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Ella Wheeler Wilcox**

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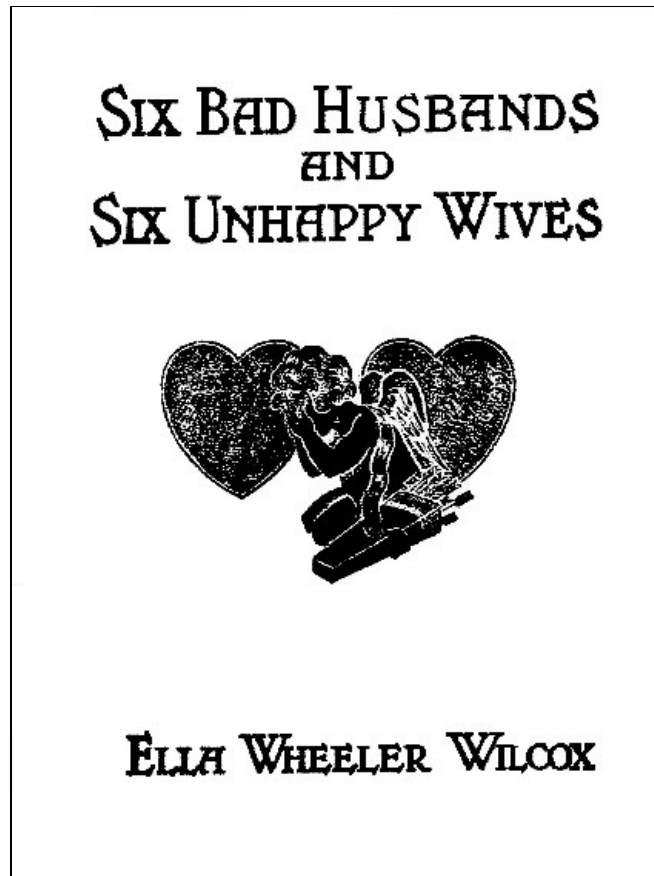
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# SIX BAD HUSBANDS AND SIX UNHAPPY WIVES

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BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

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**SIX BAD HUSBANDS**  
AND  
**SIX UNHAPPY WIVES**

BY  
**ELLA WHEELER WILCOX**

Author of 'Poems of Passion'  
'Poems of Pleasure,' etc., etc.

LONDON  
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**FOREWORD**

[v]

THE six wives described in this little book are types which exist all over the Christian world. They may be found everywhere, save in the Orient.

This does not signify that the unselfish, tactful, tender and worthy woman is not in the foreground in the picture of life.

She is.

But her virtues, her nobility, and her oftentimes sorrow, have all been so frequently depicted, that many women who are the creators of their own misfortunes, fall into the error of believing they belong to her class. [vi]

It is the writer's impression, based on observation, that a larger number of men marry for love than do women.

Just why so many men who begin married life with love and ideals, end it by being bad husbands, needs a wider and more careful analysis than this little book gives.

But it can do no good wife any harm to study herself, and in reading these pages, try and discover if she appears therein. [vii]

The noblest study of womankind is herself.

THE AUTHOR.

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## SIX BAD HUSBANDS AND SIX UNHAPPY WIVES

[1]

### I

THE first bad husband had been a very good man until he married. He had built up a successful business and a fair name for himself, and he had done it all without help, and without harming any one else.

He climbed without pulling others down; and he did little acts of kindness as he went along, never hesitating to give a dollar where he felt it was needed, even when anxious about the coming of another dollar to fill its place. [2]

He helped indigent relatives; he aided a widowed cousin to educate her daughter, and always remembered the children in his neighbourhood at Christmas time.

And when he was thirty-two, he decided to settle down and have a home of his own. He married a young woman who had distinguished herself as a bright scholar at college, and he took her away from the drudgery of the schoolroom, where she had been teaching for two years after she graduated. He placed her in a pretty home, and gave her every comfort and all his love and attention.

The wife kept the home in good order, and seemed to be very well satisfied with her condition for a time. When people praised her husband for what he had accomplished alone and with no help, rising from the ranks, as it were, to a place of influence in life's army, she smiled and showed satisfaction. [3]

But after a year passed by she began to wish her husband had acquired more polish—that he had enjoyed better advantages—and she found herself irritated by his manners and his speech.

It pleased her immensely when any one spoke of her as 'a superior woman.' She related such compliments to her husband; and he, too, was pleased, and told her how fortunate he was to have won a wife of such intellectual brilliancy.

Ofttimes he repeated similar compliments to her; telling how proud he felt when other people recognised his good luck. But, little by little, the pride of the husband abated; and just in proportion to the growing self-satisfaction of the wife. As she talked more, he talked less; he grew taciturn; his speech became halting, and his manner constrained. [4]

They had been married five years when this supposedly good and moral husband displayed his badness. He brought home a gift to his wife—one he had thought would give her pleasure. She took great pride in her house, and loved to decorate it with odd and beautiful things.

So he had seen this vase in a window and brought it to her, with almost the vanished look of pleasure in his recently lined face. [5]

The wife looked at it, and her brow contracted. Then she said rather petulantly, 'Dear, you would be wise to consult me before you buy anything for the house; you must know by this time that your own taste is not to be relied upon.'

Then the wife stood aghast as the always gentle and kindly man burst forth. He said:

'I will be DASHED if I endure this any longer.'

Having heard his own voice say 'DASHED' for the first time, he grew reckless and continued:

'I am tired of this life; tired of you. I want you to leave me. I once thought I was something of a man, but you have convinced me that I am absolutely worthless, save as a money-maker. You can take my money and go. I will make enough more to keep myself in comfort and peace. You have convinced me that my taste is vulgar; my manners bad; my speech uncouth. You have convinced [6]

me that you are a superior woman, and quite as plainly, I am made to understand that I am an inferior man.

'You have changed my open and generous nature. I have never been selfish or niggardly with you; yet you have made me feel that I wronged you by my liberality to my poor relatives. You think I should save this money for some future rainy day. I have grown afraid of having any generous act of mine known, lest it cause reproof and frowns at home. [7]

'You have made me afraid to talk in your presence. You knew I was not a college man when you married me, but since our marriage you have convinced me that I am an utter ignoramus. I am thankful to any one who helps me to improve my speech and manners in the right way, for I am ambitious enough to want to better myself as I grow older.

'But you never permit me to tell a story without taking the words from my mouth and telling it over.

'You continually humiliate me in the presence of other people by disputing any statement I make and trying to prove me wrong and yourself right. [8]

'No man of any self-respect can enjoy himself in the society of a woman who treats him in this manner; no man can keep on loving a woman who treats him so, and I confess that I no longer love you, and want to go back to my old bachelor freedom.

'My home is the last place on earth to which I look for happiness, and my wife is the last person to whom I look for loving companionship.

'The very best impulses of my nature I have to hide from you, because you do not approve of my liberality and generosity.

'And you have convinced me so absolutely that I am your mental inferior, that I will no longer compel you to live with me.' [9]

Then this bad husband went out and slammed the door and did not come back again.

And afterwards there was a divorce obtained on the grounds of incompatibility, and the deserted wife told her friends of the terrible language this bad husband had used to her, and of his brutal conduct.

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## II

THE second bad husband was none too good, perhaps, in the beginning. But he had grown thoroughly tired of the life he lived at clubs and hotels, and from the very depths of his heart he longed for HOME. [10]

He had experienced every type of flirtation which women make possible for an attractive man from his freshman college days to old age. He had come to a state of mind where he questioned if there were any really sensible girls and trustworthy wives, when he met his fate and ceased to question, and simply believed. [11]

He believed he had met the perfect woman. He told her how he longed for a home, and he asked her to be his wife.

When she accepted him he was so happy that he simply cast all his old ideas of women to the winds, and with these ideas he cast all the wisdom which he had accumulated through his bachelorhood.

Ofttimes in the past he had said that women needed to be governed; needed a master; that they became petty tyrants if given too much respectful consideration, or when their wishes were consulted on matters of any import to the husband.

Yet in face of all the bad things this man had said about the sex, he began his married life by asking the girl he married to choose the way she preferred to live, instead of telling her how he wished to live. [12]

Of course he had told her from the beginning of his love-making, that he was tired of having no home; that a club or a hotel, with all the comforts money could purchase, meant only four walls, and that a home with a wife and love and peace and order and system, represented his idea of heaven.

Nevertheless, when he said the wife could choose her way of living, she promptly chose a suite in an expensive hotel, and, after a year, she expressed a desire to go to Europe and stay through the London and Paris seasons.

It was with reluctance that she came home finally, for she was a beautiful girl, and she had been much admired abroad. [13]

After their return the husband asserted his wish again for a home, and, again reluctantly, the wife consented. She spoiled it all, however, by continually talking of the distaste she had for domestic obligations.

'I hate the sight of a kitchen,' she said, 'and I detest thinking about what I must order for meals three times a day. And servants are such hopeless problems; and one is so tied down by housekeeping.'

Of course, with such an attitude of mind, housekeeping became a burden; servants proved inefficient; and the good wife of this bad man found nothing to talk about when her husband came home in the evening but the trouble she had had in the domestic realms.

[14]

A new retinue of servants appeared regularly each week, and finally, after a year, the home was given up and the hotel became the retreat of the unfortunate man and wife. She convinced him that she was breaking down under the strain of housekeeping.

A second attempt was made the next year, with the same result, and after the breaking up of that home the wife wanted to go and travel in Europe with another unsatisfied wife whose husband was too busy to accompany her.

So she went away for three months and her husband lived at the club.

When she returned she found the bad man very dissatisfied and inclined to find fault.

[15]

He said he wanted a home; he wanted a domestic wife, and he wanted children.

Then the woman who bore his name fell to weeping, and she sobbed out that she was sorry she came home, if he only wanted to scold her and find fault with her; and she declared she was not physically strong enough to become the mother of children. She gravely hinted that she was a victim of some serious malady which would cause her death if she attempted to be a mother—her physician had told her so.

The bad man gave vent to an audible sneer at this juncture. He said he knew all about the doctors who told selfish and unwomanly wives such stories, just to please them and to keep them as his patients. But, he declared, he understood God's laws and the nature of normal human beings well enough to know that not one woman in five hundred, who was able to journey about the world by land and sea, and go sight-seeing and to attend receptions, would in any way endanger her life by becoming a mother if she took any care of herself and desired the child.

[16]

Then the wife became very hysterical and went home to her mother, and said her husband had called her all kinds of names; that he had made her homecoming unhappy, and that she could never live with him again. She said he was a coarse brute, who lived wholly in the senses and did not understand a delicate woman.

[17]

She grew so ill that her sympathetic physician ordered an ocean voyage for her, and she went abroad again. While she was away her brute of a husband became entangled in a love affair with another woman. When she came home the matter was public gossip! and everybody said what a heartless creature he was to carry on so, when his poor wife was ill, and away for her health.

And so, after due season, there was another divorce of an unhappy wife from a bad husband.

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### III

[18]

THE third bad husband fell violently in love with a very handsome girl, and he was like a man in a fever until he gained her consent to be his wife.

He had been an only son of his mother, and the girl was an only daughter of typical, doting American parents.

She was a belle in a small way; admired in her circle for her beauty, dancing, and music, and generally considered an amiable and virtuous young woman, who would be a prize worth the winning of any man.

The young man was equally popular, and his success in the business world, together with his education and social standing, made him seem a very suitable husband for the pretty belle. The husband was popular in his club, and he was proud of his athletic prowess and his good fellowship with manly men.

[19]

When his fiancée asked him to bring her a chair or a fan or to get her shawl, and kept him busy waiting on her he laughed with delight at the novel tasks assigned to him, and felt that he was a royal courtier in the kingdom of beauty.

The engagement was a brief one; and the wedding was a brilliant affair.

Everybody declared that it was an ideal union, and all the outlook was toward perfect happiness.

[20]

They did not possess wealth; a simple competence only, which enabled them to begin housekeeping with one maid. The maid did not stay long, and the first cloud on the happiness of the home was in the difficulty the young wife found in keeping any maid more than a few months.

Soon after the honeymoon the young husband realised that his position of courtier in the kingdom of beauty was growing rather difficult.

He was obliged to go to his office at nine o'clock in the morning, but the frequent intervals between the departure of one maid and the arrival of another, made a similar frequency of a breakfast at the club or restaurant, and, before his departure from the house, he was often requested to 'be a darling and bring his own lovey dovey a glass of milk and a bit of fruit.'

[21]

Knowing that he had taken his 'lovey dovey' from a home where she always breakfasted in bed, the devoted husband felt it his duty to make life as pleasant as possible for her; yet the position of butler and maid combined was not pleasing to his manly spirit. Still he liked to be obliging, and

he continued to do her bidding.

Between the basement kitchen and the sleeping-room of the young couple, two flights of stairs intervened, and it seemed never to occur to the mistress of the household that it was a hardship for any one save herself to go up and down these stairs a dozen times in a brief space of time on errands for her comfort. [22]

The husband prospered, and engaged two more domestics for his wife. But with increased service her demands increased—and confusion instead of order reigned.

Maids were called to the top floor on trivial errands, while they were engaged in duties in the basement, and they were sent to the corner box to mail letters, to the grocery store, or the chemist's, or on errands a half-dozen times a day.

When they could not go, or when they were not there, 'darling husband' was commissioned to be errand-boy. He was seldom enabled to finish his cigar or read his paper in the evening without being asked to go up or down stairs, to bring a chair, shawl, or book, or a box of bonbons for his wife's pleasure, or to run to the corner to get something she needed. [23]

He became skilled in the work of a lady's maid in the continual demand made upon him to assist his wife in fastening her gowns.

After three years the situation in which the young man found himself began to prey upon his mind. For it grew worse instead of better.

'I am no longer a manly man,' he said to himself, 'I am not the head of a house; I am an employé of a pretty woman. I am a combination of lackey, valet, butler, head waiter, and maid of all work. I haven't even a half day or an evening off; not a regular weekly time I can call my own, as most domestics have—I am going to strike.' [24]

But when he made his first protest his wife became hysterical and sent for her mother.

The mother said the husband was a brute to refuse to bring up the breakfast tray to a poor delicate woman, who had an inefficient and inconsiderate servant. Any man with half a heart, she said, would have shown sympathy and kindness in such a situation. One word led to another, until a very unpleasant condition of things existed in the household.

He told the mother-in-law that it was her daughter's fault that she could never keep a servant; that servants would leave when they were imposed upon and overworked, and that it might, in time, be possible for a husband to leave unless greater consideration was shown in the small matters of daily life. [25]

He said there was no pleasure to be had in a house with a woman who made every human being under the roof a slave to her caprices, and who was so utterly selfish that she could not understand how any one might object to being ordered about on errands night and day.

This scene was only the beginning of perpetual scenes. The husband began to stay away in the evenings. He often remained away at dinner, and the neglected wife wept upon her mother's sympathetic bosom. [26]

And in due course of time a separation and divorce occurred. Looking back over her married life, the wife was unable to see wherein she had failed. And everybody said she was such a beautiful woman; so faithful; so amiable; so accomplished, and so evidently fond of her husband.

But everybody had not lived under the same roof with her.

---

## IV

[27]

THE fourth bad husband was a popular man and much sought after socially.

He was dearly loved by his relatives—his mother, his sister, and a young cousin who lived with his parents, and whose orphaned childhood he had made bright by his care. She was fourteen and his young sister sixteen, when he married the compelling woman.

He had always said he should never marry until he met one who swept away all other considerations, save possessing her. One day at a dinner party in the house of a charming hostess, he met her. And all considerations were at once swept aside, and to win this girl for his wife became the one thought of his heart. [28]

It was impossible for any woman to have greater proof of a man's complete adoration for her than this man gave this girl. Everybody who knew him spoke of his absolute surrender to her charms.

She seemed equally in love, and the wedding followed closely on the announcement of the engagement.

The young wife was pleasing in appearance, cultivated and accomplished. Society thought she was eminently suited to be the wife of a man who had long been such a society favourite. [29]

The man's family welcomed her with open arms. So unselfish, and kind, and ever generous had this son, and brother, and protector been, that he made those who loved him partake of his own generous nature. They had long urged him to marry, to make a home for himself; and when he chose the charming girl they admired for his mate, they were all ready to take her into their hearts.

It is seldom one finds a really good mother-in-law. As a rule the mothers of men, especially, are petty and selfish in their attitude to the son's wife. They feel the woman's jealousy at the intrusion of another woman into the man's life. It is the most common phase of feminine weakness and injustice. [30]

But this particular mother was utterly incapable of anything but sweetness, kindness, tender love and generosity toward her son. She was broad and high in her thoughts of him. She wanted him to marry and to be happy.

Yet before he had been a husband three months, a troubled look came into the eyes of the good mother; the sixteen-year-old sister had grown grave; and the fourteen-year-old cousin became curiously timid about showing her cousin and protector the impulsive affection which was in her heart.

And the man, the young husband, son, brother, and friend, became constrained in the presence of his family. [31]

All this change had come about through the unreasoning jealousy of the young wife.

Despite the loyal love and romantic passion which she had inspired in the heart of her husband; despite the cordial good will and affection shown her by his family, she was jealous of the unselfish love he gave any and every one besides herself. She wanted to be the only individual upon whom he bestowed any mark of affection.

Curiously enough, she seemed to consider this state of mind an evidence of her great love; and she made no secret of her jealousy. She expected her husband to feel complimented by her attitude of mind. When he was annoyed or unhappy over it, she accused him of a lack of love for her. [32]

'If you really loved me, you would understand,' she said.

All his former society friends, the women who had entertained him as a bachelor, she regarded with suspicion and dislike. So open was her hostility that she soon made herself unpopular; and invitations to the homes of her husband's old friends grew to be very formal affairs.

For a time the young husband sought to overcome the jealousy of his wife by yielding to her whims, and by devoting himself more and more to her. But this increased her tendency to tyranny.

Then he tried to reason calmly with her; but she was incapable of logical discussion. She accused him of 'standing up for his family and friends against his wife,' and went into hysterical tears. [33]

Finally, tired of scenes, he avoided any reference to the subject, and decided to do what he felt was just and right, and abide by the consequences.

But the relations between him and his family were robbed of all their old freedom and happiness; he was in that most distressing of situations—for a man with a kind and tender heart—between his blood relatives and his wife.

Socially he became a dead letter. His wife had made herself so unpopular, and her jealousy was so pronounced, that society was glad to have its formal invitations answered by formal cards. [34]

Still there were women who liked the charming and courteous man, and would seek to enjoy a chat with him on every possible occasion. These occasions usually came to the knowledge of the suspicious wife, and resulted in further accusations of deception and intrigue.

One day the bad husband decided that he had endured all he could endure, and he deliberately gave his wife cause for a divorce on statutory grounds.

'I always knew he was deceiving me,' the unhappy wife said, and everybody sympathised with her.

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## V

THE fifth bad husband had been the merriest and jolliest young man in the neighbourhood where he found his wife. He was twenty-nine years old when he married, and his wife was twenty-two. She was very bright, and considered a leader in her social circle. [35]

The young man was so witty and so full of fun, that he had always been popular with girls and, indeed, with women of all ages. Old ladies liked him; he made them laugh and forget their sorrows. Young matrons liked him; he made them forget they were not girls. And spinsters liked him, for he seemed to be just as happy when with them as with young girls. [36]

Such a fund of good spirits opened the door of every circle to him. No one analysed him mentally, to see whether he was possessed of any profound learning under the surface brightness and mirthfulness; he was such good company that he carried people along with him and made life seem worth while wherever he was.

His wife had found him delightful as a lover; and, while she did not possess a keen sense of humour, she was young and care-free, and enjoyed the same amusements. The two seemed very congenial. [37]

The young man possessed a fair competence and good business abilities. He was popular with his



associates, and there was nothing to hinder their marriage from proving a happy one. So it seemed in the beginning.

After a few years had passed, the wife developed intellectual tastes and took up a course of study. The husband was proud of her and encouraged her in her pursuits. He was very much occupied with business, and his wealth was on the increase. Two children had blessed the union, and he was very devoted to them.

He had never been a church-going man, but had helped charities and benevolent institutions, and he believed in God and immortality. [38]

Meanwhile he lived in full enjoyment of all the things of earth. He liked a good meal, well cooked and served. He liked a good cigar. He enjoyed good company, music, cards, dancing, and fun and life. He had never sought unworthy friends, or low associates of either sex. But he wanted people about him who were optimistic, and who liked a good laugh, and he did not care for the very serious side of life.

He never read problem novels, or went to see problem plays, and he delighted in comic opera and humorous literature. For several years his wife had been his comrade in all these things. But as she developed intellectually, and as she studied into the metaphysical thought of the world, she seemed to be bored by the things which had once given her pleasure. [39]

It did not occur to her that she could keep in touch with the human side of life, and with her husband's tastes, and still grow out into larger ideals.

She said one could not serve God and Mammon, or obey two masters. And she felt she must obey the call of her soul. She forgot that the call of love is also the call of the soul.

So her husband began to go to the comic opera and the social dance alone or with a man friend. And he began to find it difficult to converse with his wife on any subject of mutual interest. He felt she was greatly his superior, and he was oftentimes very lonely. [40]

He did not give vent to many spontaneous witticisms as of old, and for the first time he felt he was ageing.

His wife talked of matters, and books, and theories of life which seemed a million miles away from his sphere of thought.

As time passed she grew more and more spiritual, and she tried to make him realise that he was on a very carnal plane, and that his whole understanding of life was wrong.

She indulged in long fasts; she went into her closet for meditation, when he was alone in the house; and she refused him the expressions of love which of old had been spontaneously given. She told him love was a thing of the spirit, that it needed no physical expression. She read from books of ancient lore, and tried to make him see that only by living in the spirit, wholly, could we make a place for ourselves in the great spiritual kingdoms of the universe, or develop our highest powers here. [41]

For two long years the man tried to live on and make the best of his position, but the wife had undertaken an impossible task. She had striven to change a wholesome, happy, good-hearted, loving human being, into an intellectual æsthetic; to turn a wit into a profound philosopher; to paralyse normal and natural instincts and appetites, and to force the man to live only in the spirit, while yet in the body. [42]

After two years the bad husband developed. He went where he found pleasure, mirth, good food, good company. He allowed his wife to go her way; he went his.

They met at the divorce court.

There was no trouble about her obtaining the divorce. Statutory grounds were given and proved. The children were given to the wife. The woman who had won him away from his wife, according to public comment, was a wholly inferior person.

Then it was remarked that his wife was always quite his superior; and that he had, by the natural law of the world, gone down to his own level. His wife received the sympathy of the whole community; and he was understood to be one of those bad men who are incapable of appreciating a good woman. [43]

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## VI

[44]

THE sixth bad husband was supposed to be quite a model young man until he married the girl who was too good for him.

She was too good for any man, so everybody said.

Such a pretty girl and a perfect housekeeper. Her mother had been an invalid, and the daughter had always taken care of the home after her mother died. She was a nurse for all the sick people in the neighbourhood; and so unselfish with her time, and strength, and money in doing for the poor. [45]

The young man felt that he was rushing in where angels fear to tread, when he asked her to be his wife; and he regarded her as something little short of divinity.

He was a healthy, human man, and fond of all the comforts of home. When he saw what a perfect housekeeper she was, his heart welled full of gratitude to heaven for his good fortune.

Early orphaned, he had boarded from early boyhood. Perhaps, because he had never known a home, he had fallen into some careless ways. He excused himself in this manner when his wife first took him to task for leaving his hat on the centre table. He tried to remember that he must always hang his hat in the closet, where it had a peg of its own, but when he came in hurried with some special idea in mind, he found himself forgetting. [46]

And again the quiet, but decisive voice of his wife reminded him. Then he sometimes forgot to wipe his feet on the doormat. When he did this, if the day was damp or dusty, he was made to repent it by seeing his wife follow him with a floor-cloth or duster, wiping where his feet had trod. When he rose from a chair and forgot to place it where it had been, against the wall, she set it back herself with a quick, prompt gesture, which made him realise his delinquency.

She often mentioned being very tired at night, too tired to go out with him because of the unnecessary work she had been obliged to do through the 'thoughtlessness of others.' He knew that 'others' meant himself. [47]

His cigar ashes were a constant source of annoyance to her. He tried to put them in an ash-tray always; but sometimes they would fall or scatter. She brushed them up immediately. So he fell into the habit of going to the club to smoke. She was a most undemonstrative girl; and what he had taken for maidenly reserve, when he wooed her, proved to be an utter absence of affection in her nature.

She believed in duty; that was her great word.

One day when he accused her of not really loving him, she asked him to point to one thing where she had failed in her 'duty.' [48]

Had she not kept his home in perfect order?

Had she not been economical in expenditures?

Had she not kept his name free from blemish?

Had she not—but at this juncture he went out and slammed the door.

And as he went he quoted from Kipling, saying: 'And now I know that she never will know, and never will understand.'

One day he fell ill with a hard cold; and then indeed she became the devoted wife. A better nurse never lived. She was simply delightful, while he was confined to the house as her patient.

But the moment he was up and out she became the nagging woman, with a mania for order, economy, and neatness; and all her tenderness and sweetness vanished into the acrid and severe manner of the thrifty housewife. She was a nurse and missionary and housekeeper—not a wife. And he was simply starving for love, for companionship, for good fellowship, for freedom, for happiness. [49]

She was unable to see or understand his needs, beyond those of an orderly house, and a bank account which was not overdrawn. She was utterly devoid of the least touch of coquetry. Her severe, neat manner of dress indicated her temperament.

One day he complimented the appearance of a young woman who was given to plumes and ribbons, and who wore her hat with an air of one who knew she would be looked at by men. [50]

'I think her type very loud and tasteless,' his wife said coldly. 'She is the kind of girl who would run her husband into debt without a qualm of conscience, in order to gratify her whims. But I begin to think that is the type of woman a man admires.'

All her judgments were severe. She had no mercy for any human frailty. A woman of that nature, who is perpetually nagging a man for leaving a book in the hammock, a hat on a table, cigar ashes on the floor, or a chair out of place, and who is cold and undemonstrative in her disposition, drives Cupid from the window, or else flings wide the door for his departure. [51]

When Cupid went forth from this home the man went also.

And the world said:

'What a brute to desert that model woman! Such a housekeeper! Such a manager! And to think how she nursed him whenever he was sick!'

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