

# An Unofficial Strike

By UNA HUDSON

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Dennis Murphy banged his dinner bucket down on the kitchen table.

"The strike is on," he said. And he looked hard at Maggie, his wife, for she had a most unreasonable habit of saying disagreeable things when the men were ordered out, and the rent was overdue, and there was no money to satisfy the demands of butcher and grocer.

But then Maggie was a woman and could hardly be expected to appreciate the manifest advantages of belonging to the union. She scowled fiercely over the sum of money that Dennis turned into the union's treasury every pay day, and in moments of extreme irritation she had even been known to calculate the pounds of meat and potatoes that the money would buy. And she had hinted more than once that, but for the union, she could live like a lady and hold up her head with the best of them. As it was she took in washing to fill up the gap in the weekly income.

"An' what's the trouble now?" she asked with considerable asperity.

Dennis shuffled uneasily.

"We want an eight-hour day," he mumbled. Maggie ironed a towel with short vicious strokes of her flat iron, and Dennis wished that the silver-tongued agitator who had ordered the strike could be there to convince her of the justice of their cause. She was so obviously in a bad humor and not inclined to listen to reason.

"An' is it eight hours ye want?" she cried, emphasizing her words with thumps of her iron. "Eight hours work for a strappin' big man like yerself, Dennis Murphy! It's lazy ye are. An' them unions has too many grievances altogether, that they have."

Which was not at all a nice speech for the wife of a loyal union man to make.

"Eight hours' work is enough for any man," Dennis protested.

"An' for any woman? How about the women, just answer me that, Dennis Murphy?"

And Dennis thoughtlessly conceded that a woman should not work longer than eight hours a day. Whereat Maggie smiled a calm, wise smile that should have warned him of trouble ahead.

"An' what'll we live on the time the strike's on?" It was a question Maggie had often asked in the eight years of her married life, and she well knew Dennis' answer, for it had never varied.

"Sure, and ye won't mind takin' in a bit of extry washin', Maggie, darlin', for to help us along till I do be earnin' money agin'."

Maggie thought she minded very much indeed, but she held her peace. And the next morning Dennis noted with great satisfaction that the wash tub stood on the back of the stove and Maggie seemed to be making preparations for a large day's work.

"Sure and I'll not begin till ye're out of the house, Dennis," she said. "The steam do be unpleasant."

And Dennis, as he went off to discuss matters with his fellow strikers, reflected that if all other wages accepted the situation in as proper a spirit as Maggie did the strike was like to be a huge success.

Maggie marshaled Molly and young Dennis and the baby into the kitchen.

"The strike is on," she announced, "an' it's a bath ye'll be after havin'."

And the children gasped, for "strike" they understood, but to their unaccustomed ears "bath" had a most terrifying sound. And their mother's preparations filled their small souls with dread, for she had filled the big tub with water, hot and cold, and she laid violent hands upon her stockings and stripped them of their buttons.

"An' it's drowned we'll be," Molly wailed in terror, as she began to comb her mother's intentions concerning them.

"Hush," said Maggie in deep disgust, "an' it's ignorant little brats ye are not to know a bath when ye see one. There do be people as takes one every day."

And from sheer inability to answer an astounding statement the children were quiet while their mother washed and scrubbed and rubbed, and laid a bath towel, stood them in a row before the kitchen stove, and she combed their hair, not in the ordinary, every-day way, but with a thoroughness that brought tears to their eyes. Then, wonderful to relate, she sewed the rent in Molly's frock and darned the knees of Dennis' overalls and replaced missing buttons.

"Ye be off wid ye," she said. "Ye'll go to school lookin' as ye are."

And she picked up the baby from the kitchen floor. "Ye'll not play in the back-yard this day," she said, with emphasis, and she put a clean dress on the protesting child and put him in a big clothes basket, and an empty spoon for a plaything.

She looked at the clock, and her cheeks with silent laughter.

"Eight hours for work," she said, "an' them gone already, I'll have to work a bit or I won't get through against the rules of the union."

And in the afternoon Dennis brought himself homeward. His house was strangely unfamiliar, for there were no clothes drying in the back and Maggie was not on the

mitte of a back porch bending over the wash tub.

Dennis opened the kitchen door with a strange sinking at his heart; he feared Maggie must be sick. Within, the fire burned brightly and the floor and table were scrubbed to the last degree of whiteness, but Maggie was nowhere visible. He tiptoed softly through the bedroom which was in a like state of immaculate neatness, and on the threshold of the little parlor he paused, his mouth falling open in astonishment. For Maggie sat in the rocking chair and her usually busy hands were folded idly in her lap. A bit of bright colored ribbon was twisted in her hair, and in her freshly ironed blue dress and starched white apron she presented so festive an appearance that involuntarily Dennis cast his eyes over the room in search of the company he felt sure must be somewhere concealed. But he saw only Molly and young Dennis, awed into unaccustomed good behavior and sitting stiffly on the hard little sofa with the baby between them.

Maggie greeted him beamingly. "Sure, and I'm on a strike, meself," she explained. "It's eight hours I want, an' I'll do no more washin', sayin' yer own and the bits o' things for the children."

Dennis slumped weakly into a chair. "It's not eight hours' work ye've done this day, Maggie Murphy," he protested.

"Indade, then an' it is," Maggie insisted. "I cooked yer breakfast, Dennis, and I gave the children a bath—"

"Ye're never after calling that work, Maggie, darlin'," Dennis objected in a tone of deep disgust.

"Indade and it was hard work," Maggie protested, and the three on the sofa nodded a vigorous assent.

Dennis abandoned the argument. "I'm after wonderin' where the money's to come from while the strike's on," he said, gloomily. Maggie rocked placidly, and smoothed out the creases in her apron.

"There's enough money put by to last out the week," she said. "An' 't'like by that time the strike will be off."

But Dennis knew that she referred to the official strike, and his heart was heavy within him.

Three days went by, and the official strike was still on; the unofficial one ditto.

"Sure an' it's a grand thing to only work eight hours," Maggie said. "I don't blame ye for strikin', Dennis. An' with the washin' off my hands I feel that aisy and rested like. An' I've plenty of time to see to the children. They do be the cleanest in the block these days."

But Dennis scowled fiercely, for the question of money was becoming a serious one, and the strike wore upon his nerves.

"Nine hours' work ain't too much for a man," he muttered, "no, nor ten, either." And Maggie knew that she had scored a point.

The next day Dennis became diplomatic. "It does me heart good to see ye these days, Maggie darlin'; ye're lookin' so foine an' rosy like. But I'm wonderin' how it'll be when the money's all gone and ye'll have to stop atin'. Yer good looks will be leavin' ye then, Maggie, darlin'."

"Sure an' me good looks is all owing to the rest that I'm after havin'," Maggie replied with spirit. "An' if I must give up the food that I'm atin' or the rest that I'm havin', it's the food I'll be after goin' without, Dennis Murphy."

And Dennis realized that the unofficial strike had come to stay.

At supper the next day Maggie served generous helpings of savory stew.

"Sure an' ye must ate all ye can," she said, "for now the money do be all gone an' there's nothin' left for the mornin' but some bread an' cold potatoes."

"An' it's the hard-hearted woman ye are, Maggie Murphy, to sit by and see yer children go hungry when ye might aisy be earnin' money by takin' in a bit of washin'."

"Sure an' they're yer children, too, Dennis Murphy," Maggie fung back. "An' it's yer place to be earnin' money. I'll cook for them an' wash their bits of clothes an' look after them good and faithful, but not a finger will I ever lift agin' to earn money."

And that night Dennis went heavy-hearted to bed, for he knew that the unofficial strike had won.

"Hurry up wid me breakfast, Maggie darlin'," he said the next morning. "I'm after goin' back to me work this mornin'." An' I'll lave the union, bad cess to them. Sure, an' it's lowerin' to a man's dignity to be ordered 'round by them unions. I'll not be standin' it no more."

"Ye're a foine man, Dennis, that ye are, an' it's meself that's proud of ye this day," Maggie said.

And Dennis felt that he had chosen well.

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She Ought to Remember This. It never takes the woman who is suspicious of all other women long to get herself suspected.

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James R. Keene, apropos of the jumping contests at the New York horse show, talked about fox hunting. "Hunting," he said, "develops a race of very savage, selfish men. There was, for instance, Jones.

"Jones, on a bitter cold day, was riding hard at a brook, when he perceived the head of his dearest friend sticking dimly out of the icy water. Did Jones go to his friend's assistance? Not a bit of it.

"'Duck, you fool!' he shouted, and jumped over him."—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

### Household Remedies.

A little fellow rushed breathlessly into a drug store. "Please, sir, some liniment and some cement!"

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