

## TAKING A FLIER IN MATRIMONY PREFERRED

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THERE can be no doubt at all that the season's styles in wives show a brand new flare.

There was a time when any woman with a good complexion and a mastery of the technique of lemon pie was considered to have a sufficient dowry. Then came the days when she had to be able to supplement her husband's salary with her winnings at bridge whist, and to keep three steps ahead of the times in the new dances. But this season—well!

A short time ago I visited the headquarters of what advertised itself as "the greatest Matrimonial Office in the world"—both capitals. You'll find it, ladies, at 385 West End Avenue, at it isn't any use. For I came away with my steps weighted with a sad, oppressive fact: Men who want to get married are at a premium just now, but women can only do it when accompanied by a bonus. Every time.

Listen to these figures: You can get an ice-cream husband (an asset in any home) for the trifling investment of \$2,000. A tramway conductor has been marked down to \$300, holiday sail. But a saloonkeeper will cost you \$5,000, a tailor \$10,000, a capitalist \$30,000, a farmer \$50,000 (potatoes are going up, these days), a hotel owner \$50,000, a lieutenant \$100,000 and a "noble gentleman" anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000. Perhaps the locksmiths do not laugh at love, but they require at least \$1,000 to set them to smiling.

It's a beastly mercenary world, for us ladies who are broke, now, isn't it?

### Styles in Husbands Are About the Same as Usual

And the funny thing about it all is that the season's styles in husbands haven't changed a bit. They are still cut on the personal bias, just as they always were, we learned at the Matrimonial Offices. Instead of asking for a bonus, every woman merely wants "a conscientious gentleman," "a loving companion," or, "a respectable young man." It is true, I did hear one yellow-haired girl pleading for a head waiter, but I feel sure that it was the pride of place and not the tips that she was thinking of.

I'd been reading a chance copy of "The Matrimonial News," and pondering over the high cost of husbands and the hardy perennial sentiment of romantic womankind, when The Pirate followed a telephone announcement of himself upstairs. We used to play together long before the days when at ten years old he ran off to be a pirate and was gone all afternoon, and got a spanking and a title for his pains, so I feel quite justified in asking him to do disagreeable things.

"I'm looking for a husband," I said, as soon as I opened the door.

He looked uneasy, and I hastened to reassure him.

"Not you," I soothed. "No, indeed. I've known you too long. And too well. Much too well."

"Did I ask?" he began, in a tone of umbrage.

"You didn't," I admitted, "but if I waited for you to propose first, very likely I'd never have the pleasure of rejecting you. About this husband business—I'm not going to bother you a bit."

"That's good," said The Pirate, ungraciously. "Hardly a bit, anyhow," I amended. "All I want you to do is to take me around to the Matrimonial agency at 385 West End Avenue."

"Matrimonial agency!" shouted The Pirate. "Are you crazy?"



The Cheapest Thing in the Whole Stock Was a Chauffeur at \$300

I pass over the painful discussion that followed, during which The Pirate conjured me to remember my family out West, and the excellent reputation it had always borne, and I told him that his ideas were hopelessly rural, and I doubted his ability to keep pace with the business methods of a big city. The worst moment of all was when I broke it to him that not only was I looking for a husband, but that he was looking for a wife, also. He was most disagreeable about it.

"I'd have to put in an advertisement, you see," I tried to explain, "and this way we can put both our needs in the same paragraph, and save money."

"But I don't want any wife," The Pirate moaned, as many another man has done when he became aware that matrimony was about to overtake him.

"What of that?" I asked, airily. "Surely you don't expect to have everything in life happen just the way you want it. And, anyhow, you don't have to marry her."

"One of the fellows at the office enrolled at the employment agency for a job, and then told them he didn't want it, for he'd found work on his own hook," said The Pirate. "But he

had to pay his little old weekly per cent, just the same. And if I passed up this wife, I'll bet they'd make me pay her alimony."

I was sorry for him, he was so tragic about it. But I had to have a chaperon; it's the accepted way to go husband hunting. And I wanted to get the masculine point of view, too, for, of course, I intended to put him into the story—though I did not mention that till on the way home.

At last The Pirate succumbed to the charm of an advertisement I pointed out, where "Two European ladies, mother 50, daughter 22, Protestants, money without stint, wish to marry two gentlemen of affairs, irreproachable character, and whose name is a household word in the community where they belong.—No. 54014." The prospect of reading, even in an advertisement, that his name was a household word, won him completely. I was the one who was visited with a tardy quail at the door of 385 West End Avenue.

### Odd Lots and Remnant Sale? No, Nothing of the Sort

"Marriage is a solemn step; let's go to the movies," I suggested. But The Pirate wouldn't hear to giving the project up.

"We'll take our new husband and wife along to the movies with us," he said. "Let's make it a party."

I've had at least two great disappointments in life. The first one came when I entered a pawnshop for the initial occasion, and looked around for the double-bent, snarling, pig-eyed sort of a proprietor you meet in Dickens, to find a nice looking man in a gray tweed coat. The greater blow came when I arrived at 385 West End Avenue, expecting to find husbands arranged in the neat and expeditious style of the department stores, on basement tables, according to the price, the \$500 ones on one table, with the odd lots; the \$3,000 ones on another, and so on up to the counts. For what I saw was only an up-to-date business office that made you think of stenographers and office boys and everyday things like that.

A man came toward us, rubbing his hands briskly. You got the impression that the matrimonial business was so rushing that it was a shame for you to take his time.

"You had an appointment?" he asked.

We had never dreamed that it would be necessary. The Pirate looked at his watch.

"Was it for 8 o'clock?" he asked, putting the burden of the prevarication upon a woman, which is a thing that men almost invariably do.

"Are we late?" I asked anxiously.

"Not at all," said the brisk man, politely. "Your names?"

"This is my sister," The Pirate explained, hastily. "My name is Jennings, and hers is—er—Bryan. She is my half sister," he added hastily. But it didn't matter at all, for the brisk man looked in his appointment book and said: "Ah, yes; 8 o'clock was right."

### Husbands and Wives Not Carried in Stock

"You're looking for?" he suggested. There was an awful pause. The Pirate wouldn't break it, and I couldn't.

"We want a husband and wife apiece," I said at last in embarrassment. "I mean, together. I mean we each want a hus—I mean—"

I stopped, for the brisk man wasn't paying the slightest attention to me. He was eyeing The Pirate with enthusiasm and saying that he was sure there would be no trouble at all in fitting him out.

"Please show us a few samples of each," I commanded, for I hadn't any intention of being left out of the conversation. It was my party, in the first place.

But the husband-clerk explained that they didn't carry any in stock. Their pictures, oh, certainly, of course, those! But the first thing to be done was to advise Monsieur and Madame, he added, rubbing his hands together more briskly than before. But he had to put it into plain English before we got it.

"The fee for advice is a mere nominal one of one dollar," he reproached.

"But I thought the dollar was for a husband or a wife," I objected. "Do you mean to say we pay a whole dollar just for advice? It's perfectly ridiculous to charge for advice about getting married. It isn't done. Everybody in the world gives you advice about that for nothing."

"Your friends, perhaps, but"—said the brisk man.

"Everybody," I insisted. "Your aunts and your forty-third cousins and the woman across the street, and the woman who brings home the laundry, and the man you sit next on the ferry. Scads of advice about matrimony. I've got enough on hand to last for three lifetimes, and if you think I'm going to pay out another dollar for"—

"Oh, for goodness sakes!" muttered The Pirate, getting red behind his ears. That's another thing about men. Even in antique shops or Division Street clothing stores, where the shopkeeper would be mortified and distrustful of your character if you didn't ask for half off, a man avoids the subject of price as if it were something demoralizing, or, anyhow, not quite delicate.

"Does a guarantee go with this?" I asked, as we paid out our dollars.

"A guarantee of advice," answered the brisk one.

"But you don't agree to get us a husband or a wife or the dollar back?" I demanded.

"But that would be impossible, miss!" he said with an impressive upward shrug of his hands. "Such matters are in the hand of Providence."

### Wives, It Seems, Come Much Cheaper Than Husbands

"We are tired of leaving it to Providence," I explained. "That's why we're here."

"About Monsieur, here, there will be no trouble," consoled the marriage vender. "I have in mind at least a score of wives for him."

"I—I think that is probably too many," murmured The Pirate, with his eyes popping out of his head.

He might have to get more advice first, though, he was told. Advice money was the only reward (except that of an approving conscience) the marriage vender got in return for his time, his railroad fare, his postage, his hotel bills, his introductions. He shook his head over the laws controlling marriage brokerage contracts and quoted, sadly:

"A marriage contract, by which one person agrees to pay another a consideration if he will procure an advantageous marriage for him, or pay another for services to be rendered in procuring a wife for him, is void. Money paid under such a contract may be recovered."

He became cheerful, forgetting his own woes, as he assured The Pirate that there were wives waiting for him all the way from near the main railroad station in Berlin to the furthest corner of The Bronx. They all had money and charm, some of them were beautiful, and all of them appreciated the fact that masculine affection carried to the nth power of matrimony was at a decided premium.

### Fine Opportunity Awaits a "Polished Gentleman"

"Monsieur is still young," he mused, taking stock of The Pirate. "Would nineteen be about the age?"

The Pirate grinned, and said that nineteen would do nicely, confessed to a preference for blondes with dimples, and admitted that \$100,000 would be a sufficient recompense for having to remember to come home to dinner.

"Of course, there are many who have more money than that," the brisk gentleman mentioned. "Here is one with \$800,000, and she is only thirty-five. And here is one but forty-five, with half a million, who wishes to marry a polished gentleman."

"Let's have a squint at her," said The Pirate. "She must have forgotten to inclose her picture," regretted the marriage vender. "But I should be glad to accompany you, in person, to make the introduction."

He went on to offer The Pirate everything from a stenographer to an editor's widow, from a saleslady to a Jewish woman "with \$100,000 in cash," from a Russian cook to a girl whose dowry included a sawmill. All of them brought money with them, in varying degrees, and none of them demanded anything more than "fond love" or "perfect respectability" or "true refinement" in return.

The marriage vender said that he conducted his trade with great discretion and conventionality, and I think he spoke the truth. No addresses are ever disclosed, for instance. And his discretion was no doubt the reason why he was reluctant to display photographs in so many instances. Only those able to present references are accepted as candidates, it may be mentioned.

"I had no idea so many women wanted to marry me," The Pirate said, swelling out his chest, and apparently hesitating between an orphan of unlimited wealth, who admitted that she was comely, and a Swedish cook, aged twenty-seven. Out West most cooks are Swedish, and it is The Pirate's contention that those only have eaten who have tasted their dinners.

### Men Customers Prefer Ready-Made Wives

"I think it's time we looked the husbands over," I said, for I thought The Pirate had had too much attention.

"That isn't—er—so easy," said the marriage vender, while I glared at him and The Pirate grinned the way he used to when he was ten years old and trying to show the place where his wisdom teeth would be when he grew up.

He explained immediately that there was nothing at all personal about it. It merely happened that most of his men customers preferred that line of ready-made wives that is accompanied by a bonus. (The word is my own; the marriage vender put it more tactfully by asking what sum I wished to mention in my advertisement.)

"You mean that I can't get married without money?" I demanded, determined to know the worst.

The brisk man didn't at all like my way of putting it. No, no, he said. There was one farmer—see!—and one gentleman who said that nationality did not make any difference, and doubtless a number of others on the free list. And also many of the requirements were—oh, very moderate, indeed!

There was a milkman, for instance, seeking a lady with \$5,000—just as if the milkman didn't have money enough! Or, if I couldn't afford that, there was a butcher for \$2,000? A poet came at \$5,000; but I have always heard that the wives of geniuses have an awful time. There was an optometrist, also at \$5,000, who appealed to me greatly, because I didn't know until I looked it up later what an optometrist was. Think what a thrill there would be in not knowing what your husband was doing! Of course, lots of women don't, but they don't know that they don't know, which takes away half the fun.

A poolroom owner was ready to marry a lady without children," but with \$5,000. A baron wanted a woman of wealth. And that's

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"I Had No Idea So Many Women Wanted to Marry Me"



"I'm Looking for a Husband," I Said, as Soon as I Opened the Door