

one etceteras of preparation. Could it be possible that they were all for nothing—that she must now set to work to undo the labour of weeks? And the misery of it all; the humiliation, the dreadful, dreadful publicity! Hilary leapt out of bed in despair, unable to remain idle any longer, dressed with feverish rapidity, and ran downstairs to join her father. As she reached the foot of the staircase, Mr. Rayner came forward to meet her. Their hands met in a close, sympathetic grasp, but neither spoke during the moment that it lasted. Then came the sound of a heavy footstep on the tiled floor, and the village joiner crossed the hall on his way to complete the erection of the tables in the dining-room. He touched his cap to Hilary as he passed, and the girl drew back, growing pale to her lips.

"Oh, he must be stopped! I can't do it. It is too dreadful!"

"Leave it to me. It's so seldom I can do anything—do let me help you now. Go to your father, and leave all this to me." He led her forward unresisting to the study, where her father greeted her with an exclamation of relief.

"Ah, here you are, dear. Sit down. We must get to work at once on this wretched business. I have sent off notes already to the vicar and the curate, who will stop preparations at the church; the domestic arrangements I must leave to you; and there will be notes to write to all invited guests. Rayner will help and Raymond also. I will draw up a form which you can copy, but the letters must go off by the afternoon post, so the sooner they are written the better. Newcome will be with us before many hours are over—"

He broke off with a sigh, which Hilary echoed from the depths of an aching heart.

"I will go at once and speak to the servants. I will set them to work to put the house in order, and hide all the preparations out of sight, and then come back here, and get the writing done first of all."

"That's my good girl!" said her father warmly, and they kissed each other with sympathetic affection.

Poor Hilary! She had need of all her courage to enable her to go through that morning's work. The servants received her orders with tears of distress and disappointment. Norah came stealing out of the room with the news that Lettice had cried all night long, could not be induced to eat, and lay on her bed icy cold, and trembling as if with

an ague. Miss Carr was too much upset to be able to leave her bed, and Geraldine's straightforward questions were for once agonizing to the listeners.

"Has Lettice been naughty?" she inquired. "Has Mr. Newcome been naughty? Will she never wear her pretty dress? Shall I never wear my dress? What shall we do with all the presents? Shall we have to send back the cake?"

"Oh, Mouse, be quiet, for pity's sake," cried Hilary in desperation. "If you ask any more questions you must go to bed. It's very naughty and unkind;" at which unexpected reproof Geraldine's eyes filled with tears.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Hilary; I only thought if you didn't want it, perhaps Miss Briggs's sister in Scarborough might like some cake—"

"Come along with me, Mouse, and I'll give you a swing in the garden," said Mr. Rayner, coming to the rescue for the twentieth time. His presence was a comfort to every member of the household, and Hilary could never think of that dreadful morning, without recalling the quiet, unobtrusive way in which he watched over her, and shielded her from every possible aggravation. When afternoon came, he insisted upon taking her to a quiet little coppice near the gates, so that she should not be in the house at the time of Arthur Newcome's visit; but from their seat among the trees they heard the sound of wheels as the fly turned down the drive, and knew that the dreaded interview was at hand.

"Lettice begged and prayed not to see him, father says, but he insisted that she should go down. He said it was only due to Arthur. Fancy what it must be to the poor, poor fellow, to lose her at the last moment, and to have to go back to London and explain everything to his friends—when the house is ready and all preparations made. I feel so angry and humiliated, that I can't be sorry for Lettice. She deserves all she suffers!"

Mr. Rayner did not answer; and they sat in silence for five or ten minutes, at the expiration of which Hilary stole a timid glance at his face, and ventured a question.

"Are you sorry?"

"Sorry for your sister? Yes,—intensely sorry!"

"You think I am hard,—unsympathetic?"

"I think you are hardly in a fit state to understand your own feelings to-day. It has been a great strain, and you have kept up bravely and well."

Hilary's lip trembled, and she covered her face with her hands. "Oh, I don't want to be hard, but it seems so dreadful! She had a whole month to think over it—and then to bring all this misery upon him at the last moment. I feel ashamed. Surely, surely, it is easy to know whether one cares or not. If I were engaged—"—"Yes?"

"Oh, I don't know—I should never, never promise to marry anyone unless I loved him with my whole heart; but when I did, I'd stick to him if the whole world were against us."

"I believe you would." Mr. Rayner hesitated at the end of these words as if he were about to say something further, but the hesitation ended in silence, and presently Hilary leapt to her feet and began to pace up and down.

"Oh, let us walk about. I can't sit still. I am too nervous. If we go along this path we shall not meet anybody, and it will pass the time. I can't bear to think of what is going on inside the house." So for the next hour they walked up and down, trying in vain to talk upon outside topics, and coming back again and again to the same painful theme. At last the sound of wheels came to their ears again. The fly could be seen wending its way down the country lane, and Hilary lost no time in running home to rejoin her father in his study.

He was standing with his arms resting upon the mantelpiece, his head buried in his hands, and when he turned to meet her, it struck the girl with a stab of pain that for the first time he looked old—an old man, tired and worn with the battle of life.

"Well?" she gasped; and he answered with a long-drawn sigh.

"Well—it is over! The most painful scene I have ever gone through in my life. He wouldn't believe me, poor fellow; then Lettice came in—he looked at her, and—the light died out of his face. It was very painful. He was brave and manly. I admired him more than I could have believed possible, would not blame her, or hear her blamed. He said very little. Stricken to the heart, poor fellow, and I could do nothing for him. He has gone back to town to stop preparations. I would have given my right hand to help him."

"Father, dear! You look so ill! It has been too much strain. What can I do for you now? Let me do something!"

"Send in Rayner to have a smoke with me. How glad I am that he is here. He is a comfort to us all!"

(To be continued.)

EASTER MORN.

ALLELUIA!

Empty is the tomb,
Hence, away with gloom;
Body and soul are reunited
That His flock be unbenighted.

Alleluia!

The stone is rolled away
Where the dear Saviour lay,
Sinners and saints look hence for Him whom
God vouchsafed to Mary's womb.

Alleluia!

Angels in white declare
Death to be vanquished there;
Let all in faith raise high thanksgiving
Now we are one with the ever-living.

Alleluia!

Empty is the tomb,
Away for aye with gloom;
Body and soul are reunited
That His flock be unbenighted! C. P.