

A MAD PRANK

BY THE DUCHESS.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

JIM and Diana have gone to speed the old lawyer on his journey. They had begged him to spend a month, a night, a week, a day even, with them, so thankful were they for his intelligence, but all to no effect. Sadly they follow him to the door, sorry in that they can show no gratitude beyond words to the man who has delivered poor dear Hilary from her hateful dilemma. And she has been so good all through, poor darling, so anxious to do what was right (only because they had asked her), it was but an hour ago indeed that she had rebelled. She had found the task to hard for her. Now the task is at an end. Won't she be delighted!

Meantime they have left the study, — and Hilary and Ker face to face.

A deadly silence ensues, quiet reigns within this room. Ker is looking out of the window, and Hilary is trifling with a book or two on the table. She had told herself she ought to go, but still—one or two words must be spoken. One should bid even the worst people adieu when one has spent an hour or so with them. One should never be rude.

"What a fortunate turn things have taken," says she, moving the books about a little indiscriminately.

"Very."

He comes back from the window, and faces her from the other side of the table. "Yes. We are free." Her air is quite as cold as before, yet somehow he knows that there is a change in it, a subtle change.

"Entirely free."

"I'm so glad," says Hilary, with careful dignity. "Because, once having decided that a marriage between us would be madness, I felt that perhaps I was doing you an injustice."

"It is too good of you to trouble yourself so much about me."

"I was troubled myself, too; or perhaps, I should not have thought so much about you. You see, my refusal to marry you meant your losing a great deal of money."

"I am not so wedded to money as you seem to imagine."

"I did not accuse you of that. I," indignantly, "only accused you of being willing to marry me without loving me."

"And what did that mean?" He almost laughs at the absurdity of her reasoning. And in truth she has lost herself a little. She makes a petulant movement, and wisely turns the conversation.

"You are going back to India, then?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

"As soon as ever I can," icily. Then, with a sudden touch of anger: "Why do

you ask me? Surely you, who have arranged my movements, are the one who must know most about them."

"I?" she looks up. "I to arrange your movements?"

"Yes, you!" He goes up to her and looks her deliberately in the face. "Will you tell me you are not sending me back to India?"

"What are you saying?" says she, with an attempt at hauteur that fails her. To her horror she knows that she trembling. "Who am I, that I should arrange your movements?"

"That is beside the question; though," with a quick look at her, "I could answer you. Will you tell me that you did not refuse me?"

"Ah! There was nothing to refuse!"

"There was me."

"You, but not your love."

"Both! Both! I swear it. I swear it now, Hilary, with a clear conscience, when there is nothing to prevent your believing it. I love you. There is no girl on earth like you, I think. I love you—speak to me!"

But Hilary cannot speak. She makes a very brave struggle, and then, suddenly, like any silly baby, her hands go up to her eyes and, to her everlasting shame, she knows that she has burst into tears.

Dear and blessed tears. They tell him all things.

Suddenly she feels herself caught in his arms. Her cheek is pressed to his. His love, on fire by reason of those tears, has now declared itself; that love, which he had half decided, has carried him past control. Like a tide it rushes on, sweeping away all obstacles, dashing straight to the goal of its desires.

Hilary, in the midst of this whirl, loses herself a little. Instinctively she clings to him. From the very first she had felt a certain sympathy with Ker. Now she knows she loves him.

"Now what was it all about?" asks Ker five minutes later. "I think you needn't have been so very hard on me, just because I happened to be a bit late."

"Oh, no. We won't talk about it any more," says Hilary, smiling at him it is true, but letting a little sigh escape her.

"Yes we will though. I can see by your eyes it is not all right yet."

"Well, I'll tell you the truth, Fred. I," blushing hotly, "didn't like to think you had found Mrs. Dyson-Moore more attractive than me."

"Mrs. Dyson-Moore! Heavens and earth! a thousand Mrs. Dyson-Moore wouldn't have kept me from you. Why, I wasn't within a mile of her all day."

"Not," faltering, "with her? Then where—?"

"I was in Cork, and that beastly train was of course slow. And—"

"Oh, Fred!" she springs to her feet. "Oh, what must you think of me?"

"I needn't tell you," laughing, "you know. I went up to Cork to get you this—" He puts his hand in his pocket. "Why?—Where? Oh, here it is!"

He pulls out a little case, opens it, and taking her hand, slips an exquisite diamond ring upon her engaged finger.

Hilary looks at him, and then, impulsively going nearer to him, lifts her head and kisses him.

"I oughtn't to take it. I oughtn't really," says she dejectedly. "I'm not worthy of it. All the time you were thinking of me, I—"

"You were thinking of me, too."

"Yes, but how?"

"Never mind, you were thinking of me. That's the great point."

"I certainly was doing that—with a vengeance! What a lovely, darling ring! Do you know, Fred, I never had a ring in all my life before."

"I'm glad of that," says Ker in a low tone. "I'm glad my first gift to you has not been forestalled."

"Your first!" she pauses, and quite a distressed change grows on her face.

"Oh, not your first! Fred—my florin! That was your first! Oh! how could you throw it away like that? Do you think we shall be able to find it again?"

"If not," laughing, "I can give you another."

"Oh, no. That or no other. I'm sure I know the spot where it fell, I—" She stops short, and colors violently.

"You what?" He takes her hands and presses his lips to her palms. Perhaps he knows what is coming.

"I watched where it fell; I meant to go back and pick it up," says she bravely, but blushing until the tears came into her eyes.

"What? Even when you thought I was going away forever?" "Yes."

"Not a bit of it," says Ker, closing his arms around her. "I'll tell you what you thought—what you knew—that nothing on earth would induce me to go away, so long as a shred of chance remained to me that you would still relent and marry me!"

"I didn't know that. No indeed. I felt sure you didn't care—that you would go."

"Well, you know now!"

"Yes, and I wonder at it," says she, still in an extremely abashed frame of mind, "considering how bad I have been to you all along."

"I am a wronged man; I acknowledge that," says Ker. "As there was to be an alteration in the will, I wish all the money had been left to me."

"How greedy of you!"

"Not at all. Greediness has nothing to do with it. But such a will would have enabled me to prove to you the truth of some words I said to you to-day. Do you remember them? You asked me if I would marry you if you had not a penny in the world, and when I said 'Yes,' you wouldn't believe me."

PERRIN'S GLOVES

For LADIES, GENTLEMEN, and CHILDREN

ARE THE BEST

For ELEGANCE, FIT and DURABILITY
ASK FOR THEM.

DRESSMAKERS' Magic Scale



MISS K. C. MACDONALD,
12 Shuter Street, Toronto.
General Agent for Ontario.

BEST
Coal & Wood
CONGER COAL CO. LTD.



6 King St. East.
Branches throughout city.



Restaurant and Grill Room...

PRIVATE ROOMS FOR LADIES

All classes Catering on short notice.

Cor. Leader Lane and Wellington Street
ALBERT WILLIAMS, Prop.

The ARLINGTON HOTEL

Toronto, - Ontario

FIRST-CLASS FAMILY HOTEL
Elegantly Furnished Rooms En Suite

COR. KING AND JOHN STS., TORONTO.
W. HAYLIE, Manager

THE ELLIOTT

Cor. Church and Shuter Sts., Toronto.
Opposite Metropolitan St.

An especially fine hotel on account of superior location, pleasant and healthy surroundings, modern conveniences.
TRY IT WHEN VISITING THE CITY

The JOHN EATON Departmental Cafe

Fourth Floor—Take Elevator.
Temperance and Yonge Sts. - TORONTO.
Brightest, largest, coolest, lunch room in the city, and low to pay than anywhere.