

THE MEEKER GIRLS

A Broken Dream Restored

By Fannie Hurst

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EVEN with such terms as "old-maid" and "maiden-lady," practically gone out of the language, there was something about the five unmarried Meeker sisters that did suggest them.

The Meeker girls were so apologetically unmarried. Each and every one of them met you on the supposition that you questioned her standing.

The old homestead, inherited from their parents, was filled with twittings among themselves and to their friends, when they called, of opportunities that might have been.

If Lily had cared to accept Tom White!

It was known, among the Meeker girls, that in 1899, during a two weeks' trip to the Adirondacks, Edith had three times refused a young Canadian trader from Quebec who had since become a coal baron.

Meta, long and affectionately indicted by her sisters as the flirt of the family, had "turned down" right and left.

After the battle of Vimy Ridge, Ella confessed to a secret fiancé who had fallen.

Teena, the youngest, although non-committal, gave you the feeling that life had not passed her by. Besides, it was a fact that Nicholas Lang, a widower of standing in the town, was calling on her.

Every girl, at one time or another in her life, has a chance to marry, the Meeker girls were forever protesting, perhaps too loudly. Thank goodness, not one of us has ever felt the need to marry just for the sake of being married. Naturally we've had chances. Not that it's the sort of thing we discuss . . .

Strangely, this defense-mechanism was not one which the girls employed solely with the friends outside the home, who as time went on began to refer to them collectively as "The Meeker Girls." It was something they practiced assiduously among themselves, keeping their spirits agog, on the buoyancy of a self-induced state of mind.

"Meta, it's an outrage the way you treat men! After all, no one expects you to feel called upon to marry every one who asks you, but surely you might let one or two of them call at the house."

"If I were to let every man call who drops into the office to ask me, we'd have the neighbors all talking. Just because I happen to be a stenographer in a law office doesn't give them the right to presume, and they might as well know it."

With Lily now, it was different. After all, the affair with Tom White was one to leave its imprint across a lifetime. The world thought Tom White had died of influenza following the World war. The Meeker sisters knew better. Tom White, just as surely as if they had seen it disintegrate, had taken to his bed of a broken heart, after Lily had spoken her sorrowful refusal. It was somehow fitting that Lily should continue to keep her heart locked in its tower. . . . Ella, too, for that matter. Poor Ella, whose secret garden had been blasted in full bloom. . . .

And so it went among themselves. And life, in the Meeker homestead, if it appeared monotonous to the beholder, was far from that to the girls. There was Meta. Evening after evening, around the pleasant sitting room fire, Lily, seated as usual, Turkish fashion on the sofa, Ella stitching away at handwork, the girls would listen to Meta.

Oh, but she was a naughty, darling, heartless sinner! No wonder, even with her equal share in the comfortable little estate shared by the sisters, Meta had decided to venture out into the business world. She was just the type to make contacts, or rather, as the girls giggled among themselves, to avoid them.

The way Meta handled the difficult situation of the men about her in the office was masterful! Naturally they swarmed about her. Even at thirty-eight, there was a sparrow prettiness to Meta, but lots of good it did the men. Evening after evening, filled with droileries, merciless in her high-handedness and oh, so comical in her world pictures of the luckless creatures who wooed her, Meta recited her days.

"And he comes into the office where I am sitting pretending to be bent over my typewriter and says: 'Miss Meta—'"

"You don't let him call you Meta, do you, darling?"

"That's what I'm coming to, honeys, if you'll let me. 'Miss Meta,' he says, 'the boys tell me you're just the coiest young girl in this office and make all the flappers look like prayer meeting.'" "Nerve!"

"Nerve doesn't express it. Nothing in the world on his mind but dating up with me. Oh, you have to be in business to know what it means to keep a man in his place."

"Would he propose, Meta?"

"Would he propose? Give a man

like that an inch and he'd be calling her every night!"

"That's right, darling, keep them in their places."

If it percolated through at all, to the Meeker girls, who in the forties and fifties, were lean and rather plucked-looking, that pathos and amusement were blended in the attitude of their friends, certainly that consciousness was slow to reach the close little inner circle.

Romance brushed this circle right after night, sat in flushes on the dry flushed cheeks of the sisters, warmed the recesses of the draughty old house.

Then came the time when, outside that inner sanctum, the amusement of friends became laughter and the laughter, derision.

Man-crazy as the Meeker girls. That sounds like a Meeker pipe-dream. Hear the latest? Another secret lover has sued for Lily Meeker's hand. Accent on the secret!

That was the beginning of a strange and deadening thing that began to happen to the Meeker girls. Delicately bred, sensitive to the intonation of the suppressed laugh, there seemed to seep slowly into that home, as the girls wore on in years, awareness that the cat of pretense was out of the bag. More and more silently the girls gathered about their little circle, evenings; less and less they came to discuss, with friends, the repudiated amours and wooings. Even Meta, as time wore on, came more and more to maintain silence concerning the many overtures of the men about the office.

It was during the period of those silent, rather dreadful years in the great old house that had used to ring to the tales of conquest, that Nicholas Lang, seventy-one, took Teena Meeker, fifty-three, off one day to the town of Greenwich, Conn., and married her!

A Meeker sister had succumbed. A Meeker sister, marrying, had proved to an all too cynical world that she was desirable in the eyes of a man. It gave authenticity, it gave reality, it gave authority, not only to Teena, but to the Meeker sisters.

Something flowed back into the eyes of the remaining four. The old light of conquest. The old vistas of romance. The old air of desirability.

The Meeker sisters are once more reciting with authority the sagas of the suitors who have sued in vain.

There is even about Teena, the wife, a slight air of sheepishness toward her sisters, for the humanness of not only having permitted herself to be wooed, but won.

Real Beauty Matter of Form, Color and Taste

Many persons believe that to be beautiful and artistic the work of man must be expensive. Cheap things are considered tawdry and even vulgar. Articles that are useful are also barred by some individuals who consider themselves capable of judging.

Edward P. Richardson, educational director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, holds different ideas. He declares beauty to be a matter of form and color and that good design need not be expensive. To prove that his theory is correct Mr. Richardson started out with a reasonable sum of money provided by the Junior League to buy useful articles that would conform to the requirements of artistic beauty.

By visiting department stores, hardware establishments, chinaware emporiums, Mr. Richardson collected 188 different articles, not one of which cost more than 50 cents and most of them much less, and assembled them in a corridor of the art institute where an exhibition of American painting was on view. They included tableware, glassware, curtain materials, table covers and napkins. The exhibition attracted much attention and there was no dispute regarding the claim that the expert had proved his contention.

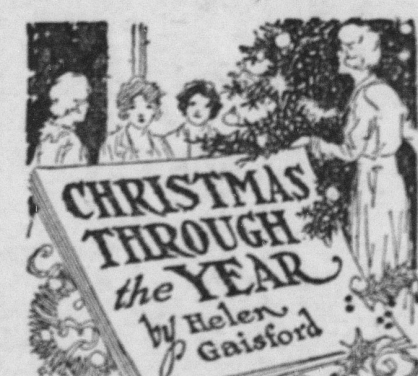
Pepper and salt shakers need not offend the lover of the beautiful, and cups and saucers can be decorative and at the same time have the element of utility. By keeping this fact in mind housewives can make life more pleasant. Manufacturers would do well to examine the collection made by Mr. Richardson, and if they will learn the lesson he set about to teach they will improve the standard of taste and find it profitable.—Miami Herald.

Parents of Presidents

The parents of Washington and Adams were of English descent; those of Jefferson, Welsh; those of Madison, Monroe and J. Q. Adams, English; those of Jackson, Scotch-Irish; of Van Buren, Dutch; of Harrison and Tyler, English; of Polk, Scotch-Irish; of Taylor, Fillmore and Pierce, English; of Buchanan, Irish; of Lincoln, Johnson and Grant, English; of Hayes, Scotch; of Garfield, English, though his mother was of Huguenot descent; of Arthur, Scotch-Irish; of Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, English; of McKinley, Scotch-Irish; of Roosevelt, Dutch; of Taft, English; of Wilson, Scotch-Irish; of Harding and Coolidge, English; of Hoover, Swiss.

Odorless Skunks

The much maligned polecat, mophitis mephitica, to give his scientific name, is on the way to losing its one claim to notoriety. Thanks to intensive breeding experiments, the odorless skunk has come to stay. Not only has careful breeding, supplemented by veterinary surgery, removed the objectionable feature of close companionship with the wood "pussey," but the animals also are stripeless. Although experiments are not fully concluded, it is felt that these hygienic polecats have reached a stage of development where they may be offered to the world's fur market.



MAXINE was entertaining the bridge club of which she was president with a Christmas party. The group of lively young women gathered about the tree for their annual election.

"Before we take up the election of officers for next year," Maxine announced, "I want to review with you a little of what we have done this past year.

"It was at our last January meeting that we decided that good times alone would not keep our club alive. Then it was suggested that we carry the Christmas spirit through the year by considering the 25th of every month a 'Christmas anniversary,' and doing some act such as we would do if it were really Christmas time.

"On January 25 we helped the Stone boy get a new suit; on February 25 we took out and cooked a real Christmas dinner for the Perkins family; on March 25 we arranged to buy music for the postman's boy, and got Mr. Williams to give him free violin lessons, and by the way, I understand he is showing real talent. In April we took care of Mrs. Perkins while she was sick, stopping in every noon to fix lunch and straighten up.

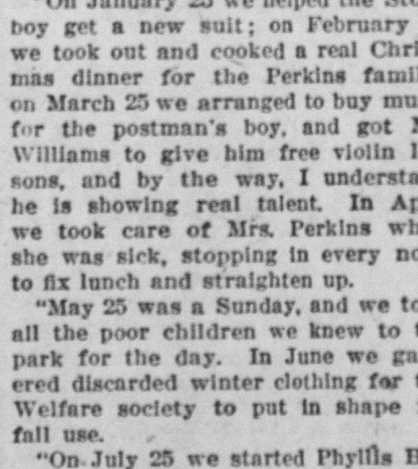
"May 25 was a Sunday, and we took all the poor children we knew to the park for the day. In June we gathered discarded winter clothing for the Welfare society to put in shape for fall use.

"On July 25 we started Phyllis Bivens off to a tuberculosis sanitarium. In August we bought school supplies for Sarah Stone, and in September we made another drive for discarded clothing.

"For a couple of weeks during October we helped in the Community Chest campaign; in November we waited until Thanksgiving day, when we distributed five turkeys; and here it is December again. What are we to do this month?"

"Well," said one of the girls, "of course we have been working all month on toys for the Community tree for poor children. So I suggest that this month we spend the 25th at home, but that next year we follow the same plan, and I nominate our President Maxine for re-election."

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The French Santa Claus
The French Santa Claus is dressed like a Harlequin in the old pantomime.

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Examination in Psychology 79
By JANE OSBORN

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WHEN Lois woke up that bright day in May the sun was streaming into her little blue and pink bedroom, and even in the moments of half slumber before she opened her eyes she felt that something was wrong. Then she remembered.

She had gone to a dance with Robert Granger the night before. She had gone—though for some reason she had felt that she ought not to go—because then she felt that she really liked Robert very much, liked him well enough to marry him. Robert had said he wanted to ask her an important question that night. She remembered now that she felt a real longing for the Robert who had made that stammering declaration as they drove home, narrowly missing a telegraph pole and a passing car as he tried to drive and propose at once. Somehow Robert had managed—when he wasn't dancing with her—to get himself drunk—foolishly drunk. The drunk Robert she loathed.

So that was the trouble, thought Lois, settling herself indolently against the pillows. Perhaps it wasn't a trouble at all—it was just fortunate that she had realized before it was too late the real nature of this Robert she had once liked.

But there were other disturbing thought waves passing through her mind—something else was wrong.

It had suddenly dawned on Lois—though she had forgotten the fact in her hazy moments of waking—that this was the morning set for the final examination in psychology 79. Of course, she had known it the day before—she had crammed all the afternoon—and it was because of the examination that she had hesitated about going to the dance with Robert.

Suddenly as she was hurrying into the neat little blue sport frock she had chosen for the day she realized that there wasn't the slightest advantage in hurrying now. Even if she went off to college without eating any breakfast she wouldn't arrive until after eleven—too late for the examination.

Lois completed her dressing with considerable leisure—taking more than usual pains with the arrangement of her hair and the placing of the faint bit of rouge which she considered necessary to hide the traces of fatigue.

An hour later—at a little after eleven o'clock—Lois entered the office of Professor Stratton, well known psychologist, who lectured in Psychology 79. He was a genial looking man of sixty, who at the moment sat at his desk with head turned to gaze lazily at the green campus trees through the open window in his office.

"I am sorry, Doctor Stratton," she said, "but I didn't wake up in time to get to the examination this morning. I would like to get credit, of course—though I hardly like to ask for a special examination."

Doctor Stratton regarded Lois without much show of personal interest. The fact was, he was always bored by the type of scatter-brained students of which apparently this young woman was typical. He told her that professors were not required to give special examinations save in cases of illness. Still he might regard her failure to wake in time for the examination in the nature of illness—mental if not physical. But he couldn't be bothered writing out a special examination for her. He would put it up to his assistant—Mr. Platt.

And so matters were arranged for a special examination the next morning at nine o'clock in Mr. Platt's small private office, and much relieved at this turn of events Lois went home—recalling as she went a few conversations she had had with the young instructor.

"I have Doctor Stratton's permission to give an oral examination," Mr. Platt explained the next morning. "After all if I am anything of a psychologist I ought to be able to get your rating in the course rather easily."

After this obviously premeditated introduction the young man looked a little confused and then laughed. Lois laughed, too. She said she liked the idea. There were things she could say about psychology that she couldn't write—because she wasn't always sure how to spell the words.

He asked a few questions—which he considered adequately answered after a few faltering remarks from Lois. A quarter of an hour of this and then it was over. He said he would give Doctor Stratton a good report.

Lois rose to go and Mr. Platt rose, too. "I am awfully glad you did oversleep," he said, "because I've had a chance to know you a little better. Perhaps you'll give me permission to call some time."

Lois gave the young instructor an appraising glance. "I'd be charmed," she said. "Perhaps you could come this afternoon."

Late that summer Professor Stratton opened a letter from his young assistant. He read it with an expression of half-amusement, half-boredom. "So it goes," he said to his wife. "Feather-brained young woman oversleeps on morning of important examination which she possibly couldn't have passed. Clever young instructor gives her a rating of ninety-eight in fifteen minutes test—and within two months has taken her for his life mate."

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Little Damage Done by Missile, as It Happened
Mark Twain, at a publishers' dinner in New York, talked of his reporting days in Virginia City. "We were trying a horse thief one day," he said, "and all of a sudden the big, burly scoundrel pulled off his boot and threw it at the judge. It was a heavy boot, too. It was studded with hobnails. . . . I am still rather proud of the way I wrote up that little incident, doing it neatly, and at the same time getting back on a rival reporter whom I disliked. I got it all in one paragraph—something like this: "Suddenly the blackguardly thief, pulling off his boot, hurled it with all his might straight at the judge's head. This desperate act might have been attended with most disastrous consequences, but, fortunately, the missile only struck a reporter, so that no harm was done."—Pathfinder Magazine.

If It's Your Liver—
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Highest Possessions Above Monetary Value
What are the things which the average human being values most? A Wisconsin clergyman has been asking this question of leading men all over the country, and the answers, as analyzed by Channing Pollock for the American Magazine, indicate that most of the desirable possessions in people's lives cost them nothing in money.

A list of fifty such valuable possessions, for instance, shows that 48 of the 50 had no monetary cost. The three leaders are: Health, love of work and capacity for it; ability to look any man in the eye.

Most of these things, comments Mr. Pollock, are very common possessions, and yet nobody would take a million dollars for any one of the lot.

Even though a man has not become well-off, if he has suffered no great personal disasters, he has had luck.

Homemade bread wasn't fluffy; it was solid, but yet light. We speak of it in the past tense.

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Children's Mustrerole is just good old Mustrerole, you have known so long, in milder form.
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