

The Middle Ground

By Marion Rubenham

A LETTER

Mrs. Talbot went away depressed by her last glimpse of Claire—a little, slim figure of gleaming silver and blue, her shining hair exquisitely dressed on top of her head, the light touching every ripple of it, the attendant maid with the great powder puff, and behind her, the dressing table with its confusion of expensive jars and bottles and brushes.

Luther's income was not large by city standards. Luther was much too poor to provide this sort of thing for his wife. Claire had sold herself for a little empty luxury.

She would never return to Luther—Mrs. Talbot was sure of that. She remembered the vain little smile that curved Claire's pretty lips as she turned before the mirror. Suddenly her personal prejudice against her brought her to a second decision—Claire ought not to return to Luther!

So, feeling her second problem was incapable of solution, she turned howeward from the ornate entrance of the apartment house. A man passed her in the hall, she did not notice him. But she recognized the long low car before the door, and the driver sat at the wheel—it was Jim Clarke's car that Amy had taken her about in seeing the city.

So it was Jim Clark she was dining with—well, that was good. Jim was the sort Claire would be happy with. Certainly Claire, the butterfly, and Luther were not mated.

She reached home later than the Talbot's early dinner hour, hoping that Amy would not tell where she had gone. But Luther was there alone, cheerfully and methodically cooking the evening meal.

"Amy is working tonight; she was gone before I got home," he explained. He had read the telegram. Luther and his mother sat down together. Jane's chair was empty for the first time since the winter began. Both looked at it gloomily, eating silently. They talked of nothing but a wedding.

Two days later Jane's letter came. "I suppose you'll never forgive me for having done it this way," she began abruptly. "But I really couldn't help it. I simply hated the idea of having anyone I knew around and watch me being married."

"But I'll tell you all about it, and perhaps you'll feel better, and not think I've left you out entirely. I met Donald yesterday afternoon, we were to go to the steamship company to see about his passage. I told him I would marry him and go. You see, I met him at the steamship office, he had already booked a single passage. He changed it to a cabin for two (this company is paying all expenses) then we went across town and got a license, and into a notary's office, next door and were married, two of the clerks acting as witnesses.

And that's all there is to tell about it. I don't want you to know we were married, but I thought that would please you, and also to have you send my trunks to the pier. I hope whoever addresses them will remember to put Mrs. Donald Moore."

There was a break in the letter—the ink of the paragraph was black, as though Jane had let it dry on, while she sat and looked at it. The rest of the epistle was lighter. Jane had an odd little habit of blotting every few lines as she wrote. And it was evident that she had broken off the effusion for she went on—

"That's the first time I've written my name—my real name—and it looks rather odd. I'm sure I never thought I'd ever see the Mrs. before Don's name, or that the Mrs. should be myself. How frightfully domestic it looked—just as though I belonged to him! I hope Donald never has that idea. He would begin at once to rebel."

"So you see, Donald and I were only engaged about half an hour—probably one of the shortest and least romantic engagements on record. I couldn't even come home for my little suitcase, because I know you would be there, and then

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I'd have to explain—and I did not want anyone to know. You'll feel badly about this, mother, and think I haven't an affection for you. It isn't that—I don't know why I should want to keep everyone out of it. I just do."

It was strange that Jane should know she acted as she did. Jane prided herself on her knowledge of psychology, and could always give scientific reasons for every mental reaction either she or Donald had. Never before had she confessed admitted acting upon blind, illogical feminine instinct.

"Then something else domestic happened—Donald gave me some money, the first time any man has given me money except father. We both laughed at it, and I went off to buy a traveling bag and toothbrushes and other things, and met him in time for dinner. The boat sails this afternoon. We have a beautiful little cabin, with two round port holes looking out over the water. It takes a little more than three weeks, we go to Buenos Ayres, and inland by rail. I'll write on the boat. So now for my running away, for I've told you all about it. You'll be horrified that I wore my old tailored suit to a wedding gown! With love to all hurriedly. Jane.

Chapter 70 So Jane had gone—cheerfully writing back that she was giving him all the details, when in reality she was telling them nothing at all! Mrs. Talbot grumbled, having read the letter several times, perhaps a dozen times, and still she could not get it out of her mind.

"What a way to get married!" Mrs. Talbot grumbled, having read the letter several times, perhaps a dozen times, and still she could not get it out of her mind.

Mrs. Talbot drew conclusions from her own experience, these conclusions she had, until recently, held as unalterable. From one of her experiences, which either she had gone through, or heard about, she had learned that the general rule was a law after that—

"She had not witnessed Jane's marriage. For weeks before it happened, Jane had protested that she would not marry Donald. "It isn't at all the way a marriage ought to be," she complained to Amy.

There were two ways of bringing up girls, according to her standards. One was to leave them in complete ignorance of all the vital facts of life, on the theory that ignorance is innocence, and that the more one knows of such taboo subjects as sex, the more, unaccountably, one's mind is corrupted. The stricter adherents to this standard left their children in complete ignorance, which resulted disastrously in some cases. "Where the normal instincts are fully developed, and the mind is not given information to realize it, there's bound to be a disaster," Jane once said.

There was the girl in blind ignorance of what she was doing, blundered and was found out. Mrs. Talbot, along with everyone else, blamed the girl as being "bad" and never once put the blame upon the mother who had left her in ignorance.

Mrs. Talbot prided herself on being broad minded about these intimate subjects. She had imparted some small bits of information from time to time, not knowing that she was treating the whole subject of sex as something morbid and fearful.

Yet, because she had read occasional stories of a sentimental turn, she pictures herself before Jane's marriage as indulging in long and intimate talks with her daughter, preparing her mind for marriage and the changed life that marriage would mean. The summer before had been a great disillusion, for Jane's medical and psychological studies gave her a knowledge that her mother was certainly never likely to attain.

It was daughter, not mother, who imparted information about life, love and sex in the occasional talks these two had! "It's a sacred subject," Mrs. Talbot said—having read that phrase often in these same sentimental stories, and not realizing that she was making it a morbid one by her attitude of timidity toward it.

But if she could not have Jane to talk to, at least there was Amy. "She's 18, it's really time she knew something," she said to herself. So, gathering up her courage—for it required courage to talk about it, she approached the subject with Amy.

Here she was met, not with the shyness she expected of a "good and innocent" girl, but with frank and amused laughter. "Goodness, mother. I knew all

that in my cradle," Amy told her. "You should hear the things the girls back home used to tell me—of course they were mostly wrong, they really didn't know anything much, they had a lot of awfully queer ideas! Of course they talked about it—just because they didn't know anything. If they had they wouldn't have been interested in it."

And when her mother wondered at that, she went on— "Thank heaven, Jane took me in hand and taught me something truthful. Jane let me read some of her medical books—you needn't look shocked, mother, why shouldn't she? I'll tell you this, she gave me a perfectly sane, normal wholesome idea of it, not the distorted, morbid ideas the girls at home had."

"Force of this logic had to be admitted. After thinking it over for a day or so, Mrs. Talbot decided Jane was right! And a day or two after that, she searched the book shelves for some of Jane's books, and spent several afternoons alternately being shocked at the enormous frankness of the books, and admiring them for the clear and unemotional statement of the subject.

"As for me," said Amy with a grand air, "I have no romantic illusions about love or marriage. I'm going to marry Adam if I can, and I think I can. He's willing to give love for love and I'm willing to give love for love. Only he hasn't real love to give me. But I can pretend I love him, and as long as he doesn't find it out, I won't be cheating."

A revolting vision of Adam's fat face and figure came up before Mrs. Talbot's eyes.

RE-ENTER DICK Chapter 71 Meantime the Spring had warmed into Summer. The opera season closed, Amy's salary stopped and Amy's lessons in the opera school ended. Her course in classic dancing stopped, too; the teacher gathered up her more prosperous pupils and went to Aix-les-Bains where she had a summer school. Amy organized to go. Paris was the one place in the world she wanted to see.

"It's time she rested a bit, she looks fagged," her mother confided to Luther. "Do you know, I think I'll see whether your father wants us to come home for the summer—the country air would do Amy good."

The strenuous season had told upon even Amy's glorious health and vitality. Sometimes she touched up her cheeks when her own pretty color was wanting—a proceeding that shocked her mother beyond words at first, but that she had accepted calmly enough. Amy's pretty brown eyes sometimes had little shadows under them.

But she never missed a performance, rehearsal or lesson, and she faithfully attended her Italian classes, and the French lessons Claire gave her. Piano practise suffered—and her mother suffered from occasional bursts of irritability.

The opera company separated—one star had a shack in the mountains—a shack attended by 30 servants; another had a villa in the smartest seaside resort on the coast; one had a Summer home in an old chateau in France; and one went to Italy, taking refuge from the heat among the mountains. Two went to California to work in the movies, and some to South America, where the smart season was on, and where gold and glory to be had. And the richest, and most famous, retired to a small farm in New Jersey where she raised chickens during the day and paddled a canoe over a tiny lake when it was moonlight, and where she lived in gingham housedresses.

And Amy alternately wanted to see Newport, California, France or Italy, or any place but the hot city where she lived.

"Wouldn't you like to go back to the farm?" her mother asked her one very warm June night. "Heavens! No! That's the last place in the world!"

Those who stayed in the city did so because they could not afford to go away. Claire had to stay, her show was running well into the hot weather. Luther's vacation came in August. Adam was building a house on the Hudson, and had rented one near by to watch the work. He gave occasional weekend parties, to which Claire and Jim and others were asked, and Amy as well. Mrs. Talbot refused to let Amy go unchaperoned, her sense of old-fashioned decorum being outraged by

the idea. Amy stormed, but obeyed, when Luther added his authority to her mother's. Adam tactfully asked Mrs. Talbot as chaperon, and she spent several weekends at his much too grand house, feeling uncomfortably in the way whenever she was in the room with the other guests. Claire was not at those special week-ends.

Adam, to Amy's annoyance, was in no hurry to make any agreement with Amy. There was one very pretty little brunette, hard, ambitious, but with a great deal of charm, who was to quote Amy "after him in the most shameless way." Mother, she was worse than I am, for at least I put a decent front on it.

"I don't see how you are going to make a man propose if he doesn't want to," Mrs. Talbot observed with a touch of sarcasm. "You make him want to," Amy answered serenely. But this subtlety was beyond the mother.

"He certainly won't at those parties of his there are always too many people around."

From which Mrs. Talbot inferred that Amy was going to bring matters to a head in her own home. Adam was to call that evening at 11, Jim was to come and they were to motor over to Claire, and a party of them were to speed to a road-house where one could dance on cool porches.

Adam came—about nine. Amy had put on the dress of gold and blue that he liked. She was seated at the piano, ready to sing choruses from the operas, or to try her pretty voice at arias (such as beyond her ability) or to sing him popular ragtime, as he chose. Adam liked having Amy sing for him, it made him feel like a Turkish sultan to sit on the couch and order the songs he wanted to hear.

Something in the extra brilliancy of Amy's eyes warned her mother—that, and the long silences between the songs.

She went to the telephone, and called Dick's house. "Come over, and pretend you just dropped in casually," he said. Dick appeared, trying not to seem out of breath.

"Hello, Aimee, oh, hello, Mr. Arnold," he said. "Hot, isn't it? I just sort of thought I'd drop in and see you. Go on singing, don't stop for me."

Amy went on singing. But there was no passing by her songs, if there were, they were filled with animated conversation. Amy's eyes blazed, but she treated Dick with exaggerated sweetness. Only she called him "Richard," as she always did when she was mad at him.

A SENSE OF JUSTICE Chapter 72 But Mrs. Talbot knew that she could not keep this up forever. One evening when she sensed that Amy was likely to become engaged to Adam she could bring Dick in as a third party—but that was all. There were many times when Adam and Amy saw each other alone, many times when he could ask her to marry him.

And Amy was only too anxious to create such an opportunity. "Why does Dick come around?" "I don't want to see him!" Amy stormed, the day after his "casual visit."

"Why do you come around?" "I told you not to," she said to Dick when he came in the following evening, and she was alone. "I came around because I can't keep away," he replied humbly. "I told you not to come and see me."

"I know. So I had a fine idea. I decided to come and see your mother. You can't prevent your mother from receiving callers."

"Then, I'll send her into the living room, and I'll retire into my bedroom," Amy said, getting up with great dignity. Dick was at the door ahead of her.

"If you try to pass—I'll—I'll kiss you," he announced. "You act like a sentimental school boy. Amy retorted in disgust, going towards the couch. "Why Arnold kissed you?" "He didn't."

"He did. I could see it in your face." Then he laughed, as Amy's hand went to her mouth, unconscious confession of what had happened. "Perhaps I'm going to marry him," she taunted. "You're not, you're going to marry me."

The words were childish, perhaps, but the voice was not. Dick came towards her again, and Amy drew back, half afraid, and half willing to be caught. "Don't—don't touch me—and I'll let you come and see me," she said. And Dick was satisfied with this half-triumph.

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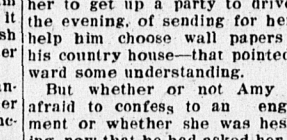
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Suddenly Amy saw that Dick simple and youthful as he seemed, would be an asset—Adam was capable of being jealous even of a boy. So he played the two against each other one evening.

As to whether Adam asked her to marry him next day she would not say. But he assumed an air of indifference. Mrs. Talbot half smiled. He had a way of taking Amy's hand, of asking her for a match for his cigarette, of telling her to get up a party to drive in the evening, of sending for her to help him choose wall papers for his country house—that pointed to ward some understanding.

But whether Amy was afraid to confess to an engagement or whether she was hesitating, now that he had asked her, her mother could not find out. Amy was capable of being a sphinx when she wanted.

So though Jane, as a problem, was eliminated, the affair, on Luther and Claire seemed only to grow more complicated. And Luther in particular made her unhappy.

He was the nervous type that suffers physically from mental depression, and he was mentally depressed all that winter. It showed in his hollow cheeks and in the wistful expression of his great eyes.

He sat quietly at home in the evenings; or took his mother bus riding—that pathetic attempt of city dwellers to get some fresh cool air at night. He sat with her in the park listening to band concerts, and hearing the music but starting straight ahead into blank space, or he sat at home reading, while Mrs. Talbot knitted or mended.

One evening she said, suddenly, "If Claire wants a divorce, Luther, you'd better let her get it."

Luther started at her in amazement. "I don't believe in divorce, and I never will. But Claire is not the sort of girl for you to be married to. She's bound to go her own way, spending money, wearing fine dresses, wasting her time on pleasure. You should have married a quiet, domestic, sensible girl, who would have made you happy. Better let Claire go entirely—and forget her."

"And take advantage of my freedom to marry a quiet, sensible girl?" Luther asked. "I don't know. That's a problem to meet when it comes, I don't approve of that—re-marriage. But you are not happy now, because after all, Claire is part of your life. Better let her go entirely, and forget her. You are not suited, stay apart."

She had come that far in tolerance. "Perhaps Amy will stay away from her then," he went on. "She's not a good influence. I wanted Amy to marry Dick—she doesn't want to. She wants a light frivolous life, too—at least she wants money to help her on what she calls her career. So if she wants to marry Adam Arnold, all right, I won't say anything more. We can only learn by experience; Amy has to have hers. If she's unhappy, perhaps that will make her softer and sweeter, even though it comes hard for her and for Dick. We have to take people as we find them, we can't make them over to suit our own ideas."

So, in a year, she accepted that much. At least, she thought so.

A LETTER FROM JANE Chapter 73 Out of all this trouble, Amy Talbot had acquired sympathy with other people, and with other people's problems—and a conviction. The conviction was that she had failed.

She wanted, with all the desperation that only a mother can feel for her children's happiness, to see Jane and Donald safely away with each other—that much she had done; to bring Claire and Luther together—there she had failed; and to prevent Amy from making a mistaken marriage, there she was bound to fail. Amy, she felt sure, was secretly engaged to Adam Arnold.

Meantime, as consolation, she mind-pictured Jane and Donald on their honeymoon. When the sight of Jane's empty chair brought a little ache to her heart, she would fancy the two sitting together on a shadowy deck, while the waves made soft noises along the sides of the ship, hand in hand, while they looked out over the mysterious moonlit ocean.

eyes, Jane curled up in one chair reading a book of Donald's on tropical fevers, and Donald was stretched out in another chair studying the philosophic writings of St. Augustine, she would have been extremely disappointed.

Jane's first letter arrived in a month. It bore the postmark of a small port in South America and according to Jane, was picked up there by a fast steamer North—

"The mail boat puts in at Havana, where mail is shipped to Florida and catches a fast train to New York, so you'll get this in no time," she wrote cheerfully. "Donald and I have been married nearly two weeks and I don't feel married at all! I only hope he doesn't! When I see him sitting and staring moodily into space I have cold spasms of fear, thinking I may already be regretting trying myself up to me—so I go off to the other deck and stay hours and hours reading, until he comes and yawns me up. I think that's an excellent idea."

"We have some young married couples on board, and I'm observing them for ideas and faults of conduct. I do believe married people stick together entirely too much—here's one young woman who never leaves her husband's side, or lets him go away for more than a few moments. She even sits in the smoking room when they play cards and does fancy work while he plays bridge. I should think he would hate the eternal sight of her! I'll not do that."

"You needn't have any romantic ideas about us. Mother, for this is the most unromantic honeymoon ever staged, just as our engagement was the shortest that ever took place. We were both violently sea sick—oh! it's an awful feeling. I couldn't be in love with Don a bit, I didn't want to see him, nor did he want to see me—for several days. Then we both got used to the sea, and have been feeling splendid. I do believe, Mother, that half Donald's temperament and nervousness was simply due to overwork and worry. I know it, because he only smokes a third the cigarettes he used to, and he can sit still hours now, without jumping up after ten minutes to walk up and down."

"I could have told her that, and 'I'm not a doctor,' Mrs. Talbot exclaimed at this point—she was reading the letter aloud at break fast to Luther and Amy.

"I could have told her so myself," Amy put in. "It proves we all know more about other people's affairs than they do themselves." Amy had been called early in order to hear the letter read, and in her usual blue gown and cap with trailing ribbons, she was drinking a great deal too much coffee to do you boys understand jiu-jitsu?"

We replied in the negative, and he continued, pounding the air with his arms: "You must know me to learn that without any more. You are so good in other athletics, try you must add jiu-jitsu to your accomplishments. Every American athlete ought to understand the Japanese system thoroughly. You know—and she smiled reminiscently—"I practically introduced it to Americans. I had a young Japan-ese—now at Harvard—here for six months and I tried jiu-jitsu with him day after day. But he always defeated me. It was not easy to learn. However, one day I got him clear over my head on his belly, and I had it. I had it."

"Let me show you," and he reached for us. Choosing me as his first victim, he grasped my wrist, and in a second (of course I was not resisting, not knowing how) he had my arm over his shoulder, his two hands bearing it down, and absolutely making me defenceless.

"Now in this position, it is on your knees or your arm will be broken."

"I am on my knees, Mr. President," I cried, as I thought my arm would snap.

President Sprawls on Floor "No, no, no, I won't hurt you," he laughed. He did not realize the force he was using.

Then he swung my brother about in various positions, the two lying on the floor, rising to their knees, and sprawling around again like boys of ten. He was really a marvel at jiu-jitsu, and enjoyed his victories and our discomfort.

I here took a sly glance at the timepiece on the mantelpiece. To my amazement, it was after 7 o'clock, and we had been with the President a full two hours, and he more! And that minute a shiver would return another day when I passed over me as I said to my President had 'less important' as well: "If a Democratic photograph-less interesting visitors!"

NEWS FROM HOME Chapter 74 Somehow, Jane's letter spoiled Mrs. Talbot's gentle romancing. She could no longer think of her daughter and her now son-in-law holding hands in the moonlight, after Jane's practical statement of how she avoided acting like a bride! But as she had to romance about something, she imagined them, first in a glorious hotel set in tropical scenery; then riding over the country on little gray mules, with native guides—and palm trees. Jane had mentioned them.

But it must be confessed that her picture was very much like a highly colored lithograph of "Life on the Western Plains" with red Indians stalking before the pack horses, while the palms looked extraordinarily like the ones that lived in little red buckets and adorned the edges of all properly furnished country porches.

"It would be nice in the mountains," she suggested to Amy one evening, as they sat in the dark living room, trying to keep cool. "It would be so quiet and restful. I'd like to go to the mountains."

Amy moved restlessly on the couch. "I'd like to go to some mountains—that is, if they had no huge modern hotel, and I could have private suite and bath, and nice meals and someone to dance with every evening."

Amy's country scenery was always adorned with the gift of ultra-modern "improvements."

"You're getting spoiled," her mother commented. "I'm sure you didn't have such ideas." "A year ago I was dead," Amy answered crossly. "I suppose you want to drag me back to the farm now?"

The little woman sighed a trifle. "It would be cooler than town, and quiet. I've never been in the city in Summer. It's trying. And that photograph over the street plays all night."

Amy forgot her crossness, as she always did when an appeal was made to her sympathies. "It's my fault for spending all my money last winter on myself," she said. "If I hadn't, I could have taken you off to the mountains. Poor Luther does more than his share as it is."

"I thought—we might go back for a few weeks," the mother said timidly, having worked up toward this suggestion with great care. "That is if father would have us. Luther's vacation is next week—three weeks. I'm getting a little tired in the heat."

"You and Luther go," Amy said, suddenly rebelling at the thought of the farm. "I'll go live with Claire, she won't mind. Adam's promised me a big party at the Galety Roof in two weeks."

"Nothing more was wanted to complete Mrs. Talbot's resolution. She would go and take Amy—by force if necessary. A "big party!" Did that mean Adam would announce his engagement then? It would be like him—details only confirmed the mother's suspicions.

"He's going to hire the whole Roof for the night," Amy said, when her mother told her she must go home with her. "And ask everyone we know that is in town. I'll go the week after, if you'll put it off."

Mrs. Talbot had a way of getting around that. She produced the letter that started Amy on her desire to go home. It was a penciled scrawl from the woman she had hired to take care of Jordan. It merely said: "I'm expecting a baby soon, please tell me what to do."

Amy giggled at once. "So you have to go home and look after father while the baby comes. But I won't want to go."

"Don't you want to see your old friends?" "Heavens, no! I hate them! They're so—ordinary." Appeal to that side of Mrs. Talbot was useless. Mrs. Talbot tried again. "You'll be so tired when rehearsal starts, your voice won't be as fresh. Three weeks in the country will build you up." Amy consented. And Mrs. Talbot wrote home, telling Jordan she would come with the children while the housekeeper was ill. Already she had written the news of Jane's letter—all without receiving any answer.

This time an answer came. "Jim will meet your train, as I'll be busy in the lower meadow next week."

"Jordan."

How Roosevelt Staged a "Jiu Jitsu" Match Private Office of White House

Continued from page 9 or snapshots us, he may lose election. Or if a Secret Service passes these windows and a two strong chaps striking President of the United States the head and rolling around on the floor with him, he will miss You are so good in other athletics, try you must add jiu-jitsu to your accomplishments. Every American athlete ought to understand the Japanese system thoroughly. You know—and she smiled reminiscently—"I practically introduced it to Americans. I had a young Japan-ese—now at Harvard—here for six months and I tried jiu-jitsu with him day after day. But he always defeated me. It was not easy to learn. However, one day I got him clear over my head on his belly, and I had it. I had it."

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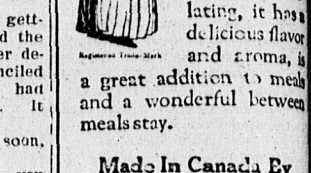
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This was not enthusiastic! But there was postscript: "I'm getting a patent machine from the mail order house."

Mrs. Talbot smiled subtly. Some men would offer flowers, a box of candy—or a diamond brooch as a gift of conciliation. These arts were not Jordan's. But he offered a "patent machine"—and that was the same thing.

An idea occurred to her suddenly.

To Be Continued

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President Sprawls on Floor "No, no, no, I won't hurt you," he laughed. He did not realize the force he was using.

Then he swung my brother about in various positions, the two lying on the floor, rising to their knees, and sprawling around again like boys of ten. He was really a marvel at jiu-jitsu, and enjoyed his victories and our discomfort.

I here took a sly glance at the timepiece on the mantelpiece. To my amazement, it was after 7 o'clock, and we had been with the President a full two hours, and he more! And that minute a shiver would