

# The Fool On The Hill

A Regency Period Rom/Com

## Chapter 1

Marmaduke Coxcomb, trademark foolish grin plastered fast to his visage, climbed from his cot, stood perfectly still for an inordinate amount of time, contemplating his lot. A shiver of excitement struck him upon remembering his plan for the morning, and this evoked an even wider, albeit more lopsided smile. The sun had not yet shown itself over the rolling Yorkshire moors. As quietly and deftly as possible (no mean feat for a portly, clumsy chap), he donned stockings, knee breeches, corset, shirt, waistcoat, overcoat, riding boots, and stuffed into his pocket other respectable yet necessary paraphernalia i.e. his handkerchief, and smelling bottle, as he was prone to fainting on these crisp mornings.

He crept down the creaky stairs, and out the creakier door to the promenade, in readiness to partake in a jaunt around the formidable countryside on his hobby-horse. He had been practising profusely around the quadrangle many a night. Now he was prepared for this new, more taxing adventure. A rogue owl hooted on the building breeze, announcing his stately arrival, egging him on. As per usual, his imaginary valet awaited him, greeting him with the courtesy befitting the Lord of the House.

‘Fine morning for it Sir,’ said Rupert the Valet.

‘Fine indeed’ said Marmaduke.

‘Heigh-ho Trigger’, he ordered as man and ligneous beast cantered towards the top of the hill, leaving a worried Rupert aghast on the cobblestones. It would be a perilous journey, he knew, but only from that vantage point could he clearly see the world spinning round on its full axis. And only there could he truly imbibe the bucolic atmosphere – and, more pertinently, dream of Lady Breeches. His cravings for her to love him burned deeply in some fundamental part of his being, right near where the smelling salts were stashed.

Later that morning, working in his role as harness cleaner, he dreamt of one day becoming Head Coachman. Only then he believed he would hold enough prestige to tell the dear Lady of his true feelings. If only he could learn to ride real horses, and cure his crippling fear of anything equine. He could almost hear her voice behind him – the visceral thrill of Ursula’s sweet, warm mutterings - the Lady of the House, whipped into lustful exuberance in the presence of her strong, centered man. He polished his saddle frenetically, to a mirror-like sheen.

‘I can tell you want me by the way you ride your hobby horse.’ The lissome girl moaned in libidinous passion.

‘Dare I say I find you particularly wanton today, Madame? I, on the other hand, want for nothing, for I am well on the road to success. At least that is what I thought not five minutes prior to our conversation. Pray tell: Do you want to have your way with me, you... you scurrilous wench?’ he said out loud.

‘Yes, darling. I’ve waited so long’ said Harriet the milk-maid, as she grabbed the cloth from his hand, tossed it away and threw him backwards against a saddle.

‘But – what?’ Marmaduke was all at once struck by a mix of mortification at the thought of his riding hobby being exposed, and strange feelings of lust for this dowdy, buck-toothed damsel.

‘What did you see?’

‘You – loping around in amongst the lavender. It was an inspiring sight.’  
The saddle they landed on got a particularly good polish that day.

From that day on, Marmaduke went out of his way to avoid Harriet. Guilt-stricken, he took a hacksaw to Trigger and threw him into the smoldering embers of the servants’ quarters fireplace. Thus he had no means of practising his riding skills over the coming days. Nor would he ever ride again, he thought. For it is my cross to bear that I shall never ride my kindly tinder Trigger, nor Flash, nor Lightning, nor even old Hildebrand. My talent has been extinguished, never to be realized. And I shall never again ride Harriet... For how could I have betrayed my one true love Ursula? Alas and alack, what a cruel world.

He retreated to burying himself in his toil. Upon polishing a particularly tarnished bridle, he heard a woman’s voice behind him.

'I haven't seen you out riding lately.'

'No. I have decided to keep my pastimes private from now on.' He could not bring himself to look at her.

'What a dire shame. I was rather taken by your form.'

'I must confess. My interests lie elsewhere. I have appreciated all you have done for me, but it is for another lady my heart yearns, one more befitting my couth.'

'Ah - the tyranny of social structures. My heart breaks. In point of actual fact, the reason for my sojourn is to tell you that the Head Coachman has just died. Do you know of an experienced horseman up to the task?'

Rubicund, Marmaduke flew around to see Lady Ursula staring at him. How could he ever undo his brazen dismissal of her, and more to the point, how could he ever learn to ride now?

*(Jane Ireland)*

## Chapter 2

Marmaduke Coxcomb told his woes to Rupert over a friendly cup of claret. His imaginary valet paid careful attention.

How did he make such a mistake? How could he have said such intemperate words to Lady Ursula, his one true love? Alack. Alas. All that was left for him to do was to drown his sorrows. Drinking before breakfast was not the done thing, but Marmaduke cared less. His faithful manservant remained silent, but the friendly cup of claret was vociferous in its agreement and suggested he needed a refill.

“Oh, Marmaduke, you can’t spend all day in here.” An ample blanket of heaving womanhood smothered his shoulders. Marmaduke shuddered and sprang to his feet. Harriet was a lustful wench even with her snaggle-toothed grin, and unmatched eyes. Marmaduke’s fevered imaginings saw past these minor impediments to beauty, but not past the smell of lavender oil and raw garlic. The foul odour followed her around like a damp cloud.

“Leave me to my misery Harriet. Do you not see I am a man in mortal pain?”

“Oh, Marmaduke, sit over here and let Harriet tend to your needs.”

Marmaduke stumbled from the kitchen. Where was his trusty steed when he was so sorely needed? He wished again he had not been so precipitate in disposing of trusty Trigger in the fireplace.

He was still musing on this when he collided with the very essence of sophistication. Lady Ursula’s elegant frame shuddered agreeably with the collision.

“Ah, Marmaduke. So glad I ran into you. I have had chance to reflect further on your prowess. Your riding skills intrigue me so. Please be so kind as to step in for the late Head Coachman and show me how you can care for the fillies. I would be ever so grateful.”

Marmaduke sprang to it. Huzzah! A chance to impress his lady love. He knew nothing about horses, but this was too good a chance to waste. He hurried to the stable, his boots clip-clopping along the cobblestones.

A nose greeted him at the stable door. “Yes?” Two haughty eyes stared down the long brown nose of a thoroughbred.

“Err... It is I, Sir Marmaduke. Her Ladyship sent me to tend to you.”

“Arh, Arrh, Oi thinks you mean the horses.”

“Oh, who is speaking?”

“Smee, Stumpy, the manure man.” A small wrinkled man stepped out from behind the horse. The wooden pitchfork in his hand spoke to Marmaduke’s nose of his trade.

Marmaduke breathed a sigh of relief. Help was at hand.

“What needs to be done?”

“Ah, well now, stay away from Captain there. He’s a nasty one. Maybe take Buttercup for a walk so I can clean er stable.”

Buttercup was the smallest mare Marmaduke had ever seen. A hint of pony proclaimed itself about the rotund horse. She looked at Marmaduke with huge adoring eyes which decreed him the most marvellous man she had ever laid eyes on.

“Come, Buttercup. Let us find you an apple.”

He took the bridle and Buttercup followed as though she knew without doubt what he spoke of. Outside the sun warmed a pleasant meadow where larks sang and flowers bloomed. Buttercup stopped from time to time to nibble at a delectable strand of grass. What fun. How delightful to be a man and his mare.

Marmaduke mused on the delights of the day as he walked to the servants’ quarters. His mind caught between thoughts of a cup of claret and Buttercup. Here was a steed he could ride.

“Yes. Soon my beauty. I will be your master and ride you.”

“You saucy man,” breathed Harriet into his ear.

*(Carleton Chinner)*

## Chapter 3

Buttercup shook her luxurious mane and whinnied. Marmaduke lifted his head and puckered his lips.

‘What ho, a vision splendid,’ boomed a resonant voice from above.

Marmaduke froze in the act of kissing the hoary, turf-fragrant mouth before him, and looked skyward, expecting to see the heavens parted and the kindly face of the Almighty peering down. Instead, he was confronted with the sight of a gentleman clad in full military regalia and sporting a most impressive waxed moustache. He proudly sat astride a magnificent black-as-midnight stallion that flared its nostrils and shivered with pent up verve. Both man and beast exuded a masculinity that made Marmaduke feel his age, and lack of potency.

The man suddenly leapt from his horse, adjusted the sword strapped to his belt, and offered a gloved hand. ‘Captain Percival Bumbercatch of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment.’

Marmaduke wiped his perspiring hand on his breeches before thrusting sausage fingers out to be met and crushed by the grip of a huge, calloused fist. ‘Marmaduke Cox-aaargh-Comb,’ he winced, ‘How can I—’

‘Lady Ursula is expecting me,’ the captain interrupted with a diffident air. ‘I am aware she has impeccable breeding and in need of a good rutting. I am well-endowed and eager to please.’

Marmaduke’s jaw dropped. A horrifying image came to him of the woman he adored in all kinds of disarray. Flushed, pouting, shaking her tresses and urging this spectacular military man to unsheathe post haste and show her his proficient thrust and withdrawal. Marmaduke’s hackles rose.

‘Her Ladyship may not be forthcoming, Captain Bumbercatch. I am of the opinion that she prefers men of a more portly build and humble station.’

A muscled thigh was slapped as the Captain let out a colossal guffaw. ‘By jove, my good man. I am not referring to Lady Ursula. It’s this fine filly I’m needing the services of . . . for Zephyr here,’ he quickly added, indicating the sleek stallion nodding behind him. ‘Though . . .’ he wistfully eyed the manor house in the distance, his moustache twitching like a rabid caterpillar.

Marmaduke's brow creased. 'Your fortitude is untimely. She's enjoying a lovely outing and taking delight in the wonders of this exuberant day. It would be most unkind to spoil her perambulations.'

The Captain cocked his head. 'Lady Ursula?'

'No. Buttercup, sir. The filly.'

'So when will she be available? I would like to move while the irons hot, so to speak.'

'Buttercup?' queried Marmaduke.

'No, Lady Ursula. Good God, man, you exasperate me. This conversation is highly perplexing. Where in the blazes can I find her Ladyship?'

'Here I am!' cried a familiar lilting tone. Lady Ursula rushed across the grasses towards them, her cheeks pink and her breathing short. 'How pleasing it is to see you dear Bumby. How can I be of service?'

The Captain gave Marmaduke a knowing wink. 'I would like to pursue the viability of some horseplay.'

She stifled a giggle with her hand. 'In that case. Marmaduke, water the Captain's handsome steed will you and then stable him next to Buttercup. It is imperative that they acquaint themselves before a successful mounting can take place. Meanwhile, Captain Bumbercatch and I will be up at the house orchestrating the finer details of coupling.' Batting her eyelashes in the Captain's direction she purred, 'Bumby dear, I have a top shelf Brandy we can partake of, and some deliciously firm dumplings you can dig your teeth into. That is if you are willing.'

'Oh, I am willing . . . and able, sweet Ursula,' he responded. 'My orifice is moistening as we speak.'

As Captain Bumbercatch took hold of Lady Ursula's arm, Marmaduke was left struggling with the reins of two excitable horses. He could tell by the way they rolled their eyes, pawed the earth and snorted, that the afternoon was indeed going to be a drawn out affair. The horses too were showing a keenness to get under way.

After watering and stabling Zephyr and Buttercup, Marmaduke walked out into the yard and found his thoughts strangely returning to Harriet. He had a burgeoning desire to plunge his face between her two jiggling pillows of flesh and have her run her fervent tongue over his bald pate. But a shriek, followed by an *'Ey up wench, thar are in*

*need of a reight good skelping'* coming from the midst of a trembling hay stack, told him that Stumpy the manure man had already beaten him to her.

His shoulders slouched and he let out a sigh. 'I have this day been cuckolded by woman, beast and trollop. What remains to give succor to a soul such as mine?' he asked of Rupert, who also seemed to have vanished. 'If only dear Trigger was here to soothe my sorrows.'

Suddenly his eyes fell on the sight of a discarded iron pitchfork leaning forlornly against a cobbled wall. He instantly grabbed the handle, threw his leg over and raised an arm.

'Tally ho, Pippin,' he called, ' Make haste for the inn. A jug of bitter ale is awaiting to be imbibed.'

And with that, he galloped away.

*(Vicki Stevens)*



## Chapter 4

Marmaduke headed to the nearest inn looking for something suitable to imbibe that would enable him to effectively forget the forthcoming mounting of his dearly beloved Buttercup. Be Strong, thought Marmaduke as he pulled Pippin up at the horse rail of the Bulls and Cock Inn.

He entered the salubrious establishment and sat down at his favourite spot, one where he could keep an eye on Pippin in case would-be horse thieves saw the impeccable breeding of his mighty steed. The inn keeper's wife came up to him with the cheapest claret jug and a cup and placed it on the table with a mighty thump. Marmaduke jumped. He was admiring Pippin's form through the window. Mrs Cock leered at him.

"I see you have 'av a new hoss." She said.

"Yes, Pippin. Trigger was far too roudy so I sold him on to a good dealer." Marmaduke lied.

"Mind that my 'usband don't see that fine, new hoss of yours. He might give you a shilling for it." She cackled as she left him to nurse his claret and thoughts.

Marmaduke wondered why people laughed at him. He thought himself not too bad in the looks department. Possibly a little on the portly side and a bit pasty and balding. He did have sausages for fingers but they were still useful for certain things, he did find it hard to knit which was rather sad because he enjoyed knitting as much as any man, so maybe that was it. He was a very well respected gentleman of small needs and means. Marmaduke pondered that the lower classes needed to have something to laugh at and being a good sport, he didn't mind it was him.

Just as he was drinking his second cup of claret, Rupert walked through the door with a look of concern on his ruggedly handsome face.

"Sir, the Lady Ursula is looking for you".

"Oh" said Marmaduke, pouring a third cup of claret.

"I can't do it Rupert. I can't surrender poor, sweet Buttercup to that brute no matter what her feelings are for him." Marmaduke started to cry into his claret as he thought of those beautiful chestnut locks, the winsome brown eyes and that beautiful rump just ripe for the picking.

Marmaduke sobbed at the thought of Buttercup's rump being taken advantage of. He so desperately wanted to mount and pound Buttercup across the moors.

“Buck up old chap.” Said Rupert rather uncomfortably. “Your father would be rolling in his grave if he thought a Coxcomb couldn’t take a mounting.”

“True” said Marmaduke as he wiped away the tears, blew his nose and drank the last of the claret.

He heaved himself bodily up from his chair and madly rushed to the door to throw up. Mrs Cock threw open the door just in time for Marmaduke’s ungentlemanly exit muttering to herself that she was so glad she didn’t give him real claret as it would most certainly kill her geraniums.

Marmaduke went home head sore and weary. Pippin was being a bit stroppy probably sensing his master was out of sorts. He tidied himself up and headed to the estate stables to have a stern talking to Buttercup about her suitor. As he walked into the stables, his senses were assaulted by the smell of sweat, the sound of screaming and giggling and muffled comments in between like

“My Bumby, it’s positively huge. How would you expect that to fit into one’s mouth,” said Lady Ursula.

“Why thankyou my Lady, it is all in the flick of the wrist” said the Captain.

Marmaduke reeled. He rose to his full height, pulled down his waist coat, rolled up his sleeves and marched into the stables to confront the captain.

As he rounded the corner, he had forgotten in his hurry to tidy himself from the embarrassment at the inn, to rail Pippin properly and stood on him. Pippin hit him squarely in the nose. Marmaduke yelled in pain and tottered backwards into the horse manure pile holding his bruised and bloodied nose.

The Captain and Lady Ursula’s conversation was rudely interrupted by this sudden turn of events and they rounded the corner to find out what had caused the commotion. The Lady gasped and the Captain looked gruff as he eyed Marmaduke with a look of disgust on his face. Lady Ursula dropped the extremely large turnip she was holding in her hand and started to laugh.

*(Peta Culverhouse)*

## Chapter 5

Rather than risk further humiliation, Marmaduke tried to regain what was left of his composure. His aim was a stoic, nonchalant countenance. Yet finding it near impossible to still himself or purse his near flailing lips, he decided to exit the stables. Proudly raising his bald pate (as he knew its glow in the lantern light would adequately shift focus from his convulsing lips), he sauntered in a dignified skid across the manure and out through the door.

As he alternated trots with limps down the winding, cobbled country lane, he was aware of the echoes of a stifled, then roaring lilt of laughter spilling from the bellies of both Lady Ursula Breeches, and Captain Percival Bumbercatch. *Bumbercatch: that sly boaster of the huge turnip – dangling its bulbous head in front of Lady Ursula's mouth – trying to entice her sweet, moist lips around it. . .* There was nothing for it: he needed his Cock Inn. For there he would return to drown his sorrows in *real* claret this time. For the life of him he couldn't understand why he was never given the real thing. . .

Marmaduke made the most of the tranquil trot, taking a detour through hedgerows and tall oaks whilst pondering his lot. Alas, the Lady's bequeathment of the role of Head Coachman to him did not deliver. Stumpy the Manure Man was forever shuffling behind the mares in eager anticipation of a full bucket, blocking all of Marmaduke's attempts to get to them. *Why did I ever fear real horses?* And poor Buttercup. . . He heard that Zephyr turned out to be as limp as his material namesake, and plans were being made by Bumbercatch to have her deflowered by none other than Devil – the skittish colt from the Dales. Marmaduke pictured Devil's horn pummeling his sweet Buttercup, suddenly becoming aware of the smelling salts in his pocket moving higher. And then there was Harriet. Sure, her large mottled, twisted chompers were alluring, as were her wandering doe eyes when they decided not to cross. He especially liked it when she wore two buckets straddling her waist like a real milkmaid. As he approached the bar, he was confronted by Lady Ursula and the Captain, having arrived before him.

'So Marmaduke, why the long face?' laughed Captain Bumbercatch. Lady Ursula sniggered in continued humiliation of him.

'I find your comments preposterous and nothing less than offensive. And if you think you can continue to humiliate me this way I'll, I'll. . .'

'You'll do what? Go for a ride on another hobby horse? Look, quick, I see a log outside!' baited Bumbercatch.

Marmaduke cringed, then snuck a peek out the window. Lady Ursula shifted and squirmed on her chair. 'There's something you need to know,' she stated solemnly.

'Whatever it is, I can bear it. For alas, I have been forsaken on more than one occasion in this life, Lady Ursula.'

'You, Marmaduke Coxcomb, are a horse,' announced the Lady, loud and clear. The room hushed.

'How dare you!' Marmaduke felt his hackles rise, lips twitch and open as the beginnings of a whinny rose and threatened to explode from him. Embarrassed, he managed to quieten it down to a snort and shake of head.

'Woah boy! Settle down now.' Marmaduke suddenly became aware of Bumbercatch stroking his nose.

'Get your slimy hand off me post haste!' demanded Marmaduke.

'Take a good look at yourself man, sorry – horse,' said Bumbercatch firmly.

Marmaduke tenuously looked down at his legs. Tanned. . . brown. . . furry. And his feet – toeless. . . hoofed. Aha, thought Marmaduke, no wonder I kept dropping so many stitches when I was knitting. And that game of Whist. . . was it my fault I lost? He was also aware of the niggling of a mosquito injecting its stinger into his hind leg. His hind leg! He *was* a horse!

'Quick, get me a claret, and make it a real one!' Marmaduke demanded of Charlie the bartender.

'Are you sure you don't mean 'carrot'?' asked Charlie, sarcastically, as he filled the water bag and attached it around Marmaduke's large head.

'You see, dear Marmaduke' appealed Lady Ursula, batting eyelids his way, 'You have always been good to us, but we were worried about your fear of horses. We always knew you were, well. . . different. You are highly verbal, which can be challenging at times, and your fear of horses has been a frightful worry for us. But then we gave you Harriet and you seemed to enjoy. . . well, that. Now we want you as our prize steed.'

'What? You mean I will be *ridden*? His lips curled in distaste, exposing claret tinged teeth.

'By me,' added Lady Ursula, laying all her feminine wiles at his hoofs.

And Marmaduke thought about this. Ridden by a female and Lady Ursula herself? It took all of two seconds for him to know he could get used to the idea. The smelling salts rose so close to his nose he could almost sniff them.

‘But what of Buttercup? I can’t have you let that cad Devil get to her. She’s so, so virginal,’ pleaded Marmaduke.

‘She will be yours, Marmaduke. She was always meant for you,’ reassured Lady Ursula in soft, soothing tones.

And suddenly Marmaduke was at peace with himself, at last understanding his role in life. He thanked them profusely, then wandered outside for a good look at that log.

*(Jane Ireland)*