

"As you like it"

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"but cold at the heart. That's April all over."

"It is this April," said Nesta, sudden tears springing into her lovely eyes. "Oh! Miss Rebecca— he's in the trenches."

"Is he, honey?" said the grey-haired woman. "Then he'll need a deal o' hope behind him. That's where you and I come in."

Nesta lifted her sweet face to the plain one behind the counter.

"Do you believe we can help to keep him safe by hoping?" she asked.

Miss Byerley took up her knitting and nodded.

"Two plain, two purl," she murmured. "Ay, bairnie, I do. Many's the danger I've weathered wi' hope and prayer. I'm just knitting them two things in my sock, Miss Nesta, and it's a nice soft one. When it's finished ye shall have the pair for Mr. Jack, and I shall feel honoured. An' there's a deal o' prayer and 'ope knitted into 'em."

Nesta's face was like clear shining after rain.

"Oh," she said, breathlessly. "Won't he be pleased, Miss Rebecca? You can't think how you've bucked me up. I simply won't give up hoping. And I've such a parcel for him here full of all sorts of good

things. Will you weigh it for me?"

"Ay—they are just bairns for chocolates, and such like, the Tommies," remarked Miss Byerley, as she adjusted her spectacles. "They tell me sardines are popular, too."

"I've got two tins," said Nesta, triumphantly. "It doesn't sound romantic, does it? But Uncle says they will be wonderfully comforting under fire."

"The Colonel's right," said Miss Rebecca, getting out her stamp-book. "He was always a gentleman full o' common sense, an' I say if yer Uncle was as young as he once was, and able to take the field, we should see some doin's over in France. But no doubt they'll mak' the enemy sit up, now Mr. Jack's there. You hold on to that, Miss Nesta, honey. I feel fair full o' faith—myself."

Nesta's face glowed as she filled in a form with fingers that had ceased to tremble.

"They say they are honoured," she said, with a deep note in her beautiful voice. "Honoured to go into action so soon! Isn't it splendid of them, Miss Rebecca? Won't we put up flags and banners when Jack comes back to Babbleton?"

"Flags and banners?" echoed Miss Byerley. "I should just think we shall. I shall have one o' each o'

them H'Allies myself a-floating from Post Office winder, for I think as we ought to treat 'em all alike. Mebbe bein' in Govinment service like, I'm not quite as narrer-minded and h'ignorant as some I could name in Babbleton. Ye may count on me for three right bonny flags, lassie."

"I knew I could," said Nesta, a tide of colour sweeping into her pale cheek, and then receding to leave it colourless. "But, oh, Miss Rebecca, what if he's wounded? Wounded and alone, maybe in a German Hospital with—with people unkind to him."

A sob choked her voice, and Miss Byerley laid down her knitting.

"Miss Nesta, my dear," she said; "I've knowed ye sin ye were a little, dark-haired bairn, full o' mischief what has turned to spirit now. Ye're run down, lassie. If I may make so bold, you come in an' have a cup o' tea in my kitchen afore ye climb that hill again. It's singin' on the hob now, is my kettle, and there's a geranium on the windy-sill, and Thomas, my cat, is purring loud on t' rug. I might ha' knowed ye was comin', for I've baked a batch o' girdle-cakes."

"It sounds lovely," said Nesta. "I know your dear old kitchen with its red floor and old cupboards. And the hill is very steep."

But half an hour later she was ready to face it, and Miss Byerley had reached the leg of her sock while she listened to the tale of Jack's adventures. It was no longer two plain and two purl, but a stretch of plain knitting, when Nesta at last got up to go.

The older woman looked at the young one with the whole of a very big heart in her eyes.

"And what if he is wounded, honey," she said. "Ye'll have him safe at home, maybe, then. And, Miss Nesta, can't he hug ye just as well wi' one arm as two? His heart'll be in it just the same."

Nesta smiled bravely through a dew of tears.

"Yes, his heart will be in it just the same," she said. "And that is what I want back again far more than his arms and legs. Miss Rebecca, do you know I pity every girl in Great Britain who isn't a soldier's sweetheart?"

"Purl one," murmured Miss Byerley, reaching the seam of her sock. "Miss Nesta, my lassie, ye needn't spread it round this here gossiping village as I said so, but I envy ye—from the bottom of my heart, I do. You and me'll pray for Mr. Jack, and you'll see he'll come home again."

The little figure in the pretty hat and the furs went back up the steep hill to the Hall with a new spring in her footsteps. Miss Byerley brushed away many a tear as she washed up her best tea things and stamped the evening mail.

Again she caught a glimpse of her plain face in the little mirror, and she was amazed herself to see how eager it was. A touch of youth gleamed in it once again.

"We can cheer 'em up," she said

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aloud. "An' we can pray and 'ope with 'em. After all, it isn't all knittin', nor even nursin'. It seems that even an old maid like me can do her bit."

It was Miss Byerley herself who took the telegram up to the Colonel's, which said that Captain Jack had been shot in the leg while carrying a comrade to safety. She gave it to Jane, the parlourmaid, with a gallant air, conscious that she came as near to a dispatch-bearer as Babbleton could hope for. And when the white-haired Colonel had sought out his niece among the wallflowers and told her the story, as only an old soldier could tell it, Nesta came running with brimming eyes after her old friend, and stopped her in the shrubbery.

The shrewd old postmistress took both her hands, and her own voice was husky when she spoke. "I was that full o' 'ope," she said, "that I've the flags just about ready. And, Bairnie, them raskils has left him both his arms."

Nesta laughed through her tears, but her face was beautiful. "And I can be his crutch for the rest of my life," she whispered, as she kissed the weather-beaten face of her old friend, and then ran back to sob out her heart to the garden before she wrote a brave letter to the wounded man in France.



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ed merrily, but pen by a rather y little person rs, with a pair hazel eyes, and delicate lips, nter, and put aper parcel. Miss Byerley," the music of n her voice. ver the counsly at her cussta," she said.

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