

"But I can't marry you — you're the wife of that ass Leigh!"
 "Wife — I don't think!" she laughed, dragging me from my
 settee, "I kept my fingers crossed!"

I felt that the Café Royal was no place for a difficult legal
 argument with one's intended wife. Time enough for that on the
 way to Biskra!

THE SUBURBANITE: and THE RIDDLE

By HELEN WOLJESKA.

THE SUBURBANITE.

(Madge, dressed all in white, sits on her balcony, overlooking a large, shady, well-kept garden. All about her are cut flowers in vases, and potted plants. She is busy with some delicate needlework.)

Yesterday the Boy was here again. . . He is so refreshing. So full of enthusiasm and youth! Such youth! Barely five or six years older than my oldest son. . .

He came to give a music lesson to Elsie, and I acted the chaperone, as usual. Elsie was rather unappreciative, I'm afraid. She's a tomboy, and doesn't care much for anything except sport and the most violent exercise. All his interesting explanation and fanciful comment was lost upon her. Not to discourage him, I took it upon myself to respond in my daughter's place. Really he has the most bizarre ideas. . . He quite fascinates me.

With the stroke of five Elsie absented herself — and that Boy and I were left alone. It is not often I am in tête à tête with a man other than my husband. Funny! But when I come to think of it: I scarcely ever talk to any other man at all except in the most trivial and superficial fashion. I don't know how it is with other couples, but when Fred and I go out calling or dining, the men always seem to talk to my husband, and we women are left to each other. . . We Occidentals are not as emancipated as we like to imagine.

Perhaps it is ridiculous — but actually, I felt as though I were doing something forbidden, sitting there in the twilight, exchanging confidences with a young man — for that's what it amounted to. He seemed eager to hear my thoughts on many subjects, and always found them congenial and kin to his own. But his, to me, seemed so much more brilliant and strange and daring! It was lovely to listen to the enthusiastic young soul's unfolding. I let myself drift — unreservedly. And finally I did not recognize my own voice any more. It uttered ideas so new to me — and yet so queerly familiar. They must have been asleep in me a long time. But nobody had ever cared to awaken them.

Suddenly a bell rang. It gave me a shock. What, if somebody should find us together in the almost dark room? But it was only the telephone. My husband called up to say that he would not be home for dinner. Business of course. We suburbanites' wives have to put up with that sort of thing so much. But what can we do. . . ?

And then — I was surprised at myself, when I actually asked that Boy to stay for dinner. The words sort of formed themselves, before I half realized it! And he accepted — he was delighted. His eyes told me that. Ah — ! It is a very sweet sensation to have somebody enjoy one's companionship. . .

I don't know why — but the dinner was not as much of a joy to me as I imagined it would be. Some of the things the children said and did seemed to jar. I really felt relieved when, after the dessert, they dispersed. We lingered over our coffee.

Finally we drifted back into the music room. It was quite dark now. I wanted to turn on the lights. But he begged me not to. He sat down before the piano and began to extemporize. It seemed to me I could see that whole, wonderful young soul of his surging up before me. Youth! to which nothing seems impossible — flamingly ambitious, gloriously alive, marvellously sensitized! And then he spoke — in a low voice, between broken chords, he spoke — of his dreams and his hopes and his sorrows. . .

Ah — ! I must stop dreaming and go on with my work — this blouse for Elsie will be adorable.

THE RIDDLE.

The sky is lurid and the clouds hang low. Autumn winds sweep over the lonely Bohemian stubble fields and tear the last yellow and brown leaves from shuddering branches. All the flowers have gone. The garden lies desolate in misty evening twilight.

Slowly moving shapes come down the broad chestnut avenue, gliding like gray phantoms.

The grandmother walks proudly in her long trailing garments of dark brocade, her beautiful face, white as wax, is framed by dusky laces. She talks to her son's young visitor from Vienna — talks with the condescending kindness of a queen. And, indeed, a queen she had been, a queen of beauty, of fashion, of love — oh mon ami, il y a bien longtemps.

With them comes a child, the youngest granddaughter. She clings to the arm of the young man, whose brilliant uniform makes a bright red spot in the gathering dusk. Her large eyes are intent upon his face, and as he looks down upon her, his full lips smiling, his white teeth glistening, she wants to crush hers against his — she feels jubilant and bitterly unhappy —

"Are you chilly?" he asks. "You seem to be trembling, little one."

She stiffens herself, breathless, with closed lids.

"No," she whispers, "no, it is nothing."

"Extraordinary —" thinks the young man.

Ten minutes later the bonne lights the green shaded lamp in the children's room. It is getting dark so early now! She takes her fine embroidery from the large, flowered reticule. . . She is working for her trousseau.

And the children sit among diminutive white furniture with their dolls, and play "robber," or "measles". The shutters rattle, the wind howls, and in the white porcelain stove the wood fire crackles cheerfully. It is all so cozy and creepy. The young mothers of the wax babies thrill with the joy and excitement of life. Only the very youngest one is preoccupied. Her large eyes seem intent on things the others cannot see. Her mind seems lost in wonderment and questioning and awe —

"Ludmilla is tiresome to-day," say the elder sisters disapprovingly, "don't let's pay any attention to her."