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A MAD PRANK

BY THE DUCHESS.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"WELL, me dear, there's some truth in what you say," returns she modestly, "and I'll take the note. Whilst you're writing it, I'm thinking I'll tell you a little thing I said to that brazen creature, Mrs. Dyson-More. My gracious, Mr. Clifford, did ye see her potticoats?"

"I tried hard," says Clifford. "I think, after a bit, I did."

"Scandalous! Scandalous!" Miss Kinsella uplifts her arms.

"What did you say to her, Miss Kinsella?" asks Hilary.

"Just a word, me dear. No more. I went up to her when she was dancing with one o' them stragglers from the barracks, an' I asked her wouldn't she lik the loan of a bill? It struck me" says Miss Kinsella thoughtfully, "that she was a little short with me, when I met her at supper afterward."

"You?" begins Clifford, "but—"

At this moment a loud knock at the front door is heard.

"Who's that?" demands Miss Kinsella, eagerly.

"Some friend, no doubt," says Diana carelessly. "Now, here is the note. You ought to take it at once. You know if the account is sent to the papers—"

"I know." Miss Kinsella is peering out of the window that commands the hall door. "Why—if it isn't that young man that is staying with Mrs. Dyson-More."

"Is it? Very likely. You really ought to see about that at once, if your nephew—"

"Is he coming to see you now, or Miss Burroughs?"

"Both—he," desperately, "is a sort of cousin of ours. But if you don't—"

"A cousin? You don't say so. On the mother's side, or the father's?"

"The father's. No, the mother's—I assure you the first—"

"Then, let me see, his name should be—"

"I'll see you to the gate, Miss Kinsella," says Clifford, genially, conveying the old lady safely out of the room just as Ker enters. Miss Kinsella manages to give him a good stare, however, as they pass each other.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Love on my heart from Heaven fell
Soft as the dew on flowers of spring.
Sweet as the hidden drops that swell
Their honey-throated chattering."

Luncheon is over, it had proved in the beginning rather a trial to Diana, who could not forget that other luncheon, in which Hilary had played such a lead-

ing part. But Clifford had said something about it, to which Ker had responded with an utterly unembarrassed air, and then they had all laughed. So it had ended.

After luncheon Ker had asked Hilary to show him the pretty garden outside, a glimpse of which could be caught from the dining-room windows, and she had put on a big straw hat, picturesque to the last degree, and brought him out—here.

"After all," says Ker, "I suppose we had better talk about it."

They are sitting in the little arbor by this time (all overgrown by trailing roses), and a slight pause had come in the rather hurried conversation that up to this has been carried on between them.

"About—" Her tone is a little faint. Her pretence at ignorance poor indeed.

"I know it is hard for you," says he hurriedly, "but it has to be done, you see, and—you must only try and forgive me. Of course, you have only to say one word, and I'm off to India again tomorrow, and that blessed £18,000 a year may go anywhere you like for all I care. If only your refusal of me would give it to you, I should feel contented. But as it is—"

"Or," says she slowly, looking on the ground, "if your refusal to marry me—"

"Well, I haven't refused," says he, tracing a pattern in the gravel with his stick.

"Well, neither have I," says she with a queer little laugh.

"Now, what do you mean by that?" He gets up and stands looking at her.

"Oh, I don't know what I mean. Don't stand there staring at me."

She too gets up, and, turning from him, begins to pull a few buds from a long-suffering rose-tree near.

"Was ever any girl placed in so horrid a position?" says she at last, in a very distressed tone. "Never, I think! And what makes it worse for me is, that I feel as if I was in fault."

"No, no; you mustn't think that. Surely neither of us is in fault."

"Of course," pulling off another most sensitive bud, "I could say that 'one word' you spoke of a moment ago, but," she now turns and looks fairly at him, "it seems such a great deal of money to throw away."

"It does, of course."

"To absolutely sacrifice it as Diana say"—hesitatingly. "Still I can't bear the idea of your marrying me only because I am worth—so much."

"That applies equally to both of us," returns he gravely.

"Yes, I know; yes, of course," hur-

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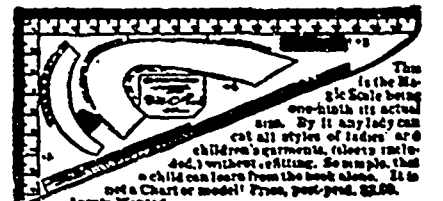
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