

# Miss Lavinia's Absent Lover

Result of the Search For the Man Who Went Away.

By VIRGINIA BLAIR

"Well, of course," Miss Lavinia confided, "I am glad to have it, but it's unsettling."

Mrs. Briggs sniffed. "It wouldn't unsettle me if any one left me \$10,000. I would know what to do with it."

Miss Lavinia leaned forward eagerly. "What would you do, Jane?" she demanded.

"Oh, well," Mrs. Briggs hesitated. "I'd get some new clothes right away and fix up the house and entertain my friends and take a trip and have an automobile."

"I have thought of those things, but they don't seem to be just what I want, after all. Maybe I'll just put it out at interest."

"Now, look here, Lavinia Latimer," Mrs. Briggs said solemnly, "don't you do any such thing. You've got enough to live on, such as it is, and my advice is to take some of the money and have a good time. Goodness only knows you haven't had many good times."

"No, I haven't," Miss Lavinia admitted somewhat wistfully. "Well, I'll think it over, Jane."

And after Mrs. Briggs had gone Miss Lavinia picked up her big yellow cat and told him her innermost wish. "I'm going to use some of that money to find out where John Forbes is," she whispered, "but I wouldn't tell Jane."

But to look for the man who had left town ten years ago was not an easy matter. And Lavinia Latimer was not wise in methods. But she wanted to know the fate of her old lover, and so it happened that ten days after her talk with Jane Briggs Miss Lavinia went to town.

"I'm going to buy clothes," was the reason she gave, but when she came to the big town it was not to the stores that she made her way, but to a dusty, musty little office in a squalid street.

"McDermott, Private Detective," said the sign.

Miss Lavinia was all pink and white and pretty as she stated her case. But Mr. McDermott set her at once at her ease. He was a brisk little man with curly white hair and red cheeks.

"So you want to find John Forbes," he said. "Is he a relative?"

"Oh, no!" And Miss Lavinia blushed.

"Owe you any money?" McDermott demanded.

"Oh, no, no!" Miss Latimer cried distressfully. "We were engaged fifteen years ago, and I couldn't marry him because I had to stay with my old father and mother—and he—he went away—and I promised that when I was free I would let him know."

"Oh!" McDermott ejaculated, and after a pause, "Were you expecting to find him still single?"

"I—I'm not sure."

McDermott tugged at his mustache. "The chances are that he'll be married."

"Of course," Miss Lavinia agreed, "but I should like to be sure."

"Surely," said McDermott. "You just let me have the case and I'll bring you news of John Forbes before you know it."

McDermott reported regularly once a week by letter to Miss Lavinia and as regularly received her answers.

Miss Lavinia wrote on pale violet paper that gave forth a perfume of fresh flowers in the stuffy little office. McDermott found himself laying those letters in a little drawer by themselves, and one day in early spring when he had traveled out into the country on a case he spied some violets by the wayside. He picked them and brought them home and laid them with the letters in the drawer.

McDermott had money of his own, so that Miss Lavinia's little fortune had no charms for him, but the thought of her delicate presence in his home often came to him with a sense of irresistible attraction.

"But if she finds John Forbes sin-

gle she will marry him," he would say with a sigh, and the temptation to overlook clues was great.

In June he called on her and found her in her garden with a little low table in front of her, on which was set forth a lemonade service. Miss Lavinia was in pelisse, with a hat wreathed with violets. "When you wrote you were coming," she said to McDermott, "I thought you would enjoy it better here in the garden. It's cooler."

"Well, if you know what a nice change it was from that office in town!" sighed the little man.

After that he came often, and gradually it began to be rumored in the town that Miss Lavinia was "keeping company" with a man from the city.

"Well, I must say that I like his looks," Mrs. Briggs told Miss Lavinia when she came over one morning after McDermott had called.

"He is just a business acquaintance," Miss Lavinia protested.

Mrs. Briggs sniffed. "I guess you wouldn't be dressing up in those pretty clothes and waving your hair just for a business man."

Miss Lavinia blushed and sighed. "You don't know how many things I have to look after since I got my money."

To tell the truth, the search for John Forbes began to weigh on her. She realized that with the coming of John Forbes would end the visits of John McDermott.

McDermott continued doggedly with his search. He didn't want to find John Forbes, or if he did find him he hoped that he would be married. But if Lavinia Latimer wanted anything, she should have it.

And, as all things must have an end, the time came when John Forbes was located in a small western town.

"It's your John Forbes, all right," McDermott wrote to Miss Lavinia. "He was born in your town, and everything tallies. But I don't know whether he is married. I'll find out I leave on Monday for the west."

"Please," Miss Lavinia wrote back, "don't look him up. Come out and see me before you go—on upper Sunday night, if you will."

It was the first time that she had invited him to a meal, and her preparations were beyond the ordinary. She had in her days of prosperity hired a competent maid, and they brought out the silver and glass, and when McDermott sat down in the dim, fragrant dining room the feast that was set before him on the old mahogany was of broiled chicken and salad and delicate biscuits and strawberries and cream and cottage cheese and all the wonderful gastronomic triumphs of Maryland cooks.

And when he had finished he sat with Miss Lavinia on the front porch.

"I want to ask you a somewhat delicate question," he said, out of the silence of the dusk. "If I find John Forbes is single what am I to do about it?"

"I don't know," Miss Lavinia faltered.

McDermott hitched his chair for ward slightly.

"You love him very much?" he asked suddenly.

"I'm not sure," Miss Lavinia murmured in the darkness.

"Well, there's one thing I would like to say right here," the little man stated. "I wish to withdraw from the case, Miss Lavinia."

"Oh," she gasped, "but I can't do without you!"

"Can't you?" he cried radiantly. "Do you mean that you could love me? I've wanted to tell you how much I loved you for a long time, only there was John Forbes."

"Oh, I didn't dream!" Miss Lavinia fluttered.

"It's more than human nature can stand," McDermott went on, "to expect a man who loves you to go and bring back another man to marry you."

"Yes," she agreed timidly, "it is I—I think, if you wish it, we will drop the case of John Forbes, Mr. McDermott."

But McDermott didn't drop the case. He went west and looked up the old lover and found him neither single nor married nor dead, but he was divorced and of doubtful reputation.

"He isn't worth another thought," McDermott said hotly when he came back. "And I'm not saying that because I'm prejudiced either."

"Well, it relieves my mind to

know," the lady confessed. "And, anyhow, if I hadn't tried to find him I wouldn't have met you—and"

"You have promised to marry me in October," said her lover triumphantly, "so who cares for John Forbes or any other man when you are going to be Mrs. McDermott?"

## Origin of White Race.

The discussion of the precise locality where the primitive man developed into the white race is by no means settled as yet. The old theory that the Aryan or white race began in Asia is still held by many high authorities, but other authorities equally high maintain that the original "white man's country" was Europe and that from Europe the race spread to other parts of the world. It is safe to say that the last word upon the subject has not yet been spoken. The debate is still open and will probably remain so for a very long time to come.—New York American.

## Almanacs.

It is still contended by many authorities that the almanac of 1457 was the first specimen of printing, and it has been variously credited to Gutenberg, Schaeffer and Pfister of Bamberg. Dr. Faustus, celebrated in legend, whose strange story has been immortalized by Marlowe and Goethe, was the accredited author of almanacs containing astrological signs (retained at the present day) and necromantic secrets.

## The Other Party.

"I want you to put in your 'Lost and Found' column an advertisement like this: 'Wallet containing a considerable sum of money and papers. Finder will keep money; return papers.'"

"Don't you think," suggested the clerk, "you had better add 'no questions asked?'"

"No. But you may say 'no questions answered.' I'm the finder."

## Charity.

"I hates dese suspicious guys," said the panhandler.

"What have dey been doin' to you now?" asked his friend.

"A gink give me a dime dis mornin' to git somethin' to eat, and den he follers me into a restaurant and waches me spend it."—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

## Ages of Birds.

The average ages of some of the best known birds are: Blackbird, 12 years; blackcap, 15; canary, 24; crane, 24; crow, 100; eagle, 100; fowl, common, 10; goldfinch, 15; goose, 50; heron, 50; lark, 13; linnet, 23; nightingale, 18; parrot, 60; partridge, 15; peacock, 24; pelican, 50; pheasant, 15; pigeon, 20; raven, 100; robin, 12; skylark, 30; sparrow hawk, 40; swan, 100; thrush, 10; wren, 3.—London Globe.

## Rats Aboard Ship.

There used to be a belief that rats never went on a ship that was destined to founder at sea. This has a fine supernatural ring, but, as a matter of fact, has a good deal of truth at bottom. Unseaworthy ships in the olden days were likely to be leaky and contain much bilge water. The rats would naturally abandon such damp quarters for a drier berth.

## Economical.

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