

The Story.

One Day in a Settler's Life.

"If you had had a grain of real love for me, you never would have dragged me out into this desolate wilderness," said Mrs. Roland Hardy, half sobbing and really angry. She arose and flashed round to the window: there pressing her hot face so closely against the pane that her nose immediately began melting a grotesque pattern of herself in the sparkling frostwork. "Had you been a gentleman, Roland, you never would have thought of doing it."

When wives get into a passion they are apt to say things that they may hereafter bitterly regret. Mrs. Hardy was no exception. Her husband stood breathlessly silent, his face paling. They had not been married a year yet. "Jane," he answered at last, in tones hard and cold, "if I had not thought you were willing, aye, and more than willing to risk it, I should never have brought you, and you know it. Remember, I told you it would be a rough life, yet you were eager to come."

Jane Hardy remembered very well. But the memory of her ardent protestations, her generous forgetfulness of self, only angered her the more just now.

"How was I to know it would be like this! There! You can go if you are going. I should like to be alone—with all this work to do."

"I am going directly," was Mr. Hardy's answer, striving for tranquillity. "Will you be good enough to put up my luncheon? I shall not come back until night."

"Oh dear, yes," she replied with alacrity, bringing her face away from the window with a jerk, and proceeding to make a great clatter in the cupboard, which in this pioneer cabin was a combination of pantry and china closet.

"I fear there is but a short allowance of wood; will it last till evening," asked Mr. Hardy, dubiously looking at the woodbox he had just replenished, and turning to brush up the bits of bark that had fallen on the neat rug carpet. His words were kind, but his tone was as chilly as an icicle.

"There is plenty; do not trouble yourself," responded his wife resentfully, her eyes bent on the bread she was buttering. In five minutes, man, dinner-pail, axe and dog had vanished in the direction of the great forest; and the young wife was alone, as she had vehemently desired to be. Roland Hardy had gone forth to his day's work of felling timber.

Most young and angry wives would have burst into tears at this point. Jane Hardy did not. She leaned against the rude mantelshelf when her husband's footsteps no longer sounded in the crisp snow, and looked unutterably sad and hopeless, as if the light of her life had suddenly gone out; looked remorseful, too, as if conscious of having had something to do with its annihilation.

The story is one of those often enough enacted in the New World. Certain expectations suddenly failing him, Roland Hardy manfully resolved to betake himself to the mighty woods, clear out a settlement for himself, erect his own house, Robinson Crusoe fashion, and in time, by dint of his hands' hard labor, become prosperous. Hardy, the settler, he would be then, with his fern lands around him, his flocks and herds, his people and his comforts. But all that would have to be patiently worked on for, and the beginning must, of necessity, be weary and toilsome. Jane Deane, to whom he was engaged, decided to go out with him—his wife. He told her he had better go on first, say for a year or two; her friends urged the same advice, but the young lady would not listen. So far as he was able, Mr. Hardy, before the marriage, described what their toil and their lonely life would be. Jane Deane looked at it with rose-colored spectacles, and thought it would be charming, a kind of perpetual picnic. It is true she did not bargain for the help they had taken with them, in the shape of a man and woman-servant, deserting them speedily, tired with the new rough work, sick at the loneliness; and those engaged in their places (after endless trouble and negotiation) had not yet come. But she had put her own shoulder bravely to the wheel in the summer weather, and made light of hardships. It was winter now; and for the first time her temper had given way.

Everything seemed to have gone wrong in the cabin that morning; and her husband's calm cheerfulness through it all had provoked her most unwarrantably. But she was not feeling well.

It is possible that many of us have such mornings—mornings when everything animate, and inanimate, conspires to bring to the surface the original gorilla that slumbers within the soul. These vexations have to be beaten down promptly under one's feet, and Mrs. Hardy had stooped to squabble with hers. A dear little rose had been discovered frozen, though wrapped in flannel and placed in the warmest corner of the burrow under the floor, called as a matter of dignity, the cellar. To be sure, the potatoes had been kindly spared; but what were gross potatoes when lovely Lamarque buds drooped in death? Mourning over them Mrs. Hardy forgot the milk-toast, and the milk-toast indignantly boiled over. Catching the pan from the stove, to a splash of hot milk fell on the front breadth of her clean crisp French gingham, and another on the ear of poor David, stretched on the hearth, and the dog howled responsively. At another time Jane would have laughed, but it was very far from her mood this morning; life in general was looking depressedly gloomy, and when Mr. Hardy came into this atmosphere of burnt milk and piteous dog-whinnies, she was declaring, in her fervid way, that housekeeping out West was simply villainous, and that she hated it—here she caught his provokingly smiling eyes—yes; hated it, and him, and the place, and everything.

He met the words jokingly, and it incensed her. In her anger she said unforgivable things, and Mr. Hardy was provoked into retorting. So they jarred and jangled through breakfast. That is, she did.

For some little time Roland Hardy had feared that a sort of suppressed discontent was taking possession of his wife. She was quieter at times, almost sad, and less given to laughter than in their old bright days, as he had got to calling them.

He had hoped everything of her love and devotion—hoped that he might ever remain as near and dear, as much "all the world" to her as she had often declared him to be. And now this had come of it; this dreadful quarrel. She had spoken out her mind.

His heart was aching with her reproaches; but generous ever, he excused her to himself as he walked along to the woods.

It was asking too much of mortal woman, he argued, anxious to make himself wretched, to tear her far away from home and friends, and all the comfortable delights of well-regulated New England life, and to expect her to be always glad and buoyant, and brave, and hopeful, keeping his own soul up with the whine-like tonic of her blithe spirits. No. It was the same old

beginning of the end, a mere question of time. Eventually she would become the indifferent, matter-of-fact sort of woman that most wives appear to be: regarding him—the lover—as a kind of mild inevitable evil, necessary to her support, and respectable to have about the home. Sooner or later, he supposed, all husbands and wives awake from their dream of love, to the long, dreary reality of making the best of things. Nevertheless, her fierce outburst on this particular morning took him by surprise; somewhat arousing his indignation. Had it not been her free choice to enter on this "villainous" house-keeping? Had he not warned her freely and fully that her days, if she came with him, would be anything but a bed of roses?

Was not life harder for him, inexpressibly harder, than it had ever been, a totally different thing altogether; but he bore on perseveringly and untiringly, looking to the end in view, and making matters light for her sake. Suppose—suppose—a flush dyed the young man's patient face as the thought occurred to him—suppose she refused to stay here and went home to her friends?

Meanwhile, Mrs. Hardy stood by the mantle-piece, horribly miserable—more miserable than she had ever dreamt of being in any of the love quarrels that had flickered their courtship. There seemed to be no "making-up" in this sort of thing; there was no light in it; it was unmitigated, hopeless wretchedness. For Mrs. Jane Hardy, her passion over, was chewing the husk of bitter repentance. He did not love her any more; he could not, or he never would have said harsh things to her; and this was the end of it all!

"To call me 'Jane!'" she exclaimed aloud, as if the word "Jane" contained all forms of vituperation. "Nobody has been cruel enough to call me that in all my life!" turning to the breakfast dishes with a bravely conquered sob. For this young lady, who had been a pet at home, had never been called by her husband, or by anybody else, by a harder name than Jenny.

Work is a good thing. Auerbach says it should have been the first commandment: "Thou shalt work!" Jenny was too unfamiliar with heart-torture to be conscious of how good her work was; but she could not but be aware, as the morning passed away, that something was driving the clouds out of her sky. Roland could not despise her all at once, she was sure.

She would gather up the remnant of his love, and guard and nourish it so tenderly that, like her poor Lamarque rose, it must still lift itself to the sun again, and some time blossom into a little beauty of sweetness, and so make life endurable. She would, in so many noble and heroic ways, prove to him—but she would not let him know it—there were women's lives, like hers—had no heroic chances. She could only keep his house in nice order, cook his favorite dishes, watch over his shirt buttons, forget the old days of ease when she was a listless young lady, and never, never, never lose her temper again. It was all dreadfully commonplace, and of no account, but she had embraced this lot of her own free will, which she could hope to climb to the heights of his regard again. As for his old romantic love for her, his tender, chivalrous devotion, that could never come back; she wasn't worth it. And so, accepting the dust of humiliation, and, like a genuine woman, having no mercy on herself, she went through the household duties, thinking all the time how dear to her were husband and home, and how she would strive to make them endurable, please God, to them.

It was a decidedly pleasant log cabin. Log cabins are always pleasant when an apt housekeeper presides over them, and enough of the world's lucre can be afforded to cover the walls with tasteful paper, and the floor with comfortable carpets. Those rude logs of which we read, with their thatched roofs, clay floors, and chimney built of sticks, are far more endurable in actual life, where they mean simply rheumatism and insects. This house was different; it was a spacious, comfortable, well-furnished place, and only called a cabin after the fashion of the country.

A stanch roof; substantial walls, ornamental within; carpets, books, pictures, a rare clock, easy chairs; everything for comfort met the eye. The fireplace, too, above gave evidence of ingenious and tasteful powers brought to bear upon their building and furnishing. Charming expedients, graceful rustic ornaments, pretty and useful things that cost little, made the cabin seem very much of a cosy mansion in a small way. In the midst of an almost savage wilderness, Roland Hardy had erected his dwelling, with a view rather to future exigencies than present needs; and his wife both possessed the gift of "making the most of things."

And it is surprising how deftly in these remote homes a woman, though she may have been gently born and reared, soon learns to accomplish the needful daily work. Where there's a will there's a way; and Jane Hardy had learnt to take a pleasure and a pride in it.

By noon to-day the work was done, and the house in the trimmest order. White leaves, just from the oven, were diffusing their fresh yeasty fragrance; the week's ironing hung warm and spotless across the clothes-horse. On the table smoked an exceedingly lonesome cup of tea; and over it leaned the pensive young housekeeper, pretending to do justice to her solitary luncheon.

Her thoughts were away in the snowy woodland with him, her husband; who was doubtless, about this time, eating and drinking chicken and clammy bread and butter. "He might build a fire, and give it a little roast on a stick," she pensively murmured; and then she felt how very glad she should be when night should come, and she could, in many furtive ways, confess to him how sorry she was, how deeply in need of his dear love.

It was nearly three o'clock when, mechanically looking through the window in the direction of the forest, she was surprised to see the dog, David, making for the house in a wavering, uncertain way, as if he had half a mind to turn back to the woods. David had more than once wearied of the monotony of watching wood-chopping, and came to the house an hour or two in advance of his master; so there was nothing startling in his coming now. He scratched at the door in his usual obsequious fashion; darted to devour, when admitted, a morsel of bread and meat; but, quitting it instantaneously, went and sat down before his mistress with the air of having something to say, and began to whine.

David was not a remarkable dog; not at all any dog in particular. He was yellow and undersized, with only a white spot on his forehead by way of ornament; and he was inclined to be lazy. He had come to them, one stormy night, a lame, starving vagrant from some emigrant train, and kind-hearted Roland fed him, put liniment on his leg, and called him David, after a faithful dog he had recently possessed, and lost. And David contentedly remained, exhibiting no marked talent for anything, and sometimes betraying a lack of decent intelligence. His mental faculties had been dwarfed

by persistent ill-treatment. Mr. Hardy thought; the dog seemed to be *cowed*. One peculiarity of his was, that he never asked for food. He was the most unobtrusive, retiring sort of animal that ever yearned for cold meat. If meat came to him, well and good; but he never uttered a whine, or gave one beggerly wag of his tail to indicate that he was hungry. He would not have done it if he was starving. Jenny was all the soul he had in his eyes, and whined like a professional beggar, he was regarded with a good deal of astonishment.

"More dinner, David? Is it possible you have brought yourself to ask for more dinner?"—going to the cupboard and carving a bone for him.

David looked hurt. Nevertheless, he took the bone gently, carried it to his rug in the corner, and left it. That caused Mrs. Hardy to look at the rug, which she had not done before, and then she saw that he had not eaten his dinner. The dog returned to his old position, whining before her as she sat.

"Oh, it is water, then!"

No, it was not water. He retreated from the basin with an air of increased injured feeling, and continued to regard his mistress with appealing eyes. All at once some instinct, penetrated to Jenny's mind, and her heart gave a great leap of fear.

"David! David! Is it your master? Is it Roland?"

The dog made a bounce of joyous relief, as if glad of being understood at last, and trotted to the door, casting a look back at her over his shoulder. If ever a look said plainly, "Come on, that look did."

"I will come, old fellow," said Jenny, going to the wardrobe, and hurriedly getting out some wraps and her fur-lined over-shoes. "Something is the matter with the dog, and it may be that. At any rate, there will be no harm in my running out to the woods," she added, with a nervous little laugh. "Roland need not know how silly I am; I can say that I wanted to find lichens."

The sun was disappearing behind a cold, hazy horizon; a chilly wind whistled the snow-clouds across the level plain, and hurriedly getting out the snows that strove to hide from it, and sent them scudding on again. The still radiance of the winter day was giving place to an early and boisterous night; to such a night that will not be forgotten in that country by living man or woman.

In her stanch overshoes, short cloth skirt, and shaggy walking-jacket, a costume in which she had tramped many a time with her husband on expeditions to the distant post-office, where a blacksmith's shop and a grocery store had put their heads together and declared themselves a city, Mrs. Hardy prepared to start. But she first of all unlocked a small store chest, and excavated from its depths a seaed bottle with "Catawba Grape" written in homely chirography on its deliciously dingy label.

"My dear old father!" she exclaimed, by no means addressing herself to the bottle; but, with dim eyes, thinking of the kind hands that were young hands when they made this wine, which, from its age and strength, was, as a cordial, equal to brandy. The hands were old hands now, capable of little but writing her shaky letters from the dear old homestead. "Who knows but Roland may be past its aid; it's some dreadful accident—but I won't think of it. And who knows but I may meet him trudging homewards; and he will ask me what on earth I have brought out the wine for? But he shan't see it; I will not show it; and to-morrow I shall laugh at myself for these foolish fears."

Talking thus incoherently, but doubtless thinking connectedly enough, she poured out a flaskful of the wine, secured it in her pocket, threw her husband's scarf over her arm, and told David she was ready. At which word the dog gave another appreciative bounce, and fairly flew past her as she opened the door.

But, once in the path leading to the forest, David seemed to have had his brief flicker of intelligence taken out of him. Instead of trotting on and leading his mistress in the right way, following the recorded example of all sensible dogs, he held back shrinkingly, evidently declining to take an active part in the search or to lead it. It was just as though he meant to say, "I have done my part; you go on and do yours."

"You are an awful idiot, David; or else I am!" snapped Jenny. But David only meekly curled his tail and trotted b behind her.

The forest, or the "wood-lot," as Roland called it, catching the word from other settlers, was a good mile away. Mr. Hardy's acres covered an amount of ground that would have turned his late New England neighbors dizzy with its vastness. It would soon yield him an ample return; at present, during these preliminary struggles, it was not much more than a living. But in the event of a certain phantom railroad becoming a real railroad, he would make a speedy fortune.

The path was rough. Roland's boots alone had formed it, tramping backward and forward to his tree-felling. Generally he paced it four times a day, going home for the mid-day dinner. The drifting snow hid treacherous holes that well-nigh went to break Jenny's ankles, as she stumbled on. The wind, growing every moment more violent, pushed her on with a giant hand; sharp needle points of snow smote her neck. "It will be rather sharp going home," she said, shivering, and pulling her scarf closer.

In October she had come to the woods for autumn leaves, and the spot was in a degree familiar to her. But the path seemed to disperse and lose itself after entering the thicker parts; and she had to direct her way by the piles of wood that had been cut in places where the trees could be most conveniently felled. If they had not said those dreadful words to each other! if they were only as they had been yesterday, when Roland loved her, she might not have felt so desperately anxious. How was she to find him? She called again and again, but the wind overpowered her voice.

There was no sound of the axe. As she paused, listening intently, she could hear nothing but the dreary whistle of the blast through the naked trees, and the sharp, sifting sound of the snow as it smote their trunks.

"David, where is Roland?—where is your master? Go and find him this minute!" impatiently menacing the cowering dog in her terror. "Find your master, there's a good dog," she added, in a cooing tone of entreaty, patting the poor animal, who stood before her with drooping head. "Good David! good old dog!"

David went on then. In the lowest natures is sometimes enshrined the pearl of delicate feeling. This dog had had news to tell, and shrank from telling it. He made no pretense to a light-hearted pace. He crept, halted, and seemed anxious to defer something.

(To be continued in our next.)