

HAL BURTON'S MISTAKE.

When Hal Burton wrote and mailed these two notes, one morning, while Hal, imagined the trouble he was calling down upon his devoted head. The first one ran:

DEAR OLD FELLOW:
If you really want her, don't let me stand in your way. Go in and win. I thought you understood that I was feeling from the first.

Your friend,
HARRY BURTON.

And the other thus:

DEAR MISS MABEL:

Owing to pressing business engagements, I shall have to defer my call for this evening. May I come soon again?

Your friend,
HARRY BURTON.

The first of these two notes, addressed in a bold chirography to Miss Mabel Benton, was placed in that young lady's hands two hours later, and the flush which overspread her face as she recognized the dashing hand, told a story in itself.

"Dear Old Fellow" were the words which struck her amazed vision as she began its perusal.

"What in the world can Harry mean? she stopped to say, but as she read on the flush on her cheeks deepened to a redder, angrier hue, and when at its close she raised her eyes, they were full of both pride and pain.

"This note was intended for Tom Steele, or some young man of that set," she thought, with bitterness, "and has been sent to me by mistake. I shall act on this revelation of fate, however, and in future avoid Mr. Burton and the jesting he has enjoyed so much of late."

"Hal is getting dreadful polite," muttered Tom Steele, as he threw the note just received and read, among cigars, and tapers, etc., which adorned his centre table. "May he come soon again! When I've scarcely missed seeing him one night for a week, what does the boy mean?"

"May I have this waltz, Mabel, whispered Hal, as the two met in Mrs. Trenton's ball-room, two days later, his eyes full of undisguised admiration as he looked down at her.

"What hypocrisy! It was Mabel's mental comment, as she caught the expression, and she answered coldly. "I am sorry, but my ball-book is quite full, handing it indifferently to him as she spoke.

A strange light spread into Harry's eyes as he saw on every other line the name of a handsome young fellow, who had lately come to Morton, and who had already supplanted him as Mabel's escort for the evening.

"It is full," he replied carelessly, and he returned the book without another word. But he gnawed his moustache fiercely as he walked away.

Mabel's manner lost none of its gaiety because he held himself distantly aloof from her for the rest of the evening. She had never been more animated.

"If she can throw me over like that," thought Harry moodily, as in his room that night he went over and over again the events of the evening, and for the acquaintance of a week, too, she is not the girl for me, and I have no earthly reason to care. He did care though, as a pain at his heart gave proof, but he smothered it down, and determined to make no sign.

"In the cast of characters for our play," announced the chairman of the Morton amateur theatrical committee, a week later, "we have assigned the part of 'Norman McGregory' to Harry K. Burton, 'Janet Grey' to Mabel Benton, 'Edgar Montrose' to John S. Fremont."

"There couldn't have been a more suitable cast, as far as real circumstances are concerned, thought Harry while reading over the play. Norman and Edgar are both in love with Janet Grey, Norman desperately jealous, and Edgar successful for the time, 'happy circumstances for me,' he added, with a sigh, 'if the real affair could assume the aspect of this at its close, for Norman is successful in the end.'"

"Why are women so wild always," he cried, giving a savage cluck at a paper weight sitting near, "about handsome men? I could have sworn she cared for me until Fremont came, and now she scarcely deigns a glance in my direction. Heaven knows I wish I could give her up as easily as I wish I could, but I can't do it, and it costs a desperate effort to wear the indifferent face I do."

As Janet Grey, Mabel was more fascinating than she knew, and Norman McGregory, the unsuccessful suitor, found her constant coldness prompted more by nature, he felt, than by the requirement of part, a bitter thing to bear, now that he was called upon every night to suffer from it.

Even the relating, demanded by the plot of the play in the end, was one in which she put so little animation that he drew no comfort from it, and was only withheld by pride from giving up the character which brought him torture every night.

The afternoon of the last rehearsal came and all final arrangements were being completed.

Mabel, wearing a gossamer over her bewitching Scotch costume, was putting those finishing touches to the stage decorations, while Mr. Fremont was preparing evergreens for her, when this conversation carried on in the gentlemen's dressing room met her interested ears:

"Hallo Tom," exclaimed Hal Burton's familiar voice as some one entered the room, glad to see you back; when did you come?"

"To-day at twelve."

"Sorry you stayed so long my boy we have missed you woefully in this affair and I told Hackett last night if I could only lay my hands on you, we'd have 'Norman McGregory' at your service, I'm sure you'd have been a great help."

"Pshaw, Hal, my talent doesn't lie in that direction."

"By the way," remarked Hal, suddenly, as if recalling something, "did you get my note before you left?"

"Why, yes, I did; but I must say I don't understand yet the cause of your overwhelming politeness. That little appeal, 'May I come soon again' was quite beyond my comprehension."

"What are you driving at Steele?"

"That note of regret you sent me the night before I left—"

"My note of regret! Is the boy mad? I wrote you a note in regard to that horse of Brown's; told you I had no intention of standing in your way, and hoped you'd be successful in get-

ting her. Is not that the one you received?"

"No such note has ever reached me," Tom answered, decisively, while Hal, illuminated by a swift idea, broke into a fit of laughter.

"I have it now," he said. "I wrote Miss Mabel Benton a note the same morning, and in my haste, exchanged the envelopes. How very careless! But my overwhelming politeness, that is rich, and he lapsed into a merry peal, in which Tom also joined.

"But what can Mabel think of me?" he wondered next, as he remembered that allusion to the horse had been made through the pronoun "her."

His eyes flashed as a sudden idea suggested itself to him, but ere he had time to follow it out he was called upon the stage.

The play proceeded smoothly to the end; no lack of animation characterized Mabel's acting in the last scenes as before. The interest she threw in it seemed to spring from her heart. Her down-cast eyes, the natural flush from her cheek, the trembling of the little hand which lay within his own told Hal glad truth; and when at last she raised her eyes, it was to find in his a look of exultant gladness.

"You ran away from me this afternoon Mabel, whispered Harry, as they stood that night in a little entry back of the stage, waiting for their cue. "I wanted an explanation of your late cruel conduct—towards me: won't you give it to me now?"

Blushing and trembling she vainly attempted a reply.

"Was it because of that note I wrote to Tom Steele?" he inquired with a merry light in his eyes.

"Yes, it was, Harry; but I don't think it fair for you to tease as her eyes dropped beneath the laughing light in his.

"Then you know, Mabel, to what it referred."

"Yes, I overheard you tell Tom Steele."

"What reparation do you intend, to make for your unmerited treatment of me, Miss Benton?" he next whispered, as clasping one arm about her he drew her close to his side.

"I have been very miserable of late; more than you can imagine, and deserve a rich reward for the suffering you have caused."

"Some one else has suffered, too," she whispered, with a swift glance from her long-lashed eyes.

"Ah, Mabel," he cried impulsively, "if such is the case, promise to take what I give you and what I return?"

"What do you demand?"

"Your heart for mine," was the quick response; "are you willing to make the exchange?"

"Oh, Harry, she said, "I must go. They need me in the dressing-room."

"Little witch? do you think I'll release you till the promise is made! One little word is all I ask, and sweet-heart, that is 'Yes.'"

"Some one is coming. I have no time to promise. Please, let me go!"

"The whole world may come," he answered, with decision; "but you shall not leave until you say what I desire to hear."

"Well, then," with a pout, "since you compel me, I will say—no!" darting swiftly from his hold, with a mocking little laugh.

A moment later, however, when on the stage he sang to her:

"You tangled my life in your hair, Janet; 'Twas a golden and silken snare, my pet; But so gentle the bondage my soul did inspire The right to continue the slave forevermore."

Her eyes spoke so plain and glad a 'yes' that he scarcely needed the confirmation given by gentle lips, as, after the play was over, they walked slowly and happily home.

"Why are women so wild always," he cried, giving a savage cluck at a paper weight sitting near, "about handsome men? I could have sworn she cared for me until Fremont came, and now she scarcely deigns a glance in my direction. Heaven knows I wish I could give her up as easily as I wish I could, but I can't do it, and it costs a desperate effort to wear the indifferent face I do."

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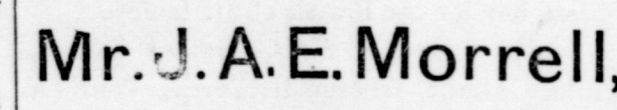
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