

Matrimonial Adventures

Mrs. Redmond's Shame

BY Maximilian Foster

Author of "The Whistling Mad," "Keeping Up Appearances," "Shoestrings," "The Whirlpool," "Rich Man, Poor Man," and "The Trap."

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MAXIMILIAN FOSTER

Maximilian Foster says of himself that he writes only when there is no fishing! And fishing is more than a hobby with him, for he has invented a fly that is not only a winner in snaring trout, but has equal merit in catching salmon. He will talk to you at length about the placatorial sport, but he is most reluctant to tell you how and when he started his career as an author.

I met him first some years ago in Maine, and it took all day before I elicited the following facts: Due to a desire to support himself by writing, he joined the newspaper world for the reason that he believed that the newspapers supplied the best experience. "The young writer," he says, "has little experience of life, but on a newspaper he not only gains his own, but gains a knowledge of other people's."

Mr. Foster's first story, 10,000 words in length and sold to the Atlantic Monthly, was written entirely at night in a newspaper office. He was doing rewrite work at the time, and would write down a page of that and then turn to a page of his own story. It was a long and laborious job, but after that first success he sold many stories to the Atlantic Monthly. He has written much fiction which appeared in the leading magazines. Mr. Foster attributes his success to his eight years of work in the newspaper world, but he has another record. During the time he was in the great war he was United States government correspondent abroad.

"Mrs. Redmond's Shame," written expressly for the Star Author Series of Matrimonial Adventures, carries its own particular message to the married man. MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

It was a quarter to eight that morning—a full fifteen minutes past the usual hour—when the door of Redmond's bedroom opened and Redmond hastily emerged. In the same haste he hurried toward the stairs. He was late, that was all there was to it—late at breakfast; and, as he reached the stairs, his eyes on the hall clock as he bristled along, his absorbed, somewhat boyish face wore on it a look of concern not unmingled with guilt.

"Dear, dear!" he clucked. To be late at one's own breakfast table is, of course, not so heinous an offense; but, as Redmond's haste denoted, the case here was different. Time—and with it promptness—naturally concerned a woman as active and indispensable as Redmond's wife. At any rate, in the life, the career she had made for herself, Mrs. Redmond had found it necessary to regulate her day to a schedule, every minute of which was actively employed. She was, in fact, that Myrta Redmond whose prominence as president of the Women's State Civic Federation was statewide, if not national; and with the demands this and her other activities made upon her, it was only reasonable that Redmond should do nothing to conflict with her appointed plans. He was, it seems, the minor official of an insurance company in the city.

An absorbed and reticent, self-effacing person, Redmond seldom if ever came in contact with his wife's official life. Even if he had, however, it is unlikely that he would have made much of an impression on her wide circle of acquaintances, her social and political associates. Among people of affairs, the selected, active set that surrounded Myrta Redmond, he would have been adjudged obscure, perhaps ineffectual—in a word, one they termed "domestic."

That, indeed, was the word. True, once in his wife's career, though it was only once, Redmond had appeared as honorary secretary of a meeting Mrs. Redmond had convened, the original appointee having succumbed at the final moment to a distressing attack of migraine. His shy embarrassment, however—his ignorance, too, of the more fundamentals of parliamentary law—at once had betrayed his unfitness; and, propelled from one embarrassing blunder into another, the ladies, his wife's associates and herself included, had diplomatically relieved him of the place.

The hall downstairs was long and spacious. It was, in fact, in character with all the house spacious not only, but even vast. However, though there were only those two to occupy it—they, John Redmond and his wife—this, too, had its explanation. Space, or as Myrta termed it, "scope," Myrta in her active life needed naturally; and it was for this the house had been selected, a habitation suitably roomy for committee meetings for caucuses and the like. But then, this air of largeness, of "scope," was due not entirely to the size of the structure itself; the furnishings—that, or rather, the lack of them, accented this; and, as Redmond hastened along the hall, the sight of its present bare emptiness pricked him with another thrust of

conscience, a stab. Tonight a meeting, a committee caucus, was to be held. Myrta's candidacy and her campaign for a state office were to be discussed; and already the man-of-all-work, prompt at the task, had begun to move out the chairs, the tables and other furnishings. Later, they would be replaced by rows of folding stools chartered from the local undertaker.

Redmond's concern grew more evident. He was still hurrying; but as he reached the breakfast room and stepped inside he stopped abruptly. "Hello!" he exclaimed. The breakfast room was vacant. Mrs. Redmond was neither there, nor, as it appeared, had she already breakfasted and gone; and, staring at her empty place, Redmond's astonishment grew.

The day was one of vital importance to his wife. At 8 p. m. the caucus would be called; and from now till then every moment of her time would be taken, planning, arranging, seeing fellow members, marshaling all her forces for the night. The office she sought was that of state supervisor, the peak, the apex of all her present activities and ambitions; and, as Redmond knew too, her candidacy for the place was to be no easy victory. Already opposition had reared its head; and, his air of questioning, his astonishment growing on him, Redmond hurriedly drew out his watch.

He had made no mistake, however. It was a quarter to eight—fifteen minutes past the hour; and again Redmond shot a glance at his wife's vacant place. He was still standing there, watch in hand and wondering, when the pantry door opened, and a gaunt, angular figure in cap and apron appeared. It was a maid, the Redmond's waitress. "You're late," she greeted abruptly, bluntly.

Redmond knew he was. That, however, did not concern him now. Neither was he the more concerned by the maid's brusque abruptness. Of his own choice, Redmond would have preferred a different, less thin-lipped, sore and flint-eyed Hebe to serve him his repasts; but Mrs. Redmond, naturally, had made the choice. The woman, Harriet Lipp, was a protégée of hers, a fragment, in fact, of that human social-wreckage Myrta Redmond, in part with her career, made it a habit to snatch from troubled waters and relaunch again in life. The waitress, in fact, owed not only her present place to Mrs. Redmond, she owed also her liberty to her, Mrs. Redmond's influence with the state pardon board having obtained Harriet Lipp's release from a three-years' sentence in the penitentiary. As Mrs. Redmond, however, had pointed out, it was for a crime of violence, not one of ignominiousness or stealth, for which Harriet had been committed; but of this distinction, a difference in Mrs. Redmond's view, Redmond was not thinking now.

"Where's your mistress?" he inquired. "Upstairs," the woman answered, briefly. The reply, too, was as blunt, as brusque as it was brief; and, his distaste of her growling, Redmond stared at the woman. "When is Mrs. Redmond coming down?" he asked. Harriet Lipp's air did not alter. "She ain't," she answered, and Redmond started.

"What?" "She's breakfasting abed," said Harriet Lipp. "In bed?" Redmond echoed. "Thuh huh!" repeated Harriet Lipp. Wondering, vaguely perturbed now, Redmond wandered to the table. In the same wonder he drew out a chair and seated himself, the maid watching him with hard, aggressive eyes. It was nothing new, though, that Redmond should breakfast alone. Often, in her full, active life, Mrs. Redmond was up and away even before he had come downstairs. There were days, too, often weeks, when her official duties, public affairs, called her entirely from her home. No, to be alone was nothing new. But now . . . Mrs. Redmond breakfasting in bed. That was new, yes.

A woman's trick—that breakfast in bed. It was a trick, too, a woman's trick, of a sort that Myrta heretofore would have scorned. The soft, the indulgent, the femininely feminine things popularly presumed of womanhood, Mrs. Redmond instinctively and contemptuously disdained. To her they meant but one thing, a confession of sex, of the weakness a confession of sex involved. The parity of the sexes, the abolition, rather, of all sex, that was Mrs. Redmond's watchword.

"Here!" Redmond said sharply to the maid, "bring me my eggs and coffee." He sat there, staring at his hands. Something had happened, he saw that; something visibly out of the way. Redmond, in fact, in the twelve years of his married life, had grown, if only subconsciously, too familiar with his wife's ways, her habits, not to sense that something unusual had occurred to her. His indications, however, were not merely the otherwise trivial circumstances of her breakfasting in bed; of late he had noted in his wife's usual calm, her somewhat complacent self-restraint, a hint of nervous temperament—a reaction as if she labored under some secret weight, a burden. Thence, now, a frown puckered on his brow. What had troubled her? He wondered, his uneasiness gaining ground.

It was rarely, if ever, now, in these latter years that Mrs. Redmond confided in the man she'd married. Between the two it was as if the usual marital situation had become reversed—he, not she, the dependent; she the master hand. The change, however, if such had happened, was not just

equitable; for Redmond, if he were the inferior, bent under what virtually was a double responsibility, that of the provider, the one who brought in the living; with that, he, to all intents and purposes, ran the household as well. Of that never mind, however. With all the other calls on Mrs. Redmond there might have been no household, save that John Redmond had stepped into the breach. He had not complained. Overshadowed by his wife, submerged in her growing prominence, the added task John Redmond had shouldered as if a duty, his.

He was not thinking of it now. He was not thinking, either, of how he himself had become submerged, thrust inconspicuously into the background of their married life. Wonder still reigned among his thoughts; and, in their confusion, his mind leaped with a quick informality from one thought to another. It is the way with those who mull things over, solitaires. Something was wrong, wrong with Myrta Redmond; and his mind dwelt on that; something wrong with Myrta. With Myrta, yes, not just Mrs. Redmond. You understand, no doubt. In other words, there were in Redmond's mind two figures, always two: Myrta, first; then—well, the other, Mrs. Redmond. The two were vividly distinct. Myrta, the one he'd married, had (to him) never changed; she still was the one, the same; but the other, Mrs. Redmond who'd taken his name, still was using it—she and Redmond were far apart. It was only at odd intervals now, brief and far apart, that the Myrta he'd married came back to him. She was still there, though. She was there now. Trouble . . .

A "mere" husband, an appendage. Well, the term fitted well enough. It was queer, though, the twist the moment gave to it. In trouble, if she were Mrs. Redmond was not merely Mrs. Redmond. He was a husband—yes; and instinctively to him she became transformed. She was Myrta; and as Myrta, his wife, if Myrta needed help . . .

Redmond, starting, had half risen from his chair when the pantry door opened, and the woman, Harriet Lipp, stalked forth. "There's y'r eggs," she pronounced. Redmond resumed his seat. To Myrta he could have done, offering aid. To Mrs. Redmond—well, that was different.

He sat there, musing. The Lipp woman had withdrawn; and his eggs grew cold within the cup. Mulling it over, his thoughts were now going at full tilt, galloping. In the way with those who mull, one thing ran into another, piling up in magnitude. If something really was wrong, what was it? A hundred thoughts raced into his mind . . . Politics . . . Schemes . . . Plots for place, for power. . . With women, women didn't differ much from men. Politics, too, were Mrs. Redmond's daily pabulum. Had she done something? Had she compromised herself? Unwittingly had she let herself into something ugly? Vague stories, sinister whispers of politics, public affairs, leaped into his remembrance. Her ambitions he knew. He knew, too, that she—that is, Mrs. Redmond—would make no distinction in methods. "In politics no sex" was the watchword of these women, Mrs. Redmond's associates, hers as well. They fought with the same tools as the men. But if Myrta . . .

Myrta again—Myrta, not Mrs. Redmond. An exclamation, sharp, explosive, escaped him. Shoving back his chair he rose abruptly. Harriet Lipp, as if her eye had been glued to the crack in the pantry door, at once shoved it open. "Say, you ain't of y'r breakfast!" she barked.

Redmond had flung down his napkin on the cloth. He looked at the figure in the doorway. "What did your mistress say?" he demanded. Harriet Lipp's eyes narrowed defensively. "Say when?" she countered. "This morning—just now!" rapped Redmond, his temper rising. "Is she ill?" he snapped again. "No, she ain't," the woman answered.

"Then why isn't she coming down?" asked Redmond. With direct finality the woman answered him. "She's a-breakfastin' abed," said Harriet Lipp. That ended it.

For a long moment afterwards the hard-featured maid stood there at the pantry door, one hand at her breast, her face strained as she gazed after him. A breath escaped her. The mystery of all this, though, was not revealed to Redmond. Already he was at the stairway hurrying upward.

Mrs. Redmond's room was at the front of the house, on the floor above. For years—four years now, nearly five—she and her husband had occupied separate rooms. As Redmond reached the door he paused. His hand uplifted, he made as if to knock, then desisted. Standing there, he put one ear to the panel and listened. It was only for an instant, though. The next instant, without even the formality of a knock, he thrust open the door and stepped inside.

"Myrta!" he exclaimed. She lay there among the coverings of the bed, her back to him; and as he entered, calling to her, she did not move. Along the pillows the masses of her thick, silky hair, like ropes of burnished copper, lay strewn; and above the counterpane a limp, slender arm, gleefully rounded and plump, revealed itself. She was still young, only a year or so over thirty; and now, as Redmond looked at her, her figure among the coverings seemed appealingly slight and youthful. More than that, though, in its supine pose at the moment there was a suggestion of lax-

ity, of helpless dejection that he was quick to see. "Myrta!" he cried again. She answered him then. It was, however, Mrs. Redmond who spoke, not the Myrta he called who roused. Nor did she turn. From among the pillows her voice rose, formal and precise—the voice of Mrs. Redmond, the public woman's voice. "What is it?" she inquired.

Redmond paused midway across the room. His air, his look, eager and anxious, altered, too. "You all right?" he questioned. A pause. She still did not turn, and in the pause he stirred uncomfortably. Then from the bed came her voice, its note, as before, still precise. "All right? . . . Why do you ask, pray?"

Uncertainly, he took a step toward her. "Why, you see, you didn't come to your breakfast," he faltered. Again she replied, this time with a change, a note of petulance in her voice. "I'm breakfasting here," she said. "I know—but the meeting—tonight's—your time," he faltered again. Another pause. Then, from the pillows the reply. It came slowly, as if, with the effort, ponderously. "There is to be no meeting," said Mrs. Redmond.

"What?" interrogated Redmond. A movement of restless impatience stirred among the pillows. "I have called it off—canceled it." Perplexed, he ruffled up his brows. "You have postponed it?" he inquired. There was again a movement among the pillows, sharp, vehement, visibly emphatic. "I have told you once," Mrs. Redmond said, as sharply; "there is to be no meeting. That is enough, isn't it?" she uttered crisply.

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THE RIGHT THING at the RIGHT TIME By MARY MARSHALL DUFFEE IN A LIBRARY My library was dukedom large enough. —Shakespeare.

ONCE upon a time young women, unmarried, were enjoined by sticklers on behavior not to visit public libraries or picture galleries or museums unless they were accompanied by a chaperon or escort of some sort—that is, unless they were forced to do so in pursuit of their daily bread. Now our children go to the libraries alone from the time they are able to go anywhere, and there could hardly be a better place for them to spend their time. But they should be cautioned to abide by certain rules of good manners when in a library if they are to be welcome visitors.

In the first place, the rule of silence should be obeyed very punctiliously. And for that reason there is distinctly an advantage in going alone to a library, for then there is no temptation to talk. To go with a friend to a library without some serious intention of studying or reading is certainly in very poor taste. In cities there is always a class of persons who go to the library because it is a comfortable sort of place, well heated in winter and cool in summer, better perhaps than their own homes as a place for an idle hour, agreeable for a nap now and then and not a bad place for a little flirtation. Sometimes you will even see one of these library enthusiasts snatching a bit of cold lunch from a paper bag kept covertly hidden from the vigilant eye of the librarian under cover of a book.

So do not make that sort of convenience of your library. Do not use it as a rendezvous, as a convenient place to meet the young woman whose family does not wish to receive you in the home. Always remember when you are in a library that if you have any questions they should be addressed to one of the persons in attendance. If you do not know how to use the catalogues do not consult another reader, but go to one of the librarians, whose business it is to give just that sort of instruction. If you do not know where to find a bit of information for which you are in search, you are quite at liberty to ask one of the librarians to help you.

Usually women do not remove their hats in public places. That is, it would be regarded in very exceptional taste to take off the hat in a department store or for luncheon at a restaurant; and only when the journey is to be long would a woman remove her hat in a railroad train. But it is perfectly all right for a woman to remove her hat when she is going to read for any length of time in the library. In a large library she may check this with her coat and any other accessories at the entrance door, or she may simply slip it from her head after she has taken her place at her seat. It is extremely inconsiderate, however, to spread one's hat and other personal belongings about so as possibly to be an inconvenience to others. Wet umbrellas should never be carried into a library. If there is no checking desk they should be left in the umbrella rack at the door.

Insouciant. "Weren't you awfully embarrassed, sitting through such a play with Charlie?" "Oh, no, not at all. The dear boy didn't dream that I had the faintest idea what it was all about."

Why Not Bank on Your Bank? That hard-headed man who sits out to the railing and nods coldly at you, even though you have had an account there for years, is not a fish-blooded money changer. He's a friend, ready to do you service if you will let him. The next time you start to invest a few dollars in some gaudy proposition, stop and ask him. He'll likely shake his head and say you are making a mistake. You'll be sure he is rut-minded, and go your way, determined to get more than his measly 4 per cent. But if you'd let him, that same clammy guy would suggest some good securities which would pay you 6 per cent or better, and probably make a net profit for you. We print this because the United States Department of Justice says that \$100,000 per year, right along, are lost by suck-investors.—Colliers Weekly.

Since women are entering all lines of business, a Baltimore woman swindled another woman of \$25,000. Of course spring time is for the old warning. "Get an auto, or an auto will get you." There are 59,063,830 silver dollars in circulation, all going about 60 miles an hour. Putting up a good front helps many a man get backing.

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C. W. Barron, the noted financial editor, says in a cable from Jerusalem that there is not water enough in all that city to maintain the bathrooms of a good-sized modern hotel. Bryan, Wm. J., asks the public officials to quit drinking. We ask them to quit acting as if drunk.

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