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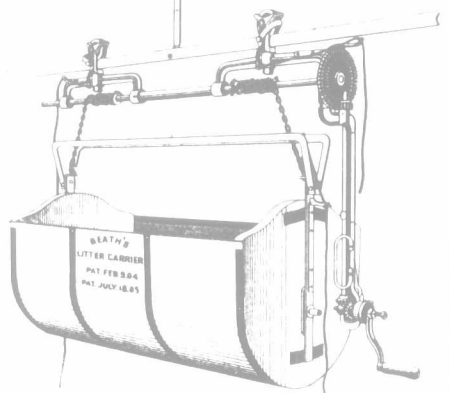
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### The Lady from the City.

By Helen A. Hawley.

"A week!" Sarah Langford exclaimed, in consternation.  
"A week!" Letty echoed, with double emphasis. "You mean over a train of two, mother."

"No, I do not, daughters mine. I mean just what I say. I want to invite her for a week," Mrs. Langford said, an open letter, from which she quoted. "Listen, Mrs. Sheldon writes: 'I am to start on the 30th for a winter in California, and one of the dear wishes of my heart is to make you a call en route. If it will discommode you in the east, please tell me frankly.'"  
"Discommode!" Sarah muttered. "I should think so!"

"She says, 'a call'—that isn't a week," Letty commented.  
The mother still smiled, though a little sadly. "I thought my girls were more hospitable. Betty Sheldon was my dearest girl friend. She was Betty Van Denberg then, and I was Sally Varick. How we prided ourselves on our Dutch blood, and vowed we'd never take English names—foolish young things we were!" Mrs. Langford's eyes grew reminiscent. "I have visited her once in all these years; since then we are both widows. My dearies, I'm sure a week together would be a bit of heart's ease to us both. Mayn't we have it?"

The girls looked ashamed at this appeal.

"Why, of course, mother," Sarah said, "we didn't intend to dictate."

"We just saw the difficulties," Letty gave her mother a whimsical glance. "Entertaining a lady from the city! You've told us many a time how palatially she lived—a dozen servants, while we've none, except the likes of these," she dropped the dish-mop and held up her hands, rosy from the ascending steam. "More trustworthy than hers were, I'm proud to affirm," the mother answered.

"And we'd have to give some kind of a party or reception for her. Society women don't like to stay several days in a place without some fuss made over them. My! I expect her gowns would trail into the front yard; we haven't a room large enough to accommodate them!"

Mrs. Langford laughed at the exaggeration. She was a woman who ruled her own house with firm, though gentle, sway, and she understood these daughters of hers. After the first embarrassments of the situation had been freely aired, they would throw themselves heartily into her plans.

"Well," she asked, "am I to send Mrs. Sheldon a cordial invitation for a week, or shall I mail her a time-table with the quickest connection marked?"

"You dear, absurd mother! To be sure you'll invite her, seeing you want her. If she doesn't like our frugal fare, doubtless she can invent some excuse to cut short her visit," Sarah disdained what she considered the usual fashionable fib.

"The spare room has a feather-bed," mused Letty aloud. "We can't afford to buy a mattress, not even an Ostermoor, much less a hair one. Those we sleep on are too lumpy and too humpy to lend; they ache to be made over, and the ticks have come to mending. Wonder if she'll like feathers?" A hint of malicious emphasis on the "like."

Mrs. Langford's face sobered. "I hadn't thought of that," she confessed. "It is the first real difficulty. I couldn't ask her to be uncomfortable seven nights. Let me think." Mrs. Langford was a person who could find a way. The girls waited.

"I know now. I've heard of an improvised mattress, and they say it makes a most agreeable bed. There are fully two yards left of that new, wide matting I bought enough to patch with. We'll make the feather-bed as smooth and even and flat as possible. Over that we'll lay a width of matting, and on the matting we'll spread the softest, thickest comforter. The springs are in good order. Take my word, it'll be luxurious."

"She'll be sure to find it out. The sheets won't always stay tucked in."

"What if she does?" Betty Sheldon knows we're poor, and we're not going to pose as anything else. But we are going to give her a rich heart welcome. Now, I'll write the invitation."

"Mother looks five years younger," Sarah said, as Mrs. Langford went to her desk.

"Dear mother! I really begin to anticipate the lady from the city. Do you suppose she'll wear her hair pompadour? They say that's going out. I'll be rather nice to see a live fashion-book for once."

"You frivolous Letty! You forget she's as old as mother. No matter how stylish she is, her styles won't suit us." There was a wide space between nineteen and forty-two, in Sarah's estimation.

Apparently the lady from the city had good sense. When the carriage left her at Mrs. Langford's door—for the little station was half a mile away—no procession of baggage waggons piled with Saratogas followed. One trunk of fair proportions had seemed ample for a week's wardrobe. Nor was it necessary to explain that others had gone forward by express across the continent.

Mrs. Langford took her friend in charge after the first greetings, while Sarah and Letty went to give final touches to the tea-table.

"She isn't like what I imagined," Letty said. "I expected she'd be proud and stately. Mother is as dignified as she is, and every bit as good-looking. From a brief survey, I call the lady from the city nice! I don't believe I'll be afraid to ask her about her dresses in a day or two!"

"Better look out for your own, Letty," Sarah was more matter-of-fact. "You're perilously near spilling that salad dressing on your sleeve. 'Twould be too bad to spoil your waist, besides having to come down to plain vinegar on the lettuce the first night."

Upstairs the tongues were not so glib. Eyes smiling through mists looked into each other's depths, as the two clasped hands. So much had gone into, or perhaps gone out of, these women's lives since they met last.

"What sweet, beautiful girls yours are, Sally! You are rich in them. My wealth often seems poverty, now that my husband and my boy are not with me," Mrs. Sheldon spoke with that frankness which at once established the old relation between them. Both had learned that "Man does not live by bread alone." It is a wonderfully equalizing lesson.

"Not that I mean to repine," she continued, cheerily. "How much Letty looks as you used to!"

"Yes," Mrs. Langford answered, caressing the hand she held, "yet she is really more like her father in constitution. The girls are both healthy, I am thankful to say, but Sarah has my old-time endurance."

Over-night guests were a rarity in that cottage home. "Do you suppose mother'll be afraid to have prayers?" Letty whispered to Sarah, the first thing when she awoke next morning. It was another "difficulty" presenting itself.

"Afraid?" There was a touch of scorn in the word. "Was mother ever afraid to do her duty?"

All the same, Letty watched and admired, as with her usual serenity Mrs. Langford read the Word, and offered prayer, with a kindly, special mention of her friend's presence. She watched the friend, too, and heard her low, "Thank you, Sally," as they rose from their knees. Then and there Letty capitulated to the charm of the woman whom money had not spoiled.

Their mother beguiled her guest for an hour, and when Mrs. Sheldon sought her room she found it in perfect order. By that time she knew there was no servant.

"They shall not get the start of me another morning. I know how to make a bed—or I did once," she thought; and the next morning Letty confided rather ruefully to Sarah: "She's found out the secret. She's made it herself."

"Made what?" Sarah stared.

"The bed—of course."

Just then the sweet, clear voice was heard from the sitting-room: "I never slept better; but, do you know, Sally, I was so delighted to find my bed had a feather foundation. Last night was quite crisp, and I did want to try sinking down into the feathers. It brought back the dear old home, and my room with the sloping roof. I had a good mind to call you to come and sleep with me, or lie awake and talk as we did many times when we were girls. Would it have been too silly?"

"Silly! O Betty!"

The girls listened involuntarily.

"To think I objected to her coming!" Sarah said.

"To think we objected," corrected her.



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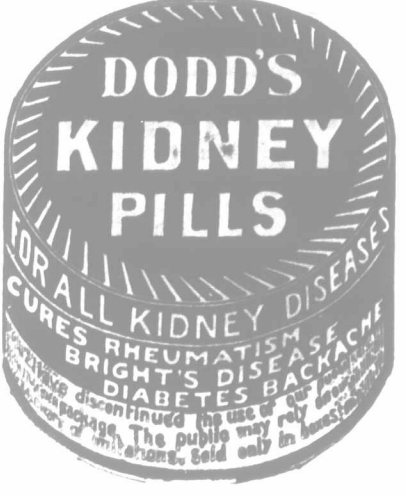
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