

The Journal of A NEGLECTED WIFE

by Mabel Herbert Urner

CHAPTER II.

THE heat became intolerable last week that there was no longer any excuse for remaining in town. Horace came out with me Friday and stayed until this morning. We were together more in those three days than we have been for months, but that strained consciousness was always between us. I found myself continually striving to make things more natural, and only succeeded in making them more constrained. I could feel Horace's disquietude and anxiety to return, even though he was careful not to show it in any way.

This morning when he left I think I felt something like relief—relief that I could relax, that I need no longer strain to be cheerful and natural, to struggle against the blank silence that seemed always to hover over us.

But he had been gone only a few hours when I began to long for him again, to feel that I had managed things badly, to think of what I might have said and done that would have brought us nearer. I am filled with a miserable sense of failure; in those three days I had a chance to be very near him, and I failed to use it wisely. And now I am anguishing over my lost opportunity.

He will be back Saturday to stay until Monday. Can I make it different, then, or as soon as I see him will some restraint come upon me and make me dumb, or give a fatal self-consciousness to everything I say or do?

June 11. I have not realized until today how completely I have isolated myself from every one in the past six or eight months. I have never entertained or gone out extensively; my home and Horace have always filled my life. And yet we have a very pleasant circle of friends, with whom, until this year, I have kept in touch socially.

But now by not returning calls, by repeatedly sending regrets to invitations for luncheons and teas I have gradually withdrawn from it all. I did not do this consciously—each time I would think: "I haven't the heart to go this week—perhaps next week I will feel different." But next week the thought of any social exertion would be just as distasteful.

How abrupt and discourteous in many instances this must be to the people I did not consider until today, when Mrs. Hammond and her daughter entered the dining-room and passed my table with the most formal greetings. Then I remembered two calls and a dinner invitation that I fear I did not even acknowledge. They are nice people, whom we have met here for two summers. After breakfast I joined them on the veranda, and told Mrs. Hammond that I had been ill much of the winter, and apologized for my really unparliamentary delinquency. She was very pleasant, and we talked for quite a while, but except when she spoke of her husband and children I was not interested. Later, when I walked down by the beach alone, I realized more than ever before how much I have changed. The things that used to interest me seem now empty and meaningless. I have but one line of thought—always of her. It has become an obsession.

Has Horace grown wholly indifferent to me that he does not see how I have withdrawn from everything? Does he not see that not only has our life together changed, but that I have no other life—no other interests at all now?

June 12. After luncheon I took some magazines down to the beach and stayed there until dusk. But I did not read; all through the long sunny afternoon I gazed dreamily out over the blue stretch of sea to the far horizon dotted with tiny white sails. There was no surf; only a soft lapping of small waves broke the warm, brooding stillness.

Always the sea has rested me, but never before have I so needed the quieting peace and serenity that came to me today. For a few hours I was granted a respite from the torturing thoughts of all these months, a sense of detachment from all things except the influences about me—the warmth, the sunny silence, the deep blue and mysterious immensity of the sea, the atmosphere of tranquillity that was over it all.

June 13. I am restless and anxious again. I have been down to the beach, hoping the sea would have the same soothing effect of yesterday. But the waves were higher today; there was a turbulent note in their depths as they foamed against the shore. A large excursion steamer was passing with its brass band, its waving flags and crowded decks. The whole atmosphere was different. I returned to the hotel with a bitter sense of disappointment. Why is it that one can never go back—can never live over again even the impressions of an hour?

Later. I have cut this sketch from a current magazine and am pasting it here. I want to keep it to have it remind me that some marriages hold greater unhappiness than mine:

THE LETTER WRITTEN AND THE LETTER SENT.

The One That Was Written:

I am going to write you the truth. The truth that for five years I have hid with lies and deceit and trickery. I hate you—I hate you—I loathe you. Oh, what a relief it is to say it, to write it, to put it into words. Sometimes I have felt that I must shriek it out to you. But I haven't—oh, no, instead I have smiled and said nice little things, loving little things. How I have fooled you! That has been my one compensation, it has been to me a childish joy—the thought that I have fooled you so completely—you, who pride yourself on your discernment, your penetration, your keen insight and knowledge of women. How I have gloated over this and longed for the time when I might hurt it at you, and you would know how you have been fooled and duped and tricked by a woman—the woman who is your wife. Oh, yes, I married you willingly enough. I was not ill and had seen no other men. I thought you very great and strong and noble, and was proud and happy that you should care for me.

And now—now, when I look into my

heart at the blackness and bitterness and wretchedness there—I smile sadly and think of the girl of five years ago. No, I don't shudder and weep; I did at first, but I have passed that now.

I remember just before the wedding ceremony I ran up to my own room, the room where all the beautiful dream-life of my girlhood had been spent, and I knelt by the bed and thanked God that this great happiness had come to me, and vowed a little vow that all my life I would strive to be worthy of it. Worthy of it! Worthy of it! It is only lately that I have developed a sense of humor. For a long time I failed to see in it any humor. But I do now; it is really very funny if you know how to look at it. Sometimes I feel an infinite pity for that girl, that innocent, ignorant girl that was once myself. But more often it is a boundless contempt for the girl who was such a little fool.

I have played my part well. You have never dreamed that I have hated and loathed you with an intensity that few women could feel.

When you read this, your first thought will be that I have loved some one else. To you that will seem the only explanation possible, the only one that you could understand. But I have loved no one. I have been absolutely true to you. Not from any sense of right or duty or loyalty—for I have had none; but simply because my hatred for you has so consumed me that I have had thought for nothing else.

They say that suffering softens and ennobles, that it makes one more kindly and gentle and humane. That is a lie. Instead it hardens and embitters and degrades.

Last month when you telegraphed from Detroit that the case was settled, and you were returning at once, instead of staying the ten days you planned, I tore that message into strips and I swore—swore. I had been cheated out of ten days of freedom, of release

from you, and the strange words came with amazing ease. It was not until afterward that I realized what I had said, and then I felt no regret, only a grim sense of humor.

Sometimes I have stood before my mirror in wonder that the slight, delicately refined woman reflected there should be the woman I am going away. I can scheme and lie and deceive with the greatest ease and proficiency. Oh, yes, I have learned a number of useful if not admirable traits, and I shall not hesitate to use them. The girl of five years ago would probably have starved—the woman I am now will not starve.

And now—I am going away. I could shriek aloud with joy when I think that I shall never see you again—your hands,

your voice, the way you walk, each individual thing about you which I hate with an individual hate.

What shall I do? How shall I support myself? I do not know. My accomplishments are not of the bread-winning kind, and yet I shall manage somehow. I can scheme and lie and deceive with the greatest ease and proficiency. Oh, yes, I have learned a number of useful if not admirable traits, and I shall not hesitate to use them. The girl of five years ago would probably have starved—the woman I am now will not starve.

And now—I am going away. I could shriek aloud with joy when I think that I shall never see you again—your hands,

I shall leave this on the pin-cushion. That is the proper place, is it not? And when you read it you must turn deathly white, clutch at a chair and cry, "My God!" With your florid complexion you may have some difficulty in turning white, but they can cry. It would add much to the effect.

The One That Was Sent: Dear John: I am sending by express the heavy underwear and that old shoddy jacket you wrote for. I am glad that game is so plentiful there, but am sorry

your rheumatism is worse. You had better get that prescription filled that Dr. Brown gave you last winter. It helped you almost at once.

Of course, I am disappointed that you are going to stay another week, for you know I miss you dreadfully. But then you really need the rest, and I am sure it will do you good. So do not hurry back.

I telephoned down to the office this morning and told them to continue forwarding your mail. I will write you again tomorrow.

Your loving wife.

This is more ghastly than anything I have ever known. For a woman to live with a man she loathes, even though in a way he may care for her, is more hideous than to live with a man she loves, though his love for her has ceased. In the last there is always the hope, the possibility that she may win back his love. In the first there is nothing—nothing but debasing horror and repulsion. . . . your hands, your voice, the way you walk—each individual thing about you which I hate with an individual hate."

Oh, it must be unspeakable degradation for any woman to live in the intimacy of marriage with a man for whom she feels such physical repulsion!

Horace comes tomorrow. June 14. I am filled with the hope that these two days here alone will bring us a little nearer together. Just the fact of his coming out to spend the week-end with me as he has done so many summers makes things seem as they used to be. It has given me a feeling almost of assurance—of confidence. Just now the menace of this woman does not seem quite so strong, quite so real. For after all he is coming out to me as he always has. Surely that means a great deal.

June 15. Horace is here. I went down to the station to meet the five train. It was a few minutes late, and as I waited my heart beat fast with hopes, plans, resolutions. I would greet him as I always used to—I would crush down this reticence, this re-

straint that had come between us. And perhaps he would respond—he would be as he was; it might even be that . . .

The train had drawn in. Almost at once I saw Horace's tall figure coming through the crowd toward me. He greeted me kindly; oh, yes, he was kind—deadly kind! But how quickly the hope died out of my heart, and again this weight of hopelessness and despair settled over me. He had come because it was his duty to come; he was kind because that was part of his duty, too. As I walked beside him to the hotel, I forced myself to make some trivial inquiries about the house, about Ellen. Through dinner the same constraint was upon us. Now he has gone for a walk by the beach. He asked me if I cared to go, but I knew he would rather go alone.

HOME, June 18th. Sunday night the Sea Cliff Hotel was burned to the ground. Two chamber-maids and a colored porter were killed, and many were injured. Oh, it was horrible! I can still see the flames against the black sky and hear the screams of fright and crash of falling walls.

I was awakened by Horace: "Mary, get something on as quickly as you can—you won't have time to dress!" I started up bewildered, terrified; the room was already full of smoke, and the roar and crackling of flames could be plainly heard. My first thought was for my journal and jewel-case. I ran to the dresser and slipped them into a small hand-bag.

"Never mind your things," Horace's voice came sternly. "Put something around you—quick!"

The smoke was thickening, sounds of voices and rushing feet came from the hall. Some one pounded on our door with the cry of "Fire!" and the knock and cry were repeated down the hall. Horace, who was only partially dressed, caught me in his arms, jerked a blanket from the bed and wrapped it around me. As he threw open the door, a cloud of black smoke rushed in upon us. The elevators were not running, and a struggling crowd of half-dressed people choked the stairway at the end of the hall. Carrying me easily, Horace turned toward a dim red-globed light, which marked a fire-escape at the end of the passage. The way led through a linen-room, the door of which was already open.

When he stepped through the window on the ladder-like structure I could see the flames leaping up from below, and a shower of sparks fell over us. "Not this way—let us go back!" I cried, struggling to slip from his arms. But he only held me closer.

"There is no other way, Mary." The quiet strength of his voice reassured me. From below came the heavy pumping engines, the shouts of firemen, and the screams of some hysterical woman. We were on the eighth floor; steadily, firmly, he carried me down that steep, narrow fire-escape. The heat was almost unbearable. Horace drew the blanket over my face to protect it from the falling sparks. The last flight was through the very flames themselves—even through the blanket I could feel their scorching heat.

When we reached the ground some one helped Horace unwrap the hot blanket from about me, and I stood in my bare feet on the water-soaked ground, among a network of fire hose, and with only a thin negligee over my night-dress. Again Horace lifted me in his arms and carried me through the crowd, across the street to a porch of one of the cottages.

Every one was very kind; we were given a room in the cottage, and a doctor was soon there dressing Horace's burns. His neck and shoulders were cruelly blistered. He had had no coat, and a thin linen shirt was no protection from the fierce heat.

At his dictation I wrote a number of telegrams, one for Ellen to come out on the first morning train with clothes for us both, and one for his office.

It was almost dawn before I could persuade him to lie down. I lowered the shades of the little cottage bedroom and then threw myself on a couch at the foot of the bed.

As I watched the flickering shadows from the dim lamp on the dressing-table I lived over again all the terrors of that night. If it had not been Sunday—if Horace, with his calm, quiet strength, had not been there!

What ghastly thoughts came to me at times! And one came to me then, the hideous thought of how easy it would have been for Horace not to have awakened me! Many men have killed their wives for the love of some other woman; and he had only to let me sleep peacefully—I tried to think of something else—to crush out a thought so cruelly unjust to him. And then came another—almost as hideous. If in some way she had been there! If he could have saved only one—and had to choose between us—which would it have been?

These flashed through my mind the incident of a prominent man, upon whom such a choice had been forced. He was rowing several miles from shore with his wife and her younger sister, whom he had just married, when that he loved. A storm arose suddenly, and the boat capsized. He could swim so great a distance carrying only one, and it had been the right boat—his wife's wife—that he had saved.

I sprang from the couch in physical protest against the horror of such a thought. The night breeze was full enough? Why must I now be haunted in this way?

"Are you still nervous, Mary? Won't you come over and see me?"

My heart leaped. I did not speak for fear of the joy and love in my voice. As I lay down by his side with my head upon his arm he had stretched out for me across the pillow, a great sense of peace and rest stole over me. All thoughts but that of his nearness left me. It had been so long since I had lain like that, and now it was as though I had come home—home—after months of weary yearning and wandering. The deep warmth and strength of his body pressed to my side, the all-aching weariness and heartiness of this long year, and rooted me with a wonderful rest and content.

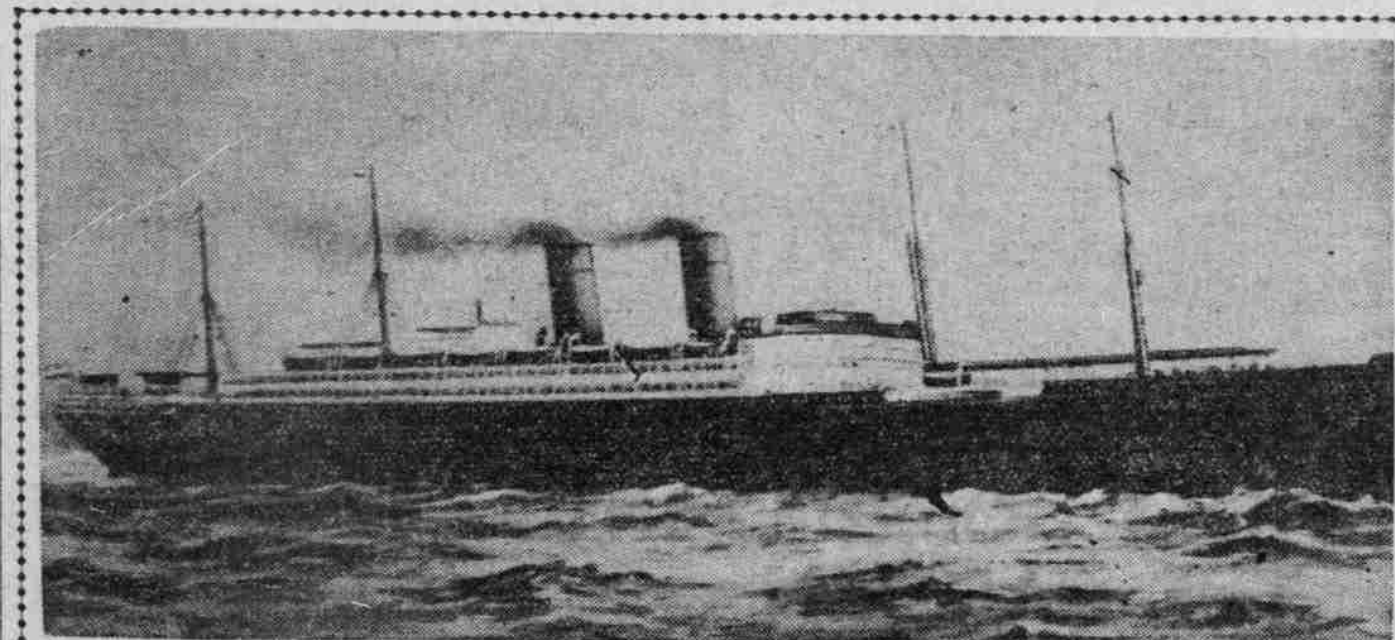
After a while his head tilted slightly, so that his lips touched my hair.

"Mary, third, brave little woman," he murmured softly. And then he quietly with his lips still against my hair.

And I knew that I would gladly go through again all the terrors of that night to feel once more his peace and joy and nearness that came to me then. Summers things seem as they used to be. It has given me a feeling almost of assurance—of confidence. Just now the menace of this woman does not seem quite so strong, quite so real. For after all he is coming out to me as he always has. Surely that means a great deal.



"AS HE OPENED THE DOOR A CLOUD OF BLACK SMOKE RUSHED IN ON US."



NEW STEAMSHIP IS NAMED AFTER GEORGE WASHINGTON.

NEW YORK, July 10.—(Special.)—The George Washington is a first-class, twin-screw, passenger and freight steamship, which has just finished its first trip. It has an alarm system for fire extinguishing and for giving the alarm from 18 parts of the ship in case of a fire. It has also the submarine bell system of signaling. For creature comforts it has a children's playroom, a solarium on the upper deck, two elevators, many private baths, etc. The ship is 732 feet 5 inches long and her tonnage is 27,000.