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...A...
BLUNDER

Being a Tale of the Restoration of Charles II.

By F. A. MITCHEL
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It was the year that King Charles came from over the water to take his rightful place on the throne of England. All was good cheer and merry-making for the people of London, who had long endured the psalm singing Roundheads, were beside themselves with joy at the change.

The day the king entered London, while his majesty was passing through the Strand, I was standing on the sidewalk, having intended to view the pageant, but my eyes were drawn above the gentlemen on richly caparisoned horses escorting the king and even the king himself to a window from which was looking down on them a young girl who seemed to me to be the fairest gentlewoman I had ever seen in my life.

Her hair was put high on her head, after the custom of the times, and bound with ribbons. Her ruff stood up under her ears, though not so high as when Elizabeth set the fashion in England. Her sleeves were slashed at the shoulders, and her stomacher was studded with gems. Indeed, she wore the costume of a highborn dame, and, as to her face and figure, they were the face and figure of an angel.

When I saw Lord Everest, whom I knew well, bending above her, craning his neck to get sight of the king, I was rejoiced, for I knew that he could tell me who she might be and maybe would make me known to her. And so when the pageant had passed I went to the door of the house in which these people were and which stood not far from Temple Bar, and when they came out I made pretense of surprise at seeing Everest and greeted him pleasantly, whereupon he seemed glad to see me and bade me come with him to his father's seat at Slough, which is near Windsor, where great merry-making was to take place among the gentry of that region for a whole fortnight to celebrate the return of the king.

I knew not if the lady I had seen at the window would be of the number present, but I thought it likely that she would be, so I went with Everest to a tavern, where a meal was served, and after we had eaten our fill and paid the reckoning we took boats and went that night to Cragnew, castle, the seat of the Duke of Berrymore.

And what was my delight that the lady who had thrilled me remained with us at the tavern on the river and was as guest as well as I at Cragnew. Such a fortnight as we passed I have never passed since. There were riding and hunting and feasting and dancing, and all the while I was the acknowledged cavalier of the Lady Eleanor, whom I had seen at the window in London. Other young gallants vainly tried to replace me, and I rejoiced greatly that it was not necessary for me to threaten them, for the lady seemed willing that I alone should at all times be her attendant.

But the time came when I was made greatly wroth through jealousy. It came about in this wise: We were to have at the end of the festivities a great ball at which we were all to wear apparel of other peoples and other times and masks and were to dance and feast in these costumes. Many of us went to London, where these things necessary to our masquerade were to be procured, but we went secretly and not together that the habit we wore to wear should not be known. I bought me a costume that would do for Christopher Columbus, who sailed over from Spain more than a century ago and discovered that land which has since been called Virginia and which has conferred so great a boon upon us in giving us tobacco.

My love for Eleanor waxed stronger day by day, so that now, looking backward to those times, I marvel greatly how I should have advanced with her so speedily, especially since there was no opposition to our fancy, for, notwithstanding that my family had stood by the king's royal father, our estates had not been confiscated, and I was just coming of age to inherit them. Besides, I had served Prince Rupert in all the battles he fought in the king's cause. And so it came about that when we strolled out into the greenwood that surrounds the castle and sat upon a fallen tree trunk I told Eleanor how my heart had gone with my eyes to her as she sat in the window in London on the day of the king's restoration and begged her to be my lady. She did not withdraw the hand I held, and when I kissed her lips she did not

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gainsay me.

And so it was all settled between us, and there was no happier man in England than I. We were to end our rejoicings at the king's return by the masquerade, and the next week I was to go to the seat of my lady's father to make a formal proposition for her hand. But before that might happen I well high rendered our union impossible.

The day before the masquerade I was walking through a corridor at Cragnew lined with sleeping chambers. As I passed one of them, the door of which stood ajar, I saw a sight that froze my heart with horror. Within the chamber I saw a Spanish cavalier admiring himself before a reflection of a mirror. And by him with his arm about her waist stood my Eleanor. Whipping my rapier from its scabbard, I cried at the top of my voice, "Death! Come out lest I disgrace myself as you have done by intruding into a lady's chamber and I slay you there!"

The fellow turned and, seeing me glaring at him with my rapier leaping forward to pierce his vitals, lost all the color from his face, which as soon as I saw it I knew it belonged to one of tender years. But he was not unarmed, having a rapier at his waist, which gladdened me, if, indeed, I could be gladdened at such a time, for it gave me an excuse to slay him.

Eleanor turned, too, and gazed at me, all amazement.

"Aha, my Mistress Eleanor! Is it meet that you should accept a lover one day and the next receive another in your chamber? Mayhap had not a draft set the door ajar I should never have known of your faithlessness!" With that I began to bawl and to roar at the "Spanish dog," the "miscreant," to come out into the corridor and defend himself. And, he not coming, I made a step forward. What did the coward do but run behind the bed and crawl under it!

By this time, with my roaring and swearing, the corridor was filled with guests, both gentlemen and ladies, who had come from their rooms to learn, maybe, if a lion had got into the castle. They saw me standing before the Lady Eleanor's open door, she, facing me, white as a sheet and not able to make herself heard above the noise I made.

Then came Lord Everest running along the corridor, and when he reached me and saw me standing, rapier in hand, glaring and howling for the Spanish cur to come out and fight like a man, he drew his own sword and beat mine down, crying:

"What means this bedlam? Cease your howling and let me hear what the Lady Eleanor has to say."

This somewhat quieted my tongue, though I continued to glare. The Lady Eleanor, seeing protection, went to the bed and, putting her hand under it, dragged the Spaniard out and helped him to stand upon his feet. Then she pushed him forward, saying:

"Look at this 'Spanish cur,' seeing for yourselves the crime I have committed in harboring him in my chamber."

"Why, 'tis the Lady Gwendolyn Tracy!" said one of the bystanders.

Then my choler suddenly gave place to a sinking in the heart as well as the knees, for I saw what I had done. Surely the Spaniard was none other than the Lady Gwendolyn, whose cos-

tume for the masquerade had just arrived from London and who, having taken her friend the Lady Eleanor into the secret of her character, was trying the suit on in her company.

"There, Sir Ralph," said Eleanor, "is the Spaniard for whom you would rob me of my good name before all these goodly people. Get you gone from me and never let me see you again."

With that she burst into a torrent of weeping and, retreating within her room, shut the door.

And I stood broken by my folly before the whole company, who presently, after the retreat of the Lady Eleanor, suddenly seeing the absurdity of my action, burst into loud peals of laughter.

"Down with the Spaniard!" cried the old duke, who had heard the same words often during his boyhood when Queen Mary's Spanish match was unpopular in England, whereupon all the company laughed again.

"'Tis like the dons," cried another, "to hide under the bed before a drawn rapier!"

"For shame, Sir Ralph, to draw sword upon a girl!"

But I, full of anguish at having by my choler induced by jealousy to act upon impulse and without knowledge, heard not a word of these jests. I was longing to throw myself upon my knees before the Lady Eleanor and at the same time bethinking myself that I would never obtain her forgiveness. Finally Everest, with kindly courtesy, seeing my suffering, came to me and, taking my rapier from my hand, thrust it into its scabbard. Then, putting his arm through mine, he led me away. As we walked down the corridor together I heard the murmur of voices and laughter behind me of those who continued to discuss my lamentable blunder.

"Do not fret your soul," said Everest. "This evening's festivities will wear away the effects of your rashness."

"There are no more festivities for me," I wailed, "unless maybe the Lady Eleanor may find it in her guileless heart to forgive me."

"And so she will," replied my friend, "when she comes to consider that your act was goodly evidence of your love for her."

"She will never forgive the affront I put upon her."

"Come, come; cease this maudlin whining! I will engage that you are forgiven this very evening."

With that he poured out a flagon of sack and bade me get up my courage, but be sure not to drink so much as to spoil the reconciliation that was to be between me and my ladylove. I dare not excite my brain, already hot, with the liquor and would have none of it.

When the ball was on Everest sought me out and led me to a curtained corner where sat Isabella, that queen who furnished the funds by means of which Virginia was discovered.

"Here is Columbus, your majesty, who returns to you penitent."

He left me with my love. And as I drew the curtains that those passing should not see in, so I draw the curtain over the close of my story.

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COURT OF REVISION.

THE COURT OF REVISION OF THE VILLAGE OF WATFORD will be held in the COUNCIL ROOM

—ON—

Thursday, June 1st, 1911.

At 10 o'clock a.m. to hear and decide any complaints against the assessment of Watford.
 m6-td W. S. FULLER, Clerk.