

Aunt Tilly's Story.

BY NELLY H. BUTLER.

CHAPTER I.

The tide was over the mornin' Mis' Judson died. I remember because I walked over on the flats, instead of takin' the boat. Anna Bell had just come home with the baby to spend the day, when Rob burst in cryin', 'Mis' Judson's dead an' they want you to come right over!'

I'm free to confess I was kind of startled, for though Mis' Judson was weakly, I thought she'd live a good ten years yet. Still it was a mystery she stood these exact weeks so long, for she was from the south an' as delicate as a flower. Dora was just like her—Dora was her oldest daughter—but somehow she threw on the fog and wind, like a sea-creature. Just think, she was only turned eighteen, and there were Tom and Rhody left on her hands! It did seem kind of hard, for she set an awful store by her mother—Dora did. While I was thinkin' of all this, I was thankin' enough Anna Bell was here, for she could get her father's dinner, and see to visitors who might come over to the light-house, and keep an eye on Rob. Then I put on my bonnet and went across the flats. I was as if Providence had sent for me and I'm sure He did now, 'cause when I got there the children were cryin' and Dora came to meet me, as pale as a ghost, but with a strange, calm look in her great black eyes.

"Aunt Tilly," says she; "I wish you'd talk to father. He's in there," and she pointed to the parlor door. Well, I did go in, and I found him close beside his dead wife. I don't remember what I said but 'twas something about his children, and he came out with his mind made up to do the best he could for his motherless ones. I stopped a minute to look at Mis' Judson. Her face was so peaceful I never shed a tear, but knew the Lord had done the very best thing for her, when He took her to Himself.

When I came out into the kitchen, if there wasn't Dick Cobrey at the door. I always had thought that he liked Dora, but he was so quiet in his ways you wouldn't have guessed it—nor the temper neither, that lay behind his cool gray eyes. He used to go with Dora some, but since she'd got acquainted with a good many folks, and especially since Mr. R. G. had begun to pay her some attention, he had kept away. So you may know I was surprised. He turned around when I came in.

"Aunt Tilly," says he, "is there anything I can do?"

I wanted to say "Yes; take her," for I most knew she worshipped him, but I only answered—

"Thank you, Dick. They're all in the fore room. I guess I can get on nicely, but if I need any help I'll send for you."

"Please do," he said, and then went out without another word.

I rowed home about four o'clock, and after I'd seen that everything was fixed up Rob brought me back. Just before I left, I told Anna Bell how Dick came over and she looked up and said—

"Mother, I hope Dora Judson will marry Mr. Cobrey. She'd be miserable with Dick Cobrey!"

I was completely nonplussed, but when I told her that Providence meant them for each other she said—

"He'll have to make one of them over then."

'Twas awful irreverent, but somehow I never forgot it.

Well, I went back and stayed until after the funeral. Dick helped me in lots of ways. The last day he came over and laid a wreath of white daisies on the coffin. Dora saw that, and she held out her little hand in such a way that he covered it with both of his, with a look few ever saw in Dick Cobrey's face. They seemed to forget me, but just then some one brought in a big box, and when Dora opened it, there lay the most beautiful thing I ever set my eyes on—a great bank of flowers such as never grew around here. They were all white, and in the middle were Mis' Judson's initials, in great purple violets. There was a little note signed "Alfred Rook."

Dora flushed a little, and great tears came into her eyes, but Dick's face grew black and he snatched up the daisies and threw them out of the window. I never saw anything so dreadful—right in the presence of the dead!—Dora fell down on her knees with a low cry, and when Dick looked at that pure white face he dropped down beside her; and I went out and brought back the daisies and laid them on the coffin. Dick was so gentle after that you never would have known him.

Mis' Judson's death seemed to break up the family. Rhody went to live with her aunt, and when Tom and his father went to sea it was only natural that Dora should come over to the point with us. It would have seemed almost wicked to bring a young girl to such a lonely spot, but she didn't want to be a soul. She took a fancy to go down to the beach and sittin' there for hours. I remember one evenin' in particular. There was a soft pink light everywhere, and out there Rob was paddling around, great sheets of crimson lay on the water. Then another boat cut through the crimson glory, and Mr. Rook sprang out on the beach close by Dora. I saw her rise and go forward, and then they walked back and forth—back and forth on the narrow strip of sand, until the glow all faded and the night-fog came up along the flats. Then he went away and Dora walked slowly up to the house. She sat down at my feet with such a sorrowful face that I knew something had happened.

"Aunt Tilly," she said, "Mr. Rook has said good-bye."

"What; for good?" I asked. She nodded.

"O, you'll see him next summer," I said, but she held up her head and spoke like a queen.

"No, I don't want to see him—for his own sake!"

Then she went up stairs. To tell the truth, I was glad that Mr. Rook was gone for everything seemed clear now.

But, O dear, it wasn't. Next mornin', while I was cookin' I looked up of a sudden and saw Dick, with a face like a thunder cloud, lookin' in at Dora, who was trimmin' a little pie for Bob. When she glanced up and saw him, a

lovely color stole over her face, but he did not notice it—no, not one bit.

"Dora Judson!" he said, "you've been deceivin' me!"

I hope I never hear a voice like that again. But Dora stood up with a face as proud as it was beautiful.

"How dare you say that!" she cried.

"Dora!" You ought to have heard him. "Weren't you walking with Mr. Rook last night; but he has gone away forever, I hope!"

"You—sent him away!"

"I did."

"Why?"

"Because—because—" She stopped and buried her face in her hands, and Dick sprang forward and took them away as if they were something holy, and—pshaw! I didn't suppose I'd cry.

Well, I left them alone till I began to think the pies would burn up, but when I did come back, Dick bent over and kissed me, and I didn't get my breath all day!

CHAPTER II.

We had a blustery winter that year. There were days and days when we couldn't get to town, but had to stay on the point, with nothin' but the great light for company, and the thunder of the waves in our ears all day and all night.

But Dick managed to get over pretty often. He'd given Dora a diamond that used to be his mother's, and they were bound up in each other. It was queer enough, but when they seemed happiest I always saw Dick throwin' the daisies out of the windows, and heard Anna Bell say, "He'll have to make one of them."

That reminds me—in the spring Anna Bell took cold and had a regular sick-spell, so I had to leave the house to Dora and go over to nurse her. In a fortnight's time she had picked up considerably, so one evening about sundown I thought I'd go home, especially as Dick Cobrey offered to row me over. I told Anna Bell I'd be back real early and started out. It was lovely. The sea was smooth as glass, and the fields beyond the flats had turned such a pretty green. I felt happy enough, but Dick hardly opened his mouth. At last he said—

"Dora will meet us at the boat. Aunt Libby's keeping house while she does a little shopping."

Sure enough, there she was, and some one with her. It was Mr. Rook. As we came up he bade us good night and walked away.

Dora seemed very gay. She sang to herself and was so merry that I couldn't imagine what possessed Dick to make him so quiet. Afterward I learned that Mr. Rook was engaged, and that he had told Dora and she was so happy—poor child—that she couldn't keep still. But I didn't know it—nor Dick.

When we got home Dora tossed her gloves on the table, and her hat on Rob's head. But all of a sudden she stopped and cried out—

"O, my ring is gone!"

Sure enough, she had lost her diamond! We ransacked the house, but of course couldn't find it. All the time Dick sat with his head on his hand—never once moving. At last I went up stairs to put Rob to bed, and when I came down I heard and saw all this. No; I don't suppose I ought to have listened, but I clean forgot myself. Dick got up and took both Dora's hands in his, and just looked at her.

"Don't, Dick," she said; "you hurt!"

"Dora, what have you done with my ring?" he said.

"It is lost!" she cried.

"Lost!" You have taken it off—and for Alfred Rook!"

Somehow she tore her hands away. Her face was as white as marble, and she said:

"Richard Cobrey, as long as you live, never come near me until you take back every word you have said!" and she was gone.

And Dick—he just folded his arms and set his teeth hard. Then he went once and touched her hat, and picked up one of her little gloves. He kissed it and then flung it down and rushed out of the house.

Next mornin' Dora came down quiet and sweet, but with a look in her eyes to break your heart. In a day or two we heard that Dick had gone to sea, and then summer came. Such a summer! We had lots of visitors, and the town was full of people, but Dora never stirred off the point. She was growin' white and slender, and I couldn't be sure I did that. Some nights she'd go down to the shore and sob, and at last she began to take long walks on the rocks. I think they did her good, but by September she looked like a ghost, and I was at my wits' ends to know what to do.

Well, one raw, damp afternoon, she went out. I said out:

"Don't stay long, Dora, so's to take cold!"

She said she wouldn't. I bustled round and set the table, and had just put on the tea to draw, when there came a rap at the door. When I first opened it a great dash of spray—mist blinded me, but when I could see—if there wasn't Dick!—But it wasn't our old Dick. His face was softer and stronger too, and his eyes were humble and brave together. All at once I knew that Providence had made him over.

"Aunt Tilly," he asked, "I want to see Dora!"

"Dora's gone out," I said; "but she's coming right home."

"Dora out—My God!" he cried, and pointed to the neck. As long as I live, I never shall forget what I saw. The flats were all covered and on a narrow strip of sand, comin' over to the point was Dora, in her black dress, and on both side great hungry waves, all dark and slippery, with white, gleamin' crests, were rushin' up.

All in a flash Dick darted by me, and I saw folks on the other side. I just covered my eyes and called to God to save her. They say it was all over in a few minutes, but it seemed ages before they were both brought to the house, drenched and senseless, but thank God, alive. Dick was himself right away, but for a long time we didn't know as

Dora would ever open her eyes again. At last she came to, and we soon had her in the big chair, all wrapped up close to the fire.

I believe I acted like a crazy thing. My biscuit were burned up and the tea boiled over, but it didn't matter, for nobody could eat. Dick stood all the time by the chimney piece, with his eyes on Dora, who sat like a lily in the big chair, so pale and happy, I had to wipe my eyes every minute or two.

But after the tea things were washed up and Rob in bed we three had a good talk—for, mind you, I'm just like a mother with those children. By and by I said:

"Dick, I've got something for you that you wouldn't take once, and I went to a drawer in the dresser and took out Dora's glove, that he'd thrown down that dreadful night; and Dora asked for it but he snatched it quick, and something fell out of it on the floor. We all looked down, and Dick reached under the table and picked up—the lost ring! He just looked at Dora and she held out her hand with her eyes full of tears, but he stretched out his arms and took her as if she had been a child, and I—well, I went up stairs and if ever I thanked the Lord I did then.

That's all. I aint much of a hand at tellin' stories. I suppose it makes me foolish to-night."

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