

A Woman's Way.

By R. H.

A tale of Love, War and the wiles of the Sex.

Cousin Jo was away when he came to town, and when she returned she hardly recognized in the well appointed youth-about-town the Charming Odd Man of Broadsea. He was one of the rare exceptions, able to combine a talent for literature and a taste for dress.

She was delighted to have so presentable and interesting a young male relative to take her about. Poetry was common ground to them, and when he showed her his book of verses she gasped.

"Have you read them to anyone at Broadsea?"

"Only to Philippa, and one or two to mother."

"What did they say?"

"Philippa says they are very pretty, and mother says she's very proud. She always says that when we do anything. She said that when Harry invented that engine, you know, that blew up."

Cousin Jo, once asked to describe Odd Man, said that he was emotional and assured.

Of course Odd Man got terribly into debt, debt which he had no very clear idea how to liquidate.

To express one's feelings for beauty otherwise than through the medium of an art; that is to say, to express it in life itself, is a very expensive proceeding, and Odd Man felt that every day life was capable of being the medium for a large amount of feeling for beauty which was in him.

He was but young, and though endowed with a real poetical faculty, which would no doubt survive, his impressionability and alertness made him fall for a time an easy victim to the jargon of the literary shop.

He was too young to question the decrees of big reputations which veiled their weaknesses beneath such phrases as "disinclination to be limited," "morals being for the masses," and "the decorative being an end in itself."

Even as Willie Pitt had implored Philippa to be herself, so Odd Man found himself wooed by the spirit of the undesirable whispering to him the same advice. It is a fine sounding phrase and has served the modern world as a fine excuse for selfishness.

Odd Man proceeded to be himself with a very free acceptance, and as he had by no means left his talent for make believe behind with his childhood, he managed to paint life in a great many engaging colors, watched by Cousin Jo with no little anxiety. She had never had a male being of her own blood so completely under her wing, and she was in a flutter lest anything untoward should happen to him.

She was too much a woman of the world not to be fully aware that youth will have its fling, but she was also woman of the world enough to know that a temperament like Odd Man's stands in particular danger.

As a matter of fact he was much safer than she imagined. She forgot to take into account that he was Captain Blount's son, and that deep down in his nature was a reserve of wisdom which spelt caution; and it was the voice of this quality in him murmuring, "gently, gently," which saved him from making a fool of himself.

He fell in love, of course, with something quite impossible; a fact which he confided to Cousin Jo with a nervous excitability which made her fear that he was very hard hit.

And so he was, only fortunately it was only one of those love affairs in which even the woman who was much older than Odd Man, did not dream of such a denouement as matrimony.

Poor Odd Man grew very thin and very jumpy in manner during the progress of a passion that preyed on him terribly. He was fully sensible of Cousin Jo's extreme sweetness in listening to his trouble, and had not been ashamed to shed tears when he confessed that he was obliged to make believe that the object of his affections was all that she ought to be, and which of course she was not.

Cousin Jo knew he was an exceptional lad, but had till then no notion of the strength of his feelings and his capacity for emotion.

There came an awful crisis when Odd Man, for reasons

which it is not necessary to set down, was separated forever from his first romance. He came to Cousin Jo one evening in the spring, white as a ghost, hardly able to speak for exhaustion.

It had happened the day before, and he had been walking about ever since in a terrible despair.

For a week Cousin Jo was afraid that he might do something silly and irretrievable, and would have liked to keep her eye on him the whole time.

Then he began to grow better, and she felt that such experiences were inevitable with such a nature as his, and told him that he must pull himself together and face his mother, both of them having been summoned to Broadsea to witness the wedding of Kathleen.

CHAPTER XXXII

Philippa felt the void that Odd Man's departure made in "The Fort" keenly.

They had become the greatest friends in a sense apart from the attachment incidental to their being brother and sister.

To her he had confided most of his dreams and ambitions, and he was full of them.

One of Kathleen's greatest grievances against Philippa was the undoubted fact that the younger children were passionately devoted to her, which she could hardly say of herself.

Her idea of bringing harmony into the household was to take each member of the family apart and rouse a feeling of resentment over wrongs which till that moment he or she had been quite ignorant of. She wanted to manage, and though to a certain extent she was not conscious of deliberate plotting, she was an intriguer by nature. She was constantly trying to show Podge, Dodge and Miny that she was the sister on whom they would be wise to rely for advice and affection.

But children are somewhat like animals in that they can but judge of the hand that feeds them, and they certainly had not been sensible of any actual selfishness or sacrifice on Kathleen's part; whereas, for instance, since Miny had been quite a little girl Philippa had been devoted to her, to a rare degree of something more than sisterly affection.

Podge and Dodge, not to speak of Odd Man and Harry, knew perfectly well that whereas Kathleen was inclined to claim that she had conferred the greatest benefits on them all by making them useful to her on every possible occasion, it was Philippa who had made herself useful to them.

It was the observation of this trait that had caused Cousin Jo to regret that Philippa was not fulfilling her obvious destiny of motherhood.

Besides, Philippa did not interfere with her brothers and sisters, and Kathleen did. They were always doing something which she felt herself called upon to report to the authorities, or to criticize herself; and it can scarcely be wondered that the family hailed her approaching nuptials with as much joy as decency would permit, and watched the least coolness or estrangement between the Rev. Montague and herself with gloomy apprehension.

They all felt that they would be ever so fond of Kathleen when she was married.

Kathleen in her heart of hearts must have had some inkling of this feeling, for three days before she was married she informed them all that she did not feel that she was fit to be a clergyman's wife.

Captain Blount paled visibly. There was an awful silence while the family pulled itself together.

"What rot, Cat!" said Harry. "I don't know where that church would be without you."

"Oh, my dear," said Mrs. Blount, "the clergyman will be lucky who gets such a wife as you. I'm sure, Kathleen, you are at Mother's Meetings from early morning till late at night."

"Oh, but it is such a responsibility," said Kathleen, with a self-satisfied smirk, inwardly convinced that she was fit to be an archbishop's bride.

The Blount family were a little

tied of the Rev. Montague as a daily visitor. He had a way of patting the younger ones patronisingly on the head, and giving them throaty admonitions, which Dodge said made her feel sick.

Dodge's cup of happiness during the wedding festivities was full, for Podge took her everywhere, and walking beside his uniformed figure—and he certainly looked extremely well, for he was a handsome boy—her proud little heart felt fit to burst, not to speak of the fact that he had money enough to provide her with a goodly supply of chocolates and cream buns.

Dodge as a little girl had been rather the ugly duckling of the family, but she was really growing into good looks to an amazing extent.

Mrs. Blount clasped her beloved Odd Man to her bosom with a positive wail of anxiety when she saw his haggard cheeks and still somewhat love-haunted eyes.

Cousin Jo confided something of the affair to Philippa and Philippa when saying good-night to him hugged him and wept over him, to Odd Man's great surprise.

Kathleen certainly made the most of her wedding. She squeezed Captain and Mrs. Blount till they felt that years of economy could not put matters straight.

Her dress was intended to impress all Broadsea, and she intrigued until she had chosen a color for the bridesmaids which Philippa would have flatly refused to wear, but that she felt that it was not the time to raise objections.

They had a dress rehearsal in the drawing room at which Kathleen nearly drove everybody beyond the bounds of prudence. A nephew of Mr. Dale's was to be the page, and thoroughly upset Kathleen by wanting to walk up the aisle holding Philippa's hand.

He was so very tiny that the procession was obliged to move with extreme deliberation. Capt. Blount was equal to an unlimited rehearsal of so pleasant an event, pacing up and down the drawing room with Kathleen on his arm with the greatest alacrity and the family buoyed Kathleen up to any extent.

As Odd Man said, rehearsals were a most wonderful make-believe. They made one feel that the deed was as good as done.

The eventful day dawned. Captain Blount read prayers, selecting the marriage in Canaan as an appropriate subject for the occasion, which he read with extremeunction.

Kathleen had her breakfast in bed, and was visited by the family ere she rose, receiving them with an affected and conscious giggle.

Later the dressmaker arrived, and voices in loud argument came from Kathleen's room. Mrs. Blount practically finished her own toilet, and adjourned to share in the placing of the bridal gown on Kathleen, and by the time the orange blossoms were twined in her red hair she really looked extremely pretty.

Philippa, Dodge and Miny made a picturesque group in spite of Kathleen's attempt to reduce them to a background not over beautiful itself, but a sufficient foil to her.

One by one the carriages dashed away, and Captain Blount and Kathleen were left alone for a few minutes in the deserted house.

Out of the fullness of his heart, and because he was really very devoted to and proud of his children, he embraced her fervently ere they departed for the church.

Mrs. Blount, looking anxiously towards the church door, guessed by a certain long pause that some hitch had occurred, and suddenly Captain Blount's voice was heard saying quite audibly,

"Disobedient to the last."

The organ played "The voice that breathed o'er Eden," and the procession moved up the aisle.

The church was crammed—a pleasing testimony to the interest taken in the Blount family. The congregation rose en masse to see the bride, and Kathleen felt that her wedding was, from a spectacular point of view, a success.

Poor Master Dale, unable to keep pace, and having hold of the bride's train, tripped, and was borne forward on it for some yards.

Odd Man felt quite funny and emotional as the procession entered the chancel, and could not, for the life of him, tell why.

The Blounts, having an unfortunate sense of humor, became

quite hysterical when Mr. Dale's uncle, an Archdeacon with a curious snuffle in his delivery, addressed a homily to the bride and groom, and one by one sank shaken with inward giggles, out of sight, till the pew had the appearance of their all having gone through the floor. Then those who were concerned went into the vestry and there was a great deal of handshaking and embracing.

"How very sweet she looked," said Mrs. Higginson.

"Charming!"

"A very pretty wedding, indeed."

"I didn't catch all the Archdeacon said. Surely he has a cold. 'I don't think so.'"

"Ah, emotion, I suppose. His favorite nephew, no doubt."

The bride and bridegroom appeared, radiant with smiles, and streamed down the aisle to the accompaniment of the "Wedding March," the erstwhile celibate looking not a whit ashamed.

There was no wedding breakfast; firstly, because it was felt to be rather an old-fashioned institution; and, secondly, because there would have been such crowds of people offended had they been left out, and left out they must have been.

The health of the bride was proposed by the best man, and Kathleen, who had grown more and more pink with importance giggled and blushed profusely at his jokes.

Podge was obliged, being the youngest gentleman of the company, to propose the bridesmaids, Master Dale not counting, as he was practically a bridesmaid himself. He asked the company not to think badly of him, although he was a sailor, and naturally had a sweetheart in every port. After which interesting announcement he lost his head and became dumb, having been prompted up to this point by Odd Man.

Later, Broadsea streamed into the house to see the presents.

The worst of getting married in Broadsea was that the wedding presents were as deficient in quality as they were amazing in quantity. It certainly seemed as if there could be no more photograph frames left in the world.

A great deal of Broadsea having streamed into the house, a large proportion was obliged to stream out again into the back garden, owing to want of space.

The Blount family, from Harry downwards, received and entertained the guests with easy egotism. As a family their opinion of themselves would have resulted in self-satisfaction, had it not been that they were gifted generally with temperament. While they were perfectly convinced of their superiority to other people, they were by no means satisfied with themselves.

Every one was very fond of them, although they possessed the knack of irritating their best friends by declining to play second fiddle on any occasion whatsoever.

Kathleen, having stood for some time in her bridal array, always with her thoroughly satisfied smile appearing over the blossoms of her bouquet, disappeared, and Mrs. Blount after her.

The guests then thronged into the front garden, armed with handfuls of rice.

After several false alarms, it was rumored that the bride was really coming down stairs, and Kathleen, in the inevitable grey travelling dress—which seems to be regarded by brides as a discreet and suggestive modification from the virgin white of their wedding robes—came down the stairs, and taking Montague's arm, made a dash for the carriage.

Mr. Dale prided himself on the fact that nobody would be able to tell that they were a wedding couple, not being in possession of the knowledge that Podge and Dodge had tied several antique slippers to the wheels, with which adornment they dashed triumphantly to the railway station.

Fragments of wedding-cake having been duly posted to all parts of the kingdom, the presents were packed and sent over to the new house which Mr. and Mrs. Montague Dale had taken.

Then "The Fort" drew a deep breath and said it could never have believed that it would have missed Kathleen so much.

French Rural Police Methods.

An extraordinary story of rural police methods comes from Pontcarre in France, a little summer resort situated on the edge of the

Forest of Armainvilliers, where a tramp murdered an old woman, the proprietress of a small inn. Her neighbor, hearing the old woman's screams, instead of giving the alarm, went off to fetch her husband in a village nearly a mile away, leaving the woman to her fate.

The husband thought he had better tell the local watchman, and went off to the latter's house. The watchman in his turn decided he must inform the mayor, who was working at Edouard de Rothschild's chateau, which is in the neighborhood. The mayor immediately set out for the scene, accompanied by the watchman, a commercial traveller from Paris, who happened to be in the vil-

lage, and a local wineshop man.

Through the windows of the murdered woman's inn they could see the murderer, rifling the upstairs rooms, but the mayor refused to act until the gendarmes arrived. When the tramp came downstairs the party saw him stepping over his victim, who lay dead. Only after the guardians of public order had watched the violation of the law for 20 minutes did the watchman decide to take action, crying, "Open in the name of the law!" and beating on the door.

But the murderer opened a back window and escaped easily into the black depths of the forest. He has not been captured.

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