

JOHN AND I; OR, HOW I NEARLY LOST MY HUSBAND.

Narrated after the Approved Fashion of the Best Heart and Home Magazines.

By STEPHEN LEACOCK.

It was after we had been married about two years that I began to feel that I needed more air. Every time I looked at John across the breakfast table, I felt as if I must have more air, more space.

I seemed to feel as if I had no room to expand. I had begun to ask myself whether I had been wise in marrying John, whether John was really sufficient for my development. I felt cramped and shut in. In spite of myself the question would arise in my mind whether John really understood my nature. He had a way of reading the newspaper, propped up against the sugar bowl, at breakfast, that somehow made me feel as if things had gone all wrong. It was bitter to realize that the time had come when John could prefer the newspaper to his wife's society.

But perhaps I had better go back and tell the whole miserable story from the beginning.

I shall never forget—I suppose no woman ever does—the evening when John first spoke of his love for me. I had felt for some time past that it was there. Again and again, he



We each grasped one of John's wrists and took him to father.

seemed about to speak. But somehow his words seemed to fail him. Twice I took him in the very heart of the little wood beside mother's house, but it was only a small wood and somehow he slipped out on the other side.

Perfection, on a Bench.

"Oh John," I had said, "how lonely and still it seems in the wood with no one here but ourselves. Do you think," I said, "that the birds have gone?" "I don't know," John answered, "let's get out of this." I was sure that his emotion was too strong for him. "I never feel a bit lonesome where you are, John," I said, as we made our way among the underbrush. "I think we can get out down that little gully," he answered.

Then one evening in June after tea I led John down a path beside the house to a little corner behind the garden where there was a stone wall on one side and a high fence right in front of us, and there bushes on the other side. There was a little bench in the angle of the wall and the fence, and we sat down on it.

"Minnie," John said, "there's something I mean to say—"

"Oh, John," I cried, and flung my arms around his neck. It all came with such a flood of surprise.

"All I meant, Minn," John went on, but I checked him.

"Oh, don't John, don't say anything more," I said. "It's just too perfect." Then I rose and seized him by the wrist. "Come," I said, "come to mother." And I rushed him along the path.

We Cry Once Around.

As soon as mother saw us come hand in hand in this way she guessed everything. She threw both her arms around John's neck and fairly pinned him against the wall. John tried to speak, but mother wouldn't let him. "I saw it all along, John," she said. "Don't speak, don't say a word. I guessed your love for Minn from the very start. I don't know what I shall do without her, John, but she's yours now; take her." Then mother began to cry and I couldn't help crying, too. "Take him to father," mother said, and we each took one of John's wrists and took him to father on the back veranda.

As soon as John saw father he tried to speak again—"I think I ought to say," he began, but mother stopped him. "Father," she said, "he wants to take our little girl away. He loves her very dearly, Alfred," she said, "and I think it our duty to let her go, no matter how hard it is, and Oh! please Heaven, Alfred, he'll treat her well and not misuse her or beat her," and she began to sob again.

Our Wedding Day.

Father got up and took John by the hand and shook it warmly, "Take her, my boy," he said, "She's all yours now, take her."

So John and I were engaged, and in due time our wedding day came and we were married. I remember that for days and days before the wedding day John seemed very nervous and depressed; I think he was worrying, poor boy, as to whether he could really make me happy and whether he could fill my life as it should be filled. But I told him that he was not to worry because I meant to be happy, and was determined just to make the best of everything.

Father stayed with John a good deal before the wedding day, and on the wedding morning he went and fetched him to the church in a closed carriage and had him there all ready when we came. It was a beautiful day in September and the church looked just lovely. I had a beautiful gown of white organdy with tulle at the throat, and I carried a great bunch of white roses, and father led John up the aisle after me.

The First Oath.

I remember that mother cried a good deal at the wedding and told John that he had stolen her darling and that he must never misuse me or beat me. And I remember that the clergyman spoke very severely to John and told him he hoped he realized the responsibility he was taking and that it was his duty to make me happy. A lot of our old friends were there and they all spoke quite sharply to John and all the women kissed me and said they

hoped I would never regret what I had done, and I just kept up my spirits by sheer determination and told them that I had made up my mind to be happy and that I was going to be so.

So presently it was all over and we were driven to the station and got the afternoon train for New York, and when we sat down in the compartment among all our handboxes and flowers, John said, "Well, thank God, that's over," and I said, "Oh! John, an oath, on our wedding day, an oath!" John said, "I'm sorry, Minn, I didn't mean—"

I Notice Little Things.

So presently we came back home and I spent many busy days in fixing and arranging our new house. I had the drawing-room done in blue and the dining-room all in dark paneled wood, and a boudoir upstairs done in pink and white enamel to match my bedroom and dressing-room.

There was a very nice little room in the basement next to the coal cellar that I turned into a "den" for John, so that when he wanted to smoke he could go down there and do it. John seemed to appreciate his den at once, and often would stay down there so long that I had to call to him to come up.

When I look back on those days they seem very bright and happy. But it was not very long before a change came. I began to realize that John was neglecting me. I noticed it at first in small things. I don't know just how long it was after our marriage that John began to read the newspaper at breakfast. At first he would only pick it up and read it in little bits, and only on the front page. I tried not to be hurt at it, and would go on talking just as brightly as I could without seeming to notice anything. But presently he went on to reading the inside part of the paper, and then one day he opened up the financial page and folded the paper right back and leant it against the sugar bowl.

I could not but wonder whether John's love for me was what it had been. Was it cooling? I asked myself. And what was cooling it? I hardly seemed possible when I looked back to the wild passion with which he had proposed to me on the garden bench that John's love was waning. But I kept noticing different little things. One day in the spring time I saw John getting out a lot of fishing tackle from a box and fitting it together. I asked him what he was going to do, and he said that he was going to fish. I went to my room and had a good cry. It seemed dreadful that he could neglect his wife for a few worthless fish.

Put John to Test.

So I decided to put John to the test. It had been my habit every morning after he put his coat on to go to the office to let John have one kiss, just one weeny kiss, to keep him happy all day. So this day when

he was getting ready I bent my head over a big bowl of flowers and pretended not to notice. I think John must have been hurt, as I heard him steal out on tip toe.

Well, I realized that things had come to a dreadful state, and so I sent over to mother and mother came and we had a good cry together. I made up my mind to force myself to face things and just to be as bright as ever I could. Mother and I both thought that things would be better if I tried all I could to make something out of John. I have always felt that every woman should make all that she can out of her husband.

So I did my best first of all to straighten up John's appearance. I shifted the style of collar he was wearing to a tighter kind that I liked better, and I brushed his hair straight backward instead of forward, which gave him a much more alert look. Mother said that John needed waking up, and so we did all we could to wake him up. Mother came over to stay with me a good deal, and in the evenings we generally had a little music or a game of cards.

Attentions of Others.

About this time another difficulty began to come into my married life, which I suppose I ought to have foreseen. I mean the attentions of other gentlemen. I have always called forth a great deal of admiration in gentlemen, but I have always done my best to act like a lady and to discourage it in every possible way. I had been innocent enough to suppose that this would end with married life, and it gave me a dreadful shock to realize that such was not the case.

The first one I noticed was a young man who came to the house at an hour when John was out, for the purpose, so he said at least, of reading the gas meter. He looked at me in just the boldest way and asked me to show him the way to the cellar. I don't know whether it was a pretext or not, but I just summoned all the courage I had and showed him to the head of the cellar stairs. When he came up he professed to have read the meter and he left the house quite quietly. But I thought it wiser to say nothing to John of what had happened.

There were others, too. There was a young man with large brown eyes who came and said he had been sent to tune the piano. He came on three separate days, and he bent his ear over the keys in such a mournful way that I knew he must have fallen in love with me. Of course I told John nothing of all this.

Precious Honey-moon.

We spent our honeymoon in New York. At first I had thought of going somewhere to the great lonely woods, where I could have walked under the great trees and felt the silence of nature, and where John should have been my Viking and captured me with his spear, and where I should be his and his alone in his arms and carry me whither he would. But I looked over all the hotel and steamship folders I could find and it seemed impossible to get good accommodation, so we came to New York.

I had a great deal of shopping to do. Then there was Mr. McQueen, who came to the house several times to play cribbage with John. He had been desperately in love with me years before, at least I remember taking me home from a hockey match once and what a struggle it was for him not to come into the parlor and see mother for a few minutes when I asked him; and though he was married now and with three children I felt sure when he came to play cribbage with John that it meant something. He was very discreet and honorable and never betrayed my part as if there was nothing at all behind.

I See Love Dwindling.

Then presently a new trouble came. I began to suspect that John was drinking. I don't mean for a moment that he was drunk, or that he was openly cruel to me. But I think he was drinking. I saw it in his eyes, though I could never be sure of it. At any rate he often seemed queer and restless in the evenings, and instead of staying in his den he would wander all over the house. Once we heard him—I mean mother and I and two lady friends who were with us that evening—quite late (after 10 o'clock) apparently moving about in the pantry. "John," I called, "is that you?" "Yes, Minn," he answered, "I'm coming to bed." "What are you doing there?" I asked. "Looking for something to eat," he said. "John," I said, "you are forgetting what is due to me as your wife. You were fed at 6. Go back."

He went. But yet I felt more and more that his love was dwindling to make him act as he did. I thought it all over very much and asked myself whether I had done everything I should to hold my husband's love. I had kept him in at nights, I had

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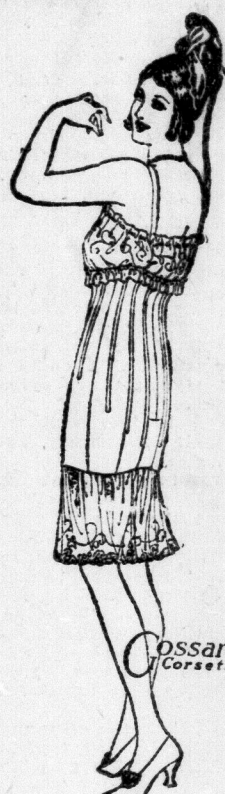
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cut down his smoking. I had stopped his playing cards. What more was there that I could do?

Decide on Great Step.

So at last the conviction came to me that I must go away. I felt that I must get away somewhere and think things out, just face things as they were. So one morning I said to John, "John, I think I'd like to go off somewhere for a little time, just to be by myself, dear, and I don't want you to ask to come with me or to follow me, but just let me go." John said, "All right, Minn. When are you going to start?"

The cold brutality of it cut me to the heart, and I went upstairs and had a good cry and looked over steamship and railroad folders. I thought of Havana for a while, because the pictures of the harbor and the castle and the queer Spanish streets looked so attractive, but then I was afraid that at Havana a woman alone by herself might be simply persecuted by attentions from gentlemen. They say the Spanish temperament is something fearful. So I decided on Bermuda instead.

A Telegram For John.

I said nothing more to John, but in the next few days I got all my arrangements made, and on the morning when the last afternoon came I sat down and wrote John a long letter, to leave on my boudoir table, telling him that I had gone to Bermuda. I told him that I wanted to be alone; I said that I couldn't tell when I would be back—that it might be months, or it might be years, and I hoped that he would try to be as happy as he could and forget me entirely, and to send me money on the first of every month.

Well it was just at that moment that one of those strange coincidences happen, little things in themselves, but which seem to alter the whole course of a person's life. I had nearly finished the letter to John that I was to leave on the writing desk, when just then the maid came up to my room with a telegram. It was for John, but I thought it was my duty

to open it and read it for him before I left. And I nearly fainted when I saw that it was from a lawyer in Bermuda—of all places—and it said that a legacy of two hundred thousand dollars had been left to John by an uncle of his who died there, and asking for instructions about the disposition of it.

A great wave seemed to sweep over me, and all the wicked thoughts that had been in my mind—for I saw now that they were wicked—were driven clean away. I thought how completely lost poor old John would feel if all this money came to him and he didn't have to work any more and had no one at his side to help and guide him in using it.

Love Triumphs.

I tore up the wicked letter I had written, and I hurried as fast as I could to pack up a valise with John's things (my own were packed already, as I said). Then presently John came in and I broke the news to him as gently and tenderly as I could about his uncle having left him the money and having died. I told him that I had found out all about the trains and the Bermuda steamer, and had everything all packed and ready for us to leave at once.

We left for New York that evening, and after we had been to Bermuda and arranged about a suitable monument for John's uncle and collected the money, we sailed for Europe. All through the happy time that has followed, I like to think that through all our trials and difficulties affliction brought us safely together at last.

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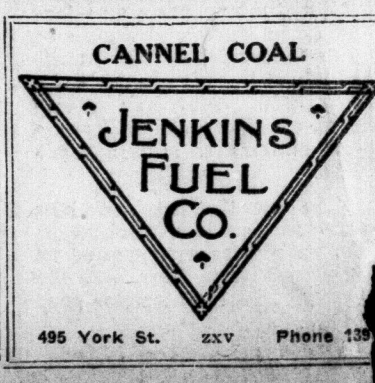
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