

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Coronation of Esther

(Lizzie Clarke Hardy, in 'American Messenger'.)

It was a lovely walk along the river road from the village school to the little brown cottage on the bank of the river, and in the cottage there was Momsie Bliss, and that was about all the comfort that Esther had as she walked slowly home from school.

It was a sunshiny day in April. The trees had arrayed themselves in the soft shimmering green of early spring, and hepaticas, buttercups, wild-flowers and violets were lifting up their smiling little faces to catch the warm sunshine. A redbird flashed by like a crimson arrow, and robins and thrushes, bluebirds and orioles, carolled and trilled and quivered with the very ecstasy of their own melody.

All the fourteen years of her life Esther had lived in the far away city, and now she could not but be glad with all this opulence of beauty around her, but still the sore spot in her heart kept aching and there was a wistful look in the usually merry brown eyes.

It was a rather trying time in the little brown cottage, and Momsie Bliss had all she could do to make ends meet, and as Esther quaintly said, 'They wouldn't tie and leave anything over.'

Papa Bliss had been sick for a long time, and the city doctor had said, if he ever was to be well again, he must go away into the quiet country and rest, and so they had come to live in the little cottage. But Esther had found that being a new scholar in a strange school was very different from being a great favorite with all her old companions, and never being left out of any of the good times, as was the case at home.

And then there was Hilda Mathews, whose word seemed to be law with all the other girls, who seemed to take delight in making it as disagreeable as possible for the quiet, studious little girl who had easily taken her place at the head of all the classes in the seventh grade.

Esther had a sweet and loving disposition, and she did not know what to think of Hilda's strange conduct and it grieved her sorely. But on this particular afternoon Lucia Hall and Hilda had had a little tiff, and Lucia had walked with Esther down the river road and spoken her mind quite freely.

'I know we all toady to her, Esther. And she thinks because her father owns the band and is mayor of Millville that she ought to be first and foremost in everything. She's just jealous of you because you are ahead of her in the classes, that's all.'

'But I can't help that, can I?' said Esther, ruefully.

'Of course you can't,' answered Lucia, stoutly, 'and don't you feel bad if she don't invite you to her old party, either. I've a good mind not to go myself. I don't believe we'll have a very good time, anyway.'

'Oh, yes, I'm sure you will, but I heard her tell one of the girls that she wouldn't invite me, anyway,' said Esther, soberly. 'She said she didn't believe I had anything to wear except the old, faded-out dresses that I wore to school.'

'But you have, haven't you?' asked Lucia a little doubtfully.

'Yes, I have, but I have to wear my last summer dresses to school this year,' and then Esther closed her lips firmly, resolved not to talk about her troubles to her new-found friend.

'There now,' she said to herself as Lucia turned in at her own gate. 'I will just put on my

morning face and not think any more about it, Momsie has trouble enough without bearing mine, but oh, dear, dear, I'm so lonesome for a real good time with the girls, and it's so awfully hard to be left out of everything.'

But in spite of the morning face Momsie could read her little daughter like a book, and she very well knew that her heart was troubled. And so that evening, as they sat on the river bank, she drew Esther's head down upon her shoulder and said gaily:

'When two at a burden lift
Each is twice as strong;
When two can sing together,
Blither is the song,'

'and so you had better tell me all about it, little daughter, and then we will both feel better.'

'Oh, Momsie, you're such a dear, but how do you always manage to find out things?' said Esther, nestling a little closer to her mother's side.

But Mrs. Bliss only smiled quietly and waited, and after a little Esther said soberly:

'It isn't anything really serious, Momsie, only the girls are not nearly so nice and so friendly as they used to be at home, and Hilda Mathews is going to have a May party, and I heard her tell one of the girls that she would not invite me because she didn't believe I had anything decent to wear. Lucia Hall says Hilda is jealous because I am ahead of her in the classes.'

'Then I am sure that Hilda is the one to be pitied,' said Momsie, thoughtfully.

'Yes,' said Esther a little doubtfully, 'but I don't want her to feel that way, I want her to like me and be friendly. It's so—so different from what I've been used to, Momsie,—' and the dark curly head went down upon her mother's knee, and Esther cried softly.

'Oh, well, I wouldn't mind, if I were you, dear. Just be kind and patient, and I am sure that when you are better acquainted the girls will love you for something else than your clothes. And besides you know that every cloud has its silver lining, and our silver lining is that papa is growing well and strong, and you know how much you are helping by being your own brave cheery self in spite of the troubles.'

And so Esther was comforted. But the days that followed were no better than before. Hilda was more disagreeable than ever, because some of the girls were growing to like the quiet, peaceable little girl who never resented ill-treatment, but kept quietly to herself, and easily ahead in all her studies.

Hilda had a little pony and road cart, and almost every evening after school she would take some of the girls for a drive out into the green country lanes. One evening Esther was walking along the river road when she saw Hilda driving toward her with one of the girls in the seat by her side. It had been raining, and there was a large pool of water in the road, and all at once Hilda leaned forward, and touching the pony with the whip whirled past, splashing the mud and water over Esther from head to foot, and as she stood with the tears of indignation making little rivulets down her mud-bespattered face, a mocking laugh fell on her ears as the pony whirled around the corner.

But a few days later something else happened.

Esther was out alone upon the bank of the river. The crimson and gold of the sunset sky was mirrored in a path of glory upon the rippling swift-flowing waters, the evening breeze was soft and fragrant and everything was so quiet and peaceful that all the trouble seem-

ed for the time to drift away, and a sweet and peaceful serenity settled down upon the troubled heart of the lonely little girl.

Suddenly there was a clatter of hoofs, and springing to her feet Esther saw Hilda's pony come tearing down the road with the lines under his flying feet, and clinging to the seat, with his yellow curls flying in the breeze and a look of terror upon his baby face, was Hilda's little three-year-old brother Clyde.

'He is running away,' cried Esther, 'he will strike the pile of rock when he turns the corner, and the baby will be killed,' and in an instant she was flying down the road toward the rearing, plunging pony. And then all that she could ever remember was of grasping the bit and being dragged and trampled and then of a sudden crash and a terrible pain, and the next thing she knew she was lying upon her own little bed and her mother was standing over her with a pale but smiling face, while just outside the door someone was sobbing and crying in a heartbreaking way.

'Was the baby hurt?' asked Esther faintly.

'No, dear, not in the least; you stopped the horse just at the edge of the pile of rocks, and the baby wasn't even thrown from the cart, but you have a sprained ankle and a bruise on your forehead, and so I am not going to let you talk very much at present; but here is some one who couldn't go home until she had seen you for just a moment.' Then Mrs. Bliss motioned for some one to come in the room. Hilda Mathews came softly in, and dropping on her knees beside the bed, buried her face in Esther's pillow and sobbed brokenly:

'Oh, Esther, you saved the baby's life, and after I had been so mean to you, too. And now I want to tell you I was just so mean and jealous that I didn't deserve it, Esther, and I don't know what to say to you, only to ask you to forgive me,' and then she broke down and cried again.

'But you mustn't cry, Hilda,' said Esther softly, 'just be glad the baby wasn't hurt, and—and let me love you a little.'

'Oh, Esther, I don't see how you can want to ever speak to me again, but I shall just worship you as long as I live. I only left the pony a moment to pick some flowers, and he was frightened at a little whirlwind of dust and started to run, and if it hadn't been for you, oh, I can't bear to think about it,' and then Hilda was sobbing again, and Mrs. Bliss led her softly from the room.

In a week's time Esther could sit up in the rocking chair by the window, and Hilda and the girls came to see her every day. Hilda's parents came also with little Clyde, and their earnest thanks brought the warm color to the pale cheeks of Esther, and afterward Papa Bliss and Mr. Mathews had a long talk out in the front porch.

Hilda had arranged to have her May party on the river bank not far from the cottage, and Esther was to be carried out in the chair. And she was sure it was the very happiest day of her life when Momsie slipped on the pretty white dress and tied the pink silk sash, saying it was quite warm enough for her to begin to wear her summer dresses.

Papa Bliss and Mr. Mathews carried her out in the chair, and Momsie and Mrs. Mathews marched along with the little procession of girls. A little platform had been built under a wide spreading tree and covered with a gay piece of carpet, and Esther's chair was placed carefully thereon. There was a big covered basket just behind the tree, but Esther just thought that it was the lunch basket, of course. There was a great deal of merry talk and chatter, the long table was set and loaded with