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# A PRECIOUS INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER V.

**Trifles.**

"Why don't your grandmother take you with her?" said Hagar, who in a measure sympathized with Maggie for being thus isolated.

"She says we are too young to go into society," answered Mag. "It will be time enough two years hence, when I'm eighteen and Theo twenty. Then I believe she intends taking us to London, where we can show off our accomplishments, and practice that wonderful courtesy which Mrs. Jeffrey has taught us. I daresay the Queen will be astonished at our qualifications"; and with a merry laugh, as she thought of the appearance she should make at the Court of St. James, Mag leaped on Gritty's back and bounded away, while Hagar looked wistfully after her, saying as she wiped the tears from her eyes: "Heaven bless the girl! She might sit on the throne of England any day, and Victoria wouldn't disgrace herself at all by doing her reverence, even if she be a child of Hagar Warren."

As Maggie had said, Madam Conway was going to England. At first she thought of taking the young ladies with her, but, thinking they were hardly old enough yet to be emancipated from the schoolroom, she decided to leave them under the supervision of Mrs. Jeffrey, whose niece she promised to bring with her on her return from America. Upon her departure she bade Theo and Maggie a most affectionate adieu, adding:

"Be good girls while I am away, keep in the house, mind Mrs. Jeffrey, and don't fall in love."

This last injunction came involuntarily from the old lady, to whom their idea of falling in love was quite as preposterous as to themselves.

"Fall in love!" repeated Maggie when her tears were dried, and she with Theo was driving slowly home. "What could grandma mean! I wonder who is there for us to love, unless it be John the coachman, or Bill the gardener. I 'most wish we could get in love, though, just to see how 'twould seem, don't you?" she continued.

"Not with anybody here," answered Theo, her nose slightly elevated at the thoughts of people whom she had been educated to despise.

"Why not here as well as elsewhere?" asked Maggie. "I don't see any difference. But grandma needn't be troubled, for such things as men's boots never came near our house. I think it's a shame, though," she continued, "that we don't know anybody either male or female. Let's go down to Worcester some day and get acquainted. Don't you remember the two handsome young men whom we saw five years ago, in Douglas' store and how they winked at each other when grandma ran down their goods and said there were not any darning needles fit to use this side of the water!"

On most subjects Theo's memory was treacherous, but she remembered perfectly well the two young men particularly the taller one, who had given her a remnant of blue ribbon which he said was just the color of her eyes. Still, the idea of going to Worcester did not strike her favorably. "She wished Worcester would come to them," she said, "but she should not dare go there. They would surely get lost. Grandma would not like it, and Mrs. Jeffrey would not let them go, even if they wished."

"A fig for Mrs. Jeffrey," said Maggie. "I shan't mind her much. I'm going to have a real good time, doing as I please, and if you are wise, you'll have one, too."

"I suppose I shall do what you tell me to—I always do," answered Theo, submissively, and there the conversation cease.

Arrived at home, they found dinner awaiting them, and Maggie when seated, suggested to Mrs. Jeffrey that she should give them a vacation of a few weeks, just long enough for them to get rested and visit the neighbors. But this Mrs. refused to do.

"She had her orders to keep them at their books," she said, and "study was healthful;" at the same time she bade them be in the schoolroom on the morrow. There was a wicked look in Maggie's eyes, but her tongue told no tales, and when next morning she went with Theo, demurely to the schoolroom, she seemed surprised at hearing from Mrs. Jeffrey that every book had disappeared from the desk, where usually kept; and though the greatly disturbed and astonished lady had sought for them nearly an hour, they were not to be found.

"Maggie has hidden them, I know," said Theo, as she saw the mischievous look on her sister's face.

"Margaret wouldn't do such a thing, I'm sure," answered Mrs. Jeffrey, her voice and manner indicating a little doubt, however, as to the truth of her assertion.

But Maggie had hidden them, and no amount of coaxing could persuade her to bring them back. "You refused me a vacation when I asked for it, she said, "so I'm going to have it perforce;" and playfully catching up the little dumpy figure of her governess, she carried her out upon the piazza, and seating her in a large easychair, bade her "take snuff and comfort, too, as long as she liked."

Mrs. Jeffrey knew perfectly well that Maggie in reality was mistress of the house, that whatever she did Madam Conway would ultimately sanction; and as a rest was by no means disagreeable, she yielded with a good grace, dividing her time between sleeping, snuffing and dressing, while Theo lounged upon the sofa and devoured some musty old novels, which Maggie, in her rummaging, had discovered.

Meanwhile, Maggie kept her promise of visiting the neighbors, and almost every family had something to say in praise of the merry light-hearted girl, of whom they had heretofore known but little. Her favorite recreation, however, was riding on horseback, and almost every day she galloped through the woods and over the fields, usually terminating her ride with a call upon old Hagar, whom she still continued to tease unmercifully for the secret, and who was glad when at last an incident occurred which for a time drove all thoughts of the secret from Maggie's mind.

CHAPTER VI.

**The Junior Partner.**

One afternoon toward the middle of April, when Maggie, as usual, was flying through the woods, she paused for a moment beneath the shadow of a sycamore, while Gritty drank from a small brook. The pony having quenched his thirst, she gathered up her reins for a fresh gallop, when her ear caught the sound of another horse's hoofs; and, looking back, she saw approaching her at a rapid rate a gentleman whom she knew to be a stranger. Not caring to be overtaken, she chirruped to the spirited Gritty, who, bounding over the velvety turf, left the unknown rider far in the rear.

"Who can she be?" thought the young man, admiring theute fearlessness with which she rode; then, feeling a little piqued as he saw how the distance between them was increasing, he exclaimed: "Be she woman, or be she witch, I'll overtake her," and, whistling to his own fleet animal, he, too, dashed on at a furious rate.

"Trying to catch me, are you? thought Maggie. "I'd laugh to see you do it," and entering at once into the spirit of the race, she rode on for a time with headlong speed. Then, by way of tantalizing her pursuer, she paused for a moment until he had almost reached her, when, at a peculiar whistle, Gritty sprang forward, while Maggie's mocking laugh was borne back to the discomfited young man, whose interest in the daring girl increased every moment. It was a long, long chase she led him, over hills, across the plains, and through the grassy valley, until she stopped at last within a hundred yards of the deep, narrow gorge, through which the millstream ran.

"I have you now," thought the stranger, who knew by the dull, roaring sound of the water that a chasm lay between him and the opposite bank.

But Maggie had not yet half displayed her daring feats of horsemanship, and when he came so near that his waving brown locks and handsome dark eyes were plainly discernable she said to herself: "He rides tolerably well I'll see how good he is at a leap," and, setting herself more firmly in the saddle, she patted Gritty upon the neck. The well trained animal understood the signal, and rearing high in the air was fast nearing the bank, when the young man, suspecting her design, shrieked out: "Stop, lady, stop! It's madness to attempt it!"

"Follow me if you can!" was Maggie's defiant answer, and the next moment she hung in midair over the dark abyss.

Involuntarily the young man closed his eyes, while his ears listened anxiously for the cry which would come next. But Maggie knew full well what she was doing. She had leaped that narrow gorge often, and now, when the stranger's eyes unclosed, she stood upon the opposite bank, caressing the noble animal which had borne her safely there.

(To be continued.)


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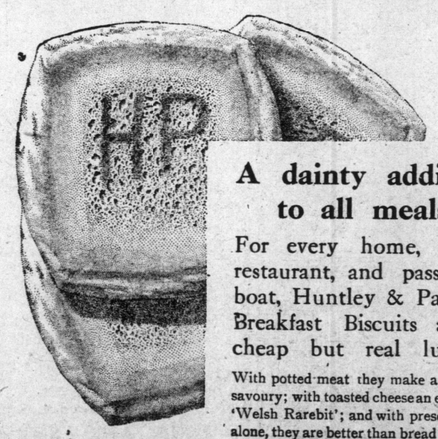
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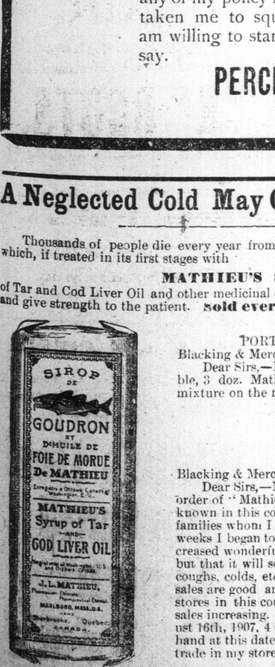
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