

for I wouldn't have it get around for the world—now you won't tell anyone, will you, Mrs. Brown?" Here she stopped quite exhausted and sat panting away like a spent locomotive, for the last remarks were uttered with the utmost impetuosity and intensity of demeanour, without an interruption of any kind whatsoever. She sat gazing entreatingly at Mrs. Brown to reply.

"Oh!" began that estimable lady, "I should not think of saying a word about it, especially after you telling me not to. Really I feel so sorry for them," she continued, "They'll have to take in boarders and washing." Here she looked at me in a way that gave the impression that my face was dirty and needed attending to.

"Yes, and go out scrubbing and cleaning windows," gasped my landlady in a breathless fashion, "It's too bad, and everyone knows it."

At this juncture Mrs. Brown recollects that she has left the house in charge of the new servant, Sarah Ann, who may be a thief and should not be trusted as she has heard servants often are, and so bidding my landlady an affectionate farewell with the accompanying admonition "to be sure and come and see me"—which, by the way, she sincerely hopes my landlady won't do—she feelingly embraces a large fat woman on her left whom she calls a "dear, dainty creature" and picking up a gingham umbrella waves a red pocket handkerchief at the rest of the company and departs by a door to the left with utmost despatch, firmly determined to spread the sensational news regarding the unfortunate Smiths as rapidly as her conversational powers will permit.

My landlady left alone in this abrupt fashion meditates reflectively for a moment, then starts off to overtake Mrs. Brown—whom she regards as having stolen a march on her,—by going into a minute analysis of the family history of the Smiths, calling them shams, imposters and two-faced hypocrites, dwelling on all points derogatory to their character in a way becoming a crown attorney and finally ending up with an earnest appeal to the entire company not to tell anyone, for she "wouldn't have it get around for the world."

Then began a most animated discussion as to the advisability of ostracising the Smiths altogether, which led to an argument as to the most effective means of ridding the community of their obnoxious presence entirely, in the midst of which the caretaker entered to lower the windows as the discussion was getting somewhat heated, and the members were looking decidedly warm. I saw little necessity for this, however, for I had come to the conclusion many days before that there was very little need of ventilation wherever my lady was to be found, she aired every subject in a manner comprehensive and complete.

What I had seen or heard that day strengthened my convictions in the matter.

By this time I had begun to doubt the sincerity of my landlady, especially in relation to the unfortunate Smiths. I did not tell her so, however; it would have been suicidal to have done that.

The memory of that eventful meeting followed me for many days succeeding our return to the farm. Every time I thought of the confusion of that reunion it drove me almost frantic.

When I recollected that my landlady was the moving spirit in the affair, my heart went out in earnest sympathy to my landlord, whom I began to regard as a martyr. Some men have more than their share of trouble and sorrow in this world and Mr. Jones's cup seemed filled to the brim.

"Great Scott! What a voice she has," said I to him one night after her usual daily fit of temper.

"Yes! she has indeed," declared he timidly, in a way strongly suggestive of being afraid to say anything more.

"I swear by all the gods of mythology never to marry," said I,— "not a country girl, at all events."

My landlord did not reply but he gave a peculiar smile which I had seen his face assume when reference was made to this subject before. I could not make out exactly what the meaning was that lay hidden there. Was it irony or sarcasm, derision or scorn, or was it simply an evidence of ill-repressed amusement which stole over his features in spite of himself?

Before my visit was concluded there was a continuation of these meetings, at each one of which it was compulsory on me to attend. In fact I observed that the remainder of my time was almost wholly taken up in this way—in something which, by no imaginable means could I become absorbed in. I demonstrated beyond all question of doubt the inadvisability of starting a bad habit. My landlady proved to me clearly the advisability of continuing the present one I had so unwillingly contracted. To have rebelled would have been useless. That should have been done at first, before the practice had become established. Besides I had told the old lady in answer to oft repeated questions that I had enjoyed the first meeting immensely—it's a way we city people have of being polite, sometimes at the expense of veracity—and she thereupon declared her intention of providing me with further entertainment of a similar description. I could not quarrel with her for that—for wishing to be hospitable; nor could I, without giving offence, reject the entertainment which she provided with the best intentions in the world. The dose, however nauseating and distasteful, must be taken in the spirit in which it was intended. It was no time to complain now. I had let my opportunity for objection pass unheeded. There was nothing to be done but patiently wait for a speedy termination of the merciless convention which seemed to draw itself out to an aggravating and interminable length.

The second meeting came and passed, and the third meeting was over.

It was not until the evening succeeding the latter that I chanced again to refer to my landlady's brilliant conversational powers. Of course she was not there or the subject would still have remained in abeyance.

It was just after supper and we were all sitting under a large apple tree, which drooped its leafy branches almost to the grass on which we lay, enjoying the cool breeze as it swept across the stream of sparkling water immediately in front of us, while the perfumed breath of the syringa proved a kind of dessert to the evening meal. The day had been exceptionally hot and we found the evening air refreshing. We were grouped around in a semi-circle—my landlord, his sons, the girls and myself—lazily discussing any vagrant subject that happened in our minds when the sight of my landlady, through the open window, at work with her household duties, arrested my attention and turned our conversation and thoughts upon her.

"You look vindictive," said Kate to me, as I "looked daggers" at the open window.

"And I feel that way as well," I replied.

A smile stole over the features of my landlord who sat next me, but it did not steal away until every member of the company had become infected with it.

My landlady stepped to the door and called the dog to come to *his* supper.

"That is the most aggressive sound I have heard since I left town," I moaned.

"Her voice seems to worry you considerably," said my host in a jocular way.

"It does indeed," was my reply, "I never, in all my existence, came across such a woman; we have a good many objectionable things to put up with in town, but I'll be hanged if you country folks don't beat us all hollow in this line."

A gentle laugh moved round the circle. My landlord was about to reply, but the arrival of the lady of the house upon the scene silenced him completely.

The next day she came to me for the fourth consecutive time and begged me to escort her to the village again, adding that this was the last meeting of the convention and it promised to be unusually interesting.

Drowning men have seen their whole lives pass before them in a few seconds; I likewise had a dim vision of the agony I had already suffered while she was yet speaking and I resolved to make a final struggle. Desperation drove me to rashness. I replied:

"Why don't you take your husband instead of me?"

"Because I have none," she returned, with startling coolness.

"None?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, none," was the reply, "you probably mistook John for my husband; I am surprised at your stupidity, why he's only my brother."

"And you're not the lady of the house," I gasped.

"Oh, yes, if it's any consolation to you to know, sir, I *am* the lady of the house," she replied, folding her arms and looking at me sternly. "You mean do I live here? Well no, not exactly, though I am staying here at present. John couldn't get along without me. (Here my landlord looked particularly doleful.) "You see, like yourself, sir, I am a visitor from Toronto, but, unlike you, sir, I am a lady and I know how to talk as such, sir."

I rather thought she knew how to talk and I also had a faint idea that she was woman as well.

"I always act like a lady, talk like a lady and endeavor to be a lady at all times," she continued, making a grasp at my hair in a most unladylike fashion.

The atmosphere was getting intensely oppressive and I accordingly drifted out into the open air to meditate.

"And she was not the lady of the house," I muttered, "simply a maiden aunt on a visit from my native town!" It was appalling. "Heavens" thought I, "how I have been deceived. I might have known no woman could talk that way who had not been reared among metropolitan surroundings; she was correct—how stupid I was and how very gullible."

My protest, however, availed me nothing, and the hired man again had the satisfaction of seeing us depart for the scene of action at the school house.

My landlady was naturally elevated at her repeated successes and looked down at me in the bottom of the democrat derisively.

Two days before I left she came to me with her card.

"Young man," said she in a faltering voice, "I understand you are leaving in a day or so. I hope you will come and visit us again. There!" she continued, pointing to the card, "is my city address. I shall follow you hence in a few weeks myself" (I moaned.) "When I arrive I would like to have you call."

* * * * *

All that was many years ago, longer perhaps than I care to state but the recollection of my maiden landlady has haunted me ever since. It is the only unpleasant memory of my eventful visit that I have.

Shortly after the happening of these events I came back to town. It is needless to say, I have not called.