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CHAPTER X.

THE TAMING PROCESS.

"Well, Miss Grace," said he, "com- instantly regained his composure and usual serenity as he answered: "Come, you are inquisitive to-night, Miss Grace. Did I ever love any one else that died? Oh, yes—a cat! I loved her very much, and she died. I remember I had to drown her because she had a bad habit of mewing at awkward moments." Grace looked at him with doubting scrutiny. "Oh," said she, "you are making fun of me, as usual! I don't know when I like you least, when you tell stories like that or when you are speaking the truth and scolding me." "Oh!" he said; "and, pray, when do you like me best?" and he knocked the ash off his cigar and, leaning one arm on the balcony, turned his face toward her. It was a handsome face—beautiful enough, with many a grace and regularity, to ensnare any woman. It did not move the rough, untutored girl before him. "Never!" she replied, with a quiet glance of earnestness; "and I never shall." "Don't be too sure, my girl," he said, with his unmovable smile of quiet superiority. "I can't be too sure," she replied, yawning and turning from the terrace. He uttered a laugh, musical and low, and looked round at her, then turned away to the night with a dark shadow upon his brow. Presently she came back, so quietly he did not hear her, and stood at his side for a moment. "Well?" he said. "Good-night," she said. "I am going to bed." "Oh, you are polite enough to say that, are you?" he said, turning his eyes down on her. "No," she said, candidly. "But Uncle Harry told me I was to do so, and I've done it." "Good-night," he said, holding out his hand; "and pleasant dreams." She touched his long, white fingers with her own small, brown ones and bounded off the terrace, leaving him there to think and plot. In the morning the squire sent down word from his bed-room that his gout was too bad to all of his breakfasting with them. So Grace and Captain

Dartmouth took their meal alone. Directly it was over the captain put on his hat and went round the farm, as he had done before his visit to town.

The men were glad to see him, and hung about waiting for his orders. Already they looked upon him as their master when the squire was away. One of them stepped up to ask him about some young pigs that he had recommended to be removed.

"The squire said as how they was to be left till you come back, cap'n," he said, touching his forehead. "And so I left 'em."

The captain nodded. "Send them to the market," he said, "and tell me what they fetch."

Then he walked over to the barn. There was some storing to be done, and the men were waiting for the squire to look at the wheat.

Captain Reginald stepped into the barn and looked round.

"What are you waiting for, my men?"

"For the squire, sir," was the reply. "Oh!" said Reginald; "ten, twenty, thirty," checking the loads. "The squire is bad this morning! You can go on Giles."

The men touched their caps and set about their work and he stood long enough to see them in swing and then went to the stables.

There he was already more master than the squire himself.

The grooms ran out and fussed about, and the pony was led into the yard.

"A mere scratch," said the captain, looking at the cut knee. "Put the lotion on and turn it into the paddock. John, how's the chestnut?"

"All right, sir," said the groom, hurrying to the stall and bringing the captain's horse out.

"Ah," said he, stroking its neck. "Did you walk it over the moor yesterday?"

"No, sir," said the groom. The captain frowned.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Miss Grace had him saddled for her, sir," said the groom. "I told her as you mightn't like it, captain, but she said as she would saddle it herself, and so we was obliged."

The captain nodded.

"Get him ready for me in an hour," he said, and turned toward the house. When he arrived there he found the squire was down, and looking gouty and irritable.

"Good-morning, sir," said the captain, lounging in. "Is the foot bad?"

"Yes," said Squire Darrell. "Deuced bad—been awake all night with the pain."

"Why did you get up so soon?" said the captain, sitting down and poking the fire.

"'Bliged to," replied the squire.

"The men are waiting for me to go on storing, and there's the pigs—to-day's market day. I'm 'bliged to be down among 'em this morning or they won't be at it."

Reginald stroked his mustache.

"I don't see the necessity," he said. "I have just been round the farm. The men are hard at it in the barn, and the pigs are on their way, as the nursery rhyme says, to market."

The squire looked up in surprise.

"Why, the stacks ain't checked!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Reginald; "I counted them."

"You did? Come, that's kind of you, my boy," said the squire. "You've saved me a painful tramp down the yard. And everything's all right, eh?"

"Everything," said the captain. "I have seen to it myself."

"Thank ye, thank ye," said the squire, with a groan of pain. "Pon my word, I'm getting a good opinion of you London gentlemen. I allers thought you were an idle set of do-nothings; but I was mistaken I see. Thank ye, thank ye."

"Don't mention it," said Reginald Dartmouth. "No thanks are due. I am only amusing myself."

"Pretty profitable amusement for me," said the squire; then added, abruptly, "Where's Grace?"

"Here, Uncle Harry," she answered for herself, coming in at the door with a basin of broth. "Here's a cup of beef-tea Mrs. Lucas has been making. I thought I'd bring it up myself, as I was coming."

The squire looked grateful.

"You're both of you very kind," he groaned. "Here's Reginald been all over the farm for me and set the men a-going."

"Has he?" said Grace, without look-

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ing round. "Well, it's time he did something useful; he's been playing at doing nothing all his life."

The squire laughed.

"Now, Miss Saucy! Reginald, just hand me that paper, will you?"

The captain gave him the paper, which had only just arrived, and turned to Grace.

"I have seen the pony," he said; "it is nothing but a mere scratch, and will be right again directly."

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed, looking round at him with a flash of pleasure. "Poor fellow, he did try to clear the gate so hard!"

The squire growled.

"Reginald," he said, "I wish you'd give an eye to the young puss. I don't mind the pony, but I'd be sorry to have her break her own neck."

The captain smiled and, with a glance at Grace, he replied, laughingly:

"You must remember she was not under my charge then; she is safe enough when she is. By the way, I must ride over to the Warren this morning. I have a message for Miss Goodman. By Jove, I'd nearly forgotten it!"

"Going to Rebecca's?" said the squire. "Who gave you the message?"

"A cousin of her—Charles Anderson," said the captain, looking at his watch. "I think I'll go now. Can I persuade you to keep me company, Miss Grace?"

Grace looked at her uncle.

"Shall I go and see Rebecca?" she said.

So seldom had she asked his advice or permission that the squire was rather astonished.

"Yes, certainly," he said. "Go with your cousin, and tell Rebecca I've got this abominable gout again or I'd have come too. Ugh! You don't know what it is yet, I suppose, Reginald?"

"No, sir; not yet," said he, as he left the room; "but it'll come in time, I don't doubt. It's in the family, you know."

"Ay, confound it, and always will be!" grunted the squire.

"So you tried the chestnut yesterday?" said Reginald, as he and Grace cantered across the fields.

"Yes," she said, unhesitatingly. "I wanted to see if he'd throw me. He didn't."

"He is a gentleman, and could not be so rude to a lady," said the captain. "Do you like him?"

(To be continued.)

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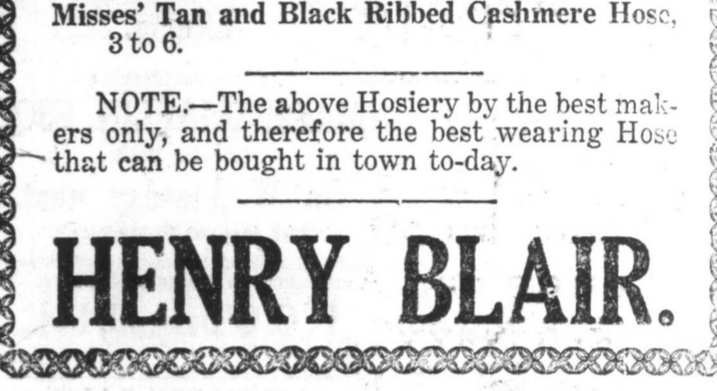
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