

A BRIDE'S WHIM.



It seems a very stupid idea to have a wedding ball without the bride, don't you think so, Elaine?

The speaker was a merry, blue-eyed damsel of some twenty summers, and she put down the soft silk she was embroidering, and knotted her hands behind her head.

Elaine, who was fashioning a few rich Gloire-de-Dijon roses into a trailing wreath, laughed, and her dark eyes danced with fun.

'Ingra,' she said, leaning forward, so that the listening breezes should have no chance of telling the secret. 'Ingra, I have such a splendid idea. Oh! if you only had courage enough to carry it out!'

'What is it? I have plenty of courage. Don't you remember cousin Dick always declared I had cheek enough for anything?'

'Very well, then. Now listen and I will tell you how you shall be a guest at your own wedding dance. First, it must be a masked ball; second, you must not let your mother know. She thinks and believes that a departure with a due supply of rice and slippers after the breakfast or reception tea is the only dignified and correct proceeding for a bride. To remain and enjoy a dance would savour too much of Bohemianism for her. "It would not be at all the thing, my dear."'

Elaine imitated the carefully modulated, well-bred tones of Mrs de Lacy, Ingra's mother, to perfection. Both girls laughed. Then a shadow crept over the bride-elect's face.

'There's Martin, you know, Elaine,' she said, as though the bridegroom's existence at all was quite an afterthought. 'He must enjoy the dance too,' cried Elaine. 'We can't very well leave him out.'

'But I'm afraid he won't like it,' said his fiancée, dubiously.

'Tell him if he doesn't agree to this, your first request, you won't marry him,' suggested Elaine.

'Then there would be no wedding and no dance! It would disappoint so many people.'

'What would disappoint so many people?' asked a pleasant, manly voice, as across the soft lawn turf a tall, well-built figure made its way.

'Oh, Martin, how you startled me! I was only telling Elaine that if our marriage did not take place a great many people would be put out.'

'Good gracious, Ingra, what an awful suggestion! And how calmly you speak of it too! What has happened? He went on, hurriedly. 'Is anyone dead? Are you ill? Isn't the wedding frock ready?'

'Froek!' exclaimed Ingra. 'One would think I was a mite of four going to her first party. No, there's nothing wrong, only—'

'Only what?'

'Only I do so want to dance at my own wedding.'

'And so you shall, dear. I'll take a musical-box with us, and as soon as we are safely in our cabin at Port Chalmers I'll set it going, and you shall have the barn-door dance, a waltz, polka, or whatever you like. You will only be somewhat restricted in your choice of partners.'

Elaine laughed heartily. 'Your next-cabin neighbours would appreciate the noise, I am sure. But Ingra wants to be present at the dance Mrs de Lacy is giving in the evening.'

her friend, and had even once or twice twitted Ingra with being completely under her thumb. So at this reference to Miss Brickley she promptly fired up.

'It isn't at all extraordinary, and it's my own idea. Lots of brides appear for a little, and I am so fond of dancing, and it will be my last chance to dance with all my pet partners.'

Martin's brow darkened. He had often wished to prevent his betrothed dancing round dances with anyone but himself. The thought of his wife doing such a thing was intolerable.

'It is quite impossible, Ingra,' he said. 'All our plans have been made, and I cannot alter them to suit an absurd whim of yours and Miss Brickley's.'

'Very well,' said Ingra, rising from her seat, and letting her white silks fall on the grass. 'I will not marry you at all.'

She darted across the grass, and before Martin could recover from his amazement and overtake her, had entered the library through the open French window, and gone up to her own room. Thither Elaine followed her, and, after a long talk, took a message out to the still astonished and bewildered lover to the effect that if he would not speak again of what had happened that afternoon, Ingra would give up the dance and marry him.

But the steamer's departure was postponed. Martin told Ingra that they would go down to Port Chalmers as arranged, only by a later train, and leave the port next day by the boat. This was demurely agreed to, and the wedding-day came.

The ceremony was over. Afternoon tea had been imbibed, and the wedding-cake discussed. Then the happy pair, as the Society papers would term them, departed in a carriage drawn by grey horses, amidst a shower of traditional rice and slippers.

But after their arrival at the Port Chalmers Hotel Mrs Martin Linn declared that she had 'a dreadful sick headache,' which nothing but the most absolute rest and quiet would cure. If she had to come down to dinner, or to talk to anyone, it would certainly last three days.

Martin could only acquiesce sympathetically, and procure a fresh bottle of salts and some eau-de-cologne. He ate a solitary dinner, and having heard from the chambermaid that the lady was just going to sleep, he strolled down to the wharf, solacing himself with a pipe. After all the wedding fuss he was scarcely surprised that the bride was knocked up.

Having satisfied herself that her husband had left the hotel, Ingra, who had made all her preparations, locked her door, putting the key in her pocket, and stole softly down the stairs. She caught a train to her station, and made her way cautiously to her mother's house, which was brilliantly lighted. In a retired summer-house she found her ball-dress and mask. She waited here for her friend, Elaine soon appeared, and congratulated her on the success of her scheme. Together they returned to the house, and Ingra danced, outwardly as happily and lightly as the rest. Her gown was very handsome, and certainly of rather daring contrasts. The front of palest blue silk was covered with sprays of pink convolvulus; the bodice was of the blue, with a pink silk ruche, whilst the train of pale pink brocade was ornamented with ostrich feathers and loops of black velvet. She would

at the hotel until daylight, and was glad that Boots, who let her in, looked too sleepy to be surprised.

But just outside her own door she met her husband, Anxious, and unable to sleep, he had risen early, and was listening at his wife's door to hear if she was breathing softly or tossing restlessly on her couch.

'Ingra!' he exclaimed, 'what does this mean?' For an instant Ingra hesitated. His voice was very stern. The lie was on her lips, 'I couldn't sleep, and have been trying a little fresh air,' but her better nature triumphed.

She walked towards the sitting-room. 'Come here, Martin, and I will tell you all.' And, with tears of sorrow and self-reproach, she confessed her escapade.

Martin was dreadfully hurt by the deceit she had practised upon him, and for a long time did not seem inclined to forgive her. But her entreaties and caresses won the pardon she craved. Her punishment lay in the fact that for months afterwards her husband regarded every sign of weakness, weariness, or illness as counterfeits. It was long, indeed, before he fully trusted her, and Ingra felt this keenly.

L.F.R.



'I do not see how she can possibly manage that, Miss Brickley. The steamer leaves the wharf at five o'clock.'

'Perhaps it will be a day late,' suggested Ingra.

'We can hardly base our arrangements on that slender chance,' said Martin Linn, seating himself in a wicker chair by the girls. 'Is the tea all gone?'

Elaine took up the tea-pot and held it against her round cheek.

'There's some liquid left, but I fear it's very chilly.' She set it down on the rustic table, and looked questioningly at Mr Linn. Then a happy thought came to her.

'I'll run in with it and get some more made,' she said. The lovers offered but a feeble protest, and with a chuckle at her own astuteness, Miss Brickley vanished in the direction of the house.

Her back was barely turned before Martin drew his chair close to Ingra's, and slipping his arm round her neck, turned her lovely face up to his.

'I suppose Miss Brickley has been putting you up to this extraordinary notion?' he asked.

Had the question been expressed differently, had Martin laughingly told her he meant to carry her off for his very own as soon as possible, and that he would not divide her with a lot of other people all the evening, Ingra would have yielded the point, and laughed at her own fancy. But he had always shown himself jealous of Elaine's influence over

not wear white for fear of attracting attention, though Elaine assured her that her striking coloured gown was much more risky. Thanks to the style of dress—unlike anything she had previously worn—and her mask, she was not recognised. But every moment she grew more unhappy. Was this deceit a good beginning of her married life? And, oh! what would Martin say if he found out? What had seemed an excellent joke began to assume a very different character to her awakened conscience.

Like Cinderella, she must vanish at twelve o'clock, for at that hour, during supper, the guests were all to unmask. Elaine met her as the various couples were making their way to the ballroom.

'Quick, Ingra,' she said. 'You can slip off now up to my room. What fun it has been!'

'I don't think so,' said the unhappy bride. 'Oh, Elaine, I believe I have wrecked my life's happiness for a whim.'

Elaine looked dismayed. 'Hurry up,' she said. 'The carriage will be ready for you, and I will never betray you.'

'I shall tell Martin myself,' sobbed Ingra.

'You had better not; he will never forgive you. Be sure—' But Ingra had slipped away to Elaine's room to wait for two or three hours.

It was a weary drive to Port Chalmers, and Ingra spent the time in bitter self-reproach. She did not wish to arrive

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