

## Ernestine's World.

(By Kate W. Hamilton, in 'Forward'.)

Hat and veil were on—a very becoming hat and veil the mirror said—and with jacket at hand to don at the last minute, Ernestine was ready to begin her journey. While she waited for the carriage she stepped out on the balcony and, with hands resting on the low railing, looked off at the world she was going forth to conquer. A sturdy little figure came round the corner of the house—a tangle of yellow curls showed under the torn hat-rim pushed back from the flushed young face, and a pair of small hands, decidedly muddy, carried a hoe.

'It seems to me that you are a very dirty boy, Tommy,' remarked Ernestine, judicially.

A pair of brown eyes flashed up in agrieved wonder at her want of discernment.

'Course. I've been making garden,' explained the child. 'I'm goin' to plant 'tatoes and lots of things for mommer. She hasn't anybody but me to take care of her now; she said so. I'm goin' to do things for her like father.'

He marched proudly on with his implement of industry, and the faint smile with which the girl had watched him faded from her face. It was true that Mrs. Barclay had no one to take care of her now; nor had any of them since Ernestine's father died. But for that she might not be going out to make her own way in the world—certainly not as she was going now, the daughter reflected. Still she was young and strong, she had always looked upon teaching as her vocation, and she had no fear concerning her success. She was free to go where she chose, and the outlook was not unpleasant. It was, of course, different with Mrs. Barclay, but Ernestine gave scant thought in that direction. She had indeed always given scant thought to her father's second wife, after the first days when she had been so distressed by the announcement of his marriage. She had been with an aunt at the time, where much of her childhood had been passed since her mother's death, and her views on the subject were colored by that worthy relative's lamentations.

'The idea of Doctor Barclay marrying again after getting along alone for five years! I suppose it's been lonely for the poor man with no place that could really be called a home, for Ernestine hasn't been old enough to take charge of anything, and, anyway, she's been with me more than half the time. But to marry a widow with two little children! What could he have been thinking of? Two children to provide for! Men do the strangest things!'

But the doctor did not concern himself with explanations. He had chosen for himself; the old house blossomed into a cheerful home again, and if in the depths of his loving heart there was a sore pain of disappointment that his young daughter did not become an integral part of it, he hid that as he had hidden many another wound, and made the best of what he had. The children were his joy, Ernestine acknowledged that, when she was at home—which was much oftener than of old, partly because it was a more inviting place and partly because of the removal of her aunt to a distant State—but she always viewed the relationship rather wonderingly, and not as anything in which she had much personal interest. She appreciated the improved conditions, was dutifully polite and kind to the stepmother who made no demands on her in any way, and she grew accustomed to the little ones' affection for her father, and to hearing them call him by the name he had

taught them. She had lost all regret at the new alliance; she was glad to have her father happy, but she viewed his family much as she did his practice—as a necessary and vital part of his life, but scarcely a part of her own.

He had kept his little household in comfort, but the busy, useful life was brief. There had been but four years of the new home, and then he was away where no need of theirs could reach him more. Ernestine had been home for weeks, ready to assist where she could, willing to advise when her advice was asked, but quietly laying her own plans for her own future, as one quite apart from any arrangements here. Her school days were over, and though her father had not left her wealth he had given her an education that would enable her to provide for herself, she reflected gratefully. Her stepmother aided her in packing her belongings, acquiescing in her plans so far as she knew them—if that can be called acquiescence where one has no voice in the matter—but sometimes the girl found the sad, gray eyes watching her wistfully. It occurred to her now, as Tommy trudged out of sight, that she really knew very little of what Mrs. Barclay purposed doing, or of how she could care for the children with 'father away.'

The sound of carriage wheels and the call of the driver dispelled her thoughts. She hastily donned her wrap and gloves and ran downstairs to find Mrs. Barclay and little Mabel waiting in the hall.

'Good-by, good-by! Tommy isn't here? Bid the little rogue good-by for me,' she said.

'I hope you'll always feel that this is home, Ernestine—to come back to—always while we are here,' said the little woman earnestly, yet half timidly, as if not quite sure of her ground. 'I wish—good-by, dear.'

Whatever the wish was it remained unspoken. Ernestine ran down the steps, the carriage door slammed, and she was away. It was a drive through the entire town, from the doctor's residence in the suburbs to the station, and when the familiar maples at the gate had faded from view, the young traveller leaned back against the cushions and allowed her thoughts to run dreamily forward. So absorbed did she grow, that she noticed nothing round her until she was startled by a quick shout from the driver, a sharp cry of fright or pain, and the sudden stopping of the horses. The cabman sprang down from his seat, and she saw people running from various directions toward them.

'What is it?' she asked, trying vainly to open the door that shut her in. 'What has happened?'

There was no answer, but she saw a group of excited people in the road, those in the centre bending over someone. Not until a helpless form had been lifted and borne across the street did the cabman turn toward his vehicle or notice that his passenger was imprisoned. He pulled open the door then, his face white and his hand trembling.

'It's a child, miss; we run over him. It wasn't my fault, he dodged into the road right in front of us to get out of the way of a street car—but I'm afraid he's awful bad hurt; I hadn't time to turn the horses; I couldn't help it, but—oh! I'd give anything if it hadn't happened. They've carried him into that office across there.'

Ernestine was on the ground before he was done speaking, and following the crowd which an accident always collects so quickly.

'Let the young lady pass; she was in the carriage,' said someone with a swift recognition of her right as one of the principals in the tragedy that had befallen. 'Let her go in.'

They made way for her, but as she entered the room one who knew her face exclaimed: 'Doctor Barclay's daughter! Why it's her little brother!'

Whose brother? The palefaced girl glanced about her in momentary bewilderment. Then, as those about the hastily-improvised couch moved aside for her, she saw that it was Tommy who lay there—Tommy, with marble cheeks, closed eyes, and bright curls stained with blood.

'Her own little brother!' said someone in pitying whisper again.

She had never called him by that name, even in thought, but the words were repeated like an iterant echo in her brain while she answered questions that were asked her and gave directions for his removal to his home.

'He is not dead; it is impossible to tell yet how badly he is injured,' repeated the surgeon, who had been summoned, trying to give her courage. 'We will take him home in a few moments. You would better go first and tell his mother.'

It was the one necessary thing to be done, Ernestine knew, and she obeyed, but a vision of that mother's face rose before her and appealed to her then as it had never done before. How could she add to the grief in the sad eyes.

The carriage that had brought her was waiting for her still, and the troubled driver tried to explain the accident.

'He was drawin' a little waggon with per-taters in it—had just bought 'em at the grocery, they said—and I reckon he seen the car and hurried across the track without seein' our team.'

The splintered waggon and scattered potatoes still lay in the dusty road, mute witnesses of the brave little heart's determination to 'take care of mommer.' Ernestine dared not look at them.

'Go quickly,' she said, as the carriage turned homeward.

She never knew exactly how she carried her sorrowful tidings or helped to make ready for the piteous little burden that was tenderly borne to them a half hour later. But all that night, as she shared the mother's watch beside the sufferer, the words she had heard kept repeating themselves in her thought, 'Little brother—her own little brother.' Were there then no binding ties but those of blood? How her father had loved this child, caring for him as his own, and calling him always 'My little son!' The very accents of the dear voice came back to her in those silent hours of watching, and memory and conscience grew strangely alert. She recalled times when he had tried to interest her in his plans for the children, and the hurt look in his eyes when she had lightly turned the subject. Was it not so that he had always cared for her—bearing even his loneliness when he thought she could be happier elsewhere, but quick to share every joy or pain that touched her life? She remembered, as though it had been but yesterday, one day when she had been telling him something of the history of one who had been kind to her at school, and had interrupted herself with an apology for troubling him about strangers. His reply had been swift and tender: 'Could anybody be dear to my girlie without my counting her my friend, too?' That had been his loving loyalty always, but she had not returned it in kind.

She glanced from the mother, sitting with bowed head in the dimly-lighted room, to the bruised little form upon the bed—both so loved by him, missing him so sorely now—