

know ; and I couldn't stand it any longer ; and he is not so bad ; but I love you the best—oh, so much the best ! You know it ; only I—I—I am so miserable."

"Doubtless," he said gravely, never for an instant removing his eyes from the fair piteous face ; "so am I—very miserable ; so have I been for the past month ; but my misery doesn't seem to touch you much. So you are going to marry this Crossus, this elderly, future baronet, and throw me over quite, are you, Leila ?"

She twisted and untwisted her hands nervously, but made no reply.

"And you are good enough to take sufficient interest in me to wish me not to break my neck to-morrow ?"

She was still silent.

"Very good. Then listen to me. I ride to-morrow, and I ride to win, and you are to be the prize. Yes, you—do not look so startled—you. I ride to win, or I ride to—Never mind that part of the business. If I win I shall consider you mine in spite of all the Maj Arburtons in the world. If not—do you understand the alternative, Leila ?"

She bent her head. Could she avoid understanding it ?

"It lies with you," he went on steadily. "You know my horse, you know the race course, you know me. If to-morrow before starting you bid me ride to win, very good ; if not—The music has begun again. Shall I take you back to your elderly, future baronet ?"

"My dear Leila, what nonsense !" cried Mrs. Anstruthers. "Rub your cheeks, child, and drink this wine. You look as white as a ghost, and about as unhappy. Not go to the races ! You will have everyone saying it is all off again just as it is all on. It is too aggravating of you, really."

It was the day following the ball. Leila, in her sister's room, was utterly refusing to accompany her to the race course, and equally positive in her refusal to see Maj Arburton.

"I know what it is," Mrs. Anstruther went on angrily ; "that boy has been talking nonsense to you. It was too foolish of you to give him a dance last night. If I had known of it I should have taken you home, most certainly."

"He did not talk nonsense, and he is not foolish, nor is he a boy," cried Leila vehemently ; and then she gave way and relapsed into copious weeping.

"At any rate he is only a sub-lieutenant, and cannot possibly have more than five hundred a year. And what is more, he doesn't mean it seriously with you. If you throw over Maj Arburton now you will be throwing him over for a mere shadow. Everybody knows what a flirt Charlie Willoughby is. He makes love to every girl he meets."

"That isn't true !" exclaimed Leila, with an effort at drying her tears.

"H'm ! how about Fanny Hope and one or two others I could mention ?" Silence. "And how about his debts ?" Silence. "And his gambling—and that actress, and —"

Leila sprang to her feet. "I won't listen any more !" she cried. "I do care for him, and I hate Maj Arburton, and I won't marry him, and I will not go to the races to day."

Mrs. Anstruther grew pale. She felt her last chance was going. "Then I shall have to remind you," she said sternly, "that I cannot support all my brothers and sisters all their lives. I did my best for Neil, and I am doing my best for you. You seem to forget that I have children of my own to be brought up. I counted on your marrying as soon as possible. I did not count on your throwing up a reasonable chance."

It was cruel, but it had its effect. Leila turned very white, then she moved to the door. "I will go with you," she said, scarcely above a whisper.

The ladies' prize race was the next on the programme. Considerable excitement prevailed among the fair sex as to who would win it. Leila alone sat calm and unmoved among the spectators. She did not seem to hear or see anything till suddenly there was a little stir and bustle, and murmurs of "Of course he'll win ;" "He's sure of the race ;" "I feel inclined to congratulate you already, Mr. Willoughby ; you look so like winning," etc.

The hero of the race took little notice of such like remarks. He made his way to Leila and bent low over her.

"Which is it to be ?" he asked.

For an instant earth and sky reeled round her, then her brain cleared, and she saw his face, resolute, handsome, desperate. She hesitated for one instant, then she spoke :

"Ride to win."

The words were so low he could scarcely hear them, but when he turned away there was a smile in his eyes.

The horses and their riders were drawn up in a line. Leila strained her eyes to watch every movement of black and white, Mr. Willoughby's color. Mazepa fidgeted and caught at the bit. There was some little delay, then the flag dropped ; they were off. At first breathless silence, then growing excitement. The course was a small one, and the race was to be run twice round.

Maj. Arburton, who had not taken part in it, uttered a "Thank God !" as Mazepa passed the dangerous corner in safety for the first time. "Blue's to the front ; no, yellow's pushing up ; no, that's Meldon. Stick to it, Meldon. Willoughby's passed him. By jove ! he's got his work cut out for him with that horse. Now they're neck and neck. Good race. No, Willoughby's gaining ; no, Meldon ; no—by heaven !"

A scream from one of the ladies, a general consternation in the grand stand, a sudden cessation of interest in the race. Charlie Willoughby rode to win, but the providence he had dared revenged itself on him. Mazepa had forced the bit between his teeth, shied away from the course and, leaping the frail protection of a hedge, which separated it from the side of the hill, had disappeared with his rider.

"It was a narrow shave, and no mistake," said Charlie Willoughby, going over the story for the hundredth time with his wife the second month of their marriage.

"But the best part of it all was when I knelt down beside you and would not leave you," laughed Leila. "I shall never forget Maj. Arburton's face, nor his words next day, when he told me all was over between us, and that the best thing I could do, after having made such an exhibition of myself, was to marry that 'young puppy.'"

"No," said her husband tenderly ; "the best part of it all was that I rode to win, and that I did win—what I most wanted—my wife."

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