

What I Discovered
by Mary Kyle Dallas

They were house-cleaning at Mrs. Copper's boarding-house. My paternal grandmother, Mrs. Perkins, lived next door to that establishment, and I had been to call upon her, and just dodged a dipper full of water aimed at an upper window as I crossed the pavement.

Water was dripping from all the newly-washed window sills. A stout Irish girl was exhibiting a great deal of very stout blue stocking on the top of a step-ladder in the vestibule. Mysterious female heads enveloped in towels appeared at upper windows and vanished instantly. A kalsomining gentleman of color was engineering two poles with a bucket strung on them through the area door, and a faint smell of paint came through the area door, and a faint smell of paint came through the door, in company with a tall person in a white paper cap, who had the air of one whose occupation was over. Behind him came a small, gaunt, prim, and perfectly-dressed young man, who was endeavoring to get a full view of his own back as he rushed down the front door steps. I knew my friends, Mr. Mirabeau Spriggins.

"How d'ye do, Spriggins?" I cried, as he ran against me, "and what are you doing here?"

He looked as though he had been after the spoons. But Spriggins has no sense of humor, so I didn't say so then.

Spriggins's answer was the Yankee one—a question.

"Perkins, have I got any paint on my coat?" he said.

Having carefully examined his back, I replied truthfully in the negative.

Spriggins gave a sigh of relief.

"You see, *she's* cleaning house," he said, "and it's a thorough cleaning. Did you know I'd come up to board with Mrs. Copper?"

"No. Have you?" I asked.

"Yes," said he. "Very nice place. Large room, south aspect, hot and cold water, reasonable terms. Had to leave Ferguson's. Nine crying babies, and two young ladies studying for the opera there. 'Greeable sort of person, Mrs. copper, in her manners."

"Oh, very agreeable," I said. "Good housekeeper, I believe."

"That's evident," said he. "Well, house cleaning is necessary." And he looked at his elbows again. "You're *sure* there's no paint on me?" he said, in a pathetic tone.

"Not a speck," I replied.

“How old do you suppose she is?” he asked, in a moment more.

“Who?” I inquired.

“Landlady,” responded Spriggins.

“Oh, Mrs. Copper! Well, somewhere between thirty and fifty,” said I.

“Vague,” responded Spriggins.

“I can’t get any closer,” said I.

“She isn’t gray,” said Spriggins; “but, then, I’ve seen those things in the windows. Thin, little wigs—invisibles, they call ‘em. Maybe she wears one of them—I think she does.”

“My grandmother does,” said I; “and my little cousin, just eighteen to-morrow; that tells nothing.”

“No, it doesn’t—does it?” said Spriggins.

“No. I say, did you ever hear anything—a—a—mysterious about Mrs. Copper?”

“Mysterious? No. What do you mean?” I asked.

“Oh!—well! Late Copper died a natural death, eh? Wasn’t poisoned, or anything?”

“Fell from a scaffold and broke his neck. He was a builder,” said I.

“She couldn’t have pushed him off, or anything?” asked Spriggins.

“Why, in the name of common sense, *should* she have pushed him off?” I asked.

“Tachment to somebody else,” suggested Spriggins.

“Mrs. Copper attached to somebody else! A plain, respectable woman like that—dear, dear! Why, whoever suggested such a thing?”

“Hm—well—nobody,” said Spriggins; “but she wasn’t on the scaffold?”

“At home getting dinner, and went into convulsions when she heard the news,” I answered.

“That seems to settle it,” said Spriggins.

“I should think it did,” said I.

“Well, good-by,” said Spriggins. “Drop in some evening.”

I did drop in. At least, after a week or two I rang the front door bell of Mrs. Copper's boarding-house and inquired for Mr. Spriggins.

I found him in his room, which warranted all his encomiums, and he was reading a paper devoted to police reports.

"Come in," said he. "Glad to see you. Nice room, eh? Had my photograph framed and hung up. Gives the room a sort of human interest, eh? um?"

I said, "It added to the effect." I don't know what I meant, but it pleased Spriggins.

He was silent for a while, then he looked at me with his queer little eyes screwed up into nothing, and said:

"See here. Landlady was married before she ever married Mr. Copper."

"Was she?" I asked.

"I ask you," said he.

"Well, I don't know," said I. "She was Mrs. Copper when I first saw her."

"Hm!" said he. "Well, if she was divorced from what's his name, what may have been the cause?"

"Have you heard she was?" I asked.

"No," replied Spriggins. "No—only she made the remark, 'first husband,' yesterday. Do you remember any case in court—What's-a-name against What's-a-name, that might have been landlady's?"

"If I could tell what you were driving at," said I, "I might be able to answer you."

"Well," said Spriggins, "here's a woman—nobody knows her first husband. I dono—I dono. Curious, um?"

"Perhaps my grandmother may know," I said, beginning to feel sure that Spriggins, whose occupation I could never discover, was a private detective. "If it's important, I'll ask."

"Well," responded Spriggins, "might be—again it mightn't. Ask, do; kind of you."

The result of my inquiries was that I soon found myself able to mention to Spriggins that Mrs. Copper had been a Mrs. Mapes, whose husband was mate of an ocean vessel lost at sea in the first year of her marriage.

When I told Spriggins this news, he said:

“Well, that’s settled too!” And I was certain that he was a detective. I began to be interested, but he was very close. He asked questions, but answered none.

One day he met me; he had evidently been waiting for me some time; and taking me by the cuff, said:

“See here, Perkins, does landlady owe much in the neighborhood?”

“Not to my knowledge,” said I.

“Um! You mightn’t know,” said he. “Copper leave her anything?”

“The house, I believe,” said I; “and I think enough to keep her from want. Grandmother says so.”

“Might have spent it, though,” said he. “Well, look here. Ever hear of any falling out with Copper—reproaching him with not doing well enough by her? Anything o’ that sort?”

“Never,” said I.

“Grandmother likely to ’a heard if ’twas so,” said Spriggins.

“I should judge so,” said I.

“Well, that’s settled, then,” said he. “Know her dentist?”

“Yes; I think I’ve met her at G.’s,” said I.

The next day I saw him coming out of G.’s, and what he said to me this time was:

“Now, look here, Perkins. If you should hear anything curious about landlady’s past life, you tell me. Something depends on it.”

“It’s not likely; but if I do, I’ll mention it,” said I. And my curiosity being excited, I asked my female relations so many questions about Mrs. Copper that they soon began to accuse me of having fallen in love with her. However, in the end I made a discovery. As soon as I heard what I am about to tell you, I fancied that I had a clew to Spriggins’s conduct; that his suspicions rested not on Mrs. Copper, but on some of her boarders. Some young man who had been robbing his employer, perhaps; for my idea that Spriggins was a detective had now become a fixed belief.

Accordingly, on returning from a sojourn in the country, where I had heard this news. I sought Spriggins out. I found him in the lunch room where I knew he usually dined, and I came behind him and said:

“Spriggins, I’ve got something for you at last.”

“Bout what?” asked Spriggins, putting down his fork.

“Mrs. Copper,” said I.

“Um?” asked Spriggins. “Eh?”

“Well, it may show you where the land lies,” said I. “One of your boarders has gone up where I’ve been on the Sound, and she’s been going on about it. She says Mrs. Copper is in a pretty desperate position.”

“Owe money?” he asked, turning white.

“No,” said I, “worse than that. She’s engaged to one of her boarders. Meets him round the corner and goes to concerts with him. Lets him court her in the back parlor. In fact, going to be fool enough to marry him. An ugly, conceited fellow, the young lady says. She can’t remember his name, but he’s a worthless creature, hasn’t paid his board since he came and is going to marry a woman years older than himself for a home. I say, Spriggins, if you can stop it, do. Arrest the fellow, if that’s what you’re after; save the poor old soul.”

Spriggins was as red now as he had been pale before. He stood up, reached down his hat, banged it on the back of his head where he always wore it, remarked:

“Cuss your impudence,” and stalked out of the restaurant.

“He has gone crazy at last,” thought I; but the call I made on my grandmother that evening cleared the matter up.

“Edward, who do you think is married?” asked grandmamma.

“Well, tell me,” I asked.

“Mrs. Copper,” said grandmamma. “She’s married a gentleman named Spriggins, one of her boarders.”

So *that* was settled, as Spriggins would have said. He was not a detective, he was only endeavoring to discover his chances of happiness with his future wife. Naturally we have never spoken to each other since.

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