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A Gift of Flowers

That Were Thrown Out of a Window

By F. A. MITCHEL

Being invited to spend the week end with my friend Mary Morrison at her cottage by the sea. I was about starting from the house when I received a telegram, as follows:

"Tiny will meet you at the station. Bring her home."

I had heard Mary speak of Tiny Archibald, who rejoiced in the more euphonious name of Gwendolin, but whose baby nickname had stuck to her through childhood and youth. I had never seen her, but had been told that she was a very attractive girl. But how was I to recognize her? Mary had not told me that she would carry her handkerchief in her left hand or that she would wear a sprig of geranium in her belt. Doubtless she had spoken of Miss Archibald to me so often that she supposed I had met her cousin.

I went to the station expecting to find a young lady on the lookout for some one she didn't know and in order to prepare for a little attention bought some violets, which I carried in my hand. I had no sooner entered the waiting room than I noticed an attractive looking woman walking back and forth, staring at every man she passed. I was sure she was the person I was to meet, so I walked up to her, lifted my hat politely and was about to ask her if she was not Miss Archibald when she gave me a meaningful look and said in a quick low voice:

"Not a word till we are on the train."

I confess I was surprised. What could be the necessity for such mystery since I was simply to escort her on a short journey? However, it was she who was making the mystery, not I, and it behooved me to do as she said and find out the cause when she chose to tell me. I relieved her of a satchel she carried and conducted her to a parlor car. When we were seated I politely handed her the violets. The day was hot, and a window was open. What did she do but throw the flowers out on a side track.

Never in my life have I been more astonished at the reception of a gift. The expression on my face betrayed how deeply I felt the insult, and the lady hastened to explain. But the explanation only added to my amazement.

"We are observed," she said; "the violets will give us away."

"Give us away?"

"Yes; Mary knows that you were to carry violets, and she may have let it out."

"Mary knows! She mentioned nothing by which?"

"Hush! The man opposite is listening."

Of all the receptions I ever had from woman this certainly was the most remarkable. Surely there was something missing that would have made all this clear. I have it. Mary has written me a letter that I have not received. In that letter she developed something in which I am expected to take part. The telegram was supplementary.

"I suppose you know where you are to take me?" said my companion in a low voice.

"I do," I replied, retreating within myself and determined to let the story proceed without giving away the fact that the only instructions I had received were to take her to Mary Morrison's seaside residence.

"Will Arthur meet us at the station or somewhere else?"

This was a point blank question that I proposed to parry. "I have not been instructed as to that. Doubtless we shall be advised when we arrive."

"Surely."

"Pleasant," I remarked to myself, "this case with which I satisfy the lady. I wonder if I'll get on as well with the rest of the questions she asks me."

"I don't dare continue this any longer," she said suddenly after looking through the car suspiciously. "I will take another seat."

She did as she said she would do. I didn't mind her mysterious actions up to this point, but now to be deprived of the company on which I had counted was positively annoying. I thought I would give up my part in the play, follow her and ask her what the dickens it all meant. I was rising to do so when she saw me and with knit brows and a commanding look ordered me to remain where I was.

The train stopped at a station at which a number of persons got on. I happened to look at Miss Archibald and noticed that she had pulled a thick veil down over her face. I didn't think very much of this, for the car was full of dust. Not having any one to talk to, I lay back and closed my eyes. A boy selling candles went through the train crying his wares. He ceased to shout at the end of the car where Miss Archibald was sitting, and not long afterward I felt a tap on my shoulder. Looking up, there was the candy boy holding out a pasteboard box to me.

"Don't want any," I said testily.

"Lady at other end of the car sent 'em to you, sir."

I took the box, removed the lid, and there on top of some bonbons lay a folded bit of white paper. Opening it, I read:

"The gentleman in the white vest

and glasses knows me. Should he get out at our station don't leave the car on any account. Go on to the next."

"This beats me," I remarked to myself, reading the note over a second time to make sure I had read it right.

I surveyed the gentleman referred to and noticed him looking over the top of his newspaper at Miss Archibald, as if trying to make out whether or not he knew her.

"Well," I said to myself, "I'm not having the companionship of a young lady, but I'm having a lot to think about. I wonder what he has to do with it all."

But Miss Archibald kept the veil over her face, and there was no show for the man to claim an acquaintance, which I inferred the play that was going on wouldn't admit. I had a notion to go and sit by him and engage him in conversation, with a view to putting him, but on second thought desisted.

Presently, the train slowing up at a station, I saw Tiny glance through the window, give her hand a quick little shake at some one outside, then look meaningfully at me and gather her belongings as if to leave the train. I followed her. She came past where I was sitting and whispered: "It's all right. They are on the platform. Come."

Whether to come or escape from I knew not what by remaining on the train I was uncertain. Curiosity prevailed, and I passed out just behind Tiny. On the platform were a young man and a girl. Tiny and the man greeted each other with a loving though somewhat excited look.

"Where's Fred?" he asked.

"Here." She turned toward me.

"That's not Fred."

"Not Fred?"

"No."

There was a tableau not describable in words.

"Why, he carried the violets," stammered Tiny.

It was time for me to say something, and I did.

"There has been a mistake here. I expected to meet a young lady at the station whom I had never seen, and I carried some violets that I proposed to bestow upon her. This young lady, through a mistake, of course, accosted me, and we got on the train together, when she threw my violets out of the window."

"Oh, heavens!" exclaimed Tiny.

The young lady and the young man smiled.

"Never mind," said the young man. "All's well that ends well. Permit me to explain, sir. You have unintentionally got mixed in an elopement. A friend of mine was to have met my fiancée at the station and escort her to me here. She has missed him, and since you have performed his part thus far I would be pleased to have you finish it by serving as my best man. This is Miss Darton, who is to be bridegroom."

I bowed politely to Miss Darton, who, vainly endeavoring to repress her merriment at the absurd outcome of the affair, returned my salute.

"Come on," said the groom. "We have no time to lose. I have a carriage waiting."

He hurried us off to the carriage, he and his fiancée engaged in too serious a business to be affected by the ludicrous feature of the affair. But Miss Darton was convulsed, and I boiled over with suppressed emotion of a similar kind.

"I wonder who got my girl," I remarked.

Miss Darton exploded at this, and it drew something like a smile to the lips of the groom. The bride refused to see anything to laugh at.

"Perhaps Fred got her," remarked Arthur.

"I trust she didn't throw his violets out of the window," I remarked.

At this the bride to be gave a nervous little laugh and said: "I trust you will pardon me. I was very much rattled."

"Naturally. One doesn't elope every day in the year," I replied.

By this time we had driven to the door of a pretty little church, where we all alighted and entered. We passed down the center aisle to the chancel, where the couple were married. The bride and groom went out together, I following with the bridesmaid. Then we re-entered the carriage and were driven back to the station. A train soon took away the bride and groom, leaving Miss Darton on the platform with me; she intending to go in the same direction as I.

"Who is Mary?" I asked.

"I am Mary. I arranged this elopement." Her merriment returned at the mere mention of the affair.

We boarded the next train, and I parted with her at my station, but not before I had received permission to continue the acquaintance begun in such an unusual manner.

When I reached my proper destination I drove up to Mary Morrison's cottage. She looked at me anxiously and asked:

"Where's Tiny?"

"Married," I replied laconically.

"Come, don't talk that way. Tell me why you haven't brought her."

I told the story and when I had finished was informed that Tiny was a poodle. She had been left in the city, and a maid was to have met me with her at the station.

I met Miss Darton later on—of course I didn't leave her without taking her address—and we enjoyed very much talking over the episode that had occasioned our acquaintance. More marriages occur between groomsmen and bridesmaids than those officiating at any other function. Miss Darton and I happened to make one of these cases. But we didn't elope, and there was no poodle to mix up anyone else on our wedding.



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