

# AMERICAN HUSBAND SLAVE TO WIFE'S CAPRICE, SOBS ONE DISILLUSIONED FRENCH WAR BRIDE

## Pretty Reine Pugnoud Says Lieutenant Beekman, U. S. A., Ceased to Be Hero After She Married Him. Blames Custom More Than Man

### GLAMOUR OF WOOING WORE OFF SOON AFTER STRANGE SCENES AND FACES CAME

#### Frenchman Beats Wife, Then Heals Bruise With Kiss, but American Only Offers Money to Solace Wounded Heart

AMERICAN husbands are vastly inferior as a genus to their French brethren in matrimony. Duped by their wives, exploited by their families, indifferent to the best and holiest things in married life, they fall immeasurably below the standard of conjugal excellence which obtains in France.

Studied cynicism? No. Bitterness? Perhaps. The disillusion of experience? Most certainly yes. For this conclusion, drawn from the brimming cup of life of a young French girl—this sweeping indictment of the manners and customs of our country today, is the fruit of an experience which has had its all too common parallel in the tragic pages of international marriage.

The status of the social order in America, and particularly that aspect which deals with the relations of man and wife, has stood at the bar of judgment in the mind of this girl, pleaded its case with the magnificent insolence of indifference and has been condemned.

Four years ago Mme. Reine Marguerite Pugnoud Beekman was a seventeen-year-old schoolgirl in her native town of St. Jean d'Angely, in the Department of Charente, France. Today she sits in a dingy hall bedroom in New York, plying her needle to earn her daily bread and looking out, as she has done for two hard, weary years, upon the ever-changing pageant of American civilization.

#### Life Has Been Darkened By Shattered Romance

It has been a seamy, sordid picture that she has seen, darkened by the shadow of her own life, framed in the black panels of despair, distorted by the glass of circumstance. She has looked upon it with the memory of a first love quickly blighted, of the bitterness and loneliness of her first years in a strange land, alone in the midst of many, cut off by barriers of tongue and thought, separated from the one to whom she had given her life.

The shadow of the war still lay heavy on France when Reine Pugnoud first met the man whom she later married. She was a small, slender girl, with a wealth of curling brown hair, surrounding a pretty oval face which glowed with an animation which even the interminable horror of the war could not efface.

"I laughed then," is the way she describes this comparatively carefree period of her girlhood. Today she does not laugh; there is an expression in her dark eyes which would almost preclude the thought that a smile had ever sparkled there.

"The school was not going, of course," she said, with her inimitable Gaelic sturrings and soft sibilants, "so the girls of the better families occupied themselves with doing what they could for the poor 'blessies' in the Base Hospital, No. 6, at Talence.

"Those were terrible days, just before the end. The wounded poured in, some of them so horribly hurt—oh! it was terrible—I can still see it. I can never forget them."

#### First Days of Romance Still Linger in Memory

"Oh, but I was in love then," she said, with a sad half-smile. "It was not long, but—yes, I was very happy then. He made love to me, and I believed everything he said. I don't know—perhaps he was sincere then."

"Then came the war—what is it?—Armistice, and we both were very, very happy for a little while, because the war was over and we were free love."

"She stopped suddenly, looking through the narrow window at the three houses opposite, where nondescript clothing and bedding hung limp and inert in the hot city air. Her lips trembled for an instant, but quickly framed themselves in their accustomed calm.

"I had never been in love before," she continued hesitatingly. "I had never known any man, except the few who were introduced to me, for French girls, you know, are kept far more in seclusion than American girls. Healed, when he told me that I was beautiful, and that he loved me so greatly, oh, it was then that I lost my heart."

"We were married just after Christmas in 1918. Soon after that I knew it was a terrible thing—that I could no longer love him; that I could never love him again. For days I wished that I could die. I could not forget how happy I had been—and what a fool."



Reine Beekman

received by Beekman from his wife. One, which, it is claimed, she wrote on the eve of her departure from the Bronx apartment December 24, 1920, reads: "Dudley—I am gone and never shall come back if you want a divorce or separation I am ready. If you want to speak to me you can put a red ribbon at the window and you can meet me in front of the house here, downtown, at 11 o'clock. I hold no grudge against you. Guard a good remembrance of me."

Different is the letter alleged to have been received some time later: "Dudley, dearest, take me back. Listen, my Dudley, dear, take back your little wife. If you know how unhappy I am since I left you, I cried for you all the days, but too proud, I did not want to come back. I have no more courage to suffer any longer, and I want to come back. I wish by my love and my fidelity to make you forget all the bad I did you."

#### Words Used in Letters Not in Her Vocabulary

Mme. Beekman, standing in the center of her tiny room, with copies of these letters in her hand, pointed a small pink forefinger at them and gave vent to her overwrought feelings in a burst of French: "Lies! Lies! Lies!" she stormed. "How can they do such things? I never wrote such letters; they are not such letters as you would write. This word 'fidelity'—I do not know that word. It is all a lie!"

#### Says American Woman Are Not Inately Chic

"The American wife can go into a good shop with a roll of bills and buy a certain amount of chic by buying clothes of real distinction. It is the greatest pain that they behold a woman who is better dressed than they. But do they dress well? Does the American wife succeed in making herself smart? The answer to that is—a very few do. Those that have enough money to patronize the more expensive shops, where a great deal of money will go, very little way, do get smartness as to their dress, but it is—what shall I call it?—artificial."

#### Thrifty French Woman Appaled by U. S. Waste

"Would the French husband permit that the wife should make a fool of him like the American husband? No, he would not be robbed and driven by his own family. He would not permit that there should be waste and extravagance in his house, nor would a good French wife give him the chance that he should complain.

"But how is it in America? If the husband makes money he does not care how much money is wasted in the house or by the wife. But let us say that he ceases to make the money. What then? There is one big row, all over the house. 'Whose fault is this? It is the husband's, because he has not been careful enough to make the wife know just how much she can spend, and no more. She is to be blamed for her—what is it?—extravagance, but not so much as the man who lets it go on.'"

She strode quickly to a small washstand, where the cracked china bowl glistened with a pool of violet liquid. "If American women would do this," she said, drawing from the dye a dripping crepe de chine garment, "so many millions of dollars would be saved. Many times I have dyed the dress, and every time my friends say: 'Ah, Reine, it is a beautiful new dress that you wear.'"

"But it is not. It is the same old dress, which I made myself for very little money, and I have kept it repaired myself, and changed it this way and that as to style. So I do with all my dresses, and I can appear well-dressed on very few dollars each week, that I have to live on."

#### Declares American Men Are Too Matter of Fact

"But the French husband is better in this way also, that he gives his wife all those little attentions which are so small in themselves but mean so much to a woman."

"American husbands do not do that; they are so matter-of-fact. They think that when they have given their wives plenty of money they have done everything that they need do. They have not with their wives. They have no finesse in their love nor insight with his relations with women."

Unconsciously her fingers sought her upper arm. "A woman does not mind a bruise now and then from the man she loves," she went on, "if he is kind and considerate to her most of the time. She will put up with that. Some women— I think all women at heart—love some of the old-time cave woman in them. Secretly they enjoy to be roughly treated by their husbands, if there is not too much of it."



sees cut off from the companionship of her husband. "In short, when a French woman was called upon to live in Texas, of the Middle West, she found herself hopelessly uprooted."

#### International Cupid Cut Much Official Red Tape

Official regulations were smoothed out and a rapidity of negotiation developed which violated all the classic traditions of French marriage. The publishing of the banns was all but eliminated, and it often happened that the whole matter was consummated in forty-eight hours, at an outlay not in excess of 100 francs.

Cupid found an able lieutenant in the person of Charles M. Loeb, a former Philadelphia lawyer, who published a pamphlet in Paris, setting forth the modus operandi for enamored swains, which served as a Baedeker for thousands who trod the broad avenue to matrimony.

In America a young man may take a girl to the moving-picture show or regale her with ice cream at the corner drug store without thought of love on either side. But in France such amenities are subject to a more serious interpretation. Such nonchalant attentions, showered upon French girls by the Americans in their leisure moments, were taken to signify affection and matrimonial intent, and many a war romance had its beginning in this way.

Faced with an appalling diminution in man power and haunted by the specter of race suicide, the French Government made every effort to encourage these marriages. Legal impediments were swept away, and the matter became so far simplified that a soldier needed only make an affidavit before the nearest military judge advocate, stating his circumstances and affairs, and countersigned by his commanding officer, in order to proceed at once with the ceremony.

This pleasing co-operation with Hyman was not forthcoming on the part of the United States Army authorities, however. Particularly after the armistice, efforts were made to dissuade the men from their matrimonial projects, orders being issued by General Pershing that the finances of all military candidates for conjugal bliss be investigated by company commanders in order to ascertain their fitness for the married state.



French brides arriving in America



More brides—this time from England

them—lectures, and all those things, and the house is run by the servants. "As to the children, it is too often that they are brought up by nurses, and I am surprised that they should know their parents."

She took up her needle and a nebulous creation of black silk which lay in her lap. "See," she said, "I am uncomforable when I am not doing something, but it is not the same as with these American women. With the French wife, when she feels that she must be active, she goes to work. This American wife goes to a bridge party."

"That is the secret of how France has lived, with all her troubles. The French work always, and from what they earn they save something. Every French family has something saved up. When the War came upon France they gave it to the Government, and surprised the whole world, which thought that there was not half so much money in the country."

#### Omar's Philosophy Fits Into Her Scheme of Life

"But the French husband is happy with a little wine and a little food. If the wife is not careful with her money, he makes trouble for her. 'Always the French husband is better, I think.'"

Such is the conviction implanted in the mind of this French bride, who at twenty-one has lived a life fraught with the accumulated experiences of years of ordinary marriage, together with many that find no place in the gamut of ordinary matrimonial vicissitudes.

It was also ordered that the pasts of both parties be scrutinized and that it be determined whether or not the prospective bridegroom could support a wife. It is reported by those who know that this most followed hard upon the return to Washington of Newton B. Baker, then Secretary of War, who complained that on his way back from France aboard the transport he had noticed a great deal of flirting between French brides and other men.

His attitude at that time is said to have favored a complete embargo on the importation of these brides with their husbands, but it was pointed out that such a course would leave many French brides stranded at embarkation points, penniless, friendless and hundreds of miles from their home towns, to say nothing of the plight of the husbands, who would be thus deprived of their wives and subjected to the necessity of returning to France at some later date to salvage them.

#### French Brides Taught Something of U. S. Ways

As a matter of fact, conditions of this sort obtained in some measure at all points of embarkation, even without the added incubus of the proposed order. At Brest, Bordeaux and St. Nazaire the many hundreds of detached brides who accumulated there in the course of the enforced although temporary separations from their husbands.

Many of them, alas, after experiences similar to those of Mme. Beekman, separated from their husbands, returned estranged life anew. Waitelaw Reid has estimated that there were at least five hundred such cases.