

ANNIVERSARY

BY VICTOR V. MURRAY

ALTHOUGH Angelica had exchanged the customary home-coming kiss with a touch more enthusiasm than usual, her cordiality had quickly faded. By the time dinner was served the domestic atmosphere was distinctly chilly.

"Something, or somebody," said I to myself, "has hurt the feelings of my loyal opposition. She appears ready to tell me all about it at any moment."

After Olga had left us with the coffee I braced myself for the outburst.

"Do you happen to know what the date is today?" asked Angelica, her voice ominously calm.

"The date? Why, yes."

"Well?" Just one word—but the tone in which it was said conveyed volumes.

I tried to look very bland and sure of myself.

"Getting near Christmas again, isn't it?" I ventured.

"Christmas indeed!" Angelica's indignation rose and bubbled over like badly poured beer. "Christmas? Is that all you can think of? Does our wedding anniversary mean nothing to you any more?"

SO THAT was it. The well-known wedding anniversary had popped up again. That explained why I found a large "W. A." marked against the date on my office calendar. I must have printed it months previously. Unfortunately the initials had suggested nothing to me that morning except the words "women's auxiliary." I had tried hard to think of something I was supposed to do in connection with a women's auxiliary but finally gave it up.

Meanwhile Angelica was maintaining a remarkably high verbal output—about 350 words a minute. I should imagine.

It appeared, judging by her remarks, that any husband who forgot his wedding anniversary was, *ipso facto*, a loose, idle, detestable person and a reprobate.

I had undoubtedly been caught unawares but saw nothing to be gained by admitting it. As an unpretentious but sincere student of matrimonial strategy I decided my best defense would be an attack.

"Come, come, now!" I said, in my most come-icish manner, "You don't really suppose for a moment that I actually forgot our wedding anniversary?"

I fancied I got a nice inflexion of mingled astonishment and reproach on the last few words.

My unexpected remark left Angelica momentarily wordless. Knowing it would only be momentarily, I hurried on.

"Forgotten our wedding day?" here I managed a faint laugh to indicate the absurdity of such a notion, "Why, I would be more likely to forget my own name."

"Then why didn't you say something about it—or do something?"

THIS was one of those questions which have to be answered like a flash. He who hesitates is lost—when he is trying to bluff his wife.

"Well you see," I said suavely, "I was just pretending I had forgotten it in order to make my little surprise all the more surprising."

"You have a surprise for me?" Angelica's face brightened.

"I certainly have," I replied, wondering what on earth I could surprise her with.

"Where is it?"

"Ah, you can't have it just yet," said I, fighting for time.

Suddenly I remembered the packet in Bill Brimming's overcoat. Bill and I had inadvertently exchanged overcoats when we had lunched together that day. Blue chinchillas look so much alike I had not discovered the mistake until I felt a small package in one of the pockets while on my way home.

I went to the hall and fished the packet out. It bore a jeweller's name on the wrapper. It looked as if the situation was saved. I would give Bill's gift to Angelica then replace it for Bill in the morning.

I walked back, gave the little packet to Angelica, gracefully submitted to the usual demonstration of delight.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly.

"Open it and see," I answered, not having the vaguest idea.

"You're a darling," she cooed, as she fiddled with the string.

"All of that," I agreed, wondering how much it was going to cost me.

THE dark red paper was off. A little card dropped out. I felt like a soldier who hears a large shell coming his way but does not know where it is going to land.

Angelica read the card. Her eyes lit up like auto headlights suddenly switched from "dim" to "full."

"Who—who is Betsy?" she demanded, thrusting the little bit of pasteboard under my nose.

On it was printed, in an unmistakably masculine hand

To Betsy—a good little girl.
From a bad boy.

"Who is this good little girl?" Angelica's voice was very cold and controlled.

My mind, which had gone numb for the nonce, began to function again.

"I've no idea," I said, using what I call my candid tone, "The jeweller must have slipped in somebody else's card instead of my own."

"Are you sure you didn't get your presents mixed and send mine to this Betsy woman?"

It took time, tact, and a certain amount of amatory action to get matters smoothed out. But finally I convinced my warlike angel that the gift was, and always had been, intended solely for her.

IHAD hardly settled back in my chair with a large and sorely needed drink at my elbow when the telephone rang.

It was Bill Brimming.

"Hey, you've got my overcoat," he said.

"Sure, I'll let you have it in the morning," I replied.

"But I want it tonight, old thing."

"Why?"

Proving the inconstancy of man's memory, the probing doubt that dogs a woman's mind, and the usefulness of a friend . . . A tale of domestic adventure that brings tears to the eyes, laughter to the heart, and a warning for one's sense of caution and future

"Because I've got to have that little present—it's most important."

"I'm sorry."

"What d'you mean—you're sorry—what have you got to be sorry about?"

"I'm sorry, but you can't possibly have it tonight."

"Don't be so difficult, I need it in the worst way."

"You'll get it in the morning."

Just then the telephone receiver was taken from my hand and Angelica, who had apparently been standing behind me, stepped up to the phone. She had a lot to say, and her voice was not nearly so pleasant as usual.

"Listen to me, young woman," she began. "What right have you to wheedle presents out of my husband? If you think you're going to get this chain in the morning you're mistaken. I have the chain and I intend to keep it. No impudent little gold-digger is going to make a fool of my husband."

Angelica continued in this strain without pause for several minutes, defied Bill to ever attempt to see me again, then abruptly hung up.

I LEANED against the wall. My knees felt a bit wobbly. Vaguely I wondered how Bill was feeling.

Angelica turned to me.

"So!" she said, looking at me as only a wife can look when her feelings are more powerful than her vocabulary, "So you were lying to me all the time."

Never say die, never admit a lie. That's my motto.

"My dear," I said, speaking in a tone of gentle reproach, "You have made a most regrettable error."

"And just what ingenious tale am I going to hear now?" enquired Angelica, somewhat frostily.

"I've just discovered," I said, "That I've got Bill Brimming's coat. He must have mine. We were in the jeweller's together before we had lunch and he bought a present for his girl which was very like yours. I got his present by mistake. Betsy must be his girl."

I tottered into the living room and drained my drink in three gulps. Then I mopped my brow.

"That was Bill who called up just now," I continued. "He wanted his coat."

"Then why did you tell him he couldn't have it until tomorrow morning?" [See also page 88]

Mr. T. K. McNair, a hostess of charms, Master Kennedy, aged six. After a bes, A.R.C.A., O.S.A.

