

JOAN'S TRAMP.

WHAT are you saying, Miss Heath? Pray give us all the benefit of your remarks, and we'll pay the closest attention." The speaker, a young man of some five-and-twenty summers, was lazily reclining on the grass-carpeted ground, his back resting against a stone, fallen at some distant period from the ruined tower that furnished the shade in which the whole party was grouped.

It was a pic-nic party. The meal being finished the partakers thereof had left the turfy enclosure which had served as a dining room, to settle down in this shady corner, here to wait until the heat should diminish, for the sun was shining with almost tropical intensity.

"Certainly, Mr. Emerson," said the young lady addressed, who made an agreeable picture, in her pink cotton dress, shown up by the dark background of ivy. "I merely said that I know why Nellie Heriot is not here. Her nerves have not recovered since the terrible fright she had day before yesterday."

"Indeed?" drawled a young Hercules, whose eyes had been glued to the fair speaker. "How interesting! Pray tell us what it was."

"A ghost?" asked the youngest girl present.

"Or a spirit message through the dining room table?" asked Emerson.

"Neither," said Phyllis Heath. "She met with a tramp when out walking, and he terrified her into giving him everything of any value she had about her—watch, rings, purse and a little locket she wore around her neck. Silly girl! to go for so long a walk alone. I never do."

"I should think not," said young Hercules, otherwise Carter Abbott.

"But I wonder," remarked a quiet girl in brown, "that she did not scream for help or run away. Phyllis says she was so frightened that she handed over everything like a lamb."

"How dreadful!" said another. "It makes one feel quite nervous."

"Miss Heriot must be exceedingly foolish, I think," stily said Prudence Heath, elder sister to Phyllis.

"What should you have done in her place, Miss Heath, if I may venture to ask?" And the dark eyes of Kane Emerson danced mischievously under the hat he had pulled low, to ward off a wandering sunbeam which had squeezed its way through a chink in the old gray pile.

"I never walk alone," Prudence replied in a curt tone.

"I should have fainted, I am sure, Kane," said Lottie Emerson.

"Don't doubt it, my dear," he said dryly, "especially if you saw help coming."

Lottie laughed.

"How disagreeable and sarcastic brothers are! You are very silent, Joan, what are you thinking of; what would you have done under like circumstances?"

She turned as she spoke to a tall, fair, graceful girl, seated upon a projecting corner of stone. Her large hat lay on her knee, that she might more conveniently lay her head against the hard wall.

Many eyes followed Lottie's in the pause that followed her question, but the ones that contained the most interest were those of Kane Emerson and Fred Lenthall, his friend, a thoughtful looking man of apparently thirty.

"I would not have given up a thing," said Joan, with a half scornful smile, "I should have knocked the fellow down."

A burst of laughter followed, but Emerson said under his breath—

"By George, I believe she would."

"That comes from going in for gymnastics," said Phyllis Heath, looking pensively at her own little delicate wrist. "I am afraid that if I hit a man I shouldn't hurt him."

Joan's red lips took a more disdainful curve, but Carter Abbott, who had been gradually edging himself nearer to the object of his intense admiration contrived to whisper—

"Wouldn't you, though! You've hit me, and it hurts awfully."

Phyllis ignored him and continued to Joan—

"What a pity you're not a man, dear! I'm quite afraid of you, I declare, you are so perfectly strong and masculine."

"The little humbug!" said Emerson, aside, to his friend, and added aloud: "If that is true, Miss Kennet, you will not mind climbing with me to the top of one of the towers. The view is worth the trouble. Are you too much afraid of the heat?"

"Oh, no; I am quite willing," said Joan, rising, in perfect unconsciousness of the cloud that instantly darkened the brow of Fred Lenthall. "Come, Lottie," and she passed her arm through that of Kane's sister, "I know that you are not more afraid of freckles than I am."

The cloud passed from the face of Lenthall, to rest for a second on that of Emerson, who, however, was equal to the occasion.

"Fred," he said instantly, you must come and help Lottie up the difficult steps."

The four were soon mounting the dark, worn stone steps. They paused to take breath at the first remains of a landing, and looked out from a deep embrasure at the blue lily-covered moat.

"Now, Mr. Lenthall," said Lottie, "let us be in front this time. I know we can get up more quickly than they do."

He was compelled to follow. Joan was about to do the same, when Emerson stopped her.

"Stay a minute, please, Miss Kennet, and let us rest on this window seat," he said, suiting the action to the word. "I twisted my ankle slightly coming up. It will be all right directly."