Matrimonial Adventures

The Mental Hazard

BY

Clarence Budington Kelland

Author of "Sudden Jim," "The Source," "The High Flyer," "The Little Moment of Happiness," "Scattergood Baines," "Conflict," etc.

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SOMETHING ABOUT CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

I asked for Mr. Kelland at the First National bank in the town where he lives on Long Island. I was directed to ascend the stairs at the left. I did, and came out at the top right on Mr. Kelland himself. There wasn't anything up there but Mr. Kelland and Mr. Kelland's desk, a typewriter, much paper, and the other chair in which I sat. We were completely surrounded by room.

It was easy to talk to Mr. Kelland, he was interested at once in the Star Author Series of Matrimonial Adventures, but I could get him to say very little about himself.

Finally I elicited the following facts: He started writing by work on a newspaper because he "wanter to get three square meals a day." He had been on the staff of the Detroit News for several years. Then he edited the American Boy. He comes originally from Michigan, but he has lived in Vermont and Maine, and has owned lumber camps in both states. At one time he and his brother owned and ran a mill for the manufacture of clothespins.

He knows the Northwest and the Maine woods, the business of big industries, and he knows everyday people, too, the way they think and feel and love. His attitude is big and human and typically American.

His first story to bring him into prominence was "Sudden Jim." Since then, he has been a name to conjure with.

"The Mental Hazard," written purposely for this series, shows the infinite fineness of his treatment of the marriage theme. It is a big story.

MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

"I'm beginning to think," said McDonald Kent to his wife, "that marriage is like golf—full of mental hazards."

"I presume," said Jane icily, "that you're trying to say something disagreeable."

"I'm trying to be pleasant. I'm trying to get dressed and out of this room without a row." His voice gradually lifted with his irritation. "Thus," he finished, "setting a world's record."

Jane turned to look out of the window, and then she began to hum. The sound of her humming bored into her husband's ears maddeningly. He was a reasonable human being; he knew nothing had been done or said which warranted either of them in giving away to anger and the usual morning quarrel, but he could feel it coming on. There was an inevitability about these morning rows, a silly inevitability. Morning after morning he had arisen with good resolutions, and so, he knew, had his wife—but the result was always the same.

"Mental hazard," he told himself. "Like driving a golf ball over the pond on the sixth hole. You know you're going to smash it into the water, and you do." He turned to Jane, with elaborate self-repression and painstaking patience.

"I don't want to be disagreeable. God knows," he said. "I don't want to start the day with a rumpus, but—"

"But you always do," she said provocatively.

He compressed his lips and stared at her, determined to control his tongue. "Honestly, Jane," he said, "I wasn't trying to say anything disagreeable—that about mental hazards. What I meant was that you can't play golf without believing you can make your shots—and that's just like marriage. We're off our game. We're always topping our irons or hitting out of bounds. Purely mental. We could play the game as well as we did six or seven years ago if we just thought so."

"I hadn't lived with you ten years seven years ago," Jane said with finality.

"God send you're not living with me ten years hence," he said, his anger suddenly ablaze.

"I wouldn't be living with you tomorrow," she answered, "if there was any way out. Oh, why haven't I money of my own? Why can't I be independent of you?"

"Well," he said shortly, "you haven't, and you can't—and there are the kids, so all we can do is make the best of it."

With that he jerked on his coat and flung out of the room to eat a hasty fast which had become flagorless for him as it had for his wife. Words, words, words. He knew, as she knew that what had passed between them was really meaningless, was nothing but sound and irritation. Both knew that, for the most part, they lived amicably, comfortably—and sincerely wanted to live together in peace and enjoyment. Then why? Why these quarrels so easily lighted? Why this exasperation with each other, this shortness of patience, this painstaking search for a cause of affront? McDonald could find no answer to his questions.

Their marriage had stretched over 11 years, and there were two children, nine and seven years old. Neither McDonald or his wife gave consideration to the fact that the ages of their children might have much to do with the steadily increasing inclemency of their life together. The fact of the matter was that the children had passed babyhood in safety. They were in school; no longer were they monopolizing the attention of their parents, and, consequently, after all these years, Jane and McDonald had time to think about themselves.

Jane was not the sort of person to think and analyze, but she felt. Her emotions were headstrong and she was undiplomatically frank in describing them. She knew that some essential element had gone out of their marriage, some element she craved. With something of fear she realized that she did not love McDonald. The urge which had swept her into marriage with him, and made their first years together very sweet and wonderful, had vanished. This discovery was followed by a period of active revolt. She worked herself into a state of mind in which she believed her husband had become actually repulsive to her, and, in her headstrong way, she told him in a storm of tears.

McDonald stood aghast. That such a thing could have happened to him was unbelievable. It was incredible until he sorted over his own feelings toward his wife and found that he had reached a state of indifference toward her. The glow was gone forever.

They had reached a point which every married couple must reach—the moment of readjustment when they must rebuild upon a new foundation or see their structure swept away by the rising storm. They seemed unable to locate a stable foundation upon which to lay a new cornerstone.

McDonald considered the practical side of the question. The thing, he told himself, was a fact. Apparently it could not be mended, so there was nothing to do but try to make the best of it. The children made any other course impossible, and finances made this course necessary. It was all he could do to support one establishment in comfort, therefore, even had he been willing to do so, he could not have allowed Jane to leave him as she seemed to wish to do. He had not the money to allow her to live separately in independent dependence.

Jane's reactions, however, were purely emotional. She no longer loved McDonald, and to love seemed to her the one essential to life—to love and to be loved. She awoke bitterly to the realization that the love which she loved had not been present in their home for years. She craved the uplift of love, remembering how she had been borne along blindly upon a warm rushing wave of love during the first years of her married life. She wanted that again, wanted it to continue. The idea of the commonplace was abhorrent to her; the thought of continuing to live with McDonald as his wife was repulsive. She was young, vivid, lovelier even than she had been ten years ago, and she felt somehow that her loveliness and her life were going to waste; that she was being cruelly, bitterly cheated.

Which, if you stop to think of it, is a dangerously fertile state of mind.

The first sharpness of realization became somewhat dulled. Life continued. The household remained intact, but always it perched upon the brink of disaster. Everything was commonplace, habit, humdrum. It was maddening, wearing, a constant source of irritation. Bickerings were inevitable.

McDonald settled down grimly to the task of holding his family together, of holding his wife. He was essentially fair-minded. He perceived, regretted, and tried to make the best of it—but it was not easy. A certain testiness of disposition added to the difficulties. As for Jane, she went along thinking of herself, holding herself more or less in suspense, craving, always craving for the return of that which had vanished forever.

Jane had always done much as she pleased, and McDonald had interfered little with her whims and amusements. She had her friends, both men and women, but, John saw with alarm, her men friends were narrowing down to one. She golfed with John Firth. McDonald was logical enough to realize the danger of it, but also he had the self-rebelling strain which drove her, sometimes against her own will, to do those things which she was extremely forbidden to do, or to accomplish that from which authority sought to repel her. McDonald knew his interference would only make a bad matter worse.

He was more or less of a fatalist, too. "If she's any good, he said to himself, "she'll stick. If not, she'll go." And there he rested, hoping for the best.

These things happened in those unpleasant days of 1920 when business was ill with that epidemic which declimated the financial population, as the "flu" had decimated the human population of the country, and now, when McDonald's mind and heart were full of the danger which threatened his home, his business took slick off it, and lay at the point of death. He dealt in silks, and everybody knows what happened to silk in that unhappy year.

For weeks at a time his presence was required in the city day and night. For days at a stretch he carried his load of worry into his home after midnight, there to lie, tossing, brain vexed almost to madness, unable to sleep. It was during these weeks of what Jane was pleased to call neglect, that her incipient affair with John Firth began to assume clear outlines. He was bringing into her life again that thing she craved—romance, the eagerness of those first days of her marriage. He loved her. Vehemently he told her of his love, and she delighted in the stirring of it—and then, as must happen, being to love with love, she imagined herself in love with Firth. Which is exactly as bad as the real thing. Or perhaps it is the same thing. And, too, there was the element of adventure, secrecy, apprehension. Love flowers best in such conditions. Here lies the chief defect of marriage—ease of access to the loved one. There are no difficulties, no obstacles. If some method could be invented whereby a husband would incur risk in seeing his wife—or the wife have to plan and evade and dare in order to see her husband, divorce would disappear from the earth.

For weeks now Jane had been holding Firth at arm's length, reluctantly and more reluctantly, with difficulty and with greater difficulty. She was happy again, clandestinely happy, thrilled, poised on the brink of the precipice.

On a Friday night McDonald took an earlier train than usual, arriving at his home shortly after ten o'clock. He was at the end of his rope. The worst had happened. He was smashed, beaten down, obliterated. As he alighted from the train he was just where he had started fifteen years ago—no, he was in a worse case than he had been then. Fifteen years ago he had dared to embark in business for himself. He had possessed youth and hope, and about his neck was no mill stone of responsibility. He could make or break and no damage done to any but himself. It was different tonight. When his creditors finished with him he would not have two nickels to jingle together. Even the house toward which he walked so slowly and heavily—that would be gone. He dreaded the ordeal of breaking the news to Jane.

Usually he rode home in a limousine, tonight he walked, walked to save the quarter it would have cost to ride. He took the short cut through a vacant lot to his back door. The soft lawn deadened his footsteps as he rounded the house to the low porch, and he arrived unheard. So lost was he in his apprehension of the coming interview with his wife that he was unconscious of his surroundings until he stood at the corner of the porch. Then the sound of a man's voice arrested him. He paused, not intending to spy, and the man's words came to his ears, vehement words, impassioned words. John Firth was making love to his wife.

McDonald hesitated. He did not think clearly; was incapable of sharp decision.

"You must love me," he heard Firth say. "You must. You must. . . . I ain't get along without you, Jane . . . Jane . . ." There was a brief silence. "Tell me you love me. Say you'll go away with me. . . . Nobody, nothing has the right to keep us apart if we love. It's a sin to keep us apart."

"I—oh, let me think, let me think," said Jane.

"Think! You've had time for thinking. Weeks and months of it. You know. You do know. . . . Oh, Jane, nobody ever loved you as I do."

"It's sweet to be loved," said Jane. "But—oh, a woman has so much to think of."

"Just think of you and me—of the happiness we have a right to have. . . . Tell me, Jane, tell me you love me."

"Not now, John," McDonald heard his wife say, "not tonight. Let me have just this night to think. Tomorrow I'll—I'll tell you—how it is to be."

"You'll tell me you love me? You'll tell me you will go away with me?"

Jane paused, while McDonald waited dumbly, unable to speak, unable to move. "I—I hope so," she said, softly.

McDonald turned slowly. Stealthily he walked away. He did not want to be seen or heard. He wanted to get away and to face this new disaster, to stare into its eyes and to demand its meaning. He tramped. Hour after hour he tramped, his head seething with incoherent thoughts. So he had lost everything: business, wife, honor—all in one debacle. He tried to realize it, to peer ahead and to picture his future. He could not. He groped for some plan to follow, for some action to take—but there was no light to follow, only the murk of bewilderment. One thing he knew, one fact stood out. He did not want to lose his wife and his home. Perhaps his wife might be a better wife and his home a happier home—but they were his and he wanted them. The thought of losing what lay yonder was intolerable to him.

There were savage thoughts, too; violent thoughts, but he fought them down. Somehow he did not blame Firth, he did not blame his wife. Circumstances, cursed circumstances were at fault. It was just the way things had happened. . . . And then, as dawn broke over the eastern tree tops, fatalism came to his succor.

"I'm at my blackest hour," he said to himself. "I'm broke. . . . If she's my good she'll stick by me. If she leaves me at a time like this she's better gone."

So, once again, he turned his footsteps toward his home. The house was still as he admitted himself and mounted the stairs to the room which his wife's and his own. He opened the door. Jane heard the sound of it closing, and she startled.

"Oh, McDonald," she said, and then she sat more erect and stared at him, at his gloomy, despairing eyes, at his weary, haggard face. "What time is it?" she asked.

"Nearly five."

"What—what is the matter, McDonald? Where have you been all night?"

"Walking," he said; "walking."

"Walking!" Alarm was in her voice. "What has happened? What's the matter?"

He paused. Which calamity should he announce first? Something, not reason, told him there was but one calamity to announce. About his discovery of last night he would be silent. He could not bring himself to speak of it, and in that moment he knew that, whatever came, whatever should be the outcome, he could never tell her what he had overheard. It must be buried, buried in his heart, never to be exhumed.

"I'm broke!" he said baldly.

"Broke! What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, patiently, "that the business has gone up the spout. I've lost everything. Even this house has gone. We'll have to get out of it. . . . I haven't a cent in the world. It's—the end."

She stared at him wide-eyed, and, strangely enough, the thought that filled her mind was not of the money lost, of comforts departed, of possible poverty to come—it was of McDonald's loss—that the thing he had labored so hard to build was destroyed. Her heart cried out with sympathy for him!

"You poor boy . . . Everything you've worked so hard for?"

"Everything," he said dully. "I'm—done."

She got out of bed and walked to his side. "It's wicked, cruel," she said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You've been wanting to—to get away from me," he said in a low voice. "There's no reason why you shouldn't now. . . . no reason why you shouldn't do it now. . . . You'll be as well off away from me as with me."

"I tell you everything's gone. This house—everything! You can't keep a servant. God knows where I'll get money for food." He turned away. "There's no use groaning this. Somehow I'll fix things up for you to stay here until—you're ready to go."

She clutched his arm. "McDonald, what do you mean? Do you want to get rid of me?"

He looked down into her eyes. "No," he said, "I—"

"And you think I'd—desert you—when you're down and out? You think I'm that kind of a quitter?"

"You've wanted to get away. You've—been sorried of me."

"Poor boy," she said softly. "Poor boy. . . . I—oh, McDonald, can't you see I couldn't go now? If you were rich—if everything was all right with you—" she hesitated. "But not now, not when—when you need me so. . . . Poor boy." She drew him down the bed beside her. "I may be a rotter," she said, "but I'm no quitter. We'll start again. Maybe it's all—been planned this way. Maybe it didn't—just happen. We'll start fresh. I'm not afraid. You know you can get a job—or get a start somehow, and I'll—work. Oh, Mac, Mac, don't you want me to help you—back?"

"You don't love me," he said.

She looked into his eyes a full minute before replying, and then she said, "No, McDonald. . . . not the way you mean, dear. It's better than the other kind of love—more lasting, more to depend on. Don't make me go—don't make me go. Let me stay and start all over again, not from the beginning, but from a new beginning."

She stood before him and held out her hand. It is significant she did not offer her lips, but something told both of them that would be playing off the key. She extended her hand, and he took it in his hand and clung to it. Suddenly she burst into tears.

"Thank God you—you—busted," she said tremulously.

RECOVERED MORE THAN DIME

Andrew Carnegie Stooped for Small Coin, and Had One More Proof of His Being Lucky.

Sometimes even the trivial side of a great man appeals to the public, writes Roscoe G. Mitchell in The Nation's Business. There is one experience I had with Mr. Carnegie. I had a copy of a cable from Berlin relative to some move made by the then Emperor William looking to the promotion of world peace. My city editor had asked that I get Mr. Carnegie to comment on the dispatch. I located Mr. Carnegie at a meeting of the Peace Federation at Hotel Astor. When the meeting had concluded and the guests were taking their departure, I rushed over to the speakers table to have a word with him. Just as I spoke to Mr. Carnegie, I was surprised to see him dart suddenly on all fours under the table without acknowledging my greeting. I pursued my quarry to his place of refuge. As I crawled under the table, I saw the ironmaster on hands and knees and a worried look on his bearded countenance.

Before I could delve further into the mystery, Mr. Carnegie's face was beaming. Getting back on his feet, he displayed a quarter and a dime. Holding up a tenpence, he said, "Just imagine, he explained:

"I had taken this ten cents from my pocket to give to the hat check girl at the door. When you spoke to me I dropped the coin. Now I have recovered my offering and an additional twenty five cents. . . . Tell you my boy, it's better to be born lucky than rich."

Her Status.

He—I suppose you'd like to be free to marry again?

She—No, just free.

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Moths.

Do you play the stock market? In June more than twenty million shares of stock changed hands on the New York exchange; this was the heaviest June trading of any year ever, except in 1922, 1919, 1909 and 1906.

Surprising to many, that stock speculation was heavier back in 1906 and 1909, when the population was considerably smaller than now. It suggests that the "gambling fever" is not any more acute than it used to be. Probably it has even subsided. We doubt if there's as much betting and card playing "for keeps" as in the old days. Seems otherwise, merely because people gamble more openly now.

BATHING SUIT AND SILK HAT

Mayor of English Town Stages Novel Ceremony in Dedicating New Bathing Pool.

A unique ceremony of inauguration recently took place at Grimsby, Lincolnshire, England, when the lord mayor was requested to preside at the dedication of a municipal bathing pool.

His honor appeared at the head of an impressive procession clad in official frock coat and silk hat. Everybody naturally expected the usual dedicatory oration inseparable from such functions. What, then, was the general astonishment when the mayor, standing beside the pool, doffed first hat, then frock coat, vest, trousers, shirt, shoes and socks and appeared arrayed solely in a rather ordinary bathing suit, in which garb he plunged bravely into the pool.

This unexpected dedication was hailed with resounding cheers which greeted the sporting executive when he emerged spluttering from the water.

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With the antiseptic, fascinating Cuticura Talcum Powder, an exquisitely scented, soothing powder, skin, baby and dusting powder and perfume. Renders other perfumes superfluous. One of the Cuticura Toilet Trio (Soap Ontment, Talcum).—Advertisement.

Palpably False.

"I heard a queer story in town yesterday," related Gap Johnson of Rumpus Ridge. "It was windy one day and a lady came around a corner, and a certain feller turned his head so quick he broke his neck."

"That's just like all the men—that—ev'ry" returned Mrs. Johnson. "They'll look every time a woman—"

"But the story goes that this feller tried to look the other way, an—"

"Now, Gap, you ort to be ashamed of yourself, lying that way before the children."

If nothing else can bring neighbors together, sometimes trouble will.

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A SCHOOL GIRL'S SUCCESS

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Mrs. George E. Whitacre Tells of her Daughter's Breakdown and How Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound Made Her a Healthy, Happy, Strong Girl

Every mother possesses information of vital importance to her young daughter, and the responsibility for her future is largely in her hands.

When a school girl's thoughts become sluggish, when she suffers the consequences of wet feet, headaches, fainting spells, loss of sleep and appetite, and is irregular, her mother should have a thought for her physical condition and try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, which has proved a reliable aid to nature for just such conditions in so many cases.

This Mother Writes:

Mahoningtown, Pa.—"I would like to say a few words about Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. About a year ago I thought it would be necessary for me to take my daughter out of school. She was losing weight, was nervous, and when she would come home from school she would drop into a chair and cry, and say, 'Mamma, I don't believe I can go to school another day!' I gave her Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and now she is a healthy, happy, hearty, strong girl and weighs 120 pounds. She has no difficulty in doing her 'gym' work, and she works at home every night and morning, too. I am a mother who can certainly praise your medicine, and if it will be of any benefit you may use this letter as a reference."—Mrs. GEORGE E. WHITACRE, 621 W. Madison Avenue, Mahoningtown, Pa.

Every girl ought to be healthy and strong, and every mother wants her daughter to do well in school and to enjoy herself at other times.

Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound is a splendid medicine for young women just entering womanhood. Mothers can depend upon it. It is prepared from roots and herbs, contains nothing harmful, and has great power to tone up and strengthen the system, so it will work in a healthy and normal manner.

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To Remove Dunst From Clock.

It is not always necessary to take a clock to pieces to clean it. Soak a piece of cotton wool in paraffin, place this in a tin lid or small saucer and put it in the case of the clock under the works. In a day or two it may have attracted all the dust which has impeded the movement of the clock.

WOMEN NEED SWAMP-ROOT

Thousands of women have kidney and bladder trouble and never suspect it.

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Pain in the back, headache, loss of ambition, nervousness, are often times symptoms of kidney trouble.

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However, if you want first to test this great preparation send ten cents to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y., for a sample bottle. When writing be sure and mention this paper.—Advertisement.

Her Status.

Elizabeth was spending Christmas at Uncle Rick's. The kitchen was a busy place and she was told to stay out of it, which was rather a hardship.

Her cousins, the twins, sometimes made trips out there and she heard dolefully to her mother: "The twins keep going to the kitchen and they are just boys and here I'm a nice little girl and I can't go."

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Breaking Up.

The Lawyer—I don't see what you two partners are quarreling about. It's a simple matter to share the assets and liabilities.

The Client—But the question is "who's to take the assets and who the liabilities?"

Had not science progressed as far as it has, many modern occurrences would be taken as miracles.

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Well, That Would Be Appropriate.

Mrs. Peabody was taking Mr. Peabody to task for his carelessness in his dress, and was on good ground, because Mr. Peabody doesn't use quite the best of taste. Mr. Peabody had put on a red tie and a white vest to go to a funeral. "If you were going to be attacked by cannibals," said Mrs. Peabody, "you should have on your salt and pepper suit."

Opportunity Calls from CANADA

Pay a visit to Canada—see for yourself the opportunities which Canada offers to both labor and capital—rich farmlands, cheap and easy terms, reasons why and where, at $15 to $25 an acre—long terms of years. Great crops last year the biggest in history, thriving well-established towns, railroads recently incorporated.

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IS SAFER ASHORE THAN AT SEA

Denizens of the Ocean Face Far Greater Dangers Than Do Their Fellow Beings on Earth.

That life in the sea is fraught with much greater dangers than life on land is evident when we consider the variety of cumbersome armor which marine creatures find it necessary to equip themselves with. On land the tortoise, snail and a very few others represent the armored classes; in the water we have countless numbers of creatures; molluscs, crustaceans, echinoderms, and so on, all encased in formidable suits of mail.

The shells of cockles are provided with hundreds of strong tenter-hooks. In the case of one species these bristles are rubbed away in old age when the shell becomes solid and heavy. Other species whose shells do not thicken with old age retain their bristles. Another well-protected creature is the sea-urchin. Its covering has been compared to a Crystal palace whereof each separate joint, girder and pane grows continually without altering the shape of the whole. Were the struggle for life as severe on land as in the sea we might be presented with the strange spectacle of birds encased in cumbersome boxes, and the shy field-mouse poking out a wary nose from under the shade of a shelly dome.

Captive Beasts Fade.

To capture an elephant that is a "perfect 36" and a tiger with a natural complexion, the American Museum of Natural History has sent an expedition into India. Officials of that institution say that animals kept in captivity soon lose the coloration of skin and fur which they have in the wild state. Their figures, or, as the scientists put it, "their skeletal conformation," also become so changed that they represent their kind but poorly.