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An Athletic Girl

And What She Achieved

By HELEN JENNINGS

Johnny Perkins and I were born in adjacent houses, only Johnny was born a year before me. Johnny had no boys to play with, and there were no girls living near me. The consequence was that we began to play together as soon as we were old enough to be playmates and kept it up till we were past ten years old. Johnny's mother was content to have him in my company. She said that when he played with boys they abused him, tore his clothes, robbed him of his playthings—in short, treated him with all uncharitableness. They induced him to climb trees, get into the mud and say bad words. I, being a girl, and rather a delicately organized girl at that, didn't tyrannise over him or otherwise injure him. I certainly didn't induce him to climb trees.

When Johnny was eleven years old his father got rich, and the family went to live in a big house, and I didn't see anything of him after that until he was twenty years old.

Meanwhile I had been growing more and more delicate, and the doctor, when I was sixteen, recommended little or no school and athletics. The consequence of this was that I grew robust and from a "little angel," as I was called, had become a sportsman. I played tennis, golf and other out of door games and had become quite a horsewoman. Johnny, on the contrary, had been going downhill in this respect, just as I had been going uphill. When his father made money and Johnny was taken away from me his mother hired a nurse for him. It seemed the only way for her to keep him from tearing and soiling his beautiful clothes he was obliged to wear. His nurse watched him like a cat. If he got into a swing she would order him out. If he rolled in the grass she would pick him up, set him on his feet and ask him what he meant by getting the green on his white knickerbockers. The result of all this was that when Johnny reached the age of twenty he didn't know how to swim, he couldn't pull an oar, he had never ridden on a sled or glided on a pair of skates.

I overheard a lady who had known him since he was a baby say to my mother: "Johnny played too much with your daughter, Kate, when he was a little fellow, and when he was parted from her he fell into the hands of a nurse. That's what's the matter with Johnny, poor boy; he couldn't help it. He's been educated so and will remain so."

I had been very fond of my little playmate, and now that I had been changed from a fragile girl to a sportsman I felt awfully sorry for the boy. Johnny had been handicapped. What I didn't like especially was the influence I had had on him in the beginning. I blamed myself for his condition, for, I argued, if he hadn't played with me when he was a little chap his mother couldn't afterward have tied him down to a nurse.

When I was nineteen I went to visit at the Perkinses. When I saw Johnny I wanted to cry. A more helpless man I never saw. He had never mingled with any except swells, and none but the most effeminate swells would have him around. I couldn't believe that he was the dear, honest, sympathetic, self sacrificing boy I had been so fond of and had remembered as my dear little playmate.

"Well," I said to myself, "I'll get some of that out of him if I have to kill him."

I had been invited to spend a week at the Perkins country home, and I determined to make the most of that week. Pocketing my repugnance to Johnny's effeminacy, I ran up to him with outstretched hands, taking both his in mine, and said:

"Oh, John; I'm jolly glad to see you again, old fellow. I've been eager for it ever since I received your mother's invitation. We'll have a hot time while I'm here. We'll just make things hum."

He looked at me in a half frightened way and said he was "very much pleased to meet me again." He "remembered our childhood days very well." He seemed to be a bit taken back by my exuberance and especially my slang, which, by the bye, I adopted for the occasion.

"Have we time for a ride before dinner?" I asked. "We can talk over old times together in a canter."

"Oh, yes, I'll tell James to bring round the auto, or would you prefer to go in the box wagon? James usually drives me in the wagon."

"Neither. I'll go on horseback."

"Horseback! I don't know how to ride a horse."

"You'll have to learn if you ride with me. Come; order a horse for yourself and one for me."

A pained expression passed over his face. From force of habit he looked at his mother, who said that John had not learned to ride. She had intended to have him take riding lessons, but had never been in a position to do so. I must excuse him.

"I'll be his riding master," I said. "Come, Johnny; let's have a canter."

I had purposely brought matters to a crisis. If John was a natural milksop he would obey his mother, who at tempted to command him by a frown. If he was a man he would stand by me whether he knew how to ride or not. There was a brief struggle within him, and I won. He went out to the stable to select the horses and give his instructions. I ran upstairs, donned my riding clothes, and when I came down John appeared in an immaculate riding suit—he had never worn it before—and going out to the porte-cochere, we mounted and rode away.

John had provided himself with a horse that could not be driven out of a walk, and even then the poor fellow had a hard time to keep his balance. But I had made a beginning and made up my mind that before I had got through with him he should be jumping logs and ditches. I was tempted to prick the animal he rode with a pin and get my pupil dumped on the turf, but I didn't wish to try too much at once, so I refrained. I gave him a short lesson of an hour, then permitted him to return to the house, take a bath and put on his evening clothes before dinner. He was quite exhausted, but seemed to be very proud of having ridden a horse.

It required only this much to convince me that John was a man, like other men. He had been deprived of the elements of development. How can a plant thrive without sunlight? My old playmate had grown to manhood in obedience to a natural law. He was like a boy who had been taught to swim by reading swimming instructions from a book. In other words, he had not learned at all.

The next morning I came down to breakfast in a tennis suit, John in immaculate morning costume.

"Go straight upstairs," I said to him, "and come back in your shirt and trousers. Do you suppose you're going to entertain me sitting on the piazza? Not on your life! You'll play tennis."

He gave a sickly smile, marched upstairs, came back in sporting costume, and after breakfast we went out to the court. He played the game, though he had begun too late to make much of a hand at it. When we had played one set he was tired, but I kept him at it till an hour before luncheon, and he went in to the tub reeking with perspiration.

At the end of the week a great change had come over John. He had got some of the "soft" out of him and had entered upon a new career. I had been a link for him between his mother and freedom. Before the week expired he had declared his independence and developed a natural taste for athletic sports. He was like a plant brought from a cellar and placed in the shower and sunshine of an April day. He wouldn't hear of my leaving. I must stay on indefinitely, as long as I would.

His mother needed some one to take him from her influence as much as he. She had followed a habit and was not sorry when she saw that I was trying to undo what she had done, for there is no mother who does not wish to see her son manly, even though she be the cause of his effeminacy.

I remained at the Perkinses for a month and even then found it hard to get away. I had nearly killed Johnny, but he said "he liked it." His mother didn't approve of that part of it and asked me if a taste for athletics necessarily involved breaking persons' necks. I replied that an occasional neck was necessarily broken in athletics, as well as in other less strenuous pursuits.

A year passed, during which I was constantly spending short or long terms at the Perkinses. Athletics were to Johnny like a new toy to a child. In the winter he learned to skate and in the summer to swim. He was greatly handicapped on account of learning those accomplishments late in life and had not had a strong natural taste for them would not have learned them at all. As it was, he became fairly proficient in them.

I was repaid for all my trouble—if it can be called such—by John himself. Among other sports, I was fond of canoeing. It seems to me the most dangerous of all outdoor sports, even for those who can swim—that is, if they go too far from land. One day Johnny and I were paddling in a canoe on a bay of the Atlantic ocean. We ventured too far out and were caught in a squall. We saw it coming and death in it. In John the nature of a strong man triumphed over the disadvantages he had so long endured. He became the anchor, I the clinger. He ordered me to lie down in the bottom of the boat in order to preserve my equilibrium, while he crouched as low as possible and still worked a paddle. Watching the wind coming over the water, he kept the canoe in a position to be struck on the stern instead of on the side.

We plunged on the crests of the waves for awhile, but no strength or skill could keep us straight before them. The canoe turned, and the next wave that struck us keeled it over. Both swam for the boat, which floated bottom up, and caught it.

There is a good deal in this story about what I did for John and very little about what John did for me, and yet what he did for me, though concentrated within half an hour, was worth many times my efforts in his behalf.

The wind howled; the rain poured down on and about us, obscuring the land. The waves dashed themselves against us as if determined to drive us from our frail support. And during this time John was holding me in my perilous position, both of us clinging to the canoe. Then when it was all over and boats came to our assistance they took me aboard unconscious.

I had saved John from a life of effeminacy, and he had saved me from death. I found him as necessary to me as I had been to him, and we have never parted.

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CARE OF THE CAT.

How Pussy Should Be Corrected and How She Should Be Fed.

It isn't a very nice task to punish pussy if you're fond of her, but there are times when she must be chastised. (This is how to do it, according to Mr. Louis Wain, the great authority on the fascinating feline.)

In the first place, don't actually strike the cat. A blow merely numbs it. And when the spine, which is its most sensitive part, is struck—particularly if the cat is old—it is likely to sprain at the striking.

When pussy does anything wrong, frighten the wrongdoer by striking a stick on the ground. A cat is most sensitive to sounds and will connect this new noise with what it has done. It feels more intensely than most animals; hence its supposed savagery in cases. Cats are highly electrical, and it is very good to have one perch on one's shoulder or knees.

The best food for puss is raw meat, chopped up, and only one meal a day should be given. Most of the mistakes which are made in training cats arise from an absence of knowledge of the cat's character and constitution.

—Ladies' Answers.

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