

Because We

What if he was married! She needed him and he needed her. So, risking everything a good woman cherishes, she recklessly plunged—

I SCHEMED and plotted to win another woman's husband. In the beginning I did not even have the excuse of being in love with him. But deliberately and cold-bloodedly I set out to captivate the man, because I knew he could give me everything my lonely heart desired.

I was a widow of a year. My husband had left me moderately provided for. I had a good social position. I had beauty and charm. My husband had been slavishly devoted to me, and after his death I was bewildered and restless without his guiding hand and companionship. I found it difficult to go places unescorted, and envied and resented other women with their husbands in attendance. I hated the rôle of "widow," and determined that I would not be a widow long.

There were but few eligible unmarried men in our town, and I was beginning to feel discouraged. Moreover, my tastes were extravagant and my income did not half suffice to gratify my cravings for luxurious and costly things.

Our town is a live, prosperous one, with a population of a little under a hundred thousand. We have our clubs, our social cliques and organizations; the women of my set dress as well as the women of the larger cities, and we have our cars and country clubs, where we play tennis, golf, badminton, mahjong, and other games and sports. We all play bridge. Some of us are fiends at it.

Before my husband's death mine was an orchid existence. I lay abed till noon, when my maid prepared my bath and brought me my breakfast. I played bridge or mahjong all afternoon, and danced all evening. I couldn't go to teas and parties after my husband's death—not for a few months anyway, and my life became duller and narrower. I was restless and dissatisfied. Moreover, I missed my husband as a husband. Really, I was in a pathological condition at the time I met Jerry Wallace.



He arose and announced
my engagement to Jerry
Wallace

It was at a country club dance—a dance that I had to sit out with the older women, as I was still "in mourning." A friend, Jenny Doty, pointed him out to me. She said: "Look who's here—Gerald Wallace himself! Know him?"

I saw a man of about thirty-five. He was a large, athletic, man's type of man, keen-eyed, ruddy, with an open-air look about him. He was not dancing, but seemed to be looking clear across the room at me.

"NO—who is he? I never saw him before. New in our town?"

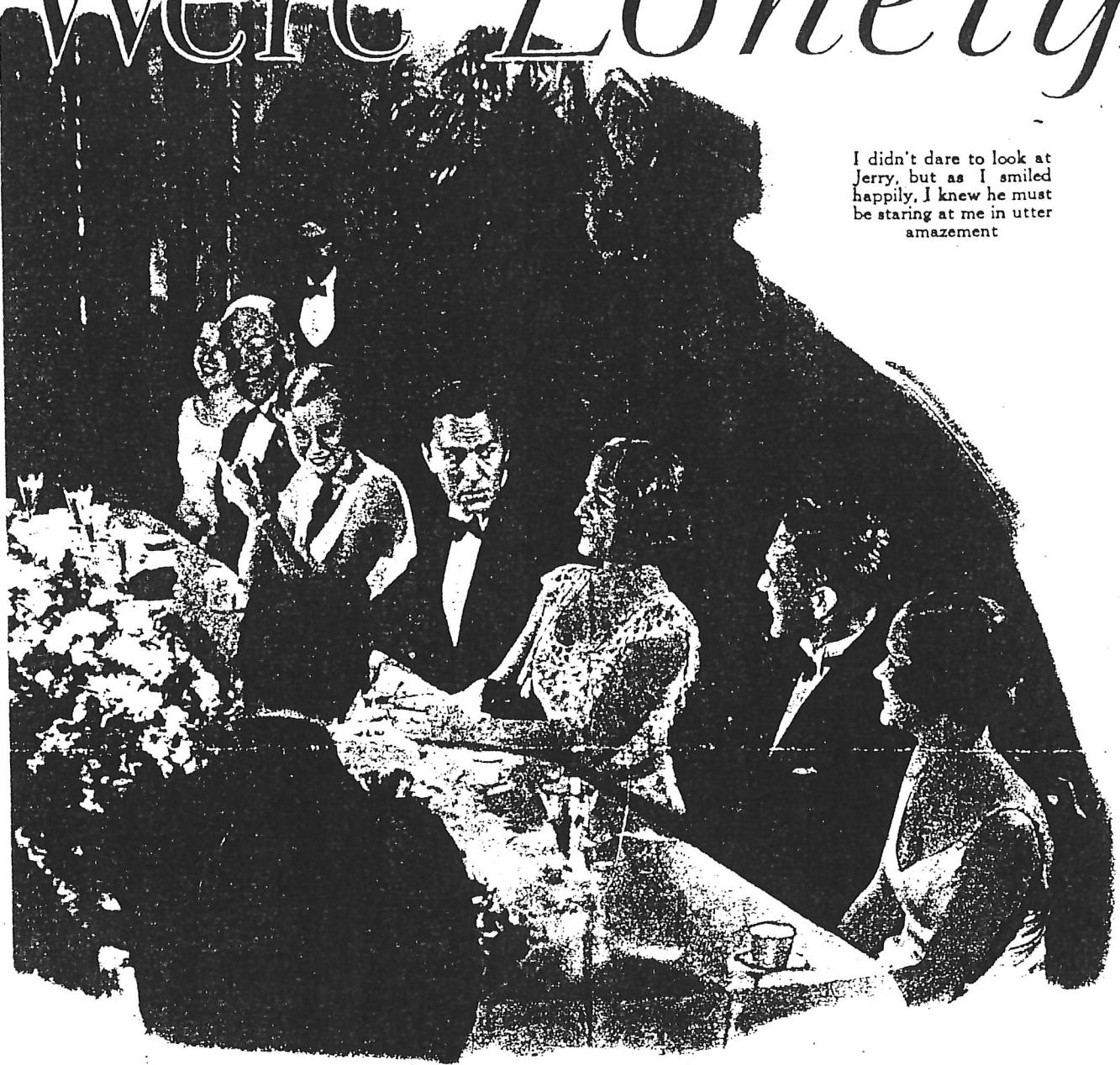
"No, but he doesn't go out much. Too busy making money."

"Is that his wife with him?"

"Oh no—just some girl. His wife's in California. Been gone three years now. Fancy leaving a man like that!"

A strange excitement went over me. I cannot explain it; I suppose it was psychic. Jenny was still chattering.

Were Lonely



I didn't dare to look at Jerry, but as I smiled happily, I knew he must be staring at me in utter amazement

"They say he's staying till he can clear out with a cool million. Then, so they say, he plans to join his wife."

His wife! From the very first, the thought of her excited and enraged me. I resented her. I hated her unreasonably, blindly. What sort of a woman was she to leave her husband, to follow the career of a writer? I am not intellectual, but I am accomplished too, in my way, and I know how to charm and attract and please men.

I WAS planning that very moment to use my every wile to fascinate Jerry Wallace. I recognized him as the type of man I wanted—rich, attractive—a real man in every sense of the word, and I am frank to say that I did want a man. I wanted a lover. I wanted the protection and security of a husband. I wanted the lovely things, and the attentions and devotion that a rich man can give to a woman.

So, as I said, I set out deliberately to court this man. I planned my campaign with care and craft. I learned

everything I could about him—his habits, his tastes, his work, his past; how long his wife had been gone, what their life had been together, who she was, where they went, who were their particular friends.

I even got his financial rating through Bradstreets. I learned that he was not over-fond of society, in the sense that I knew it.

HE was an outdoor man, rode horseback, played golf, went on long motor trips, went hunting and fishing. I learned that he was something of a book worm, was fond of music and the theater.

I learned—and how this irritated me!—that he had been passionately in love with his wife and since her departure had lived almost the life of a recluse. They had no children, and she had become dissatisfied with the restrictions and lack of literary opportunities of a small city.

When I had learned all I thought was necessary, I started my campaign to win him, by going to his office

with some stocks I had taken from my safety deposit box in the bank. He was a stock broker and I explained that I had been recommended to see him with regard to the disposal of my stocks. It was a business call, brief, pleasant; but I was playing my part well, and I knew I had made an impression on him. Just as I was about to leave, I asked him casually whether he played bridge. He replied, with one of his rare smiles, that although he did not play bridge, he could *learn*. That broke the ice between us and gave me the exact lead I wanted. I smiled demurely back at him and said, "I'm considered a very good teacher."

He burst out laughing at that, and I immediately joined in with him. He stopped abruptly, and I could see the interest in his eyes, as he deliberately looked me over. (I am sure I had never looked better in my life. My black and white half mourning was especially becoming to me!)

After a moment he said, "When may we begin the lessons?"

I answered jokingly, "Tonight or never!"

"Fine!" said he. "Tonight!"

AND that was the beginning between us.

It was all so dead easy to start with. One would think he had been looking for just such a woman as I—for a home like mine to come to. And as for me—I knew what I wanted! I intended to have this man so completely under my control that I could get from him anything I desired. I suppose I would have scorned to consider myself the ordinary gold-digger. Mine was a scientifically planned scheme, and I intended to play my game and my man with technique and skill. Sometimes our best laid plans, however, come back like boomerangs to slay us. I thought I had myself so well in hand that I could make my own moves like a cold-blooded chess player; and yet before I realized it I was enmeshed in my own web.

The mere presence of this man had the power to obsess me with an almost overpowering sensuousness. The first time, he put his arms around me, I nearly lost my senses. He swept me literally off my feet. I realized that I had fallen madly in love with him.

We were both lonely. He was the loneliest man I had ever met. He was like a child, literally craving and hungering for affection and attention. He lived at a hotel, when all his inclinations were toward the intimacies and the comforts of a home. I made my home lovely for him. I would have things for dinner that he liked and could not get at the hotel or restaurants. I always looked my best, prettied up for him. I covered up my real character, which was somewhat temperamental and excitable, and I met him always when he came to my house after a day's work at the office, with a smile, and I made him feel that

the house was his, and that everything we did was to please him.

I had my two little sons on hand when I knew he would be amused or interested. I never let them tire him. They were good looking little fellows, and he took to them at once. The boys thought him great. We became a habit with him. He would come straight up from his office to my house, and he spent every spare moment with me. We went on week-end motor trips into the mountains or to the resorts, but we always took the boys with us!

Propinquity means so much. Jerry had been actually hungering for the companionship and the tenderness of a woman, and that, I think, was what first attracted and drew him to me. That and my sex and beauty. He was not indifferent to these. No man could have been. I can say that without vanity, and you may be sure that I did everything in my power to make myself desirable and seductive. I held off as long as I humanly could, but no woman could have resisted him.

He was a generous lover and, being very rich, his gifts were princely ones. Checks, stocks and bonds, diamonds, furs, a beautiful new car, a grand piano, a daily flower account—everything my heart could desire. I had all that, and I tried to assure myself that I had him too. And that was one of the curious parts of our affair. I never felt down in my heart that he was wholly mine. There was something about him, some reserve, that I could not reach. I don't recall his ever actually telling me that he loved me. Many a time I sought to trap him into this admission. I would ask him, "Do you love me?"

HE would turn the subject off with some joking reply such as, "Do you have to ask?" Or, "Now what do you think?" But he never actually admitted it. Once he said that his actions spoke louder than words. I tried to be content with that. I told myself that

he never would have lavished all those gifts upon me; he would not seek my company constantly; he could not have those intimate relations with me, if he did not love me, and when his arms were around me all the fears and ghosts of doubt seemed to disappear.

There was one subject that became absolutely taboo between us. His wife. He would not discuss her with me. I could never induce him to talk about her. In the beginning, when he was putting himself out to be especially nice to me and court me, he would answer any question I asked about her in a monosyllable. For instance, I asked him if his wife played bridge. He replied no. I followed this with, "Well, how did you amuse yourselves?"

He changed the subject abruptly, and said, "Looks like rain."

(Continued on page 92)

Your Letter May Win a Prize

One of the reasons why TRUE STORY holds first place in the hearts of so many people is that we are constantly trying to give them the kind of magazine they most desire.

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In your letter please tell us:

- (1) Which are the three best stories and why.*
- (2) Which is the least interesting story and why.*
- (3) Our faults, and your constructive ideas on how to make the magazine better.*

Address your letter, April TRUE STORY Criticism Contest, 1926 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

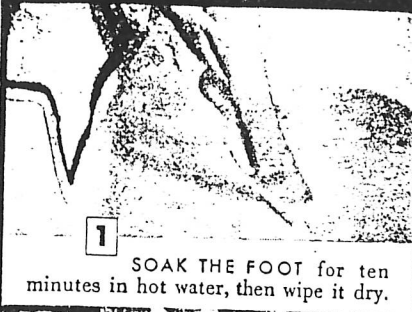
All letters criticizing the April issue must be in this office by April 5th. Letters will not be returned, and we cannot undertake to enter into correspondence regarding these contests. Prize winners will be notified in due time, and the names of winners will be announced in the magazine as soon as possible. The editors will act as judges and their decisions will be final.

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Because We Were Lonely

(Continued from page 30)

Another time I asked him if she were pretty. He replied yes. I came out then with "Prettier than I am?" He looked at me queerly then—almost approvingly—and I did not like that look.

I repeated my question, and he replied. "Let's go on with the game." We were playing bridge with a couple of friends I kept at him, though I realized it irritated him even to mention her name, but I had acquired an almost morbid interest in her. I wanted to force him to talk freely about her. I wanted to dig into his feelings, and find out how he felt toward her now. I was dying to have him say to me that he no longer cared anything at all about her.

One day I said, "I hear she's very clever—is she?"

I saw his eyes light for a moment, and then he replied evasively, "Cleverness is not everything."

My heart leaped. I felt that he must mean that she lacked the qualities that I possessed and which endeared me to him.

Imagine then how my heart sank, as, speaking almost as if to himself, he added, "She was more than merely clever. She had everything a man wants in a woman."

He got up then—he had been sitting beside me—and he took a few strides up and down the room, his brows knitted as if in troubled thought. I could scarcely breathe. It seemed to me an intolerable thing that he should be walking up and down there—thinking of her. It seemed to me that what he had said about her was almost an affront to me. It was more than I could endure.

He came back to where I was sitting on the davenport. He said, "I don't want to talk to you about my wife. It's not decent."

I covered up my feelings. It was part of my rôle not to anger or irritate him, and I said with a brave smile, "All right, dear. I understand how you feel. I didn't mean to be inquisitive."

HE made no comment, but he went home early that evening, and I had a bad night. I think I cried most of the night. I didn't realize that I had begun to pay the penalty.

They say I am a woman of tact and ingenuity. I have always had a good social position, and I thought a lot of my position in society. Of course, in a town of this size, it was impossible for Jerry and me to carry on an affair of this sort without people noticing it. I handled the matter with as much discretion as I could.

Of course, it was impossible to pretend that he was merely a friend. I could not get away with that. So I told every one that he was an admirer, and I showed the presents he had given me, and I induced him to escort me to certain social functions.

People became accustomed to seeing us together. They were very indulgent and assumed that we were engaged. Every one knew his wife had been gone several years, and they assumed that he would, in time, be divorced and, of course,

then would marry me. I cultivated this idea. But I was mighty careful to give no inkling of the intimacy of our relations. People never suspected that my lover had a latchkey, and that he came back to my house after my boys were abed.

Of course, I knew there were many people who gossiped about us. That was my fault. I was too garrulous. I could scarcely keep my secret. I was so foolishly in love that I was always talking about him. Out of a clear sky, I would find myself telling this or that woman that Jerry had taken me here or there or he had given me such and such a present. Then, of course, I was wearing far more expensive clothes than they knew I could afford. However I had the foresight always to end my confidences by saying that he had been separated so long from his wife, and it was only a matter of time before he would be divorced.

As time passed, I became more and more anxious to legitimize our relations.

Finally I summoned the courage to speak to him about it. I said, "Jerry, every one asks me when we are going to be married."

He gave me a quick, queer look, then answered with mock seriousness, "A man should be off with the old love before he is on with the new."

"THEN why don't you get off with the old love?" I said daringly.

He frowned at that and, after a moment, he said, "Ethel, you knew I was married when we started this affair. It's not so easy to get a divorce. I have no grounds."

"What about desertion? Isn't that grounds enough?"

"No—my wife never deserted me."

He scowled, stood up, and seemed to kind of shake himself. Then he said, "Let's not discuss this—there's a good girl."

But though I did not discuss it, it was on my mind. I could think of nothing else. I told myself, there was only one solution of our problem—divorce and marriage. I wanted him to marry me. Marriage became an obsession with me. And I knew we were being talked about and suspected. I saw that in women's faces—and men's too. So I cast about for ways and means to force him to take some definite action.

One day I said to him with assumed lightness, "You know, Jerry, if you don't marry me, I can sue you for damages."

He laughed back at me.

After a moment he said, "My wife's my insurance!"

I could have screamed—but I had to pretend to smile.

"What would happen," I said, "if your wife and I should come face to face?"

He came back swiftly, as if the question amused him, "She'd win!"

I hated her with the intensest hate. What right had she to all this power over him? I was being his real wife—not she—she was away out in California, amusing herself with her silly writing.

How I wished and longed to say as much to him; but I did not dare. There was always something about him that held me at arm's length and, as I have said, she was the one sensitive taboo subject between us.

My love for him grew more and more intense, and I had the desperate feeling that his was waning. In my desperation to hold him, I did indiscreet and foolish things. One day at a luncheon, one of the women said, "Isn't Mr. Wallace married?"

"Oh, they've been separated for ages," I returned with assumed lightness. Then, plunging in further, I leaned over and said confidentially, "He's going on to Reno in a few weeks now to get his divorce."

Now I was up against it! I had to make good that boast. I knew the woman I had told it to would spread the story everywhere. Before I realized it people would stop me on the street to congratulate me. I worked my head to think out some way by which I could force him actually to go to Reno, to get a quick divorce. Once free, I felt sure I could induce him to marry me. I gave a dinner party, and invited twenty guests. Then I had a friend of mine—my lawyer, in fact—announce my engagement to Jerry Wallace. I didn't dare to look at Jerry sitting next to me. But as I smiled happily, I knew he must be staring at me in utter amazement. I knew I had done a bold, wild, daring thing. How would he take it? What would he do? They drank a toast to us.

Then every one crowded about him, shaking his hand, congratulating him, and so forth. When they were all gone, and we were standing in the reception hall, he spoke rather grimly.

"Well, Ethel, it seems you have put me on the spot!"

I PRETENDED I did not know what he meant. I had been as surprised as he was when Mr. MacLean, who, I said, must have been a little drunk, had made the announcement. Anyway, I declared, since we had been going everywhere together, naturally people did think we would marry. He stared at me in his odd, almost cold way, and then he said: "As a gentleman, of course there's only one thing for me to do."

"Yes—yes! What are you going to do, Jerry?"

It seemed as if he would never answer. Then I saw that his thoughtful expression had somehow softened.

"Poor little girl!" he said almost tenderly. That was too much for me. I broke into wild weeping, and he put his arms about me and comforted me. While I cried, he kept reassuring me. I was not to worry any longer. He would do what I wanted. He'd go to Reno. There would be a divorce. After that—well—he spoke in his whimsical way: "It would all be on the knees of the gods."

"You mean we will be married?" I asked tremulously.

There was something almost humble in his voice as he answered, "If you'll have me!"

Have him! I felt almost insanely happy!

A week later he left, by automobile, for Reno. I went part of the way with him. It would be a five-day trip by

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motor. I would have given anything in the world to accompany him. But it was not to be and, although I journeyed back to Council City, my heart went with him.

I began to count the days. Six weeks was the legal term of residence. He wrote to me at intervals of once or twice a week, and his letters were like himself, curiously guarded, and curt in tone. He wrote of his trip, of the climate, of his camp at Lake Tahoe, the Nevada side, of Reno, with its hectic atmosphere. Not one word or expression of love, save in the end, when he would sign his letters "Affectionately, Gerald Wallace." Never Jerry—always his full, formal name. I tried to write letters to him that would match his own—but I had already sent him several passionate love letters, reeking with my longing for him, and my hopes for our future.

He had left Council City in the big car which I had thought was mine. As I had no other car, I was handicapped in getting around; so I bought an inexpensive coupé, and I wrote him about it, expecting him to send me a check by return mail to pay for it; but I received no such check.

I WAS frightfully restless during this long time of waiting; and I affected a gayety that, at times, mounted almost to hysteria. I did the most imprudent things. In my anxiety to retain the respect and good will of the social world of which I had always been a part, I told every one that Mr. Wallace was in Reno for the purpose of acquiring a residence to secure a divorce. Friends began to give me engagement showers. I had to live up to the rôle of an engaged woman, and I bought a hope chest and acquired a marvelous trousseau.

I found myself acting, even to myself. Over and over again I would tell myself that I was engaged to Jerry Wallace; that he was coming back to marry me.

I couldn't keep my mouth shut. I even talked to the girls in the department stores where I bought my trousseau. Soon every one in town was discussing my impending marriage.

People took it as a matter of course, and they thought that I was so lucky and so happy. I was going to marry one of the best catches in the town, a wealthy man; a handsome man, and one who must love me so much that he had actually gone to Reno to divorce his wife, in order to be free to marry me. Remember, Council City was a small city, taken all in all, and every one in the social world knew the affairs of everybody else. In a way, I was popular, but I knew too, that many of the women were jealous of me. Women are always jealous of members of their sex who are attractive to men. I was demonstrating that my beauty and charm had won for me one of the most desirable men in our town.

Five weeks went by, four of which had been spent by Jerry Wallace in Nevada. I was obsessed by an inner fever. As I have said, I am not clever, and I found it difficult to write letters that I felt would interest him. I had recourse to pamphlets and books, from which I copiously plagiarized. I wrote him all about trees and nature and birds and brooks—and God knows what. I think now I must have been awfully silly to write him like

that, and I can imagine what his reaction must have been, for he hated affectation and anything that was not natural. But I had to write something, and since he did not write me love letters, I had to fill mine with what I then flattered myself were literary phrases. What a fool I was!

I made trips to his office, on one excuse and another. I learned from his office manager that he was in almost daily touch with Jerry, by long distance telephone, and I envied him and resented the fact that Jerry had not telephoned or telegraphed me once.

One day I went to see his lawyer, and I almost passed out when he told me that Jerry had gone on to Los Angeles to see his wife about a final financial settlement. I was filled with a haunting terror. I dreaded the thought of his again coming into personal contact with his wife. I think I must have looked strange, for his lawyer explained to me that this meeting was necessary. He reassured me, and said that Mrs. Wallace's lawyers had already corresponded with her husband's Nevada attorneys, and the terms of the settlement had been agreed upon. He said that her lawyers had declared Mrs. Wallace was agreeable to the divorce.

This, at least, gave me some relief. She was not going to contest the suit. None the less my hatred for her deepened, and I could not endure the thought of that meeting between them. What would they say to each other? What would they think? How would she look to him? I recalled his words, "She has everything a man wants."

To add to my distress at this time, he did not write to me or send me word for another two weeks, and I had no way of addressing him, for I did not know whether he was back in Nevada or still with her in Los Angeles. There was absolutely nothing I could do, save wait—wait—wait!

THE first I knew that he was on his way back to Council City was when I read a note in the paper to the effect that he was expected in town on Saturday. You can imagine how I felt! That a newspaper should have word of his expected arrival (probably through his office) before I, who expected to be his wife, had. And I had to smile at people I met on the street, or who called upon me, and pretend that, of course, I knew he was coming, but that I had hoped to keep it a secret! A secret! As if I could keep anything that concerned him a secret!

Finally his telegram came. He would arrive Saturday morning, and would call upon me at two. That was all the wire contained. It was signed with his full name.

I spent half the day before he arrived at the beauty parlor. I spent the morning of the day, itself, in bed—to calm and quiet myself. I sent my boys away, for I wanted to see him alone—just we two, face to face again. Then after lunch, from one o'clock on, I began to wait for him. At two o'clock to the minute I heard the front door bell ring (he did not use his latchkey!) and forgetting my instruction to my maid, I rushed to the door, pulled it open and precipitated myself into his arms. We were standing in the hall. I became gradually conscious

of the fact that he was trying to release my arms from around his neck—that he was freeing himself of my grasp. When that was done, he gave himself a kind of little shake, and then he looked down at me, and I saw that his face was stern and cold.

"Let us go inside," he said. His voice was calm, level, cool. It had a guarded sound. I didn't know what to do, what to say, what to think. I followed him into the living room and I sat down weakly on the big davenport, hoping he would sit beside me; but he remained standing by the fireplace, his face averted. After a moment I said tremulously:

"Whatever is the matter, Jerry? You are acting so strangely."

At that he looked at me from under his knotted brows.

"I'm sorry, Ethel."

"Sorry—for what?"

I was a prey to a horrid premonition. I was afraid to hear him speak.

His chin set in an almost dogged line and he said, "Sorry to be obliged to tell you that it is all over between us."

A dead silence fell. I was trying to take that in, to comprehend the full import of his words. I did not know my own voice, and my throat felt dry.

"Over? What do you mean?"

He spoke slowly, almost as if he were choosing his words.

"I don't want to hurt you; but it is better to tell you the truth. I am not going to marry you. I did not get a divorce."

I half started up, and he said roughly, "Stay where you are. I'll try to explain. My wife and I have become reconciled."

AGAIN that long, long, silence. Then I began to sob, to beg, to implore, to threaten, to taunt him. I accused him of baseness, of deceit, of brutality. I said I'd kill myself; I'd kill him; I'd kill her. Ah, you all know what a "scorned woman" says at such a time.

He merely stared down at me, his jaw squared, and in a pause in my outcry, he said firmly, "It's true, I have done you a wrong. But I would be doing you a greater wrong if I married you or continued relations with you when I love another woman."

At that I screamed.

"It's a lie! It's a lie! You love me! I have been in your arms, and you have told me you loved me!"

His voice was firm as fate.

"No—I never told you that, Ethel. I never lied to you. I will not say I was indifferent to you—you attracted me immensely, but your attraction was mainly sexual, and no woman can hold a man purely through sex."

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," says the poet. How true that is! I felt all hell raging inside me. I don't know what I said. I talked like a wild woman. I fought like a tigress to hold him—he, who had never been really mine!

Then I pleaded, "Oh, please, please think it all over. Don't cast me off—don't discard me. Wait a bit—wait—wait—"

"But my wife is coming—she will arrive within a few days."

"No—no! You can't bring her here. She can't come to this town."

"Certainly she is coming here."

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"But don't you see? Can't you understand what that will mean? The whole town knows of our engagement. How can I face the ridicule, the talk, the curiosity? I'll be ostracized, cut! Everybody in town will be talking about us. Oh, can't you see them at the teas and bridges? Oh, don't, don't bring her here!"

After a moment he said, "Of course, we'll have to face the music. There's bound to be a lot of talk; but if my wife is willing to face it, we should be too. What's more, I am willing to send you on an extended trip abroad. How would you like that?"

"I don't intend to leave this city," I shouted at him. "It's my town—not hers. She's been living in California. She hates Council City. Why should I get out for her? Answer me that! I won't go, I tell you. I won't go!"

"Very well. Stay then and take your medicine."

"I'll make things hot for her—I'll—"

His face hardened; his eyes had almost a look of hate in them. His eyes held mine, and were dead cold.

"Look here, Ethel. I want to do the fair thing by you, but I warn you if you do one single thing to injure my wife, you'll suffer for it."

At that I began to laugh hysterically.

"Make me suffer, will you? Well, what do you think I'm doing now? You can't make me suffer *more*!"

"YOU went into this affair with your eyes wide open," he said, speaking coldly and incisively; "You knew from the first that I was a married man. You broadcast an engagement that could not exist. None the less, I was willing to play your game." I went to Reno, fully intending to divorce my wife, and to marry you. I did this as a gentleman; but I could not carry my plan through. It was humanly impossible, for the moment I saw my wife I knew that I still loved her; that I had never stopped loving her; that I had fallen in love with her all over again."

His eyes were gleaming. He seemed almost to have forgotten he was speaking to me. I could see he was reliving that

meeting with his wife after their separation of over three years. His voice grew husky.

"The moment I looked at her, my arms ached to hold her. I had one desire—to take my wife in my arms!"

I couldn't bear it any longer. No woman could have. I flung myself at him. I tried to claw him. He held my hands down at my sides, and forcibly thrust me back on the davenport.

"Try to compose yourself," he said. "Nothing you can say or do now can alter things."

But the touch of his hands aroused a fire within me. Something broke all up inside me. I wanted to feel his dear arms around me once again, if only for the last time. I was mad for the pressure of his lips on mine.

"Oh, Jerry," I implored, "take me in your arms again. Kiss me for the last time."

He stared at me, not unkindly, but strangely unmoved. His words cut me to the soul.

"NO! Apart from the fact that it would not be fair to my wife, it would be odious to me."

This is my story. Imagine, if you can, what my life now is. I live in the same town with Gerald Wallace and his wife. We belong to the same social set, though now I am not invited to people's homes as I was. I am being cold-shouldered, ostracized, cut by some people. Others, pitying me, come to my house to console me. But even they tire of me as there is only one subject I can talk about.

From being one of the most sought-after women in our town, I know I have become the very laughing-stock of Council City. I know that I am the subject of whisper and joke at every tea and bridge. I know that the worst is believed of me.

Mrs. Wallace's arrival created a sensation. Society was not slow in showing which way their favor turned. Morbidly, avidly I read the society personals. They are giving teas, dinners, receptions, parties for her—Mrs. Gerald Wallace! As for me—I am paying the penalty—the price exacted of a woman who breaks the Seventh Commandment!

Stranger Than Fiction

(Continued from page 4)

my own son!

I tried to speak, but no words came. Jimmy Calhoun, standing beside me, was the first to realize that something was wrong. He supported me as I started to fall, and led me to a chair.

"My boy! My boy!" The words sounded like a moan. They came involuntarily, the cry of a soul in agony.

I don't remember the next hour very clearly. Somehow I got back up to the hospital and identified the body. Jimmy Calhoun stuck beside me, his grief as great as mine.

I had been a widower for several years—Charles and I had been more like a pair of brothers in the old house than like father and son. Life without him seemed impossible, even weeks afterward.

Yet my attitude toward Jimmy did not change. In the court proceedings which followed, I went through with my agreement to appear as his attorney, and the fact that the father of the victim was pleading for him almost automatically effected his complete exoneration.

And to show Jimmy further that I had no feeling against him I invited him to my home two or three times for dinner. These meetings had a curious effect on me—I found that somehow they dissipated my loneliness, particularly as Jimmy proved a fine, intelligent and sympathetic lad.

And so at last it came about that I decided to ask him to come and live with me. A few months later, I formally adopted him.