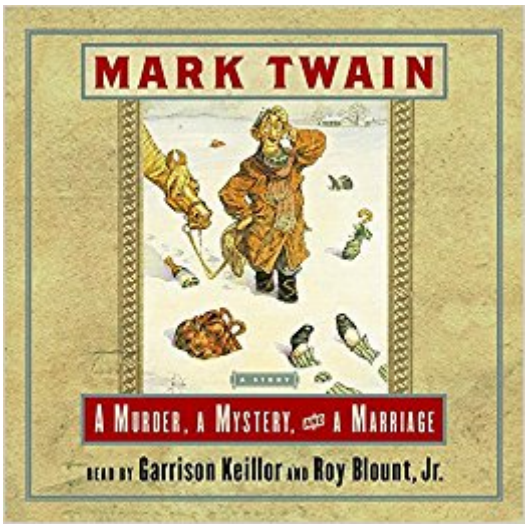
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A Murder, A Mystery, And A Marriage



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Synopsis

"Upon the border of a remote and out-of-the-way village in south-western Missouri lived an old farmer named John Gray..."In 1876, the same year The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was published, Mark Twain wrote a story for The Atlantic Monthly. He meant it as a "blind novelette"--a challenge to other writers to submit their own ending of the story in a national competition. Twain asked his editor at The Atlantic to request submissions from leading authors of the day, including Henry James.Perhaps because few writers could write as well as Twain, no one responded, and Twain’s original complete manuscript languished in literary hibernation. It was rediscovered in 1995 and will appear in The Atlantic Monthly in summer 2001, having come full circle. Set in the fictional town of Deer Lick, Missouri, A Murder, a Mystery, and a Marriage chronicles the fortunes of a farmer determined to have his daughter marry the son of a wealthy man. It’s a charming story in the Twain tradition and a delightful addition to his legacy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Atlantic Monthly, to great hoopla, recently resurrected an 1876 Twain manuscript; in this slim volume, it is reproduced, along with insightful comments from Roy Blount Jr. The question is, do we have a forgotten masterpiece? Or is the Atlantic playing a game like the Duke and the Dauphin’s Royal Nonesuch in Huckleberry Finn, inflating expectations and leading up merely to a diddly stag show? In Twain’s story, a Frenchman is found in a field of snow outside a small Missouri town. He refuses to explain how he got there, but lets it be known he is a Count Fontainebleau. He courts Mary Gray, the town beauty. Mary was intended for her true love, Hugh Gregory, but her father,

John Gray, scotched the marriage. David Gray, John’s brother, has threatened to drop Mary from his will if she marries Hugh, whom he dislikes. Then David Gray is murdered, and Hugh Gregory is convicted of the crime. Count Fontainebleau is on the verge of marrying Mary when there is a sudden turnaround of events. Twain’s original idea was to give a skeleton plot involving a mysterious stranger and a murder to other writers (including, bizarrely, Henry James) and have the Atlantic Monthly publish all their versions a scheme presumably engineered to show Twain’s superiority. This never happened. Twain’s story is, admittedly, a trifle. Roy Blount directs his comments to the reason Twain put aside Huckleberry Finn to write it, leading him to speculate interestingly, albeit somewhat irrelevantly, on Twain’s life and politics, which were shifting in 1876. Altogether, this Twain curiosa is less interesting in itself than for what Blount makes of it. (Sept.)Forecast: Curiosity will spur sales of this bauble, as will the gift-book-size trim and six watercolor illustrations by Peter de Sive.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The core of this little book is a gimmicky mystery that Twain wrote for a proposed Atlantic Monthly magazine competition in 1876. The fanfare accompanying its publication made it seem as important as a lost chapter of Huckleberry Finn; however, it’s a distinctly minor piece, good for a chuckle or two. The real meat of the book is humorist Roy Blount’s contribution, which uses half the pages to tell the story behind the story and place it in the context of Twain’s other writings. This will interest Twain buffs and scholars but may stretch the patience of listeners, especially since Blount writes better than he reads. Fellow humorist Garrison Keillor narrates Twain’s story itself, but even it may not please everyone. His timing and inflections, while perfect for his own material, tend to bury Twain’s voice. Not a necessary addition to libraries that own the print edition. R. Kent Rasmussen, Thousand Oaks, CACopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It’s Twain who could complain

In 1876 Mark Twain proposed to William Dean Howells, the editor of the Atlantic Monthly, that a number of authors including Twain himself each write a story--"’blindfolded’ as to what the others had written"--based on the same skeleton plot, which Twain would devise. In the end the idea came to nothing, or almost nothing, because Howells never managed to interest other authors in taking on the task. But Twain did write his own contribution to the project. His A Murder, A Mystery, and a

Marriage is a curious story about a greedy farmer's attempts to line his pockets by marrying his daughter off to a wealthy suitor. The farmer's plot is complicated, however, by his estranged brother's will and by the appearance in town, under unusual circumstances, of a multilingual stranger. The mystery--there is, after all, a murder in the tale--is laid to rest in Twain's final chapter with the unlikely introduction of Jules Verne into the story. Twain never published his novella, and part of the manuscript was lost for more than a hundred years. It appeared in print for the first time in 2001.The Norton paperback of A Murder, A Mystery, and a Marriage includes four facsimile pages of Twain's manuscript and is beautifully illustrated with watercolors by Peter de S?ve. In a brief foreword and a nearly forty-page afterword Roy Blount Jr. discusses the history of the manuscript and places the story in the larger context of Twain's more familiar work and the politics of the day. It is not the most interesting of essays, but Twain fans who are sufficiently familiar with his oeuvre and with mid-nineteenth-century politics may appreciate it.Debra Hamel -- author of Trying Neaira: The True Story of a Courtesan's Scandalous Life in ancient Greece (Yale University Press, 2003)

What fun!

One of Twain's best. Read it, you'll love it.

I LOVE Mark Twain but sometimes when a story is put away in the desk drawer, it is for good reason. The author would know better than anyone whether or not to publish a story and just put it away or even trash it. This is one of those stories. It may have been a story that he thought might be interesting in his mind, but when he started putting it to paper, it lost steam or it just wasn't enough to make for a good book. I did not enjoy this story nor could I find a liking for any of the characters. I really tried hard to do so. Mr. Twain knew what he was doing when he gave up on this one.

In my effort to be a little more cultured/diversified in my reading I picked up this book by Mark Twain. I would give it 3.5 stars if that were an option. The story itself is quite short. The forward and afterward are longer than the story itself. It was interesting to read more about Mark Twain's life and the comparisons of his writing.

This short story by Mark Twain, discovered years after his other works were published, tells of a farmer in Deer Lick, Missouri who stumbles upon a Frenchman lying unconscious in the snow, miles

from any nearby structure and without any footprints or tracks around him to explain his appearance. The Farmer, John Gray, aids the confused man, taking him home to be nursed by his wife and daughter. There, they learn his name and, as he settles into town, gradually learn that he is of noble birth, forced to flee his homeland for political reasons. The family warms to him, including the beautiful young Mary. His courtship is unfruitful, however, for her heart belongs to a previous suitor. Though she has been forbidden to marry him due to the prejudice of an uncle who has settled his estate on her, Mary remains faithful to her lover. But will she stand by him when his reputation is stained with blood? Or will she finally give in to the Count's pursuit?A quick read, I found this short story fun and, though not one of Twain's best works, entertaining enough to be worth the short time it took to read it. The mystery isn't hard to solve but the excitement that builds at the climax of the story is drawn out perfectly and really adds to the enjoyment of the book. All in all, a nice bit of fiction to fill in an hour on a rainy Sunday afternoon.

Mark Twain's A Murder, A Mystery and a Marriage is a very minor work by the great author. The story -- written for Atlantic Monthly -- is slight enough that it can be read in sitting. There are some amusing points, but the plot is so transparent until the last chapter that it never really excited me. The last chapter is the story's villain's tacked-on explanation, and it comes completely out of left field. I actually found the foreword and afterword more interesting, as Roy Blount explains why the story was written and muses on how the politics of the day may have influenced Twain and his writing of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. This is a book for a true hard-core Twain fan who wants to read everything he ever wrote. Others probably should stick to his more major works. For more in-depth book reviews I've done, search for goldenrulecomics on hubpages.com.

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