

"Oh, it's for Mr. Hartly. I'll take it down to him and make him give me a ride."

Mr. Hartly's handsome horse stood prancing at the gate; and once on the back of the spirited animal the note in Willie's pocket was entirely forgotten as though it had never been written.

"I can't give you a very long ride, Willie," said Mr. Hartly, to his delighted namesake. "I am going away in the evening train."

"Where to?" asked the disappointed little fellow; "and how long are you going to stay?"

"I'm going a great many miles off, and I don't exactly know how long I shall remain."

A few moments after they parted, and Willie returned home with his news. His sister's anxiety concerning the mysterious disappearance of her note was forgotten in these new disclosures, and so Master Willie escaped without question or censure.

As he was undressing that night the note slipped from his pocket and fell upon the floor. He picked it up, saying—

"I ought to have given it him this afternoon. I'll keep it till he comes home and then give it to him."

And having hidden it safely away in the bottom of his little tool chest, Master Willie said his prayers and crawled into bed with a pleasant sense of duty done.

Six months passed by, and Will Hartly returned.

During his absence his friends had learned that he had completed his studies for the medical profession two or three years previous, and, being rich, had been doctoring all along the poor people in the suburbs.

Nellie Ainsworth avoided him conscientiously.

"If I could have shown him that I believed in him before everything was proved, I wouldn't have cared," she mused, sadly, "but now, as it is, I don't want to see him."

But one evening, as she and Willie were standing by the gate, he came down on horse-back.

"Oh, Mr. Hartly, Mr. Hartly!" called the boy, loudly, much to her dismay. "I want you to finish that ride you half gave me the night you went away. You said you would when you got back."

"All right!"

And Mr. Hartly leaped lightly off his horse.

"Come out here. I never forget my promises."

But Master Willie was in no hurry. The gentleman's watch chain attracted his attention.

"Oh, Mr. Hartly, you've got a new chain; and what funny little things!" handling with evident admiration the lockets attached. "Do they open?"

Before the gentleman could answer, the busy little fingers had solved the question for themselves, and the largest one lay open.

"Oh, there's a picture!" said the small discoverer; but before he could look further his companion closed the tiny ornament and placed the chain back in its rightful place.

"Was that your sweetheart, Mr. Hartly?" he asked, curiously.

"What a question!" said the gentleman, with a little laugh, which Nellie knew to be forced. "Come, are you ready?"

"In a minute," said the boy, hurrying to the house, as a sudden thought struck him. "I've got something for you; just wait till I get it."

Nellie's principal feeling was one of thankfulness that she had no opportunity of re-writing or delivering that little note so strangely lost on the evening of his departure.

"He might have thought I cared for him if he had received it," she mused; "but, as it is, he can't think anything of that kind."

And in her strangely sad triumph that his thoughts were likely to be of such an entirely different character, she failed to notice her brother's reappearance until she heard him say: "There, Mr. Hartly, I have kept that for you ever since the night you went away. I had it in my pocket then, but I forgot it till after I got home; so I just put it away and waited."

Nellie, looking up to see what this well-preserved article could be, saw with a gasp her own note of six months ago passed over into Mr. Hartly's hand.

"You see," Willie went on, proudly, not at all noticing his sister's distressed face, "Nell left that on her desk, and I just took charge of it."

"I am very much obliged, Willie," and Mr. Hartly, with considerable calmness, proceeded to open the tiny envelope.

Then Nellie Ainsworth found words; for, extending her hand, she said, in a tone she would have given a fortune to have kept from trembling, "Mr. Hartly, please give me that note."

The gentleman looked into her face for one second, and something in the scarlet cheeks and downcast lids emboldened him strangely, for without a "Forgive me!" he opened the note and read it through. Then he turned to her and said very softly, "Did you ask me for this because its contents are not supposed to hold good now?"

"Not exactly," she stammered, something in his voice only adding to her confusion.

"I am glad of that," he said quietly.

Then, interpreting correctly her little timid glance at the mysterious guard, he disengaged it from the chain, and pressing it open, passed it over into her hands, saying, "This is yours. What will you do with it?"

She looked at it, recognizing herself, in a sort of happy glow; then, after a moment's hesitation, passed it back to her companion.

A few minutes after, Willie Ainsworth testified to the condition of things in this wise: "Oh, ma, Mr. Hartly kissed sister Nell down at the gate and she never said a word!"

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