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A GOOD HEARSE IN CONNECTION

For The Advance.]

Beelzebub and the Editor.

Several years ago I was engaged on the staff of the *Hammersmith Vidette*. That paper is not running now, and the town of Hammersmith has been incorporated as a city under a different name; therefore you are excusable for your ignorance as to the whereabouts of the place or of the brilliant literary talent that flashed forth in the columns of the *Vidette*. I say I was engaged on the paper; and it is mainly to rescue my own name from oblivion, and claim the honor due me as one of the literary lights of that sheet that I write this little reminiscense. From a pecuniary point of view my position was not an enviable one. Gentlemen who dropped in on business called me "Bub," but the foreman generally prefaced it with "Beelzy." I did not like the latter title, especially when given the plain, everyday name for old Beelzy, and in fact no one but the foreman dared use it around there.

The editor of the *Vidette* was a young unmarried man, probably 28 years of age. He was the whole reportorial staff, editor, manager and proprietor condensed into one, and he discharged the onerous duties of his position to my entire satisfaction, with one exception: he wouldn't disburse on pay day.

One afternoon Miss Edith Dobie, a handsome young lady, daughter of our town clerk, called on the editor, to solict missionary aid. She had never before visited our office, although her father was a patron of the paper and half supported it by placing all the town printing and his own (for he was land and insurance agent, bailiff, auctioneer, money-lender, etc., as well as town clerk) in the editor's hands for execution. I was closeted with the proprietor when this vision of loveliness entered, trying to persuade him to disgorge my previous week's salary, which amounted to $2. I had not been successful. This was the period of my service when I first became aware of the editor's susceptibility to any of the finer emotions of the heart. It was a decided blush that mantled his cheeks, and his embarrasment was almost painful. I was quite astounded when he pulled out a wad of money and gushingly tendered Miss Dobie a ten dollar bill. He then handed me my salary and I departed for the press room to scrub rollers.

From what I had seen I decided that the editor must be in love with Miss Dobie, and it was not long after this that my suspicions were verified very unexpectedly. Hurrying into the sanctum one day on an errand from the foreman, a particularly strange sight met my view. The editor was on his knees upon the floor, with hands clasped, while before him on a chair stood the waste basket, which he was apostrophising with an earnestness and determination that left no room for other mundane sights or sounds, much less my entrance. I listened attentively for a few moments. He was ranting away in a sickening manner about, "loving his darling to distraction," and so on. In the midst of one of his maudlin sentences I brought him to his feet with a suddenness that must have come near unjointing his vertebrae by shouting:

"Coal Oil."

"The Devil!" yelled the editor.

"Yes," said I, "the foreman calls me that sometimes, but you, as a gentleman, ought to be ashamed to call a boy names when you know it hurts his feelings. I shall tell pa."

"There, there, Samuel, never mind my boy." I will not do it again. I was just placing some waste papers in the basket; you may take it outside and empty it."

Now, of all the numberless duties devolving upon the office boy, that of emptying the basket is the least onerous. He takes a fiendish delight in conning over discarded contributions from literary fanatics, and offers from quack medicine vendors for advertising contracts at a rate that wouldn't pay for the ink in which they were printed. On this day, however, I found something more to be prized than all the riches which this cornucopia of mine had heretofore produced. It was the following letter, written in the editor's best style:

MY DEAR MISS EDITH,—I fear you may consider me bold in writing to you the words which I am about to pen. At no time in my life have I experienced so much trepidity in performing any duty as the one which I have voluntarily placed upon myself at the present moment, and added to my present difficulties is the fear that you may construe this letter as an evidence of cowardice, when it is only a desire to escape the possibility of hearing your sweet lips form the word "No." I want you for my wife, Edith, and if it is possible for you to be happy with me, delay not in sending a few lines to relieve the tantalizing suspense I have been laboring under for some time. Believe me, darling,

Yours devotedly, etc.,

By a strange coincidence, I also came across another note addressed to Miss Edith Gowan, a young lady who was attending high school and much given to writing love-sick poems for the paper, which seldom appeared. She evidently labored under the idea that the editor had nothing to do but revise and rewrite her manuscript. It was a scather. In it the editor informed Miss Gowan that "she aspired to a position which she could never occupy with any credit to herself," and several other sentences quite as severe. Possibly he concluded it was too severe, and threw it where my eagle eye observed it. As for the first letter, I understood perfectly how the editor had wavered for a long time between the ultimatum of writing and proposing in the othordox way, and how he had at last decided upon the former, and then, not quite satisfied, had proceeded to rehearse his part before the basket, where I disturbed him.

The finding of these letters overwhelmed me with emotions peculiar to good fortune. It tickled me more than the granting of a half holiday. It pleased me more than would a ticket to the circus or a raise in salary, for I knew there was a mine of fun in them if the claim was properly worked. But I didn't work it properly. What gaurdian fiend of boyhood is it that always causes a boy's innocent jokes to turn out so disastrously for himself and everyone else? Acting upon the innocent desire for a little fun, I forwarded the letters to the respective ladies for whom they were intended, at least I thought I did, but subsequent events proved that the similarity in their names had led to a transposition of the two missives. In other words, Miss Gowan received the love letter and Miss Dobie got the "scather."

On the following day I was holding "copy" for the editor while he read proof of a quarter-sheet bill, when the door was suddenly burst open and the town clerk rushed in with a riding-whip in his hand and a tornado working on his face which immediately belched forth hail-stones of weight sufficient to knock the editor senseless.

"Look here, you vile maligner!" shouted Mr. Dobie, "what do you want by insulting my daughter in the way you have! You think she is not good enough for you, eh! My daughter! And she has been aspiring to the position of your wife, has she!"

"Mr. Dobie, I—I"—said the editor.

"Aye, aye, is it, you villainous scoundrel! And what brought you around my premises so often for the past month? Was it the attentions she was paying you, you miserable puppy!"

"I—I"—said the editor, faintly.

"Oh, you cowardly sneak, I'll make you sorry for this. I came here to horsewhip you, but that would be too easy, and I have something better! You have been living and prospering on my patronage heretofore, but I'll—"

The sentence was completed as he slammed the door after him and I did not hear all of it.

After his departure the editor staggered to a chair and fell into it. He seemed to require a rest, for his legs shook under him with a genuine ague vibration. I never witnessed such a ghastly, sickly and woebegone expression on any man's face as the experience of the last few moments had cast over his. It equalled in ghostliness that of the Laocoon or the Dying Gladiator, and there was a dazed and glassy expression about the eyes that made me fear of his sanity. I was petrified at thought of the terrible mistake I had made.

And then, before we had recovered from our stupefaction, there came a soft tap at the door and the high school miss stepped in. The editor did not glance up, and seemed not to hear her entry. I could feel my hair rising as the young lady skipped over to his chair and threw her arms about his neck. I moved towards the door when she stooped down and kissed him. That kiss awoke him from his lethargy and placed him on his feet like a flash.

"The devil!" he shouted. Ah, I beg pardon—

"Yes, it was me," I screamed, as I slid out the front door and swiftly but sadly wended my way home.

At the end of two weeks I heard that the editor had a breach of promise suit pending, brought by Miss Gowan. Then I went and explained confidentially to Miss Dobie the sad mistake I had made. She laughed and cried in one breath when I explained to her my scheme to undoing the mischief.

The day of the trial arrived and I was in court. So was miss Dobie and her father. Miss Gowan's council produced the letter which had been quoted. It was all the proof they required and they rested their case upon it. The editor had no evidence in rebuttal, and things looked mighty blue for him. At this point I said:

"Mr. Judge, I know something about that letter and I wish to depose."

I was sworn, and stated as clearly as possible the facts that I have here chronicled. I also produced the letter originally intended for Miss Gowan and read it aloud, but before its completion plaintiff and her friends had all left the court-room. The Court was convulsed with laughter. The town clerk and the editor departed arm in arm, and I presume the preliminary draft of an agreement was drawn that day; at all events the *Vidette* was sold one week afterward, and the vendor took a half interest in the business of the town clerk, which, I presume, must have been a better paying one than the paper, as there was a bridal tour when the wedding came off.

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