

## Kate Coventry.

## CHAPTER X.

CONTINUED.)

he had even gone the length of vowing that he would have shot his clumsy retriever for being the cause of the accident, only he let her off because if it hadn't been for the dog;—and here, seeing Cousin Amelia's eye fixed upon us, my companion stopped dead short, and concealed his blushes in a glass of champagne. Taking courage from that well-iced stimulant, he reverted to our railway journey in company.

'I knew you again this morning, Miss Coventry, I assure you, a long way off; in fact, I was going the other way—only, seeing you walking in that lonely part of the down, I feared you might be frightened' (he was getting bright scarlet again), 'and I determined to watch you at a little distance, and be ready to assist you if you were alarmed by tramps, or sheep-dogs, or—'

I thought he was getting on too fast, so I stopped him at once by replying:

'I am well able to take care of myself, Mr. Haycock, I assure you, and I like best walking quite alone; after which I turned my shoulder a little towards him, and completely discomfited him for the rest of dinner. One great advantage of diffidence in man is, that one can so easily reduce him to the lowest depths of despondency; but then, on the other hand, he is apt to think one means to be more cruel than one really does, and one is obliged to be kind in proportion to previous coldness, or the stupid creature breaks away altogether. When the ladies got up to leave the dining-room, I dropped my handkerchief well under the table, and when it was returned to me by the Squire I gave him such a look of gratitude as I knew would bring him back to me in the evening. Nobody hates flirting so much as myself, but what is one to do shut up in a country-house, with no earthly thing to occupy or amuse one?

Tea and coffee served but little to produce cordiality amongst the female portion of the 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 preachers and the failings of their respective maids. Mrs. Marmalade 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 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 freemasonry 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, chok- ing in his stiff white neckcloth, turned over the leaves, Sir Brian bawled Mr. Haycock gracefully on his abstemiousness after dinner, an effort of self-denial of which no one could accuse him, and yowled, with much laughter,

## CHAPTER XI.

I must despair of being able, in simple narrative, to convey the remotest idea of the dulness of Dangerfield Hall; but as during my residence there I beguiled the weary hours by keeping a diary (bound in blue velvet, with brass clasps, and a Bramah lock), I have it in my power, by transcribing a few of its pages, to present to my readers my own impressions of life in that well-regulated establishment. I put things down just as they happened, with my own reflections, more or less philosophical, on the events of each day. My literary labors were invariably carried on after the family had retired for the night; and I may observe that a loose white dressing-gown, trimmed with Mechlin lace and pink ribbons, one's hair of course being taken down, is a costume extremely well adapted to the efforts of composition. I take a day from the diary at random:—

Thursday.—Up at half-past seven: peeped in the glass the instant I was out of bed, and wondered how Cousin Amelia looks when she wakes; yellowish, I should think, and by no means captivating, particularly if she wears a nightcap. I don't care how ugly a woman is, she has no right to look anything but fresh in the morning, and yet how few possess this advantage! Nothing like open air and plenty of exercise; saving one's complexion is undoubtedly the very way to spoil it. Saw Brilliant and White Stockings going to exercise in the Park: what coddles they look on these fine autumn mornings, covered with clothing! Felt very keen about hunting; the same feelings always comes on at the fall of the leaf; shouldn't wonder if I could jump a gate, with my present nerves. Should like once in my life to plant a field of horsemen, and show these gentlemen how a woman can ride. Interrupted in my day-dreams by Lady Horsingham's bell, and huddled on my things in a tremendous hurry; forced to wash my hands in cold water, which made the tips of my fingers as red as radishes for the rest of the day. Got down to prayers by half-past eight, and took Aunt Deborah her tea and toast from the breakfast-table at nine.

Breakfast dull, and most of the party cross. Aunt Horsingham is generally out of 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 bideous 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

be strong and independent of them, and perhaps their superior at these very sports and exercises on which they plume themselves? Do you think they are to be taken by storm, and, so to speak, bullied into admiration? You're wrong, Kate, you're wrong; and I believe I am equally wrong to talk to talk to you in this strain, inasmuch as the admiration of the other sex ought to be last thing coveted or thought of by a young person of yours.'

'I'm sure, Aunt, I don't want the men to admire me,' I replied; 'but I would not give much for the admiration of one who could be jealous of me for so paltry a cause as my riding better than himself; and as for ideals, I don't know much about such things, but I think a man's ideal may do pretty well what she likes, and he is sure to think everything she does do is perfect. Besides, I don't see why I should bully him into liking me because I'm fond of the beautiful out-of-doors instead of the fireside. And courageous women, like courageous men, are generally a deal more gentle than the timid ones. I've known ladies, who would not venture into a carriage or a boat, who could wage a war of words bitterer than the veriest trooper would have at his command; and I've heard Cousin John say that there is scarcely an instance of a veritable heroine in history, from Joan of Arc downwards, who was not in her private life as sweet, as gentle and as womanly as she was high-couraged and undaunted when the moment came that summoned her energies to the encounter. Unselfishness is the cause in both cases, you may depend. People that are always so dreadfully afraid something is going to happen to them, think a great deal more of self than anything else; and the same cause which makes them tremble at imaginary danger for their own sakes, will make them forgetful of real sufferings in which they themselves have no share. I had rather be a hoyden, Aunt Horsingham, and go on in my own way. I have much more enjoyment; and, upon my word, I don't think I'm one bit a worse member of society than if I was the most delicate fine lady that ever fainted away at the overpowering smell of a rose-leaf, or the merry peal of a noisy child's laugh.'

My aunt lifted up her hands and gave in; for the return of Cousin Amelia from the music-room, effectually prevented further 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 cutlets, 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 strewed 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

should like to ride that chestnut. Then a brown and two bays, one of the latter scarcely big enough for a hunter, to my fancy, but apparently as thoroughbred as Eclipse; then a gray, who seemed to have a strong objection to being led, and who held back and dragged at his rein in a most provoking manner; and lastly, by the side of a brown hack that I fancied I had seen before, a beautiful black horse, the very impersonation of strength, symmetry, speed, and all that a horse should be.

'Ask the groom whose they are,' whispered Amelia, as he went by. 'I don't quite like to speak to him; he looks an impudent fellow, with those dark whiskers.'

I should like like to see the whiskers that would frighten me; so I stopped boldly out into the road, and accosted him at once.

'Whose horses are those, my man?' I asked, with my commanding air.

'Captain Lovell's, Miss,' was the reply. My heart jumped into my mouth, and you might have knocked me down with a feather.

'Captain Lovell's!' exclaimed Amelia; 'why, that's your old flirt, Kate. I see it all now,—but I hardly heard her, and when I looked up the horses were a mile off, and we were retracing our steps towards Dangerfield Hall.'

What a happy day this has been, and how unpromising was its beginning! And yet I don't know why I should have been so happy. After all, there is nothing extraordinary in Captain Lovell's sending down a stud of horses to hunt with so favorite a pack as 'the Heavy-top' hounds. I wish I had summoned courage to ask the man when his master was coming, and where he was going to stay; but I really couldn't do it, no, not if my life depended on it. All the way home, Cousin Amelia laughed, and sneered, and chattered, and once she acknowledged I was the best tempered girl in the world; but I am sure I have not an idea why I deserve this character; her words fell perfectly unheeded on my ear. I was glad to get to the solitude of my own room, when it was time to dress for dinner, that I might have the luxury, if it was only for five minutes, of thinking undisturbed; but there was Aunt Deborah to be attended to; for poor Aunt Deborah, I am sorry to say, is by no means well, and Gertrude came in to do my hair; 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-candles 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 one 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 odious 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

from Dangerfield Hall, and being the beginning of the season, and a favorite place there was a considerable muster of the elite of the country, and a goodly show of very respectable horses to grace the covert side. As we rode up to the mounted assemblage, I perceived, by the glance of curiosity, not to say admiration, directed at myself and White Stockings, that ladies were unusual visitors in that field, and that the Heavy-top gentleman were not prepared to be cut down, at all events, by a woman. Cousin John seems to know them all and to be a universal favorite.

'Who's the lady, John, my boy?' whispered a fat squire, in a purple garment, with a face to match; 'good seat on a horse, eh? rides like a bird, I'll warrant her.' I did not catch John's answer; but the corpulent sportsman nodded, and smiled, and whinced, and wheezed out, 'Lucky dog—pretty couple—double harness.'

I don't know what he meant; but it was something tensely ludicrous, I gather from his nearly choking with laughter at his own concluding observation, though John blushed and looked rather like a fool.

'Who's that girl on the chestnut?' I again heard asked by a slang-looking man, with red whiskers meeting under his chin; 'looks like a larker—I must get introduced to her,' added the conceited brute. How I hated him! If he had ventured to speak to me, I really think I could have struck him over the face with my riding-whip.

'I told you it would not be long before we met, Miss Coventry,' said a well-known voice beside me; and turning round, I shook hands with Captain Lovell; and I am ashamed to confess, shook all over into the bargain. I am always a little nervous the first day of the season. How well he looked in his red coat and neat appointments, with his graceful seat upon a horse, and so high-bred, amongst all the country squires and jolly yeomen that surrounded us! He had more color, too, than when in London; and altogether I thought I had never seen him looking so handsome. The chestnut with the wicked eye, showing off his fine shape, now divested of clothing, curvetted and bent to his rider's hand as if he thoroughly enjoyed that light restraining touch: the pair looked what the gentlemen call all over like going, and I am sure one of them thought so too.

'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 now about 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.