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CHAPTER IX. A DUEL OF WITS.

"No," replied the exquisite, without a smile. "I have never seen one."
"Never—seen—a battle, and you're a captain? What's the good of being a captain if you don't fight battles?" asked Grace, staring at him.
"I don't know," retorted Reginald, beginning to enjoy the originality of the young savage. "I assure you, Miss Darrell, I have often asked myself the same question."
Grace stared for a minute and then returned to the road, as though Captain Dartmouth had no further interest for her.

He waited for another question, but finding that it did not come, said, quietly:

"I have not been all around the world, as I admit I ought to have been, Miss Darrell; but I have travelled over a great part of it."

She looked round at him with renewed interest.

"Have you?" she said. "Where?"

"Oh, ever so many places—England, Ireland, Wales—"

"Oh, not them!" she interrupted, scornfully. "They're not places—I don't mean them. What I mean is foreign places—Africa, America, Italy, France, Desert Island, and among the Indians and savages. Have you been there?"

"Not among the savages—until this afternoon," he added, to himself—"but I've been to France and Italy and Switzerland. I'll tell you about them if you like."

"No, thanks," she said, indifferently. "I don't care to hear anything about 'em if there ain't any savages."

Captain Dartmouth stroked his mustache, not a bit offended or embarrassed.

"Then I won't tell you," he said. "Perhaps you'd like to hear something about the savages and the rest of it that other people have seen; if so, come and sit down—it's rather draughty, don't you think, just here at the window?" and I'll tell you."

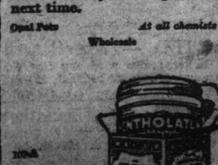
Grace took no notice for a minute.

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and he crossed over and wheeled the chair up for her, arranging the cushions in a comfortable position.

"Now the chair's ready, and so am I," he said, dropping into his own chair and crossing his legs.

Grace came and sat down without a word, and the captain began an old African hunting story, relating it truthfully as far as he remembered it, and supplying any details he might have forgotten.

His voice was pleasing and he had it under thorough control.

Now, as he sat opposite the dark, bowed, attentive face of the strange girl, he dropped a great deal of his languor, and, quickening and raising it as the scenes he was describing required, held her attention fast and charmed her out of herself.

Her face lighted up with the most absorbed attention, her head was bent forward, her eyes fixed upon him, her lips, from which the breath came sweetly and quickly, apart and tremulous with excitement.

"Hello! You two've been making friends, eh?"

CHAPTER X. THE TAMING PROCESS.

"Here is a beast to be bent or broken; bent by the stronger will of man, and broken by his subtlety."

Grace was strongly built for a girl and had a strong constitution.

Unlike most girls who are fortunate in the possession of muscle and sinew, she did not waste her strength; nay, more, she was positively proud of it.

To be able to hold the dead Hugh's horse, or walk round the estate—a matter of sixteen miles altogether—and to plunge into a cold bath when the late autumn frost was silencing the window panes, were feats much more to be commended in a young lady than playing the piano or miming French, as she called it.

Every morning as the clock struck six she rose and, wrapping herself in her dressing-robe, made her way to the bath-room. Then, all in a glow with cold, crisp water, she made a hasty toilet and donned a little gray riding-habit.

Treading softly down the stairs so as not to wake the squire, who never rose till seven, she ran into the yard, where one of the men had orders to have her horse saddled for her. She was but a girl, but woe to the man if her horse was a minute behind time. The Darrell impatience and temper displayed themselves very quickly.

Once mounted she was off; away over the hedges and across the country, her half-dried hair flying in the wind, her cheeks all aflame with health and excitement, her eyes as flashing as those of the horse, who enjoyed the mad morning gallop as much as his very rider.

The squire had attempted to put a stop to her "treak," as he called it, but of course in vain, and had given in, stipulating that a groom should follow her.

This Grace agreed to, and kept her word.

The groom was allowed to start with her, and then followed—followed half a mile away—Grace having got clear of him in a quarter of an hour.

She had kept her word, but the squire owned himself beaten, as usual, and for the future his lady took her morning gallop alone.

The morning after Reginald Dartmouth's arrival, Grace returned and entered the hall as he sauntered down the terrace for a lounge round the garden.

He glanced at the habit and held out his hand.

"Are you going out?"
"I've been," said Grace, giving him the tips of her fingers and snatching them away again before he had time to close on them. "Been and come back," and she pushed the dark food of hair from her flushed face.

"You are an early riser, Miss Darrell," he said, with a smile. "I have only just come down."

Grace threw up her head contemptuously.

"You're lazy," she said.
"Very," he assented, quietly. "I always was."

Grace looked at him, rather nonplused by his impassive face and immovable way of taking things, and moved on.

"Is that your horse?" asked Captain Reginald, nodding languidly after the animal as it was being led away.

"Yes," said Grace. "Isn't he a beauty?" and she ran down two steps to look after him.

"Yes," said the captain, raising his eyebrows; "very fair."

"Very fair! What do you mean—that he ain't a good one?" she asked, indignantly.

"Nothing half so rude," he retorted, as quietly as before. "Very fair means passable, tolerably good. You said beautiful."

"And I meant beautiful, too," she said, shortly. "Come, have you seen a better one?"

"Plenty," he said.
"I don't believe it," she answered, coolly.

He lifted his hat.
"That's very rude, but it's original. Do you know, Miss Darrell, that you are the only living being who ever told me I fibbed?"

"No, I didn't," said Grace, plucking off her hat and wiping her forehead with her gauntlet. "At least, I didn't mean it if I did. What I meant was—"

Oh, you're not listening," she broke off, turning her back to him as he played with his eyeglasses listlessly and yawned behind his hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I am afraid I am scarcely awake."

"Why didn't you stop in bed then," said Grace, "if you're so uncommon tired?"

"Why not, indeed?" he said, gravely, and the girl, half annoyed, half puzzled at his evident determination not to be offended or made angry by her, ran past him into the house.

Reginald Dartmouth looked after her with a strange smile, and muttering "My savage cos should live in a habit—it becomes her," lounged into the stables.

"Are these all the cattle?" he asked one of the men, glancing at the stalls.

"These be all, 'cep'n' Miss Grace's, sir, and the pony," replied the man.

The captain stepped up to one or two and had their rugs taken off.

"Where's the old hunter that used to be in this stall?" he asked.

"Dead, sir," said the man. "Master H—" he stopped short, and said, instead, "He was put 't' the wall at 't' back of the Warren, and missed un."

"Ha!" said the captain. "Mr. Hugh, I suppose?"

The man shook his head.

"Saddle this gentleman for me after breakfast," he said, laying his hand on a powerful cob. "He's as fast as any here, I suppose?"

The man shook his head.

"No," he said, "Miss Grace's be the head of 'em all. There beart' one as can touch him."

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The captain nodded, languidly and went in to breakfast.

"Good-morning, sir," he said, shaking hands with the squire.

"Ah, good-morning, Reginald," was the response. "Been strolling round, eh?"

"Yes," said the captain. "I have been as far as the stables."

"See anything you like there?" said the squire, sitting down and blowing his nose with great gusto.

"Yes," said the captain. "I have asked one of the men to bring me round a bright bay cob."

"Ah, good horse, and quite up to your weight," said the squire.

"Where's Grace, I wonder? Here's the coffee and all the rest of it. Hi, Mrs. Lucas!" he shouted; but before that lady could appear Grace entered and, kissing her uncle, sat down to the inn.

"Well, haven't you got a word for your cousin, madam?" said the squire.

"Seen him before," said Grace.

"Yes, we have already given each other the weather-orders," said the captain, peeling his egg. "I was fortunate enough to catch Miss Darrell returning from her morning ride."

"Ah," said the squire, "she's an early bird! Don't know where she gets the notion from. Most of the young women are lie-a-beds nowadays."

"And most of the young men, too," said Grace, looking over at Reginald without any attempt at disguise.

"That's meant for me, sir," said Reginald.

"Ha, ha!" said the squire. "Grace says what she means pretty plain—a great deal too plain sometimes," he added, nodding at her; but she went on with her breakfast without retort.

"What are you going to do—ride, didn't you say?" said the squire.

"I thought of going for a gallop," said Captain Reginald. "Perhaps I can persuade you to accompany me, sir."

"No, I can't," said the squire. "Confounded gout! Grace will, though."

The captain looked over at her interrogatively.

"Can I count on so much honor?" retorted Grace. "I don't know—perhaps."

The captain bowed.

"You shall tell me after breakfast," he said; then, turning to the squire, added: "I have one or two letters. Can your man take them for me, sir?"

"Oh, yes!" said the squire; "put 'em in the bag there and they'll go all right."

"I'll add a line or two to this one," Captain Dartmouth said, holding one of the letters up; and taking a pen wrote inside the envelope: "Send me, with the gun, the three large volumes of novels, and start the Sybil down as soon as possible."

Then directing the envelope to his valet, he dropped it with the others.

After breakfast he lounged upstairs and exchanged his coat for a tight riding one and put on his spurs.

Grace was standing by the window.

"Have you made up your mind, Miss Darrell?" he asked, stroking his mustache and looking perfectly careless and indifferent as to her decision.

"No, I haven't," she said.
He dropped into a chair and beat his legs with his whip.
"Well, aren't you going?" she said.
"You're keeping the horse waiting." (To be continued.)

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