

'As if that would make any difference!'
'Of course it would make a difference.'
'Well, I'm going in now. You'd better come.'

But Ada turns back and goes out again at the little gate. Maud opens the glass door. Within is a low, wide passage, still darker than the alley, with quaint old-fashioned prints in black frames on the walls. At the end of this, and running at right angles with it, or rather in the form of a T, is another and longer passage, with a wide-silled window looking into a garden. To the right is the door of the sitting-room, and other doors are along the passage. On the left is the kitchen, all alight now with sunshine streaming in through the wide, low window from the rick-yard, with the glow from a huge fire in the deep chimney, with refractions from silver and glass on the well-spread tea-table drawn up to the window, with the beaming face of cousin Margaret cutting up plum-cake at the dresser.

'Just in time, Maud,' she smiles benignly. 'Garde has come—and I've sent him up to his own old room. Run and take off your hat, for I've made tea, and the chickens are being taken off the spit.'

Maud does as she is bidden, and smooths her hair at the little black-framed glass in her quaint little room, wondering whether her cousin's four years of exile have changed him very much. He has written to her several times since then, but people's letters seldom show the changes in themselves—certainly not the outward changes—which strike one so much after long absence. She wonders, too, with a little heart-beating, whether he will think her changed, and as pretty as she was at fifteen. For Maud has a very pretty face.

She does not change her brown-holland dress—it looks as neat and nice as possible, with its linen collar and crimson tie. She had a neat little figure too, prettily rounded. So she twists her long curls round her fingers—whereon no rings glitter except one little garnet hoop, a birthday present from her cousin long ago—and looks at her round roseate cheeks and soft violet eyes in the glass, and smiles complacently at the reflection which even the green shade of the little mirror cannot mar.

Then she goes to meet her hero.

He is in the kitchen, standing in the middle of the floor, talking to his mother—a tall, strongly-built young man in dark-blue serge, with his blue stockings and knickerbockers, and dark wavy hair parted in the centre of his head. He has a very dark, sunburnt face, with a dark moustache, and a pair of keen, brown eyes.

He has a full view of Maud as she comes down the passage. He meets her at the door, and, taking her hand, stoops to kiss her just as he used four years ago. Maud feels at home with him in a moment; the four years are as a dream that is gone—as a shadow when it departeth.

'You're not a bit changed,' Garde says, looking down at her with laughing eyes.

'And you're not changed either—at least, not much,' she answers, looking up at him.

'Where's Ada?' cousin Margaret asks, glancing up from her plate of plum-cake.

'She went round to the farm-yard, I think. We came back together just now from the high pasture.'

'She's with the boys,' cousin Margaret supposes, not without reason.

Ada is with the boys. They are all in the great dusky barn at this moment, where the air is sweet with the smell of grain, and the walls are lined with the great piled sheaves and heaps of golden-brown wheat. The boys are trying to make a little wiry-haired terrier fetch a rat from behind the threshing-machine, and Ada watches with interest, prepared to decamp, if the rat is caught, before anything sanguinary happens. With her big hat awry, and fun in her arms, she stands at gaze, with Fred at her side, and Jack and Charlie urging on the terrier. Outside is the sunny farm-yard, with women milking five sleek cows in one corner, and horses drinking in another, and ducks and geese and hens and pigeons quacking and cackling and cooing in the low sunshine, and the dairy door open, showing a glimpse of cool flagged floor and great round shallow yellow pans full of milk and cream.

The terrier is evidently not clever at catching rats. Three or four other dogs are excluded from the affair, and sit or stand outside the barn door, with deep interest depicted in their faces, for what is going on within.

'I see the rat quite plainly!' Charlie shouts. 'He has got partly under the machine, only his red head is visible on the father side, between the machine and a pile of sheaves. If I had a gun, I could shoot him in a second.'

'Run for the gun, Jack!' Fred cries excitedly. Fred is a lathy lad of nineteen, who will yet be a fine-looking man, if he does not stoop so much. A little drilling will do him all the good in the world.

Jack runs for the gun only too willingly. Ada does not object to see the rat shot, though she would object to see it worried, so she waits the issue calmly, standing in the barn door.

'Boys—Ada—you're all to come in to tea.'

It is Maud's voice, and Ada turns to look at her. She is standing just outside with—whom? The forgotten cousin! Ada, with instinctive coquetry, bethinks her of her own appearance and shudders.

'Well, Ada!' Garde Ruthven says, going to her and holding out his hand.

She shakes hands with him rather nonchalantly, because she knows appearances are against her, and she does not want to make up for them by warmth of manner.

(To be Continued.)

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