

## PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY B. M. CROKER

## CHAPTER XXV

## I DISTINGUISH MYSELF WITH THE MULKAPORE HOUNDS

"To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus, And wrench the world with noble horsemanship."—Henry IV.

The reading-room at the club was a general lounge and rendezvous. When it was too dark to play tennis, and too early to go home to dinner, people flocked in, ostensibly to select novels and read the papers, but in reality to chat, gossip and flirt.

One evening Ellen Fox and I were turning over the newly arrived English mail, and discussing the merits and demerits of some fashions in the Queen (a paper much affected by us both). The round table at which we were seated was pretty full; at least twenty chairs were occupied. Close to us sat my cousin Maurice, engrossed in the Field, but occasionally raising his eyes, and glancing in our direction with open amusement, as he could not fail to overhear a warm argument as to whether a certain costume, which had mutually fascinated us, would look best made up in spots or checks.

"I hate checks!" I exclaimed emphatically. "Have you seen Mrs. Fleming's new foulard? It makes her back look like a draught-board."

"It is too large a pattern; and then she is stout. Now, a small pattern on you—"

"Would be hideous. I have a rooted objection to checks!" I interrupted briskly.

"Well, they are going to be the rage," returned Ellen, with decision. "Look at Mrs. St. Ubes. She is always in the height of the fashion, and studies the becoming more than any one I know."

To look at Mrs. St. Ubes was easier said than done. She and Colonel Gore were almost completely concealed behind the broad pages of a mutual Times. Presently Mrs. Gower came in, and sinking into a place beside me, drew a paper toward her with what I am sure she deemed an indolent grace. After listlessly turning over the pages, she glanced round the table, and having taken a mental photograph of all the party, moved her chair a quarter of an inch toward me, and asked, in a loud stage whisper:

"Who is the woman opposite in the filthy white dress?"

I had a perfect horror of Mrs. Gower's sotto voce remarks—especially in the reading-room—and hunching up my shoulders, shook my head violently as a token of complete ignorance. Seeing that there was nothing to be had from me in the way of information or conversation, Mrs. Gower turned her attention to the general company.

"Who is going out with the hounds to-morrow?" she asked, raising her voice, and casting a comprehensive glance round the table. "First day of the season. Meet at Lungay pillay, and chotah-hazree at the gunners' mess."

"I'm going, of course," returned Mrs. St. Ubes, raising her eyes above the edge of the paper. "And I!"

"And I!" chorused various treble and bass voices.

"You are not going, Miss Neville, are you?" said Mrs. St. Ubes, addressing me pointedly.

"Yes, I hope so, if Colonel Keith can take me. My uncle has an engagement for to-morrow morning."

"But, my dear girl," she exclaimed, with an air of affectionate patronage, "you have never ridden to hounds, and you won't be able to keep up on that tripping old gray of yours."

"Oh, I dare say I shall," I answered, with rising color. "He is much better than he looks."

"Your uncle really ought to get you something a *little* younger," said Mrs. St. Ubes, with the air of a person who was giving a piece of friendly advice. "I believe your old animal was all through the Mutiny, and probably present at the battles of Assaye and Plissay!"

A general smile was the result of this polite witicism.

"Then he must be quite a veteran," said Mrs. Vane, coming to the table, regardless of the cavalier she had suddenly deserted in an adjoining window-seat. "Age is to be respected, is it not, Mrs. Stubbs? I beg your pardon—St. Ubes, I mean."

"Now the weak point in Mrs. St. Ubes's armor was her age. She was keenly alive to any allusion to years, and dreaded the census no less than the Black Plague."

"In horses, certainly," she answered boldly, laying down the paper and facing her antagonist. "But Miss Neville's old Bucephalus is perhaps entering on his second childhood, and that is the reason he appears to be a reliable mount. Anyway, he is perfectly quiet, which is the chief desideratum. He goes in double and single harness, carries a lady, gentleman, or child; in fact, does everything but wait at table."

"Hear her! Oh ye shades of the Dardanelles!"

A rash rejoinder was on the tip of my tongue; but fortunately I caught Maurice's eyes fastened on my crimson face with a look of mingled inquiry and amusement. Before I could make a more moderate reply, Mrs. Vane (who had evidently taken the matter into her own hands) observed:

"Miss Neville is too modest to speak for herself, but I believe she is a very fair horsewoman; quite up to the average of lady riders, and no more afraid of a fidgety mount than you are yourself, Mrs. St. Ubes."

"Can you ride, Miss Neville?" asked Mrs. St. Ubes almost turning her back to Mrs. Vane, and speaking as if she were putting me on my oath.

"Of course I can," I replied, confidently.

After a pause of a few seconds, during which she and Colonel Gore were engaged in an animated colloquy behind the newspaper, Colonel Gore's head abruptly emerged, and said:

"I can lend you a gee for to-morrow, Miss Neville, if you like. A little hot-tempered or so, but—"

"Oh!" interrupted Mrs. Ubes, with a sneer! "If Miss Neville can really ride as she says she can, she won't mind 'Promotion.'"

"Well, at any rate, he has no vice; and if Miss Neville does not want a very quiet mount, and will honor me by riding him, I am sure I shall be only too delighted," added Colonel Gore, meekly.

"Thanks, very much," I murmured; "but my uncle does not like my riding other people's horses."

A glance of unexpressed significance was here thrown round the company by Mrs. St. Ubes; it said most distinctly: "She is afraid!"

"I will be sure for your uncle's consent," said Mrs. Vane, nodding towards me; "so you can accept Colonel Gore's kind offer. In fact, I myself shall ride your despised old Methuselah, though I am no great equestrian. I too will come out and see this wonderful hunt. I shall, of course, provide myself with a pair of field glasses; and I dare say, with their assistance and if the old horse can gallop at all, I may be able to keep the stragglers in sight."

"Very well, then, Miss Neville; it is settled that you ride my horse to-morrow, and Mrs. Vane rides yours," said Colonel Gore, politely; "I will send down for your saddle this evening."

"Thank you," I replied, feeling a good deal of apprehension touching Uncle Jim's views of the arrangement.

What is the name of your venerable animal?" asked Mrs. St. Ubes, with an air of affectionate interest.

"Oxford Gray," I answered, barely raising my eyes from my paper, and speaking in my chilliest tone.

"Oxford Gray?" shrieked Mrs. St. Ubes; "what a name! Why not 'Turkey Red' or 'Green Baize,' or 'Navy Blue,' at once?"

"Come, come, come," expostulated Mrs. Vane, gayly, "I am sure you have all laughed at him quite enough; you have had a board on him, in military parlance, and he has been cast. What is the good of pouring water on a drowned rat? Are there any arrangements to be made about this hunt to-morrow?"

After some discussion, it was settled that we were all to assemble at the club, and to go to the meet in a body, it being three miles from Mulkaapore.

As we drove home Mrs. Vane said, "I had no idea of letting that woman trample on you: what a spiteful little wretch it is! She has no special ill will toward you; merely dislikes you in common with the whole of her sex. But she hates me with all her heart; and knowing that you are my friend, and no match for her, she pays you out for my sakes; you are my scapegoat."

Next morning, by dimmest daylight, a tall, rakish-looking chestnut horse awaited me at the mounting block, with "Colonel's Gore's compliments." I did not like the look of his eye, nor the way he laid back his ears, but I had no time to take these details into consideration, as Mrs. Vane was mounted, and we were already late.

"Now, Noah," she said impressively, as we sallied forth from the compound, "mind you distinguish yourself; you look as if you could huff your own, and if you don't ride the head off Mrs. St. Ubes—in the vulgar idiom—I'll never speak to you again; so mind that!"

We then indulged in a mild trot, which brought us to the club enclosure, where nearly all the party were already assembled; Mrs. St. Ubes, on a pretty bay Arab, was the center of attraction to a laughing circle. Their mirth ceased with ominous abruptness as we approached.

"So you really have come," exclaimed Mrs. St. Ubes. "We began to think you had cried off—changed your mind at the eleventh hour! I beg your pardon—St. Ubes, I mean."

"Now the weak point in Mrs. St. Ubes's armor was her age. She was keenly alive to any allusion to years, and dreaded the census no less than the Black Plague."

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A sudden move was now made, and we all found ourselves out on the green plain surrounding the club. No sooner had we set foot on the grass, than Mrs. St. Ubes and Miss Hudson passed me at a furious gallop, expressly with the intention of setting off my horse. Of this I am firmly persuaded. It answered the purpose admirably.

He immediately shook his great fiddle head, gave a loud snort and a squeal, and made some extraordinary evolution impossible to describe; his head had totally disappeared between his forelegs, and I seemed to be riding a headless animal. Another acrobatic feat, and I still remained; but at a third I felt confident that I must go. Luckily for me he contented himself with these two awful buck jumps, and settled down into a tearing gallop.

"You sat him splendidly, Miss Neville," shouted Maurice, whose horse was stretching away alongside of mine. "He only wants a good breather now, and he will be all right. But he is by no means a mount for a timid elderly gentleman, and anything but a lady's horse. If Mrs. St. Ubes had been on his back just now, he would have 'promoted' her, to a dead certainty."

At the liberal pace at which we were traveling we soon distanced the others, and were among the first arrivals at the meet—a clump of toddy-trees at the side of a road. The hounds—poor exiles from their native land and drafts from many celebrated English kennels—were grouped round Vasevany, the Black Kennel huntsman; and the M. F. H. himself, a stout, popular man—"A rare good sporting sort," to quote Mrs. St. Ubes in the act of descending from his dog-cart as we rode up. The meet was not a lengthy proceeding. Soon we moved on to draw a favorite cover—the bed of a river, where we beat for a "Jack," and he was almost immediately viewed away, nonchalantly canting up the opposite bank as much as to say: "Don't you wish you may catch me?"

We lost no time in fording the shallow water, and in a very few seconds were speeding away across a flat open country, as fast as our horses could carry us, none an obstacle to be seen, there was nothing to stop us. I let Promotion go his best, and rode him at the very tail of the hounds, a little in advance of Mrs. St. Ubes, who was riding, very jealous, I could see, and disputing every inch of ground with almost vicious emulation.

After about two miles of plain sailing the country became more intricate—paddy-fields were disagreeably frequent, and when we got among stony ground, Mrs. St. Ubes's cat-like Arab had decidedly the advantage of my big blundering horse.

After this, again open country, and the pace and distance now began to tell; and to keep the leading hounds in view was quite as much as most of us could manage; while many of the stragglers began to tail off. About a dozen still held gallantly on, including Mrs. St. Ubes, Miss Hudson, Maurice and myself; but he and I were gradually outpacing the Arabs of the party, and I was putting Promotion along at a pace that I flatter myself considerably astonished that ill-tempered, rawboned gentleman.

I was slightly in advance of Maurice when a shout from behind made me a sudden start. Sure enough, right in front, at a distance of about thirty yards, a huge, yawning nullah, with ragged, broken sides, gaped before us. It was either in or over. To refuse it would have been to lose the rest of the run.

"For heaven's sake, Miss Neville!" shouted some one. I heard no more. My Irish blood was most thoroughly up, and I would have ridden at a stone quarry under the circumstances. With a tremendous cut of my whip I rushed Promotion at it, and landed safe and sound on the other side. I was instantly followed by Maurice, the master, and a little way behind, sporting major, and that was all! I had—oh, ecstatic thought!—pounded Mrs. St. Ubes, and cut down the rest of the field, I did not care for that so much; but to have left my rival planted on the other side—and that the wrong side—was indeed a most blissful reflection.

There was no going round possible nearer than half a mile, so we had an immense lead, a lead which we took good care to keep. The Jack was now nearly dead beat; but so were the unaccustomed English hounds, and although Ganymede and Governor were within twenty yards of his brush, he made good his escape, popping into a hole among some rocks, almost under their disappointed noses. We had been running for nearly forty minutes, and were not sorry to turn our horses' heads in the direction of a small breeze off a neighboring tank, and to fan our heated faces with our handkerchiefs. As we moved off slowly toward home, Mrs. St. Ubes and the rest of the crowd came galloping up and the party, to my great astonishment, included Mrs. Vane.

"Killed of course!" cried Mrs. St. Ubes. "My stupid Arab would not jump that nullah, and that threw me out completely. You would not have been up" (turning to me) "if you had not been so splendidly mounted."

This remark was evidently intended to repress any undue elation on my part.

"There I can't agree with you," exclaimed the master; "Miss Neville's riding is quite sufficient to warrant her being with the hounds in any country, and I never saw a more awkward brute to ride than that hard-mouthed old steeple-chaser, Honor to whom honor is due. Pray"

(turning to me gallantly)—"pray, Miss Neville, where did you learn to wick the world with matchless horsemanship?"

Could I say, "In the fields about Galloway, and with the Dardanelles hounds?" Most emphatically not, with Maurice among the audience.

"At home long ago; all Irish girls can ride," I returned evasively, endeavoring to change the conversation, to which Mrs. St. Ubes had been listening in disdainful silence, and a mortification she could not conceal. She was certainly in a very bad humor, and no wonder; she had intended (if I did not break my neck) that I should furnish forth excellent sport for the Philistines; and behold, I had cut her out completely, and, in spite of my rough and ready mount, the honors of the day were mine. We rode slowly back toward the cantonments as the sun was rising and the day was getting hot. Maurice had constituted himself my escort, and kept at my side until a long expanse of wet paddy-fields compelled me to move in single file (like a string of ducks) along the very slippery causeway or bund, that was the only visible pathway.

Not one European out of a hundred has seen an Indian paddy field; truly no very lovely sight, especially at the time of year to which I am referring. The young grain was buried in at least a foot of muddy water, which had been turned on to irrigate the coming crop. Here and there, the muddy expanse was crossed and recrossed by narrow little banks of slippery gray mud, whose use was twofold, as a means of keeping in the water and as a mode of transit. Along the very narrowest of these the whole hunting party were cautiously navigating their horses. One was literally between Scylla and Charybdis; a slip on either side would entail the most unpleasant consequence.

Our procession was headed by Colonel Gore, followed by Mrs. St. Ubes; then came Miss Hudson (whose face was flushed to a rich beet root color), then I, came, then Maurice.

The two ladies in front were discouraging and laughing in a very high and scornful key, and comparing the latest run to various forms of punishment to their disadvantage; when, unluckily, Miss Hudson's horse made a stumble and, on recovering himself, caromed violently against Mrs. St. Ubes's Arab, who, in spite of frantic exertions to keep his footing, slipped off the narrow causeway and fell back into the muddy, greasy, paddy. What a scene of excitement ensued, although there was no danger whatever incurred by the unfortunate rider, beyond a muddy habit. The horse persisted in making the most valiant efforts to right himself, and dashed up the mud in a manner fearful to witness, much less experience and for once, his mistress had a complete collapse. First, she was fished out; then her steed. What a spectacle she presented! I could compare her to nothing but myself on the day of my disastrous drive in the mule cart.

How angry she was! though too much a woman of the world to give full expression to her feelings. Her eyes were actually blazing and I think she favored Miss Hudson with a few private but pungent remarks of anything but an agreeable nature. As we emerged into the road once more, we left Mrs. St. Ubes standing under a toddy tree, with two eyes in attendance, busily rubbing her down with wisps of grass, while Colonel Gore stood by, superintending the performance with grave solicitude. We walked our horses slowly on, to enable them to overtake us, and Maurice again resumed his place beside me, and took up the thread of our late discourse.

What a difference there was in our relative positions since we had last ridden together (at Galloway)! Then I, the ugly little hoyden, was deeply penetrated by the very honor my cousin did me in permitting me to accompany him; and I eagerly picked up any stray crumbs of conversation that my reluctant escort condescended to throw me. Now, the position was reversed. I, the grown up young lady, the Diana of the day, was good enough to allow Captain Beresford to ride at my right hand, and he bore himself as became the grateful recipient of a considerable favor. We were not altogether alone; Mrs. Vane completed our trio. Radiant with satisfaction, she tapped me on the shoulder with her whip.

"That's what I call swift poetical justice," she exclaimed, indicating with a backward jerk of her head the deplorable figure under the toddy tree. "She wished to make you ridiculous on that great rawboned brute," glancing contemptuously at my mount, "and instead of that she has been 'cut down,' to use a hunting phrase, and after her experiences in the paddy, she will certainly have to be 'hung up to dry.' She has been 'hoist with her own petard'—ha, ha, ha!" Here Mrs. Vane's joy was so exuberant that she lost all recollection of where she was and clapped her hands, in maneuver that had the effect of starting off Oxford Gray at a round canter. Seeing that "forward" was the order now passed on, we immediately followed her example, and were soon scattered over the plain, racing and chasing in the direction of our well-earned cotahazree. We found our goal, laid out under an immense banyan tree, in the Artillery mess compound. A snowy table, covered with fruit, flowers, cold fowl, ham, and game pies, was a welcome sight to many; a dozen busy servants came swarming round with hot dishes, tea, coffee and cold iced drinks. Most people were

thirsty, and the latter were in great demand. Maurice waited on Mrs. Vane and me most assiduously, and did the honors well. In vain he pressed us to take some claret and water; we both declared for a good strong cup of Neigherry tea, but I saw Mrs. St. Ubes, who sat immediately opposite, consoling herself with an iced brandy and soda. Having supplied our wants, Maurice had leisure to satisfy his own. "I'm dying of thirst," he observed, taking up a long tumbler and quaffing its contents. "Ah!" he explained, "on such a hot morning as this I'm inclined to agree with an old poncher at home who used to wish that his throat was half a mile long, that he might taste the drink all the way down."

A roar of laughter greeted this reminiscence, and, completely off my guard, I muttered, "Poor Gilligan!"

"What did you say, Miss Neville?" asked Maurice, eagerly.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all!" I returned, greatly confused, and assuming a sudden and energetic search for my whip and gloves.

"Nothing!" he echoed, looking at me steadily. "Oh, well, I really thought I heard you mention the fellow's name. But of course it must have been imagination," he added still looking intently at me, with his earnest dark gray eyes. I think it was his eyes with their thick black lashes and straight well-marked eyebrows, that lent the great charm to Maurice's face. A chiseled nose and heavy mustache are not an uncommon sight; but such eyes as Maurice's were certainly not to be met with every day.

"Do you know, Miss Neville, that I have only seen one girl ride like you in all my life. I did not think she had her equal until now. She was a little cousin of mine, and you remind me of her in other ways besides your riding."

"What was she like?" I asked, audaciously; "was she pretty?"

"No—o, certainly not pretty," he answered, slowly; "but you know that plain people do resemble pretty people sometimes," he concluded, impressively.

"In what way do I resemble her?" I inquired, with bold persistence; "admitting that we are both plain?"

"There is a look in your eyes when you are excited or amused—"

"I declare," interrupted Mrs. Vane, impatiently, "you have a regular monomania on the subject of family likenesses." (She was seated at the other side of Maurice.) "First, Miss Neville is like your grandmother. Now it is a little cousin. The next time it will be some one nearer and dearer—your lost fiancée, for instance," lowering her voice to a whisper.

At this remark my cheeks overtrilled the traditional cherry. I bent my head, and busied myself intently on peeling a plantain; and Mrs. Vane, having assumed the reins of conversation, gayly drove away in quite another direction, thus avoiding all dangerous topics and delicate ground.

TO BE CONTINUED

## THE IRISHMAN IN THE MILL

A TRUE STORY

By Rev. Richard W. Alexander.

Flaming posters were visible all over the little town. At the corners, small boys with bags slung across their shoulders were thrusting big-lettered dodgers into the unwilling hands of the passers-by. Some looked at them curiously, and put them in their pockets; some flung them into the gutter after tearing them to shreds. They were of the style of the Menace of to-day: "Escaped Nun will give a Lecture! Horrors of Convents Told! Wickedness of Priests Exposed!"

Such was the purport of the posters and dodgers that flooded the little borough of M'K—, one autumn day in the year 19—.

Many of the townsfolk were disgusted, but many more, through curiosity, went to the lecture, and listened to the fraud in woman's clothes who dared to utter the nameless falsehoods that over and over again have been relegated to the dwelling of the father of lies. Among them was a curious married woman who had been persuaded by a friend to hear what the creature would say; it would pass an evening anyway, as amusements in the place were rare. She listened, aghast and open-mouthed, to the lecture, and, of course, brought home one of the slanderous pamphlets always on sale at such gatherings. Next day the so-called "escaped nun" had vanished, but the husband of the woman who dared to utter the nameless falsehoods that over and over again have been relegated to the dwelling of the father of lies. Among them was a curious married woman who had been persuaded by a friend to hear what the creature would say; it would pass an evening anyway, as amusements in the place were rare. 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