

there at all. Then he stopped to think it over.

And Dick sat above him and waited. The fish saw his best plan; it was to lie still and wait, and wait, and wait. So that when the big monster above grew tired and curious and jerked to see if he was still on, His Majesty would pull in the opposite direction, reverse the hook, as it were, and live again.

But the fish tired first. With a vicious jerk, he darted down into a rocky cleft and began to swim rapidly back and forth, there. Had he but known it, that jerk was the happiest signal he could have given Dick. It had not been an easy matter to sit still such a long, long time, with never a sign. But now, with a deep sigh of contentment, he settled himself for a tedious but glorious fight, every thought centered on the end of the slender rod which he held in his bronzed hand.

And Pierre, like an ugly squat shadow, crouched behind him, eyes glittering and beady, landing net in a steady hand.

The sun slipped several cogs nearer the west; the sylvan tunnel grew darker as the tall pines opposite shut out the light; the heavy hush of mid-day settled over the forest and even the birds and insects were silent. Only the agonized flit of the tiring fish broke the stillness until almost two hours had passed. Pierre, a shade less intent than his M'sieu, heard a noise. He scented human presence and scowled. This was no time for interruption.

"Are you ready?" whispered Bartlett.

"Oui, M'sieu," whispered the man in answer, bending farther forward.

Down the length of the pool came the conquered King. He dragged a little, but he was tired—so tired—that when within a few yards of the spot where Dick stood, he turned over on his side and gave up the fight.

With a whoop which matched Dick's very own, a girl bounded from the bushes, and shouted.

"Bully for you, boy! It was a splendid battle! An inch of slack, a half wink tighter, would have freed him. And, Dickie, he's bigger than mine," she ended, generously.

Breathing hard, Dick looked up stupified. Peeping from a leafy cover was Batiste Laframboise, and out on the edge of the pool stood Mildred

Ellery.

"Pierre!" gasped the conqueror, "what time is it?"

"Too late to catch the train, my boy," she said. "No wedding bells for me!"

"Mildred!"

Paragraphs will hardly describe the numerous emotions in the one word.

"I came after my reluctant bridegroom," she continued, teasingly. "Unless you have changed your mind," and she made as though to take a beautiful gleaming hoop from her finger.

"Oh, Mil, honestly—you can ask Pierre! We are all packed and ready out there on the trail! He bit, why it was just a few minutes ago, and—"

Of course she should have tortured him further; any self-respecting woman would. But Mildred was not that kind; she was a sport from her heels up, and she knew, she knew.

"Never mind, old man," she said. "Let us have something to eat, and push on for the Club. Fortunately for you, dad got the minister to run out his special, and we will be home by midnight. Dad and he are at the Club."

"With or at?" asked Dick anxiously.

"At. You have nothing to fear from them, and probably when we bring you in, mother's joy and relief will be so great she will do little more than weep on your buzzom. But when the first spasm has worn off—"

"I deserve it," groaned repentant Richard. Then with a change of manner, "but, I say, Mil, isn't he a lalla-poullusa?"

"All of that. He is five and three-quarters, I heard Pierre say just now."

Of course the newspapers got hold of the story, and, of course, some of them garbled it worse than others. But they were pretty unanimous in one item. It ran:

"Among the gifts of the bridegroom to the bride was a mounted trout. This splendid specimen was captured but a few days before the wedding, weighs five and three-quarter pounds, and is highly prized by the bride who is an enthusiastic sportswoman herself. Mr. Ellery, the father of the bride, has fitted up a cabin in the woods for the happy young couple, where it is feared they will spend most of their summers."

And for once the papers guessed right.

LAUGHING AT LIFE

Number Four—The Monotony of Weddings

By GEORGE EDGAR

Author of "The Blue Birdseye," etc.

SOMEONE ought to invent a new form of wedding. People are beginning to realise how dreadfully monotonous a wedding ceremony is, but the nearest we have to change is an alteration in the method of going to the celebration. People still walk and drive to the church in the old-fashioned way, but of late more enterprising young persons have motored, cycled, and even flown to the ceremony. I have heard of couples being married in a balloon and down a coal-pit, and now and again folk are married in registry offices. In some respects, through its prosaic form, a wedding in a registry office is as original as any method of being united, but you cannot make the average woman believe in the idea. Though you can be as hopelessly and as positively married in a registry office as you can anywhere else, the process does not seem the same kind of thing. Orange blossoms, a procession of bridesmaids, the "Voice that breathed o'er Eden," and a salute of confetti at the church door, are essentials of the correctly planned wedding. No woman is really satisfied in her heart of hearts with the services of a registrar. They make her think of county courts, of the fiscal receivers in bankruptcy, and the interminable chase after the impossible—the perfect housemaid or cook—introduced for a fee by the proprietor of a servants' registry.

The wedding is a family affair. In some respects, I do not blame the family. They are making

sure that Laura or Kate leaves home for keeps, and naturally they are entitled to hold some sort of festivity to betray their joy over the fact. Some girls never do leave home. They remain to criticise the old man after his usual late night at the club, or to see mother is properly dressed when she goes out fine walking. Parents of such girls begin to feel too old to live at fifty. One man I knew, who had a daughter who would not leave home, after trying the usual methods without any tangible gain, began to tell possible husbands that his wedding present, when that particular daughter happened to find a mate, would be £1,000 spot cash. That did it. No power on earth could have kept the girl at home. The man who won her—I recall he wanted to start in the boot trade for himself—would have gone through fire and water for the lady—and the cheque. He considered his enterprise well worth the sacrifice. And the old man—well he paid out the cheque without batting an eyelid, and did not even think about the sacrifice.

Marriage by Proxy.

MYSELF, as I never go to weddings—now—I do not care how monotonous they are. But judging from the experience I have had of a variety of such celebrations, my whole complaint is that it ought to be possible to hold an ordinary number nine-sized wedding without dragging the bridegroom into it. No

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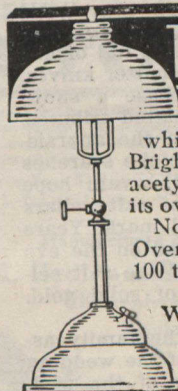
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