

Family Circle.

NEIL'S DILEMMA.

BY JERUSA JUMBLE.

"Was that Ettie Bradley?"
 "Yes."
 "I thought so; but you bowed so coolly, and looked so sober, I thought I must be mistaken. What's up now, Neil? Did she give you the mitten?"
 "No."
 "Well then, perhaps you are afraid she will?"
 "I think not."
 "Well, well, I don't like to be too inquisitive, if I can find out without; but really a man's curiosity is quite equal to a woman's, when fully roused; so I promise you no peace until you satisfy mine. What troubles you?"
 "Did I say anything did?"

"Yes. Actions speak louder than words sometimes; you have not been looking well for several days; I thought perhaps you had overdone, and there was a little liver trouble; now I begin to see that the heart has more to do with it than the liver. Sit right down under this tree and tell me all about it. You know my interest is born of genuine friendship. You will be better off to unburden your mind to some one, and I will never betray you in any way. What did that sigh mean?"

"It arose from amid the ashes of a dead hope. But I hesitate to speak my feelings, even to you, because I dislike to speak of another's mistakes; it seems like disloyalty to the friendship which has so long existed between Ettie Bradley and myself."
 "The friendship which has existed! Doesn't it still exist? I am sure she bowed politely, and smiled as pleasantly as one would ask when you met just now; otherwise I would almost imagine you had quarrelled."

"I should consider myself a disgrace to the mother who bore me, if I could so far forget myself as to quarrel with a lady."

"O come, Neil, you know I would not insult you, or repeat anything told me in secret. So tell your story in as few words as you choose."

"Well, Fred, you know I have enjoyed Ettie's company very much. I had talked, walked, and driven with her; in fact spent many delightful hours in her company, and was fast coming to the conclusion that she was the woman of all women for me. I don't think this will surprise you, as you seemed pretty well aware of my feelings, judging from some words you have spoken in jest."

"Yes, Neil, I understood your attentions to mean something more than a mere pastime. But I must have misjudged the girl very much if your friendship was not reciprocated."

"I believe it was; and this belief only adds to my sufferings to-day. You are already aware that I have always prized very highly my mother's advice. With my usual confidence, I spoke to her of my serious intention of trying to win Ettie's love. She talked to me in a loving manner; but I thought she seemed disturbed, although she declined to explain; but advised me to get a closer look into Ettie's home life before I fully decided a matter so important to both parties. I had never thought so much about obtaining a housekeeper, as a companion, but mother convinced me that I should miss my tidy home, and for health's sake, should need my food properly prepared; and had never been accustomed, either, to sew on my own buttons, or go with them off. I then realized that I was not in reality acquainted with Ettie's home life; my calls had either been made in the evening, or according to previous engagement. She sings and plays so nicely that I gave her little chance for other work during my visits; that she could, and did, do fancy work. I knew, because I had seen her work (or what she said was hers). She does Kensington paintings, among the rest. I called the next Tuesday evening, with my eyes and ears on the alert. It seemed to me that she was more becomingly dressed than usual; her pretty hair coiled loosely upon the back of her shapely head, while the front hair seemed one mass of tiny waves; her complexion is almost faultless, so cosmetics are unnecessary. I did not call for music as soon as usual, and she busied her fingers (which were shapely if not lily-white) with a dainty little piece of ric-rac. After a pleasant chat and some music, I left for home, more in love than ever. During the evening I learned that Mr. and Mrs. Bradley were going to Kingston, to spend the next day, and laid my plans accordingly. I rode over to Britin's with father, purchased a book I had promised Ettie, and started to deliver it, cutting across lots, etc., and coming into the yard at the back of the house. I confess the back yard seemed distantly related to the flower yard, and my heart throbbed with a mighty fear of the revelations which might follow. I did not wish to see yet felt compelled to look. I walked on, feeling more like a criminal going to judgment, than a lover calling upon the girl he loved. Coming around the corner of the house, I saw through the open window, first, a basket of unfolded clothes, nicely sprinkled with flies. The breakfast, just as the family left it, except that the flies were holding high carnival over everything."

"Go on, Neil; murder will out, and you may as well tell the whole truth first as last."

"Well, the next sight must have paralyzed my power of action, for the instant, for I came to a dead halt, just opposite the window. You know my mother is always a lady, never a sloven, even in the kitchen, and the picture presented looked worse to my eyes than it would to those better accustomed to such sights. In a low rocker sat Ettie

Bradley, so changed from the Ettie Bradley of my acquaintance as to be almost unrecognizable. The dress and apron she wore were far from clean; the shoes were ragged and slipshod; no collar adorned the pretty neck; the hair had been slept in, but not combed since my visit; the tiny waves were in preparation, in the form of two hateful looking horns. And shall I say it? Her hands and face were ornamented with something very like pot-black."

"What was she doing to allow such an inventory of her charms?"

"Reading an exciting novel which she had laid aside upon my entrance the previous evening. So engrossed was she with her book, as to be apparently oblivious to all surroundings. Then you know it takes longer to tell about a thing than it does to look at it. While my regret was very deep, I was even then conscious of a feeling of deep thankfulness, that I saw this sight with eyes free to look in another direction. Recovering my senses, I passed quickly around to the front door and rang the bell. In a few moments I heard stealthy footsteps, and felt rather than knew that Ettie was looking at me from behind the curtain. But the door did not open. I rang again and waited, determined to have it out while I was about it. In perhaps fifteen minutes the door opened and there stood my pretty Ettie; face and hands clean, hair brushed, and while it showed haste, still it looked very unlike the last view I had had of it; only serving to show how little time it would take to make some heads more presentable. Her wrapper and apron were clean; at the neck she wore a neat ric-rac collar, fastened by a small, but neat pin; to be sure her face was over-flushed from haste and excitement, but she looked so different, and so pretty, that my heart throbbed with a mighty regret, and I felt for the moment capable of almost any sacrifice, if that could, thereby, have come the *revelation*, everything else in accordance. But I was to have a still greater trial, for while giving me a most cordial welcome, she, at the same time, apologized for keeping me standing, saying she was housekeeper in her mother's absence, and was just making up the bread. At this she blushed deeply, but turned it off, saying she ever done such things. I very warmly assured her that I believed it the duty of every young lady to perfect herself in all the arts of housekeeping. Then blushing more deeply than before, she answered, 'I think so too! I could not tell you all that passed. I kept saying over and over to myself: "Untruthful and untidy, untruthful and untidy." I felt like one in a dream, she urged me to spend the day with her, but I desired to get away by myself, and declined, having no desire to dine at that neglected breakfast table, where I knew the flies must be still paying their "horrible respects." Some people seem to think a nice parlor compensates for an untidy kitchen; or afternoon "fix-ups" for morning untidiness. But Ettie's falsehoods, fashionable though they be, grieve me beyond all else. I could never love, or respect her, as I desire to love the woman I call wife. You can see, Fred, it is a hopeless case."

"Yes, Neil, I do, from my heart, I pity you. In fact I pity you both. I am surprised at and disappointed in Ettie; she seemed so nice. To tell the honest truth, had it not been for the visit you received from your little brown-eyed Cousin Rieta, I should have made a fool of myself over Ettie Bradley."

"I say what I know, Fred, when I say Rieta is worthy of your love, and I shall be only too happy to claim you as a cousin, when the time comes."

"Thank you; may the time still come when you shall find your Rieta; one good enough to pay for all previous disappointments."

"It does not seem, now, that I can ever care for another. The feelings I entertained toward the Ettie I believed her to be, still haunt me. 'Tis a nightmare from which I cannot wake. The Ettie I love, lives only in an idea; the Ettie I saw in Mr. Bradley's dining-room is a reality which I cannot love or respect."

"Still, Neil, I pity her, because she has not had your bringing up."

"I know it; I more than ever realize a mother's responsibility in training her children. For this reason alone, I could never install Ettie Bradley where it might fall to her lot to train a daughter to make any man such a wife as she would make me. If young men and young women were always wise they would always look before they leap. A mother's wisdom caused the look which prevented the fatal leap in my case. But it cannot prevent all suffering. What will Ettie think of me? I believe she was fast learning to love me as well as she was capable of loving. I cannot endure the thought of her believing me to be that most despicable of creatures, the flirt, who strives to win what he really don't want, or won't take. I have given her reason to think that my attentions were of a serious nature; now what can I do?"

"I presume you will be horrified to hear that I have about made up my mind to tell her the exact truth. I would rather merit her anger than her contempt."

"Well, sir, I presume you will have both if you try that on, whether you merit them or not. But I must go home, now; you know I start for Philadelphia in the morning."

Three months have fled, and we will listen to a second conversation between Neil Dawson and Fred Ivison. Neil Dawson's face wears a look of contented happiness; Fred's one of puzzled inquiry.

"Well! Neil Dawson, I used to think you a man of your words; but only three months ago, you spoke these words: 'I could never love and respect her, as I desire to love the woman I call wife.' Now what am I to think upon learning that you now expect to make this same her your wife? Are you marrying a woman you neither love nor respect? or

have you changed your opinion as to the virtues which can command the same? Don't worry about my dropping in to dinner oftener than once or twice a day."

"I won't, I promise you; nevertheless shall expect the honor of your company quite often; not so much for the dinner's sake, as because you appreciate the cook."

"Bah! don't talk to me; my love for the cook is not, as yet, sufficiently strong to relieve my memory of a very interesting, and life-like picture, imprinted by your animated description of a certain breakfast-table. I enjoy my hash better without the relishing thought that its ingredients had ever furnished picnic grounds for a few aristocratic (3) flies."

"Don't Fred; please oblige me by not making the disgust, evidently so genuine, so ludicrous that I am obliged to laugh in your face. Give me time to convince you that my word has not been broken—scarcely cracked. The girl I love, and am proud of, bids fair to be one of the neatest, as well as the sweetest little house and home-keepers among your acquaintances."

"I won't pretend to question either your word or your judgment; am open to conviction, but can't see exactly how one could change so much in so short a time."

"Where there is a will there is a way. But I will explain. The evening you left us I went to Ettie in perfect candor, telling her what my feelings were toward the woman I had thought her to be. I did not hide my love, only declaring firmly that it belonged to the ideal, not the reality. She wept bitterly, showing no signs of anger; frankly owning, not only her faults, but her affection for me, also. You may imagine something of our feelings: joined in heart, but separated by an awful barrier to a nearer and dearer union in our lonely lives. It was a sad interview. When I left she asked me to come again in two months, begging me not to close my heart against her, until she had made at least an effort to be worthy of my love and respect. Her mother married very young, without the least knowledge in regard to the housekeeping; spent the first few years in a boarding-house (that base of all young married people who patronize them). Of course she is not capable of training her daughter. Ettie said my words to her that sad Wednesday morning had roused her somewhat to her true condition, causing a new ambition; therefore a difference in her manners as to work and dress, and she felt that already she was a little different from the girl she was that day. Said she never saw her untidiness as she did that morning; ashamed to be seen by anyone outside of the family, in that trim, she never could have opened the door before making a change; in her great shame was driven to speak deceiving words, lest I should guess the truth. She had grieved much over these things. Only finding comfort in the new-born hope of still becoming in reality what she was in pretension, I told my mother just how things stood. She said it would be next to impossible for Ettie to overcome, alone and unaided, the mischief of mis-spent years. So you can imagine I spent a miserable two months; receiving from her no word of encouragement, could only hope she was succeeding better than my mother thought she could. Fortunately I was obliged to go away on business the next week, and returned only the day before my time was up. It is possible that might have had something to do with my returning just when I did; however I was very glad to get home, and mother seemed pleased to have me back again, and more than usually pleased with my appreciation of the dinner I found just ready to be eaten; but if she had spent, as I had, two, or nearly two, months, in a little backwoods hotel, where there was nothing first-class but the charges, she could have enjoyed it better herself. We never fully realize the value of a thing until we lose it, or are likely to. Perhaps this will, in a measure, account for the increased vigor of my love for Ettie. Well, its getting late, and I will cut my story short. I found my mother had put her 'hand to the plow.' She was teacher and adviser. Ettie had proved an apt and willing scholar. She it was who had prepared my good dinner; and better than that had won my mother's affection as well as mine. Sometimes I am almost tempted to be jealous of their friendship for each other; you know my mother never had a daughter's love. She thinks we will be safe in setting up a 'dove cot' of our own, six months hence, when you will consider yourself upon a standing invitation to dine whenever it suits your convenience."

"Thank you; the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I shall surely put in an appearance, out of curiosity, if nothing more. Then, after I have ransacked pantry and closets, rummaged drawers and boxes, peeped under beds and into corners, finding everywhere a full corroboration of your very sanguine expectations, I may possibly consent to prove the 'pudding,' which, mind you, is to be seasoned with—well, I don't care what, so it is not our friends at the breakfast table. Ah! Neil, an otherwise sensible man is a 'precious goose' when he is in love. Don't contradict me; I speak from experience; and she is the 'best teacher,' you know. And everyone wants a lesson from her science of Love."

A rusting tea-kettle can be remedied, it is said, by browning coffee in it. A thorough washing with soap and water will remove all the odor of the coffee, and leave the kettle free from rust. Another way is to place an oyster shell in the kettle, upon which the rust gathers. Remove the shell when it gets crusted, and substitute another.