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The Happiest Year

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The happiest year of our lives began with an ending, and ended with a beginning. A strange and mysterious thing, as I look back on it. The war years had been fraught with uncertainty— moving about the country from one army post to another, following Charlie, my doctor-husband, with a young son and a cocker spaniel in tow. The overseas separation came along, and with it long periods of anxiety and no news. At last came the aftermath home again, trying to tie up the strings where they had broken. Instead of the long-awaited “they lived happily ever after,” life became a series of seemingly endless and painful adjustments. And so I found myself in the throes of what the doctors called a “simple depression”— a six-month spell of the blues. Life, for no good reason, looked very dark indeed.

Then, early one June morning, I looked out of the window with new eyes. The world was really a very lovely place—with the sun shining warmly on the new green leaves of the trees, the roses blooming so gorgeously. The words of the poet came to mind, “Oh, what is so rare as a day in June, Then, if ever, come perfect days.”

The veil had lifted. Suddenly I knew again that “God’s in his heaven, all’s right with the world.” That was the beginning.

When things go wrong, everything seems to be getting worse; when things go right, everything seems to be getting better. One good thing led to another. We had two sons. and had long hoped for another child. It seemed like a futile dream, after so many years. And now, amid the general feeling of well-being and happiness, we discovered that indeed we were to be blessed again.

Our joy knew no bounds—everything was possible now that this minor miracle had occurred. It was almost too much to ask that the child might be a little daughter — we had just hoped secretly a little boy. As this happy period went along, another good thing happened. My husband had long wanted to enter a certain specialty in medicine, but the opportunity to do so had never presented itself. Now. when he had just about given up the idea, a residency in this specialty was being considered at a nearby hospital, and he was told that he would have the position when the matter was settled. This again was something to look forward to and plan for.

I learned anew the truth that motherhood is the natural state of woman. Never had I felt or looked better. I was rosy, robust — and rotund! To be carrying a child gives a great feeling of security. As the scheduled day arrived, the inevitable symptoms told me that our child was getting ready to enter the world. and I must put my house in order. I was full of the joy of expectation, and went quickly about my tasks of doing laundry, finishing up some curtains and getting grandma to care for the children. It looked at the last minute as if I would also have to drive myself to the hospital, but my husband was finally located on his calls and took me there himself. Someone loaned me a little book of prayers for mothers in childbirth. Propped up in bed, I read these for the first few hours, and found they helped me to keep calm and cheerful.

I had asked my doctor to allow me to be conscious during the delivery, for I felt I had missed the greatest moment of all by being asleep at the time. Unfortunately, I did not have the physical stamina to go through delivery without any pain-relieving drugs, but the type of anesthesia permitted me to be fully conscious, so that when the baby was born I heard a chorus of voices say, “It’s a girl!” And then I heard her cry. Truly this was the most marvelous moment of my life. In a minute or two the nurse brought her over to me to see, and I was so exultant I could only keep saying, “Isn’t she beautiful! Isn’t she a darling!” To me she was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. I could see from my husband’s shining eyes, looking down at me over his white mask, that he agreed with me.

It seemed impossible that she was really mine. I lived in a state of ecstasy for hours afterward. Only one who has been through the same thing can really understand what I felt. I was also starving (I always get hungry when I’m happy!), and Charlie brought me a chicken sandwich that tasted simply delicious. I had never known it was possible to have such joy in this world. All I could do was to keep sending my rosaries joyfully up to God. My husband could hardly contain his pride and pleasure at having the long-desired little girl—who looked just like him! I had the added happiness of being able to nurse her—a bit of a struggle at first, but so rewarding in the sense of well-being and closeness of mother and child as to be heartily recommended to all mothers. The child thrived, and so did I. When we all drove home on Holy Saturday, and the older boy car-
ried the baby proudly in, followed
by an excited younger one, there
was a new sense of completeness
to our happy family.

Often, during the next two
months, when I was sitting in the
rocking chair nestling the little
baby, I had such a glow of happi­
ness that I’d pray a little: “I know
that such great joy can’t last al­
ways, dear God, but it’s so won­
derful that I can only say thank
You, thank You, and may I accept
the bad times that may come and
remember this wonderful time.”

Shortly after the baby’s birth
the expected residency material­
ized, and my husband attacked his
new work with great zeal and en­
joyment. It seemed to be a stimulus
for him to be studying again, and
he took large volumes of medical
books to bed with him at night to
pore over. He was continuing his
private medical practice evenings
after his long hospital day, and
though he was very tired, he loved
the work.

Then it was early June again.
Our climbing roses were in full
bloom, and Charlie was taking a
few minutes after the long, hot day
to inspect his beloved garden. Af­
ter that, a quick supper and back
to the office. Back after eight, and
all of us sitting together in the
kitchen, eating something cool. My
husband was telling the older boy
that it was time he took over mow­
ing the lawn, and that both boys
should try to be more helpful to
me, now that I had so much extr
work with the baby. The boy
were off to bed at last, and we se­
down to relax with a bit of tele
vision. Charlie complained of ind­
igestion, but he had had it so fre­
quently in the past year, especiall
while I was carrying the baby, the
we thought little of it. We wer­
up to bed, and he sat up in bed
rubbing his chest. I becam­
alarmed, and asked him if I should
call a doctor. He said no, an­
asked for a cup of coffee. Some­
ting prompted me, while I was
getting it, to call the heart special­
ist who lives nearby. He cam­
soon, and the pain kept getting
worse. The doctor was very calm
as all good doctors are, and he
was Charlie.

“Starting tomorrow I’m givin­
up my private practice,” he said
and then added jokingly, “if it
isn’t too late!” The doctor gave
him an injection, and Charlie la­
back on the pillows resting, while
the doctor and I sat nearby, talk­
casually. Charlie said that the pain
seemed to be easing up a little. We
all sat there quietly and calmly.
Then suddenly, there was a spasm
and Charlie was unconscious, and
breathing deeply. The doctor did
what he could, but when I asked
him if there was any hope, he told
me the truth. He suggested I call
the priest and the family. By the
time anyone came it was all over.

After the last rites had been
administered and everyone had
gone downstairs, I stole back into
the room and knelt down along­
side the bed. Somehow there
seemed to be a sense of peace
about the room—as if all were well.

I have read that the room a
Christian has died in becomes a
sanctuary, and so it seemed now.
My stunned mind drew some com­
fort from that. The priest came in
and prayed a little with me, then
drew me gently away and asked
to see the baby and the other chil­
dren. The little baby was my sol­
ace, and the boys my strength. The
infant was at the beginning of the
great adventure of life, and her
father at the beginning of his Great
Adventure. I could almost feel the
weight of the cross descending
upon my shoulders, and yet, as
time went on, I began to under­
stand what Our Lord meant when
He said, “My yoke is light, and
my burden is sweet.” The way has
been made easy for me each day,
somewhow, and new pathways of
which I never would have dreamed
have opened up to me. I never
have had a real sense of loss, for I
always feel Charlie to be close to
me, helping me to make decisions,
making the road easy. Sorrow, yes
— remorse, never. Each has re­
ceived his own—I, my cross, my
husband his crown—the begin­
ning and the end.

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