

PAPA SAYS NO

Isobel circled the dining table, banging down knives and forks and throwing the napkins onto the plates. She could hear her brothers in the other room. She could smell them too. Well, not them, exactly. But she could smell the fresh winter air they had brought indoors after their snowball fight.

She had watched them through the window as she'd dusted the sitting room.

It looked like such fun. She had wanted to play too. But according to Papa, throwing

snowballs wasn't a suitable activity for a young lady. Neither was hockey, and Isobel wanted to do that more than anything.

She hated having to be a young lady. It was boring. Boys had all the fun.

Isobel might have been happier if she'd had a sister to do things with. But she didn't. All she had were five brothers. To make matters worse, they were all older.

She sighed. All she ever got to do was help her mother with chores. It was so unfair. She didn't want to embroider pillow slips and fold laundry. She wanted to play hockey with her brothers.

As she put out the water glasses, she made her mind up. She would ask Papa one more time.

Isobel glared at the newspaper hiding her father's face.

"It's not fair!" She pouted.

Mama shook her head in warning, and Isobel's brothers stopped eating. Their eyes bugged out as they stared at their little sister. No one ever spoke back to Papa.

Papa lowered his Ottawa Citizen and put it down beside his plate. Then he took off his spectacles and laid them down too.

He frowned at Isobel. "The world is not always fair, Isobel. You will find that out soon enough. But this is not about fairness. It's about what is proper. Some activities are meant for boys and some for girls. It's as simple as that. Hockey is a boys' game. It is not suitable for young ladies."



"Why not?" Isobel demanded. "I can skate as good as Billy and Matt."

"As well as Billy and Matt," her mother corrected her.

Isobel heaved a frustrated sigh. "As well as Billy and Matt. So why shouldn't I be allowed to play?"

"You might get hurt," her father said. "Hockey is a rough sport."

"I'm not going to break, Papa. I'm fit and strong. Just yesterday I beat Billy at arm wrestling."

"I let you win," Billy blustered.

"You did not," Isobel retorted. "I beat you fair and square, Billy Harkness!"

"Children, stop," Mama said. "There will be no squabbling at the dinner table."

“And there will be no more arm wrestling either, Isobel,” Papa added. He sent his daughter a look that meant the subject was closed. Then he turned to his wife. “It is obvious that Isobel is spending too much time with her brothers. Is there not something else she could do? Read poetry? Paint? Take singing lessons, perhaps?”

The mere thought made Isobel shudder. “Isobel Stanley plays hockey.” She flung the words at her father like a dare. “I saw her picture in the newspaper. She plays with other young women on the rink at Rideau Hall. If the Governor General’s daughter can play hockey, why can’t I?”

“Isobel, that’s quite enough,” Mama scolded her.

Papa cleared his throat and picked up his knife and fork. “Listen to your mother, child. How Lord Stanley runs his family is his business. It has nothing to do with how I run mine. You may continue to skate, but there will be no more talk of hockey. Is that clear?”

Isobel scowled. It was clear all right. But she didn’t have to like it.