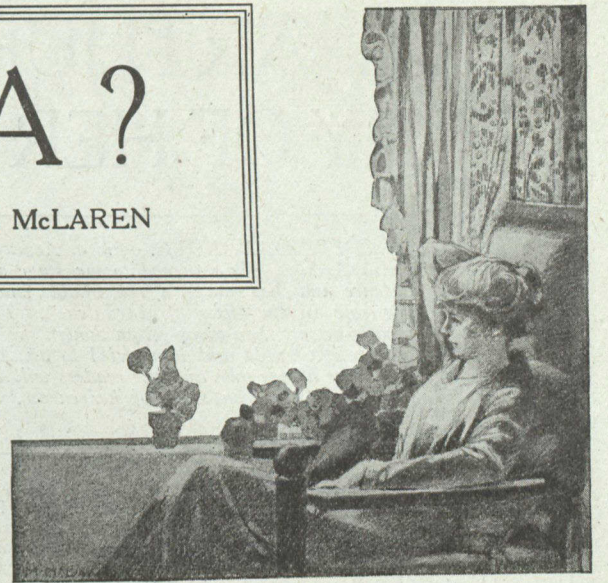
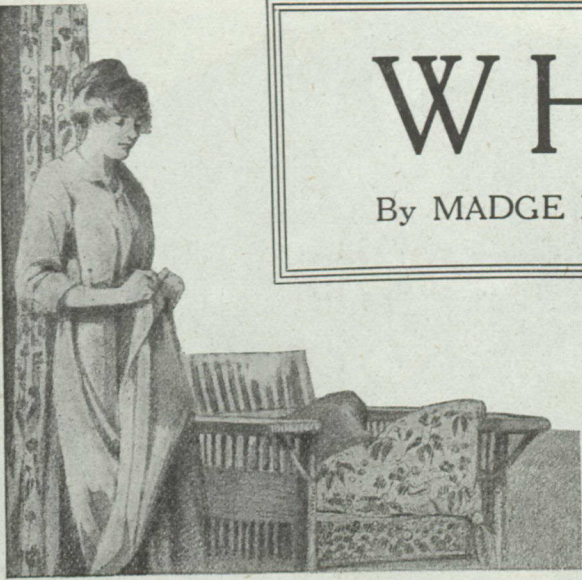


WHY JULIA?

By MADGE MACBETH

Illustrated by MAUDE McLAREN



"Tapestries, maybe."

"That's it. And the lights, ma'am—there's too many and they're too bright. She just had a couple of candles, mostly, though when she was having meals by herself she'd bring in a lamp from the kitchen."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Louie, quickly. She felt ashamed, like an eavesdropper, and her cheeks burned.

"Of course we must alter the lights. Then about food—"

Julia considered, in a puzzled way.

"Do you want to eat like Mrs. Closser, when she was by herself or when she had Mr. Bol—, I mean, when she had company?"

Louie stooped to pick a small thread from the carpet before answering. And when she raised her head all the blood in her body seemed to have flown to her face.

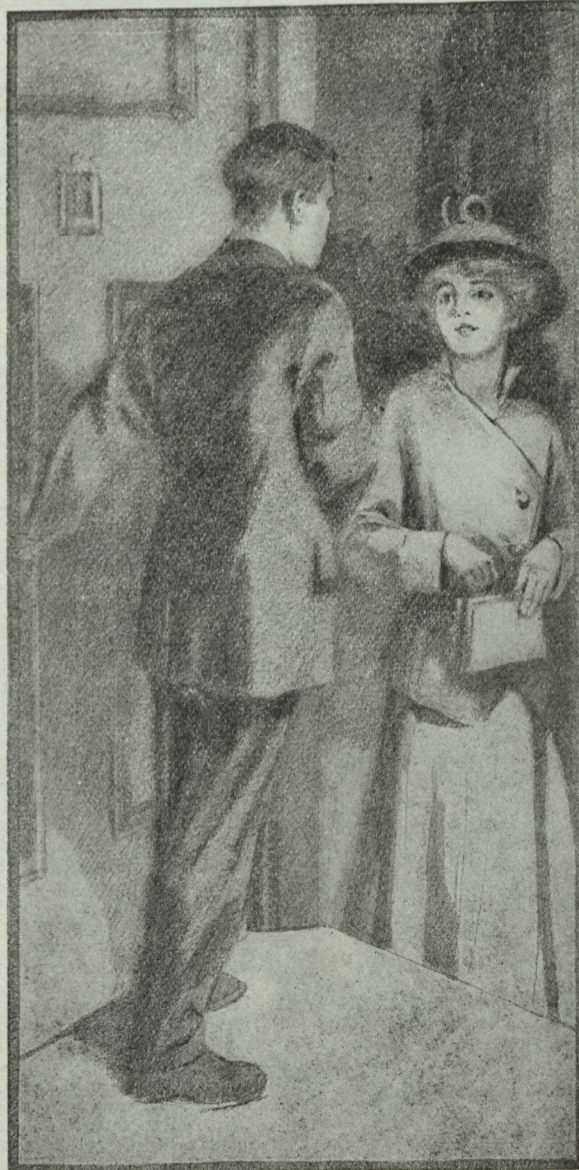
"I want to live all the time," she said, distinctly, "just as Mrs. Closser does—when she has company. You see, Julia, we admire her tremendously—my husband and I—" she stumbled awkwardly through the explanation which she had rehearsed a hundred times to herself,—"and—er—we feel that an entire change in our mode of living will not only be acceptable but good for us. There's nothing so soul-sapping, Julia, as falling into a rut," she suddenly moralized. "Now, er—as I have lived here all my life, and have seen little of the world outside, I, like all the rest of us in Screaton, live exactly as people did two generations ago. I do not know how to set about making changes, such as Mrs. Closser brought with her. But you, having lived with her, will be able to show me—little tricks in decorating, cooking and serving. And she is so tasteful, isn't she?"

Had Julia lived in Shakespeare's day she would doubtless have thrust her tongue into her cheek. Being a product of the present generation she merely looked at Mrs. Bolton from under lowered lids and mumbled, "Yes, ma'am."

THEY began that afternoon, Louie and her lately-acquired maid making a trip to the city and returning with an armful of parcels. The following morning they worked as no housekeeper in Screaton ever had, with the result that when Timothy came home at night he found a metamorphosed home, and he felt rather than saw the beginning of a subtle change in his wife.

The dining room had taken on the appearance of a Turkish retreat; bizarre tapestries and hangings replaced the familiar pictures, a jewelled lantern threw spears of red, blue and green upon the cloth beneath, but gave no light to the rest of the room. A huge scarlet centre piece decorated the table, and Louie, herself, as though to complete the change, was garbed in a remarkable adaptation of Oriental draperies which made Tim feel as though a stranger had usurped her place.

"Hello, what's all this?" he asked in an attempt at jocular. The room shed an atmosphere which had particularly appealed to him of late, but he did not want that atmosphere in his own home. "Are we openly confessing ourselves in sympathy with the Turks, my dear?"



"Where have you been?" he demanded sternly.
"I have been to dinner in town," she said evenly.

"Oh, no," Louie laughed. "I was just deadly tired of our blatant simplicity, that's all! The houses in Screaton had begun to get on my nerves—especially our own. I felt that I had to branch out and strike an individual note."

It just happened that the note she struck during dinner was one to which Timothy had inclined his attentive ear frequently of late, so it had no novelty to compensate him for the absence of Louie's good rich soup, fine juicy roast and the profusion of fresh vegetables which ordinarily adorned his table. He missed the wholesome, home-made pudding which no whipped cream conundrum could ever equal, and he felt that his dinner was a failure. It consisted of countless unfamiliar tid-bits, on toast, on lettuce, hidden in parsley, nestling beside asparagus and mushrooms, seasoned with lemon peel, green peppers, and a soupçon of garlic. Even a Japanese epicure would have gasped at their number. And the uniformed maid, like a mechanical device for removing the numerous plates and substituting others, whom his wife called Julia?

Why Julia? What was she there for anyway?

The opportunity to ask Louie did not come until they had left the table and repaired to the inglenook in the living room, for coffee. They had sat at the meal called dinner exactly one hour and ten minutes, according to Timothy's watch, and while he had not found the time at all irksome, still, no man wants to sit an hour at the table in his own house with his own wife!

"Oh, Julia," repeated Louie, carelessly. "She is just a girl who was looking for a place. I was glad to take her for I have decided that no woman is called upon to wash, and dust, and bake her youth away as I have done. One's hands, one's very person, get saturated with a domestic odor which is difficult to counteract by a few leisure moments in the evening. One gets bounded by the duties of the seasons—house-cleaning, preserving, more house-cleaning, and the repairing of the linen closet. Look at Mrs. Green, for example."

She spoke this last airily, and examined her highly polished nails.

Timothy was uneasy, puzzled. The sentiments expressed by his wife were familiar to him; he had concurred in them frequently of late. Familiar also was the heavy perfume which fairly throbbled about the room. But he did not like it in such allopathic doses. He asked himself a hundred times that night, what did it all mean? Where did it all lead? He did not go out; it was too late, and Louie was too entertaining, in her role of Oriental enchantress.

Julia got his breakfast in the morning, and thereafter. Louie stayed in bed and busied her once-capable hands with manicuring implements, until in time Timothy learned to hate their beautiful perfection. In time, too, he commenced to come home for lunch—something which had not transpired for many a miserable day. The first time this happened his coming created little short of a panic in the house. Julia was the first to see him, and she made haste to warn her mistress.

"Oh, quick, Julia, think!" cried Louie, frantically. "What shall I wear? What shall we have to eat?"

Julia took hold of the situation with rare ability; she worked swiftly and well. And when satisfied with the effect her mistress produced, she rushed off to the kitchen, with the comforting assurance that "Mrs. Closser's luncheons shouldn't have nothing on her."

Had Timothy slipped in unseen he would have surprised his wife at the homely task of sponging his clothes. Arriving as he did, however, he found a too-fragrant bundle of lace and ribbons, lying listlessly on a Badgad covered couch, reading a recent novel. From an artistic standpoint the luncheon could not have been improved. Instead of the substantial cold beef, the fried potatoes and sliced peaches, Louie had prepared for herself and Julia, the latter served a charming chafing dish affair, in which green peppers and tinned mushrooms played a conspicuous part. He had expressed himself delighted with no more many and many a time, and Julia knew it!

IN a few weeks, Louie Bolton became the obsession of the village; her conduct was considered not a whit less meretricious than that of Mrs. Closser herself. As a matter of fact there began to grow whisperings of vague extenuations for Mrs. Closser; she was merely a vain, empty-headed butterfly, who had been cast into uncongenial surroundings. She did not know the ways of Screaton and could not adapt herself to them had she known them. She was at least perfectly frank in not returning calls and in her preference for the masculine society of the place. Beside, if a man preferred the company of a woman like that, the fault was to be laid at the door of his wife! (The women who expressed these sentiments kept too close a watch over their husbands to allow even an admiring glance to be wafted in the direction of the unconventional stranger, so it was easier for them to forgive a poor, wayward man!) But with Louie, it was different. She knew the ways of Screaton, and she knew perfectly well how Mrs. Closser had been regarded. Yet, in the face of public condemnation, she chose to imitate her!

She was accused of every sin from extravagance to unfaithfulness, and so startling did the rumor grow that presently it was whispered that Timothy was going to divorce her.

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IN every community there is at least one woman who places upon her own brow the crown of Dictator and conscientiously tries to fulfill her duty as monitor of the realm.

Consequently, it was Mrs. Adney who led the open revolt in Screaton against Louie Bolton for "hiring a girl."

"Such tomfoolishness!" she exclaimed.

"Hardly more than a bride, with a tiny house, and everything new—"

"—and no children to mess things up," interpolated Mrs. Rivers, who had nine.

"—and such a good housekeeper herself," remarked Mrs. Green, whose slogan was "capability first."

"Tim Bolton doesn't make any big salary either," continued Mrs. Adney, "and even if he gets the Superintendent's place after Christmas, I don't see that he's got any license to hire a girl."

"Suppose he had," argued Mrs. Green, "there isn't enough for her to do. She'll just eat her head off, sitting round."

"Maybe Louie Bolton wants her for company's sake," a small, pale woman piped. She was the sort of person who always smiled the sweetest when saying the most disagreeable things.

Mrs. Adney wheeled upon the speaker. So did the other ladies.

"Humph," they said, and then fell silent. The suggestion carried weight. Certainly Tim Bolton was away from home a great deal.

"Well," remarked Mrs. Adney, "she couldn't fill her husband's place with a hired girl, and she need not have gone to the expense of paying for company. I'm sure any of us would be glad to sit with her, and talk about her—er—affairs. I intend to do my duty by her anyway."

But Louie Bolton did not want company; like a wounded animal she longed for solitude and seclusion. She dreaded inexpressibly the coming of an alien presence into the home which had been hers and Tim's—"had been" because that indefinable something which a man stamps upon the place he loves and lives in was gone, despite the fact that his clothes and material belongings still occupied the house.

The latch of the gate clicked, and a young girl carrying a newspaper parcel came up the nasturtium-bordered path. Louie met her at the door and smiled bravely in welcome.

"Come in, Julia," she said.

The smile embarrassed Julia; she was not accustomed to them. In the Home where she had been raised, work left little time for smiles, and in her one and only situation she was expected to perform her duties seriously. Singing, even, was tabooed. She felt a warmth about her heart as she followed Mrs. Bolton into the house. The cheery brightness dazzled her, and she stumbled awkwardly as she went upstairs to the pretty pink room which was to be hers. It was a south room into which the morning sun poured in great, caressing, life-giving waves; it was the room which Louie, way down deep in her woman's heart, had hoped to put to a different use, some day.

Some day!

Presently, Julia slipped shyly downstairs, smoothing the creases out of her new pink uniform, and thinking it a pity to wear anything so nice for working.

"What am I to scrub first?" she asked, taking the nature of her work for granted.

"There is nothing to scrub just now," Louie answered, smiling. "Sit down here for a few minutes and talk to me. We must understand one another thoroughly before we begin."

Pulling her dress smooth in the back, Julia sat stiffly on the edge of a chair, lacing and unlacing her red fingers. The gentle blowing of the bright chintz curtains, the fresh purity of the whole house, the golden radiance of Mrs. Bolton's hair, produced a blur of happy impressions, and reminded her of a bed of brilliant morning glories.

"It is not my intention to teach you my way of house-keeping," continued the pleasing, friendly voice. "I want you to do everything exactly as you did in your last place. Do you understand?"

JULIA came back from her flower-dream to the realities of the present. Her face clouded and her heart sank. The memory of the last seven months was not a happy one. "Do you mean that you want to live just like Mrs. Closser does?" she faltered.

This was precisely what Mrs. Bolton meant. She was willing to reorganize her entire scheme of life, to re-decorate her house, and to make drastic changes in her wardrobe in order that she might become as Mrs. Closser. Julia looked about with a frankly discouraging eye; the house was too bright, the hangings too fresh, the kitchen too well stocked with wholesome things. And Mrs. Bolton, herself, was no more like that other woman than was Julia.

"But we must change all these things," said Louie. "That is what you are here for—to help and advise me, you know. Beginning with the dining room, what would you suggest?"

"Something to keep the sun out," replied the girl. "She never could abide the sunshine. Said it made wrinkles and dust show up. And some of those cloth pieces to hang over the paper on the walls. I forget what she called them, but I would know them in a shop."