

In her presence, however, he was rather quiet than otherwise. The moment she came in he stopped talking. She saw it, and half stopped, too.

By-and-by, who should run up to the door, all muffled up to her pretty eyes, but Tilly Fogg! She had been sent for, for that was at the bottom of the arrangement. It could never have succeeded without her.

She came clear into the room before she knew who was there, and the moment the startling intelligence revealed itself through her eyes she made a movement as if to have retreated with precipitation, had not Susan stood close at her back, and crowded her along so as to shut the door. There they were, then, all together; not one of the three unhappy parties had previously thought of such a thing.

"Now," said I to all hands, "what's the trouble?"

"Yes," said Susie Wilde, who was a real good little girl, "what is the matter, sure enough?"

"Why?" said Tilly, reining herself in proudly, and looking everywhere but at Ethan.

"Who said anything was the matter?" blurted out Ethan, who couldn't have held his tongue to save his life.

"See here," said I. "You, Tilly, are very unhappy. You needn't tell me you are not, for I know well enough you are; I could see it last night."

She tried to be indignant, but made only a poor feint of it.

"Now, Lucy," I continued, "what made you go so readily to the dance with Ethan, if he never invited you?"

Lucy was instantly as mad as a March hare.

"He did invite me, I'd have you to know!" she exclaimed, fixing her spectacles anew upon her nose.

"He didn't!" broke in one of the girls who was in the secret. "We did it. We got up that invitation ourselves!"

"And I——" she hesitated in her confusion.

"Then you didn't——" chimed in the relieved Tilly, for the first time speaking to Ethan.

"No, never!" he answered with ready emphasis.

"Then I forgive you!" said Tilly, much lightened in her mind. And she cordially extended her hand.

Ethan not only took it, but he knew his duty well enough to throw his arms about her and kiss her besides.

Lucy Doane flounced out of her chair, and started for the door.

"I don't care," said she; "I've been engaged this ever so long to the minister's son over in Fifield, and now I'll marry him!"

"I would," amiably answered Ethan, not letting Tilly quite go out of his arms.

And the party was made smaller by the sudden withdrawal of the brisk little "school-marm."

The rest of us sat down to a supper—a real hearty country supper—and a grand good time we made of it, too. There was no more trouble for Tilly and Ethan; their differences were all healed.

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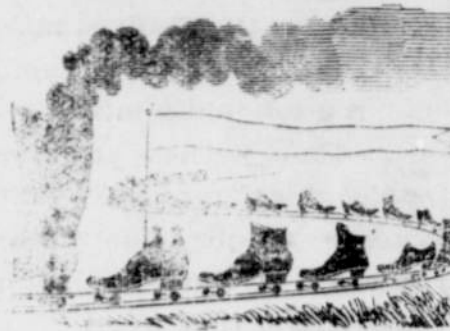
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