

THE TENTH WOMAN

By Dell Leigh.

We had been shooting cock pheasants all day with considerable success, and were stretched out in deep chairs around Mallison's gun-room fire with the immediate prospect of some of his very pre-war whiskey, followed by an excellent dinner and more excellent bridge after that. In fact, an ideal Christmas holiday lay ahead of us, and I for one was blissfully content—we all were. Especially Heagerty, the youngest of the party, doubtless because there were some charming women, as he put it, "knocking about the countryside." It was he, of course, who brought up the subject of the women folk at a few moments pipe-smoking silence. An impressionable young man.

"I say, Mally, what an absolute fizzer Mrs. Ainslie is. What'd you call her—Cushla? Funny name. Rather nice though. . . by J-o-v-e!" His voice trailed off into beatific reflection as he gazed into the roaring fire.

We had all observed her carefully: naturally. Who wouldn't? The wife of a man whose shoot marched next to our host's, she had been out with the guns all day, and bringing them down by the head every time. One of her handsomest women I had seen for some time, and as sporting as a terrier. Did everything very well, according to all accounts. Young Heagerty was quite right. We confirmed his opinion with acquiescing grunts, we old birds.

"Oh, the Tenth Woman," said Mally. "Yes, she's a class apart, is Cushla. That's her real name. Suits her, somehow, don't you think?"

We did. But why the Tenth Woman? What was the idea?

Mallison laughed. "There's a pretty little story hanging to that. You may as well hear it, you fellows. We are all dining over at Ainslie's after his shoot on Bank Holiday; it'll be a cheery affair, mark my words. He's got some superb 'bubbly.' It is sure to be referred to, 'cos it's the anniversary of the business, this Christmas; but you'll only get a garbled, rotten account if she puts in her ear. She's as modest as she is pretty, and you can't say that of all women. But I was staying there last Christmas when it happened; the Misses was recovering from 'fit on the Riviera, and his house was like a mausoleum in consequence. So I can give it you more or less first hand.

"You don't know Highmoor, any of you? A great barrack of a place compared to this. You'll see. But Fred Ainslie does you remarkably well and usually fills the house with riotous livers at Christmas for the shooting. He's extremely well off, as you may have heard. But he lived a bit of a hermit's life after his first wife left him, and only opened up the place properly at rare intervals. Yes; the first Madame Ainslie walked off with a still richer Yank of her acquaintance. He simply had to divorce her on account of the family name and the entail, and one thing and another. We needn't go into that. She was a dreadful woman, in my opinion. Fred was as sour as hell about it for some years—not surprising.

"But last Christmas some of his young cousins and nieces and people filled the house and night for him; insisted on it; said he was moping; dare say he was. Cushla Fane (as she was then) was among 'em; brought down by Daphne Phillips, cousin of Fred's, who was at Rodean with her; great pals. It appears that at dinner on Christmas Eve Cushla, who was sitting on her host's right for no particular reason, got involved in rather an acrid argument with him on the sex question. She didn't know her man then, and little enough I expect of the circumstances of his loneliness. She says he propounded a very unporting point of view about women generally. Was distinctly beastly about them in fact. And put the lid on by saying: 'My dear Miss Fane, believe me, nine women out of ten are sisters under their tinted skins. You have usurped to yourselves certain rights and privileges during the last few years that you never had before—and all that sort of thing. But when you come down to brass tacks woman lives by man, and on him for the most part parasitically so in most cases. And, of course, when it comes to a moment of danger, national or personal, you all turn instinctively to us for initiative and protection; and away go all your dogmas and assertions—which is as it should be. . . .

"He didn't mean the half of this, of course; Fred is one of the best. But she got him on the raw once or twice. You know how heated this sort of argument grows. Anyway, she seems to have taken him seriously, and was very angry. Expressed herself in no measured terms about him to Daphne in the billiard-room afterwards. Darn silly the whole thing was: threw a bit of a blight over the merry party that evening, though.

"Now, what actually happened that night I was only able to piece together accurately bit by bit, by getting the two of them off their guard subsequently and at different times, when they were in an expansive mood, don't you know. I took some pains about this, because it struck me afterwards, knowing Fred as I do—we were at Rugby together—as being so devilish funny, a complete reversal of the usual situation. Also, coincidence played a big part, which proves that it does sometimes outside the covers of the monthly magazines. . . .

"Go and mix the drinks one of you—George, like a good fellow. There's a gin and it, as well, for anyone who wants it. . . .

"We drifted off to bed very late, about half-past twelve or so; the womenfolk had been gone some time. Fred was jawing in my room, much to my disgust, until about one; a distributive woman chiefly, which bored me stiff. Eventually he wandered off to his own room and I was asleep in two seconds, and heard nothing more until the tea came in at eight.

some rather fine pearls, and all the Christmas Box money for servants, keepers, etc.

"That's what he's after," said Cushla, "and we'll have him as he comes through the window all to ourselves," she laughed softly. "Can we get out there round some other way?"

"Yes, through the kitchen quarters—but you're not coming, Miss Interpide!"

"Rubbish! You can't rouse the house round the window. Take some thing heavy and bowl him over as he crawls out. There's an eight-foot drop or something of that sort, isn't there? The last thing he'll be looking for will be you outside the window."

"Fred unhit the old Chinese police truncheon off the wall in the corridor—handy sort of weapon—and she said, 'Splendid!'

"Fred said it was a malevolent sort of his the way she said it. And together they crept out through the back doors round the garden to the shrubs by the library window. A nice situation for a fellow to find himself in on a dark night; but when you know Cushla a bit better you will realise there is no gainsaying her when her mind is made up. As Fred says, it was as if he had been dealing with a dangerous situation with a man, and not with a woman at all. And to do the old boy justice one must say he would tackle any two men barganded at any time—he's a plucky devil. And he would, no doubt, have shoved her out of the way if it had come to a mess-up.

"Arrived outside the window, she pulled Fred's face down to her own and whispered: 'Lift me up; I want to see what he's doing.'

"Obediently—he was now entirely under the spell of her, I'm certain, he prised her up on his shoulder. She hung on by the window sill and looked in.

"The brute had left a wee chink in the curtains when he went into the room again and got to work. She could see him moving about. But not when he was engaged on the safe. He was out of range there. All these details were whispered very quietly into Fred's ear. She was thoroughly in her element; enjoying every moment of it. Fred wasn't. He was getting cramp, holding her up; but she made him lift her at intervals—for her to report.

"They think they must have lain in wait outside that window—December, and she in her nightie, mark you—for best part of an hour. If never seemed to have occurred to either of them that the feller might have continued his deprecations upstairs amongst the women's bedrooms. But he didn't. Cushla was in the very best of luck for about the twentieth time when she squirmed away like a rabbit going to ground.

"The next thing he was aware of was a bag being dropped softly on to the grass out of the window. A leg was straddled over the sill. A head and shoulders appeared—and then Fred struck. He fell like a sack of potatoes. Cushla, capered with joy, and forthwith proceeded to tear her dressing-gown into strips. Fine stuff, Fred said, wide strips of silk for trussing a man up with. They fetched the disgruntled butler out of his bed and locked the cove up in an empty cellar.

"He was one of a member of the gang who had been burgling places all over the home counties. Confederate in car on high road, no doubt. That's how the police said they worked the country houses. Their man had done two spells of time for robbery with violence. He was masked, rubber-gloved, and carrying a foul little Colt automatic, fully charged—pleasant specimen—what?

"Fred broke the news to half a dozen men at breakfast. Cushla was the only woman down, looking as fresh as paint and very lovely. She threw pieces of toast at him when he began, and said 'shurr-up!'

"But when he had finished and the men were getting off the usual epithets and compliments, she ladled some more marmalade on to her plate and replied merely: 'You are all very silly—such children you men are—though rather dears.' Then she looked roguishly across at her host and said: 'Nine women out of ten—do you remember? What was it they were—m? . . .

"Fred just looked at her. But with quite a different look. A look that already spelt—doom, shall we say, what? . . .

"No, by God!" broke in young Heagerty, rising and going rapidly towards the drinks, empty glass in hand. "Doom, did you say? My word. . . .

"And we endorsed his sentiment in silence, broken by the hiss of a sphygmometer. . . .

The Highwayman

My Oliver Madox Hueffer.

"Isn't it just too perfectly wonderful!" exclaimed Mrs. Ezra F. Grunzer, letting down the window of the post-chaise to gain a wider view over the snow-covered woods. "Don't you feel thrilled to your very marrow, Angel-face?"

"I certainly do, Sweetie," agreed her husband. "Now say, haven't I given you a sure 'nuff surprise of a bridal trip. We ought to be at the Baronial Hall inside of half-an-hour if these pampers steeds keep going." He added, thoughtfully.

Not the most exacting of American brides could, indeed, have asked more of her devoted husband than the offerings of Mr. Grunzer to his newly-wed wife (nee Theda Stubenheim of Peoria, Ill.). Not only had he purchased for her Wahnsley Manor, one of the most perfect remaining examples of Tudor architecture in England, not only had he arranged for triumphal arched and assorted loyal tenants to greet her on arrival, not only were there to be Yuletide revels, wails, boars' heads, and the other appurtenances to a medieval Christmas—their wedding happening at that festive period. He had even arranged that the last stage of their journey, from Chid-yate Junction, should be carried out in an honest-to-goodness postchaise of the period, driven by postillions in appropriate uniform and immortalised at the start by a whole army of reporters and cinematograph operators. Never certainly was there a more considerable bridegroom than the young Gumshee King of Sandusky, O.

"You're sure there is nothing I've forgotten, Panchoppet?" he enquired anxiously, capturing an errand hand.

"There is just one thing, Duckalove. If you could have fixed up for a highwayman, on a wonderful black mare, like—what was his name—Tom Turpin, to hold the chaise up, and insist I should dance a minuet with him in the snow. It always was done in the old days, and it would have made Mame Schmittberger just mad when she read about it. Mercy on us—what it that?"

Her husband had just conquered a smile of satisfaction at his own forethought when the chaise stopped suddenly and a man thrust his head through the open window. It was crowned by a cloth cap wore goggles instead of a black mask, but the gesture with which he thrust an automatic into the face of Mr. Grunzer was all that the sternest realist could have desired. "Nah then," he barked.

"Put them 'ands up, and keep 'em up. 'And oyer yer cash, and be nippy wif it. Too bloomin' sold to stand 'ere."

Mrs. Grunzer felt that she ought to faint. Being uncertain how to set about it she only half-closed her eyes, concealing a smile while her husband, with admirable docility, handed over his watch, pocket-book and other valuables, even to his diamond bosom-pin, and made no more protest than a mutter. "Be careful with that, mind. It's valuable." when the highwayman demanded the famous pearl necklace the formerly belonging to Marie Antoinette—which adorned his wife's neck. Only when the marauder, satisfied with his haul, turned as if to depart, did the victim show signs of impatience. "Say you," he snapped. "You aren't through yet. How about the dance with the lady?"

"I don't want none of your lip," said emulater of Tom—or Dick—Turpin. "You keep your math shut an' you won't get 'urt. Nah then, Bill. Whlll abart it?"

A second man, who was over-awing the postillions, a pistol in either hand, rejoined him, and together they leapt into a large grey motor-car blocking the road in front of the chaise, and disappeared amid a whirlwind of snow. "Hulljee," muttered Mr. Grunzer below his breath. "Who ever heard of Dick Turpin in an automobile. Makes me mad, that does." And without further comment he ordered the postillions to drive on.

So mad he seemed, indeed, that for a time his wife thought it wiser to say nothing. She was on the point of condoling with him for the foolish ignorance of historic detail shown by his employees when again the chaise stopped. A man on a tall black horse was beside it, extending towards the window an old-fashioned horse-pistol. He wore a steeply-crowned hat, a black mask through which his eyes glittered wickedly, a top hat riding on with many capes; from head to heel he was the typical Knight of the Road. "Stand and deliver!" he commanded in an affected voice. "Track and Ode-bodkins—an thou delayest—"

Mr. Grunzer sprang from the chaise, aflame with fury. "You doggorn mutt," he thundered. "What in the name of—of the Eighteenth Amendment do you think you are doing?"

The highwayman was obviously taken aback. "I beg your pardon, he stammered, "are you not Mr. Grunzer, the American gentleman who has just bought Wahnsley Manor?"

"I am, you doddrabbed rube. And who the Gorrinity do you think you are?"

"My name is Arthur De Vere Montgomery. I am playing in The Babes in the Wood at Litchester and I was asked by Mr. Travers, the estate-agent—"

"We know all about that. But who were the others—the ginks in the automobile?"

"Automobile? Do you mean the grey car that passed me about five minutes ago? I have no idea. Stay, though—I did notice a grey car outside the 'Mitre and Crozier' at Chid-yate, while I was making up there, just before starting. Of course, everyone was talking about you—your ingenious idea—and I noticed a couple of men in motor-goggles—"

But Mr. Grunzer was not listening to him. Already he was in the chaise, and with his body half out of the window was shouting at the postillions to drive like fury to the nearest police-station.

—O. M. H.

"SHAVING TACKLE" SUITS MOST MEN

Razors and Shaving Soaps, Etc., Come Useful at All Times.

No man ever owned too many reliable razors, and when Christmas comes around with unfailing regularity he naturally expects another addition of the safety kind to his supply. They come in plush-lined metal boxes, accompanied by a packet of blades.

A man-sized bath sponge might well top the bulging sock, hanging by the fireplace beside a miscellaneous collection of small stockings. Outside of the fun it provides for the family, a business-like bath sponge would be a welcome addition to the personal possessions of any man.

Shaving soap in one of those quaint new wooden bowls is a delight to use. A round wooden lid fits on the bowl when not in use.

Military brushes make an acceptable gift, and come in good plain designs, fitted in a festive box.

Manicure sets, either in travelling kits or in the more elaborate plush-lined boxes, are useful and appropriate as gifts. Most men prefer their nail articles to be of ebony, and to this end the manufacturers have turned out innumerable designs in this wood.

Burning Yule Log Was a Big Event

"Those Who Kiss Beneath the Mistletoe Will Never Quarrel."

Christmas in the old days teemed with spells and omens and if our ancestors faithfully observed them all they certainly deserved to have the best of luck during the coming year.

Embrace as many friends as possible beneath the mistletoe for those who kiss beneath the Christmas mistletoe will never quarrel. A flat-footed woman about-the-house during Christmas time will always bring bad luck.

The burning of the Yule log was a great event. It was dragged in with songs and rejoicing and placed on the fire, the larger the better, for Yule log flames out all memories of wrongs and anger, and brought peace and goodwill to all who warmed themselves in its heat. None was allowed to stir the fire for fear of breaking its beneficial influence; no squinting or barefooted person was allowed to enter the room while it was burning for this brought poverty and poor sight to the household. It was thought unlucky, too, for an odd number of persons to be in the room at the same time and a charred piece of the log was carefully saved and preserved in the cellar during the following year; this was an infallible security against all danger of fire.

Plows by Wind Power.

Brightlingsea, Eng., Dec. 11.—Sails were introduced as an aid to plowing in a soil tillers' match near here. At times the sails caught the wind and speeded up the work of tilling the ground. However, puffs of wind blew the plow from its straight course and caused irregular furrows.

The birth rate of the United States is decreasing.

The Irish Free State has imposed a tax on bachelors.

Season's Greetings

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