

"Why, so it was. People have no business to keep up such fires, and shut out the fresh air in May, have they? You look quite pale, little one."

"My head aches," admitted Dolly shyly. "I think it is because I couldn't help crying last night, everything was so strange, even the ayah had gone; but it was silly, and I don't mean to cry any more."

The kind face, which had seemed to invite this confidence, looked still more kindly upon her as she made this simple confession; but he laughed as he answered lightly—

"If you cry yourself ill, Miss Dorothy, or fall sick any other way, you will have to have me to come and see you, to give you physic and keep you in order, and what will you say to that?"

"I think that will be the best part of it," answered Dolly, catching the laughter in his voice, and joining in it as she finished her demure reply. And after that there was no more shyness, and the little girl spent a very happy half-hour, walking about his large garden, gathering strawberries out of his greenhouses, and receiving with pretty eagerness and admiration the beautiful flowers he cut from time to time, and bestowed upon her as they walked through the conservatories.

They parted on the best of terms, Dr. Gordon declaring that he should very soon come over to ask if the headache was quite gone, and to see how Master Marmaduke behaved when he "played at being Dr. Gordon."

And Duke, when he heard where Dolly had been, informed his grandmother at dessert that same evening, "that as soon as she had bought him that pony he wanted, he should ride over and call on Dr. Gordon himself."

CHAPTER V. IN THE GARDENS.

Two days later Dolly and Duke went together to spend some hours of the afternoon in the pretty gardens which they admired so much.

Duke had, on the previous occasion, struck up a sort of friendship with some boys who lived in one of the great houses behind the trees, which Lucy had pointed out; and Lady Temple had greatly approved of the advances made to one another. The Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Fitzherbert Lennox were the most intimate acquaintances which that distant, haughty dame possessed in the neighborhood; and although they did not very frequently meet, and their intercourse was generally limited to occasional stiff calls, still the two families were on decidedly friendly terms; and Mrs. Lennox, who, though much younger, was in her own way as proud and exclusive as Lady Semple herself, was decidedly gratified by the solemn courtesy displayed towards her by the dowager, and did all in her power to increase the intimacy between their houses.

Of course this was well known to both nurses, and the children were accordingly encouraged to chat and play together.

There were four boys in the Lennox nursery party, the youngest of whom was about Duke's age, and the eldest a year and a half older than Dolly. Their names were Bruce, Wilfred, Edgar, and Hubert, and they were fine, handsome boys, and had been very much indulged all their lives.

Dolly thought them very noisy and rather quarrelsome, and was half afraid to join in their rough-looking play; but Duke was daunted by nothing, and could hold his own with any one. His masterful way always seemed to make him popular with other boys, and even those older than himself frequently allowed themselves to be led by him, and were not unwilling to do his bidding.

Dolly, however, withdrew herself a little from the noisy play, which rather alarmed her, and stood watching it at a little distance.

Presently she noticed that one of the strange boys, she did not know which, stopped playing and stood apart also, looking at her. He was slight and pale, and had light brown hair and dark grey eyes, and did not look strong like his brothers. Dolly could not be sure whether or not he was a nice boy. There was something in his face that she liked, and that made her feel sorry for him, she hardly knew why; and yet there was a fretful look about the lines of the mouth, and two furrows in the forehead which seemed to show that it was very often puckered into an ugly frown, and these things made her feel a little doubt as to whether or not he would be a pleasant companion.

She did not move, but by and by he did, drawing a little nearer to her at every step, until at last he stood by her side. Then Dolly looked at him and smiled shyly; and he smiled a little too, and his face was quite pleasant then.

He did not seem as though he meant to speak, and so, after a minute, Dolly thought she had better say something.

"Are you Edgar?" she asked, by way of opening the conversation.

"No; I'm Wilfred. I'm older than Edgar. I'm just as old you are. I'm ten. Duke said you were ten."

"So I am."

"And your name's Dolly?"

"Yes."

"Is it anything else?"

"It is really Dorothy—Dorothy Temple; only most people call me Dolly."

"I think I shall call you Dolly; I suppose I may?"

"Oh yes, do."

"I mean to, because it sounds as if we were friends. I think I should like to be friends with you."

"I should like it too," said Dolly politely, feeling courtesy demanded of her some such reply.

Wilfred looked at her under his brows for a moment or two, and then said without a hesitation—

"I want you to like me better than you like them,"—indicating with a sweep of his hand his three brothers. "I want you to be my friend."

"Why?" asked Dolly, feeling rather perplexed.

"I hate going shares with anybody," returned the boy, with the little frown beginning to show upon his forehead. "I like to have a thing all to myself. I want to have you for my friend."

"I will be your friend if I can."

"And not to any of the others?"

"I can't tell. I haven't spoken to them hardly yet. I daresay they won't want me."

"Yes, they will, because you're pretty and you're a girl. But don't you care for them. I want you only to like me. You will, won't you?"

"I really can't tell yet," answered Dolly, rather bewildered by his persistence; "but I shall like you just the same, whether I like them or not, so it will make no difference to you."

"Yes, but it will; it will spoil it all," asserted Wilfred, and the frown was all the more marked now from his impatience and earnestness. "The others always get everything nice, and I get nothing. I'm always left out, and nothing good ever comes to me."

"Doesn't it?" returned Dolly with sympathy. "I'm so sorry."

Wilfred seemed pacified for the time, and did not continue the conversation. There was silence awhile, and then he asked—

"Don't you care to play?"

"I don't think I do very much. I didn't in India, not often, except just with Duke. There weren't many children in the station, and it was often so very hot there."

"I don't care to play either. I'm not strong like the others, I like keeping quiet. Mostly I bring out a book and read. They call me a bookworm and a milksop; but I don't care. I don't like any of them much."

"But you ought to be very fond of your brothers," said Dolly.

"Well, I am not then."

"But why? I love Duke so very, very much."

"I don't love my brothers a bit, and they don't love me. Bruce says it's being like a girl to be fond of people, and love them. He doesn't love anybody, I'm sure, and I don't believe Edgar does either."

Dolly was silent. It seemed a very curious state of affairs to her.

"But you love your mother," she said by and by, in a wondering kind of way.

"Oh, pretty well—not particularly," replied Wilfred in an off-hand way; and as Dolly was too much aghast at his tone to volunteer a word, he added later, "I love Molly as well as anybody, when she isn't very cross."

"Who is Molly?"

"My sister."

"Have you got a sister? I didn't know."

"I've got two. One's grown up. Molly and I are twins."

"She isn't out here, is she?"

"Oh no! She never comes out hardly. She fell downstairs three years ago and hurt her back. She always has to lie down now."

"Oh dear! I am sorry," said tender-hearted Dolly, very pitifully. "Poor Molly!"

"She used to be stronger than me, and could do lots of things I never could; and she was always laughing then. She doesn't often laugh now. Very often she is very cross indeed."

"It must make her feel so unhappy not to be able to run about; perhaps we should be cross if we had to lie down always," suggested Dolly gently.

"Perhaps. I don't think I should care much. I like keeping quiet and reading. Molly is nice when she isn't cross. Will you come and see her?"

"I should like to, if my grandmother will let me."

"Oh, she won't mind. She and my mamma call. She's a nasty, cross old woman, isn't she? Duke said so, and we all know she is. But she won't mind your going to see Molly. Will you come now?"

"To-day? Oh, I can't. I must get leave first."

"She won't mind, I tell you."

"But I can't go without asking."

"She need never know. They won't see us, and I won't tell."

"Oh, but, Wilfred, I couldn't go like that; it wouldn't be right."

"What does it matter if nobody knows?"

"It makes it worse; deceiving people is as bad as telling a story."

"It wouldn't be deceiving anyone," returned Wilfred sullenly. "We're not obliged to tell everybody everything we do."

Dolly looked half perplexed and half distressed, but did not yield.

"Then you won't come?"

"Not till I have asked grandmother."

(To be continued.)

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