



CHAPTER X.—Continued.

HER nods have been received with a stony glare, her smiles with a glassy eye. Hilary can see that Ker has gone behind the fan too, and that now the fan is shaking.

Such a charming fan, and so big! What was it Miss Kinsella had said about her always having a big fan? To hide herself behind, was it? This is a big fan any way, and a delicious one too, all blue and gold! Indeed, Mrs. Dyson-Moore is a dream of blue and gold all through. A rather scanty dream it, must be confessed, but a dream for all that. The few—very few—pieces of clothing that she wears, are made of blue and gold satin—a blue and gold cap rests upon her naughty head, and (perhaps to make up for her deficiencies elsewhere) she is literally covered with golden bells. She tinkles as she goes!

A touch of burning envy saddens for a moment Hilary's heart. If she could have got a lovely costume such as that—not that of course—but something equally lovely—she might have shown up well to-night. There are one or two costumes in which she has often told herself—only herself—that she would be well—very well worth looking at. But any of them would cost at least ten guineas, and she—well, she hasn't got ten guineas. That's all. It is a finished argument.

The fifth dance on the programme is the Lancers.

"A beastly shame," mutters the Crusader, *sotto voce*, who thinks all dances should be waltzes, if only to oblige him.

The musicians have struck up the opening bars and there is a little stir through the room. Some are running away from the slow dance, others are running toward it. Hilary sees Mrs. Dyson-Moore rise from her seat and Ker with her. They take a step in the direction of the middle of the room. Plainly they are going to dance it—together.

She turns to her partner, and says a little hurried word or two. If Ker advances still farther into the room he will probably see her, and as yet she seems unprepared for the fight. She moves toward the door nearest to her with a view to escape. The Crusader, whose noble mind is bent on waltzing and nothing else, seconds her efforts with all his might. At the doorway, however, she is stopped by a bluff and hearty old King Hal.

"Will you give me these Lancers, Miss Hilary?" asks Lord Emherst. "It is given to youth to be happy enough to hear you off in the fast dances, but perhaps you will spare an old man like me a little walk through."

The pleasant-faced old gentleman holds out his arm to her. It is impossible to refuse.

"I shall be delighted," says she, smiling.

She puts her arm through his. All at once, her courage returns to her. Yes, she will dance these Lancers, and if Mr. Ker sees her, well—well, then, this embarrassing situation will be at an end. And she could hardly bring it to a finish in better company.

Lord Emherst is the one big man in the county, and certainly the best beloved by all classes.

When she and he have taken their places, Hilary for the first time lifts her eyes. A sigh of relief welcomes the fact that her *vis-a-vis* is

not Ker. A second later the relief is dead. Killed by another fact.

The man on her left hand is Ker!

He and Mrs. Dyson-Moore are dancing at the sides. In another moment or two she will have to place her fingers in his. He will turn her round. What will he say? Do? Nervousness seizes upon her. She is afraid to lift her eyes, but with the nervousness comes a strange, uncontrollable sense of amusement. She feels that she would like to laugh, but dare not. Oh, that luncheon!

The time has come. She turns and holds out her hands to him. For the first time to-night Ker's eyes rest upon her.

That dress! That face! His fingers close on hers mechanically. He is looking at her, but he sees only the avenue, the rhododendrons, the girl holding up her white hand for his inspection. The hand is lying in his now. He flushes a dark red.

The music restores him to his senses. Once again the steps are gone through—once again the parlourmaid is holding out her hands to him. One hand is a little closed. It holds something. She opens it, and slips the something into his palm.

"Forgive me," breathes she.

It is the florin!

"It will be difficult," returns he. "I know you now. Your name is not Bridget."

"No."

"Nor Maria, nor Sarah, nor Henrietta."

"No."

She is ashamed of herself, but she does laugh.

"It is Hilary?"

"Yes."

She has returned to her place, but a little while later they are face to face again.

"Will you give me the next dance?"

She shakes her head. "Engaged."

"You will give me one, however? You owe me something."

"Do I? Very well, I'll pay it."

Another little chance comes.

"Let me see you after this?"

She smiles.

"Who is Miss Burroughs dancing with?" asks he, dropping back to his place with Mrs. Dyson-Moore.

"Lord Emherst. You know her?"

"Slightly. As a fact she is a sort of cousin of mine."

"Is she? Of course, I remember. You went to see the Cliffords one day when you were here a week ago. Some people say she's handsome."

"Not handsome!"

"No?" delightedly. "Well, I agree with you. And dowdy! My word, I'd rather stay at home forever than go about in a rig-out like that. I'm so glad you"—with emphasis, and a glowing glance from under her blackened lids—"don't think her a beauty."

"As for that, I only said I didn't think her handsome."

"Well?"

"Strictly handsome people, you know, are seldom beauties."

"Oh, I see," with distinct offence. "You think her then—?"

"A very pretty girl," says Ker.

"One could say that of every other girl one meets," says Mrs. Dyson-Moore, with a little offended hitch of the shoulder nearest to him.

The Lancers are over now. Ker, slipping through the crowd here and there, looks everywhere for Hilary. But in vain. Has she been avoiding him? When the next dance is in full swing, he looks for her in the ball-room, and sees her waltzing gayly in the arms of a Mephistopheles.

He stations himself doggedly in one of the doorways, and watches her. When the dance

is over, she moves through it. He stops her.

"Miss Burroughs, you promised me a dance. I think."

"Yes?" She looks at her card. "I have nothing until the ninth. That," without looking at him, "is free. It is a polka, and I hate polkas. Will you have it?"

"Grateful for small mercies," murmurs he, bending over her card to scribble his name on it. He looks at her as he gives it back.

"You will remember?"

It is plain he has little faith in her. Hilary gives him in return a strange little glance.

"I always remember," she says.

CHAPTER XI.

"She will encounter all
This trial without shame,
Her eyes men Beauty call,
And Wisdom is her name."

"At last," says Ker. He comes up to her and holds out her arm. "This is the ninth."

"Is it?" says she, innocently enough. Though, to tell the truth, she has been quaking over the fact during the past five minutes.

"You hate polkas, I think you said," continues Ker. "So do I. We shall therefore have a chance of a nice long *tele-a-tele* in here!"

He leads her in relentless fashion, into the conservatory close at hand, and up to the farthest end, where, behind some flowering shrubs, two vacant seats can be seen. He does not sit down, however, or ask her to do so either. He stands looking at her somewhat remorselessly.

"So!" says he, after a minute. And then: "Now what have you got to say for yourself?"

Here they both laugh. Hilary, it must be confessed, rather shamefacedly.

"Oh! I know—I know," says she with a divine blush, "what you are thinking. And it is true! I am a fraud—a swindle." She covers her face with her hands, still laughing, and presently looks at him through her fingers. "But you mustn't say it."

"Thinking is good enough for me," says Ker, with a shrug. He takes her hands from her face and brings them down. "What on earth made you do it?" asks he.

"I don't know. It was a whim—a prank. It came into my head, and so I had to do it."

"Do you always do everything that comes into your head?"

"Not always. But—" She breaks off. "After all I do know why I did it. You," with charming audacity, "made me."

"I made you?"

"Yes. You. You! If you had not given me that florin, I should never have known that I looked like a *real* housemaid."

"Oh! come! That's very unfair," says he, colouring. "I didn't even look at you."

"More shame for you," demurely. "However, that won't get you out of it! If you hadn't time to see me when I was giving you a glass of water, you had, at all events, plenty of opportunities of seeing me when I was giving you your luncheon."

"That was far too confusing a scene to admit of calm judgment. How could one fairly class a girl who was called six or seven different names in the space of thirty minutes?"

"Ah! that was too bad of Jim. But even if that opportunity failed you, another was given I," with a little glance at him, "gave it! You must have seen me when—"

She pauses.

"When you told on the avenue that a glass of water given by you wasn't worth two shillings."

Yes. You remember, then?"

"Who could forget such a libel?"

(To be continued.)