

A WORD OF WARNING: The men cannot be doing with women who change their minds midway through a job

Getting 'the men' in

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WHAT a week it's been! I've had 'the men' in. Always a bit dilatory about the look of the exterior of the house, all through the most decent summer we've had for years, I kept postponing engaging anyone to do a bit of outdoor maintenance while the weather lasted.

My drive was mossy as a fairy dell, my paintwork genuinely distressed, my gutters sprouting weeds. Even the starlings who nest annually in the backyard downspout, took one look at the state of the place last spring and sought alternative accommodation. Everything looked tired, worn and unkempt – much like myself. In a road where other residents are constantly titivating – sweeping their drives, power-washing their pavers, leaf-blowing their lawns, planting, watering, weeding, mowing, de-gunging their gutters, grouting their tiles and painting, painting, eternally painting, in order to maintain a degree of spickness and span-ness you'd go far to find, I'm single-handedly lowering the tone of the whole neighbourhood. Ignoring all dilapidations I am beyond shame.

How I miss the Loving Spouse who could turn his hand to most things. The difficulty was getting him started. Half a dozen reminders voiced in tones of increasing urgency (aka 'nagging') worked in the long run and anything he couldn't do himself, he knew somebody who could. How I miss that man.

The thing is, while you have 'the men' in, you cannot call your soul your own. Their work begins with a great deal of standing about exchanging pleasantries with me, followed by forensic examination of the problems to be addressed. Subsequently, a depressing interlude featuring much head-shaking and sucking of teeth on their part and growing apprehension on mine. The men explain in exhaustive and intricate detail what needs doing. I don't understand half of it but, like a victim of 'nodding dog syndrome' I assent meekly to every suggestion. The doom-laden phrase, "That'll have to be replaced," occurs frequently.

Over tea at the kitchen table comes the estimate. Smiling brightly, even as my stomach contracts with shock, I utter in strangulated tones, "That's fine, fellas! More tea?" A word of warning here – the men cannot be doing with women who change their minds midway through a job, or suddenly come out with phrases like, "I've just thought of one more wee thing you might tackle while you're here…"

Following my mother's example, I'm a great believer in feeding the men. It prevents them absconding for a lunchtime that lasts half the afternoon – though the odd visit back to the yard, ostensibly for some arcane but necessary piece of equipment, may be permissible.

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Scones, pancakes, hot cross buns, fruit cake; cheese on toast or hot soup on a chilly day go down like snuff at a wake, accompanied by big mugs of strong tea and a smoke at the back door while I load the dishwasher and note that supplies of milk and butter are running dangerously low.

While it's polite to take an interest in their work, never seek information from the men on how any piece of equipment works, or you'll be rewarded with more information than you need. A man demonstrably enthusing on its versatility and his own expertise guarantees you a complete foundering in a stiff breeze with a fixed smile on your blue lips.

An unpredictable number of days later the men roll up their dustsheets and tarpaulins, clean their brushes, pack the van and depart. Already, I kind of miss them – but now at least the neighbours are relieved. I'm no longer lowering the tone of the neighbourhood.

Well, of course Sod's Law dictates what happens next. The pristine effect lasts precisely two days before the first brisk autumn winds deposit a carpet of fallen leaves on the newly cleaned drive and pavers. Heavy showers paste them to the ground and bouncing raindrops speckle the fresh paintwork with gunge.

I protect the front doorstep tiles (grouted last because of a sudden downpour) and tape on a big notice requesting 'PLEASE DO NOT STEP ON THE TILES'.

A white van man delivering a small parcel through the letterbox leaves a single, large, wet footprint in the middle of it.

ON THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 2 1921

Charged with Threats

A REMARKABLE case was heard in Belfast Summons Court before Mr James Roche, RM, presiding, when two young men named Thomas McNeice and Robert McMinn were prosecuted for using threats to a tramway construction gang on the Antrim Road. On the Bench beside the Resident Magistrate were Councillor W J Twaddell, MP [assassinated in May 1922] and Alderman Duff, MP [Unionist]. District Inspector Lynn asked to have the defendants bound over.

James McAloran, a ganger, stated that on the forenoon in question the defendants came to where witness and other men were working on the tramway track near Chichester Park and threatened that no Fenians would be allowed to work there. Witness was a Catholic and the defendants were Unionists.

Mr N Tughan (defending) – Did not IRA gunmen come up that day to protect the Catholics? – I could not say. Were they not arrested? – I heard they were.

The Resident Magistrate said there has been no interference since and the Bench dismissed the application.

Move to Dismiss Fermanagh Official Fails

AT THE meeting of Fermanagh County Council on Thursday, Mr John McHugh [Nationalist, chairman] presiding, a letter was read from the Local Government Board regarding the Council Secretary, Mr Thomas Corrigan. The letter read: 'It has been represented to the Board that Mr Thomas Corrigan has taken a prominent part in politics and has undergone imprisonment. In this connection, [we] consider it of the utmost importance that a person holding the position of secretary to a county council should not be identified with advanced political movements on either side, especially in a council where both parties are more or less evenly divided. …' Mr Hanna [Nationalist] moved that Mr Corrigan should be appointed permanently as the Council Secretary.

Mr Cahir Healy [Sinn Fein] described the Board's letter as the most extraordinary document. They struck at the County Council because the Council had too many of a Nationalist majority.

Mr Hanna's motion [appointing Mr Corrigan] was carried by 14 votes to 11.

DESPITE the truce, violence and sectarian intimidation continued in Belfast. In Fermanagh, where the county council was inconveniently nationalist-controlled, unionists attempted to remove its chief official, a former Sinn Féin activist. Cahir Healy (1877-1970), a journalist, IRB member and founder member of Griffith's 1905 Sinn Féin, would be interned by the unionist government in 1922.

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