

LOOKING FOR A LADY

The Morning Astorian's Short Story.

"Who is the girl?" asked Bradley. Elwood held out his hand for the album.

"Hanged if I know!" he answered as he glanced at the photograph. "That was off the last film roll I had. I snipped it on the train just as we were pulling out. Pretty little thing, isn't she?"

Bradley nodded. To him the pictured girl was more than pretty. She was beautiful. She leaned against the side of the door of the waiting room, evidently watching the passing of the train, and the unconsciousness of her pose was one of its charms.

She was dressed in something white, and her hat swung from her hand, the hair—Bradley was sure that it must be golden—fluffing softly about the perfect oval of the face. From the first glance Bradley had fallen in love, and it was irritating that Elwood could not remember which station it was.

"Surely you must know something about it," said Bradley impatiently. "Was it near town or some distance out?"

"Search me," was the irritating reply. "It's one of a roll of a dozen films that I exposed along the line. After the film was cut up I could not tell which were which. I just took them to use up the film."

"I wish you'd let me have a print," said Bradley, trying to appear unconcerned and longing to throw a book at Elwood's grinning face. His anger fell when the other promptly ran a paper cutter under the edges of the print and handed it over to his friend.



THE GIRL OF THE PICTURE STOOD BEFORE HIM.

Bradley put it carefully into his pocketbook and sought to lead the conversation into other channels.

But that evening when he reached home he tucked the print into his looking glass and went to sleep to dream of the girl. His own vacation came in a few days, and he determined to spend the time in locating the station and through that the girl. The L. and V. had three sets of plans from which it built stations. These were of wood, brick or stone, according to the importance of the place. There were probably fifty or sixty stations along the line precisely like the one in the picture. Instead of buying a ticket to the fishing country, as he had at first intended, he purchased a mileage book and started out to find the station.

Just above the door in which the girl had been standing he noticed a peculiar knot in the boards, and giving up only sufficient mileage to carry him on to the next wooden station, he made his way down the line. He rode on the same train until dusk prevented him from closely examining the stations and then left the train, to the great relief of the conductor, who had early in the day come to the conclusion that his passenger must be insane.

The second day's search was no more successful, and on the evening of the third day he had come to the end of the line without having located the station he sought.

He bought another mileage book and turned back over the road, and this time he found the place for which he sought. The station had been newly painted, and the knots had been covered up by the paint.

But he found that the station was only the first step. There still remained the girl. There were half a dozen places where summer boarders were taken, he learned from the station agent. He picked out one and made arrangements to have his trunk forwarded, and then he settled down to prosecute his inquiry.

"Seeing the train come in" was a popular occupation with the summer visitors, and Bradley did not let a single train escape him. He hung about the station at all hours, but beyond getting very well acquainted with the station agent he made no progress. It was apparent that the girl he had sought had gone.

It was near the end of the second week that Bradley summoned up the courage to show the agent his photograph and ask information.

"A friend of mine took it the other

day from the train," he said. "I thought that perhaps she might like one if I could locate her."

"I remember her," said the agent. Bradley's heart gave a bound.

"She's gone out west somewhere," said the agent vaguely, and Bradley's elation was suddenly checked.

"I suppose that some one has her address," he suggested. "I might get it from them and mail her a copy."

The agent smiled.

"She wasn't visiting no one," he explained. "She just stopped off here a couple of days to see the lake. I think her ma came from here years ago, and she wanted to see it."

"What was her name?" Bradley reflected that perhaps she lived in a city where they had a directory.

"Molly something," said the agent. "I don't recollect that I know what her other name was."

"Perhaps the woman who kept the boarding house at which she stopped might know," suggested Bradley, but again his hopes were dashed with the answer that the girl had stopped at the hotel.

Bradley searched the register for two months back, but there was no hint there. The little hotel was run in easy going fashion, and the register was ornamental rather than useful.

At last he gave up in despair. He had run every clue to earth, and he knew no more than on the day of his arrival. His vacation had come to an end, and, since it was useless to linger, he gave up the quest.

The town had never seemed as hot and dusty as it did on his arrival, and as he came at last to the apartment house in which he lived and recalled the hopes with which he had started out his depression reached the lowest point. He climbed the stairs. At the top of the last flight a girl came out of the rear flat, and in his surprise Bradley dropped his suitcase. The girl of the picture stood before him.

As he stood staring Mrs. Harrold came hustling out of her apartment.

"Did you have a nice time?" she asked as she greeted him.

"The homecoming was the best of all," he said, with a smile.

"It usually is," she agreed, unconscious of his hidden meaning. "I'm glad you're here. My niece, Molly Joella, from California, is spending a month with me. She came the day after you left. You escaped two weeks of escort duty."

"There are two weeks left," he said, with a smile. "That will be plenty of time."

"That is not a very gracious speech," suggested Mrs. Harrold, with a laugh. Bradley blushed.

"I'm afraid it doesn't sound the way I mean it," he stammered. "I can't very well explain now."

But he made his explanation ten days later, when he showed Molly the photograph and told her of his quest.

"And now that I have found you, may I keep you?" he asked.

"Findings keepings," suggested Molly demurely. "At least that is what we used to say when I was quite a little girl."

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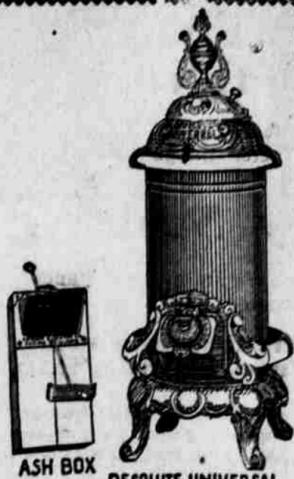
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