

rather liked that than otherwise, not having yet arrived at the age when a hunter, warranted not to cock his ear, blink his eye, or whisk his tail, is a *sine qua non*.

A feeling of cordiality was soon established between rider and horse.

As to his mouth, in his slower paces there was no fault to be found with it, though she could fancy his pulling when hounds ran hard, but then what horse was worth his salt, or rather his oats, who did not?

Altogether, Maggie was as nearly falling in love with Galopard by Galopin as if he had been her own peculiar property, instead of belonging to her sister.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRAIGHT NECKED FOX.

"Hulloa! You have changed horses," exclaimed Captain Falconer, as the monster procession now began to squeeze through a bridle-gate which led to a well known covert, and he found himself hustled up against Maggie. "How's that?"

"Galopard pulled more than Geraldine could hold, so I got on to him instead," answered the girl. "Don't I look very fine?" smiling archly. "I feel very fine, I can assure you!"

"I should have thought if the horse pulled too much for her, he pulled too much for you."

"Captain Falconer," she rejoined in a bantering tone, "do you wish to insult my biceps? You've no idea how strong I am. Jack taught me boxing, and before he went away I was almost as good as he. Can you box? It's a splendid exercise."

"Very likely, and a particularly graceful, lady-like one. I shall learn all your accomplishments by degrees."

She bit her under-lip with vexation. He looked upon her as a regular tom-boy, destitute of all feminine graces, and in the last few days she had become keenly conscious of her own deficiencies.

"Will you have a boxing-match with me?" he said laughingly, "that would be awful fun!"

She looked at him quite viciously for a moment. Why would he always persist in chaffing her?

"No, I won't. I won't do any such thing, and I'm sorry I mentioned the subject."

"Come, come, Maggie, don't be cross."

"I'm not cross." And her lips began to tremble.

"Dignified then. Dignity ain't your style."

"Nothing's my style," she returned ruefully, "except to be horsey and slangy, and unladylike, and shock all the people whose good opinion I most care about."

"You haven't shocked me, if that's what you mean."

"Yes, I have. You know I have."

"Well, only when your excessive good-nature leads you to become rough-rider for the family. Seriously, Maggie," he added in an altered tone, "the office you take upon yourself is rather a dangerous one, especially in a country like this, which requires a lot of doing."

She laughed.

"Somebody must risk their bones, and I'm not a bit afraid, Captain Falconer."

"I know that, child, without being told. But others may be afraid for you."

"Others? Who? There's nobody to care, in my case, except Jack, and he's away."

"Yes, there is, Maggie. I care," and he looked at her in a manner which overwhelmed her with confusion.

"It is very kind of you to say so, but—but—" It was not easy to express her real sentiments, which were that so great an honor was almost impossible.

"You don't believe it? What a sceptical little person you are! The fact is, you ride a great deal too hard, and I can't bear the idea of your hunting an animal you know nothing whatever about."

"Oh, if that's all, I shall soon find out what my mount is worth," she answered, trying not to let him see how deeply she was touched by his solicitude, which produced the greater effect from her not being accustomed to find herself the object of so much consideration. "But come, we must be moving on, instead of exchanging fears for each other's safety, for if once we fall to the rear of this crowd, hounds may find and be miles away before we even reach the covert."

So saying, she gave Galopard a slight touch of the heel, and trotted briskly on, threading her way with great dexterity through the maze of carriages and gigs, horses, children and foot-people that lined the road for nearly a quarter of a mile.

Maggie was aware how fatal it frequently proves to lag behind on an occasion like the present, and how an enticing conversation may often be the means of losing a run. Therefore she did not draw rein until, by artfully seizing on every opening, she managed to reach the head of the cavalcade, and saw the waving stems of the hounds immediately in front. Galopard too went quieter when he could almost put his foot on every straggler. He loved the sight of the speckled beauties.

A steady jog of a couple of miles soon brought them to the crack covert of the "Ripper Hunt," which was known by the name of Thornberry Hillside. It lay on the slope of a steep incline, and was guarded on the top side by an unjumpable bullfinch, some eight feet in height, and at the bottom by a treacherously banked brook. Beyond, the rich fallows of a ploughed field caught the eye, and after this one blot on the fair green landscape stretched a glorious vista of undulating pastures, crossed and recrossed by dark lines of flying fences irresistibly fascinating to sportsmen who love the glorious sensation of springing from one field of sound old turf to another.

(To be Continued.)

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