A STRANGE MATCH

With a Singular Result

By JULIUS WILSON

John Dexter and I were schoolmates, chums in college and always intimate friends. John, who inherited a fortune, went abroad for awhile after graduating, and I went into the law. As soon as I was ready for business John turned over to me the care of his estate.

John was in every sense a bachelor. He was devoted to bachelor life and showed no disposition to become a husband.

"What—tie myself up to a woman!" he would say. "Do you realize what that means? Slavery—absolute slavery. And, more, you are mixed up with another family that you have no interest in whatever. The first time you meet them—after your marriage—they call you by your first name, and you are expected to do the same by them, a familiarity that doesn't exist between you and some of your lifelong friends. How can a man endure to be caged with one woman and no way of getting away from her? There's nine chances in ten against his ever having any comfort after he's been chained."

Then he quoted some doggerel on the subject:

"There's many a man when the key has been turned
In the wedlock for which he has ardently yearned
Would give all the wealth in his bank and his pocket
And borrow besides, for a key to unlock it."

Now, this aversion to matrimony on John's part was unfortunate. I happened to have a client, a young lady, Margaret Storms, whose property was very much tangled up with the estate of John Dexter, and I could see no such advantageous way of straightening it out except by their uniting their interests in marriage. There was a double reason why this was extremely difficult. Miss Storms was or pretended to be as adverse to marriage as Dexter. But I have never had any faith in this antagonism between the sexes except in special cases, and in this case the two had never seen each other.

I resolved to beard the lion and the lioness in their respective dens and make one supreme effort to unite them and their estates.

Woman, notwithstanding her bitterness when prejudiced, may be more easily handled in a matrimonial matter than man. She naturally seeks her sphere—the home and children—earlier than man. I therefore resolved to begin my attack on Miss Storms. I went to see her and opened up the object of my visit by telling her of the difficulties in the way of making her estate pay the income it should because of the antagonistic interests in the property of another person. Then I went on to say that $20,000 a year income might be more desirable with a husband than nothing a year without one.

"Not in my case," was her quick reply. "I am satisfied that I couldn't be tied up with any man for a month without hating him."

This was not encouraging, but I pursued the argument, while she, though she said nothing, sniffed the air like a war horse hearing the boom of distant cannon. When I came to a pause she asked the name of the man I proposed she should wed. I told her, and her ire burst forth.

"Oh, yes. I know all about him. He's the man who hates women so and goes about spouting those satirical lines he has either composed—though I don't believe he's smart enough—or borrowed."

And she spouted the rimes John had given me on the subject of marriage.

"You go back," she continued, "and give him this answer to his borrowed doggerel:

"There's many a girl when embarked on the wave
Of life's ocean with him who has sworn he's her slave
Will find to her cost when nothing can save her
That the captain's a brute and the vessel's a slaver."

"That's unfortunate," I said. "John's very unwise to be getting off such stuff. But he doesn't mean it any more than you mean your rimes. Nevertheless I expect I had better stick to the law without trying to do outside work. But if your estate eventually passes into the hands of this man Dexter don't blame me."

"Oh, bring him along. I'm not afraid of him. If he bites me I can stick a pin in him."

I said nothing to Dexter about my unfortunate opening of the subject of his marriage, but when I saw him again I told him that the probabilities were his estate would soon be absorbed by that of Miss Storms. Had it not been for this card that I played to both of the parties concerned I might have waited till they were both in their dotage before producing any perceptible effect. When I had used it with Miss Storms she had said, "Oh, bring him along." When I used it with Dexter he asked, "What kind of a looking thing is she?"

"Very pretty," I replied, "and remarkably bright."

"H'm! Heaven save me from a smart woman!"

By dint of hammering it into each of them that the other would eventually get both estates I finally got them to consider a union. John was willing to meet Margaret and look her over. Margaret, when I took her up on her invitation to "bring him along," backed out, saying that she didn't propose to be trotted out like a horse for sale. But she failed to suggest any other method, and I began to think the matter was entirely off when she made the following remarkable proposition:

"Since you think I must either lose my fortune or marry this woman hater I will marry him. But I won't live with him. Will that serve the purpose?"

"It would help matters, and you might learn to love him."

"Love him? Nonsense!"

"Well, I'll send him to call on you."

"I don't wish to meet him."

"Then how will you marry him—by proxy?"

"On the day appointed for the wedding bring him here a few minutes before the ceremony. I will come downstairs, and the service must begin as soon as I enter the room. When it is concluded let him go at once. I don't wish to have a word with him."

"Phew! Talk about woman haters! Man haters are a hundredfold worse. However, a marriage, even like this, will straighten out some legal points of great importance in these estates, and when you have met Dexter, who, I have often told you, is a bang up good fellow, you may relent. One thing I fear—if you treat your husband as your propose he will never consent to meet you after the marriage."

"H'm! I haven't said I would consent to meet him, have I?"

Having accomplished in a measure what I had set out to do, I felt very much like backing out and telling both the parties that after all such a union as the lady proposed would be of no great advantage to their interests and would only chain together two persons who would consider their bonds a burden. But, with a distaste for marriage on the part of both, what difference could such a wedlock make since neither wished to marry any one at all? They would be married under the law, which would mean nothing except in their property affairs. On the whole, I decided to let the matter go on and take the consequences, whatever they might be.

The marriage ceremony occurred at 12 o'clock noon. I reached the house with Dexter, who leaned on me for moral support in what he called the most dreadful moment of his life, at five minutes of 12. He wore an ordinary business suit, but if he had been dressed in a carter's suit the gentleman—to the manner born—would have been none the less apparent.

When the clocks began to strike 12 a door opened, and Margaret, becomingly dressed, but not in bridal costume, entered. I saw the two glance at each other, a little pale, but after the first sight a natural color came into the cheeks of both. During the service they made the responses in a reasonably clear and firm tone. When they were required to join hands I saw a slight flush come over John's face. I wondered if it came from the human current coursing through their arms or if Margaret had by the slightest possible pressure conveyed something to him.

There were no congratulations, the bride leaving the room as soon as the ceremony had been finished. The bride's mother advanced to John and engaged him in conversation. I had promised him that as soon as the ceremony was over I would go with him to his club and join him in something to steady his nerves. But Mrs. Storms seemed to be making it difficult for him to get away, so I passed out, saying to him as I did so:

"You will find me at the club."

I went to the club and waited for him an hour. He did not put in an appearance. Having at my office matters needing my attention, I went there and began an afternoon's work, expecting the while to see John come in. He didn't come. At 5 o'clock I returned to the club, asked if he had been there and learned that he had not.

I had promised to dine with him, he assuring me that if I failed him in his extremity it would be a cause of war between us. Nevertheless the dinner hour came and passed and no John. Nor did he appear during the evening.

John did not turn up for a month, at the end of which time he telephoned me to dine with him and his wife the same evening at her home. I gasped for breath. Did I hear aright? Had I gone daft?

"W-h-a-t?" I asked.

"Seven o'clock."

"Where?"

"At Mrs. Storms'. We haven't got any other place to live yet. You know, none was provided."

"Oh!"

Apparently John didn't wish to go into explanation, for I heard a click and knew that the receiver had been hung up.

At the appointed hour I appeared at Mrs. Storms' and found my chum and his wife living together like two turtle doves.

"By Jove, Billy," said John, "it's fine! Go get married right off."

No explanation was ever given of what occurred after I left John to follow me to the club. That is a part of the story that must be left out, but I have always believed that when the couple joined hands during the wedding ceremony a very important communication passed from the bride by means of a very small pressure of the hand. I have further believed that when she left the room a look instructed her mother to retain the newly made husband. The rest is a sealed book.

I am much relieved as to my part in the match, for the couple are devoted to each other.

THE RED AND THE GREEN

A Story of Domestic Love and Squabbles

By EDMOND L. STANLEY

When Bob and Carrie Delafield were married they went, on returning from their wedding trip, to their own house which was very large, containing several separate suits of rooms. Both had their ideas of decoration, and, having disputed over the colors for the interior of their bedrooms, they finally concluded that the bride should direct the decoration of one suit, while the groom should select the colors for another. The first suit was to be the bride's rooms, the second the groom's.

Mrs. Delafield—that was to be—chose for her apartments a very beautiful shade of green. Bob Delafield, who had no artistic taste whatever, but thought himself a connoisseur, especially in colors, put his suit in red. It wasn't even one of those rich reds which, when put in the right place are often very attractive.

"By Jove! That's elaborate!" said Bob when he saw his decorations complete. "And appropriate," added his wife, smiling, "for a member of the fire department."

Since a bride and groom don't care to occupy separate apartments the couple agreed that they would use the two suits on alternate weeks. They tossed a coin for the first choice, and Bob won. So upon their return from their wedding journey they occupied the red suit.

Now, it happened the day after their arrival that Bob accidentally knocked a cut glass pitcher—a wedding gift especially cherished by the bride—off a table and smashed it.

"Dear!" exclaimed his wife in a tone of anger. "What abominable carelessness! I would rather have had you break anything in the house than that pitcher. It was Mollie's gift."

"Do you suppose I intended to break it?" replied the husband, with a fierce inflection on the word intended.

"Get away!"

Both had started to pick up the fragments, but at this order of his bride Bob desisted and left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Bob was so infatuated with what he called the old rose color of his suit that he had induced his wife to order their dinner there that same day. The pitcher was broken at noon. Carrie sulked all the afternoon, and when dinner was served her eyes were red while on her face was the expression of an injured woman. Only monosyllables were spoken at dinner by either.

This is a sample of what frequently occurred during that first supposed to be happy week at home after the honeymoon.

On the beginning of the second week they removed to the bride's suit, each secretly vowing that should the scrappy condition continue—and they expected it would—they must have a rest by temporarily separating.

It was Sunday morning when they first awoke in their new quarters. A bit of sunlight had stolen in through the window, faintly illuminating the room. It seemed to Carrie that she had been sleeping under the rustling leaves of a tree and had awakened to look upon a meadow robed in the verdure of the lovely month of June.

It at once occurred to her that she had been very disagreeable to her husband, and she was heartily sorry for it.

"Oh, Bob," she said, "what a horrid creature I have been for the whole of this first week of our homecoming!"

"You mean that I have been positively brutal."

"Well, never mind whose fault it has been. We won't do so any more."

"By Jove, sweetheart, I believe I like the decoration of your suit better than mine, after all."

"Yours is very beautiful."

"How lovely it is of you to say so. You said when you first saw it that it was appropriate for a fireman."

"Did I? How mean of me! I think it's lovely."

"What a clumsy brute I was to break that beautiful cut class pitcher you thought so much of. My carelessness spoiled a whole week for us—our first week in our beautiful home."

"Never mind, dear; we'll make up for it in the second. We won't speak a cross word during the whole week, will we?"

"No, we won't."

They breakfasted in the green suit, as they called it, and with every mouthful exchanged endearments.

That day was a haven of rest to them after seven days of irritation. They lounged about their home reading the morning newspapers, putting little things that needed attention to rights and giving each other only words that sounded like the twittering of mating birds. In the evening they went to church, and every hymn, every note of the organ, seemed to strike a responsive chord within them.

"Oh, blessed seven days!" said the wife the next Saturday afternoon. "I'm sorry they are ended, but I doubt not that the next seven will be equally happy."

"They have been so delightful that I propose we continue right on in these rooms for another week."

"What difference can it make what rooms we occupy? I will not admit that we get on better in my rooms than in yours. The first week we were tired from having traveled so long. Besides, that hotel food upset us both."

Now, the husband who had occasionally played poker with his friends was a great believer in luck. He considered that they were having a fine run of luck in the green suit and was very much opposed to the change. But Carrie was bound to give up to her husband in the matter, and when a wife makes up her mind to do that nothing can stop her. Bob used every argument to induce her to consent to remain in her rooms, but failed. When he found there was no use to struggle with her any longer he gave in.

Sunday morning Bob dreamed that he was in hell. About him was a lurid light covering all the firmament. Satan came to him and asked him why he didn't go to work at the furnaces, and when he said he was tired and didn't wish to work the arch fiend poked him with his pitchfork and woke him up. The lurid glare of hades dissolved into a lurid glare in his bedroom. A window shade had been left up, and the sunlight was pouring in, illuminating the red decorations. Then Carrie awoke and, sitting up in bed, shaded her eyes with her hands.

"What an awful glare!" she exclaimed. "I thought you lowered that shade last night. I told you to do so."

"I don't remember your telling me any such thing."

"I certainly did."

"You didn't."

"I did."

"What's the matter with you this morning?"

"Nothing."

"You're cross as a bear."

"First cast the beam out of your own eye and you will see clear to cast the mote out of mine."

"I always heard the devil is good at quoting Scripture."

He turned over, with a grunt, and tried to go to sleep again, but the glare in the room prevented. The wife lay thinking. Where was the loveliness of the past happy week? Their expectations of a renewal were disappointed on awaking the first morning. Bob tossed about for awhile, then got up and took his bath.

"Where the devil is the warm water this morning?" he yelled from the bathroom.

"Didn't I tell you yesterday that the range fire had gone out?"

"What did you let it go out for? Do you suppose a man wants to bathe in ice water, especially on Sunday morning?"

"Oh, shut up! You'll drive me crazy."

Bob slammed the bathroom door. Presently he came out with a razor in his hand and blood on his chin.

"Cut yourself, dear?" asked his wife.

"Oh, don't 'dear' me. Get me some court plaster quick."

She went to the medicine closet for the court plaster, but since she couldn't find it at once he hurled maledictions upon her. Finally she threw the court plaster at him, went to her own suit and shut the door. Bob didn't expect to see her again for hours. He was agreeably disappointed. In half an hour she came out, with an angelic smile on her face, and said:

"Don't you think I'd better have the breakfast served in my room instead of yours, dear?"

"No, I don't. You can have yours served there if you like. I'm going to eat mine in my own rooms."

"All right, dear. Did you cut yourself badly?"

"Little you care whether I did or not."

Carrie after fixing Bob's coffee handed it to him and let go of it before he had got a hold on it. The consequence was that cup and saucer fell to the table, the cup was broken and the coffee soused over the white linen tablecloth.

Bob burst forth into a torrent of profanity, and Carrie, with flashing eyes, left the table.

One hour later Bob, realizing that the blessed day of rest that came but once a week was likely to pass in misery, went to his wife's room to try for a reconciliation. She was sitting at a table writing some letters. It seemed to him that she had left him — and he had followed her to the garden of Eden. There was something delightfully verdant about the apartment. Carrie looked up at him lovingly. He bent down and kissed her.

"What the deuce were we squabbling about anyway?" he asked.

"I don't know, dear."

"Nor I. I only know I wanted to kill some one."

"And I felt as if I would fly out of my skin."

The next day the family physician was called in to see Mrs. Delafield and was received in the red suit. After giving her some minute instructions pertaining to her case he said:

"Have you other rooms in the house than these?"

"Yes. Why do you ask, doctor?"

"Because in your condition it will never do for you to occupy these. The red will have a very bad effect upon you. Red will drive some persons to insanity."

"How would green do?"

"The very thing. Red is terribly irritating; green is very restful. If you have a room decorated in green, move into it at once."

"Indeed I will, doctor."

When Bob came home his wife met him at the door and flung herself into his arms, radiant.

"Oh, Bob," she exclaimed, "there's no more need for us to quarrel! I've found out the cause. It's the red suit. The doctor has ordered me out of it. He says the green rooms are just the thing for me. Don't you know we've always been pleasant with each other there?"

"Come to think of it, I do."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

"I expect it's the red in many couples' lives that sets them to quarreling."

CHERRIES

They Saved Her From Herself

By CLARISSA MACKIE

In April Miss Alberta Ely looked at the snowy bloom of her big cherry tree and sighed anxiously.

"It looks as if there was going to be a sight of fruit this year if the pesky birds don't eat 'em all up," she said to herself. Then aloud she suddenly shrieked, "Here, you, boy; don't you dare touch them blossoms."

"I was only picking a few flowers, ma'am," he apologized. "I wanted them for my mamma."

"Those are not flowers," returned Miss Alberta severely. "Those would have been cherries in July if you had left them alone. One, two, three—um—nine cherries you've picked off my tree, young man."

The boy looked from her lined and careworn face to the fragrant snow of blooms over his head. "There's plenty more flowers, ma'am," he said wistfully, extending the crushed twigs he held, "but I suppose you better take these. They're yours."

Miss Alberta snatched the blossoms from his hand and tossed them toward a little mound of wilted dandelion roots she had been digging out of the turf. "Hasn't your mother taught you it's wicked to steal?" she demanded.

The boy winced, but he squared his shoulders and answered sturdily: "Of course she's told me that, ma'am. It's me—myself—that did it. She wouldn't 'prove of me doing it."

"Well, I should hope not," ejaculated Alberta, with a fleeting glance toward the roof of the little brown house next door. "When did you move in, boy?"

"Yesterday," he answered, "and my mamma's drefful tired today."

"What is your name?"

"Duncan Fearly Bartlett. That's my papa's name too."

April passed into May—May into June—and then came July, sultry and hot, with the rich odor of overripe fruits in Alberta's shrubby garden. Faster than she could convert the berries into cans of amber and ruby tinted preserves they ripened on the bushes, and pirate robins swooped to snatch titbits for the gaping mouths that crowded the nests.

"Scat!" Alberta would cry, waving her gingham apron at the feathered robbers.

"Oh, twee—wee—weeeee!" the robins would answer saucily as they dashed away, only to return later and repeat the foray.

"Drat 'em!" and Alberta would whisk indoors to rescue the scorching sugar from the fire.

"If the cherries had only waited a little longer!" she groaned one hot day as she looked from the kitchen window into the branches of the cherry tree, where the rich red fruit hung in thick clusters. "If I can only get this currant jell off my hands"—

"Do you want a boy to pick cherries?" asked Duncan Bartlett from the doorway, where he stood hat in hand. "My mamma says I can pick on shares if you want me to and I'm careful not to fall."

Alberta looked at him suspiciously. He was seven years old and small for his age, but he was strong and wiry and had an open, chubby countenance that made him look still younger. He wore a clean suit of overalls, and his brown feet were bare.

"I don't like to have my fruit picked on shares," she said sharply, "but I'll tell you what you can try. You can pick 'em on quarter shares. Out of every four quarts you can have one for yourself."

"All right, ma'am," he said, with some disappointment in his tone. "If you'll give me a pail and a rope I'll begin now."

Alberta provided a pail and a rope and a long ladder and watched the small cherry picker carefully climb the rounds until he disappeared among the green branches.

Just before noon Duncan appeared at the door staggering under a pail of luscious cherries. Perspiration streamed down his sunburned nose and cherries stained his lips.

"How many you got there—eight quarts? Well, you get two quarts out of that." Alberta measured a scant two quarts from the brimming pail and dumped them in a paper bag. "You coming back after dinner?"

"If you want me to."

"Come along. Somebody's got to pick 'em. Well, I declare, you've been eating some!" She pointed an accusing finger at his reddened lips.

Duncan flushed proudly. "I only ate some the birds had pecked," he confessed.

"He's gritty," she murmured as she emptied the cherries into a basket and set the pail outside the door.

By 6 o'clock Duncan had picked fifty quarts of cherries, and Alberta reluctantly parted from twelve quarts.

It was after supper that Ellen Snively's face appeared at Alberta's kitchen door. "You all through your supper?" she asked as she stepped within and pushed the sunbonnet back from her sharp face.

"Yes. Sit down." Alberta pushed the Boston rocker forward and hung her dish towel on the line at the back door. "I'm dead beat. Been canning fruit all day and got my cherries to do tomorrow." She sank breathlessly into a chair.

"That Bartlett boy's making a good thing out of you," remarked Ellen complacently. "I bought twelve quarts of cherries from him, and the little rascal charged me 15 cents a quart for 'em."

"Fifteen cents a quart!" echoed Alberta in dismay. "They told me down to the store they'd take all I could spare for 8 cents. That boy must have made $1.20 off my tree. That's a man's wages." Alberta was [illegible] excited.

"Miss Green only paid [illegible] cents a quart to have hers picked," said Ellen Snively significantly, "and she sold 'em for 15, making it [illegible] cents a quart. I thought it was too bad he should be making all the money off you, and so I ran in to tell you. I got to go along and get ready for prayer meeting now. You coming?"

"By and by," groaned Alberta weakly. "I got to think this cherry business out first. I feel's if that boy has cheated me. I've a good mind to go over there and make him give me some of that money back. I didn't know that cherries was selling so high or I wouldn't have let him pick on shares."

"Even shares?" demanded Ellen Snively.

"Quarter shares. And that's enough!"

"Plenty enough," agreed Ellen.

"I don't know as I can get down to meeting, Ellen, but you might as well take along my contribution to the missionary vacation fund. I promised $5," said Alberta with conscious generosity. She brought the money and placed it in a small envelope. "I expect it's hard work for them missionaries to convert the heathen to the Golden Rule," she sighed.

"Hiram says he should think the heathen would want a vacation instead of the missionaries," giggled Ellen Snively frivolously as she pocketed the money.

"I'm sorry Hiram ain't a professing Christian—it's a great comfort," observed Miss Ely primly as Ellen disappeared around the corner of the house.

Half an hour later she returned from a trip to the little brown house. She had recovered 80 cents of Duncan's money and had amended her bargain by paying him 2 cents a quart for the cherries he had picked and thus reduced his earnings to $1. She felt very uncomfortable over the matter, [illegible] for once inside the modest brown cottage she found herself in refined surroundings. Mrs. Bartlett was a charming woman and had introduced her husband, Dr. Bartlett, a whole souled, genial man, who inwardly chuckled over his little son's business venture, but outwardly treated it with great seriousness and consideration, much to Duncan's comfort.

Alberta Ely surmised that her new neighbors were far from being in straitened circumstances and had merely sought the little cottage for a summer's recreation in the valley. Their simple courtesy put Alberta's niggardly errand to shame, and her cheeks flushed hotly as she counted the money down on her kitchen table. "I wish Ellen Snively had stayed at home," she said impatiently. "I've got to get all that fruit down cellar and it's dark now."

She lighted a lamp and set it down in the cellar; then while the darkness closed in and the air grew more humid and sultry every moment she toiled up and down the stairs, carrying basket after basket of the canned fruit she had worked so hard to preserve. At last she carried the basket of cherries and halfway down the steep stairs she stepped on her skirt, tottered and then overbalanced by the basket of fruit she fell down the remaining steps, twisting her ankle badly as she did so.

For many dreadful moments Alberta Ely lay there on her cellar floor unable to move her foot. Pangs of exquisite pain stabbed her ankle to be succeeded by hot burnings. She felt it swelling within her shoe, and at last she extricated herself from the mass of crushed cherries and assumed a sitting posture, but it was impossible to move farther.

Thunder roared and shook the house to its foundations. The fermenting jars of 1907 cherries yielded to the heat and exploded with astounding reports. At last there came a blinding, dazzling flash of white light outside the cellar windows, followed by a deafening crash, succeeded by another crash of splintering glass. Alberta Ely fainted from pain and fright.

When she regained consciousness she was in her own sitting room, surrounded by the entire Bartlett family. The doctor had skillfully bound her injured ankle, and his wife was holding wet cloths to Alberta's brow, while Duncan pressed strong smelling salts to her thin nose.

"Your preserve shelves came down last night, and it looks as though you'd lost all your fruit," explained Mrs. Bartlett after awhile. "I'm afraid that's not the worst of it, Miss Ely. The lightning struck your cherry tree and split it in two halves. We saw it and came over. We were afraid the bolt might have entered the house."

Alberta Ely looked through tear filled eyes at the three who were so cheerfully ministering to her in spite of her meanness regarding the cherries Duncan had picked. Something hard loosened from about her heart, and it must have been the covering of stinginess, for it never appeared again. She reached out and caught Duncan's chubby hand and kissed it with trembling lips, and the Bartletts understood they had made a new friend and smiled at each other.

None of them heard Alberta Ely whispering to herself. "No missionary ought to take a vacation so long as Ellen Snively and me can act so un-Christian," she thought bitterly. "When God just had to send a bolt of lightning to that cherry tree to make me understand some things."