

Newness Out of the Ashes

Alexander Woollcott, essayist, playwright and commentator for *The New Yorker* magazine, once described the scene in a New York hospital where a grief-stricken mother – a Mrs. Norris – sat in the hospital lounge in stunned silence, tears streaming down her cheeks.

She had just lost her only child and she was gazing blindly into space while the head nurse talked to her, simply because it was the duty of the head nurse to talk in such circumstances.

“Have you noticed the shabby little boy sitting in the hall just next to your daughter’s room?” the nurse asked Mrs. Norris. No, Mrs. Norris replied, she had not noticed.

“There,” continued the head nurse, “there is a case. That little boy’s mother is a young French woman who was brought in a week ago by ambulance from their dilapidated one-room apartment to which they had gravitated when they came to this country scarcely three months ago. They had lost all their people in the Old Country and knew nobody here. The two had only each other. Every day that boy has come and sat there from sunup to sundown in the vain hope that she would awaken and speak to him. Now he has no home at all.”

Mrs. Norris was listening closely now.

So the nurse went on. “Fifteen minutes ago, that little mother died, dropped off like a pebble in the boundless ocean, and now it is my duty to go out and tell that little fellow that, at the age of 7, he is all alone in the world.”

The head nurse paused, then turned plaintively to Mrs. Norris. “I don’t suppose,” she said hesitantly, “I don’t suppose that you would go out and tell him for me?”

What happened in the next few moments is something you remember forever, Woollcott said.

Mrs. Norris stood up, dried her tears, went out and put her arms around the boy and led that homeless child off to her childless home.

And in the darkness, they both knew they had become lights to each other.

We who work in Life Care and in Century Park experience it often: Out of grief and sorrow can come something beautiful, something sustaining – the power of love that nothing else can match.

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter