

A Girl's Caprice

OR, THE RESULT OF A FANCY DRESS BALL

CHAPTER I.

To-day, that "gay philosopher," has risen upon the world with quite a charming air. Its sighs are balmy and its smiles frequent. It is evidently in a glad and glorious mood, as well it may be, having just been highly decorated by that splendid general, the sun, who marshals us through most of our happiest hours, and who is now shining with all his might upon the long, old-fashioned windows of Diana's home.

"What a day!" says Diana's sister, looking up from the pile of lilac calico lying on her knees. It is the kind of calico, both in color and texture, that one associates in one's mind with a servant's morning work—determined in its shade, but pretty for all that, and striped; little lines of dark violet running over the lighter ground.

"Yes—heavenly!" says Diana, whose married name is Clifford. She speaks rather absently, as if finding it difficult to lift her mind from the making of the little mob-cap at which she is so diligently stitching. The glance she gives upward, as if in answer to Hilary's rapturous sigh, is purely mechanical, though she evidently wishes it to be understood that she too acknowledges the heaven-sent glories that are lighting up the trim lawn outside, and rendering the garden an earthly paradise. But in a second her eyes fall to her task again.

"The idea of your wearing this!" says she, giving a contemptuous twirl to the delightful little cap. "And that—with an equally contemptuous pointing of her forefinger to the lilac mass lying in Hilary's lap—"at the biggest fancy-dress ball we have had here for ages, when at any moment you might be mistress of £18,000 a year."

"At any moment I might not, also," says her sister with a little laugh. "And even if I were the mistress of it, there would be a master too. That takes all the gift of the gingerbread. In the mean time—smoothing out the folds of the lilac skirt with a fond hand—"I shall wear this. A housemaid's dress is a fancy one—for every one except the bona fide housemaid—and as it is inexpensive, and as pennies count, I have chosen it. Providentially, at a ball of this kind one can be as bizarre, as eccentric, as one likes."

"Still," says Diana, with a regretful sigh, and a swift glance at her lovely sister, "I had always imagined you as—"

"Oh, I know," with amused impatience. "Joan of Arc."

"Certainly not," indignantly. "As 'Morning.' You would have looked beautiful as 'Morning.'"

"I shall look divine as Sarah Jane," says Miss Burroughs, with calm conviction. She lifts the calico skirt with daintily careful fingers—it is as yet only tacked together—and regards it with an admiring eye.

"Jim would have liked to give you something better," says Mrs. Clifford, leaning forward, with her elbows on her knees, and the cap between both her hands. Her tone is plaintive. "He says you are too absurd, too proud—"

"Jim is the dearest brother-in-law in all the world," says Hilary, unreserved affection in her voice. "That is why I am not going to let him beggar himself and the chicks for me."

"What nonsense! A mere gown—"

"Well, this is a mere gown, too. And I'm sure it will suit me. Do you know, Di," flinging down the half-finished dress and going to a long mirror let into one of the walls, "last night an awful doubt arose within my mind. I felt that the dress would suit me so admirably—so altogether—that I began to think that perhaps I was to the manner born—that Nature had meant me to be a real Sarah Jane."

She peers at herself in the glass, leaning a little forward, poised, as it were, on her toes, and with her hands clasped behind her back. The glass gives her back a very exquisite reflection—softly smiling dark-blue eyes, a mouth a little quizzical, but tender too, and a strong, firm chin, a forehead low, broad, and earnest, and such hair—hair that shines like burnished gold. Not the dead-gold hair we know of, nor the crispy hair that never seems at rest, but a mixture of both these, looking always as if half an hour ago it had come out of a warm, sweet bath, and was growing brighter and brighter through the sun rays that have dried it.

"No, I don't look like it now," says she, turning away, and letting her slim figure drop once more into her lounging-chair. "But when I have the cap and gown on, I know I shall look the thing. Humiliating thought!"

"There won't be a girl in the room like you," says Diana affectionately. "Ah! that's my saving clause!"

"Willfully misunderstanding her," Housemaids will be a rare quantity. I expect I shall be 'nique—I shall perhaps be that astonishing thing

at a fancy ball—the only of my kind in the room. I shall therefore—solemnly—'create a sensation.'"

"You will do that anyway," says Mrs. Clifford. She looks at her sister a little discontentedly. "I'm sure I don't know what they will all say of me. That I went in silk attire myself, and brought you as Cinderella."

"To find a Prince?"

"Your Prince! why, he's found," says Diana. "He is almost sure to be at the ball. Did I," slowly "tell you? I met old Miss Kinsella yesterday, and she said Mrs. Dyson-Moore told her she expected him on the fifteenth by the late train."

"The night of the ball!" A startled look springs into Hilary's eyes. But in a moment she recovers herself. "The late train! He will be too tired to go anywhere."

"He may wish to meet you."

"A girl he has never seen?"

"A girl he must either marry, or lose £18,000 a year."

"What a detestable will!" cries Hilary, springing to her feet, and beginning to pace up and down the room. "Iniquitous I call it. What on earth had I ever done to Aunt Charlotte that she should insist on bringing me into an affair of this kind? Why could she not choose some other niece? Some other nephew and niece, who knew each other?"

"There would have been less wisdom there. People who knew each other—that's generally fatal! When strangers meet there are possibilities."

"There are indeed, and very unpleasant ones. I feel certain," stopping short to regard her sister with an effective eye, "that Frederick Ker is the very last man in the world I should ever care to marry."

"Of course, if you have made up your mind beforehand—"

"I haven't made up my mind about anything."

"Not to look at him."

"You are wrong there. I'm dying to look at him—from a distance!"

"It is such a great deal of money to throw away," says Mrs. Clifford with a sigh. Money with her is not too plentiful.

"Who says I'm going to throw it away?" cries Hilary gayly. "Perhaps I am going to seize it. And perhaps it is he who will throw it away after all. He may not like me! He may reject me! He—"

she turns once more to the mirror as if to gain support from it. "Immortal gods! what an awful thought!" says she. "I confess, in a stricken tone, "it never occurred to me before."

"Well, it needn't occur now," says Diana, her fair, handsome face lighting. "And you needn't pretend you think it."

"But it's so serious, Di. If I refuse to marry my cousin Frederick, or if he refuses to marry me, £18,000 a year goes to 'The home for lost animals—the dogs.'"

"Well, it is in your own hands."

"Don't let us think of it till after this dance, anyway," says Hilary. "We have a little breathing-space left us."

"Not if he is there!"

"Oh, he can't be! Coming by that late train!" She lets her hands fall into her lap again, the needle sticking up in dangerous proximity to one of her pretty fingers, and looks at her sister anxiously. "If he should come to the dance, Di—of course," with eager conviction, "he won't; but if he should, promise me you will not introduce me to him, or get any one else to do it."

"But if he asks me?"

"How can he? He doesn't know you either."

"He could get an introduction. Mrs. Dyson-Moore might—"

"Not she. She will be taken up with herself and her admirers. Now promise."

"Well, I promise. But is it wise? Ought you not to meet him at once, and—"

"Marry him!" sarcastically. "No, I think not. I must have time. And, above all things, I want to enjoy this dance."

"Mrs. McIntyre is giving another fancy ball the week later; you will have to meet him there."

"Sufficient unto the day," says Hilary recklessly. "And who knows he may not have left long before that? I have made up my mind not to meet him at this first ball, at all events."

Diana looks at her sister with a certain concern.

"I wish you would try to like him," says she. "He means so much to you."

"Exactly as much as I mean to him. Don't look so forlorn," with an irrepressible laugh. "I'm going to try and like him as hard as ever I can. Harder even, if it will please you. Do you suppose I too cannot see all the bonbons that are to be got out of £18,000 a year?"

"I believe you are as blind as a bat," says Diana with some indignation.

(To be Continued.)

WORTHY BIG FORTUNES.

Priceless Autographs That Repose in London Safes.

Some of the finest and most valuable collections of autographs in the world lie in no less prosaic places than the safes of old-established banking firms, the signatures in question being either in the form of receipts for money or those made in special books for guidance and purposes of comparison at the banks in question.

In at least two cases in London these autographs are absolutely priceless, for they extend back for nearly 200 years, and they comprise specimens of the handwriting of every British monarch during that time, of many foreign potentates, and of nearly every distinguished man, whether in war, commerce, statesmanship or art. For purposes of comparison even now these old-time bank autographs are said to be absolutely invaluable, for it must be recollected that these signatures are the very private and, so to say, hall-marked autographs of their writers, having attached to them secret marks known only to the writer and to the bank; and when salerom forgeries in the way of autographs are offered now, these often faded writings are as precious as when they were made, to obviate bank forgeries, in times long past.

Only quite recently a small tradesman of Portsmouth happened to look through a lot of what he had always been told by his parents was old lumber. This tradesman's great-grandfather had been a purser on various British war vessels during the Napoleonic wars, one of the ships of which he served having fought at Trafalgar with himself aboard as purser. Most of the old lumber in question was found to relate to this ancestor, and among it were scores of receipts and other documents written by Nelson, Collingwood and many other naval heroes of those days. One particular batch of this old lumber was sold within a few weeks of its discovery for £50. In one account book alone were scores of naval autographs of the greatest interest and value.

ROBS WAR OF HORROR.

Hungarian Invents a Gas-Charged Shell.

At last it has been discovered how to make a military omelet without breaking the eggs. Hereafter war may be bloodless; ship's companies, battalions, whole armies may be placed hors-de-combat, but only temporarily. In the middle of the wildest charge squadrons of cavalry may be reduced from a state of heroic fury to beatific anaesthesia, and may instantly be precipitated, in most regular formation, into peaceful slumber.

In a word, a Hungarian genius has invented a shell which, on bursting, liberates a gas warranted to stupefy all who breathe it without causing any permanent or serious effect.

When such a soporific shell bursts and awake, perhaps, to find themselves prisoners in a hostile port.

Let a number of such shells explode over a fortress and not the fortress but the garrison will fall—into coma.

Scientifically speaking, it is entirely possible that this gas-charged shell will do all that its inventor claims. He is now in communication with the Japanese government, so it is not improbable that Port Arthur and Vladivostok may be as quiet soon as the palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

The inventor's Hungarian hatred of Russia, dating back to 1848, prevented him from approaching the czar, to whose pacific ideas such a humane shell would strongly appeal.

Of course, such a shell would revolutionize warfare. The hospital corps would become the most important branch of the service, and port and branch of the service, and would need to be enormously increased in order that prostrated combatants could be removed from the field and restored to consciousness.

The next Hague convention would have to agree that all who were asphyxiated by this gas should consider themselves dead until the war ended.

And what would happen when opposing artilleries employed the wonderful shell? Each side would surely increase the charges of gas until some would be killed by an overdose of it. Thus the shell's beneficent purpose would be defeated.

CHILDREN AS INCUBATORS.

Pathos and humor are combined in a singular story from Russia, relating to a poor peasant woman living near Vileika, who was left absolutely destitute with six children to support. At last a luminous idea struck her. She suggested to the neighboring poultry farmers that she should relieve them from the trouble and expense of using incubators for hatching chickens and turkeys. They agreed, and the eggs, carefully secured from injury in wooden cases, and packed in wool, were placed in the children's cots, which were constantly occupied, day and night, by the six little ones in turn during the three weeks required for incubation. As each of the cots contained 400 eggs—200 on each side—the human incubators succeeded in hatching 1,200 eggs at a time, for which they received 1 cent an egg, or \$12. Their earnings, therefore, for lying in bed for twenty-one days amounted to exactly \$4 a week, a sum far exceeding the average wage of a Russian skilled workman in the country districts.

A Woman's Love...

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

From the distance came the faint echoes of cheering and the dying sounds of music. A little wind made a hush among the leaves, and overhead the cold stars made more beautiful the beauty of the deep blue sky. Thick dark lay on each hand, and in front stretched to the far wall a broad band of light in which her shadow cut a dead black line. The air was cool, and seemed to bring some slight calm to her fever.

For a moment she was caught out of herself, and, as from a height, she looked down on Maddalena, the poor harassed Queen, as on some one she had never seen before. A tiny branch was blown against her face, and she noted shapely form of a certain green leaf. What sort of leaf was it? How did its edge become so gracefully serrated? What intricate veining! How impossibly perfect! Curious, she thought, that at such a moment as this when she ought not to steal a moment from her lover, she should be standing here in the night, wondering at the shape of a leaf, at the magic of its venation. A moment from her lover? Ah!—she turned.

She had been a moment only in the light; but the glare, where all had been blackness, caught the eye of Asunta, and in the glare the brilliant whiteness that was Maddalena. Asunta left her place by the railing. Hector might pass a thousand times for aught she cared. Yonder was her rival, yonder the woman that had taken Hector from her, yonder the real object of her revenge. Crouching cunningly, she slipped through the coverlets of the garden like a wild woodland thing, beautiful and murderous.

Maddalena turned and entered the room again. Hector was standing before her.

"The world is a wonderful thing," she said; "the world and the night and the stars, and there is magic in them all. But one moment with you, my beloved, my Hector, is the world and the night and the stars. I am a small thing, and my love is a small thing, and together we are as nothing before you. This day you have made me a Queen—there but three of us in the whole earth—and look! I tell you I am a woman prouder of being loved by you than I am of my people, of my throne, of my crown! What are they all but yours—yours?"

She lifted the simple gold band from her hair, and holding it in both hands, knelt and laid it at his feet.

"Let this be for sign that I am yours. Say to me, Maddalena, my wife, come with me!" and I come. Say 'Maddalena, my wife, stay here and let me have leave to go!' and I stay."

"Maddalena!" was all that he could say, and that in tones broken and almost inaudible. "Maddalena, my wife!"

She rose.

"Your wife, Hector, my beloved, now and for ever! My people will surely not ask from me that last torture—to wed another man. Your wife or no man's. I cannot be yours, I shall be no man's!"

"Maddalena, how you love me!"

"There is no 'how,' Hector. I love you—that is all. I love you."

Not yet had they touched lip to lip or breast to breast. That, by some secret concord, was kept for the last moment, and as a sacrament too holy to be used lightly.

And now fell on their ears the first stroke of twelve, sounding from San Bernardino.

She rose and moved to him, her foot spurning the crown, not consciously, but as if she knew not it were there.

"We part now!"

"We part now!"

Lip to lip, and breast to breast, all passion of love throbbing in the embrace, all the quivering wonder and trembling despair of love in the close holding of each to each. It is an eternity, that last long crush of life into life—an eternity into which is pent all their days from the day of birth to the day in the future when death must surely come: an eternity of happiness, an eternity of pain.

"I love you!"

"I love you!"

And then again silence falls. And in the silence soul meets soul, and all about them spreads the kind dark, and each soul knows its fellow, and is mixed with it in an ineffable ecstasy of despairing joy, a wild abandonment, an intolerable pain of happiness.

"Good-bye for ever!"

"No, Hector, no. Good-night—only good-night!"

The silence is shattered by a laugh he knows and the crackle of a pistol. His eye is aware of Asunta's face at the window.

Maddalena is a dead weight on his left arm, whole no longer.

"Alas! Alas! Alas!"

Asunta is gone, but the faithful foster-brother is here aghast.

"The Queen, Alas! the Queen!" Hector speaks in Gaelic.

The bullet has passed through Hector's protecting hand and entered her side. Already a blur of red shows on the silver of her robe. She is cold and lifeless, white as the garment in which she was crowned.

"Tighearna!"

The great Highlander took her from Hector, now wounded in both arms, and laid her gently on a couch.

"Dead!" Hector murmurs in a daze.

"Dead!" comes the echo from Alas! Alas!

"O! God, why not I, why not I?"

Asunta is forgotten—she is nothing—Maddalena is dead, Maddalena is dead, love is dead, the world is at an end. There is no room to think of aught else—this fills space.

"Alas! Alas!"

"Heckie!"

They are standing, one on each side of the couch where she lies.

"You love me, my brother?"

"O! my mother's son, I love you!"

"Your promise is sacred."

"What promise?"

"Do you forget yon summer afternoon in the Forest of Rothiemurchus, when to the brotherhood of milk we added the brotherhood of blood?"

"I remember, Heckie, I remember—but do not ask me now."

"I do ask you now, I do ask you now."

"Heckie, Heckie!"

"You passed your word!"

"Perhaps she is not dead. Let me go for assistance."

"Alas! Alas! will you go back on your word, will you be foresworn? Must I spit upon you?"

"No, no, my brother, no! I love you too well."

And with a cry that was madness of devotion and unutterable sorrow, Alas! Alas! gripped his dirk and drove it, half-deep, into his brother's heart, letting go only when the weight of Hector's body told on his grasp of the steel. And as the blood spouted, and that which was Hector fell across the Queen with her name on its lips, laughter as of a fiend broke at the window.

In the broad band of light Alas! Alas! saw a woman flying. A leaf like a stag's and he was after her. A second it seemed, and his hand had gripped a neck. The frightened face was Asunta's and in her hand was a pistol. There was one swift snap, and as a dog shakes a rat, Alas! Alas! shook Asunta, and revenge had recoiled on itself.

Hector lay on a great bier in the Cathedral. A pall of silver cloth covered him. And on it flamed a single blood-red rose, a rose that looked like a heart against the splendid white, a rose that was the heart of Maddalena—for Maddalena did not die—would to God she had! At the foot of the bier rested the crown of Palmetto—in homage to him that had won it. On the altar glimmered innumerable candles, the pale lambent glow of the lamp that burns continually shone down mysteriously the pallor of marble columns gleamed, and to and fro went the dim figures of priests in vestments of rich hue. The organ pealed.

And then, through a lane of the men of Palmetto holding torches, a lane miles long, went Hector Chisholm Grant to his rest on the highest peak of the Monte, a rare and most royal progress.

Over against his bed is a rock on which they have cut

Hector Grant,
Palmetto Remembers!
(The End.)

JAPANESE BABIES.

How They Are Brought Up in the Flowery Kingdom.

Judging by Western ideas, Japanese babies have a hard time; yet, there are no healthier children in the world. The Japanese baby is dressed and undressed in a frigid temperature in winter, and in summer no care is taken to protect its tender little eyes from the full glare of the sun. In winter the small head is covered with a worsted cap of the brightest and gayest design and color. The black hair is cut in all sorts of fantastic ways, just like the hair of the Japanese dolls imported into this country.

The babies of the lower classes are generally carried on the back of the mother or little sister; sometimes the small brother is obliged to be the nurse-maid. The kimono is made extra large at the back, with a pocket of sufficient size to hold the baby, whose round head reaches the back of the neck of the person who is carrying it. It is not an uncommon sight to see children who are barely old enough to toddle burdened with a small brother or sister sleeping peacefully on their backs. At first one expects to see the child stagger and fall beneath the weight, but apparently none of its movements are immediately and it plays with the other children as unconcerned as if it were not loaded down with another member of the family.

At Nagasaki, among the women coalers who coal the ships, one sees many who carry babies on their backs in this way. The mothers work all day in the rain or the sun or the snow, and the baby seems indifferent to everything. The top of its head alone is visible, while the movements of the mother do not seem in the as much work as the men.

A CURIOUS PLANT.

There is a plant in Chili, and a similar one in Japan, called the "flower of the air." It is so called because it appears to have no root, and is never fixed to the earth. Each shoot produces two or three flowers like a lily—white, transparent, and odoriferous. It is capable of being transported 600 or 700 miles, and vegetates as it travels suspended a twig.