

Geraldine flushed an angry red. It was an unpleasant surprise to find he had repeated her words. She had not taken this into calculation. And Maggie was always such a fool about these sort of things, and had not an atom of discretion.

"Now look here," she said, "advancing towards her with a resolute mein, "I'm not going to stand any lecturing about honesty and so forth from you. So the sooner you understand the fact the better. It's not your place to preach to me, or to instruct me as to what I am, and what I am not to do. I only asked Captain Falconer a screw price for Paragon. He is quite sharp enough to know that, without your taking upon yourself to explain what the horse's exact infirmity is. If he and I are content, there is nothing more to be said."

"I don't agree with you," returned Maggie stoutly. "You are trying to get rid of a worthless old animal under false pretences, and you know that as well as I do."

"Fiddle-de-dee. I know nothing of the sort. May I ask if it is Captain Falconer's blue eyes and handsome face that have made you turn so straight-faced all of a sudden?"

Maggie blushed scarlet, but said in a steady voice:

"You should have confessed openly that Paragon was gone in the wind, instead of leaving Captain Falconer under the impression that the horse was sound."

"Now, is it likely, Maggie? Do people ever volunteer those sort of statements when they have an animal for sale? I really gave you credit for a little more worldly wisdom."

"What is the use of worldly wisdom, when the very first time Captain Falconer rides Paragon he will find you out?"

"That's my affair," returned Geraldine, lightly. "I've no doubt I shall be able to smooth him over."

"Even if you do, your insincerity will remain the same, and—and," added Maggie, with tears in her voice, "you have made me tell him a story, and now he thinks we are both bad."

"Rubbish! What do you mean by both bad?"

"Captain Falconer evidently doubted your word, for he asked me as a favour to tell him if Paragon were really sound," explained Maggie.

Geraldine changed color. This put a new and a much more awkward complexion on matters. She was sharp enough to know that if Maggie had spoken the truth she could not but be greatly damaged in the gentleman's estimation. But then she had never reckoned on his asking questions of a third party behind her back, and felt most indignant at the proceeding.

"I call it awfully shabby of Captain Falconer, cross questioning a child like you," she said, a trifle uneasily. "May I ask what reply you made?"

"I said that you knew better than I. If I had answered frankly, I should have betrayed you, and then I was afraid he would not like you any more."

Geraldine cast down her blue eyes, and heaved a great sigh of relief. She went up to Maggie, and patted her on the back in a cordial and approving fashion.

"After all," she said, "you are not such a bad little thing in your way, and whatever your faults may be nobody can accuse you of being a sneak."

Maggie coloured up with pleasure on hearing this somewhat qualified praise. She got so few kind words from this pretty sister of hers that she valued them beyond their worth.

"Geraldine, dear," she said, looking up into the other's face, "you are so beautiful, and I am sure Captain Falconer admires you very much, as indeed, how could he help doing? but—take my advice. Don't attempt to deceive him. He's not the kind of man to forgive a woman when he finds her out in telling him stories. It's not too late yet to put matters right, and he would like you all the better for behaving straightforwardly."

For an instant Geraldine hesitated as she looked into the depths of the pleading eyes raised to her own. Then her lower nature conquered the better instincts roused by Maggie's speech.

"Nonsense," she said sharply. "You cannot possibly know anything about Captain Falconer, one way or the other. As I said before, do leave me to manage my own affairs. And now for goodness' sake go to bed, for I'm catching my death of cold standing here listening to you."

"You won't tell the truth, Geraldine! Have you quite made up your mind?"

"Yes. Why should I? It's not my place to volunteer information, any more than it is yours to dictate to your elder sister. Good-night, parson."

"Good-night," answered Maggie, recognizing the futility of her efforts, and turning away sorrowfully. She could not understand Geraldine. It seemed to her extraordinary that her sister's discernment of character should be so slight as to prevent her from seeing how entirely against her own best interests she was acting.

"She thinks he will forgive her, but I know he won't," mused Maggie. "His whole face changed this afternoon when I told that abominable fib, and oh! how I wish now that I had never done it. But one thing I have quite made up my mind about, Geraldine or no Geraldine, he shall not be imposed upon."

The only difficulty after arriving at this determination, was how to put it into execution. She was still reluctant to betray her sister, for, however much she might and did condemn her conduct, she realized that she was not the proper person to reveal its iniquity. That the consequences would prove far more serious than the mere non-selling of Paragon Maggie felt convinced. It seemed to her that Geraldine's fate hung in the balance. Her powers of prescience had grown curiously sharpened.

(To be Continued.)

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