

A CHILD'S PROBLEM

By LINA M. SANTIAGO *

I love my mother because she is very dear to me. The only thing I do not like in her is that she talks a lot. She calls me names if I do not listen to her at once. She scolds me if I do not go to school. She hates me if I do not come home early. When I play, she tells me to stop. When I run away from home, she whips me. But after all, she is my mother.

Father likes his work in the factory, but he does not care to know about my needs in school. He tells me that Mother has to take care of them. But Mother fails to do so because she is very busy.

My teacher is very good to me. She is very kind. She says that I have to buy pad paper, pen and ink, book covers, and give thirty centavos to the Red Cross. When Mother knows those things, she says she has no money yet.

In school, I play alone because my classmates do not like me. They move away from me because they say that I smell fishy. My teacher says that I have to take a bath every day but Mother says that I have to put on new clothes every time I take a bath which means more work for her. My teacher tells me to have a toothbrush, a face towel, and a clean handkerchief. I told Mother about my teacher's requirements and she says that she does not know what to do with it. She says also that I can use Father's toothbrush and handkerchief.

I learn some rhymes in school which say—

*"No more coffee, no more tea
Drink milk, and only milk for me."
"Away with tea, away with coffee,
Milk and eggs are good for me."*

* Zamora Elementary School.

The four children looked around helplessly, their enthusiasm of a moment ago dampened considerably. Then the oldest girl had an idea. She ran to the Gumamela plant, and pulled off a gorgeous red flower.

"Look!" she said, "the Gumamela is just ideal for our games. It is so red and so bright, and no one will be angry if we tear them to pieces. They are here for us to play with. Come on, pull some. We can still play our game."

The children shouted with glee. They ran to where the oldest girl stood and started to pull off some of the big flowers. The tiny fairy scrambled up to the tallest blossom, thrilled by the turn of

But I cannot put them into practice because Mother gives me coffee and at times tea. Another rhyme says—

*"An apple a day
Keeps the doctor away"*

But apples are dear. My teacher says that children must eat fruits and vegetables, and eggs, too. But I do not always find them at home. Mother says she cannot buy them every day but only on Christmas, New Year, and Patron Saint Day. She says that Father's earning is not enough for the family.

I am growing taller and thinner. My teacher tells me—"Do not move," "Sit still," "Keep very quiet," "Stop playing," "Look at me," and many others. I simply cannot do those things. I do not know why I like to move here and there every minute of the day. To me, the domestic pets at home and the insects in our garden are better off because they are actively free. The kittens and the puppies run and jump under the watchful eyes of their mothers. The young of the mosquitoes wriggle in the water every time I peep into our big water jar. I see the butterflies fly from flower to flower, and the dragon-flies playing overhead. Why can I not be active like them?

My teacher says, "Study these . . ." "Do that . . ." but I cannot see how useful those things are to me. She tells me to work on the projects but they are not interesting. If I tell her that I do not like the projects, she says that I am lazy and dull. She hates me when I tell her to give me useful projects because she says that I know more than she does. If I do not obey her, she lowers my grade.

I am facing a difficult problem, what shall I do?

events. They were getting her flowers, preferring them above the more beautiful others. They were going to play with her flowers, because they "were just right."

She saw the children run out of the garden, their dresses fiery with the radiant red of the blossoms. The Gumamela fairy heaved a sigh of relief. She looked up at the Ylang-ylang tree, with its fragrant blooms swaying securely in the breeze. She looked at the haughty rose, at the regal lily, and at the radiant dahlia. Then she drew her robes about her and smiled. Still smiling, she went to sleep. The wind caressed her little face, serene and lovely in its contentment.