

Denouement

BETTY RICHART

Mrs. Bridgford was fidgeting. The prospect of the long evening before her filled her with nervous panic. Her husband sat solidly established behind his newspaper; she knew that no prospect of adventure could lure him from it. They sat in their intimate sphere of lamp-light without exchanging a word; the daily commonplace, had been duly gone through at dinner. Now there was nothing.

For years Enid had been in the habit of occupying herself with trifles while Tom absorbed the evening news. She tried sewing and knitting and reading indiscriminately; Tom never paid the least attention to any of it. Occasionally he commented upon current events or read passages from the paper. For twenty years his wife had been accustomed to reply in the words expected of her.

Tonight Enid Bridgford was tense; Tom's monosyllabic remarks fell into the pool of silence like pebbles. She rustled the pages of her magazine without seeing the words or pictures. Something, she thought, would have to be done sometime. Meanwhile, hold on; don't look at the straight line that is the back of his head. Don't pay any attention to the way he chews a cigar without lighting it.

Mrs. Bridgford happened upon a head-line in her magazine. "Are you a neurotic?" it read. A little amused with herself, she answered the list of questions. Her score was disquieting.

Then she turned to other articles, but gave up trying to read when she saw the pictures of glamorous dresses and lands far away. Modern kit-

chen equipment advertisements didn't stir her imagination; she had all those things—electrical and aluminum gadgets—already. Tom was willing to spend money for what he called "useful articles."

On a sudden impulse she prevailed on her husband to submit to her psychoanalysis.

"Are you self-conscious or afraid to meet people?"

"No," said Tom.

"Do you often think of suicide?"

"Never," said Tom.

"Do you indulge in self-pity?"

"No."

"Do you have temper tantrums?"

The answers to the questions came as steadily as hammer-blows, every one a decisive "No." And Enid knew that Tom was being honest, that he was right in not hesitating a minute in replying "No" to every single question.

Without a word Enid threw the magazine in her husband's face. In that moment even he was too much astonished to speak. Before he had time to wonder what was behind all this, Enid was up and out of the house. She was running down the street wildly, feeling somehow triumphant, as if she had just escaped the claws of a savage animal, having outwitted him, but not conquered him by strength.

She had no idea where to go. Only she knew she was never going back to that house, to dwell in it with the hundred per cent normal man she had married. Twenty years—that was long enough for such a life.