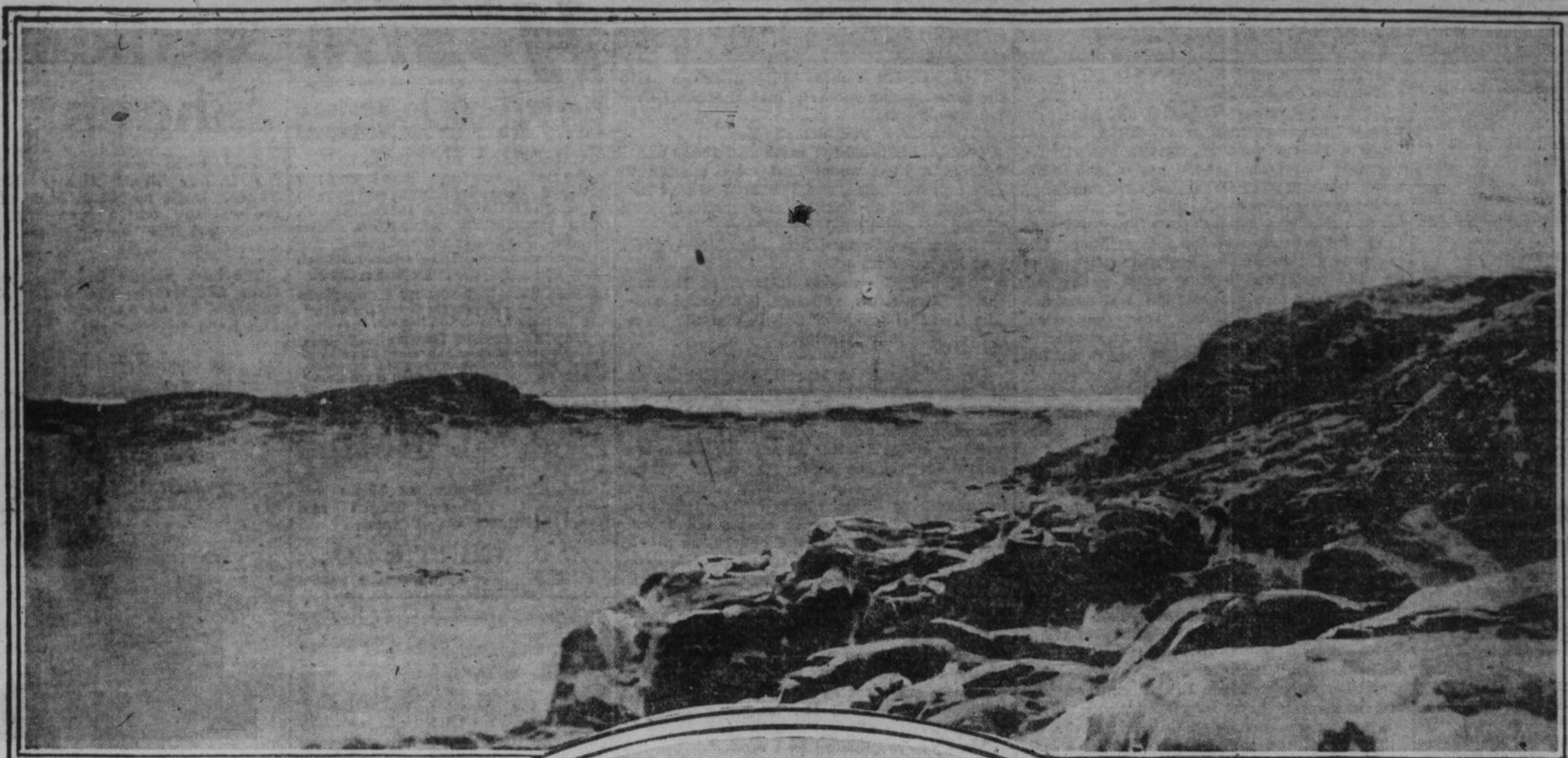


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The Auburn-Haired Girl.

By ANITA W. EDGERLEY.

Half a mile north of the Stevens farmhouse, where Miss Irene Kingsland from the city was visiting her aunt and uncle, was the byroad leading to what was called a glen with cascades and it was a rather wild and rocky spot.

It was a quarter of a mile from the main road, and on the byroad lived a widow with an auburn-haired daughter sixteen years old. After Miss Irene had been at the farmhouse for a week and had become familiar with the sight of pigs, chickens, geese and an old rooster blind in one eye, she was told about the glen and was anxious to see it. The road was plain before her. Take the first turn to the right and she was there.

She was told about the byroad, but not about the auburn-haired girl. In

this world there are always some things left out to make us trouble at a future date. The young lady of nineteen started out bravely, and her spirits were unruffled until she turned into the byroad. There she came across the auburn-haired girl sitting on a log by the roadside. The proper way would have been for her to stop and ask a

question or two about the glen, and thus open up a pleasant conversation. Unfortunately she took another way. She hid herself stiller, erect and passed on. The auburn-haired girl, who was almost as pretty as Miss Irene, followed her. Miss Irene heard her footsteps, but would not look back. Auburn hair coughed and began to hum a tune, but it was no use. Just how long it takes an auburn-haired girl to get her dander up has never before been recorded for use of the Agricultural or any other department. In this case it was four minutes. She had heard of Miss Irene as being haughty and having at least two hats, and she wished to take her down a peg.

From a distance of ten feet in the rear she remarked quietly that some folk considered other folk as dirt beneath their feet. Miss Irene reached the glen with flashing eyes and blazing cheeks, and, of course, she could not be expected to find any grandeur or romance. The moss-grown rocks were there, and the waters cascaded, but they were naught to the humiliated and indignant girl. She would go home, but she could not go by the same route and pass that young man again and receive more abuse. She would go by the fields and woods.

It was in carrying out this determination that she soon found herself in an old clearing and realized that she was lost. She had started to weep over it when another female entered the clearing and advanced toward her. The newcomer was a lady of thirty, and she was also lost. She had not been lost in leaving the glen, but in seeking to find it. She was cool and calm, and did not fear that they could not find their way to the high road after a rest.

As the couple sat on a log talking, events were happening elsewhere. The auburn-haired girl had gone down to the main road, and as she reached it a young man came driving along in a buggy. She recognized him as young Merrifield, a lawyer in Belleville, five miles away. Having all the law there was on his side, he was not afraid of a pretty girl, even when he didn't

know her. He checked his horse, when near her and said:

"Say, miss, have you heard that one of the female patients in the Belleville Insane Asylum escaped this morning?"

"No," she replied, with deep and excited interest and prepared to listen.

"Yes, and when last seen she was headed this way. I am going over to Liverpool and they wanted me to spread the news as I drove along. Don't suppose you have seen anything of a stray female around here?"

"Oh, but I have. She passed here an hour ago on her way to the glen. I thought she was queer in her head. Yes, you'll find her at the glen."

It was the pretty girl's opportunity at a rival and she took it. The lawyer decided that if she would ride to the glen with him, to soothe and calm the nervous, in case she was violent, he would make an effort to return the patient to the authorities. The girl shook and climbed into the buggy. Of course Miss Irene was not found at the glen, but the lawyer was a Sherlock Holmes in his way. He looked about and found fragments of her cardinals sticking to the rails of a fence she had climbed, and, leaving the horse and buggy, and enthusiastically followed by auburn-hair, he belted to the trail until the clearing was reached.

"That's her!" exclaimed auburn-hair, as she pointed to Miss Irene and smiled wickedly.

If the lawyer hadn't been a lawyer he would have advanced and seized the pretty party and thrown her over his shoulder and started for the buggy, but lawyers don't rush in where angels fear to tread. Here were two females. Indeed, with auburn-hair, there were three.

He hadn't a description of the escaped patient. He had been told she was a "youngish" female. The three were "youngish." It might be any one of them.

It might be the one who had given him the information. Insane people are cunning and up to all sorts of tricks.

"Well, why don't you take her?" demanded Auburn-hair maliciously.

"Sir, what does this mean?" asked Miss Irene as she drew herself up.

"Sir, what does this mean?" asked the strange lady as she did likewise.

"Why—why," stammered the lawyer, "one of you has escaped from the asylum at Belleville. I am here to ask you to return with me. You shall have a nice ride in my buggy, and if you are very quiet I'll let you drive the horse. The asylum is a nice place, you know—nice place. It's homelike and nice—very—and—and—"

"It's her," repeated Auburn-hair, pointing again to Miss Irene as the confused lawyer looked from one to another.

"You are the one!" sternly and tragically whispered the strange lady as she pointed at the auburn-haired girl in turn.

"By George! by George!" he gasped as he rubbed the back of his head. The pretty lady looked six seconds. Then the lawyer rallied his wits, Auburn-hair hid on an old frock and was hatless. She must be the one who had escaped; and she must be taken back.

"Now, then, be very quiet and very nice," he said in a soothing way as he took her hand. "You are going home, you know. You are going where every one loves you. If you are good

and nice you shall have a teddy bear to play with. Come along, dear—come right along. Perhaps you two ladies wouldn't mind accompanying us. The tables had been turned on poor little Auburn-hair. But she was no timid fawn, despite her very evident good looks. She scratched; and as she defended herself as best she could, the strange lady rose up and clasped Miss Irene in her arms and went dancing around and singing and laughing.

The four were found thus when an attendant of the asylum rushed into the clearing and advanced to exclaim:

"Good heavens! Only one escaped, and here are four!"

It took five minutes to straighten out the tangle. The strange lady was the escaped patient. Of course Auburn-hair had got the worst of it all around, and she was the first one to go. She was game, but she knew when she was worsted.

When the lawyer and the girl from the city had been left alone he made his address to the jury. It was up to him to make it a "hummer." He asked the jury to remember that he had never hunted escaped lunatics before; that he knew nothing about jealousy and auburn-haired girls; that if he was only doing his duty, and that if he was brought in guilty, suicide was the only thing left him. The jury listened and replied:

"You are forgiven this time, but don't you ever take me for a lunatic again! You may take me home."

In driving down the byroad they had to pass the widow's house. The auburn-haired daughter was at the gate and waiting for them.

They looked straight ahead, as if they were not on earth, but as they came opposite she called out:

"Oh, it's a case of love at first sight, is it? Well, I'll send each of you a teddy bear to-morrow!"

Some courtships have had their beginning under still more unfavorable circumstances and ended most happily. That's what this one did.

Here's hoping the early frosts will not spoil the canned-fruit crop. Even a deaf man seldom overlooks an invitation to take something.

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