

BOYS AND GIRLS

Their New Year's Present.

(By Margaret Johnson.)

On either side of the path through the woods the snow lay, white and unbroken. The trees arched overhead, their myriad twigs tracing an intricate pattern upon the cloudless blue of the sky. Elsa did not lift her eyes to see this beauty. Her thoughts were busy and troubled, and she walked with drooping head. Such a little thing it was to worry over! So many girls would never give it a thought! She was too honest, too conscientious. Her examination paper had been perfect but for that one question; and it was quite by accident

'Lena,' it wailed, 'it iss my turn! You haf keep it too long, Lena!'

Looking down she saw a tiny boy, whose round blue eyes, peering from the folds of a great comforter, gazed tearfully at a girl, not much larger than himself, clad in a dingy red jacket and cap.

'What is the matter?' asked Elsa, kindly.

'It iss the skate, Fraulein,' said Lena, confidently. She had seen the young lady before, and knew the stately house on the avenue where she lived.

'Ve haf only von, und ve takes turns to wear it. Yacob cries because he iss so little.'

laboring under obvious difficulties, as long as Elsa's amused eyes could follow them.

If Lena had been presented with a pair of wings she could not have been more wonderfully grateful. Up and down, back and forth she skimmed, untiring. Little Yacob grew weary and went home, his one skate hugged lovingly to his bosom. The crowd thinned on the pond, the air grew colder, and the dull red sunset burned behind the trees.

Then with a sudden pang Lena realized that there was an end to her joy. The skates were not hers. She would never have them again. She looked around for the tall figure of the girl who had played the good fairy to her. There she was, far away at the other end of the pond. Lena took off the skates and started across with them sorrowfully.

Midway over, she stopped. A sudden temptation had taken possession of her. What if she should keep the skates? Instantly it seemed to her as if she must have them. She did not stop to think, but gave one quick glance about her. Elsa was talking with some friends far away. No one was looking. No one would know. She turned and ran to the shore, and dashed into the woods, running with all her might, filled with a fearful joy, toward the little house where she and Yacob lived, across the railway track.

It was a long way. The winter day came to a sudden close, and it grew dark early in those still woods. Lena began to be oppressed by the loneliness and gloom about her. She scarcely understood the misery that crept over her as she ran. Still she went on as in a dream. Not until she was nearly home did conscience fairly awake in her sturdy little bosom, and smite her with sudden woe. What had she done! What was she—a thief! She stood still. Before her shone the lighted window of her home. Behind her stretched the shadowy woods, gloomy with gathering darkness. She was chilled and weary. Her feet were heavy, and her hands ached. The tears came slowly and fell over her cold cheeks. A sob rose in her throat. She turned and started back through the woods.

In the big armchair before the library grate Elsa sat that evening, gazing listlessly into the fire. Her brow was clouded, and her heart full of bitter and troubled thoughts. To think that even the little child whom she had trusted, who looked so innocent and honest, should have betrayed her confidence! There was no truth, no honesty, then, in the world. Why should she strain a point to be true to an over-fine sense of honor? What did it matter, after all? No, she would not tell Miss Mathews about that history question.

The door-bell rang loudly and suddenly. The servant hastened to the door; but almost before she could open it, a little figure half-ran, half-tumbled over the threshold, still clinging desperately with benumbed hands to something shining held against its breast.

'Lena!' cried Elsa, springing up.

'O Fraulein!' cried the child, holding out the skates with a great sob, 'I haf bring them back. I want them, oh! so much. I haf think I will keep them. But I cannot. Und it vas so cold, und so far, und I haf lose my way! But I'm not a thief, Fraulein, und I haf bring them back!'

The quick tears sprang to Elsa's eyes. She stooped and caught the little trembling figure in her arms.

'Lena!' she cried. 'You dear child! You brave, honest little soul! Did you come all



'FRAULIEN, I HAF BRING THEM BACK.'

that she had opened her history, to get a paper which lay there, just at the page which answered that troublesome question. Was it her duty to tell Miss Mathews about that, and lose the perfect mark she was so anxious for?

A sound of voices came floating through the frosty air; a confused, joyous murmur, mingled with the keen, silvery ringing of steel upon ice. She was nearing the pond. Following a bend in the path she came full upon it—a brilliant sight; the sparkling sheet of ice, covered with gay figures, darting, skimming, and swaying, in the sunshine. Elsa put on her skates and joined the flying throng; but she was in no mood for pleasure, and presently was standing again on the shore, gazing with absent eyes at the merry scene. She was roused by the sound of a plaintive voice near by.

'But you can't do anything with one skate,' cried Elsa.

'O ja, Fraulein,' said the child. 'You can skate fery well, mit von foot to slide, and von to push.'

Elsa was seized with a sudden impulse.

'Do you think you can wear my skates, Lena?' she asked; and taking the dainty, shining skates from her own feet, Elsa knelt down and buckled them on over Lena's stout shoes.

'Now go, and let me see you try them,' she said. 'Yacob can have the odd one; and bring them back to me when you are tired.'

She watched the child start off, and saw that she could really skate very well. The dingy red jacket darted in and out among the crowd, and little Yacob came after,