

The Somnambulist

MRS. Moffet was in despair. No wonder. Here she was, “a lone lorn widow,” who having been left in straitened circumstances—with only the house in which she ived to call her own—had been reduced to the dernier resort of taking boarders. Now calamity had come upon her, she was about to lose her best-paying boarder—lose him just as the winter was coming on, and the thousand and one extra expenses which cold weather is certain to create all to be met.

Mrs. Moffet was a meek little woman, timid and retiring; she disliked change in her household affairs, she had disliked worry and anxiety, being naturally cheerful and lively in disposition, and she did like Mr. Montgomery. And now this cold morning in the early winter Mrs. Moffett was forced to stand face to face with the truth. He was going away. And why? Ah, that was the worst of it! He had lost money—a large amount—from his room, and refused to longer remain in a house where thieves were harbored.

Mrs. Moffet listened to Mr. Montgomery’s story with alternate horror, terror, despair. At its close she burst into tears

“Oh, dear! It is awful!” she sobbed. “You know that I am ignorant of the whereabouts of your money; and oh, it will ruin my house if it gets known!”

“Can’t help it, ma’am. Very sorry, I’m sure; but then it’s a mere case of self-defense. Can’t stay in a house where I am liable to be robbed.”

And then Mrs. Moffet bowed with as much dignity as though she were an empress.

“Very well, sir. You know best, of course, sir. I will have your bill ready in a few moments, and you—”

“Stay, Mrs. Moffet. I will not leave until my month is up, which will be in three days, I believe.”

Mrs. Moffet bowed once more.

“As you like, sir. In the mean time we will do all in our power to recover the missing money.”

But Mr. Truman Montgomery looked blank.

“Poor little thing! How pale she looks,” he said to himself, as he went back to his room to go through with a long and fruitless search once more. “I wish it had been different. But then a man can’t stay in a house and look upon it as a home when he is always losing money. First, it was that package of twenty pounds I didn’t say a word to Mrs. Moffet about that, for fear of hurting her feelings—and then it was a five pound note, and now—now it is this package of a thousand pounds. Too much to lose. Altogether too much I

declare. Yet I wish it had not happened here. Lucy Moffet is the sweetest little woman alive, I think.”

And at that very moment “the sweetest little woman alive” was shut up in her own room in close confab with Frank Glyndon, one of the boarders, who was also a private detective.

“He tells me, madame, that he has lost money here, before,” the young man is saying as he studies Mrs. Moffet’s pale, agitated face intently; “and I really think—for the reputation of the house, if for no other reason—you ought to have this mystery cleared up. I’m in favor of searching the boarders.”

“Mercy!” shrieked Mrs. Moffet.

“It wouldn’t do, Mr. Glyndon. I’d lose the last one. Fancy searching Colonel Overton and his stylish, fashionable wife—or their rooms—to find a stolen package of money. No-no! Whatever you may see fit to do in this sad business must be done secretly.”

The detective took a new tack.

“Mrs. Moffet; there is a closet adjoining Mr. Montgomery’s room. May I occupy it to-night? I have an idea, and would like to prove if my theory is correct. If you consent, I will slip into the closet after Montgomery has retired (there is another door, you know), and in the morning I will make a faithful report to you.”

At last it was settled. There were only three nights before Mr. Montgomery’s intended departure. They must make the best of the time.

The next morning Frank Glyndon smiled knowingly in Mrs. Moffet’s direction when he met her at the breakfast-table. The smile and the look which accompanied it met Mr. Montgomery’s eye, and straightway a strange conviction was aroused in his breast. What did it mean? That Mr. Glyndon was a detective he did not dream. Shortly after breakfast was over he saw Glyndon slip a folded scrap of paper into the widow’s plump hand. The sight made Montgomery gnash his teeth.

“A billet-boux!” he muttered. “Here, this is going on right before my eyes. I suppose there will be a wedding next!” and Mr. Truman Montgomery, as he left the house and wended his way down-town in search of a new boarding place, certainly did not feel comfortable.

Now the scrap of paper had contained these words.

“I have found out the mystery. Have some of the boarders—all of them, if you like—in the upper hall to-night at about eleven o’clock, and you will learn the truth. It was just as I had suspected.”

Eleven struck in loud tones from the big clock on the stairs, and most of the boarders, obedient to a hasty summons, appeared in the hall outside the door of Mr. Truman Montgomery's room. A little later the door was opened noiselessly from within and the boarders saw before them Mr. Frank Glyndon. He laid his finger to his lip and pointed within the room. This is what they saw by the light of the hall gas; Truman Montgomery, in dressing gown and slippers—but sound asleep—working away diligently at the empty grate. Two dozen eyes watched with breathless eagerness while Mr. Truman Montgomery, still in that heavy slumber, knelt before the grate and thrusting his hand up the chimney, brought down an oblong tin box.

“No wonder the chimney smoked!” exclaimed Mrs. Moffet, breathlessly.

And right then Frank Glyndon stepped to Montgomery's side, and slowly and carefully awakened him.

“Turn up the gas—high Mrs. Moffet!” commanded Glyndon firmly. “Mr. Montgomery—you somnambulist!—your money is found!”

The next day Mr. Truman Montgomery sought Mrs. Moffet, and there was a long private conversation; when he left he kissed her and called her dear Lucy.

Shortly afterward the placard was removed from the door of the Moffet house—a boarding house no longer—and only yesterday the paper announced a marriage; the contracting parties being named respectfully Montgomery and Moffet.

1101 words

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