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The Mistaken Identity of Tommy

By ADDIE F. MITCHELL. Copyright, 1905, by E. C. Parcellid.

Mrs. Vaughn put down the letter she had been reading, with a troubled little sigh. Her daughter Madge looked up from the step.

"What's the matter, mother? You look as if you had been reading your death warrant."

"I have—the death warrant of our summer's peace. Aunt Mary North writes to ask if we won't keep her Tom while she and Mr. North go abroad for the summer."

"Who's her Tom?" asked Madge succinctly.

"Her stepson. I've not seen Aunt Mary since she married Mr. North, and I know next to nothing of the North family. But Mrs. Wilson knew Mr. North when they were living in Chicago (that was in the time of the first Mrs. North), and she said there were two girls and a boy. The boy was in kilts then, and that was five years ago, so he must be about eight or nine years old. Aunt Mary says he has been ill with typhoid and that she remembers with hope for his health that the air at Pinecroft is healing."

"But we can't have him, mother. Think of having an eight-year-old boy on our hands the whole summer! We can never get enough cooked for him to eat, and he'll be drowned regularly once a week and break all his arms and legs on the other days. And I wanted a quiet, heavenly rest this summer before I have to go back to that awful office. And it will be—well, the other kind of a time with a Tommy around, that is certain."

"But, Madge, I can't refuse Aunt Mary. She was your father's favorite aunt and always so good to him. No, Tommy will have to come, whether we want him or not."

"Well, then, when?"

"The letter says next Tuesday unless they hear from us that it is not convenient."

"Tell Aunt Mary I have the small-pox or that I died suddenly at the news—anything. Please, mother!"

"I was wondering," said her mother, "whether an eight-year-old boy would be afraid to sleep in a room by himself. Shall we put a bed in the alcove off my room or fix up the south chamber?"

"All the boys I've ever seen," answered Madge, "were afraid neither of the things under the earth nor of those upon it. Give him a room to himself, and then you'll be saved the everlasting clatter of fishing tackle and knives and toads and things in your room."

Still grumbling, Madge helped her mother get ready the south chamber. As she worked she grew interested and even took from the walls of her own room some interesting prints which she thought would be suitable for a boy's room.

"I can't see, though, why Aunt Mary didn't take the little wretch abroad with her—the sea air would do him good. Take out all the fancy things, mother, as you value them."

"If you only understood big boys as well as you seem to understand the small ones you would not be twenty-four and still single," teased her mother.

"I do, mother," said Madge vehemently. "I understand them altogether too well, and that's the very reason I am still single."

There was no immediate reply to this, and Mrs. Vaughn turned her attention to the room.

"Get all your old picture books and put them on that shelf, Madge, and I think I'll bring Jim's old hobbyhorse down from the attic. He may despise it, but you never can tell."

"I suppose I could make him some kites," said Madge. "There's all that red and blue paper and miles of yellow string. Perhaps if I make a big one he'll get fastened to it and fly off to Mars. And while I'm up in the attic I'm going to bring down some of Jim's old overalls."

Arrangements were finally completed, and Madge rather looked forward to the coming of the little boy, so that when Tuesday came she willingly drove to the station for him, though she protested that St. Lawrence and his griddle were as nothing to the torment she was undergoing. She took along a bag of cookies, "just to stop up his mouth so he can't ask questions," she explained.

The train was late, and Madge got a little cross as she waited in the open trap with the hot sun beating down upon her. The pony was restless, and she dared not leave him to go inside of the station. When the train finally steamed in, however, she gave the reins to a porter and went to find her young charge. She watched the few who came out of the coaches nervously, with one eye on the dancing pony, but as far as she could see no small boy was on the train. Fearing that he had not heard the name of the station called, she spoke to the conductor, who told her that no such person was on the train.

"Well," she thought, "I suppose I should be glad of it," and was going back to the trap when it occurred to her that he might some way have got past her into the station and might be waiting for her there. She looked in. No one was there but a very tall young man, who was leaning back rather limply against the seat, pale as from a recent illness. Madge gave him more than a passing glance because

she wondered who he might be. Young men at Pinecroft at this season were a rarity.

"Looks sick," she muttered, "or a little daffy." She was getting into the car when a quiet "I beg your pardon" caused her to wheel around. The strange young man, hat in hand, was certainly speaking to her. She merely looked her surprise.

"Are you not Miss Vaughn, and weren't you expecting me?" Her blue eyes widened into a positive stare of amazement.

"I—I am Madge Vaughn, but you—you must be mistaken," she said.

"I am Dr. North—Tom North, my mother wrote." He was blushing a little at the queerness of her reception.

"You—you are little Tommy?" "Why"—She began to laugh merrily, and the young man laughed, too, a bit stiffly, for he did not understand the joke. "You have the advantage of me," he said.

Madge sobered at his tone and realized that she was not displaying any marked hospitality. She held out a repentant hand, which the young man took eagerly. "We're sort of cousins, I guess," she said. "Anyway, if you are Tommy North we've been looking for you, so get in, and we'll start."

"I can go away if it is not convenient," protested the man.

"Convenient! After I've worked for three days getting picture books and kites and little blue overalls ready for you? No, sir; you will have to use all those things."

"You see," she explained as she drove along, "we got the impression from some one that you were about eight years old. Your mother never mentioned your age or height, and so we got ready for a small boy, and—here are some cookies I brought along so that you would not ask questions on the way home." She thrust a paper bag into his hands.

They were both laughing like children as they drove in at the gate, and by the time explanations were made to Mrs. Vaughn the young man was thankful that the surprise had happened. He felt that it had been a good thing to take Madge by surprise, for when two people have laughed together they have rapidly progressed in their acquaintance.

On the very first day Mrs. Vaughn had looked at the two with comprehension in her eyes, and as the weeks grew into months she felt reasonably sure that Madge would never go back to the office.

"Why should she," whispered the older woman to herself, "when a prosperous young physician is not only willing, but obviously anxious, to monopolize her?"

The day before he was scheduled to go back to the city a new man by reason of Pinecroft air and agreeable companionship they took the big red and blue kite to the top of a nearby hill to fly it. It soared clear above the trees as the man slowly unwound the long yellow string. The girl watched it rather sadly, for as yet there had been no word of love between them and she realized that she had grown to care so much that it was hard not to let him see it. She felt glad, though, that she had not let him see it, because there might be another girl in the city to whom he was bound, and she—well, she had her work at the office. The tears had come into her eyes, and now they splashed over. The young man looked up just in time to catch sight of them, and, letting the string go, he turned and caught her in his arms.

"Dear," he whispered, "what is it?" She did not speak, but she did not try to get away either, and after a moment he said:

"Is it because I am going away—is it, Madge?" She shook her head.

"Why, then," he urged, "tell me." Suddenly she began to laugh—a soft little laugh that made the man hold her closer.

"I was only wondering," she said, "whether or not there was a girl"—

"You bet there is," he interrupted, "and I've got her right where I want her." Which sentence, slangy as it was, seemed to be wholly satisfactory to Madge.

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Read the Morning Astorian.

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