

The Birth of a Notion

To Harry Al Raschid Belongs the Credit of Building the First Sedan

By HARRY IRVING SHUMWAY

ONE of the best Shahs that ever filled out a marriage certificate in triplicate was Harry Al Raschid. Nothing up-stage about this Shah, who was affable as an alderman just before election, and he was more apt to be called just Al than "Your Supreme Elegance," which every subject was supposed to hand out with a kow-tow from the belt line.

And Al was hail-fellow well met with his harem also and nevertheless. He felt a wife was just as good as anybody else and allowed 'em rain checks from the harem every other Thursday if they'd been good gals for a fortnight. Yeah, Al was popular with his wives and with his men friends, too, which phenomenal ain't as common as freckles in August neither.

As this tale has to do with and appertains to the harem, we might as well tell what such same is. Marriage is an institution, as everybody knows, although so is an

asylum, for that matter; but that's neither here nor there. But marriage in the days of Harry Al Raschid was more than an institution; it was more like a State University. That is, it was composed of co-eds. Al was the only he-co-ed and every precinct in the State could send a delegate to be a she-co-ed. Some places could cast twenty-four votes and send twenty-four she-co-ed cuteys to be a wife to Al, and they was nothing tough in that, however, because the gals in them days, although a little more tanned than nowadays, darn seldom hurt an eye. And that was what a harem was.

Yeah, Al had a very pleasant bevy of wives and never had no divorce troubles or had to name any of them correspondence who are always gumming up the nuptial arguments of today. In them days a correspondence was fed to the crocodiles instead of being drowned with tea, as nowadays.

But true loves never run smooth and you take two hundred of 'em and like as not something is always going wrong.

One of the bonds of contention in Al's menage, or menagerie, whichever, you'd call it, was the old

bus. Of course, Al was a rich man and never wore the same shirt more'n three days at the outside, but all the same he only had one car, because in them days they didn't punch them out on a hydraulic pile-driver, but a bus was hand-made. So Al almost dreaded a sunshiny day because here he was with a sport gig which held self and only three wives and a coupla hundred wanting to go without the formality of drawing lots about it.

Imagine the Shah some fresh, dewy morning just after he'd had a few softboiled eggs and half a dozen cups of coffee and was just sitting down to enjoy a good cigar when along would come some wife or other and grab him by the lapels of his coat.

"Al, dear, wouldst take me for a spin? Wouldst?"

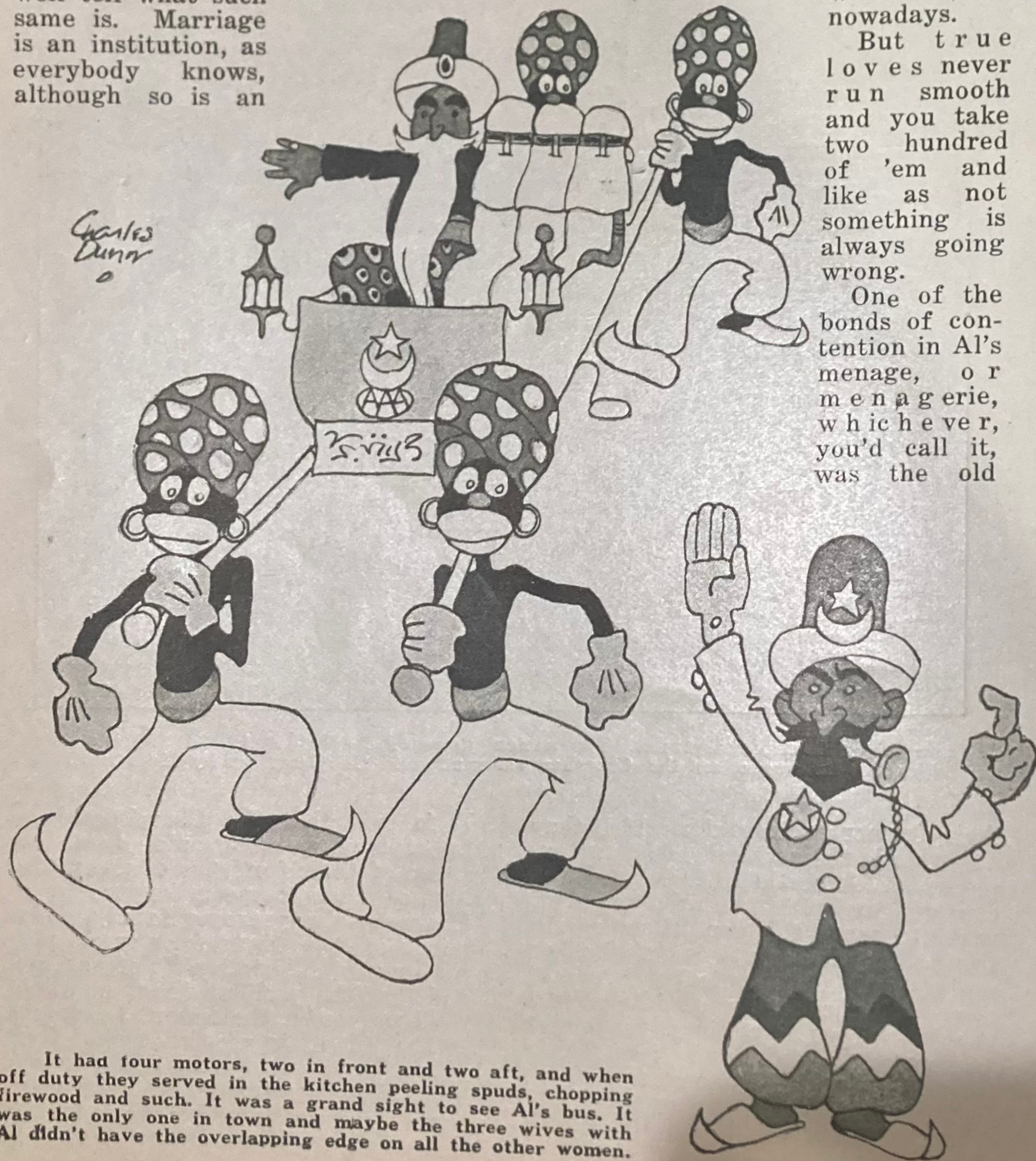
Then Al would blink, look at his engagement book and say, "Well now, Pansy, I wouldst with pleasure. Nothing wouldst tickle me more than to wouldst. But I'll tell you how it is, Molly. I'm booked up all day with State affairs and can't get away til six and maybe six-fifteen. You see how it is, Clara, hey?"

But you know how that gag rates with women after you've worked it until it needs eight or nine shims to keep it from rattling. When a woman wants to go driving, all hell is scorned or something like that. And bimeby Al begins to hear adverse noises whispered around. The wives are getting discontented.

For instance, when Al took in the opera he made 'em all walk to show no partiality. Just think of that! A poor guy having to get a permit for a parade when he wanted to take his family to the opera.

Al lived in what you might call the backwoods of civilization and his little kingdom was way behind in murders, arson, divorce, war, and other cultures, so it was natural that the old bus he used was primitive. It had four motors, two in front and two aft, and when off duty they served in the kitchen peeling spuds and chopping firewood and such. It was a grand sight to see Al's bus with the four black Nubian motors trotting up and down Main Street and, as it was the only one, maybe the three wives with Al didn't have the overlapping edge on all the women in town.

Well, things began to go from worse to still worse. The wives appointed a committee of discontent consisting of two hundred wives which made it as unanimous as Christmas. So one day after things had gone from worse to still more



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worse they called a convention—an unprecedented act in the whole history of wivery.

Lotus Blossom, aged fifty-two and dean of the harem, appointed herself chairman and called the great meeting to order.

"Now looka here, you babies, we are met to find ways and means to jack up our old man in the matter of transportation and pleasant momentum. As we all know, our Al thinks one little four-passenger bus is enough to keep us from crying in our sleep. He's as wrong as a toothache and it's up to us to make him see the light or else take away what light he has. The balloting will now commence. Awright, Jennie, for what purpose does the wife arise, hey?"

"I make a motion——"

"Well, don't make no motion in that costume you got on. This is a respectable pow-pow. Awright."

"I move we make Al get us fifty

new busses."

"Yeah, and see fifty new jobs for the court embalmer if we try to make him do anything."

"We gotta use diplomacy. That baby is as stubborn as a ton of cement. Awright, for what purpose does wife Clementina arise?"

"I gotta great idea, Lotus Blossom."

"No? Honest?"

"Yeah. It's a pip, no kidding."

"Awright. Spread it out and let's examine same. Shoot!"

"Here goes. Get this. If a bus can be made that'll hold four folks, why can't they make one that'll hold two hundred? Al has hinted that we might have one new bus this coming semester, so whyn't we have one that'll hold us all? Sistren, lean your brains against that picture puzzle and see if I'm rotten."

Then all hell, sometimes called pandemonium, broke out amongst the delegates. Some was for it and

some was for knocking it out of the ring. But bimeby Lotus Blossom cracks her gavel over a few skulls and brings order.

"Order! Stop that singing over in the corner. That's better. The secretary will call the roll. Well, for what purpose does the half-delegate arise —Oh, you're a wife. Gosh, the new crop is running small. Awright, shoot, little flapper!"

"Candidly, old dear, I think Clementina's idea is full of moth holes. So, there!"

"Is 'at so, you little onion," bawled Clementina. "Well, if all you wore a hat for was to shade your brain you'd never need to see no milliner again. Say, if the Pacific Ocean was intellect you couldn't bring a tear to a humming bird's eye. Why, if——"

"Order! The delegate is only entitled to cast one aspersion and she's cast two. The last one is out. Well, little flapper, what's all the curdle in Clemmy's idea, hey?"

"Just this, old darling," murmured the wee opinion. "Just supposing for a hypothesis to guess with that you got this bus which would hold two hundred of us. Where is Helvetia would we get the motors? Step over that, Clementina?"

But Clemmy was right there like a bucket of trouble. "I thought some nit-wit would spread that applesauce and it might as well be you. Well, here is the low-down on that. If four Nubian motors can motivate four of us, whyn't two hundred of 'em act momentarily for two hundred of us? I guess that rubber sieve will hold a few quarts, hey?"

Well, that idea just upset the brain in every linnet's head and you could have chucked a busy match into a fireworks factory and got no more poignant statistics. Delegates from different sections of the kingdom formed in bunches and marched around the hall. The cheering lasted seventeen minutes. The chairman broke eight gavels.

"The convention will be in order. All those wives who are in favor of jacking up the old man, fair means or foul, for a new two-hundred passenger bus will yelp 'aye.'"

"Aye!" from one hundred soprano and one hundred alto throats.

"I guess that's vociferous, what? It's a vote. Well, for what purpose does wife Olivia arise?"

Olivia was one of those tall, flame-like cutes who look sort of out of some book and you could never be quite sure of where she was whilst you were downtown but fascinating. Lots of lure. "Madame Chairman," drawled Olivia. "I move this bus be covered and be draped with heavy curtains. We are all sisters under the skin you love to touch and our complexions must be kept up to par—if Pa is going to maintain a waiting list. You get me?"



A committee consisting of Wives Clarice, Clementina, and Lotus Blossom waited on the Shah the next morning. As it was early, the old bean was kinda cloudy.

"We gotta have a new bus. We'd love one that would hold two hundred—all of us."