

Joan passed through, then half turned.

"I think," she said with energy, "there are few things more contemptible and underbred than a practical joke."

"What an idiot I am!" thought Emerson as she disappeared.

He stood leaning on the gate-post for awhile, absorbed in thought. The moon was rising as he walked slowly back. He scarcely raised his eyes from the ground, but kicked the stones along as he went, as if they had a share in his discomfiture.

"Hi!"

He looked up. The call came from Lenthall, who, with a cigar between his lips, was idly sitting on a stile.

"Well?"

Emerson waited until Fred Lenthall came up by his side.

"Kane," said the latter, looking him over, "if it pleases you to make yourself look like a stupid, pray do so; but if you frighten Miss Kennet again like this, you shall answer for it to me."

"Indeed!" said Kane coolly, "how long has it taken you to compose that speech?"

"Wherever you acquired a taste," Lenthall went on, ignoring this last remark, "for this vulgar masquerading—"

"Fred, you are an idiot!" interrupted his friend. "Don't grand-language me! If you want to punch my head, do it like a man. I'm ready!"

He threw off his rough "gaberline," and made a feint of rolling up his shirt sleeves, but Lenthall did not move.

"You evidently want to be laid up with rheumatism," he said, "the air is full of moisture."

Kennet picked up the coarse garment and proceeded to put it on once more.

"You're a nice friend, he said," as they walked on together. "As soon as I am in trouble you jump on me."

"In trouble?" Lenthall repeated.

"Yes. I've mortally offended Miss Kennet. Fred, old man, I'm awfully fond of that girl, and she does not care a straw for me."

"I wonder at that," Fred said dryly.

"Well, I don't know, but I don't think it's my fault. I don't think that sort of thing comes from anything you do or say. By Jove! Isn't she strong, too? Still, I shouldn't have gone down so easily if I hadn't been just on the edge of the ditch. Oh, here's my hat—wet through, of course. Capital disguise, wasn't it?"

He picked up the soaked head-gear from the road and became silent. He was out of humor with himself, while Lenthall would say nothing that would bring back his self-respect. The latter was inwardly elated that his friend should have made so false a step with respect to Miss Kennet.

A little group was collected on the smooth lawn at Heathfield, as the Heath family called their pretty, gabled, red-brick house. The occasion was that of a garden party, at which were present nearly all who had been in the pic-nic at the ruined castle.

The center of this little group, toward whom even the tennis and croquet players cast now and then an inquisitive glance, was the fair Phyllis, in a complete costume of pink, with hat, gloves and sunshade to match. Her interested listeners were Joan Kennet and her mother, Carter Abbott, Fred Lenthall, and one or two others.

"I suppose," Phyllis was saying, "that he must have been riding carelessly. I was just peeping out of my window, and there he came, looking a wee bit melancholy, I thought, but perhaps that was only my fancy; I know I am foolishly sentimental."

She gave a quick glance at her large admirer, who tried very hard to think of some complimentary remark. However, he had no sooner constructed one beginning with "Well, I sh—" when Lenthall nipped it in the bud by saying—

"Pray, go on, Miss Heath."

Phyllis complied.

"He was about opposite our house when his horse stumbled, and then scrambled and seemed to try to save itself, but could not. Down it went on its knees, and Mr. Emerson was thrown completely over its head. I screamed."

She dropped her sunshade on the grass, and clasped her pink gloves at the recollection. Her hearers looked so pale, especially Lenthall and Joan, that she felt encouraged to proceed.

"He came down on his head with oh! such a horrid thud! And then, somehow, he and the horse seemed to be all mixed up, and it sprawled about trying to get up, and at last did get on to its feet, and galloped away. I just saw from the window that there was blood on his face, and that he did not move.

"And what did you do then," asked Abbott breathlessly.

"Oh, I don't like to tell you," and Phyllis hung her head and looked at the ground; "I am such a little goose, I know; I fainted."

"You are too graphic, Miss Heath," said Lenthall, seeing Joan's ashy face. "Let me take you to a seat, Miss Kennet."

"No, thank you," she said decisively. "I would rather hear the rest. Is he—is he dangerously hurt, Phyllis?"

"When I came to," she answered, declining to give the conclusion of the story before legitimately reaching it, "mamma being in a great fright, and pouring lots of dreadfully cold water on me, he was down in the dining room and the doctor had been sent for—and his father, old Mr. Emerson. Papa wanted him to stay here so as not to be moved, but Mr. Emerson would have him home at any cost. I didn't see him, but I crept down to the door, and, oh dear, it was so horrid!"