

A PRECIOUS INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER V.

Trides.

"It shall never be said that Henry Warner was beaten by a schoolgirl," muttered the stranger. "If she can clear that, I can, bad rider as I am!" and burying his spurs deep in the sides of his horse, he pressed on, while Maggie held her breath in fear, for she knew that without practice no one could do what she had done.

There was a partially downward plunge—a fierce struggle on the shelving bank where the animal had struck a few feet from the top—then the steed stood panting on terra firma, while a piercing shriek broke the deep silence of the wood and Maggie's cheeks blanched to marble lize. The rider, either from fear or dizziness, had fallen at the moment the horse struck the bank, and from the ravine below there came no sound to tell if yet he lived.

"He's dead—he's dead!" cried Maggie. "Twas my own foolishness which killed him," and springing from Gritty's back she gathered up her long riding skirt and glided swiftly down the bank until she came to a wide projecting rock, where the stranger lay motionless and still, his white face upturned to the sunlight, which came stealing down through the overhanging boughs. In an instant she was at his side, and his head was resting on her lap, while her trembling fingers parted back from the pale brow the damp mass of curling hair.

"The fall alone would not kill him," she said, as her eye measured the distance, and then she looked anxiously round for water with which to bathe his face.

But water there was none, save in the stream below, whose murmuring flow fell mockingly on her ears, for it seemed to say she could not reach it. But Maggie Miller was equal to any emergency, adventuring out to the very edge of the rock she poised herself and looked down the dizzy height, to see if it were possible to descend.

"I can try at least," she said, and glancing at the pale face of the stranger, unhesitatingly resolved to attempt it.

The descent was less difficult than she anticipated, and in an incredibly short space of time she was dipping her tasteful violet cap in the brook, whose sparkling foam

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and never before been disturbed by a hand as soft and fair as hers. To ascend was not so easy a matter; but chamois-like, Maggie's foot tread lightly, the dangerous path, and soon knelt by the unconscious man, bathing his forehead with cold, old water, until he showed signs of returning life. His lips moved feebly at last, as if he would speak; and Maggie, bending low to catch the faintest sound, heard him utter the name of "Rose." In Maggie's bosom there was no feeling for the stranger, save that of pity, and yet that one word "Rose," thrilled her with a strange, undefinable emotion, awakening at once a yearning desire to know something of her who bore that beautiful name, and who, to the young man, was undoubtedly the one in all the world most dear.

"Rose," he said again, "is it you?" and his eyes, which opened slowly, looked at her with an eager, questioning look the face of Maggie, who, open-mouthed and impulsive as usual, answered, somewhat sadly: "I am not Rose, though I wish I was, if you would like to see her."

The tones of her voice recalled the stranger's wandering mind, and he answered: "Your voice is like Rose's, but I would rather see you, Maggie Miller. I like your fearlessness, so unlike most of your sex. Rose is far more gentle, more feminine than you, and if her very life depended upon it she would never dare leap that gorge."

The young man intended no reproach, and for the first time in her life began to think that possibly her manner was not always as womanly as might be. At all events she was not like the gentle Rose, whom she instantly invested with every possible grace and beauty, wishing that she herself was like her, instead of the wild mad-cap she was. Then, thinking her conduct required some apology, she answered, as none save one as fresh and ingenious as Maggie Miller would have answered: "I don't know any better than to have as I do. I've always lived in the woods—have never been to school a day in my life—never been anywhere except to camp-meeting, and once to Douglas store in Worcester!"

This was entirely a new phase of character to the man of the world, who laughed aloud, and at the mention of Douglas's store started so quickly that a spasm of pain distorted his features, causing Maggie to ask if he were badly hurt.

"Nothing but a broken leg," he answered; and Maggie, to whose mind broken bones conveyed a world of pain and suffering, replied: "Oh, I am so sorry for you, and it's all my fault too. Will you forgive me!" and her little chubby hands clasped his so pleadingly that, raising himself upon his elbow, so as to obtain a better view of her bright face, he answered: "I'd willingly break a hundred bones for the sake of meeting a girl like you, Maggie Miller."

Maggie was unused to flattery, save as it came from her grandmother, Theo or old Hagar, and now, paying no heed to his remark, she said: "Can you stay here alone while I go for help? Our house is not far away."

"I'd rather you would remain with me," he replied; "but as you cannot do both, I suppose you must go."

"I shan't be gone long," said Maggie, "and I'll send old Hagar to keep you company." So saying, she climbed the bank, and, mounting Gritty, who stood quietly awaiting her, she seized the other horse by the bridle and rode swiftly away, leaving the young man to meditate upon the novel situation in which he had so suddenly been placed.

"Ain't I in a pretty predicament?" said he, as he tried in vain to move his swollen limb, which was broken in two places, but which, being partially benumbed, did not now pain him much. "But it serves me right for chasing a harum-scurum thing when I ought to have been minding my own business and collecting bills for Douglas & Co. And she says she's been there, too. I wonder who she is, the handsome sprite. I believe I made her more than half jealous talking of my golden-haired Rose; but she is far more beautiful than Rose, more beautiful than any one I ever saw. I wish she'd come back again, and slitting his eyes he tried to recall the bright, animated face which had so lately bent anxiously above him.

"She tarries long," he said at last, beginning to grow uneasy. "I wonder how far it is, and where the deuce can this old Hagar be of whom she spoke."

"She's here!" answered a shrill voice, and looking up he saw before him the bent form of Hagar Warren, at whose door Maggie had paused for a moment while she told of the accident and begged of Hagar to hasten.

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Accordingly, equipped with a blanket and pillow, a brandy bottle and the camphor, old Hagar had come, but when she offered the latter for the young man's acceptance he pushed it from him, saying: "Camphor was his detestation, but he shouldn't object particularly to smelling of the other bottle!"

"No, you don't," said Hagar, who thought him in not quite so deplorable a condition as she had expected to find him. "My creed is never to give young folks brandy except in case of emergency." So saying, she made him more comfortable by placing a pillow beneath his head, and then, thinking possibly that this, to herself, was "a case of emergency," she withdrew to a little distance, and sitting down upon the gnarled roots of an upturned tree, drank a swallow of the old cognac, while the young man, maimed and disabled, looked wistfully at her!

Not that he cared for the brandy, of which he seldom tasted, but he needed something to relieve the death-like faintness which occasionally came over him, and which

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old Hagar, looking only at his wistful eyes, failed to observe. Only those who knew Henry Warner intimately gave him credit for the many admirable qualities he really possessed, so full was he of fun. It was in his merry eyes, and about his quizzically-shaped mouth, that the principal difficulty lay; and most persons, seeing him for the first time, fancied that in some way he was making sport of them. It was old Hagar's impression as he sat there in dignified silence, rather enjoying, than otherwise, the occasional groans which came from his white lips. There were intervals, however, when he was comparatively free from pain, and these he improved by questioning her with regard to Maggie, asking who she was and where she lived.

"She is Maggie Miller, and she lives in a house," answered the old woman, rather pettishly. (To be continued.)

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