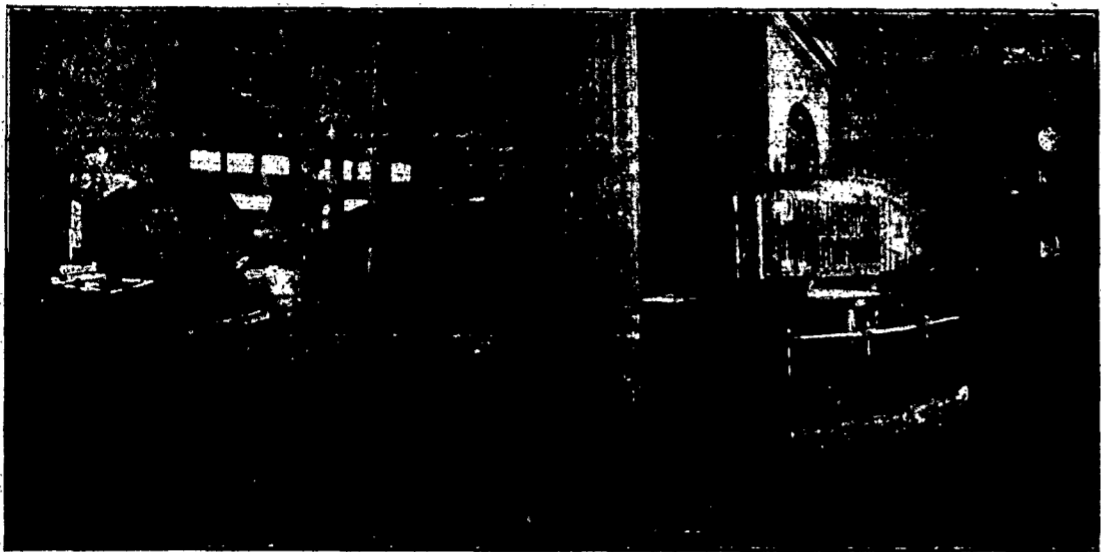


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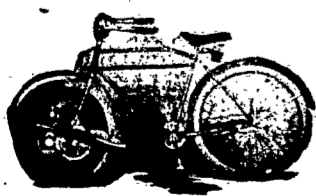
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Nancy's Easter Bonnet

By ANTOINETTE RICKENBAUGH



ALTHOUGH it is the middle of April, and violets, crocuses and daffodils are blooming in the garden, the evening is chill and damp, so we are sitting at our round table as we did in winter, with the lamp burning brightly and a cheerful fire in the grate. We mean father, mother, Nancy, Ann and I. Ann and I are still schoolgirls. Nancy is the young lady of the family.

It is Saturday night, and we are expecting Nancy's Easter bonnet from the milliner's, for tomorrow the beautiful Easter (father always calls it that) will dawn upon us. Father hoped the bonnet would be sent home the first part of the week, so that we would become used to it and could now have our minds fixed more entirely on the religious side of Easter and not so much on the "vanities," as he calls all pride of dress.

Father is reading aloud, we are supposed to be listening as we sew; but, alas! I, and, I think the rest, are listening for the clanging of the "knocker," announcing the coming of the bonnet. And now the sound we are waiting to hear falls on our ears. I look up at Nancy—that is the name we like to call her. She gives a start and the color deepens on her cheek. I hear Sarah go to the door. Our hands that seemed so busy drop in our laps. In comes Sarah with a cardboard box, not the kind that one sees now—white and small, tied with tape—this one is big and grand; it is dark blue, with immense roses decorating it. Sarah sets it down before Miss Nancy, with a broad smile upon her kind, black face. She lingers at the door. Ann and I gather round as Nancy takes the lid off the box and lifts out the bonnet. Exclamations of "Oh!" "Lovely!" "Beautiful!" come from all excepting father. He gives a smile, which is all we can expect from him; we know that his smile means approval.

The bonnet is a cream-white leghorn, with the crown well set up; the brim is deep and wide, with an upward fling, two ribbon bows decorate it of softest pink (peach blossom, it is called), held out by delicate wires, so that nothing is lost of the fine quality or color of the ribbon. Beneath the wide flaring brim is a cluster of roses in the same soft color as the ribbon.

"Put it on, Nancy," we all shout at once. Sweet, pretty Nancy stands before the long ornamental glass and puts it on her crown of gold brown hair. She turns to us. Deep in the shady brim behind the cluster of roses her bright face is all aglow—the very color of the roses.

"What will Robert Gray think?" I whisper to Ann. She and I are nearly of an age and mostly have thoughts and ways in common. Father now calls us from our excitement over Nancy's first Easter bonnet. Prayers are said, the good night kiss is given and to bed and silence we all go.

In the early morning we are roused from sleep by dear father's sweet, clear voice, singing some homespun verses through the halls and past our doors.

Awake, awake! Full slumber shake From drowsy eyes. Behold! the skies Shine with the light of Easter morn.

Rejoice, rejoice! Let heart and voice Sing out a lay Meet for the day On which the Lord, the Christ is risen.

We spring from our beds, Ann and I, and go to the window to behold the grandeur of the sky. The sun has just cleared the horizon, which is outlined by the beautiful, restful mountains. Some soft clouds hang above them—turned into golden fleece by the sun's first gracious rays. Nancy marvels at the splendor of this Easter morning,

we say, "Nance" we call. Not bearing a reply, we tap at her door, opening it at the same time, not waiting for the "Come in." What do we see? Nancy standing before her glass in her long, soft, clinging nightgown, with her Easter bonnet on her head. A peal of laughter bursts from us. Nancy turns her face, red with a flush of anger. "You are not polite to open one's door in this abrupt manner." But her ire lasts but a moment. She sees the ridiculous picture she makes and joins in the laugh. Dear, sweet, pretty Nance!

If going to church Ann and I always walk in front, father, mother and Nancy walk behind us to see that we conduct ourselves properly, but today mother has granted our request to walk behind our elders. We have only eyes for Nance as we walk demurely along. We note the effect of sunshine and shade on the bonnet and how finely the bows of beautiful ribbon set out. "No bonnet will be as grand and no face will be as pretty as Nancy's in church today," we say.

Just inside the thedim vestibule of the church stand Robert Gray. In the dull light I see his eyes brighten and his color deepens as his gaze rests on Nance. Up the aisle we walk, Nancy with her usual grace, but I think with her head held very high, but that may be the effect of the high pitched brim of her bonnet. Notwithstanding my being so absorbed in the "vanities," using father's expression, the sweet, deep tones of the organ and the burst of the joyful Easter hymn, "Christ, the Lord, is risen today," stir my heart to full Easter joy, and my eyes are wet with tears of thankfulness for the once crucified and now risen Lord. Nancy is moved too. I see the brim of her bonnet droop and her handkerchief disappear from view for a moment—to wipe away a tear, I'm sure. The spirit of devotion takes possession of us all. As we pass out of the church Robert, with a graceful bow, joins Nancy. "We know now what Robert thinks of the bonnet," Ann and I say as we linger along the quiet path that cuts across a corner of a grassy meadow to gather our dauntless; today they spot the grass with bits of gold.

We each have a handful of the bright yellow flowers, which we give to mother. She puts them in a wide bowl to grace the hall. "Nothing," she says, "however common, is made in vain. Every flower has its own beauty and use." This is mother's way of viewing everything and everybody.

Robert calls to gather Nancy to evening service. "An unusual event," Ann says, "Ann says, with a smile, she and I are keenly alive to whatever occurs in which Nance and her bonnet play a part. Oh, the beauty of this Easter night! The moon shines so brightly that the dew on grass and flowers sparkles like jewels and every object stands out clear and distinct. While we enjoy the beauty of this heavenly orb it hatches an idea in our busy brains. This bright moonlight night, we say, will help us to see Nance and Robert walk up the path to the door. We are on our way home from the evening service. We hasten our steps to go to our room and stand behind the thin, soft drapery of our window. They are coming, with slow steps—the clear moonlight shines full on Nancy's face. How sweet it looks in the depths of that lovely Easter bonnet! They stand and talk in a low, serious voice. Presently Nance drops her head, bonnet and all, on Robert's shoulder and, strange, but true, Robert's head disappears in the depths of the Easter bonnet. We rush from the window, covered with shame to feel that we have spied on so sacred a scene. We only wanted to see how the bonnet would look by moonlight, with Robert walking in its shadow.

I get thus far in my reminiscence when there comes a rap at my door. "Come in," I say. Enters Nancy, the third. On her head is the Easter bonnet whose history I have just written. The years have dulled the soft tint of the leghorn, and the majestic bows of ribbon are faded and crushed, as are also the clustering roses under the brim. But the sweet face of sister Nancy's grandchild, all aglow in its depths, looks almost the same as the face it first sheltered and by which it was adorned on the Easter of long ago.

Ancient Origin of Cross Buns. The cross buns are probably a commemoration of the miracle of the barley loaves. A sculpture in a Roman museum represents them, each with a cross.

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