

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

present. Where do we have lunch, Miss Hope?

'At the Knoll,' said Audrey. 'We always used to have it there; Neville said it was out of the wind, you know.'

Sir Jordan blandly assented.

'It is a very good place,' he said.

Lord Lorrimore gnawed his mustache. It was not the first time by many that he had heard Audrey speak of this influence, and whenever she had spoken of him it had been with a sigh.

'Let us go to the Knoll then,' he said.

They rode on, and Sir Jordan, as on the preceding evening, had most of the conversation.

He knew the history of all the places they passed, and presented it in agreeable form for Audrey's acceptance.

Lord Lorrimore was left in the cold, and gnawed at his mustache more fiercely than before.

They reached the barrows. It was a wide expanse of sandy heath broken by big bushes of furze and gorse, with here and there a patch of trees. One—the largest of these—was called the Knoll, and here it was proposed that luncheon should be held, and the grooms were already unpacking the hampers.

'What a splendid place for a race,' said Audrey, unthinkingly. But her purposeless words were instantly caught up by the two men beside her.

'A race? Yes,' said Lord Lorrimore, and he glanced at Sir Jordan's horse.

'Would you like to see one? What do you say, Sir Jordan?'

To his surprise, Sir Jordan yielded a ready assent.

'I think we too are the best mounted,' he said. 'Suppose we run to that bush and back. But we must have some prize, Miss Hope; will you give the winner the flower in your hat?'

Audrey instinctively put her hand on the tall Gloire de Dijon rose which Lord Lorrimore had that morning stolen from the gardener and presented to her; but Lord Lorrimore assented before she could raise any objection.

'I am ready,' he said.

The others had come up by this time, and hearing of the match, displayed a good deal of interest.

'Jordan's horse is the better of the two,' said Lord Marlow.

'And I will give a start,' said Jordan, blandly.

'I want no start—no points,' said Lord Lorrimore, quickly. But he was over-ruled, and compelled to take fifty yards.

The two men started, and the horses dashed off at a swinging rate. But as was characteristic of him, Sir Jordan held his horse in check and did not let him go at his full pace until he had turned the corner.

Then he rode him hard—as hard as he knew—and came in a winner by a dozen yards.

Audrey treated it as a joke, and appeared to have forgotten the Gloire rose till Jordan, riding up to her, claimed it with a smile on his face. He was rather pale, and it was evident he was trying to suppress his triumph.

She gave it to him with a smile.

'It is not worth anything,' she said.

'It is all faded and drooping.'

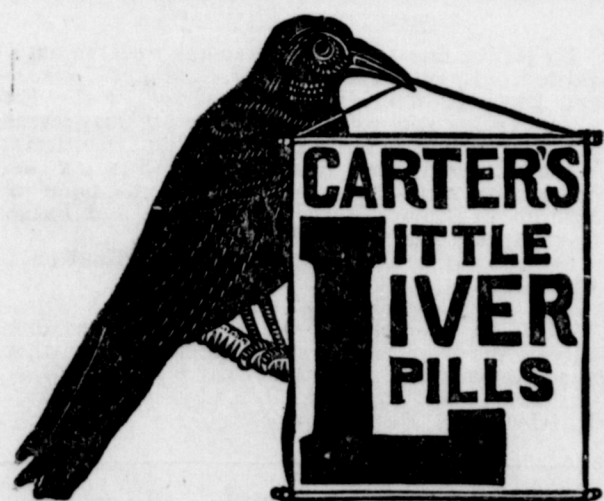
'It is worth its weight in diamonds to me,' said Sir Jordan in a low voice.

Audrey stared and laughed, but Lord Lorrimore, who heard the courtly speech of his rival, frowned and drew away.

It was a very enjoyable luncheon to all but Lord Lorrimore. He ate the pate de foie gras and the salad, and drank very sparingly of the champagne, like a man thinking of other and graver things; and when the man went off with their guns in search of rabbits, he stalked off apart from the rest and ruminated.

His rival had beaten him and won the flower he, Lorrimore, had given her. He glanced back at Jordan walking alone with a satisfied expression on his face, and the rose in his button-hole, and as he glanced his blood grew hot.

Could it be possible that Jordan could snatch Audrey from him as he had snatched her flower? Jordan was still young and rich, and though Lord Lorrimore hated him, he was bound to admit that he was clever and brilliant.



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'He is the kind of man women are taken with,' he thought, bitterly.

A rabbit got up, and he fired and missed it. The best humored of men do not like to miss their first shot, and an easy one, and his failure did not improve Lord Lorrimore's temper. He turned with a start of anger and a hot flush on his face as Sir Jordan's voice just behind him said:

'That was an escape for Master Bunny, Lord Lorrimore; and as he spoke he raised his gun and caught a passing rabbit.

Lord Lorrimore controlled himself by an effort.

'You are a good shot, Sir Jordan,' he said, civilly enough.

Jordan shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He was a good shot, and he knew it.

'Possibly,' he said; 'but rabbits are big and easy.'

'Yes,' said Lord Lorrimore.

A pigeon rose from a belt of trees and came within range, and he dropped it.

'Oh, that's better,' remarked Jordan, with a patronizing smile.

Lord Lorrimore flushed.

'Have you ever been in Mexico, Sir Jordan?' he said.

'Unfortunately, no,' said Jordan. 'I have been always too much occupied to travel much. You were going to say—'

'That in Mexico the men show a pretty trick with a rifle.'

'Which you are kindly going to show me?' remarked Jordan, blandly, but with the faintest tone of a sneer.

Lord Lorrimore colored.

'If you care to see it,' he said.

The two men had walked on side by side and had reached one of the clumps of trees.

Lord Lorrimore stopped and looked round. No others of the party were in sight.

'Yes, I will show you,' he said; and he took a visiting-card from his case, cut a hole in it, and with his penknife pinned the card to the trunk of one of the trees. 'Do you happen to have a bullet cartridge?' he said.

Jordan searched his wallet.

'Yes, two—only two.'

Lord Lorrimore took one and slipped it into his gun, then paced out a distance from the tree and faced round.

'Do you think you could fill that hole up with a bullet?' he said. 'Stay! When we rode just now you thought it necessary that we should contend for a prize.'

Jordan inclined his head with a smile.

'Which I was so fortunate as to win,' he said, softly.

Lord Lorrimore bit his lip.

'Just so,' he said. 'Shall we compete now for the same prize?'

Jordan affected a little start.

'The stake is too high a one,' he said.

Lord Lorrimore fired up.

'You did not consider it so just now,' he retorted. 'I am only anxious to win it that I may restore it to its owner, to whom I gave it this morning.'

The last words slipped out on a waver, and Sir Jordan seized them and turned them to his advantage in a moment.

'Ah! I understand,' he said. 'You are naturally anxious to restore it. But, forgive me, as Miss Hope parted with it so readily—'

Lord Lorrimore's dark face went white at the blandly uttered taunt.

'Pardon me,' he said, slowly, and with an evident effort at self-control; 'Miss Hope could scarcely refuse to offer the flower as a prize, lest she should seem to hold the trifles too highly. You have won it—'

'And I will risk it!' Jordan broke in, but with the same calmness and self-possession which seemed to irritate Lord Lorrimore more than any display of heat or resentment would have done; and this was why Jordan kept cool.

Lord Lorrimore looked at him, his breath coming fast and painfully.

'You are doubtless aware, Sir Jordan,' he said, 'that I am an humble suitor for Miss Hope's hand.'

'All the world knows that,' said Jordan, with a little bow and a smile.

'And all the world is welcome to know it!' responded Lorrimore, haughtily.

Jordan bowed again, the pink and pattern of courtesy, but for that same shadow of a sneer.

'And what is it you were to propose, Lord Lorrimore—that we shoot for something more than the flower? If so, I must beg to decline. I value the flower very highly, but Miss Hope is far too precious a prize to be won or lost by a shot.'

At that moment the two men, though they were unaware no longer alone, somebody had suggested that the ladies should go into the woods to look for anemones, and Lillian and Audrey had started for the clump of trees amid which Jordan and Lorrimore were debating. But no sooner had the Beauty reached the shade than she sat down and calmly informed Audrey that wild flowers were not in her line, and that she would remain there until Audrey had finished posy-picking. Audrey had offered to stay with her, but Lillian had placidly declined.

'To tell you the truth,' she said, 'I mean to go to sleep. I always feel sleepy in the open air, and as there is nothing to be done till the men have finished their tiresome rabbit-shooting, why—Lend me your sunshade, dear; you won't want it, and it's quite hot, isn't it?'

Audrey tossed her the sunshade with a laugh, and wandered on. Before she had gone very far she heard voices, and a few words which conveyed to her something of the business that was going on between the two men.

She stopped, and the blood mounted to her face, then forsook it. Womanly modesty whispered, 'Escape before they see you,' but a vague feeling of uneasiness would not let her beat a retreat.

She came out into the open where the two men stood. They lowered their eyes and looked rather confused for a moment. Jordan was the first to recover himself, and smiled with a little bow.

'Why are you not rabbiting?' she said, as carelessly as she could. 'I give you fair warning that Lady Marlow is depending upon your rabbits for tomorrow's

lunch, and that if you don't take big bags home, you will get nothing but bread and cheese.'

'We are getting a little practice, Miss Audrey,' said Jordan, lightly.

She looked round.

'This is where we lunched the last time I was here with Neville, Sir Jordan,' she sighed. 'It seems such a long time ago.'

Jordan's smile gave place to an expression which was meant to reflect hers. Lord Lorrimore pricked up his ears and stood grave and silent.

She gathered up the skirt of her habit slowly to give them time to join her or go about their business, but as they did not move she was bound to retire.

'Well,' she said, 'are you going to outdo Neville? He killed thirteen that day—but I told you that before.'

'You have a good memory, Miss Hope,' said Lorrimore.

Audrey looked at him.

'For everything connected with my old playmate, she said quietly and walked away. The two men waited for a moment or so, then Lorrimore said grimly:

'Now, will you shoot first, Sir Jordan?'

'As you please,' said Jordan; and raising his gun, he took careful aim and fired.

The bullet struck the tip of the card only.

His lips twitched and his face contracted for a moment, but the next it turned with a smile toward Lorrimore.

'It is your turn,' he said. 'I have missed; but I have the flower still.'

The taunt was admirably calculated to excite his rival and unsettle his aim; but it failed. Lorrimore raised his gun, seemed to take scarcely any aim, and sent his bullet into the whole in the card.

He turned and faced Jordan with set lips and a swift flash of his dark eyes.

Jordan, with carefully lowered lids, took the rose slowly from his coat and extended it to his rival.

Lorrimore took it, raised his hat slightly, and without a word stalked off in the direction Audrey had taken.

Jordan stood looking after him, his hand clutching his gun, and with an expression on his face, which, if it could have carried a bullet, would have pierced his rival through the heart.

Lord Lorrimore had not to walk far. He found Audrey standing as if waiting for him.

She raised her eyes and glanced at him with an offended air, which he affected not to notice, as he held his hand with the rose in it.

'Let me return you your property, Miss Hope,' he said in his grave voice.

Audrey took the rose, dropped it on the ground, and set her foot on it, then turned her flashing eyes upon him.

'How could you be guilty of such—such folly, to quarrel over a worthless flower?'

'You forget; you wore it,' he said in a low voice. 'We were not quarreling.'

'You were!' she said, her lips trembling, her eyes softened by his grave retort. 'I saw your face. Oh, what fools men are to—'

'To fall to loggerheads about a trifle!'

'The woman I love is more than a trifle to me,' he broke in again in his grave voice.

She opened her eyes and swept him a courtesy.

'Oh, then it was me you were shooting for, like two plow-boys at a fair.'

'Like two men in deadly earnest! At least, one was.'

'Indeed! And did you think I should be gratified in such a way?'

'Show me some other, some higher way,' he said quickly. 'You know there is nothing I would not do to prove my love and yours.'

She made an impatient gesture.

Do you think I could rest easy while that man wore the rose I had given you? Had you flung into the sea—'

'You would have dived for it,' she broke in, with a laugh that was meant to be sarcastic, but quavered a little.

'Yes,' he said, gravely; 'I will do anything, go anywhere to prove my love, though I think you cannot doubt it, Audrey.'

She let his use of her Christian name pass unnoticed.

'I am of a great mind to send you to—'

'To—' she said, with a laugh of annoyance.

'Send me where you please,' he said.

As he spoke, an idea flashed into Audrey's mind. Remember, she had been thinking of Neville.

'You would?' she said. 'Suppose I asked you to go in search of a lost friend—a friend whose absence and silence trouble me—would you go? Wait! It is not only for him or myself I ask, but for you, Lord Lorrimore. You are wasting your time.' The color rose to her face, then left it pale.

'Ah! when will men learn that we silly, useless women are not worth so much trouble?'

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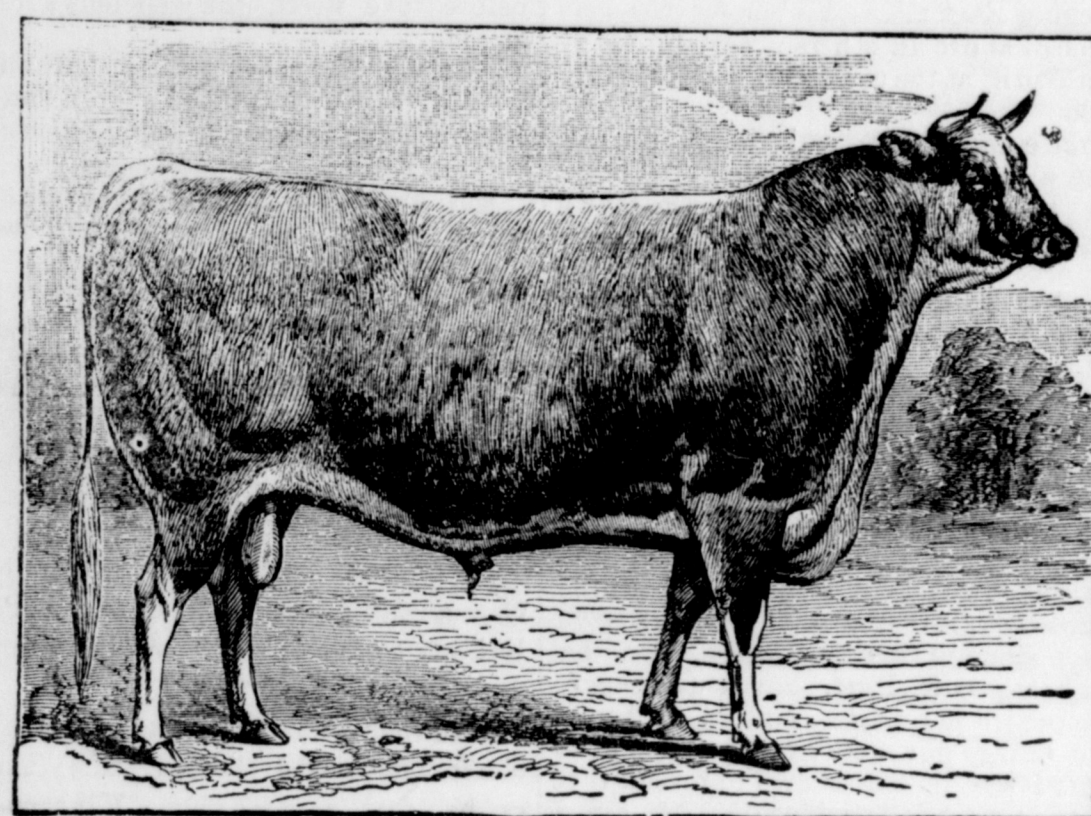
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'Never mind me,' he said. 'Go on. Who is this friend you want me to find?'

He watched her closely.

'Neville Lynne,' she said, meeting his gaze steadily.

He did not start, but still watched her.

'Sir Jordan's half-brother? He does not know where he is—'

'No.'

'Or says so. And you'—his lips trembled and he grew pale—'why do you want him—this Neville?'

She stamped her foot.

'How you harp on one thing! He is a friend—an old playmate. We were children together, and now he is wandering, perhaps homeless and penniless. Do you think all the world is in love with me, as well—'

'She stopped, and bit her lip.

'I will go,' he said. Then his face changed and his eyes grew dark. 'And when I come back, having failed or succeeded, you will be—ah!'

'She did not understand for a moment, then the blood rushed to her face.

'Audrey Hope still,' she said in a low voice.

His face cleared.

'I may be away some time—a year—two.'

'Two years,' she said, promptly. 'I will wait. It is a promise.'

He held out his hand.

'Give me your hand,' he said, solemnly.

She stretched it out slowly. He took it, and grasped it so tightly that the rings cut her fingers. Then he bent down and kissed it, and without a word, turned away.

She, woman like, was frightened at what she had done. She did not regret the promise to remain single, but the sending him on a wild-goose chase.

'Lord Lorrimore!' she called out faintly—so faintly that he could not hear her.

Then she leaned against the tree and did what every woman knows she would do—burst into tears.

They waited dinner half an hour for Lord Lorrimore, and Lord Marlow nearly wore the edge of his waistcoat pocket threadbare by pulling out his watch.

Then the butler brought a note for Lady Marlow.

'Oh dear!' she exclaimed. Lord Lorrimore had gone.

'Gone!' was the general response.

'Yes; he has been called to London. I am so sorry.'

'So are we all,' said Jordan, blandly.

'Oh, well—oh—hum—perhaps we'd better go in to dinner. Where's Audrey?'

She had left the room and gone upstairs, but she entered as he spoke and came forward with a smile, but looking rather pale.

And no wonder, for on her dressing-table, where her maid, at Lord Lorrimore's request and a sovereign, had placed it, she had found this note:

'I have gone. You will keep your part of the compact, I know, and I—well, I well, I will bring your friend to you, if he is alive. Tell no one—especially Sir Jordan Lynne.'

LORRIMORE.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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