

It is Mary Smith.

By
Elizabeth Jordan

The Strange Adventure of a Tired Business Man Who Didn't Believe in Love at First Sight

JOHN SMITH laid down his sister's letter and uttered a rude word. He was devoted to Kittie, but in that moment he would have enjoyed taking her by her pretty shoulders and giving her a good shaking. Why was it that Kittie's sort never realized the value of a fellow's time?

Kittie appeared to think that he, John, was in New York for the sole purpose of entertaining her friends of hers who suddenly decided to spend a few days in the metropolis. Whereas, what he was really here for was to wrest from the reluctant city an annual income which would send his sister comfortably through college, provide her with pretty gowns and silk stockings and matinee tickets, and leave enough to support his brave front as a young and successful capitalist of industry.

To meet their combined expenses and to be a little ahead of the game kept John hustling. Both he and Kittie were natural spenders, and their easeful life before their father died a bankrupt had not given them a training which helped them now. Their strongest emotion, therefore, was over his death was an immense and horrified surprise at the situation of penury in which they found themselves—a surprise their mother shared to such an extent that the shock of it killed her. She died, indeed, with something of the effect of hastening into the next world to ask her husband how it had happened.

The five years following these calamities had been hard years for John, but he had made them as easy as he could for Kittie. Then he had got his real start in the world and so, weary and he picked up Kittie's letter, and reread its last paragraph with a forgiving grin. Kittie could not realize how busy he was. That was Kittie's only fault.

"You will like Mary immensely," Kittie had written. "She's the dearest thing in the world and so pretty, and her name is Smith, you know, so perhaps she's our cousin or something. I won't ask you to meet her at the train, for that might not be convenient." (O, thoughtful little Kittie!) "But she'll go right to the Beresford when she arrives tomorrow. I want you to be at the hotel at 6 and take her somewhere for tea. Then you can make some more plans, for she'll be in town three days. She's going to be bridesmaid next month at the Knapp-Barry wedding. Do be good to her, Jackie, darling. She's one of my dearest friends, and I want you to live up to all I've told her about you."

John's handsome young face wore a reconciled but thoughtful expression as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket. He had worked briskly on his little problem. "Thursday," he was today. At 5:15 it was now half past 4, and he was in his downtown office, at least a good half hour from the Beresford. Kittie's letter had just come to him in the last afternoon mail. She had told him so much time to turn around; but that was Kittie's way. She was like a happy child in her gay assumption that everything and everybody could be shaped to her wishes. John grinned again. He had a business appointment at a quarter to 5, and was late to warn the party of the second part, who was doubtless at that moment in the subway on his way to John's office.

John closed the drawer of his desk with emphasis, took up the last trace of his irritation, left with his stenographer a message intended to calm the irate caller, and hurried to the nearest subway station. He would take the girl at the Beresford to tea at some place where good food and good music were provided, he resolved, and before she left town he would take her to dinner and the theater. That would represent all the time and money he could spend on her, and he would have to give Kittie a gentle hint about sending him any one else for a while.

He entered the lobby of the Beresford at exactly 5 o'clock, and, as if preaching an aloof youth at the hotel desk, asked that his name be telephoned up to Miss Mary Smith. The rather wooden countenance of the youth underneath the common expression that made it almost human. He turned upon young Smith a quick glance that held interest, appraisal, and envy. Then, as a light in a window vanishes when the shade is drawn, his countenance resumed its professional mask. But he answered Smith more fully than he had answered anyone else that day.

"Miss Smith was just here at the desk," he said. "Her train got in an hour late. She can't have gone up in the elevator yet. No—there she is near the second car, with two pages carrying her bags."

John Smith did not catch the last words. He was on his way to the elevator, and as he flew he understood the clerk's expression and the presence of the two pages. He had pictured Mary Smith as a pretty college girl—young, slender, fluffy, rather giggly—the type, in short, of Kittie and most of Kittie's friends. What he saw was a girl so arrestingly lovely that he actually caught his breath at the first glimpse of her.

She was young and slender as he had expected but here all resemblance to his mental vision ended. Her youth and slenderness were the youth and slenderness of a Diana. Her hair and wonderful eyes were so dark as to be almost black. She carried herself with a proud sweet dignity, and with the poise of a woman of the world. She was quietly but exquisitely dressed, every article she wore being designed to set off her amazing

beauty and succeeding admirably in its mission. Her hair was still a little breathless, John faced her.

"Miss Smith?" he asked. She turned, looked at him gravely, and then quite suddenly smiled. The smile made John a trifle dizzy. And this was the girl Kittie had called "so pretty!" Women were like that. They simply could not appreciate one another's beauty, but they would rave over some barbaric Adonis. His reflection was checked by the discovery that Miss Mary Smith was holding out her hand. He took it in a daze with a tremor running through it. Talk of Helen of Troy—And now she was speaking, in a voice that perfectly expressed her personality—a voice softly contralto and musical.

"My train was late, I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

"No—I just got here."

He was still holding her hand. She withdrew it gently. It was clear that she was accustomed to putting dazed young men at their ease. She went on with the graciousness so much older than her years:

"I wonder if you would mind waiting for me a few moments—not more than 15. I'd like to look at my rooms and brush off some dust. But I won't stop to change my gown."

He backed away as she spoke, his eyes on her face.

"You'll find me waiting here in the lobby," he was able to bring out. "Please don't hurry. All my time is yours."

She smiled again, and with a friendly little nod entered the open door of the new waiting elevator.

"Fifteen minutes," she repeated.

Left alone, John stood for a moment, staring at the ascending car that bore her out of his sight. Then, still with that odd, new sense of being temporarily dazed, he went back to the hotel lounge, chose a seat in a remote corner, where he could watch the elevator doors, and let himself simmer, as it were, in a sense of incredible well being.

Perfect though this was, at first it was also vague. The only fact in it was the wonderful and satisfying fact that he was waiting for her. The knowledge was enough. He did not try to analyze it. He merely sat still, smiling rather fatuously. Then, as the moments passed, he realized that his stunned brain had resumed its functions. It was planning, planning feverishly, making a schedule of engagements that, if possible, would cover every waking hour of Miss Mary Smith's visit to New York. She was to be here three days—three entire, glorious days.

Of course he would take her to dinner and the play tonight. Could he call in the morning and take her out to breakfast on the pretext of showing her the world and so pretty, and some unusually interesting restaurant? Probably not, but he'd try it. They would have luncheon together, of course, and in the afternoon he would hire an automobile and take her for a long drive. They would dine together, of course, and then get back late—very late. The following day—Him'm'm, for the following day he had half a dozen important business conferences, which arranged themselves in an impressive row before him, but he would get out of them all, of course. Time enough for that sort of thing when she had left town.

Fully ten minutes passed before he took in what really had happened to him, and he had thought that love, if it ever came to him at all, would be a thing of slow growth, based on knowledge and mental kinship and understanding. Yet, here he was. At 5 o'clock a tired young business man, slightly irritable because somewhat bored, and only half alive, now, at ten minutes past 5, a lover shaken by his first passion, dazed yet thrilled, humble yet triumphant, wretched because she was not here, ecstatic because she was coming, and more inhumanly alive than he had ever been or dreamed of being.

The wonder and splendor of the experience overwhelmed him. He was almost 30, and he had never been in love before. He had about given up hope of ever loving or being loved. He had been too close to a girl who had told him that she would not marry either, and that they two might make a home for each other. That aspiration now seemed a thousand years behind him. The life he had lived alone, he had passed on to another planet. He had come into his heritage as a man.

The elevator door on which his straining eyes were fastened swung back and the girl came forth. There seemed to be others in the car—at least there were vague shadows that probably fancied themselves men and women. As he rose and went to meet her John set his young jaws and resolutely steadied his nerves. What had happened to him was a miracle, but he knew nothing about it. To her he was a stranger whose sole claim to consideration was that he was the brother of her friend. He was her host in a strange city and she was for the time dependent upon his courteous and common sense.

No suspicion of what he felt must reach her. His role was that of Kittie's brother, an agreeable young man pleasantly interested in his sister's friend and normally anxious to make her visit as pleasant as possible. That role would be difficult, but he knew—to carry it out was his only chance of winning the girl. One false move or act, a too-impulsive word, and he would lose her forever. The knowledge restored his poise.

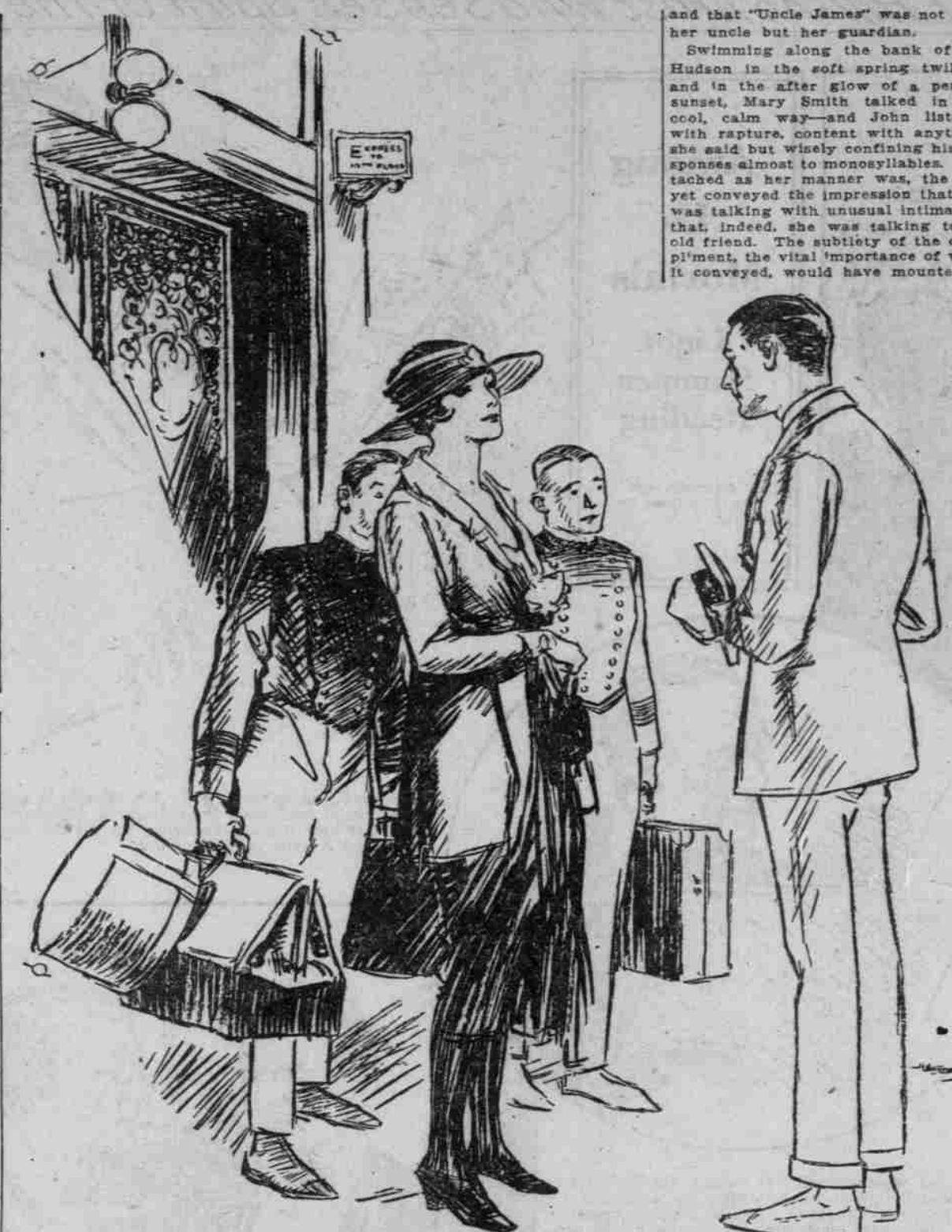
"This is wonderful," he tested as they met. "It's exactly 15 minutes."

"And you expected to wait at least half an hour?"

"I have a sister, you know. At a guess, I should say that I've spent about eight years of my life waiting around for Kittie. Where shall we go?" he asked, as he helped her into a taxicab. "Have you any choice?"

She shook her head.

"No. I didn't even know we were



Hat in hand and still a little breathless, John faced her. "Miss Smith?" he asked.

going out. But it's very nice," she added, with her young graciousness. "The Plaza," he told the driver, and then, as he sat down, turned to stare at her.

"You didn't know?"

"No, I thought you were merely to call. It's very nice of you to take me out, after that dusty journey."

The taxicab had turned into the park, the driver evidently preferring the quiet roads to the traffic congestion of upper Fifth avenue. Mary Smith looked out of the window and drew a deep breath.

"How heavenly the park is," she sighed. "And how I love New York in the spring!"

"I love it all the year 'round," John gazed out at the park with a proudly proprietary air. He felt as if New York were his and as if he were giving it to her. Certainly he would give her as much of it as three days permitted. "I'm sorry the journey was so long," he added, sympathetically.

He longed to be saying all sorts of things—brilliant things, personal things. But the safe course was to be strictly bromide until she knew him better. They talked of trains, then of travel. Inensibly the talk became more personal. When the taxicab stopped at the entrance of the Plaza he had learned that she had been in Paris throughout the previous summer and she knew that he had served his country in the aviation corps.

These experiences engrossed them throughout the tea hour. To an accompaniment of soft music, cheerful voices, toasted muffins and jam they exchanged experiences and gave viewpoints. For this hour they were citizens of the allied lands rather than of one. He took her with him into the deep blue of French and German skies; and it was while he felt higher among the clouds than he had ever been in reality that John Smith received the shot which brought him down to earth.

"I wish I could stay in New York longer," the girl said, wistfully. "There's so much to talk about—and to see," she ended.

The words went to her companion's head, but he held himself steady. "I wish you could, too," he said with an emphasis that made her glance at him in surprise. "But we'll make the most of your three days."

"Three days?" It was her turn to look at him in amazement. "Why, I'm sailing for Cuba tomorrow afternoon. Didn't Uncle James tell you that when he wrote?"

John shook his head. The jolt was so staggering that he could not utter a word, but it left his mental processes unimpaired. Even before she had ceased speaking the whole situation was clear in his mind—clear with an abhorrent clearness. This Mary Smith—therefore, oh, black reflection, she was not his Mary Smith! In a big hotel like the Beresford there might well be half a dozen Mary Smiths and he had drawn the wrong one, though to him she was absolutely the right one.

A "flash in" of Kittie's little college chum sitting in her lonely hotel room waiting for him to appear was regarded with callous indifference, and immediately dismissed. A companion flash of some unknown young man, waiting in the lobby for the Mary Smith whose dark eyes were

this instant regarding him over her tea cup, was surveyed with more indifference and pleasure. But all the time John Smith was thinking faster than he had ever thought before.

His proper course was clear and he

knew it. He should explain the situation to his companion at once, apologize for his unconscious part in the mixup, and now that the tea hour was over, escort her back to her hotel and, if she so elected, how him

self out of her life. It would be for her to decide whether she would or would not continue their acquaintance. He was not sure what that decision would be, but he feared it.

This Miss Mary Smith was not an unconventional person. On the contrary, she was a thoroughly sophisticated and well-bred one with an obvious social background and traditions. Whatever she might decide as to the future, one thing at least was clear. She would not one with him tonight and go to the theater if she discovered that he was a stranger. Yet it was absolutely necessary to his life's happiness that she should do both—that, since she was to leave New York so soon, he must make use of every moment she was here to impress himself upon her.

All's fair in love and war! The old motto swept comfortably into the foreground of his mind. She should not be allowed to discover the mistake that had been made. He made this decision suddenly and irrevocably. Therefore, she must not even be allowed to return to the Beresford. The chump who was to have met her might be waiting in the lobby. Also, he, John, might run across his own little Mary Smith. He must not risk any such contretemps. He leaned toward his companion and addressed her with entire assurance.

"I hope you will like the programme I have arranged for this evening," he said, casually. "We're going to have a spin out in the country for an hour or two. The apple blossoms in Westchester are gorgeous and I want you to see them before it gets dark. Then we'll dine on the terrace of Briarcliff Inn, to show you the wonderful view and we'll get back in time to see Ethel Barrymore in her new play."

The beautiful Miss Smith looked slightly overwhelmed but also, he exultantly realized, greatly tempted. "It's a wonderful programme," she said, hesitatingly, and of course I should love it, but—

"Some head waiters," he announced, "appear to call all diners 'Smith,' just as some men call all waiters 'George.'"

He was quite satisfied with this effort, but the lady's comment wiped the smile from his face.

"But they ought to do much better than 'Smith,' she suggested. 'Don't most men resent being called 'Smith'?' John was under the ice now, cold and unresponsive, but he rallied feebly. "Oh, I don't think so. You see, there are so many—er—distinguished Smiths, and it's a name of such fine traditions—"

He was glad to be interrupted by a waiter, who served another course. Also the interruption gave him time for a saving remembrance.

"Your own name is Smith, you know," he could not help reminding her. "That alone lendsuster to it."

"I know it is Smith," she spoke sadly, ignoring the compliment and with an effect of dwelling on what now appeared to be the flaw in his happy life. "I've always hated it."

She smiled the smile that so enchanted him. "I hope to change it some day."

Under the shock of these simple words John Smith went under the ice again and for a perceptible interval remained there. When he emerged and spoke his voice was unnatural,

and that "Uncle James" was not only her uncle but her guardian.

Swimming along the bank of the Hudson in the soft spring twilight and in the after glow of perfect sunset, Mary Smith talked in her cool, calm way—and John listened with rapture, content with anything she said but wisely confining his responses almost to monosyllables. Detached as her manner was, the girl yet conveyed the impression that she was talking with unusual intimacy—that, indeed, she was talking to an old friend. The subtlety of the compliment, the vital importance of what it conveyed, would have mounted to

"You haven't made any—any arrangement to change it—have you?" She suspended the action of her fork and looked at him with raised eyebrows. Her expression showed surprise and a suggestion of disapproval, but he met her eyes with something in his that touched her.

"Please tell me," he begged. "Are you engaged to be married?" In a desperate attempt to seem normal he caught at the name he had so carefully avoided. "Uncle James didn't tell me you were," he added, with unconscious pathos.

Miss Mary Smith drank half a glass of water. She drank it very slowly, and when she set down the glass there was an odd light in her eyes which had not been there before. But she spoke indifferently.

"There's no reason why I should not answer your question," she said as she resumed her dinner. "I am not engaged to be married."

Her host drew a deep breath and, leaning back in his chair, beamed at her ecstatically. His eyes were almost and almost pathetic, but an unsympathetic nature seemed to lie under Miss Smith's beautiful exterior. She ate her dinner with an expression of detachment, as if her thoughts hardly to have heard his question and almost started when he urgently repeated: "Would you?" He could see her mind return to him as if from a little journey.

"Would I refuse anyone named Smith?" she asked, rather vaguely. "Why, I haven't never thought about it." She smiled again. "Fate isn't as relentless as we think," she said. "I don't believe she would play such a shabby trick on me as to let me fall in love with a man named Smith. You see, I have had the name for 21 years, as it is. I think I have had my share of it."

Her companion again submerged like a submarine. The attention of Miss Smith returned to the elaborate coiffure of her neighbor. Then John came up for air. Another saving reflection occurred to him. The reflection occurred to him as if from a little journey.

"What would you like? What's your favorite name?"

"David."

"That's a fine name," John promptly decided that his new name should be David. "What else?"

"Well, if I were choosing a name from all the world," Miss Smith spoke now with the thoughtfulness due to the importance of the topic. "I think I should choose 'David King.' I don't like middle names," she added. "And I don't like last names of more than one syllable. I think David King is dignified, many name."

John nodded.

"And Mrs. David King will look great on visiting cards," he contributed. "So order yours as soon as you like. That's going to be your future name."

"This is a prophecy," Miss Smith seemed really interested. Smith shook his head.

"No! It's a mere statement of fact." His guest slowly drew on her gloves. "It's a quarter past seven. We must start back to town," she decided.

"All right. But we've got to settle a lot of things we can't discuss at the play. For example, what time shall I call to take you out to breakfast? You mustn't miss the flower market."

"O, thank you very much, but I can't breakfast with you. I'm going to breakfast in my room and shop all morning."

"Great Scott!" The world grew dark before the eyes of young Mr. Smith. "And I shall call at 4! Why, that doesn't leave us any time at all!"

"You might come to lunch with me at the hotel," the lady was plainly relenting. "That is, if you don't mind lunching late—about half after one."

"And you call at 4?" Smith fully repeated. "If that's the best you can do for me, but don't let's lunch at the hotel," he added hurriedly, a sudden vision of Kittie's friend and Miss Smith's unknown escort returning to him. "Meet me at Delmonico's, and we'll stop at the hotel for your baggage on the way to the boat."

"Perhaps that will be better," she conceded. "It's nearer the shops."

Mr. John Smith put in the golden hours of the following morning anxiously waiting for half past one. More than 30 minutes before that time he reached Delmonico's, and having ordered a perfect luncheon, established himself in the lobby to wait for his guest. In the emotional strain of his paring he had forgotten to tell Miss Smith in what room they would meet. Early that morning, however, desiring to hear her voice, he called her up on the pretext of such understanding. He was forced to leave his message with an indifferent clerk. After Smith had already gone out, but might be back soon. Sunk in a big chair and reflecting gloomily upon his disappointment, Mr. Smith was startled by a fresh young voice.

"How do you do, Mr. Smith? This is Kittie's friend, isn't it? I didn't get your telephone message from the clerk till half an hour ago. Then I hurried right up here. It's so kind of you to take so much trouble."

Motionless and with dropped jaw John stood and stared at the figure before him, whose voice had brought him mechanically to his feet. It was a pretty girlish figure and the girl was the fluffy, flapper type he had

originally expected Miss Smith to be. The ass of a clerk had given her his message. And here she was expecting to be entertained and fed and to use up the last hour in which the only Mary Smith on earth could be with him. Words failed John. He stared, speechless, while the round, pretty face of the girl regarding him slowly took on an expression of puzzled confusion.

"Mr. Smith! Mr. John Smith! Mr. John Smith!"

A page was passing, calling his name. Mechanically John responded, mechanically he accepted the note the boy gave him, apologized to little Miss Smith, and opened and read the note.

"Dear Mr. Smith: I can't go on with it! It's too horrid of me! You see, I'm not Kittie's chum at all, though I know her and I am in her class. I had to come down unexpectedly yesterday. The other Mary Smith decided to wait till morning and I was so lonesome—and I knew the whole plan and I was sure Kittie wouldn't mind—and so when you came up and spoke to me in the hotel I took the other Mary's place just for a lark and to see if I could carry it off. I'm so ashamed of myself! I know the real Mary came this morning and I hope you will get in touch with her. Goodbye. I won't apologize. But please forgive me for everything—and especially for teasing you about your name and letting you realize that I wasn't the real Mary. I did that to see what you would do. Mary Smith."

"P.S.—You were wonderful!"

As they took in this remarkable document the eyes of John Smith shone like incandescent lights. The next instant he was addressing the second Mary Smith.

"Miss Smith, are you a good sport?" She looked at him uncertainly.

"Why, I—I hope so," she faltered.

"Well, I'm going to throw myself at your understanding. Something very vital to me has just come up. Will you eat your luncheon here alone—it's all ordered—and then will you let me call at your hotel and take you to dinner and the theater this evening? Then I'll explain everything in detail. Will you do that?"

The second Miss Mary Smith was a good sport. She showed it by her surprised but prompt reply.

"Why, of course, I will."

"Three rousing cheers for you!" John fervently exclaimed. He took her into the dining room, seated her at the table he had reserved for her luncheon, and generously "tipped" the waiter, and then hurried himself into a taxicab.

He was not surprised to learn that Miss Mary Smith was not at the hotel and that her luggage had already been sent to the hotel. He was, however, on the City of Havana when he bribed his way on board. There, in the final hour before its sailing, Mr. John Smith put in the most eloquent and soul satisfying hour of his life. The result of this hour he gave to the second Mary Smith at a dinner that evening as he radiantly faced her across a small table at the Ritz.

"You see," he explained, "I've just become engaged to be married. And under worse conditions a man's engagement day can be rather full and strenuous!"

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Many Nature Mysteries Are Still Unsolved.

CONUNDRUM SET, WHICH MAN WITH ALL HIS LEARNING, CAN'T ANSWER.

NATURE is full of mystery. She sets conundrums which man, with all his learning, is unable to answer satisfactorily.

Crows when at rest on the tree-tops or when foraging in the fields invariably have sentinels out to give warning of danger. Why has Nature gifted these birds in this distinctive way? How do the crows arrange the duties of the sentinels?

When rook-shrikes begin, the first shot will send the whole colony of birds into the air in a panic, but as soon as they reach a height which is beyond the range of the guns, the loud of birds will pause and remain at the same altitude although shot may be spluttering in the trees for an hour. How do they know when they are at a safe altitude?

The most conceited citizen of the bird kingdom is the common turkey cock. He is powerful, arrogant, aggressive, ever seeking a quarrel, but usually the first combatant to run away when a battle really takes place. Why has Nature endowed him with such a strange medley of qualities?

Why is it that the common male barndoor fowl has been singled out by Nature to be a perpetual demonstrator of the art of politeness to the weaker sex? As soon as the cockerel grows a comb and a voice which can crow, he begins to make attention to the opposite sex. He tends them, hunts for them, and declines to eat until they have satisfied their wants. For ages mankind has been killing off cockerels, but the chivalry of the barndoor fowl remains untarnished.

Pigeons have been used and studied for ages, but who can explain by what mysterious sense the homing sets his course? A young bird has been sent away 100 miles and liberated in strange surroundings, and within a few hours has been found safely perched in his own dovecote. How did he find his way home?

Question of Car Replacement.

Scientific American.

As highway transportation develops and passing motor trucks become practically the sole means of road travel, the proportion of first purchasers of cars and trucks in the total of car sales will decrease, and the demand for new cars each year will become more and more nearly equal to the number of cars which drop out of service. For this reason it is becoming increasingly important for the trade to know how many cars will be required for replacement of those withdrawn from service.

Analysis of registration, production, export and import figures over a period of years leads to the conclusion that the average life of the 2,000,000 cars retired from service in the last seven years was about 5.3 years.