

A MYSTERY

It Was Explained With a Happy Denouement

By F. A. MITCHEL

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I prefer the autumn for automobil- ing. The country is then beautiful, and I am comparatively free from the dust of other autos. In these rides I love to commune with nature and usually go alone.

One October I was riding through the beautiful hills of Vermont when evening came upon me in a thinly settled region, and I encountered a break-down at the same time. I couldn't, like Joshua, turn the sun back in his course, and I saw at a glance that I couldn't repair the break in my auto. Fortunately near me was a house. It was a queer looking structure built of brick and hexagonal in form. Leaving my auto beside the road where it was stalled, with a light before and behind, I went to the house resolved if admitted to spend the night there. There was not much encouragement of a welcome for me since it was now quite dark and not a light was to be seen at a single window.

On reaching the premises I went to the front door and beat on it with the old fashioned brass lion's head knocker. I failed to rouse any one. Then I went around the house, looking for a possible entrance. I found one through a window the sash of which had been left unlocked. Entering, I struck a match and saw that I was in a house furnished in colonial style. Not a bed or bureau could have been less than a hundred years old. It was evidently the home when occupied of refined and educated people.

Going upstairs, I found a bedroom that suited me, with a four post bedstead and a broad open fireplace. A wood box stood beside the latter, and I soon had had a dozen logs burning brightly. Then, returning to my auto, I took my lunch basket, which I always carried in case of necessity, containing both meat and drink, and returned. There were lamps in the house and dishes, but no eatables. I took of the dishes what I needed, went upstairs, pulled a small table to the fire and ate my supper, washing it down with a pint of wine.

I had been riding in the wind all day and was very sleepy. Instead of getting into the bed, on which there was what was required for comfort except sheets and pillowcases, I fell asleep in my chair. I don't know how long I slept, but when I awoke the fire gave out only the glow of coals. Remembering that I was alone in a deserted house, I instinctively looked about me to make sure that I was perfectly safe. On a wooden partition separating the room from another hung an unframed print, the head and shoulders of a young girl, life size. There was something about the eyes that arrested my attention. By the imperfect light they seemed strange. In fact, they looked like human eyes inserted in a paper picture. I am not superstitious or nervous, but the uncanny effect startled me. Throwing some light wood on the fire, I started a blaze, but when it came and I looked again at the picture the eyes were merely printed.

I got up from my seat, went to them and, seeing that they were paper, threw off my outer garments, lay down on the bed and went to sleep.

The next morning I was awakened by hearing a sound as though something had been set down outside my door. Remembering the eyes on the picture, I was somewhat curious at any happening. Getting up, I went to the door, opened it, and there at my feet was a pitcher of hot water.

My mind went back at once to the fairy tales of my boyhood. I was surely in the house of a magician, and I hoped that the "princess" was there too. Performing my ablutions, I put on my clothes and, opening the door, went downstairs. The first room I struck was the dining room, and what was my astonishment to find the table set for breakfast, with both plates.

"Hello, fairy!" I called jocularly—that is, I tried to call jocularly, but failed, and when the wall gave back no sound but that of my own voice I confess I felt a very uncanny sensation. Had I suffered some sudden brain trouble?

I was rattled. The eyes I had seen the night before, the pitcher of hot water, the breakfast table set with dishes only—had completely upset me. I determined to explore the house and bolted right into the kitchen. I found no one, but a fire was lighted in the stove, and on it coffee was spouting up in a percolator. I went into all the other rooms on the ground floor and, finding no one, mounted the stairs to explore the upper stories. There was no one in any room. In the garret I found a locked door and couldn't effect an entrance, but it seemed to me that it was a storeroom. I returned to the room I had slept in. My heart was beating like a kettle drum. I peeped and tried to laugh at the oddity of the situation, but it was no use. I sat down in the chair in which I had slept the night before and tried to reassure myself that I was mentally sound. I don't remember how long I was in my room—perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes—when I heard a tap at the door and a sweet voice say: "Breakfast is ready."

In 1898 the total number of railroad employes in this country was 874,558. Last year the total was 1,451,000.

Central Vermont train 3, the New England States Limited, was two hours and 13 minutes late into Montpelier Junction Monday night because of the derailment of part of a freight train at Sharon. The accident happened a short time after the mail train north bound had passed Sharon.

I made a dash for the door, opened it and looked—anywhere, everywhere. Not a sign of life!

But the odor of coffee, fresh made toast and broiled meat reassured me. I went down again into the dining room, and there on the breakfast table were beefsteak, fried potatoes, eggs—in short, a fine breakfast. I looked into the kitchen; there was no one there. I sat down to the table, poured out a cup of coffee, helped myself to the viands and ate my breakfast.

The first sip of coffee, the first mouthful of food, bracing me, as it did, made me feel more confident that I was not in a condition to be transferred to bedlam, and by the time I had finished my breakfast I felt sure there was some explanation of the mystery on other grounds than that I had lost my reason. "And yet," I argued, "slipping into doubt, 'insane' persons believe themselves of perfectly sound mind."

I arose from the table, went into a sitting room in the front of the house and looked out through a window. There was my auto standing beside the road just as I had left it the night before. The morning was bright, and I would have liked to lay a plan for its mending and a possible getting away, but would not do so on any account before having solved the mystery. I sat down in the sunshine, lit a cigar and began to plan—not the repairing of my auto, but a method of finding out whence came the attention I was receiving in this apparently unoccupied house.

I finally concluded that the only way to draw out the mysterious somebody who was ministering to my wants was to entrap him or her into a fancied security. I resolved to pretend to sleep. Taking up a book I found on a table, I began to read, nodding and starting up alternately till finally, as if overpowered by slumber, I began to breathe heavily and then to snore.

It wasn't long before I heard whisperings in the hall without. Then after a dead silence between my partly closed eyelids I saw a face peering through the doorway, which was but half open. It was the face of a girl. It was withdrawn, and the face of another girl appeared. Three of them in succession surveyed me with evident interest and satisfaction, to say nothing of admiration.

"Oh!" I exclaimed mentally. "There's mischief in the wind. Trust a girl for deviltry and three girls for three times as much of it as one. I have evidently fallen into the toils of a bevy of them, and they are having great fun at my expense."

I didn't bother myself as to how these girls came to be there. I contented myself with waiting and watching through my half closed eyes. A door behind me was opened, and presently I felt a tickling on the back of my neck. I knew at once that one of these girls was teasing me with a feather. I made a frantic grasp for what was intended for a bug, but snored on. The bug lighted on my cheek—another frantic clutch and another, my efforts to catch the insect becoming more and more ludicrous. At last I heard smothered laughter.

It is a law of nature that the more successful we are the more venturesome we become. Women who are most timid in beginning to take risks eventually become the most reckless plungers. Being young and fond of adventure, I was delighted with the turn the affair had taken. The more venturesome the girls the sounder I slept, the louder I snored. Then a girl tiptoed into the room and when I moved scurried out. Another, emboldened by the success of the first, did the same thing. Then I heard a whispering, catching but a few words—"Dare you to kiss him."

"Well, now," I remarked to myself, "this is getting interesting." And I snored loud enough to wake the dead.

Then one of the girls—wasn't she pretty, though!—stole into the room, every fiber under quick control, the spirit of daredevil in her eyes, advanced, retreated, advanced again. I never slept so quietly in my life, though my heart was beating like a triphammer. Then she tiptoed around beside me, bent over me, straightened up, bent again, lowered her face to mine and lightly touched my lips with hers.

There was a frightful shriek as I unfolded her tightly within my two arms and a whole chorus from those without. I rained kisses on her cheeks and on her lips. "Thanks for the night's lodging," I said, giving her a smack on her right cheek. "And this is for the hot water at my room, this for the breakfast." And so I expressed my gratitude for everything I had received and many things I hadn't received.

Well, the climax had come and passed. Every one came forward, and the oldest girl gave me an explanation. The house belonged to the father of one of them, who had inherited it from his great-grandfather and always kept it exactly as he had received it. In summer it was used by the family for a country residence. The night of my arrival the daughter of the owner had brought a party of her girl friends with provisions for spending the weekend. They had found signs of some one within and finally ventured inside themselves, surveying me through the eyes of the picture which had been turned into peepholes for a former purpose. Then it had occurred to them to have their amusement in mystifying me.

Some young men—and a chaperon of course—were expected during the day, and I was invited to make one of the party. I accepted and had the time of my life. I have since been there often and an extravagantly fond of the place. There is good reason for this. I met my wife there, gave her my first kiss there, courted her there and married her in the very room in which I kissed her.

What Impressed Her.

"What impressed you in the sermon?"

"The way they brought the head of the prophet before the king on a salver."

"That is impressive."

"Yes, they trained servants properly in those days. Now, mine, when they

September 7, 1911, will be the 150 anniversary of the founding of the town of Rutland, when some public celebration will probably be held to commemorate the event.

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THE REPUBLICAN, Springfield, Mass.

WHEN TO FEED POULTRY FOOD

There is a prevailing notion with a certain class of poultrymen that it doesn't pay to force laying fowls during the warm summer months—that they will get along very well with ordinary food and what they can pick up about the yards. That this opinion is not shared by the most progressive poultrymen is shown by the fact that not long ago the manufacturers of "Page's Perfected Poultry Food" inquired of some of the prominent poultry breeders of New England as to what they considered the best time in which to feed this food. D. J. Lambert of Apponag, R. I., who is famous as a breeder of high class poultry and one of the best known in New England, answered as follows: "We feed 'Page's Poultry Food' every month in the year."

If you want to know more about this food and the best ways of using it, write C. S. Page, Hyde Park, Vt., for his booklet, "Profitable Poultry." It will be sent free, postpaid, to anyone mentioning this paper.

Hard on the Mars.

Twice as the bus slowly wended its way up the steep Cumberland Gap the door at the rear opened and slammed. At first those inside paid little heed, but the third time they demanded to know why they should be disturbed in this fashion.

"Whist!" cautioned the driver. "Don't spook so loud; she'll overheat us."

"Who?"

"The mare. Spake low! Shure O'm demavin th' crature? Every toime she 'ears th' door close she thinks wan o' 'yes is gettin' down ter walk up th' hill, an' that sort a' raises her sperrits."

—Success Magazine.

Soon.

Tourist (in Venetian hotel)—Boy, call a motorboat!

Boy—Nothing doing in that line, sir; the chauffeurs are on strike.

Tourist—Suffering public! What are they striking for?

Boy—They want all gondolas relegated to the cross-tow canals and the speed limit of motorboats increased to thirty miles an hour.—Sunday Illustrated Magazine.

PANAMA CANAL LOCKS.

Plenty of Leeway For the Largest Ocean Steamers.

We were shown in the central offices at Culebra a most interesting model of a typical completed lock with a small wooden replica of the Olympic going through it. The Olympic is one of the new Titans of the White Star line, 890 feet in length and 92 feet wide, and she will have plenty of leeway in a chamber whose usable dimensions are 1,000 by 110 feet. The Olympic with her 50,000 gross and 45,000 net tonnage represents the largest type of vessel that can seek to cross the isthmus for a long time to come, and there is still a margin left for ships even more monstrous. The lock model clearly illustrates the action of safety gates in checking the flow of water, and a chain from wall to wall in front of the lock chamber in an emergency will suddenly restrain a vessel of 10,000 tons moving at six miles an hour. The further precaution will be taken to forbid vessels from proceeding under their own steam; they are to be taken in tow by electric locomotives.

It is already calculated that the boats ascending the lock stair at Gatun will not require more than one and one-half hours for the transit, and the Pacific locks will detain the vessels for about the same length of time. The average vessel will take from ten to twelve hours to cross the isthmus, and there is no reason why passengers should not proceed by train if they like in advance of the ships and disport themselves as they please at either terminus.

Under ordinary circumstances it will require about fifteen minutes to fill the lock-chamber; if there is particular need for haste the process can be completed in half the time. The available water supply will allow of forty-eight lockages per diem, which might easily mean an average of something like 80,000,000 tons of traffic annually as compared with 21,000,000 tons in the case of the Suez canal and the 40,000,000 tons of the St. Lawrence.

The lock-chambers are filled and emptied by means of an interesting system of lateral culverts which open in the flows and connect with larger culverts in the central and side walls of the lock chamber.—Fullerton L. Waldo in Engineering Magazine.

"Hangar," the Airship Word.

"Hangar," denoting a shed for airships, is taken from the French, who use it also to denote a shed for cars and wagons, especially among farmers. The word is not Celtic. It was much used in the middle ages to denote the service exacted from country peasants in forwarding government contributions. We first hear the word in the fifth century before Christ, in Aeschylus, Herodotus and Xenophon. They got the word from Persia, where it denoted the king's courier. This word "hangar," whether originally really meaning a messenger or a burden, should not be confounded with the term "angel," which is Greek, while "hangar" is Persian. English dictionaries will throw light upon the subject in the article "angariation." Few words have shown greater persistence than this Persian postal term.—Letter in Boston Transcript.

The Heroes of Sedan.

A monument in commemoration of the heroic charge of the French cavalry on Sept. 1, 1870, at Sedan has been unveiled at Floing. Floing is two kilometers from Sedan. The monument, the work of the sculptor Guillaume, consists of a colossal statue, symbolizing France giving the military salute, while she lowers toward recumbent figures at her feet the flag for which they shed their blood. A bas-relief of Floing stone represents the famous cavalry charge, which provoked the historic eulogy of King William as he witnessed the heroism of the French soldiers, "Ah, les braves gens!" The structure, more than thirty feet in height, is described as being singularly impressive. Many survivors of the war crossed the frontier from Alsace and from Lorraine to attend the ceremony.

Mosque of St. Sophia May Collapse.

Under the heading "The Doomed Hagia Sophia" the Ikdum of Constantinople says that the great mosque, with its mighty dome, is in peril and may collapse. "Earthquakes have shaken its walls, and repairs have been made which now appear to have been imperfect, hence the lamentable condition," adds the Ikdum. Its pessimistic statement is made on the authority of Marangali, an architect appointed by the Turkish government to "make exhaustive examinations and give a detailed report."

Pistol Toting in Paris.

An ingenious idea has been put forward for the solution of the revolver difficulty in Paris. The recent deeds and misdeeds of the Apaches have caused such an outcry there that citizens have been clamoring for the general right to carry firearms in self-defense. A suggestion which has been made is that the government reserve to itself the monopoly of the sale of firearms in France and that each office for their sale have a list of people to whom firearms are not to be sold.

Fastest Motorboat.

The world's official record for speed on water was broken at the recent motorboat races at Monaco by the Duke of Westminster's powerful racer Ursula. This wonderful racing craft made an average speed of forty-three miles an hour over a course about four miles in length. She is fifty feet long, and her power plant consists of two 400 horsepower engines, giving her a horsepower of 800.—London Mail.

All temperature records for December in Augusta, Ga., were broken last week Friday, when the mercury dropped to 25 above zero. Sandy Stuart, an aged negro, was found frozen to death in the street.

"I understand, Mr. Reuben," said the visitor, "that your son is devoted to the turf?"

"Yes, I reckon he is," said the old man. "Jabez kin lay down on the grass for half hours 'bout makin' no complaint."—Harper's Weekly.

ON THE JOURNEY

Amy's Experience in a Berth and What Followed.

By CICELY ALLEN.

"I am very sorry it cannot be arranged," said the young man, with a deprecatory wave of his hand, "but—"

"All the latest popular novels! That chance to get your reading matter! No books sold on train after it starts!" The newsboy bawled this in Amy Carter's ear, and she lost all the young man said except the words "wait! climb those beastly steps."

Not that she cared. She was quite able to climb the little ladder to the upper berth. Her lip curled disdainfully.

"Oh, it doesn't matter in the least, you know. It was the conductor's idea, I assure you. Only in the south, where I come from, men, as a rule, are more obliging."

She picked up her novel and proceeded to ignore McKean's presence. He looked at her blankly, then flung himself down the sleeper to the smoking compartment. "Well, I do think she's a bit harsh!" He pulled out a paper and tried to forget the score in the eyes but recently lifted to meet his.

In the meantime the girl in section 7 stared wrathfully at the letters in her book, which fairly danced before her eyes. "A nice beginning for my first novel! Never wanted to go to Colorado Springs anyhow. I had much better remain at Bar Harbor than to let the Carters inveigle me to coming west."

With this final reflection she commenced to read in earnest, but somehow her mind went back to the very disagreeable young man who had disregarded the sleeping car conductor's request that he yield the lower berth to the young woman, whose Pullman ticket had been duplicated by a checkless employee in an uptown office. She could not forget the real reason for his eyes nor the nervous, embarrassed way in which he had smoothed his hair while he was offering his biting explanation. She could not reconcile this, however, with the fact that he had declined to climb the little steps in her stead. It was most annoying; she argued, that she could not forget a certain fascination which his long, firm hand had held for her and the hair he had smoothed.

She could imagine that he had spent hours trying to brush out a comb in his tendency to crisp curls. She was very glad there was something that could defeat him, if it was nothing more than curls, and after deciding that she was more content.

She did not see him again until she entered the diner at dusk. The only place left for her was a single seat at a table meant for four. The three passengers already seated were men, talking business in rather loud tones. Amy hesitated. A figure at the table opposite rose suddenly. The very disagreeable young man who had sent her to the upper berth was standing beside her.

"Take my place," he said quickly, "and I will go over there with the men." He had been occupying a seat at one of the small tables, and a gray haired woman was sitting opposite him.

Amy saw all this at a glance and with a surprised uplifting of her eyebrows and a mechanical "Thank you" accepted the seat. The young man had not yet been served, and she realized that the change had not embarrassed him in the least.

"Quite willing to do things that do not incommode him," she thought scornfully.

The young man did not presume upon the receipt of his courtesy, but immediately after dinner he came over to the smoking compartment and Amy early ordered the porter to make up her berth. Once tucked snugly away, she forgot her grievance. The steady clunk-clunk of the wheels was a singular lullaby to which she soon yielded.

It seemed as if she had not been asleep more than three minutes when she awoke to the most horrible noises that she had ever heard. What had happened? Had the train run into a circus or a jungle of wild beasts? No; the train was still moving. Its unremitting clunk-clunk could be heard at intervals between the awful sounds which now wassalled her ears. If it were not wild beasts, then maybe some one around her was dying.

This pretty, carefully reared, ever protected southern girl had never seen any one die, and in her ignorance of this and various other matters she was working herself up into a fine frenzy. A particularly deep and agonized groan was followed by a sound that was a cross between a penny whistle and a sob. She could stand the suspense no longer. She pushed the fly button and, carefully arranging the curtains, struck out her head to meet the look of inquiry in the porter's black face. Up and down the car she gave a hasty glance. Apparently no one else realized the tragedy that was going on so close at hand, for no other curtains were swaying, no other heads were thrust out.

"Sum'n you want, miss?"

"Why—why, don't you hear that dreadful noise?" she said. "I think some one in the berth next to me is dying."

In the dim light she could see the dark's teeth gleam ivory white in a grin that reached from ear to ear.

"It's just the gentlemen in the lower berth, miss, snoring. I will wake 'em up. Soon as he rolls over he'll stop."

Amy jerked in her head as if the porter had struck her. She could feel him switch aside the curtains below her. Two masculine voices were wuffed toward her, then the sound of a deep grunt that was decidedly masculine—and silence.

Up in her eyrie Amy lay, still flushing hotly with mortification. She knew that porter would tell everybody on the train next morning. She wished she could change cars. Then suddenly from the berth below the hated sound rose again. Evidently there was no respite from this infliction, and, oddly enough, she felt herself pitying the man who was responsible for it. It was really a disease, she decided, and he was so young too!

The next morning she met him face to face in the dining car. Her cheeks were flooded with crimson. She knew by the quizzical light in his eyes that he had heard of her mistake, and undoubtedly every one on the car knew it by this time and would consider it a fine joke.

She ate her breakfast in a resentful humor. She felt reckless and miserable, and it may have been this mood which caused her to sway uncertainly as she crossed from the diner back to the sleeper. She reached out a hand to steady herself against the side of the vestibule. Suddenly it seemed to her as if a sharp, red-hot iron had been thrust into her finger tip and run up to her shoulder. She tried to draw away her hand as a child does from a hot stove, but something held it tight, and then she awoke to the truth. The train had been swinging around a curve, and the iron rails, or folds, of the vestibule, left uncovered by a careless employee, had opened just far enough to admit her finger and then had closed upon it again. She was held as in a vise, and her calls for assistance could not be heard above the roar of the train. And so it happened that the "hateful young man" came upon her, white lipped and fainting. When they had tried the hand loose he carried her unconscious figure into the vacant drawing room. The conductor came hurrying up, greatly perturbed over the accident, which meant a damage suit for the company. He turned to the porter.

"Is anything through the train and find out whether there is a physician on board."

The young man spoke sharply. "I am a physician. Porter, bring me that long, narrow black bag from my berth."

And so it happened when Amy woke up it was to find the hateful young man deftly bandaging her injured hand. The drawing room was placed at her disposal by the anxious conductor, and the entire train force was on hand for her. The unconscious vestibule meant that some employee's head would fall into the basket.

Toward noon, in spite of the terrific pain in her crushed finger, Amy commenced to feel drowsy, thanks to the mild narcotic which Dr. McKean had administered. He plumped up the pillows for her, and she murmured drowsily, "I didn't sleep very well last night."

McKean bit his lip. "I was afraid you wouldn't. That was the worst part of my having to put Mr. Carter in the berth with you, but I couldn't get him another lower in the car, and he stubbornly refused to buy up a drawing room."

Amy felt suddenly wide awake. "Mr. Carter? Why, didn't you?"

"Lord, no! You didn't think I was rubbing the roof of my berth, did you? Mr. Carter has been at a sanitarium just east of Harrisburg. He is a patient of my father's, and his people asked me to pick him up and bring him on to Colorado Springs, where I am staying for a week or so. That's what I was trying to tell you last night."

A sudden light dawned on Amy. "Oh, it's all the fault of that newsboy! I am going to the Carters myself. They're giving a house party."

"Yes, I know," said McKean. "I saw your name on your luggage. But now you're going to sleep, and if you don't mind I shall sit here beside you and see you are not rocked off when we make a fast run."

Amy dropped her head weakly among the folds of her blanket. "No, I don't mind. I will be only too glad to have—go—stay." Suddenly she raised her heavy eyelids. "But promise me you will never tell what I said to the porter last night."

Dr. McKean's eyes twinkled. "I promise on my honor."

Where He Snored.

A statesman who was defeated for office tells a good story on himself. "I was co-opture," he says, "before the primary; that I would just trim my opponent good and plenty. I didn't hesitate to say so, either. I was licked good and proper, and what happened to me is told of a certain chipmunk competitor of his hole and getting on a vantage point, where he frequently reiterated this bombastic declaration: 'I can lick any bird in the forest! I can lick any bird in the forest!' A big and just when the latter was a little more bombastic than ever the hawk remade 'a swoop and a swipe at him.' There was a scuffle for a second, and the hawk came up with several souvenirs from the chipmunk's back. The latter shot into his hole. Some time later he emerged, warily peering around. 'Did you lick him?' asked the sparrow. 'No, I didn't lick him.' He plied the chipmunk, and then proudly: 'But I escaped with my life!'—Kansas City Journal.

Wondrous in the strength of cheerfulness.—Thomas Carlyle.

"F VE HUNDRED"

Rules and Schedules

10c Dozen

THE ELM TREE PRESS

Don't fail to investigate closely the antecedents of any strange Santa Claus that turn up anywhere in your household after midnight. There are several impostors about impersonating the good old chap who are entirely unauthorized to represent him and who have no standing whatsoever in the Yuletide union. If they stir your heart to action give them what you have for them quickly and without stint lest, actuated by the spirit of the hour, they get in their gifts first.—Pack.

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