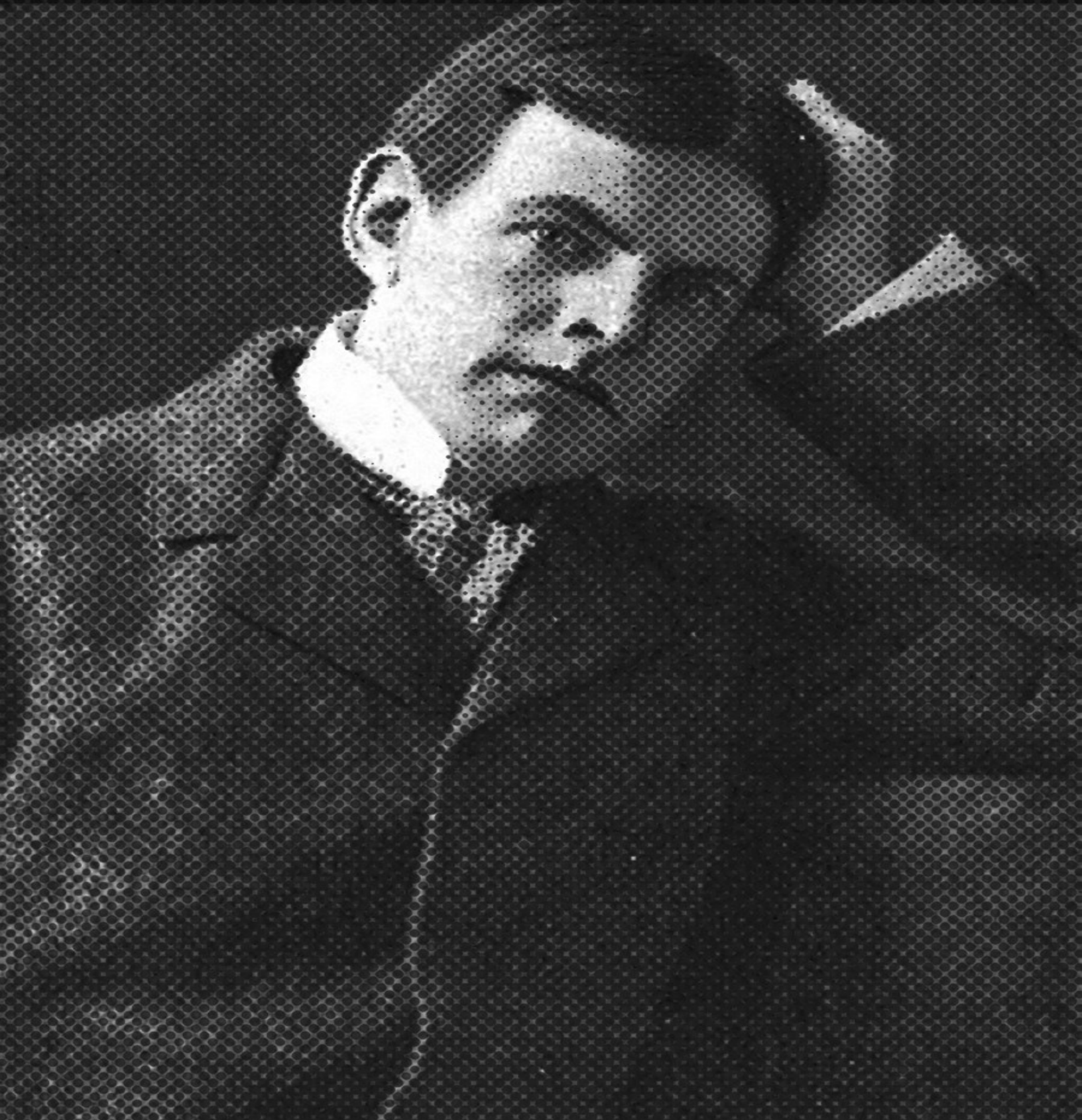


**David Graham Phillips**



*The Husband's Story*

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# **The Husband's Story**

**A Novel**



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I AM tempted to begin with our arrival in Fifth Avenue, New York City, in the pomp and circumstance befitting that region of regal splendor. I should at once catch the attention of the women; and my literary friends tell me that to make any headway with a story in America it is necessary to catch the women, because the men either do not read books at all or read only what they hear the women talking about. And I know well—none knows better—that our women of the book-buying class, and probably of all classes, love to amuse their useless idleness with books that help them to dream of wasting large sums of money upon luxuries and extravagances, upon entertaining grand people in grand houses and being entertained by them. They tell me, and I believe it, that our women abhor stories of middle-class life, abhor truth-telling stories of any kind, like only what assures them that the promptings of their own vanities and sentimental shams are true.

But patience, gentle reader, you with the foolish, chimera-haunted brain, with the silly ideas of life, with the ignorance of human nature including your own self, with the love of sloppy and tawdry clap trap. Patience, gentle reader. While I shall begin humbly in the social scale, I shall not linger there long. I shall pass on to the surroundings of grandeur that entrance your snobbish soul. You will soon smell only fine perfumes, only the aromas of food cooked by expensive chefs. You will sit in drawing-rooms, lie in bedrooms as magnificent as the architects and decorators

and other purveyors to the very rich have been able to concoct. You will be tasting the fine savors of fashionable names and titles recorded in Burke's and the "Almanach de Gotha." Patience, gentle reader, with your box of caramels and your hair in curl papers and your household work undone—patience! A feast awaits you.

There has been much in the papers these last few years about the splendid families we—my wife and I—came of. Some time ago one of the English dukes—a nice chap with nothing to do and a quaint sense of humor—assembled on his estate for a sort of holiday and picnic all the members of his ancient and proud family who could be got together by several months of diligent search. It was a strange and awful throng that covered the lawns before the ducal castle on the appointed day. There was a handful of fairly presentable, more or less prosperous persons. But the most of the duke's cousins, near and remote, were tramps, bartenders, jail birds, women of the town, field hands male and female, sewer cleaners, chimney sweeps, needlewomen, curates, small shopkeepers, and others of the species that are as a stench unto delicate, aristocratic nostrils. The duke was delighted with his picnic, pronounced it a huge success. But then His Grace had a sense of humor and was not an American aristocrat.

All this by way of preparation for the admission that the branch of the Loring family from which I come and the branch of the Wheatlands family to which the girl I married belongs were far from magnificent, were no more imposing then, well, than the families of any of our American aristocrats. Like theirs, our genealogical tree, most

imposingly printed and bound and proudly exhibited on a special stand in the library of our New York palace—that genealogical tree, for all its air of honesty, for all its documentary proofs, worm-eaten and age-stained, was like an artificial palm bedded in artificial moss. The truth is, aristocracy does not thrive in America, but only the pretense of it, and that must be kept alive by constant renewals. Both here and abroad I am constantly running across traces of illegitimacy, substitution, and other forms of genealogical flim-flam. But let that pass. Whoever is or is not aristocratic, certainly Godfrey Loring and Edna Wheatlands are not—or, rather, *were* not.

My father kept a dejected little grocery in Passaic, N. J. He did not become a “retired merchant and capitalist” until I was able to retire and capitalize him. Edna’s father was—No, you guess wrong. Not a butcher, but—an undertaker!... Whew! I am glad to have these shameful secrets “off the chest,” as they say in the Bowery. He—this Wheatlands, undertaker to the poor and near-poor of the then village of Passaic—was a tall, thin man, with snow-white hair and a smooth, gaunt, gloomy face and the best funeral air I have ever seen. Edna has long since forgotten him; she has an admirable ability absolutely to forget anything she may for whatever reason deem it inconvenient to remember. What an aid to conscience is such a quality! But I have not forgotten old Weeping Willy Wheatlands, and I shall not forget him. It was he who loaned me my first capital, the one that— But I must not anticipate.

In those days Passaic was a lowly and a dreary village. Its best was cheap enough; its poorest was wretchedly squalid.

The “seat” of the Lorings and the “seat” of the Wheatlands stood side by side on the mosquito beset banks of the river—two dingy frame cottages, a story and a half in height, two rooms deep. We Lorings had no money, for my father was an honest, innocent soul with a taste for talking what he thought was politics, though in fact he knew no more of the realities of politics, the game of pull Dick pull Devil for licenses to fleece a “free, proud and intelligent people”—he knew no more of that reality than—than the next honest soul you may hear driveling on that same subject. We had no money, but “Weeping Willie” had plenty—and saved it, blessings on him! I hate to think where I should be now, if he hadn’t hoarded! So, while our straightened way of living was compulsory, that of the Wheatlands was not. But this is unimportant; the main point is both families lived in the same humble way.

If I thought “gentle reader” had patience and real imagination—and, yes, the real poetic instinct—I should give her an inventory of the furniture of those two cottages, and of the meager and patched draperies of the two Monday wash lines, as my mother and Edna’s mother—and Edna, too, when she grew big enough—decorated them, the while shrieking gossip back and forth across the low and battered board fence. But I shall not linger. It is as well. Those memories make me sad—put a choke in my throat and a mist before my eyes. Why? If you can’t guess, I could not in spoiling ten reams of paper explain it to you. One detail only, and I shall hasten on. Both families lived humbly, but we not quite so humbly as the Wheatlands family, because my mother was a woman of some neatness and energy

while Ma Wheatlands was at or below the do-easy, slattern human average. *We* had our regular Saturday bath—in the wash tub. *We* did not ever eat off the stove. And while we were patched we were rarely ragged.

In those days—even in those days—Edna was a “scrapper.” They call it an “energetic and resolute personality” now; it was called “scrappy” then, and scrappy it was. When I would be chopping wood or lugging in coal, so occupied that I did not dare pause, she would sit on the fence in her faded blue-dotted calico, and how she would give it to me! She knew how to say the thing that made me wild with the rage a child is ashamed to show. Yes, she loved to tease me, perhaps—really, I hope—because she knew I, in the bottom of my heart, loved to be teased by her, to be noticed in any way. And mighty pretty she looked then, with her mop of yellowish brown hair and her big golden brown eyes and her little face, whose every feature was tilted to the angle that gives precisely the most fascinating expression of pretty pertness, of precocious intelligence, or of devil-may-care audacity. She has always been a pretty woman, has Edna, and always will be, even in old age, I fancy. Her beauty, like her health, like that strong, supple body of hers, was built to last. What is the matter with the generations coming forward now? Why do they bloom only to wither? What has sapped their endurance? Are they brought up too soft? Is it the food? Is it the worn-out parents? Why am I, at forty, younger in looks and in strength and in taste for life than the youths of thirty? Why is Edna, not five years my junior, more attractive physically than girls of twenty-five or younger?



But she was only eight or nine at the time of which I am writing. And she was fond of me then—really fond of me, though she denied it furiously when the other children taunted, and though she was always jeering at me, calling me awkward and homely. I don't think I was notably either the one or the other, but for her to say so tended to throw the teasers off the track and also kept me in humble subjection. I knew she cared, because when we played kissing games she would never call me out, would call out every other boy, but if I called any other girl she would sulk and treat me as badly as she knew how. Also, while she had nothing but taunts and sarcasms for me she was always to be found in the Wheatlands' back yard near the fence or on it whenever I was doing chores in our back yard.

After two years in the High School I went to work in the railway office as a sort of assistant freight clerk. She kept on at school, went through the High School, graduated in a white dress with blue ribbons, and then sat down to wait for a husband. Her father and mother were sensible people. Heaven knows they had led a hard enough life to have good sense driven into them. But the tradition—the lady-tradition—was too strong for them. They were not ashamed to work, themselves. They would have been both ashamed and angry had it been suggested to them that their two boys should become idlers. But they never thought of putting their daughter to work at anything. After she graduated and became a young lady, she was not compelled—would hardly have been permitted—to do housework or sewing. You have seen the potted flower in the miserable tenement window—the representative of the life that neither toils nor spins, but

simply exists in idle beauty. That potted bloom concentrates all the dreams, all the romantic and poetic fancies of the tenement family. I suppose Edna was some such treasured exotic possession to those toil-twisted old parents of hers. They wanted a flower in the house.

Well, they had it. She certainly was a lovely girl, far too lovely to be spoiled by work. And if ever there was a scratch or a stain on those beautiful white hands of hers, it assuredly was not made by toil. She took music lessons—Music lessons! How much of the ridiculous, pathetic gropings after culture is packed into those two words. Beyond question, everyone ought to know something about music; we should all know something about everything, especially about the things that peculiarly stand for civilization—science and art, literature and the drama. But how foolishly we are set at it! Instead of learning to understand and to appreciate music, we are taught to “beat the box” in a feeble, clumsy fashion, or to screech or whine when we have no voice worth the price of a single lesson. Edna took I don’t know how many lessons a week for I don’t know how many years. She learned nothing about music. She merely learned to strum on the piano. But, after all, the lessons attained their real object. They made Edna’s parents and Edna herself and all the neighbors feel that she was indeed a lady. She could not sew. She could not cook. She hadn’t any knowledge worth mention of any practical thing—therefore, had no knowledge at all; for, unless knowledge is firmly based upon and in the practical, it is not knowledge but that worst form of ignorance, misinformation. She didn’t

know a thing that would help her as woman, wife, or mother. But she could play the piano!

Some day some one will write something true on the subject of education. You remember the story of the girl from Lapland who applied for a place as servant in New York, and when they asked her what she could do, she said, "I can milk the reindeer."

I never hear the word education that I don't think of that girl. One half of the time spent at school, to estimate moderately, and nine tenths of the time spent in college class rooms is given to things about as valuable to a citizen of this world as the Lap girl's "education" to a New York domestic. If anyone tells you that those valueless things are culture, tell him that only an ignorance still becalmed in the dense mediæval fog would talk such twaddle; tell him that science has taught us what common sense has always shown, that there is no beauty divorced from use, that beauty is simply the perfect adaptation of the thing to be used to the purpose for which it is to be used. I am a business man, not a smug, shallow-pated failure teaching in an antiquated college. I abhor the word culture, as I abhor the word gentleman or the word lady, because of the company into which it has fallen. So, while I eagerly disclaim any taint of "culture," I insist that I know what I'm talking about when I talk of education. And if I had not been too good-natured, my girl— But I must keep to the story. "Gentle reader" wants a story; he—or she—does not want to try to think.

It was pleasant to my ignorant ears to hear Edna playing sonatas and classical barcaroles and dead marches and all

manner of loud and difficult pieces. Such sounds, issuing from the humble—and not too clean—Wheatlands house gave it an atmosphere of aristocracy, put tone into the whole neighborhood, elevated the Wheatlands family like a paper collar on the calico shirt of a farm hand. If we look at ourselves rightly, we poor smattering seekers after a little showy knowledge of one kind or another—a dabble of French, a dabble of Latin or Greek, a sputter of woozy so-called philosophy—how like the paper-collared farm hand we are, how like the Hottentot chief with a plug hat atop his naked brown body.

But Edna pleased me, fully as much as she pleased herself, and that is saying a great deal. I wouldn't have had her changed in the smallest particular. I was even glad she could get rid of her freckles—fascinating little beauty spots sprinkled upon her tip-tilted little nose!

She was not so fond of me in those days. I had a rival. I am leaning back and laughing as I think of him. Charley Putney! He was clerk in a largish dry goods store. He is still a clerk there, I believe, and no doubt is still the same cheaply scented, heavily pomatumed clerkly swell he was in the days when I feared and hated him. The store used to close at six o'clock. About seven of summer evenings Charley would issue forth from his home to set the hearts of the girls to fluttering. They were all out, waiting. Down the street he would come with his hat set a little back to show the beautiful shine and part and roach of his hair. The air would become delicious (!) with bergamot, occasionally varied by German cologne or lemon verbena. What a jaunty, gay tie! What an elegant suit! And he wore a big seal ring,

reputed to be real gold—and such lively socks! Down the street came Charley, all the girls palpitant. At which stoop or front gate would he stop?

Often—only too often—it was at the front gate next ours. How I hated him!

And the cap of the joke is that Edna nearly married him. In this land where the social stairs are crowded like Jacob's Ladder with throngs ascending and descending, what a history it would make if the grown men and women of any generation should tell whom they *almost* married!

Yes, Edna came very near to marrying him. She was a lady. She did not know exactly what that meant. The high-life novels she read left her hazy on the subject, because to understand any given thing we must have knowledge that enables us to connect it with the things we already know. A snowball would be an unfathomable mystery to a savage living in an equatorial plain. A matter of politics or finance or sociology or real art, real literature, real philosophy, seems dull and meaningless to a woman or to the average mutton-brained man. But if you span the gap between knowledge of any subject and a woman's or a man's ignorance of that subject with however slender threads of connecting knowledge, she or he can at once bridge it and begin to reap the new fields. Edna could not find any thread whatever for the gap between herself and that fairy land of high life the novels told her about. In those days there was no high life in Passaic. I suppose there is now—or, at least, Passaic thinks there is—and in purely imaginary matters the delusion of possession is equal to, even better than, possession itself. So, with no high life to use as a measure,

with only the instinct that her white smooth hands and her dresses modeled on the latest Paris fashions as illustrated in the monthly "Lady Book," and her music lessons, her taste for what she then regarded as literature—with only her instinct that all these hallmarks must stamp her twenty-four carat lady, she had to look about her for a matching gentleman. And there was Charley, the one person within vision who suggested the superb heroes of the high-life novels. I will say to the credit of her good taste that she had her doubts about Charley. Indeed, if his sweet smell and his smooth love-making—Charley excelled as a love-maker, being the born ladies' man—if the man, or, rather, the boy, himself had not won her heart, she would soon have tired of him and would have suspected his genuineness as a truly gentleman. But she fell in love with him.

There was a long time during which I thought the reason she returned to me—or, rather, let me return to her—was because she fell out of love with him. Then there was a still longer time when I thought the reason was the fact that the very Saturday I got a raise to fourteen a week, he fell from twelve to eight. But latterly I have known the truth. How many of us know the truth, the down-at-the-bottom, absolute truth, about why she married us instead of the other fellow? Very few, I guess—or we'd be puffing our crops and flirting our feathers less cantily. She took up with me again because he dropped her. It was he that saved her, not she or I. Only a few months ago, her old mother, doddering on in senility, with memory dead except for early happenings, and these fresh and vivid, said: "And when I think how nigh Edny come to marryin' up with that there

loud-smelling dude of a Charley Putney! If he hadn't 'a give her the go by, she'd sure 'a made a fool of herself—a wantin' me and her paw to offer him money and a job in the undertakin' store, to git him back. Lawsy me! What a narrer squeak fur Princess Edny!"

Be patient, gentle reader! You shall soon be reading things that will efface the coarse impression my old mother-in-law's language and all these franknesses about our beginnings must have made upon your refined and cultured nature. Swallow a caramel and be patient. But don't skip these pages. If you should, you would miss the stimulating effect of contrast, not to speak of other benefits which I, probably vainly, hope to confer upon you.

She didn't love me. Looking back, I see that for many months she found it difficult to endure me. But it was necessary that she carry off—with the neighborhood rather than with me—her pretense of having cast off Charley because she preferred me. We can do wonders in the way of concealing wounded pride; we can do equal wonders in the way of preserving a reputation for unbroken victory. And I believe she honestly liked me. Perhaps she liked me even more than she liked her aromatic Charley; for, it by no means follows that we like best where we love most. I am loth to believe—I do not believe—that at so early an age, not quite seventeen, she could have received my caresses and returned them with plausibility enough to deceive me, unless she had genuinely liked me.

And what a lucky fellow I thought myself! And how I patronized the perfumed man. And what a thrashing I gave him—poor, harmless, witless creature!—when I heard of his

boastings that he had dropped Edna Wheatlands because he found Sally Simpson prettier and more *cultured*!

I must have been a railway man born. At twenty-two—no, six months after my majority—I was jumped into a head clerkship at twelve hundred a year. Big pay for a youngster in those days; not so bad for a youngster even in these inflated years. When I brought Edna the news I think she began to love me. To her that salary was a halo, a golden halo round me—made me seem a superior person. She had long thought highly of my business abilities, for she was shrewd and had listened when the older people talked, and they were all for me as the likeliest young man of the neighborhood.

“I’ve had another raise,” said I carelessly. We were sitting on her front porch, she upon the top step, I two steps down.

“Another!” she said. “Why, the last was only two months ago.”

“Yes, they’ve pushed me up to twelve hundred a year—a little more, for it’s twenty-five per.”

“Gee!” she exclaimed, and I can see her pretty face now—all aglow, beaming a reverent admiration upon me.

I rather thought I deserved it. But it has ever been one of my vanities to pretend to take my successes as matters of course, and even to depreciate them. They say the English invariably win in diplomacy because they act dissatisfied with what they get, never grumbling so sourly as when they capture the whole hog. I can believe it. That has been my policy, and it has worked rather well. Still, any policy works well if the man has the gift for success. “Twenty-five per,” I repeated, to impress it still more deeply upon her and to



revel in the thrilling words. "Before I get through I'll make them pay me what I'm worth."

"Do you think you'll ever be making more than that?" exclaimed she, wonderingly.

"I'll be getting two thousand some day," said I, far more confidently than I felt.

"Oh—Godfrey!" she said softly.

And as I looked at her I for the first time felt a certain peculiar thrill that comes only when the soul of the woman a man loves rushes forth to cling to his soul. In my life I have never had—and never shall have—a happier moment.

Once more patience, gentle reader! I know this bit of sordidness—this glow of sentiment upon a vulgar material incident—disgusts your delicate soul. I am aware that you have a proper contempt for all the coarse details of life. You would not be *gentle* reader if you hadn't. You would be a plain man or woman, living busily and usefully, and making people happy in the plain ways in which the human animal finds happiness. You would not be devoting your days to making soul-food out of idealistic moonshine and dreaming of ways to dazzle yourself and your acquaintances into thinking you a superior person.

"Do you know," said my pretty Edna, advancing her bond at least halfway toward meeting mine, "do you know, I've had an instinct, a presentiment of this? I was dreaming it when I woke up this morning."

I've observed that every woman in her effort to prove herself "not like other girls" pretends to some occult or other equally supranatural quality. One dreams dreams. Another gets spirit messages. A third has seen ghosts.

Another has a foot which sculptors have longed to model. A fifth has a note in her voice which the throat specialists pronounce unique in the human animal and occurring only in certain rare birds and Sarah Bernhardt. I met one not long ago who had several too many or too few skins, I forget which, and as a result was endowed with I cannot recall what nervous qualities quite peculiar to herself, and somehow most valuable and fascinating. In that early stage of her career my Edna was “hipped” upon a rather commonplace personal characteristic—the notion that she had premonitions, was a sort of seeress or prophetess. Later she dropped it for one less tiresome and overworked. But I recall that even in that time of my deepest infatuation I wished to hear as little as possible about the occult. Of all the shallow, foggy fakes that attract ignorant and miseducated people the occult is the most inexcusable and boring. A great many people, otherwise apparently rather sensible, seem honestly to believe in it. But, being sensible, they don’t have anything to do with it. They treat it as practical men treat the idiotic in the creeds and the impossible in the moral codes of the churches to which they belong—that is, they assent and proceed to dismiss and to forget.

However, I was not much impressed by Edna’s attempt to dazzle me with her skill as a Sibyl. But I was deeply impressed by the awe-inspiring softness and shapeliness of her hand lying prisoner in mine. And I was moved to the uttermost by the kisses and embraces we exchanged in the gathering dusk. “I love you,” she murmured into my ecstatic ear. “You are so different from the other men round here.”

I dilated with pride.

“So far ahead of them in every way.”

“Ahead of Charley Putney?” said I, jocose but jealous withal.

She laughed with a delightful look of contemptuous scorn in her cute face. “Oh, *he!*” she scoffed. “He’s getting only eight a week, and he’ll never get any more.”

“Not if his boss has sense,” said I, thinking myself judicial. “But let’s talk about ourselves. We can be married now.”

I advanced this timidly, for being a truly-in-love lover I was a little afraid of her, a little uncertain of this priceless treasure. But she answered promptly, “Yes, I was thinking of that.”

“Let’s do it right away,” proposed I.

“Oh, not for several weeks. It wouldn’t be proper.”

“Why not?”

She couldn’t explain. She only knew that there was something indecent about haste in such matters, that the procedure must be slow and orderly and stately. “We’ll marry the first of next month,” she finally decided, and I joyfully acquiesced.

Some of my readers—both of the gentle and of the other kind—may be surprised that a girl of seventeen should be so self-assured, so independent. They must remember that she was a daughter of the people; and among the people a girl of seventeen was, and I suppose still is, ready for marriage, ready and resolved to decide all important matters for herself. At seventeen Edna, in self-poise and in experience, judgment and all the other mature qualities, was the equal

of the carefully sheltered girl of twenty-five or more. She may have been brought up a lady, may have been in all essential ways as useless as the most admired of that weariful and worthless class. But the very nature of her surroundings, in that simple household and that simple community, had given her a certain practical education. And I may say here that to it she owes all she is to-day. Do not forget this, gentle reader, as you read about her and as she dazzles you. As you look at the gorgeous hardy rose do not forget that such spring only from the soil, develop only in the open.

That very evening we began to look for a home. As soon as we were outside her front gate she turned in the direction of the better part of the town. Nor did she pause or so much as glance at a house until we were clear of the neighborhood in which we had always lived, and were among houses much superior. I admired, and I still admire, this significant move of hers. It was the gesture of progress, of ambition. It was splendidly American. I myself should have been content to settle down near our fathers and mothers, among the people we knew. I should no doubt have been better satisfied to keep up the mode of living to which we had been used all our lives. The time would have come when I should have reached out for more comfort and for luxury. But it was natural that she should develop in this direction before I did. She had read her novels and her magazines, had the cultured woman's innate fondness for dress and show, had had nothing but those kinds of things to think about; I had been too busy trying to make money to have any time for getting ideas about spending it.

No; while her motive in seeking better things than we had known was in the main a vanity and a sham, her action had as much *initial* good in it as if her motive had been sensible and helpful. And back of the motive lay an instinct for getting up in the world that has been the redeeming and preserving trait in her character. It was this instinct that ought to have made her the fit wife for an ambitious and advancing man. You will presently see how this fine and useful instinct was perverted by vanity and false education and the pernicious example of other women.

"The rents are much higher in this neighborhood," said I, with a doubtful but admiring look round at the pretty houses and their well-ordered grounds.

"Of course," said she. "But maybe we can find something. Anyway, it won't do any harm to look."

"No, indeed," I assented, for I liked the idea myself. This better neighborhood *looked* more like her than her own, seemed to her lover's eyes exactly suited to her beauty and her stylishness—for the "Lady Book" was teaching her to make herself far more attractive to the eye than were the other girls over in our part of town. I still puzzle at why Charley Putney gave her up; the only plausible theory seems to be that she was so sick in love with him that she wearied him. The most attractive girl in the world, if she dotes on a young man too ardently, will turn his stomach, and alarm his delicate sense of feminine propriety.

As we walked on, she with an elate and proud air, she said: "How different it smells over here!"

At first I didn't understand what she meant. But, as I thought of her remark, the meaning came. And I believe

that was the beginning of my dissatisfaction with what I had all my life had in the way of surroundings. I have since observed that the sense of smell is blunt, is almost latent, in people of the lower orders, and that it becomes more acute and more sensitive as we ascend in the social scale. Up to that time my ambition to rise had been rather indefinite—a desire to make money which everyone seemed to think was the highest aim in life—and also an instinct to beat the other fellows working with me. Now it became definite. I began to smell. I wanted to get away from unpleasant smells. I do not mean that this was a resolution, all in the twinkling of an eye. I simply mean that, as everything must have a beginning, that remark of hers was for me the beginning of a long and slow but steady process of what may be called civilizing.

Presently she said: “If we couldn’t afford a house, we might take one of the flats.”

“But I’m afraid you’d be lonesome, away off from everybody we know.”

She tossed her head. “A good lonesome,” said she. “I’m tired of *common* people. I was reading about reincarnations the other day.”

“Good Lord!” laughed I. “What are they?”

She explained—as well as she could—probably as well as anybody could. I admired her learning but the thing itself did not interest me. “I guess there must be something in it,” she went on. “I’m sure in a former life I was something a lot different from what I am now.”

“Oh, you’re all right,” I assured her, putting my arm round her in the friendly darkness of a row of sidewalk elms.

When we had indulged in an interlude of love-making, she returned to the original subject. "I wonder how much rent we could afford to pay," said she.

"They say the rent ought never to be more per month than the income is per week."

"Then we could pay twenty-five a month."

That seemed to me a lot to pay—and, indeed, it was. But she did not inherit Weeping Willie's tightness; and she had never had money to spend or any training in either making or spending money. That is to say, she was precisely as ignorant of the main business of life as is the rest of American womanhood under our ridiculous system of education. So, twenty-five dollars a month rent meant nothing to her. "We can't do anything to-night," said she. "But I've got my days free, and I'll look at different places, and when I find several to choose from we can come in the evening or on Sunday and decide."

This suited me exactly. We dismissed the matter, hunted out a shady nook, and sat down to enjoy ourselves after the manner of young lovers on a fine night. Never before had she given herself freely to love. I know now it was because never before had she loved me. I was deliriously happy that night, and I am sure she was too. She no less than I had the ardent temperament that goes with the ambitious nature; and now that she was idealizing me into the man who could lead her to the fairy lands she dreamed of, she gave me her whole heart.

It was the beginning of what was beyond question the happiest period of both our lives. I have a dim old photograph of us two taken about that time. At a glance you

see it is the picture of two young people of the working class—two green, unformed creatures, badly dressed and gawkily self-conscious. But there is a look in her face—and in mine—To be quite honest, I'm glad I don't look like that now. I wouldn't go back if I could. Nevertheless— How we loved each other!—and how happy we were!

I feel that I weary you, gentle reader. There is in my sentiment too much about wages and flat rents and the smells that come from people who work hard and live in poor places and eat badly cooked strong food. But that is not my fault. It is life. And if you believe that your and your romancers' tawdry imaginings are better than life—well, you may not be so wise or so exalted as you fancy.

The upshot of our inspecting places to live and haggling over prices was that we took a flat in the best quarter of Passaic—the top and in those elevatorless days the cheapest flat in the house. We were to pay forty dollars a month—a stiff rent that caused excitement in our neighborhood and set my mother and her father to denouncing us as a pair of fools bent upon ruin. I thought so, myself. But I could have denied Edna nothing at that time, and I made up my mind that by working harder than ever at the railway office I would compel another raise. When I told my mother about this secret resolve of mine, she said:

“If you do get more money, Godfrey, don't tell Edna. She's a fool. She'll keep your nose to the grindstone all your life if you ain't careful. It takes a better money-maker than you're likely to be to hold up against that kind of a woman.”

“Oh, she's like all girls,” said I.



“That’s just it,” replied my mother. “That’s why I ain’t got no use for women. Look what poor managers they are. Look how they idle and waste and run into debt.”

“But there’s a lot to be said against the men, too. Saloons, for instance.”

“And talkin’ politics with loafers,” said my father’s wife bitterly.

“I guess the trouble with men and women is they’re too human,” said I, who had inherited something of the philosopher from my father. “And, mother, a man’s got to get married—and he’s got to marry a woman.”

“Yes, I suppose he has,” she grudgingly assented. “Mighty poor providers most of the men is, and mighty poor use the women make of what little the men brings home. But about you and Edny Wheatlands— You ought to do better’n her, Godfrey. You’re caught by her looks and her style and her education. None of them things makes a good wife.”

“I certainly wouldn’t marry a girl that didn’t have them— all three.”

“But there’s something more,” insisted mother.

“One woman can’t have everything,” said I.

“No, but she can have what I mean—and she’s not much good to a man without it. If you’re set on marrying her wait till *you’re* ready, anyhow. *She* never will be.”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“Wait till you’ve got money in the savings bank. Wait till you’ve got used to having money. Then maybe you’ll be able to put a bit on a spendthrift wife even if you are crazy about her. You’re making a wrong start with her, Godfrey.

You're giving her the upper hand, and that's bad for women like her—mighty bad.”

It was from my mother that I get my ability at business. She and I often had sensible talks, and her advice started me right in the railroad office and kept me right until I knew my way. So I did not become angry at her plain speaking, but appreciated its good sense, even though I thought her prejudiced against my Edna. However, I had not the least impulse to put off the marriage. My one wish was to hasten it. Never before or since was time so leisurely. But the day dragged itself up at last, and we were married in church, at what seemed to us then enormous expense. There was a dinner afterward at which everyone ate and drank too much—a coarse and common scene which I will spare gentle reader. Edna and I went up to New York City for a Friday to Monday honeymoon. But we were back to spend Sunday night in our grand forty-dollar flat. On Monday morning I went to work again—a married man, an important person in the community.

Never has any height I have attained or seen since equalled the grandeur of that forty-dollar flat. My common sense tells me that it was a small and poor affair. I remember, for example, that the bathroom was hardly big enough to turn round in. I recall that I have sat by the window in the parlor and without rising have reached a paper on a table at the other end of the room. But these hard facts in no way interfere with or correct the flat as my imagination persists in picturing it. What vistas of rooms!—what high ceilings—what woodwork—and plumbing!—and what magnificent furniture! Edna's father, in a moment of

generosity, told her he would pay for the outfitting of the household. And being in the undertaking business he could get discounts on furniture and even on kitchen utensils. Edna did the selecting. I thought everything wonderful and, as I have said, my imagination refuses to recreate the place as it actually was. But I recall that there was a brave show of red and of plush, and we all know what that means. Whether her "Lady Book" had miseducated her or her untrained eyes, excited by the gaudiness she saw when she went shopping, had beguiled her from the counsels of the "Lady Book," I do not know. But I am sure, as I recall red and plush, that our first home was the typical horror inhabited by the extravagant working-class family.

No matter. There we were in Arcadia. For a time her restless soaring fancy, wearied perhaps by its audacious flight to this lofty perch of red and plush and forty dollars a month, folded its wings and was content. For a time her pride and satisfaction in the luxurious newness overcame her distaste and disdain and moved her to keep things spotless. I recall the perfume of cleanness that used to delight my nostrils at my evening homecoming, and then the intoxicating perfume of Edna herself—the aroma of healthy young feminine beauty. We loved each other, simply, passionately, in the old-fashioned way. With the growth of intelligence, with the realization on the part of men that her keep is a large part of the reason in the woman's mind if not in her heart for marrying and loving, there has come a decline and decay of the former reverence and awe of man toward woman. Also, the men nowadays know more about the mystery of woman, know everything

about it, where not so many years ago a pure woman was to a man a real religious mystery. Her physical being, the clothes she wore underneath, the supposedly sweet and clean thoughts, nobler than his, that dwelt in the temple of her soul—these things surrounded a girl with an atmosphere of thrilling enigma for the youth who won from her lips and from the church the right to explore.

All that has passed, or almost passed. I am one of those who believe that what has come, or, rather, is coming, to take its place is better, finer, nobler. But the old order had its charm. What a charm for me!—who had never known any woman well, who had dreamed of her passionately but purely and respectfully. There was much of pain—of shyness, fear of offending her higher nature, uneasiness lest I should be condemned and cast out—in those early days of married life. But it was a sweet sort of pain. And when we began to understand each other—to be human, though still on our best behavior—when we found that we were congenial, were happy together in ways undreamed of, life seemed to be paying not like the bankrupt it usually is when the time for redeeming its promises comes but like a benevolent prodigal, like a lottery whose numbers all draw capital prizes. I admit the truth of much the pessimists have to say against Life. But one thing I must grant it. When in its rare generous moments it relents, it does know how to play the host at the feast—how to spread the board, how to fill the flagons and to keep them filled, how to scatter the wreaths and the garlands, how to select the singers and the dancers who help the banqueters make merry. When I

remember my honeymoon, I almost forgive you, Life, for the shabby tricks you have played me.

Now I can conceive a honeymoon that would last on and on, not in the glory and feverish joy of its first period, but in a substantial and satisfying human happiness. But not a honeymoon with a wife who is no more fitted to be a wife than the office boy is fitted to step in and take the president's job. Patience, gentle reader! I know how this sudden shriek of discord across the amorous strains of the honeymoon music must have jarred your nerves. But be patient and I will explain.

Except ourselves, every other family in the house, in the neighborhood, had at least one servant. We had none. If Edna had been at all economical we might have kept a cook and pinched along. But Edna spent carelessly all the money I gave her, and I gave her all there was. A large part of it went for finery for her personal adornment, trash of which she soon tired—much of it she disliked as soon as it came home and she tried it on without the saleslady to flatter and confuse. I—in a good-natured way, for I really felt perfectly good-humored about it—remonstrated with her for letting everybody rob her, for getting so little for her money. She took high ground. Such things were beneath her attention. If I had wanted a wife of that dull, pinch-penny kind I'd certainly not have married her, a talented, educated woman, bent on improving her mind and her position in the world. And that seemed reasonable. Still, the money was going, the bills were piling up, and I did not know what to do.

And—she did the cooking. I think I have already said that she had not learned to cook. How she and her mother expected her to get along as a poor clerk's wife I can't imagine. The worst of it was, she believed she could cook. That is the way with women. They look down on housekeeping, on the practical side of life, as too coarse and low to be worthy their attention. They say all that sort of thing is easy, is like the toil of a day laborer. They say anybody could do it. And they really believe so. Men, no matter how high their position, weary and bore themselves every day, because they must, with routine tasks beside which dishwashing has charm and variety. Yet women shirk their proper and necessary share of life's burden, pretending that it is beneath them.

Edna, typical woman, thought she could cook and keep house because she, so superior, could certainly do inferior work if she chose. But after that first brief spurt of enthusiasm, of daily conference with the "Lady Book's Complete Housekeeper's Guide," the flat was badly kept—was really horribly kept—was worse than either her home or mine before we had been living there many months. It took on much the same odor. It looked worse, as tawdry finery, when mussed and dirty, is more repulsive than a plain toilet gone back. I did not especially mind that. But her cooking—I had not been accustomed to anything especially good in the way of cooking. Mother was the old-fashioned fryer, and you know those fryers always served the vegetables soggy. I could have eaten exceedingly poor stuff without complaining or feeling like complaining. But the stuff she was soon flinging angrily upon the slovenly table I could not