

THE BACHELORS' DINNER

BY KATHARINE EGGLESTON

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"I'M ready for something serious now," Margaret Waldon said as she stirred her tea.

"Does that mean Joe?" Alice Winthrop asked, helping herself to a third lump of sugar.

"Well, it might!" Margaret laughed and blushed a little.

"So am I!" Wilda Thayer cried with enthusiasm. "I've had my summer at Tuxedo, and it was a dream! But one can't go on dreaming forever. You have to wake up and think about—"

"Wallace Ames," Margaret interpolated.

"Do you know, Margaret," Alice began, "I have always wondered what particular device you took to stand Joe off. He was so dreadfully in earnest!"

"Yes, he was," Margaret agreed, with a satisfied little nod which somehow gave the impression that she realized what a provocation to desperate courting she provided. "But, you see, I told him that I couldn't think of being married till I had had a taste of official life. I couldn't settle down to humdrum married existence just as father had been sent to the Senate. It was too much to ask of one girl!"

"And he realized it?" Katharine Courtney inquired.

"Well, he couldn't very well marry me unless I was willing, could he?" Margaret asked, smiling.

"I told Wallace that I'd be ready after this summer," Wilda Thayer continued. "I knew there were going to be things that would make Tuxedo too good to miss; and I wasn't going to miss it. That was just the whole thing, and he had to make up his mind to wait."

"We've been telling you why we put off our weddings, Alice. It's your turn now," Margaret said, turning to the slender, expensive-looking girl in the modish fall gown that talked subtly of disguised detail representing a month's salary for the average man.

"Papa and mama had a very plain talk with Hardin, and he—we decided to put it off indefinitely."

The reply was evasive, and the other girls glanced quickly at the speaker. They had rather more curiosity about Alice's postponed wedding than about any of the others. Each one considered the advisability of pushing the matter to a point where the self-contained Miss Winthrop must either do some more explaining or feel herself underestimated, actually suspected of having been jilted by Hardin Norris.

It was Katharine Courtney who broke the silence.

"It looks a little as if you had all put off marrying till there was nothing else interesting to do—had made a kind of last resort of it!"

"A girl gives up a great deal," Alice affirmed positively.

"She might be supposed to get something in exchange," Katharine suggested.

"What a mopey crowd!" Beatrice Anstruther cried, crossing the threshold into Margaret's gray and green boudoir, with every indication of health and happiness rioting in her cheeks and eyes and buoyant carriage. "What's the matter?"

"We were considering a very serious question," Margaret said, after the girls had greeted the blooming young matron at whose June wedding they had helped to make an impressive pageant.

"You look happy," Alice observed, studying her friend critically.

"So that's your serious question!" Mrs. Anstruther exclaimed, making an intuitive leap into the very heart of the situation. "Had all the fun you want for the last year, and now you are ready to make Hardin Norris"—she glanced at Alice as she spoke the name—"and Wallace Ames"—Wilda's face flushed under her gaze—"and Joe Gary miserable."

"I don't think they regard it in that light,"

Alice said, with one of her frigid assumptions of dignity.

"I hope they don't!" Mrs. Anstruther observed, as if she had inside information that led her to doubt the statement.

Katharine, being rather less concerned with heart complications than the others, felt no hesitancy in inquiring into the meaning of the young matron's sphinxlike look of wisdom.

"What's the inside, Beatrice? You owe us any tips that your experience enables you to give."

"Oh, I'm not doing any matrimonial missionarying! I have my hands full with domestic matters; I'm not hunting out foreign heathen to train!"

For a moment, none of the girls spoke. It was too obvious that Beatrice was thinking longer thoughts than she chose to put into words.

"Have you seen Hard—Mr. Norris lately?" Alice asked with evident difficulty.

"Oh, yes!" Beatrice responded airily. "We dined with him and Joe just last week."

"Oh!" was Alice's only comment.

But Katharine had no delicate pride that held her silent.

"Where did you go?"

"To their house," Beatrice answered, amused at the stiffening to attention that marked two figures.

"Their house?" Katharine obligingly exclaimed.

"Their apartment, rather. It's the handsomest thing you ever saw!" Beatrice rhapsodized.

"We ever saw! We didn't know they had an apartment!" Margaret exclaimed, her curiosity overcoming her pride. "Did you, Alice?" she added, appealing to the one who, next to herself, would be most likely to be informed.

Alice shook her head and looked to Beatrice for further enlightenment.

"Mr. Ames is in the same—"

"What?" Wilda cried with characteristic impetuosity.

"Yes, they have a whole floor. It's palatial!"

"Where is Bobby Milner?" Katharine demanded, taking a sudden personal interest.

"He's just back from abroad, you know—"

"He has been back more than two weeks! Is he in that apartment? If he isn't there yet, he never will be, if—if I can help it!" Katharine cried with a noticeable uncertainty as she tried hurriedly to make an inventory of her powers of prevention.

"They spoke of having you girls there for dinner some—" Beatrice was beginning; but a chorus of interruptions stilled her.

"Oh, did they! Make them ask us soon!"

"Tell them—tell Mr. Norris he'll have to ask us very soon," Alice said. "I'm going to two or three house-parties in the next few weeks. I shall be in town for just a few days now."

"You see, they have to hurry if they want us all," Margaret urged.

"I'll do my best; but—" Beatrice paused.

"But what?" Alice said, laying aside her dignity and getting frankly cross at Beatrice's manner.

"I happen to know that they are having all sorts of affairs, and I don't believe they can squeeze you in; but I'll feel around and find out," she said magnanimously, while she inwardly rejoiced at the downcast faces of the girls.

She seemed almost to hear the creaking of the tables as they turned.

II

A WEEK later the invitation was forthcoming. With Beatrice chaperoning, the four girls went to the men's apartment, prepared for regaining the ascendancy that seemed threatened by this inexplicable move into bachelor quarters. But for some reason Alice wore a gown that represented scarcely half the number of her father's dollars that usually found their way into her dinner-gowns.

Every detail was seen and carefully lined up into a sort of mental account, to be figured out later by the eager eyes of the piqued and curious girls as they entered the apartment. The three men had pooled their domestic interests, and the profit on the investment showed up bravely in a Japanese butler, a trim little maid in the bedroom where the girls were laying aside their wraps, and, best of all, a cook who could cook!

"My, isn't this room a beauty!" Katharine said, breaking the pause during which the girls rested from asking questions about how they looked.

"What do you think of our housekeeping?" Joe asked, glancing with pardonable pride over the table at which his own and his fellow apartmenters had seated their girl guests.

"It's—very nice," Alice replied, filling a breach that none of the others tried to mend.

"Very nice!" Beatrice exclaimed. "Well, rather! It's perfect! I begin to feel sorry for my poor husband. All this luxury without the nuisance of a wife! I begin to see

what an incision into the body of a man's selfishness a wife is."

"Beatrice!" Alice protested at her friend's disloyalty.

"It's the truth! You do not need us!" the young matron insisted, looking at Hardin and Joe.

But Hardin and Joe were looking—at Alice and Margaret.

"It seems to be human nature to want what you don't need, what really is not good for you, or what you can't get!" Joe observed gloomily.

Course after course of the dinner came and went with a flawless perfection of service and of taste. At every evidence of this perfection—an excellence and luxury obtained without the assistance of any woman whose service was not bought as a mere commodity—the girls saw their own stock in the matrimonial market falling in value. They saw themselves, as wives, merely the evidences of men's weakness, their inability to deny themselves the luxury of the feminine. All around them were the signs that as necessities they had no place in the life-scheme of the men who loved them—or, at least, had loved them.

"Being mere men, we can be comfortable in our own home," Hardin said, as he went toward the big living-room with Alice. "We smoke all over the house, so we sha'n't have to deny ourselves the pleasure of your company."

"Yes, we're not afraid of hurting the curtains!" Joe said, as he opened a choice collection of cigars that hid luxuriously in a mahogany cabinet made for them. "If you will let us, we will enjoy ourselves," he added, as he paused for permission.

"Oh, don't let us interfere with your—enjoyment!" Alice exclaimed crisply.

"Interfere any further, you mean," Hardin said for her especial benefit.

"It's an ill wind, you know. The interference seems to have brought you a charming home!" she replied. "By the way, your color scheme is delightful. You can't tell me that you men achieved that! Some women helped."

Alice spoke confidently, glancing about at the rich brown and dull blue tones of wall and rugs, chairs, and picture-moldings with a look that said:

"You may be almost independent of us; but you still need us for the small finesses of living!"

"Two women did it! They are a firm; and this kind of thing is their business. Great, isn't it?" Hardin replied.

Alice was silent. Here again was a sign that for money these men had secured what she had always supposed only personal interest could gain. They had a home in all that stood for taste, comfort, convenience, without any assistance which they could not secure for money. And she was businesslike enough to know that it had cost no more than it would cost to provide for a wife whose taste and ingenuity might have wrought somewhat the same results—though even that she doubted. She began to recognize that she, as a woman, had no knowledge that compared in its excellence with the work of these specialists. It grew clearer and clearer to her that a wife, to a man like Hardin Norris, was distinctly a luxury.

He, meanwhile, sat a little behind her, studying the picture she made as the jets of flame in the gas-grate sent quick golden beams sliding over the waves of her hair, and shed a rosy glow over the curves of her figure. And he wanted the luxury without which all the satisfying details of his surroundings were only half enjoyable.

"We have the feminine touch, you see," Joe said, as Hardin finished. "Touched just once, and it's all over!" he added.

"What do you mean by that?" Katharine asked, sensing a veiled meaning in his words.

"It's all settled in the first bill. No continuous performance program of 'touches' for gowns, hats, and the rest. Decorators are a cheaper method of getting the sweet evidences of woman's fingers than matrimony!" Joe said, with a suspicion of sourness in his tone.

"One ought to expect to pay for privileges in this world," Margaret flashed at him.

"Not too high a price!" Hardin said, rousing from his dreams.

Alice glanced quickly at him.

The air of the charming room seemed to grow heavy with unsaid meanings. The men glanced at the girls; the girls assumed expressions of too elaborate unconsciousness.

III

BEATRICE ANSTRUTHER looked at her husband, and he winked. Then the handsome matron exploded the conversational bomb that always manufactures itself in such periods of quiet, where three or four are gathered together, all thinking of themselves in relation to each other.

"You—you and Alice's father aren't very friendly, are you, Hardin?"

Hardin growled.

"Friendly! Just now, it's a state of

armed neutrality; but if we ever meet at close range—"

Alice sprang from her chair.

"I'm going home."

"No, you're not! You're going to stay right here!" Hardin asserted with a finality that rubbed all of Alice's sensibilities to nervous fuzz.

"You were perfectly horrid to father and mother!" she cried, standing face to face with the man who loved her.

Hardin rose on a black and sweeping current of righteous wrath, and cycloned her into silence and her chair.

"Perfectly horrid! You don't know how they treated me! It was a modern inquisition. It was—hell!" The other girls were leaning forward in their chairs, while the men gave the assistance of silent encouragement that helped Hardin to express himself. "And I took it like a lamb-faced fool! I sat there and writhed till the leather seat got warm! I sat there till every vestige of my manhood was beaten down and rubbed into the Turkish rug! It makes me mad all over to remember it!"

"What? Remember what?" Katharine demanded, while the others listened to hear the real story of Alice's indefinitely postponed marriage.

"What? What? What?" Hardin vociferated with crescendo explosiveness. "Why, the questions Alice's father asked me, till he ran out, and her mother began!"

"What were they?" Wilda and Margaret asked, while Alice looked at them with eyes that blazed rage.

"The first one was how much I made," Hardin said, a grim memory of his grilling setting his jaw to right-angled squareness.

"Well, of course, you couldn't expect a girl's father not to make an effort to see that the man could take care of her," Katharine observed.

"I told him. He looked as if I didn't figure up to a high enough mark, so I did what every other fellow does when he's got the girl-getting fever and sees her drifting out of reach. I lied."

Alice moved restlessly to another chair, and the other girls tried to hide their interest under expressions of shocked surprise.

"You needn't come any of your goody dodges on me!" Hardin said, the sense of his wrongs filling him with resentment. "I know how you tell them on less provocation! You'd have gone me one better, if you'd been in my place. With that old hippopotamus—"

"How dare you speak so disrespectfully of my father?" Alice cried.

"I'll begin to hunt up some respect for him when I get back some of my own that he bulldozed out of me! I lied to him. I hate a man who forces me to lie. I stated airily that while my salary was what I had told him, I had outside interests that brought me in about twice as much. As a matter of fact, most of my outside interests work the other way; but I wasn't going to tell him that. He had me at the small end of the spy-glass, anyway."

Hardin paused; but Wilda urged him on.

"Go on!"

"I did. When he asked me how I stood with the firm, what chance I had for promotion, I told him I was right next; that the only reason I wasn't the vice-president now was because they had a deal on that made it inadvisable to put the old one out."

Beatrice's husband shouted:

"Jove, you were dealing in futures! What did he say?"

"Oh, he stopped to think up a harder one; and that's when Alice's mother took a try.

"'Of course,' she said, 'we could not let Alice leave our home unless we were assured she would go to one as good.'"

"'Of course not!' I answered.

"Then I lied some more, and said I had thought of one of those thirty-five-hundred-dollar apartments in the Bensonia. She was delighted; it was better than father could afford. Then father began again. They had given Alice every advantage, and they wanted to be sure they were trusting her expensive accomplishments in good hands. They talked about me as if I were a storage firm for feminine perfections, and ought to furnish full insurance protection. I lost sight of the idea that marrying used to be regarded as a partnership, and that I was something in the game. I just got the fever, and all I thought of was making good as the custodian for Alice, and for her expensive tastes, accomplishments, and luxuries. They examined my teeth, tested my breathing—I'll just tell you girls, right now, that you'll have to be up and doing some show work yourselves if you think self-respecting men are going through that sort of thing for you much longer. I was questioned till I got speechless, and just nodded when I could. A little of it might have raised the price of the stock. The bunch I got raised—hell!"

"Mother said—" Alice began.

"Don't tell me anything your mother said!" Hardin warned. "I've heard enough

of her sayings to last me through. I wiggled under their impertinences for a long time; but at last the worm turned! Then I did the asking. I asked what practical knowledge of housekeeping Alice had, to offset the home that I had to provide. I could make a living. Could she make a home? I could make ends meet in business. Could she make them meet in the house? I'd have to give up a club or two, and my riding-horse, to have her. What would she give up to get me? And they nearly fell over at what they called my extraordinary demands.

"I told them I wasn't looking for a piano-player. I wanted a companion. I wasn't hunting an ornament for my home. I wanted a partner in making it. Then Mrs. Winthrop threw up her hands and said I would rob her daughter of all to which she had been accustomed. I said I'd merely cut down the luxuries for her as I did for myself. And the fur flew!"

Hardin wiped the perspiration that the recollection brought to his forehead.

"And I finished by saying that they had educated Alice for everything I didn't need in a wife, and none of the things I did need, so we'd just call the deal off!"

"Oh!" Alice cried, her offended pride rampant as she sailed across the room toward the bedroom and her wraps.

Joe had his grievance; and he began to air it.

"You girls seem to think you are all that counts. You stand us off with every old excuse—summers at Tuxedo, a winter in Washington; then, when you're hard pressed for amusement, you'll marry us to keep from being bored. But you're too late. We've made homes of our own, and we don't need you!"

IV

A LONG silence usurped the place of the heated dialogue.

Alice paused in the door.

"I haven't heard any one say he didn't want us!" she remarked.

Hardin looked across at the bronze figure of Mercury.

"We've taken a year's lease on this apartment, and Bobby here is thinking of taking the next floor with—"

Katharine did not wait to hear the rest.

"Bobby, I want to see you alone," she said, the curls about her face contrasting beautifully with the white purposefulness that made her pale.

"The library's a good place," was Bobby's practical response; and he winked at Hardin as he passed.

Mrs. Anstruther rose and took her husband's hand.

"We're interested in your Delft things, Hardin. You don't mind if we go into the dining-room?"

"No; go on. Make yourselves at home. I want to show Margaret the kitchen," Joe said.

Margaret followed with a surprising readiness.

"Ames, you've got that new humidor in your den. Miss Wilda would like to see some of the comforts of a bachelor's home," Hardin suggested as he took note of the almost emptied living-room.

"Thanks, old chap; one good turn deserves another. Let's have a look at the humidor," Wallace replied, as Wilda rose.

"Now, it's up to you, Alice," Hardin said as he came close to the slender girl poised on the threshold.

"How long is your lease?" she asked.

"A year."

"Would you consider a partnership at the end of that time?"

"Alice!"

She moved aside to avoid his reaching arms.

"That will give me time—to qualify. I'll take up domestic science; I'll gradually cut out the taxis and things—"

"You mean it?" Hardin cried.

"I mean that I'll do all I can to be a 'sure thing.' I see a lot of things from a different view-point—and I can manage father and mother!"

The bachelor apartment-house lost three actual and one prospective tenant as a result of the bachelors' dinner.

THE GAME OF LIFE

If life's a game that all must play,
May it be mine to find away,
'Mid all its trials and its bumps,
That hearts are trumps!

John Kendrick Bangs

IS THE UNITED STATES PREPARED FOR WAR?

HAVE WE THE SHIPS, THE FORTS, THE GUNS, THE POWDER, AND
THE TRAINED SOLDIERS AND SAILORS THAT MUST BE READY
FOR OUR DEFENSE IN CASE OF EMERGENCY?

BY ROBLEY D. EVANS,

REAR-ADMIRAL U. S. N. (RETIRED)

FROM the days of George Washington to the present time we have had the advantage of good advice, from men well able to give it, on the subject of preparedness for war. Probably no one has ever put the matter so well as Admiral George Dewey, who phrases it thus:

"In times of peace prepare to maintain it."

To maintain peace means that we must be so well prepared for war that we can compel others to keep the peace, not only with us, but, if we take a broad view of our duties as a world power, with all other nations. How near we may be to fulfilling the requirements of this ideal position we can determine only after a careful review of our offensive as well as defensive preparations.

It seems plain that financial ability to stand the strain is the first great requisite for any nation that proposes either to fight a great and successful war, or to prevent another nation from doing the same thing. That we have this ability no one can doubt.

The next great requisite for the preserver of peace is possession of the implements necessary to persuade those disposed to make war that it cannot and must not be done—in other words, ships, forts, guns, military supplies, and, above all, a body of trained men ready at a moment's notice to prevent war, or, if need be, to defeat those who insist on having it. The nation possessing all these things will control the sea, and will thus insure her own peace beyond question, even if she does not care to play peacemaker for the rest of the world.

Let us look carefully at our state of pre-

paredness in these respects, and declare the results of our inquiry. In obedience to the naval regulations on the subject, which the writer wishes to respect and obey in every particular, he will give only such facts as have been made public in Congressional debates or in printed documents, and are therefore known to all governments.

HAVE WE SHIPS ENOUGH?

First, then, as to ships. The people of the United States are justly proud of their navy, and of what it has done, but if they are under the impression that we have a sufficient force to play peacemaker for the world, or to have any weight in such a rôle, without the assistance of some first-class naval power, they are sadly mistaken.

Even for the protection of our own coast, the force we have is inadequate. The battle-ships that we have built and designed compare most favorably, ship for ship, with those built or designed by any other nation; but can thirty battle-ships, even if we had all the necessary auxiliaries in the way of colliers, cruisers, torpedo-boats, submarines, and other necessary vessels—which we have not—be considered sufficient for the defense of our great extent of coast-line? The answer must certainly be in the negative; and it is plain that, at our present rate of building ships, this condition will not change, because the leading nations are building more rapidly than we.

The efficiency of our battle-ships is, beyond question, of the highest order. Let us examine certain details for a moment, and