

ROMANCE OF AN ALIAS.

The sleigh-bells rang merrily on the clear frosty air, as Allan Harman hastily drove to the depot to meet his old college chum, Jack Alliston, who was coming on the late train to visit him in his home in Allenville. And he was none too soon, for just as he drove into the station yard, a distant, hoarse whistle sounded, growing louder and clearer every moment till with a roar the red-eyed monster dashed hissing and puffing into the station dragging its serpentine lengths after it.

Then what an uproar there was—noisy porters and cab-drivers struggling for mastery in the din—but out of the midst of it all, Allan soon rescued his friend, a tall, well-made young fellow in a cape-overcoat and cap, and soon they were skimming over the snow homeward.

The first mutual greetings over, and eager questions answered, Allan remarked, "I say, Jack, I want you to agree to something."

"But I must know what it is first," said Jack, cautiously.

"It's a kind of joke," said Allan. "You see, I have always been singing your praises at home, and one day, Nell, my sister, said to me, 'Allan, I wish I could meet this paragon of men without knowing who he was, and so see just how perfect he really is.' So I suggested to father and mother that I introduce you to Nell as John Gordon, instead of John Gordon Alliston, just for the fun of the thing. Will you agree?"

"Oh," said Jack, with an embarrassed laugh, "that's kind of hard on me, isn't it? Yes, I'll agree, on condition that you let me know your sister's verdict afterwards when you discover my identity to her, for it does a fellow good to have his faults pointed out to him once in a while."

"Faults?" said Allan, with a mild uplifting of the brows, "do I hear aright? My dear Jack, you force me more and more to the conclusion that you are that *rara avis*—a

modest young man," which remark Jack treated with the silent contempt it deserved.

On their arrival at the house, Jack was ushered into the cozy sitting room and formerly introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Harman and Eleanor as "my friend, Mr. Gordon," receiving a cordial welcome from all. A pleasant half hour of conversation ensued in which Jack won the hearts of all by his bright, lively, yet sensible talk and winning manner. From his half shaded corner by the grate Jack could hear Eleanor perfectly, while almost entirely screened from her view, and made good use of his opportunities, for Allan had often spoken to him of his little invalid sister, and he was naturally curious to see what she was like.

He saw a face almost entirely colorless, out of which looked great fathomless eyes, wearily. Now and then the curly dark head was raised in sudden interest, as the conversation went on, and the face would sparkle for a moment, then relapse into the old, pathetic, tired look, and the slight little form in its rich crimson wrapper, would sink back into the great easy chair which almost hid it from view. Jack felt a great rush of pity come over him and he mentally resolved to do his best to give her pleasure during his visit. Of books and music, Allan had said, she was passionately fond. So many an hour he contrived to spend in her society—hours which, before he knew it, became indispensable to him—finding her well read and original in conversation, indeed, more than once Jack found himself beaten in argument by Eleanor's quick vivid retorts. But his ruffled feelings were always soothed afterwards by the sweetest of music.

Now, what could be more natural than that these two should fall in love with each other, which they certainly did, and moreover Jack told Allan about it one day and expressed his wish that Nell should know who he was. In his secret heart he was

more than a little afraid of Nell's coming wrath when she found out Allan's "little joke."

However, that afternoon Allan met Nell in the conservatory, and after a few remarks on her lately improved health, launched forth one of his old loudatory remarks about his college chum, Jack Alliston. "Allan," said Nell suddenly, "how is it that you have never spoken to us of Mr. Gordon before he visits us? I think," she continued, with suspiciously rosy cheeks, "that it would be hard for even your paragon Mr. Alliston, to be nicer than he is."

But to her surprise, Allan broke into a loud laugh.

"I say, Nell," he began, "do you remember ever saying that you wished you could meet Alliston without knowing who he was, and so behold his numerous defects with unblinded eyes?"

"Yes," said Nell, hesitating for a moment as a glimmer of the truth dawned upon her. "Oh, Allan, you don't mean that Mr. Gordon—" here she paused and gazed blandly at Allan.

"Is Jack Gordon Alliston? Yes, I do!" said Allan, going off into another fit of laughter. "You see, you have had your wish, and have confessed that he is a good sort of fellow after all, eh Nell?" he asked with much fraternal solicitude. "And see here, Nell, he is growing tremendously fond of you—" but here Allan perceived that he was addressing his remarks to a neighboring row of flower pots, who did not look very interested, while Nell was nowhere to be seen.

But not long after, Jack announced to Allan that he was coming back next summer to take Nell away with him "to travel for her health," as he casually remarked.

However, happiness being a great conducive to health, Nell improved rapidly, and from last accounts will soon be quite strong, though if you were to suggest to her that she would not need to travel now, she would be highly indignant.—Rex,