

'make.' Besides, when I'm a year or two older, I shall want you to come and live with me and be my housekeeper. I say, Mag," with a sudden change of voice, "shan't we just have a jolly lot of dogs and ferrets, eh?"

"Indeed we will," said Maggie, heartily. Then a shadow darkened the bright expression of her face, and the tears came stealing up into her greenish-grey eyes.

He looked at her uneasily, for his heart was nearer his sleeve than he chose to admit.

"Well! What's up now?"

"No—nothing, only you are going away—far away over the seas to Australia, and it is horrid to think of."

"Then don't think of it. The remedy is easy enough, and, you silly idiot," growing abusive as her emotion became communicative, "remember it's only for a year."

"A year is such a long time, Jack. So many things happen in a year."

"Is that any reason to turn on the water works?"

"I shouldn't m—m—mind so much, if I could go too, to look after you."

"Bah! you donkey. Girls are always obliged to stay at home; but I'm a man, and intend to travel about, and see something of the world before I settle down here as a country squire. Come, come, Madge, cheer up. Don't look so dismal, there's a dear." And, feeling a most vexatious moisture, quite out of keeping with his dignity, beginning to dim his vision, Jack slapped her briskly on the back, by way of administering comfort. Unfortunately, this sign of affection had a contrary effect to that intended. Maggie, from snivelling surreptitiously, wept openly, and in a manner no longer disguisable.

"It—it—will be aw—awfully dull w—without you, Jack. I—I don't know what on e—earth I shall do."

"Nonsense, Mag. You'll go hunting and have a real good time of it. Can you guess what I am thinking of doing, if you're a sensible girl, and behave yourself?"

"No, what? Of letting me have a piece of your hair when you get it cut to put in my locket as a keepsake?"

Jack laughed outright. Maggie's innocent worship was flattering, if somewhat ridiculous.

"No, silly billy. I mean to let you ride Polecat and The Fizzer all the time I'm away. There! You can't have a greater sign of my affection than that. There's not another girl in the United Kingdom I'd place such trust and confidence in."

"Oh, Jack! how good of you. Do you really mean it?"

"Of course I do, else I should not say it. Ugh!" in great disgust, "Crying still! What the deuce is the matter now?"

"I can't help it. You—you are so kind to me, and none of the others are. If I am an ugly duckling, they need not always make me feel it, as they do."

"That's because they're snobs," returned Jack, who often felt indignant at the treatment Maggie received at her sister's hands. Then he put his arm around her waist and said, with the nearest approach to a caress his nineteen years and ten months would permit of—"Never mind, old girl, if they take the shine out of you in looks, you can beat them all hollow over a country. There's not one of them can handle an awkward horse like yourself, and if I weren't your brother, and were a marrying man, I know precious well which of the five Miss Brothertons I'd choose."

Maggie was so overcome by Jack's eloquence and rare praise that she could find no fitting words to express her gratitude. Her heart was big to bursting, and she fell on his neck and kissed him, with such warmth and effusion that, finally, he was forced to put an end to her demonstrations by the school-boy expression of "Shut up," and "Get out."

But, for once in her life, Maggie refused to be shut up or get out. She stayed up there in Jack's room until at last he told her he really could not stand any more of her company, and should withdraw his offer of Polecat and The Fizzer if she did not depart immediately.

And this threat proved effectual.

CHAPTER II.

A FAREWELL VISIT TO THE STABLE.

It wants exactly one week to the first advertised meet of the "Ripper" hounds, and as the time for his departure can be counted by days, almost hours, Jack Brotherton has to summon up all his resolution in order to tear himself away from the time-honored pursuit of fox-hunting, to which, like his father, he is ardently attached.

"But, having once deliberately resolved to travel, and expand his ideas by seeing foreign parts, having moreover taken his passage to Australia, and made every arrangement for a twelve months' absence, he could not well alter plans at the last moment simply because "Polecat" and "The Ripper" had already covered themselves with glory in the cub-hunting season, and accounted for no less than seventeen brace of cubs.

Nevertheless, it made the parting bitter, and he told Maggie confidentially that it was his infernal luck leaving home this particular winter which promised to be an open one, and when the prospects of sport were so unusually encouraging.

Mrs. Brotherton was fortunate in one respect. Among her many troubles, want of money was not included. The squire had died a wealthy man. After providing for his widow, the estate, worth about five thousand a year, was left to Jack, and each of his daughters on attaining her majority inherited an annual income of three hundred pounds.

(To be Continued.)

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