

a girl's whim," said the elder Mr. Duckett, with gloomy significance, as he yielded a wrung consent to his son's representations, "I doubt Hilda's mad caprice will cost us dear."

"Nay, father, there is no danger; 'tis but a night's revel, remember. Holding things in abeyance, and double watchfulness, will keep all secure."

Algernon spoke confidently, but the elder man was not reassured, and as he turned away, the son experienced an uneasy qualm which was not easily dispelled.

"I wish Hilda were back in Germany—better still, had never left it. Having her home was a mistake unless she were to know all," he said to himself discontentedly as, unmooring his boat, he sculled himself down the river towards St. Mildred's—a favorite diversion on his part, as the banker's garden, sloping to the water's edge, by affording a possible glimpse of Clemency amongst her roses, presented an irresistible attraction. Nor, to-day, was this attraction disappointed. The banker would have been saved much mental perturbation had he only known that whilst he stood debating with Miss Sweetapple the advisability of acquainting his daughter with the proposals of this new suitor, down by the weedy river banks, beneath the shadowy, overhanging willows, the young man was arguing his own cause with a skill which pretty Clemency would have found it difficult to parry, had she not already been tolerably well versed in Love's besieging tactics.

As it was, she found it no easy task to eschew her own as to emerge from the conflict unshackled by present bond, or promised future favor.

She was somewhat taken by surprise, it is true, a little fluttered and unbalanced by this energetic lover's specious pleading. Yet hesitant, dubious of her own inclinations, unconsciously influenced by a secret preference unacknowledged even to herself, she was, moreover, withheld by a faint, scarce recognized repulsion from yielding one iota of her simple maiden dignity to his passionate adjurations.

"But you will come to Hilda's ball and give me your answer there? Say that you will!" he entreated. "Oh, you need not speak," he added quickly, replying to a gesture of dissent. "A look, a touch of your hand, a leaf from your bouquet—and I shall know!"

Clemency, sweeping him a little mocking curtsy, turned silently away, her head held high.

She resented thus being dictated to or hurried; and had no intention of intimating her answer other than in her own time and way. It was well Algernon Duckett had been trained in a school of rigid self-control, for an intangible something in the girl's piquant hauteur stung his amour propre while stimulating his infatuation almost into frenzy.

He made a step forward as though he would have followed her; but, restraining himself by an effort, retreated, leapt into his boat, and savagely gnawing his under lip in discomfited disappointment, sullenly rowed himself back.

"Let us go to the Minister," Clemency said, slipping her hand coaxingly under her father's arm half an hour later, when the cathedral bells chimed their summons to evensong; and Mr. Sweetapple, nothing loth, gathering his thoughts together, acquiesced without demur.

This was a frequent custom with the two. Frequently, also, going in or coming out, they were joined, as to-day, in the cathedral porch by a tall, grave-eyed man. Could it be that these uncertain meetings lent a subtle glamor to Clemency's fascination for St. Mildred's sombre yet glorious fane?

The High Street's lazy traffic was subsiding as they came out. Before the post-office or some of the larger shops stood carriages, whose occupants had paused on the daily drive to enquire for letters or match silks and ribbons. At the chief draper's a solitary horsewoman was waiting the shopman's return with change or purchase; a sullen-looking, thick-set groom in attendance in the rear. The girl's attention was divided betwixt curbing the impatience of a somewhat mettlesome steed and scanning the passers-by. As she caught sight of the approaching group her face brightened; she turned her horse's head nearer to the pavement, making a little detaining motion with the hand that held her whip. Its golden mountings flashed in the brilliant sunshine. A jewel scintillated from its butt as her fingers fell back against the pommel. Clemency's keen eyes took in those accessories at a glance; the stylish habit, cut in the fashion of a bygone generation, and beaver hat, the new trappings and costly steed, the well-dressed attendant, the jewelled whip. All the appointments were good, if somewhat over fresh; yet was there discrepancy in the picture, as a whole, which jarred indefinitely upon her taste. But the frank face and clear eyes down-bent to hers held only what was pleasant.

"Congratulate me, I have conquered! Father says I may have my dance," Hilda Duckett said, stooping from her saddle, flushed, eager and triumphant.

"I am glad, since so keeping your birthday pleases you," Clemency answered, and then blushed hotly, biting her lip as her father glanced at her enquiringly, and Hilda exclaimed in brusque surprise:

"How gossip flies! Why, it was only decided this morning. Oh, I understand," she added, with a nod and laugh of amused enlightenment.

Mr. Sweetapple looked puzzled. Ralf Alden's brow darkened. Clemency, with a little defiant air, bent forward and stroked the mare's glossy neck.

"My invitations are not issued yet, of course; but you will all come?" Hilda questioned, with a comprehensive glance including Ralf, though he was still unknown to her.

Mr. Sweetapple introduced him. Ralf bowed stiffly, making no response.

"I—we—do not dance," Clemency said, her small head erect.

(To be continued.)



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