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### ALMOST A LOVE STORY

By M. QUAD  
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One day when little Miss May Fletcher was only four years old a neighbor of the family brought over a boy of about the same age. The two children had been playing together half an hour or so when the mother of the boy called out:

"Susan Fletcher, see there, will you? Your girl is trying to flirt with my boy!"

That was the beginning of Miss May's career. By the time she was ten or twelve years old and going to school she was breaking the hearts of the boy pupils. She was a handsome girl, and she had cute, coy ways about her.

When she was approaching her twentieth year her solemn faced father solemnly asked her:

"May, do you know that this whole town of Tiponville is talking about you?"

"No, father," was the reply. "What are they saying about me?"

"That you are a confirmed flirt and a coquette."

"Why, father, how you shock me!"

"Don't pretend such innocences, child," said the father. "Let's go over your case a little. When Parson Brown came here, an unmarried man, two years ago, he seemed to take quite a shine to you."

"Yes, father."

"I have an idea that he asked you to be his wife."

"He did, father, but how was it? We were coming home from prayer meeting when he said that he loved me and wanted me to become his darling wife. Just as I got my mouth open to say yes a big dog, chased by a little dog, came running up on the sidewalk behind us. The dog struck Parson Brown in the legs, and he went sprawling. I tittered, I giggled, I snickered. How could I help it? Mr. Brown went off in a huff and in six months was married to Amanda Jones."

"But there was Charles Renfrew," continued the father, with a smile around his mouth.

"Yes, I remember him, but it was not my fault that he quit coming here. I was expecting to be Mrs. Renfrew some day, but he had not proposed yet."

"He came one night, and just as he started in to propose he gave me a wrist and the false plate in his mouth, which I never suspected was there, flew out and under the table, and he sat scrambled for it. Father, I had to sneeze or blow right out of the window! Poor Charles dove under the table for his plate, gave me one awful look and went through the front door."

There was a silence for two minutes, and then the father asked:

"But what about George Fox, who has been coming here quite often of late?"

"I don't know," was the reply. "I think he will ask me to marry him."

"And you'll titter and spill it all."

"Not if I can help it, father. George squints with both eyes every two or three minutes. It is a dreadfully funny squint."

George Fox was a young bachelor of twenty-five, who lived with his widowed mother. He was a farmer. He had admired and loved Miss May and meant to make her his wife, squint or no squint.

Three or four days after Mr. Fletcher had had the talk with his daughter, as recorded above, young Mr. Fox caught sight of the girl picking raspberries in his field. The sight gave him an idea. He waited to see if she would appear again next day. She did, and at the far end of the field he let down the fence and turned in his old bull and ram and gave them a whack as they passed through the gap. They were gentle creatures, but at the whack the bull emitted a bellow, and the ram shook his head in defiance, and by a freak of fortune both tumbled among the bushes.

The girl who had broken so many hearts saw them approaching and after one scream started for a tree. Up she went until she was seated on a limb that she deemed was a safe roost, and it was only then that she saw Mr. Fox and called out to him to come to her rescue. Mr. Fox came along at a lazy pace, as if there was no special reason for hurrying, and when he approached within thirty feet he took a seat on the fence, with his back to her and asked:

"Well, what's wanted?"

"I want to get down, of course," replied the girl up the tree.

"I am not hindering you."

"But the bull and the ram!"

"Oh, they haven't killed anybody lately!"

"George, you won't leave me here, will you? I may fall at any minute, and it will be awful the way I shall die."

"See here, girl, I love you and want you to be my wife," said George with his back still to her.

"Are you squinting now, George?"

"Yes, by thunder! I am squinting at the old bull and ram!"

"Keep it up, George, dear, until you get the critters out of this field. This evening you can come over and we will decide whether to go to Boston or Niagara Falls on our tour. Hurry up, dear, for this limb is cracking under me and will soon break."

And George, in spite of his funny squint became a hero and a husband, and they put in five days at the falls, and Tiponville said it was a good match on both sides.

## The Bandbox Baby

An Absurd Mistake and How It Was Righted

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Miss Celia Atherton tipped to meet her little nephew's farewell kiss.

"Good-by, Don, and don't lose the bandbox. Tell your mother I put an extra thick icing on the cake. She likes it that way."

"I know it, Aunt Celia," laughed Don as he picked up the great flowered bandbox, which was tied about with a heavy cord. "I'll be careful of the cake, and mother shall receive it with out a scratch."

He waved his hand as he divined out of the gate and sprinted up the street toward the railroad station.

The bandbox was quite heavy, for it contained one of Celia Atherton's famous fruit cakes. Rich and fruity and masked thickly with a heavy frosting, Celia's cake would be received with delight by her sister-in-law, Don's mother.

The train was on time, and Don, standing on the platform of the rear car, saw the little village fade from sight as the train speeded toward the city.

Another one of his brief, delightful visits to Aunt Celia was over.

He entered the coach, found an empty seat, upon which he placed the big square bandbox. He hung his overcoat on the hook, tossed his bag into the rack and went ahead to the smoker.

He forgot all about the bandbox until the train was drawing into the terminal station.

Then he hurried back to the coach, took his coat and bag, stepped aside to let some one pass through the aisle, picked up his bandbox and dashed for the door as the brakes squeaked and the train came to a standstill.

Behind him arose a confusion of sound, in which he distinguished a woman's voice raised in protest.

But now he was on the platform, hurrying along toward the street entrance. He plunged into the nearest taxicab and a moment later was whirling uptown toward his mother's house.

Beside Don, on the seat, was the flowered bandbox.

"Hope mother's cake is O. K.," he thought.

Just then a small sound smote the air. A wee, unmistakable cry.

The cry of a baby!

Don Atherton jumped and looked around as if he thought some infant stowaway was concealed in the vehicle.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated. Again the cry, louder now, and it seemed to come from the bandbox!

Gingerly he picked up the box and nearly dropped it again, for something stirred within it!

Don glanced from the window and saw that they were nearly home. He

was a perfect darling, Don, I should postpone investigations until he was within doors.

The cry was repeated several times, and then stilled. Five minutes later a very much puzzled young man was greeting his mother in the front hall.

"Let us go to your room at once, mother," he urged. "I have something to show you."

Behind closed doors he set the flowered bandbox on the sofa and led his mother up to it.

"Mother, Aunt Celia has sent you one of her fruit cakes. It's in there. I think it must be lonesome," he added whimsically, "for I'm sure I heard it cry."

"How absurd you are, Don!" laughed Mrs. Atherton as she untied the wide tapes and lifted the lid.

For several moments mother and son stared down into the big box.

And from its nest of pillows stared back at them a solemn blue eyed baby, perhaps three months old, a baby contentedly nibbling nourishment from a bottle.

A beautiful baby with fluffy white skirts and with blue ribbons tied in cute little bows.

Mrs. Atherton was the first to recover her wits.

"Don," she said in a horrified tone. "What do you mean by this dreadful joke?"

"I don't know, mother, honestly I don't," he expostulated. "Where in thunder is Aunt Celia's cake?"

"Never mind the cake, my son. Tell me, where did this baby come from?"

"Search me!" he retorted sharply.

"Mother, when Aunt Celia gave me the bandbox it contained a cake—a fruit cake. Now I find it's a baby!"

"Some one must have put it in here for a joke," declared Mrs. Atherton, bending over the box and reaching a tentative finger to the rotund cheek.

"It's a perfect darling, Don. I believe I'll take it out."

"Don't drop it, mother," he cautioned. "The mother of five daughters and a son looked scornfully at him before she lifted the baby from its lacy pillows and allowed his little head to drop into the hollow of her arm."

Don, gazing at her, saw that his mother's arms were made to cuddle babies, and he felt that there might be difficulty in persuading his mother to part with it.

She had been confessedly lonesome since the last daughter had married and gone away.

The baby was making playful clutches at Mrs. Atherton's beautiful white hair, but its blue eyes wandered around the room as if searching for some beloved and familiar object.

"It wants its mother," remarked Don. Mrs. Atherton came back to the present with an indignant start.

"Its mother!" she sniffed. "A nice sort of creature she must be to deliberately abandon her child! I have heard of such cases, and simple men are usually the victims."

"Don Atherton, tell me truly did not some woman ask you to hold her child, and when she did not come back did you not take out the fruit cake and substitute the baby?"

"I did not," Don denied hotly. Then he retorted, incident by incident, how he had boarded the train at Red Top, had placed Aunt Celia's bandbox on a seat and gone into the smoker—and at the last moment had returned for his belongings.

"You are sure you have your own overcoat and bag?" asked Mrs. Atherton anxiously.

Don looked toward the coach where he had tossed them, and his eyes widened in growing horror. Instead of his own travel worn black bag was a dainty affair silver trimmed and distinctly feminine, and instead of his own topcoat was a woman's long black cloak.

"Good heavens, mother, look at that!" he gasped. "I must have made a frightful mistake!"

"You have," agreed Mrs. Atherton grimly. "Look at that bandbox, Don. See the row of holes around the cover? To give air to this unfortunate child. But why should a woman want to carry a baby in a bandbox?"

"Search me!" muttered Don for the second time.

"You must go right down to the station and report what you have done."

"Of course—I'll telephone first." He moved toward the instrument.

He dropped the receiver as a hurried tap sounded at the door, and a servant's frightened face appeared.

Behind her were other faces and a confused murmur of voices.

"Please, Mrs. Atherton, the police are here. They want Mr. Don," she gasped.

A blue uniformed figure pushed past her and entered the room.

"Pardon me, madam, but I am looking for Donald Atherton, wanted on a charge of kidnaping."

"I am Donald Atherton," interrupted the young man, coming forward.

"Here is the baby—it was all a mistake, officer—an exchange of belongings. I had a bandbox with a fruit cake in it, and—"

"Oh, baby, baby!" interrupted a sweet, glad voice, and the officer was thrust aside as a slender, black-gowned figure rushed in.

As she came, she dropped a big flowered bandbox at Don's feet.

"Here is your bandbox, old cake," she sang at him as she passed.

Reluctantly Mrs. Atherton transferred the baby to the eager young man, and it clung to her with little blissful gurgle.

The others watched her as she crowded over the baby—the two policemen, the startled maid servant, a strange footman who carried Don's bag, and overcoat, Mrs. Atherton and Don himself.

Don thought he had never seen a fairer picture. The girl was so beautiful. Her black garments enhanced the purity of her complexion, and strands of red gold hair curled under her hat trim.

The policeman coughed significantly. "Well, madam?" He addressed the girl.

She turned with a startled glance.

"Oh!" She looked from Don to his mother, and a blush swept over her features. "It is all right, officer. I am sure it can be explained." She shifted the baby to her other arm and opened a silver mesh bag. She slipped a folded bill into the officer's hand, dismissed them with a smile and spoke to the footman:

"Martin, bring in Mr. Atherton's luggage."

Don pushed a chair forward, and she sank into it, with a smile. He noticed that the baby was asleep and that its head had found the same sort of cuddling place that his mother's arms offered.

"Shall we try to explain this absurd mistake?" asked the girl.

Mrs. Atherton, from her corner of the sofa regarded the girl with friendly eyes.

"Suppose you let Don tell his story, and then we will hear yours," she suggested.

So Don Atherton repeated his story of the fruit cake in the flowered bandbox, of his excursion to the smoking car, his return at the last moment and his hasty snatching of bandbox and bag.

The girl listened, nodding her head gravely as he finished.

"You boarded the train at Red Top," she said. "I got on at the next station, Fairmont. As that train is made up of ordinary coaches, I took it in preference to the later train, on which a seat was reserved for me."

"At the last moment the baby's nurse deserted me, and so I did what you must think was an absurd thing—I put the baby in a bandbox and carried her over so nicely. You see, I am not used to babies!"

Mrs. Atherton looked strong disapproval at this confession.

"You see, it is not my baby," went on the girl. "It is my sister's child. My sister died last week, and I am taking baby to my father's home. Her father, an army officer, has been ordered to a western post."

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## A Story of Abraham Lincoln's Physical Strength

By ELINOR MARSH

If Abraham Lincoln had lived till his birthday falling due in February, 1916, he would have been 107 years old. Had he not fallen in his prime at the hand of an assassin or been taken off in some other unnatural way he would doubtless have lived to a great age, for he was physically a very strong man.

We may well wonder how Abraham Lincoln endured the strain of four years of civil war, millions of people looking at him to bring about a restoration of the Union, foreign nations threatening to intervene, thus insuring the division of the country; vainly trying to find generals who could accomplish results, and constantly abused for what was considered his mismanagement. It would seem that no man without herculean strength could live through such an ordeal.

That the physical structure of Abraham Lincoln was equal to the requirements is made plain by the following story told of him many years ago by a friend of his boyhood—who was employed in the same store with Lincoln.

"Billy," said Abe one day, "what makes you bet with Enoch? You ought to know better than to bet with a man on his own tricks. If he didn't know he had a sure thing he wouldn't bet."

The advice was given because this Enoch would come into the store in the evening ostensibly for the purpose of loading, but really to win small bets by a number of tricks. One of these was doubling up his hand so as to hide one of his fingers. He would bet that Billy couldn't mark that particular finger.

Of course Enoch always won such bets. When Abe advised Billy to stop betting the latter told him that he had lost nearly a dollar to Enoch and he didn't wish to stop till the money was won back.

"Will you promise me," said Abe, "that you'll never bet any more if I put you in a way to win back what you have lost and a great deal more?"

"You bet!" replied Billy.

"How would you like a plug hat to wear with your Sunday clothes? It would set you up with the girls."

"I'd like a plug hat first rate, but how am I going to get one, seeing that it would cost me \$7? It would take pretty nigh a week's salary."

"I reckon I can help you to one. At any rate, we can try the next time Enoch comes around and wants to bet you on his tricks. Tell him that you've got tired betting pleyans amounts, but if he really wants to bet something worth