

## No Room at the Inn

(By Martha Rayner in Mother's Magazine)

Young Mrs. Dillon, with her arms full of Christmas packages, rushed up the steps of her trim little house on Haliday street. Inside, she could hear the telephone ringing insistently. The key refused to go into the lock, the door stuck, and the packages showered in all directions—but the phone was still ringing when she reached it. "Hello—yes—yes—this is Laura Dillon," she replied quite out of breath. "Sally Funk? Have we any room? Why, yes—" rather hesitatingly. "Just you and Henry?"

"No, the children are with us," came the voice at the other end. "We've been phoning and phoning ever since we got here, but everything in town seems to be full, and I don't know what to do."

"But do you suppose I could make you comfortable?" faltered Mrs. Dillon. "We've just that one room, you know."

"Oh, the children can sleep on the floor, or anywhere," Mrs. Funk assured her. "We won't make a bit of trouble. I told Henry you wouldn't let us sleep in the street."

"Oh, no, of course not!" gasped Mrs. Dillon.

"Well, we'll be right up as soon as we get some dinner. Good-by."

Young Mrs. Dillon, realizing that her own faintly murmured "good-by" had fallen upon thin air, hung up the telephone receiver with a feeling of complete helplessness in the hands of fate. "Oh, dear," she said as she bent to pick up her scattered parcels. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

It was a quarter to six by the little clock on the mantel-piece, and promptly on the hour Mr. Dillon was due to arrive with a very immediate appetite. Ordinarily, it would have been a tragic thing to be so late in starting dinner, but in the present crisis that fact seemed of minor importance. Mrs. Dillon turned on all the lights and gazed about her cozy rooms with anxious eyes. The well chosen rugs, the gleaming polished floors, furniture of shining walnut with soft tapestry upholstery—every thing was in perfect order, without spot or blemish. "Oh, dear," said young Mrs. Dillon

again. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Still seared upon her memory, was the picture of that hectic week, some six years before, when she had helped Sally Funk move from the house across the street. She felt tired even yet when she thought about it. Sally Funk had always been a very neighborly person, but her ideas of neighborliness had quite frequently resulted in considerable inconvenience to others. Mrs. Dillon pondered over this as she put on the tea-kettle and hurried to set the table. If she could only finish that before Warren came, he would think the dinner was almost ready. When she heard his step on the porch she flew to open the door for him.

"Oh, Warren, what do you think?" she cried. "The Funks are in town, and they're coming up here to spend the night."

"Well, that's cheerful news. How did you happen to ask them?" he inquired in tones of disgust.

"I didn't Warren, but she called up and said they'd been phoning and phoning, and couldn't find any place to stay."

"Well, why didn't they go to a hotel? All the hotels can't be full."

"Oh, I suppose they thought the hotels were too expensive."

"It's not our fault if the hotels are too expensive for them, is it? And there must be plenty of boarding-houses."

"Yes, I know, Warren," sighed Mrs. Dillon. "but what could I do? Probably none of the boarding-houses would take them with the children."

"Children! Well of all the nerve. How many children?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Warren; she hung up before I could ask her. They only had one when they moved away, but she distinctly said the children were with them." She sighed tragically.

"Must have at least two, then," growled Warren, "and I'll bet they're noisy, dirty little beggars. They'll be all over the house—just ruin everything." He, too, was gazing about their charming, well-kept rooms appreciatively.

"Yes, I know Warren," sighed Mrs. Dillon. "but what could I do?"

"Well, I'll bet I would have told them where they got off. I suppose we can stand it for one night. They can't do much damage in their sleep." He buried himself in the evening paper, and Mrs. Dillon made all haste with the dinner.

Just as they had finished eating, the guests arrived. They sounded like a regiment ascending the front steps, and when they came streaming in, it was quite evident that Mr. Dillon's estimate had been too low. There were three children. Mrs. Funk was one of those double-chinned persons, well uphoistered like an over-stuffed davenport. She kissed Mrs. Dillon effusively and proclaimed that she was nothing short of an angel to take them all in. The Dillons helped them struggle out of their wraps in an overwhelmed silence. Almost immediately the whole house seemed to swarm with children. Gwendolyn, aged eight, who had enjoyed the distinction of being the baby when the Funks moved away from Haliday street, devoted herself to an investigation of the Dillon bookshelves. One after another, she pulled out volumes, skimmed through them for pictures with a practical and sticky hand, and piled them about her on chairs or floors, open or closed as the fancy struck her. Henry, Jr., age five, and Artie, aged three, discarded a varied assortment of toys, and began a spirited scramble for the possession of a small fur rug that lay in front of the fireplace. The fur flew, but their fond parents were quite oblivious. Mr. Funk, a thin, meek-faced man, who seemed completely eclipsed by the rest of his family, settled himself in the nearest armchair and looked about him mildly.

"Well, well, Dillon," he said, rubbing his hands together appreciatively, "it seems good to see you again. Nice little place you have here, too. All you need now is some children to sort of liven things up for you."

Mr. Dillon did not reply. He was too busy listening to Mrs. Funk's explanation of their visit.

"We think we've sold the house here at last," she was saying. "It's been so unsatisfactory renting it with us so far away—took just about everything that came in for repairs, and running down all the time, of course. So when he had this offer, I just said to him that we'd all pick up and come along for a trip. He could settle up the business, and I would do some shopping, and the children could see the city stores in holiday time. I don't think we'll be here more than a week."

Mrs. Dillon's eyes signaled her husband in a sort of panic. A week! Why she

never could stand this noise and confusion for a week; she never could cook enough for so many for a whole week. Breakfast and possibly luncheon, would have been bad enough—but a whole week—and at Christmas too. Why, it was only four days to Christmas, and there were endless things yet to be done. She and Warren were invited out to Christmas dinner to be sure, but there were all the gifts to tie up, and candy to be made (that always took the best part of two days) and there was the house to decorate—Christmas was their special time of celebration, the anniversary of their engagement. Oh, it was impossible to have these people for a week. Surely Warren would set his foot down about it. Now was the time.

But Warren's attention had been momentarily distracted to the scene of the boys and the fur rug. He was picking up a lustily howling Artie from the spot where he had landed an instant before with a resounding thump and the tail of the luckless animal. Henry Jr. stood quite unmoved, the remainder of the twany skin clutched to his breast, and an expression of angelic innocence in his big gray eyes.

Her mother laughed, "Why, Junior," she said in amused reproof—"don't you know you mustn't try to take things away from Artie? Give him the rug right away!"

"But, mother, Artie's spoiled their (Continued on page ten)



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