

jump big enough to clear a house, if you let her head alone, and don't interfere with her mouth. She'll not stand being hauled at."

"Yes, Jack, I'll do my very best to attend to your directions. I've often watched Polecat going with you, and know that she requires quiet treatment."

"That's where it is. She is a hot, excitable sort of mare; but nevertheless she'll carry you like a bird."

As they shut the box, Jack added in his most nonchalant manner:

"By-the-bye, Mag, I was nearly forgetting to mention it, but ease her a little uphill, and over ridge and furrow. You see she's but a young thing yet."

"All right, Jack, I'll remember." But Maggie thought to herself that, whether Polecat were a young thing or an old thing, those hocks and that back would ever prevent her from being a good stayer or strong galloper.

After this they proceeded to visit The Fizzer, who was a stout, cob-like bay gelding, of an altogether different class. With his short sturdy limbs, round sleek barrel and placid eye, he looked like a regular old gentleman's hunter, not speedy enough for the fine, large pastures over which he was called upon to extend himself. Pace was indeed his weak point, and Jack was prepared to part with him, if Maggie could find a good customer. She promised to do her utmost, and after receiving an infinity of instructions as to the best method of showing him off, brother and sister quitted the stable, both saddened by the thought that it was the last time they should visit it together for a long while to come.

Jack was to start early next morning, and all that evening, Mrs. Brotherton, after the fashion of loving mothers and weak women, gave him a series of oft-repeated parting directions. When he kissed her and said good-night, he promised to be sure and remember his comforter and railway rugs, to wear the warm knitted waistcoat on board ship, that she had made for him, to avoid draughts, cold, and damp sheets, and above everything to abstain from drinking and evil company.

All of which injunctions he forgot before he was out of the house.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OH! JOY. A YOUNG MAN.

The house seemed terribly dull without Jack. Mother and sisters missed his cheery voice and bright face, his masculine vivacity, and perpetual state of motion; but none mourned the lad's departure with such poignancy and sincerity as Maggie.

It seemed to her as if some joyous element had been suddenly withdrawn from her life, and even the near approach of the hunting season failed, in her brother's absence, to afford quite the same delight as usual. They two had been in the habit of riding so much together, and of spinning such yarns when the day was done.

He had only been gone a few hours, and oh! how blank everything appeared. She felt as if she could never reconcile herself to his loss.

The five girls, with their mother, were assembled in the morning room, which, when alone, they generally occupied. The clock had just struck six. A bright wood fire hissed and spluttered on the hearth, the crimson curtains were drawn, and a couple of softly shaded lamps gave an air of comfort and refinement to the apartment.

Mrs. Brotherton was lying on a sofa knitting. She was one of those women for whom knitting seems to have been specially invented in order to enable them to get through their lives with some semblance of usefulness and activity. She was seldom seen without a stocking for Jack in her hand. He ought to have possessed hundreds of pairs, only oddly enough they never appeared to come to completion. A constant dropping and picking up stitches, losing and finding of balls, and matching of wools retarded the work. For the rest, Mrs. Brotherton neither read, played, sang, nor drew. Her resources of self-amusement were extremely limited, and her greatest pleasure consisted in desultory gossip appertaining to the affairs of her neighbors. In fact, she was not an uncommon type of the country well-to-do lady, whose intellect becomes deadened and senses stunted, through having little or nothing to rouse them.

Even Geraldine was infinitely better off than her mother, for she could take interest in trifles, and at the present moment was perfectly happy, trimming up a bonnet destined to appear in church on the following Sunday. Meantime, the twins were deep in a game of backgammon, over which they snarled like a couple of young puppies contending for a bone, and Matilda, the superior, was doing her very best to keep awake over a scientific book of great profundity. In order that her mind should not be disturbed by any physical uneasiness, she had chosen the most comfortable arm-chair in the room, and placed it right before the fire. The genial warmth, however, produced a lassitude of brain very nearly approaching slumber.

Presently the door opened, and the footman appeared, bearing a letter, which he handed to Mrs. Brotherton, and then retired.

Maggie jumped from her seat, and went over to her mother's side.

"Is it from Jack?" she enquired, eagerly.

"No, my dear, I wish it were," responded Mrs. Brotherton in a kindly voice.

"How could it be, you silly?" interposed Geraldine contemptuously. "when you know quite well that Jack has been travelling the greater part of the day, and even if he had written, the letter could not possibly arrive till to-morrow."

"It is too much to expect common sense from Maggie," said Matilda with great sarcasm. "She is one of those people who never think before they speak."

(To be Continued.)

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