

A MODERN PRODIGAL

By Louise J. Strong

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Mrs. Spencer was hanging up her sunbonnet as her son came into the kitchen with the milk.

"You're out calling early, mother," he laughed.

"I wanted to see Mr. Wilson before he left home," she replied evasively. "Won't the tramp come in to breakfast?" indicating a gray haired man, who stood by the pump drying his face on a red cotton handkerchief.

"No; said he'd take it on the porch as he did his supper."

"Most of them are not so modest, sleeping in the barn and eating on the porch when they could have had a bed and come to the table." There was a sneer in her tone, unusual to her kindly nature. "And it isn't always safe to put them in the barn," she added.

"Oh, he seems a pretty decent old fellow"— Her short, discordant laugh interrupted him an instant. John stared, then went on, "He doesn't use tobacco, and he wanted to do something for his meals."

Mrs. Spencer snuffed and added to the tray of food she had fixed a cup of coffee, into which she dropped two lumps of sugar.

"Got to take it as you fix it whether he likes it or not, hey?" John commented, smiling.

The tramp seated himself on the edge of the porch in front of the open door, whence he glanced furtively and frequently at Mrs. Spencer in her place opposite him. She ate little, with an absent, perturbed manner, and returned the glances with a curious expression in her eyes.

John and his wife chatted vivaciously, endeavoring to dissipate the painful thoughts it was evident the sight of the old tramp had aroused in their mother's mind. She scarcely noticed



"I MIGHT HAVE BEEN MARRIED THIS MINUTE."

them and presently, with little Sammy in her arms, went out on to the front porch.

"Too bad we took the old fellow in," John muttered. "Makes her think of"— Lizzie nodded understandingly.

As her son came out on his way to the store Mrs. Spencer put the boy down and took a roll of bills from her bosom and handed it to him, saying, "Here is the money for the interest, Johnny."

"Why, mother, who loaned it to you? I couldn't borrow it!" His eyes glowed with relief.

"I didn't borrow it. I've sold the tombstone." She put up a hand as he would have spoken. "You know, Mr. Wilson wanted it when his father died. I sold it to him this morning for three-quarters what it cost just as it stands. I never ought to have put it up with no certainty that he was dead. It comes good now, though, for the interest, what I got for it."

"Why, it'll put me right on my feet!" John cried. "But you oughtn't to have done it, mother. You thought so much of father's stone."

"I was a fool about it when he might be alive for all I knew," she said, with self-contempt. "I made myself the laughingstock. What more do you want?" she demanded suddenly of the tramp who had come around the house and paused as if to speak.

"I—I thought I might get a job. You said you had a grocery store," looking at John. "I'd work for my keep till"—

"It isn't likely he'd want an old tramp about," Mrs. Spencer interposed brusquely.

"No, I suppose not," the old fellow assented and scuffed dejectedly down the path.

Mrs. Spencer watched him a few moments, her face pale and lips twitching; then she commanded harshly: "Samuel Spencer, come back here! You knew if you got in once I couldn't let you go off that way! I'm an old fool, Johnny, I suppose, but I can't bear to have your father straggling about the country like that, sleeping anywhere and eating any old thing. It isn't fair to you, son, but we'll have to try to keep him."

"Father!" John and Lizzie cried together.

"I tried to expect it at first" Mrs. Spencer hurried on "but when I put up the stone I really thought he was dead, it had been so long. And I might have married and been a bigamist!" she flared at the tramp, who stood in a downcast silence. "I might have been married this minute. I could have been. What then?"

"If you'd been married again, Harriet—I didn't think you would, though—but if you had I'd never let you know I was alive. And I don't mean to burden you. There's lots of work in me yet," he quavered.

"You don't look it, and there was never any too much at your best, but of course you've got to stay. I guess he can do errands and mind the boy, Johnny."

John shook hands heartily with his unfamiliar father, whom he could not remember, introduced his wife and exhibited the child named for his supposed defunct grandfather.

"You've got to clean up and shave and have that shag of hair clipped. There's some of your old duds upstairs, decent ones." Mrs. Spencer laid down the law, then turned to John again. "I expect it'll raise a great racket, selling the tombstone and all, and I couldn't have sold it if I hadn't recognized him last night, Johnny. Dear knows what folks'll say." She flashed scorn at the prodigal, who drooped shamefacedly, but with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I've got some things at the depot," he explained meekly when she stopped.

"Things! I didn't know tramps carried baggage," she snorted.

"I'm not a professional tramp; only in the way of running from Dan to Beersheba. That was always my fall-guy, you know, Harriet. But I'm getting"—

"You're getting too old and worn out to stand it, else you likely wouldn't have come home now," she interrupted a little bitterly.

"You always had a good heart, Harriet," he said gratefully. "I would go that last time, but I thought I was in for a good thing in mining out there, and when everything failed— Yes, I know, everything always seemed to fail with me," he interjected in answer to a look on her face. "When everything failed I was ashamed even to write, and I kept going from one thing to another, thinking I'd do better, till the first I knew I was getting old and gray and realized that I'd left you to tug along and raise Johnny alone. I'd never come back only"—

"Only you couldn't do anything else," she put in again, unable immediately to forgive the long desertion.

"And to think of your slaving and putting up a tombstone for me and giving the little shaver my name! I've treated you dog mean, Harriet," his voice trailed, shakily, into silence.

"Well, what's done's done," she said, regarding him more kindly. "I don't know as we can help the way we're made, and I don't suppose it's always been easy for you any more than for us. We'll make the best of it, won't we, Johnny? Your father can job about enough for his keep."

"Yes, that's so, father," John laid his hand on the old man's shoulder. "We'll soon be jogging along as if you'd never been away."

"Bless your hearts, so you will take in the poor old good for nothing tramp!" The bent shoulders straightened, he sprang nimbly up the steps, seized Mrs. Spencer and kissed her soundly in spite of her shocked resistance, then grasped John's hand. "You didn't let me finish about coming back, Harriet. I got over being a failure. I went up to the Klondike and caught up with the luck I'd always been chasing, and— and Johnny, boy, you can buy out the whole little town if you want to, and Mrs. Spencer, ma'am, let's begin over again with the wedding trip we missed the first time."

How the Air is Purified.

Motion, mechanical and molecular, the great law of the universe, is a natural method for the purification of the atmosphere. Its power as a purifier of the air is shown mechanically in the flow of rivers and in the ocean currents. Molecularly it serves the same purpose in the form of heat, light and electricity. When not in motion air stagnates as water does and becomes offensive and bad, because it is easily impregnated with fine animal and vegetable dust as well as noxious gases. Certain physical conditions are always necessary for the continual movement of the air. We know that the diurnal motion of land and sea air brings the warm days and cool nights as well as the rain and wind. In the tropical regions as the sun rises the heat of the day increases, and the breeze sets in from the sea to the land. As the sun goes down the heat diminishes, and at sunset the temperatures of sea and land are equal. At night again the breeze is from land to sea until morning, when the temperature may become equal and the sea breeze return.

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THE WELL GROOMED WOMAN

New Ideas For Making the Hair and Complexion Pretty.

If the gods at your birth did not bestow the fairy gift of beautiful hair they were chary with their charms. There is no reason, though, for despair. This lack of generosity simply means added effort on your part to make up for their oversight. Dull hair is abhorred of Dame Fashion, whose mandate is for shining, scented locks. It requires lots of time and patience to accomplish this, but the trick can be done. First wash the hair as often as you deem it necessary. Whether it be every two weeks or three depends upon the oiliness of the hair. But be sure to select a sunshiny day, as success depends upon the tresses being thoroughly sunned and dried. Soap jelly and plenty of water will clean the hair perfectly. Rinse nine times. A little borax in the last water is very good.

Dry the hair until every bit of moisture is out of it. Let the air blow on it if possible; if not, direct the maid to use vigorously a palm leaf fan. Avoid the "steamer" if you would have your hair shine. After the hair is washed don't put tongs on it for twenty-four hours; otherwise it will take away the gloss which has been such a labor of love to acquire. To keep the hair in good condition shampoo it twice a week by scattering a tablespoonful of finely powdered cornmeal through it and brushing with a soft brush until the meal is entirely out of the hair.

Perfuming the hair is a fad of the moment, but before scenting it be sure that the locks are perfectly clean. To perfume it pour in the hand six drops of oil of jasmine, pass the brush lightly over your palm, then brush the hair until every strand has been gone over. This will give the hair a delicious odor.

Care of the Complexion.

The woman who wishes to keep her complexion soft and smooth will wash her face with a cleansing cream before retiring. Rub in with the tips of the fingers.

There are very few foreheads, even among the youngest women, which do not show some slight trace of wrinkles. Dust will invariably collect in these little lodging places, no matter how shallow they may be. Good creams, properly applied, will remove every trace of dirt—traces so fine indeed that the eye ordinarily does not perceive them.

What is true of the forehead is equally true of the corners of the eye, mouth or nostrils, where wrinkles or blackheads are prone to creep in almost unawares.

After the entire face has been covered with cleansing cream allow it to remain on for about two minutes before removing. This is accomplished with a soft towel or piece of gauze. If used during the day a good face powder may be applied after the cream. At night, before retiring, no powder should be used after the cream.

A Novelty For the Table.

Fancy table gongs for calling the maid from the kitchen have altogether superseded the plain forms of striking



A FANCY GONG.

bells and are novelties shown in the shops among the new spring household furnishings.

In Austria a man and a woman are supposed to be capable of conducting a home of their own from the age of fourteen.

MEN AND WOMEN.

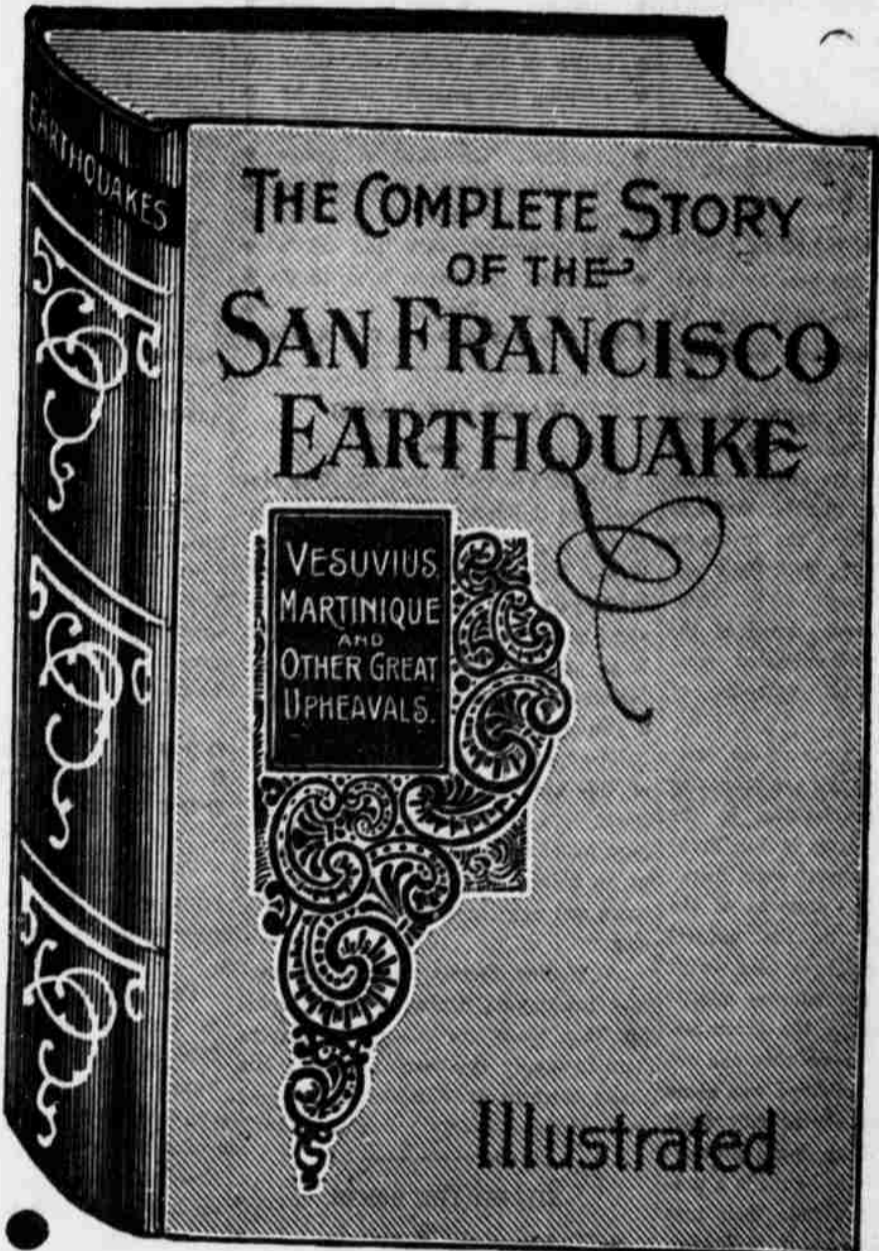
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