

# Officer Nineteen's Last Case

by Frank R. Adams

**J**UDGE, yer honor, I never broke no coffee-cup on her head, no more'n a rabbit. Honest, judge, I missed her, and it hit the wall."

The judge smiled wearily and settled himself patiently to hear the troubles of Mr. and Mrs. Biff Funnel.

Mrs. Funnel, to take the lady first, was a straw blonde with prominent bones and latent fire in her cold blue eye. She had rather tremendous vitality which accounts for the fact that she had survived half a dozen years of married life with Biff. Just now she was a little proud of the prominence of her domestic troubles, and for the first time in her life she wore a black eye as a badge of honor.

Biff, the other half of the sketch, was uneasy under the load of public attention. He pretended to be indifferent, but without any marked success. His eye, beneath a brow with a studiously cultivated beetle, refused to meet that of any of his fellow men.

It would waver apologetically in spite of all the determination he could put into it, and so he scowled truculently into space which, not being peopled with eyes, could not stare him down.

For the rest, he was a big man and a fine puddler at the steel mills, as any one would

admit who had ever worked with him. His head was the shape of an old-fashioned cannon-ball, and had the same consistency. Each arm hung from a conveniently stooping shoulder, and could be swung with the accuracy and efficiency of a pile-driver, and had a lifting power equivalent to a No. 1 steam derrick.

You will get the idea in a general way from this that Biff was a lot like Niagara Falls—in the unharnessed state he represented power without purpose.

"No, sir; I never broke that cup on her," he reiterated, when he was brought into the dock. "Besides, what's a cup, anyway, yer honor? I could show you a place where she lammed me with a frying pan that's worth talking about. You know yourself, judge, that when anybody shies a skillet at you it's going to leave a dent where it lands."

The court of domestic relations was an experiment as yet in the city; indeed, the Funnel case was No. 16 on its first docket. The sessions, so far, had been held in the evening, because all the officers of the experimental court held other important positions during the day and could only spare time for this volunteer service after their regular day's work was done.

The judge opined that he had heard enough from the principals in the case, and intimated that he was ready to hear from Probation Officer No. 19, who had brought the Funnels to the attention of the court.

When Probation Officer No. 19 took the stand the judge relaxed with a sigh of content. Behind the shiny new star, which had hardly been used at all, was the earnest personality of Miss Dorothy Webster.

Dorothy Webster was a terribly inadequate name to give to Officer No. 19. It sounds so commonplace, so little descriptive. The ancients put it all over us in naming wonderful women. For instance, Aphrodite sounds beautiful, and so do Phryne and Sappho.

But we moderns have to worry along with place cards labeled Dorothy, or Nellie, or Hazel, or Mary, no matter if we have complexions that cause peaches to pale with envy and hair that would make Lady Godiva look like an ad for herpicide.

The description isn't an exaggeration, either.

Almost everybody felt that way about Dorothy Webster. Her eyes were so sweetly serious and her voice was so soft and low that every man upon coming within her wave radius became immediately conscious of a cavity in his heart. Some more than others, of course.

One of the worst was Carl Brayer Esq., a humble spectator at the session of the court of domestic relations.

At one time Carl had been justified in thinking that he was the favorite in the Dorothy Webster handicap. But not any more. Not since she had taken up sociology as a practical science. Now if he wanted to see her, he had to call for her at some obscure settlement or take her home from an uplift meeting somewhere.

The fact that he did call, instead of hunting up another girl, is a fair indication of the

persistent nature of the young man. To-night he was escorting her to and from the Court of Domestic Relations in lieu of an evening call.

Speaking of the court of domestic relations brings us to a realization of the fact that we have left a beautiful and charming witness upon the stand, namely, Officer No. 19, who has just bent her sweetly serious gaze upon the judge and parted her adorable lips to give soft testimony anent the world-old problem of the Funnels.

It appeared, according to Officer No. 19, that Mr. Funnel was a good many things that a gentleman really ought not to be.

"This brute," testified Dorothy in a low, sweet voice, "gets drunk on an average of three times a week, and when he comes home he usually attacks his wife violently. You can see by looking at her what he did last Thursday. Sometimes he stays away from home for two or three days at a time, and when he does come back his salary is gone. If Mrs. Funnel asks him for any money it only makes him angry, and he mistreats her."

It was unfortunate for Biff Funnel that the case against him was presented by one so melting. The dressing down which the judge gave him was out of all proportion to what seemed meet and fitting punishment for a gentleman who has few home pastimes besides that of beating up his helpmeet.

The judge was tired, anyway, and he was in a hurry to go home and indulge in a disagreement with his own wife.

Therefore, he told the Funnels a number of harsh truths about married life, and threatened to have Biff arrested if he used anything besides language in future family discussions. That done he turned them back to the tender mercies of Probation Officer No. 19 with an injunction to report in the course of two weeks.

"The court is adjourned," the judge announced briefly, reaching for his hat with

one hand and his umbrella with the other.

Carl Brayer drew a sigh of relief. At last he would have an opportunity to talk to Dorothy alone. It would be half an hour's ride home on the street-car, and in half an hour he could say a good many things that he had on his mind. True enough, he would not ordinarily have chosen a public conveyance as the place in which to make the speech he had planned, but it seemed a case of now or never.

Dorothy was usually surrounded with half a dozen women or long-winded Bohemians interested in art or suffrage or poverty (from the outside), or something that seemed to require more conversation than a peace conference. But now there would be no one to listen. They settled themselves in a half filled car.

"I got a raise to-day," he began by way of preamble.

"Did you?" she said enthusiastically. "I am awfully glad."

He looked at her to see if her enthusiasm were genuine. It was. Everything about her was genuine, from the shining fire of youth in her eyes to the color that came and went in her cheeks and flooded her throat where her dress came to a modest V in front.

She was eminently desirable, and he almost held his breath at the thought of putting his fortunes to the test. Why, he might lose her, and then what? She was just a part of his life, that was all, and the idea of going on without her was intolerable.

"But I will have to move to New York," he said, taking the plunge. "I am to be assistant manager of the sales department in the main office."

"Oh!" Dorothy took this announcement curiously. He looked eagerly into her face to see what she thought of it, but he could not make out. At first he felt sure that she was terribly sorry, and then he wondered.

There was no way to find out save by

direct question. "It will be a great thing for me," he said, "if you will go with me."

She looked up at him startled. "I go with you?" she repeated. "Why, Carl Brayer, are you proposing to me?"

"I am," he said huskily, "and I am doing a darn poor job of it, too; but if you get the idea I suppose that's all I can hope. How about it? Is it a go?"

Dorothy considered thoughtfully. "Carl, you know I have always liked you ever since we were just babies, and you used to pull my hair, and the boys and the girls at school wrote our names together on the blackboard. I admit that there was a time that I would have married you if you had asked me."

"The reason I didn't," he interjected hastily, "was because I didn't think I was earning enough money."

"But now," she went on soberly, "since I have seen a little more of life, I begin to question the advisability of marriage for me at all."

"Not get married at all!" Carl stated in amazement. "Since when did you get that idea?"

"I think," returned Dorothy loftily, "that I can do more good as a free agent than if I were tied to some man and a family of children. The duties of a home would cripple my usefulness to society at large."

"Quoted right from a book," supplemented Carl.

"And not only that," Dorothy went on calmly, "but I have no reason to believe that marriage makes for happiness. Since I have been an officer of the court of domestic relations I have seen nothing to make me think that marriage is an institution which confers any benefits upon its votaries."

"Great Scott!" protested her escort in masculine indignation. "Can't you forget your old courts of domestic scraps for a minute?"

"No," retorted Dorothy. "How can I with

an example like that before me?" She pointed ahead of them. In opposite seats, across the aisle from one another, sat Mr. and Mrs. Funnel.

"I didn't notice that they were on this car," said the young man. "What have they got to do with it?"

"They are married," explained Dorothy, "and surely you wouldn't call them happy. What advantage is the name of Funnel to her? He doesn't speak to her; he doesn't clothe her decently, and he is drunk half the time. Wouldn't she be better off without him?"

"Surely you don't compare me to him?"

"Why not? You may not belong to the same stratum of society, but I'll wager your ideas are the same. I don't say that you would necessarily assault me, but there are other ways of hurting a woman and neglecting her. After a man has been married for a few years he apparently forgets how much he ever cared, and becomes indifferent to the sufferings of his wife."

True enough, the Funnels were as valid an argument against marriage as you would run across in a month of Sundays. To judge by his back and folded arms, Biff Funnel was scowling fiercely into space in a solemn attempt to convey to the world at large the impression that he wasn't related to anybody and did not wish to be, while Mrs. Funnel looked out the window, sniffing occasionally as she thought how abused she was, but not deigning to notice the abysmal brute across the aisle.

"It is a pretty picture, I'll admit." The young man laughed shortly. "But I maintain there is something stronger than all your theories. I don't know exactly what it is myself, but I feel that it exists. I won't say that it is love because that sounds old-fashioned, as if I were quoting out of Bertha M. Clay; and besides, I'm afraid that you will laugh at my using such a word."

"Don't apologize. Passion doubtless has a place in our lives just the same as eating and drinking, but they should all be subordinated."

"Ouch!" Carl exclaimed in despair. "How can such harsh language come from such rosy lips?"

"Don't be silly. Some one might hear you."

"Don't you want me to admire you?"

"I'd rather have you admire my mind than my lips."

"But," he objected, "I'm sure you've got lips, because I can see them. I have even in the remote past touched them."

"I will overlook your slighting reference to my intellect, but let me point out in passing that it is your attitude in that respect which makes me say 'No' to your proposal. I could never marry a man who does not care for my mental companionship. My mind will be active long after my eyes are dim and my cheek is lined with wrinkles."

"Dear heart, do you think that would make any difference?" Carl's voice choked with a tenderness that caused her to look at him a little wistfully. "I will love every tiny wrinkle that nestles amid the roses of your cheeks just as now I love even the funny little wrinkles in your brain."

"Why do you spoil your pretty speeches?" Dorothy drew away from him indignantly. "If you didn't I might not know that you are making fun of me."

"And you would rather be deceived? I'm not making fun of you, really. I'm weaving little tender jokes around your heart to make it remember me with gladness. The mind forgets, but the heart never. Let who will capture your thinking apparatus, but give me a place in your heart, and I will hold it against all comers."

"This is my last desperate assault before raising the siege. Come with me, dear, and be my love, or anything you like—my settlement

worker if you wish. I'll promise to be so bad that it will be a great credit to you to reform me, to uplift me from the slough of wickedness in which I shall wallow. And if I am not bad enough, I assure you that I have heard upon reliable authority that in New York you will find a number of very excellent and highly specialized wicked people who are very efficient in sin. Say 'Yes,' dear, and let me get this engagement ring out of my pocket before it burns a hole in it."

"No, no! Don't get out a ring here!" Dorothy was genuinely alarmed and was blushing furiously.

"All right. I'll save it until we get home. Just say it is all right."

"No, Carl, I can't." She was sweetly, wistfully firm. "I have my work and you have yours. They lead us apart. I am really sorry, but I cannot sacrifice my individuality for sentiment."

"Do you really mean that?" There was a note of discouragement in his tone.

"I'm afraid I do." She looked away as she dealt the final blow. She knew what a look of uncomprehending pain would be in his eyes, and she dared not trust herself to behold it. She might weaken just out of pity. "What would people like Mrs. Funnel do if I should desert them? They have come to depend upon me for help, and it would be criminal for me to abandon them. I am more necessary to my poor people than I am to you."

Further conversation was done away with by the excited clamor of a fire-alarm bell.

The car stopped half-way over a four corners, while down the cross street at a galloping pace came the various sections of a complete detachment of fire-fighters, each bell clanging out a vigorous warning to clear the streets. Every one looked out the windows. A hose-cart turned in front of the car and went down the tracks ahead of it. Then came a fire-engine, a chemical engine, and lastly a hook-

and-ladder.

"Look out!" yelled some one. "Look out when she swings!"

The warning was justified. The long truck curved around the corner, swaying perilously on its wheels; and as it righted, the end of one of the heavy ladders struck the street-car and shattered the glass in all the windows in the front and on one side.

Cries of consternation from the passengers mingled with the bedlam of the bells and horses' hoofs. Excited men and women jumped to their feet, ready to leave the car if there were serious danger.

"There is some one hurt," said Carl, noting a special commotion up ahead.

"Who is it?" asked Dorothy.

"It's that woman, Mrs. Funnel," Carl went on, making his way between the seats to where the lady in question lay huddled in the aisle. She had been hurled from her seat by the impact of the collision.

Carl and Dorothy were the first ones to get to her side, and the girl knelt on the floor regardless of her dress and took the woman's head in her lap. She was severely cut about the face and scalp, and there was a gash in her shoulder.

"Some bandages," commanded Dorothy efficiently. "There is probably a drug-store on the street corner. Have some one telephone for an ambulance."

"The conductor has already gone out to stop the police ambulance when it goes by to the fire." This information was volunteered by a bystander.

Dorothy bound up the unconscious Mrs. Funnel as best she could. By the time the flow of blood had been stopped an ambulance had arrived and a young surgeon had taken charge.

As they started to lift her from the floor Mrs. Funnel opened her eyes dazedly.

"Where is Biff?" she murmured faintly.

Dorothy bent over to listen.

"What's that?"

"I want my man," Mrs. Funnel repeated. "My man, Biff. Where is he?"

"There, there!" soothed Dorothy. "You are all right now."

"But I want my man," Mrs. Funnel wailed. "Maybe I am going to die, and I want Biff."

"Do you mean that, Kate?" said a voice eagerly. Biff Funnel broke through the circle of bystanders.

"Come here, Biff. Don't you let anybody touch me but you. You pick me up and carry me. Where have you been all this time? I wanted you."

With tender strength Biff leaned over and picked up the shapeless figure of his wife. She nestled closely in his arms.

"There! They don't none of them know how to lift me like you do, Biff. I feel better already."

They took the Funnels home in the ambulance. The rest of the passengers were given transfers and invited to take the next car following.

"Poor woman!" murmured Officer No. 19 when she and her escort were settled for the few remaining blocks of their journey. "I suppose she was delirious."

"Delirious? Why?" Carl questioned.

"She must have been. Didn't you notice how she kept asking for her husband? I suppose that in the unconscious state she went back to the time when he was good to her before they were married."

Carl looked at her curiously. "Do you really think that?"

"Of course. I must go around to see her the first thing in the morning to see what I can do. Heaven knows she needs some one to be kind to her."

When he had brought Dorothy to her door Carl held out his hand in farewell. "Good-by!"

"You'll call for me to-morrow at the settlement?" suggested Dorothy

interrogatively.

"No," he decided after a brief struggle with himself. "I think that possibly I had better not see you any more for a little while. Besides, I have to get ready to go East."

"Oh!" Dorothy realized that he meant what he said. But she must not let him know how much she would miss his foolish masculine attitude of tolerance and protection. "Then this is good-bye for some time, isn't it? I hope you will write and let me know how you are getting on."

"I will," he promised, repressing a wild impulse to seize her in his strong young arms and carry her off by main force.

Instead, he extended his hand. She took it. How inadequate it all seemed. You shake hands with people you meet only for a moment; you shake hands with the partner of your heart who rejoins you from the lost years of the past.

The same ceremony does duty at meeting and at parting, when an acquaintance goes forth for a day or when a friend goes out of your life forever. And when you go yourself, if you are lucky, may your own cold hands be held firm in the warm clasp of some one you love.

Carl stumbled down the steps, and almost ran down the street as if by haste he could get away from the memory of her that would pursue him for the rest of his life.

Behind the cruel, closed door Dorothy Desirablissimus wasn't feeling any too grand, either. She was conscious of a huge dent in her complacency. She didn't want Carl for a husband, but it was going to be desperately difficult to convince her heart that it was best never to see him again.

But it must be done some way, so she set about distracting the fool little blood-pusher by plans to relieve the distress of poor Mrs. Funnel, who had obviously been sent by Heaven to become her personal charge.

Something—her charitable plans or some mental activity, of course—kept her awake most of the night. Therefore, it was with no particular alacrity that she arose to greet the day and the task of relieving Mrs. Funnel.

Still, duty came first, and after a dispirited breakfast, during which she alarmed her solicitous mother by her lackadaisical appetite, she repaired to the Funnel domicile.

She surmised rightly that Mrs. Funnel would be in bed, so she walked in without knocking.

The room where the mistress of the establishment lay was the principal feature of the apartment. There was a kitchen besides, but that was all. The lady of the house reclined, propped up in bed. She was pale in the spots of her not covered with bandages, but, strangely enough, on her lips rested a smile that she could not entirely dispel even at the sight of Dorothy.

Mrs. Funnel gazed upon her visitor with illy concealed apprehension. “Gee,” she said by way of explanation, “I wish you wouldn’t have come to-day.”

“Not come to-day?” Dorothy echoed. “Why not?”

“I meant on account of Biff,” Mrs. Funnel faltered. “He might not like it.”

“Don’t worry about that in the least, Mrs. Funnel,” Dorothy assured her. “I will protect you from the big brute. If he touches you I’ll have a policeman sent over from the station to lock him up.”

“No policeman better come around here,” said the invalid hotly. “If he does, Biff will knock his block off. And he can do it, too.”

“I don’t think I quite understand,” the girl said, puzzled. “I don’t suppose your husband has any reason for liking me, but I don’t see why you should care whether he is pleased or not.”

“No,” mused the married woman, “I didn’t hardly think you would understand. I don’t

suppose you ever will until after you’ve been married for a while to a no-account man-sized man. Do you see them flowers on that chair?”

“Yes.”

“And this candy—my favorite kind, too?”

“Yes, I see them.”

“Biff gave ’em to me,” asserted the matron proudly. “You see, all this time I’ve been talking things over with you and doing Biff an injustice. I got some high-toned notions in me that didn’t belong. Biff never beat me up just for meanness. If he didn’t care nothing about me he never would have laid a hand on me. That’s the kind of man he is. When he’s drunk he ain’t got no desire to throw crockery at no other woman but me. It’s just his way of taking an interest in me. I really knew it all the time, but I sort of forgot when you talked to me. Do you see what I mean?”

“No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

Mrs. Funnel sighed at the inadequacy of the English language to convey the thoughts which were crowding her brain. “I’ll tell you, Miss Webster, all this talk about domestic relations courts and woman is man’s equal is all right when you’re feeling good, but when you’re hurt and sick they don’t take the place of a man that loves you. I can’t explain it any more. Listen—what’s that?”

Heavy footsteps were slowly pounding the stairs that led to the Funnel apartment.

“It’s Biff,” announced Mrs. Funnel with one shining eye, the other being bandaged. “He’s been over to the Dutchman’s to get a pitcher of beer for us. Would you mind, deary, not to let him see you? He’s so good to me I don’t want nothing to rile him, and you can’t possibly understand. You know how it is—there’s something between two people you can’t explain to somebody else, especially if it’s between one of us women and her man. Come and see me again some other time, in a couple of months when I’m all well. But now if you’ll go out through the kitchen he won’t

see you."

The girl realized that she was very obviously an outsider, and in reply to the older woman's earnest plea she moved out into the kitchen.

None too soon. Before she could reach the back door the front door opened and the master of the house strode heavily into the room. Fortunately, he looked neither to the right nor to the left. Therefore, he did not see the girl in the obscure shadow of the kitchen. In one hand was a foaming pitcher of brew, and in the other a small paper parcel. He headed directly for the bedside and dropped the parcel in the injured woman's lap.

"I was gone a little longer than I said I'd be," he explained with rough shyness, "but I went up to the store and got you a little present."

"What is it?"

"Don't ask fool questions. Split open the bundle and see."

With eager fingers Mrs. Funnell undid the string.

"Why, Biff, you darling!" exclaimed the wife, holding out her arms to her husband. "I never had a pair of silk ones before. Don't you think them too swell for me?"

"Kate," he returned, lifting her tenderly in his derrick grip, "there ain't nothing too swell for my old girl."

Mrs. Funnell, with her arms around her husband's thick neck, recollected that her visitor had not made her escape yet, and she waved a silk stocking frantically in each hand behind the man's back as a signal to depart.

Feeling singularly *de trop*, Dorothy opened the door softly and let herself out. As

far as the Funnells were concerned, she certainly was out of a job

That lack of anything to occupy her time may account for the fact that along about four o'clock that afternoon she called up the office where Carl held forth, and finally got that young man's attention. He was feeling pretty glum and blue, but the sound of her voice galvanized him to instant activity.

"Are you very busy?" she asked in a very miserable sort of a voice.

"Why, no, not particularly," he replied pleasantly with an attempt not to appear eager, but merely polite.

"Because if you're not, there is something I'd like to discuss with you—something you were talking about last night."

"Yes?" non-committally. "What?"

"Oh, nothing much! I've just been thinking that I've never been to New York, and maybe I sort of ought to go there—just educationally, you know."

"Wait!" he exclaimed sharply. "Where are you? I must see you."

"I thought, maybe, you might want to. That's why I'm telephoning from the drug-store downstairs in your building." This last was in a traily sort of plaintive whisper that died away to almost nothing at the end.

Carl snapped the receiver into the hook.

"Mr. Sears," he said, addressing his superior, whose desk was adjacent, "I've got to leave the office, and I may not be able to get back until after closing-time."

"All right!" the older man said. "What is it—a large order?"

"Yes," agreed Carl, dashing for the door. "It's the largest order I ever had in my life."