WOMAN ABOUT TOWN

Stories of Washington Life.

We use our language puzzingly;
It's odd the way we do it.
"The story was quite dry," we say,
"But still I wade through it."

"If men hadn't taken to saying things in print before women did," says an Eighteenth street matron, "a visitor from Mars would be a deal more likely to get an accurate impression of humanity. If women had started it first, we'd hear of what a puzzle a man is—he's really a lot more difficult to understand than a woman—and we'd hear that man and not woman is the bond slave of conventionality. The hot spell proved that. I was going downtown with my husband the hottest afternoon, and we had the usual discussion, when I asked him to fasten the buttons on the back of my blouse. He began, as usual, by asking why on earth I didn't have it buttoned in front, and, as usual, I answered that all the lingerie waists were made like mine. Then he said it was a silly fashion, and that if he were a woman he wouldn't be a sheep and follow a senseless leader—no, indeed; he'd wear exactly what he pleased and not go on being bothered by buttons just because a few congenital idiots set a tomfool fashion. However, he got the buttons fastened finally, and then he began to complain of the heat.

"'I shan't mind it,' I said. 'I'm not going to wear a coat, and I'm going to put on my straw hat. Why don't you wear your Panama? I had it cleaned and blocked last week.'

"He looked at me with the look a husband always puts on when his wife's foolishness is past the power of words to express.

"'I'd look nice, wouldn't I, in a Panama in March,' he said, sarcastically. 'Nobody ever wears one before May. I'd be a pretty spectacle, wouldn't I?'

"We didn't speak all the way down town, just because I said—well, I just repeated what he'd said to me."

* * * *

The feeling the average woman has for furs must be something deeper than a liking. Perhaps it is an instinct, the gratification of an atavistic taste, the race-old memory of a time when the cave woman dressed in skins. At any rate, it's something one can't explain. One might fancy that in this climate, furs being luxuries and not necessities, no woman would chose to announce her poverty by wearing imitation ermine and near-mink. She could be quite as comfortably clad without a mottled and dingy wisp of fur about her neck. And even if cold weather did seem to call for furs, one would fancy that the first warm day would make her discard her pretense of ruxury; but it doesn't. I saw a woman one day last week in a dainty and diaphanous shirt waist, and about her shoulders lay a fur scarf that I could duplicate myself if I had two dead cats and a box of paints. But for the fur she would have been well dressed. What obscure instinct moved her I know not, but I do know that the less severe the climate of any of our cities, the more imitation superfluous furs one sees. Old San Francisco was fairly rabbity with cheap furs, and this year's Mardi Gras at New Orleans, with weather like an average June here, brought out tons of muffs and boas that masqueraded pitifully, forgetting the honest raccoons and rabbits on which they grew. One doesn't see imitation furs in Winnipeg, nor in Montreal, but Southern cities are fairly disfigured with them.

* * * *

Talking about the South, I met a man the other day who has just returned from there with one of his fondest illusions shattered. He has rather a clever knack at singing coon songs, and one of his favorites has been a ditty which referred to the opossum as the ne plus ultra of negro gastronomic delight. He says he sang it at a negro school he visited down in Mississippi, and to his surprise it failed to elicit any expressions of delight. After the entertainment he asked a group of negroes whether they were not pleased with the song.

"The song was very fine, sir," the spokesman of the group answered, "but you all from the North don't understand what a 'possum is. He ain't fit to eat. He's a buzzard on four legs. He'll eat anything worse than a buzzard will. Coon, now, is pretty good eating, but nobody what knows anything would touch 'possum."

And all the group concurred. 'Possum, they all agreed, was unfit for food. It may have been merely a local prejudice, or it may be that the writers of "coon" songs don't know much more about the negro than they did when they used to insist on "massa" as a word in use in the South.

* * * *

I'd like, by the way, to have some one tell me the derivation of the word "Hoosier." Indianians don't mind being called Hoosiers any more than Illinoisans object to being termed "suckers," and I never met a man from Indiana who didn't assure me that the word was a corruption of the question "Who is you?" the "Qui vive" of the early settler. In New Orleans "Hoosier" is almost as much a word of insult as "Hessian" is in some parts of Virginia. There's small choice between "Hoosier" and "poor white trash." The word is differently used in Southern Mississippi. If you ask a Biloxi man whence he came and he answers, "Oh, I'm a real Hoosier," you are not to understand that he came from Indiana. He means merely that he was born and brought up in Southern Mississippi, and he fancies the word is a corruption of Cherokee origin. It's rather unusual for a word to be a term of reproach in one place and a thing to be proud of in another place not a thousand miles away, and I wish somebody would tell me how "Hoosier" came to mean two things, or one thing, even, for that matter.

* * * *

"There's something uncanny about a woman who telegraphs instead of writing," says a woman I know. "It isn't feminine to use ten words when you can just as well use a thousand, not to mention the difference in cost. I might have known I ought to beware of Betty, for she's taken to telegraphing, but I didn't think of it till too late. Ever since she went to Texas to live she's been the worst possible correspondent. She sends me a telegram about four times a year, but never a letter. She asked me to visit her, and she put her invitation into ten telegraphed words. I went down in January and found her just about as she used to be when she lived here—except for the telegraphing habit. She was devoting herself to the finest rose garden in Texas, and to visiting forlorn sick people, just as she did up here. Most of the time I was staying with her we were driving about chirking up invalids. I met dozens of them, but I can't remember names anyway, and invalids are all so much alike that you couldn't expect me to know any of the ones I met down there by name. Well, about two weeks ago I had a telegram from Betty—I'm so used to her that the sight of a yellow envelope doesn't give me heart failure any more. This is what she wired:

"'The James Sprunts left here to-day. Give them careful treatment.'

"I racked my brain, but I couldn't recall ever having met anybody named them. I remembered then how I'd told Betty that I wished I had some of her Sprunt, but I concluded she must be talking about the Boston people who lived in the cottage next hers. The man had a liver and the woman had nerves, and they were an awful complication, being incurably Bostonese to begin with. It was just Betty to dump two invalids like that down on me without any more warning than a telegram. She has a fad for invalids. I knew they'd take for granted that she'd written to me, and they'd expect me to take them in and give them careful treatment. Maybe she'd told them that I was sister-in-law to a doctor—she'd be sure to think of it. Well, I flew to work to get ready for the Sprunts. I got the best room in the house ready, and bought a lot of health foods and moved the children to the top of the house where they wouldn't annoy anybody, and did everything I could think of to make the place suitable for a man with a liver and a woman with nerves. I was just worn to a frazzle when the expressman came with a small box. It was beautifully packed, and in it were six small rosebushes, or plants, or whatever you call lovely dark red roses. There they were in the box, six of them, and each one was labeled—but how on earth was I to know anybody'd call a rose such a name as that?—each one was labeled 'James Sprunt.'"

* * * *

The little woman who lives in the flat across the street is full of quaint superstitions. Everything that happens is an omen. The dropping of a fork or a pair of scissors or a knife or a pin has a meaning to her. She hopes she and her husband will be rich enough to build a house before she's forty, because if they're not they'll have to buy one ready built or make an old one over, for she is confident that if they build a house when they're past their youth, one or the other of them will die within a year. She's never known it to fail, she assures me. One evening lately I went in to see her. Her sitting room was littered with the pieces of a broken jardiniere. She warned me not to step on it.

"I dropped it just after I lighted the gas," she said. "I'll get up early and sweep it up, but, of course, I can't do it to-night."

"I'll do it for you if you're tired," I said.

"Oh, no," she cried in alarm. "I wouldn't think of it. It'll have to stay there all night. I wouldn't dare sweep at night.

Sweep after dark,
Sweep sorrow to your heart.

"I never knew it to fail."

Of course, it's well to know how to avoid ill fortune like that, but sometimes I think that understanding all about signs and omens complicates living to a quite dreadful degree.

The Oldest Woman in America

Born When George Washington Was President, She Is Still Hale and Hearty, and Loves Life After 112 Years.

Once at Red Bank you follow a doubtful trail up the mountainside, climbing steep rocks, and being forced often to a circuitous route to avoid deep ravines, says Jack Temple in the Pittsburg Post. Far up the side of the mountain a little home nestles snugly in a wealth of foliage—high above Red Bank Creek and the Allegheny River—a home that shelters the oldest woman in the State of Pennsylvania, perhaps in the United States. Mrs. Elizabeth Freeman has just passed her one hundred and twelfth milestone, having celebrated this anniversary on the fourth of the present month, upon which occasion there were gathered about her at the simple mountain home seven children, twenty grandchildren, fifty-five great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren, while she herself was as enthusiastic, contented, and active as any member of the company.

In this day, when nature's laws are defied and perverted, when marriage means the selfish seeking of pleasure and the attachment of ambition, such a family seems the more wonderful. Mrs. Freeman has contributed dozens of happy homes, and more contented inmates of homes, to the American nation, and is yet well, hearty, contented, and happy, living her life as she did 100 years ago, right at the heart of nature—simply.

The tiny rocky path that winds through and around the hills is so beautiful in its autumnal glory that one almost forgets the visit at its end in following the trail. Through crimson, gold, and bronze the heights are ascended, and with each step there comes the low distant music of the stream that rushes down the side of the mountain, bearing in its onward course the leaves of the dying summer.

Commercialism cries "Cut out the babbling brook business!" and the man who advocates this doctrine dies at the age of sixty with some unnecessary nervous disorder. Elizabeth Freeman spent her childhood in the forests, attending the little country school. The later years took for their strongest influence the songs of birds, the beauty of the woods, and she has yet to realize that she has nerves. The years have not dulled her mind nor weakened her sensibilities; her faculties are all as bright and clear to-day as those of any woman half her age, save, possibly her hearing; she is slightly deaf, but not uncomfortably so.

I found her carrying huge pumpkins up the hill to their winter storage. Her eyes kindled with humor as she turned first to me and then to her burden.

"Why did God let those pumpkins grow so big?" she questioned. She laughingly refused my offer to assist her in their transportation.

"I've been carryin' them these many years, an' I 'low they wouldn't kinder understan' lettin' strangers tote 'em in." She waited a full minute before she spoke again, and added: "I guess they need'n' mind, fer they's goin' to be et. I don' keer who totes 'em ter the barn."

I saw the load safely deposited in their usual storage place in the barn, and protestations on my part proved of no avail. Mrs. Freeman insisted upon carrying them herself, and I watched her sure step and wondered at her spontaneous wit.

Down the little path leading from the house an old man slowly hobbled toward us, and I turned questioning eyes upon my hostess—my very antiquated hostess—of the mountains. She was quick to read the unspoken interrogation.

"That's Tom," she volunteered.

"Your brother?"

She laughed, and her laugh was as low and musical as a note of the mountain stream.

"My son," she said.

Truly, he looked every bit as old as his mother.

"Tom's over eighty," she informed me. "He's mighty sot in his ways."

The man under discussion paid no attention, but went about some work at the barn, whistling a tune.

He looked like Rip Van Winkle after his twenty years of sleep, but who can conceive Rip Van Winkle's mother—her very living presence? I rubbed my eyes to be sure that I was not asleep and dreaming, as I followed Mrs. Freeman into her cozy home.

"Yes," she began reminiscently, "folks thinks it strange that I've lived all these years. I reckon not. Folks to live has got to live right, eat right, sleep right, and have the natural things of God aroun' them."

"Tell me of your early life," I asked.

"Well, the fust I kin recollec' clear is 108 years ago. I was four years old then, an' my sister, what's next ter me, was born.

"I was born in Fayette County, Pa., October 4, 1793, 112 years ago. 'Twas durin' the second administration of George Washington. I was Elizabeth McKnight. My daddy was a native of Ireland, an' my mother was a German."

The first part of her statement surprised me. I had not thought what 112 years really covered.

"George Washington?" I repeated after her.

"Yes'um. I've lived through the time of every President since Washington's second administration. I recollec's them all, from Washington to Roosevelt, same's 'twas yesterday."

She tells thrilling tales of the American Revolution drawn from her personal recollection and experience.

Elizabeth Freeman's parents lived in the neighborhood of Connellsville, at the time when it was only a hamlet of five or six houses; when there was but one iron kettle in the entire neighborhood for making apple butter. This utensil was in great demand when the fall ushered in the season for compounding the winter's allowance of "Pennsylvania salve." The entire township coveted the kettle and clamored for its use.

Mrs. Freeman talks much of the day her uncle started off to join the United States forces in the war of 1812, and the sadness of it all. The breaking of a home was more serious then than now.

"When were you married?" I asked.

For a moment she was silent, not because memory failed her, but because the thought made her suffer anew the loneliness of 30 years ago, when her companion was taken away. The clear blue of the dear old eyes clouded for an instant, but when the mist had cleared she lifted them to my face with a tender smile.

"It was a happy time," she told me, "I was 20 and he was 23 when we was married, and the whole township turned out to the wedding, with all the countryside. They tell me folks these days marry fer all sorts o' reasons, money and sech, my child, but t'wan't thet away in my day. My ole man had been keepin' comp'ny with me fer long, an' it jus' come naturally time to quit settin' up with ont 'nother.

"Lord bless yer, honey, I never was nuthin' but happy in all my life, but thet was the best of all times." She talked of the wedding and the old church with enthusiasm and singular memory of detail.

"Twan't long after til my man wanted to come to Clarion County, bein' a furnace man. We made the trip to Beaver furnace in a big wagon and four horses, carryin' all our chittles long in the wagon with us, an' our cow jes' come long behin'. Thet was bout eighty years ago, an' we was the fust to strike a match to the furnace over yonder." She pointed to the rim of the Red Bank furnace.

"When we fust come into the county Rimersburg hed one house an' one store. There was furnaces all aroun', but my man helped build the Red Bank furnace, an' he worked in the iron fer years. We was the fust to come an' we allus stuck, even when the hard times come aroun' fer the iron business."

She grew silent in the thoughts the great privations those days brought her. When she took up her story her voice trembled perceptibly.

"They was good people," she said, "an' hones'. Many's the family lived through the whole winter in them times on nothin' but stewed pumpkins, eatin' them out of wooden spoons they had whittled out of cucumber wood. I reckon ef the people to-day hed to go through with half them sturdy people went through with when the iron business in this county give out, they'd give up in despair. Wall, our men never give up, I ken jes' tell yer, an' even when they was workin', 40 cents a day is all they got fer a day's work—I reckon yer thinks that mighty little?" she questioned.

Mrs. Freeman next drifted into talk of the civil war. The anxiety of the people to learn the result of the various battles, the long tramps of the country folk to get across to a daily newspaper, the anxious scanning of the lists of killed and wounded are things that seem to her to have occurred but yesterday, and she talked of them for hours, seeming never to tire, and always to feel the keenest interest in the stories she narrated.

Every day of her life, except in extremes of weather, this wonderful old woman may be seen trudging along the mountain paths herding in her cows and attending to domestic duties. She can still walk for miles with little fatigue, and loves her solitary rambles in the leaf-strewn paths about her home.

The past summer she did not lessen the size of the garden she tilled with her own spade and hoe, and raised vegetables not only for the summer, but a sufficient amount to can and store for the winter. She is more active than her eighty-two-year-old son, and her faculties are all clearer.

Born in 1793, Mrs. Freeman has lived in three centuries. Born in the latter part of the eighteenth, lived through the entire nineteenth, and is still bright, well, and happy in the twentieth. In all her long life she has had but one illness sufficiently serious to necessitate a dose of medicine, and has been the mother of eleven children, seven of whom are still living.

The family has planned a great day for the 4th of next October, which will be her 113th anniversary. They intend to advertise the big reunion, and invite the public to attend and congratulate one of the most remarkable women this country has ever known.

My visit neared its close.

"Bless you, my child, you must have a cup of tea with the old woman before you go," she said, and I was pleased to accept hospitality from the hands of the little white-haired great-great-great-grandmother.

"Grandmother old with aproned lap,
And hair much whiter than her cap,
For in those tresses hoary
A life-time's purity is caught,
As if some silk-worm deftly wrought
The golden texture of her thought
Into a crown of glory."

This thought seemed to take on a double significance as she smilingly lifted her cup, herself like a dainty piece of old Dresden.

"Wait!" I exclaimed, and lifting my cup filled with the fragrant beverage of her own steeping, I touched it lightly to her own—"To the health and peace for many years yet for the loyal little mother of generations!"

Her response was a low contented ripple of laughter.

JUST PLAIN WEDDING

Missouri Man Wanted Unvarnished Truth Told.

EDITOR IS UNDER DELUSION

Young Man Who Desired Mawkish Gush About Flowers, Bridal Dress, and Lohengrin Wedding March Cut Out Is Not the Groom, but Bride's Former Devoted Admirer.

"Would you like a little piece to print?" asked a dark-eyed, slender young man, as he deferently removed his hat to a shirt-sleeved individual whacking at a "writing in sight" machine in a local newspaper office, says a Macon, Mo., correspondent of the Kansas City Star.

The shirt-sleeved man threw his cigar in a box and stopped his mechanical spelling.

"You bet," he said.

"It's a wedding."

The young man blushed and the editor smiled in wisdom.

"The names are Tom Maxwell and Susie Smith," said the informer, hurriedly, "and we—they want it fixed up a bit different from the usual run. I notice you generally head 'em by saying, 'A Beautiful Wedding,' or 'A Quiet Affair,' or something that way."

Might Call It "Rough House."

"We might say 'A Rough House,'" suggested the editor.

"That wouldn't be bad—anything but the eternal, mawkish gush—the 'beautiful bride, attired in white veiling and sunflowers, looked lovely as she passed down the aisle on her father's arm to meet the handsome young man she had chosen for better or worse.' There wasn't anything like that there."

"No?"

"No, there wasn't. The bride wore a dress made over from last winter that cost 15 cents a yard, and she didn't carry flowers. The groom is a hard-handed farmer boy and he wouldn't know a dress suit from a matador's outfit."

"You're modest."

"Thank you. Just say Tom Maxwell and Susie Smith were married Monday night at the old man's home up in —— township and that one or two of the neighbors saw the thing pulled off. 'Uncle Bonaparte,' Pap Smith's nigger woodchopper, fiddled 'The Arkansas Traveler' for a wedding march. They had johnny cake, molasses, maple sugar, and bacon after the agony was over, but nobody felt hungry. No presents were expected and the couple was not disappointed. Tom will live with his father-in-law until a job of some sort turns up."

Editor Is Disillusioned.

The editor, who had been taking notes, looked up.

"Now, you know you wouldn't like for me to put it that way," he said with gentle reproach.

"Indeed I would," said the young man earnestly. It's the Lord's truth and why not tell it the way it happened?"

"Oh, I can print it that way all right, but you'll get mad as a hornet if I do."

"I'll pay up five years in advance if you get it up just that way," said the visitor, pulling out his pocketbook to show he wasn't bluffing. "Will you do it?"

"If you're that much in earnest I guess I'll have to," remarked the editor, getting up and scanning his mail list. "Where do you get your paper, Mr. Maxwell.

"My name ain't Maxwell!" exclaimed the subscriber spiritedly. "It's Jerry Ryan."

"I beg your pardon. Then you are just here as a friend of the family?"

"Sure! I used to go with Sue myself."

AMERICA'S CELERY CENTER

Dutchmen Do Most of the Work in the Kalamazoo Fields.

Two Thousand Acres Under Cultivation—Why the Hollanders Take to Growing Celery.

Will Kalamazoo ever cease to be the celery center of the world? This has often been hinted and the question frequently asked, says the Kalamazoo (Mich.) correspondent of the Detroit Free Press.

"Not in a century," said F. C. Butine, president of the Capital City Celery Company, and probably the largest grower here. "It will not cease to be the center so long as growers have thousands of acres of land, extending far out from this city, which have not yet been developed and will not be until the growers are forced out by the growth and extension of the city."

The rapid growth of this city for the past five or six years has compelled the owners of celery marshes to constantly give up their land. The encroachment of building and street improvement has been so rapid of recent years that there are but a few acres left of land that was used in 1900. The limit of the land right in Kalamazoo has almost been reached. Over the hills are more acres and it is on this land that the growers expect to maintain the reputation of Kalamazoo for celery.

The marshes now under cultivation total about 2,000 acres. This is practically the same as has been cultivated during the last ten or fifteen years, but at one time all of the land was inside of what is now the corporate limits of Kalamazoo. Crowded out, the celery growing marshes extend to a radius of about ten miles.

The only reason celery growing does not extend and American people do not take hold of it, according to Mr. Butine, is that there is too much hand labor. If means were provided whereby there would not be so much stooping and hand picking of weeds, the industry, which has remained stationary for years and confined to the Holland people, will develop, and thousands of acres would be cultivated regardless of what are now under cultivation.

Celery growing will average about $200 to the acre, and as there is but little hiring done, it represents the wages of the family that plants, cultivates, and harvests the crop. One man can attend two and three acres, this meaning from 40,000 to 60,000 plants.

The women and children in the average Holland celery grower's family all work in the field with the men. A child can do as much weeding as a man and makes a competent hand.

The Hollanders take naturally to celery culture, for in their native country the land is almost all black, marshy soil, in which they cultivate beets, potatoes, turnips, and a variety of garden truck.

PARIS OF SOUTH AMERICA.

Traveler Reminded of Europe at Once by Buenos Ayres.

From Reader.

Buenos Ayres is "the whole thing" in Argentina. I know of no country in the world which is so dominated by its capital. If the traveler comes from the interior, after leaving behind the splendors of Andean scenery and crossing the 500 miles of prairie, he feels like a swimmer who has been a long time under water and takes his first deep breath of civilization when he enters the city.

I arrived at 6 o'clock in the morning, before the busy life of the harbor awoke. As we rolled along the broad water front and up the Avenida Mayo I said to myself, "I must have taken the wrong steamer, or I am dreaming. Surely I am in Europe." It was not the things seemed European, or that it was easy to detect an imitation; it was Europe. No amount of self-argument would overcome this illusion; the asphalt smelt as it does in Europe, and was cleaned in the European way; the little trees grew in the tradition of European culture, the buildings were French, the cafes, the newsstands, all the lazy life of the early morning was continental, and the Swiss porter touched his cap as he asked me in French—for which he expected a tip—whether monsieur wished his baggage sent at once to his room. No wonder a chatty old French lady asked me at dejeuner, "How do you like Buenos Ayres? It's little Paris, isn't it?"

Mother-in-Law—Before Taking

By Helen Rowland, Author of "The Digressions of Polly," "Honeymoon Conversations," &c.

"Do I look perfectly hideous?" inquired Kitty, glancing up at me anxiously.

"Oh, I—I shouldn't say that," I replied, deprecatingly, as I noted her stiff sailor hat, common-sense boots, and plain little tailored frock.

"Of course, you shouldn't say it," rejoined Kitty, with a touch of disappointment in her voice, "but you think it, don't you?"

"Well," I agreed, compromisingly, "you do look rather—rather different. There isn't any powder on your nose, nor any rustle to your skirts, nor a single kink in your pompadour; and you don't smell of violets, nor seem quite happy, but—there it is!" I exclaimed, suddenly.

"There what is?" asked Kitty, with a smile of satisfaction.

"Your dimple," I explained.

"Oh, that!" said Kitty, rubbing her offending cheek with a little frown. "I wish I could leave that off, too," she added with a sigh.

"What on earth have you been doing?" I demanded.

"It isn't what I've been doing," quoth Kitty, promptly, "but what I'm going to do that—that is the matter. I'm going to call on my mother-in-law, Mr. Curtis," she added, turning solemnly upon me.

"Your—what?"

"A woman who owns a son," explained Kitty.

"But her son isn't your——" I began, quickly.

"No, he isn't mine," responded Kitty, frankly, "and he never will be! But she's a 'mother-in-law' in the most harrowing sense of the word. Every mother of every son is a 'mother-in-law' to every girl who—who——"

"Who looks at him?" I suggested.

"Whom he looks at," corrected Kitty. "She's the mother-in-law 'before taking;' and, like medicine, 'before taking,' she's much worse than after you've swallowed the dose and gotten it down. Did you ever see a man so depraved, and homely, and unattractive, and uninteresting that his mother didn't fancy that every woman he met wanted to marry him, and didn't hate her for it, instead of—of thanking her?" And Kitty severely pushed back an obstreperous curl that crept from under her sailor hat and hung down over one ear. "It's the mothers of men," she went on, walking rapidly, "who prevent all the happy marriages and make all the stupid, grouchy old bachelors, and are at the bottom of all the silly runaway matches and of most of the matrimonial misery in this world!" and Kitty's heels clicked angrily as she hurried down the avenue.

"You," I remarked, lifting my eyebrows accusingly, "seem to have had an unusual amount of experience for——"

"No," interrupted Kitty, jingling her chatelaine impatiently, "only the usual amount—the amount that every girl has who hasn't a hump or a squint. And the more charming and popular and eligible a girl is the more agonizing her experience and the more desperately she is fought and frozen and snubbed by the embryo mothers-in-law. It's a battle to the knife for a really fascinating woman to get a husband in these days!" and Kitty sighed mournfully.

"Oh, well," I remarked, cheerfully, "we've got to be protected some way. It's the natural provision of Providence——"

"Providence didn't give a woman a son," retorted Kitty, "as it gave her a nose or a finger—to be attached to her through life. But she invariably thinks it did. And she looks upon every fairly attractive girl as a thief or a bird of prey, ready to pounce upon her 'treasure.' Every time I meet the mother of an unmarried man I feel as if I were on trial for my life, and it makes me so self-conscious and rebellious that it simply drives me to—to do things."

"Kitty Glenn!" I exclaimed, reproachfully. "To do what things?"

"Well," said Kitty, twisting her chatelaine and looking the other way, "to sit in the conservatory longer than I should and to say things I shouldn't and don't mean and—and, oh, you know how a wrongfully convicted criminal feels."

"I can't say I do," I remarked, coldly.

"He feels," said Kitty, "as if he might just as well eat the cake he is accused of stealing."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Then that is why when my mother is aroused you are always so——"

"I'm not!" cried Kitty, reddening.

"So——"

"Don't you dare say it, Mr. Curtis."

"So particularly fascinating," I finished. "Ah, well! There's something on the mother-in-law side after all."

"There's nothing on her side," retorted Kitty, defiantly, "but pure, unadulterated selfishness. It isn't her love for her son that prompts her to keep him away from the girl he wants. It's her love for herself and the fear that some other woman will profit by her handiwork. She forgets that she herself profited by another woman's handiwork when she married her husband. She forgets all that she endured at the hands of that other woman before she got that husband. She forgets that her son is human and that his happiness is at stake, and——"

"Not at all!" I objected. "That's just what she remembers; that he is human—too human—and that his happiness depends upon finding the right girl, and——"

"There isn't any right girl!" declared Kitty.

"What!"

"Not in the eyes of a man's mother. Cleopatra herself wouldn't be beautiful enough, nor the Queen of Sheba rich enough, nor St. Cecilia good enough for the meanest, smallest, most miserable specimen of manhood a mother ever cherished. His name might be Smith, and his income $10 a week, his chief feature a hump, and his only talent a talent for amusing himself; but you couldn't convince his mother that any girl, who, out of sheer pity, dances with him or allows him to call, isn't a siren trying to lure him from his happy home. And the worst of it all is that it is the right girl she breaks him off from every time."

"Nonsense!" I declared. "Nobody on earth can break a man off from the girl he loves, unless——"

"No," rejoined Kitty scathingly, "but a determined mother can make it so unpleasant for that girl that the girl will break it off herself if she has an ounce of pride. And, besides, no man's mother ever waited long enough for her son to fall in love before beginning to 'mother-in-law.' She takes time by the forelock and her son by the coat tails the moment he is old enough to enter a ballroom or to feel a glimmer of interest in the opposite sex. She can scent a love affair or a flirtation as quickly as a hunting dog does a rabbit. The sight of a pretty girl's photograph on her son's dressing table sends her into paroxysms of fright. Every time she kisses him, she sniffs at his coat lapels in mortal fear that she will detect the odor of violets or peau d'Espagne. She watches the clock and listens for his footsteps whenever he stays out after half-past 10. She drives him to subterfuges and lies by her eternal questionings, and warns him against 'designing' women, until he shudders at the thought of matrimony. She remembers all the little tricks she practiced when she herself was young, and explains them to him in their most revolting details, until he begins to look upon femininity as he would upon cold poison. Somehow, the little gods only know how, the moment he stops calling promiscuously and cuts the list in his engagement book down to one address, she finds it out, and from that moment she regards her son as a doomed man, the victim of a malicious, designing, scheming woman."

"But," I protested, "if you aren't malicious——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Curtis!"

"And haven't any designs," I continued, "couldn't you convince her, or propitiate her, or——"

"Could you convince a lunacy commission that you weren't insane by signing an affidavit to that effect?" inquired Kitty bitterly. "Could you convince a judge that you weren't guilty of theft with the stolen goods at your heels? Could you propitiate a lioness whose cub had followed you out of the jungle? Whatever you do you convict yourself. Snub the man, and his mother will declare you are only trying to whet his passion by indifference, or that you are hurt because he isn't more attentive. Be pleasant to him, and she will vow you are pursuing him. Try to make her love you, and you will end by making her hate you and talk about you as 'that woman who attempted to ensnare my son by making me sofa pillows and sending me flowers.' Ignore her, and she will think you are afraid of her. Fight her openly, and she will tear your good name to tatters. Be charming, and she will dub you 'fast'; sweet, and she will call you 'insipid;' cleber, and she will say you 'know too much' in a tone that will make cold shudders run up and down her son's spine. And then, when she has driven you to desperation or to throwing the man over, she will put her arms tenderly round his neck and soothingly assure him that she always knew you were 'that kind' of woman and 'warned' him against you, anyhow."

"Whe-eew!" I exclaimed. "And I never realized——"

"Of course you didn't!" broke in Kitty. "No man ever realizes until too late—until his mother has managed to separate him from every nice, wholesome, self-respecting girl who might have made him happy, or——"

"Perfectly wretched," I suggested.

"And until he has become a grouchy old bachelor," continued Kitty, spitefully, "or in a mad fit of revolt has run away with the cook or a chorus girl or some creature depraved enough to—to fight the embryo mother-in-law with her own weapons, and then—and then——"

"There's the devil to pay!" I said shudderingly.

"And everybody is beautifully miserable; and the mother-in-law rails at Providence in one breath and cries triumphantly in the next 'I told you so!'" finished Kitty, waving her chatelaine dramatically.

"Now I understand!" I exclaimed, turning on Kitty with a look of enlightenment.

"Understand what?" inquired Kitty, looking up at me in surprise through the refractory curl.

"Why my mother hates you so."

"Does she?" gurgled Kitty delightedly.

"She calls you 'That woman,'" I explained.

"How nice!" cried Kitty.

"And 'warns' me against you."

"Oh!"

"And when a man's mother hates you," I proceeded, "it's a sure sign——"

"Well?" Kitty smiled encouragingly.

"That the man——"

"Doesn't?" broke in Kitty quickly.

"Loves you," I said softly.

"I don't believe in signs," said Kitty, with a toss of her head. "And, besides, I have made up my mind——"

"Already?" I asked in astonishment.

"To marry——"

"What!"

"A nice lone orphan," said Kitty, as she turned suddenly into a side street and mounted a flight of brownstone steps.

"Kitty!" I cried. "This is my house. You aren't going in——"

"I am going, said Kitty, "to call on your mother."

"Then my mother is your——"

"I didn't say so!" cried Kitty, turning rosy to her ears.

"Kitty," I whispered softly, "I could almost kiss——"

"How dare you, Mr. Curtis!"

"My mother," I finished, virtuously.

MURPHY OF NO. FOUR

An Idyll of Easter.

On Holy Saturday night, Driver Murphy, of Engine Company No. 4, having watered his horses and seen them comfortable for the night, sat in the back room of the quarters taking his ease, enjoying the questionable fragrance of his black pipe and the nervous excitement of solitaire.

Although Driver Murphy was a bit over forty-five years of age, he was still, in the parlance of his associates, a "good man," which is a term applied not so much to his moral standing as to his strength of limb and his ability to handle the plunging horses of the engine. Many and wonderful were the stories told of Murphy's younger days in the department, of his physical prowess, of occasions when ineffective brakes and broken reins had given him opportunities for its display, of how, time and again, his cool head and mighty courage had saved lives and property.

Truly, the rugged chest and massive arms gave ample evidence of these tales, as did the sworn evidence of Tillerman Boyle, who, if a smile of incredulity spread over the faces of his listeners, insisted that he had seen it, and his heart was in his mouth. Boyle was a great admirer of the driver (almost everybody was who knew him well), and never tired of singing his exploits to the younger men; exploits which were worthy of a more exalted reciter, but which scarcely could have found a more sincere and picturesque one. In most matters on which a difference of opinion was likely to arise Murphy and Boyle stood united, and the calm philosophy of the driver combined with the manly humor of the tillerman was generally victorious in the heated arguments, which ranged from horses to baseball and to politics.

The pair agreed that Bryan and free silver were essential to the perpetuity of the nation; they both held that long-legged, big-boned horses were the most serviceable to the department; they insisted that Jimmy Collins, who was one of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and in good standing, was by far the most superior third baseman in the world; they joined in the denunciation of Japanese treachery and England's meddling attitude, but it was when the question of home rule and Ireland came up that they held the floor for hours expostulating with Redmond and defying Chamberlain.

On religious subjects also they agreed, but there was one matter which was never discussed between them without a reproachful tone coming into the voice of Murphy and a sadness and coloring over the face of the tillerman. Both were Catholics, and both were ready to argue, fight and fall for that faith, yet, while the driver was a devout attendant at church, Boyle had neglected to hear mass for many years; so when the question of orthodoxy came up the tillerman was ever uncomfortable.

* * * *

This Holy Saturday night, as Murphy sat earnestly matching queens and utterly engrossed in the mazes of Chinese solitaire, Boyle, with a copy of the evening paper on his knee and the sympathetic editorial on a rejuvenated democracy unread, was thinking thoughts which made him turn his eyes now and then toward the card player at the table. The house was quiet, save for an occasional restlessness of the horses and the steady ticking of the house clock as it drew near 10 and passed it.

Murphy shuffled the cards again, refilled the pipe, and glanced at the clock. "Ain't your watch up, Martin?" he asked.

"Yes, but I'm reading, Denny, and I'll stay up a while yet."

Again there was silence for a time, during which the paper remained untouched; then, with a slight cough, Boyle said: "To-morrow is Easter, Denny." There was no answer from the driver, who removed his pipe as he played a trey of hearts.

"I wish I was off to-morrow," said Boyle, this time with meaning in his voice.

"Why?" questioned the driver, raising from his seat and putting away the cards.

"I thought I'd like to go to St. Mary's in the morning and hear the Easter service. It would do me good, maybe," Boyle answered.

"It would, entirely," said Murphy.

"But I ain't off and maybe it's just as well. I would be a stranger in the church now, me that's been a black sheep this eighteen years."

"It's a crime, Martin Boyle, to be going on this way—you that used to pass the plate and was never a month away from your duties. And Father Sheenan thought you had the makings of a priest in you and so did your good mother, and so did I. Here you are making your dead father turn over in his grave and having them that don't know you think your a renegade." Murphy sat down again and relighted his pipe.

"I know it, Denny," said Boyle.

"Why, man, you've had ten Sundays off in the last year if it was church you wanted, and I——"

"I know it, Denny," interrupted the tillerman. "I have a bad streak in me and well I know it. My mother says that must be it."

"No, Martin, it's not that; its your afraid to make your duties and it's well you know it." Murphy spoke earnestly and the tillerman shifted in his chair. "I'm off to-morrow, but I'll stay on duty till 9 o'clock, and you get up early and go to confession before the 7 o'clock mass and go to the 7 and I'll wait till you come back."

"But when will you be going to mass, Denny?" asked Boyle.

"I'll wait till the 10. It won't hurt me to hear a long sermon on Easter."

"But, Denny——"

"Be off now to bed and say some prayers and I'll call you at 5. And have you your beads?" asked Murphy.

"I have that. I never was so much the black divvie as that to lose me beads or leave off me scapulars," answered Boyle.

"Well, good-night and good luck," wished Murphy.

Boyle looked at him a moment and tried to speak, but a lump rose in his throat and his eyes moistened.

"'Tis you that should have passed around the plate, Denny;" and Boyle went to bed. The driver took a last look at the horses, and soon followed up the stairs, murmuring: "Won't his mother be the proud one?"

* * * *

Martin Boyle, with bright eyes and clean shaven face, sat in St. Mary's Church the next morning, praying as only a strong man can pray; and beside him, with happy sighs and many a covert glance at him, sat his mother. Her heart had gained one of its fondest desires; a prayer that had never gone a day unsaid was answered, and even the trembling cherries in her Easter bonnet seemed to beam with her. Some of the congregation, those who knew the Boyles, were surprised to see the man at church, but all of them looked with admiration at the broad-shouldered fireman and his feeble mother as they went up the aisle together to communion.

Just as the mass started, the clang of the fire bells drowned for a moment the solemn intonations of the priest, and Boyle switched uneasily in his seat when the familiar bell of No. 4 rushed past the church.

Father Sheehan had just concluded the reading of the gospel from the pulpit and the parish announcements were being made, when an altar boy approached the priest and gave him a note. The priest opened and read it, and with closed eyes and voice scarcely audible, he said: "Your prayers are requested for the repose of the soul of Dennis Murphy, who was killed this morning in discharging his duty."

Boyle sobbed once, then bent lower on his knees and prayed.

GERALD EGAN.

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