

The Fireside.

"ONLY JIM."

BY MRS. ELSIE DUNCAN YALE.

"Oh, Aunt Ellen, is it really you? Well, this is a surprise, and you don't know how glad I am to see you," exclaimed Gertrude as she opened the door. "Do come right in. You must excuse the way I look," she continued apologetically as she glanced down at her torn wrapper: "I've been house-cleaning this afternoon, and I thought I wouldn't dress for supper, as long as there'd be only Jim. Well come right upstairs, and you can rest while I make myself respectable."

The elder lady followed her upstairs to a pretty, daintily furnished room.

"There," exclaimed the young wife, as she set down her guest's umbrella and valise, "this is my guest room. How do you like it?"

Her aunt surveyed the room approvingly.

"Very nice indeed," was her comment. "The pink paper is lovely, and those ruffled curtains are as pretty as can be. That's just what I like, a nice easy chair and footstool, and I'm so tired I'll try it right away."

"I have a number of my wedding presents in here," continued the younger woman. "Jim's grandmother gave me the hemstitched sheets and pillow cases and shams. That madonna over the bed I guess you remember. Lucy Wheeler gave it to me. Those etchings were presents too, and Uncle John gave me the rocker. Jim bought the chiffonier last spring, and I made the scarf, and the pink pin-cushion. His sister embroidered that apple blossom pillow for me, she does such lovely work. Now I'll go dress, and you rest till supper time, for there's an hour yet."

An hour later they sat at the supper table, at which Gertrude, in a pretty sprigged lawn dress, presided. The beefsteak was done to a turn, the biscuits were delicately browned, the cut-glass dish of peaches was flanked by a pitcher of rich cream. In the centre of the table stood a low bowl of pink and white sweet peas, harmonizing with the delicate china.

Jim, as he took his place at the head of the table glanced at his wife with mingled surprise and approbation.

"How pretty you look in that dress, Gertie, with your hair all fluffy. I always liked that blue dress, and what a fine supper you've gotten for us, hasn't she, Aunt Ellen?"

His wife flushed with pleasure at the unwonted praise.

"I thought I would get out all my nice china and best tablecloth in honor of auntie," she explained, "and I found just a few blossoms on the sweet peas for a centrepiece. I haven't had this china out for a good while. You see there's only Jim and the children at supper, so it really isn't worth while."

After the meal was over, the dishes washed, and the two children in bed, the aunt and niece sat together on the porch while Jim excused himself to go to the post office for the mail.

"Before I go to bed, Gertie," said her aunt, "I'm going to get you to play something for me. I always liked your playing. Don't you remember how I did?"

Gertrude shook her head. "Oh, I

can't play a tune through now," she admitted reluctantly; "I don't really have time for my music. I'm sorry too, for Jim's real fond of music, but somehow I've gotten my hand out, so I rarely touch the piano now. You see I have so much sewing for the children to do, and the housework, so the time goes."

The week of Aunt Ellen's stay passed rapidly, and the day before her departure she sat upon the piazza assisting her niece in the task of darning stockings.

"Well, Gertrude," observed the elder lady, as she critically examined a well-worn heel, "you seem to be pretty well fixed. Jim is a fine fellow, the children are real good, and you've got a nice cosy little home."

There was no reply, and she was surprised to see a tear trickle down the young wife's face, and fall upon the blue sock she was mending.

"Why, what's the matter, child? Has anything gone wrong?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the niece hastily, as she wiped her eyes. "It's only, well—I've a good notion to tell you all about it. I never meant to tell a living soul, but I'm not happy, though I suppose I ought to be."

"Why, what's the trouble, little girl?" Gertrude bent lower over her work.

"Well, auntie, I've always said I hated a jealous wife, and I know Jim loves me better than anyone else. But he don't seem to care about staying home any more, and lots of times he goes over to the Deanes to spend the evening. I can't go, for I can't leave the children alone in the house. But sometimes I sit here, and I hear Mrs. Deane playing the piano, and Jim singing, and it just hurts me terribly. There," she said with a little catch in her voice, "I didn't mean to tell anyone, for it doesn't seem loyal to Jim. He's real good to me, and gets me everything he can afford, but I guess I'm getting old and faded." She wiped her eyes, and took up the blue sock again.

"I don't see why you should feel badly about his going out in the evenings," replied her aunt calmly, "as long as it's only Jim."

Gertrude dropped the ball of darning cotton in her surprise.

"Why, what do you mean?" she asked astonished.

"My dear child," replied her aunt kindly, "during the week I have been here, I don't know how many times I have heard you use the expression, 'Only Jim.' You didn't always trouble to make yourself pretty for supper, because there was only Jim. You didn't take particular pains about setting the table attractively, because it was only for Jim. I noticed that while the guest-room was really artistic, yours was plain and unattractive, because it was only for Jim. My dear girl," she continued, "Jim is the dearest one on earth to you, and the most important. I can remember when he used to come and call on you before you were married, how you used to fix yourself up for him, and look so pretty and sweet when he came to call. Now you are just as good looking as you ever were, only you just want to cultivate a little of the care you used to take of your personal appearance. I know it makes a difference when you are doing your own work, but Jim would be delighted if you would always

take pains to look fresh and dainty when he came home.

"Don't wear wrappers to do your work in, they are for invalids. A shirt-waist and washable skirt are much neater and trimmer. Then about your music. I can remember how you used to play for Jim to sing, and how he enjoyed it. Take up your music again, even if it is only for ten minutes a day, and you'll soon be able to play his accompaniments again. Maybe it seems odd to you to hear an old maid like me giving advice about husbands, but I have lived a good bit longer than you, my dear, and I've used my power of observation. A great deal of this world's happiness is based on trifles, or what appear to be trifles. Now," she concluded, "I think I've preached enough, but I think if you take my advice, you'll be happier."

Gertrude threaded a needle meditatively.

"Well," she said, after a moment's reflection, "I believe you are right, auntie. I have felt as if as long as I was Jim's wife, and he loved me, it didn't make any particular difference. So I wasn't always particular about fixing myself up when he came home from the store. But I'll try your plan, and I'll take up my music. I love Jim dearly, and I didn't want to feel that he was growing away from me."

As her aunt left on the following morning, Gertrude bade her an affectionate good-by.

"I'm so glad you came, auntie," she said, "for you don't know how I've enjoyed your visit."

"Yes, indeed," corroborated her husband. "Gertie has looked ten years younger since you've been here. I suppose it is rather dull for her here with just me and the children."

As the stage drove away, Gertrude turned to her husband, and slipped her hand in his.

"Don't say 'only me,' dear," she said, "for don't you know that you are the one person in the world to me? I know I've gotten careless and haven't taken pains as I should, but I'm going to do better for 'only Jim' is all the world to me."—*Observer.*



TEMPERANCE HUMBUGS.

A Boston paper refers to Carrie Nation as a "humbug." There never was a greater mistake in newspaperdom; whatever Mrs. Nation is, or is not, she is no humbug. She says what she means and means what she says; and those are not the distinguishing marks of a humbug.

She may be a "terror," but it is to evil-doers. She may have been "a destroyer," but only of property that was being used to destroy the human race, and used in spite of the law. She may be "mad," but not in the insane sense of the term.

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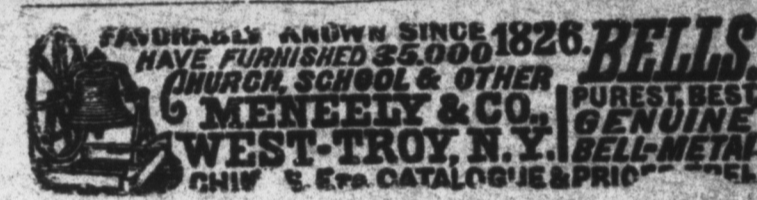
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