

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## The Black Sheep.

(John A. Campbell, in the 'Wellspring'.)

'You're too young!' cried Fanny.

'I'm fifteen,' said Mabel, stoutly.

'Fifteen! And yet you think you can manage that Junior society, when Miss Mitchell failed?'

'Since there's nobody else to do it, why shouldn't I try?'

Fanny looked at her cousin in surprise. 'I do believe you have made up your mind,' she said. 'It wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for those Morse children. The others are docile enough; but Willy and Sally Morse—dear me!' A suggestive shrug of her shoulders followed.

'We cannot expect to have all our children good at the start,' was the prompt answer. 'I've seen naughty girls and boys before now.'

'Oh, but not like those two! Sally and Willy are the worst children in the whole world!' declared Fanny, in a tone of calm conviction that impressed her cousin; and then she proceeded to narrate some of the pranks and escapades of the youthful Morses. From the recital it appeared that Sally and her brother were very black sheep, indeed.

'You'd better give up your plan, Mabel, before they compel you to do so,' said Fanny.

'Oh, but I shall not give it up,' replied Mabel, with the spirit of fifteen years; 'and I must find some way to make those children behave themselves as they ought.'

'When you have found it let me know,' said the skeptic as she ran lightly up the stairs.

But, after all, Mabel's first meeting was a success. The children were quiet and seemed interested. The closing hymn was sung with vigor, as only children can sing, and then the audience dispersed, one or two lingering to gather up the books and pile them on the shelf in the corner.

'Robert,' asked Mabel of one of the small helpers, 'were Sally and Willy Morse here today?'

'Yes'm. In the last row. But they're always good the first Sunday,' was the assurance, given in a tone that was almost apologetic.

'Thank you,' said the superintendent. She pondered deeply all the way home; then she told Fanny that she did have a few fears for meeting number two.

'Did they misbehave?' asked Aunt Ada, kindly.

'Well, Sally took her brother's book away from him and he sat on her gloves,' said Mabel, smiling.

'Just mild preliminaries,' observed Fanny, with a knowing nod. 'So you're timid about next Sunday?'

'I could tell by their eyes that they were taking my measure, as it were,' confessed Mabel. 'I expect an outburst then.'

'Why don't you go with your cousin, Fanny?' inquired Mrs. Mabon.

'Never!' was the laughing retort. 'Past adventures have warned me.'

On the following Sabbath Mabel set boldly out, fortified by a gentle pat on her shoulder from her aunt and a sympathizing glance from Fanny. As she stood at three o'clock in the chapel she confessed to herself with a smile that there were small reasons for fear. Not a child had appeared, and, from the way in which the rain beat upon the roof and dashed against the panes of glass in the six small windows, it looked as though there would be no Junior meeting that day. She went to the front door and peered up and down the road. The turbid torrents on either side of the thoroughfare rushed dismally along, and the trees and bushes sighed as the gusts of wind swept by and shook down more raindrops. The clouds were gray overhead. There was not a boy or a girl to be seen. With a countenance upon which relief and disappointment were alternately written, Mabel hurried indoors and struggled into her waterproof. Then a bright idea flashed through her mind, and she paused for an instant after putting on her plain little cap.

She stepped out upon the rain-swept porch, and shivered as a gust of wind tossed her hair about. 'I'll do it!' she exclaimed, lock-

ing the door behind her and raising her umbrella.

Mrs. Deane, the wife of the sexton, lived several blocks down the road, and thither Mabel repaired with the chapel key.

'Do you know,' she asked of the gaunt apparition who answered her knock, 'where the Morses live?'

'The Morses!' echoed Mrs. Deane. 'I thought everybody knew where they live. What with taking apples and flowers that don't belong to 'em, and carrying on more like little savages than respectable children!'—Mrs. Deane, probably referring to Sally and her brother, paused for a moment for a fit conclusion to her sentence, and finding none, demanded, 'You're not going to have anything to do with those youngsters, I hope, miss?'

'I'm the superintendent of the Junior Christian Endeavor society,' said Mabel; 'and I wish to visit them this afternoon, if you will kindly tell me where they live.'

'Oh, certainly! In the gray house at the end of the street,' said Mrs. Deane, closing the door. She opened it in a second to add, 'The one with the front yard that looks as though a cyclone had been through it—a cyclone with a grudge, too!'

After a long, disagreeable walk, Mabel reached the door of the house she sought. She found that Mrs. Deane's tart description of the place was far from inapt. Flower beds, lawn, and gravel walk, were in a sad state of confusion. Mentally quaking, she rang the bell.

Willy himself opened the door. 'Miss Hopewell!' he cried, in amazement.

'Yes, it's I, Willy,' said Mabel, hastily. 'I came to see if you were sick. You were not at the meeting, and they tell me that you are usually quite regular.'

'Did you come all the way here to find that out?' asked Willy; 'honor bright?'

'Honor bright,' said Mabel, and she was totally unprepared for the light that suddenly flashed over the boy's face at the simple announcement.

'Well, no one else ever did.' Then, as a sudden moan sounded through the hall, he added, 'I'm not sick, but Sally is.'

'What is the matter?'

'She's got an awful headache. She often has 'em. She's had this one all day, and I don't know what to do. I'd rather have it myself a hundred times,' declared the boy, and then paused, afraid to betray his feelings any further.

'Where's your mother?'

'She and dad's over to Aunt Maria's for the day, and we're all alone. Sally wasn't up when they went, so they didn't know.'

'Oh, dear!' came in weak tones from the parlor just then.

'Take me in to Sally. Maybe I can help her,' said Mabel, disposing of her cap and cloak.

Willy, with another surprised glance, led her into the room where Sally lay upon the sofa, her sunny curls matted and tangled, her cheeks flushed, and her forehead bound with a strip of white linen.

'Sally, here's Miss Hopewell.'

'The new superintendent?' murmured the little girl, quickly turning to stare at the newcomer. She tried then to sit up as though nothing were the matter with her, but sank once more upon her pillow and commenced to cry.

'Poor child, is it so bad as that?' asked Mabel, tenderly laying her cool fingers upon Sally's temples. 'Willy, bring some vinegar and cold water, and a comb and brush and another pillow. We'll try to make her more comfortable.'

Willy hurried away and Mabel sat down by the sofa and stroked the sufferer's forehead. When the boy returned with the desired articles he found his sister gazing quietly up into the visitor's eyes as Mabel skillfully smoothed the heated pillow. A look of relief passed over his face.

'Here they are, Miss Hopewell.'

'Now,' she replied, after thanking him, 'we'll have everything arranged in a jiffy, and then I'll tell you a nice long story that I once read to my own little cousin when he was ill.'

The tumbled curls of the invalid were carefully brushed back and loosely bound with a dark ribbon that Willy rescued from a dim corner; the bandage, moistened with the vinegar and water, was again tied round Sally's white brow, and the extra pillow was placed in position. Sally heaved a long sigh of content.

'That's lovely,' she murmured.

'Is it?' asked Mabel, smiling. Then, after raising the end window to admit some fresh air, she drew a rocker up to the side of the couch, and, while she fanned Sally, told a long and absorbing story, to which Willy also listened with flattering interest.

It was half-past five when the tale was finished. A glance through the curtained windows showed that the rain had ceased.

'Now, let's have supper,' said the superintendent, brightly. 'We'll have tea and toast.' She felt safe in mentioning such modest fare.

'Tea and toast!' cried Willy. 'I can't cook! Ma left some milk and cold meat for us, and a pie; only Sally and I ate the pie before she got her headache.'

'Oh, I'll make the toast and tea,' said Mabel, wondering, as she looked into the boy's clear brown eyes, how her cousin could have called him 'an ugly little scapegrace.'

'And then I'll stay with you till your parents come back. You said they'd be back at eight o'clock, didn't you?'

'Yes'm,' said Willy, leading the way into the kitchen, where he eagerly watched the preparation for supper. 'Miss Hopewell,' he began, and then paused, his eyes restlessly roaming from one article of furniture to another in the shabby little room.

'Well, Willy?'

'Do you know you're the only one that ever stopped one of Sally's headaches?'

'Oh, I don't believe it has gone yet! It only feels easier,' said Mabel, buttering the thin, brown slices of toast. She waited anxiously for her companion's next words, but he was silent.

The cosy meal of that evening was long remembered with pleasure by each one of the little group that gathered about the table. The feast was spread within a convenient distance of the sofa, and Sally lay in delightful ease, nibbling her toast and sipping her tea, while her brother and Miss Hopewell chatted about Junior doings.

'Yes,' said the latter, 'next Sunday I mean to bring some pencils to the meeting, and I hope I shall be able to find somebody to sharpen them for me.'

'Oh, I can sharpen pencils,' said Willy.

'Then I'll turn them over to you.'

'Do you want anyone to hand round the Bibles to the boys and girls? I can do that, too.'

'Very well,' said Mabel, and wondered what her cousin would think to see and hear the two black sheep then.

'There they are now,' said Willy, suddenly, as his quick ears caught the sound of oncoming wheels.

'I must go,' declared Mabel. 'The people at home will be wondering where I am keeping myself all these hours.'

She kissed Sally, who had fallen asleep, and hurried into the hall after her wraps. Just as the carriage drove round to the house she opened the front door and stepped out upon the starlit veranda. Willy wished to walk home with her, but this offer she declined. She shook hands, however.

'Miss Hopewell,' said the boy, 'I'm glad we've got you for superintendent.' Then the door closed abruptly.

The Edgeville Junior Society prospered, and not long after the stormy Sunday the minister's wife called upon Mrs. Mabon. Both Fanny and Mabel were in the room.

'It is the strangest thing that you have succeeded so well with the boys and girls,' said the visitor to Mabel.

'Oh, the black sheep are turning white,' put in Fanny, with a laugh, 'and the others follow their lead, you know. Mother, tell the story of that rainy Sunday; you never tire of repeating it.'

Her mother smiled and told it.

'Well,' said the minister's wife, 'the new