"The Free Press" Short Story

The Cupboard of Mother Hubbard

By GRACE E. SICKMOND

[illegible] "[illegible] mother—quick!"

"We've visitors, an unexpected pleasure," said mother chilly, [illegible] the valley envelope. "She says she's here at six-fifteen and—"

"Mrs. Anderson Stuyvesant Howe," [illegible] mother, smiling.

"Mrs. Anderson Stuy— goodness! [illegible] old school friend, Mary Downs! [illegible] you've told us about her dozens of times [illegible]."

"Mrs. Stuy!" I interrupted, in horror thinking of our evening meal.

"And it's a quarter of five now. What, in the name of all that's—"

"She's accustomed to a late dinner," [illegible] mother.

"Well, she'll get a cold lunch here," said [illegible] with some feeling. "At a quarter of five on Friday we never have anything in the house but things for hash—and [illegible] is out."

"A hash be made up," said Harriet with decision. "Mrs. Anderson Stuyvesant Howe is accustomed to a late dinner, she shall have it."

"She is also accustomed to being served by a butler," said mother, looking at me with some pity.

"She can't have him—" Harriet was pulling on her jacket as she spoke. "But if a very correct waitress changes her mind—"

"Waitress!"

"I will be waitress; you can call me Mademoiselle—then you don't forget it. I will go down town this minute, order up canned soup, strawberries, beefsteak, mushrooms, fresh bread, olives—anything I can lay my hands on. I wish I could find roast beef somewhere, just beginning to brown. You, Aurelia, will get out all the best china and see that the fire is brisk. Have the hash started; with a few frills it will do for one dish. Mother please stir up the salad dressing and put on your best frock. That's all I ask of you—only do be sure to beat the oil in evenly enough."

And she was off like a flash of autocratic lightning.

"Hello!" cried a masculine voice at the kitchen door half an hour later. "What's the matter with the Hubbard family? Anybody hurt?"

"Come in, Jerry, if you love us, and make yourself useful," and I held out the chopping bowl. "Hash this hash and ask no questions, there's a dear. We are in awful trouble."

"Look's like it," commented our athletic young friend and neighbor, accepting his task without a murmur, and beginning to chop with commendable vigor. "Knew something was up when I saw Harriet following up the telegraph boy at a three-minute gait, with her hat over one ear. Company of course. Nothing else could cause three delivery wagons and a confectioner's man to arrive within five seconds of one another."

"Confectioner's man? You goose! That was the plumber. We've put off fixing that faucet in the bathroom until we are forced into it by this emergency. You can't explain to a guest the use of a molasses cork in the hot-water faucet without causing some embarrassment—not to us, of course."

"The best tablecloth has a little hole in the middle," announced mother in a gloomy voice from the dining-room.

"Put the cake-basket-jardiniere of ferns over it," directed Harriet cheerfully. "And give Mrs. Stuyvesant that one immense dinner napkin we haven't returned to Mrs. Ward yet. Do have some presence of mind, mother."

"I don't see how you are going to make anything fit for company out of ordinary commonplace, everyday beefsteak hash," I groaned, as I emptied a dishful of cold potatoes into the chopping bowl.

"Leave that to me," cried Jerry, with a grin. "Just hand me the Worcestershire sauce, the red pepper, a lemon or two a few sprigs of that chickweed outside the kitchen door—"

"Parsley—" corrected Harriet, dashing the can-opener into the can of chicken soup.

"After I've combined these things with real artistic effect, just frizzle the stuff a few minutes, add a pinch of salt, a dash of tabasco, wrap in a hot napkin and serve on cracked ice with—"

"Here, hull these strawberries, that's a nice boy, and don't put in the bad ones. They're too poor to serve in a state of nature; I'll chill them and pour over some whipped cream if—"

"The cream is sour," announced mother, from the pantry, with the calmness of despair.

"It can't be!"

"Mother Hubbard," said Harriet, sadly, "if you can't tell us things that will signal us, I wish you would kindly refrain from speaking. If that cream is sour, it has soured since the telegram came."

"That's what it has," shouted Jerry. "Atmospheric changes—drop in the family barometer. If you people could see your own faces, you wouldn't blame it on the cream."

"Jerry," I cried, "stop trying to be funny and go and get us some cream, cream, somewhere, anywhere—ask your mother for it. Take this pail and don't come back without at least a pint."

"[illegible] calls I go at any [illegible]," said the neighbor, [illegible] "But [illegible] Michael [illegible] is I [illegible]."

"Do, and my blessing go with you," murmured Harriet. "And if you can make it convenient to put a pound of lost wages in your pocket as you come back, no harm will be done."

"Girls," said mother some time afterward in a stage whisper, which made us drop everything and run, "I see a cab turning the corner."

Harriet dashed up stairs and was down again by the time the cab reached the the door. She looked rather distinguished for a waitress, even in her cap and apron, and, though her face was a trifle red, she had assumed a most demure expression.

Mrs. Anderson Stuyvesant Howe entered with as much dignity as a rather dumpy and decidedly overdressed little woman could carry; its effect, however, was somewhat marred by a snort of imperfectly suppressed laughter from Jerry who was behind a screen. He had returned from his errands just in time to join me in the act of crawling into this retreat. Harriet gave us a warning look from behind Mrs. Howe's back, and I clapped my handkerchief frantically over Jerry's mouth.

"Do be still," I begged. "If you give us away, Harriet will never forgive you."

"Great guns, but she thinks she's a swell," whispered Jerry in my ear. "Look at the gemlets. I thought it wasn't good form to sparkle like an electric fountain—before sundown." With a sudden clutch at my elbow he cried: "I smell something burning, sure as time. Look out, don't knock the screen down—"

We flew to the kitchen. It was the hash. I groaned as I lifted the spider from the fire.

"I said 'frizzle it,'" whispered Jerry regretfully, "not fizzle. Never mind—put some red pepper over the burns—she'll take a drink so quick she won't notice the taste."

A white-capped maid from the big house next door—Jerry's home—appeared suddenly to my astonished gaze, bearing a large cake, covered with a napkin. Jerry met her with a smothered whoop.

"Here you are," he exulted. "Mother sent it; I told her the awful hole you were in. Cook says she made it this morning."

"Jerry, your mother's an angel. So is your cook."

"She's all right," agreed Jerry with conviction. "Mother sent you a quart of cream, too."

Harriet ran into the kitchen. "She's gone straight upstairs to dress for dinner," she informed us hysterically. "She only took time to give one searching glance at everything in sight. Go up and put on your best things; I'll see to this. Jerry run home and get into your evening clothes, will you? We'll introduce you as another guest; it will help tremendously to carry this thing off, and you are a dear in that dinner jacket."

"Artful thing, you," chuckled Jerry, starting for the door. "Mrs. Sylvester must see me in it."

"I'm sure she'll come down in full fig," went on Harriet. "If she does, I shall choke every time I get behind her. Did you see her diamonds? Big as cartwheels; her hands are loaded—and for traveling!"

"Girls," said mother in our ears, "I am ashamed of you. Our guest—"

"Oh, mother," murmured Harriet. "When you yourself have taught us what is what!"

The dinner was ready at last. Everything was served so far as possible; everything else las left ready for our waitress to slip upon the plate in the kitchen. At the last moment Harriet smashed a tumbler, creating a momentary flurry, but we were comparatively calm when we heard the respectful, "Dinner is served," which ushered in our fate.

Jerry had accepted his role with an anticipatory grimace, and when Mrs. Howe sailed downstairs was prepared to do the honors. Our guest as Harriet had predicted, but as I would not have believed any guest would have dreamed of doing in our modest little home, had made a gorgeous toilette and entered with the air of an empress. I stole one look at Jerry's face as the low-cut gown and glittering ornaments of Mrs. Howe met my gaze; I dared not look at him again. He had immense control of his smooth young features, but on this occasion the frequent twitch of the muscles about his mouth, which he strove heroically to conceal by sundry coughs and clearings of the throat, came near being too much for me. There was an awful silence for a moment, as we sat down at the table. I saw Mrs. Howe glance from her handsome dinner napkin to Jerry's noticeable smaller and limper one; for, though mother and I got ours out of sight at the first moment that artless youth left his until the soup arrived and then shook it out with uncalled-for ostentation.

Then mother rose nobly to the occasion and drew Mrs. Howe into a semi-animated discussion of their school days. She held our guest's attention by interesting reminiscences of the latter's supremacy at the Young Ladies' Seminary and recollections of her popularity among her classmates, while Jerry trod stealthily upon my toes under the table.

Meanwhile the soup came and went, and Harriet glided in and out with the practiced skill of an accomplished waitress. All went well until the hash appeared. Then I saw the dish upon the roll and my lips shake. Harriet's face was a study as she served Mrs. Howe. I dared not look at Jerry when he bravely tasted the hash. Its appearance was really very good, and Harriet had deluged it with tomato sauce and parsley, but when Mrs. Howe hastily grasped her glass of ice-water I felt my self-control giving way. Harriet made a sudden and most unwaitress-like escape from the room; Jerry coughed in his napkin; as I—well—I was only sixteen, and sixteen finds it easier to laugh than to be sober—I giggled.

Mrs. Howe glanced at me suspiciously, and I grew hysterical. Mother gave me a stern look, which made me worse. Jerry recovered himself and glared savagely at me, and this finished me. At this trying moment I caught sight of the hole in the middle of the tablecloth peeping out from under the "cake-basket-jardiniere," which had got pushed to one side. The absurdity of the whole, pitiful attempt to "live up too" Mrs. Anderson Stuyvesant Howe and her supposed elegance took possession of me. I buried my face in my napkin and laughed; then I cried. The company ceased to attend to anything but me.

"She has these attacks sometimes," explained mother, patting me gently on the back.

"Are they serious?" asked Jerry, politely. Then an evil spirit entered into him and he added, "Can I get something for Miss Aurelia? Ammonia—camphor—red pepper—anything."

"Oh, don't!" I shrieked. Then I rose from the table, and Harriet came and led me from the room. She pinched my arm black and blue on the way, but it had no effect upon me. I rushed upstairs and buried my face in a pillow. Meanwhile the dinner went on. By and by I recovered my self-possession, or thought I had done so, and went solemnly back to the dining-room.

"Better dear?" asked mother cheerfully. "Will you have some of the—er—hash—brought back? Marie—"

"No, no," I said with my eyes on my plate. "I'll just take some salad, please."

There was a silence as Harriet moved slowly towards the kitchen. Presently she came back and served me with desert which the others were eating. I understood.

There hadn't been much salad; and when I left the table our clever waitress had divided my share among the other plates. I had thought my shaken nerves well under control, but they played me false again. I began to laugh once more, feebly, as one who would rather not laugh, but is too weak to resist. Then mother herself forgot her part and brought down the house.

"Harriet, bring Aurelia some hartshorn."

Mrs. Howe stared. Jerry, after one convulsive effort to maintain his gravity, burst into a ringing laugh so uncontrolled and hearty that Harriet gave way without a struggle and joined in. Mother turned upon us a despairing look and succumbed. Mrs. Howe's face began to grow flushed under her powder. I fervently wished as I sat there shaking, my face hidden in my napkin, that the earth would open and swallow us up, with all our hollow pretensions.

Mother recovered herself after a moment; and a glance at our guest's injured expression evidently made her decide upon a full confession. There was really nothing left to do but to throw ourselves upon Mrs. Howe's mercy and trust to her sense of humor.

"My dear Mary," she began apologetically, "you must excuse us if you can. After dinner we will tell you the whole story. We are really not amusing ourselves at your expense, however it may seem."

Harriet untied her apron strings and flung off her waitress's cap. She drew herself up to her full height and looked at Mrs. Howe like the young gentlewoman she really is. "Let me present myself, Mrs. Howe," she said. "I am Harriet, mother's daughter, not Marie, a waitress, and this performance is just a poor joke of my planning. But its a joke on us, please be sure, not on our guests."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Howe. For a moment I thought she was going to be angry. "Snob," I said to myself, under my breath, and stopped laughing so suddenly that Jerry looked at me in astonishment. Mother led the way into the sitting-room. Mrs. Howe rustling and glowing and with a haughty expression about her very back, as it seemed to us, who followed her.

"Nice actress you are," whispered Jerry in my ear. "All you need is an understudy ready to jump when you get rattled and run off the stage." But I was holding my breath and wondering what was coming next.

"You see," said Harriet, with cheerfulness, "your telegram surprised us in rather a—well—Mother Hubbard's Cupboard happened to be very nearly bare, and we had to fly about to get ready. We girls are fond of pranks, you know, Mrs. Howe, and we thought it would be fun for us to play at the style we don't live in. Please don't think we were in the least ashamed of our house or our everyday ways."

She drew herself up a bit higher and glanced unconsciously from a fine old French print on the wall to the Persian rug beneath her feet, two of the few treasures left us from a once luxurious home. Then in the midst of the awful silence she finished her explanation.

"Some funny things happed while we were getting ready which left my sister's nerves a little shaky, and she couldn't play her part through. We meant to have a little fun out of it, that's all. But we truly never meant to make you think we were making fun of you."

She looked at Mrs. Howe, half smiling. Our guest looked back at her with a softening face. Her diamonds flashed in the lamp-light, and her elegant gown rustled as she began for the first time that evening to laugh. The haughty expression vanished, and her real self showed through the aristocratic disguise she had so long tried to wear. The "snob" in her was gone, for the moment at least. She turned to mother.

"It makes me think," she said, "of the spreads we used to have, and of the way we used to try to change the face of everything when one of the teachers knocked at the door. Remember, Sue the one who always surprised us when we least expected it? We called her 'The Unbidden.' It was too bad for me to give you so little time to get ready. But I'm glad I did it, for now I've seen what clever girls you have. I'm sorry—" with a jolly laugh—"little Miss Aurelia has these attacks; but if she'll just let me give her this vinaigrette of mine"—she unfastened a little gleaming jewelled affair and put it into my hand—"perhaps it won't remind her unpleasantly of this 'Unbidden.'"

After all, there are "snobs" in cotton gowns, and truly fine hearts under much affection. Mrs. Howe came down to breakfast next morning in the plainest of tailored dresses, and only seven diamonds where seventeen had shone the day before.

Severe infestations of mosquitoes have been reported in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia.

CANADIAN NATIONAL

EXHIBITION

TORONTO

AUG. 25 to SEPT. 9 1933

(SUNDAYS EXCEPTED)

Canadians are justly proud of the fact that the world's largest annual Exhibition is situated within the borders of Canada. Having grown for five and a half decades to its present tremendous proportions, this great Canadian institution has become recognized around the world as the "Show Window of the Nations".

This year during its fourteen days and nights of operation, every phase of human progress and endeavour will be on review—carefully-planned, artistically-arranged exhibits of the natural and manufactured products from all parts of Canada and various countries throughout the world. The outstanding agricultural show on the continent in the world's largest show building. Beautiful paintings in two art galleries. Science and Invention in the Electrical and Engineering building. National motor show in the new Automotive Building. Glittering Pageant "Montezuma" depicting the conquest of Mexico by Spanish adventurers, nightly from Aug. 28 to Sept. 9. Sculling races for the world's professional championship. Band of His Majesty's Scots Guards and thirty other bands. World's championship Marathon swims, Women's Friday, Aug. 25, Open, Wednesday, Aug. 30, and other international competitions afloat and ashore.

For fourteen days and nights this colossal annual Exhibition will be a Mecca of inexpensive recreation and education for everyone. Plan to come this year. Exceptional excursion rates arranged. Consult local agents. Railways, Steamships, Motor Coaches.

WM. INGLIS, *President* — H. W. WATERS, *General Manager*

The WORLD'S LARGEST ANNUAL EXHIBITION

Did You Ever Stop to Think ?

By Edson R. Waite, Shawnee, Oklahoma

Clyde P. Steen, Editor of The Fremont (Ohio) Messenger, says:

"Newspaper advertising is the very barometer of trade. Without it, there is no trade!

"Although it should not be true, newspaper readers know when business is bad. They know when little buying is being done. They know by the lack of advertising in their newspaper. The merchant, feeling the pinch of a distinct falling off in business, fails to advertise. The newspaper reader, as a result fails to make purchases. Then they both begin to lament about how bad business is!

"It has always been that way. The merchant has never advertised when business was bad—at least has not advertised as comprehensively as he did when business was good. The psychology of this has never been definitely figured out. The recent depression would never have continued as long as it did if the merchant would have advertised in the newspapers. It was proven that every time this same merchant had something special and used extra space in the newspaper, he was soon sold out on that special. Dollar Days and similar events attracted larger crowds this year than ever before. The real reason was because they were advertised to a greater degree than was ever done previously.

"The average merchant has learned his lesson, it is believed. Consistent advertising, he has found, is the only kind that will keep the channels of trade alive and cause the crowds to throng his store. Every day he is missing from the columns of the local newspaper means the loss of a definite amount of business. Mr. and Mrs. Public, and even the little Publics, read the newspapers now more than they ever did. They were all reading them during the depression, but now they find articles advertised which are much needed, and which would have been purchased before had they been brought to their attention.

"Newspaper advertising is slowly, but surely returning to normal. National advertisers — manufacturers of the nation's leading products — are increasing their advertising space and this causes the dealer who sells these products to increase the use of local space. Mr. and Mrs. Public will know that business is good when they see the advertising boom and they will want to satisfy that desire to be in the buying throng!

Watch Your Newspaper. Keep tab of the advertising and You will know just what is doing in the Volume of Business at Your Favorite Store.

Business Directory

MEDICAL

DR. J. A. McNIVEN
Physician and Surgeon
Office and Residence—Corner Bower Avenue and Elgin Street.

LEGAL

Phone No. 22 — P. O. Box 33
HAROLD NASH FARMER, M. A.
Barrister, Solicitor, Notary Public, Conveyancer, Etc.
PERRYMAN BLOCK - ACTON, ONT.
MONEY LENT ON MORTGAGES
Hours—9.30 a. m. to 5.00 p. m.
Saturdays—12.00 o'clock

KENNETH M. LANGDON
Barrister, Solicitor, Notary Public
Offices:
Acton — Georgetown
Over T. Seymuck's Cafe — Main Street S.
For Appointments Phone Acton 65—or Georgetown 86
Office Hours — Acton, Tuesday and Thursday, 1.15 p. m. to 4.30 p. m. Evenings on request.

DENTAL

A. J. BUCHANAN, D. D. S.
Dental Surgeon
Office: In Leishman Block
Hours: 9 a.m. until 6 p. m. Evenings by Appointment
Gas for Extractions
Closed All Day Wednesday — Phone 148

P. W. PEAREN, D. D. S., L. D. S.
Dental Surgeon
Successor to Late Dr. J. M. Bell
Phone 29 — Mill Street, Acton

MISCELLANEOUS

FRANCIS NUNAN
Bookbinder
Account books of all kinds made to order. Periodicals of every description carefully bound. Ruling neatly and promptly done.
Wyndham Street - Guelph, Ont.
(Over Williams' Store)

Watchmaker — Jeweller
J. H. JORDAN
GEORGETOWN
Expert Repairs — Prompt Service
We have for years been doing repairs for other jewellers across Canada, so are quite capable of doing yours.

Axelrod Auto Parts
Used Parts for All Cars
BATTERIES — TIRES
ACCESSORIES
29 Gordon Street—Phone 559
GUELPH, ONTARIO

TAIT OPTICAL CO.
Optometrists and Opticians
110 Wyndham St. — GUELPH
W. T. Patterson Optometrist (Regd.)
Quality — Accuracy — Service

JUST ARRIVED
A New Stock of Imported Granite
We have just received some fine Monuments from the Old Country, include many very fine designs. These stones are of high quality. We invite you to inspect our stock and get our quotations.
Monuments Erected Anywhere—Get Our Prices
Acton Monument Works
J. NICOL & SON
PHONE 153 — ACTON, ONT.

Life Insurance
We specialize in Life Insurance only, and are qualified to advise on any present or future needs.
Do you know it is possible to provide $100.00 a month, plus dividends, by saving as little as 10 cents per day?
See
Frederick L. Wright
District Representative
Imperial Life Assurance Company of Canada
Acton, Ontario