

MY MOST UNFORGETTABLE TEACHER

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My most unforgettable teacher had the gift of eloquent speech which made others feel and touch her soul. She could talk for hours on subjects supposed to be dull and commonplace. With an intimate touch here and there, she could make the subject come to life, emerging so vividly in its reality that we find it as personal as our own problems, interests and dreams. There was no doubt that she had a way with words. They came to her as easily and naturally as emotions and instincts. Green in years, I could only half fathom the depth of her eloquence; yet, it was this very lack that impelled me to study harder and read more so that I could perceive the loveliness of her thoughts and the beauty of her soul.

I became obsessed with an almost blind, dog-like devotion and fanaticism to believe in her doctrines and philosophies of life. They were so warm and infinitely human that if they were kept and strictly followed, I believe no one need be afraid, unhappy or insecure.

Vividly I remember the lesson we had with her which opened to me for the first time the magic door to her mind and heart. One of my classmates who had been absent for almost two weeks came to school again, dressed in mourning clothes — an unrelieved black matched by her own wan and pinched face. She was remote and aloof as she hid in the shell of her grief, so inconsolable she seemed that the sympathy in my heart died unexpressed. I experienced an acute sense of embarrassment and agony

whenever I sought the tragedy in her eyes. My teacher who was twice more *psychic* than I felt this too.

It was sheer coincidence that our lesson one day was Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." My teacher had read the poem in a voice I had never heard her use before — in such liquid and mellifluous tones that I felt the tears gathering behind my eyelids. I blinked them away hastily and took a sidewise glance to see how it was affecting my tragic classmate. Her face was a mask, inscrutable and unrelenting. If she would only break down and cry, I thought. It would do her a world of good, I was sure, to give release to her emotions, to have a good cry and purge the bitterness that was making her hard. Yet, there she was, stolid and forbidding like a rock.

My teacher then proceeded to explain what the poem was about. I was surprised at the way she took up this particular lesson with us because it was a marked departure from her usual method. She went on and told us, as if telling a story that life, like all good things, must end. The important thing is whether we have made our lives richer while we lived it, she said. Did we make others happy by bringing into their lives some ray of sunshine in the form of an encouraging smile, perhaps, when their spirit seemed broken and needed just that to keep it fighting again? It is true people get hurt by other people but most of the time they could get along very well without each other. The world needs people to keep it going, people who do not wrap up themselves

in the shroud of their own troubles and sorrows. The death of a loved one, she went on to say, is something that is hard to accept at first, something that we should grieve about but not forever. We should give way for love to replace that which we have lost, not necessarily for another person but love for some kind of work that will make us and others happy.

The message she had given us exceeded the thought that the poem meant to convey but I did not mind it all, I, who at other times would have felt monstrously cheated. I knew just what Tennyson wanted me to learn from his poem. What I did not know was that life could go on forever, that death was not the end of things. This knowledge which I first gleaned from her in the early days of my youth prepared me for what might have become a deadly blow in my later life. In the dark days of the death of my own father, this knowledge held me in good stead. It kept me strong and formidable against the terrible onslaught of sorrow which I am sure would have conquered me had I not been forewarned in time. How correct my teacher proved herself to be when she said, "That one will always live in your thoughts, that one will always be with you by the things he used to say, the ideals he fought for and the dreams he believed in. In short, he will always be with you in the form of a song, a gay laughter, and a prayer."

My sorrowing classmate remained in the room with our teacher after that perfect beauty of a lesson. An hour later, she went out with a tear-stained face but whereas before it had bitterness written all over it, there was now only peace and serenity in its place.

On wings of rapture, my days flew by under her wise guidance and tutelage. I came to appreciate English more than any other subject because of the magic of imagination she infused and blended with it, by making it the medium by which I could understand life and its beauty more than its ugliness.

Day by day, I came to know what made her lovely and charming in spite of her years. I discovered the secret of her sweetness and charm and have wished ever since to make it mine. Across the years, I see her radiating the beauty within her, exuding the essence of ideals that she had faithfully carried out by the way she had lived her life and fulfilled her mission.

It was so easy to love a person like her. I did so with such intensity and ardor that I vowed then and there to be a teacher like her someday. Out of my deep liking and respect for her and the ideals she represented, I became one, but it remains to be seen whether or not I could ever be what she meant to me. I have never stopped trying to scale the heights she attained, yet, honestly, I believe teachers like her are made in heaven.

