

## ST. TAMMANY FARMER.

Covington, June 14, 1879.

### THE MYSTERIOUS BOX.

[Saturday Night.]

"You are such a cowardly little puss, Fanny," said my husband.

"I know it," said I, deprecatingly.

"But, my dear love, where is the sense of jumping at a mouse, and shrinking at a spider?" reasoned Ferdinand.

"I—I don't know," admitted I. "But, really and truly, Ferdinand, I can't help it."

He stood there, so tall and muscular, and majestic, looking down upon me with a sort of caressing pity.

"A woman should always possess within herself the reserve force necessary to meet any special emergency," said Ferdinand.

"Yes," assented I, feebly; "I suppose she should."

"But what would you do, Midget in an emergency?"

"I should call you," responded I, promptly; "or I should get under the bed."

Ferdinand looked at me with a visage of despair.

"Fanny," said he, "you are perfectly incorrigible."

"I'm afraid I am," sighed I. "But you know, dear, it takes all sorts of people to make a world; and I'm one of the small fry—not a great big, courageous Hercules, like you."

And so Ferdinand left off arguing with me. He always did when we arrived at a certain point in the chain of logic. And he sat down to read the paper, while I crept off into the back room to sort over Berlin wools, and cry a quiet little tear or two by myself, because Ferdinand thought me such an inefficient mite of a thing.

We lived all alone in a little rose-thatched cottage, with a patch of primeval forest rising up in the rear, and lovely sylvan view of wood and valley, and rolling pasture-land, in front.

I had found it a little lonesome just at first, for Ferdinand had married me out of a boarding-school, and it took time for me to become accustomed to these grand Western solitudes. But I loved him very dearly, and I was secretly proud of being called "the doctor's wife," eighteen-year-old child that I was.

As I was comparing two shades of brown zephyr, Gretchen, the maid, knocked at the door.

"Would madam allow her to go home for just that afternoon? Max Demmerlein, from her own Bavarian district, was on a visit to her brother Karl, and it would be so fine to hear from home. Would madam allow her to go, after the supper dishes were cleared away? And she would be sure to return in the morning before madam was up."

I looked sympathetically at the girl.

"Is he your lover, Gretchen?" said I.

"No, madam; but—that is to say—"

"That is to say he may be," in-

terrupted I. "Well, Gretchen, you may go; but be sure you return tomorrow morning in time to get breakfast."

Gretchen protested that she would be as punctual as the dawn, and trudged away to hurry up the supper dishes. She had hardly gone when a horseman rode up to the door.

Was Dr. Bliss at home? He was wanted instantly at the saw-mill, ten miles or so beyond. There had been an accident, and a surgeon's skill was required, without delay.

Ferdinand looked dubiously at me.

"Oh, do hurry, Ferdinand!" said I, turning a little pail at the idea of the dreadful accident. "Don't stop a minute! The poor man may be dying!"

"But I don't like to leave you alone, Frances. The maid is gone, and—"

"Oh, never mind me, Ferdinand. You won't be gone long."

But still he hesitated.

"If the light wagon was not broken," said he, "I would take you with me. As it is, I must go on horseback. Now, Fanny, mind you lock the door and fasten the windows well, and I shall not be longer than I can help."

So my husband rode away, and I sat down in the lamplight, to my worsted work, trying to feel as brave as a lion.

After all, what danger was there? We had no burglars in the neighborhood that I knew of, and nothing to tempt them in the house, always excepting that old-fashioned tea-service of solid silver, that aunt Hetty had just bequeathed me, and that had arrived by express three days before. It was very rich and elaborate—a great deal too much so for me to use in my humble style of house-keeping. But, then, it was a family relic, and I felt proud of it in my secret heart.

Danger! I smiled within myself at the idea; and yet I found myself counting the hours before it could be possible for Ferdinand to return.

A knock at the back door. I started as if it had been the roar of a park of artillery.

"How foolish you are, Fanny Bliss!" savagely apostrophizing myself, "to jump so at a simple call for the doctor! I'm ashamed of you."

So I went to the door, assuming a valor which I was very far from feeling.

"Doctor in?" demanded a gruff voice.

And in the starlight I could perceive a wagon drawn up in the road opposite our front door.

"No," I answered, "but he will be soon."

"How soon?"

"I don't know exactly," said I, but—

"Oh, it don't matter," said the man. "It's a box for him, by express, from the medical hospital at Milwaukee—charges paid. And I'll just set it inside the door, ma'am, by your leave."

As I held the lamp for them to do so, I saw that it was a long and narrow box, of unpainted pine; and all of a sudden it flashed upon my mind that it was a subject for dis-

section. I had read and heard of such things being brought clandestinely into doctors' houses, and my heart stood still at the idea. A corpse—and alone in the house with me!

The men had left it in the hall, placed so that I could not close the door opening into the sitting-room. There was no fire in the kitchen, and the chill of the late autumn evening rendered one necessary; so that I found myself cut off from a retreat thither, and I could not reach the stairway that led to my own chamber without stepping directly over the grisly package.

With a shudder I sat down before the blaze, staring into the hot coals, and trying to divert my thoughts from the mysterious box. But all that I could do would not banish the consciousness that I was not alone. I pictured to myself again and again, in a growing agony of terror, the cadaverous face beneath the strip of pine cover—the rigid limbs, the awful glare of the glassy eyes. And—

At that instant I chanced to glance up in the direction of an oval mirror that hung directly over the mantel, and, as true as I live, I saw the box-lid softly lifted the mere fraction of an inch.

An electric thrill ran through me. I grew hot and cold in a single second, as the whole truth burst on my mind.

There was no dead corpse in that box, but a living enemy. Gretchen's departure, my husband's sumptuous, the silver tea-service—all blended themselves together in my mind, and, for an instant, I felt myself at the mercy of the ruffian who lay yonder, stealthily biding his time.

For a moment I sat quite still. Then I rose quietly up, and without any vestige of unseemly hurry, moved leisurely across the room to a cupboard, where lay a hammer and a box of heavy nails, with which Ferdinand had been mending a shelf that very afternoon; and returning with the same slow movement, I quietly bent over the mysterious box and hastened to sufficiently secure the lid down with a nail and two or three nervous, quick blows. Nail after nail I drove resolutely in, taking care to keep my wrought-iron pickets close enough to the edge to bury themselves in the side board and do no harm to any glass, china, or other article which might be packed within.

At first there was a sound like a muffled exclamation from within, and then all was silence.

"If I have hurt him," said I to myself, "it serves him right. If he suffocates to death, the loss to the community will be small."

I locked and bolted the doors with redoubled care. I dressed up an umbrella in Ferdinand's Sunday hat and coat, and set where its blurred reflection should cast a shadow not unlike that of a man, on the white window blind. And then I stirred the fire and trimmed the lamp, and sat there, keeping horrible vigil, until Ferdinand should return.

He came at last, at eleven o'clock, tired and disgusted.

There had been no accident at the saw-mill, he said, as he unbuttoned his coat, after leading Major around to the stable.

"I know it," said I.

"What do you mean, Fanny?" said he, looking quickly at me. And then I told him all.

It proved afterward to be a very neatly-planned "job."

The gentleman in the pine box, Pierce Standley by name, a well-known border-rough, was to have possessed himself of my silver, after I was snug asleep, while his two hopeful companions "cracked" the next house, where a few Government bonds were suspected to have been concealed by an old man.

He was not hurt, but only thoroughly frightened, by my determined operations; and as for stifling him, I need not have been afraid of that.

Ample ventilation had been secured, by gimlet-holes bored in the side of the box, while the lid had originally been so lightly fastened down that a very slight effort of strength on the part of its occupant could have pried it up, until my hammer and nails settled the business effectually.

Standley was lodged in the town jail, whence, being recognized as the hero of several notorious burglaries, he was speedily promoted to State Prison for a term of twenty years.

It is needless to add that poor Gretchen came back early the next morning, tired, footsore and bitterly disappointed.

Max Demmerlein was still in Bavaria, and likely to remain there, for anything Gretchen knew.

"Fanny," said Ferdinand, looking admiringly at me, "you have proved yourself a heroine. Were you not afraid, little one?"

"Not half as much as if a rat had jumped at me," said I, smiling.

And I don't really think that I was. But Ferdinand never alluded any more to my lacking "the reserve force necessary to meet any special emergency!"

"This," says the *City Item*, "is the highly intelligent species of conversation which high-toned public people carry on during business hours, right in the middle of a street crossing:

"Hello?"

"Hello!"

"Why, you're quite a stranger!"

"Ah? What's the news?"

"Oh, nothing. What's the news with you?"

"Oh, nothing special. How's business?"

"Oh, so so. How's things with you?"

"Just so so."

"Well, fine weather, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir—splendid."

"Well, so long!"

"So long."

Egyptian mummies are ground up into paint. They are used for this purpose because the asphaltum with which they are impregnated is of a quality superior to that which can elsewhere be procured. They produce a peculiar brownish tint, highly prized by the best artists.

Junk dealers are buy metalists.

**CONTROLLING VICIOUS HORSES.**—A new and very simple method of training vicious horses was exhibited in West Philadelphia recently, and the manner in which some of the wildest horses were subdued is astonishing. The first trial was that of a kicking or "bucking" mare, which, her owner said, had allowed no rider on her back for a period of at least five years. She became gentle in about as many minutes, and allowed herself to be ridden about without a sign of her former wildness. The means by which the result was accomplished consisted of a piece of light rope, which was passed around the front jaw of the mare, just above the upper teeth, crossed in her mouth and thence secured back of her neck. It was claimed that no horse would kick or jump when thus secured, and that a "bucking" horse, after receiving the treatment a few times, will abandon his vicious way forever. A very simple method was also shown by which a kicking horse could be shod. It consisted in connecting the animal's head and tail, by means of a rope fastened to the tail and then to the bit, and drawn tightly enough to incline the horse's head to one side. This, it is claimed, makes it absolutely impossible for the horse to kick on the same side with the rope. At the same exhibition a horse which for many years had to be bound to the ground to be shod, suffered the blacksmith to operate on him without attempting to kick, while secured in the manner above described.

**WELL RECOMMENDED.**—A gentleman once advertised for a boy to assist him in his office, and nearly fifty applied for the place. Out of the whole number, he in a short time chose one.

"I should like to know," said a friend, "on what ground you selected the boy? He had not a single recommendation."

"You are mistaken," said the gentleman; "he had a great many. He wiped his feet when he came in, and closed the door after him, showing that he was orderly and tidy. He gave up his seat instantly to that lame old man, showing that he was kind and thoughtful. He took off his cap when he came in, and answered my questions promptly and respectfully, showing that he was polite. He lifted up the book which I had purposely laid on the floor, and placed it on the table, while all the rest stepped over it, or thrust it aside, showing that he was careful. And he waited quietly for his turn, instead of pushing the others away, showing that he was modest. When I talked with him, I noticed that his clothes were carefully brushed, his hair in nice order, and his teeth as white as milk. When he wrote his name, I observed that his finger-nails were clean, instead of being tipped with jet, like the handsome little fellow in the blue jacket. Don't you call these letters of recommendation? I do; and what I can learn about the boy by using my eyes for ten minutes, is worth more than all the fine letters he can bring me."

A cool house is half a ton of ice.