



CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"Oh! not so desolate, Miss Kinsella," says Hilary, with mild irony. "You have got Mr. Peter, you know."

"Well, I have, me dear," says the old maid, brightening. "And it must be confessed by all that me nephew, Pether Kinsella, is a host in himself. But even Pether says I know nothing. You're not 'up to-day,' he says to me. An' surely, Mrs. Clifford, that's a most extraordinary remark to make to me, who am out o' me bed at seven sharp every mornin' o' me life. But that's what he's always tellin' me. You're not 'up to-day,' he says. I suppose it has some meanin', but faith I can't find it out."

Hilary is shaking with laughter; Mrs. Clifford comes to the rescue.

"It is slang," says she. "A silly expression. You must tell Mr. Kinsella not to talk slang to you. And 'date,' perhaps, is the word. Don't you think," with a view to changing the conversation, "that Mrs. Browne looked very well last night?"

"And her dress," says Hilary. "Oh! charming!"

"No such great thing," snaps Miss Kinsella. "Did ye look at her sleeves? Chinese silk—eight pence a yard!"

"It looked all right," says Mrs. Clifford, wondering what Miss Kinsella is going to say of her dress at the next house she goes to.

"And Mrs. Dyson-Moore?" asks Hilary, mischievously. "What did you think of her dress?"

"Faith, there was nothing to think of," says Miss Kinsella promptly. "I couldn't see it."

"Oh! fie, Miss Kinsella!" says Hilary. "What an insinuation!"

"I thought she looked very pretty," says Mrs. Clifford vaguely, who is now wondering how to get rid of her.

"So did Meejor Blackburn, that big dragoon from the barracks. Me dear Mrs. Clifford, I must tell you," leaning forward, and lowering her voice, and giving a glance over her shoulder at the door to see if it was firmly closed. "I'm the last one in the world to pry upon any one, as you know, me dear. But I went into one of the conservatories, just to see if the Chinese lanterns were burnin' all right, and sure enough, there she was, she an' the Meejor, lookin' bigger than ever, an' her hand clasped in his, behind her fan. They do say that is why she buys them big fans; just to hide behind with meejors."

"I don't think there is any real harm in her," says Mrs. Clifford, who had made several ineffectual attempts to stop this revelation, and who is now feeling very uncomfortable. "I am afraid, Miss Kinsella," nervously, "we are keeping you—and—"

"Not at all. Not at all, me dear. The day is young."

Hilary comes forward a step or two.

"Did you hear," says she impressively, "that Lady Bolton had a little daughter last night?"

"No? ye don't say so!" This is Miss Kinsella's formula. She rises instantly. "Poor dear young creature. I must fly to her. Good-by. Good-by." She hurries away, all sails set.

"Hilary," begins Mrs. Clifford, "who told you? I thought it wasn't expected until—"

"Nobody told me," says Hilary, "I merely asked her if she had heard it. I should have been surprised if she had. Because certainly I hadn't. But she's gone, anyway."

"Thank Heaven!" Mrs. Clifford sinks into a seat. "What is to be done about Bridget?"

"I know," says Hilary, stopping in the middle of the *pas de quatre* she has been dancing up and down the room with an imaginary partner. "I thought it all out while that old lady was gossiping with you."

"You know?"

"Yes. I'll be your parlormaid for this occasion only."

CHAPTER V.

"The color of the king doth come and go,
Between his purpose and his conscience,
Like heralds 'twixt two dreadful battles set."

"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. Look here, Di, don't be foolish. 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 'pattern.' 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 here. 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 want 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.

(To be continued.)

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