A Girl's Caprice

OR, THE RESULT OF A FANCY DRESS BALL

CHAPTER VII.

He refuses to stay to afternoon tea, however. Having waited until four o'clock, presumably on the chance of seeing the young woman who has been meted out to him as a bride, he rises abruptly.

"I fear there is no chance of my seeing your sister to-day?"

"I'm afraid not," says Diana with hesitation. "But if you wait for tea——" she hesitates again. What she was going to say or hint was, that if he did wait, perhaps Hilary might then have come in from her supposed walk. But the hypocrisy is too much for her. And yet, would it have been a lie? If he does stay, most undoubtedly he will see her face to face.

"Thanks, I'm afraid I can't stay any longer," says Ker a little stiffly, to her intense relief. He looks at her for a moment, and then says shortly, "Have you a photograph of her?"

"A photograph of Hilary" Diana's tone is faint. The ground seems to have opened up beneath her feet. She casts a terrified glance round her, to the tables, the cabinet, the chimney-piece. If there should be one of Hilary's here, and he should notice the likeness!

A wave of thankfulness sweeps over her as she sees that the little stands on which Hilary used to smile, and look grave, and ponder over impossible baskets of flowers, have all been carefully removed.

"I think I ought to have one," says she uncertainly. "Upstairs, perhaps. If you will forgive me a moment——"

"Certainly," says Ker, who is looking at her with some surprise. Her evident discomposure has struck him. What kind of girl is this Hilary Burroughs? What mystery surrounds her? Yet Mrs. Dyson-Moore, when he had questioned her cautiously, had assured him she was pretty, charming, and all the rest of it.

Diana leaves the room hurriedly, glad of a chance of arranging her thoughts and her next lie, as she tells herself somewhat bitterly. Hilary had no right to lead her into this sort of thing. Why, if the children only knew! Good gracious! it would demoralize them forever. They would read her lectures for the future!

Ker, left to his own resources, moves mechanically toward the window. Why should Mrs. Clifford refuse to let him see a photograph of her sister? Is she ugly? Nobody could take Mrs. Dyson-Moore's opinion of any one. She would probably call you ugly if you were pretty, just for spite, or pretty if you were—if you were—— What a strange-looking parlormaid. She's pretty, if you like! Odd he hadn't thought much about that last night, but he had remembered her when he had seen her again. Where on earth had Mrs. Clifford picked her up? He could swear she was never born a parlormaid.

And, by Jove! There she is!

There she is indeed! Out there in the garden, just where the shrubberies begin; with her charming head in delicate relief against the green of the laurels behind it, with her lips apart, and her eyes smiling—and her arm tucked in the most unmistakably confidential fashion into the arm* of—her master!

Ker stares, as if disbelieving his own senses. Is that Clifford, or one of the men? A groom, perhaps. There is, however, no mistaking Jim Clifford, the strong, kind, manly face, the broad shoulders, the goodly length of limb.

"Good Heavens! If his wife were to see him now," says Ker, in a horrified tone. Involuntarily he glances toward the door! If she should come back, and by some ill chance go to the window and look out—and——

He looks out again himself hurriedly. The "guilty pair," as he has already designated them, are now fast disappearing through the shrubbery. The last glance he gets of them tells him that they are both convulsed with laughter.

He has had but a short acquaintance with Clifford, certainly, yet in that time he had learned to regard him as an essentially honest man; a thoroughly good fellow. So much for appearances. Never will he trust in them again. He would have staked his life on Clifford's probity, yet here he is holding a clandestine meeting with his own parlormaid, in his own grounds! What a despicable hypocrite! Ker had noticed one or two little touches between him and his wife at luncheon, that had seemed to betray a thorough understanding between them—a thorough and lasting affection; and now, what is he to think of those delicate "touches"?

He remembers now that there had been other "touches" too, by no means "delicate" apparently. That sudden up-springing of Clifford to help her open that bottle of ale. His tone when he did so: "Go on. I'll do it!" It was a low tone, but familiar, terribly familiar.

Low, of course, for fear his wife should hear him. It suggested a confidential secret existing between them! A secret! Was it a criminal secret? The shrubberies says "yes" to this.

No doubt the assignation there had been arranged beforehand. This would account for Clifford's withdrawal from the drawing-room half an hour ago. He had muttered something to his wife on going, some thing about a visit to one of the farms—but of course he was bound to make some excuse, to give an explanation, however vague, for his going.

Of course he knew that this would be a safe opportunity to meet that—that—beautiful girl!

Ker would have liked to apply some bad epithet here to the parlormaid, but somehow it does not come to him. It all savors so strongly of a low intrigue, that that word strikes upon his brain, but it seems impassible to connect the word intrigue with her. Her face rises before him—the eyes so clear—the brow so open—the lovely, happy lips.

And yet, this evidence!

He pulls himself together angrily! Certainly something ought to be done! Diana should be told! But then, who is to tell her? Ker, with a sudden pang, acknowledges that it would be impossible for him to draw upon the parlormaid.

At this instant Diana returns.

"I'm so sorry," says she calmly. "But there is no photograph of Hilary to give you."

This is an ambiguous sentence. It might mean anything! "No photograph to give him." She evidently means to convey the idea that there is not one to give, But to Ker, now, with his suspicions thoroughly awakened, it conveys only the thought that there may be many, but not for him to see.

He expresses a polite regret, says good-bye to his hostess, and having been accompanied by her to the door in the friendliest fashion, leaves the house.

He has hardly gone one step beyond the hall-door when Hilary thrusts her charming head out of the dining-room door.

CHAPTER VIII.

"He's gone?" questions she.

"Thank Heaven! Oh, Hilary, what a day we've had!"

"And by no means 'cheap,'" says Hilary, who really is hopelessly frivolous.

"No. No indeed! All I've suffered! I wouldn't do it again for anything. Hilary, I've counted them up, and I think I told him four decided lies. And the worst of it is. I thinks he suspects something."

"What makes you think that? Nonsense, Di! There was nothing. I'm sure I think I was the best parlormaid you have had for years."

"Still I'm sure he has found out something. His manner was quite changed before he left. A little stiff, and he kept looking at me in the strangest way. He asked for your photograph."

"What?"

"Yes. For your photograph. It was quite natural. Why shouldn't he ask for it? But when he did, I assure you my heart sank. I thought I should have fainted, but providentially some one had removed you."

"Don't talk as if you were an 'Irish Invincible,'" says Hilary with reproach. "I hope I shan't be removed in their way. As a fact I took all my photos out of the room myself. It occurred to me that he might see one of them."

"How you think of things!" says Diana with admiration. "Nevertheless," descending once more into the lowest depths, "when he went away he left us full of suspicions."

"Is that all he left us?" says Hilary with a disgusted air. She glances round her and at this moment her eyes fall upon the umbrella stand. "You have wronged him," cries she. "The noble creatures! I knew he would leave us something worth having. Behold his stick!"

There it is! A good, serviceable-looking stick of cherry-wood, with a thin band of silver round the neck of it.

"How could he have forgotten it?" says Diana. "Did you ever hear of a man forgetting his stick before? His gloves if you like, or——"

"His head?"

"Nonsense. He is going away for a week, and will want it. I suppose I had better send it over to the Dyson-Moores'."

"Why, he can't be gone beyond the gate yet," says Hilary. "I'll run after him with it."

"Hilary, don't! No. you mustn't! Besides he must be gone quite beyond the gate by this time. And besides——"

"I'll chance it!" says Hilary. She catches up the stick, darts like a modern Atalanta through the doorway, and is gone up the avenue before Diana has fime to collect another argument.

She would probably not have overtaken him, however, but for the fact that, finding his hand empty, and therefore awkward, he had discovered the loss of his stick and was returning for it.

Just as he comes to the clump of rhododendrons that hide the house from view, he sees a charming, lithe figure running toward him. Such a figure. Not of fun certainly—though fun is quick in it, especially in the eyes and mouth, if veiled. A lovely thing she seems to him, all life, and that at its sweetest—with her soft hair flying loosely round her brow and her lips a little parted.

"Your stick, sir," cries she demurely, as she comes up to him. He had stopped on seeing her, as if studying the strange charms that belong to this strangest of all strange parlormaids.

"Thank you," says Ker. He takes the stick mechanically, as if not thinking of it, and then says suddenly: "I think it was you who gave me that glass of water last night."

His tone is cold, even severe.

"Yes, sir," returns the maid respectfully. "And it was you," with a little glance at him from under the lang lashes, "who gave me"—hesitatingly and fumbling in her pocket—"this!"

She has brought out the memorable florin, and is now holding it up between her thumb and forefinger.

"Well?" says Ker.

"I have been thinking, sir," gazing with evident sadness at the florin, "that a glass of water is not worth two shillings.

An idiotic sense of gladness suddenly overcomes Ker. After all—even in spite of that scene in the shrubberies—she must be a good girl, an honest girl, one whose conscience forbids her to take more than her due. Such extreme delicacy of conscience is not common with her class. Her class! He is aroused from his reveries by the good girl.

"Will you take it back, sir?" She is holding out the florin to him.

"Nonsense!" says Ker, coloring furiously.

"Then I may keep it?"

"Of course," frowning.

"Forever?"

"Forever and ever," says he, laughing now in spite of himself.

"Well, I shall," says the counterfeit Bridget. "If only," with a sentimental sigh, and downcast eyes, "to remember!"

"To remember what?"

"Ah! never mind."

"But I do mind," says Ker, who has somehow forgotten for the moment that monstrous episode in the shrubberies.

"I'm sorry for that," placidly. "Well," with a respectful smile, "I shall keep it, sir, anyway—forever."

"Did any one ever keep a two-shilling piece forever?" asks Ker with some amusement.

"I shall!" says Bridget sweetly. "I'll make a hole in it, and hang it round my neck."

"That's very good of you," says Ker. "I shall like to think I was the giver of it."

All at once he pulls himself together. Memory has supplied him with a picture! Once again he sees this girl—this siren—with her arm in Clifford's, and her face uplifted to his in evident confidence. He can almost hear the light laughter with which she and he disappeared into the shubbery. He can almost hear too, he tells himself, with a return of his former indignation, the weeping of poor, pretty, faithful, Diana, when the truth, as eventually no doubt it will be, is laid bare to her.

"Look here," says he sternly, turning to the "siren," "I think I saw you just now, out there," pointing in the direction of the laurel-walks.

"Me, sir?"

"Yes, you."

"Perhaps I was gathering laurel-leaves, sir, for cook to put in the milk?"

"No, you were not," says Ker shortly, "you were talking to—your master!"

"Oh—I——"

She grows crimson—so crimson, so undeniably embarrassed, that Ker for the second feels his heart stop beating. Yet why should it stop? She is guilty! This hot blush must be one of shame. And yet to blush at all, is not that a sign of grace? It horrifies him to find presently that he is even at this last hour striving to condone the culprit's fault.

As a fact, Hilary is completely taken aback by his attack. She had not anticipated it. When laughing with Jim over the absurd situations at luncheon it had not occurred to either her or him that they could be seen from the drawing-room window. They had thought of Ker as being engaged with Diana. Hilary had really run out to get some laurel-leaves to put into the milk that is to make the children's rice for supper, and had there met Jim on his way to the farm that lay beyond the mill over there. They could not resist a hurried laugh over the luncheon, and so had been—discovered.

Her embarrassment, after a moment, gives way to other feelings. Having run lightly in her mind over the facts of the case, as they must seem to Ker, an overpowering sense of mirth makes her its slave. What had he thought? that she was flirting with Jim—poor old Jim—behind the mistress' back?

It seems too funny for anything.

With a view to having her amusement, she pulls out her handkerchief and buries her face in it. To Ker it seems that she is crying through fear, no doubt, he tells himself contemptuously. He feels no pity for her; that absolute untruth about the picking of the laurel-leaves for the cook has disgusted him. It was too ready a lie! He watches her as she stands with the handkerchief pressed against her eyes. A very pretty handkerchief of the very finest cambric.

"Poor Diana's, of course," he tells himself.

At this moment "Bridget" glances at him from behind her shield.

"I hope you won't tell the mistress sir," says she in woebegone tones.

"I? Why should I tell her?" says Ker indignantly. "What I think so scandalous is, that there should be anything to tell her."

"Yes, sir."

She has gone behind the handkerchief again, and her shoulders are shaking. Evidently she is crying hard.

"To me," says Ker, a little softened by this evidence of contrition, "your mistress seems both good and kind."

"Oh, yes, she is, sir; she is indeed. You can't think how kind."

"Then I think it abominable of you," spoken sternly, "to betray her in that sort of way."

"I won't do it again, sir. I won't, indeed!"

Her voice is quite stifled now. She is plainly in floods of tears. Ker begins to feel quite sorry for the poor, misguided girl. No doubt Clifford is greatly in fault. This pretty creature has only wanted one word from a friend...a real friend—to show her the iniquity of her ways, and waken her to a sense of her ingratitude toward a kind mistress.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," says he, "and——" He pauses. Somehow Diana's sad fate recurs to him again. How is she to be defended against a bad husband, and this so evidently easily-led girl? "I wish," says he impulsively, "that you would try to be a good girl."

"I'll try," says Bridget, who now seems suffocating.

"That's right," says Ker heartily.

"And you won't tell misses, sir?"

"You know that," says he a little stiffly. Is she only desirous, after all, of getting off scot-free? Her face, now open to his inspection, the handker chief having been lowered, helps to this idea. It is just as it was before it went behind the flag of distress, lovely, bright, pale-pink.

"I'd like to shake hands with you over that, sir."

The lovely parlor-maid holds out her hand to him and perforce he feels that he must take it.

What a very white delicate hand! He looks at it as it lies within his own.

"Never does a stroke of work if she can help it evidently. Leaves all to poor Diana," decides he.

He rests his eyes on hers.

"It seems to me, Bridget, that you are not a very industrious girl," says he austerely.

"But why, sir?"

"Your hands. Look at your hands."

Bidget looks at them. She spreads them abroad, indeed, as if examining the offending members with great interest.

"Are they too white, sir?" asks she at last.

"Much too white."

"You," thoughtfully, "would like them to be brown?" She holds them up before Ker's eyes. They look pale as paper in the sunlight.

"I don't know what I want," says Ker angrily. He turns upon his heel, and leaves her.

(To be Continued.

NATIONS WITH WAR FADS

METHODS OF WARFARE OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.

Russia Must Have British Coal—Britain Approves of Dum-Dum Bullet.

Every nation is touchy on some point in connection with war. In the present struggle we shall probably hear many complaints made by either party as to one or the other having committed some breach of the "laws of war." Very few wars take place without some such complaints. Russia has herself started grumbling, on the ground that Japan made a "treacherous" attack on her ships at Port Arthur without first declaring war.

The charge is unjustifiable, for over sixty wars of the last century were started without a formal declaration. In fact, declarations of war have gone out of fashion.

Nearly all the Powers agreed at the Hague Conference that permanent arbitration was a very desirable thing. But Germany protested, and her action prevented the idea being generally adopted. The Kaiser and his Government declared that to be compelled to submit disputes to arbitration was "dangerous and derogatory to a monarch's sovereignty and independence," and the Kaiser refused to pledge himself to bow to the decisions of judges not appointed by him, on a case that had not arisen.

A great grievance of Russia against "perfidious Albion," which is decidedly comical, is the very fact that we are neutral. This alone cripples Russia's passage to the Far East, by restricting her coal supply at our stations on the route. Britain cannot even sit still without offending somebody.

THE PARTICULAR FAD

of the United States is an objection to privateering and attacks on merchant shipping in times of war. She adopted the grievance as a result of the Alabanna maraudings in 1866, by which scores of the Federal ships were sunk. The Alabama was proved to have been built in Britain, and to have sailed from a British port, and we were adjudged guilty, and made to pay $15,000,000 for the damage. This has rankled with America ever since, and whenever a conference of the Powers is summoned she seeks to raise the question.

The United States had the opportunity of securing the abolition of privateering in 1857, in the Declaration of Paris, but she refused to sign any such convention unless the Powers also agreed to stop all interference with merchant traffic during war. In this attitude America also refused to admit several other important articles, such as the rights of blockade and the respect of a neutral flag conveying an enemy's commerce.

Her principal enemy in this fad about the freedom of merchant commerce is Great Britain. It would be dead against our interests to consent to it, as in time of war one of our strongest assets will be the power of our fleet to hamper an enemy's trade by closing our ports and channels to his ships.

But both Britain and America reserved the right to use "projectiles intended to diffuse asphyxiating or deleterious gases." All the other Powers, with a few trifling exceptions agreed, at the Hague Conference, to deny themselves

THESE LUXURIES IN WAR.

The United States, again, is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention. This is an agreement to enable Powers to organize relief societies to attend the sick and wounded in time of war. It was concluded as a result of the horrors of suffering experienced at the Battle of Solferino, in 1859, and was signed by fourteen Governments. America, however, did not support it.

Britain, for her part, has just as large a catalogue of fads as anybody else. Some seem to be sensible, others not. We showed ourselves to be very determined in 1874 when invited to attend the Brussels Conference. This was summoned with a view to humanizing war, as a result of the Franco-German horrors. Amongst the things which it was desired to stop in warfare were the use of poisons, either in liquid or on weapons, of shells and explosive bullets, of red-hot shot, and guns loaded with scraps of iron.

Britain objected to joining officially in the Conference, because, in the words of our Foreign Secretary, such rules "facilitated aggressive wars and paralyzed the patriotic efforts of an invaded people." As Britain abstained, nothing direct resulted from the Conference.

To this day Britain retains a kindly feeling towards expanding bullets.

THE "DUM-DUM"

(a bullet which expands when it strikes) is regarded with horror by the other European States, and at the Hague Conference an attempt was made to declare it contrary to the laws of war. Together with the United States, we protested that the "Dum-Dum" bullet did not aggravate the sufferings of the wounded.

Very shortly afterwards the bullet was accidentally used in our South African War, but, in view of European protests, it was dropped at once. Nevertheless, International Law does not bind us in this matter, while it does bind our fellow nations. It would be against British principles, in any case, to use them if an enemy abstained from doing so. All we claim is that the "Dum-Dum" is fair in war against uncivilized races. Portugal is another State with a leaning towards the "Dum-Dum," and also declined to abolish it.

But there is a defence for the "Dum-Dum" bullet. It is invariably only used against savages. In African warfare it has been found that the small calibre shot is almost useless. It will go clean through a black without stopping his headlong rush. The "Dum-Dum" stops him.

CHINA'S LITTLE FADS

have practically prevented her from being regarded as one of the civilized Powers of the world. The title to civilization rests on whether or not a Power has subscribed to International Law, as represented in the various Conventions.

China did not sign the Geneva Convention regarding the nursing of the wounded, or the Treaty of Paris of 1887, while Japan did. Therefore, in Japan's war with China she was very much concerned as to whether she was to treat China as civilized or as a barbarian. She finally decided to call China civilized, and so thrashed her in a civilized manner.

Britain has a substantial fad to put before the Powers as a result of the Boer War. It is that when an army is in effective occupation of a country the native forces, if they continue their resistance, should be treated as rebels. De Wet's irritating tactics after the occupation of Petroria were the cause of this fad, and "guerilla warfare" will probably be treated very differently next time we find ourselves faced with it.

There is no doubt that, before the present war is over, new and strange fads will crop up with regard to naval war. Amongst the resources some Powers have tried to abolish is the submarine, but that is too promising a weapon for the Powers to willingly surrender.—Pearson's Weekly.

WOODEN-LEGGED RUNNER.

A lame man named Francois Rosin, who calls himself the champion wooden-legged man, ran a race on the Boulevard de l'Abattoir, Paris, covering nine miles in an hour, and a little over fourteen miles in two hours.