

A SMILE IN A MILLION.

THE STORY OF A RAVING BEAUTY.

Jessie Farthingale had directed her withering smile at another presumptuous young man. Nothing in society was better known or oftener discussed than Miss Farthingale's withering smile. It was so extraordinarily eloquent, so deadening, so awful, that it had become a subject of grave comment. It was said that men who had received the full force of the smile on sentimental occasions had never again looked happy, that some had become thoroughly demoralized and had taken to drink, while one had wasted away and died. The withering smile, let me say, was only used by Miss Farthingale when she received an offer of marriage.

I cannot make you understand the full nature and appearance of the Farthingale smile unless you have seen the young woman who was accustomed to utilize it. Were you told that Jessie Farthingale was a wonderfully pretty girl, that her hair was soft and brown, that her eyes were large and dark, and her skin was white and pure, you would merely conjure up a common-place vision of youthful beauty, such as regularly figures in the feverish love novel of the day, and would not get any true idea of my heroine. But if you have met Jessie Farthingale you know what strange and illusive charms of expression and what delicate tints of the flesh distinguish her from all the rest of her sex in New York. There is no color in her face except the merest suggestion of a blush near the eyes. Her lips were uncommonly red, and you will notice, after knowing her long enough to think of the details of her great loveliness, that her small ears are almost as red as her lips. The face, however, and the neck, shoulders and bust are exceptionally white, almost luminous in pallor. That faint pinkness on the temples and eyelids increases, I think, the misty shine of Miss Farthingale's heavy lashed eyes. And then the young lady's poise is so buoyant. She stands straight and tall, and points up her chin somewhat at all times, so that the curve of her throat is unusually long and graceful. Another attraction is her hair, which is abundant and grows wavy, and impresses everyone by its eminent cleanness and freshness. You may have sometimes seen the kind of hair that seems to proclaim a moral and physical purity in the woman which it crowns. Such was the hair of Miss Farthingale, and it was always smoothly, softly and simply arranged, not concealing the white brow, but drifting at times across the ears. All these items of beauty conspired to make the possessor of them the handsomest girl in society. And with gracious manners, a lively wit, and patient temper, she was the most lovable girl in the world.

Now, what was so rare a creature as this doing with a withering and deadly smile? What earthly use could she have for such a thing? Well, perhaps this was the most interesting point of Miss Farthingale's character. There was really nothing deliberately malicious in her special smile. Her ordinary smiles were soft and beneficent as sunshine, and the wither was only summoned from the recesses of her soul when she received an offer of marriage. The egotism of Miss Farthingale exhausted itself in the single announcement that there was not a man in the world whom she could love well enough to marry. And it must be said that in her heart she believed that no man was worthy of her love. Her pride in her beauty and her worth took this form. She was a modest, genuine, straight-forward girl in her intercourse with the world, but she could not conceive that it was a duty of her life to bestow herself and all splendors upon a man who would surely be unable to properly and permanently understand and cherish her. Her friends, therefore, had grown to believe that she was determined to become a most remarkable old maid. At twenty, too, she had received offers from every bachelor in society and no less than a dozen visiting noblemen, and upon each had fallen the withering, blasting smile.

At last let me attempt to indicate the appearance of this smile. Whenever a man proposed to Miss Farthingale he received no verbal answer. The beautiful maiden that had aroused his love heard him make his avowal, and as she listened a look of drowsy, languid amusement stole into her eyes. Her head, which was customarily held high, drooped slowly until she looked up from under her lashes into the face of her quivering suitor. Her sensitive lips parted just the least bit and turned gradually up at the corners. A dimple—no tiny indentation of the flesh, but an important and deep calyx, like the cup of a flower—melted in her cheek. There were cynicism, ridicule, superiority and perfect calmness in this untimely merriment. And when the smile was complete and fixed, a note that was as musical as a bird's, and yet was an almost inhuman expression of contempt, bubbled from Miss Farthingale's lips, and if the man had not by this time fainted, he either fled in a despairing rage or sank into the nearest seat and allowed his heartless enslaver to escape.

After a while this smile of Miss Farthingale's became famous. And what was said by all that had seen it was, that when the young woman indulged in it she was more beautiful than ever. Once looked upon

that smile was never forgotten. It haunted men ever afterwards, floating constantly before them, an imperishable and taunting defiance from the unattainable ideal.

Suddenly there came into society during Miss Farthingale's reign a most striking and agreeable young stranger, whose courtly manner, gentle bearing and handsome countenance recommended him strongly to all people. He was a young Englishman of good family, and had been well introduced. He seemed a very shrewd as well as polite young man, and he traveled a good deal about the country. It was said after a time that he was an industrious person and traveled on business. This announcement did not, however, interfere with his progress in good society, although it was hoped that he was in some very gentlemanly business, such as the sale of wine. Dry goods would have been fatal to him, but wine would be all right. Whatever was his business, the young man was a most thorough gentleman and man-of-the-world, and his popularity increased continually. His name, by the by, was Philip Blenkington.

Mr. Blenkington met and admired Miss Farthingale. He did not betray any excitement when he first spoke with her, and it could not be definitely asserted that he paid her any undue attention at any time afterwards, yet he was fully conscious of her marvelous beauty, and his attitude toward her was one of profound respect, in which was mingled something resembling a chivalric devotion. And she received his graceful attentions with somewhat more marked animation than she customarily exhibited. Whenever the two were together it was generally remarked that they made a decidedly handsome pair. Yet it was not suggested that Mr. Blenkington had any ambitions in the direction of Miss Farthingale. By this time it was conceded by everybody that the young woman was wholly out of reach, and no man might hope to wed her.

Mr. Blenkington had heard of Miss Farthingale's withering smile. A matron had told him about it, and he had become interested as it was described.

"I should say," he had remarked to the matron, "that if one hoped to see Miss Farthingale's most beautiful and effective expression, he would have to summon this smile to her face."

"No doubt," replied the lady; "though I should fancy the extreme loveliness of the smile would hardly appeal to a man under the circumstances."

Mr. Blenkington quite agreed with the latter observation, and from that moment gave a great deal of thought to the matter. He studied Miss Farthingale very intently, and the more he studied her the more deeply was he impressed by her beauty and her character. She was the loveliest and the best bred girl he had ever known. She would be an inexpressible honor to any man that could wed her. The feeling of pride in calling her wife would be exquisite. She would be the queen of a supreme kingdom of love. With her a man could live without sunlight, and the children she bore him would be god-like boys and gentle, beautiful girls. And while thus soliloquizing he thought of the long and dismal file of men that had attempted to win her hand and had been overwhelmed and obliterated by her famous smile. Yet he must see that smile. The desire attacked him and would not allow him further peace. He dwelt upon the thought continually and intensely, and finally became a victim of impatience, and went about looking pale and wide-eyed. And now there were a few remarks made in discreet places about the interest Miss Farthingale had inspired in the young man. That young lady herself, being very clear-minded, noted the growing warmth in Mr. Blenkington's manner, but did not confess to herself whether it pleased her or otherwise. At the same time she was particularly gracious to him. Perhaps she recognized in him a man that was so modest and honorable that he would not exaggerate the meaning of her cordiality with him or allow any one else to misinterpret it. Therefore, a more than ordinary friendship gradually grew up between these two interesting young people, and it would have been by no means unreasonable to draw conclusions as to the possible outcome of it.

One night Mr. Blenkington and Miss Farthingale met still once again at Mrs. John Cleary's dance in her big house in Fifty-seventh street. Both knew when they exchanged greetings that something important was to happen. Blenkington was rather paler than usual, while the faint blush around Miss Farthingale's eyes deepened. They glanced at each other a little nervously and talked for the mere sake of talking. The signs were ominous.

At last Mr. Blenkington succeeded in straying to a deserted corner of the big conservatory, far away from the dance and where the music penetrated but faintly, and there, between two tall palms, he turned and confronted his stately and radiant companion. It would be a mistake to assert that he did not know what he was going to say to her.

He began in a low and serious voice and proceeded deliberately. He spoke of her superlative charms, of her immeasurable superiority to himself and of his unforgivable presumption in hoping that her heart might respond to the rapture that thrilled his own. But he ventured now, though his soul despaired as he did so, to declare to her a love that consumed him, a love that was life, and he asked her to be his

wife. She listened to his impassioned utterances and seemed to be battling with some emotion that possessed her. She took note of the handsome and brave figure her suitor made as he stood there before her. For a long time she held her head high and regarded him with serious, sympathetic eyes. Then, as though she had suddenly conquered herself, her gaze melted, her chin descended, the lines of her face softened into that gradual, mysterious, terrible smile, the dimple broke the curve of the perfect cheek, a lazy, misty merriment stole from under the long lashes, and the note of contempt gurgled through the crimson lips. At that very instant Mr. Blenkington bent suddenly downward and snatched up a small square object from the ground. Holding this object on a level with his chest he seemed to point it at Miss Farthingale. There was a clicking sound and simultaneously a vivid, dazzling flash of white light. Miss Farthingale sprang backwards with a muffled scream and clutched at her breast. From the small square object in Mr. Blenkington's hands a puff of smoke floated toward her. The smile had vanished from her face and she was as pale as death.

"What does this mean?" she gasped.

"You have merely been photographed," Miss Farthingale, replied Mr. Blenkington, quietly. "And now I owe you a humble apology. You will forgive me, perhaps, when you learn all. First, you must know I am an enthusiast in my business. Not that it is a nice business, but because there is a great deal of money in it. I am the manufacturer and vender of a new dental powder. I shall make a very large fortune by the sale of this powder. I am exerting myself in every way to popularize it and am meeting with pronounced success. I needed a trademark, something effective in the way of a portrait for my boxes and my pictorial advertisements. I have been looking for a suitable feminine face for two years. At last I met you. Under any circumstances a portrait of you would be just what I wanted, but I heard of the wonderful smile with which you invariably greeted an offer of marriage. I resolved to have a picture of you while thus smiling and, of course, there was but one way for me to get it. Therefore I did what I have done. Now, my dear Miss Farthingale, will you forgive me?"

The dazed and panting beauty stood glowering upon the amazing young man who thus addressed her, her nails digging into her throat, her eyes glaring, her lips quivering in her rage. When Mr. Blenkington ceased speaking, she took two steps toward him and raising her clenched hand struck him with all her strength, first on one cheek and then on the other, after which she turned and fled from him, while he stood there smiling and stroking his smarting face.

And so Mr. Blenkington is now having innumerable lithographs made of Miss Farthingale's withering and overpowering smile, which will hereafter be used on all the boxes of his very popular dental powder, unless the young lady should decide to enjoin him by law. In any case, it is more than probable that she will use a different quality of smile the next time a man petitions her to become his bride.

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