



CHAPTER V.—Continued.

"I REALLY wish you would not jest about it," says his wife, who is now evidently on the verge of tears.

"But Diana," anxiously, from Hilary, "what are you going to do at luncheon without a servant to attend table?"

"I don't know," tearfully.

"Well, as I told you before, I do. I know all about it. I've drilled enough parlormaid in my time to know how to hand round plates and things myself, and how to conduct myself generally. The question is," severely, "will you two know how to conduct yourselves?"

"This is an open aspersion upon our manners," says Jim. "Diana, are you going to submit to it?"

"Time is flying," says Hilary. "Am I to attend table or not? I shan't appear in any other character, so I may as well be of use to you as not. And really, Di, I don't see how you are going to manage things without Bridget. Jim, tell her I may do it. I," laughing in a suppressed sort of fashion, "have set my mind upon it. I want to see," with a little tilting of her nose, "what my future husband is like when he is off his guard."

"Oh! so that's your reason!" says Clifford.

"I know you will forget yourself, and call me Diana," says her sister.

"By-the-bye, what's your name to be?" asks Clifford, turning to Hilary.

"Bridget, of course."

"For mercy's sake, Jim, if this awful affair is to be carried through, don't forget that," says Diana, who is still plainly aggrieved.

"Nonsense. He can't forget Bridget," says Hilary.

"True for you. I wish to Heaven I could," says Clifford, who has suffered many things at the hands of the original Bridget, who certainly does not shine as a parlormaid. Upon this he saunters out again into the garden, to read his *Cork Constitution*.

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Diana, having given in to the inevitable, though with a bad grace and many misgivings, now sits trembling in the drawing-room, waiting for Ker's coming. The hall-door has been thrown wide open, and it has been arranged by Hilary that Diana on hearing his footstep on the gravel outside is to go at once to the door and greet him.

"It will look so nice and friendly," said Hilary, when settling this question. Of course Hilary herself could hardly have done it, being engaged on the last touches to the luncheon table, and cook gone for eggs, and the children and their maid far away up in the wood with a little basket of goodies all for themselves, and Bridget, as we know, five miles away by this time. Diana, sitting in the drawing-room, is, to tell the truth, quaking. But now she hears a step upon the gravel, and as "courage mounteth with occasion," so her spirit comes back to her, and going to the open hall-door she receives Ker with a delightful smile, and leads him back to the room she has just quitted. It is a pretty room, filled with sunlight and sweet flowers, and a few other things besides, and with all the windows lying wide open.

"I am so sorry," says she at once. "My sister—" she falters. Really it is horrible of Hilary to place her in such a position.

"Tired, no doubt—laid up? Not able to appear?"

"Well," nervously, "she hopes she may be able to appear—"

Diana, who has really meant only to temporize, now seeing where her words have led her, controls with difficulty a mad desire to laugh.

"Afterward? After luncheon? I hope so too," says Ker. "Of course I can quite understand how she feels about all this. It is very good of her not to have refused me at once, even without a trial. It seems unfortunate that we cannot meet."

He pauses.

"Yes, yes," says poor Diana vaguely. What on earth is she going to say next?

"The will was preposterous," says Ker. "There was something that suggested madness about it. But it appears it is all right."

"You tried?" Diana tells herself she is absurd, but somehow a feeling of anger toward him arises now within her breast. He had tried to break the strange bond between him and Hilary. Pray where would he find an equal to Hilary? In her heat she has forgotten that as yet he has never seen Hilary.

"Naturally. First thing. When I came back to England I went straight to my lawyer. If he will could be upset—if the money could be divided between your sister and me—what a relief!"

"To Hilary—certainly!" very coldly.

"To both!" frankly.

He is so entirely above-board that in spite of herself she cannot keep from smiling. He does seem honest. And if so, and if heart-whole (as he had assured her last night), what a husband for Hilary! And now, with all her silly fooling, she will probably destroy her own great chance.

"At you are honest! I like that!" says she earnestly.

Then she remembers that she herself is not very honest toward him, and her heart quails within her.

"Mr. Ker," says she suddenly, "I don't think you will be able to have any—any—talk with Hilary to-day, but if you will come and lunch with us again to-morrow—" She tells herself that whatever happens she will compel Hilary to see him to-morrow.

"You are very good," says Ker. But the fact is, I must leave here to-morrow, for a week. I have some business in Dublin. I am afraid I shan't be back again until Thursday."

"The day of Mrs. McIntyre's fancy ball?"

"Yes, I hope I shall meet your sister there at all events."

"There, beyond doubt! But you must not be so late as you were last night," says Diana, trying to carry it off with a high hand and ignoring his insinuation.

"Oh, I shall be early. And your sister—?"

"There is really no reason why you should not call her Hilary," says Mrs. Clifford, with a faint smile, "she is your cousin, you know."

Ker looks at her.

"Yes, of course. But such a strange cousin. A cousin who—" He stops and laughs involuntarily.

"I know," says Diana, laughing too.

"Who ought to be—"

"My wife!"

"It is dreadful!" says Diana quickly. "Dreadful for both of you. But at all events neither of you are in fault. You should both remember that when you talk it over."

"When we do!" Ker lifts his brows as if amused. "Your—I beg your pardon—Hilary is, I am afraid, not anxious to talk it over. However, even if she is too fatigued to come down to-day, you promise me we shall meet at the McIntyres'?"

"Certainly she will be there," says Diana, but a little faintly. Who could arrange for Hilary? She turns to him. "You have a long leave, I hear. I hope when your visit at the Dyson-Moores' is at an end you will come here for a little while. It would give you and Hilary an opportunity of being better acquainted—of—"

"Making up your minds?" The young man laughs lightly. "Thank you very much. I shall be delighted to give Miss Burrows the chance of seeing how—"

"Yes," says Diana. She leans forward.

"How charming I am." At this they both laugh.

Here, to Diana's great relief, the door opens, and Clifford enters the room. He shakes hands cordially with Ker, and in a little informal fashion tells his wife that luncheon is ready. Hilary sent him in to break the ice. A moment later the gong sounds. Hilary has beaten a wild tattoo upon it and then rushed back to her place at the head of the table, where Diana will sit behind the cold roast beef!

CHAPTER VI.

"This is the prettiest low-born lass, that ever Ranon the green sward: Nothing she does or seems But smacks of something greater than herself: Too noble for this place."

It is not until Ker has finished his salmon that, looking up suddenly, he finds his eyes met by those of the parlormaid. Her eyes are quickly withdrawn, she is handing round the cold roast beef now, but his remain on her—moving as she moves. Where on earth has he seen her before? That he has seen her before he is positive, but where? He is also quite sure that when first he *did* see her, he did not realize that she was—was—What is she? Beautiful! Is beautiful the word?

He is obliged to take his eyes off her now, as she has come round and is standing almost behind his back.

"Potato, sir?"

Ker gives a little start. Her voice so low, almost as beautiful as herself!

"Thank you," says he. He feels as if he is apologizing to her for the trouble she is giving herself on his account. Then suddenly he pulls himself together and turns to Diana.

"I see I am not to have the pleasure of seeing your sister," says he with a slight smile.

"No. I am so sorry," says Diana, her eyes on her plate.

"I hope I haven't frightened her away," says Ker; he now addresses himself to Clifford.

"You couldn't!" says Clifford. "Nobody could frighten *her*! I've often tried—and failed; the mustard, Bridget. She's strong. Very strong."

(To be continued.)

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