

MOTHER: A STORY

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Mother: A Story by Kathleen Norris

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KATHLEEN NORRIS

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M O T H E R

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BY

KATHLEEN NORRIS

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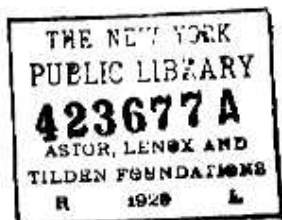
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J. E. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

TO

J. E. T. AND J. A. T.

As years ago we carried to your knees
The tales and treasures of eventful days,
Knowing no deed too humble for your praise,
Nor any gift too trivial to please,
So still we bring, with older smiles and tears,
What gifts we may, to claim the old, dear right ;
Your faith, beyond the silence and the night,
Your love still close and watching through the years.

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MOTHER

CHAPTER I



WELL, we couldn't have much worse weather than this for the last week of school, could we?" Margaret Paget said in discouragement. She stood at one of the school windows, her hands thrust deep in her coat pockets for warmth, her eyes following the whirling course of the storm that howled outside. The day had commenced with snow, but now, at twelve o'clock, the rain was falling in sheets, and the barren schoolhouse yard, and the playshed roof, ran muddy streams of water.

Margaret had taught in this schoolroom for nearly four years now, ever since her seventeenth birthday, and she knew every feature of the big bare room by heart, and every detail of the length of village street that the high, uncur-

tained windows commanded. She had stood at this window in all weathers: when locust and lilac made even ugly little Weston enchanting, and all the windows were open to floods of sweet spring air; when the dry heat of autumn burned over the world; when the common little houses and barns, and the bare trees, lay dazzling and transfigured under the first snowfall, and the wood crackled in the schoolroom stove; and when, as to-day, mid-winter rains swept drearily past the windows, and the children must have the lights lighted for their writing lesson. She was tired of it all, with an utter and hopeless weariness. Tired of the bells, and the whispering, and the shuffling feet, of the books that smelled of pencil-dust and ink and little dusty fingers; tired of the blackboards, cleaned in great irregular scallops by small and zealous arms; of the clear-ticking big clock; of little girls who sulked, and little girls who cried after hours in the hall because they had lost their lunch baskets or their overshoes, and little girls who had colds in their heads, and no handkerchiefs. Looking out into

the gray day and the rain, Margaret said to herself that she was *sick* of it all!

There were no little girls in the schoolroom now. They were for the most part downstairs in the big playroom, discussing cold lunches, and planning, presumably, the joys of the closely approaching holidays. One or two windows had been partially opened to air the room in their absence, and Margaret's only companion was another teacher, Emily Porter, a cheerful little widow, whose plain rosy face was in marked contrast to the younger woman's unusual beauty.

Mrs. Porter loved Margaret and admired her very much, but she herself loved teaching. She had had a hard fight to secure this position a few years ago; it meant comfort to her and her children, and it still seemed to her a miracle of God's working, after her years of struggle and worry. She could not understand why Margaret wanted anything better; what better thing indeed could life hold! Sometimes, looking admiringly at her associate's crown of tawny braids, at the dark eyes and the ex-