

**BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME: Adapted from a story by Arlo Bates**

By Frank J. Morlock

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Etext by Dagny

## CHARACTERS

Members of the Soldiers' Aid Society:

Mrs. Cumings  
Mrs. Drew  
Mrs. Stern

Mattie Seaton, a young flirt

Non-speaking parts:

Archie Lovell  
Nancy Turner  
Mary Foster  
Delia Burrage

Scene: A graveyard with a large gravestone, some time during the American Civil War. Soldiers and people cross the stage in mourning. It is a Sunday afternoon.

Three middle-aged women members of the Soldiers' Aid Society are looking at the newly erected gravestone of Archie Lovell.

**Mrs. Cumings**

Well, Old Lady Andrews did right nice by Archie. It's the fanciest tombstone in Cedarville.

**Mrs. Stern**

She was always an old fool about her nephew anyway.

**Mrs. Drew**

It's an awful shame his body was never found. Poor Archie's probably in some ditch. It makes me shiver.

**Mrs. Cumings**

I wonder why she went to Boston so sudden.

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**Mrs. Stern**

It's none of your business, Nellie Cumings, nor mine neither. I expect she had some business.

**Mrs. Drew**

At least she's spared the spectacle of three girls puttin' on mournin' for Archie.

**Mrs. Stern**

For my part, I don't believe any one of the three was ever really engaged to Archie Lovell. He went round with all of them, of course, but that wasn't anything with him!

**Mrs. Drew**

I expect it's very easy for a girl to put on mourning when a man's dead and she says she's been engaged to him!

**Mrs. Stern**

If any one of 'em had been engaged to Archie Lovell while he was alive she'd have bragged enough about it at the time.

**Mrs. Cumings**

A soldier can never tell these days who'll take it into her head to claim she was betrothed to him.

**Mrs. Drew**

The way things are going, the men are getting killed off so fast that the only satisfaction a girl can get anyway is to go into mourning for some of 'em, and I don't blame 'em if they do it!

**Mrs. Stern**

Let's hope they don't present the parish with a passel of brats.

**Mrs. Drew**

Sarah Stern! What a thing to say.

**Mrs. Stern**

Fiddlesticks. It won't be the first brat we've had since this war started.

**Mrs. Drew**

If it was one of the three, it was Delia Burrage. He used to go around with her all the time.

**Mrs. Cumings**

No more'n he did with Mattie Seaton. He used to see Mattie home from singing school that winter before he enlisted!

**Mrs. Drew**

Well, anyway, when Delia presented the flag to the militia before they marched off, he was with her all evening.

**Mrs. Cumings**

He used to go with Mattie a lot.

**Mrs. Stern**

He sent Mary Foster that wooden chair he carved.

**Mrs. Cumings**

Well, that was on a bet. That don't count. She told me so herself.

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**Mrs. Stern**

I don't know how many girls Archie was engaged to I dare say he didn't know himself and for all I know, he may have been engaged to all three of these girls that are flying the black flag for him. But I can tell you the girl he really wanted to marry and she isn't in black either.

**Mrs. Cumings**

Who is it?

**Mrs. Drew**

I don't know who there is that's any more likely to have been engaged to him than Mattie.

**Mrs. Stern**

He'd no more have married her than he would me.

**Mrs. Drew**

Who is it then?

**Mrs. Stern**

Nancy Turner.

**Mrs. Cumings**

She's a sly one

**Mrs. Drew**

Look, here comes Delia.

(The three gossips draw back. Delia Burrage, decked out in her best crape, goes up to the tombstone and arranges some flowers. Everyone stares.)

**Mrs. Cumings**

Here comes Mary Foster.

(Mary, also carrying flowers sails up, and, not to be outdone, falls on her knees. Delia, not to be outshone, does so also. But Mary has gained the upper hand.)

**Mrs. Stern**

Now we'll have a show, here comes Mattie!

**Mrs. Cumings.** Trust Mattie Seaton for not letting anybody get ahead of her.

(Mattie approaches, flinging back her long veil to reveal her pretty face.)

**Mattie** (in a deliberately loud voice)

Oh, thank you so much for bringing flowers. Archie was so fond of them!

(Mattie moves behind the tombstone and places a wreath she is carrying over it. This leaves her standing with her two rivals kneeling.)

**Mrs. Drew**

Is she boss of that grave or not, I ask you?

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**Mrs. Cumings**

If that ain't the beatinest.

**Mrs. Stern**

I wish Archie Lovell could see that. He'd be more than willing to get killed for a sight of his three widders and that Seaton girl comin' it so over the others.

**Mrs. Drew**

He'd think he was a Mormon or a Turk.

**Mrs. Cumings**

He'd see the fun of it. Poor Archie, he did love a joke.

**Mattie** (in a broken voice)

Thank you so much for your sympathy.

(Mattie, after kissing the top of the tombstone, exits dramatically in tears. Delia and Mary exchange a furious glance, but unable to think of a retort, get to their feet almost as one and beat a retreat in a different direction. The old gossips cannot restrain themselves and begin to laugh.)

**Mrs. Drew**

God forgive me, I can't help laughin'.

**Mrs. Cumings**

Well, where's Nancy Turner?

**Mrs. Drew**

She didn't feel well enough to come this afternoon.

**Mrs. Stern**

She's with Old Lady Andrews.

**Mrs. Drew**

Old Lady Andrews got home?

**Mrs. Stern**

Yes, this noon.

**Mrs. Cumings**

But, you said she'd gone to Boston.

**Mrs. Stern**

Nobody knew but me.

**Mrs. Drew** (soberly)

Did she bring home Archie's body?

**Mrs. Stern**

Yes, she did. She had a dreadful time finding out anything, but she has friends in Washington.

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**Mrs. Drew**

Where was Archie buried?

Mrs. Tern He wasn't buried anywhere.

**Mrs. Drew**

Why not?

**Mrs. Stern**

'Cause he ain't dead.

**Mrs. Cumings**

Not dead!

**Mrs. Stern**

No, only taken prisoner. He was wounded and he's been in Andersonville.

**Mrs. Drew**

How is he now?

**Mrs. Stern**

Oh, he's all right now. And here he comes, to see his gravestone.

(A Union Lieutenant and a girl in crinoline come in, arm in arm.)

**Mrs. Cumings**

Why, it's Nancy Turner with him.

**Mrs. Stern**

No, it's Nancy Lovell. They were married in Boston.

(A crowd has gathered. Miss Burrage and Miss Foster try to hide, but Mattie Seaton daringly comes forward.)

**Mattie**

Why, Archie dear, we thought we had lost you forever. We all supposed you were dead, and here you are, only married. Let me congratulate you, though after being engaged to so many girls, it must seem queer to be married to only one. Nancy, to think you got him after all, just because you went ahead and caught him! I congratulate you with all my heart, only look out for him. He'll make love to any woman he sees. (she kisses the speechless Nancy) Come Delia, come Mary! There's nothing for us to do but to go home and take off our black. We may have better luck next time!

(Mattie sails out with Delia and Mary in tow.)

**Mrs. Drew**

Did you ever!

**Mrs. Cumings**

This is a scandal.

**Mrs. Stern**

Now that girl has grit!

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CURTAIN