A PRESENT FOR TEACHER: BY GRACE L. COLLIN

IT WAS well-nigh incredible. That morning's rumor seemed not half so likely to be true as other rumors circulated in the school-yard at recess—rumors to the effect that the principal employed barbed-wire instead of a ruler in the disciplining of naughty boys, or that Miss Hicks, the instructress of the highest grammar grade, had taught for a hundred years. No one could tell where this latest rumor had started, whether on the "boys' side," an arid stretch of scuffed gravel, echoing to barbaric whoops, or on the "girls' side," where the grass grew in tufts and a withered walnut tree made a rendezvous for the exchange of secrets. Perhaps this particular rumor had entered by neither of the latched gates marked "For Boys," or "For Girls," but by the central archway, whose semi-circle of iron was perforated in a pattern forming the announcement "Public School Number Two." This was the Teacher's Entrance, and the morning's incredible rumor was to the effect that a teacher, Miss Hanson, was to be married.

"I don't believe it," said Bobby Morris, recently promoted to the Middle Grade, of which Miss Hanson had charge. "I don't believe any man would dare ask a woman who knows as much as Miss Hanson to keep house for him. She never gets stuck in the multiplication table, and she can hold her pen just like the pictures of 'Correct position' on the inside cover of the copy books, and she can play 'As We Go Marching through Georgia,' on the piano for us to do calisthenics by, and she can take pink and green chalks and draw a pattern of wild roses on the blackboard around the Roll of Honor names."

"I don't believe it's true, either," agreed Susie, the older sister, gazing with sentimental vagueness into the fernery on the luncheon table, "because I don't see what he and she could find to say that would possibly do for love-making. Of course he can't help remembering all the time that he's talking to a teacher, and must be careful not to say me for I. And his letters must be just like compositions, that she'd have to go over with red ink marks in the margins. Then he can't possibly come to see her, because the Grammar School Principal doesn't approve of callers, unless there's bad news in the family and they've come to take you home."

"Who is it you're chattering about?" asked Mr. Morris. "Miss Hanson—that nice, washed-and-ironed looking girl I pass on my way to the office?"
A PRESENT FOR TEACHER

"That can’t be the one you mean, father," said Susie, "if you call her a girl. She may look younger than some other teachers, but really they’re all exactly the same age. Bessie Parker says so. The Principal told Mrs. Parker that his first requirement in a teacher was ‘the age of discretion.’"

"I hope that nice little Miss Hanson has been discreet in her choice." Mrs. Morris observed. "You children must give her a nice wedding present—nothing elaborate or expensive, of course, but something to remind her of her loving young pupils."

"I'd like to see the wedding present that’d remind her of me," remarked Bobby. "I can’t think what it’d look like."

THE clang of the "first bell" sounded through the air of District Number Two, and the children both jumped as if the bell addressed words of summons directly to their ears. Wherein lay the horror of being late to school, their parents could not fathom. Neither Bobby nor Susie sprang guiltily alert when it was a question of being late to bed, or to dinner, or to church. Investigation of school methods revealed no torment lying in wait for the offender who did not arrive at the storm door entrance before the lingering strokes of the last bell faded upon the air. Quoting Dr. Johnson’s dictum to the effect that that which reason did not prompt, reason cannot account for, Mr. and Mrs. Morris finally agreed to let the little Morrices respond to the ringing of the first bell, like the genie to the rubbing of the lamp.

That evening the rumor of the morning was confirmed. Miss Hanson had been spied in the Teachers' Room, being embraced by Miss Hicks, the pedagogue of a century’s experience. In the hallway, the janitor had been overheard to "make so bold as to bless her bright face." Bobby contributed the item that during geography period, the principal himself had made an affable entrance into the Middle Grade, and after Miss Hanson had directed the pupils to trace on their maps the courses of the Yang-tsi-kyang and the Hoang-ho, he had made facetious remarks to Miss Hanson, which had flushed her cheeks to a rosy pink above the linen collar. Further, Susie, herself a graduate from the Middle Grade and a devotee of the instructress, had lingered outside the perforated arch for Miss Hanson’s exit, in order to accompany her as far as the corner where their ways parted. Hanging to the left hand of her idol (the right being occupied with the results of a written test in arithmetic) Susie had felt, under the glove, a jewelled ring on the fourth finger.
A PRESENT FOR TEACHER

“And you needn’t bother about Susie and me getting her a wedding present,” said Bobby. “The Middle Grade is going to take up a subscription, and all together give her a present, and I’m chairman of the committee.”

“Bobby on a presentation committee!” exclaimed Mr. Morris, recalling Bobby’s unerringly bad taste in literature and art. “I’m proud of you, my son, but, for your future safety, I hope that Miss Hanson’s fiancé may not know that it was you upon whom this honor was conferred.”

“Oh, Bobby,” appealed Mrs. Morris, anxiously recalling the boy’s approval of the ornate china in a café, as contrasted with the willow pattern at home, “doesn’t your committee think that it would be a good idea to let Miss Hanson herself choose, or if you want to surprise her, ask Miss Hicks to——”

“No, mother, the committee doesn’t think that’s a good idea at all,” replied Bobby, setting his square chin. “Miss Hanson is our teacher, it’s our pocket money, it’s our present, it’s our——”

“That will do, Bobby,” said Mr. Morris.

IT WAS the last day of the term. There had been exercises in the Middle Grade. “Pieces” had been spoken. Songs, pitched by Miss Hanson in a La-a-a that had never before been so emotionally tremulous, had been sung. An intricate march and drill had been executed up and down the aisle and “on the floor.” Then Miss Hanson, in a voice shakier than ever, had made a little speech of farewell to the “dear children, whom she would always remember, and who, she hoped, wouldn’t qui-quitte forget her.” It was all as it should be, but now, on Mrs. Morris’s face, grew deeper the expression of apprehension that had lain there like a shadow all the afternoon. For, rising with that jaunty air which awakened forebodings in his mother’s heart, Bobby Morris, chairman of the presentation committee, grasped in his strong, energetic hands a flat parcel, secreted in his desk till this moment, and advanced to the desk. His few well chosen remarks (framed by Mr. Morris during luncheon) were lost upon Mrs. Morris, as she sat with eyes riveted upon the package, while all the atrocities of the village shops, so attractive to the eyes of Bobby and his colleagues, defiled before her mental vision.

With a girlish anticipation, Miss Hanson snipped the wrappings, and then, with a delighted smile, held up an admirable photograph
of the Mona Lisa, framed in a dull wood whose sepia tints were in perfect keeping. With a gasp of amazed relief, Mrs. Morris sank back upon her bench.

"This is perfectly lovely," beamed Miss Hanson. "I really think I must thank the parents as well as the pupils, for suggesting the choice of this fine replica of a masterpiece which happens to be a particular favorite of mine."

Bobby shot a complacent glance across the benches. "Nobody but the committee had any say-so about it," he mentioned.

"That makes it even more significant," replied Miss Hanson. "I almost think that my little illustrated talks on art may have had some influence. This picture is doubly gratifying. I shall always treasure it. Perhaps you children will repeat for me the latest motto in the copy book, as its sentiment seems most applicable here. You may remember it, for you each wrote it fourteen times last week."

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever," chorused the children, triumphantly.

WITHOUT intruding on the private affairs of your committee," suggested Mr. Morris, at the next gathering of that family, "may I ask how you happened to hit upon, er—select—La Giaconda?"

"Huh?" asked Bobby. "Oh, you mean the woman in Miss Hanson's present. Well, ever since that time I got taken to the art exhibition, I haven't forgotten the homely things that people said were good looking. And sometimes, when I'd finished my practical problems the first in the class, Miss Hanson showed me an art book that she kept in her desk, with pictures of the same sort, only worse. So, when the boys on the committee decided that the present would be a picture out of a picture store, and not a sofa pillow, or a bureau set, or a plated water pitcher (because the girls, when they disagreed, got to crying in department stores), I said:

"'Now, see here, do you want to choose something artistic?'

"And they said, 'yes.'

"'Then I said, 'Do you know how to tell when it is artistic?'

"And they said, 'no.'

"'Well, I do,' I told 'em. 'You hunt around for the worst bargain for your money, until you find the poorest looking, dullest colored picture you ever saw, drawn by a man who worked before they taught free-hand.'

"So the picture man took us to a section where there were quite
THE SIGN

a few like what I said. 'Now,' said I, 'of all these guys, which is the worst?'

“Well, some chose one and some another, but when we noticed the cracks of the old canvas showing through that one photograph, we decided on La What-do-you-call-her. But it had a bully frame, shiny as glass, cut in a pattern like Number Fifteen for advanced workers, in the book that came with Will Baxter's jig-saw. Of course I knew that frame would never do, because we all liked it. The girls came near crying again, but I had the picture man bring out one frame after another, till he showed one that didn't look finished, and was so ugly it made the boys want to fight me for calling it 'artistic.' But I said,

"'Now, just wait a minute and see if I ain't (am not, yes, mother) right.' And I asked the price, and you can bet your bottom dollar (no, father, I won't say it again), that horrid, mean, hateful picture cost more, for that number of square inches, than anything else in the store. And that rough old frame—why, it came seventeen cents a foot higher than the shiny one.

"So then the committee knew that I was right, and we all went off and had soda-water because we'd worked so hard, and they treated me to my glass, because I knew how to pick out a present for teacher that'd be 'a thing of beauty and a joy forever.' I think it's a good idea to understand art, after all."

THE SIGN

H  ER smiling is the sun for me,
   Though in her eyes the rain-floods dwell;
   For I, who know her heart so well
      Through love's divining,
Can see the sudden sign, can see,
Like to a gold-swept amethyst
Between the sunlight and the mist,
   Love's rainbow shining.

AGNES LEE.