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Read the Guide-Advocate "Wants."

A MATTER OF PRECAUTION

By M. M. WILLIAMS

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"It's your manner, Marjorie—so distant and stand-offish. A man needs encouragement if he—well, if you expect him to get anywhere," the very new Mrs. Gordon said to her maid of honor, with the accent of supreme wisdom possible only to supreme ignorance.

Marjorie's answer was a soft chuckle. Alicia's role of experienced matron diverted her amazingly. Step-sisters, close friends notwithstanding, when Frank Gordon had come mooning after her, she had engineered the transfer of his facile affections to her housemate so deftly, so subtly, neither of the newlyweds suspected her agency. She had foreseen how it would be—Alicia with her liquid nature, taking form from what it fell into, would try to live up to the Gordon dignity, partly in loving obedience to her Frank, but more through her own aspirations.

As a first fruit, she must marry off Marjorie—she would miss her, of course—but a solitude of two was enticing. In the honeymoon year even the best-beloved tertium quid crowds a dovecoat, no matter how roomy.

"You are really pretty," Alicia went on patronizingly. "Prettier than I am"—this without conviction. "But then you are older—twenty-three almost—beginning to—stamping there embarrassed

you looking away.

"Besides, I'm almost a pauper with a fine feeling for the fine things money buys," Marjorie supplemented, not bitterly, but with darkening eyes. "Maybe you are right. Maybe I ought to be advertising myself in the 'object matrimony' class. But, somehow, I just can't see it. Lazy as I am, work looks better to me."

"Marjorie!" Alicia exploded. "You know that's out of the question. Frank will never allow it. People will say, oh, dreadful things. We must consider our position. But you are joking—you must be. There is nothing you can do."

"I am a mighty-competent cook," Marjorie said, slowly, pulling herself together after the explosion, which had hardened her nebulous consciousness of need into something imperative. Until the moment of speaking, she had never thought of her cooking as an asset. Now, by a lightning calculation, she reckoned it, plus a bond or two, a few sticks of furniture, and a right good will, as a provision, wholly adequate for independence.

The house was Alicia's—work there was impossible. Further the countryside already was suffering a plague of tea rooms, wayside inns and booths of home-made dainties, aimed at motorists beginning to be booth-sly. But somewhere there was a place for her—she must find it—the sooner the better.

Next morning Alicia read tearfully a scrawl which ran: "Don't fret, honey—go to seek my fate—not sure yet whether it will turn out a fortune or a husband. Tell folks what you please—you can make them believe anything, you lie so deliciously. You'll hear from me through Judy—she knows everything—and won't tell. Be good to yourself and keep Frank in his place until I come back. Love and all the rest of it, from the Wicked Marjorie."

Judy knew everything, through having been the deer of hope. "Dem Warrens people ober to Pine Hill done come yere to learn what we all doin', and was ragarin' an' chargin' case dee couldn't git no cook ter stay wid um—not since Jincy, Judy's sister, had been wrested from their kitchen by sudden matrimony. Oh, yessum, dee paid all right—most anything vus asked um. But de ole lady she was cranky as a ram's horn, even befoh she fell and broke so many bones. Den de two trained nurses and dat dar ramrod-legged man, her sen, even wusser. Dey was sholy too much fer any plain wukin' ooman. Maybe er lady mought stand um. Miss Mahje better run 'long ober dar, tight an' make heggement, 'pendin' on Judy ter send on her suitcase—and keep her mouf shet ter everybody."

Marjorie nodded—she was beyond speech. But she hugged Judy tight, and ran away trying hard to whistle. Six hours later, on the edge of sundown, she was in the Warren kitchen, saying to herself as she glanced around: "Tuesday of creation week couldn't have been a patch on this." The ramrod-legged son had fetched her to the door, waved a helpless hand at the spectacle within, then vanished murmuring he would make it worth her while to stay.

Faith my move mountains, but virgin ignorance can give it three in the game. If Marjorie had known half the week following taught her she would never have adventured into the Warren household. One nurse was a kindly incapable—so was the remnant elderly maid. But the head nurse, Miss Snickers, made up for both by abuse of the permissiveness even head nurses have to be hateful. Small wonder when she had marked down the ramrod-legged one as her special prey and saw in Marjorie a potential rival. Especially after order came out of chaos and meals were no longer penances but full-fed delights. The tongue-tied Mr. Warren had no need to praise them orally—the smacking of his lips was sufficiently convincing. Also and further he began almost to thrive to an extent which moved Jim Leslie, his imported scientific farmer, to say, grinning at Marjorie: "if you keep this up

you'll be able to get blood out of that turnip."

Casual contacts with this person, who did for himself and came into the kitchen only to bring fruit and vegetables, were Marjorie's main alleviations. She knew she was a puzzle to him—also that he found study of it fascinating. Audaciously she had no fear that he would recognize in Joy, the Warren cook, the Marjorie Joyce Millburn he had danced with casually at the senior prom five years back. Then he had been slight—now he was tanned, muscled, almost burly. Yet she fancied she would have known him without hearing his name. His manner towards her was friendly—kind yet touched with a fine respectful chivalrous reserve infinitely refreshing.

Upon a sweltering late August twilight the scent of ripe grapes enticed Marjorie to the long arbor which ran down the main garden walk. "She was very tired—but happy—hadn't she a hundred dollars to show for her

—she snatched angrily as she passed—John was a fool—no good girl could be so heartlessly extortionate—with sickness in the house—and so little to do. John had checked her peremptorily there—later, in the hall, he had apologized almost timidly for his mother—she was so old, so ill—she would never be better—he knew, if she did not, what a godsend Joy had been to them. He had looked even more—Marjorie smiled, wryly, remembering his eyes. Possibly the memory helped to send her out of doors recklessly conscious that in the arbor she risked encounter with Leslie—he had a theory that grapes should be cut while sun-warm.

"I'll let you help if you are very good," he called gayly as she came within range of his lantern light. Hanging directly overhead it hung revealing white illumination upon her lifted brow, her round lips, the small quizzical curl of her lips. Instantly he knew her—as instantly he dropped grape-shears and basket, leaped from the ladder and caught her hands, saying: "Want a prize idiot? Here he stands!"

"Any proofs?" Marjorie asked sardonically. "A whole month of it—I ought to have known you at the very first," he said huskily, falling back a pace. Miss Snickers was advancing majestically upon them, leading a reluctant captive—Mr. Warren—and brandishing a letter as though it were a dagger. As she came close she thrust the letter upon Marjorie, hissing: "By special messenger—he's waiting for the answer."

"He is—judicious," Marjorie answered, taking the missive, which was addressed: Miss Marjorie Joy-Milburn, at Pinehill warrens.

Saying ceremoniously: "Excuse me," Marjorie broke the seal and read, "You come back HOME, unC Dan is done Found he-self. Say ef I Dont find you quick, he'll Kill me. I'm in deEe Kyar down At de big Galt—you come wid de shofEr—make him Tote you Close."

"You are going, of course?" Leslie said. He had read shamelessly over her shoulder. She nodded. Miss Snickers interposed. "Not until your bags are searched. I insist upon that—for my own protection. A person sailing under false colors is capable of almost anything. I do not propose to jeopardize my good name."

"She is not going if I can help it," Warren almost shouted, clutching Marjorie's arm. "Stay—as my wife. I loved you the minute you came."

Miss Snickers screamed and promptly fainted. Marjorie brushed past her, saying to Mr. Warren: "Thank you—but it's no." Then ran toward the back door. Leslie reached it ahead of her, held it shut and said in a shaken voice: "Marjorie, I've loved you five years without knowing it. I know all about you. Uncle Dan's finding himself will make you an heiress. So I—I—it seems I had better tell you. I've got a million in my own right—and expectations—"

"Why tell me?" Marjorie asked primly, but with dancing eyes. "Just as a matter of precaution—so I won't be set down as a fortune hunter," Leslie answered, possessing himself of her hand.

ALL RIGHT TO BLEACH HAIR

New York Magistrate Settles Question Which Has Long Been More or Less in Controversy.

If thy right eye offend thee pluck it out. If your hair is not the shade you dote on bleach it, color it or cut it off if you wish. Whose business is it? A mother-in-law recently accused her daughter-in-law, a handsome young blond, of bleaching her hair—using peroxide on it. A magistrate had to settle this matter; and the newspapers made much of it, and one would think from perusing what they had to say there is some law, statutory or unwritten, that makes it almost a felony to discolor the hair.

Nothing of the kind, declares the New York Telegraph. Many women bleach their hair, and it is quite all right if they wish to do so. Dark-haired girls and women and those with black hair frequently turn the color of their locks to that of a brickbat, with henna. And red-haired ladies sometimes change their color to that of yellow field corn. That is their affair and no one has a right to complain. Many folk twit those who have thus improved on nature, but they will do so no more—the magistrate has settled that.

A Good Instance.

Teacher—Can you give me an instance of the economy of nature?
Pupil—She used sheets of water to cover the beds of rivers.

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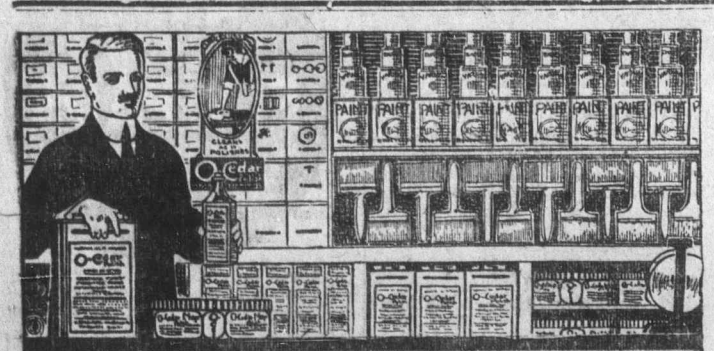


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