

## Desperate Coughs

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## The Way of A Woman...

(Helen Rowland in S. F. Chronicle.)

"Why is a woman?" snapped the bachelor, flinging himself into the big armchair opposite the widow, with a challenging glance.

"Why—why, because," stammered the widow, startled at his sudden appearance.

"I know it," said the bachelor with conviction.

"And there are lots of other reasons, Mr. Travers."

"But they aren't reasonable," declared the bachelor doggedly.

The widow closed her book with a sigh and laid it on the table beside her.

"Who said they were?" she said witheringly. "Neither is a woman. Being reasonable is so stupid. It's worse than being suitable, or sensible, or—or proper."

The bachelor lifted his eyebrows in mild astonishment.

"I thought those were virtues," he protested.

"They are, Mr. Travers," returned the widow crushingly, "and that's why they're so uninteresting. You might as well ask why is music, or painting, or patte rafe gras, or champagne, or ice cream, or anything else charming and delicious—"

"And utterly useless."

"Of course," agreed the widow, leaning back and thoughtfully twisting the bit of lace she called a handkerchief. "It's the utterly useless things that make the world attractive and pleasant to live in—like flowers and bonbons and politics and and love—"

"And tobacco," added the bachelor reflectively.

"Woman is the dessert to the feast," went on the widow, "the trimmings on the garment of life, the spice in the pudding. Of course, a man can eat his dinner without dessert or champagne and live his life without kisses or a woman—but somehow he never does."

"And that's just where he gets into trouble," retorted the bachelor promptly. "If you could only tell, he went on pathetically, 'what any one of them was going to do or why she was going to do it, or—'"

"Then it isn't 'Why is a woman?' but 'Why does a woman?' that you wanted to know," interrupted the widow helpfully.

"That's it!" cried the bachelor, "why does she get off a car backward? Why does she wear a skirt four yards long and then get furious if you step on it? Why does she make a solemn and important engagement without the slightest intention of keeping it? Why does she

MAID OR MOTHER, WIFE OR WIDOW, SHE CAN CHANGE HER MIND LIKE THE WIND.

put on open-work stockings and gaudy shoes and hold her frock as high as she dare—and then annihilate you if you stare at her? Why does she use everything that is not intended to be used—a hairpin to pick a lock, a button-hook to open a can, a hairbrush to hammer a nail, a hatpin to rob a letter box, a razor to sharpen a pencil and a cup and saucer to decorate the mantelpiece? Why does she gush over the woman she hates worst and snub the man she is dying to marry? Why does she lick all the glue off a postage stamp and then try to make it stick? Why does she cry at a wedding and act frivolous at a funeral? Why does she put a new feather on her hat and a new kink in her hair, and expect a man to notice it as quickly and be as astonished as he would if she had shaved her head or lost a limb? Why does she seem offended if you don't make love to her, and then get angry if you do? Why does she act kittenish when she's big and dignified, when she's little and old, when she's young and silly, when she's old? And why, oh, why, did you inveigle me into coming down to this miserable pink-and-white house party with the hope of being near you and then utterly ignore me and spend your time flirting with Bobby Taylor, while I sulk about like a lost sheep or run errands—"

"For Miss Manners?" suggested the widow cuttingly.

"Miss Manners?" exclaimed the bachelor, scornfully.

"You once thought her very beautifully, Mr. Travers."

"That's just it!" retorted the bachelor. "Why didn't you let me go on thinking her beautiful—"

"As delicate as a sea shell, wasn't it?"

"Yes," snapped the bachelor, "and as—hollow."

The widow smiled enigmatically.

"Tell me," she said sympathetically, "what she has done to you."

"Well, for one thing," complained the bachelor, "she coaxed me out on the piazza last night in the moonlight, and then, when she had talked sentiment for half an hour and lured me to a dark spot and simply goaded me into taking her hand—"

The widow sat up straight.

"But you didn't do it, Billy Travers!"

"Of course, I did. It seemed almost an insult not to. And what did she do? She jerked it away, flung herself from me, rose like an outraged queen, turned on me with that 'I-thought-you-were-a-gentleman' air and said—"

The widow lay back in her chair and laughed.

"Oh mercy!" she said, wiping the tears from her eyes when she was able. "Excuse me, but—but—how did she look when she did it?"

"Well," confessed the bachelor, "she did look rather stunning."

"That's why she did it," explained the widow between laughs; "a woman's reason for doing most things is because she thinks she will look well doing them."

"Or because she thinks you will look surprised if she does them."

"Or because she wants to attract your attention."

"Or to make you feel uncomfortable."

"Or to astonish you or amuse you—"

"Work on your sensibilities, or get on your nerves, or play on your sympathies. But," he went on growing worth at the recollection, "the idea of a little chit like that—and that isn't the worst. This morning she dragged me out of bed at half past five to go fishing. Fishing! At this season! I never saw a girl so crazy for fish in my life; and when we had walked four miles to find the right spot and she had been silent long enough for me to feel a nibble at the bait and had helped me with her might and main to haul in that blessed little fish, do you know what she did?"

The widow looked up questioningly.

"She cried because I wanted to bring it home and made me throw it back into the water. That's what she did!"

The widow sat up straight, with horrified eyes.

"Well, of course she did!" she exclaimed heatedly. "She only asked you to catch the fish didn't she—not to kill it?"

The bachelor stared at her work a moment without speaking. Then he got up silently and walked over to the window.

"I suppose," he remarked after a long pause, apparently addressing the front lawn or the blue heavens, "that it's that sort of logic that incites woman to play for a man until she catches him—and then throw his overboard. O Lord, he continued glancing at the sky devoutly, 'why couldn't you have made them nice and sensible?'"

The widow took up her book with disdain.

"Nice and sensible!" she repeated witheringly. "Just think how it would feel to be called 'nice and sensible!' I wish," she added, turning to her novel with an air of boredom, "that you would go and—talk to Ethel Manners."

The bachelor eyed her narrowly.

"I guess I will," he said finally. "She seems more interesting—now that you've explained her."

The widow stopped in the middle of a paragraph and looked up.

"And, by Jove!" went on the bachelor reminiscently, turning to the window again, "she did look dreamy in a sunbonnet and that little short skirt this morning. She has adorable feet, you know."

The widow closed her book with a sharp snap, keeping her fingers between the pages.

"I know Mr. Travers; but how did you know?"

"I looked at them," confessed the bachelor, frankly, and her ankles—"

The widow's mouth closed in a straight line.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Travers," she remarked frigidly, "that you are not a fit companion for a young girl like Ethel."

"I'm not equal to her," grinned the bachelor.

"No you're not. She's a nice, sensible girl and—"

"Do you hate her very much?"

"Hate her?" The widow's eyes opened with astonishment.

"You called her 'nice and sensible.'"

"Bobby Taylor's looking for you, Marion," called Miss Manners, glancing in at the door suddenly.

"Well good-by. I'm off," said the bachelor, following the swish of Miss Manners' skirts with his eyes as she hurried away down the hall.

"Sit down, Mr. Travers!" commanded the widow in an awful tone.

At that moment a buoyant young man poked his head in at the door.

"Go away, Bobby," said the widow. "Mr. Travers and I are discussing—or—psychology."

"Eh!" remarked Bobby, dutifully withdrawing. "Why do you do it if it hurts?"

The bachelor looked up at the widow under the tail of his eyelid.

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

But the widow's underlip was curled into a distinct pout and her eyes met his reproachfully. She dabbed them effectively with the end of her lace handkerchief.

"Of course it does," she said with a little choke in her voice, "when



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