

Trouble Half-Way

Amy's father had died and, in this extract, we read how she was getting used to her mother's new husband.



For a start, Amy never knew what to call him. She would not, like Helen, call him Daddy and she knew he did not expect her to, but Step-Daddy sounded daft, and she could hardly call him Mr Ermins. Mum did not like her calling him Richard.

'You never called your Dad Michael, did you?' Mum had said unreasonably. Usually she just made a mumbling noise. It was easier for him: she was Amy to everyone. No one would ever have called her daughter – not Dad, not Richard.

Mum was folding the napkins into even smaller squares ready for ironing. 'What d'you want to iron nappies for?' Richard would ask, sometimes. 'Helen won't know any different.'

'Oh, I don't know – it looks... nicer,' Mum would say.

'But no one can see them.'

'I can see them,' Mum would retort, looking at the tottering pile of flattened napkins on the table, like a stack of sandwiches waiting to be cut into quarters. Richard would be looking at the laundry basket on the floor, full of things still waiting to be ironed.

'Life's too short,' he would say.

Now he was looking at the elastic bandage round Amy's knee.

'How's your leg?'

Mum was looking at her socks but not saying anything. The socks were gying round her ankles because she kept tugging at them during lessons and the stretchy part was giving way. Mum ironed socks, too.

'It's not too bad,' Amy said, meaning her knee, and added carefully, because it was Richard who had asked, 'thank you.'

'What do you mean, not too bad?' Mum said, quickly. 'Has it been hurting?'

'It twinged a bit this morning when I knelt down in assembly.'

'You be careful – you want it right for Thursday. Perhaps I ought to write a note and ask Miss Oxley to let you off games and that for the start of next week.'

'But I've got to practise,' Amy said. 'Anyway, Miss Oxley won't let me do anything I shouldn't. She says I'm the best chance we've got if Debra isn't better.'

'What's wrong with Debra?'

'She turned her ankle on the beam on Wednesday. She came down too heavy.'

Amy noticed that Richard was staring at her over the rim of his mug.

'Kneeling?' he said. 'In assembly?'

'Yes.'

'Hands – together – eyes – closed – Our – Father – which – art – in – heaven?'

'Yes.'

'Good God,' said Richard.

'What did you do in assembly, then?' Mum demanded, unfolding the ironing board. 'Stand on one leg?'

Jan Mark

Do you remember?

Copy these sentences. Fill in the missing words.

1. Amy's mother's new husband was _____.
2. Her father had _____.
3. Amy's mother was doing the _____.
4. _____ was Amy's teacher.
5. Debra hurt her _____ on the beam.
6. Mother asked Richard if he stood on one leg in _____.

