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THE HARLEQUIN;

OR,

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

(From the N. Y. Metropolitan Record.)

I was proceeding, not long since, down one of the principal thoroughfares of London, in the direction of a certain theatre, which honor and discretion forbid my particularizing, when I felt myself familiarly taken by the arm. Looking round, I beheld the face of an old and intimate school-fellow, whom I had not seen for three or four months. At our last meeting, he was fairly on the way to contract one of those convenient but uninteresting marriages in which the consent of friends and every other combination of concurrent circumstance cause the course of true love, or false, to glide along as smoothly as a passenger barge on a Flemish canal. He was then gay, rosy and smart; but he looked pale and highly excited, and wore any thing but the aspect of a man in his honeymoon.

'Where are you going to, Wilson, to-night?' he quickly and abruptly asked, as if he had not a moment to lose.

'I believe I am going to the Park Theatre, to see the new pantomime, and to pass my judgment on the rising young clown who is making such a stir in the theatrical world.'

'Aha,' answered my friend, with a smile full of meaning; 'I'm going there too.'

'That's a very fortunate coincidence,' said I. 'We may as well sit in the pit together, for the sake of a little chat between the acts.'

'No,' he replied; 'I cannot be with you in the pit during the performance; I shall be particularly engaged in another part of the house.— Still, I will endeavor to catch your eye.'

'Oh, I suppose you are going to have a *tete-a-tete* in a private box, or something of that sort, with Mrs. Jones that is to be, or that is perhaps. Well, that's all very natural for a limited season. By the way, when are you to be married, Jones; or is the knot already tied?'

'That knot is not tied—I mean that knot with Clarissa Jinks. That engagement is all over and done with for the present. I have, not long since, commenced another. I will tell you all about it one of these days.'

'Why not tell me now, at once? You know how fond I am of sensational romance. The first piece at the Park to-night is that everlasting and horrid thing, George Barnwell, which can be of no earthly use to us as a moral lesson, seeing that neither of us is so lucky as to have a rich uncle to kill. Instead of witnessing Miss Millwood's intrigues, suppose we step into the Peacock Supper Rooms, which almost join the theatre, and have a glass of porter till the tragedy is over and the overture to the pantomime is ready to strike up. You can tell me there the history of the sorrows of your heart.'

'Impossible!' he hastily answered. 'The hour is almost come when I too—but you shall know everything this very night. I will promise to sup with you after the pantomime; only you will have the nuisance of waiting for me at least a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes before I can join you. Tell the waiter to let us have the room which Signor Giacoma—a very particular friend of mine—uses, and we shall have a quiet evening to ourselves.'

'Good! I will order a dish of natives to be ready to "open sesame" the moment of your arrival.'

'Order as many oysters as you like; I must have something more substantial than that after my work is done. The people will prepare me my steak and my stout. I have not yet dined, nor shall I till then. I'm now off to begin a hard night's task; so, good-by till after the fall of the curtain.'

He instantly left me, and disappeared up some mysterious passage, which led, like a rabbit's burrow, out of the street. Not caring for the last act of George Barnwell, I strutted up and down, meditating my school-fellow's unexplained condition and adventures without finding any clue to their drift. At last, it was time to enter the theatre: my good luck and the heaving tide of the crowd, drifted me into a capital place, neither too far from the stage nor too near it.— The old established medley, scramble-scramble, pantomime overture was rasped, and scraped, and pizzicatoed by the fiddlers, and the fairy tale introduction began.

As I said, I am forbidden to indicate the real name and locality of the theatre which I call the Park, and therefore cannot honestly inform you whether the Sleeping Beauty or Little Red Ridinghood were the groundwork of the pantomimic preface. Enough that we had a genuine production in the highest school of art. There were tricks worthy of the days of Bradwell, married to 'spokens' and modern allusions which would do honor to the authors of the most spiritual burlesques and extravaganzas. We had a harlequin whose checkered dress fitted so well

and was worn so naturally, that he seemed to have been born in it, and that he must have come into the world a parti-colored infant; we had a smiling columbine, with flowers in her hair springs in her heels and toes, a silver tissue outer-petticoat, and a crinoline under one, both which latter made up by their width for any deficiency they might be charged with as to length. We had a pantaloone—such a panfaçon!—dangling, drivelling, and made of India rubber. But the star of the night, the great hit of the season, in fact, was the clown—a brilliant comet arrived no one knew whence, but who charmed all hearts alike with the novelty, perfection, and bold inspiration, which distinguished his clowny accomplishments. Once or twice, when he uttered a word or two, my thoughts started off a-bouncing in various directions in search of some other voice which it seemed to echo; but soon the convulsive heaving of my sides made me insensible to all but the fun before me. Now and then the clown fixed his eyes on the pit, and made some singular and original grimaces in my direction; but I, like all the rest of the audience, considered that extemporaneous effusion as belonging to the part, and that it was not a bad joke that some one member of the public present should be selected to be made mouths at and put out of countenance. However, whether in tragedy or comedy, the current of time sweeps all before it. The last scene had dazzled the spectators with splendors of fairy temples, and gas illuminations, and fiery cascades, and colored lights; the kicking, the tricking, the jumping, the bumping, the grinning, and spinning were all at an end. The curtain fell, and with it fell many a young imaginative soul from the regions of fancy to thoughts of bed time.

As agreed, I awaited Jones at the Peacock Tavern. The waiter treated me with marked distinction when I mentioned Signor Giacoma's name, and ordered a solid and comfortable supper. In due time the rendezvous was honored. My former school-fellow came in with the look of a man who had just been going through some pleasant but fatiguing exercise. Although the pantomime season is not sultry weather, his short hair was saturated with perspiration; he had evidently just been dressing himself rapidly; and he seized the pot of porter, took a long pull and set it down again with a sigh of gratification.— The waiter, as he placed our meal on the table, glanced at one side of Jones' face, and with a respectful 'Excuse me, sir,' wiped off with his napkin a small red and white patch which by accident appeared in front of his (Jones') ear.— The latter merely said, 'Thank you,' in a matter-of-fact way, and we were left to discuss our smoking-hot steak.

'And, after all, what do you think of the pantomime?' my companion inquired, when he had finished his first plateful.

'The pantomime was admirable, and the clown was supreme; but I can't think what induced him to make such a dead set at me in the pit.'

'Can't you? well I can. And, to cut the matter short, the clown was myself!'

'You? Impossible! You, with your lugubrious phiz, your heavy looks, and your sluggish movements—you cannot be that incomparable and spiritual clown.'

'Indeed I am, though, and I thank you for your compliments; the public voice confirms their sincerity. And as my clownship is connected with my broken-off marriage, just let me finish this couple of kidneys, and you shall then hear the whole history.'

The request for a little further refreshment was only reasonable from a man who had been making me laugh till I cried again; so, after a pause in our conversation, which was well filled up by mastication and deglutition, the knife and fork were laid aside; he commenced unfolding the exciting story of his matrimonial failure and his pantomimic success.

'You know, Wilson, I was always extravagantly fond of the play; but you do not know that the department of the drama which absorbed my thoughts was pantomime. Easter spectacles, however gorgeous, fell dead upon my fastidious eyes. Summer itself had but little charms for me, because harlequin and columbine were laid up in lavender till Christmas should come round again. My imagination revelled in pantomimic scenes; and pantomimic feats were almost the only ones that I cared to consider seriously.'

'You know very well that my maiden aunt was anxious that I should marry Clarissa Jinks, who was her goddaughter. My father and mother liked the idea, because old Jinks has made a pretty penny by stock-jobbing, and of course Clarissa, who is his only child, will have the whole of it by and by. We went through all the callings and ballings, and dinings and teadrinkings usual in such diplomacy. I did not care much about the girl herself at first, but I did not say 'No' to my relations wishes.— What induced me to say 'Yes' decidedly, was the finding out one afternoon that Clara was the

very image of the last columbine I had seen.— Was this merely an illusion? I now think that it probably was; but what confirmed me in the idea was the discovery that her governor was a perfect pantaloone. Study for the part was totally unnecessary; he only required to put on the costume.

The notion, too, entered my head that, by foul means or fair, by force or stratagem, I would for my own proper entertainment, make Jinks and his daughter publicly appear in the only dress which could suit them properly. Sometimes I was so completely absorbed in this project, that I sat by columbine's side for a quarter of an hour together without uttering a single word, to her great and justifiable astonishment. You may suppose I did not tell her what I was thinking about.

'One day, a regular pantomime dandy buck called at Jinks' while I was there. He was quite as much of a dandy-buck as Jinks himself, with the exception of the costume, was a pantaloone, and Clarissa a columbine. Eyes so thoroughly well practised as mine were could make no mistake in affairs like those. The buck was called Melville, or Belville, or something of that kind. But his name is of no consequence. I instantly saw that he had 'intentions' respecting Clarissa, and I resolved to play him one of the old stock tricks. He paid rather frequent visits to Jinks'. One evening, as he was going to sit down, I slipped his chair from under him. It was a pure, correct and classical move. Down went the buck flat on his back; but the proof that nature had cut him out for the part is, that in falling he thrust out his arm to save himself, and accidentally gave a back-handed tip to the housemaid, who was bringing in a water with cake and wine. She stumbled in turn, and laid hold of Jinks' periwig, which came off, and was left in her hand.

I meanwhile had seated myself in the chair which I had stolen from the buck; and, with my hands clasped upon my knees, I twiddled my thumbs and stared at the ceiling with that innocent look which first rate clowns alone can execute artistically. I heard in imagination the applause of those gallery-critics who are best competent to appreciate the traditions of art.

Nobody but Columbine—I mean Clarissa—observed my action; and she laughed like a mad thing at the buck's misadventure, because she detested him, as in duty bound. Dandy-buck, ashamed of his tumble, and out of countenance at the young lady's merriment, utterly lost his presence of mind, and could not in the least imagine how his chair had disappeared. The unlucky idea then entered his head to dust himself with his pocket handkerchief, which only made his situation the more ridiculous. Jinks glared at him with furious looks; Nancy the maid stood stock-still and thunder struck. The buck very shortly took his leave, which was the best thing he could do. As soon as he was gone, Jinks without making any allusion to his wig, crossed his legs, pulled out his snuff-box, and said with magisterial dignity, 'Really that young man's awkwardness is quite disgusting.'

This first success emboldened me; but as I had to do with a substantial citizen, whose acquaintance with dramatic literature was properly very imperfect, I was obliged to exercise great self-control in curbing my pantomimic aspirations. One day, nevertheless, on calling at Jinks' exactly at their dinner-hour, and managing to reach the dining-room without encountering a single creature, I could not resist the temptation to hide myself under the table, exactly as I had seen so many clowns do. The soup was already there: so, bearing the old gentleman and his daughter approach, I caused the soup-tureen to vanish with me. Pantaloone and columbine sat down to dinner.

'Well, Nancy,' said my intended father-in-law, 'you said the mock-turtle was on the table.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the servant briskly.

'I do not see it,' answered the old gentleman.

Nancy uttered a cry of astonishment.

'Come,' said her master, 'make haste and fetch it.'

Nancy never stirred a peg.

'Well,' said Jinks, 'what are you about?'

Nancy vowed that she would take her 'davy' that she had brought in the soup, and set it on the table. What had become of it was quite past her comprehension. The debate increased in animation.

'Do you take me for Tom Fool at Bartlemy Fair?' said Jinks in a rage. (This expression filled my heart with delight.) There is a private in the Coldstream Guards who is always prowling about this neighborhood; I am certain you have given him for supper the whole of the jar I brought from Birch's, and now you have the impudence to declare that you cannot conceive what has become of it!'

Nancy began to cry, and vowed that it was a shameful calumny, and that she knew nothing

about Coldstreams, or any other streams, except the Serpentine. At that moment I twitched columbine's sashkin off her lap. She stooped to pick it up again, and saw me and the soup-tureen under the table. She uttered a short cry which her father did not hear, and then relieved herself by a burst of laughter. Ah, columbine was a charming girl! she fell into convulsions of merriment at the most trifling event. She laughed when a door was opened, or when a door was shut; when a blue bottle-fly flew across the room, or when a cur-dog barked in the street. She laughed at all times and in all places; and generally did not take the trouble to inquire what it was that made her laugh.

Meanwhile the governor poured himself out a glass of wine, to replace his missing plate of soup. While he turned round to treat poor Nancy with a final grumble as she went towards the kitchen, I stretched out my arm, and the glass of wine followed the soup-tureen. Nancy almost immediately reappeared, bringing in a dish of hashed chickens. Jinks bestowed a moment's reflection on the sudden disappearance of his glass.

'Now, really,' he reproachfully said to the girl, as she carefully placed the dish upon the table; 'are you crazy to day? Why have you taken my wine glass away?'

'I, sir? I haven't touched your wine-glass!' protested the maid, in astonishment.

'My glass of sherry,' responded Jinks.

Columbine, as usual, burst out laughing, and gave me an encouraging kick in the ribs. Her gayety exasperated the governor, who continued his address to Nancy: 'Do you mean to make me believe that my wine-glass has gone without hands, like that capital mock-turtle, which your Coldstream follower has eaten? Ah, now I see how it is; the fellow is hidden somewhere in the kitchen.' With these words Jinks started up to make a search, followed by Nancy, in a towering passion. As soon as columbine and I were left alone, she told me she had never so much fun in her life. 'Hide the hashed chicken under the table,' she said.

'Your proposal,' I answered, 'will hardly do; it will cause suspicion. We can play some better trick than that.' I caught sight of the evening paper, unopened in its cover, lying on a side-table close by. I laid hold of it, and slipped it dexterously into the middle of the hash, hiding it under the joints of the fowl. My father-in-law returned.

'The soldier is not there; he has managed to get away; but I will take good care this is the last time he shall come. Quick, Nancy, another wine-glass!'

Nancy, who naturally had fallen into the snare set a glass on the table, without saying a word. The governor took a spoon, and began to serve the hash. 'What do you call this?' he asked.

'That?' pouted Nancy; 'that's a leg of chicken.'

'But this hard substance here, which I feel with the spoon?'

'A bone, perhaps, or a piece of toast. Bones and crusts are neither of them soft.'

Jinks drew out the object in question.— 'Heaven forgive me,' said he; 'it's this evening's paper! You have put the *Globe* into a hash. I cannot suppose you have done it on purpose; that would be abominable; but you certainly have lost your senses.'

Nancy gasped with wonderment; she had not strength to say a word in self-defence. She stood with her arms a-kimbo, petrified with stupefaction. Columbine was choking with laughter. 'Gracious goodness,' said the governor, 'what a fool the girl is!' So saying, pantaloone—excuse my giving him that name—wiped the paper with his napkin and opened it. 'Let us see how things are going on to-day. That Neapolitan question will ruin me.' He put on his spectacles, threw himself back in his arm-chair, and read with difficulty, because his eyesight was not too good. 'To-day, Prince Procrastini, the Austrian envoy-extraordinary, had a second interview with the king—(Ah, so much the better!)—with the king. It was observed, that after his departure from the royal presence, several couriers—for—(Nancy, put the candle a little nearer this way.)'

Nancy did so. Whilst he went on spelling out his news, I quietly drew a lucifer match, and set fire to the paper. Pantaloone and Nancy uttered a simultaneous exclamation—one of terror, the other of rage.

'It is really no fault of mine,' said Nancy, beginning to lose her senses in earnest. 'The candle is tall, and the paper caught fire below. I am sure the house must be bewitched.'

'The house is bewitched, is it, you impudent busy? Leave it, then, instantly before another five minutes.'

He followed her into the kitchen, and desired her to mount upstairs and pack her boxes. I seized the opportunity to decamp, after stealing a kiss from Columbine, who declared that she should die of laughing.

Next day I fancied the old gentleman treated me rather coldly. Did he suspect any thing? Nancy was reinstated in her place. All I know is, that he remarked to my aunt, 'Your nephew seems rather a light young man.' But she turned it off with the clever remark, that though my complexion was fair for a man, my hair was not red, nor even sandy. She then took advantage of the opportunity to sound my praises in every respect, and immediately sent pantaloone a splendid present of half a dozen pots of currant jelly for his roast mutton, made with her own fair and maiden hands. I tried hard to intercept her peace-offering, that I might remove the jelly and put a dead rat into every empty pot; but adverse circumstances prevented me.— What a capital stage-trick it would have been!

The pantomime-costumes still ran in my head. Whenever I thought of our future home-circle during the honeymoon (for it was agreed that I should live with Jinks and his daughter), I pictured to myself my father-in-law and my bride moving about the house in the dress I have alluded to, and myself, as clown, doing the honors. I imagined the rooms filled with trap-doors, sliding-panels, and all sorts of unexpected contrivances to astonish the vulgar herd of morning-callers.

At last an opportunity occurred of partially realizing my desires. I greedily seized it. A grand fancy ball was to be given at the Heligoland Square Rooms, for the benefit of the sufferers in the Chinese insurrection. Jink's name, to his great annoyance, was forced upon the committee list; and every body, myself included, told him that his duty was to sanction that noble charity with his influential presence. He yielded graciously; and to me was deputed the task of choosing the costume.

'You know better than I what will suit me,' said the governor, taking me confidentially by the button; 'something simple, dignified, and majestic, proper for a man with my means and position. Nothing absurd and out-of-the-way.'

'What do you think of a Turkish dress?'

'The Turks,' he said, after a moment's reflection 'generally maintain a stately carriage; but the Eastern question has altogether been such a loss to me, that I feel rather a grudge against "Turkey".'

'How would you like to be an alchemist, or an enchanter?'

'I should prefer that, the alchemist especially. Enchanters are only nonsense fit for fairy-tales and advertisements. However, I leave it all to you; but at my age 'tis a great sacrifice to make, to dress myself out in a fancy costume.'

On the day appointed, I arrived at Jink's, followed by a porter (a theatrical dresser disguised as such) and a cargo of band boxes. One of these was opened; and the contents displayed a complete and vividly-colored pantaloone's dress.

'What the deuce is this?' said Jinks in amazement.

'A costume of the reign of James II.' (My father-in-law elect was theoretically, historically a Jacobite to the back-bone.)

'Are you quite sure that this was the fashion in poor dear James II.'s days?'

'Nathan will give you a certificate that the king himself wore it at the court of France.'

'And this very absurd peruke?'

'Absurb! It once belonged to Lord Clarendon!'

All scruples were silenced. With the dresser's assistance, he was soon attired. Clarissa, under Nancy's hands, was converted into columbine; and I, rejoicing in my destiny, became clown with a rapidity known only on the stage. Jinks growled when he looked at me.

My happiness was approaching its climax.— We started together in a glass coach I had engaged. But the human heart is never content. On the way a fancy entered my head which caused the abrupt termination of my matrimonial prospects, and brought my talents to the public service. I was not satisfied with merely putting the Jinkses into travestie; pantaloone must play a bit of his part as completely as dandy-buck had done.

Our entrance into the ball room made a great sensation. Columbine was instantly carried off by a porter. I, properly powdered and printed, entered thoroughly into the spirit of my part.— I got out of Jink's way as much as I could to avoid being tempted to the actually disrespectful action of giving him the classical buffet and slap. I vented my impetuosity on empty air; I wrestled with shadows, and played tricks with nonentities. The company were charmed with my personation. The whole room was in a roar of laughter, and I soon felt all the inspiration of the Pythoness. By a sad fatality, pantaloone unexpectedly stood at my elbow, grinning fatuously in perfect style. It was too much; I could resist no longer. My muscles trembled all over my frame; my brain was in the excited state of etherised intoxication. I gave him such a thundering box on the ear. Ha! ha! ha! You should have seen and heard it!'