

# "No Longer Blinded By Our Eyes"

I MUST tell you about Kata! This morning when I went to school I had a surprise. I found all my little sick ones back after their colds and where I had had 20 or 30 infants last week I had about 50 to-day, including two brand new ones; an infinitesimal boy, and, believe it or not, blind Kata!

I expected her to be shy, extra shy, but as I watched her standing just within the door between Ruhi and big Wharepa I had a feeling that she wasn't, and that her stillness had its source in an alert attention. Moreover, her uplifted face was serene, there was a light at the corners of her mouth and her big dark eyes glancing upward from side to side made me think she was watching something glorious flying to and fro.

I told Ruhi to sit her on a small chair by the fire, thinking from habit that a little new one would be nervous in a desk, and I put the doll in her arms. Then forgetting the urgency of my preparation for such unexpected numbers, and oblivious of the liquid sound of running voices rising in the room, I stood a moment and watched her.

She began at once excitedly to mother the doll. The hands almost quivered with sensitivity as she felt feverishly and lovingly over it. She stroked and patted it just as her own mother must have done, yet much more passionately. This mothering was more intense than anything I had seen in a child, and I must have handled hundreds in my infant-teaching work, thousands I suppose. Kata's hands seemed to speak.

She seemed to have no shyness of us and I thought it must be because she couldn't see the strangeness of us. Yet for a while before I had placed the doll in her arms she had plainly felt us. I couldn't have mistaken that absolute stillness of receptivity at the door. And apparently she still felt us. She didn't speak as she warded off the heat from the blazing manuka on her bare legs,

A Short Story, written for  
"The Listener" by SYLVIA  
HENDERSON

and when I told Ruhi to move her further from the fire I felt again the inner alertness.

Then I had to get on with my preparation for the other 49.

Later on when I was well under way, I remembered to tell Ruhi, who was the doll monitor, to get the doll's bed. She put it before Kata, but Kata obviously didn't know, and it was I who put the bed on her knee and said, "This is a bed for the doll, Kata."

At once the sensitive hands started in on it. She began smoothing the mattress and balancing the stuffing as well as I could myself with two eyes to aid me.

SOON she was talking and laughing happily to herself as I have seen her do down in the pa, and when Rangitangi's hooligan blood began to snigger and to draw the attention of the others to laugh at her also, I forgot my patience learnt over the years of association with young children and spoke sharply, reminding them of the rule not to laugh at the very little ones. Not, I realised with a shock, that Kata would have known if they had.

When playtime came, I let the whole bubbling, jostling lot out before I went to Kata to tell her it was time to go out to play. But she said clearly, her eyes flinging to and fro as though following flying things above her, "I take the doll, Mrs. Som'set!"

But I answered, "No, you can't take the doll, Kata. Not outside."

I knew how long the doll would last outside once the small girls began quarrelling over it. Besides the toys had such a way of disappearing once they passed through the infant room door. And I wanted to preserve my collection of toys for the little ones, to show them how pleasant school could be. Also the doll that Kata had loved half the morning was a pre-war doll with sleeping eyes and they had been off the market for years already. Moreover it was the doll we had brought home from Wellington two or three years ago to our own little girl after I had been away from her so long. I didn't want it lost or broken.

Kata said instantly, "I stay by the doll."

But from my hazy inner sight I took the unfair advantage of authority. I said, "You must go outside now, Kata, for some sun and for some cocoa. Leave the doll here and when you come back you can have it again."

(continued on next page)



"Her big dark eyes glancing upward made me think she was watching something glorious"

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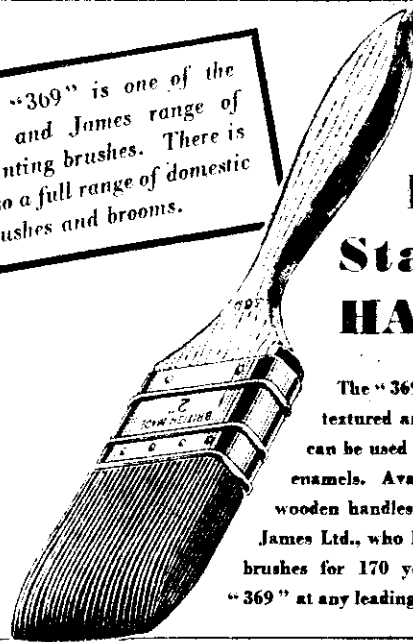
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