THE MYSTERY GIRL

A Fascinating Romance of Baffling Plot and Throbbing Love Interest

By CAROLYN WELLS

Copyright, 1922, by J. B. Lippincott Company. Serialized by Ledger Syndicate.

THIS BEGINS THE STORY

John Waring, gentleman and scholar, has just won the hotly contested election to the presidency of Corinth College, a venerable New England seat of learning. Before his inauguration, he plans to marry Emily Bates, a charming and cultured widow. With his life's ambition achieved and a rosy future assured, there seems no instant hesitation before he answers in the affirmative her question, "Are you entirely happy?"

Into this quiet college town comes Kate Austin. Through her uncanny ability to compel others to do her bidding, she succeeds in establishing herself at Corinth's most exclusive boarding house, kept by Mrs. Zalmon and her husband, Reed Salt. Further than giving her name as Anita Austin, the "Mystery Girl" seems to develop no information regarding herself or her business in Corinth. She meets Perkins Payne, a freshman, and makes a friend of Mrs. Bates. Mrs. Bates suddenly develops a sudden and deep interest in President-elect Waring, and obtains his photograph. When she meets Dr. Waring at a tea, he blanches and his hand crash to the floor. Outside, Waring's secretary, Morton, learns the girl doesn't like the college community. Dr. Waring is discovered lying dead before dawn in his study, with hands locked.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

An Incredible Case

WHEN Lockwood returned to the study, he found the medical examiner and Doctor Greenfield in consultation.

The examiner was a large, pompous-looking man, with an air of authority. He looked at Gordon Lockwood from beneath his heavy brows, and demanded, "What do you know of this?"

The younger man resented the tone, but he knew the question was justified, and so he replied, respectfully:

"Nothing more than you can see for yourself, sir. I broke in at that glass door, being unable to get in any other way, and I found Doctor Waring—as you see him now."

"There was some other way, though, to get in and out," Examiner Marsh stated.

"Positively not," Lockwood repeated.

"Don't contradict me! I tell you there must have been—for this man was murdered."

"Impossible, sir," and Lockwood's eyes met the examiner's with a gaze fully as calm and insistent as his own.

"Very well, how came he by his death?"

"I am not the examiner," the secretary said, and he folded his arms and leaned against the corner of the great mantelpiece; "but since you ask me, I will repeat that there was no way of ingress into this room last night, and this necessarily the case is a suicide."

"Just so; and, granting that, will you suggest what may have become of the weapon that was used?"

"What was the weapon?" Lockwood asked, not so disturbed by the question as the examiner had expected him to be.

"That is what puzzles me," returned Doctor Marsh. "As you can clearly see the wound was inflicted with a sharp instrument. The man was stabbed just below his right ear. The jugular vein was pierced, and he died to death. A plexus of nerves was pierced also, and this fact doubtless rendered the victim unconscious at once—I mean as soon as the stab wound was made, though he may have been alive for a few minutes thereafter."

Gordon Lockwood gazed imperturbable at the speaker. He had always prided himself on his unshakable calm, and now he exhibited its full possibilities. It annoyed Doctor Marsh, who was accustomed to having his statements accepted without question. He took a sudden dislike to this calm young man, who presumed to differ from his deductions.

"I must say," observed the mild-mannered Doctor Greenfield, "I knew Doctor Waring very well, and he was surely the last person I would expect to kill himself. Especially at the present time—when he was looking forward to high honors in the college and also expected to marry a charming lady."

"That isn't the point," exclaimed Doctor Marsh, impatiently. "The point is, if he killed himself, where is the weapon?"

"I admit it isn't in view—and I admit that seems strange," Lockwood agreed. "But it may yet be discovered, while a way of getting into the locked room cannot be found."

"All of which is out of your jurisdiction, young man," and Marsh looked at him severely. "The police will be here soon, and I've no doubt they will learn the truth, whatever it may be. What inference do you deduce, Doctor Greenfield?"

"That's hard to say," replied Greenfield, slowly. "You see the aperture it made is a perfectly round hole. Now, most daggers or poniards are flat-bladed. I'm not sure a real weapon is ever round. The hole is much too large to have been made by a hat-pin—it is as big as a—a—"

"Slate pencil," suggested the examiner.

"Yes, or a trifle larger—but not so large as a lead-pencil."

"A lead-pencil could hardly accomplish the deed," March mused. "A slate-pencil might have—but that is a most unusual weapon."

"How about a bill-file?" asked Doctor Greenfield. "I know of a man killed with one."

"Yes—but where is the bill-file?" asked March. "There's one on the desk, to be sure, but it is full of papers, and shows no sign of having been used for a criminal purpose. If, as Mr. Lockwood insists, this is a suicide case, the victim positively could not have cleaned that file and restored the papers after stabbing himself."

"He most certainly could not have done that!" declared Doctor Greenfield.

March examined the file carefully. It was an ordinary affair consisting of a steel spike on a bronze standard. It would without doubt make an efficacious implement of murder, but it was difficult to believe it had been used in that way. For the bills and memoranda it contained were, to all appearance, just as they had been thrust on the sharp point—and surely, had they been removed and replaced, they would have shown traces of such moving.

"Anyway," Doctor Greenfield said, after another examination, "the hole in the side of Waring's neck seems to me to have been made with an instrument slightly larger than that file. Surely, there are round stilettos, are there not?"

"Yes, there are," said Lockwood, "I have seen them."

"Where?" demanded the examiner, suddenly turning on him.

"Why, I don't know." For once, the secretary's calm was a trifle shaken. "I should say in museums—or in private collections, perhaps."

"Are you familiar with so many private collections of strange weapons that you can't remember where you have seen a round-shaped blade?"

Examiner Marsh stared hard at him and Lockwood became taciturn again.

"Exactly that," he conceded. "I have some time, somewhere, seen a round-bladed stiletto—but I cannot remember where."

"Better bench up your memory," Marsh told him, and then the police arrived.

The local police of Corinth were rather proud of themselves as a whole, and they had reason to be. Under a worthwhile chief the men had been well trained, and were alert, energetic and capable.

Detective Morton, who took this matter in charge, went straight to work in a most business-like way.

He examined the body of John Waring, not as the medical men had done, but merely to find possible clues to the manner of his death.

"What's this ring on his forehead?" he asked, looking at the dead man's face.

"I don't know—that struck me as queer," said Greenfield. "What is it, Doctor Marsh?"

The examiner peered through his glasses.

"I can't make that out, myself," he confessed frankly.

Morton looked more closely.

There was a red circle on Waring's forehead, that looked as if it had been put there of some purpose.

A perfect circle it was, about two inches in diameter, and it was red and sunken into the flesh, as if it might have been done with a branding iron.

"Not a very hot one, though, "Morton remarked, after suggesting this, "but surely somebody did it. I'll say it's the sign or seal of the murderer himself. For a dead man couldn't do it, and there's no sense in assuming that Doctor Waring branded himself before committing suicide. Was it done before or after death?" he asked of the two doctors present.

"Before, I should say," Doctor Greenfield opined.

"Yes," concurred Marsh," but not long before. I'm not sure it is a brand—such a mark could have been made with, say, a small cup or tumbler."

"But what reason is there in that?" exclaimed Morton. "Even a lunatic murderer wouldn't mark his victim by means of a tumbler rim."

Absorbedly, he picked up a tumbler from the water tray, and fitted it to the red mark on Waring's forehead.

"It doesn't fit exactly," he said "but it does almost."

"Rubbish!" said Gordon Lockwood, in his superior way. "Why would any one mark Doctor Waring's face with a tumbler?"

"Yet it has been marked," Morton looked at the secretary sharply. "Can you suggest any explanation—however difficult of belief?"

"No," Lockwood said. "Unless he fell over on some round thing as he died."

"There's nothing here," said Morton, scanning the furni-hings of the desk. "The inkstand is closed—and it's a smaller round, anyway. There's no one of these desk fittings that could possibly have made that mark. Therefore, since it was made before death, it must have been done by the murderer."

"Or by the suicide," Lockwood insisted firmly.

Morton, looking at the secretary, decided to keep an eye on this cool chap, who must have some reason for repeating his opinion of suicide.

"Now," said Morton, the detective, briskly, "to get to business. I must make inquiries of the family—the household. Suppose I see them in some other room—"

"Yes," agreed Lockwood, with what seemed to Morton suspicious eagerness. Why should the secretary be so obviously pleased to leave the study—though, to be sure, it was a grewsome place just now.

"Wait a minute," Morton said, "how about robbery? Has anything been missed?"

Lockwood looked surprised.

"I never thought to look," he said, "assuming suicide, of course robbery didn't occur to me." He looked around the room. "Nothing seems to be missing."

"Stay on guard, Higby," the detective said to a policeman, and then asked the secretary where he could interview the housekeeper and the servants.

Lockwood took Morton to the living-room, and there they found Mrs. Bates as well as the two Peytons.

Though her eyes showed traces of tears, Emily Bates was composed and met the detective with an appealing face.

"Do find the murderer!" she cried; "I don't care how much that room was locked up. I know John Waring never killed himself! Why would he do it? Did ever a man have so much to live for? He couldn't have taken his life!"

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Mrs. Bates," Morton told her, "yet you must see the difficulties in the way of a murder theory. I'm told the room was impossible. Is not that right, Mrs. Peyton?"

Flustered at the sudden question the housekeeper wrung her hands and burst into tears. "Oh, don't ask me," she wailed, "I don't know anything about it!"

"Nothing indicative, perhaps," and Morton spoke more gently, "but at least, tell me all you do know. When did you see Dr. Waring last?"

"At the supper table, last evening."

"Not after supper at all?"

"No; that is, I didn't see him. I am training a new servant, and I watched him as he took a tray of water pitcher and glasses into the study, but I didn't look in, nor did I see the doctor."

"Did you hear him?"

"I don't think I heard him speak. I heard a paper rustle, and I knew he was there."

"The servant came right out again?"

"Yes; my attention was all on him. I told him exactly what to do during the evening."

"What were those instructions?"

"To attend to his dining-room duties, putting away the supper dishes and that, and then to stay about, on duty, until Dr. Waring left his study and went to bed."

"This servant has done these things before?"

"Not these things. He arrived but a few days ago, and Ito, the butler, attended to the doctor. But Sunday afternoon and evening Ito has off, so I began to train Nogi."

"And this Nogi has disappeared?"

"Yes; he is not to be found this morning. Nor has his bed been disturbed."

"Then we may take it he left in the night or early morning. Now the doctors judge that Dr. Waring died about midnight. We must therefore admit the possibility of a connection between the Jap's disappearance and the doctor's death."

At this suggestion, Gordon Lockwood looked interested. Whereas he had preserved a stony calm, his face now showed deep attention to the detective's words and he nodded his head in agreement.

"You think so, too, Mr. Lockwood?" Morton asked, in that sudden and often disconcerting way of his.

"I don't say I think so," the secretary returned, quietly, "but I do admit a possibility."

"It would seem so," Mrs. Peyton put in, "if Nogi could have got into the study. But he couldn't. You know it was locked—impossible, Mr. Lockwood?"

"Yes," Gordon returned. "I heard Dr. Waring lock his door."

"When was that?" asked the detective, sharply.

"I should say about 10 o'clock."

"Where were you, then?"

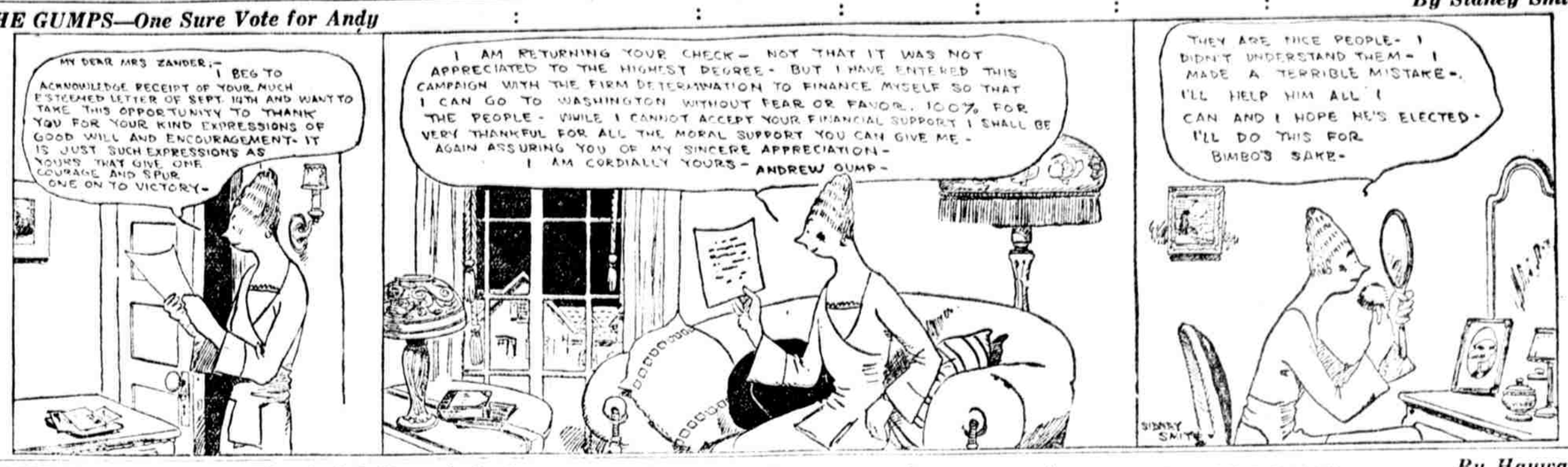
"Sitting in the window nook outside the study door."

"Could you not, then, hear anything that went on in the study?"

CONTINUED MONDAY

THE GUMPS—One Sure Vote for Andy

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—The Awful Moment Arrives

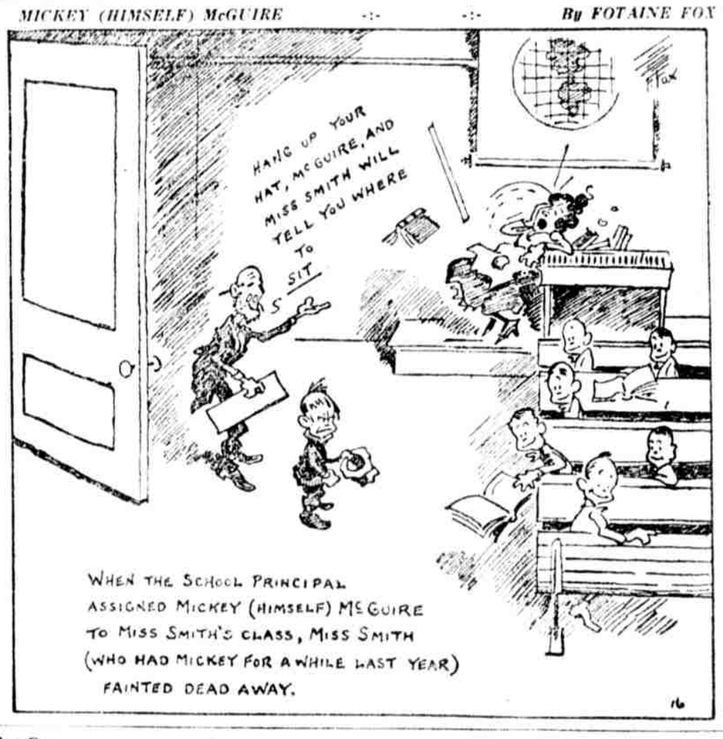
By Hayward

The Young Lady Across the Way

The young lady across the way says if Booth Tarkington had never written a thing but Main Street, he would still be a famous man.

MICKEY (HIMSELF) McGUIRE

By FOTAINE FOX

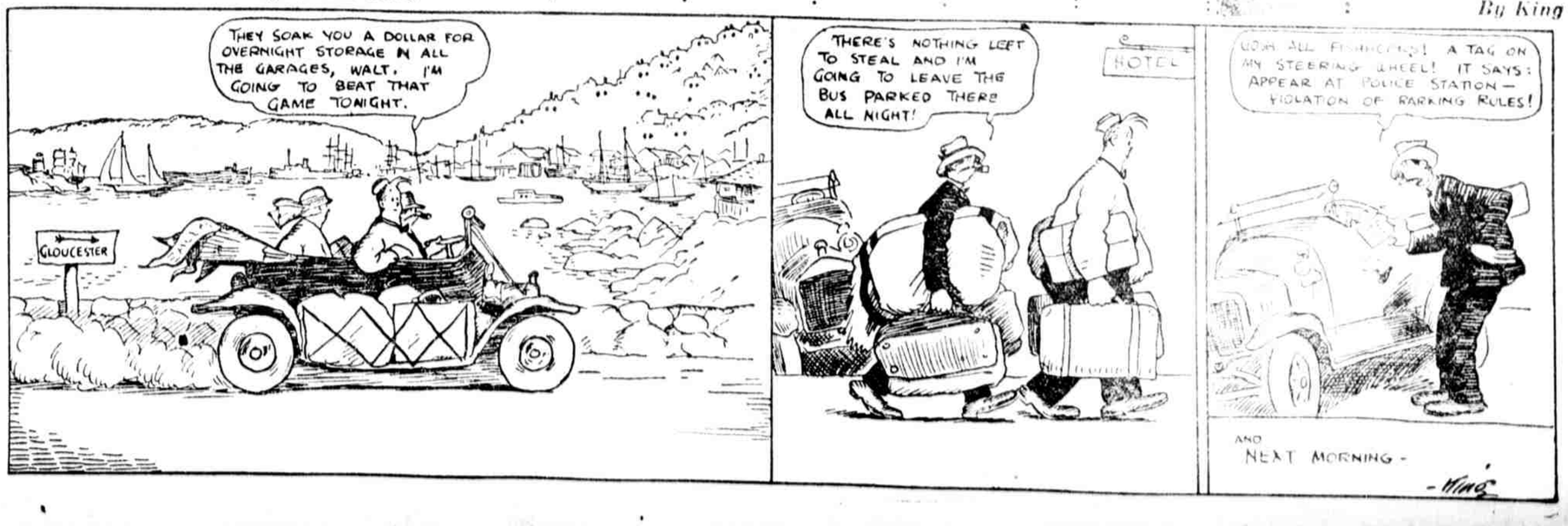


SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG

PETEY—It's Fine When It's On

By C. A. Voight

GASOLINE ALLEY—Storage $5 and Costs

By King