

THE ONE PLOT THAT FAILED

Dick Graham's Novel That Unsettled His Mind.

The Other Girl Loved the Opposite Fellow and Vice Versa—An Unfathomable Mixup.

I.

We fellows had missed Dick's cheerful face a good deal from the Levity Club of late, and the idea took possession of us that he must be ill or in some way. As his special friend I was commissioned to investigate. To this end I called upon him at his chambers in the Temple.

I knocked, but received no reply, so I pushed open the door and entered. I expected to find the room empty; but, to my surprise, right before me as I entered sat Dick Graham at a writing table which was strewn with manuscripts and odd scraps of paper.

"Dick, old chap," said I, stepping forward to his desk and laying my hand upon his shoulder, "what's up? Turned deaf all of a sudden?"

"Good heavens!" he cried. "I—I— you gave me a fright, Harold. I didn't know anyone was in the room."

"I beg your pardon," I replied. "But I knocked several times, and as I received no invitation to come in I entered."

"The fact is"—he began apologetically, with a glance at his desk.

"Yes, yes," I interrupted, "I see—you confounded old yarns. Well, you simply got to turn up for a now, come."

"Would," replied Dick, "were I engaged upon any ordinary story, but none I am working at now is my masterpiece."

"H'm!" I coughed slightly. "Really," said Dick, "I'm in earnest this time. Look here, I've just conceived the idea for a plot which will work into a story will startle the world with its brilliancy. Just a squint at the outline. Perhaps suggestion might help me."

Eagerly he raked together about a dozen scraps of paper covered with diagrams and a sheet of paper closely written upon.

"My idea," he began, "is this: Two fellows, named respectively Dick and Harry, are in love with two girls, Lucy and Mabel. Now, Dick loves Lucy while Harry's affections are centered upon Mabel. Very well. But there is trouble—i. e., Mabel doesn't care a straw about Harry. Her fancy is Dick. And the object of Lucy's tender passion is Harry. Do you see?"

"Yes," rather faintly.

"Well, he continued, "there is to be a masked ball in their town, and my four characters will be present. Dick intends to go as a Chinaman and Harry as Mr. Answers. Mabel is going as Queen Mary and Lucy as Mrs. Kruger. By some means they all get to know what the disguises of the others will be. But at the last moment each couple exchange their dresses, reversing the characters. Do you see?"

"I think I grasp it," I muttered between my set teeth.

"Well," continued Dick, "the consequences is that Harry, who was going as Mr. Answers, but who has really gone as a Chinaman, proposes to Lucy, who is made up as Queen Mary, taking her to be Mabel, who as a matter of fact is masquerading as Mrs. Kruger."

A cold sweat was beginning to break out all over me, and I believe I must have worn that same kind of hunted expression which was now increasing on poor Dick's face. He had gathered two or three scraps of paper and was illustrating the "idea" to me by means of rough sketches of the characters, from one to the other of whom he drew arrows to point his meaning.

"Go on," I said desperately.

"You see," he said, in compliance, "there is an arrow pointing from Dick to Lucy, showing he loves her; here is another from Lucy to Harry, showing she loves Harry."

I fairly trembled now, and Graham's hair was assuming a rigid perpendicular. "There here is a curved line from Harry to Lucy in the diagram, showing them at the ball, which points to the fact"—

"Heaven's man!" I broke out, "drop it, or I'll go mad!"

"Do have a little patience!" he cried excitedly. "It's getting quite simple I assure you. There are only a few points to clear up, and it'll be as simple as A B C."

He dipped his pen in the ink, and drew another diagram representing the four characters.

"You see by this," he said, pointing to it, "that Dick, who ought to be a Chinaman, is really Mr. Answers; while the girl he—that is, her—and Harry has changed his disguise from Mr. Answers to a Chinaman. Well, Dick loves Lucy—Queen Mary, really—but he takes Mrs. Kruger to be she."

"Pardon me, Dick, old fellow," I interrupted. "It may be that I am very dense, but I must confess that I can't follow you."

"That's because you're a fool!" he snapped. "This is the grandest, most novel, simplest, and at the same time most intricate plot ever hatched."

"Well, have another try to explain," said I.

II.

Setting his teeth and fixing a steely look upon the papers before him, he

commenced: "Dick loves Lucy, and Harry loves Mabel. Mr. Answers is going to a ball—no, no; Harry will be Mr. Answers, and it is he who will be at the ball with Mrs. Kruger."

"Haven't you got it a bit mixed?" I ventured timidly.

"Not a bit," he said feverishly. "Let me continue before I lose the thread."

In awe I listened to him as he proceeded:

"They change disguises. Mrs. Kruger and Queen Mary are Mabel and Lucy, only the other way about. The Chinaman proposes to Mrs. Kruger and is accepted—I mean, Mr. Answers is."

He had jumped to his feet and was turning over the diagram feverishly.

"Stop it, man!" I cried. "You'll go off your head!"

"Mrs. Kruger and Queen Mary went to a masked ball," I heard him mutter. Once again I besought him desist.

"If the fancy ball—that is, suppose Mrs. Kruger were a Chinaman—no, no!"—He was fairly dancing about now with excitement and, bad sign, had started to work the thing out on his finger tips.

I waited for no more. Without delay I dashed off to the Levity and fetched half a dozen friends. We arrived at Dick's chambers.

The poor fellow was sitting quietly on the floor, surrounded by manuscripts and sheets of paper bearing diagrams.

"If Mrs. Kruger were to meet Mr. Answers at the carnival, would Lucy be engaged to a Chinaman or to Queen Mary?" he was muttering. "Suppose Queen Mary were Mrs. Kruger—impossible! Then Mr. Answers must be a Chinaman, and I know he isn't. Suppose a Chinaman married a fancy dress ball! Who proposed to Mrs. Kruger?"

We stole away as softly as we had come, a scared look on our faces.

A week later poor old Dick Graham was safe in Bedlam.

From a scrap of paper I found in Dick's rooms I have copied the most concise description of the plot he ever wrote. Here it is:

"Dick is in love with Lucy and Harry with Mabel. But Lucy loves Harry, and Mabel loves Dick. They are all going to a masked ball and know each other's intended disguise beforehand. Dick intends to go as a Chinaman and Harry as Mr. Answers; Mabel is going as Queen Mary and Lucy as Mrs. Kruger. But at the last moment each couple change disguises. Of course at the ball Harry proposes to"—

Here the writing breaks off. The attempt to work it out drove Dick Graham mad, and I defy any one else to do it without the same result.—Chicago Times-Herald.

Omar Kabiff.

One day as Omar Kabiff sat in his palace and reflected on the wisdom of his rule he heard a great murmuring in the streets, and calling in his prime minister he said:

"The people murmur. Go out and see what the chin music is about."

The P. M. was absent for a few minutes, and then returned to report:

"O ruler of the sun, the people murmur because the price of corn is so high."

"That's it, eh? Well, go back and tell them that the price shall be reduced one-half. Can't no trust shove up the price of corn in my dominions."

The P. M. went back and made proclamation, but still the murmuring continued.

"What's the row now?" demanded his highness as he jingled his bell and the P. M. answered it.

"O wise king, the people complain of a scarcity of corn. It cannot be had at any price."

"I see. Make proclamation that the people fill up on 'taters.'"

"But no 'taters were planted in Persia last year, your highness."

"Then let 'em try turnips."

"But alas, there are no turnips!"

"But beans we always have with us, and with plenty of beans on his table no one will suffer."

"O king over Persia," said the P. M. as he began to look troubled. "I sold all the beans to Turkey by your order a month ago. The sultan desired them for his bean shooters."

"Well, then, let my people turn to carrots and onions."

"But none have been grown, O ruler."

"And maybe you will tell me that there isn't a cucumber to be found in Persia?"

"Not one, your highness."

"Say you so? How is it that such a state of affairs has come about?"

"By royal proclamation, O ruler, you had 20,000 farmers beheaded last year as an agricultural experiment. You were seeking a new fertilizer. Ah! I remember. And the beheading of 20,000 farmers has left 100,000 citizens of my capital foodless!"

"It is true, O ruler."

"Very well, Hassim. It's a plain case of arithmetic without any experiment in it. To balance the want of crops raised by the 20,000 farmers you will see to it that 100,000 of my citizens are made a head shorter. That will even things up, give the people to understand that I'm looking out for their best interests and probably prevent an epidemic of cholera."

M. QUAD.

The Gem Was Gone.

A certain Holborn bookseller once gained some valuable information in a curious manner. In one of his catalogues he entered a quite unpretentious little booklet as follows, or to this effect: "Hornem (Horace). The Waltz, 5s."

When folding the catalogues for the post, a customer happened to come in

and take up one of the new lists. In going through he paused to see the Hornem entry and blandly asked to see the book; after a momentary glance he planked down the full catalogue price and carried it home.

The catalogues for the London district reached their destination by the last post the same evening, and, curiously enough, this Hornem article attracted the attention of more than one bookman. At 6 o'clock the next morning an enthusiast from the northern lights of London started for town in the full confidence of bringing home the rarity.

He arrived at the bookshop at 7 o'clock, and, consoling himself with a pipe, took his seat confidently on the doorstep. By 8 o'clock two other bookmen had arrived. When the book seller came to open his shop, he was rather astounded at the eagerness of the small crowd.

I will not dwell upon a description of what their feelings might have been or what their language certainly was when they discovered that the book was gone. The bookseller, however, learned that the little quarto was one of Byron's rarest pieces and worth quite \$400.—Ex.

The Bravest Are Tenderest.

The terrible war in South Africa has made us talk and read a great deal about the British soldier. Tommy Atkins, even when it seems unlikely, shows kindness to the children he comes across. An instance of this occurred in a little incident that happened during the Sudan campaign.

When a party of lancers were out reconnoitering, they came upon a small village which had somehow been deserted by its inhabitants, except one child which had been left. The poor little fellow cried as he saw the horsemen.

A lancer who was riding ahead caught up the child and brought him safely to a place where he was fed and taken care of.

This recalls a rather similar story told of some soldiers long ago. It was when the English were fighting in Spain. There had been a skirmish, and afterward a party went back to bury the dead. Some gypsies had passed, and, having fled in alarm, they had left a child, which the soldiers found on the field of battle. They took it up, but it was too young to eat bread, so they went off to try to obtain milk. It had scarcely any clothes, but one of the men wrapped it in a soldier's tunic. Afterward it was given into the care of one of the women settlers, and the boy grew up to become a soldier himself.—Ex.

Oh, Inconstant 'Man!

"Talk about woman's fickleness and capriciousness!" she exclaimed scornfully. "I'd like to know how she can beat man when it comes to being vacillating and mentally unreliable."

"What's the matter now?" asked her dearest friend.

"Why, if it were not for man's inconstancy I'd be engaged to be married."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, he asked me to marry him, and I refused. I didn't think I wanted to, you know, but afterward I made up my mind that I did, and the fickle thing never asked me again."

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