

WHEN A MAN MARRIES

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CHAPTER I

At Least I Meant Well.

When the dreadful thing occurred that night, every one turned on me. The justice of it hurt me most. I asked them to give up other engagements and come, that I promised all kinds of jollification, if they would come; and then when they did come and got in the papers, and every one—but ourselves—laughed himself black in the face, they turned on me! I, who suffered ten times to their one! I shall never forget what Dallas Brown said to me, standing with a coal shovel in one hand and a well, perhaps it would be better to tell it all in the order it happened.

and dropped their voices when they were mentioned. Well, on the anniversary of the day Bella left him—oh, yes, she left him finally. She was intense enough about some things, and she said it got on her nerves to have everybody fuss when she asked for her husband. They would say, "Hello, Bella! How's Bubbles? Still bantling?" And Bella would say to laugh and say, "He swears his tailor says his waist is smaller, but if it is he must be growing hollow in the back." But she got tired of it at last. Well, on the second anniversary of Bella's departure, Jimmy was feeling pretty grim, and as I say, I am very fond of Jim. The divorce had gone through and Bella had taken her maiden name again and had had an operation for appendicitis. We heard afterward that they didn't find an appendix, and that the one they showed her in a glass jar was not hers! But if Bella ever suspected, she didn't say. Whether the appendix was anonymous or not, she got box after box of flowers that were, and of course every one knew that it was Jim who sent them. To go back to the anniversary, I went to Robert's to see the collection of antique furniture—mother was looking for a sideboard for father's birthday in March—and I met Jimmy there, boring into a worm-hole in a seventeenth century bedpost with the end of a match, and looking his nearest to sad. When he saw me he came over. "I'm blue today, Kit," he said, after we had shaken hands. "Come and help me dig dirt, and then let's go fishing. If there's a worm in every whole in that bedpost, we could go into the fish business. It's a good business."

"Better than painting?" I asked. "He ignored my gibe and swelled up alarmingly in order to sigh. "This is the worst day of the year for me," he affirmed, starting straight ahead, "and the longest. Look at that crazy clock over there. If you want to see your life passing away, if you want to see the steps by which you are marking the time, look at that infernal hand staying quiet for sixty seconds and then jumping forward to catch up with the procession. Ghit!" "See here, Jim," I said, leaning forward, "you're not well. You can't go through the rest of the day like this. I know what you'll do: you'll go home to play Grieg on the piano, and you won't eat any dinner." He looked guilty. "Not Grieg," he protested feebly. "I'm not going to do either," I said with firmness. "You are going right home to unpack those new draperies that Harry Bayles sent you from Shanghai, and you are going to order dinner for eight—that will be two tables of bridge. And you are not going to touch the piano."

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"Nothing of the sort," I said coldly, "and the fact that you didn't marry me does not give you the privilege of abusing my friends. Answer me like you would to any other girl." Jim took me to the door and stopped there to sigh. "I haven't been well," he said heavily. "I don't lose sleep. Wouldn't you think I'd lose sleep? Kit"—he lowered his voice solemnly—"I have gained two pounds!" "I said he didn't look it, which appeared to comfort him somewhat, and because we were old friends, I asked him where Bella was. He was in Europe, and that thought she was going to marry Reggie Wolfe. Then he sighed again, muttered something about ordering the funeral baked meats to be prepared and left me. That was my entire share in the affair. I was the victim, both of circumstances and of my plot, which was mad on the face of it. During the entire time they never once let me forget that I got up at the door-story affair, and I got up for them. They asked me why I couldn't cook—not when one of them knew one side of a range from the other. And for Anne Brown to talk the way she did—saying I had always been crazy about Jim, and that she believed I had known all along that his aunt was coming—for Anne to talk like that was sheer idiocy. Yes, there was an aunt. The Japanese had started the trouble, and Aunt Selina carried it along.

CHAPTER II The Way It Began. It makes me angry every time I think how I tried to make that dinner a success. I canceled a theater engagement, and I took the Mercer girls in the electric brougham father had given me for Christmas. The chauffeur had been gone for hours with their machine, and they had telephoned out the police stations without success. They were afraid that there had been an awful smash; they could easily have replaced Bartlett, as Lollie said, but it takes so long to get new parts for those foreign cars. Jim had a house well up town, and it stood just enough apart from the other houses to be entirely maddening later. It was a three-story affair, with a basement kitchen and servants' dining-room. Then, of course, there were cellars, as we found out afterward. On the first floor there was a large square hall, a formal reception-room, behind it a big living-den, and back of all a Georgian dining-room, with windows high above the ground. On the top floor Jim had a studio, like every other one I ever saw—perhaps a little more quaint, and was really a shrine of his painting, and there were easels, palette and brushes everywhere. It is strange, but when I think of that terrible house, I always see the halls, enormous, covered with heavy rugs, and stairs that would have taken six housemaids to keep in proper condition. I dream about those stairs, stretching above me in a Jacob's ladder of shining wood and Persian carpets, going up, up, clear to the roof.

"Damn the cat!" he said rudely. "Her name isn't Buttons. Her name is Caruthers, my Aunt Selina Caruthers, and the money comes from buttons." "Oh!" feebly. "It's an old business," he went on, with something of proprietary pride. "My grandfather founded it in 1775. Made buttons for the Continental army." "Oh, yes," I said. "They melted the buttons to make bullets, didn't they? Or they melted bullets to make buttons? Which was it?" "But again he interrupted. "It's like this," he went on hurriedly. "Aunt Selina believes in me. She likes pictures, and she wanted me to paint. If I could, I'd have given up long ago—oh, I know what you think of my work—but for Aunt Selina. She has encouraged me, and she's done more than that; she's paid the bills." "Dear Aunt Selina," I breathed. "When I got married," Jim persisted, "Aunt Selina doubled my allowance. I always expected to sell something, and begin to make money, and in the meantime what she advanced I considered as a loan. He was eyeing me defiantly, but I was growing serious. It was evident from the preamble that something was coming. "To understand, Kit," he went on dubiously, "you would have to know her. She won't stand for divorce. She thinks it is a crime." "What!" I sat up. I have always regarded divorce as essentially disagreeable, like castor oil, but necessary. "Oh, you know well enough what I'm driving at," he burst out savagely. "She doesn't know Bella has gone. She thinks I am living in a little domestic heaven, and she is coming tonight to hear me flap my wings."

"To-night!" "I don't think Jimmy had known that Dallas Brown had come in and was listening. I am sure I had not. Hearing his chuckle at the doorway brought us up with a jerk. "Where has Aunt Selina been for the last two or three years?" he asked easily. Jim turned, and his face brightened. "Europe. Look here, Dal, you're a smart chap. She'll only be here about four hours. Can you think of any way to get me out of this? I want to let her down easy, too. I'm mighty fond of Aunt Selina. Can't we—can't I say Bella has a headache?" "Rotten!" belatedly. "Gone out of town?" Jim was desperate. "And you with a household of dinner guests! Try again, Jim." "I have it," Jim said suddenly. "Dallas, ask Anne if she won't play hostess for to-night. Be Mrs. Wilson pro tem. Anne would love it. Aunt Selina never saw Bella. Then, afterward, next year, when I'm hung in the Academy and can stand on my feet"—"Not if you're hung," Dallas objected. "I'll break the truth to her." But Dallas was not enthusiastic. "Anne wouldn't do at all," he declared. "She'd be talking about the kids before she knew it, and patting me on the head." He said it complacently; Anne flirts, but they are really devoted. "One of the Mercer girls!" I suggested, but Jimmy raised a horrified hand. "You don't know Aunt Selina," he protested. "I couldn't offer Lella in the gown she's got on, unless she wore a shawl, and Betty's too fair." Anne came in just then, and the whole story had to be told again to her. She was ecstatic. She said it was good enough for a play, and that of course she would be Mrs. Jimmy for that length of time. "You know," she finished, "if it were not for Dal, I would be Mrs. Jimmy for any length of time. I have been devoted to you for years, Billie."

Miscellaneous Reading. BAGDAD BAZAARS.

Fascinating Bazaars of a City of the East. If Market Street cars gave transfers to Bagdad, and an alert San Francisco woman could step off, shopping bags in hand, some of the most suddenly find herself in the midst of Bagdad's ancient bazaars—Oh, my, what joy! I had such luck; and, excepting one or two wandering misadventurers, I am the only American woman, I believe, who has ever lived in Bagdad. True, I didn't come all the way on a street car transfer; but I did find myself, after two months' travel, in mysterious old Bagdad, and ever since the bazaars have held me in their thrall. And these vast, mystic marts flourish today as they did in the long ago, when Marco Polo did his holiday shopping here and sent gold woven shawls home to dark-eyed damsels in the land of spaghetti. And this same Mark P. was no mere mad tourist, rushing through the east for new sensations and scenery. He was the real, original bargain hunter, and says in his travels that he found the Bagdad bazaars the "bargain hunter's paradise." And so they seem to me today. I know Tokio's marvellous markets, the famous "walled city" of Shanghai; "Pipe street" in Pekin has pried money loose from me, and Bombay's offerings have taken toll. But to Bagdad's bazaars I hand the palm. To enter is to come out penniless. There is so much to buy, and each tempting bargain seems dirt cheap. Think of hand-hammered finger bowls at ten plasses (11 cents) each, and all sold brass; or long, full ostrich plumes selling for \$1.25—the kind you pay Market Street milliners \$25 for. Of course, here there are gray with desert dust and look droopy and whipped out, just as they were when snatched from the tall of the fleet-footed fowl, which was probably glad to get away with only the loss of her tail feathers. But cleaning and dyeing primp them up as we see them when sold for fifteen or twenty cents. And all these things with never a "free" clearance sign to remind one of special sales or any of the bargain hunting scrambles we know at home. "I'm really doing business in the same old way in Bagdad, just as they did in the days of the Arabian Nights, when a cunning merchant and his favorite wife, Scheherazade, strolled out together for a merry evening in the coffee houses. The shops hold just as they did in the Bagdad bazaars. Here are no super-civilized sections of the Yankee department store type. But all around passes a "modern" pasteurized milk, and a curious interest. Alexander the Great, Herodotus and all the early kings of Babylon were in the bazaars. Mesopotamian towns. One can almost imagine old Nebuchadnezzar sauntering through the bazaars, and Bagdad's bazaars are playing the B. C. slot machine and asking innocently for election news from the Phoenix. King Solomon, King Solomon, wise as he was, is reputed to have spent a lot of money foolishly in Bagdad. "I can never be undone," I said soberly. Well, that's the picture as nearly as I can draw it: a round table with a low centerpiece of orchids in lavender and pink, old silver candlesticks with filigree shades against the somber wall; waiting; nine people, two of them unhappy—Jim and I; one of them complacent—Aunt Selina; one puzzled—Mr. Harbison; and the rest hysterically mirthful. Add one sick Japanese butter and grind in the mills of the gods. Every one promptly forgot Takahiro in the excitement of the game we were all playing. Finally, however, Aunt Selina, who seemed to have Takahiro on her mind, looked up from her plate. "That Jap was speckled," she asserted. "I wouldn't be surprised if it's measles. Has he been sniffing, James?" "Has he been sniffing?" Jim threw across at me. "I hadn't noticed it," I said meekly, while the others choked. Max came to the rescue. He was refused to eat it," he explained, distinctly to everybody, apropos absolutely of nothing. "I said the box, 'ready cooked and predigested.' She declared she didn't care who cooked it, but she wanted to know who predigested it." As every one wanted to laugh, every one did it then, and under cover of the noise I caught Anne's eye, and we left the dining room. The men stayed, and by the very firmness with which the door closed behind us, I knew that Dallas and Max were bringing out the bottles that Takahiro had hidden. When Aunt Selina indicated a desire to go over the house (it was natural that she should want to) it was her house, in a way) I excused myself for a minute and flew back to the dining room. It was as I had expected. Jim hadn't cheered perceptibly, and the rest were patting him on the back, and pouring things out for him, and saying, "Poor old Jim!" in the most maddening way. And the Harbison man was looking more and more puzzled, and not at all hilarious. I descended on them like a thunderbolt. "That's it!" I cried shrilly, with my back against the door. "Leave her to me, all of you, and pat each other on the back, and say it's gone splendidly! Oh, I know you, every one!" Mr. Harbison got up and pulled out a chair, but I wouldn't sit; I folded my arms on the back. "After a while, I suppose, you'll slip up-stairs, the four of you, and have your game." They looked guilty. "But I will block that right now. I am going to stay—here. If Aunt Selina wants to see me, she can find me—here!" The first indication those men had that Mr. Harbison did not know the state of affairs was when he turned and faced their eyes out in the street. "Mrs. Wilson is quite right," he said gravely. "We're a selfish lot. If Miss Caruthers is a responsibility, let us share her." "To arms!" Jim said, with an affection of lightness, as they put their fingers across their eyes, and every one's glasses dropped, and threw open the door in confusion, and we went into the library. On the way Dallas managed to speak to me. "If Harbison doesn't know, don't tell him," he said in an undertone. "He's a queer duck, in some ways; he mightn't think it funny." "Punny," I choked. "It's the least funny thing I ever experienced. Dallas is ceiving that Harbison man isn't so bad—he thinks me crazy, anyhow. He's been staring his eyes out at me—" "I don't wonder. You're really lovely tonight, Kit, and you look like a vixen." "But to deceive that harmless old lady—well, thank goodness, it's nine, and she leaves in an hour or so." But she didn't. And that's the story. To Be Continued.