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A Lost Ring
 It Made Trouble Between Two Lovers
 By F. A. MITCHEL

Mary, Farmer Ashurst's daughter, was putting her room to rights of a bright morning in the springtime. The windows were up, and the warm sunshine was pouring into the room. She swept, dusted, made her bed and when all was finished untied the strings of her apron, took off the dust out of her chestnut hair, and it rippled in the sunlight. Then, pouring water into a bowl on the washstand and removing a ring from her finger, she laid the latter carefully on the window sill and proceeded to wash her hands.
 "Mary?" called her mother from below.
 Mary was drying her hands, but went at once into the hall and, leaning over the banister, asked what was wanted.
 "Go out to the spring house and get me some milk."
 Hanging the towel on the banister, Mary went downstairs and did her errand.
 Meanwhile a jackdaw sailed from a cote raised on a huge post in the yard and lit on the roof of the porch just outside Mary's window. He strutted about, pecking here and there, examining minutely breaks between the shingles as if looking for something, and not finding anything to interest hopped up on to the window sill.
 The moment he caught sight of Mary's ring its sparkle was reflected in his eyes. He turned it over with his claw, pecked at it with his beak, then threw his head back and laughed. Of all the odds and ends, bits of tin, broken crockery, spoons, hairpins and such other articles he had pilloined this was his richest find. He danced about it for awhile, evidently wondering how it was made and why it was so beautiful and how it came to be right there for him on the window sill. Then, hearing Mary coming up the stairs, he took it up in his beak and, spreading his wings, flew with it to the cote on the top of the high post.
 A moment later Mary came back into her room and discovered that it was not where she had left it.
 Her engagement ring, given her but a few days before by Joel Armstrong, had disappeared.
 There came in at the window a distant sound of a man's voice urging on his horses while plowing. It was Joel's. Molly ran downstairs and across the fields toward her lover. Joel saw her coming and at the turn pulled in his horses.
 "For heaven's sake, Molly, what's the matter?"
 "The ring! It's gone!"
 He put his arm about her, and she told the story of the mysterious disappearance.
 "Well, sweetheart," he said, "when she had finished, 'if you don't find it I'll buy you another.'
 "But," she moaned, "it won't be that ring. Besides, there's the bad luck."
 "Of losing it?"
 "I mean it'll bring bad luck."
 "Oh, no, it won't. That's idle superstition. Tell me, did anything occur while you were gone to the spring house to knock the ring off the window sill?"
 "Not a thing, so far as I know, and mother, who was in the house all the time, says she heard nothing."
 "Anybody in the house but your mother?"
 "No."
 "Sure no tramp came by or a tin peddler or anybody like that?"
 "Not a soul."
 "Funny, isn't it?"
 There are many ways of saying these last few words. Molly thought she detected a tinge of incredulity in the way Joel spoke then. She drew away and looked lugubriously on the ground.
 "Well, don't think any more about it," he said. "I'm going to town on Saturday, and if the ring doesn't turn up by that time I'll bring back another—a prettier one."
 Molly said nothing by way of reply, but turned to go back to the house, while her lover started up his team.
 That evening Joel Armstrong went to the store to buy some rope. There he met John Mudge. Mudge and Armstrong were friends, and Armstrong told Mudge of his engagement, mentioning the mysterious loss of the betrothal ring. Mudge looked thoughtful.
 "There's some'n wrong about the Ashurst farm," he said. "There's been a number of things lost there, and the queer thing about it is that they have all disappeared when there wasn't anybody about but the family."
 "Who's wrong?"
 "Oh, I don't accuse anybody, but it don't stand to reason that things should disappear without somebody to take 'em."
 "That's just what I've been thinking about," replied Joel, knitting his brows.
 And so Joel parted with his friend, his idea that there was something wrong with the loss of the ring confirmed. The next step was to think out a reason for there being something wrong, especially a reason connecting Molly with the wrongness of it. He couldn't conjure up any such reason, but he explained his inability to do so on the ground that the bigger the rascality the bigger the mystery. A suspicion that Molly had been deprived of the ring in some other way that she did not wish him to know crept in and took possession of him. He did not try to see Molly till the next evening; then he went to her house, and the moment he entered she knew that he had changed toward her. He sat down beside her and began to question her as a lawyer would cross examine a witness.
 "Tell me every person who was in the house during the day you lost the ring."
 "No one except father and mother and me."
 "Who was here the day before?"
 "What has that to do with it?"
 "It might have something to do with it."
 "How?"
 "Never mind that; tell me."
 Molly began to draw back within herself. There was something in both the question and Joel's manner in asking it, seeming to indicate that she was herself involved in this investigation.
 "There was some one here the evening before the ring was lost, but I'd rather not tell you who he was because I think you'd better not know. It might make you feel uncomfortable."
 "You'll have to tell me; might as well out with it first as last."
 "Sam Turner."
 The expression that passed over Joel's face was not a pleasant one. Sam Turner had been his rival, a rival he feared, for Turner was very much respected and had been the choice of Molly's parents for their daughter. It occurred to Joel that this visit of Turner's had something to do with the mystery of the ring. Perhaps he had taken it away with him and Molly had invented the story of its disappearance till she could get it back. Perhaps there were a number of other perhaps equally far-fetched—but to one bitten by the serpent of jealousy very palpable. Joel's manner became quite cool.
 "What does all this mean?" asked Molly. "Didn't I tell you when I made my choice between you and Sam that it was irrevocable—at least if you're not going to cause me to think I've made a mistake. He came to wish me happiness in my engagement, and, though it was evident he suffered, he said not one word in complaint at my having declined him for you."
 Joel rose. He said nothing till he reached the door, then told Molly that he would think the matter over and let her know. What he was to think over he did not explain. Molly kept her eyes fixed on him till he had withdrawn, but spoke not a word. She had looked upon Joel Armstrong as one with too noble a nature thus to accuse her within a few weeks of their engagement. This was a surprise and a shock to her.
 The next morning Joel received a note from Molly breaking their engagement. The shock was now with him, though he was no better satisfied that there was not something underhanded which he could not understand. He made no reply to the note. He did what a man usually does in such cases—he sulked.
 The third thing he heard was that Molly had gone away on a visit. He was beginning to find by this time that he had overrated his ability to get on without her, even though she might have deceived him. His farm duties were light, for the planting was finished, and there was little to do but wait for the first reaping. So he sat in the barn when idle and thought about Molly. Sometimes it would suddenly come over him that all this trouble as to the loss of the ring was nonsense; that it had been really lost and there had been nothing to cover up. But this view of the case would not last long. Besides, if Molly had really loved him she would have shown more distress at his suspicion of her. It did not occur to him that the more sensitive she was to her honor the more indignant she would be at being falsely accused.
 One day while he was in the store he heard two men talking.
 "That was queer up to Ashurst's yesterday, wasn't it?" said one.
 "What was it?"
 "Why, they got a pet daw up there. They've been missin' things for a long while and didn't know where they went to. Mrs. Ashurst saw the daw fly into a winder, light on a bureau, pick up a tortoise shell comb and fly away with it to the cote. Ashurst he

climbed the post on which the cote set and pulled out a hull lot o' things. Among others was a ring that disappeared some time ago."
 Joel waited to hear no more. He staggered out of the store and walked as fast as his legs would carry him to the Ashurst farm. Mrs. Ashurst saw him coming and inferred his errand. She met him in the doorway.
 "Where's Mary?" he asked.
 "Away. She hasn't come home yet."
 "When will she come?"
 "Don't know."
 "Will you give me her address?"
 She wrote it on a bit of paper and handed it to him. As he took it Mrs. Ashurst noticed his hand trembled.
 Joel wrote a penitent letter. Inclined to extremes, he had a little hope of forgiveness as he had had doubt that there was something underhanded going on. He calculated exactly by what mail he would receive a reply and was at the postoffice with a wildly beating heart to receive it. He was doomed to disappointment. No reply came.
 It was now reaping time, and he went to work cutting the wheat. Suddenly he saw Molly coming from the house and making straight toward him, just as she had done the day she lost her ring. He got down from his seat and hastened through the grain to meet her. She suffered him to take her in his arms. The episode was over.

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