

NETTA AND HER HUSBAND

By FANNIE HURST

IF SHE had ever thought about it at all in that light, Netta would probably have thought the problem of her marriage unique. As a matter of fact, it was such a universal problem that it is not at all unlikely that in the 45 identical houses, five rooms, sleeping porch, built-in washbats, that occupied the little suburban street where she had her home and being, there was a startling repetition of her self-same problems. Netta had been married for six years. There were no children. Her husband was an architect, with offices in the city. He was junior partner in a growing but not large concern and was a nice, clean, average example of a little community of men who get the 8:10 train at the little stucco station six mornings a week.

If he was a rather deadly average as to his politics, his religion, his credos, his pastimes, his home life, neither he nor Netta realized it.

The fly that fell into the ointment of the average married life of this average American couple, living the standardized routine of the hundreds of thousands of other couples, appeared rather suddenly in the sixth year of what might well be called a congenial marriage. Suddenly it came over Netta, whose interests in her pretty little home were normal ones, whose activities in her little suburban community were neighborly ones, whose prettiness had rather increased since her marriage than diminished—suddenly it came over this energetic little wife in her snug little home, in her snug little suburban development, that she was married to a husband.

It came over Netta one morning as she stood in front of her little dressing table, with her bare arms raised in the act of brushing her smooth coilure of bobbed hair, that she had no lover. It was five and one-half years since the young architect, Frazier Maughm, to whom she was married, had so much as commented on any of the personable qualities that had seemed to capture him during the period of their engagement and the brief subsequent term of the honeymoon.

Almost immediately Frazier had committed the error that is typical of thousands of American men of his class. In the terms of his own father, who had once been rebuked by his own mother for a similar defection and had replied: "After you have run for a car, you sit down," Frazier had "sat down." He had begun the dangerous, the disillusioning mental habit of taking Netta for granted.

What was taking place between Netta and her husband was taking place in practically every one of those 45 identical houses on the standardized street of that standardized town.

The women used to talk about it at their bridge parties, at their afternoon gatherings, as they rode into town on their shopping expeditions. They talked about it wistfully and vicariously. The patter that took place among them was of starvelings. Motion picture heroes who eulogized their women in pleasant superlatives across the screen fascinated them. They were fond of saying among themselves that foreign men were so fascinating. It was wonderful to have your hand kissed. Fancy John kissing one's hand! He would explode all over with laughter. Ah me, yes, foreign men did have that something—

Bitterly, there came welling up into the little heart of Netta one day the realization that Frazier's morning kiss was a peck; that Frazier's evening kiss was a peck that sometimes actually slipped and hit her on the top of her nose. Demonstration between them had ceased. They no longer even walked the streets arm in arm. Let Netta come downstairs for a dinner party and a bridge in the neighborhood, radiant in a new little frock she had assembled for herself, and not so much as a cheep out of Frazier unless in the key of, "Say, you better go upstairs and put on a petticoat," or, "Rub some of that circus paint off your lips."

Never a tribute to her skill, her economy, her prettiness. Just rub-a-dub-dub of routine. Just lovelessness. Sometimes it seemed to Netta that her heart was dying of starvation. More and more bitterly she withdrew into herself, and yet, so far as Frazier was concerned, there was never a ripple on the equanimity of his consciousness.

Their life together had just become routine. There was no romance, no demonstrativeness. No unexpected show of interest and appreciation. Just one day after another of placid acceptance of things as they were by Frazier. One day after another of increasing bitterness and resentment on Netta's part.

It was Frazier's calm acceptance of things that was so maddening to Netta.

Netta was there to be pecked at when he came home evenings. That seemed to be all that he noticed.

Netta was there to see to it that his dinner was hot and well served, that it consisted of the things he liked, that they were cooked to his taste.

Crisp were his shirts. His clothes in orderly array. Spotless his abode.

All things arranged as he liked them, with neatness, cleanliness and—only he was blind to it—charm. Netta was a good housekeeper, a good home maker, a woman who imposed her personality on her surroundings.

Because of Netta, Frazier started off to work each morning with cheerfulness and a feeling of well-being that a good breakfast gives. And Netta was there to be pecked good-by in the morning.

In other words, Netta was always there. Frazier took her as much for granted as he did his morning paper spread before his plate at breakfast, or his comfortable chair placed wherever the weather made it most comfortable—before a cheerful fire when the weather was raw, where it caught such breeze as there was when the evenings were warm.

Curious, but as the months stalked by there crept into the festering little soul of this woman a rebellion and even a sullen hatred of this sharer of her destiny. She used to turn her cheek for him to kiss in the morning as if it were so much leather. She used to stand within a radius of the embrasure of his arms, glorifying in her anger at the stupidity of the man.

And still Frazier went his way, rejoicing, attending his baseball games, doing his eighteen holes on Saturday afternoon, shellacking the little two-seated sedan, trailing bushes up the garden trellis. If he noticed a change that had come over this woman of his choice, he noticed it without comment. He took it all apparently as the normal procedure of two people whose lives have become wedded.

Slowly there took shape in Netta's mind the determination to estrange herself from this so-called sharer of her woes and joys; to withdraw into herself; to let the circumstances of their alienation reach a climax. She yearned for admiration, the kind of adulation to which her blond loveliness was entitled. She was not yet ready to be finished with the exilir of youth. Frazier was.

One Saturday afternoon, however, something happened that nipped her whole plan of procedure in the bud. A trivial incident and yet it was to open Netta's eyes. In the end, it was to lessen her terrific disappointment in Frazier's inability to keep life a much fairer thing than he had succeeded in doing. It revealed to Netta that she had builded her judgment on superficial sands.

The estrangement which she had contemplated was never to happen—all because of this trifling incident.

On the Saturday afternoon in question, Frazier was crouching on the lowermost step of the veranda, sprinkling the rose bed with a garden hose. Netta, sullen, heavy-hearted, was sitting upstairs in a crisp organdie frock which she had just made for herself, reading a novel.

There came up to Frazier a door-to-door woman canvasser. From her window, Netta could overhear the conversation. She knew the scheme. It was an old one. A city photographer would make a life-sized copy of a cabinet photograph for a nominal sum, provided you paid the canvasser a deposit of two dollars. Then you were to receive a twelve-dollar portrait upon an additional payment of three dollars.

"I am not interested," said Frazier. "Surely," said the canvasser, "there is some member of the family whom you would like to surprise with a portrait. How about your wife?"

"Nonsense," said Frazier. Upstairs, anger smoldered in Netta. "It won't cost you anything to let me see a picture of your wife," said the canvasser, a well-setup woman of intelligence.

"I don't know where one is," said Frazier.

"You don't know where there's a photograph of your own wife?"

"I hate them."

Upstairs, in her pretty frock, hot, swollen tears formed in Netta's eyes. "Well," said the canvasser, "that's a confession. And you don't want a picture, then, I take it."

"No," said Frazier, "you're right, I don't. There never was a portrait could get her coloring or the kind of something that's caught up in her blue eyes or the expression around her mouth that no woman in the world ever had but Netta. I should say there isn't a portrait that could do her justice."

After the canvasser had gone, Netta, with bright pink spots on her beautiful cheeks, came downstairs, cool, crisp and radiant.

"Go upstairs," said her husband, who was sprinkling the lawn, "and put on a petticoat."

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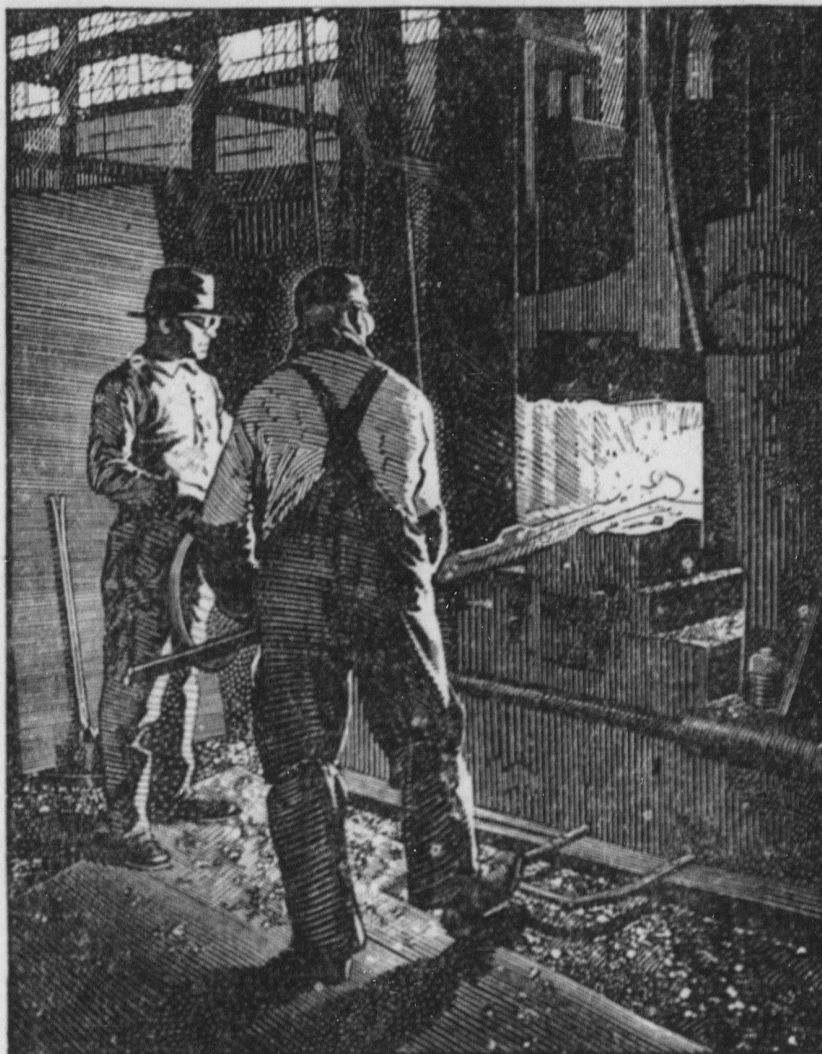
Official Radio Calls

By international agreement, all the countries of the world that have radio transmitting stations have been assigned certain letters and combinations of letters. For the United States the assigned call letters are N and W, also from KD to KZ. Japan has been assigned J; Mexico CY and XA to XD; Britain and the British colonies B, G, M, CF to CK and other combinations. In this country the call letter N is reserved for navy stations and WUA to WVZ and from WXA to WZZ for army stations.

Military Honors

When a man is buried with "full military honors" it means with the honors suitable to one's rank, and depends on the rank held by the individual at the time of his connection with the service. For example: A man in private life who has formerly been secretary of war would be buried with military honors suitable to the rank of secretary of war.

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Nothing Modern About Liking for "Flip-Jacks"

Mardi Gras jollification in old England reached a climax at noon on Shrove Tuesday when the so-called Pancake bell was rung from the parish church tower, signaling a rush for frying pan and batter on the part of the village goodies, and general feasting and rejoicing of Tom, Dick, and Harry over successive batches of pancakes until far into the night.

In the words of a Seventeenth century chronicler: "Shrove Tuesday there is a bell rung, call'd the Pancake bell, the sound whereof makes thousands of people distracted and forgetful either of manners or humanity. Then there is a thing called wheat flour, which the cooks do mingle with water, eggs, spice, and other tragical, magical enchantments, and then they put it by little and little into a frying pan of boiling suet, where it makes a confused dismal hissing, until at last by the skill of the cooks, it is transformed into the form of a flip-jack, call'd a pancake, which ominous incantation the ignorant people do devour very greedily."

By which it will be seen that there is nothing new under the sun, and that flapjacks are prepared and consumed now in much the same fashion that flip-jacks were in the Seventeenth century.

"Pieces of Eight"

This coin is a Spanish piece that circulated freely in this country in Colonial and Revolutionary times and the coin to which we owe the adoption of the dollar as the unit of our currency. It had become the custom in many places, especially in the South, to pride goods, keep accounts and make collections in "Spanish milled dollars," the name under which the old "pieces of eight"—eight reals—were known in the Colonies. When we came to have a currency of our own we took the piece of eight, or Spanish dollar, as our unit and divided it into a hundred cents.

Modern Music Made No Hit With Lord Balfour

In music Lord Balfour took a great delight and was an enthusiastic lover of the old masters, especially of Handel. Modern music had little charm, if any, for him.

"I remember how patiently he would sit through dinner at his favorite restaurant in Paris until most of the clients had left and the noise of jazz and jingle had ceased," recalls Sir Ian Malcolm in his personal memoir of Balfour, "and would then ask the chef d'orchestre (a very gifted young Polish violinist) to play him some Eighteenth-century French music."

Then during the nine months Lord Balfour remained in Paris for the peace conference his house was the scene of many brilliant musical evenings.

"I remember one evening," says Sir Ian, "when Charles Hendl was going to sing, he inquired delicately whether anybody present objected to German songs. The chief (Balfour) promptly replied: "I don't. I will take them as part of the reparations that they owe us!"—Kansas City Times.

Boys on Parade

As in the case of the college student, it takes but little to start the New York street urchin off on a parade. He finds a long pole, or even a discarded and dilapidated broom, which will do for a flagpole. He and his companions seize on a pile of celery stalks thrown out by a grocer; these are carried as swords or muskets, and the line of youngsters perhaps half a dozen in all, march proudly up the street to the badly sung tune of "The Maine Stein Song."

Husbands and Wives

The man who tells you that he never had an unpleasantness with his wife is a liar—or a dud.—American Magazine.

Mankind Never Able to Change Nature of Cat

It seems that the house cat of today behaves in much the same manner as it did in the bygone ages. The animal's association with man has not changed its habits in one particular. It goes about in its own way and takes its own time and all efforts to make it take some part in the operations of the household have failed. The animal resents any interference with its coming and going. Miss A. S. Firkins, of Columbia university, has put the cat to an intelligence test. Seventy-eight cats were secured from a pet show and put through a series of tests. The first problem put before the cats was how to reach food placed inside an inclosure. Most of the cats solved this by stepping upon a plate which opened the way. The problems were then increased in difficulty, the hardest being one which required the cats to touch seven plates, one after the other, to get the food. Only two of the contestants were smart enough to do this. One of the conclusions arrived at was that male cats are smarter than the females.

Bostoness

She was a Boston provincial, and smacked of the Back bay. Approaching a clerk in one of Fifth avenue's swankiest millinery shops she said quite patronizingly: "I'm from Boston and would like something a trifle smart without being the least bit showy." "I get you, ma'am, sort of second mourning," replied the experienced saleslady, adding "I once lived in Boston myself."

Careth for Carrots

When Annabel returned from Sunday school her mother asked what the text was. Promptly Annabel replied, "Eat Carrots for Me." Since then Annabel has been eating, without protest, her mother's prescribed carrots, not knowing that the text really was, "He careth for me."

Duke's Emphatic Rebuke

Chilly souls who complain of the temperature of other folks' rooms and offices during the transition days between empty grate and full may not all feel equal to teaching the delinquents a lesson, after the manner of the second duke of Wellington, said the North China Herald, not long ago. Very fond of warmth at all times, he found occasion to grumble at his friend and neighbor, Lady Dorothy Nevill, because of the smallness of her grates, and one autumn day when he arrived to lunch with her he gave one glance at the fire, then turned and asked the footman to bring his overcoat. The coat being brought, he put it on and sat in it throughout his stay. No efforts could induce him to remove it. "No," said he doggedly, "I will shame you into having good fires."

Alaska's Official Flag Designed by Schoolboy

A contest was held by the American Legion, Department of Alaska, in the public, private and native schools in the territory for the purpose of selecting an official flag for Alaska. A law passed by the legislature of the Department of Alaska on May 2, 1927, provided that the design of the official flag (the winning design) is eight gold stars in a field of blue, so selected for its simplicity, its originality and its symbolism. The blue, one of our national colors, typifies the evening sky, the blue of the sea and of mountain lakes and of wild flowers that grow in Alaskan soil, the gold being significant of the wealth that lies hidden in Alaska's hills and streams. And the law also provides that the governor shall cause the original design to be encased properly and placed in the Alaska Historical museum, and that due credit be given to Benny Benson, aged thirteen years, a student in the seventh grade of the Mission Territorial school, near Seward, Alaska, the designer of the flag, herein described and adopted as the official flag of Alaska.