

A Girl's Caprice

OR, THE RESULT OF A
FANCY DRESS BALL

CHAPTER V.

"Oh, I'm not in the humor for jokes," says Diana languidly. "That's a good thing, for I'm in solemn, sober earnest. Though I confess I'm perjuring myself. You know I told you I should not appear at luncheon to-day, and now I shall. Though not as Hilary, as Bridget."

"Put it out of your head. It is a mad idea. I shan't even let you think of it."

"Are you prepared to control my very thoughts then? Great is Diana, we all know but still I shall think of this thing, in spite of you. This stranger is coming. It is essential, considering all things (my future prospects principally)" with a little malicious grin at her sister, "that you should put your best foot foremost, so as to make a first grand impression. But, unfortunately your 'best foot' is deserting you for a mere 'palter.' Bridget will certainly go to it or else remain here by your imperative orders, and sulk and drop all the dishes. Now, I shall not sulk, and I shall drop no dishes, and I have got my regimentals in my wardrobe upstairs."

"Jim would never consent to it, and then there are cook and nurse to be considered. Do you wish to have your name all over the country?"

"As for that—I shall send cook up to Oaklands to get us some eggs, once luncheon is nearly ready, and Ellen out with the children; for the rest, I know I can manage it. Now, don't make a fuss, Di darling. I assure you it is better to have me for a parlormaid than nobody at all."

"Ah, here is Jim!" says Diana, rising and running to the window, and tapping vigorously. "Jim, come in. Come in her. I want to tell you something."

She tells him a great deal certainly, and Hilary tells him even more. It becomes plain to Jim that his wife is dying with fright about the wants of a parlormaid for this important occasion, so naturally he throws his influence on the side of Hilary—almost unconsciously, however.

"He'll never know me, Jim," cries Hilary.

"My good child, that's a large saying. He is going to stay in this part of the world for a month or so, so I expect he'll get to know you one way or another."

"He won't know me to-day, anyway."

"Except as the girl who swindled him out of two shillings last night."

"Oh, Jim!"

"Well—didn't you?"

"I think as you do," says Diana; "that he must meet her in a day or so, and then!—what will happen then?"

"The crack of Doom will be nothing to it," replies her husband solemnly.

"I really wish you would not jest about it," says his wife, who is now evidently on the verge of tears.

"But Diana," anxiously, from Hilary, "what are you going to do at luncheon without a servant to attend table?"

"I don't know," tearfully.

"Well, as I told you before, I do. I know all about it. I've drilled enough parlormaids in my time to know how to hand round plates and things myself, and how to conduct myself generally. The question is, severely, 'will you two know how to conduct yourselves?'"

"This is an open aspersion upon our manners," says Jim. "Diana, are you going to submit to it?"

"Time is flying," says Hilary. "Am I to attend table or not? I shan't appear in any other character, so I may as well be of use to you as not. And really, Di I don't see how you are going to manage things without Bridget. Jim, tell her I may do it. I, laughing in a suppressed sort of fashion, "have set my mind upon it. I want to see," with a little tilting of her nose, "what my future husband is like when he is off his guard."

"Oh! so that's your reason!" says Clifford.

"I know you will forget yourself, and call me Diana," says her sister.

"By-the-by, what's your name to be?" asks Clifford, turning to Hilary.

"Bridget, of course."

"For mercy's sake, Jim, if this awful affair is to be carried through, don't forget that," says Diana, who is still plainly aggrieved.

"Nonsense. He can't forget Bridget," says Hilary.

"True for you. I wish to Heaven I could," says Clifford, who has suffered many things at the hands of the original Bridget, who certainly does not shine as a parlormaid. Upon this he sputters out again into the garden, and his "Cork Constitution."

Diana, having given in to the inevitable, though with a bad grace and many misgivings, now sits trembling in the drawing-room, waiting

for Ker's coming. The hall-door been thrown wide open, and it been arranged by Hilary that D on hearing his footstep on the el outside is to go at once to door and greet him.

"It will look so nice and friendly," said Hilary, when settling question. Of course Hilary he could hardly have done it, being gaged on the last touches to luncheon table, and cook gone eggs, and the children and t maid far away up in the wood a little basket of goodies all themselves, and Bridget, as we k five miles away by this time. D sitting in the drawing-room, is tell the truth, quaking. But she hears a step upon the gr and as "courage mounteth with cation," so her spirit comes bac her, and going to the open hall she receives Ker with a delight smile, and leads him back to room she had just quitted. It i pretty room, filled with sunlight, sweet flowers, and a few other th besides, and with all the windows ing wide open.

"I am so sorry," says she at c

"My sister—" she falters. Re it is horrible of Hilary to place in such a position.

"Tired, no doubt—laid up? able to appear?"

"Well," nervously, "she hopes may be able to appear—"

Diana, who has really meant to temporize, now seeing where words have led her, controls difficulty a mad desire to laugh

"Afterward? After luncheon? I so too," says Ker. "Of course can quite understand how she about all this. It is very good of not to have refused me at once, without a trial. It seems unfortunate that we cannot meet."

He pauses.

"Yes, yes," says poor Diana uely. "What on earth is she going say next?"

"The will was preposterous," Ker.

"There was something suggested madness about it. But appears it is all right."

"You tried?" Diana tells he she is absurd, but somehow a fec of anger toward him rises now v in her breast. He had tried break the strange bond between and Hilary. Pray where would find an equal to Hilary? In heat she has forgotten that as he has never seen Hilary.

"Naturally. First thing. W came back to England I straight to my lawyer. If the could be upset—if the money be divided between your sister me—what a relief!"

"To Hilary—certainly!" very ly.

"To both!" frankly.

He is so entirely above-board in spite of herself she cannot from smiling. He does seem h And if so, and if heartwhole (as had assured her last night), wh husband for Hilary! And now, all her silly fooling, she will p bly destroy her one great chan

"Ah, you are honest! that!" says she earnestly.

Then she remembers that she self is not very honest toward and her heart quails within her

"Mr. Ker," says she suddenly, "don't think you will be able to any—any—talk with Hilary to but if you will come and lunch us again to-morrow—"

She herself that whatever happens will compel Hilary to see him to-morrow.

"You are very good," says Hilary.

"But the fact is, I must leave to-morrow, for a week. I some business in Dublin. I a raid I shan't be back again Thursday."

"The day of Mrs. McIntyre's ball?"

"Yes, I hope I shall meet you ter there, at all events."

"There, beyond doubt! But must not be so late as you wer night," says Diana, trying to it off with a high hand and ign his insinuation.

"Oh, I shall be early. And sister—?"

"There is really no reason wh should not call her Hilary," Mrs. Clifford, with a faint

"she is your cousin, you know. Ker looks at her.

"Yes, of course. But strange cousin. A cousin wh He stops and lughs involunta

"I know," says Diana, la too. "Who ought to be—"

"My wife."

"It is dreadful!" says Diana ly. "Dreadful for both of yo at all events neither of you a fault. You should both re that when you talk it over."

"When we do!" Ker lifts his as if amused. "You—I beg pardon—Hilary is, I am afraid anxious to talk it over. He even if she is too fatigued to down to-day, you promise shall meet at the McIntyres?"

"Certainly she will be there, Diana, but a little faintly. could arrange for Hilary? She to him. "You have a long l

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