



Archyology II : (The Final Dig) : The Long Lost Tales of Archy and Mehitabel

Don Marquis

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In this second and final volume “composed” by archy, the literary cockroach, the wonderfully whimsical insect and his fractious feline friend, mehitabel, engage in misadventures large and small and comment with quirky accuracy on the common state of humanity. Previously unpublished in book form and literally recovered from a steamer trunk by editor Jeff Adams, these stories are the product of Don Marquis, a New York columnist and raconteur who was one of America's most popular humorists during the early twentieth century. archy supposedly worked at Marquis's newsroom typewriter at night, diving headfirst onto individual keys to tap out columns; unable to use the shift key, of course, archy settled for lower-case letters and dispensed with punctuation entirely.

Ungrammatical as they may be, archy's wry insights are a true delight, for, as he puts it, “one advantage of being a cockroach is that i see things from the under side.” From that unique perspective we follow the continuing saga of archy, the Cockroach Detective, a spoof on the gumshoe genre in which the six-legged private eye encounters a raja, his chorus-girl harem, Bolshevik twins, an Egyptologist, seven sister manicurists, and a set of bejeweled false teeth. In other episodes archy saves the US fleet from a German U-boat attack, muses with a spider about humanity's inhumanity to insects, stows away on a freighter to London, and climbs to the top of the Washington Monument.

In the Capitol building itself, archy says, “there is no attention paid to me because there are so many other insects around it gives you a great idea of the american people when you see some of the things they elect.” The Ku Klux Klan, he observes elsewhere, “is going strong and the national emblem will soon be the great american kleagle.” Meanwhile, mehitabel, who claims to be a reincarnation of Cleopatra, offers to hire hit-cats to clean up City Hall, not of rats but of reporters. Accompanied by the inspired drawings of cartoonist Ed Frascino, these new archy tales are, Adams writes, “classic American humor, as vivid and amusing today as they were decades ago.”

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