

stop just now to defend him. I must go back to my boys, and here are the little ones preparing to make another descent upon you.'

A tide of children swept them apart, and Miss Carroll was soon busily playing 'Nuts in May,' when a chorus of excited voices informed her that the first balloon was going to be sent up; and she concluded that the invaluable Oliver had arrived.

Looking round she saw a tall dark young fellow carefully holding apart the fragile paper sides of the balloon, while her cousin knelt upon the grass, soaked the wadding with spirit and applied a match to it. The crowd of children at a little distance swayed and fidgeted, with bursts of exclamation; the pale blue flames went quivering up; the balloon slowly filled and tugged at Oliver's detaining fingers.

'Let it go!' said young Mr. Wilmot, rising; and his helper discreetly released the pink and white monster, which rose majestically in the air, sped by the frantic shouts of all the boys and half the girls.

Would it top the elms? It seemed inclined to sink again, and swayed perilously from side to side; then the faint breeze caught it, and it drifted along not more than five feet from the ground, pursued by an excited mob of children.

'Let it alone! don't touch it!' shouted Mr. Wilmot, quite loud enough to be heard above the uproar; and the balloon was just on the point of recovering itself when one of the bigger boys, finding himself close to it as it swayed along, must needs try to give it a helping hand. He 'nobb't just touched it,' as he declared afterwards, but the touch capsized it altogether. In a moment it was wrapped in a sheet of flame; the next, it had fallen—not harmlessly on the grass, but on the thin cotton frock of a little girl who was running just beneath it.

Almost before anyone else had seen what had happened, Oliver Haythorn had reached the spot with one bound, and had crushed out the flames with his bare hands. His next proceeding was hardly so praiseworthy, for he seized the delinquent and boxed his

ears with so much vigour that he howled again.

'Well done, Oliver!' said Mr. Wilmot's voice behind him. 'I say, though, stop! You shouldn't hit anyone on the head like that. Johnny Martin, if you would mind what's said to you, you wouldn't be so often getting yourself and other people into trouble.'

Miss Carroll was beside them by this time, and to her the little girl was handed over, sobbing with fright, but fortunately unhurt. Even at that moment the cousins' eyes met with a twinkle of amusement. The little incident seemed to illustrate what they had just been saying as much as did the expression of the young fellow's handsome face, just now glowing and quivering with excitement and anger.

'Have you hurt yourself, Oliver?' asked the curate. 'Are you sure your hands are not burned?'

'Only singed, sir. Nothing to hurt,' answered the lad with a little laugh, surveying them. 'It was Bessie's frock that came off the worst.'

'Oh! Miss Carroll will make all that right. And we are well out of it, if you haven't broken the drum of Johnny Martin's ear! Seriously, my dear lad, don't you know that one should never punish for consequences? If Master Johnny had been disobedient as usual, without any harm coming of it, he wouldn't have had his ears boxed. And yet he meant no harm.'

He laid his hand affectionately on the other's arm as he spoke, and the dark face looked sullen for a moment, then suddenly cleared up.

'Nor did I, only I felt mad at him for a minute. How about the other balloon, sir? Will you let it up now?'

Mr. Wilmot agreed. The children, somewhat subdued for the time, kept at a discreet distance, and the second balloon filled successfully, and sailed steadily up into the clear evening air, rising high above the tree-tops and disappeared slowly from view.

The boys rushed to the end of the field 'to see where it went,' and the curate again touched his young friend's arm: