

the old Squire and his son would be no trifling matter. In imagination, she saw them standing facing each other—the father ruddy, bristling, energetic—Rex straight and tall, his lips set, his eyes gleaming. They were too like each other in disposition for either to find it easy to give way.

"Boys are a great trial," she said, sighing profoundly. "We have two, you know, Raymond and Bob. They have gone back to school now, and the house is so peaceful. I am glad I wasn't born a boy. They never seem happy unless there is a disturbance going on. But both Rex and your father seem so fond of you. Can't you coax them round?"

"Oh, I daren't! Edna looked quite alarmed. Mother and I never interfere; we leave them to fight it out between themselves. But if they go on fighting for the next three years it won't be very lively, I must say!"

Edna would have been as much surprised as delighted if she had known that the conflict which had so long destroyed the peace of the household was at an end, even as she spoke. No one could fail to notice that the Squire was in an unusually radiant frame of mind at luncheon, or that he addressed his son with marked favour; but it was not until the drive home was nearly over, and the gates of Clouddale in view, that Rex enlightened his companion's curiosity on the point. He had cleared his throat once or twice in a curious, embarrassed manner, before he began to speak.

"Er—Norah—I've something to tell you. When we were shut up in that hole last night, I was thinking too. The governor has been very good to me, and it seems ungrateful to stand out about college, when he is so keen on it. It is only for three years. I—er—I told him this morning that I would do my best till I was twenty-one, if he would promise to let me have a free choice after that."

"Oh, Rex, did you? I am so glad. I am sure you will never regret it. You will always be glad that you did what your father wished, even if it is hard at the time. I think you are very, very good and kind, and unselfish."

"All right! You needn't gush. I hate girls who gush," said Rex, curtly, and Norah understood that she was to say no more on the subject, and collapsed into obedient silence.

It seemed a day of good resolutions, for Norah could not but notice that Hilary looked ill and was obviously in low spirits. Her greeting had been more affectionate than usual; nevertheless, the remembrance of the quarrel of a few days earlier still rankled in Norah's mind, and the resolutions of yesterday were too fresh to allow her to be satisfied without a definite reconciliation. The first time they were alone together, she burst into impetuous apologies. "Oh, Hilary, I wanted to say that I'm sorry I was cross on Monday. I don't mind a bit about the drawing-room; alter it in any way you like. Of course you know better how things should be, after staying in

London. I'm sorry I was rude, but I did dust it, really."

To her surprise, the tears rose in Hilary's eyes, and she looked absolutely distressed. "Oh, Norah, don't! I'm sorry too. I didn't think I had grumbled so much. But Miss Carr's house is so beautiful, and when I came home—"

"I know. But it looks ever so much nicer in summer, when the doors are open and the flowers are in bloom. If you like to move the piano, and make it stand out from the walls, I'll give you my yellow silk for the drapery. Aunt Amy sent it to me for a dress, but I've never used it."

"Thank you, Norah; it's awfully good of you, but I shall have something else to do besides draping pianos for the next few weeks, I'm afraid," said Hilary, dismally. "Mary has given notice!" and the poor little house-keeper heaved a sigh; for Mary had been a model housemaid, and it would be a difficult matter to replace her in this quiet country place.

"Mary given notice! Mary! Oh, how horrid! I hate strange servants, and she has been with us so long. Why ever is she—!" Norah checked herself with a quick recollection of the events of the last week, but Hilary did not shirk the unfinished question.

"She was vexed because I found fault. I felt cross and worried, and vented it on her. I didn't realise it at the time, but I see now that I was unreasonable;" and to hear Hilary confess a fault, was an experience so extraordinary, that Norah sat dumb-founded, unable to account for the phenomena.

The threatened loss of Mary was too important a family event to pass unnoticed in the general conversation. Lettice was full of lamentations, and even Rex had a tribute to pay to her excellence. "The big, strapping girl, who waited on me when I was laid up? Oh, I say, what a nuisance. I wish she would come to us; she has such a jolly good-natured face."

"If she came to you, I would never stay at your house again. I'd be too jealous," said Norah dolefully. "We shall never get anyone like Mary."

"We may be thankful if we get anyone at all. Girls don't like living so far from the village," groaned Lettice in concert, and the virtues of Mary, and the difficulties of supplanting her were discussed, at length, throughout the afternoon. Hilary's sense of guilt in the matter made her even more energetic than usual in her efforts to find a new maid. She visited the local registry offices, inserted advertisements in the papers, and wrote reams of letters; and, on the third day, to her delight, a young woman arrived to apply for the situation. It was the first time that the duty of interviewing a new servant had devolved upon Hilary's shoulders, for all three maids had been in the family for years, and, in her new doubtfulness of self, she would have been glad to ask the help of Miss Briggs, but that good lady had taken Geraldine for a walk, and there was no help at hand.

"I don't know if she is afraid of me,

but I am certainly terrified of her!" said poor Hilary, smoothing her hair before the glass, and trying to make herself look as staid and grown-up as possible. "I don't know what on earth to say. Lettice, come and sit in the room, there's a dear, and see what you think of her. I shouldn't like to engage anyone on my own responsibility." So the two girls went downstairs together, and Lettice looked on from a quiet corner, while Hilary sat bolt upright, cross-questioning the new servant. She was a tall, awkward girl, untidily dressed, with a fly-away hat perched on the top of her head, a spotted veil drawn over her face, and the shabbiest of boas wound round her neck. "What a contrast to our nice, trim Mary," groaned Lettice to herself, while Hilary cudgelled her brain to think of appropriate questions.

"And—er—have you been accustomed to housemaid's work?"

"Oh, yes, miss. I'm very handy about a house, miss. I'm sure I could give you satisfaction, miss."

("I don't like her voice. She has not nearly such nice manners as Mary," sighed Hilary to herself. "Oh dear me!")

"And—er—can you—er—get up in the morning without being called?"

"Oh yes, miss; I'm fond of early rising. It's never any trouble to me to get up."

"And—er—we are rather a large family, and I am very particular. Are you quite strong and able to work?"

"Oh yes, miss; quite strong, miss. Never had a day's illness in my life."

"And—er (there must be other questions to ask, but it's terribly difficult to think of them. I can't ask her to her face if she is honest and sober—it's absurd" thought Hilary in despair).

"And—er—er—I suppose you are good-tempered, and would not quarrel with the other servants?"

"Oh yes, miss. Oh no, miss. All my mistresses would say for me, I'm sure, miss, that there never was a girl with a sweeter temper. I couldn't hurt a fly, miss, I'm sure I couldn't, I've such a tender heart."

("I'm sure she has nothing of the kind. I don't like her a bit; but, oh dear, what can I do? If she goes on agreeing with all I say, I have no excuse for telling her that she won't suit.")

"And—er—you would have to attend to all the bedrooms, and the school-room, and help the parlour-maid with the waiting. If you have not been accustomed to a large family, I am afraid you would find it a heavy place."

"Oh no, miss; not too heavy, miss. I'm never so happy as when I'm working. I've been brought up to work."

"Yes—but—but—but I'm afraid you would not suit me," cried Hilary, summoning the courage in despair, and determined, at all costs, to put an end to the interview. "I won't trouble you to send your character, for perhaps your mistress might object to give it twice, and I—er—you see—I don't quite know when my present maid is leaving, and I think—I am afraid—"