

Matrimonial Adventures

"Miss Confee"

BY

Joseph Hergesheimer

Author of "The Three Black Pennies," "Mountain Blood," "The Lay Anthony," "Gold and Iron," "Java Head," "Indiana Condon," "Cytherea," etc.

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PERSONALITY OF JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

Books and authors—they belong together. You read the words compiled into telling description, amazing characterization and thrilling romance, and vision the author anew in each of his productions. With Joseph Hergesheimer you travel back and forth through the years, into distant countries and customs, or he takes you for a jaunt into your own time and among your own people. He wields a magician's wand. I had never met him until the evening of one of the Authors' League dinners. I had gone to it hoping that he would be there, but the dinner was almost over and no one had seen him. I did not know him even by sight, but it was a strange thing that as I watched three late comers enter I asked the woman seated next to me if she knew Joseph Hergesheimer. "There he is now," she said, "that last man who came in."

We talked the next day, this big American author and I, not at all as if he were one of the most prominent of our American writers, but just as an American who was interested in America's literary ideals. And that is the big thing that impresses you in Mr. Hergesheimer—his instant grasp of a vital subject. He deals with life honestly, he treats it directly, with force and human feeling.

MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

Just as she was about to vanish from his office Lewis Bettelman stopped Miss Confee. While she had been sitting beyond the arm extension of his desk, listening, as usual, with her gaze concentrated on a pencil turning in her thin fingers, he had been half conscious of something disturbing in her appearance. This impression had left him, been absorbed in the immediate subject of his address, but it had returned in time for him to bring her to a stop at the door.

"Miss Confee," he said. She came half-way back, her brow marked by a query in which there was a trace of impatience. "What I wanted to say was—" he began; but this displeased him. "I was thinking lately," he went ahead more directly, "that you've had too much to do. Now this last matter is disposed of you might as well take a rest. The shore's nice late in May; you'd better run down for a week or so."

"But this last isn't done," she replied, sharply; "we don't know as we can get a leather that will suit our purpose; the prices'll have to be lower than any we're quoted on the first-class material; and we ain't right certain how many jobs it would take to bring us out."

"Details," he replied, dismissing them with a waved hand. "No, I'm set on you getting a rest. You've been going it too hard at the office again." A slightly deepened color answered his solicitude. "No more than usual," she answered him. "I can take a day or two later, when things are fixed." In reply he asked her mother was.

"Well enough," she replied almost defiantly. "You work yourself to death for me here, and the same at home for your mother." Lewis Bettelman grew excited, angry. "The fact is," he exclaimed, "that you ought to have an interest in this office. If the world was run right you would have, too; you'd own 50 per cent of this business today. It wouldn't have been anything without you." She tried to stop his speech, but it swept her remonstrance aside. "You've been with me fourteen years in all; and since Swope died, you and me have been it. You've seen it come right along from a half-dead carriage repository to a pretty lively little automobile accessory concern. You brought it up as much as anyone—that's what you did; yes, sir, and more. You gave it taste, you gave our jobs tone; and that's what sold them. And now, I won't have you working yourself to death. If it wasn't for my family—"

Suddenly Lewis Bettelman's energy suffered a collapse. "I want you to take a holiday," he added impotently. "Is that all, Mr. Bettelman?" she demanded.

He wouldn't answer her nor glance up, and, after a moment, he heard the soft impact of the door. "H—!" he swore silently fidgeting. All that he had said to Miss Confee was true; it was, rather than an exaggeration, an understatement. She had been in valuable. As it was in the past year—the worst of years—he had made fourteen thousand dollars. This year, and it was only May, it was clear that the profits would be sixteen—or better. Or better! Miss Confee, that was the answer.

He wondered how old she was—near to forty, certainly, not a good-looking woman, nothing like as pretty as Nanine, his wife, had been; and, of course, not within sight of Eldreda, his daughter. Miss Confee was too

thin, too small; and then her hair was no particular color. She wore glasses of an unbecoming pattern, that a little magnified her very earnest onyx-brown eyes; and her clothes . . . to save his life, after being with her day and day for fourteen years, he couldn't remember a detail of her dress; inexpensive, it would be that. The care of her mother must absorb most of her salary.

He had spoken of her good taste, exercised in the direction of specialties for automobiles; that was splendid, but it wasn't her best quality; she was principally remarkable for the energy of her mind, her energy and a quality of determination, of—of courage. But, at last, she was showing the effects of this; or, as he had said, perhaps she was only tired. He would make her take a rest; he'd shut the office, close it down, he thought extravagantly. If he couldn't get her away by other means.

As it was, he paid Miss Confee as much as he could get her to accept. She had positively refused a further raise. He wished, vainly, that Nanine and Miss Confee might be closer to each other, as close as possible . . . but on Nanine's account. This desire suddenly recalled to him the startling fact that Miss Confee, except, once when he had been ill, to take dictation, had never been in his house. The Confrees, mother and daughter, had rooms in the congested city, but his house was in a suburb, where it was restful, quiet and green.

His customary train of late afternoon carried him for forty minutes through the city to its outskirts and the development of which his home was a part. Eldreda was outside, in a deep wicker chair, absorbed in a magazine of the moving picture world. She was nineteen, had large, appealing eyes, a spectacular pile of naturally blonde hair, and she had taken third prize in a beauty contest conducted by just such a magazine as she was reading.

The photograph of her upon which this triumph had been based, greatly enlarged, hung prominently on the wall in the living room. In it her firm shoulders were draped in a precariously informal seeming piece of silk, her hair was dressed to its utmost effectiveness; and she regarded the world with an innocent and tender surprise. Her mouth the photographer had softened in shadow.

She nodded to her father, and instantly returned to the page before her. Eldreda, he knew, was cross because he wouldn't send her to California in order to complete the success so auspiciously begun. Sending her

He went on into the house, and up to Nanine's and his room. His wife was reclining on a couch. Since she had grown so fat she found it necessary to rest a great deal. That fatness had come upon her so overwhelmingly that any vestige of struggle had been doomed from the first. She had simply expanded until she resembled an inflated caricature of Eldreda.

"There you are," she said languidly. "Yes, here I am," he agreed; "I thought, maybe, Nanine, the evening was so fine we'd all take a little ride after supper."

"It blows my hair," she answered without interest, "and that back seat is too short. To say nothing of Eldreda's complexion."

"Now look here," he cried, "I've heard enough about that back seat and Eldreda's complexion and your hair. There's a nice little limousine I fixed up and the owner can't pay for it. Well, I can get it right and I'm going to buy it for you girls. How's that, hey?"

"It might be good and then it mightn't," she told him; "it depends if it rains inside. If it does it will hurt my head."

"I'd hate to think over the times my head's been hurt through raining," he retorted, with a display of spirit, "and there is another thing I got to speak of—that's Eldreda. I'm not going to give her three thousand dollars to go to California with, and she might as well stop posing and posturing. I ain't a camera, I ain't a director, and it'll get her nowhere."

"Sooner or later," Nanine asserted. "What do you mean?" he demanded heatedly.

"Genius will be justified," she added emphatically.

Suddenly he felt absolutely helpless; nothing he could say would move, affect, his wife, nothing touch his daughter. It might be wiser to give Eldreda the money at once, to speed her into the West, to the acclaim and fortune so surely—in her estimation and her mother's—waiting for her.

"Now if I was West I could get about more," Nanine asserted. The weather there, they say, is elegant. This was a new phase of the western project and he was startled at the possibilities it opened. Did she mean that she would go out with Eldreda, he asked. Nanine did. He could spend the winters with them.

"Who would run the business, pay for so much?" This question, very silently, he answered for himself, Miss Confee. She could, very nearly, almost, do just that. But not quite; it was the combination of Miss Confee and himself that was so potent.

The memory of the weariness he had discerned in his secretary came back to trouble him. She had grown visibly older in the past year. The day had stayed warm into evening; and they, Nanine and Eldreda and he, were seated on the porch. There was an illusory glimmer of moonlight, at intervals there was a faint star in the locust trees along the sidewalk, and the ingratiating subdued ripple of a piano. At irregular intervals Eldreda sighed explosively, agonized with the

tragedy of everything; and then she was veiled from Lewis Bettelman by the dark, he knew exactly to which emotions she was giving form and body.

Perhaps, with his slight assistance, she might mount in a dazzling arc to stardom in the sky. He wasn't, he felt, mean; but, aside from the already comparatively large cost of his family, there was the greatest need now to turn everything possible back into his business . . . It could be counted on to make, when all was considered, tremendous returns. In three years, it might be, they could easily send Eldreda to the South seas, and he said so, aloud.

"I suppose," her voice answered out of the gloom, "you chose the South seas so's you wouldn't have to buy me any clothes."

"On the contrary," he replied explicitly, "I was trying to think of the farthest and most expensive place I could. It seems like, with you and your mamma, a person is always misunderstood."

"Don't pick continual on Eldreda. I won't have it," her mamma put in. "You can't seem to learn that Eldreda's delicate. She's not a pot but a fine vase easily shattered."

"Well," he replied pacifically, "it's too nice an evening for ructions. Things is going too smooth for that." The smoothness of "things" brought Miss Confee back to mind; and, after a moment's forced hopeful consideration, he spoke of her to his family.

"Now, take Miss Confee—"

"Who's she?" Nanine demanded.

"That's his stenographer," Eldreda explained.

"She is more than that, Eldreda," he patiently corrected her; "Miss Confee is a good half of our business. She's been with me now for fourteen years, and in the first month after I got her she near to paid for all she's had since. Taste! That's where she's valuable, that's what she is; we're a small house, but I tell you our work's been complimented by big people. We are going, not coming. What I am getting at is this, and I know—" he hesitated shortly, and then began again with a rush. "I know you'll both back me up, Miss Confee's been with me, us, for fourteen years now, and she's a part of the place. The truth is she can't work any more without me than I can her. If anything happened to that she'd be gone. It's her mother and her honesty both together; her mother's got a kind of expensive sickness and Miss Confee won't take anything from me but a dogged moderate salary. She won't have a penny more, after all she's given us; but with your help, with your approval, I've thought of a way to make her safe, when I pass on to my California. It's this—we will give her an interest in the business, make her a small partner like."

He waited, on the mark of an optimistic interrogation, through the deep silence that followed, a silence finally shattered with an unqualified derision.

"Partner," said Nanine, "partner, her, a stenographer? You're mad, ain't you?"

His momentary unwarranted expectations, like glass, fell swiftly, shattering on the hard ground of reality. Eldreda giggled.

"You don't know the best, because you haven't seen her—why, she's a million and looks like an old wisk broom with most of the straws out. I'll tell the street Pa's got some taste himself, I'll say so."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Lewis Bettelman's wife told him, "trying that on us. You must think we never see anything of life. What makes me mad is your speaking it right out to us, before your daughter."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, vaguely trying to face them both.

"Take it to the fireplace," this was Eldreda.

"How long has this been going on?" Nanine asked.

Drawn rigidly upon the edge of his chair, with his face burning, he was, at first, unable to reply to either. When he spoke it was in a repressed, hard tone. "I told you," he said, "I told you Miss Confee had been with me fourteen years, and I told you, too, that we had her to thank for a half of our success. What I was trying to find out was could she hope for a little kindness from you so's she could look easy at any future. Do you understand—while Eldreda and you have been setting, sitting, at home reading moving picture magazines, Miss Confee and I were in it with our last breath keeping a roof over your heads and wondering where we'd all be next year. She's helped to make every deal we've pulled out on—those nights I was so late we were sitting up figuring in dimes—"

A desolating feeling of the uselessness of any attempted explanation smothered his determined effort, and a fresh silence fell upon them.

"Don't you give her a Christmas present?" Nanine asked. "I said, don't you give her a present at Christmas?" "Yes," he replied, finally.

"Well, then—?"

Lewis Bettelman laughed, a sorry variety of mirth. "I'll tell what," he proclaimed to the dark: "I'm going to bring Miss Confee right home to supper and let you see for yourselves."

He was doubtful about the wisdom of this later; going to the office he resolved it again and again in his mind, but, confident that Miss Confee's splendid qualities must be clear even to his family, he asked her, very formally, to supper at his home. She was obviously startled, almost distressed, and instinctively she declined the invitation. "Nonsense," he replied, back on his customary footing with her; "of course you'll come. My wife said very particularly." That latter,

Well, she'd think; Miss Confee didn't have a thing suitable to wear; the gray voile . . . That was Thursday, and, finally, it was arranged that she should go out with Lewis Bettelman, for an evening at his home, on Monday.

"Isn't it ridiculous we never thought of this before?" he said to her on the train.

Neither his wife nor Eldreda was visible when, with Miss Confee, he reached the porch of his home. "Nanine," he called through the open door, "Here we are." There was no answer, and he was placing Miss Confee in a comfortable chair when Eldreda appeared. Her manner, he recognized, was that of the earl's daughter meeting the faithful retainers from the castle terrace—there was a quick smile, a widening of the notable eyes, followed by a congealing of every human aspect.

Lewis Bettelman knew this posture well, and it specially irritated him.

"Mamma," she said, "has a touch of neuralgia, and asks to be excused."

"I didn't know that," he admitted incautiously; "I'll go right up and see her."

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded sharply, standing before the recumbent Nanine.

"It hurts my face to talk," she explained hastily. He gazed steadily at her, and then, without further speech, turned and left the room. It was too bad about Mrs. Bettelman, Miss Confee said. They were at the table, and he was eating in a savage silence. Eldreda's hands drooped like spent lilies on her wrists. She couldn't think why they had cottage cheese—a disgusting dish.

"Smear-case," Lewis Bettelman corrected her, taking a conspicuous second helping. His disappointment, his resentment and anger, had hardened within him; he scarcely noticed Miss Confee, so slight in the gray voile, with an appropriate pale flower under the close rim of her hat. After supper the three sat uneasily in a May evening palpably silver under the moon, a warm spring breeze barely stirred the foliage of the trees, a piano played and stopped.

Lewis Bettelman's anger deserted him, but he ached as though it had left an actual wound. Eldreda rose, remaining immobile, statueque, waiting for a moment, and then, without explanation, vanished into the hall. This created in his mind an image of her leaving for the West, for California. His wife, as well, had spoken of going. He could come out and see them in the winters. Sharply a voice within him whispered, cried, that he, didn't have to; they couldn't drag him to California.

It wasn't, however, of himself that he was thinking, nor of Eldreda and Nanine, but of Miss Confee. His admiration for her, he discovered, was immeasurable. And rightly; a person of integrity, who had given her vitality, her life, to him and his interest. Now she was an old maid. But he discarded that term as soon as it occurred to him—Miss Confee was nothing so absurd. With money, with the security he was about to offer her, she'd have more hats with roses, roses pink and not gray.

"Miss Eldreda is beautiful," she said, sudden and wistful. "We must see that she gets to California. Couldn't we do it this fall, Mr. Bettelman?"

"This summer," he corrected her; "and Mrs. Bettelman is going with her."

"But who will stay with you?" Miss Confee demanded.

"I'll be all right," he assured her. "I can go out and see them in the winters . . . If I have to."

"I don't understand," she replied, slowly.

"You will soon enough," all his restraint was gone. "I don't care how soon they leave and if they never come back. If my money is all they want they can have it, most of it, and I'm well rid of them. What are they to me, I'd like to know, the way you are? Nothing. You and me have slaved for them long enough. From now on we're going to work some for ourselves, we're going to have a little ease and days off rolling over the country."

Turned toward Miss Confee he saw her sway in her chair, and then she blundered to her feet—

"Mr. Bettelman!" her voice was so choked that she was practically inarticulate. "What—what do you mean? Whatever in my conduct gave you the liberty to say such things?" She sank back into the chair. "I'm, I'm all in a tremble." There was the stopped heave of a sob. "Understand that I am leaving your employment as soon as you can get somebody else."

"Miss Confee," Lewis Bettelman was aghast, "how could you think I'd insult you—you being you and me, me. I only want to protect you, your old age, I mean. I tried to get Mrs. Bettelman and Eldreda to agree in making you a partner, but it was no good, they couldn't see it; so I was going to let them go."

"You put it very queer," she said; "but I'm sorry I took you like that. Thank you, Mr. Bettelman—" a tremor shook and interrupted her. In the silence which followed he was conscious of the fragrance of the locust petals as they scattered through the air. Life might, it ought to be, the same, happy and free and—and sweet. Miss Confee's voice, small but indelible, final, answered his vague rebellious aspiration. "I could never accept anything from you that way; remember who they are . . . your wife and daughter!"

From the floor above came the thin sound of a lazy and contemptuous snigger.

COUNTY STATISTICS

Malheur County Real Estate Transfers Recorded During Week July 7th to 14th.

U. S. A. to Ambrose D. Callahan—S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 29; NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 32; and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 31-37-46. 2-15-23.

U. S. A. to Andrew Hansen—SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Lots 2, 3 and 4, Sec. 18; and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 19-13-42. 5-18-23.

Milton B. Sexton et ux to Lewis Hyde-Lots 18 and 19, Block 3, Riverside Add. to Ontario. 5-9-23.

U. S. A. to Samuel M. Simpson—E $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ Sec. 35; SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 26; NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 13-16-40. 8-28-22.

Fritz R. Miller et al to Arthur J. Glover—S $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 9-18-47. 5-29-23. \$1.00. (Q. C. Deed)

Sheriff H. Lee Noe to First National Bank of Elgin—NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 21-15-46. 6-26-23. \$3,250.00.

D. K. Robie et ux to The Weiser National Bank—SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 32-15-47. 7-9-23. \$1.00.

Richard E. Heuser et ux to Frances Bierman—5 acres in NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 20-18-7 6-1-23. \$1,550.00.

Complaints Filed in Circuit Court. Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. vs N. A. Mead. 7-9-23. Recovery on Account. \$957.00.

Will R. King vs. Brogan Irrigation District. 7-11-23. Recovery on Account. \$1,950.00.

Boise Payette Lumber Co. vs W. F. Lyman. 7-13-23. Recovery on Note.

Petitions Filed in Probate Court. Estate of Sylvania E. Ward. 7-9-23.

Bills of Sale. Bankers Discount Corporation to Grace A. Rutherford—166 horses and mules. 6-23-23. \$10.00.

CLUB NEWS NOTES

ITEMS OF INTEREST ABOUT THE BOYS AND GIRLS.

CLUB NEWS

The members of the River Dale Club consists of ten members whose names are Alvan Van Buren, President, Rex Guilford, Vice President, Grant Weber, Secretary, Wilford Weber, Marion Little, Wayne Guilford, Dennis Raich, Leslie Guilford, Morgan Shaw, Dexter Shaw.

The meeting was called to order by Alvan Van Buren. The minutes were read by Grant Weber.

The business part of the meeting consisted of judging live Stock. Mr. O. E. Green our local leader gave us some important points on Dairy cows and Pigs.

Later in the meeting we organized a Base Ball team.

Grant Weber, Sec.

Uncommon Sense

By JOHN BLAKE

SWELLED HEADS

YOU will find victims of swelled heads on every bench in the park, in every bread line, in every poorhouse, in every jail.

It is an easily communicable and a deadly disease. The only cure for it is a severe jolt, and sometimes it is the remedy that success is made of.

Remember that a little success is often easily come by. Sometimes it is due almost wholly to luck. Sometimes it follows advancement through favoritism, which is probably the worst thing that can happen to anybody.

In any event, no success can survive a swelled head.

If in the early years of your career you find yourself well ahead of the fellows who started with you, look out. You have still a long way to travel.

If you are satisfied with yourself, be sure you will never get any better. And if you don't get any better you will soon begin to go back.

Authority cannot safely be entrusted to any man till he shows that his head will not be affected by it.

Once let him begin to make bad use of it, to domineer, and to bully, and he might as well bid any further progress good-bye.

Remember always that big men never get the swelled head, or if they do get a slight attack they soon recover.

If you have begun to think that you are "doing pretty well thank you," and to pity the poor devils who are not as bright as you are, stop and take stock.

Don't think about the men who have passed, but about the men who have passed you. Consider the important men of your acquaintance, and of history.

Read their biographies, and note how they continually struggled to make themselves capable of bigger and better work. There is no time to get a swelled head when a man is really going up. It is the chap who stops to admire himself who falls victim to conceit.

If you are as great a man as Lincoln, as Shakespeare, as Napoleon, puff and strut all you please. But the chances are you are not. And until you are perfectly sure that you are, keep on trying. The study of big men will give you less time to admire yourself, and thereby save you from a malady that is absolutely fatal to any important success.

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REPORT

all the news happenings that come to your attention to this office. It will be appreciated for every piece of news will make the paper more interesting for you as well as others. We want and with your help will print all

THE NEWS