

## A Misunderstanding.

BY CORVELL HARRISON.

The clock across the hall struck two. Billy Travers slid down off the billiard table, yawned, and moved toward the door.

"Don't go," said the man in the armchair by the fire. "I was just going to tell you a story."

Billy stood irresolute. "If it's a story of the West," he said, "I'll be hanged if I want to hear it; you—"

"There's no local color about it," answered the other man.

"I want to go to bed," sighed Billy. "But I'll listen. Go ahead."

The other man began:

"There was, once upon a time, a girl who was about to be married. We will assume that her fiance engaged some of her attention, and the rest of it was given so entirely to her trousseau that she found she had not one spare moment wherein to acknowledge the julep-spoons and tea-strainers which came pouring in upon her. So she summoned to her side a friend of whose devotion and orthodoxy she entertained no doubts, and said: 'You promised to help me if you could; I want you to thank these people for the things they have sent. Just say to each that I'll use her lovely present every day, and always think of the giver every time I do. Make the writing look as much like mine as you can, and remember that I call all the girls by their first names, and almost all the men.'"

"I see the plot," interposed Billy; "she didn't put a Mr. to your name."

"There was a man," continued the story-teller, "who had indulged in a bit of sentiment with the prospective bride before he went out West. So, on receipt of her wedding invitation, he bought her a little gift; and finding at the jeweler's that he had no carte de visite with him he wrote upon a blank card, 'With all the good wishes of Francis Marston,' and below it, his address.

"A week later he received a note which ran something like this: 'Your fish-set, dearest Francis, is a gem. When you're a bride yourself, you will know how nice it is to be remembered by one's friends at such a time. I wish you could see my trousseau. I have a pink soie de Japon and a white peau de Cygne which are perfect, and my hats are all from Paris.

"With lots of love and thanks, Blanche.' The note was directed, of course, to Miss Francis Marston."

"The plot thickens," murmured Billy. "I suspect that the young lady did not know that only a male Francis is spelt with an I."

"Well, the man's curiosity was aroused," went on the other man, "and he wrote Blanche for an explanation. After a considerable time it came. 'She had been so busy; would he forgive her? Her dear friend Courtenay Wentworth had written the note.' Now in the breast pocket of a certain blue coat of the man's was a picture of two girls, on the back of which was written, 'Blanche and Courtenay.' The face which was not Blanche's was a strikingly beautiful one, and although the man had not deemed it profitable to ask any questions concerning it at the time when it was given to him, he had not infrequently caught himself studying it attentively. He extracted it now from the pocket of the blue coat, and after a careful survey of its eyes and mouth, he wrote to Blanche again. He would like, he said, to thank 'her dear friend Courtenay Wentworth' for the note,—which was a very nice note, indeed.

Would Blanche send him the address? Blanche did send him the address, with no comment whatsoever, and, smiling a little at the jealousy of women, he sat down to write to Miss Wentworth."

"Did he tell her he was a man?" asked Billy; "because—"

"Certainly not. He told her, in fact, that he was a girl—one whose health had necessitated her coming West, where she found herself often very lonely and homesick.

"He thanked her for the note," continued the other man, "and said that he had often heard Blanche speak of her. He had, in fact, he said, a picture which Blanche had given him of 'Courtenay' and herself, so that her face, also, was not unfamiliar.

"And then he said that since Miss Wentworth had been kind enough to write to him once, he wondered if she would be good enough to send him a few details of Blanche's wedding. He was so interested, he said. And then he added that he was hers, very sincerely, Francis Marston. The Frances he was careful to spell with an e.

"Well, an answer came very shortly, and while he did not perfectly understand the description of the bridesmaids' dresses, nor take any very considerable interest in Blanche's pre-nuptial emotions, the charming naivete, the bright girl-ishness of the letter hinted at a character so entirely in keeping with Miss Wentworth's face that he—that is, he—began—to—"

"Exactly," said Billy. "Go on."

"He acknowledged the letter, of course," the other man resumed, "and with the acknowledgment he sent some pictures of Pike's Peak at sunrise, which he hoped might be of interest to Miss Wentworth.

"They proved of great interest to Miss Wentworth, and after saying so, she confided that it had given her much pleasure to brighten, for ever so short a time, Miss Marston's exile from the East, and if there were any other items about friends in New York which Miss Marston would care to hear, she would be so glad to send them to her."

"What a kind heart she had," murmured Billy. "I dare say she had been crossed in love."

"Well, after that it was plain sailing. She not only answered his letters, but she answered promptly and at length, and because her own were so kind, and sympathetic, and sweet, and clever, he came gradually to consider them the principal things in his life. He learned from her letters that she was forced by her family to lead a worldly life, and, rather than disappoint or hurt them, she would attend a tiresome round of dinners and balls, while she yearned with her whole heart to be of some use in the world.

"He used to sit for hours in the evening with her picture before him," went on the man, "wondering how she would look saying certain things. And he used to imagine her dressed in certain dresses. He was sure that she wore gray—soft, clinging gray—with a lot of little ruffles at the bottom of the skirt, and some white things at the waist. And in the evening he was convinced she wore black.

"At last the man got a letter saying Miss Wentworth's mother was very ill, and Miss Wentworth was beside herself with grief. Then he knew that Miss Marston must die, since it was clearly impossible for her to be as sympathetic, in Denver, as Mr. Marston could be in New York. So he wrote to Miss Wentworth, saying he was coming East, and hoping that her mother's illness would not prevent her from seeing one whose heart ached to express its sympathy. Miss Wentworth replied that her mother's illness would only prevent her from receiving Miss Marston in her own

house, but if Miss Marston would lunch with her at the Astoria she would certainly not neglect this chance of meeting her.

"Well, the man packed up his suit-case, and went to New York. He had planned a great many speeches about his being a man, and her being good enough to forgive him, but when he stood before the door of the private parlor to which he had been shown, he felt suddenly that his sack-suit was an insult which no words of his could excuse.

"He tried to imagine how a person would feel who, expecting to meet a rather slim, haughty girl, found herself confronted by a rather big, humble man. He tried also to remember that his letters had always been discreet and ladylike, and that it was all her fault, anyway; and when he found that he could do none of these things, he lifted the curtains and went in.

"In the center of the room, facing the door, stood a man.

"This room is engaged," he said, quickly.

"I understood," said the man who was not Miss Marston, somewhat taken aback, "that it was engaged by—by—a lady."

"To a certain extent it is," answered the other man. "It is engaged by a Miss Courtenay Wentworth."

"Then the man who was not Miss Marston began dimly to guess at things.

"If you are her brother," he said, "and she's found out I'm a man and is angry, won't you say so at once, please?"

"I am nobody's brother," said the man who was not Miss Wentworth. "My name happens to be Courtenay Wentworth. What are you talking about?"

"And the picture?" asked Billy. "Was the picture of a girl named Courtenay Biggs, who had nothing whatever to do with the case?"—Harper's for April.

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