

"I like the *dress*, dear, but I don't think it suits you. No, Nora, it does not," she added, with decision.

Nora felt annoyed. She had particularly wished to look well this evening, and, in truth, the deep rich hue of her gown became admirably her fair skin and dark hair. But when we are told a thing as a fact, our minds naturally veer toward believing that there must be something in it; and therefore Mrs. Conway-Hope, having succeeded in making Nora regard her new plush with disfavor, resumed her seat, feeling that she had made the kindest possible remarks to her young relation.

But this lady had a natural aptitude to be disagreeable, and probably could not help it, for she esteemed herself one of the saints of earth. She also esteemed herself a master, or rather a mistress, of the art of conversation; and as Nora Stewart's guests began to assemble, she placed herself near first one shrinking man and then the other, and at last succeeded in driving the good-tempered, jovial-faced clergyman of the parish into a convenient corner, where she firmly kept him until dinner was announced.

Nora's party consisted almost entirely of young people. Two pretty English girls—Maud and Alice Lee—were staying in the house, and were in love for the time being with everything Scotch, including young Malcolm Fraser, one of Nora Stewart's neighbors. This young Highlander, and his pretty sister Minnie Fraser, were among the first to arrive.

"And where are Mr. and Mrs. Fraser?" asked Nora.

"My mother sent her love," answered Minnie, whose hair was of such pale gold color as to look almost white, "and she could not leave my father to-night; his rheumatism is so bad."

"What poor women have to come to, you see," said Maud Lee coquettishly to young Fraser, after hearing this explanation.

As the young girl said this, "Mr. Biddulph," was announced, and a tall, grave-faced, distinguished-looking man walked rather slowly into the room; and as he did so, a brighter light stole into Nora Stewart's dark eyes, and a flush came on her fair cheeks, which had been so pale before.

"I am afraid I am late," said Mr. Biddulph, courteously, as he shook hands with his young hostess; "but the loch is so rough to-night we had to tack a bit before we could cross."