

**LEISURE HOUR SERIES -  
NO. 219. HER GREAT IDEA,  
AND OTHER STORIES**

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Leisure Hour Series - No. 219. Her Great Idea, and Other Stories by L. B. Walford

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# HER GREAT IDEA

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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GRANDMOTHER," ETC.



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## HER GREAT IDEA.

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A MOANING, melancholy November evening was fast shrouding itself in the darkness of night, as train and omnibus, together with the more genteel hansom and brougham, severally conveyed their freights westward, after a day's toil in that portion of our vast metropolis known as "the City."

People do not feel lively on such an evening; at least, such people as we now refer to—working, anxious, sobered-down, and more or less married men.

The brain may or may not be exhausted; but the temper and the stomach almost invariably are. Small worries and annoyances, mere trifles in themselves, have been magnified under the pressure of the heavy-laden atmosphere and dreary sky; a shade of extra trouble, which seemed unnecessary, but which at another time would have been accounted little of, has been felt a grievance; even an additional letter to have had to write, or personage to interview, has

helped to add up the sum of despondency; a grasshopper, in short, has been a burden.

At the close of some such day no one is disposed to take much neighborly heed of another, nor to volunteer interchange of the cheerful word and hopeful prognostication current on a bright spring morning. No one wants to be asked for an opinion, nor importuned for a congratulation or note of sympathy; and certainly least of all is one in the vein for partaking of a pleasant jest, whereabouts there hangs a flavor of being at his own expense.

Mr. Herbert, who was in just such a mood, after just such a day, had been the victim of just such an ill-timed piece of humor, when he emerged from his omnibus and walked up the dingy street of handsome, formal, hopelessly common-place and uninteresting houses, one of which called him master. With a growl, which a less respectable gentleman would have turned into an oath, he had left the omnibus and the smiles of his opposite neighbors—congenial enough fellow-passengers, as a rule, with whom he journeyed to and fro six days out of the seven, but whom on the present occasion he stigmatized in his heart as grinning asses—and plunged into the dark street, with its faintly flickering lamps, in a state of mind which nothing but a comfortable, quiet, well-cooked, and

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appetizing dinner, administered straight away, could have restored to equanimity.

"I do hope that woman will be punctual for once," he muttered, as he stood upon the doorstep, fitting in his latch-key. "It is the most extraordinary thing how a creature" (he meant the cook) "who has nothing in the world but her dinner to think of all day long, can not manage to send it up at the hour it is ordered for. I wonder if any one ever will succeed in convincing one of these pests" (Mr. Herbert had an excellent cook, of whom, in his normal state, he entertained a high opinion) "that seven o'clock means seven o'clock," proceeded he, shaking the key out, and opening the door, "and that if a dinner is ordered for seven, it is not meant to be rung up and hurried up at a quarter past? Humph! No signs of it yet, at any rate," glancing through the half-open dining-room door; and if I were to say anything, I should be told that it is all laid, and that it is only half-past six o'clock. Laid! It has been laid like that for hours, I'll answer for it," popping his umbrella, with a surly rattle, into the stand, and thereby knocking down a walking-stick, which straightway rolled on to the floor, and had to be picked up and restored to its place (another straw to the burden). "Most inconvenient stand that ever was made, for a narrow little bit of a passage!" cried



Mr. Herbert. "Such passages as they give us in these vile London houses, too! The whole room wasted in drawing-room and dining-room," dashing his hat on to its peg with an impetus that, as a mere matter of course, jerked another hat off. "Confound it all!" twitching off his great-coat, and in the heat of the moment tearing loose the silk tab by which it should have hung. "Confound it all! It seems as if every single thing I do or touch conspires against me to-day. There, then!" at the end of all patience; "there, then!" and he threw the coat over the rail, pockets bulging, sleeves half in and half out, the whole a huddled, shapeless mass. "Some one else may see to the trash, for I am sick of it all!" and giving the hat on the floor a vengeful kick, which would not have misbecome a schoolboy deprived of a holiday, the unfortunate gentleman—who, to let the reader into a secret, was suffering from a troublesome liver attack—slowly and heavily proceeded to mount the lengthy stair, that bugbear of the average London house.

And now comes the sad and touching part of our little story.

Mr. Herbert had a very beautiful and a very youthful-looking wife, many years his junior, who, having succeeded in charming him out of his senses seventeen years before, had achieved the still more difficult feat of enthralling them

ever since. At five-and-thirty the dark-eyed Mabel was as lovely and as winsome as in her budding womanhood, and at eight-and-forty her husband was as keenly alive to the fact as he had ever been. Upon her was concentrated the somewhat morose affection of a reserved, unapproachable nature, which loves neither easily nor often; and although his bold-eyed, handsome schoolboy son and his tall daughter, named after her mother—but designated "Mab" by way of distinction—claimed a subordinate share in his interest and anxiety, it is certain that neither one nor other, nor both together, nor twenty more children if he had had them, would have weighed, in his estimation, against the little finger of his wife.

To her, therefore, as his natural refuge and consolation when out of spirits and humor, he was involuntarily wending his weary way on the evening in question, secure, as he thought, of her sympathetic ear for his recital of the series of vexations and crosses which had fretted his spirit throughout the day, when, on reaching the turning of the stair, and with his hand already on the rail of the banisters above, and his foot on the step of the next flight, he heard something which made him pause: a low murmur of voices, betokening the presence of occupants within the small un-lit retreat at the back of the drawing-

room, which communicated with it by folding-doors, and at this hour shone only from its reflected glow.

Usually neither apartment was inhabited at the time of Mr. Herbert's daily return. His wife would be in her room dressing, his daughter elsewhere—he knew not where. Accordingly he stopped, with something of a frown on his brow. He would have preferred to go straight up, and sink into an easy-chair by Mabel's fire for a few minutes, before proceeding to his own toilet; and now it would appear she had been detained by visitors below, and—should he go in and see who it was?

A slight draught of air at the same moment blew open the unfastened door of the comfortable, well-lit apartment at his back, and to his surprise, as he turned, unable now to pass unperceived, he beheld it empty. Not a soul was to be seen.

“What is she doing with them in the back room?” thought he. (With him “she” always stood for his wife.) “And why are they so quiet all of a sudden? I certainly heard voices—” and then he broke off short; for as certainly he heard the voices—or rather one voice—again.

It was a man's voice, deep, bass, and unmistakable. Moreover, it was, or else it seemed to be, suppressed and eager: the sort of voice that penetrates by the very anxiety it betrays not to