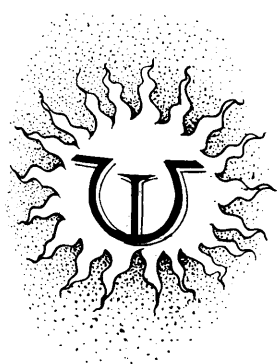


OUR FIRST BALL.



E were young at the time—oh, so young.

Then the hard hand of time had not rubbed the raven locks from our manly brow.

We had not learnt how 'the dust of a dusty to-day is the dust of a dusty to-morrow.'

It came about in this way.

We belonged to a dancing academy at

the time, and, in the guileless innocence of our heart, we had, by the power of bright eyes and pearly teeth, taken a double ticket for a ball.

Among the ladies and gentlemen of the academy we had acquired considerable notoriety as one of the greatest dancing failures on record.

This will explain much.

Yet there it was in full gold print. Mr. Simpkins and lady. Carriages at 3!

Ye gods and goddesses!

What visions therein of prancing greys—glittering harness—bowing and scraping Jeames's and magnificent turnouts!

Aye! let the sombre hued background of musty scented cabs and cussing extortionate cabbies be never so gruesome! The roseate vision was with us—tho' it had't come to stay. But we digress—

and lady. There was the rub,—who should we take? Who *could* we take? That question of the lady troubled us much and necessitated much shampoo and barbarous tribulation.

Happy thought! why not take Miss Jollyboy from the academy? She was not beautiful, *but* she had other peculiar advantages. She was built on a plan of massive grandeur, and could no doubt stand the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to—in a ballroom. We were occasionally wise in our generation.

This important matter settled we proceeded to study a little work on ball-room etiquette, and practised deportment in the solitude of our chamber till we grew to hate the sight of our clumsiness.

Then we looked up long neglected friends who might have experience in such matters, and, perchance, a dress suit.

We were ever of a taking nature, and we took all offers.

We were determined to do the thing in style, even though it cost us our little all.

'Twas in the air we breathed, the town rang with the coming event—to our inflated imagination. Bless your hearts! hadn't we read of such doings in books many a time and oft!

How well we could recall the thrill of delight as our heroine entered the ball-room and became the cynosure of all eyes.

How we were wont to beam with pride as an unseen sharer in her triumphs!

How the conservatory scene used to raise the green-eyed monster in our youthful bosom, as *he*, the mazy Dook, bent tenderly o'er her and urged her to fly and be *his*—his alone!

And our hair stood on end lest she should consent, and we were powerless to warn her that *he* was married and the father of a large neglected family!

How we sighed with relief when footsteps were heard approaching and the villain's foul plot frustrated.

We remember them well—those same old footsteps; we used to listen anxiously for them whenever the plot grew strained. And now, at last, we, even our humble self, were to do, to see, to mingle amid such glittering scenes.

The eventful night arrived at last, and we proceeded to dress. This was to be our first appearance in a full dress suit, and we were nervous.

We felt sure of this as we surveyed the mingled skin and hair we had taken off our chin with a jagged razor.

Our new dress shirt reposed pure and peaceful in its box on the bed.

O! that shirt; that horrible three-cornered cut-throat! To think of it thrills our spine to this day.

'Twas the cruellest, cardboardest shirt that was ever built. Quite innocent and pure it looked too, in its box, but when disturbed it assumed a personality all its own, and became thenceforth our deadliest foe.

But we set our teeth and swore to conquer or die—perhaps both. We shut the door and stood *him* on the bed.

Then we eyed *him*; he remained calm. Such was the hateful hypocrisy of the wretch.

We tried a conciliatory movement thro' the base, but he nearly forced the crown of our heads down to our waist, and fairly crackled with laughter at the bare thought of our overcoming him so easily.

Then we clutched him by the collar and shook him to show him we were in earnest.

We fancied he stiffened a little and rustled a laugh of derision.

Then we stripped and cavorted around him and took him in the rear, but he was ready and cut us a cowardly cut under the left ear.

We let him alone till we applied stamp paper to the wound.

His end was near.

We waited our opportunity and sprang upon him with irresistible fury.

There was a confused mixture of legs and arms, a steady flow of sultry language, a smell of brimstone, and we were standing *inside* that shirt; a smile of complacency overspread our mobile but battered countenance, but he wore wrinkles all the night and gave us spiteful digs out of sheer cussedness.

Time rolled on; we were considerably shaken by the recent struggle; the fair one would be waiting. Horrible thought; did fair one ever wait before—or since?

No time to answer conundrums. Jumped into dress suit; found pants dreadfully small; make mental note to be careful when stooping; tie on dress necktie in hangman's knot under left ear, and rush madly through crowd of sisters with pins and advice.

Find cabman asleep on his box and waken him violently.

Says "e is alfred dry."

Promise him oceans of beer if he gets there on time.

Cabby drives furiously, and is pulled up half way by wakeful policeman.

Name and address taken.

Arrive at fair one's house; horse blown, driver swearing horribly, and ourself bathed in perspiration through agony of mind and swaying of cab.

Entreat driver to disguise himself in sobriety till we reach end of journey.

Find fair one is "not half ready yet." Sit down in parlour and reckon up cost of cab per hour.

Fair one's mamma comes to entertain us.

Will insist upon assuming role of future mother-in-law to ourself.

Horrible thought! Have wild visions of breach of promise case with ourself in dock!

Diversion caused by entrance of big-eyed youngster who stares at our person in silent awe.

Secretly give infant 6d. for interrupting tête-à-tête.

An aroma of perfumery and entrance of fair one gorgeously arrayed.

Cabby comes in with awful thirst and is refreshed with ale.

We set off.

Looks horribly like a cheap wedding, but don't say so. Admiring crowd cheers and throws dirt

and things. Find afterwards that cabby had stuck large faded bouquet in his hat.

And so at last we arrive at our destination, bumped and jolted out of all original semblance.

Dismiss cabby with large portion of our private fortune, with air of Lord, inwardly reflecting on future courses of cheap dinners, etc., to make up for lavish expenditure.

We adjourn to gentleman's room for repairs.

Have necktie readjusted by knowing friend with large borrowed diamond.

Take liquid refreshment from friend's flask, and feel brave.

Play skittles with herd of inane individuals of female persuasion, and manage to secure our particular fair one and ascend grand staircase.

Horrors! Forgotten ticket!

Square door-keeper with remainder of private fortune.

What a sight met our gaze and filled our head with rapturous intoxication!

What harmony of colour; what delicate perfumes; what ravishing music!

Ah! but it *was* intoxicating to our unsophisticated youth. Am reminded by admonitious dig from Fair One.

Lead her to seat and go ask man what to do next.

Man says fill girl's programme.

On way back to fair one feel dreadful temptation to smack large red back with white bosom, belonging to stout lady; shall do something awful ere this is over,—feel it coming on.

Toe the mark with fair one in set of Lancers.

Keep a figure ahead all thro' and come in easy winners amid thick language from all damaged ones in set.

Feel scorn of Fair One scorching us up and get hot.

Assured her waltzing was more our forte.

Next dance *was* a waltz, and we had to go thro' it with 15 stone of fat woman hanging to our neck.

Used said weight as buffer and did terrible execution.

Some feeble efforts made to stand against us, but of no avail.

Field covered with disabled ones,—looks like ravages of steam roller.

Hear people asking who *we* are.

Get hotter and melt dress-shirt, which is slowly but surely transforming into a wet necktie.

Want badly to retire into wilderness and howl.

The maze thickens; we become dazed with the whirling swirl of the dancers,—suddenly a screaming chorus and something falls with a sickening thud.

It is a human body.

Our body.

Find this is so after being discovered by exploring party, who have just in time removed a mass of clothes and female from our flattened figure.

Collect remains and adjourn to examine our self.

Meet man in lobby; says champagne only thing to dance on.

Champagne capital stuff; feel like giant refreshed.

Forget all about pants and take fair one to supper.

Take champagne with knowing friend and smoke big cigar.

Begin to enjoy ball immensely.

Ball-room seems more crowded after interval; overcome by heat and sit beside pretty girl in blue, and tell her family history. Fall badly in love with her and request pleasure of waltz.

Found we could waltz splendidly *now*, and got along like dream of bliss till we suddenly and violently met a post that was wandering loose around the room.

Pick girl in blue off floor and sit down to wait till room stops going round.

Tell pretty girl, in spite of appearances, she is queen of my heart to-night.

Pretty girl laughs hard and regrets,—already married!

Go in despair to seek original fair one, but not to be found.