she must have suffered during the early period of my existence, and perhaps even now, poor dear, sweet mamma may be lying awake at night wondering what kind of hero or rogue her son may turn out to be, whether it is worth while sending me to high school or down town to an office to struggle away at figures in some ugly

big ledger. To be a mamma and especially my mamma must be a job that sorely tries the patience. But don't worry, mamma, your darling son has secret ambitions of his own. When he gets out of high school he is going to bring honor to you and the goes well, and you will be amply repaid for all the anxious and despairing moments spent upon your youngest child—that's me.

There are six of us in our family—two girls and four boys. Everyone is older than I am, and being the youngest, I suppose Ma looks for remarkable things in me, as she did in the oldest as a boy. But alas, and alack! poor patient Mamma received her first jolt when I was but six. That momentous sixth year was the turning point in my career, and Mamma did the turning. It was really the first consciousness I had of Mother as an individual with an inalienable right to govern me and govern me sternly.

It happened one day that Ma, in her quiet, unobtrusive way, opened the drawer of a big ugly cupboard in our kitchen and went searching through a lot of more or less rubbish that accumulated in what was really a depository for everything. Of course, being inquisitive, I had to help Mamma find what she was looking for, so I helped her rake over the rubbish. Soon she removed an old shaving strop with the metal pieces off and withdrew to a back room with me at her heels. Arrived there, she took a seat and invited me along side of her. In her very quiet and unobtrusive way she informed me that quite by accident she had discovered that I had not been at school for a whole month—that I had been playing hookey—that it was wrong of me to deceive her and myself and my teacher—that it must not occur again—that it would not occur again if she could help it, and so she turned me around. This was the turning point in my career, for with the aid of the shaving strop which she doubled up in her hand, she applied in a practical way to my rear the admonition she had directed to my face.

Mamma seemed much perturbed. This all happened at night. The next morning Mamma put on her hat and cloak and marched me off to my class, which was just assembling. She sat me down in one of the front seats while she spoke with my teacher in an undertone. By and by the teacher beckoned to me to come up to my desk. I approached with much trepidation. She and Mamma both spoke kindly to me, and in a few moments I was standing in front of the class, my eyes full of tears, and in a trembling voice, almost inaudible, I had to ask the class, my teacher and my mother to forgive me for playing truant and promise never to do it again. A better punishment wise mamma could not have found. Timid by nature, it would have been an ordeal for me to have stood before the class in ordinary circumstances, but, disgraced, it was terrible!

And so Mamma does everything. The other children didn't give her a bit of trouble, so she has often told me, but me—her heart must have been broken.

After the above mentioned episode, Mamma, by a clever knack, did not permit me to bear a bit of resentment against her. On the contrary, my love for her grew immensely, until to-day I think there's not another woman in the whole wide world as true, as loving, as tolerant, as mindful of her duty to us and to everyone else. Her hair is beginning to gray now, and I begin to hope that I may not lose the chance of some day paying her back for all her tender care of me.

Mamma is most independent—I mean independent in spirit. She will not allow anyone to do anything for her that she can do for herself, nor will she ever put herself under obligation to anyone if she can possibly avoid it. I remember one day she was soliciting alms for the church. She was offered a cheque for \$50.00 by a man who wanted his name mentioned as largely as possible, and who seemed to give Mamma the impression that he was obliging her by giving it because he imposed so many conditions upon it. Mamma promptly but politely refused the cheque, but in order that the fund would not be without the proffered amount, she made it up out of her own savings and put it on the list under some other name.

If Mamma had been a man, I believe she would have made a dandy army commander. Not that she is always giving orders, but she has such an imposing air about her that really one cannot help but admire her. If one of us does something that displeases her or causes her distress, we can all feel the discomfort she is suffering, and we can almost anticipate what she is going to say, although it may be but very little. And we can little is directly to the point. Never, never, have I known her to rebuke Dad in front of any of the children—there are three of us at home now, the other three having been married. Nor does father criticize or rebuke her in front of us, although I have frequently heard them in their bed-room holding forth in a wordy argument, where most of the words come from Dad. You can always distinguish Mother's even, quiet voice as it utters words each one of which seems to have a meaning and each one of which is uttered with the greatest seeming deliberation. Under the greatest stress she is always calm and clear-minded, but I have seen her cry after having disposed in her own way of some momentous worry. Yes, indeed, Mother could have commanded an army, she could have managed a great business, she could have ruled a state. As a diplomat I don't think there is a woman her equal. While she is not a friend who acts with an ulterior motive in everything she does, yet she is tactful and diplomatic in her relations with others. No one has ever to my knowledge caught her napping.

An indefatigable worker, she inspires all of us with a spirit of up and doing. Laziness she abhors, and will not tolerate. If one of us shows signs of failing in an attempt, Mother is right at us to carry it through. "You must not fail," she says. "Cowards fail, but not real men and women." She is the first one out of bed in the morning and the last one in at night, nor does she retire before she sees that everything and everybody is well. A spirit indomitable and a will of iron carry her through everything.