

portion of his time to adorning his person. In the present instance the person was worth some pains in adorning, for the stranger was tall, well made and rather handsome, in a womanish, effeminate style of appearance. He was exceedingly fair, with a warm, rich color which told of perfect health, his eyes were of the palest possible blue, and his hair of the lightest possible tinge of blonde. He called it "golden," but his less complimentary friends designated the hue as "molasses froth color," and as far as actual similitude went they were, probably, most correct. The face was an open good humored one, but gave no signs of intellectual power, and looked something like what the face of an overgrown baby might resemble.

"Why, Polly, old fellow, where did you drop from?" exclaimed Fowler, seizing the outstretched hand, and shaking it warmly, "I thought you intended spending the winter in Europe?"

"Yaas, yaas, I did have some such idea, you know, but it's such awful slow work travelling alone, you know, especially when a fellow don't understand the language, you know. Ah! Frank, how are you, old fellow?"

"First rate, how have you enjoyed your trip?"

"Aw, pretty well, saw lots of strange sights, you know; was in Paris during the excitement at the declaration of war, you know, and saw the departure of the troops for Berlin. But I'm precious glad to get home again and see some of the boys, you know."

"Polly," said Fowler, who had been speaking to Morton, "allow me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Morton; Charlie, this is my friend Mr. Theophilus Laancelot Polydor Johnson, whom for short we call 'Polly.' He's one of those lucky individuals who are blessed with industrious fathers who labor hard to amass a fortune in order that their sons might have the pleasure of spending it; and 'Polly' bids fair to circulate his father's dollars with as much pains as the old gentleman took in saving them."

The two men shook hands, but not warmly; altho' not known to each other personally each had heard of the other, and there was an evident disposition toward a very cordial mutual dislike.

"When did you return, Polly?" asked Fowler.

"Just a week ago to-day."

"You've seen the Howsons, of course?"

"Yaas, yaas, I've seen them once or twice since my return. Awful jolly girl Annie is, isn't she?"

"I haven't had the felicity of seeing the lady for some months, and am, therefore, unable to testify as to her jolliness. So she is kinder to you than she was before you went to Europe?"

"Yaas, she's evidently getting fond of me, and I like it."

Morton flushed up very suddenly and took a step forward as if to address the speaker, but checking himself he walked to an unoccupied table and began knocking the balls about.

"Really, Polly," said Fowler, in a bantering tone, "you ought to be careful or you will steal the hearts of half the girls in Montreal. What with your 'good looks' and 'winning ways,' to say nothing of your quarter of a million of dollars, you create fearful havoc amongst the fair sex, in justice to whom I think you ought to have a label put on your breast, 'Dangerous.'"

"Stop your chaff, old fellow, and let us have a game, I have only time for one game; have to get home early to dress."

"What are you going to the concert too?"

"Yaas."

"Alone?"

"No, I think I shall take Annie."

Charlie Moxton suddenly dropped the cue he had been knocking the balls about with, and crossing to Johnson, said:

"I ask your pardon for my inquisitiveness, but did I understand you to say that Miss Howson was to accompany you to the concert to-night?"

"Yaas, I said so."

"May I ask if Miss Howson made any engagement with you to go?"

"Well, no, not exactly; that is, you know, she told me she was going and asked me if I wouldn't go too; and I thought it was a hint, you know."

"It appears to me you take rather too much on yourself," replied Morton, warmly, "to announce in a public billiard-room on such slight grounds as that that you would 'take Annie.' He turned to the bar-keeper, paid for the drinks he had ordered, and prepared to leave the saloon."

"Look here, old fellow, you know, if you are spooney in that quarter, you know, I don't mind it. I don't care how many fellows there are after the thing I want, I can always win, you know, if I want too."

"Can you?" said Morton, his temper fast rising, "and so you think—"

"Oh! bother what he thinks," exclaimed Fowler, interrupting, "if we are to have a

game of billiards, let us begin at once; Polly and I will play you two, if you like, that will make an even match."

Morton pulled off his coat, and quietly selected a cue; five minutes before no power could have induced him to lose the time necessary for a game, but the few careless words of Johnson's had so irritated him that he felt an unconquerable desire to "measure swords"—or, to be more correct—"cues" with the smiling gentleman who thought himself so invincible.

The game was 250 points up, and from an early stage it was evident that the contest rested between Morton and Johnson, Fowler and Farron being but indifferent players and neither of them contributing much to his partner's score. The two men were very evenly matched, Johnson was a brilliant reckless player, attempting the most difficult strokes with a carelessness which showed clearly his immense self-conceit, but withal playing a strong game, far above the average. Morton, on the other hand, was a slow careful player, who never seemed to do anything brilliant, made no long runs, and few "fancy shots," but his steady runs of ten or fifteen kept adding to his score in a way which more than counterbalanced the occasional runs of forty or fifty from his more showy opponent.

The game was closely contested all through, and as they turned the string into the last hundred, it stood, Morton, 235; Johnson, 201; it being the latter's turn to play.

"Look out, boys, now, and see me run out," he said boastfully as he played the first shot, a difficult carom, which he made. Fortune certainly seemed to turn suddenly in his favor; the balls broke splendidly, and kept well together, and he continued to make shot after shot until he had run the score up to 249, wanting only one to go out, and the balls lying well together for an easy carom.

"That's the way to do it," he said confidently, "I told you I always win," and leaning carelessly over the table he struck his ball, but, playing half at random, made a "miscue" and missed the shot.

It was now Morton's turn to play, and he commenced with even more than his usual caution. It was a very trifling matter, the winning or losing of the game, but somehow he felt as if it was a personal struggle between Johnson and himself for superiority. During the long run Johnson had made he had suffered all the agony of defeat, and when he found he had another chance he was so nervous that he almost missed the first shot. Gaining nerve, however, as he went on, he kept the balls together and made the 15 points necessary to win the game; then turning to Johnson with a little smile of triumph, he said:

"You see, Mr. Johnson, you don't always win," and putting on his coat he left the saloon.

SCENE II.

A PERFECT FLIRT.

The same evening; place, Mr. Howson's residence on Sherbrooke street.

Mr. Howson was a retired merchant of considerable wealth, who, having acquired a fortune before he was too old to enjoy some of the pleasures of life, resigned his position in the business world and determined to spend the remainder of his days in quiet enjoyment, free from all the cares and troubles of mercantile life. He was a widower with two daughters, Annie aged nineteen, and Julia who had just attained the dignity of her sixteenth birthday. The establishment was presided over by a sister of the late Mrs. Howson, Miss Moxton, a maiden lady about whose age there was some doubt, but about whose temper there was none.

Miss Moxton and her eldest niece were alone in the splendidly furnished parlor, the former seated by the centre table busily engaged on some worsted work, which she was working at with most praiseworthy application, and the latter listlessly turning over some music at the piano, and occasionally trying a few bars in a careless uninterested sort of way.

They were a perfect contrast, the aunt and niece. Miss Moxton was tall, angular, and exhibited rather too generous a development of bone. Never blessed with any great pretensions to good looks, her features, partly on account of her thinness, and partly on account of a natural acidity of temper, had assumed a pinched and sharpened look which gave her somewhat of a bird-like appearance; the high cheek bones, prominent nose, sharp grey eyes and thin sallow cheeks affording an outline which bore a fanciful resemblance to a bird of prey. Miss Moxton's nose was her peculiar feature; originally intended for a Roman it had turned out a complete failure; starting well at the top it, somehow, projected so suddenly and formed so complete an arch that it could only be classed under the denomination of "hooked," but, half way down it suddenly underwent another change, and the tip turned up in the most aspiring and determined manner. It was a wonderfully flexible nose too, and the extent

to which Miss Moxton could elevate it, when wishing to express her contempt or dislike of anything, was something tremendous. On such occasions she was accustomed to give her head a sudden toss and elevate the nasal organ with a sort of snort and an exclamation that it was "a shame," "a perfect shame," or other expressions indicative of her dislike. Miss Moxton's dress was plain, almost severely so, and the small quantity of hair which time had spared her, was brushed back from her forehead, and done up in a tight little bunch at the back of her head, having somewhat the appearance of half a French twist loaf. Altogether she gave the idea of being a severe, rigid woman, with rather determined ideas and no hesitancy about expressing her opinions.

Annie Howson was a brunette and a beautiful specimen of one. Her complexion was clear, with a rich, warm color tinting her plump cheeks, face a pure oval, with a delicate Grecian nose, eyebrows so perfectly shaped that they at first caused a suspicion of penciling, and great masses of raven black hair which fell in magnificent profusion far below her waist. But it was in Miss Howson's eyes and mouth that her chief beauties lay; the former were not exactly black, but a sort of velvety brown color which deepened to black in moments of excitement. Very large, and bright, and bewitching were those eyes, and it was an ecstatic pleasure to gaze into their pure, limpid depths and fancy you read there the soul of truth and constancy. Pleasurable it was, but dangerous also, for with all her appearance of guilelessness and innocence Miss Howson was an ardent flirt, and delighted in using her beautiful eyes to lure captives to her feet and then sport with them. As for her mouth it was perfect; small, delicately shaped and fringed with thin, ruby tinted lips it set one longing to kiss it; and when the coral fringes parted in a sparkling smile and disclosed the rows of small beautifully white teeth the charm was complete. The figure was in perfect keeping with the face, rather under the average height, full and round without any disposition towards stoutness, it was just exactly suited to the face, and it was no wonder that Annie Howson was the acknowledged belle of the city, and that both young and old men bowed in admiration before her.

Miss Howson was what is known as an "accomplished young lady," she could sing well, because nature had endowed her with a good, sweet, pure voice of considerable power, which art had not been able to spoil; could dance with becoming grace; play the piano with a certain amount of mechanical exactness; could speak French so that every Englishman and no Frenchman, would understand her perfectly; and possessed a sufficient smattering of geography to know that Poland was the capital of Russia; and of history to inform you that Romulus was the founder of the British Empire. Of astronomy she only knew that there was a man in the moon, and she often wished that she could take a trip to the moon to see that man. In fact Miss Howson had been "finished" at a fashionable uptown "academy for young ladies" in New York—where her father had sent her in preference to giving her a good sound education in Canada—and she had learned everything that was useless, and very little that was useful.

"What time is it, auntie?" asked Miss Howson, turning towards Miss Moxton who was facing the clock on the mantel-piece.

"A quarter past seven."

"A quarter past seven! I think Charlie might have been more punctual, he promised to be here at seven to practise this duet with me, before going to the concert."

"Perhaps he has been detained by business. It is quite early yet, the concert does not commence until eight."

"And it will take half an hour for me to get ready after he comes."

"Well, I'm sure," replied Miss Moxton with a toss of her head, "if you are in such a hurry why don't you get ready before he comes?"

"And sit here waiting for him! No, I thank you, I don't please to wait for any man."

"But you think nothing of keeping a gentleman waiting half an hour for you."

"Oh! that's quite another matter; no gentleman expects to find a lady ready to go out with him when he calls for her."

"But she ought to be. The want of punctuality in the young ladies of the present day is shameful, perfectly shameful," and Miss Moxton elevated her nose with a scornful snort as a protest against the unpunctual habits of modern young ladies.

There was silence in the room for a few minutes, and then Miss Howson, looking impatiently at the clock, rose and walked to the window.

"I wish Polly would come," she exclaimed petulantly, "I would go to the concert with him, and teach Mr. Charlie to be more punctual in future."

"Go with Mr. Johnson!" said Miss Moxton in surprise, "then you would have to go alone, for I should not accompany you."

"Well, what would be the harm; I don't see why a girl cannot go out with a gentleman without having some one dragged along all the while 'for propriety,' no one ever thinks of such a thing in New York; and I don't think Polly is a very dangerous person to trust one's self with."

"Dangerous or not," replied Miss Moxton with another toss of her head, "it would be very improper for you to go out alone with him unless you are engaged to him."

"Engaged to Polly! I must be very anxious to get married before I engaged myself to such a fool as he is."

"I'm sure," retorted Miss Moxton, "I wish you were engaged, or married to some good man; like Mr. Morton, for instance," she continued after a moment's pause.

Miss Howson turned from her aunt and walked to the mantel-piece to consult the clock which would go on registering the fleeting seconds with such provoking regularity; but her color rose a little, and she kept her back to Miss Moxton as she replied, half petulantly, "Charlie, indeed! Why he is nearly old enough to be my father, and I've known him ever since I was a little girl."

"So much the better, my dear, you have known him long enough to learn to respect him, and as for his age, thirty-five is just the right time for a man to get married."

"Yes, but to some one nearer his own age than I am; besides, Charlie is such a muff."

"I am surprised, Annie, to hear you use such an expression, especially as applied to Mr. Morton."

"Everybody says he is; even Polly calls him a muff."

"Because everybody says a thing it does not follow that it is true. I'm sure I never saw anything 'muffish' in Mr. Morton; he is one of the nicest, most agreeable gentlemen I ever met."

"But he is so shy; I don't believe he ever kissed a girl in his life."

"I should think his wife would not be apt to find fault with him on that account. I hate your flirting men, making love to a dozen different girls without intending to marry one."

"And I like a fellow who can make himself agreeable to a girl. I have no great fancy for your 'quiet' gentlemen."

Further conversation was prevented by a ring of the bell, and almost immediately afterwards the delinquent entered the room, looking very hot and uncomfortable as if he had dressed in a hurry, and rushed off in haste to keep his appointment knowing he was late. Miss Howson looked at the clock which pointed to half-past seven, and Mr. Morton following her glance, grew more uncomfortable.

"I am very sorry, Annie, I commenced hesitatingly, "that I am so late, I was detained—"

"By business, of course; that is always a gentleman's excuse."

"No, not exactly business, but I was unexpectedly detained. I am sorry about the duet; I suppose there is not time to try it now, if we want to hear the first part of the concert?"

"I have been trying it all the afternoon, but I could not get on very well without you. I have a great mind not to go to the concert now, just to punish you."

"It will be pleasant punishment, if you will let me remain here, and practise the duet with you."

Miss Howson stood undecided for a moment and then said:

"I think we had better go. I promised to meet some friends there, besides, auntie would be disappointed."

"Oh, don't mind me," exclaimed Miss Moxton, "I don't care at all about going."

Another ring of the bell, and in a few minutes Mr. Johnson entered the room in considerable haste.

"Ah Miss Howson, afraid I would be too late, you know, didn't want to miss the concert, we'll be in plenty of time, if it does not take you too long to get ready, you know," he paused as he noticed Morton, and looked towards Miss Howson. That young lady did not feel very well at ease, and, wishing to gain a moment's time to collect her thoughts, introduced the two gentlemen.

"Mr. Johnson allow me to introduce to you my friend Mr. Morton; Mr. Morton, Mr. Johnson."

Morton made the slightest possible inclination of his head and said, very stiffly,

"I think I have met the gentleman once already to-day."

"Oh yaas, yaas!" said Mr. Johnson, "billiards, you know, lost by a fluke; shan't lose next time. We'll be late, Miss Howson," he continued, "unless we hurry."

Miss Howson had had time to recover herself, and in the brief moments occupied by the introduction she had decided, in her own mind, which of the two men it would be best to break with, if she was forced to renounce her present flirtation with both. Both men were rich, Johnson was the wealthier of the two, but Morton was also rich and doing a large,