

moment, she tripped and fell face downwards on the muddy road, with both hands out-stretched.

"Hulloa!" said a voice close by. "I hope you are not hurt."

She arose nimbly, but oh! such an object. The wet, black clay disfigured her from head to foot, her hat had got jolted on one side, and both eyes were bunged up with mud. And to think that Captain Falconer, of all people in the world, should see her in this abominable and unladylike state. She blushed a painful crimson which showed even through the dirt.

"No," she said brusquely. "It's nothing. Please don't look at me, that's all."

"Never mind," he returned, seeing she was evidently a little upset by his presence. "Here, we'll soon put you to rights; let me give you a clean," and he brought forth a dainty, white silk handkerchief, with a cunningly devised monogram in one corner.

"You can't with that thing," said Maggie contemptuously. She was so desperate'y ashamed of herself that she tried to cloak it by an additional shortness of manner. "It's only fit for a faucy bazaar, or to be worn round a woman's neck," and she gave a mirthless laugh.

"Never mind what it's fit for, Maggie," he answered good-humouredly, "it's nice and soft, and will do to wipe your poor little face with."

Why did he talk to her like that? His kindness made her feel quite savage—savage with herself, for how could she help wanting to see him, when he was so good and so superior to all the other men of her acquaintance?

She laughed again. This time hysterically.

"My poor little face," as you rightly call it, would disfigure so fine an article. My own handkerchief is quite good enough for it," and she commenced scrubbing her cheeks vigorously with a coarse linen one.

"There! Now you look quite respectable again, Maggie, and I am going to give you a lecture."

"What about?" she asked, beginning to recover from her confusion.

"Do you know that you are a most horribly faithless little person?"

"In what way, Captain Falconer?"

"Why, I expected to find you at home when I called. I asked you to stop in."

"Yes, but I never said I would, and as it so happened I couldn't, even had I wanted to. Matilda sent me into Foxington to buy her some gloves and ribbon."

"And you went all by yourself, child? Are you not afraid to tramp the roads alone, in these troublous times, when there are so many rough characters about?"

"They never do me any harm," said Maggie; "and besides," she added softly, "I am much too sorry for them to be frightened. They look so miserable, especially the poor women, with their worn-out boots and dragged petticoats. I always feel inclined to give them my own. It seems such a shame that I should be dry and warm and well-fed, whilst they are shivering and starving."

"You have a kind heart, Maggie, and an unselfish disposition. Cultivate them. But to return to our subject. I should have thought that one of your sisters might have accompanied you."

"They do generally," she answered, with childish simplicity, "but they all wanted to stop in this afternoon in honour of you."

"And so they sent you to do their errands? Well, I am partly satisfied, Maggie, as that accounts for your absence. I had begun to think you were cutting me on purpose."

Again the colour flew to her cheeks. She could not allow him to remain under a false impression.

"I—I must tell you the truth, Captain Falconer. I did not mean to be rude, or to hurt your feelings; but I—I—well, I thought you were only laughing at me when you asked me to be in when you called, and so I made up my mind to go out for a walk."

"Oh! did you, indeed, Miss Maggie. And why should you be so sceptical as to doubt my word?"

"Because it seemed to me you only said it out of good nature."

"Pon my soul, no. I'm not so good-natured as all that." Then his voice assumed a softer intonation, and he said: "My poor little girl, you are much too sensitive, in fact your sensitiveness verges on the morbid. Can you not believe that a person may like you for yourself?"

"Yes—perhaps—like," murmured Maggie doubtfully.

"And you want more than 'like.' You want love, eh, child?"

"I—I—do not know," drooping her head bashfully.

"I do, though, and you are right. I am not so unsympathetic, Maggie, as you may imagine, for I too have an aching heart, which seems as if it never could be satisfied. There is not much sympathy to be found in this world, is there? So few people care enough about you to take the trouble of finding out what stuff you are really made of. They look at the surface, and judge accordingly. If that is bright and pleasant, well and good; they ask for nothing more. They have very little compassion to expend on people who are gloomy or unhappy. And so one has to go with the stream, and laugh and talk like one's neighbours, who little suspect the existence of a deeper under-current. But the misfortune is, you feel things all the same."

"Ah! that's where the shoe pinches," said Maggie, who had listened intently to every word, and felt herself more and more drawn towards him. "But you are not unhappy, surely?"

"I ought not to be, but I am. That is to say, I am not content. I want something more than I've got."

"We all do that. Perhaps you might be happier if you were married."

"Perhaps I might. Only matrimony is a terrible venture and it's hard to find the right woman."

(To be Continued.)

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