

The Third Lady

WHAT is more difficult than being the country's Third Citizen? Why, being its Third Lady, of course! Mrs. Colby found that out when she went to Washington with her husband, who was the last Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. If the President and the Vice President die, the Secretary of State takes the chair. But, if you were his wife, which chair would you give to the Japanese ambassador when he and the Rumanian minister and the other personages came to dinner? What would you wear—talk about—serve?

WE WERE to go to Washington. It was the most wonderful moment of my life.

The children came downstairs to celebrate. "When do we start?"

But there was an immense amount of mobilizing before we got started. For we were adjusted to twenty years of life in a brownstone-front house in New York with four servants. Now there was to be a shift in economical gear. The hearth had become official.

"You must get some new clothes," the family said.

There is nothing so stimulating as the Public Eye. Potentially it changed the way I did my hair, it put a shine on my finger nails, and it set me on a sheet in front of a mirror where I turned for hours, hearing, "You look like a young woman in this. You have the figure of a girl in that."

I emerged from a last fitting with a fur coat and four evening dresses, among which there was an old trusty of black velvet, a dashing combination of silver and rhinestones, one dress for outside receptions, magnificently beaded, and a film of chiffon and lace for receptions at home.

One daughter was very lovely in a whole set of frivolities—blue satins and white. Not much for warmth or endurance—everything for charm. And the rest of the children were similarly arrayed. Washington had reached out its wand and moved us out of our pumpkin.

I shall never forget the first arrival at the station in Washington. The official route was a greased rut. All we had to do was to let ourselves slide. Porters seized my bags, a car was waiting, and Charlie, the State Department chauffeur, accustomed to new and inexperienced official ladies, opened the door with a flourish.

One has the feeling immediately in Washington that the official life is a stage set and waiting; one's part is all cast. All one has to do is to play it.

Living Up to One's Butler

CHOOSING a house is part of that feeling. In New York lists of houses are handed out. Day after day one drags one's feet up and down stairs trying to find a home.

But such is the power of official prestige that twenty-four hours after we arrived at the capital we were wafted around from one beautiful house to another, each owner vying for the privilege of renting to us.



Mrs. Colby's memories preserve a vivid picture of official Washington

The one we took had high ceilings, and it opened into a garden. There was a staff of servants. Then we sent for the children.

I met them at the station. The puppy was hysterical at being released from the baggage car. The children were completely surrounded by luggage, because the youngest had at the last moment brought all her books, and another had the puppy's basket that the expressman had forgotten, so it had to be carried along all done up in paper.

The house seemed enormous to me when we rolled up to the front door, and I was frightened to death by the butler, who looked like the Prince of Wales. Other people's butlers one can take casually, as they always see one on parade and never go further than taking one's umbrella. But owning one is different. He was flanked by a parlormaid, and there were a first and second chambermaid waiting on the stairs. . . .

Someone said to a tourist looking at a famous picture in the Louvre, "That picture judges you." I had the same feeling—that I was on trial, and that there would be no mercy in these starched judges.

Someone had to bring in the puppy's basket, and the butler took it out of my hand as if it had been a scandal best disposed of without comment. The first thing that a Cabinet member's wife learns is that she knows next to nothing—and even that is best forgotten or it will get her into trouble. Etiquette looms before her like a dark forest. Just as she despairs of finding her way over the unfamiliar trails she is told that "Mr. Cooke is waiting downstairs."

Mr. Cooke is the guide a merciful government has provided for its social addenda of wandering females. What Vergil was to Dante, Mr. Cooke was to me. I would like, in passing, to give a tribute to the patience of this kind man. Vergil did his job once and received classic credit—but Mr. Cooke, without any acclaim, does his over and over. Women to be guided must seem like chronic political eruptions to Mr. Cooke. And yet he made the situation he found us in as fresh as anything.

The Perfect Schoolmaster

THERE was a pleasant Miss Marsh too, who wrote out lists and behaved each morning as if a political lady were a treat to her. Looking back, I think Mr. Cooke and Miss Marsh would be the two people who, if I went back, might remember that I had been in Washington.

Mr. Cooke was waiting downstairs in the little pink room. With the question, "Are you settled?" he clicked on the spotlight. The show had begun. We were so brightly lighted that everything became important.

First of all my handwriting, that had been with me all my life and was good enough for family letters and shopping lists, wasn't fit to go into the White House or to make its debut in the Washington mail without a change in deportment. It had to sit up stiffly. Its sprawling and flourishing days were over.

By

NATHALIE
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COLBY

Under Mr. Cooke's guidance I began by rewriting three "acceptances" in correct style and elegant penmanship.

Then he took out a pencil and marked down the official routine we were to follow. We were to make the first calls everywhere. First in order came the embassies, then the ministers' homes, then the wives of the Supreme Court Justices, and then the senators' wives.

The idea sounded very bold to one who had been brought up on the New England principle of "Never speak till you're spoken to," but Mr. Cooke explained that the custom was due to our official position. Then I remembered the story of a late Prince of Wales bowing to a beautiful lady who rode on top of a bus. "Official position" reversed things! I felt very grand. I too would bow first, dispensing official largesse!

Just the same, I was glad when Mr. Cooke told me there was no largesse allowed at the White House. Secretly I had a vision of being told that the President and Mrs. Wilson were not at home to bold women. It was a relief to hear that the White House took care of itself. It "summoned" its guests.

In a few days we felt at home—except for the butler's asking me every morning what should be done with the "overhead dust," that I'd never heard of or noticed and shocking him by saying,

One felt a coronet on Mme. Jusserand "Just leave it—leave it!" Books were lying about, flowers were in vases, there was a fire in the little pink room, and the puppy had begun to chew the house up. I was ready to take my first steps, keeping sight of Mr. Cooke's hand in the distance.

Our first call was at the French Embassy. M. and Mme. Jules Jusserand had been nearly twenty years in the capital, and M. Jusserand was dean of the Diplomatic Corps.



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Mr. Cooke's (Continued on page 46)

Welcome Home

Things become more

The Story Thus Far:

TOM BENTHAM unexpectedly comes home from South America. His father, who had forbidden young Bentham to enter his home for the past four years, has died and Tom decides to use his old latchkey.

He goes up to his old room, switches on the light and beholds a girl sitting up in his bed. He tries to engage her in conversation but she tells him only that the house has been sold, and she orders him to go.

Next day he goes to his father's lawyer, Aubrey Robinson, who protests that it has not been sold and assures Tom that he must be mistaken about the girl.

Mrs. Huggins, the caretaker in the Bentham house, telephones at that point and Robinson speaks to her out of hearing of Tom.

Then the two men go over to the house and hunt from top to bottom in vain for the girl. The only trace is a lovely fragrance of perfume in the top drawer of the bureau.

Tom finally goes, half convinced, saying that he is to report to his paper and then is departing immediately for a vacation. As the door closes behind him, Robinson puts the chain in place so that no key can open the door entirely and goes back to the kitchen and Mrs. Huggins.

At that moment the girl comes out from hiding in a closet with the words: "Well, Mr. Robinson, may I ask how it was that you allowed that to happen?"

"MY DEAR Barbara," said Mr. Robinson, seating himself on, or rather against, the kitchen table and folding his arms, "you see the far-reaching consequences of committing a crime."

"And who was he—this feller, coming in like a thief in the night, instead of ringing me basement bell like a Christian?" said Mrs. Huggins, eager to throw the blame anywhere but upon Barbara.

"I see the consequence of that thoughtless young man's taking his latchkey with him to South America," replied the young lady.

"Ah, well, the question of the ultimate cause . . ." said Robinson. "However, I am very sorry that you should have been frightened."

Barbara was taking a short turn about the kitchen, but she stopped at this as if an insult had been offered to her. "Frightened?" she exclaimed. "I was not in the least frightened . . . why should I be? Startled, yes, when he woke me from a sound sleep by dropping his bag on the floor. But frightened? No, I have never seen anything to make me believe in this beast-of-prey theory. Besides, there was a bell at my bedside that would have brought Delia Huggins up here in three seconds, and I should like to ask you what any rather slight young man could have done against a combination of Delia and me. How was it that you

made such a mistake in the time of his boat's arriving?"

"I did not make a mistake," replied Mr. Robinson rather tartly. "He took a boat to England and saved a day."

"Mercy, what an inconvenient young man he seems to be!" said Barbara. "I had set my alarm clock—his alarm clock, as it turns out—for six o'clock, so that I would have plenty of time to pack and be out of the way—and as it was it was a terrible scramble. Delia and I were sewing up that old mattress—"

"IT'S a pity," observed the lawyer, "that you use such a strong perfume. I think I might have persuaded him that it was all a figment of his imagination—if he had not smelled that bureau drawer. Well, after eight o'clock this evening you can settle down for another week, and by that time everything will be arranged. He's off to the Adirondacks tonight. This time I shan't take any chances. I shall see him off. He's a very irresponsible sort of fellow."

"I thought he was rather attractive," said Miss Deane.

Mr. Robinson smiled his discriminatively legal smile. "I did not say he was unattractive," he answered. "I said he was irresponsible. Did you have any trouble in getting rid of him?"

"Dear Mr. Robinson," replied Barbara, "women never have any trouble

in getting rid of a man if they really want him to go. But so often a woman only wants to appear to want him to go. It took me some time to get rid of this boy last night because, as a matter of fact, he rather amused me. But as soon as I really wanted him to go—he went."

"You have no softness, Barbara."

"I should hope not. Come upstairs to the library and tell me all you know about him."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," said Mrs. Huggins, "what a fix for your mother's daughter to be in! And me who remembers you in your

—they sent him to South America to write up this earthquake. . . ."

"Goodness, has there been an earthquake in South America?"

"And a tidal wave—didn't you know? That's why this boy couldn't get home until a month after his father's death."

"Oh, I wish I had asked him about it. . . . I love tidal waves," said the girl wistfully. "I don't suppose I shall ever see him again."

"Not for some time, I hope," said Mr. Robinson. "By a week from today I hope you will be in Canada. . . . Ah, my dear, if you had only told me beforehand. . . ."

"If I had told you what I meant to do, you would not have let me do it."

He nodded at the truth of this, and

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"Are you trying to say that you are guilty?" he inquired

baby carriage as if it was yesterday!" "I don't know any good of him," said Mr. Robinson.

"I did not specify that it should be good," replied Barbara, and she left the kitchen and mounted the stairs rapidly. Her back was as straight as an arrow.

In the library they sat down on the sofa before the fireplace, where the night before Tom had sat and looked at his mother's portrait.

"Well, I can tell you this," said the lawyer. "His poor old father was utterly disgusted with him."

"Fathers!" said the girl. "What do fathers know about their children?"

"He knew what I just told you—that the boy was sent away from school for gambling and took to drinking in college and refused to go into his father's business and earn an honest livelihood. Mr. Bentham had a nice little wholesale linen business—not a fortune, but a steady, dependable sort of profit. . . ."

"It sounds dull to me."

"It sounded dull to the boy—who wanted to write," said Mr. Robinson as if writing were one of the seven deadly sins.

"And does he?"

"He's a special writer for one of the newspapers—I believe he has done well

took his departure. He had other clients and much to think of—among other things what explanation he would offer to Bentham when he met him at the train—for he saw that he would be obliged to say something. He only hoped that nothing would prevent the young man's departure.

SEVERAL motives took Bentham back to the office of his paper—some of them the same that take a boy back on a visit to his old school—the enjoyment of seeing the others still at work, the desire to be praised for recent achievements, but most of all a sort of homing instinct. It never crossed his mind that his holiday—so definitely promised—could be endangered.

Smith, the managing editor, on seeing him sprang toward him with a cry of joy. The managing editor was a