

# "Worn Out" People

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# PSYCHINE

(PRONOUNCED SI-KEEN)

ALL DRUGGISTS—ONE DOLLAR—FREE TRIAL

DR. T. A. SLOCUM, Limited  
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## MARTHA

Many a time in the four years during which the village greengrocer courted our maid Martha, my wife and I shared a good laugh over the bashfulness of the one and the haughtiness of the other. But, somehow, when Mr. Peck proposed and was accepted, the joke collapsed like a pinpricked toy balloon, and neither of us could find anything left to laugh at. It was a hard thing to realize that Martha, who had been with us all the nineteen years of our married life, had actually decided to leave us. Martha was not, speaking literally, a perfect treasure, but she had long ago become familiar with our little ways, just as we—which was quite as important—had become familiar with hers; and, apart from resenting the bare idea of engaging a stranger, we felt, as we gradually admitted to each other, that Martha had a place not only in our modest household, but also in our affections. But, after all, we only admitted to each other a feeling that had been in existence for many years, ever since the night when our little boy was suddenly taken away—that night, and the dreadful days which followed, when Martha's heart seemed broken as our hearts, although her hands were ready and steady for the work that had to be done.

—I doubt if there was ever a sentimental engagement which gave complete satisfaction to every one acquainted with either of the contracting parties, and in Martha's case my wife would be the first to admit that she was what is mildly termed "put out" when one morning her maid, busy washing the breakfast dishes, remarked abruptly, yet calmly:

"Excuse me, mem, but I maun tell ye I've made up ma mind to hae Donald Peck, the greengrocer."

My wife cannot recollect the exact reply she made to the announcement, but she distinctly remembers dropping the lid of a muffin-dish by which she set great store, and which she could never trust to Martha's fingers.

In the evening she reported the announcement and some subsequent conversation to me, adding:

"But the thing that puzzled me most, Jim, was that Martha wasn't the least excited. She didn't even blush."

"How old is Martha?" I inquired.

"That has nothing to do with it—but I fancy she's about forty. You don't mean to infer that a woman cannot blush at that age, do you?"

"It is for you to say, Margaret," I returned, smiling at her.

She said it without words, and laughed a little laugh that trailed off into a sigh.

Presently she spoke again, seriously.

"No, Martha didn't blush and she wasn't a bit confused. She just went on washing the dishes as if she had said nothing more important than 'It's not quite so cold this morning.' Why, Jim, she didn't even appear to be particularly glad about it!"

"Perhaps she was sad," I suggested.

Margaret shook her head. "I thought she would have shown some sorrow at the prospect of leaving us," she said in a low tone. "I confess I was disappointed in Martha this morning. I didn't—she continued, a note of dignity slightly hardening her voice—"I didn't look for tears of gratitude, but I did expect some expression of—of regret."

"It was too bad," I muttered, not knowing what to say. "You have done so much for her, dear—when she was ill, when she was jilted by that wretched fellow just after she came to us, never mind that. And yet I can't believe that Martha isn't sorry to leave me."

"No more can I. In fact, I should not be surprised if she threw over Peck at the last minute and stayed on here!" I exclaimed, cheerfully.

"My dear! The wedding is to be six weeks hence. She wouldn't have fixed it so definitely if she had any doubt about keeping to her bargain on Martha. I can get another maid. Indeed, I have sometimes thought of one that a younger woman might be, of course," I assented, thinking of one hundred and one little things to which a stranger would have to be educated.

Margaret was thinking like this when she was silent for several minutes and casually observed:

"Peck is a decent sort of fellow, but he is quite respectable and if that's what you

mean, Jim. He certainly ought to be the latter, with the prices he charges for his vegetables and fruit."

"But what's wrong with him?" I asked.

My wife hesitated. "Well," she said at last, "I'm sure he's a mean man—you can see it in his eye, when you catch it; and I don't mind saying that I wish Martha were going to marry anybody else in the village, for I'm convinced that as Mrs. Peck she'll have harder work and far less reward than she has had here."

"But Martha must see something attractive in him, surely?"

"I suppose so. But, as I said, I wish she had taken some one else. Really, Jim, I was amazed when she told me this morning, for I know, and so do you, how she has been snubbing him for years."

"Ah, there's nothing like a lover being persistent."

"Lover!" Do you think every man who'll have a wife is a lover?"

"I think you're a bit severe on Peck," I ventured.

"No, Jim, I'm not. I see the man nearly every day, and I'd be sorry for any woman who becomes his wife. I'm not thinking of Martha at all now." Mr. Peck wants an assistant, but does not want to have to pay a proper wage. Martha is a comely woman, and a careful one, too, except in regard to glass and china. She would do capitally in the shop as well as in the house. Oh, I do wish she hadn't taken that greedy, selfish little man!"

"But what can you do, dear?"

"Nothing! Absolutely nothing, except to go to town as soon as possible and engage another maid. I suppose I should consider myself lucky at my time of life going to a registry office for the first time."

"Is Martha going to be married from here?" I inquired.

"No. She didn't give me time to offer that. She wishes to leave this day month and go home to stay with her old mother, who has not been well lately, and be married there. I dare say that is the better way."

"Save some trouble."

"I wouldn't have minded that," said my wife, gently, though I would have hated to see her go out of this house with Mr. Peck. However, I've got to concern myself about the new girl now. I'll write to Winifred to-night and ask her how she sets about engaging a maid."

"Your sister has had some experience."

"I should think so! Poor Winifred! She has two maids and a—nurse, and she has never had one stay for a year, and she has been married fifteen years in June."

"Well, Margaret, I trust we are not in for a period of quick changes, even in our small establishment."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Margaret, rather gloomily, as she rose and went to the writing-table. "I've heard that it is very difficult to get a girl to come to the country, and when you get her to keep her, girls find it dull, which I dare say is natural. However, I must do my best, but—"

She paused, playing with a pen.

"Well, dear?"

"But you must understand, Jim," she continued after a moment or two, "you must understand that it will take years, probably, to get the best of girls to do everything in the way we are used to. And there are some little things that I don't think I could ask a stranger girl to do."

"For instance?"

"Well, I don't think I could ask her to bring our morning tea into the bedroom, as Martha has done since the morning after we came home from our honeymoon, dear. I don't think I could do that. Could I?"

"Perhaps not. Exit one piece of unnecessary indulgence! I returned with affected carelessness. "Proceed, Margaret!"

"No, no. We'll find out plenty of little things we can't have soon enough, such as cooking a Welsh rabbit at 11 o'clock at night because we happen to get suddenly hungry. I never liked Martha being up so late, but she seemed to take a pride in it, and of course she hadn't to rise very early. I'll have to do the Welsh rabbits myself in future."

"We'll have dinner an hour later and do without the rabbits," I said, bravely.

"We shall certainly have to alter some of our habits, Jim. Perhaps we have been too easy-going. At any rate, you must give up dropping into the kitchen when I'm there to ask the unimportant questions. I don't think—but don't let's talk any more about it now. I'm going to write to Winifred."

As the days went on, depression took a firmer hold on us both. Margaret accounted for it by the fruitfulness of the various visits to the town registry offices, but I felt that it was really due to the strange apathy and carelessness of Martha, who treated her mistress with a cold respectfulness, and never ventured a word with regard to her future unless she was asked for it. Naturally Margaret froze also, and ceased to make kindly inquiries.

"I'm sure," she once sighed despairingly, "I can't think what has come over Martha. Her manner is so queer that sometimes I think she must be ill. I haven't seen her smile since she became engaged and the other day, when I tried to make a joke about her being our greengrocer in the near future, her expression almost frightened me."

"You've never gone into the kitchen when Peck was there, have you?" said I.

"I couldn't, Jim, I couldn't!"

"Perhaps she knows you don't like him, and naturally feels offended."

"I don't think she's offended. Sometimes she's like a dumb thing, simply longing to speak. Her eyes have not changed. It's her face, especially her mouth."

"Have you mentioned our proposed little wedding present, dear?"

"No. We'll send it after her, to her mother's. I couldn't give it to her here now."

"Cheer up, Margaret!" I said, feebly. "She's not worth all the pain you are giving your tender heart."

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"Perhaps not. I don't know—and yet I can't believe that she has lost all her feelings. Surely the soul of that mean little man hasn't gone into her. That's nonsense I'm talking, but I—feel the whole thing terribly, and—so do you, Jim."

"I do," I had to confess at last.

Margaret's world and mine had always been rather a small one, and perhaps that was a reason why we felt the matter so seriously and so deeply.

The day of Martha's departure arrived, and the local chariot stood at the garden gate, laden with her belongings and ready to take them and herself to the station.

"You must come, Jim, and say good-by to her, and wish her luck and happiness," said my wife, entering the study.

"All right," said I, feeling it was all wrong. "Has—has she broken down, Margaret?" I asked nervously.

"No. And I don't think she will. Come. It's time she was going now."

We went into the kitchen together. Feeling miserable and foolish, I repeated with the utmost stiffness the kind words which I had committed to memory the previous evening.

"Thank ye, sir," she said, quietly. My wife held out her hand.

"Good-by, Martha, but—but not for long. We'll see you soon again. All good wishes, you know."

"Thank ye, mem," said Martha, still quietly.

Then, for an instant, she let her eyes—honest brown eyes they were—rest on her mistress. Surely, I thought, she was going to break down at last. But, no. Although the look in her eyes was motherly (there is no other word to describe it), her face was hard.

We went to the door and saw her off. At the last moment I fancied her lip quivered, but I could not be certain as to that.

The cab rolled away. Margaret shut the front door softly, and together we went into the study.

So far Margaret had been unsuccessful in her quest of a maid, and for a fortnight we had to be content with the daily help of an elderly woman from the village.

"Martha will be married by now. They will probably be dancing at the wedding," said Margaret suddenly, about ten o'clock one evening. She did not look up from her sewing.

I had been dreading the coming of the remark all the hours during which I had been making a pretense at writing.

"So she will," I responded, with as much carelessness as I could muster, and was wondering helplessly what I could say to change the subject when a bright thought struck me.

"I say, Margaret, I'm shockingly hungry. Do you think you could be bothered—"

"Welsh rabbit," she said, rising with a sad smile. "Remember, I can't make it like Martha, Jim."

"Nonsense! It was you who taught Martha." For the moment I had stupidly forgotten that Welsh rabbit suggested her departure, otherwise I should never have mentioned it.

Presently Margaret left the room, after which I had asked her to leave both doors open so that I might not feel too lonely.

I heard her moving about the kitchen, stirring up the fire, removing the lid of the range and shutting the damper. Then she went to the larder, thence to the table and I guessed she was cutting up the cheese and slicing the bread. Once more she went to the fire and remained there.

I was inwardly debating how I was going to attack the Welsh rabbit when ready, for I had no appetite worth mentioning when I heard Margaret run hastily from the fire to the back door and open it.

"Martha!" she cried in a frightened tone, whereupon I jumped from my chair.

"Ay, mem, it's just me," replied a very familiar voice, not quite the voice of a fortnight ago.

"Oh, Martha! What are you doing here?" gasped my wife.

The back door was closed, probably by Martha.

"Excuse me, mem, but is ma place filled up?" The question came anxiously.

"No. Not yet," Martha, but—"

"That's fine!" exclaimed Martha, with intense satisfaction. "I've bin a wee bag wi' me the night, but I'll sign ma trunk and other things sent on the morn. I'm rale glad to see ye a back, mem. But I'm vexed to see ye a wee thing wearit-like. Hoo's the maister?"

"Jim!" cried my wife. "Please come quickly. Here's Martha come back. Do try to get her to explain, for I—"

"Well, Martha," said I, entering the kitchen, "what has happened? Has the wedding been—ahem—postponed?"

"Deed ay!" she promptly answered, her face beaming with smiles, "it's postponed, as ye say, sir, postponed for ever an' ever."

"What?" cried my wary Maister.

"I'm no' gann to marry Maister Peck nor any other man," said Martha, gayly. "Ye see, mem, ma Uncle Robert is dead."

"Dear me! I'm exceedingly sorry," I began.

"Dinna fash yersel," sir, for I'm no' sorry. He was a hard man when he was leavin', but no he's awa' an' his bit siller comes to ma pair, an' his

ther. So you see, mem," she turned to her mistress, "I'm no' needin' to marry Maister Peck nor any other man, an' if ye'll let me, I wud like to hide here an' dae as I've done for near twenty year."

"But, Martha," cried my wife, the tears in her eyes, "were you going to marry Mr. Peck because your mother was in want?"

"That's about it, mem. Ma Mither is gettin' auld, an' her sicht was failin', and she had lost a' the fine needlework she used to bring her in a bit siller. An' so there was naethin' for it but to marry a man o' substance, an' Maister Peck—awel he was the only man o' substance that seemed to want me. It was a bargain 'twixt him an' me. I was to keep his house an' shop when he died, and she had lost a' the fine needlework she used to bring her in a bit siller. An' so there was naethin' for it but to marry a man o' substance, an' Maister Peck—awel he was the only man o' substance that seemed to want me. It was a bargain 'twixt him an' me. I was to keep his house an' shop when he died, and she had lost a' the fine needlework she used to bring her in a bit siller. An' so there was naethin' for it but to marry a man o' substance, an' Maister Peck—awel he was the only man o' substance that seemed to want me. It was a bargain 'twixt him an' me. 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