

The Girl With the Birthmark

A Curious Experience While Momentarily Unconscious.
By F. A. MITCHEL.

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I was standing on sand and could hear the plash of waves, but could see nothing about me, for I was enveloped in mist. A rocking sensation made me doubt whether I was ashore or on the water. Another singular feature was a faint singing of birds—so faint, indeed, that I doubted whether I heard birds or a ringing in my ears. There were occasional voices about me, having a mellow sound, as if spoken on a quiet day after a fall of snow or on a balmy morning when the air is full of moisture.

While I was wondering where I was and how I happened to be there a girl came out of the mist and stood before me. She seemed as much surprised to see me as I was to see her. Her face was that of a saint—fair complexion, hair and eyes. There was but one blemish—a small red birthmark, shaped like a rose leaf, on her neck. It was rather an imperfection than a blemish.

"Where are we?" I asked.
"I don't know," she replied.
"I hear the sound of waves."
"Then we must be on the seashore."
"And birds singing."
"That would indicate that the beach is lined by woods."

"Wherever we are, we were evidently sent for each other." She lowered her eyes.

"You were certainly sent to be with me. What would become of me alone in this dense mist without the power to find my way out of it? With you I shall be happy even here. You are very lovely."

"You do not say beautiful."
"But you are beautiful."
"No; I can't be that."
"Why?"

"Because of this." She put a finger on the birthmark.
"Do you know," I said after a brief pause, "that I like you so well as you are that I would not have even that changed?"

"How good of you to say that! You say it to make me feel less dissatisfied on account of my defect. You do not mean it."

Suddenly the mist was gone. It did not melt away; it vanished. We were standing upon a beautiful bay. For miles on either hand the beach curved in a semicircle. Back of us the shore rose till it mingled with mountains. The waters of the bay were of different colors. Near us, where it was shallow, it was a pale green, beyond a deep blue and beyond that silver. On this silver an island rested, rising from its base to a height on which the sun shone golden. We stood looking out at the view. I was entranced, and, turning my eyes upon my companion, I saw that she was equally wrapt.

"I feel," I said, "that I must go out on the bosom of that sea."

"There is a boat," she replied, "chained to a stake."

Lowering my eyes to the verge, I saw a skiff rising and falling with the languid swells.

The next scene of which I was cognizant or at least remember now was pulling along under great cliffs that formed the island.

"There is a cave," said my companion, "with a waterway for an entrance."

Turning the boat, I pulled for the cave. The rocky roof over the waterway just grazed our heads as we made the entrance. Inside we found ourselves within a cavern, its roof hung with stalactites. The light coming from the entrance tinged the vaulted roof with ever changing colors. Now it was a blood red, now a pale blue, now sea green, now white.

"It is from the changing of the waters outside," I said. "A changing sky changes the bay, and the changing bay changes the hues in here."

"It is all change," she said sadly. "I wish something in the world were fixed."

I dropped my oars and, seating myself beside her, took her in my arms.

"I wish this would never change," I said, "for I have found my love." I kissed her. She put her arms about me, and it seemed to me that I had thrown off something that had troubled me, some great evil that had overhung me, and I had passed to a consciousness of perfect happiness.

Ah, while supremely happy in this companionship, I felt my love slipping through my arms and saw her floating over the surface of the water toward the mouth of the cavern. At that moment both the water and its rocky dome were a pale blue. They tinged her garments with the same hue. She looked back at me with an expression of indescribable melancholy. I called to her not to leave me, but she floated on, passed out through the mouth of the cavern and was gone.

I seized the oars to follow and, dashing under the low arch that separated me from the outside, in another moment was under the greater vault of the heavens.

All was serene as when we entered the cavern, but my love had vanished. Then came a sensation of being tossed to and fro, up and down, as though I were on a stormy sea. It was merely a consciousness of feeling. There was no communication with the outside world. There were voices in the air. What they said I did not

know. There were also sounds of invisible people passing and the occasional opening and closing of a door.

Next I was lying on a lounge looking out of an open window. The air was clear as crystal. Before me rose a range of snow capped mountains. Over them was a white cloud. But was it a cloud? No. It was a peak far above its fellows, with a strip of cloud beneath it that gave it the appearance of a peak. How high it was! It seemed to mingle with the heavens' blue. I arose and went to the window to get a better view of its summit.

When I leaned out and looked up at it it seemed higher, higher, all the while higher. My brain began to whirl. I returned to my lounge. I was weak and languid.

While I was recovering from my giddiness a door opened and my lost love came into the room. At first she looked anxious, then smiled.

For a moment I was in doubt if it were really she. It did not appear that she was changed, but that I looked at her through different eyes from before. Her figure did not face me, but she was looking at me sideways. I was troubled. I longed for her, she was with me, but I was not sure she was the same person. While I gazed in perplexity she turned, and I saw the birthmark on her neck.

Then she came to me, seemingly wading through water, and took my hand. I drew her down beside me and said reproachfully:

"Why did you leave me?"
"I couldn't help it. It was fate. Everything changes in this world."

It did not occur to me that this was a vague answer. At any rate, I was satisfied with it.

"Are you going away again?" I asked.
"No, not now; some day."

"When will that be?"
"A long, long while from now."

"And will you love me until this separation comes?"
"I will love you always, here and where I go."

"I will go with you. You shall not go without me."

Then hand in hand we were climbing the mountain I had seen from the window. We seemed to be ascending as if buoyed by wings. Eager to reach that cloudlike summit I had seen, we pressed on and on, but whenever I looked up to see if we neared it we were as far below as before. Turning to look back, the houses beneath appeared like ant hills. Then I felt the snow slowly moving beneath me.

"It is an avalanche!" I exclaimed.

We were turned toward the valley and hand in hand slid down the mountain. Though we moved with accelerated pace, we kept our feet. We were like two gulls soaring, then, turning their wings aslant, sailing down an aerial incline. Suddenly the snow before us began to pile up against the base of a cliff. We lost our balance, and, head downward, I felt tons of snow piling on top of me.

"No bones broken," I heard a voice say close beside me. "If there's no internal injury he will be all right."

I opened my eyes. I was lying on hard snow, while people stood about me, all looking very anxious. One of them, a girl, stood gazing down upon me with a pair of mild eyes in which there was a world of sympathy. There must have been something in my glance to affect her, for she lowered her eyes, blushed and turned away. As she did so she exposed one side of her neck. It bore a birthmark shaped like a rose leaf.

"What's the matter?" I asked.
"Matter! Why, you have fallen twenty feet from the ledge up there."

I remembered passing over a ledge, but I didn't remember anything else.

"How long have I been unconscious?" I asked.
"You fell this very minute. Here; take a little of this."

A party of tourists happened to be passing when I fell and among them a doctor. From where I lay I could see the Alpine peak Jungfrau. I had been looking at it during the period of my unconsciousness, which might have been an infinitesimally small fraction of time. I had seen the girl with a birthmark only during the same space of time.

They wished to assist me to the hotel just below, at Sheldig, but I concluded to try my legs. The doctor gave me his hand, and I got on my feet. One of the tourists who stood about me volunteered to go with me, but I got on fairly well without his assistance.

What I have recorded is the beginning of a love story; but, though I have no objection to telling a dream, I shrink from giving the thoughts and feelings of myself and the lady of my love. I was less interested in discovering whether I had displaced any of my internal parts than getting on the track of the girl with a birthmark. I missed her at Sheldig, but saw her the next evening at the Kur-saal (casino) at Interlaken, sipping a lemonade. I dogged her footsteps for days before I succeeded in corralling her—that is, before I could find her lighted, so to speak, and I could get a mutual acquaintance to introduce me. I finally cornered her on the Rigo, near Lucerne, and, as luck would have it, my friend Jim Thompson was there, too, and was acquainted with her.

I expected under the influence of my dream that I should have as easy a time getting her as I had during that long drawn out infinitesimally short period. Instead, I had a real woman to deal with and not a creation of my own fancy.

There was no dream for her. I was to her an ordinary personage with whom neither dreams nor romance had anything to do. I was obliged to lay siege to her heart and advance by regular approaches. I made very slow progress. Nevertheless by persistence I finally conquered, and it was not till then that I told her this story.

Her Peace Offering

A Story Showing That Women Are Not All Alike.

By PETER G. TRASK.

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"My dear," said Dr. Joe Bemerton as he threw off his coat and hat, tossing his heavy driving gloves into the latter, "I'll be hanged if I go out again tonight if I'm called by a multi-millionaire."

"Oh, Joe, I'm so glad! You look awfully tired, and just think how long it is since we've had a quiet evening together."

"Right you are, Pol. I'll get on my velvet jacket, put on my easy shoes, sit down before these blazing logs with you beside me, and we'll have a real old fashioned evening—like our courtship days, eh, sweetheart?"

He tweaked her ear and gave her a kiss.

"Won't it be nice? You can sit in the big chair right before the flame, while I sit in my little working rocker beside you and darn the stockings."

"Oh, no; don't darn stockings! You didn't darn stockings in those days."

As soon as dinner was over the doctor pulled the big chair up to the fireplace and drew his wife down on his knee. She had weighed a hundred pounds when they courted. Now she weighed a hundred and fifty. Bemerton had had several obstinate cases during the day and was tired. It wasn't five minutes before he remarked that he had strained a muscle in his left leg when getting out of his auto, slipping on a bit of ice. He thought that they'd better sit side by side. So Mrs. Bemerton got off his knee and with an effort succeeded in squeezing in beside him. If she had gained fifty pounds he had gained more, so that instead of the aggregate bulk of 215 pounds between the two arms of the chair, as in their courtship days, there were now 350. However, they managed to wedge themselves in, and Mrs. Bemerton leaned back on her husband's arm.

"Just as nice as ever it was," he said gallantly.

They sat chatting for awhile, but the topics they talked about as lovers did not seem to rise up with the spontaneity of former days. There were long gaps in the conversation. The doctor yawned.

"We don't need to talk all the while," she said drowsily. "Remember what a clutter we used to keep up?"

"I wonder how we did it."
"Did it! We didn't do it. It did itself."

There was a lull, during which the doctor's eyes closed, and he was beginning to draw the heavy breath of slumber when his wife started in anew.

"Do you know, Joe," she said, "that wretched butcher sent in the most abominable steak this morning—all bone and gristle?"

"Yes, dear, but my arm is cramped. If you'll raise a bit I'll move it."

He moved the arm and was sinking again to a snooze when the telephone bell rang.

"I'll go," said Mrs. Bemerton, starting up.

"No; you wouldn't understand." And the doctor went to the telephone.

"Yes; I'm Dr. Bemerton."

"I'm pretty tired."

"Is he?"

"Suffering much?"

"Well, I suppose I'll have to go."

Mrs. Bemerton, who was listening, sighed. The doctor came back into the room the picture of woe.

"Now, Joe, you said you wouldn't go out again tonight for a millionaire. You're tired out. In another moment you'd have been asleep. Why didn't you refuse?"

"How could I? If you were suffering and called for a physician to relieve you and he declined to go, what would you think of him?"

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped. Will you ride?"

"No; it's not far. I'll walk."

She helped the poor man on with his overcoat. He gave her a parting kiss and as he went out said:

"If I'm going to be delayed I'll telephone you, and you're not to sit up, but go to bed like a dear, good little woman, and I'll come in without disturbing you and sleep in my own room. Ta-ta, sweetheart!"

Mrs. Bemerton's regret was that her liege lord must go out after a hard day's work into a cold night to incur more responsibility. She was a practical woman and had discovered very soon that the return to courtship days would not be a success. She was not therefore disturbed at the interruption on that account. Indeed, she was relieved.

As soon as the front door closed behind him Dr. Bemerton hastened his steps. A few blocks away was his club, and thither he went. Leaving his overcoat at the coat room, he went into the cafe and there found Mrs. Nichols and Gilson, who hailed his entrance with shouts of satisfaction.

"What did you mean," exclaimed Bemerton to Nichols, with mock severity, "by telling me that the patient was suffering and I must come at once to relieve him?"

"I meant this," replied Nichols—"that Gilson is suffering for some one to split a bottle of ginger ale with him. As for me, I'm suffering for something of the same kind."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Bemerton. "You fellows will be the death of me some day. It doesn't seem as if one of us can have any fun without the other two or any two without the other one."

Dr. Bemerton sat down, and Nichols pushed the button, and when beverages had been ordered Bemerton said to the waiter:

"Peter, I wish you to telephone my wife that the case is very serious, there are three doctors in consultation, and I'll probably be detained till a late hour. Say I haven't even time to do the telephoning. Now, be careful, Peter. Don't give away where the message comes from."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Nichols. "Three doctors in consultation! Good! Very good!"

"Consulting as to which is preferable as a diluent—ginger ale or sarsaparilla," laughed Gilson.

Peter had served twenty years at the club and knew how to send such telephone messages very well, but he was head waiter, and his responsibilities were multifarious. Being especially crowded tonight, he transferred the order to a greenhorn who had worn the club's button but a few days. This was the message sent to the doctor's wife:

"Dr. Bemerton is here at the club in consultation with two other doctors. He won't be home till late, mum."

"All right," came the response. "Tell the doctor not to hurry and that I think a Welsh rabbit or a stuffed crab will do him good."

Then the greenhorn goes to the three doctors in consultation and says to Dr. Bemerton:

"Docther, Mrs. Bemerton says yer not to hurry, and she thinks a stuffed crab or a rabbit 'll do yer good."

Bemerton, who was raising his glass to his lips, stopped it on the way.

"Who phoned her?"

"I did, sor. Peter told me to. He was busy."

"And did you tell her I was at the club?"

"Shure, sor. Where else would I tell her?"

Nichols and Gilson leaned back in their leather covered chairs and roared.

"That'll do," said Bemerton to the waiter, who went off puzzled.

"Well, boys," said Bemerton, "I'm in for it." And he told the story of how he had started in for a return to courtship days, accusing them of breaking in upon his and his wife's happiness.

"You must do something mighty nice," said Gilson, "to get out of this muddle. My wife would never forgive me for a thing like that."

"What can I do?" asked Bemerton.

"Give her a sealiskin," suggested Nichols.

"She has one. Besides, that would require time. I've got to face her tonight when I go home."

"The only thing you can do," said Gilson, "that can be done tonight is to telephone to a flower shop and have them send you a fine mess of flowers to take home with you."

Bemerton was not favorably impressed with the plan. He said that he had forgotten every anniversary of his wedding day as it came round and the customary gift, his wife reminding him of it a month after it had passed. To take her flowers now seemed like giving her taffy. However, at that hour it was the only thing he could do; so, calling up a flower shop, he directed the proprietor to send the handsomest basket of flowers he could make up. Then he threw off care and, with his friends, spent a delightful evening, marred only by a telephone message from Dr. Gilson's better half to know if he was at the club and one from a patient of Dr. Nichols asking if the medicine he had ordered had better be taken at 11 o'clock or a quarter past 11.

But all good times must come to an end, and the trio at last separated. At the door of the club Bemerton's two friends admonished him to do a lot of petting when he got home, confessing himself a brute and relying on the floral gift to set matters right. Bemerton didn't say anything. He knew his wife and that she was not one to be coddled.

When the doctor opened his front door he found the lights turned down and the silence of oblivion. Excellent! Perhaps his wife was asleep. He would not have to face her till morning. Taking off his shoes and leaving the flowers in the hall, he crept upstairs.

"That you, dear?" came a voice from his wife's bedroom. "Had a good time? Hope you didn't eat anything to upset your stomach."

"Only stuffed crab, as you suggested. You're not angry with me, are you, dear?"

"Angry! Why should I be? I was well pleased when I learned you were at the club instead of being with sick people. Only you might as well have told me where you were going. It would have been a relief to me."

"By Jove, what a sensible woman you are! Both Gilson and Nichols said their wives would be furious. They suggested that I bring you a ten dollar basket of flowers to pacify you—ha, ha."

"Flowers! Don't you bring me flowers when Lilly needs a new overcoat and Jennie hasn't a decent dress to her name. If you had spent \$10 for such worthless things I'd have sent them right back tomorrow to the shop you got them from."

Mrs. Bemerton didn't see her husband or his expression when she said this, and it is well she did not.

"I'll just go down and fix the furnace before turning in," he called. "It's going to be a cold night."

Mrs. Bemerton heard coal shoveled into the furnace, but she did not hear a beautiful ten dollar basket of flowers thrown in at the same time.

The next morning Dr. Bemerton made his first call at the flower shop, where he paid for the penitential gift.

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