

# Dear Sandy . . . . .

By Lucile Newman

(This story, written for English Composition, last year won merit, but not top, mention in the Atlantic Monthly Short Story Contest last spring. Ed.)

Old Doctor Stone's hands seemed to tremble more than usual this afternoon. His voice was thick and unsteady. He never once dared to glance at the small cross with the four wreaths encircling it which stood before the altar—nor at the four boys in uniforms who had placed them there and who now stood at attention, two on each side of him. He looked straight over the small gathering out the opened, double doors into a hazy summer's afternoon.

"We are gathered here this afternoon," he said, "in memory of Thomas Atwood Harding who was killed in action somewhere in the Pacific on June 26, 1943. . . . ."

Killed in action . . . his own words seemed to echo in hollow, resounding laughter . . . killed in action . . . "Thomas Atwood Harding was born April 3, 1919 . . ." his voice went on in its slow deliberate way, but his thoughts raced back seven-teen years ago when he had just come to this community.

When he came to Arlington, there was at first only the polite friendliness of his congregation and much loneliness for him. He had made only a few close friends—he had never married. His one pride had always been flowers. Almost any summer's evening found him putting about his gardens. It was just such an evening that he made his first acquaintance with Thomas Atwood Harding. . . . .

As he looked back now, he saw himself crouched on his knees beside the old red rose bush, trawling about its roots. Suddenly a shower descended upon him. Looking up, he beheld only the clear evening sky. He remembered looking back with a scowl to catch sight of four small figures scampering across the lawn. Quickly jumping up, he turned off the hose. Then he beheld the fifth culprit who had become twisted up in a slight wire fence about one of his jonquil beds.

He walked over and looked down at him with a twinkle in his faded blue eyes. As gruffly as he could manage he said, "And, my good man, what is the meaning of this?" The tousled little seven-year-old ceased his struggling, but with down cast face said nothing. He remembered kneeling down and untangling the bare ankles and feet from the wire. The little fellow, freed, scrambled to his feet but stood there before him in silence.

"My, how that shower cooled me off. Haven't gotten drenched by a hose since I was your size," the

Doctor said. "Reminds me, too, that I must give the flowers a drink." Just as he hoped, the head bobbed up; he found himself peering into two of the merriest blue eyes he had ever had the pleasure of meeting.

But instantly the head dropped again and a meek voice said, "S'pose you'll tell my Dad, and s'pose I'll get it then."

The Doctor almost laughed outright at that, but instead he said quite seriously, "How can I tell your Dad when I don't even know your name?"

A pause . . . "M' name's Thomas-Atwood-Hardin'".

"Well, Thomas-Atwood-Hardin', s'pose we don't tell your Dad . . . s'pose we let this be between just you and me." Thomas glanced at him sheepishly and then smiled his slow, crooked smile.

Thomas helped him put away his gardening tools that evening. Just as he was getting ready to leave, he turned to the Doctor, "You can call me Sandy if you want to . . . all the fellows do."

He remembered feeling a tightness in his throat as he called, "Well, goodnight . . . Sandy . . ."

That was a long time ago, seventeen years, and the red rose bush nodded its friendly blooms out in the garden, "Yes, a long time," it murmured . . . and the stained glass windows also seemed to agree as they slowly changed the floor from dull brown to rich purples, and yellows, and reds. An impudent summer breeze flipped over a page in the Bible before him. He turned it back—back to Matthew 6:9-13—back to Sandy.

He remembered that it was by Sandy's constant nagging that he consented to take over a scout troop. At first it was a tremendous job along with all of his other duties, but the delight that it gave Sandy was many times worth it. Their friendship was one of mutual respect and admiration. He never talked much about religion to Sandy. In fact he never really spoke of it except in subtle ways to impress right and wrong upon him.

On a monthly outing of scout troop number one, he and Sandy had

been left on the lonely wharf together. It was one of those powder blue twilights that make one feel especially close to those one loves. He remembered Sandy's sitting there swinging his legs back and forth, contentedly watching the cool green water ripple past him down stream. "Sandy", he said, "what do you believe in?"

"Why, I don't know . . . God . . . I suppose. I reckon I never really thought about it." His legs stopped swinging, and he looked way off where the lake rose up to meet the sky.

"I pray, all right, but I just always say the Lord's Prayer. You know, Doctor, I like that." He was fifteen then.

As he looked back now he saw great gaps in time and space,

High school . . . the less frequent visits . . . Sandy in his first tuxedo . . . his many loves . . . Sandy going away to college . . . and his coming back with ideas that sometimes shocked the older generation. He remembered Sandy's bringing up the question of religion for the first time on one of his week-ends at home. . . .

"You know, Doctor, I have been thinking about God and all. Couldn't you be wrong? Couldn't God be a myth and nature the only real proof of power . . . Isn't there some logical explanation to the Bible?"

He thought a good deal before answering, "Well, Sandy," he had said, "how do you still feel about the Lord's Prayer . . . it meant a

# Graduate Returns As Assistant Dean



MISS SARAH K. BURRELL

"I don't think the important things have changed at all," says the new Assistant Dean in telling of her impressions on returning to our campus. "The things that I remember most are Salem's friendliness, the interest that the people take in you here, and the very nice people who attend Salem. And I don't think these things have changed at all. Any changes that I do notice are improvements."

Miss Burrell (her family pronounces it Bur-RELL, but she will answer to BUR-rell!) lives in Winston-Salem. She attended Reynolds High School and Salem College, graduating from Salem with an A. B. degree cum laude in June 1940 (majored in Latin and French). She was a member of the Order of the Scorpion, of the Student Council, I. R. S. Council, and Y. W. C. A. cabinet. She was President of the Day Students, received senior class honors and college honors.

Since graduation Miss Burrell has been Supervisor in Signal Corps work at Arlington, Virginia and has done secretarial work in the library of William and Mary College in 1941-42. She says that college graduates can take part in any number of jobs in the Signal Corps and that a degree much enhances one's opportunities there. She adds that Salem College girls would probably be favorably considered because of excellent work done by Salem College girls at the present.

Miss Burrell's hobbies are piano-playing ("for my own personal private use" she hastens to add!), collecting records and, when cash permits, collecting music boxes. Her favorite sports are tennis and swimming.

lot to you once."

"Yes, I remember. It was down by the wharf, wasn't it? . . . I remember." And he smiled his slow, crooked smile. . . .

Sandy had graduated the following summer and had at once joined the air corps. The Doctor remembered his farewell visit. Sandy had never been much on good-bys. When he had started to leave, he simply said, "Well, Doctor, I'm off to the air corps. Going over right away . . . Got to get this thing over with." And he laughed. Out on the walk he turned back and called, "About the Lord's Prayer, Doctor, you can always say that for me."

The Doctor's mind wandered back to the congregation. He was aware again of the four boyish figures that stood there straight and strong. He was aware of the stiff wreathed cross before him and of his own voice saying, "Let us pray . . . Our Father, which art in heaven," . . . he raised his head and through his tears saw the blurred figure of Sandy standing in the door way smiling his slow, crooked smile.



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