

the stranger. Not till he had hurried away did they feel free to enjoy the views to be obtained from this spot.

"I hope we have seen the last of him," said Marjorie, pettishly. "He has contrived to be a nuisance to us this morning, and yet he is young, and well dressed, and not bad looking."

"He is gone—forget him," replied Joan. "After all the route was as free to him as to us. We are not likely to encounter him again."

Nor did they till the following day. Marjorie fancied she caught sight of him on the pier at Sandown, were they were lingering in the twilight to watch the moon rise, but was not certain, so said nothing about it.

But on the morrow, as they were exploring the beauties of Shanklin Chine, his dark face looked down upon them from the top of a flight of steps. He was gone instantly, but the encounter was a provoking one. If he were not dogging their steps, why did he start and avoid them as soon as he saw that he was descried?"

"What signifies," said Joan, in her most matter-of-fact style. "He may be mistaking us for some of the celebrities now on tour in the island. You are not unlike one of our famous actresses, Marjorie; or he may be deceived by my blue goggles into thinking I am a German archduchess. While he climbs the Chine we will return to the beach. The tide is out, and it is possible to get round the foot of Dunnose to Luccombe and the Landslip. We may pick up some Isle of Wight diamonds as we go."

Accordingly Joan's suggestion was acted upon, and towards the close of a day of scrambling up and down the most romantic of paths, and pausing ever and anon to enjoy the exquisite bits of scenery, the friends, tired and hungry, passed through Bonchurch on their way to the Ventnor Hotel, at which they had, by telegraph, secured rooms.

On the low wall of Bonchurch Pond sat the stranger, and though he vanished as soon as they drew near, they met with him again at the door of the Temperance Hotel.

Was he staying there too?

Apparently so, for ere they could be certain that the recognition was mutual he disappeared into the coffee room.

"If he does cross our path again," declared Joan, angrily, "I will march up to him boldly—fortified by my spectacles, of course, and demand his name and address."

"And if he declines to satisfy you?"

"Why then I'll give him in charge!" said Joan, promptly.

"On what charge?" queried Marjorie, and as her friend had no answer ready, she made none.

But in the middle of the night Marjorie sat up in bed, exclaiming:

"I know; I have guessed who he is, and what brings him here! It is Aunt Dawson's doings. She is so afraid something will happen to we two adventurous damsels that she is paying a policeman in plain clothes to keep guard over us."

"As if we were not to be trusted," commented Joan, sitting up too. "Why, it is intolerable; and I for one refuse to submit to such degrading surveillance."

"How are we to help ourselves?"

But Joan would not answer this yet.

"Go to sleep, Madge, and I'll tell you in the morning."

Marjorie obeyed, but seemed to have scarcely closed her eyes when she was aroused.

"Up with you, sluggard! It is six o'clock. I have already interviewed a chamber-maid, who will have breakfast ready for us in half an hour."

"And wherefore?" was asked in sleepy tones. "I decidedly prefer my rolls and coffee at nine."

"I will tell you while I brush your hair for you. I am determined to circumvent our body guard. If you make haste we shall be on the road before he has left his room. I shall also enquire the most direct route to Niton, and deliberately follow another. Seest thou, maiden? Agreeest thou?"

"I shall enter into your plans with all my heart as soon as I am wide awake," was the yawning response. "By all means let us press on if by so doing we can shake off the spy. It takes away half the enjoyment of our tour to know that we are watched and followed wherever we go."

A plunge into her bath and Marjorie was her own merry self. Breakfast was quickly despatched, and so briskly did the friends set forth that they might have reached Niton, which was to be their first stopping-place, before the sun was high, if Marjorie had not been continually tempted to botanize, and Joan to sketch.

"I am getting awfully hungry!" said the former, presently.

"There are houses in sight," Joan told her. "This is Puckaster Bay we are skirting; and not far from the lighthouse point there is a dear little old-fashioned inn. I saw it two summers ago when I came here with my brother. We will lunch there."

"On bread and cheese and cresses," sang Marjorie. "Exhausted nature must be invigorated before we can climb St. Catherine's Hill, especially if you are correct in saying it is the highest in the island."

"Here is the inn," said Joan, ten minutes later, as, with her hands full of the pretty pink flowers of the sea-gull weed, Marjorie came to her side.

"It looks deliciously primitive and restful. We will stay here to-night, if mine host and hostess please us. Let us go in and see what they are like."

Joan opened the white gate of the neatly kept garden, took half-a-dozen steps along the gravel path, then biting her lip and reddening, she beat a hasty retreat.

"He is there!" she gasped, "sitting just inside that window, in the easiest of attitudes; and—and he peered at me over the top of the newspaper he was pretending to read. I'll never forgive you, Aunt Dawson—never!"

"What shall we do?" asked Marjorie, faintly. "I am so hungry; and

one of those children playing under the trees told me that it was half a mile to the village, and all up hill!"

Muttering something about finding a baker's shop somewhere, Joan led the way to where a signal-post led to Niton; but there stopped and listened. It was the "toot-toot" of a horn, and the steady tramp-tramp of four horses that she heard. The coach for Freshwater was just coming into sight. The coachman drew up his team in obedience to her uplifted hand. Every seat outside was full; but inside—

Dragging Marjorie after her, she jumped into the coach. Another "toot" of the horn, and away they went, Joan crying, triumphantly:

"Now we have distanced him indeed!"

"And lost half our walk," added Marjorie. "I had set my heart on seeing Walpen Chine, and Whale Chine, and the submerged forest at Brooke, and the Druid stone at Mottistone, and astonishing the Franklyns with our pedestrianism. Instead of which, it will seem as if we had broken down in the middle."

"We could not go on with a strange man always at our heels," she was reminded. "How far is it, did you ask? About twenty miles, I think."

"Twenty miles, and I am starving! I think I had better finish the sleep you broke in upon, and forget my woes."

And Marjorie dozed very comfortably till a touch from Joan awoke her. They had arrived, and were received with open arms by Mr. and Mrs. Franklyn.

Their description of their journey—told as it was by Joan with irritating humor—evoked shouts of laughter, Mr. Franklyn protesting that he owed a debt of gratitude to the unknown for having driven his guests to Freshwater at least two days earlier than they were expected.

"How delightful!" observed Marjorie on the second evening after their arrival, when Joan and Mr. Franklyn were touching up some sketches made in the morning; and she and Mrs. Franklyn were lounging in low chairs beside an open window. "How delightful it is to find you alone, and to be able to monopolize you! I was so afraid you might have a mob of people staying here!"

"We did not invite anyone but a cousin, who could not come, and you two dear girls," was the reply. "I expect my brother will join us. Morton Hemsley, the author; you know his books? Now you shall know him."

"By George! here he is!" exclaimed Mr. Franklyn, jumping up and hurrying into the long entrance-hall to welcome the new-comer.

As he had left the door of the room open it was impossible to help hearing what passed.

"Yes, here I am. How is Polly? What a pretty spot you have hit upon!" exclaimed a deep, pleasant voice. "How did I come? Tramped it, of course; and a jolly walk it has been, in spite of drawbacks."

"Of what kind—headaches or blistered feet?"

"Neither, I am happy to say. But at Stokes Bay, where I crossed to Ryde, I met old Mrs. Dullerton—you know her?—the mother of half a dozen antiquated spinsters—and she told me two of her daughters were enjoying a walking-tour in the island; and as she was sure we should meet she loaded me with messages for them."

"And did you meet the dear old girls?"

"My good fellow, they haunted me! At Seaview I first dropped upon the pair. I should say couple, for one was an amazon in blue gig-lamps, the other a little woman who shrouded her middle-aged charms in brown gauze. Yes, they first appeared at Seaview, and from that time I could not get away from them. Wherever I went, there they came too. But what is it amuses you so very much? Is Mary here?"

Morton Hemsley walked unceremoniously into the sitting-room, folded his sister in an affectionate embrace, and then became aware that she was not alone. Moreover, that the beautiful, ladylike young women who were her companions, were blushing and laughing in a most unaccountable manner.

"Allow me to do the introducing," cried Mr. Franklyn. "Joan, my dear—Marjorie, darling—this is the detective in plain clothes who marred your holiday; Morton, I have the pleasure of presenting you to Miss Joan Orton, the amazon of your adventure; and this is little Madge Gordon, the ancient maiden of the brown gauze veil."

There were merry explanations given and demanded, Joan inquiring, with all the gravity she could muster, whether she ought not to resent to the death the strictures passed on her commanding figure.

But the offender must have taken great pains to atone for his rudeness, for the next walking-tour Joan Orton undertook was not with pretty Marjorie Gordon, who was preparing for a journey to New York with an American bridegroom, but with her own newly-wedded husband, Morton Hemsley, the author.

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