

The Fireside.

HOW THE PARSONAGE WAS PAPERED.

SUSAN HUBBARD MARTIN.

The little parsonage stood bleak and cheerless in the wintry sunlight. A window was open, and the February wind, sweeping through the empty rooms, rattled a torn shade that had been left there by the last tenants. Deacon Cummings and the Sunday-school superintendent stood viewing the cottage with speculative eyes.

"There's the salary to raise," the deacon was saying, "and the extra expense of the new furnace must be met. No, we'll have to let the parsonage go. I know it does need papering, but we've our hands more than full already."

The Sunday-school superintendent looked more than disappointed.

"I think we could manage it," he suggested mildly, "if—"

"No, we can't!" put in the deacon, decidedly. The parsonage 'll have to go as it is."

"But his wife's an invalid," persisted the Sunday-school superintendent, still more mildly, for, like all the rest of the church members, he stood greatly in awe of the determined deacon.

"Yes, she is," the deacon assented, a little reluctantly. "Hasn't been able to do a thing for over a year." "That's why they're coming West. Well, it's hard for a pastor on a small salary to have a sick wife. Hard for him and the children. I should like to see the parsonage papered, but it's quite out of the question. The sun comes in finely at the windows, that's one consolation, and soap and water is another. They'll have to put up with things as they find 'em. It's all we can do to raise the salary."

A moment later the two men walked away, leaving Lily Maude standing by her scrub pail. Lily Maude was washing the floor. She had been hired by the committee for that purpose. The last minister had been unmarried, and the parsonage had been rented. But with his departure a new order of things was being brought about. A new pastor was coming, and with him an invalid wife and three small children. And Lily Maude was to scrub and wash windows and woodwork, to make ready for the new occupants.

Lily Maude was pale and small and stoop-shouldered. Her hair was colorless, and her blue eyes, her only beauty, looked out serenely upon a world that had never been an easy one to her, for Lily Maude's mother was dead and her father a cripple. Lily Maude made the living now for both. She was only sixteen, yet her small hands were already calloused and toil hardened.

"And the new minister's wife hasn't been able to do a thing for over a year." Lily Maude had heard what the deacon had said, and she knew something of what it meant. She had been used to sickness all her life. Was not her father helpless now, and had not her mother been an invalid for three years?

She looked up at the grimly walls regretfully; then, taking her broom, she walked into the small bedroom. Here the walls looked worse than ever. There were soiled finger-marks upon them, and some one had torn from them strips of paper, laying bare the plastering.

"And she hasn't been able to do a

thing for over a year, and will have to lie here in a room like this," thought Lily Maude. "It's too bad!" I'm afraid it will make her worse instead of better."

She leaned on her broom-handle meditatively. "If I could only do something," she whispered slowly. "I believe," she added, "I believe I'll try. This room has to be fixed some way."

By noon the next day Lily Maude's work was done. The floors were clean, the windows shining, the woodwork spotless. She had done her best. As she turned the key upon the house, her thin face was full of purpose. She hurried down the walk, a shabby little figure in her worn shirt and jacket. Her hands were bare, and the sharp winter wind had already made them blue. But Lily Maude was not thinking of anything so small as her own discomfort. She was used to facing cold winds; used to scanty fare and shabby clothes; used to hard work and poverty and deprivation.

She walked rapidly until she turned into the principal business street; then she slackened her pace, halting at a certain shop door. Here samples of wall paper were displayed in the windows, together with a number of cans of paint and a few picture frames. Lily Maude entered. In the rear of the shop some one was busily working. It was Horatio Robinson, the proprietor.

He looked up at Lily Maude. "How do you do?" he said, cordially. "What can I do for you?"

Lily Maude flushed a little. "I came to see you about papering a bedroom," she replied, shyly, "but I haven't any money. It's a room at the parsonage," she added. "The minister's wife is coming there to live, and she's sick. I heard them talking about it. The church don't feel able to do anything, and I—I just can't stand it to think of her going into a room like that!"

She looked up, with the flush still on her face. "I can scrub, Mr. Robinson, and I can wash," she went on, shyly, "and I thought—for I studied it all out—that perhaps you might let me work for your wife to pay for it. Will it cost very much?"

Horatio Robinson looked down into the small face.

"That depends upon the quality of the paper," he answered, kindly. "If it's cheap—"

"But it must not be cheap," broke in Lily Maude, hastily. "It must be pretty and bright; not too bright, you know, but something that will be pleasant to look at."

"How's this, then?" said Mr. Robinson, taking down a roll of paper from the shelf above him. "You'll have to wash a good many days, though, to pay for this," he added, shrewdly. "Perhaps you wouldn't like that?"

But Lily Maude's hands were clasped. She was looking at the paper. "Oh, I shouldn't mind that at all!" she answered quickly. "I'm used to washing, and that paper—it's beautiful, Mr. Robinson. Will you really paper the room and let me work for you?"

Horatio Robinson looked at her kindly. He was a sharp business man, but he had a good heart, nevertheless.

"I don't see how I can refuse you," he said, smiling. "When people show

their disposition to do their part, I like to do mine. So, you like the paper, do you? Well, your taste is good, for its the handsomest thing I have."

"It's lovely," said Lily Maude, dreamily, still gazing at it. "Oh, I hope she'll be pleased."

Mr. Robinson was touched. He looked at the slight figure, and something rose in his throat.

"I'll do the work for you to-morrow," he said. "It isn't every one I'd do it for, but you're a brave girl."

Lily Maude grew radiant. "Thank you! thank you!" she cried, gratefully. "And I'll work my very best for your wife!" she added quickly.

"I'm not afraid of that," was the answer. "You can go up to see her this afternoon and talk it over. She won't work you hard," he added. She's not that kind.

"I don't mind work," replied Lily Maude, blithely, "as long as I can please folks. Here's the key, Mr. Robinson. It's the bedroom off the sitting-room. That's to be her room. I heard the ladies talking about it." Lily Maude smiled again, and hurried out.

The man looked after her thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, as he turned to his work, "I like a spirit like that. There's some promise to a girl of that kind, and some Christianity. Willing to scrub and wash to pay for papering a room for somebody that's sick. That's religion. Such a frail little creature as she is, too! I think I'll go to hear that new preacher when he comes. I'm interested in his family already, and I'll do my best work on that papering, as sure as my name is Horatio Robinson."

The room was finished, and Lily Maude stood by it in awed admiring silence. Mr. Robinson had himself added a handsome border. The unsightly walls were hidden, and Lily Maude's heart was full of joy.

"Isn't it beautiful," she cried, ecstatically. "And, oh, I'm so glad, so glad to think I could do it."

The door opened. Lily Maude looked up and saw Deacon Cummings.

"Well, Lilly," he began, pleasantly, "you did your work very well, I see. Everything as clean as a new pin."

Just then his eyes fell on the newly papered walls. "Whose work is this?" he demanded.

Lily Maude turned pale.

"Mr. Robinson's, sir," she faltered.

"Yes, yes, but who is to pay for it?"

Lily Maude looked up bravely. "I am, sir," she answered. "I'm going to scrub and wash for Mrs. Robinson until it's all cleared up. You see, sir," she went on, timidly, "I heard them tell about the minister's wife being so sick and not able to do anything, and all that, and these walls looked so bad I was afraid when she saw them she'd get worse. Things like that trouble sick people a good deal. I know, for I've been with them all my life. I hope you don't mind my doing it, sir?"

The deacon looked down upon Lily Maude in her worn and shabby dress. Then, like Horatio Robinson, he felt something rise in his throat.

"No, no, Lily," he said, huskily, "you did right, quite right." He went hastily out into the next room.

The whole parsonage was papered, and out of the deacon's own pocket at that. Then somehow the story of what Lily Maude had done crept out, and others went to work. A carpet was put down that matched the bedroom walls. Rich old Mrs. James, hitherto not noted for her liberality, opening her



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heart and her purse-strings, sent over a beautiful brass bed. Some one else added the coverings, and kindly hands hung dimity curtains at the windows and spread a rug on the floor. Easy chairs and pictures completed the pretty room, and an ideal resting place for an invalid, so fresh was it and so attractive.

"Tired, Margaret?"

A little, dearest."

The minister's wife tried to smile, but the effort was a failure. The jolting of the train jarred on the tired nerves, and through the car window the prospect was not alluring. Long stretches of buffalo grass flashed by, interspersed with white patches of alkali; and every turn of the car wheels was taking her farther from her old home. Still, if she could only get well! And wonderful recoveries were made in the pure, invigorating climate to which they were hurrying.

Yet how she dreaded it all! New scenes, strange faces, and perhaps the new friends would not be like the old tried ones she was leaving so far behind.

"Cheer up, dear," the minister was saying. "We'll soon be there."

"I wish we could go straight to the parsonage," she answered. "Somehow I dread hotels—and strangers."

"Never mind," was the cheerful answer. "I'm ashamed to murmur when I have the children and you."

"Gray Rock," shouted the conductor, and the minister rose.

"Home, Margaret," he said, tremulously. "Come, children."

It was a little station, and only two or three were standing on the platform. Among them was a tall man with a weather-beaten face. It was Deacon