

Three Ways to Manage a Husband



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To those who have never tried the experiment, the management of a husband may seem a very easy matter. I thought so once, but a few years' hard experience has compelled me to change my mind. When I married Mr. John Smith, which was about ten years ago, I was not altogether blind to his faults and peculiarities; but then he had so many solid virtues, that these were viewed as minor considerations. Besides, I flattered myself that it would be the easiest thing in the world to correct what was not exactly to my taste. It is no matter of especial wonder that I should have erred in this, for Mr. John Smith, while a lover, really appeared to have no will of his own, and no thought of himself. It was only necessary for me to express a wish, and it was gratified.

I soon found, much to my disappointment, that there is a marked difference between a husband and a lover: it was at least so in the case of Mr. Smith, and observation, since I have had my eyes open, satisfies me that it is so in most cases. I must own, in justice to all parties, however, that this difference is made more apparent by a want of knowledge, on the other side, in regard to the difference between the relation of a wife and a sweetheart—between the wooed and the won.

There were a good many little things in Mr. Smith, which I had noticed before marriage, that I made up my mind to correct as soon as I had an opportunity to apply the proper means. He had a fashion of saying "Miss" for "Mrs.," as "Miss Jones" and "Miss Peters" for "Mrs. Jones" and "Mrs. Peters." This sounded exceedingly vulgar to my ears, and I waited almost impatiently for the time to

come when I could use the prerogative of a wife for its correction. He had an ungraceful way of lounging in his chair and half reclining on the sofa, even in company, that was terrible. It made me uneasy from head to foot. Then he said, "I *shew* it to him" for "I *showed* it to him," "of-*ten*" for "oft'n"—and "*obleeged*" for "obliged." Besides these, there were sundry other things that worried me not a little. But I consoled myself with the reflection that when I became Mrs. Smith all these little matters would vanish like frost in the sunshine. I was, alas! doomed to be mistaken. But let me give my experience for the benefit of those who are to come after me.

We had been married just ten days, and I had begun to feel that I was really a wife, and had a right to say and do a little as I pleased, when Mr. Smith said to me, as we sat quite lover-like on the sofa in the evening,

"I met Miss Williams as I came home this evening—"

"For mercy's sake, Mr. Smith! don't say *Miss* when you speak of a married woman. It is excessively vulgar." I was not aware that I had spoken in a very offensive way, but I noticed an instant change in Mr. Smith. He replied, with some dignity of tone and manner—

"I ask your pardon, madam; but I didn't say *Miss*. I am not quite so ignorant as all that comes to."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Smith, but you did say it," I replied, quite astonished at this unexpected denial.

"Excuse me for saying that you are in error," he returned, drawing himself up. "I never say *Miss* for *Mrs.*"

"Why, Mr. Smith! You always say it. I have noticed it a hundred times. I believe I can hear pretty correctly."

"In this instance you certainly have not."

Mr. Smith was growing warm, and I felt the blood rushing to my face. A rather tart reply was on my lips, but I bit them hard and succeeded in keeping them closed.

A deep silence followed. In a little while Mr. Smith took up a newspaper and commenced reading, and I found some relief for a heavy pressure that was upon my bosom, in the employment of hemstitching a fine pocket-handkerchief.

And this was the return I had met for a kind attempt to correct a mistake of my husband's, that made him liable to ridicule on the charge of vulgarity! And to deny, too, that he said "*Miss*," when I had been worried about it for more than a year! It was too bad!

After this Mr. Smith was very particular in saying, when he spoke of a married woman to me, *Misses*. The emphasis on the second syllable was much too strongly marked to be pleasant on my ears. I was terribly afraid he would say "*Mistress*," thus going off into the opposite extreme of vulgarity.

This first attempt to put my husband straight had certainly not been a very pleasant one. He had shown, unexpectedly to me, a humour that could by no means be called amiable; and by which I was both grieved and astonished. I made up my mind that I would be very careful in future how I tried my hand at reforming him. But his oft-repeated "he *shew* it to me," and "*obleege*," soon fretted me so sorely, that I was forced to come down upon him again, which I did at a time when I felt more than usually annoyed. I cannot remember now precisely what I said to him, but I know that I put him into an ill-humour, and that it was cloudy weather in the house for a week, although the sun shone brightly enough out of doors. "*He shew it to me*," and "*obleege*," were, however, among the things that had been, after that. So much was gained; although there were times when I half suspected that I had lost more than I had gained. But I persevered, and, every now and then, when I got "worked up" about something, administered the rod of correction.

Gradually I could see that my husband was changing, and, as I felt, for the worse. Scarcely a year had passed before he would get into a pet if I said the least word to him. He couldn't bear any thing from me. This seemed very unreasonable, and caused me not only to sigh, but to shed many a tear over his perverseness. From the thoughtful, ever considerate, self-sacrificing lover, he had come to be disregardful of my wishes, careless of my comfort, and indifferent to my society. Still I felt by no means inclined to give him up; was by no means disposed to let him have his own way. It was clear to my mind that I had rights as well as he had; and I possessed resolution enough to be ready to maintain them. His self-will and

indifference to my wishes roused in me a bitter and contentious spirit; and, in an evil hour, I determined that I would make a struggle for the mastery. An opportunity was not long delayed. The Philharmonic Society had announced one of its splendid concerts. A lady friend, who had frequently attended these concerts, called in to see me, and, by what she said, filled me with a desire to enjoy the fine musical treat that had been announced for that very evening.

When Mr. Smith came home at dinner, he said, before I had time to mention the concert—

“Mary, I’ve taken a fancy to go and see Fanny Ellsler to-night, and, as there will be no chance of getting a good seat this afternoon, I took the precaution to secure tickets as I came home to dinner. I would have sent the porter with a note to know whether there was any thing to prevent your going to-night, but he has been out all the morning, and I concluded that, even if there should be some slight impediment in the way, you could easily set it aside.”

Now this I thought too much. To go and buy tickets to see Fanny Ellsler dance, and take it for granted that I would lay every thing aside to go, when I had set my heart on attending the Philharmonic concert!

“You are a strange man, Mr. Smith,” said I. “You ought to know that I don’t care a fig about seeing Fanny Ellsler. I don’t relish such kind of performances. You at least might have waited until you came home to dinner and asked the question. I don’t believe a word about the good seats all being taken this morning. But it’s just like you! To go and see this dancer toss her feet about— was a thing you had made up your mind to do, and I was to go along whether I liked it or not.”

“You talk in rather a strange way, Mrs. Smith,” said my husband, evidently offended.

“I don’t see that I do,” replied I, warming. “The fact is, Mr. Smith, you seem to take it for granted that I am nobody. Here I’ve been making all my calculations to go to the Philharmonic tonight, and you come home with tickets for the theatre! But I can tell you

plainly that I am not going to see Fanny Ellsler, and that I am going to the Philharmonic."

This was taking a stand that I had never taken before. In most of my efforts to make my husband go my way, he had succeeded in making me go his way. This always chafed me dreadfully. I fretted and scolded, and "all that sort of thing," but it was no use, I could not manage him. The direct issue of "I won't" and "I will" had not yet been made, and I was some time in coming to the resolution to have a struggle, fiercer than ever, for the ascendancy. I fondly believed that for peace' sake he would not stand firm if he saw me resolute. Under this view of the case, I made the open averment that I would not go to the theatre. I expected that a scene would follow, but I was mistaken. Mr. Smith did, indeed, open his eyes a little wider, but he said nothing.

Just then the bell announced that dinner was on the table. Mr. Smith arose and led the way to the dinner-room with firm step. Before we were married he wouldn't have dreamed of thus preceding me! I was fretted at this little act. It indicated too plainly what was in the man.

Dinner passed in silence. I forced myself to eat, that I might appear unconcerned. On rising from the table, Mr. Smith left the house without saying a word.

You may suppose I didn't feel very comfortable during the afternoon. I had taken my stand, and my intention was to maintain it to the last. That Mr. Smith would yield I had no doubt at first. But, evening approached, and the trial-time drew near, I had some misgivings.

Mr. Smith came home early.

"Mary," said he, in his usual pleasant way, "I have ordered a carriage to be here at half past seven. We mustn't leave home later, as the curtain rises at eight."

"What curtain rises? Where do you think of going?"

"To see Fanny Ellsler. Of course, I mentioned to you at dinner-time that I had tickets."

This was said very calmly. "And I told you at dinner-time that I was going to the Philharmonic, and not to see this dancer." I tried

to appear as composed as he was, but failed in the attempt altogether.

“You were aware that I had tickets for the theatre before you said that,” was the cold answer he made.

“Of course I was.”

“Very well, Mary. You can do as you like. The carriage will be here at half-past seven. If you are then ready to go to the theatre, I shall be happy to have your company.” And my husband, after saying this with a most unruffled manner, politely bowed and retired to the parlour.

I was on fire. But I had no thought of yielding.

At half-past seven I was ready. I heard the carriage drive up to the door and the bell ring.

“Mary,” called my husband at the bottom of the stair-case, in a cheerful tone, “are you ready?”

“Ready to go where?” I asked on descending.

“To the theatre.”

“I am ready for the concert,” I answered in as composed a voice as I could assume.

“I am not going to the concert to-night, Mrs. Smith. I thought you understood that,” firmly replied my husband. “I am going to see Fanny Ellsler. If you will go with me, I shall be very happy to have your company. If not, I must go alone.”

“And I am going to the Philharmonic. I thought you understood that,” I replied, with equal resolution.

“Oh! very well,” said he, not seeming to be at all disturbed. “Then you can use the carriage at the door. I will walk to the theatre.”

Saying this, Mr. Smith turned from me deliberately and walked away. I heard him tell the driver of the carriage to take me to the Musical Fund Hall; then I heard the street-door close, and then I heard my husband’s footsteps on the pavement as he left the house. Without hesitating a moment for reflection, I followed to the door, entered the carriage, and ordered the man to drive me—where? I had no ticket for the concert; nor could I go alone!

“To the Musical Fund Hall, I believe, madam,” he said, standing with his fingers touching the rim of his hat.

I tried to think what I should do. To be conquered was hard. And it was clear that I could not go alone.

“No,” I replied, grasping hold of the first suggestion that came to my mind. “Drive me to No. — Walnut street.”

I had directed him to the house of my sister, where I thought I would stay until after eleven o'clock, and then return home, leaving my husband to infer that I had been to the concert. But long before I had reached my sister's house, I felt so miserable that I deemed it best to call out of the window to the driver, and direct him to return. On arriving at home, some twenty minutes after I had left it, I went up to my chamber, and there had a hearty crying spell to myself. I don't know that I ever felt bad before in my life. I had utterly failed in this vigorous contest with my husband, who had come off perfectly victorious. Many bitter things did I write against him in my heart, and largely did I magnify his faults. I believe I thought over every thing that had occurred since we were married, and selected there-from whatever could justify the conclusion that he was a self-willed, overbearing, unfeeling man, and did not entertain for me a particle of affection.

It was clear that I had not been able to manage my spouse, determined as I had been to correct all his faults, and make him one of the best, most conciliating and loving of husbands, with whom my wish would be law. Still I could not think of giving up. The thought of being reduced to a tame, submissive wife, who could hardly call her soul her own, was not for a moment to be entertained. On reflection, it occurred to me that I had, probably, taken the wrong method with my husband. There was a touch of stubbornness in his nature that had arrayed itself against my too earnest efforts to bend him to my will. A better way occurred. I had heard it said by some one, or had read it somewhere, that no man was proof against a woman's tears.

On the present occasion I certainly felt much more like crying than laughing and so it was no hard matter, I can honestly aver, to appear bathed in tears on my husband's return between eleven

and twelve o'clock from the theatre. I cried from vexation as much as from any other feeling.

When Mr. Smith came up into the chamber where I lay, I greeted his presence with half a dozen running sobs, which he answered by whistling the "Craccovienne!" I continued to sob, and he continued to whistle for the next ten minutes. By that time he was ready to get into bed, which he did quite leisurely, and laid himself down upon his pillow with an expression of satisfaction. Still I sobbed on, thinking that every sighing breath I drew was, in spite of his seeming indifference, a pang to his heart. But, from this fond delusion a heavily drawn breath, that was almost a snore, aroused me. I raised up and looked over at the man—he was sound asleep.

A good hearty cry to myself was all the satisfaction I had, and then I went to sleep. On the next morning, I met Mr. Smith at the breakfast table with red eyes and a sad countenance. But he did not seem to notice either.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself at the concert last night," said he. "I was delighted at the theatre. Fanny danced divinely. Hers is truly the poetry of motion!"

Now this was too much! I will leave it to any reader—any female reader, I mean—whether this was not too much. I burst into a flood of tears and immediately withdrew, leaving my husband to eat his breakfast alone. He sat the usual time, which provoked me exceedingly. If he had jumped up from the table and left the house, I would have felt that I had made some impression upon him. But to take things in this calm way! What had I gained? Nothing, as I could see. After breakfast Mr. Smith came up to the chamber, and, seeing my face buried in a pillow, weeping bitterly—I had increased the flow of tears on hearing him ascending the stairs—said in a low voice—

"Are you not well, Mary?"

I made no answer, but continued to weep. Mr. Smith stood for the space of about a minute, but asked no further question. Then, without uttering a word, he retired from the chamber, and in a little while after I heard him leave the house. I cried now in good earnest. It was plain that my husband had no feeling; that he did

not care whether I was pleased or sad. But I determined to give him a fair trial. If I failed in this new way, what was I to do? The thought of becoming the passive slave of a domestic tyrant was dreadful. I felt that I could not live in such a state. When Mr. Smith came home at dinner-time, I was in my chamber, ready prepared for a gush of tears. As he opened the door I looked up with streaming eyes, and then hid my face in a pillow.

"Mary," said he, with much kindness in his voice, "what ails you? Are you sick?" He laid his hand upon mine as he spoke.

But I did not reply. I meant to punish him well for what he had done as a lesson for the future. I next expected him to draw his arm around me, and be very tender and sympathizing in his words and tones. But no such thing! He quietly withdrew the hand he had placed upon mine; and stood by me. I could feel, though not see, in a cold, erect attitude.

"Are you not well, Mary?" he asked again.

I was still silent. A little while after I heard him moving across the floor, and then the chamber door shut. I was once more alone.

When the bell rang for dinner, I felt half sorry that I had commenced this new mode of managing my husband; but, as I had begun, I was determined to go through with it. "He'll at least take care how he acts in the future," I said. I did not leave my chamber to join my husband at the dinner table. He sat his usual time, as I could tell by the ringing of the bell for the servant to change the plates and bring in the dessert. I was exceedingly fretted; and more so by his returning to his business without calling up to see me, and making another effort to dispel my grief.

For three days I tried this experiment upon my husband, who bore it with the unflinching heroism of a martyr. I was forced, at last, to come to; but I was by no means satisfied that my new mode was a failure. For all Mr. Smith's assumed indifference, I knew that he had been troubled at heart, and I was pretty well satisfied that he would think twice before provoking me to another essay of tears. Upon the whole, I felt pretty sure that I had discovered the means of doing with him as I pleased.

A few weeks of sunshine passed—I must own that the sun did not look so bright, nor feel so warm as it had done in former times— and then our wills came once more into collision. But my tears fell upon a rock. I could not see that they made the least perceptible impression. Mr. Smith had his own way, and I cried about it until I got tired of that sport, and in very weariness gave over. For the space of a whole year I stood upon tears as my last defensible position. Sometimes I didn't smile for weeks. But my husband maintained his ground like a hero.

At last I gave up in despair. Pride, self-will, anger—all were conquered. I was a weak woman in the hands of a strong-minded man. If I could not love him as I wished to love him, I could at least obey. In nothing did I now oppose him, either by resolute words or tears. If he expressed a wish, whether to me agreeable or not, I acquiesced.

One day, not long after this change in my conduct towards my husband, he said to me,

“I rather think, Mary, we will spend a couple of weeks at Brandywine Springs, instead of going to Cape May this season.”

I replied, “Very well, dear;” although I had set my heart on going to the Capes. My sister and her husband and a number of my friends were going down, and I had anticipated a good deal of pleasure. I did not know of a single person who was going to the Brandywine Springs. But what was the use of entering into a contest with my husband? He would come off the conqueror, spite of angry words or ineffectual tears.

“The Springs are so much more quiet than the Capes,” said my husband.

“Yes,” I remarked, “there is less gay company there.”

“Don't you think you will enjoy yourself as well there as at the Capes?”

Now this was a good deal for my husband to say. I hardly knew what to make of it.

“If you prefer going there, dear, let us go by all means,” I answered. I was not affecting any thing, but was in earnest in what I said.

Mr. Smith looked into my face for some moments, and with unusual affection I thought.

“Mary,” said he, “if you think the time will pass more pleasantly to you at the Capes, let us go there by all means.”

“My sister Jane is going to the Capes,” I remarked, with some little hesitation; “and so is Mrs. L —— and Mrs. D ——, and a good many more of our friends. I did think that I would enjoy myself there this season very much. But I have no doubt I shall find pleasant society at the Springs.”

“We will go to the Capes,” said my husband promptly and cheerfully.

“No,” said I, emulous now for the first time in a new cause, “I am sure the time will pass agreeably enough at the Springs. And as you evidently prefer going there, we will let the Capes pass for this year.”

“To the Capes, Mary, and nowhere else,” replied my husband, in the very best of humours. “I am sure you will enjoy yourself far better there. I did not know your sister was going.”

And to the Capes we went, and I did enjoy myself excellently well. As for my husband, I never saw him in a better state of mind. To me he was more like a lover than a husband. No, I will not say that either, for I can’t admit that a husband may not be as kind and affectionate as a lover; for he can and will be if managed rightly, and a great deal more so. Whenever I expressed a wish, it appeared to give him pleasure to gratify it. Seeing this, instead of suffering myself to be the mere recipient of kind attentions, I began to vie with him in the sacrifice of selfish wishes and feelings.

It is wonderful, how all was changed after this. There were no more struggles on my part to manage my husband, and yet I generally had things my own way. Before I could not turn him to the right nor the left, though I strove to do so with my utmost strength. Now I held him only with a silken fetter, and guided him, without really intending to do so, in almost any direction.

Several years have passed since that ever-to-be-remembered, happy visit to Cape May. Not once since have I attempted any management of my husband, and yet it is a rare thing that my wish is

not, as it used to be before we were married, his law. It is wonderful, too, how he has improved. I am sure he is not the same man that he was five years ago. But, perhaps, I see with different eyes. At any rate, I am not the same woman; or, if the same, very unlike what I then was.

So much for my efforts to manage a husband. Of the three ways so faithfully, tried, my fair readers will be at no loss to determine which is best. I make these honest confessions for the good of my sex. My husband, Mr. John Smith, will be no little surprised if this history should meet his eye. But I do not believe it will interrupt the present harmonious relations existing between us, but rather tend to confirm and strengthen them.

This story is taken from *Married Life: Its Shadows and Sunshine* by T. S. Arthur. It was originally published in 1858 by J. B. Lippincott & Co. of Philadelphia.