

Matrimonial Adventures

His Wife's Visitor

BY

Henry Kitchell Webster

Author of "Roger Drake," "Captain of Industry," "The Traitor and the Loyalist," "The Whispering Man," "A King in Khaki," "The Sky Man," "Jane Madness," "The Real Adventure," "The Through-brook," "An American Family," "Mary Villiston," "Real Life," etc.

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HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

Like so many of America's big authors, Henry Kitchell Webster began writing at an early age. His first work brought forth stories of mystery-thrillers; he specialized in plot.

Then he turned from that form of fiction to material with more substance. For one of the leading magazines he traveled in the tropics and wrote articles, not purely for local color, but studies of the life with a sociological background.

Later came his novels with their portrayals of real people and real problems, showing the power of Mr. Webster's mental equipment, for he is a widely cultivated person with a knowledge of the drama, music and literature. He speaks with authority on all of these subjects.

Mr. Webster is one of the authors who takes a long time at his writing, and the story that follows, written expressly for the Star Author Series of Matrimonial Adventures, was in process of development during a trip through Europe. "His Wife's Visitor" shows how very clever husbands sometimes are!

The telephone rang for the third time since they had sat down to dinner. The maid, in her hurried haste to placate the tyrant, set down the dish of fried eggplant from which George had been about to help himself on the sideboard out of his reach.

George and his wife sat listening in silence. The maid returned and said, "I think it's for you, Mrs. Tait." George sighed and produced the evening paper, which had been tucked under his leg against this precise contingency.

He didn't particularly care about the news, of which he had already read the unexciting headlines, but he did want to register a not unnamable protest against these continual interruptions of their dinner. Emily insisted on making a more or less formal meal of it. She'd have been mildly annoyed with him if he'd gone to the sideboard and helped himself to the eggplant while the maid was at the phone.

Then why couldn't she instruct Anna to say to these importunate telephoned that her mistress was at dinner and ask them to call her in an hour? It wasn't as if they ever had anything to say.

There was no use saying this to Emily. He knew her argument as well as his own. Anna's morale would be roused if they short-circuited her services by helping themselves, and then where would they be when they had people in to dinner? But if he didn't want the meal interrupted by telephone calls, why did he insist on their dining at the bic tric hour of six instead of seven when most of their friends did?

Of course Emily knew his answer to that, too. By dining at six they could, whenever they felt like it, go to the first show at the Alcazar and see the picture right end to, instead of from the middle of the fourth reel. Also they could find a convenient place to park the car. And they were home again by nine, so that if George had any evening work to do there were a couple of solid hours left for it. And as for setting an example of propriety to Anna, George felt it was rather hard. Ever since their first child, George, Junior, had been two years old, George, Senior, had been submitting to innumerable small infringements upon his personal liberty under the plea of setting a proper example. But now that Junior was in college, and his younger sister in a boarding school, it seemed to George at forty-three that he might be allowed to tuck back in his chair if he liked and empty his pipe scrapings into the dessert plate. There was no good saying any of that, either, for Emily knew it as well as he did.

points she insisted upon, and about the seriousness with which she took her committees and her classes and her clubs. It did not behoove her husband to rail, no matter how often they called her from the dinner table to the telephone.

He had had time to think as far as this, his mind slipping rapidly past the familiar landmarks just as his eye slid down the columns of the newspapers, before he perceived that Emily was not, this time, talking to any member of her drama committee, nor to any citizen of Avonia, nor to anyone she'd had the slightest expectation of hearing from. It was a man—George could tell that from the quality of her voice—and he seemed to be throwing her into a good deal of a flutter.

"Why—why, yes," she was saying. "Oh, but we'd love to have you! . . . Yes. That'll be fine . . . We certainly will. Only I'm afraid you won't find us very exciting. . . . Four o'clock Saturday then."

George, as she returned to the table, fastened his gaze upon the paper. When she was rattled she liked to be allowed to take her time. She sat down a bit heavily in her chair, drew a couple of long breaths, resumed her knife and fork, and then asked, "Did you hear any of that?"

"Not much," he told her. "I thought you sounded sort of surprised."

"I should say I was," she admitted, "when I hadn't heard from him for nineteen years. Calling up on the long-distance to ask if he can come and spend Sunday with us! Surprised?"

"Who?" George wanted to know. "I don't know why he should want to. He certainly won't find any material for a play in us. Still, it'll be nice to see him again. I don't suppose I'll know him."

"Look here," George demanded, "whom are you talking about?"

"Oh," she said, as if she had just heard his questions; but it was another moment before she answered it. "Why, it's Charley Hawkins—Hawthorn Hawkins—George, you know who he is?"

"I know who Hawthorn Hawkins is, but why do you call him Charley? And why does he call us on the long distance and propose to spend Sunday with us?"

"Why, he's giving the Sheldon lectures down at the University this year, and he looked up Avonia on the map and saw how near it was—so he phoned to ask if he could come."

"But why Avonia, and why us? If you know him as well as that, why haven't you ever told me anything about him?"

"George," she cried, scandalized, "I told you all about Charley Hawkins when we were first engaged—and you didn't even listen. He wasn't famous then, of course. And I haven't heard from him since the note he wrote with the wedding present he sent us. Now, for goodness' sake, don't ask any more questions, but let me eat."

It was from preoccupation rather than obedience that he let her alone until she rang for the maid. Then, "You haven't been writing to him, have you—telling him he was great and so on?"

Her eyes flashed at him, but the entrance of Anna procured him a polite answer. "I couldn't very well write to him when I'd never seen one of his plays."

"Ever read 'em?" he asked. "They are published, I suppose."

She shook her head and waited until Anna went out; then she swooped upon him. "I never thought you'd be so silly," she declared, "as to be jealous. And about a man I haven't thought of for twenty years."

"Jealous!" he retorted furiously. "I'm not."

"What are you then?" she asked with an alkaline sort of smile, and he found the question unanswerable.

"Well, I hope you will be decent to him anyhow."

"I don't know whether I will or not," he told her. "That depends." She didn't speak to him again that night.

Two days later, coming home from a rather strenuous bout of shopping, Emily found her husband—home from the office a good hour earlier than usual—reading a small green paper-covered volume, which he put down hastily as she came in, and then took up again and held out to her.

"Three Plays by Hawthorn Hawkins," she read. "Why, where did that come from? I tried to get it at Street's, but they'd never even heard of it."

"Come in the mail," he said. "I found it when I got here."

"Addressed to me?" she asked.

"Why—yes. I believe it was. I opened the package without thinking."

"Charley sent them on, of course," she remarked; "so that I'd have something to talk to him about."

"I don't believe he did," George said decidedly. "Not unless he's an unusual ass."

She flushed angrily at that, but he went on before she could speak. "I said I thought he wasn't an ass, not that I thought he was. There'd have been a card or an inscription if it had come from him. Anyhow, I wouldn't thank him for it unless he gives you a lead. Read 'em and say nothing. And don't leave 'em out on the sitting room table where they'll be the first thing he sees, either."

Her smile conceded that this advice was both friendly and intelligent. "But where did they come from?" she demanded.

"Search me!" he told her. "They don't postmark this fourth-class stuff. No, I didn't mean anything uncomplimentary. As far as I read in the first one, it seemed pretty good. I thought you might have sent to Chicago for them." She pointed out that there wouldn't have been time. "Oh, well,"

he concluded, "I don't believe it's much of a mystery. Some old friend, most likely, that he told he was coming, sent it along so that you could surprise him. You'll read 'em tonight, I suppose."

She said she would, unless he wanted to go out somewhere with her; but he said he must go back to the office and work. "I'm going to be pretty busy between now and Monday," he added.

She looked at him sharply. You're going to be here tomorrow when he comes, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'll be here—you bet." It was so evident, though, that the last brace of words had escaped him involuntarily that she forbore to remonstrate.

They kept rather carefully away from Charles Hawthorn Hawkins as a conversational topic that night. Next morning, however, just before he left for the office, George unobtrusively broke the ice by saying, "Don't count on him too much, Emily. He may not come, you know—send you a telegram this morning."

She asked hotly why he said that, and added, as the suspicion struck her, "I believe you've been telegraphing him, yourself, not to come." But this injurious charge she at once retracted.

"They're supposed to be sort of temperamental and changeable, that's all," he explained, "and I thought he might change his mind about this."

"You wish he would, I suspect," she observed.

"Yes," he answered, unhappily, "I suppose I do."

She gazed at him a moment in mute exasperation. Then her expression softened and she gave a reluctant laugh. "I think you're the most ridiculous person in the world," she said. "I suppose you think he's coming out here to break up our happy home and get me to run away with him."

He looked so glum over this that she gave him up as hopeless. "Oh, go along," she cried. "But I'm going to kiss you first. And you will be home sharp at four, won't you?"

It was an hour earlier than this that she found him in the dining room unwrapping a package containing two bottles, one of gin and the other of Scotch whisky.

"Got 'em from Walter Harbury," he explained sheepishly. "Walter has a regular bootlegger—comes around once a month. Been meaning to lay in something like this for quite a while."

Her astonishment over this bit of unabashed mendacity made it possible for him to get on to something else. He put the bottles away in the sideboard, turned his back upon it, and gazed at her so intently that she frowned inquiringly and presently asked, "Well, what is it?"

"Nothing," he said, "only I think you're looking great—just as you are."

Now this was the unadulterated truth. At forty, after two children and nineteen years of marriage and Avonia, she still looked infinitely desirable to George, and never more so than in the sort of clothes she was wearing now, a small felt hat crammed down upon her small round head (she'd been out doing some last-minute marketing), a sweater, a sport skirt, low-heeled shoes; her face moistly flushed, innocent of powder. It was true and Emily knew it was true.

All the same, she saw through him and smiled derisively. "So you want me to look like this when Mr. Hawkins comes?" she asked. "Well, I won't. I'm going up to dress this minute."

"I wish you wouldn't, Emily," he pleaded. "I don't want you to dress up for this chump. I don't want you to do anything—special for him. I don't see why you should. You don't care anything about him, do you? Nor about what he thinks?"

Her flush deepened as she met his look. She reached out suddenly and took hold of him by the ears. "Idiot!" she said, "Idiot!" But in the interval between the two words she kissed him, and she did not dress up for Mr. Charles Hawthorn Hawkins.

Perhaps because her husband's performance occupied the first place in her attention, she found it hard to remember what a celebrity Charley Hawkins had become.

He was seriously changed, through all his changes. The twenty pounds or so he had put on hadn't made him look older; had served only to accentuate the plump, cherubic look of boyish innocence there'd always been about him. He talked about himself a lot, just as he'd always done.

Emily shot an uneasy glance at George now and then; for instance, when Charley spoke offhand of the foremost American actress as Ethel. She wondered whether George was saying to himself, "Ass!" But apparently George was not. He seemed to be enjoying the zoepp of the theater as much as the tales of Capri and Tahiti and other wondrous places the playwright had inhabited.

Emily herself didn't talk much. They drifted back occasionally into reminiscence, but since this, of course, excluded George, they didn't go far with it.

George had spoken of being busy, of the amount of time he'd have to spend upon a case that was coming up Monday, but he showed no signs of going off and leaving them to their own devices. She didn't know whether she wished he would or not. Intrinsically she wasn't especially anxious to be left alone with Charley, but if George was staying away from his work in order to watch them, she was furious with him.

Only, it didn't seem like that. The two men got around to the war, at last, and the humble but absorbing parts they had respectively played in

it, and after an hour of this, she bade them good-night. This was insincere, so far as it was addressed to George, for she fully intended staying awake until he came to bed, and asking him a few questions, but her modest share of the unwanted alcohol made her sleepy, and she never knew how late the two men—and the bottle of Scotch—sat up.

She got no chance next morning, either, for a private talk with George before they met their guest, and in consequence George's calm announcement of the day's program and his total elimination of himself from it fell upon her like a thunderclap. She caught him alone a few minutes after breakfast and asked him what he meant by it.

"I don't mean anything by it," he protested. "I have got to work all day, just as I told you. Hawkins understands all right. I told him about it last night. He's got to leave this afternoon and there's no good Sunday train from here, so it seemed decent to say that you'd drive him over to Rockport."

"You're simply—throwing me at his head?" she protested.

She detected a touch of bravado in the way he said, "Nonsense! He came to see you, didn't he?" But Charley was already coming downstairs with his bag, so there wasn't time for anything more.

Well, the events of that day were in George's head, then, whatever they turned out to be.

George bade their guest a cordial, almost paternal farewell and, clapping his hat a little too much on one side of his head for a Sabbath morning and an hour when he was certain to meet their neighbors going to church, strolled down the street in the direction of his office.

It was seven o'clock that evening when she stopped their car at the curb after her return, alone, from the fifteen-mile drive to Rockport. George was reclining, very much at his ease, upon the Gloucester swing on the veranda.

"Hello!" he called to her. "You back already? Had a good day?"

She chose to regard his second question as of a piece with the first, and she came up the front steps before she spoke at all.

"I suppose you're famished for supper," she remarked. ". . . If you've been working all day."

"Oh, I got home about an hour ago and scrambled myself some eggs. How about you?"

"I'm not specially hungry," she said. "I'll get myself a glass of milk by and by."

She sat down facing him. "George," she demanded, "why did you send for those three plays of Charley's?"

He sat up. "Why did I send . . . ?"

"It was either you or Anna who sent for them," she interrupted. "Charley swears he didn't send them and that he didn't say anything to a soul about coming out here."

He lay back again. "Oh, all right," he conceded. "I telephoned to Chicago for 'em the morning after I found out he was coming."

"But why?"

"Oh, I don't know. How could I know what he was going to be like? I didn't know what he was coming for. So—well, I wanted you to be ready for him."

She took a minute or so to digest this reply. "I suppose you mean," she mused, "that you thought he might be coming out here to see how much of a—black girl was that he wanted to marry once, after she'd lived twenty years in Avonia. And you wanted to—fix me up so he wouldn't laugh. I suppose that afternoon dress Miss Maitland made for me doesn't look like much."

"Oh, d—n!" he said, and got to his feet. "Look here, Emily! You're all right in any dress. It wasn't you I didn't feel sure about. But he might have been any sort of ass. Of course, I saw he was all right before I'd talked with him ten minutes."

"No," she said, "you needn't have worried about that."

She let the voltage accumulate during a longish silence. Then she added, "He kissed me this afternoon. He'd been rather—sentimental all day, and when I said good-by to him he kissed me."

"Well," said George, after a silence of his own, "he certainly is a darned nice fellow."

She stared at him, speechless.

"Oh, I'm not much surprised," he went on. "You see, he told me about it last night."

"Told you, last night!" she echoed. "He didn't say he was going to kiss you," George exclaimed. "Said he'd always been romantic about you, and all the more after he'd got old enough to realize how kind you'd been to a ridiculous, priggish kid. He said you'd contributed more to his education than anybody else he'd ever met, and he'd always felt grateful to you. Been wanting to come to see you for years, but was afraid to. Scared to death, he said he was, until he saw you were just as you had been; hadn't changed a hair. Actually wrote a telegram to say he wasn't coming and then tore it up."

"Well, then, why shouldn't he have a . . . day in the country? I hope you showed him a good time. I guess you did, or he wouldn't have kissed you."

He perceived now that she was crying. "I don't blame him for that, a bit," he went on. "I think he showed darned good judgment. Because you are a peach, Emily, and that's the truth."

He patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. "Come on in, old lady," he concluded. "What do you say to some scrambled eggs? You're hungry, that's all the matter with you."

The American Legion

(Copy for This Department Supplied by the American Legion News Service.)

WHAT LEGION POSTS CAN DO

Essay Contests, Participated in by Children, Bring Out Many Good Suggestions.

Carrying out a national program of activities in community affairs American Legion posts in many localities are holding essay contests among school children. The post at Monson, Maine, recently held a contest among children of the seventh and eighth grades on the subject, "What the American Legion Can Do to Better Our Town." The winning essay, written by Miss Anna Zimmerman, contains suggestions which Legion national officials believe worthy of adoption by other posts.

The essay, in part, follows: "The erection of a soldiers' monument would keep alive in the minds of the small boys' admiration of bravery and patriotism. This would also make the town look better and would show other towns that we had contributed our share towards defeating the Kaiser.

"Clean streets is another item of great importance. The children could be encouraged by the Legion to keep the streets and sidewalks free from all kinds of waste matter.

"Another thing of importance is a public playground where children of all ages could go and play any time that they wish to. This playground would require a supervisor to keep the grounds in good condition and to introduce proper play. This would keep the children off the streets and therefore there would be less chance for accidents.

"A hand stand would be a very nice thing for the town to have. We have a very nice band, but there is no good place to play outdoors, while if they had a hand stand, they could give concerts at least one night in every week.

"A gymnasium would be of great value to the young people of this town. There is no place where sports can be enjoyed here. There could also be a public swimming place where children could learn to swim.

"Among some of the important things is to have a good hall which would add to the town a great deal, as there is no hall to have entertainments and socials given by the town unless they use the halls owned by private parties.

"The Legion men could open up the quarries that are now out of work, which would draw young men as well as men with families to come here and live.

"They could also help stimulate Americanism among the people of Monson by example and by patriotic entertainments."

LEGION EXTENDS GLAD HAND

Placing in Federal Position Member of Canadian Body One Example of Comradeship.

The hand of the American Legion is always extended in fellowship to veterans of the allied armies. In many cases this is done in daily association and in comradeship, and in others, in actual aid and financial assistance for the former comrades-at-arms.

T. T. Watson, a member of the Great War Veterans' Association of Canada, is a firm believer in the friendliness of the Legion, according to a recent letter to T. C. Lapp, editor of the Veteran, the official publication of the Canadian organization. This letter found its way to National Adjt. Lemuel Bolles of the American Legion and is an illustration of the splendid feeling existing between the organizations in the United States and Canada. Watson wrote: "I starved out in the Okanagan valley and came to the U. S. flat broke.

"Went into the American Legion and asked what was the chance for a member of the G. W. V. A. to get a job. They said the chance was fine and until they found me a job there was bed and board and an advance in money. Inside of 24 hours they placed me in a good U. S. federal job, where I still am and likely to remain.

"I write this to show that the American Legion has the friendliest feeling for all Canadian returned men. Their motto is 'Every returned man a job,' and they seem to be carrying it into effect."

Watson made his application to the Tacoma (Wash.) post of the Legion, which placed him at work in a local hospital.

On Equal Terms.

A rookie who had been assigned to the cavalry much against his will approached the sergeant and remonstrated. "Say," he objected, "I never rode a horse in my life."

"Oh, that's all right," countered the sergeant, easily. "We've got a horse that's never been ridden in his life. We'll start you off together."—American Legion Weekly.

Juvenile Scalper. Teacher: "I thought I told you to sit in the seat next to Mary Jones." Willie Wisenore: "Yes, ma'am, ye did, but I sold it to Tommy Smith for a nickel."—American Legion Weekly.

GREATER RESPECT FOR LAW

Legion Probation Plan Saves Many Detroit Ex-Service Men From Stigma of Prison Terms.

Judge Thomas M. Cotter of the Recorder's court of Detroit, Mich., acting on suggestion of the American Legion, has successfully put into operation a probation plan, which has instilled in the minds of many former service men a high regard for the authority of the law.

The system was suggested in 1919, following discharge from military service of many thousands of men, of whom some were forced to appear in police court on minor charges of misdemeanors. Under the plan inaugurated many of these men were spared the stigma of a prison sentence, due to a far-sighted policy instigated by Judge Cotter.

Only the word of the man himself, with a promise to be a better citizen, and the word from some American Legion official is necessary to save the man from sentence. The plan works remarkably well, according to the re-



Judge Thomas M. Cotter.

ports of the court. Out of 847 former service men who appeared before Judge Cotter, only six or seven appeared in his court to answer charges for violation of the statutes. The plan has been adopted in every police court in the city of Detroit.

At the time of the institution of the probation system Detroit was filled with bolshevistic propaganda, and the success of the Legion system indicates the turning point of many former soldiers from disregard of law and order to a high respect for the law's authority.

FROM CONVICT TO COLONELCY

American Legion Acts to Obtain Pardon for Man Who Made Record in British Army.

Kenneth F. Thomas had been convicted and was serving a term in a Virginia penitentiary on a charge of bigamy at the time of the outbreak of the World war. While employed in one of the prison farm projects he escaped, made his way up to Canada, where he enlisted and was soon in active service.

He established a splendid war record, reaching a colonelcy before discharge. During this time he kept the Virginia authorities informed of his movements, and promised that he would return and serve out his term as soon as the war was over.

Recently the man returned to Richmond and declared that he was ready to complete his prison term, admitting his identity, and acknowledging his war record. Delay in return, it is said, was due to the fact that for two years he has been in a hospital recovering from the effect of wounds.

His splendid record for bravery and attention to duty won high esteem of the British army officials. The American Legion has taken up the fight to obtain pardon or parole for the man, and the case has been presented to the governor of Virginia by interested Legionnaires.

Roy M. Hancock Among Missing.

Diligent search is being made for Roy M. Hancock, formerly a private in the Motor Transport Corps of the army, a World war veteran. Mrs. Hattie Hancock of Chattanooga, Tenn., waited in vain for word from her son following the war. Government officials had him classified as a deserter. Early in April Mrs. Hancock received word from the state hospital for the insane at Fort Sum Houston, Texas, that her son was a patient in that institution. On the heels of this information came word that he had escaped and no trace has been found of him since that time. Hancock is twenty-eight, five feet nine inches in height, dark hair, and has a horseshoe tattooed on his right arm below his elbow. In the emblem are the words "Good Luck." Following the government's discovery that the man was a mental patient and not a deserter, he was given an honorable discharge.

Donation of Memorial.

Officials of the Illinois department of the American Legion, state officials and prominent Chicagoans gathered recently at Cicero, a suburb of Chicago, for the unveiling of a monument to the soldier dead of the city. The monument was given by a Cicero real estate dealer and bears the names on bronze plates of those Cicero men who made the supreme sacrifice. Dedication exercises were under the direction of the Legion.