A VERY GENTLEMANLY MURDER

and other stories
from "The Bulletin"

HAROLD MERCER

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Collected, edited and produced by
Terry Walker, 2024

Harold Mercer, 1882-1952

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 included acting, then becoming the company's touring manager. After marrying in 1905, he worked mainly as an accountant and auditor, while also becoming involved as a union organiser.

He served in the AIF in World War 1, and after his return to Australia worked principally in newspapers as a freelance. He wrote prolifically for the *Bulletin* and numerous other newspapers and magazines. He also wrote under the pseudonym 'Hamer'.

This is the fourth new volume of his short fiction to be produced in **e-Book** form.
These four 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

(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)
The Frequent Lover: His Verses (1925)
The Lady Who Was French, and Other Stories (1929)
The Adventures of Mrs Parsley (1942), short stories
Romances in Real Life (1945), short stories

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1: Costs

The 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 look-out 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" country men, 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. Tge 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 have 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.

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2: Miss Minks, War Worker

The Bulletin, 12 Apr 1917

MISS MINKS finished her preparations. Having put up the new bed in the spare room which she had never before used she arranged the pictures on the mantelpiece, the quaint ornaments on the dressing-table, and refixed the bows on the bands that held the white, newly-starched curtains; and all the work was a delightful labor of love. Then, as an afterthought, she went out to the garden, gathered a bowl of flowers and placed them amongst the ornaments.

After that she prepared herself for the excitement of the day. Chaste were Miss Minks's notions; and yet. to do honor to the occasion, she had carefully placed beautifully-bowed ribbons in her lingerie. Her dress was the new one, painfully home-made, yet glorious. With the extremest care she put the final touches to her hair, selected and adjusted her riband belt, and placed her hat on her head. With an air that was almost agitation she turned from the door, as she was going out, to see by the glass if her appearance was fitting.

Miss Minks was going to meet her lonely soldier.

Miss Minks's life had been a drab and solitary one; and the war was a red splash in the monotony of its quieter colors. Once, long ago, she had had what might be called wan glimmerings of lovers, who pressed her hand for a time, or even, may it be said, put an arm around her; but protestations had all been vague and indefinite. Miss Minks might have done better under more favorable conditions; but her people were a Superior Family, and they gave a chill to the wooer. Her circumstances had left her with a home of her own and an extremely moderate income upon which to support her loneliness; and she hardly realised that it had robbed her of much better things.

But, after she had lived many years in a grey fashion to which she had become reconciled, the war suddenly gave her surroundings a red tone which was exhilarating. It woke in her blood something which the opportunity to do work for the soldiers satisfied. If anyone had told her that the satisfaction that pleased her was only the gratification of the feminine instinct to serve men. she would have felt outiaged— insulted. To her it was the answer to the call of patriotism.

She knitted socks; she was a member of the Red Cross, the Blue Muffler Society, the Convalescent Hospital-Shoe Club and all the other organisations which sought to provide comfort for soldiers. She was a lay member who wanted only the joy of working.

Then somebody suggested the Lonely Soldiers' Society, and she entered gladly on the task of writing letters. It was a new enjoyment; but it met with disappointments.

Her first case was a Private Blisters, about whom Corporal William Masters had written that he "felt sorry for the poor beggar, who didn't get any letters sent to him." She sent three newsy, cheerful letters to Blisters, interspersed with Christian advice, but got no answer. She did not know that Blisters said, "Blime, 'ere's some old tart writin' to me!" and was much tickled by the religious and sentimental phrases. She believed that her lonely soldier had died the death of a hero, and mourned him as lost. Other disappointments came her way, including that of the soldier who said bitterly that he had a wife, and was at the war for the sake of peace. But eventually she found her soldier.

Martin Trebolt responded to her letters with a painstaking zeal. He answered with minuteness all her many queries about bully beef, the chaplain's sermons, the trenches, the Turkish prisoners and so on, before he started his own personal paragraph. In these he described himself as a lonely wanderer who was grateful for her correspondence. Then he was silent for a while until a letter, in a nurse's hand, but signed by himself, said that he was in hospital and described the nature of his wounds with seeming light-heartedness.

And now her soldier was returning, wounded.

A troop of soldiers, laughing, happy, apparently little the worse for war-wear, filed off the ship. One of them, searching the wharf for friends, politely offered to show her Trebolt when he was brought off. As she was sympathising, mentally, with a man who came with a halting, wounded gait, bandaged arm and bandaged eyes, being half helped, half carried, off the ship, he suddenly pointed. A spasm shot through the tender heart of Miss Minks. She ran towards the wounded soldier.

"Oh, my poor Martin!" she cried. "I am Mary Minks!"

Although the wounded man's face had been smiling with the forced, fixed smile of one who insists upon being cheerful in the teeth of misfortunes, the look that came over it when she spoke was an altogether different thing. There was a sudden glow in his cheeks and his head lifted with a lilt. His uninjured hand shot out, groping for hers, and was grasped instantly.

"You have been very good to me," he said. "It is very good of you to come down to see me. I have nobody else." His words, although there was no stressing of his troubles in the tone, gave a simple hint of terrible loneliness which brought tears in Miss Minks's eyes. She insisted that he should go home with her, so that she might look after him. It was not a trouble, but a privilege; she could not fight, but she could do her duty to her country by tending those

who had suffered. There was very little difficulty in arranging matters, for Miss Minks was prepared to take all responsibility in regard to her soldier.

Lying in his clean white bed, in the fresh, sweet-scented room. Martin felt a delightful content in his condition, a content rich with fragrant dreams of the kind woman whom he could not see, but whose touch was so soft, cool and gentle as she adjusted his bandages or ministered to his wants. The scent of the flowers she daily placed upon his dressing-table delighted his nostrils, and there was the sweetness of lavender about his sheets and the very bandages he wore. As Miss Minks sat and talked to him, giving him the news of the war and asking him questions about his experiences, he heard the click of her knitting-needles busy over more socks for more soldiers. When she went out it was only to do some other work for other soldiers: and having made every provision for Martin's comfort while she was gone, she hurried back, bringing cigarettes and fruit for him. Picturing her at her knitting, Martin saw the perfect woman, beautiful and kind; fresh, sweet and young as the spirit of a rose garden.

"I would like to have my eyes again," he said, "if it is only to see the lady who is so kind to me."

Miss Minks smiled, placidly.

"But your sight is not gone," she said. "You will be able to see again. Only you must have patience."

"Thanks to you," he said, reaching out his hand to grasp hers.

In the grey mist of her years it had hardly seemed necessary for Miss Minks to set aside any store for a rainy day; yet from a habit of frugality, because her wants were few, she had done so. Now her savings came in usefully, and she expended them gladly. She engaged a leading eye specialist— who, however, when he found how the case stood, refused to charge the fees which were the privilege of his reputation— to cure her wounded soldier's worst affliction. And shortly he gave hope of an early cure. Her soldier would see again, although his eye-sight might never be perfect.

Martin received the news with a strange eagerness, and the days passed slowly, became almost tiresome in the deferment of his hopes, the greatest of all of which was that he would be able to look into the face of his benefactress. To her, however, the day when her soldier would see was fraught with a vague apprehension. She knew, from the things he sometimes said, that he regarded her as beautiful: and looking at her face in the glass, trying to add a touch here and there to her withered appearance, she sighed. Before the day arrived when the bandages were to be removed Martin had recovered from his other afflictions. His arm, which finished at the wrist in a stump, did not trouble him, and he could limp about the house with the aid of a crutch.

He was in a half-darkened room when the doctor stripped away tlie covering. The morning had been full of pent-up excitement, and he was trembling when the moment arrived. With the removal of the last bandage a sharp pain stabbed into his eyes as the dim light struck them, and even when the pain passed only a blurring vision came to him. Then slowly it cleared.

"How is it?" asked the specialist.

"I can see," answered Martin almost under his breath; and then he looked eagerly past the doctor at Mary Minks.

A queer little cold shiver ran through her heart as she felt the eagerness of his face change abruptly to pained disappointment.

But if there was disappointment he forced it away, lest it should hurt her. He took her hand in his.

"I owe you everything," he said, simply.

"I have only done what is a pleasure for me," she said.

"Shortly I will be able to get work," he

went on. "And then I will be able to say what I want to say to you."

He could see her breast fluttering as she drooped her head.

"You mustn't be silly!" she said, softly.

"And you must still take things easily. I will have to go now for a while."

He was glad at the moment that she put him off. He had grown to love the ideal he had created; and he felt, somehow, that the woman who had tended him so sweetly expected him to love her. Had she been as beautiful and youthful as he had imagined— even her jesting references to a "poor old maid" had not shattered the illusion— he would have felt that it was asking her to make something of a sacrifice to marry a maimed man; and yet he knew that she expected him to ask her, and he was eager to fulfil her expectation. Now, with his disappointment fresh upon him, he felt that it was no less a duty of gratitude ; but it seemed as though some of the sacrifice fell upon him. Visions of the bright young girl with whom he had quarrelled before he went away, temporarily shut out by the gloom of his blind days, came back to him, troubling him with a sense of renunciation.

And yet, as he told himself, if Mary Minks was plain, advanced in years, lonely and aching for love, the duty imposed by gratitude was more insistent than ever.

Being able now to look after himself he sought lodgings, for he could not ask Miss Minks to accept any monetary return for her kindness, and his independence forbade him any longer to live upon her charity, Then, securing his discharge, he passed back into civil employment at his old desk, Gradually, as he got thoroughly well, he noticed a cooling of Mary's manner to him.

A sort of old-maidish stillness superseded the gentle tenderness which she had shown while he was helpless. The thought stayed with him that she was showing her natural offence at his delay in asking her to marry. He had caught sight of his old sweetheart in the city, and with a spring in his heart had hurried his steps towards her. As he did so, he apologised to his conscience that Miss Minks had grown cool, and did not care; but Conscience, refusing to be satisfied. had presented the other view. He checked himself suddenly.

“I am an ungrateful dog," he muttered.

SHE WAS writing when he arrived,

"You don’t mind my finishing this letter?” she said, reseating herself.

He approached and leaned over her.

"Mary,” he said, "you have been so good to me. I am only half a man, but I can earn my salt and look after you. Will you marry me?”

She looked up at lnm in a startled way, her breast heaving.

"Oh, you mustn't talk like that!” she cried.

"But I *want* you to marry me," he said.

"Oh, I am sorry, she said, hurriedly. "I didn't suppose you would think ot things like that. I— l don t want to marry; I am too old."

He moved backward, astounded, not knowing whether he felt relieved or not.

"I'm just writing to Jack Travers,” she went on quickly, as it to stop him from renewing the subject. "My new lonely soldier, you know. And he has been wounded, too, and is coming out, I expect. I am just writing to say that the room is all ready, and l am waiting to care for him next."

Martin's first feeling had been one of relief; but he was a tangle of emotions when he went away, he looked back at the house with a feeling of something smarting in his heart.

"Who is this Jack Travers," he muttered, jealously. "God! but I believe I love Mary, after all."

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3: The Lease

The Bulletin, 3 May 1917

I HAVE some pity for landlords, especially my own landlords. I've had quite a number of them who needed it. They were people with a bad habit of calling on Monday morning for the rent, as if they expected to get it. Some landlords don't call. I have known those who have, instead, sent men— disreputable-looking men. But even those landlords who don't call or send seem to expect their rent just the same. Hope is a wonderful thing, and expectation is a large edition de luxe of hope.

The landlords who deserve the most pity are those who possess the very little property which, apparently, they regard as a dangerous thing; say, one cottage besides the humpy they are living in. It gives them so much anxiety that it would be very much better for them if they hadn't got it. When it is empty they worry about the rates and taxes; when it is occupied they are terribly afraid that the tenants will knock it down with a tack-hammer; and when the tenants move they rush round frantically to make sure that the carriers haven't taken the house with the furniture.

I had an office once next to a house and estate agent who had one ewe-lamb house of his own. He advertised that it was to let, giving the neighborhood and the rent— a very cheap rent for a close-to-the-city house— and he wanted a "selected tenant." I didn't know this until I arrived in the morning and found the stairs and the landings crowded with people. Some of them had brought their breakfast, in order to be in time. They rushed me when I approached, and that is how I learnt about the advt.

Later, when the real landlord came, I heard sounds of great anger outside my door. The applicants for the house went in one by one, and passed out breathing anger. One of them came into my room to let me know what he thought of my neighbors, and others stood in the doorway, listening, and approved. It appeared that the house-owner was particularly careful about the "selected tenant." He took names and addresses, and the names and addresses of previous landlords, and inspected rent receipts; but not even the bribe of a month's rent in advance would tempt him to let the place until he had communicated with the previous landlords, and ascertained all about the morals and disposition of the would-be tenant. One angry woman snorted: "Wonder he didn't ask to see me marriage-lines!"

He got his tenant, of course. Also, a few weeks later, he got a bailiff. I noticed the shabby, beery-lookifig individual coming in every morning; and, one day, when my neighbor's door was locked, he confided to me that he was

trying, without success, to effect an entrance into the recently-let property, and had to report every day. Finally, he reported that he had got in and taken possession of the blinds left on the windows. Careful selection, apparently, is not always as successful as it should be.

Once I had a landlord who lived next door to his one letting property. He told me in an impressive way that an M.P. lived across the street, next to Blinks, the big softgoods merchant, and that Alderman Smith resided on the other side of the cottage; and he charged all these things in the rent. He seemed grieved to hear that I had several children, but he overlooked it; and he asked me if I was prepared to sign a lease for twelve months. The light fashion in which I assented appeared to grieve him; and he insisted on reading the document to me before I signed it. Then he carried his copy reverently to the safe, and seemed upset at the offhand manner in which I folded mine and put it in my pocket.

When the furniture arrived he was on the spot advising the vanman how to get it in without scratching the doors. This seemed to spur the carters to greater efforts, which wouldn't have mattered so much only it was my furniture.

His troubles didn't cease when the van-men had gone, because about that time I started putting up the blinds. It's a job I tire of, and when I was weary of turning screws I put the fixtures up with nails for a change. I hadn't been engaged at the hammering for long, however, before the landlord came running in with a gimlet and screwdriver. He seemed to doubt my word when I said I had some, and insisted on leaving his. Later, when the hammering continued, he called in twice to ask nervously if he could be of any assistance. Even after that I could see him, with the light at the back of him, peering anxiously through the slats of his blinds. I had finished the curtain-fixing, but now and again, in a spare moment, I knocked the hammer against the window-frame just to see the effect. It was a sport that lasted for several nights.

When I came home next night my wife said that she was sure the place would not suit us. I reminded her that a week before she had been sure that it would suit us, and, anyway, I had signed a lease; but she said that previously she had not known that the landlord was one of the fixtures. It appears that he called in shortly after I left to remark that young Hamer was using the pieces of asphalt, where it was broken, as coal for his trains; and since then he had been in half a dozen times, ostensibly to see what needed to be done to the copper, but really because he heard hammering in the kitchen, or because he heard nothing and wanted to see what it was all about. Later on he called in to see me, and made, in an apologetic way, seven complaints about (1) the children, (2) the dog, (3) the girl, and (4 to 7) generally.

As days went on my wife became more convinced that the place would not suit us. She said that the landlord was a nuisance, and wasn't a bit mollified when I told her I would get the Council's officer down to inspect him and see if he could not be removed. She declared that, lease or no lease, she was not going to live in a place where a Jack-in-the-box lived next door, and his face appeared over the fence every time the slightest noise occurred to see which part of the house was being knocked down. She had choked him off the habit of coming in so frequently by asking him, one morning, if he had not better stay to lunch; it would save him the trouble of coming back afterwards. My wife can be sarcastic, sometimes. I know. She told me when I came home one morning, certainly not later than four, that breakfast was late that morning, as she had been too tired to wake the girl.

On Sunday I prepared to lay out my vegetable garden. I have seldom eaten any vegetables grown by myself, but that is because I move. I have no doubt other people have eaten them ; and I like a kitchen garden. As I prepared the first bed the face looked over the fence before I was ready with anything to throw, and said it was Sunday.

"I know," I said shortly.

"What are you going to do?" asked my landlord.

"Lay out a vegetable garden," I answered.

"You can't do it!" he protested.

"I can," I retorted. "I've done it, often."

"But your lease says you can't. You are not to remove any of the shrubs or plants in the garden."

"I'm not going to remove them," I said, "just put them in another place— in a heap at the end of the garden."

He groaned, and disappeared; but shortly was back again, with his lease, and he insisted upon reading it over to me. He seemed ridiculously like a parson reading the lesson for the day. He was quite reverential over it. I went on digging, and said "Amen" at the end of it.

"So you see you can't change the garden without my consent," he said.

"So you see, I can!" I retorted, still digging.

"The lease says you can't."

I thought he was going to read it again.

"If I can't do what I like with my own garden, I'll find another house," I said.

"You can't. The lease is for twelve months," he answered.

"Then, if you object to me doing as I like here," I said, "cancel the lease."

"No," he answered. "I don't want to do anything unpleasant, but if you spoil the garden I will sue you on the terms of the lease. Listen!"

And he did start to re-read the lease. I went inside and left him at it.

That evening I agreed with my wife that the house would not suit us, and I went in to see my landlord, after tea. and said so.

He said that he did not like to talk business on Sunday, but if I liked to leave the next week's rent, as I was there, I could do so. In any case, the lease set out a twelve months tenancy, from which he would not release me. He wanted to read me the lease again.

"Very well, then," I said.

Next week I laid in a stock of sapling stakes and wire-netting, and let them rest ostentatiously on the lawn. My landlord, according to my wife, used to pause and look them about twenty times a day; but my wife had reached that stage at which she would not speak to him. At last he asked me what they were for.

"Oh," I said, "the wire netting is for the windows, and the stakes are for the snakes to climb on. I'm going to rig them up in one of the front rooms— the sitting-room. It's nice and sunny and will do splendidly."

"Snakes!" he cried. "Surely not!"

"Oh yes, splendidly,' I said. "Then I'm going to fix up the other front room as a sort of aviary.

"But you can't!" he gasped.

"There's nothing in the lease against that," I said. "I m not going to move any fixtures; the chandeliers will make splendid perches. And these saplings will just fit in between the floor and the ceiling, and will come down easily afterwards."

"But you'll spoil the rooms. Snakes and birds!"

"Oh, they make a bit of a mess of a place, certainly,' I admitted, "but most of it can be cleaned up afterwards. I've got some of the snakes inside in boxes. Will you come in and see them?"

He didn't want to; and, after arguing tearfully with me, and asking me if I couldn't do with just the vegetable garden, if he agreed to that, and finding me obdurate, he went away in a despairing manner.

Later, I saw him reading the lease as he paced the garden. I knew he wanted to read it to me not because it prohibited snake-keeping— he had not thought of that— but on general principles

The next morning as I was leaving, I called back to my wife.

"Look, Ethel, keep those children from pencilling on the walls to-day, if you can. The walls are disgraceful."

I saw a head jerk in a startled fashion on the other side of the fence, and felt certain I heard a groan.

"You can't expect me, with only one girl, to be watching the children all day," returned Ethel. "I smacked Hamer for chipping the mantelpiece with the chisel but you shouldn't leave such things about."

"Well, anyway," I said, "get me some paste ready for tonight. I'll fix up that wallpaper where the children have torn it. And take their paintbox away from them."

"That on the wall in the dining room isn't paint," returned my wife. "it's jam. The baby did it."

I'm certain I heard groans.

"I'm going to fix up the room for the snakes to-night," I called back as I bolted for my train.

When I got home my wife showed me a notice to quit. She said the landlord me come in wanting to inspect the house but she had refused to allow him in. I went in and saw him, telling him sternly that the lease was for twelve months I offered to read it to him. I said that bgy giving notice to quit he had forfeited all claim to rent but finally, I consented to the cancellation.

Having seemingly resigned himself to the hopeless damage of the property, my land-lord did not trouble us again ; but upon the day we moved he hovered round, endeavoring to get an opportunity to inspect the house before we left and assess the damage.

The manner in which I forbade him to enter excited his worst fears, and he was nearly frantic by the time the last van was loaded and the girl had put aboard the broom and bucket she had just been using.

He seized the keys with trembling eagerness and rushed into the house.

"You wait till I've seen what harm has been done," he called out in a sort of frenzy.

I didn't; but as I walked away I turned back and saw him looking with dazed sadness after me. The house had been swept and garnished throughout, its walls bore not a mark or stain— it was actually in a better state than when I went in in fact, I had been a good tenant— and it was he who had cancelled the lease.

I think it broke his heart

But he recovered sufficiently in a few days to write me a letter saying that a stopper from the kitchen sink was missing and unless it was replaced he would place the matter in the hands of his solicitor.

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4: Two Bottles and a Lady.

(as by "Hamer")
The Xmas Bulletin, 10 Dec 1927

MRS. MOLLOY was a prohibitionist, but she was the sort of woman who would much sooner wash the whisky advertisements from the hoardings with her tears than snatch them down in violent protest. Her big, bulging bosom heaved with real sadness when her eyes fixed on the drunk with the returned-soldier's badge who fell into the tram, and, having dumped his parcel— obviously two bottles of beer wrapped in brown paper— on to the seat, sagged in an affectionate manner beside them.

The poignancy of grief for the son who had found a grave in France had long softened into a sorrow that was almost a joy in its beauty; but always that badge on the coat of any man stirred her sympathies.

"How sad!" The exclamation was forced from her. A feeling that she ought to speak to this poor fellow warred with her natural timidity, and conquered. She moved along the seat until opposite to him; then, leaning forward, she timorously touched his hand.

"My poor young man," she said gently, "isn't it a terrible thing that you should be in this state?"

He looked up dazedly.

"Born here," he said shortly. "Goo' old Noo Shoush'll do me."

"I mean in this condition. I had boys myself who were soldiers, and one of them died. Think," she said softly, "what your dear mother would feel to see you like this! You have a mother?"

"She'sh dead !"

"You poor, dear fellow!" breathed Mrs. Molloy.

The Digger's tears were soon floating on a tide of beer, and they ran down his cheeks under the pressure of this sympathy. Mrs. Molloy herself was transformed into his mother; soft, consoling sympathy, gentle reproof, she gave him.

He suddenly remembered his stop.

"Here, misshush," he said, as he rose; and he planted his two bottles upon what little of a lap Mrs. Molloy's stoutness had left her; "I'm goin' to givsh up. Goo'-bye, dear lady, an' God blesh you!"

Awkwardly he gave her hand a firm clasp that was almost an embrace as he stumbled off.

Mrs. Molloy's face flamed red as she regarded the parcel on her knees: then, in an embarrassed and stealthy manner, she put the bottles beside her

on the seat, and with relief that the next stop was hers, stepped off the tram as the conductor made way for her.

“Here, missus; you’ve left your parcel,” called the conductor; and, turning at the imperative call, she found the two bottles thrust into her arms. Mrs. Molloy had no time to reflect that he might have been a Boy Scout and probably regarded this as his one good act. She felt she could hardly drop the bottles in the street, and the conductor and his tram were gone before she recovered her speech. She was most conscious as she moved away with flushed face— and the beer parcel— that someone had made a remark that “The old girl likes her beer.”

Her passage to the office of her daughter, who ran a typewriting business, was a path of shame; she was overcome with horror at the possibility of meeting someone who knew her.

“It’s your own fault, mother,” said her daughter severely— she was the severe type— “you will go talking to these disreputable people.”

“I’m sure he wasn’t disreputable, my dear; only foolish,” expostulated her mother.

“Still, the unfortunate affair is over now. I can leave the dreadful things here, and they’ll be removed with the rubbish in the morning.”

“You certainly will *not*!” said her daughter sharply. “Do you think I'm going to have bottles of beer standing round the office for my clients or my girls to see? And what would the cleaner think of me?”

Her mother looked piteously at her, impressed by her argument.

“There’s the liftman; you might give them to him. I know he drinks,” said the daughter, a touch of scorn in the addendum.

There was balefulness in the liftman’s look as he took them down; he and Miss Molloy had not got on well together. The elder lady hesitated nervously until the ground floor was reached.

“Do you drink?” she asked, as he waited with the lift-door open.

“What the ’ell's that to do with you?” he asked in reply.

Mrs. Molloy fled after her daughter, who had superciliously left her to her fate and was waiting in the doorway.

"Oh, mother, you must get rid of that,” she said.

“I know, dear,” said Mrs. Molloy, near the verge of tears.

“Put them down behind the door,” suggested Miss Molloy.

It seemed a good idea; but, although stooping was rather a task for Mrs. Molloy, she found that her daughter left her to do it herself.

“’Ere! You carn’t leave parcels there!”

Mrs, Molloy straightened herself with a guilty start, and, half turning, saw that the surly liftman had come out with a suspicious air, and was watching. Still with the bottles, she hurried out like a shooed fowl.

Outside she almost collided with Mrs. Button, who was a co-memb.r of the committee of the Women's No License League.

“My dear, I’m glad to see you, but I’m in a terrible hurry. I’ll be along to your party to-night, dear. I notice you have the same ideas as myself: we believe that drink should be wiped out, but it is only dutiful to provide for the tastes of our husbands’ friends in our own homes,” gushed Mrs. Rufton, her eyes resting on the dreadful parcel. “I always tell Mr. Rufton to bring home what he thinks necessary. Now, darling, I must be off.”

Mrs. Molloy was a loyal lady, and the inference that her husband was leaving it to her to bring home the beer distressed her. In normal times it would have made her indignant; but all other feelings were sunk into one of dismay that the circumstantial evidence against her was so overwhelming.

“Mother, I have a telegram to send,” said her daughter, coldly. “You had better go on, and I’ll meet you at the boat.”

Helplessly Mrs. Molloy let her go. To thus desert her mother was like Florence. When her daughter met her outside the ferry wharf. Mrs. Molloy was still nursing, with a red face, and eyes in which gleamed tears, the two bottles. She had had a dreadful series of adventures.

Getting into the tram she had found herself suddenly facing Mr. Dunlop, president of the Central No-License Committee, who, whilst he spoke to her in an unusually uncordial manner, had allowed his eyes to rest every minute or so upon her incriminating luggage. His manner was so accusative that she felt that any attempt to explain the situation would seem like puerile prevarication. She got off the tram after travelling only a couple of blocks.

Dropping the beer into one of the wire waste-receptacles, although the idea came to her with bright hope, proved no good.

She had stood beside the basket, resting her parcel on the edge while she glanced around furtively to see that no one was looking before she dropped it in. Then she hurried away as if pursued by a devil.

She was. He was a bright boy who chased her with the parcel, obviously puzzled and as obviously waiting for his reward. In her confusion she gave him sixpence and thanks.

“The old man might've been narked,” remarked the youth, with a friendly grin.

Then, mixed with the phantasmagoria of faces which seemed to be all regarding her beer-parcel, was the terrible incident of the crowd she met

coming out of a bar. They looked like men who would accept beer without question.

“I’ve got a couple of bottles of beer here,” she began, timorously, standing before one of them.

“No good to me,” he returned, and then, with a note of virtuous indignation in his voice, he said: “I’m a respectable man with a missus of my own; an’ it’s shockin’ ter see a respectabie-lookin’ old woman like you goin’ on like this. Anyway, if I was that way inclined I’d choose a young woman, an’—”

But with a horrible realisation of how she had been misunderstood, and with flaming cheeks Mrs. Molloy had fled.

She got no sympathy from her daughter.

“Oh, you’ve still got them!” said Florence, snappily. “Well, come on, we’ll get home.”

The quick way in which she walked ahead separated her— with obvious intention— from her mother, who, losing her and nursing a new idea as well as the bottles, waited until the rush had gone. The man at the season-ticket gate knew her.

“I’ve got two bottles of beer here,” she said, desperately. “You can have them.”

“Let me have a look at your ticket,” he said, firmly.

Used to being passed as a remembered face, she had to put the bottles down while she held up the traffic and groped in her purse for her ticket.

“I thought you might not have renewed, and was trying to bribe your way through,” said the gatekeeper, with no apology in his manner. “It’s been done before— with a beer-bottle filled with water.”

Mrs. Molloy had desperate ideas as she hid away in an obscure corner of the boat, where, with evident unwillingness, her daughter joined her.

“Give it to one of the engineers; they're a drunken lot,” prompted Florence.

The man with the oilcan was civil enough when she approached.

“No thanks, missus,” he said, in response to her stammered offer. “I can buy all the beer I want.”

She retreated before the rebuff, and her cheeks flamed anew when she heard him talking to the deckhand.

“Cheek these prohibitionists have!” said the engineer. “They’ll do anything to spoil a man’s taste fer beer. The old bird doesn't know that I know she’s a leading cold tea-ite; and she comes along trying to palm off a coupler doctored bottles to kill the taste.”

Mrs. Molloy didn't wait long enough to hear the deckhand's reply: "I'd have taken a risk anyway!" With an almost demented rush she moved to the side of the ferry and hurled the beer overboard.

MOLLOY himself had not Mrs. Molloy's antipathy to liquor.

"That's deuced awkward," he said when he heard the story of his wife's woes. "I've asked Morley to come to-night with his wife; and he's a man who doesn't think he's been well treated unless he's given liquor. I thought it best to prepare Mrs. Rufton for the presence of beer in the house to-night by explaining about Morley; and when she told me that she met you bringing some home I didn't worry about getting tlm bottles. Nice mess you've landed me in, haven't you?"

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5: Who Was Peter Gourlay?

The Bulletin, 15 May 1929

FROM the moment that, with the electric light switched on, I regarded the still figure lying on the bed, and realised that I was looking at my own dead body, life has been little short of a continuing nightmare. I will be glad when it is all over; and yet the desire for life, even when it is associated with loathing, remains instinctively strong.

Imagine, if you like and can, the horror of waking to find that you have changed from a young, wholesome man in the middle twenties, with the hope of a long life extending before you, its only threat that of an athlete's heart developed by a too-strenuous devotion to sport— changed from that to an old man! Not an old man suffering the natural decrepitude of years, but one tormented with vague memories of ill living.

It is impossible for me to say exactly how I allowed myself to fall under the influence of Peter Gourlay, but it was reasonable enough that I should accept the comfortable advantages of the position he offered me. The laurels I had won in several branches of sport had made me neglect what should have been my real interests in life; at twenty-six I had no profession and no definite prospects, and the time when I could go on living upon sport as an amateur was passing. The best prospect I had was to turn a professional in one of the branches; and that life did not appeal to me.

It was at this period that I was introduced to Peter Gourlay. The man repulsed at the same time that he attracted. He had a mental alertness that fascinated; but there was a snake-like gleam in his eyes that, even before I knew him well, made me shudder. Yet the interest of a man who had made his mark in the world of brains flattered me. I gladly dined with him, and when, upon the third occasion, he asked me to become his secretary, I accepted the position eagerly. A substantial salary, relieved of the cost of board and lodging— for I was to live in his house— with very little to do: this seemed the sort of job a man might dream about but never hope to get.

That it seemed too good to be true contributed to my discomfort later when, wondering at certain sinister happenings in the house, which had a kind of essential eerieness for all its luxury, I sometimes wished I had refused the position.

It was probably a first impression that fixed in me the sensation of eerieness. At the very first dinner it had struck me that there was no sense of personal attachment between Gourlay and the servants who waited upon his comfort. They seemed of less interest to him than the furniture he used; a

conviction formed itself that whatever might happen to them would be of not the slightest concern to Gourlay, and that this was his attitude to all the world. Nobody mattered except as far as he existed for the convenience of this wealthy, clever old man.

Feeling this, his generous treatment of and his interest in me made me uneasy. I had been hardly three weeks with him before he arranged that I should sign his cheques— not with my own name but with his own. He rushed me into it, taking me to the bank and making the necessary arrangements for the acceptance of my signature without thinking it necessary to ask if I was prepared to undertake the responsibility. It occurred to me that there might be some improper motive, and I was all the more uncomfortable because I could not evenl suspect what it might be. It was not likely that Gourlay wanted to ruin me— why should he? But, supposing, that for some mysterious reason he did want to ruin me, my signing his cheques might offer him a way.

At the time I made a feeble protest; and, worried by guessing at possibilities, I renewed the subject as we sat over dessert.

"Mr. Gourlay— about my signing those cheques," I said ; "I'd much rather not accept the responsibility."

"You don't have to sign the cheques unless I tell you. In fact," he smiled, "you will be liable to get into trouble if you do sign any without that warrant. But I know you are a man who can be trusted, and I am showing my confidence in you."

It was flattering; yet I was still uncomfortable. "I can't see the necessity for it," I protested.

"One prepares for eventualities." he said, still smiling rather queerly. "I'm an old man, and I might go down one day— paralysis, perhaps. It would be handy to be able to draw money as it was wanted."

"But you are not really old," I said.

"I am seventy-five," he said, his eyes almost dancing.

The statement shocked me. He looked at least twenty years younger than that. I exclaimed upon it.

"The gland treatment," he said. "I undertook it directly I heard of it and ascertained that it was safe. I took a trip to Europe especially to secure it."

"And you really feel, as well as look, younger?" I asked.

He lifted his arms with a jaunty freedom and laughed.

"You are the first man I have met who has tried it; but, of course, I have heard of it. It is a wonderful development."

"I have discovered something more wonderful than that," he said, speaking with eager intensity. "The gland treatment can only renew the energy and possibly extend life for a few decades. It cannot restore wasted tissue. My

discovery is that youth can be brought back again; that life can go on indefinitely, renewing its youth from age to age."

I stared at him, astounded at a sudden vehemence as he stood up and added, almost venomously, "Death can be cheated!"

I sensed behind the exultation that here was a man who hated and feared death. The situation was both abnormal and uncomfortable.

"How do you propose to do it?"

His laugh was saturnine.

"Those experiments in my study have something to do with it. Some day I will let you know all about my secret."

The atmosphere seemed to have grown hot and intolerable. I announced that I would go out for a stroll.

"Drink that wine first," he said.

"I've had enough; I don't care for more," I replied.

"Drink it!" he barked.

I looked him straight in the eyes ; the tone was too domineering. Resentfully I took a pace or two towards the door.

The next I knew was that I saw him smiling in triumph, and— I had drunk the wine!

He said nothing as I strode out into the air. He had, I suppose, mesmerised me, if it was only for a moment. I was ashamed of it; it was what I had reckoned, in the pride of my strength of body and will, no man could do. In my resentment my inclination was to throw up my position and leave; yet my shame was a curious bar. I felt disinclined to tell him I was going, because of the humiliation of admitting that I had been a victim of his mesmeric powders.

In a few weeks I realised that I had lost the opportunity of going; invisible chains, mighty in their strength, had bound me to the house. Gourlay had mesmerised me again; and hotly then, as soon as I had my clear senses back, I had protested. He only smiled when, resenting his grinning indifference to my protest, I told him I was going to leave him.

"You won't do anything so foolish," he said.

Although I had made up my mind to leave next day. I did not. A ridiculous indecision fell upon me; always it was the next day I would go, until one night, after again I had felt my senses drift completely into his power, I went upstairs and began to throw my belongings into my suitcases.

The handle of the locked door rattled whilst I was doing it. A mad fear fell upon me, causing me to check all movement, even that of breathing, and fall into complete silence, hoping that Gourlay would go.

"Open the door," his voice commanded from the other side.

I determined not to do so; but when he repeated the order, even whilst there was in my heart a sort of frantic despair at my weakness, I obeyed.

"So!" he said, standing and looking at my preparations for departure with eyes that seemed on fire. He stood like that for a moment; then, I cannot say under what impulse, I began to place my clothes back in cupboards and drawers, bitterly ashamed of my weakness, yet unable to resist an order that his mind had conveyed to mine. When I had finished he was standing by my elbow, a glass which held something that looked like wine in his hand.

"Drink it," he said.

I wanted to throw it in his face and follow it up with my fists, old man though he was ; but the power of doing what I myself willed seemed to have left me completely. The room began to twist around me, and I felt Gourlay helping me to my bed.

When I woke I was not in my bed, but sprawled,on a chair in that study of his, with its test-tubes and phials of chemicals. A stiffness was in my limbs I had never known before, even after doubling a strenuous football match in the afternoon and a hard wrestling bout at night; my bones seemed to creak as I raised myself. Feeling too tired to think how I had come to be in that study, I stumbled upstairs to my bed, neglecting even to switch on the electric light. I staggered back as I was about to throw myself down, for there was someone lying there— staggered back to switch on the light that immediately flooded the room! The next moment I was staring down on the figure stretched on the bed— obviously a dead body.

A nightmare moment! For that body, still and already cold, was my own!

Heaven knows what confusion of thought rushed through my mind in the next few moments. It was, of course, all a nightmare; a hellish imposture forced upon me by that fiend Gourlay, whom I should certainly leave in the morning. To break the spell of it I screamed, and shortly the servants rushed in.

"He is certainly dead," said Travers, who was valet and general factotum; and his face had a look of queer suspicion. Then, turning to me, he added: "I suppose I had better get the doctor, Mr. Gourlay?"

Mr. Gourlay! I wheeled from him to the long mirror in the wardrobe; and in the glass, staring back at me, I saw the face of Peter Gourlay.

It was still a nightmare, of course; and unendurable as it was, there was still the consolation that it must shortly pass. People moved about me, but I did not want to think of them. Dr. Hamilton came and spoke to me.

"Heart failure," he said. "The young fellow was an amazingly fine specimen of manhood, but there was just that one weakness— due no doubt to past overstrain. And then some sudden shock— but what could have been the shock?"

"I do not know," I said dully.

"Some news he had received, perhaps," he surmised. "Maybe some fright in the night. Still, there is no doubt that the death was from natural causes."

Gradually my mind settled down to the understanding that an apparent impossibility had happened. I was dead; and yet I was Peter Gourlay and alive.

Once I had accepted this position, even as everyone accepted me, I set about to search for some explanation. I had Peter Gourlay's keys and started to investigate the contents of the bureau in his study. Masses of the papers did not interest me at all; but, as if by some latent impulse, I was led to a special drawer.

In it were filed pages of meaningless figures and formulas. The only other document was a will; its contents held me spellbound.

Duly attested, and of recent date, it was the will of Peter Gourlay, bequeathing all his property to "my secretary and adopted son, Peter Gourlay, otherwise known as Hector Dowker."

Gradually I pieced together a theory of

the plot. Gourlay, who thought of nobody but himself, had boasted that he had discovered a means by which life— his life— could be prolonged indefinitely. Obviously his own carcase nearing the end of its days, he had evolved some process for the transference of personality; and my young athletic body had been selected for his experiment. But he had never known—I had never told him— of that heart weakness which had been unable to resist the shock evidently involved in the transference.

The more I considered it the more I was satisfied with my reasoning. The old man had planned so that when he lived as Hector Dowker, he could become possessed of his own property; he had no doubt considered that it would be easy to get rid of an old man, shocked, even as I was now, by the undesired transference of personality. And in his drawer he had left a formula which would enable him to continue his horrible pursuit of renewed youth in the future, transferring to one young body after another.

I laughed as I thought of it! He had succeeded, but he had failed— failed because he did not know there was a diseased heart in the body he planned to possess. Here I had a sort of triumph over him; by his ghastly plotting he had robbed himself of a bodily habitation!

I, at least, had his; and yet how bitterly had he robbed me— of my youth, my middle-age! I had skipped from the threshold of manhood to the brink of the grave.

As I grew used to being recognised as Peter Gourlay I determined to make the best of the affluence that he had left me; yet always was that despairing bitterness. It drove me to horrible thoughts and impulses. Sometimes I found

myself puzzling over that formula, nursing a hope that even I might carry out Gourlay's idea, and so win back the youth I had lost. There must have been something of Gourlay's personality lingering in my brain-cells; when my own asserted itself I loathed the idea I had entertained. So intensely, indeed, that one day I tore the whole file of figures and formulas to threads, and burnt them piece by piece. Yet his personality still struggles to exert itself, so that I often catch myself trying to recall the mysterious symbols and note them down.

The climax came one night when I had been tossing in a nightmare; and it seemed that Gourlay was determined to cheat me. My thought flew to the will, which I had stowed, with some vague feeling of its importance, in a drawer in my room,

No sooner had the idea come than I was looking at the document, glad to see it was safe. Something prompted me then to turn quickly towards my bed.

There was the body of Peter Gourlay— mine, by strange inheritance— lying asleep but troubled, and over it what appeared to be a formless shadow.

I— whatever there was of me that could look upon and see myself asleep— rushed back to my bodily habitation; but there was something that resisted me. With whatever it was, I fought in a frenzied desperation. It seemed that for long minutes I was being forced back, overcome. I was panting and covered with cold sweat when the servants rushed in, switching on the lights, aroused, as they told me, by my cries.

Since then I have ordered that the lights in my room shall always be alight when darkness comes: and I have attendants ever near to come to my call. Yet, night atter night, I have felt Peter Gouriay near me in my dreams, his old mesmeric influence steadily gaining the mastery,

And I know that the spirit of Peter Gourlay, cheated of the youthful body he had planned to seize, is fighting me for the body that was his. But I will resist him to the last. Even as I write the horror of his presence is upon me.

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6: The Pawnshop Orpheus

The Bulletin, 24 Apr 1940

PURLEIGH had only just as much interest in church matters as his wife, who liked to consider herself a friend of the parson's wife, could force him to take; but he was booked to do his share at the Old Fogies' Concert. For the concert itself the Rev. Smalltext, a man of ideas, was responsible; instead of the faithful followers of the church, in the interests of the organ fund, being bored by their young, they should arrange for the young to be bored by their own efforts. The way the parson put it, however, was that there was surely enough talent amongst the elders to provide a programme which, because it was unique, would appeal. Maria suggested that Purleigh ought to be able to do something.

"Oh, leave me out," said Purleigh.

"Mr. Smalltext has put you down for an item," said Maria. "I told him that when you were younger you could play any sort of a wind instrument."

"I won't do it!" said Purleigh rebelliously.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Maria; and Purleigh knew then that most likely he would.

If his old ability, discarded as one of the follies of youth, remained, he had no excuse. His parents had shown a measure of inspiration in giving him Orpheus as a second name, although he had tried to forget it, even to the length of sometimes telling the inquisitive that the "O" in J. O. Purleigh stood for "Oliver." It had been for years a mere initial in his signature.

WITH familiarity, the idea of taking the platform ceased to be repugnant. An old ambition was stirred when he created a vision of himself, instrument in hand, bowing to the plaudits of the audience. He would surprise them, he told himself. At all events he could do better than Brink.

With that thought, his part in the concert gained a definite appeal. Although, as a result of Maria's favor, Brink might some day be his son-in-law, Purleigh disliked him— all the more, perhaps, because he had nothing against Brink. Smug, self-assured, the near-middle-aged man, still unmarried, who had built up a local business and a pious reputation seemed to Purleigh too good to be true. Purleigh infinitely preferred young Bates, with his honest human failings, and he hoped, at times, that Bertha shared his preference, in spite of her mother's disparagement.

To be a concert star Purleigh had to have something to play, the medley of instruments he once possessed having long vanished. As he wanted it cheap,

he went into the pawnshop; "musical instruments, saxophones and banjos," the sign put it.

"Hullo! What's this?" he said, fingering a quaint little instrument consisting of three reeds, sprouting away, so to speak, from a mouthpiece.

"I don't know heem," said the shopman. "I puy heem vrom a voreign sailor."

"Queer looking things" remarked Purleigh. He was lifting it towards his lips when the shopman interposed sharply.

"No, no! Nodt here!, Id ees nodt goodt to addract addention."

"Why not?" demanded Purleigh. The shopman shrugged; but his fat, amiable-looking wife smiled into the conversation.

"Ven der sailorman play heem, it made me go— so!" she said, giving a wriggle to her hips and shoulders. She laughed towards her husband. "Heem, doo!" she added.

The shopman looked ashamed at this betrayal of a folly. "I bay der sailorman to sdop heem," he said hastily. "Id was nodt goodt for pizziness." Purleigh had a picture of these two fat people moved to queer movements which was wholly delightful; and that little instrument had to be his. Perhaps this interjection of the wife was only sales talk, anyway. The hastiness of the salesman did not strike him as really significant— except possibly of the worthlessness of the instrument— until later. Still, the queer thing attracted Purleigh ; it was cheap, and if it was a failure he could see about a flute or a piccolo later.

Once out of the shop Purleigh had an overpowering desire to test his long-suppressed musical ability. Once back in his office he took the instrument from his pocket, and put it to his lips.

The result startled him. Notes fantastically wild, yet infinitely sweet, poured into the air; what was more startling was that something like a tumult seemed to waken around him. He was astonished when his typist, carrying some papers for him, danced into the office like a chorus girl in a comedy.

As the door opened to admit her, a sound from the outer office that was almost, if not positively, one of revelry came in with her. Purleigh, however, was immediately concerned with the usually staid Miss Symonds. Her eyes were glinting wickedly, and the way she bent them upon Purleigh as she danced towards him caused him to dodge away around his desk, thrusting the instrument into a drawer as he moved.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, half to himself. "By Jove!"

Miss Symonds checked suddenly, her face scarlet with shame, even through her powder.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Purleigh!" she cried. She was again the staid, and now a very confused, Miss Symonds. The noise outside ceased as suddenly as her dancing. Purleigh made no comment, but his mind was full of wonder. And all the time the longing to put his lips to the triple reeds was with him. His desire was like a drunkard's craving for liquor. It was most extraordinary. Purleigh's knowledge of mythology was not great, but he had heard of magic instruments, and apparently he had queerly become possessed of one. He was not inclined to puzzle over the mystery. What appealed to him was that it would be a huge joke to introduce unexpectedly to a staid church gathering an instrument capable of such remarkable results. He chuckled whenever he considered the possibilities.

What he took home was a tin-whistle, and when he showed his family what he could do with it even Maria, who was inclined to be annoyed at first about his choice of such a cheap instrument, was pleased.

"Dad'll be the star of the evening," cried Bertha.

"Just fancy— merely with- a tin-whistle! "

"I'm sure you'll make a hit," said Maria.

"Too right I will!" Purleigh's laugh seemed unnecessarily boisterous ; he was thinking of the little reed instrument safely hidden in the toolshed.

PURLEIGH'S devotion to his tools became remarkable. Whenever he was wanted, it seemed, it was from the toolshed, where he worked with a closed door, that he emerged. It was from the toolshed he came, for instance, when Maria called him in excitement and alarm about the queer conduct of the fowls. "They've stopped now, but they were going on as if they had all suddenly gone mad, leaping in the air and twirling about."

Purleigh looked at the fowls, which were regarding one another with an absurd appearance of astonishment.

"You must have been dreaming," said Purleigh.

"No, I wasn't dreaming," Maria said firmly. "There's something very queer about everything today. There's hardly a breath in the air, but a few moments ago those trees were swaying, as if there was a heavy wind."

That was not the only queer happening. The next-door people had a cow which was grazed in a paddock at the back, but was brought into the yard for the milking. Its owners, alarmed, brought in the veterinary surgeon after it had developed a habit of leaping about and dancing in a peculiar cowlike fashion all over the flower-beds. Maria, from the verandah, saw its curious antics and called Purleigh; but by the time he had come on the scene— from the toolhouse— the strange antics had ceased, and the cow had resumed its customary docility.

The dog had occasional spasms of madness, during which it turned somersaults and careered round madly, while Maria shut the doors of the house, bolted the windows and screamed wildly to Purleigh. The cat was sometimes affected, and the misbehavior of the fowls was constant. Even Maria herself admitted that she sometimes felt a strange desire to dance— in fact, did dance.

"It was as if there was something in the air," she said. "I don't know what to make of it."

PURLEIGH, of course, did. Yet his courage failed him when the evening arrived. He felt considerable stage-fright. Brink was in the hall to greet the Purleigh party when it arrived.

"I'm glad, Mr. Purleigh, that you are giving us your assistance," he said. "I hope it may mean an— ah— closer association with the church."

"I hope your turn knocks that geyser kite-high," said young Bates aside. Young Bates did not care much for these affairs, but, as Bertha was there, he had come. "Brink only thinks he can sing, anyway."

This to Purleigh was encouragement for which, with the courage oozing out of him, he felt grateful. But the smugness with which Brink insisted that the polite applause of the audience was a demand for an encore to his song put him on his mettle. After the few first notes on his tin-whistle his diffidence went completely. He had not, after all, had the courage to start right off with the magic reeds.

A storm of applause heartened him. There was something curiously appealing no doubt, in a stout, prosperous, middle-aged man producing melody from a tin-whistle. Rev. Smalltext, seated, as chairman, at the corner of the low platform, pounded his podgy hands together as vigorously as anyone; but he looked somewhat askance when he saw that Purleigh, ready to respond to the recall, had put the whistle aside and held in his hand a strange reed-like instrument. Smalltext did know his mythology. The instrument was very like one associated in it with bacchanal orgies.

Purleigh had decided upon the melody he would play, but, as often happened when he practised this little instrument, he found himself playing something altogether different. It was an extempore brilliancy, note following note automatically; a song of the wild woodlands where everything in Nature was intoxicated with the simple joy of living. Rev. Smalltext had the feeling that it did not sound quite respectable.

"Mr. Purleigh— Mr. Purleigh! Just a minute."

Smalltext's words, spoken in agitation, were almost the first intimation to Purleigh, intent upon his music, that the magic was working as usual. First of all

there was a tapping of feet all over the hall, falling into the rhythm of the music; then the audience began to rise, chairs were thrown or pushed aside, and everywhere people were dancing. The disorder was apparent even in the front seats.

Smalltext, agitated, had risen to his feet; but almost at once the agitation vanished, a look of wild, rebel joyance shone on his face, and he gave a leap in the air. Then, as two vessels come together in a collision, he went off the platform with outstretched arms, to join forces with a woman who was dancing on the floor with arms outstretched to him, and whirl away in a wild fandango.

Purleigh, too, was filled with a mad exultation, but it found its expression in the music he was making instead of his feet, and it became wilder and wilder.

Shortly everybody in the hall was dancing. Some, indeed, preserved a degree of sedateness; but Brink was not one of these. He looked, as the magic stirred him, for Bertha, but apparently Bates had whisked her away. He grabbed another woman, and, whirling away with her, was soon the maddest of the mad throng. Even as he played Purleigh followed Brink's progress. He seemed in a curious way distinguishable. All the customary propriety had dropped from him as if it had been a mask.

Suddenly he let go the woman with whom he was dancing, hustled away the man next to him and, seizing his partner, continued the wild whirl with her.

It happened to be Maria!

The sight inflamed Purleigh, but for the life of him he could not cease his playing. He stepped from the platform, playing as he went, trying to make his way to where he had last seen Maria. The press of dancers made his progress slow.

There was a skirmish behind him and then a woman's hands grasped him by the shoulders. "Peter! I've found you! It's you I want to dance with— not anyone else." It was actually Maria speaking! Purleigh felt a glow of strange gratification. He whirled a little with her, finding it necessary to hold and play his strange instrument with one hand only, but, as the notes seemed to make themselves, that was quite possible. He did not want to stop playing— he felt as if that might go on for ever— but he wanted to get away from the crowdedness of the hall.

The crowd, however, insisted upon going with them. It followed them into the open air, twisting through the doors like soda from a soda-water bottle. It was the strangest sight ever seen in a suburban street— a carnival procession of those who should have been the staidest and most respectable citizens, leaping along the street, dancing, shouting, singing, laughing. The procession was quickly augmented. The people who had been in the street wondering

what was going on in the hall were caught in the chaotic revel. It was complicated by the mad gamboilings of cats and dogs moved also by the magic music. When processionists fell over the animals, there was fresh uproar.

And Purleigh couldn't stop. He felt that he had had his fun, but, although he wanted to, he couldn't take the magic reeds from his lips. He wondered a little blankly where it was all going to end, or if it was going to end.

And then, suddenly, it ended.

"You've got her!" Like an enraged bull Brink came charging full tilt at Purleigh. Purleigh was hurled backward, but grapped with him manfully.

THE dancing stopped abruptly. The crowd was still, its members looking at one another stupidly and with astonishment. Purleigh felt the broken pieces of the magic reeds, knocked from his lips and trampled on in the scuffle, beneath his feet, and was glad that there was an end to them. Maria was clinging to his arm, and there was young Bates still gripping Brink after dragging him off Purleigh, with Bertha near him.

"We had better go home, dear," said Maria. "Will you look after Bertha, Mr. Bates? Bring her home for supper and have some with us." She swept past Brink, ignoring him.

Purleigh had a curious gladness in his heart. Maria, with all her domination and queer treatment of him, had wanted him when that spirit of madness stirred; it was a thought that lifted their lives out of the prosaicness into which they had fallen. Young Bates was in favor, too. And he had proved, as he had known all along, that Brink was too good to be true.

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7: The Curse of the Earlams

The Bulletin, 29 Nov 1933

DR. EGAN conveyed an impression of exasperation as he removed his stethoscope and placed it on his desk, signalling to Arthur Earlam to put on his clothes.

"You're killing yourself," he said angrily. "There's nothing wrong with you, and yet there's everything wrong with you. What you are suffering from, really, is self-hypnotism."

Arthur Earlam, having put on his coat, let himself fall into the lounge-chair with an air of extreme lassitude, and smiled wanly.

"It's the curse of the Earlams," he said.

"Damn the curse of the Earlams! It wouldn't matter tuppence if you hadn't let it soak into your mind."

Earlam drew himself out of the chair wearily, walked to a desk, as if the exertion was a drain on his energy, and brought from it a leather-bound folio, which he threw on the table as he fell languidly once more into his seat. His action had turned back the leather cover, revealing a handwritten title-page bearing the words "The History of the Curse of the Earlams" in the pointed caligraphy affected by women of the Victorian era.

"It's all in there, explain the mystery as you will. Generation after generation no new Earlam has been born into the world but his father died just before."

"I know. You've shown me that already. I'd like to burn the damn thing," said the doctor irritably. "What made your grandmother write up the wretched business?"

"I suppose she felt proud of belonging to a family that had owned a real live curse for hundreds of years," said Earlam with a bitter laugh. "You can't deny the existence of the curse, if you read that history.

"My father did not marry until he was 64. He died two days before I was born. My grandfather died a week before my father was born. His father had brought his bride to Australia, trying to avoid a curse, already long established, by a change of climate. They were here for five years before my grandfather was born; but when my grandfather did make his appearance his father was dead. My grandfather's grandfather, again, was one of twins, also born after the death of their father. The other twin had an affair with a servant girl, his mother's maid; she gave birth to a child three days after the father died; and

my great-great-grandfather died before the birth of my great-grandfather. The chain is pretty complete."

"It's the most ridiculous nonsense I ever heard," Dr. Egan said. "A chain of superstition, carried on from generation to generation."

"It's a poetical idea in a way. The child can only be born by the father sacrificing his own life. Perhaps his personality is required to be passed on in the new life. I feel as if I have in my brain vague memories of events that happened centuries ago."

"In fact, you feel that you are really an Earlam who helped to chop off the head of Charles the First, or tried to prevent it. It's all morbid bunkum, Earlam. You've saturated yourself in the superstition as, very likely, all your forebears did. If you were so impressed by the idiotic legend, why the blazes did you and Mrs. Earlam think of having a child?"

"Before Mary and I married I explained the position. We told ourselves we would do without children; but as time went on I felt that she longed for a baby. I had the same longing, too. We finally decided to defy the curse."

He made a pathetically weak gesture with his arms. "You see it is too strong for us. I'll be dead before the child is born."

"You won't if you throw off your rotten delusions. Don't you see how unfair it is to Mrs. Earlam? You are going to leave her with the feeling that she is almost a murderer— a husband-slayer. Instead of the prospect of the baby's birth being a joy to her, it is hell to contemplate! Do you know that she suggested an operation to me?"

"An operation!" exclaimed Earlam.

"To save you. I refused, of course— it would be murder. It isn't necessary, anyhow. Good God, man, you've got a brain, haven't you? You're something better than a damned abo. who's had a bone pointed at him!"

"You must admit that the curse is a mystery."

"That's the hell of it all— you're proud of it!" The doctor seized the folio from the table. "You'd better let me tear this rotten thing to smithereens."

Earlam, with a start of energy, took it from his hands. The doctor stared at him and, crossing the room, shook his fist at an enlarged portrait on the wall— the picture of an elderly woman, capped.

"You don't seem to have any great fancy for grandma."

"Why should she write a beastly thing like that? I knew the lady better than you did, Arthur, and yet I daresay you didn't care for her."

"I was afraid of her; but she was a great old girl. Lived to be over ninety; and look at the women's movements she led, even when she was old!"

"Led? Was, you mean. She insisted on being the whole thing or nothing. One of those domineering females. You were only a boy when she died."

"Ten years old."

"Yes ; I knew grandma. A woman of iron— and rusted! But I never hated her until I knew your case and found she'd written that thing. It was fastening the shackles of a stupid legend on her descendants. You've got to forget it, Arthur.... For the wife's sake!"

As Egan passed out into the hall, a woman rushed forward eagerly to meet him. The question she wanted to ask was in her face, in her whole bearing.

"There's nothing wrong with him, Mary," said Egan, affecting a boisterousness of manner. "He's suffering from superstition, that's all. Laugh him out of it!"

"Can he be laughed out of it?" she questioned eagerly. "He will live— there is no danger, is there, doctor?"

Egan scarcely knew the answer he shot at her; he meant it to be reassuring. But he cursed under his breath.

He had known Earlam from his infancy; known him for a clean and likeable young man, touched by an effeminacy for which the history of the family— a long line in which the successive sons had never experienced the guardianship of a father— was responsible. It was exasperating to think that he could do nothing to save this fine young man— and the wife who would suffer, too. Earlam was wasting from a sickness for which all his medical science could find no cure.

And Mary must have the feeling that she was carrying within herself her husband's death-warrant.

Mary had never been unduly impressed by the family history of which Arthur had told her. She had regarded his belief in such a bogey as a curious freak ; but in her affection for him had respected it. When he had apparently abandoned the superstition she had been glad, as one who hails the recovery of a loved being from a distressing malady. The discovery that it still lingered and was likely to have terrible results horrified her. Her natural desires, satisfied, would mean the death of her husband. But she conquered her tears. The only way to meet the threatening disaster, to triumph over the supernatural tragedy that was looming over the house, was to remain cheerful, to laugh away, with practical commonsense, the ghosts of the past that had taken possession of her husband's soul; to dismiss them as folly.

"Mrs. Chartres is calling for me, Arthur," she said. "You know what a goose Mrs. Chartres is! She's found a new fortune-teller— Mrs. Chartres believes in all that silly nonsense— and she wants me to go along with her."

"Pooh!— fortune-tellers!" said Arthur.

"I thought it would be a bit of fun," said Mary. "Will you come along with us? I'd like to hear if she says anything about the curse of the Earlams. I bet she

prophesies that you live to be a hundred— and probably a nice wife for you next year!"

"I won't go, dear," Earlam said. "But you go if it'll amuse you."

The fortune-teller, discovered in a shabby, semi-detached cottage in a shabby suburb, proved a bore. Mary could not even gain amusement from the eager faith with which Mrs. Chartres, giving at least half the information that was handed back to her, gulped in the prophecies of the greasily impressive and "aitch"-less palmist.

"There's a shadder broodin' over yer," said the palmist as Mary took her turn.

"That's the curse of the Earlams," said Mary to Mrs. Chartres, filling in a careless remark in sheer boredom.

"You're Mrs. Earlam—" Mary could have laughed at the cheap obviousness of it; the mark of the wedding-ring, though Mrs. Chartres had induced her to remove it, was on her finger. "The baby you are to have will be a fine child— a boy. Some trouble threatens your 'usband. But I can see money"

"That'll be my rents. Darcy, my collector, always brings the money along on Mondays; Arthur has it paid in for me next day."

She was glad when it was all over; glad, too, when she had got rid of Mrs. Chartres and could go home, feeling tired and miserable. Her husband was killing himself with a superstition, and she had missed another of the decreasing days of his companionship without doing anything to help him.

The burglary was a clumsy one. Arthur Earlam, wakened by the sounds of furtive movement, was out in an instant. Revolver in hand, he stood in the doorway as he switched the light on.

The burglar turned round with a gasp and stared at him standing there. Without a command his hands went up in token of surrender; Earlam was too astonished, as he stared at the face of the intruder, to give any command. Mary, disturbed for her husband in his weak condition, had leapt from bed as he moved, had tried to persuade him not to face the unknown danger. Still more concerned about the effect of s hock upon his health than for any other consideration, she had rung up Dr. Egan instead of the police. Egan had had Earlam on his mind all the evening; in no time he was at the Earlam home.

A disturbed, half-dressed servant let him in, and in the hall Mary came to meet him and wordlessly led him into a lighted room. He paused, nonplussed. For a moment he thought that the furtive-looking man in the far corner of the room was Earlam himself, strangely aged, bloated curiously and dressed shabbily; but from where he sat, screened by the chair in which he was sitting, Earlam thrust out his head, looking back at him.

"Ah, Egan!" he greeted. "Look what we've got here."

The shabbily-dressed man leapt from his seat.

"Mister!" he appealed. "You tole me you wasn't goin' to call no perlice."

"This isn't a policeman, Honeysett," said Earlam cheerfully. "This is Dr. Egan. Doctor, I want you to meet my friend— my burglar, I might call him. He broke in here to-night, and when I bailed him up he had a nice tale to tell me about being sooled on to the job by his mother. Mother tells fortunes, and gathered from my wife, who went to her with Mrs. Chartres, that there'd be some loose cash in the house to-night. It seems my friend here has never been a burglar before— he's anything but an expert. Doesn't look like an expert, does he? But what does he look like?"

It was a queer group, there at that hour— the invalid Earlam, showing more animation than he had displayed for months, enjoying the situation apparently as he lolled in his chair in his pyjamas; Mrs. Earlam, in a kimono, standing anxiously near him; the doctor, with tousled hair and a glimpse of pyjamas showing through the opened breast of his overcoat; the half-dressed servant, gape-mouthed in the background ; and, before them all, the alarmed and protesting intruder in his shabby clothes, elderly and uncouth, and yet—

"What does he look like?" said Dr. Egan, taking up Earlam's question. "Why, damn it all, he looks like you"

"That's the sweet part of the joke! From what I have gathered from our friend, his mother told him he was safe in burglaring here because his father was my father. Though the Law wouldn't recognise it, he's my half-brother !"

"I ain't persoomin' on no relationship," put in the man who looked so like an older and debauched edition of Earlam. "Me mother says ole Mr. Earlam treated 'er 'andsome, an' she kept 'er word to 'im never ter say nothin'. But there's me been outer work these six munce, an' me mother, pore soul, takin' ter forchune-tellin' ter try an' 'elp, an' the idea came to 'er when th' lydy there, she called an' mentioned some money in the 'ouse. There's me missus an' the kids—"

"Kids?" cried Earlam, springing to his feet. "How many children have you?"

"Four of 'em, all 'elpless. An' look, mister, whatcher goin' to do?" whined the intruder.

"Do?" cried Arthur. "I'm goin' to give you a fiver to go on with, an' get you a job. Jane, take this gentleman down to the kitchen and give him something to eat. Then make him a parcel of food to take home."

His whole aspect was one of animation as he turned on Egan when, spluttering amazed thanks, the burglar followed the half-dressed servant from the room.

"A lot of men would only be horrified to discover a half-brother like that. He's an Earlam— there's no doubting that. And see what it means to me! Long

before I was born my father had a son— and lived for twenty-five years after it! And that son has four children and is still alive. That finishes the curse of the Earlams! "

"By Jove!" exclaimed Egan, feeling that a key to a problem had been thrust into his hand. "I see the whole business now! I told you what a domineering woman your grandmother was; how she took your father about with her, chained to her chariot-wheels. She was determined that she would allow no woman to share her son's affections; she used to preach fiercely, too, that a man's conduct should be as chaste as a woman's. She worked up the curse of the Earlams to help her; obviously— though she probably thought he did— your father didn't believe in it much, and his death was by accident, anyway, even if it was a coincidence. The curse of the Earlams is probably a fake from beginning to end."

"You can't say that," said Arthur stiffly.

Egan laughed boisterously at him, seeing that he resented the complete destruction of a family tradition, just as he might have resented a declaration that some old art treasure, prized as a family heirloom, was bogus.

"I don't care whether I can or not. What's happened has done what medicine never could have done. Look at you now —a dying man yesterday, it seemed; as sprightly as a chicken now! "

"It means a lot to me," laughed Earlam.

"Oh, damn you, Earlam! " cried Egan. "I'm thinking of what it means to her."

Arthur turned swiftly to Mary at this reminder, his arms held out to her. The look of strain she had tried hard to conceal had vanished.

"Arthur! Oh, how glad I am!" she cried.

As he took her in his arms he heard the door click as it shut. Dr. Egan, as satisfied as they were, was departing in search of his disturbed sleep.

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8: The Moorbank Mystery

The Bulletin, (NSW) 26 Aug 1926

"YOU'LL have to excuse us if we're not the best sort of company tonight," said Jason between pants; "this robbery business has set our nerves on edge. It's simply a blessing to have friends whose nerves are not as rattled as our own ; but we make rather a poor return."

Although he had made the same remark several times since, meeting me in town, he had pounced upon me with a demand that I should go home with him to dinner, it impressed me more now than formerly. The Moorbank burglar had excited the whole city. The series of robberies in the fashionable, scattered suburb, which the police seemed powerless to check, was a natural theme for public excitement. Only once had the police been able to lay hands on the marauder, and the result was a badly-hurt policeman, in hospital, unable to give a coherent version of what had happened to him.

Hearing or reading about other people's robbers, however, is not pulse-stirring, and even Jason's nervy recounting of events in the train did not infect me with the fears obviously vibrating through his tissues. In Moorbank itself, however, with the misty shadows of evening upon it, I felt the brooding fear of the robber who struck first here and then there, and had shown himself capable of murderous violence; and the jerky hurry of Jason's walk, which, setting the pace, caused us both to pant, helped the infection.

"I'm sorry!" I exclaimed, as in the darkness I jostled into somebody. Without a word of apology, or even a check in his stride, the man walked past me, a rudeness which woke a warm flame of wrath.

"What are you waiting for? Come on," said Jason, pausing as he felt my absence from his side, and returned to pluck at my arm.

"You have some nice neighbors," I said loudly for the man who had passed to hear. "Do you know that bounder?"

Jason peered. "No, I don't know him," he said. "Come on, old man ; we want to get home as soon as possible. The wife is so nervous when it gets dark."

The man strode on to a street lamp, made dim by night-mist, but sufficient to show him square-shouldered, rather angular, sinister somehow in appearance, and so indifferent to my remarks that he did not alter in the slightest his steady stride. The indifference chilled my rage. There seemed something uncanny about it. I hurried on with Jason. His nervous pause at the gate and his searching glance at the garden shadows before

he ran towards the door gave me a fresh impression of the terror that gripped the place. Almost I ran after him; and his whispered colloquy through the door, as if he spoke to a beleaguered garrison, aided the impression. It was

further helped by the sharp banging of the door directly we entered, and the relieved agitation of the two women, Mrs. Jason and the servant, whose pale faces confronted us.

"The Watsons' house was robbed last night!" The two women announced the fact together.

"The Watsons!" exclaimed Jason blankly. "When?"

"It must have been late. Everything was right when they went to bed; this morning they found a sweep made of everything. Mrs. Watson fainted when she found out, and she's had a breakdown. They had to take her to hospital."

"When they catch a burglar they ought to shoot him on sight, or hang him if they take him alive!" said Jason, blood-thirstily, as we sat at dinner. "It's not what he steals that matters; it's the effect of the shock on the nerves of the women. There's Mrs. Watson, now, in hospital through it. The Tysons have put a caretaker in their house, and gone to stay at the Dandenongs. But they can afford it. Young Halsey— you know Halsey— he can't; and since they've been robbed his wife has gone to live with her mother. She says she'll never be able to live in the house again ; and poor Halsey's only just paid probably all he had to get into that house, and has a heavy mortgage on it."

"It's hard on Halsey," I said.

"But you can't blame his wife," remarked Mrs. Jason with a sharpness in her tone

which I felt was intended for Jason. It brought an awkward pause. Then she went on : "The strain of living in a place like this is too much to expect a woman to stand. She has it all day, anticipating what is to come at night. Husbands who care about their wives' health are sending them away."

Jason's face flushed.

"May," he said awkwardly, turning to the servant who had been giving us an attention which had convinced me that Mrs. Jason would have made a fine principal of a school for domestics, "there is no need for you to stay; we will ring for what we want,"

"Mrs. Jason," began the girl, as if appealing.

"The girl's afraid of being in the kitchen by herself at night," interposed Mrs. Jason. "Stay here if you like, May; you'd better sit down somewhere."

That incident added to the sensation of weird apprehension. With the girl sitting awkwardly in the background I did my best to lead the conversation to other subjects; but the arrival of Professor Dumbrell brought us back again.

We were lingering over dessert when the ring came at the door.

"Do you mind coming with me?" said Jason as he moved towards the hall; and he did not admit the visitor until he had inquired his identity through the door.

Professor Dumbrell was a queer little man, very wrinkled, very wizened, with a face which combined a certain wizard-like austerity with an element that was almost child-like, that element being, to a considerable extent, vanity, apparently. It seemed that he began talking about the mysterious burglar simply that he might brag about himself. Obviously he liked to feel that he was admired for his courage in passing through the streets, which fear of the mystery man had emptied at night. That seemed absurd in itself; and yet so much had the fears of the Jasons impressed themselves upon me that thought of my own necessity to seek my train later presented itself as an unpleasant prospect.

Mrs. Jason helped to explain the Professor's importance in the matter of the mystery man, to his child-like delight. He had a psychic gift, it appeared. Mrs. Tyson had recovered a ring, which had evidently been dropped or thrown away by the thief, by the directions the Professor had given her as a result of his queer power. It was the least part of the, spoils, but the ring had a sentimental value, and the Professor almost gloated as he described Mrs. Tyson's gratitude. He had made trifling recoveries for others, too.

"It's only for lack of a better name that I call my power psychic, though," he said. "I have a capacity at times of sensing scenes and things at a distance. It has nothing to do with the soul; I don't believe in the soul. It is just one of those powers science is commencing to investigate."

"I remember seeing mention of you and those recoveries in the papers, Professor." I said, "but it always struck me that if you could locate individual items you should be able to locate the whole loot — perhaps the robber himself."

"I may yet," he responded mysteriously. "I lay claim to no magical power, and what I have of it is limited, but I am following a line of study, and have already had success. You know, I suppose, that I told the police the Watsons would be robbed last night?"

That led to a general exclamation.

"The police, of course, were unwilling to treat my warning seriously. They put a guard on the place, but took it off at midnight; and the robbery must have happened later. I can't explain how the impression came to me, but it came, and the robbery might have been stopped if I had been taken seriously."

When, leaving Mrs. Jason and the servant to their duties, we went into the sitting-room, the Professor proved a most interesting, informative talker, with a surprising knowledge of modern developments in practical science— in radio and wireless control. He got up shortly, however, to retrieve his glasses, which he had left in the dining-room.

"It would be a very great favor," said Jason to me during his absence, "if you'd stay with us for a few days. You see how things are with us; your presence would help a lot. Don't refuse, old man. My wife thinks I ought to send her away, and, honestly, I can't afford it. With somebody else in the house she won't feel so badly about it."

I didn't like the idea much, but Jason made it a call of friendship, and I promised.

"I wonder what's become of the Professor," I said, and going to the door threw it open.

To my surprise the hall was in darkness, but as I held the door open the Professor's voice said, "Looking for me? I've lost my way back somehow," and came forward blinking in the light. He announced that he would have to go now, and Mrs. Jason— the servant hanging about her skirts — joined ns to farewell him.

"Perhaps with all this upset around I ought to walk home with you," I suggested not eagerly, but shamefaced and reluctant.

"Oh, I have no fears!" said the Professor. "I'll be all right alone."

"The Professor sleeps in his house all by himself," said Mrs. Jason with admiration in her voice.

"Yes," he agreed; "my housekeeper goes home in the afternoon after she has left my tea ready. But there's nothing in my house that would attract a burglar. My valuables are of the sort that a burglar wouldn't know what to do with. There's a lot of things of interest, though. I'd like to show them to you. Suppose you come to see me— say the night after next?"

It was arranged— even to the servant, who made an outcry at the prospect of being left alone, going with us. The Jasons seemed relieved that the Professor did not want my escort; I must confess I was, though ashamed of myself for it.

"The Professor's remarks suggest it," I said, as we sat in the sitting-room : "why do people keep valuables about that would attract a robber when one is at large like this? Even you. When you took me into your bedroom I saw a jewel-case which— "

Jason looked at his wife.

She explained promptly: "If the robber does come, a desperate man like that would make you show where the things are if he can't lay his hands upon them."

Later we managed to talk about other matters; but Mrs. Jason did not forget to ask her husband to go with her, although it was only across the hall, where she wanted to get from her bedroom a photograph to show me.

Her shriek and his alarmed shout drew me with a rush to them, to find them white and shaking, Jason with his hands pointing as he gasped, "The window!" It was wide open, but the jewel-case was not taken. With a bound I reached the window, and looking out was in time to catch sight of a shadowy form disappearing through the gate.

And I recognised it. There was no mistaking those shoulders. It was the man who had collided with me earlier that night! The Jasons restrained me as I dashed for the door and I didn't take much restraining.

The arrival of the police brought some relief to our agitation. I was glad to recognise a man I knew, an exchange officer from Sydney, who had been allotted only that day to investigate the Moorbank burglaries. The disturbing incident of the evening, I believe, actually brought us calmness. We felt that we were under the guard of the police that night, when, after a supper eaten in more comfort than the previous meal and with the police as guests, we went to bed.

Next day I arrived early with a suitcase containing some belongings; and it seemed a fair thing that in the afternoon I should set out to meet Jason, who could not reach home until long after dusk. The mist had fallen heavily again, but ahead of me at times loomed shadows coming towards me— men walking to their homes. Then, turning from a side street a figure loomed which caused a twitch at my heart.

"Hey, you ! Stop !" I shouted.

I set off at a half-hearted run, but the man ahead seemed not to have heard me. His pace certainly accelerated, although he was still only striding along. Ahead of him suddenly I saw the figure of Jason.

"Stop him!" I yelled. "That's him!"

Just as I thought that Jason was going to make an effort to stop him, he staggered aside as if in a scramble to avoid the man, and half-fell against the fence. When I came level with him he grabbed my arm frantically.

"Don't go on!" he implored. "I meant to try to stop him; but I couldn't. He terrified me.' He's uncanny— why, there seemed to be fire in his face!"

By the time I had released myself, the man I pursued had vanished. Jason was obviously shaken ; but he improved when he got home, though, even when the police came he could only say "Uncanny!" and shudder when asked to describe the man I had chased.

It was not my Sydney friend Dalton who came from the police. That officer, one sergeant said, was pursuing a line of investigation which was keeping him busy. But when the sergeant used the 'phone to make a report on what we had told him, he turned to us with a portentous face.

"Mr. Walker's, in Atherton-avenue, has been robbed."

"That's the street you saw your man leave," cried Jason, excitedly, to me.

Surprisingly the evening settled to calmness. We played dummy bridge, and forgot the oppressive fears that were about us. When we did mention the robberies it was with some exultation. It was we who had discovered their perpetrator.

Next evening we set out together, after dinner, to visit the Professor, and met a surprise as we reached the street to find two policemen there. A motor-car with dimmed lights was backing away into the mist further up the street.

"Been told off to watch your place tonight," explained one of the men. "Understand some information has been given that our friend is paying you another visit."

"Well it's a comfort to know the place will be looked after while we are away," said Mrs. Jason.

Her attitude— she appeared glad to get away— settled the question as to whether we should forsake our excursion. I think we were all glad she gave us that lead. The Professor's house, set back in the weedy gardens surrounding it, was in darkness, except for one dim light upstairs, when we reached the door; and our knock met no immediate response. I had reached the knocker, to hammer it again, when a ghastly screech, followed by others, came from within. The house became suddenly full of thudding noises and other sounds. We fell back on the lawn, terrified by the sudden manifestations ; spellbound, shortly, when lights flashed in all parts of the house. The un-expected developments created sheer terror; and we fell back towards the gate. It was a relief to see, in a car racing up to the gate, the caps of police; astonishing to recognise two of them as the men who had been standing by the Jasons' gate. We were further astonished when, from the house, Dalton walked amongst us.

"You people had better go home," he said. "Professor Dumbrell is dead."

"What? Murdered? By the burglar?"

"No, not murdered," said Dalton, with a grim smile, and a finger which pointed to the police car. "And the burglar is there. Don't be shocked— it's not a corpse."

"Only a mass of gadgets with a man's clothes on — well smashed up, now," said the policeman with a grin.

"The most wonderful bit of machinery ever made, probably," Dalton told us later. "A perfect automaton— only it wasn't an automaton. Dumbrell, who has gone further in wireless control than most people would believe, because they thought him mad, had perfected it in this doll. It could even see, feel and hear for him, wherever it went, conveying impressions back to him in his house, and he could direct it to the finest movements. An ideal machine for robbery without risk! Dumbrell might have made a fortune out of his ideas legitimately,

but he couldn't get any backing here— and he'd spent all he had making his machine-man. He tried to raise funds in Sydney, but he was too eccentric in his manner to impress financiers. He really went mad when he was refused support. I was called in by one man he threatened— that's what put me on the trail; nobody else believed he had accomplished what he claimed.

"His failure must have put him on the idea of getting back the money he had spent by robbery. Then, vanity— the idea of being the god in the machine of a big sensation— carried him on.

"The policeman who was nearly killed was electrically shocked. I had my men at your place fitted to meet the emergency, and instructed them to sail in and smash the devilish thing as much as possible. They did their work well. Either some shocks travelled back to him when his machine was being destroyed, or knowledge of detection overcame the old man. He fell into a mass of live wires. My men, waiting to make a seizure, had to cut the electric mains before they could enter his room."

Dalton lifted his glass.

"Well, he had to die," he said. "Let's drink to him— he was mad, but a great genius!"

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9: Politics, Biggar and Bunkum

Bulletin, 7 Mar 1932

"MY opponents' politics are bunkum!" With his big figure and his breezy manner, Biggar could thunder that declaration so as to make it sound like a serious political utterance. It was as near to a serious political utterance as Biggar ever got.

I had supposed that Biggar had had enough of politics when the optimism with which he pictured himself as Biggar, M.L.A., crashed on a humiliating total of 159 votes. It was a politically sophisticated Biggar, however, who blew upon me in Pitt-street and blew me into the place where drinks are served. I mentioned his prospect of becoming Biggar, M.L.A.

"My boy, I haven't got a hope! That's in confidence, of course. It's a good job— that's the way I look at it. They were wanting someone to cut in on the Jordan by-election, and as Pompard, M.L.A., mentioned my name I thought I might as well take it on. The costs of the campaign are none of my business, and I get six quid a week and exes."

The way he thumped another two shillings on the bar gave a sort of emphasis to the point that the exes, were all right.

"Who's the they?" I asked.

"A lot of people have gone mad on this Bray plan," he explained. "Our man, of course, can't touch it; the Labor chap, Parsons, was likely to play it up a bit and pick up some free votes: the only thing was to get a Bray Planner into the field to tie them up."

"Are you a Bray Planner?"

"I believe in it," said Biggar with a sudden earnestness. "The only remedy for the ills of our economic system is a change in the basis of the system, which has outlived its usefulness. We have the spectacle of people starving in a world of plenty, simply because—"

I reminded him that I wasn't a political meeting.

"Oh, well, the Bray plan has no chance— yet. You know how dirty politics are, old chap. Asa matter of fact, if I thought I was likely to be elected I'd draw out. I don't want to be mixed up in the messy business ; but as a pocket-money job it's good enough."

Biggar used up his time and his expense money liberally; it was while we were changing hostelries that we met two youngish men who were boisterously greeted by Tom.

"I thought you were going to call in to-day at lunchtime," said one.

"So I was— forgot. But I ran into my friend, here— he writes for the press," said Biggar impressively.

He introduced them. "Hamilton Miller and Reg. Bamford. Miller's secretary of my committee and secretary of the local Bray Plan branch— a dashed good secretary, too ; Reg. is one of my lieutenants. What about a drink, boys?"

"Haven't time," retorted Miller, rather impatiently. "There's an extra meeting to-night. I've got speakers to carry on. Don't be late."

"I'll be along at seven to remind you, Mr. Biggar," put in Bamford. "Millie be at home, you think?"

Biggar grinned.

"She'll be there all right."

Miller came back as they were passing.

"Got those quotes for that printing— you promised to have them? Right! Well, don't forget to bring them; we want those posters and circulars at once."

"That," said Biggar as we turned into the Hotel Magnificent, "will be commission for me."

My old friend's political views were as hazy as ever, but he promised the earth in a manner that sounded decisive, metaphorically shouting for the electors with the public revenue, just as he shouted for his friends with the money allowed him for expenses.

Explanations of the Bray plan were left to others, preferably to Hamilton Miller, who, as far as his debating-club manner permitted, did it ably.

Reg. Bamford also was an indefatigable worker in the Cause. Millie Biggar was the explanation. The leggy Millie of a few years ago had grown into a fascinating miss, with a job in the Lottery Office, achieved when her father had failed in his Lottery Shares venture.

Mrs. Biggar appeared wistful, as she always did when her Tom ventured out of the placid shallows of his £4 per week into the deep seas of wider adventures.

"I think Tom has a much better chance of winning this time?" It was a question she put rather than an opinion.

"You don't really want him to win," I said.

"Of course, I do! It is people like Tom they want in Parliament. But," she added, with a sigh, "we'll see so little of him when he gets in."

The puzzle was the altruism of Hamilton Miller. An apparently keen Bray Planner, he must have known, as the secretary of its local association, how Biggar had come into the fight; but he was putting wonderful work into the campaign. Hardy, an old political hand who had found something better than election hazards in brewery travelling but still loved the smoke of battle, gave me a sidelight. Hardy was a friend of Biggar, too.

"Miller— there's a youngster who's going to be in politics in a few years. He believes the Bray plan is coming as a factor, and Tom's here to break the ice for him— at somebody else's expense. Of course, Tom hasn't Buckley's chance, but Miller will get a fair vote for him, and he'll get a few himself; people like a boisterous chap like Tom. Next time Miller will be the candidate. He'll stand with a clean sheet and a great reputation for organising."

It seemed a good summary of Miller— cold, self-seeking, knife in hand for anyone who had outlived his usefulness to himself.

"His organising is good," I commented. "It's made me wonder sometimes whether Tom has a fighting chance."

"Not a ghost!" laughed Hardy.

"Queer things have happened in politics, of course. Look how McGarry won the Murrumbidgee! He tramped the whole electorate, or begged rides, canvassing; doing a spot of work here and there to pay his way, and doing it well; and the farmers reckoned a hard grafter like that was the man for them. But things like that don't happen now; the parties are too strong."

It was the logical view; anyway, it didn't matter to Tom, who kept repeating in private his disdain of the honors he was ostensibly seeking. In another form he made his views public. "Our politics are corrupt; rotten to the core! I am asking you to help me to clean the Augean stable! " he would thunder.

"That touch about the Augean stable seems to get them, Tom," I commented. "What's it refer to?"

"It's an old racing scandal," he answered. "Forget for the moment when it happened."

An odd feature of the campaign was the secret support given to the Biggar cause by a local bank manager. He was on the Foodie committee, but privily he came to Biggar with encouragement and, sometimes, subscriptions. Bitterness was in his heart against the banks because of his slow progress in their service. And there was Simsott, of the, Simsott Stores, which, dealing with working people, expressed open sympathy with Labor. Because of the cheque the Parsons committee had received, Biggar strolled in to see if he could get one for his own. He found Simsott, in his private capacity, a virulent hater of Labor and all its works, and collected a small cheque. Having cashed it, he divided the money, putting ten shillings into his waistcoat pocket.

"My commission," he commented. "It isn't my regular job to collect cash for the committee."

He soared into the higher realms of finance when he tried to borrow £20 from Abstein. Abstein laughed.

"Oh, no, my friend! You have as much chance of winning the election as getting £20 from me!"

The "dirt" began to fly, as usual spread by vicious rumors for which each candidate vigorously denied responsibility.

One night I found Mrs. Biggar on a platform. Her oratory was poor, but her earnestness was immense. Something had been said about a separation in the Biggar household when Tom had been led away by temporary affluence. A divorce had even been discussed. But in defence of the man who, in spite of his faults, had always been her hero, she spoke of him as the model of husbands. The crowd, liking the loyalty, cheered her to the echo. I entered the committee-rooms to find Mrs. Biggar sobbing hysterically on the bosom of her husband.

"Can't we give it up? It's all so horrible, Tom!" she cried.

"There's only a few days of it, dear. Isn't she a Briton?" he demanded proudly. "You heard her to-night? There, darling, cheer up. I'm going to borrow five bob from our good friend and we'll have some supper right here! Prawns and beer!"

On the eve of the election people had something else to talk about. Parsons, the overdressed Labor candidate, who looked as if he had never done a day's real work in his life, had bolted. The Labor organisers were dismayed, but carried on. Whisperers made the most of it. The affairs of a company with which Parsons was concerned were being investigated by the police; Parsons, in fear of arrest, had fled. Foodie, it was said, had put the police on the track. Mean brute, Foodie!

Biggar was indignant. "I don't believe Foodie would do such a thing," he roared. "Whoever spread the rotten rumor ought to be horsewhipped."

Next day, while the dull excitement of the voting proceeded, Biggar was mainly absent, enjoying, behind the closed doors of the hotels, the last experience of being treated as potential M.L.A.

"It's Foodie's seat," he told me. "He'd have won even if Parsons had been here. He may lose a few votes over that lying rumor; but I've been telling everybody that there's not a word of truth in it. Anyway, I've had a pretty good job— while it lasted."

I wondered how large a vote Biggar would poll in the changed circumstances. As we waited in the committee-rooms, the strained faces of Mrs. Biggar and Millie told on Biggar's nerves.

"Come out," he whispered. He found a way into a hotel, where, in spite of my desire to return, we lingered.

The landlord had answered a buzzing telephone. He put his hand over the mouthpiece as he asked, "Are you here, Mr. Biggar?"

Biggar was. The landlord spoke again into the 'phone and turned excitedly.

"You're wanted at the committee-rooms. The lady says you're winning."

It was like a thunderbolt; but Biggar laughed as we hurried out. "Poor Millie gets excited and jumps at conclusions."

The excitement about the committee-rooms, however, hastened our footsteps. Biggar was hailed rapturously; we had to push our way through the crowd that thronged the doorways. Mrs. Biggar threw herself upon Tom.

"Tom! Tom! You're winning!" she cried.

Everybody seemed to be shouting at once; but we heard some things clearly. "The first return was Biggar, 157; Foodie, 130 ; Parsons, 25. The total now is Foodie, 2071 ; Biggar, 1970; Parsons, 195!"

"And Foodie's best subdivisions are in! Why, in Lumsden he only got a majority of 91!"

"The Labor crowd must have switched to you, Biggar! "

It was being thundered from all sides; in the midst of the faces surging around him excitedly Biggar's looked stunned, unbelieving. It had gone almost as pale as the face of Miller, which had a curious, strained appearance.

The telephone was ringing sharply. Somebody who took the call gave a shout.

"Graham-street polling-place: Biggar, 213 ; Foodie, 193 ; Parsons, 10. Progress total: Foodie, 2264; Biggar, 2184. Only 80 behind! You'll get an absolute, Tom!"

"The Parsons preferences will go to you, Tom!"

"I'm damned if I understand," said Biggar. "Even if I get Parsons's votes Foodie should still—"

"The people couldn't' stand that idea that Foodie had put Parsons away! That's what's killed him— a man getting rid of an opponent like that."

"I don't believe he did it!" burst out Biggar with a very real indignation. "Whatever they say, Foodie is too decent! It was a dastardly thing for anyone to say."

He was shaking hands with everybody. I saw Abstein hand him a paper and a fountain-pen, and then money. He was giving Biggar the twenty pounds. The next return made Biggar 47 behind. "You're wanted at the Town Hall, Tom! There's a crowd waiting there, cheering for you."

There was a crowd outside, too, now; we could hear its shouts and cheers. Biggar was moving towards the door when the next ring came with news that roused the clamor into a tumult. We had to shout for information.

"Biggar, 3217; Foodie, 3001; Parsons, 218. That's with Kingswood schoolhouse polling-place"

Miller's pale face came pushing through the crowd to reach Biggar.

"Well, Tom, I did pretty well for you," said Miller. "My spreading that tale about Foodie did the trick."

It was a wrathful face Biggar turned upon him.

"You! It was you did that— that contemptible—"

"Come on, Tom! Come on!"

Biggar went with the men who were tugging at him. But Miller had been repudiated. His face showed the realisation. Biggar, M.L.A.! The unbelievable had happened; later returns confirmed and extended the victory.

Biggar looked surprised, but gave me five pounds when I asked for it. I saw the cadgers "touching" him already, and he was responding as if he owned the universe; it was as well to save something. Presently I heard him talking of what he would do when he was in "the august halls of our Legislature"

But the impression that remained most from the kaleidoscope of that night was the face of Mrs. Biggar. White but proud, it was; yet there was something of desolation upon it. Her Tom was being taken from her.

10: A Very Gentlemanly Murder

The Bulletin, 4 Dec 1935

"EVEN if a man commits a murder," said Mrs. Parsley, pausing with a duster in her hand, "he can at least behave like a gentleman. For a man to hit his wife on the head with an axe is not quite the thing."

My landlady, who, when I am too busy to leave it, "does" my room herself, either in fear of what would happen if the girl was allowed to be there with me or in hope for herself, is liable to speak with scorn of people "who lack conversational debility." The reproach she intends could never be levelled against herself. My early attempts to discourage her discussion of the latest murder sensation had been grunted replies ; but this statement of Mrs. Parsley's was provocative. "Not quite the thing."

"I don't suppose a murderer worries about being a gentleman," I commented. It was fatal.

"At one time I was connected with a murder," said Mrs. Parsley, much as if she were boasting of her relations. The hand with the duster was now leaning on my table, a definite sign of work-cessation.

"It happened in these very flats," she continued impressively. "When they told me Mr. Fosdick had murdered his wife you could have knocked me down with a feather. But, as I pointed out to the people who made nasty remarks— there's always people who will be nasty over those things— it was a very gentlemanly murder, if he had done it. There was no vulgar noise, no screams, and no body, for that matter, for a time. It was most respectable.

"Mr. Fosdick came to live in Number Ten before he was married, and if he didn't pay his rent regularly his excuses were most gentlemanly. There was no sneaking out of the place to avoid me when he owed a week's rent. No! Mr. Fosdick owed several weeks' rent; but he was very nice about it. 'I hope the small amount I owe does not inconvenience you, Mrs, Parsley,' he says. 'There is a little hitch about my estates which will be settled any day, and then I'll reward you for your trouble.'

"Always well dressed, Mr. Fosdick was; and at night he'd go out in his evening dress looking like a welted earl. It was an advertisement for the establishment, the way he looked.

"Hope referred, as they say, makes the heart sick ; and my hopes had been referred so often about that rent that I was beginning to feel sick about it, and I was beginning to suspect that those estates were not all that they should be, as the saying goes— if they ever was.

"It was just when I was beginning to think that, gentleman as he was, I would have to ask Mr. Fosdick to go, that he told me about the rich marriage

he was going to make. Pleased as Punch, he was, which everybody knows is an intoxicated liquor that goes quickly to the head; and I was as pleased as he was, not only because he said the rent would be fixed, though that was a relief.

"HE brought the lady to the flat one night to tea, which, under the circumstances, I had arranged to get for him and put down to the account. 'Make it as slap-up as possible, Mrs. Parsley,' he had said. 'She's used to such things.' It was a case of in for a penny in for a pound with me. There was nothing to complain about about that tea.

"She was all he said she was; beautiful and charming and looking as if she owned all the money in Darlinghurst.

" 'This is my humble home, Maud. It may be poor, but it suits my simple needs,' he said when he brought her in. 'It'll be different, of course, when we're married.'

"For a moment the 'humble home' business got me hot, seeing how things were. I was putting the finishing touches on the table.

" 'This tea cost a bit of money ; it isn't so humble,' I put in.

" 'Money?' he laughed. 'We never talk about such a commonplace thing as money!'

" 'It's not commonplace with some people,' I answered, still a bit hot; but, of course, I cooled off, and I wasn't going to give him away when, while he was out of the room for a moment, she asked me what I thought at the time was a queer question.

" 'Mr. Fosdick is well-to-do, isn't he?' she asked.

" 'He's got estates. I've heard a lot about his estates,' I said ; which was Gospel truth, for every time he spoke about the rent he mentioned them.

"Mr. Fosdick paid up like a gentleman on the day he was going to get married, and, of course, leaving me. I think we'll add another pound for your kindness in waiting,' he said. But, as he explained, which sounded quite reasonable, I am sure, he wouldn't come into his wife's money for at least a few days, so he'd have to give me a P.N.

"Imagine my surprise, me thinking they was well away on their honeymoon, when he came back— her with him.

" 'We had to postpone our honeymoon, Mrs. Parsley,' he said. 'There is some business about my wife's estate that will have to be fixed up first. Until it's settled we'd like to stay here— Number Ten will do. My wife has taken such a fancy to you!'

"I let them have it before I knew what I was doing. They both looked flustered, and she looked angry; and when they were in the flat I heard them

having a ding-dong go. Not that I'm a Peeping Tom which hears no good of themselves, but it came plain through the door.

"You don't expect me to live in this hovel!' she said.

" 'My dear Maudie,' he answered, "I thought we were going to make the best of things together. This is the best we can do at present.'

" 'Money was too commonplace a thing for you to discuss!' she said, with aspirations in her voice.

" 'Didn't you take the same attitude? Come, Maudie; we were both after money, and we've both been had. It's rather a joke.'

" 'I'm not laughing,' she says.

" 'What about me?' he said, 'it's knocked me sky-high to find we were both in the same boat. I'm not holding you, Maudie, but I'm rather fond of you; and I think if we work together we'll do all right.'

"I was that flabbergasted that, when he came to me and asked me in his cool, gentlemanly way to give him back the extra pound he had pul on the P.N., and he would give it back to me in the morning, I let him have it. I hadn't intended to do it; in fact, I had been worrying whether I didn't ought to tell them to go at once. But, then, there was what he said about them working together and doing all right.

"I was sorry for him, too; being so basely deceived, and him such a gentleman, and taking it in the cool fashion he did!

THEY went out that night together, jazzed up as if they were going to see the Lord Mayor; and when he paid me back in the morning I realised that he was a man of his word. In fact, he handed me three pounds and took back the P.N., which he said didn't matter now that they were going on living with me, and he'd square matters in a few weeks.

"I didn't care much for her, although she could be nice enough when she wasn't in her tempers. She never seemed to think of how basely she'd deceived him; and her habit of talking about hovels— quite loud so that people in other flats could hear— was something I didn't like. Constant dripping will wear away stone, they say, though why anyone should waste good dripping I don't know. My place has never been a hovel, and never will be; and, as I say, people who live in grass houses shouldn't throw their weight about.

"They used to have little card-parties in their flat; and I don't think much of some of the friends they had there. In spite of her tempers, he was always gentlemanly. Even when he was cross— as he was one night when they came home— he was quiet about it.

" 'For a woman who has to live on her wits, you've got mighty little to live on,' he was saying as they climbed the stairs. 'A simple system, and you slip like that!'

"The next day they owed me for the rent again.

"Like a bolt from the flue it all happened: Mrs. Fosdick disappeared, and then, a lot later, poor Mr, Fosdick, who had seemed extracted over it, looking for her everywhere, was arrested for murder.

"That was after the body was found. Mr. Fosdick, very pale in the face, poor feller, asked me to go to the morgue.

"If he hadn't told me that it would be hard to identify her, I don't think I would have. I forgave her all she had said about hovels, poor thing; and I did identify her, and so did he. I felt really sorry for them both, it always being so terrible for a young thing like that, with all her faults, going to a happier land.

"As for poor Mr. Fosdick, I told him that the rent didn't matter for a week or two; but he said there was a little insurance, and directly that was paid he'd fix me up.

"I began to think, secret-like, that, after all, the poor feller would be better off without her, especially with that insurance. But it was that that made all the trouble. Them insurance companies. You see, we had thought that the poor thing was just drownded, which she had done herself. But the Government Ananias must find poison in her. Them insurance companies must have got him to interfere.

"It was a thunderclap to Mr. Fosdick as well as me when the detectives came. He could only say, pale-faced, that he didn't do it; but they took him away. Everybody seemed to turn against him. They said the big insurance— he had told me it was small ; but he was always a gentleman— upon his wife's life supplied a motor for the crime. Though what a motor had to do with it I don't see.

"ALL I could say was that I didn't believe it, but, if it was a murder, it was a very gentlemanly murder: no fuss about it— everything done so nice and quiet. But you couldn't imagine Mr. Fosdick doing anything that wasn't gentlemanly.

"It made me angry to think of them insurance companies bringing up the matter of that policy just to save their dirty money. I never did trust them insurance companies, with all their special promises and their agents takingup your time at the door and refusing to go away. Even if Mr. Fosdick had murdered his wife to get the insurance, it must have been because he wanted the money very bad.

" 'I do hope,' I said to Mr. Davis,who, not being a gentleman himself, didn t like Mr. Fosdick, 'that that poor woman doesn't call the heavenly mansions "hovels." ' You see, what Davis said about Mr. Fosdick deserving to be hung got my back up. It made me angry with the poor thing for getting such a gentleman into trouble, pretending she had money. But for her he might some day have married a millionairess and made a name for philandering and benevolence, giving away his wife's money. I'm sure he would have, him being of a kindly nature.

"According to everybody, Mr. Fosdick was going to be hung. But one day they sent for me at the police department, and I got the shock of my life.

"For there was Mrs. Fosdick!

"She was crying something awful, and was saying that she couldn't stand the strain of keeping dark, and knowing her husband was charged with murder. Mr. Fosdick, who was there, too, looks at her in that queer, cool way of his and said she was foolish; they'd never have been able to prove the murder against him.

"Of course, they couldn't hang Mr. Fosdick for killing his wife when she was alive; but were those police satisfied? No! Instead of letting lying dogs sleep, as the Bible says you should, they had charged them both with aspiring to defraud the insurance company. Oh, those insurance companies! Sons of Mammals, they are— always out to protect their money!

"One of the detectives told me I was lucky not to be charged, too; but Mr. Fosdick had admitted something that let me out.

"Before I knew what I was doing I had gone bail for them; I was that flurried I would have gone anything. And there was Mr. Fosdick, in his same gentlemanly way, telling me all the lies about their estates being settled next week, and everything being fixed up with me, who was a brick.

"It was only natural, after all they had gone through, that they should need a holiday. I didn't know anything about their going away being a responsibility of mine, although 1 believe in what Shakspeare says about a man being his brother's keepsake; but the police made a lot of fuss about it when they didn't turn up at the court. They talked about cheating my bail, which, no doubt, they would if they got a chance ; but I went to the M.P. of the district and he settled it with the Department of Injustice which is only what an M.P. should do, even if you do vote for the other side.

"Although I never got my rent, I got a lovely letter from Mr. Fosdick so gentlemanly; just like himself. He said that they had to go away to get their estates fixed up, but they would come back and settle with me— which they have never done to my knowledge and consent, although I'm sure I don't blame them for keeping away, with them police always on the lookout.

"So you see it wasn't a murder after all ; but I'm sure it would have been a very gentlemanly murder if Mr. Fosdick had done it. Always such a gentleman, he was."

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11: Cantgetbakfromthere

Bulletin, 10 October 1934

"CANTGETBAKFROMTHERE? It's the other side of Billibangerwon," said the man called Baldy. He gazed thoughtfully at the station waiting-room fire.

"It's nearer Bunberrumbora," said the man called Jim.

"Maybe," assented Baldy after deep thought. "Might be five or six miles nearer. But then you've got to cross the ridge at Bellybruyoung going that way. Any'ow, you get out at Carribombery."

CANTGETBAKFROMTHERE had been mentioned in some yarn one of them had been spinning. We were grouped near the waiting-room fire, and I had asked casually where the place was.

That had started it. For my part, the place I wanted to get to was Sydney.

"Yairs, you get out at Carribombery," assented Jim. "That is, unless you—"

"No ; you get out at Carribombery," put in the man in the corner, Bill. "Then you go along to Coolawarra. 'Bout twenty miles."

"That ain't the best way," objected Jim. "Go to Nambanki— that's my idea. Then you go from Nambanki to Boodleton."

"Best way is to go to Boodleton through Coolawarra," objected Baldy.

"Not if Old Lawler is still running the coach to Nambanki. Anyone know if Lawler is still running the coach to Nambanki?"

THEY argued about it. I dozed off, vaguely hearing the argument, which seemed to decide that Lawler was his own son who still drove the coach not for the last eight years.

I was pretty well fast asleep when somebody prodded me and said:

"You get off at Carribombery. Then you get to Boodleton either through—"

"Yes, I follow," I said hastily.

"Then you go on from Boodleton to Cantgetbakfromthere."

"Not by a long shot, you don't!" said Baldy impressively.

"You'd git lost," said Bill. "No; after leaving Boodleton you make for Jerripompom"—

"Fletcher's homestead's belter," said Jim.

"Fletcher's homestead was burnt out in 1925, and he threw up the lease," said Bill.

"Oh, then, of course, Jerripompom."

"And after that," I mumbled, "you go to Bunberrumbora"

"No, you don't. Bomboona is the best way," said Baldy. "Thirty miles or so"

"I'd go by Sherrit's Creek," said Bill.

"Supposing it was running a banker?" demanded Jim. "No ; Flinders's place for mine."

I DOZED while they argued that point.

Somebody awoke me again by saying: "You get off at Carribombery—"

"After leaving Sherrit's Creek," said Bill, "you make for Poodlehampton." He paused to look a challenge at Baldy and Jim; but this time they nodded an assent.

"That'll do me," I said hastily. "I daresay I'd find my way from there if ever 1 needed to."

"You'd have to go from there to Harrigan's," said Bill.

"Not if you wanted to strike Billibangarwon," said Baldy. "The best way would be to get. to Slattery's."

"That's near Billibangarwon?" I asked.

"Slattery's? No; a hell of a way off. From Slattery's you'd have to go to Minnewanta and then strike across to Wimble's. Then, if there hadn't been any rain and the road was passable, you'd make Tintinby, and from there go on to Swabblehurst. After that—"

"To go from Poodlehampton to Rigglestones'd be better," said Jim.

"I allus went by Pipplepool," said Baldy.

THEY started to argue again, but the rumble of the train ended that.

They turned out on to the station with me; and then I discovered that they were not travellers. They were merely locals who came to the railway station to get a little hectic excitement by having a conversation in the waiting-room.

"You get out at Carribombery," said Baldy, as the train to move.

"That is unless you want to get to it by the other way round," said Jim, trotting beside the moving caravan. "If so, you get off at—"

"You get off at Carribombery!" shouted Bill as the train really moved.

Looking back, I saw that they were still arguing. Anyway, I was going to Sydney.

———————

12: Shaking Up the *Banner*.

Bulletin, 19 Sep 1934

PETERSON was a "lit'r'y" man merely by courtesy. He was proud of the courtesy, but found it troublesome. His real business was meat, but he had taken over the Bunglewongie *Banner* for a bad debt, and it had remained one. The *Banner* was such a hopeless affair that the proprietor, having extracted a series of loans from Peterson, had simply disappeared, leaving the whole concern, including the unpaid compositor and what he grandiloquently called "the plant," on Peterson's hands.

Peterson had tried to keep it going, being pleased at the standing the paper's ownership gave him. His misfortunes with his editors may be ascribed to his habit of seeking them by advertisement, and then selecting the man who sought most hungrily for the job; "thirstily" would perhaps be the better term, for Peterson's cheapest-in-the-market editors were invariably thirsty. Sooner or later fie always paid them a week's money in advance, knowing that they would seize the opportunity and disappear. He would then struggle to fill in the columns himself, with the aid of the comp., until the cares of that job induced him to try a new man.

The only satisfaction Peterson got out of it was his own full-page advertisements— when he got tired of trying to fill the paper otherwise— of the prices and merits of his meat.

It was in one of his moments of exasperation that he met Walker. With his curious wild eyes, his red nose and his frayed clothes, Walker was not impressive; but his manner was, and so were his testimonials. He had worked "on the literary staff" of a multitude of papers, from the Tuckerburra *Trumpeter* to the Crowflat *Chronicle*. He had written some small things for papers of much larger standing, and he spoke about those achievements as if he were their most notable contributor.

When Peterson broached business he found Walker an enthusiast.

"What I have always wanted," Walker said, "is to have charge of a paper. I'm a man of ideas. Mister Peterson, we'll shake up the old *Banner* —we'll make its presence felt! What you want is circulation; then you'll get advertising. We'll make the *Banner* spread right into Mullagownie, Gingaranga and all those places. We'll make it a paper that the people'll want to read. You'll see! We'll make it the London *Times* of this part of the State!"

After the third drink Peterson was almost convinced by his enthusiasm; but he reminded Walker that, hardly a tap having been done on the bi-weekly, he'd have to set to work at once to get the out at all. "Not that it matters much

being a day or so behind time," he added, a little bitterly. "The people don't seem to mind."

"We'll alter all that!" cried Walker forcefully. "It is going to matter; and the *Banner* is coming out on time, with people looking for. it. I won't promise a big change in this issue— it's a matter of just getting it out; but wait for the next!"

The energy that was put into the job amazed Peterson. Walker, with his coat and vest off, exposing his string-tied braces and torn shirt, bent over the rough editorial table and dug his pen into paper at a great rate; he harried the slow-moving country-bred comp. to some grumbling speed. Soon Peterson had the satisfaction of reading proofs that stirred his soul with pride.

"That leader, 'Wake Up, Bunglewongie!' ought to shake 'em up," gloated its author.

"It's good," commented Peterson.

"First-class! But where did you get this 'Mystery Murder at Mildura'?"

"That's my feature story," said Walker. "How did you get hold of it?"

"Mildura's in Victoria— hundreds of miles away. Nobody's likely to know whether it's true or not."

"Oh, but—" began Peterson, staggered.

"It's a good yarn, and will hold up the interest for the next issue. If people can't find it in the Sydney papers they'll look for further details in the next *Banner*. "

"But if it isn't true" Peterson began to protest. Then, harassed by the rush to get the *Banner* out at all, he decided to let the argument wait. "But what about this: 'Rumored Corruption in Shire Council'?"

"We're safe on that," remarked Walker. "We don't accuse anybody, and we don't say what the corruption is. We merely mention rumors having reached this office which demand inquiry, and which we are investigating in the public interest."

"What's it about?" asked Peterson helplessly.

"Hanged if I know," retorted Walker cheerfully; "but it'll make people look out for our next issue. You bet there will be rumors, too, once we've made the suggestion. We'll investigate them— refute them or not, just as we like. You see if some of those councillors don't come in with ads. You see!"

Whatever doubts Peterson may have had, he was entirely pleased with the finished product. Walker had worked all night, and forced the comp, to work all night, too; and, amazingly, the *Banner* was out to time. A casual remark of the owner's had been turned into a lengthy paragraph about the movements of "our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Frank Peterson," who would shortly leave for a few days upon business "of incalculable value to Bunglewongie." And he

was flattered. He felt that his world was a bigger world than before, and he was a bigger figure in it.

His confidence established, he went away for the few days, with a parting injunction to Walker to go slow on such items as the shire scandal. But misgivings smote him occasionally during his absence.

He was startled on his return to find a boy selling the Bunglewongie *Banner* on the station. Every member of the crowd seemed to have a *Banner* in his hand. Even as he responded to Walker's greeting, he heard Bill Johnson say to a man on the train, "Eh, Joe, git an eyeful of the *Banner*! You take this copy— I'll git another."

Every train passenger seemed to be leaning out of the windows to secure copies of the *Banner*.

The proprietor and the editor of the "Banner" had a drink in the hotel, and Peterson had the impression that there was something queer in the publican's manner as he served them.

"The *Banner*'s made a hit to-day, all right, Frank."

There was a grin below the publican's remark, and Peterson, feeling uncomfortable, muttered, "It seems so; I haven't seen a copy yet."

"I had a couple here just now," said the publican. "Somebody must have grabbed them."

"They're going like hot cakes," exulted Walker. "Come down to the office and have a look at a copy."

Peterson did not respond this time to the warmth of the enthusiasm; he was cold with suspicion. And he felt so afraid of what he would find in the *Banner* that he wanted to postpone his inspection. He said civilly that he would be down directly he had slipped home and had a brush-up. His doubts were not allayed when, as they moved away from the bar, the publican tapped his forehead significantly, whispering, "A bit mad, isn't he?"

At the door Peterson watched Walker stepping buoyantly towards the *Banner* office. People who happened to be on the pavement edged aside as he passed and came back to look after him and whisper together.

Peterson was an easygoing man, not given to wrath; but when he got angry he frothed. He was frothing when, much sooner than he had intended, he reached the "Banner" office; yet he stood at the door for a moment, half-fearfully, prepared to slam it between himself and a dangerous maniac ifWalker showed a dangerous mood.

Walker, however, merely greeted him with a cheerful grin— "an idiot grin" was how Peterson mentally described it. Reassured, Peterson's wrath flamed again.

"What th' hell have you been doing with the *Banner*?" he howled, coming right into the sanctum and waving the crumpled copy he held.

"Shaking it up, sir," said Walker. "Putting it on the map. Everybody's bought a copy."

"My God, I should think so!" groaned Peterson.

"As I said, I'm a man of ideas—"

"Ideas! " flamed Peterson. "What sort of an idea is it to print the leading article upside down?"

"I wanted people to read it. Print *anything* upside down and people will read it; so—"

"You're crazy!" yelled Peterson. "What the hell do you mean by printing the report of Peter Pickering's funeral under 'Sporting News'?"

"Mr. Peterson—"

"What have you done? Pickering was one of my friends, and now his family— And look here —look here!" he continued frenziedly, turning over the paper until he found the paragraph he wanted:

" 'A meeting of the local shareholders of the Bunglewongie Creek Tin-Sluicing Company was held yesterday to consider the statement of affairs presented by the board.' Why in the name of goodness was an item like that placed under 'Cookery Recipes'?"

"Don't you see—"

"I see nothing but the rattiness of the whole thing! Here: 'Charles O'Neill, 47, was charged at the Bunglewongie Police Court with being drunk and disorderly'— and that's under 'Social Gossip'! And the report of the Hawthorn-Patrick wedding is under 'Obituary Notices.' There's not a piece in the paper that's in its right place, unless it's printed upside down! You flamin'—"

"Mr. Peterson," said Walker, rising with dignity, "listen to me for a moment. Can't you see my great idea?"

"Great idea!"

"The *Banner* suffered because nobody read it— even those who bought it. Consequently nobody advertised in it. Well, everybody's reading it to-day. Everybody has a copy; some have bought several copies. People will advertise in the next number in the hope of another big issue. It's made a sensation!"

"Because people think you're mad; they'll think I ought to be in the rat-house, too."

Half a dozen loungers could be seen on the other side of the street, gazing curiously at the *Banner* office. "Why, the whole damn town is staring at us! The whole world is laughing at us," Peterson yelled.

"Just so," said Walker with that satisfied grin of his. "It's been a great success. I've had special issues printed and sent out to Gingaranga—to all the adjacent towns. They'll sell there just as well as here, and—"

Peterson, nearly choking, tore at his collar.

"I've had copies posted to every paper in New South. I bet they'll comment on this issue and give us the widest advertisement a paper ever—"

"You ruddy idiot!" roared Peterson. "And my name's on it as proprietor, printer and publisher! I'd like to strangle you!"

"Don't you see?" said Walker. "In the next issue I explain that the whole thing was done in order—"

"There won't be a next issue— not with you in charge!"

"If you'll only be reasonable—"

"Reasonable! *You* talk of being reasonable! *You*, who— *Look out*!"

Peterson had seen the brick coming, and dodged as it crashed through the window. "See what you've brought upon us," he gasped. "And here's old Patrick coming into the office—"

The door burst open, and a man whose wild whiskers seemed to bristle and whose walking-stick waved belligerently came in, a crumpled paper in his hand.

"I want an explanation, Mister Peterson— from you and this worm who's workin' for you! Me darter's weddin' printed under the Obitcharies; an', as if that isn't enough, look-it here!" He turned the paper over. " 'The wedding party was full of moderately good spirits, and some of the younger guests spent a very hoppy time.' Watcher mean by a reflection like that on respectable people? I didn't throw that brick. There's plenty others after you."

"It's not my fault," cried Peterson frantically as the murmur of excited voices was heard outside. "It's this escaped gorilla! He's sacked!" He turned upon Walker fiercely. "You're sacked, d'you hear? And get out through the back before murder is done. You've had money from me in advance, and it's all you're goin' to get. Get out, I tell you, before they scrag you!"

The man of ideas showed a tendency to argue, but the rapid approach of the belligerent voices and a push by Peterson decided him upon the safest course. He dragged a forme crashing to the floor as he dashed through the printery.

And Walker, if you meet him now, will tell you that the *Banner* just missed being the greatest organ of public opinion in the Commonwealth because of the inability of the benighted inhabitants to absorb new notions in journalism.

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13: The Accident

The Bulletin, 14 Dec 1922

In the tradition of the Christmas "ghost" stories... and why not the appropriate number 13...

PARKINSON was passionately devoted to his wife, who fully returned his affection, and this night he made for home with gladness in his step, because of the bracelet which a special bit of luck had enabled him to purchase. It was a trinket she had wistfully admired in a jeweller's window only a week before, and Parkinson, as he walked, was lost to his surroundings in anticipation of the surprise it was going to mean to her.

He woke from his abstraction sharply at a sudden tumult of shouts as he was crossing Pitt-street. A tram was charging down on him, and he had hastened to avoid it before he noticed two motor-cars speeding abreast on the other side. To stand still meant annihilation by the tram, to check himself and spring backward was likewise impossible, and it seemed equally impossible to avoid the oncoming cars. All this flashed upon him in one nightmare moment; then he leapt forward, taking what appeared to be the least appalling risk.

Trembling and shaken, he realised with amazement that he had escaped. Dizzily he watched the rush of people from all directions into the middle of the street, and it dawned upon him that there had been an accident —probably caused by the efforts of the car-drivers to avoid running him down. Yet he felt too sick to investigate, and moved away. A curious nausea assailed him as he thought that he, himself, might be lying there in the street, the life crushed out of him; and the wife he loved might wait wonderingly for his return until the gruesome news was brought to her. He visioned himself as actually dead, and found himself wondering whether consciousness would cease abruptly, or whether the impulses of thought would move onward in dream-action as real to the dreamer as actuality. What was actuality, anyway?

It seemed to him that his thoughts had reached the brink of an abyss filled with black mists of confusion; and from the dizziness of further thinking he checked himself with an effort. Yet the same thoughts returned often in subsequent days, always bringing with them a vague bewilderment.

"That narrow shave has upset me," he would mutter. "I must try to put it out of my mind."

But his escape had made another difference, which he noted sometimes with amazement. He put it down to the shock of thinking of his wife as a grief-stricken widow, and the effect it had had on his mind. He had been, before, a fond, well-intentioned husband, whose intentions went astray very often; but now all the old carelessness had gone. He had no longer a weakness for lingering with friends, but always hurried home after the daily routine of his

work. And his business went with a curious smoothness. Matters he had planned in an abstract fashion, happily ignoring the difficulties but hardly hoping for actual success, he now carried through triumphantly. The uncanny way the obstacles vanished had in it a nightmarish touch. Wealth came to him. Soon he was able to plan out that bungalow it had been his life's dream to buy his wife; and he actually did one evening drive home his own motor-car.

There was happiness, of course, in the realisation of these long-cherished dreams; but it was saddened by a strange feeling of separation from his wife. While he joyfully heaped luxuries upon her, and warmed to the momentary gladness each of his gifts brought her, he was aware that she was fretting, as though continuously her heart was yearning for something she had not. And. strangely, he found it difficult to speak to her about this phase, though a hundred times he tried to do it. Then she became ill, and with an ever-growing weakness and indifference, she lay in her bed and wept weakly. He would put his arms around her, and with loving solici-tude try to win back to normality her stricken spirit; but always she appeared to be oblivious of his presence. He became desperate as he watched her wasting away.

ONE AFTERNOON as she lay with his arm around her shoulder, in the last stage of her weakness, a strange change came over her. His glance had wandered through the window, out over the sunlit garden, and he had sensed a joyous note of Spring in the air— the hum of new-born life, the sweet scent of awakened beauty. Then, turning to her, he saw a swift ecstasy sweep away the worn sadness of her face. And as he looked into the eyes so suddenly starry, she flung her arms about him in a passionate embrace. Parkinson's senses reeled under the shock of delight, and he was but mistily conscious when she rose from the bed, her arms still linked around him....

The mists cleared and he found himself in a radiant countryside, his wife, aglow with happiness, beside him. He was still trying to adjust himself to the sudden transition when she said: "It's glorious to have you again!"

"Have me again?" he echoed wonderingly.

"I have wished for nothing but death since that day you were killed in Pitt-street," she said.

For one amazed instant Parkinson was at a loss; then he knew everything— and the music of an eternal Spring was lilting in his ears.

"POOR SOUL!" said the nurse, reverentially laying-out the body; "she died heart-broken— and for a man who must have been a waster. They say he was drunk on the day he was killed."

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14: Lottery Luck

Bulletin, 24 Jan 1934

LIKE a southerly burster came Tom Biggar into my life again. I was drinking the second whisky for which he had paid before I fully realised the change in his appearance. The pockets of his coat might be worked outward already by his habit of thrusting into them parcels he wished to carry home ; but his clothes were good, and almost brand-new.

"Seaside Sites must be looking up," I remarked.

"Seaside Sites be blowed!" returned Biggar heartily. "I'm my own boss now, and I intend to remain so."

My heart fell slightly. Biggar had had so many lucky strikes which petered out, leaving him a desperate borrower of his friends' spare silver, that it sounded like disaster to hear that he had again abandoned the assured four pounds a week dear to the heart of Mrs. Biggar and the commission that was the breath of his own nostrils. Seaside Sites at least yielded him that.

I waited for him to explain his new road to fortune, as he usually did without prompting. But he was more reticent than usual.

"I'm going to shout you a lottery share," he vociferated. Although I told I had no violent hunger for any such thing, it is hard to resist Biggar when he is in his boisterous mood. He guided me to an office where people moved in and out as bees do about a hive.

It all came as a surprise. There was young Tom Biggar, promoted from the large Eton collars that used to be one of his features, grinning at me; there was Millie Biggar, grown into flapper-hood, attending from behind her desk to the rush of clients for shares, but sparing time to give me a smile. Signs indicated that we stood within the office of the Lucky Tom's Loytery Shares Syndicate.

"So you're Lucky Tom!"I exclaimed. The advertisements in some of the papers had hit my eye, but it had never occurred to me that Lucky Tom was Tom Biggar.

"And you've been amongst the big money, I see," pointing to signs which set forth that Lucky Tom syndicates had won a first and a third,

"My oath, yes," he said, lifting his voice. "And in the next few weeks the Lucky Tom syndicates will be scooping all the big prizes."

"Hear, hear! Hope you do, Mr. Biggar!" This came from amongst the jostling crowd that filled the office.

"Already we have a larger percentage of wins than any other shares syndicate in the business," said Biggar, addressing me, but still regarding himself as a loudspeaker.

I found myself talking to others I knew slightly— old acquaintances of Lucky Tom's impecunious days. Biggar gathered us together, and soon he was getting Milly to make out the dockets by which each of us, including himself, had a share in a lottery ticket in the name of "Lucky Tom's Old Pals.'

It was Tom's shout; but he was not content with that. He took us out to the nearest hotel.

"Why, the money's rolling in," he said in reply to my. protest that the drinks were mine. "All you chaps were damned good to me when I needed it; and it's my turn now."

"I hope the good times'll last, Tom," I said. "Government's talking of closing down these shares syndicates."

"They'll never do it," he replied cheerfully. "All damned foolishness. It's the personal factor that counts. Look at me with my subscribers. I'm their friend as well as their agent. That's what matters. Fancy them rushing to have their shares passed out to them by mere civil servants! We people are performing a service to the public; and even if the Government tries to stop us they'll never succeed. We'll find a way of carrying on in spite of them."

Biggar finished rather warmly.

"And how's Mrs. Biggar? What does she think of it all?"

"What should she think of it?" he retorted. "I've bought her a house; it's hers for keeps."

It rather took my breath away. Tom, who had not taken me as fully into his confidence as he had usually done, had somehow burgeoned into the lottery business in a big way; his newspaper advertisements were huge, and office rent must be considerable. I knew the profits such a business made were large, but that they should have enabled him already to shelve his incessant war with the landlord astonished me. It pleased me, too. My own interest in the lotteries is slight; but what business I had in that direction I naturally did in Tom's office.

Tom himself was often out; when he was not he always came out with me. His philanthropic attitude to the people who thronged into the place struck me as rather absurd; but there was no doubt that Tom was enjoying not only his affluence but his sense of being a public benefactor.

Of the affluence I had another proof when I was bidden to a feast to celebrate the anniversary of the Biggar wedding. In other days the occasion might have been honored in prawns and beer, with a special outing to the pictures. And somehow, when I met again the devoted Mrs. Biggar, I had an impression that she would have enjoyed the simpler form of entertainment better, although this affair was held with full circumstance at a leading hotel and the M.P. who, in strange circumstances, had become a friend of Biggar

made the speech of the evening, complimenting the couple on their long union and their happiness.

Mrs. Biggar certainly looked pleased as Tom replied. "I owe everything to my wife," he declared ; it was as natural for Tom to say a thing like that as it was in the old days to talk about letting people in on the ground floor. And that was not to say that Tom himself did not feel that he was sincere. As for Mrs. Biggar, her eyes glowed over her flushed cheeks as she looked adoringly at the man whose chequered fortunes she had shared.

"You haven't been to see us at our new house," she said reproachfully when I spoke to her. "It's our own, you know; Tom bought it."

"I promised Tom I would run out one Sunday," I said. "I'm glad Tom is doing so well."

There came into her face a slightly wistful look.

"It's splendid, isn't it?" she said. "But I wish it didn't occupy so much of Tom's time. He's very seldom at home now. I suppose he's right in thinking that it's the proper thing for him to take an interest in municipal politics. Of course, Tom's just the sort of man they want on the council; the rates are so high, and all that sort of thing, with the men they have there now. Tom would soon alter that. But I'd rather have him at home more."

So that was the way of it? Biggar had developed a feeling that his public benefactions should not end with the mere buying of lottery tickets for those who wanted shares. During a previous burst of affluence, the devotion that always existed in adversity between the Biggars had been temporarily impaired. For a moment I felt almost sorry that Biggar was so prosperous.

That feeling changed when I spoke to Greenlees, who managed Seaside Sites. It was a curiously mixed gathering. Biggar had evidently determined to entertain his friends and to impress guests who were not so friendly.

"How long is it going to last?" demanded Greenlees, rather sourly, in response to a remark about Biggar's altered circumstances. "When this lottery-share business is stopped, what is Biggar going to do? He'll be glad enough of his old job— if he can get it."

"You'd be glad enough to have him," I suggested with a laugh.

"I don't know about that," he retorted.

"It's not the first time he's thrown in his job to go after something else. I like a man who settles to his work. Biggar's too erratic."

"He's a good salesman."

"He's a good salesman, of course. Yet a stunt like this comes along and away goes the job he is fitted for!"

"Well, he's making money, and he's happy. He believes he is doing a public good," I said.

"That's what makes him a salesman. He's able to convince himself that everything he touches is the right thing— it's simply a benevolence to pass it on to others."

It was an illuminating commentary upon our friend, which made me almost forgive Greenlees for his sourness. Had I wished I could have given as illuminating a commentary about himself. He is one of those persons who think salesmen are sent into this world to do their work for them, and grudge them any success (the salesmen, I mean) that raises them above helotry.

Biggar's prosperity seemed solid enough, in spite of threats of Governmental interference, which was a long time in coming. Suddenly it fell to the ground like a pack of cards.

I had spent a lazy holiday aboard a Murray-river steamer. Returning to the city, I went to Biggar's offices. Gone were the bustling crowds; gone the youthful Biggars; gone was Biggar himself."Lucky Tom's" was closed. There were "To Let" notices in the window.

"They went broke, and the bailiffs came in," said a man lounging near. "You got a share in any of the prizes they won?"

"What's that to do with you?" I rejoined.

"Aw, nothing," said the man. He seemed malicious; he may have been associated with one of the rival concerns. They simply had to go broke— shouting drinks for customers and all that," he sneered. "A business can't carry on that way."

In my concern, I recalled my promise to go out to see the Biggars. I did it that evening. The new house, I found, was a comfortable-looking bungalow.

It was a subdued Biggar who greeted me, although he seemed glad of my coming.

"How did it all happen?" I asked.

"I spent too much. I thought spending would establish the business, and once established I could cut down; but I found that hard. However," he added with a laugh, "it's over now. It was good while it lasted. I'll find a job, I suppose; it's a bit of a comedown having to look for one."

"Anyway, you got this house out of it," I said.

He looked around nervously. Mrs. Biggar was busy clearing the table in the room beyond the lounge, where we were sitting.

"The instalments are a bit overdue," he acknowledged. "It'll be all right if I can get a job without delay, but—"

"Seaside Sites," I suggested. Remembering Greenlees, I was far from hopeful.

"No! " Biggar spoke forcefully. "No; I can't go back, cap in hand, to them. There's beer in the ice-chest. I'll get it."

While he was gone Mrs. Biggar came forward. She had heard my remark.

"Seaside Sites," she said. "Don't tell him, but I went to see them to-day. I said the offer would have to come from them. They'll want him, don't you think?" Her query was full of anxiety.

"They ought to," I answered, as confidently as I could.

Biggar came in, swinging a bottle of beer with an assumption of his usual jauntiness. His arm went affectionately about his wife.

"You've no idea what a Briton she is!" he exclaimed.

The doubtful encouragement I had just given had brightened her face; at this moment it was all happiness. Undoubtedly affliction seemed to suit the Biggars best.

"A regular Briton!" Biggar repeated, opening the beer. His wife had gone to answer a tinkle which told that Biggar had had the telephone installed.

"You know we won a first in the lottery," he said.

"The Lucky Tom Syndicate did?"

"No; we won it— the share-syndicate business wasn't started then. The wife put in a shilling with four others, and l got the ticket— called it the 'Lucky Tom.' It was the wife's thousand really. We used it in the syndicate business, and all she's got out of it is the hundred or so we've spent on the house. Yet she doesn't say a word about it! "

"You mean to say you got through the thousand your wife won?" I exclaimed.

Tom stood with the bottle in his hand,a shamed grin on his face. He could see the absurdity of the situation, humiliated as he was.

"It's Mr. Greenlees, of Seaside Sites," cut in the voice of Mrs. Biggar. The good lady was flustered. "He asked if you were in, and when I hesitated he said would you be sure and call to-morrow and—"

"I'm in!" said Biggar cheerfully.

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15: The Blood of the Mullitons

The Bulletin, 8 July 1931
As "The Mullitons", *Sunday Mail* (Qld.) 31 Aug 1941

TOM MULLITON'S buggy dashed into the township and pulled up at the hospital. A little later Tom, always a good mark for hangers-on, was at the Commercial Hotel. It leapt to sudden life with his arrival.

"Sorry to hear about the youngster," said Dr. Bruce, who had drifted in upon the information that Tom was about. Bruce, the derelict medico, who had been there since the township was young, was a sort of courtesy member of the hospital staff. Nobody depended upon him, though everybody liked him.

"It's my fault," said Mulliton. "Have another whisky."

Bruce had it.

"Can't see it's your fault," he said. "The boy's got simple pulmonary trouble."

"Look at the way I married," said Tom moodily. "Never thought of the consequences! Well— I married! And now I have a whole brood of 'em. I suppose this is only a start! And I was fool enough to think the blood of the Mullitons good enough!"

"What bee's got you?" demanded Bruce.

"You know as well as I do— me marrying Dolly. When a man's young he doesn't think; though he'd be as careful of the breeding of his stock as if his own life depended on it. The guvnor was always talking to me of it —the need for keeping the blood of the Mullitons pure. Yet I go and marry Dolly— and here I am!"

"Here we are!" agreed Bruce, with an idea of distracting Mulliton from his melancholy. "And the whisky's good!"

"It's all very well to joke," glowered Mulliton. He stopped. "Here, Ted! fill 'em again. I'm going out for a time. Be back directly." .

With Tom gone, Bruce could dwell on his drink. Presently, however, he went to the door, hesitated, came back swiftly and drained his glass. Then he, too, went out in a hurry.

He had sensed that there was something strange about the way Tom was taking the illness of his boy. The trouble was old enough, of course. The blood of the Mullitons allowed for no human frailties; and Tom was blaming for this illness the vitiated blood he had brought into the family when he married Dolly. Dolly had come inland to a job as barmaid because of a chest weakness, and she had made little resistance when dashing Tom Mulliton decided that the barmaid at the Commercial was a right and proper person to be Mrs. Mulliton.

Bruce remembered the ferment of the district when Tom impetuously carried out his will. His own sympathies were all with Dolly. Had Tom the elder been alive the marriage might never have taken place, but his restraining influence had been removed quite early. He had been found lying on the bush road near the entrance to. the homestead with marks on his head which showed how a hanging branch of a tree, broken down by the storm of that wild night of long ago, had swept him from his saddle.

Dolly had taken the coldness of the families in the surrounding district philosophically, and had settled down contentedly with her home and children. As for Tom, he was several times a father before doubts of the wisdom of his act began to assail him. Bruce had discovered them when the family had been first caught by an epidemic.

"No need to let it worry you, Tom," he had said. "All children pick up these things at some time or another."

"I didn't," Tom had retorted.

Whenever the children made a quick recovery it was the blood of the Mullitons that had pulled them round. When they didn't Dolly's miserable constitution was to blame. Tom was very fond of his children. The idea that there should be anything physically imperfect. about one of them was torture to him. In his own herds he was ruthless in weeding out the unfit— stock perfection had been a Mulliton tradition. "Only the best are good enough for me to keep," had been old Tom Mulliton's dictum. And so with humans: only the best deserved to live. The rest were a misery to themselves and others. The idea that he had been less careful of the breeding of his children than of his cattle was a constant worry to Tom. It maddened him to think that bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh should be doomed to future suffering. He was fond of Dolly, too, in a queer way, that had something of hatred in it, regarding the affection she had inspired as a trap that had caught him.

Bruce wandered down to the hospital to have a talk with the matron and look at the boy, for whom he had a peculiar affection. Half-delirious, little Tom only partially recognised him, but smiled wanly when the doctor's whisky-palsied hand lay for an instant on his forehead.

"Mind he doesn't have anything to eat," he said to the matron. "His father may leave him lollies, but he mustn't have 'em."

Conquering the thirst that was in him, he kept away from the hotel for a time. When at last he did go there, it was to find the bar almost deserted.

"Tom Mulliton gone?" he asked Burns, the publican.

"About half an hour ago. He's been heavy on the booze to-day— even for him. Seems to be worrying over that kid of his. I tried to get him to stay— the

way he was— and go back to-morrow. He'll be breaking his neck one of these nights."

Bruce wandered down to the hospital again. A stack of picture-books and toys was on the locker by little Tom's bed. The child was sleeping the fitful sleep of fever.

"There's these chocolates, too," said the nurse. "I didn't leave them where he could see them."

"I'll take them," said Bruce, and stood talking for a while on the verandah, with the box in his hand. The expectant look of a mongrel that had followed, at his heels from the hotel caught his attention. Opening the box he tossed the dog a chocolate, which it adroitly caught and swallowed at a gulp.

"Storm working up to-night, nurse," he said. There was a quality of yellow in the fading light, and the trees in front of the hospital were tossing wildly. "My God! Look at that dog. Nurse!"

The mongrel's prick-eared expectancy had changed suddenly to almost ludicrous puzzlement. The hair about its neck and shoulders bristled slightly, and a whine came from its throat. It turned, staggered a few steps, and collapsed.

Bruce burst into the hotel bar, gasping.

"I want a horse, Burns!" he cried. "Now. Not a second to spare."

"What's the hurry, Doc, anyway?" asked Burris.

"Tom Mulliton," said Bruce. "He's been trying to poison that kid of his. I want to get to his home before he can reach it."

Bruce's indecision was all gone. Friends volunteered to go with him; but he was the first to mount, the first to gallop out of the township.

The night had closed in quickly and the wind had risen; but through the racing clouds the moon threw a cold gleam on the road. The track was tree-lined and the branches' tossed and groaned in the rising gale. It gave an eenness to the surroundings as the group of horsemen sped recklessly along.

It was a long ride to Campbell Downs. Bruce felt the irk of the saddle ; he was insecure in his seat, but he took a grip on himself and pressed on. He had a horrible dread , of what might be happening ahead; thinking of it. his heels kicked sharply into his horse's side. Charteris's horse loomed up alongside.

"Tom seems to have been driving erratically," he shouted. "Watch the tracks— from side to side of the road. See there! He went over that stump."

"I hope he's smashed himself up, said Bruce gritting his teeth. He recalled the queer look he had seen in Tom's eyes that morning. It was pregnant with meaning now. The illness of little Tom had brought a crisis in the father's mind. Having tried to destroy his son, his next, move would be to destroy his family.

Bruce had an agonising picture in his mind of gentle little Dolly facing a determined maniac in the defence of her children.

The horses' hooves thudded on the soft clay of the road. Low hanging branches of the trees, swaying downwards under the pressure of the gale, constituted a danger, the riders, time and again, had to bend low over their horses' necks to avoid them.

Charteris gave a "Hallo!" as a smudge came into sight on the road ahead. There had been a smash, then; the knowledge brought a sense of relief to the doctor's heart. Charteris, a better rider, had pushed ahead and was off his horse, and standing by the broken buggy when the others arrived.

"It's a wreck," he said. He must have driven into the tree full rip. But Tom evidently wasn't hurt; he's not here."

"Come on!" shouted Bruce. He s taken the horses and ridden on!" He could picture the maniacal determination with which it had been done, and the thought re-awakened his terrors.

Wobbling in his saddle Bruce clung on desperately. The thud of the horses' hooves and the panting of their breaths, the creakof the saddle girths, made a note of alarm amongst the eerie noises of the storm.

"That's where old Tom Mulliton was found, isn't it?" yelled Charteris, with a sweep of his arm.

Bruce nodded. He remembered starkly that night of tragedy, for it was he who had found the body, lying spread out on the road. And he feared there was to be another night of tragedy. Charteris, slightly ahead again, pulled up sharply, and Bruce nearly shot over his horse's head as he followed suit. A black girl had stepped into the road in front of Chartcris. The white of her eyeballs glistened in the darkness, and her teeth chattered as she spoke.

"Misser Mulliton him bin wild. Him bin tell'it me get to Hell outer the house. He bin chase me out."

"For God's sake let's get on," cried Bruce.

The gate was wide open and he dashed through it ahead of the others. A frightened scream from the house, long-drawn and pitiable, gave him hope. If she could scream she was still alive.

He threw himself against the front door. It did not yield.

Within there was the sound of splintering wood, renewed screams, and the whimpering of children.

"Come on— all together!" cried Charteris at his shoulder. Under their concerted rush the door gave.

An oil lamp, hanging from the' ceiling, threw a yellow glow on a long hall. Mulliton was pounding at a closed door with an axe. In his left hand he held a

revolver. He turned sharply to meet the intruders, and Bruce winced as the revolver went up in the air.

"So the boy's dead— poor kid!" Tom cried exultantly. He evidently believed that these men had come to capture him on that account. "I loved ; the;boy ; but I'd rather see him dead than grow up to be a weakling. That's one good thing done, anyhow."

A shot rang out as the men, who had hesitated for a moment, rushed forward, too late to seize the revolver, which Mulliton had turned on himself. '

"THE BLOOD of the Mullitons!" said Bruce, explaining matters; to Charteris later. "Poor Tom was so proud of it— but it's the common-sense stolidity of Dolly that will probably be the salvation of those children. They haven't a sign of the Mulliton hysteria, which was marked in Tom even as a baby. Tom's mother was a highly-strung woman— the very worst type to be the wife of one of the Mullitons, with their strain of hereditary insanity."

"Hereditary , insanity !" exclaimed Char

"Yes; Tom's father .suicided knowing it was coming on him —it develops towards middle age. So did his grandfather. We kept it from Tom in the hope that ignorance might save him."

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16: The Frills of the De Beaufrils

Bulletin, 22 Feb 1938

"I NEVER did think them French people was to be trusted," said Mrs. Parsley, waving a letter I addressed to one De Beaufrils I had discovered amongst my own. "People who named a thing bloo-monge when it isn't blue but white cannot be regarded as converters of the truth, to my way of thinking."

"This De Beaufrils is a Frenchman?" I suggested.

"Only by distraction," said Mrs. Parsley. "When first they came I remarked that the name seemed French to me.

" 'We came over with the Normans,' he said, proud-like. Though what there was to be proud of about that I don't know.

" 'It doesn't matter to me, Mr. De Beaufrils,' I says, 'who people came over with, or where from, as long as they're respectable and pay their rent regular.' Which are my garden principles, and I don't care who knows it.

" 'I think I'd better pay a month in advance,' he just smiles, and hands me a cheque, which I took, though I always like cash best. But he must have dealt with a very respectable bank, for it paid up and didn't dishonor it like some of them banks do.

"My first depression wasn't good. He was a bit too la-di-da for me; but still that was one point in his favor, having an honorable bank. I think the Bible says 'By their banks ye shall know them,' or something like that; and after my experience with dishonorable cheques I was glad to meet one of the good kind.

"His wife was a good bit la-di-da too, but seemed a nice little thing all the same. The way they used to talk about their connections you would think they was gas-stoves. There wasn't anybody mentioned in the cable news that they wasn't related to. He was always saying 'Keep the change' to people who brought parcels; and, though it was only a penny ha'penny usually, it seemed as if he was made of money. They appeared very superior people— though, as I always say, true hearts are more than cornets.

"The way some of the other tenants took them was queer.

" 'Mr. De Beaufrils was telling me,' I says to Mr. Wassail, 'that you are going to play bridge in their flat to-night. He was talking about you.'

" 'I suppose he called me a Plea Being,' says Mr. Wassail.

"As a matter of fact Mr. De Beaufrils had spoken of him as 'Our Plea Being friend Mr. Wassail,' but I didn't mention that, not knowing exactly what it meant.

"'I don't know that I'll go to their infernal bridge party,' says Mr. Wassail. 'These De Beaufrilses are a bit too uppish.'

"All the same Mr. Wassail did go to the bridge party, and he looked as if he had dressed himself up specially in a new suit to do it. Even Mr. Slompack used to go to their parties like that.

" 'Would you mind ironing out a white tie for me, Mrs. Parsley?' he would say. 'We're mixing with the nobility to-night.'

"There was always people coming to the flats to see them, too. A very populous couple they seemed to be. And then suddenly it happened."

"What happened?" I asked.

"He deserted her; left her without a penny, that little wife of his. All broken up she seemed.

" 'It's a terrible thing, Mrs. Parsley,' Mr. Wassail says to me. 'I'm a demoncrat myself, but to see a delicately matured woman like that thrown suddenly on the world without a penny is shocking! What a scoundrel!'

" 'Yes, indeed!' I says. 'He owes me over two weeks' rent.' Which was right, for after that undishonorable cheque I had let the rent go on, never thinking but what he had plenty of money and would make it good some day.

" 'I will make myself responsible for the rent of Mrs. De Beaufrils's flat until we see what can be done,' said Mr. Wassail. 'We will have to do something for the poor little woman. Why, Mrs. Parsley, he even took her jewels. 'If he had only left me my jewels I could have done something ; perhaps paid my passage home,' she said to me. Fancy a man doing a thing like that, Mrs. Parsley!'"

"It all came out, then, just the sort of man that that Mr. De Beaufrils was. When it was suggested that letters should be sent to her influential relatives in England Mrs. De Beaufrils said it would be no good: they had cast her off because of the way she had clung to De Beaufrils; and, him being the black sheep in wolf's clothes of his family, it was no use writing to them.

" 'I don't know what I shall do yet. I suppose I will be able to secure a position as lady's maid in some family,' says Mrs. De Beaufrils bravely.

" 'You mustn't think of anything like that,' says Mr. Wassail. 'We will see what we can do for you. We will get you stable-iced.'

GETTING Mrs. De Beaufrils stable-iced, as Mr. Wassail called it, became a sort of public movement. Mr. Wassail, Mr. Slompack and Mr. Warren, who, though they had flats here, used to have their meals in restaurants, made a derangement to board with her. If it hadn't been for that I'd have asked her to move into a smaller flat; but I felt I ought to help, even when she didn't keep up the rent out of the money they gave her.

" 'Dear Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'everybody is so kind. I feel it is terrible being such a useless protuberance as I am. But I believe they are raising a general subscription to help me. (I wonder what my poor dead father, who was

so proud, would say if he knew that!) And I'll pay up my rent in full when I get that. I really think I ought to buy some widow's weeds.'

" 'What ever for?' I gasps.

" 'It looks so much more respectable when a woman is alone in the world. I am a widow in a way, aren't I?' she sighs.

" 'Your husband isn't dead,' I says.

' 'He is dead to me,' she says, and burst into tears.

"You couldn't argue with the poor thing when she was crying. So out she came in black on the money she ought to have paid for her rent; and very becoming it was, too. It made her look so perthetic that them poor men couldn't upset that boarding derangement even when they found out what a failure it was.

"You see, Mrs. De Beaufrils wasn't used to getting up early in the morning, and one morning Mr. Slompack, who was very obliging, being in a hurry, began to get the breakfast himself. He was half-way through it when she appeared.

" 'It was dreadful of me. I must get an alarm clock,' she says. 'I wish I was such a good cook as you are, Mr. Slompack.'

"Although one of them did get her an alarm clock it didn't make much difference, because she forgot to set it, and Mr. Slompack frequently had the breakfast half-ready before she was up. Then there was the night she was going out to a picture-show and was in a hurry to get the dinner things away.

" 'Let me help you with the washing-up,' said Mr. Wassail.

" 'It's so good of you!' she says. 'You could wash the dishes if you don't mind.'

"She puts an apron on him, laughing; and then Mr. Warren, who had gone to his own room after dinner, came back.

"'Oh, I haven't cut you out of your job, Mr. Warren,' she cries. 'You can still do the wiping-up, as you promised. It is so good of both of you.'

"She puts an apron on him, too, laughing, and out she goes— with Mr. Slompack, which I expect made them feel all the worse about it. I heard them talking about being sick and tired of the boarding derangement, but it went on. Before a week was out she had them men doing most of the work they was paying her to do.

"IT was the time she went out with Mr. Wassail that the millinery-shop idea came up.

" 'It's the very thing,' Mr. Wassail told me. 'She's unsuffocated, an' we've got to look after her; but she's a woman of extinction, and she ought to do well in a shop of that kind. Women who know her sad story will simply rush to help her.'

"There was a little shop to let not far away, and it didn't take two days for 'Madame De Beaufrils, Models from Paris,' to be on the window. Mr. Wassail, who was something to do with them warehouses, arranged it all.

" 'I'll get my aunt along—she's hat-mad and has tons of money,' says Mr. Warren.

"Of course them men hoped that she would give up boarding them when she was started in business. I expect that was why Mr. Wassail was in such a hurry about getting the shop going.

" 'Oh, I wouldn't be so ungrateful!' she cried when they mentioned it. 'After all the kindness you have shown me! And, really, I love looking after you men.'

" 'But you'll find it difficult, with the shop to look after,' says Mr. Slompack, hopefully-like.

" 'I'll manage,' she retortoised. 'You've no idea how clever I can be when I try.'

"I was as sorry for her as the others, but I will say that little woman knew how to get other people to do her work. She had a lot of friends, and she got them to mind the shop for her sometimes. Other times she would ask me if I'd mind doing a few vegetables for her and putting on her dinner and making a little pudding.

" 'She'll get tired of it by-and-bye, when the shop begins to pay,' says Mr. Slompack, like a man who's designed to his fate. 'She's such an impractibubble woman; you can't be angry with her.'

" 'So unsuffocated,' says Mr. Wassail. 'It's only to be expected in the case of a woman brought up like she was— a real lady. What she wants to do is to divorce that bla'guard and marry again.'

" 'Oh, that's your game, is it?' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'There are any amount of men would be glad to marry a woman like Mrs. De Beaufrils,' says Mr. Wassail loftily.

"When I heard that I began to see what was the trouble between them men, who wasn't as friendly as they used to be. They seemed to take it in turns to take her out; and you know jealousy is a green-eyed lobster which bites whom it devours.

"Mrs. De Beaufrils did pay me a little rent sometimes, but there was always a lot owing, and I was looking forward to when they gave her the subscription money which they said would be capital for her. Or if she married one of those men everything would be all right.

"It was when something more came out about that husband of hers that I found she was still thinking a bit of the man who had so cruelly deserted her. Mrs. De Beaufrils sent for me to come and speak to a man who was in her flat

and was talking of taking possession of the furniture. He said Mr. De Beaufrils had given him a billy-sale over it.

"She puts an apron on him, too, laughing, and out she goes with Mr. Slompack, which I expect made them feel all the worse about it. I heard them talking about being sick and tired of the boarding derangement, but it went on. Before a week was out she had them men doing most of the work they was paying her to do"

" 'If you touch one stick of that furniture, which is mine, you will only do it over my dead corpse,' I said.

"He looked very surprised, but we got rid of him. Fancy that De Beaufrils getting someone to give him money on my furniture, pretending it was his!

" 'He's wicked enough for anything,' sobs Mrs.

De Beaufrils, very upset.

" 'Mr. Slompack says that everything he did was crook,' I says.

" 'Mr. Slompack had no right to say that!' she cries, suddenly angry. 'They all hated my husband because they knew he was a cut above them. That's

why they're willing to help me— they feel they are showing they are better than he is!'

"I just stared at her. She put her hand on my shoulder and said she was sorry.

" 'It was silly of me to say that. I hope you'll forget it, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'Everybody has been so kind ; and of course I know my husband is a really bad man. I'm a fool to hate to hear people saying things about him.'

"That made me feel sorry for her again ; but I certainly thought she was a fool, even if she was unsuffocated, not looking after them men better.

"THERE was one night when Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail were wandering up and down wondering about their dinner. Mrs. De Beaufrils hadn't said anything to me that day about putting it on for her.

" 'This is really too bad, you know, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Wassail. 'I looked in at the shop, but there was only an elderly lady there she had evidently got to look after the shop for her.'

" 'She's probably gone to a picture-show and forgotten all about having boarders,' shys Mr. Slompack in that sarcastic way of his, which I don't blame him for under the circumstances. 'We don't matter. We only paid her a new week's money this morning.'

" 'Slompack,' says Mr. Wassail, a bit warm, 'don't get hasty. I'm sure Mrs. De Beaufrils does the best she can. Naturally she is not used to— to this sort of thing. If you don't like it'

" 'I don't like paying for board and having to get my own meals,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'All right,' says Mr. Wassail. 'You draw out— Warren, too. I'll explain to Mrs. De Beaufrils. She can be my housekeeper. That will be less humiliating to her than having to look after all and sundry.'

"Mr. Slompack stared at him and laughed, but before he could say anything Mr. Warren arrived, all hot and bothered.

" 'What do you think that woman has done?' he cries.

" 'That woman ! What do you mean by 'that woman"?' demands Mr. Wassail, fierce-like.

"But Mr. Warren was too excited to notice him. 'Two days ago I took my aunt along to the shop. Now she's sold her the business! For a hundred pounds! A business that's only a sign on the window, a few hats and the money she owes for rent!'

" 'That explains matters,' says Slompack. 'She's got that subscription money too, and our board money, and she's never paid anybody. She's cleared out. She's as bad as her husband.'

" 'Don't you dare say that!' cries Mr. Wassail.

" 'Well, let's see whether she's removed her clothes. Mrs. Parsley can let us in,' says Mr. Slompack.

"She had gone all right. There was not a vesture of her left.

"Mr. Wassail was very upset and angry at the remarks the others had made about her. 'She has probably got homesick for her relatives in England. A boat left this morning. A sudden impulse may have seized her,' he says.

" 'She needn't have taken our board money,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Or my aunt's hundred,' says Mr. Warren.

" 'Is it any wonder that she is hard after the way that scoundrel treated her? It's enough to make her hard,' says Mr. Wassail.

"Then he seems to make up his mind. 'I'm going to Melbourne,' he says. 'I'm going to tell her that she is not as friendless in this country as she may think she is.'

"He called a taxi and went right off. But when he came back it was evidence that he didn't find her on the boat in Melbourne.

"He was very quiet about what happened. I'd never thought that Mr. Wassail would be like that, as if he had a heart bowed down by weighty woe. He even paid up the bills for the milk and bread which Mrs. De Beaufrils had left.

" 'The poor woman may have been on the boat, travelling in her maiden name,' he says. 'Perhaps she wanted to get away quietly from a country where she had such sad experiences.'

"IT was months later that we found out what had become of her. Them letters for De Beaufrils, like this one you got, kept on coming here— mostly bills they are —and Mr. Tullock got one of them.

" 'De Beaufrils! Why, Mrs. Parsley, that's an unusual name. There was a man of that name staying at the same place as myself in Brisbane,' says this Mr. Tullock. 'A precious scoundrel he is, too.'

" 'That would be our Mr. De Beaufrils,' I says when I heard that description.

" 'He had a charming wife, and they seemed to have plenty of money; but he deserted her. Left her without a penny even took her jewels, which would have enabled her to start something for herself if she had sold them. It excited a lot of sympathy, a real lady like that being left at the mercy of the world,' says Mr. Tullock. 'I gave a couple of guineas myself to a subscription ; I wish I had given more; That poor little woman!'

"So there you are! A regular game, it seemed, of them De Beaufrilses! Mr. Wassail was knocked back when he heard about it. He looked as if he would have liked to commit suicide. But I dare say he didn't like to cut his throat or drown himself, so he married a barmaid."

I looked sharply at Mrs. Parsley, but she was completely innocent. The gift of putting things queerly comes naturally to her.

17: The Old Truth and Nothing Like the Truth

Bulletin, 22 March 1933

"TRUE 'earts is more than cornets," said my landlady, leaning impressively on her broom— "as pore old Mrs. Evans would tell yer if she knew the truth, the old truth and nothing like the truth, as they say in the police courts— though God forbid I should ever go near them meself."

Of course I realised, when she started like that, that Mrs. Parsley intended to talk; and, though I held my pen suspended in the act of writing, I knew also that the hint was useless.

"You never know what the Corner-coupler of Time may bring you," said Mrs. Parsley, giving two sweeps with her broom to show that that was why she was in my room really, "and I'm sure Mrs. Evans didn't. They say them the gods love they grind exceeding small, and that was Mrs. Evans, if ever there was one. She lived in Number 20 and that is small enough for anybody. 'lt useter be a bathroom, I think, before the old 'ouses was turned into these residentials,' I tells Mrs. Evans when I showed 'er round.

" 'I don't care how small it is, Mrs. Parsley,' she says, 'as long as it's a place where my boy can find 'is mother when 'e comes back from the war.'

"When I 'eard that, my face was the picture no artist can ever paint, as the saying is, for it was four years after the war. But I soon knoo all about Percy Evans; 'e was reported missing at the front, supposed killed— which I suppose them 'oo supposed it knoo what they was talking about; but poor old Mrs. Evans, being an unbelieving Thompson, wouldn't believe it. Poor little lady! She reckoned any day Percy would come in, back to his mother.

"We all got fond of the 'dear little lady,' as everyone called 'er, waiting tip there in' 'er little room fer 'er boy to return front the war, which we knoo could never be. Lor' love 'er, unless miracles should come to an end. Everybody wanted ter 'elp 'er, 'er only living on the pension money, but she was a proud little soul— if anyone as-much as lent 'er a penny fer the gas, she'd return it as sure as eggs, which, after all, isn't so certain, every egg being a mystery incarnation until you open it.

"But I'll say this, that the dear little,lady, with all the way she must've 'ad ter skimp 'erself to live, and the faded little atom she was with 'er thin little arms, 'ad 'er moments, as they say. They was on such times as Anzac Day. when she'd put on all the pompadour of 'er Mother's Badge an' go down to one of them Sehtemoffs with 'er poor little bunch of flowers, proud as Punch and Judy that a son of 'ers was one of the 'eroes 'oo laid down their lives in the glory fields of France; an', she'd come back, 'er eyes all wet with crying, to tell

'ow some big Digger 'ad asked 'er all about 'er Perce, an' thought,'e remembered 'im in 'is mob, an' 'ad taken 'er away ter 'ave a cup er tea in memory of Perce—;un' 'ad asked 'er if she wouldn't like ter take a bottle er stout 'ome in memory of Perce, too. Which she, refused, being teetotal, but enjoyed just the same as if she'd 'ad it.

"Pretty well anyone in the residential would 'ave done nothing rather than seen an 'air on the little lady's 'ead 'urt, but there is people *I* call yobs. 'What in the 'ell d'ye mean by calling me a yob?' says Mr. Mack when I tells 'im that's what 'e was. 'Yes,' l says; 'in,'ell is the right place fer yob t s,' I says. 'An' whatever a yob is you're one.' Which I will admit is about all I knoo what, a yob was.

"That, was the s morning I told 'im off after the night 'e an' 'is drinkin' friends put their silly joke over the dear little lady. There are times any woman 'oo keeps a residential 'as to be blind in one eye like Nelson on his monument, an' I didn't mind Mr. Mack 'aving 'is drinkin' parties in 'is room as long as 'is friends got drunk respectable an' didn't make too much noise about it; but when I 'ears a row in the passage' and finds Mack an' 'is drunken men's there surroundin' Mrs. Evans, it. was the last stror that maketh the 'eart sick, as the Bible says.

"Mrs. Evans was 'oldin' a great big feller, 'o'o was silly-drunk, by the 'and; an' she was lookin' shy as a, girl. 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley!' she called ter me. 'Mr. Mack thinks 'o 'as found my Percy fer me! This gentleman! He looks something like Percy might, 'ave grown; but Percy was only a boy when 'e went, to the war. An' the gentleman came back from the war with his memory gone. Mr. Mack says 'e remembers 'im as Percy Evans. But I don't know what to think— it 'as took me so-by surprise!'

"*I* knoo what to think; the drunken yobs 'ad thought it a good joke to put over the dear little lady. I could see the sniggers in their ugly faces; but. when I glared at them, they was more like sheep that are led to the altar. The chap 'oo was standing alongside Mrs. Evans looked real ashamed, I'll say that for 'im.

" 'I'm afraid there might be some mistake.' he was sayin'. 'Mack 'ad no right ter mention it until 'e was certain,' 'e says, 'it'd be better if I come back to-morrow an' we can talk the matter over,' 'e says.

" 'E went, the pore dear little lady seemin' rather glad to let 'im go; an' the rest slinks , away, too. The little lady was all upset, but didn't see the dirty trick they 'ad put on 'er, pore soul; an' I 'adn't the 'eart ter let 'er know things as I saw 'em. The next day I told Mr. Mack I'd sooner 'ave 'is room than 'is few shillings, even if I never let it again, an' 'e went. An' I 'oped the dear little lady, 'oo didn't say a word ter me about what 'ad 'appealed, would forget all about it.

"They say the unexpected happens in the best relegated families. Well, next afternoon, I 'see the man 'oos 'and Mrs. Evans 'ad been 'olding comin' up the stairs, with flowers an' a lot of parcels on 'is arm.

" 'Yer friend Mr. Mack is gone,' I says, barrin' the way. 'I told 'im ter go. I don't want anyone in my 'ouse 'oo thinks a dirty trick played on a pore little old lady is a joke.'

" 'Madam,' 'e says, 'a joke like that— if it was only a joke— would be detestable. As far as I'm concerned, the thing wouldn't 'ave 'appened at all, only it was sprung on me, like it was on Mrs. Evans. But 'ow do you know I'm not Percy Evan's? I assure you,' 'e says, seeing the look on my face, 'that I ain't jokin' now! At the least I owe an apology to the little lady; an' I want to see 'er.'

" 'E was so much in earnest I let 'im go up, but I went with 'im. When we knocked at the door, she opened it, an' stood there, white an' trembly.

" 'Percy!' she said, sort of uncertain.

" 'Am I?' he asked, stepping forward an' adding 'er arm to steady 'er. 'After what 'appened last night I 'ad to come an' see you. They say I was known as Percy Evans; but, you see, I lost my memory; an' I came back as someone else.'

" 'You don't look ill— you look all right,' she faltered.

" 'So I am— except as far as the memory goes.'

" 'Can't, you remember anything?' she asked softly.

" 'Nothing—except a little woman who used to fuss about me. A woman like you. I'd like to feel you are my mother; that I could look after you, an' —'

" 'Percy!' she cried, and clung to him a little. 'I think you are my Percy; but it is all so strange after my being told all these years that you were dead; you mustn't think it queer that I—I'

"She was near breaking down; but Percy clinched the matter by droppin' 'ees parcels, flowers an' all, an' takin' 'sr in 'is arms, an' 'ugging 'er; an' when 'e did that she clung to 'im like a linnet, cryin' on 'is chest in 'er 'appiness.

"It was one of the nine days' wonders of the world, 'im coinin' 'ome like a probable son after bein' dead an' all. So you see what them 'oodlums 'ad meant ter be a joke 'ad worked out right, as it always does fer them as keeps the lor. A proud little lady she was, goin' out with 'er big son; an' a fine son 'e was, too, although not as 'andsome as what she'd said 'e was by no means; but an 'olesome-looking feller, 'oo paid 'is rent reglar— 'e come to stay 'ere, to be near is mar— an' 'ers, too. Not that she'd move from 'er little room, though 'e wanted 'er to. She wasn't goin' to be an interpus upon 'im, she said.

"But 'e did all 'e could ter make 'er comfortable an' 'appy. If ever a woman walked through green fields, it was that dear little lady. She wanted ter' show 'er Percy off to everybody. ' 'Ave you seen my boy, come back from the war after they said 'e was killed ?' it was to everybody. So, of course, she

interdooced 'im to Miss Handy— a kind-'earted little creature as ever was,, 'oo had always been special kind to Mrs. Evans. Then when they went to the pitchers or anywhere their party soon was three; and Mrs. Evans, thinking two's company, as the Bible says, dropped out and let Percy and Miss Mandy go alone. She didn't mind; she was 'appy because they was 'appy, and because she knoo that before 'e went ter bed 'e'd look inter 'er room an' say 'Good night, Mum,' an' creep over soft to kiss 'er on 'er cheek, if she pretended ter be asleep. I reckon she pretended often, liking the idea that 'e'd take the trouble to kiss 'er whether she was awake or not.

"Naturally the story about 'er Percy comin' 'ome gets about, an', one day a reporter comes up. The poor little lady was all flustrated. She said she wouldn't tell 'im anything until she saw Percy, an' almost shut the door in 'is face; and so 'e came ter me. And that was why I called Percy into my room ter 'ave a word with when 'e came 'ome.

" 'We don't want to say anything. Mother was right, we don't want anything published,' Percy, said, almost as flustrated as the little lady 'erself.

" 'But why not?' asked the reporter.

" 'E kept badgerin' Percy, which I couldn't see 'is reason for meself, an' added my word— not that I'm one for advertising, but I didn't see no 'arm in it being said they lived at my residential— until Percy went to the door to see it .was shut, an' then turned an' faced us.

" 'Look 'ere,' 'e says, 'I'm goin' to tell you something on your solemn promises ter keep it to yourselves. I'll not say a word unless you promise.'

" 'E got our promises, o' course.

" 'I ain't Percy Evans,' 'e says, slow and solemn.

"You c'd 'ave knocked me flat, me 'aving got useter thinkin' that my first oppression was wrong.

'"I never 'ad a mother that,I knoo of,' ,'e says. 'I was brought up in an 'ome, an' boarded out when I was twelve to a place where the woman wasn't much of a mother to 'er own kids, let alone me. I was glad ter get to the war. I suppose I've always felt.as if I've missed something; but I didn't notice it much till the night I came 'ere, an' a damned silly trick was put on a poor little old lady by a damned a— a—'

" 'A yob, ' I says, 'elping 'im out. 1

" 'Quite,' 'e says. 'At the time I was only sorry for the cruelty of it. Then I thought it over ; the poor little lady, waiting for the son to return 'oo never would return, an' me in a sorter way 'aving wanted a mother all me life; an' I remember 'ow she seemed uncertain whether I wasn't 'er sou. I came up, not quite decided to say I was, but with some sort of idea of suggesting that, as I was a returned soldier without a mother an' she was a, mother without a son,

we might split the difference, so ter speak, and adopt one another. When she greeted me as Percy I reckoned I'd let it stand, an' he 'im. Now you know why I don't want nothin' published. We might not be able to live up to the story if it gets in print. The poor old lady thinks I am 'er son, an' it'd be cruel now if anything was done to make 'er think I wasn't.'

"The reporter-chap was a good-natured young feller, an' 'e saw the point, being as plain as a needle in a haystack, as the saying is.

"Everythin' went, on 'appy after that, with Percy— I 'ad ter call 'im Percy, of course, not knowin' any other name— an' Maud growin' fonder of each other as anyone could see with 'arf an eye— or no eye at all, if you 'appened to 'ear . their kissin' on the stairs, comin' up, for that, matter. Seein' that Mrs. Evans seemed to like it, it struck me all in a heap when she comes into my room cryin' one day.

" 'Oh. Mrs. Parsley' she sobs. 'They're goin'-ter be married next month, an' Percy's asked me to live with them in a 'ouse 'e's buying at Peak'urst.'

" 'Well, dear soul,' I says, 'that's nothin' to cry over. You'll bo 'appy as one thing living with them two, both so fond of you.'

" 'Oh, but, Mrs. Parsley,' she sobs, 'I feel such a wicked woman!'

" 'Wicked? *You*!' I laughs. 'Tell me 'oo you've murdered,' I says, makin' fun of her of course.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, don't joke!' she says. 'I felt I must tell someone, so I. came to you. I can't go on livin' a lie. Mrs. Parsley. I was never married.'

"Of course, I was knocked all aback as if a blow 'ad took the wind out of my sails. If an angel from 'Eaven 'ad stepped down, wings an' all, an' told me she was Dora, of Darling'urst, it wouldn't 'ave give me a worser' shock. An' yet, the way she speaks of it, as if it was so awful, makes me feel inclined to open up an' tell 'er some of the things that 'appened to massif when I was young, as Gawd knows things 'appen to all of us.

" 'Well,' says I, 'there ain't no good tellin' your son about it, if 'e don't know. There's many a good woman made a mistake, an' been no worse a mother fer it.'

" 'You don't understand me.' she answers, going all red. 'I didn't ever make a mistake. I never 'ad a son.'

"Then she rushed out with 'er story. It was during the war. she said, she'd got envious of all the women 'oo'd got sons at the war to worry over and cry about an' say prayers for. So she invented Percy, who was a pure fabrication; she'd got the Mother's Badge from a woman 'oo didn't prize it like she did, an' the pension she was getting was jest an old-age pension.

" 'I pretended— just, pretended,' she sobbed. 'Then Percy came, thinkin' I might be the mother 'e'd forgotten. I yielded to temptation— the temptation

of tryin' ter make myself believe I really was 'is mother. But I can't go on deceivin' 'im— 'im 'oo's been jest like a real son to me, and 'oo I come to love jest as if 'e was my son. It was not so bad while we was livin' 'ere, but to go an' live in 'is 'ouse, knowin' I was an imposture— l couldn't!'

"I didn't know whether to laugh or cry— the two of them both shammin' and thinkin' they was deceiving the other! An' yet if it was made clear to them that they weren't deceivin' each other, they'd lose something. An' 'ere was the little lady that never 'urt as much as a fly on the wheel of fortune callin' 'erself a wicked woman!

" 'Wicked fiddlesticks!' I says. 'You'll be a wicked woman if you make 'im un'appy— a pore feller 'oo thinks you're 'is native-born mother— by doin' anythin' or sayin' anythin' to spoil 'is allusions. You're 'appy, aren't you? So .'is 'e. The only thing is to carry on.'

" 'Do you think so?' she cried, eager, I c'd see, to believe me right.

" 'lt's your bounder duty,' I says.

"And I'm goin' down ter Peak'urst ter see them this afternoon," concluded Mrs Parsley abruptly, seizing her broom again with an earnest of getting her delayed work done. "It's the 'appiest little 'ome I know of, fer the Corner-coupler, which Mr. Fellowes used to speak of— 'e was a scholard beside 'aving been trained in the 'ard school of the University— 'ad other things in stalls for the dear little lady, 'oo's the most devotedest grandma you ever see.

"But she still goes out on Anzac Day and Narmistice with 'er Mother's Badge on an' enjoys 'er cry. It's for the , mothers 'oo 'ad sons 'oo never came back from the war, she says."

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18: All Debts Paid

Bulletin, 9 Nov 1932

BLOTHERS was a man full of trouble. Not that he really owed much; but he owed what he could. A man who did his best in a small way. And the manner in which he could borrow two bob after almost weeping tears over his failure to repay the last had a touch of the artistic.

There was always someone looking for him; someone who would accost you apologetically and, explaining that he had seen you with Blothers, ask you if you knew his address, and when you suggested that it was Earlwood would say, "Too right! He did live at Earlwood; but where is he now?"

That is the way, usually, you learned about Blothers's latest change of address.

One day I came upon Blothers in a sort of climax of the agony which his debts brought upon him. Before him were sheets of paper upon which figures were scrawled, and all about him was a litter of documents that looked like bills, with the blue paper of court summonses scattered amongst them.

"Just take a seat whilst I finish this, old man," he said, and swept away the papers that had spilled on to a chair. "What did you say that furniture account was, Mabel?"

"They took the furniture," objected Mrs. Blothers. "They claimed we still owed them thirty-seven pounds odd."

"We'll give them forty," said Blothers, and put the figures down.

"You haven't forgotten the eighteen pence for the odd-job man who cleaned up the garden at that place we had at Arncliffe?" inquired Mrs. Blothers anxiously. "You remember he wanted ten shillings and all you had—"

"I'm putting down two and six," said Blothers. "I say, old chap, I've put you down £5. Will that cover it do you think? Oh, well, perhaps it is on the liberal side, but we're not going to argue about trifles; let it go at £5. Do you mind running up that column to see if my total is correct, whilst I add up these?"

"What's the idea?" I inquired. "Going bankrupt?"

He looked up with surprise and some hurt.

"The name of Blothers has never been associated with a disgrace like that!" he said. "Besides, do you realise how much it costs to go bankrupt?"

"Two hundred and seventy-three pounds eleven and tenpence!" exclaimed Blothers when, having checked it, I handed the last sheet back to him. "Say three hundred, to include items I may have omitted. How is a man in my circumstances to meet a sum like that? Yet it must be done— it shall be done!"

"Why worry?" I asked. "Pretty old, some of those bills, aren't they? The people you owe them to have probably forgotten all about them."

"But I cannot forget! I will be a miserable man until I can face the world and say 'There is not a single person on this earth to whom I owe a farthing!' "

His anguish perturbed me, the more so as it continued in spite of efforts to pacify him; but his mood changed suddenly. He crossed quickly to the table and tore the lists which had caused him such trouble into fragments.

"Well, that's settled!" he said decisively. "I can't pay, so it's no use worrying any more about it. Do you think, Mabel, we've got enough for a couple of bottles of beer?"

As it happened, I had, and was glad to wash out the memory of recent anguish.

"Mind you," he said as we sat over the liquor, "when I say that those debts of mine are settled, I only mean for the time being— a sort of moratorium."

"We might win a big sweep," said Mrs. Blothers hopefully. Her husband frowned a little, evidently not liking his aspirations to honesty to be made dependent on chance.

"When we do strike luck I'll give everyone a hundred per cent, interest on what I owe them!" he declared.

"Ned's a man like that," chimed in the lady. "He likes to be fair to everybody."

And then Edmund Blothers won first prize in the State Lottery.

Not being specially interested in the lotteries, I missed this, somehow; but Blothers avalanched upon me in Pitt-street, and told me all about it. I was glad. I liked the Blotherses. Their loyalty and affection to one another stood out refreshingly. So I congratulated Blothers in the usual manner; as a matter of fact, the elated prize-winner, not having yet collected his prize, had very little but the ticket he flashed exultantly, his enthusiasm and a slip of paper with what proved to be an advertisement clipped from the morning paper pasted on it.

"That's what I intend to do!" he said boisterously, thumping the paper as he passed it to me. I read:

"Edmund Blothers is anxious to hear immediately from all persons to whom he may be indebted in any sum small or large."

An address, of course, finished the appeal.

"Well?" I asked.

Blothers flushed. "I'm going to pay them all up— double whatever it is I owe them. People will be able to say of me at last, 'He looks the whole world in the face, for he owes not any man!' "

His enthusiasm swept me along with him; and I found myself in the office of a catering establishment, listening to him tell an impressed manager that he

was Edmund Blothers, winner of the Umpteenth Lottery, and I saw him wave that over-used ticket in verification.

"The fact is, Mr. Bakebun," he said confidentially, "in the course of recent years, owing to ill fortune, I have incurred some debts which I have not been able to repay. The first thing I want to do is to repay every penny I owe— not only pay it, but pay double, as an act of thankfulness. What I propose to do is to invite all my creditors to a dinner—a really good dinner— at which I will carry out this idea of repayment."

"It's a fine gesture, Mr. Blothers," said the manager, greatly impressed.

There was a feeling of alarm within me as we walked out. I could see poor Blothers, who all his life had so badly needed money, dissipating the fortune that had come to him in magnificent gestures, and being as poor as ever again.

"There's no need for you to be foolish, Ned," I said. "Entertain your creditors it you like, but you needn't make the entertainment too lavish. And there is no earthly reason why you should double the amounts you repay. To be candid, most of your creditors will regard it as a gift from the gods if you pay them at all."

"I tell you I'm going to do the thing properly!" retorted Blothers enthusiastically. "There's not a man in all Sydney will be able to say I did not treat him well. I'll make the beggars who said harsh things ashamed of themselves."

It was a remarkable crowd that attended the Gloriana for the great occasion— a crowd in which obviously hired dinner-suits predominated; but it was a very glad crowd. Over it Blothers beamed, bestowing buoyant greetings on men he had dodged for years. The envelopes I had expected were not at our allotted places at the table, but, when we were seated and the waiters had commenced their service, Blothers himself passed quickly round, handing envelopes out to the guests. Before he had reached me there rose a murmur of delight rippling round the room; somebody commenced to thump out applause, and others joined in; and hardly had Blothers finished and reached his own place than the whole assembly broke into cheers.

"Took your advice; look the whole world in the face," Blothers had said cryptically and hurriedly in passing me. "Not double— ten per cent, interest."

The cheque I discovered was for £5 10s.; although the few shillings I had given Blothers were too many to be remembered I did not believe that the total would add to a fiver. Still, that was a matter I could argue with him later on.

It was a hectic night. Blothers had had the thing done splendidly as far as food was concerned: his effort rose to magnificence in the drink department. It seemed, shortly, that there was always someone on his feet expressing the

general public opinion of Blothers as a dashed fine fellow. The inevitable arguments arose. One was between two gentlemen who had served Brothers with milk in the long ago. The facts appeared to be that Cowrun had declined to serve Blothers any longer and he had transferred his custom to Milkan, who, being a rival, had not been warned by Cowrun of the danger of non-payment. But these facts were forgotten to-night. Cowrun accused Milkan of having stolen from him a customer whom he would have felt it an honor to go on serving if he owed him a million pounds; and Milkan retorted that Cowrun was a sordid money-grabber who had not recognised an honest gentleman when he saw one, but had pestered him for a paltry account.

Suppressed, the argument smouldered and had a new outbreak; and there were others. So the gathering broke up into pieces. I found myself enjoying, with a parcel of assorted tradesmen who had obviously never been there before, the midnight drink service of a palatial hostelry, hearing over again of the wonderful esteem in which Blothers was held. In the morning I met another section of the gathering in a hotel at Darlinghurst; and for the next two days fragments, still celebrating, were liable to be met unexpectedly in various bars.

And then came the shock.

The laugh of Amos boomed as we discussed it. Amos is one of the most tolerant men I know; he can afford to be.

"But why did the little beggar want to go to all that trouble," I said, "if he didn't mean—"

"He did mean, probably," laughed Amos. "It's the power of habit, my boy! In Sydney the poor devil has been borrowing and owing all his life. In theory he wanted to pay everybody in full, always, but not badly enough to make a big effort to do it. The old theory was in his mind when his fortune came. But see how his resolution faded! First he was going to double the amount he owed everybody. Then he shied, as he thought over it, and came down to the debt and ten per cent, interest.

"And then," chuckled Amos, "when he considered the big amount he was throwing away on the debts he had never been in the habit of paying, revulsion came. Habit asserted itself. He rushed to the bank and drew out all his money before the cheques could be presented. Somewhere else— in Brisbane or Melbourne or wherever he and his wife have gone— he will probably start afresh and never owe a penny to anyone; but habit in Sydney was too strong for him."

Ruefully I fingered in my pocket the cheque that had proved merely waste paper.

"Do you know what?" cried Amos with a roaring laugh. "This morning I had a visit from a gentleman named Bakebun, who saw me at the feast. He wanted to know if I knew where Blothers has gone. Blothers hasn't even paid the caterer!"

19: The Parcel

Bulletin, 23 Aug 1923

THE Poor Man's Palace is a dreary place in which people pay cheaply for rest, and get the cheapness but not the rest. Most of it is in cubicles; and a cubicle in a large building enables the would-be sleeper to hear everybody else snore.

Down the stairs of the hostel crept the woman, with a furtive look in her eyes and a brown-paper parcel on her arms. As the gaze of the Salvationist standing in the hall went to her face with a challenge which seemed to say "Are you saved?" her eyes turned from his, guiltily. Obviously, she wasn't saved. She passed her keys over, ignored the clerk's statement that as they had not been given in before 9.30 she should pay another day's rent, and moved in a shame-faced fashion from the room.

She was appallingly young for the misery that appeared on her face, and terribly white— her whiteness had almost a greenish tinge. She looked frail and delicate, as if a flick of wind might blow her over. A doctor would have undoubtedly ordered her to bed; but the man at the door in the Salvationist cap was not a doctor.

"What's that in the parcel?" he demanded.

"It's mine!" she flashed, defiantly clutching the parcel tighter; and, looking abashed, he stood back as she passed.

She wandered aimlessly along the street— aimlessly and weakly, for she tottered now and then as if she would fall. Plainly she was ill; and within her was a terrible craving— a craving for something to satisfy her hunger or lull her senses. She pulled out a purse and counted money— threepence in silver, two pennies and three ha'pennies. She had paused before a teashop where the lowest price was eightpence, and she passed on.

People were rushing into shops and out again. Happy wives were leaving their husbands on the pavement— they usually waited two minutes and then "broke" for the nearest hotel— messenger-boys were passing, whistling. The scene was one of busy prosperity. And through it passed the woman with her parcel, weary, faltering, obviously sick. She stopped before a wineshop. The warm, inviting smell of the wine came out to her.

Again she counted the money in her purse; and then she entered.

"Port wine? Threepence or sixpence?"

She looked up dully from her seat. Dazedly she realised where she was.

"A threepenny," she said. That meant two drinks at least.

A man lurched across to her as she sipped it and sat down at the opposite side of the table. She picked up the parcel she had placed beside her and held

it tightly. But the man regarded her in a manner which was meant to convey encouragement.

"Drink that up and have one with me," he said. "A real good 'un."

She felt mellowed by the glow of the wine— raw and meagre as it was— and, looking up at the man, she smiled. Then the smile died, and she shrank back.

He was gloating over her. His low-browed, animal face had a leer which he intended to be pleasant. In it she saw only the bestiality which was at the back of his mind. The heavy, rolled flesh of his neck fascinated her. She knew that it was no kindly impulse that had induced him to come to her. He was a mere gorilla-man seeking his desires. Yet when the bar-keeper came round she ordered port. The warmth of the liquor was giving her new life, and she wanted more.

"Put your parcel down and enjoy your wine," said the man.

But she clasped the parcel more closely to her, almost passionately. He looked at her astonished ; and then he gloated again. Her frail, shadowy beauty appealed to his senses—appealed to that animal impulse in him to hurt and destroy. Here was something fragile and delicate, apparently defenceless before him. He called for the glasses to be refilled.

During the second drink he put his huge, rough hand upon hers. The wine was mellowing her, transforming her weakness into ecstatic foolishness, and she liked it. She liked the feeling of strength and virility in that hand— she who felt so weak. She wanted to cry— cry in some place where she would feel safe in the contact with strength, the strength of which that hand assured her. Over her cold hunger the wine was throwing a rosy warmth. The world that had been so cruelly definite and unhopeful an hour before was swimming mistily around her, glad and welcoming.

"Put down your parcel," said the man.

She suddenly recalled herself from her day-dreaming and pulled it away as his hand touched it.

"Oh, if you feel that way!" said the man. "Something pretty valuable you have there, I should think. Have another port?"

She had it. Warmth was moving in her veins, and she laughed sillily, hilariously, at some coarse jest he made. Encouraged, he moved from the chair opposite to the one beside her and his hand was laid familiarly upon her knee. She showed no resentment, but giggled; and the parcel quivered ominously in her arms. The string had become disarranged and she tried to fix it; then left it as it was while he pressed her to have another drink.

His face was inflamed; his greedy eyes bulged. Even his ugly, blunt fingers seemed to indicate the lust that his face indexed. A loose end of the brown paper which wrapped her parcel swayed open and hurriedly she replaced it.

His arm was placed caressingly over her shoulder. He whispered things in her ear which she but half understood. She only knew that wine was warm, within her after she had been cold, and that strength to lean against was good. The repugnance, she at first felt for him was gone. He had been kind to her! Her heart said it in a demand for the repayment of the kindness.

"Put down that parcel!" said the man, with a drunken impatience.

He leaned over to grasp it with his disengaged hand, and it slithered through her arms to drop dully on the floor.

"My God!" she cried; and as she rose her chair crashed as it fell backward to the floor.

"My Gawd!" echoed her companion.

His eyes bulged more as the wraps of paper unfolded, revealing a waxen face, deathly pale, and, as he judged it, only new-born. He leaned over the table, staring, all the lust now gone from his face.

"My Gawd!" he ejaculated again.

People gathered round them, open mouthed —a nightmare of staring faces and gasping breath.

The gorilla-man was shaking like a leaf. Fear was upon him— the awful fear that strikes the strong-bodied and weak-minded to whom life, brutal life, is everything and death is a terror. He felt entrapped in an awful death-tragedy which shook him to the minutest cell of his body. All he wanted was to be out of it.

"Here!" he said. He tore a roll from his pocket, and in a hurried, terrified fashion slipped a five-pound note into the hand of the woman. She was standing, stupidly, in a daze, regarding the parcel and its contents. Then he was gone.

The woman stooped to pick up the parcel. Then she looked at the money in her hand, dully, but with a glowing enlightenment.

"Well, this pays for it," she said. "A woman gave it to me to mend; but, staying at the Poor Man's Palace, I couldn't do it. And I wanted the money, too. Now it's broke, but it don't matter. I've got enough to live on till I get a job."

The wine-shop proprietor had a peep at the parcel, and breathed a sigh of relief. A doll!

"Good Lord! I thought it was a dead baby!" he said. "Come on. I'll give you another drink; and then go out and get a feed."

20: My Criminal Career

Bulletin, 22 April 1936

IT is all very well for people to tell you how easy it is for young men to drift into criminal ways. In spite of years of endeavors to drift I found myself merely an insignificant clerk with Duguid and Cheesitt, with all my youthful dreams fading. Until the affair of the Presentation Theft at the Hotel Splendiferous.

In my youthful dreams was a vision of newspaper headlines dealing with the bold deeds of "The Mystic Shadow"; of well-known detectives nodding respectfully as they passed me in the street, and one of them saying: "He's the brains of the gang; but we can't get him. He's far too clever." That sort of thing.

I received no encouragement from my people. Instead of being apprenticed to a burglar with whom I could have gained some experience in the work for which I craved, Mr. Eyewash— Ephraim Eyewash, the superintendent of the Sunday school I had attended in my boyhood— secured me a job with the firm in which he was accountant. And under the wowser eye of Eyewash I was robbed of all opportunity; for what was the pilfering of a few stamps to one of my soaring ambitions?

I realised that a man needed training to become a leader of gangsters; but

the books I had sedulously studied could not be regarded as technical guides. They mentioned clever and daring crimes, but gave no real information about how an ambitious young fellow could be put in the way of doing them.

I did my best. I mixed with all the fellows my parents advised me to avoid and learnt with disgust that their wickedness went no further than stealing apples, surreptitious cigarette smoking and backing racehorses. Without exception, they lacked real ambition. Directly I could get away from home I went to live at Darlinghurst, and got to know men who, it was whispered, were "heads." They showed no inclination to invite me to join their activities.

There was Dan Drewin, whose face looked like seven years' hard labor. I cultivated Dan, at some cost in beer, as a man likely to put my feet on the path I wished to tread; and at last I got an opportunity to mention my heart's desire.

"If anyone showed me a way I could make a good haul and get away with it, I'd get into it like a shot," I told him.

Before I knew what was happening he had me jambed in the corner while he talked honesty to me. "Crime ain't no good, son; it only lands you in gaol and breaks the 'earts of them that love yer. There ain't nothing in it. I know. I was a hold-up man once. But I learned the ways of honesty and truth! "

The next thing he was shoving tracts in my hand headed "The Burglar's Heartbreak." A man who looked like Dan! The feeling that held me when I got away from him at last was of positive discouragement.

THE next day Eyewash sent for me and told me that, if I kept on working hard, I might— in another few months or so— get an increase of half a crown a week. Me! Living in a world full of things that might be stolen, and wasting my life!

I did a bit of sly-grog running for Baldy Davis. At first I didn't know it was sly-grog running; Baldy reckoned, I expect, that I knew his game. When I got my hand on the first suitcase he handed to me, telling me where to take it, I felt a thrill. I was making a start. But when I found it was only sly grog I felt very disappointed. It was humiliating for a man with my ambition. I told Baldy one night that I was after better things.

"Don't think of it, son," said Baldy. "You gotter be honest. It was because I thought you was honest that I got you with me."

They made me sick; he and Dan were as bad as Ephraim Eyewash himself.

"There's a thing I wanted to speak to you about, son," Baldy went on. "I seen you talking to Ned Hardcard. That ain't going to do you no good. He's Slippery Ned, and he's just out after doing a stretch. If the Johns see you talking to 'im, it's going to spoil you for the sly-grog. 'Ave a bit of sense, son ; you don't wanter go mixing with dishonest company."

So, after all, he gave me a hint. Next day I had a heart-to-heart talk with Ned. He looked at me queerly.

"I might work you in with me, Pimple," he said ; Pimple was a name some of them had given me. "By cripes, yes! I think you're just the bloke!"

"You've got something in view?" I asked eagerly.

He dug out a newspaper cutting. " 'Ave a look at that."

I tried to look wise, but all it appeared to me was a notice about the coming entertainment of a man whose name was often in the paper, F. Bangwell Boggs, by his friends and admirers at a dinner at the Splendiferous.

"See the bit at the end, 'Contributions to the presentation which is to be made to Mr. Boggs may still be forwarded to the hon. sec.' That's where we come in: the presentation. This 'ere Boggs, as it says, is an organiser; and you can bet 'e'll do some good organisin' for himself. A wallet of notes; 'undreds and 'undreds of pounds it oughter be. Well, it's ours."

"Oh, ye-es," I said. My breath was taken away a little.

"All you got to do," said Ned reassuringly, "is to be waiting on the side steps of the Splendiferous to take the loot when I rush out. I'll do the rest."

Ned seemed to have his plans all ready, and I assured him that I was with him.

"That's where you fit in. The police may yard me; but they won't find anything, 'cause you'll 'ave the swag. They'll never think of you, if we're not

seen together; so we'll meet secret in future. All you got to do afterwards is to go fer your life when I 'and the stuff to you, and 'ang on to it until you 'ear from me. That's where you re useful— you're honest."

Ned bringing that up, too, was like a blow ; but I overlooked it. At last, I felt, I had my foot on the first rung of the ladder.

Bright hopes of the future were dancing before my eyes when Ephraim Eyewash sent for me to say that, it being a slack time, I was to take my holidays.

"I am going away myself— for a month," he said. "You have been a protege of mine; I hope you— ah— always follow the principles of— ah— truth and integrity which I have helped to instil in you, God bless you, my boy," he said.

WITH joy I began my holidays, glad in the thought of worth-while work ahead of me. It was not until the night of that affair at the Splendiferous that I had any misgivings.

It seemed easy enough, just waiting about while Ned did the real work in the hotel. But it wasn't so simple. There was the anxiety about how matters were going inside. Ned had not been confidential about his methods, except for casual remarks to the effect that if Boggs made any trouble he supposed that he'd have to dong him one.

I hadn't been on watch long when a man moved from the other side of the lane, and approached me.

"She's not come out yet," he said. There was something sinister in the way he spoke, with his chin thrust out truculently,

"I'm not waiting for any girl," I said.

"Oh, ain't you?" he sneered. "You ain't waiting for Gladys, hey? Think I haven't heard about you? A man oughter stoush you."

"I don't know any girl called Gladys," I said.

"Oh, y' don't!"

This was an uncomfortable situation; and I was relieved when Lighthand appeared.

" 'Ullo, Pimple! " he said. " 'Aving an argument?"

"This chap thinks I'm waiting for some girl," I said. "I'm not."

He looked at me queerly.

The bellicose man moved back, muttering, to the other side of the lane; he was outnumbered.

"Who are you waiting for, anyway?" asked Lighthand curiously.

And then I didn't feel so relieved. Lighthand was one of the Darlinghurst mob; but he wasn't in this business; and I didn't want him to be in it.

Ordinarily that lane was one of the quietest spots in town; now there appeared to be far too many people using it as a thoroughfare.

"It's someone I want to meet privately," I said.

"Oh, all right!" he grinned.

He had just turned away when Ned came out with a rush. He thrust a parcel into my hand which I thrust into my pocket.

"Go for your life," he said.

He disappeared, going down the lane; I went up the other way; but soon I found the belligerent man beside me.

"Oh, you ain't meeting Gladys?" he sneered. "That bloke didn't bring out a message to you to meet 'er somewhere else? I'm goin' with you. When you meet 'er, you see what happens to you!"

A brawl with him in the street would bring the police; and with that loot in my pocket my desire was not to meet policemen. I pushed him into a shop window and made a dash for a passing tram.

PERHAPS it was that these incidents upset me, I should have gone to bed full of joy at the achievement of my aspirations; but the endeavor to concentrate on my future greatness as a king of the underworld who reminded Ned, when he protested about his small profits in the jobs he was ordered to do, that he had once involved me in a robbery on a mere third of the returns was a complete failure.

I was even a little scared of the loot, a bulging wallet. Directly I reached my lodgings I thrust it into what I thought was a secure hiding-place; but all night long I kept getting up to change the hiding. A half-formed intention to count the spoil Ned and I would have to divide was frustrated by my anxiety to hide the wallet quickly. My effort, as I lay half-dozing, to revel in advance in the spending of the money was a failure, too.

21: The Angora's Box

Bulletin, 24 Nov 1937

"THERE is no doubt about that poets' justice that falls alike on the rich and the poor who are always with us," said Mrs. Parsley.

"Look at all that fuss there was about little Miss Muggins's box— a regular Angora's Box, Mr. Slompack said it was, when he got to know of the commotion, with all the trouble it caused; and now the Stooples, who were Number 11, are going to England."

The curious jumble caught me unawares; my questioning look was all the encouragement my landlady needed. Sometimes she releases her garrulity with none at all. The pretence of "finishing off "my room was abandoned.

"That box might have been made of diamonds, for the fuss that was made about it, what with Miss Muggins herself and them Hoddles and Parkleighs and Tuckers. They used to come down like the Assyrians on the fold ; and I never could stand Assyrians if they were sheep in wolves' clothing or not.

"The first time I saw that box was when I met little Miss Muggins when she arrived to stay with the Stooples. She was standing by her luggage, which the taxi-man, not being paid more than his right fare, as one could see with half an eye, had stacked them like a mountain made out of a molehill.

" 'What do you think I should do with that box, Mrs. Parsley?' asks Miss Muggins when Mrs. Stoople had gone upstairs carrying some of the parcels.

" 'Get it mended,' I says, not guessing at once that she was hinting about me getting someone to carry it up the stairs. It was only afterwards, in the effusion of time, that I found that that box was an apple in the eye, as the saying is, to little Miss Muggins. She wouldn't budge until she saw it go safely up the stairs with her, as if she was its garden angel.

" 'Little Auntie's a queer bird, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Stoople, explaining-like afterwards. 'She sort of shares herself around amongst us and the other relatives. You'll see how they get sore if she stays with us for long!'

" 'They all think she has something valuable in the box,' says Mrs. Stoople. 'With us it doesn't matter; we like little Auntie. We call her that, although she's only a distance relative really.'

"I always liked them Stooples; if he did get drunk he did it most respectably, and he always made up for the rent the next week if he'd spent it. They were a jolly pair, and if they did live a hand to foot existence, as Mr. Stoople called it, they was very happy over it, spending the money they didn't have very cheerful like. But don't talk to me about them other relatives! If them plagues of Egypt were anything like them I don't wonder them Ismailites

were glad to get away from them even if they had to sleep on a pillow of cloud by night.

"Miss Muggins was a proud little woman who loved to talk about her illustrated aunt's sisters, as she called them. But they wasn't all women. Her grand-father had been a captain of Hurras in the Crimean War, and she had'some aunt's sisters who fought in the Wars of the Rosies, too. Of course, I had heard tell of the women who manicured themselves to the railings of the House of Commons in England and defiled the police who tried to move them ; but I had never heard them called Rosies before. I don't go much on women who brawl in the streets myself. The home is the place for that sort of thing, as I always say; but, there, I suppose they felt they had a riotous cause. I must say little Miss Muggins didn't look like a woman who would be one of them.

"The quietest little mouse as ever said boo to a goose, she was. The box had belonged to the grand-father who belonged to the Hurras; she said it had been with him in the Crimean War, which it looked. He had brought it with him to Australia and he had left it to the granddaughter who had been his greatest pet and had always been with him.

" 'That box is my greatest treasure, Mrs. Parsley,' she told me. 'Nohody will know what I have in that box until I am dead ''

" 'I expect it holds the missing will,' says Mr. Slompack, who was fond of what he called Hairy Percy's flage, although, as I often told him, he had no right to mention a man like Hairy Percy, whoever he was, before ladies. Everybody seemed to get to know about Miss Muggins's box, and they was curious about it, even though, as Mr. Slompack said, they was disintersected parties.

"BUT them relatives! I never saw such a lot. Miss Muggins hadn't been staying with the Stooples for more than a few days before one of them, which I afterwards found out was Mrs. Hoddle, rings up on the telephone.

"'Oh, are you the landlady?' she says. And she wants to know if Miss Muggins is still staying, and if I knew if she brought an old box with her. All sort of questions, as if I was the riddle of the Pinks. When I brought Miss Muggins I could see, although I'm no Peeping Tom that listens into other people's conversations, that that Mrs. Hoddle was asking her when she was going along to stay with them. Miss Muggins said she thought she would stay on with the dear Stooples for a while longer.

"There wasn't one of them who, when they came, didn't try to pump me about Miss Muggins and the Stooples before going up to the flat. They'd pretend they wanted to be told the way to the flat, as they had forgotten, and then they'd start talking.

"'I suppose, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Parkleigh, which was as sharp-faced a woman as ever you could cut with a knife, 'that Miss Muggins has never dropped a hint, in conversation with you, about what she has in her box?'

"I told her no ; and then she said that the Stooples were just fortune-hunters who only wanted Miss Muggins for what they expected to get from her when she died. 'That's why I would like to get the poor soul away from them,' she says.

" 'The Stooples are very respectable people, and tenants of mine who always pay their rent, I says stiffly. 'I will not hear a word to their interment. And I'm sure they're very fond of the little Auntie, as they call her.'

IT was when Miss Muggins went to stay at the Parkleighs' and left the box in the Stooples' flat that the fun started, if fun you could call it, though some people have a queer sense of humor. All the family seemed to have heard and the way they rampaged on the 'phone, like roaring liars seeking their prey, as the saying is, was dreadful. I knew, because of the way Mr. Stoople swore back at them, and him apologising to me about it.

" 'As if the little Auntie can't leave her box where she chooses —although this is the first time I've known her do it,' he says. They think we've put something over them; though, as far as I'm concerned, I wish that little Auntie had taken her box with her.'

"It was a regular family row, and some of it was fought out on my stairs. That was when the Tuckers, who was some more of the relatives, came along and said that it was an insult to all the rest of the family, Miss Muggins leaving her box with the Stooples.

" 'We'll get a conjunction to have you strained from using undue influence,' screams Mrs. Tucker. And she did her screaming in the corridor, because the Stooples wouldn't let them into the flat.

"It was worse than that, even, when a couple of men, one of them old and the other young, came along.

" 'Mrs. Parsley, the Stooples seem to be out, the elder man said. 'Have you a key to let us into the flat? Our name is Parkleigh— I'm Mr. Parkleigh and this is my son. You see, Miss Muggins has sent us to get her box."

"They seemed so genuine that I was almost opening the door for them; but I was glad that I didn't when I found out that Miss Muggins hadn't sent for her box, and wanted the Stooples to keep it for her, as Mr. Stoople found out, speaking to her on the 'phone. Can you imagine such Judas Iscarrots? They made quite a fuss before they went. They might have been there yet if Mr. Slompack hadn't said that it was a long time since he had had the pleasure of

throwing anyone down stairs, and he felt the need for exercise. That he told me was some more of that Hairy Percy's flage.

" 'I'm sorry you've been worried, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Stoople. 'I'll ask the little Auntie to take her box next time; there's too much trouble about it. It appears that she did not want to take it to the Parkleighs' because on a previous occasion she caught that young reprobreak who was here to-night trying to go through it.'

"After that matters seemed to go on the even tendon of their way, as the Bible says; that was after Miss Muggins had come back to collect her box and go off to the Tuckers'. Of course, when she was away like that, and her box was away, too, I didn't hear much of how things were going from bad to worse or otherwise. But when she came back again there was all the rumpus over again. Although they was the poorest of the lot and only had a small flat, she seemed to like best to be with the Stooples. But the other relatives hated her being there, although, from what I heard some of them say, they grudged what they gave her.

" 'She ought to pay for her keep,' says Mrs. Pushman. 'Why should she go round from one to another never paying for anything? We can afford it; but it's imposition on people in your position,' she says.

" 'We're not going to grudge little Auntie a few meals and a bed,' says Stoople.

" 'No; but you don't expect to get it all back when little Auntie dies! Oh no, of course not!' screeches Mrs. Pushman.

"They was a nasty lot, all of them. Although I say it myself, them being my tenants, them Stooples seemed to be the only decent ones of the crowd.

"One day when Miss Muggins was still away, at the Hoddles' this time, the telephone started again, and I knew there was trouble because, when Mr. Stoople answered, both of them got very angry and started to roar into the 'phone about hell and other unpleasant places that are mentioned in the Bible. It is usual, when a man talks like that, he is talking to his relatives, which I knew it was in this case. I was just wondering what it was all about when little Auntie arrived with all her luggage piled up in the entrance.

"Mr. Stoople banged down the receiver and ran down the stairs to her. She was crying.

"You could have knocked me down with the last feather to fly with"

" 'Little Auntie, I hope you're not upset. You mustn't be upset. We're glad to have you again. I'll take your box up,' he says.

" 'No; it doesn't matter about the box,' she says.

" 'I'll take it up,' he says.

"THEY'D hardly gone upstairs before the place * seemed full of people. There was Hoddles and Pushmans and Parkleighs all looking nastier than I'd seen them before, as if they was going to a dogfight.

" 'That woman is an imposture. She impostured on all of us!' said Mrs. Parkleigh to me.

"It was no use telling them that the Stooples were out or didn't want to see them; I simply went up to see that they didn't make a disturbance in a respectable residential. When the door of Number 11 was opened they simply poured in. There was poor little Auntie crying in a corner, with Mrs. Stoople trying to bring comfort to the worn lamb with the heart bowed down by weighty woe.

"But Mr. Stoople faced them crowd of relatives like the horns of an angry bull; he called them swine, which he always seemed to like to call them, and told them to clear out.

" 'We've come to expose that woman. We decided to come all together,' says that Mr. Parkleigh, which is as bad as his wife. A yeller jaunders, if ever there was one, he looks. 'She's been imposing on us all these years, leading us to believe she had something valuable in that box. And there's nothing but rubbish in it.'

" 'Living on us! ' screamed Mrs. Hoddle.

" 'You won't get that money you was counting on, Tom Stoople!' said Mrs. Tucker.

"It was wonderful to see the way Mr. Stoople dealt with them, like Horatius defying the lightning. It seems that them Hoddles, which it was like their cheeky impudence, had gone through Miss Muggins's box while she was out. And they'd found out there was nothing in it like they thought she was keeping like a miser. So, not satisfied with turning the poor soul out into life's rain, they had gathered together like a pack of wolves at the door to hunt her down and crow it over the Stooples.

" 'It's prime! ' chuckles Mr. Slompack. 'Fancy a simple-looking old lady like Miss Muggins, not having enough to live on, putting it over those vinegary hard-heads like that! That chap Stoople was fine.'

"He had been, too, the way he had stuck to that poor Miss Muggins, saying that he didn't care whether she had money or not, she was always welcome to a home with them.

"Just as we was talking about it, in comes Mr. Stoople himself. He had a paper in his hands.

" 'I've left the poor little Auntie with my wife,' he says. 'I'd like to explain. The poor little soul, when her grandfather died, found she'd been left with a mere pittance. When she found how ready all these capacious relatives were

to believe she had money because the old grandfather had once been rich as a Crisis, she let them go on thinking. She still carries in that box piles of scriptures— all valueless, of course— that would have made her a wealthy woman if the old man had not been foolish and invested his money in the J. Bees Balfuer affairs which went smash.'

"YOU talk about the mysterious ways of Provi' dence which always give a silver lining to the darkest cloud before the dawn! Mr. Slompack, which I always thought was using that Hairy Percy's flage when he said he was a broker, almost jumped in the air as he grabbed that bit of scripture which Mr. Stoople had in his hand to show what Miss Muggins had been keeping.

"You could have knocked me down with the last feather to fly with when Mr. Slompack said that if Miss Muggins had a lot of those she was well-to-do. He had a lot to say about trustees of that there J. Bees Balfuer estate who'd nursed the asses until there was a lot of money years afterwards for them as thought they' had lost it— but all that sort of talk was so much Greek and Algeria to me. All I knew was that by the divine aspersions of Providence poor Miss Muggins was rich.

"And there was Mr. Stoople ringing on the 'phone like a man processed to call them relatives 'swine' again and tell them the news.

" 'Annie and I are going to make a trip to England with little Auntie,' he yells at them.

"And Slompack tells Stoople how fine he thought he had been. 'You didn't care about the money, anyway,' he says, 'yet you must have been disappointed.'

"Mr. Stoople laughed. 'No, I wasn't,' he says. 'You see, we knew poor little Auntie didn't have anything but that scripture that we thought no good. You see, being hard-up, and thinking Auntie might help us, we went through her box twelve years ago.' "

A remembrance that she had a duster in her hand came back to Mrs. Parsley. "Well, isn't that poets' justice?" she demanded.

22: The Time For Devilry and Mirth

Bulletin, 27 Dec 1939

"EVERYBODY knows that Christmas comes but once in a lifetime and it is a season for devilry and mirth," said Mrs. Parsley. "I don't believe, though, that people should divulge in organs of righteous living, doing nothing but eat and drink, falling upstairs and getting all enframed with spiritual likker, and having arguments as if they were married couples! Christmas should be a time of sweet accordiums. But when there are people who want to stop Christmas from being Christmas they are going too far."

"Stop Christmas, did you say?" I exclaimed.

"There never was such an upset as the Christmas that happened," Mrs. Parsley pursued. "What with husbands defiling their wives about giving them presents, and people getting at daggers withdrawn, as the saying is, over it, the whole place was in tremors."

"YOU'D never think that a man like Mr. Tom Biggar, who was big and jolly even when he was complaining about why he couldn't pay the rent, would start all that. A reg'lar Southerly Bluster, Mr. Slompack called him, with his habit of slapping people on the back, even me, which it nearly took my breath away. Very sorry was I for those children of his, which children always look forward to Christmas, with a father who wanted to put an end to it.

"Which those children came here all unbeknownst to me, or I wouldn't have let them have the flats. Not that I don't like children, which we have all had to be some time or another; but flats are no place for them, and it gave me the surprise of my life the day after them Biggars came to see them kids sliding down the bantisters and racing about the stairs.

" 'Mr Biggar,' I said, going straight to his flat, 'What is the meaningof this. I let this flat to a married couple.'

" 'Oh, come now, Mrs. Parsley, he says, 'married couples sometimes have children.'

" 'Not in flats,' I says.

" 'Yes, there are a few children ' says Mr Biggar, as if he had just discovered them, which him being the father it was absurd for him to portend that he hadn't noticed them before. 'I suppose I should have mentioned that we had some children, but one is liable to overlook details.'

"'Mr. Biggar,' I says firmly, 'if you call them details, I serpently would not have let you this flat if I had known you had them. Perhaps another little detail you overlooked was the rent you promised to let me have when you arrived. Which the terms is inadvance.'

"They had let me into the flat, and the look on that Mrs. Biggar s face which a very nice woman she seemed, made me feel sorry for her, it was that anxious.

" 'Mr. Biggar will put all his cards on the table, she says.

" 'Why, certainly, I'll put all my cards on the table,' says Mr. Biggar.

'Them cards, it seemed, was only a figment of speech, as the saying goes, and a great one for laying his cards on the table that Mr. Biggar proved. Every time he wanted to sell anybody a block of land or something else, which he was always trying to sell somebody something, he talked about them cards.

" 'You see, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Biggar, 'only this morning I reproached Mr. Slompack about the purchase of a block of shares, which I am letting him in on the ground floor. Directly I collect my com. I will let you have the rent.'

"Although I didn't like that talk about letting people in on the ground floor, that being a phase used by that Mr. Parsnip who wanted to float me into a limited debility company, I let them stay.

" 'Tom ought to be in a big position; he's a very able man, Mrs. Parsley,' Mrs. Biggar told me. 'But he likes to work for Com. Often I tell him he'd be better off if he got a reg'lar salary, even if it was only four pounds a week.'

"I couldn't see myself why he couldn't make that Com. pay him a regular salary. Howsoever, we all have our own troubles, and Mrs. Biggar had hers, no doubt, though she got on with her husband much better than most married Couples. But, although I'm no Peeping Thompson, who hears no good, one morning as I passed the flat I heard her saying that it looked as if it as going to be a very poor Christmas.

"Mr Biggar came out of the flat looking very hot and not as jolly as he was usually.

" 'Oh, damn Christmas! It's nothing but a blarsted nuisance,' he says and slams the door behind him.

"IT was just there that all that tumor had its genius. Who should be coming along the corridor when Mr Biggar said but Mr. Bangwelterer who had No. 3, and was as grumpy as he was well off.

" 'Quite right!' he says. 'I like your sediments, Sir. I *hate* Christmas. It brings out a lot of noisy fools.'

"Mr Biggar looked a bit took aback, but the pair went along together, and I could hear Mr. Biggar saying that just when business was bad and that Com. had made himself scarce there were all sorts of things to buy for Christmas. And when I went back to my flat they was still talking in the lounge at the top of the stairs and Mr Wassail and the Major and that Mr Martin with them.

Which Mr Wassail had been soeaking for weeks about what her husband was going to buy her for Christmas, and he looked ill every time she spoke of it.

"Mr Biggar was growing quite excited. 'It's a great idea, gentlemen,' he says. 'We'll start the No Christmas League, Members will have a badge and we'll be undertakers not to buy presents for Christmas. Hundreds of men'll be glad to join up so as they can save spending their money on a lack of principle.'

" 'How'll we work it?' says Mr. Wassail.

" 'Leave that to me,' says Mr Biggar, 'We'll make 'em sit up! Mr Bangwelterer can be a precedent, and Mr Wassail and the Major can be vices; and I'll be security. How about us all putting in half a dollar each as an entrance fee, and getting things going?'

"All they had been saying about the absolution of Christmas had seemed stuffed with nonsense to me, and it surprised me to see them handing money to Mr. Biggar, after which Bangwelterer said they'd better have a drink, and they went out. He seemed quite pleased at being a precedent, and so did the others about being vices. And what surprised me more was Mr. Biggar coming in later, all jovial and with bottles of beer, and paying me some rent.

"It was a nine days' blunder next day when it was all in the papers about them men wanting to stop Christmas being Christmas. There was columns of it all spread out, and all that Mr. Bangwelterer said, and Mr. Biggar; which it sounded very like Mr. Biggar when he said that the League was laying all its cards on the table; and there was talk about people who were working for that Com. who didn't get much money at Christmas.

"The whole place buzzed with incitement over that, and there was that Mr. Bangwelterer very proud of all the duplicity he was receiving about the Anty Christmas League, as they called it. The number of papers Mr. Bangwelterer bought, it seemed he must want to send them to his friends so that they would see his name in print. But the others was like that, too. From what they said Mr. Biggar knew a man who was on the papers, and he had put all that in, and said that the membership of the League was already many hundreds, which I couldn't see how it could be that already, though Mr. Biggar was rushing about and getting members, too, with his pockets full of money.

" 'IT'S absurd!" says Mrs. Wassail. 'My husband says he won't buy any Christmas presents as a matter of lack of principle. It's just meanness; but I'm not going to stand that from any husband.'

"Mrs. Wassail always spoke like that as if she had a lot of husbands. 'I don't intend to speak to him again until he designs from this absurd League.' But I must say that if Mrs. Wassail called the way she went on not talking to her husband I can't think what would ever happen if she nagged him.

"Mrs. Biggar was almost in tears. 'It's not like Tom,' she said. 'Tom is so openhearted and generous, I can't understand him wanting to despoil such a fine, kind destitution as Christmas. It quite upset me when little Dick, poor little soul, asked me, so pathetic, whether Santy Claus was dead.'

"And there was vases broke in Number 14 when Mr. Andrews joined them Antys. They wore badges on their coats now, which Mr. Biggar must have been very quick to see them attributed to everybody so early. Like one of them strokes of glazed lightning he seemed; only I learnt afterwards that them buttons had been got cheap, them letters which everybody thought stood for Anty Christmas League having been meant for Australian Croakie League, which it had got them badges made and then had gone broke. Which that accounted for the design; everybody thought the mallets was to knock Christmas on the head, but they didn't understand the hoop.

"But nobody knew about that, and they thought Mr. Biggar was very clever getting them so quick, and having all that improper gander, as they call it, in the papers; for on the days that follered there was a lot more of it. There was parsons writing in to say that that Anty League was quite right; Christmas wasn't intendered for guzzlings, and all the money spent on drinking and feasting would be better spent on helping the indignant. Others said there was too much noise and it would be better if all the righteous behavior was done away with. And there was Mr. Biggar talking about hundreds of members having joined the League ; and you could tell it was him because he said that by getting the agritation going just before the Christmas rush was starting the Anty League had got in on the ground floor.

"Mr. Slompack was one of them who was wild about it. He said that Mr. Biggar serpently had thrown a spaniel into the wheels, and he called Mr. Bangwelterer a Miss Anne Throphy, which I couldn't understand, Mr. Bangwelterer not being that sort of man at all.

"'I believe in Christmas, Mrs.

Parsley,' said Mr. Slompack. 'Biggar I can understand; the poor chap hasn't the money to do what he'd like to do; but Bangwelterer just wants to stop other people's happiness. And now, because he's got a little duplicity, he's talking about going into Parliament, and having Biggar as his security. It's got the shopkeepers scared, all this improper gander.'

"IT was as if there was a war on, with the people taking sides and getting bad-tempered as the horns of an angry bull about it, especially the women whose husbands were wearing them badges. The shopkeepers about here were all upset and said I shouldn't allow things like that to go on in my flats. Poor Mrs. Biggar was quite upset about it.

" 'And besides, Mrs. Parsley,' she tells me, quite tearful, "it seems terrible to go on like this about not having poultry for Christmas ; it's unchristian, and even though my Tom doesn't go to church he's not one of those esthetics who don't believe in nothing. And plum pudding, too ; it doesn't seem quite civilised. Besides the presents for the children, which he was always very fond of giving them! It seems to me as if he's gone wrong in the head. It's very trying, you know, working for Com.'

" 'He ought to leave them, if it makes him that way. He's certainly started something, Mrs. Biggar. Why, the whole country's in an uprise about this Anty business. Which, you pore thing, I know it's not your fault, but it's going to be a terrible Christmas.'

"AND so it was. There was papers pastured on the walls telling people to have a real holiday, but no Christmas wastefulness. And there was all them rows in the place which seemed likely to be like one of them caravans which fall clashing down the mounting side, when Christmas came. Already Mr. Wassail went up to the Major's flat one night to sleep there because of the way Mrs. Wassail wasn't speaking to him; and she went after him when everybody was asleep and started hammering at the door, saying she wasn't going to have her husband spending all night drinking with his precipitated friends. Then there was Mrs. Andrews going home to her mother and coming back and finding that Mr. Andrews wasn't home, and making all that fuss about it when the milkman helped him up the stairs.

"As if it wasn't bad enough, there were them Antys quarrelling, too. It was a man named Trubbleheimer, and well he looked it, who, it appeared, Mr. Biggar had unrolled as a member. He didn't live here, but he kept coming looking for Mr. Biggar, who was always in and out, and it was mostly out, and missing him. But I overheard him when he caught Mr. Bangwelterer and Mr. Wassail on the stairs one day.

" 'Where's this Biggar?' he demandered. 'I'm a member of the dissociation, and I intend to see that things are done. If Biggar can't attend to them let him resign and I'll be the security.'

" 'But Biggar started the whole thing! ' says Mr. Wassail. 'I suppose he's out getting new members.'

" 'Well what's he doing with the money?' asks Mr. Trubbleheimer. 'It's our money. He's got to discount to us for it; he's got no right to spend any of it without our authorship. If he does, he can be arrested for embezzlement. And you're irresponsible, too, as precedent, Bangwelterer— you, too, Mr. Wassail, as a vice. You might be necessities after the fact.'

"It gave me quite a shock to hear that, especially as Mr. Biggar had been paying his rent without talking about seeing that Com.; and the shock was worse when Mr. Biggar came in in a new suit of clothes, which his other one had certainly looked shabby. If it was embezzlement new clothes wasn't the right thing. I was glad that poor Mrs. Biggar, who was worried enough, hadn't heard about that. Those two men seemed worried, too.

" 'But look here, Biggar,' I heard Mr. Bangwelterer say, coming down the stairs with Mr. Biggar, and he's eyes seemed to be on that new suit; 'something will have to be done. Trubbleheimer insists on having everything in orders.'

" 'Tell him to put his head in a bag,' says Mr. Biggar. 'I've got to see a chap now.'

"That Mr. Trubbleheimer didn't seem the sort of man to be told to put his head in a bag with immunity; and I don't think they told him that when he came back again, hardly had Mr. Biggar gone. Very hot he spoke all about having found out that Mr. Andrews was taking his wife for a holiday (that having follered their rumpus, which it seemed very right and proper to me, but he said it wasn't royalty) and there would have to be a meeting to compel him. Which he went on to talk about compelling all members who were disroyal.

" 'We'll put Biggar out. If necessary we'll persecute him. I'm prepared to act as security myself,' says Mr. Trubbleheimer. 'What's being done? There hasn't been anything in the papers for days.'

" 'Certainly there should be more duplicity,' says Mr. Bangwelterer. 'But I've got a bit of trouble on my hands. The employers at Hardman and Cripps are on strike. They've been used to getting a Christmas bonus, and they've been notified it's not going to be given this year.'

" 'What's that got to do with it?' demanded Mr. Trubbleheimer.

" 'I'm the manager,' says Mr. Bangwelterer.

"THERE was Christmas coming in the streets with all them beautiful flowers like there were in the Garden of Eden, and the poultry that was to be killed squawking everywhere, and everybody with happy faces; but it seemed there was going to be nothing but trouble, trouble, toiling bubble, as the Bible says, in these flats. And when I didn't see Mr. Biggar for a few days I thought that that Mr. Trubbleheimer, which a very nasty man he was, must have got out that persecution, although Mr. Bangwelterer and Mr. Wassail was against it. It was terrible to think of poor Mr. Biggar, even if he had wanted to stop Christmas being Christmas, being arrested right then and them poor kids left without a father.

" 'I can't make it out, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Biggar. 'Tom rang me up to tell me not to worry, but he would have to be away for a few days. He's not a

man to stay away from home, and I don't see why his work for this precious League should keep him away. Especially as that Mr. Trubbleheimer keeps coming to our flat to see him, and told me to tell him there was a meeting on Thursday night. Mr. Trubbleheimer says he'd better be there for his own sake.

" 'I don't like that Mr. Trubbleheimer,' added Mrs. Biggar. 'He looks like a sheep in wolf's clothing to me. Tom says he thinks there's a salary and wants his job as security for the league.'

"It didn't seem to me that that Mr. Trubbleheimer would have left messages for Mr. Biggar and had him arrested, too. But you never know; for if ever there was a two-faced Judy, as they call them, it was that Mr. Trubbleheimer. I was almost as worried as that poor Mrs. Biggar.

"And then Thursday came, and no Mr. Biggar, and matters in the flats were worse than ever. And although I couldn't make headed tails out of it, because Mrs. Wassail was calling out nasty remarks to Mr. Wassail, them men, Mr. Bangwelterer and Mr. Wassail and Mr. Taylor and the Major, were all talking very disturbed as they went out to the meeting which Mr. Biggar didn't know about.

"IT worried me to think of what would happen to Mr. Biggar if it hadn't happened to him already if he wasn't there, as how could he be? But there; the unscrewable ways of improvidence work in a historical way their blunders to perform! Being all upset I'd gone out to get a bit of air on a tram ride to Watson's Bay, and there when I got back was a noise going on in the flats almost as if there was a righteous organ. I was astoundered; only I was glad it was a jolly organ, not one of them undomesticated quarrels that there had been so much of.

"It was Mrs. Wassail I met at the top of the stairs. Looking happy she was.

" 'I came to look for you, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'They want you at the party.'

" 'What party?' I said.

" 'Why, the Biggars',' she said. 'Mr. Biggar came home with a lot of friends all of them laden up with parcels— you never saw such a procession!— and Mr. Slompack lent them his flat, too, so that they'd have more room. He's up there and they want you to come along and have a drink and some cake.'

"If ever a woman was flappergasted, it was me when I looked in on that vestal scene, as the poet calls it. There was people all over the place laughing and drinking; decorations strung across the room, and even a Christmas-tree in the corner, all tinsel and lights and them children with them toys looking as happy as Larry. Which, directly he saw me, Mr. Biggar came over with a bottle of wine and a glass, and Mrs. Biggar came, too.

" 'Ha, ha!' laughs Mr. Biggar. 'You see we're at it, Mrs. Parsley. I couldn't hold it up till Christmas. Come in and enjoy yourself.'

"It astoundered me ; but I felt a bit sick when I saw all he must have spent, and thought about that embezzlement and the meeting them Antys were holding.

" 'But,' I gaspered, 'I thought you didn't like Christmas, Mr. Biggar.'

" 'Me?' laughs Mr. Biggar. 'I love it. It's a great time. Why, I could hardly hold myself until I'd got my first week's screw.'

" 'Tom has a regular job. It's a big firm, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Biggar, all happy and excited. 'And it's a year's contract; and much more than four pounds a week. The firm was depressed by Tom's disorganising ability; and he had to work right through three whole nights, sleeping on the job, to help derange for the final Christmas rush.'

" 'My disorganising ability!' laughs Mr. Biggar. 'No, Mrs. Parsley ; I'll lay my cards on the table. They want to stop me from carrying on that Anty Christmas business.'

" 'Traitor!' says a voice behind me in the doorway. And when I turned round and saw Mr. Trubbleheimer, Mr. Bangwelterer and Mr. Wassail there it seemed to me that that there Name's This had arrived. I suspected that at the back, where there was others, would be them detectives to arrest poor Mr. Biggar.

"But he only laughed.

" 'You sold the League,' says Mr. Trubbleheimer. 'Well, you're finished! I'm security now, and you'll have to hand over all the money and the list of members, or we'll persecute you.'

" 'Oh, you're welcome,' laughs Mr. Biggar. 'You wanted my job, Trubbleheimer, from the start, and you can have it. But there's nothing much in it. There's only about forty members, and the bills for those posters are still owing.'

" 'Only forty members!' exclaims Mr. Trubbleheimer, which you could see the disappointment on his face.

" 'Too right!' says Mr. Biggar. 'Only for that newspaper boost, which a friend of mine reckoned was a good story, there wouldn't have been anything in the blarsted silly League at all. Only I was hard-up, I'll say frankly, when that idea came, and saw the chance of raising a few bob, I wouldn't have had it on my mind. Well, I've got a good job now, and we're incubating. Come in and join us, won't you, gentlemen? You drink, don't you?'

" 'Too right I do!' says Mr. Wassail, stepping right in and going over to Mrs. Wassail quite friendly. But the others didn't. They seemed on the horns of a tenterhook.

" 'Come in, gentlemen! ' says Mr. Biggar. 'lt's Christmas.'

"Which it seemed a funny thing for a man to say who'd been talking of stopping Christmas; but it was only Mr. Trubbleheimer that seemed to mind. As Mr. Wassail told him, quite hot, if he didn't like to stay he'd better get. There was enough members of that Anty-Christmas League there, celebrating Christmas, to outvote him or any trouble he wanted to make.'

"I said," concluded Mrs. Parsley, "that them who want to stop Christmas being Christmas go too far. And that's what they did at that party. Why, they was asking the milkman to have drinks with them before they went to bed. And the worst of it all was getting that Mr. Bangwelterer, who had hated Christmas, up to his flat. Which he wanted to talk to everybody about how his employers were going to get their bonus, and all about his name having been in the papers and he was going to go in for Parliament."

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23: The Perkiness of Perkins

Bulletin, 23 July 1930

"THIS 'ere business of laughing an' the world laughs with you," said my old friend Bill Birdseye, putting my matches in his pocket (he had already levied his usual tribute of tobacco), "ain't what it's cracked up to be. An' that's what Peter Perkins would tell you 'imself if 'e was alive to-day to talk about it. For Peter was one of them coves who is always tryin' to be the life an' soul of the party an' makes everybody 'ate 'im for it."

When I take a walk along the waterfront to have a crack with some old acquaintances I make a point of looking as innocent as possible. That is an encouragement for them to do their worst in regard to their yarns; and this time I waited as usual.

"The shipwreck," said Bill, "was all right, if you understan' me, as shipwrecks go. She jest piled 'erself on the reef at 'igh tide; and before she started to go to pieces everybody was able to get off without being all het up."

"You were talking about your friend Peter Perkins?" I said, knowing that this was an idiosyncrasy of Bill's— going off at a tangent to test whether you wore interested in his story.

"Peter," said Bill, "belonged to the ship's comp'ny of the *Savaloy* when she struck. 'E 'adn't been seafarin' all 'is life, Peter 'adn't; born into the undertakin' business 'e was, an' it's there 'e picked up 'e's. First ideas about takin' a cheerful interest in 'is work. When 'e was only a 'prentice 'e used to come 'ome cheerful at night to tell the family about 'oo was dead, an' 'ow they was goin' to bury 'em. It's my opinion that's why 'e's parents decided to go farmin': as long as they stayed in Melbin they could 'ardly ask 'im to go an' board out somewheres. After that 'e used to keep boardin'-'ouses amused whilst 'e chatted about 'e's day's work and the corpses 'e'd met. It never seemed to strike 'im that it was 'is 'appy conversation made landladies ask 'im for 'is room so often.

"Still, in spite of some of 'is bosses objectin' to a man 'oo burst into song as 'e screwed down coffin-lids, or whistled jaunty as 'e went out with a funeral, 'e didn't strike real trouble with 'is cheerfulness until 'e married. Now, a wife oughter be interested in 'er 'usband's interests; but Mrs.Peter never showed none in Peter's account of 'ow a coffin 'ad been trimmed. And 'is 'abit of bringin' 'ome coffin-nails, to use as cribbage pegs when 'e played with 'e's friends, or to tittivate the 'ouse with, got 'er real annoyed. Another 'abit that didn't please 'er was the way 'e used to remember 'er relatives.

" 'Aunt Mary?' 'e would say. 'Let me see. Yes, I remember— oak casket, five-foot-four. Nickel 'andles and fixin's. Yes, I remember Aunt Mary.'

" 'E persisted in bein' cheerful, even when she started to throw crockery at 'im every time 'e mentioned a coffin; but finally she left 'im an' sued 'im for alimony, quotin' the sound of the breakin' crockery, which neighbors 'ad 'eard, as evidence of 'is persistent cruelty. 'E simply 'ad t' 'ave someone to talk to about 'is corpses, so 'e went to pubs; and that day 'e sung 'Beer, Beer, Glorious Beer' while drivin' an 'earse to a funeral was the finish. The loss of 'e's job on top of 'e's alimony beat 'im ; 'e went to sea. An' that's 'ow 'e come to be a member of the crew of the *Savaloy*, known by the name o' Ray, which was short fer 'our little ray of sunshine,' that bein' what the crew decided 'e wanted to be after bein' acquainted with 'im fer 'arf a' hour.

"As I says, the shipwreck was done well; for although the *Savaloy* was a total wreck on a' island a good bit off the track, it was pretty sure we'd be took off in time; an' we was able to get ashore with lashin's of stores and provisions, while the Kay made cheerful remarks about picnic parties. There was water on the island; an' the worst that was likely to 'appen to us was that we'd get dead sick o' one another, shut up together on a little back yard of a' island in a wilderness o' water.

"We started by gettin' dead sick o' Peter Perkins makin' jokes about the 'ole dam' thing.

"There wasn't no need fer us to think o' cannibalism if Peter 'adn't brought up the subjec' in 'is jokin' way. 'We needn't be afraid o' starvin', any'ow,' 'e says. 'Jest get a' eyeful of Bingy Parsons; nicely roasted, 'e'd go round the 'ole company fer dinner fer three or four days.'

"Bingy Parsons, as went to about twenty stone an' not bein' a hoptimist prob'ly thought it might come ter that, looked at 'im sour an' tried t' appear as if 'e was ten stone smaller.

" 'Taken with plenty of mustard,' says Perkins, ' 'e'd digest all right. I slipped a few tins o' mustard inter me pocket before we left the ship, jest in case.'

"Bingy started to 'ate 'im from that moment; an' the 'atred grew as Perkins wept on day arter day making 'is fersetious remarks, such as: 'Ain't it time we started makin' a bakin' dish fer Bingy? 'E'll be full o' rich gravy when 'e's roasted. It'd be a shame to waste any of it.'

"Jest 'ow Bingy felt about it you can guess by the fact that 'e got up about daybreak every mornin' to take a run round the beach, as if 'e was in trainin' ter win a long-distance runnin' championship. It was one of the island amusements t' get up early to see 'im waddlin' across the landscape like a' animated bag o' fat.

"But Bingy wasn't the only one to suffer. When Stiffy Garter goes a bit off-color one mornin', Perkins says, says 'e: ' 'Ere's Stiffy lookin' as if 'e's goin' ter peg out on us. Can we afford to waste our larder in that fashion? If Stiffy dies 'e oughter be glad to die fer the good of the commoonity. Stooed gently, 'e wouldn't be too tough.'

"Or to a chap 'oo's name was Swan 'e'd say'Roast Swan ! Cripes, that'd go well! Why, it'd be like the kings o' Hingland used ter dine!' One way an' another, they all got their little turn; an' it made 'em love 'im like a brother, I don't think!

"Y'see, blokes might never think o' doin' a certain thing, hut mention it to 'em and they'll do it. A bloke, fer instance, might never, left to isself, think o' bein' dishonest; but start to show you suspect 'e might, an' talk about it, an' 'e does. So there on the island we started to look each other over and do a guess, wonderin' if the worst come to the worst 'ow this and that bloke and go, an' whether he'd be best roast or boiled. An' we'd get a creepy sort o' feelin' every time we caught other blokes lookin' at us..

" 'There must be somethin' in this cannibalism,' said Sad Mas we sat on the beach one night smokin' afore turnin' in. 'Look 'ow 'ard it is to break niggers off their taste fer long pig, as they calls it!'

" 'In the Tasmanian convic' settlements,' says Cap'n Flemin', 'there useter be prisoners 'oo, 'aving got the taste, useter entice other prisoners to escape with them jest to satisfy the cravin'.'

"O' course, blokes like Bingy didn't care to talk upon such a subject, but Swan puts in, 'I wouldn't mind 'avin' a go at it, jest to see what it's like. It can't be too bad!'

" 'Too bad?' exclaimed Perkins, cheerfully. 'Let me tell yous a nice bit o' long pork is jest the thing fer a change— a sorter Sunday dinner.'

" 'Well,' says the skipper, 'seein' as 'ow you started the idea, 'ow about you volunteerin' to be the first to go, fer the good of yer fellers?'

"There was a sort of approvin' growl; an' lookin' round to see a dozen pair of eyes glintin' in the starlight, as they fixed on 'im, Perkins must've come to the conclusion that this wasn't all in 'e's own banterin' style, for 'e gives a nervous little laugh.

" 'We'd all remember you as an 'ero, 'specially if you 'appened to be the only one as 'ad to go,' says the cap'n seriously.

" 'It'd certainly 'elp the stores ter last out,' says Joe the cook.

" 'It wouldn't be fair to yous blokes, says Perkins, still tryin' ter be as fersetious as usual but a bit shaky over it. 'To make long pork real tasty you've gotter 'ave an expert like me as cook. Joe'd simply spile the joint.'

" 'Ain't I a' expert?' says Joe. 'Let me tell you this: I read a' article once on 'ow keepin' cattle contented and cheerful improved the quality of the meat. It stands ter reason the same thing applies to 'uman meat. The most cheerful bloke is bound to taste the best. An' 'oo's the most cheerful bloke 'ere?'

"There was a sorter simultaneous murmur that it was Perkins. The conversation was continued on these lines till we noticed Perkins 'ad vanished.

"After that, though 'e still tries to be perky, Peter began to show signs of nervousness. Whenever any of the blokes looks at 'im 'e'd give a sorter little jump, and whenever 'e was with any of 'em 'e always worked it to keep a bit apart, lookin' as if 'e was ready ter bolt. The talk about long pork was kep' up; the fellers said it looked 's if it was bound to 'appen sooner or later now that the subjec' 'ad been broached.

"I shall never fergit 'ow Perkins looked one mornin' when a deputation (I was one of it) called on 'im early, an' 'e sprung up in 'e's shirt to meet us.

" 'Where's that mustard Yer said yer brought ashore?' asks Joe the cook. 'Stores is run short, an' a bit o' long pork wouldn't be 'arf what it should be without mustard.'

" 'That was only my joke,' says Perkins, shiverin' a bit.

" 'We're goin' to search,' says I. 'We must 'ave that mustard ready fer the feast. My appetite's all worked up.'

"We picks up 'e's clothes, lookin' through 'e's pockets, when the cook gives a yell. Dodgin' out like an 'are, Perkins was sprintin' away with 'is shirt tails flappin' in the mornin' breeze. The cook's yell wakes up others, an' they leaps up to join us in the chase. A lot of them was only in their shirts, too. It was a funny sight to see 'em, with Perkins goin' 'ell fer leather in the lead.

"We lost sight of 'em in the 'ill, which is covered with vegetation. But we gets search parties out. The boys, not 'avin' 'ad anything ter do fer a long time, enjoyed it; an' while some searches the others starts ter make a big fire on the beach.

"Takin' a bit of a spell, we could see them at it.

" 'They're goin' to make a good roast of Ray,' I says. 'It makes me feel 'ungry to think of it.'

" 'E oughter eat very well,' says Sadler, 'If you'd said to me three weeks ago that I'd be thinkin' of eatin' 'uman flesh an' likin' the prospect you'd 'ave give me the 'orrors.'

" 'E started it, talkin' about cannibalism,' says Bingy. 'Ullo, didn't you 'ear a rustle in them bushes? We got 'im, boys.'

"We all jumped up, ready to make a dash into the clump; but, to save us the trouble, Perkins comes out, 'e's shirt all in ribbons where 'e'd torn it dashin' through the bushes.

" 'Boys!' 'e yells, 'there's a steamer over there, comin' this way ! We're saved!'

"We all stares and finds 'e's right. But I turns and grabs Perkins.

" 'Come on, boys.' I says. 'Catch 'old of 'im an' tie 'im up.'

" 'E put up an 'ell of a struggle, yellin' to us that we couldn't be so in'uman as to eat a feller creature now that there wasn't no necessity; but Sadler tells 'im we've been thinkin' about long pork so long that now we've jest got to 'ave a taste of it before, we're rescued. So, all trussed up, an' cursin' us like 'ell, when 'e wasn't pleadin' an' askin' us if we didn't 'ave mothers too, we carried 'im down to the beach, where the fire's blazin'.

" 'Where's that mustard yer brought ashore?' demands Cap'n Flemin', cornin' up to talk to 'im after 'e'd been dumped in the sand near the fire.

" 'Cap'n,' he yells, 'you bein' in command an' responsible, you can't allow this to go on ! 'Ere's rescue cornin' an'—'

" 'We've jest got time to cook you before a boat puts ashore,' says the skipper. 'You wouldn't like ter go to your Maker feelin' that you'd caused indigestion to yer feller creatures through the lack of a little mustard, would you? Come, be a man an tell us where you put it.'

" 'There ain't no mustard!' yells Perkins, frantic.

" 'What? You told a lie about bringin' it ashore?'

" Perkins nodded 'ard as if 'e 'ad a new 'ope. 'Cap'n,' 'e whined, ' 'uman flesh ain't worth eatin' without mustard. Besides, as you say, it's indigestible.'

" 'Well, if there ain't none, we ll ave ter try you without,' says the cap'n with a sort o' sigh. 'Better git on with your job, Joe.'

"As the cook approached, knife in 'and, Perkins near split 'Eaven with 'is shrieks. But 'is larst shriek, the biggest yell 'e could muster, as the knife went down ter 'im, was drownded in a roar of laughter. Perkins sat up stoopidly, with 'is bonds cut, starin' all round at the 'ole crew larfin' at 'im."

Bill Birdseye knocked out his pipe and held his hand out blindly but with a gesture that was irresistible. So was the next one when drew his sleeve across his lips. He was rapidly emptying my tobacco-pouch as we moved towards the bar.

"Perkins knocked a forchin outer it," he said. "Ever struck the sideshow of *The Man 'oo Was Nearly Het* . Well, that was Ray— made quite a story out of it, 'e did!"

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24: Anti-Depression Pills

The Bulletin, 20 May 1931

GIVING a very good impersonation of a southerly buster, Biggar burst upon me in Pitt-street. After knocking most of the breath out of me by the bang he planted on my back, he proceeded to take away the rest by asking me to have a drink.

"Come and have a whisky— have two whiskies," was the expansive way he put it. Then he noticed that I was returning the smile of Mrs. Biggar.

Her presence there, with the three small Biggars clustered around her, had awakened my worst fears. Biggar can be just as breezily patronising when he wants to borrow a couple of bob as when he has it to spend; and many times I had seen Mrs. Biggar and the family standing like this in the offing whilst Biggar borrowed the money for the fares to some new home— the old one having outlived its credit, as it were. To-day, however, the lady's smile lacked its old quality of anxiety, almost of pleading. It looked happy and assured.

For Biggar to have a drink with me while his family stood in the street would have embarrassed him and me. He solved the problem. I watched him as he crossed the road to the cakeshop, a small Biggar tucked under each arm, like a parcel, and his wife following with the third. Having dumped his family, Biggar returned.

"Feeling the depression? What rot! There isn't any!" he said, banging down his money on the bar just as if there wasn't. "Let's drink this one up, and have another. I've been in the pictures with the family, and I'm thirsty."

His money thumped on the counter again. Someone has remarked that it is expensive to mix with millionaires. I have found it so. The sort I know tell me all about their latest money-making schemes and then borrow a bob or so for their fares home and the sausages or fish or whatever it is that they want to take with them.

"I can't go wrong," shouts this type of plutocrat. "In another six months I'll be going home in my own car. But I'm damned if I know how to get there, to-night. Have you a couple of bob that's doing nothing?" I have known too many such millionaires; known them in every shape and form, but seldom in the cashed-up form in which Biggar appeared to be on this occasion.

"Glad to see you're doing well," I said. "What are you doing it on?"

"Anti-Depression Pills," was his astonishing reply. "Do you suffer from constipation of business, bills before the eyes, loss of trade, pain in the bank account? An Anti-Depression Pill, taken hourly, will clear those clouds from the brain, restore that flagging energy, bring back that waning interest in life. Anti-Depression Pills can cure all ills. Each is worth many guineas in the bank."

"You talk like a patent-medicine advertisement."

"That's just what I am!" he shouted. "Look at me! Am I talking about hard times, impending bankruptcy, national repudiation and disgrace? Certainly not. It's an ill wind blows nobody any good, and what you miscall the depression has blown me a fortune. Anti-Depression Pills! Try one?"

He had been waggling a small brown globule before my eyes. Being suspicious of all such things, I shook my head; but his gaze went past me, and, turning, I noticed that old Dalton, evidently interested in our conversation, had edged near.

I introduced them.

"Would you care to try one, sir?" Biggar asked.

The ancient inspected the pill.

"It's guaranteed to remove the blues, give you a true perspective of what you imagine to be the depression, and bring back the confidence which will enable you to put things right again. Take one."

Dalton rolled the pill in his hand, then turned to the barmaid and asked for water.

"Has he got any money?" asked Biggar in a swift whisper.

"He must have —he never spends any," I muttered.

Biggar watched Dalton with interest as he gulped the pill. "In half an hour you'll feel the benefit," he said. "I'll guarantee that that pill will give you a different outlook on life."

"You selling them?" asked Dalton, looking, in spite of his suspicion, as if faith was already working a miracle.

"Not to-day. This is a sample box. You see, the pill is not properly on the market yet, although I've sold a few boxes privately. I'm looking for the capital to launch it in a big way."

"Anti-Depression Pills," mused Dalton, questioningly.

"That's the name! Y'see, my theory is that the depression is as much a matter of the mind— and the stomach as of economic circumstances. People need something to tune them up; when they get over the run-down feeling, they're able to tackle their troubles better. Look at my landlord! Before taking those pills he had three of his cottages empty; now they're tenanted."

We laughed.

"I'm serious," protested Biggar. "The pills restored the cheerfulness of his outlook; helped him to face matters properly. He came down with his rents, of course; but he's happier now with the places occupied than merely eating up rates and taxes. He's backing me, now, in a small way, and if he doesn't come in with the money to market the pill properly, I'll get it elsewhere."

I masked a grin. I could see the landlord, irritated about his empty cottages, asking Biggar for his rent and Biggar putting him off with a tale of the impending fortune from his pill. And, having argued the landlord into sampling a pill and reducing his rents, I could see Biggar making a canvass for tenants in that spasmodically energetic manner of his, and persuading the man of rents that the Anti-Depression Pills were responsible. It was surprising what Biggar could make you believe when he tried; he has frequently made me believe that he needed my money more than I did.

When I left Biggar had Dalton button-holed and was talking millions—the usual millions. At Biggars request I dropped in to the cakeshop with a message that he wouldn't be long. The family, wallowing in cakes and ice-cream, didn't seem to mind how long he was. In depression times, it was good to see them like that.

I never thought Biggar would really impress Dalton. Perhaps I am unduly sceptical about millions. But Dalton has had actual cash to put into enterprises and, no doubt, has had returns, so he may have grounds for regarding these things as something more than delightful fancies. A couple of days later, when I met him in the same bar, he mentioned with some anxiety, I thought, that "that friend, of yours, Mr. Biggar, did not come into see me." He had hardly spoken before Biggar appeared, loud-voiced and buoyant as ever, followed by Fitzjames.

I knew Dalton would not mention his disappointment about Biggar's failure to keep his promise; he wasn't that sort of man. He expected people to chase him and refused to chase them. It was part of his business armory. I reproached Biggar myself.

"Ok, I'm sorry, Mr. Dalton. Fact is, Mr. Fitzjames here, when he heard of my proposition, was very keen about it, and we've been going into matters. You didn't seem very interested."

"If you're fixed, it doesn't matter," said Dalton, with poorly-acted indifference. "I wanted to know , how you got on, though; and, any time you like to look in, I'll be glad to see you."

I winced. Fitzjames looked as if he owned terraces of houses, but he owned nothing. Biggar had "rung him in," evidently to whet Dalton's interest, and I had made myself a party to the confidence trick. Still, if he could succeed with Dalton, Biggar deserved all he got. Dalton is a cautious investor, and I hate cautious investors. But for them, my millionaires, who never have any money of their own, could have floated all their schemes, and I might have floated a few of my own, and industry would have been forty or fifty millions better off.

A couple of weeks later the Anti-Depression Pills advertising smote the eye everywhere, and Biggar began to flash round in a fine new motor-car, a very

picture of anti-depression himself. He occasionally thumped my back unexpectedly, thumped his money on a bar counter, thumped down a couple of whiskies, and thumped away, more like a southerly buster than ever. And Dalton wore a fat smile that suggested— though he seldom mentioned business— that the-Anti-Depression Pills had done him good.

The world in general took the pills— at 2s. 6d. a box— with avidity. I met people who told me they were marvellous. There were advertisements containing testimonials from persons who declared that they not only felt better, but that their businesses had been improved by them. One was from an undertaker. Biggar himself claimed that a Stock Exchange boom was a direct result of their popularity.

I was glad to see some of the millions I had so often heard about materialising. Not until I met Mrs. Biggar one day, dressed in unwonted finery, did I realise that there was a fly in the ointment.

"Poor Tom has lost his head," she said. "He goes to the races every week; stays out all night, losing money over cards. It's making me very unhappy. As a friend of his, I wish you'd have a talk with him— quietly, of course ; and don't let him know that I spoke to you about it. Sometimes I think I'll have to get a divorce."

It seemed grotesque. Here was Mrs. Biggar, who in adversity had suffered so much at the hands of the prodigal, and endured it with smiling cheerfulness, made wretched by his prosperity! But, of course, it was impossible to talk to a southerly buster. He blew about the city shouting that the depression had been the best thing that ever struck the country. Biggar always did look at matters from his point of view. It surprised me when I met him one day, boisterous as usual, and heard that he had sold his interest. It surprised me more when I learnt that the price was £200.

"Two hundred!" I exclaimed. "I thought it was. a goldmine?"

"So it is," he said ; "but Dalton's a mean old cuss. He started to nag about my spending too much money— eating up all the profits in publicity. Let him run the thing as he likes; the depression won't last long enough anyway for us to make a fortune out of the pills."

And then one day Mrs. Biggar came to me, tearful and pleading. She was slightly incoherent, but it appeared that Biggar was in trouble and had to appear at the court that day. They had been separated, but when she heard he was in trouble I It appeared, roughly, that Dalton was kicking up a fuss; vaguely, as I could get the information from Mrs. Biggar, the matter was one of registering a wrong formula.

Outside the court the family was waiting— as the family had so often waited before. The children ran to meet their mother; almost at the same time

Biggar, jaunty as ever, issued from the court, talking with another man, from whom he broke away to join us, greeting his wife with an unashamed public hug.

"It's all right, sweetheart! Only a fine, and I got my solicitor to pay that."

"But you got £200," I suggested.

"Lost every bob at the races."

"And what was the formula?" I asked.

"Just a dose of alcohol— and the faith that people swallowed with it," said Biggar. "At least that's what I sold the people. By the Lord, I could do with a drink. Are you holding cash?"

"If Mrs. Biggar doesn't mind," I said.

She gave a smiling assent.

"Come along then," he said. "I want to tell you of a new proposition of mine. There's a fortune in it."

We made our way to the corner pub, where I knew Biggar would talk to me about millions and finish by borrowing a couple of bob. My last impression as we entered was of Mrs. Biggar standing with her children.

She was happy again—happy in the knowledge that she was once more a sharer of her Tom's haphazard fortunes.

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25: The Puffick Gentleman

Bulletin, 29 April 1931

"YOU would have liked," said my landlady, "to have met Mr. Nobuck Palmer, the gentleman that used to occupy the room next to yours. Mind you, I have always had superior people in my house. Even if some of the married couples wasn't properly married they was very respectable, or else I wouldn't have let them stay more than a day with me. It don't do to be too severe in these days; you can't blame people for not getting married with all these dreadful divorces going on, especially if they've been married before and haven't been able to get one; but respectability I will have. Not that I mind a man getting drunk now and then, as long as he pays for it if he breaks a window. 'Even be to him as even thinks,' is my motto.

"But Mr. Nobuck Palmer, he was a cut above the others— a puffivk gentleman, if ever there was one. So free and easy in his manners, and always sayin' 'Beg yours' on the slightest provocatin'; something to do with the peerage, I believe, too. Time after time he used to refer to 'My noble ancestors.' He looked as if he might have been a duke— in disguise, of course.

"Directly he took the room I saw he was one of the quality. 'I hope you won't mind, Mrs. Parsley,' says he, 'if I don't pay the rent until next week, when I expect one of my ships to come in. Just at present *Splosh non est*, *pro bono publico*, *san fairy ann*, as they say in the classics,' he says.

"Put nicely like that, of course, I didn't mind. I have always admired scholards, and he was full of such Latin potations.

"Such a nice gentleman he proved, and he had several others coming to see him. 'My old college friend,' he would say, introducing them. You could see that some of them hadn't been to college, but that was just his nice way, making them feel comfortable and that he was no better than they was. A regular paradox of politeness he was.

"He wasn't a shipowner, really, what he said being only his way of putting things. He told me later that he was a professional philantlierpist; he relieved people of their troubles. Money he said was the worst trouble in the world. Which is true; as I always say, 'Money is the root of all evil, especially when you can't get it.'

"But he said, poor feller, that a lot of people misunderstood him. He didn't exactly say how it happened, but it seemed he had been providing the eddication of a young feller— he was such a kind gentleman— when some sort of trouble arose. The young man thought he'd been robbed somehow, and simply because Mr. Palmer had been with him they took all his money from him. 'lt's gone into Chancery, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'and I left it there in

Brisbane and came south myself, because the doctors said a change of air would be for the good of my health.'

"Well, of course, I know what it's like when money goes into Chancery, because I've read about it. Look at all those millions that people go to England for to claim and never get, as far as I can make out. It seemed to me that the young man was very ungrateful to put him to all that trouble, seeing the eddication he was getting.

"Mr. Palmer seemed so fond of talking to me that it. made me feel proud— a scholard like him! In spite of his troubles he'd laugh so merry when he told me about such things as his estates in England and how a uncle had stolen the birth certificate to prevent him from getting them. 'Isn't the dear landlady a dream?' he says to one of his friends one day. 'She reminds me so much of my dear old mother— as she used to be. Of course she's too young to be like what mother is now.' He was, always saying nice things about me like that, and I liked to hear him talk so nice of his mother. I always think it's fine for a man to be a prodigal son and think of his mother. After all, blood is thicker than water, and a lot of it must pass under a bridge.

"He always told me that things would be all right with him when his uncle from Fiji arrived, and one night his uncle did arrive— he whispered to me that it was him when one of his friends brought uncle up, and he borrowed ten shillings from me to buy beer, because, he said, he might lose his expectations from his uncle if he didn't entertain him properly, and he'd run out of change.,

"I didn't think much of his uncle for an uncle of a puffick gentleman like Mr. Palmer; but these things happen in the best of families, and uncle certainly looked as if he had some money, even if he looked a bit drunk as well.

"My worst fears were realised. By-and-bye there was such a noise in Mr. Palmer's room that I had to go up. It was that terrible uncle making a row and declaring he had been robbed, and would call the police.

" 'I'm sure no one would be robbed in my house,' I says, severely. 'I know Mr. Palmer is a puffick gentleman, and I expect his friends to behave likewise— even his uncle.'

" 'The gentleman has lost a wad of notes,' says Mr. Palmer. 'He evidently lost it before he came up here, and has only just noticed it. Well, we can't let him suffer, being a friend. You two boys see if you can give him a quid or so' — he spoke to two of his friends who were in the room— 'and I'll put in my share.'

"That was generous, wasn't it? His friends handed out a couple of notes each, and Mr. Palmer drew me outside the door.

" 'I've got a fiver here,' he says to me, 'and I can't give him all that. Could you get me change, keeping two pounds to pay what I owe you?'

"The uncle looked pacified, but very drunk, as they helped him out— to send him back to the Australia, Mr. Palmer said. It seemed to me Mr. Palmer had treated him very generous, but then it's an old saying that generosity knows no lord.

"Next day I was cleaning up near his room, when one of Mr. Palmer's friends rushed in and started abusing him. It was something about his uncle from Fiji being a crook, and taking them down for their money; but Mr. Palmer closed the door— to stop me being offended by the bad language, as he told me afterwards. He was such a thoughtful man.

"That was when he asked me to keep the five-pound note for a while. The bank, he said, had repudiated it for the time being— I once knew one that did that with a cheque; pretty crooked some of these banks are, if you don't watch them! He said he'd give me a tenner for it later.

"It was only a little while later two gentlemen called to see Mr. Palmer; important-looking gentlemen they were, too. Shortly afterwards I was just passing his door as they was coming out together.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley!' he calls and then says to the other gentlemen, 'I must say good-bye to my landlady— she's been a dear soul to me. Mrs. Parsley,' he says, 'the King has sent for me— about my estates and my money in Chancery. I may be away for a little time; but when I get my title and estates I'll pay you well for your kindness.'

"And then, dear fellow, he kisses me. 'This is a little present for you,' he whispers, 'a family heirloom— keep it, but don't show it, it might cause trouble until my estates are secure.' And he slips something into the bosom of my dress.

"It was a reel wonderful gold watch. The initials on it weren't his, so it must have belonged to another member of the family. Just fancy giving that to me.

"I've still got it— and the five-pound note. I don't know what has become of him, not having heard, but I know I'll hear nun

again, a gentleman s word beimg his bondage, as the saying is, and once said never

"Still he's been gone a long time now. Prevarication is the thief of time; but, whatever happens to Mr. Palmer, I'll always remember him as the puffick gentleman.

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26: Mateship

Bulletin, 18 March 1926

"A MAN 'd do more 'n that for a mate," was a stock phrase with Thurston.

He had joined up with the reinforcements which dribbled in to make up the strength of our smashed platoon, a medley of old hands returned from hospital or leave, raw newcomers and lead-swingers scraped from safe jobs which had to go in the urgency of 1918.

My acquaintance with him began on the morning we moved back towards the line. It was always at such a time that the Diggers showed at their worst. There were the cursings of adamant M.O.'s by lead-swingers who had failed in a last attempt to get left out; the grumblings of the old hands at the over-use of the Australians, who seemed to be always ordered into the line again when they were imagining that a real "rest" was just beginning, or at never being left out with the "neutrals"— the "nucleus" or skeleton battalion on which to reform if the battalion should get smashed in the line; and the irritating, nervous questionings of newcomers whose courage was beginning to ooze.

"Cripes! When a man's married an' only drawin' a bob a day," remarked Thurston cheerfully, "he might just as well be in the line as out of it! A few bob will be accumulatin' for him to spend when he comes out."

Once the battalion was moving and the chance of evasion had gone, the Diggers struck a better humor. Any voice raised in "windy" grumbling was bantered down; the men discovered a grim, sardonic humor in prophesying the worst for themselves. As a marching companion Thurston developed a cheerful resource. He showed me how marching became easier if the carrying of rifles was shared, two mates taking it in turn to carry both rifles; he also showed a generous idea of what was his share.

In the skurry for billets at Borie I overlooked the man I had appreciated as a marching companion; yet I had hardly thrown off my equipment before he dropped down beside me,

"Didn't know where you'd got to, Blue," he remarked. "But, cripes, this isn't a bad old home —tons better than that I found."

"I was just going to look for you, Thurston," I lied, ashamed at my forgetfulness.

"My name's Tom," he said; "I've been looking for a mate ever since I joined the A.I.F. but I never seemed to keep any of 'em long. Something always happened to them or me."

"That's a cheerful recommendation."

He laughed. "A man needs a mate," he said wistfully. "Especially when he's pretty much on his own, an' not many letters comin' in from the other side."

"You're married, though?" I suggested.

He sat up suddenly on his bunk, fumbling, with his tunic; his paybook opened in front of my eyes, he struck a match, the light of which fell on the "Dependants" entries.

"Six children!" I exclaimed. He looked a young man to have gone so far in matrimonial cares.

"It's a pretty big parcel," he said grimly.

"Well, you can't call yourself alone in the world," I said.

"They don't write much," he answered, and lapsed again into silence.

"I had a mate," he said suddenly, "when I was in Australia, and we knocked about together for eight years. All up an' down Queensland and old New South we've been together. My old man was a cow-cocky, an' we didn't hit it about what constitutes filial duty. He reckoned that a son oughter work for the sake of the old man until he was Lord knows how old, an' it was the duty of a father to larrup him if he grumbled. I stood it pretty long, and then I bolted.

"I didn't get on too well. I was almost out when, limping along near Dubbo, I met the chap who became my mate. He hollers to me; an' when I went over to his camp he gives me a swill of tea and some food, and tells me I'd better doss by his fire.

"We swapped yarns as, we smoked after tea, and then he suddenly looks at my feet and throws over a spare pair of boots. 'Better put 'em on,' he says. 'To-morrow, if you care about it, you can come along with me. I've got a clearing contract, and there's work for you if you want it.'

"Of course I did go along; and we were mates ever after. He was years older than me, but we seemed to get on well together. He was a terror for work; an' he could nose out jobs in a way that beat me. Him an' me were working when other blokes were grumbling all over the country that there was no work to be found; and he didn't mind what price he tendered for a job or how hard lie had to yakker as long as he could keep doin' something. I reckon he did half as much again as I did, yet he always shared fifty-fifty— would have it so. It suited me a darn sight better than trampin' about broke; and I liked the old bloke, though he'd never go on a spree. You see, he couldn't afford it; he had his wife and kids to keep."

"Well, you had your wife and kiddies, too." I suggested.

"Yes, of course," he said, but his talk ended suddenly.

Then we were disturbed by the swift "swoosh" of a shell, the thud of its fall on the earth reverberating through to us, shaking the earth from the sides of the dug-out. During the next ten minutes our new friendship had that baptism which in the war appeared to ripen mateship so wonderfully. When it was over the call came to me to help the one casualty the barrage had caused. He had to

be taken to the medical-aid station, and it seemed natural to find Thurston with me.

On our way back we found the battalion moving. With the sergeant who had been detailed to wait for us, we followed directly we had secured all our equipment.

"But what's the stunt, sarge?" I asked.

"Somethin' doin' in the line— Lord knows what!" said the sergeant irritably. The sudden call had jarred him even more than us; such calls, which might mean a smashed and broken battalion before the morning, were pleasant to nobody.

The possibilities were being whispered amongst the Diggers when we caught and fell in with our platoon, the whispering sounding eerily amid the stealthy noise of moving feet in the darkness. Then the older "Side of the road!" came back, again and again, and ambulances commenced to pass. Later, walking wounded and men with stretchers passed, some of the wounded cheerful about the "Blighties" they had received and inclined to return to our questions ironical banter about our bad luck in the direction we were travelling.

We heard all sorts of varying stories along the road; but by the time we had taken possession of a trench position in "close supports"— rather relieved that we were not being thrown right into the line for a hop-over— we knew the position, fairly well. The South Australian brigade which ours had been due to relieve next night had had a big hop-over, and "thudded" with such heavy casualties that it was judged necessary to hurry up the relieving troops ahead of time.

The quietness of our platoon— essential in any case, now we were near the line— was almost oppressive. The newcomers— fresh reinforcements and old lead-swingers were overawed by the evidences of war they had seen: passing wounded on the road, a continual stream, although only a small part of the total; the crowd of whispering shadows in a field as we passed, where the sharp clank of spades and the low, droned voice of the padre reciting prayers indicated that recovered bodies were already being buried; the passing, later, of blanket-covered burdens on the way to that field; broken limbers and dead horses by the wayside; the shelling of the roadway, during which we had to crouch for cover in the hedges at the side; the poor, moaning Digger who died with a low, horrible scream as we swung past his stretcher.

But the march and its incidents had ripened amazingly the mateship between Thurston and myself; when we moved into the front line, it seemed that we had known one another for years. I had learned a lot about Tom, but

chiefly from his broken anecdotes; there were strange reticences when he was deliberately telling me about himself.

Apparently he had had a wild youth, spending his cheques carelessly; and now the repression of his shilling-a-day status was irksome, although there was no sign of grudging the money he had to allot for his family. Strangely, he spoke little of his family, and I sensed reasons even before he, in a moment more confidential than usual, showed me the photograph of a girl not yet out of her 'teens— a bright, smiling girl, pretty even in the cheap and poorly-finished representation.

"That's the girl I'm going to marry when I get back," he said.

"But you're married!" I exclaimed.

"I'll have to get rid of the missus, of course," he said with a queer, ironical grin.

That sort of thing was common enough, of course; but he; with his clean-cut ideals of mateship and loyalty, hardly seemed the type. His confession jarred. His wife and family seemed to be in a shadowy background to his mateship with the man he spoke of only as "Tom," but almost with reverence, and I gained a knowledge of real mateship in his stories of their difficulties, struggles and mutual sacrifices.

Story after story was rounded off with "A man would do more 'n that for a mate."

They seemed to have been a queerly-assorted pair. A cheque collected, Thurston was inclined always for a spree; but his mate, older than he by years and settled down, would never join him. He was tied by a devotion to a family that made excessive demands upon him; and, careless and spendthrift himself, Thurston appeared to entertain a reverence for that quality in his friend which caused him to slave and stint himself to make proper provision for others.

Thurston had, on occasions of holiday, gone with his mate to his home; and his mate's wife, he said, was a nice woman, but one who managed money badly; she no sooner had received one lot than it was gone and she was looking for more. Tom spoke of it indignantly, recalling the anxiety her thriftlessness threw on his mate.

"The poor beggar 'd go nearly dotty if we were slow in picking up money, thinking of that family of his going without," he said.

And it all ended in tragedy, it seemed.

Meeting his mate during one of his sprees, Tom had forced him to have a drink, and to his consternation had wakened a spirit of riot of which he had not dreamed. In his young days the mate also had been fonder of spreeing than Tom himself, but the domestic loyalty to which he made himself a slave had suppressed his tendencies. With the taste of the old liquor came a fierceness

of unrestraint which paralysed Tom. Before morning the other Tom was buying drinks, time after time, for everyone in sight. Penitence came with empty pockets, and a remembrance of the money that should have gone to his home.

But the fierce desire for the riot of freedom stayed when another cheque was earned.

Tom graphically gave an indication of his mate's struggle between self-reproach and reawakened desires, and his own efforts to restrain his friend; and then, one morning, the mate vanished, forgetting, apparently completely, the family whose needs before had been such an obsession.

"What became of the family?" I asked.

"I did what I could for them," said Tom. "A man would do more 'n that for a mate. Tom must have gone off his head to leave 'em like that. It 'd drive him frantic to know they wanted anything, if he was all right. So I had to do my best in his place."

"But you couldn't, with your family."

"Well, I did my best. After all, the whole damn thing was my fault," said Tom with deep feeling. "I'd brought back bad impulses to a man who was like a saint in the way he did without things for the sake of others."

The call came to me for duty— a patrol was wanted to search No Man's Land for possible wounded from the hop-over of the previous night, and, if it could safely be done, to bring back any dead for burial; and it surprised me when Tom came out of the dug-out with me.

"It's right," he said. "I told the sarge that my mate was in the stunt, and I had to be in it, too, and he put off Pearson to make room for me."

Although a lull was over the Front, like that which in nature succeeds a storm, strange and unreal after the conflict, the work was ticklish and gruesome. Tom and I kept together and succeeded in bringing back the bodies of two men, and we were carefully reconnoitring further afield when three Verey lights shot questioningly in the darkness ahead of us. As their pale glare shone upon us we saw shadows running some distance away from us. Some of the new hands, unable to stand the strain of keeping stock-still under the glare of light, were betraying our presence by moving; and, knowing what that would mean, before the machine-guns commenced to bark we made a dash into the cover of the yawning shell-hole the light had shown to us.

We lay shiveringly in the cover whilst a chorus of machine-guns barked viciously and a stream of bullets thrashed the air over us.

"There's a man in here," whispered Tom, "and he's still alive."

I could hear the strangling, choking breathing—the breathing of a man who is struggling with death; and we both slithered in the direction of the sound, and were by the wounded man when another Verey went up, throwing its pale

light into the hole. It gleamed for a moment on the man's battalion colors and on the ghastly, greenish-hued face, on which the cold sweat gleamed. The eyes were open, and seemed to fix on the face of Tom.

"Tom! Tom Thurston!" cried the man whom I knew by that name.

"Jack!" The wounded man's exclamation was a hoarse whisper.

I stared. And I saw the tears of a mental agony shine in the wounded man's eyes.

"Jack! My wife and kiddies!" he gasped weakly. "It was madness that made me leave them— a madness for freedom, to have my money to spend, and be free to live as I chose. Something seemed to snap, and I let myself go. But I've been lying here, knowing I'm done, thinking of them— unable to die."

"They're all right, old mate," said Tom softly. "I've been looking after them."

"You!" he gasped.

"Yes, o' course. But I couldn't get the jobs as you could; and so I decided to enlist. And then we got the idea that I should enlist as you, so as they could get the separation allowances— and the pension if I took the count."

The wounded man's hand came up, feeling for the other's, and grasped it weakly.

"Cripes!" he whispered, the tears of relief and gratitude falling on his cheeks, "You're a wonderful mate, Jack!"

"It's no more 'n a man would do for a mate," returned Jack, whom I had known as Tom, deprecatingly. "Besides, if I get back again I'm going to marry Lil."

Even in the agony that was upon him the real Tom gave a little cry of pleasure.

"We'll get you back, Tom," said Jack.

"It's no use; I'm done," responded Tom weakly.

Then it was that the idea came to us, and quickly I spoke of it. It was on to a man already dead that we finally got the tunic of the man I knew as Tom, and then Tom made a change on his own account.

When the machine-gun fire died away I made my way back to my platoon with the papers and the identity disc which would show that Tom Thurston was dead, and his wife and family entitled to the pension earned for them by an Australian soldier who had made the last sacrifice; and in the meantime the man who had shown such loyalty of mateship, with the colors on his shoulder and the papers in his pocket which would identify him as a missing member of a South Australian unit, was threading his way carefully through the lines so as to pass the area where he might be recognised as Tom Thurston.

27: Discipline

Bulletin, 25 Nov 1926

ELTON CALTHORP felt the ground rocking under his feet, and was surprised at the tempest of wrath overwhelming him— he who from his youth had taught his spirit discipline. Perhaps the ways he had travelled had not always been the most pleasant, but they had always been safe; his care for the feelings of others had acted as a guard to his own life. But the sudden shattering of a dream which seemed so sure, as well as so sweet, found him unguarded; he had been so cautious that, it seemed, a special malevolence of Fate had exalted his vision into the skies in order that his feet might be tripped.

His mind went back to the morning of his first meeting with Zonia. Always when he thought of her she was framed in the glory of that day. It was one of milk-washed skies, joyful sunlight, heat intense but pleasurable—the sort of heat that invited the world to siesta. Pavements, exuding the warm smell of melting tar, shimmered in the sun, and bubbles of pitch boiled out of the asphalt-road surface. Calthorp, sixty-two and in the habit of regarding himself as old, felt that he was not so elderly after all; felt a spring in his gait and a buoyancy in his breast that reminded him of youth— indeed, well preserved and carefully-dressed, he looked rather a prosperous man of early middle-age than the oldster he was. The day was glorious to him; but there was an extra fineness about it as he turned into the Gardens, where a breath of something very like coolness struck the cheeks occasionally, bringing the smell of damp earth and the impression of sprinkling water, although the cooling sprays could not be seen.

His training of reticence, rather than bashfulness, would have caused him to pass his accustomed seat had he noticed that it had an occupant; but when, abstracted, he arrived there, the quick action of the girl in making way for him was so disarming that he found himself sitting beside her and adding to his thanks a remark about the weather.

"Oh! it is wonderful!" she responded. "On a day like this you glimpse the fulness of life that is to be enjoyed, and should be enjoyed, by everybody. But, if they could, they would lock up this beautiful sunlight and make profit out of selling it to us by the pint."

"Thank God no one can do that!" he said devoutly. "The sunshine is free to us all.

"No, it isn't," she contradicted, rebelliously. "They make us pay for that, too. In the office where I work the girls will have to stay until the golden glory of the day is gone, and I, because I had to come out here, will probably lose my job."

With that start Calthorp found himself listening, strangely interested and strangely pleased, to the girl whose delight at having someone to talk to was a great deal more evident than he allowed his own to be. He smiled sardonically at the reflection that his friendly confidence put him in his place. He was an old man, a harmless old fogey, to whom a girl might chatter as she liked, on a chance acquaintance, without any suggestion of a need for circumspection. He represented disciplined old age; she was youth, crude youth, making its demands upon life for happiness. In a very little time he had learned a great deal about her, and —in spite of his long devotion to discipline, or perhaps because of it —what he learned he liked.

She was a rebel, whose enemies were a mysterious "they" who put shackles upon life and callously surrounded every precious pleasure with fences. She had a riotous hunger for the good things of the world, and though she resented the fact that in most directions it would remain unsatisfied, that did not in any way impair her enjoyment of those pleasures which came her way. She spoke to him of dances— cheap, poor little dances— and he found that their tawdry glories were invested with an interest because of her zest.

References to "boys" came into lier revelation, but they faded out of the narrative for reasons never explained but obvious; the standard of the "boys" was not on a level with her own. Undoubtedly she was wholesome.

He was surprised to discover the time.

"Young lady," he said, "you have a very proper indignation against people who with hold from others things they might enjoy, so I hope you will not withhold from a lonely old man the pleasure of taking you to lunch. It is now nearly one."

"What a nice way to put it!" she cried, her eyes glistening. "I didn't expect to have anything to eat until I got home, but there is a place here in the gardens, under the trees—"

He liked the frankness of her acceptance, and, sitting in the dancing shadows and speckled sunlight thrown by the trees, he was inclined to join her in her enthusiasm about the delight of the *al fresco* meal. It was ages since he had so enjoyed a meal.

"I don't want to encourage your habit of staying away from the office," he said, "but possibly we might arrange for some more of these lunches. And as you like theatres, perhaps you will come with me to see 'The Honeymoon Girl'?"

"Ooh!" Her exclamation was that of one receiving unexpected gifts. "I would have to ask my boy; I wouldn't like to go without telling him. But, of course, he won't mind."

After that they were friends, and, in a laughing humor at having called him that, she named him "Uncle." Calthorp was satisfied to be regarded as old and on the shelf so long as he was allowed the companionship of youth which renewed his own. He was quite humble about it. The girl gave him more than he could possibly give her. Her avidness renewed his appetite for things long grown stale; the performance, dull in itself, was given merit by her unsophisticated enjoyment. There were times when her crudeness jarred his fastidiousness, but as time went on he noticed the jars less.

Calthorp was not only satisfied to be reregarded as old; he liked it. The gulf of years between them would have made their relations ridiculous on any other basis, as he saw it. There was no elderly foppishness about him. If he put a buttonhole in his coat and donned a carefully-selected new tie for his meetings with Zonia, it was merely that his bright "niece" should have no need to be ashamed of her companion.

Sometimes he wished he had met such a girl when he was younger. Such splendor as a great love affair can give to a life he had missed. He had early found himself married to a woman by whom he had never been deeply stirred. Respect for her feelings had prevented any possibility of subsequent loose love affairs. Consideration for others was Calthorp's actuating principle. Gratification and calm happiness had come to him from a clean, well-modulated life; but. looking back, there was something distinctly unsatisfying in the wedded life that did not even yield a deep grief when the companion of thirty-five years had died.

His children had grown up and married, and had their own interests. In spite of intellectual resources, he was— but for Zonia— a lonely man. He thought of her doctrine of payments, which she had mentioned in almost her first words to him, reflecting that if he had won serenity his life had still made its payment.

As was natural to one of Calthorp's habit of mind, he saw Zonia's parents to explain his adoption of his "niece." It was an interview rasping to his senses. Their greedy hopes that their daughter had hooked a wealthy admirer were obvious. He thought it necessary to dissipate their ideas. Somewhere back in their lives there must have been romance when Zonia was named, but life had edged them to a mean sharpness. Frankly he disliked them.

His estimate of her parents only made Zonia seem more wonderful. There was sheer enjoyment in all their meetings. The prospect of them gilded all the rest of Calthorp's days. And it was a real grief when he noticed that the merriness of his friend was clouded, and realised that a shadow had been upon her for at least a couple of their meetings— he had thought it but a passing mood.

"Zonie," he said, "something has damped your spirits. What's the matter? Don't you think an uncle might be told?"

She fell silent.

"Well, if you don't want to tell me, I want to cheer you up. Suppose you come to a theatre with me to-night. Stay on and we'll have dinner somewhere, take a car for a run and then the theatre."

"Oh, yes!" she answered eagerly.

"That young man of yours won't object?" he quizzed.

And then he learnt that the young lover was gone. Although it would give him more of Zonia, he was angry; it had apparently hurt Zonia deeply. He picked out the most amusing of the evening's shows, and his heart glowed when she suddenly laughed outright, joyously.

But thereafter he sensed a sobered Zonia, and was distressed. His pleasure in serving her had reached the stage when sacrifice became a pleasure. Wanting desperately to chase the clouds from her life, he formed a plan on the memory of her delight in talking of travel— of Paris, London, Naples, Venice. He had the money and to spare.

He would miss her desperately, but in the delight of a trip to those cities of her dreams she would forget her sorrows. She could take her mother with her. Delight in his sacrifice became an ecstasy as he pondered his idea and pictured her pleasure. But when he made her the offer, her grave thoughtfulness surprised him.

"No; I have taken too much. I could not take all that money from you," she said.

"From an old man to his niece—"

"You are not old! You are not old!" she cried aloud passionately. "For a man you are young."

"Almost from the first you called me 'Uncle.' "

"I was only a girl; you have taught me to grow up. Don't you notice it?"

He did ; but with her resistance he wanted now to press his sacrifice upon her. He felt that her reluctance was only inspired by disinclination to accept so large a gift.

"But I don't want to go," she said.

The subject dropped; and Calthorp only realised that the offer had made a difference between them when she failed to appear at the time appointed for the next meeting. A multitude of questioning fears fell upon him. He realised that his young companion had grown to occupy so large a place in his life that he would be desolate without her.

Yet it bore in upon his mind with a devastating humility that he was an old man and she only a girl— what more natural than that the return of her lover

should create a passionate obsession which would cause him to be forgotten, unwanted! If she did not want him, if she had no longer use for the pleasures he could afford her, he would not pursue her.

In his loneliness the desire to live once more the pleasant hours they had spent by walking one of their most frequented paths led him rambling through the gardens. And at the end of the ramble he came upon Zonia suddenly, despondently seated on a secluded seat.

The unexpected meeting created an earthquake of emotion in both. As, with a glad cry, he called to her, she rose in confusion, and then, in the chaos of explanation, she was sobbing in his arms, telling him that she thought the suggested trip abroad meant that he was tired of her friendship and wanted to get rid of her. Obsessed with this idea, she had decided not to intrude upon him: but, just as his steps had been led along the path, so had she come here to review old memories.

Sweetly amazing as the revelation was, Calthorp fought against it. The union of youth with age, he gravely argued, was unnatural; it was a crime to youth which he shrank from committing.

Now this dream that had been so wonderfully sweet was abruptly shattered, he recalled how he had resisted being flattered into what he had always regarded as folly, and keen joy as it was to him had only yielded to what seemed indisputable evidence that the marriage would make Zonia happy.

FATE had duped him maliciously. The joy of their brief married life had lulled him into a secure feeling that the marriage was an act not of folly but of wisdom: and then, entering the house one day, he all but intruded upon the scene which destroyed the foundations of his happiness.

Not daring to trust himself with the shock fresh upon him. he did not obey his first impulse to dash in upon Zonia and her lover, but withdrew hastily, before they had seen him, to fight with his anger. He had been a fool, of course; but it was Zonia who had made him one, against his better judgment.

Soon, very soon, the angry thoughts gave way to a dull hopelessness; and he felt an old man again, the weight of years restored to his shoulders and dragging more heavily than ever they had. In his well regulated mind order restored itself. It was futile to blame Zonia; she was a creature of young, crude impulses, and his was the folly in allowing his matured judgment to be set aside. How could he throw the responsibility upon her? He had held out a golden bait to her and by that had encouraged her to trickery. He had known well enough that young blood would call to young blood, and that discipline was not the lode-star of the rebellious girl he had met on a sunny day in the Gardens.

His appearance, calm and grave, startled Zonia and the young man. They were seated apart now; but a look of guilt was in their faces.

"I want to speak to you— to both of you," he said as the young man rose. "I may say that, coming in a while ago, I heard— and saw— you."

"Elton!" cried Zonia, her face flaming. He blessed those blushes; there was at least honesty in their confession.

He was calmly judicial, and he spoke down Zonia's protests. He exonerated her from blame; the wedding of age and youth was a mistake for which he took responsibility. It was for him to rectify the mistake; his care was Zonia's happiness. But they would have to wait. He would put it in Zonia's way to secure a divorce. "And I will also provide her with some money— the money that tempted her to her deception."

He could not help a tone of bitterness.

Zonia cried out incoherently against it.

"Yes; an old man who marries a girl invites trouble," said the young man. "It isn't natural."

"Will you go!" Zonia flared at him furiously. He seemed to shrink out before her.

Calthorp watched him go. He had explained the situation and now he felt dazed. He turned towards the door, but found, suddenly, that Zonia, her eyes flooded with tears, was standing before him pouring out words.

"I did love him, but he did not want to marry me," he heard her say. "When he heard I was married he came here; and his coming took me by surprise. I—"

"I will not stand in your way," he said. "I have wronged you all the way through, and I will supply you with at least the evidence for a divorce. Then—"

"You will not, Elton!" she cried passionately. "Don't you realise that, living with you, I have changed? I am no longer the crude girl you first met; I know that life means restraints as well as impulses. Don't you see the change in me?"

"Yes, you have changed," he said. "But what has that to do with it? You love this young man"

"I don't!" she cried. "I have grown to love something finer than youthful selfishness. I have been learning, and how could I have any consideration now for a man who would shamefully make love to a woman, the wife of another man, whom he would not marry when he could? How can I compare a cheap creature like that with my husband!"

Calthorp's brain cleared. The light of a very clear adoration was in her eyes. The weight of years suddenly dropped from his shoulders.

28: The Marriage Contract

Bulletin, 30 May 1928

WHEN Ratoffski called in to see Levinstein with his son, very smart and looking really fine in his new clothes, with the scarfpin shining in the tie he had put on for the first time, Levinstein knew from the way in which he plunged into a religious argument that it wasn't to discuss religion that he had come. They liked one another, these old men, both staunch in their Judaism; but, after all, the habit of disguising thought, coming down through centuries and developed strongly in most Jews, could not be overcome easily even in respect to the dearest friend. Levinstein smiled as he reflected that Ratoffski probably had some secret which he would by and bye reveal, casually and cautiously; and, with his habit of judging all things by the light the Talmud threw upon it, he quoted in his heart: "Your friend has a friend; and his friend also has a friend. Beware!"

Having much of the same make-up, Levinstein argued the theological point, finding the splitting of doctrinal hairs enjoyable in itself, and perfectly satisfied to let Ratoffski unburden himself in his own time, whilst Mrs. Solomon removed the white cover and the candlesticks which had graced the table for the just-passed Sabbath. Of course they should have been removed before, the sun having long set; but, Levinstein reflected, Ratoffski must have been very eager to come so early, for he was one of the strictest of Jews, who would not use any vehicle while the Sabbath lasted.

Young Ratoffski bore the conversation less patiently. He was plainly restless, and, when occasionally dragged indulgently into the conversation, gave his opinion shortly and with indifference. But it was his alacrity in springing to his feet that disturbed the engrossed old men, who turned to see him greeting with eagerness the handsome girl, who, radiant in the finery which all womanhood wears for carnival, had swept into the room.

"I'm going, Daddy," she said, leaving the young man and sweeping over to her father.

"Wish me to enjoy myself."

"You will enjoy yourself, I know, Rachie," said the old man, in a voice that was good wishes in itself.

"And where is it you go, young lady?" asked Ratoffski jocularly. "Is it to the Barmitzvah party with the Solomons? Ah, a fine boy the young Moss Solomon— the way he recited his portion showed the mark of the scholar! We also go to the Solomons; and if you are going there, why should not Issie go with you at once, and escort you?"

"Yes," said Issie, stepping eagerly forward; but she turned to meet him with a happy though apologetic laugh.

"I'd be glad," she said, "only I'm not going to the Solomons— not till to-morrow. To-night I am going to a private dance— a big dance. The Agsley-Sanderses— you've heard of them?"

There was just a shade of pride in her voice as she mentioned the name, and a shade of disapproval in the tone of Ratoffski as he said: "Christian friends?"

"Somebody is going to call for me, and I think I hear the car now," she said. "Good-night, dear Daddy; good-night, Mr. Ratoffski."

"I will go out with you, anyway," said Issie, as she turned towards him. "And then," he added to his father, "I will go on to the Ratners and pick you up at the Solomons."

"Don't you go marrying a Goy, young lady," called Ratoffski.

"Oh, that's different!" she smiled back at him. "To enjoy oneself with one's friends is one thing, but I know what father wants. And I'm a Jewish girl, Mr. Ratoffski."

"Well spoken!" The young people having vanished on the last words of the girl's speech, it was just a general ejaculation of approbation. "She is a fine girl, Rachel is, Levinstein— a fine girl. She will make a good wife, eh?"

"Not for a long time yet, I hope," said Levinstein, a trifle wistfully. "She is the only one I have with me now— the image of her dear mother, who died for her."

"It seems but yesterday she was a school-girl," said Ratoffski. "To-day she is a young woman— to-morrow she will be a wife. She will, whether you will or not. It would be best if you made plans for her."

"There is time," said Levinstein, reluctantly. "I will look round in good time."

"You will no doubt give her a good portion," said Ratoffski, with a casualness that was almost an emphasis.

"So-so," said Levinstein, all his caution awakened. "My daughter will not, of course, go to her husband a beggar."

"It is a mistake, this mixing with the Goyim," said Ratoffski.

Levinstein almost laughed; for the eagerness of the young man, his aspect of disappointment when he learnt that Rachel was going where he could not attend her, had given him the key to Ratoffski's visit.

And now, with the worst but usually humorous characteristic of the Jewish nature, he was bargaining. Levinstein knew, for instance, that the reference to his daughter's friends was a veiled depreciation— a hint that her associates might have weakened her Judaism and therefore her value as a Jewish wife,

for which reason a higher marriage portion should be given with her; there was even a suggestion that she might marry a Christian, which would cause her father to pay almost anything if it would prevent such a calamity.

Levinstein picked up the challenge. "We are citizens of this country, and not all its citizens are Jews," he said. "They are our fellow-citizens and friends; we can keep our religion while we are friendly to them. My daughter, in her music studies, has met some of them, and they like her, and she likes them. Am I to keep her from the enjoyment of social pleasures that are better than I can give her? Is her religion to be made a thing that robs her of innocent pleasure, or is it not a thing that should add to the pleasure and fulness of life?"

"But it is dangerous," Ratoffski persisted. "Youth is impulsive and hot, and the Jewish young people should meet together if we want to stop the sort of marriages we regret. It is dangerous. How old is she?— twenty? Her mother was your wife before that age; mine married at sixteen. It is dangerous, I say."

"I would trust Rachie anywhere," said Levinstein. "She is my favorite, my dearest; and because she knows it would break my heart to marry the Goyim, she would marry no one but a Jew. She knows my heart; when she marries I shall live near, and to her children I shall teach the Torah, and give them their Hebrew, and open for them the Talmud. She may never have been told this; but she knows it. And would she who loves me well disappoint me."

Probably because he recognised that it was useless to shake the father's belief in his daughter's worth, or make him fear any weakness, Ratoffski came to the point; would it not be best for her to become engaged? His son liked her; he would learn to love her (and Levinstein laughed again inwardly as he remembered the young man's eagerness); he was good looking, well mannered, clever, a good young man.

"He is not making much money," said Levinstein, the inevitable bargaining spirit, falling on him, too.

"What better?" cried Ratoffski. He qualified for his dentistry brilliantly; he is bound to make his way. And what better than that the two make success together, so that their lives belong to one another?"

So, with some fencing, the matter was brought finally to an agreement, subject only to the happiness of Rachel in the arrangement, with the amount of her endowment duly fixed by a father who, in his pride, was more generous than Ratoffski expected.

"As for Issie," admitted Ratoffski, now there was no need for disguise, "he's mad for her. He worships the ground she walks upon. And madly he says to me: 'There is only one other girl— and she is a Christian. If I cannot have Rachel it will be madness to me, and I may marry the Christian.' Think of it,

Levinstein! My only son— and he might marry a Christian, in whose house I could not eat for fear of *trefah*, whose children would not be Jews! Ah, my dear good friend, my thanks are all yours!"

"Well, he is a very fine boy— a good Jew. I am satisfied," said Levinstein.

"And she is a splendor amongst women," cried Ratoffski enthusiastically.

The splendor amongst women, which was something of the term that Issie's thought applied to her as he stepped beside her into the garden, had given the bridegroom whom the elders had planned for her short shrift that night. Turning to him on the verandah, her outstretched arm had pointed to the motor-car purring before the gate, from which an occupant had just alighted.

"You see they have come for me," she cried, "so I'll just run down to them. I'm sorry to leave you so abruptly, Issie; but I may see you to-morrow, at Solomons."

"You will see me there, Rachie," he said earnestly, clasping her hand. And then she went whirling away, greeting with gladness the man who met her at the gate, and was gone from his sight in the whir of the starting motor. Hurt at losing her, still more hurt at her failure to introduce him to her friends, he walked down the garden path, and out into the street, a chaos of dark thoughts swamping over the bright hopefulness which had been his when he had come that evening. A passing taxi gave him a sudden thought, and he leapt aboard.

"Follow that car!" he cried, pointing to the tail-lights now far ahead.

He did not know why he did it. Telling himself that his act was caddish, he several times was on the point of checking the cab, getting out, and dismissing it; but, still battling with such resolves, he reached the big house, a blaze of light from ground floor to upper storeys, and with its balconies and gardens hung with festoons of gay lanterns, around which the big, luxurious cars buzzed like monstrous, precious flies.

Two hours— three hours— later he was still walking round the scene of revelry, a gloomy shadow lurking on the edge of its circle of light. The house, set in its grounds, came close to the street on the front and one of the. sides, the ballroom was an annexe on the garden side. Laughter, the ripple of band music, the lisp-lisp of innumerable talking voices, occasional merry cries, and the scraping of feet, and occasionally a clink of billiard balls— it came to him in waves.

He saw figures pass before lighted windows; once or twice, with a heart that leapt, he saw Rachie pass, always happy and laughing; sometimes his passion flamed because a man was with her and was graced with her smile. He

was not grudging Rachel her happiness— he tried to assure himself that he was glad of her enjoyment— but grudging the happiness he did not share.

All the time he wanted to go, and several times walked away, but always returned, torturing himself. Then he became alarmed. The Apsley-Sanderses were known for the "freedom" of their parties— rather prided themselves upon it. This night uproariousness developed early: it seemed to Issie's eyes that an orgy was developing.

He wanted to get Rachel away from it. Suppose he called, asked for Miss Levinstein, and explained that he had been asked to see her home— a family friend? But he did not know how to do it; he did not know what would happen if he did. Perhaps he would be thrust right into the ribald throng, and his mission would create ridicule— would draw unpleasant attention to Rachel, too. She might even be annoyed herself.

He felt strangely unable to do anything.

Of course to Rachel it appeared different. She noticed the growing wildness, but she had grown gradually towards it, and it seemed natural. The Intoxication of enjoyment was beating through every vein of her. It might have cheered the man who was nursing his misery in the shadows outside to know that she thought of him now and then, regretting that he was not there to enjoy it all. Poor Issie! It was a shame to have left him so abruptly. She liked Issie, who had been a boyhood friend, and it hurt her to think he might have been hurt. For her young heart had long ago given him a closer relation than the old people would have expected: she knew that of all the Jewish boys of her acquaintance he was the one she was most likely to marry— some time in the future.

But that night she felt guilty; she had been anxious to get rid of him. There was young Flowers— she liked him, and his attentions flattered her; she knew her delight at his coming had exceeded any feeling of regret at leaving Issie. Of course, there was no thought of ever marrying Flowers; but he charmed her. And to-night he was specially attentive. The flattering of it was even a greater intoxication than all the other pleasures of the evening.

He came smiling to her, when she had just finished a dance, at the time when the music and laughter of the night seemed swimming in her veins, and drew her away with a suggestion of refreshments. They were standing in a deserted part of the house, by an open window through which they could look out on the stars, when he offered wine to her, chaffing her reluctance.

As she took it he drank with her.

"May we always be as happy as we are to-night— together!" he said.

And then suddenly he took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Oh, why did you do that!" she cried, pushing him from her.

"You are not really angry?" he asked, his attitude between penitence and laughter. There was a cry and a scuffle in the garden, which disturbed the situation. They moved away, still together in spite of her reproof, which scarcely seemed real to her; and she heard him extract the information from a passing man-servant that an intruder had been discovered in the garden, and secured.

"But I think you are still angry with me," she heard him saying. "It is only fair you let me explain myself—you are the last girl in the world I would hurt or insult in any way."

With some little idea that she had consented to listen to his explanation, she found herself on a small balcony with him; and then, instead of talking, his arms were passionately around her, holding her tightly whilst she struggled, and his warm kisses were raining on her lips and cheeks. And unbelievingly she found herself listening to what he was saying with less feeling of insult in her heart than she showed.

"But what does it matter!" he breathed passionately. "We can be married to-morrow. We love one another, and every sense I have is aching for you."

Her resistance seemed to swoon away. The night seemed a gorgeous dream, with nothing of reality beyond it; and this was the natural ending of it.

BUT it was a bitter task that was Rachel's next day. Perhaps she had reason to consider herself fortunate; at any rate, Flowers was ready, even eager, to marry her. And his mother and sister, who had always been kind to her, would no doubt welcome her. Yet to break the news to her father that she was going to marry a Christian was so terrible to her that it seemed comparatively easy to tell him why it was necessary. She had been mad, carried away by the intoxication of the night, had forgotten everything; but now, was it not the only way out— to marry Flowers?

She had not exaggerated the effect it would have on her father. He seemed a broken man, with all the faith and happiness swept out of his soul. And yet he was not bitter against her.

"Ah, Rachie, Rachie!" he cried, "I would rather have had it that you had lain dead upon your dear mother's breast. Ah, to lose you, whose mother's death made you the dearest of all!"

It was so he moaned for long; but when Ratoffski came, puzzled, in response to a telephone request, he was grey and grave, but calm. It was Ratoffski who was broken when he learnt that the marriage contract must be considered at an end.

"But you know what it means!" he groaned. "I have told you, my son— my only son!— will marry a Goy unless he can have Rachel. And you promised!

You made your covenant! My son loves Rachie with a great love. Because she was not with him last night he did not appear at the Solomons, and he returned home this morning looking pale and haggard and unkempt. He had been grieving all night because he feared she did not love him. And when I told him that it was all right— she was to be his— he looked for a moment with a face of such joy, and then suddenly cried, 'She does not love me!' and rushed from the room to hide his tears. It will mean madness to him— your broken promise."

His reproaches went on until they earned an explanation which made him scornful.

"To marry a Goy! The daughter of you, whose grandfather was a Rabbi, and who pride yourself on your Judaism! Against your will? Why, then, has obedience in children ceased in Judaism? Do you curse her and throw her off? No! Her children you will have at your knee, knowing that the children whose mother is a Jewess may still be received as Jews. But what of me?— and you have many children; I have but one! Will my son's children, if he marries a Christian, be Jews? Can I teach them Jewishness? And, again, what is a promise to you?"

"I will tell you, then," said Levinstein, calmly, "because I feel I have wronged you— unwittingly. Only swear what I tell you is only between you and me."

"I swear," he said, and Levinstein, wincing, told his story. "And my daughter does not even love this man," he added, feelingly. "It was just a madness, for which I was to blame. It was Issie about whom she thought. 'Poor Issie!' she said, thinking of his disappointment."

Ratoffski was suddenly calm . and collected, and a twinkle of cunning was in his eyes.

"Well, why don't she marry Issie?" he said, "Who will be the wiser?"

"Would Issie marry her?" asked Levinstein, eagerly.

"You ought to make the portion more,"

said Ratoffski. "Five hundred more. There is no reason for Issie to know."

"But Rachie says he would have to know before she would marry him," insisted Levinstein. "She is right, too."

"Well," said Ratoffski, "supposing we tell Issie about it and he says he will still marry her, will that satisfy you?"

Levinstein nodded.

"Will you leave it all to me? I will telephone him."

Ratoffski was so far calmed that he discussed apropos matters from the *Talmud* whilst they waited.

There was the High priest's daughter who had brought upon herself the penalty of death, because offences, forgiven in women of less exalted parentage, were an abomination in the child of the priesthood. Wish as the judges might to acquit her, the case seemed hopeless until the learned man apportioned to her defence called her father to witness.

"Is this your daughter?" he asked; and the High Priest said "Yes."

"I know it is your belief that it is your daughter," he said, "but on what proof can you swear it? Then the Chief Priest admitted that the accused possibly might not be his daughter; and, on the Hebrew rule that if any doubt exists the benefit must be given the accused, the girl who might not have owned priestly parentage was aquitted.

"No man can say who are his children; I shall be content to have jewish children who will call me grandfather," he said, piously. "Your undertaking is to let me question," he added hurriedly, as Issie's step was heard.

IT may have seemed to Issie that two grave judges fronted him, both perturbed, but both prepared to judge him. He himself was calm and had overcome the condition which had disturbed his father, who now motioned him to a seat.

"Issie, my boy," he said, "your father-in-law wanted to say something to you, which he has promised to let me say. What would you say if you were told that Rachel had been in the arms of a Christian and would not come to you chaste?"

"Say? I would say that it was a damned lie!" said Issie, definitely.

"But that is not quite"— began Levinstein, when Ratoffski's swaying hand restrained him.

"Suppose her father wanted to say rubbish like that to you?" he said.

"I'd say," said Issie, firmly and rising— I'd say that I'm satisfied with Rachie just as she is, and I don't want to listen to anything about her. Also that as I hear her outside I'm going to her now, so you'll excuse me!"

As he strode out the old men looked at one another, a sly grin on Ratoffski's face.

Outside the door Issie held Rachel in his arms.

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29: Riding to Lose.

Bulletin, 25 Nov 1931

"YOU tork erbout it bein' 'ard ter win a Cup! It is, an' there's not a bloke knows it better than me; but that's nothin' ter tryin' ter lose a Cup."

Old Joe Dixon had become confidential; his finger-nail ran along a line in an old paper. It was the impassioned eulogy of a turf-writer who described Joe as "the incorruptible of the turf, a rider upon whose inspired hands no breath of suspicion has fallen." Joe added his own version: "I've been as honest as a bloke can be without being a mug."

Joe poured out some more beer, gloating over the sparkle and foam of the liquor. "This is a sorter consolation fer givin' up ridin'— you can take a glass o' beer without thinkin' of what it's goin' ter do ter yer weight," he said, with satisfaction.

"You were saying you wanted to lose a Cup?" I said.

"Wanted ter lose a Cup? Me?" he said. "I 'ad ter try to lose a Cup; but as ter wantin' ter lose it— well, can you imagine a parson not wantin' ter be a narch-bishop? Every rider 'opes to pull orf a Cup before 'e finishes; an' natcherally I was after it when Pacer comes inter ther limelight— an' me booked ter pilot 'im! It struck me all of a neap when I learnt we weren't to go for it! The owner, Frank Ynton, was as upset erbout it as me— though, on 'is side, 'e could 'ave another shot; it was my larst charnce.

"It 'it me all ways; up ter then I'd looked on Frank as a bloke 'oo would be the sport against all odds; not the sort of bloke ter 'ave 'is nose pulled— not in the Cup, anyway. But when I got the strong of it I couldn't 'ardly blame 'im.

"Y'see, Frank isn't a rich man— 'e's rather on the poor side, as nobs go. Pacer 'ad been rather a surprise to 'im as well as everyone. Frank lost is 'ead a bit; started gettin' the money on until 'is last shirt was on it. If Pacer won 'e 'ad a tidy fortune; if 'e lost, 'e was absolootely outed. Frank was game ter take the risk.

"The trouble was that public support poured on fer Pacer. 'E was linked with everythin' in the doubles; an' 'e was backed straightout until the fortune Frank 'ad at stake was a fleabite to the fortunes the bookies were riskin'. It was a cert they couldn't square themselves nohow if Pacer won. In desperation they tried to get at Frank, an' the 'orse, an' me.

" 'They're up to anythin' to stop us,' says Frank ter me, 'but we'll beat 'em! Pacer's goin' ter win!' It was that one day—an' the next 'e'd surrendered. Y'see, they got the squeezer on 'im properly. 'I can't stand the racket, Joe,' he said. 'I'd like to tell them to go their 'ardest; but they're desperate— they'll stop at

nothin'. They'll smash me before the race if I keep out; an' then I'll lose the race an' all I 'ave left!'

"Cripes! 'E looked miserable, an' so was I; but, after all, if I 'ad no charnce of ridin' a winner, I might as well come out as well as I could on the business side.

"It was that oily blankard Mossy Stokes did the business with us; all the time we was torkin' I felt I'd like to land one on that fat nose of 'is. I was better treated, in a way, than Frank. 'E 'ad 'is liabilities on Pacer. wiped out, of course; and there was a big poultice to nothin' fer 'im on Princedom— which was erbout the most likely of the rest with Pacer out of the way. I 'ad a parcel on Princedom 'anded ter me, too, but I was fixed better in the cash proposition. An' seein' that that was satisfactory, I didn't worry about mentionin' the wad I'd put on Pacer meself.

"It was a relief when it was fixed. We was safe, anyway, me and Frank, with the chance of winning a hefty lump each on Princedom.

"What I always says is these bookies don't know their game. They give the show away, so that the mugs should 've tumbled; pencillers 'oo 'ad shut right up on Pacer opened out again, actually asking fer more business on 'im. Of course, there was a few smelt a rat; there was a bit of a run on Princedom ter show that. An' that was why, going through the park at night, my car was 'eld up by a gang. 'Sail right, Joe,' says one of them; 'we don't want your cash. We just stopped yer ter give yer a warnin'. If Pacer don't win the Cup you'll be dealt with. You'll 'ave the soul-case kicked off yer.'

"'Very kind of you,' I said sarcastic, 'but if Pacer don't win ther Cup, what the 'ell's goin' to?'

"The cows! I didn't mind 'ow much of their money they put on an' lorst. But that was one of the things that made me begin to realise that losin' a Cup wasn't goin' to be so easy. Then there was Bob Martin came to me to say that he was layin' me a couple of 'undred to nothin' on Pacer. An' Martin 'ad always been a good friend.

" 'I don't want that, Mr. Martin,' I says. 'Don't do it! I wanter feel that I'm doin' this ride fer the glory of it. What erbout your own 'orses? Esmead's got an outside chance.'

" 'E just winked at me, and went. It gave me a bit of a sweat to know that other 'orses, without us knowin' about it, were running fer us. A couple of days before I'd been countin' on all the field as likely to be against us; an' 'ere I was learnin' that it might be 'ard for us to lose.

"There was other things, like when Jim Larsen came ter pump me. As well as I could, I tried ter put 'im off doin' 'ees dough on Pacer, but) 'e just grinned at me. And 'e told me straight 'is mount, Mountjoy, was out of the runnin'.

"I tried not ter think of 'ow I was chuckin' away me chance of being a Cup winner; but in spite of meself I woke up at night sometimes, an' squirmed when I thought of it. And then I'd git nightmares of all the 'orses in the race bein' tied up ter let Pacer win.

"The 'ole thing was gettin' me down, an' poor Frank was feelin' it worse than I was. 'I'll chuck this damned racin' game directly this is through; it makes a man feel like a crook,' 'e tole me several times.

"The day of the Cup I was a bunch of nerves. I'd reckoned I'd be that way if I was out ter win, not knowin' what the others was goin' ter spring ter stop me; but 'ere I was feelin' bad over the difficulties of 'avin' ter *lose* the blanky race!

"The feelin' grew worse as I 'eard what the crowd was sayin'. 'Wouldn't 'ave anythin' but Pacer on me mind— 'it's Pacer fer a cert': that's what you 'eard every side. An' I thought of the blokes 'oo 'ad promised me a wallopin' if Pacer lorst, although what they'd do to me would be nothin' to what this crowd would feel like doin' if they guessed I was ridin' a schlenter.

"Paisley, the steward, 'oo always looked ter me like a parson 'oo'd taken by mistake to 'orse-racin', 'ad a word with me, warnin' me of the public dough I carried, and the row there'd be if I lost.

" 'I'll do me best, Mr. Paisley,' I says.

" 'Yes, mind you do,' 'e says, drily. It sounded like a threat. Me— I was feelin' 'appy, I don't think!

"In the Paddock Tommy Strachan, 'oo's up on Skylark, sidles up ter me with a 'Good luck, Joe. Make er good race of it.'

" 'Ow erbout Skylark?' I says. "E's got er bit of a chance, they tell me.'

" 'Wot? Against Pacer? Forget it, 'e says. 'All I'm out fer is the money fer a place; but I'd sooner lose that than see Pacer lose. Anythin' I can do fer you when the bumps start I'll do. You can depend on me!'

"Me 'eart thudded. I could depend on Tommy Strachan! The friendliness of some of the other boys didn't matter so much, their 'orses not bein' in the tork like Skylark. I began ter git an 'orrible feelin' that I'd ave ter win! Fer me own part, o' course, I'd sooner ave ridden a Cup winner than git all the tea in China, but a. bloke as to run straight with is connections. I 'ad ter see poor Frank through.

" 'Is 'ands were shakin' when 'e spoke ter me; 'is voice seemed 'oarse an' strange, an' there was lines on 'is face, which was dead white. There was us, both made safe on the nice, as it 'ad seemed yet this was 'ow we felt erbout it. Ridin' ter lose. 'You know what ter do, Joe,' 'e says. 'Don t let any accidents appen. That Princedom money will be hellish usetul ter me.'

" 'I won't let yer down, Frank,' I says.

" 'By God,' 'e says, 'I'd like ter be able ter say ter you, Joe, Damn everything, go out an' win. It's murder with an 'orse likes Pacer,' e says, lookin at 'im affectionately. But we're in now, an we'll 'ave to go through.'

"It did seem murder, the more I looked at Pacer, with 'is springy tread, full of fire an' force. More so when I was on 'im, the way 'e moved under me. It made me feel e could win anythin' we wanted 'im ter win— we'd been a pair o' mugs ter git ourselves tied up like this.

"The start's a thing I don't remember; it was as if I was doped. I only woke up to find meself in the ruck, with Pacer going like a machine under me. There was several 'orses out a'ead, but from the easy goin' 'e was makin' of it, I got a norrid nightmare feelin' the 'ole field was standin' still waitin' fer Pacer ter shoot a'ead.

" 'Ow I cursed meself. 'Ere was I, 'oo should've been enjoy in meself with the feelin' of 'ow easy it was ter win with a Pacer under me, feelin' miserable as a bandicoot.

"We moved ahead a bit. Someone bumped us. an' that was Pacer's reply— to get a'ead of it. I 'ad ter let 'im go for fear of too plainly pullin' 'im. There was a roar from the crowd of 'Pacer!' which told me the eyes of all that crowd was on us. Nice fer me, that was '

"I steadied Pacer, though the beauty wanted ter keep goin'; 'e 'ad anv amount of steam in 'im. An' there was I, alongside Princedom, goin' stride fer stride with 'im. Levey, 'oo was on 'im, gave a sorter little grin as 'e saw 'im come up to 'im. An' there we stayed, with the pace seemin' sickenin' slow.

"Levey an' I was apprenticed tergether an' 'ad been lifelong friends. I didn't mind openin' out ter 'im; an' I was gettin' anxious. I leaned a bit towards 'im.

" 'Fer Gawd's sake, Abe,' I panted out, 'shake it up. Make a race of it.'

" 'E threw a quick grin at me; I jest caught 'is reply, panted out like my own words above the noise.

" 'Waitin' fer you. I'll foller you in.'

" 'Princedom's on a win, ain't it ?' I pants out.

" ' 'Ope you ain't wasted no money on it!' he garsps.

"The dirty swine— they 'ad double-crossed Us! Too much money 'ad come in for Princedom in the larst few days. The cows wanted the earth, an', 'avin' put Frank an' me on Princedom fer our cut, they 'adn't cared tuppence fer diddlin' us.

"In the rage that seized me I must ha' pushed Pacer a'ead er bit; an' he jumped at the 'int. Princedom came with us, keepin on me girth; and a great roar went up from the crowd. But in a moment I 'ad a plan. It was a desp'rate idea. I'd keep Princedom on terms with me, takin' 'im right through, an' at the larst moment I'd pull Pacer fer all I was worth, an' let Princedom through

before Levey saw ther game. The thing would be plain, of course. I'd end me turf career in disgrace instead of glory; but I was finishin' in any case, an' as I felt then, I didn't care a damn. The cow would win, an' Frank an' me would get what was due to us,

"Pacer, glad ter he let out, was goin' great guns, but I 'eld 'im ernough to keep Princedom w'ere I wanted, with 'ees 'ead alongside me knee. The colors of the jocks on the other 'orses seemed to fade away back of us as we passed them, and the roars of the crowd sounded like the surf on a rough day.

"As we swept inter the straight we was over'aulin' the 'orses in front of us as it they was 'ardly movin', an' the crowd 'ad gorn 'ysterical. It was just one long roar of 'Pacer! Come on, you beaut!' over and over again.

"Poor cows! They was ter be let down— it was Princedom was goin' ter win.

"We only 'ad Willowee a'ead of us now, an' she was beat; but I got a idea of somethin' cornin' fast on the outside. Princedom wasn't cornin' along fast enough fer me, an' I sent Pacer along a bit more, in the 'opes that Abe would foller, as 'e did. I couldn't afford to let this other thing catch us. I took a quick look back outer the corner of me eye, an' saw, almost on me quarter, the white blaze that meant Skylark.

"Another dirty crook cow— kiddin' ter me ter put me off me guard, an' now comin' all 'e knew ter cut me down!

"Pacer responded to me call, but Princedom faded away a bit; 'e didn't seem ter 'ave it in 'im.

" 'Skylark! The favorite's beaten!'

"I caught that, suddenly, from the crowd. There was that white blaze on me girth, an' gainin' inches.

" 'Damn yer, Pacer, you're goin ' ter win!' I howls out loud, an' settled down ter ride fer all I was worth. You see, I gotter angle I 'adn't been able ter see before, bein' mixed up with all that crook work. The big prize was somethin' fer Frank, if 'e didn't get nothin' else; an' fer me there was the pride of 'avin' ridden a Cup winner— besides me own bit on an' Bob Martin's couple o' hundred an' a few other titbits.

"But Skylark was on level terms now— and now a'ead! The crowd was groanin'; there was more in that 'orse than I'd thought. An' only a few yards ter go!

"A sort of super'uman feelin' came ter me. I threw meself body an' soul inter the effort. Cripes, 'ow game 'e answered! We caught up the inches Skylark 'ad gained in a few strides; but Skylark 'ung on. We went past the post so close together that I'm damned if I knew which 'ad won. I 'ad a sinkin' feelin' it was Skylark.

"It seemed a dead 'ush 'ad fallen on the place; but the thing was settled in the vast roar and the tumult of cheerin' that went up when the numbers appeared. Bloomee, I'd ridden the Cup winner, after all!

"Frank was acshally pleased, more so when I told 'im all about it; but it's not necessary fer me ter say what Mossy Stokes an' that crowd said erbout it. My troubles! seein' how things panned out financially; an' I was present at Frank's weddin'— that was one of the things what had made 'im windy, it seems.

"That," said Joe, with a whimsical smile, "was when that press cove wrote the stuff about me bein' the incorruptible of the turf."

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30: The Call of Judah

Bulletin, 9 Jan 1929

LOOKING back upon my first meeting with Moses Lockstein it seemed absurd that I should be at all concerned about him. And yet I was concerned, apprehensive of what would happen to him.

My first feeling had been something of aversion. It was not until afterwards that I realised how carefully our introduction had been arranged; and then I could only feel amused at the almost childlike guile of my friend Givotski who, in spite of it, I liked for his many genial good qualities.

"You are a journalist, yes?" said Lockstein. "I do not care for journalists. They interfere too much. So do their papers. They tell people that they are being badly treated, and people believe them and kick. Now I lend money. I sell it as a grocer sells his goods. The grocer he expects to get his twelve and a half per cent, profit, sometimes more; on a lot of goods he turns all his money over in a week. If I want to make similar profits on my money they cry out."

"The people would be in an unhappy state if the papers had not fought for them," I suggested.

"They would not be unhappy because they would not know," he retorted emphatically. "And why would they be unhappy? A man should be careful, provident; he should remember that the father's sins visit themselves on his children. That is according to law."

"It's a law that would fall pretty hard children if fathers weren't afraid of exposure," I remarked mildly.

"Well, I do not fear the papers," he said warmly. Then he smiled humorously. "You see, every time the papers report a case in which I am concerned, they advertise me. People hear of me who had not heard of me before, and they come to me for money— the man who borrows money never thinks lie will have difficulty in repaying. And the reports in the papers help me to make those who have pay. They read and then they say, 'Lockstein is a hard man; it is no use asking for any grace from him.' It is to my advantage that people know me as a hard man. That far I have to thank the papers. But I am glad to meet you— most glad," he said, with a sudden geniality. "You and my friend Mr. Givotski will have another drink with me."

He had shouted before; I sensed immediately that there was something he wanted. But, of course, there was no direct approach to it. I was thus able to size him up before the request arrived; and I had concluded that his preliminary outburst was merely a vaunt to hide his real feelings. Public references to his harshness in business hurt him deeply; so he pretended that

he liked them. His attitude was not peculiarly Jewish, though it is one very common amongst Jews.

But when he spoke of his daughter he was another man. A devotion and pride, almost sloppily sentimental, was in every cadence of his speech. When Givotski interposed that she had "a voice like Melba's" the crude over-exaggeration of the compliment did not annoy him; instead, his eyes flashed their pleasure.

"She is to have her first big concert next week," Lockstein said.

"Perhaps you could write a little notice for the papers about it," Givotski suggested with a too-palpable offhandedness, just as if that was not the whole purpose of the introduction and the long, round-about friendly conversation!

I could have laughed at their obvious belief that they had kept their harmless little conspiracy hidden from me; at the childish simplicity that is so often associated with the mind which works in tortuous ways. But I wrote out an advance notice of the coming concert for the sake of Givotski, who, instead of possessing the money-making or money-keeping powers usually attributed to the Jew, was a spendthrift, dependent to a considerable extent upon "lifts" from his coreligionists, who had for him the racial admiration for the man of erudition and Talmudic scholarship. If it was to benefit him I was satisfied.

That was not, as I thought it was, the end of Lockstein so far as I was concerned. As a matter of fact, the man who did not like newspapers developed a passion for press publicity which was almost pathetic. In spite of the crafty way he had gone about getting the first paragraphs written, he was quite prepared to pay for everything, and even pressed to be allowed to do so when payment was refused for some small service that did not seem worth it. The press-notices I wrote were all about his daughter; but I grew to realise that he liked to have "daughter of Mr. Moses Lockstein, the well-known member of the Jewish community," dragged in somewhere. Once, early in our acquaintance, when I had left the phrase out, I saw a look in his face that expressed hurt; and an unusual cheque and a wonderful animation of manner greeted me when I had persuaded a paper to publish a photograph of the daughter, taken in the garden of their house, with her father standing beside her.

It was a few occasions before Lockstein got out of the habit of approaching the subject of these paragraphs by indirect means. When he wanted a longer notice of his daughter's first concert than the papers had given, the approach was by way of a surprise meeting in the city, and an exuberant invitation to dinner, which was such a good dinner that it looked as if the coming of a guest had been anticipated. The request for the paragraph came afterwards, as we sat over some very good wine.

It was then that I met Lina Lockstein, and with her the side of the moneylender that had nothing to do with his business. Amidst the ostentatious luxury of Lockstein's house she fitted like a ruby resting in a cushion of velvet—warm-colored, bright and a trifle hard. Every action of the father spoke of an over-doting pride; to me the girl appeared scarcely worthy of it. She could be charming enough, but the charm was artificial, even as the well-trained voice was metallic and characterless; and she was spoiled, full of an assurance that she was entitled to all that was lavished upon her.

The ostentation of the house was repeated in the happenings in it; yet I found even in this some reason for liking the man. On the Friday night I soon, discovered the white cloth and the candles would be on the table; and then, if Lockstein wanted anything written, he did not want it until Saturday night—when the Sabbath was over. The arrival of collectors for Jewish charities on the night of my first dinner in the house seemed more than a coincidence. Lockstein gave generously; an impression of a scene staged came to me.

Yet it appeared to me that this religious and philanthropic display was not ostentation only. Lockstein almost pathetically wanted to show that he was not the mere slave of a business with which he was admittedly not in love. And I heard from another of how, the Jewish Aid Society having refused a loan to a Jew of unstable reputation, Lockstein had paid to him the money on the stipulation that anonymity should be observed.

It was when I discovered a growing unease in Lockstein's manner that I realised I had unwittingly cultivated a liking for him in place of the original aversion. Lina's musical career wms founded on love of adulation; instead of needing to make money from it, she had the backing of her father's money, and it secured her advancement far beyond her importance as an artist. Concert promoters can see special virtues in a performer with a rich father prepared, without hope of financial return, to back their ventures.

But while Lockstein helped his daughter to her niche, he was paying for the gulf that was rapidly opening between himself and the greatest softening influence of his life.Lina had acquired friends of social pretensions, and her desire to live up to them was doing the damage.

Nothing but Lockstein's ageing appearance showed the hurts his daughter inflicted, especially by her too obvious desire to hide the fact that she was a Jewess. This led her to constant breaches of that Sabbath observance which was an essential part of her father's life and being. He had tried to stop this backsliding; but his habit of pampering his daughter had weakened his hold upon her.

Business took me one day near his house, with no intention of seeing him; but his friend Givotski caught up with me and linked his arm with mine.

"It is a kind act to comfort a man in the time of his bereavement," he said, moving along with me towards Lockstein's house, thinking that it was my destination.

"Bereavement?" I exclaimed.

"What? Have you not heard?" he said.

"Lina has married, without her father's consent. Married a Christian! A rich young man, of an old English family,' Roy de Lucey! It is a hard blow to the old man. His daughter is dead to him."

I knew what this would mean to the Jewish mind, and my heart was filled with pity for him and his unrewarded devotion. All his life, I knew that, proud of his ancient faith, he would have built, upon having a part in teaching the children of his daughter the Torah; now all those good dreams were shattered.

The blinds were down and there were outward signs of mourning at Lockstein's house. The old man was stricken with grief; and when he had installed us in comfortable chairs he returned to the three-legged stool on which he had evidently been sitting. It was a mourning for the dead he was maintaining; the mourning lamps, wicks floating in oil in open vessels, were about the room; and, besides using only the stool, Lockstein wore heel-less shoes to add to the discomfort the mourner is expected to impose upon himself. His waistcoat was open and torn, and the inside of the coat was ripped and visible— this to show that he observed the tradition in the rending of his garments.

My condolences were awkward, the situation seeming unreal to me; but Givotski uttered soft comnsolations, blended with many Hebrew texts.

"Perhaps the future may restore something," he suggested, at last. "You are rich; if the young man is willing, you have friends who may be able to influence the Rabbi to admit him as a proselyte and let the children be educated in Judaism."

"She was all my wealth; my dear Rachel lived in her," moaned Lockstein, in the curious chant which fits the mourning spirit.

He ignored Givotski's suggestion; in his speech Lina was one who had passed. There were no reproaches; all his references were to past affection, past perfection. Lina was dead.

He arose and brought an album, which he laid on the table. As he opened it I saw with surprise that it was filled with press cuttings— there must have been hundreds of them carefully kept by this man who at first had told me that he did not like the papers. His finger fell on a particularly long cutting, one of several like it.

"It was a magnificent wedding," he said, with a curious element of pride in his voice. "They must have wanted her, to pay all the money it cost without

asking me for a penny. If it had been in the Synagogue, and I had paid for everything, it could not have been a grander wedding. But against my wishes! In a Christian church!"

It was grotesque, this pride allied with the mourning for one dead. But I carried away with me a vision of a broken old man bent on his stool, his head upon his hands.

MONTHS later Lina, to my surprise, ran after me in a street in the city. She was more radiant than I had ever seen her, and yet bore a hint of trouble in her eyes.

"You have an influence with my father," she said. "If you speak to him it might have more weight than if the words came from one of his own people. We have written to him, but he takes no notice. We have called, but his housekeeper always tells us he is not at home. And I am afraid to go to his office. My emotion might be too much, and my pleadings would make a scene. But why can not my father be friendly? Because I married a man I love!" And she forced a commission upon me which I accepted unwillingly.

It surprised me to find that Lockstein even listened to me. His eagerness was restrained, but it was plain that he had been waiting for some opportunity to see again the daughter he had tried to regard as dead. And I left assured that, although Lockstein would never get over his daughter's marriage outside the faith, the re-union ought to, at least to some extent, drag his life out of the tragedy into which it had been cast.

Givotski, pale-faced, seized my arm one day a little later.

"Lockstein! Come with me!" he gasped; and then more coherently: "I am afraid for him. I am going out to his house, but I am afraid to go by myself, llis housekeeper 'phoned me that he had come home full of lamentation, talking madly. In fear she returned to see whether she could do anything for him, and saw him in his study, with a revolver on the table; but he pushed her from the room and locked the door."

Even as he spoke Givotski had hailed a taxi and thrust me in; and as we raced out of the city he told me something of the suffering that Lockstein's re-union with his daughter had brought upon him. Undoubtedly Lina had affection for him; but her social ambitions dominated everything. She met him privately with gladness, but when he had to be introduced to friends no mention was made of any relationship. He was just "Mr. Lockstein." There was no acknowledged connection between the wife of De Lucey and the Jewish moneylender.

The humiliation of it all had struck blow after blow at the old man. Better had the daughter remained dead to him than lived as one ashamed to acknowledge her father and her race!

Givotski explained a little of what had happened as the taxi raced to the old man's home. "He told me that he had made up his mind to go to the big garden party she was giving to-day. I tried to dissuade him, but he would go. Now his fears have evidently been confirmed by what has happened. It is the finish."

From the litter about him Lockstein had been cleaning up his papers, making ready his affairs.

Pathetically aged, he looked grimly at the weapon which Givotski had instantly seized.

"But suicide!" Givotski exclaimed. "To take one's life is against the law! It is a shame, a disgrace in our faith."

"What worse shame can a man suffer than that his children disown him?" Lockstein replied bitterly.

There was a moment's diversion, and, turning, we saw a rather fine-looking young man enter. To me Givotski whispered: "De Lucey!"

"Mr. Lockstein," said the newcomer, speaking under stress, "I have only just now heard that you left the party offended; and I have only just now learned, too, why, I am ashamed, sir. But I beg of you not to blame Lina. She has this madness of social ambition. It will go, perhaps— when the child is born."

The momentary light in Lockstein's eye as he exclaimed "The child!" faded quickly into what seemed a worse despair.

"When I heard you were at the party I wanted to see you, sir," the young man resumed. "I have not worried about these things before, but the child has made me think of them. I want to see how it can be arranged that the child shall be brought up in Judaism."

"You— a Christian!" began Lockstein.

"My grandfather's name was Luckenburg," said De Lucey.

"Luckenburg!" Lockstein exclaimed.

"He made money; it was the women who wanted to be socially big; they created an English ancestry." He laughed curiously at that. "But it was a Jewess my father married; and *I* married a Jewess. And I was brought up in the Torah; and I read my Portion. My mother's social ideas held me; but now with the child coming—"

There was almost maniacal happiness in Lockstein's face. Both were too occupied to notice us. I tapped Givotski's arm and we crept away, and as we passed out we heard the words like a triumphant song from Lockstein:

"There is but one God, He is God!"

31: The Man Who Became Hitler

Bulletin, 26 July 1939

IN troublous times it is natural that Mrs. Parsley's thoughts should dwell, pretty often, upon the world's tribulations. The morning paper lying open on my table displayed a large heading about the Polish Corridor.

"Them corridors!" exclaimed my landlady. "Only this morning I had an argument with Number Nine about her sweeping her dust into the corridor when it had only just been done. A regular Mrs. Hitler she is; and she's going on Monday.

"Great places for trouble them corridors are! Especially if there are Hitlers about. Why any man should make so much trouble for other people with his Nasty ideas, as he calls them himself, is a conthunder-'em to me." Mrs. Parsley suffered a thoughtful pause. "I've been thinking that, perhaps, when he was much younger, somebody called this Mr. Herr Hitler a Hitler, and that's what made him make up his mind to be one."

Certainly an arresting thought! Mrs. Parsley, noticing its effect, parked her carpet-sweeper against the wall.

"There was a case like that in these flats: for a time I thought there might be a bloody revelation, as Mr. Slompack calls it, though I don't like the word, on these very stairs, with the millinery called in to express it, and dead corpses lying everywhere. Not to mention them consecration camps that would be likely if the Fashions had their way.

"They'd only been a few days in Number 10 when Mrs. Catwalloper told me that her husband was a dominoing personality.

" 'If he tries to domino anyone in these flats, out he goes!' I said, firm-like.

"But it seemed that it wasn't that sort of dominoing she meant. She wanted to show me she was proud of the way that Mr. Catwalloper bossed her about, which the other women in the flats used to hold indigent meetings about the way he used to do it. Them women thought that if there was any treading upon to be done it was the wives should do it, which in my experience they do, usually.

"Mrs. Catwalloper was a big, amiable woman, twice his size, and them women didn't like her standing it. That was why, when Mr. Wassail had two ladies' tickets for the races, Mrs. Wassail wanted Mrs. Catwalloper to go with her, to defile her husband. She asked Mr. Wassail to speak to him about it.

" 'Mr. Wassail,' says Mr. Catwalloper in that dominoing way of his, 'my wife, I think, has already told Mrs. Wassail she cannot go. I do not improve of races, especially for women."

" 'Bah! Hitler!' says Wassail.

"Them words were like words of fate. Mr. Catwalloper started talking about the law forbidding the bans for consulting terms. But we never know what far-reaching defects our simplest acts may have. Mr. Catwalloper began to be proud of being told he was like Hitler. I heard him talking to Mr. Slompack about it, as if he was boasting; he said, too, that people had taken him for Napoleon. And there he was posing, with his hat on sideways, his hand in his waistcoat as if he had a pain in the abominable regions, trying to get a look at himself in that big mirror in the lounge over the stairs.

"From what Mr. Slompack said he didn't think much of that Mr. Herr Hitler. Mr. Catwalloper became quite oppressive saying that he was a man of deflexible determination. All the highfalutin things he said I can't remember, but there was quite a hot argument.

" 'You'd better mind your p's and q's with Catwalloper, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack. 'He's a Fashion. He'll be sending you to one of those consecration camps.'

"He wasn't dissatisfied any more with bossing his wife; he wanted to boss everybody and everything. It seemed to start when Doodems, Mrs. Fidgett's little pom., rushed out to snap at his heels. Mr. Catwalloper desecrated a look on the dog and said 'Go!' with an imperial gesture. Doodems pulled up short, as if he had got the shock of his life; then he turned tail and didn't even bark until he was safe in the flat.

" 'Will-power, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Catwalloper, pleased as Punch and Judy., After that he started ordering about all the cats and dogs, and the children that played on the pavement; and soon he was telling everybody in the place what they ought to do.

"But the strangest of all was when Miss Tulip says one morning: 'Mrs. Parsley, what's the idea of Mr. Catwalloper getting himself up like Charlie Chaplin?'

"Which I had noticed that moustache he had grown; it did make me think Mr. Catwalloper reminded me of someone I had seen in the sweet by-and-bye, as the song says.

"BUT seemed as if, before anyone could say 'Jack Robinson,' if anybody wanted to say anything so silly, the whole place was full of Fashions, wearing green shirts and holding their hands in the air and saying that 'Hell!' when they met one another.

"There was a lot used to come from outside and meet in Mr. Catwalloper's flat. Sometimes they had some sort of drill in there, and you could hear the Major giving orders.

"When there was them meetings in the flat, Mrs. Catwalloper used to come out and sit in the lounge over the stairs. She only smiled when the women asked her questions, saying she wasn't allowed to speak; although she did say proudly that her husband was a dominoing personality and a born leader, and soon there'd be a new Reg Jimmy. When the new Reg Jimmy came, every man would have to get married, especially if he had money. The women, even if they didn't like Fashions, and thought the color of green they had for shirts wasn't a nice one, thought that a good idea. All those women wanted to see Mr. Slompack married.

"They had me scared, all them Fashions being about the place, especially when Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail spoke about what they had done in Europe, sending people who offended them to consecration camps, and even killing them if they desisted or tried to escape.

"Mr. Slompack didn't like them; one day, very angry, he said if another of those nincompoops gave him a Nasty salute he'd turn him round and kick him down the stairs. But, scared as I was, I made up my mind that that new Reg Jimmy they talked about, when he came, would only enter my flats over my dead corpse.

"The strange thing was I had been going to tell that Mr. Catwalloper to go, because of the way he went about consulting the tenants as if he was the land-lady, not me, telling them what to do. But procrastriation is the thief that hides his light under a bushel. I couldn't very well tell Mr. Catwalloper to go as I had meant to that day, when his dominoing proved so useful with the Tangletrots, who were Number 20.

"This day they had been going on terrible for hours, taking no notice of me when I gave them notice through the door if they didn't stop and making a noise as if they were throwing my furniture at one another. I was so extracted that at last I opened their door with my key. Even then I couldn't get them to stop; and I don't know what I would have done if Mr. Catwalloper hadn't come in through the open door.

" 'This disturbance must cease! At once!' He says in that dominoing way of his. Which it seemed to me he was like one of them fools who rush in where angels fearful tread.

" 'And who the hell—'

"Mr. Tangletrot only got as far as the word I wouldn't demean myself to deploy— only he said it when he stopped, staring like a catfish out of crates.

" 'Mr. Catwalloper! ' he cried, 'I'm sorry, sir. But you see my wife goes on as if it's fun for me to be out of a job!'

" 'Huh!' says Mrs. Tangletrot like one of those Figure-O's ; 'you're out of a job, but you can go to the races like a selfish hound and lose—'

" 'Silence!' orders Mr. Catwalloper. And blunders will never cease, but there was silence! Mrs. Tangletrot suddenly saw how her husband looked, and became spelling bound, as they call it, herself.

"You could see how pleased Mr. Catwalloper was with himself, reckoning it was all his dominoing personality. As it turned out, Mr. Tangletrot had applied for a position at Pokey and Sons, and he recognised Mr. Catwalloper was the staff superattender, which it means he disengaged all the hands.

"Of course, I couldn't tell Mr. Catwalloper to go after he had done that; and I was pleased that Mr. Tangletrot had got a job which seemed to settle their rows, so that I didn't have to tell them to go either. But that was before there were all them green shirts about, and Mr. Tangletrot had become Mr. Catwalloper's left-tenant, as they called him, and my place seemed to belong more to them Fashions than it did to me.

" 'FASHIONS!' said Mr. Wassail. 'You should heave them all out. We want none of them Dictators here; it's bad enough for a man to be married.'

"Which I felt inclined to tell Mr. Wassail that it was all very well for him to talk, but if he hadn't called Mr. Catwalloper a Hitler he might never have thought of filling the place with so many Fashions that they frightened me.

" 'I wouldn't live for a moment under the same roof as any Fashion, only I'm not going to give way to the vermin. You ought to bundle the whole lot out. As for that Catwalloper, he ought to be shot,' said Mr. Wassail.

"Mr. Slompack didn't agree with him. 'In my opinion,' he said, 'they're only making silly asses of themselves. I feel inclined to kick some of them in the pants myself; but you can't expect Mrs. Parsley to empty several of her flats because of that. I find the worst annoyance is their fistical jerks; but they may strengthen their abominable muscles.

" 'They're plotting,' says Mr. Wassail.

" 'Plotting what?'

" 'Why, they want to establish a Dictator's ship,' says Mr. Wassail.

'"I won't allow them to build anything like that in these flats,' I says.

"The way some of the tenants felt, like Mr. Wassail, it looked as if there would be uncivil war in the flats, and them Fashions certainly had me intimated, the way they looked and what they said would happen when that new Reg Jimmy who was coming arrived; and with all them coming backwards and forwards it looked as if there was an army of them all calling Mr. Catwalloper the chief.

"The day they were all standing in a line outside my door when I opened it scared me almost to debt, which is a thing I hate.

"That rose out of them fistical jerks which Mr. Slompack spoke about. Mr. Catwalloper said that the Fashions had to do reg'lar fistical cultures, because every true Fashion had to be fistical fit. Them in he flats who had become green shirts used to shake the building doing their exercises every morning; the worst of them was that Mr. Tumpat, who looked like an elephant which had got fat, and when he did his he sounded like a herd of elephants. When the tenant in the next flat said that Mr. Tumpat's exercises shook him out of bed in the morning I told Mr. Tumpat he would have to go.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Catwalloper, 'we are here to demand that the notice you have given to Mr. Tumpat should be withdrawn.'

"Seeing them standing there, all together, gave me plantations of the heart; and all I could say was that Mr. Tumpat could stay if he promised to do his exercises more quietly. Then they all shot their arms up into the air and said 'Hell!' Which it was like their impudence ; but I was too upset to tell them I wouldn't have that there swearing in my establishment.

"WHAT with them dominoing the place like that, and me fearing that there might be bloodshed and not knowing what to do if they brought that Reg Jimmy along, you might think I felt glad when we didn t see so much of them green shirts, and Mr. Tangletrot and Mr. Catwalloper were never seen together any more. But Mr. Wassail said they had gone on the underground and that they had some big plot hatching.

" 'They're going to bring off a coo,' he says. 'I'm more afraid of what they are doing now we don't see them than when they were a defence to the eye. I'm goin' to see the police about it.'

Even Mr. Slompack seemed depressed that there was something strange about the new envelopement, especially as Mr. Catwalloper had taken to going in and out at all hours of the day looking very mysterious; and I had heard Mrs. Catwalloper arguing with him, which she didn't do usually, and crying. 'I hope,' says Mr. Slompack, 'that goat Catwalloper doesn't start anything, for the sake of his wife. They won't stand any Fashion jokes in this country.'

"Mr. Wassail must have told the police, for they came and saw Mr. Catwalloper, which Mr. Wassail said it was easy to fool the police on really important matters; but they went away without saying anything. And there we were all on the horns of a tenterhook, as the saying is, which was worse with me because Mr. Catwalloper didn't pay his rent.

"Hitler or no Hitler he wasn't going to owe rent in my flats.

" 'I've got to meet a lot of expenses for the Caws,' he says when I spoke to him about it. 'But you shall be paid. Now no more about it.'

"I was nearly telling him off ; but I thought about them consecration camps, and I was so nervy about what them Fashions might be doing that I let it pass.

"Every day I felt plantations in my heart. We were all waiting for something to happen; which what they say about expectoration deferred making the heart sick is very true. We wondered what carbolical schemes them Fashions were concubating, and whether the bloody revelation Mr. Wassail spoke about would come right on my doormat. And then something did happen.

"That Mrs. Bragglethwaite arrived.

"SHE was having an argument with Mr. Slompack when I first saw her.

" 'But, my good woman,' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Don't you dare call me your good woman,' she says.

" 'All right; you're not a good woman,' says Mr. Slompack, cool as a concubine; which made her look like them daggers drawn at him. 'What I'm trying to tell you is that I'm not a friend of Mr. Catwalloper, but his flat is Number 10— just along the corridor there.'

" 'That's Hitler's mother-in-law, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack to me. 'There must be some trouble in the window that brings her. Aperiently she doesn't like our friend Catwalloper.' Comparisons, as everybody knows, are odorous; but I must say that Mrs. Bragglethwaite was a different sort of woman to Mrs. Catwalloper; and that depression she was so fond of using of knocking the stuffing out of people was hardly ladylike, to my way of thinking. A reg'lar rough diadem she was.

"But she certainly knew how to deal with that Mr. Catwalloper. He had hardly come home that evening before there was a disturbance; and there she was dragging Mr. Catwalloper along by the ear, with Mrs. Catwalloper following pleading with her to remember that he was a dominoing character and couldn't help being that.

"When she got to the top of the stairs, Mrs. Bragglethwaite just gave a swing, and down the stairs went Mr. Hitler Catwalloper. It wasn't only once she did it. Every time he picked himself up and followed them back to the flat she came back again, holding him by the ear, and threw him down them stairs. Quite a lot of the tenants came along to have a look at it.

" 'How dare you, ma'am! ' Mr. Catwalloper gasps at last, clinging to the bannisters half-way down. 'How dare you come to my flat and behave like this?'

" 'That'll do for you, little Hitler!' she says. 'It's not *your* flat. You didn't pay the rent, and *I* paid it to keep a roof over my daughter's head.'

"Which was true, her having asked me soon after she came how much rent they owed and paid me. Which was when I heard her talk about knocking stuffing out of people.

" 'And you'll stay out, little Hitler,' she says, 'until you come to my terms, or I'll throw you downstairs by your ear every time. Look at that worm!' she says to the tenants who were looking on. 'He's lost his job, trying to be a Hitler. His firm sacked him when they found he was using his position as staff superattender to force men to wear green shirts and hold up their hands like kids asking to be excused. It was his own left-tenant, directly he felt the job he had given him was sure, put him away to the firm. I've got a country store; for my daughter's sake I've offered him a job there. But he's got to drop this Hitler nonsense— and shave off that silly mo.'

" 'You could have knocked me down with the last straw which shows the way the wind is blowing; that being all his Fashions amounted to— the men under him in his firm who wanted to please him as staff superabundance, and just one or two people in these flats.

"Mr. Catwalloper didn't wait to hear all that; but from what Scotty told me next day he was thrown downstairs by the ear again late that night. But he wouldn't give way. He must have slept in the kennel which Mr. Slompack put in the yard for Toby when he was here. I'm not saying Scotty saw him there when he was hosing the yard in the morning. But it's the only time I'd known him to hose that kennel.

"I saw Mr. Catwalloper going up the stairs, all dripping wet. That water must have taken the last of that dominoing personality from him, for he seemed mild as a lamb when he went away that afternoon with Mrs. Bragglethwaite and his wife. And that little moustache was shaved off, too.

It was as if them Fashions that had frightened everybody had been an idol's dream, except that sometimes, when the Major got very drunk, I heard him drilling menagerie Fashions in his room and saying that 'Hell!' to himself.

"What I say is," concluded Mrs. Parsley, "that them people in Europe would save a lot of trouble if, by the unscrewable ways of improvidence, they could find a mother-in-law for this Mr. Herr Hitler. Them's the ones to stop these Hitlers."

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32: The Lady Who Was French

Bulletin,14 April 1927
Weekly Times (Vic.), 6 April 1940 as "The French Mrs Higgs".

"I'M sure that landlady is French," said Nora. Even if there had not been a blush in her voice, the remark would have informed me that the flatulent sentimentalist who bore the most un-French name of Higgs, wedded to an accent that hinted of O'Brien, had been trying to discuss bridal secrets; for in the surroundings from which I had rescued Nora, to refer to a novel or play as "French" carries a suggestion of extra-naughtiness.

"Rescued" is the right term, for we of Bohemia regard Suburbia with scorn as a mental dungeon in which the voluntary internees, even in days of sophistication and breadth, still (amongst other things) regard all things French as morally unrighteous, even if the French now are Allies.

I felt a touch of unease. Our love— mine and Nora's— was a delicate romance that could not suffer the proximity of coarser things; I feared the reaction upon my shy Nora of any pornographic remarks that Mrs Higgs might make. A momentary intuition of the danger had occurred to me when I engaged the room.

When we left our luggage— there was not much of it— on the seaside wharf whilst we found a habitation, Nora had accompanied me; but directly I set out to inquire about the "large double-front room" I saw proclaimed by the skew-whiff card in a window, she let me go in alone. After delay, and a shambling of slippered feet on the other side, the door opened and the amiable but rather bleary face of a man with a close-clipped beard looked round the edge of the door.

"Married couple?" he asked, when I made my inquiry.

"Yes."

"Young married couple?" he suggested, rather than asked.

"Yes."

He flip-flopped to the end of the passage, and I heard him, greatly exceeding his commission, tell somebody that a newly-married couple wanted the balcony flat. That brought out Mrs Higgs.

"It's a lovely room; looks right out on the bay. I've had eleven newly-married couples in it, and they all loved it. Come and I'll show yer."

She was a floppy sort of woman, and she flopped over with semi-sentimental conversation as she led the way.

"I love 'aving bridal couples in the 'ouse; seems to brighten the place up so," she said. "It's a very respectable house; I never take in any but respectable married people. And single men. Just now there's only three single men— leastways one is married, but he's not living with his wife— an' the Cap'n —

him you saw below. He's been staying with me six years now. And this is the flat."

Having thrown open the door, she stood back to let me admire it. "Flat" she called it, after the modern way. It was a nice room.

"A lovely view," she said, throwing open the French windows. "Afternoon sun. Being newly married, you won't want a morning sun coming in and disturbing you," she added, fatly.

In spite of an uneasy feeling that I wouldn't like remarks like that made to Nora, I engaged the "flat," and I went away to gather Nora and the luggage.

We had a sort of official reception when we arrived, with Mrs Higgs saying tenderly to Nora, "My dear, I hope you will be very, very happy while you're here: you'll find the bed very comfortable", and looking as if she could easily shed tears for that strange reason that women find for shedding them at weddings, whilst the Cap'n lingered in the offing as if he felt he was part of the celebrations. Altogether I was glad when we had a closed door between them and us.

Nora had been frightened and shy all the morning, afraid of the adventure she was facing, and the greeting weighed upon her shyness; but when I put my arms round her and told her that this was our home— our first home— and showed her the view, she brightened up.

"Yes, I think we'll be dreadfully happy here, you and I," she smiled; and then the shadow came back a little.

"I wish everything was all right and we could have Auntie, Uncle and the girls down to see us."

"What does it matter?" I demanded, fiercely, and a' little impatiently. "You and I have a world of our own and we don't need anybody else— or care about them. They'll all come round in time. We have each other, anyway."

She put her little hands up to my face tenderly, with her lips turned up to me; and I flopped down onto an easy chair, dragging her to my knees. An apologetic knock at the door came shortly.

"If you want to get anything in, the Cap'n will be glad to get it for you," said Mrs Higgs, on the other side.

"We'll be having our meals out," I said.

"But that might not be convenient always— for breakfast and so on," said Mrs Higgs.

Over such matters Nora was, as yet, all at sea. I told Mrs Higgs the few things we would require, gave her the money, and thanked her.

"I'll put them in your safe in the kitchen. I'll show you where it is when you want it," said Mrs Higgs. "I won't disturb you again."

Damn the woman's fatty sentimentality! I determined to steer Nora clear of Mrs Higgs as much as possible, and to a large extent did. But when Nora and I went out some time later I noticed how a group of feminine faces formed in the half-open window of the house next door.

"Mrs Higgs said they were only married this morning," was the comment I heard.

So Mrs Higgs had told the world. Probably there were faces, less noticeable, in other houses, taking the excitement that comes to women in the inspection of newly-married couples. But Nora had noticed nothing, and I hurriedly led her over to the treed reserve. Even the streak of fear in Nora's happiness was completely forgotten.

breakfast came to our door, all nicely prepared, next morning— a kindly act, seeing that it was not in Mrs Higgs's contract to do such things. Her knock disturbed me, and I leaped out of bed to open the door and take the tray.

"I thought maybe you'd like something," Mrs Higgs said, "but I left it till half-past ten before I would disturb you."

She gave me a rough impression of enjoying our honeymoon as much as we did. I hurriedly looked round, glad to see that Nora was only drowsily waking, thanked Mrs Higgs, and closed the door.

All that day we spent happily, finding the secluded spots and feeling that the beautiful views had been specially created as a background for our romance. When, to go with some cold chicken we brought home— "home" had a rich, full sound to both of us— Nora suggested a cup of tea, I went with her to make it.

Mrs Higgs and the Cap'n were in the kitchen, drinking cocoa together; and we learnt the ways of the house. The Cap'n appeared to be an amiable creature who was ready to do all sorts of odd jobs, although he apparently paid well for his accommodation; and he had a sort of dog-like adoration for the over-fat but pleasant-looking Mrs Higgs.

At her command, he lit the gas and put on the kettle for Nora. Then he started to talk to me about the sea, and I was unable to hear what Mrs Higgs was saying. But it was after that that Nora expressed her opinion about Mrs Higgs's French origin. I changed the subject; I did not want the delicate fabric of our romance to be sullied by the clumsy ideas of any people it did not concern.

The next morning no breakfast arrived at our door, for which I felt relief; I preferred to go down and get what we wanted, lire Cap'n was there, putting a kettle on the stove, and looking a singular mixture of happiness and furtiveness. He said he had to get some things, and went out; and then, just as

I was putting our breakfast on a tray, Mrs Higgs appeared in a wrap, with her fat, sentimental smile more in evidence than ever.

"I'm sorry I didn't get breakfast for you and that sweet little girl-wife of yours," she said.

"We didn't expect it; it was good of you to do it yesterday," I replied.

"The fact is—" Mrs Higgs gave a coy little laugh. "You know, the Cap'n has been after me for years, but I didn't think of ever havin' another husband; but you young people coming here, I suppose, worked us both up. He came to my door that first night you was here, but I wouldn't let him in; but last night I had to open the door to him, poor fell'r. He's very fond of me."

I fled from further revelations, my soul stoned with a feeling that I must keep them from Nora. I had instilled in her heart the great idea that love— real love— was everything; that it was worth even the sacrifice of friends. The coarse conduct of these people from whom time had drained the capacity for high passion, was a travesty upon our ethereal flights; but I dreaded lest Nora should feel some smudge on our own bright dreams by becoming acquainted with such offensive realities as these. So I hurried her out.

That afternoon Nora grew tired, and, hoping to avoid Mrs Higgs and the Cap'n, I took her home to rest. They seemed to be lying in wait for us, however, and in a confused sort of way we found ourselves led in Mrs Higgs's sitting room— a sort of holy place we had not previously seen open. There were signs of banqueting on the table.

"You must have a glass of wine to drink our health!" said our landlady. "It's really to you we owe being married now! Yes; me an' the Cap'n have just got married."

"Married!" Nora cried. "Oh, I'm so glad! I congratulate both of you!"

It seemed to me that Nora's face had suddenly grown pale. The late Mrs Higgs thrust out a podgy hand on which gleamed two gold bands and another ring that glinted with brilliants.

"I'm still wearing the one Higgs gave me; but this is the Cap'n 's. And as there was no engagement, he gave me this to make up for the engagement ring."

Suddenly I felt mean, ashamed. I had given Nora nothing except an invitation to share a struggling poverty, a doubtful future, and the passion I had declared to be everything. Knowing how she loved me, I had dominated her, although I could not drive the frightened feeling from her,

"Of course," said the Cap'n. lifting his glass, "we old fogeys can't expect to he quite like you young people with your love, but we can find comfort in one another."

"We can't expect babies," said his bride, "but we ran be happy."

I felt Nora's hand, which had groped for mine, grip tight, convulsively. Taking her arm, I told them we had only returned for a moment; we had to go out to an appointment.

"Where are we going?" asked Nora, when we were outside; there was a strain of tears in her voice.

"Let's go and get married," I said.

I felt the sudden spring of real, unshadowed joy in her as she turned and embraced me there in the street. Jettisoning all my blatant conventional views regarding matrimony seemed well worth while in that moment.

33: The Marriage Epidemic

The Bulletin, 16 March 1938

"EVEN if he did feel like suicide," said Mrs. Parsley, pausing in her dusting as if she had I suddenly remembered something, "I'm sure Mr. Wassail would not have married if it had not been for that honeymoon couple.

"You know there's always something about a honeymoon couple. It made me feel all of a quiver myself. They still had rice in their hair and confections hanging on their clothes.

" 'You're a honeymoon couple,' I says.

"They looked at one another an' laughed, and then looked at me and laughed, squeezing one another's hand which they had clasped between them.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, how did you guess?' she cried.

"If I'd known as much as I know now I wouldn't have had them near the place. I believe in marriage, but I believe in marriage in moderation.

"They became Number 24, which isn't as nice as I would have liked for such nice people, as I told them.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Poppet, 'all we want is love in a cottage.'

"Which, if they liked to call a flat two floors up a cottage, was very well; they seemed to think that it was all the better to go up two flights, instead of one, with their arms round one another's waists. They was so affectionate you never saw them but they was holding hands. I suppose it was because they was so young and so happy, always singing and laughing, that made people notice them.

" 'I hear you've gone in for keeping lovebirds, Mrs. Parsley,' says the butcher when I called in for the meat. I didn't understand till he added: 'They were in here. I don't know that being married is so bad.'

"He gave a look at the girl at the cash register which made her turn all red.

"That was the way of it. People used to go to the doors of their shops or look out behind the curtains of their windows to see them as they passed. Even Miss Perry, although she said it was disgusting for people to do their love-making in public, used to ask if they had gone up to their flat, as if the idea gave her a thrill.

" 'You can't suggest they're not married,' I says, because that is what Miss Perry used to expect about all married couples if they seemed fond of one another.

" 'Of course I don't. Didn't I see the confections on them when they came?' And then she sighed. 'I sometimes wonder whether I did right in refusing my opportunities to get married.'

"Mr. Slompack looked in on his way up the stairs while we were talking.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' he said, 'if I see much more of those lovebirds you'll have me getting married myself.' Then he saw the way Miss Perry was looking at him, and he scurried away as if he was scared.

"Miss Perry came out in more finery after that, and had her hair done in a new way; and she always seemed to be about the stairs when Mr. Slompack went out in the morning or when he came in at night. The poor man used to come in by the back stairs to avoid her. Then she took up Mr. Wassail, who was still heartbroken over finding out all about that Mrs. De Beaufrils.

" 'There is something in life for all of us,' I overheard her telling him one day.

" 'Thank you for giving me that assurance, Miss Perry,' said Mr. Wassail in that deep voice he had adoptioned ever since he had become heartbroken.

"THERE wasn't a person in the place that didn't seem to be defected in some way by the presence of them lovebirds, as most of them called them. I was a bit afraid that Mr. and Mrs. Coggins, who had been Number 16 for ages, would object, them being very strait-laced people.

" 'Well, certainly, Mrs. Parsley, it is not quite the right thing," says Mrs. Coggins, 'for people to go about embracing each other in public; but they are so young and charming it seems natural.'

"Even the little old-age pensioner who lived in Number 12a came home on pension day with a boy friend, who was a gentleman of 74, droring the old-age pension, too; and she began to hint in a few days that she might be getting married soon.

" 'Do you know, Mrs. Parsley,' says Miss Perry, coming in excited one afternoon, 'that Dumbbell, the butcher down below, is going to marry that girl cashier of his? After eight years, mind you! It seems that these Poppets going in and out, looking so much in love, has made up their minds for them.'

"That wasn't really the start, because Mr. Carroll had told me only that morning that he was going at once, He was going back to his wife, and that was almost the same as getting married. Then Miss Tiper had given notice that she would give up her flat the next week.

" 'I'm going to be married, Mrs. Parsley,' she says. 'Mr. Peters. If people can be as happy as that couple upstairs— why, so can we.'

"I like people to be happy, and marriage is very respectable; but I didn't like the idea of losing tenants like that. Fortunately I had let Mr. Carroll's flat, which nearly faced Number 24, almost immediately.

" 'Dear Mrs. Parsley,' says Miss Perry, looking all girlish, 'do you think I should marry Mr. Wassail if he asks me?'

" 'If he asks you!' I exclaims.

" 'I feel sure, from what he has been saying, that he is going to,' she giggles. 'He's elderly, of course; and I'm only a pore, lonely girl, with no one to advise me.'

"Pore, lonely girl! Mutton made up to look like lamb if ever there was.

" 'He's coming up the stairs now,' she whispers, all thrilled.

"So he was. And behind him was a big woman with red hair. I didn't want him to tell me that she was a barmaid, which I found out later I was right.

" 'This is the lady we have to thank for our happiness,' he says, seeing Miss Perry. 'But for her encouragement I would never have had the courage to propose.'

"Miss Perry was just staring at the woman as if she'd never seen red hair before in her life.

" 'My wife— Miss. Perry, Mrs. Parsley,' he says. 'We got married this morning. We will go on living in my flat, Mrs. Parsley. You'll excuse us, won't you? I want to show my lovebird her nest.'

"Silly he looked, and he looked sillier when he tried to go up the stairs with his arm round her waist. He seemed to think they ought to behave like those young lovebirds; but they weren't built the same way.

" 'Don't be a silly old fool, Bert,' she says primly.

'Everybody looking at us!'

"And she pushed away his arm and went ahead.

"Miss Perry just stared after them. Then she rushed to her flat and slammed the door. She seemed to be slamming the door every opportunity. And once during the night she had a screaming fit and threw things about the flat. Regular historical she was; which shows the mistake of trying to put a young head on old shoulders, which the Bible says is impossible.

"The door-slamming stopped next day; and that evening she went out to the pickshers with Mr. Snazzle, the young man who had come to the flat Mr. Carroll had left.

"A roomantic young man he seemed. Them Poppets had got him, too; he said he felt inclined to write a story about them, and asked all about them, as if he couldn't hear too much. I never saw a man who seemed so roomantic.

"I BEGAN to feel that them lovebirds, much as I depreciated their billing and cooing, as the Bible calls it, had done enough damage when I got the idea that the Wassails would be leaving me. Mr. Wassail was one of my real old tenants, and always paid regularly.

"In spite of being a barmaid that Mrs. Wassail was a real nice woman; only she didn't like Mr. Wassail going on with her as if he was young Mr. Poppet.

She only called him an old fool and told him to be his age when he tried it. I think it was a disappointment to Mr. Wassail.

" 'I might have known!' I heard him roar at her. 'Marry a barmaid and nothing will do her but you must buy a hotel and put her in charge! '

" 'I don't want to be idle. I only want you to make yourself comfortable for life, Bert,' she says.

" 'I was comfortable enough till I got married,' he says bitterly.

"Mr. Wassail was wearing a worried look like a man whose hopes were blighted in the bud, as the poet says. But I was thinking that really I would have to ask them Poppets to leave before this marriage epidemic got any worse.

"The nastiest shock of all I got when the Cogginses asked me into their flat. There was a regular spread on the table, and they asked me to join them in some cake and wine.

" 'We're going to let you into a secret, dear Mrs. Parsley,' says Mrs. Coggins. 'Nobody must know but yourself. Tom and I got married this morning.'

" 'Married!' I almost shouts. 'But you are married! '

" 'No,' says Mrs. Coggins; and there he was, standing with a sheepish grin on his face, saying nothing. 'We hadn't thought it necessary before. You see, Mr. Coggins was married before. His wife was in Melbourne and he didn't know whether she was dead or not. But with those dear young people the Poppets in the flats, we felt ashamed.'

" 'I thought we might as well take a risk,' says Mr. Coggins, speaking at last.

" 'And we'll be leaving, Mrs. Parsley, sorry as we are to go,' says Mrs. Coggins. 'We're thinking of buying a home in the suburbs and settling down.'

"If ever there was a nine days' wonder that was one! The Cogginses! I'd always thought them the most straight-laced people in the house. But you never know till the numbers go up, as Shakspeare says.

"Then it seemed as if, after making all the upset, quite innocent like, that the Poppetts wanted to leave. Young Mr. Poppet paid up a week's rent, quite handsome, and they went at once.

"And then that Mr. Snazzle left, too. Someone had locked him in his flat, and he was angry about it, although I told him he ought to watch his key better. I suspected Miss Perry, but I didn't like to tell her that that was no way to treat a man she was determined to marry, not knowing for sure.

"She had another fit of slamming doors when she found he had gone. But then things began to settle down again, and the empty flats filled up ; and I was glad that them lovebirds had left, although the place did seem a bit empty without them.

"Mr. Wassail took to his old habit of drinking, and his wife didn't take it as well as you might think she would, having been a barmaid herself. Always quarrelling they seemed. One evening, months after the lovebirds had gone, they came in arguing like one o'clock, him with a paper in his hand. And they come to my flat.

" 'They weren't married at all!' yells Mr. Wassail as if he thought he was Gable's horn, which is enough to wake the dead. 'I've been married under false pretences.'

" 'I'm sure I'd never expect you of it, Mr. Wassail,' I says, took aback. 'You was always so respectable.'

"It wasn't until I looked at the paper he had banged on the table that I understood what had upset him. It was full of photos of the big Dunbar divorce; and there was the innercent bride, that I thought was Mrs. Poppet, photographed as the despondent, Mrs. Dunbar, whose real husband, by his picture, was a big fat man.

"And the picture of Mr. Snazzle was there, too, as 'the private detective who gave evidence this afternoon.' It must have been them Poppets who locked him in his flat before they left. There was a letter, too, Mrs. Poppet had writ to a friend in which she said, as if it was a joke, how they had covered themselves with rice and confections to look like a honeymoon couple.

"There was enough evidence without calling on anyone in these flats, it seems.

"After that I'll never believe in honeymoon couples again, not if they have rice on them and wheat and barley, too, and old boots tied on to their clothes. Them doing a thing like that!"

Mrs. Parsley resumed her dusting with an angry energy suggesting that she was mentally sweeping bogus honeymoon couples from the shelves.

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34: The Horse Dealers

Bulletin, 14 Nov 1934

SNIGGINS stamped into the bar with a heavy displeasure towards the whole world and, muttering his discontent as he greeted the landlord, made a gargle of the first mouthful of his beer. Having in this fashion settled the dust of the morning's travel, he emptied the jug at a draught and pushed it over for replenishment.

"That flamin' 'orse!" he snorted as Ryan looked inquiringly at him. " 'Ow fur is it to my place? Ten miles! It's taken me two and an 'arf hours to do it with that big-limbed, lanky, misbegotten—"

" 'E doesn't look a bad 'orse," said Ryan, looking out to where the steed leaned, as if half asleep, against the buggy shaft. "Well bred, ain't 'e?"

"Bred? Bred? You've blanky well 'it it! You'd think the stiff-necked 'ad been trained to a baker's cart. Wants to stop and deliver a loaf every coupler yards or so, an' 'as to be whacked out of the idea that 'e's in a delivery-cart. Me arms are sore using the whip. Me mouth is dry with dust and cursing."

" 'Ave one with me," said Ryan opportunely. He threw a question over his shoulder as "Thinking of selling 'im?"

"Sell 'im? If I knew anyone I wanted to do an injury, I'd give him away."

"There's the butcher," suggested Ryan. " 'E could do with a nextra 'orse."

"What! Bailey! That low-down—"

Ryan was oblivious of Sniggins's quarrel.

"Better'n giving it away," said he.

"Well, Bailey can 'ave 'im for a fiver."

"It looks like a good 'un," said the publican reflectively, eyeing the steed again.

"If Bailey likes to 'ave 'im, 'e can git 'im for a tenner," amended Sniggins.

With a sudden gush of hospitality, Ryan filled the mugs again.

"Listen," he said confidentially. "I owe that cow, Bailey, one. Treats me rotten over the meat 'e supplies, an' takes me down in his charges. If I complain 'e says the charges are right, and I can take it or leave it; and a pub 'as to 'ave meat. What about me puttin' it to 'im?"

" 'E can 'ave it for fifteen quid," said Sniggins.

HERE Ryan nudged his arm; and, with a scowl and a curt nod to the newcomer, Sniggins moved his mug of beer away and took his seat on the form which ran along the wall as the meaty man with the purple face approached the counter. Bailey's look in his direction was equally unfriendly.

Ryan accepted Bailey's invitation to "have one," and thrust his face forward, whispering. Sniggins, assuming an air of preoccupation, heard:

"If you want a good bargain... he's getting another 'orse, and wants to sell this 'un."

"That thing," sneered Bailey, with deliberate insult, casting a supercilious look towards the front of the pub. Sniggins checked a rising impulse to demand what he meant by disparaging his horse, and remained superbly indifferent to the undertoned conversation at the bar.

At last he moved to have his mug refilled.

"Why not 'ave one with us?" asked Bailey in a conciliatory tone, and proceeded to talk in an easy, friendly fashion about generalities until at last he said:

"Ryan tells me you're thinking of selling the moke. If that's so, I don't mind taking 'im off your 'ands."

"Thirty quid's my price for that 'orse," said Sniggins.

Bailey shrugged.

"Reckon 'e's Peter, do you?" he demanded. "Well, I don't want an 'orse; but if you wanted to make a sale I'd give a quid or so more'n the right price, for friendship's sake. I wouldn't mind six quid."

"Oh, 'ere, give us another drink!" cried Sniggens derisively. "Bailey's trying to buy some meat!"

"I ain't got no zoo contract; and even the lions 'd object if they was fed on that."

" 'E's a well-bred 'orse," said Sniggins fiercely. " 'E's by Lightning, and a sort of cousin to Lightning nearly won a Cowflat Welter Once."

"Oh, well, if you don't want to sell 'im! " said Bailey indifferently; but a moment later he walked to the door and called old Jack Pullem, who was inspecting the quadruped they had been discussing.

"We're just going to 'ave one, Jack," he said. "What'd you think would be a good price for that 'orse out there, Jack?"

" 'E's a good-looking 'orse," began Jack. Then he noticed that the money for the drinks was in Bailey's hand and there was a fierce prompting in his eye. "Erbout nine or ten quid would be a good price," he said as he reached for his mug. He glanced again at Bailey's eye. "I wouldn't like to give more than seven quid meself."

Sniggins snorted and drank his beer quickly; then he signalled to Austin, who had entered hopefully at the other end of the bar. At the same time he planked the money down for more drinks.

"I was just saying, Bill, that I'd take thirty quid for that 'orse of mine. Fair price, eh, Bill?"

"Cripes, I wish I 'ad thirty quid! I'd close with you like a shot!" said Bill enthusiastically. He had no doubt about who was shouting.

SOME business called me out— I had been writing in the parlor at the back of the bar. When I got back the little group had grown to a crowd, all arguing about horses, with only an occasional definite relation to the one in the front of the pub.

Bailey raised the point again.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, in the manner of one bestowing the gift of everlasting life; "I'll give you nine-ten for the 'orse."

"It's a fair offer," murmured Martin.

"A darn good offer I call it," said Old Jack.

"You oughter close with that, Arty," urged a man with a red nose.

"Fifteen quid's the lowest I'll take for it," said Sniggins firmly.

"Dirt-cheap!" remarked Young.

"Giving it away!" said Tweedale.

"If you take it to old Paul, he'll give you more than that," put in Austin, "an' Gawd knows he don't give no money away."

"What about another one?" inquired the commercial traveller who had somehow got into the argument. "I don't profess to know much about horses, but did you ever hear the story of the girl—"

WHEN the bar was more or less officially closed for the night, the argument became still more confused.

Sniggins and Bailey shook hands many times and wondered why they had not been better friends in the past, and the commercial traveller tried to get a hearing for limericks in between little side-whirls of discussion upon everything from religion to crops. There were a few combative interludes, and then Bailey's voice rose, very blurrily, to proclaim that he and Sniggins were the best cobbers in the world, and, because of that, he was prepared to pay eleven pounds for the horse.

"Norrer penny lesh than fairteensh quid," stammered Sniggins.

Some merciful person had stabled the horse, and I heard Ryan tell his wife that Sniggins was putting up for the night.

The babel blurred into a murmur; and then Bailey's voice, very thick in its tone, declaimed:

"Look 'ere, Arty, bloodsh shickery warrer, and, we being frien'sh, I ain' goin' ter lerrer quid sthand between ush. Twelfsh quid forra 'orshe— there! A nact o' frien'ship. Because I know you shink I took you down over that— hic — paddoesh."

"Youshh a blanky liar!"

Sniggins's voice rose passionately, There was a sudden tumult, the sound of much struggling and the bang of falling chairs ; then the more sober voice of Ryan interfering.

Sniggins's voice rose in pained passion as he declared that he was not a mug and nobody had taken him down.

Then the meeting, most of it, fell out of the hotel, and Sniggins fell towards his bedroom, explaining plaintively to Ryan, who helped to -prevent the falling being too drastic, that he was not going to be insulted by being told he had been taken down. It would take a better man than Bailey to do it, anyway.

SNIGGINS was gloomily drinking his beer next morning, trying to forget his headache, when Bailey came in open-handedly. He evidently wanted the horse badly.

"No good nursin' ill-feelin' over what happened last night," he said generously, "We were all a bit shot. How about taking that nine-ten for the animal?"

Austin came in by one door and Martin by another, and moved towards the bar. Sniggins refused to unbend.

"Twenty quid's my price," he said.

Young entered, just as Bailey, in a conciliatory fashion, called for drinks; Old Jack and Tweedale, also, were just in time. The knot of the night before was soon assembled, prepared to continue the argument and the free drinks.

But when the evening began to close a Sabbath silence had fallen on the hotel.

"Where's the mob?" I asked. "Have they all gone down to it again, or is the horse sold?"

"Bailey paid eleven pounds for it!" replied Ryan,

"Who do you think got the best of the bargain?" I asked.

The publican grinned,

"I did," he said. "They spent twenty-two quid deciding it."

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35: The Orton Murder

Bulletin, 17 June 1936

THE ease of his escape gave Eric Sorley a queer feeling of terror. It suggested another trap which would send him back to his prison.

Through the dark night he looked back across the silver sheet of the river at the dark huddle of the prison-camp buildings on the other side. One light twinkled; that was in front of the guard-house. The whole place was silent, undisturbed. His absence had not yet been detected; the way he had piled the blankets would satisfy the warder if he looked in to see whether a man who had been a model prisoner was still in his place. Acting the model prisoner had been part of his plan of escape.

It was good to be free, so good that the fear of losing his freedom before its object was achieved added to the terror within him. There was a lot to do before he could feel himself safe. Imperative to place miles between himself and the prison-camp, get clothes in exchange for the prison garments, and put more miles between himself and the place of exchange, for the clothes would have to be stolen, and their loss would be reported. All that would have to be done before morning.

He set off at a steady jog-trot. It helped to dry his trousers, uncomfortably wet. He had stood knee-deep in the water to push the boat into the stream, so that when it was discovered, miles down the river, it might give a wrong clue.

As he hurried he thought. He had sacrificed the easy, healthful conditions of the prison-camp. If recaptured, it would be a pent-up weariness within stone walls for him. But if he made Mary know the full truth it would be worth while.

HE must give her a faith upon which to base her loyalty. Heyland was the thief; the plausible, hypocritical Heyland. Sorley had long suspected that there had been systematic embezzlement; his own fault had been in regarding it as no business of his if the trusted Heyland betrayed the confidence of the firm. Sorley had quieted his misgivings by bragging to his conscience that he was no informer; and then, with the discovery of the defalcations, he had found the responsibility saddled upon his own shoulders with devilish ingenuity. It had seemed unbelievable that he could be found guilty. When his case was desperate, even his own counsel had advised that any attempt to accuse the trusted, crafty Heyland would probably do him more harm than good. The jury would regard it as a cowardly attempt to blame another man for his fault. Besides, as a side issue, young Ted, Mary's brother, might be involved more than the man who so cunningly hid himself behind others.

Perhaps his counsel had not believed him.

HE came to another road, glanced up and down before starting his dash across. He did not hear the car that came speeding around the bend. His first realisation of danger was the blinding flash of the headlights; then, with a scream of brakes, the car struck him. But the brakes had acted; the blow merely knocked him aside, winded him, and left him unable to obey his impulse of flight, standing beside the car, whilst the driver leaned out and inquired whether he was hurt.

"Hullo!" the driver exclaimed. "Why, you're You don't want to be wandering about in those clothes, old chap! They'll get you damned soon if you do. You want to get a change. When did you get away?"

"I escaped a couple of hours ago," Sorley returned, relieved.

The man in the car was not by any means pleasant-looking, but evidently handing over an escaped convict was far from him.

"Of course, I'll have to get some clothes— when I can."

"I think I can help you. About two hundred yards back round the bend there's a house. An old man lives there by himself. Once he goes to sleep, he sleeps like a log. I went in just now and called, but he didn't wake. He's asleep in the room on the left as you go through the living-room. In the room further on he has several suits hanging behind the door.

"You could take one without it being missed— for days possibly. And, look, here's a couple of quid that may be useful."

Sorley was too staggered by this unexspected friendliness to say anything. With a "Good luck!" the motorist sped on.

WHEN Sorley cautiously made his way into the cottage he still had the feeling that all that was happening was unbelievable. Yet he had the two crisp notes in his pocket; and here was the door. A minute later he was feeling his way through the dark of the house, steadying and guiding himself with hands that touched the wall, fell on the table, on the back of a chair. They seemed dusty. The room with the clothes was there, too, as the man in the car had described it.

Sorley was not finicky. Directly he had secured the clothes he stole out of the cottage as cautiously as he had entered it. He did not wait, but made the change.The suit was a surprisingly good fit. He carried his convict clothes with him for some time until he came to a creek which opened out into a waterhole; there, in deep water, he sank them with heavy stones.

Still, it was not until he had travelled another mile that sufficient confidence came to him to take boldly to the road. Even so, he avoided contact

with the lorries that began to appear with the approach of dawn. He might have secured a lift quite easily, but he was taking no risk.

He was staggering with fatigue when he came to a little township where the hotel was just opening. A train which ran into the little station and left again as he neared the hotel gave him confidence. It could be an explanation for his arrival. It would be best to sleep during the day and travel again at night.

Some misgivings came to him, and he hesitated. Then he walked into the hotel.

"I want a room for the day," he told the girl from whom he ordered a drink in the bar. "You'd better take for it out of that."

FEELING a good deal better, he set off again in the afternoon, walking. He might have taken the train, but decided that, on a quiet, country platform, a strange passenger was too likely to be closely observed and remembered. He walked on to Parramatta and boarded a train there. So far everything had gone smoothly.

A man entered the compartment with a newspaper crumpled in his hand, and fell into a seat beside him.

"Queer thing, this murder of that old man at Orton," he remarked. He thumped the paper with the back of his fingers.

"Orton? Where's that?" asked Sorley.

"Little place between Parramatta and Penrith," said the stranger. "This old chap went to the bank yesterday and drew out a big lump of money. He lived alone on his farm. This morning the cottage was found open and the man dead on his bed. He was strangled and the money was gone."

At first Sorley listened with indifference. Then chill horror began to steal through him.

As casually as he could, Sorley asked for the paper. The print danced before his eyes. In the dazzle, one headline seemed to dance over all the rest: "Fingerprints Found."

Fingerprints! He remembered how his hands had groped, encountering the dust in that cottage. Undoubtedly his fingerprints would be everywhere. The horror of it dawned fully on him. He had been right in his intuition that Fate, making his escape easy, had only baited a trap for him. Murder!

And again he would have to answer for the guilt of another!

What a tale for sneering disbelief would be the only one he could tell—about meeting a man in a motor-car, he would be unable to describe, who had directed him to a cottage where he could get some clothes.

He tried to remember details about the car. The whole incident seemed a blur of big lights and a shadowy big man talking to him.

Sorley got out of the train. Later he took a tram.

It was hopeless to think now of escape if he was taken. His escape had placed him in the position of having to hide for ever. With luck, he might be able to smuggle out of the country. But, first of all, he must see Mary.

WHEN he rang up the flats where his wife was living she came herself to the telephone. The tone of her voice when she heard him speak made his heart leap. It told him that, whatever she might think, she still cared for him.

He knew she would take all the precautions he had urged before coming to their trysting-place; and he waited in a shadowed corner of an out-of-the-way cafe with patience.

“Eric, you did not do it! I will not believe that you did it!” she cried passionately as she greeted him.

“S-sh!” he warned her. “I did not do either that or the embezzlement.”

He told her then all that he had wanted to tell her, adding the story of his escape. She pressed his hand in sympathy.

She assured him. “I could not understand. Ted ought to be able to expose Heyland. I will make him speak—”

“What is the use?” he questioned despairingly. “It can do me no good—now.”

“But it’s because people regard you as a criminal that this— other— looks against you.”

“It will make no difference. An innocent man, desperate to escape, might as reasonably have committed this murder.”

Sorley was despondent; but they made plans for his escape from Sydney, for her to follow him.

As they left the cafe together two men stopped them.

“Eric Harper Sorley, we want you! Sorry, Mrs. Sorley, but—”

So Mary had been followed...

Fingerprints! They mocked Sorley’s dreams, tortured his thoughts as he lay in prison or sat in the court hearing witnesses state the plain facts that, pieced together, made such a damning case against him. The evidence of the fingerprints held all the scattered points of evidence together.

Sorley himself realised how ridiculous the story of a meeting with a man in a car must seem against this compact circumstantial evidence. His motive for murder was so evident; a desperate escapee seeking clothes and money might be capable of anything.

It was only another mockery that Heyland, having overdone it at last, had been arrested and committed for trial; that this would exculpate Sorley completely from the old charge.

His lawyer and the barrister were making heroic efforts with a hopeless case. He woke for a moment from his listlessness as young Forsyth cross-examined a police witness.

"The fingerprints found were not all those of the accused?"

"There were some others," admitted the witness.

"Some others? Were those others investigated? Were the police merely satisfied with having secured the fingerprints of the man they suspected?"

"All the fingerprints were investigated. No facsimiles were found of the others in the police records."

"I put it to you that, of the fingerprints taken, not one traced to the accused was in the room where the deceased was found dead?"

Sorley caught his breath; it seemed an illuminating point in his favor. The quick hope died.

"One fingerprint was on the door."

"The *outside* of the door?"

"Yes; the outside. It might have been left in the course of the cautious opening of the door."

"Some of the other fingerprints were found in the room. Not the accused's?"

"That is so. No trace of similar prints have been found in the police records."

No hope. The glimmer that had sprung into Sorley's mind died out. All this was only prolonging the agony. He looked over again to Mary to refresh his courage with the picture of pathetic loyalty she presented to his mind. A blow seemed to smite his brain. A face stared out of the crowd behind her. He did not believe his eyes. He turned away, and then looked again. He whispered to his lawyer.

"Don't look round. The man who was in that motor-car is in the court."

"What's that?" The lawyer was instantly excited.

"Almost in a line with my wife's head from here, among the crowd. Look! He has got his hand to his face— that huge hand! I could tell it anywhere."

Neville Carter moved away swiftly.

He paused to say a word to Forsyth, and then went on towards the back of the court. A hope blazed fiercely in Sorley's heart.

As if some knowledge of their discussion had reached him, the big man rose and moved quickly towards the door. He had gone by the time Carter reached the place where he had been.

Sorley, watching, felt his hope die.

Carter came back shortly, carrying a crumpled newspaper, and approached the dock.

“Did you get him?” asked Sorley eagerly. But he knew already that Carter had failed.

“He got away, I think you’re right about him. It’s psychologically right for him to watch the trial. Sort of thing’s happened before. And that fellow was alarmed.”

“If he got away, it’s pretty hopeless,” said Sorley,

“Don’t give up hope. If I could get the police interested I might. I’m going to try.”

Carter left the court after another word to the barrister. Sorley listened hopelessly as Forsyth began his address. Forsyth was long-winded; the case was adjourned with the speech unconcluded.

Sorley left the court dazed. It was all so hopeless.

IT was a surprise that Neville Carter should be at the gaol to see him in the morning.

“Within an hour or so you will be free,” he said.

Sorley gasped a question.

“Fingerprints! ” Carter said. “I induced the police to investigate that newspaper for fingerprints. They were not very willing, but they found some prints smudged into the type that coincided with those found inside the room where Jenkins was murdered. That interested them! They got busy; and last night they arrested your gentleman. Webster’s his name. He’s married to a niece of the dead man and benefits by his death. He was financially in the soup. Just fancy! A man is forced by some impulse to watch another man being tried for the crime he committed. Then, leaving in alarm, he leaves a newspaper behind him. And I—”

Carter was excited by his own cleverness; but he stopped as the overwrought Sorley swayed.

“Here, bear up, old man!” he cried, catching him. “Your wife is here!”

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36: Too Much Smith

Bulletin, 22 Aug 1934

MUDVILLE is a suburb just large enough to have a number of Smiths, including several William Smiths. The one who matters had what is vaguely known as "a business in town." Some time in the remote past he had thrown a desk and chair into a cheap office, screwed to the door a plate with "W. Smith, Agent," on it, and prepared to do business. The effluxion of time had added some sundries and piles of untidy, dusty papers to the office ; but he remained anything but affluent, and tradespeople in Mudville had not recovered from their early suspicions.

But one Monday morning things changed. Smith was preparing to put off the payment of the milkman's account, when the distributor of cow-juice dashed towards the gate.

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Mr. Smith; it'll do at the end of the month," he said smilingly.

The butcher arrived a few minutes later. He usually collected cash on delivery; but this morning he remarked that a monthly account might be more convenient.

Glowing with satisfaction at these evidences of local appreciation, Smith was setting out for the city when Robb-Jones, who called a Ford "my car," hailed him and insisted upon driving him into town, and then pressed him to have a morning whisky. No great pressing was needed.

"But I'll have to return it some other time," said Smith, who had left with his wife the money the butcher might have taken. "Fact is, until I get to the bank—"

Robb-Jones dived for his pocket-book.

"Will you allow me?" he said. "We're neighbors; it'll be an hour before the banks open."

Smith, amazed, took a dignified attitude.

"No— really!" he said. "I make it a point not to borrow money."

"But I insist" said Robb-Jones. "I'll be offended if you refuse."

"Well, if you put it that way," said Smith.

As a matter of fact Robb-Jones had only discovered that morning that he was a neighbor. Hitherto he had been aloof.

All this was merely prelude to a day of delightful surprises. People who usually passed Smith with curt nods invited him to drink with them; what had been strictly cash transactions were put on a credit basis; and in the new friendliness of the world business was rushed upon him.

When he reached home he found his wife almost hysterical.

"It's been a wonderful day," she said. "All the tradespeople are obliging, and trying to force credit on me. Then Mrs. Barr and Mrs. Catts called upon me— oh, there's been a heap of callers! People who never seemed to know we existed before. I had to send round for cakes and things— you must give people something to eat; and the woman in the cakeshop told Mildred 'You'd better let me book it.' "

"Amazing!" gasped Smith. "Something of the same sort has been happening to me."

"Do you know what it is?" demanded Mrs. Smith. "They think we've won the State lottery. The name was put in the papers as William Smith, of Mudville; and they think it's us!"

William stared. He had laid it down that they had no money to waste in lotteries; and so they had been quite uninterested in the results. He saw daylight now. There was that conversation with Robb-Jones, for instance.

"I've got to congratulate you on your good luck," Robb-Jones had said.

Smith, trying hard to remember some luck, thought of his election to the committee of a branch of the Oddfellows.

"I went very near it once before," he replied cheerfully. "It's nice to know of the good you can do; and it's useful, in a way, in the business."

"I think I'd celebrate it by taking a holiday," Robb-Jones had said. At the time Smith had thought that was carrying matters a bit too far. Now he realised that Robb-Jones— and others— were thinking of something not in his own thoughts.

"Well, let them go on thinking it," said William to his wife energetically. "We've had a pretty rough spin all told. Let them find out for themselves! We're not deceiving them; they're deceiving themselves."

"Oh, I'm not going to undeceive them," said Mrs. Smith.

But such a deception could not last long. The real William Smith, who had been away, and whose frequent absences prevented his being well known, returned in haste and went on a "bender" at the local hotels. The news spread quickly. It always does in Mudville.

On his way home Smith encountered the grocer outside his shop. The grocer's recently pleasant greeting was absent.

"What about your account, Mr. Smith?" he asked.

"My account? It's not the first of the month."

"All the same, I'd like a settlement. My terms are cash or, at most, weekly payments."

Smith entered the shop and snapped, open a chequebook. "You suggested yourself the monthly account: I prefer weekly payments myself."

Smith used his chequebook convincingly where he encountered a similar attitude. Robb-Jones became almost friendly again when his debt was paid. For Smith had benefited substantially from the few days of misunderstanding. In the city it was still suspected that he had a financial backing of £5000.

Mudville, however, regarded Smith as a man who had deceived it. He might be able to pay his way, but he was a shifty customer. It had been thought that he had won the lottery and he had not; could evidence be more conclusive? Mudville was prepared to think him capable of anything. The many things that happen to William Smiths, as reported in the papers, were all attributed to him. If his improving business kept him away from home for a day or so, William Smith was either in gaol or had absconded with funds or eloped with another woman or had become intoxicated and been run over by a tram.

Smith found himself regarded darkly as a man out on bail for shop-breaking or as having been fined for drunk and disorderly or for being at a two-up school. Naturally, these suspicions pained him. His wife also was pained, especially when she received condolences about her husband's death following the announcement in the press that William Smith, aged 35, had been run over by a car whilst under the influence of liquor.

The crisis came when a paragraph appeared in the afternoon paper subsequent to Smith's departure on a business trip:

A sensation was caused on the Newcastle steamer last night by the arrest of a passenger who, with a lady, had booked for the northern port. The charge is one of embezzlement, heavy defalcations being alleged... .The police believe that the intention was to proceed from Newcastle to Brisbane, and thence north.... A man said to be the husband of the woman accompanied the police...

Underneath, separated by the simple sub-heading "Man Charged," appeared:

William Smith, 42, agent, was this morning brought before the Central Court on warrant

It was Mudville's biggest sensation. Mrs. Smith was verging on hysteria when Smith, having returned unsuspectingly by train from Newcastle, came back.

"You! You're out on bail! And you dare come here after you—"

"What's the matter?" demanded the astonished William,

"O-o-oh, you ber-rute! screamed Mrs. Smith.

Her landord dlved under the table just in time to avoid a well-flung vase.

The situation took a lot of explaining, especially as Smith didn't know, at once, what to explain. He had to dodge around furniture to escape flying missiles. But at last the air was cleared.

Smith became Jewel-Smith shortly after that. The first name was a pet name his father had given his mother; dad said that it was the only jewel he had to give her.

Before long they moved from Mudville— and they did not acquaint Mudville with their new address.

MUDVILLE never suspected that the William Smith who won first prize in the lottery a couple of months later was the Smith it had neglected, and flattered, and rejected. A new-found belief in his star, inspired by his Mudville experiences, had turned out luckily for William.

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37: Clocks

Bulletin, 2 Sep 1936

MATHERS felt he must not be a moment too soon; yet he feared to be late. The sound of a clock striking in a house as he passed caused him to quicken his step, his heart jolted by the sound. As he reached the main street, however, he chuckled with the feeling of a man who has allowed fear to make a fool of him. The clock over the entrance to the tailor's shop showed twenty minutes to the hour. There was plenty of time.

What was it her note had said?

If you do not come by 11 o'clock I will know that, really, you do not care. At one minute past l shall be a dead woman. Going on like this is no good; and if you do not care there is nothing in life for me.

Eily was tempestuous enough to do anything; but she had to have her lesson. Really, he cared for her a great deal; ever since he had received her note he had been gripped by a haunting fear.

To rush pell-mell in answer to her call would only pamper her histrionics; she might even laugh at him. If ever there was to be peace between them it was necessary to chastise her spirit by delay until the last minute. Let her realise that her unrestraint was a dangerous thing.

Still, there was anxiety in his heart. Involuntarily he quickened his step, and as a tram clanged towards the stopping-place he turned into the road. With his foot on the footboard he turned back resolutely.

"No," he told himself, "I'll walk. There's ample time. If I take the tram I'll be too early."

The next moment, as the clock in the tower of the suburban Town Hall came into view, his heart seemed to be turned to ice. The hands showed five minutes to eleven.

The panic that fell upon him as he looked wildly around for a taxi passed quickly. Again he laughed, jerkily, feeling the pain in his heart. The clock across the road at the post office showed 10.35; as it was but two minutes since he had seen the one at the tailor's, one or the other must be wrong. As for the Town Hall clock, that was obviously out of order again. It was always out of order. The last time it had been adjusted one of the hands had been faultily fixed, so that it was difficult to say which hour was indicated. When he crossed the road to secure a glimpse of another of its faces he saw that it had actually stopped at five minutes to ten.

As, reassured, he walked down the hill he smiled tenderly. He would be in time; but poor, wild-hearted Eily would be counting every minute now. There

was a strange mingling of regret and satisfaction about the punishment his delay was inflicting.

SHE had made a tempest of their lives, which, seeing how much they really meant to each other, should have been full of happiness.

The idea that her wayward impulses should destroy their serenity simply because she loved him so much— he could have no doubt of that had maddened him. She deserved punishment that would beat the folly out of her.

The rising warmth that was in the day reminded him of her. It was just such a day that they had met at Bondi.

The girl who boarded the tram hurriedly as he was coming home smiled; then he remembered her. They had met in the surf, almost colliding as they came in on the crest. There was no stand-offishness about her; she talked brightly all the way in to town.

"It's a coincidence, our meeting again," he remarked for the fourth time.

"Isn't it?" she laughed, her eyes sparkling at him.

"I hope you don't mind the suggestion ; how about having some tea with me?" he said.

"I'll have to ring up home and explain first."

There was not only tea a picture-show afterwards. It seemed to fall out quite naturally; he saw her home. The block of flats by which she stopped hinted that her people were well-to-do. He had gathered as much from her conversation.

"There's going to be an awful row when I go in," she said with a nervous laugh.

"Do you want me to help you face it?" he laughed.

"That would only make it worse. Reg will be there; that's his car."

"Reg?"

"He's the man I'm engaged to marry. My people want me to marry him. He's got tons of money. He drove me down to Bondi to-day."

"The stout chap who came over while we were talking in the surf?" Mathers felt some amusement, remembering the man's looks of annoyance.

"Yes. We had a quarrel afterwards."

"That's why you came back in the tram?"

"No. I saw you catch it and I wanted to speak to you again!"

She laughed at him and fled into the flats. After that he doubted whether she would be at the appointed meeting-place next day; but she came with an eager step, a face that was all brightness.

IT was the interference that came to their romance that day that precipitated matters. They had been wandering together along a quiet road that led towards her home when the car he had seen on the previous night drew up sharply beside the pavement and Reg, furious of face, stood before them.

"What's the meaning of all this?" he demanded. "Do you know that this lady is engaged to marry me?"

"I'm not. I broke the engagement!" she said quickly. She had already told Mathers about the row. "It's a matter, I suppose, in which the lady can please herself," he suggested. Mathers heard himself described as a penniless vagabond. He had laughed. He was not wealthy, of course, but he was neither penniless nor a vagabond. Reg had finally left them, discomfited.

"Did you mean that that we were

going to be married?" he heard Eily breathing into his ear as if she found rapture in the thought. He had said it, he remembered, in defiance of Reg; her acceptance of it was a trifle dismaying.

"Eily, I have nothing to offer compared with what you're used to."

"What does it matter?" she had returned. "All I want is you. I knew that the moment I saw you."

IT was all very amazing. Mathers told himself afterwards that he ought to have known what to expect; the price of such a passion as Eily's was turbulence. She had sacrificed in a moment everything for him; it was not to be wondered at if their own peace was sometimes sacrificed on the same altar.

She would cling to him almost exultingly at the end of one of their quarrels.

"It is almost worth while to have a quarrel," she had told him. "It is so beautiful to make it up again."

That irritated him. Sometimes he felt that she was impossible to live with; yet there was still the flattering obsession of her love for him.

It was the chilling thought that all this warm impulse, this passionate waywardness, might be frozen in death that caused Mathers to quicken his step again involuntarily. The clock in the produce-store showed 10.40. He must have walked very quickly.

He sauntered for a time. The only hope of peace in their lives was that she should suffer her lesson to the last moment.

His heart jumped again. The clock in the little refreshment-shop showed less than five minutes to eleven!

He was breaking into a run, and the perspiration, feeling cold with his fear, was streaming from his face as he reached Taylor-square. Two clocks there

reassured him. The one above the hotel gave him nine minutes to spare; the one at the tram-stop a minute longer.

"Confound those clocks!" Mathers wondered how many tragedies their warring lies had wrought; but that wonder did not move him from his resolve to exact the ultimate minute of Eily's punishment. He would catch her exactly at the moment of despair. This time he hoped the reconciliation would be final.

The tram clock should be right, yet in spite of its reassurance he felt like one who was walking on the brink of a precipice. He was gambling with minutes, feeling that the gamble was necessary to win future happiness; but the strain was heavy.

His faith in the tram clock could not fend off a fresh shock when a clock in a jeweller's window indicated three minutes to the hour; his hurry died out at the sight of another which gave him nine minutes.

He had plenty of time, even though this clock, too, was wrong. He had reached the hotel which stood on the corner within a hundred yards of the

cheap residential where Eily lived. He pushed one of the doors ajar to look at the clock on the bar wall.

A full four minutes yet. Mathers hesitated; then, gripping himself, he walked inside and ordered a drink.

"DING, dong, ding, dong, dong, ding" The big G.P.O. clock from the heart of the city struck the hour. The sound of the peal fell on his heart like a sledge-hammer.

''Dong, ding. Ding, dong, dong, ding."

Mathers was in the street, his feet pounding on the pavement, as the peal, as if mockingly, sounded the last quarter:

"Dong. Dong. Dong."

The hour was booming out remorselessly. Mathers's feet seemed weighted with lead, hard to lift from the ground. Damn the lying clock in the hotel! Damn his pig-headed delay to the last moment! Poor little broken-hearted Eily

"Dong!" With a quivering note the clock finished its count of the hour It was like a note of doom. He was at the house now, at last. But the sound of the chimes had died into silence. The door was open and he rushed in. An astonished residential-keeper barred his way.

"Mrs. Mathers," he demanded, his voice coming in painful gasps. "Which flat?"

"Number five, first floor. But what—"

He pushed her aside and tore up the stairs. He beat on a door, calling "Eily! Eily darling!" and rattled and pushed at the door-handle,

A frenzy gripped him; ignoring the landlady, who had followed him up the stairs, he heaved his weight against the door. And again.

With a crash of rending wood the door yielded and he was in the flat.

"Eily!" he called.

He found her on the bed. There was froth on her lips and a distorted look of agony on her pretty face, despair in her staring eyes. Beside her on the coverlet was the little bottle with the red label that meant poison,

He grasped her wrist to feel for her pulse, and he he saw the wristlet watch. It had been his gift to her— a cheap thing because he had little money to spare; but Mathers never thought of the possibilityof tragedy in its cheapness.

The hands showed 11.20.

As he stood there, stunned, he seemed to be surrounded by clocks, their faces all showing different times, laughing at him on all sides, mocking him!

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38: The Child

Bulletin, 13 Dec 1924

THE shadow that fell upon Olsted seemed to blot out all his happiness. So much of his life had become centred in little Lorette that his new knowledge had snapped every strand of its interests.

It was because of the child that he had become a tame husband— a change from the fickle Lothario which seemed even to himself almost unbelievable. Marriage he had scarcely taken seriously. He had been quite prepared, he told himself, to take it seriously; but in those days he had expected his wife to be a warm-hearted companion. He had been fool enough to fancy she loved him; but the discovery that she was a coldly selfish woman, who was moved by no stronger impulse to matrimony than the desire of making a good match, altered all that. The warmth of the passing pasaion had scarcely outlived the honeymoon; and Olsted found himself with a curious loneliness, a sense of something missed, and a cynical bitterness which made him regard his matrimonial obligations as nothing that need bar him from the pursuit of those amorous encounters which had before given him a racy reputation— that sort of reputation which is invariably exaggerated but has a basis in fact.

Olsted was aware that his wife had some sort of a feeling for him, but it seemed that she merely desired to be dominant in his life because that would be a tribute to her personality. He found her nothing but cold and exacting; and it was a sense of respect due to the woman who was his wife, rather than from any belief that the knowledge of them would cause her heart-break, that made him secret in his amours. Yet in spite of the fact that the flirtations of which she was aware were only harmless affairs, he felt her resentment beneath the disregard she professed for them. Judging it merely as the annoyance of one who objects to trespass upon her empery, Olsted at times experienced waves of dark fury. There were moments when he almost decided to make her aware of his real infidelities, in order to rouse her to some warmer feeling: he refrained merely because he judged her incapable of any warmer feeling.

The birth of the child had altered his whole outlook. His firm had some important commissions in England, and he had been selected to undertake them. It was in quite an offhand way that he had suggested that she could make the trip with him if she chose.

"Of course we shall be tied to just England," he said. "I'll have neither the time nor the money to spare for making it much of a pleasure jaunt. Still it will be a good trip if you care about it."

"I don't know that it would be much pleasure to me," she said with a laugh. "I'd be lonely awav from all my friends. Perhaps you had better go by yourself."

Her indifference angered him so that he could not shiow his disappointment, or even admit it to himself, he let it stay at that; perhaps it was best from all points of view for him to go by himself.

Sometimes, before he left, she appeared to develop a warmth, a reluctance to let him go, that almost prompted him to suggest that, after all, she should travel with him. The fear that she would refuse, after she had shown a renewed indifference to vague, tentative suggestions, restrained him. When she had made his departure a sort of social function, with a number of their friends preventing that intimate farewell which he had half hoped their parting would be, he decided with an inward laugh— a laugh that was a screen for his own disappointment— that he could have a much better time travelling by himself than with an exacting wife at his elbow.

He had the good time, protracting his absence because of it. Her letters were too cold and formal to make her a magnet to draw him quickly back; he developed the habit of feeling that he was a single man as long as he was away from home, and enjoyed the sensation of bachelor freedom.

Then her letter came with the news. It was in keeping with her character that she should have held it back so long; yet he found himself not blaming her for coldness, but extolling her in his mind for modest shyness. He found himself also, after an hour of confused, ecstatic thought, in which his mind always wandered back to the intelligence he had received, remembering an appointment which now he could not keep.

The woman's voice at the other end of the 'phone was nastily angry when he rang up to say so. He cut her off suddenly, feeling that even the sound of her voice was a sacrilege to the new-found holiness that had come into his life. He found himself, too, hurriedly finishing the last of his business and taking the trip back to Australia. The magnet that was wanted to draw him back had been found at last.

And now all the lapses he had known and enjoyed since he left his home became memories which he would like to forget. He had been carelessly indifferent— disgustingly indifferent, it seemed now— to all moral restraint while....

HIS LAPSES had begun early. He had got no further than Albury before at breakfast he had met a girl whose readiness to give him confidences had attracted him. The confidences were continued in the observation-car as they continued the journey towards Melbourne. There he had a little business for his firm before he caught his boat; his evenings were disengaged, and the girl,

who was going to a city strange to her, eagerly accepted his invitation to go to the theatre. She was an amazingly simple girl; but, of course, her moral sense was weak, or she would not have so easily drifted into intimate friendship with him, and so easily allowed the intimate friendship to, develop. Certainly he had felt rather mean when he told her that he was married, because she seemed then to imagine that the episode was something more than a brief incident that must come to an end. The girl was a fool, but a warm, human, passionate fool; and her attitude had been less of anger than of dull hurt that was in itself a reproach. He had been momentarily tempted to ask her to make the journey with him: her warmth, compared with his wife's coldness, appealed to him. But he let the temptation pass. Now there seemed something horrible about what had been a pleasant memory. Women had suddenly become more than the mere creatures of man's pleasure; and their new role made his former regard of them a desecration.

SO Olsted came back to the cot of the child, some weeks old when he returned, a penitent to an altar; and as to the priestess of that altar he gave his wife reverence. In her aloofness he found a beauty he had never seen before: and although it to some extent disappointed and puzzled him. he found tolerant reason for it. Home now, at any rate held something that made it all-sufficient to him.

He hardly noticed at first the way in which his wife's dominance was falling upon him; if he did notice it ; he saw no reason to resent it. The child was five years old before he woke up to a knowledge that something of the old bitterness had grown upon him. He know then again that she was as cold, selfish and exacting as ever; that she was only prompted by selfishness in all she did; that she gloried in her power to rule him. Still, there was little Lorette, and nothing else mattered. Though dissension arose between them, approaching to what were at time almost brawls, Lorette remained and stilled a tongue which hot temper spurred to the expression of angry thoughts. The child consoled him for all he felt that he missed.

Then her resentment seemed to turn towards the child. She was angry that he should eagerly give it more attention than he would bestow upon her.

It was in the hot anger of one of those disputes that the blow came that darkened all Oldsted's life. A hundred times a cruel thrust had been on his tongue; this evening he could not restrain it.

"Your absurd jealousy is directed even against your own child," he said. "And it is not the legitimate jealousy of one who feels love: it is just the anger of a selfish woman who wants supremacy. Do you want me to slacken the

intensity of my interest in Lorette—the only thing that ties me to you? If it wasn't for Lorette—our child— I would be parted from you to-morrow!"

Then was Hell in her eyes as she looked at him: a light that was almost red blazed at him ; her lips were tightly pressed together as she said, "Oh!" A torrent of fury seemed about to pour from her; but she only turned swiftly and left him. It burst a few minutes later when she returned furiously.

"*Our* child!" she cried passionately. "You said 'our child.' That is your mistake."

Strange noises sang in Olsted's head. He could see nothing for minutes but a white face and blazing eyes that were like the picture of concentrated fury. The world seemed breaking around him; the ground swaying under his feet. It was after ages of chaotic thinking that he was able to speak, and then, all. he could say was: "What are you saying? , Lorette is not—"

"That's what I said," she retorted, her eyes showing a flash of joy in his discomfiture.

He clutched a definite idea from the chaos of his mind, and the fury of an outraged husband swept him.

"Then you mean to tell me you—"

There was ferocious meaning in the commencement, but he checked the phrase.

"Yes,", she taunted, her eyes still laughing fiendishly at him. It seemed she delayed in order to endure his torture; but as a hot word formed on his tongue she interrupted him savagely:

"Don't you dare call me that! Lorette, of course, isn't my child either. I adopted her."

His knowledge of his wife's character made him believe her. Besides, her attitude and voice carried conviction. Deprived of the one definite, thought which he had been able to grasp, his brain was numbed.

"You adopted her— why?" he said dazedly.

"I thought it would hold you. I was afraid of you staying so long away. I was afraid you might do something that would force me to divorce you for my pride's sake. The child, I thought, would hold you to me."

He remembered many things that had previously had no significance: her absence from her friends for a couple of months; the change to a new neighborhood when she returned from the country private hospital where the child was supposed to have been born; the fact that he could not remember any of her relatives who had been with her at that time.

"You miserable trickster!" he cried. "You wanted to hold me— but not because of any love."

"I may have had love— possibly," she gibed. "I certainly wanted your money— more than I could get for alimony— and your position; and there is no one else I want to marry. I wanted to hold you; but"— her voice rose in a burst of jealous passion— "I had no idea in bringing a child into the house that it would get the attention that rightfully belongs to your wife."

Then a disbelief came to him; a hope that what she said could not be true. But she had proof to show him— proof which included a birth certificate, for which he had never thought to ask, with names that were not his or hers set down as those of the parents. When he tried to take them from her she stuffed them away in her bosom, He looked at her a moment as if prepared to spring upon her and seize them; but he felt dull and heavy with his emotions, and it did not seem worth while.

"Oh, you can keep them!" he said. And then his fury turned upon the child through whose agency he had been duped. "I have been cheated —made to love, as my own, a nameless brat! You are right— you held me with it; now the bond is gone and there is nothing. t j ie d oor behind him seemed to echo with a sound of finality—the sound that breaks off the absorbed interest when a book is closed, its story ended. Yet a turbulence of emotion went with him, refusing to be shaken off. He hurried to his club, drank deeply and sat down to cards in the hope that the play would make him forget. But his play was abstracted and bad; and, suddenly, as he sorted his cards without realising what he was doing, he felt a couple of little hands on his head and a childish treble which cried "Daddy!"

"What's wrong with you, Olsted asked Bayten. "You seem to have the jumps."

"Oh, let's throw the game in," he said. "I can't concentrate to-night somehow. Come on— l'll pay."

He went to bed so drugged with whisky that he immediately fell to sleep; but— it may have been in a couple of hours— he woke to a painful wakefulness, with a heart beating quickly. He could swear that a childish voice had screamed in terror and anguish— calling him, knowing that he had gone. Imagination, of course; yet the impulse was in him to rush out, through the night, back to his home to see if the child was safe, comfort it if it was distressed. He tried to fight down the feeling, to forget it, to deny its existence; but every moment there came to him pictures of the curly-licaded child, sounds of its voice: now in endearment of him, now in terror and grief. He loved the child! Even if it was not his own, he loved it!

He tried to sleep, telling himself that he would tear that love out of his heart; but terrors assailed him. What would happen to the child, innocent of all offence? Brutal usage, perhaps, by a vindictive foster-mother.

A wild thought that in ungoverned anger she might have thrust the child out to spend the night in the streets would intrude itself. The car— fortunately passing the door as he left the hotel— seemed hardly to move. Leaving it, he dashed to the door, let himself in with his key and took the stairs three at a time to Lorette's bedroom.

An immense relief flooded his heart as he switched on the electric light: Lorette was safe, sleeping peacefully. He observed, yet scarcely noticed, that there was a figure that drooped beside the little bed as if in grief. But his wife, in that attitude, was also asleep.

He went swiftly to the bed, dropped on his knees beside it, and softly drew the little curly head against his cheek. The child gave a little, contented sigh as he did so, but did not waken. And he was happy in being just so; too happy to resent the presence of the woman who was his wife and his enemy on the other side of the bed.

She seemed to sense his presence, and woke, raising her head to show a face that was heavy with tears. She gazed at him dully for a moment, and then spoke.

"It is Dot Dorain's child," she said, simply.

His heart seemed to empty itself, and stand still. His mind went swiftly to Albury, to Melbourne, to the simple girl he had met, and the hectic nights afterwards.

"But the name on the birth certificate—"

"She took another name— it was my suggestion in case there should be any search; and, now she is married, it is better. When she was in trouble she traced you to your home."

His child, then— his, after all! It was a thought the triumph of which would prevail whatever else might happen; but, though it obsessed him so that he did not hear what she was saying, it struggled with a curious wonder at iris wife's conduct, an admiration which superseded his bitter estimates of her character. And then he found her standing before him.

"I may be selfish, as you say," she said in a heavy, sob-laden voice, "but I am not cold, and I have loved you and longed for you to love me. Because I could not say so, thinking you were indifferent, you have thought I did not care. I wanted you to take me to England with you, only you asked me so indifferently that I would not admit it. But I loved you well enough to take care of your child and even— when it might have been natural for me to hate it— to forget the woman, and love it because, it is yours.

"It is a wonderful thing you have done," stammered Olsted, abashed before her, staggered by the revelation. And then he made a step towards her.

"Is it possible for us to start again, Nellie? We have misjudged each other, and nearly wrecked our lives in doing it. *Can* you?"

The answer was in the face before him, down which the tears that wash away grief were falling.

39: The Bailiffs Are In

Bulletin, 26 Dec 1932
The Australian Woman's Mirror, 27 Dec1932

TO find the telegram awaiting her at the place where she was expecting a season of release from her home cares came as a shock to Hilda. She paused a moment before tearing the cover.

Please come home. The bailiffs are in.

Hilda laughed quite mirthlessly and handed the paper to Andy, standing questioningly beside her.

Without meeting them, she had been living for years under the shadow of the bailiffs.

Then Andy had come into their lives again, brought home boisterously by Ted. They had all been friends in the days before Hilda had married, and now Andy exuded prosperity; he had the qualities that earn it. He had paid Hilda the compliment of remaining unmarried.

His continued friendship was pleasant. He was always kindly; he showed he realised the circumstances of their life without commenting upon them. Hilda felt when he made the suggestion about their being his guests at. a theatre party that it was prompted by a feeling that she needed some relaxation from the life she was leading.

"It's jolly good of you, Andy!" Ted had said enthusiastically. "It's just the thing Hilda wants; she's mad about the theatre, and we haven't been for donkey's ages. But someone has to look after the kids. I tell you what— if it would be all the same to you to take Hilda by herself I could run the children to a picture-show."

It had become a more or less regular thing by Ted's own arrangement. Hilda fell into the plan and enjoyed her outings after a first feeling of resentment. The growth of an understanding between her and Andy was slow and imperceptible.

"He tries to be such a good fellow," Hilda commented. "He can't help his irresponsibility."

"Oh, he's a good fellow!" agreed Andy. "He's not a home-bird, really. If he was free he'd be out half the night and thoroughly enjoy the life. It never appealed to me. A fireside to sit beside comfortably has always been my dream."

There was something wistful in the way Andy said that. Hilda began to see her life and Ted's from the viewpoint Andy gave her. Her marriage with Ted had been a mistake; he would be happier without her. He did not complain,

because it was his nature to laugh at trouble, but in reality she and the children were a load for a man not built for carrying burdens.

Andy, without being at any time lover-like, made plain to her what he was prepared to do. He wanted her for his wife; had wanted her before she was married, and had not given up the hope even then; and he wanted no stain upon her. In this there was the absence of a lover's quick passion, but there was something magnificent about his stolid conventionality, his devotion.

A feeling of tranquillity in the prospects of the future had come to Hilda; there was delight in the warm welcome that Agnes Curnow gave her; when, Ted in his hearty way agreeing, she had been driven by Andy down to those old friends of theirs at Cronulla. She had gone there feeling that this was the end of the old life.

Then had come the telegram, shattering everything!

"The damn fool, letting this happen," snapped Andy, looking darkly at the wire. "And then worrying you over it! What will it be for?"

"I don't know," said Hilda with a little hysterical laugh. "Ted pockets the bills and says they'll be all right; he tries to keep me from knowing about the summonses. He's always kept the bailiffs off hitherto— I even if we had to move. This might be any of a dozen things."

"If we knew the amount I could wire the money ; anything to prevent your holiday being spoiled."

Anxiety about her home and children that she thought she had put behind her was dragging at Hilda's heart.

"I think I'll have to go home," she said. "Afterwards, when matters are settled, I'll come again. Agnes won't mind when I explain."

The sound the car made as it reached the cottage brought the children running out surprised to see her. Enid came rushing into her mother's arms.

"Mummy!" she cried excitedly. "We've got a bailiff! He's such a nice bailiff He brought me some chocolates."

Hilda, worried, pressed into the house hardly replying to the children's exuberance, her arms over their shoulders; Andy followed. Ted looked up in surprise from the business of frying something over the fuel stove in the kitchen. An apron was aound his waist.

"Why, hallo!" he cried. He put down the cooking fork he was using and approached to kiss her.

With Andy looking on, Hilda felt a srange guiltiness in responding. It seemed grotesquely, unfaithfulness to a man to whom she had promised her future.

"Meet the bailiff— a darned decent chap, name of Simpson," said Ted quite cheerfully, waving a hand that passed over a table untidily set without a

cloth and covered with used dishes and other parapernalia, including an opened bottle of beer, to indicate the untidy-looking man who had risen in an embarrassed fashion from a chair in the corner. "We're just having a little snack— the kiddies have had theirs. You and Andy'll have some bacon and eggs, won't you?"

His cheerfulness was typical of Ted, as so was his talk of bacon and eggs instead the trouble that had brought her back.

"What's it for, Ted?" she demanded, in your wire you didn't say anything about the amount or who the people were.".

"Oh, that's fixed!" he said airily. "I ouldn't have sent that wire to you. It was an impulse. I sent another telegram telling you not to worry after I received the money wire from old Chalmers in response to my request for advance payment for the work I'm doing for him. I didn't expect him to send it, although explained the circumstances. It was Peachey, the storekeeper, put in the bailiff; but that enabled me to pay him off— and the other one, too."

"The other one?"

"Yes; that milkman chap— Cowdrey. A paltry twenty-two and sixpence, and even a quid for the expenses on top of that. He put in a bailiff, too. It doesn't matter, though; I paid them off."

"Then what on earth is this— gentleman— Simpson, is it?— doing here?"

Ted exploded with a laugh.

"Oh, we've had an orgy of bailiffs— and a man to cut off the gas, too; hence the stove. Simmie's another— at least he's same one who came for Peachey. He'd hardly gone than he came back again— this time for Darrell and Co. A good chap! He brought back some fruit and sweets for the kiddies."

"You see, ma'am," said Simpson, with an apparent realisation that his gifts might not be so well appreciated by the mother, "I don't like this business— it's an unpleasant job especially when it's done upon good people like y'r 'usband; but it's good work for me— two in one day— an' I thought the kids—"

"What is the amount?" demanded Hilda brusquely.

"Four fifteen and seven, including all fees up to to-night."

"Don't worry, I'll get it fixed all right," said Ted. "If old Chalmers came to light so easily there's others who will give advances."

But you'll be without the money later on," said Hilda despairingly. Despairingly, appealingly, she looked at Andy. His face was dark with discontent. No wonder! It was not fair to expect—

Andy's hand went in search of his pocket-book, and Simpson, looking reluctantly at the eggs and bacon still on the stove, which Ted remembered in time to save from a condition of harsh departed.

"See you again, mister," he said, nodding to Ted.

"Not— not to-day, anyway, Simpson," Ted laughed after him. He became serious as he turned towards his wife and Andy. "It's very good of you, Andy, and it was damned selfish of me calling you back from your holiday, Hilda. You see I was a bit off my feet. I didn't think Chalmers would send that money."

Hilda, who had looked into one of the inner rooms, gave an exclamation.

"Why, what's this, Ted? You've got everything packed up!"

"That? Oh, yes !" Ted laughed. "That's why I was glad to get you away. I knew trouble was coming, and I'd decided to reorganise things. We were going to move— I wasn't going to tell you until the thing was done. I was afraid it'd worry you."

Hilda sent a despairing look towards Andy. Ted was hopeless.

"You see, Hilda, things have been going all to pot with work; money harder to get than ever. I haven't wanted to worry you, but we've got to reorganise. There's a little place I can get down at Kogal Bay; it's small— only a camp cottage, really— but it's comfortable enough and the outlook is splendid.

"What's more to the point, it's only ten bob a week. I was hoping to move down there to-night directly it was dark enough," he added with a laugh. "But the bailiffs came sooner than I expected, and I must have lost my head, sending that wire to you. I meant to come down and tell you after I'd got the move done. My idea was that, with the rent down to nothing, I could give you a regular allowance to manage on— I ought to have tried that before—and we could struggle through some way until things became better. But you're standing'—wait until I get a comfortable chair for you."

He dashed out of the room.

If Ted had made his proposal a few months before Hilda's heart would have been full of gladness and hope.

"It's awful," said Andy, responding to the glance she gave him.. "A terrible life to give any woman. Why don't you tell him now that you're through with it?"

"Oh, no," she began wildly.

"It's the opportunity," he persisted. "Agnes Curnow wanted to know why you didn't bring the children. You could take them back with you. Make the matter plain to Ted. It's only fair to him as well as yourself. He'll be able to look after himself— that's about all he can do."

Ted came back with easy chairs, but

Andy moved towards the door.

"I noticed a garage down the street, he said. "The car's short of petrol, and I think I'll get the tank filled. You kiddies like to come for a ride?" .

They skipped out with him joyfully at the suggestion, and Hilda was left alone with her husband. Feeling-a sort of desperation at the hurt she must give

him she felt that Andy was right. Only by speaking now could she.open the door to the serene Eden whose lure had now fallen upon her.

"Ted, I think it time we should make an end to matters between us. You were never built for responsibility; you will do better on your own account. Andy says he will be able to find me a position at a good salary, and I'll take the children. There will be no more of all this trouble and you will have the burden of us lifted from your shoulders."

He stared at her incredulously.

"Burden? What burden?" he demanded. "I don't understand a word you're saying "

"When I went to stay at the Curnows' this morning I didn't intend to come back. I intended to get a position and keep myself, and I meant later to ask you to let me have the children. I want you to agree for us to have a divorce." .

"A divorce?" he gasped, unbelieving. "What ever for?"

"Simply because our life together has been a mistake —a mistake for both of us. It's brought trouble upon you, and it's been a nightmare to me. All the suspense and difficulty.... I've got past the limit of endurance."

"You mean —your love is dead?" he said blankly. "I've killed it? And all the time I've been trying to keep the worries from you—all I could. I know I manage financial matters pretty rottenly—" He stopped suddenly, and anger electrified him.

"It's Andy!" he flamed. "That's why you want a divorce! Of course; he has money! He's been making love to you! By God, I'll— Pretending to be my friend, too."

She caught his arm as, furiously, he moved to the door.

"Listen, Ted; Andy hasn't made love to me— not in the way you think."

"But if you get a divorce you'll marry him? That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," she admitted frankly. "But don't think that there has been any love-making between us. Only I know Andy wanted me before you and I were married, Ted. He still wants me. If I am free he will marry me."

"And you—you want that?"

His anger had suddenly spluttered away, leaving him queerly unemotional.

"Ted, life has been a nightmare to me; I want peace and security. I know now our marriage was a mistake; I want to mend the mistake."

He listened almost apathetically, she thought, as she went on explaining her viewpoint.

Somehow, when the thought of the re-planning of their lives had come to her, she had anticipated no difficulty with Ted. There was no selfishness in Ted's nature; he wanted people to be happy, and he could be happy in feeling that he assisted their happiness, even if it meant his own sacrifice. The idea

that her happiness lay in being away from Ted might hurt him, but he would, she had thought, raise no serious objection.

"You shouldn't have allowed Andy to pay off that bailiff," he said. "It's placing me under an obligation to him I wish it hadn't happened. If matters are going to end between us all the stuff might just as well have been sold off.

"I've meant the best you know, Hilda, but I always seem to make a mess of things; and it's what's going to make you happy that matters. But there's the children; they're my children."

"I want the children— l must have them, Ted! I'm their mother, and I can look after them. They can go to good schools regularly. And of course you are their father. You will see them regularly. I could take them away with me now. Mrs. Curnow asked me to bring them."

"I'll see them every week?"

"Whenever you like."

He got up and moved towards the sitting-room; there was only the droop in his figure to tell how life had gone out of him. Yet he seemed resigned.

"Instead of taking the furniture to Kogal Bay I'll store it. You might like it later on if you're going to take a place with the kids. I'll pick out a few things you'll want and have them sent to you. There's the car outside now. You'd better go out and tell Andy. Tell him he's won. I won't meet him."

She made a step towards" him, her heart touched by the hurt that must be in him. Truly, the bailiffs were in as far as he was concerned.

She paused. She must keep Andy from coming in; afterwards she would return and say good-bye.

"He's agreed to everything," she told Andy, who just then stepped out of the car. The children had met her, hilarious after their short drive, and gone back with her.

"The children will come back with us; if you don't mind waiting, I'll get them out some decent clothes."

The gleam of triumph in his eyes filled her with a sudden revulsion.

For a moment, as she thought of the broken Ted, she hated Andy for that look. He was so assured, so self-seeking; the sacrifice that Ted was prepared to make without a complaint for her happiness was one that Andy would be incapable of making.

Her heart melted afresh as she entered the house with the children; she suspected from his sudden movement that Ted had been sitting with his head-sunk in his hands and had risen to prevent her seeing him like that. Poor fellow! What was he feeling?

As she proceeded to find clothes for the children and put them on the way to dressing, into which they entered greatly excited at the prospect of a holiday, he moved about as if he did not desire to speak to her,

She found, when she could leave the children, that he had put apart a pile of their own boxes and belongings.

"I'll have these taken away and sent to you; you II get them to-morrow," he said without looking at her.

"Why the cot?" she.asked.

"Well you see, Hilda, you don't know what may happen. Somebody may find out where the furniture's been stored and seize it, I thought you might like to be sure of the cot. Both Teddy and Inez slept in it. I wouldn't myself like any chance of it going."

She was infinitely touched. That was like Ted. Her heart was wounded by the wound he was giving him. All very well for Andy to say that he would soon get over it.

Her arm went over his shoulder.

"Do you feel it all very much, Ted?"

Even then he did not look at her.

What I feel is—that you care more for Andy, and I didn't know! I had a great idea that we could make things better in that camp cottage; but of course Andy can make your life comfortable. As you love him— well, that's all that matters."

She could not endure it any more. He was as much a child as one of her children whom she could not desert. And she could not desert him, for she did not love Andy, had never loved Andy; she had only been allured by the prospect of escape from a life of strain by the future of security he had offered. And there was a glimmer of hope that was better.

"Ted," she whispered, "I don't think we shall go. It's you I love, really; and that idea of the camp cottage is beautiful. If you'll only let me manage"

She knew by the emotion she felt in him as he turned and seized her how much, really, he had felt, how much he had been prepared to suffer in letting her go the way he thought she desired.

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40: A Dinkum Santa Claus

Bulletin, 13 Dec 1933

DIRECTLY the old chap edged on to the seat I guessed he had decided that I was a good mark for a fill of tobacco. Both were right; but he seemed an interesting old reprobate. There was a gleam of humor in his eyes. After he had filled up and put the balance of his ample helping from my pouch in his pocket, he noticed my glance at the white whiskers sprouting all round his face. He stroked them thoughtfully.

"They ain't as long as they used ter be," he said. "Why, larst Chris'mus I was a dinkum Santa Claus!"

"A dinkum Santa Claus?" I questioned.

"It was this way. I was down at the Centeral, up on a drunk charge— what's Chris'mus for, anyway? Me whiskers was that long that every cow about the place calls me 'Father Chris'mus.' Y' see, it was quite a long time since I'd been out at the Bay, an' it was 'ard enough gittin' the dough for booze without thinkin' about shaves an' 'aircuts.

" 'Comorn, Father Chris'mus,' says the John. 'This is you! Drunk, yer Worship.' An' 'e tells 'is Nibs all about it, includin' the times I'd been there before, an' 'ow orfen I'd signed the pledge.

" 'Fined five shillings,' says 'is Nibs.

"Well, o' course I couldn't find no five bob, an' I was sayin' so when a well-dressed bloke in the court calls out 'I'll pay the fine, yer Worship.'

" 'E slings me a bob an' tells me to wait for 'im. It appears 'e was there to be fined for indecent drivin' or one of them things blokes as own cars fall in for. O' course I waited, after spendin' the bob ; 'e looked a bloke 'oo'd be good for more than a deener. An open-'anded, laughin' sort.

" 'Ere 'e is!' 'e cries when 'e comes out o' the court with some other blokes. 'What d'you think of 'im for a dinkum Santa Claus? My sister-in-law Ally's 'oldin' a children's Chris'mus Eve party to-night an' I'm going to take 'im along to be Father Chris'mus. Whadyer say to that, dad?'

" 'Sounds all right to me,' I says, 'as long as the dough's right,' says I. 'E laughs an' says 'e'd treat me fair, an' then 'e pushes me inter 'is car— a swell affair it was— and orf we goes. It appears 'e don't intend to take me 'ome, not yet. 'E wants to show me orf to 'is frien's first —'me genu-wine Father Chris'mus,' 'e calls me.

"Don't arsk me wot sort o' morning it was! The porters at the 'Otel Splendiferous, 'oo orfen sooled me away w'en I was cadgin' for coins or bumpers, wanted to chase me out till the bloke tells 'em I'm with 'im ; then they looked as if they wanted to bite me. So did a dawg that was in a place

they called the Wintergarden with a woman 'e called Ella; but she picked 'im up an' 'eld the yappin' beast. When 'e interdooced me an' asked 'er wot she thort of the dinkum Father Chris'mus 'e was takin' to 'is sister-in-law's party, she said 'Too sweet!' Me! "

Looking at him I certainly thought the expression rather misplaced.

"I tell yer I was a sensation! I didden mind, not even bein' shown orf to the barmaids, 'oo wanted to know where Reggie— they called 'im Reggie— 'ad picked me up. Y' see, 'e an' 'is frien's was a hopen-'anded lot, an' every time they 'ad a drink there was one for me.

"Reggie was a bit lively by the time we got inter 'is car again, an' 'e was very jolly an' confidential-like.

" 'It's me brother's wife's 'ouse I'm takin' you to,' 'e tells me. 'Ye've gotter be on yer best be'avior. She mightn't welcome you too well, at first; but she'll soon see the joke. A good sort.'

" 'E drives on a bit, but, jist as I'm dozin', I 'eard 'im talkin' again.

" 'Only thing I've got agin Ally,' 'e says, 'is she's a climber. Calls 'erself Alicia now; used to be Alice. It wooden matter two pins if she didden want to interfere with Gwen—that's me niece. 'Andson's a decent young feller, but Ally's down on 'im in spite of Gwen likin' 'im, 'cause she wants Gwennie to marry a bloke of a Nenglish fambly.

"It didden matter to me; I s'pose 'e wooden 'ave spoken about all that to me, only 'e was a bit shot; an' I tries to go to sleep again in spite of 'is torkin'. But I wakes up to find 'e's pulled the car up an's still yappin'.

" 'Y' know,' 'e says, 'it ain't fair to Gwen, bein' badgered about marryin' a Nenglish Johnnie jist because of 'er mother's soshal nambitions. I wish Ally wassen like that —it spoils 'er.'

"'E spoke, grieved-like, jist as if it was my fault, but I let 'im 'ave it 'is own way. I was goin' well an' didden care what 'appened. When I wakes up the car was stopped again, an' a lady, standin' in front of a big 'ouse, was starin' in at the winder at me. I stared back a bit; there seemed somethin' fermiliar about 'er, but a man carn't remember all the people 'e's cadged from.

"'What are you?' she demands.

" 'I'm Father Chris'mus,' I says.

" 'Oh, are you?' she says. 'An' what are you doin' in there?'

" 'The bloke wot owns this car brought me 'ome in it. 'E paid for me,' I says; an' then, seein' from the look of 'er that she didden understand, I adds: 'At the Centeral P'lice Court. I'm to be Santa Claus at a children's,' I says.

"I s'pose I should've broken the noos to 'er gentler; for when Reg appeared, cornin' through the 'ouse, she turns on 'im an' calls 'im a disgrace. 'Other men

'ave to get drunk to do the things you can do sober,' she says; 'an' you're drunk now.'

"But Reg 'ad a way with 'im, an' 'e took 'er into the 'ouse, laughin', an' tellin' me to foller. I stood in the 'all while they talked over matters in a room off it, wonderin' what I'd be able to 'it 'im for, for waste o' time and breach o' contrack, if the job didden come orf, an' lookin' at what the nobs call the hobjects of bigotry and virchew, ter see if there was anythin' I could put in me pocket.

"I 'ears Reg say that all I wants is a clean-up an' the proper clothes, an' a young girl—that was Gwen —'oo pratted into the argument, I 'eard 'er say 'It'll be a scream!' An' then the missus she starts to laugh, too.

"About the barf— I was inclined to kick when I 'eard about that. I ain't one of those dirty people as 'as to be always washin' theirselves an' wastin' good water. But when I got meself to face it the barf was good-oh— a lot better than the one ye've gotter take at the Bay. Arterwards, when they'd give me a feed an' put me inter bed in clean perjamas, Reg comes up with a bottle o' whisky.

" ' 'Ere's yer 'air of the dawg for ye,' 'e says. 'Now you sleep it orf, an' you'll be bright an' lively to-night.'

"I tell yer I felt like the Prince o' Wales lying there in the room of the chauffer they'd 'ad to git rid of because of the bad times— especially as 'e didden notice that I 'ad slipped the bottle o' whisky under the bed while 'e wassen lookin', an' when he came back in a stiff shirt an' black clo'es to wake me, 'e seemed a bit taken aback to see me squiffy. But 'e took it in good part, even when 'e'd spotted the whisky bottle. It meant another 'ot barf to pull me together again. But I seemed to be gettin' used to barfs.

"It was a gran' party that night— don't arsk me about it! Especially when I'd found where the licker was, an' 'ow to get at it, quite innercent-like, without being seen. The lady of the 'ouse, it appears, didden 'ave no kids of 'er own, only Gwen, 'oo was growed; but there was a lot of kids in the Dart family she'd married into, an' she liked to entertain 'em. I was a great success amongst them kids. Reckoned I was worth me money, whatever it was, an' perhaps they'd give me extra for me entertainment. Y' know 'ow, when a man gets a few in, 'e thinks 'e owns the earth.

"An' all the time I was thinkin' that this was good-oh, if I c'd make it larst. They was good-natchered people, an' a man might be a file to prat 'isself in fer an 'ome, fer a while, at least. It'd do me, if I c'd! The idea's in me think-box that if I c'd only put meself in good with the dame, Ally, it'd 'elp. Then I thinks of what Reg'd let out to me in the car that I'd 'eard dreamy-like. From what I c'd remember, then, Ally wanted Gwen to marry a young nob, an' 'ere was a

young nob follerin' 'er about, an' I kept worryin' meself as to 'ow I c'd do somethin' outer it to please the old bird.

"I sets out to make me king-'it when the pair stopped right in front of me, sudden; it seems to me that now's me charnce, now or never.

" 'Father Chris'mus's blessin' on this young couple,' I says, as if I was a Salv'army colonel or a bishop or somethin'. 'An 'an'somer couple there cou'd'n be in orl Horstralia! Kiss one another, with the blessin' of Father Chris'mus!' I says.

"The young bloke looks at Gwen with a laugh, an' she laughs too; an' 'e says, 'That seems like a horder,' an' kissed 'er before orl the crowd. She seemed to like it, an' it was a great 'it, from the way everybody laughed an' clapped.

"An' then me face fell, as the sayin' goes— fell so much that I felt as if it'd 'it the floor. I'd made a mistook ; I c'd see that from the way Ally was lookin' at me, with a heye of thunder. An' the doodish-lookin' bloke beside 'er was lookin' sourer than she was! Cripes, it made me feel crook, throwin' away a good 'ome like that. I tried to lose meself in the crowd, 'opin' I c'd find a drink, which I needed. But they was too quick for me ; I 'adn't 'ad no more'n three drinks, what people 'ad left 'ere an' there on tables an' things, before they run me down— she lookin' like a storm an' Reg laughin' 'earty, tryin' to chaff 'er to a good 'umor.

" 'You'll 'ave to get 'im away, Reg,' she says. 'It's time 'e finished.'

" 'Don't worry about me, mum,' I says, 'I'm enjoyin' it.'

" 'Comorn an' I'll git yer a drink,' says Reg. An' some'ow I found meself at the gate with 'im in a noo second-'and soot of clobber they'd give me.

'Ere's ten bob,' 'e says, 'an' a couple of bob extra to get a bed to-night; an' 'ere's a little flask of whisky. Now ye're set; git along, ole man! '

" 'Look 'ere, Mister Reg,' I says, 'a man can't be Father Chris'mus all the year round. What about a job feedin' the fowls?'

" 'We don't keep fowls. You'll 'ave to get along, old man. Go'-night,' 'e says, and shuts the gate on me.

"It seemed like an 'in't; I wassen wanted. But some'ow I didden like the idea of takin' my nice clean clobber to a doss-'ouse. So I 'ung round.

"It was a warm night, an' I was comfor'ble enough ; but they made quite a song about it when they found me asleep in a 'ammock on the lawn. It was the servants made the most fuss, an' when I argued with them Reg an' Ally an' Gwen came down to look at me, an' 'e tells me that I'd been paid, an' this was over the odds.

"I puts on the soft pedal. I arsks 'em 'ow they c'd think of turnin' Father Chris'mus out in the crool world— on Chris'mus Day, too!

" ' 'E's right,' says young Gwen ; 'we can 'ardly do that, can we?'

" 'If 'e doesn't go we'll call a p'liceman to him,' says Reg. It 'urt me, but 'e was sol'm this mornin'.

" 'Oh, no, I won't 'ave a perliceman brought to 'im,' says Ally, which surprised me more than Reg 'ad done.

" 'Why not let the poor ole man stay an' 'ave a little of our Chris'mus dinner?' says Gwen. ' 'E'll go away after that, won't you?'

"They let it go at that. Slap-up dinner it was ; an' there was some booze to it, too, when I tole 'em that lemonade gave me colic. An' then they said good-bye to me, quite nice, with a few more bob added, an' thort they was rid of me.

"But not me ; I ain't the sort o' man to let a good 'ome go to waste if there's a chance of 'anging on to it. Besides, I felt I 'ad a sorter claim on 'em.

"It was their own fault. The lights 'avin' gone out in the room, I thort they'd finished with it for the night. But the light switched on again; an' when Ally saw me asleep on the couch she let out a scream that brought all the 'ouse'old. They 'adn't gone to bed, as I thort. That's the worst of these big 'ouses ; you can't be certain.

" 'Look, you get out, an' stay out,
or I'll 'and you over to the perlice,'
says Reg. I turns to Ally, seein' there's
no 'ope in 'im.

" 'I'm a poor, 'omeless wanderer, mum,' I says, tears in me voice. 'You, with your kind 'eart, 'ave given me a taste of an 'ome, an'— '

" 'I'll ring the perlice an' 'and 'im over,' says Reg. 'E was provin' 'imself a real narsty bloke.

"'No, you won't!' she says. 'You'll get out your car, an' take 'im away— far enough for 'im not to return. An' pay 'im to keep away.'

" 'I've got me car 'ere, Mrs. Dart,' says the bloke 'oo'd kissed Gwen. 'I'll take 'im.'

"What was the good of argyin'? I walked out as if me 'eart was broke, which it wassen, seein' there was good cash a'ead; but I stopped in the doorway, 'earin' angry words between them two —Reg and 'er.

" 'If 'e comes back again, I'll call the perlice!' says Reg.

" 'You won't!' she says, fierce-like. 'Oh, you're be'avin' like a cad, Reg! You know very well why I won't 'ave the perlice to 'im! You know the trick you've played on me!'

" 'What on earth's the matter with you, Ally?' 'e arsks.

" 'Every time you tork of the perlice you put the screw in! Very well— I surrender! Gwen can marry young 'Arry, if she likes. After all, 'e's a nice

feller. 'E wouldn't do the caddish thing you've done!'

" 'I don't understand,' 'e stammers.

"You c'd see that 'e didden really; but I did. I knoo, then, why Ally's face 'ad seemed fermiliar. She was me niece. Yes, mister, me niece Alice. Used to climb on me knee. Didden see 'er agin fer years; then I saw 'er in the little bush pub where she was 'ousemaid an' beer-puller. I'd 'eard that she'd married a rich squatter, but that was the larst I'd seen of 'er.

"She thort that Reg knoo 'oo I was an' 'ad brought me up to remind 'er of what she 'ad been, to force 'er to reason over Gwen's affair. Well, I was glad of that; but I'd allus been fond of little Ally, an' she'd been kind-'earted to me when she was at the pub, slippin' me free drinks an' silver. I wassen goin' to 'ave 'er 'umbled; I was glad she'd got on."

There was some genuine feeling in the old ruffian's voice as he spoke.

"So I went away in 'Arry's car, leavin' the forchin it might've been to me be'ind. But I got three quid out of it— the quid Reg gave me, the quid she sent after me an' the one 'Arry gave me out of gratitood before 'e said good-bye. An'," he concluded with a wink, "Ally springs a few bob to go on with now an' then, when I send her me address."

It was afterwards, when, remembering an appointment, I had left in a hurry, that I found I was without my tobacco pouch. The dinkum Santa Claus must have pocketed it.

———————

41: The Curse of True Love

Bulletin, 26 Nov 1929

"THE Bible says," my landlady told me, "that the curse of true love always runs to smoodge; and," she added, "there was never a truer word spoke. It was no wonder the Egyptians let the Israelikes go when that was one of the plagues. I've kep' apartments for years and I've often had to give people notice fer the same thing.

"You see, I won't 'ave my tenants disturbed. I'm that soft-'earted. There was one rouple I 'ad 'ad to put out came back to me again. 'Well,' I says, 'you can 'ave your old room, but it will be four shillings a week extra for breakages.' As you know, jealousy is a green-eyed lobster going about seeking whom it may devour; and it 'ad bit them so bad if he was a minute late she'd think he'd been out with another girl, and he'd get serspicious about 'er it didn't matter what— they always found something to fight about. Love will find a way, as the saying is.

"But I 'ad to get rid of 'em again. They'd agreed to pay the four shillings extra, but after that they seemed trying to get their money's worth. 'I'm sorry,' I says to them; 'I know you're very fond of each other, but the other tenants won't stand it.' So they seek French beans and pastures new from which no traveller returns.

"They was a queer pair, both of them. I met them afterwards in the street and they told me they had a 'ome of their own out at Paddington. So 'appy they looked, 'anging on to one another like they always did when they weren't throwing things at one another. 'I'm afraid we were trying tenants, Mrs. Parsley,' 'e said with a nice smile. 'But Mary was not to blame. It was all my fault; I was always making 'er jealous.' 'You make me jealous!' she says. 'The foot was on the other leg!' And the nex' minute they was at it 'ammer an' tongues, an' I 'ad to give 'em good advice. ' 'Ome is the place for domestic quarrels,' I tells them. An' so it is, even if it's only a room, when people really love one another.

"Of course, there are people who don't 'ave rows. There was a couple I 'ad in number 21. They used ter come down the stairs with 'is arm round 'er waist.

" 'Don't tell me they're married!' says Miss Perry to me. 'You never see decently married people so fond of each other.' Now, I can't abide people who won't let sleeping dogs delight to bite. 'I'm sure they're married,' I said ; 'why, they showed me the receipt they 'ad, made out to Mister and Missus, from the 'otel they stayed at the night before they came 'ere. It's a respectable 'otel, an' what is good enough for the goose is good enough for the gander, I says. 'Let

him who is without sin amongst you,' as the Good Book says, 'live in glass 'ouses.'

"All the same, that was only a superfloot on my part; I 'ad a pretty good idea that Miss Perry was right, but as they was perfectly respectable but for being so affectionate, it was no business of mine.

"You could 'ave knocked me flat with a feather, as the sayin' is, when one night, gettin' out of me bed to see where the row was, I found it was at their room. Lestways, it was outside their room, being a rather fine-looking woman banging at the door and screaming through the key'ole.

" 'What woman 'ave you got in there?' she screamed. ' 'Ow dare you lock your door against your lawful, wedded wife, you reprorake? You can't pay your money into the court,' she says, 'but 'ere you are with another woman.'

" 'Now, Madam,' I says, 'you can't make a disturbance like this. This is a respectable—'

"She wouldn't even let me finish it. 'You've got my husband here with a strange woman,' she says. At least, she didn't say 'woman'; in fact, some of the language she used was outragious. And she seemed so ladylike, too.

"I told her I had no time to look at marriage certificates, an' 'is word was as good as 'ers, at any rate. She made a fearful to-do— scandalous, it was, as I told her, makin' a disturbance like that in a decent 'ouse. When Mr. Carter opens the door to 'ave a word with me, she pushes in; and, of course, I went in, too, to throw my oar on the troubled waters.

" 'No, I am not his wife!' says my Mrs. Carte —not knowing any other name, I 'ad to call 'er that. 'I did not nag 'im till he 'ad to leave me for peace.'

" 'You, Hilda, who I thought was my best friend! Oh!' she says, 'your 'usband will know about this!'

" 'I don't care,' she retortoised. 'You did not depreciate your 'usband, but I do, and I love him, and am willin' to go to the gates of 'Ell fer 'is sake.'

" 'Don't you dare mention a place like that in my 'ouse,' I said, indignant; but it was no use. Much as I like to keep my 'ouse respectable, I 'ad to call a policeman in before I could get them to stop; an' even 'e 'ad a lot of trouble to get Mrs. Carter— not my Mrs. Carter, the other one— to go away quiet. I told 'er off before she went, I promise you. 'It's no wonder with raging females like you,' I says, 'that men are infidels to their wives. A woman's crowning glory,' I says, 'is 'er 'air ; an' she shouldn't get it off,' I says."

Mrs. Parsley was obviously proud of this bit of jdnlosophy and repeated it twice for my benefit.

" 'I must say that Mr. Carter be'aved like a gentleman right through; 'e told them 'e would knock their 'eads off if they didn't stop, but 'e didn't lift 'is 'and, not though both of them smacked 'is face— the strange Mrs. Carter because 'e

wouldn't let 'er say the things she wanted to say about my Mrs. Carter, and the other one because she thought 'e was sticking up for 'is wife. 'E was between two stools, you see, and the onlooker always gets the worst of the game.

" 'After that matters became rather upsetting in the 'ouse, what with the strange Mrs. Carter coming back off and on an' avin' to be turned out, an' her bringin' along a Mr. Corless, who I understand was my Mrs. Carter's 'usband. These trirangles make one confused, an' some'ow I can never think of 'er even now except as my Mrs. Carter. Later on this man comes back again very drunk an' goes wanderin' about the 'ouse talking about shootin' people, as if my 'ouse is the 'appy 'unting-grounds where the lion lies down with the lamb. I got 'im put out; but in the mornin' Paddy, th' 'andy man, finds 'im asleep in the bathroom. 'E'd 'id 'imself there to get more evidence, he said, an' gone to sleep over it.

" 'I think it best, too,' I says, 'when Mr. Carter, most gentleman-like, comes to me an' suggests that they 'ad better go. 'I've 'ad weddin's from my 'ouse, but I don't want no divorces,' I says. Still, I couldn't help liking him, 'e was so promp' and genteel. 'The curse of true love always runs to smoodge,' I tells 'im, 'so don't be discouraged, for there may be darker days before the dawn. You love your little lady, Mr. Carter, an' you're quite right to stick to 'er through fat an' lean. If you love true she's yours in the sight of 'Eaven. After all, a marriage certificate isn't everythin', although I do say it meself, what 'as always been a respectable woman. An' that wife of yours—'

" 'She was in a temper last night,' 'e says, 'and you saw the worst side of 'er. She's a nice little woman, really. Of course, she's long ceased to love me, and she's been a milestone to me, cold and thinking of nothing but money; and this poor little girl of mine, with 'er drunken 'usband'—'

"I squeezed 'is 'and to show my sympathy, an' I 'adn't the 'eart to stop them when they went away without payin' the last week's rent.

"To my supprise, the strange Mrs. Carter comes up one day, months later, very quiet an' respectable, and looking so sad, me 'eart went out to 'er.

" 'I divorced me 'usband,' she says, as if she 'as tears in 'er throat, 'an' now 'e's free to marry this woman— 'er 'usband 'as divorced 'er, too. I thought I'd like to have a room 'ere. Have you got the room 'e used to live in vacant?'

" 'It's a double room,' I says.

" 'I don't mind payin'!' she says. She was pulling away at 'er gloves, as women will when they're feelin' things 'ard. ' 'E was a fine, dear man,' she says, 'an' I never woke up to it till the other woman took 'im from me. I'd like to 'ave the room 'e used to 'ave.'

"The next moment she was sobbin' on my shoulder: 'But I always did love 'im. though I was nasty to 'im because 'e seemed to 'ave grown cold on me.'

" 'You poor thing!' I says. 'If you still love 'im 'e is yours in the sight of 'Eaven, even if 'e 'as gone an' married another. An' 'oo knows, when we find refluge in that hark where the 'erald angels sing, what will 'appen.'

" 'I will never see 'im again!' she sobs.

" 'In the bright mexico of youth there is no such word as nil desperandia,' I tells 'er.

"An', sure enough, there wasn't. There you are, the curse of true love again, an' it's always runnin' to smoodge, as the Bible says as I was always taught to believe in.

"One night, late, bless me if Carter 'imself doesn't come in, lookin' 'aggard-eyed an' famishin'.

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' 'e says, 'I'm throwin' myself on your mercy. I want a room; but I may not be able to pay you for a couple of weeks— I'm broke. As you know me, I thought I might come to you.'

"Thinkin' of the week's rent 'e went without payin', I says to myself, 'I do know you.' But I says to 'im: 'Wait a minute an' I'll see'; an', goin' out of my room, I meets 'is wife— 'is wife that used ter be— just outside my door.

" 'Don't let 'im know I'm here,' she whispers.

"Well, I give 'im a room; an' later on she comes into the kitchen with a kimono over the dinkiest nightgown you ever see— although, if you don't mind my saying it, I don't put it past you that you've seen a few— an' she commences cookin' chops.

" 'The poor darling,' she says. 'E looks as if he 'asn't 'ad a good feed for a week. That woman! She drove 'er 'usband to drink, an' now she's making poor 'Arry's life an 'ell. So I thought I'd cook 'im something an' take it to 'im.'

" 'In your nightie!' I says.

" 'Mrs. Parsley— darling!' she whispers; an' kissed me. 'You won't mind. I'm sure. Remember, I am 'is wife in the eyes of Heaven, whatever the law 'as done.'

"Now, what could I say to that? It seemed respectable enough to me. But I followed along to the bathroom, which was alongside 'is room— just to see there wasn't any row. So I 'eard 'im cry out as she stepped into the room with the tray.

" 'Get out of this!' I 'ears 'im say.

" 'Arry !' she says.

" 'It's you that's the cause of the mess I'm in!' 'e says. 'The divorce expenses an' all. An' that damn woman!'

" 'I've loved you all the time, 'Arry! 'Arry, dear! 'Arry!' is what I 'ear, an' there's a sort of tenderness in the way she says it that must 'ave been a world of comfort to 'im.

"I went back later and knocked at the door. Mrs. Carter comes, lookin' 'appy, an' 'ugs me.

" 'I was goin' to suggest, Mrs. Carter,' I says, 'that now you an' your 'usband 'as made it up again 'e might go to Room 21— it will save the rent of the extra room.'

"You see, I knew 'e was up against it, an' I 'ad a new tenant waiting fer the room. It seemed respectable enough to me, them bein' married in 'Eaven, an' lovin' one another, in spite of the divorce.

"She 'ugged me again, an' 'e came out an' called me a good soul (which, thank God, I am, 'aving been confirmed), an' shook my 'and."

With which assurance Mrs. Parsley remembered she had household duties waiting for her, and left me to reflect upon the romance of Room 21.

42: Planchette

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 theguests 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—l2.ls 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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43: Dirty Pieces of Silver

Bulletin, 11 Jan 1939

"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 1 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 his 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. 'I'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 I 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 feel 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 her first husband and what a fine fellow he was makes her a laughing-stock.'

Mr Harris was glads to get back to No. 17. He said he didn't care whether it was , he right room or not; he had made it his own, and he could still dream of 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."

44: The Glory of France

The 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 get 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 on 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 fiancée,

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— l 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! Jiin-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 lie 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; andin 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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45: 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 I 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 kept 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 off.

"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. 8 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. Plumwit, 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 mornin'. '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 Miss Littlejohn,' she says.

"Well, you could '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 at 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. Wo'retley, '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 seme 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 'ardly 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 be ashamed, meeting people, 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 cease 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 'e 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. We'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 would 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. Ihe writing seems to dance; but I can see it's a joyful letter telling 'er that hand 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 comin' 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—'MINE.'

"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 'ersclf to git.

" 'No, I won't go— I won't!' she kept sayin'. '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 fin 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' I 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, to 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 unscrewable 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."

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46: The Parson's Punch

Bulletin, 14 Aug 1929

"RELIGION," said Chiller the Smoodge, " 'as got to 'ave a punch behind it."

The meeting had surprised me. It was hard to believe my eyes when I saw my old-time, good-naturedly lawless friend, grown rotund and now well dressed, talking with a clergyman at the corner of the street. Only the greeting he gave me as I passed assured me that it really was Chiller. I had not gone many yards, however, before he was by my side, hailing me.

"It was no good asking the parson to have a drink," said Chiller as we had ours. " 'E's up ag'in the Demon, an' don't believe in puttin' it down this way."

"You look as if you're doing well," I remarked.

"Too right! Git an eyeful of this," said Chiller. From a prosperous-looking pocket-case he extracted a card, which he thrust towards me. "Mr. Charles Crowther, J.P.," was printed on it, with a line in the corner telling the world that the man I had known as Chiller the Smoodge had a business of his own.

"I'm a bloomin' J.P., y'see," he said with a touch of pride. "I represent lor-an'-order now. Y'see, I struck the idea that the rabbit-skin 'ad more in it than the rabbit. There was a 'ot demand for skins during the war, so I gits on to the idea; an' now I'm a dealer in skins, all sorts. An' I've settled down with a missus an' kids to look after."

"How is the missus?" I asked.

"She's tiptop— and the same one," he said with a twinkle in his eye which showed that he remembered days when too much success with the ladies earned him the title of "The Smoodge," and some magisterial censure.

"When I began to take meself serious as a citizen," he said, "I joined up the Labber League, and I'm vice-president now. And a J.P.," he added.

"With parsons as your personal friends," I suggested.

"That bloke I was speakin' to? Oh, he's a good sort! Rev. Ezra Fowler."

"Not the man who started the street mission?"

"Him! Don't look the sort of bloke to take on a fightin' game, does 'e? Poppin' with enthoosiasm, though, was Mister Fowler when he started.

"Y'see, 'ow I met the parson was through bein' a big man with the Labber League. 'E came erlong and joined the league, an' wanted to open us up with prayer, an' when e was turned down 'e kept comin' erlong with the idea ag'in. It's funny when you think of it, discussin' whether meetin's should be opened with prayer at the North Surry 'Ills League! Though I ain't sayin' they may not be needin' it.

"Ezra allus got a good 'earing. Even the blokes that was Carthelicks an' 'ad a nacheral grouch ag'in 'im reckernised 'e meant well, an' admired 'im. Don't

know whether you know, but 'e was well off, an' 'e 'ad done well at scholarin' an' could 'ave got a good church billet anywhere, but 'c reckons it's his duty to come to Surry 'Ills an' start 'is mission, an' get jobbed by drunks when 'e starts preachin' on the street corners. Apart from that, 'e done a lot of good with 'is money; an' if there was any trouble 'e'd butt in. Not with 'is fists cripes, 'e never knew fists was made for punchin' jors! Yet I've 'card of 'im standin' up ag'in a fightin'-drunk 'usband an' calmin' things down.

"Yes, we got to like 'im. I went down to see 'im once in the old place 'e'd turned into a mission 'ouse: wanted ter chat 'im about a selection ballot that was cornin' off. Although 'e belonged to the League, it was only jest to show that 'is 'eart was with Labber; 'e wouldn't think nothin' of politics, religion bein' 'is lay; an' I wanted to get 'is vote against Commernists— the blokes," Chiller added with a touch of heat, " 'oo reckon that a bloke like me, jest because 'e's built up a bit of a business, is a catterpillist an' a' enemy of the people.

"The door of 'is 'ouse was allus open; there was a room there where anyone wantin' shelter could drop in an' get a bite. I went parst the swing-door that shut off the end of the 'ouse to the room where I knew I'd find 'im. But I pulls up at the door, 'earin' voices.

" 'Ezra, give it up!' I 'eard a woman's voice saying, with tears in it. It was a young woman, I could tell, 'They will only kill you.'

" 'Millie,' 'e said— he had a surprisin' voice fer a man of 'is size— 'I 'ave Christ's work to do. The well-to-do parishes can do without me; 'ere is a place where there is real work. I 'ave put my 'and to the plough and cannot turn back. It may be unfair to you, dear, to ask you to wait; if your 'eart cannot give you patience, and I must lose you.'

" 'Don't talk like that, Ezra! There is nobody else I could possibly marry,' she said. 'But it all seems so 'opeless.'

" 'The waiting may not be as long as you think,' 'e says. 'Within a year my work must 'ave some effect. I will 'ave changed sufficient of the people to alter the 'ole district, and make it a safer place fer people to live in. Then we will build our 'ouse 'ere an' get married an' come an' live amongst my people.'

"I 'eard 'er with a rush of sobbin' pleadin' with 'im, and 'im saying 'Millie, you must not tempt me!' an' I got away. It didn't seem no moment to talk about politics; but, curious-like, I 'ung round to get an eyeful of the tab. When I saw, as they come out, what 'e was 'oldin' off with the idea of doin' 'is duty, I got a bit more respect fer 'im, 'owever much of a fool I thought 'im.

"After that, whenever I met 'im, I slung off a bit about 'is 'opeless job, but all 'e says is that the 'arder the task the greater the victory. When 'e says that, 'e 'ad a bandaged 'ead where a rock 'ad 'it 'im, so I suggests that I might get a coupler John 'Ops along to lay doggo near 'is meetin's in case 'e come in fer any

rough-'ouse. 'An' then, be cripes,' I says, 'we'd give 'em rough-'ouse and put the fear o' God into 'em.'

" 'Mister Crowther,' 'e says, 'you can't put the fear of God inter people's 'earts that way. You can only do it by peace an' gentleness; if I did not think those things would prevail, rather than vi'lence, I would be discouraged.'

"The parson meets a bit more trouble some time after that. There's 'arf a dozen men lounging at the street corner, an' 'e pulls up with 'is usual 'l'd like fo 'ave a few words with you, men.' It happened that Smasher Riley was in the outfit. On the average a bully don't git much show in Aussie. In other countries— Amuriky for one— you 'ear of one man standin' out an' makin' everybody else's life an 'ell until an 'ero comes along game ter stoush 'im. They don't stand fer that 'ere. The way I figure it is this. There's a bad an' a good side to everything. The 'abit of the Aussie push of gittin' tergether an' dealing out stoush ain t nothin ter be admired. It's cowardly perhaps ; but it's that trick of orgernisin' that keeps ther bully out in Aussie: an', let me tell yer, it was the same thing that 'elped the Diggers to pull so well together in the war."

Having delivered this philosophic digression with a flourish, Chiller picked up his story.

"Smasher was a natural bully, and probably all the more because 'e darsen't use is talent on the mob, 'e looked upon the parson as an 'Eaven-sent opportunity 'Cut it!' 'e says. 'We don't want none of you —— psalm-singing— — 's 'ere.'

" The parson, only stoppin' an' lookin' at 'im a moment, goes on, although Smasher 'as stepped right over to 'im, threatenin'.

"Didn't you 'ear me speak, blarst yer—' says Smasher— I'm givin' 'im the benefit of ther doubt on the language.

" 'Oh, nark it, Smasher!' says the boys. 'The parson's not a bad coot.'

"But, you see, the parson wasn't one of flier mob, an' none of 'em reckoned it worth while ter buy a fight with Smasher.

" 'My friend,' says my reverend, not flinching, 'the work I have been appointed ter do I must do, an' your threats will not stop me.'

" 'Perhaps *that* will then,' says Smasher.

"Smasher's a 'uge brute, an' 'e didn't trouble ter make the blow light. The parson went crashin', and lay there; but when a couple of flu' boys, defyin' Smasher, went to lift 'im up an' 'elp 'im 'ome, 'e says, 'No. lads, thanks; I must not give in. I must speak, especially to this misguided man.'

"And there 'e was, facing the bully with the blood runnin' down 'is jor.

" 'Want some more, eh?' says Smasher, looking for a new chance. 'You just clear off right away or I'll plug you again. An' any night I see yer 'ere.'

" 'I shall be 'ere tor-morrow at this time,' says the parson calmly. 'An' I shall stay to-night to—'

" 'E's saved by someone calling 'Nit! 'Ops!' An' the 'ole crowd melts. The 'ops is me and Sergeant O'Brien, 'oo I 'appen to've met an' walked erlong with, O'Brien being a personal friend, 'aving lumbered me a coupler times back in the old diff'rent days. It was lucky we arrived; the parson was sick and groggy with the blow, but 'o declined to go to the police station— asked the sergeant. as a personal favor, to fergit it— would ruin 'is mission, 'e said, if 'e brought ther penalties of the law in. The upshot was that the sergeant leaves 'im ter me, and I takes the parson into a 'ouse near by where there was a woman I knew. I was surprised to see she knew the parson, too.

" 'Oh, the brutes— the fighting brutes !' she cries when she sees tin; parson's face, the fightin' business bein' one she 'ad a pertickler derry on. She bustled round the kitchen, gettin' 'ot water to bathe 'is face.

" 'I meant to see you before this, Mrs. 'Ayes,' says the parson. 'I do 'ope you an' your husband have made it up.'

" ' 'E knows what to do,' she says, defiant.

" 'Then you 'aven't,' 'e says regretfully. 'I'm sorry. Your husband is really a fine man.'

" ' 'E's one of the finest blokes I know,' I says.

" 'Then why doesn't he get a decent job?' she asks.

" 'But he has work,' says the Reverend Ezra, surprised. 'Nothing could have been more sincere than the way he came along to me and asked me to get you to take that money. There were tears in his eyes as he told me you wouldn't take it from him. It showed that he cared.'

" ' 'E's so stubborn,' said Mrs 'Ayes. ' 'E promised me before we married 'ed give all that up; an' 'e goes back to it. 'E knows that if 'e gives it up 'is 'ome's waitin'; but though you talked me into doin' it, Mister Fowler, I don't like ever taking money 'e gets from that place. I'd sooner work fer me own.'

" 'But it's not dishonest,' said the parson, 'oldin' his 'ead over the dish whilst she bathed the blood off. 'An' I think you really love him, too.'

" 'E looked searchin'ly up at 'er, an' she turned 'er 'ead away. 'E took the cloth gently from 'er 'and, an' she 'opped it into the scullery. I could see the tears glistenin' as she went.

" 'Pity they don't make it up. I've tried my best,' he whispered.

" 'Wimmen's a stubborn lot,' I whispered back, an' then, to change ther subject, I arsked 'im about givin' the missionin' up.

" 'What these blokes want,' I says, 'is a bloke like that fightin' parson 'Ulton Sams. You've go ter 'ave a two-fisted religion preachin' in these parts.'

" 'I think my way will prove best,' 'e says, 'is bruised and puffed face twistin' as 'e smiled. 'What I am preachin' is a religion of gentleness an' goodwill, an' I think I will prevail. There can be no room for vi'lence in it. When I go along to-morrow night'

" 'You're not goin' along to-morror,' I says.

" 'Certainly I am,' he says, like a rat-leap. 'I said I would. And I will— night after night.'

" 'I wish I 'ad 'Ulton Sams to bring with you !' I says.

"That's the idea I carries away with me— if I could only find a fightin' parson amongst the crowd in Sydney who'd come along with a good 'ard fist ter 'tip a cobber! An' then I strikes the idea. Smasher Riley was along at the same spot with ther mob the following night. It looked as if the neighbor'ood was prepared ter fun; there was more than usual 'angin' around, and people was sittin' at their windows, as if they was gran'stands.

" 'Allo!' cries Smasher. 'It's a noo parson to-night, eh?' Th'other bloke's too broke up to come, eh?'

" 'I am 'ere ' dear frien's,' says the parson, 'ter take the first part of the service My— ah— colleague is not due for another 'arf-'our, but will, attend in due course.

" 'An I am 'ere,' I says, 'as sorter chairman.

" 'We will commence,' says the parson, 'be singin an 'ymn you must know—"

" 'Oh, will we!' cried Smasher. 'I said larst night we didn't want no psalm-singin' blankards 'ere, and my word's goin' ter go.'

" 'We sing,' says the parson calmly, 'Onward, Christian Soldiers. I know the words brothers; perhaps you would like the 'ymn-book.'

"He offered it to Smasher, who snatched it an flung it to the ground. 'Get out!' he roars, with a swing at the parson.

"To his surprise the swing was stopped.

' Yer will pick up that 'ymn-book, brother, says the parson quietly.

" 'Like 'Ell I will!' says Smasher. 'An' you get out before you're 'urt.'

"The parson's coat was slipped off and handed to me.

" 'You will pick up that 'ymn-book, brother,' says the parson, flickin' off his collar an beginnin' to roll his sleeves

"There was real interest now. The crowd a big one had formed a ring; there were faces at all the windows.

" 'Smasher looked queer as 'e watched the arms the parson revealed. Still the bloke was only a parson! TB dived in with a swing intended to sweep 'im horf the earth.

"That was where the religious edjucation of Smasher started. The jolt on the nose that pulled 'im up an' sent 'is swing nowhere was only the start of it. Not that the affair was one-sided. Smasher was a good, wild fighter, an' got in a few, but the mill was so willing 'e was groggy an' very bloodstained in erbout five minutes.

" ' 'Ad enough?' says the parson.

" 'It'll do me,' growls Smasher. 'I know when I'm beat.'

" 'E turned to go, but the parson tapped 'im on the shoulder.

" 'The 'ymn-book, brother,' 'e says. 'You must pick up that 'ymn-book before you go, brother.'

"'Go to— 'Ell!' snarls Smasher; and it started again. But Smasher did pick up the 'ymn-book.

" 'Friends,' says the parson, 'I am goin' to leave you now, but I have to announce that the Rev. Ezra Fowler will be 'ere shortly, as 'e promised to 'old his meetin'. I'd like it ter be known, though, that I'm 'is colleague from now on, an' I'll be 'ere again fer any gen'leman as can't leave a man what preaches peace alone.'

"Mrs. 'Ayes was surprised ter see us.

" 'Another parson, missus, 'oo's been slightly damaged by one of ther mob an' wants 'is face bathed, missus,' I says. 'D'you mind?'

" 'Why, no,' she answered. 'What cowardly beasts those men are!'

" 'Y'see, Mrs. 'Ayes, 'I says, 'this parson could look after 'isself a bit better than th' other one. 'E went erlong ahead— seein' the Reverend Fowler was set on turnin' up ter be killed— ter make things safe fer 'im.'

"We 'ad got out o' the darkness of the all into the light of the kitchen, and Mrs. 'Ayes, turnin' round, saw 'oo was at the back of me.

" 'Bill!' she cried.

" 'Well, if 'e ain't a parson 'e's a damn good actor,' I grins. ' 'E tells me 'e's givin' up the Stadium since you're so keen on it; an' 'is larst fight, as you might say, was in the cause of religion.'

" 'Bill!' she cries again; and then, 'Oh, Bill!' An' I knew it was a scene where I wasn't wanted.

" 'l'll call ter take that clobber back in the mornin , Bill,' I says as I passes out. I stopped to 'ear the Reverend Ezra talking to a big crowd, which was cheerin' 'im as if 'e was a perlitical meetin'. 'E didn t seem quite able to understand it."

Chiller rose and we moved towards the bar.

"We'll ave another," he said.

"Fowler didn't stay in Surry Hills?" I asked.

"No," said Chiller thoughtfully. "As I'd said, he got disheartened when he discovered that it was religion with a punch the crowd really respected. But 'e picked out about as poor a parish as 'o could find ter work in. Got married, too like a sensible man. So you might say I killed two birds with one stone that time."

47: 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 to-morrow!" 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 knock-out. 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'; she wash—" ... 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. It'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 petritied, 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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48: 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 suspect 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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49: The Search for the Bonzer Tart

The Bulletin, 7 Oct 1915
The Search for the Bonzer Tart (short story collection) 1920

The Sydney working class slang of over a hundred years ago has long vanished. "Bonzer" survived into the early 1950s, and meant "good" or "very good"; while in 1915 "tart" meant "girl or woman"; but its meaning has since greatly narrowed down to "promiscuous" or prostitute— Ed.

"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 omethin' 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 ter 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 un 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 Avas 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 'av'e 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 when 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 goes; 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 with a light sentence.

IT WAS a couple of years later that I saw him going his rounds with a rabbit cart. "Why, hello, boss!" be 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!"

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50: "The Flowers That Boom in the Spring"

Bulletin, 11 October 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 Ive 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.'

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

"That Mrs. Puffinbeck seemed to think shed 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. 'lt'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. 'l'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. 'l'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."