



## CHAPTER I.

"And, indeed," says Nurse Crotty from her seat by the fire, "though I'm not one of those who holds with cosseting and fussing, yet I do say, Miss Joan, as you oughtn't to be excitin' of your mother so much. She's that flushed and feverish, and not a wink has she slept these two nights, and this blessed infant-a-vant! all the attention it can get."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, nurse, shut up, and don't bother!"

It was I who said that—I, Joan, the eldest of that family of six of whom Nurse Crotty had been discoursing. I lay there on the bed beside that quiet figure in the faded face and feverish eyes—lay there with an aching heart and passionate, resentful thoughts, for I hated the interloper whose fretful cries sounded ever and anon in the quiet of the fire-lit room—hated her with jealous, resentful pain for breaking in upon the completeness of the circle—of disturbing its usages and arrangements, for being of the same sex as myself, the eldest and the spoiled darling of this gentle, fragile mother, whom I had at once loved, and idolized and tyrannized over for fourteen years.

"I don't disturb you, do I?" I asked my mother softly, laying my cheek beside the dear changed face, that for months and months had been growing so pale and wan.

"No, my darling," she answered tenderly. "But I am so sorry you are not pleased about it, Joan," she went on presently. "I thought you would have liked a little sister—something to pet, and protect, and play with."

"I had the boys, and I had you," I answered rebelliously. "That was quite enough."

"It was God's will, my child—you should try and remember that."

But I was silent. I could not and would not remember anything except that the interloper was an interloper; that none of us had wanted her; that none of us cared for her; that my mother was ill, my father more stern and aggressive than his wont; that Nurse Crotty was a nuisance; that the whole arrangements of the house were upset and disorganized; that I was in a vile temper, and altogether an ill-used and suffering individual.

"Don't talk about it," I said at length.

"Nurse says you are feverish, and ought to rest and sleep—Do try and get well soon, mother!" If you only knew how we all miss you!

With a swelling heart and clouded brow I descended the stairs from my mother's room, and proceeding along the hall, opened a swing door at the end of it, and in another moment found myself in the midst of the noise and hubbub which generally associated itself in my mind, and every one else's, as part and parcel of "the boys."

Here they were, the whole four, making noise enough for eight.

Teddy and Toddy were playing leapfrog. Hughie was jumping over the forms—those notched, and inked, and long-suffering pieces of furniture that we had dubbed "seats of learning"—and Alfred, the eldest of the four, was kneeling on the rug, a book in one hand and a toasting fork in the other.

"Enter the tragic muse!" cried Ted, passing in the act of accepting Toddy's "back," and waving his hand towards me as I entered. "Doesn't she look like me? What's the news, Jo, and how's the kid?"

"Jo's nose is out of joint," cried Hughie, vaulting on to the table instead of the forms, and facing me with a broad grin, which by no means befitted a naturally wide mouth, "or she's had a tussle with the nurse. Did you get the best of it, Jo? Have you seen the matter?"

"Yes," I answered curtly. "I've just left her. Is the tea ready? It's five o'clock."

"King Alfred is doing his best to burn the toast as per usual," said Ted. "Trotter brought in the teapot some time ago, so I suppose it's ready. I know I'm jolly hungry, and quite ready for it."

I walked to the fireplace.

"Here, I'll help with the toast," I said, taking up another fork and quietly looking the look from the student's hand. "Alfy, I do wish you'd give up trying to do two things at once."

"Does nurse say it's 'the beautiful child as ever she nussed'?" asked King Alfred. "You know she's told each of us that in turn."

"I don't know," I said, rising from my knees and carrying the huge pile of toast to the table, "and don't care." I added, litely.

"Our sweet sister's usually placid nature is ruffled," remarked King Alfred, following me and taking his seat at the well-served board. "Don't you mind," he added, patting me on the back, a process I hated; "we'll stand by you to a man. The intruder shall be relegated to the nursery, her musical voice will not penetrate these sacred regions, and we'll promise you to forget we ever had another sister."

"It doesn't matter to me," I said. "I shall be grown up while she's still a baby in the nursery."

"And married and settled. Who knows?" chimed in King Alfred.

"Pass the toast to Toddy," I said with dignity, waving aside these kindly suggestions. "The child hasn't had half enough. How greedy you and Hughie are!"

"He's younger and smaller; he ought not to eat as much as we do," said Toddy loftily. "We're only acting for his digestive welfare."

"Hush!" cried King Alfred warningly. "I hear the tramp of feet. Listen! They come nearer. It is it—it is—"

"Be quiet!" I cried, raising a white, scared face from the tea tray, and springing involuntarily to my feet as the door opened.

"Father!" came in a muttered chorus, as the four laughing boyish faces followed the direction of my own.

"Joan!" said the parental voice, which had never been over and above welcome to our ears in that upward passage from childhood to indiscretion—"Joan, nurse says your mother is asking for you, and—and—the boys."

"Asking for us?"

There was no mirth now on the young white faces.

There was nothing in my heart save one sharp pang of agonized dread, as, without another word or look, I rushed from the room, and up the stairs to the dear loved presence, which, alas—alas, dear heaven!—would soon be a presence no longer—only a memory!

## CHAPTER II.

It is three years since my dear mother's death. How well I remember when father called us out of the school room to her bedside, where she lay so still, so pallid. Only once did she speak, and then her words were addressed to me in a faint whisper.

"For my sake, Joan!"

I knew what she meant. I was to be good to the babe whom I had determined to hate, whose coming was costing her her life. I pressed her hand in token that I had heard and understood her—that I was I, and that I would do my best. Her swooning, followed by an illness which prevented me from attending the funeral of my beloved dead mother and kept me in my room for nearly three months.

When I was well enough to join the boys in their play they recalled to my mind the babe, whose very existence I had almost forgotten. I had, in fact, not seen her since the occasion I mentioned in my previous chapter.

I went to the nursery to fetch her, and as I looked upon her little white face, and saw her golden hair and dark eyes so like my mother's, all the resentment and jealousy I had felt against the child passed away, and then there came into my heart a deep, abiding love which nothing could replace. I took the tender mite from Nurse Crotty's arms and carried her in triumph to my brothers, followed by the nurse, and then there, at Teddy's although father had had her christened Dorothy, his mother's name.

"You are Joan," said Teddy. "Let her be Darby; then it will be Darby and Joan."

And Darby and Joan it has been ever since. We noticed now for the first time that the babe's eyes maintained a fixed stare, which did not change when brought into the brightest light or near the flame of a candle, and Nurse Crotty finally confessed that she had had for some time a suspicion that the babe had been born blind. And such it proved to be. The motherless little mite had come into the world wanting the sense of sight.

As I made this discovery the memory of my dying mother's dying words, "For my sake, Joan," rushed over me, and I unconsciously repeated them as I hugged the little one to my breast.

"I am glad mother did not know," murmured Teddy, "for how she would have grieved."

"I am glad mother did not know," Those were Teddy's words, and at first I had echoed them thankfully, seeing only desolation and martyrdom in the darkened life of my little sister; but as time went on I found that she needed little of the pity and compassion that overflowed in our hearts. A brighter, sweeter little nature never developed itself. The child herself seemed quite unconscious of her loss, and she began to walk, would toddle about, and feel her way from place to place in a little while.

All this time I have said little about my father; but, indeed, since mother's death, he had withdrawn himself from us more and more. We rarely saw him, except at the formal dinner at which I and the two elder boys were in duty bound to appear; but in course of time Alfred and Ted and Hughie were sent to a boarding school, and Toddy and I shared the instructions of Miss Gray, a somewhat antiquated governess, to whom, however, I was indebted for my limited stock of accomplishments, as it never seemed to enter my father's head that I needed more varied teaching. The misfortune of my youngest brother won but a brief wonder and compassion from him. He called in eminent doctors, paid the fees, and heard their decision stolidly. And after that he seemed to trouble himself in no way about her, and rarely looked at her even when he saw her in my arms, or clinging to my side.

She slept in my arms, and was ministered to by me alone; and now, as I take up the thread of my story again, she was three years old—a little sunny haired, fairly like creature, who seemed to me the very embodiment of infantine loveliness.

It was nearly Christmas again, the snow lay thick upon the moors, and the boys were sitting waiting for the boys. They were coming home for the holidays, and Toddy had gone in the dog cart to meet them, for the station was four miles off from our house—the old, grim, battered-looking building that had come to us from some remote ancestor in the reign of William the Conqueror, and lay amidst moors and forests, in a wild district of Hampshire.

The child was sitting quietly on my lap, listening for the first sound of wheels. Long before I heard them the little voice came, and she said, "They're coming, and she was quite right. A few moments, and there was a rush of feet, a shout of eager voices, and the schoolroom door burst open to admit the troop. They kissed and hugged me first, then lifted the little one on to the table and began to criticize her.

"How she's grown! And how much prettier! Isn't she a ducky?" and then they fondled her gently and tenderly, and King Alfred lifted her on to his shoulder, and marched about the room in that fashion, in order, so he said, to exhibit her to the best advantage. "A few moments," and there was a rush of feet, a shout of eager voices, and the schoolroom door burst open to admit the troop. They kissed and hugged me first, then lifted the little one on to the table and began to criticize her.

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## A RESURRECTION THOUGHT.

The bulbs that were hid in the darkness  
Through the winter time and the snow  
Have felt the thrill of the sunlight,  
Their hour to bloom they know.  
Purple and gold and scarlet  
And white as the robes of a king,  
To the glory of love at Easter  
Their beautiful wealth they bring.

The grass that was brown and withered  
And cold on the sodden plain  
Has been kissed by the tender sunshine,  
Carressed by the crystal rain,  
And its bright green lances quiver,  
Lo! twice ten millions strong,  
And the birds, with their nest among them,  
Flies up with a sudden song.

And we, who have seen our darlings  
Reft from our side away;  
Who have wept in silent anguish  
O'er the cold and pulseless clay,  
Take heart in the Easter gladness,  
A parable all may read,  
For the Lord who cares for the flowers  
Cares well for our greater need.

He knows of the loss and anguish,  
The grope of the stricken soul;  
He will bring again our dear ones,  
By his touch of life made whole.  
We shall need and know and love them  
In the spring beyond the sea,  
That, after earth's dreary winter,  
Is coming to you and me.

—Mrs. M. E. Sangster.

## THE EASTER LILY.

EASTER was but a fortnight off and two little girls, Lulu and Fanny, were watching with great interest mamma's calla, which at last was budding. Every morning they came early to the windows, where a few house plants were struggling for existence, and although every time they hoped to find a flower, and every time were so sadly disappointed, still the next morning found them at their post, hoping, in their childish faith, that some little blossom might be found for them.

All winter long they had watched the tiny leaflets unfolding, and these few plants had been carried back and forth, from one window to another, to catch every gleam of sunshine that strayed into the little room they called home. Every night these little loving hands had carefully covered the delicate leaves for protection from the chilling winds that would creep through the cracks and crevices, for old Boreas was a cold-hearted fellow, who shows little mercy for the poor, and worries his way into their chilly corners as if he were a welcome visitor.

But I don't think he had caught sight of this little bit of summer or he would have curled up the leaves with his cold fingers, and blown with his icy breath, until the tiny stalks became limp and lifeless, and the soil itself stiffened around the poor little roots. The little girls knew all this, and had covered their treasures so carefully at night, and cared for them so tenderly by day, that at last they were to be rewarded for all their labor—the lily had budded.

Long years ago—in fact, so many that it seemed to Lulu and Fanny like a dream—there was a dear little home, where plants bloomed in the windows, and a warm fire gleamed in the grate; and in the springtime birds sang in the trees, and the lawn was covered with the greenest grass, where the bright spring flowers opened their eyes. And then, one day, the little girls could not tell how, all these beautiful things had faded away, only they and mamma were left, and mamma had to see all the time, and sometimes she cried, too. Now these plants were all the garden they had; and only to think of it, the lily had itself stiffened around the poor little roots. The little girls knew all this, and had covered their treasures so carefully at night, and cared for them so tenderly by day, that at last they were to be rewarded for all their labor—the lily had budded.

So the days crept by, and it seemed as if the lily would never unfold. To be sure, the winter was long and cold, and some days so dark and cloudy that the sun forgot to look in through the windows, and some nights were so cold that the lily itself came near being chilled, so the bud was not very strong.

However, the days were getting warmer, for Easter was almost there.

At Sunday school that day Christ had risen from the dead, and how beautiful the Easter morn would become to them if Christ indeed had risen in their hearts, and she went on to tell how some Christians, during the forty days before Easter, would deny themselves some known pleasure and strive to consecrate themselves anew to Christ.

"My dear girls," she added, "are not we all willing to deny ourselves something for the sake of Christ? To give up some amusement, or habit, or treasure, that perhaps may be crowding us out of the kingdom?"

"Is there not some object dear to us we are willing to give up for him? He gave his all for us—life, kingdom and heaven itself; his precious blood was shed, that we through him might live; and what have we done for him? Is there not something we can lay upon the altar as a sacrifice, and feel that Christ has received his love into his heart?"

All the way home from Sunday school, Lulu and Fanny were talking about what they could do for Christ; and perhaps, because they did not quite understand what was meant, or else had so little to give, they were long in coming to a decision what they could give to Christ; at last Fanny said: "I know what it is—the lily, we can give the lily to Christ; you know the teacher said it must be something we thought a great deal of, something dear to us, and I believe we care more for the lily than anything else."

"We'll send the lily to him," said Lulu, "don't you?"

"Don't you?" said Fanny, "but I guess God will show us how." And now that the lily was to be given to God, they bestowed more care than ever upon it; each day the bud grew larger, and you could begin to see a rim of white above the green.

The days sped on, and there were only four days till Easter, but in the meantime a malignant disease had settled over part of the city, and little children were rapidly falling at its approach; each mother trembled as she held her loved ones, for who knew how near the angel of death might be; he hovered around the home, and wealth and comfort, and of poverty and want, until at last the shadow fell across the street and into the room where the Easter lily was.

Fanny lay there unconscious of the sadness and gloom that had settled upon their little home; sometimes in the night she would talk about the lily—God's lily, as they called it now. Each day the shadows deepened, so dark, so sad, and to-morrow was Easter.

All night mamma and Lulu watched the little sufferer, hoping for some word or look of recognition; morning was slowly dawning, Easter Sunday, when so many ages ago Christ had risen from the dead, and brought with him light and life to the waiting soul.

Away off in the distance you might catch the chime of the old cathedral bells as they rang in to the joyous Easter morn; some of the music reached Fanny's ears, for half opening her eyes she stretched her hand toward Lulu and whispered: "I will take the lily to him." Just then the sunshine burst into the room, Lulu turned to the window, and there unfolded in all its beauty was the lovely lily.

Long hours afterward, when the Sabbath bells were pealing their glad notes, and choral voices sang, "The Lord is risen indeed," the little child lay there so still, so beautiful, with the smile of heaven upon her lips, and holding in the waxen fingers her precious gift, the Easter lily.

## AN EASTER ANTHEM.



## BEST OF THE YEAR.

The Easter Holiday Season and Its Delightful Associations.

ASTER is more delightful in its associations than any other holiday season of the year. It follows a period of conventional mourning. It is a revival from traditional gloom.

It opens the morning of hope and expectation. It reveals the unfolding buds of the year and of human faith and promise.

In these respects it differs in significance from the autumnal thanksgiving and later Christmas holidays. Autumnal holidays mark the end of the harvest, when all its fruits have been gathered and when gratitude is expressed for every gift of Providence to man. The year is closed. Reflection is the sole occupation of the mind.

Truths may be gathered from experience as fruit is gathered from the soil. But in the autumn every human sentiment is inspired by a knowledge that the best products of the year have been gathered, that its enjoyments are closed, that its fugitive hours, opportunities, events and lessons, that all which it contained for good or evil, have become an element of the unreturning past.

Easter is the period of resurrection. It is a season of the revival which nature experiences with each return of the sun in its orbit and of the rains and dews at their appointed time. It brings vernal sunshine, airs and odors. It is celebrated by offerings of flowers, by gayety in attire, by festive display, by all the gaudy outward semblance in which the dayspring of the heart and of the season is clothed.

The Christianized Easter which the world celebrates is a higher inspiration of pagan philosophy, renewed, refined and etherealized by the influences which proceeded from the revelation of Christ and from their sublime conclusion. From the earliest era when man began to study the world around him and defy its manifestations the spring was sanctified as the period of the year when the vigor of nature's creative forces first was displayed. Every form of ancient mythology recognized the vernal equinox as the point of rejuvenation for the world of vegetable and animal life. Every wind of spring that blew and every wave that murmured were regarded as the source of new vital energies in production and growth.

From these beautiful pagan beliefs to the beautiful new Christian belief the change was not violent nor phenomenal. It was a graceful evolution from heathen to Christian thought. It was transition of that which was false but was almost as beautiful as truth to the beauty and holiness of truth. Coleridge described the abandoned fictions of classical beliefs: The intelligible forms of ancient poets, The fair humanities of old religion, The power, the beauty and the majesty That had their haunts in dale or piney mountain, Or forest, by slow brook or pebbly spring, Or chasm, or watery depth—all these are vanished; They live no longer in the faith of reason.

In place of these fantastic heathen images the new religion brought realities of grace and truth. The old fictions of the earth and air dissolved and disappeared. They were succeeded by the gospel of peace and good will to all mankind—of universal practical charity, of faith manifested in good works, of all the gospelsons which Easter day and its associations convey. Pagan philosophers and poets reached only the fancies and dreams of men. Christian philosophy reaches the profoundest depths of the intellect and the heart.

This is the lesson and instruction of the day! It relates both to the past and the future. It is a reminiscence and a promise. It combines the garnered wisdom of ages with the hope of all the years to come!

Day of Great Joy.

The Easter of Rome transcends in pomp and splendor that of all other countries. The Pope is borne into the great gallery of St. Peter's, and gives his solemn benediction, "to Rome and the world."

Poland feasts at this period on saffron cakes, roast pig and little lambs served

with pistachio plums. The number of dishes cooked is enormous. Eggs form a part of all the pastimes. The religious services are devout and impressive.

In Mexico it is the great festival of the year. In the City of Mexico the population fill the streets and the parks, which resemble the most beautiful gardens. People passing each other in the streets throw flowers with their salutations. Bands discourse sweet music, and there is general abandonment to the delights of the festival of their "Sunday of joy."

In America the occasion is observed generally but quietly. Presents are exchanged, eggs and flowers are given a prominent place, and the church services are unusually impressive. If the Americans had any special use for the festival in a worldly way they might designate it as the "feast of hats." The feminine portion of the community wear new hats, according to the ancient tradition that to be lucky all the year, something new must be worn on Easter Sunday.

IN JOYOUS GREETING.

Gifts that are Fraught with the

The custom of giving Easter gifts is on the increase. A few years ago a simple card sent to friends was accounted sufficient recognition of the day. But the card swelled into a leaflet, the leaflet into a book, and now the book has sought the companionship of divers and sundry articles of a distinctly feminine character, and with them proceeds to organize a Christmas at the beginning of spring.

With a slight change of sentiment even Christmas and New Year's presents can pass muster as Easter offerings. The cards are delicate in design and spring-like in coloring. Excavations creep in through the only channel open to it, manifesting itself in groups of chickens and pictures of rabbits on cards designed especially for children.

The eggshell, variously decorated, is ubiquitous, as usual. The decoration of eggshells is not so difficult as it looks to one familiar only with their fragility. To prepare them, wash the shells first with vinegar and then with soda and water; puncture a small hole in each end and blow out the contents. Make a solution of plaster of paris and water, thin enough to run easily, and fill the shell