

The Making Over of Sunrise Farm

By E. G. Bayne

Nancy Hartman settled herself comfortably in the big rocker by the coal stove and took up her knitting.

"Now, I ain't goin' to stir out of this till supper time," she said decidedly and fetched a sigh of relief. "Bein' a farmer's wife is sure no cinch—on your feet from four in the mornin' an' no let-up till along 'bout two in the afternoon, Cy! Now, you mind an' wipe them feet of yours afore you set foot in this here room!"

Cyrus out in the kitchen changed his cowhide boots for easy slippers, and presently entered the cosy sitting-room, yesterday's Winnipeg morning paper in one hand and his old spectacle-case in the other.

"Fine weather fer ducks, eh Ma?" he queried good-humoredly. "You an' me had oughter be durn glad we don't hev to turn out a day like this."

It was, indeed, a raw, wet, altogether disagreeable spring day with an east wind that sent a wet drizzle whipping against the window-panes and bent a row of thin poplar, along the fence, almost double.

"It'd be jest my luck, though," Nancy observed, as she drew up a fresh leash of yarn with a broad sweeping movement of her left arm. "Jest my luck to be called over to Brown's to see a sick child or down to Jake Willis' place to doctor up old Sairey Ann's rheumatiz."

"That's cuz you're the best home nurse in the province," returned Cy, promptly. "Anybody that can do things better'n the average run is sure to be called on. Now, if you hadn't gone an' married an old rooster like me you might a' been head matron of a big hospital by now, or else—"

The telephone bell cut in upon Cy's voice.

"Now, who on airth—" he was beginning.

Nancy stopped counting stitches and laid her work down.

"That's Jim Bank's ring—two long an' two short," she said, rising. "I guess it's Amelia callin' up to get that recipe for shortbread I promised her."

She went to the telephone and took down the receiver, while Cy paused in the act of turning a sheet of his paper to listen to the one-sided conversation.

"Hello! Yes, this is Hartman's. . . . Yes, I thought it was Banks'. . . . You don't say! . . . Well, well, that sure is too bad, Jim. . . . How did it happen? . . . Well, I ain't a bit surprised, so there! I always said as how them cellar steps 'd be the means of a broken—What's that? . . . Can't you get someone else, Jim? . . . Oh well, I guess I could, then. Cy ain't no great hand at cookin', but I guess he won't poison himself for a day. Well, I'm glad she's restin' easier. . . . Yes, I'll go right down. Good-bye."

Nancy hung up the receiver and turned to Cy. "Do you think you could rustle your own grub for a day or two, Cy? Mely Banks fell down the cellar steps this mornin' an' broke her leg an' the doctor says it'll be a six-weeks' session in bed for her. Jim wants me to run down an' stay with them till he can git help—"

"Sure, I can git along! Take the sorrel mare, Nance. She goes twicet as fast as the gray. Wait—I'll go an' hitch her while you git ready. But now, see here Nance, jest a word: Don't you go to workin' yourself sick fer Jim Banks! Remember that he's worth a cool twenty thousand!"

"Oh, never fear, Cy. There ain't nobody can tell me anything 'bout Jim I don't know already. Ain't Mely my own first cousin?"

Nancy hurriedly packed a small grip, and in less than ten minutes was on her way to Sunrise Farm, eight miles to the east. She was a plump, good-looking woman, well set up, and with a keen though kindly eye, and she was fifteen years younger than her husband, whose second wife she was. Two compelling motives had called her out of her comfortable home on a day like this, the call of the suffering to which never yet had she turned a deaf ear, and her love for little folks. Jim Banks had six children, three of them still at home, and Nancy being childless herself never lost an opportunity to play fairy godmother to

other folks' little ones. In the back of the buggy she hadn't forgotten to put, hurried as she was, a large bag of sugar cookies and some real maple sugar that had been sent to her from Ontario.

Amelia was in bed in the "spare room" off the parlor, and Jim, in his well-meant, masculine effort to be useful, had built such a roaring fire in the seldom-used hall stove that most of the house was filled with smoke.

"Land sakes!" was Mely's feeble greeting, as she recognized her cousin through the blue haze. "So you did git here, Nance! I didn't want Jim to tell you 'bout this, knowin' how busy you always be, but he was set on havin' you. Poor Jim, he's as helpless as a baby without me."

"Jim tells me your seedin' is over," said Nancy, as she tied on a clean apron.

"Yes, an' aint it lucky? I had three men to cook for up till yesterday."

"An' no help?"

"Where can you git help nowadays, Nance! 'Course, Dolly helped some, but her bein' only eight, she—"

"I suppose the children aren't home from school yet?"

"Well, Fred didn't go to-day. He's out in the barn helpin' Jim. Dolly an' Marjorie they'll be home soon now. I think four o'clock's just struck. Now Nance,

don't you git to tirin' yourself out. I hope this ain't puttin' you out—"

"Quit fussin' now, Mely! I been here afore. Guess I know where things is kept. I'm goin' to make you some nice chicken broth right away. I'll have Jim kill a good, fat hen—"

"We're savin' all the fowl this year, Nance, to sell—"

"You hush right up Mely Banks!"

"But—"

"Not a word!"

Mely pleaded a corner of the sheet in thin, hot fingers. A hen to be killed on her account! Why only last night Jim had told her they would have to retrench more than ever.

"A hen costs a heap nowadays, Nance," she began, after a moment, her eyes following Nancy as she bustled about, putting the room to rights. "There's Oxo tablets in the pantry. I like Oxo broth real well. Jim an' me we're—we're sort of economizin' this year—"

"Economizin', eh?" snorted Nancy, turning around sharply. "Queer sort of economizin' I call it, with Jim buyin' a new driver not a month ago an' puttin' in them fancy fixin's in the barn an' a second cement root-cellar he ain't no call for, while that kitchen of yours—oh, I had a peep into it afore I come in!"

"Kitchen?" echoed Amelia, weakly. "Oh, yes; I know it ain't been improved any, but it's only the kitchen, Nance. I—"

"It's where you spend close on to fourteen hours a day, jest the same! But

there, I sure didn't mean to fire up so quick, an' git you worked up when the doctor said you was to be kept quiet. Lay your head over more on to the pillow an' try to git some sleep now. I'll pull down the blind. There!"

And Nancy went out to the kitchen. She stood for a moment on the threshold looking about her.

"Economy?" she murmured, with a doleful shake of her head. "They ain't got no notion of economy."

This was the scene of poor Mely's daily grind. Here nearly two-thirds of her life was lived, for, allowing the customary twenty-four hours to a day, the average farmer's wife sleeps rather less than six hours, though medical science and her own common sense tell her that she ought to sleep for eight hours, at least.

The kitchen was badly lighted. The floor was clean but uneven, being made of soft wood that had sprung and warped here and there. The wallpaper was at least twelve years old and looked twenty. There was a three-inch step between kitchen and dining-room. The small, narrow pantry was as dark as a wolf's mouth, having, of course, no window.

"An' don't I know it!" thought Nancy. "When I was here the time Marjorie was born, I went in there to git a handful of dried apples an' I run my arm up to the elbow in a stone jar of soap lye by mistake!"

There was no refrigerator, no inside pump, no place sufficiently roomy in which to hang clothes on a stormy day,



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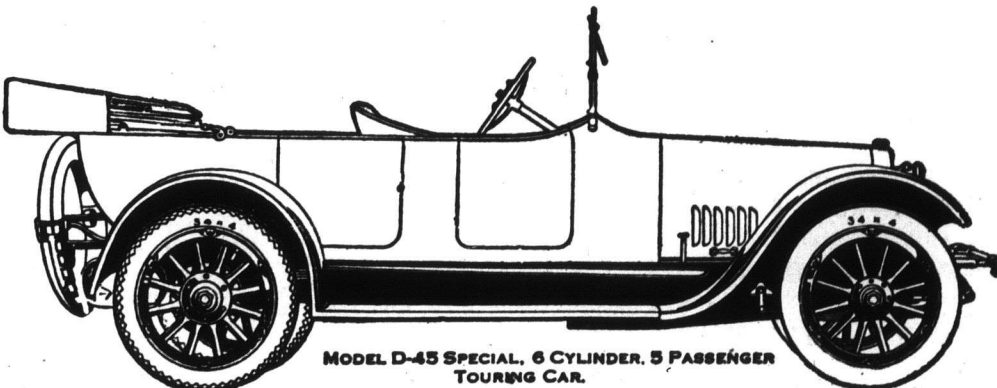
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