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THE PROSPECTOR

I

A SOCIAL IMPOSSIBILITY

IT was one of November's rare days. The kindly air, vital with the breath of the north wind and mellow with the genial sun, was full of purple haze; the grass, still vividly green, gave no hint of the coming winter; the trees, bony and bare but for a few rags of summer dress, russet-brown and gold, stood softened of all their harshness in the purple haze and slanting, yellow light of the autumn afternoon. Nature wore a face of content. She had fulfilled her course for another year, and, satisfied with her achievement, was obviously thinking of settling herself into her winter's sleep.

It was a good day to be alive. The tingle in the air somehow got into the blood.

So it felt to a young girl who danced out from under the trees on the west boundary of the University campus.

"Oh!" she cried to her staterier, taller sister, who with a young man followed more sedately into the open. "Oh, what a day! What a picture!"

She was a bonny maid just out of her teens, and, with her brown gown, brown hair and eyes, red

cheeks, and wholesome, happy face, she fitted well into the picture she herself looked upon.

"Dear old 'Varsity," said her sister in a voice quiet, but thrilling with intense feeling. "There is nothing so lovely in all this city of Toronto."

"Toronto!" exclaimed the young man at her side. "Well, I should say! Don't you know that a distinguished American art critic declares this building the most symmetrical, the most harmonious, the most perfectly proportioned bit of architecture on the American continent. And that is something, from a citizen of the 'biggest nation on dry land.'"

They walked slowly and silently along the border of the matchless velvety lawn, noting the many features of beauty in the old grey face of the University building—the harmonious variety of lines and curves in curious gargoyles, dragons, and gryphons that adorned the cornices and the lintels, pausing long to admire the wonderful carved entrance with its massive tower above.

"Great, isn't it?" said Lloyd. "The whole thing, I mean—park, lawn, and the dear old, grey stones."

At this moment some men in football garb came running out of the pillared portico.

"Oh, here's the team!" cried Betty, the younger sister, ecstatically. "Are they going to play?"

"No, I think not," said Lloyd. "Campbell would not risk any scrimmaging or tackling this evening, with McGill men even now in town thirsting for their blood. He's got them out for a run to limber up their wind and things for to-morrow."

The sisters were football enthusiasts. For the past four years the beautiful Rosedale home of the Fairbanks had been the rendezvous for students, and, as many of these had been football men, the young ladies had become as devoted to the game and almost as expert in its fine points as any of its champions.

"Don't they look well and fit," exclaimed Betty as the string of runners went past.

"Yes, and fit they are every man," replied Lloyd. "There's Campbell! He's a truly great captain, knows his men, and gets out of them all that is possible."

"Yes, and there's Brown; and McNab, isn't it? Aren't they the quarters?" asked Betty excitedly.

Lloyd nodded. "And yonder goes 'Shock,' the great Shock."

"Oh, where?" cried Betty. "Yes, yes. Now, do you know I think he is just as mean as he can be. Here I have been bowing and smiling my best and sweetest for four years, and though he knows a lot of the men we know he is just as much a stranger as ever," and Betty pouted in a manner that would have brought deep satisfaction to Shock had he seen her.

"Here are the three halves, aren't they?" inquired Helen, the elder sister.

"Yes," replied Lloyd. "There's Martin and Bate. Fine fellow, Bate—and——"

"Oh!" broke in Betty, "there's the 'The Don.' I do wish they would look. They needn't pretend they don't see us, the horrid things."

"Of course they see you," answered Lloyd, "but

they are engaged in serious business. You surely don't expect to divert their attention from the pursuit of their noble art. Why, who, or what do you conceive yourself to be?"

But Betty only smiled serenely, and shook her curls back saucily.

"Oh, I know," replied Lloyd, "I know what you are saying. 'Some day, some day they will grovel.' Alas, only too soon! And, indeed, here comes The Don on his second round. I'll ask him what he means."

"If you dare!" cried Betty.

"Mr. Lloyd!" said Helen haughtily, and Mr. Lloyd thought better of it.

But "The Don" did not even glance toward the group.

"Look at that, now," said Lloyd disgustedly. "Did anyone ever see such besotted devotion to a barbarous vocation?"

"He did not see us at all," insisted Betty. "But why is Mr. Balfour called 'The Don'?"

"Obviously, I should say, from his Don-like appearance, bearing, carriage, etc. But I am not an authority. Ask little Brown, your special slave. He knows all about both Shock and The Don."

"What absurd names you have," exclaimed Betty. "Now, what is the reason for Shock's name? Is it the shock of his charge in the scrimmage?"

"Not bad, that. I rather fear, however, it has to do with his most striking feature, if feature it be, for when you pull him feet first out of a scrimmage, a

method not infrequently adopted, his head is a sight to behold. But, as I said before, ask Brown."

"I will to-night. He's coming over after tea. You are coming, too, are you not?"

Lloyd bowed. "I shall be delighted."

True to her word Betty greeted Brown, on his appearance in the cosy, homelike parlour of the Fairbanks' that evening, with the question, "How did 'The Don' come by his nickname?"

"Oh, did you never know that? Most fellows put it down to his style, but it's not that. He got it from his blood. You know, his father was one of those West India sea-captains that one used to find strewn thick through Halifax society, who made fortunes in rum and lost them pretty much the same way. Well, the old captain married a Spanish girl. I have seen her portrait, and she was a beauty, a 'high-bred Spanish lady,' sure enough. Lived somewhere in the islands. Came home with the Captain, and died in Halifax, leaving her seven year old boy in charge of an aunt. Father died soon afterwards. Grief, I believe, and drink. Even then his people called the boy 'the little Don.' He had a little money left him to start with, but that has long since vanished. At any rate, for the last five or six years he has had to fend for himself."

"Quite a romance," said Lloyd.

"Isn't it?" exclaimed Betty. "And he never told us a word."

"Well, The Don's not a publisher."

"But then he told you."

"Yes, he told me and Shock one night. He likes us, you see."

"*De gustibus non disputandum,*" murmured Lloyd, and in answer to Betty's inquiring look added, "as the old woman said when she kissed her cow."

"Now then, what about Shock's name?" continued Betty.

"Hair," said Brown laconically. "You have seen him come out of a scrimmage like a crab?"

"Yes. Isn't he just lovely then?" exclaimed Betty.

"Lovely? Oh, woman, woman! A ghastly, bloody, fearsome spectacle. Lovely! But it was ever thus. 'Butchered to make a Roman holiday,'" replied Lloyd.

"Well, he is rather bloody. Bleeds easily, you know, but it doesn't hurt at all," said Brown. "He never really enjoys himself till the blood flows."

"Disgusting old Berserker!" exclaimed Lloyd.

"But I think he is just a dear," went on Betty enthusiastically. "The way he puts his head right down into a crowd of men, and lets them jump on him and maul him!"

"Yes," replied her sister, who had taken little part in the conversation, "and comes out smiling. That is what I like."

"And bloody," added Lloyd. "That's what Miss Betty likes."

"I want to know about him," cried Betty impatiently. "Why don't we get to know him? Tell me about him," she insisted. "Where does he live? Who are his people?"

Brown hesitated.

"Well, you see, Shock's shy. Does not go in for the sort of thing that Lloyd, for instance, revels and glitters in—teas, functions, social routs, and all that, you know. He has only his mother, a dear old Highland lady, poor, proud, and independent. She lives in a quaint little house out on the Commons away behind the college, and lives for, in, with, by, and around Shock, and he *vice versa*. He shares everything with her, his work down in the mission——"

"Mission!" interrupted Betty.

"Yes. Runs a mission down in St. John's ward. Gives her all his experiences with the denizens of that precinct, keeps her in touch with his college work, and even with his football. You ought to see him lay out the big matches before her on the tea table with plates, cups, salt cellars, knives, spoons, and you ought to see her excitement and hear her criticisms. Oh, she's a great sport!"

"Go on," said Helen, her fine eyes beginning to glow. "Go on. Tell us more about her."

But Brown shut up abruptly, as if he had been taking a liberty with the privacy of his friend's home.

"Oh," he said lightly, "there's nothing more to tell. They live a very quiet, very simple, but, I think, a very beautiful life."

"And she's fond of football?" inquired Betty.

"Devoted to it."

"And has she never seen a game? Has she never seen Shock play?" inquired Helen.

"Never."

"Would she be afraid?"

"Would you insult the widow of a Sutherland Highlander whose picture in warlike regalia regards her daily from her cottage wall?"

"Well, I am going to see her," exclaimed Betty.

Brown looked annoyed.

"What for?"

"Why, I am going to call."

Brown laughed a little scornfully. "Yes, and be sure to leave three cards—is it?—and tell her your day."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Betty indignantly. "You are not very polite."

"Oh, I am sorry, really. But I imagined the old lady looking at you and wondering what was your particular business, and then I thought of your difficulty in making it quite clear to her."

"Why! does she not call on anyone?"

"No. She takes her knitting and visits."

"Well, I'm going anyway, somehow. I'll ask Shock to take me."

"Oh, Betty, you could not do that," said Helen. "No man would like exhibiting his home, much less his mother."

But Betty shook her head decidedly, saying, "I'll find some way. Tell me, what does she like?"

"Shock."

"But I mean what amusement and pleasure has she?"

"Amusement! Shades of the mighty past! Why, Miss Betty," Brown's tone is sad and severe, "in my

young days young people never thought of amusement. We had no time for such follies."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Betty impatiently. "Has she no other interest in life than Shock?"

"None. Her church,—she would regard your prelacy with horror,—and Shock, and Shock's doings and goings—and football, of course, as I have said. Shock plays, you see."

"Then I have an idea," cried Helen. "We'll——"

"Do go on," appealed Brown.

"Better give it to him," said Lloyd. "An idea, you know, is to some people a rare and valuable asset."

"Not now. Perhaps later I may impart it," said Helen.

"It would be a great kindness," said Brown humbly, "if you could let me have it soon."

"Nature abhors a vacuum, you know," put in Lloyd.

At this point the bell rang and The Don came in. He was a young man of striking appearance, handsome, dark, well set up, with the eyes of his Spanish mother, but with the head and jaw of his Scotch sea-captain father. With all his ease of manner there was a shy, proud reserve about him, and a kind of grand air that set him apart from any company in which he might appear.

After saluting the young ladies with a somewhat formal bow, he announced, "I want you, Brown."

"Oh, sit down," cried Betty. "Sit down, Mr. Balfour. We are not going to allow you to carry off our visitor in this abrupt manner."

"Yes, take yourself off," cried Brown. "You see I can't be spared."

"Please sit down," urged Helen. "We want to ask you about the match."

"I really cannot," replied The Don. "I am on duty, you see."

"On duty?"

"Yes. Looking after men who would stay out to all hours, and regale themselves upon cake and all sorts of indigestible stuff. And more than that, Shock is outside waiting."

"Oh," cried Betty, "do bring him in. For years Helen and I have known him, and yet we don't know him. Bring him in."

"Can you not persuade him to come in?" urged Helen.

"I am sure I cannot. But if you were to try——" The Don paused, looking doubtfully at her. Helen hesitated.

"Oh, he's awful, I know. He will hardly speak to me," interrupted Betty. "But if you'll come with me I'll humble myself before him."

In a moment or two, sure enough, they returned, with Shock following.

He was a big man, gaunt and bony, with a mighty pair of shoulders topped by a square, massive head on which bristled a veritable shock of coarse, yellow hair. But he had a strong, honest face, and good, deep blue eyes. He seemed too big for the room, and after shaking hands awkwardly with Helen, who had gone forward to meet him, he subsided into

a deep arm-chair, struggling with his hands and feet.

The contrast between Shock on the one hand, and the elegant Lloyd and the handsome Don on the other, could hardly be more striking. All in the room were conscious of this contrast and sought in every way to minimise it. Betty plunged into football talk, to which Shock listened for the most part smilingly silent.

She was determined to draw her unhappy visitor from his shell. But her most brilliant efforts were in vain. Poor Shock remained hopelessly engaged with his hands and feet, and replied at unexpected places in explosive monosyllables at once ludicrous and disconcerting. Not even The Don, who came to her assistance, could relieve the awkwardness of the situation. Shock was too large to be ignored, and too unwieldy to be adjusted.

After a few minutes of hopeless endeavour The Don gave up the attempt and rose to go, saying: "You will need to excuse us. We are due at a meeting to-night. Come along, Brown."

The alacrity which Shock displayed in getting upon his feet gave abundant testimony to the agony he had been suffering during the last half hour.

"Yes, we must be off," said Brown, far more eager to go than was his wont.

"Will you not come again?" said Betty to Shock, as she shook hands with him. "My mother would be glad to see you."

But Shock could only look at her blankly, evidently

wondering what her mother might wish to see him for, and when Betty tried to extract a promise from him he muttered something about being "far behind in his work and very busy."

But Betty was not to be baulked.

"I should like to call on your mother," she said. But again Shock looked blank, while Brown began to make faces at her from behind his back.

"When will your mother be in?" she persisted.

"Oh, she's in every day, except when she goes out for a walk, or——"

Brown kept up his signalling, and The Don began to look puzzled and annoyed.

"Well," said Betty desperately, "I would like to go and see her some day."

Shock hesitated, blushed, and then answered: "We have no friends in the city, and we do not visit much, and——"

"Oh, I'll tell you, Miss Betty," burst in Brown. "Get a sharp attack of typhoid and Mrs. Macgregor will then come and see you. She's a great nurse."

"That she is," said Shock enthusiastically. "She would be glad to come."

"Come along, Brown," broke in The Don. "We are late now. Come along, Shock," and the three men went off together, leaving Lloyd behind.

"Isn't he awful?" said Betty. "And didn't I humiliate myself?"

"You certainly deserved humiliation," said her sister indignantly. "You might have seen he was

dreadfully shy, and you ought to have left him alone. And now for my great idea. I will take you both into my confidence. I am going to drive Mrs. Macgregor to the match to-morrow."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Betty. "And I'll go with you. But how can you persuade her?"

"I have thought about that," said Helen. "We'll ask Mr. Brown to drive around with us a little before, and I'm sure she will go."

"Will you allow me to join the party?" humbly asked Lloyd, "or is there someone else?"

"Oh," said Betty, "we are sure to need somebody, and you will do as well as any other."

In obedience to an invitation conveyed by Lloyd, Brown appeared at the Fairbanks house in the early morning. Eagerly the young ladies propounded their plan. At once Brown entered heartily into it, and calling with them in the afternoon persuaded the old lady that she ought to attend the great match, emphasising especially the fact that Shock would be delighted to see her there, and would be stimulated to do his very best by her presence.

"It will likely be his last game, too," urged Brown.

This finally decided the matter, and so it turned out that perhaps the most enthusiastic, and certainly the most picturesque, of all the groups that surrounded the campus next day was that which filled the Fairbanks carriage, consisting of two young ladies, an elegantly attired young man, and a quaint, plainly dressed, but undeniably dignified, old lady.