

Strange but curious story had reporter's interest

The story didn't make very much sense to the reporter, and so he didn't have much of a chance of making it understandable to his readers. But he tried.

His article appeared in the Feb. 17, 1881, issue of the Bloomington *Hawkeye*. According to the front-page story, the reporter was walking on the square and minding his own business when he was "accosted by a fashionably dressed and pretty lady, apparently about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, yet wearing a wearied look, as if she had long been traveling among strangers."

The lady was looking for a leading hotel, and the reporter directed her to the National Hotel. Upon their arrival there, she asked the reporter to call upon her there on the following morning at 10 o'clock. She had an interesting story to tell him.

Came the appointed time, the lady appeared in the hotel lounge and proceeded to tell the reporter that "she had an important errand here, and that she counted herself extremely fortunate in forming the acquaintance at the outset of her business



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

here, of the individual who above all others could serve her; and that the accidental meeting just referred to only heightened the romance of the occasion."

Was the reporter beginning to be suspicious at this point in the conversation? If so, the article at that point gave no hint of it. What he did reveal to the readers was: "The statement that she had first questioned the reporter as to his vocation, habits of life and antecedents, ought to have antedated the foregoing after mentioning the arrival at the National House."

At their meeting the reporter observed that the lady looked rested, but "her rose-

ate lips seemed tremulous with emotion, and her youthful cheeks bore testimony that she had recently been weeping."

She explained that she was engaged to a Professor C.L. Simmons of Detroit, Mich. "... we had thought to come hither to have my affianced husband's friend, Professor A., to light for us, on the marital altars, the nuptial torches."

Furthermore, said she, Simmons should have been in Bloomington two days ago. And where was he? "Now what am I to do?" As if answering her own question, she told the reporter it was the "second disappointment" and suggested that perhaps "man's perfidy" was to blame.

The plausibility of the story deteriorated from that point. She disclosed that her intended was a nephew of the Surgeon-General Barnes of Washington, D.C. It seems that the surgeon-general had given his nephew a rather bizarre Christmas present — the heart of John Wilkes Booth (Abraham Lincoln's supposed assassin) in alcohol.

She went on to explain "that Professor

Simmons had entrusted this accursed moving organ in the greatest crime of the century to Miss Barnes Miers, of Indianapolis, who was to be the custodian of it until the day of her marriage to her second cousin (Simmons) when Professor Simmons was to present it to the University museum here through Professor Amzi Atwater."

Quipped the reporter at the end of the story, "Miss M. returned to Indianapolis Tuesday, taking with her both her own heart and Booth's, and both were whole and in a good state of preservation."

Either the reporter or editor of the *Hawkeye* had put an interesting headline on the story: "SIMMONS' HEART CURE! WAS SHE CRAZY?" There certainly is that possibility.

Another one occurs to me. Professor Atwater was frequently the butt of jokes perpetrated by Indiana University students. One night, for example, he found a canoe with a lighted lantern in it on his lawn.

In any case, we probably will never know who was pulling whose leg.

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