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Beer & Weeks

Charlottetown

A HUSBAND TO MARCIA

By CAROLYN BEECHER

Chapter I.

"I won't stand it!" How many times John Aldrich had made that remark it would be impossible to say. Yet as he reached the corner of the street where he turned to take the car he waved a good-bye to the woman standing in the window of the house he had just left, his eyes lifted as if against his will to the tear-stained face.

John Aldrich was not a pampered sort of a man, yet in the months just past he had canvassed again and again all potential methods of delivering himself from his uncomfortable existence and had found them futile. He had almost come to believe that there was no escape; that circumstances were inexorable. One is prone to think the female of the species is the one with the imprisoned soul, the one who kicks thorns against the pricking, who hunts for a mode of escape. But just as often it is the male who, lacking of moral excuse, makes the excuse of immorality, goes on and on until he reaches the breaking point.

Ten years before John Aldrich, a bright young electrical engineer, met Marcia Vane, Mrs. Brewster, an aunt of Marcia's, gave a dance. The young engineer was one of the guests. He had met Marcia once before, but so casually had the introduction been made that he had not remembered her name.

The greeting she gave him was so impersonal that it piqued him. It was as if he meant absolutely nothing to her. Being a man, John Aldrich resented this attitude. And as he was rather popular with the girls it roused his interest. It was the old story of the attraction of indifference.

John made no great effort to obtrude upon that indifference, but regarded Marcia with a sort of amusement mixed with admiration, for she was very alluring indeed in her dainty dancing gown, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling.

At twenty most girls are alluring—youth, feminine youth is then at its most captivating age as masculine youth of twenty-five, that Marcia was rather selfish, a bit spoiled by doting parents, did not then appear to militate against her attractiveness. She was fascinating when her eyes flashed with humor, of wit. She was educated, accomplished. Rather tall, slender, an ash blonde with blue eyes. Not much in that description to differentiate her from other girls of the blond type, yet she was different. She compelled people, life, to her with even then. And it may have been just this difference, sugar-coated by her youth, that appealed to John Aldrich. He was not facile. And this quality in others had always been to him an attraction.

John's courtship was like himself, direct. To Marcia it was a novel experience. Most of the young men she knew made her feel they were in love with her without declaring themselves. But as I have said John Aldrich was not facile. Then, too, he was a home-loving man and longed for a home of his own. He wanted, as he often said to himself, to stretch his legs under his own table.

He had lived in a boarding house since leaving college, which accounts for this peculiarity. He was doing well in his business for so young a man. At least he made

enough to support a wife—so he thought. He loved his profession, was ambitious, of a good family, and, perhaps most in his favor looking, tall, dark, athletic, with a rather serious face lightened with a pair of laughing brown eyes. For the rest, he had the features of other men—a nose, mouth, chin—all good of their kind.

The story of his life was a simple one. The son of parents in ordinary circumstances, he had been given what they, being educated people, believed necessary—a college education. There, as their responsibility ended when he was graduated, he had since shifted for himself, and creditably. He had one bad. He was a connoisseur and in a small way, a collector of china.

He loved to own it, to handle it. Marcia was variable and subtle. Life had been a properly restrained affair as far as her parents could govern it for her. Just why she decided she wanted John Aldrich no one but herself knew. That she did want him was enough. And as usual, what she wanted she took.

John Aldrich gave Marcia Vane willingly the home she expected. When his conscience would prick because he had neglected his business for her sake he would say to himself:

"It will be different, after we are married. Then she will be willing to see less of me and let me attend to business. We shall be all ways together now." His blood leaping at the thought.

John was twenty-six, Marcia twenty-one, when they married.

Chapter II.

Marcia had an idea of life that had John Aldrich known it might have brought him dismay. Life for her was to be what she willed, with a check book as an aide-de-camp. Her people had done well by her, but considered that when she married their responsibilities ended. There were other children, and Mr. Vane was not rich, although they were very comfortably off.

At first the dainty apartment to which John Aldrich took her as his bride satisfied her. Her newness of having a home of her own, her pride she took in showing it to her girl friends, the novelty of being "my own boss," as she expressed it, held in check other tendencies. In her dainty morning gowns, overseeing the one servant, or pouring tea for her intimates in the afternoon, Marcia was in her element and, for that time, happy. Events naturally belonged to John—at first. He adored his bride, and had no idea she was beginning to fret before they had been married many months because he did not take her out more often, though he loved his own fireside, even though it lacked a grate and was represented only by a wooden mantel painted white.

To come home after a strenuous day and eat his dinner in the cozy dining room, Marcia opposite, waited upon by the deaf maid in her black dress, white apron and cap, was like heaven to him.

"There's nothing like putting your legs under your own table," he remarked so often that Marcia petulantly wished he would find some other mode of expressing his delight. Finally she told him so.

On Thursday when the maid was out, John was gloriously happy. He lavishly made it a point to come home, early "to help." Then it was Marcia who wore the white apron and they put over the dinner together. The maid always prepared the vegetables before she left. Marcia wouldn't for the world have soiled her hands by doing it.

"I love you when you look so domestic," he said to Marcia, smiling down at her, as with flushed cheeks she bent over the stove. "Sometimes I wish we could be

alone all the time. That we didn't have to have a maid, but I suppose that would be too hard for you, even if I helped." He didn't add that it would also be a help not to pay the wages servants now demanded even for a simple menage like his.

"Well of all things, John Aldrich!" Marcia straightened indignantly then in the age-old words of women of her type she added: "If you wanted a servant, why didn't you marry one?"

The dinner burned while John tried to pacify her.

With strange gaiety John wondered why what he had said should cause such a storm. He had only remarked that it would be nice to be alone.

He was glad he had said nothing concerning the maid's wages. Or the work was so light with only the two of them, as had been in his mind. He would work a little harder hereafter, Marcia must not be made unhappy.

He did not realize that self-sacrifice, the glory of it would tend to make Marcia less selfish, for the simple reason that he did not then realize her selfishness.

John Aldrich had had a share of the stern experiences of war before he met Marcia. It had filled him with a curious disinclination for anything disagreeable in life.

"I've had my fill of unpleasant things," he once remarked; "if I can make it so I shall have none in my married life. He forgot the all and took the end. So he gave to give. And as a continuing drop, plug will wear away a stone, so his constant capitulation weakened the moral fibres of his being.

He learned soon to put an inhibition not only on his speech, but on his thoughts—to save Marcie, who still pouted prettily, and whose eyes were irresistible when flooded with unshed tears.

His delightful Thursday nights, when he helped get the dinner, were soon things of the past. Marcia had insisted upon meeting him at some restaurant on these nights and afterward going to a play or a motion picture show.

"I hate housework, and I don't intend to do it!" she declared, then repeated the out and dried remark that if he had wanted a a housekeeper he should have married one. Then she had planned their Thursdays.

It was only a little thing, so John Aldrich reasoned, and he really should be ashamed to care, but some day he did care and felt hurt. He knew the work was not for Della, the little maid, did all she could and he assisted, also. Marcia always left the dishes for Della to do in the morning. It did seem as if Marcia might have been willing to do the little that fell to her part as his. He would do anything to give her pleasure. Then as usual, after similar commentings, he would excuse Marcia and flay himself for being selfish.

Chapter III.

John Aldrich could not of course express it verbally, but the fact that he had heard Marcia express her opinion of people who had families, their good times to care for troublesome children, seemed almost monstrous to him. He had supposed all women wanted children some time.

Many of John's ideas were turning topsy-turvy. Yet he was a bit old-fashioned and clung tenaciously to some of them, albeit he had sold them, or contradicted them.

Many times Marcia complained of being lonely.

"It is deadly dull here alone all day! If we lived further down town I could go out more."

"We have outdoors here just as generously," John replied with a smile.

"I didn't mean just going out doors," meant that I could go to the shops—see things!"

"That would mean" more expense, Marcia, to say nothing of the greater temptation you would have to spend money if you were often in the shops. No, dear. We will have to be contented where we are for the present. You have your friends and your home to look after. I don't see why you should be lonely." He did not add what was in his mind—that he would give for the apartment and dismiss the maid she would not find time hanging so heavily upon her hands. He had learned to be discreet in his suggestions.

"I have joined an afternoon bridge club," Marcia told her husband gleefully. "I shall have to take some lessons or I shall lose my shoes. The women play a wonderful game."

"You can't afford to play for big

stakes, Marcia. Better pull out if they do."

"If I choose to use my allowance for that instead of clothes and pay my own debts if I lose, I don't see that it makes any difference to you. You always spoil everything for me. I suppose you would like to take away my allowance so I couldn't play."

"Dear, but your allowance won't go far if you gamble."

"Who thought or said anything about gambling! Just a social game of cards for small stakes isn't gambling."

"You like pretty clothes, and I also enjoy seeing you well dressed. At present I cannot make your allowance any larger. If you lose you will have to wear your old clothes."

"Always say something disagreeable! It makes me feel so happy. Suppose I win, then I can have better clothes."

John Aldrich sighed. One couldn't argue with Marcia. If he tried, she grew angry and made him so uncomfortable. The next day she began her bridge lessons. She already played a fairly good game. She had played in a social way for years, and so in a month her teacher flattered her by saying she didn't need him longer.

"Watch me show the rest of them I can play bridge!" she remarked to John before he left in the morning of the day the club was to meet. "I'll probably shall be late getting home. They play right up to dinner time."

At 7:30 Marcia came in flushed, excited. John greeted her pleasantly, although it had been home an hour, and dinner had been ready since 7.

"Well, how did you come out?" John asked, trying to show an interest because he knew it was expected.

"Just as I told you I would! I showed them I knew how to play 'way' for. Gleeefully she tossed a roll of bills across to him. 'Count them!'"

"Thirty two dollars."

"You have forgotten the change. Thirty two fifty. What do you think of that? I'll soon have enough to pay for my lessons, then I'll be on velvet."

"I have a theory about cards, Marcia, about gambling of all kinds. I don't believe any one can afford to win any more than they can afford to lose. How often could you afford to lose \$25.50?"

"For throwing cold water on anything you beat any one I ever saw, John Aldrich! Most men would be proud of a wife who did things I believe all you think a woman is good for is to keep house for some man!"

Just then announced dinner was getting cold, so John was saved the necessity of replying. But all through the unpleasant dinner Marcia talked of the party, the wonderful spread the hostess had given them, etc.

"No wonder you can't eat if you had all those good things," John said, as he helped himself to a chilly potato. "It must have cost something with food at the price it is."

"There's a kitty, you know," eagerly. "And it must almost pay for the food."

John Aldrich frowned into silence. A kitty, too. His wife was really gambling.

Chapter IV.

The incident of the cards lingered in John Aldrich's mind, causing him to feel keen anxiety. He knew Bob French, the husband of the day's hostess, could not afford to pay his wife's gambling debts any more and having good times, Marcia's—not as well. Was it considered an fair for women to gamble to such an extent? Helplessly he wondered if he could persuade Marcia to give it up, knowing he could not.

Marcia continued to play. Dinners on those days continued to be eaten when they had become cold, and John also continued to play, because Marcia's appetite had been satisfied with the rich food provided by the ubiquitous kitty.

Marcia had developed nervousness. When John spoke of it, blaming her devotion to cards, her strain to win, her fear of losing she pooh-poohed the idea.

"If you would earn more money so I could have another maid and a car for other women, I wouldn't be so nervous. The cards have nothing to do with it! Then in a different tone: "You are just as smart, smarter than most men, John, why don't you earn more? I believe it is because you don't assert yourself and demand higher prices for what you do. Nell French told me the other day that her husband told his firm he would leave if he didn't get an advance. He got it right off the reel. Nell is going to have a little car. I'm so envious I don't know what to do. If you had enough spunk to ask what you are worth, I might have one also. I do so want a car."

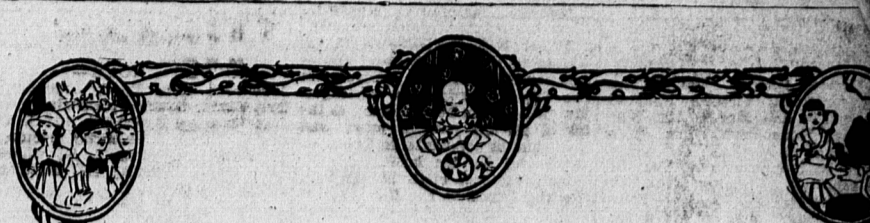
French, John answered patiently. "He is a salesman, perhaps will always be one. I have ambitions to be more than a man at present. My profession gives me opportunities. A few dollars more or less means nothing as far as my future is concerned. If I demanded a higher price for my services now when I know the conditions of my capital and labor might be cutting off my nose—not only my nose, but my prospects for the future."

"Nonsense! You don't value highly enough." "You are ordinary nice to say so, Marcia. I am glad you think me clever. But I must be the judge of what is proper for me to do in my business relations."

"You can't understand, I suppose," her tone changing again, now sarcastic, "how mortifying it is to ride in street cars when one's friends have care of their own."

"I'm sorry Marcia, but you'll have to use them a bit longer, or walk."

"You're not sorry. You don't



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care a hang!" "You are getting slangy, my dear. Please don't be unhappy because I can't afford a car for you. Perhaps some day I shall be able to give you all you want."

"I'd rather have things now than wait until I am too old to care whether I am them or not."

John Aldrich laughed at Marcia's brilliant speech and tone. He was still too much in love to resent what she said, save occasion ally.

"We are making another mistake, John!"

"You call not being able to afford a car, a mistake?"

Marcia paid no attention.

"We are young. Young people make a great mistake when they stay at home instead of going about and having good times. When we get old we may have rheumatism, or lumbago and can't, I don't mean to settle down like an old woman."

"Did you think I wanted you to?" John Aldrich saw visions of the evenings he spent at home disappearing in the distance. The evenings he loved with Marcia, when they read aloud, or she played for him on the baby grand piano he had given her at the cost of several things he needed. Occasionally their friends would drop in, or they would go to some movie in the vicinity. But mostly except on Thursdays, they remained at home. John perfectly content, Marcia apparently so—neary always.

But the rift in the lute was there and it was gradually becoming wider.

"No—and if you did, I wouldn't! Then: "It is fine that you have that extra work. If we do things as others do them it will mean additional expense." She smiled with satisfaction.

That very day John had taken on extra work. He really had done all he should before. But Marcia wanted so many things, he longed so to see her happy, the gay, light-hearted Marcia he had married—that he couldn't bear to leave undone anything that might even remotely contribute to her happiness.

He had the same mistaken idea most men entertain. He thought he knew the women he married. No man ever knows his wife until the honey-moon is a thing of the past—isn't it so?"

Chapter V.

John Aldrich often felt a heart-sinking when the bills came in, but as far as possible he avoided mentioning them or saying anything about them to Marcia. They must be paid. But he wouldn't worry her about them. Yet occasionally he

could not overlook some extravagance. If he did he shuddered to think to what it might lead.

For instance, her taxi cab bills. "You will have to use the stage more, Marcia. If you dislike the street cars and subways so much, I can't afford such cab bills."

"I have only had a taxi when it was necessary." Marcia's voice was cold as ice.

"What you consider necessary is not the question. I can't pay such cab bills." Perhaps John spoke more severely than he intended. Marcia burst into a flood of tears, unusual in her. Up to this time she had rarely cried, but little. The suffusion of her eyes, the appeal of unshed tears had been sufficient to bring her husband to her feet. But she realized something in his voice she had not heard before. So the tears were not restrained, neither were the recriminations.

"I always said you should have married some common woman who cared only to ride in dirty street cars or the crowded subways!" she declared, sobbing pitifully. As she never had said any such thing, never given this version of her oft-repeated remark about the sort of wife he should have married, it would have tickled John's sense of humor had the occasion not been so serious.

"I suppose I shall have to pay this, but remember, Marcia, I can't afford to pay cab bills to any amount." While he spoke John had been critically examining the bill.

It seems that most of the charges are on the days when you play bridge."

"You can't expect me to be the only one who goes to the club in a street car!" Marcia sobbed.

"Then you will have to pay for your cabs out of your winnings," John said, and folding up the bill tucked it into his pocket. An hour later, when he was about to leave, Marcia for the first time since their marriage refused to kiss him good-bye, for the first time failed to stand at the window and wave him a farewell before he turned the corner.

The thought of the omission was with John Aldrich all day. It hindered him in his work.

"I might have better said nothing. I could make the amount of the bill while I am fretting over Marcia," he declared as he threw aside his papers. Then: "Poor girl! I hate to deny her anything. But taxicabs are beyond me. If she only used them occasionally, but it's almost every day." He had taken the obnoxious bit of paper from his pocket and once more had glanced over its contents. "Highway robbery! It would be cheaper to get her a car, if I had to pay bills like this often."

When he reached home Marcia was still red from weeping. She still had the mark of a much abused person. She turned her cheek to his kiss and made no offer to return it. But before dinner was finished she was chatting about her plans for entertaining. John hesitated to cast another shadow over her content, but could not allow her to believe that because he had taken on more work and was making a little extra money, that it would simply extra expenditures. He would need it all and more for the current bills.

"Don't plan on too much entertaining, dear, until we get a bit

further out of the woods. Our expenses have been much heavier than I expected. I will owe as fast as I can, it breathe more freely."

"Gow! Why, we owe not our regular monthly bills."

"I know, but they have so how lapped over. Now this taxi for forty dollars will make it hard to square things this month—even with the extra I have earned."

"That's right! Lay it to me! It's always the woman who does everything wrong."

"I expect Eve tried to make things easy for you by eating the apple. She established a precedent for wrong-doing."

"Don't try to be facetious! It is in bad taste."

"I was only trying not to have you feel too serious, dear. We will do all we can. I can promise no more."

"If you really loved me you would assert yourself, as I have told you a hundred times. Men no half as clever as you are making enough money so your wives can have some pleasures. I'd rather be dead than live half way."

"We are a long time dead, remember, Marcia," jocularly replied John, but with no feeling of gayety in his heart or in his sombre eye. For Marcia had burst into tears and run from the room. The slamming of her bedroom door causing John to follow her. His dread making her unhappy was too great to allow him to ignore her outburst.

Before she ceased weeping she had his promise that he would interfere in her entertaining. While she had promised to be economical.

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