THE FOOLISH GONDOLA

and other stories

HAROLD MERCER

Berlin sans

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and other stories
from "The Bulletin"

Harold Mercer

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Terry Walker, 2024

Harold Mercer

HAROLD ST AUBYN MERCER was born in Brisbane, Qld, in 1882, and his first short story was published in the *Bulletin* in 1900. His varied career is detailed in "With Self Clipped Wings', his autobiographical "obituary", published in this volume.

This is the fifith **new** volume of his short fiction to be produced in **e-Book** form. These five new volumes of Mercer's short stories are:

1: The Manor Chamber Mystery, and other stories
2: Locksley is Out, and other stories
3: The Grave of Pierre Lamont, and other stories
4: A Very Gentlemanly Murder, and other stories
5: The Foolish Gondola, and other stories

(One novel, four volumes of stories, and one of verse, were published in his lifetime and are now extremely rare.) They were:

The Search for the Bonzer Tart (1920) stories
The Frequent Lover: His Verses (1925)
The Lady Who Was French, and Other Stories (1929) stories
Amazon Island (1933) Novel
The Adventures of Mrs Parsley (1942) stories
Romances in Real Life (1945) stories

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1: "The Flowers That Boom in the Spring"

The Bulletin, 11 Oct 1939

MY landlady held her finger in the air.

"Spring!" she said simply. Dimly from different directions I heard two doubtful sopranos, a contralto, a tenor and a baritone lifting their voices in song. The voices of amorous cats joined the general symphony. The cry of a bottle-oh in the street had a lilt in it.

"Everybody likes spring; the time when, as the poet says, the young man's fancy slightly turns to torture love," said Mrs. Parsley. "But it's a time when landladies have to be very careful to see that tenants don't get into the wrong flats, and that husbands don't come looking for flats with other husbands' wives. Very upsetting it is to some people. But the greatest surprise I ever got in my born life was when Mr. Slompack went about singing 'The Flowers That Boom in the Spring, ha, ha'; and one morning he came sliding down the banisters."

"Mr. Slompack!" I exclaimed.

"Mr. Slompack," repeated Mrs. Parsley solemnly. "Of course Mr. Slompack is scarcely human like other men, as the saying is ; but if it hadn't been for what he had said to me I am sure I would never have expected him of the detention of getting married. It was one day when I made a remark about him seeming all different that he said that about the tidal wave in the affairs of men which being nipped in the bud makes his fortune.

" 'I'm making a big venture, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I've had a finger in many other people's pies and they've come off well. Now I'm going to have a venture of my own.'

" 'Thinking of getting married, Mr. Slompack!' I exclaimed, all took aback.

" 'You'll know all about it in a little while, Mrs. Parsley,' he laughs.

"Heaven knows I'm not one to talk about my tenants' affairs; so it must have been that Mr. Slompack told other people; in a little time it seemed all over the flats that Mr. Slompack was thinking of getting married. Such excitement there was among the women; and among the men, too, for that matter. Especially when he started to sing about them flowers that boom and slide down the stairs. 'Spring!' he says. 'It's good to be alive a morning like this.'

" 'Too right it is,' says Mr. Horssey, with a grin; and Mr. Slompack had hardly been gone down the stairs and out before he says: 'I'm laying two to one the young filly, four to one either of the mares, six to one no marriage and name your own ticket Miss Perry.'

"IT seemed most shocking to me to make bets on a scared subject, as they call it, like marriage; but I gave him ten shillings to go on little Miss Puffinbeck, which he called the young filly. Mr. Horssey, who had taken Number 17, was dissociated with the Turf, as he called it, and he was ready to bet on anything. As a lot of the other tenants had bets with him about Mr. Slompack getting married, I thought I might as well have an interest.

" 'I think,' says Mrs. Wassail, sedimentally, 'that it ought to be Mrs. Puffinbeck he will marry. She may not have youth on her side, but he belongs to her in a sort of way. I'll have another ten shillings on Mrs. Puffinbeck.'

"Mrs. Puffinbeck coming to the flats had helped all those aromas about Mr. Slompack. She hadn't been there more than a couple of hours before she met him on the stairs.

" 'Why, Slommy! " she cries, just as if her voice was on the high seas, as the saying is. 'Slommy! Dear old Slommy! Who ever would have thought of seeing you here?'

"Which all I can say is, if she hadn't seen him she might have been more surprised, for when she had come looking at the flat, which she did twice before taking it, she'd asked me both times if Mr. Tom Slompack was staying here. There is a lot of publicity, as they call it, about some women, and that surprise was pure affection on her part. I must say she did it very well; but Mr. Slompack was certainly flappergasted.

" 'Don't be ungallows enough to say you don't know me, Slommy dear,' she says. 'I'm not changed as much as all that, am I?'

" 'Why of course you're not, Kath; but it's astonishing to meet you,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Why don't you call me "Kitten" as you used to, Slommy dear?' she says.

"Which if ever he had called her 'Kitten,' I thinks to myself, she must have grown a great deal since then. But he might have, because from what they said he had been her sweetheart in the years that the moss has beaten, as the poet says, but she had married someone else.

" 'Joe was always very good to me,' she sighed, 'but sometimes I wondered whether I made a mistake. You know I was always very fond of you, Slommy. I often approached myself for having ruined your life.'

"'Oh, don't worry over that, Kath,' he says, quick-like. Which if ever there was a man who didn't look as if his life was ruined, it was Mr. Slompack.

" 'But you never married,' she whispers, all in a kind of thrill. 'Never mind, Slommy, we will be able to see a lot of one another now, and make up for lost time. Even to-night, perhaps, we might go somewhere'

" 'Oh, I'm sorry, Kath,' he says, 'but I deranged to go out to-night with— well, with Mrs. Towerbee, as a matter of fact. And I wish you wouldn't call me Slommy.'

"It went like wildflowers all over the flats that Mr. Slompack's boyhood sweetheart had come to stay in the flats; and all them women was saying to one another that if Mr. Slompack was intendering to get married naturally he'd marry his old sweetheart. But all them tittle-tattlers didn't know what I did, that that derangement with Mrs. Towerbee, which it had surprised me to hear him mention it, had only been an excuse to get away from that Mrs. Puffinbeck. For, happening to be in the corridor, I heard Mr. Slompack tap at the door of Mrs. Towerbee's flat and ask her if she'd care to go out to a theatre that night.

"It must have been a surprise to Mrs. Towerbee, who hadn't had much success up to then in getting Mr. Slompack to take notice of her, though I must say she tried; proud as a peacock she looked as she sailed out with him past the lounge, where a lot of the tenants were. Little did Mr. Slompack know of the implications that were depending; for that night a man came looking for Mrs. Towerbee.

" 'He wouldn't give his name,' I told them when they came in, 'but he's just gone up to your flat, Mrs. Towerbee.'

"Mrs. Towerbee went as pale as a damn mask, as the saying is, though, myself, I think it a vulgar phase.

" 'It must be my ex-husband ; although I divorced him, he still pesters me. I'm afraid he may make a disturbance if I meet him. He still loves me, I think, poor chap,' says Mrs. Towerbee, smiling at Mr. Slompack.

" 'Naturally; how could he help it?' says Mr. Slompack; and no one could say there was anything ungallows about the way he said it.

" 'I wonder if we could go up to your flat until he leaves?' says Mrs. Towerbee, bold as them brass-tacks. 'Mrs. Parsley could tell him that I rang up to say I was staying with friends; then he'll go away. I'm sure Mrs. Parsley won't mind— will you, Mrs. Parsley?'

" 'I daresay we'll be able to hunt up a little supper,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'My husband,' I heard Mrs. Towerbee say as they went upstairs, 'says that if ever I marry again he'll shoot the man I marry.'

"After hearing that, which it gave me a shock, I was very glad to get rid of Mr. Towerbee by telling him his wife wasn't going to be home.

"THE flats, which got to know all about Mrs. Towerbee having had supper in Mr. Slompack's flat, was inclined to back her against Mrs. Puffinbeck on account of her looks, except those who was full of sediment, which thought

Mrs. Puffinbeck having been his old sweetheart would tell in the long run which has no turning. That's when that Mr. Horssey, which had only just come, started making those bets.

"And then there was that Miss Ruby Puffinbeck, who was Mrs. Puffinbeck's daughter and was not at all affectioned like her mother. She was taking a domestic silence course at a tactical college, so her mother had told me ; and a very good thing it seemed to me for any woman to take. The married couples I've known in these flats would be much better off if the wives had taken one. It was the day after he d met his old sweetheart that Mr. Slompack saw the daughter, too, and very depressed he seemed by her. And, I expect, too, about hearing about the domestic silence course, because Mr. Slompack knew as much about married couples as myself almost, having been here a long time. Experience does it, as they say.

" 'Why, Ruby can come with us to those pictures to-night,' says Mr. Slompack. Which it seemed to me that he was glad of the thought, not being able to get out of taking Mrs. Puffinbeck somewhere.

" 'It's good of you, Mr. Slompack; but I'm sorry. I've got an appointment,' says Miss Ruby, and she adds, just as if she was defiling her, when her mother looks at her: 'With Roy.'

" 'So you've let him know we've come here?' says Mrs. Puffinbeck, quite raffled. 'I told you not to! I told you you had to drop that young man.' She turned to Mr. Slompack. 'lt's absurd Ruby having a boy hanging round at her age. Only seventeen.

" 'Oh, mother!' says Miss Ruby.

" 'Oh course she is a big girl for her age; but that's all she is,' says Mrs. Puffinbeck, hurried-like.

"And even if she was old enough to have a sweet-heart, this Mr. Taylor hasn't got any money, not even a certain job.'

" 'If he's young, you never know how far he'll go,' says Mr. Slompack.

"That Mrs. Puffinbeck seemed to think she'd made a mistake in cactus, as they call it, for she put her hand on his arm and looked coy.

" 'But he isn't like you were when you were a boy, Slommy,' she says. 'Everybody knew you would get on. Don't think I think money is everything, but—'

" 'Perhaps you could get this Roy to be my guest to-night, too,' says Mr. Slompack, like a drowning man clutching at his straw hat, as they say in them novels. But Mr. Slompack had to take Mrs. Puffinbeck by herself that night, because it appeared there was a previous derangement and Mrs. Puffinbeck was even ready to let Miss Ruby go with her boy friend rather than have her with them.

"Which it seemed to me that all Mr. Slompack took Mrs. Towerbee out for was to have an excuse for avoiding taking Mrs. Puffinbeck out sometimes; and he had to take her out now and then, them having been old sweethearts. Sometimes that Miss Ruby went with them, too, but mostly she seemed to be waiting for Mr. Taylor, which very nice it was to see them together, though you could hear them talking hopelessly about Mrs. Puffinbeck not being a dissenting party.

"Them women made it a swelter; they knitted ties for Mr. Slompack and socks and sweaters which he didn't wear; and they kept cooking little things for him and asking him to have dinner in their flats. One was always trying to get ahead of the other.

"THERE was Mr. Slompack taking ladies out to shows and parties nearly every night, which had never been like him; and he seemed a different man altogether. He even asked both those women to go out with him on some nights and brought another man, Mr. Pogglewoggle, to make up four. A very careworn-looking man Mr. Pogglewoggle was; and I heard him ask Mrs. Puffinbeck if she was fond of children. It seemed a strange thing to me for a man to ask a woman when he'd hardly been introduced to her. A most improperganda remark.

"Though I knew why Mr. Slompack had started taking them women out, it looked to me as if they had wore him down when Mr. Slompack went about looking excited and happy and started singing that about the flowers that boom in the spring.

" 'The women say the wedding-bells are going to ring for you, Tom,' says Mr. Wassail one morning. 'You ought to let your pals know.'

" 'For me?' cries Mr. Slompack. 'I haven't gone mad yet— not quite.'

"Mrs. Wassail said that only proved it, because men always said they weren't going to get married when they were. 'Besides,' she says, 'didn't he tell you in an unguarded moment that he was going to make the venture? Only, now, he's fallen genuinely in love; that's what makes him so happy. And of course it's his boyhood sweetheart having come back again, after all these years. He couldn't help but feel the survival of love, meeting her again!'

"It seemed to me she was right, at least except about Mrs. Puffinbeck, which that woman seemed so arty fishy to me, and she wasn't nearly as good-looking as Mrs. Towerbee. It made me quite scared when that Mr. Towerbee, which she said was going to shoot her husband, kept coming again.

" 'She seems to be avoiding me. Tell her I've got to see her,' he says, impatient-like.

"Mrs. Towerbee was with Mr. Slompack when I told her about it.

" 'It's comforting to me,' she says, looking up at him as if she thought he was a sort of Horatius who played bridge while Rome was burning, 'to know I've got a friend who will stand by me.'

" 'Why, of course,' says Mr. Slompack. 'He won't molest you while I am with you.'

"It made me quite upset to think that Mr. Slompack, who had been such a good tenant, might be shot, even if he meant to leave the establishment if he got married. And to me it seemed plain that it must be Mrs. Towerbee; when all them bets were being made I almost felt inclined to have a few shillings on her. For one thing I didn't think that he would like the way that Mrs. Puffinbeck ordered that Mr. Taylor out of the flats and not to see her daughter any more, in spite of Miss Ruby being all in tears and defiling her, too.

"AND then came implications. Miss Perry, who, when first those aromas started about Mr. Slompack intendering to get married, had turned out in a new outfit, all girlish, mutton done up like lamb, as Mrs. Wassail said, which she added that she must be an opdermatist, had said it was scandalacious the way Mrs. Puffinbeck and Mrs. Towerbee was setting their caps at Mr. Slompack; but she was more indigent when she came home from town full of the news how she had seen Miss Ruby and Mr. Slompack in a tearoom.

" 'Scandalacious I call it! ' she says. 'There they were sitting in a corner, screened by palms, him stroking her hand. A man of his age with a girl like that— even if it is ridiculous her mother saying she's only seventeen! '

"There was some indigent meetings among the women over that. And there was Mr. Slompack going along the passages in the morning singing 'The Flowers That Boom in the Spring, ha, ha,' as if he had the pure heart that never reduces; and Miss Ruby ran down the stairs laughing as if she hadn't been shedding tears over that Mr. Roy Taylor, which hadn't been near the flats again, only a couple of days before.

"Not that them other women believed all that Miss Perry said, when they talked it over. 'It's only natural that a man wants to be friendly with the girl who's going to be his stepdaughter,' says Mrs. Wassail; though there was others who said there was no fool like an old fool, and they wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Slompack took to Miss Ruby despite the asperity in their age; which that was men all over, and it would serve him right. And Mr. Horssey started making them bets over Miss Ruby. But I wouldn't have believed it myself if it hadn't been for what I saw with my own eyes.

"I was going to go upstairs when there was Mr. Slompack and Miss Ruby at the top of the stairs, having just come in.

" 'Well, you run along, dear,' he says. 'Don't let your mother know anything.'

" 'Oh, I won't!' she laughs, and she looks up at him, leaning quite close. 'Oh, Mr. Slompack, I think you're just wonderful!'

"And then she just throws her arms round his neck and kisses him ; and away she runs laughing.

"It gave me a shock, I tell you. Playing up to a man like Mr. Slompack like that; which, of course, every man likes to be told he is wonderful by a young woman, especially if he isn't a young man; but I didn't suspect it in a girl like Miss Ruby. Which it seemed to me, after all, she was just as arty fishy as her mother, willing to forget her Mr. Taylor if she could get a man well-to-do like Mr. Slompack, who, although he said he was a broker, was never broke. Even if she wanted revenge by cutting out her mother it didn't make it any better.

"Shocked as I was, and very sorry that Mr. Slompack should make a fool of himself, that's why I had that ten-shillings bet on the young filly when Mr. Slompack in the morning went about singing about them flowers that boom more joyful than ever, just as if he was in the seven havens of the right, and coming sliding down the bannisters.

"The whole flats were on the tipcat of excitement, although I didn't tell anybody of what I had seen. And when Mr. Slompack spoke to me later in the day I felt quite a relief in the attention.

" 'I'm going away for three or four days,' he said, quiet-like, though I couldn't help noticing that he was all ablaze with excitement and happiness. Little did I expect what was going to happen.

"IT seemed that the whole place was buzzing with excitement next day. Women came to me asking what had happened.

" 'What has happened?' I asked.

" 'Why, Mr. Slompack has gone,' says Miss Perry.

"'I know that; he'll be back in a few days,' I says.

" 'And Miss Puffinbeck hasn't been about for a day,' says Mrs. Wassail. 'I call it a shameful disgrace if he's gone off with a girl like that— him who was her mother's sweetheart.'

" 'But Mrs. Towerbee has gone, too,' says Miss Perry. "There's a note been on her door all day—it was there yesterday —saying she'll be back in a few days.'

"Everybody seemed spelling-bound, wondering which it was Mr. Slompack had married, and making all sorts of spectacles about it, when Mrs. Puffinbeck came poundering down them stairs as if she wanted to break them down.

" 'I'm paid up to date. I'm leaving, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, as if she'd like a row with me if a word was said as long as if it was with someone. 'At once. I'm goin' to Melbourne.'

"I couldn't recover my breath to tell her that a week's notice was usual; and the way she looked everyone got away and nobody asked her any questions. In half an hour she was gone, with all her luggage. The whole place was teething with excitement, and tenants had gathered round in the lounge asking me if I knew which it was, Miss Ruby or Mrs. Towerbee, Mr. Slompack had married, which I wasn't able to tell them, when that Mr. Towerbee came in.

" 'Where's she gone?' he asked when I told him about Mrs. Towerbee being absent.

" 'Nobody knows ; we think she's gone to get married,' says Miss Perry.

"He seemed to jump in the air: there was them emblazoned fires in his eyes. 'Aha! My time has come!' he cries. And he went.

"And that Mr. Horssey was gone too. Which I found that out when I went up to his flat, thinking that if the bad news came through that Mr. Slompack had married Miss Ruby I could collect my money anyway. But there was the flat with the door wide open, and not a thing of his left in it. And he owed a week's rent, too!

" 'A man's a mug to have bet with a man like that,' says the Major. 'Only yesterday he collected another five bob from me to put on Mrs. Towerbee. If Slompack has married her that's six quid the cow owes me.

"We was all up in the ear, as the saying goes. There was even arguments which was nearly fights about whether it would be Mrs. Towerbee or Miss Ruby Mr. Slompack had married. But nobody could say for certain, and everybody was on the horns of a tenterhook wanting to know, although as the time passed it seemed we never would until Mr. Slompack came back— if he did come back.

"And then, just as our curiosity was giving way to that painted assignation, there was a noise on the stairs, which I went out to see what it was about, and the first man I saw was Mr. Wassail, though a lot of people seemed to be coming up the stairs after him.

" 'Here's the probable, Mrs. Parsley! ' calls out Mr. Wassail.

"And there was Mr. Slompack, looking as if he'd been drinking, and all excited. I heard him say 'And I made a clear five thousand pounds.'

"Then my heart stood in my mouth; for there, coming up at the back, was that Mr. Towerbee. He went straight towards Mr. Slompack. I was going to screech, when he held out his hand, quite friendly.

" 'Mr. Slompack?' he said. 'My name's Towerbee. I want to thank you.'

" 'Thank me?' says Mr. Slompack all took aback.

" 'Too right!' says Mr. Towerbee. 'You introduced my former wife to Mr. Pogglewoggle, I understand.'

" 'Yes; poor old Pogglewoggle was a widower with six children who'd had a bad time with house-keepers and wanted a wife,' says Mr. Slompack, which it discounted for that question about children that had shocked me. 'Mrs. Towerbee was willing to marry him. You don't want to shoot the poor fellow.'

" 'Shoot him! ' shouts Mr. Towerbee. 'I'll thank him! My wife promised me, when I let her have a divorce, that she wouldn't want my alimony for more than six months; and just when I'd been trying to get to her, to tell her she hadn't played the game, I got the good news that she was married. I felt I had to thank you. No more alimony to be paid! It's a relief!'

"Well, I never did! So that fixed Mrs. Towerbee, which married to that six children she was, after putting over that tale about her ex-husband being so sorry to get rid of her. There's no end to the publicity of some women.

" 'Where's the bride?' I asks Mr. Slompack.

" 'Bride?' he asks, looking blank. Then he laughs. 'Oh, you're thinking of all the silly tales they put about. I'm not married.'

" 'But you were so happy!' I stammered. 'And taking those women about.'

" 'Wouldn't you be, Mrs. Parsley?' he says. 'I've done a lot of investering for other people. I decided to have a venture of my own— I think I told you. I got some shares down to a bob each which I had a tip would come right. When they started to move up, I was excited, I admit. I was glad of a little perversion ; taking those women about. Those shares went up and up. I sold at thirty-five shillings each. I've made five thousand pounds, Mrs. Parsley! Wouldn't you be happy?'

"Naturally I was dumpfoundered. So it all turned out to be them silly women making out that a man had to be going to be married just because he was happy and excited making a lot of money! It's like women, when you come to think of it; full of silly sediment.

" 'But Miss Puffinbeck—' I says.

" 'She's Mrs. Roy Taylor now,' he says. 'Making money like that, I felt I ought to do something for the young people. I got Roy a good job with a firm in Melbourne. Of course there was trouble over Mrs. Puffinbeck's consent to the marriage, as she said Ruby was only seventeen; but I knew Mrs. Puffinbeck some time ago and I felt she was more than that, though she'd even made Ruby think she wasn't. I had a search made for the birth certificate, which showed Ruby was just twenty-one'

"Well, Mrs. Wassail said that it was a shame that Mr. Slompack didn't marry his old sweetheart; but, myself, I've no time for them arty fishy women.

Why, anyway, have women to be so deceitful about their ages? Now I don't care who knows my age. I'm forty-nine and proud of it."

"Of course, Mrs. Parsley," I said tactfully. I shouldn't say that Mrs. Parsley is more than sixty anyway.

"I think," said Mrs. Parsley reflectively, as she gathered her brooms, "that that Mr. Wattlegrin is in love. I hear him singing in his bath every morning."

Which shows that experience doesn't shake even our Mrs. Parsleys from their "sediment."

" 'Sitting in a corner, screened by palms, him stroking her hand.' There was some indigent meetings among the women over that."

2: Planchette

The Bulletin, 15 July 1936

PLANCHETTE had always appeared something of a joke to Tom Peters. And it was only as a joke he attended a seance at which the queer little contraption, the pencil at one end resting upon a pad of paper, wrote the answers to the questions of those who placed their hands upon it.

Merely for a joke Peters, in his turn, put his hand on the little frame. It fidgeted under his touch.

"You must ask Planchette a question," someone prompted.

"How am I going to die?" asked Peters.

Even some of the laughers checked their merriment. This was throwing a challenge into the face of Providence! Peters knew his question would create a sensation, and enjoyed making it.

Planchette jerked about spasmodically. Distinctly on the paper, when it finished with a flourish, was the one word "Violence!"

The group whose faces were bent over the table around him gave a gasp. Peters felt the necessity of maintaining the jest as a jest.

"When?" he asked, with assumed bravado. Planchette moved again.

"That's plain enough!" someone cried with a finger on what had been written. "It says June 24, 1936. And what's this other word? It looks like 'Midnight!'"

Peters would not have admitted to anybody the profound sense of relief he felt. The whole affair was a joke to him; certainly a prophecy of death to occur in twenty-six years could be quite an easy joke.

The war came. Peters enlisted.

"The war will have to last until 1936 before it finishes me," he used to say laughingly. He had been in the habit of jesting like that about the prophecy even before the war; his survival through all

its dangers may have helped to fasten an unacknowledged real belief upon him. To feel that one had a certain tenure of life for twenty, fifteen, ten or even five years was, in a way, comfortable.

But when 1936 came it was different. Peters might tell himself that the Planchette writing was all a foolish joke it could not dispel the gathering terror in his heart as he found January changed into February, and February, March and April flying.

THE lighted face of a clock stared mockingly at Peters as he looked out of a window. There seemed derision in the hands as they pointed to the time—11.30. And 12 was the death hour.

That morning Dr. Burton had put him through a medical examination and had told him that organically he was good for another twenty or twenty-five years.

"Something's upset you, man!" he had exclaimed on his arrival. "You're ghastly, and shaking, too. What's wrong?"

"I'd like you to give me the once-over first, doctor. We'll talk about things afterwards." Peters had stuck to that. Burton was giving him a final examination of his heart when he became startled.

"Good heavens, man, what is wrong?" he demanded.

"That blasted clock!" exclaimed Peters. The timepiece on the mantelpiece was still chiming the hour. Every time a clock struck now it was a reminder to Peters of swiftly-flying time. As he dressed he began his explanation.

"Now look here, old man," said Dr. Burton gently; "sit down quietly and look at the matter reasonably. I've heard of these planchette writings; I've also heard of table rappings— all that bunk. When people get together intent upon experiencing manifestations, they will get some, somehow. When you were working that planchette your mind, either on your own inspiration or impressed by the thoughts of others bent on a joke, guided your hand in scrawling that word 'Violence.' Then, in the same way, you put down the date— a comfortably far-distant date. And, because that date has arrived, you're letting a little trick in mental or nerve mechanics worry you so much that you send for me in case violence may mean a sudden collapse.Let me assure you, old man, you're as sound as a bell. All that's wrong with you is that you've let this idea take possession of you. Been worrying over it for weeks, perhaps?"

"Ye-es. As a fact, I have."

"Well, you'll laugh to-morrow, when the fatal day has passed."

Strangely it stuck in Peters's mind that the doctor had used the words "fatal day."

"I'll call at the chemist's and get them to send up a tonic that will brace up your nerves a bit; and, as for to-night, I'll give you a sleeping draught—"

"That's no good," said Peters with apparently restored cheerfulness. "I've invited a few friends along, and I can't very well go to sleep with friends in the house."

"So much the better. Keep your mind off this absurd business, anyhow. I bet you can't think of anyone who would want to harm you."

"No; I can't."

"Then forget it!" cried Burton briskly. "Enjoy yourself to-night, and forget a silly fear. There's nothing to worry over."

IT was easy enough for the doctor to tell him to forget the planchette; it was hard to do the forgetting. He had been for days like a condemned man counting off the days to his execution. Yet here he was, a hale man; popular, too— there was no one likely to wish him injury. Even if burglars came, he could lock himself in his room, avoiding them. Life was more valuable than any goods they might take.

Peters told himself this, time and again; yet oppression hung over him. It was futile to attempt to lose himself in a book; he had failed to rivet his attention on the paper that morning. After the doctor had gone he took it up again, determined

The chiming of the clock once more brought him to his feet with jumping heart. Another hour gone!

He strode to the clock and, with a peevish action, put the chimes out of commission. Not a single line of what he had read remained in his mind. The whole day passed like that; his thoughts overridden by that nightmare fear, in spite of every interest he sought. With painful care at each crossing, as he looked up and down for fear of cars, he had made his way to the bowling green. When he left, he could hardly remember the men with whom he had spoken. Only Danvers— it was a remark by Danvers which lashed the dull ache of his fear to a positive pain.

"One o'clock! " Danvers had said. "I'll have to get home to lunch— friends coming. By jingo, how time flies!"

Time did fly, in spite of the painfulness of moments. One o'clock— eleven hours to go!" was how Peters's heart registered an echo to the exclamation of Danvers.

Billiards in the afternoon, after a lunch that was a nightmare, was equally a failure as a distraction. Something seemed to be dragging at him, telling him he was wasting time when he ought to be setting his affairs in order. He hated to think of that. It was pandering to the panic that had taken possession of him.

HE was standing on his verandah when a clock in some house opposite began to strike the hour of five. His heart jolted afresh. Seven hours only!

And then six; and then five! It was impossible to avoid keeping the gruesome tally. He was glad when his friends arrived; but even they brought only a partial forgetfulness. To entertain them, talk to them, was an effort, with his thoughts dragging back to his fear. They noticed the worry upon him, and their looks were curious. It was one thing explaining the situation to your doctor; another entirely to put it before these people, whose sympathy might have covered a secret derision.

Even when he flattered himself that he was free from the nag of the terror, it was suddenly restored.

"I say, Peters, that clock of yours has stopped," said Pritchard ; and he looked at the watch on his wrist. "It's gone nine o'clock!"

Only three more hours!

And then the Sampsons. "Jim and I will have to go, I'm afraid. The children have gone to a party, and we arranged to pick them up," said Mrs. Sampson. "It's ten o'clock!"

Two more hours— two only! He tried to ignore it. They were a bright crowd, used to taking possession of his house and amusing themselves. That gave him opportunity for a quiet talk with Palmer, the one man there to whom he cared to speak in confidence.

"What's the matter with you to-night, Tom?" Palmer asked. "Look how that whisky's shaking in your hand!"

"I'm under sentence of death," said Peters with a forced laugh.

"Doctor?"

"No." He hesitated, and then he plunged into the story.

"What's the use of troubling about a foolish idea like that?" demanded Palmer robustly.

"That's easy to say. I've said it myself a hundred times to-day. The fact is, the idea won't be got rid of. If I wake up to-morrow well and alive the spell will be broken; but—"

"Now, look— what's likely to harm you? Nothing! If you like— I pass the police station on the way home— I'll call in and ask them to tell a man off to watch the house. I'll say some suspicious characters have been hanging about. That'll stop the only possibility."

"I had hoped that you would hang on until after twelve." said Peters.

"Right, I will!" said Palmer heartily. "And so will some of the others. We'll make an all-night session of it."

After that it seemed ominous, the working of a malevolent fate, that the party should break up early. Peters's parties usually lasted late; to-night the guests all had some excuse for going. Perhaps the atmosphere, lacking its usual geniality, had deprived them of their desire to stay. And then a phone call came for Palmer. His wife, a chronic invalid, had taken a bad turn; she wanted him at home.

"I'll come back if I can, said Palmer awkwardly. Peters knew that the querulous invalid would see that he didn t.

"Anyway, I'll drop in at the police station, as I said. Put that idea out of your mind, old chap; you'll be all right."

The last of the others went on his heels.

ONE hour to go.

"You won't want me any longer, Mr. Peters?" queried his housekeeper.

"No— yes," said Peters, suddenly changing his mind. "I wonder if you mind, Mrs. Hansford, waiting up for a while— just in case anyone comes back. Mr. Palmer said he might. Until a little after midnight—12.15 would do. I don't like troubling you."

"Oh, it's no trouble. You're not feeling too well, sir? If I might suggest a tonic, there's nothing like"

"I've got the one Doctor Burton sent me. He sent a sleeping draught, too, didn't he? You might mix it for me."

But when she handed it to him he furtively threw it into the grate. That was because he dreaded to open a window to throw it into the garden. Of all things he did not want to sleep— until the fatal hour was past. He felt that he would be able to sleep well enough when the ordeal of the night was over. A consciousness of his cowardice was upon him as he began to ascend the stairs. He was flying from terror, leaving a frail old woman to face what he feared. He slipped a revolver from his desk drawer into his pocket before he went.

"The house is locked securely?" he asked, with a foot on the stairs.

"I always see to that," returned Mrs. Hansford.

What an insupportable terror was upon him as he entered his room! He could have shrieked out against it, like a frightened child. The blind was up, and the clock in the tower seemed to grin at him— malevolently, derisively. It was 11.30. Half an hour of torture before he could hope to put aside the horror superstition had placed upon him!

He shrank back from the window in the act of approaching to let down the blind. Here was a loophole for disaster. Some murderous maniac with a gun in his hands might seize the opportunity for a killing if his figure showed in the window. He switched off the light he had just turned on and stood in a darkness only relieved by the pale light of the moon.

His heart throbbed furiously, painfully. A new idea came to him. If it was possible that anyone should have evil designs upon him he would trick him— or them. He tossed cushions upon the bed, pulling the clothes over them to give the impression of a sleeping form. Then he stole soft-footed from the room, closing the door behind him.

He half expected some attacker to spring out from the darkness; but, swift-footed, he moved across to a seldom-used guest-room. The light gleamed as he touched the switch, showing the room to be safely empty. He turned the light off again, locked the door and leaned against it, panting in sheer fear.

This room had the same aspect as his own. It seemed to him that the lighted clock-face was stooping to leer at him through the window. Its hands were surely derisive fingers, pointing out to him the swift passage of time to the hour that had become so dreadful. It was close upon the quarter to now. All foolishness, of course. Only another fifteen minutes and the spell of terror would be over and he could laugh at his fears.

His heart stopped suddenly; then it beat more furiously than ever. There was undoubtedly a step—a man's step— on the stair, a step stealthily made, as if by one who did not wish to be heard. So the wild improbability had happened after all! His ear against the door panel, he heard again the soft fall of a foot. He heard the handle of his door turned and the faint creak the door made as it opened.

Somebody had entered his room. But who— who? What had happened to Mrs. Hansford?

As he listened with a desperation so intense that it seemed his heart was making a drumming that might drown other sounds and betray him, he clutched his revolver tightly. Fear filled each second with dreadful agony. Again he heard a soft footfall. Peters recognised the faint creak of the loose board outside his doorway. Another door was opened as softly as the first.

Peters threw a swift glance at the clock-face. It was more jeering than ever; there was a sort of demoniacal triumph on it. Seven minutes to!

He knew now that Planchette had written truthfully. Midnight on this day was his death-time. The ruse by which he had delayed the marauder was only lengthening time to fulfil the prophecy. Everything had worked to that end. Of what use was resistance? It was only prolonging the agony of seconds that each held a year's torture.

And then the handle of the door against which he was pressed moved stealthily. There was a gentle pressure which the lock resisted.

Peters's heart froze with horror; the cold sweat covered him. A quick glance showed him that the last minute to the hour had arrived. A shot rang out just as the chime in the lighted tower began to toll the midnight hour.

"WHAT the deceased had told me in the morning," said Doctor Burton at the inquest, "worried me. Having had a late call elsewhere, I decided to look in upon him before I returned home. Mrs. Hansford, hearing my step on the verandah, opened the door for me. She seemed to be expecting me, and relieved that I had come. Hoping he had gone to sleep, and fearing to disturb him, I went upstairs softly... I would say that he was goaded to insanity by a superstitious fear when he shot himself."

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3: The Glory of France

The Christmas Bulletin, 7 Dec 1929

THAT subtle fragrance of the garden came to meet you as you trod the road, a change from the hard scent of gum and wild honeysuckle that lay heavily on the bush surroundings; and, as I reached the fence and saw its riot of roses and garden blooms, the beauty of it held me.

"Hey, Corp! *Merci*!" The hail came suddenly, followed by a sound of hurrying feet as a man dashed up the path. The next moment my hand was being shaken vigorously by one whose face was familiar enough, though my memory refused to name him; and I found myself drawn upon the verandah and seated there.

I was remembering now. It seemed that I was back again in a smoke-filled estaminet in France, crowded with Diggers who had just come into camp nearby. Marie, with others, was flitting about fulfilling the orders for drinks, pausing to exchange laughing badinage with some of the men. Rumors of a French success had come through, and though the stories had proved to be wholly false, there was elation in the atmosphere.

Then suddenly, at someone's suggestion, Marie was on a table, head in the air, singing with defiant spirit the *Marseillaise*. A moment, and her voice alone was heard, vibrant with patriotic fervor; with the light of the oil-lamps flickering on her vaguely and the cigarette-smoke curling around her, she seemed like the very spirit of France. Soon the Diggers commenced to roar or to shout their cheers in the most familiar passages, and the song finished with a pandemonium of applause mingling with the grating of chairs and clinking of upraised glasses. The spirit of this movement caught the girl; and as if herself holding aloft a glass she cried, "The Glory of France!"

"The glory of France— *you* are!" Sergeant Royle exclaimed, standing below her at the head of the table, with his laughing eyes on her face. She laughed down at him in return; then he held his arms to help her, and as she leapt he caught her in a tight embrace. He would have kissed her, but with reddened face she pushed herself free.

A light blow fell on his cheek.

"I am sorry, Ma'moiselle," he said; "I apologise. Compree apologise?"

"*Oui*, you are ver' sorrie. So am I, M'sieur the Sergeant. That blow was for Pierre, my betroth'."

"He's a lucky chap," said the sergeant.

"He is a soldier of France," she said proudly. And then, as if afraid of giving offence: "Pardon! You, too, are a soldier— *for* France. He is your comrade, is he not?"

A chorus approved the sentiment, which established Marie's position with us. "She put it neat, that shiela," Old Dan whispered to me. "It isn't playing the game to try to take a cobber down for his girl."

Marie again was laughing about the place, carrying her bottles and biscuits; and Jim Royle, always trying to catch her eye and exchange a word with her, was noisily merry with those around him.

There was a diversion when Clay, the postal orderly, came in, and a rush to him directly he spoke.

"A bit of a mail just come up, and I thought you fellows might like to git your letters." A good fellow Clay. "Private Horley here?" he asked.

Somewhat shakily a youngish Digger rose at the table next to mine.

"A letter?" he asked.

"No; there's a message come through for you up at the orderly-room."

"About the wife?"

"You'd better come up."

"It's about the wife— I'm expecting it. Is she dead? Is she dead, man— is she dead?"

"You're to be given a week off duty if you want it," Clay said awkwardly.

Horley rose, staggering towards the door. There he paused, came heavily back and slumped into his chair.

"Bear up, Pete," said Daniels, putting an arm over his shoulder.

"I was expecting it," said Horley brokenly. "Curse the damned office-hounds in Australia! They reported me killed; and she went down. Been ill ever since. We'd been fond of each other since we were kids. Then I enlisted, and all of a sudden we decided to get married. Only a day that was before I left— and when I go back she won't be there."

The note of tragedy had subdued the riot. Not to intrude on his grief, the groups had turned again to their own affairs. A few men, deciding to leave, gripped his hand silently as they passed out. And Marie, coming to him, softly, unasked, stooped with a quick impulse, one hand over his shoulder, and kissed his cheek.

Jim Royle sprang up on seeing that, but sat down again.

Afterwards Royle's infatuation for Marie became a camp jest. The alert, good-looking youngster had earned a reputation for efficiency outside the war matters that had earned him his stripes; the amorous adventures attributed to him had certainly not left any impress upon him.

Possibly because the shadow of death was hanging over us more definitely than usual, it was a time when jests, however cheap, were welcome. We were stunt-practising instead of doing ordinary drill work, preparing for tactical operations which might mean the end of most of us. The sheep were being made ready for the shambles, which were to be faced in possibly a day's time, possibly a week's, but soon.

Apart from that, the stunting had an advantage; our practice through, we were free, and camp leave was frequent. And even when leave was not legitimately available, Royle was often at the estaminet that claimed Marie as an ornament. He had established himself in favor, too.

Lying amidst the grass in the fields under the spring sky, with its blue flecked by fleecy clouds, it was possible to get many dreams of peace from the heads of the spring flowers that nodded gently amongst the green. I liked to spend spare time like this, with a magazine for a companion ; and so I heard the voices of Royle and Marie talking beyond the hedge. I was about to move; but it seemed a mere friendly, laughing conversation, so I stayed. Suddenly, however, there was a protest from the girl.

"I'm only trying to tell you, in the right way, that. I'd like to take you back to Australia with me," he insisted.

"La, la, it is not to kees me that you need to tell me anything," she laughed. "You should remember Pierre— as I do."

"Oh, hang Pierre! I'll swear I love you, Marie, as well as he does. And I think you love me a bit."

"Why, of course, I love you, Jimmee; but I love Pierre, and I am to marry Pierre. He is fighting for France, and he trusts me."

"Well, he can't blame other fellows for wanting to kiss you. Just a kiss— what does it matter?"

I was glad that Marie broke away from him, for there was something in her voice that told me she really did love Royle very much; and, not being in Jimmy's shoes myself, I felt that loyalty to Pierre should be considered.

It seemed they had gone a good time when my own dry throat suggested refreshments ; and I turned towards the estaminet: but I passed the pair still oil the way, and still talking earnestly as they strolled.

There was a French soldier in the estaminet, a pleasant-faced fellow, already fraternising with the few Diggers who had arrived. He turned from them, leaping to his feet at the cry of "Pierre!" as Marie rushed to him, extending her two hands, which he took in his and raised to his lips.

"You two— you must be comrades," said Marie, standing between Jimmy, who had followed her, and Pierre. She was laughing; her emotion might have

been ascribed to her sudden meeting with her lover, but her face was at one moment white and the next red.

There was instantly a sense of hostility between the two men. Jimmy showed it clearly; but in a moment, Pierre, obeying the wish of his fiancee, leaped forward with a hearty, outstretched hand which Royle had to accept. It may be that so Pierre hoped to put an obligation of comradeship in the way of rivalry.

Whatever Royle's feelings, he had little cause for impatience. Pierre's regiment was passing on the way to reinforce the French troops now placed on our left, where the Portuguese had lost the long-held Messines ridge. Pierre had merely begged an hour of leave to see his sweetheart.

We got the news on evening parade that in the early morning, after stacking our packs and surplus equipment and getting into battle order, we were to move for the line.

It was Horley I met as I made my way across the camp after getting my equipment ready. "I don't mind." he said. "I hope we go straight in and that a bullet finds me. That's how I feel. So let's have a last drink."

Camp leave had, of course, been stopped, but there was a way through the hedge and across a field. How sweet the wine tastes that you think may be the last!

We had little time, however; by regulation the estaminets had to close early. It struck us that it would be best for us to leave by a rear way. Horley fell back upon me as he opened the door. Surprised, I looked over his shoulder, and in the dim twilight saw Marie seized fiercely in Jimmy's arms.

"You have told me you love me," he was saying passionately. "I have made you tell me you love me, and I know you do. But I want your kisses, Marie. To-morrow I am going up the line— I may not come back. Are you going to send me away coldly?"

She was fighting off his face with her hands as his lips sought hungrily for hers.

"Oh, Jimmee, Jimmee!" she panted. I do love you so my heart might break. But Pierre— he trusts me, and he is fighting too. He too may be killed. It is not loyal, it is not true!"

He was about to turn when she sprang upon him, taking his face in her hands.

"Oh, Jim-mee! Jim-mee! You must come back to me! God must keep you safe, my love— my love!"

She reeled from him sobbing towards the door. I don't think Royle waited to see how she threw herself on the ground sobbing out her prayers and her

love for him. He just stared as one dazed with some new realisation, and then, turning, plunged off towards the camp, blundering into shrubs as he passed.

"Dirty dog!" remarked Horley as we threaded our own way through the quickly gathering darkness after him. "That poor French chap! What right had Royle—"

"Oh, I don't know. War makes things different; we may all be dead to-morrow,"

I said. And then, after a pause: "Royle made a joke of love, but he's got a dose of the real thing now."

Down in the trenches at Meteren he showed it— a changed Royle, alert as ever, but pensive. Contrary to expectations, we were comparatively quiet; the activity was on our left towards Mont Kernel. Here nightly, amid a chaos of sound, there was a carnival of lights; the flashes of the guns roaring into action on the slopes, the flying fragments of the shells bursting up into a pyrotechnic display, mingling with the incessantly rising Verey lights, the red and green signal flares and the ground lights. Through it we could almost see the lines of the attacking French, dashing into the maelstrom of fire, to be hurled back again and again.

Intently Royle watched it all: the flashes of the guns gave light enough to show the thoughtfulness of his face.

"Poor devils!" he said; and I knew him too well to think that he had any but good wishes for the man who was creating such a problem for him.

And then at last our own turn came to spell.

We were like men reprieved as, out of the mire of the trenches, we made our way back into the village estaminet again. Marie, dressed in black, flashed a gay, expectant smile towards us, a smile of greeting, with something also of disappointment.

"Does she know about Royle?" I asked Horley, finding myself seated beside him.

"The black is for the chap she was engaged to— Pierre. He's been killed," Horley said.

The Diggers were boisterous; the gaps were less numerous than we had expected, and the reaction inclined us all to merry riot. Marie bustled about with the wine; every time the door opened her eyes flashed towards it, always to meet disappointment.

She could bear the suspense no longer. Several times she had paused as it about to put the question; at last it had to be spoken: "Where is he? Where is Sergeant Jimmee?"

"Wasn't Jimmie the sergeant that was skittled on patrol?" asked Hawkins. He had joined us in the line, and had not previously been in this estaminet.

Her tray clattered on the table. She stood like a statue, her face suddenly as white as any marble.

"He died bravely," I said, hurriedly following on the words of the blundering fool, and then I remembered a phrase: "For the glory of France."

"Oh, la, la, yes! For the glory of France! she cried with a peal of laughter; and in a minute she was on the table singing defiantly and full-throatedly as she had done when first she had impressed herself upon me. But now, although many of the Diggers joined in with her, there was something wild, demented about her. She finished with a shrill laugh, and then dropped on to one knee, sobbing into her hands. Half a dozen were ready to catch her as she tell swooning.

IT WAS ALL this I pictured, forgetting the verandah fronting the Eden-like garden forgetting even the old battalion mate whose face although not his name was remembered. And he was talking.

"I could not help thinking of her and her wild grief ever afterwards; and when the war was over I took my leave in France just to see what had become of her. In the little village they thought her half-mad. She loved France still; but it had become a tomb to her. She was hoping to go to Australia; it was the land that he had come from, the man she had learnt to love in spite of her wish to be loyal to her Frenchman. War makes wrecks like that: I know you remember how it killed my wife."

It flashed upon me now who he was; but he had changed mightily.

"It seemed to me that we who had come through had to piece together what was broken. She was eager to come to Australia— and so she married me," said Horley simply.

"You married—" I had begun; and then my eyes, which had been cast down as I listened to him, sprang up.

A gracious-looking woman had stolen upon us. Leaning over her husband's shoulder, her hands had grasped his with understanding, sympathy and gratitude. She smiled her recognition of me as I looked. And I knew that here, out of it all, these two at least had garnered a rich harvest of happiness.

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4: Blue Blood

Bulletin, 25 June 1930

"I WOULDN'T 'ave such people in my 'ouse fer all the tea in China, not if the land was flowing in ink and 'oney," my landlady declared. She had been showing her best rooms to a man and his over-dressed wife, and I had heard the wife remark, "It's not quaite what we have been accustomed to."

"Blue blood is thicker than water, of course," proceeded Mrs. Parsley, "but I'm satisfied as long as I keep my 'ouse respectacle. I'm not one to go in fer 'aving dukes and lords about my place, for I've always 'eld that true 'arts 's more than cornets and simple things amuse small minds. Not good enough fer 'er! she says— not the sort of place she's been used to! 'Perhaps you've not been used to a respectacle 'ouse where all the married couples are married couples,' I says sharp. As Mr. Cummings, 'oo was something on the stage and knoo his Bible off by 'art used to say, that must' ave touched 'er on the craw, fer she started as if she'd bin shot. An' I think myself she was shot— 'alf-shot, anyway."

Having relieved herself of this surge of wrath, Mrs. Parsley became her amiable self again.

"I don't 'old much with lords and earls," she said, "except in books. But, as the sayin' is, 'You can't judge a novercoat by the sausage that wears it,' an' I daresay I've 'ad people in my 'ouse as well connected as ever that woman was 'oo came this mornin'. There was old Mrs. Calthorp de Roebuck, 'oo useter occupy 30A, for instance."

"That little top-floor room?" I asked surprisedly.

"Full many a gem of sparkling rays, siree, is made up in little packets," retorted Mrs. Parsley. "She was very poor, but it wasn't until she'd been with me some time I found out she 'ad the old-age pension; an' all beside that was a little money a grandson useter give 'er.

"Almost proud of being poor, she was; and of her fambly connections, too— I 'eard about them almost the moment I spoke to 'er.

" 'Mrs. Parsley?' she asks, when she 'ears my name. 'I wonder if your husband is connected with the Parsleys of Pashingham?'

" 'My 'usband,' I said, not quite gettin' 'er meanin', 'is a very respectacle man in spite of a slight failin' fer drink. 'E's bin connected with the wharves for twenty-seven years.'

" 'The Parsleys of Pashingham were a very old family,' she says. 'Evelyn Parsley married my mother's cousin, whose sister was married to the younger brother of the Earl of Broketon; so, in a way, I am connected with the family.'

" 'Beware of the Greeks when they bring you fish,' is a Bible proverb I've always thought very true; and I become suspicious when people try to make out they're related. So I thought I'd make it quite plain.

" 'I don't think my 'usband 'ad anythin' to do with them Parsleys,' I says. 'As a matter of fact, although we didn't shout it from the 'ousetops like the foolish virgins, Mr. Parsley was a fondling, which is where 'e got some of 'is bad 'abits, I always say. such as knockin' 'is pipe out on the floor.'

" 'My resources may be limited, but I'm well connected, and I've a lot of influential friends,' she says when I shows her the room and tells her the rent. I can't see 'ow 'er influential friends is goin' to do me much good; but, partly because she says that, and looking like a permanent, and 30A being small and 'ard to let, I cut a coupler bob a week off the rent.

" 'The little old lady,' as they called 'er, soon became popular in the 'ouse. In spite of being sharp-tongued at times, an' in spite of 'er 'abit of keepin' people in their places as she called it, she was a naffagle old soul 'oo was willin' to talk to everyone about 'er connections, especially 'er grandson 'oo was somethin' in the city.

"She was liked chiefly because she kep' so cheerful. You could pickcher 'er when she was young dancing among the beauty and the chivalry with earls and whatnots all round 'er; an' here she was in 'er old age in 30A, and naffagle to all, if a bit condescendin'.

"It was pleasant to talk to 'er; an' people was eager to ask 'er to 'ave a cup o' tea or put pennies in the gas when she ran short. 'I can't see my bankers until Wednesday,' she would say. Wednesday was pension day. But we didn't let on we knoo that. A silent tongue is more precious than rubies on a swine's snout, as I always say.

" 'It's the way of the world, Mrs. Parsley,' she would say— 'nobody likes the poor relation'— exceptin' the grandson 'oo was Somethin' in the City. Young 'Erbert Storie, he was; a gentlemanly, kind young chap, comin' out to see 'is grandma so reg'lar an' always so affectionate an' jolly with 'er. It must 'ave been 'ard on 'im, givin' 'er whatever money 'e did, for it came out that 'is Something in the City was being a clerk in a prodooce store.

" 'E 'asn't been cornin' long before 'e notices Miss Baird, a pretty girl 'oose father was in the police but 'ad married again. She begins to smile at 'im on the stairs, a blushin' violet if ever there was one, and after a while she used to go for a walk with 'im after 'e'd said good-bye to 'is grandma. Both scared of the old lady findin' out they were, as if their bein' in love was one of them crimes that blush unseen. An' in love they were, as you could tell.

"The little old lady, 'oo 'as sharp eyes, notices of course, an' might 'ave noticed earlier only that a man named Slimkins came to the 'ouse an' useter take up a lot of 'er time.

" 'It's not a subject I talk about much,' 'e said, 'but I always like to meet a lady of good family. There's somethin' in blue blood, whatever you like to say. My own people— my Australian ancestors—was the Captain Slimkins who came out in the early days.'

" 'Yes, she's a very nice girl,' I 'ears the little old lady sayin' one day. 'An' you know, 'Erbert, there's nothin' I want more than your 'appiness, my dear. But think of 'er family— only a policeman's daughter, 'Erbert!'

" 'Nonsense,' 'e began.

" 'Oh, 'Erbert!' she cries. ' 'Owever poor we may be we can still remember our family. But there, if you still feel you cannot be 'appy without 'er, don't worry about the money you allow me— I daresay I can secure some employment in giving tuition to people with neglected education.'

"'Don't be so silly, Gran!' he cried.

" 'If you were married,' she says, dignified like, 'I might refuse to take it. You would owe your duty elsewhere.'

"She was a denominating old body when she wanted to be. and she knew that that is where she 'ad 'Erbert. She 'ad poor little Doris the same way, too, before long.

"An' soon the 'ole 'ouse was sayin' that if 'Erbert an' Doris married they would be very selfish. 'They are both young; surely they can wait,' says Miss Furley, 'oo, being forty-five if a day, 'ad done a lot of waitin' 'erself, an' 'ad no idea that 'ope deferred is the thief of time.

"Money's a curse when you 'aven't got it; an' 'ere it was croppin' up again.

" 'Owever, it's an ill wind that blows away the silver lining. Young Slimkins brings in a friend one day an' introdooces 'im to the old lady. This friend—a Mr. Brewer 'e was— sat on the edge of a chair twistin' 'is 'at round an' gaping like a trusted fowl while she talks of Lord This an' the Earl of That.

"Suddenly Brewer stands up an' speaks.

" 'It's this way,' he began. 'The wife an' me 'ave come in fer a bit of money. The idea of the missus is that we oughter get into society. What about givin' us an' intro' to the Guv'nor? We'd pay all right.'

" 'Well, really,' she says, 'you see my resources are now very limited, an' I've got rather out of touch with society.'

" 'Oh, that's all right; people'll only be too glad to 'ear from you again,' puts in Slimkins. Then he turns to Brewer. 'You leave it to us,' 'e says.

"A few days later I gets a shock. There's a frightened call, and I find the old lady talkin' to a man who says he's a police officer. The little old lady is tryin' to 'old 'er 'ead 'igh, but she's all of a tremble.

" 'You can say, Mrs. Parsley, that I 'ad nothin' to do with it!' she cries. 'This gentleman says that Mr. Slimkins got £300 from Mr. Brewer fraudulently pretending he was going to introduce 'im into society, and I'm an implication.'

" 'Your name's mentioned; an' inquiries have been made. The wealthy relations you spoke about to Mr. Brewer, it appears, own an 'am an' beef shop at Newtown. An' your husband was a Government House messenger.'

" 'I married my husband for love,' says the little old lady. 'My own family is a very old one.'

" 'I ain't concerned with that, mum,' says 'e. 'The facts is that, on your own statements, it looks as if you been workin' in with this 'ere Slimkins. No one wants to involve an old lady like you in trouble. But what I want to say is that my name's Baird.'

" 'Not Doris's father!' cried the little old lady.

" 'That's me,' 'e says, sort of grim. 'I love my daughter, Mrs. de Roebuck, although she don't 'it it with my new missus; an' I like that grandson of yours. I'm prepared to 'elp 'em to be 'appy. I can give 'em a 'ouse; an' they want you to go an' live with 'em. But I understand there's some objection about 'Erbert's family.'

" 'But, Mr. Baird,' says the little old lady, 'you're not just a policeman! You're an official of the Police Department and a property owner!'

" 'Put it that way if it pleases you, mum,' 'e smiles.

" 'Mr. Baird,' she says, crying, 'you don't know 'ow 'appy you've made me!' She stops. 'But tell me, Mr. Baird,' she says suddenly, 'there was a branch of the Bairds of Bramleith that came out and settled in the New England district eighty years ago. Are you—'

" 'E didn't wait. Merely shook 'ands 'ard an said the young people were waitin' below an' 'e d send them up. An' they did come up; an' you'd think the little old lady 'ad been beggin' 'em to get married instead of keepin' 'em back, the way she went on.

"Not long after I 'eard the little old lady was dead," said my landlady with tears m her voice and eyes; "but I don't really need to cry about 'er, because 'er last years was all 'appy, an' she was particularly proud of the baby that was named Calthorp de Roebuck Storie. I went out to take some flowers for 'er grave one day, that being one of the few pleasures I give myself; an' there was 'Erbert there, with 'is wife an' their little ones, all very well dressed, but mi still the thoughtful, dutiful grandson as of old.

" 'I'm running a bottle-yard now,' 'e told me. 'It's a good business. I only went in fer clerkin' because Gran thought it more genteel. Did you see the tombstone we've given 'er?'

"I 'ad. An' I felt sure it would make the old lady's soul rejoice like the village blacksmith. It ran:

Sacred to the Memory
of
Mary Calthorp de Roebuck,
Aged 76
A Connection of the Fifth Earl of
Broketon."

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5: The Blessed Baby

Bulletin, 15 June 1932

"I 'OPE," remarked my landlady, "that the baby belonging to the new people in No. 17 doesn't disturb you. As the Bible says, out of the mouth of baby sucklings cometh wisdom at the midnight's hour; and then there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, especially if some of the lodgers are wanting to sleep it off. I like the dear little things meself, an' a baby's a sort of sign of respectability, especially when it has parents: but lodgings is no place for them.

"As the Pope said (though I'm a Protestant myself, I must say), when he saw the Saxin children in the Art Gallery, 'No, they are not angels, but their country needs them.' So 1 always say, no home is replete without them, and I'm glad when I see tradesmen advertising 'Families supplied.' As the poet said, 'There is no fireside who ever did offend it, but has one vacant chair'; but in my opinion there are too many keeping the chairs vacant. Maybe it's the gas stoves have something to do with it.

"I wouldn't have let No. 17 to the couple if I'd known they had the baby, although very nice people they are, and him in the Iceworks, which is a very respectable position. They didn't bring the baby with them when they came to see the room. Not that I blame them; but what a tangled mess we leave when first we practise to deceive, as the poet says— not that it takes much practice with most people. Now all the guests are complaining of being kep' awake at night; and I'm glad to hear you say you're not one of them. It's drink with some of them; it makes some people crotchetty; now with you"— My landlady checked herself and trailed on.

"But I remember a time when a baby was welcomed in this very 'ouse, an' everybody seemed to go mad over it. It was a nine-days' blunder, if ever there was. I never suspected what was goin' to 'appen when I let No. 5 to Miss Littlejohn. A crabbled little woman she was, especially about men. Born into trouble, she was, as the sparks fly up and never set the Thames on fire. I think she felt about men like a man 'oo lived with me did about food, and once, being hard up, went six days without it; 'e said the smell of cookin' put 'im in a vi'lent rage, an' e 'ated everybody 'oo ate anything.

"Whatever else Miss Littlejohn was, you could be sure she was respectable. Mr. Plum wit. a jolly feller, but rather coarse in 'is jokes, reckoned if Miss Littlejohn wasn't a Miss there was some brave feller in the world 'oo deserved a bar to 'is V.C. Yet, one night, Mrs. Johnson, 'oo was in No. 7, came 'ammering at my door some time in the mormn'. 'Mrs. Parsley! Mrs. Parsley!' she cries, like the voice in the wilderness, 'there's a baby, and nobody with the poor woman. Er door's locked.'

" 'A baby! You're mad !' I says, opening the door an' starin' at 'er pale, pantin' face. 'Babies don't appen in this 'ouse without my consent.'

" 'I assure you it's right,' she insists.

" 'In what room— who is it?' I asked.

" 'In No. 8— it's 8 — it's Miss Littlejohn,' she says.

"Well, you co.uld 'ave knocked me down with the straw which shows the way the wind was blowin'. I 'urries upstairs, to where there's a little knot of people round a door in pyjamas an' dressin'-gowns and Gawd knows what. Sure enough there's a little cry— the cry of a new babe. It did upset me— upset me so at first I was angry.

"'Miss Littlejohn!' I calls out, rattling the 'andle of the door, ' 'Ow dare you do a thing like this in my 'ouse?' An' then I remembers I'm a woman meself. 'You poor soul, open the door an' let me in,' I says. And I was running down for my 'ouse keys when the doctor from over the road an' a nurse with 'im came bustling in.

" 'This is Miss Littlejohn's room, of course?' he says, puttin' a key in the lock. 'I must ask all you good people to move away; the patient will need to be quiet. Which is the landlady?' And then he told me what to do.

"When I come back with the 'ot water the nurse took it qt the door. The people 'ad gone, but not to bed; they was standin' round each other's doors or in each other's rooms talkin' about it. An' no wonder! Miss Littlejohn ! I was all in a fluster meself.

"But the worst shock I got of all is in the morning when Miss Littlejohn, in a wrap, an' lookin' white as a sheet, I find in the kitchen makin' groats. She mumbles somethin' about the gas in 'or room bein' crook.

" 'You get right back to bed an' I'll make the groats fer you,' I says. 'D'ye want to kill yourself? Fancy gettin' up an' about like this!'

"A rush of red came into 'er face.

" 'Me, Mrs. Parsley?' she cried, indignant. 'Me?'

" 'Well, I must say I'm surprised,' I says, 'but I ain't goin' to say anythin' to you, you pore soul, in your present condition. I daresay you re more sinned against than sinnin'. But now you've got to think of the pore little life you've brought into the world.'

" 'Ow dare you speak to' me like that?' she stormed. 'Me? Don't be ridiculous! I found this poor girl in a doorway in the street below, cryin' as if 'er 'eart would break. I learnt from 'er just 'ow things were with 'er, an', although I don't know much about these things, I saw there was not a moment to be lost. So I rushed 'er up to my room, got 'er into bed, and then rushed across for the doctor. I first 'anded 'im my key, bein' too upset to come back an' face what was 'appenin', an' waited in his surgery. Oh. Mrs. Parsley, the poor girl is well

brought up; but she hasn't got a 'ome an she's been deserted. What beasts men are!'

"I'm not one to talk, believin' that a still tongue is more precious than a jewel in a swine's snout; but before breakfus everybody in the 'ouse knows the story, an' Miss Littlejohn was a sort of hero to them 'oo adn't liked 'er before.

"It was surprisin' the way the 'ole 'ouse took on about that baby. They all know Miss Littlejohn was pore, an' they all put in liberal to pay for the doctor's expenses and etcetera and etcetera, although the cheque of Mr. Swift, 'oo everyone thought was a gentleman, an' 'oo 'eaded off the subscription with five pounds, was proved dishonorable when it went to the bank— Mr. Swift left next day, an' paid 'is three weeks' rent owing with another dishonorable cheque. Three gentlemen, includin' Mr. Woretley, 'oo everybody reckoned a 'orrible surly feller, undertook to pay a week's rent each for the room—Miss Littlejohn, 'ad to 'ave another fer a time— an' Mr. Plumwit come 'ome that night as merry as anythink. 'E said 'e 'ad been wettin' the baby's 'ead; 'e couldn't 'ave done it better if it 'ad been 'is own child. 'E brought 'ome some flowers an' a box of chocolates fer the baby an' its mother: an' when 'e was told the baby couldn't eat chocolates an' the mother wasn't allowed, 'e gave it to Miss Littlejohn, if you please!

"Well, the baby was a dear little thing; an' so was the mother, pore creature. Never shall I forget 'ow I felt drawn to 'er, she a girl 'ardl.v out of 'er teens as she lay there lookin' down so proud at the sweet little thing, an' 'er eyes filling with tears as she Thought of 'ow matters stood.

'Never you mind, dearie,' I comforts 'er. 'There's always a silver cloud before the dawn, and the ways of improvidence is best, 'owever 'arsh they may seem to the 'uman eye, which is not inflammable,' I says. ' 'Oo knows that it may prove all the better that he didn't marry you, leavin' you free to wed some rich young man 'oo 'as won a Whiddon.'

"Some'ow it didn't seem to comfort 'er. She sobbed; but when I kissed 'er she clung to me an' was better. An' so, though she didn't let it out all at once, I learnt bit by bit that she 'ad met a rich young feller 'oo'd taken 'er out, an', finally, very much in love with 'im r an' with no mother to guide 'er, as the poet says, they 'ad gone to live in a little flat. An' probably 'e would 'ave married 'er only 'e thinks that a girl 'oo would do that might take up as easily with someone else. As the motter says; 'Evil beasts are they as evil think,' an' a very good motter, too, it is. So they 'ave rows an' 'e flares up an' leaves 'er.

" 'Umanity is a strange thing, even if it stays in a residential that I've always kept respectable, as you know, being a writer, and writing all about murders an' things which I don't think ought to be printed in the papers, though I will say I always read them first. There's nearly everybody in the 'ouse raisin' an

'owl about the poor little mite in No.. 17, which is a sweet little soul— a regular little, bud from 'Eaven ; an' yet, because Enid's little one was born on the spot and gave 'em a thrill, everybody in the 'ouse seemed to fancy they 'ad a share in it. Not that there was any rush to pay expenses after the first go-off; keepin' things goin' was left to Miss Littlejohn, 'oo went back to 'er own room an' shared it with Enid an' the baby, an' looked after them, too, so as.you'd 'ardly know it was Miss Littlejohn.

"In spite of being a 'eart bowed down by weighty woe. you wouldn't find many girls brighter than Enid when she got about; a little inclined to bo ashamed, meeting pebple, but very proud of 'er baby, an' quite right, too. Even the animals 'ave that instinct; the 'ymn says 'Can its mother's tender care pease towards the child she-bear?' No, nor its he-bear either!

"Then an old friend of Enid's turned up; he'd met her taking the baby for an airin'. 'E was a young man, but a bit too staid an' proper an' severe for my likin'; an' I didn't think 'c mattered much, until as I was passing No. 8, which the door of it was ajar. I 'card somethin' that made me 'eart jump.

" 'Then you will be takin' baby away?'

Miss Littlejohn cried, 'er voice soundin' like some strong swimmer in 'is agony, as the Bible says.

" 'No; understand me,' says 'is lordship, pious as a church service on Easter Friday, 'I loved Enid years ago; and I still love her. She will go back to her people, and in six months I will marry 'er. But 'er people won't ave the baby ; and I certainly won't. You'll make an arrangement for its keep.'

" 'Oh, 'ow sad for Enid. But I would look after it for nothing,' cried Miss Littlejohn. An' then the door closed, I suppose to 'ide Enid's sobbing.

"So Miss Littlejohn was left with the little cherub, an' it got to be known as Miss Littlejohn's baby. She'd go red over that sometimes; and yet it pleased 'er. It was queer to see 'er with that baby; she got some woman near with a family so large that one more didn't make no difference to look after it while she was at work; but when she was 'ome it didn't seem as if anything mattered but the baby. It was a kind of abscess with 'er, as they say.

"So Miss Littlejohn was 'appy until one day. 'earing 'er sobbin', I looked in at the door, an' there she was sprawled over 'er sewing-machine where she'd been makin' things fer the baby, cryin' as if 'er 'eart wouni break. There was boxes of lovely flowers on the floor, an' a wonderful gold wristlet watch tumbled out of its case near them, as if it was thrown down. 'She did not love the baby enough to take it before, and now they want to take if from me." she says when I speaks to 'er, and she 'ands me a letter, crumpled in 'er 'and. The writing seems to dance; but I can see it's a joyful letter telling 'er that Enid is being married that day, an' now they will be able to take the baby— 'im 'avin'

changed is mind about it— and they were comm up for it. But they could not forget the dear lady as 'ad been so very, very kind, and these— which means the flowers and presents was a token of their gratitude.

" 'But it's mine! The baby's mine!' cried Miss Littlejohn, starting up like a little roaring lion seeking 'oom it may devour. 'It's not so much as 'im. An' he Wouldn't take the baby at first; turned the little soul down. Men are such beasts! But I've looked after the little mite; I've gone without to see that it got all it wanted. I'll keep it,' she says.

"I tried to smooth 'er down, an' thought I ad done it; but I didn't know what a tragerdy it was until Enid came rushin' up to me an' throws 'er arms round my neck, kissing me. She 'as 'er 'usband with 'er an' e seems full of 'appiness. too : but when I go along with them to No. 8, the door's open an' all 'er things is packed up, an' Miss Littlejohn and the baby is gone.

" 'I can't bear it. 'aving the baby taken from me, a note she 'ad fastened against the looking-glass explained. 'I will send for my things when I can ; but I am not goin' to let them take my baby, fer it is'— she made great big letters of it—'MlNE.'

"You can guess the hullabulloo then; Enid sobbin' an' cryin' an' refusin' to go; the police an' detectives comin' in, and them still awaitin' there; Enid cryin' over the baby's cot, which Miss Littlejohn 'ad scrimped 'erself to git.

" 'No, I won't go— l won't!' she kept saym . She may come back— they can bring us news 'ere if they find 'er.'

"So on they stayed, till late at night, an me in an' out to see them, she cryin' broken-hearted, an 'im lookin' like twopennorth of misery. Hour after hour strikes, an as midnight nears we're all quiet, waiting.

"Then the door opens quick, and Miss Littlejohn, the baby clasped in 'er arms as if it was the 'oly gruel or somethin', comes in. In a minute Enid's 'usband leans on the door, an' as it closed be'ind 'er, claspin' the baby tighter, Miss Littlejohn faces us all, defiant. 'I 'ad to come back,' she says with a stranglin' throat. 'I 'ad no money and I walked and walked about, an'l thought you d 'ave gone. But you can't 'ave it— its mine!'

"Then it come to me all of a sudden. 'Miss Littlejohn,' I says, with a quick look at the other parties, 'don't you see this ain't the man Enid was goin' ter marry 'oo didn't want the baby? It's the baby's father, 'oo found 'er out an' 'as married 'er.'

" 'An', you dear thing,' says Enid rushing to or an puttin' 'er arms round 'er an' the baby, too, in spite of 'er shrinkin' back at first, ' Arry is as grateful to you as I am; an we want you to come an' live with us, t° t be near the baby you love.'

Well then there was so many 'appy tears in that room I took mine outside. I don't know what happened, but it was four o'clock before I got to bed, talkin' to the lodgers about ow all things had worked together for good in the unscrwwable ways of Providence."

There was a look of firm resolve in the eyes of Mrs. Parsley as she finished. Her narrative had evidently steeled a resolve.

"They can 'owl to 'igh 'Eavens as much as they like," she said. "but that there baby in No. 17 is goin' to stay."

6: Grievance

Bulletin, 8 Nov 1933

IN the days when I wore a hat, I became acquainted with John Farrell: Hats Renovated, Umbrellas Repaired, Clothes Pressed and Cleaned.

Somebody had given me a yarn about Farrell, which I had written and had published. I was rather dismayed when I found myself being introduced to him as the author; he might have been offended. Actually he was so delighted that he bought drinks in a lavish manner and looked for other means of expressing his gratitude. And he saw my hat.

Never in my life have I been able to develop any reverential feelings about a hat. To me it is merely something to be lifted when meeting ladies of one's acquaintance, during the singing of "God Save" or when funerals pass; something to be blown off by wild winds and thereafter folded up and carried; to be sat upon sometimes in places where fears of losing it are justifiable ; convenient occasionally as a pillow, or even as a beer wrap when a bottle needs to be disguised.

Farrell looked at my dilapidated felt and said his foreman, Harry Beeston, could work a change in it that would surprise me. He was obviously very proud of possessing Harry Beeston, and with good reason. Harry Beeston did the job so well that at the sight of my transformed cady the eyes of creditors gleamed with hope, street cadgers gave me special attention and an old friend flattered me by asking if I could lend him a fiver.

When I had written another paragraph about the hat-renovating foreman's enthusiasm for growing pansies, I became definitely persona grata with the John Farrell concern. My hats, after being sat upon several times, quickly fell into disrepair again; and I lived in constant danger of meeting either Farrell or his foreman and being hustled to the workshop to have my headgear restored, gratis, to respectability.

To Harry Beeston hats were an Art. He had been apprenticed to the trade for seven years, he told me, adding "I am still learning." As for Farrell, he frankly admitted that Beeston was the soul of his business. In his pride he had written to the Prince of Wales, when H.R.H. was in Sydney, beseeching an opportunity to show what Australian workmanship could do in the way of restoring hats. A framed letter on the wall testified that the heir apparent was truly astonished at the workmanship.

"A man who recognises the quality of a hat like that," said Beeston, as he proudly showed the royal testimonial, "is worthy to be King."

The little hat-foreman with the long furrow of baldness running through hedges of hair to the back of his head was one of the outstandingly happy men

of my acquaintance. Hats like mine, I found, were a particular joy to him, since he could show what he could do with them. He went home after his days of artistic triumph, and two beers for a finish, to his family on four nights in the week; on the fifth the family came to him, and they went to the pictures. There were triumphs at home, too. I have mentioned his pansies; he had evolved several new varieties. And he cherished the hope that young Harry would some day be as good a hat-renovator as his father.

John Farrell died suddenly. The first I knew of it was when Beeston, his eyes red— there had been a real friendship between them —met me in the street and insisted upon taking me to the closed workshop and furbishing up my hat for the funeral— which, incidentally, I did not attend. I will have to attend my own funeral, of course; I keep away, as far as possible, from others.

Farrell left the business to Beeston, with a proviso that it should be carried on in the old name. That strange longing for posthumous fame that is in all men's bosoms had taken this form; as long as there was a hat-renovating business in Sydney the name of John Farrell would not be forgotten.

"Jack knew he could trust me," said Beeston proudly. "He knew that I would never let the name of John Farrell down."

It was a rich gift really; the concern made those extraordinary profits that some small businesses often do; and Beeston evinced a natural pride at his leap from a position as a mere paid (if important) employee to that of employer.

It was not until some months had passed that I realised that things were not going well.

The fact that Beeston should be met in a bar in the morning, clad in purple and fine linen that looked altogether too new for comfort, showed how he had altered his way of life— leaving the work of which he had been so proud to the people he paid to do it.

"It's not a fair thing," he said to me privily, having conducted me into the group with which he was drinking, when I had asked how the Farrell concern was faring. "It was my work, really, that made the business; it's my work that keeps it going. But when a man exhibits a hat I have made better than new, he doesn't say Harry Beeston did it; he says John Farrell did."

"Take thou the gains, and let the credit pass," I laughed.

"It's no laughing matter!" he retorted. "I'm an artist, as it were; and an artist thinks of more than the profit. I'm working for the fame of a dead man; I'm getting none for myself."

It was astonishing. Previously no mean streak had been discernible in the happy little man who had been hat-renovating foreman. Now he was envious of the dead, whose testamentary generosity had placed him in Easy Street.

"How are the pansies?" I asked, to get to more agreeable subjects.

"Great!" he answered. "This year I'll have a variety which will be as near to a real black as it is possible to get."

"That's fine," I said.

"I was thinking of calling it John Farrell, after the old boss," he went on with a flash of his old enthusiasm. "But I don't know about that, now. Seems to me I've been working all my life— I've been years on this pansy— making names for other people. I haven't so much time for gardening, now; I've got a man looking after the place; and as I might not produce anything like this again I might as well think of my own name as Farrell's. Jack was a bit selfish, you know.

"I've a good mind to sell out," he added. " I could carry the whole connection over to a business in my own name."

"Don't be silly," I advised. "You'd be foolish to try any monkey tricks with a trade like that."

"A man wants to feel that his business is his own," he grumbled.

It was a real grievance. Whether the alteration in his family life assisted the growth I could not say definitely; but that had certainly altered.

Beeston got me to draft out a paragraph he wanted to have inserted in the evening paper about some social activity his wife had undertaken. Young Harry, it appeared, had gone to Burlington College.

"The wife thinks of making a parson of him," Beeston explained. Less than a year ago he had been talking, almost with excitement, of his son's coming apprenticeship to the hat business.

I met Beeston at a city club that same night. The happy Friday evening family outings must be things of the past. I was strangely sorry at the discovery. In a short meeting Beeston's grievance was annoyingly in evidence. It had evidently taken possession of his mind. He was not the agreeable fellow to meet that he had been.

He had something of his old, almost boyish excitement when he told me that he had arranged to sell the John Farrell business, name and all. Without waiting for the final settlement he had put up his own shingle.

He was full of confidence, full of a renewed enthusiasm for his art. The idea that he would be working for his own name appeared to give a rebirth to his zeal.

Bit by bit I learned of his difficulties.

He had disposed of the John Farrell business on a small deposit, retaining the right to set up for himself; the purchaser, becoming scared, decided not to go on. Beeston, it transpired, had been depending upon the purchase-money to assist his new concern. There was nothing surprising in learning that, with

the birth of social ambitions in his wife, he was not so well off as when he had been Farrell's head man.

Embarrassed by the hitch in his arrangements, Beeston got rid of the John Farrell establishment for a fraction of its value. Fred Small, an investor, the merriest of souls in company, bought it. Small knew nothing about hat-renovating, but he knew a lot about business.

Beeston, who knew a lot about hat-renovating and nothing about business, found himself hit by a price war. Small, who had capital to spare, was willing to put more of it at the back of his purchase-money to crush out opposition. Even so, perhaps, he did not run the show at a loss, although a temporary loss would be nothing to him.

"He can't put in good work at the prices," Beeston told me bitterly. "He's simply rushing the work out, killing the John Farrell name."

"Well, that's all the better for you, isn't it? The customers, if they're dissatisfied, will come to you."

"But so many of them don't notice. As long as a hat is renovated, they don't seem to care whether the job is done properly or not," he said, very much like a deeply religious man talking about the insincerity of other people's religion. "I'd sooner cut my throat than turn out some of the work they're doing at Farrell's'."

In a casual way I discovered that Beeston was being hit by other influences.

Hillier remarked on the state of his hat, which had been flung off his head into the muddy road by a strong wind. "I'll have to take it to John Farrell's," he said.

"What about Harry Beeston?" I asked.

"I've had my hats done at Farrell's ever since I remember," he said. "They've always given satisfaction."

"But Beeston was Farrell's."

"Can't help it; I like the old firm," said Hillier.

Beeston had not calculated upon that human characteristic when he had broken from his old moorings.

In bitterness of spirit he cut his prices, although he clung, even in that predicament, to the feeling that his work was an art and had to be treated as such. Small's retort was a further cut. It was not until I read of the predivorce alimony application of Mrs. Beeston that I realised how far Beeston's domestic happiness had vanished in the changed circumstances his grievance had produced. It was easy enough to divine what had happened ; lack of understanding of her husband's difficulties on the part of a wife, moved late in life by the desire to cut a figure in society, had led to incessant quarrels. The lady I remembered regretfully as a clinging and worshipping spouse had her

point of view. She felt exasperation, no doubt, at the motives, quite unintelligible to her, which had created the difficulties.

Yet it was hard on Beeston. Especially as Small could afford to laugh at the efforts of the desperate little hat-artist to compete with him.

In my pity for Beeston I, who didn't care tuppence about how a hat looked, took one along to him and insisted upon paying for the work done to it. It was rather surprising to find him accepting the payment eagerly; but he insisted upon buying drinks.

"I'm broke," he said. "I can't carry on even another couple of months. I've had to owe everybody to keep up those payments to the wife— blast her! No, I don't mean that; but I couldn't stand that woman's nagging."

No use talking about pansies to him now. He had let all that go. Yet, even as he spoke gloomily about his impending ruin, it seemed to me that matters were not so black as he thought them.

"There's one thing," I told him; "an expert like yourself can always get a job."

"A job!" He almost shouted it. His expression seemed savage. It is very hard for any of us to go back.

When next I met Beeston he was down. His plant had been seized; his examination in the Bankruptcy Court was listed. When I asked him to have a drink he accepted with the eagerness of one who had the longing in his throat and nothing in his pocket with which to gratify it.

"They've beaten me," he said. His hand thumped upon a small bulge over his hip. "There's always a way out; but if I go I'll see that swine Small goes with me."

I reasoned with him chaffingly, trying to make his violent thoughts appear ludicrous. But when I left him I was haunted by the tigerish lines on his now worn face and the glint in his eyes. Grievance had made him dangerous, I felt sure. One does not rush to the police with alarming news of every murderous threat one hears; yet whenever I thought of Beeston— and the thought haunted me— I felt uncomfortable. I thought, too, of Small, always with the vision of him falling, hand pressed to his heart, the habitual laugh frozen out of his face.

It was tragical how what should have been a stroke of good fortune had converted a man in every circumstance happy into the desperate, ruined hater that poor Harry Beeston had become. I was so worried about him that I went out of my way to meet him next day. Almost with the greeting, he vented a burst of invective against Small.

With the bitterness of it on my mind and the knowledge that the little bulge was again on his hip, my blood froze when, as we entered a bar, I saw Small stride towards us.

My nerves were tense, prepared for a leap if Beeston's hand wandered towards his hip. But for the moment he seemed stunned at the friendliness of Small.

"You're going to have a drink with me— two drinks!" cried that person heartily. "Men can fight and still be friends, can't they? Better friends, perhaps, for fighting. Two of my best friends are fellows who bested me in a deal. And, after all, Beeston, you're the man who's won in our little affair."

It was a strange statement to make. It sounded so much like a taunt that I thought Beeston would take it as one.

"It's a fact," Small proceeded. "John Farrell's business is settled, as far as I'm concerned. It needs a man who can look after the renovating part and make its reputation what it used to be. I've wanted to get you back in the factory. Decided in the end that I would get you back. But didn't know where to find you, so I went out to your home."

"I'm not living at home," said Beeston.

"I didn't know," said Small. "However, I saw Mrs. B. She seemed to be worried about you; but when I told her that there was a job as manager at John Farrell's, and a partnership if you liked, she seemed happy."

"You mean—" Beeston choked. He was flabbergasted.

"I want to get that blasted business off my mind, with someone I can trust to look after it. Got other fish to fry," said Small cordially. "If you're willing, the sooner we talk terms the better. I want to strike a bargain this very day if I can. No haggling, Harry, between you and me. Are you on?"

For a moment I thought that in the perversity that grievance breeds in some men Beeston was going to refuse to negotiate. When I saw him take the heartily extended hand I knew that the obsession which so nearly destroyed him had been removed from his mind for ever.

"You're going back to John Farrell's, old man," said that big-hearted commercial pirate Small. "Your first job will be to renovate this bird's hat— and his other hat, if he has another. Name your poisons again, lads, and we'll drink success to John Farrell's under the new-old management."

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7: The Hold-Up

Bulletin, 4 Nov 1936

A PALL of midnight silence blanketed the suburban street; the shuffle of uncertain feet made a disturbance that was almost startling. The hesitancy of the man who lurched through the night was not altogether that of intoxication. He paused, now and again, swaying, as if unwilling to advance at all; and he talked to himself of his sorrows.

The troubles were feminine. "If a man wassen drunk," he told an electric-light standard, "he woulden go home at all; yet she'll nag, nag, nag about it until all he wants is to get drunk again tomorrow!" He pulled himself together.

"Got to be done, I s'pose," he sighed; and he lurched forward again.

A shadow detached itself from the blackness of a wall.

"Put 'em up! All I want is your cash; I'm desp'rit. Put 'em up or I'll shoot."

The words came in an incisive, determined whisper. Involuntarily the drunk's arms began to move up; then they dropped again. He blinked at the shadow that confronted him.

"Go on, old man," he said, "shoot! Tha'sh besht shing you could do! End of all my mish— mishery. An' I'm in— inshured."

The bandit was embarrassed. The hearty welcome to his threat was totally unexpected. It sounded like a joke. By way of hinting that it was no joke on his part, he pushed the nose of his revolver into his victim's waistcoat.

"Come on!" he commanded. "I've got no time to waste. Hands up! "

"Well, don' waste time! Go on! Wha' d'you want to keep me waiting for?" moaned the drunk querulously.

It was a deadlock. When the bandit repeated "Come on!" all the command had gone out of his voice.

"If you hadder wife like mine," wailed the drunk, "you'd want me to shoot, if you wash me!"

His bluff called, the robber eyed the drunk for a moment, calculating his chances of a sudden spring and a knockout. The other, however, was a sizable man and might be more trouble than he was worth, seeing that he had a nagging wife and had been spending what money she might have left him.

With a snarling "Go to hell!" he commenced to back away.

"Wai' a minute," urged the drunk, following up, and putting a fearless hand on the bandit's arm. "Wha'sh your hurry? I'll tell you about it. I wanner talk. I musht talk to shomeone!"

ALERT for any movement dangerous to his liberty, the bandit listened impatiently to the man who staggered beside him, babbling of matrimonial

troubles. The shaky one grazed a seat placed for waiting tram passengers, and slumped into it, extending a clutching hand to induce the bandit to sit beside him.

"If you had shot me, ash you shaid," he complained, "I would be out of me mishery. Sit down, an' I'll tell you about it."

The bandit hesitated, and did sit down. The garrulous fool might become sleepy, if allowed to talk; that would give the opportunity to "rat" him without risk.

"Trouble ish," mourned the drunk, "I'm fond of th' wife, inner way. I wanner look after her; but she nagsh, nagsh, nagsh! I don' wanner get drunk every night, but if I go home shober I've gotter lissen to her about wha' I did when I wash drunk. I alwaysh have shome drinks to help me bear it. An' in the mornin' I feel ash if I musht have a whishk— whishky; sho it all startsh again."

"I've hadder missus meself. Women are rotten!" commented the bandit bitterly. Surprised, he found the drunk's hand sympathetically on his arm.

"You pore schap! But you didden have ash bad a wife ash mine. No one could have ash bad a wife ash mine. I'll tell you abou' wha' she doesh."

The bandit became restive.

"Why the hell don't you leave her?" he cut in, attempting to rise, but finding himself detained.

"Fond of her, I sh'pose. She was alone in th' worl'; sho wash I." ... The drunk threatened to lapse into sentimentality, but remembered his sorrows. "Why didden you shoot me? Tha' wooda been besht way. I'm inshured; she's gotter good home; no troub— troublesh but me; a quiet life"

"I'd give 'er some excitement if I was 'er 'usband!" remarked the bandit harshly. "That'd cure 'er!"

"Would you?" the drunk asked admiringly, and he went on, musing. "Exshitement? Tha'sh an idea! A jolly goo' idea! "

THE bandit, alarmed for a moment until he found that it was only an expression of suddenly-born enthusiasm, found his arm gripped by two hands.

"I know! Goo' idea. You be a burglar! Scare hell out of her. Then she finds me home ; you get away; an' she'sh too shankful to shay anyshing to me!"

"A burglar? No blanky fear I won't."

"I know where there'sh a quid fer you. Got to hide my money to keep it. lt'sh yoursh if you jusht come home, let me wake her up, and let me push you out. I'll give you the quid d'rectly we get home."

A quid is a quid. Unwilling at first, the burglar found himself walking beside a man whose spirits were now buoyed up by the prospect of peace for at least a night; the man who had intended to rob him become a bosom pal, a real

friend in need. The drunk deplored with one breath that he knew of no more than one hidden pound with which to reward his pal; with the next he exulted in contemplating the success of his scheme.

The approach to the bungalow was made with due caution, and the bandit was handed the key so that the door might be opened without fumbling. As silently as it was opened, the door was closed again; and the drunk, dropping on his knees, fumbled along the edge of the linoleum. When he rose, the bandit felt something that was certainly a note, and seemed like a pound-note, pushed into his hand.

"There! All I wan' you to do is to wait long enough to scare her. When I shay 'get out' go for your life," whispered the drunk.

"Who's there?" demanded a voice from the interior. "That you, Peter? Of course! Coming home after midnight again."

The two men kept a close silence.

"Answer me, Peter! Who's there?"

There was now a quiver of fear in the voice. The springs of a bed creaked, and an electric button clicked, the globe throwing a thin stream of light under the door on the left of the hall. Then the handle of the door rattled, and the door itself opened, cautiously.

"WHAT the devil are you doing in this house? I warn you, I have you covered. Put your hands up!"

Peter, considering his state, had mastered his voice well, and thundered the words excellently. The woman squealed fearfully as she heard them; and the light in the hallway was switched on sharply.

The woman, obviously terrified, stood in the doorway ; by the front door the bandit held his arms in the air; further up the hall, with pipe in hand to represent a revolver— he would be able, afterwards, to boast of that quick-thinking bluff as well as giving it as a reason for allowing the burglar to escape— Peter made a really fine figure.

"It's all right, May," he said reassuringly. "I'm here. So I came just in time to catch you, my fine fellow! Any exshplan— explanation?"

"It's a cop," said the burglar sullenly.

"It is!" retorted Peter masterfully. A brilliant thought came to him. "I'd say you could go, myself, but what I can't forgive is the way you have frightened my wife."

He moved towards her protectively but with a gasped "Oh, my gracious!" May had fallen faintly against the lintel of the door, staring, pale-faced, at the intruder. Both the jaw and the arms of the latter went down.

"May! Jumping cats, May!"

"WHAT the hell's this?" snapped Peter. The sudden tenseness of the situation, completely different from the mock one he had planned, had swept the intoxication from him. He moved heroically to support the drooping May.

"Well, this is a go!" remarked the bandit. A look of fear came into his eyes. He moved towards the door.

"Get out!" thundered Peter quickly.

He had almost forgotten that cue. He got a surprise when May's faint turn dropped from her. She became violently herself again; and she sent him backwards with a push as she advanced.

"No! Now you are here, you stay while I talk to you, you worm!" she cried. The burglar was like a man petrified, and allowed her to cut off his retreat to the door, where she stood facing both of them.

"So you are still alive; and you have come here! I thought you were dead!"

"I couldn't help it, May," said the intruder feebly.

Even as he felt the ascendancy going to the vimful May, Peter thought he did hold some points over her. This, then, was the model husband May had so often held up to him— a footpad and burglar and not dead after all! But the thought faded quickly. May had not discovered his trick, perhaps, but she might guess at something worse— a league between him and Tom. There was going to be trouble. Panic seized Peter. At a moment when May's attention was on the man who had returned from the dead, Peter slipped out through a back door.

Coming round the house he heard the front door bang and then the sound of it opening again, and a feminine voice smote on the air.

THE man he had left to his fate was beside him as he turned at a run up the street. They kept together, doubling round a corner and making a beeline for a laneway, then to the right, and to the right again.

"Keep going," panted Peter as Tom showed signs of slackening. "She sometimes gives chase."

"Don't I know it!" the other panted in reply.

They turned every corner, sometimes doubling on their tracks, as men who knew they had to foil a cunning pursuit, but still working further and further afield. At last sheer exhaustion stayed them to a walk, and eventually they rested on the doorstep of a hotel,

"We ought to be right here," said Peter. "You can get a drink at this pub, sometimes, at five in the morning."

"Gawd! I could do with a drink!" exclaimed the bandit. "May! Jest fancy your missus being May!"

"Thank heaven I gave you that quid! " said Peter. "I'll need some of it; but if you come to town with me—"

"What? 'Aven't you any money?" demanded the bandit.

"Only a copper or so."

The bandit laughed hoarsely.

"But there's that quid," said Peter anxiously.

"That quid! May saw it sticking out of my pocket and she grabbed it. She said it would go towards some of the maintenance I hadn't paid her."

The two relatives by marriage sat dejectedly on the doorstep facing a hopeless dawn.

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8: Stranded

Bulletin, 16 Dec 1936

THE David Weedon Comedy Company had been bumping on the rocks for weeks and had got off by miracle. A new recruit to the show (and the business) I had been surprised when, on its due date, I received my first salary.

David Weedon, who stood by in his fatherly fashion while the manager, Mick Mahon, paid out, patted my shoulder.

"My boy, in the fu-ture we are going to put you on the bills as treas-urer," he said. "Mister Mahon will explain what you have to do. It will mean that your sal-ary will be, from now on, on a weekly basis instead of for seven playing nights. God bless you, my boy!"

"I'm sorry business has not been better, Mr. Weedon," I said.

"It is unfor-tunate for the people who have stayed away, owing to the cold weath-er, and missed a great the-atrical treat," said Weedon, as if that was his only worry. "Mat-ters must im-prove, however. At Boolaroo we will have a good sea-son."

"Yes; Boolaroo will be good," said Mahon, looking up.

The position of treasurer was not as good as it sounded. The duties consisted mainly of collecting the money from the ticket offices and handing it over to Mahon, or going into the box myself in the smaller towns— my own stage appearances did not occur until some time after the opening.

There was no more salary except in dribs and drabs of advances, and, of course, payment of hotel expenses; and I began to be sorry for myself for having left Sydney.

Still, there was always Boolaroo.

AT Boolaroo it rained. The company got into its make-up and moved restlessly about the stage, taking it in turns to spy from the peephole in the proscenium upon a house very slowly becoming a little less empty, and listening gloomily to the pelt of rain on the iron roof.

Mahon and I probably had a worse time waiting in "the front." Most of the people who came through the rain presented cards or rain-soaked scraps of paper— complimentaries. When, for the seventh time, Mahon sent me round to the stage with a message about the unfinancial state of the house, old Weedon took a final peep at the audience.

"It is all right, la-dies and gentle-men," he said. "We play! And to-night you need have no fear of the aud-ience. We outnum-ber them!"

It was impossible not to like old Weedon; at the back of his ponderosity he had a sense of humor.

THE tragedy came at Hillburg. My first intimation came when Fitzjames, the juvenile, woke me up with a shake of the shoulders.

"Get up quickly, old chap, and come down to breakfast," he said.

"The train doesn't leave—" I began.

"We're stranded," said Fitz. "Mahon's done a bunk. You'd better come down and have breakfast before the hotel people hear about it."

It was a reasonable precaution. The other members of the company were already down, and it had not struck the hotel people yet that it was extraordinary that theatricals, with no rush to catch a train, should be among the early breakfasters.

My place was beside Fay Norton, who smiled wanly. Up to that moment the stranding of the company had not struck me as tragical. I had in my pocket enough for my fare to Sydney, and I would have been leaving in any case if salary was not forthcoming. But poor little Fay Norton—

"I say, how are you fixed, Fay?" I asked. "Got any money? Can you manage to get to Sydney?"

"I've got two shillings," she laughed. "I always send my money to my mother— she's an invalid, you know. I couldn't ask her for any money."

Then I knew it was tragedy. I couldn't go off to Sydney and leave her to get back as best she might.

"I can fix your fare," I said impulsively.

"How about you?"

"I'll be all right," I said off-handedly.

"But we may get through somehow," said Fay hopefully. "I've been stranded before, and we got out of it some way. Look out, here's the waitress."

A little later Weedon appeared, looked round the dining-room and signalled me.

"A tragic bus-iness, my boy," he said. "Tragic! You know what has happened? With all these po-or people on our hands"

"Our hands, Mr. Weedon?"

"As treas-urer of this com-pany, you—"

"But you know very well, Mr. Weedon—"

"I know, my boy— I know!" said Weedon placatingly. "You have no res-pons-ibility. All I want is your co-op-eration. We will, first of all, see this publican."

WE saw the publican. When the news was broken to him that Mahon had disappeared ("with— ah— all the funds," as Weedon put it) he was hostile.

"Can you blame me, Mr. Bunghole?" demanded Weedon in a voice full of emotion. "In the course of a long, hon-or-able stage car-eer, I have wronged no man. I have been be-trayed. It would be sim-ple for me, now, to wash my hands of every-thing— to depart and leave the com-pany. But that is something that I could not do. The mem-bers of my com-pany are like my child-ren ; I could not des-ert them. I must stand by, and see what can be done."

"What do you propose doing?"

"I am no bus-inessman, Mr. Bunghole ; I am an act-or," said Weedon. "Mr. Harding here is our treas-urer."

Bunghole turned a sharp eye on me. "Oh, you're the treasurer?"

"I—"

"Mr. Harding is as unfor-tun-ate as the rest of us. The mon-ey has gone with the man-ager; no res-ponsibility can rest with Mr. Harding. But if anything can be done he will be in a pos-ition to look af-ter the bus-iness for us. I have heard of the great heart of the peo-ple of Hillburg, Mr. Bunghole ; I am sure it will not fail, in view of the plight of these unfortun-ate people I can-not desert. You will par-don me, Mr. Bunghole, if the tears stand in my eyes; these people look to me, perhaps, and I must do my best for them. Perhaps a ben-e-fit might be ar-ranged, with the sup-port of the noble-hearted people of Hillburg."

His look implied my cue.

"You see, Mr. Bunghole," I said, "something has to be done for these people or they'll be left stranded in the town. It's no fault of ours that our manager should have left us in this hole. A benefit can easily be arranged which, if you are prepared to wait for your money, would enable us to settle with you."

"Have a drink," said Bunghole. It was the first sign of his relenting. "You'd better see the Mayor. I'll ring him up," he said presently.

WE saw the Mayor. My respect for David Weedon as an actor grew. In this and subsequent interviews his voice was pregnant with emotion as he talked of the unfortunate lot of the stranded people he regarded as his children. As he presented it, his interest was entirely altruistic; he might have departed, leaving it to others to solve the problem.

"I am no businessman, Mr. Mayor— I am an actor. My friend here can talk about the business side. But it is in the in-ter-est of this town that the pro-blem of those unfor-tun-ate people should be solved. Mr. Bunghole, the pubdican, sug-gested a ben-e-fit. If the coun-cil would give the hall free—"

"That wouldn't be possible," said the Mayor. "But I could undertake that the council, when the matter is put to them, would agree to a pound a night."

"As long as that doesn't have to be paid till the money comes in," I said.

"I'll fix that. If you like I'll go with you to the newspaper office, and I'll take you to see Mr. Triggs. He'll probably take twenty or thirty tickets."

Mr. Triggs took forty. He also suggested that there should be five-shilling tickets entitling the holders to stay to a dance after the performance on the second night. His suggestion was two nights.

All Hillburg knew within a few hours that the David Weedon Theatrical Company had been stranded. All Hillburg was sympathetic; perhaps it had taken note of old David Weedon's frequent references to the great heart of Hillburg and wanted to justify them.

WE left Hillburg full of joy and money, although Weedon, in spite of being no man of business, had taken possession of that. At Hilton Junction there was a surprise. Mick Mahon, jaunty as ever, was there to meet us.

I had always liked Mick Mahon; his cold-blooded betrayal had been unbelievable in such a man as he was; but it seemed like effrontery for him to re-appear like this. Everybody else, however, had a warm greeting for him.

As the train moved on I found myself in a separate compartment with Weedon and Mahon, helping to check the count of notes and money.

"There's twenty-four, three and sixpence I took away from the takings at Hillburg, besides the tenner I left you for emergencies, too," said Mahon. "By the way, I've got Blaggville and four other towns billed like a circus. We ought to do well there."

"We'll have a treasury when we get to Blaggville," said Weedon. "The people'll be glad to see the ghost walking."

"Too right! The people have to be paid, Dave," said Mahon cheerfully. Having put away the money, "Can you blame me, Mr. Bunghole?"

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9: Not Unwarranted

Bulletin, 17 Aug 1938

"NOBODY could help but like Mr. Dumpy; he was so happy-go-lucky, so full of his spree, as Mr. Slompack used to call it," said Mrs. Parsley, pausing in her work. "But he never seemed to be completely happy unless there was a warrant out against him.

"Of course," Mrs. Parsley added hastily, "they were respectable warrants. They were always to do with money he owed his wife, which showed he was married; and nothing can be more respectable than that. But, until he explained, I was very annoyed about policemen coming to my flats.

"I had just been telling those policemen, which anyone could know them, even if they was disguised in plain clothes, that I wasn't my brother's keepsake, and if Mr. Dumpy wasn't in his flat, which was Number 19, he must be out, when Mr. Dumpy himself appeared— out of my bedroom, if you please!

" 'That fooled them, Mrs. Parsley!' he cried. 'I must apologise for trespassing in your bedroom, but the easiest way to get away was to drop from my window down to yours. I hope you don't mind.'

"I was so flappergasted that before I could tell him all I meant to say he had told me all about it; and somehow I couldn't be angry when he spoke about all the escapes he had had with them warrants, which always came out when he owed a little money, laughing about it, poor fellow.

" 'There's nothing to be ashamed of, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I'm afraid I'll have to avoid our friends the police for a time until I get this fixed up. So I'm going to move, Mrs. Parsley.'

" 'Move, Mr. Dumpy?' I cries.

"He winked.

" 'Yes— into Number Seven; you've got that vacant, haven't you? You will be able to tell the police when they come again, quite truthfully, that I've given up my flat.'

"Whatever made me do it, I don't know. It was funny; I found myself being just as happy as Mr. Dumpy was himself about seeing those policemen looking puzzled when I showed them the empty flat.

"It wasn't only me. Even Mr. Slompack would run along to Mr. Dumpy's new flat and tell him to look out; he'd seen those dees in the street below. And Mr. Wassail would sing 'Sailor, beware; sailor, take care,' as a warning.

"You see, those policemen came back. They said Mr. Dumpy had been seen near the flats, and they asked me if they could have a look into my yard. That was the time Mr. Wassail started singing; and it gave Mr. Dumpy, coming in the back way, the hint to bolt for the back stairs quick. Those policemen hung

round half the evening, and several times went up to Mr. Dumpy's old flat and knocked, though they knew it was empty. And all the time Mr. Dumpy was playing bridge in Mr. Slompack's flat.

"He seemed, really, to enjoy dashing up back stairs and getting out of windows, even climbing over walls, although he didn't look as if he was built for climbing walls. Then one day he came home laden with bottles.

"'I fixed that warrant up,' he said. 'Got the money to-day and squared it.'

" 'I wouldn't like anything like that hanging over me,' said Mr. Wassail. 'Anyway, I'm glad to know you've got everything square.'

" 'Oh, there'll be another warrant out soon,' says Mr. Dumpy, almost as if he was hopeful of having a little more fun. You see, his money came in lumps now and again ; and he had a wife who wouldn't wait.

"There was a reg'lar party that night. Even the plainclothes policemen dropped in. He'd invited them, just as if they was old friends.

" 'I want you to meet a couple of fine fellows— Bill Cumber and Jack Dorahy,' he says. 'They've always treated me like sports, though there are times when I don't want to meet them.'

" 'Oh, you know, Harry, we've got to do our duty,' says Cumber, both of them looking quite uncomfortable.

" 'Oh, don't worry about that. Here's hoping you won't catch me next time you look for me,' laughs Mr. Dumpy, lifting a glass of beer.

"MR. DUMPY was quite right about there being another warrant soon. One evening Miss Keller, who had Number 14 just near the stairs, on the second floor, called to me to come up, and there was that Bill Cumber and Jack Dorahy arguing with her at the door.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, will you tell these gentlemen that this is my flat?' says Miss Keller, angrily.

" 'This certainly is Miss Keller's flat,' I says.

" 'Well, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Dorahy, 'we had been along to Harry's flat and we made sure, as we were coming away, we saw him dart in here.'

" 'It's an insult! ' cries Miss Keller.

" 'Miss Keller isn't a lady to have men in her flat,' I says.

"'Have you any idea where Harry is?' asked Bill Cumber.

" 'He told me he was going to Wollongong for a fortnight,' says I. Which was gospel truth. It wasn't needful for me to tell them that Mr. Dumpy had winked.

"When I had seen the policemen going down the stairs I went back to Miss Keller's to see whether she was very upset.

" 'They're after that poor Mr. Dumpy again,' I says. 'lt does seem a shame, poor feller, that they don't let him alone.'

" 'lt's worse than that! Fancy a woman going on like that— trying to get her husband into prison! What type of a woman must she be?' says Miss Keller hotly.

" 'I'm sorry for him; but if there's going to be this sort of upset I'll have to ask him to go,' I says.

" 'Hard-hearted Mrs. Parsley! ' says a voice which I knew was Mr. Dumpy's. You could have knocked me flat with the last straw that shows the way the wind blows when that Mr. Dumpy stepped out from the clothes hanging in a corner wardrobe. He was laughing as if it was a joke.

" 'I saw those policemen coming up and I had my door open to warn Mr. Dumpy,' said Miss Keller. 'I thought there might be something wrong.'

" 'lt was very lucky. Miss Keller dragged me in just in time,' said Mr. Dumpy. 'Miss Keller's a sport.'

"Mr. Dumpy changed to Number 23 after that. When them policemen came back the door of his old flat was wide open, with brooms and things in it to show it was being done out; and there was a card outside the door to say that Mr. Dumpy had gone to Wollongong.

"There was never a tenant in this place who occupied so many flats as Mr. Dumpy. He was like one of them wandering minstrels the song is about the way he shifted from one flat to another. But you couldn't but like the jolly way he took his misfortunes.

"When the party was held after Mr. Dumpy had fixed that warrant, Miss Keller was there, looking as if she felt she was the heroine of the story. But that was not before there had been all sorts of excitement, with them police coming back. Mr. Dumpy seemed to have as many lives as a cat has kittens the way he just dodged them.

"SOON there was another warrant.

" 'What a disgrace to her sect that woman is,' said Miss Keller. 'Anyone who couldn't get on with Harry Dumpy must be pretty hard to please. He's got a wonderful deposition.' And shortly she was saying that if Mrs. Dumpy was to die she would marry Mr. Dumpy and show him what it was to have a real amiable, kind wife. I don't say that she wished any harm to Mrs. Dumpy, but she hoped for the best.

"It's always been my idea that that Miss Perry who used to make nasty remarks about Mr. Dumpy and Miss Keller carrying on must have let Mrs. Dumpy know about it. She might have been jealous about Mr. Dumpy never hiding in her flat.

"Mrs. Dumpy looked a rather pleasant person, but she got the habit of coming down to the flats and making herself unpleasant in spite of my telling her that there was nothing wrong between Miss Keller and her husband, as I wouldn't stand, not for a moment, anything that wasn't respectable.

"One night there was a tremendous hullabaloo. When I got up there was Miss Keller and Mrs. Dumpy breathing fire and brimstone and treacle, as the saying is, at one another, and them two policemen was there and a lot of the tenants. It appeared his wife had got out a warrant which Mr. Dumpy hadn't thought could be out so soon; and he had been caught in fragrant delicter, as Mr. Slompack called it.

" 'Sergeant, arrest that man!' says Mrs. Dumpy, which neither Mr. Will Cumber nor the other was a sergeant, but I suppose she thought it sounded better.

" 'I'd sooner be dead than try to get my husband in gaol. If a man didn't want me I'd let him go,' says Miss Keller.

" 'I'd sooner be dead than carry on with another woman's husband,' retorted Mrs. Dumpy.

'Let's get along and get it over,' says Mr. Dumpy to the policemen. He didn't seem to enjoy the argument as well as the women did.

"'Do you mean you'll have to go to prison?' asked Mr. Wassail.

" 'They've got me this time,' smiles Mr. Dumpy. 'It'll be a couple of weeks before I can get the money to pay up."

"Mr. Wassail wasn't having that. He squared the warrant and told Mr. Dumpy that he could pay him back when he got it. While it was being settled they gave Mrs. Dumpy, who wouldn't go away even when the police asked her, a bad time. Even Mr. Slompack called her a bloodsucker.

"'Here! Here!' says Mr. Bill Cumber. 'You're not going to speak to the lady like that while I'm about.'

" 'It's a good thing there's one gentleman in the place,' says Mrs. Dumpy.

"After that matters became a regular swelter for poor Mr. Dumpy ; it was a case of come one, come all, and troubles coming not in single scoops but in battle-lions. And Mr. Dumpy actually did leave. There were no more empty flats for him to move into.

"NEITHER the police or that Mrs. Dumpy would believe it for some time. You would think from the way they haunted these flats that they lived here. Everybody missed the poor feller a lot. Mr. Slompack used to say that it didn't seem like the old place at all without having Mr. Dumpy to warn that the police or his wife were after him.

"Not that we never saw anything of Mr. Dumpy. He came to see Miss Keller, either coming in with a rush or entering over the wall at the back which divides this place from Comberville Flats.

"Pore Miss Keller was very fond of him. It was real tragercal, for Mrs. Dumpy showed no signs of dying to let them two get married.

" 'She's determined to send him to gaol. I'm afraid I've made matters worse for him; she has become more bitter now. Fancy a woman going on like that!' says Miss Keller.

"Poor Mr. Dumpy was finding it more difficult to square them warrants or keep payments going so that there wouldn't be warrants. He was still cheerful; but Miss Keller used to talk, desperate-like, about not letting him go to gaol if she had to break open a bank.

"The time I saw that Bill Cumber and Mrs. Dumpy going up the stairs I didn't know how best to give a warning, although I knew that Mr. Dumpy had arrived only a little time before. I had a sinking feeling in my heart that he was caught.

"But I went out into the yard and happened to catch Mrs. Mason at her window in the flat next to Miss Keller's. 'Tell Miss Keller that a storm's coming. Going up the stairs, now,' I says.

"I was wrong; there was no storm, although the voices were loud enough when I went upstairs wondering what could possibly be amiss, there being no disturbance.

" 'If you want him you can have him,' Mrs. Dumpy was saying. 'I wouldn't think of holding a man who has ceased to care for me.'

" 'The only reason Mrs. Dumpy applied for warrants against him,' said Mr. Bill Cumber, 'was fer his own good— to bring him to his census.'

" 'I wanted to try to make a man of him, but I failed,' says Mrs. Dumpy. 'Now I am ready to divorce him.'

"The way that Miss Keller threw her arms round my neck when she came down to tell me all about it, you'd have thought she had won the lottery. There's the merciful ways of improvidence, all working out for good to those who love the Lor' for yer! If Mrs. Dumpy hadn't have got them there warrants she wouldn't have met that Mr. Bill Cumber, who she married directly the divorce was through; and she and Mr. Dumpy who didn't get on might have gone on bein' tied to one another.

"We gave Mr. Dumpy and Miss Keller a reg'lar send-off party before they went off to get married. But he seemed sort of saddened, as if he was worried about the idea of never having a warrant again, which used to make him so jolly.

" 'He's too much of a Bohemian to be married,' says Mr. Slompack to me one day after they had left to take a cottage at Bondi. 'Still, I'm glad he married Miss Keller. She stuck to him well. All his troubles are over now.'

"IT was only the day before yesterday that that Mr. Jack Dorahy —he's a plain-clothes sergeant now— came to the flats with another feller.

" 'I suppose, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'that y ou haven't seen our old friend Harry Dumpy, who used to stay with you?'

" 'He's living with his wife out at Bondi somewhere,' I says.

" 'No he isn't,' says Mr. Dorahy, grimlike. 'I've got another warrant for him.'

" 'But his wife married your companion, Mr. Bill Cumber!' I exclaims.

" 'Well, this must be from another wife,' says he firmly.

"He had hardly gone before there was Mr. Dumpy! He was laughing fit to kill himself.

" 'Well, I'm home again, Mrs. Parsley!' he says. 'I'm glad you told Jack that I wasn't here and that you wouldn't have me back, with the old trouble, on any account. He probably won't come here again, so it will be safe for me to stay. Helen will never think of looking for me here.'

"Talk about being flappergasted!

" 'Yes, there's a warrant out against me again,' laughs Mr. Dumpy— it sounded just like old times. 'Helen and I didn't hit it, and so I cleared out. I've dropped back a bit in my payments and— anyway, I'll be able to square that warrant next week.' "

Mrs. Parsley resumed the work that had brought her to my flat.

"You'll be meeting Mr. Dumpy," she said. "He's Number 11. I expect some night he'll be in here with you playing chess while them police are knocking at his door, wondering where he's got to.

"You'll find him a very jolly gentleman; full of his spree, as Mr. Slompack says."

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10: Sentimentalists

Bulletin, 28 March 1934

IT was a terrible thing to Mrs. Parsley to have to ask No. 7 to change his quarters. He was a Permanent; in fact, Mrs. Parsley had taken him over with the Manly harbor front boarding-house. John Harris had honeymooned in No. 7, and had come back after many years to live amongst the memories of his "dear little girl," of whom he spoke in expansive moments.

Even though he only represented a pound a week, the sentimental Mrs. Parsley was touched by the faded little man's devotion to the wispy little creature, a thing of joy and brightness, to whom his memories clung.

"I'm sorry, but I'm full," she said with all the satisfaction with which landladies make such a statement. But the massive and richly-dressed Mrs. Baldock stayed on her doorstep. She had stepped back to gain perspective, and pointed with her parasol to the room she wanted; and when Mrs. Parsley, after the manner of landladies, had said, in response to a question, that she got £3/5s. per week for No. 7, Mrs. Baldock said majestically, "I'll give you three pounds ten."

Such an announcement was over-whelming to a woman used to having to haggle over shillings. People who offered three pounds ten could not be lightly dismissed. Mrs. Parsley thought the lady might be induced to take a better room, entirely on the front. She would not be sorry if No. 6, whose rent and marriage status were both doubtful, had to go.

But Mrs. Baldock wanted No. 7.

"There is a sentimental reason. I don't know if you will understand, dear Mrs. Parsley," she said, a shake in her voice. "I have been all over the world, and had a great many of its enjoyments, but the greatest happiness in my life was when I was living in that little room."

"You spent your honeymoon there?" hazarded Mrs. Parsley, caught by sympathy.

"Yes, that was it. If you had only known my dear husband you would know what it means to me. He was such a fine man; so tall and strong and—magnificent! Full of fun, too, but as brave as a lion. My first husband—the first man I loved. A woman never forgets the first man she loves."

"Ah, no, indeed!" said Mrs. Parsley, and felt moved to make some references to Mr. Parsley, who had actually been habitually a very late Mr. Parsley before he became the late Mr. Parsley. But she remembered No. 7. If the massive woman had a fine, stalwart bridegroom to remember, the faded Mr. Harris, with his little girl of the long ago, was not to be despised. She explained the case.

"But men never feel as women do about these matters," said Mrs. Baldock. "And, after all, you have to consider your own interests, Mrs. Parsley."

That was the view taken by Macpherson. Macpherson had grown to regard Mrs. Parsley as his own special housekeeper who cheapened matters for him by running a boarding-house in which he was the one person of real importance. He was a Permanent of Permanents. He had been with the landlady in four different establishments, and Mrs. Parsley invariably sought Macpherson's advice.

All along he had said that Harris was paying too little. Although Mrs. Parsley had agreed to think the matter over and let Mrs. Baldock know, she was still concerned about having to tell No. 7. Macpherson, who loved authority, undertook to do the telling.

Harris, after all, took it very quietly; but a pained look came into his face.

"You know," said Macpherson, "you can't expect Mrs. Parsley to lose money over you. She's very sorry to disturb you and all that, but she is ready to give up her own room— the one on the upper floor, just over No. 7— to oblige you. And she won't charge you any rent this week. Of course, if you don't care about the arrangement, the only thing will be to ask you to leave."

So Mrs. Baldock paid her money, and arranged to arrive the following night, and Mrs. Parsley felt that a position of difficulty had been nicely smoothed out when, without any trouble, John Harris's belongings were removed to No. 12.

There was little sign that revolt was smouldering in John Harris's bosom that morning; but Harris had a grievance to discuss with his friends. He also had a pound more than usual to spend. By evening the smoulder had become a flame. When Macpherson reached home it was to find an agitated Mrs. Parsley, who told him that Harris had re-entered No. 7 and refused to leave it.

"I'll soon fix him," said Macpherson grimly.

"Go 'way! " grunted Harris when Macpherson, finding the door locked, rattled the handle, demanding admission. Macpherson continued to rattle the handle. The door opened suddenly.

"You can go to hell!" Harris roared, standing defiantly in his pyjamas in the doorway. "This room is mine, and here I'm going to stick. It's only damnable cheek that you should want to turn me out, after all the years I've been here."

"Now, look here, Harris," began Macpherson.

"Oh, Mr. Harris, you agreed to the change," pleaded Mrs. Parsley. "It's not like you to make a disturbance— such a quiet gentleman as you've always been."

"I can't help it, Mrs. Parsley. I've got to be loyal— to her! My little girl! To think of a great fat Kosciusko of a woman coming in here, spilling her sloppy sentiment —why, it's sacrilege!"

His belligerence faded, however, when Mrs. Parsley burst into tears. She had always done her best for him, she reminded him; and if he had said that he objected so strongly she would have let him stay on, money or no money. But now, it was going to make all sorts of trouble.

Harris gave way. He allowed himself to be escorted upstairs by Macpherson while Mrs. Parsley straightened the disturbed bed.

"He's decided to go for a walk; that will cool him oft'," said Macpherson, coming down the stairs.

Harris, however, did not cool off. A single drink awoke the feeling within him that he had been too soft. The place that he had kept sacred to the memory of the dearest little woman in the world was to be desecrated by a mountain of flesh with a stupid remembrance of some hulking brute of a man— he imagined the type a woman like that would consider a fine man. She'd have money; people like that always did have money. But it was damnable that money should crush a memory as sweet as his. He returned to the house and attempted to re-enter his old room. Macpherson was on the alert, and, despite his struggles, he was taken up to No. 12, a couple of boarders carrying his kicking legs and Macpherson his shoulders, and bundled unceremoniously into the room, the door being locked.

Mrs. Parsley felt sorry for him. The shabby little man, fighting for the dreams of his "little girl," seemed something of a hero.

However, when Mrs. Baldock arrived she greeted that lady with a smile and assured her that No. 7 was all ready for her to occupy.

Mrs. Baldock appeared agitated.

"Now it's come to the point, I feel afraid," she said tremulously. "I've been married three times, Mrs. Parsley, and for years I've had the idea of coming back here, where my happiest days were spent. We were very poor then, but oh, so happy!"

"Money isn't everything," said Mrs. Parsley, a reproachful stab in her heart as she uttered the triteness.

"And now I'm— I'm *frightened*," said Mrs. Baldock.

"But you'll like being there when you've got over that," said Mrs. Parsley, beginning to lead the way.

Harris had not wasted much time in futile assaults on the locked door, for an idea had come to him. It was quite an easy drop from the window of No. 12 on to the balcony of No. 7. Nothing in in it at all. He'd show them!

"I almost feel," said Mrs. Baldock as Mrs. Parsley threw open the door for her to enter, "as if I might come face to face with my dear, dear husband again."

Then she uttered a shriek.

"There's a man in the room! In the bed!" she screamed.

Mrs. Parsley's heart stood still; and Harris, who had dozed off contentedly, sat up abruptly at the sound of the turmoil. In an instant he had leapt from the bed.

"Maria! It's you! "he shouted.

"My God, Jack!"

Somewhat paralysing to Mrs. Parsley's mental faculties was this revelation that the "dear little girl" of Harris's memories, supposed to be dead, was this massive woman; that Mrs. Baldock's stalwart bridegroom was the shrunken John Harris. It was hard to believe; and Mrs. Parsley took a long time to believe it. By the time she had reached something like normality, Mrs. Baldock and Harris were engaged in an argument rapidly gaining heat.

She heard Harris say, a touch of emotion in his voice: "To think that we should meet after all these years! And in my room."

"It's my room," said Mrs. Baldock firmly. "I've paid for it."

"It's my room!" Harris flared. "For the last six years—"

"Yes, I heard! Of all the hypocrisy!" cried Mrs. Baldock scornfully. "Pretending to be so fond of the memory of the woman you married—pretending she was dead! Do you remember how you treated the dear little girl, as you used to call me? Do you remember that— you beast?"

Harris laughed with a hoarse bitterness.

"My dear little girl! " he mocked. "Yes, I remember the misery you made of my life. It served that blackguard Brown right when you divorced me and married him."

"Don't you dare speak like that about a better man than you ever knew how to be!"

That hit Harris on the raw.

"Well, he couldn't put up with you, anyway! He died two years later; probably he was glad to die. And your name's not Baldock; it's Brown. Thank God, it isn't Harris!"

"That's none of your business; but, if you like to know, I married Bill Baldock after Brown died. I'm nothing to do with you, now; only I'd like to say a few of the things I left unsaid before you ran away from me like the coward you were and are!"

"You left unsaid!" The exclamation was full of devastating scorn.

"Before you get out of my room—" screamed Mrs. Baldock wrathfully.

"Before you get out of my room! It's mine! Now I know who—"

It was at this stage that Mrs. Parsley recovered her vocal faculties. She pleaded for peace.

"Always remember you have found one another again. You told me, Mrs. Baldock, what a fine man your husband was, and how you loved him—"

"Love him! That worm!" cried Mrs. Baldock.

Harris put in a forced "Ha, ha, ha! Dear little girl! That!" he jeered.

As Macpherson had gone out, there was no one with the confidence of authority to intervene. The boarders became interested in the wrangle, which rose from storm to gale; the neighbors became interested. So did a policeman when he saw people standing opposite the house, thrillingly hopeful, no doubt, that they were listening to the prelude to a murder. He was welcomed by a distracted Mrs. Parsley, and put an authoritative "What's all this here?" into the disturbance.

He was told.

"It's twenty-four years since you two lived here?" he asked. "You're sure it was here?"

"Yes; Number 57. I remember it well."

"I've still got old letters— with '57' on them," verified Harris.

"Well, that's where you're both wrong. This used to be Fifty-three until there was a reallotment of numbers ten years ago. What used to be Fifty-seven is a few doors down."

Harris went off with a hoarse laugh. Mrs. Baldock departed in search of the original No. 57 in a manner suggesting that she regarded Mrs. Parsley as guilty of false pretences.

Harris returned next evening. He wanted No. 7 again; and Mrs. Parsley welcomed him emotionally.

"You see," said Harris, "I've got used to building my dreams about that room. It doesn't matter that it's not the right room; I've made it mine. I'll be able to forget that fat old tart and think of the dear little girl I once loved."

"You shouldn't speak of her like that," reproved Mrs. Parsley, feeling hurt. Her sentimental mind could not grasp the fact that these people were clinging to ideals which were best divorced from realities. "You loved each other once. She's living in the other house now; so perhaps—"

"Oh, I'll be able to avoid meeting her," said Harris, almost fiercely.

11: Clothes

Bulletin, 7 Oct 1936

SCRUTHEM deserved to be taken down. Still the law is inexorable; it alarmed me to hear that Joe Cochran had done the "taking down." There seemed no possible escape for him; he did not even seem to wish for it.

Cochran was one of Scruthem's clerks. In the long ago I, too, labored with the firm, but when I discovered that Cochran had been there for five years and was drawing the princely salary of £2 10s. per week, I got out.

It was not for lack of trying that Cochran did not get out also ; but the idea that the rent in his tie or the hole in his boot was going to lose him each new job he applied for probably helped. Cochran reckoned that if he could only secure a complete rigout of clothes he would soon make good; but his prospects of doing it were absurdly small. He made strenuous efforts to— as he termed it—"catch up to himself."

For weeks he would leave off smoking, do without lunch, and try, by a score of little savings, to accumulate some money; then suddenly he would lose heart and dissipate at least a new hat and a tie in the beer of oblivion.

The existence of a really nice girl who, for reasons known only to herself, clung with a pathetic devotion, while her charms faded and she drifted towards the lot of the unmarriageable, to the hope that Cochran would some day be able to marry her, did not help the saving.

COCHRAN was always threatening to leave; but when I met him, ages after I left the service of Scruthem and Co., he was still at the old address.

"I asked 'Scru' again for a rise," he told me, "and the beggar took the usual stand— if I could get more elsewhere I was at liberty to go. The mean old hunk knows that I'm a good clerk, but he knows, too, that I can't afford to leave him until I get something else, and that it's no use going for a new job and admitting that you're only getting a salary like mine. People think that that's all you're worth. Still he has given me a rise— half a dollar a week!"

"Better than nothing," I commented.

"Just about nothing," he said bitterly. One had to feel sorry for a man like that— and for the girl who was fading as she waited.

WHEN next we met, Cochran had changed. He wore a suit that was not only excellent in make, but good in material. His boots shone in patent-leather glory, and he carried a stick. As a finishing touch, Cochran, when, in answer to his invitation, I steered towards the cheaper bar of the adjacent hotel, led me

to the saloon, with an imperious manner indicative of a lofty scorn for cheap refreshments.

"What's the matter?" I inquired.

"I'll tell you afterwards," he said.

"Meantime, we'll have another drink, and then we'll dine and we'll go along to the theatre afterwards."

I suppressed my curiosity, speculating, however, that he was probably a lottery prize-winner, and dined with him luxuriously. It amused me to notice that he insisted on attacking costly details, not, apparently, because he liked them, but simply because they were costly. Several times during the dinner, and afterwards during the intervals at the theatre, he appeared to be about to tell me the meaning of his affluence; but it was not until we were engaged upon supper that he let me have his confidence.

"It's a fine thing," he said exultingly, "to feel that you're dressed properly and can have what you want to eat and drink and smoke, and needn't worry about counting the change. It makes you feel a man— ready for anything."

"How long have you been a millionaire?" I asked.

He leaned over towards me. "I've taken old Scruthem down."

It was said triumphantly.

"How do you mean?" I asked, startled.

He did not directly answer.

"He's systematically underpaid me," he said. "I've seen all the things he and others could have, and I wanted them, and felt myself less than half a man because I didn't have them. I reckoned the old vulture owed me money— and I took it."

"But that means gaol for embezzlement," I whispered.

"I never even had a complete decent rigout of clothes," he said eagerly. "I was a thing of starved and thwarted desires, with nothing but starved and thwarted desires ahead of me. I couldn't even treat Janey to a decent outing. I decided that if I could only live live, mind you— for a single week, whatever happened, it would be better to stand the racket rather than to go on merely existing. So I saw my chance, and got away with a hundred."

"It means gaol," I remarked lamely.

"Of course! " he retorted with a laugh. "But I'll have had my satisfaction. I'll be through the lot in a week; and directly it's gone down I go to Scruthem, tell him and let him know what I think of him."

Obviously he wanted no mercy. Only an optimist would expect it from Scruthem.

"I couldn't do it without the clothes," he added, "but dressed up like this, and fed well, I'll stand up to him as man to man and let him do his worst."

I GAVE him my address before we parted, on the understanding that, when he was arrested, he should send for me and I would do what I could

for him. My conventional sense of morality might be shocked, but I felt that Cochran had more justice on his side than Scruthem could ever claim.

Weeks went by and I heard nothing. I searched the papers for news, but found none. Then, when I had partly forgotten him, and partly formed the conviction that he must have changed his plans and got away, I met him again. He was prosperous-looking and fat. He explained things.

"I went down to see old Scruthem earlier than I intended," he said. "He wrote to me. I had been away for five days, and things were getting into a mess because neither he nor anyone else knew the run of my work. When he saw how I was dressed he merely thought I'd grown sick of my job— he thought I had come into some money. He offered me half a dollar rise to get me back. Then he offered a dollar."

Cochran laughed mirthfully.

"I sailed into him for all I was worth. You know what I told you about clothes. It was right. They pulled me through. I talked to him like a Dutch grand-mother, and let him know the whole business. The screw tried to use the threat of punishment to get me back; but when I told him that I'd rather go to gaol than go back on the old footing— that, as a matter of fact, I'd fully made up my mind to go to prison— it was up against him. Being the sort of man he is, he respected me for kicking, in place of despising me for being a slave; he realised he owed me a great deal more than the hundred I had taken; and gaol was the last place he wanted to send me to, being almost in a panic at losing me.

"I hadn't known my own value fore; but he couldn't afford to lose me, so I resumed on something like a salary.

"Since then," Cochran concluded, "I have never looked back. I've had confidence, and I could assert myself."

A YOUNG, seedy-looking man passed as we emerged on to the pavement, and Cochran nodded to him.

"That's one of my clerks," he said. "A damn' useful young fellow he is, too."

"Well, after your experience, you ought to know how to treat your clerks,"I ventured.

A hard, commercial look swept the geniality from his face. "A man's only worth what he appraises himself at," he said shortly. "I give that fellow fifty bob."

Again he became genial.

"Better look me up at the office," he said. "Or come out home and see Janey. We're married now. Here's the address."

He had written it on the back of a card. I looked at the face of it:

J. Raymond Cochran.
Scruthem, Cochran and Co.

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12: Her Ruin

Bulletin, 23 May 1934

JOHN GRAY had ruined her life; yet Connie wore black, even in her heart, for him. But for him there would still be for her the bright lights, gay clothes, hectic nights— all the things she had considered "life."

The meeting had been an accident, at one of those Darlinghurst parties which themselves seem to be accidents. There had been awed whispering about the shabby man seated in the corner, looking out of place in the assembly of noise and inanity; and she had heard the story of what had happened when he was in hospital. The sister to whom he had expressed gratitude for the infinite patience of the nurses had told him to thank, not them, but the grace of God prompting their work. "Are you not the grace of God?" he had retorted.

Connie liked the story. John Gray? Yes, of course! She had never read anything he had written, certainly; neither, probably, had those who spoke of him in awed whispers; but she knew a few limericks and a few soulful verses.

With the adroitness that was part of her business she was soon talking to him. She liked his talk; it was a disappointment when he moved to leave.

"Could I come with you? I'm a bit tired of— all this." She wished to give the impression that she, too, was bored with the noisy triviality.

Actually, she was anxious to get away from Charlie; she supposed that was his name, since at the hotel lounge where they met he had raised no objection to it. Charlie was spending money with the prodigality of the mean man when liquor has loosened the reins; but Connie knew the type. There was likely to be a sudden repentance— a savage one. Already he had reminded her twice of the few pounds she had extracted from him. There was as great a likelihood of trouble as more money, and Connie, an adept at dealing with men who go out to have a good time and wake next day wondering whether they have had it, thought it best to be satisfied.

Charlie was most uninteresting. He had insisted on bringing her here, and seemed to have forgotten her temporarily.

"It would be wasting your time, wouldn't it?" It was John Gray's first revelation that he knew her calling. He was warning her as nicely as he could.

But they went out together to what was to her an incredible adventure. Charlie was wiped off the map. He would be savagely angry, but he would return to the ways of virtue and meanness, and they were not likely to meet again.

It was merely a walk in the moon-light and a supper of fish and chips at his flat, a cheap place, all books and untidiness. Nothing more. In a generous

impulse she had wanted to buy supper; but he had laughed. "Oh, I can rake up a couple of bob for fish and chips."

Yet he had filled the gardens they passed with romance, and in his courtesy to her had made the poor supper seem to her— who believed in making her cavaliers pay heavily for her entertainment, on the principle that it was fatal to let them think her cheap in any way— a feast of unusual delight.

That was the start of it.

"Connie's gone dippy! She's mad over some writer chap," her friend Alma Hills said of her a few weeks later. "He's not young either; and he hasn't a feather to fly with. When I asked her what she was getting out of him she said she didn't want anything— she'd like to give him everything if he'd take anything from her. I told her she ought to see a mental specialist."

John Gray had been surprised to see her again when she dropped into his flat; not quite pleased. "It's scarcely bright amusement for you," he had said when she expressed a wish to see him sometimes. She eagerly seized on his lack of objection; a strange friendship grew between them— the gold-digger and the writer.

His treatment of her was so different from that of the other men she met that the difference fascinated her; for his part, he found something that attracted him to the impulsive girl.

Connie thought that she knew men, although once, when she boasted of it, John Gray had laughed. "You don't really," he said, something like pity in his voice. "You only know the worst side of them."

John Gray certainly puzzled her. He was not prepared to accept anything from her, not even herself.

But he came home one day to find her installed in his flat, which she had redeemed from its untidiness.

"I've come to look after you— you want looking after," she laughed defiantly.

Then she pleaded suddenly, eagerly.

"Jack, I worship the ground you walk on, and it makes me hate— everything else. I want to live here and look after you."

"You have your own flat," he said.

He had seen it but once, and his "It must cost you a lot of money" had given her the impression that he despised her.

"I have given it up— l have given everything up," she said desperately. "I only want you. I won't be a burden; I can get a job."

He suffered her to stay. She would probably be tired in a week and would go, leaving him a little hurt but a little relieved. The same idea was at the back

of her mind. But there was no going back for her. She realised that when, for a time, she lost him.

Editors were cutting down expenses. They needed money; and she got it. It was for Jack, she told herself fiercely; and then she was afraid to let him know she had it. But when she bought things he knew they could not afford, he talked of parting.

His attitude irritated her.

"But for you I would be at Randwick! I've never missed a big meeting at Randwick, and I've always worn pretty dresses there," she stormed.

"I'm afraid I can't give you Randwick and pretty dresses there." His smile was gentle and a little hurt. "You want them, I know; you can get them, no doubt. It would be better if we finished."

Connie's training had taught her that outrageous violence was a way to gain her ends; in emergency she resorted to uproar.

She was desolate when she found him gone; she had refused to go herself. The kindness of the note he left, the intense trouble he must have gone to raise the money, cut her to the heart. It was the right moment for shaking off her madness ; but life was worthless now without John Gray.

Hunting like a wild thing, she found him. She went on her knees to be taken back to him.

She remained on her knees ever afterwards. His was a tyranny powerful because of its gentleness; the fear of losinghim was a terror that made her shape all her nature to his desire. One by one he clipped the claws with which she had once fought successfully. She was happy in poverty and cheap dresses. Curiously happy. Gray's step at the door never failed to thrill her; there was a glory in the unmarried respectability she had attained; a strange pride in being called "Mrs. Gray" by his friends.

"There is happiness even in watching the white feet of the sunlight dancing on the pavement," he had told her. She had reached the stage of feeling that.

And then John Gray died.

Connie was like one who had been led far into a strange land and then deserted. It was Tom Martin who had stepped from the background when the only thought that kept her alive was that John Gray's memory must be honored, if for the rest of her life she had to wear her fingers to the bone.

A stodgy little man, an insignificant worshipper in the circle around John Gray, he had come forward with practical help. Friends had collected the money for the doctor and the undertaker and the cemetery people; and there was a surplus. He pressed it into Connie's hands.

"We all admire the way you stuck to Gray," he said sincerely.

"There is nothing in life for me now he is gone. I would rather be dead with him," she replied dully.

"It is something to have lived for so long with him; there must be beautiful things to remember."

He promised to do what he could do to get her work; in an uncertain way she thanked him. She did not know about the future. God— if there was a God— had forsaken her. Money had come easily to her once. She would like it again, as a means to drink and forgetfulness and a quick end.

But the tyranny of John Gray still held. She could not disgrace his memory, even if she could overcome the repugnance that had come for the old life. She did not go to the hotel but turned aside into the little "ham-and-beef." In the times when Jack was ill and finances were desperate, an apology for delay in serving her had revealed the fact that Stodgors was embarrassed by the absence of an assistant.

"Why not try me?" she had asked. Stodgors, astonished, had thought it a joke.

"I would be very glad of the work," she had assured him. The money he paid her had been useful.

Now, when she entered, Stodgors greeted her with a kindly sympathy. He had been proud of having the occasional patronage of John Gray. In a way he had been a worshipper, too.

"Mrs. Gray," said Stodgors, "if you felt inclined to consider a job in this shop regular, I'd be glad to have you. You was smarter than anyone I've had. You want a little time to get over things, I know," he added hurriedly, "but any time you're ready, even if it's months, there's the job, if you want it."

His good-hearted words brought the tears into her eyes; but the proposition seemed absurd. In a ham-and-beef shop, doling out threepenn'orths— she who had once had a flat which made her friends envious; had been admired at Randwick!

Still, jobs were few and applicants many. Easy enough to go canvassing, but hard to make enough to compensate for the wear and tear of shoe leather. She was living on the little money she would accept from Martin.

Martin saw her regularly; he seemed to regard it as part of his duty to his dead friend.

"You're fretting too much," he told her. "He wouldn't like that. Come with me to the pictures to-night."

They went regularly after that; it became pleasant to talk of John Gray, as they always did. Those talks enabled her to put out of her head the recurring thought of finding the path back to her old life which desperation brought to her. The memories made the struggle worth while.

Her clothes were growing shabbier. When a hotelkeeper sent for her to fill a long-promised job in his bar, there was a difficulty, only overcome by a kindly barmaid offering to lend her some dresses until her salary enabled her to buy some of her own. In a bar a woman must dress well.

The girl's dresses were neat; and Connie had not lost her looks. The publican noticed it. When they heard that Smartern wanted to see Connie in the office the other girls laughed. She hated the way his eyes gloated upon her, undressing her with their stare; hated the touch of his fat hands on hers.

"You're pretty slick, young lady," he said. "I may be able to put you on the cash-desk, shortly. That'll be more money for you. Not that you need worry about that— if you're sensible. Don't make any appointment for Saturday night. We might have a little outing together."

Connie was glad it ended there, a demand for Smartern's attention coming opportunely.

Martin, absent for a few nights, came to see her. He was told the news and shook his head.

"The money's good," he said. "But at Smartern's! I don't like it."

She laughed a little hysterically.

"The alternative seems a place in a ham-and-beef shop," she said.

"That might be better," he commented steadily. "Smartern's! There's another alternative. You might marry me."

"Marry you?" It startled her.

"Why not? We both have memories of John Gray. I love you for yourself, as well as for what you were to him; and I'm comfortably off. I have always admired you; your loyalty..."

The surprise stirred the hysteria that had been in her heart.

"You don't know what I've been."

"Oh, yes, I do. You were good enough for John Gray; you are good enough for me. You are as he saw you— a good, loyal woman!"

Good! She could be better than he thought. But she did not want to marry Martin.

"I would rather we were just friends," she said, calm now.

"We will always be friends, I hope," he said, pressing her hand.

John Gray had ruined her. Because of him she could not return to the old ways, nor ever marry for the sake of a home. And yet, the following night, as she stepped out from Stodgors's shop, a queer contentment was in her heart. She saw the moonlight flooding the street and remembered the beauty John Gray had seen in it.

She had once thought that she had known men; and now there had been

John Gray, and Tom Martin, and honest, kindly Stodgors, who, to-morrow morning, would be her employer. She felt a sort of pride in herself— pride and thankfulness.

The row with Smartern was a memory of the past. Rebuffed, he had been insulting, filthily insulting— and, standing erect, she had brought her clenched fist down with all the weight of her arm on his fat face.

"To think that I ever thought I could go back!" she told herself with a smile. "Why, I'd even forgotten how to swear at him properly."

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13: The Mind of Ah Foo

Bulletin, 13 March 1929

NOBODY in the court realised what was in the mind of Ah Foo as the Judge pronounced sentence of death. The killing of one Chinaman by another, even if it were cold-blooded and brutal, was of small public interest; the wooden face of the condemned man seemed the natural thing to expect from a Chinaman. They went away talking about "the fatalism of the East," and then forgot all about the case; even the Judge made his remarks brief, feeling the impossibility of being impressive whilst the dull face in the dock was without a gleam ot intelligent understanding.

But in Ah Foo 's mind the whole scene was a blur; the brain was stunned by the confusion of his thought. There was nothing there of the imperturbability that those who watched him imagined; he wanted to scream aloud that he was innocent; but the habit of impassivity kept him silent.

After he had been led away he still wanted to scream his protests. There was within him no surprise that he, an innocent man, had been found guilty and was going to hang for a crime about which he knew nothing.

The evidence was against; him strong enough: Lo Fang dead in the hut; Ah Foo's knife blood-stained near him; and the money he had banked about the time Fang's body was found supplied a motive. What evidence Ah Foo's lawyer could rake together of his Client's movements in the city did not lessen the probability of the crime having been committed by him. His story that he had left his hut-companion alive and sleeping was absurd.

In his mind there was nothing amazing in such miscarriage of justice; his childhood in China had trained him to it. He did not even object to death, as far as death itself was concerned; it was the form of it that gave bitterness to his thoughts. There was an abominable cruelty about these white people. They would take him to the gallows, put a rope round his neck and with the drawing of the bolt hurl him into eternity.

Only three or four people, officials, would stand by to see him off. That was the refinement of cruelty which caused frantic protest to bubble in his heart. The more he pondered over it the more he cried against the horror. In China he would have been taken out before the crowd. The eyes of the multitude would have fortified him. There might have been the glory of preliminary tortures to endure, so that he could show to the onlookers his indifference; and they would have gone away saying, "Ah Foo died well." Executions might be commonplaces to them, but they would say that he died better than others. If there has been nothing else in a man's life, he could at least die well.

There was a brutality about the white people that would deny him this privilege— he who had had nothing else in his life. In China his young life had been one of starvation and kicks; in Australia, to which he had been smuggled, it had been a long slavery to buy his freedom from the men who had contrived his arrival. His one hope had been to return to China with some hard-saved money and to walk about in the town where he had been born, displaying his affluence.

Now that dream was over. He was to die unjustly for a murder which mattered nothing to anyone, except perhaps the Chinese who had lost the further tribute they had expected from the dead man and himself, and had sent good money after bad in his defence.

A visitor— a white man— put an idea into his numbed mind. Danton's face was white; he was nervous. Ah Foo saw in his arrival a desire to placate him, to keep his mouth closed. Mentally he smiled, pleased that something of a grin could flash into his shadowed mind. What good would it be to him to talk now?

Danton went quickly, having said very little beyond a whispered "You've been decent with me, Ah Foo." He had provided a little money so that the prisoner could secure anything he wanted.

But he left an idea behind. Ah Foo turned old pictures in his mind. He recalled the falling dusk when a woman's scream had come to him whilst he still worked amongst the vegetables. Curiosity had led him to where the grounds of the old deserted cottage abutted on the vegetable garden. There were more screams, and a woman came out of the cottage struggling to escape the clutch of a man, who seized her more closely

Events happened quickly then. Out of the gathering darkness a man raced, and with sharp, angry words flung himself upon the other, punching him, tearing the woman from his grasp. In a moment were fighting, rolling desperately over and over on the ground, whilst the woman stood by, moaning and wringing her hands. Ah Foo had gazed in petrified interest.

Suddenly the men were apart, rising to their feet. The one who had got there first seized a batten from the fence and rushed but he went down like a log. The other had also seized a batten and had used it with greater speed.

Ah Foo still stared whilst the two bent over the prostrate fellow.

"He's dead! My God, he's dead!" said the man.

Ah Foo did not catch what was said in the agitated words that passed between the man and woman; but he knew the man had protested that he must give himself up to the police, while the woman had pleaded against his decision. Apparently she had persuaded him at last.

''We'll go through the Chinese garden then, he had said. "We might be seen on the road."

They had come upon Ah Foo before he could dive away. He was frightened, especially when the man strode towards him, the woman stopping behind with a quivering cry.

"You saw?" demanded the man, "Lookee here. This lady she marry me soon— see? Him very bad man; we come just in time to save her. No mean killee. Savee?"

Ah Foo did not savee, but, still frightened he tried to mumble something reassuring.

"You tellem p'lieeman, eh?"

"No tellee p'lice. No likee," said Ah Foo decisively.

He meant that, too. His masters had worked upon his fears of the law in their own interests, and in his terror of re-transportation the very thought of a policeman him with horror. Not for a score of dead men would he have willingly spoken to a representative of the law.

Later that night he had gone out and removed possible evidence that they had forgotten, raking over the soil where their feet had left imprints in the garden. When the discovery of the dead man had been made and the police had called at the hut, All Foo had answered "No savee" to all they said, with a deadly fear all the time that they might guess he had no right to be in Australia.

Even the Chinese who jabbered about it, he had avoided the subject of what the papers called "The Harry Park Mystery." The offer of a reward meant nothing to him. He did not believe the police would pay the money; they would only find out he was a prohibited immigrant, send him away and rob him. Raw to white law, he felt, too, that, he might himself be charged with murder it he admitted any knowledge of it.

Much time after, when he was less raw and, as one who had learned some English, was on the vegetable run, he came upon the man and woman again. They lived together in a neat house in a poor suburb.

The surprise caused Ah Hoo to hesitate; and the man saw the hesitation and looked startled and angry.

"Me no tellee p'liceman," said Ah Foo placatingly.

Ah Foo went away a ten-shilling note the richer and with a regular customer, from whom similar favors might be expected from time to time. It was nil very satisfactory from Ah Foo's point of view.

He began to like these people, to feel sorry for the look of strain on their faces to reassure them he tried to show his friendlinwss.

"No lil' babee, eli? No lil' boy, lil' gel?" he asked Danton one Saturday as he put down his baskets.

Danton turned sharply from the bench where he was working.

"Good God, no!" he said. Ah Foo had understood vaguely that the shadow over them was spoiling their happiness, keeping them childless, and was more sorry.

All the night after Danton had visited him in the gaol Ah Foo turned things over in his mind, dreamed about them. He would not die the unnoticed murderer of another mere Chinaman. People would talk about him before he died.

In the morning he poured his story upon the warder.

"Me wantee tell. You savee Hallee Plark? Me killee white man there."

With a splather of excited pidgin-English he detailed circumstances which riveted the crime upon him. The warder brought the chief warder; and then the governor came; and the next day he heard the prisoner who was on duty as cleaner in the hall talking to the warder about it with a freedom regulations utterly forbade.

"So this Chow in here killed a white man, too?"

"Confessed to it," said tlle warder affably.

Its in all the papers to-day. The chap was found dead at Harry Park, right alongside the Chow gardens where this Pong worked; but they never suspected the Chows. The dead bloke insulted this Chow and he up and hit him with a lump of wood, killing him. Get on with your work, and when you've done go over them handles again. We want 'em shiny."

Ah Foo knew that the sudden change to the voice of authority meant that a senior had entered the hall, and he was sorry. He would have heard more gladly. Elation was in his mind, lifting him above his heart's clamor against the early finish of a life completely thwarted. He even forgot the cold brutality of the white man's habit of quietly hanging a man, compared with tin spectacular glory of public torture in China.

Somehow, too, a still better idea came, to his mind. The little money Danton had given him to rose-line his dreams of China had awakened more affection in the soul of Ah Foo than he had felt towards any other human being; moreover, he approved of Danton acrimo. The idea that pleased him was Danton and his wife with the strain fitted from their faces when he was gone and the fear of discovery was over; and the vision had included 'children about their knees the children he felt they wanted, but dared not have whilst the fear of the old crime haunted them.

But that night, when he woke up in the darkness, he called himself a fool. Were there not other murders he could have claimed, making himself a murderer among murderers— one about whom the people would talk for long.

He turned the thought gloatingly in his mind. His death would be a glorious one; not for the mere murder of another of his race but for killing many. There was the white girl Ollie, found done to death in an empty house in Surry Hills—another unsolved mystery. She had been the wife of Hop Young, a Chinaman of some respectability, which she had sullied by leaving him to live with another Chinaman. Suspicion had pointed naturally to Hop Young as her destroyer ; but he had apparently left Sydney months before the murder. Yet Chinatown knew more than the police, and its whispers had said that Hop Young was actually the murderer.

Well, Hop Young was in China now and would not dispute the honor with him. He knew enough out circumstances of the case to fasten the crime easily upon his own shoulders. Here was a story he could create which would excite the Chinese, too: they who had despised him us a mere helot, one who could not have women, would wonder to hear how he had enjoyed the embraces of a woman who had left one rich amongst them, and who had killed her for abandoning him. Ah Foo grew into a romantic hero of his own imagining. The brutality of British justice had lost all its terrors.

"Strike a light!" said the warder when he got an inkling of the new disclosure. "Why don't you let us know all the murders you ve committed while you're about it."

But there was circumstantial corroboration in the known details of the Surry Hills murder to support Ah Foo's newer story and again his confession was taken.

"Not that it matters much as far as it concerns him," said the chief warder. "It closes the book on another unsolved mystery, that's all."

But it concerned Ah Foo in two ways; one of them he only learnt that afternoon.

"You've been a mug, Ah Foo," said the warder. "If you hadn't opened your mouth about those other murders you'd be a free man before to-morrow. Two gunmen were caught in a robbery and made a dash for it in a motor-car. A police bullet caught the driver and the car crashed into a wall. Both men are dead in hospital, and each of them before dying confessed to the murder of your friend Lo Fang."

Reaction swung through the soul of Ah Foo. Once more his heart protested against

Mm sudden ending of his thwarted life, which he knew must come on his confession of other crimes.

"Me lie! Me no killee the white man, and the gel," he pleaded desperately.

"No use you crying off it now." said the warder. "Your circumstances were tod right; you've made it easy enough for the police to hang you live times over. I reckon they'll fasten on the girl case; they'll get you easiest mi that."

DANTON tore himself away from his wife.

"I've got to go, Nell," he said. "I can't stand the suspense. I'll go and see Ah Foo.It's best to face what's coming. Now these men have confessed, he'll cry off that confession."

The news of the dual confession which freed Ah Foo from the stigma of the murder of Lo Fang had come right upon the report of how lie had confessed to the crime which hung its shadow over Danton's life— a thousand times Danton had cursed himself for his failure to face the issue in the first place with bis plea of justification. No other news had yet reached the press; and with fearful foreboding Danton made his way to the prison.

"Me no tellee p'lice," Ah Foo managed to whisper to him. His face expanded slightly in a satisfied grin. "They get me me for another murder: I killee white gel Ollie."

"FUNNY PEOPLE, these Chinamen," said Danton to the warder, who let him out. "That Ah Foo served us with vegetables, and I felt sorry for him. Struck me as a decent Chow; but he seems quite pleased with himself. Doesn't seem to mind hanging— the fatalism of the East. I suppose."

He strode out with head up and swinging tread, more jaunty than he had been for years.

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14: The Nursery Handicap

Bulletin, 8 June 1937

"POOR WOMEN plunged into maternity!" exclaimed Mrs. Parsley. "I've no patience with such notions. As if having babies is not quite the right thing, and what God made mothers for."

Mrs. Parsley, lingering about my room on the pretence of dusting it, had been fencing for an opportunity to exercise her boasted "conversational debility." Equally I had pretended to be busy writing; but when she made an inquiry concerning a staring headline on the paper lying on my table I had replied. Mrs. Parsley's genius for mistranslation did the rest.

"Not that it should be treated with brevity," said Mrs. Parsley. "Treating children being born as if it was a horserace is not all that it should be. Yet, after all, that is the way the veritable adenoids was born."

Mrs. Parsley's queer word-mangling frequently puzzles me. The "veritable adenoids" was a complete surprise, causing me to suspend my pretence of writing and look up. That was Mrs. Parsley's opportunity; she came to an anchor facing me.

"Didn't I tell you about the Keeleys, the people who had No. 7?" she asked. "Very respectable people they were, who always paid their rent, with a daughter Nora, who was an apple in the eye with them. But, for all their love for her, I don't suppose they'd ever have let Nora marry young Harry Martin only for Rich Uncle George.

"Even then," said Mrs. Parsley, "I didn't know it was a horserace."

"A horserace, Mrs. Parsley!" I exclaimed.

"I didn't know, not until Rich Uncle George spoke to me one day. He had come up to see them; but they were all out.

" 'I suppose, Mrs, Parsley,' he said, 'you know all about the Nursery Handicap? You're interested, aren't you? The Nursery Handicap, nine starters; first past the post with a bouncing baby boy the winner. Prize, Rich Uncle George's money. Are you having a little bit on Nora, Mrs. Parsley?'

"To me it seemed a little coarse; but you can't make a silk purse out of a pig's trotter; and Uncle George, even if he was rich, was a rough diadem. He had callous hands, as if he had done plenty of hard work, which, heaven knows, there is no shame in.

"YOU see, Uncle George, when he came back, spending money like a prodigal son who wastes his money on righteous living, had been discontented about there being no great-nephews for him to take to circuses, and so on.

Uncle George, who was Mrs. Keeley's brother, had run away when he was a boy and been forgotten until he returned like a regular Crisis. He mentioned it to me one day even.

" 'It's a disgrace, Mrs. Parsley,' he said. 'My mother had nine children, but all her daughters and daughters-in-law have been dodging it; and now there's only three great-nieces to show me. And the Keeleys here won't let Nora marry because this young Martin hasn't much money and spends what he has. I like him. But the trouble with the family is that they're child-mean. They're afraid of expense.'

" 'Well, you've saved some money yourself, Mr. Tipper,' I says.

" 'Not by scraping every threepence, Mrs. Parsley,' he says with a laugh. 'I haven't got the family money-hunger.'

"It was a little time after that that Mrs. Keeley came to me very excited, and told me that Rich Uncle George was going to leave his money to the first great-nephew that was born in the family. It wasn't long before Nora was married to young Harry Martin. As far as her parents were concerned it was the greed of gold which is the route to all evil that was the reason; but Nora looked very happy; and when they came back from the honeymoon they had a separate flat here— No. 8.

"But, you see, Nora wasn't the only one. She had a lot of cousins who hadn't worried much about having children until they saw a profit in it. Nora might 'ave got a good start, so to speak, if Mrs. Keeley 'ad not been so auspicious about matters. You see, Uncle George didn't say much about his money, and Mrs. Keeley wanted to be sure. She even asked me if Uncle George, who used to talk to me often, had ever mentioned exactly how much money he had, which he hadn't.

"Then she must go to the members of the family talking about it. They all cornered him one day.

" 'I said I would leave my money to my first great-nephew, and I stick to that.' That was what Mrs. Keeley told me Uncle George had said. I suppose Mrs. Keeley decided that nothing venture and not be had was right, for Nora got married at once. "Nora only laughed when I told her one day that I hoped her baby would get Rich Uncle George's money.

" 'Oh, I'm not worrying about that, Mrs. Parsley,' she said. 'I don't suppose there's any chance; there are a few other babies will be born before mine. I'm happy in being married.'

"Mrs. Keeley used to talk to me about them other babies.

" 'Alice's baby is going to be a girl; so is Helen's. Nora's will be a boy. I can always tell,' she'd say to me, speaking as if she was a regular coracle. I couldn't see that she should poise as an authority, having had only one child 'erself. But

some women are like that; an' it seemed to comfort 'er to say it as time went on.

"BUT I didn't know it was a horserace until *—' Uncle George spoke in that way.

" 'They're coming up the straight now,' said Uncle George; 'an' it's going to be an exciting finish. I'd like to see Nora win myself.'

" 'So would I,' I says. 'And, Mr. Tipper, you could have arranged it that way if you had liked.'

"He laughed. 'So I could, Mrs. Parsley, but I didn't think of it at the time. I don't suppose Nora really cares now she has that husband of hers!'

" 'All the more reason why she deserves to win, having no mercery object,' I says.

" 'Well, have a couple of bob on her just to show your sympathy,' said Uncle George, laughing.

"Believe it or believe it not, you could bet about it. Somehow it had got about— I don't know how, not being a woman to talk about my tenants— and everybody was interested in the Nursery Handicap, as Uncle George called it.

"Mr. Wortley, who was our s.p. man then, was willing to take bets about it. He was a most respected man, and even religious. He gave me five to one, which wasn't very encouraging when I wanted Nora to win.

"I got quite used to people calling it the Nursery Handicap. They called it that when they dropped in to hear if there was any news. There was no doubt about the excitement. Mrs. Keeley felt a strain. She grew quite snappy.

"But the first news we got was good. Cousin Agnes, married to one of the Tipper men, 'ad er baby, which was a girl. The news came unexpected: an' I expected Mrs. Keeley to be glad. But she was quite snappy, because No. 11 had fallen up the stairs the night before, when he came home drunk, an' she said she had not been able to get a wink of sleep after he had disturbed her.

"Nora, who was a dear girl, came to my kitchen to apologise. 'You must excuse mother,' she says. 'She's a little upset.'

" 'Anything gone wrong, Mrs. Martin?' I asks.

"She laughed as if she didn't care about anything. 'My cousin Helen has gone to the Women's Hospital,' she said; 'and at my cousin Alice's the nurse has been called in. Mother will worry over this silly business.'

"The news got round; I don't know how. Of course I answered people when they asked me questions. It was surprising the excitement in the whole neighborhood. That poor Mr. Keeley suffered; his wife seemed snapping at him all day, and she made him go on ringing up on the telephone. I was a bit worked up myself, especially after Mr. Wortley had come and said I could have

ten to one Nora if I wanted another bet. Mr. Punter, who had No. 17, took an even pound Alice.

"The evening came with no definite news, which may be good news, as the saying is, but didn't relieve the tension. I met Uncle George coming down the stairs. 'I seem to have started something, Mrs. Parsley,' he said.

" 'You have that, Mr. Tipper,' I says; 'and it looks as if I'm going to lose four shillings over it.'

" 'Never say die,' he laughed.

"I HEARD poor Mr. Keeley at the telephone all through the night; an' once I got up, thinking it might be somebody else.

" 'I'm fed up, Mrs. Parsley,' he said. 'The missus wants me to ring up every five minutes. It's going to become worse. Why, there's May, Hilda, Joy and Ellen before Nora. I won't be able to stand up to it if it goes on.'

"His shout early in the morning woke the whole building, I think. Most of the flat doors opened so that the people could listen-in; you see, everybody in the place had a bet of some sort on it. Helen's baby was a girl, it seemed. Mrs. Keeley was so excited that she came down to see me.

" 'Didn't I say it would be a girl?' she boasted. 'I can tell every time. It will be the same with my niece Alice. Nora's will be a boy.'

" 'Well, then, Mrs.' Keeley, you needn't worry,' I says. 'If you are satisfied about the others—'

"She didn't appear so easy in her mind when I said that. An' that Alice didn't seem in no hurry to relieve anxiety; a selfish, inconsiderate woman that Alice had always seemed to me when she came to see the Keeleys. She wasn't the girl to hurry herself for nobody.

"They say that troubles never come singly; an' when I came back from the grocer's a telegram had just arrived. It was from Mrs. Keeley's sister Mary at Bathurst, where Mary's daughter Joy lived.

"The Keeleys were readin' the wire when I went up to their flat.

" 'What would you make of that?' Mrs. Keeley asked me.

"The wire ran: 'Happy event this morning. Both doing well.'

" 'That's like Mary— she always was a cat,' snarled Mr. Keeley. 'If it had been a boy she'd have mentioned it, to have a triumph over us. I bet it's a girl; but she knows we'd like to know that definitely, so she won't say so.'

"That seemed like the wisdom of the serpent, which must be right, since the Bible says so; but Mrs. Keeley was worrying. She sent a wire, reply paid, but they didn't answer. Joy worried her even when the news came that Alice's baby was a girl. It wasn't until the birth announcement was in the papers that she was satisfied that Nora's chance was still good.

"I reckoned that my money didn't look so bad, and Mr. Wortley said that if I wanted another bet on Nora the price was five to one.

"The excitement rose from a simmer again when a 'phone message said that Hilda had gone into her private 'orspital.

"When I went up to Mrs. Keeley's flat she was enjoying a cry— quite historical she was. Nora was there trying to comfort her.

" 'You shouldn't work yourself up so much, mother,' she says. 'I'm not worrying. It really doesn't matter.'

" 'You shouldn't say that!' cried Mrs. Keeley, quite fierce. 'It does matter. But get me a glass of water, an' I'll be all right.'

"I guessed the glass of water was only an excuse. 'I'm not afraid of Hilda; hers will be a girl like the others,' she tells me. 'It's May and Ellen. I can always tell, Mrs. Parsley; and they'll be ahead of Nora.'

BUT that's where she was wrong— with all her wisdom about it. About Nora, I mean. Certainly it gave me a jolt when I heard that May's father had rung up to say that the nurse was going to be called in next day.

"That very night I was wakened by the bustle an' disturbance, an' off Nora went to the 'orspital, white-faced but smiling. I 'ad time to squeeze 'er 'and before she was put in the taxi.

" 'Nothing to fear, dear,' I says. 'Them optimistic nurses know their business, otherwise they wouldn't be optimistics.'

" 'They're making a neck-to-neck go for it,' says Mr. Wortley, calling in, hardly I was up, in the morning. 'If you want a further interest, Mrs. Parsley, I'll give you evens.'

" 'Alf an hour later I wished I had taken him at his word.

"Mr. Keeley almost 'owled it out when he answered the ring on the 'phone which 'e was sittin' on the stairs waitin' for. 'Is wife 'ad gone to the 'orspital. 'It's a boy!' he shouted. I didn't blame 'im for rushin' out to 'ave a drink, what with the strain over an' 'is wife away and everything.

"When Rich Uncle George came he knew the news already. I told him that the Keeleys were at the 'orspital. So was young Martin.

" 'I know,' 'e says. 'I've been there. It's a boy, and beat May's by two hours. They're going to call it George. I'm glad it's Nora.'

"Then his voice changed. 'I want to leave with you a letter for Nora,' 'e said, holding out an envelope to me. You could have knocked me over with the last feather to fly with; 'e sounded that final. 'I'm going away. I'm glad Nora has her kid. With a pair of 'andsome parents like that, it ought to be a veritable adenoids.' "

The interpretation of the baffling phrase flashed to me then. But I was still interested in the prize-money for the child that was to be a veritable Adonis.

" 'I've got a job on a boat,' said Uncle George.

" 'A job! You? Rich Uncle George! ' I cried flappergasted, which I am not surprised they use that phrase, seeing what some flappers are like.

" 'Why, yes, of course!' laughed Uncle George. 'I've always worked for my living— and spent my money. A win in the Irish Sweep enabled me to come back and do the grand amongst my relatives for a year. That letter holds the cheque which closes my bank account. A tenner!'

"The way 'e laughed 'e seemed to think it was a

Golden Jest.

" 'Poor Nora.' I started trying to make 'im see 'ow wrong it was. 'She'll be disappointed—'

" 'Not she! I told her all about it long ago. She's got her husband out of it; they'd never have let her marry him. That's why I'm glad Nora won. None of the others have a grouch; anyway, I'm leaving my money— what money I have —to my first great-nephew.' "

Mrs. Parsley paused and grabbed her duster with a firm resolve to make up for lost time.

"I don't believe in turning that sort of thing into a horserace," she said. "But, somehow, it seemed fair enough to me, especially after Mr. Wortley 'ad paid me up my thirty-four shillings, which 'e did like a gentleman."

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15: The Foolish Gondola

Bulletin, 29 March 1939

" 'MY husband's very humorous ; he's a reg'lar circus,' she says. Directly I heard *that* it was enough for me," said Mrs. Parsley. She had been called away and had returned from showing a prospective tenant a flat.

" 'I'm sorry; I'm full,' I says. I daresay they may have been a very respectable couple; but I'm taking no more risks of having circuses in my establishment."

The suggestion that Mrs. Parsley had been landlady to a circus startled a question from me.

"Well, not exactly a whole circus," she replied, "though I must say that it seemed that way at one time; if a camel had walked into my kitchen, hump and all, I would not have been surprised. It was bad enough having the place overrun with, lions and monkeys, so that you never knew when you were going to meet them. Which I am sure that sort of thing was enough to send anyone's heart down to Nero, as the saying is, which everyone must know where a man like him, who went on fiddling when the place was burning, must be. And on top of all that was Mr. Pallotti, who had sworn a gondola, and when he got excited showed how he was going to kill the man he had sworn it against."

"Gondola? Vendetta," I suggested.

"Something Eyetalian anyway," said Mrs. Parsley; "being foreign I don't think much of it, whatever it is. I scorn the foreign yokel, as the song says. This Mr. Joe Pallotti was quite a nice little man. But even Mr. Pugwuggle seemed to think he might kill the man he was after, him having made a vow to do it.

" 'Soma day I weel finda heem and then I weel keela heem— like so!' he would say.

"IT was Mr. Pugwuggle who arrived first. 'I am Pugwuggle's Mammoth Circus,' he said depressively.

"It knocked me all of a heap, him looking to me only like one man, and I had always been led to believe that a circus was a crowd.

" 'What I mean to say is I am the interpremier, grovelling head, manager and directorial supper-riser of that marvellous aggravation of circus stars known as Pugwuggle's Mammoth Circus. I want a commodious and elegant flat for myself, my wife and my daughter, the Adorable Angelina, Undeputed Queen of Equine-Turpentine Acts!'

"Although he was fond of using words of a lot of syllabuses until he climbed off his high horse and got friendly, he seemed very respectable, and I let him Number 10. Even Miss Perry admitted that they must be respectable because

he wouldn't dare to talk in the rough way he did to his wife if they weren't really married. But Miss Perry didn't like the way the Adorable Angelina came downstairs walking down the bannisters on her hands with her body balanced in the air and her skirt hanging down the wrong way.

" 'I don't think you should allow your daughter to do that,' says Miss Perry one day.

" 'Oh, that's kid's play to Angel,' says Mr. Pugwuggle. 'She's all right. She's a clever little so-and-so.'

"He was certainly a rough diadem, was Mr. Pugwuggle. His wife was very fond of him and used to call him the roughest names to show it; and their Angel was as pretty as a picture.

"They came when there was a lot of flats empty, and as nobody objected to the Pugwuggles, but some of the tenants, especially the men, seemed to like to see Angel doing that on the stairs or springing up and hanging to the ceiling, I let the others come. Though the day after Mr. and Mrs. Choochin came I thought them pugilists had come again, and had to talk to them about the way they shook the whole place in the morning with their training. Being acolytes in the circus they had to keep in condition, they said.

"Mr. Joe Pallotti occupied one of the small flats right upstairs by himself. He seemed a jolly little man, and everybody liked him, but he sometimes spoke like a man with a heart bowed down by weighty woe, as the song says.

" 'I am da lonely mana, Mrs. Parsalay,' he says to me. Alla I can liva for now is my gondola. Soma day I shall finda da man who have ruin my life. And I weel keela heem —so! I shall invite heem come and seea me. I shall laugh, I shall smile! Then, sudden— so! He ees dead!'

" 'I want you to understand extinctly,' I says firmly, that I will have none of that in my establishment. It's not respectable; not the right thing at all.'

" 'I weel tella you what eet ees,' he says. 'Eet ees justice! L am 'appy wit' my Nessa. We love each other. Togezzer we feeda da baby lion, on da bottle. She is my wife. Sometime she say "Joe, weel you efer be able to marry me?" And I say "What mattare? We ees 'appy!' "

" 'Oh,' says I, 'you weren't married?'

" 'Ow could we be? Dere ees another wife— peraps one in Italy, too. But what mattare— though sometime Nessa she ees sad. I lova her! And then she go! Leave us, me and da lion cub, Caesare; merely she writa to saya she weel always be fond of me; but she ees marry to a man she lova, too. I go mad. I vow, solemn I take oat', I weel finda her, I weel finda heem! She did not saya who he ees ; but I weel finda heem. And then, I weel be sudden— so! He ees dead! '

It didn t seem quite respectable to me him not been married to Nessa ; and I told him straight it would be best for him to forget all about her and his vow. But he says, 'Eet ees an oat'. When I finda heem I weel keela heem— so! '

"THE real trouble started one night when going down stairs I met Mr. Wassail, shaking like an aspic leaf. He had been to a party, which was nothing unusual for him.

" 'Missersh Parshley'— which was just the way he said it— 'have you any lionsh staying here?'

" 'Mr. Wassail,' I says, 'it's time you went to bed. Lions! '

" 'But Missersh Parshley, have you?' he says, which, of course, made me tell him no, not to be foolish. 'Missersh Parshley,' he says, speaking like that still, 'I could've shworn I shaw a lionsh come in and go upshtairs.'

" 'You're talkin' nonsense, Mr. Wassail. Of course there are no lions, I says firm. He seemed satisfied, although he was still shaking.

" 'I'll have to have another drink to tone me up,' he says, although it didn't seem to me that it was that that he needed. As a favor, Missersh Parshley, don't mention to Missersh Wasshall that I told you I thought I shaw a lion. She might make a song about it,' he says.

"Which I daresay she would. I thought to myself that I had never seen Mr. Wassail like that before, and I was sorry for the poor fellow.

"I was just dozing off to sleep when there was a banging at my door.

''Mrs. Parsley! Wake up! There are lions in the house! ' That's what I heard; and I thought I heard a lion's roar, too ; but I told myself I must be dreaming. There was two women outside my door, looking white and scared, and bad-tempered like women get when they're upset, saying that they weren't going to live in a place where wild beasts were permitted. Then I saw that there was a taximan there, too, who wanted to know if I was the landlady.

" 'Where's the man with the lion?' he asks. 'Cripes, missus, it ain't no good sayin' there ain't a man with a lion— I want to collect a fare off him.'

"I was beginning to feel as if I was having one of them deliriums with trimmings; and I told that taximan that if he was in the habit of driving people about with lions he ought to collect the fare without waking people up at the midnight's silent hour, which it wasn't at all silent the way things were.

" 'I ain t kiddin, missus,' he says. 'I come back to my taxi on a stand near Pugwuggle's Circus and there's a fare sitting in it 'oo tells me to drive to this residential. I ops in an' sets off. Looked to me as if the bloke had a big pile of rugs; and I didn't take no notice of funny sounds, which I thought might be me fare's way of snoring. But when we gets here and I 'ops out, this fare lugs out a lion. I don't mind sayin', missus, that it took me aback. I didn't wait to collect

no fare, but got for the lick of me life. Now I've come back to collect, if you'll tell me where I can find the bloke.'

" 'You can come upstairs with us,' says I, for them women was from upstairs. There were tenants all about the corridor up there in their wraps, and there was Pallotti, too. He seemed glad to see me. Missus Parsalay, eet ees a veree gooda lion. Get ees a nica lion. Eet would not 'urt a childa,' he says.

'Mr. Pallotti,' I says firm-like, though my heart was fluttering like a bird in a gilded cage, 'if you've had the audacity to bring a lion into my establishment the sooner you get it out the better. And yourself, too,' I says.

" 'A nice sort of residential! You get wild animals thrown in,' says that Mrs. Turner. That annoyed me, seeing the sort of trouble I was always having with that woman and her husband.

" 'I will not have lions in my house,' I says. 'Married couples is bad enough, some of them.'

'But thees lion is mucha more tamer than married couples! ' says Mr. Pallotti. 'Come wit' me, Mrs. Parsalay. Come into my flata; you can pata da lion, you can stroka heem. Caesare ees so gentle!'

"I could see myself patting a wild beast like that! Especially as, when that Mr. Pallotti moved to open his door, everybody scrambled to get into their flats and leave me alone. I wrenched myself free and reached the top of the stairs myself.

" 'You keep that door closed until you take that animal out; and get it out before the morning!' I calls out.

" 'But, Missus Parsalay, you no understan',' he says, like he was pleading and hurt. 'To pleasa me, you come, speaka to Caesare. No? Missus Parsalay, we coulda nota leta the bailiff geta me beautiful Caesare! '

" 'I'm going to see Mr. Pugwuggle,' I says.

"Mr. Pugwuggle only opened the door an inch and started to talk about seeing me in the morning; but now that I was well away from that lion I was really angry about it.

" 'Mr. Pugwuggle,' I says, 'you're goin' to speak to me right now; and I'm coming into your flat to talk to you! '

"With that I gave the door a push; and then I was sorry, as people often are when they are like fools that rush in where angels fear the treadmill. What they were that came with a rush, dashing past me, I did not know then. I gave a scream and ran; in my flat I must have fainted, although I knew the place was full of pander-harmoniums with all sorts of queer noises, and people running about, and sometimes women screaming. I wanted to telephone for the police, but even if the residential was being pulled down, as it sounded as if it was, I couldn't venture outside amongst all those wild animals, whatever they were.

"That's why I didn't speak to Mr. Pugwuggle in the way I should have when he came to my flat, which he began by saying he was sorry. Which well he might be. I was so relieved to see him.

" 'We've collected nearly all the monkeys which got out when you pushed open the door,' says Mr. Pugwuggle, as cool as a concubine, as if having monkeys in his room was quite the right thing. 'The animals were scared and made a rush to escape.'

" 'How dare you bring such animals into my establishment, Mr. Pugwuggle,' I demanded. 'Monkeys in your flat and a lion in Mr. Pallotti's! And I suppose Mr. and Mrs. Choochin—'

" 'They've got the baboons,' says Mr. Pugwuggle, calm as you please. I began to think I really had them delirium with the trimmings. 'There's a couple of elephants in the yard.'

" 'Elephants! ' I gasped.

" 'We had some difficulty to get them there elephants in,' he says. 'Any damage done to the gate I'll make good. I've brought some brandy here; I know you were upset.'

"That brandy did me good.

" 'Where have you put the tigers?' I asks sarcasticlike.

" 'Oh, we couldn't bring the tigers, but there's a couple of horses, too, in the yard,' he says.

" 'Mr. Pugwuggle, my residential isn't a circus-tent, and I don't intend it shall be one. It's a place which I've always kept respectable,' I said. And that was only the beginning. I was telling him off properly when he interrupted me,

" 'The bloomin' aninrals are here now, Mrs. P., an' it can't be helped. They're a nice quiet lot of animals and they won't cause much disturbance.'

" 'Not cause much disturbance!' I cries.

" 'Listen, Mrs. P.,' he says, 'Pugwuggle's Mammoth Circus is i.n a bit of an 'ole. There's a court disorder out and the bailiffs are likely to come in. Me an' the boys are indetermined to beat that disorder— it don't matter to you what it was about. The only way we could do it was to divide up the animals amongst the people and get 'em away where we could. The bailiffs'll find just the remainder— animals the Zoo won't want to buy and some old equipment we can buy back cheap if there's a sale. We'll be able to bring 'em to terms pretty easy.'

" 'You and your people,' I says, 'can get out of here to-morrow— or to-day, which it is now— and take them animals with you. If you don't go I'll have you put out.'

"'Mind if I smoke, Mrs. P.?' he says, and lighted a cigar. 'I s'pose you'll put that there lion out y'self? Not that 'e ain't a quiet lion, as lions go. Pallotti only

told 'im to be silent, an' you notice 'e ain't done no roarin'. 'E's like a dawg. But it's much better to be friendly. Look, any damage that's done I'll make good. Do out your flats like new when we're gone, if you like.'

" 'How long will it be before you can get them animals away?' I asks.

" 'Oh, two or three days,' he answers careless-like.

"It made my head whirl to think of my residential filled up with savage animals that might cause all sorts of damage like one of them unstinking volcanoes. And what the tenants would do worried me.

" 'Oh, I'll fix it up with the tenants. I'll have a word with a few of 'em,' he says. 'An', of course, I'll pay all fines— that is, if there's any trouble about 'aving them elephants in the yard.'

"IT'S a strange thing about tenants that you can never tell what they're going to do. They make trouble when you don't suspect it, and then, when you do suspect, there isn't any.

"People looked out of the windows of all the flats round about all day long, looking at the elephants and horses, and I think our tenants liked the feeling that they owned them, in a manner of speaking, and could go down and feed them. They even liked passing Mr. Pallotti's flat and feeling they was very near to a lion which they could hear moving about inside. They was introduced to the baboons, too.

" 'Fancy me sleeping through all that rumpus, Mrs. Parsley. Not even a monkey came into my flat to wake me up,' says Mr. Slompack. 'You want to rename this establishment, Mrs. Parsley. Call it Jungle Mansions and advertise the big-game shooting— elephants, lions and mountain antelope.'

" 'It's upset me, but I couldn't help it,' I says. 'I hope you're not inconvenienced.'

" 'Inconvenienced— no! 'he says. 'I like it; and I'm only too glad to think we're helping out these boys. The first thing I saw this morning looking out of my window was a jolly old elephant. I think that old Toby knows me now; he trumpeted for another apple when he saw me.'

"You talk about the ram that was glad to get out of the thicket when Abraham altered his mind! The tenants taking it like that was a relief to my mind, but that Mrs. Fidgetts was a disaccordion note, as they say. Her little Pom had disappeared, and she was sure that that lion had eaten him. But only Mrs. Fidgetts was sorry if it had.

" 'Pleasa, Mrs. Parsalay, come up and pata da lion,' that Mr. Pallotti kept saying to me, as if he thought I ought to enjoy patting lions; which I don't think I would even if I tried to like it.

"I thought he was going to say that again when he came to me, grinning like that Mrs. Chester's cat that is mentioned in the Bible paradox.

" 'Mrs. Parsalay, I hava da good news. Now I hava my revenge!' he says. 'My Nessa, she weel coma backa on a veesit. She say her 'usband he coma, too. Soon I meet heem! Soon I knowa heem.'

"He made that stabbing movement he was so fond of, so that I had to jump back. It scared me.

" 'Then I keela heem— like that!'

"It made me worried. Mr. Pallotti was such a nice little man, in spite of him having brought that lion to his flat, that it wasn't nice to think of him being hanged, let alone a murder being done in my residential.

" 'You shouldn't talk of murdering people. It isn't respectable,' I tells him.

" 'Eet ees just!' he says. 'T'ree year I vow da man dat taka my Nessa from me I keela heem. Eet ees an oat' and must be done. When I meeta heem I shall laugh, I shall smile ; an' then, sudden, the knife under his ribs— so! He ees dead! Ah!'

"Even Mr. Slompack and Mr. Pugwuggle were concerned when I went to them about what he said. "'I know about it. Everybody knows that Pallotti has sworn to kill this man who married Nessa. She ought to keep him away,' says Mr. Pugwuggle.

" 'Don't you know who he is?' asks Mr. Slompack.

" 'No. Nessa just left us, leaving word that she was going to get married. She didn't say who to or where she was going. She was fond of Pallotti, and probably she knew how he would feel about it. What beats me is that she should bring him now. Maybe she wants a showdown. I've written to her warning her that Joe has been swearing for the last three years to kill her husband.'

"THEN one night there was a party at the Pugwuggles' flat. A lot of people came, most of them Eyetalians, being friends of Mr. Pallotti. As some of them came in I heard one being underdressed, as they call it, as Nessa. She was very pretty, and the Eyetalian whose arm she held was a fine-looking man, too. When I thought of that knife Mr. Pallotti talked about when he made those jabs at my ribs and said 'Just like that— so!' it made me feel creepy.

"And, well, it seemed I might feel creepy, the way matters went at that party. The first laughter gave way to loud voices all speaking together like that Confucius worse, confound it, that the proverb mentions; a vegetable tower of Cain and Abel it became soon, as if everybody was arguing at once, shouting angrily at one another.

"I was feeling all on the horns of a tenderhook, when Mr. Slompack came to my flat.

" 'It sounds rather bad, doesn't it?' he says. 'I'm a good deal afraid about that Pallotti; that's why I stayed home to-night. It seems a shame. I like Pallotti. He'll throw himself under the hangman's rope by this foolish gondola of his.'

" 'I'm going along to speak to them,' I says, at a fresh tumult that really sounded as if someone had been murdered. 'I can say I came to ask them to consider the other tenants.'

" 'I'll go with you,' says Mr. Slompack. We were full of misty givings, as they call them, for with the fresh uproar and the sound of falling furniture it seemed to me that it could be only the unscrewable ways of improvidence that could make it less than two or three people killed.

" 'Come right in if you can force your way through the row! ' yells Pugwuggle ; which was encouraging. He came to meet us, pushing through people who looked to me as if they were fighting, though nobody seemed hurt, which was a relief to me.

" 'You thought there was murder, I suppose?' roars Mr. Pugwuggle ; he had to roar. 'It's been a surprise. Fancy! Luigi, that's the brother of Mario, who married Nessa, has been after my daughter Angel all these years. I didn't know! They've become engaged. That's what the riot is about. It sounds like murder,' and he laughs.

"Mr. Pallotti saw us then and shouted. He put his arm around the shoulder of the man Mr. Pugwuggle called Mario, and came pushing him over. It gave me a turn. I thought he might have just remembered his vow to stab this man, and want to do it right in front of me.

" 'These are my frien's. Dis is my besta frien'; I knowa heem from a boy!' he says, then he laughs. 'Listen, Mario, I say to dis lady, time agen, "I keela da man who taka my Nessa— so!" But then I nota know it was my besta frien'. For the stranger who do that— da knife; but for my besta frien' I giva everyt'ing—even Nessa! I am glad to giva!'

" 'MRS. PARSLEY,' says Mr. Slompack when we got away— the respiration was standing on his forehead— 'I am going to my flat to get a whisky. I think you had better let me bring you one, too. I never heard a sediment like that before.'

"Which was how I felt, too. And I'm not going to take any risks of having any more circuses in my establishment."

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16: The Gay Lottery

Bulletin, 22 Dec 1937

"THE worst I ever thought of Mr. Tom Martin, who was Number 19," said Mrs. Parsley, "was I that he was very fond of the flagrant weed, as Mr. Slompack used to call it. He wasn't at all the type you'd take to be a gay Lottery."

"A gay ?" I questioned.

"Lottery," repeated Mrs. Parsley. "Having been brought up religious, I believe, when it comes to marriage, in monotony; not that some people haven't got an excuse when you think of how difficult divorces are to get at times. As long as people live as if they're respectably married it's their business what they do. But I've no patience with a man who, when he's living happily with his own awful wife, as the saying goes, is a gay Lottery.

"Not that giving a fastidious name might not be worse. People who do that sort of thing are up to no good, I says ; and I wouldn't have them near the place, not if I knew it."

I allowed my pride at reaching a quick solution of my landlady's word-puzzle to betray me into becoming once again the victim of her garrulity. "And was Mr. Tom Martin a gay Lothario?" I asked.

Mrs. Parsley parked her sweeper against the wall and approached the table where I had been trying to write. "I'd never 'ave thought there was anything wrong at all with the Martins, such quiet people they were, jest 'im and 'er and their daughter, 'oo looked as if she might be marrying, too, soon, by the young feller 'oo was always 'anging round. I'd thought them such a devoted couple when they came— a reg'lar Derby and Joint, as Mr. Slompack said; and I'd hoped that, example being better than princes, they would teach the couple in No. 17 not to throw my furniture at one another so often.

"But there was that Mrs. Vingar always talking about other people's affairs. Not that I took much notice of 'er; what that woman said to me went in at one ear and off the duck's back, as the sayin' is.

" 'That Mr. Martin is living a double life,' she says. 'Coming 'ome at night on the tram with that barmaid, brazen as can be. And bringing 'is wife 'ome vi'lets. If my 'usband brought me 'ome vi'lets I'd want to know what 'e'd been up to. ' 'Oo's the other woman, you liar?' I'd say, an' 'it 'im with the first thing that came 'andiest.'

"That was the sort of woman Mrs. Vingar was; she seemed to think that that was what 'usbands was made for, to be 'it with crockery; not but what it mightn't do some of them good sometimes. It wasn't until she talked about that barmaid that I really took heed.

"Me ears, pricked up, as they say, enabled me to see that that poor soul who'd seemed so pleasant and smiling when she first came was all broken down and dissolute, so to speak, if you caught 'er when she didn't know you wasn't looking. When she did know she still smiled. And she never seemed to 'ave any words with her husband.

" 'I've no patience with 'er— letting 'im put it orl over 'er like that, and go scot free,' says Mrs. Vingar.. 'She says to me that she's trusted 'er 'usband all 'er life, an' she'd be ashamed of suspectin' 'im now. She's just a fool.'

" 'P'raps she's right,' I says. 'Mr. Martin don't look like one of them that'd go gladding about. Not at his age.'

" 'That's just what she says; and I tell her that at his age a man doesn't like to feel 'e's growing old, and if a woman smiles at 'im 'e's gone.

" 'Why, they've been married nearly twenty-five years,' I says.

" 'Yes, and he seems to have forgotten all about their silver wedding. She told me she wouldn't remind him.'

"IT seemed a terrible shame to me to know that sweet old soul was having her heart broke in my establishment. Although him and her went on just as if there was nothing out of the way, everybody in the flats knew about it. 'How's the gay Lottery gettin' on, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Mr. Slompack, as if it was a joke.

"At last poor Mrs. Martin came to me, and she couldn't help the tears in her eyes.

"Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'I feel desperite. That Mrs. Vingar, she's always coming to my flat and tellin' me I ought to find out— about my husband, you know, Mrs. Parsley. She wanted to come with me to do it.'

"The poor soul was speaking as if she was compressing a crime. It made me sorry for her. 'Don't you take too much notice of what Mrs. Vingar says,' I says.

" 'She's a terrible woman,' she says. 'I wish she wouldn't come into my flat and talk as if it was natural for wives to hit their husbands with the wash-basin. I couldn't let her go with me; but if you wouldn't mind coming, Mrs. Parsley I feel so ashamed. But I think I must find out, as she puts it.'

"She finished all confused; I was so sorry, I went with her. And she found out. That Tom Martin, which I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it, waits outside the hotel, long after it's closed. And then that barmaid comes out and joins him. They walks up the hill together, thick as thieves.

"It frightened me almost to see the look on the poor soul's face as we stood in the doorway of the empty shop where we'd been watchin'. 'What are you going to do, Mrs. Martin?' I says. She gave a funny sort of hard laugh which wasn't at all like her.

" 'I'd be ashamed to let him know I had spied. There's always been such confidence between us,' she said.

"It wasn't till she got back to her flat that she broke down. It was their silver wedding being only a couple of days off that hurt her most, and him having forgotten all about it.

" 'I've always thought that me and Tom was one; we always seemed that, Mrs. Parsley,' she sobbed. 'We saved and helped one another; now it seems just a waste of life and hard work. I didn't mind letting myself grow old; it seemed to me we would just go on like that together. But now everything is broken. There's nothing left.'

"She suddenly stopped.

" 'Don't say a word about this to anybody,' she says. She had heard her daughter coming in with that young man of hers; and she put on a smile almost like her usual one.

" 'Mum,' says Gladys; a nice girl she was, and she was all flushed an' sparkling now. 'Bob's got his rise ; he thinks we could be married next month. Will you ask father?'

" 'No,' she says. 'You're not going to marry yet. You're too young.'

"They stared at her like codfish out of water. 'But, mother! You were younger when you married dad.'

" 'I know,' she says. 'I made a mistake. It leads to nothing.'

"It was tragic; interfering with them young people, too. You could see that the whole world had turned to girls and wormywood to that poor woman. I left them, of course; but I hadn't been downstairs long before Gladys and Bob came down.

" 'Has anything happened to-day to upset mother, Mrs. Parsley?' asks Gladys. Of course, having promised her mother, my word being my bondage, I couldn't say.

" 'I've never seen her like this,' says Gladys. 'She's talking of going to New Zealand. She and dad were always talking of that; but now she says dad will stay at home. She wants me to be her accompaniment. I won't go!'

"THEY'D hardly left before Mrs. Vingar came in, all excited like.

" 'That Tom Martin has gone up carrying a big bunch of flowers! I'd give him flowers!' she says. "Although she must have been curious to know all about me and Mrs. Martin having gone out together, me having seen her watching from behind her curtain like a Peeping Tom that sees no good, she didn't stay. She was too anxious to listen near the Martins' door, hoping for the worst.

"Although I did think myself that Mrs. Martin might have thrown them flowers at Tom Martin, me having seen what I had seen, the only row in the establishment that night was in Mrs. Vingar's own flat.

" 'What you heard breaking, Mrs. Parsley,' she tells me in the morning, 'was the soap-dish. It was the only thing I could lay me hands on as he went out the door. He'll pay you for a new one when he settles the rent on Friday.

" 'Him not coming home till ten o'clock an' then dodging telling me where he's been! He ran out and stayed out all night. But wait until he comes home to-night. He'll get what's coming to him!'

" 'I hope,' I says, 'that you'll remember it's my furniture.'

"I was really too worried about that poor Mrs. Martin, which wasn't like one of them vigoros to worry about Mrs. Vingar. It seemed a terrible thing to me, the Martins' life being all broken up, after they'd lived so much of it together, by the poor old fool becoming vaccinated with a barmaid.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Martin, 'I'm going to go on a trip to New Zealand; and I'm taking Gladys with me. My husband, I dare say, will keep the flat on.'

"'Oh, Mrs. Martin!' I cries, 'surely you ain't goin' to leave the field to the enemy, as the poet says? I'm sure Mr. Martin can't really love this woman'

" 'It doesn't matter, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'Everything is spoiled for me now. It's always been love between us. I haven't even given him a reason. I couldn't. I couldn't say I had spied upon him.'

"I'd never thought there was women like that until I met her; but there must be, jest as there are angels in heaven.

"Tom Martin came to see me, too ; he said he thought his wife must be ill. She seerfted different to usual. He looked puzzled; and, looking at him, it didn't seem to me as if he could be one of those there gay Lotteries. I almost felt sorry for him, but when I thought of his poor wife I got impatient.

" 'I'm going to talk to you straight, Mr. Martin,' I says. 'You ought to know what is the matter with Mrs. Martin. Do you think she knows nothing of your goings-on, you grey deceiver?'

"He looked confused, as well he might.

" 'I have been deceiving her, I admit,' he says, 'but I meant it all for the best.'

" 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Martin,' I says, indignantly. 'At your age! A barmaid.'

"He stared at me.

" 'Does she know about that?' he asks, as if one of them caravans had fallen down the mountain-side upon him.

" 'What's more, she saw you together,' I says.

"That put the wind up him properly ; the way he looked, as he went out, I was sorry for him even if he was a gay Lottery. I thought it must be pretty terrible being found out in his sin like that Pontius Pirate who threw the first stone, him not being used to it like you, if you don't mind my saying it, and others might be. He was a unsuffocated sort of man.

"That there barmaid joins him, and they walks off together, thick as thieves."

"I hoped in my heart that he'd come back on his bended knees and beg her forgiveness and all would be right between them; but I was dreadfully afraid that him knowing he was Found Out would only make it worse for both of them. And my worst chickens came home to roost that very afternoon, when he comes along bringing that barmaid woman with him. It looked brazen to me.

IT was not as if I hadn't got enough trouble on my hands to make one of them saints swear. There was a disturbance going on upstairs which I found was in the Vingars flat, Mr. Vingar having returned.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, bring a policeman,' he says. I've stood enough from this woman.'

" 'Mr. Vingar,' I says, 'this has always been a respectable residential; and I try to keep it so. If you have been and brought your wife home flowers, be a man and admit you're in the wrong,' Because that's what I thought he must have done.

" 'Me bring her home flowers! ' he says; but Mrs. Vingar started then, talking away, and what she was saying wasn't at all ladylike. He says suddenly, 'I'll go for a policeman myself.'

"It was while I was hurrying after him to ask him what it was all about that I met the pianner coming upstairs. The men said it was for Mrs. Martin, so I told them where to go.

"At first I thought that Mrs. Martin, sick of the thought of having been saving all her life with the man who had wandered off with a barmaid, had made up her mind to spend all the money they had saved on planners and things, which I thought all the more when I saw boys going up with parcels.

"Then I suddenly remembered a story I read about a man who bought a pianner and hid his wife's corpse in it when he murdered her. It made my blood run cold to think of it, although Tom Martin didn't look that sort of man. Still, you never know. And when I saw him going up the stairs with that barmaid— well, it seemed to me that anything might happen.

"At the moment they passed I was talking to Mr. Vingar and the policeman he had brought. What that man was saying made my head reel; but I was so

extracted when I saw that couple going up the stairs that I broke away from them. Vingar could do what he liked with his policeman; I was afraid something terrible was going to happen in the Martin flat.

"I suppose I must have knocked at the door. When I entered the flat you could have knocked me down with the last feather to fly with.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, isn't my husband good?' cries Mrs. Martin, standing beside that gay Lottery as happy as ever I had seen her. 'Look at all he's got me— presents for my silver wedding. He wanted it all to be a surprise; so he got Mrs. Simpson to help him choose it all. Wasn't it good of her, too?"

"With that there pianner standing against the wall, and parcels all about the room, and everybody smiling, it looked as if Father Christmas had called.

" 'lt wasn't good at all. I've enjoyed it,' says that barmaid; which it appeared as if she wasn't a barmaid after all as we generally know them, but a

lady bar attendant as she preferred to be called. 'lt was so fine to see a man so eager to give his wife a beautiful surprise as Mr. Martin was; and when he said that he didn't know who else to ask without his wife getting to know, why, I was glad to help,

"So there you are! It was just like that poor unsuffocated Tom Martin to ask the attendant at the place he had his drinks, which was one of the only women he ever spoke to, to help , and he wasn't a Lottery after all.

"Everything had come out so happily that I didn't mind what happened to the Vingars— which it turned out they werent Vingars at all, having given a fastidious name. They was Tipples; at least he was. She wasn t his wife at all, and he'd decided to go back to his real one. Which served her right, she going on like that throwing things at him just as if she was really married to him."

Mrs. Parsley prepared to resume her domestic activities. "I don't know what good the pianner was; a white sepulchre I should call it. Nobody knew how to play it. But Mrs. Martin said it was a nice thought, and liked to tell people how her husband had given it to her."

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17: The Pretenders

The Bulletin, 19 May 1930

MOLLY did not believe in fairies who made dreams come true— too much matter -of- factness had been forced into her life for that— but it seemed that some fairy had taken a hand that afternoon when little Dorothy came running excitedly into the flat (title, entirely by courtesy, of the room partitioned slightly to shut off a small kitchenette) with her cry of, "Look what the lady gave me, Mamma, dear!"

Dorothy waved a ten-shilling note in her little hand. The magnitude of the gift had swept away the remembrance of the principles her mother had impressed upon her, and Molly herself felt, a thrill, too. She had had a momentary vision of the inside of her purse and of the few shillings in it that would have to be eked out if she could not collect to-morrow for the dress she was working upon.

"Dolly, how often have I told you that you must not take money from strangers! You must take it back at once. Who was it gave it to you?" she demanded, refusing to admit to herself a hope that the donor might have disappeared and become unfindable....

"But, Mummy, it was the lady in the big car, and she made me take it, explained Dorothy. "And I think she has gone away."

Molly's heart bounded with hope, but it fell at the sound of voices, one of which asked, "This is the room, then, is it?"

A gracious, smiling woman, looking much younger than her years, entered when Molly timidly opened the door, and said, "I thought, after yielding to an impulse, that I ought, to come along and ask this little girl's mother to permit me to give her a present. Besides, if you'll pardon my curiosity, I wanted to meet the mother of a child who has attracted me so strongly.

"It was very good of you," said Molly, holding out the note. (How reluctant were the fingers, in spite of herself!) "You see, I make it a principle—"

"But you *will* allow her to keep it. Oh, please!" pleaded the visitor.

"If you really want to very much," faltered Molly. She strove hard to keep her voice from appearing either wistful or eager.

"You see," the woman hurried on, "I've noticed Dorothy —she told me her name was Dorothy when I stopped to talk to her the other day— so often when I have been passing here. She attracted me strangely. What a dear little thing she is! I acted on an impulse I could not resist this afternoon, and then came up here on another, if you don't mind my sitting and talking to you."

"Williams is my name," said Molly. And in a few minutes site found her rather drab world changed strangely, for this unexpected visitor, so interested

in little Dorothy and obviously wealthy, was talking of coming next day to become a patron of her humble needlework.

"But this afternoon I would like to take Dorothy for a drive, if you will let me. I dare say she would find it a treat.

"Oh, I don't know," stammered Molly, prudent principle interfering again. "You see, I don't let Dorothy out of my sight except to go to kindergarten, and—"

"You're quite right," said the visitor. "But I expected you to come, too, it you could put aside your work for the afternoon. It would do you good."

The visitor was dominating in peisonality and won. Exhilarated by the swift passing of the smooth-running car out of the city into the fresh air of the open suburban and country roads, Molly found as much novelty and excitement in the excursion as did little Dorothy. It was seldom she was able to enjoy the open air and the sunshine, and never in circumstances like these. It was wonderful to lean back luxuriously against the cushions, feeling that the drudgery of work was recklessly abandoned, but safe in the assurance of some new patronage on the morrow for which the payment would not be doubtful.

It was gratifying, also, to reflect that the giver of this, enjoyment was receiving repayment in enjoyment to herself.

"I have a multitude of friends," Mrs.Ducie explained, "but few very dear to me. Even those who are have so much of their own that it is difficult to give them any new pleasure. I have all sorts of pleasures myself except the one I wanted most."

Molly suddenly felt rich. She understood Mrs. Ducie. She had possessions the wealthy woman lacked.

"You have no children?" she said

Mrs. Ducie looked at her doubtfully for a moment, then, leaning forward eagerly, put her hand on Molly's.

"I had a son. He had romantic ideas; he felt that he should make his own way in the world without the power of his father's influence and money to help him. He disappeared. For years I hoped he would return. I have tried to find him, but not a trace has been found. It has left very lonely. When I saw your little Dorothy the feeling struck into my heart that just such a little girl might be my own son's daughter. It grew— it grew, day by day, as I saw her. There is something so reminiscent of him. By the way, what was your husband's name?"

"Robert Williams," said Molly, her heart beating fast.

"Robert Williams Ducie was my son's name!" cried Mrs. Ducie excitedly. "Mrs. Williams— it looks as if a dream has come true! He —he is dead?"

"For four years," said Molly slowly.

"You have a photograph?" demanded Mrs. Ducie feverishly.

From her breast Molly dragged up by its chain a locket, an old-fashioned adornment, opened it and showed the face of the man she had loved and lost.

There was nothing patrician about those features— Dorothy had got her good looks from her mother but Molly's heart bounded as she heard the elder woman speak.

"It is him! A little different, but still my Bob! Oh, my dear, my daughter-in-law— and my dear, sweet grandchild!"

MOLLY looked back upon the rearrangement of her life and little Dorothy's as a time of startling confusion. The unbelieved little fairy of whom she had liked to dream, who would change the drabness of her life into something gay and splendid, had acted beyond any dream. Mrs. Ducie could not do too much for her or for Dorothy. Molly adjusted herself to her new life remarkably; she wore her rich garments regally and mixed with the society into which she was thrown as if she had all her life been used to it instead of being a poor little seamstress who had gone into the bar to get away from the drudgery of her calling, hurried into marriage partly to get away from the sordidness of the bar, and then gone back to the old drudgery when her husband's death left her penniless and a mother.

To her all the luxury she now encountered had the added zest of novelty. She luxuriated in it; in the thought of the bright future that was ahead of Dorothy; in the love, like that of a mother, which Mrs. Ducie showered upon her. Yet at the back of her happiness was a shadow— the shadow of a carking conscience.

Perhaps she might have cried it down, but for one thing; and that was Tony Andrews.... Strangely enough, Mrs. Ducie approved of Tony. Molly felt some resentment at that resentment curiously touched with jealousy. Mrs. Ducie probably hoped Molly would marry, seeing in the prospect a closer ownership of little Dorothy. Molly's heart cried out against the idea, yet it seemed ingratitude to allow any feeling of jealousy towards Mrs. Ducie, who had been so full of kindness to her, who had given her everything she had, including Tony, especially as she felt that Mrs. Ducie was being made the victim of a fraud, her goodness misused.

Genuinely, Molly was mystified about the circumstances that so strangely changed her fortunes. Molly knew that honest, humble Bob Williams was no son of Mrs. Ducie, no heir to great wealth; too well she knew of his narrow-minded parents, who, disregarding his plea that they should meet his wife, had cut him off when they heard that he had "disgraced the family by marrying a barmaid."

It had all been so easy to Molly after her yielding to sudden temptation. At first she had dreaded some revelation that would expose her imposture, but none had come. In the Ducie home she had looked for photographs of the missing son but found none; Mrs. Ducie explained that her husband had, in an angry moment when his son left home against his wishes, destroyed all mementoes of him.

That was one danger gone, and confidence grew with Molly as time went on. Still, conscience pricked. Against the feeling that she was imposing on the generous Mrs. Ducie was the argument that Mrs. Ducie was happy in the deception; but another thought still irked. Somewhere in the world there might be a woman and children who were entitled to the place she was stealing for herself and Dorothy. Often she felt inclined to go to Mrs. Ducie with a confession; as often she temporised, torn by conflicting emotions.

So she let matters go on, but it was different when her love for Tony grew. Tony had such honest, searching eyes; she could not deceive Tony, could not bear to hear him hurl at her the accusation "Liar! Fraud!"

Crisis came at last.

"Molly, dear," said Mrs. Ducie, half laughing, "please don't go out this afternoon. It's a special request. I've been asked to keep you at home even if I imprison you —until someone comes."

MOLLY laughed a promise, but she went to her room with her head swimming. When Tony arrived it was to meet her coming down the stairs in the simple, cheap frock of her dressmaking days, her arm over the shoulder of the wondering Dorothy.

He stared at her in surprise.

"You look as if you are ready to go out," he said. "It's not a great compliment to me; I specially asked that you should see me this afternoon. There's something I want to say."

"There's something I have to say," she answered, trying to keep her voice even.

"There's something I must say. I can't go on meeting you, living a lie. I am not Mrs. Ducie's daughter-in-law."

He looked at her steadily, but laughed lightly.

"Dear," he said, "I don't care who you are as long as you are Molly."

"But don't you see? I am an adventuress; I have no right in this house. I am an impostor."

"Molly," he said earnestly. "I came out purposely this afternoon to put an end to all uncertainty— to tell you I love you, ask you to marry me. Whatever

you say about yourself, I have seen enough of you to know what you are, and—I 'm asking you!"

A wan smile trembled on her white face as she looked at him.

"I think you are really wonderful. That is why I am forced to do the honest thing I should have done long ago. I have a confession to make to Mrs. Ducie, and I want you to hear it."

He still held her hand, and by it she led him with her, her other arm still over the wondering Dorothy. Mrs. Ducie turned, startled to hear them, her quick eyes on the dress Molly was wearing, which Tony had scarcely noticed.

"Mother I can't help but call you mother, for you have been one to me I have come to tell you I am an impostor. I am not your son's widow; I couldn't be, for I know who my husband's parents are and both are alive. But when you insisted that I must be your son's wife and I saw all that it would mean to be that I yielded to temptation. You have been good to me and to Dorothy, and I have tried to return your kindness as best I can; but what can you think of me now when you know that all I am is a pretender?"

Mrs. Ducie stretched out her hand and drew Molly forward, Dorothy with her.

"Dear," she said, "of course I knew you were a pretender; but I am a pretender, too— a worse one than you can be— for I never had a son. I wanted children, but my wishes were never fulfilled. It was my fancy to dream that I had a son, and I promised myself that some day I would adopt a child and delude myself that it was the child of my dream son. That afternoon of our first acquaintance I concocted the story and was delighted to find you believing it, accepting me as Dorothy's grandmother. It was I who thought I was deceiving you!"

Bewildered, Molly looked round at Tony, who smiled at her encouragingly.

"Oh— Tony!" cried Mrs. Ducie. "Tony has known me since he was a boy— he knows I have no son. I made him promise not to give me away. I wanted my pretence to be real— I tried hard to believe it was so."

There were tears in her eyes, a wistful look on her face.

"I want you to let us keep our pretence, dear. Please!"

Tony stepped forward and put his arm around the woman he loved.

"I think I can vouch for Molly," he said happily.

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18: The Search for the Bonzer Tart

The Bulletin, 7 Oct 1915

Back in the early years of the 20th century, "bonzer tart" was praise, meaning "wonderful girl". Bonzer *vanished from use in Australia sometime around the late 40s, and* tart *has changed its meaning considerably since 1915.*

"COLD-BLOODED bigamist" the Law called him; but the Law did not hear the soul-aspirations that prompted the search for the bonzer tart undertaken by Chiller the Smooge as I did during the time he was on remand. He certainly tried to make the Law hear; but the Law demands facts and was impatient with what it regarded as his wanderings.

It was after Bob Burke, by an impassioned appeal, during which he made the most of the irrefutable argument that his client was unlikely to take advantage of his liberty to repeat his offence, had managed to secure merely nominal bail, that I met the bigamist. I wanted to see Burke, and Burke wanted to have a word or so with his client; but he had another case due in the court, for which he had to leave us. As a consequence the bigamist and I were together.

''How long'll he be, likely?" Chiller asked, shortly.

"He said about an hour," I replied. "But you never know in a court how long a case will take."

"D'you mind having a drink, then," Chiller suggested, half apologetically; and, as it seemed the least dry way of passing time, we sought the refreshment he suggested.

"How d'you think you'll get on?" I asked him.

"I s'pose I'm bound to go up," he said, gloomily. "You see, it's the second time."

"But they can't charge you twice with the same offence!"

"Oh, it's not the same offence. Its the second charge of bigamy," he responded evenly, as if that sort of offence was an everyday matter. But he apparently noticed that his reply astounded me, for he added: "It wasn't my fault, Mister; I was druv to it."

He eyed his beer dismally.

"It's all right for most blokes," he said, "when they make up their minds that the piece they're hitched to ain't the bonzer tart they thought. They can get over it, and console 'emselves with the idea that if she ain't the bonzer tart she's not a bad cook, or it's 'andy to 'ave someone to do the washin', or somethin' like that. They go to the races or the football match an' forget everything but the fact that there'll be a 'ot tea at 'ome waitin' for 'em when they've finished the drinks they meet on the way. With me it's different. I've

wanted the bonzer tart all me life, an' it's allus worried me when I've known I 'aven't got 'er. You see, some coves 'as soul, an' a soul gives you a lot of trouble."

"And bigamy charges," I suggested.

"Well— yes! But I think I've got the bonzer tart now, anyway; an' I don't mind standing a stretch if I 'ave!.

"When I was a little kid almost, you know, I 'ad me ideas about wimmin; ideals you call 'em. The wimmin I mostly met was factory girls with short skirts and pig-tails and grown-up ideas about things that most of 'em. thank Gawd, manage to get over when they really grow up and learn their foolishness. They 'adn't much time fer me. an' I 'adn't much time fer them, though I sampled a lot of 'em. I thort I might find one to suit, but none did. They was too darn familiar fer me, an' I sheered off 'em; an' they got an idea that I 'ad a bit of a rat. I don't blame 'em; but it didn't worry me much, anyway.

"They called me 'the Smooge' because I was allus chasing new muslins. Yet it wasn't because I wanted new pieces, but because none of 'em satisfied me. They druv me to it."

"You suffered from sublime discontent," I suggested.

"That's right, Mister. Anyway, I s'pose it's right. My first missus, now, was what I thought was the bonzer tart, else I shouldn't have hitched with her. But I found she wasn't. You get to know a lot about a woman when you go with her fer a while, but you never know exactly what she's like till you marry her. This 'ere piece disguised herself more'n the others, and that's what led to me mistake, and she useter listen to me talking about me ideals as if she enjoyed them. Afterwards I found 'er ideals was a 'ome and three meals a day an' a feelin' that she 'ad a man who was just 'er own property an' nobody else's; an' it didn't matter much who he was. Give 'er 'er due, she wasn't bad an' did 'er best: but 'er idea that I was just a bloke wot had to be fed reg'lar tired me. I 'ad a soul that, some'ow, couldn't be fed on eggs an' bacon an' beef. An' the way she went fer a tart I picked up with, thinking she was the bonzer tart, settled all me delusions. She did it with a fryin'-pan.

"It settled all me delusions about the other tart, too. 'Ave you ever seen 'ow gentle an' sweet-voiced two women can be when one 'as a fryin'-pan an' another a bottle, an' both a grievance?

"After that I sheered off women for all I was worth. But when a man sheers off, that's the end of 'im; and I finds myself living with a woman whose ideal is to sacrifice everything for love. I got on with her all right, although it was a bit of a strain when I come 'ome an' find er' weeping over a novelette instead of getting me tea. Still, a man forgives a lot of things if he thinks a woman really loves 'im; and this uu useter say I reminded 'er of Sir Marmaduke Fitztubley, or

someone, in one of the books, and I might well 'ave been him but for an accident of birth.

"But in spite of her ideals she had, like all wimmin, her love for respectability, and she keeps worrying me about it.

" 'Give me me marriage lines,' she says, piteous. 'A marriage lines is a woman's proudest possession.' I says to myself: 'Here's a tart, virtuous' (for, mind you, a girl's only unvirtuous if she's unvirtuous with someone else 'gentle, forbearin', capable of sacrifice'— 'aving made one fer me —'full of ideals and love and passion': and I takes the risk an' another name and marries her.

"Two days later she flung a cup of tea at my 'ead and asks me if I'm fool enough to believe what she said about Sir Marmaduke Fitztubley. She made things 'ot. If I tried to get away from her she would rush frantic'ly out of the house to let the neighbors know I was murderin' 'er. Then she'd rush back to throw something at me, and rush out again for some more screaming. By the time every woman in the street had got the habit of coming out to see me as I passed, and saying 'Brute!' I decided that it was best to clear. Then she goes to the police an' puts me away fer bigamy."

"What did she make all the trouble about?" I inquired.

"Oh, it was only her way," he responded. "She wanted life to be a drama or a romance or something. As long as I wasn't married to 'er she was satisfied with the idea that she was living in sin for my sake. 'Love's sacrifice,' she called it; and directly she lost that she made rows and misunderstandings on general principles. She must 'ave enjoyed 'erself tiptop about that time. When she came with a John 'Op to where I was workin' an' says, 'There is the villain!' and Avhen she 'ad a fit in court, and when she came to Darlinghurst, when me time was up, and 'eld me down in the street to ask fer fergiveness. But I didn't do no fergivin. The only way I like the drama is fer two hours, now an' then, at a bob a time. It's an 'orror in the 'ome.

"Me first wife fastens on another bloke to give 'er the 'ome and the three meals a day and the bloke that's 'er own property, and gets a divorce; an' I goes out in the world, so to speak, with me ideals about wimmin dinted but not broke. Then I gets them dinted some more. She was a religious piece this, and she gets me that way that I think she's a saint, an' 'ardly like to touch 'er. Blow me if church doesn't see me reg'lar on Sundays; an' after we're married I see nothing to change me views about 'er until just before the kid is born she tells me things. As I see it now, it was a rotten tale; an' I don't know that I blame the poor girl fer gettin' a father for the child its own father wouldn't give 'is name to; but 'er 'aving told me she wouldn't marry me unless I became religious, and tried all that sham on me— it was red 'ot and I chucked 'er."

"Did she put you away?"

"Not she!" he said, quickly. "That ain't 'er sort! Why, if I 'adn't parted up to see 'er over 'er trouble, just because there wasn't anyone else to do it, an' left 'er a few quid to help her afterwards, and she wanted to pay me back, she wouldn't 'ave troubled me at all. Oh, she might easily 'ave been the bonzer tart, as far as that gees; but she wasn't the bonzer tart for me. I thought she was dead, not 'aving 'eard anything of 'er for five-years, until this case an' I can tell you she doesn't like 'aving to give evidence against me.

"The tart I've got at the present time, now, she's the bonzer tart. This is the way she puts it to me: 'Your wife's probably dead,' says she. 'but if she isn't it wouldn't be much risk for you to marry me. But I don't want you to run any risk at all,' she says; 'I'm willing to trust you.' What can a bloke do when a tart talks like that —a regular bonzer tart, fine-looking and well-read and all that? Why. she knows Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Marie Crelli and Garvice by heart!"

The bigamist "went up." as he predicted, but the Law, having admonished him with heavy language, let him off wvith a light sentence.

IT WAS a couple of years later that I saw him going his rounds with a rabbit cart.

"Why, hello, boss!" he cried. " 'Ere, you must 'ave some rabbits."

"But I don't want any, really." I said.

"But you must have a pair," he insisted; "just a present— here, it's a fair thing."

"And how are you getting on?" I asked.

"Tip-top." he responded, heartily.

"Found the bonzer tart?"

"I found 'er," he said. Then he bubbled with enthusiasm.

"I thought it was a mate of mine who was paying me solicitor— Burke, you know— but it was 'er all the time. Out of her hard-earned. An' when I comes out of quod, there's she waiting for me, and she tells me there's a home for me ready until I get me feet again. An' there I've been ever since, an' likely to stay, as long as I can earn a crust to keep it going. She's the bonzer tart all right; she's 'ad 'er troubles an' they ain't 'armed 'er."

"The girl you had when your case came on?" I suggested.

" 'Er? No!" he retorted indignantly. 'Not er! She's with another bloke. This is me second wife— the second one, lawful. 'Chiller,' she says, with the tears in 'er eyes when she comes to gaol to see me— she comes up reg'lar— 'if you 'adn't been married to me you wouldn't 'ave been 'ere. It's my fault, and I'm sorry. I'll look after you when you come out,' she says. 'You gave my little boy

'is name.' says she, 'and you was always good, and you've been treated shockin'.'

"An' there's the boy!" he added boisterously; and I noticed the child on the cart.

"Come on, Pal!" he cried, "shake 'ands with the gent. 'E ain't my kid, as you might say," he added, "but he's no worse, as a kid, for that. An' 'e is my kid, too, because 'e belongs to the missus. Ain't you, eh?"

"My daddy!" said the boy, patting Chiller's scrubby face.

"That's the chicken!" cried the bigamist cheerfully. "Anyway, we've got another of these at home, and there ain't no mistake about that— eh, Pal!"

19: Costs

Bulletin, 23 Sep 1915

THE ordinary crowd which gathers in front of the Central Court littered the steps as I mounted them. There were the excited groups of people who make the occasion of even a remote connection with "a case in court" a memorable day's excitement. There were the seedy men with anxious, strained faces, half ashamed of being seen, and fearfully anxious about the ordeals they had to face— most of them there about summonses, which, had they known it, need not have troubled them. There were people who fidgeted uneasily; others who stoically waited, used to the surroundings, for judgment on possibly serious matters; all sorts and conditions of men. Police-court solicitors and solicitors' clerks, on the lookout for old clients for the purpose of introductions to other clients, dodged in and out.

I was a little ahead of the time when there would be a sudden shuffling towards the various courts on the stroke of 10 o'clock and self-important officers of the law would call "Silence!" in the court-rooms.

At the top of the steps I met Lane.

"I say, old chap," he said, hurriedly, "could you oblige me with a couple of quid till later? I came down with just a little silver because of a 'phone message from a country friend, and I find that what he wants is this cash, and I can't get it unless I go back to Balmain. A friend and fellow-townsman of his wants it to help a friend's son through some trouble; and he wants it quick and lively."

"I'm sorry, I haven't got two quid," I said. "I would gladly—"

"You see, the money's wanted to pay some solicitor's costs, and if it's not forthcoming he won't act. It means business to me if I can fix up my friend: I'll get his friend's business, anyway, and some others. I don't know a soul here. You know some of these lawyer-johnnies, don't you?"

I admitted I did; and then, seeing Dan Riley, the solicitor, told Lane to hang on for a minute. I wanted to oblige Lane just as badly as he wanted to oblige his friends.

"I'd let you have the couple in a second, if I had it," said Riley, heartily, when I asked him. "Wait a bit, though ; I'll have some money in a minute or two, and then you can have it. Look out for me."

"How long?" I asked.

"Oh, only a few minutes— not more than five, certainly," said Riley, as he bustled away.

I went back and told Lane that he could have the cash within five minutes; and Lane took me over and introduced me to two obviously "financial" countrymen, Green and Falconer.

"It's lucky we met you, then," said Green. "I didn't like to mention the particulars on the 'phone to Lane, making sure that he'd have a couple of notes about him. I had no need to bring any coin with me when I came in this morning; so when I met Falconer here I couldn't fix him up."

"They cleared me out at the races yesterday," said young Falconer. "I've wired home for some dough, but I can't expect it for an hour or two. The chap who wants the money is a fellow I'd like to oblige, if I can— it's a son of a great friend of his who's in the mess. If the lawyer doesn't get his four guineas he won't appear."

"Oh, it's four guineas!" I cried in dismay.

"Oh, two quid has been fixed up already," he answered. He looked, at Green. "We'd better tell them it's arranged," he added.

Lane and I remained talking together for a while, until Green and Falconer returned with another man. They signalled Lane. Presently he came back to me, perturbed.

"See if you can get the cash straight away," he said. "The sharks are waiting for it."

In turn I pursued the benevolent Riley, catching him just as he was entering the door of No. 1 Court.

"Can't do it just now," he said. "But I will in a jiffy. Wait somewhere about here for me."

I hurried away with my news to Lane, and then returned. The jiffy was a fairly long one; but finally Riley appeared, quite suddenly, in a desperate hurry.

"I've got a cheque here for a couple of quid you can have. It's not my own, but it's good enough," he explained swiftly.

I duly handed the slip of paper to Lane, and then drifted away to attend to my own affairs, which kept 'me till lunch-time. I met Riley as I passed out.

"Come and ĥave a taste," he said; and while we took our ease in the lounge-bar he passed a scrap of paper over to me. "Seen that before?" he asked.

"Why, it's the cheque you handed me this morning," I exclaimed. "How the—"

"Exactly," returned Riley, laughing. "That little piece of paper for a couple of quid has paid me four quids' worth of costs this morning."

"Then you were the skinflint solicitor who wouldn't appear till he had received his four guineas costs?"

"Precisely. The same who accepted a cheque for two quid to go on with, then passed on the cheque to a friend, and duly received the same two quid back as payment for the balance. The nett result, by the way, seems to be that you owe me two pounds:"

"And somebody else, who is owed the money by somebody else, who also has someone else to collect from, owes me two pounds," I added.

But the nett result was worse than that. Riley still waits, good-naturedly, for his money. Lane hasn't paid me yet— he says he hasn't been reimbursed himself. And the father of the young man about whom all the trouble was taken, was mad that anyone should have taken any trouble at all, and won't part a cent.

As for the two-pound cheque itself, that very interesting document proved to be worth nothing at all when presented at the bank.

The cheque being worthless, Riley did not lend me anything, nor did I let Lane have anything. Riley was innocently guilty of passing valueless paper, and I repeated his offence.

Riley admits that the case is a peculiar one. He suggests "a quid" as a compromise.

20: Ingratitude.

Bulletin, 24 June 1915

SINCLAIR SINGLETON, an actor of the old-fashioned, ponderous style, stopped me as I was passing Poverty Point. It appeared, at first, that he merely desired to make quite unnecessary remarks about the weather. Then his real purpose unfolded itself.

"I am not in a position," he said, "to invite you to have a drink. Di-rectly, if the ghost walks, I will be glad if you will join me."

The invitation to invite him was too obvious to ignore; so I asked him to name his refreshment, which proved to be beer— in a mug.

"It is not like the beer we used to get," he said, poising the pint and looking through it. "ln the old days, when I had my own company— ah, those were the days!"

"I notice," I said, "the papers give Doris Knowles fine notices in the new piece."

He set down his beer and looked at me.

"It is a triumph for me, sir," he said— "a triumph for me!"

He half emptied his mug.

"All that girl knows about the stage, I taught her! She is talented— very talented. But she owes her position to Me! She should have been my wife, and then it would have been better— for us all.

"When first I met her she was a raw amateur, playing professionally for the first time, with a small tra-velling com-pany, and she would have remained just where she was, but for Me. And what is her gerrat-itude?"

He finished his beer with a sigh.

"If you will ac-company me to the theatre, while I see if the ghost has walked, I will unfold to you the nar-rative " he said. "I noticed the talent of Doris but I saw that what she wanted was a knowledge of stage-craft such as an actor like Myself could give her. And I determined that she should not perish pro-fessionally, for want of a helping hand.

"I gave her in-struction in the Art, sir, and she profited. More than that. I pushed her; I got a po-sition for her and myself in a better-class company; and in or-der not to stand in her way I was content, while she a played second woman, to take quite an minor part— something quite below my ord-inary stand-ard. In fact little better than u-tility!"

He suddenly stopped and held my arm impressively.

"I did more than that," he said: "I left my wife and family for that woman!"

I was about to say, "very good of you!" but I remembered, suddenly, that perhaps it wasn't. So I merely said, "Indeed!"

"The greatest sac-rifice a man could make or any woman," he continued plaintively, "yet in the end she was not gerrateful. The com-pany we were with stranded. It was then I gave her her great op-portunitv.

"I got a com-pany together, and I let her play lead, with myself of course, as juvenile, and I played up to her in a way that is not known to these younger act-ors."

He showed a tendency to digress at this stage, stopping in the street and illustrating the difference between the modern style of slurring the lines, and the old, dramatic method of leading up with increasing vehemence to the lines of the partner in dialogue.

I inquired hurriedly how they got on.

"We did all right for a time," he said moodily. "In fact, it made Doris's name. People went mad about her. You know what they are like; they often fail to understand Art. She did many things of which I disap-peroved. Still she was very pop-ular. More pop-ular, perhaps than I myself. But then *I* never work for pop-ularity; I have al-ways worked for Art!

"No." he went on, "many of the people did not understand Me. But we did fairly well. Of course, working with perractically no cap-ital,. we had our troubles; but we carlied a piano-case with us, and it was useful when fares were short. Very useful " he added thoughtfully.

"It was in our seas-on in Wellington that the climax came. You know how it can rain in Wellington? It rained as if Heaven were weeping because there was such a God-forsaken place on the earth. The people began to be dis-coutented about their sal-aries. In-grates! I had taken them up when the seat was out of their trousers, as you might vulgar-ly put it, and given them several months' work; and here they were corn-plaining about their pal-try salaries! There is little gerratitude in life, and none, sir, in an act-or!

"When one of them held me up about his shirts. I knew the thing couldn't last. The ungerrateful dog wanted to get his laundry; and just two minutes before the curtain was due to go up, after the orchestra had been rung in (we got some amateurs after the band had left), the brute demanded three-and-six-pence for shirts— shirts, sir— or he wouldn't play. First I told him to go to the Devil: finally I gave him a slip to get the money from the ticket office.

"I was sick of the business, and all the ingerratitude; and I wanted Doris to come back with me to Sydney. But she found some fellow who was prepared to finance her and the show. And, sir, heark-'ee— on a stipulation he made, and she agreed to, that I was not to play lead, but merely to stage-manage the show. A young fool who didn't know what acting was, sir! But again I yielded— for Doris's sake.

"Luck, sir, luck was with 'em; and that tour was a success; and after it Doris got a show with the Firm. But all they had for me was utility work, and I turned that down. Fortun-ately Doris got good engagements, constantly: or, unfortun-ately. For when I tried to get up other shows she refused to go with me. The girrl I had made in the business!

"Finally, when she went on tour, she refused to take me with her. That woman, sir, said it would cost too much; but if I liked to take an engagement as u-tility, she would get me one. U-tility! I who have played Iago!

"That was the end! She did not— but I do not speak of this! The girl I schooled, and taught, and made what she is! Let her think of her ingerratitude, sometimes. I will nev-er do anything to harm her!

"It was my own fault!" he added, after a long pause, accusing himself. "I should have married her!"

We had reached the stage-entrance of the theatre, and Singleton, having me affectionately by the arm, drew me in. He may have been afraid I would escape.

"Miss Knowles on the stage?" he inquired of the doorkeeper.

"No," said the doorkeeper, briefly. "She left this for you."

Singleton onened the envelope as we went.

"Gerratitude!" he hissed in his best style. "Gerratitude! Ten shillings— a paltry ten shillings !"

He made as if to hurl the insult from him, but thought better of it and placed it carefully in his pocket.

"I am afraid," he said, meditatively, halting before the bar-door, "that we will have to do without that derrink,"

But, of course, we didn't.

21: Picking-up

Bulletin, 16 Jan 1916

THE Prisons Department is democratic in the way it conveys its daily haul to Long Bay. Out in that drab institution the black sheep of Sydney are divided from the goats, and the goats from the kids.

There are, in all, nine divisions— from the aristocratic debtors, who rank as "confinees," to the long-distance and frequent offenders; and they have separate "ranges" and yards as far as possible. But in the Black Marias which garner the day's catch from police stations. Children's Courts and so on, and take it out for transference to the prison train at the Darlinghurst Police Station, there is, as it were, no class distinction.

So it happened that I met the practitioner of a unique profession.

"Oh, you're all right, then; I suppose you'll get it paid, and he out," said my neighbor in response to my curt answer to his question about myself. The people who travel by H.M. Prisons vehicles or occupy his boarding-houses evince a great curiosity about the causes that have brought them companions in misfortune. It is not a thing to be resented; it is the same sympathy that causes men to tell one another of their physical troubles when they meet in a doctor's waiting-room.

"I'm different," said my neighbor. "I've got two months to do. Still, it's not a busy time, and it's all in the way of business."

"Business?" I said.

"Yes; I'm a picker-up."

"What line's that?" I asked, curiously.

"Oh, it's no line; or, as you might say, it's any old line. It's a business by itself, as the sayin' is. I got two months for it this time. Got a cigarette?"

The question was superfluous, since I had just drawn a packet from my pocket and helped myself. I handed him the box.

"There's only one or two of us in Sydney in the business as a regular thing," he said, drawing at the smoke he was lighting with a match lie had also borrowed by a dumb action. "But there's lots that try it on now and again."

"But what is it?" I asked.

"Why, you just pick up things," he returned. "Say it's Christmas— that's the busy season. You're mooching about with an eye open, and you see some geese, or a turkey, or ducks; well, you just pick 'em up! Sometimes, if you dp well, you can get enough to run a cart around selling them.If not, you just get 'alf a suburb away, quick, and sell out. If he's good at it a man can make a couple of quid a day when things is brisk."

"Stealing," I commented.

"It depends on how you look at it," he said, coolly. "If it wasn't for chaps like us, a lot of people'd go without poultry fer Christmas. The man who knows what hie's doing takes from places where there's plenty.

"Of course, there's not a trade all the year round in fowls, although it's a good stand-by, as the saying is. But there's other things. There's blankets. Just on winter people who ought to buy new 'uns start to hunt out their old naps; and they 'ang 'em on the line for an airing. Well, you just pick 'em up. There's poor people who're worryin' to know where to get the money for blankets. They buy 'em cheap."

"Don't know they're stolen?" I suggested.

'Call it stolen, if you like," he returned, unresentfully. "Of course, you spin a tale; but they know. Still, being honest, they tell themselves it's all right. And then there's the rewards."

"The rewards?"

"Yes; if things are slack, you pick up a pet dog or a cat, or a cockatoo, and wait for the reward to be advertised. But there ain't much in it: there's too many people think a 'substantial reward' is 'arf a dollar. An old bloke what advertised that way once gives me two bob. ' 'Ere, wot's this?' I says. 'Is it to pay fer the dog's-meat?'

then he slams the door on me. But I tells the neighbors what I think of 'im.

As I'm going away, one of 'em says: 'Find that —— dog again and drown 'im, an' I'll give you five bob—' 'I'm honest,' I says. '*Ten* bob,' he says— the mean skunk. When I goes back after the job's done he says, 'D'ye want me to tell the old bloke you done it?' he says. The mean 'ound! 'I wish you was a dog, an' I could find you,' I says."

"Stop that laughing!"

The command came from the alley-way. The prison tram is a series of locked compartments with a patrol passage on one side. The voice of authority sobered the picker-up a trifle.

"Two months ter go!" he said gloomily, "Still, it's in the way of business."

"You must be caught pretty often?" I suggested.

"Oh, no; this is only my eleventh," he answered. A man has his set-backs in every business. It's all right as long as it don't interfere with a busy season."

"I should say work was better."

"Oh, I've tried work," he said. "It's not that I mind it. but the profits ain t big enough. Work? Why, I went on the wharves, lumping; but there's too many professionals there."

"What— stealing?"

"I wish you wouldn't chuck that up so often. No— picking up things. There's a few has got the monopoly, as the saying is. So I was froze out. Of course,

there's pickers-up in every trade. One place I was at there was a traveller was a picker-up. He must have made a couple hundred quid a year.

"What's your religion?" he asked abruptly.

"Well—" I began slowly with a smile.

"Be a Cartholic," he said. "You get more attention from the priests; and there's the services, and it fills in time."

The tram gave a screech as it turned on a sharp curve and stopped.

"We're here now," said the picker-up. "Don't forget what I said about being a Cartholic. Got another cigarette?"

I felt in my pockets, but found my two packets gone— and I knew where they were. The picker-up didn't return things, and he had retained also a silver matchbox. But just at that moment, the prisoners were being marshalled out, and I did not feel like mentioning the matter.

ln the house where prisoners receive their initiatory bath and their gaol clothes, have their measurements and weights taken, and pass in their belongings, my friend was recognised.

"Hullo, Grabber," said the warder, genially "Back again? What's it this time?"

"Doormats," he grunted.

The warder's face lit with a memory.

"Last lime you went out the Governor's fountain-pen went out, too. What d'vou do with it?"

But Grabber only grunted, and got at once to his job of helping to serve out clothes, as an old hand who knew the lay of things.

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22: The Release

The Bulletin Jan 1918

"SOILENCE!"

An uprising of heavy policemen betokened the arrival of Justice. Justice was not much to look at. He was probably representative in his person of the sort of justice which is dispensed in the police court. But the formal respect was not the less observed on that account. The word "Soilence" went round the court with urgent whispers to laggard or inexperienced persons to "Remove that 'at!" or "Stand up, there!" Then, Justice being seated, the solicitors reseated themselves, the policemen without special duties to perform sat down, and the laity fortunate enough to have a seat seated itself. The prosecuting constable sorted himself out from the ruck. The deposition-clerk clicked his typewriter; and the court was open.

By the time I had finished with a hoarse individual who drew me outside, and tried to square me about a case of which I knew nothing, and refused to believe that I was not a witness for the prosecution, and appealed piteously to me to "be a sport", after threatening to have the push on me if I put him away, the Court had got through a lot of business. It had dealt with the drunks. Two of them had signed the pledge, which for a first offender is the easiest method to escape without a fine. It had dealt in a brief fashion with the "guilties" and suspended for further treatment the "not guilties." It had dosed as a police court and opened as a petty debts court, and proceeded to deal with me. Then it closed as a petty debts court and re-opened as a police court.

It was an uninteresting day, and nothing more than the usual happened to show how great an ass the law is and how wooden-headed are some of the idiots who dispense it. A milkman who apparently had, like Pharaoh's daughter, drawn a profit from the water, was fined heavily to the extent of 10 shillings, and a woman who had taken a parcel which didn't belong to her from a grocer's shop was told to produce a fine of £3 and 6 shillings costs within 48 hours, or go to gaol.

Then Michael Kerrigan was called. Michael Kerrigan stepped forward and anticipated things.

"Not guilty, y' Anner. You see, its this—"

"We'll learn all about that," said his Anner.

"Sit down!" commanded the sergeant.

"I never done it, y' Anner, s'elp me Gawd!"

"Will you sit down!"

"S'elp me Gawd!" repeated Kerrigan impressively.

"If you don't sit down," said Justice, I will deal with you for contempt."

Then Kerrigan subsided. Although when the prosecuting sergeant read the charge he narrowly escaped being dealt with for exclaiming "You're a liar!" He escaped because the personification of Justice did not catch the remark and accepted an explanation that it was someone else— Michael had apparently made a practice of despoiling empty houses of gas-fixtures, coppers, iron roofs and similar things, and disposing of them. There was no evidence about it. It is a remarkable thing that in our police courts the police are quite frequently allowed to give their suspicions about accused men as evidence. But the fact of his having disposed of a quantity of these things, amounting in value to £20-odd, for £4, was proved by the testimony of the man who purchased them, and the man who lent him the cart on the day on which the robberies occurred and the goods were sold, and by people who had seen the cart in the vicinity of the rifled houses. Michael's defence was that he had met a man— a man with a tanned face and a red moustache, whom he knew as "Ginger"— and this man knew another bloke (laughter— "Order in the court!") who had a lot of old coppers and iron to dispose of, and that, when he got the cart, intending to go in for a bit of dealing. Ginger had met him and introduced him to the man— name was Smith— who had taken him to a vacant lot and filled his cart.

"I sold the stuff, y' Worship, but s'elp me, I didn't know it was stolen. I gave the money ter Smith, and I haven't been paid meself yet. Smith said he'd pay me when the cheque was cashed."

"The cheque was open," said the prosecuting sergeant.

"So help me Gawd!" said Kerrigan, impressively. He had an undying belief in the power of the phrase. He looked at Justice. It was referring to notes with a pretence of understanding them, while it waited for the deposition-clerk to present a copy of the evidence. He looked at the prosecuting sergeant, who was sorting out his papers for the next case. He looked towards the reporters. There was only one, and he was considering how "Kerrigan's Kurious Kapers" would look as a headline. And

Kerrigan uttered again, "So help me Gawd!"

"Witnesses?"

Kerrigan had no witnesses. He relied on the look of celestial innocence he tried to assume.

"Cross-examination ?"

"You say this man's name was Smith?"

"Smith— s'elp me Gawd !"

"Where did Smith cash this cheque?"

"With some bloke, I don't know his name, s'elp me Gawd !"

"Don't say that." said Justice severely, for the half-dozenth time. "It's blasphemy. You're on your oath; that will do. Don't use the words again!"

"I won't, y' Worship, s'elp me Gawd, I won't, then!"

The cross-examination concluded with Kerrigan still calling upon the Almighty to s'elp him.

"Previous convictions?" queried Justice.

"None," admitted the police. "But the accused consorts with bad characters, and has been under suspicion for some time."

It was one of those loose statements that are submitted in the police-courts without any evidence in support; and Kerrigan did not know enough to point out that parsons mix with bad characters sometimes, and that now and again an absolutely honest man mixes with Prime Ministers and other members of Parliament. It probably wouldn't have helped him much, anyhow; he had elected to be dealt with summarily, and the man who fined a milk-and-water man ten shillings dealt with him as summarily as the necessary dissertation on the ungodliness of offences against property would allow.

"Luckily for you, it is a first offence," concluded Justice, severely. "Five pounds or thirty days' hard labor."

"Time?" said the stunned Michael.

"No time!" said Justice, sharply. "Next Case."

But while Kerrigan, protesting that he was "ennercent," was being removed, a woman's voice rose in a wail.

"Yer Anner, yer Anner, he's me 'usband, a good 'usband, too, and 'e's me sole support an' the support of me childer. An' if 'e goes to gaol, yer Anner, we'll starve. 'E's bein' led away, yer Anner, that's what 'e 'as— led away by propogate companions."

A worn but neatly-dressed woman, sobbing excitedly, had burst from the back of the court, and the end of her discourse landed her as near to the bench as she could get.

"Who is this woman?" inquired Justice with asperity.

"She's Kerrigan's wife," explained the police. "A hardworking, respectable woman."

"Yes, an' there's five childer, yer Anner, and their father going to gaol means they'll starve. 'E's a good man, truly, yer Anner. 'E's bin misled! For the love of 'Eaven, yer Anner, let him off! 'E was a 'ardworking man till the union made the strike"

"Was he in a strike?" Justice.

" 'E was, yer 'Anner, but he's left the union, and 'e's bin out of work since," she said, pacified by a hope that Justice was relenting.

"My good woman," said Justice, "your husband has been convicted, and nothing can be done. If the fine is paid—"

"Oh, yer Anner," wailed Mrs. Kerrigan, "an' where am I to get five pound from— me with me 'elpless children! For the love of 'Eaven, yer Anner —'e was a good man, an a good 'usband. An' a good father, too; if he 'adn't been, he—"

"My good woman," began Justice, perturbed.

"Y' Worship," said the smartest police-court solicitor, seizing the opportunity, as the smartest police-court solicitor knows how, "perhaps, before the court closes, the fine may be found. I myself am prepared—"

"Very well, Mr. Longtongue," said Justice, and he proceeded to hold out hope to Mrs. Kerrigan, while someone at the solicitors' table started a collection. The police-prosecutor gave five shillings. The police made a collection amongst themselves and the audience. One of the solicitors who knew me drew me into the matter.

That was one of the bright moments of my life. I noticed that the unforgiving creditor who was responsible for my presence had lingered, like myself, to hear the case. I took my solicitor friend over and told my creditor that if he liked to give ten shillings I would give five. He was glorying in the verdict a foolish magistrate had given him by cutting the difference between what he claimed and what I admitted I owed; and he didn't realise at that time the hollow thing a verdict (which costs six shillings to obtain) really is. He reckoned that coming from a loser my offer was generous; while I gloated over the fact that in addition to the money that he had sacrificed by taking me to court, my antagonist was going to pay ten shillings for his morning's enjoyment.

Longtongue, my friend and myself were able to go to Mrs. Kerrigan with the good news and the cash, and the fine was paid. The poor woman in piteous language rendered her thanks; and we went with her and the released husband outside the court. He was not as exuberant in his gratitude as his wife. In fact, he did not appear to be certain about being grateful at all. We watched them as they went up the street. By the time the corner was reached the woman's piteousness had left her. She was a volcano of wrath in full eruption.

"I've got you now!'' she screamed at him, filling her hands with blue-metal. "Think I wanted yer for yerself, yer loafing carcase, yer! I wanted ter 'ave it out with yer before I cooled! Got that money, did yer, an' never even brought 'ome a bottle o' beer! Where's the money, ye brute— what 'ave yer done with it?"

———————

23: Dr. Jenkins and Mr. 'Ides

Bulletin, 1 April 1938

BUT for the sensational newspaper reports of the disappearance of the notorious Enoch Nottaben, and incidentally £40,000 invested by trusting clients, Mrs. Parsley might not have told me about the mysterious Mr. Palder. Mrs. Parsley evidently had read the full details of the Nottaben affair; the one paragraph that really interested her was the part of the police report stating that the vanished Nottaben had not been seen in his "elaborate and stylishly fitted" flat for two weeks, and that six months' rent was owing.

Over that item the worthy Mrs. Parsley became, as she put it, "speechless with indignation." Which meant that she was more voluble than ever.

"Doing" my room, she said, "It makes me sick to read of a man like that, going off with all that money and not paying his rent. I don't call it at all honest."

"You don't look for honesty in a man who behaves in that way, do you?" I asked.

"Even if a man is a thief he can at least be honest," said Mrs. Parsley firmly. "You've only to take Mr. Palder, who was Number Seven. He might have been a Dr. Jenkins and a Mr. Ides, as Mr. Slompack once said, but he paid his rent as regularly as one of them Garden angels. Even those who whispered all sorts of things about him had to admit that he was a perfect gentleman.

"A jolly man he was; and his wife and he got on so well together that Miss Perry said she was quite sure they couldn't be married, not legal. Miss Perry is one of them who never seemed to have heard about what that Honey swore. Mrs. Palder was a nice woman, too, only she did like to put it on. And I didn't like the way she spoke about having Come Down, as if living in these flats was that. But I liked him very much. Everybody had to.

" 'Well, Mrs. Parsley,' he'd say as he went out in the evening, 'I'm off to break into another bank.'

"I thought all that was a harmless joke until the police came. Of course the breath of suspicion falls on the just and unjust alike, and Mr. Palder never seeming to do any work, but always prosperous and going out every night, made people curious. Especially Miss Perry. She thought he might be a drug-runner, which she said made a lot of money. That about evil being to them as evil thinks applied to Miss Perry!

" 'You might as well say that young Mr. Vingard (he was Number Fourteen) is auspicious, too,' I says. 'He stays at home a lot during the day, and goes out at night.'

" 'That's silly,' says Miss Perry. 'Everybody knows that young Mr. Vingard is interested in mission work and is going to become a clergyman. But there's nothing to explain why Mr. Palder goes out at night, except what his wife says about him going to his club. Which I don't believe! I've never heard him coming home drunk yet— not on a single night.'

"That is what Mrs. Palder had told me: 'Tom is fond of the night life, although there isn't much of it in this country. Nothing to what we were used to in London. Tom would like to take me out, but I prefer to stay at home with a book now, and I don't interfere with Tom.'

"IT wasn't only Miss Perry; a lot of people were curious about Mr. Palder. Even Mr. Slompack used to talk about 'the mysterious Mr. Palder.' Of course, Mr. Slompack was always fond of high-flowing repertory.

"You'd better look out that you're not entertaining burglar's underwears,' he says.

" 'Mr. Palder,' I retorted, 'is down on the electrical roll as a gentleman, and I'm sure he is that, and nobody can say otherwise about him.'

" 'You never know, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack. 'He may be a nifty curious character. For all you know he is this Raffles burglar they're talking about so much.'

" 'You will have your little joke, Mr. Slompack,' I says. But I began to think there might be, as Mr. Slompack said, something nifty the night Miss Perry showed me that report in the evening paper.

"It was all about another of those Raffles robberies, and was headed 'Raffles Robber Again: Audrastic Thief Fools Maid.' The robber had been seen by a maid in the house, but he was lounging on a couch smoking and told her he was waiting for her mistress, who was his sister, to come home, and had got in with a key she had given him. 'You'd better keep your eye on me, young lady,' he says; 'I may be a burglar.' Him joking like that made the girl think it must be all right, and she left him alone, only to find, when her mistress came home, that the bird had flown and so had a lot of valuables. It was because he did things like that they called him the Raffles burglar, though I must say, at first, I thought it had something to do with the lottery.

" 'There you are,' says Miss Perry. 'You say there's nothing queer about Mr. Palder because he wouldn't joke about breaking into banks if there was. I suppose you'll say this man wasn't a burglar because he joked like that?'

"That seemed inexhortable, as Mr. Slompack says. It turned me into a doubting Thompson like the others. It seemed to me a terrible thing that a nice man like Mr. Palder might be a burglar; I'd never had anything like that in my house before.

"I didn't know what to do. At one time I thought of asking Mr. Palder to go before anything happened; but even if he was a burglar he was a most respectable burglar. It certainly seemed to me that if anything came out he would prove to be one of those good burglars you read about who do their burglaring to pay for an expensive operation for an invalid sister or some other good purpose.

"And I was glad to see him talking a lot with that Mr. Vingard, who he called 'Padre,' though he wasn't that yet— only a parson in embroglio, as Mr. Slompack put it. I thought that perhaps, talking to him, he might see the terror of his ways and that burgling wasn't quite the right thing.

"In any case, I didn't know that he was a burglar at all; and it was not for me to throw the first stone at the crows. But I do know that every time I saw a detective coming near the place it made me feel terribly frightened.

"IT was Detective Frame and Detective O'Grady who did come at last. Them police are a deceitful lot; oh, what a mangled web they weave the way they practise to deceive, as Shakspeare says. They pretended they was making inquiries about someone who was missing, and wanted to know who had come to stay at my flats during the last few months.

"I felt all of a-twitter. I'm a law-abiding citizen; but I would be a traitor to my sect if I betrayed a tenant who was really such a nice man and paid his rent regularly. So I tried to make the most of Mr. Vingard and all about how he was interested in missions and was going to be a clergyman. They didn't seem to worry much about him.

" 'This Mr. Palder Thomas Palder, isn't it? What does he do for a living, do you know, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Detective Frame.

"It seemed to me that matters might look very black for Mr. Palder if I told them he went out every night without doing any work, so I said he was night porter at a hotel, which was the only thing I could think of that was done at night that was respectable on the spurt of the moment.

" 'What hotel does he work at?' asks O'Grady, sharplike.

" 'Mr. O'Grady,' I says, dignerfied, 'I am not my brother's keepsake, and I do not ask where my tenants work unless they tell me.'

"I wanted to warn poor Mr. Palder, who, I felt sure, even if he was a burglar, was more sinned against than sinning; but it is difficult to let a man know you think he is a burglar.

"'A terrible thing happened yesterday, Mr. Palder,' I said when I caught him in the morning. 'lt quite upset me. Two detectives came.'

" 'Aha, Mrs. Parsley, you are discovered!' he says. Not a twitch on his face, mind you. 'What have you been doing' now?'

" 'I believe they're after that Raffles burglar, and they think he might have come here,' I says. 'Poor fellow, I feel sorry for him.'

"I thought that might prompt him to let me into his confidence trick, as they call it, and I wanted to see how he took it.

" 'Ah, the net's closing on that chap; they'll get him yet,' he says. He was as cool as a concubine.

" 'Them detectives are very auspicious,' I says.

"He only laughed. 'They'll be arresting me yet, I expect.'

"Him joking like that cheered me up; but then I thought of what the papers said about that Raffles.

"It seemed a pity, in a way; if he'd only taken me into his confidence trick I could have warned him, and he could have got down the back stairs and out the back way. But they were too quick for me. They were upstairs before I could say Jack Robinson, if I wanted to say anything so stupid.

"My heart felt quite heavy as I saw him go away with them, though he was still as cool and undiscerned as could be. There was something terrible about picturing a jolly soul like Mr. Palder being locked behind iron bars.

"I was quite prepared to be sympathetic to poor Mrs. Palder, with all her putting it on, when she came downstairs. But she didn't seem at all upset, as I thought she would be.

" 'Some men from the police have been here to get my husband to identify someone,' she says. I felt quite impatient with her, still putting on that swank when her husband seemed to be in trouble, as she must know, and trying to pretend that it was something altogether different. But she was angry, too.

" 'Some interfering fool has been saying that my husband works in a hotel— night porter or something,' she says. 'Fancy! My husband—a man of impudent means! I'd be obliged, Mrs. Parsley, if you hear anyone saying anything like that if you'd put them right. Night porter, indeed!'

"Fancy a woman going on about a simple thing like that when her husband was in serious trouble! From the way she took it, I didn't like to tell her that it was me that said that, doing my best for her husband.

"I WAS glad, I can tell you, to see him come back again, although them detectives were still with him, but soon they said good-bye and let him come in. They had been standing beneath my window, so I heard them calling him 'Tom.' That was something I didn't like. I've noticed that them detectives always call a man they're going to arrest Tom or Joe or Bill. I suppose it's to make it more friendly-like.

"What it seemed to me was that the net was closing, as Mr. Palder himself said, and even if he'd bluffed them for a time they were just waiting to grab him. I was all the more sorry because Mr. Vingard had had to go away, being appointed to a mission in Balmain which he had to leave at once to go to. It is always useful for a man if he gets into trouble with the police, I've noticed, to have a clergyman to go along and give him a good character, even if he is a burglar. And although Mr. Vingard wasn't quite a clergyman, in embroglio is better than nothing.

"But you talk of being audrastic! That very night there was another of them Raffles robberies. It seemed like flying into the face of improvidence. The papers in the morning had a big account of it. That Raffles, after robbing a place, had helped himself to a good supper of cold chicken and champagne and left a note of thanks for it.

"If I saw them detectives once that day I saw them half a dozen times, passing the door and waiting about the street corner; it worried me so much that I had to ask Mrs. Palder if her husband was going out that night.

" 'Why, of course he is!' she says, as if surprised. 'Tom couldn't miss his club for the world.'

"She would swank, that woman! I felt inclined to shake her. Aha, me lady, I says, pride comes before a fall of snow; but all the same I was very sorry for him, and her, too, in what seemed bound to happen.

" 'Off to rob another bank, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, as cool as ever, as he was going out.

" 'Don't you think a little holiday in the country would do you good, Mr. Palder?' I asks.

" 'Think I need a holiday, eh?' he asks, laughing.

" 'You're not looking too well,' I says.

" 'You want to get rid of us, I'm afraid, Mrs. Parsley,' he laughs. 'lt's not so easy.'

"As I said, you couldn't help but like Mr. Palder. Always so jolly, whatever happened.

"It was nearly midnight when the telephone began

to ring like mad. I seemed to know what it was before I lifted the receiver.

" 'Police here,' said the voice on the other end. 'ls that Mrs. Palder? No? I want to speak to Mrs. Palder. Tell her it's about her husband.'

" 'l'll tell her,' I says, my heart all jumping.,

"I'll say this, that she was extracted. She was very fond of her husband.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, my husband has met with— with an accident,' she says. It seemed to me then that even at the eleventh hour, when, as everyone

knows, graveyards yawn, she had to keep up her swank. 'He's in hospital. I'll have to go to him.'

" 'You pore soul!' I says. 'Can I do anything for you? Could I come with you? It's very late.'

"But off she went by herself without saying anything more. And she didn't come back, although I sat up nearly all night hoping to hear all about it.

"WHEN I did go to sleep I slept in. I was all late when I got up in the morning, and being behind with my work I had no time to look at the papers.

"And there, suddenly, was Mr. Palder! His head was all bound up, and his arm was in a sling; and he looked very pale.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I'm afraid we'll have to be leaving you. Mrs. Palder doesn't like going on living here now. She won't come back herself. She asked me to come to fix with you and collect the things.'

" 'Oh, Mr. Palder!' I says. 'I'm so sorry at what's happened. There's no need for her to feel like that about it. Did you get bail?'

"'Get bail?' he says; but he went on: 'My wife has got peculiar ideas. After all that was in the papers this morning she doesn't feel as if she could go on living here.'

" 'I've been that busy I haven't been able to get a paper yet,' I told him.

" 'Oh, here it is,' he said. It gave me a bit of a surprise— him carrying that paper and seeming proud of it all— but blunders never cease. On the paper I saw the headlines, as big as the Harbor Bridge: 'Raffles Caught. Night Watchman's Pluck. Injured, Holds Robber.'

" 'I'm sorry, Mr. Palder,' I says. 'Even if you were a burglar, Im sure you were a good burglar.

" 'Burglar!' he exclaims. You'd need one of them excavation-marks to write it down the way he said it. 'I caught Raffles, Mrs. Parsley. Mrs. Palder is a bit sore with me getting my name in the papers like that. It's an honest living, I say; but, you know, Mrs. Palder is a bit peculiar. She doesn't like people to know I'm a night-watchman.'

"Did you ever hear the likes! There it was in blackened white, as the saying is, in the paper, all about how brave he'd been in tackling that Raffles.

" 'You'll be surprised about who Raffles was. Look here,' he said, pointing to the end of the report. I'll read it! *Edward Jones, alias Egbert Halliday, alias Tilton Vingard, alias Rev. Tilton Vingard*. That's Raffles!'

"I nearly dropped through the floor; but I knew then why that young young Vingard had been called away to a mission elsewhere after them detectives had come to the flats.

"But I will say this," concluded Mrs. Parsley, "even if Mr. Palder was a Dr. Jenkins and Mr. Ides and Mr. Vingard was a thief, they was both honest, They paid their rent."

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24: Necessity After The Fact

Bulletin, 8 March 1939

"I PERSONALLY I believe," said Mrs. Parsley sententiously, undoubtedly deriving inspiration from the headlines about the latest mystery staring from the newspaper on my desk, "that if there is a murder or a suicide there should be a dead corpse. It is one of the baser principles. That's why everyone was so mystrified when they said that Mr. Sottom's dead body didn't belong to him."

"That would certainly be embarrassing," I remarked.

"It was most embracing for me, seeing that I was a necessity after the fact, as the police call it. It's all over now, but I was on the horns of tenderhooks for ages over it. I never knew when that sword of Oclees (which I can't get myself to use the 'damn' as Mr. Slompack does) was going to fall and cut the Gordon knot.

"That poor Mr. Sottom was one of them men who is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward. When them Sottoms was quite new tenants in Number 14 I overheard them having an argument as I passed their flat.

" 'But I did it for your sake, darling,' he says. 'The money being short this week, I thought I'd make it up by giving it a fly at two-up.'

" 'And I suppose you got drunk for my sake, too?' she says.

" 'You know I'd do anything for you,' he says.

"It didn't seem to me any good for her to call him a bungalow, always messing things up ; but really she didn't go for him half as badly as some wives I know would have done.

"It wasn't half an hour later that the woman in Number 15, which was one of them I was thinking about when I spoke of other wives, came running down, all agertated, to say that something terrible was happening in Number 14. There was several tenants outside the flat door, and from the sound inside someone was sharpening a razor, very loud. One of the people said that Mr. Sottom sounded desperate, and they heard him say he intended to commit suicide.

" 'Well, good-bye, everybody!' That was Mr. Sottom's voice; and then there was a thud as if some- body had fallen to the floor.

"It gave me plantations of the heart; I didn't want anything like that happening in my residential. But when I poundered at the door and it was opened, there was Mrs. Sottom calmly laying the table.

" 'lt's only Mr. Sottom committing suicide, Mrs. Parsley,' she says; and she calls out: 'Get up from the floor, Jack, and don't go on acting the fool. Tea's ready.'

"While I stood there dumpfoundered, he came out from the bedroom looking rather sheepish, but quite hungry..

"He was always committing suicide; but when people got used to him nobody ever thought he would really do it. It happened every time he had an argument with his wife; but after I'd told them both that I wouldn't have no suicides in my residential he used to go out to do it. Whether it was to throw himself under a train or jump off the Gap he never seemed to get any further than the corner pub. And he always came back again.

"At other times he was a jolly little feller and everybody liked him. And Mrs. Sottom, too, who was a handsome woman still, and must have been fond of him to stay on the endurance file with him, the way he was always getting into trouble, and owing money, and having policemen coming with summonses. There was a Mr. Palty, who was Number 20, was a friend of theirs, and I often heard him telling Mr. Sottom that he wasn't going to lend him another penny. But I know Mr. Slompack lent him some money and still said he liked him.

"But there came the time he didn't come home.

"MRS. SOTTOM was worried, but she tried to be cheerful. 'I expect he's only lost his job again, and doesn't like to return and tell me,' she says bravely. 'He's like that.'

"It was when she rang up his employers and found they hadn't been his employers for a couple of weeks, though he had left home every morning as if they were, that she was really upset. Only a little time after that the news came that Mr. Sottom had really and truly committed suicide. It was Mr. Palty on the 'phone from the city who gave the inflammation.

" 'To think that he should speak about the insurance being all right,' Mrs. Sottom wailed on my neck. 'As if that would dispensate for the loss of a man like Jack! He had his idiot sins and crazies, but he was one of the best men that ever lived.'

"He went on becoming better and better the longer he was dead; and Mrs. Sottom came back from identifying him at the morgue all broke up. Not that she could identify him much, because his body had been found in the water below Boulders Bluff all battered with the sea, an' all the clothes tore to ribbons. But some of the people who had driven down in cars to amuse themselves looking at the place where the unidentified body had been found had found some papers under a stone. And then everybody knew that poor Mr. Sottom had gone, for there was a farewell letter from the poor feller, besides summonses and pawntickets. There was no doubt in anybody's mind about it being him.

"The funeral obsequiousness was quite a big affair, and when they came back Number 14 was full of people all talking about what a good chap Mr. Sottom was, and how he had borrowed money from them. It was Mr. Palty who was the residing genii, as Mr. Stompack called him, serving out the liquor and all that.

"When a knock came at my door and I opened it I thought I had seen a ghost. I shut the door quick ; but when he kept on knocking I thought it couldn't be a ghost, although, but for the whiskers, it looked like Mr. Sottom.

" 'S all ri', Mrs. Parsley,' he says. He was drunk; there was no mistake about it. 'I'm not a ghost. I'm my uncle.'

"Well, of all the things that ever were— a man making a statement like that! I couldn't make out what to make of it.

" 'Why aren't you upshtairs, Mrs. Parsley?' he asks. 'I wan' you to hear what everybody thinks of me— of my nephew, I mean. You was always very good to me— to my nephew and his wife.'

"It seemed a terrible thing to me to have a dead man there standing at my door telling me he was his uncle; I didn't know what to do about it. And I was glad when Mr. Palty and a friend of his, Mr. Darby, came along looking very upset, and caught hold of him.

" 'Can we bring him into your flat, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Mr. Palty.

"Bring him in they did, while I stared at them. It was a nine days' blunder to me. They pushed him into a chair, and then they pulled him up, shaking him, trying to make him sober.

" 'You fool! You'll make a nice mess of things. You'll get us all into a jam-tin,' says Mr. Darby.

" 'All right! All right! ' he says. 'There's only one thing left for me to do. I'll commit suicide.'

" 'You have committed suicide, you fool! ' says Mr. Palty. 'Have some sense, man! You were in an awful mess. You'd lost your job and hadn't told your wife: you'd bamboozled money from the firm before they sacked you, and they're liable to find it out any time, although they won't worry about it now you're dead. That's only part of the troubles you're in. Your liable to go to gaol for contempt of Court over that District Court order.'

" 'So we helped you to die. And what's your gratitude?' says Mr.' Darby.

" 'lt was the only way out for you,' says Mr. Palty. 'That unidentified body at Boulders Bluff came in nicely. Darby here motored out and put those papers of yours under the stone and then drew someone's attention to them. It was all nicely arranged; and your wife will get your insurance. But you're going to spoil everything, you bungalow!'

" 'You had to go to the funeral!' says Mr. Darby bitterly.

"That seemed to annoy Mr. Sottom. 'Well, whose funeral was it?' he says quite hotly. 'I'd a right to be there.' And then he got subdued and mournful again. 'It wouldn't be showin' proper respect if I didn't go to my own funeral.'

"It appeared that, because they was frightened he would turn up anyway, them friends of his had let him go to the funeral as his own uncle, him having grown that beard. But he had been a lot of trouble to them. One of his ideas was that after the burial he should have got on a tombstone and returned thanks for those who had attended. He had become worse later on; one of the things Mr. Palty hadn't liked was the way Mr. Sottom had made up to his wife. Kissing her in a way Mr. Palty didn't think was right in an uncle just making her acquaintance for the first time, and telling her he'd stand by her just as if he was his own nephew.

" 'I never knew she thought so much of me,' says Mr, Sottom, full of sediment and liquor. 'It's worth being dead to find out.' But really Mr. Sottom was drowsy; and while they were going at him he started to go to sleep. They'd been so busy reminding him of all they'd done for him and what a bungalow he was that they'd hardly taken any notice of me, who was just standing there like a codfish out of water.

" 'We'll have to take Mrs. Parsley into our confidence trick,' says Mr. Darby. 'I daresay you see how things are, Mrs. Parsley. As friends of Mr. Sottom we took the only way to get him out of terrible difficulties. Now we've got to go on. So—'

" 'Don't you say a word about all this, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Palty, sharplike. 'It will only mean trouble for yourself if you do. You are a necessity after the fact now.'

"That made me angry, with the sharp way he said it. 'Don't you call me names like that, Mt. Palty,' I says. 'I want none of your vile dispersions.'

" 'I'm sure there's no need to talk to Mrs. Parsley like that,' says Mr. Darby, which was a nice man. 'Mrs. Parsley will keep our counsel for the sake of poor Sottom and poor Mrs. Sottom. You see, Mrs. Parsley, if it comes out that the identification was wrong, and Sottom isn't dead, there will be trouble for all of us.'

" 'I shall be as silent as the graveyard,' I says. 'There's no need to call me a necessity. I wouldn't do anything to give trouble to nobody.'

"AH, what a tanglefoot they leave when first they practise to deceive, as the Bible says; and, though I shouldn't say it was the first with that Mr. Palty, there was no doubt that was true. Those poor men were worried ; but no doubt they had acted for the best, especially in trying to get the insurance money for that poor Mrs. Sottom, and I wasn't going to do anything to harm

them. Especially as it seemed true about my being a necessity after the fact if it came out that Mr. Sottom wasn't his own uncle but himself. I let them leave Mr. Sottom locked in my flat, him having gone to sleep.

"Them two men had hardly gone before they were back again, both looking very upset.

" 'His real uncle has arrived,' says Mr. Palty. 'He motored down from Queensland; and he says he doesn't know of any other uncle, unless his mother had a brother he had never heard about.'

"There was a nice kettle of fish and chips! They got him out by the back gate, and Mr. Darby took him away. Mr. Palty had to go back to look after the mourners.

"It was terrible for me being a necessity after the fact, and that Mr. Sottom likely to do something stupid like the bungalow they all called him. There was them insurance companies making a fuss about paying up. Them insurance companies! I've no time for them, with their talk of premiers (which I always say there should be only one Government) and policies as if they were political meetings; and them not wanting to pay unless they are quite sure that somebody's dead. As bad as them banks that make cheques dishonorable, they are.

"It seems that Mrs. Sottom's parents had made Sottom get out big insurances when first they was married, and they had been kept up, as the saying is. Mrs. Sottom must have managed that, because poor Mr. Sottom couldn't. As Shakspeare says, the best-laid schemes of micey men gang daft with glee; but it wasn't a laughing matter with them two men or me, who was a necessity.

"It would have been bad enough if Mr. Sottom— who was Sam Billings now, and had a job at the fish markets which Mr. Palty, being a fish salesman and having influence there, had got for him, had been content to stay away. But he didn't, and, although he only came like the thieves in the night, some people in the residential started to talk about seeing ghosts, which there had been talk of ghosts in the place just before.

"Whenever there was a smell of fish about the place all me nerves got going with the thought that Mr. Sam Billings was there. He didn't like being dead, and the money he was paid wasn't enough, and he thought he ought to have some of the insurance money; and he didn't like the thought that his widow, who looked very nice in black, I must say, and almost young, might marry again. He began to be jealous of Palty, who saw her every day and looked after her affairs— which I must say myself Mr. Palty seemed to take more interest in her than was necessary, and was always taking her out. He said she had to be lifted out of her sorrow, which he seemed to like doing.

"Mr. Palty began to get annoyed with him, too, because whenever he came up he borrowed money. Sometimes I kept him in may flat when he came, because then we could get him out of the back gate better without him being seen. And there was almost rows sometimes.

" 'You fellers killed me,' says Mr. Sam Billings. 'You wiped out all my friends; I can't go and borrow money when I'm short. I've got to come to you.'

" 'Do you know,' said Mr. Palty, turning to Mr. Darby, 'the man's blackmailing us! I'm not going to stand that.'

" 'You can call it what you like,' says Mr. Sam Billings as cool as a concubine. 'You know you've both committed a criminal defence.'

" 'You ungrateful swine!' cried Mr. Darby. 'What we did we did to get you out of a hole. Dammit, man, you'd have been in gaol, and your wife— what would have become of her? She's got the insurance money, which makes her comfortable.'

" 'And if it comes out you're in it, too,' says Mr. Palty.

" 'Me?' he says, as calm as one of them evening zebras, as the saying is. 'They can't charge a man with a criminal defence for being dead. *I* didn't swear I was dead,' he says.

"THERE were fresh implications when a man named Tomsitt came out, shaking like an aspic, to see Mrs. Sottom. He said he had seen her husband's ghost in a bar in town where they used to drink together. As he had seen Mr. Sottom buried he was naturally upset, especially when the ghost asked him to have a drink. Mr. Tomsitt said he didn't know what happened then: he must have turned tailor, as the saying goes, and bolted. Outside he hailed a taxi and came right away to tell Mrs. Sottom.

" 'Do you know, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'I sometimes have a feeling that dear Jack isn't dead— that he might come back to me.' She was excited, but not as upset as she might have been, hearing that her husband was wandering about like a disembowelled spirit.

" 'Wouldn't it be awkward about your insurance money? You'd have to pay that back,' I says.

" 'Oh, that would be terrible! ' she says. 'I am so comfortable now, for the first time in my life. I often wish I had Jack to share it with me; but, of course, that could not be.

" 'Mr. Palty has been suggesting that I should go to New Zealand,' she says. 'He even suggests that I should transfer my money there; he says he would get that done for me. Mr. Palty says he could take a holiday and see me safely over. I think,' she says, smiling sadlike, 'that Mr. Palty might ask me to marry him. But I don't think I could forget my poor dear Jack so soon.'

"Well, there was another kettle of fish and chips— Mr. Palty going on like that like a snake in the glass in sheep's clothing, without saying a word to anybody else; and him knowing that her husband wasn't rightly dead!

"I was beginning to feel that I would be glad to be rid of the whole lot of them and being a necessity after the fact. If they went it would be two of them gone, anyhow. If I said anything about what Mrs. Sottom told me it might make matters worse ; but I did tell them men about Mr. Tomsitt seeing the ghost.

" 'The bungalow! ' cried Mr. Palty. 'When he gets a few drinks aboard he's liable to do anything. He'll turn up one day with his beard shaved off. Then we'll all be in the soup.'

" 'This sort of thing can't go on,' says Mr. Darby. 'A man schemes to help a friend out of a mess, and this is what he's got to endure.'

" 'No, it can't go on. It's not going to go on as far as I'm concerned,' says Mr. Palty. And knowing what Mrs. Sottom had told me I could read between the lions, as the saying goes.

"It seemed to me that we was all expended on the horns of them tenderhooks; but there was worse to follow. One morning the paper was full of an account about how the man whose body had been found at Boulders Bluff had been murdered.

"A man who had been arrested had made a statement that he had seen two men fighting at the top of Boulders Bluff. One of them had pushed the other over. He had been camped in the bush dodging a warrant, and he had seen everything. He wasn't going to give himself up to make the report, but when he was arrested he wanted to tell all he knew.

" 'Good God!' cries Mr. Palty, coming into my flat with the paper in his hand. 'Murder! Now the flats will be in the fire!'

" 'Not my flats, I hope, Mr. Palty,' I says. 'I can't be a necessity after the fact about Mr. Sottom being murdered, because we know he wasn't murdered.'

" 'No; but the whole matter will be opened up again,' he says. The insurance companies will make a fuss. The only thing is for you not to say a word of what you know, Mrs. Parsley. It's more important now than ever.'

"OF course everybody in the flats was talking about the new envelopment; the news ran like wild-flowers all over the place. Mrs. Sottom took it quite calmly.

"Mr. Palty and Mr. Darby were there when she came downstairs.

" 'That couldn't have been Jack. He must be somewhere, and he may be dead, but that couldn't be him. Nobody would want to murder Jack,' she says.

"Mr. Palty and Mr. Darby looked queer. I think they had often felt they wanted to murder him.

" 'All along I've had an idea that that identification was wrong,' says Mr. Slompack a little later. "Sottom had a lot of trouble and he might have decided to disappear. I've got a depression that he's still alive.'

"The silver lining is before the darkest hour, so they say, but I couldn't see it, and people talking like that made me more uncomfortable, me being afraid to say anything, although people usually admit that my conversational debility is good.

"In the effluvia of time the next day came; it was worse. In the midday paper was all about how that criminal had made a new confession. He said he had murdered the man whose body was found at Boulders Bluff. He wasn't John Sottom at all, but James Chapman. What made matters worse there was nobody I could talk to. Mrs. Sottom wasn't in her flat; Mr. Palty wasn't in his; and I didn't see that Mr. Darby.

" 'It was awful. I thought perhaps they had all been arrested and maybe they would be coming for me soon, me having been that necessity. When I heard Mr. Darby's voice on the 'phone it was almost like the voice of one of them angel sheriffs that sing in heaven.

"But he was very agertated ; he wanted Mr. Palty, and seemed worried he was not about.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, tell him I met— our friend— you know, Sam Billings— walking in Sydney all shaved, and— tell him to wait, if he comes home.'

"Well, if ever anyone was extracted it was me. He rang off without saying anything more; and all I could do was to wait like them patients on a monument, though that seems a strange place for patients to wait. I was glad to know, however, that Mr. Darby wasn't arrested.

"It never rains without pause was very true the way them two arrived, almost together. Mr. Palty was first; he asked if I had seen Mrs. Sottom and rushed up to her flat. When he came back, not having found her, Mr. Darby had just arrived.

" 'Sottom's been walking about Sydney, shaved and without disguise,' says Darby.

" 'I know. He came to my office,' said Mr. Palty.

"Mr. Darby seemed surprised. 'I got rid of him,' he said as if he was pleased with himself. 'When I demonstrated with him he said that there was a boat leaving for New Zealand in half an hour. He was prepared to get away if I gave him twenty quid. He said you would probably give half to get rid of him. That's what I rang up here about. But I wasn't going to miss the chance. I found the money. I pushed him into a taxi, drew down the blinds and saw him safely on the boat.'

" 'You blinded fool!' yelled Mr. Palty at him. 'Why didn't you come to my office first? He locked me in; there's an outside bolt and he drew it. Being Saturday, the offices were shut. It wasn't until I'd pummelled for hours that I was let out. *I* was going to catch that boat; and now I've missed it!'

" 'Oh, you were going to catch that boat, eh?' said Darby. 'Well, I suppose it's fair; but I was going to tell you I'm leaving for Brisbane. Oh, and Sottom gave me a message. I didn't understand it. He said his wife thanks us both for helping her to that insurance money. He said his wife wanted her love sent to you; although how—'

"Mr. Palty looked as if he was going to have that appleplexy which is so dangerous.

" 'Curse it! ' he yelled. 'His wife was on that boat! '

"The way that Mr. Darby looked at him was a caution. 'So that was it!' he says. 'You were going to run away with her— and the insurance money; and he cut you out! Palty, you're a b—— cad!'

"It's a word I don't like using, but that's what he said. And then he went out. I was glad when Mr. Palty went that night, too.

"Them insurance companies kept sending people to try and find out where the Sottoms had gone, but officiously I didn't know, and I never heard anything more about it. A still tongue keepeth a silent head, as the saying goes; and there was none left to say I was a necessity after the fact."

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25: The Barrackers

The Bulletin, 4 Nov 1915

THREE weeks after the day upon which they first became acquainted a juvenile humorist placed, midway between the backs of their seats in the Suttor Stand, a card: “Engaged.” It was the sort of humor that appeals to a crowd; and it lost nothing because the couple never became aware of it. The incident merely serves to show that, to the popular eye, their progress was rapid.

They had met first in the same stand— pretty well the same spot. The colors they sported were a bond of sympathy between them; but they barracked together without noticing one another particularly, until, when the Eastern Glebes had carried the ball up to the South Balmains’ line, and to cap the movement it only wanted one of those crafty movements which had won Paddy Smith his reputation, the young man rose and howled for the hero.

“Paddy! Paddy! Paddy!” he entreated. “Show 'em what you’re made of, pal! Oh, you beauty! Go it, you treat! O-o-oh! hard luck!”

He was just about to retake his seat when the infamous conduct of the referee in awarding a penalty against the Eastern Glebes roused him once more.

“Yah! Get a guernsey!” he yelled, disgustedly.

“Excuse me,” said the young woman, "but which is Paddy Smith?”

“Paddy? Why, that’s him, number 3; the one with the splash of mud so as you can’t see the number. See, he's got a bit of a limp; that fall must have hurt him a bit. But he’ll be on the spot when he’s wanted, Paddy will— my word for that!”

“Do you know him?” asked the girl.

“Know him? I should say I do! I know him like me own brother.”

Obviously he realised that he deserved admiration, and he got it. The friend of the chief hero of the Eastern Glebes was worthy of honor, even if, as it afterwards transpired, the friendship depended on only one casual meeting. He was given, on the spot, a standing; and, the ice being broken, he enlightened the young woman on the niceties of the game and the vague suspicions current about the financial inducements which explained the partiality of the referee. As sundry South Balmain barrackers also expressed vague suspicions about the reason for the referee’s undoubted partiality in another direction, matters were evened on that score.

It was only natural that at the next match played by the Eastern Glebes he should look for the girl, and, seeing her, renew the acquaintance. On this occasion, between the times when it was imperative that every energy should be centred on the important business of barracking, the conversation became

personal. He was Harry Sinclair, clerk in the wholesale softgoods establishment of- Flugg and Fidgett; she, he learnt, was Miss Florrie Walker, expert machinist in the factory of Illphit and Storrblaus, clothing manufacturers; and, as it transpired that the serious business of both their lives was to follow the career of the Eastern Glebes.

Saturday by Saturday, it was tacitly arranged between them that they should share the glory of victory or the humiliation of defeat together. The arrangement worked excellently; the enthusiasm of a mutual barrack was an unfailing bond. But, although exceedingly friendly, they progressed no further. Certainly they went to a picture-show or so together, and met on Sundays in the Botanical Gardens; but their conversation on these occasions was mostly about the past victories of their team and its prospects.

Miss Walker had a fine independence of her own— that new independence of the working girl who is able to support herself and get what she wants without desiring the generosity of any male companion; and when Harry— of course he was simply Harry— wanted to "shout," she insisted on paying her own way everywhere. That was no doubt equitable— because the wage that an expert machinist can earn exceeds by a great deal the likely salary of an average clerk; but it placed them on a footing which appeared to interfere with the growth of tenderness.

When the close of the football season left a blank in their lives they endeavored to fill it by excursions to various places, and thus they reached a new arrangement. Harry paid the expenses; but, to do her part, Florrie stowed away in the Savings Bank an amount similar to what she would have expended had she been paying for herself, and it was understood that it was a mutual account. By this time they knew that some day they were to be married, though it would have been difficult for either to explain how and when the understanding was reached. They had just drifted into it.

The opening of the football season again saw them back in the ranks of the barrackers. But new interests had arisen. The War claimed a lot of the interest that could be spared from the pursuit of football; and it was obvious that, with Florrie, it claimed an increasing share of interest. There were demands for men; the able-bodied and unencumbered were being called upon; and somehow Florrie's interest in football did not seem able to sustain itself. At times it positively flagged.

"The Eastern Glebes," she said suddenly one day, "haven't sent nearly as many men to the Front as some of the other teams. Why doesn't Paddy Smith go?"

"What? And us lose the chance of getting the premiership?" cried Harry incredulously.

" 'S all very well," retorted Florrie. "but there's better things than football. South Balmains have lost pretty well half their team, yet they're not doing badly. And some of their best men have gone."

"They'll be right out of it," said Harry, decisively.

"I shouldn't mind seeing them win," said Florrie. "They deserve it."

"Well, if they did win, it would be the chaps that didn't go to the war that did the winning," said Harry logically; and then a spurt of play brought him to his feet, howling vigorously.

Florrie's interest in the war made him uncomfortable. He had an interest in it himself; immediately he had seen the football results in the late Saturday papers he always turned to see if there was anything fresh about the war. But Florrie's interest seemed illogical. She was inclined to favor the teams whose men had responded to the recruiting call, forgetting that she was really favoring the men who had not gone, giving them the credit of the real patriots, he had an uneasy feeling that a girl capable of such unreason might even have an idea that he should go.

The next week Florrie had a shock for him.

"I'm not coming to see Easts next week," she said.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I'm going to the South Balmain and Central Suburbs match," she said.

"Oh, are you?" he answered, with assumed indifference. "Barracking for South Balmains, I suppose?"

"That's so," she saiw, shortly. "Souths are my team for the future. I like a team that's got the right spirit."

"You can barrack for whom you like, of course," he said, with some heat in his voice. "But there are other things between us, you know. There were arrangements."

"If you're thinking of the banking account," she said, stiffly, "I'll draw the money, and you can have your half when you like."

He quite forgot to howl gleefully as Paddy Smith collared the ball, and, dodging skilfully, grounded in the corner. He was disturbed to his soul.

"I suppose vou think *I* ought to do something?" he burst out, suddenly.

"You ought to know what you ought to do," she answered cryptically.

After they had parted he argued the position with himself, and arrived at the uncomfortable feeling that the girl was right. He felt more about the breach between them than he had cared to show; and for a whole week he was full of unjoyful thoughts. Liberty and civilisation were calling for soldiers, and the men of the Eastern Glebes, like many others, had not responded as they should. What ought he to do? All the week he discussed that point within himself, until he reached his conclusion.

On the following Saturday, instead of taking his way to the Eastern Glebes' match, he was waiting betimes at the entrance gates to the ground where the South Balmain match was to be played; and his wait was rewarded, finally, by the appearance of Florrie, the colors of her new team pinned to her blouse. He shouldered his way towards her.

"Thought I'd catch you," he said, "so I dropped the other match. I wanted to say something to you."

"It's no good trying to get me to go back to the Easts," said the girl. "There's more men in the Souths, an' they don't shirk going to the war when they're wanted. That's where they ought to be— the war."

"I've been thinking over things," said Harry, "and it seems to me you're right."

"Of course I'm right!"

"Yes; I've thought over the matter all the week, and I've come to my decision." He spoke portentously. A man in khaki, standing near, turned curiously.

"Yes," pursued Harry. "I've been thinking over what you said about the South Balmains having the most men at the war. It seems to me that there's only one thing for me to do; only one thing for any man to do— I'm going to barrack for South Balmains!"

With an air of glorious vindication he drew the colors from his pocket and fixed them to his coat.

"I thought you would," said Florrie, gladly. "Come on, we'll get in."

26: Twin Souls

Bulletin, 14 July 1937

"TWIN BEDS! ” said Mrs Parsley with a snort. “I’ve no patience with such ideas. Anyway, I’m not putting them in any of my flats. And twin souls is something I will never have in the place again, neither.”

Mrs. Parsley had been interrupted in the “doing” of my apartment. When she came back the argument she had had, apparently with prospective tenants for No. 12, had started a train of thought. I knew that it was impossible to continue my work until Mrs. Parsley had got what she wanted to say off her chest.

“It was Mrs. Wetherby, who stayed in No. 17, who was a twin soul,” said Mrs. Parsley. “She had left her husband owing to incombatibility of temperature, which meant, I thought at the time, that he had turned cold on her, although the combat part of it seems to me why most people live together.

“ ‘I hope you won’t mind, Mrs. Parsley,’ she said, ‘I have a gentleman visitor who will call to see me pretty often.’

“ ‘People has a perfect right to do what they like in their own flats, as long as it’s respectable,’ I told her.

“ ‘Mr. Pomple and I are twin souls,’ she said. ‘He is likely to be here every day.’

“ ‘Everybody has their own ideas,’ I tells her; ‘but don’t you think it would be more respectable to let people believe you was married?’

“She was shocked. ‘I was afraid you would think that; that is why I spoke. I have a husband, Mrs. Parsley; and I do not forget that. I am a good woman. My love for Mr. Pomple is on the aster plane; there is nothing earthly in our affection.’

"I DIDN’T know much about the aster plane myself, but I must say that Mr. Pomple didn’t look much like a twin soul to me. He was a podgy little feller, and he could talk like a book; but it proved I was right when one night I heard a rumpus in Number 17. When I got there Mrs. Wetherby was very excited and crying.

“ ‘Tell this man he has to leave this building,’ she said.

“ ‘You asked me to come,’ he snarled.

“He called her a sentimental fool before he went, and other things. The aster plane Mrs. Wetherby talked about was no good to him. So I was left with an undetached twin soul on my hands, so to speak. I wasn’t sorry, because

other tenants were beginning to make sneering remarks about twin souls, and I've always kept my place respectable.

" 'Sometimes I think men are merely beasts, Mrs. Parsley,' Mrs. Wetherby said to me. 'I feel almost inclined to go back to my husband.'

" 'It's not a bad idea sometimes,' I said. 'Has he a home for you?'

" 'Oh, yes; my husband's very fond of me,' she says. 'But he is so unspiritual; I had to leave him.'

"It wasn't until she came to my sitting-room to pay her rent one day that I realised that there might be danger in having a spare twin soul on the premises. Mr. Glenroy, the violinist, was there, too, explaining why he couldn't pay, so I introduced them.

" 'Ah, but we have met before,' said Mrs. Wetherby.

" 'We pass on the stairs pretty often,' says Mr. Glenroy.

" 'Sheep that pass in the night with never a word,' said Mrs. W. with a sigh. 'There is more than that. I have listened to you playing your violin.'

" 'Just practising,' he said.

" 'It seemed to me,' she says, 'that there was a note in it intended especially for the heart of a lonely woman. I have often wondered if a little perspiration has winged its way back from my own heart to yours.

" 'I think,' she said depressively, 'our souls have spoken to one another.'

" 'I've got to go,' he said, looking really frightened as he went. And he had just cause and impediment to be frightened, too. Not that I suppose Mr. Glenroy would have minded being a twin soul if he wasn't frightened of more misunderstandings with his wife than there were already. It must be pretty hard for a man to tell a woman who says he's her twin soul that he isn't; an' it's likely to be embarrassing if it's done on landings where an auspicious wife might pounce on them.

"Mrs. Wetherby used to sit on the stairs waiting for Mr. Glenroy to come home. He took to coming in by a back entrance ; but it was when he'd had to climb in through a window to avoid her that he complained to me. He said that he'd have to leave unless Mrs. Wetherby let him alone.

" 'You've got to remember,' I told her— 'don't mind my mentioning it— Mr. Glenroy has a wife.'

" 'Alas, yes!' she says. 'Too well I know it. A woman with no soul to which his can speak; no soul to answer his, as mine does. I feel that his being married makes it more necessary for me to give him consolation— the consolation one twin soul can give to another. I know all about my poor Henry,' and she smiled.

"BUT it was no smiling matter to me. The first I knew it was all over with Mr. Glenroy was when Major Porthak came to me. He was an elderly

gentleman who occupied Number 11; and his main amusement was whisky, which, as the Bible says, is a mocker.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he said, 'I object to being a twin soul. I've never been a twin soul to anyone yet, and I never will be. If any old frumps think they're going to make anything like that of me— I'll tell them off.'

"Then I knew that that Mrs. Wetherby had become a spare again. It appeared that Mr. Glenroy, getting over his shyness after a quarrel with his wife, had made the same mistake as Mr. Pomple. The quarrel may have made him drink, and you know the proverb says that mistakes will occur in the best irrigated families.

"I didn't like to tell poor Mrs. Wetherby to go, seeing she paid her rent regularly and was quite respectable; it seemed that the best thing to do was to introduce her to someone who might be a twin soul without doing any harm to anybody.

"The new tenant in No. 19 looked as if he might do; he didn't have much the appearance of a twin soul; but, then, Mrs. Wetherby didn't seem to mind that.

" 'He knows that po'try you told me the other day,' I says, 'the "Misunderstood" one— he loves po'try, don't you, Mr. Smith?'

" 'I feel sure you do,' said Mrs. W. in the deep voice she used when the twin-soul mood was stirring 'er. 'When a man has soul you can see it in his eyes.'

"Although Mr. Smith looked embarrassed, it seemed that that was a good start. If Mrs. Wetherby could discover soul she could discover a twin soul, it seemed to me. That made the other tenants safe; and safety first come first served is my motter.

"And then a lady came and took Number 14.

" 'I will have a gentleman calling to see me pretty often ; but you will know it is all right, Mrs. Parsley,' she said. 'Our friendship is purely plutocratic. We are twin souls.'

"You could have knocked me flat with a feather. It seemed to me I was running a residential especially for twin souls.

"It struck me as queer the way Mrs. Wetherby took it when I told her, as of course I did.

" 'You should be careful, Mrs. Parsley,' she said.

'Are you sure those people are genuine twin souls?'

" 'I'm only saying what I've been told,' I re-tortoised. 'Surely, Mrs. Wetherby, you're not the only genuine twin soul.'

"She just shook her head like a doubtful Thomas.

"I WAS as unauspicious as a new-born babe about what was going to foller. Troubles never come singly, so the Bible says. That Mr. Smith seemed to have disappeared; and right on that came the rumpus. It was all around Number 14, which the new Mrs. Harvey had taken. It was Mrs. Wetherby who was making all the noise.

" 'Mrs. Parsley! ' she screamed when she saw me, 'are you going to allow this sort of thing to go on in your house? Here's my husband— my husband, mind you— with this creature in the flat here.'

"Mr. Wetherby didn't look much like a twin soul to me, either ; he was bald and fat— but, there, beauty is only skin-deep.

" 'My dear, you shouldn't make this fuss,' he said. 'Since you left me I met Miss— er— Mrs. Harvey, and we discovered that we are twin souls.'

" 'You!' screamed Mrs. Wetherby, scornfully.

" 'Surely other people can be twin souls,' I said.

" 'Not my husband! I won't have my husband being anyone else's twin soul,' she said.

"It was a terrible rumpus, with all the tenants in the other fiats interested. My giving them all notice to go did no good. I had to leave them to go to ring up the police.

"When I came back it was all over. And Mrs. Wetherby had another twin soul.

" 'Dear Mrs. Parsley,' she said, 'it was all a trick of my husband— I didn't know he knew where I was living— bringing this woman here to test whether I cared for him. A man who does a thing like that must have some soul. I never considered before whether my husband might not be my twin soul.'

"I'm not sure, but I think I saw Mr. Wetherby wink at me.

" 'It's mootooal misunderstanding,' he said. 'I'd have divorced my wife if I thought there was anything wrong; but when I found there wasn't I wanted to get her back.'

"I was so flappergasted, as they say, that I let them go without demanding a week's rent in loo of notice— Mrs. Harvey, she vanished, too, folding up her tails like the scarab, as the poet says. Yet, in a way, in spite of the vacancies coming sudden (there was Mr. Smith's flat, too), I was pretty glad to be shot of twin souls."

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27: The Dogs of War

Bulletin, 5 July 1939

"IF only I had that Mr. Herr Hitler here in these flats," said Mrs. Parsley— "not that he is the sort of man I would like to have owing me rent— I would let him have a piece of my mind. All the upset he is making! Only last night I was thinking of advertising them empty flats; but when I read that in the paper about Hitler letting loose the dogs of war it put me right off."

The repercussion of world politics upon the affairs of my landlady was astonishing, as Mrs. Parsley's reactions frequently are. Soothingly I suggested that she might advertise her flats with entire safety. There might not be a war.

"Out of all this turmoil we may reach a stage when people will refuse to quarrel," I suggested comfortingly.

"Not married couples," retorted Mrs. Parsley decisively. "It would be too much to expect them to see the terror of their ways. I suppose it was that paper talking about dogs that upset me. Well might they call them the dogs of war, for there's nothing people will fight over so easily, as I learnt to my sorrer. I like them myself; for dogs are intellergent animals, like men, only they're faithful. But never again will I permit them to be kept in my flats.

"Not now," corrected Mrs. Parsley. "Once l thought it didn't matter; and look what came of it! With the place full of substitute babies and Mr. Slompack exposed as one of them whitened steeplechases in wolf's clothes with a poor abandoned wife crying on his doorstep, as they say. And everybody saying ne should provide the girl with a home. The police here, and everything!"

Mrs. Parsley paused for breath. It seemed a long way from Hitler ; but the hint about the moral downfall of Mr. Slompack, always standing as a rock of respectability in Mrs. Parsley's establishment, interested me.

"I will say that Mr. Slompack brought it on himself. 'Let us all keep dogs,' he said. Little did he know that them were fatal words.

"Everybody had always thought Mrs. Fidgett's pom, which she called Doodems, was a pest, but when Mr. Grampy, who was a new tenant, brought Cancan, which it was kennelled in the yard, the ill-feeling was distendified, as the saying is. Mrs. Fidgett said Cancan's howling at night upset Doodems's nerves, and Mr. Grampy said it was Doodems's yapping that made Cancan howl.

"They were regular bony distensions, if ever there were any. Mr. Grampy said Cancan was a goldmine. It was always going to win some big race; and the men were on its side because Mr. Grampy gave them inflammation about dogs that were going to win races, and they could always lose their money in backing it. When Cancan didn't win, Mr. Grampy said it was because

Doodems's yapping had kept him awake and spoilt his rendition. But there were others who didn't like Cancan's howling, like Mrs. Turner, who said, it was a sign of a death and sent for the doctor to see whether she was dying. Mrs. Turner always said she would be better off in heaven; but, although heaven may be a happy landing, as they say in the hymn, I've never known anyone who wasn't upset at the idea of going there.

"It was when I told the men, who put all the trouble on to Doodems, that I had told Mrs. Fidgett she could have Doodems in her flat just as any other tenants who liked could have dogs, and my word was my bondage, that Mr. Slompack said that about everybody keeping dogs.

"IT was no sooner said than done in the eye, as the books say; at least some of the tenants got dogs; and when them dogs started fighting on the landings, and the owners began quarrelling, I wished I had put my foot down before it all started. Even the Major, who had always been friends with him, was soon threatening to punch Mr. Wassail on the nose (which the word he used was 'snout,' but I won't demean myself) because his Airedale had nearly torn his fox-terrier to pieces.

"Mr. Slompack had had an inferior motive when he had said that, so it appears. It sounded strange to me when he said he had a dog in quarantine which a friend of his travelling in Europe had sent out, asking him to look after it until his return; and Mr. Slompack said that as everybody was keeping dogs he might as well bring Toby here as put him in a dogs' home.

"Never in my widest dreams of having rice, as Mr. Slompack himself says, did I think that there could be a dog the size of Toby. When I first saw that dog I nearly fainted ; I thought it was another lion. And them dogs nearly fainted, too. Doodems had come to the top of the stairs to yap, as he often did, as if he owned the place ; but when he saw Toby he jest gave a yelp and bolted for the flat. It was the same with the other dogs. One moment you would see them ; but suddenly they would be gone, and you knew they had seen Toby. And Cancan, when Toby went 'woof!' got into his kennel as far as he could go and forgot all about his howling.

"Mr. Slompack brought the dog up the stairs to show how gentle it was, with all its size. Very proud of it he was.

" 'Look how he pricks his ears! ' he says. 'Listen! Do you hear that baby crying? Toby hears it. His filigree is a breed of dogs trained to rescue children who were lost on the mountains or in the woods. Toby was only a pup when he left his home; but the instink is in him.'

"Mrs. Fidgett said Toby was a scandal; and some of the men didn't like it; but the people in the neighborhood looked upon that dog as an unnatural

curio and used to follow them when Mr. Slompack led him out for a walk on a leech.

"IF Mr. Slompack had always kept him on a leech, though, all might have been well. Little did I think that the day when Mr. Slompack thought Toby might have a run by himself, as he had an appointment, was going to be the momentary day it proved.

"When Toby found he was free he jumped in the air with a 'woof' which made a horse across the street look as if it wanted to bolt. He gave a look at Mr. Slompack as much as to ask wasn't he coming, and off he boundered.

" 'He's a great dog,' says Mr. Slompack proudly. 'I feel that animal would do a great deal for me.'

"If Mr. Slompack had only known what that dog was going to do for him he would have turned in his grave, if he had been in it.

"Before we knew where we were or what was happening these flats seemed to be full of babies. The first was outside Mr. Slompack's door, when Mrs. Turner came rushing down, all agitated, to call me up. There was several women there all standing round, afraid of the dog, and there was a baby between his paws playing with them, quite happy. Toby's tail was banging against the door as if he was knocking to get in. But I was used to feeding him, and it's well known that a dog won't bite the Anne what feeds him. No sooner had I picked up that baby than Toby gives a great 'woof' and out he boundered again.

"Mrs. Wallsley, when the dog was gone, wanted me to let her hold the baby, which I was only too glad to do ; and we were all sitting together in the lounge at the top of the stairs, saying that that there instink is a thing that works in a wondrous way its blunders to perform, and that it was wonderful that that dog hadn't been out half an hour before it found a lost baby, when Toby brings the second baby in.

" 'Good heavens,' cries Mrs. Wassail, 'babies can't be lost at this rate. I wonder if they are really lost babies. I hope he doesn't bring back any more.'

"For Toby had no sooner seen me than he plumped the second baby in my lap, gave a 'woof' and out he went again.

" 'Won't Mr. Slompack be pleased,' says Mrs. Fidgett, sarcastic like.

"Mr. Slompack wasn't pleased; not when he knew. At first, when he saw us women with them two babies, he used some of that Hairy Percy's flage that he likes so much. 'What is it —a mothers' meeting?' he asks. But he was took aback when we all started to tell him about how Toby was bringing in babies as if the place was one of them screeches. And just to prove our words there was sounds like a baby crying ; and up the stairs bounders Toby with a third. He just

put this one in my lap and started to leap round Mr. Slompack, woofing like anything.

" 'Good heavens!' exclaimed Mr. Slompack. 'This is awful. Lie down! Good dog.'

"Mr. Slompack only said that about being a good dog to quieten Toby; but the dog must have taken it for praise and discouragement. Mr. Slompack made a grab at his collar, but missed, and, in spite of him calling out to it, the dog went rushing down them stairs like one of them caravans that crash down the mounting side. We heard him woof out in the street.

" 'This is terrible! ' cries Mr. Slompack. It was terrible, too, having babies brought to the establishment not in single flies but in battle lions, as the saying goes. Not that them women seemed to think it so terrible. They seemed quite pleased to have babies to nurse, especially that Mrs. Wallsley, though she had told me once that she and her husband had decided they couldn't afford any themselves and, anyway babies were a lot of bother.

" 'We must consider how to get these babies back to their mothers,' says Mr. Slompack, worried.

"There wasn't any occasion to think of that for long; it was a case of Mahomets going for the mountains, as the Bible says.

"IT frightened seven monks' groans out of me, as the saying is, when that mob of people came pouring up the stairs, following Toby. He had another baby in his mouth, but he was growling so that they were afraid to take it from him. Soon that crowd was everywhere on the stairs and right out in the street, so people told me later, going on as if they were going to pull the place down, and talking about kidnappers who trained dogs to steal babies. It was as if all Clapham was let loose. There was so much diffusion that you could hardly hear them babies howling, let alone what anyone said, except one man with a gruff voice who kept saying that a man ought to stoush 'im.

"I must say that not even Horatius who played bridge while the crusaders attacked Rome could have been more cool than Mr. Slompack ; he stood there like Ajax defiling the lightning; although he might not have been so good if Toby hadn't been beside him growling at them which came too near, which they didn't. They was all afraid of Toby, which who wouldn't be? But in spite of him some women burst out of the crowd and seized babies, hugging them. But they weren't satisfied with getting their babies back. They told Mr. Slompack off terribly, all speaking together.

"Confucius was worse, confound it, as the Bible says, when them firemen came forcing their way up the stairs, somebody, seeing the crowd, having rung

up the fire brigade. But by-and-bye the tumors die down, with the crowd satisfied to say 'Give it to 'im, missus! Good on you! 'E deserves it all.'

" 'Keeping a huge dog what snatches babies out of their prams when a woman's back is only turned for a moment!' says one of the women.

" 'The baby must have cried,' says poor Mr. Slompack, 'and the dog—'

" 'Can't a poor mite cry without being kidnapped by a great caverning animal?' asks another woman.

" 'A man oughter shoot the beast,' says the man with the gruff voice. It gave me a start, thinking there'd be shooting; but I could do nothing. If they had been tenants I could have given them notice ; but they weren't.

"I expect it was that pound each that Mr. Slompack gave the mothers that modified them, after he'd tried to explain about it being the dog's instink; but I dare say it was the money he gave the man with the gruff voice, thinking he was a father, which it turned out he wasn't, to buy his friends a drink that did most good.

" 'Come on, boys,' he says. 'He's a sport, anyway. It's not his fault; and he's going to keep the dog chained up.'

]"IT was surprising how empty the place seemed when that crowd had gone; and Mr. Slompack looked quite pleased, in spite of all it had cost him, tipping the firemen and all. Little did he know that his troubles was just beginning.

" 'Who does this baby belong to?' asks Mrs. Turner.

"There it was asleep in her arms and quite unconscientious of all the tumors. Mr. Slompack said probably its mother would turn up soon; but it was still there when he came back from chaining up Toby, which the poor brute looked disappointed at not getting the praise he must have thought he earned. And by that time Detective Cassidy and a policeman were there, too, to see what all the rumpus had been about.

" 'We'll have the baby sent to Scarba,' says Mr. Cassidy.

" 'I don't know. The mother may come here. I feel guilty in a way,' says Mr. Slompack, 'and perhaps—'

" 'Oh, it would be best to keep it here! I'll look after the little darling!' cried Mrs. Wallsley.

"Everybody thought that was a happy dissolution; so the police said the child could stay pro temper, which was something it certainly showed when it woke up. But no mother turned up in spite of a taxfully-worded notice in the paper.

"So the baby stayed. The tenants called it 'Mr. Slompack's baby,' which he didn't altogether like, no doubt thinking it was hardly respectable, him being a

bachelor. The poor man didn't know that there was much worse waiting for him in that corney cup-holder of Time of which the poet sings.

"There wasn't any trouble about looking after the baby, except that Mrs. Turner didn't see why Mrs. Wallsley should have a monotony of it, and even Mrs. Fidgett, besides Mrs. Wassail, wanted to have a share.

"Them women was all against it when Mr. Slompack said that something would have to be done about the child, and as it was his irresponsibility he thought he had better send it to Scarba. He said he thought it would be best to talk it over in his flat. Almost every woman in the place took that as a generous invitation.

"But I was downstairs, that being a night new tenants were to come, when a young woman came to me and asked if this was the place where the lost baby was. She seemed weighed down by weighty woe; but she was very well dressed.

" 'It's in Mr. Slompack's flat at this moment,' I says.

" 'Is that Mr. Tom Slompack?' she asks; and hardly waiting for me to say 'yes' and tell her which flat it was, up she rushes, me after her. She burst into the flat, which the door was open, like a bolt from the balloon and dives over to the baby to hug it and cry 'Oh, my precious little darling!' But she left it in Mrs. Wassail's arms— which was having it for a time. She rushes to Mr. Slompack and throws her arms round him.

" 'Oh, Tom! Oh, my dear, dear husband!' she cries, weeping. 'Fancy my having found you! Fancy that dear dog having brought our lovely little baby to its own father.'

"IF ever there was a bolt from a bombshell that was! And a pretty kettle of fish and chips it was, too. You should have seen the way all those women looked at Mr. Slompack!

"Mr. Slompack might have been as cool as that Horatius playing bridge before that mob downstairs ; but he wasn't that way now, trying to unwrap himself from that young woman, which she refused to be unwrapped, and telling her that she was historical and he'd never seen her before.

" 'Oh, Tom, Tom!' she cries, all piteous. 'Is your memory gone? Of course, I knew it must have gone, or you wouldn't have deserted me the morning after we were married. But you can't throw me off now we've met by a coracle.'

"You never saw such a scene! I couldn't make heads and tails oi it, what with that woman talking with tears in her voice, the more so when Mr. Slompack had broken away and got round the other side of the table, and kept saying that he wasn't married and didn't know her; and the women saying that

they knew all the time that there was something queer about Mr. Slompack. They seemed certain that she really was his wife.

" 'Oh, how can he say he never saw me before?' wails the woman. 'I have my marriage lines in my box which I can show. It says Thomas Slompack. We met in the train coming from Melbourne; and although it was all very sudden he made me believe he had fallen in love with me at first sigh. And so had I with him. I had had to leave my position in the country because of the way my employer behaved, without money; and I thought he pitied me. Directly the train arrived we got married. Then we went to a hotel. I trusted him and was happy; but he went out after breakfast, and I never saw him again. Not till now. And now he—'

" 'The callow brute! ' says Miss Perry; and she was not the only one who spoke as that Mrs. Slompack, as it seemed she was, broke down, weeping.

" 'Well might he say he felt guilty about that baby,' says Mrs. Fidgett.

" 'lt's preterposterous! ' cries Mr. Slompack. 'lf a Thomas Slompack married this woman, it wasn't me. She's a complete stranger."

"Mrs. Slompack gave a moan like a wounded heart, as the saying is, though, of course, a heart, being a mere orgy of the body, can't speak. 'Isn't it terrible?' she wails. 'He seemed such a kind man ; if he hadn't made me believe that he mved me, I wouldn't have married him. I always put it down, him losing his memory, to him having been intoxicated on the train.'

" 'Me intoxicated on the train!' yells Mr Slompack, looking as if he was going to burst.

" 'You've got your baby! I'll be glad if you'll all leave my flat,' he says. 'I've had enough of this. That woman must take her baby away.'

" 'But where am I to go?' cries Mrs Slompack. 'I've worked hard to keep my baby— our baby; but l was put out of my lodgings because I had no money. I was looking for new ones when my dear babe disappeared. I've been looking for it ever since ; and I've got no home and no money.'

" 'Oh, if you're without money, that's different. I wouldn't see any woman in want. Give her this,' Mr Slompack says, keeping the other side of the table still.

" 'You could stay in my flat to-night with your dear baby,' says Mrs. Turner. 'That inhuman monster may think better of it in the morning.'

"HOW Mr. Slompack got them all out of his flat I do not know; but I know he slammed the door very hard. Never in my born existence did I know sucb a hulloobulloo. The news about Mr. Slompack being really a married man was all over the flats like wildflowers. The women had always seemed annoyed at Mr.

Slompack being a bachelor, with the money he seemed to have which a wife would be able to spend; and I think they felt a triumph in having him married.

"But the things they said about the poor man! It was Miss Perry who called him a whitened steeplechase, and nearly all tbem women said that they bad known all along that there was something queer about him. They must have watched him as the cat watches the mice at play the way they remembered how he had been to Melbourne, and hadn't come back here stnd § bt when be returned, and had looked as if he had been drinking heavily.

"Some were for advising Mrs. Slompack to go for him for maintenance; they said she could get five or six pounds a week and wouldn't need to be worried wbb him. And others thought that Mr. Slompack had some good in him and would do the right thing.

" 'Especially as you have a dear little baby,' says Mr Wassail sedimentally. 'No man will turn against his own child— if he is a man.'

"It seemed as if the indignation meetings of women were going on amongst the flats all night long, and saying what a brute Mr. Slompack had shown himself. It must've been them that thought there might be a happy ending which prevailed, for I found Mrs Slompack with the baby in her arms and Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Wallsley with her tapping at Mr. Slompack's door in the morning.

" 'Baby wants to say good morning to its daddy,' says Mrs. Slompack in a cooing voice like one that wanted to let bygones be bygones.

" 'The pigheaded brute!' says Mr, Turner. 'We've been knocking for a quarter of an hour and he won't take any notice.'

"Which the reason why was plain that very moment, when Mr. Slompack came up the stairs from the street.

" 'You can all come in,' he says, and goes on speaking. 'I'm not married to this woman. That's Preterposterous. But she says she is without money, and she has a baby. I've been out to cash a cheque. Now I'm willing to give her twenty pounds if she will go away and find lodgings for herself and the child.'

" '*Your* child, Tom,' she says. 'Oh, you can't mean to cast me off like this.'

'If you've got any claim against me,' says Mr. Slompack, as cold as a bicycle, 'you can prove it in court. Meantime, here's the money; take it or leave it.'

" 'Brute,' says Mrs. Turner. 'Hard-hearted brute."

" 'I think perhaps, I'm too damned soft-hearted,' he says.

" 'Who will look after the baby for you?' says Mrs. Wallsey quickly.

" '*W*e will,' says Mrs Turner. 'There's no need for you to hurry to return, dear.'

"SHE didnt either. When Mr. Slompack came back at lunchtime sort of anxious to see that she had gone, the baby was still here. We were in the lounge with it; and Mr. Slompack had to stand what them women said about him changing his mind and doing the right thing. He was so worried that he couldn't retortoise anything.

" 'Here she comes!' he said suddenly.

"But it was Detective Cassidy aad two women. The young one pushed up in front of him.

"There wasn't any mistake about this young woman; and if that there Solomon who had to cut a baby in two to decide which was which had been present he wouldn't have had any doubt about who was a mother. She didn't take any notice of Mr. Slompack or any of us. With something like a yell she rushes forward sudden and grabs the baby from Mrs. Fidgett's arms, hugs it to her, then holds it off look at and then flops into a chair rocking it her arms like the broken doll of the song. All the time she was crying 'Oh, my baby! My little darling!'

"Detective Cassidy was standing there looking all soft-like, as even policemen can look, and pleased with himself as if he was entirely irresponsible for everything, including the curse of true love which was running t 0 ad f hat smoodge again. And he told us about it:

"Mrs Bradley was called away sudden to go to her mother who they thought was dying, and she asked her landlady to look after the baby, who was asleep in a pram on the verandah, while she was away— which, being a very motherly woman, she was ready do. When Mrs. Grabbit saw the pram empty she thought the mother must have found she couldn't leave her baby, and, being in a hurry, just returned and grabbed the child. It wasn't till Mrs Bradley came back back they both had the historics, nearly, discovering the baby was missing— missing for days. But we was able to fix them up at the station.

" 'But,' I says, 'what about the other mother? We was expecting her back any moment.'

" 'What!' exclaims Mr. Cassidy. 'What other mother? I never heard yet of an infant having two mothers.'

" 'Nuisance Nancy, I bet!' cries Mr. Cassidy when we told him; and the way he described her down to her peroxide hair and her eyes that looked as if they couldn't tell a lie, which I never believe them sort of eyes myself, was like two peas in a pod. 'She won't come back,' he says. 'So she put over the tale of a romance in a train, and a marriage at the end of it, did she? And then being deserted at the hotel, and thinking the husband had only lost his memory?'

" 'lt was something like that,' says Mr. Slompack, very uncomfortable.

" 'That's her lay,' says Mr. Cassidy. 'She actually worked that on a young man who was just going to go to the church to be married and done for; how we heard of it was because, after paying her twenty-five quid to get rid of her, the chap rang us up in case there was a scene at the church. He thought she genuinely believed that what she said was true, y'see. She seizes on anything that's going; makes a nuisance of herself until she's given money to get rid of her. That's why we call her Nuisance Nancy. I suppose you gave her some money, Mr. Slompack?'

" 'Well— er— I did,' says Mr. Slompack. 'But I don't think we need say anything about that.'

" 'There you are, y'see! ' says Mr. Cassidy, with a shrug. 'We could have a lot on Nuisance Nancy only people who've been had won't go on. We want to get her. Would you be prepared to lay a charge, Mr. Slompack?'

" 'No, I won't,' he says, defiant. And sometimes I thinks, afterwards, that he'd almost sooner have been really married to that Nuisance Nancy than have all the tenants know he had been the victimisation of a trick like that. Which all that should have cleared Mr. Slompack from the vile aspershums that had been cast upon him. But it didn't. Miss Perry, for instants, said he must have a guiltless conscientiousness to have parted with his money like he did. Perhaps he really did marry a young woman he met in a train under a name he used as an alibi, and then deserted her; which would account for him remaining a bachelor. Them women did hate that Mr. Slompack being a bachelor!

"The first thing Mr. Slompack did was to take Toby out to the Home for Dogs, where if he got out and started bringing back babies there wouldn't be any trouble like we had. And the first thing I did was to get Sandy, the odd-jobs man, to put up a notice that no dogs was allowed in the flats.

But it was Mr. Wassail that showed how everybody was disgusted with dogs.

" 'That damned Cancan! ' he says. 'We lose our money on it; and then when we're too upset here to think of it, it wins! At ten to one. Damn' dogs! I've given my Airedale to Detective Cassidy.'

"Which Detective Cassidy didn't know that that very morning it had bitten the postman," concluded Mrs. Parsley.

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28: The Infernal Triangle

Bulletin, 27 Oct 1937

"THE Bible says that a woman's crowning glory is her hair; so it stands to reason that she I shouldn't get it off," remarked Mrs. Parsley didactically. "But they do; and that is one of the reasons for the infernal triangle, which is one of them things I will not have in my house if I can help it. But the poor thing is always with us, as the Bible says."

For once I made no effort to check Mrs. Parsley's garrulity. I had some idea of what had stirred it this morning ; and I was curious as to the cause of the commotion of the previous night.

"If I had known that the Coopers, who was Number Fifteen, and the Blacks, who was Number Eight, had brought their triangles," went on Mrs. Parsley, "they would have only come into the place over my dead corpse. But how was I to know their aniseedings? lam no prophet to be able to read the mistries of the dead, forgotten past; and I had no more idea than a, baby duckling that Mrs. Cooper was Mrs. Black and Mrs. Black was Mrs. Cooper."

"By Jove! An interesting situation!" The ejaculation was forced from me. "I don't wonder there were ructions."

"Ructions," said Mrs. Parsley with a touch of acidity, "are what I will not allow in my establishment, not if I can help it. A good row now and again is what you cannot avoid between people who are respectably married; but ructions— no. Although there may have been some in this case.

THEY booked up for their flats within an hour of each other, and it was not until they had both been here some time that I noticed something funny when they both met in my flat, where Mrs. Black and Mrs. Cooper had come to ask about something. As I introduced them, Mrs. Cooper went all stiff as if she had been a frozen imidge.

" 'I hope,' she says, 'that you are getting along happily with my husband.'

"Talk about the last straw that shows the way the wind is blowing! You could have knocked me down with that. It didn't sound respectable to me at all.

" 'I don't know you, Grace ; and I don't want to know you,' said Mrs. Black, which it didn't sound to me like the gospel truth, seeing she used her Christian name.

" 'If you ladies are living with one another's husbands,' I says when I could get a chance to put my oar in the troubled waters, 'wouldn't it be more respectable not to talk about it?'

" 'How dare you say that!' cried Mrs. Cooper. 'Of course it is my own husband I am married to. But this woman stole my first.'

" 'Stole!' cried Mrs. Black. And they was off again like a packet of firebrands.

"It turned out that they were quite respectable, both having been divorced and married again to each other's husbands, as was very proper and right; but I felt it was embraces of riches, as they say, to have them both here with their infernal triangle and everything.

" 'I'm sure I don't know what is best to be done,' I says. 'You are both paid up to the end of the week: but I suppose that one of you ladies will be leaving.'

" 'I'm sure *I* won't,' snaps Mrs. Black. 'The place suits me, and I'm not going to leave simply because a woman who has married the worm I discarded chooses to come here.'

"It was a case of two minds that butt a single thought, two hearts that beat the band, with them. Each of them thought that the other had come to the place with mallets aforethought, as they say in the courts, because the other was there.

" 'That woman has come here,' says Mrs. Cooper— that was when Mrs. Black had gone to her own flat— 'to flaunt my 'usband before my eyes. But you needn't be afraid, Mrs. Parsley. There will be no disturbances. I will treat her merely as the dirt beneath my feet.'

"Which was precisely what Mrs. Black said, too, when I spoke to 'er alone. This 'dirt beneath my feet' and worm that was discarded were hard words, and it didn't seem to me very pleasant to have them being cast about the house. But it wasn't for me to turn away good tenants who paid their rents and were quite respectable, having divorce decrees to show it, so long as the only notice they took of one another was to take no notice of one another, which was what they told me they intended to do.

"AS a matter of fact, it seemed that their being in the same place was not going to be so bad as time went on. They even became almost friendly, as they ought to have been, seeing that they had all been married to one another. You wouldn't have noticed much difference in them to ordinary pairs except that each couple was so loving you would almost think they weren't really married. If it hadn't been for other people interfering in their little undomestic disagreements— people like that Mr. Hepburn, who was Number Sixteen, and that Mr. Ben Tomlin— the triangle might have been left in obeisance, which is the right place for such things.

"Of course, I knew that both the husbands wanted to leave. Not that I'm one of them peeping Toms who hear no good of theirselves; but, working about the place, it was impossible not to hear what went on in the flats. When

Mr. Black'd say that it was best to get away, Mrs. Black'd tell him that that was because he still had a soft spot in his heart for that dreadful creature and couldn't bear to see her the wife of another man; which, if she had known that, she would never have married him.

"That being the attitude of their wives, the men had to stay, though they were very uncomfortable about it. I rather liked that Mr. Cooper, who was big and jolly and a very quiet man, except that, when he got a few in, he thought he was a regular Robinson Crusoe, and used to linger on the stairs singing, as he came in, to let the other tenants admire his voice. Which Mrs. Cooper used to say that he was singing to stir memories in Mrs. Black's heart, and was quite nasty about it. But I hadn't much time for Black, who was a little pugressive man, and used to boast about being a publican in politics. He hoped, he would say, that the day would come when the people would rise and all kings and emperors would be admonished. I have no time for people who talk like that.

"Once as I was tidying the hall outside Number Eight I heard Mr. and Mrs. Black hard at it.

" 'He may be a worm,' says she, 'but I'm sure the pore feller doesn't deserve to be treated in the way that beauty that used to be yours treats him. Never thinks of his meals, pore feller— and him with a delicate stummick!'

" 'Damn 'is delicate stummick,' says Black nastily. 'Whatever Agnes gives 'im is too good for the swine.' "'How dare you talk like that! Remember,' says Mrs. Black, 'he was once my 'usband. I believe you still 'ave a soft spot in your heart for that worthless creature.'

" 'Well,' says Black, 'I don't see why you should be always going at her. Why not leave 'er alone? It would be much better if we moved and got away from them.'

" 'That shows 'ow spineless you are, Tom!' says Mrs. Black. 'You'd run away.'

"What Mrs. Black said to 'im, however, was nothing to what Mrs. Cooper said to Cooper, especially after the night 'e 'ad 'ad tea with the Blacks. Mrs. Black, seeing 'im roaming about the corridors like a lost ram on the Mountings, looking out for 'is wife to come 'ome, 'ad seen a good chance to crow it over 'im. Not that 'e wanted their tea, I expect, but they forced it on 'im.

" 'I'm sure you never missed a meal when you was my 'usband,' says Mrs. Black when they 'ad 'im fairly seated where they could let 'im 'ave it. 'I don't know how that creature 'as the face to go to the pickshers an' leave 'er 'usband at 'ome to starve.'

" 'Oh, she ain't too bad,' mumbles Cooper.

" 'I wouldn't let even a dog go without 'is meals,' said Mrs. Black to let 'im know jest where 'e stood. "Mrs. Cooper evened matters up by ironing a shirt

for Black. She 'appened to be talkin' to me when Black comes along to see if I could rub over a shirt for 'im, Mrs. B. 'aving gone back to bed after getting breakfast, and gone to sleep.

" 'I'll do it for you, Tom, with pleasure,' says Mrs. Cooper, grabbing at the shirt prompt-like. 'When you was my 'usband, Tom, you never wanted for a shirt ready to go out, decent-looking. And look, this wants mending! I wouldn't let anyone go about in a shirt like that!'

"Black couldn't very well grab the shirt back. 'E 'ad to let 'er do it, looking pretty miserable. 'E knew that Mrs. Black'd nearly tear the shirt off 'is back when she 'eard about it.

"SO they went on doing all the things for one another's husbands as unpleasantly as possible. That was where the triangle came in. The women 'ad their own way of fightin', but the men, when they started, was noisier. I 'ad to go up to Number Eight to stop the row.

" 'Whose wife are you' anyway?' I 'eard Black yelling. ' 'E's allus 'aving 'is meals 'ere! '

"There was more there than I expected; an' Black's lip was bleedin'. That wasn't Cooper's fault. It was that young chap Ben Tomlin, a stranger within the grates, so to speak, who had punched him for saying something nasty to Mrs. Black. A regular night errand, Mrs. Black said he was, talking afterwards to me.

"That was where the ructions, as you call them, began properly. Them triangles was getting in their dirty work on the crossroads, as the saying is. The trouble in Number Fifteen was all over when I got up there. Mr. Hepburn, who was in Number Sixteen, just next door, was coming out of the flat when I arrived.

" 'I want to tell you, Mrs. Parsley,' he says in a loud voice which I knew at once he wanted the people inside the flat to hear, 'that if that scoundrel starts the rough stuff again with that poor little woman I'll take him by the scruffle and throw him out of the window.'

"It appeared that Mrs. Cooper had offered to do up a suit for Black which Mrs. Black had accidental upset some soup over— at least, they said it was accidental; and Cooper had made a row about it. Then Mr. Hepburn had interfered when Cooper was trying to throw the suit out of the window, and Mrs. C. was threatening to crown him with the hot iron.

" 'I am not going to have my house turned into a Bethlehem, not for anyone,' I tells Mr. Cooper. 'One of you pairs will have to seek pastors new,' I says.

" 'I wish I could get my wife to go, Mrs. Parsley,' says Cooper. Poor feller, I was a good bit sorry for him, being such a quiet man really, except for his habit

of singing when he was drunk ; but seeing his wife doing up her former husband's pants was enough to make any man boil, as they say.

"But somehow, although one time and another I told both the Blacks and the Coopers to go, not once but often, they stayed on. And so did the disturbances, with that Ben Tomlin and Mr. Hepburn butting into them now to make Confucius worse confound it, as Shakspeare says. The way I used to have to run up to Number Eight or Number Fifteen to tell them they'd have to go, which they never did, was bad for my carpets. Them two men were seeing the best side of their former wives and the worst of their present ones.

"SOMETIMES there would be almost the peace that passes all understanding for nearly a week and then there would be a flare-up again, with all of them going hammer and tongues, as the saying goes. Even when there was peace anyone could see with half an eye what was coming. There were them two men sticking up for the wives that had been, and them new wives not seeming to care so much. I made a mistake when I let my first wife go, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Cooper to me one night. 'It's no good crying over the spilt milk of human kindness,' I says. 'Experience does it. Your present wife is your wife now, Mr. Cooper, and I'm sure she's a good woman at heart.'

"It was a pretty kettle of flesh-and-blood drama, as they call it. I could see how the wind was blowing nobody any good. So it didn't surprise me when that bust-up came last night."

"I heard it," I said curiously as Mrs. Parsley paused.

The first I knew of it was when I saw Mrs. Cooper leaving with a couple of suitcases.

" 'I'm going away, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'Life with my present husband is no longer supportable. I am going to join the only man I really ever loved and start a new life.'

"It took me aback, coming suddenly like a bolt from the beaut, as the saying is. After all, it seemed better to me that she should leave the life of dimension, and Black, too. Their rent was paid up in both cases, so there was no call for me to interfere; and my flats would be quieter without them. Still, I wondered how Mrs. Black would take the news, or if she had heard.

"When I went to Number Eight I got another shock. There was a letter addressed to me tied to the bell. It was from that Mrs. Black ; she had gone, too. She wanted me to tell 'er husband. The way she. put it was that she 'ad found out what man she really loved and had gone to him.

"Of course, I am very respectable myself, but it seemed to me that if those women had decided to go off and live in sin with their own former husbands it was quite right and proper, them having been married before, which covers a

multitude of sins. It was almost natural, it seemed to me. And as spring is coming on, and there won't be any difficulty in letting their flats, I wasn't so shocked as I might have been at them two women slipping from the paths of virtue."

But, Mrs. Parsley," I said, a little out of my depth, "if they were all gone, what was the cause of that disturbance last night?"

'Why, it was Mr. Black and Mr. Cooper," said Mrs. Parsley. "Talk about blunders never ceasing while there's life and hope, I was as surprised as you are when I found that the row I went up to see about was in Number Eight, for which I had put up the Flat Vacant' notice in the front. And it surprised me more when I found that it was Black and Cooper who were making the building shake like the walls of Jellicoe, tumbling one another over the chairs and tables.

" 'What have you done with my wife, you swine?' Cooper was saying as he rolled over Black, knocking over a couple of chairs and trying to punch him. " 'What have you done with mine, you devil?' says Black.

"There would have been murder done for sure, which is a terrible thing to think about happening in a respectable home when there are so many places better suited for it, if it hadn't been for the other tenants, who rushed in and helped me to tear them apart. But it was the ring on the telephone that come for me while they were still struggling that smoothed matters out.

It was from that Hepburn. He rang up to say that he had taken his belongings out that afternoon and wouldn't be back. 'Tell Cooper that Agnes sends her love,' he says with a laugh as he rings off.

"When I got back to Number Eight with this inflammation, it was to find that one of the tenants had told Black how he had seen Mrs. Black in a taxi laden with luggage with that Ben Tomlin.

"That was the end of the infernal triangle, which is the last I will have in my house as long as I live.

"What you heard last night," concluded Mrs. Parsley, "seeing that you came in late, was the party they held in Number Fifteen. With all the beer they had I don't wonder that Black and Cooper and some of the other tenants, too, are sick this morning. I could have interfered, but it's a poor heart that never rejuices; and you couldn't very well blame those two men for having a little celebration after losing their wives like that."

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29: The Immigration of Souls

Bulletin, 5 Oct 1938

"DIRECTLY he started to talk about the immigration of souls," said Mrs. Parsley, "I told I him I was full."

Interrupted in her work in my flat, Mrs. Parsley had returned after interviewing an apparently discursive prospective tenant.

He had remarked that he seemed to have seen her somewhere else, "or perhaps it was in some previous life," he had added ; and had then revealed his belief in transmigration.

"He seemed a nice, quiet gentleman until he said that," said Mrs. Parsley with that pensiveness she shows whenever she has sacrificed the prospect of a tenant on the alter of her principles. "But I have had quite enough trouble with immigrating souls, as it is. They're not the sort of things I like to have in my residential.

"Mr. Rattray, who was Number 9, was the first. He said, when he first came, that his dear wife must have a quiet flat where she wouldn't be interfered with by other people. My private opinion was that he wanted it away from others so that he could roar at her. For roar he did. And I daresay she deserved it, for she only smiled and did what she liked.

"BUT you could have knocked me flat with the last straw the day I first heard about them immigrating souls. Mr. Rattray was sitting in the lobby at the top of the stairs looking substracted, when I asked him if he'd been for a walk, thinking he was just resting. He seemed to wake up.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I have been far away over the burning desert sands. I've been by one of them oozes,' he says; and then, when I was wondering whether he'd got a touch of the sun, he asks me if I believed in immigration of souls.

" 'Most certainly I do, as long as they're British,' I says.

"He sorta smiled.

" 'You don't quite understand me,' he says, 'I mean the passing of souls from one existence to another. Have you never felt in your mind vague memories of a past life, when perhaps you kept another residential in the days of, say, King Charles?'

" 'I'm sure I haven't,' I retortoised. 'I never kept another residential in my life, and I'm sure that, even if I had, I've enough to think of about this one, with the queer things some of the tenants do.'

" 'Or perhaps in some previous state you were a queen?' he says.

"That gave me a shock. When tenants try to flatter you, it means they usually want to owe the rent, and, although Mr. Rattray was supposed, especially by his wife, to have plenty of money, you never can tell till the numbers go up, as the Bible says. So I told him flat that I never was a queen, and never expected to be one.

" 'You never can tell, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'There must be something in these memories that come to us. Since Mrs. Romaine came to this place I've had the firm conviction that I've met her elsewhere. And yet I certainly never met her in my present life. She was part of my life in some former existence. She has the same feeling.'

"It so took me aback that I told Mr. Slompack about it; but he had heard already. 'There may be something in that, Mrs. Parsley,' he laughed. 'A lot of people believe in it. That Mrs. Romaine is a weird-looking woman— a very fine-looking woman, too. You can understand her having such ideas. But it beats me why she should pick on little Rattray. He doesn't look like a man who's' inherited a hero soul from the past; I don't believe he knew he had a soul until Mrs. Romaine came here.'

"THE Romaines when they had come had asked me whether they could have cycle circles in their flat, and although I had told them that a flat was no place for such things, and certainly I would not permit it, knocking my furniture about, they took Number 3. I kept my ears open, but they didn't ever bring any cycles. As a matter of fact, they were very quiet, seeming a bit foreign to me, and they had a lot of people coming to see them. She was a tall, dark woman, very handsome, and she said that her husband lived on the aster plain, though how that could be with him in there in Number 3 I couldn't make out.

"Quite soon a lot of people in the flats seemed to know about Mrs. Romaine and Mr. Rattray having immigrating souls, and made a joke of it; but it wasn't any joke to me having immigrating souls meeting in my corridors and talking together in a way that some people who didn't know the facts might think was scarcely respectable. So one day when I heard them talking together— right outside my flat, if you please!— l asked them in.

" 'The Nile is rising,' I had heard her say. 'Does that mean nothing to you, Tom?'

" 'Why, of course, it does!' he said after a while. 'I can remember distinctly, now that you speak. The Nile, of course!'

"I told them as nicely as I could that I didn't want to protrude on my tenants' affairs, but there was a limit.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, we have felt before this that we owe you some explanation,' said Mrs. Romaine. 'Mr. Rattray and I are both convinced that we have met before.'

" 'It's very nice for old friends to meet—' I began.

" 'I mean in our previous lives,' interrupts Mrs. Romaine; the way she spoke you almost had to think that what she said wasn't as mad as it seemed. 'There can be no harm ; both of us are tied— Mr. Rattray to his wife and I to my husband. It always seems to have been like that; and, of course, we can't very well let them know. There can be no harm in our just meeting in the corridors ancf trying to compare our memories now and then, seeing that we have known one another at least two thousand years.'

" 'Two what?' I almost screeched. But she went on as calmly as Horatius playing bridge. 'Two thousand years ago. The first time we met I was a slave girl, and Mr. Rattray, who was a captain of soldiers, slew my master. We both remember that, don't we, Tom?'

" 'The story of our lives is as enduring as the laws of the Medium Persians,' says Mr. Rattray, a little proud of himself about having killed that man, even if it was two thousand years ago.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, you may find it hard to believe, but I distinctly remember my grief when my hero was tortured to death.'

"I noticed that Mr. Rattray didn't like that quite so well.

" 'Then we have livid memories of another parting. It was in Rome. I was extracted with grief as the man I loved was taken from my arms. He had to go to face the lions in the area.

" 'You can't wonder at us wanting to meet— just as we may meet— and piece together the vague memories that linger in the back of our minds. But we are tied— it has always been so with us. We can only hope that in some future existence, when we meet again, we will be free. I am just telling you these things so that you can understand.'

"It sounded like a bedlam let loose to me, and yet the way Mrs. Romaine spoke she seemed to be quite sane and yet believe every word she spoke. All sorts of things seemed to have happened to that poor Mr. Rattray ; and you'd think that he would have been glad enough to take his wife and get away without me giving him notice, before anything else happened. But, somehow, I didn't give notice to anybody. They didn't seem to be doing any harm, and although Mr. Romaine lived on the aster plain, where they can tell your future, he didn't seem to know anything about his wife having met a man she knew in her previous life— whole lot of previous lives, it appeared. As for Mrs. Rattray—

" 'Oh, I know all about my husband and that Mrs. Romaine. Let them have their immigration of souls ; I got this out of him after I'd caught them in the passage last week. It's a nice gown, don't you think, Mrs. Parsley?' She was a coldblooded little gold-digger, that one!

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ALTHOUGH it was a worry to have them two talking in the corridors about their past lives, which they didn't do so often now, I might have forgotten about it if that Mr. Romaine, who I only saw now and then, hadn't stopped one day and started talking about the immigration of souls.

" 'Anyone who doesn't believe in it is foolish,' he said. 'There is nothing else to explain the memories we have of things that happened long ago— dim they are, but they are there. And it's a strange thing, Mrs. Parsley, but I have a feeling that somewhere in this building there is a man whom I knew in a past existence, and who was an enemy of mine. I have been studying the people who live here, trying to make out who it would be. Someday I may recognise him.'

"If ever there was a bolt from the balloon that was! It gave me quite a shock.

" 'Supposing you recognised him, what would happen?' I asked, trying to be just a casualty, as the saying is.

"He smiled in a funny way. 'Well, I don't know. In our former lives I killed him. I can remember that. He might be my enemy again. I have a theory, Mrs. Parsley, that there are spirits that are always antagonistic. I might kill him again.'

"He spoke like the calm before the storm, as the saying goes ; it gave me quite a turn. It was so mysterious, too, him saying something that fitted in like that to what his wife and Mr. Rattray were saying. There seemed more than a chance of there being murder on my doorstep. I was all hot and bothered wanting to warn them two people.

"They come in together, which explains why I hadn't seen them talking in the corridors so often; but that made matters all the worse. Mr. Rattray went quite white.

" 'Well, he doesn't realise that you are the man yet,' says Mrs. Romaine. 'He just feels that a spirit he knew before is near him. He may never find out it is you.'

" 'I don't want to give him a chance,' says poor Mr. Rattray.

" 'I won't have murder done in my establishment,' I said. 'And I must say I don't like having immigrating souls about the place. One of you couples will have to leave. I don't care which.'

" 'If I suggested to my husband that we should go, he would want to know the reason,' said Mrs. Romaine. 'Apparently he doesn't suspecLyet; but he might guess.'

" 'I will try to get Mrs. Rattray to move,' says Mr. Rattray. 'Perhaps that would be the best.'

" 'Is it to end like this, after alol the lives we have lived in vain?' asked Mrs. Romaine. 'I didn't think it possible! Always in our other lives you stood beside me, Tom. I remember how bravely you went to the torture.'

" 'They don't have things like that now,' says Mr. Rattray, not looking very comfortable.

" 'If we were brave we would cut the Gordon knot that has kept us apart in life after life,' said Mrs. Romaine, dramatic like. 'You are tied to a wife who only thinks of your money, and I Why shouldn't we go away where my husband and your wife would never find us?'

" 'Oh, this is terrible!' I says. 'You can't do anything like that!'

" 'Is it so terrible?' asked Mrs. Romaine. 'Do you realise that we have waited for two thousand years? And at last'

"Well, that sounded like madness to me; but I felt I would be glad enough to get rid of them, one or all of them, whatever they did, what with the talk of murder and all that; and I left them alone in my flat to make up their minds what they were going to do.

"THE next few days I was on the horns of a tender-brook, feeling that something terrible was going to happen ; but, although it was quite a relief when Mr. Rattray came and paid me four weeks' rent and handed me a letter to give to his wife in the morning, which showed that he was going, I had to tell him he oughtn't to leave his wife like that.

" 'But I must,' he says. 'She'll be provided for; I've arranged that.'

"I saw him slipping some of his bags out the back way, and, although there was giving that note to his wife in the morning, that seemed to be the end of the trouble. From what I had seen of Mrs. Rattray she wouldn't worry much, I didn't think. And as I didn't see Mrs. Romaine, I judged she had gone, too.

"But that wasn't the end of Mr. Rattray ; it wasn't
the end otherwise, either; such an upsetting night as
it was you never saw!

"First there was Mr. Rattray ringing up on the 'phone several times to know if Mrs. Romaine was in her flat, which she wasn't. And then he came back himself, looking wild and talking wildly, too.

"He had arranged to meet Mrs. Romaine at the railway station, but she had not arrived, he said. He would have her arrested, he said, roaring as if I was his wife.

" 'You can't have a woman arrested for not meeting you,' I says.

" 'But she has my money, Mrs. Parsley— five hundred pounds I drew yesterday for expenses! She fooled me to let her take charge of it. She's got my money!'

"He seemed nearly mad about it.

" 'Who has your money?' And there was that Mrs. Romaine in the doorway! She was angry, too. 'Have you seen my husband, Mrs. Parsley? He was to have met me, but I've waited for hours. He's slipped me up.'

" 'So you arranged to meet me, but you were going to meet your husband! Making a fool of me!' roared Mr. Rattray as if it was his own flat he was in, not mine.

" 'If you want to know what's become of your money, he's got it,' she yelled back at him. 'I gave it to him. It was his scheme to fool you with all that immigration of souls business, and we were to go away together to-day. Mrs. Parsley, have you the key of my flat? I can't get in. I left my key on the mantelpiece. My husband may have left a note.'

"HE had. We all went up together; and when Mrs. Romaine opened the note that was lying on the table she went on so that I thought she would smash all the furniture in the room.

" 'He says he is tired of being mesmerised by me; he'll leave me to go on mesmerising that fool Rattray. As if I would be bothered with a man like that! I'll make him pay if I have to follow him half round the world. I will! I will!' Mrs. Romaine went on raving like that. Then she turned sharp and savage on Mr. Rattray. 'There's something in it for you, fool! It's your wife he's taken with him.'

"And that is just what had happened, which I say blunders will never cease. Anyway, I'm not taking any more risks with having immigrating souls in these flats," concluded Mrs. Parsley, resuming her dusting. "It's bad enough having people with pasts like a lot of them do have who come here. I don't want them going back two thousand years."

30: Limited Debility

Bulletin, 12 Jan 1938

"NOBODY," declared Mrs. Parsley, with some warmth, "is going to form me into a company; not if I know it. They can talk about trustees and deference shares and particles of dissociation till they are black and blue in the face; but in the future I'll stay as I am."

"Has someone been trying to float you into a company?" I asked.

Mrs. Parsley pounced on a word and abandoned her pretence of "tidying up."

"Float!" she exclaimed. "That was the very word he used. Mr. Parsnap, the resembling villain he is. A reg'lar sheep in wolf's clothing if ever there was one. And only this morning he came to me and asked me to take shares in a company. There's nerves for you! As bold as one of them trocaderos in a Spanish bullfight.

"Yet I thought Mr. Parsnap was rather a nice gentleman when first he came here. Flat 10 he was, and paid a deposit and said he'd fix up the rest at the end of the week, which seemed all very business-like to me, as he said he was a little short until he saw his bankers, which he had to do on Friday. Although he told me he was a Cosmopolitan— l always respect a man's religious convictions even if he is an Anarchist or some other foreign sex— never for a moment did I expect that he wasn't the gentleman he seemed to be. Which only shows that you can never judge a book by the cover till the numbers are up, as the Bible says.

"And there was that Mr. Parsnap, before the week was up, talking of forming me into a company and about drawing up perspectiveses and getting bores of directors. I don't know what came over me that I should have listened to all his talk of Parsley Mansions, Limited, and limited debility and all the rest of it. Only I expect that when he spoke about getting rid of the landlord that had something to do with it.

"MY dear Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I want to show you how to make money; you'll never do that by merely letting flats and paying away all the money you make to the landlord. It's a good business you've got. The first thing you've got to do is to get rid of the landlord.'

" 'You shock me, Mr. Parsnap,' I says, 'making a preposition like that in cold blood. Live and let live is my motter, and I'll be no party to murdering that poor old man, even if I don't like him.'

"He only laughed. 'I don't mean that, Mrs. Parsley. We'll buy the landlord out, or perhaps give him shares, build a new block of flats for you, and put you on a real salary, besides the money you get from shares.'

" 'But all that will take money, which is the root of all evil, especially if you don't have it,' I says.

" 'Oh, money! ' he says. 'We'll soon get the money! It's as easy as falling off a log!'

"The way he spoke you would think it was, too. I couldn't understand all he said, but he seemed to know what it meant. I asked Mr. Slompack what he thought of it.

" 'You want to be careful, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'Some of these people'd rob you of your birthmark.'

"That startled me, I can tell you, for I didn't even know that Mr. Slompack knew I had a birth- mark. Humsoever I put it down to some of that Hairy Percy's flage he was so fond of.

"I could have wished that Mr. Slompack was there when the troubles came in their battle-lions. He had had to go away on holidays; and I'm sure if it hadn't been for that Mr. Rogers who was Number 23 I don't know what would have happened. A nice, quiet, unassuming man he was. I expect he was a missionary of some kind because he went out late at night, and he told me that his job was a sinny cure. That explained why he could be at home so much.

"He looked prosperous, and I knew he was religious from the way he said 'God blast it' when he jambed his finger, instead of merely 'Blast it,' as some men do. He said his father had been wild, although late in life he joined the church; but it had been a lesson to him and he had determined always to walk in the paths of riotousness, which was very proper and as it should be.

"But Mr. Rogers only came in later when that Parsnap was going round seeing which of the tenants would buy shares. You see, in spite of what Mr. Slompack said, that Mr. Parsnap had a way with him.

" 'I've put you in for ten thousand one pound B class shares fully paid up,' he says. 'You're a rich woman, Mrs. Parsley! Of course, any money you may have you would like to invest in more shares you can put in. You get in on the ground floor.'

" 'Mr. Parsnap,' I says, 'I'm going to keep my flat on the first floor, jest above the stairs, whatever happens.'

"He laughed and says I could have a flat where I liked, which I should say I could, seeing it was my own place. He was full of talk like that which I didn't like. But it seemed all right about him making all that money for me, so I let that pass.

"IT was only when he didn't pay his rent that I began to be worried. I told him about it.

" 'Oh, but, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I think we can

let that pass. What I owe now I really owe to the company; and as the company will owe me money for my services as secretary we can digest that later. You get your ten thousand pounds, you know!'

"It seemed queer to me that a man who talked about all that money being as easy as falling off a log shouldn't pay his rent punctual; but if he was going to get all the money it didn't matter much. Especially as he knew a lot of bankers and solicitors, because he put their names in them draughts he wrote on the papers. He said I was to be one of the bores of directors, which- I didn't like him putting it like that, and a man he knew, Sir Richard Boosey, was to be another. It seemed to me rather fine to have a Sir there; but not when I saw him.

" 'I'm afraid you're disappointed in my friend Sir Richard, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Parsnap. 'He's not much to look at, and as a matter of fact he's rather hard up; but a name like that looks well on the bores of directors. Sir Richard will be useful to me, selling shares. He belongs to a good family. I was thinking of bringing Sir Richard to stay here.'

" 'As long as he pays his rent,' I says. 'He may be a knight, but if he doesn't pay his rent he's not respectable.'

" 'Oh, well, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'charge him rent if you like. I will guarantee it. We could let him have that little back room for ten shillings, couldn't we?'

" 'Mr. Parsnap,' I says, 'if one of them dukes came to me on his bended knees and asked me to let him have that room for ten shillings a week, I wouldn't do it; no, not even if he wore his garter and said "Honey swore" to me.'

"Anyway, Sir Richard, which wasn't anything to look at and was worse to drink, came to stay. He was one of the bones of distension between me and Mr. Parsnap, though I was getting sick of him going on as if he owned the place and not paying his rent; no, nor Sir Richard's either; and me not seeing nothing of all that money he talked about. But Sir Richard was really a Sir though he might not look it; his letters came addressed that way.

"But it beats the band when the landlord, that we was going to git rid of, comes and wants to know what it's all about. That Mr. Parsnap had been to him about coming in on the ground floor, as he put it, and being one of the bores of directors. Some of the lodgers were worried, too.

" 'What's this here, Mrs. Parsley?' asks Mr. Rogers. 'Are you passing us over as goodwill?'

" 'I'm being formed into a company of limited debility,' I says, not wanting to show me iggerance. 'We're going to build a new building with every model convenience.'

" 'So Mr. Parsnap has been telling me,' he says. 'It seems a good idea. I may take a parcel of shares.'

"I FOUND Mr. Parsnap with his plausible explanations and his this and that, doing just as he liked, as if he owned the house; and that limited debility still as far off as ever. But at last he reached the last straw that shows the way the wind is blowing.

" 'Mr. Parsnap,' I says, 'this cannot go on no further. How dare you send a nemo to my tenants telling them to pay their rent to you?'

" 'As secretary for the company, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, as naffable as never. 'The company has now taken over!'

" 'Only over my dead body, Mr. Parsnap,' I says hotly; and I daresay I says a lot of other things. 'This place is mine, and I'm not going to have anyone coming in like a thief with a knight to steal my rent from me. If he is a knight,' I says.

" 'Everything is quite in order, Mrs. Parsley,' he says.

" 'We'll see about that,' I says. 'I've been to all the tenants to tell them to take no notice of that nemo you had the cheek to send them. And now, Mr. Parsnap, with your Parsley Mansions and your general debility, you had better get out. You owe too much rent as it is— you and your precious knight.'

" 'You can't talk to me like that, Mrs. Parsley. You've got to understand your position,' he says. He wasn't naffable any more. 'You are just a servant of the company. You signed an agreement to sell your interest.'

"You could have knocked me down with that last feather to fly with. When that sheep in wolf's clothing had got me to sign the document, of course I didn't know that that was what I was doing.

" 'You're a cheat, Mr. Parsnap,' I says. 'There isn't any Parsley Mansions yet, which you told me you were going to build ; all you have done is to live rent free and borrowin' money for the registration fees'— which he had done, saying the company would return it. 'Company or no company, you're going to go,' I says.

" 'You'd better consult a lawyer, Mrs. Parsley. I'm ready to go with you,' he says, real nasty-like.

"It seemed rather fine to have a Sir there; but not when I saw him—"

"And I found out he was right. It seemed to me from what people told me that it was a reg'lar mess-up. Mr. Brand, who knew all about the law, having

been fined several times for s.p. betting, said that apparently I was ruined. I had parted with my goodwill, and I'd got myself into a colder sack, as he put it.

" 'I'm afraid you're in a mess, Mrs. Parsley,' Mr. Rogers told me. 'But I'm going to see what I can do for you. I've told your Mr. Parsnap that I might take some shares. Don't let him know I intend to help you.'

"Such a nice man Mr. Rogers was! he went to sleep in my big chair. My heart felt sick when I saw Mr. Rogers going through the papers that Mr. Parsnap showed him, and nodding and saying everything looked all right.

" 'There's one thing,' he says. 'Mrs. Parsley, I think, doesn't want this to go any further. She would sooner get out of it and go on as she was going before.'

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley is thoroughly satisfied,' began Mr. Parsnap.

" 'You speak for yourself, Mr. Parsnap,' I says. 'I've been robbed like a chicken in the nest.'

" 'Yes; that's what it appears to me,' says Mr. Rogers, quiet-like. 'Mrs. Parsley has been robbed. Come to a show-down, Parsnap! When you started this you probably only thought you could get an excuse for not paying your rent. You know very well you can't get this company going.'

"That Parsnap was taken by surprise. He blustered like the angry wind that shows its temper to the shorn lamb; but you could see Mr. Rogers had his measure.

" 'If Mrs. Parsley wants to drop this company,' says Parsnap, 'she's got to pay me for my loss of time. I hold the documents and I'll fight unless I get a square deal.'

" 'All right, Mrs. Parsley will pay you two pounds ten, and you hand over all the papers,' says Mr. Rogers.

"Mr. Parsnap laughed.

" 'What sort of a mug do you think I am, Rogers?' he says. 'I want fifty pounds.'

"It was a dingdong argyment, but Mr. Rogers got them to leave the room, though Sir Richard took a lot of waking up, while he asked me how much money I could pay. It seemed to me pretty hot that I should have to pay anything for my own place.

" 'It's unfortunate, Mrs. Parsley, but it's the only way to get rid of this Parsnap man. You've only got seventeen pounds odd here? Well, I'll see what I can do.'

"And very finely he acted, too; although that Parsnap wouldn't take less, he said, than twenty-five pounds after Mr. Rogers had begun by offering him ten pounds.

" 'I'll give you my cheque straight away for twenty pounds; Mrs. Parsley can settle with me later,' says Rogers. 'And you're lucky. You've been living on this for weeks.'

"I CAN tell you I was glad to get rid of them, even at that, and be shot of the limited debility. 'You keep that,' says Mr. Rogers, handing me what he called the quitter he had got that Parsnap to sign, and all the other papers he had made him pass over. 'Burn all these others. I'll take this money; and you can put the balance against my rent.'

"Mr. Rogers had to go away during the night; I found a note on his table when I went to clean his room to say he'd got an unexpected call. That Parsnap came in in a great state. It seemed that them banks, had been at it again, making the cheque dishonorable.

" 'No account! ' I says. 'As if twenty pounds is no account! It might be to them banks, but it's not to me, anyway.'

"He called Mr. Rogers a double-crosser, but I wasn't going to listen to him dispersing a real nice old gentleman like Mr. Rogers just because those cheating banks made his cheque dishonorable. After telling him that if he wasn't out of the place by midday and his precious knight with him I'd have their things thrown out, I slammed the door in his face.

"The nerve of that Parsnap! He says he still thinks I owe him twenty pounds; but he's willing to let sleeping dogs be bygones. And he has the nerve to come back here with his getting in on the ground floor to get me to take shares in another company he has.

"But I've had enough of that limited debility. If anyone forms me into a company again or gets me to have anything to do with one, it will be time for me to make my last will and detestament."

31: Artistic Expression

The Home: an Australian Quarterly, 1 Feb 1938

THE little shop in Dingy Street, with the muslin curtains always looking freshly washed and stiffened, intrigued my curiosity from the first glimpse. It was so futile and feminine.

The owner of the big house whose grounds were now a crowded suburb had named one of the streets after his yacht; and to call one of the off-shooting thoroughfares Dinghy Street was a humorous after-thought. Actually it proved a more convenient thoroughfare than the larger road; and time, circumstance and the public idea of the fitness of things made it Dingy Street.

In the midst of the dull street the little new shop stood out strangely with its quaint array of baby clothes, crude paintings on easels, cushions, and articles reminiscent of fashionable crazes of years before— in all the weird collection not enough to make a decent business if such goods were marketable; and amongst them a card indicating that a room was "To Let.”

Every time I passed I paused to have a look at the window and wonder about its proprietress. For, of course, it was a proprietress. The signs of that were all over it. I had met so many of the unbusinesslike women who, needing money, and full of the conviction that they are capable of "succeeding in business, had opened up establishments which were equally grotesque in their way, though seldom as mixed. Nearly always these little women, old or young, were bright, likeable creatures, maintaining a steady optimism that assured them they would succeed in time. But invariably the day arrived when the landlord was hard, and the poor little assets vanished.

I considered what sort of a woman it was who had chosen the little shop in Dingy Street for her venture, and the wonder increased as the grotesque but dainty window continued its existence, seemingly untroubled by landlords and other dangers common to all business. The wondering led me into all sorts of excursions into the lands of imagination; but it was always some little, faded woman, intensely eager to welcome any stray customer, but restraining her eagerness to avoid giving the Impression that a customer was a rarity, who rose in my vision. And then, one day I met the shopkeeper by the grace of a sporting-looking man, recognised as a bookmaker, with whom I had had racecourse dealings. I had decided to make the arrival of a baby in the house where I was staying an excuse for a purchase, and met the sporting-looking man on the doorstep.

"D’yer know the party who keeps this place?” he asked, pausing to speak and jerking his head towards the door.

"No,” I answered.

"A regular character," he said. "A weird old party. If you're coming in I'll introduce you."

The introduction put me into a state of amazement. Standing behind a counter, which was daintily decorated, like the window, was a man who by no stretch of the imagination could be designated dainty. He was fat and fairly tall, and a little fuzzy hair grew on top of his otherwise bald head. His shirt-sleeves were rolled over massive, if flabby, arms to the elbows, the shirt being by no means clean; his face was calmly benevolent, but it needed a shave. He wore no collar, and, although his waistcoat was fastened, his corpulence had sundered waistcoat from trousers, and in the gap showed the not-clean shirt and the tabs of untidy braces.

"This is Mr. Poison— we call him 'the artist of Dingy Street'," said the sporting man.

"Always pleased to meet a friend of yours, Mr. Keeling," said Poison, holding out his hand.

It was a big and stubby hand; but there was something beautiful in his voice, and it helped to subdue the laughter within me. There was nothing feminine about it, but a quality of remarkable gentleness; and that, incidentally, is not invariably a feminine quality.

"I've gotta pal wants some pitchers for the walls of his 'ouse, so you might as well send 'alf a dozen up —I'll pay the carrier and send you a cheque," said Keeling, offhandedly, as if he was in the habit of ordering pictures on the basis of groceries. 'Poison paints all these 'ere pitchers himself." His fingers circled round, indicating crude canvases on the walls.

" 'E's an all-round artist, Poison. Not only paints pitchers, but carves wood; and then 'e can do work with a needle— lace sort of things and all that— would surprise you! An' show 'im the statooette you made with wax, Polly."

Poison, flushed with pleasure, hastened to show us, and went from the little wax statuette, which had been made worse by colour crudely applied, to a host of other "artistic" achievements. Indeed, it seemed that there was nothing approaching artistic work Poison had not touched, from fine needlework in gaudy silks to clay modelling. As he showed us his samples, with all the excitement of a child pleased with its accomplishments, there was some pleasure in listening to his voice, and in observing his complete innocence of failure.

"Do you find it easy to sell these things about here?" I asked.

"Not easy," he admitted; "but you would be surprised at the love of art there really is in a neighbourhood like this."

His artlessness was amazing; and, when we had spent some time in inspecting the various items he produced for our delectation, I felt almost

ashamed to bring him down to such a mundane thing as the sale of a pair of bootees. But he had ecstasies for the design even of these. "There is art in everything," he said enthusiastically, as he wrapped them up.

Keeling delayed until I had completed my purchase, and left the shop with me.

"A wonderful man!" he said when we had gone some paces.

"Do you buy many of those pictures?" I asked, looking at him curiously.

"I ain't strong in art," he said, and his eye gave a half-wink; "but I 'ave some cobbers 'oo don't think much of 'is paintings, some'ow— say they would spoil the walls. So I don't 'ang them in my 'ouse; at least, not unless I know 'e's coming out. But I buy 'em." Then, after a pause: "You see, I reckon he's a fine sort of chap; and I owe something to him. There was a girl, a sort of relation. She 'ad married a crook jockey, and got in bad with 'er people over 'im; so bad that, when 'e left 'er, she was afraid to go home. And when she wrote no notice was took. So she was down here, crook and starvin', and, ordered to clear out of 'er room, was at the end of things when Poison 'ears of it; and along 'e goes to 'er, and, sayin' 'is room was vacant, tells 'er she might as well 'ave it until it's let, an' then takes down the sign so as he won't let it, and gets 'er food an' waits on 'er like a woman— better'n a lot of women. An' when I 'ears about 'er 'aving written and no notice being took, I goes along an' finds 'im standing to 'er like that— 'im as poor as a twelve-stone jockey!"

He paused again; there was genuine feeling in his voice when he resumed.

"I'd nursed that girl on my knee as a kiddy, and I felt sore when I see what she 'ad come down to. She died, poor girl; an' the kid's out at my place. I feel as if I owe a sorter debt to old Polly."

That was my first introduction to the good acts of Poison, but afterwards, as we became friendly, I found that they were many. It may have been because of them that he gained reputation as a man of artistic attainments.

I soon found that "the artist of Dingy Street' was a well-known identity, and the little business not so poor a thing as I had imagined. Many a local resident was satisfied that a gift which would show artistic taste could safely be procured at Poison's.

One of my meetings with him was in the street, and, as an hotel was near, I suggested a drink. It rather surprised me that he accepted; somehow it added an incongruity to his association with the quaint little shop.

But he was anxious to get "back to the kids"; and he wanted also to ask my opinion about a piece of music he had composed.

"Music, too?" I questioned amusedly.

"Yes; I go in for music, too," he returned; "and writing poetry besides. I think I'd sooner write a bit of poetry that got into print than do all the other things. But," he added sadly, "I haven't had any success yet."

As we went along he told me that he had let his room to a woman with a couple of little girls. He enthused over the woman, and said he intended to paint her— as the Madonna. Secretly, I wondered what sort of a daub he would make of it, and whether the lady would be flattered when she saw the work.

Apparently she was a casual person who, on the strength of occupying his room, had left the children in his charge. They were in his sitting-room at the back of the shop— which I saw now for the first time; two little girls, who rushed at him affectionately as he entered, and called him "Daddy."

"I like them to call me that," he said. "Their mother asks me sometimes to keep an eye to them, and I do. Look what Hilda here has been doing! Oh, it's only a picture that isn't much good, and I told her she could play with it— look how she's chalked out the out-lines! Only eleven, too! She'll be an artist, that girl. And Nora here's a musician. She's standing behind the piano all the time I am playing."

"Play something," said the smaller girl, who, of course, was Nora.

The room was littered with evidences of Poison's activities, and against one wall stood a ramshackle piano which appeared as if it had been several times secondhand before Poison got hold of it. He exhibited a sheet of music-paper dotted with single notes.

"This is it!" he cried. "I dotted it down here as I picked it out; and I think you'll say it's fine! You see, I don't know much about music, and I'll have to get someone to write in the bass; but that should be easy for a man who knows how, if he's given the air, don't you think? And this is a good air."

He sat at the piano and strummed, with one hand, an air that was certainly pleasing.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, turning with the triumph of one who knows he has earned appreciation. "Don't you think that will make a hit?"

"It sounds familiar," I said cautiously.

"Does it?" His face showed disappointment.

"It's very like the 'Blue Danube'," I suggested.

He pondered thoughtfully for a moment; and then disappointment blanked out the ingenuous delight of a creator.

"So it is," he asserted. "It is the 'Blue Danube.' But I might have made a name for myself with that if someone had not done it before me."

It was an amazing point of view, which I let pass, for a rustle in the doorway occurred, and Poison was speaking past me. "Home again!" he cried

cheerfully. "The children and I left some lunch for you, seeing you were so late and might like it."

"Oh, it's all right; I had lunch with Mr. Keeling," came the answer. The voice was hard, and there was no thanks in it. Turning, I saw a woman in whose face the hardness of the voice was repeated. It was a handsome face, certainly, or had been; but there were vicious lines upon it, indications of the character of the woman, which filled me with a sense of danger for Poison, whose eyes were adoringly upon her, and for the bright children who were his charges.

Poison walked with me to the shop door, when the woman, after a little conversation, had taken the children upstairs with her.

"My friend," he said. "I feel as if a great happiness had come into my life. It is only a couple of weeks that Mary— Mrs. Ogden— has been with me; but never before, since the days when I was a young man, have I had the same feeling for any woman. And I love her children, too. I have asked her if she will marry me, and I think she will."

Grown fond of the simple-hearted fellow, I went away bitterly sorry, judging the woman as I did; but an absence from Sydney prevented me from going to see him again. On my return I got my next news from Keeling, whom I happened to meet in town. And he was full of indignation.

"That damned woman!" he said. "You met her. She was a bad egg right through. She was kidding poor old Polly all the time she was going out with me. I ain't so short of cash that I mind spending a bit on a woman if I take a fancy to 'er; but to think she was kiddin' poor old Polly like that! She got on his soft side by tellin' about the 'ard life she'd 'ad with a crook 'usband. 'Er 'usband's dead, but that was the only true part of 'er yarn."

"But what's happened?" I demanded.

"Gone and bolted with a crook just out of gaol, leavin' the two kids on poor old Polly's 'ands. And never paid a berjn for 'er lodgings— not that Polly would mind that, poor coot! The other nearly broke 'is 'eart. It was the way she did it that was so cruel."

"That's better than if she had married Poison," I commented.

"Rather," he snorted. "I wouldn't have stood for that, knowing her as I did. I wouldn't have stood and seen 'er marry Polly."

"And the children?" I asked.

"Polly's going to look after them as if they was 'is," said Keeling. "That shows you 'ow wicked she is— leaving 'er kids like that. Why any decent person thinks about kids, even if they ain't their own. I tell you what; I made 'er a fair offer; to keep her and give 'er enough to look after the kids, too; but she goes off and marries this crook. Some women 'ave no moral sense."

There was a suggestion of something that was not distinctly virtuous about Keeling's complaint; and it gave a touch of humour to Keeling's virtuous indignation.

When I called upon Poison I found him with the children, who were happy enough and appeared to have no regrets for the mother who had deserted them; and Poison seemed interwoven in their happiness. He was determined in his intention to keep the children, but was concerned about their future.

"It is strange how sorrow helps you in art," he said. "I've achieved something that all my life I've been trying for; I've had a poem published in *The Mercury*. Yes, I've got one in! I'll show it to you; I'm sure you will like it. But, I say, do you think there is much in what they say about a taint being handed down from generation to generation, always likely to break out?"

I saw the anxiety that caused him to check on his way to secure the printed proof of his poetic triumph, and answered, comfortingly, with assurances of all that environment might do to counteract the effects of heredity. What was worrying him was obvious.

"Ah, that's it— environment," he said, thoughtfully and as if consoled. "There must be a good environment. It is the weeds spread their seeds, not the soil that produces them."

Afterwards I remembered that I had not been shown the verses which, normally, would have been produced with much eagerness; and the omission struck me as a pathetic indication of his preoccupation.

When I called a few weeks later the door of the shop was closed, and, knocking having produced no response, I was turning away, when he came up suddenly. He was in work-soiled clothes, his hands were grimy, and the marks of sweat were on his face.

"Glad to see you," he said, opening the door. "You see, I've taken on a job wharf-labouring, and it's only when there's nothing doing on the wharves that I can open the shop."

"And the children?" I asked.

"I've got them at a school a good school, where they'll get all the training that's right. The proper environment, you know, which this place doesn't have," he said. "That's the reason of the job. By myself I could grub along with the little shop, but there wasn't enough in it to pay school fees."

He said it cheerfully, but I saw the magnitude of the sacrifice. I shook hands; I had to go away on a long business trip, and I took leave of him as of one who was doing a good deed.

When I returned from an absence that was prolonged even beyond expectations many activities kept me from going near Dingy Street; and a long time passed before, impelled by a desire to see Poison and hear how his life

had gone, I went that way. But the shop that had so drawn my fancy had been refronted, and in a much-improved window a medley of sweets and fruit appealed to purchasers. The Italians in charge knew nothing of Poison; and, even when recalled at all, the "artist of Dingy Street" was only a vague memory. The nearest definite information I received was that "the old bloke went over a year ago."

Then I met Keeling unexpectedly. He had retired from the turf, and "the religious side of the family" having apparently claimed him, he told me, with some pride, that he was a church-warden in the suburb where he was now residing. He was genial; the main change religion had made in him apparently being to mend his speech, quieten his clothes, and give him a certain steadiness of demeanour. When I mentioned my desire to see Poison he whisked me into a car and drove me away.

The shop was labelled "Art Furnishings, Ltd.," and in its prosperous-looking window, with the name, "F. Poison, Manager" neatly done in gilt on one side, were many articles that might easily attract. I was soon shaking hands with a Poison strangely burnished, from his now snowy and more plentiful hair to his shoes. His well-cut clothes and gold pince-nez challenged comparison with his former array. And Poison, easily and without offence, laughed as he noticed my surprise.

"My daughter Hilda's responsible," he said. "She was only a girl when she got the idea of getting me out of the old shop; and she put it to Keeling here. Well, we got the money, and the thing pays— and here we are! A great girl that! Business-like as anything; and a manager— why, she managed to brush me up. Nora's going to be a great musician; but Hilda's an artist— look, there's some of her work!"

It surprised me. It was immature, of course; but the quality was good, and indicated strong talent. I took a look at several pictures, and came across one or two that were reminiscent of the old shop.

"There's just one or two of mine," he said hurriedly. "I still dabble in paint a bit; but we don't try to sell them. It's only for my own amusement now. I get my satisfaction in seeing Hilda's pictures. She's engaged to a young chap— an artist and a wholesome young fellow—and they intend to work together. You must come to their wedding. Why, as you came in I was writing a poem to have ready for it."

"You had a poem published, I remember," I reminded him. "I happened never to have seen it."

"Why, I've got it here!" he cried pleased. "I brought it in to help me with this one. But, after all, it's not only in painting pictures or writing poems that there's art. There's art in everything."

As he spoke he had been leading us towards his office at the end of the shop, where, with a rummage amongst some papers, he picked up a printed slip and handed it to me. Then he broke away at a merry-voiced babble in the shop, where there was an incursion of youth— two fine-looking girls, one with her hair still "down" (it was in the long style) and an equally good-looking youth— excellent types.

I laughed at the paper in my hand. The printed triumph of Poison was a verse published as a shocking example with a comment in the "Answers to Correspondents" column.

But as I looked up, laughing, and saw the girls around Poison, it seemed to me that the man who had wandered along so many blind alleys in his search for artistic expression had attained an artistic achievement in what those girls— whose fate might have been so harsh— had become.

32: At the Cross-Roads

The Bulletin, 22 Sep 1900
As by "H.M."

This is the first story by Harold Mercer ever to be published. He refers to it in his self-written "obituary", essentially an autobiographical sketch, which he wrote in the late 1930s, and which was published in The Bulletin *on 25 June 1952.*

"IT IS the last time," she resolved: "To-night will decide."

Simultaneously he resolved the same thing.

When a man and woman have been married for a good while, their love, grown no less sincere, drops from the serial height at which it first floated, to the prosaic, but safer, level of domesticity. To many too warm-blooded, too affectionate people, this fall to a more comfortable, less intense warmth is painful to a high degree, and, like most things painful, is misconstrued. This is the dangerous season in married-life. This is the period when both man and wife stand at the Cross-Roads, perplexed and passionate, for the blood is still hot and sensitive, the life still full of opportunities, hopes, and futures, seductive and bewildering.

Into the woman's ear the devil of dissatisfaction had cooed "You are not happy," and despite her verbal denial her heart told her she was not. There was such an unsatisfied longing at her heart, such a superabundant fountain of affection out of which she wanted to give to the man; but he had become cold.

As for the man, he had settled into a very comfortable, everyday mode of life. He had got used to the company and proprietorship of his wife, and a little careless; but still his affection was ardent, and sometimes he felt, with a dull, complaining ache at his heart that she was growing rather restrained towards him— regarding him less.

And then across the paths of both crept devils to tempt them. His was a not very handsome woman. He had met her several times without remarking any distinguishing characteristics, but eventually the fascination of her nature fell upon him.

He saw it first at an evening-at-home, in which he had found himself seated with her in a secluded recess— afterwards, he thought, by her manoeuvring. She was decidedly handsome, he thought— Night personified! Around her head tumbled her mazy mass of shining black hair, coiled loosely to her shoulders. Her eyes spoke voluptuous sweetness; there was about her a delicious, captivating odour; every twist of her shoulder was intended to fascinate—and succeeded. She turned with delightful coquetry to whisper something in his ear, and breathed the sweetest, most intoxicating of perfumes on to his face, and moved her lips and eyes tantalisingly before his

eyes, till he felt he could not refrain from drawing the enchanting face to him, and covering it with kisses. His senses were excited to the perception of unrealities. Earth seemed to fade, and he was alone with this creature in a passionate Heaven, as he heard her speaking into his ear well-considered flatteries, and bit-by-bit putting an irresistible temptation on him.

The wife's tempter was not so fascinating, but he was sympathetic. He had a capability of agreeing with everybody, of fitting himself into the moods anti opinions of others. In appearance he was an exaggerated shop-walker; yet, somehow, he was allowed to say things no other man dared say.

"You are not happy," he told the woman in an insinuating, sympathetic voice one day; using the very words her unseen devil had put to her. Then he spoke to her about future happiness, until she came to regard him as the angel of Hope itself— in a starched collar ; and began to rely on him for comfort. Her husband was such a good, dear man, but he was so rough and unsympathetic.

At the same time her husband was resolving that, while she was the sweetest woman in the world, she did not possess the passionate devotion of the Temptress.

And at last one evening the Temptress declared herself. She had often given hints before, but now she burst out with full confession.

"Where is your wife?" she inquired, suddenly.

"Oh, she is not here; I left her at the Bourkes' and came on, because " He didn't say why— perhaps he hadn't realised till that moment.

"The love of these milk-and-water creatures never endures a winter. Now, mine could turn winter to summer itself. Hers is already dying."

The man moved uneasily.

"Ernest," she whispered, putting her face before his, "do you not think that to have my love would be delicious— better than hers?"

He turned white at hearing her so address him.

It was very, very sweet, but it brought the apprehension of a catastrophe.

"It is true, Ernest, I love you. Love you with a burning, imperishable love! Think what it is— a never-dying, unquenchable, burning desire! You are not a statue of marble, or a block of ice, are you? Even so, I shall melt you to the heat of my passion."

He experienced a kind of shock ; not altogether unpleasant, but terrible ; and did not respond.

"Kiss me, Ernest! Cover my face with kisses, Ernest!"

"Don't! —don't!" he gasped. "For God's sake, don't! Think of what you are doing ! "

"I shall not!— I will not ! I only think of you, Ernest. You and I are alone in the world—our paradise. There is the whole earth for us to wander upon. My life, my heart, my fortune— they are all yours."

"My wife!" stammered the man.

"Think of my love — hot, hot, hot!— and compare it to her milk-and-water affection— already cooling. Feel the touch of my lips— there— and there— and the embrace of my arm, so— and make your choice!"

He could not resist her. Like a man overcome by some powerful drug, he experienced sensations of Heaven, but knew no reality. Still, when he left her, he gathered his reason against her, and championed against her fascination the claims of the sensitive little woman at home.

But her tempter had not been idle. He had been discoursing to her in a sympathetic tone on the injustices women receive from men, and the latter's unworthiness, while she listened, with growing wonder. Was Ernest, as he hinted other men were, false to her? No! no! But, then, why was he so cold? She shuddered, and looked to her companion for sympathy.

"Why should women be compelled, therefore, to be so true to husbands who are not true to them? A woman only does herself right who leaves an husband that has wronged her."

She approved the sentiment, not caring what it meant. She only heard his cooing, sympathetic tones.

Suddenly he burst out with a declaration of passion.

"Mary! Why do you stand it? Do you not see how cold he is?— how little he loves you? There is more love for you in my little finger than in his whole anatomy. Mary! Mary! It is not wrong. Consent to fly with me, away from him to where we shall be eternally happy, and I'll live for no happiness but yours."

"Mr. Watkins!" exclaimed Mary, really frightened and angry. Then she burst into tears. "Oh, I wish you hadn't! I wish you hadn't! You have only made me more unhappy. Why did you say this? I did like you so!"

"I do not want you to like me, Mary; I want you to love me— to love me! Why do you refuse? I love you hotly— passionately; he does not at all. There would be no harm if you fled with me."

Then suddenly he changed his tone. "Poor little girl! Poor little girl! " he cooed, and in another minute she had her face buried in his shoulder.

"Remember," he said when he left; "telegraph to me to meet you at the railway at 11 o'clock tomorrow night, if you can be ready in time— or to make another appointment."

"Unless I change my mind," murmured she, faintly.

"You will not do that." He smiled in bold assurance.

So it was that on the morrow husband and wife resolved that that should be the last of those uncertain days in which each knew not if the other cared. And yet neither dared make advances to tire other, for dread of a cold repulse. The day passed in agony; the night succeeded; and eventually the woman rose, as if tired.

"Good-night, Ernest," she said. "I am going to bed; I am tired."

"Why, what is the matter, Mary? Nothing wrong, I hope ? "

"Oh, nothing. I'm merely tired,"

"Good-night, then, dearest."

She lingered; the clock struck eight. Possibly she expected him to rise and kiss her; but he had resumed his paper, which he was ostentatiously reading, upside-down: possibly he expected her to cross the room and kiss him. But she left suddenly, with a sigh of impatience, and both were disappointed.

"I shall resist no longer," she resolved. "It is better not. He does not care."

Yet a sudden tenderness seized her and she could hardly refrain from turning back to him, to beg him to take her in his arms, and love her again; but the steel strength of an insulted pride and the terrible dread of a cold repulse rose between them.

At nine o'clock a servant entered to the man with a note.

"Missus said to give this if she wasn't back at nine, sir," she explained.

"What! —has she gone out?" demanded the man.

"Yes, sir, nearly an hour," said the servant with a slight elevation of the brows.

"Yes, yes, I know— l was forgetting. Go now," said the man, helplessly staring at the note in his hand, dreading its contents. When she had gone he tore it open, discovering a sheet of paper covered with an evidently pain fully-written scrawl, smudged and blotted with tears. The writer had apparently been suffering bitterly.

"I am leaving you, because I think you are tired of me. Do not think hardly of me; because I am leaving you only for that reason, and I can't bear it, and I will never forget you— never. Good-bye."

At first he was simply annoyed; then the full comprehension of his loss bore in on him with a sensation of vast, fathomless emptiness. He rushed to her room, saw that some of her dresses and her jewellery were gone, searched everywhere for some clue to tell him that she would soon return, but was only rewarded by a conviction that she had carried herself completely out of his life. He realised what a place she had filled in it, by its appearance of voidness when she was no longer there.

"Gone!" he muttered, helplessly.

"Gone! Whom with— where— how I wonder? To think that— l loved her so much, too...." He read her letter again— then crumpled it in his hand.

"Curse her! All damned hypocrisy, every word. She never loved me really. As Zillah says, her whole nature was milk and-water; too little capable of heat to remain warm for any time. She never really loved me— curse her!"

He cast the letter, torn to fragments, to the floor, and spurned them as he left the room; but, turning at the door, he looked back on her belongings with scornful eyes.

"Well, this has settled the matter for me, he decided; "I shall resist no longer."

After she had left him, Mary had composed two messages. The first, to Watkins, "Meet you as you wish," she sent the servant to the telegraph-office with, telling her at the same time to order a cab: but the second she had written after many unsatisfactory attempts, in agony of mind, with eyes blinded with tears, and the note was still unsatisfactory when the cab arrived. However, she sealed it, and giving it to the servant with instructions, crept sadly, unwillingly, out of the house, giving the cabman orders to drive about for a time, and reach the railway-station at eleven.

As she sat in the cab, thoughts bitter and sweet crept into her mind, and she wept. Occasionally she glanced out to see in the dim light some old remembered place, about which every pleasing recollection was wrapped up in him. She began to realise what she was leaving; the depth of her love for him, the misery that was greater now than ever; and she gave a little cry of helpless loneliness. How would this insignificant man, Watkins, compensate for the great loss she was bringing on herself? But then the other man did not care for her, and all her woes were overwhelmed by that great one.

"Why has he ceased to love me," she moaned in agony. Why had he ceased to care for her? He had once been her passionate slave, dwelling on her every whim; a thousand little self-denying considerations he had shown her, his great tenderness, the sweetness of his caresses, and the sense of security and comfort in his protection came to her mind with bitter regret. Was she going to cast all these things away for that comparative insipidity, Watkins? Might she not plead for.them again? Surely, her husband could not resist the pleading of one to whom he had once been glad to plead; surely he had some affection for her still. A wave of tenderness swept over her, as she pictured what Ernest might possibly feel at finding himself deserted. A sudden impulse to return seized her, and she called up to the cabby an order to drive back. She would return and ask Ernest to forgive her and beg him to love her again with his old love.

She sprang out, directly the cab reached the house, and leaving the cabman unpaid, let herself in with her own key with tremulous hands, and set out to find her husband. Delightful visions of a sweet reconciliation had occupied her mind during the return, but now in all the house there was no sign of him. Frightened now, she rang the bell to summon her servant. "Where's your master?" she demanded hoarsely.

"He went out, d'rectly after I'd given him your note, ma'am," replied the astonished maid, noticing her mistress's distraught looks with feelings both of commiseration and curiosity.

"What? Oh, yes; I know— you can go."

When alone she threw herself on a sofa in an agony of grief. "Oh, he does not care!— he does not care!" she sobbed. "Why did I come back?— why did I leave him ? I have lost him altogether!" Suddenly another idea struck her. He might now be frantically hunting for her, or, in a frenzy of distress at losing her, doing himself some harm.

She sprang to her feet in distraction, with the apprehension that instant action was necessary! Below, the cabman was "barneying" for his fare, which he thought, by the peculiar behaviour of the passenger, he had lost.

"Tell the cabman to wait," she called down, and returned again to write a note, which she managed to do after many unsuccessful attempts:

I want you to forgive me. I have come home again. Where are you? I am going out again to find you. If you return before I do, do not leave again. I shall return shortly.

She placed the note on his table, and entered the cab once more.

"Where to, madam?" enquired the cabby.

The question puzzled her. "Oh, anywhere." Then, becoming aware that that was a rather peculiar reply— "To some newspaper-office."

What had become of him? How should she find him? She had a dim idea of advertising, but could not think how. Hurried ideas entered her mind, but were crowded out by others before they could mature themselves. The rapidity of her fearful thoughts seemed to make the speed of the cab a crawling walk. "Drive faster!" she called to the cabby; and, as the man was already driving very fast, he began to think his pretty passenger a lunatic.

As they turned into a fashionable, well-lighted street she saw a sight that filled her with amazement. It was her husband; but with him was a dark, handsome woman, leaning on his arm, and bending towards him with a snake-like charmingness, and they were entering a cab together. The woman's look at him was one of passionate affection, and he seemed to be intoxicated by it. A sick sensation ran to the wife's heart, and again she surprised the cabman by reversing her order.

"Drive back again, please."

The man looked down at her.

"I say, mum, do you— er — do you know wot yer doing?"

She hardly heard him, and showed no surprise.

"Of course I do. Drive back again, please."

"But excuse me, mum; there's nothin' wrong, is there?"

"What business is it of yours?" she answered, angrily. "Drive me back at once. Is it your fare you want? Here's ten shillings as an advance. I want you to wait for me again, and you shall have more. Now drive back— quickly, please."

All this while they had been drawn-up within sight of the other cab, and she saw the endearments of the temptress, and what she thought a look of stupified happiness on his face. She did not know, of course, that all the time, enchanted as he undoubtedly was, there was a gnawing agony at his heart.

" Queer fare, this un, an' no mistake!" mused the cabby as he turned his cab.

When they arrived, she went upstairs and tore up the letter she had written. Then she looked at her watch, which stood at twenty minutes to eleven, and descended again.

"Railway-station," she said to the cabman, as she again entered the cab. "Another ten shillings if you get there by eleven!"

He earned the money.

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33: Vortical Language

Bulletin, 12 May 1938

"THEM sailors have a way of their own," said Mrs. Parsley. "Take Cap'n Felix Binge— the I Cap'n we always called him. Full of vortical language, as Mr. Slompack called it. 'Avast, ma'am!' he says— the very first words he spoke to me. 'I beg your pardon!' I says, quite flappergasted. But when he spoke of being an old seadog who had swallered the anchor and was looking for a mooring. I felt inclined to tell him that prevarication was the thief of time and it was no good him telling me he'd swallered any such thing as an anchor. But I showed him Number 14.

" 'Shiver me timbers, it's a snug little berth— all trim and shipshape,' he says. 'We'll sign up the ship's papers, Mrs. Parsley, and then we'll splice the maimed brace.'

"The maimed brace was some rum he had in a flask in his pocket, though he called it Nelson's blood; and it's stuff I can't abear. Still, he meant well, and I thought he'd be a very good tenant in spite of his vortical language and the way he used to sing 'A Life on the Ocean Wave.'

"He wore a peaked cap and a reefer coat with brass buttons, and everybody called him Cap'n in no time. Sometimes he'd walk down the street with his telescope under his arm to have a look at the ships from the Point.

"You wouldn't think that a man like that, who called himself a simple old seadog, would cause all the trouble he did and then prove himself a regular sheep in wolf's clothing, as the saying is.

"The tales the Cap'n used to tell! All about shipwrecks and sharks and them spittoons that are the worst gales you ever saw.

" 'When I was in the Barbadoes,' he would start. That story was about the mutineers who tried to strike the flag, though what harm they could possibly do with striking a flag I never could make out. He told tales of all over the world, when he could get anyone to listen to him.

"Mr. Nobuck Palmer was one of them that would. Such a perfect gentleman as you never saw, with his 'Beg yours' and his way of calling others his college friends to pretend he thought they had been as well eddicated as he was. He introduced the Cap'n to some of his friends.

" 'The Cap'n knows where the treasure is hidden. You've got a plan of it, haven't you, Cap'n?' I heard him say once as they was going upstairs with some friends.

" 'Ye-es,' says the Cap'n, not too willing. I s'pose he wanted to keep his'plans to hisself, not being free-handed like Mr. Palmer.

THE Cap'n became quite a well-known character. Even one of the papers got hold of him and published all about his adventures. Only the Cap'n wasn't too pleased about that, because people wrote to the papers about it. One of them said that there was no officer named Binge on the *Seaflower* when it was wrecked, and another said that the *Tincan* caught fire in 1896, not 1899. The Cap'n said it was the newspapers' fault for publishing the stories all wrong.

"Nobody thought any the worse of the Cap'n for that, and when Detective Burke came I never thought for a moment it could be the Cap'n he'd come about.

" 'You've got a Captain Felix Binge living here, Mrs. Parsley?' It was a bolt from the blue which falls on the just and the injustice alike, if you like!

" 'This is him coming up the stairs now,' I says.

"It was right in front of my door Detective Burke spoke to him. 'Ever been to London, Cap'n Binge?'

"'Er— yes,' says the Cap'n. 'Limehouse! I know Limehouse as well as I know Sydney.'

" 'Don't happen to know a woman who was Eva Brice, eh? She married a Captain Smith at Battersea in 1910. This is a question I've got to ask, Cap'n. You don't happen to have been Captain Smith, do you?'

"'Shiver me timbers!' exclaimed the Cap'n. 'What's all this about? My name's Binge.'

" 'You've got papers, I suppose? I'll have to ask you to let me see them.'

"The Cap'n went away with the detective looking so scared that I thought the fat was in the soup, as the saying is ; he came back all right, but he didn't seem like the same Cap'n until next day, when he started using his vortical language again and told me all about it.

"It seemed that that about a sailor having a wife in every port came into it. Dim his lights, said the Cap'n, they had a list at the police office as long as a yardarm of master marians who was being looked for on account of wives all over the world; and some of them might be living under an alibi, as they call it.

"The police was satisfied, but that was only the beginning. The next was a tall, thin woman, with a lad about fifteen an' a girl nearly as big, who came to my door.

" 'You've got a sailor staying here,' she said. 'Which is his flat?'

" 'There is Cap'n Binge in Number 14,' I says.

" 'Oh, 'e calls 'imself Binge, does 'e?' says the woman. 'Well, 'is name's Jelly, which is the name 'e married me under in Seattle. I follered 'im out ter Sydney ten years ago, when 'e didn't turn up, an' now I've found 'im!'

"She was cocksure about it in spite of all I could say, an' wanted me to let 'er into the Cap'n's flat, which I wouldn't; but when the Cap'n came up the stairs— which I tried to give him the office, knowing how some of these awful wedded wives go on, but he didn't notice— she didn't even know him.

" 'Here's another seafaring man,' she says. 'Perhaps he can tell me about my 'usband.'

" 'This is Cap'n Binge,' I says.

"She seemed quite annoyed with the Cap'n for not being the man she was after, an' she stayed there talkin' about 'er 'usband as if we was responsible for 'im.

" 'It's no use people tryin' to 'ide 'im; I'll find 'im yet,' she says, fierce-like. 'And then I'll let 'im know what I think of 'im.'

"The next woman had been married in San Francisco and had come to Sydney seven years ago. She used to come in and out, knockin' at the Cap'n's flat and going away; an' she told me that she was sure 'er 'usband still cared, though 'e was a bit forgetful. And when she found the Cap'n wasn't the man she was lookin' for she was so upset that the Cap'n 'ad to give 'er some money to get rid of 'er.

"Another woman, who came from Liverpool, wasn't so sure that the Cap'n wasn't the man.

" 'Of course a man changes a lot in twelve years,' she said. Which the Cap'n would have had to change a lot, she having told me her husband was six foot tall and had red hair. This one seemed to think that, anyway, Cap'n Binge'd do; an' she used to call regularly to see him, as if her having come after him thinking he was her husband made friends of them.

" 'Shiver my timbers,' said the Cap'n, 'when I ship a mate it'll be one of my own choosing.'

" 'Too right!' said Mr. Palmer, who was with him. 'Besides, I expect one of the Cap'n's own wives will turn up yet. You take it from me, Mrs. Parsley, the skipper's been a gay dog in his time.'

"The Cap'n, with a silly grin on his face, winked.

" 'I know if it was me,' I says, 'with all these women from all over the world chasing for husbands who was master marians, I'd settle down an' not let anyone know I'd been to sea.'

" 'It can't be done, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Palmer. 'The sea gets in the blood. A man like my old college friend here can't help being an old seadog alter spending his life on the rolling main. He's going to have a bit more of it, too. Don't forget that Sunday trip on the yacht, Cap'n.'

" 'don't think I'll go. When I swallered the anchor I made up me mind never to set foot on a deck again,' says the Cap'n.

" 'You've got to go. It's all arranged, an' a lot depends on it,' says Mr. Palmer.

"THERE was a Mr. Piffler in Number 19 who used to go sailing every Sunday. When the Cap'n came it seemed to be a case of birds of a feather being thicker than water; but the Cap'n, every time he was asked to go out on Sunday, said he had had enough of the sea. So I was surprised to hear about this trip.

" 'I thought another of the Cap'n's wives had arrived this morning, Mrs. Parsley,' said Mr. Slompack on Sunday. 'lt was only Mr. Palmer getting the Cap'n up to go on a harbor trip.'

"There was a great joke in the flats about the Cap'n being seasick on that yacht.

"'There's nothing in that,' says Mr. Palmer, sympathetic as he always was. 'I know a sea captain who's seasick at the start of every voyage he makes.

" 'I was seasick the first time I went to sea,' said the Cap'n. 'Of course I got over it. But, having been ashore so long, it was just like starting all over again.'

"The Cap'n didn't like the chaff. It was all the worse because that was the time Mr. Nobuck Palmer, who had always been a good friend to him, left. Two gentlemen came for him, and he told me he had to go with them to see about his estates, which was in Chancery.

"And there was more trouble in the stores, which there always is ; I guessed something was wrong when them detectives came again.

" 'Cap'n Binge .anywhere about, Mrs. Parsley?' asks Detective Burke. 'He's not in his flat.'

" 'He ought to be home soon; he's just gone out to have a look at the shipping,' I says.

" 'l'll wait below,' he says.

" 'I hope it's not another wife,' I says. 'They've all proved bogies so far.'

" 'No, it's no wife business,' he says.

"I didn't like the way he said it, and I was on the horns of a tenderhook, as they say, trying to warn the Cap'n. I left a note under his door and waited about to see him ; but I never saw the Cap'n again— leastways I did see Detective Burke talk to him in the street, and they walked off together.

"Mr. Piffler came in to see me, pretty late and excited-like.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he said, 'there's been some trouble about a plan of a treasure on an island Cap'n Binge made out. It appears that that Sunday the Cap'n and Palmer went out on that yacht a man named Bilger paid thirty pound for an interest. Later he got doubtful when Palmer disappeared, and went to the police.'

" 'Mr. Palmer,' I says, 'has gone to Brisbane to see about his estates in Chancery there. I do hope the Cap'n hasn't got Mr. Palmer into any trouble.'

" 'It was Palmer who got the money,' says Mr. Piffler.

"THE next day a man named Pogson came with a note from the Cap'n to collect his things.

" 'I hope nothing has happened to him,' I says, very upset.

" 'Oh, he's all right, the silly old fossil. Had a bit of trouble with the police; but that's over, I think.'

" 'I can't make out why he couldn't come himself, then,' I says.

"Mr. Pogson laughed.

" 'I think he's ashamed,' he says.

"That struck me as queer, but I went up with Mr. Pogson to help him put the things together.

" 'It looks a bit of a job,' he says. 'Not that I mind taking a little trouble for old Binge. We worked in the same store for thirty-five years.'

"I was flappergasted; a tenant could have walked out without paying his rent, I was so taken aback.

" 'In a store! ' I cried. 'Why, the Cap'n's been all over the world! '

" 'Captain me foot! ' says Mr. Pogson. 'Binge's never been outside Sydney in his life. He's always liked reading books about the sea, an' he got his tales from them, I s'pose.'

"Well, blunders will never cease! Just fancy the high-pocrisy of that man, using all that vortical language and drawing a bogie's chart of a treasure island, which I s'pose he had got from one of them books! An' getting a man like Mr. Palmer nearly into trouble over it!

"As I told Mr. Pogson, I wouldn't hear a word against Mr. Palmer. Cap'n Binge might not be a captain, but there was no doubt about Mr. Nobuck Palmer being a perfect gentleman."

34: Dirty Pieces of Silver

Bulletin, 11 Jan 1939

(Variant of "Sentimentalists" Bulletin, 28 March 1934, story 10 above)

"TWO minds with but a single thought, two hearts that beat the band sounds a very beautiful sediment," said Mrs. Parsley, pausing as she dusted the ornaments on my bookcase; "but it can be very awkward, especially when the single thought is over one flat, as it happened over Number 17. Such an upset I wouldn't have in my place again for all the tea in China, or anywhere else, for the matter of that."

Mrs. Parsley had spoken tentatively, turning back from dusting the ornaments on top of my bookshelf; she decided that she had seen in me sufficient encouragement for the exercise of her boasted "conversational debility," and definitely abandoned the shelves.

"Of course, I shouldn't have listened to that Mrs. Fulton. I told her I was full, but she seemed to be one of those people who are dull of misunderstanding.

" 'Oh, dear me, Mrs. Parsley!' she cries, just like that— surprised like. 'I take a glass or so myself now and again, but— Well, what you do is your own business, and I'm sure nobody would expect that you had had more than sufficient. It makes no difference with me about wanting to have one of your flats.'

"I was nearly shutting the door in her face, and afterwards I wished I had ; but I was so flappergasted, her taking me up like that, that I couldn't say anything. And so she went on telling me that she had lived in these flats when they was only a terrace of houses, before they was turned into a residential. It was when she was first married.

" 'You spent your honeymoon here?' I says. A feller-feeling makes us knocked all of a heap, as the saying is.

" 'I know you understand, dear Mrs. Parsley,' she says with a sort of sob in her voice, 'I have been all over the world, and I've had a great many of its enjoyments, but the greatest happiness of my life was when I was living in that little room.

" 'If you'd known my dear husband,' she goes on, 'you would know what it means to me. He was such a fine man, so tall and strong, but gentle with it all. Humorous, but as brave as a lion. My first husband— the first man I loved. A woman never forgets the first man she loves.'

"She went on talking about that husband as if he was a paradox of virtue, and saying she didn't care what she paid as long as she could live on a spot that had so many harrowed memories, until at last, thinking of some people who'd probably have to go before they broke all the furniture, that being one of their

bad habits when they had an argument, I said that I might be able to fix her up in a few days, full though I was.

"She looked from her dress as if she was a sort of Crisis, and there shouldn't be any worry about her rent if I put her in Number 20 where those people was.

" 'Oh, but it's Number 17 I want,' she says. 'I took the liberty of going upstairs. You see, I know where the old house used to be by the number on the shop below, and I measured out the position.'

"It knocked me all of a heap, Number 17 being such a small flat for a woman who looked as well-off as she did. And then there was that poor Harris who had lived there ever since I took the place. The way he got tight was all I had against him, though he didn't pay as much as he should. Still he was a Permanent, if ever there was one; and it was a matter of sediment with him, too, about having that flat.

" 'But I would be a Permanent, too, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'And I'm ready to pay twice what he's paying.'

" 'You wouldn't want to disturb the poor feller, I'm sure,' I says. 'You wasn't the only one to live here in the long ago, Mrs. Fulton. This gentleman is always talking of his little girl that lived here with him.'

" 'But men never feel as deeply as women on these matters,' sighs Mrs. Fulton, 'an' you have to consider your own interests, Mrs. Parsley.'

"THAT'S what Mr. Slompack said, too, when I told him about it. It upset me, the idea of upsetting Mr. Harris, with his talk of that dear little girl of his, especially when he got drunk, but actually because I wanted to put Mrs. Fulton off. I'd told her he was paying two shillings more than he was, and she was willing to pay twice that. It was tempting. Although it seemed to me like them dirty pieces of silver that Ananias took when the cock crowed thrice, Mr. Slompack said I ought not to be foolish. I could give Mr. Harris a better flat at the same rent and it shouldn't matter to him much. Mr. Slompack said he would speak to him himself; and when I said I didn't like it he said something about a sand fairy named Ann, which surprised me, never having thought Mr. Slompack believed in fairies.

"The way Mr. Harris took it when Mr. Slompack spoke to him, all about me having let him off very easily, and not being able to afford to stand in my own light, and how I was going to let him have the flat right over Number 17, which was much the same, surprised me. He looked a little pained, like a flower that's been nipped in the bud, but he agreed to move. So I told Mrs Fulton when she called that she could have Number 17, and she paid up just like the Crisis she looked. But you never know what's going to happen until the numbers are up,

as the Bible says. That Mr. Harris started drinking, and, though he made no objection when I got the odd-job man to shift his things directly the people had gone from the other flat, he must have been nursing some dissentment.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Wassail, speaking stiff like, 'I'm surprised to hear you are turning that poor little Harris out of his flat. I don't mind telling you,' she says. 'The poor feller is very hurt about it. And Wassail has taken the excuse to go drinking with him all day.' Which it didn't take much for that Mr. Wassail to find an excuse.

" 'I was sorry to have to disturb him,' I says, 'but he will be quite happy in the other flat.'

"'I wouldn't be too sure,' she says. 'He said he'd be damned if he would give up his old flat.'

"Sure enough, when I went up to see if Number 17 was ready I couldn't get in. The door was locked on the inside. Listening against the door, I could hear deep breathing, like someone in the arms of Morphia, as the saying is.

" 'Mr. Harris! Open the door at once! ' I says, rattling the handle. But all the answer I got was snores. By-and-bye I got Mr. Slompack to help me, and Mr. Snodgrass, and we made as much noise outside that flat as if we was a couple of married couples having an argument. But if there was anything but snores it was only Mr. Harris telling us to go away as he had made up his mind not to shift from where he was— in bed, it seemed.

"It was a pretty kettle of frying fish, with that Mrs. Fulton due to come that night.

" 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Harris!' shouts Mr. Slompack through the door. 'You're ungrateful.'

The door opened suddenly, and there was Mr. Harris in his pyjamas, standing like that fellow, A. Jackson, defiling the lightning, as they talk about.

"'Ungrateful, am I? You can all go to hell!' he says. 'This flat is mine, and here I'm going to stick. It's damnable cheek to want to turn me out after all the years I've been here. Wassail says it is.'

"I could see how he'd been worked up. But I kept thinking about them dirty pieces of silver, and I couldn't give Mr. Harris notice as I would have any other tenant who went on like that. Besides, giving him notice was no good, with that flat wanted that night.

" 'Oh, Mr. Harris, I thought you were a man whose word is hi,s bondage,' I says. 'And it's not like you to make a disturbance— such a quiet gentleman you've always been!'

"'I can't help it, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I feel I've got to be loyal to my little girl. Am I going to let that woman come in here, spilling her sloppy sediment? Why, it's sacrilege!'

" 'Mr. Harris, I've always done my best for you. If you'd only said you dejected so strongly you could have stayed on, money or no money; but now it's going to make all sorts of troubles which never come singly,' I says; and somehow I burst into tears. I was sorry for him and his royalty about his little girl, as well as the fix he had put us in.

" 'Never mind, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, quiet all of a sudden. 'l'll go back to my other flat.'

"Them tears had done it. They say a woman's tears can wash the hardest socks, though I've never tried that myself. Howsoever, he went upstairs as quiet as that little lamb with fleas as white as snow, which is a fairy tale, of course, and I tidied up the flat again, which he had unmade all the bed sleeping in it; and as this time I'd got the key, which he had kept, from him I thought the trouble was over.

"LITTLE did I expect that Mr. Harris'd go out drinking again and get talking with Wassail and them others who told him he'd given away too easily. When he came back, as Miss Perry said, shamefully intoxicated, though I called it drunk, it was the row he made trying to break into Number 17 was the first I knew of it. And when I demonstrated with him he wanted me to bring Mr. Slompack so that he could punch his head. But when Mr. Slompack took him by the arm he thought he was a policeman. With Mr. Snodgrass and some others, he got him up to his flat and locked him in, putting a padlock on the door.

"All upset I was, feeling sorry for the poor little man, who, even if he wasn't what you would call as sober as a jug, wanted to fight for that little girl of his, like one of the knights of old who used to bite the dust, according to the books. Though what good doing that was I don't know.

"But never did I expect for one moment that Mr. Harris should climb out of the window and drop down to the window of Number 17 like one of the acolytes in the circus. I didn't know anything about it, and when the noise stopped in the flat above I thought he had gone to sleep. So when Mrs. Fulton arrived 1 took her straight up to Number 17. She seemed all of a-tremble, like one of them aspic leafs.

" 'Now it's come to the point, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'I fee] almost afraid. I've been married three times, Mrs. Parsley, and for years I've had the idea of coming back here, where my happiest days were spent. My first husband and I were very poor, but oh, so happy!'

" 'Money ain't everything,' I says, and it made me think of them dirty pieces of silver which I'd sold poor Mr. Harris for.

" 'And now I'm frightened,' says that Mrs. Fulton.

" 'But you'll like being there when you've got over that,' I says.

" 'I almost feel,' says Mrs. Fulton as I began to open the door, 'as if I might come face to face with my dear husband again.'

"The first I knew about Mr. Harris having got back in the flat was after I heard Mrs. Fulton's shriek when she came rushing back from the bedroom, all pale-faced.

" 'There's a man in that room! In the bed!' she says.

"For a moment I thought she was seeing ghosts of her husband, but when I looked into the room there was Mr. Harris sitting up on the bed, looking stupid with just been wakened from sleep with the noise of that scream.

"Just as I was recovering myself to give him a piece of my mind, I saw him wake up with a funny startled look on his face and jump out of bed.

"'Maria, it's you!' he shouts.

"And 'My God, Jack!' she cries.

"IT made me gasp like a codfish out of the water that passes under the bridge. Here was him had been talking for years of his dear little girl, and she was really Mrs. Fulton, who was a regular mammal of a woman; and the big handsome man she had talked to me about was the one everybody spoke of as 'poor little Mr. Harris.' No wonder I felt like I was, standing on one of them giddy Ikes, as they say.

"Anyway, it seemed to me that everything had come all right. I could easily let Mr. Harris's flat for more rent than I'd been able to ask him for it under the circumstances; so it seemed like the unscrewable ways of improvidence again.

"So, thinks I, everybody's happy now, like the clerks in May, as the saying is; and the best thing is to get out and leave thepi alone. I'd been too dazed to notice what they had been saying, but, just as I was turning to go, I heard Harris say, 'To think we should meet after all these years! And in my room.'

" 'It's my room,' says Mrs. Fulton. 'I've paid for this flat.'

" 'It's my flat,' roars Harris. 'For the last six years—'

" 'Yes, I heard! Of all the hypocrisy!' cries that Mrs. Fulton. 'Pretending to be so fond of the memory of the woman you married— pretending she was dead. You worm! Do you remember how you treated the dear little girl, as you used to call me? Do you remember that— you beast?'

"He put on one of them laughs that married people use to make one another angry.

" 'My dear little girl!' he says, mocking like. 'Yes, I remember the misery you made of my life. It served that blackguard Brown right when you divorced me and married him!'

" 'Don't you dare speak like that about a better man than you never knew how to be! '

"And there was me, so flappergasted that I couldn't say nothing, standing there while they called each other everything under the sun. Then I tried to throw some oil on the tumbled Walters, as they say.

" 'Remember you have found one another again and should be loving and happy,' I says. 'You told me, Mrs. Fulton, what a fine man your husband was and how you loved him—'

"'Love him! That worm!' she cries. And Mr. Harris put in a 'Ha, ha, ha! ' like the bad men do in the plays, and says 'Dear little girl! That!'

"Mrs. Fulton grabbed what came nearest to her, and one of my vases went crack against the wall the other side of Mr. Harris's head. He slid off the bed, but looked up and repeated what he said, with the laugh. He dodged down as another of them vases went.

"It was terrible. I have had to deal with married couples, but these was an unmarried couple, and I couldn't stop them. All the tenants were gathered outside the door in the corridor, and I could see people in the windows across the street.

"It was not until I brought the police, which I didn't like doing, that they quietened down what had been a regular Bethlehem let loose.

"IT was old Sergeant Kelly, who has been in the district for twenty years, who come up.

" 'Now, one speak at a time,' he says when both of them started talking as madly as they had been going for the last half-hour. He got them quietened down by-and-bye, and heard all about it.

"'Well, you're a bright pair!' says he. 'Go on like that, and then behave like this when you meet. It's twenty-four years since you lived here, is it? Are you sure it was here you lived?'

" 'Yes. Number 324 ; it's on the shop down below. I remember the number well,' says Mrs. Fulton.

" 'I've still got old letters with "324" on them,' says Mr. Harris.

" 'Well, that's where you're both wrong,' says the sergeant. 'The numbers in this street were reallotted twenty years ago, and what was 324 in those days is now eleven places further down the street.'

"Well, did you ever hear the likes of that? Harris walked out, laughing one of them horse-laughs. And then that Mrs. Fulton, without unpacking, went away behaving as if she thought I'd got her here by forged pretences.

"I heard later she'd taken a place down at Number 302, which you know how dingy it is; and the way she talks about 'er first husband and what a fine her was makes her a laughing-stock.

whether it was the right room or not; he had made his own, and he could still dream there of the dear little girl he imagined his wife to be when he first married her.

" 'I'll be able to forget that fat old tart by-and-bye,' he says,

"It seemed to me that the course of true love, which they say runs to smoodge, shouldn't be treated like that; and I told him so.

" 'You shouldn't speak of her like that,' I tells him. 'You loved each other once. You're living close by, and you'll meet and—'

" 'I'm damned if we will,' he says. 'I'm going to go in and out by the back gate.' "

Mrs. Parsley purposefully grabbed her duster once more,

"So there you are," she concluded. "Two minds with but a single thought when it's about a flat is not what I want in my establishment."

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35: Human Nature Is Not Inflammable

Bulletin, 14 Dec 1938

"TO my way of thinking," said Mrs. Parsley, "all this talk about trial marriages is so much fiddlestrings. As far as I can make out, all marriages are trials ; sometimes they are worse trials to the people next door and their landladies than they are to the couples themselves. If people want to do things like that, why can't they do it respectably and pretend that they are really married?"

I knew then why the "flat-to-let" notice was standing outside the entrance to the residential, why Mrs. Parsley was rather late in arriving to do my room, and why I had just seen the young couple from No. 14 removing their luggage.

Mrs. Parsley, after a few moments of intensive activity, paused ; and it was obvious that she had drifted from thought of the No. 14's. There was a reminiscent gleam in her eye.

"I suppose a trial baby is in another catalogue," she said. "I must say I don't think it quite the right thing; it places the reputation of other people in Picardy, as the saying is, what with everybody wanting to know who was the baby's father."

"A trial baby!" I exclaimed. Mrs. Parsley's face showed the satisfaction of the fisherman when the fish has swallowed the bait. She definitely abandoned her work.

"Well, I suppose you could call Mrs. Hapsting's baby a trial baby. Everybody was sorry for Mrs. Hapsting over her troubles, poor soul, but when she told me that she had made up her mind to have a baby— that was the way she put it— it knocked me all of a heap.

" 'Why, Mrs. Hapsting,' I says, 'I thought you said you wouldn't marry again, not if it was the best man under the sun.'

" 'I don't intend to marry again, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, as cool as a concubine. 'I'm just going to have a baby, and it won't have any father.'

"That made my head whirl. 'You pore dear,' I says, 'going to see them daughters has upset you. You'd better have a lie-down.'

" 'I mean, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'that, me not bein' married to its father, he will have no claim over the child. I've had three children, and they've been taken away from me ; I intend to have a child that will be all my own.'

" 'Not in my residential you won't, Mrs. Hapsting!' I gasps. I was all flappergasted, as well I might be. Mrs. Hapsting was a most respectable woman, even if she had been divorced; but all this didn't sound at all respectable to me.

"And I wouldn't have permitted it either, only I didn't think Mrs. Hapsting could be serious, talking like that; and then, before I knew where I was, there was everybody saying that Mrs. Hapsting was a very courageous woman.

"IT'S a social aperient. She's doing a sensible thing,' says Mr. Slompack. 'I, for one, intend to give her my support. So will most people who know the circumstances.'

" 'Not Mr. Proppanger,' I says.

" 'No, Mr. Proppanger wouldn't,' says Mr. Slompack. 'But, personally, I think that Mrs. Hapsting is a game little woman for defying the convents.'

"When people spoke like that, all I could hope was that

Mr. Proppanger would succeed in turning Mrs. Hapsting from her fell purpose, as the Bible says. Mr. Slompack said that Mr. Proppanger was one of them frantics ; he had been a clergyman before he had given cheek to a bishop for being rich, but now he ran a mission of his own and paid his rent in thrippenny bits. Everybody had a great respect for Mr. Proppanger; and I thought, if anyone could get Mrs. Hapsting not to be foolish in defying the convents, he could.

" 'That poor Mrs. Hapsting,' he says to me once when I mentioned her. 'Human nature is not inflammable, Mrs. Parsley. I can see her point of view, but the laws of God have to be obeyed.'

"And I am sure if Mr. Slompack had seen the trouble that was coming he would have hoped Mr. Proppanger would have succeeded. But, there! He went on patting the foolish woman on the back, not knowing that he was rushing to destruction like them gadderin' swine in the Bible oracle.

"Mrs. Hapsting's husband had divorced her, and he got the right to give the custard to the children, which is the silly way them Courts have of putting it. I've no patience with them, using all them ambidextrous terms. Mrs. Hapsting always said she was innercent. It was because of her jealousy, which, as everybody knows, is a green-eyed lobster and causes a lot of trouble. She said that he knew she was innercent, and she only did it, whatever it was she did, to make him jealous, too.

"When he died he was still nasty. He had those three children kept at school, and he made a derangement that she was only to see them there once every three months. Every time she'd seen them she came home with a heart bowed down by weighted woe, as the poet says. It was a cruel shame, people said. Mrs. Hapsting could take the children herself, but if she did the trusty wouldn't pay her the money she was given every week, and the children wouldn't get any money either till they was twenty-one. Mr. Slompack said

there was something of the make-a-valley about the derangement. It certainly made a lot of trouble.

"That's why Mrs. Hapsting wanted to have a baby that was all her own, so that she could get over her sorrer about the others; and all the people— except Mr. Proppanger— kept on saying it was quite right that she should, until it seemed quite respectable.

"I'M sure I never really thought that Mrs. Hapsting would actually do such a thing, but she did. It must have been the way everybody said she was right. Even Major Porthack, whose chief interest was whisky, said by gad, she had pluck, that woman; and that Miss Perry seemed to think it would be a good idea if fathers was abolished. Mrs. Hapsting started to be proud instead of ashamed ; you know the old saying about fools rushing where angels fearful tread.

"She said she was going to devote her life to giving him special training to make him the puffect man; puffect in mind and puffect in body was how she put it. And, happy as a bird, she pays money down to get some land where she can build a house, so that the baby'll grow up with plenty of ground to play in.

"So there it was, happening under my eyes, and what could I do? There was all the women starting to make baby clothes already, and the men making jokes about who was the father; but nobody could say. Mrs. Hapsting said that nobody but herself would ever know who the father was.

"And then, if you please, that Mrs. Hapsting started crying again, moping about just as she used to do about them other children of hers.

" 'I thought you were so happy about defying the convents,' I says.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, I have been worrying whether I have done wrong,' she says. 'Oh, I wanted the baby; but it's a terrible thing, I sometimes think, for a pore helpless mite to come into the world without having a father. I made a mistake over that.'

" 'Well, Mrs. Hapsting,' I retortoised, 'you wanted it all to yourself, but if you've changed your mind you know who the father is. Tell him about it!'

" 'I couldn't do that. It would be breaking an agreement,' says Mrs. Hapsting.

"Before I knew where I was, all the women in the place and some from outside were taking the matter up. There was Mrs. Hapsting always crying now and women comforting her ; and there always seemed to be indigernation meetings of women on the landings.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Cummings, 'have you any idea— any idea at all— who is the man who is the father of Mrs. Hapsting's coming child?'

" 'She's the only one who knows,' I says.

" 'And she won't say,' says Mrs. Cummings; 'but the pore thing is moping. He ought to come forward like a man and do the right thing. I intend to find out who he is, an' I'll make him do what is right.'

"UP to that time nobody had worried very much about who the father was; but now it made all the men in the house uncomfortable. You see, they knew it might be thought to be any of them.

"There was a lot of people on the lounge at the top of the first stairs one afternoon, an' they was all talking about the same thing like two minds with not a single thought, as the Bible says.

" 'I must confess,' says Mr. Slompack, 'that I am disappointed in Mrs. Hapsting. I thought she was a woman of courage— her plan seemed a very good idea, in her circumstances. But she seems to have forsaken her own ideas.'

"'Why not?' asks Mrs. Cummings. 'lt is, after all, a sad thing for a child to be born into the world without anyone it can call father.'

" 'But supposing,' says Mr. Wassail, 'that it was a married man?'

"I make no complications about anybody— nor dispersions. All I say is that the man who is irresponsible should do the right thing."

" 'Ho! Now I wonder what put that into your head,' cries Mrs. Wassail, looking at him queer. 'Do you happen to know, by any chance, that it is a married man?'

"'My dear!' cries Mr. Wassail, looking very uncomfortable. She still glared at him.

" 'Oh, I'm sure Mrs. Hapsting isn't that type of woman,' says Mrs. Coleman. 'She's too respectable. By the bye, Mr. Slompack, I think you were one of the foremost in saying that Mrs. Hapsting was right in doing what she proposed?'

"Mr. Slompack looked suddenly angry. 'I hope, ma'am,' he says, 'that you are not making any complications about myself.'

" 'I make no complications about anybody— nor dispersions,' says Mrs. Coleman. 'All I say is that the man who is irresponsible should do the right thing.'

"Mr. Slompack got very annoyed ; he says he is not going to be consulted and there's such a thing as a liable law. After he had gone that Mrs. Cummings said that she felt convinced, in herself, that Mr. Slompack was irresponsible.

"IT wasn't only Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail. When young Mr. Craven gave notice that he had to go because he had been transfixed to an office in the country, Miss Perry was the first to say that it looked as if he was escaping; it showed the guilty conscientiousness that bleeds no accusers. Poor Mr. Craven, who was a most respectable young man, never having missed his rent

one single week, was so upset by the whispers that he left before his notice was up. That upset the plan of some of the women to hold him at the door as he was leaving and make him confess and marry Mrs. Hapsting.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Major Porthack to me one morning, 'I want it to be clearly understood that I will not have people in this establishment saying I am the father of any children. You might let the other tenants know that I intend to insult my solicitors and proceed with the utmost riggings of the law if I hear any more of it.'

"It was terrible. There was them women getting more and more determined that some man should do the right thing by Mrs. Hapsting and the pore innercent unborn babe, and not knowing who the man was because Mrs. Hapsting still wouldn't say, although she moped more and more. The way them women looked at the men and the hints they gave made it uncomfortable for all of them. I was afraid that some of my good tenants would be leaving to get away from it. Mr. Slompack even said he would go, only he was afraid that everybody would think the worst.

"And the men made some of the fuss, too. There was nearly a fight one night because young Mr. Crowe had been asked by some of the men why he didn't own up instead of letting everybody else be expected. That Mr. Crowe liked to boast about being a ladies' man ; from the hints he dropped you would think he had as many wives as a cat, as the saying goes, which is scandalous. He hadn't minded what people thought when they joked with him about him being the father of Mrs. Hapsting's child, until there was this trouble. Then the horse was on a different collar, as the saying is.

"It was Mr. Slompack who appealed to Mrs. Hapsting ; but some others were with him.

" 'You know, Mrs. Hapsting,' he said. 'I have always stood by you. But the position is becoming intollable. You might at least tell these women that no man in this place is irresponsible.'

"Mrs. Hapsting only burst into tears.

" 'Oh, I couldn't do that!' she sobbed. 'lt wouldn't be the truth.'

"That was a bolt from the bombshell if ever there was one. And the way some of those women looked at Mr. Slompack f

" 'Well, for heaven's sake,' cried Mr. Slompack, 'you can at least tell them that *I* had nothing to do

with it.'

"'Oh, I couldn't do that either!' she wailed.

"And you should have seen them women; they thought they had poor Mr. Slompack then. But Mrs. Hapsting went on to say that, if she started telling people that this and that man wasn't irresponsible, she would be really saying

who it was, just as if she had spoke his name. 'And I wouldn't like to lose the respect of my child's father by letting him think that I would break the sacred undertaking we give to one another,' she says.

"A lot of the women said that that was only Mr. Slompack's bluff, knowing that Mrs. Hapsting wouldn't betray him; and I had an idea myself that it might be him.

"BUT the silver lining is always darkest before the dawn; and suddenly Mrs. Hapsting was going to be married. The word flew through the place like wildflowers. It was Mr. Storrie, who was Number 17, and had been very sympathetic, who was the man to come to light at the thirteenth hour, so to speak. The men were all relieved ; but the women were disappointed, I think, because, Mr. Storrie only having come recent, he couldn't be the right man to do the right thing ; and they wanted to get him, especially if it was Mr. Slompack. I didn't think it was right myself, although I was glad that, as the marriage was going to take place at once, Mr. Storrie, with Mrs. Hapsting's money, wouldn't be owing me any more rent.

"Mr. Proppanger disapproved most of all. 'No, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'Matters are going from bad to worse, as they always do when a wrong step is taken. Human nature is not inflammable, but although it was all wrong there was something fine in Mrs. Hapsting's purport. Now she is throwing all that away I think I ought to stop it.'

"It gave me a sinking feeling in the heart to think that he might upset everything and start all the trouble going again. I felt as if I had been lifted from the horns of a tenterhook when they actually left the place to get married.

"A lot of the women went. When they came back the first one I saw was Mrs. Cummings. She was all excited.

" 'Mr. Proppanger married her,' she says, breathless like.

" 'Fancy him doin' that!' I says, relieved to hear it was over and done for. 'Why he was all against Mrs. Hapsting marrying Mr. Storrie ; and I thought the register was going to marry them.'

" 'He didn't marry her to Mr. Storrie; he took Mr. Storrie's place! Oh, I can tell you there was a sensation!'

"Of all the nine days' blunders that never cease! Before I could do anything but gape like a catfish out of water there was Mr. Proppanger and Mrs. Hapsting, standing together looking very loving. To me it was Confucius worse, confound it, as them Chinese say; I could hardly hear what he said except that he had married Mrs. Hapsting and after all it was him really was the father.

" 'Human nature is not inflammable,' he says. 'I admit my weakness. I have been tortured ever since I yielded to it. But I feel now that my celebrate ideas were small things to stand in the way of my duty.'

" 'I wanted the finest man I knew to be the father of my son,' says Mrs. Hapsting— Mrs. Proppanger that was now— looking up at him like one of them adorning angels.

"Well, there you are! The social aperient worked out for good by the unscrewable ways of improvidence; but there was a lot of trouble before that happened. Her money helped him a bit and he ceased to be such a frantic. He's become a clergyman again and them Proppangers are happy.

"But it wasn't a boy at all. It was a girl, and they call her Annie," concluded Mrs. Parsley, preparing to resume her dusting.

36: The Panthon Cat

Bulletin, 6 Sep 1939

"IT'S no wonder they call a cat a cat; I'm sure I there isn't another animal that is more like a woman than is a cat, besides the tomcat having nine wives, which is scandalous," said Mrs. Parsley astonishingly. "I have had tenants who have kept cats; and experience does it, as is a well-known classified saying."

My landlady paused to enable me to consider the truth of her outburst of unnatural history, but her "conversational delibility" was in good working order, and she went on almost immediately.

"Especially there was that black cat Tibby, that belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Cuddlehop, which was killed time and again and frightened the tenants by coming back as a ghost each time. Which it was enough to frighten anyone to see it sitting in the sun washing its face, as cats do, when you knew it was a thousand feathers deep, as the song says, lying drowned in several feet of water in Rushcutters' Bay.

"Never shall I forget the way the Major looked when he told me. Not by the widest sketch of the illumination could it be said that the Major had been sober for two days; and he looked as if he had the delirium with trimmings— he was shaking like an aspirin, with his eyes all bleary and unshaven.

" 'Look at that animal; it'll drive me mad, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I drowned that cat, Mrs. Parsley— three days ago! It's driving me out of my mind to see it there when I know it's dead!'

" 'But if it's alive it can't be dead,' I says.

"That only made him wilder; he said he was not a supercilious man who believed in ghosts, but that cat was a panthom if ever there was one, because, after he had half emptied a bottle of whisky to get over the shock of seeing it alive he had gone down to where he had drowned it. When he dragged the bag out of the water there was Tibby in it as dead as a ninepin. The Major had to have another half-bottle of whisky to recover from the shock of seeing that, and he started drinking properly, especially every time he saw that cat.

"There were cold bicycles running down my back when he told me, for only half an hour earlier I had nearly stroked that cat, which seemed more friendly than usual. But people didn't stroke Tibby much because it used to scratch and bite without the least invocation.

"Myself, I'm rather fond of cats, which is very friendly animals as a rule, and like to be petted an' make out they are very fond of you as long as you feed them and let them do just what they like; which is like them women cats. But this Tibby wasn't a friendly one; it was the most disagreeable cat you ever saw.

"Directly them Cuddlehops came I thought there seemed something sinecure about it, and about them, too, which seemed very lazy people, and just like that cat, especially about the eyes. I wouldn't have let them into the flats if I had known that that cat was to be like one of them panthoms that haunt old houses.

"But, there, if we could only read into the starry past as we can into the futurity a lot of my tenants would never have been my tenants only over my dead body.

"THAT cat,' says Mr. Cuddlehop the first day, 'is nineteen years old.'

" 'That's a little over two years for each of its nine wives,' says Mr. Slompack, though I didn't think it was the kind of cat that had nine wives.

" 'That's its age all the same,' says Mr. Cuddlehop. 'Why it was with its aboriginal owner four years before we took charge of it fifteen years ago. If I caught anyone trying to injure Tibby I'd murder him.'

"That was a shock to hear him say the cat had belonged to blacks, though they may have counted for it being so savage; and I didn't like to hear Mr. Cuddlehop talk about murder either. Which he must have guessed that that cat wouldn't be liked.

"It hadn't been in the flats two days before everybody hated it, and Mrs. Turner said it had a devil. It had gone for me, ferocious as a tiger, when I went to pat it. And Mr. Slompack and a lot of others had been scratched and bitten. Mr. Wassail said it was probably being so old that made it disagreeable until it scratched Mrs. Wassail, and she gave him such a time about if he was a man he'd go and talk to Mr. Cuddlehop. What a lot of people did have words with Mr. Cuddlehop, especially them that had birds. That Tibby wasn't too lazy about going after birds, which it seemed to believe a bird in the cage was worth two in the bush.

" 'It's nat'ral for a cat to go for birds,' says Mr. Cuddlehop, sour-like. 'If people are silly enough to keep birds. There ain't no profit in keeping birds.'

" 'There isn't any profit in keeping cats,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Oh, ain't they?' says Mr. Cuddlehop, cunninglike. Which Mrs. Turner says that perhaps they was a pair of witches and Tibby was their witch-cat, and that was how they got their money. 'There's evil spirits in this house since they came, anyway; and I should know because, being an invalid who might die any day, I'm physic,' she says.

"Seeing how nervy she was I was glad she didn't hear about Tibby being a dead cat alive about the place. If she thought that a dog howling showed she was going to die I don't know what she would have thought of that.

"It was Miss Perry who came downstairs screaming one night, saying that the cat had been scratching at her window, and she wasn't going to have dead

cats coming into her flat. She had got to know about the Major having killed it, so I got Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail to help me lead her into my flat, where she had histories.

" 'My good woman, you must be reasonable,' says Mr. Slompack. 'Tibby isn't a dead cat.'

" 'Oh, yes it is!' said Mr. Wassail. 'The thing's been giving me the creeps. To see that cat about the place when I knew it was killed— it's made me feel queer.'

" 'Yes,' I said, 'the Major drowned it in Rushcutters' Bay.'

"Mr. Wassail stared at me like a codfish out of the water that passes under the bridge.

" 'No, he didn't,' he said. I shot it. I saw a chance one night when it was in the yard. That was a week ago. It was dead all right, and I carried it away and put it in one of the garbage-boxes at the end of the lane. You might remember; the next day the Cuddlehops made all that fuss about Tibby being missing. When it came back again next day I was astoundered. It's made me feel creepy ever since.'

"Well, of all the blunders that never cease! I didn't know whether I was on my heads or my tails, as the saying is. And they all were the same way when I told them, only Miss Perry had histories worse, and I'm sure she would have fainted if Mr. Slompack hadn't got round the other side of the table so that he wouldn't have to catch her if she fell. Which it was enough to drive people extracted. According to what he said, Mr. Wassail had shot that cat three days before the Major had drowned it, and yet there was that animal in the yard, which we could hear it meowing below my window.

"Mr. Slompack said that about there being stranger things than our foolish Sophies dream about, and Miss Perry said she'd never be able to sleep in a house where there was a cat which was only a panthom of a cat. Which I said I wasn't going to have things like that in my flats, and I would give them Cuddlehops notice; but Mr. Slompack didn't see how I could do that, and anyway if the cat was a panthom it might stay behind. Which he said that he didn't believe in panthoms, and that the Major and Mr. Wassail must have been mistook.

"We might have been talking about it until now but that meowing in the yard suddenly ended in a cat scream; there was a dreadful bumping sound, and then there was quiet.

"Mr. Cuddlehop was coming down the stairs when we all went out to see what was the matter. 'Somebody's been trying to hurt Tibby,' he says. 'lf I find who it is I'll half-murder him.'

"Downstairs he went; we could hear him calling 'Tibby, Tibby' out in the yard, which he kept on doing for a long time while I was trying to get Miss Perry to go up to her flat and not be historical and the men were helping. And then up the stairs comes Mr. Bootle, who has Number 21.

" 'Well, that's the finish of Cuddleshop's cat,' he says. 'lt tripped me up on the stairs when I was coming in last night, and scratched me. I said I'd get the brute; and I got it in the yard with a batten.

" 'You killed it?' asked Mr. Slompack, which I thought he was going to censor him.

" 'Too right I did,' says Mr. Bootle. 'Old Cuddlehop will have to do a lot of calling. I took the body down the street and threw it down the drain.'

" 'You'd better not let Cuddlehop know ; he'll be ropable,' said Mr. Slompack.

"'I don't care if he knows,' says Mr. Bootle; 'but he won't know unless you people put the show away.'

"There was Mr. Cuddlehop wandering about the yard and the lane all night calling Tibby ; and next day, when there wasn't any cat about the place, it seemed that that was the last of it, even if it was a panthom.

"THE day after that, as I was working in my kitchen with the flat door open to hear anyone coming up the stairs, I felt something rub against my leg. It was like that pome says about the schooner *Haspirate*: she shuddered and paws like a frightened steed, then leaped a table's length—only it was up in the air I leaped. For it was that Tibby that had rubbed against my leg! And it wasn't only that I knew that cat had been shot and drowned and bashed on the head, but it was uncandy, as they call it, for Tibby to be so friendly.

"I was that terrified that I was up at the Cuddlehops' flat hammering at their door and telling them to take their cat and get out before I knew where I was.

" 'Why should your nerves be in this state of k.os. because our cat came into your flat, Mrs. Parsley?' asked Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'I hope you're not irresponsible for poor Tibby having disappeared once or twice.'

" 'Me?' I cries, flappergasted; of course I didn't want to tell them about me knowing that Tibby had been killed. And because of what Mr. Cuddlehop said about murdering anyone who hurt Tibby, I didn't want to let on about the Major and Mr. Wassail and Mr. Bootle.

" 'I don't like cats that are a boney distension in the place,' I says, 'and there's something uncandy about Tibby.'

" 'Well, Mrs. Parsley, we like our flat here,' says Mr. Cuddlehop, 'and we intend to stay. If we go we'll want to know who tried to hurt Tibby first. Not

that, anybody could hurt that cat. Even if they killed it, Tibby would still come back.'

"You talk about them witches that there Shakspeare wrote about that were for ever blowing bubbles, bubbles, toil and troubles! I felt as if I was standing alongside their scald-can, in that flat with them people, especially when the cat came in meowing just as if it was a friendly animal; and glad was to get out, all shaking as I was. And who should I meet on the stairs but that Mr. Bootle, who looked as if he'd seen a ghost.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I'm sober, ain't I?'

" 'For all I know,' I says, sharp.

" 'I haven't had a drink,' he says, 'but I could have sworn I saw that cat Tibby running up the stairs just now ; and yet I know that Tibby crossed the Sticks. Which I took him to mean the backyard fence.

" 'Look! There it is! 'he cries, grabbing my arm, which upset me more than I was already, and pointing up the stairs. 'I must be suffering from depressions. I think I will go and have a drink.'

"From the noise he made when he came home that night, he certaintly did.

"IT was terrible having a panthom in the house, especially when I was scared to tell the Cuddlehops that I knew the cat was dead. By this time everybody had heard that that cat had been killed, though not many knew how often; and though everybody was a bit ashamed of believing there could be such a thing as a panthom cat everybody was uncomfortable.

"That cat seemed to have a devil in it, too; now that it knew that people knew it was dead, it pretended to be friendly, and tried to come up to people to be petted, or scratched at flat windows to be let in. When some women gave a scream you knew it was that, or if there was a hurry of footsteps and the slam of a door it was someone getting away from that Tibby, which was following them.

"As Mr. Slompack said, there was an estate of tendon in the whole place; that's what made it give me quite a shock when some visitors came and asked about them Cuddlehops and if they owned a cat, especially when the elderly gentleman said he was an executioner, which he didn't look like. In fact, he looked a very mild old gentleman. But the young man who was with him seemed angry.

" 'There, you see, there is a cat, and it's name is Tibby," said the old gentleman.

"'But nineteen years old! It's preprosperous!' says the young man.

" 'This isn't idol's curios, Mrs. Parsley,' says the old gentleman, which very polite he was. 'I am the trusty executioner of a estate in which the Cuddlehops

are disinterested— and so is this young man, Mr. Hardy. We came to see the Cuddlehops, but as they didn't seem to be in their flat Ah, here they are!"

"Them Cuddlehops were coming up the stairs puffing like them gramorpoises. They was very polite to the old gentleman, which it seems his name was Mr. Deedswell, although the way they looked at young Mr. Hardy was like them daggers withdrawn, as they say.

"'Why, come to the flat, Mr. Deedswell,' says Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'You know we're always glad to see you! And I suppose young Mr. Hardy will want to come, too.'

"'Yes, I'll come,' he says, and gives a laugh. 'Just because I know I'm not wanted.'

"But just as he was following them there comes that young Miss Taylor that shared an upstairs flat with a friend, coming down the stairs. They both stared at one another, flappergasted.

"'Edna!' he cries. Then he dashes up a few stairs to meet her. Not being a peeping Tom that hears no good of themselves, I don't know what they said; but when I came out of my flat again there she was sitting on the lounge at the top of the stairs.

" 'You know that young gentleman?' I says.

" 'Yes,' she says, with that telltale blush, as them books say, which tells the way the last straw is blowing. 'I've known Mr. Hardy a long time, in fact Well, Mrs. Parsley, I thought he was too wild, so I moved from where I was staying. He didn't know I was here ; and I was surprised to see him. I'm waiting for him.'

" 'Not that I expect it will make any difference,' she adds, 'although he says he will stop being wild and settle down if I'm— if I'm friends with him again. He says he's trying to get some money which will help him make a fresh start.'

"My heart was all aflutter to think that there was roomance, which I could see it was, on my very stairs. That was something, I says to myself, to take my mind off panthom cats. But it seemed it wasn't, because the first thing I hears them talking about when I passed, casual-like, was cats.

"THAT was after Mr. Deedswell and Mr. Hardy had come away from the Cuddlehops' flat, Mr. Hardy talking as angrily as the horns of the bull in the pome ; but Mr. Deedswell was shaking his head.

" 'You're a preduseed party, Ron,' he says. 'I just take the facts as I find them.'

" 'But' Mr. Hardy was beginning to say something when "he saw Miss Taylor sitting on the couch. He told Mr. Deedswell that he would see him in the office, and went over to her.

" 'All you've got to do, Edna,' is what I heard, which it was after they'd been talking a long time, 'is to get the cat into your flat. Then you can put it into a basket and bring it down to me. Oh,' he says, when she says something, speaking very low, 'the cat won't be hurt. I'll send it to my cousin's little daughter up at Tamworth.'

" 'Oh, it's stealing, Ron!' she says.

" 'They're cheating, Edna,' he says. 'lt's for you and me. I want you, darling ; and that wasting my money as I did is a back number. When I get a start again'

"I couldn't take so long passing up the stairs that I could hear any more; but having heard so much I had an idea what was happening when I saw Miss Taylor go down the stairs in the morning with a dress-basket, and I thought I heard a 'meow' come from it. A little later there was that Mr. Cuddlehop going all over the place asking people if they had seen the cat and calling 'Tibby, Tibby.' Very upset and angry he seemed. But for my part I was glad if Miss Taylor had got the thing away, which it seemed to me if it wasn't killed again it couldn't have a ghost.

"The whole place seemed relieved at that panthom cat being gone ; the tenants grinned when they heard Mrs. Cuddlehop and, soon, Mr. Cuddlehop, too, going about calling Tibby; and the Major nearly kept sober.

"And then there was that Tibby back again!

"Which it didn't seem possible to me after it had been killed three times and then sent to Tamworth. But there it was, giving me the creeps again.

"That Mr. Deedswell had returned, and Mr. Hardy, looking like that corn-curing hero they wrote the song about, with him, which it was him that called out when they met Mr. Cuddlehop on the stairs, 'Where's that cat of yours now?' Which it seemed plain he knew it was over the hills and fade away, as the saying goes, at Tamworth.

" 'Mr. Hardy insisted that I should come, Mr. Cuddlehop,' says Mr. Deedswell, almost apologetic.

" 'Oh, did he?' sneers Mr. Cuddlehop. 'lt's about the cat, is it? Well, what about that ?'

"There before my horridified eyes was that cat coming along the corridor; and when Mrs. Cuddlehop calls 'Tibby!' it comes at a run. For a moment I was putrified to the spot; but as it came nearer it was too much for me. I just gave a yell and rushed away to shut myself in my flat.

"When I could recollect my censers, as they say, I heard-them men arguing there. 'Oh, well, you win— for the time being,' I heard Mr. Hardy say at last; and then there he was tapping at my door asking me where Miss Taylor was. Which I told him she was down in the yard drying her hair, she having told me she would do that. He went down so quick that he fell right over a case that

was lying near the door. I heard the clatter and what he said, which was hardly the words of a gentleman.

"As the Bible says, little strings make great causes spring in the air, and I didn't know then that that was to have a big result.

"But what I did know was that them Cuddlehops was going to go. It was too much for me to have a cat in the house which was there after it had been killed and was in Tamworth and here at the same time; and I thought to myself that if that panthom cat still stayed after the Cuddlehops was gone I would have to get them Fistical Researchers to see what they could do to get rid of it. Why, I was almost frightened to go about my flats because of the shock of seeing that Tibby that should have been dead. But go up to the Cuddlehops and tell them to go I did, though it was in fear and trembling I did it.

" 'It's that Ron Hardy put you up to this, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Cuddlehop. 'All right; we'll go— but we will stay here till our week's up. And you may be sorry.'

"The way she said it made my blood all cordial. I began to think they and that cat of theirs had something to do with the devil, as Mrs. Turner said; what they might do made me frightened. And when I woke in the morning with the whole place seeming full of yells and banging on doors, as if panderharmoniums was let loose, it seemed to me that that Nemo's Sis had come home to roost, as the saying is. And the first thing I saw was that Tibby sitting on one of my chairs!

"That cat seemed to have a devil in it, too; now that it knew that people knew it was dead, it pretended to be friendly, and tried to come up to people to be petted, or scratched at flat windows to be let in. As Mr. Slompack said, there was an estate of tendon in the wholeplace."

"How I got to the door I don't remember, but I was almost as historical myself as them women who had been hammering at it, talking about panthom cats being all over the place and having got into their flats. And that was just as things was.

"THAT panthom cat seemed to have broken up into a dozen Tibbys; some of the men were chasing them out, not liking them any more than we wimmen did. But it seemed as if it could be nothing but the devil's work, a cat that was dead dividing itself into a whole lot of cats which, when you looked at them, was the same, and everyone of which, if anybody said Tibby, looked as if it had been called.

"It was Bethlehem let loose, with us women all grouped together, some screaming when more of them cats rushed past; I'm sure if it hadn't been for Mr. Slompack some of us would have gone mad.

"But the darkest cloud is always before the silver lining; and Mr. Slompack came down the stairs with his hand on a young man's coat collar which he was pushing ahead of him. And Mr. Cuddlehop was following, saying the boy had a message for him and he would deal with him.

" 'No,' says Mr. Slompack, 'this young man has something to say which the people in this place ought to hear. It'll set their minds at rest. Out with it, youngster; say why you brought all those cats.'

"It made them plantations in my heart not so bad to hear them cats had been brought instead of being Tibby split up into a crowd of 'em.

" 'Me father said Mr. Cuddle'op could keep 'is own cats,' says the young man, which it seemed he was glad to speak. 'There was us with black cats all over the place, and all called Tibby, so that whenever Mr. Cuddle'op wanted a cat it was there fer 'im. Dad didn't know why Mr. Cuddle'op wanted the so-and-so cats, and why 'e always took the eldest; but when Mr. 'Ardy told 'im that Mr. Cuddle'op 'ad been makin' over five quid a week out of it, an' only payin' 'im a few deeners, 'e got sore. 'E ses, "Mr. Cuddle'op can keep 'is own blasted cats 'imself"; an' sent me in with them.'

" 'Well, who's the winner, now, Cuddlehop?' says a voice I reckernised; and there, coming out of the crowd what had gathered round the stairs, I saw that Mr. Hardy there with Mr. Deedswell, as if they was them solemnised twins, in spite of the difference in their ages. And Mr. Deedswell did look a an executioner, as he said he was, the way he looked at Mr. Cuddlehop.

" 'I wouldn't have found out about that farm where you kept your cats for emerging agencies,' says Mr. Hardy in a jubilee tone of voice, 'if you hadn't left a crate with the farm address on it, and your name, lying in the yard where I fell over it.'

" 'So, Mr. Cuddlehop,' says Mr. Deedswell slowly, 'you rang the changes with those cats. You always had a new one when one died. I was too easy as a trusty executioner.'

" 'You cheated me, Cuddlehop,' he says. 'You can be persecuted for fraud. It's an interdictable defence, Cuddlehop; and your game is up.'

"Which all that was said was Confucius worse, confound it, as the saying is, to me; only I was glad to know them cats wasn't ghosts, and it was Balaam to my soul to see them Cuddlehops, who had made such a lot of trouble, leave the place like conflicted thieves, as if staying in the place where their probity had been exposed was girls and wormwood to them. It was Mr. Slompack who explained what it was all about.

" 'Open profession is good for the sole, Mrs. Parsley,' Mr. Slompack, said (which that is why, I daresay, you never hear of a policeman with corns on his feet). 'I must confess that those cats made me feel creepy. It seems that Mr.

Hardy's grandmother was very fond of a cat named Tibby, and when she made her last willing testimonial she provided a trust fund of five thousand in Collingwood bonds to provide for the cat. As long as Tibby lived, the income was to go to Mr. and Mrs. Cuddlehop, who were old servants, if they looked after Tibby. Those Cuddlehops were caretakers for a time, but after a while they decided, being lazy people, that they might live on Tibby for good by having cats looking like it ready to take its place when it died.

" 'This Deedswell seems to have been an easy-going executioner, and as long as he saw a cat now and then he was satisfied. But young Hardy found out about there being some more money to come to him when the cat died. He was an orphan from when he was four, and when he got his money, when he became an adulterer, he was mainly occupied in spending it. It was when he met a girl who made him feel he wanted to settle down, and he wanted some money to make a real start, that he became curious and started to worry the Cuddlehops. Well, he's bowled them out, and he'll get the money now.

" 'I think I'd better wake 'em up,' says Mr. Slompack grinning. 'They've been sitting in the lounge all the morning close together, and they seem full of oblivion that it's long past lunchtime.'

"Which that course of true love did certainly seem to be running to smoodge with those two. And after all that panthom cat, although it seems it wasn't a panthom after all, was the one that had brought them together. Which so they tell me they have a black cat in their house now, and they call it Tibby."

37: A Fatal Vaccination

The Bulletin, 10 May 1939

"EVEN them laws of the Medium Persians that Mr. Rattray used to talk about," said Mrs. Parsley, "didn't have anything so silly as the Law of Entrails. That is the most nonsensible thing I have known in my widest dreams of avarice, as the saying is. Because his aunt's sisters have been famous in the Ananias of the Empire is no reason why a man should be a fit and improper person to inhabit an estate which somebody else doesn't want to leave to him. He might even be a probable son."

The newspaper open on my table had a heading referring to a British legal decision upon an inheritance matter. It was obviously the sight of that which had inspired my garrulous landlady. Having amazed me into attention, she wasted no more time on the pretence of "doing" my flat.

"Most certainly that Mr. Cedric Sisselhemp was not a fit and improper person, even if he was a 'Hon.' He didn't impress me at all, and when, right at the start, he wanted to owe half the rent for Number 11. I told him straight that it was money in advance or no flat, Hon. or no Hon.— which it was on his card, although I thought that might be only a bit of affection on his part.

"A regular reprobrake he was if ever there was one; always getting his face slapped. If ever there was a man like one of them villains of them melon-dramas, it was the Hon. Cedric Sisselhemp. And it was a shame to think he was going to marry an unsuffocated girl like Doris Holderwizzle, who was a very nice, pretty little girl, in spite of her father.

"A very curious man was Mr. Holderwizzle, who had been an actor, he said, and had made a fortune out of it, which he was the first actor I had ever known to do it. He had a queer way of speaking which made me annoyed with him the first time he came here, and I told him that the rent I was asking for Number 4 was very cheap.

" 'Lay not that fluttering uncle to your soul,' he says. I told him straight that I was a respectable woman who couldn't dream of behaving like that with uncles, fluttering or otherwise.

" 'Oh, understand my drift (Shakspeare),' he says.

" 'Which the name is Parsley,' I says stiffly.

" 'I was only trying to say, Mrs. Parsley, that I don't think the rent so cheap,' he says. 'It is an old actor's habit to quote Shakspeare.'

"There was no doubt about it, it was. Only a minute later when he had paid the rent he told me to 'ave aunts and quit his sight; and he was always saying things like the quality of mercy is distrained, and how he'd sooner like a dog

obey the moon than sock a Roman. When you got used to him he was all right; but he was very impressed at Mr. Cedric Sisselhemp being a Hon.

"What with Miss Doris, who had her head turned a bit at the thought of being a lady some day, being a good bit impressed, too, the chances didn't look very bright for the fine young man who used to come down from the country to see her sometimes, though she liked him best, no doubt.

"Of course, they didn't know as much about Mr. Cedric Sisselhemp as I did. There was an argument outside his door only the night after he had first arrived. There were two women there; and from the row I had heard he had put them out of the flat and slammed the door.

"But I've noticed that women, when they are angry, would sooner say things through a locked door than any other way, because they have an excuse for speaking louder. And one of the women, which a very handsome woman she was, and well-dressed, was doing that.

" 'Oh, let him alone, Helen,' says the other woman— she was only a girl. 'Let us go away.'

" 'You mongrel,' says Helen. 'I wouldn't have minded if it had been a suffocated woman like me, but with Daphne here, who believed everything! You behaved like a sneak'

" 'Come, come,' I says; 'my residential has always been respectable and I can't have a disturbance like this. He's not your husband, is he?'

" 'Thank heavens, no! ' she says. Then she spoke close to the panel of the door: 'I just want to say this to you, Cedric. You're going to pay for the way you treated Daphne. Don't you forget that! I don't care what it costs me; I don't care what I do; you're going to be sorry. You see!'

"It was the way he laughed, the other side of the door, that first made me think he was like the villain in them melondramas. But the women went away quite quietly, the younger one crying a little.

" 'We're sorry for making any upset, Mrs. Parsley,' says the one who had done the talking; 'but you may understand some day when you get to know what sort of a man Cedric Sisselhemp is. We won't cause you any worry; but that man's going to pay for what he's done to my little friend as sure as my name's Helen Golightly.'

"HER word proved her bondage as far as what she said about not coming again to make disturbances was concerned. Very soon I got to know that what she said about Mr. Sisselhemp was true; for, although some of the women were very impressed at him being a lord-to-be, it didn't stop them from slapping his face. And some of the men were angry with him, too.

" 'Women seem to have a fatal vaccination for our young lordling,' said Mr. Slompack.

" 'He must be a false pretender,' I says. 'If he's a lord, Lord help us.'

" 'Oh, he's the heir to a title all right, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack. 'He'll get it when his uncle dies; and his uncle is over seventy. He hates our young friend, and won't give him a penny; but he is rich, and when he dies the money comes to Cedric. That's according to the law of entrails.'

"That's how I got to know about it; but that Mr. Sisselhemp didn't seem to mind who knew about how his uncle hated him; and he wasn't at all ashamed of the troubles he had been in. Whether he could pay his rent or not —which he soon began to owe it in spite of my efforts— he went out every night all dressed up as if he was going to see the Lord Mayor. The only work he seemed to do was playing cards or going to the races. Once he came home with black eyes and all bruised about the face, which he said was a motor accident.

" 'His friends probably found some spare aces up his sleeve,' said Mr. Slompack, who had played cards with him one night. 'That young man lives by his wits.'

"There was other money he got, too; although they said that Lord Bunglehasset (that was his uncle) wouldn't give him a penny if he was starving, and if he could help it wouldn't leave him a farthing in his last willing testament. A Mr. Levinstein used to come to see him; and Mr. Slompack said that Mr. Sisselhemp had apothecaried his prospects to raise money from him, which was why he always seemed to be telling Mr. Levinstein that the old devil was over seventy and was bound to die soon.

"I often thought of telling Mr. Sisselhemp to go, especially when that Mr. Hardman began again to talk of breaking necks when he came to see Miss Tulip. Which he had hardly any need to do since Miss Tulip had smacked Mr. Sisselhemp's face all that was necessary. And then there was the trouble with Mr. Wassail; which I had noticed myself that Mrs. Wassail liked to be talking to a man who might be a lord some day. But I didn't know there was anything really wrong until accidental I heard Mr. Wassail talking in Mr. Sisselhemp's flat.

" 'I want you to understand this, Sisselhemp,' says Mr. Wassail. 'I'm not a dog on a mangle. If my wife cares for you more than she does for me, and you want her, I am willing to stand aside. A divorce could easily be arranged.'

"Mr. Wassail's voice sounded full of hope to me; he had found marriage interfered with his drinking; and when I told him his grumbling about his wife wasn't inconstant with the loving words he sometimes said to her, he told me that, if he didn't tell Mrs. Wassail that life wouldn't be worth living without her, life wouldn't be worth living with her.

" 'Don't be a fool. I don't wanf to marry Mrs. Wassail,' says Sisselhemp.

"That was when Mr. Wassail punched Mr. Sisselhemp. Perhaps he felt disappointed.

"MR SISSELHEMP became a regular bony distension; but somehow he stayed on. And then one day Mr. Levinstein came up, all agitated, waving a paper he had in his hand at Mr. Sisselhemp when he met him half-way up the stairs.

"'Look at it! Look at it! Lord Bunglehasset has been and got married! Vot do Ido for my money now?' he wailed.

"Mr. Sisselhemp seemed took aback; but he gave that melondrama laugh of his.

" 'Poof! ' he says. 'An old man of seventy-two. No doubt he'd like an heir to beat me out of it; but there's no chance. Your money's all right.'

" 'Dere's a chance,' said Mr. Levinstein.

" 'Well, you're charging me for that, aren't you?' says Mr. Sisselhemp. 'I see the old fool is coming to Australia for his honeymoon. I think I'll look him up—he may pay me to keep away from him.'

"Which is concisely what Lord Bunglehasset did do. I had been asking Mr. Sisselhemp for his rent; one day he came down waving a cheque and saying he would pay me directly he had banked it. 'You might like to have a look at how my uncle loves me, Mrs. Parsley,' he laughed, tossing a letter to me.

"He had no shame, that Mr. Sisselhemp! What that letter said was that Lord Bunglehasset had been a bit of a blaguard himself, but he had tried to be a gentlemanly blaguard. He said that the cheque was being sent on the misunderstanding that his nephew kept away from him; and he might send another when he left if Mr. Sisselhemp did keep away.

" 'As if I want to see the old rotter!' he says.

"Blunders will never cease in this wide world of sorrow; I felt that was Bible truth when that Miss Helen Golightly came along and wanted a flat. I must say you can never tell about our sect what they will do next; for when Mr. Sisselhemp came up the stairs and saw her at my door she was charming to him. So I changed my mind about telling her I was full, which I had been intending, thinking she was merely coming to make unpleasantness.

"But, really, you'd have thought that that Miss Golightly had heard about that cheque and had come along to help him spend it, the way she went about with him, as if she had forgotten all she had said about making him pay. I didn't see much of her; a regular will of the whisper she seemed; but whenever I did see her she was with him.

"That Mr. Sisselhemp was like a man processed, as they say, when she went away, which she did after a week, having only taken the flat for that, without, it seems, having told him she was going.

" 'Where has she gone, Mrs. Parsley?' he says.

" 'Not being my brother's keepsake, I don't know where she's gone. All I know is she's given up the flat,' I tells him stiffly.

" 'But, Mrs. Parsley, it seems indelible that she should go off like like that. Just when— we were becoming real friends,' he said.

"Although I didn't say that, it struck me that Miss Golightly hadn't forgiven him as much as she seemed, and had returned to give him some of his own back. She had just vaccinated him, and spent his money, and then left him to worry; a fine-looking woman, most striking, she was, that any man might worry about. And worried he was. He even advertised in the papers for her; and for a couple of months he seemed like a deformed character not worrying about other women and just hoping that Miss Golightly would return.

"It seemed to have been real love at first sigh with him, although he had seen her before. But that about the leper changing his spots came in.

"OFTEN I was going to get rid of him; somehow he kept staying on in spite of there being more rows when, in the effluvium of time, he began to recover from the way Miss Golightly had upset him, and Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail not liking him. He owed his rent pretty often; and sometimes I heard him having arguments with that Mr. Levenstein, trying to get more money from him.

"It was about then that them Holderwizzles came; and directly that Mr. Sisselhemp clapped his eyes on Miss Doris, who was very good to look at, you could see the wickedness in them. He didn't have much chance with her for several days because that Mr. Peter Martin from the country was with them; and very fond of one another they seemed. Mr. Sisselhemp, however, made great friends with Mr. Holderwizzle, who was very taken by the Hon. 'As my friend Burns says, "The rank is but the Guinness stamp; the man's the gold for all that,' he says when they was introduced, 'but I'm sure you're gold, and I'm pleased to meet yer.'

"They became thick as thieves, as the saying is. You couldn't talk to Mr. Holderwizzle without his speaking about 'my friend the Honorable Cedric Sisselhemp' just as if he was Shakspeare himself; and that Miss Doris, who was as fresh as one of them flowers that grow in the Lyceum fields, as the saying goes, was thrown into the company of that reprobrake.

" 'It's a damned shame, Mrs. Parsley,' Mr. Slompack says to me. 'She hasn't the sense not to be dazzled by a man who might be Lord Bunglehasset some

day. I tried to talk to that fool Holderwizzle, but he only said that marriages between the stage and the mobility had taken place before.'

"That Peter Martin, when next he came down, seemed to think that it would be nice, too, to punch the head of the future Lord Bunglehasset; but all he did was to have a row with Miss Doris and go away saying he wouldn't come back until she had learnt sense.

"AND then the blow fell for that Mr. Sisselhemp. It was in the paper about a son being born to the seventy-three-year-old Lord Bunglehasset, who had been married in a registry office to a Mrs. Longworth, a widow, a year ago. It was Mr. Slompack who showed it to me. 'That will be one in the eye for our young friend,' he said. And he told me about that law of entrails again, which he said Mr. Sisselhemp would even cease to be honorable, if ever he was that, now that he was no longer an heir consumptive.

"Before most of the people in the flats had finished their breakfasts that Mr. Levinstein had arrived like one of them early worms that fear no evil. And directly Mr. Sisselhemp opened his door (which I am no Peeping Tom who hear no good of themselves, but as I was doing the corridor I couldn't help hearing) he started to talk.

" 'Vot about my money now?' he says. First Mr. Sisselhemp said blast his money and that babies died sometimes; and then I heard him saying how he was going to marry a woman with a wealthy father and Mr. Levinstein's money would be all right. That, of course, was Miss Doris Holderwizzle.

"He must have convicted Mr. Levinstein somehow; he could be very applausible when he liked; for a little later he paid up some of the rent I had been speaking to him about. But the best-laid schemes of micey men gang aft ugly; and it's the same with the men who are rats. Mr. Holderwizzle didn't seem to like him any more when the news went through the flats like wildflowers that he was no longer honorable. He seemed to think he had been a false pretender. He told me to tell Mr. Sisselhemp if he inquired for Miss Doris that she was not athome.

"Everybody was pleased to hear about it; but Mr. Sisselhemp didn't let matters rest there. There was an argument in Number 4; I heard Mr. Holderwizzle talking about whoever steals his purse comes crash, and saying that about ave aunts and quit me sight.'

"Then it was Mr. Sisselhemp's voice I heard. 'Well, you wouldn't like people to know,' he says. "I thought I ought to insult Mr. Slompack about what I had heard, which he said it sounded to him as if there were black males about. 'If they try to bring any of them here,' I said firmly, 'I will give everybody notice.'

" 'I mean,' says, Mr. Slompack, that this Sisselhemp knows something about Mr. Holderwizzle which he wouldn't like the world to know. There's nothing we can do, though it's a damned shame.'

"Which he meant the talk about that Mr. Sisselhemp marrying Miss Doris; it was going to happen quite soon, for Mr. Holderwizzle appeared to have dropped his dejections. Although Miss Doris tried to look happy she didn't seem as happy as she tried to be.

"BUT there's always the silver lining before the dawn. And the silver lining, if you please, was that Miss Helen Golightly. It gave me the shock of my life to see her. Very beautifully dressed she was, and very beautiful she looked, like that Venice de Mile End Road they talk about, only for the lovely clothes she had on. There was that girl she called Daphne with her carrying a baby; and Miss Doris was with them, too. It took me all of a heap when I saw them coming down the stairs.

" 'We've been looking for Mr. Sisselhemp, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'He doesn't seem to be in his flat.'

" 'Here he is, coming up the stairs,' says Miss Doris.

"And there he was. His eyes were starting out of his head like a crab's which walks sideways—and he looked as if he would have liked to have walked sideways. His face was very pale. Miss Doris made no attempt to go near him. He just stared at them wondering what they were all together for.

" 'Well, Cedric Sisselhemp,' Miss Golightly says pleasantly, but looking queer about the eyes, 'I told you I would do anything to make you sorry for the way you behaved to Daphne. I meant anything! Doris isn't going to marry you. She knows all about you now; and she's coming away with my husband and myself to stay at the station of Mr. Peter Martin while we are his guests.'

"'Your husband! You are— married?' he cries, still dumpfoundered.

" 'Of course I'm married; why there's my baby,' she says. 'You'd hardly know Daphne, would you? She's my companion; and soon she's going to be married— to a better man than you ever knew how to be. When I heard, through a letter from Peter Martin, that you were counting upon marrying Doris, I came out determined to stop it. A man like you! What a blaguard you are, Cedric Sisselhemp, using black males on poor old Mr. Holderwizzle because he liked people to think he had been an actor. As if there was any real shame about having made money out of merry-go-rounds! You used his weakness to intimate him.'

"That was a surprise packet of crackers! To think that old Mr. Holderwizzle, with his potations of Shakspeare, had been a false pretence? It wasn't until I

heard him say 'Sisselhemp, do what you will, dishonor shall be honorable,' that I knew he was there. I hadn't noticed him.

"And then Mr. Sisselhemp, who had been standing as if he was dazed, was suddenly electrocuted into life.

"'Helen!' he cried as if waking up. 'I looked for you, Helen,' he cries, moving towards her. But she looked at him cold, like one of them Icebergs that go swimming at Bondi in the winter.

" 'Lady Bunglehasset to you, Cedric Sisselhemp,' she says.

" 'Lady Bunglehasset! ' He was gasping like a catfish out of water.

" 'I married your uncle when I went to England to do what harm I could for you,' she says. 'I think he liked me because I hated you.'

" 'lt's a lie! ' he howls. 'lt was a Mrs. Longworth he married.'

" 'Mrs. Helen Longworth— that was my married name. I didn't use it after my divorce,' she says smiling, as if she enjoyed every momentum of his upset. 'We travelled out incorrigible this time, so that you wouldn't know we were coming. That was after we had received Mr. Martin's letter. The poor lad only wanted to know if you were Lord Bunglehasset's nephew, to make sure Doris wasn't going to marry a pretender. You—'

"But that Mr. Cedric Sisselhemp, who had seemed almost pathetic for a time, was foaming with fury now.

" 'You married my uncle!' he shouts. 'You came to live in these flats pretending you—'

" 'While my husband was making a tower of the coalmines,' she smiles, cool as a concubine. 'You haven't taken any notice of the Bunglehasset heir yet, Cedric Sisselhemp. The baby that takes your place as the excessor to the title ought to interest you.'

"He looked like one of those furies that a woman scones as he looked at the baby. They say that out of the mouths of babes and sucking-pigs comes wisdom at the midnight's silent hour; and it looked as if that baby smiled, though it might only have been wind. Mr. Sisselhemp looked as if he would kill it.

" 'You wicked woman!' he yells. Only it wasn't only that he said. 'My uncle will know. I'll let him know the dirty trick you played,' he yells, standing beside himself, as they say, if ever a man did that, which I must say must be difficult.

" 'My husband will neither open a letter of yours nor see you. If you try to see him you will be thrown out. Anything you care to say about me, in any case, would only be distributed to the spite of a disappointed man —the vellum of a snake,' says Lady Bunglehasset. 'You can prove nothing. I'm sure Mrs. Parsley would not allow anything improper to

happen in her flats.' " 'Which indeed I would not! ' I says hotly, waking up when it seemed, from what she said, that he had been casting dispersions on my establishment— up till then I had been standing dump-foundered, listening to them. 'And let me tell you, Mr. Sisselhemp, I've had enough of you. I'll trouble yer to get out! '

"The language that man used— really gutteral language it was, as the saying is. But Mr. Slompack, who wouldn't allow anyone to use language like that before women, arrived, and so did Mr. Wassail and the Major; and that was the end of him. Mr. Slompack had never liked him from that night he played cards with him.

" 'I suppose, though,' says Mr. Slompack later, 'that a man who was irresponsible for cutting himself out under the law of entrails would feel inclined to use bad language.'

"All I can say is that, however that may be, it was his own fault for letting women have such a vaccination for him, and being so immortal in his conduct."

"Mr. Sisselhemp became a regular bony distension."

38: The Mailed Fish

Bulletin, 16 Aug 1939

"ALL about them reffugitives is very terrible," said Mrs. Parsley, pausing in her work after a side-glance at the headlines staring from the paper open on my table. "Just fancy agricultured people being turned out of their homes to be prosecuted like they are, and become paramours on the face of the earth, like the dove of peace that was let out of the Ark.

"A couple of the poor creatures (not that they looked poor) came here yesterday; but I had to tell them I was full. If I let people like that into the place, it would become a regular Tower of Babble. Apart from that, I know all about them prosecutions, because of what happened to Mr. Smith, who was Number Eleven; and I'm not going to risk having my tenants blown out of their beds by them bombs, as I thought might happen at one time.

"Had I been told," pursued Mrs. Parsley, now definitely abandoning the implements she had brought in for the purpose of giving my apartments their 'doing out,' "that Mr. Smith's name wasn't Smith when he came and that he was one of them reffugitives, he would not have got that flat. Especially if I had been told that he had been a dipsomaniac co-respondent writing for the papers in Europe.

"I'm a broadminded woman, and in a general way I don't mind co-respondents, who can't help themselves very well, husbands being so unreasonable. But people who live in grass houses shouldn't be the first to cast a stone; and it was very foolish for that Mr. Smith to have said nasty things about them Nasties when he was a co-respondent and all!

"MR. SMITH seemed a very quiet man, and Mrs. Smith was a very charming woman; but there appeared to be something queer about them from the start, what with him going all of a tremble sometimes when he got letters and looking out of the front door as if he expected someone he didn't want to see to come, and one day running through the place and out of the back gate, as if all the Deemings (which a terribly bad murderer that Deeming was!) was after him. Not until Mr. Grobbleboy got that letter, though, did we know that Mr. Smith was a prosecuted reffugitive. The letter was in German, but Mr. Grobbleboy had it transplanted into English.

"A very kind and synthetic man Mr. Grobbleboy seemed. Only for him it might not have come out about Mr. Smith, leastways until he and that wife of his woke up one morning and found they were dead corpses in their bed. He had just received one of them letters that made him shake like an aspirin; they

were all marked across the envelope where they had been re-redressed to him.

" 'Excuse me if I protrude,' says Mr. Grobbleboy in that polite way of his. 'I notice you seem to be upset; and seeing we were neighbors in a way, if I could do anything'

" 'Me upset? Where did you get that idea?' says Mr. Smith, as if he was frightened to own up how frightened he was. But soon he must have, because the two of them went out together, Mr. Grobbleboy having asked him to have a whisky to settle his nerves. "It was after that that we learnt all about them Smiths being reffugitives.

"'I told Mr. Biersgarmstein— I mean Mr. Smith— that he ought to take at least some of the tenants into his confidence trick,' says Mr. Grobbleboy. 'We are British, and we won't stand for a man being prosecuted for his opinions like this.'

" 'It certainly looks like the mailed fish,' says Mr. Slompack.

"A pretty kettle of fish and chips it seemed! That Mr. Smith when he had been a dipsomaniac co-respondent, Mr. Grobbleboy said, had written indescrately before the new regiment came into power. He had barely exceeded in escaping from Europe and saving Mrs. Smith from indignation at the hands of them Nasties. But they was determined to punish him.

"Them Nasty agents were following them with their prosecutions; so that's why they had to become Smiths. Them letters was to tell them that them agents were on the long trail a-winding, as the song says; and they said that if Mr. Smith and his wife gave themselves up they would be sent back to Europe for a fair trial of strength; which, Mr. Grobbleboy said, meant they would disappear overboard and none would dare ask what had become of them. And they said, if they didn't give themselves up, a bomb might be thrown under their bed one night which would be the end of them.

" 'I'll have no bombs in my establishment,' I says. 'Anybody who tries to bring bombs in here will do it only over my dead corpse.'

" 'The police ought to be told,' says Mr. Wassail.

" 'Oh, no, no,' says Mr. Smith, and Mr. Grobbleboy says that Mr. Smith's Anne was tied, which it appeared was a relative of his. Them Nasties were holding Mr. Smith's relatives as ostriches; and if Mr. Smith went to the police terrible things might happen to them.

" 'Maybe dey vill be shodt,' says Mr. Smith, which it was the first time I'd noticed he spoke like that, which maybe I would've if I'd thought he wasn't really Mr. Smith, but Mr. Biersgarmstein, as Mr. Grobbleboy said. And after that I noticed, too, he called himself 'Smidt.'

“ ‘Besides that would not save him,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy. ‘The only thing for them poor people to do is to keep hidden— to retire the chase, so to speak. I am sure we will all be prepared to help them.’

"BUT it was not until I had told them about the man who had come up, very rude and corrupt in his manner, if you could say he had any manners, to ask for Mr. Smith that Mr. Slompack and the other were really depressed.

“After what Mr. Grobbleboy had said, I was on my garden, as they say.

“ ‘Smith?’ I says. ‘I never heard the name.

“ ‘What?’ he sneers. 'Never heard the name of Smith?’

“ ‘There’s no person of that name in this establishment,’ I said, which, as their name was Biersgarmstein, it was a wide lie, as they call it.

“‘Oh, Freetz!’ cries Mrs. Smith, when I told them, ‘you mus’ fly! You mus’ ged away! Nefer mind aboud me; I vill be ’appy eef you vos safe.’

“Which it sounded very noble of her, and showed how devotered she was; but Mr. Grobbleboy said that a better plan would be to throw the enemies off the scent.

“ ‘The Smiths had better go up to my flat,’ he says. ‘I will go into Number Eleven. If anybody comes, I am Mr. Smith.’

“ ‘And if anybody merely drops a bomb in for Mr. Smith, that is your funeral,’ remarks Mr. Slompack.

“ ‘I am prepared to take the risk,’ said Mr. Grobbleboy, nobly; and that Mrs. Smith was so overcome that she took his hand and kissed it, saying ‘Tank you! Tank you, our frien’!’

“Which it seemed very fortunate that it was no sooner said than done in the eye when them two men came asking for Mr. Smith, both of them speaking with that gutter assent which the Major said showed that they were really Germans. And the way they went on, after we had sent them to Number Eleven, as Mr. Grobbleboy had wanted us to do.

“ ‘Gentlemen, you seem annoyed because I am not the Mr. Smith you are looking for,’ says that Mr. Grobbleboy, as cool as anything.

“ ‘The Misder Smidt ve vant is nod Mr. Smidt; and ve know he liffs here,’ one of the men said very angry. ‘Vere is he? Bevare, my friendt, how you inderfere in pizziness vich is no goncern of yours.’

“ ‘I tell you this is my flat, an’ my name is Smith,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy, very loud. ‘Now you are satisfied—’

“ ‘Ve are nod sadisfied,’ says the man.

“ ‘Well, I’ll trouble you to leave my flat, anyway,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy.

“ ‘I would never have thought it possible that such things would happen in a free country! Why those men were absolutely threatening,’ says Mr.

Slompack. Which he went on to say that he had thought what had been said about Mr. and Mrs. Smith was a grocer's exaggeration, but he was now convinced.

" 'Well, you see how dangerous their position is,' says Mr. Grobbleboy. 'The only thing is for Mr. Smith to keep very dark; he'll have to be virtuously a prisoner. Fortunately he has some goods he smuggled out of Germany— rugs and carpets. He couldn't take his money out for fear of rousing auspicions. They're really valuable, though, and I think I'll be able to help him dispose of them, though it will have to be done quietly.'

" 'We'll all help,' says Mr. Wassail. And that is what they did.

"A WAVE of symphony went through the flats for those poor creatures who was in terror of their lives; anyway them carpets was very good, and they were very cheap; and Mr. Slompack, after he had got a friend to buy one, sold quite a lot. I bought one myself for the lounge.

"It seemed terrible them poor people having to stay in hiding from the inflictions of that prosecution; at least he did. Mr. Grobbleboy said that probably their enemies didn't know Mrs. Smith so well, and as long as she was well wrapped up there was no reason she couldn't go out now and then. Which he took her to the pictures.

"The ears of them Nasties must have burned with what was said about them at the indigernation meetings the tenants used to hold, especially as there was more of what Mr. Slompack called the mailed fish, them letters arriving without having to be re-redressed now. It was terrible to me, when I thought of what had been said about blowing people up with bombs, which it seemed to be likely to happen any day. I was on the horns of a tenderhook, not knowing when the Gordon knot would be cut and that sword of Occles would fall on us all; but I couldn't very well ask them Smiths to go, though I wished they would. And there was them two men coming again to see Mr. Grobbleboy, and hinting that he knew where Mr. Smith was and it would be the worse for him if he didn't tell them.

" 'But this is nonsense! You could get the police about that,' said Mr. Slompack. 'If you did it, that wouldn't give the Nasties an excuse for visiting distribution on Smith's relatives.'

" 'You don't know,' says Mr. Grobbleboy. 'I've put my soldiers to the wheel of chance and it's as well to do the things properly.'

"But one night Mr. Grobbleboy came in, all excited, from taking Mrs. Smith to the pictures, and she fell on my shoulder, crying, when she saw me, which I was just having a few words with Mr. Slompack and the Wassails in the lounge.

“ ‘We’ve been follered— all night,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy. ‘Those two men; they sat behind us in the theatre. They were following us— tried to stop and speak to us. But I whisked Mrs. Smith into a taxi and we came home.’

“He walked, nervously like, to the top of the stairs, but he came back as quick as a flash in the pan.

“‘Quick! You get to your flat, Greta— by the other stairs,’ he says to Mrs. Smith; and then to us, ‘Let’s be talking as if nothing has happened.’

“And there was them two men again, tuckulent as ever, as Mr. Slompack said about them.

“ ‘Mr. Smidt, ve vant a vord mit you,’ says one of them. ‘Dot lady mit you dis night—she is der Mrs. Smidt whose Mr. Smidt ve vas looking for.’

“ ‘That lady,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy, ‘is neither my Mrs. Smith or anyone else’s Mrs. Smith. I don’t have to explain about any lady who was in my company to anyone.’

“‘Oh dacity!’ said Mr. Slompack. ‘How dare you come here and—’

“ ‘Ve vant to see dot lady,’ said the man.

“ ‘You’ll see no lady here,’ roared Mr. Slompack. ‘Get out, or we’ll call the police.’

“ ‘And throw you downstairs! ’ said Mr. Wassail.

“ ‘So! Bud ve gome back. Now ve know!’ says the man.

“Directly they were gone, which I was glad they did go, there was such a bustle and to-do as you never saw.

“ ‘They know definably that Mr. Biersgarmstein is here now,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy. ‘We must get Mr. and Mrs. Smith away. Apart from their own safety, we have to consider Mrs. Parsley; she doesn’t want anything terrible to happen in her flats.’ Which I was very glad to hear him say that. ‘Let us go up and see the Smiths, gentlemen— and Mrs. Wassail. Mrs. Parsley, don’t let those men into the flats if they come back.’

"ALL excitement was Mr. Grobbleboy; and so was the others; I heard about what happened when they came back later, the men having deranged to take it in turns to keep watch so that them men couldn’t get into the place during the night. It seemed that Mr. Smith was terrified, but he didn’t have the money to get away; all the money he had been getting had been sent to a solicitude in England to pay his billy costs for getting some of Mr. Smith’s property which was there, though why them billy costs should be so heavy I don’t know. But them solicitudes are terrible for charging fees.

“ ‘This is all the money I have,’ says Mr. Grobbleboy, handing over a roll from his pocket. ‘I’m going to give it to Mrs. Smith; it might be safer with her. You can leave me a note to get some of your carpets if you like. I’ll see that the

rest are sent after you. Not that I care about the carpets as long as I can help you from this prosecution.'

" 'Tom,' says Mrs. Wassail to her husband, 'you can't let Mr. Grobbleboy do all the generosity.'

" 'I'm certainly willing to help, too,' says Mr. Slompack. 'I can let you have a cheque; you can cash it in the morning.'

"The Major was willing to help, too; and so were some of the other tenants. And very glad was I when them Smiths were gone in the morning, leaving their carpets— which it seemed they had quite a stack of them in that flat— with the different people, which they all reckoned they could get their money back even if they sold them cheap.

"I felt like the Pilgrim's Progress when the bunion rolled from his back next day when them Smiths was gone; which Mr. Smith was smuggled out of the back gate early in the morning, and Mr. Grobbleboy smuggled Mrs. Smith out later the other way to lay a fall's tail, as he put it, if they were followed, and meet Mrs. Smith at the boat. It seemed to me that matters might divert to the even tendon of their way now they had gone.

"But never was there such weeping and wailing or snatching of teeth, as the Bible says pietically, as there was that evening. It didn't happen until that evening, and it began when that man who had first come up and asked so corruptly for Mr. Smith came again, and said he happened to know he was living here. So I sent him along to Mr. Grobbleboy in Number Eleven, thinking there could be no harm now, especially as it was only Mr. Grobbleboy he would see.

"But it appears Mr. Grobbleboy wasn't there. I knew that before the tumor occurred, because them two men we thought was Germans had come, giving me quite a start, especially when they didn't speak with that gutter assent any more, like Germans.

" 'Where's this Grobbleboy, Mrs. Parsley?' says

the bigger one. 'He seems to have done a flit. His flat's open, an' there ain't nothing in it.'

" ' 'E owes me money, Mrs. Parsley,' says the other man.

" 'Owes you money!' I exclaminated.

" 'Too right he does,' said the other. 'Ten quid each 'e promised us for coming an' talking like 'Uns and 'anging about the place; an' all 'e's given us'

"Before he had included what he had to say, there was such a tumor upstairs as you never heard, with the whole place shaking and rocking; and then that Mr. Smith and the man who had come asking for him came falling down the stairs, punching at one another.

“People came rushing from everywhere to pick them up and tear them apart. Their faces was all bleeding.

“ ‘Ask him what he’s done with my wife!’ panted the man who had been fighting with Mr. Smith.

“ ‘You’d better ask Grobbleboy,’ says Mr. Smith, bitter-like. ‘She left you to run away with me; and now she’s run off with another man. They didn’t meet me at the boat; that means they’ve gone off together. And they’ve taken all the money. He was cunning when he said that Greta’d be the best to hold it.’

“ ‘What?’ cries Mr. Wassail, which was there, with Mr. Slompack, too. ‘You mean the money we gave you for carpets?’

“ ‘Carpets?’ says somebody; and then I saw that Detective Cassidy was there and a couple of others who looked like detectives too, as it seemed they were, and another man. ‘That’s what were here about. Hey! This carpet on the floor looks rather like what we are looking for, doesn’t it, Cousins?’

“Which that other man with them has a look at it and says, ‘lt’s one of ’em, all right.’

“ ‘Mrs. Parsley,’ says Mr. Cassidy, ‘l’m sorry. I daresay you bought that carpet in good faith; but it’s one of a big lot lifted from a warehouse in Melbourne. We only received information yesterday that they were being sold in Sydney.’

“ ‘Stolen!’ I cries; and it didn’t seem needful for me to keep dark about anything with this pretty kettle of fish. ‘Why, Mr. Smith there, who is Mr. Biersgarmstein really, and a prosecuted reffugitive, told me that carpet came from Germany.’

“ 'I didn’t!’ he retortoised. ‘lt was Grobbleboy who put over all them tales about Germany. My name ain’t Biersgarmstein; it’s plain Smith; but that Grobbleboy told me if I’d pretend to be a reffugitive, which’d help him to sell his carpets, he’d give me enough money to get to New Zealand with Greta.”

“ ‘All the same,’ says Mr. Slompack, looking real upset, which was no doubt about that pile of carpets which he had in his flat for the cheque he had given, there was a letter in German.’

“ ‘Grobbleboy fixed that,’ says Mr. Smith, which it seems his name was Smith after all. ‘He got the whole idea from seeing me upset when I got letters from Dixon there, Greta’s husband, saying he was going to find us wherever we had got to.’

"WELL, with all that, I didn’t know whether I was standing on my head or my tail. It seemed that that Mr. Grobbleboy that had seemed such a puffict gentleman and so kind and synthetic was known to the police as Slim Joe, and was a sort of Mustard Mind, as they call it. Mr. Cassidy said they would soon

get him, but I never heard that they did. The tenants had a lot of trouble about deceiving stolen goods, but that Detective Cassidy is a nice man, and he left me out of it, although I lost my carpet.

" 'It's a funny thing, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack, 'that the only one who had any luck out of the whole business is most upset about it. That Mr. Dixon ought to be very glad to be rid of a woman who wants to run off with a new man every few months. But he isn't.'

" 'Anyway, I'll think a long time before I believe the next extrocity story,' says Mr. Slompack. And of course, as it turns out, them Smiths weren't reffugitives at all; as a matter of fact the vice was worser, as the saying goes. But 'Experience does it' is a good motter; and I'm not going to risk having reffugitives in my place after all that happening."

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39: A Regular Punch-Us Pirate

Bulletin, 19 April 1939

"ALL I can say is that, as Mr. Slompack says, some people show an employable lack of immorality," said Mrs. Parsley. My landlady was in a state she describes as "speechless with indignation," which means that she is more talkative than ever.

"Deplorable lack of morality?" I suggested.

"Yes; that's what I said," retorted Mrs. Parsley. "And some of them who show it ought to know better, like that Mr. Hurrah, whose conduct was always impeekable, as he told me himself. It's easy enough for them single men. But let them face real trouble and hardship. Let them get married! Not too often, of course," added Mrs. Parsley hastily.

"The man who has more than one wife deserves what happens, and gets no symphony from me."

My astonishment at this philosophical outburst left me wide open to Mrs. Parsley's attack; and she continued: "Always saying 'I wash my hands of it,' Mr. Hurrah was; a regular Punch-us Pirate. By profession he is one of them artichokes, and when he first came here he was always talking of self-contained eunuchs and remuddling these flats till I was sick and tired of him. When he found that I didn't want to be remuddled he washed his hands of that too. But he wasn't able to wash his hands so easily of them Snazzlewit pearls."

"The Snazzlewit pearls?" I queried.

"NEVER shall I forget all the trouble there was about them," said Mrs. Parsley. "It began the night Mrs. Trumpett came moving into the flats calling out, 'Mrs. Parsley! Mrs. Parsley! There's a man in your garbage tin!'

"The way it sounded was as if one of the women had thrown her husband there, which I have no doubt some of them wives would have liked to have done; but when I went down to the yard a lot of people were there, and a couple of policemen who had hold of a man they said they were going to charge with being illegitimately on the premises without an awful excuse. Which they did in the effluvia of time.

" 'It must be those Snazzlewit pearls,' says Mr. Slompack. 'The man no doubt was sneaking into the flats when he heard Mrs. Trumpett opening the back gate. He hid himself in that big garbage tin to escape reservation; and if he hadn't sneezed he would have been all right.'

" 'But Mrs. Snazzlewit told me she had them pearls kept in a safe depositor,' I says. 'She never wears them.'

" 'I'm afraid you'll find a lot of niftyarious characters who don't know that, or don't believe it, will try to get those pearls, Mrs. Parsley,' said Mr. Slompack.

"Truer words were never spoken in jest; and if I had known what was to follow I think I would have asked those Snazzlewits to leave, taking their objects of bigotry and virtue, as Mr. Slompack called them.

"Of course, everybody knew those Snazzlewit pearls; they were as infamous as those pearls that were thrown before the gadding swine in the Bible; and there was a lot of talk about them when Mr. Snazzlewit went bankrupt. But Mr. Snazzlewit wasn't going to let his creditors touch a hair of the head, as they say, of a present he'd given to his wife.

"At first, when I found that the Snazzlewits, who had taken Number 4, was the same as were bankrupt, I was upset, especially when I saw in the paper how he had told the officious asinine that he hadn't a penny in the world. But I must say that the way he paid his rent showed he was a gentleman, if ever they was one.

" 'It takes all sorts to make a whirl,' Mr. Slompack says; which is very true, the all-sorts who have been in these flats having often put my head in a whirl. I can't help liking these Snazzlewits, in spite of the way he treated his creditors. By the accounts they certainly hit things up, spending money like probables; but he seems to have made up his mind to give his wife a good time, and she's just as contented as he is now it's over.'

"Which they must have spent a lot of money, all the talk of it there was in the papers and the nasty things that officious asinine said about Mr. Snazzlewit having given slavish entertainments fit for a king when he was bankrupt. The papers put in photers of Mrs. Snazzlewit as she was at the Prince's Ball, wearing the valuable pearl necklace which the officious asinine wanted to get. It appeared that Mrs. Snazzlewit had had her photer in the papers time after time before they got into all that trouble and came to live in these flats.

" 'I don't mind being poor, Mrs. Parsley,' she said. 'Poor dear Sam has been very good to me. He tried to give me everything, and if I had known he was running himself in difficulties I would not have allowed him to do it. And I would gladly sell my pearls if it would help him. But he won't let me. Although it may seem silly to have such valuable jools when we're living in poverty.'

"And then she went away, all wrapt up in furs that didn't look much like poverty to me, to a bridge party.

"But considering the way some wives went on with their husbands when they lost their money she was very nice; and only that I didn't like them niftyarious characters coming after them pearls, which they seemed to do even though it was a wild goat's chase, as the saying is, I had nothing against them as tenants.

" 'Some night,' says Miss Portley, 'we will all be murdered in our beds by one of these thieves.'

"That was after the man had been caught in the garbage tin, when another man was nearly caught in fragrance de licker, as it is called, trying to break into the Snazzlewits' flat when they was still out at a party, and only a little while after that there was what Mr. Higgley told me.

"MR HIGGLEY was a prodigy of Mr. Hurrah's, who had introduced him to the flats because Mr. Hurrah said he was vaccinated with Miss Lovejoy, who Mr. Slompack called the Queen of She-bears, which was some of that Hairy Percy's flage he was so fond of. Very up in the air was Miss Lovejoy with most people, but she seemed rather to take to Mr. Higgley when he came to stay in the flats, all dressed up with gloves and a walking-stick and spats. But I'm sure I couldn't make heads or tails of that young man, for he suddenly took notice of Miss Portley, who laughed at him in his get-up; a few days later he's dressed up like a reg'lar larrikin, taking Miss Portley to Luna Park on all the razzle-dazzles and the houplas and coming back with her eating hamburgers. Miss Lovejoy swept past them with her nose in the air; but directly he sees that he runs after her.

"He couldn't make up his mind, young Mr. Higgley couldn't. When he was with Miss Portley he wanted Miss Lovejoy; and when he was dressed up to please Miss Lovejoy it was Miss Portley he seemed to think most about. And soon those girls were breathing fire and brimstone and treacle at one another's throats, Miss Portley making remarks about women who tried to turn a man into a tailor's dummy, and Miss Lovejoy talking about girls who dragged a man down to their own level. And there was Miss Tryon, who shared the flat with Miss Portley, saying Mr. Higgley was only a worm. It was very unpleasant to have that going on.

"Mr. Hurrah, too, was annoyed. He said he felt the model irresponsibility for having introduced Mr. Higgley to Miss Lovejoy. It was then he said his own conduct was impeekable; and he wasn't going to have Mr. Higgley playing fast and loose with a young woman's affections. I thought he was going to say that he would wash his hands of him, but he didn't. He said he would wipe the floor with him if he didn't behave decently to Miss Lovejoy after making her believe he was serious.

"I couldn't have that going on in my flats, and so I told Mr. Higgley.

" 'Distension amongst my tenants is something I will not permit, Mr. Higgley,' I told him; 'and you seem to have become a regular bony distension. Either you bring that to an end or I must ask you for your flat,' I says.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'I have made up my mind to ask Miss Lovejoy to marry me. I worship the very ground she talks upon. She is a woman who would uplift a man. Because she suggested it, I am getting my voice agricultured with Mr. Dewly-Throttle.'

"Which Mr. Dewly-Throttle was a new tenant who had just come to the flats. He said he was a member of the Philammonia, and he intended to give lessons in voice perdition. A great deal of noise Mr. Dewly-Throttle made, singing 'Ah-ah-ah-ah' over and over again, and songs in foreign languages.

" 'But, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Higgley, 'there's something about Mr. Dewly-Throttle I think you ought to know. When I went into his flat for my lesson I noticed a lot of dust beside the sideboard. It made me so curious that while he was in the bedroom I had a look. Mrs. Parsley, he's dug a lot of bricks out of the wall! The hole is hidden behind the sideboard!'

"You talk about a bolt from the bombshell! Mr. Dewly-Throttle had taken the flat next to the Snazzlewits; it was as plain as one of them spike-staffs that he was making that hole in the wall to get through after those Snazzlewit pearls that wasn't there. It wasn't a minute before I was poundering on his door demanding for him to let me see what he was doing with my wall. Although he wouldn't let me in he must have known the game was up, for when I went back with Detective Carmody Mr. Dewly-Throttle was gone with all his belongings.

"The police took the fingerprints he had left with his fingers on the furniture; and later on they brought back photers which was Mr. Dewly-Throttle all right, but they said his real name was Blotsom and he was only just out of gaol for robbery. The police said he poised as a musician, which he really was; that shows how far some people will go to commit a wave of crime when they'll even sing to do it. The police said he'd probably done all that singing to drown the noise he was making removing them bricks. There's complicity for you!

"EVERYBODY said that the Snazzlewits had had a very lucky escape; quite a fuss was made over Mr. Higgley for having seen that dust; and it didn't seem that rightly I could tell him to go after that, even though he had gone back on Miss Lovejoy again and back to Miss Portley, and Mr. Hurrah was making them remarks once more about wiping the floor with him.

"It was terrible, too, having all those niftyarious characters coming after the pearls. like that, hiding in garbage tins and jumping from windows and digging holes in walls.

"It was a relief to me to hear from Mrs. Snazzlewit that they might get rid of those pearls, which of course everybody was saying they was very foolish to

keep that money in mere joolry when it might be investured, making money for them.

" 'You may not have any further occasion for this worry, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Snazzlewit, 'which I am very sorry you should have been caused. It seems absurd to keep those valuable pearls now, especially as I want to help dear old Sam, who's been a perfect dear to me. I'm going to sell those pearls shortly and invest the money to be a benediction to us.'

" 'No, you're not,' says Mr. Snazzlewit, quite warm.

" 'Oh, yes, I am. They're my pearls, aren't they? And if I want to sell them I can. I think I may get Mr. Hurrah to get his friend to devalue them for me. "Although I am not one to debulge anything that is told me in diffidence, it was surprising how that news ran over the flats like wildflowers. Everybody said Mrs. Snazzlewit was doing the right thing; especially Mr. Wassail. Mrs. Wassail, who was like that, had been wanting pearls ever since the Snazzlewits had arrived.

"Never would I have permitted it if I had known that those pearls was going to be brought into my establishment, where they had already caused enough trouble without being there. Like a thunderclap of hands the dreadful thing happened. Them pearls were on Mrs. Snazzlewit's neck one minute, and the next minute, as you might say, they were gone.

"Mrs. Snazzlewit had called me into her flat. 'I thought you might like to see the famous pearls, she says. 'Of course. I've arranged for them to go back to the safe depositor after this evening's over.

"And there they were! Mrs. Snazzlewit was all got up to go out to some special affair; and so was he. But she had one of those diamond ta-ra-ras on her hair; and there was them pearls on her chest. They was lovely, I must say; but they made me quite sick in the stummick, thinking of what might happen if any of those sort of people who hide in garbage tins knew about this. I was quite glad when I saw them go away in the taxi.

"And then they forgot about putting them jools back in the safe depositor! It was too late, and they had come home, thinking it wouldn't matter to keep those pearls for a single night. That was where they made the mistake; which mistakes will happen in the best lubricated families.

"Never shall I forget the hullooballoo there was in the morning, like a regular pandermonia let loose, when those pearls were found to be stolen. They had hidden them under the mattress at the foot of the bed; and in the morning they were gone.

"Mrs. Snazzlewit was historical, and the police had already arrived when I got upstairs; and people were in the corridors in their dressing-gowns whisperin' together as if someone was dead.

" 'I wonder when Mrs. Snazzlewit expects to get the insurance,' said Mr. Slompack sinfully, as they call it.

"But them pearls, it turned out, weren't insured at all; and, considering it was dead loss, them Snazzlewits took it very well, especially him, being cool as a concubine. But it was dreadful. There were the police asking questions of everybody. But nothing did they find out. A window in the flat had been forced open, but the police said the dust hadn't been disturbed on the sill and they didn't believe that anyone had come in that way; regular doubting Thompsons they are about lots of things. Their theorem was that somebody had got into the flat while the Snazzlewits were out, and forced that window to create a false scent, and whoever was the thief had had a key.

"I asked them to search my flat, and most of the tenants said they could search theirs; but it was surprising what them police found out about things happening and people wandering about these flats at midnight. There was Mr. Andrews and Mr. Hurrah and Mr. Wassail had all been seen about at about three in the morning. That was why, when I heard what they had explained, I told Mr. Andrews and that woman in Number 21 I'd always had my auspicions about to go next day. Mr. Hurrah said he had been doing a bit of quiet defective work, thinking the new tenant in Number 10 might be another Dewly-Throttle; and he was the first to ask the detectives to search him and his room. Mr. Wassail didn't want to say what he had been doing at first, but that was because he'd been upstairs drinking with the Major, which Mrs. Wassail hated him doing that.

"So it all ended with everyone being auspicious of everyone else, and nobody knowing what had become of them pearls. Them detectives'd come bouncing into the place at all times, unsuspected, as if they wanted to spring a surprise; and they'd ask where So-and-so or somebody else was, and go up to speak to them. But it didn't seem to do any good. Them missing pearls seemed to be likely to be one of them undissolved myst'ries.

"EVERYBODY was so wound up that it was almost like the relief that comes before the storm when there was a disturbance in the place. It was that Mr. Hurrah trying to wipe the floor with Mr. Higgley. But it was over when I got to where the tenants had gathered. To my surprise there was that Miss Tryon there, going for Mr. Hurrah like a tiger cat.

" 'You big bully,' she says. 'Using your strength on a man who isn't nearly your size!'

" 'It's been something that's been coming to him for a long time,' says Mr. Hurrah. 'The way he's behaved is disgusting!'

" 'Cripes, I'll have you on any time,' says that Mr. Higgley.

“ ‘Now, now! ’ I says firmly. ‘I won’t have this sort of thing in my establishment. I’m sick and tired of all this; and I’ll be glad of your room at the end of the week, Mr. Higgley.’

“ ‘But that isn’t fair! It was Mr. Hurrah attacked him,’ says Miss Tryon.

“ ‘Mr. Higgley knows I said he would have to go, long ago,’ I says.

“But I didn’t expect that Mr. Higgley would go next day. I The first I knew of that was I when I heard the sound of voices going up the stairs; and there was Detective Cassidy and a couple of other plainclothes policemen and Mr. Higgley.

“ ‘Did you know Mr. Higgley was leaving you to-day, Mrs. Parsley?’ asked Mr. Cassidy.

“ ‘No, I did. not,’ I says all of a fluster.

“ ‘No; I thought not,’ says Mr. Cassidy. ‘Well, we caught him going away, and we want to have a look at his luggage. To save him trouble we brought him back to his flat.’

“‘I tell you Mr. Higgley wouldn’t do anything dishonest!’ says Miss Tryon, which it surprised me to see her there. But he looked all white and scared like a man under-sentenced to death.

“They hadn’t gone upstairs long before I decided to take the bull by the horns of the delimit, as they say, and go up, too. As the landlady, I had a right to know what was going on in the establishment. On the stairs I passed Scotty, the handyman, and he was all excited.

“ ‘Mrs. Parsley,’ he says, ‘they’ve got the pearls! ’

“ ‘What!’ I cries.

“ ‘That ’lggley ’ad them,’ he says. ‘I ’eard about it. They’ve got the Snazzlewits up there and they’re arresting ’lggley.’

“Somehow I felt sorry; he might be a fool, but I never thought there was no harm in him. But when they let me into the flat, which they didn’t until Mr. Snazzlewit said it was all right, they wasn’t arresting Mr. Higgley. They seemed annoyed with Mr. Snazzlewit.

“ ‘You know, Mr. Snazzlewit, there’s such a charge as obstructing the police,’ says Mr. Cassidy. “‘I can’t help that,’ says Mr. Snazzlewit. ‘I’m not going to let that young feller suffer wrongly. I repeat, I gave him the pearls.’

“ ‘You mean to tell us you stole your own pearls— or rather your wife’s— and simply gave them away? Why?’

“ ‘My wife was going to have them valued,’ says Mr. Snazzlewit.

“‘Well, what of that?’ demands Mr. Cassidy, looking like a reg’lar Name-this, as they say.

“Mr. Snazzlewit looked at his wife, standing beside him. ‘I didn’t want my wife to discover they were valueless— worth possibly fifty pounds, as a very

good bit of imitation jewellery, instead of real pearls. I wanted my wife to be happy, to have her name in the papers if she liked it; but even when I was chucking round money to do that I didn't feel like spending thousands just for some pearls. So—'

" 'My dear old Sam!' says Mrs. Snazzlewit. 'And you didn't know that I guessed all the time? If I hadn't I'd have tried to sell the pearls long ago. Why, you old darling, I knew you wanted to make me happy, and I didn't mind the trick at all.'

" 'I told you Eric wasn't dishonest!' says Miss Tryon, triumphant-like, to Cassidy.

" 'What are you doing here, Miss Tryon?' I says.

" 'I'm not Miss Tryon. I'm Mrs. Higgley,' she says. 'We were married this morning. Somebody had to marry the poor boy to stop other women making a fool of him. And so—'

"Well, talk about a whirl without end, that was the way my head was when I got downstairs, especially when the people kept coming along to ask what had happened, like the curiosity that killed the cat in spite of its nine wives. Mr. Slompack laughed when he heard it all.

" 'So that was it! 'he says. 'Clever! Old Sam Snazzlewit didn't spend twenty thousand pounds of the money that was short on those pearls, and the rest of the money didn't go in an organ of extravagance. The papers boomed the extravagant doings just as they did the pearls, without doubting they were real; and even the officious asinine didn't auspect that that didn't explain how the money went.'

" 'I can't make head and tails of that,' I says.

" 'There's no occasion for you ever to be worried at the Snazzlewits' rent,' he says with a wink. 'I had spoken to him about that when they first came.

'Well, I hope, for Mr. Snazzlewit's sake, the officious asinine doesn't call for a fresh inquiry.'

"Which I may say didn't happen.

"MISS LOVEJOY was in my flat when Mr. Hurrah came, looking very upset and a bit startled to see her there.

" 'Mr. Snazzlewit said that about the pearls?' he gasped incredibly. 'Said they weren't worth fifty pounds?'

"He seemed to swallow hard when I told him 'yes.'

" 'Oh, well,' he says, careless-like, at last. 'I did my best for you, Higgley. Now I wash my hands of the whole thing.' That reg'lar Punch-us Pirate turned to go.

" 'Oh, no, darling,' says Miss Lovejoy, rising and linking her arm in his. 'Not of the whole thing. Not of me. It was kind of you trying to get me married off before I found out that your wife had got the divorce you told me she would never try to get. No wonder you dodged to prevent me seeing the papers. The night the pearls were stolen you came to my flat—'

" 'Oh, hush! ' he says.

" 'What does it matter?' she says. 'I am still fond of you, Tom, in spite of your faults. I'll marry you.'

" 'I told you that's impossible,' he says, angry, and tries to get away. The struggle between them took me all by surprise; all I could say was 'Stop that now!' Miss Lovejoy it was that broke away and got behind the couch.

" 'Oh, you won't marry me, hey?' she says. 'All right! Mrs. Parsley, what do you think of these?'

"If I couldn't believe my eyes there was them Snazzlewit pearls! They was in a case she must have grabbed from his pocket, which she had opened to show me.

"I could only gasp.

" 'But Mr. Snazzlewit gave the pearls to Mr. Higgley!' I says.

" 'No, he didn't!' says Miss Lovejoy. 'They were an imitation— Mr. Hurrah got them made. He got me to get photers of Mrs. Snazzlewit wearing those pearls, so that he could get them copied and— and what he thought was pearls are imitations, too!' She began to laugh.

"He had been standing like a codfish out of water, but he was quiet all of a sudden.

" 'All right, Ruby, I'll give in,' he says.

"And would you believe it the next moment that Queen of She-bears was in his arms sobbing and saying that she'd only gone on like she had because she loved him— which what some women will do to a man when they love him is surprising, especially to the men. And what is more surprising is what some of them love the men for.

"Well, let lying dogs sleep is a very good motter, so I didn't say anything about all that. They did get married; that Queen of She-bears was something Mr. Hurrah couldn't wash his hands of, but all I can say is that what Mr. Slompack says about some people having an employable lack of immorality must be right!" Mrs. Parsley finished on a note of indignation, and grabbed her carpet-sweeper.

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39: The Illimitation Contest

The Bulletin, 26 Oct 1938

"THE noble art of self-defiance, as Mr. Slompack calls it," said Mrs. Parsley, "may be all very well in its way; but it gave me a shock when I found out that the Ramplers, who was Number 20, were surprise fighters— at least he was. Very respectable people they had seemed when they came; and I thought he was a farmer down for a holiday. It was only in the early morning, when the place shook as if elephants were tumbling about in the attic, that I found out.

"Very sheepish he looked in his unawares when they opened the door, and she said something that I didn't quite catch, but it knocked me all of a heap.

" 'Well, if a great, big man like him wants to play trains, I'd be obliged if he didn't make so much noise about it,' I says, sharplike.

" 'Training, not trains,' says he, and jerks his thumb. 'She makes me do it. I could do it at Jim much better.'

" 'He's fighting in the illimitation contests,' she says, 'and I'm determined that he shall win.'

"That started a regular argument between them, him saying that he could do all his work, as he called it, with this Jim that he knew, and her saying that she meant to see he was fit. Perhaps it was because I was relieved that they weren't breaking the furniture that I let them alone, but I was worried about how the other tenants would take it.

"Mr. Slompack didn't seem to mind at all. Quite the contery. He said that fisticle fights were known to the ancient Greeks, which didn't depress me much, because I haven't got much time for them sorts; but he told me that if ever I went to the Art Gallery I should see statutes like the Radiators and the Dining Alligator, which he said were ripplers of statutes made hundreds of years ago in Rome.

"Very interested he seemed. And so were the other tenants. A lot of them got into the way of going to the fights and talking about rights and crosses and counters and hooks, which sounded to me like shop fittings more than anything else. Mr. Rampler became a sort of hero. But he didn't seem to be very keen about the fighting himself.

" 'It was the missus who got the idea of my coming down and having a go, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'I think I'll be getting back soon. Farming is my line, not fighting.'

" 'Go back! You'll do no such thing!' says Mrs. Rampler, which she didn't mind how sharp she spoke to her husband. 'His mission is Slugger Joe Martin.'

"That seemed nonsense to me, Mr. Rampler looking nothing like a clergyman.

" 'Why do you want him to fight Slugger Joe?' asks Mr. Slompack, who happened to be there.

" 'If he can beat Slugger Joe, he's on the map as a fighter,' says Mrs. Rampler. 'He'll get some real fights then— and big money.'

" 'I'd sooner be farming,' says Mr. Rampler.

" 'But do you think he could beat Martin?' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'He will,' says Mrs. Rampler. 'And what's more, he's going to give Slugger Joe the hiding of his life. Slugger Joe deserves it. He's a cad and a mongrel.'

" 'I believe he is regarded as a rather decent fellow,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Is he?' retorts Mrs. Rampler. 'I happen to know his wife and the way he treated her.'

" 'It's nothing to do with me any trouble a bloke has with his wife,' says Mr. Rampler.

" 'You're going to fight him, just the same,' says his wife. She was the boss, there was no doubt about that.

"YOU never saw in your life the way the whole place got interested in that Mr. Rampler and that there mission of his, as his wife called it. He was getting on pretty well, and a lot of the tenants won money on him, which made him more popular than ever. Every night when there was one of the fights the tenants would come in in a crowd, sometimes with Mr. Rampler with them. The noise they made you would think it was Bethlehem let loose.

"She was only a little woman, that Mrs. Rampler; and until she spoke fiercely you'd think she was quite a little mouse; but she did have that big man under her thumb. She made him go off to see his friend Jim every day; and if he as much as said he felt like having a glass of beer she snapped at him so that he looked afraid of mentioning it again for days.

" 'You ought to have a few shillings on Rampler, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Wassail. 'He's going to win that illimitation contest. You might get a price if you backed him now.'

" 'But,' says Mr. Slompack, who was with him— they were going out to see the fight together— 'I can't see him beating Joe Martin. He's a good fighter— he'd be a splendid fighter if he liked the game. But he doesn't.'

"The women was as interested as the men, and although Miss Perry said that surprise fights were brutal exhibits, and couldn't understand how Mrs. Rampler could be so unwomanly as to urge her husband on, that didn't prevent her from having her bets on Farmer Fred, as the papers called 'im.

"THERE was one fight which was declared a draw; and I pitied poor Mr. Rampler that night the way his wife talked to him; and his face looked as if he'd

been in an accident, too. I had to pass their flat to tell Number 21 to turn off his wireless, which he had going after midnight, and I heard her at it.

" 'You've got no ambition,' she says. 'I'm doing my best to put your name on the scrolls of flame, and you're not interested.'

"A woman has come across from the ringside and is talking to Farmer Fred. Slugger Joe jumped to his feet as if he wanted to object."

" 'My ambition is to 'ave a good farm,' he says. 'I don't want to be a chopping block in a price ring. I wish I'd lost; then we could go 'ome.'

" 'You're still in,' she says, 'an' you're going to win. If you don't, when we get 'ome I'll set fire to the farm.'

"Everybody seemed to think, after that, that Mr. Rampler's chances weren't so good; but he won the illimitation contest. It was put on the wireless, and I listened in, with me heart in me mouth at what seemed to be happening to poor Mr. Rampler. I missed the end though because there was some trouble between the tenants in one of the flats; and the first I knew that it was over the tenants began arriving home all excited.

" 'He won,' says Mr. Wassail. 'On points.'

"I didn't think that Mr. Rampler was the sort of man who would take points against anyone; but I was pleased he had won; and that night Mrs. Rampler gave a party and everybody went in to congratulate Farmer Fred; but the poor chap was mistaken if he thought he could have some beer with the others.

" 'Two glasses only, I said,' says Mrs. Rampler, taking a glass he had filled from him. 'That's your limit; you keep to the soft stuff.'

" 'He's got a big fight ahead of him,' she says. 'The fight with Slugger Joe has been arranged.'

"IT struck me there was something funny when I heard young Mr. Tebbutt talking to Mr. Oddson, the s.p. man, who had got the habit of coming in and out the residential as if he owned it. 'I'll have an even quid with you that the fight with Joe Martin doesn't come off,' he says. And when there was no elephants in the roof in the morning it seemed funnier still, although I thought Mrs. Rampler might have given the poor chap a holiday. But the note I found slipped under the door held the money for another fortnight's rent. Mr. Rampler said his wife might stay on for a while, but he was going home.

"If ever a woman was like a lioness despoiled of her pay it was that Mrs. Rampler. She had been tired, it seems, after the party, and had slept in; and when she woke up her Farmer Fred had gone.

" 'Keep the flat; I'll have him back in a few days,' she says to me; and off she went too.

"When, after a week had gone by, the Ramplers were still away, we thought that was the end of them, though there were bits in the paper about the fight between Mr. Rampler and that Slugger Joe; and I was wondering whether I could show people Number 20 when they came looking for flats, when back they came. And the very next day them elephants started bumping the place about again, and Mrs. Rampler went off with him herself to see that he saw his friend Jim.

"You'd think there was a gale a-day, as the saying is, the night of that fight; in fact, there was excitement for days ahead, for Mrs. Wassail said she wanted a new hat to go to the fight in, and she made Wassail feel that he wasn't doing the right thing by his friend, Mr. Rampler, when he didn't want to buy it; and everybody was on the pit-a-pat of excitement, as the saying goes. A lot of the women went to the fight, too, which in my idea is not the right thing. A woman's place is the home; and heaven knows there's quite enough fight for most of them there. When the time came, if you stood out in the passages you could hear the wirelesses all on; and they was all giving the fight. Everybody who hadn't gone there was listening-in.

" 'I'll be glad to get it over,' was all Mr. Rampler had said to me about it; and I kept thinking that he would be glad to get it over when I heard what was happening to him. But it was most aggravating. Just when I wanted to listen-in people came, one after another, knocking at my door, for this, that and the other thing. 'Farmer Fred is down; that was a beautiful right swing connecting with the jaw. He's taking the count, one, two, three,' says the wireless; and then someone comes knocking at my door. But Mr. Rampler must have recovered, for soon there's roars of cheering coming over the air. The next I can make out clearly is that Joe Martin had landed Farmer Fred a hit under the eye which had opened a cut, and he was staggering against the ropes attempting to smother, though why he should do that I don't know. 'The gong saves him,' says the wireless. It didn't look very good for my five shillings I'd had with Mr. Oddson.

"Then someone else came to the door. I hurried back to the wireless, made more excited by the roars I heard. I thought it was that Mr. Rampler had been beaten; but the first thing I heard was 'A woman has come across from the ringside and is talking to Farmer Fred. Slugger Joe jumped to his feet as if he wanted to object.'

"I could see Mrs. Rampler doing it. Then the fight started again; I heard the man say that Farmer Fred was looking quite fresh again, and was sailing in. All that talk about rights and crosses, and right lefts and fishhooks to the jaw, was Greek to me; but the crowd was roaring so much you could hardly hear what was being said. And I could hardly believe my ears what I heard. It was Mr.

Rampler who was doing everything now. He knocked that Joe Martin down, and when he got up he knocked him down again. It was not very gentlemanly; but that Joe Martin hadn't been very gentlemanly either. And then that count they had mentioned so often was interfering again, and there was a roar; and then, a minute later, while I was still dazed wondering if I had heard aright, a tenant was knocking at the door crying out 'He's won, Mrs. Parsley!'

"I never saw such a to-do. All the people who had stayed at home came out of their flats to talk about it most excited. They was still talking, hanging about the lounge at the top of the stairs when the others came pouring in. Such a scene you never saw in these flats. Everybody was talking at once, but they stopped to give a cheer when Mrs. Rampler came in hanging on her husband's arm. And then everyone started to congratulate them.

" 'I'll be getting back to me farm now,' says Mr. Rampler, looking really happy.

" 'I suppose you're happy now, Mrs. Rampler,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'No, I'm not,' says she surprisingly. 'Fred should have punished him more than he did. He was wide open in them last rounds, and Fred could have given him the hiding of his life.'

" 'Aw, you don't want to murder a man, Millie. You only want to hit 'im to put him out,' says Mr. Rampler.

" 'That's what you should have done— murdered him. That's what I told you to do,' snaps Mrs. Rampler. Mr. Slompack said she was a bloodthirsty little wretch. 'Well, I am, with a man like that. Fred'll have another fight with him, and he'll hit him harder. There's some drinks in our flat if you people, all of you, care to come up. Fred can have a few to-night.'

"Mr. Rampler was the first to make a move up the stairs. If it had been another time I wouldn't have allowed the noise to go on. But it finished suddenly.

" 'Slugger Joe!' cries Mr. Rampler, staring at the door as if he'd seen a ghost. 'Oh, come in, Slugger, if you'll join us in a drink.'

"And there was a man standing in the doorway, looking badly knocked about, and staring ahead of him.

" 'I didn't come up for a drink,' he says, slowlike. 'I came up for my wife.'

"'You got what you deserved to-night, Joe, only not half enough,' says Mrs. Rampler.

" 'I know you put this up on me, Millie,' he says. 'You got even. I've been wanting you back for years, Mill— that other girl was only a fatal vaccination.'

" 'Here, what's this!' cries Mr. Rampler. 'You're talking to my wife.'

" 'If she is, it's bigamy,' says that Slugger Joe. 'Millie, you're my wife still. You didn't divorce me. And I need you. It was you built me up, Millie; it was you kept me down to my work. That's what put me in the fighting game.'

"He wasn't taking any notice of Mr. Rampler, or of any of the crowd there, which we mightn't have been there at all, we had become so quiet; some had sneaked out past him. He was absolutely blubbering.

" 'I need you, kid,' he says, 'if I'm to get back to my place in the game.'

"She stepped across the room to him suddenlike, and turned back to Mr. Rampler, who was gaping like a fish.

" 'Fred, I've got to go with him,' she says. 'He really is my husband and— I loved him even when I wanted to see him beaten.'

"Well, of all the nine days' blunders, that was the tenth. Her not being Mr. Rampler's wife at all, really, although he thought she was; and her going off with that battered-faced surprise fighter who wasn't half as good looking as Mr. Rampler. All he said about the matter was that he was going back to his farm, which he did next day.

" 'There are stranger things in heavenly earth than are dreamt by our foolish Sophies,' said Mr. Slompack, calling me Horatio in that funny way of his. 'Just fancy a man wanting to be bossed about by a woman like that.' "

40: “With Self-Clipped Wings"

Bulletin, 25 June 1952

HAROLD MERCER wrote this self-obituary for The Bulletin *many years ago. On June 13, 1952, after having dinner at his son’s home at Bondi, he said a cheery goodnight and stepped out into the street. A moment later he was knocked down by a motor-car. Death was instantaneous. Although in recent years Mercer no longer drew his main income from freelancing— during the war he worked at Sydney G.P.O., and for the last four years at Lysaght's— his pen was never idle long, and he found in his last two jobs, as in all before them, plenty of material for* Bulletin *pars.*

He was 70 at the finish; “Hamer,” “Hamfat,” “Percy Pawnticket,” “Harold Hardupp” “Exdig” “Spare Corp.” and a host of other pen-names die with him. —The Bulletin

IF with my passing a few words are written about me they will probably repeat the charge, often made to my face, that I was a humorist; as a humorist and also as an enterprising, hard-working freelance I claim the right to write my own obituary. My practice, always has been to live, financially, in advance; and by dying inadvance I shall run true to form

And, after all, I probably know more about myself than anyone else.

The fact that I am writing my obit., however, must not be taken ais a definite promise. But in world grown so tough that it breaks the point of a freelance there is no knowing what will happen. First, to sum up:

He sang, a bird with self-clipped wings.
Dull often, but quite dull flashes;
He made a hash of many things,
But now there’s peace to all his hashes.

It is left to every man to make his own hashes; and there is one detail about hash that is a compensation for any ill aftereffects— spice is an ingredient. I must have had a fondness for hashes or I would not have made so many of them. But it may be said that usually the materials for every hash are well prepared for the maker before he starts upon his job.

It has been said of me that I have been “the most successful freelance in Australia,” and I have frequently been asked for advice by people who desire to be successful freelances. It has always seemed rather a joke to me. Often, as I have given the advice, I have been cogitating desperately about where to obtain the cheque necessary to keep the domestic pot, and other pots, boiling.

There is printed and documentary evidence— if in the course of a careless life it had been collected— to show that I have been a successful scholar; a successful actor and theatrical manager; a successful hotel-manager; something similar as commercial traveller and an accountant (I knew all about accountancy except how to keep my own accounts); and an exceedingly successful union-organiser at a time when an enthusiasm for such matters led me into work which resulted in the organisation of twenty-eight unions, many of them still in existence.

The word “success” had been thrown at me quite a lot; and the varied experiences gathered have helped to make the successful freelance people say I am (or was), whilst within myself always was the consciousness of failure.

Failure is of course relative, but the fact is I have not brought to fulfilment a single point of the promise kindly people have seen in me; I have not done any of the work I really should have done. It has not been lack of industry; my crime against myself has been overwork. I have probably written more verses than Rod Quinn; and probably not a single one of them will be remembered. I have never had time to polish, to perfect. Since, at the age of eighteen, I began to pile upon my shoulders responsibilities that have made my life one of servitude, the spur of necessity rather than attainment has kept me struggling. The Kaiser’s war gave me the only holiday I have ever had in my life, for even when I was in staff positions the urge to make money for liabilities to be met was still with me.

There is joy in battle, of course, as long as the battle can be fought. There is an exultation even in a temporary success in a battle that is hopeless and lost. No man who has money at his command can have the satisfaction from it that comes with the cheque won unexpectedly to save a desperate position. Despite my full share of sorrows, life and living have always been beautiful to me. I have no grouch against anyone, even those who have not returned when needed the aid that was freely given to them. My hashes have been my own; I have so much for which to thank my forebears that it would be folly to blame them for their aid in the hashes.

My name actually was not Mercer, but Bailey, or more rightly Bayley, my grandfather having been an estimable minister who wrote some tomes of a purely religious nature. My father broke his articles with a solicitor to fight for the South in the American Civil War, and, having won his captaincy and a couple of wounds at Gettysburg, kept thereafter the form of the name which was shown on his papers. The Bailey v. Bailey divorce, a Sydney sensation of 1893,* accounts for the Mercer, my mother having reverted to her maiden name and taken me with her, so to speak.

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* *Australian Star*, 16 Nov 1893, p5

That incident was one of fear in my early life. My father, a genial good fellow to his friends, was a merciless bully to those who opposed him in any way. He had a way with creditors that might be envied; after one encounter they avoided him. How he became a railway-magnate in India I do not know; his position was sufficiently important for him to be made the guest of the Australian railway systems when he reached Australia on furlough— from which, having left a mountain of debt behind him, he did not return; the free travelling privileges were used for something like six years!

I was born in a three-roomed, sparsely-furnished cottage at Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, and my early years were passed in extremes of near-poverty and bursts of affluence, when my father, having floated some company, proceeded to spend the spoils on lavish entertainment.

When I was six my mother took me to England, where I had my first schooling, and met a family in which the military tradition was very strong, and there were patches of considerable wealth; thirteen different brands of religion, ranging from Buddhism and Freethought to the belief of the Baptists and Plymouth Brethren, leading to much verbal war; an intellectual grandmother who wrote her last article for the "Westminster Gazette" at the age of 85, but who had a fatal belief that a boy should be taught to "spend money like a gentleman"— i.e., as if it did not matter; and a warrior grandfather wedded to the ideas of feudalism.

I was expelled from a dame's school to immediately score a "very good" conduct report at a school where men were my mentors. I think it was the relief occasioned by that report which caused an uncle to give me a tenner, which I spent in a way that fully gratified my grandmother. I also narrowly escaped adoption by a wealthy female relation, with a living in her gift, who would have liked to make a parson of me— a fate to which my infantile objections were raised very strongly.

My stay in England lasted three years; the divorce that came after the return was preceded by ten months' imprisonment in a boarding-house, where I had my first experience of war behind barricades. The fear was that my father, by seizing me, would force my mother to return to him. Incidents of the campaign included a revolver, a battered-in door and a badly battered clergyman uncle.

My child-life was dominated by fear. I saw many instances of my father's violence, and I was an important witness at the divorce hearing. A bullet through my cap as I fled for home some little time afterwards made it certain that mine was an unforgivable offence. However, my father's violence had by

that time given the police such cause for action that he was warned out of the State.

The fear lived, however. When I made a little fame a couple of years later as “the boy chess-player” and “the boy reciter” it was as Harold St. Aubyn; in the same name I passed a university exam. —very well, too— but the minor publicity gained so scared my mother, who lived in fear of my father’s return, that I was withdrawn altogether from school.

My first introduction to *The Bulletin* arose out of the divorce, a friend drawing attention to comments, one of them being upon Judge Windeyer’s description of my mother’s conduct as “angelic.” Just four years later my first verses were published by *The Bulletin*; might have tried it earlier but for resentment at the sarcasm of that comment.

Probably an inclination to write was more or less an inheritance—with a grandparent on one side who wrote religiously, a grandmother who was a constan contributor to the reviews, and a grandfather on that side who belonged to a family which from generation to generation burst into verse.

It was the surprise of my young life when postal-note arrived from The Bulletin one day for some verses of mine an elderly friend had sent in. I was fifteen then the joy that every writer has experienced over his first-born was mine. That, and the greed for gold the eight-bob inspired, set me writing vigorously. The success remained isolated for some time, and once there was a rebuff when (anent some verses signed flamboyantly “H.StA.M.”) “Answers to Correspondents” informed me: “We would not print that— not if your name was X.StA.Z.” But after that, instead of replies in “Answers,” matter came back with little notes of encouragement, such as “Try again,” pinned to them.

Somehow I found that money was to be made from paragraphs; and I began to exploit other avenues. In some ways the comparatively small village of Sydney was more virile from an artistic point of view in the late ’nineties than it is today. Australian plays were being staged; the pantos were local productions— I made a little money by sending in words for songs of a topical nature; Australian books were being published. I found a remarkable market for advertising verses, then very popular. One set brought a £25 prize.

All this was triviality— mere potboiling. Winning a half-share in a prize for an essay on the future of the Australian Commonwealth (then impending) was something of an event. The essay-competition was run by an English magazine, and the also-rans who gained mere honorable mentions flaunted many degrees. I was really a serious-minded youth who fled from cricket directly a match was finished to continue a search which went from Professor Draper and Robert Ingersoll to Swedenborg for the truth of things and the real meanings of life; even when I went sailing I took tomes with me, and argued

points of theology with my elders. My serious writing took a political and social economic form, and the articles were published— quite often. Amongst a mass of uncompleted novels written with serious intent was actually a book of philosophy! And Angus and Robertson returned it with suggestions for alterations and resubmission!

Yet my first venture in story-writing was inspired by a spasm of jealousy about the favor won, particularly with a pretty girl of my acquaintance, by a friend who had had a schoolboy story published in the "*Sydney Mail*."

I resolved to show that I could do better than that— nothing less than The *Bulletin* was my aim. The writer's road may be a hard one, but it has its compensations. Even in the blasé days when production had to be in the mass and the main spur was necessity, the knowledge of some particular point well made, the appreciation of someone who stops in the street to say how he enjoyed a particular story, verse or paragraph, exalts the heart. The ecstasy that came to me when, turning over a copy of *The Bulletin* on a bookstall, a mere couple of weeks after writing that story, I saw it on the back page, was something that it was worth living a hard life to experience.

A copy of the paper went with me to the solicitor's office where I toiled. I tried hard to conceal the joy and triumph surging within me. When another member of the staff remarked "See you've got *The Bulletin*. Any thing specially good in it this week?" I returned casually "A pretty good number. By the way, there's a little thing of mine on the back page." The paper went with me to Wynyard square during the lunch-hour; I wanted to sit by myself for a while, and, although I tried to read the rest of the paper, time after time I found myself staring with exaltation at my own work.

The yarn inspired an old and very dear friend to remark that "Instead of being written by a boy like Harold it might be the work of an old roué of 50." My mother, after reading it, had, I think, a wild idea of trying to buy up the whole issue of *The Bulletin* in order to destroy it, and hide my shame. Then pride triumphed.

The story, incidentally (it was "At the Crossroads," published September 22, 1900), lost me my reputation as a white-headed boy amongst the fond mammas of our set. I was no longer asked to act as escort for precious daughters from late parties; on the contrary, when I called upon girl-friends the fond mammas often made a point of remaining very determinedly in the vicinity.

That story brought me my first *Bulletin* payment that took the form of a cheque; and it occasioned my first call at the office. Suspicious of my identity, Tom MacMahon, the accountant, got me to write out a slip of copy, which was compared with the MS. before payment was made.

My habit was to drop my MS. on the counter of *The Bulletin* and fly before I could be charged with the offence, but on my next visit Tom MacMahon intercepted me with the remark that Mr. Archibald wanted to see me. No need to repeat what he said, but Archibald had a remarkable memory about small things, forgetful as he was over many. Only a few months before he died he said to me with a sharp suddenness, "Where's that book I told you to write the day I first saw you?"

The book is not written yet— one of the phases of my failure.

Some time afterwards Archibald sent for me again. He had a little pile of my paragraphs on his desk. "They are not up to your best; sit down there and rewrite them," he said. Most of those paragraphs subsequently appeared.

At that time I was working in a solicitor's office, rebelling against the prospect of adopting the law, which I hated— and still hate. An uncle— the same who had gifted me with a tenner for my school achievements— had undertaken, if I made up my mind to become a lawyer, to provide me with an income until I was on my feet. He now wrote a stern letter objecting to the "socialistic tone" of some of my articles my mother had proudly forwarded to him. I wrote expressing my gratitude for kindnesses received from him, but declaring that I didn't intend to allow anyone to interfere with my opinions. In that way I cut off my wealthy uncle with a postage-stamp; he never wrote to me again.

To get away from the hated law I went on the stage. I had been a fairly distinguished amateur, and an offer was made to me. I was never a good actor; the fact that the stage is full of bad actors probably accounted for the notices I some times secured. In three months I was linked up with the business side, being appointed assistant manager— which meant a regular weekly salary instead of payment for six performances or a week's work. In ten months I was managing a company. At 20, it was the worst thing that could have happened to me— especially with my early training in despising money. As one result, I landed in Sydney, after a two years tour in N.Z., to which the term "successful" could be (and was) applied, with 3s. 6d. in my pocket. The stage never held any glamor for me; and I left it quite willingly when I married at 23 and decided that married life and the stage would not work well together.

By that time I was making a fair income as a freelance, but found that with all my time my own, the money made went rather too easily. So I took a position as a clerk, and in three months was accountant to a Waterloo firm. With my salary and freelance earnings I had the most prosperous period in my existence; but plunging with enthusiasm into the formation of the Clerks' Union I experienced the sack (actually, I sacked my self, but I could see the sack coming following a refusal to withdraw from my union activities) and the

boycott. That treatment only stimulated my enthusiasm. I became a commercial-traveller when I found the boycott well set against me as a clerk, and I was doing well when my new guise was discovered and the boycott applied again.

The battle was rather enjoyable, although bitter at times. I emerged with a practice as auditor; did a tremendous amount of freelance work; my knowledge of labor affairs got me a staff job on the Sydney "*Herald*" on terms that were excellent; as a labor organiser I organised 28 new unions besides definitely establishing the Clerks Union and helping to found the Writers' and Artists' Union, from which sprang the A.J.A.; and had success as an industrial advocate.

The world seemed at my feet in those days; although how I managed the work is now a mystery to me. My office in Post Office Chambers was known as "the Little Trades Hall." Offers for my exclusive services, upon wonderful terms, came to me constantly; many of them I regarded as bribes to lure me from my union work, and rejected them with scorn. And then my own pet union, the Clerks', demanded my exclusive services at £4 per week. In one way and another I was at that time making— and spending or giving away— fully £30 p.w.! The resolution making this demand was carried by a majority of only one vote, and I could have defeated it if I had not been too proud— after the work I had done— to organise my own support. There were other incidents that damped my union enthusiasms, but as I was withdrawing from activities that were often quite unpaid, I crashed generally. The "*Herald*" wanted me to go definitely on the staff, offering to make the sacrifice of other work worthwhile; foolishly I refused, and we parted company. The "*Herald*," which I found an excellent employer, allowed it to be resignation instead of dismissal.

After that I let most of the other work go and concentrated on freelancing, which I continued even during my services with the A.I.F. (in fact, some of my best-paid freelancing was done in London, after being invalided from France). There were gaps. For a while I was publicity officer at Sydney Repat., a sub-editor on "Aussie" and Melbourne representative of *The Bulletin*, but really I have been freelancing all my life; the varied other experiences have merely been the mines that provided the material for my real career. There have been few periods in which, as a sole means of livelihood, it has been easy; the path trodden by the free-lance is usually cruelly hard.

When I commenced the work even *The Bulletin* rates were very much less than they are today. The daily papers' rate was 1¼d. per line, and there were queer ideas about verse. A Queensland weekly, having been approached for payment for some verse it had published. protested that it was not usual to pay for verse unless specially ordered; it forwarded a whole 2s. 6d. The likeable

editor of the now-extinct “A.A.A.” (“All About Australians”) printed and paid for (at low rates) several stories, but told me that he expected verses free as a sort of makeweight. There have been periods of real affluence in the freelance world, but they are infrequent and shortlived. The freelances have, indeed, always been used as the shock-troops of every new newspaper enterprise; soldiers to be petted and encouraged when they are wanted, and then forgotten. The brief period of their affluence passes once the newspaper’s position is assured.

To make my living I have written verse and stories, paragraphs on all subjects, leaders, special articles and mere jokes. I have written sermons and prayers; advertisements; articles of a technical nature; yet only in one or two periods have I made such an income— from freelancing alone— as anyone described as “most successful" might expect.

My own weaknesses probably have defeated me, although my waywardness has been less great than many people suspect. I have never yet met a woman who was as interesting to me as a good book. I have never known what loneliness is; life is too full. But Nature has provided that he who does not pursue is pursued. Mistrained to be careless of money, I have never actually wasted it dissolutely; yet I have let it go, with the opportunities it might have given me for the real work I have never done, in order to secure peace.

My own wants are simple. I recall in the depression years meeting a friend who talked despondently of suicide. His money had gone, and his wife had left him. Checking my inclination to congratulate him, I shouted a whisky and then a couple more, and provided the four-bob that was necessary to save him from a sudden end.

Wondering afterwards what had caused me to let go money which I actually needed very badly myself, I was forced to a laugh when I recalled the pathos with which he had told me that he had been forced to pawn his other suit. I myself had no other suit to pawn.

I have carried rather heavy burdens and have landed in failure. Life is a beautiful thing, and I have enjoyed it fully: when it can no longer be lived it ends. I have no grouch.

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* *Australian Star*, 16 Nov 1893, p5

End