

THE HIRED MAN.

"You've come, have you?" said my mother-in-law, in a deep voice, as she stood on the threshold, grimly surveying me with eyes that shone like hard, greenish-blue gooseberries behind her spectacles.

It was rather a curious complication. My mother-in-law had not the least idea who I was. I had cheerfully intended to take her by surprise; but now that the eventful moment had arrived, my courage was oozing out at the ends of my fingers.

My name is Richard Dalton. I was then just twenty-one, with a face that was not absolutely ugly, a sublime audacity and pockets not particularly well-lined, and I had just distinguished myself by running away with a pretty girl from boarding-school.

"But, Dick," she had remonstrated, "we've nothing to live on."

"Don't be a goose, darling," had been my reply. "What do people need to live on? All the wants of this world, more or less, are fictitious. A crust of bread and a glass of water three times a day, and now and then a suit of clothes—we must be poor, indeed, if we can't manage to compass that."

Nettie had looked admiringly upon me, and acquiesced in my argument. We had taken board at the Angel Hill Hotel, and began our honeymoon royally. At the end of a month mine host had become a little importunate on the subject of his bill, and Nettie's mother had written a letter to her, signifying that she wanted nothing whatever to do with us. We had made our own bed, she signified, and now we might lie on it.

"Oh, Dick," cried Nettie, clasping her hands, "what are we to do?"

"Hanged if I know!" was my rather blank response. "But don't cry, darling, I'll go and see her myself."

"You, Dick!"

"I, myself."

"She'll have nothing to say to you."

"She can't help herself."

"She'll turn you out of doors."

"We'll see about that."

"But, Dick, you don't know—you can't have any idea—how terrible she is," sighed Nettie.

"Saint George conquered the dragon, my love," I asserted, cheerfully, "and I mean to conquer your mother! So pack my valise, there's a darling, and I'll be off before the landlord comes back from Boston!"

"But, Dick, if he's troublesome, what can I say to him?" appealed poor little, frightened Nettie.

"Tell him I've gone out of town, and shall be back in a few days," said I, confidently.

But when I walked resolutely up to my mother-in-law's door she greeted me as if I had been expected for the last week or so.

"You've come, have you?" was the salutation.

"Well, yes," I admitted, "I've come."

"What on earth detained you?" said she.

In my mind I cast about what to say, and settled on the first convenient excuse that came into my head.

"The train was delayed at Bogletown," said I.

"Well, come in, now that you're here," she said, "and get warm. It's awful cold weather for this time of year, isn't it?"

"Kinder," said I, with an assenting nod.

"You are married, I suppose?" she said.

"Oh, yes," said I, swallowing the hot coffee and winking my eyes very hard, "I'm married."

"Can your wife make herself generally useful about the place?" sharply demanded the old lady.

"Certainly she can," said I, beginning vaguely to see my way through the mists of perplexity that had heretofore obscured my brain.

"How old is she?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Eighteen," I answered.

Mrs. Martin frowned.

"What does possess girls to get married nowadays," said she, "before they're left off dolls and patch-work?"

I looked thoughtfully down at the pattern of my plate—a pink Chinaman crossing a carmine bridge, with two very red willows drooping at the far end of it, and some impossible streaks of weather below—and made no direct answer. My mother-in-law was doubtlessly laboring under a misapprehension, but I did not exactly see that it was my business to set her right. She had evidently engaged a hired man, and took it for granted that I was the personage in question.

"What can you do?" she asked, abruptly. And with equal abruptness I responded:

"Anything."

"Come, I like that," said my mother-in-law, rubbing her hands. "At least you are not afraid of work. Do you understand cows and horses?"

"Well—not much," I owned. "There were no cattle at my last place." (Which was very true, for I had been a clerk in a bank at \$300 a year.) "But I have not the least doubt that I could soon learn if you would kindly show me what is expected of me."

"Can you cut wood?" she asked.

"Certainly," said I, reflecting to myself that any fool might do that.

She asked one or two questions more, which I answered with the blind fatuity which attends youth and confidence. She seemed pleased at my willingness to undertake anything and everything.

"And now about wages," said she, briskly. "What will you ask—for your own services and those of your wife—for the month?"

I fitted the tips of my fingers reflectively together.

"As we are both rather inexperienced," said I, "we'll agree to work the first month for our board. After that you shall pay us what you think we are both worth."

"Hum—hum!" said my mother-in-law. "That's a sensible proposition—a very sensible one, indeed. Well, send for the young woman at once. In the meantime I'll show you over the place and

explain to you the nature of your duties."

So I hired myself out to my mother-in-law as farmland, without further ceremony, and immediately wrote and posted a letter to Nettie. On my return from the postoffice I met a burly young man meditating at a spot where four roads meet.

"Can you tell me, sir," said he, "where Mrs. Abel Martin lives?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I can tell you," I responded, affably. "But if you're looking for the situation of hired man I may as well tell you that it's filled."

The burly young man made some remarks, indicative, in a general way, of his opinion of the fickleness of woman-kind, and departed, while I returned rejoicing to the old farmhouse.

"Here's a very nice beginning," said I to myself. It is now my business to give as much satisfaction as possible."

Fortune favored me in more ways than one. My mother-in-law sprained her ankle on the second day, and I played cook as well as man-of-all-work with distinguished success, and I had the satisfaction of hearing her say to old Miss Priscilla Perkins that "she didn't know when she'd taken such a notion to any one as she had to the new hired man!"

"He's too young and good-looking to suit me," observed Miss Priscilla, pursuing her steel-trap of a mouth.

"He is good-looking, ain't he?" said my mother-in-law. "But he's dreadful handy about the house, and he ain't one bit afraid of work. And you'd ought to have seen the oysters he stewed for my supper last night, and the cup of tea he made. Why I don't miss Jimmie Stiles one bit. If only Nettie could have stayed single till she met such a man as this!"

I smiled to myself as I laid out the kindlings for the breakfast fire. My accomplishments as "Jack-of-all-trades" had never done me much good before, but now they were certainly winning me some credit in the world.

At the end of the third day she had told me the whole story of her daughter's runaway match with "a good-for-nothing young city chap." On the fourth day she had consulted with me as to whether it would be better to put the forty-acre lot into oats or rye, and I had won her heart by taking to pieces the old hall-clock, which had not gone for ten years and restoring it to running order once again.

And on the evening of the same day Nettie arrived, all blushing and trembling.

"Oh, Dick," said she, "is she very angry?"

"My dear," said I, "she hasn't an idea who I am."

"But, Dick!"

"No 'buts,' my darling," said I, cheerfully. "Let us be Julius Caesar over again. We come, we see, we conquer."

And I dragged my unwilling little wife into the back room, where my mother-in-law lay on a sofa, nursing her ankle.

Mrs. Martin jumped up, spite of the wounded ankle.

"Here's my wife, ma'am," said I, "and I hope she'll give satisfaction."

"Nettie," she cried, in blank amazement.

"Oh, mother, mother!" faltered Nettie, throwing both hands around the old lady's neck, "please forgive me this time and I'll never, never elope again."

"Please ma'am, we'll be good," added I. And my mother-in-law relented on the spot. How could she do otherwise?

"Henrietta," said she, "you've been a naughty girl—there's no denying that. But your husband seems a handy man about the house, and I'm tired of living here alone. So take off your things and go to work getting supper. As for you, Richard—"

"Yes, ma'am, I know," said I. "I've been playing a double part and deceived you all along. But I wanted you to like me—and you know," I added, "all is fair in love and war!"

"Well, I do like you—a little," admitted my mother-in-law. "And now that I have seen you, Dick, I don't so much wonder at the way Nettie behaved."

After that she never scolded us any more. And I honestly believe that this is the only case on record in which a mother-in-law was conquered in so brief a campaign. Nettie says she doesn't know how I did it. In fact, I don't quite know myself.—Amy Randolph, in *New York Ledger*.

Origin of a Famous Word.

Emmanuel, one of the earliest of the Dukes of Savoy, is known to fame as the Turncoat. He obtained this nickname for a curious reason. His territories were inconveniently near to the forces of both Spain and France, with which powers he found it necessary to be on friendly terms, as they were often in the habit of invading his dukedom. However, he had to side sometimes with the one, sometimes with the other, according to which were stronger at the moment. So he had a coat made that was blue on one side and white on the other. When he took part with Spain he wore the blue side—the Spanish color—out; when he wanted to stand well with the French he turned the white side out. There was something to be said for the poor man in such a fix, but history, that has no mercy, only knows him as the Turncoat. A favorite instance in England of a man who always took care to be on the right side was the famous Vicar of Bray.

The Tricky Hindoo.

Another ingenious device of the mild Hindoo is to drill a hole in the thickness of a rupee, and then, with infinite labor and skill, to scrape the silver from the inside, leaving only a sort of shell without damaging the impression or the ring. Lead is then poured gently in, mixed with some alloy which gives the requisite ring, and the hole is carefully closed. Only a very keen and experienced eye can detect the imposture. The silver which is thus abstracted will be worth less than a shilling, and the manipulator has still his rupee to spend. But the operation may occupy him the greater portion of a week, during which time he might have earned two rupees by honest work.

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