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The Real Townsend

A Complication That Was Born of a Blunder.

By MOLLIE K. WETHERELL.

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"For the Eflinghams," I said to the elevator boy as I handed him my card.

I was in a New York apartment house for a call on some old friends of mine. The elevator boy handed my card to the telephone boy, who announced to the Eflinghams that Mr. Townsend had called.

"All right," said the latter after receiving a reply. "You're to go up."

I stepped on the elevator and was soon ushered by a maid in a black dress and a white ruffled apron into the drawing room of an apartment on the sixth floor. There was no one in the room, which surprised me, for I was very intimate with the Eflinghams and supposed that at the announcement of my name the whole family would be waiting to greet me.

It was fully ten minutes that I sat waiting when I noticed that the light shining through a keyhole in a door opening into an adjoining room suddenly gave place to darkness.

"One of the girls," I said to myself, "is spying on me. That's a game two can play at."

I got up from my seat, strolled about the room, looking at the pictures on the wall as if to kill time while waiting, and when I reached the door in question quickly turned the knob and threw the door open.

There, kneeling so as to bring an eye opposite the keyhole, was a young lady I had never seen. Her face was crimson, and after looking at me for a moment she covered her face with her hands.

I saw at a glance that not only one mistake had been made, but several. There might be fifty families in the building, and there were probably more than one named Eflingham. I had doubtless got into the wrong flat. But why was the girl peering at me through the keyhole? Perhaps there had been a double coincidence of names, she knowing some one by the name of Townsend, or she did not know any one by that name and was anxious to reconnoiter the visitor before appearing. My curiosity being aroused, I resolved not to spoil my chance of enlightenment by giving anything away. I proposed to listen, not to talk.

The girl arose and, still blushing to the roots of her hair, came forward.

"I am mortified beyond measure," she said, "at being caught in such a position, but you must admit that before receiving a call from the man I am to marry I would naturally desire to see him unobserved myself."

"The most natural thing in the world," I replied, repressing a start on learning that I was to be the girl's husband.

"I received your note," she continued, "saying you would call yesterday, and later your telegram that you had suddenly been called away. Then when you were announced just now I was taken quite by surprise, having expected that our meeting would not take place for some time yet."

"I decided not to go," I said. "My act is certainly not calculated to give you a favorable impression of me, I admit. Just think of a man calling for the first time on a girl he is to marry, whom he has never seen, and finding her peeping through a keyhole. It's simply dreadful!"

"But becoming. To my taste, a girl never looks so well as when blushing."

"But there is no necessity for us to stand. Be seated." She sank on a sofa, I on an easy chair. "I have fought against such a marriage, but my guardian, who has certain views for my property, has finally worn me out. Besides, he tells me that you are as much interested from that point of view as I. Nevertheless I have told him that after seeing you if you were repulsive to me the matter should not go any further. And that is the reason why I was endeavoring to get a peep at you before meeting you. I intended if you were disagreeable to me even in appearance that I would after all decline to receive you."

"Knowing this, I'm sorry I didn't leave you free to make a decision."

"I should have decided to meet you," she replied to this, casting down her eyes.

"Thank heaven!"

"You mean that you are pleased that these schemes for the development of our properties are to be carried out," she said archly.

"I assure you," I replied, with an injured look, "that these property schemes have nothing to do with my satisfaction at finding you in every way so much more attractive than I had hoped for."

There was a blush at this, not of mortification, but of pleasure.

"Now, I beg of you," I continued, "not to speak further of this matter of property interest that has brought us together. Let us consider our projected union one of inclination alone. Yet before doing so I would like to get one matter out of the way so that it may not influence us. Please write on a bit of paper what you consider the amount of your possessions, and I will do the same. We will exchange these papers and will both know what

we are to expect primarily from each other."

Now, I flatter myself this was very foxy on my part. I was not sure but that I would like to win this girl, and I did not care to do so, rendering myself liable to a charge of deception other than in permitting her to continue in a mistake. We exchanged the slips, and it turned out that my possessions were double hers.

"Why," she exclaimed on looking at the amount on my slip, "Mr. Markney did not tell me that there was such an inequality as that. I don't understand why you who had never seen me should have desired me simply on account of a property consideration, mine being but one-half yours."

"I said to you just now before this interchange of information that after it had been made the sordid part of this transaction should be dropped. Now let us talk of other matters."

By skillful management I learned that the man I had been mistaken for had gone away to be absent several weeks and that no communication was likely to take place between him and Miss Eflingham until his return. At first I permitted myself to drift on into the false position carelessly, but now and again twin es of conscience would come to me and, more than all, a distaste for the denouement that was sure to follow. At the end of this our first meeting it was evident that we were mutually pleased with each other, and if we continued to be so the wishes of the lady's guardian would be carried out. What these wishes were or how far they would tend to her enrichment I didn't care. When I arose to go she said:

"But you are not going before seeing my stepmother and my half sisters. They are my only relatives."

"Pardon me," I replied. "I am rather shy of meeting strangers, especially under the present circumstances. How would it do for them to get a sight of me the way you did—through the keyhole?"

"If you ever mention that again you may consider the matter broken off between us forever. After all, I think it as well that you should meet them during a later visit."

"I'm sure of it. How often do you think you can endure a call from me?"

"As often as you like."

I wondered whether Miss Eflingham considered that we were engaged and would grant me an engaged man's privilege or, rather, expect me to take it. I didn't wish to presume so far on a mistaken identity and was going away without a kiss. The lady must have considered herself engaged, for she made it plain that no such cold departure would please her. I took the kiss, and, though it was intensely enjoyable, I felt that I had received that to which I was not entitled.

When I stepped out of that apartment house into the open air I was fairly overpowered by the change which had come over me since I had entered it. There were pleasurable sensations confused with horrible anticipations. What would I do during the next few weeks while this other Townsend was away? Was I to try to win the girl? I coned over the question as to whether or no it would be honorable for me to do so. There were several points in my favor. In the first place, I was twice as well fixed in worldly possessions as the other fellow. In the second, I had found favor in Miss Eflingham's sight, and she had yet to see him. She might on meeting him take a great dislike to him. I secretly hoped she would. I took pleasure in depicting him in my mind's eye as a red headed, freckled, snub nosed chap with the forehead of an orang outang.

I went straight home, sat down in an easy chair and tried to think of some plan whereby I might come out of the matter with eclat instead of contempt, but failed to find one.

What would have been the outcome had I not been pierced with an arrow shot from the little god I don't know. It would probably have been far different from what it was. I vowed to keep away from Miss Eflingham and the consequences of my first visit to her. I kept my resolution by calling the next day, and the next and the next, for two weeks, every day intending a confession and never making one. Meanwhile the matter between us was a case of desperate love.

I went to see my sweetheart one day and learned that the sword suspended over me had fallen. I found her in the room where I had first met her, talking in an excited state to a man who, as I entered, looked at me scrutinizingly. Miss Eflingham, as if to shut us both from her mind, sank on a sofa and concealed her face with her handkerchief.

"Who are you, sir?" I asked. "The lady does not seem inclined to introduce us."

"I am Edward Townsend."

"And I am John Townsend."

"I am the Townsend, sir."

"Edith," I said, "it's all out. You mistook me for this gentleman, and I permitted you to continue in your mistake. All that remains to be done is for you to decide between us."

"Leave me, both of you," she wailed.

The other Townsend and myself naturally obeyed and at the same time. It was an embarrassing walk through the corridor and a miserable ride down the elevator. I was much put out to discover that the real original Townsend was a far better looking man than myself. When we parted at the outer door we both raised our hats politely, scowling at each other, and went in different directions.

Within a week a little note came to me addressed in a woman's hand. I tore it open. It read:

Dearest, come to me.

Then I knew I was the real Townsend.

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