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TOM'S WIFE.

We had just finished breakfast. Tom laid down an egg-spoon he had been playing with, and looked across at mother.

"Aunt Anne, I think I'll take a wife," he said, exactly as he might have said, "I think I'll take another cup of coffee."

"Take a wife!" repeated mother, by no means receiving the information as tranquilly as it had been given. "What for?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Tom, thoughtfully. "It's a notion I've got in my head, somehow."

"All nonsense!" said mother, sharply.

"Do you think so?" said Tom, apparently doubtful, but not in the least put out.

"Think so? I know it. What in the world can you want of a wife? After all these years we have lived so comfortably together, to bring home somebody to turn the house upside down! And, then, what's to become of that poor child?"

The "poor child"—that was I—reddening at being brought into the argument in this way, was about to speak for herself when Tom interposed, warmly:

"I'm sure May knows I would never have any wife who would make it less a home for her—don't you, May?"

"Of course," I said.

"And I'm sure she knows nothing of the sort," persisted mother, "nor you either, Tom Dean. How can you answer for what a wife may take into her head to do, once you get her fixed here you can't expect her to forget, as you do, that May has no real claim on you."

"That I have no real claim on her, I suppose you mean, ma'am," Tom put in for the second time, just as I was getting thoroughly uncomfortable. "But, for all that, I intend to keep her—that is," added Tom, with one of his short-sighted blinks sideways at me, "as long as she'll stay with me, eh, May? And whoever has anything to say against that arrangement will have to go out of my house to say it—not that I'm afraid of any such result in this case—and, on the whole, Aunt Anne, I should like to try the experiment."

Mother smiled grimly, but Tom was so evidently bent on his "experiment," as he called it, that she gave up the argument.

"You can dance, if you're ready to pay the piper," she said, shortly. "And pray, how soon do you mean to be married?"

Tom's face fell a little at this question.

"I can't say exactly. I suppose we shall have to be engaged first."

"What!" said mother, opening her eyes; "You never mean to say, Tom, you haven't spoken to her yet?"

"Not yet," answered Tom cheerfully. "Time enough for that, you know after I had spoken to you."

Mother, as a minister's widow, was not much given to the idle mirth that is as the cracking of thorns under a pot, but now she leaned back and laughed till the tears stood in her eyes. "Well she said, "if it was anybody else I should say he was cracked; but you never were like other people, and you never will be, Tom Dean. But, at least, you have fixed on the lady?"

"Oh, yes," answered Tom; "but, if you will excuse, Aunt Anne, I would rather not say any thing about her just yet, for, if—if any thing should happen, it wouldn't be pleasant for either party, you know." And with which veiled allusion to his possible rejection Tom took his hat and left the room.

Our household was rather queerly put together. There was no particular reason why I should have been of it at all; for I was not really related to Tom, nor even to "mother," as I called her, though I am sure we were as dear to each other as any mother and daughter could be. She was the second wife of my father, who, like most ministers, had been richer in grace than in goods, and had left us at his death with very little to live on. Then it was that Tom Dean had come forward, and insisted on giving a home to his aunt and to me, whom he had scarcely seen a dozen times in his life before. That was exactly like Tom—"queer Tom Dean," as his friends were fond of saying, "who never did anything like anybody else." I suppose, in spite of his clear head for business, there is no denying that he was whimsical; but I am sure, when I think of his unfailing generosity and delicacy, I can't help wishing there were a few more such whimsical people in the world. Naturally, at the time I am speaking of, my opinion had not been asked; all I had to do was to go whither mother went, and, while she gave her energies to the house-keeping, give mine to growing up, which by this time I had pretty well accomplished. But perhaps for that very reason—for one sees with different eyes at twelve and eighteen—my companion in the house had already begun to seem unsatisfactory to me; and the morning's words put it in a clearer light, since it had been used as an argument against Tom's marrying. I knew that mother had spoken honestly, believing that such a step would not be for his happiness; but was not he the best judge of that? I knew him if reflection should bring him round to her opinion, to be perfectly capable of quietly sacrificing his own wishes for my sake, who had not the shadow of a claim on him; so it must be my part to prevent his own kindness being turned against him now. Still, it was not so easy to see how I was to provide for myself, in case it should become advisable. What could I do? Draw and sing and play tolerably, but not in a manner to compete with the hosts that would be in the field against me. Literature? I had read so many stories whose heroines, with a turn of the pen, dashed into wealth and fame. That would be very nice, only—I was not the least little bit literary; I had never even kept a journal, which is saying a great deal for a girl in her teens. The fine arts, then, being out of the question for me, what remained? There was some clerkship, or a place in some family, and—and there was Will Broomly!

That may seem like going away from the point, but it was not. I was matter-of-fact, but I could see well enough what was going on right under my eyes, and I had a pretty clear idea of what was bringing Will to the house so often as he had taken to coming lately. There was a "situation," then, that would give me the home life I liked best and felt myself better suited for; but would it answer in other respets? I overcast the long seam I was sewing twice over, I was so busy trying to make up mind whether I liked Will Broomly well enough to pass my whole life with him, and even then I had not come to any decision, when I was called down stairs to Letty Walters.

Letty was the prettiest, I think, of all my friends, and certainly the liviliest. Tom called her "the tonic," and used to laugh heartily at her bright speeches. I suppose it was this that made mother fix on Letty as his choice. When I came into the the sitting room I found a kind of cross-examination going on. It was amusing to anybody in the secret, as I was, to watch mother's artful way of continually bringing the conversation round, as if by chance, to bear on what she wanted to know. But it all amounted to nothing, either because Letty was too good a fencer or because she really had nothing to betray. But, when Tom came home, mother took care to mention that Letty had called.

"What, the tonic?" said Tom. "Too bad I missed her."

"But for your choice being already made," said mother, with a covert scrutiny of his face, "I dare say you might have as much of the tonic as you liked."

"But I go on the homœopathic principle, you know," answered Tom, with a twinkle in his eye.

After that, mother's belief in Letty's guiltiness wavered. Her suspicions were transferred from one to another of our acquaintance, but always with the same unsatisfactory result.

"It passes my comprehension," she said to me, desparingly, one day. "I am positive I could not tell the right one by Tom's face in a minute, and yet I have mentioned, everybody we know."

"Perhaps it is somebody we don't know," I suggested; "some friend of his we have never seen."

"What, a perfect stranger?" said mother, sharply. "Never talk to me, child; Tom's not capable of that."

I was silent, for I did not want to worry her; but that was my opinion all the same.

The same evening—it was rather more than a week since Tom had hurled that thurderbolt of his at us—mother began about it openly.

"When are you going to introduce your wife to us, Tom? I suppose you have come to an understanding by this time?"

"Oh, there's no hurry," Tom said, as he had said before; but this time he did not speak quite so cheerfully. "The fact is," he continued, with a little hesitation, "there—there's a rival in the case."

"A rival?" repeated mother, with unfeeling briskness.

"Yes, a young fellow—younger by a good deal than I am," and Tom's face assumed an absurdly doleful look. "He is always there now. I confess I don't see my way clear; I'm waiting for her to make up her mind."

"And she's waiting most likely for you to make up your's," said mother, forgetting in her propensity to right matters, that she was playing the enemy's game.

"There's something in that that never occurred to me," said Tom, his face brightening. Mother saw her mistake, and made a counter move at once.

"But the ways of my time are old-fashioned now; young ladies, now-a-days, take matters into their own hands. If she cared for you, you may be pretty sure she wouldn't have waited till this time to let you know it—that is, I judge by the girls I am in the habit of seeing; but if this one is a stranger to me—" (here mother riveted her eyes on Tom's face; oh, dear, my unfortunate word!) "if she is an entire stranger, I cannot pretend to form any opinion of her, of course."

"Of course," repeated Tom, absently.

"Not that I have any such idea," resumed mother, growing warmer; "I have said, and I say again, that to bring a perfect stranger under this roof is not my opinion of you, Tom."

I felt my mother's words like so many pins and needles; for Tom was looking meditatively across at me, and, though that was just a way of his, it seemed now as if he were reading in my face that the opinion was mine, and that I had been meddling in what did not concern me. I felt myself, for very vexation, getting redder every moment, till it grew intolerable.

"It is so warm here," I said, for an excuse, turning toward the French window. "I am going to get a breath of air."

I went out into our little strip of garden ground; Tom followed. I thought I should never have a better opportunity to say what I had it in my mind to say, so I waited for him by the bench under the old pear tree. "Sit down here, Tom," I said, "I've something to say to you."

"Have you?" said Tom; "that's odd for I—. Well, never mind that just yet. What is it, May?"

"Tom," I said, still surer now he had misjudged me, and more resolved to set him right, "I want a place."

"A place?" repeated Tom, puzzled, as well he might be, by this sudden and indefinite announcement; "what kind of a place?"

"I don't know," I said, for, indeed, my ideas were of the vaguest. "I thought you might, being in the way of those things. Now, pray, Tom," I went on quickly, "don't fancy I am discontented, or—or anything of that sort; the truth is, ever since I left off school I have wanted something to do, and had it in my mind to speak to you about it." With this I looked at Tom, fearing he might be vexed; but he did not look vexed, only preoccupied.

"I do know of a place, as it happens," he said, after a while, "only I'm not sure how it would suit you."

"That's soon seen," said I, "what is it like?"

"Well, it's a sort of—of general usefulness—"

"It must be to run errands," said I, laughing. "And where is it, Tom?"

"Well," said Tom, hesitatingly again, "it's with me."

"The sooner the better, so far as I am concerned," said Tom, and with that he turned round and looked at me, and directly I met his eyes I knew somehow, all in a moment, what he meant; and I knew, too, both that I could not have passed all my life with Will Broomly, and why I could not.

I am sure Letty Walters, who interrupted us just then, must have thought my wits were wandering that evening, and, indeed, they were; for I was completely dazed with the sudden turn things had taken. But Tom, who had the advantage of me there, took it quite colly, and laughed and talked with Letty just the same as ever till she went away.

It was pretty late when we went in. Mother sat where we had left her, knitting in the twilight.

"Wasn't that Letty Walters with you a while ago?" she said, as we came up.

"Yes," said I, with a confused feeling of an explanation of something being necessary; "she just came to bring the new crochet-pattern she promised me."

"H'm!" said mother, as much as to say she had her own ideas as to what Letty came for.

Tom had been wandering about the room in an absent sort of fashion, taking up and putting down in the wrong places all the small objects that fell in his way. He came up and took a seat by mother. I became of a sudden very busy with the plants in the window; for I knew he was going to tell her.

"Wish me joy, Aunt Anne,' 'said he, "it's all settled."

"Settled, is it?" said mother, in anything but a joyful tone. "It is as I suspected all along. Well, you have my best wishes, Tom; perhaps you may be happy together after all, I'm sure I hope so."

This wasn't a very encouraging sort of congratulation, and Tom seemed rather taken aback by it.

"I'm sorry you're not pleased," he said, after a pause; "I had an idea somehow you would be."

"I don't know from what you judged. But there, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You'll be married directly, I presume; I must be looking out for a house," and mother stroked her nose reflectively with a knitting-needle.

"What for?" said Tom; "I thought of keeping on here all the same."

"I never supposed otherwise," said mother, "Of course I did not expect to turn you out of your own house."

"But what is the need of looking for another, then?"

"Why, for myself."

"For yourself!" repeated Tom, in a tone of utter amazement. "Going to leave us—just now? Why, Aunt Anne, I never heard of such a thing!"

"Now, Tom," said mother, speaking very fast, and making her needles fly in concert, "we might as well come to an understanding at once on this subject. I am fully sensible of your past kindness—now just let me finish—I say I appreciate it, and have tried to do my duty by you in return, as I hope I should always be ready to do. I wish all good to you and your wife, and shall be glad to help her if I ever can, but to live in the same house with her is what would turn out pleasantly for neither of us, and, once for all, I can't do it."

"Aunt Anne," said Tom, pushing back his chair, and staring in mother's excited face, "either you or I must be out of our wits."

"It's not me, then, at any rate," retorted mother, getting nettled.

Amusement and a certain embarrassment had kept me a silent listener so far, but there was no standing this; I tried to speak, but could not, for laughing.

"I think you are all out of your wits together," said mother, turning sharply. "What ails the child? It's no laughing matter."

"You don't understand each other," I gasped; "oh, dear! it—it's not Letty—oh—oh, dear!" and relapsed again.

"Not Letty?" repeated mother, turning to Tom. "Then why did you tell me so?"

"I never told you so," said Tom.

"Yes you did," persisted mother. "You came in and told me you were going to be married."

"Yes, so I am," said Tom, still at cross-purposes.

"Now, Tom Dean," said mother, rising and confronting him, "what do you mean? And who is to be your wife?"

"Why, May, of course," answered Tom.

"May!" and then, after a pause of inexpressible astonishment, it was mother's turn to laugh. 'Do you mean to say, Tom, it was that child you were thinking of all the while?'

'Why, who else could it be?' said Tom, simply.

'Well,' said mother, 'I ought to have remembered you never did do anything like anybody else. But, still why in the world did you go to work in such a roundabout way?'

'I wanted to see how you took to my idea,' said Tom.

'And how did you suppose we were to guess your idea meant May?' moth- asked.

'Who else could it be?' repeated Tom, falling back on what he evidently found an unanswerable argument. It was no use talking to him. Mother gave it up with a shake of the head.

'And you won't want another house then, Aunt Anne?' said Tom, suddenly. That set mother off again; Tom joined with her, and altogether I don't think we ever passed a merrier evening than the one that made us acquainted with Tom's wife.—*Appleton's Magazine.*

A good-looking telegraph operator in Columbus, Ohio, waited about an hour the other afternoon to witness a plunge by the sea-lion. His lionship finally jumped, and a suit of linen duck went to the washerwoman in the afternoon.

A Danbury man imagined himself a hen, and while under the influence of that conceit sat down on a dozen eggs, and hatched out an Italian sunset a circus poster. His wife rem- debris with the bald end