

A Girl's Caprice

OR, THE RESULT OF A
FANCY DRESS BALL

CHAPTER III.

Now Hilary had gone down the stairs five minutes before with her partner—a magnificent cow-boy—to get an ice, and is standing near the buffet enjoying it, and looking prettier than usual (which is saying a great deal) in her cap and gown, when she feels a touch on her arm.

Looking round she sees Jim. "Our dance, I think," says he, taking advantage of the fact that the cow-boy is a stranger from the Par-racks at Clonbroe, whereupon the cow-boy bows to Hilary, and retires from the scene.

Jim regards her with a reproachful eye.

"Still urging on your wild career!" says he, "with Nemesis at hand—and the sword of Damocles about to fall—and all the rest of it."

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"He's come!"

"He?"

"Your future Lord!" says Clifford, with the biggest L on record.

"Oh, no!" Not really!

"My good girl, I've been staring at him for the past two minutes. He was talking to Diana, and evidently cross-examining her about you. At least I hope it was that. To me it seemed as if he was cross-examining Diana about herself. I'll have a cross-examination of my own with her later on."

"You won't tell him I'm here?" says Hilary, in a tone of frightened entreaty.

"Not I. But Diana will. And after all, Hilary, why shouldn't you get it over at once? It isn't as if you were bound to marry him."

"I can't. I," defiantly, "won't. I'd rather die than see him, I—"

Clifford makes a quick movement. His eyes are on the stairs above him.

"I expect you'll have to die," says he. "For here he comes!"

"Oh, no!" says Hilary.

In fact Ker is running down the stairs at the top of his speed, to find that glass of water for the fainting Swiss peasant. Hilary has barely time to stand back from Jim, and give him a glance that warns him that eternal infamy will brand him if he now by one word betrays her, when Ker is in their midst.

Seeing a smart-looking maid (even at this hurried moment he notices that "beauty lies within her eyes") with an empty ice plate in her hand, that apparently she is just taking away from somebody, he rushes up to Hilary, and says in a breathless tone:

"A glass of water, please."

Hilary, after a second's shock, is equal to the occasion.

"A glass of water, sir?"

"Yes. And in a hurry, my good girl."

"You shall have it, sir."

She goes over to the buffet, procures the glass of water in question, and brings it back to Ker.

"Oh, thanks. A thousand thanks" says he, in a hurried way.

He seizes the glass, squeezes a florin into Hilary's hand, and is gone.

Hilary stands still for a moment, then subsides into the dark recess of a closed doorway, her brother-in-law following her.

"A nice beginning," says he wrathfully. "How do you think you are going to meet him after this?"

"He won't remember," says Hilary.

"Won't he? Don't you think somebody will tell him?"

"Tell him what?"

"That you were dressed as a parlormaid tonight? And when he sees you, as he must, don't you think he will put two and two together?"

"Perhaps he has no head for mathematics," says Hilary, but even she feels that this is frivolous.

However, the discussion is brought to an end suddenly by Diana, who comes down the stairs to them with Peter Kinsella, and having dismissed that florid young Romeo, warns Hilary that if they don't go home at once they will probably be mixed up with the rank and file at the end.

"This awful suggestion has its effect. Soon they are on their homeward way, and "At last," as Diana says, "can talk."

Clifford leads off the conversational ball in a light and airy fashion.

"Ker has just given Hilary two shillings," says he.

"What?"

Diana peers at him through the fast-growing brightness of the coming dawn. If he were no the most abstemious of men she would have told herself that perhaps there had been a last glass of champagne, but—

"Yes, I assure you," says Clifford. "I saw him do it. I don't think much of him, do you? Most fellows give the girl they are going to marry a ring or a bracelet, or a trally-wag of some sort, but I never heard of a two-shilling piece before. Perhaps it's fashionable! We're rather out of it down here, you know, so we mightn't know. But to me it sounds shabby."

"You must be mad," says Diana.

"It's Hilary who ought to be mad."

"I dare say she expected girl!"

"Hilary, what does says Diana, turning to

"Oh! mean!" sa

"That's the wor paltry florin! I wouldn't

I were you, Hilary. I over. By-the-by, you you, I suppose? You melancholy coin to Di,

"Don't mind him," who is choking with la

oh, such a thing has h came down the stairs t

of water for some one—

"That wretched Blake Diana, who now anticip

trophes.

"And seeing me in ca thought I was an a couldn't resist the situ

indeed as if I were in he took me so entire

and I answered him.

"Sir," and got him the ter, whereupon he kib

this," holding up th florin, "into my hand!"

"Good gracious, wh done?" says Diana.

"You think I ought t Hilary mistakes her,

however. I shall keep cious relic; but wasn't

deal to give for a g Di? Wasn't it very e

him? Do you think it to marry such a spene

has proved himself to

"Oh, I'm not thinki

all," says Diana, in a

guish. "And how you

jest of it—I am onl;

that I have asked him

morrow, and that I

When he sees you—"

"Sees me! Never!"

now thoroughly frighte

think I would face hi

What on earth did you

"Why, for you!"

her solemn way.

"Then it is useless.

world would tempt me

to-morrow."

"But you will hav

sooner or later."

"Then it shall be la

has forgotten all about

water."

"Taht wouldn't ta'

says Clifford. "I expe

ed rom his memory by

may remember "is,"

gloomy forebodings as

erliness of Ker's disp

loss of his two-shilling

"Nonsense! I son't

ever think of that i

Diana, who is highly i

her husband for even I

show up Ker to Hilary

ary light; girls are so

sometimes over the vag

"That's what I say,"

who is rather enjoying

told you I thought

spendthrift."

"Well," says Diana

rather marry a spendt

miser any day!"

"Which am I?" asks

xiously.

"Oh, you! You're no

his wife, who is a litt

with him.

At this, Clifford pas

suddenly round her, and

up close to him.

"Poor old girl! Lo

Married to a hopeless

says he, whereon they

gether, and peace is rest

"Hilary, darling, you

at luncheon!" entreats

"No! No! Never!" s

with emphasis. "I—I c

CHAPTER IV.

"Miss Kinsella is in

room, ma'am," says the

It is next morning, ar

too, considering the diss

the night before. Diana

have only just got down

to be told, in their lan

that that old gossip-mor

ing to see them, seem

can be endured. Mrs. Cl

at the cook.

"Why on earth didn't

were in bed?" says she,

tone.

"I don't know, ma'am.

know what you'd wish."

And of course she di

pressed into upstairs ser

first time. The parlo

been in the lowest spiri

post at eight o'clock car

had been quite incapab

anything ever since. Th

letter contained was th

was a little bilious (the

in Traloe, and she had

her), and that there wa

very big "pattern" held

ing in her own place, abou

from her present situ

"pattern" means a danc

highway where four roads

where the peasants cong

stated occasions to foot

and fro, with the assista

old piper—generally, and

ence blind.) It has

therefore, to her simple