

heap of fallen relatives were myself, and, alas, my Aunt Noberry. "She is to be my guardian still," I thought, somewhat unkindly, as it occurred to me afterwards.

At last the girl's voice broke cheerily through the clear, frosty air: "There, that will do, John; we will leave the poor old tree in peace for the present," and, tripping gaily on before, she left her companion to convey us with his great, brawny hands into the house.

I think that process was too much for my nerves, as I remember nothing after till I found myself in a small square hall, having the entrance door at one end, and the staircase and a passage at the other. The polished oak floor was strewn with a perfect wilderness of evergreens, and in the midst of the litter, near a bright fire, on a low basket chair, sat the golden-haired girl, actively stitching holly leaves on to a long strip of brown paper, and brightening it up here and there with a few clusters of our red berries. She was singing, too, as she sewed, in such a sweet, soft tone; I think it was her voice that brought me to my senses again. And she looked so fresh and lovely! I felt as I lay there, peeping up at her again and again and listening to her voice, that I was well repaid for anything I had undergone. At last her busy fingers rested for a minute, and she raised her head as a small child wrapped in furs, and swinging a pair of skates in her hand, came springing down the stairs.

"Nellie, dear," said the golden-haired girl, "you are off to the pond, I suppose? Well, just tell Iva, who is there, that I have just begun to stitch, and should be glad of her help. She intended to come, I know."

"All right, Dolly, I'll tell her," was the answer, as the little skater disappeared through the door, letting in a breath of wintry air as she did so.

It did not seem long before there came a sound of merry voices, stamping of feet, and a man's laugh. At the sound of that laugh Dolly's head bent lower, and her face became as red as the berries she was at that moment securing to the paper, and, to make matters worse, the needle ran into her poor little thumb; but when the door opened I could detect nothing unusual in her appearance.

I wondered what this meant, and looked eagerly to see who entered—only a girl of about fourteen, an awkward representation of Dolly herself, but her hair was not so rich in colour, nor her complexion so fair, and a young man with the flush of recent exercise on his face, and a smile still lingering on his well-shaped lips.

"Mr. Westward has kindly offered to come and help," said Iva, with a mischievous look in her eyes, as she hastily threw off her wraps.

"It is very good of him, I'm sure," replied her sister; and there was not a sign of agitation in her voice, or of embarrassment in the smile with which she greeted the new-comer.

"But, Mr. Westward, I thought you were so fond of skating! It's a shame to drag you away from your favorite pastime."

"I have been stretching my legs on the ice for the last two hours, so I'm glad to get on terra firma again; besides, it is no fun when you have not the companions you hoped to have. You might, at least, have come for half-an-hour, Miss Turner."

"Oh, I really could not. I have been so busy all the morning, and there is plenty to be done before night. Suppose you begin at once, by cutting some leaves and berries for Iva and me. Here is a pair of scissors; don't cut your fingers off by mistake."

"They are not very sharp, I hope," he said, examining the scissors critically.

"Well," laughed Dolly, "I really don't think they could really find their way through one of your thick fingers, so don't be afraid."

I cannot go repeating the talk and laughter that followed.

They all seemed very merry but I took little notice of their conversation, being in constant fear of having my leaves submitted to the vigilance of those sharp scissors. However, I did learn that there was going to be a large gathering of friends in the house that evening, and dancing was to be the chief entertainment.

I also noticed enough to suspect that Mr. Westward was what you mortals call "in love" with my young lady, the sweet, golden-haired Dolly. He was not a bit silly, or languishing, or sentimental, as I have heard mortals are in such cases, but often, when she was not looking, he would gaze at her with his whole soul in his eyes—deep, steadfast grey eyes they were, too—eyes that no one could look into and not trust the owner.

Iva, moreover, confirmed my suspicions by her peculiar, school-girlish behavior. She sat with her back a little turned to the others, joining frequently in the conversation, but never looking in the direction of her two companions; and sometimes, when silence fell among the trio, a queer little smile crept round the corners of her mouth, which she seemed to control with difficulty.

At last, after one of these pauses, she suddenly sprang up, and, murmuring something about going to fetch the scroll for