

THE MAID OF ATHENS;

OR,

"OH, ALONZO!"

A Magnificent, Complete School Tale, dealing with the Laughable Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Masquerades.

"My dear fellows, do you like my costume?" Alonzo Todd, of the Remove Furn at Greyfriars, blinked into No. 1 Study as he asked the question.

Harry Wharton & Co. were there, very busy. It was a great occasion. A fancy-dress ball was being given at Cliff House School, and the humus of the Remove were going; and for several days they had been much exercised in their minds with regard to their costumes.

In No. 1 Study, at the present moment, a knight in armour, a Roman senator, an Elizabethan nobleman, a buccanier, and an Indian rajah were gathered—looking decidedly unlike Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, of the Remove.

But when Alonzo Todd looked into the study, asking the opinion of the Co. upon his costume, the knight and the senator, the nobleman and the buccanier and the rajah burst into a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, Alonzo!"
"Ripping!"

The Duffer of Greyfriars blinked at them, pleased by the impression his costume had made. Certainly it was a striking one.

"What does it represent?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The Maid of Athens," said Alonzo. "Cousin Peter helped me to make up. He says it is exactly like the Maid of Athens."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

If Alonzo was anything like the Maid of Athens, the Maid of Athens must have been an odd maid, and a very prim and peculiar old maid at that. Cousin Peter was a humorist, and he had evidently allowed his peculiar sense of humour full play, in helping Alonzo to dress for the part. Alonzo wore a long skirt of blue, and a bodice of pink, and an old-fashioned bonnet. The bonnet was secured by strings under his chin. Under the bonnet peeped out crazy curls, plenty of them. His face was made up so that it was quite unrecognisable, and Peter had given him a liberal allowance of wrinkles. He carried a large umbrella under his arm, which certainly the genuine Maid of Athens never did.

"You really like the costume, my dear fellows," purred Alonzo. "Cousin Peter says it is sure to be effective."

"Effective!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "My dear chap, it is simply stunning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Alonzo will take the biscuit!" gasped Wharton. "Lonzo, old man, you are a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!"

"I'm so glad you're pleased," said Alonzo. "I must go and thank Peter again for taking so much trouble with me. He has taken more trouble with me than with himself. That was the end of Peter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the gentle Alonzo ambled away, leaving the chums of the Remove amused in hysterics. There was a sound of wheels in the Close.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's the brake! Are you ready, my infants?"

"All ready!"

"Then kin on!"

And, putting on their coats over their costumes, the Famous Five descended from the study. Half a dozen more fellows, with coats on over various striking costumes, met them when they came. Quite a large contingent of the Remove were going to the fancy-dress ball. Mr. Quech, the master of the Remove, was going with them, but he was not in costume. Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, had intended to do so, but he was expecting the arrival of an elderly relative from abroad that evening, so at the last moment Mr. Quech had taken his place. Mr. Quech saw the juniors into the brake, and he gave a jump at the sight of Alonzo Todd. Alonzo's stunning costume was already producing its effect.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Quech. "What—I mean, who is that?"

"If you please, sir, I'm Todd!" said Alonzo weakly.

"Oh, you are Todd! That is an extraordinary costume, Todd!" gasped the Remove master. "Pray, what does it represent?"

"The—The Maid of Athens, sir."

"The—The Maid of Athens, sir," said Alonzo weakly. "Cousin Peter thinks it is very life-like, sir."

"Bless my soul!"



Dr. Locke turned towards the unhappy Alonzo, upon whose mind was dawning the mistake that had been made. "Madam, who are you?" cried the Head. Alonzo Todd staggered to his feet. "I—I—there has been some mistake!" he gasped. "I—if you please, I'm Alonzo Todd!" (See Chap. 2.)

Mr. Quech turned away, apparently suffering from some internal pain.

The juniors crowded into the brake, and Mr. Quech followed them in, and they drove away in great spirits.

Alonzo was feeling the most cheerful of all the party. Every fellow assured him solemnly that his costume would be the hit of the evening, and Alonzo was very pleased to hear it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Traveller's Return.

"M-m-m-my dear Peter!"

"Hallo! Anything the matter, 'Lonzo'?" asked Peter Todd cheerfully, as he consumed his third ice in the supper-room. "Getting on all right?"

The Maid of Athens blinked reproachfully at the humorous Peter.

From the adjoining room came the strains of the band, and the merry tramping of the light fantastic toe. But the Maid of Athens did not seem to be sharing the general excitement. She—or he—was looking worried.

"My dear Peter, I am afraid you have been playing a practical joke on me. I really do not think this costume is suitable."

"Go on!" murmured Peter. "It's made quite a sensation."

"I fear it is somewhat ridiculous, my dear Peter."

"Not really!"

"Yes, indeed! Mervin and Clara laughed so much."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon the whole, my dear Peter, I think I shall withdraw from the scene. I do not really care very much for these frivolous amusements. If you had not over-persuaded me, Peter, I should have greatly preferred to remain in my study, and peruse the new volume on 'The Story of a Speck of Dust,' which my Uncle Benjamin sent me this morning. I really think I will go back, my dear Peter, especially as I do not care."

"Oh, yes!" said Peter. "Stay here, and pile into supper. Look at Bunter there. He hasn't done anything but eat since he arrived. Go on! do likewise."

And Peter strolled away.

But Alonzo had made up his mind. The grave and serious character of Alonzo was really not in keeping with that festive scene of gaiety. In the midst of the festive air, he thought with regret of that entrancing volume on "The Story of a Speck of Dust," and after Peter had gone back to the dancing Alonzo quietly slipped away.

Smiles followed the Maid of Athens wherever he appeared. But Alonzo slipped into the cloak-room, and put on his ulster, and slipped out of the house. Several cabbies had lined up outside Cliff House in the hope of picking up fares after the ball, and Alonzo had no difficulty in securing a carriage home. He gave a sigh of relief as he sank back in the cab, and rolled away towards Greyfriars.

"I am almost sure that Peter was pulling my leg, as he would call it," murmured Alonzo. "However, I shall be very glad to return and pass these leisure hours in improving my mind; instead of wasting time in idle amusement. I am sure my Uncle Benjamin would approve of my return."

The cab rattled away along the dark lane, and passed through the village of Friarale, and reached the gates of Greyfriars. The gates were

closed, and the cabman descended to ring the bell. Gosling, the porter, opened the gates, and at the sight of the Maid of Athens sitting in the cab his manner became very respectful.

"Drive on!" he said to the cabby. "Take the lady up to the ouse."

Alonzo had been about to descend at the gates, as juniors generally did when they came home in convalescence. Gosling's unusual civility to a junior somewhat surprised him.

"My dear Gosling—" he began.

Gosling started.

"Didn't know you knew my name, num," he said.

Alonzo stared at him. He suspected that Gosling must be slightly intoxicated. It did not occur to his simple mind that the porter did not recognise him.

"My dear Gosling, of course I know your name," he said. "I—"

"Yes, num. The 'Ead told me he was expecting you," said Gosling, respectfully.

"Drive on to the ouse, cabby."

And the cab drove on into the gateway, and rattled on to the Head's house.

"Dear me," said Alonzo, in surprise, "that is very peculiar. How could the Head have known that I should be leaving early?"

The cab stopped outside the Head's house. Trotter, the care, came out and opened the door for Alonzo to alight, touching his cap very respectfully.

Alonzo stepped from the cab. He paid the cabbie, who drove away, and then turned to go towards the School House entrance.

"This way, if you please, ma'am," said Trotter.

"My dear Trotter—"

"My 'at! 'Ow does she know my name?" murmured Trotter in surprise. "This way, ma'am. This is the 'Ead's house."

"Yes, but—"

"The 'Ead told me to take you in the moment you came," explained Trotter. "The 'Ead is engaged just now, but Miss Locke is waitin' for you."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Alonzo. "Are you sure, Trotter?"

"Sittin'!"

"Miss Locke is waiting for me?"

"You are quite sure that Miss Locke is waiting for me, Trotter?"

"Why, yes. The 'Ead expects you this evening."

"Oh, very well!" said Alonzo. He was greatly surprised, but there seemed to be no mistake about it, and he followed Trotter into the house.

He was still more surprised when Trotter showed him into the drawing-room. What the Head could want with him, and why he was shown into the drawing-room instead of the Head's study, Alonzo could not imagine. Miss Locke was in the room, and Molly, the Head's younger daughter, both of them rose with affectionate smiles to greet Alonzo. If anything in his costume struck them as odd they were too polite to show it.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Miss Locke. "I hope you have had a nice journey."

"Yes, yes, thank you," stammered Alonzo.

"Are you very tired?"

"Nunno, thank you!"

"Take this nice chair by the fire," said Miss

Locke. "Papa will be here in a few minutes. How well you are looking!"

And, to Alonzo's horror, Miss Locke put her arms round his neck and kissed him!

Alonzo almost fell down.

Certainly, no other fellow at Greyfriars would have objected to being kissed by Miss Locke! Alonzo, perhaps, had no objection. But the surprise almost overcame him. Miss Locke was a very pretty girl, and had always seemed very modest, and almost shy, and for her to kiss Alonzo in this almost affectionate manner was simply staggering. Alonzo wondered whether he was dreaming.

"Well, haven't you a kiss for me?" said Miss Locke, smiling.

"Yes, indeed—certainly!" stammered Alonzo. And he kissed Miss Locke.

Miss Molly embraced him affectionately, and kissed him several times. But as Molly was a child, this was not quite so confusing. Alonzo, not quite knowing whether he was on his head or on his heels, allowed himself to be led to the armchair before the fire, and sat down there in helpless amazement.

"Papa won't be long," said Miss Locke, sitting down opposite Alonzo, and regarding him affectionately. "Will you come to my room and take your things off?"

"Your—your room?"

"Yes, dear."

"Nunno, thank you! I—I— Nunno!"

"You would like to see papa first?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well," said Miss Locke. "Now you shall tell me about your travels. Did you find Cannes very nice?"

"Nunno!"

"Yes. Have you not been to Cannes?"

"Nunno!"

Miss Locke looked surprised.

"I understood from papa that you had been to Cannes," she said. "Never mind, Ah! Here is papa!"

Dr. Locke came in. He came directly towards Alonzo, who rose to his feet. To Alonzo's utter amazement Dr. Locke kissed him on the cheek. It was the climax! Kissing seemed to have broken out like an epidemic in the Locke family. Alonzo simply could not understand it. It was impossible to suppose that the Head of Greyfriars had been drinking. But what on earth could it mean?

"Sit down—sit down!" said the Head generally. "I hope you are not tired after your journey."

"Nunno, thank you! You are very kind, sir."

The "sir" appeared to surprise Dr. Locke. "Surely you will call me Henry!" he exclaimed.

"Henry!" stammered Alonzo. The idea of calling his headmaster by his Christian name took Alonzo's breath away.

"Why, yes, of course," said Alonzo.

"I—I will certainly call you Henry if you wish," stammered Alonzo. "You—you are very kind, Henry."

"You must be hungry after your journey," said the Head. "Supper is prepared. You would like to take your things off?"

"Nunno!"

"Very well, then, we will go in to supper," said the Head.

"B-b-but—"

"Please take my arm!"

"T-t-thank you, Henry!"

Alonzo took the Head's arm like one in a dream. Like one in a dream, he sat down at the well-supervised supper-table. He was hungry, as a matter of fact, and in spite of his amazement he proceeded to do full justice to a very excellent supper.

But before supper was half through there came an interruption. The door opened, and Trotter, with an astounded expression upon his face, showed in an old lady, with silvery hair and large spectacles.

Dr. Locke rose in some surprise.

"M-m-miss Trotter!" stammered Trotter, looking out of the corner of his eye at Alonzo at the supper-table.

The Head jumped.

"What! Madame?"

"Don't you know me, Henry?" exclaimed the silver-haired lady. "I have not seen you since you were a little boy, but I knew you at once!"

"Wha-a-at! You—you are—"

"I am your Aunt Matilda! Don't you know me?"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Miss Locke; and Molly gave a shriek. "Then who—who—"

"Aunt Matilda!" ejaculated the Head. "You are—Aunt Matilda?"

"Certainly, Henry! Have you forgotten me? Surely you were expecting me this evening?"

"Yes—no! I mean—ahem!—then—then who is this?" Dr. Locke turned towards the unhappy Alonzo, upon whose mind was dawning the mistake that had been made. "Madam, who are you?"

"I—I—"

"Who are you?" exclaimed the Head. "Yes, I know you now, Aunt Matilda; but excuse my surprise. But this—this person has introduced herself here in your name!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated Aunt Matilda.

All eyes were fixed upon the Maid of Athens. Alonzo staggered to his feet.

"I—I—There has been some mistake!" he gasped. "I—"

"Who are you?" exclaimed the Head.

(The conclusion of this story will be found on page 6, col. 1.)

THE MAID OF ATHENS.

(Continued from page 7.)

"Alonzo Todd, sir, of the Remove," stuttered Alonzo. "I—I thought you knew, sir."

"Wha-at! Todd! Then what is the meaning of this masquerade?" thundered the Head. Alonzo cast a longing eye towards the door.

"Todd," repeated the Head—"Todd! This is—is amazing! How dare you, Todd, come here in that ridiculous attire, and pass yourself off as my aunt?"

"I—I didn't, sir! Oh, dear! I—I've just come home from the fancy-dress ball, sir!" shrieked Alonzo. "I was very much surprised when Trotter showed me in here. He said that you were expecting me, and—and I was very much surprised indeed, especially when Miss Locke kissed me."

Miss Locke turned crimson.

The Head looked fixedly at him for a moment. But Todd was evidently telling the truth, and the Head's face relaxed. He passed his hand over his mouth. Miss Franter was smiling, and Molly was almost in hysterics.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "You—you are a most extraordinary boy, Todd! Why are you dressed in feminine attire, and in such very extraordinary attire?"

"I—I was at the fancy-dress ball, sir. I—I was the Maid of Athens. And I came home early, and—and—"

"The Maid of Athens! Ha, ha, ha! I—I mean this is—is extraordinary! Go away at once, Todd—go away! I should be very angry with you, only I know that you are the most stupid boy in the school. Go—go away!"

Alonzo Todd was only too glad to go away. With a swish of skirts he vanished. And the Head sank down in his chair and gasped with laughter.

Harry Wharton & Co. returned in great spirits from the fancy-dress ball, but they found Alonzo looking distressed. With a lugubrious face he explained to them the peculiar mistake that had arisen on his return to Greyfriars. But the chums of the Remove did not look distressed or lugubrious when they heard it. They shrieked, and they roared, and they yelled.

"Oh, Alonzo!" gasped Peter. "Oh, Alonzo! I said you'd take the biscuit in that costume! And you've taken it—taken it whole! Ha, ha, ha!"

THE END.

(Another Splendid School Tale next Saturday.
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