A Girl's Caprice

OR, THE RESULT OF A FANCY DRESS BALL

CHAPTER III.

Now Hilary had gone down these stairs five minutes before with her partner—a magnificent cow-boy—to get an ice, and is standing near the buffet enjoying it, and looking prettier than usual (which is saying a great deal) in her cap and gown, when she feels a touch on her arm.

Looking round she sees Jim.

"Our dance, I think," says he, taking advantage of the fact that the cow-boy is a stranger from the Parracks at Clonbree, whereupon the cow-boy bows to Hilary, and retires from the scene.

Jim regards her with a reproachful eye.

"Still urging on your wild career!" says he, "with Nemesis at hand—and the sword of Damocles about to fall—and all the rest of it."

"What do you mean, Jim?"

"He's come!"

"He?"

"Your future Lord!" says Clifford, with the biggest L on record.

"Oh, no!" Not really!"

"My good girl, I've been staring at him for the past two minutes. He was talking to Diana, and evidently cross-examining her about you. At least I hope it was that. To me it seemed as if he was cross-examining Diana about herself. I'll have a cross-examination of my own with her later on."

"You won't tell him I'm here?" says Hilary, in a tone of frightened entreaty.

"Not I. But Diana will. And after all, Hilary, why shouldn't you get it over at once? It isn't as if you were bound to marry him."

"I can't. I," defiantly, "won't. I'd rather die than see him. I——"

Clifford makes a quick movement. His eyes are on the stairs above him.

"I expect you'll have to die," says he. "For here he comes!"

"Oh, no!" says Hilary.

In fact Ker is running down the stairs at the top of his speed, to find that glass of water for the fainting Swiss peasant. Hilary has barely time to stand back from Jim, and give him a glance that warns him that eternal infamy will brand him if he now by one word betrays her, when Ker is in their midst.

Seeing a smart-looking maid (even at this hurried moment he notices that "beauty lies within her eyes") with an empty ice plate in her hand, that apparently she is just taking away from somebody, he rushes up to Hilary, and says in a breathless tone:

"A glass of water, please."

Hilary, after a second's shock, is equal to the occasion.

"A glass of water, sir?"

"Yes. And in a hurry, my good girl."

"You shall have it, sir."

She goes over to the buffet, procures the glass of water in question, and brings it back to Ker.

"Oh, thanks. A thousand thanks" says he, in a hurried way.

He seizes the glass, squeezes a florin into Hilary's hand, and is gone.

Hilary stands still for a moment, then subsides into the dark recess of a closed doorway, her brother-in-law following her.

"A nice beginning," says he wrathfully. "How do you think you are going to meet him after this?"

"He won't remember," says Hilary.

"Won't he? Don't you think somebody will tell him?"

"Tell him what?"

"That you were dressed as a parlormaid tonight? And when he sees you, as he must, don't you think he will put two and two together?"

"Perhaps he has no head for mathematics," says Hilary, but even she feels that this is frivolous.

However, the discussion is brought to an end suddenly by Diana, who comes down the stairs to them with Peter Kinsella, and having dismissed that florid young Romeo, warns Hilary that if they don't go home at once they will probably be mixed up with the rank and file at the end.

This awful suggestion has its effect. Soon they are on their homeward way, and "At last," as Diana says, "can talk."

Clifford leads off the conversational ball in a light and airy fashion.

"Ker has just given Hilary two shillings," says he.

"What?"

Diana peers at him through the fast-growing brightness of the coming dawn. If he were not the most abstemious of men she would have told herself that perhaps there had been a last glase of champagne, but——

"Yes, I assure you," says Clifford. "I saw him do it. I don't think much of him, do you? Most fellows give the girl they are going to marry a ring or a bracelet, or a trally-wag of some sort, but I never heard of a two-shilling piece before. Perhaps it's fashionable! We're rather out of it down here, you know, so we mightn't know. But to me it sounds shabby."

"You must be mad," says Diana.

"It's Hilary who ought to be mad. I dare say she expected a ring, poor girl!"

"Hilary, what does this mean?" says Diana, turning to her sister.

"Oh! mean!" says Clifford. "That's the very word for it. A paltry florin! I wouldn't stand it if I were you, Hilary. I'd fling him over. By-the-bye, you have it with you, I suppose? You can show the melancholy coin to Di, can't you?"

"Don't mind him," says Hilary, who is choking with laughter. "But oh, such a thing has happened! He came down the stairs to get a glass of water for some one——"

"That wretched Blake girl," gasps Diana, who now anticipates a catastrophe.

"And seeing me in cap and gown, thought I was an attendant. I couldn't resist the situation—I felt indeed as if I were in a situation, he took me so entirely bona fide, and I answered him. Called him 'Sir,' and got him the glass of water, whereupon he kindly pressed this," holding up the memorable florin, "into my hand!"

"Good gracious, what is to be done?" says Diana.

"You think I ought to return it?" Hilary mistakes her. "I shan't, however. I shall keep it as a precious relic; but wasn't it a great deal to give for a glass of water, Di? Wasn't it very extravagant of him? Do you think it would be safe to marry such a spendthrift as he has proved himself to be?"

"Oh, I'm not thinking of that at all," says Diana, in a voice of anguish. "And how you can make a jest of it—I am only remembering that I have asked him to lunch tomorrow, and that he is coming! When he sees you——"

"Sees me! Never!" cries Hilary, now thoroughly frightened. "Do you think I would face him after this? What on earth did you ask him for?"

"Why, for you!" says Diana in her solemn way.

"Then it is useless. Nothing in the world would tempt me to meet him to-morrow."

"But you will have to see him sooner or later."

"Then it shall be later, when he has forgotten all about—the glass of water."

"Taht wouldn't take him long," says Clifford. "I expect it has faded rom his memory by this; what he may remember is," with evidently gloomy forebodings as to the miserliness of Ker's disposition, "the loss of his two-shilling piece!"

"Nonsense! I son't believe he'd ever think of that again," says Diana, who is highly incensed with her husband for even pretending to show up Ker to Hilary in a mercenary light; girls are so troublesome sometimes over the vaguest things.

"That's what I say," says Hilary, who is rather enjoying herself. "I told you I thought him a born spendthrift."

"Well," says Diana boldly, "I'd rather marry a spendthrift than a miser any day!"

"Which am I?" asks Clifford anxiously.

"Oh, you! You're nothing!" says his wife, who is a little indignant with him.

At this, Clifford passes his arm suddenly round her, and brings her up close to him.

"Poor old girl! Look at her! Married to a hopeless nonentity!" says he, whereon they all laugh together, and peace is restored.

"Hilary, darling, you will appear at luncheon!" entreats Diana softly.

"No! No! Never!" says Hilary, with emphasis. "I—I couldn't!"

CHAPTER IV.

"Miss Kinsella is in the dhrawnroom, ma'am," says the cook.

It is next morning, and very early too, considering the dissipations of the night before. Diana and Hilary have only just got downstairs, and to be told, in their languid state, that that old gossip-monger is waiting to see them, seems more than can be endured. Mrs. Clifford stares at the cook.

"Why on earth didn't you say we were in bed?" says she, in an irate tone.

"I don't know, ma'am. I didn't know what you'd wish."

And of course she didn't, being pressed into upstairs service for the first time. The parlor-maid had been in the lowest spirits since the post at eight o'clock came in, and had been quite incapable of doing anything ever since. The news the letter contained was that her aunt was a little bilious (the aunt lived in Tralee, and she had never seen her), and that there was to be a very big "pattern" held this evening in her own place, about five miles from her present situation. (A "pattern" means a dance on the highway where four roads meet, and where the peasants congregate on stated occasions to foot it gayly to and fro, with the assistance of some old piper—generally, and by preference, blind.) It had occurred, therefore, to her simple mind, that if she cried a great deal over her aunt, she might find a way to go and enjoy herself at the "pattern."

"Where is Bridget?" asks Diana, alluding to the parlor-maid.

"She's crying, ma'am. She's had bad news, she says."

"Bad news?"

"About her aunt, ma'am. She's very bad, she says."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. And how is Bridget now?"

"The same way, ma'am. But she says she's sure her aunt is worse!"

"How can she know that?" asks Hilary.

"I don't know, miss."

Mrs. Clifford, who has served a long appreticeship to Irish servants, and who has heard of the "pattern," rises abruptly, and turns to Hilary.

"Come, let us see Miss Kinsella. Let us get it over," says she. Together they enter the drawing-room.

"You're surprised to see me, my dear." Old Miss Kinsella comes to meet them with a beaming face. "An' so early too. But you know that your Bridget's aunt is also a cousin of my charwoman, an' she says she is very bad to-day."

"The charwoman?"

"Oh, no. Miss Burroughs, dear—your Bridget's aunt. And I hear that she wants Bridget very badly; and I knew you would want Bridget very little to-day, being so tired—"

"I think that is why we should want her," says Hilary, turning to the old "busybody thankless," with a rather severe air.

"But when her aunt is dying, says Miss Kinsella, her old maid's curls swaying backward and forward in an angry fashion. Her face takes a lugubsious turn. "And when you have two other servants too, and when death is in question——"

"The cook and the nursery-maid hardly count," says Mrs. Clifford, "and, as a fact, I want a parlormaid very much to-day. I have people to luncheon."

"No, ye don't say so!" says Miss Kinsella, leaning forward, all delight and anxiety. She has forgotten her present crusade in her burning desire for gossip. "An' who are they?"

"It doesn't matter," says Diana calmly. "What does matter is the going of Bridget."

"I should think," says Miss Kinsella, enraged at the refusal to gratify her cariosity, "that a luncheon party should not count with the dying of an ancestral relative!" She doesn't know herself what this means, but it sounds splendid. "When we're dying, we don't think of luncheons," says she, which certainly is an incontrovertible fact.

"Well, but you see we're not dying," says Hilary.

"Of course if Bridget's aunt is dying," says Mrs. Clifford, "she must go to her. However, I hope she will not lose her way there, and go to this 'pattern' instead."

"Oh! Mrs. Clifford, me dear, we shouldn't misjudge the poor. Of course I know very little about anything that's goin' on meself" (there isn't a thing going on in the neighborhood, touching poor or rich, great or simple, that she doesn't know), "bein' only a poor, desolate old maid."

"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 today,' 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 morning' 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. Brawne 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— 8d. 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 shoulders 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 burning' 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——"

"Nat 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."

(To be Continued.)

IN MERRY OLD ENGLAND

NEWS BY MAIL ABOUT JOHN BULL AND HIS PEOPLE.

Occurrences in the Land That Reigns Supreme in the Commercial World.

It is many years since trade was so bad in Leeds as now.

Burnley Weavers' Association has a membership of 12,000, an income of £206 weekly, and is worth £20,-833.

The front at St. Mary's church, Torquay, is supposed to be 1,000 years old, and its restoration is being discussed.

The birth of a baby in a family at Yeadon, Leeds, establishes the record of five living generations in a direct line.

The new White Star liner Baltic, which is to carry 3,000 passengers, will leave Liverpool on her first voyage on June 25th.

Mr. Wm. Barrett, who was buried at Finmere, near Buckingham, the other day, had lived for over 80 years in the same house.

Prof. Atkinson, the great specialist in bone-setting, and founder of the Animals Institute, died on the 14th ult. at his London house.

It is proposed to inaugurate a movement in Staffordshore for a county memorial to the late Sir Thos. Salt to commemorate his public work.

A hall erected at Bradford in memory of Dr. Cartwright, inventor of the power loom, was opened on the 20th ult., and handed over by Lord Masham to the public of the city. The hall cost £55,000, of which £4,500 was given by Lord Masham.

It is stated that the late Duke of Cambridge has left his baton, uniform and medals and decorations to the Whitehall Museum. It is fit that these relics of the old soldier should be sent there, for there are few buildings in London with which he was more familiar.

The Kids' Chronicle is the title of a new Liverpool journal. It is published by the Street Arabs' Institute.

By a Khedivial decree just issued, the number of British officers on the strength of the Egyptian army will be considerably increased.

Lady churchwardens are quite the vogue in Buckinghamshire. There are no less than five of them holding this office in the county.

Congregational music as rendered in these islands is hideous, says Mr. Moody, organist of Ripon Cathedral. He is prepared, according to the Yorkshire Post, to hold rehearsals of the congregation in the nave of the cathedral.

At a wedding in Burley-in-Wharfedale, a Yorkshire village, the bridegroom failed to appear. A search was made for him, and he was found sitting on the river bank crying bitterly. He refused to go to church, and the ceremony was abandoned.

M. Favre, principal station master at Calais, France, received from King Edward the Cross of the Victorian Order in recognition of his services during many years to members of the English royal family passing through Calais.

Mistress—"Do you love babies?" Maid—"Not at three dollars a week, mum."

Tramp No. 1.—"Do you know, Mick, that the old duffer who has just gone up the street had the impudence to tell me that if I hadn't spent my money for beer I might be ownin- a brick house?" Tramp No. 2—"What did you say?" Tramp No. 1—"I reminded him with great sarcasticness that yer carn't drink brick houses."

Proud Mother—"You will be five years old to-morrow, Willie, and I want to give you a real birthday treat. Tell me what you would like better than anything else." Willie (after thinking earnestly for five minutes)—"Bring me a whole box of chocolate creams, mother, and ask Tommy Smith to come in and watch me eat them."

DESERTS OF THE OCEAN

SEAS WHICH ARE NEVER SAILED.

Disappearance of Sailing Craft Has Increased Their Area.

Oceans, like continents, have their deserts. On the high seas there are vast spaces whose waves have never been parted by the prow of a sailing vessel or lashed by the propellor of a steamer; immense solitudes where the flap of a sail is never heard nor the strident cry of a siren; veritable deserts whose silence is broken only by the howling of the wind and the roar of the waves which have been vainly pursuing one another since the days of creation.

These deserts lie forgotten betwixt the narrow ocean highways travelled by vessels. In such waste places of the sea a disabled ship, driven out of its course by a hurricane, may drift for months, tossed by the ceaseless ground swell, without being able to hail assistance; her only chance of escape is the possibility that some oceanic current may drag her into a more frequented region.

FOLLOW BEATEN TRACK.

It is generally supposed that by reason of the universal increase of maritime traffic the sea is everywhere furrowed by vessels. This is a mistake. Ocean commerce has grown enormously during the last half century, but that development is due to the substitution of steam navigation for the old fashioned employment of the sailing vessel. When the first steamer began to churn the water with its paddle wheels, the sailing fleet ceased to increase; with the advent of the screw propellor they began to decrease. The gradual but constant disappearance of sailing ships made the ocean more of a desert than before. Sailing vessels had their established routes in accordance with winds, currents and seasons; the gaps between the routes taken by outward bound and homeward bound ships were often considerable; moreover, the capricious elements not infrequently played the mischief with nautical instructions, and as a result the field of operations for ocean shipping was vastly expanded.

OCEAN HIGHWAYS.

This is no longer true to-day. The liner goes straight ahead, in defiance of wind and wave; the ports between which she plies are great industrial or commercial centres, whither come numberless railways, serving as prolongations of the lines of navigation. Freight cars carry their loads of merchandise to the lesser ports and the cities of the interior. The railway has killed coastwise navigation.

The ocean highways are therefore anything but numerous. The most frequented of oceans is the Atlantic. Apart from the Polar seas, we see that in its northern part there is only one desert zone—a dreary waste of waters between the routes from Europe to the United States or Canada, and those from Europe to the Antilles. In the south, between the routes from South America on the Western American coast and the routes from South Africa, extends a desert occasionally traversed by the steamers of the lines from Cape Town and Mozambique, which, when the coffee season is at its height in Brazil, cross the Atlantic for cargoes at Rio Janerio or Santos.

PATHLESS DESERTS.

The Indian Ocean is frequented only in the north, by lines out of India and Indo-China, and a little way in the west by liners from Oceanica, which call at Colombo and then make straight for Australia. Two lines, each with a steamer a month, follow a slender lane from Australia to Cape Town. The Pacific is the Sahara of great seas. Saving only the steamships from the Far East to California and British Columbia, a line from Sydney to San Francisco, and a one-horse line (with sailings four or five times a year) between Tahiti and the United States—save for these mere ribbon like streaks the Pacific is a desert. Only a few native canoes ply daringly from island to island in archipelagoes, girt around with coral reefs—veritable ocean graveyards, the terror of seafaring men.

How many ships, of which we have received no tidings and of which not so much as a drifting spar has ever been picked up, have been dragged by irresistible winds into those solitudes of the South Pacific, no one will ever know, for the ocean guards its prey full well. Sometimes, however, a little part of its secret leaks out, and then we divine the shocking tragedies of which it has been the theatre.

The average man spends too much time making money and too little enjoying it.

Mrs. Sequel—"I understand your husband can't meet his creditors?" Mrs. Equal—"I don't believe he particularly wants to."

"The way we test the quality of our whisky," averred a traveller recently, "is to inject one drop into the vein of a rabbit and if after that the rabbit will not fight a bulldog the whisky is no good."

Mr. Manley—"Well, darling, I've had my life insured for $5,000." Mrs. M.—"How very sensible of you! Now I sha'n't have to keep telling you to be so careful every place you go to."