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Matrimonial Adventures

## The Second Coming of Mrs. Bain's First Husband Irvin S. Cobb

Author of "Back Home,"
"The Escape of Mr. Trimm,"
"Roughing It Delauxe," "Paths
of Glory," "Old Judge Priest,"
"Fibble," "The Glory of the
Coming," "The Thunders of Si-lence," "The Abandoned Farmers," "The Belled Buzzard,"
"J. Poindexter, Colored," etc.

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#### **IRVIN S. COBB**

Is there anyone in this country who does not know the name of Irvin S. Cobb? Or what that name stands for in American literature? Judging from the way his books are taken from the public libraries -and they are too many to be named here-I should say emphati-

tie has been and done many things-newspaper man, war correspondent, author, playwright, etc., etc.; there isn't space enough to chronicle all the ground he has covered, but from the time he first began writing he has been claimed by his fellow countrymen in a way that seems to make him belong to his admirers individually. The auther who touches us humorously almost never fails to do just that. But it is his serious side, that side that gave us "The Belled Buzzard" series and "The Escape of Mr. Trimm," that has added to his great quota of our affections,

In "The Second Coming of Mrs. Bain's First Husband," written for the Star Author Series of Matrimonial Adventures, we have a story of marriage of striking originality. It takes up an old point-the nagging wife-in an entirely new fash-

MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

0 -----

If only Mrs. Thomas Bain had been content to compare Mr. Thomas Bain with men about him, he, for counterarguments, would not have been put at a serious disadvantage. Out of her ammunition locker he might have borrowed shells to fire in his own defense. Did she, for instance, cite the polished beauty of Mr. So-and-So's drawing-room behavior, speaking with that subtle inflection which as good as said that his own society manners left much to be desired, Mr. Bain's rebuttal would have been prompt and ready. He would have spoken right up to point out the fact that So-and-So notoriously neglected his family or that he drank entirely too much for his own good, or that he habitually failed to pay his just debts. Mr. Bain was no scandal-monger, understand. Still a man must fight back with such weapons as he may com-

But Mrs. Bain's method of attack was entirely too subtle for him; it left him practically weaponless. Out in the world he amply was competent to fend for himself. Beneath the domestic roof-tree, where his wife sat in judgment on him, his ways, his small shortcomings or his larger faults, he completely was at a loss for proper rebuttal. It gave him such a helpless feeling! It would have given any normal man a helpless feeling. And Mr. Bain was in all essential regards a normal man-a good citizen, a good provider and, as husbands go, an average fair husband.

I would do Mrs. Bain no injustice. She was a normal woman, too. But it is only natural that when destiny has fashioned an advantage to fit our hands that we should employ it. Her advantage was a very great one. Her criticisms of Mr. Bain took the form of measuring him off against the conceived

picture of her first husband. And her first husband was dead. Now, in common decency, an honorable man-and Mr. Bain was an honorable man-may not speak ill of the dead. What is more, had he, under stress of provocation, been minded to retort that after all Mrs. Bain's first husband was not exactly perfection either, he could have produced no proof to support the assertion. For he had never seen his predecessor. He knew nobody who had known the deceased. The present Mrs. Bain had been for three years a widow when first he set eyes on her. She had lately returned then from Honolulu; it was in Honolulu that she had been bereft, as the saying is, by the hand of death. And Honolulu is a long distance from Brockway, Mass., where Tom Bain's people, a stay-athome stock, had lived these five generations past.

So, on those frequently recurring oceasions when Mrs. Bain, with a saddened, almost a wistful, air was moved to remind herself of her first husband's marvelous qualities-temperament, disposition, tact, amiability or what notthere was for her second husband nothing to do but to suffer on in an impotent silence. It is not well that anyone on this earth-and more especially a husband-should be required to suffer discomforts in silence. Suffering calls for vocal expression.

Otherwise, as human beings go, Mr. the other. It was that dead first husband of hers, who, invoked by her, kept rising up to mar the reasonable happiness which might have been theirs. The thing was getting on his nerves. In the peril. He wanted above all things deed, at the time this briefened narrative begins, it already had got upon his nerves. He had come to the point where frequently he wished there had never been a first husband.

There were even times when he al-

there never had been such things as the dawn. In this instance, though, de la year past you have been intimidated second husbands, either.

With the acute vividness of a war scarred veteran remembering the first time he was shot, he could reconstruct the occasion when Mrs. Bain's former husband first came into his life. They had been married just two months then. The honeymoon was in its last quarter. If the couple were ever to go along together in harmony the time had now come when mutual understanding must succeed the period of renewed her remarks on a matter to adjustment and balance. She had the benefit of experience on her side; for she had been through the process once before. Tom Bain might be a green hand at this business of being married, thinking, no amount of exasperation own defense as powers of coherent but, subconsciously, he was beginning to adjust himself in his ordained and proper place in the matrimonial scheme as it related to him and this very charming lady. In other words, he had reached the place where he was slipping out of the bridegroom pose into the less studied and more matter-offact status of a husband. He was ready to quit acting a part and be his own self again always, though with regard for the limitations and restrictions imposed by the new estate upon which he had entered,

The campaign against him-we may as well call it a campaign-opened on the evening following their return from the trip to White Sulphur. That first day at his desk had been a hard one; so much which seemed to require his personal attention had accumulated while he was away. He left the office pretty well tired out. On his way home he built up a pleasant vision of a nice quiet little dinner and then a peaceful hour or so in the living room in slippers and an old smoking jacket.

Mrs. Bain met him at the door with a greeting that put him in thorough good humor. This, he decided, was the best of all possible worlds to live in and his, undoubtedly, was the best of all possible ways of living.

"You're late, dearest," she said. You've just time to run upstairs and dip on your evening clothes. I've laid them out for you." "Why, there's nobody coming in for

dinner, is there?" he asked. She drew away from him slightly. "No, there's no one coming," she said.

What difference does that make?" "Well," he said, "I'm rather fggged out, and I sort of thought that, seeing there'd be only the two of us, I'd come

to the table just as I am." "Very well, dear," she said, "suit

courself." But he took note that she had shortened the superlative "dearest" to "dear." Also she slipped herself out of the circlet of his encircling arm. Suddenly there was a suggestion-a bare-trace-of an autumnal chill in the

But, as a newly married man, how could be suit himself? He clad himself in the starchy shirt, the high, tight collar that pinched his throat, the pinchy patent leathers, and all the rest of the funeral regalia in which civilized man encases himself on any supposedly festal occasion. She gave him an approving look when, ten minutes later, he presented himself before her.

"Tom," she said as they sat down, "I think you always should dress for dinner. Arthur always said that a gentleman should dress for dinner."

He stared at her, puzzled, "Arthur?" he echoed. 'Who's Ar-

"My first husband," she explained. Arthur looked so well in his evening

"Oh!" he said, like that. That was all he said for a minute or so. He was

She was thinking, too, Practically all women are popularly supposed to have intuition, and certainly this particular woman had her share of it. Probably It was in that very moment of reflection that the lady decided on a future plan of action.

At any rate, this was the beginning. Eventually, Mr. Bain awoke to a realization that he was the victim of a gentle tyranny-that he had fallen captive to a combination enemy made up of an affectionate if somewhat masterful lady and the memory of a dead and gone personality. Mrs. Bain's first husband was persistently dogging Mrs. Bain's second husband. Daily, after one fashion or another, the latter was reminded of the late Arthur. Arthur, It seemed, had never lost his temper. What made the comparison hurt the more was the indubitable fact that Mr. Bain occasionally did lose his. Arthur had never raised his voice above the low-pitched key of innate refinementno matter how irritated he might be. Arthur had been so tidy; never left his clothes lying about where he dropped them. Arthur had not given her a cross word in all the seven years of their life together. Arthur invariably had been so considerate of her feelings. It was Arthur this and it was Arthur that. She realized her power and she used it. Mrs. Bain's first husband was ever, so to speak, at the elbow of Mrs. Bain's second husband, by proxy chiding him, admonishing him, correcting him, scolding him, even.

And for all that he naturally was a sunny-natured and companionable person, Mrs. Bain's second husband was, at the end of the first year of his married life, in a fair way to become a most unhappy person. Their matrimonial craft was sliding down the rapand Mrs. Bain were well suited one for ids toward a thundering Niagara; and she didn't realize it and he, thoroughly under the dominion of forces with which he found himself powerless to cope, only dimly and dully appreciated to have and to hold his wife until death | me a grave wrong as well. I may be did them part. But always there was only a memory-I may say that, pre-Arthur tagging along, making a crowd of three of what otherwise might have ory has its feelings, its sense of rebeen a congenial company of two.

But, as some one has most aptly

liverance came to the oppressed, not by the constantly presented image of with the graduations of the spreading a fabulous creature. Your peace of dawn, but rather with the solid em- mind has been seriously affected. Bephasis of a bolt from the blue. There fore your eyes I have been held up as had been an evening of bridge with the Tatums and Bain, who played well, had | der on my name. It has been an in-It is barely possible that he had betrayed a passing emotion of testiness wish you to know the truth. I was been made on the way home in the cab.

"My dear," she was saying, "I really must repeat again that, to my way of tack, was reviving, was rallying to her could have justified you in showing speech returned to her, your feelings as you did show them at least twice at that card table. Now, Arthur would never-"

At this instant Mr. Bain's finger lights flashed on. What next ensuedthe vocal part of it, I mean-might have suggested to an eavesdropper, had there been one, that the vowel under strong excitement. "Eh?" That was his astounded ejacu-

"E-c-e-e!" A shrill outery, part scream, part squeal, from her. "I-I-" Mr. Bain ngain.

"Oh!" Mrs. Bain's turn.

"You!" Her startled gasp of recogni-

"Yes, Evelyn, that's who it is." This, in matter-of-fact tones, was a third voice speaking.

After this for a moment the spell of Mrs. Bain silent.

Standing in the middle of the floor, facing them, was a shadow. I use the word advisedly. With equal propriety might write down "apparition" or "wraith" or "shape" or "spirit" to deprefer "shadow,"

It had the outline, somewhat wavery and uncertain, of a man. It had the voice of a man-a voice calm, assured, almost casual. It had the garb of a man, or at least it had the nebulous faint suggestion of garbing. But it had no substance to it, none whatsoever. It had no definable color, either. It had rather the aspect of a figure of man done in lines of very thin smoke. You could look right through it and distinguish, as through a patch of haze, the pattern of the wall-paper behind it. And now, as it spoke again, you could, in some indefinable sort of way, see its voice starting from down in its chest and traveling on up and up and so out of its lips. It was no more than a patch of fog, modeled by some unearthly magic into vaporous semblance of a human form. It was inconceivable, impossible, an incredible figment of the imagination, and yet there it was.

Its second speech was addressed to Mr. Bain, who had frozen where he button, his eyes enlarged to twice their size and his lower law sagged.

"You are astonished? Permit me to introduce myself. I am Arthur-Mrs. Bain's first husband. I am glad to meet

Mr. Bain, under this shock, came to himself. The shackles of twelve months of bottled-in restraint fell from him "Are you?" he answered, "Well, I'm

d-d if I'm glad to meet you." "I understand." The voice was gentle, almost compassionate. "You will be glad later on, I think-very glad. Shall we sit down all of us?"

The Thing took a chair. And the back of the chair cloudily revealed itself as a sub-motif for the half-materialized torso of its occupant. Mechanically, moving jerkily, Mr. Bain followed suit; he likewise took a chair. Mrs. Bain, uttering choked whimpering sounds down in her throat, already had fallen upon a couch and was huddled there. It was just as well the couch had been handily near by, for her legs would no longer support her. Her first husband-we may as well

call him that-turned to her. "Control yourself, Evelyn," he bade her. "There is no occasion for any excitement. Besides, those curious sounds which you are now emitting annoy me. I haven't long to stay and I have much to say."

He cleared his throat-the process might be followed with the eye as well

as by ear-and proceeded. "I have been endeavoring for months past to bring about this meeting. In fact, ever since shortly after your second marriage to this gentleman, I have striven to return to earth for the one purpose which brings me tonight. But it was difficult-very difficult," He sighed a visible sigh. "It is not permitted that I should explain the nature of the obstacles. I merely state that they were very great. As you will notice, I am not able even yet to attain the seeming solidity-weight and specific density-which I craved to take on. So I just came along in the somewhat sketchy and incomplete guise in which you now see me.

"My reason for coming is simple. desire to see justice done. Where I was, I could not rest in peace knowing that you, Evelyn, were lying so outrageously and, what was worse, making me an unwitting accomplice, as it were, to your lying campaign,

"Evelyn, you have been a foolish wicked woman. You have done this gentleman here"-including Mr. Bain, with a wave of a spectral arm-"s cruel wrong. But what, from my point of view is even worse, you have done cisely, is what I am-but even a memsponsibility, its obligations to itself.

"Very well, having made that point most permitted himself the wish that said, it's always darkest just before clear, I shall proceed; Sir, for nearly -Louisville Courier-Journal.

a paragon-I. And I resent the slanfor a partner Mrs. Tatum, who didn't. suit which no self-respecting memory should be compelled to stand. Sir. 1 once or twice. At midnight, as they not a paragon, and I thank God for it. were entering their home, Mrs. Bain I was not the perfect husband this woman would have you believe. I was which reference already had twice fussy, faulty, crochety-and I am proud of it.

"Oh, Arthur!" Mrs. Bain, under at-

"Don't 'Oh, Arthur' me," he snapped, "but listen: And you, too, sir, if you will be so good. We quarreled frequently in those years of our married found the push-button just inside the life. She complained of my brusque famb of the living room door and the ways, of my fits of irritability, of my refusal to like many of the people that she persisted in liking, of my tastes and my habits and inclinations. She didn't care for some of my friends; I sounds in their proper order were be- didn't care for some of hers. I objecting repeated by two persons laboring ed to any number of things about her - and rarely refrained from saying so. She has told you that between us there was never a cross word. Bah! There were tens of thousands of cross words, When we get on each other's nerves, which was often, neither of us hesitated to let it be known. When we disagreed over something-or anythingwe argued it out. We loved each other, but merely loving did not make either of us angelic. We quarreled and made up and quarreled some more. We fell out and we fell back together again. terrific fascination held both Mr. and There were times when we were like a pair of cooing doves and again there were times when the proverbial monkey and parrot had little if anything on us. In short, and in fine, sir, we behaved just as the average reasonably well-mated married couples do scribe that which confronted them. I behave. And for my own sake, and incidentally for yours, sir, I would not have you believe differently.

> "That, I believe, is practically all I had to say to you. Having said it, I wish to add a final word to our wife, here. Evelyn, speaking with such authority as is befitting a first husband, I wish to state that, so far as my observations from another sphere have gone, your present husband is a firstrate fellow. I like to think of him as my successor. And I intend to see that he has a fair deal from you. I trust this visit from me has been a lesson to you. Hereafter, in your dealings with him you will please be so good as to stand on your own merits, You will kindly refrain from dragging me into your arguments as an advocate on your side. My stock of patience is no greater than it was before I became a memory-remember that. I sincerely trust it will not be necessary for me to admonish you personally a second time. Because I warn you here and now that next time I shall return under circumstancés that will be most embarrassing to you. Next time there will be no privacy about my appearance; I shall come to you in public. You'll be a talked-about woman, Evelyn. There'll be pieces about you in the paper and spiritualists and trance mediums and delvers into the occulta meddlesome, noisy lot, too, I may add -will make your life a burden for you.

> So have a care, Eevlyn! "Str. to you I extend my best wishes, I'm sorry we didn't meet befere. But, some of these days we'll make up for lost time-when you join me on the plane where I am at present residing. Well, I guess that will be about all. . . Oh, if you don't mind, I'll just disstpate into air and float up the chimney-it's more convenient." Out of a nothingness near the fireplace came a voice, growing thinner and fainter: "Good-by, Bain, old chap. Good-by,

Evelyn-and don't forget. It was at this juncture that Mrs. Bain went off into a swoon. It also should be noted that, even as he sprang to her side to revive her. Mr. Bain wore on his face a look of husbandly solicitude and concern, but his feet twittered a dance measure.

Personally, I do not believe in ghosts. I assume, readers, that you do not believe in ghosts, either. But Mrs. Bain does, and as for Mr. Bain, he does, too, firmly-and, as a happily married man, he is every day renewing and strengthening his belief in them.

## "Retirement."

A tired feeling has evidently turned the thoughts of several of our readers toward pensions and retirement. They will feel better when they have

had a holiday! Until then, we venture to remind them of the dire effects that frequently result from giving up work.

Work is the most deep-rooted of habits-with those who have been engaged in it till past middle age. Suddealy to renounce it isn't safe. We can recall edifying-if unverifiedtales about those rich men who retired and died at once; or else came back and asked to be made office boys, in order that they might be saved from

You don't believe these stories? Then you reject our proffered consolation. You will have to fall back on the far hope of an old-age pension, perhaps, big enough in these days-te nourish an undersized sparrow.-London Mirror.

## Courtship.

They met at the winter colony is. California.

"Will you give me a kiss here in the daisy field?" he asked. But she was coy.

"Why not?" he urged. "Daisies don't

"All right," said the girl, "but let's get away from this babbling brook."



### How to Gain Strength and Endurance

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