



DISAPPOINTMENT should always be taken as a stimulant, and never viewed as a discouragement.

—Newsmen.

The Strike of Hannah

May E. Wilkins Freeman.
(Continued from last week)

THEN Mrs. Maria Gore began to talk. She was a very small old lady in an ancient black silk with many high-lights of gloss. She wore a large brooch and a coil of fair hair set in a circle of pearls. Mrs. Maria Gore, in spite of her age and small size, gave an impression of force, and a sort of malicious power. Her black eyes between her two folds of false pearls gleamed as sharply as a cat's. Her mouth was small with a curious twist. Deep ruffles of lace fell over her tiny yellow claw-like hands which clutched each other nervously. There was no repose about Mrs. Maria Gore, but there was restrained intensity which might be mistaken for repose. In all her life Maria had never screamed, but she would have liked to scream. Her one safety valve was her sizzling tongue. That relieved her constant strain of spirit. When she had no one present upon whom to let loose this vituperating lash, she sold in solitude, as if at some unseen opponent of fate. Where Hannah Dodd kept still and revolted, Maria Gore expressed her state of mind to the utmost. She expressed it that morning to the tall thin woman sitting opposite with her grim, defiant face.

"Here they are, all coming," declared Mrs. Gore, scowling her old face and twisting her mouth maliciously. "Every one of them; all the MacFarlands and that young man MacFarland is engaged to, and they say he's a millionaire. They have taken a notion to spend Thanksgiving here in the brick oven, and here the kitchen range taken down, and the fireplace opened, and the turkeys and chickens roasted on spits, the old-fashioned way, and here it is Tuesday, and only two days to do it all in. The letter only came last night, and I sent Tommy Simmons right off to you. They wrote me to get help. They took MacFarland says, Mrs. George S. MacFarland says, and here are only two days to get ready for them. 'Heat the brick oven,' says Mrs. George MacFarland. How do I know that oven will draw? It hasn't been used for forty years. Well, Mrs. Dodd, you've got to go to work. I suppose you came prepared to work?"

"Yes, I calculated you wanted me to work," said Hannah, stiffly. She had her apron in the street, with her apron on. She had a certain vanity in spite of humble estate.

"Well put your apron on and get to work," said Mrs. Maria Gore. "You'll have to step pretty fast for there's no end to be done. I heard

Mrs. Bemis wasn't having you as usual does Thanksgiving, so I thought I could get you."

"No, Mrs. Bemis didn't want me this Thanksgiving," said Hannah.

"Suppose she's pinching like everybody else," said Mrs. Gore. "I don't see what has gone into folks here for my part. I don't see why Charles Augustus Bemis is any poorer this year than he ever was. I heard he'd been making money on his hens, been selling eggs for fifty cents a dozen. Well, if folks want to pinch and save, and work their fingers to the bone for

their being here. But that's the way with such folks."

Mrs. Maria Gore had said that last with malignity and pride, which made a curious combination, and Hannah Dodd had gone immediately to work. There was an enormous amount of work to do. Mrs. Maria Gore was unaccountably parsimonious with the money of the wealthy George S. MacFarland, and resented a hint that more help was needed, and Hannah worked for her life. All the great ancient bedrooms had to be aired and put in order, and that was no small task, for Mrs. Maria Gore was but a indifferent housekeeper, but only troubled herself about her own particular comforts. A man came in twice a day to care for the kitchen furnace, and she lived comfortably in the midst of dust, while she was warm, and had her own little dainties for meals. She cooked her meals, and that was about all Mrs. Maria did. As for her own bedroom, she had a nest in the midst of her deep feather-bed, which she did not disturb for months. She sat beside her window in the south room and read or gazed out upon the street while Hannah worked. She only related herself to cold Hannah, or relate in a rasping voice, like an angry crow, her list of complaints against life in general. Hannah used to hear her while she was working, and wondered at it. She had such a soft nest in life she would be quiet. She felt like marching in and speaking her mind to Mrs. Maria Gore in spite of her black silk and her brooch set in pearls, but she was mindful of her dollar a day with which she could buy Thanksgiving dinner for her children, and she restrained herself.

It is possible that her resentment

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the sake of leaving it to some far-off relations (they haven't a near one to my knowledge) they can. It isn't free enough with his money. It takes folks that haven't got so much to be so mighty mean with it. You get right to work, Mrs. Dodd. I know Mr. MacFarland will be willing to pay you well—as much as a dollar a day, if you do all right."

Hannah had tied on her apron and stood up, like some gaunt slave of labor who obeyed it and yet faced it, and asked what she should do first.

"I guess you'd better go and see that the bedrooms are opened, and the beds and things aired first," said Mrs. Gore, "they'll catch their breath of cold, and blame me. Shouldn't wonder if they all got cold any-how. Here they are coming from a steam-heated house. Mr. George S. had a hot-air furnace put in here last year on my account, so they won't have to depend on open fireplaces, but if the wind is northeast the draught thing won't send a mite of heat any-where but up chimney. I guess they don't know what they're coming to, but then folks like them don't stop to think consequences. They've always had things just the way they wanted them, and they can't imagine anything else. I suppose they'll be so astonished they won't know what to do, if the wind blows from the north-east, and don't pay any attention to

against the old woman acted as a sort of poisonous stimulant, for she worked as she had never worked before. It was an almost Herculean task which it had been set her. All that great dust-laden untidy house was to be in order, and all that Thanksgiving cooking was to be done in two days. Then Mrs. Gore's prophecy with regard to the brick oven proved a true one. It did not draw. It set fire to some woodwork around it, and the village fire department had to be called in, and a mason. When that happened Hannah set her mouth hard, and she marched upon Mrs. Maria Gore. That was Wednesday morning. "Now look here, Mrs. Gore," said she, "I'm willing to do all I can, but I ain't willing to do what I can't, and you may just as well know it."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Gore, snapping her black eyes at her.

"As for trying to cook pies and puddings and bread and cake in that old oven, that Mr. Slocum will need half the day to get in order to do it. But I'll cook them in the stove oven, and if you want to tell them MacFarlands they wasn't cooked in the brick oven you can."

Mrs. Gore stared at her. She looked helpless, which was a strange look for her.

"I'll get them pies and cakes baked to-day, though I shall be up to sit up till midnight to do it," said Hannah,

"and I'll get them turkeys and chickens dressed, and then I'll take down the range and get the hearth cleaned and them silly old cranes and pots and things ready to roast and broil to-morrow, but I won't undertake to bake in that brick oven and get things done, because an angel from Heaven can't do what he can't do, and I can't do it."

"Well," said Mrs. Maria Gore. "I'll get the brick oven fixed up after Mr. Slocum gets it fixed," said Hannah, and then at injun puddin' can be baked in it, and you can do just as you are aimed to do about tellin' them that the other things were baked in the stove oven. I should tell if I was in your place. I don't believe in teflore such things as victuals. But you can do just as you think best. It's your lie, it ain't mine. It ain't likely they'll ask me if all the things were baked in that crazy old brick oven, and if they do I shall just tell them to ask you."

"It isn't very likely they'll ask me," returned Mrs. Maria Gore reflectively. "If Mr. George S. MacFarland or any of his folks go and do a thing, they don't dream they won't do it."

"Well, I guess they got left a good many times," then remarked Hannah Dodd rebelliously and slangily. "You don't know anything about such folks as Mr. George S. MacFarland and his folks, you couldn't," said Maria Gore, with a rest.

"Well, I don't want to," replied Hannah. "All I want is to be able to bake them in the stove oven, where I can bake them in that old brick oven where I can't."

"Well," said Maria Gore, and Hannah returned to her field of action. It was a hard-fought one, although it was in a kitchen, and the weapons in use were domestic utensils. Hannah considered to be peaceful. It was, as she had prophesied, midnight before she had finished, before the last of the chicken pies and the other pies were baked and the pantry shelves, before the cakes were baked and the poultry dressed, and the pudding set therein, and she had moved, with her fairly masculine strength, the kitchen range into the wood-shed, cleaned the hearth, and set it forth with its ancient array of crane, portholes and the rest, then Hannah washed her hands, took off her apron, and marched in upon Mrs. Maria Gore, who was soundly asleep in her study little bedroom out of the sitting-room. Hannah aroused her with no compunction and the old woman's black eyes opened upon her viciously from under the flapping ruff of her nightgown.

"Well, I'm through for to-night," said Hannah Dodd.

"Then why didn't you go home and lock the back door and take the key, so you can get in on the morning and go still, and not wake me up this time of night!" demanded Maria Gore.

"I waked you up because I wanted my pay for these two days' work," said Hannah Dodd. "I kept thinkin' you would say something about it before you went to bed, I didn't want to. Then the first thing I knew you had gone to bed at half past seven, and I heard you snore, and I thought I might just as well wait till I was through and wake you up then."

"I never snored in my whole life," declared Maria Gore, "and I haven't been asleep more than fifteen minutes."

"Well, I don't mind whether you think you snore or not," replied Hannah Dodd, "but I want that two dollars."

(Continued next week.)

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