

# HOW TWO WRONGS MADE A RIGHT

A Story.

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The maid who brought the mail to Vernon's room that morning had her hands full, in the most literal sense. There were several of the long, bulky envelopes whose appearance brings dejection to the heart of the aspiring writer. There were one or two of the envelopes which keep such dejection from becoming chronic, also bearing the name of a periodical, but too thin to contain anything in the shape of a returned manuscript. It was even possible that they conveyed checks.

But Vernon brushed these all aside, and even let the letters from home lie unnoticed in favor of a square envelope directed in a small, neat hand to Mr. Vernon Hamilton Field. This the girl regarded with an amused smile, and opened first of all.

"Mr. Vernon Hamilton Field:

"Dear Sir—Your admirable story 'Chums' has been sent me for illustration. I read so many colorless and flavorless tales for boys that it is a relief to come across one bearing indications that its author has not forgotten his own youth. The vigor and vivacity of 'Chums' is a positive inspiration to a busy illustrator, who too often is forced into mechanical work by the very insipidity of the stuff submitted.

"As I am about to begin the illustrations for the story, I should like to ask your idea as to the age of the girls introduced into the picnic episode. I should be sorry to have my work disappointing in any way to the author who has given me such pleasure. Very sincerely yours,

"LESLIE M. ESKINE."

The long envelopes and the letter from home lay in a neglected heap while Vernon perused this communication for the second time. Her eyes were dreamy, and one or two unexpected dimples had made their appearance. "It's the nicest compliment I ever got!" she cried. "To think that I can write a boys' story in such a realistic way as to make an experienced reader believe that I was once a boy myself. Leslie Eskine, you're a dear girl. I could love you for your blunder."

It was not till she went to her desk to answer the query contained in her complimentary letter that a sudden mischievous idea took possession of her. She sat with her fountain pen poised in air while she considered. "What is the use of going into explanations? I'll see if I can disguise my identity as well in my note as I did in my story." She drew down the corners of her mouth in conformity to her ideas of masculine dignity, and began her reply. "My dear Miss Eskine."

It was a clever letter, the youthful author decided, as she read it over before inclosing it in its envelope. All traces of femininity had been carefully suppressed. She had cultivated a rather bluff cordiality, and had introduced one or two slang phrases with telling effect. She laughed outright as she sealed the letter.

The next day a broad-shouldered young fellow, sitting before an easel in a snug studio, whose fittings were far from suggesting artistic poverty, stared with amazement at an envelope addressed to "Miss Leslie M. Eskine." His amazement was, however, tempered with evident chagrin. "Miss Leslie," he repeated contemptuously. "Now, I wonder what gave the fellow that impression. Well, let's see what he says."

For altogether different reasons from those which had moved the author of the letter to self-congratulation Mr. Leslie Eskine approved it.

"He's the right sort, plain enough," was his verdict. "That letter's a dandy. Maybe," he added with a grin. "he wouldn't have taken quite so much pains if he hadn't supposed he was writing to a girl. Well, there's no harm in keeping him in the dark a little."

It was rather surprising how many reasons these two young people found for exchanging letters. Mr. Leslie Eskine lost no opportunity of conveying to Vernon his appreciation of her work, and when Vernon came across some of his illustrations in one of the current magazines, she could do no less than write, expressing her admiration, which was sincere. "I think your experiences must have been unlike those of the average woman," Vernon wrote. "There is such vigor and breadth in your drawings. One would almost call it virility."

On one occasion the truth nearly came out. For Eskine, reading one of Vernon's stories in a woman's magazine, so far departed from his customary complimentary attitude as to find fault with it. "Of course, it's well written," he explained. "You're so extraordinarily versatile that even when you depart from your legitimate line you're equal to the occasion. What I object to is the decision the heroine reaches in the concluding paragraph. No woman, much less the woman you have pictured, would take this course. It's entirely unnatural."

Vernon was frankly angry. She lay awake several hours that night composing a reply which would crush Miss Leslie Es-

kine to the dust. She would begin by saying that she considered herself as well qualified as anybody to judge what course a woman would take under given circumstances, and after launching this thunderbolt she would reveal the fact that she was Miss Field.

By morning her mood had changed. The whole thing had become a joke. She replied with a very humble letter, saying that undoubtedly Miss Eskine's criticism was just. "I will be very glad," wrote Vernon, giggling ecstatically, as she penned the words, "to profit by your more intimate knowledge of the workings of the feminine mind." And a certain broad-shouldered young man who read the letter grinned sheepishly, and, addressing a suit of armor in a corner of the studio, observed confidentially that he guessed he had put his foot in it. The frigid silence preserved by the recipient of these confidences seemed to give consent.

When the anniversary of Eskine's first letter came around, and Eskine wrote with unusual cordiality in commemoration of the event, Vernon's sleeping conscience woke up. There had been something in the letter that had made her vaguely uneasy. The enthusiastic references her correspondent had made to the inspiration of the singular friendship brought before her thoughts very distinctly the misunderstanding under which Leslie Eskine was laboring. "She thinks I'm a man," thought Vernon, conscience-stricken. "And it's even possible that she might fall in love with me."

She wrote a long letter that same afternoon. It was a frank letter. She explained as well as possible the mischievous impulse which had led her to allow Miss Eskine to continue in her misapprehension, and laid emphasis on the fact that she had grown to value the friendship. "Indeed, if you are angry with me for continuing this childish deception," Vernon wrote, "I shall be frankly miserable." At this point she was compelled to have recourse to her pocket handkerchief. It was extraordinary how blank the future seemed without the cordial encouragement of Leslie Eskine. Even her criticisms were preferable to silence. It was a damp little wad of a handkerchief that was restored to Vernon's pocket at last.

She sent the maid to the corner with the letter, and devoted herself to writing humorous verses. She was half way through the second poem when Mary Ann trudged up the stairs to say that a gentleman wished to see her. "Leastways, he asked for Mr. Field," explained Mary Ann. "But since you're the hon'ry individual so named, it's you he must 'a meant."

"Let me see the card," said Vernon cautiously, and held out her hand. The next minute she was on her feet, gripping Mary Ann's shoulder.

"Mary Ann, did you say a gentleman? Isn't it a lady? Stop and think, Mary Ann."

Mary Ann's respectable British backbone stiffened. "In that case, Miss," she replied "it's the most extraordinary type of female ever in this 'ouse, for it's in breeches and with a mustache."

There was a long silence. "Tell—him," said Vernon at last, gulping over the pronoun, "that I will be down very soon."

When she descended the stairs, Vernon Field did not look like a rising young writer whose stories had been accepted by some of the best magazines. Instead, her manner suggested a naughty child, anticipating an interview likely to result in her being sent supperless to bed. And the young man in the parlor who rose at her entrance looked anything but a successful illustrator. He was flushed, awkward, uncomfortable—yet it was he who first found his voice.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I wished to see Mr. Field—Mr. Vernon Hamilton Field. Perhaps," he added hopefully, "you are his sister."

Vernon sat down. She did it hastily, for her knees were giving way. "No," she replied, frankly, "I'm not his sister. I'm he!"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Eskine, explosively.

"I mean I'm she. I'm Vernon Hamilton Field—the only one there is."

"And I," said the caller, "am Leslie Eskine."

They looked at each other, and the explanations and apologies trembling on the lips of each were never spoken. Vernon gave way to hysterical laughter and Eskine chimed in. And when they wiped their moist eyes and regained breath for serious speech all was understood and all was forgiven.

"We were both wrong," Eskine said, when he bade her good-by several hours later. "We were both wrong, but this may be one of the rare cases when two wrongs make a right. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what you mean," Vernon answered. But her eyes, dropping before his and alluring in their very shyness, told a different story.