

MARRIED FOR HALF-AN-HOUR.

THE date of this occurrence is not important; in fact it is just as well left untold. I was on the hotel run for a morning paper in St. Paul, Minn., at the time, and glancing over the Ryan register one afternoon, I saw the name of Mrs. George Trehune. It was written in the long, angular scrawl affected so extensively by women of the dramatic profession, and, although I had never before heard of Mrs. Trehune, her signature attracted my attention. There is more of instinct than any other sense in selecting from a long list of signatures those of people worth interviewing. Mrs. Trehune's slap-dash characters set me thinking what sort of a woman she was, and nothing was easier than to find out, so I handed my card to the clerk, pointed to the room, number 205, and awaited the return of the bell-boy.

In five minutes, or thereabouts, he informed me that I was to "go right up," and up I went.

"Come in," called a voice in answer to my tap at the door. I entered. Near the open fire, in an arm chair, sat a young woman. She wore a white gown of that soft, caressing wool that so invariably sets off well the wearer's charms. Rising, as I entered, she advanced towards me, and her manner betrayed at once the well-bred woman. I took a mental photograph of the face and figure before me. The former was oval, well-featured, set with a pair of lustrous, dark eyes, and framed in curls of an indefinable color—half golden, half brown. The latter was tall and shapely.

"Pray, be seated," she said, as I began to explain why I had asked for an interview. "Oh, yes," she went on, "I know why you came. I have several friends in the profession, and, in fact, have the greatest regard for daily newspaper writers. They are equal to almost anything."

"You flatter the craft," I answered, "some of us are very retiring. I am—"

"I hope you are not, sir?" said my charming vis-a-vis, leaning impulsively forward as she spoke. Her elbow found support on the arm of the chair, her chin rested on her shapely white hand, and her large dark eyes looked straight into mine. It was an embarrassing situation, and I confess I hardly knew what to make of it. With an effort, I met the gaze of this strange young woman, and said inquiringly, "You dislike nervous people."

"I should hate myself, if that were the case," replied Mrs. Trehune, "for I am all nerves. Oh, dear, dear, if I only dared to do it."

With a sudden whisk, she was out of the chair and pacing back and forth on the carpet like a chained lioness. There was very evidently something wrong with Mrs. Trehune. Why, good heavens! she was sobbing.

"My dear madam," I exclaimed, "if I can be of any possible service—"

"Oh, I dare not ask it of a stranger," she protested, throwing up both arms dramatically. "And yet," she added, "none but a stranger would do."

The sight of the tears had scattered my self-possession to the winds. I was ready now to fight a duel or two if necessary, in defence of this mysterious young person.

"Ask anything you like," I said, desperately, "I'll do it."

"Will you?" whispered Mrs. Trehune,

coming hurriedly toward me. "If you will do what I ask, I can never do enough for you in return. Mine is a case that requires immediate and skilful action. You will have to use all your finesse, for I have not time to explain matters fully. You must be patient, then indignant, and finally exasperated. Do you understand?"

"Certainly," I answered promptly. Crazy as a March hare was my inward reflection.

"And you will do this for a stranger?" inquired Mrs. Trehune.

"Command me," I replied.

"Then, listen," she said, drawing her chair near mine, with an apprehensive glance at the door. "I am not Mrs. Trehune. I shall be this afternoon, if all goes well, but at present I am Clara Talbot. I have run away from my home in Chicago to marry Mr. Trehune. He is of Kansas City, and was to have met me here. I have received a telegram from him to say that his train is several hours late. Never mind why it was necessary for me to run away. It is a family matter. My people have never seen Mr. Trehune. I met him at the house of a friend in Europe last year. They wanted me to marry another man. I fled yesterday, after telegraphing George to meet me here. My father has followed me. He is in the hotel now;" (another glance at the door) "his card preceded yours. I sent word that I was dressing, and he is waiting down stairs. When I read the name on your card—a newspaper man—I conceived the plan. Will you be my husband for half-an-hour?"

I started up like a scared jack rabbit. "Good gracious, madam," I exclaimed, "I don't know enough about you to do the thing successfully."

"Oh, try," pleaded the brown-eyed fugitive, "please try."

"I'll do it," I said desperately, and the next instant there was a crash. The door flew back, and in burst an old gentleman with a very red face, from which a couple of small eyes snapped angrily as he dashed his hat and cane down on the centre table. Using the latter as a sort of a rostrum, he glanced straight at the girl, and began to rave, ignoring me entirely.

"Well, Miss," (in a tone of concentrated fury) "what do you mean by this disgraceful escapade?"

My temporary wife glanced hopefully towards where I sat, within easy reach of the old man's cane. Summoning all my fortitude, I arose and looked the irate parent straight in the eye.

"I shall have to request, sir," I said, "that in addressing this lady you will remember that respect is due her as my wife and your daughter. You must show her that respect, sir, do you understand?" raising my voice a trifle on the last few words.

"Oh," shrieked the venerable pater, literally dancing with rage. "So you are the blackguard who has inveigled my daughter into this idiotic proceeding. I've a good mind to thrash you," and the cane was raised threateningly.

"I hope you will change your mind," I went on as calmly as possible, "Your present conduct will result in a scandal."

"Scandal be blown, sir. What could be more scandalous than the present state of affairs?" he cried.

Things went on in this way for ten minutes, until the old man howled himself hoarse, and I could hear the bell-

boys tittering in the hall outside. Then he gradually calmed down, and as a last resort tried the sympathetic dodge on the terrified young woman. The latter had hardly spoken a word throughout the scene. She was too badly frightened, I think.

There were tears in the old gentleman's eyes as he turned towards my supposed wife. Had she not always been well treated? Was not her mother the best of mothers? Had he not been the most indulgent of fathers? Was not her home one of luxury? etc., etc. Yes, she admitted each clause in the indictment as it was checked off.

"But, father," she sobbed, "I loved him so much, and oh! I could not marry that other."

"Where was this wretched marriage performed?" he inquired savagely.

"Milwaukee," answered the girl, in a great hurry.

"I'll have it dissolved, you hear me, I will!" shouted the enraged pater, getting noisy again.

"Let me remind you, sir," I said, deliberately, "that your daughter is of age," (I was not sure about it); "that we are legally married, and that any amount of talk will not alter the fact. I might also suggest that as our train leaves for the south at 4 o'clock, we have very little time to devote to this sort of thing."

"Oh, what! adding insult to injury!" he roared, "Well I'll leave you here for the present, but you will hear from me, sir," shaking the cane in my face. "I'm not the man to submit tamely to a rascally abduction of this character. You're a scoundrel, sir, a notorious scoundrel," reiterated my angelic father-in-law, and with this choice parting shot he retired, slamming the door after him.

"How did I manage it?" I inquired, turning to where the future Mrs. Trehune was. She had fainted. Just like a woman! She had the nerve to go through a scene like this undisturbed, to all appearance, and then, when the danger was over she must spoil it by an exhibition of weakness. I rushed to the water, poured a glass of it out and approached the young woman. She was recovering, though, before I reached her, and in an instant sat up.

"How can I ever repay you?" she asked, "you did it superbly, and George will soon be here now" (glancing at her watch). "My dear sir," she went on, "I cannot tell you how grateful I am. I shall make Mr. Trehune call at your office this evening and thank you personally."

My engagement as Miss Talbot's husband was evidently at an end, so protesting that I would willingly have done twice as much for her, I withdrew. Trehune came in later in the afternoon, and they were married by the rector of Christ Church. The Kansas City young man called on me in the evening, and insisted on my going to supper with him and the bride. We had a delightful little spread at the Ryan cafe, and I have never set eyes on either of the Trehunes or the venerable Mr. Talbot, of Chicago, from that moment to this.

They say that money does not bring happiness. This is an experiment, however, which every one wishes to try for himself.