

FROM A GIRL'S STANDPOINT

*II—MEN AS LOVERS

By Lilian Bell

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EN seldom make good lovers. I deeply regret being obliged to say this, as they are about all we girls have to depend upon in that line, but it's the solemn truth. I don't pretend to say why this is so. I suppose it is because they are just men, and a man never dwells upon the sentimental side of life, nor understands the emotions, unless he is either a poet or a Miss Nancy, and it's almost equally dangerous to marry either of those.

Pray, do not be offended, my friends, the poets, at being mentioned in the same paragraph with a Miss Nancy, until you discover the exact meaning of that effective term of opprobrium. A Miss Nancy is a poet without genius, one who has a talent for discovering the fineness of life, but who lacks the wit to keep his views from ridicule. It is not a step of the seven-league boots between the sublime and the ridiculous. Sometimes it is only an invisible step of the tiniest patent leathers.

I never could understand why a man who plays a good game of whist should not know how to make love. There are so many points in common. You can play a game of whist with only enough skill to keep your partner's hands from your throat, or you can play it for all there is in it. Why do men never make love for all there is in it?

Now I am not a whist-player. Ask those who have played with me, and see the well-bred murder in their eyes as they remember their wrongs. They will tell you that I can take all the tricks—not just the odd, but three, four and five tricks—yet I am not playing whist. I am just winning the game, that is all. If my partner, in an unthinking moment, says, "Let's win this game," we win it. But it is like saying to the cab driver, "You make that train." We make the train and say nothing about taking off a wheel or two in the process. Once, after a game of this kind, my partner said to me, "Allow me to congratulate you upon a most brilliant game—of cards!" Consider my professional feelings as a whist-player!

Now you must not think me either stupid or blundering. I play with magnificent effrontery, often rushing in where angels fear to tread, but, somehow, effrontery is not the best qualification for a whist-player. I am too lucky at holding the cards, and play each one to win. I am lavish with trumps. I delight to lead them first hand round, but I have not the courage of my convictions, for I always feel little quivers of fear when I do it, because when my trumps and aces are gone, then I'm gone, too. I have no skill in *finesse*, in the subtlety, the delicate moves which are the inherent qualities of a game of whist. To tell the brutal truth, I play my own hand. Could anything be worse, dear shade of Sarah Battle, even if I do win? In short, my manner of playing whist is the way some men, most men, all men make love.

Now you know, brothers—I call you brothers to prove how very friendly my feelings are toward you, even if I do show you up from our side—you know that a good whist-player is only slightly interested in the play of the great cards. His fine instinct comes into play when the delicate points of the game are in evidence; when it is a question of who holds the seven of clubs, if he leads the six in the last hand, or of the lurking place of the thirteenth trump. I never can remember anything below the jack, and I give up playing whist forever at least once every month. But I am so weak that I return to it again and again, as a smoker does to his briarwood. I feel partly vexed and partly sorry for myself when I realize that I cannot play—I can only win. I have seen lots of men win very superior girls, but they have done it in a manner which would disgust a good whist-player. Yet they, too, keep on with their indifferent love-making with the same fatal human weakness which sees me brave the baleful light in my partner's eyes night after night—when I am in a whist-playing community. Many men make love because the girl is convenient and they happen to think about it. It never would occur to me to hunt up three people at a country house, and ask them to play whist. But if three are at a table, and there is no one else, I drop into the vacant place, which could be filled much better by a skilled player, with pathetic willingness.

I wonder if a man ever deliberately made up his mind to marry and then hunted up his ideal girl? Alas, alas, if he did I never heard of him. But I have seen scores of them drop into vacant chairs at the girls' side, and make love just because they were handy.

We hate this "handy" love-making, we girls. You needn't think we don't know it when we hear it. Sometimes we are not so stupid as we pretend. But we never let you see that we are clever enough to understand you, because you don't want us to. You dislike to think that a look is going straight through you, because it hurts your little vanity to feel that your arts are so transparent. And I don't blame you. We girls are just as bad. If we are pretending to you that we have been waiting all our lives for just you, we hate to have you discover that we have employed those years of waiting very satisfactorily to ourselves, so much so that a casual observer would not have suspected the emptiness of them.

So your funny little pretenses are all very well, provided you don't let us catch you in them. Only—possibly you don't know how many times we do catch you. That is one of the chief points. You never know how many times we see through you and beyond, and know just why you did certain things much better than you yourselves knew it. Of course, it wouldn't be wise for us to tell you this individually, for that would break up the meeting, but there is no harm in letting you know in bulk.

I suppose there is not a man in the world who would not be surprised if he knew that we do not consider men good lovers. We have accepted them, and been engaged to them, and married them, and pretended to them, and what is still worse, pretended to ourselves that they were satisfactory, but the truth is they were not, and they are not, and this is the first time we have dared to say so.

Now don't expect, if you go to your wife or your sweetheart and ask her if this is so, that she is going to tell you the truth about it. I wouldn't either. I would pretend that the others might be unsatisfactory as lovers, but that you—well, you just suited me, that's all. I'd have to, you understand, to keep you going. And that is what your sweetheart will do. If she didn't you would get cross and sulky, and there would be a week of unhappiness for both of you, and then the girl would apologize and back down from her position, and then you would go on exactly as you did before.

No, if you are going to profit by this at all, don't talk it over with any woman you love. Talk it over with some clever woman whom you might have loved if you hadn't seen this other girl first—you needn't bother to tell her this, she knows it already—and she will tell you the truth, because she has nothing to lose. You won't give her up because she tells you a few disagreeable truths about yourself. A man will always take more from a woman whom he has no business to love, than he will from his own sweetheart or wife.

I wonder why things are so. Is it that ideal love is only founded upon the truth and the superstructure is built of fabrications? Is it that women are much more artistic—



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tic, and cleverer at masquerading the truth, that we make so much better lovers than the men? Oh, the scores and scores of men who have told me what their wives thought of them, and then the looks these wives have shot at me across the flowers on the dinner-table! Only one glance, which no man caught, telegraphing, "Do I, though? You are a woman and you know. You know what I would have if I could, but how I have had to make him believe that he was all of that, because he is my husband." Not that she is dissatisfied with him. Not that she would give him up. Not that she would leave him or have anybody else if she could. She loves him all she can, and he loves her all he wants to. He has won the game, but he has not played for all there was in it. Emphatically he has not.

I never have been able to make up my mind whether ideal love was the best, or if love with a great deal of common sense in it wasn't the most philosophical and better in the long run. But to those of us who are romantic it is fearful to think of deliberately turning our backs on terrapin, and lobster, and ice cream, and meditating upon plain bread and cold potatoes. You men don't recognize the romantic streak which, of more or less breadth and thickness, runs through every woman, making her love good love-making. You are so terribly practical and common-sense and every-day. We girls like flowers, and mental indigestibles, and occasional Sundays. We don't know why we do, but we do, and we can't help it, and if you are going to make love according to Hoyle you've got to recognize this fact, and pamper us in our folly. Don't we pamper you?

Now I know perfectly well how some of you are going to work at it. You will begin by thinking, "Yes, that's true. I've got a girl like that, and, by Jove, I'll humor her!" Bless your dear hearts! Your intentions are always of the best. If only you knew how to carry them out! But the first time you come across a little unreasonable, sentimental folly of hers you will take her hand in yours and say, "Yes, dear, I understand just what you mean. I know exactly how you feel on the subject, and

I am perfectly willing to do what you want me to. But, don't you see, if I do, it would look just a little queer to mother (or the boys, or the other fellows, or to Jessie and the girls, or to—you may insert the name for yourself), and while I want to please you I hardly think that is quite the way to go about it, so if you will be the dear, sensible little woman that you always are, we will simply take a nice little walk instead of going to Europe, and I will try to make it just as enjoyable to you. You know I shall be with you, Darling, and haven't you often said that you were perfectly happy wherever I was?" And Darling will begin a little weak argument in favor of Europe, although she sees that your mind is made up. But you have seen her weaken at your smooth talk, and you give her some more, and if that doesn't do, why you kiss her and then she's gone. And before you leave her she has assured you that she really would "just as soon" or "much rather" (according to the girl, and how well she knows the part to play) take a walk than go to Europe, and you come out whistling and thinking what a dear little thing she is and how much you love her. Oh, you've won! Nobody denies that, but look at your partner's face if you want to know how you've done it.

Why didn't you do as you said you were going to? Why didn't you do it her way? Why don't you study your sweetheart and get to know her and to know the real woman, the side she never shows to you nowadays? Because just as soon as she sees your way of doing, she is going to hunt up a new method of managing you. It is all your own fault that you are managed (as you all know you are), and your fault that you get pale gray truth instead of the pure white. It starts out pure white, but it is doctored before it gets to you.

You never are satisfied to do anything else in the slovenly way in which you make love. I know a man who is just an ordinary man in everything else, but to see him drive his spirited horse is to know that he has the making of a good lover in him. He is full of enthusiasm in studying her disposition. He will interrupt the most interesting conversation to say, "There, Pet, that pile of stones won't hurt you. Go on now, like the pretty little lady that you are. Here's a nice bit of road. Hold your head up and just let's show what you can do. That's right. That's my beauty. See how she reaches out. Isn't she handsome? Quiet now, Pet. Take this hill easily. We know you could keep up that pace for an hour, but you mustn't tire yourself all out just because you have a willing spirit. See her look around to see if I am pleased with her." "Dear me, that's nothing," I said. "Any woman would do as much if you treated her that way." He is over thirty-five, so he grinned appreciatively. He spends hours studying that horse's traits. He is always saying that she won't back, or that she hates this and is afraid of that. His horse never has to do anything that she doesn't want to; but his wife does.

You men wouldn't do business or even play golf without many times the thought you put into your love-making. Of course, now I am not talking of the sleepless nights or the anxious days you had before you knew whether she loved you. No, indeed, you did enough thinking and worrying then to please anybody. But I am referring to the girl whom you are engaged to, perhaps you are married to her and have been for forty years. You are not too old yet to know that you have not been a successful lover. I know that old story that men are so fond of telling just here about a man running for a car before he has caught it. Yes, we know all that. But we want you to keep on running. However, on the other hand, I know that ideal love is a difficult thing to manage from our point of view. It is a fearful strain to live up to it. In fact, nobody can do it. But I never could see why you had to stick to one or the other. Why can't you mix the two?

Ideal love is a beautiful thing to think about or to live in for a few weeks or months—according to your temperament. It cannot be equaled for the first part of an engagement or the honeymoon. But it is like going to the theatre and seeing the grandeur of the old gray castle, and the perpetual moonlight, and the devoted love of the satin duchess for the velvet duke. You know that it is just acting, and that the villain is not really going to swim the moat with his band of steel warriors, and burn the castle, and capture the duchess and marry her by force. Yet I love to pretend. I dearly love to take two pocket handkerchiefs with me and sop them both—and I'd like to cry out loud, only I never do—but I always have to pull my veil down and feel my way out of the theatre. I love to throw myself into it, and it always annoys me when the acting is so bad that I can't. If any man sees any moral in that, let him heed it and believe that I am only one of ten thousand other girls who would like to throw ourselves into the illusion of it, only your acting is so bad that we can't.

If only men would realize that the material side is what we girls care the least for. Pray don't think, just because you have built us Colonial houses, and have our clothes made for us, and never allow butchers' bills to annoy us, that you have done your whole duty by us. It never occurs to most of us, who have these dear American men for lovers and husbands, that we could ever really get cold or hungry. You would have a fit if you thought anybody belonging to you didn't have all the clothes they wanted and the best the market affords. But you think it is a huge joke when we say that we are mentally cold and hungry a good deal of the time, and that you are a storehouse with all that we need, right within your hearts and brains, only you won't give it to us.

When you want to surprise us with a present what do you do? You buy us a sealskin or a diamond ring. Is that what you think we want? Perhaps some of you have a wife who only wants such things and who cares for nothing else so much. If so, give them to her. If her higher nature is satisfied with plush, let her have it. Smother her in sealskins, weigh her down to earth with jewels. But the rest of us? What are you going to give us?

*The second of a series of articles written by Miss Bell for the JOURNAL. The first article, "The Man Under Thirty-five," appeared in the December, 1895, issue. Others will be published during the year.