

BOYS AND GIRLS

The Parson's Place

(By Annie Hamilton Donnell, in 'Youth's Companion.')

The girl's eyes followed the train wistfully, until only a film of smoke was left hanging in the still air. Then she turned and faced the desolate little station.

'I believe I'm marooned!' she groaned. 'There isn't a soul in—yes, there's a boy. Have I got to ask him for help?'

The boy was brown—very brown. His trousers were crammed carelessly into big top-boots, and the boots were muddy. The boy was big and awkward and bashful. He sidled away down the deserted platform, as if to escape as soon as possible. He did not look up once.

'Oh, wait! Please wait a moment!' the girl cried, hastily. 'There's nobody else to ask. Won't you please tell me if this is Cutler? I'm afraid I got off at the wrong place.'

'Not any stage!'

The girl's voice showed distress. A trail of muddy roadway stretched away before her, and her eyes followed it despairingly.

Terry Quinn's heart melted. 'How far are you calculating to go? I don't know but I could take you a piece,' he said, suddenly. 'I live this side of the village a little way.'

'I am going to the Parsons place. Do you know where it is?'

The Parsons place! A picture of it, abandoned and forlorn, rose before the boy, and he contrasted it mentally with the beautiful, delicate girl before him.

'Yes, I know where it is,' he said. 'You can go along with me if you want to. I've got a load of grain, so I shall have to go slow.'

'Oh, I don't mind going slow!' the girl cried, gratefully. 'You are very kind.'

An old farm-waggon loaded with grain-bags stood near. She had hard work to clamber up to its high seat.

and the unknown Parsons place. At last she could bear it no longer.

'Is it—nice?' she asked, suddenly, starting the color into the boy's brown face. 'The Parsons place, I mean.'

Terry had the dismal picture still in his mind. The Parsons place was unrepared, uninhabited. He remembered the tall weeds and grass in the dooryard, and the broken windows and the gate that sagged on its hinges. For ten years the Parsons place had been abandoned.

'Is it painted white with green blinds?' the girl persisted. 'Are there beautiful trees? And rose-bushes? Is there a view? I shall be so glad if there's a piazza! We could wheel mother's couch out on it, and she could lie there all the pleasant days and get well. That's what we're coming here for. The doctors said she—could not be any better in the city. It's awful in the city in summer.'

The boy made no answer, and attributing his silence to bashfulness, she continued:

'This place—the Parsons place—was left to us a year ago in a will. Now that mother is sick, we are very glad of it, because the doctors say she must be in the country. I've come to see about getting the house opened and aired. Then I'm going back for them all.'

'Where were you expecting to stop tonight?' questioned the boy, awkwardly. She turned upon him in puzzled wonder at the question.

'Why, at the hotel, I suppose. I hadn't thought, but that's where I shall go, of course. Is it near the Parsons place?'

Terry Quinn felt a wild desire to laugh. The idea of a hotel near the Parsons place was too much for him. But a side glance at the wistful, girlish face sobered him.

'There isn't any hotel hereabouts,' he said. 'No hotel. Why, I thought of course—Oh, I don't see what I am going to do!'

'Mother'll take you in, I guess,' interrupted Terry, hurriedly. 'We live close by. She'll see to you. Mother's great.'

In the instant of offering the girl the hospitality of his own home, another idea had occurred to Terry Quinn. He sat on the edge of his seat, driving the old white mare at a snail's pace, and thought it all out to his satisfaction.

It was growing late. The soft June dusk was settling lightly over the land. The girl's impatience nearly asserted itself. It would be too late to see the Parsons place!

'We've got the key at our house,' Terry announced, with startling abruptness. 'We've always kept it. You'd better not try to go down to the house till to-morrow. It—it needs daylight to see it anyways well. Mother'll go along with you in the morning. Mother's great.'

He had said that before. The girl smiled to herself wearily.

They were jogging by a little unpainted, uninhabited house set in weeds and neglect. The girl shuddered.

'Oh, I hope it won't look like that! That's dreadful!' she said. 'If it looked like that I shall—cry!'

Terry whipped up the old white mare hastily, and drove away from the dreary place. In another five minutes he had stopped in front of a cheerful little house hugged by vines and roses. His mother was in the doorway.

'Oh, yes, she's "great"! the girl thought, as she lay up-stairs in a big, soft bed. 'She's beautiful. She helps out the Parsons place,



IN AN AGONY OF BASHFULNESS.

The boy's abrupt stop and the girl's impetuous chase had brought them close together—too close for the dainty summer skirts. The girl involuntarily twitched them away from contact with the big, muddy boots. She did not see the blood rush to the boy's tanned face, staining it a rich mahogany hue.

'Have I made a mistake? Oh, I hope I have—no, I guess I don't mean that, but it's so—so dreadful here!'

'This is Cutler!' the boy muttered, stiffly. 'But it's not the village. That's over there four miles.' He pointed with his thumb.

'Four miles! Then there must be a stage. I don't see any. Oh, it hasn't gone, has it?'

'There isn't any stage that meets this train. There's one in the morning.'

They rattled away down the muddy road, lurching into ruts and swaying over stones. The girl's eyes grew wide with alarm.

Terry Quinn sat on the edge of his seat, and gazed straight ahead in an agony of bashfulness. At intervals he slipped a little farther away from the dainty figure beside him, until the vacant space on the seat had widened absurdly.

He was sure the girl was laughing at it. He was sure she was afraid of his muddy boots and coarse clothes. Suppose he spilled her out. Suppose she got her skirts all floury from the bags! Suppose she wanted to talk!

The girl sat looking down the road. Her sweet face grew more sober every minute. She was thinking of her mother and Molly