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Accomplishing Something
By BLANCH RALPHS CANNON

AFTER Shirley married, she and Dick went to live in Bridgetown in southern Idaho. It was a prosperous little town with blocks laid out in squares, narrow streets crowded with shabby cars ignoring the new semaphores; rows of frame houses all alike, with geraniums set in tomato cans on the window sill; an occasional cow grazing on a front lawn; a beastly little foreign quarter down by the tracks, owned by some church-going capitalist who paid an honest tithing from the fifty dollars a month he got from each condemned building of his block of slums. It was summer and the heat from the sagebrush-covered desert crept into the town in the day, but at night the desert became chill and the heat lingered on the brick walls and asphalt streets down town.

Dick had a little brokerage and they had to get up at six-thirty because the New York Exchange opened at ten o'clock, and now with daylight saving he had to be at his office at seven. At the first jangle of the alarm, Shirley stumbled out of bed, blind with sleep, and put the coffee on. Then she went in the bathroom and washed her face with cold water and ran a comb through her hair. By this time Dick was pounding on the door and the coffee was boiling over, quenching the gas flame.

In nightgown and slippers she squeezed oranges, made toast, and timed eggs. At a quarter to seven Dick came in, with little smarting red nicks in his face from shaving too fast, wearing the same suit and a fresh shirt. They had breakfast in the kitchen because there was no dining-room and they ate only dinner on the drop-leaf table in the living room. They didn’t talk because they only had ten minutes before Dick had to leave for a five-minute walk to town.

After Shirley kissed him goodbye she had another piece of toast and more coffee. Then she smoked a cigarette and read the paper beginning with the comic strip and ending [ 119 ]
with the foreign news. She read every page, including the sports page. Now, she had a particular interest in the *Post-Herald* because she wrote a column which appeared three times a week. She was paid a dollar a column. It was sponsored by Olafsen’s Furniture Store and was signed Betty Budget. She really got a kick out of doing it. Things like this—“Have you walked past Olafsen’s this week? If you have, I know you were fooled, just as I was by the imitation Oriental rugs in the window.” She gave hints to brides about interior decorating and advised women with restless children to freshen up the house with new curtains and slip covers which would make the youngsters proud to bring their friends home. She already had enough ideas to last three times a week for five weeks. She was going to buy new drapes for her living room with the money she earned. She was going to order them from Dinwoody’s in Salt Lake.

Before she dressed in the mornings she cleaned the house quite thoroughly, wearing rubber gloves. Then she took a bath in the old-fashioned tub with claw-feet, using Yardley’s bath salts and staying in the water too long. She dressed in a cotton sports dress, manicured her nails, and called up Lenore. Lenore was from Cincinnati and hated Idaho more than Shirley because she came from farther away. They walked to town and shopped at Piggly-Wiggly for groceries and Hatton’s for meat. They could have saved money by marketing once a week and buying in quantity, but they bought just enough for one day. They discussed what they would have for lunch and dinner and walked through the five and ten and got a kick out of the farm women shopping there. Sometimes they bought trinkets or kitchen utensils. Then they separated and met their husbands and walked home to lunch.

In the afternoon they usually went to bridge parties and played with older women who apologized for their hands during canning season. They often won the prizes of bonbon dishes or handkerchiefs, but when they played together with their husbands at night, they played for money.
There was a circulating library in town and Shirley read several books a week and discussed them when she returned them to the pimply spinster who loaned the books. There was no one else to discuss them with because Dick only read *Time* and *Fortune* and *The New Yorker*, and Lenore didn’t read anything except her letters from home.

This morning, Shirley didn’t get up to put the coffee on. She prodded Dick hard instead, and he got up and fixed his own breakfast and brought her a cup of coffee to bed. She didn’t get up till nine-thirty. She only dusted the tops of things and made the bed because she was going to have a cleaning woman from now on. She dressed and looked at herself sideways in the full length mirror. Then she called Lenore and arranged to meet her on the corner of First and Henry Streets.

Lenore looked cute in a plaid seersucker her mother had sent from Cincinnati. They started walking toward town. Shirley took hold of Lenore’s bare elbow.

“I went to the doctor yesterday.”

Lenore stopped walking. “Did he say you were?”

“Yes—two months.”

“Well—congratulations. My God, I can’t imagine you with a baby.”

“Neither can I. I’ve never even held one. And I think they’re awful when they’re tiny. I suppose you wouldn’t think that about your own, though.”

“What does Dick think?”

“He’s glad about it.”

Lenore stopped Shirley and turned her around until they were facing each other. “And tell me how you feel about it? Are you really glad?”

“I don’t know. I’m scared, but it does make me feel I’m accomplishing something.”

They turned in the market, took baskets over their arms and began their daily selection from the long line of canned goods against the wall.