

a nice-looking little girl in her way, isn't she, Helen?"

"Oh, I think we may give her credit for more than that. She has an exquisite complexion, and holds up her little head as if she were quite conscious of being the eldest child of a famous man. You won't be ashamed of your daughter, I promise you."

Hilary was delighted at the thought of accompanying her father to the "At Home," but though she gushed over the prospect in her letters to her sisters, she did her utmost to hide her excitement from Miss Carr. The old lady had a habit of making sly little hits at her expense, the cause of which the girl totally misunderstood. She imagined that it was her youth and want of experience which annoyed her hostess, whereas, in reality, it was her affectation of age and worldly knowledge. When the night arrived, however, it was impossible to keep as calm as she would have liked, as she arrayed herself in her dainty new frock before dinner. Miss Carr's choice had been eminently successful. A plain white silk dress with an overskirt of chiffon, which gave an effect of misty lightness, a wreath of snowdrops among the puffings at the neck, and long satiny ends of ribbon. Hilary looked very young, and sweet, and fresh, as she walked into the drawing-room, with a flush of self-conscious pleasure on her cheeks, and her father gave a start of surprise as he saw her.

"So! My little girl!" Miss Carr was not yet in the room, and he took Hilary by the hands, holding her out at arm's length, and looking down at her with grave, tender eyes. "It's very nice, dear. I'm proud of you." Then drawing her to him, and kissing her on the forehead, "we must be great friends, you and I, my big daughter. This is the beginning of a new life for you, but you will not grow to think less of the old home and the old friends?"

"No, no, father! no never!" Hilary spoke in a quick, breathless whisper, and there was an unusual moisture in her eyes. Her father saw that she was nervous and excited, and hastened to change the subject before there was any danger of a breakdown. The door opened at this moment to admit Miss Carr, and he advanced to meet her holding Hilary's hand in his, in the high, stately fashion in which a knight of old led out his partner in the gavotte.

"Miss Hilary Maud Everette Bertrand, at your service. And many thanks to the good fairy who has worked the transformation!"

"Humph!" said Miss Carr, shortly. "Fine feathers make fine birds. There's the gong for dinner, and if you two are not hungry, I am; so let us get the serious business over first, and then I'll have a look at the fineries." Then, after her usual fashion, she slipped her hand through the girl's arm and led her affectionately across the hall. "Sweet seventeen! Ah, dear me, I wonder how many years ago it is since I went out in my first white dress? I was a pretty girl then, my dear, though you may not think it to look at me now, and I remember my excitement as if it were yesterday."

When the carriage came to the door two hours later on, Hilary wrapped herself up in fleecy shawls and went into the drawing-room to bid her hostess good-night, but she was not allowed to take her departure so easily. Miss Carr protested that she was not wrapped up sufficiently, and sent upstairs for a hood and a pair of hideous scarlet worsted bedroom slippers, which she insisted upon drawing over the dainty white satin shoes. Hilary protested, but she was not allowed to have a say in the matter.

"Nonsense, my dear; it's a bitterly cold night, and you have half-an-hour's drive. We can't have you catching cold, just to have your feet looking pretty in a dark carriage. Go along now, 'Good-night.' I shall be in bed when you come back, but I'll hear all your adventures in the morning," and she waved the girl away in the imperious fashion which no one dare resist.

Hilary was annoyed, but she soon forgot the ugly slippers in the fascination of a drive through the brightly-lighted streets, and when the carriage drew up beneath an awning, and she had a peep at a beautiful hall, decorated with palms and flowering plants, and saw the crowd flocking up the wide staircase, her breath came fast with excitement. Her father led her into the house and disappeared through a doorway on the left, while she herself was shown into a room on the right, wherein a throng of fashionable ladies were divesting themselves of their wraps, and giving finishing touches to their toilets before the mirrors. Those who were nearest to Hilary turned curious glances at her as she took off her shawls, and the girl felt a sudden and painful consciousness of insignificant youth. They were so very grand, these fine ladies. They wore such masses of diamonds, and such marvellous frocks, and mantles, and wrappings, that she was overawed, and hurried out of the room as quickly as possible, without daring to step forward to a mirror. Such a crowd of guests were making their way up the staircase, that Hilary and her father could only move forward a step at the time, but after they had shaken hands with a stout lady and a thin gentleman at the head of the stairs, there was a sudden thinning off, for a suite of reception rooms opened out of the hall, and the guests floated away in different directions.

Mr. Bertrand led the way into the nearer of the rooms, and no sooner had he appeared in the doorway, than there came a simultaneous exclamation of delight from a group of gentlemen who stood in the centre of the floor, and he was seized by the arm, patted on the shoulder, and surrounded by a bevy of admiring friends. Poor Hilary stood in the background, abashed and deserted. Her father had forgotten all about her existence. The group of friends were gradually drawing him further and further away. Not a soul did she know among all the brilliant throng. Several fashionably-dressed ladies put up their eyeglasses to stare at her as she stood, a solitary figure at the end of

the long room, then they turned to whisper to each other, while the youngest and liveliest of the party put her fan up to her face and tittered audibly. They were laughing at her, the rude, unkind, unfeeling creatures. "Laughing, what could there be to laugh at?" asked Hilary of herself. Her dress had been made by a fashionable modiste; Miss Carr's own maid had arranged her hair. "I may not be pretty, but there's nothing ludicrous about me that I know of," said the poor child to herself, with catching breath. In spite of her seventeen years, her new dress, and all her ecstatic anticipations, a more lonely, uncomfortable, and tearfully-inclined young woman than Hilary was at that moment it would be difficult to find. She looked round in despair, espied a seat in a retired corner, and was making for it as quickly as might be, when she came face to face with a long mirror, and in it saw a reflection which made the colour rush to her cheeks in a hot, crimson tide. A girlish figure, with a dark head set gracefully upon a slender neck, a dainty dress, all cloudy chiffon, satiny ribbons, and nodding snowdrops, and beneath—oh, good gracious! beneath the soft frilled edgings, a pair of enormous, shapeless, scarlet worsted bed slippers! It would be difficult to say which was the more scarlet at that moment—the slippers themselves or Hilary's cheeks. She shuffled forward and stood in the corner paralysed with horror. There had been such a crowd in the cloak room, and she had been so anxious to get away, that she had forgotten all about the wretched slippers. So that was why the ladies were laughing! Oh, to think how she must have looked—standing by herself in the doorway, with those awful, awful scarlet feet shown up against the white skirts.

"Sit down and slip them off, and hide them in the corner. No one will see you," said a sympathetic voice in her ear, and Hilary turned sharply to find that one end of the seat was already occupied by a gentleman, who was regarding her with a very kindly smile of understanding. His face was thin, and showed signs of suffering in the strained expression of the eyes, and Hilary, looking at him, found it impossible to take his advice otherwise than in a friendly spirit.

"Th—ank you," she stammered, and pulling off the offending slippers hid them swiftly behind the folds of the curtains, and seated herself on the sofa by his side.

"That's better!" cried the stranger, looking down with approving eyes at the little satin shoes which were now revealed. "Forgot to take them off, didn't you? Very natural. I did the same with snow shoes once, and was in the room for half-an-hour before I discovered that I still had them on."

"But snow shoes are black. They wouldn't look half so bad. I saw those ladies laughing at me. What must they have thought?"

"Do you think it matters very much what they thought?" The stranger turned his face to Hilary, and smiled again in his slow, gentle manner.