

Edith's Vocation

"Do you think it wise to let Edith go?"

"I cannot well help it, Father. If I object to her going, her father will be more than ever determined to have her go."

"But her vocation?"

"He promises that he will consent to her becoming a Religious when she returns if a year in gay New York has not 'cured' her."

Father Garvey was troubled. "Do you think the promise is an honest one?"

"I know that he will keep his word if she still wants to enter the convent, but"—she hesitated—"I think he firmly believes that a year of gayety will make her forget the nuns and her happy school life, which is, he claims, all that her vocation amounts to."

Father Garvey walked up and down the room, his head bent, his hands clasped behind him. Suddenly his face cleared. "Edith is a devout Socialist. We will leave her future in the hands of our Blessed Mother. Why should we fear? Tell Edith to come to me tomorrow morning after Mass," extending his hand in dismissal.

"You wish to see me, Father?"

Edith paused at the sacristy door.

Father Garvey turned with a smile. "Yes; come in. What's this I hear about your going to New York for a year?"

"Isn't it wonderful, Father? All my life I have wanted to see the ocean; now I shall not only see it, but get out upon it. Uncle Louis has a yacht and they take a little ocean trip every summer."

"The ocean is a wonderful thing; very awe-inspiring."

"O Father! just think of all the wonderful things I will have to tell Mother Agatha and the dear Sisters when I come home."

"You are glad to go, my child?"

"I really don't know, Father," a shadow crossed the bright face. "When I think of the ocean and the many strange and beautiful things I am going to see I can hardly wait for the time to come. But when I think of leaving home, my parents, the dear old convent and all my old sweet associations, why, then,"—her voice broke a little—"I am not sure that I want to go at all." Then, more cheerfully, "But a year will soon pass and everything will be the same when my year is over."

Father Garvey watched her closely. "But you will not be the same." "Why not, Father?" surprisedly. "Your uncle's position and wealth will put you into society where you will meet and make friends with all kinds of people; most of them worldly and irreligious. You will see and hear things which, in your innocent and sheltered life, you have never dreamed of."

Edith's cheeks flushed. "What shall I do, Father? Papa's heart is set upon my going." "Go, kneel before Our Lady's altar, renew your act of consecration to her and ask her to watch over you in a particular manner. To tell her that you are leaving your soul in her keeping until you return. Then promise to say special prayers in her honor every day."

"I will, Father, I will." Edith was crying softly.

"Keep strictly to the practice of your religion. Omit none of your devotions, and above all, my child," Father Garvey spoke solemnly, "keep your heart and mind pure, as a child of Mary should ever be."

"I will, Father, I will. And you will pray for me?"

"Every day, my child. And now," clasping her hand warmly, "good-by. A pleasant journey and a safe return. God bless you always."

Edith drew in deep breaths of the cool, balmy air. Next week she was going home. Home! She had been away for one long year. Father, mother, the convent, Mother Agatha, the dear Sisters, Father Garvey, the church where she had received her First Holy Communion. She would see them all again.

The honk-honk of a big machine broke her reverie. She caught a flash of the ear through the trees when it turned into the grounds. With a cheery "good morning!" Mark Pennington sprang from the auto and hurried up the steps.

"Fair goodness of the day," bowing low before her, "behold an early worshiper. Surely I am favored by the gods this morning. I was but driving past the temple just to feel that I was near your shrine and behold! I am permitted to kneel at your feet and offer my request together with my homage."

"Your request, sir knight?" Edith played up to his jest.

"That you would deign to share my chariot for a chase with the morning breeze. We'll outride the east wind, we'll meet the spirit of the lake, we'll fill our hands with earth's sweetest blossoms. I'll weave for you a crown of daisies, I'll—"

"There, there, sir knight," laughed Edith. "I'm persuaded of your fealty. I grant your request."

"My heart is torn with joy, fair goddess; my chariot waits."

"Arise, sir knight, let us go." Laughing merrily, the young people hurried to the auto. After they were seated the young man turned to her. "I am curious to know where you were going so early."

"I wanted to go to the 7 o'clock Mass at St. Ursula's."

"Seven o'clock Mass on a week day?"

Edith ignored his surprised tone. "It is not much out of your way. I thought you might set me down there and then go on with your drive, or," noting his disappointment, "you could return with me."

"How long will this—Mass—keep you?"

"About thirty minutes. You could have a nice little spin in that time."

"Couldn't I wait for you?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"And," he hesitated. "I could go in, couldn't I? I have never been inside a Catholic church."

"Certainly you may come in. I shall be glad to have you."

Mark Pennington paid little attention to the service. He watched Edith, who, forgetful of his presence prayed earnestly. He had thought her charming at tennis, beautiful in her simple evening dress. He admired her quick wit and ready humor. But the Edith, with the pure angelic face, whose tender eyes were fixed upon the altar, was a revelation to him.

Catholicism meant nothing to Mark Pennington; that is, nothing more than handsome churches and broad charities. He rather admired their quiet indifference to small bigotries and their fidelity to their faith. But always thought of Catholics as a race apart. His porter was a Catholic, as was his laundress. The negro woman who cleaned his office, was a Catholic, so also was the old apple woman at the corner. He had seen her telling her beads while waiting for a car. The wise and learned priests, the black gowned, soft stepping nuns were Catholics. But Edith! the brightest, jolliest girl he knew. That was different.

Somehow she seemed very far removed from him. Yet he had intended that very day to ask her to be his wife.

After the service, seated in the machine, Edith was her bright, companionable self again. Mark, however, was quiet and thoughtful.

"So you are going home next week, Miss Edith?"

"Yes," she said brightly. "I can hardly wait until next week. Do you know I have been away a whole year?"

"Have you no regret in leaving?"

A shadow flitted across her face. "Uncle Louis and Aunt Jane have been very good to me and I love them, but—father and mother are home. I have made some dear friends here, but there are dear friends at home."

"Dearest friends?" He watched her narrowly.

"Some dearer, Mother Agatha and the Sisters. Then there are my old schoolmates and dear Father Garvey. Not to mention," she added laughingly, "the dog, the cat and the birds."

"What are you going to do with your time, your life?" Something in the man's voice troubled Edith. "You cannot stay home always."

"I expect—I hope—to devote my life to the service of God, to enter the convent."

Neither spoke for a moment, then Edith continued. "I pray that I may be found worthy."

"But you are so young, Miss Edith, you have seen so little of life. You could wait five, yes, ten years before shutting yourself up in a convent."

Edith's eyes met his fully. "Give my youth, the fullness of my health and strength to the world and the tag end of it to God?"

"But, Miss Edith," he hesitated, "you might draw some man to the right path. Is not the office of wife and—mother a holy one?"

"It certainly is, and God gives special graces to those whom He calls to that life. But when one has been called to the religious life to be the bride of Christ, no earthly bridegroom can satisfy her soul. I cannot understand why I have spoken so plainly to you of my hopes for the future, Mr. Pennington. I have never mentioned my desire to anyone except my mother, my confessor and Mother Agatha, and now—I am prattling to you—a non-Catholic—who could have no possible interest in my future life."

"Pardon me, Miss Edith, my interest in your future life is deeper than you can guess. I appreciate your confidence more than I can tell you. You have taught me much. I had no idea that very young girls became nuns or that they entered the convent because they felt a call to go. I thought that only women of mature years who had"—he paused a moment—"failed in other things, sought the shelter of the cloister."

Edith smiled. "What a strange idea. Most of the nuns enter the convent between twenty and thirty, just as a girl marries. I am glad to have corrected that impression. They are such noble women, Mr. Pennington, such sweet, strong characters."

"I can well believe that."

Edith tactfully changed the subject and they chatted cheerfully about many things during the remainder of their ride.

"Will you sometimes remember me in your prayers, Miss Edith?" The young man held her hand close. "You pray for heathens, do you not?"

"Yes, I will pray for you, although I do not consider you a heathen," said Edith, leaving the car.

When Edith—for the first time clothed in the habit of her chosen order—was receiving congratulations from relatives and friends, Mother Agatha touched her shoulder. "Sister Loretta, an old friend wishes to speak to you."

Edith turned to meet the eyes of Mr. Pennington. "I came, Sister, to offer my congratulations and to bring you some good news."

Edith laid her hand in his. "Good news?" she queried.

"Good news," he answered her. "I was baptized the first Friday in May and to-morrow—I enter the Jesuit novitiate."

"Good news, indeed! Oh, this happy, happy day!"

Sister Loretta's eyes were dim with tears.

She Knew Not

She had never mailed a letter before, and so she approached the stamp clerk's window with the same air that she would enter a dry-goods store.

"I would like to look at some stamps, please," she said.

"What denominations do you want?" asked the clerk.

"Denominations!" she gasped in surprise. She hadn't supposed that stamps belonged to any church.

"Yes," replied the clerk, who saw no necessity for holding a lengthy discussion over the sale of a stamp. "Is it for a letter or a newspaper?"

"Oh, I want to send a letter to Uncle John, he just moved to—"

"Then you need a two-cent stamp," interrupted the clerk, offering her one of that value.

"I hardly like that color," she observed, holding the brick-tinted stamp up to the light and surveying it critically. The clerk looked at her in astonishment. In his long experience in the postal business he had never before met a customer who objected to the color of stamps.

"That is a two-cent stamp, madam. Please stand aside, and let the gentleman behind you come up."

"Haven't you got them in any other color?" she asked, wholly oblivious to the "gentleman behind."

The clerk began to act crossly. "I never did like that shade of red," she added.

"There is only one color," he said.

"That is strange," she mused. "I'd think you'd keep them in different shades, so that there'd be some choice."

The clerk said nothing, but he kept getting crosser every minute, and murmurs of discontent began to rise from the ever-lengthening line of people who would have been thankful to get their stamps without criticising their hue.

"You are sure you have none in a brighter red, or even a different color—like green, or seal brown, or jubilee blue for instance?"

"You can put 2 one-cent stamps on your letter if you like," said the clerk, who began to see that the customer could not be frowned away.

"Let me see them, please."

Two green stamps were solemnly handed to her, and the crowd began to hope that at last she was suited.

"Ah, that will do," she said as she took up the one-cent stamps, and eyed them as if they were samples of dress goods. "I like that shade better. I'll take only one if you please." And she handed the other back to the clerk, who took it mechanically, but added:

"If it's for a letter, you'll need two. These are one-cent stamps and letter postage is two cents."

"Oh, I don't want to put two stamps on my letter," she said. "I don't think they will look well."

"It requires two cents to carry a letter, madam, and you must either put a two-cent stamp on or two ones."

"I don't like the looks of two together. You are sure the other doesn't come in seal brown or—"

"No!" thundered the clerk, getting very red in the face.

"Then I'll have to see if I can't suit myself elsewhere."

And she departed. The clerk replaced his despaired red and green stamps, mopped his perspiring brow, and began to make up for lost time.

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