

great leisure. Perhaps that girl of years ago would have turned cold at the thought of life on this homestead. Maybe she had pictured herself as some day entering with a mysterious young man the ancestral halls he once had forsaken. They did in novels.

She didn't realize what a tinsel dream that had been until she found among his belongings, put away very carefully—Snowball had insisted that she alone search for the address of some

one to notify, but there hadn't been any—a red feather fan. Looking at it, the girl seemed to hear again the voice of a phonograph record that Kelly had broken, that thrillingly brilliant, somehow cold voice.

She knew then that Kelly's heart had been haunted by a very different type of woman from that of a country school-teacher, that his life had only touched hers to enrich it—imaginatively.



## A Bird's Nest

BY ALICE WADE MULHERN

**M**ICHAELA was a sort of maid in waiting to Mother Superior. She lived at the convent, for she had no other home. Years before she had come as a girl from Canada to become a lay nun; but there were so many errands to be done in the village, and Michaela was so willing to go back and forth from the convent, that soon that became her vocation in life.

The nuns were cloistered; not wholly so, because theirs was a teaching order, but so much so that they never left the convent grounds except when being transferred to another house of the order. A thing which rarely happened, as a matter of fact, for there were but few offshoots of the mother house in this country.

So, it was Michaela who kept the convent somewhat familiar with what happened in the town. To the greater part of the nuns, no doubt, she was a

sort of meddlesome superservant; but to us children she was that dreaded thing, an emissary from Mother Superior. And she made the most of her position.

She spied upon us at games. She reported us when we threw over our left shoulder the salt we had spilt at table. She pinched us, too, sometimes, and stuck her tongue out at us when we did not smuggle out to her bits of the fruit or cookies we had had for dessert. She called us names, whispered under her breath as she passed us, when we failed her in her toll from us of two cents from the ten we were allowed each week. Out of revenge, she hid our sewing-aprons, and once in a while she messed up our schoolroom desks or broke our pencil-points. Yet no one, in so far as I know—and I was at St. Genevieve's eight years—no one ever told such things on her. It was fear of

what her reprisal might be which kept us silent. It was not schoolgirl loyalty, for we hated her, and many times we offered up holy mass that God would send her away from the convent back to the Canada she had come from and which she was always praising.

My head used to ache for a long time after Michaela had pulled my hair each morning when the rising-bell had failed to waken me. "Benedicamus" (a yank and a pull), "Dominum" (another tug). This time it was one that made me sick at my stomach as mechanically I answered: "Deo gratias." Still mechanically, my head breaking with a dull pain that hammered and stung, and shivering with the chill that half past five sends shooting through a body not quite warm all night, I dropped to my knees for my morning prayer, and then rushed through my dressing with such speed that I was almost warm as I ran out to join the blue-veiled rows that filed down through the dark corridors to the chapel.

Always was I at the tail end of the line, my blue veil crookedly on the very edge of my forehead, the hairpin which was its fastener painfully twisted on a head still aching from Michaela's morning pull.

Mass was at six; but ten minutes of morning prayers with the community of the nuns preceded it. To me—I was seven when I entered St. Genevieve's—this morning service through the autumn, the winter, and the spring was a blur. I was so tired that until after breakfast I moved but as an automaton—as a thing with a head that throbbed and thundered, that pounded and beat as though it were the place where echoes come from. All was a blur: the gas-jets lighted because it was not yet dawn; the two tall candles on the altar,

which by their flame showed that everything was in readiness for low mass; the voices of the forty girls and the sixty nuns chanting the acts and the litanies; the cold dankness, faint with incense, of the chapel; the long blessed wait for Father Waldemar, who was sometimes late.

How we loved that wait; for then we sat back on the benches and a kind of open-eyed sleep fell upon us. It was so still in the chapel, even the cold was forgotten as the soothing calm of the prayerful place stole over us. Small bodies relaxed from the nervous haste of the morning's startled waking and frantic dressing. No longer taut with cold, rigid with holding together the small parts which made them, our bodies slept, unmindful of gnawing stomachs—stomachs faint for a warm drink of anything, of anything at all that should send blessed heat pounding through the icy veins.

We had no food until seven o'clock; for after mass we marched into study hall, where Sister Beatrice, our mistress, read us the life of the saint whose day it was. For myself, the virgins and confessors, the hermits and bishops made exceedingly dull entertainment; but when it was a martyr's day, I forgot everything—sleep and aching head and breakfast—especially if his tortures for the faith were minutely described.

Boiled in oil, veins opened in the bath, stabbed by sharp knives, crucified upside down, honored in death because of being a Roman citizen by being put to the sword, shot at with arrows that avoided the vital spots, stoned to death, clubbed to death, suffocated, burned at the stake, stretched on the rack, put to the wheel, eyes gouged out, tongue pulled out by the roots—such episodes were familiar to me at seven, and much

more real than anything else in the world. During recreation one of our favorite guessing-games touched upon the form of death we should choose should we go to the East to save the lives of girl babies whose parents threw them into the Yellow River. All of us really believed that all missionary nuns who did not die of leprosy died of horrible injuries at the hands of God's enemies.

Time had no factor in the martyrology—Saint Stephen might even at the moment of the reading be dying under pelted rocks; poor little Saint Simon, innocent infant, might have fallen into the hands of the Jews only yesterday. In Tonkin, Chinese children, at the very moment perhaps as we were having our oatmeal, were having their ears lopped off for assisting at holy mass—the self-same sacrifice through which we had drowsed and fretted.

Such an introspection meant that voluntarily we did penance for a profane distraction. Perhaps we chose to abstain from sugar for a week, or with fingers on our lips we warned all comers that we were on "silence." Still another form of amendment was to promise our blessed Lord to do everything Michaela asked us to, for a day, or for a week, dependent upon our gauge of the sin's enormity.

And Michaela, unwholesome spirit of ill, seemed uncannily aware of such vows. The fiercer our struggle for perfection, the more intense was her persecution. A turning toward her of the unslapped cheek made for no let-up to her deviltries; for, the less our resistance, the greater to her seemed her power. From her point of view, a gift was never a generous offering; it was a bribe. And when a child gave her a

present, she grabbed it without a word of thanks; but her fat cheeks puffed out as if they would burst, and such darting green lights shot forth from her eyes as made us believe the rumor that behind her eyelids were adders' tongues.

Once when I was repenting for an imagined shortcoming by being Michaela's slave for the week, she came upon me reading from "The Little Flowers," Sister Beatrice's cherished treasure-house of tales about Brother Juniper, and the Wolf of Gubbio, and how Saint Francis sought humility. I was kneeling before the grotto of our Lady, sharing with her the trials of the Brothers Minor. Without a thought for the holy place, with never a glance of veneration to the Virgin, Michaela crept up behind me, snatched from my hands the sacred blue-covered book which Sister Beatrice had offered me after study hall, tore from it three pages, hurled the despoiled thing into the grotto, and ran off to make spitballs. She blew them at me for the rest of the week of my martyrdom to her whims. And I kept my temper; but I began from that episode to loathe Michaela with a slow, brave, and constructive hatred. I watched her, too, with eyes upraised to her face, with a scrutiny especially keen when she sneaked quietly out to pay a visit to our pets.

From that moment, though, I was burdened with the sin of blood-guilt. I knew that one day I should kill Michaela. This certainty of her murder made of my life an agony, until before the altar I confessed to Christ Jesus the crime I had it in my mind and heart to do. He had promised that if one asked God the Father anything in His name, that thing would be granted. So I prayed Heaven for a boon—not that

God would forgive me when I killed Michaela, but that I should kill her for a cause which He could understand.

But Michaela knew I watched her, and she grew afraid. She called out my "Benedicamus Dominum" quite softly, and she dared not touch my hair. She stayed more and more among the other servants, and, her nightmare presence gone, the children almost forgot their pinched arms and ink-splashed pinafores.

I had told no one of my intention to kill Michaela; but I seemed physically and mentally to have undergone a great change for the better. Almost overnight I shot up so tall that Sister Angel had to let down all my frocks. I stayed at the head of my class with a monotony which would have been intolerable had I noticed it. I became so religious, so absorbed in prayer, that Sister Beatrice in alarm for my health made me monitor of the pets.

Now, more than ever, I watched Michaela—not so intensely, however, not quite so fanatically. A great deal of the romance of my trust had now come upon me and, imaginatively, I was a young page of Saint Francis's. Here was I, his guard over all small things—these were really his pet hen, not ours; his pair of rabbits, not ours; his bowl of goldfish, lent to us to keep us company; Major was his Airedale, Blossom was his Collie, Ginger was his cat. I took care of them for him in the daytime; but he it was who protected them at night when the convent slept.

One morning I found Babette, our hen, dead in her green-and-white coop. There was no blood about, nor were her feathers scattered. Yet, there she was, cold, a black, unfluttering heap. I gathered her close and strode into Superior's office. I knew that Michaela

had killed Babette—why else had she died? "Here," said I, thrusting the small black bird into Superior's face as she sat behind her desk, "here is what Michaela has done. She has killed Babette, and so I shall kill her."

"You are very rude, my child, and quite unjust," replied Superior, rising from her chair. "We shall send for Sister Beatrice and Michaela; but, in the meantime, you, for your impoliteness and your threat, shall be on silence for a week."

When Michaela, weeping, and shrieking that I hated her, denied that she had killed Babette, Superior asked me to beg Michaela's pardon and to pray our dear Lord for self-control. The dead form of my sweet Babette inspired me to unheard-of courage. "I do not believe Michaela," so said my voice; "she is lying, Superior, and I shall kill her."

"Sister Beatrice"—Superior's voice was so low one scarcely heard it—"you will place this child on two weeks' silence, and since association with gentle animals has made her rough of speech and coarse of thought, you will see that hereafter Sister Léocaddie assumes charge of the children's pets."

Once out of Superior's office, Sister Beatrice led the way up to the infirmary; and there, in the stillness of that far-away place, she took the little black hen and me upon her lap, and since I could not speak, she planned Babette's funeral. She reminded me, too, of Sister Léocaddie's gentle heart, and she knew that she would offer us carnations for the grave.

Two important things happened during my two weeks of silence: Sister Beatrice read to us the stories of the Round Table, and one morning on our way to chapel she showed us four rob-

in's eggs in a beautiful nest on the top-most crotch of the tallest cherry-tree.

So great was our joy that for days a dream seemed to have fallen upon the convent. Our voices were softer, our eyes laughed at each other's in a kind of secret fellowship; we walked on tip-toe past the cherry-tree, both indoors and out, lest we disturb the mother robin who so patiently sat brooding upon her eggs. We were all awake before the rising-bell so as not to be late when Sister Beatrice gave each of us our daily peek at the nest. One peek a day on the way to chapel; one only was the rule we had agreed upon—only one lest we frighten the mother bird. No matter where we heard a robin's song, it was our father robin cheering his mate.

I could not feed the pets, it is true, but Sister Léocaddie was very kind. She waited for me every morning and fed them when I came from breakfast. As for Michaela, she kept farther away than ever from the pet yard; for Sister Léocaddie would not have her "near anything that lives," she once confided to me.

As for my pledge to avenge Babette, there yet was time. One day, as I had told Superior, I should kill Michaela. I knew this. Michaela knew it, too, and I think Sister Beatrice saw the picture in my eyes. Yet, never, for one moment, did I plan the manner of her death. The how and the when were undetermined, but the act was as good as done.

A heavy piece of lead pipe was in my hands when I first saw Michaela under the cherry-tree, poking at something with a long clothes-prop. I had picked up the pipe near the cow-pump, where it had been left, no doubt, by a work-

man who had intended it for some job of repairs. As my mind grasped the fact of what Michaela was about to do, the pipe became my avenging sword.

Yet, for one second, the anguish of her deed quite overcame me. The tiny birds had just hatched out. How could they save themselves when Michaela tipped the nest? God and Saint Francis! Even as I shrieked, my grasp on the lead pipe tightened, and I was over the ground with lightning speed; but I was too late to save the fledglings. A tiny body brushed my face as I beat with all my strength upon the still-upraised arm of my enemy.

Again and again, for hours upon hours, it seemed I struck her. This for Babette; this for the killed birds; this for the terrorized father and mother birds; this for God; this for Saint Francis; this— But then Sister Beatrice carried me away. "Baby, baby," she said, "what have you done?"

The other children buried the small robins; but for days the parent birds mournfully called and called. No other robin ever built a nest in that cherry-tree.

I had broken Michaela's arm and her nose. Her body bore bruises for a long time; but no one ever scolded me, not even Superior.

Although I had not killed Michaela, she was really dead in so far as we children were concerned, for Superior had forbidden her ever to come near us, ever to speak to us, ever to step into the pet yard. Should she fail to obey, back was she to go to Canada forever.

And when I came out of the infirmary after a week or so, Sister Léocaddie said that Superior thought I now was strong enough again to be monitor of the pets.



Grand Central Terminal.

A drawing by George Price.

A PASSION for drawing and early association with his friend and neighbor at Coytesville, "Pop" Hart, started George Price on his career as an artist. His interest in the life about him has resulted in many drawings ranging from Harlem crap-games to the fish-markets of Bruges. His pen has the gift of satire as his drawings of two phases of New York life published on this and the following page show.