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Jim Hurst's New House

Written for The Western Home Monthly by S. G. Mosher

YOUNG Mrs. Hurst knelt before the cedar chest that contained her wedding presents, and from one corner took a parcel carefully wrapped. Opening it she gazed fondly at the richly chased silver teapot which it contained. There were other articles in the chest—table-cloths of handsome double damask, and linen sheets and towels and napkins, all with hand-worked initials. Mrs. Hurst took down a tin of silver polish from the shelf behind the kitchen stove, and was cleaning the teapot when her husband came in.

"Jack Dalrymple brought the mail, and from the look of the sack I guess those seed potatoes from the Experimental Farm must have come at last."

He untied the sack as he spoke, and shook its contents out on the table. Besides the potatoes, some newspapers, and a catalogue, there were two letters. Jim handed one to his wife.

"From Isabel; and this is from the machinery company. I suppose full of new excuses as to why they don't send the plow I ordered."

Mrs. Hurst opened her letter. It was from her husband's older sister, who lived in England, and was a well known writer. All three of Jim's sisters had married rich men. His own people had not been wealthy, however, and his share of his father's estate was just sufficient to bring him to Canada and start him on a half section farm. When he married, two years later, his sisters had all sent handsome presents to his bride. These were expensive and quite unsuitable to a young couple just starting housekeeping on the western prairie, but Jim knew that his sisters did not understand conditions in a new country.

"O, Jim, Isabel writes that she is coming to visit us. She is run down as a result of war work, and the doctor has recommended a sea voyage. She will leave England about a month after the date of this letter."

"That's fine; I shall be awfully glad to see Isabel again. We have not seen each other for seven years."

"But don't you see how impossible it is that she should come here? I know from her letters that she has no conception of what life out here is like. Besides, where can we put her? We have only the two rooms."

"The new house will be finished before she comes," Jim said hopefully. "And you can hire Rita Dalrymple to help you with the work while she is here."

"What would your sister think of a half-breed maid, who insists on sitting down to dinner with the family, and who wears a soiled party dress in the morning?"

"Oh, she will think it one of the customs of the country. And you must

remember that though Isabel's husband is a rich man, and she earns a good deal by her writing, yet she has known poverty, and can wash dishes and make beds. Just as soon as seeding is over I shall start work on the new house. But I must get these potatoes planted this afternoon."

When her husband had gone out Eva finished cleaning the teapot, then she carefully rolled it up and replaced it in the cedar chest. She had meant to send it to the jeweller in Calgary who had already bought almost all of her wedding silver, and with the money so obtained buy a pump for the well. They had managed so far with a pulley, but now that they had thirty head to water, Jim often said he wished he could afford a pump. But now she must use the silver teapot while her sister was visiting her. She hoped Isabel would not make enquiries about the rest of the silver.

That afternoon she went out to look over the new house. Though only a five roomed log structure, it was a great improvement on their present abode. Jim had been prevented from finishing it by lack of funds, and now that he had the lumber for the interior finish, help was hard to get. Then the house must be painted and papered, and they would need some furniture. Eva did not see where this money was to come from, and she spoke about it at supper that night.

"Now, don't worry," Jim answered. "I can get the paper and paint on time. As for the furniture, I can sell a steer."

"I have a good mind to let Cousin May, in Calgary, have those linen sheets," Eva said thoughtfully. "There are three pairs, and she would pay ten dollars a pair. I could get curtains and such like with the money. But Isabel will wonder what has become of all my wedding presents."

"Before you have known Isabel a week you will be telling her all about it," Jim said confidently.

That night Jim was awakened by smoke, and found the shack in flames. There was just time to waken his wife and save the contents of the building before the roof fell in. Fortunately the fire did not spread to the other buildings. The nearest neighbors were over a mile distant, and Eva would not hear of waking them up. It was now after three o'clock, and would be dawn in less than two hours. They took refuge in the granary, where Jim rolled himself in a blanket and was soon asleep, but Eva sat shivering, waiting the coming of daylight. Her head ached and she felt dizzy, but she shook off the feeling of illness, for the coming day would be a busy one. Of course they would have to live in the granary until the new house was finished.

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