

A Husband to Marcia

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...of some extra money, which she had at once appropriated. "You see, old dear, it is just as I have always told you. Things come your way if you try to make them."

"Yes," absent. "I have heard that man I told you of, and— "If he is any good I am surprised that he has been out of a job so long."

"Of course I had to pay him something so that he wouldn't take anything permanent, but not much."

"You mean you have been paying that fellow all this time?" "I did it out of my allowance, so you needn't take that tone with me. And I would never find another chauffeur with such good references. Five years with one family, then he is so good-looking, not big, but tall and slender, I hate a chauffeur in a sedan."

John laughed in spite of his annoyance. "Be careful, Marcia; he sounds dangerous."

"Why, John! I would no more think of looking at another man, so matter who he was, than you would think of looking at another woman. But one likes nice looking people around. I shall get his outfit right away so that he can arrive to the club Friday. I'll stop and get Claire Sanders, I guess when she sees him she won't have so much to say about a well turned out car."

John made no answer and Marcia, aggrieved, went on. "I never saw such a man! Nothing seems to interest you but that chauffeur. I believe you would rather hand over that old desk than do anything else in the world. You need a change; something to stir you up a little. That is one man I would like to see with you. You get too little recreation. I hate your work at times."

She spoke with a tone of regret in her voice, as if she were being rebuffed by his devotion to his desk. "Do you suppose I work day and night for the fun of the thing, Marcia? We need every penny I make and more, too, to live as we do. When you are satisfied to change your mode of living, do with less, perhaps I shall have to bend over my desk as many hours, and perhaps I could have more of a companion, because I would not be so tired."

"Now you are cross with me. No, I am not cross. But work hard as I can our expenses keep increasing. My income is not so happy, Marcia would not be happier about everything if we could save a little. But it seems impossible. She sighed, worn out by the constant striving of the lack of appreciation received at home."

hasn't any right to expect anything different from herself in her surroundings, but that a pretty woman is like a jewel and must be carefully set. "It seems that you and Morrow have had quite a discussion. "Adele and I were talking about style, etc., and he joined in. You know he is desperately in love with her, and they have been married longer than we have. He never denies her the slightest thing. "Morrow is a very rich man. His father left him a good deal of money. Why shouldn't his wife have everything?"

"That's what I say! A man who loves his wife will see that she is happy, will give her everything. Then: "That's the reason I think sometimes you don't love me. You are so reluctant to give me the things I need to make me happy."

"Ye gods!" John exclaimed. Then, under his breath: "Can you beat it?"

Chapter XLII Muriel Doran had come close to John Aldrich's life, its longings, its this and its that touched understanding in her, and sympathy, and they tell us as akin to love, and which we know often precedes love.

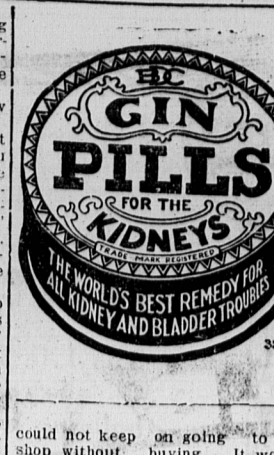
Muriel was about thirty years old, yet she looked younger than twenty. Her eyes were blue, her hair a certain, a certain, a certain, which had developed about her mouth, had in a way aged her, without making her lose her prettiness appreciably. In opposition to Muriel's face was always reposeful and her smiling eyes gave a look of youth in spite of her usual seriousness.

John wondered why Muriel never had married. He could not imagine a man, free, knowing her, and passing her by. While in the same moment, Marcia, young, arrogant, making her sorrows, demands so easily and selfishly swayed by her desires, would appear before him, making the comparison odious, regardless of the effort John made to refrain from criticizing his wife or comparing her with another.

At times Marcia's selfishness, her inherent love of ease and luxury even, when she knew it was beyond their means to gratify, annoyed him so that he would speak sharply to her, or leave her without a word, fearing that if he spoke he would say too much. At such times Marcia would weep and wail with nearly the same abandon as when they were first married. But with a far opposite effect upon John.

It was noticeable at such times that John's thoughts flew to Muriel. She was the one woman in the world for him, and the one who had obtained they never could be anything more than friends. She could, from the sheer depth of her nature, influence him to tell her that he loved her, almost sure that she cared. But his very love hid him back. He could give her nothing, be nothing to her. It would be cruel to disturb her, and another thing, if he confessed his love he would not be able to see her, but with her even as he now was. So he strangled the impulse and they met as friends, nothing more.

There was within him, had been for a long time, the crying need for companionship, for the understanding Muriel Doran gave him. He could not afford now to lose that companionship, to break the fraternal bond, to have her showing the craving he had for something more.



could not keep on going to the shop without buying. It would mean the reason for his visits to plain. Marcia resented this occasional buying of china, just as she had resented it from the first. Even now, she perhaps, because of her jealousy, had developed a feeling that she was being deceived. "What if I am; and she took no pleasure in his china. Indeed it was an ever present thorn in her flesh.

This was exaggerated after a brother collector had spent some time with John one evening, and Marcia had overheard much of their conversation, including the value of the small collection John had made.

She was astounded. All that money for a lot of old china, when she wanted so many things; needed in fact. By the time the collector left, she had worked her self up into a perfect passion of self pity because she was denied what she wished for, so that John might tie up a lot of money in that senseless china.

"I am astonished at you, John Aldrich!" she commenced when the door closed after their guest. "What have I done?" good-naturedly asked John. "I heard what Mr. Norton said. The idea of your spending all that money on china."

"You heard him give the value of my collection, not what I paid for it." "You could sell it for the figure he named, couldn't you?" "No, but I never shall. "And I have to scribble and save in all sorts of ways while you have a lot of junk that would give me things I need. Suppose the house should burn or something."

"My collection is insured." "Another silly expense. Don't you talk economy to me, John Aldrich, now that I know what that junk would bring. I am through economizing so you can waste money on things like that. Money that belongs to me, because I am your wife!"

Chapter XLIII Marcia's jealousy of little Don Cameron had been passive up to this time. She had resented any time taken from her to devote to the boy, but aside from that had said nothing. But now she developed an active, unreasonable jealousy of the boy himself. A conversation she and John had one night might have roused it.

"I don't see why you have to stop and talk to that child when it is dinner time," Marcia complained. John had stopped in the hall and chatted with Don a few minutes, and Marcia, hearing their voices, had opened the door and called him.

Yet Marcia did not give one the impression of happiness, despite all that was done for her, all she did at the dictates of her own sweet will. She never seemed quite satisfied, was always peevish, and for something different. She was bored, yet busy, in her own way, running here, there and everywhere, searching for pleasure, then complaining that there was no time for anything; that she didn't know where the days went.

The discontented lines deepened on her pretty face, the tiny ones around her eyes grew more noticeable. This became an added cause for discontent, also for spending a mass of money twice a week at first, then daily, was reason for demanding a larger allowance.

"I must have her, and more money! I must have her, and more money!" Marcia declared to John. "But Marcia, three dollars a day for wrinkles seems a lot." John spoke facetiously. It often tried to turn Marcia's tongue in this way, but seldom with success.

"Claire Saunders has her every day, and she had done wonders for her. If I have her regularly I won't be obliged to have her for long—not every day. After a while twice a week again will do. But until she gets my skin in shape I must have attention every day. Other women do," ending as usual with either a plea or statement, based on what other women of her acquaintance did.

"But, Marcia, you are pretty enough as you are." "If I wasn't pretty I wouldn't care to take so much time keeping myself up. Ugly women can't help being ugly, but when one is pretty it is a duty to keep pretty."

"Quoting Morrow again, I'll bet." "What if I am; and doesn't what a woman needs and doesn't act stingy. He gives Adele everything she asks for. Am I to have that extra money? Madams comes this morning and I must tell her."

Chapter XLIV John Aldrich waited a little before he answered. In itself his demand for a mass of money was reasonable enough, from her point of view although John, man like, could see no necessity for such slavery to beauty. But Marcia's demands grew with their achievement. So long as she gave into them would they ever cease? Yet, perhaps Marcia was no different from other women of her class; no more selfish than many women, many men. She was simply a pleasure loving creature, who considered it only her right to live her life untrammelled, unfeathered, and spend her time and money as she desired.

"I will give you part of what you seem to think you need to stave off old age, Marcia. I thought we are getting old together, you never disappoint me. You never say that you are my second wife, if you make yourself prettier than you are and— younger looking."

"Nonsense! You are awfully handsome, John, and that gray hair is very becoming. Really, it makes you so distinguished looking."

some demand which he had granted against his better judgment; granted to keep peace. Marcia was not the jealous sort. She felt too sure of her own attractions. She often said to Neil French: "John wouldn't look at another woman—I know him too well. Then I take good care he doesn't have any spare change to go phandering with. A man can't get very far away without money."

They both laughed as if it were a good joke. Yet Marcia had added that about the money just in a spirit of fun. She was sure of John. She loved him, was his wife. That told the whole story. John stopped in the little shop that morning. His spirit needed bolstering and he never saw Muriel Doran that he did not feel her uplifting influence. It was the first time he had called in the morning, and she showed her surprise.

John made some little excuse, but as she raised her smiling eyes to him he studied her face. For the first time since their acquaintance began, he looked at her closely. Her face was underlined, there were no signs of discontent about her mobile lips, no tiny wrinkles about her eyes. A certain quiet peace radiated from her.

"Do you enjoy a massage?" John asked to be answered by a merry peal of laughter. "A massage, of course! No! I have neither the time nor the money to spend beautifying myself."

"Oh, nothing. I just felt a bit curious, that's all." "She'll think I am crazy," John muttered after he left the shop. "I guess I am—pretty nearly. But if she can look like that and work as hard as she does, who can't Marcia keep her looks when she has nothing to do but take care of herself?"

Chapter XLV John Aldrich took his problem and little Kenneth straight to Muriel. She listened with tears in her eyes while John told his story. Marcia's part in it softened as much as possible. "She is not strong and felt the care of a boy full of life would be too much for her," he explained, fully.

Muriel understood, but she gave no sign that she thought any circumstance was different from what John had told her. She puckered her brows in thought for a moment, then said: "I know just the place for him. A Doran's place, an apartment house with mother and me just lost their little boy, about this boy's age. They are poor, but refined, nice people in every way. I am sure they will be delighted to take him. I can get off if I will go there right away and find out."

She easily got permission to leave the store and went with John and little Kenneth. Before she returned, or John had gone to his office, little Kenneth had been well-manned and arranged in a baby carriage. Muriel was to pay what seemed a ridiculously small sum for his keep, and the boy had been left sitting happily on his foster mother's lap.

Neither John nor Muriel saw much as they left the home, that was to be the boy's as soon as John could attend to a few necessary preliminaries. When they separated in the street John held her hand for just a moment.

"You are one in a thousand, Muriel, you never disappoint a fellow," he finished boyishly. "O Well I hope you put that boy in a home," Marcia said that evening, meaning some institution.

"Yes, I put him in a home," the boy, what he had done for him, was his secret and Muriel's. He would not share with Marcia. "That's where he belongs."

"Yes, he is where he belongs, in a home," that ended all talk of the boy until one night when they were giving a dinner party. Marcia recalled their guests with the story of how John had brought home a red-headed baby expecting her to keep him. They all seemed to think it uproariously funny.

But it gave John a new interest in life, a more intense interest because it was shared by Muriel Doran. He worked even harder now, but did not give way so easily to Marcia's demands when she urged him to leave "that old desk" to go out with her. He had the boy to care for, later to educate.

Muriel kept a close watch of Kenneth his new home, and told of Mrs. Turner's kindness to the little chap in a way that made John feel at rest about the boy. He had soon ceased to grieve for his own mother. Mrs. Turner had been so quick in sensing his needs and filling them by showering the mother's love he needed upon him.

Often John went out of his way to stop and play with the boy. He called him "Uncle John" and loved him deeply. Nearly always there was a new toy, a book, some little gift in his hand. Really the companionship of the boy was making John younger, smoothing the lines of care from his face, the force of the urge of youth to be youthful.

Kenneth was an added bond between John Aldrich and Muriel Doran. Had Marcia known of the feeling Muriel's ready help had awakened in John, the comparison he could not avoid making, she would not have resented so bitterly what she called a ridiculous action in expecting her to take the boy into her home.

Now when John thought of Muriel there came into his mind the day she had taken the boy to her heart and helped him find a real home for the little wail. She had taken Kenneth in her arms, had mothered him with tears in her eyes for his pitiful condition, while Marcia, under the same circumstances, had angrily dismissed him.

"Some women are potential mothers, I guess, others never could be 'real mothers,' he said to himself, as he compared the two women, their actions toward the child. "This potential motherhood in Muriel appealed strongly to the child love in John. It strengthened dangerously his feelings for Muriel although he in no wise allowed himself to think of blaming Marcia. Marcia was just Marcia. But that she should use the boy to further her own ends came as a shock.

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