

THE BRUTE'S WIFE.

HOW SHE RESOLVED TO LIVE HER LIFE WITHOUT HER HUSBAND.

BY ALICE GARLAND STEELE.

I.

THE Brute's wife leaned against the parlor cabinet, with utter disregard for the dangerous proximity of her pet Sèvres vase. He *was* a brute! She had asserted it with tears, after he had started for the station without remembering that it was her wedding-day. To wake up after six years of married life to find one had a—a brute for a husband! Once he had been a prince, the Prince Charming of her girlhood dreams; but oh, the terrible metamor-

phosis, he was a prince no longer—he was just a brute!

Two fresh tears started from under her reddened eyelids, but she furtively wiped them away with a corner of the duster. Not even the alabaster boy in the corner should see her weep. She wasn't exactly anxious to be strong-minded—strong-minded women were out of place in suburban homes; but she didn't intend to be one of those meek, miserable mortals—she was charmed at the alliteration—whose whole life became a tragedy of tears.

She might just as well stare facts in the face. He was a brute, and she was tied to him till the day-after-never-at-all; but—but what? That "but" was a door of emancipation, beyond which lay the broad, beautiful acres of a woman's liberty. She didn't doubt they were beautiful; the untried is always beautiful.

The front door bell rang. It was her special friend, in a spick and span tailor-made and a ravishing new hat, with red cherries and green leaves on a field of brown. They kissed spasmodically; they always did, even if they met seven times a day. The special friend sank down on a willow ottoman.

"Well," she said, "I came out on the first train, so as to have a whole long day with you. Let's see—just six years ago to-night I was bridesmaid, in sea green, at your wedding!"

"Oh," cried the Brute's wife, clapping her hands. "You remembered!"

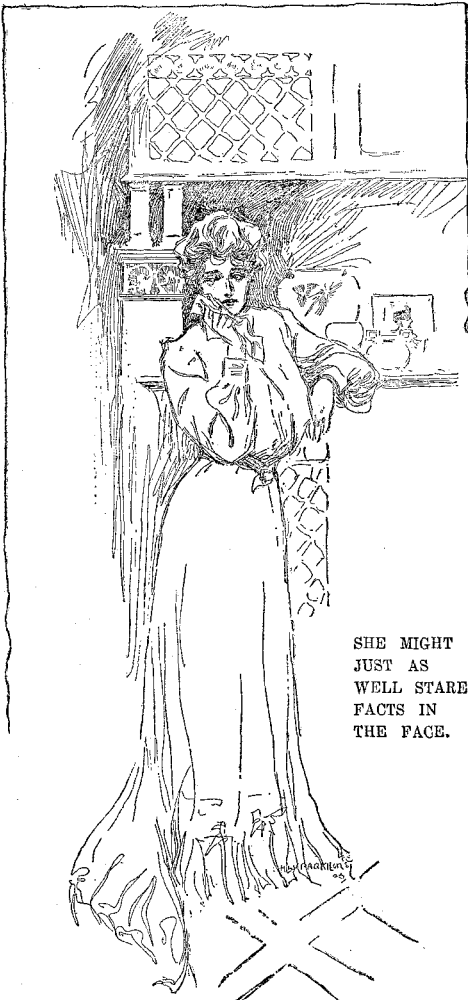
Her special friend smiled.

"My dear, how could I forget? The day of all days to you and Jack! Life isn't worth living if one leaves sentiment out; it becomes a—a car of Jugernaut, which crushes your spirit, or it's like air without oxygen—you can't breathe."

The Brute's wife stood on the rug, turning her wedding-ring with nervous fingers.

"Jennie," she said, "Jack forgot!"

"Forgot what?" asked the special friend. "To leave money for the milk bill, or to order the greens for dinner? Well, that's married life—it ought to be a perpetual note-book, there are so many



things to tease one's memory. Bah, I wouldn't be you for worlds, love!"

Jennie was eight and twenty, and single; married life had grown small in her line of vision.

"No-o," stammered the Brute's wife; "he remembered the greens, they've just come; but he forgot our wedding-day!"

The special friend sat aghast.

"The brute!" she cried.

If any proof were lacking, the Brute's wife now had it. Hadn't her special friend said so? A little flame of red crept into each cheek.

"It doesn't matter in the least," she said. "I have determined to live my life without him."

The special friend coughed. She had always had a secret opinion that Jack had been meant for her, had not unkind fate intervened.

"You don't mean a separation?"

The Brute's wife blazed.

"Jennie," she cried, "how *can* you? Put me in the papers and bring in the reporters and be done with it! No, never, never!" She stamped her foot. "Jack—I married him—I"—her voice broke—"I know he loved me once—indeed he did, dear fellow, but—but—oh, I can't say it!"

"But he doesn't now," finished the special friend sympathetically. "Well, it's too bad, but you won't miss much. He hasn't taken you to the theater but twice since Christmas, and as for a supper—I believe you've forgotten the taste of broiled lobster!"

"We've always preferred Welsh rabbit at home," said the Brute's wife stiffly. "He said I made it so well, and it never got stringy."

"For pity's sake don't get huffy," said the special friend. "I only speak for your good—don't I know you suffer? But why should you? Here you are, at twenty-six, buried alive in a little, miserable, two-story villa town, an exhausting half mile from the station, with two babies to look out for, and a new cook to hunt every month; and all because you married a mere man! I tell you, it's brutal. If Jack had loads of money, and you could keep your auto, and have dinner parties, and go abroad when you felt like it, I wouldn't say a word; but you can't. A miserable pink tea is all you can manage, and then you have to borrow your neighbor's maid! My dear, you've been angelic to stand it for six years!"

The Brute's wife, in spite of herself, began to cry softly.

"We were so happy till just lately," she whispered behind her handkerchief.

The special friend laughed.

"That was the billing and cooing stage; it doesn't usually last so long. The next stage is the awakening, and then comes recrimination, separation, divorce! Can't you see it all, as they have it in the newspaper headings?"

"I wouldn't do such a thing," said the Brute's wife indignantly. "Jennie, if you mean to insinuate I'm not respectable, I'll never speak to you again!"

"Now there," said the special friend, "you fly off on a tangent for nothing! Poor dear, your nerves are racked to pieces! Come, we'll go in for some fun, and show Mr. Jackanapes that we women can get along twice as well without the men."

The special friend looked positively heroic. The Brute's wife, inspired with splendid courage, stuffed her handkerchief up one sleeve, and her lips trembled back into their usual self-possessed curve.

"Jennie," she said, "dear Jennie, you buoy me up like a——"

"Life-preserver!" laughed Jennie. "Well, all right, let's strike out for the nearest shore. First, we must get rid of the children."

The Brute's wife paused, horror-struck.

"Don't be silly, I don't mean in the bloodthirsty villain way—bags weighted with stones and a well, or anything of that sort. It will all be up-to-date and regular. We'll send Bobby and Daisy to your mother's for a week; it will give them a change of air, and you time to turn around and think for yourself. Your second maid can go with them."

The Brute's wife had settled determination in her eyes.

"We've only one maid now," she said. "The other married Mrs. Ridge's gardener last week, while I was at the whist club. If the kiddies go, I'll take them myself."

The special friend resigned herself to the inevitable. Bobby and Daisy always had sticky fingers and asked questions by the cartload.

"I'll take them in," she sighed. "You can trust the precious pets to me. Meanwhile, you get dressed and take the noon train in. I'll meet you at Davison's at one; we'll lunch there, go to the matinée afterwards, and then home to my house. I'll 'phone to a couple of the girls, and have Fred and Robert come in for an impromptu hearts party. You'll

stay with me for a few days, any way, won't you?"

"But, Jennie, what will Jack say?"

"Bother Jack!" said the special friend, and her tone admitted of no re-

laid it on the dresser instead; then she folded the jacket into a small, tight roll, and put it into a corner of her satchel, for old times' sake.

"Now," she breathed, "I'm ready!"



AS SHE CAME INTO THE ROOM HE TURNED.

ply. She stood up. "Come, we must fix the children."

The Brute's wife led the way up-stairs without another word.

II.

AN hour later she sat alone in her pretty room with a half-packed suitcase on the floor, and her heart remembering the sticky, clinging caresses of Daisy and Bobby, who had hailed an unexpected visit to "grandma's" with reluctant delight. So they had gone, and she was going, and Jack would come home on their wedding-day to an empty house! She bit her lips to keep back the tears; freedom was bitter-sweet, but she must have it!

She penned a little note and pinned it to Jack's smoking-jacket, the dear brown jacket that she had give him that first Christmas in the new home! With sudden remorse she tore the note off and

She snapped the case and pulled down her veil. She went a moment to the kitchen before going out.

"Cook," she said, "I'm going to town over-night, with Miss Meredith. Have the dinner at seven, as usual, and don't forget the cream sauce; you know how my husband likes it. Good-by—be sure you lock the kitchen windows when you go to bed."

The cook looked up with suspicion in her eyes.

"Was you sick, ma'am? I thought as I heard you groanin'."

The Brute's wife swept out with conscious dignity; but as she walked to the station, she felt like a creeping, guilty thing that belonged to night, not to day. The train was late. Every one, from the ticket agent to the white dog with one ear that lived in the shed, eyed her, she fancied, with disapproval. She tried to take courage in the thought that the children were happy at her mother's, that her gown looked well, that it was just the day to go to town, the weather was so

beautiful; but she reached Davison's almost in tears.

Jennie was late! Had anything happened to the children?

The waiter came to take her order, but she motioned him away; she was waiting for a friend. She went over her note to Jack; it was very short and mysterious.

JACK:

I've gone to town with Jennie for a while. Don't write or come. If your cold is bad, take some quinine, and don't forget to water the rubber-plant.

ADA.

It was almost laughable; how Jack would stare! It wasn't quite the way they did in books, but then melodramatics were silly in real life. She sat waiting, drumming on the polished table with her gloved fingers till Jennie came in, smiling.

"The kiddies are all right," she said airily. "I've 'phoned to all the girls, and Rob is going to bring his cousin. I've tickets for 'The Thoroughbred.' Now we'll have lunch—I'm starving for an oyster patty!"

Her mirth was infectious, but somehow it wore off. They were late at the theater, and "The Thoroughbred" was tommy-rot—the heroine a sweeping, up-to-date creation who needed a strait-jacket. There was just one part that made the Brute's wife sit forward, breathless—the hero, who was married to a sweet, blossomy little thing, left her in a moment of anger to droop and fade away on her stem, till remorse brought him back. It was a happy ending, but it was nerve-racking! It stretched the emotions out like rubber bands, so that when they snapped back they hurt. The special friend was wrathful.

"Three dollars for that! It was like pie made of dried apples! Come, we'll order the ices for to-night—or would you have just frappé?"

The Brute's wife assented miserably. It was after six, and Jack was whirring home on the train; she tried to follow his movements, and kept looking at her watch till she saw the twelve numbers at once through her tears, like a snake fence around a tiny crystal pond. Jennie rattled on, unconscious.

"Goodness," she cried, "we'll be late for dinner! Come, Ada, I told the girls to get over early!"

The evening was like a nightmare; they came, they laughed, they talked, they played hearts till midnight. They all asked her where her husband was, and told her she looked quite "gone"

about something; it must be spring fever—the kind one gets in the fall. When they began to tell one another old love stories of the boy-and-girl period, it grew positively painful. Fred had been her own first sweetheart.

"Do you remember the valentines, Ada?" he laughed. "Hearts all stuck with arrows; and the candies—it's a wonder they didn't give you chronic indigestion! And then Jack came along and spoiled it all, the brute!"

She recoiled as from a blow.

"You mustn't call him that!" she said sharply. "He—he isn't!"

Fred, pausing to relight his cigar, looked at her curiously, and for the rest of the evening called her Mrs. Mason very pointedly. She felt that she hated him.

After they had all gone, she sat on the bed in Jennie's room while she brushed her hair. Jennie had only a tiny pigtail that never needed brushing; it hung down her back now like an abbreviated Chinese cue.

"Ada, Fred is in love with you yet, I do believe!"

"Is he? Then he needn't be—the prig! He isn't worth Jack's little finger."

Her special friend bridled.

"At least," she said stiffly, "he would have been considerate and kind!"

The Brute's wife looked down at her lap as if it were a most interesting map of South America. She yawned a counterfeit yawn.

"I guess I'll go to bed," she said, rising.

"Do, dear, you must feel worn out. How worry ages one! You look *years* older; but never mind, rest now, and I'll send breakfast up to you in the morning."

The Brute's wife reached her room to throw herself on the bed in a passion of tears.

"He's a brute!" she kept whispering.

III.

SHE sat through the night wet-eyed and sleepless, till the dawn, gray and cold, swept over her face as she opened the window.

"Oh," she gasped, "I can't stay another minute. I want to go home!"

With stealthy steps she repacked her grip, her heart beating at every sound. She looked at her watch; it was six o'clock, and no one would be stirring for an hour. She wrote on the back of one of her cards:



"SAY SOMETHING NICE TO HER."

DEAR JENNIE:

I'm obliged to leave early. Thanks for a lovely time. Come to lunch on Wednesday.

ADA.

Then she took up her satchel and stepped out into the gloom of the hall, slipping the card under Jennie's door as she passed.

The stairway was dark, but she got down quickly and unchained the front door as if it were the gate of Paradise which she had shut against herself. In the vestibules opposite, white-capped maids were busy with cloth and brush, and the early morning air caressed her hot forehead and blazing cheeks like a cool, friendly hand.

She was one of six passengers on the home-bound train, all sleepy save herself; but she felt like a child going back, to receive a whipping, perhaps, but to be comforted with sugar-plums afterward. When she reached the little ivy-covered station she was all smiles. She left her satchel with the porter, and hurried up the hill. She paused before her own gate, an expectant light in her eyes, till she remembered with a pang that the kiddies were not there; but there was Jack. With a sigh, she fitted her key in the lock.

It was just seven by the little gilt clock as she looked into the parlor. The al-

baster boy seemed to throw her a silent greeting. She slipped up-stairs and pushed open her own door. Jack was there by the window, holding in his hand her torn note. As she came into the room he turned, and she saw his face worn and haggard.

"Ada!" was all he said, but no endearment could have meant more.

She came over, and with her hands in his told him all.

"I worried so," he said. "Not to find you or the children was like finding oneself alone in a graveyard. Your note told me nothing. Cook insisted you'd had spasms, but I knew that wasn't so. I'd bought tickets for 'The Thoroughbred'—of course they were wasted!"

She laughed hysterically.

"Jack, dear, you did remember, after all!" He stared at her. "Our wedding-day, dear! You *didn't* forget—you got those tickets to surprise me!"

There was entreaty in her voice. He shook his head.

"I didn't, Ada. By George, how can a man remember he's been married for years when he has a wife who makes time stand still? I didn't remember. I don't think of those little things; but I do love you, Ada!"

She stroked his sleeve, repentant.

"It doesn't matter," she said, "now!"

"Ada, I've been tyrannical, I guess, about some things. I thought we didn't

need the world and his wife to make us happy. I've kept you housed too much."

"No, no," she whispered. "I'm the one—I've been silly!"

"Well," he said, "perhaps we're both to blame. Let's begin over again with breakfast!"

"Jack," she said, "I'll go down on the train with you, and get the kiddies. Won't that be nice?"

He fumbled in his pocket, and with a man's idea of reparation drew out some bills.

"Here," he said, "stop and buy a gown or a hat."

She laughed.

"A hat like Jennie's, Jack—with cherries?"

"Bother Jennie! She's an old maid! Come to breakfast."

The cook, suspicious-eyed, waited on them at table. During one of her exits, Ada leaned over to whisper to Jack:

"Say something nice to her! Tell her the cakes are good. She's not a prize, but it's so hard to make them stay!"

THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH.

THE YOUNG AMERICAN MATRON WHO SHARES ONE OF THE PROUD-
EST ENGLISH TITLES AND IS MISTRESS OF THE HISTORIC PALACE
OF BLENHEIM.

NINE years ago, when Miss Consuelo Vanderbilt was married to the young Duke of Marlborough at St. Thomas' Church, on Fifth Avenue, the wedding profoundly interested her fellow countrymen and fellow countrywomen. American peeresses—or peeresses of American birth, which is not always the same thing—were not so numerous then as they have since become. And this particular marriage was a particularly dramatic and significant one. On one side was the holder of one of the most splendid and famous of English titles, the owner of an historic palace and estate, and the claimant of titular honors as a prince of the extinct Holy Roman Empire. On the other was one of the fairest daughters and greatest heiresses of the house of Vanderbilt—a family which has been such a factor in the history of New York that it may almost be regarded as a public institution.

If the popular interest in the Vanderbilts is a more or less inquisitive one—possibly even an impertinent one, at times—it certainly is not unfriendly. None of our multimillionaire dynasties has done more to prove that it is not absolutely necessary to be poor in order to possess the elementary virtues, or that, to paraphrase Thackeray's witty lines:

Hearts just as pure and true
Beat on Fifth Avenue
As in the worst purlieu
Of Cherry Hill.

At the time of her marriage, the personality of Consuelo Vanderbilt was quite unknown to the public. She was a girl in her teens, not very long out of

the schoolroom. She had met her young husband—he was not quite twenty-four—in England, where it is said that his stepmother, the first American Duchess of Marlborough, had brought the two together. He followed her across the Atlantic, there was a brief summer courtship at Newport, the engagement was announced, and the wedding followed on the 6th of November, 1895. Then came a honeymoon journey to the blue waters and enchanted lands of southern Europe, and on the last day of March the duke and his bride were welcomed to Blenheim by a rejoicing throng of their tenants and neighbors.

All these things, of course, were duly chronicled in the newspapers. So, too, was the young duchess' first conspicuous appearance in English society, when, a few months later, she entertained a brilliant house-party at her historic country seat. The great halls—this is no figure of speech, for the rooms at Blenheim are of an immensity that might be termed either baronial or barn-like—the great halls in which the famous Sarah Jennings, first Duchess of Marlborough, entertained the wits and gallants of two centuries ago, had not seen such festivities for many a year.

Six royalties were of the party, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, now king and queen. The latter is said to have summed up her impression of the duchess with: "She's a sweet girl—I like her," and ever since she has been the close personal friend of the younger woman. King Edward, too, has shown marked courtesy to her and her husband.