

Facing About¹

Newel K. Young

"No, Newel, your mother is not dead. But she has asked to see you boys and Vilate as soon as we can go there."

But though Eugene, my sister Vilate's husband, spoke with assumed good cheer, I saw plainly that he knew mother would live but a few hours.

Two weeks before the fateful evening, of which I am writing, my sister Vilate was married. During the evening of her marriage mother was taken seriously sick with pneumonia and was carried home to our tent, just north of town. These were the pioneer days of the early settlement of Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua, Mexico.

The second morning of mother's sickness, under conditions that were heart-rending to her, father was called away, leaving us with only a little flour, molasses, and two quarts of milk a day.

Even mother's dauntless heart sickened, and crushed and bleeding, it all but died that day. While death was tearing her away she tried to want to live for us boys.

The next day Brother Call came and took her to his home, where she regained consciousness that had slipped away during the preceding night. No daughters were ever more attentive to, or tender of a mother than Sisters Theresa and Hattie Call were of my mother. I think of their loving ministry to her, and of their gentle patience with me in my boyhood with awed reverence. They saw with a Christ-like eye that mother's heart must be nursed and healed as well as her body.

Vilate and her husband came to our tent and cared for us boys during mother's sickness. I know now my sister's heart was hungry to minister to mother with her own hands, but she denied herself that privilege for us boys.

For two weeks the dark shadow of death hovered over her bed hourly.

Then came the fateful night, when the two women whom I had seen with mother in the afternoon came inquiring for Eugene. They had a whispered conversation with him, thus exciting my fear and curiosity. After the women left I followed my brother-in-law into the tent where he whispered to Vilate. She fell into a chair. I thought mother was dead. In that minute I knew her worth to me. Just here the words quoted at the beginning of this story were spoke to me.

I went out in the corn field alone with the darkness and—yes, God. My thoughts and fears were chiefly for my smaller brothers. In the silence and darkness there a miracle was wrought. I knew I was their keeper. I was born again! My manhood sprang into life! I became responsible for myself and others—faced life.

I knelt down in the midst of the rustling corn and promised my Heavenly Father that if He would heal my mother and spare her life on earth' until my youngest brother was grown that I would be kind and thoughtful of her, and obedient to her.

I came out of that corn field, not, the rude neighborhood hoodlum that I had been, but a fourteen-year-old purposeful man.

Mother recovered and died fourteen years later of the same disease, when my youngest brother was twenty-one years old.

I never forgot my promise to God.

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