

BITTERSWEET.

Mrs. Theodore Jones Taylor had, in an unostentatious way, been doing a good deal of serious thinking. No one suspected her of anything of the sort, least of all her husband, because he was not the kind of woman one suspected of doing anything at all of a secretive character. It was not her nature, and her circumstances had been such that she never had occasion for developing this trait. If ever a model and comfortable wife was mated to a model and comfortable husband in a model and comfortable home it was Suzanne Taylor. It had been so from the beginning five years before.

Taylor secured a good position with a high-class automobile agency, his father gave him as a wedding present a nice house in Scarsdale, and there he took his bride and his position in society. No question ever arose about a single detail of the whole arrangement. Taylor enjoyed a good income, earned without any nerve-racking effort on his part. And he loved his wife. Not even his wife doubted this.

Yet here she was thinking—not out loud but quietly and to herself. Sometimes she began this in the morning as soon as she awoke. She rose early because she was doing her own work, with some day help in order to avoid the confusion resulting from the modern brand of insolent and incompetent servants. Teddy was fussy about his breakfast and she was a good cook. She did not mind the extra effort involved in this new duty but, like every good cook, she did object to his not getting down promptly. Things like popovers and even toast must be timed to the minute and while one has more leeway with coffee it can never be quite as good as it is immediately after it comes to a boil. Teddy always meant to get down on time but he did not leave himself sufficient margin for the little mischances of the morning, like not being able to find his razor strap, cutting his chin and the sticking of a cravat in a fresh collar. He clung to the last few minutes of sleep with healthy satisfaction; and, even when ten minutes late, he came down with his handsome face beaming, ready with some such careless remark as:

"Don't fret, Sue. I was a little bit out of luck this morning."

"Tell that to the muffins," she was apt to answer.

"My apologies, muffins."

Apparently the muffins always accepted his excuses, for they were invariably perfect. By nursing them along in the oven and preventing them, with infinite patience and subtle skill, from getting overdone while keeping warm, Suzanne managed it. She accomplished this, although it meant moving the pot first on and then off a half-dozen times while watching his three-minute egg to see that it did not get hard over a period of ten minutes. She did not so much mind doing this, but it was one of the things that set her to thinking.

Once seated, Teddy refused to hurry his breakfast no matter how much warning he received from the French clock on the mantelpiece.

"Every free-born American is entitled to an honest breakfast," he insisted. "It's in the Constitution."

"If you got up a little earlier—"

"Had plenty of time if the darned old razor strap hadn't got hidden," he broke in.

"Where did you finally discover it?" she asked.

"Sneaking behind a towel."

"On the usual hook?"

"Yes," he admitted.

"How did the towel get there?"

"Hanged if I know but there it was. I'm going to buy two or three more straps so if one gets lost I can find another."

"Or," she suggested, "you might put the towel back where it belongs."

He ate his breakfast with a relish—almost too much of a relish. It might have been just as well had he stopped with the third muffin and the first cup of coffee. Suzanne had noticed in the last few months what appeared to be the threat of a double chin. He denied it in face of the fact that he had been obliged to order a new stock of collars a quarter-size larger than any he had ever worn before.

"I have a hunch the collar makers are cheating on the sizes," he declared.

"That's curious," she said sweetly. "But how did they get hold of your old ones?"

"Those just shrank. You can't trust these modern laundries."

He sat back and lighted a cigarette with an air of calm content.

"It's ten minutes of, Teddy," she notified him.

"Right," he answered and rose reluctantly.

She helped him into his overcoat and he departed. For a moment she stood there all by herself in the hall. He had forgotten to kiss her. That was not that he did not care but merely that he did not think. And of course one kiss more or less did not make much difference, especially after five years of marriage.

She went back to her work. There was, of a kind, a good deal of it. And much of it was not particularly interesting. It looked at times like such vain repetition. Just one thought made it possible—that it contributed to Teddy's comfort.

She had tried to make this home the most attractive place in the world to him and she had succeeded. He never came back from his occasional business trips without admiring it. A month ago he had gone to the factory in Detroit for three or four days and the first thing he exclaimed when he came in the door was this:

"Believe me, Hutchins will do some talking before he gets me on there again. I'll resign first."

Hutchins was the general manager.

"Anything go wrong?" she asked anxiously.

"The firm isn't kicking; it's I. Home's the place!"

Here was a tangible proof of success that ought to satisfy the most ambitious wife, for when he traveled no limit was fixed on his expense account. He had the best, and the best today is more than princes of the past ever enjoyed. Yet he was glad to get back. But this was one of the facts which started her to thinking.

Somehow Teddy hadn't gone ahead the way she expected him to do—the way, she had suspicion, Hutchins and Hill expected him to do. He hadn't slipped back exactly but he hadn't gone ahead. He stayed right where he was. He had been with the firm now five years and his salary had never been advanced. To be sure, the firm had been generous with him at the start and his commissions that first year had been considerable. Since then he had held his own and under her careful management this income had been sufficient. There was even a little left over. He had suggested taking some of this and buying a car but she shook her head.

So it was not the question of money that was bothering her. But still there Teddy was, in business right where he started. Within that same period most of his friends had moved up to something or other, to assistant managerships, to junior partnerships, to vice presidencies and firms of their own. She did not know exactly what it amounted to except that it pretty definitely marked progress of some sort.

Even at home Teddy had not advanced. That was a good deal to admit; but once she began to think she found herself obliged to admit a good deal more than she wished. That is the danger of thinking. This feeling was not based altogether on the fact that he forgot to kiss her good-by in the morning—though that was significant enough—but on half a hundred little incidents that seemed to mark a certain indifference and carelessness. He was, to put her impression in a single word, growing slightly heavy. She noticed this in his speech, his manner and his habits. This had not developed yet to a point where it affected one whit her love for him but it was a tendency that disturbed her for his sake.

Just what she expected of Teddy it was difficult to say, because she was not yet clear in her own mind into what this relationship between them ought to grow. But she was quite certain it ought to grow into something. Otherwise they would lose even what they had. It was impossible for them to go on standing still, because everything else was growing. One either went forward or backward.

Perhaps it was with a certain guilty feeling that she prepared for him the kind of things he particularly liked. After all he was one man in a hundred and she had plenty for which to be thankful. So she made, among other things, a fudge cake and covered it with rich, boiled chocolate frosting. Then she fussed around with a cream of celery soup and French-fried potatoes to go with the steak and a romaine salad with French dressing. Her reward came as he was finishing his black coffee.

"Gosh but that was a real feed," he exclaimed.

He adjourned to the sitting-room with his evening paper while she was doing the dishes. When she came in to join him an hour later she found him fast asleep in his chair, his head back and his mouth open.

The next day Mrs. Theodore Taylor asked for her automobile.

"What?" exclaimed Teddy.

"You said I might," she reminded him.

"And you said you didn't want one."

"I've decided I do."

"Right-o. I'll see if I can't pick up a small, cheap car."

"I don't think I want that sort, Teddy."

"Some class to you," he declared.

"Just what do you want?"

"Some sort of nice runabout."

"That will cost money."

"I suppose so, but if I can't have a good-looking car I don't want any."

"What struck you all of a sudden?"

"Nothing—all of a sudden," she answered quietly.

And yet Taylor went off that morning feeling somewhat uneasy. Of course she was entitled to an automobile if she wanted one, but what he could not understand was why in thunder she should want one. The longer he was in the business the more he realized that they were mighty expensive playthings. Most people never looked beyond the initial cost, when, all things considered, that was the least item. Unless a man could afford to ignore absolutely the question of upkeep he oughtn't to own a car. Taylor had not yet reached that point and what is more it began to appear that business this year was not going to be as good as last year.

His sales in the last few months had taken something of a slump. Hutchins had the nerve to jack him upon the matter and to show him what young Weston was doing. But what young Weston was doing did not prove anything. He was new to the firm and was hustling overtime to make good. The lad would eventually outgrow that pace and settle down to normal. Normal business—the week after week, month after month, year after year stuff was what counted. To be sure, the whole Taylor was satisfied that he was making a fair showing. Only it was not any time to expand.

However, in the present instance he seemed to have no alternative. He did not want to look mean and he did not want to worry Suzanne with his troubles. She had always been a good deal of a brick and this was the first big thing for which she had ever asked. So two nights later he rolled home in a spick-and-span little runabout that really was something of a peach. It was not been driven a thousand miles and had cost him the neat sum of thirty-two hundred dol-

lars. He had to admit that there was considerable satisfaction in seeing it parked outside the house. It gave an air to the whole street.

Suzanne was delighted. That is, she said she was delighted and went through all the motions.

"It certainly is a beauty," she exclaimed.

"I'll say so," he answered proudly.

She circled it, examining the upholstery and the pretty nickel trimmings and admiring the color and the finish.

"It has an engine too," he announced.

He lifted the hood and with practiced skill pointed out its mechanical virtues and the points of its superiority.

"It will hit eighty," he added for full measure.

"Eighty what?" she inquired anxiously.

"Eighty miles," he groaned. "But it will hit eighty of anything else if you don't steer. It doesn't go all by itself."

"I must learn to steer then," she agreed.

"Will you give me a lesson to-night?"

"This was in May and for two hours she sat beside him and made him go up and down the road explaining to her the difference between the clutch and the accelerator and the self-starter."

"You punch them all with your feet," she summed it up.

"Sure. Only you secure quite different results according to which ones you punch," he reminded her.

He called to her attention the fact that they had not had dinner.

She took the matter lightly enough. "Never mind. We don't get a new car every day."

"I should hope not," he replied.

"It was too late for her to prepare the table with her usual attention to detail."

"We'll just picnic to-night," she said.

Taylor was never very strong for picnics anyway. They had always seemed to him at best rather messy affairs to be put up with for the sake of the traditional sentiment surrounding them in the woods or by the shore. But a picnic in the house lacked even that saving quality. It partook more of the nature of a hunger sop at a dairy luncheon. It lacked all the charm and ceremony and daintiness that properly should accompany a leisurely meal at home. Though he voiced no complaint he left the table unstaffed and started for the sitting-room with his paper. But he was called back.

"It's almost nine o'clock, Teddy," his wife reminded him. "You aren't going to leave me to do the dishes all alone?"

"Oh, let them go until morning," he called back.

"They'll be right here even then and I won't be able to get your breakfast on time."

"I don't want any breakfast."

"Not now of course, silly, but you will."

Taylor dropped his paper and turned to. He was not fond of this sort of thing although he thought of himself as domestic. But domesticity has two sides and this was the side he did not like.

"Will you wash or wipe?" she inquired.

"Wipe—if it's all the same to you," he decided.

A dish towel is well enough to start with, but after a minute or two it becomes moist and clammy. He would have used one for each plate had he had his way but he did not have it. She allowed him only three and he handled the last one with the tips of his fingers.

"Well have to have someone in; that's all there is to it," he declared when he was through.

"Servants to-day are so unsatisfactory—and expensive," she objected.

"Hang the expense!"

"Only you can't get rid of it that way."

"Well, there are other ways," she demurred.

"We'll see," he growled.

At that, when finally he did have an opportunity to settle down to his evening paper with her on the other side of the table doing a bit of embroidery, he was wider awake than usual and even took the trouble to read aloud to her some of the more interesting items of the day.

It was toward the middle of June that Taylor began to get really worried about the increase in his household expenses. The car accounted for some of the bills, for Mrs. Taylor was running about a good deal; but it did not explain them all. And the new cook, of course, was an added expense. But over and above these perfectly manifest liabilities there was a general inflation that extended all along the line. And with it all there was, as far as he could see, mighty little to show.

For three weeks, he had not had at home anything but an indifferent meal. And the baffling part of this was that he could not put his finger on anything in particular and say, "This is punk." It never was exactly that. The soups were flat without being positively bad, just as they were never hot without being edible but they lacked that little something more that made them want to come back a second time. The bread was passable and the desserts looked good but he never could get more than halfway through one of them.

And yet Taylor, to his credit, said nothing. He was a reasonable man and understood that Mary Ellen averaged as well as most of them. He understood further that he had no right to expect his wife to continue indefinitely in the kitchen. She had done her share in the last five years and it was only natural that with a new car she wanted more time. He tried to see her side, tried to be fair.

Now that it was so easy to get out there, she used the country club a good deal and began to take an interest in golf. That it was good for her he had no doubt—he really wished he could get out with her more. But

there was no chance of this with that collection of bills staring him in the face. No matter how many of them he paid there seemed to be just as many left. His library table was always cluttered up with a batch of them. Suzanne sympathized with him continually.

"I'm afraid I'm getting extravagant," she suggested.

"No, it isn't that," he denied. "I hear everyone kicking the same way. Living to-day is a darned expensive proposition and that's all there is to it."

"You're very sweet, Teddy."

"Who wouldn't be with a wife like you?" he grinned back.

He believed what he said, too. Those last new frocks she bought—she had to cost them—were stunning affairs. He was glad when dinner was over and, beyond the range of Mary Ellen's eyes, he could sit and admire her. He had forgotten how pretty she could be when she tried.

It began to look as though the only way Taylor could square himself was to earn more money. He did not come to this conclusion consciously. He was not the kind of man who reaches conclusions that way. This was fortunate because it would have brought discouragement. He had nothing with which to reproach himself in the past, for he considered that he had struck a good fair pace from the first and maintained it. Moreover, everyone admitted that business was so bad that any organization should be content if at the end of a year it split even.

But the trouble with Taylor's private and personal organization was that it was not splitting even. As president, treasurer and general manager of Taylor Incorporated he knew he was running behind at a rate which threatened bankruptcy if he did not do something about it.

He had been getting to the office pretty regularly on time lately. With so much to think about he woke earlier than usual, while coffee that tasted like chickweed and muffins without any taste at all were never any excuse for prolonging breakfast. Suzanne would have been worried about this sudden slump in his appetite had it not been for the fact that he could very well afford to lose some twenty pounds. But even so it was not pleasant to sit opposite and watch him toy with his food, recalling his old-time enthusiasm. It demanded self-control, particularly when she knew exactly what the trouble was. When Mary Ellen made coffee she did not make it especially for Teddy. She merely brewed coffee in a general sort of way, as they do in restaurants. That was true of the muffins. As for his three-minute egg, it became automatically an eight-minute egg if he happened to be five minutes late.

However, this enforced abstinence did not seem to affect his health adversely. He moved around the office with a brisker step, which Hutchins was quick to notice. He had always liked Taylor and if he had left a certain disappointment over his work of the last year he was ready enough to forget that, provided the man gave him a chance. And this Teddy seemed to be trying to do.

For one thing, he got out more. Automobiles are not sold from behind a desk. If they were, the firm would not have needed salesmen. They are sold as the result of personal interviews and actual demonstrations. An automobile in a catalogue is one thing—most anyone can get along without those—but an automobile so shiny bright that you can see your face in it anywhere, purring sweetly right under your office window, is quite another proposition. The more it costs, the more important it is for a prospect to ride in it. Ten minutes—around the block once or twice—is not much to ask of a busy man. Or better still, call at his house some morning and bring him down town or reverse it and take him home. Then the next time he steps into his old car it will look like junk. And the worse business is, the more like junk it will look and the more ashamed of himself the owner will be.

Taylor did not intend to exert himself especially but he knew that if he landed old Brenbridge, who had been hanging fire six months, the commission on the sale would clean up at least half a dozen of the middle-sized bills. It was money with that in mind that he went to see him.

"It was my fault that he drove down to his office at least six times until he finally got him out. Even then, as Brenbridge stepped into the seat beside Taylor, he said:

"You're only wasting your time and mine. With business the way it is today I'm not buying new cars."

"Business has been punk," admitted Taylor. "But it's looking up."

"It is, is it?"

"Surest thing you know."

He spoke with conviction—a conviction which he could not explain.

"I'd like to see some tangible evidence of it."

The car was moving as smooth as velvet down the street.

"A little confidence is all we need," declared Taylor. "The sort of confidence a car like this gives you. Notice the way those men turned around to take a second look?"

Brenbridge did. One of them was old Adamson.

"Let me have the wheel," ordered Brenbridge.

Taylor drew up to the curb and swapped places with the old gentleman. The latter started her and the power of the clean twelve cylinders seemed to run up his arm and quicken his pulse. The engine responded as only a new and perfect thing can do. He was out with her twenty minutes and when he finally returned to his starting point he nodded.

"Might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb," he said. "I'll take her."

Taylor felt the same thrill old Brenbridge had felt. He was convinced of his own conviction. Business was looking up.

Once Taylor got started there was no stopping him. He never realized how much honest work he did during the next six months, although he was pleasantly aware that the accumulat-

ed stack of bills on his desk vanished neatly and forever. Others appeared, to be sure, but that was a matter of no great importance. With his commissions mounting, as they soon began to do, paying a house bill involved nothing more serious than the few seconds necessary to sign a check.

The only thing that bothered him about this was that with his time at home now limited he resented sparing even these few seconds from the society of his wife.

Night after night he found it impossible to get home for dinner—or to get dinner anywhere except to snatch a bite at the station restaurant. That period between the close of business and the seven-fifty-five train he found to be one of the most valuable portions of the day. At that time he was able to meet men he could not reach in any other way.

Prospects were always willing to be driven home to dinner and this generally gave Taylor an opportunity to show the car to the wife. It was worth while. The wife was seldom concerned about the broad question of general economic conditions or, if she was, the sixteen coats of varnish which made the new car shine like a grand piano helped her to forget them. There were a dozen other nice details, too, made for the eye of the wife alone—like the cut-glass vase on the side, the neat little bag near the door, the foot warmer on the floor, and the monogrammed lights.

"Not perhaps in themselves important," explained Taylor. "But all tending to give that tone to the car which particular people appreciate."

Apparently the particular people did appreciate them, for Taylor sold more cars in December than any salesman had ever sold in that month in the history of the firm.

"I knew you had it in you."

And when Taylor came home late one evening in January and reported his success, Mrs. Teddy applauded too. But, all things considered, she did not show quite the enthusiasm that Hutchins did. It was a bit lonesome these winter nights, eating dinner by herself evening after evening.

"I should think that at least you could make the six-ten," she said wistfully.

"I always plan to, but so many darned things come up," he answered.

She thought, too, that he was beginning to look rather thin. He did not seem to notice it, but one evening he came home with a new box of collars and she saw that they were marked fifteen.

"Didn't you make a mistake?" she asked as she examined them.

"Guess the collar-makers are getting honest again, for that size is plenty large enough now."

"Won't they shrink?"

"Chinks are improving too," he declared. "I've noticed it for the last two months. Guess the whole world is getting better."

That was nice of course and Suzanne would have been the last person on earth to deplore it. Certainly Teddy had improved in every direction. He was just as sweet and considerate and thoughtful as he could be. But she did miss him at dinner. What was that old proverb? "Be good and you'll be lonesome." It didn't seem fair.

If Mary Ellen would only let her make a fudge cake now and then. . . . But when once, tempted beyond her limit, she suggested this, Mary Ellen turned on her.

"Isn't my cake good enough?" she demanded.

"Yes, Mary. Certainly. But Mr. Taylor—"

"What's good enough for you is good enough for him," argued Mary Ellen.

Had she been mistress of her own house, Suzanne would gladly have postponed the dinner hour until eight. This, however, was on the face of it so absurd a proposition that she did not broach the subject even indirectly.

Taylor doubled his income during that period from May to May but this, oddly enough, did not interest Suzanne in the slightest. If this had been all that was accomplished she would have called it a poor bargain. Not for four times that sum would she have gone on another year lead and thought as he could be. But she did miss him at dinner. What was that old proverb? "Be good and you'll be lonesome." It didn't seem fair.

If Mary Ellen would only let her make a fudge cake now and then. . . . But when once, tempted beyond her limit, she suggested this, Mary Ellen turned on her.

"Isn't my cake good enough?" she demanded.

"Yes, Mary. Certainly. But Mr. Taylor—"

"What's good enough for you is good enough for him," argued Mary Ellen.

Had she been mistress of her own house, Suzanne would gladly have postponed the dinner hour until eight. This, however, was on the face of it so absurd a proposition that she did not broach the subject even indirectly.

Taylor doubled his income during that period from May to May but this, oddly enough, did not interest Suzanne in the slightest. If this had been all that was accomplished she would have called it a poor bargain. Not for four times that sum would she have gone on another year lead and thought as he could be. But she did miss him at dinner. What was that old proverb? "Be good and you'll be lonesome." It didn't seem fair.

If Mary Ellen would only let her make a fudge cake now and then. . . . But when once, tempted beyond her limit, she suggested this, Mary Ellen turned on her.

"Isn't my cake good enough?" she demanded.

"Yes, Mary. Certainly. But Mr. Taylor—"

"What's good enough for you is good enough for him," argued Mary Ellen.

Had she been mistress of her own house, Suzanne would gladly have postponed the dinner hour until eight. This, however, was on the face of it so absurd a proposition that she did not broach the subject even indirectly.

Taylor doubled his income during that period from May to May but this, oddly enough, did not interest Suzanne in the slightest. If this had been all that was accomplished she would have called it a poor bargain. Not for four times that sum would she have gone on another year lead and thought as he could be. But she did miss him at dinner. What was that old proverb? "Be good and you'll be lonesome." It didn't seem fair.

If Mary Ellen would only let her make a fudge cake now and then. . . . But when once, tempted beyond her limit, she suggested this, Mary Ellen turned on her.

"Isn't my cake good enough?" she demanded.

"Yes, Mary. Certainly. But Mr. Taylor—"

"What's good enough for you is good enough for him," argued Mary Ellen.

"I'm going to make fudge cakes and everything. And we won't have dinner until you get home, even if it's midnight. It won't hurt you now to put on a little weight."

"That's too deep for me."

"And I'm going to sell the old car."

"You don't understand; I've been advanced, and not chucked."

"Advanced, that's it, Teddy? So we can afford a little freedom. Oh, you don't understand and never will understand and it's not important that you should. The only thing I'm sorry about is that I've got to give Mary Ellen two weeks' notice. But, Teddy Taylor—that dinner will be worth waiting for."

It was, but hang it all, what was the joke?—By Frederick Orin Bartlett.

\$268,000,000 in Bond Issues to be Passed on in 1928.

Preparations are being made by the State Department to advertise the twelve proposed constitutional amendments which were passed by the 1925 sessions of the legislature and will come up for second passage next year before being placed on the ballots in 1928 for action by the voters.

Four of the number of proposed changes in the organic law of the State call for increasing the bonded indebtedness about \$285,000,000. In addition to be asked for in 1928 the voters will be asked to pass on two others to further increase the State's debt another \$33,000,000 bringing the total to \$268,000,000.

The proposed amendments which call for increasing the debt to be advertised this summer are: Capitol Park improvements, \$100,000,000, including the memorial bridge; rehabilitation of State-owned institutions, \$50,000,000; soldier's bonus, \$35,000,000; and highways, \$50,000,000. The two other bond issues which also will be voted on two years hence are forestry \$25,000,000 and Pennsylvania State College \$8,000,000.

The proposed new highway loan is the third for road making purposes. Funds from the other two have virtually been exhausted or will be after this year's program has been finished or contracted. Carrying charges and sinking fund payments for the highway bonds are paid out of receipts for automobile licenses and other department income while other issues would be paid for from the general fund.

The bonus amendment had previously passed two sessions, but because of legal technicalities and a Supreme Court ruling, could not be voted on until 1928. Since that opinion a new amendment was drafted and it already has passed one legislative session.

Two of the other proposals are expected to create wide interest. One would permit voting machines and the other making legal the old age pension system. The League of Women Voters for several years has sponsored the voting machine proposal and the former old age pension law was declared unconstitutional.