

usual, or I couldn't do that," flinging the crutch to the other end of the room with a loud resounding crash as if to test his strength.

"Rather a noisy way of proving your words," Sir John remarked a little sharply, seeing the alarmed expression on Sheila's countenance. "Remember ladies have nerves, dear boy; but we will drop the subject now, for this is a day of rejoicing to you, to Easy, and above all to me; for your dear devoted friend has consented to stay with us for ever as my wife."

"Isn't it downright splendid?" babbled Easy, clapping her hands gleefully. "Oh, Wally, what glorious times we shall have now, because she will belong then to you and me in earnest, won't she?"

"Yes," he answered in a muffled tone that was almost incoherent, "we shall have high jinks now."

"You are rather flippant, sir, in your language," corrected his father gravely. "Even joyful news should not cause you to forget you are a gentleman."

"I am not quite so refined as I should be, probably, but I think excuses should be made for a being who never enters society," he retorted sullenly, not heeding the gently pleading eyes of Sheila, who stood with the olive branch of peace beaming in her face.

"Wally, dear, wish me happiness," she whispered, bending over him and pressing her lips to his pale forehead.

"It is not for me to do that," he muttered, "I, the insignificant cripple."

"But you do," this entreatingly, "say it, dear."

"Of course I do, everybody does," he answered peevishly.

"Come, Sheila, we will leave him for a while, it is one of his trying days. I can see the traces of pain on his face."

"Yes, I have been in torture," he ejaculated.

"Your back as usual," the baronet said, sadly.

"Yes, my back," he reiterated with a sneer, which was lost on his father.

"I never saw the lad so ill-tempered before," muttered Sir John, "he was downright rude," as Sheila and he made their way to the cheerful drawing-room. "You must punish him by not spending so much time with him, that will bring him to his senses."

"He will soon get all right again," she answered hopefully, "invalids often get fractious after a spell of pain. I am sure I should be very tiresome if I were in his place."

"Little peacemaker," he said fondly, "discord flies away near you, like dew before the sun."

"I wish in very deed it were true" was her inward comment, as her thoughts dwelt upon the fierce behaviour of her ill-tempered charge.

"Congratulate me, Ivon, dear boy," broke out Sir John, with a joyous ring in his deep voice, over the claret after dinner that evening. "I have won as fair a bride as ever gaddened the eyes of mortal man."

"Indeed, uncle, you amaze me!" returned Ivon Russel, staggered at the moment with astonishment.

"Why, pray?" asked the baronet rather testily.

"Well, I suppose I thought you had settled down to—to——"

"An old fossil from which all the sap of life and hope had withered and died," he supplemented, coldly.

"I cannot say that exactly, sir, but you see it came unawares (this apologetically). Who is the lady?"

"Miss Hamlyn."

"Little Sheila," he said, incredulously, as if he could not have heard aright.

"Do you know any cause or impediment to the union, sir?" the baronet observed, with dry irony, a momentary pang of jealousy rushing upon him.

"Certainly not," looking ill at ease under the angry, scowling gaze of Sir John; "only she is somewhat young and—and——"

"Not a fit wife for the already hoped for deposed master of Ravenscourt, eh?" he broke forth passionately. "The fact is, you young cubs fondly believe all the sweets of existence belong by nature and right to your immaculate selves."

"Since every sentence I drop seems to irritate you, uncle, perhaps we had better say no more on the subject."

"The jacknapes is in love with her himself, I can see," was the suspicious thought of the enamored baronet, who, now that he had gained his heart's desire, fondly imagined every man coveted his treasure, and envied him his exported bliss.

Another pestering idea possessed him too, that Ivon, being the next heir to Wally's deace, had perhaps a more subtle motive and desire in not wishing his uncle to take unto himself another wife, and so oust him out, probably, of his inheriting the property.

#### CHAPTER IV.

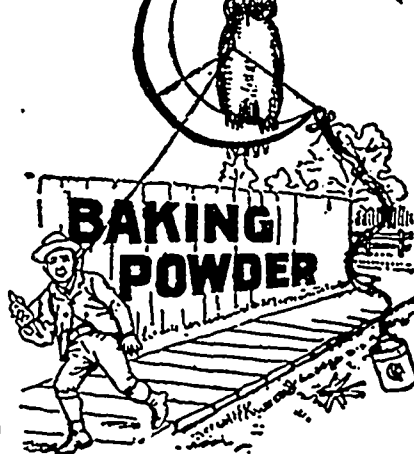
The pale dog-violets were all aburst with flowers, the meadows gay with white and yellow Marguerites, while the beds that dotted the green sward were a mass of purple and white splendor, with their nodding blue bells and sweet fragrant hyacinths.

A warm springy feeling pervaded the air, to the intense enjoyment of the beady-eyed linnets and thrushes, high up in the soft feathery trees where the sun-flecked blue sky peeped between the interlacing boughs of fat buds.

Nature had donned her holiday attire to smile and bless the sweet little bride who was, with the help of Betsy, lacing with tremulous hands her simple white silk wedding-gown.

(To be continued.)

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