NORA'S TEST

From Darkness To Light

BY MARY CECIL HAY

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Foster's house in Great Cumberland Place was one of those London dwellings whose name is Legion. It was tall and narrow, its ruddy complexion darkened to a seedy brown by age and smoke, and its paint faded and crusty from the wear and tear of too many London seasons. It had five rows of narrow windows, placed there, to all appearance, simply as background for a limited variety of potted shrubs.

High up was the chamber of the two Misses Foster; for the dwelling was not a mansion of unlimited space, and this large upper chamber was very capable of containing two beds and two young ladies, even with the almost constant addition of a very diminutive French maid. And though a tiny room adjoined it, which Miss Foster called her dressing room, it inclosed her graceful form but seldom; for the advantage of a younger sister's unfailing attention and acute suggestions overbalanced any of those objections which Genevieve Foster would otherwise have urged against sharing any one's apartment.

On this evening Lucette had been dismissed unusually early, and Miss Foster was herself putting the finishing touches to her toilet, while her sister stood thoughtfully weighing the relative merits of pink and blue, before selecting accouterments for her crisp white grenadine.

"I should not wonder," she pondered aloud, "if mamma does not begin at once to make much of her, just as if she were a guest. Mamma is so uncertain that I can never feel sure of her."

"But she listens to reason," observed the elder sister, as she put in her emerald earrings; "and we have had a sensible talk together about Miss St. George. She is no relative of ours, and no guest—not even an acquaintance. She is here for a special purpose, and she must be left to pursue that purpose conscientiously. It is, indeed, for her sake that I have urged mamma to let her continue her studies undisturbed."

"For her sake, of course; and, indeed, for mamma's, too," observed Victoria Foster. "Mamma would be the very last in the world to wish for another grown-up daughter."

"An awkward, uneducated daughter, too," put in the elder sister, complacently, "who will have no idea of the very commonest usages of good society. Pooh! Mamma has too much regard for her own reputation."

"I don't at all agree with Will about Miss St. George,'s beauty," said Victoria, presently. "Certainly I saw her only for a minute, but I think her style will not be taking in London."

"Taking!" echoed Miss Foster, with the calmest contempt. "Who is it to take? The girl will be at her lessons. If her beauty smites Miss Archer, all the better; but who else can it smite?"

"Will. He is coming this evening, you know; and he seemed so anxious about seeing her that perhaps he will be coming often."

"Will is wiser than you imagine," rejoined the elder sister. "He is not one to marry on an income of three hundred pounds a year. You are a goose, Tory. Fasten this bracelet for me."

Thus the two girls stood facing each other before the toilet table when their mother entered the room; and she smiled as she saw the profiles reflected in the glass—both fair and correct, with features unmarred by any eccentricity of character, and pale blue eyes, the fire of which could never hurt the large, white lids. It was quite excusable in Mrs. Foster to be proud of her stylish daughters. That her grandfather should have bequeathed Genevieve a yearly income of two hundred pounds for pocket money, seemed to the mother a most natural proceeding, considering how prettily Genevieve always received the old man; but Mrs. Foster was totally unconscious of Genevieve's having usurped the foremost place in her kindly, fickle heart.

"Well, mother," Miss Foster said, "I suppose Nora St. George is still lying down. You will leave her to do so, of course."

"She did not lie down at all, my dear," returned Mrs. Foster. "She has been unpacking, and now she is with Miss Archer in the school room."

"Why did not Miss Archer go home this afternoon, as usual?"

"I thought it wiser," explained Mrs. Foster, "and, indeed, kinder"—with a timid air of deprecation—"to keep her this evening. Miss St. George would have felt so very lonely, as Tory would not consent to dine early and stay with her. I wish, even now, that you would stay with her, Tory."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Victoria, with quiet contempt. "Am I to be made a school girl just to please this utter stranger, for whom we have done a great deal too much already in allowing her to come here at all?"

"But you are a school girl, Tory," remarked her mother. "If you were not, why should Miss Archer and your masters come every day to teach you? I hope, my dear, that you will see the kindness of what I propose, and go and take tea with Miss Archer and your new comrade."

"No, indeed, mamma," said the young lady, hotly; "I will not be put down in this way for an interloper. I told you I must dine with you to-day; indeed, I shall do it every day now. What have I in common with this Irish girl?"

"Then you refuse to do as I ask you?" inquired the mother, rising, with a sigh.

"Certainly I do. Even you," added Victoria, diplomatically, "would be sorry yourself afterward, and ashamed, too, for behaving so to a daughter of seventeen. Gena knows very well that I am as grown-up looking as she is, and that I ought to do exactly as she does."

"You shall do it after to-day, if you will just keep Nora company on this occasion. She looks so very strange and lonely. Will you?"

"No, mamma; so do not ask me any more. I hate to refuse you."

Rather slowly and unwillingly Mrs. Foster entered the school room—a small, dull apartment in the back of the hall—and so impressed upon Nora that after the fatigue of her long journey it would be cruel to ask her to dine with them, that Nora felt that a dinner in London must be a long and wearisome ordeal, from which Will's mother had most kindly released her.

"I shall be very glad of tea," she said, when she and the quiet governess, with the tired eyes, were left together again. "I am very hungry; are you, Miss Archer?"

"Only rather," replied Helen Archer, with a smile for the friendly, bright-faced girl who was so fresh after her long journey, and so unsubdued in this subjugating household; "I have not had a journey, as you have had."

"I hope you live here always," said Nora, in her pretty, coaxing voice.

"No," Miss Archer answered; "I come every morning and go away at 4 o'clock. I never before stayed even so late as this. To-night the footman is to see me home at 10."

"Is it far?" questioned Nora, looking earnestly into the worn face, and asking the question in no spirit of curiosity. "May I go home with you some day and see your dogs?"

Up to the roots of the hair, already sprinkled with gray, the slow, pained color mounted in the face to which no loving, flattering words had ever made the blush familiar. But Nora, in her innate modesty, understood no cause for this. She had not proposed seeing father, mother, brother or sister, for her own delicate feeling had grasped at once the possibility of there being a lonely home like her own; but of course Miss Archer had dogs and cats, and perhaps hens and chickens, and—ah, even perhaps a tall, brown horse like Borak himself! Then why had she colored and looked so sad at the mention of her home?

"I ought not to have asked that," confessed Nora, humbly, "until I had tried to make you take me as a friend."

"Presently," said Helen, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, "you will see how little you will be tempted to make me a friend, however I may wish to call you so. My—my home is a good way off, Miss St. George, through many ugly, noisy streets; and I have no dogs, no cat even, and there is no one but myself."

"Then," observed Nora, speaking very earnestly—"I can only beg that some day you will let me come when you know me better, for I am very lonely, too, and I have had a lonely home."

"Some day!" echoed Helen—and smiled then, for she could never guess what that coming was to mean.

"Miss Archer," cried a gay voice at the door, as it was opened a little way and a head was popped in, "how do you like your new pupil? Is not she beauti—— Nora, I never dreamed of seeing you here! They—I—I thought they told me you were resting."

Willoughby Foster was in the room now, shaking both Nora's hands at once, and looking into her face with the most eager delight and unfeigned admiration.

"I am so glad to see you, so rejoiced to welcome you in my mother's house. I cannot tell you what a joyful day this seems to me. All the way from Guildford the train seemed crawling like a snail. Poynz said it was delightful, and went to sleep; but I was aggravated to madness, knowing you would come before I was here to welcome you. Nora, you have grown more beautiful even since we parted a week ago."

"And older," Nora supplemented, standing back against the heavy, colorless curtain, with the easy grace which belonged to her. "Do you and Mr. Poynz live together?"

"No; but Poynz is often down at Heaton, and he was coming up to-day. Where are the girls?"

"Who are the girls?" inquired Nora, with a laugh in her eyes.

"Sisters, of course. They were not surely——" He paused, and turned to Miss Archer.

"The Misses Foster are at home," she announced, in that manner of quiet apathy which grows on solitary natures, as the moss grows on solitary graves.

"What are their names, Mr. Foster?" asked Nora, still with the smile in her eyes; "I understood that one was a little girl who would learn with me; and now I cannot tell them apart."

"They are awfully alike," assented Will, in his cordial way, "only Gena is calmer and cleverer—Genevieve her name is, but we call her Gena. Indeed, I call her Jenny sometimes, but she objects to that elegant abbreviation. The other—your fellow-pupil, dear—is Victoria. I suppose the second bell will ring in a minute or two. I must dress like lightning. Once more, Nora, dear, it is delightful to see you here. Good-by now for five minutes."

"Mr. Foster thinks," observed Miss Archer, after he was gone, "that you will dine with them, and he will be disappointed." And then she looked into the girl's face, with a power of scrutiny which grows natural to a skillful teacher; and, almost as easily as she had read Nora's simple unconsciousness of anything beyond the old childish friendship. What change would it make in the beautiful, girlish face when it should be known at last?

But these thoughts, of which Nora was so unconscious, were not allowed to linger on this evening, for Nora chatted pleasantly to the governess, now quaintly, now with unexpected thoughtfulness, yet always with a charm which made Helen Archer wonder much.

"Have you really finished tea, Miss St. George? You were so hungry, you said."

"I have really finished. What are we to do now?"

"We must go to the drawing room."

Nora followed Miss Archer up the staircase, and into a large, high room, with tiny white chairs and couches sprinkled over a pale green carpet, like mushrooms on a smooth patch of pasture land. Miss Archer sat down near the wall, and resumed the knitting she had brought from the school room, but Nora went at once to one of the windows, and looked between the closed curtains.

"I wonder what it is all like," she said, as if speaking to herself.

A rustling sound behind never disturbed Nora in that gaze which showed her so little; and it was with a start that she dropped the curtain when Miss Foster, passing close beside her, pointedly requested her to do so.

"One likes one's drawing room to be private property," Genevieve said, "not thrown open to the street in this blaze of light."

"Sit down, Miss St. George," said the lady of the house, in a mixed tone, compounded of the desire to be genial and please her son—whose vexation had been very apparent at dinner through Nora's non-appearance—and the desire to be frigid and please her daughters. "How long did you say it was since your grandfather died?"

"Two weeks," answered Nora, with an icy stillness in her voice.

"Two weeks," repeated Mrs. Foster, placidly. "Then I think you should have crepe on your dress—indeed, that evening dress might have been entirely of crepe. I like consistency."

"Yes," said Nora. "I thought it would be inconsistent to have crepe when I could not afford it."

"It is inconsistent not to have it," murmured Mrs. Foster, looking kindly into the girl's face, though rather puzzled; "I do not go into farther particulars. Has Miss Archer discovered how very backward you are?"

"Yes," returned Nora, smiling, as Helen raised her eyes for a moment. "She could not be with me two minutes without discovering that."

"You do not seem to take the fact much to heart," observed Genevieve, lying back in her easy chair.

"Perhaps the things we take most to heart we talk of least," said Nora, in her quiet, direct way.

"Then are we to understand that you do really grieve over your ignorance?"

"I don't know," she answered, still with deep consideration. "Sometimes I'm afraid that, if I were not obliged to learn, I should care to do so; and then sometimes I'm so ashamed that I long to learn all day and night. I——"

Victoria Foster had sat down to the piano, and dashed into a brilliant waltz; so Nora stopped, listening in silence from that moment until the last note was struck. Helen Archer, from her distant seat, watched the girl's face and wondered.

"Miss St. George," said Genevieve, claiming her attention deliberately, just as someone came into the room, and approached her chair, "surely you play yourself? Every girl plays in these days."

"No, they don't, Miss Foster," contradicted Nora, simply, "for I cannot."

"Then," returned Genevieve, clearly and slowly, "you sing of course."

"I don't know."

Nora had been going to say she could sing Irish ballads, and a few airs she had picked up from Celia—and Will, too—in the old times; but somehow, when she had begun her answer, and Mr. Poynz had come up to her and offered her his hand, the warm, amused greeting in his eyes stopped the explanation; and, though she fancied at that moment that possibly it might not matter whether she could or could not sing as educated girls did, yet the color crept into her face when the explanation failed her.

"I'm afraid you will find it very difficult to learn to play now," observed Victoria, turning on the music stool. "One's fingers never grow nimble on the keys unless one begins to practice quite early in life."

"And that," observed Mark, "is the soul of music—for one's fingers to be nimble on the keys."

"Nora," said Will, in a lowered tone, as he eagerly appropriated a seat next to her, "I've been so mad with my mother. When, before dinner, I just made the time to rush into her room to ask her how she liked you—I beg your pardon, but, of course, I knew she must like you immensely—she never said a word about your sneaking out of dining with us. I didn't enjoy the meal a bit."

"I enjoyed mine," said Nora. "Miss Archer, didn't you enjoy your tea?"

This was too much for any well-organized family to stand, and the very marked silence and stiffness which were intended to quench the governess' possible reply proclaimed the fact at once. Miss Archer, without looking up, went on with her knitting; Nora was keenly conscious of having invoked a chill upon the atmosphere; and Will moved his eyes uncomfortably under his mother's gaze.

"Dr. Armstrong."

The announcement came acceptably now, if never before within Nora's memory. She greeted him just as the others did, and then she found herself wondering at his courtly manners, never guessing how carefully he had studied them for this night, when, in his own imagination, he was to stand in competition with the man against whom the worst passions in his nature were ready to rise in revolt. She watched him accost all the ladies in their turn, and then seat himself beside the younger Miss Foster, and entertain her easily, in his bland, fluent way. She saw that Will was pleased to see him, and that Mrs. Foster smiled when he spoke to her; and so she wondered whether she could have known Nuel all her life, and yet have been blind to his excellence.

CHAPTER IX.

The dingy school room in Great Cumberland Place was very silent this morning, not only because its two occupants were busy, but because neither the glad April music of the country nor the restless loud pulsation of the town could find its way through the hazy window panes.

"I never shall remember," said Nora, in a tone of perplexity, without raising her eyes from the list of questions over which she was pondering, "who besides George IV. was called 'the first gentleman in Europe.' I hope, whoever he was, he had more claim to the compliment. This is the last question but one, and I've looked all through my reference books in vain. Tell me, Miss Archer. Ah, do!"

"Louis d'Artois," the governess answered, smiling at the Irish coaxing. Then Nora busied herself again in her book, hurrying to do her task, because she knew a pause would be sure to take her thoughts away beyond the hope of recall.

"Even yet," thought Miss Archer, before bending her eyes again upon the exercise she was correcting, "it is only by a real effort that she can apply herself. But she makes the effort bravely still, as she has made it all through the year."

In spite of her sturdy application to her tasks, it was always with a very suspicious readiness that Nora welcomed any legitimate interruption of them; and so now, when, after a rap upon the door, Mr. Poynz entered the school room, she was not at all unwilling to transfer her attention from Louis d'Artois to Mark himself. And Helen Archer turned from her corrections, and took up her knitting with a flush of pleasure upon her face—for what more welcome break had that school room life than a visit from one who seemed to have taken them both as friends, governess and pupil alike?

"Isn't it a pity," said Nora, gravely, her hands folded on her book, "that they are all out? I mean a pity for you, Mr. Poynz, not for us. And you've been away three whole weeks haven't you? Mrs. Foster will be sorry to miss you."

"I should be so exceedingly sorry to miss Mrs. Foster," returned Mark, tranquilly, "that I intend to wait for her return."

"I'm afraid they may drive a long way," Nora went on; "and they've been gone about ten minutes yet."

"Hardly ten minutes yet."

"Did you know, then?" exclaimed Nora, with the liveliest surprise that he should have come in under those circumstances.

"Yes."

(To be continued.)

Discovered by Accident.

All forms of bituminous pavements, whether manufactured from natural or artificial asphalt, are in fact artificial stone pavements. The industry started with the use of the natural rock asphalt from the mines in the Val de Travers, Canton Neufchatel, Switzerland. The mines were discovered in 1721, but it was 1849 that its utility as a road covering was first noticed. The rock was then being mined for the purpose of extracting the bitumen contained in it for the use in medicine and arts. It is a limestone found impregnated with bitumen, of which it yields on analysis from 8 to 14 per cent.

It was observed that pieces of rock which fell from the wagon were crushed by the weight of wheels, and under the combined influence of the traffic and heat of the sun a good road surface was produced. A macadam road of asphalt rock was then made, which gave very good results, and finally, in 1854, a portion of the Rue Bergere was laid in Paris of compressed asphalt on a concrete foundation. In 1858 a still larger sample was laid, and from that time it has been laid year by year in Paris. From Paris it extended to London, being laid on Threadneedle street in 1869, and Cheapside in 1870, and in successive years on other streets.—Municipal Journal and Engineer.

A Clock of Bicycles.

Alphonse Duhamel, of Paris, has made a timepiece that stands 12 feet high, and is composed entirely of bicycles or their component parts.

The framework is a huge bicycle wheel, around which are arranged 12 ordinary sized wheels, all fitted with pneumatic tires. A rim within the large wheel bears the figures for the hours, the figures themselves being constructed of crank rods. The hands are made of steel tubing, which is used for the framework of bicycles. The minute strokes on the dial are small nickel-plated spokes.

The top of the clock is an arrangement of 12 handlebars. The clock strikes the hours and the quarters, bicycle bells of course making the chimes. The pendulum is made of a bicycle wheel, and the pendulum rod of various parts of a bicycle frame.

It is said that the clock, besides being a curiosity, is an excellent timepiece. It is to adorn one of the public buildings of Paris.

Not Up to Her Ideals.

A little New York girl's idea of a farmer is evidently taken from the funny pictures printed by the papers of her native town. This particular little girl is visiting in Albany, and while out walking the other day was asked if she wanted to go down through the public market and see the farmers.

"Farmers?" she said, questioningly.

"Yes, farmers. Don't you know what farmers are?" asked her escort.

"Oh, yes," was the answer. "They wear boots and straw hats and people sell them things."

She couldn't quite make the real thing gibe with her comic picture idea.—Albany Journal.

Why He Felt Bad.

"Good-morning, Jasper! I am very sorry to hear of your domestic trouble."

"Tank'e, sah, but I hain't knowin' jist w'at sorter trebble yo' 'fers ter."

"Why, isn't it true, as I have heard, that your wife has run away from you?"

"Dar hain' nuffin' mo' true, sah."

"Then you certainly must feel bad about it, don't you?"

"I ain' 'nyin' dat at de presen' time I done feel radder bad."

"At the present time? I don't know what you mean by that."

"I mean, sah, dat she hain' yit had time ernuff ter git so far away as ter make me plum sho' she hain' nebber comin' back."—Boston Courier.

A Cotton Manufacturing City.

Fall River, Mass., produces more than three-quarters of all the print cloths made in the United States, has one-seventh of all the spindles in the country, and about a fourth of those in New England, and more than twice as many as any other city in the country. Its mills turn out more than 1,500 miles of cotton cloth every working day.

Hand-Painted Hats Are the Thing.

One of the newest specialties in Paris this season is the hand-painted hat. The other day I saw an exquisite creation of black velvet with a brim quilled in such a way that the velvet apparently formed great rose petals, on each of which was a painted golden feather.—Ladies' Home Journal.

Among the few possessions of a shiftless man you will always find a worthless dog.

The profundity of some people shows in their ignorance.

SUPPOSE WE SMILE.

HUMOROUS PARAGRAPHS FROM THE COMIC PAPERS.

Pleasant Incidents Occurring the World Over—Sayings that Are Cheerful to Old or Young—Funny Selections that Everybody Will Enjoy.

"Say," queried Farmer Hayrix, "what dew they raise in them thar roof gardens down tew th' city?"

"Peaches, uncle," replied the city-bred young man."—Chicago News.

Mutual Compassion.

"Oh! my poor woman! My heart bleeds for one in your condition!"

"Thanks, sor; Oi was thinkin' the same of the likes of you!"

Putting Him Right.

Tommy—Mamma said you only come here on account of the lunch.

Rev. Fiddle, D. D.—Hereafter, my dear child, I shall come for dinner, too.

Wanted to Turn Her.

"Lot's wife wuz turned inter a piller er salt," said the old colored citizen, "en ef de days of miracles wuzn't pas' en gone I'd lose my temper some day en ax de Lawd ter turn mine inter a week's groceries!"—Atlanta Constitution.

Cause of His Sadness.

Mr. Goodman—Your little playmate seems sad.

Willie—Yes, sir. He had ter stay home from school yestid'y——

"The idea! And he's sad on that account?"

"No, sir; it's because he had ter come back ter school ter-day."—Philadelphia Record.

Villains! Vipers!

Mrs. Ruthven—It's a shame that reporters are permitted to put the names of society people in the papers.

Mrs. Smythe—Indeed, it is, my dear. They always spell mine wrong.—The Smart Set.

Expected to Exchange It.

Customer—I want to buy an umbrella.

Dealer—Yes, sir; something for about $5?

Customer—No; something about $1. I'm going to a party.

A Good Catch.

Tom—When I went fishing down at the beach this summer I landed a twenty pounder.

Dick—Oh, I landed a 130-pounder there.

Tom—What, a fish?

Dick—No, a girl.—Chicago News.

In the Book Store.

Josh Wayback—Gimme a lot of French novels I hear so much about.

Mrs. Wayback—What do you want them for, Josh?

Josh Wayback—Well, Mandy, we got a lot o' space to fill in the new bookcase and they tell me them French novels is very broad.

IN THESE DEPARTMENT STORES.

Customer (at book department)—I want to get "The Last of the Mohicans."

New Clerk—Well, I guess you'll find that at the remnant counter.

Ignorant, but Not Blissful.

Miss Citybred (in country) — What kind of a tree is that?

Uncle Hayrix—That's an apple tree.

Miss Citybred—Why doesn't it blossom?

Uncle Hayrix—It's a little too late.

Miss Citybred—Oh, then I'll get up real early in the morning and see it blossom.—Chicago News.

Most Assuredly.

"Do you know that Tom kissed me last night?"

"Well, I declare! I hope you sat on him for it."

"Oh, I did! Most assuredly!"

The Truth of the Matter.

Mr. Faintly—I wouldn't think of reading Christmas ghost stories to my children.

Mr. Biggs—Why not?

Mr. Faintly—Well, it might scare them, and—er—er—they make me nervous, too.

Innocent Woman.

He—They are making a lot of fuss about these "sweat shops."

She—Indeed! I wonder if they'll make them close the Turkish baths?

Its Origin.

Rodrick—I wonder who first originated "rummage sales?"

Van Albert—Probably some man who went to hunt for something in his bureau drawer after his wife had been through it.—Chicago News.

Heavy Returns.

"What business brings the heaviest returns?" asked the man who wanted to know.

"The literary business," sighed the struggling author, as he opened a two-pound rejected book manuscript.—Philadelphia Record.

Equalizing Matters.

Knox—Don't you believe in telling your wife everything that happens?

Proxy—Well—er—I can't say that, but I do believe in telling her some things that don't happen.—Philadelphia Record.

The European Plan.

Landlord (after fair guest has fainted at sight of her bill)—Jean, I have sent the boy for a glass of water for the lady, and I want you to see that 10 cents is added to her bill. Understand?—Fliegende Blaetter.

Consoling.

She—I believe you are marrying me for my money alone.

He—Oh, no; that'll be gone soon.

The Aftermath.

Husband—Come, sit on my lap, my dear, as you did in our old courting days.

Wife—Well, I declare! I haven't received such an invitation for an age.

Husband—And—er—bring a needle and thread with you, my love.—New York Weekly.

Didn't Give 'Em Away.

Mrs. Justwed—Do you sell turkeys?

Poultry Dealer—Well, I don't look like a philanthropist, do I?

Answered the Purpose.

Her Niece—And this, auntie dear, is a real old master.

Aunt Tabitha—Don't you fret, child; it's just as good as some of the new ones.

A Suggestion.

The Angry Father—What do you expect me to do—send you all the money you ask for, or calmly allow you to get into debt?

The Son—You might do both.—Life.

Some Worth Cultivating.

He—What do you think about the microbes in kisses theory?

She (cheerfully)—I've heard that we couldn't get along without certain kinds of microbes.—Puck.

All in That Class.

Sillicus—Have you noticed that most heroes are married men?

Cynicus—Sir every married man is a hero.—Philadelphia Record.