

with a feeling of such helpless misery as she had never known before in the course of her short life. The Mouse cried openly, Miss Briggs whisked her handkerchief out of her pocket at intervals of every few minutes, and Hilary's forced cheerfulness was hardly less depressing. As for Rex himself, he was perfectly quiet and composed, but his voice had a hard, metallic ring, and his face looked drawn and old. Lettice could not bear to look at him, for it seemed to her that there was more evidence of suffering in his set composure than in all the demonstrative grief of his companions.

Conversation languished over tea, and at last Hilary suggested music as a last resort. If there were music there would be a chance of moving about, and putting an end to these death-like pauses. Rex could speak to Norah, which no doubt he was longing to do, but so soon as music was suggested, the curate begged eagerly to hear Miss Norah play, and she rose to get her violin with the usual ready acquiescence. Norah had made immense strides during the three last years, and was now a performer of no mean attainments. It was always a treat to hear her play, and this afternoon the wailing notes seemed to have an added tenderness and longing. Lettice bit her lips to keep back the tears, while she watched Rex's face with fascinated attention. He had pushed his chair into the corner when Norah began to play, shaded his eyes with his hand, and beneath this shelter he gazed at her with the unblinking, concentrated gaze of one who is storing a memory which must last through long years of separation. How often in the bungalow home in India the scene in this English drawing-room would rise before him, and he would see again the tall, girlish figure in the blue serge dress, the pale face leant lovingly against the violin—the face which was generally so gay and full of life, but which was now all sad and downcast! Lettice followed Rex's example and turned to look at her sister. Dear Nonie! there was no one in the world like her! How sweet and gentle she looked. No wonder Rex hated to say good-bye—he would never find another girl like Norah Bertrand.

The curate was loud in his expression of delight when Norah laid down her bow, but Rex neither spoke nor moved, and Hilary in despair called upon the other visitor to sing a song. The curate had a pleasant little tenor pipe of his own, and could play accompaniments from memory, so that he was ready enough to accede to the request. His selection, however, was not very large, and chiefly of the ballad order, and the opening bars brought a flush of nervousness to Hilary's cheeks—"The Emigrant's Farewell!" What in the world had induced the man to make such a choice? An utter want of tact, or a mistaken

idea of singing something appropriate to the occasion? It was too late to stop him now, however, and she sat playing with the fringe of the tea-cloth, hardly daring to lift her eyes, as the words rang through the room—

"I'm bidding you a long farewell,  
My Mary kind and true,  
But I'll not forget you, darling,  
In the land I'm going to.  
They say there's bread and work  
for all,  
And the sun shines always there,  
But I'll ne'er forget old Ireland,  
Be it fifty times as fair!"

Could anything be more painful—more disconcerting? As the last notes rang out she darted a quick glance at Rex, and to her horror saw the glimmer of tears in those "masterful" eyes, which had hitherto been so scornfully free from signs of weakness.

The next moment, and before the choruses of "thank you's" had died away, Rex was on his feet, holding out his hand with an air of defiant indifference.

"I must go; it is getting late. Good-bye, Hilary. Good luck!"

"Oh, good-bye, Rex! I am so sorry—"

"Good-bye, Lettice. You will be an old married woman when I see you again."

"Good-bye, dear, dear Rex. Take care of yourself. C—come back soon!"

"Miss Briggs! Mr. Barton! Thank you very much. Oh, yes, I shall get on all right! Good-bye, little Mouse—give me a kiss!"

"Good-bye, darling, darling Rex—and I've worked a book-marker for you with 'Forget-me-not' in red worsted. It's gone in the post to-day, and you will get it in the morning."

"Thank you, Mouse. I'll use it every day of my life. Good-bye, Norah!"

"Good-bye, Rex."

That was all. A short grasp of the hand, and he was gone. The glass door banged behind him, footsteps went crunching down the gravel, and Norah stood like a frozen statue of despair in the dim, flagged hall. For one moment only, then Lettice seized her by the arm, and dragged her hurriedly along the passage. Such a flushed, determined Lettice, with sparkling eyes, and quick, decisive tones!

"Norah! You can't let him go away like that. You can't!—It's inhuman! The poor boy was crying when Mr. Barton was singing. I saw the tears in his eyes. He went away because he could not bear to stay any longer. And you never said a word! Oh, run, run—go out of the side door, and cut across the shrubbery to meet him at the gate. Oh, Norah, quick. It is your last chance! Think! You may never see him again!"

The last words put an end to any hesitation which Norah may have felt.

Lettice held the door open, and she rushed out into the drizzling rain, hatless, cloakless, as she was, forgetting everything but that awful suggestion that she might never see Rex again. Down the narrow path, where a few weeks before she and Rex had first discussed the journey to India: across the plot of grass where Geraldine had her garden, and there, at the opening into the carriage drive, stood Rex himself, staring before him with a strained, expectant glance, which gave way to a flash of joy as Norah's tall figure came in sight.

"I thought you would come! I thought you would not let me go away without a word!" he said, and Norah gave a little sob of emotion.

"What can I say? You know all I feel. I shall think of you all the time, and wish you good luck; and every night when I say my prayers—"

"I know! I thank you, Norah." Rex turned his head aside quickly, but Norah saw that he was trembling with emotion, and waited in awed suspense for his next words.

"Norah—it is a long time—three years—five years—I can't tell which it may be. I shall think of you all the time. There never will be anyone else for me; but it will be different with you. You will meet new friends up in London. There will be other fellows—better than I am—who will care for you too. Perhaps when I come back you will be married."

"No, Rex, don't be afraid. I am not like that. I never forget."

He gripped her hand, but made no answer, and they stood together in a silence which was sweet to both, despite the rain, the gloom, the coming separation. Norah was the first to find her voice.

"You will write home often; and we will send you all the news. The time will soon pass, and you will enjoy the life and the strange new country." She looked into his face with a flickering smile. "They say there's bread and work for all, and the sun shines always there."

"But I'll not forget you, darling, be it fifty times as fair!" came the answer in a strained, hoarse whisper. Poor, shy Rex! Even at the moment of parting it was agony to him to speak that word of endearment, and having said it, he was consumed with embarrassment. Norah was still tingling with delight, when her hand was seized in a painful grip, a gruff "Good-bye, Norah!" sounded in her ears, and she was left alone in the garden path.

She put up her hands to her face and sobbed in helpless misery—

"Oh, Rex, Rex! Five long, long years! Oh, God, be good to my boy—take care of him!—Bring him back safe and well!"

(To be continued.)

