

guests after their flight to the drawing room. Lady Horsingham and Lady Banneret talked apart on a sofa; they were deep in the merits of their respective maids, and the failings of their respective proachers and the failings of their respective maids. Mrs. Marmaduke and Mrs. Marygold, having had a Book-Club feud, did not speak to each other, but communicated through the medium of Miss Finch, whose deafness rendered this a somewhat unsatisfactory process. Aunt Deborah went to sleep, as usual; and I tried the two Miss Bannerets consecutively, but ascertained that neither would open her lips, at lips, at least in the presence of mamma. At last I found a vacant place by the side of Mrs. Plumridge, and discovered immediately with the peculiar ironmasonry which I believe men do not possess, that she was one of my sort. She liked walking, riding, driving, dancing—all that I liked, in short; and she hated scandal-gossiping, sensible women, morning visits, and worsted-work, for all of which I confess to an unqualified aversion. We were getting fast friends when the gentlemen came in from their wine, honest Sir Brian's voice sounding long before he entered the room, and the worthy gentleman himself rolling in with an unsteady step—partly from incipient gout, and partly, I fancy, from a good deal of port wine. He took a vacant seat by me almost immediately, chiefly, I think, because it was the nearest seat; and avowing openly his great regard and admiration for my neighbor, Mrs. Plumridge, proceeded to make himself agreeable to both of us in his own way,—though I am concerned that he trod heavily on my sprained foot, and spilt the greater part of a cup of coffee over her satin gown. The Squire, whose nerves for the present were strung above blushing pitch, soon joined our little party; and whilst the two Miss Bannerets performed an endless duet on Aunt Horsingham's luckless pianoforte, and their brother, chocking in his stiff white neckcloth, turned over the leaves, Sir Brian bantered Mr. Haycock gracefully on his abstemiousness after dinner, an effort of self-denial of which no one could accuse him, and vowed, with much laughter, that Haycock must be in love! in love, Miss Coventry—don't you think so? A man that always used to take his two bottles as regularly as myself—I am a foe to excess, ladies, but Haycock's an anchorite, d—me—a monk! Haycock, monks mustn't marry, you know!—Wouldn't he look well with his feet shaven, Miss Coventry, and his head bare, and a rope round his neck? Sir Brian was getting confused, and had slightly transposed the clerical costume to which he alluded; but was quite satisfied that his little badinage was witty and amusing in the extreme; indeed, Mrs. Plumridge and I couldn't help laughing: but poor Squire Haycock's embarrassment was so intense, that he ordered his carriage immediately, and took leave, venturing, however, at the very last, to shake me by the hand, and braving once again the banter of the inebriated baronet.

'Stole away,' said Sir Brian; 'a shy man, Miss Coventry—a shy, diffident man, my friend Haycock, but true as steel—not a better landlord in the county—excellent neighbor—useful magistrate—good house—beautiful garden—lots of poultry, and a glass beehive—wants nothing but a wife! Order the carriage, my lady. Mrs. Plumridge, you must come and see us at Slopperly, and don't forget to bring Plumridge. Miss Coventry, you're a charming young lady, mind you come too.' So jolly Sir Brian wished us both a most affectionate good-night, and shaking Aunt Horsingham violently by both hands, packed himself into his carriage in a state of high good humor and confusion. I have since heard that on his arrival at Slopperly he stoutly refused to get out, declaring that he preferred to sit in the carriage whilst they changed horses, and avowing, much to his old butler's astonishment, his resolution to go at least one more stage that night.

humor at breakfast-time, particularly on Sundays. Cousin Amelia suggested my towels were too coarse—they had rubbed a color into my cheeks like a dairymaid's. John said I looked like a rose; a tea-rose, he added, as I handed him his cup. Cousin John is getting quite poetical, and decidedly improved since he left London. I wonder whom he got that letter from that was lying on his plate when he came down? I am not curious, but I just glanced at the direction, and I am certain it was in a lady's hand—not that it's any business of mine, only I should think Miss Molasses would hardly have the face to write to him. I wonder whether there is anything between John and Miss Molasses. I asked him, half spitefully, the other day, how he could bear to be parted from her now the season was over; and he seemed so pleased at my taking an interest in the thing at all, that I had no patience to go on with my cross-questioning. I don't think she's good enough for John, I must confess, but he is easily imposed on by young ladies—as indeed, for that matter, are the rest of his great thick-headed sex. When breakfast was over, and Cousin Amelia went off as usual to practice her music for an hour or two, I thought I might steal away for a visit to my favorites in the stables; indeed, I saw John at the front door, in a hideous wide-awake, with a long cigar in his mouth; but I was waylaid by Aunt Horsingham, and as these visits to the stable are strictly forbidden, I was obliged to follow her into the drawing-room, and resign myself for the whole morning to that dreadful worsted-work, more especially as it was coming on a drizzling mist, and there was no pretext for my usual walk.

'I am glad to see you getting more sociable Kate,' said Lady Horsingham, in her dry, harsh voice, as I took a seat beside her and opened my work-basket. 'It is never advisable for any young lady to affect singularity; and I have observed, with some concern, that your demeanor on many occasions is very unlike that of the rest of your sex.'

I never give in to Aunt Horsingham; after all she's not my own aunt, so I answered as pertly as ever I could—

'No; you mean I don't spend the morning in looking in the glass, and talking evil of my neighbors; I don't scream when I see a beetle, or go into convulsions because there's a mouse in the room. I've got two legs, very good legs, Aunt Horsingham—shall I show you them?—and I like to use them, and to be out of doors amongst the trees and the grass and the daisies, instead of counting stitches for work that nobody wants, or writing letters that nobody reads. I had rather give Brilliant a good "bucketing" (Aunt Horsingham shuddered—I knew she would, and used the word on purpose) over an even heath or a line of grass, than go bodkin in a chariot, seven miles an hour, with both windows up. Thank you, Aunt Horsingham; you would like to make a fine lady out of me—a useless, sickly, lackadaisical being instead of a healthy, active, light-hearted woman; much obliged to you, I had rather stay as I am.'

'Miss Coventry,' said my aunt, who was completely posed by my volubility, and apparently shocked beyond the power of expression at my opinions—'Miss Coventry, she repeated, 'if these are indeed your sentiments, I must beg, nay I must insist, on your keeping them to yourself whilst under this roof. (Amelia, my dear 'to my cousin, who was gliding quietly into the room'. 'Amelia, go back to your music for ten minutes.) I must insist, Miss Coventry, that you do not inoculate my daughter with these pernicious doctrines—this mistaken view of the whole duties and essentials of your sex. Do you think men appreciate a woman who, if she had but a beard, would be exactly like one of themselves? Do you think they like to see their ideal hot and dishevelled, plastered with mud, and clogged with wet? Do you think they wish her to

discussion; and we beguiled the time till luncheon by alternate fits of scandal and work, running through the characters of most of the neighbors for twenty miles, and completely demolishing the reputation of my friend, as they called her, lively, sarcastic little Mrs. Plumridge. John was off rabbit-shooting; so of course did not appear at that meal so essential to ladies; and after Cousin Amelia, by way of being delicate, had got through two outlets, the best part of a chicken, a plateful of rice-pudding, and a large glass of sherry, I ventured to propose to her that if the afternoon held up we should have a walk.

'I'm not equal to much fatigue,' said she, with a languid air and a heavy look about her eyes which I attributed to the luncheon; 'but if you like, we'll go to the garden and the hothouses, and be back in time for a cup of tea at five o'clock.'

'Anything to get out of the house,' was my reply; and forthwith I rushed up-stairs, two steps at a time, to put on my things, whilst my aunt whispered to her daughter loud enough for me hear, 'She really ought to have been a man, Emmy; did you ever see such a hoyden in your life?'

It was pleasant to get out even into that formal garden. The day was soft and misty, such as one often finds it towards the close of autumn—dark without being chill, and the withered leaves strawed the earth in all the beauty of wholesome natural decay. Autumn makes some people miserable; I confess it is the time of year that I like best. Spring makes me cross if it's bad weather, and melancholy if it's fine. Summer is very enjoyable, certainly, but it has a luxuriance of splendor that weighs down my spirits; and in those glorious hot, dreamy, hay-making days, I seem unable to identify myself sufficiently with all the beauty around me, and to pine for I don't exactly know what. Winter is charming, when it don't freeze, with its early candle-light and long evenings; but autumn combines everything that to me is most delightful—the joys of reality and the pleasures of anticipation. Cousin Amelia don't think so at all.

'A nasty raw day, Kate,' she remarked, as we emerged from the hothouse into the moist, heavy air. 'How I hate the country, except whilst the strawberries are ripe. Let's go back to the house, and read with our feet on the fender till tea-time.'

'Not yet, Emmy,' I pleaded, for I really pined for a good walk; 'let's go on the high road as far as the mile stone—it's market-day at Middlebury, and we shall see the tipsy farmers riding home, and the carriers' carts with their queer-looking loads; besides, think what a color you'll have for dinner. Come on, there's a dear!'

The last argument was unanswerable; and Cousin Amelia putting her best foot foremost, we soon cleared the garden and the approach, and emerged on the high road three miles from Middlebury, and well out of the sight of the windrows of Dangerfield Hall. As we rose the hill, on the top of which is perched the well known mile-stone, and my cousin began already to complain of fatigue, the sound of hoofs behind us caused us both to step and look round.

'It's cavalry,' said Amelia, who jumps rather rapidly to conclusions, and is no judge of a horse.

'It's a stud,' was my reply; 'somebody coming to hunt with "the Heavy-top." Let's stand in this gate-way and see them pass.'

We took up a position accordingly, and if I felt keen about the commencement of the season, how much more so did I become to watch the string of gallant well-bred horses now jogging quietly towards us with all the paraphernalia and accessories of the chase?

Two, four, six, and a back, all clothed and hooded, and packed for travelling. Such a chestnut in the van, with a minute boy on him, who cannot have weighed four stone—strong, flat, sinewy legs (the chestnut's, not the boy's), hocks and thighs clean, full, and muscular as Brilliant's, only twice the size; a long, square tail, and a wicked eye—how I

and then the dinner-bell rang, and the wearisome meal, and the long evening dragged on in their accustomed monotony; but I did not find it as dull as usual, though I was more rejoiced than ever when the hand-candle came, and we were dismissed to go to bed.

And now they are all fast asleep, and I can sit at my open window, and think, think, think, as much as I like. What a lovely night it is! The mist has cleared off, and the moon is glistening in the moonlight, and the old trees are silvered over and blackened alternately by its beams; the church tower stands out massively against the sky. How dark the old belfry looks on such a night as this, contrasting with the white tombstones in the churchyard, and the slated roof shimmering above the aisle! There is a faint breeze sighing amongst the few remaining leaves, now rising into a pleading whisper, now dying away with a sad unearthly moan. The deer are moving restlessly about the Park, now standing out on bold relief on some open space brightened by the moonlight, now flitting like spectres athwart the shade. Everything breathes of romance and illusion; and I do believe it is very bad for me to be watching here, dreaming wide awake, instead of snoring healthily in bed. I wonder what he is about at this moment? perhaps smoking a cigar out of doors, and enjoying this beautiful night. I wonder what he is thinking of!—perhaps, after all, he's stewed up in some lamp-lit drawing-room, talking nonsense to Lady Scapegrace and Mrs. Lumley, or playing that edacious whist at his club. Well, I suppose I may as well go to bed. One more look into the night, and then—hark! what is it? how beautiful! how charming! distant music from the wood at the low end of the Park; the deer are all listening, and now they troop down towards the noise in scores: how softly it dies away and rises again: 'tis a cornet-a-piston, I think, and though not very skillfully played, it sounds heavenly by moonlight. I never thought that old air of 'You'll remember me' half so beautiful before. Who can it be? I have never heard it since I came here. It can't be Captain Lovell's groom; it's not quite impossible it might be Captain Lovell himself. Ah! if I thought that! Well, it has ceased now. I may as well go to bed. What a happy day this has been, and what dreams I shall have!

CHAPTER XII.

Friday.—This has been an eventful day. I thought somehow it would be so; at all events, the first day's hunting is always an era to me—so when I came down to breakfast in my riding habit, and braved the cold glances of my aunt and the sarcasms of my cousin, I was prepared for a certain amount of excitement, although, I confess, I did not bargain for quite so much as I got.

'You'll enjoy yourself to-day, I trust, Miss Coventry,' said Aunt Horsingham, looking as black as thunder.

'Mind you don't get a fall,' observed Cousin Amelia, with a sneer; but I cared little for their remarks and remonstrances. White Stockings was at the door, Cousin John ready to lift me into my saddle, and I envied no mortal woman on earth, no, not our gracious Queen upon the throne, when I found myself fairly mounted, jogging gently down the Park, in all the delighted anticipation of a good day's sport. I think I would rather have ridden Brilliant of the two, but John suggested that the country was cramped and sticky, with small fields and blind fences. Now, White Stockings is an animal of great circumspection, and allows no earthly consideration to hurry him. He is, moreover, as strong as a dray-horse, and as handy, so John declares, as a fiddle. To him, therefore, was entrusted the honor of carrying me on my first appearance with the Heavy-top hounds. The meet was at no great distance

'I saw your horses on the way to Middlebury, yesterday,' I at length found courage to say; 'are you going to hunt all the season with the Heavy-top?'

How long do you stay at Dangerfield? was the counter question from Frank; 'you see I know the name of the place already; I believe I could find my way nowabout the Park; very picturesque it is, too, by night, Miss Coventry. Do you like music by moonlight?'

'Not if it's played out of tune,' I answered, with a laugh and a blush; but just then Squire Haycock, whom I scarcely knew in his hunting costume, rode up to us and begged as a personal favor to himself that we would accompany him to a particular point, from which he could ensure us a good start if the fox went away—his face becoming scarlet as he expressed a hope Miss Coventry would not allow her fondness for the chase to lead her into unnecessary danger; whilst Frank looked at him with a half-amused, half-puzzled expression, that seemed to say, 'What a queer creature you are; and what the deuce can that matter to you?'

I wonder why people always want to oblige you when you don't want to be obliged; too civil by half, is much more in the way than not half civil enough. So we rode on with Squire Haycock, and took up a position at the end of the wood that commanded a view of the whole proceedings, and, as Frank whispered to me, was the likeliest place in the world if he wanted to head the fox.

The Heavy-top hounds are an establishment such as, I am given to understand, is not usually kept in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and other so called 'flying counties.' I like to gain all the information I can—Cousin John calls this thirst for knowledge, 'female curiosity'—and gather from him that the Heavy-top consists of twenty-two couples of hunting-hounds, and that the whole twenty-two come out three times a week during the season. I don't see why they shouldn't, I am sure; they look fat, and remind me of the other hounds poor Uncle Horace used to keep when I was a child. He (that's my oracle, Cousin John) further adds, that they are remarkably 'steady'—which is more than can be said of their huntsman, who is continually drunk—and that they consume a vast quantity of flesh; which, far from being a virtuous, appears to me to be a disgusting tendency. They are capital line hunters, so says John; a line hunter, I imagine, is a hound that keeps sniffing about under the horses' feet, and must be a most useful auxiliary, when, as is often the case, the sportsmen are standing on the identical spot when the fox has crossed. He considers them a very killing pack, not in manners or appearance certainly, but in perseverance and enduring determination.

Their huntsman is what is called 'one of the old sort'; if this is a correct description I can only say that the old sort must have worn the brownest and shabbiest of boots, the oldest of coats, and the greasiest of caps; must have smelt of brandy on all occasions; and lived in a besotted state of general confusion, vibrating between 'delirium tremens' and 'delirium tremens.' They have, however, a certain whip, called Will, who appears to me to do all the work, and to keep everything right. When old Tippler dribs himself to death (a casualty which must shortly happen), Will is pretty sure to succeed him—an event which I fancy will greatly add to the efficiency of the Heavy-top hounds. To crown all, Frank Lovell did the whole thing 'slow'; but I have remarked, gentlemen make use of this epithet to convey their disapproval of that which they cannot find any positive fault with—just as we ladies call a woman 'bad style,' when we have nothing else to say in her disparagement.

(To be Continued.)