

Nora's eyes were raised to her lover's face with a quick startled expression; then her eyelids drooped and her cheeks flushed beneath his gaze.

Captain Hilliers looked earnestly at the downcast face beside him. Who was this Mr. Hamilton? Some old admirer of Nora's perhaps. He did not like the idea. They walked on for some time in silence, then he said—

"What did that fellow want to say to you last night, Nora?"

"Why do you ask me, Frank?" answered Nora, in a low frightened tone.

The girl's agitation was plainly visible; for she was afraid that Colonel Despard would overhear their conversation.

"Why do I ask you?" rejoined the Captain. "I may as well say, why don't you answer me?"

"Because there is nothing to tell," replied Nora quickly, remembering her promise to Jack.

"Or rather you won't tell!" persisted Frank, looking and speaking as if he were annoyed.

For the first time since they had known each other they parted almost coldly; but they met at evening service again, and Captain Hilliers, watching Nora's face during the sermon, was ashamed of his suspicions. When as they were coming down the aisle Nora's eyes wistfully sought his, he warmly pressed the timid hand she held out to him, and, reconciled, they walked home together with a grateful sense of the peace of the Sunday evening stealing over them.

* * * * *

Captain Hilliers and his uncle sat opposite to each other at breakfast on Monday morning in the snug warm breakfast room at Hilliers Court, looking out over the broad acres of wood and moorland, where the dark branches of the leafless trees were outlined against the wintry sky. A bright fire roared and crackled in the grate, the table was spread with an abundance of good things, and the room had an air of comfort and luxury.

The post-bag had just been brought in, and they were both deep in their letters. Presently the Captain looked up and said—

"I say, uncle, here's a bore! I shall have to go up to Dublin."

"What to do, Frank?"

"Oh, Tom is coming over about a horse, and nothing will do but I must choose it for him!"

"I see. And when must you go?"

"By the mail this afternoon; and I dare say I shan't get back till Wednesday."

Breakfast over, Captain Hilliers sauntered about for a while, and finally wandered off in the direction of the village. It was a clear and rather frosty morning with a bright blue sky, and the air was laden with the odour of dead leaves. He found little Daisy alone in the drawing-room, lying on the rug, poring over a lesson-book.

"Where is Nora?" he inquired rather eagerly.

"I don't know; she was here a minute ago. Perhaps she is in the garden. Look, Frank—Nora is going to wear that lovely dress at the ball!"

"Very pretty," said the Captain surveying the black net dress trimmed with silver ivy-leaves.

"I wish I was grown up," sighed Daisy.

"And so you will be in time, Daisy. See—here is something better than ball-dresses—sweets enough to last you a week! Now I must be off to look for Nora."

The lesson-book received very little of Daisy's attention after that. She sat down again contentedly on the hearthrug, and Captain Hilliers hurried off in search of Nora. He went through the flower-garden, and under the arch in the hedge, then wandered slowly down the kitchen-garden, and at last found Nora beside the river under a large elm-tree, leaning over the low wall talking to some one in a boat.

She turned with a start at his approach, and the boat darted away down the river, creeping well within the shadow of the wall. With a flush of annoyance, Frank saw that Nora's companion was Jack Hamilton.

Feeling deeply her want of confidence in him, he waited for her to speak, to volunteer some explanation; but Nora, not knowing what to say, held her peace; and her lover, more hurt and annoyed than he cared to confess, concluded that she had some motive for her silence on the subject. He would not condescend to question her; so the game of cross purposes began—a small beginning that led to a great amount of unhappiness.

Nora thought Frank was rather out of temper that morning; and, when he was gone, she went up-stairs to her own room and wept bitterly. What had annoyed him? she wondered. What had made him so cold and stern? He had not seemed to care when he said he was going away, and they would not meet for two whole days. Oh, what long days they would be to her!

* * * * *

Nelly arrived the next evening, very weary after her long journey. It has been wild and rough in the Channel, and the traveller looked pale and tired as she stood once more before the fire in the old home while her father chafed her cold hands. Nelly's lips were quivering; this coming home stirred feelings that would not be suppressed.

"You had better go to bed, darling," said Colonel Despard kindly, looking at the heavy sad eyes. "Poor child, you are tired out! Nora will bring you some tea."

When Nora went up-stairs a few minutes later, carrying a small tray laden with dainties, she found Nelly lying on the bed with her face hidden on the pillow, sobbing almost hysterically.

(To be Continued.)

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