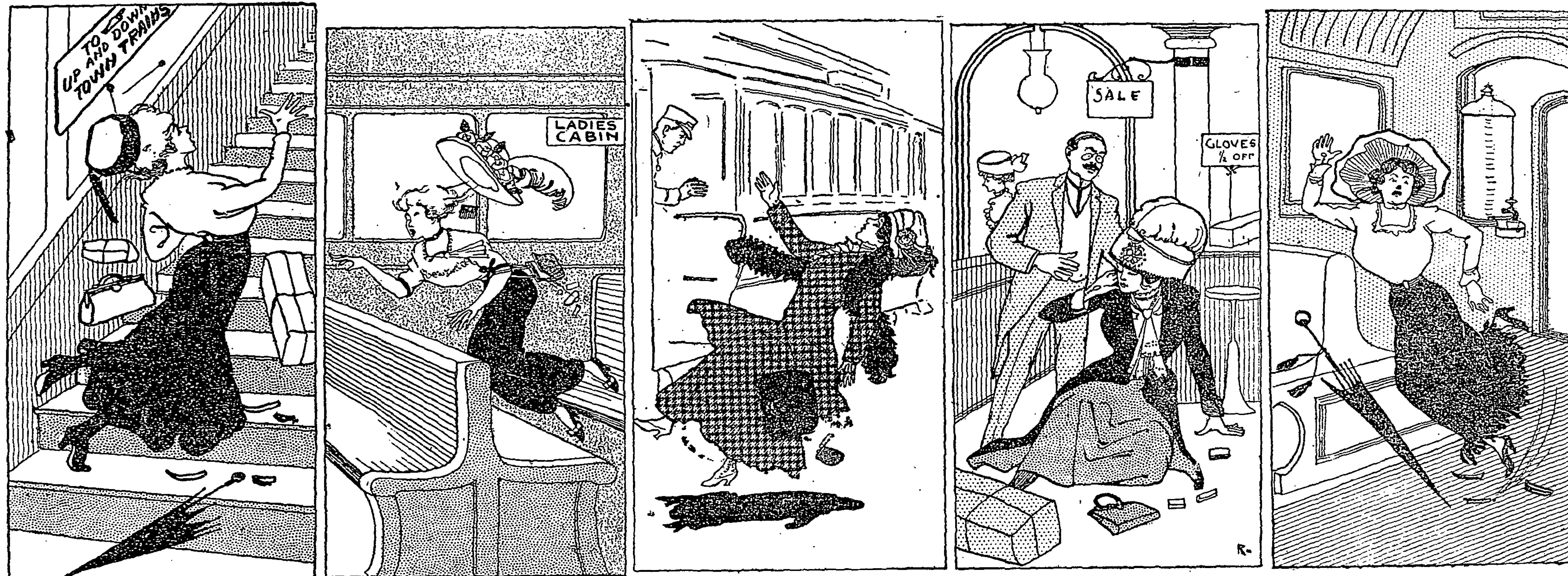


# THE WOMAN, THE BANANA PEEL AND THE DAMAGE SUITS

## Mrs. Anna H. Sturla, Who Has Made a High Record for Accident Cases, Will Have to Prove to the Court She Hasn't Been Faking.



Slipped on Banana Peel on "L" Steps.

Injured on a Ferryboat.

Fell from a Trolley Car.

Hurt in a Department Store.

The Banana Peel in a Train.

### FIVE OF THE ACCIDENTS WHICH WON DAMAGES

To figure as the victim of seventeen accidents in a space of four years is rather more than the share of bad luck usually apportioned in this life to any one person.

Yet that is the record of Mrs. Anna H. Sturla, formerly of Wyckoff, N. J., and now of New York. Misbehaving ferryboats, trains, and cars, and, above all, banana peels, which seemed literally to dog her footsteps, have allowed Mrs. Sturla, since 1906, to have hardly three consecutive months without mishap. Incidentally, she has collected from railroad and other companies a little short of \$3,000 as consolation money for the various injuries which she claims to have sustained on these seventeen unfortunate occasions.

Just at present Mrs. Sturla is in the Tombs Prison. She was arrested on June 4 last on a charge of grand larceny, growing out of investigation of her accident cases, the complainant against her being the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad.

When she was first arraigned the victim of many mishaps pleaded not guilty, with leave to withdraw the plea in a week. At the end of that time she allowed the plea to stand. After trying to have the indictment against her dismissed she pleaded guilty on Nov. 10 last of the present month. On Nov. 15 Judge Rosalsky refused to grant her clemency and she decided to stand trial. Her case will come up in court to-morrow.

In most of the accident cases Mrs. Sturla claimed to have sustained a hernia of the abdomen. Over and over again doctors have certified that this was indeed true. Medical authorities say that difficulty is sometimes experienced in the examination of an injury of this kind, in determining whether or not it is of recent infliction.

The first accident on record in which Mrs. Sturla figured as the victim occurred on June 16, 1906. At that time she was conducting the Harold, a lodging house in Wyckoff, N. J. She left her home to go to New York and boarded the ferryboat New Brunswick. As it was approaching its Manhattan slip one of the vessel's air pumps broke, rendering it unmanageable for the moment. Before anything could be done to slow up or stop the engines, the ferryboat crashed into its pier with great violence. Mrs. Sturla, who occupied a seat in the ladies' cabin, was thrown violently across another seat, sustaining injuries.

She was taken to St. Francis's Hospital. Dr. McGill, physician of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, to which the ferryboat belonged, was summoned to examine her. He certified that hernia had been caused by the accident. Mrs. Sturla demanded \$5,000. The company compromised by paying her \$1,000.

Two months later, on Aug. 25, 1906, she recovered \$300 from the Erie Railroad for injuries sustained while riding on a train of the New York, Susquehanna & Western Division of that line. This train, it was claimed, was backing into Paterson, when the car on which Mrs. Sturla was a passenger, suddenly lurched. She was tumbled into the aisle and claimed that she was again injured. A doctor promptly examined her, and the payment of the money was the outcome.

Again two months, or nearly that, elapsed and once more Mrs. Sturla got mixed up in an accident. This time it was while she was on a shopping trip in

New York. After she had made her purchases she started up the stairway of the "L" railroad at Thirty-third Street and Sixth Avenue. On the stairs, she claimed, she slipped on some fruit skins and fell to the floor.

The station agent assisted her to her feet and then telephoned to the New York Hospital for an ambulance. She was taken to the hospital and remained there over night. Her case was diagnosed as ventral hernia.

It was not serious, however, for she was able to leave the institution on the morning of the next day, Oct. 19. She started for Mount St. Vincent. On her return from there in a local train of the New York Central Railroad on the evening of the same day she suffered another mishap, she claimed. While descending the stairs from the railroad's station at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and Park Avenue she fell once more. One version of the occurrence was that two men who went to her assistance picked up a banana peel near where she had fallen and remarked that this must have been the cause of the accident.

She was taken to the Harlem Hospital, where she received treatment. After leaving the place she threatened to bring suit against the railroad for damages. The railroad company paid her \$500.

Owing to her accident of the previous

day at the "L" station she claimed \$1,000 from the elevated railroad people. They refused to pay it.

Still again, a period of two months elapsed. Then Mrs. Sturla was heard from. This time it was in connection with hurts sustained while she was riding on a car operated by the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, Dec. 22, 1906. She was entering it, she claimed, when she fell. She was removed to the Cumberland Street Hospital, and from there notified the company of the mishap.

She gave her name to the conductor of the car as Mary Fuller, according to him. When the time came for settling on the part of the company she said she was Mrs. Sturla. She gave the other name at first, she said, because she did not want her friends to become alarmed.

The company paid her \$50.

The next month—to be precise, on Jan. 28, 1907—she claimed that while she was a passenger on the ferryboat Lakewood of the Central Railroad of New Jersey she started to go to the upper cabin, slipped on a fruit peel, and fell. She claimed that a porter picked up the peel and carried it away. Examination on this occasion showed that she had sustained a rupture of the stomach. The company paid her \$150.

On March 14, 1907, Mrs. Sturla and the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad Com-

pany were at outs with each other. This time she figured, at first, as "Mary Hall of Washington Court House, Ohio."

She said that after she had partaken of dinner on one of the company's dining cars on a train running between Bound Brook and Philadelphia she started toward the car in which her seat was located. While en route she stepped on something. It threw her. She was taken to a hospital in Baltimore.

On leaving the institution she said that her real name was Sturla and that Hall was her maiden name. Again she said that the reason she gave another name was in order that her friends might not become alarmed.

Mrs. Sturla had a considerable run of luck after that accident, because six months elapsed before she again appeared as a sufferer. Then she named Sept. 19, 1907, as the date when she and her extraordinary ill fortune once more encountered each other.

It was on the ferryboat Bergen of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Company. She was in the ladies' cabin, she said, when a banana peel, that old bete noire of hers, again tricked her and caused her to fall to the floor.

She maintained that her mishap was due to a small paper bag, from one corner of which protruded the fatal banana peel. The bag, she said, appeared to be

the remains of some one's lunch. When examined after this accident, she admitted having hernia, but said it had been perfectly cured.

She stated that she had been examined by three doctors, all of whom declared that she must be operated on as a result of her injuries. She pointed out to the railroad company that this operation would cost her \$250, to say nothing of room, nursing, &c.

The company paid her \$150.

Not six months went by after that before Mrs. Sturla was once more in trouble with these arch-foes of hers, banana peels. One of these slippery gentry, according to her, was soon all ready for her on a boat of the Union Ferry Company, proceeding to the foot of Fulton Street, Brooklyn. As the boat was entering the slip the miserable peel saw its chance, got under one of Mrs. Sturla's feet, and caused her to fall to the deck.

She got \$200.

On March 4, 1908, less than a month later, she again slipped on something, but did not specify this time that it was a banana peel. The scene was the washroom of a car on the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad. Mrs. Sturla claimed that, when she stepped on the thing—whatever it was—she fell, striking her abdomen. She added that the floor

was not clean.

It might be assumed that by this time those grim old foes of hers, banana peels—that Yellow Peril of her life!—would

have decided to rest on their laurels and persecute her no more.

Far from it!

One of them, according to her, was in her path on May 10th, 1908—only eight days after her Fort Lee Ferry mishap—while she was shopping in the store of R. H. Macy & Co. It threw her, as usual. She was taken to the Herald Square Hotel, close by, and stayed there a couple of days. The owners of the store settled with her for \$150.

May, 1908 was certainly a month full of vicissitudes for Mrs. Sturla. No sooner had she recovered from the effects of her accident at Macy's than she fell—nine days later—while attempting to board a car of the Public Service Railway of New Jersey, at Newark. According to some witnesses, she tripped on her skirt. Mrs. Sturla claimed that the car gave a jolt and knocked her over. She received \$100 from the street railway company.

Whereupon twelve days elapsed. Then she appeared as a claimant against the Pennsylvania Railroad—her second claim against that company. She said that she was descending the grand staircase in the railroad's Broad Street Station, Philadelphia, all unaware of the fact that a banana peel was once more on the job.

It got her. She was assisted to her feet, and to the ladies' waiting room. From there she was removed to St. Joseph's Hospital.

In connection with this case a claim agent of the company made a statement to the effect that he went to see Mrs. Sturla after the accident at the Colonnade Hotel, and called to her attention that she had received \$1,000 in 1906 from the company for a similar injury. Thereupon, according to him, she left Philadelphia, and the company heard no more of a claim.

On April 10, 1909, she claimed that she tripped and fell while boarding a car of the Atlantic Coast Electric Railway Company at Asbury Park, N. J. The company would not pay her any money.

The last accident in which she figured before her arrest was on Oct. 13, 1909. Then she claimed that she fell while on a car of the Boston Elevated Railway.

But by that time the Alliance Against Accident Fraud had become interested in her case. It communicated with the Boston elevated people, informing them that Mrs. Sturla had been involved in other accidents. The woman left Boston without collecting her claim.

The matter was put into the hands of the District Attorney's office in New York as early as June, 1909, but owing to Summer vacations and other delays, nothing was done for some time. Finally the wheels were set going and the arrest of Mrs. Sturla, at Hazlett, N. J., followed.

A study of the many cases in which the longest time elapsing between any two of the seventeen accidents in which she was the victim was a little over six months—between March 14 and Sept. 19, 1907. The shortest time was twenty-four hours, between Oct. 18 and 19, 1906. In a period of less than one month she figured in four accidents.

As to the direct responsibility for the seventeen mishaps, she blamed the Jar of a ferryboat once, a jolting train ditto, the sudden start of a car four times, and banana peels eleven times. The total amount she received as damages was \$2,950.