

beauty, if she could. See what power it confers. Without any trouble it places within her reach all that goodness, talent and intellect fail to obtain."

"Ah, Maggie, so you think, but you talk like a child. By-the-bye, how old are you?"

"Me? I'm eighteen. My birthday was on the seventh of this month."

"Just twelve years younger than I. Well, do you know, Maggie, I venture to prophesy that when you get to my age you will alter some of your opinions. I began life by worshipping beauty, just as you do at present, and now that I am thirty years old, and have seen nearly all the lovely and fashionable women of Society—women who go out night after night, and whose career is a sort of triumphal progress while it lasts—I have come to the conclusion that one sweet, fresh, country girl, pure in mind and in body, is worth the whole lot of them put together."

"I don't know anything about fashionable women," said Maggie, simply. "Some come to our Hunt ball, but I don't see them, because I'm not out."

"Child," he said, with sudden emotion. "Take my advice, and don't seek to make their acquaintance. It can do you no good. Keep your youth and innocence as long as you can."

He spoke so earnestly, and with so much bitterness, that Maggie felt he must be alluding to his past life. It shot through her mind that he was referring to Mrs. Thorndyke, the beautiful woman to whom he had lost his heart, and she felt very, very sorry for him. She was a romantic little person in her way, and had already conjured up sundry pictures of the handsome Keith fading away on account of an unrequited passion. Her sympathies, at any rate, were entirely enlisted. She was devoured with curiosity to know the true history of his love for Mrs. Thorndyke, but was much too bashful to allude to it.

Further conversation was now put a stop to by the rain slackening, and as the body of the Field cantered across a grassy meadow, the winds all at once hit off the line, and ran very prettily for about twenty minutes. During this little spin Captain Falconer had several opportunities of admiring Maggie's horsemanship.

Polecat was by no means an easy mare to ride, and never having carried a lady before, she kept trying to sidle away from the habit, and gave a flourish of her heels whenever a gust of wind came and blew the hem under her. Maggie however rode her with consummate skill, and throughout the day, whenever hounds ran, Captain Falconer saw the queer little figure in the big white waterproof well to the fore.

But it was a disappointing hunt. Scent proved extremely indifferent, and although there were plenty of foxes, they baffled their pursuers in every instance. To make matters worse, towards three o'clock it set in for a regular wet afternoon, the rain coming down in torrents. Lily and Rose had already gone home, and Maggie was just going to follow their example, when she looked round and saw Captain Falconer approaching with a similar intention.

"I'm as fond of hunting as most men," he said. "But I don't think this is quite good enough. Do you?"

"Hardly. I shouldn't mind the rain if we were having any sport, but under the circumstances it seems wiser to beat a retreat."

"I think so too. Will you show me the way, Maggie?"

"Most certainly. Fortunately, we have not very far to go."

"That's good news. How far are we from home?"

"Only about two miles. That's the beauty of living in the centre of a Hunt instead of on its outskirts. Anything over six miles we think quite a long distance."

They put their horses into a brisk trot, and moved on at a rapid pace, it was too wet to converse either with comfort or pleasure, and nothing reduces people to silence so quickly as a certain amount of physical misery. Just outside the village Maggie pulled up, and said:

"We are now within a couple of hundred yards of the Manor House now, and I shall walk Polecat this little bit. Baines never likes our bringing the horses back hot to their stables."

"He is quite right. It will do both our hunters good to ease them."

"Won't you come in?" asked Maggie, as they neared the Manor House.

"No, not to-day, thanks. It is too wet. But I shall look forward to paying my respects to your mother to-morrow afternoon."

"Very well, I will tell her," said Maggie. Then she cleared her throat, and with a desperate effort, for this fashionable ex-guardsmen made her feel painfully shy, added, "I should like to thank you properly, Captain Falconer, for lending me your coat, but I am such a bad hand at saying pretty things; only—only," and her voice trembled, "I feel your kindness all the same. It was so wonderfully good of you, and I shall never forget it."

"Nonsense," he replied, in an off-hand manner. "What are men for except to take care of the ladies?"

"I—I'm not quite sure, but I'm inclined to think that even Jack, good as he is, would not have parted with his waterproof when it came on to rain."

He laughed.

"I'm not better than Jack, surely?"

"Not all round, of course. But you might be in one way. Jack does not care much for women, and I suppose you do?"

"Aha, Maggie! you want to know too much. At any rate I feel immensely flattered at being equal to Jack in any respect. And now, good-bye."

She stretched out a little hand, clad in a dripping woollen glove, and he shook it warmly. As he looked into her ugly, pleasant face, a sudden impulse made him say:

"By-the-bye, Maggie, if I come to-morrow you will be in, won't you?"
(To be Continued.)

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