

'There now, my dear, you are to be quite at home. We're going to be as jolly as sandboys, and you are to do just what I tell you until you get strong.'

Ida, weak and glad, sat still and looked on at the brisk little woman's movements, like one in a hazy dream. There was a homely atmosphere about the small house and its owner that appealed to the lonely girl, and later in the evening, when Mrs. Lavinia brought out her millinery and began to sew, Ida looked on, lazily content, in that lassitude which follows a severe illness. But her idleness did not last long; with returning energy came a desire to work, and after a week she asked permission to help in the sewing, a permission gladly given.

Ida's deft fingers worked wonders with ribbon and chiffon and flowers, and the elder woman's admiration at her handiwork was generous.

Ida was installed as chief adviser in delicate questions of selection and arrangement, and she proved a new attraction to the farmers' daughters, so that life passed busily for the two women. Ida was happy in the thought that she was not a burden on her good friend, and Mrs. Lavinia, feeling herself free to leave Ida in charge of affairs at home, gave fuller scope to her charitable enterprises. She had, too, at this time a particularly interesting case, the details of which Ida heard, of course, though she did not take the same interest as Mrs. Lavinia, by any means.

A young man without friends, and with but little, seemingly, of the world's goods, had fallen ill from overwork in the Boys' High School, which he had taken charge of some six months before. Of this Mrs. Nelson heard by accident at the post office, and straightway she came home and filled a basket with delicacies, and set out for the new master's house.

It required all her courage, though, to explain her visit to the tall, gaunt young man who answered her knock. He looked at her in undisguised surprise and faintly-concealed amusement, but the genuine motherliness and kindness in the quick blue eyes touched him inexplicably and he thawed and let her have her way, as most people did.

That was the first of a series of visits, and Ronald Gresley found himself waiting for the quick pat-pat of the 'elastic sides' up his gravel path, and then always followed her cheery greeting and something to show she had not forgotten the invalid.

'Now Ida—Miss Sinclair—sent these,' she said, the first time she brought roses. 'She said you would be longing for the scent of a rose. She knows, does my dear, what it means to be ill. When her brother died—and may he rest in peace—she got ill herself and nearly went to heaven, only I kept her back.'

'Was that quite wise, Mrs. Nelson? I would not thank you for keeping me alive, if I thought I had a chance of getting into a better place than this world.'

'Wise? Of course it was wise! The world wants good people, like my dear.'

Ronald was fingering the roses thoughtfully, while Mrs. Nelson prattled on about Ida, giving him a sketch of her story.

'You like the roses?' she asked at last, beaming on him.

He started as if from a dream.

'The roses? They are fine. They remind me of an old English garden I knew when a boy.'

Mrs. Nelson nodded till her feather shook.

'That's just what my dear said they would do. 'It's better to send him a jelly, my dear,' I said, when she came in looking like a picture with her hands full of roses. "Bring him a jelly, too, Mammie," she said, "but don't forget the roses."'

Gresley was a man of few words. It was Mrs. Nelson who did most of the talking on these occasions.

'My dear, I'm sure that young man belongs to a good family. There's some mystery about him. He owned as much as he'd never taught school before.'

'He's a University man—Cambridge, I believe,' said Ida. 'Probably he is one of the hundreds who drift to the Cape in search of fortune and end by taking up work they were never meant to do.'

'Not but what they say he's a good teacher, and the boys like him,' said Mrs. Nelson.

A few weeks later Ida was sitting alone in the workroom trimming a hat, when there entered a tall, pale young man, whom she guessed to be the new master. Ida rose and followed him into the shop. He turned at the sound of her step and said, with some hesitation:

'Is Mrs. Nelson at home?'

Could this brown-haired and blue-eyed vision be 'my dear,' of whom he had heard so often? The vision smiled brightly and stepped behind the counter with a quaint business-like air that did not convince him one little bit.

'Mrs. Nelson is out, but I am her assistant! What can I do for you?'

He, still bewildered, pulled himself together sufficiently to ask for some ribbon to be used as badges for a cricket team he was getting up among his boys. In a few minutes his nervousness went, for Ida entered into the subject of cricket badges with delightful earnestness. She brought down every ribbon in the shop, in spite of his protests that she was tiring herself unnecessarily. When a big green box on a high shelf refused to come down for her, he went in behind the counter and took it down.

'This blue—it is what I have been looking for—will go beautifully with the red, and will make a striking badge. Do you not think so?' Ida held the ribbons together.

'Splendid! One wants something that will be seen at a distance and yet be tasteful. Could I—er—Will Mrs. Nelson be able to make them?'

Ida smiled demurely.

'I will make them if you can trust them to me,' she said.

'You? Would you? I know they would be just right if you do them.'

'You have a large amount of faith,' she said. 'I hope you will not be disappointed. When do you want them?'

He mentioned the date.

'I hope you will be there to see them worn,' he ventured.

'Of course I'll be there. Everybody will be there, I expect. I just love cricket. We had a team at school, and we girls once beat the boys, but,' with a laugh, 'they were rather small boys.'

'That was in England?'

'Of course in England.'

'We are fellow-exiles,' he said. 'Mrs. Nelson has spoken much of you. May I consider myself introduced?'

'The dear old Mammie! Is she not the quaintest and kindest soul in the world? Of course she has told me all about you, Mr. Gresley, and I feel we are old acquaintances.'

'Thank you. Yes, Mrs. Nelson is one of those people this rough old world would be worse without. I have to thank you for the roses sent to cheer a sick man's room.'

Ida laughed and blushed.

'And she promised not to tell!'

'She was too kind not to let me know of your thought for a stranger.'

'I wonder,' thought Ronald to himself as he walked home, 'why that girl's relatives have left her in such a position. A princess playing at being a kitchen-maid would be no greater wonder than such a girl acting as milliner's assistant.'

The cricket badges necessitated many visits, and Mrs. Nelson nodded wisely to herself when the young people wandered off from badges to talk of many subjects she did not understand. Sometimes Mr. Gresley remained to tea in the little house, and then he saw Ida housekeeping, with that air of a princess at play which amused him.

The days drifted by pleasantly. On fine afternoon in April, not having anything special to do, Ida set off up the Pass which led from the village to the next Division.

Looking down the valley she saw a man's figure coming up the Pass, and recognised Ronald Gresley. Her first impulse was to hide behind a big rock until he passed, but on second thought she decided to remain