

# Tom Spencer's Match

By HILDA RICHMOND

"Abbie! Abbie! How could you be so careless?" were the first words Mrs. Spencer heard as she opened her eyes and, with a shudder and a groan caused by the pain in her leg, returned to consciousness. "I'm astonished at you."

The poor woman said nothing, but tears of pain and mortification rolled down her cheeks, and the doctor who was working over the injured leg gave Tom Spencer a look that should have withered him. "It wasn't carelessness, Mrs. Spencer," he said quietly, "the cistern is a death trap and it is a wonder you escaped as easily as you did. For a man of your circumstances to allow his wife to get a painful injury through carelessness, Tom Spencer, is a shame." Mrs. Spencer was again unconscious and he felt he could say what he pleased. "She'll get a rest now, anyway!"

"My wife has a comfortable home and plenty to eat and wear," said Tom Spencer indignantly. "To hear you talk one would think I beat her or starved her."

"You'll meet your match some day," said the doctor seeing signs of returning consciousness in his patient. "You'll have to get a trained nurse to look after your wife and see that this room is kept warm enough but not overheated."

"A trained nurse!" gasped Tom. "I can't afford a trained nurse. I thought of getting Sarah Ellen Green."

"A trained nurse is cheaper than a funeral," said the physician briefly. "You can take your choice."

Sarah Ellen Green positively refused to minister to the stricken household and she said so in no uncertain words. "I know all about you, Tom Spencer!" she said grimly. "Weighing out three pounds of butter for your wife to use. I don't put my head into no trap like that. It takes good milk and cream and butter and eggs to keep house with, and I can get my three dollars a week and nothing said about skimping and saving. No, thank you!"

Mr. Spencer walked out with his head high in the air, and he remarked that Sarah Ellen Green wasn't the only person in the world who did housework, but when he had made the rounds of the whole community and had interviewed everybody he began to be discouraged. The kindly neighbors took turns staying with Mrs. Spencer until help could be found, and the three children had been sent to their grandmother's, but such a state of affairs could not last always. Moreover, it was very expensive to allow wasteful women to conduct the affairs of the household—he had succeeded in eleven years of married life in partially training his wife in habits of economy—and he wanted to get back to some sort of system. Finally his second cousin, Mrs. Lettie Nelson, said she would come for accommodation, provided he would get a trained nurse, and this the worried man was forced to do.

"Lettie, you know expenses are awful heavy just now," he said as that capable woman tied a big blue-checked gingham apron over her dress and prepared to lay hands on the articles strewn about the disorderly kitchen. "Try to be as saving as you can."

"Trust me for that, Tom," said Mrs. Nelson. "I pride myself on my economy."

That afternoon as Mr. Spencer started to town she handed him a list of things to buy, as the household supplies were never very well kept up, and in the days when various ladies prepared meals everything had run down sadly.

"Be sure to get the Golden Star coffee, Tom," she said. "I see Abbie has been using the Silver Blend. The Star is three cents cheaper on the pound and it's just as good. And bring a pail of that baking molasses, for it's better for sweetening than sugar and costs less. Sugar's awful high just now."

Mr. Spencer beamed with delight as he found his grocery bill thirty-five cents less than it would have been had he gone to his regular place of dealing. Mrs. Nelson knew of a "bargain" store where things were very cheap, and he resolved, as he handed the money over the counter, to have done forever with high-priced

stores. To be sure the place was untidy and the supplies looked doubtful, but they were much cheaper than elsewhere, and that was the main thing.

"I don't know that I like this coffee, Lettie," he said at supper time as he looked at the thin, weak liquid. "It doesn't taste right."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Nelson sharply. "I don't believe in letting my appetite rule me. I like this coffee," and she took a sip from her cup with evident enjoyment. "I'll ask Miss Harrison how Abbie liked the coffee this evening." She soon brought out the report that Mrs. Spencer thought her cup unusually good, so the man of the house felt sure his appetite was a little off that evening.

"Will you have some syrup on your cakes, Tom," asked Mrs. Nelson next morning. She was baking doubtful-looking corn cakes on the griddle over the slow fire, and Mr. Spencer saw nothing else for breakfast.

"Why, yes, I guess so. Abbie usually had meat and potatoes for breakfast, Lettie."

"Yes, and look at what you've said about your expenses. Corn cakes are

"There's no need to throw money away like that, Tom. Winter is your slack time and you may as well put in your leisure carrying in wood and water. This wood box holds a good supply and you can fill it every day right after breakfast. I never did go out in the snow after wood and I never will. It's a man's place to do such work."

"I—I think the children bring in wood for Abbie," said Tom, slowly rising from his insufficient breakfast and going to his tasks. It took an hour to carry enough water for the family washing and to fill the wood box, and then he discovered that there was no more wood cut and ready for use, so he prepared to spend the rest of the day at that work. There was no wood house in which to work and it was cold and stormy out of doors, but there was nothing else to do, as the wash boiler remained on the stove all day and consumed wood like a furnace. He longed to rest his aching limbs by the comfortable fire in the sitting room, but every time he set foot in there the nurse or Mrs. Nelson found some pretext for dislodging him.

"Don't use that boiler again, Lettie."

## THE FARMER

You may tell of the world's great heroes;  
Of its conquering men of might;  
Whose deeds of old in stone are told,  
And their claim to heaven-sent right.  
But there's nothing in all the story  
That for virtue can compare  
With the strength and skill of those who fill,  
The needs that all men share.  
So here's to the man whose labor  
A goodly harvest yields;  
For better than they who rule or slay,  
Are the men who fill the fields.

The crowds in our busy cities  
Year in, year out may toil;  
But they all depend for their labor's end  
On the workers of the soil.  
So all the skilful trading  
And the wondrous works of thought,  
Should not avail should the harvest fail  
Where the farmers' hands have wrought.  
So here's to the men whose labor  
A kindly harvest yields;  
For better than they who rule or slay,  
Are the men who fill the fields.

Our earth is wide and wealthy;  
But few its sons must be  
If the fruitful land uncultured stand,  
While they wander, labor-free.  
So home, and art, and knowledge—  
The best that life can win—  
Can only grow where the plow shall go,  
And with seedtime thought begin.  
So here's to the men whose labor  
A precious harvest yields;  
For better than they who rule or slay,  
Are the men who fill the fields.

M. H. S.

Hastings Coulee, Alta.

very nourishing, and with syrup on them they will stay by you till dinner time. Meat is too expensive for breakfast."

"What makes the fire pop and sizzle so, Lettie?"

"It's the hole in this wash boiler," remarked Mrs. Nelson. "That is the reason the cakes bake so slowly. The water runs into the fire box and puts out the fire. By the way, Tom, you may fill the barrel at the back door with rain water for me. It hurts my back to bend over and dip up water."

"I'm going to get a pump for that cistern the first time I go to town," said the man of the house firmly. "I meant to do it long ago and just put it off."

"I'll buy a new one," he said as he saw her bringing it out the next morning. "It wastes more wood than anything."

"Wood is cheap, and it's good exercise to get it ready. And, anyway, I must wash this morning. An invalid in the house makes a lot of extra work."

Hard work with the axe in the cold reduced Tom to absolute weakness and he sought the house for food and warmth. "I can't wait till dinner time, Lettie. I'm starved. Have you any crullers or pies?"

"Crullers! Pies! They are unhealthy and expensive. It isn't healthy to eat between meals, but if you think you can't

wait there's cold corn bread and syrup in the cupboard."

"Where is the butter?" he inquired, getting out a forlorn chunk of cold corn bread and a dish to hold the thick, black compound that he had heard fifty times at least was cheaper than anything else one could buy. "I don't care much for syrup."

"The allowance is gone and we'll have no more until I churn. It seems to me, Tom, that your appetite is getting very delicate that you can't eat good food. You told me you wanted me to save, and then you find fault with everything I do."

"Abbie used to—"

"Yes, but look what Abbie spent. She told me just the other day that she never gave you a list that you didn't grumble over it, and you haven't done that since I've been here. No woman likes to have a man finding fault and growling all the time."

Fifteen minutes later Tom Spencer threw down his axe and started to town in the wagon, and the first place he sought was a good restaurant. "Give me some sausage and cakes and ham and eggs," he ordered, and then and there he made his first square meal in days. Refreshed, he rose and paid his bill without a feeling of ill treatment and hurried to the hardware store where he laid in enough utensils to astonish his wife, but he left the back part of the wagon free, and later loaded it full of coal. Then he drove home and burst in upon the astonished Mrs. Nelson with a new wash boiler and several other new utensils.

"Have you lost your senses?" she gasped as he took the offending wash boiler from the stove and unceremoniously pitched it into the back yard.

"No, I've just found them. I wonder if we could take the fire out of here and put up the new stove at once. Hereafter we're going to burn coal. I'm nearly frozen with this poor wood."

"I've tried to do my best and it doesn't please you," said Mrs. Nelson with her apron over her head. "Before you do anything else take me home. You said your wife was extravagant and now you don't like the way I do. I only came for accommodation and I'll leave if my ways don't suit you."

Of course Tom Spencer begged her to stay and finally she said she would a little longer. "It's all folly getting those things," she said over and over, "and I knew just how to manage with the old ones. I'm afraid you'll wind up in the poorhouse, Tom."

Tom Spencer rejoiced to think he could take a vacation from the wood chopping, and he joyfully hauled coal until he had a respectable heap in the back yard. To be sure it was out in the snow and the mud, but he determined as soon as Lettie Nelson went home to build a coal house. He was sick and tired of the word economy, and in his heart he resolved never to say it again when his wife was well. The meals still continued on the saving order, though he bought a lot of good things unsolicited, and he longed for the time when the capable cousin could go back to her own home. As often as he could he ate in town, but she kept him on the move doing things for her so that he rarely had the chance to make his escape.

"Lettie has offered to stay after I get about and show me her ways, Tom," said Mrs. Spencer to her husband during one of his visits to the sitting room as she began to improve. "She says she can teach me how to save—"

"Abbie, I never want to hear that word again," said Mr. Spencer solemnly. "I have had it for breakfast, dinner and supper since your accident and many times in between, and I am sick and tired of it. Have I worried you to death with my constant talks about economy?"

"Tom," said a voice at the door, "there's a man out here with a new corn sheller. I hope you haven't spent a lot of money for some new-fangled contraption."

"Lettie, he's thoroughly repentant," said Mrs. Spencer, unable to keep the

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