

## COLLABORATEURS.

By S. D. SCHULTZ.

## CHAPTER VII (Continued).

ARCHER asked for Florence's programme with the commendable object of restoring her composure, and when he found that Allison had engaged half the dances, not counting extras, he was confirmed in the conviction that freshmen were perfect paragons of dauntless temerity. When a first year man falls a victim to beauty's charms, he becomes a mere creature of unreasoning impulse, recognizes no half measures, but loves with a concentration of ardor, an impetuosity of devotion that knows no bounds. Allison had met Florence Haverley for the first time this evening, and here he was with unparalleled presumption calling her an "affinity," and even had the effrontery to claim half her dances.

"Well! here comes your affinity," Archer said lightly, after a pause.

Florence turned her head quickly, and as rapidly glanced back again. Her brown eyes telegraphed an ominous look that boded ill for Archer's future peace of mind, but soon afterwards sparkled with pleasure, when, in a few moments, Allison suggested a *tete-a-tete*, at the same time indicating an alcove, luckily unoccupied, and improvised by facing a Japanese screen with a half circle of luxuriant potted palms.

Left alone, Archer ruminated on Seymour's unexpected presence at the ball, and how it would affect his chances with Ethel. Although he could not boast of appreciable advances in her favor as a lover, he had been happy in the rare fortune of being near her, and the mere possibility of eventual success was sufficient to inspire dreams of ecstasy. But now the coming of Seymour had eclipsed his budding sanguinity with a shade of scepticism. He was not exactly jealous, but still found the rack of uncertainty excruciating torture.

"Yes," he reflected, "Fairlie said that Seymour had been very attentive before the Rebellion, and then that letter that he wrote on the eve of the Cut Knife engagement indicates that something must exist between them."

Besides Archer could not dismiss the suspicion that Seymour's presence there that evening was something more than merely fortuitous. His brow clouded at the idea that they were corresponding, and that, perchance, Ethel's mentioning of the Haverley "At Home," by way of letter, had induced Seymour to attend.

Happily, those enlivening concomitants of gay company, embraced by sprightly music, darting forms gowned in triumphs of tint and mode, and other attractions specially pleasing to eye and ear, do not allow one for long to indulge morbid fits of anguished doubt.

He went into another room, and his face brightened with a look of expectation, as he eagerly sallied in the direction of a well-known face.

"Oh! I'm so glad to see you, Mrs. Coursiere," he began, as he bowed beamingly before her.

"Yes! one would judge so," replied the lady addressed with mock irony. "I am disposed to think the very contrary, though, from the persistent manner in which you have avoided me of late."

"Your reprehensible conduct deserves the most severe condemnation, in the language of the member from —. But!" she continued commiseratingly, "poor fellow, this is your first effort at Ottawa, and the work must be exacting."

Archer's eyes could not restrain their admiration, as he noted the beauties of Mrs. Coursiere's gown.

"Do you like it?" she interrogated archly.

"Immensely—a perfect dream of dainty grace and captivating loveliness," he replied rapturously.

But then Mrs. Coursiere's dresses were certain to be noticeable for combination of delicate tints and charming design. On this particular evening, she wore a pearl grey silk, embroidered with an almost imperceptible tracery of flowers, and the sleeves were pale rose and airily bouffant. A cluster of American Beauty roses, with their lustrous pink shading into a mellow glory of carmine crimson, nestled in her corsage.

Mrs. Coursiere was the wife of a prominent Quebec member. She had been a Baltimore belle, and her matrimonial experiences had evidently fallen in pleasant ways, for she had lost none of the comely charms and winsome ways of vivacious young womanhood.

Archer had met her soon after her marriage at Niagara-on-the-Lake, where he had gone for a brief vacation. She soon learned to appreciate him at his true worth. Having been flattered all her life, it was a refreshing novelty to meet one who did not indulge in frequent paroxysms of idiotic drivel. She was heartily nauseated with the numerous class of men who busy their brains to say "nice things." Archer's unreserved candor and absence of affectation ingratiated him in her liking. Their friendship partook of the truly platonic—a relationship derided as impossible, where hearts are young and impressionable. They even maintained a regular correspondence, and Mrs. Coursiere manifested a permanent interest in his welfare by sending him from time to time the libretto of the latest opera, anything of striking merit in fiction, or, perhaps, a metropolitan paper's criticism upon a recent drama or literary work. Archer was, indeed, happy in the possession of such a friend and well-wisher.

They had been exploiting a new comedy, whose first night had received a most eulogistic reception at the hands of captious critics, when Mrs. Coursiere changed the conversation by enquiring abruptly:

"Have you seen Miss Grant, yet, Archer?"

"No! I have looked all over for her, and—at least—that is—I—I—mean," Archer stammered, colored painfully and gave up in despair.

Mrs. Coursiere shot one penetrating glance at Archer in his hapless plight, and swiftly formulated a conclusion. His clumsy betrayal of a more than ordinary interest in Ethel Grant astonished her, but with a woman's tact, and the prescience of a matchmaker, she did not emphasize his confusion by pursuing the methods of the majority of her sex, when they surprise an unsuspecting lovesick swain into a confession of a cherished secret. She did not chaff, but adroitly plunged into the topic, which she had intended introducing, when interrupted by Archer's tell-tale embarrassment.

"You men are cringing, crafty, despicable, pusillanimous, cowardly creatures—there. I've said everything, and I feel relieved," she had spoken slowly, and defiantly, pronouncing each syllable with accentuated distinctiveness.

Archer having fully recovered from his temporary show of abashment, looked up with an expression of "what next" in his wondering eyes.

"Certainly," Mrs. Coursiere resumed, "Miss Grant has not been altogether shunned, and she can credit her interesting personality, and my assistance for escaping humiliating neglect. I am all the more convinced after Ethel Grant's experience of this evening, that money is the all important factor in the eyes of you mercenary men. Ethel has many endearing qualities, and her conversational powers could not fail to impress those who are fortunate enough to meet her. But mental gifts are of little avail without hard cash. I am getting more misanthropical every day. Men seem to reserve their chivalry, their gallantry, their artificial airs for wealth. Few are independent. Most—it is a frightful accusation, but I must say it—act like sneaking cur. These are hard words; but we, Americans, are accustomed to speak plainly, and do not hide ugly truths under ornate language. I will show you what I mean. Ethel came fully half an hour ago. Her aunt—Mrs. Downley, chaperoned her. Not a man could summon up sufficient courage to approach her. The miserable things—they thought they would compromise themselves, because Ethel had to do newspaper reporting for a living, and the money bags were depleted. I saw that something had to be done at once, so I introduced a member of the Cabinet to her, and her sweet look of gratitude was my sufficient reward. But you horrible men—how I despise you."

Archer was secretly happy that Ethel had won such a warm champion in Mrs. Coursiere, but could not resist giving expression to a scarcely audible crescendo whistle of amazement at this bitter denunciation of male shortcomings.

"Gracious, I did not imagine you could be so splenetic. I hope you feel better now, after effervescing such a fury of bottled indignation. I am at a loss, though, to understand, why you, of all women, should asperse our sex with such unbridled vehemence, after all the adulation you have received from us poor maligned men."

"Sidney Archer, you are lapsing into insufferable idiocy," Mrs. Coursiere exclaimed impatiently. "I gave you credit for sense—but look!—I declare!"—and Mrs. Coursiere, in her amazement, temporarily parted with etiquette by pointing her fan.

Archer, whose back had been to the doorway, turned his head, and following the direction indicated, saw Ethel pausing at the entrance of the room, and surrounded by a host of gentlemen, evidently intent on securing her coveted programme.

"I wonder if she will keep her promise, and reserve those two dances for me," he ruefully speculated. "At any rate, I must bide my time, and wait until that mob is disposed of. If they succeed in getting a number each, I'm out of it, that's all."