

# MY WATER SPRITE

An Episode of a Summer Vacation

By F. A. MITCHEL

I took my summer outing in the mountains, stopping at the Cliff House. I had not been there three days when rowing on the little lake around which all the hotels were centered, I passed a girl in another boat, who looked at me for a moment scrutinizingly and seemed about to bow to me. But since I did not remember ever having seen her before and supposed she was just taking me for some one else I gave her no encouragement. In other words, treated her as a stranger. Since we faced each other as we receded we did not pass out of each other's sight for some time, and I could see on her features the sensitiveness of a girl who has spoken to the wrong man.

It is not to be expected that such an incident as this occurring to one who has nothing to do but enjoy himself would pass out of mind. I must meet that girl and learn whether it was she or I who had made a mistake. I had not seen her at my hotel; therefore assumed that she was stopping at some of the others. There were more than half a dozen hotels in the vicinity, and I feared that to find a person whose name I did not know among so many summer residents would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

But what trouble will a man not take in an adventure of this kind, especially when he has nothing else to do? Made the rounds of the hotels, beginning in the morning when the guests first come out on the porch to see themselves spending some time on each porch looking for my water sprite as I called her, but luck was not with me, and at the end of the first day had not seen her.

I spent four days of a two weeks' vacation going the rounds of the hotels, instead of devoting myself to such summer sports as were at hand, looking for a girl in whom I could have no interest except that she had supposed she was passing some one she knew in the evening of the fourth day I went to a dance at one of the hotels, and as I was strolling around in the walks there suddenly appeared over the shoulder of her partner the face of my water sprite.

Dreading to lose her, I would have been glad to drop the girl with whom I was dancing and keep my object in sight, but I had just begun to dance, and experience with my partner had taught me that she would keep the floor as long as the music lasted. And she did, it was fully ten minutes before I was released, and then she said she must go out on to the porch for some cool air. What could I do? I proved myself a gentleman, wishing all the while that I was a boor. By the time the girl was ready for the next dance with another partner, thank heaven, nearly half an hour had passed. Then it was too late. I hunted everywhere for my water sprite, but did not find her. If the girl I had been dancing with had known my feelings toward her for detaining me I would have had another adventure on my mind no so attractive as the first.

The next morning, passing the landing of one of the hotels, I saw the girl I sought, in a charming rowing costume, step into a boat and pull out into the lake. I immediately made application for a boat, but all were engaged. The girl I wished to follow could see me wildly running about trying to get a boat, and, though I was not near enough to see, I fancied there was an amused smile on her face. Then she disappeared behind an island, and I ground my teeth.

Several times after this I met her and every time it was my misfortune to be so situated that I could not reach her. I showed so much temper over my disappointments that at last, when I was suffering under one of them, her face broke into a pleasant smile. There is nothing a girl likes so well as to be chased, and, instead of helping the chaser to reach her, she will throw obstacles in his way.

I learned enough of the girl who knew me and whom I did not know to be assured that she was devoted to boating. Indeed I had seen her on the water, shooting along like the water sprite for which I had named her. So I resolved to spend a day on the lake in a boat, trusting it would give me an opportunity to catch her. I hired a boat at 9 o'clock in the morning and, taking a luncheon, resolved not to come off the water till dinner time in the evening.

I had not been out long before my girl passed me just as she had done at our first meeting. For a moment we looked at each other, surprised; then with a tantalizing smile on her lips, she gave two or three vigorous strokes that carried her away from me.

She had an advantage of me in this. To follow her I was obliged to turn and, not being a skilled oarsman, instead of backing water with one oar and giving way with the other, I made a considerable curve. After I had turned I had another disadvantage in having my back to the girl, while she had her face to me. I was obliged to stop rowing for a moment to see where she was and saw her a short distance away rowing on her own.

Thinking that she had decided to

grant me an interview, I pulled for her, and when I thought I had reached the point where I had seen her I stopped rowing to turn my head and have a look. She was rowing a few hundred feet ahead of me. I noticed the long graceful sweep of her oars, the regularity of the time between the strokes, the nicety of her "feather," and saw that if she intended to give me a race, notwithstanding my superior strength, the issue would be uncertain.

Indeed, I was under a disadvantage in every respect except strength. My great drawback was that while she could see me I could not see her. Besides, the lake was a long one and full of islands, behind which she could lose herself if she wished to do so. I concluded to give up the chase for that day and plan for one later that would take away the disadvantage of chasing with my back toward my opponent in the race.

I pulled ashore, and while doing so it occurred to me that if I hastened with my preparations I might yet be in time to have it out before luncheon. I ran to my room, took down a small mirror that hung on the wall, secured some twine and went back to my boat. The looking glass I set up in the stern, and of the twine I made tiller strings that I tied to my feet. Then I pulled back to where I had left my water sprite. I did not have to turn to see her when I came near enough to her to do so. I spied her lazily moving across the water, but noticed that though she did not seem to exert herself she made very good headway.

I pulled straight toward her, and as I approached, supposing that with my back turned to her I could not see her, she pulled across my bow. I followed her by a curve. Catching glimpses of her in my mirror, I saw that this puzzled her, and at the same time I had evidence that she was bent on teasing me. Then suddenly she caught sight of the mirror, and it was evident to her that she had lost an advantage.

She was within a hundred feet of me when she realized that she could do no more fooling. It was beautiful to see her bend to her work. She had evidently been well trained in rowing, for scarcely a drop of spray did she knock up, while with every stroke her boat gained headway, skimming the water as if bemastered with the silences of a fish. My mirror worked beautifully, and, aided by my rubber strings, I had very little disadvantage except for the want of skill. It was evident that it was a matter of brute strength against training.

My hope was in tiring her, though I was so clumsy that I was as likely to tire myself. I put on all my strength for awhile, then slowed down, repeating the process again and again, thinking that I could recover after one of these spurts quicker than the water sprite. But at last, finding this did not appear to give me much advantage, I pretended to be fagged out and waited for her to fall into a trap. Fortunately for me she gave me an opportunity. I could see the water and the shore behind both of us, while she could not. Noticing on our port side a narrow bay, I steered to the starboard to drive her into it. I succeeded, and presently she found herself in the mouth of the bay.

It was amusing to see her when she made this discovery. She gave a few furious strokes to starboard, but I banded her off. Then she made a few strokes to port with the same result. Gradually I drove her up the bay, which narrowed as we proceeded, and finally into the mouth of a creek, where she grounded.

"Pardon me for my seeming intrusion, but it has occurred to me that I have had the pleasure of meeting you somewhere, and I wish to be enlightened."

She smiled and replied that I must be mistaken. To this I said I was not mistaken, and after laughing at me for some time she said:

"I must have grown awfully old that you can't place me. Three years sometimes make a great change in one. Can't you recall a starlit night on the veranda at Beach, when you sat with a girl in a corner? You told her that it was a case of love at first sight; that—"

"For heaven's sake, are you Miriam Beach?"

"No."

"Then you must be Alice Archard."

"Wrong again. I'm the third girl you proposed to that summer."

I remained silent for a few moments, then recovered my assurance.

"Don't you know," I said, "that, as the children say, 'the third time is the charm'?"

She burst into a merrier laugh than before, and I added:

"We don't need two boats for two persons. If you will get into mine, we'll take yours in tow and I'll pull you in."

I handed her to a seat in the stern of my boat. She took up the mirror to make a place for herself. Holding it before her face, she arranged some strands of her hair that had become loose.

"That's womanlike," I said.

"And it's manlike," she retorted, "to propose to three girls in one season and forget them."

"No more of that 'n' then lovest me," I said and called forth a blush. That tells the story, I said to myself. I pulled back to her hotel, where I left her and her boat.

"Don't you want the mirror?" I asked her.

"No, thank you. Keep it as a memento of your ingenuity."

"I suppose I may call this evening?"

"Certainly. But there is no veranda overlooking a beach. Besides, I have grown wiser with age."

Her wisdom did not serve her, for when we returned to the city we were engaged.

# THE STRANGER

How He Secured Damages From a Railroad Company

By DOROTHEA HALE

"Tickets!"

The conductor stood by a man with his hat over his eyes, apparently asleep. He made no response to the demand, and the conductor poked him. The passenger woke up, blinked his eyes at the conductor, then began to feel for his pocketbook. It was not in his hip pocket, where he first looked for it, and he began a series of sudden thrusts in all his other pockets.

"Conductor," he said, not having found it, "some pickpocket has relieved me of my tickets and \$50 in cash."

"Ticket!" repeated the conductor, apparently oblivious to this ingenious excuse.

"I tell you I've been robbed of my ticket. Pass me to the end of the road and I will see that you get one as soon as I can cash a draft."

"Give me either a ticket or the money for your fare or you'll have to get off the train."

"What in all this rain?"

"Yes, in all this rain. In the first place, you were not asleep at all when I came round, but pretended to be. In the second place, you can't beat your way on this road, and, in the third, fork over or I'll put you off."

Other passengers were by this time interested in the debate. They saw the man look at the conductor with a peculiar expression, in which surprise and condemnation were mingled. Though young, his face had in it the look of one who was accustomed to command. His clothes were covered with the dust of travel, but were not shabby. As he looked at the conductor his countenance hardened, then he said quietly:

"Put me off."

The conductor seized the bell cord, pulled it vigorously, and the train came to a stop between two fields.

The road was ditched on both sides and the passenger had difficulty in finding a footing. The train started on. He stood staring at it for a few moments, then looked about him for shelter. There was but one house in sight, and that was fully two miles away. The rain beat down, wetting the ejected passenger to the skin, and a cold northeast wind intensified its chill. Taking a glance at the probable best route by which to reach the house mentioned, he started toward it.

He was an hour reaching it, facing as he did the storm and several times having to retrace his steps. On arriving he found it to be far better than the average farmhouse and was received by kind-hearted, hospitable persons. He begged shelter and some dry clothing, which was given him, but a chill warned him that he had better go to bed at once.

His hosts, the Livermore family, consisted of the father, mother and their daughter, Jennie. The father had been obliged on account of ill health to take up his residence in the country and was trying to make a living by farming. Though he had become well again, he found his city life had not given him the experience a farmer needs, and he was rapidly running in debt. Nevertheless the family was all kindness to the stranger. His chill was succeeded by a fever, and in less than a week he was at the point of death. Then he rallied and in a short time was convalescent.

During his illness Mrs. Livermore was his chief attendant, but when he was getting well she turned him over to her daughter. The weather was becoming warm, and Jennie placed a bed chair on the porch for him and covered him with blankets. There he sat most of the day in the sunshine.

From the porch he could look down on the railroad and the place where he was elected in that pillbox storm.

"It's a shame," said his little nurse, Jennie, "that you should have been forced to risk your life as you were. How much would it cost to sue the company?"

"Why do you ask?" The invalid looked at the girl's indignant features with interest.

"Because I had a legacy of \$200 left me not long ago, and if that would do I think I would let you have it."

The stranger regarded her with an amused expression. Such unthinking generosity was refreshing.

"Will you give it to me for the purpose of securing justice?" he asked.

She sat, turning the matter over in her mind for a few minutes, and at last generosity won.

"Yes," she said resolutely, "I will only you mustn't say anything to father or mother about the matter, for they might not approve."

"Probably not," replied the stranger, "but I may accept your offer. Keep your money where you can have it ready whenever I call for it."

The stranger sent for funds, which he received during his convalescence and paid his physician. He begged to be permitted to pay for at least his keeping. But this was refused him.

He had written the auditor of the railroad company by which he had suffered, stating his case and asking what indemnity would be paid, if any. The reply was that the company admitted no legal liability whatever, but if he

would state the lowest sum he would take in settlement his claim would be considered.

When the stranger read this he was sitting on the porch and Jennie was attending him. He smiled, and Jennie asked him at what he was smiling.

"I will name a very low sum—the amount you propose to lend me to try the case. After that I shall bear nothing more from the auditor."

"Why not?"

"Because his object is to induce me to name a sum that I will accept for my claim. He will file my reply, and if the case ever comes to trial he will show it as evidence that \$200 was all I had asked in settlement."

"How do you know so much about these matters?"

"Kindly give me writing materials," replied the stranger without answering her question, "and I will prove to you that I am right."

He wrote a letter offering to accept \$200 in settlement for his claims, asking an immediate reply since he was about to leave the place from which his offer was made. Though he remained there two weeks longer, no answer came.

"I wonder how in the wide world you know all that?" remarked Jennie.

But the stranger did not seem inclined to explain things. When he was strong enough he went away, giving heartfelt thanks to all his benefactors and bidding Jennie a tender goodbye.

"Now, remember," he said at parting with her, "if I send to you for that \$200 you won't go back on me, will you?"

"But didn't that offer you made spoil it all?" she asked.

"Yes, it worked in that way, but there are other ways."

Jennie's confidence in this young man, who seemed to know so much about railroad matters, was perfect, and she promised to send the money when called for. Then the stranger went away, and they heard no more of him for months. Spring passed into summer, and the early autumn came. Then Jennie received a letter from the stranger, saying that he was using her legacy without really having it in his possession. He explained that he was doing it on the credit system, which made it just as available to him as cash. This was all Greek to Jennie, but she remembered how he had foretold what the auditor of the railroad would do, and she wrote back that it was all right. She was glad he was getting the benefit of her money, and hoped he would make the railroad company pay at least his doctor's bill.

During the summer the stock of the said company began to go up and down, sometimes jumping five points at a time, then sinking ten points. Sometimes it would remain at a fixed price for weeks, then gradually settle. Within a few months, passing through these changes, it sank from par to half that value. Everybody wondered what was going on "behind the scenes" to cause such fluctuations and such a recalculation of price. But nobody seemed to know. After awhile it began to rise and went back to par.

When the annual meeting of the directors came, around an unknown name walked into the room where it was held and showed certificates to the amount of 53 per cent of the capital stock. He presented the names of a new board and, holding a majority of the stock, elected every one of them. Most of his votes were by proxy.

"You are," asked the astonished president of the man who held them, "an vice president of the R. T. and G. line, on the Pacific coast. Last spring I came east on business for my road. I was robbed of my pocketbook on having a train on your road and, entering neither money nor tickets, was put off in a store by your conductor. I contracted pneumonia and came very near dying. Subsequently I offered to accept \$200 for my claim against your company, but no reply was made to my offer. On my recovery I made a study of your road and formed a plan to unite it with its feeder. I interested my backers on the Pacific coast and obtained from them the necessary financial equipment. As chairman of the new board I call upon the officers of the company for their resignations."

Not a person present had ever heard of the \$200 claim for damages. The president said that if he had known of it he would gladly have settled the claim, paying a just amount. The chairman of the new board said he was glad the president did not know of it, since the investment under the new scheme promised to be a very profitable one.

A few days after these developments, Jennie Livermore saw the stranger coming up the walk. She ran out to meet him.

"I've won my suit against the railroad company," he said.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, and I must pay you for the use of your legacy, which helped me to win it."

"How much did you get?"

"Your share is in this check."

He handed her a check for \$6,040. She failed utterly to grasp what it meant. Then the others of the family came out to welcome him, and he told them how he had secured indemnity from the road for having been put off a train and made ill in consequence. There were additions to the story which interested them far more than the recital thus far. He had also deposited with his broker a check for what he deemed the payment for his stay with them while he was sick. \$1,000—and had bought and sold with it the stock of the railroad company. He was manipulating. That fund now amounted to over \$30,000.

The stranger made another visit to his benefactors, and when he went away he took with him Jennie Livermore.

# Ezekiel's "Daughter"

Scientific Versus Common Sense Farming

By CLARISSA MACKIE

Perched on the rail fence and looking like an amiable scarecrow, Ezekiel Flinder nibbled a blade of grass and freely commented on the methods of his young neighbor.

"You ain't never going to make a farmer of yourself, Mr. Hartwell. Your head is too full of newfangled notions. Platters is platters even if you call 'em 'tubers' or any other fancy name, and beans is beans and not legumes even if the hysterical culture club does claim they belong to that family."

Ernest Hartwell grinned patiently as he listened to Ezekiel's evening lecture. Born and bred in the city, an inward craving for a country life had at last drawn him to the pretty village of Little River.

"You can't deny that Mrs. Flinder's baked beans are more delicious since she learned how to cook them at the domestic science club. You said yourself that—"

"Maybe so, maybe so," waived Ezekiel airily. "Still, when it's all said and done with, whether she learns these notions at the minister's hysterical culture club or Miss Patty Dunn's domestic science thingumbob, the beans she cooks is just plain beans after all. I don't take no stock in theories or science or nothing but plain common sense."

"It must be a great satisfaction to feel that one can clip coupons from his stock of common sense," remarked Hartwell meekly as he hoed between his rows of corn.

Ezekiel snatched at him beneath his bushy brows. "You're laughing at me, Mr. Hartwell. I can tell it by that kink in your eye. Anybody ever tell you that you had a funny kink in your eye?"

Hartwell rested on his hoe and surveyed the farmer solemnly. "No, Mr. Flinder, no one ever broke the news to me. I've been told that I had the form of a bed slat, the face of a pirate and fussy hair like a doll, but I have always prided myself on my chin blue eyes, and to be told that there is a kink in one of them is heart-breaking." He dug despondently at a bunch of wire grass.

Ezekiel spat reflectively and let himself down to the ground. "You're a mighty fresh young man, Mr. Hartwell," he chuckled, "but it's a good thing for you I ain't got a daughter."

"Why?" demanded Hartwell, surprised.

"Oh, because you'd be dead set to marry her; and I wouldn't listen to it a minute. It couldn't be thought of no ways." Ezekiel was chewing grass vigorously.

"Once more I repeat, why? What objection have you to me as a son-in-law?"

"First I'd say to her: 'Young lady, you shan't marry no sculptor feller. Pick out a good, plain farmer boy, and you shall have my consent and the blue glass lemonade set I drew at the raffle for a wedding present.'"

"I'm a plain farmer boy," urged Mr. Hartwell.

"First off, you're a sculptor. That's your trade and all you got to fall back on. There can't be no money in sculpting or else you wouldn't have come and tried chicken farming out of a book."

"I like farming. It is my recreation," objected the amateur agriculturist.

"It'll be your ruination," predicted Mr. Flinder, raising a horny finger. "Look at that there corn!"

"Well, look at it!" agreed the planter proudly. "What's the matter with it, eh? See any taller corn hereabouts? See any thicker stalks? See any larger ears?"

"No, I don't see none of those things. All I can see is that there ain't no row planted straight. They're set zig-zag as though a tipsy man had set 'em out," chuckled Ezekiel.

"That's done purposely. There's a scientific reason for planting 'em that way," hazarded Hartwell.

"Humph!" snorted Ezekiel testily, and for a little while he was silent, following Hartwell slowly down the row of corn. Then he said tentatively: "I ain't never seen none of your sculpting yet?"

"Not?" queried Hartwell politely. "Not so much as a wink at it. I've often told Maria when I see you going into that workshop of yours that I guess I'll run in and see what you're up to, but somehow it's sort of damp and chilly looking in there, leastways it must be if it's full of graven images."

"H'm!" observed the sculptor. Ezekiel looked disappointed. He was plucked at Hartwell for not offering to initiate him into the mysteries of his workshop.

"I reckon you feel kinder timid about showing 'em off, but I guess we can make allowances for your being a beginner. You needn't feel bashful about it. You might some day make a figure for the soldiers' monument we're going to have on the green, and it would be an advantage for Little River folks to know what you can do. We always encourage local talent."

"Thank you; I'll think it over," said Ernest Hartwell modestly, shouldering his hoe. "I believe somebody is looking for you, Mr. Flinder."

Ezekiel wheeled sharply about to confront a pretty girl, dark haired, gray-eyed, blue gowned, with sun-kissed cheeks and scarlet lips. "Well, Miss Christine, how in thunder do you do?" He belovely, delightedly squeezed her hands.

"Very well, indeed, Mr. Flinder," she replied, with a provoking glance at Hartwell, who stood expectantly near. "I'm glad to see you looking so hale and hearty."

"What train did you come on? You ain't it all, I'd have met you if I'd known you was coming down today. Maria said yesterday that she'd get a letter from you, wanting to know could you get board down here another summer for you and your aunt. But I didn't know you was expected today."

"I couldn't wait another moment," laughed the girl. "Aunt Phoebe is coming tomorrow with all the trunk and things. I came down in the noon train, and the stage brought me to the house, but Nancy says Mrs. Flinder has gone to her ethical culture club. I came on down here looking for you."

"Well, here I be! Guess we might as well go along up to the house, Miss Christine." He led the way, intentionally ignoring the expectant embryo farmer. But Hartwell was equal to the emergency.

"Introduce me, please, Mr. Flinder," he said humbly, and Ezekiel smiled sourly and performed the ceremony that made the sculptor acquainted with Christine Davidson.

"Miss Christine is like a daughter to me, Mr. Hartwell," he said meaningly as the girl released her hand from Hartwell's clasp and turned away.

"And I am a plain farmer boy, and I'm good," murmured Hartwell obstinately.

"You're a sculptor and you'll starve to death some day," was Mr. Flinder's cheerful prognostication as he departed for his own side of the rail fence.

The next day he came once more to the rail fence and watched Hartwell raking the accumulated weeds he had uprooted the afternoon before. "Any time you say I'll bring Miss Christine over to see the sculpting, provided it's all proper, I'll tell Miss Phoebe Davidson about you—that's Christine's aunt—and she said you might be worth investigating," he observed, watching Hartwell's face.

"The deuce she did?" ejaculated Hartwell, his face growing very red. "See here, Mr. Flinder; just keep all these ladies away from my place. Understand?" He looked quite fierce.

"Well, I'll be stumped!" ejaculated Ezekiel, backing off. "You confounded young puppy, you! I don't believe you dash show me none of your sculpting. I'll bet it's nothing but a mess of mud pie!"

"Would you really like to see some of my work?" asked Hartwell with outward seriousness, although there were all sorts of kinks in his blue eyes. He enjoyed his verbal skirmishes with his neighbor quite as much as Ezekiel did, and Ezekiel was secretly proud of the fact that a rail sculptor lived cheek by jowl with him. His own lament was that he could not boast to his fellows that he had seen any of Hartwell's work.

"Yes, I'd admire to look at it. Maybe I could tell you if it was good enough for the soldiers' monument. I know something about art even if I don't belong to no hysterical culture club," grinned Ezekiel defiantly as he stamped down the path in the yard of the young man toward the back-lot.

In the long, low building, which Hartwell used as his workshop, they passed a moment while the artist gazed around at the several statues swathed under canvas coverings. "Smells damp in here," he said awkwardly as Hartwell removed the canvas from a large crouching lion modeled in clay.

"Lord! love you, but he looks like he would bite!" exclaimed Ezekiel; then he scanned the young man suspiciously. "I scarcely believe you made that there critter. You don't look like you had it in you, meaning no offense."

Hartwell smiled and removed a wet cloth from a mass of modeling clay. "Seeing's believing," he said cheerfully and moved his fingers deftly, surely, and with lightning rapidity, picking up and laying aside a modeling tool, he brought before Ezekiel's amazed vision a startling picture in miniature.

Against a background of rough clay was a rail fence. Sitting on the rail fence, one cowhide boot swinging nonchalantly over his clasped hands, was Ezekiel Flinder himself, looking like an amiable scarecrow as he nibbled a blade of grass.

Ezekiel stared, open eyed, open mouthed, chagrined almost to tears. "By gummy!" he breathed heavily at last. "It's me!"

"It is, Mr. Flinder," smiled Hartwell. "Why, if Little River sees that I'll be the laughingstock from Upper Ford down to Stepping Stone! I believe in you, Mr. Hartwell," he said earnestly. "I don't want no more proof. You're as consarned a good sculptor as I want to see, only break the thing before anybody sees it."

"How about your daughter?" asked Hartwell, holding his hands above the wet clay model.

"If I had one I'd make her marry you first to keep on good terms with you, Mr. Hartwell. Now, Miss Christine is my daughter, but I'll give you all the chances I can to—"

"You're too late, Mr. Flinder," interrupted Hartwell, the kinks coming into his eyes. "You see, I've been engaged to Christine Davidson for a year, and we're going to be married next month, and we expect you to donate the blue glass lemonade set."