

that his eyes were a little restless, and that he spoke with a certain hurried excitability when he was interested in his subject. If he had been a horse you would have said that he was a high-couraged animal, nothing more. At dessert the children stared at him with round eyes, and I could see that my feeling of disappointment was shared by them; but they made no dreadful remarks, nor was the harmony of the evening in any way disturbed. As for his manners, nothing could have been more pleasant. His voice was rather loud, but not disagreeable; he talked a good deal—chiefly about sport—and was very cheery and unaffected and ready to make friends with everybody.

After dinner, Florry Neville took him away into a corner and began to flirt with him outrageously; but that I had known beforehand that she would do. I may mention that Florry's my cousin, and that I have been acquainted with her little ways for many years. Rufus appeared to be much taken with her. I don't know whether she chaffed him or not; but, if she did, her chaff must have been of a very mild order, for no one could have looked more complacent than he did when the ladies went up-stairs and we adjourned to the smoking room.

The next day he came out shooting with us, and shot uncommonly well; and in the evening we played pool, and, although he was fluked twice and sold once, he did not break the lamps. After he had been three days in the house he had made himself quite a popular person, having spoken no uncivil word to anybody, nor, offended against a single law of good breeding unless it were in his attention to Florry, which were perhaps just a shade too conspicuous, and which seemed to cause Mrs. Toogood some anxiety. But on the fourth day something happened which was quite certain to happen sooner or later. Florry grew tired of her red-haired admirer and took up with a more recent arrival. As soon as dinner was over I saw Percival make for the sofa upon which she was sitting with his supplanter; I saw her look up at him over her fan with that air of innocent surprise and inquiry which she knows so well how to assume when it suits her purpose; and then, after saying a few words to her, he suddenly whisked round upon his heels and came striding towards the fireplace with a scowl upon his face which boded no good to the Dresden shepherdess on the mantelpiece. Evidently the desire to break something was strong upon him; but he spared the china. All he did was to snatch up the poker and began hammering at the coals with a violence which sent some red-hot cinders flying out on to the hearthrug. This was certainly a breach of good manners; and when I mildly asked him whether anything was the matter, he inquired savagely what the devil I meant by that—which was worse. However he begged my pardon presently, and I said it was of no consequence.

On the following morning we went out after the partridges again, and I don't think I ever, in all my days, saw a man shoot so wildly as Percival did. He had started in a bad temper, and the worse he shot the more angry he became. Everybody who spoke to him got sworn at for his pains, and he ended by pulling up in the middle of a turnip-field, pitching his gun half a dozen yards away, and marching off, with his hands in his pockets, growling and muttering to himself.

"Dear me!" said Toogood, rubbing his head, as he gazed after his retreating guest, "how ridiculous it is, to be sure! Fancy a man of his age behaving like a spoiled child in that way!"

"Ah," said Moreton, "I told you how it would be. Now you'll see. He'll go back to the house and kill the first person he meets."

"I suppose I ought to go after him," sighed Toogood, ruefully.

But I said I would go; and my offer was accepted with alacrity.

"Do, like a good fellow, Oliver," answered Toogood; "I believe you can quiet him down better than anybody."

The truth is that our irascible friend had taken rather a fancy to me. Far be it from me to suggest that my own personal attractions were not amply sufficient to account for this; still, I have observed that, when I happen to be staying in the same house with Florry Neville, men often do take a fancy to me. I don't know why they should imagine that because she is my cousin it is worth their while to worm themselves into my good graces; but the fact remains that they do.

I overtook Percival in the adjoining field, where he had stopped short and waited for me, after having been shouted at three or four times.

"Well," he said, looking anything but amiable, "what's the row? What do you want?"

"I have brought you your gun," said I; "you may want it again, perhaps. I'm not quite up to the mark myself to-day, so I thought I might as well walk home with you."

This soft answer seemed to have the effect of turning away his wrath. He laughed, and clapped me rather heavily upon the shoulder, saying, "Upon my word, Oliver, you're an awfully good little chap!"

That is what one gets by being good-natured. I may be quite as sensitive about my diminutive stature as some other people are about their red hair; but because I don't fly into tantrums, a man thinks nothing of calling me "a good little chap;" whereas if I had said, for instance, "You aren't a bad sort of a red-headed duffer, Percival, after all," I suppose he would simply have torn me to pieces.

"The fact of the matter is," he went on, confidentially, "that I have a devil of a temper." He looked as if no expected me to express some surprise; so I said, "Have you, really?"

"Yes. I can control it pretty well generally; but every now and then it gets the upper hand of me. And it is irritating to go out for a morning's shooting and not to be able to touch a feather, isn't it?"

I said there was no doubt of that.

"Besides which, I have had other things to annoy me—annoy me most confoundedly," he went on, frowning, and clinching his fists in a manner which I afterwards found was habitual to him. "What do you think of Miss Novillo?" he asked, abruptly.

(To be Continued).



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