

the inn to-night, as his people are away, and it was too dark to go on, but he looks precious bad. Couldn't we put him up here?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Better carry him straight to bed and get off that boot," said Mr. Bertrand cordially. "It will be a painful job, and if we can get it done before he comes round, so much the better. Here, you boys, we'll carry him upstairs between us, and be careful not to trip as you go. Someone bring up hot water, and bandages from the medicine chest. I will doctor him myself. I have had a fair experience of sprained ankles in my day, and don't need anyone to show me what to do."

The procession wended its way up the wide old staircase, and for the greater part of the evening father and brothers were alike invisible. Fomentations and douches were carried on with great gusto by Mr. Bertrand, who was never more happy than when he was playing the part of amateur surgeon; then Miss Briggs had her innings, and carried a tray upstairs laden with all the dainties the house could supply, after partaking of which the invalid was so far recovered that he was glad of his friends' company, and kept them laughing and chatting in his room until it was time to go to bed.

The next morning the ankle was much better, but, at his host's instigation, the young fellow dispatched a note to his mother, telling her not to expect him home for a few days, as Mr. Bertrand wished him to stay until he was better able to bear the long, hilly drive.

The girls discussed the situation as they settled down to finish the much disliked mending in the afternoon. "It's very annoying," Hilary said, "I do hope he won't be long in getting better. We were going to London on Monday week, but if he is still here we shall have to wait; I hate having things postponed."

"I wish he had been a girl," said Norah, who came in for so much teasing from her two brothers during the holidays that she did not welcome the idea of another boy in the house. "We could have had such fun together, and perhaps she might have gone home, and asked us to stay with her. I should love to pay visits. I wonder if father will take us up to London in turns, now that he has begun. I do hope he will, for it would be great fun staying in Kensington. I remember Miss Carr when we were in London; she was a funny old thing, but I liked her awfully. She was often cross, but after she had scolded for about five minutes, she used to repent, and give us apples. She will give you apples, Hilary, if you are very good!"

Hilary screwed up her little nose with an expression of disdain. Apples were not much of a treat to people who had an orchard at home, and she had outgrown the age of childish joy at the gift of such trifles. Before she could speak, however, the door burst open, and Raymond precipitated himself into the room. He was a big, broad fellow of sixteen, for he and Lettice were twins, though widely different in appearance.

Raymond had a flat face, thickly speckled over with freckles, reddish brown hair, and a pair of brown eyes which fairly danced with mischief. It was safe to prophesy that in less than two minutes from the time that he entered the room where his sisters were sitting, they would all three be shrieking aloud in consternation, and the present instance was no exception to the rule. It was very simply managed. He passed one hand over the table where lay all the socks and stockings, which had been paired by Hilary's industrious fingers, and swept them, helter-skelter, on the floor. He nudged Norah's elbow, so that the needle which she was threading went deep into her fingers, and chuckled Lettice under the chin, so that she bit her tongue with a violence which was really painful. This done, he plunged both hands into his pockets and danced a hornpipe on the hearthrug, while the girls abused him at the pitch of their voices.

"Raymond Bertrand, you are the most horrid, ungentelemanly, nasty, rude boy I ever knew!"

"If you were older you'd be ashamed of yourself. It is only because you are a stupid, ignorant little school-boy that you think it funny to be unkind to girls."

"Very well, then! You have given me all my work to do over again, now I won't make toffee this afternoon, as I promised!"

"I don't want your old toffee. I can buy toffee in the village if I want it," retorted Raymond cheerfully. "Besides, I'm going out to toboggan with Bob, and I shan't be home until dark. You girls have to go and amuse Freer. He is up, and wants something to do. I'm not going to stay indoors on a jolly afternoon to talk to the fellow, so you'll have to do it."

"Indeed, we'll do nothing of the kind; we have our work to do, and it is bad enough to have two tiresome boys on our hands without having to look after a third. He is your friend, and if you won't amuse him, he will have to stay by himself."

"All right! Nice, hospitable people you are! Leave him alone to be as dull as he likes—it's no matter to me. I told him that you would look after him, so the responsibility is off my shoulders." Raymond paused, pointed in a meaning manner towards a curtained doorway at the end of the room, tiptoed up to the table, and finished his reply in a tragic whisper. "And I've settled him on the couch in the drawing-room, so you had better not speak so loudly, because he can hear every word you say!"

With this parting shot, Mr. Raymond took his departure, banging the door after him, while his sisters sat paralysed, staring at each other with distended eyes.

"How awful! What must he think? We can't leave him alone after this. Hilary, you are the eldest, go and talk to him."

"I won't—I don't know what to say. Norah, you go! Perhaps he is musical. You can play to him on your violin!"

"Thank you very much. I'll do

nothing of the kind. Lettice, you go; you are not shy. Talk to him prettily, and show him the photographs."

"I daren't; I am horribly shy. I wouldn't go into that room now, after what he has heard, for fifty thousand pounds!"

"Norah, look here, if you will go and sit with him until four o'clock, Lettice and I will finish your work between us, and we will all come and have tea in the drawing-room, and help you out for the rest of the afternoon."

"Yes, Norah, we will; and I'll give you that pink ribbon for your hair. Do, Norah! there's a good girl. You won't mind a bit after the first moment."

"It's all very well," grumbled Norah; but she was plainly softening, and after a moment's hesitation, pushed back her chair and said slowly, "All right, I'll go; but mind you are punctual with tea, for I don't bargain to stay after four o'clock." She brushed the ends of cotton from her dress, walked across to the door, and disappeared through the doorway with a pantomimic gesture of distaste. At the other side she paused and stood facing the invalid in silent embarrassment, for his cheeks were flushed, and he looked so supremely uncomfortable that it was evident he had overheard the loud-toned conversation which had been carried on between the brother and sisters. Norah looked at him and saw a young fellow who looked much older and more formidable than he had done in his unconsciousness the night before, for his grey eyes had curious, dilating pupils, and a faint mark on the upper lip showed where the moustache of the future was to be. The stranger looked at Norah and saw a tall, slim girl, with masses of dark hair falling down her back, heavily marked eyebrows, and a bright, sharply-cut little face, which was very attractive, if it could not strictly be called pretty.

"How do you do?" said Norah, desperately. "I hope you are quite—I mean, I hope your foot is better. I am glad you are able to get up."

"Thank you very much. It's all right so long as I lie still. It's very good of you to let me stay here. I hope I'm not a great nuisance."

"Oh, not at all. I'm sure you are not. I'm not the eldest, you know, I'm only the third, so I have nothing to do with the house, but there are so many of us that one more doesn't make any difference. My name is Norah."

"And mine is Reginald, but I am always called Rex. Please don't trouble about me if you have anything else to do. If you would give me a book, I'd amuse myself."

"Are you fond of reading?"

"No, I hate it—that is to say, I like it very much, of course, but I have had so much of it for the last two years that I sometimes feel that I hate the sight of a book. But it's different here, for a few hours."

"I think I'll stay and talk to you, if you don't mind," said Norah, seating herself on an oak stool by the fire, and holding out a thin, brown hand to shade her face from the blaze. "I'm very