MISS TRIGG, DOMESTIC

EDWARD DYSON

(AS BY "SILAS SNELL")

Edward Dyson

Edward Dyson (1865-1931) was the son of a mining Engineer, and he grew up on goldfields in Victoria and Tasmania. In 1883 the family settled in Melbourne and he worked as a factory hand, and took to writing. This proved so successful that he soon became a full-time freelance writer under an ever-growing list of pseudonyms as well as his own name: Dy Edwardson; Ed Ward; Silas Snell; E.D.; Ward Edson; Eddyson; and many more.

This book is a collection of all 16 "Minnie Trigg" short stories he wrote for the Melbourne *Punch* under the name "Silas Snell". It tells of the comic adventures of a young woman domestic servant in her various employments in pre First-World War Melbourne. This is the first time the series has been collected into book form.

—T.W.

MISS TRIGG, DOMESTIC

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As by "Silas Snell"

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1: The Fairy Godmother

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MINNIE had a romantic temperament. Certainly she did not look it in the early morning, when the milkman was in the habit of discovering her valiantly storming the enemy— Dirt— on the back verandah with a dexterous hair-broom, her sunny locks (some wretches called them red) screwed into a small, hard knot not unlike the handle of a crumb-tray at the back, of her head, her skimp skirt caught up at one side, showing a liberal allowance of bony leg in a white stocking and a dilapidated shoe, a black smudge from the gas-stove on her nose, and her left eye blinded by that contrary and unpenitent whisp of hair that would persist in breaking bounds and going on its own.

At such times Minnie had the prosaic aspect of any common or back-door domestic— in fact, rather more commonplace than ordinary, for Minnie's nose was tilted upwards, and her mouth had a rakish grin. Neither was there anything to suggest the poetic spirit in Minnie's address on these occasions.

"Mornin', Tins. 'Ow's cows?" said Minnie blithely.

Whereupon Milk-o would retort wittily:

"Mornin', Slops. Why don't you wash your fice?"

To Minnie the milkman was always "Tins," just as the butcher was "Bones," and the policeman "Boots."

These knew nothing of Minnie's romantic temperament; that was a secret hugged to her own heart, a consolation for her lone moments, a source of delicious imaginings in the hour before sleep at night, or for the brooding daylight hours spent over mechanical tasks, when her mind could drift from the peeling of potatoes or the ironing of sheets to the abounding realms of fancy, where there were spuds and sheets were undreamed of, but where gallant youths of exceeding beauty wooed Minnie with astounding ardour, or where Min., transformed into a dainty damsel apparelled to reduce Mrs. Solomon in all her glory to a mere frump, was whirled in a gorgeous motor of brown and gold through immeasurable Edens, her wealthy and handsome saturnine adorer at her elbow, the chauffeur, scarcely less beautiful, dying at his wheel of a secret passion for his gentle mistress, who, alas! has no eyes for any man but the dark, brooding devil of a duke by her side.

This secret romanticism made Minnie somewhat particular about the kind of family she permitted herself to be engaged to. You never found Minnie Trigg in dull, drab, commonplace families.

"I got no use fer them dead-an'-alive people, where the ole man's got whiskers, an' the ole woman's got the 'ump, an' nothin's ever doin', week-days

or Sundays. I'd rather be where the boss comes 'ome on his ear re'lar Wensdees, an' the missus plays tattoos on his crumpet with the corffee cups. I would that. I'm all fer the eventful life, I am."

Miss Trigg was quite content with the Scarlets. Mr. Arthur Scarlet was a good-looking man, a prospering architect, with a great ambition to revolutionise Australian taste; and Mrs. Arthur was a slim, girlish, little woman, with floating hair the colour of a narcissus, large, grey, infantile eyes, and all the sentimental ideals of a spoilt only daughter.

Minnie could not live in a family without taking an interest in its affairs. Within a week of accepting service under Mr. Scarlet's roof she knew more about the Scarlet menage than the master dreamed of. This was not an unusual experience with Minnie. It not uncommonly happens with other domestics, I believe. Miss Trigg knew, for instance, that Mr. Lionel Bindlow was much fonder of Mrs. Scarlet than Mr. Scarlet would have deemed advisable in a friend of the family. She knew, too, that Mr. Bindlow called Mrs. Scarlet "Nance" when they were alone together, and addressed her formally as Mrs. Scarlet in the presence of her husband.

It was the discovery of this significant variation that first awoke Minnie's concern. Minnie was now twenty-two. She had been a servant since she was thirteen, and, as she sometimes assured her friends, she "knew a bit."

"You carn't 'ave lived in dozens iv fam'lies without pickin' up here an' there a bit, mostly badness," said Minnie; and Minnie knew to the point of conviction that when a frequent visitor, young, good-looking, masculine, and with them "mischievous eyes," calls the pretty mistress by her Christian name on the sly, "there's tubs of fun a-comin' of it."

Minnie liked Mrs. Ssarlot, and she liked Mr. .Scarlet. "There's stacks o' toil an' trouble," she said, "an' th' missus is one o' them sort that can't turn their 'ands to anythink without makin' it worse than it ivbs ; but she 'treats a girl sort, o' sisterly, same ez if she was a fuller creature, anyhow, takin' a kind hit iv interest in you an' yours, an' that counts with me more an' jools and precious stones."

So if Miss Trigg were a trifle assiduous in keeping an eye on developments when Mr. Bindlow was " 'angin' round," the action must not be put down to vulgar curiosity. She discovered that Mrs. Scarlet had been weeping one afternoon after Bindlow left, and concluded that the plot was thickening.

Minnie found, too, that Mr. Scarlet was not always informed of his friend Lionel's afternoon visits, and one afternoon she heard an eloquent scrap of protestation in the drawing room.

"You are wrong, Lionel— wrong, wrong, wrong! I do love my husband."

Lionel Bindlow, to the ordinary observer a rather nice-looking, aimless sort of boy, with money perhaps, and no wholesome means of occupying himself, was to Minnie the blackhearted and wicked villain of the piece, bent upon luring the beautiful, misguided, neglected wife from her allegiance. Doublod over the front rail of the Royal gallery, she had seen many such at their despicable machinations, and had loathed them all with the proper loathing of a humble but honest servant girl.

Minnie knew perfectly well what would happen unless Providence intervened to save Mrs. Scarlet from her folly. The villain would lure her away; there would he a feverish career of gilded luxury, tempered with remorse, then the villain would desert her (villains always do), and she would die in a black cloak in a London snow storm.

Many tears were shed by Minnie over this fearful prospect on her faithful pillow at night, for of late she had ceased to be the heroine of her own romances, having given pretty Nancy Scarlet the star part, contenting herself with a subordinate but important post as the faithful maid who clings to her missus through all her vicissitudes, and eventually restores her to happiness, or keeps her company when perishing in the conventional snow storm.

Miss Trigg was worrying over the plot. Would she drop Mr. Scarlet a hint?

"How's a gel t' go an' do it?" she asked herself again and again. "She can't up an' give it to him straight. 'Say, Ned, yer missus has dreams iv goin' gay with one what shall be nameless, 'septin' that his eyes is mortal wicked an' black, an' his initials is L. B.' Beware iv the same.' "

Minnie shook her head lugubriously over the idea. "That 'ud just raise mad cats," she mused. "An' it's a chicken to a cheese-mite, he wouldn't believe me, an' would take an' tumble me neck over knickers into the back lane, with a fortnight's wages in lieu. Then where 'ud things be? The villain 'ud 'ave it all his own way, an' the hero would come 'ome one fine evenin' t' find a note on the drorin'-room furniture t' say all was over atween them, and she was gone t' one what wouldn't never neglect her fer a dusty office an' shabby ole plans an' specifications."

Certainly, that would never do. Minnie kept on thinking, and Lionel Bindlow continued to call, and Mrs. Scarlet grew paler and thinner, and there were traces of worry in her face that her stupid hushand could not see.

"That's 'ow it is," said Minnie over her sweeping. " 'Arf the time it's the dilly fat'eadedness of 'usb'ands wot's the cause of it all. One wouldn't believe a 'uman bein' could be as fat-'eaded as 'usbands is, goin' about with mud in their eyes an' cotting-wool in their ears, seein' nothin', hearin' nothin', their 'eads full of mashed pertater brains, their bloomin' 'earts ez cold ez if put t' Iceep in refrigerators like lumps iv mutton. Oh! I'm sick iv the indjitiosity iv 'usbands!"

Minnie swiped at the cat in the fury of her emotion, and the indignant animal fled over the pot plants, destruction in her tracks.

It was true Mr. Scarlet was neglecting his wife. A trying period in matrimonial history had been reached. They were about five years' wed, and a transitionary stage had iieen reached— the stage when the fiery lover is tailing off into the staid husband. Mrs. Scarlet was aware of it, and called it the death of love. Scarlet, if seriously admonished, would have been amazed; he would have denied that there was any falling off in his love for his sweet little wife; but if pressed might have been brought to admit that he got into the way of expecting her to take it for granted.

His professional interests were very absorbing just now. Nance knew he loved her; they were very comfortable— why worry over trifles? Why explode unnecessary amatory fireworks?

Minnie had an occasional idea of making a confidante of Constable Don Holwell; but despite her admiration for Constable Don Holwell's fine figure she had no great respect for his perspicacity.

"Police intelligence?" she said. "Pooh ! I won't 'ave it at any price. I've knowed heaps iv policemen in my day, most of them all right Johns in their way, but never 'ave I knowed one with a great 'ead on 'im like that Sherlock 'Olmes. Don, he's good enough t' run dow a stealer of doormats, or t' put it across one iv the push, an' he's a good-looker, an' fair dilly about me; but I couldn't trust him with a delikit case like this. If he married brains he'd make a boshter detective; but as he is, he's just common Cop, bless his 'eart !"

So the assistance of Constable Holwell was not called in at this stage, and Mr. Scarlet received no hints, and the plot thickened without Minnie getting a chance of putting a finger in.

There were developments, she was conscious of that much; but she did not realise how far they had gone till the climax was upon her.

Mr. Scarlet was supervising the building of a picture theatre in a provincial town. He was away for two days, and at twelve on the night after his departure Minnie Trigg was still awake, absorbed in a pathetic plot, when a sound from the front of the house disturbed her. Minnie, who had always lively anticipations concerning handsome young burglars, was out of bed in an instant. There was a light under her mistress's door. Minnie trusted herself to apply a sympathetic eye to the keyhole. She saw her mistress, fully dressed, busily engaged packing a portmanteau.

Minnie knocked on the door. A startled look possessed Mrs. Scarlet's pretty, troubled face. She stood irresolute for a moment, then moved to the window, and made a hasty signal.

Minnie knocked again. "Is anythin' wrong, Mrs. Scarlet ?" she asked. "I thought I 'eard somethin'."

"It is all right, Minnie," replied her mistress carelessly. "I was moving about, but I am going to bed again." And the light was switched off.

But Minnie did not go back to bed. She stole to the drawing room window, and saw a male figure cross the garden and take cover in the summer-house.

Then Miss Trigg went back to her room. She jumped into a skirt and jacket, crept out by the back door, and passed a motor purring softly in the shade of the pepper trees at the corner.

Minnie found Constable Don Holwell, and took him into custody.

"Quick!" she said. "I want you to do somethin' for me."

"Is anything wrong,?" asked the officer.

"Nothin' much. But will you arrest a man for my sake?"

"Will I what!"

"Well, he's hidin' in our summer-house. Arrest, him, run him in, charge him with' any ole thing, but don't mix our name up in it."

"Here, my girl, what's the game?"

I know not what persuasion Minnie used, but a few minutes later, to the great consternation of the man lurking in Scarlet's summer-house, a helmet shone in the doorway, and a sccond later the intruder was in the hands of the law.

"What are you doing here, me beauty?" asked Constable Holwell.

The man protested. He was there to do no harm. The constable was making a terrible mistake.

"Mistake or no," said the Law, "I'll risk it. Come on easy, or I'll shift the summerhouse with your head, me lad."

Mr. Lionel Bindlow elected to go easily. When the constable charged him with drunkenness, abusive language, and resisting the police, he made no protest. He couldn't. When he appeared before the court next day he accepted the situation, and paid the fine, although he had never been drunk in his life. Anything was possible but to have to explain his position in Scarlet's summer-house at half-past midnight.

Lionel had an interview with Mrs. Scarlet a few hours later. Minnie gathered that it was stormy. He left, looking furious, and Miss Trigg had so contrived as to hear sufficient of the interview to be satisfied that Mrs. Scarlet had gained time for repentance.

When Scarlet finished the big job he had in hand, he took his wife to Sydney for a long holiday. They came back looking radiant, and Minnie gave them the nicest lunch she could concoct, feeling like the fairy godmother.

"I'll never get over wondering, what that man was doing in your summer-house, Minnie Trigg," says Constable Holwell.

"What's a gel t' do, Boots," Minnie retorts, "wid the bad devils iv men lurkin' in all corners t' carry her off in motor cars?"

Then the constable scrapes his jaw, and says sadly: "Never will I forgive myself for not fetchin' him a clip or two with me stick, the bla'guard."

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2: Her Romantic Attachment

Punch (Melbourne), 2 April 1914

MINNIE was in the employment of the Flohms, of Scofield-road, Bloom, when she first met Mr. Willie Peterson. Bloom, as you know perfectly well, is an eminently respectable suburb much frequented by the Cohens, the Isaacs, the Moseses, the Hoggsteins, the Ochheimers and other representatives of the lost tribes that are now very well found.

Bloom stands for much money to the square inch, and its somewhat ostentatious red villas give it the suggestion of a scarlet fever patient from a height; but as few people aeroplane or take the breeze in balloon, few have noticed this pathological peculiarity.

The Flohms were affluent, but not extravagant. Israel Flohm was, in fact, a cautious man with money, and walked on his instep to save his heels; but Mrs. Flohm was a fat, motherly body, who did not cut off the servant's butter too near the hem, was not exacting in the matter of off hours, permitted some social intercourse in the kitchen, and paid a fair wage regularly and without obvious reluctance, and Miss Minnie Trigg was duly grateful.

"You see, Tins," said Miss Trigg to the milkman, "the missus here has a foot like a Yorkshire puddin', an' a face like a 'am; but she's easier to live with than many a spangled beauty I've come aginst in the course iv me long perfessional career, so me an' old Flohm stays on."

Really, Minnie and her mistress were on excellent terms. Mrs. Flohm told Minnie all about her rheumatics, and her cousin, Charley Cohen Hamstatter, who "vos a grade musician mit a band" in Germany, and Minnie responded sympathetically with the touching tale of the carbuncle she once had on the back of her neck, and descriptions of the deplorable habits of her father when he went home soused, and hit mother with the wash tub.

Mr. Willie Peterson stepped up very casually one evening when Minnie was bustling out, with her umbrella under her arm, her hat hung on the left gable, awaiting final adjustment, worming her way into a new pair of pure blue cotton gloves, and "How's it for a trot with me?" said he.

"Garn, none o' yer lip," responded Minnie, with equal casualness.

"Where's the harm Sis?" persisted Mr. Peterson, still at her elbow. "You're alone, I'm alone. Let's make it a brace."

Minnie clutched her umbrella. "Gimme much more o' yer lip, and you'll lose your block, Gus," she said.

"Never," said William, airily. "You ain't got the heart to do it. Anyone can see at half a glance you're a lady. No hitting Mokes about with a brolly in

yours. Not in the public street. Not likely. You're a cut above it, Sis. Besides, you're a mass of good temper, and you say if a lad's square an' all with me, and chats me decent, there ain't no call for fireworks."

"How you talk," said Miss Trigg, not unkindly. Truth to tell, Miss Trigg was impressed. The "John" had a nice figure, on which an easy brown suit hung with certain elegance. He had a regular featured brown face, too, in which a bright blue eye glowed with peculiar effect. "Nice rain we're havin' after the shower," said Minnie.

As a matter of fact, there was no rain, and had been no showers lately. This was merely Miss Trigg's way of letting the interesting stranger see that that his attentions were not wholly unbearable.

Mr. Peterson took Minnie to the pictures that evening. After the pictures he took her to Tilly's " 'am-an'-beef" booth, and treated her to sandwiches and coffee.

By this time Mr. William Peterson was plain Bill to Minnie, and ere they parted he kissed her good and hard nine times against Israel Flohm's back gate, despite Israel's admonition of only a few hours earlier.

"I von't haff id dot you kiss all der paint off der gate of mein back door mit der boys. You kiss by dem againsd der palings ver der ain't no new paint is."

"Meet us again soon, Min," pleaded Mr. Peterson. "Give it a quick date. You've got me all sloppy about you, little love girl."

That beat Minnie. She had never been called "little love girl" before, and it appealed to her disguised romanticism. "Little love girl." Minnie looked herself over in the mirror that night. "Little love girl." Now, there was a way to talk to a girl— a way with some heart in it. Billy was a boshter. If he would only love her for herself alone with an undying passion, and then turn out to be something in disguise— a duke, perhaps, or a threat actor, who had been changed in his cradle or something— how lovely it would be!

Minnie lay awake thinking out all sorts of possibilities about Bill. She was sure his station in life was superior. When she asked him where he scratched for a crust, he replied frivolously: "Oh, I've got an easy grip at Wood and Weegull's, blowing up toy balloons."

In Miss Trigg's dreams that night, Willie Peterson turned out to be the rightful heir, and inherited the estate, also the title; and it was Minnie herself who, at the critical moment, produced "the papers."

Of course, Min had not decided to keep Billy waiting in hot impatience. She cut Bones, the butcher's carrier, out of a date, and instated Bill for her very next loose night.

Bill and she walked the shore that evening, and sat in the sand, and watched the moon scatter confetti on the shimmering sea, and Bill was very affectionate when he was not extremely curious.

Strange to say, the Flohms were much discussed. A young gentleman finding himself suddenly in love might have her upon a more interesting theme for discourse old Israel Flohm who, in addition to having the flattest feet out of Palestine, had a figure like an enlarged bologna, and too purple buttons on his left cheek; but Billy kept working back from artless amorous prattle to the subject of Flohm.

"Runs a sort of old curio bunk in the city, don't he?" said Billy. "Jewels worn by the big pots in Egypt a million years ago, an' truck from Babylon, an' what not?"

"Somethin' o' the like," Minnie admitted. "He's always bringin' along some sort iv tripe dug up out o' the mud, an' said to be worth a 'underd thousan'. Not worth two beans iv yeh ask me."

"Go on. Where does he stow it? Seems a queer thing t' have valuables of them dimensions piled round in a little bit of an old villa that a thief could almost push a hole in with his hand."

"He don't keep them much about the house. He's a shrewdie, old Flohm. But when there is anythin' worthwhile on the premises he sticks it in a bit iv a iron safe he's got. No thief could push a hole in that, I bet; it's just a hunk iv iron."

"I s'spose so," said Bill, thoughtfully. "What size would you say it was—not as big as an ice chest?"

"No; 'bout so size." Minnie measured out eighteen inches square.

"Nice an' handy," said Bill. "A bloke could tuck it under his arm, provided there wasn't too many millions in it. I'll bet a quid he just keeps it in any old room. The front one next the drive most likely."

"Well, yiv done in yer quid right away, bright boy. 'Coz he keeps it in his bedroom."

"Go on. I'd never have thought it. But, of course, the windows are all locked and the doors bolted. Blokes with names like Israel Flohm what walk on the flat of the foot don't take many risks, I've noticed."

"Oh, blow Israel Flohm!" Minnie pouted. "You didn't bring me here to hear you flutin' about him. Whatsa matter with me?"

"You're the pick iv the fruit market, Min. You're the prime peach, and you've got me silly."

MINNIE met Billy several times. Twice she entertained him in Mrs. Flohm's kitchen, when his curiosity concerning the house and its inhabitants almost spoiled what might have been a very pleasant evening.

Minnie was thinking almost exclusively of Mr. Willie Peterson these nights. "Tins," the milkman, and "Bones" from the butchery, as well as "Feet," the policeman, were now unconsidered trifles, about when there was no room for speculation. Neither of these could by any stretch of the imagination be deemed to be anything but what they appeared; but there was an entrancing mystery about Billy, which appealed with compelling force to the deep layer of sentimentality at the bottom of Miss Trigg's heart. Her private opinion was that he was the madcap elder son of a rich squatter, who had fallen in love with a captivating housemaid, and was prepared to make any sacrifice rather than lose his little "love girl."

Then came the shock. Billy made no bones about it. He was dramatic and emphatic.

"Look here, Miss," he said, "we've got to get down to business, and the business is that little iron bank of old Flohm's."

"Why, whatcher mean?"

"I mean pinching it when it's worth pinching."

"Burgulry!" squealed Minnie.

"Something iv that kind of sort. But there's no gumption in lifting an empty crock. It's for you to squeal when the goods are there. I mean you pipe me on when he's got somethin' sweet in the old bandbox, and we trips in and lifts it out."

Minnie was smitten with horror. She sat glaring at him. "It's thievin'!" she cried.

"Well, don't yelp, old dear. A man's got to do something for a honest crust— do something or someone; and I'm for doing old Flohm. He can afford it."

"I couldn't! I wouldn't! I won't!"

"Oh, yes, you will. See here, little love girl." He was hugging her close. "You've got to help me in this if you care a cuss for me. I'm hard up. I want to give you a good time. I want to take my little love girl out of this business of slopping and flushing for a piebald push that ain't fit to clean her pretty boots, and there isn't any other way."

"You're one o' them burgulars," whispered Minnie, horrified, but not a little thrilled at the romance of it.

"Well, supposing?" He kissed her. "I was driven to it. But this will he my last job. I promise you I'll go straight alter this, and settle down in a grip like any square John, and we'll have a great old time. You'll do it?"

"No!"

"You've got to. You've just got to. I only ask that you'll leave a sign—a stone on the gate-post will do— when its worth our while to try; then you can go to bed, and lie low. It'll all be done nice and natty— no hurt to anyone, no suspicions."

He kept at her, and Minnie was very much in love. He swore if she didn't help him in this he would rush into all sorts of rash actions, and get himself ten years for a certainty.

"We mean to have a cut at old Flohm, and we will whether you help or no Of course you can squeal, and put me away. Perhaps you are willing to do that. Perhaps you don't care a curse for me. Well, I've got to run the risk."

He could be very pleading. She did not notice that he dropped his slangy manner at these moments; she was too much disturbed to notice anything but the tumult of her own heart.

In the end she promised. Here she was at length a heroine, a real heroine of true romance, the little love girl of a gentleman burglar, like one of those in the entrancing, stories— working with him, sharing his danger, willing to sacrifice everything for him.

What Minnie had promised was that she would watch, and when she had good reason to believe there was a fair haul in the safe in would let Billy know, and a scrap of red ribbon under a splinter on the back gate would mean "Now."

Billy kept at Minnie, and the girl thought at times that she would be equal to the crime, trying hard to stifle thoughts of Mrs. Flohm's kindness, and the goodness of heart that went with old Flohm's flat feet and bulbous figure, and the two purple buttons on his jaw. But to stop Billy she would have to inform on him, and never could she do that.

ONE NIGHT Bill found the signal there. It was all done very quietly, so quietly that Minnie was not aware it had been done. Mr. and Mrs. Flohm awoke from a sleep that had been prolonged by chloroform to find the safe gone.

Bill and one pal had done it. A slim steel device opened the drawing room window. On padded shoes they stole into Flohm's bedroom, and very coolly each placed a chloroformed handkerchief over the mouths of one of the two noisy sleepers. Then the safe was taken up between them, and ten minutes later a motor car was bowling the thieves away to a quiet nook by Black Rock.

Here Bill and his pall spent two hours of hard graft cracking the safe with big hammers and chisels.

By the end of that time there was an aperture in the back large enough to admit Bill's hand. He put a hand in, and groped about.

"Empty, by—!" he cried.

Bill's companion ripped out a string of oaths!

"Yer givin' me kid," he said. "Don't do it. It makes me sick."

"Not on your life, Nipper. There's nothing to it. Hold! What's this?"

Bill had produced a folded note. He opened it, and read:

Yer welcome to what you've got.
—Minnie.

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3: The Proxy

Punch (Melbourne) 9 April 1914

WHEN MINNIE TRIGG first Look service with Mrs. Arthur Carte, Mr. Arthur Carte was already a thing of the past, and the Sunday excursions to his graveside with bouquets like tittivated cauliflowers had almost ceased.

Mrs. Arthur Carte was still under thirty. She had a buoyant, girlish figure, and a bright eye— an eye, by-the-way, that had again become alert in quest of the main chance.

Mrs. Arthur's mamma lived on the premises as a sort of general caretaker of Mrs. Arthur's reputation; but Mr. Williams was a mild, middle-aged lady, a little too fat for comfort, who fitted into an easy chair so happily that she never got out without great physical effort and much reluctance.

Rosy Carte was something of a chatterbox about the house. She loved to know what was going; on in the neighbourhood, and to discuss it to the minutest detail, and any local information Minnie could give was thankfully received.

Rosy's mamma, being of lethargic habit, and having a morbid appetite for lugubrious fiction, was of small value as a confidante; but Minnie Trigg, too, maintained a lively interest in local events, and the world-in-small round about "The Willows," which was the name of Mrs. Carte's villa, and had always some trifle of interest to impart, and was ever ready to discuss the contemporary history of any family in the square.

It is natural in these circumstances that the wide difference in their social positions (Mr. Arthur Carte was a doctor of dentistry, bless you), was no bar to a voluble kitchen friendship between Minnie and the Missus.

"Straight griffin," said Minnie, discussing this theme with Tins the milkman, "there's lots iv old girls like this'n of mine. In the drorin'-room 'ome days it's 'the girl' with a stern penny-ice haccent, 'n' yer 'umble's one iv the lower orders. But out in the kitchen iv mornin's we sort iv get together, V we're ez pally ez two old Boots, talkin' iv bits in' things, 'n' sorter tearin' Mrs. Higgins to ribbons. Mrs. Higgins is opposite, she does have a bit too much ragtime about the 'ouse for one what cracks genteel.

"Mind yer," continued Miss Trigg, "I ain't blamin' my missus fer nothing. She ain't two-faced, she's jist human, 'n' when yer jist human yer gotter behave sorter mixed. I don't expect her t' fall on me neck in the drorin'-room jist because we're haffable with each other in the kitchen. But I know when she's most herself, and it's not with the four o'clock push— not on your life."

Mrs. Arthur Carte, it has been admitted, was keeping her sparkling brown eye for a suitable partner in the great co-operation, and there were two or

three gentlemen in the field whose form Rosy was shepherding with a view to purchase.

On this matter, too, Minnie's opinion is of value.

"She's cautious is Mrs. Carte, I don't blame 'er," said Miss Trigg to Miss Cosgrove, a bosom friend with whom Minnie sometimes squandered Sunday evening off. "Her first was a peevish sort, with a everlasting corf 'n' pink flannel binders. Now, any feelin' woman can stand a little peevishness in a man— that's neither here nor there, men bein' animals what peeve easily; but peevishness ez a settled 'abit is like white ants in the system— it gnaws the patience out iv veh. Same, too, with a corf. You can symperthize with an occasional corf; but a corf wftat's alwiz about the 'ouse gets beyond human endoorance in a year 'r so. As fer pink flannel binders, I put it to you— could any 'ealthy-minded woman go on lovin' a man what wears 'em?

"Well, me dear, havin' missed the 'bus, as it were, with No. 1, Mrs. Carte is goin' over No. 2 in detail, you might say, inspectin' him minute. She'd like him well, 'n' she'd like him wealthy, which is very natural. There's three lingerin' on, all bucks, meanin' gents well over forty; the missus she can't hit on which to encourage most.

"Up to now I think Mr. Trier is leadin' by an ear. I happrove iv Trier. If she arst me I'd say, 'Snap 'im while yev got the charnce, 'n' bless yeh, me children ' True, he's a trifle deaf in the left ear, 'n' it does worry one a bit I should think, him always shuffin' t' work his right round on yeh, while never lettin' on fer a moment his left's a cripple. He's a bit near-sighted, too, without his glasses; but he's fresh-lookin', 'appy sort iv a lad at fifty, he's got the beans. Oh, I'd take a holt iv him all right if I was 'er. But, o' course, I don't offer me advice where it ain't asked."

How Minnie Trigg became closely mixed up with Rosy Carte's love affairs, and actually involved in the canoodling, it is my delicate duty to tell.

IT WAS a Friday night. Minnie was sittingin in her room, plunged in the adventures of *The Kidnapped Earl*, when a ring at the doorbell brought her to her feet. The caller was a smart young man of about thirty. He was Mr. Hillwell, he said.

Mr. Hillwell was received in the drawing-room with marked graciousness, and Minnie returned to the adventures of the unfortunate nobleman aforesaid; but in ten minutes Mrs. Carte was with her in great apparent mental distress.

"Minnie," she said, "I'm in a pickle. Mr. Hillwell is here, and Mr. Trier is coming. I said I would keep this evening for him. I don't want to send Mr. Hillwell away, and I can't afford to disappoint Mr. Trier, and I wouldn't for

worlds have them meet. You see, they are related in a way, and neither know the other is paying me some attention; and until I have quite made up my mind one way or the another, I want to be rather nice to both. You understand."

"Yes, Mrs. Carte. I've been sorter mixed up atween two lads myself afore this."

"Well, you can help me, Minnie. You are just my figure, my dresses fit you. Yoii could pass for me in the dark.''

"You mean I'm t' take on the old Trier Johnnie— me?"

"Why not. He's a bit deaf, his eyesight is only middling. Put on my other black dress (black is his favourite), put that bunch of Virginia creeper in your hair, take a fan, and linger in the garden. Carry him off to the seat under the willow, and keep him there till Mr. Billwell goes. Will you do this for me?"

"Well, I'm a bit iv a sport." Minnie grinned her most raffish grin. "I think the old boy's a bit iv all right. My oath, will I!"

"Bless you! Bless you! Get into the black dress as quickly as yon can. Don't forget the fan. Talk as little as possible, and do, my dear girl, try to do it in my way."

"Oh, delighted, Mr. Trier. So-o-o good of you to come. Yes, indeed, a lovely night. Shall we sit in the garden ? Oh, you silly man!" Minnie was giving quite a passable imitation of her mistress's voice and manner.

"Impudent scamp," cried Mrs. Carte. "Hurry. Don't forget to keep on liis left. That's where the weak ear is. Keep the fan up, and detain him till I come. I steal up behind the rose-bush, and touch you on the shoulder with a stick. Then send him on to the verandah, and leave. I'll do the rest."

The plan, extravagant though it was, worked admirably. Minnie met Mr. Trier as he came down the garden path.

"Ha, ha!" cried the buck delightedly, "may I believe you were waiting for me?"

"Why, of course," Minnie replied, tapping him with her fan with rather exaggerated coquetry.

"By Jove! it's good of you to say so, Mrs. Carte; awfully good. Might I— eh!— might I call you Rose?"

"Oh, yes, I think you might— when we are alone."

"When alone ? Yes, yes, certainly. We are alone now— Rose. Beautiful name. Beautiful bearer."

"You silly man. It's a lively night. Shall we sit in the garden a while?"

They did, and despite Trier's manoeuvring, Minnie got on his left side. But as Trier did all the talking that did not matter a great deal. They were there an hour before Mrs. Carte's signal came. Then Minnie suggested a cup of coffee on the verandah, and excusing herself passed into the house. A rapid change of

head-dress followed, and then Mrs. Carte joined Trier. Ten minutes later Minnie, as the maid, served the coffee.

"It was awfully good of you, Minnie," said Mrs. Carte, "and you did it well. I'm much obliged. And you can keep the black dress."

"Oh, don't thank me, ma'am," Minnie replied. "I had the time of my life. He kissed me twice."

"Whaa—at! You dared to let him kiss you?"

"Of course, an' why not? Isn't it usual?"

"You baggage! Don't you realise you were me? I thought the wretch was excessively affectionate on the verandah. I'll never trust you again."

Minnie was apologetic. "I thought you'd like it, Mrs. Carte," she said. "An' after all he's not so bad lookin'."

"Thought I'd like it?" gasped Mrs. Carte.

"Wouldn't you? I did." Minnie grinned far and wide. "In fact, I think I've helped you along splendid. Give me another evenin' with him under the willow, an' he's yours."

"Another evening, my girl? Oh, no, thank you."

But when a fortnight had passed Mrs. Carte was still undecided between this particular pair. She liked Hillwell best, but Trier had a great deal more money than the younger man, and about the latter she was not at all certain. He was somewhat backward as a suitor, and was still at a stage at which he might cool away. Rosy wanted something more definite, and was lingering impatiently between the two stools, when the catastrophe seemed imminent. There was another simultaneous visit. Mr. Trier was with Mrs. Carte when the knock came. Minnie found Mr. Hillwell on the mat. Minnie was equal to the situation. She bestowed Mr. Hillwell in the library with Mrs. Williams, and then sprang the danger signal on her mistress.

A minute later Mrs. Carte was with Minnie. Minnie was already half-way into one of her mistresses's dresses.

"Mind, you baggage! No kissing," admonished Mrs. Carte.

"It's an old friend of the family to see me," Mrs. Carte explained on returning to Trier. "But isn't the room close? Wouldn't you prefer to sit under the willow?"

He would be delighted. He chuckled over it quite jubilantly. "Just adore that seat under the willow," he said.

"Very well, run along, and I will join you there in a minute or so."

So Minnie had her second turn with the dear old boy.

"Excuse the fan, won't you," she said with some exaggeration of Rosy's affectation; "but the mosquitos are so dreadful, really?"

"Don't notice them. Fact, notice nothing when you are near." He hitched closer. Minnie did not retreat. He took her hand.

"You silly man," said Minnie.

"How is it we always get on so much better under the weeping willow tree, eh— what?" he asked slyly. "Must be the absence of lights. Hate lights. Love loves the dusk and the darkness, don't you think so?"

"You mustn't talk love to me, Mr. Trier," Minnie thought she was doing particularly well.

"Not talk love— why not ? Beautiful theme, love."

"Because I am alone in the world. And, oh, so lonely, with none to protect and guide me."

"Poor little woman. That's too bad— too dashed bad." His left arm was. about her waist, his right hand clasped hers. "But why go on being alone and lonely; why not take a companion?"

"I have mother; but she is no company for me."

"Pish! not a mother, something nearer and dearer. Take a husband. Take me!"

"Oh, Mr. Trier!"

"Call me George."

"Oh, George!" He had both arms around her now. He was kissing her.

"I love you, Rosy," he slid. " 'Pon my soul, I love you like the very deuce and all that. Will you be Mrs. George Trier?"

"Oh, Georgie!"

"You will! By George, you will— you will!"

"Yes, Georgie."

Well, Georgie remained under the willow for two hours that night, and Minnie had to smuggle him out in the end.

"I won't ask you to come in. I'm all over the shop. I mean, dear, I'm too disturbed. Leave me now, won't you?"

And Trier went, jubilant over his success, swinging his limits like a triumphant schoolboy.

Mr. Hillwell was a late stayer, too, that night. Minnie awaited his departure in fierce impatience, swelling with the news. At length Rosy came.

"I've got him for you, m'a'am!" cried Minnie, almost shouting in the excitement of the moment. "He's caught all right."

Mrs. Carte went pale; her mouth opened in dire apprehension.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"He proposed. Mr. Trier's proposed, square and all."

"Proposed ?"

"Yes, to-night."

"And you?"
"I accepted him, you bet!" This with a squeal of triumph.
"You did? You did? Oh, heaven, I'm ruined!"
"Ruined, ma'am?"
"Yes. Half-an-hour ago I accepted Mr. Hillwell."

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4: Mrs. Wiley's Mamma

Punch (Melbourne) 16 April 1914

MISS MINNIE TRIGG was perfectly comfortable with the Wileys. Mr. Wiley was a large, soft, easy-going Saxon, and Mrs. Wiley was a small, pale, spoilt girl with one resource in difficulties— tears.

Mrs. Wiley had a corner to cry in, and if George ventured to argue with her, or it rained when she wanted to air a new tout. or was fine and bright when she was threatened with unwelcome guests; or if the butcher was late with the meat, or the heavens fell, she threw herself in her corner and wept.

If there was any difficulty to be coped with she continued weeping until someone else hadentirely overcome it. Once when the hall curtains caught fire and threatened the whole house, she proceeded to refresh herself with tears, and when Minnie and two neighbours had singed and smoked themselves black beating the fire out, they found Mrs. Wiley in her corner, comfortably crying into a lace handkerchief of about the square of a duty stamp.

"Well, of all the fools!" gasped a neighbour, in blank amazement. That sent Mrs. Wiley off again, and she cried all morning. When her husband returned she resumed crying again, and cried all evening. She was crying for her mother. She had had a terrible shock, she said, and only mamma could soothe her.

George resisted. George, it seemed, had all a young married man's antioaihius, and h found his mother-in-law a thorn in both sides.

"Every young man should haye an objection in life," he said. His was Mrs. Hancock, Mrs. Harold P. Hancock, the mother of his darling Birdie.

As George maintained his resistance till morning, Birdie cried in her corner all the second day.

"Bless yer 'eart!" said Minnie to her friend Bones, the young gentleman from the butchery, "she never runs dry. She's a-cryin' now, sittin' all so comfy in her little eosy corner. Call this evenin', an' she'll be goin' strong fer the benefit iv poor George. She's one iv them natural springs. She's own cousin to the creek the blokes recite about, coz 'Men may come, an' men may, go, but she goes on forever.' "

"Better get to yer dooties; an' see she ain't washed nothin' away," said the playful Bones. "People out in front is reportin' the bustin' iv a main."

"Oh! leave 'er to it," Minnie was quite resigned. "When she's cryin', she ain't doin' nothing worse. Lor' knows what 'ud come to 'er if she had to bottle it. Maybe she'd get dropsy, or water on the brain, or something like that, wet an' dreadful."

George found Birdie weeping again when he came from business in the evening, and as she continued to weep the poor man relented, and mamma was sent for. "Anything for a dry life," said George.

Mrs. Harold P. Hancock lived at Castlemaine, and her visits had not been frequent. Minnie had not yet met the lady; but all the same sentiments of apprehension stirred in Miss Trigg's gentle breast when Mrs. Wiley broke the news.

"You'll have to look out, you blokes," Minnie told Tins, the milkman. "Ma-in-law's comin'. I don't know this pertickler ma-in-law, but my experience of mas-in-law in general don't give me 'appy hopes of this one. Me and George ain't longin' for 'er, an' that's a bad homen, because George hisself is a good, easy, simple sort, what could live on good terms with any old thing that didn't hit him first.

"I don't like mothers-in-laws about the 'ouse no more than sons-in-laws do, and a jolly good reason why— they're interferin' wild-cats, and they always want things done different.

Mrs. Hancock proved to be an elderly edition of her daughter; but her fretfulness was tinged with asperity. She was taller, too, and tougher, and had what Minnie called a cutting edge. When she arrived she rushed into Birdie's arms, and Birdie rushed into hers, and they cried over each other with mutual effusion.

"It was a touchin' sight," said Minnie to her friend, 'Arriet Brown. " 'Me pore, pore Birdie; me pore little girl!' sez mamma 'Ancock. 'Come to yer mother's 'eart,' sez she. 'She will protect you, she will guard you. There, there, dearie, did they ill-use you? Were they cruel to you? Did they keep mummie from her little girl?' "

Minnie threw up her hands.

"That let all out," she said. "You'd have thought Birdie 'ad been shot. Lor' love us, 'ow she did cry! An' straight ez a church, 'tween me an' you, 'Arriet, nothin' on earth had ever been done to poor Birdie but a lot iv coddlin' an' spoilin'; If George 'ad only led her out to the stable, an' took a slipper to her once in a way, she'd 'a bin a 'appier an' a better woman."

Minnie knew trouble was coming before Mrs. Hancock had been in the house two hours. After she and Birdie bad had their good cry, she took off her travelling garments, donned a house skirt and an aggressive white apron, and entered into charge.

After an hour spent in investigation, it appeared that there was nothing that was wholly satisfactory. She told Minnie of twenty-seven arrangements that must be revised, and Minnie was mum. Large experience and an unusual

shrewdness had taught Miss Trigg that silence is the most effective argument in such situations— in almost any situation, in fact.

When Minnie began back talk, it was safe to argue that the end was near; and Minnie began on the third day after enduring much.

"You really must not wash up like that, my girl; it is absurd," said George's mother-in-law. "I don't wash up like that; my mother before me never washed up like that."

"Well, ma'am, if it's any comfort to you, I'll wash the back of the plates now, and come back at it on Friday, and wash the front." Miss Trigg had a curious way of drifting into comparatively accurate English when being caustic.

"No impudence to me, miss," said Mrs. Hancock sternly. "You wash the dishes, and dry them with a cloth. I don't hold with these racks arid rubbish."

"The plates dry themselves this way; but you can wipe them yourself if you can't sleep for thinking of it."

"I shall speak to my daughter of this."

"Very well. Tell her while you are about it I'll wash her dishes in my own way, or I won't wash them at all."

When Birdie was spoken to in condemnation of Miss Trigg's new-fangled dish washing she cried. When George was told of it he swore. He said he didn't care a curse how Trigg washed the blighted plates so long as she had them clean— and he had noticed they were clean. At this Birdie cried harder than ever.

Mrs. Harold P. Hancock had a method of washing that had been her mother's method, and her grandmother's. She severely disapproved of certain chemical and mechanical devices to which Minnie resorted.

"This rots the clothes," said she. "I won't have it. You must wash them with plain soap and elbow grease. The girls of this generation are that lazy they don't know what to do with themselves."

Minnie went on washing in her own way, outwardly calm. Miss Trigg knew she was a good servant, and had perfect confidence in herself. If one mistress did not appreciate her excellent qualities she would not have to go far to discover another who could. Her weapon was always effective— a week's notice.

Mrs. Hancock remained arguing and protesting. Minnie made no reply, which naturally was construed into gross insolence, and reported as such. Again Birdie cried and George swore.

On the following afternoon there was a disagreement over the ironing. Mrs. Hancock disapproved of electric irons. She was sure they spoiled the clothes. Flat-irons had been good enough for her. Flat-irons were good enough for her mother, and her mother was the best fine ironer in all Lancashire.

"But," said Mrs. Hancock, stung beyond indurance by the studied impertinence of Minnie's silence, "you are an insolent, lazy baggage. Anything to get out of the work. I'll do the ironing myself."

Minnie cut off the current, stepped back, and turned down her sleeves. "Very well, Mrs. Hanoock," she said, "and you can cook the dinner, and make the beds, and scrub the floor. You can have all the work on your own. You can revel in it. Get busy, and heaven bless you at your honest toil. I'm off."

Minnie went to Mrs. Wiley and gave notice. She was leaving immediately. Birdie wept. An hour later, when Minnie was packing, there came a quiet knock at her door. Mr. Wiley put his head into the room.

"Come, I say, Minnie," he said, "you're not going to desert me in my hour of tribulation. Here's a sovereign. See it through, won't you?"

Miss Trigg stood up, and looked her master in the eye.

"See it through," she said, "meanin' 'er?"

He nodded. "I'm up against it, too," he said. "We're quite satisfied with you. You suited us entirely till dear old mother-in-law came along. If you're game to fight it out, I'll tack another half-crown on to your wages. But, for heaven's sake, don't drag me into anything."

"Right-o," said Minnie decisively, "I stay."

Miss Trigg returned to the kitchen, where Mrs. Hancock was valiantly attacking the linen with flat-irons heated at a wood fire she had lit. Mrs. H. had a rooted antipathy to gas stoves. It seemed, her mother had never used a gas stove, nor her great-grandmother.

Minnie seated herself comfortably, and watched Mrs. Hancock for ten minutes. Then she produced the diverting romance of *The Duke and the Dairymaid*, and plunged into the history of a splendid passion. Mrs. Hancock stood this for about half-an-hour, when her natural indignation overwhelmed her.

"Well, I never!" she gasped. "Of all the outrageous effrontery. "She dropped the iron, and marched off for Mrs. Wiley, who came in tears. ,

"Really, Minnie, really!" said Mrs. Wiley, feebly.

"Whatever's wrong with everybody?" asked innocent Miss Trigg.

"You should not be sitting there reading while mother does the work. It's too bad."

"Yes, it's pretty bad, seein' how the blessed iron she left is burning the front clean out iv Mr. Wiley's dress shirt."

Mrs. Hancock shrieked, and rushed at the iron. She shook it wildly at Minnie. "I wouldn't keep you in the house two minutes, you shiftless, good-for-nothing," she squealed.

Minnie prepared to resume her reading. "I hope you'll stay a year," she said. "I've oftem thought it would be great if the families would on'y provide someone to do the work for the servants."

This, policy Minnie followed systematically. If Mrs. Hancock objected to her methods she said: "Do you think you'd like to do it, ma'am?" and if Mrs. Hancock, in her righteous auger, set about showing how the job should be done, out came Miss Trigg's love romance, and down plumped Miss Trigg to absorb herself in the amours of the rich aristoctacy.

But the storm burst again on the second washing day. Mrs. Hancock said she had instructions from her daughter to assert herself. She would hive the washing done properly.

"Very well, I'm not struck on washing," said Minnie. "I don't do it for the love of it. Have a go," and Minnie sat down to her book.

"No, I will not have a go, Miss. You do your work, you loafing, shameless thing, you!"

Minnie continued reading, and Mrs. Hancock, in a paroxysm of anger, look her by the two shoulders and shook her. This was not good policy on the part of George's mother-in-law. Minnie was small, but she was energetic

Minnie was on her feet, her two hands went into the tub, they brought out a mass of wet garments, and a moment later the lot was swung into Mrs. Hancock's face.

Mrs. Hancock staggered back. "Oh!" she said. "Oh!" Then she smote Minnie to the earth with a bar of soap.

In an instant Minnie was on her feet again, again her hands went into the trough, and again a mass of washing was hurled into Mrs. Hancock's face.

Mrs. Hancock retorted with a washboard, and broke it over Miss Trigg's hard head. thoroughly aroused, Minnie went for the hot things in the boiler, and swiped her enemv with seven white shirts. Mrs. Hancock replied in kind, and for nearly five minutes the two women belted each other with soaked clothing. At the end of that time Minnie's youth told, and when George and Birdie arrived on the scene Mrs. Hancock was down, and nearly smothered under the week's wash, to which Minnie was adding buckets of suds.

Then followed a retreat to the house, Mrs. Hancock assisted by her daughter and George, Minnie travelling independently. Mrs. Hanoock had recovered sufficiently after half-an-hour and two nips of whisky to pronounce her ultimatum.

"Either that girl leaves the house or I do."

Minnie was invited to state her case. "Of course I'll leave," she said; "but it will cost Mr. Wiley fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds, you brazen hussy! You'll get your week's wages, not a penny more."

"Fifty pounds," said Minnie. "Mr. Wiley engaged me for two years, and I have his written agreement where he says I'm to get fifty pounds down if he breaks the contrack."

Mr.. Wiley left the room hurriedly. To his mother-in-law he seemed to retire in confusion.

"I don't believe my son-in-law was such a fool as to give any such agreement," snorted Mrs. Hancock.

But five minutes later Minnie was able to produce a written contract containing the exact terms stated by her.

It was Mrs. Hancock who left. But if she had examined that contract more closely she might have noticed that the ink was barely dry, and this might have given her to understand how George was engaged immediately after leaving the room.

As a matter of fact, the idea had only come into Minnie's head while they argued, and George had been quick to seize the point.

"The old Dutch sez she'll never visit at George's again while I'm there," Minnie told 'Arriet; "so you can bet your life Mr. Wiley won't be givin' me the run in a hurry."

5: Deceivers Ever

Punch (Melbourne) 30 April 1914

IT IS DEMONSTRATED that Miss Minnie Trigg had some versatility. When in a perfectly natural position and condition, Minnie freely displayed the nature of her upbringing and the qualities appertaining to a slum area breeding; but if occasion demanded Miss Trigg was capable of assuming some of the airs and graces of her mistresses along with her mistresses's "frorck."

It was as a fair imitation of a young person of the middle class— second grade— that Minnie captivated Mr. Wesley Stock. One need not assume that Mr. Stock was overwhelmed by Miss Trigg's physical attractions, or the charm of her character and the brightness of her mind. Nor need it be inferred that Minnie was knocked silly by Mr. Stock's bright smile, winsome ways, and manly bearing.

Minnie was introduced to Mr. Wesley Stock on the St. Kilda Esplanade one Sunday afternoon, and theys "took like a bloomin' vaccination," as Minnie herself expressed it, with some elegance.

Miss Trigg's friend, 'Arriet Brown, introduced them. Miss Brown was for the time being a limp waitress in a city tea-room where Mr. Stock took his habitual lunch of scones and coffee, and 'Arriet knew him only as a regular customer.

Mr. Stock was an airy, inconsequent young man of thirty-four— an instinctive lover, whose attitude towards every fairly attractive girl he met was that of a rapt adorer.

The Lothario put on this rapt attitude with Minnie straight away, and Minnie realised that she had "done a knock." Which, I may state for the enlightenment of the uncultured, means that the young lady had made a deep impression on a susceptible male.

Mr. Wesley Stock was "a cut above" Miss Trigg's average young man, for Minnie, in her humbler moments was not adamant when "Tins" the milkman threw out signals; nor was she always blind to the charms of "Bones" the butcher, or "Feet" the policeman. But the raffish damsel who took occasional excursions with "Bones," or "Doughie," or ''Tins" was Minnie Trigg, general servant, in her own proper and peculiar person, and in her own robes; whereas Miss Trigg, who was now "getting about" with Mr. Wesley Stock, was a voting person of restrained bearing and carefully-selected speech, wearing a frock that had been the property of a recent mistress— a person of some judgment in the matter of gowning.

True, Mr. Stock cared little if a certain slovenliness of diction did betray itself in Minnie's less guarded moments. He was not bigoted in etymology, and after all a girl is a girl.

So it happened that after the first two weeks of her professional term with the Brands, of Mitchell-street, Minnie Trigg suddenly developed a superiority to milkmen; her atmosphere m the presence of butchers' travellers was decidediy chill, and even if "Doughie" came upon her in her most down-at-heel moments, when her hair "looked like a birch broom in a fit," and her clothes seemed to be hung to backs on her spare frame, she preserved an austerity in marked contrast with the cordiality towards the baking trade in other parts and former "places".

Miss Trigg had Mr. Stock ''clinched.'' She was meeting him "reg'lar," and Mr. Stock was some class. His suits were neat, his linen was always clean, and his finger-nails were spotless.

"I go a heap on finger-nails," Minnie told her friend 'Arriet. "Any old lad in any old game can spruce himself up, 'n' crowd on a bit o' dorg after hours, but ten to one 'is nails gives him away. That sort never has the sense t' jlisgiitee their finger-nails, consequent; when they're, done up like a dook, regardless, with 'at, suit, 'n', boots, there's their finger-nails edged in mournin' like a death in the family, givin' them clean away fer no-account Johns will:at -grubs fer their livin' et some cheap job like Billy 'Ill's, 'n' he's sortin' spuds at Gaffin's produce store all th' week, 'n' pertendin' t' be a blank clerk aristocrat Saturday afternoons an' Sundays."

"Oh, Mr. Stock's a torf all right," 'Arriet admitted. "He don't do nothink in the way o' 'ard work to 'urt him, 'n' he's pretty 'andy with his tips. He's somethink in the city— owns a bank, p'raps."

Miss Trigg had fought her own life's battle ever since she was eleven, and before that she had fought a brace of tipsy parents, and dealt with claimant tradesmen always rapacious for a bit on account. She knew her way about, as she was often constrained to admit. Although she treasured certain romantic allusions and illusions, they were for her spare moments and her dreams— she did not permit them to muddle her views of existence or to interfere with her just estimate of men. She was cautious with Mr. Wesley Stock.

"A girl's gotter look after .'erself," she told 'Arriet.

"An' well I know it," 'Arriet agreed sadly.

"If she don't no one else will, so I'm takin' Mr. Stock steady. He's very nice, 'n' he sez I'm the onl'y girl he ever, really loved; but, you know, he never by any charnce 'ints there's such a thing as engagement rings, or gives a girl t' hunderstand he'll maybe be waitin' et the church one o' these fine days. So Dicken t' silly business with Wesley. We're gettin' about, 'n' he's took me to the theatre, 'n' once t' supper; but I'm watchin' him, don't you forget."

"A pore girl's gotter," said 'Arriet."

Meanwhile Mr. Stock did not seem to know Miss Trigg was a humble working girl in the kitchen, not even a graduate from the domestic arts class. If he did know he was apparently quite indifferent. He made no inquiries, and he and Minnie always parted under the same sheltering pepper-tree at the corner of a cultivated street reserve, quite a distance from the domicile of the Brands of Mitchell street.

Possibly Mr. Stock had his doubts, but they did not concern him much. Miss 'Arriet Brown had led him to infer that Miss Trigs was acting as companion to a fatigued lady of good family, but Wesley did not brood on the, fact. He got back to his familiar formula, 'A girl's a girl,' holding with that bad boy Kipling:

"Bridget O'Grady and the General's lady,
They're all the same under their skins."

When Minnie's. association with Mr. Stock was nearly seven weeks' old, quite a long engagement as Minnie's little love affairs went, Mrs. Brand's daughter Amelia came home to her mother's house. Mrs. Brand's daughter Amelia was Mrs. James Weybridge. She came home in tears, with a limp, half-dressed baby over one arm, and followed by half-a-Cab load of ill-packed trunks and boxes.

Minnie recognised the symptoms. She had often seen married daughters come home to mother betraying similar emotions, and know what the story would be when it came out.

And, of course, the story would come out. Meanwhile doors were shut tight, Minnie was barred out in her kitchen, there was a sort of muffled feeling about the rest of the house, and the keyhole of the spare bedroom was plugged with cotton lint.

All these things were observed of Minnie Trigg. Mistresses get into a way of regarding their servants as unreasoning animals. It is quite a mistaken impression. Nothing is more sensitive to strange developments in the domestic circle, nothing so strongly resents a family secret as your domestic, and in nine cases out of ten she unravels the mystery with an expedition and a thoroughness that would put S. Holmes to the blush.

Within three days Minnie knew that Mr. James Weybridge was a brute, a beast, a coward and a wretch, and that Mrs. James Weybridge would never go back to live with him— never— never— never. So there.

Mrs. Brand said she had not trusted James from the first. It appeared that Mrs. Brand had discovered at their initial meeting that James had a shifty eye, and she was always suspicious of a man with a shifty eye.

There was no reason why Minnie should hear these things, but she did. Her determination to hear them was perhaps due to her deep interest in the family and her concern for its welfare.

Mrs. Weybridge's chief complaint against her hushand was his late hours. She was suspicious of him with other women, too. Besides, he rambled. He would come home to her at all hours, and callously remark that he had been plaving cards or billiards with one or another of his disreputable acquaintances. Nothing would induce her to again consent to live with the abandoned villain.

After the ninth day Minnie had hints that negotiations towards a reconciliation were under way. Amelia's pa had seen James. James had expressed his belief that Amelia was dotty. She had left him without reason. She could return when she liked, or she could leave it alone if she liked. It was all one to James.

Amelia's brother Tom saw James. James had always loved Amelia. He never loved her better than now, but she had treated him Shamefully. He thought she ought to apologise.

James's sister Ann saw Amelia, and they cried together a good deal. James was really very unhappy. Amelia should do something.

Amelia's father and her brother together attacked James. James was heartbroken, his home was desolate, his life blighted, but he owed something to his self respect. Amelia must come to him— he would not go to her.

Amelia would not go to him— never, never, never, while grass grew and water ran. He had driven fcr forth. He must take her back if he wanted her.

James's father and mother saw Amelia. The whole family chipped in, and it was agreed that all should meet at Brand's for dinner on the following Sunday evening. James would attend, and they would see what calm reasoning could do with the unpleasant situation.

Minnie was rather glad. She had not to meet Wesley Stock that night. She was extremely anxious to see this matter out.

There was an excellent dinner in preparation. Minnie laid the table with her best skill. Meanwhile the family, conclave was in. full blast; in the drawing-room.

James Weybridge arrived late. To Minnie's great chagrin Mrs. Brand admitted him. James was rather sullen. He sat at one end of the drawing-room, Amelia at the other, with her child in her arms, looking very pretty and pathetic. The families argued in between.

Old-Mr. Weybridge had nothing to advise but one simple though drastic measure— "Kiss her, Jim!"

By continued repetition old Mr. Weybridge impressed his views— Jim did kiss her. All was right in the family of Wevbvidge. junior. The Parties went in to. dinner.

Minnie was prepared for a happy ending. When the gong banged she knew peace had been secured, and caught up the soup tureen and sailed in, radiant, sharing liberally in everybody's happiness.

For a terrible moment it seemed that Minnie Trigg would drop a two-gallon tureen of thick soup on Mrs. Brand's twenty-guinea pale blue carpet. She didn't, though; but she landed it on the table with a crash that jerked half a pint into Mr. Brand's lap.

No wonder. The man on Mr. Brand's right, holding Amelia's left-hand affectionately in his, was her own faithful swain, Mr. Wesley Stock. Mr. Stock was on his feet, staring wildly. Minnie, round-eyed, thunderstruck, was staring back. The others thought the demonstration due to the narrowly-averted tragedy with the soup.

But Minnie said never a word. She came and went, serving the dinner, faithfully, and there were no more accidents.

Young Mr. Weybridge's face had gone grey. It did not resume its normai ruddiness, and every time Minnie came in his anxious eyes went furtively to her face. Minnie never met them.

It was a terrible meal for yobung Mr. Weybridge. The parting from his wife had been an impressive lesson to him— the reconciliation had filled him with joy. Now here was a grim possibility of further evil.

The coffee was served, and Minnie Trigg was back in her kitchen, sitting on a stool, her fingers clawed in her hair, thinking hard.

"He ain't goin' t' get off' so.'easy. Not altogether, he ain't," was the burden of Minnie's thoughts. "I can't go 'n' bust up the whole show, 'but I orter do somethink. He's 'ad me on toast orright. I'll give him one to go on with somehow. But 'ow— that's the question—'ow?"

Evidently an idea came to Minnie. Presently she appeared in the diningloom, and said very distinctly:

"Please, Mrs. Brand, can I speak to you a minute? There's somethin' I want to say most partic'lar and important "

Mrs. Brand arose. James was on his feet. James was white now. -

"Dud— dud— don't!" he stammered. "Don't go. She's a— That is, don't leave us, mother-in-law."

"Nonsense, James. I won't be a moment," said Mrs. Brand.

Mrs. Brand followed Minnie to the kitchen. James arose, and went for his coat and hat. The others went after James, pleading and protesting. They dragged him back.

"Why, I thought it was all right," protested
Mr. Brand.

"Kiss her, Jim," said Weybridge, senior.

"Isn't it all cleared up after all?" queried Amelia's married brother, indignantly.

Mrs. Brand bustled back. "The silly girl only, wanted to apologise about the soup," she said.

James gasped. He dropped his hat. He dropped his coat. He sank in a chair. Minnie had a glimpse of him then, and she felt that in some small measure at least she had got even.

"Travellin' under false nimes, deceivin' pore gurls," she told her friend 'Arriet. "Well, anyway. I made him go' flat ez a ripped balloon. 'E look sicker'n a scalded cat. 'E never 'ad such a turn in his life, 'n' I'm satisfied. To say nothin' of five pound what I received hanonymous by post next mornin'."

6: Pancakes

Punch (Melbourne) 14 May 1914

MISS TRIGG had been with the Barrows a month before she discovered Uncle John Thomas. Uncle John Thomas was Mrs. Harrow's bachelor brother. He was sixty-five— a short, round, rosy, explosive, little man with very white hair.

"He's a nice enough, clean little old bloke," said Minnie, to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, "but nothin' t' write home, about; an' the way that faim'ly goes on about him would give yeh a crick in the neck. Straight, you'd, think he was King George an' Julius Knight rolled into one bundle."

"He must 'ave a bit o' stuff," commented Miss Brown. "Take it from 'Arriet, when they fusses over Uncle hextraordinary, you can bet he's got a sock chockful of beans."

"True for yeh," said Miss Trigg. "I ain't noticed 'em sloppin' their affections over Uncle George Barrow, who looks somethin' like first cousin to a bottle-o, and sneaks in by the back gate t' borrer a tanner or t' get Mr. Barrow's left-off clo's."

Uncle John Thomas had been away, visiting another relation, and when he returned Minnie was a valuable addition to the Barrow family.

Miss Trigg was soon made aware of the arrival of Mr. Thomas.

Mrs. Barrow appeared in the kitchen soon after breakfast on the following morning, and said:

"You mustn't put salt in the coffee, Minnie. "

"Why, you said my coffee was d'lishus, mum, and I on'y put a pinch iv salt in t' settle the groun's."

"Yes, we like it very well, but Uncle, John Thomas doesn't. Uncle John Thomas is very particular."

A little later there was another appeal. "Minnie, you really must try and make less noice when washing up. Uncle John Thomas doesn't like it."

Then there was another order. "Always set the bath-heater going at exactly eight o'clock. Uncle John Thomas takes a hot plunge every morning. Uncle John Thomas is a very precise man."

Once more: "You haven't made Uncle John Thomas's shirts stiff enough, Minnie. Uncle John Thomas likes his shirts very stiff."

Minnie was beginning to cherish ominous feelings towards Uncle. She had cheerful moments when it seemed to her that a little arsenic in the coffee of Uncle John Thomas would make life more liveable at No. 11 Sweet street.

At odd times Miss Trigg had views of Uncle John. He looked a fussy man. He never seemed quite still. He even walked and talked in his sleep, and when he had nothing else to do he wandered about looking for trouble. If in his

peregrinations he discovered something wrong the gardener had done, or something right he had neglected to do, Uncle John Thomas ran in with his complaint, making excited cries like a scaootboy; and he nagged and nagged about the matter for the rest of the day.

"Well, I dunno what they think," Minnie told 'Arriet, "but Uncle John Thomas would want to have quids enough t' stop the river afore I'd have him livin' in my 'ouse."

"P'raps they think it ain't fer long."

"Oh, ain't it! You haven't, seen 'im. He's a hard old never-die is Uncle John Thomas. Why, l wouldn't be surprised if he put 'em all to bunk in the Gen'ral Symmetry. That would be a knock for 'em."

Another point that was impressed upon Miss Trigg by her mistress was Uncle John Thomas's unbounded affection for little Master John Thomas Barrow, only child of the family.

"You must try and keep little John Thomas very clean, Minnie. Brush his hair carefully, and always change his jumper when Uncle John Thomas comes in from his walk. Uncle John Thomas will have him looking nice, and, of course, you've noticed how fond Uncle John Thomas is of his little nephew. That child is the pride and joy of his life— the apple of his eye."

"He may be the happle of his eye," said Minnie to her usual confidante, "but such bein' so, Uncle John Thomas ain't very fond of happles. I seen him givin' little John Thomas beans behind the stable this mornin', an' many a time he gives his hair a tug or nips his arm a treat. Fact is, little John Thomas is a spoilt brat, and Uncle John Thomas is a spoilt bloke, an' two spoils never agrees."

Uncle John Thomas had been in the house five weeks before he exchanged a word with Minnie, and then it come so suddenly.

"Love yeh! 'twas th' surprise iv me life," said Miss Trigg. "Fair took me breath away. Him such a reg'lar gentleman, an' me on'y a domestic servant, as you might say."

THIS IS what happened. Uncle John Thomas had popped his white head and his pink face into the kitchen, closing the door close on his Adam's apple, and had smiled broadly at Minnie, and remained smiling.

"There was me a-cleanin' th' dishes, an' there was his nibs's head stuck in like a knob on the wall, a-grinnin' away fit t' crack," confessed Miss Trigg later. "I thought he'd gone dippy."

After a minute and a half of this, during which Miss Trigg was strongly impelled to throw a pudding basin at the head in order to relieve the great

tension, Uncle John Thomas started nodding. He nodded about ten times, and then winked slyly, and said:

"I say, are you the girl makes the pancakes?"

"Why, of course I am," retorted Minnie. "Who else?"

"Lovely!" said Uncle John Thomas, smacking his lips.

"What; me or me pancakes?"

"Both. Especially the pancakes."

Uncle John Thomas came in, closed the door cautiously, and leaned against it.

"Do you know," he said, "for five-and-thirty years I've been looking for a girl who could make beautiful pancakes."

"Go on," said Miss Trigg, now much pleased.

"Yes, and, now I've found her." Uncle John Thomas chuckled, and danced a few steps. Then he tugged the lapels of his coat, and winked saucily. "And now I've found her," he repeated. He winked again. "And she's a plum!"

Uncle John Thomas was edging near. He came quite close, winking and chuckling all the time. He danced a few more steps, then slipped an arm round Minnie's waist.

"Lovely pancakes!" he said.

Minnie threatened him with the dish cloth.

"You edge off, Uncle," she said, "or maybe I'll swipe you one with this."

"Not at all," said Uncle John Thomas. "Wouldn't think of edging off. Never edge off." With a sudden, jerky, bird-like peck Uncle John Thomas kissed Minnie near the ear. "Delicious pancakes!" he said.

"Would yeh believe it," Minnie told Miss 'Arriet Brown, "he was a reg'lar old sport, that jolly and agreeable, I fair took to him."

"An' him sixty-five, an' a nagger an' a nark," snorted Miss Brown.

"Oh, go on yerself! He's a nice clean old gent. I never saw a cleaner, an' his 'air's beautiful. So's his teeth. They're false, but they're real good. 'Better shift,' I sez to him, 'you'll have th' missus droppin' to this.' 'Let 'er drop,' sez he. 'Can she make lonely pancakes? No.' Then he kisses me again. With that we hears Mrs. Barrow's step in the passage, an' off he skips, dancin' a bit, throws a kiss back, an' does a duck out. When the missus comes in he's readin' sly in the back garding."

Next day at about 11 o'clock the white head and pink face bobbed into the kitchen again.

"Mind, pancakes for lunch, my love," said Uncle John Thomas. "Delicious pancakes!" Then the head disappeared.

There were pancakes three times that week. On the third occasion. Mrs. Barrow said:

"Pancakes again! My goodness me, girl, we don't want to live on pancakes."

"I thought Uncle John Thomas liked them," replied Minnie innocently.

"Nothing of the kind. How could you think so?"

But the mistress interviewed Minnie next morning.

"You may make pancakes again, Minnie," she said. "Uncle John Thomas is really very fond of them, though for the life of me I cannot tell how you came to know."

On the occasion of Minnie's next evening out she was walking quietly along the street, when Uncle John Thomas's face bobbed at her from the first corner.

"Good evening," said Uncle John Thomas pviily. "Come to the pictures? Lovely pancakes!" He gave her waist a squeeze, and said: "Delicious pancakes! We'll see the pictures, then we'll have some oysters and stout. Eh? Eh? On the sly, you know. Like oysters and stout? But pancakes are better. Always loved pancakes. No ow call make pancakes like you. 'Pon my soul, I adore you for your pancakes!"

"I'd rather be loved for meself alone," said Miss Trigg.

Minnie Trigg threw her whole soul into her pancakes.

"After all, he's a very clean oid gent, and so jolly with me. His likin' for my pancakes has touched me 'eart."

"Pig's feet!" snorted Miss Brown, who might have been jealous of her friend's success with a seeming capitalist. "It's the money yer after. Yer mersingary, thats what."

"An' if I am after his money! Why shouldn't I marry fer money? Many a better's done it."

"What! Has he perposed?"

"Well he ain't gone so far; but he's that gone on me pancakes I'm expectin' it every day."

Minnie was not disappointed in her expectation. It happened in the kitchen. Uncle John Thomas slipped in from the back.

"She gone to talk scandal with the dame next door," said he, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, smiling and skipping. "I say, my dear, the pancakes were more delicious than ever to-day! Superb!"

"Glad yer liked' 'em," said Miss Trigg happily. "I put some spice in for a hexperiment."

"A threat success— a triumph. Never tasted such pancakes. Never can I hope to get another to make pancakes to suit me. Will you marry me?"

"Oh, Mr. Thomas!"

"Call me Johnnie, and say you'll marry me.

Uncle John Thomas was squeezing her waist very hard, and planting kisses on her neck. "Say you'll have me, my Pancake. Queen.

"Whatever will the missus say?"

"She'll say everything in the dictionary, and perhaps a lot that isn't to.be found in any decent lexicon. She'll say it over often. But, our troubles. We shall be enjoying pancakes in a little home of our own. They think they are kidding me here. They think they are fooling old Uncle John Thomas; but Uncle John Thomas is spry, he's wily, he knows what he's about. Annie bores me, and as for that brat they're named after me, I'll give ten of him for one of your glorious golden pancakes. If I believed I ever resembled that boy I'd never forgive my parents for not drowning me in a tub. Will you,have me?"

"Could you see your way to puttin it in writin'?" asked Minnie innocently. "You see, you gents has such a way of forgettin'."

"Certainly, certainly, certainly, my love!" Uncle skipped off. He returned in a few minutes with an offer of marriage written and signed. "Now, mind, pancakes to-day to celebrate the occasion," he said. "Kiss me."

Minnie kissed him.

Alas! Calamity struck poor Miss Trigg within twenty-four hours. Uncle John Thomas had stolen into the wash-house, and Mrs. Barrow caught him kissing Minnie in a flare of soapsuds. The result was a week's notice. This came a little later.

"Nice way t' treat your sister-in-law what- is-to-be," said Minnie pertly.

"What's that?" screamed Mrs. Barrow.

"Me and Uncle John Thomas is engaged, I'd have you know."

Minnie was given a fortnight's wages, and bundled out of the house that evening. She saw nothing of uncle. Despite her efforts during the next two or three days she could not see Mr. Thomas. She wrote, and no reply came, and the situation began to look serious.

It was 'Arriet drew her attention to a personal in the *Age* agony column.

"If M. T. will wander on the sands near the boat shed at half-past three on Wednesday, J. T. will be there to meet her."

This was signed "Pancakes."

Minnie went to keep the appointment. Uncle John Thomas was there—pink and chuckling. He danced a sand jig; he embraced her.

"My dear! My dear!" he said, "I haven't had a pancake fit to eat since you left. My wretched sister made some. Horrible! I threw them at her. I hit her in the eye with one. 'Right enough for poultices,' I said—'no good for pancakes.' "

But there was no time for explanations and arrangements. Mr. and Mrs. Barrow arrived on the scene. They, too, had seen the personal. They literally tore Uncle John Thomas away, and departed with their captive in a taxi.

MINNIE had to take another place; but she retained her faith in Uncle John Thomas. His passion for tea cakes would bring him back to her. But the days passed one after another, and there came no word, and at length in sheer desperation she went to seek hiim.

Uncle John Thomas was in the lawn. Minnie approached boldly. "Uncle," she said.

Uncle John Thomas rounded on her.

"You?" he cried. "You? What the deuce are you doing here? Out of this!" He threatened her with a stick.

Minnie's disappointment was terrific. The shock dazzled her. "You promised t' marry me," she said.

"It's a lie, you hussy! Out of this!" He actually struck her.

That was too much. All Minnie's regard, turned to disgust. She flew at him; her fingers sank in his thick, white hair. They fought.

Uncle John Thomas had no compunction about striking a woman. He struck as often as he could, and the wild-cat welled up in Minnie, and she scratched, and pinched, and tugged, and tore. Her own lip was cut, her hat was off, her hair was down; she felt she was in for a black eye, and she fought harder, whirling like a wheel.

Uncle John Thomas had his heels at the brink of the pond surrounding the fountain. Minnie saw her chance. She charged him all her weight, butting hiim in the vest. For a moment Uncle clutched at the air, then he went down on his back in the pond. As he crawled out, Minnie seized the only weapon handy, and bounced it on his head. it was a small, hard-shell turtle. Uncle John Thomas went back into the pond again.

At this stage Mrs. Barrow appeared on the soene, and rescued her brother.

"You shameless wretch!" she cried, "to come here and assault this poor old man."

"What about, that poor old man hassaultin' my eye?" cried Minnie, pointing to the discoloured orb.

"I'll go for the police."

"Do. I'm goin' for a lawyer. See this"— Minnie pulled a paper from her pocket— "that's his promise of marriage writ out, and signed all proper an' accordin' t' law. I'll see if a pore girl's 'eart is to be lacerated and her eye blacked fer nothin'. I'll have a thousan'pounds damages."

Mrs. Barrow calmed suddenly on seein' the letter. "Perhaps you had better talk the matter over with Mr. Barrow," she said. "We want no scandal ; but my poor brother is hardly responsible, you know."

As a result of the talking over process, Minnie received £50 for her promise of marriage, and a most appreciative "character" from Mrs. Barrow.

"What I want to know is why he come to round on me so nasty," asked Minnie at the parting.

Mrs. Barrow confessed. "The fact is," she said, "I found your recipe for pancakes."

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7: The Sad Case of Willie Borlow

Punch (Melbourne) 28 May 1914

IT WAS Mr. Borlow engaged Minnie Trigg at the registry office. Something in her raffish eye and her ginger-for-pluck appearance appealed to him.

"The job is easy," he said. "Fifteen shillings a week, a five-roomed villa, no children, no cats, no callers, and no confounded piano or phonographs. I hate, loathe, and despise phonographs. I have the greatest contempt for cats."

" 'Ow many in the fam'ly?" asked Minnie with a judicial air. "Is the washin' sent out? What nights off, an' is a girl 'lowed to be seen 'ome?"

"There are myself and my mother," replied Mr. Borlow. "Mother doesn't talk much, and can't hear very well. Mother crochets. It's her only vice. Don't care a fuss what you do with the washing. You can go off pretty well every dashed night for all I care, and you can come home with a blessed circus and I won't growl, provided there's no brass band. Mind you," he added fiercely, shaking a threatening finger at Miss Trigg, "no brass bands. I hate brass bands. And I hate monkey organs. Dash it all, girl, if you encourage monkey organs about the place I'll kick you out of rhe house!"

"Yer barmy!" said Miss Minnie Trigg mildly.

"BUT I took on the job all right," Miss Trigg confided to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, a few days later. "My troubs erbout his kickin' me out or puttin' any silly bizness across me. He ain't no higher than that. I cud kick his bloomin''at off, but he's ez queer ez a van-load of apes comin' back frim a picnic. He's got money, I fancy, jist enough t' live on, an' his mother lives with him. He's old, but she's older. 'Sttuth ! I never saw sich an old body. She 'sits in a chair what creaks, an' her bones creak, an' her voice creaks. She don't talk often, an' when she does you'd think it was the wicker work furniture comin' round after bein' sat on by a fat gatherin'."

"Don't sound ez if you was goin' t' be worked to a shadow at 'Willis Villa, " said 'Arriet.

"No, I ain't quite killin' myself; but I reckon it's goin' t' be worth the money to live with Willie. Willie's the boss. His mother calls him Willie, an' seems t' think he's still a kid in knickers, though he's near sixty, an' a widower, with a whisky freak, an' one foot in a ten-pound bundle mostly along of gout."

But Minnie learned a great deal more of her new family before a fortnight had fled. Mr. Borlow was a short, thin, merry gentleman of a very excited manner, with round, staring eyes, and thin, bristling, grey hair. He shaved clean, and his face was pale, lit up with one touch of colour. The extremte tip

of his nose was so red that the illumination looked artificial, and suggested a circus down in an angry humour.

Minnie's first real adventure with Mr. Borlow happened early one morning. She had served breakfast, and was having her own meal, when Mr. B. made a sudden, dramatic entrance into the kitchen. His eyes were rounder than usual, his thin hair was erect, the danger signal on the limit of his trunk burned with electric fury. He held a decapitated egg in his left hand. He paused in the middle of the room, held up the egg, and pointed a rigid forefinger at it.

"Call that an egg?" he squealed. "Call that an egg, do you ? You— you— you wretch! You she devil, do you call that an egg?"

" 'Taint a wheelbarrer, is it?" said Minnie. "An' it ain't a mangle."

"Smell it!" Mr. Borlow strode forward, pushing the offending egg at her. "Taste it !"

"Garn, chase yerself! If it ain't a noo-laid I'll take yer word fer it," said Miss Trigg.

"New laid? New laid? New laid?" with every repetition of the query. Mr. Borlow's voice jumped up the scale. "Why, dash it all, woman, it's an antique! It's a Babylonian relief. It's from the tombs of the first Pharaohs, and it smells like all the plagues of Egypt. How dare you serve me such a dirty trick?"

"Blime!" said Miss Trigg. "You don't expect me to know the birth an' breedin' of every egg that comes into the 'ouse, do you?"

"I know this, that it's like your infernal cheek to give me an egg for breakfast that is totally unfit to associate with gentlemen. Don't you grin at me, you whelp of the slums. Don't you dare!"

Mr. Borlow threatened Minnie with the egg. Minnie ducked, and the offending ova was bowled against the wall, where it hung in an offensive blob.

Mr. Borlow kicked over the kitchen table. "I'll teach you to give me improper eggs," he squealed. He took up a plate, and crashed it on the floor. "There's for your putrid egg," said he. He seized the milk jug, and hurled it through the window. "That'll teach you to know a demoralised and unsound egg when you see it!" he howled.

Miss Trigg was not much disturbed. "Oh, go on," she said, "don't mind me. There's the sugar basin. Have a go at the butter dish."

"You— you vixen. You ginger vixen!" cried Mr. Borlow. He chased her twice round the overturned table, and threw half-a-loaf at her as she skipped through the kitchen door.

"Natural," said Miss Trigg, telling the adventure to Miss Brown, "I reckons it's all up with yours at 'Willis Villor,' an' I'm goin' about t' pack up me goods, when 'long comes his niblets a nour after, calm ez cold-biled rice, an' sez he, ever so sweet an' gentle: 'It's a nice day, is it not?' I sez it's a moderate fine

day, barrin' a little thunder, an' a slight shower iv eggs an' things. 'Maybe, Minnie,' sez his gills, 'you'd like the afternoon to yourself an' half-a-crown to spend.' He flicks me arf er doller, an' goes off. Well, I ain't one to 'arbour spite, so I unpacks an' resolves t' ferget the bad egg."

Minnie enjoyed another week of comparative peace and quiet with the Borlow's, but a second demonstration came in due course. She had served the dinner, and was entering the diningroom with two coffee cups on a. tray, when Borlow sprang upon her from behind the door.

"What're these?" yelled Mr. Borlow in a seeming frenzy. "What in the deuce's name are these things?" In the fright of the preliminary outburst Minnie had dropped the tray, and the fragments of the cups and saucers strewed the carpet.

"They're pancakes, of course," stammered the girl.

Borlow held all the pancakes she had served for the sweets course piled on his left hand. He was pointing at them tragically with the forefinger of his right. To all appearances he was more distressed about the pancakes than he had been about the egg.

"Ho!" he yelled, "so, ho! they're pancakes? Well, take your infernal pancakes." He slapped one clear in her face. He pelted her with three others. He seized her in a paroxysm of fury, and pushed a pancake down her back.

Miss Trigg was not what you would call a long-suffering damsel. She knew her rights as a superior domestic, and would not admit that any master was within his rights in pushing pancakes down her back.

"I was that roused," she told 'Arriet, "I 'ardly knew what I was up to afore I'd grabbed a tureen iv cauliflower, an' fair smashed it on his 'ead. He went down, sorter sittin' with his 'air an' eyes clogged with biled vegetable, gapin' at me like somethin' struck by lightnin'.

"There was I," continued Minnie, for the edification of Miss Brown, "standin', knocked sorter silly by my own rash act, wonderin' what was goin' t' happen next, when all iv a sudding ole Mrs. Borlow begins to cackle. It was the funniest cackle you ever 'eard. Blow me, if the old girl wasn't laughin'. It sounded like snappin' twigs, but it was laughin' all right, an' she was rattlin' in her chair, makin' her bones crack somethin' awful, an' croaks she: 'Tha's right, my dear! Tha's right! That'll do Willie good, that will!' With that I scooted out the room. When I comes back with the coffee sorter shy, Borlow was sittin' carm an' placid in his chair, with a bump on his 'ead 'bout ez big round ez a grey kitten, an' sez he: "Coffee? Ah! thank you, Minnie, thank you very much." An' strike me up a tree, if he doesn't come into the kitchen while I'm washin' up, an' give me a shillin'."

It was only a day later that Mr. Borlow interviewed Minnie in the bathroom concerning cats. He was carrying a large, writhing, blasphemous, yellow she-cat by the tail, and was in a great state of moral unrest.

"What did I tell you about cats, miss?" he. gasped, whirling the cat threateningly. "Didn't I say no cats? Didn't I give you distinctly to understand I would not have cats ?"

" 'Taint my cat!" Minnie protested.

"I said no cats," persisted Willie Borlow; "and what do I find but this disgusting animal in my trunk— with six kittens!" He took a kitten out of his coat pocket, and threw it at Minnie.

"Six kittens, you harridan!" he yelled. He produced another kitten, and threw it. "How dare you encourage cats in my. trunks?" he squealed. "What do I keep you for, you red-headed she-devil?"

He threw another kitten.

By this time Minnie had come to a sort of appreciation of Mr. Borlow s great need. She replied with a lump of soap, which took him in the ear. Willie Borlow threw another kitten, and whirled the mother cat for a grand assault; but Minnie swabbed him in the face with the mop, rammed him to the floor, and gave him three, to go on with. In the excitenent the cat escaped.

"Dear me," said Willie Borlow, sitting with lis back to the door, and rubbing his huits. "Dear me, this is very Home-like.''

"Home-like?" murmured Minnie. "Home-like?" then she sat on the side of the bath, and laughed. "Homelike!" She had never struck anything so ridiculous in the course of her long public service.

The old woman hobbled into the kitchen that afternoon. "I believe you have been beating my Willie again," she cackled.

"That's ' right! Te-he-he. That's right. Don't be afraid, stand up to him. He-he-he-he. it soothes him. Te-he-he."

The ancient crone seemed quite happy.

"You see," said old Mrs. Borlow, "my poor Willie lost his dear wife five years ago, and he's never got over it. He misses her awfully. Having no one to have it out with is a terrible trial to him. But you seem to suit, my dear— you seem to suit."

"I do my best, mum."

"While Willie's poor wife was alive he used to have it out with her, and she used to hit him with the bellows. That was very soothing."

"D'yer mean t' say 'e likes it?" queried Minnie in amazement.

"I don't know, my girl; but it's necessary to him. Willie must have it out with somebody. When I was younger he used to hive it out with me. But now I'm too old. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! now I'm too old. I always used a fish skillet. A

wooden fish skillet, has a very soothing effect on my Willie. But a mop will do— a mop will do."

"Do you really say now I've got to hit Mr. Borlow about when he has them tantrums?" asked Minnie.

"He expects it. He's used to it. He s been used to it all his life. For thirty years I beat Willie when he. was too obstreperous— for thirty years his poor wife did. it. She's dead now, poor thing, and I'm too old."

"Hadn't yeh better get a man in, mum?"

"Oh, no! Oh, dear, no, my child! A man won't do at all. Willie must have a woman to roar at. It has always been a woman. His late wife did it very well. He can't recollect some of the beatings she gave him without weeping. He was very fond of her. Once he assaulted her with a whole dinner, from soup to fruit. He thrashed her quite severely with a boiled pullet. Then she hit him with the piano stool, and whipped him so severely with a carpet beater that he had to stay abed for three days. Don't hesitate, dearie, if he seems to be getting out of bounds. Use your mop on him."

"I'll do my best, mum."

"Do, do, and my Willie' is. not ungrateful. He will probably raise your wages."

"And 'ere I am," Minnie explained to her friend, 'Arriet Brown, "fixed in a nice easy grip, with seventeen an' a tizzie a week, where I ain't got much to do, an' where I'm expected t' deal it out good an' 'ard t'. the boss. I hit him in the weskit with a vegetable m'arrer on'y this mornin', 'cause he went ravin' over the way I done his shirts up. It's dead funny the way I knocks him about with the mop, when he gets tryin' t' kick the roof off. 'Selp me, you'd think we was married."

Minnie was really quite comfortable, with the Borlows. Sne had discovered that there was no particular harm in Willie if he was properly handled and severely dealt with at the right moment. He had to explode at times, and bore no ill-will when corrected after the manner practised by his late lamented wife.

"I don't miss her so much now," Willie confessed one morning after he had been driven round the garden with a yard broom, to soothe an outbreak brought on by a hole in his sock.

Miss Trigg had been with the Borlow couple for over twelve months at the time when, she took a week's holiday to go to her sister's wedding at Traralgon. When she returned she found strangers in Willie's villa, and learned, to her great amazement, that Willie Borlow was dead. He had died suddenly the evening before, and preparations were being made for the funeral.

"You see, my girl," explained the aged mother, "he had an awful bad attack of tantrums, brought on by some burnt toast at breakfast. He had long

recognised it was no use going on at a poor, useless old body like me, so he went roaring round the house, looking for someone to have it out with; but, of course, there was nobody. That was the death of my dear Willie— his having no one to have it out with. I always dreaded the moment would come. Suddenly he recollected, and cried out: 'Great heavens I made the toast myself.' And with that he fell in a fit. He never recovered. Poor Willie! Poor, poor, little Willie! He would have been alive and happy to-day if he had only had somebody to have it out with."

MINNIE was weeping when she told 'Arriet. "It on'y shows," she said, " 'ow a girl should stick to her dooty. I feel as if I'd killed him. It was me goin' away an' leavin' him with no one t' ease his feelin's on what brought on that fit."

"There, there, don't go an' carry on," said the mournful 'Arriet.

"I carn't 'elp it, 'Arriet. Me 'eart's touched. I believe pore Willie was goin' t' ask me t' m'arry him, he was that took with my way of 'andlin' a mop."

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8: Terrible Uncle James

Punch (Melbourne) 4 June 1914

WITH THE CALDWELLS respectability was a sort of religion. Respectability has its own Decalogue, and the Caldwells observed the one hundred and ten commandments much more scrupulously than average Christians regard the sacred ten. Respectability has its catechism, too, and the little Caldwells were carefully instructed therein. At the age of seven not one Caldwell of them all could fail to give the correct answer to any question of Mrs. Grundy's.

At fifteen Henry had his card-case. At ten he knew exactly now to treat a lady when walking abroad, which side to take in fifteen given conditions, with which hand to lift his hat on approaching a person of the other sex, and just now high to lift it in accordance with that person's age or social status.

"Blessed if they don't go to bed by rule an' get up by arithmetic," said Minnie to Miss 'Arriet Brown. "They're the queerest crew ever, they've got little books fer breakfast, so ez I know exactly what's the fashionable way t' crack a negg, or the swagger style iv askin' fer a fresh cup iv corfee. They're got little books fer lunch, an' little books fer dinner. Blime! ye'd think it was a hobject lesson in nachrul 'istory t' see 'em takin' their places fer meals, with Pa Caldwell as 'eadmaster, an' Ma Caldwell ez chief instructor iv the hinfant class."

" 'Ave they got any special book on hetiket fer servants?' asked 'Arriet.

"My hat, have they! Didn't Ma Caldwell come at me with it first evenin' I took on. She's writ it herself, *'Rules an' Hinstructions fer the Guidance iv Domestics Servants*,' it's called, an' it's all set forth in a hexercise book. 'Ow t' do this, an' 'ow t' do that. 'Ow t' wear a cap, 'ow t' open a door, 'ow t' serve soup, 'ow t' haddress yerself to a lady visitor, 'ow to haddress yerself to a gentleman visitor. There's even a page on 'ow to walk.

" 'Trigg,' sez she t' me, 'yer a good servant, but I ain't quite pleased with yer way of walkin'.'

" 'Whatser matter with me walkin'?' sez I, a bit rattled. 'Don't expect a girl t' walk on her 'ands, do yeh?'

" 'No, Trigg, certingly not. Don't be ridiculous, please. But I would like you to keep your head up, your, shoulders square, and take measured steps—so.'

Mr. William Ogden Caldwell was a small, stout, stiff gentleman, with a very, shiny round lace, a very shiny round head, a shiny hat, shiny boots, and a shining shirt front. If shine counts for respectability, no person on earth could have doubted Mr. Caldwell's respectability.

The touchstone of right doing with Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell was, "What will the neighbours say?" If a little Caldwell were tempted to do wrong, that

momentous question, "What will the neighbours say?" stirred in his mind, awakening all the good within him, and he resisted the evil thing.

Minnie was admonished in the same way. "You really must not say good-night to that young man at the back gate, Trigg. What will the neighbours say?"

"Please, do not raise the clothes-line above the level of the garden wall, Trigg. Everyone can see the washing. What will the neighbours say?"

"Trigg, I had much rather you did not conduct conversations with the grocer on the back verandah. What will the neighbours say ?"

At length Minnie was stung to retort. "I dunno what you know about the ways of neighbours, ma'am, but from what I've bin gatherin' concernin' their' thinkin's an' doin's l've come to the conclusion they'd say just what they like. What you do won't make no partickler difference."

"All the same, Trigg," said Mrs. Caldwell severely, "there are certain rules of propriety and decorous conduct which we must all observe. See page 15."

This "see page 15" referred Minnie to Mrs. Caldwell's useful brochure, "*Rules and Instructions for the Guidance of Domestic Servants*."

Despite Minnie's acute philosophy concerning the manners and customs of neighbours, the people of Ten Crescent seemed to entertain great respect for the Caldwells. Mrs. Caldwell's "afternoon" was well attended, and was conducted with such taste and such nicety of method as to be regarded as a standard of style to which all young housekeepers should aspire.

It was during the holding of one of these important and almost sacred functions that Minnie appeared at the door, signalling wildly to Mrs. Caldwell. Minnie was visibly disconcerted.

"Bub-bless my soul, is it a fire?" gapped one elderly dame.

Mrs. Caldwell excused herself according to Burbank's "*Brochure of Domestic Etiquette*," chapter 4, page 82, and joined Minnie in the hall.

"How dare you, Trigg?" she said. "You have behaved in a most unseemly manner. What will the guests think?"

"I dunno what they'll think presently," retorted the domestic; "espeshly if he breaks out."

"If who breaks out ?"

"The bloke in my bedroom."

"A man in your bedroom. Heavens!"

"In me bedroom? He's in me bed. What will the neighbours say to that? He's thin, an' he's dark, an' he's dirty, an' I won't have the likes in my bed. So I give you a week's notice. I don't know him. Never seen him afore. Yet when I goes back after servin' the tea there is his nibs, large ez life, sittin' in the kitchin, hisself on one chair, his ole boots on another, 'eatin' the 'am sandwiches. I yells at him. ' 'Ear, 'ear, yeh beat,' I yell, 'sling yer hook. Whatcher

doin' 'ere, eatin' them san'wiches?' He jist smiles et me like a skull, an' 'Go to the deuce, me girl,' he sez, an' reaches fer the cakes. I was jist in time t' save arf iv them. I didn't know what t' do, so dashed in t' cut more san'wiches, an' while I'm doin' it that frowsy waster strolls into my room, an' spreads himself in my bed, boots an' all. What I want is you t' keep a heye on him while I run for a John— a police, that is."

"Stay, Triggs." Mrs. Caldwell was very pale. "Let me have a look at him first."

Mrs. Caldwell stole to the door of Minnie's room, and peeped in. She rams back in great, distress. "You— you mustn't go for the police, Trigg. You mustn't disturb the poor man."

Minnie gaped at her mistress in sheer wonder. "I said a week's notice, mind," she said. "If it comes t' dossin' down boots in my bed I'm off it."

"Hush, hush ! Let us wait till Mr. Caldwell comes home. Meanwhile, do the best you can. This will be made right."

"Blowed if the ole girl didn't go back, an' tell the twitterin' party iv sparrows in the drorin' room I'd scalded meself," said Minnie, describing the incident to 'Arriet, her friend and confidante.

" 'The foolish girl has spilt some boilin' water on her foot. It is really only a trifle, but she is in some pain. I hope you'll forgive me,' sez she. You never saw a perfect lady be so nice an' sweet, cool ez a blessed hice-chest all the time, though I knows fer a cert that hinsolent bla'guard a-snorin' on my bed is weighin' heavy on her nerves."

When the guests had left, Mrs. Caldwell returned to the kitchen, and to her amazement found Minnie seated with her hat on, and a dress basket on her knees.

"I'll send fer me other traps," said Miss Trigg. "I ain't 'ard t' get on with if I'm treated proper, but tramps in me bed is dead hookity, an' I ask yeh to accept me resignation."

"Don't go, Trigg; please don't leave me. I am very much distressed. You may have Clara's room. In any case wait till Mr. Caldwell comes. Don't leave me along with that man."

"Leave yeh alone," said Minnie. "Yeh needn't be alone three minutes. Say the word, an' I'll have the p'lice force an' the fire brigade in two ticks. If the p'lice can't put him out, the fire brigade will."

"No, no, Trigg. I must wait for Mr. Caldwell. I have special reasons."

Minnie set down her basket, and took off her hat. "All right," she said, "on condition I get another bed I'll stay, though it is the first time I've took service in a tupp'ny doss."

When Mr. Caldwell returned home Mrs. Caldwell met him in the hall. There was much whispering, and then William Ogden Caldwell went boldly towards Minnie's room. His boldness evaporated with each stride, and when he reached the door he was most timorous.

"Don't you be afraid of Mr. Caldwell," said Minnie, approaching with a spade in her two willing hands, "I'll back you up. Get the tongs, ma'am."

"Go away!" said Mr. Caldwell.

Minnie backed off a few steps, and William Ogden Caldwell put his head in at the bedroom door.

" 'Ello, Bill!" said a coarse voice.

"Eh—eh! good-day, James," said Mr. Caldwell.

Then Mr. Caldwell withdrew his head, and looked helplessly at Mrs. Caldwell.

"Go to your work at once, Trigg," said Mrs. Caldwell sharply.

Minnie returned to the kitchen. She put aside the spade very reluctantly.

"I 'ad counted on havin' a bat at him," she told Miss 'Arriet Brown in the latter's room on the following evening. "But, after all, it seems he's a sort iv friend iv the fam'ly. 'I'm a friend iv the Caldwells. Them the sweetest an cleanest' an' properest push on earth— an' 'im! You orter see him, 'Arriet. You wouldn't pick him up to sell to a ragman."

After that peep at "Jim," Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell withdrew to their own room to hold council. They had come to no conclusion by six. Minnie was busy with the dinner, when suddenly the intruder reappeared in the kitchen. He was yawning copiously.

" 'Ello, you," he said,— what's fer tea?"

" 'Tain't tea," said Minnie, "it's dinner; an' it's no blessed bizness iv yours anyhow."

"I don't care what you call it, I want sausages— pork sausages."

"Well, you can want."

"Pork sausages!" roared the stranger.

The roar was so terrific, it brought Mrs. Caldwell to the kitchen, tremulous with concern. Minnie explained in her own simple, direct, emphatic way.

"it's a fine thing," sneered the stranger, "if a poor man can't have a few sausages if he needs them. Is this infamous grinding of the poor in the interests of a brutal plutocracy to continue for ever? Is it?" he roared. "No, no, no! We shall end it, we lawless ones, we free spirits, we rebels. And we know how. By heaven! we know how."

"Really, really, Uncle James, really," protested Mrs. Caldwell. "You know you would not be refused food in this house. William will go for the sausages."

"At once!"

"Yes, yes, certainly at once, Uncle James." Uncle James had pork sausages for his meal. Mrs. Caldwell fried them herself, and a week later James was still with the Caldwells, sprawling about the house, bossing it, an unkempt, undesirable, of whom Mr. W. Caldwell had an ignominious terror. The one effort of the Caldwells was to keep Uncle James out of sight of the neighbours.

"What would the neighbours say?" was Mrs. Caldwell's constant lament.

Caldwell wanted James to wear some of his old clothes, and offered him clean linen; but the advance stirred James to fury.

" Wear any man's cast offs ?" he snorted. "Make the offer again, Bill, and I'll wring your nose."

"There, there, James, don't be violent," protested Mr. Caldwell.

"Violent? Violent? What recourse have the poor but to violence ? And I tell you, Bill, they will one day end this rotten civilisation— this putrid social system—" with violence James slapped his coat pocket, which seemed to contain a round object about the size of a large apple.

"You— you haven't one of those fearful things on you, James?" faltered William.

"Haven't I? I have just."

Minnie now understood the position.

"He's Mr. Caldwell's brother," she told 'Arriet. "A seasoned rotter, 'e is, one o' them hanarchists. Hanarchist! Blime! I'd hanarchist 'im if they'd give me ten minutes at 'im with a prop. I dunno what he's done in the past, but he's got 'em all dead scared. I ain't scared though, an' one o' these evenin's Jimmy is goin' t' get it frim me."

Minnie let loose rather sooner than, she had expected. James was dissatisfied with the meal she served him on the following evening. He ate in the kitchen, refusing the society of the effete plutocrats in the dining-room. James wasted little time in argument, but took the tablecloth by its corners and showered food and crockery all over the floor; then twirled the cloth about Minnie's head. Miss Trigg extricated herself. She did not wait to express the state of her feelings in plain language, but went down on a rolling-pin. Her first blow caught James the Anarchist on the elbow he threw up to guard his head.

"Oh!" said James. "Whew!" said James.

Minnie struck again. "Outer this, you dirty loafer," she said. Her second blow reached the ear of the anarchist.

"Police!" cried Uncle James.

Minnie's third swing came into contact with the head of James Caldwell, and James made for the door. Minnie beat him out of the house and into the

night. When Miss Trigg returned she was met by the horrified Caldwell family. But all Mr. Caldwell said was:

"He'll do a mischief. I'm sure he'll do us all a terrible injury."

All through his dinner Mr. Caldwell was beset by grim anxiety. He was tremulous with nervousness. His face was grey, and the smallest noise set him jumping.

Mr. Caldwell's concern was not without reason. Minnie was serving the pudding when the dining-room window crashed, and a heavy, round, dark object fell upon the table, and rolled to the floor.

William Caldwell uttered a yell of terror.

"Run!" he cried. He caught up Eric, and ran for the door. Mrs. Caldwell snatched up Esther, and ran, too. The other children followed their parents pell-mell out of the house.

Five minutes Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell cowered in the garden, awaiting the expected catastrophe. No catastrophe came. When William stole back he found Minnie busy in the kitchen.

"Whe— where is it?" he faltered.

"Where's what?" asked Minnie.

"The bomb."

"Oh, that? I 'it it with the 'ammer."

"You hit it with the hammer. My goodness! What happened?"

"Then I ate it."

"Ate it? Ate a bomb?''

"I ate some of it. Didn't I tell you that Uncle James was a miserable bluff. See, here's what's left of his bomb!"

Minnie showed the fragments. They were the remains of a coconut.

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9: The Bentways Family Skeleton

Punch (Melbourne), 11 June 1914

THE BENTWAYS were superior people. They lived in a large, square, formidable house that had something of the aspect of a social fortress. The house was set in extensive grounds. It was entirely surrounded by close-set fir-trees, tneir dark austerity adding greatly to the aloofness of the house— and lending it their name, "The Firs."

The Bentways stood as much apart from their suburb as their house did. People saw them always from a distance. Residents in the locality beheld the big Bentways motor passing sedately through the stern iron gates of "The Firs," and caught glimpses of austere Miss Bentways, or very correct Mr. Arthur Bentways, or even grey, reticent Mrs. William Bentways, their mother, sitting in its dim recesses; but were admitted to no more intimate connection with the Bentways and "The Firs."

Minnie was only one of many servants at "The Firs," but within a couple of days she had lost all the sense of semi-veneration with which the suburban people regarded its occupants.

"My word, they've got 'eaps all right," said Miss Twiggy for the enlightenment of her bosom friend 'Arriet, "but they ain't such a much after all. They stows away there, an' puts on dog, so that local simpletons think they're it and a bit. But, lor' blesh yer 'eart, 'Arriet, I fell to their little family secret right away."

"Go orn," said 'Arriet, her eyes distending. " 'Ave they got a fambly secret?"

"O' course they 'ave. Was you ever in service at a place wot 'adn't a fambly secret iv one sort or another? There's a skellington in every cupboard. That's my experience. Sometimes it's a little, no-account sort o' skellington— other times it's a great, big, grinnin' monster. The Bentways' skellington is a sort of medium skellington— but they're worried by it a lot. It's a hactive skellington, an' won't keep in its cupboard."

"Krismiss ! I wouldn't stay where there was skellingtons," said 'Arriet nervously. " 'Ave yer seen it ?"

"Seen it ? I see it all over the place. It's the ole man. It's ole Willyim Bentways his self."

" 'Ow cud he be a skellington, an' 'im not dead?"

"Garn, 'Arriet, wot's the matter with you is you ain't got any brains. Fambly skellingtons ain't always dead uns. The Bentways fambly skellington ain't dead. If he was he wouldn't be a skellington. You bet, I furridged him out in no time. Harf the fun of bein' a servant is furridging out fam'bly skellingtons. I was onto Mr. Bentways, senior, right from the jump. He's the lad what's got all the stuff.

He made the pile, contracting an' buyin' property, an' he's a heavy sort iv bandy-legged roughie, with no dog to him at all. He ain't got no more style than a born bottle-o, an' slouches about the place in the misrable clothes he wore when he was a navvy over thirty years ago, he does."

"G-a-a-rt,! an' him that rich."

"Yes. They say he's worth more'n 'arf-a-million, an' yeh wouldn't think he 'ad a penny fer bootlaces. He don't wash himself till som'eone makes iira, an' loves' t' go potterin' about the place with a spade an' a barrer, doin' odd jobs an' bits iv gardenin', cuttin' wood, diggin' oles, an' puttin' up sheds an' thin's. The cook, what's bin there years, tells me he kicked up thunder once when his son engaged a 'andy man t' do the work iv the garden an' the yard. Ole Willyum chased the bloke off the place with a axe 'andle. He'd 'a' brained 'im if he'd got 'in

"So yeh see, 'Arriet, that's the Bent ways family skellington. They're ashamed iv the ole man, an' they can't alter 'im, coz he won't be altered, bein' that pig-headed. He likes work, an' he 'ates spendin', and he 'ates clothes an' good 'ats, an' looks like a street sweeper what's blown in."

Minnie heard and saw a good deal more of the elder Mr. Bentways in the course of the next fortnight. She gathered that when Mr. Arthur Bentways and Miss Eugeme Bentways were younger they were very ambitious to he just "it" in a social sense, and went in for entertaining. But when old - man Bentways had charged into the drawing-room among their swagger guests on three different occasions in shirt sleeves, old brown moleskin pants, and unlaced blucher boots, dirty from a job in the garden, and had wanted to know what in thunder that pack of gaudy imbeciles was doing in his house, wearing holes in his carpets, and devasting his larder, the younger people had given it up as a bad job, and were now waitng for Providence to dispose of papa before seeking to shine in society.

But Providence was tardy in disposing of papa. Papa was a tough nut. He remained hale and hard and headstrong. Young Mr. Arthur was rich, and kept the house going, but the old man had to be conciliated— otherwise heaven knows how he might have left his half million.

"S'welp me ! I've found out a new one about ole Willyum," Minnie told 'Arriet one evening. "He goes out an' takes jobs. Yes. if he ain't watched he'll do a guy through the back gate in his scrouger togs, an' get along somewhere where work's goin' on, an' bail up the boss tor a job."

"No!" gasped 'Arriet incredulously. "An' 'im with banks chock full iv money."

"Yes, he done it. He done it more than once. The cook tell me she 'erself saw him one day mixin' mortar on a buildin' job. Another time he went missin'

fer a fortnight, an' Mr. Arthur put the privit D's on him, an' they found him doin' pick an' shovel work in the sewers fer eight bob a day, an' livin' in a little room he'd hired on his own."

"Well, ain't he a trick? What'll he do next?"

"Heaving only knows. But he loves it. See he's been used t' 'ard work, an' he likes it. More'n that, he likes 'ard cash Straight, my privit opinion is he's just a hair's breadth off his 'ead, though he don't look it, 'part from his wantin' t' work, which ain't natural. My ole man never wanted to work. Neither did yours."

Mrs. William Bentways, of "The Firs," was a mild, simple old woman, the type of lady that a working man's wife makes when she finds herself withdrawn from all the interests that made life endurable, and surrounded with all the comforts she could not enjoy. The probability is that if she could have had her own way she would have preferrod to be living with Bill in a simple cottage, doing her own housework, attending to Bill and a few hens all day, and sewing patches and darning socks in the evenings. But being now tne wife of a rich man, and the mother of a lady and a gentleman, she had to sit about in perpetual Sunday clothes, with folded hands, and let time pass as heavily as it might.

One day, when Minnie had been at "The Firs" about eight weeks, Mrs. Bentways sent for her.

"I rather like the ole girl," Minnie explained to 'Arriet. "She's a kindly, dccent sort, an' havin' worked 'erself, knows how to respect them what works. When I went in to 'er she was lookin' sort o' ruffled an' upset. She she: 'You're a nice girl, Minnie, an' I think you'll do somethin' for me— something partickler. I want you to go to that vacant land in Wills-street near the tram corner, have a good look what is going on, and come back and tell me. Mind you miss nothin', and be a good girl, and please don't tell anyone else where I am sendin' you, or what you see.'

"Well, o' course I went. There was a rough fence round the land, which was owned by Mr. Arthur Bentways. He'd let a contrack fer a row iv 'ouses, an' the men was 'ard at it. I takes a look round, 'arf suspectin' what the missus was after, an', sure inough, there was his jills diggin' away 'ike ole 'Arry in one iv the trenches."

"Wot, Mr. Bentways?"

"Who else ? He'd took a job from his own son's contractor, what didn't know 'im from a crow, an' there he was pastin' in', doin' ez much 'ard yacker as any two others, his ole whiskers waggin', an' his ole bald 'ead sweatin' like a waterin'-can. Work! 'Strutk! he jiss seemed t' revel in it.

"Course I went back an' tole the missus, an' she burst into tears. 'I guessed it ! I guessed it!" sez she. 'Oh, what will Mr. Arthur say ?'

"She gimme two bob t' sit quiet an' say nothin'; but a few hours later Mr. Arthur came in the back way, bustlin' his dad before him, an' the ole man was all over yeller clay an' wet with sweat— and he was givin' Arthur nothin'. Mad! Lor', he was ropable.

" 'Somethin' if a man can't please hisself,' yells he. 'By I will please myself. Do you think I'm goin' t' be an infernal slave t' my blessed fambly. By heavens! I'll show you! I'll show you!'

"Then Mr. Arthur bustled him into his room, an' in course all the girls knew what 'ad 'appened."

Mr. William Bentways behaved himself fairly well for a few days. Then one afternoon he went quietly out by the back gate, wearing a coat, a very unusual article, of apparel with him, and instantly disappeared.

It was as if he had stepped into oblivion the moment he closed the little gate after him.

Minnie was called upon to go in one direction, seeking Bentways, senior. Three other servants were sent in' other directions. All were instructed to keep up the search till six o'clock, and to carry on the hunt about any place where work was going forward.

The search was all in vain, and William did not return home that night. Next day the search was renewed. Minnie was sent out by Mrs. Bentways, with special directions from the old woman.

"Look for him wherever there is any kind of digging being done, my dear," said Mrs. Bentways. "My husband is fond of digging. It is a weakness of his. If you find him I'll make you a very nice present."

"I'm on a good wicket these days," Minnie Trigg confided to 'Arriet. "I ain't no more slavey. I'm Miss Trigg, privit detectiff. I got nothink t' do but jist prowl round, lookin' fer clues. I ain't found none up to now, but the perfession suits me all right. I'm all over the place on me own, searchin' fer Mr. Willyum Bentways, what disappeared from his 'ome on 12th inst. Short, stout, bloo eyes, whiskers, legs bowed a bit, about sixty-five years iv age. So, 'Arriet, if yeh spot a ole stray answerm' that description y'll be rewarded on givin' infirmation what'll lead to his recovery, dead or alive."

Minnie was retained as a private detective in pursuit of the missing Mr. Bentways for over a week. Meanwhile, Mr. Arthur had put two agencies on the job, the police had been privately instructed to keep an eye for his lost parent, and the search was extending all over the country.

When a fortnight passed consternation seized the Bentways family. There was no knowing What their "hard-headed father might dp. But the grim

possibility of his fixing up a new will during this period of absence and estrangement was ever tefore their eyes.

The story got into the papers. The mystery of the missing Mr. Bentways became a matter of extraordinary public interest. William had never been photographed, consequently pictures of him were not available; but all the papers in three States published minute descriptions of him and the possibilities of the case were discussed by shrewd gentlemen everywhere.

At this stage Mr. Arthur Bentways offered a reward of £100 to any person supplying information that would lead to discovery of the whereabouts ol William Bentways, of "The Firs," Newberry-street, Kew.

"They've called me off, 'Arriet,'' said Minnie Trigg dolefully. "I ain't a success ez a privit detectiff, so I've bin requested t' resoom me ordinary dooties ez a ' domestic. It's a great shame, coz I was doin' pertickler well, havin' me travellin' expenses paid, also gettin' a hallowance fer dinners an' wear an' tear, But that 'undred quid's worth 'avin', so I'm keepin' me eyes open."

The search for the lost father was resulting in a great deal of inconvenience to others beside the Bentways family. Old men answering somewhat to the printed description of the missing William were being brought to "The Firs" hourly.

"Some of 'em comes willin' enough," said Minnie, "it bein' understood they stands in for 'arf the 'undred if accepted. But most of 'em comes reluctant, an' puts up fights on the drive, on the garding path or on the doormats. We 'ad ez many ez five fights yesterday afternoon 'tween ole blokes an' chaps what was bringin' em in t' be claimed. Some of 'em is dragged on foot, some is brought in cabs, an' one ole geezer was brung along in a taxi. The party what brought him was furious when Mrs. Bentways wouldn't accept him as her long-lost, lovin' husband, and said he was bein 'posed on an' deceived. He insisted on leavin' him— he said he would sue fer the 'undred pounds reward. Mr. Arthur 'ad to kick him off the premises."

Mr. Arthur's great concern grew, and he had bills printed, and stuck up all about the place, reading :

REWARD.
One Hundred Pounds
Will be paid for information leading to the recovery of William Bentways, missing from his home "The Firs," Kew.

Their followed a description of the lost man, and a reassurance concerning the £100 reward.

But six weeks had gone, and Mr. William Bentways remained unheard of, There was now talk of the advisability of dragging the Yarra. Several experts

had come to the conclusion that William was somewhere under water, attached to a snag.

IT WAS in the middle of the seventh week that Minnie burst in on 'Arriet Brown in the latter's room at the house 'Arriet was just then favouring with her services.

"I've got it!" she squealed. "I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!"

"Got wot?" gasped 'Arriet. " Yer fair barmy. Got wot— the measles?"

"I've got the 'undred pouuds."

"I don't believe yeh. 'Tain't possible."

"Oh, ain't it ? Well, I've tound him. I've got the ole man Bentways, an' he's at home now safe and sound— all of him barrin' his whiskers. He'd shaved his whiskers off, but I knew him." Minnie was actually dancing mad in her excitement and the exuberance inspired by thought of the £100.

"But 'ow ?" wailed 'Arriet. In heaving's name get sane 'n' sit, 'n' tell a body 'ow, 'n' where, 'n' when."

" 'Twas t'-day, this very afternoon. I'm out. In Kew, mind yeh— in very Kew, not a mile frim his own 'ouse— 'n' I'm' keepin' me eyes open, when I sees a bloke in a sort iv calicker suit, stickin' bills on a hiron fence. I'm curious, I gets nearer the view. He's a clean-shaven old John; but he ain't shaved his heyebrows, or I wouldn't a knowed him, but I did know him.

" 'Willym Bentways!' I yells.

"He looks at me keen. 'Oh, go to ——,' he says, 'n' goes on pastin' up the bill.

"But I ain't t' be put off. I dogs him and fixes him all right. In less'n' a hour Mr. Arthur bowls him 'ome in the motor in his calicker suit, 'n' with his paste-tin and his roll of bills.

" 'N' whatcher think? Here's the hextraordinary part. The bill what old Willyum Bentways was stickin' up— what was it? 'Course you'd never guess in the creation iv cats. It was the bill offerin' a 'undred pounds for his own recovery. He'd took a job with a bill-sticker, he havin' been a bill-sticker once when he was young in England, 'n' is postin' the very bill advertisin' for his very self when I nabs him. Which," said Minnie, "proves another thing conclusive— the rich Mr. Willyum Bentways, of 'The Firs' carn't read."

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10: The Bailing Up of Uncle James

Punch (Melbourne) 18 June 1914

NO FAMILY with whom Miss Trigg had taken service was as careful of the conventionalities as the William Caldwells. Social propriety was observed by the Caldwells as if their lives depended upon it. Mr. William Ogden Caldwell condescended to no indiscretions, not even a mild cigarette.

"He's alwiz boastin' how he was never inside a public 'ouse in all his life," Minnie explained to Miss 'Arriet Brown. "An' the way he swells hisself up when he sez it, I'm sometimes frightened he'll fly open. Lor', I dunno what 'ud 'appen if he was dragged into a pub be force one iv them days. He tells it to the kids to hinspire them to good works, an' he tells it to me an' the missus so that we can sit round an' wonder at the wonder of it. The missus thinks he orter get a knighthood or a bloomin' monymint 'r somethin'; but I don't overflow with liadmiraMon t' no pertickler extent.

"The neighbours calls his nibs the Admiral Crichton," Minnie continued. I ain't sure, hut it seems t' me that means a sort iv Johnny Alright, little brother to 'Enery No'error an' Tommy Stop'ome."

But if the Caldwells, of "The Holme," Ten Crescent, were painfully correct, William Ogden Caldwell's brother James was the limit in all other respects. As the black sheep of the family, James felt himself called upon to be the antithesis of William.

If William Caldwell never entered a hotel he took an excellent precaution to avoid meeting James Caldwell. James never came out of hotels. At least, he rarely did so voluntarily. If William was a neat, dapper, shiny man, James was a shabby slouch, who usually, resembled a disreputable undertaker—if you can imagine such an incongruity. William was an upholder of law and order, a gentleman of great moderation in politics, a man who revered Parliaments and municipal bodies, and was even known to have a deep veneration for Mayors. James was an avowed anarchist, a bitter enemy of society, a condemner of politicians, a foe of all known social institutions, and his loathing of Mayors was vitriolic and protracted.

"I could spend a whole day sitting in a corner hating Mayors," said Uncle James on one occasion when he drifted in at the back gate, and was informed by Minnie that his sister-inlaw was busy in the drawing room, entertaining the suburban Mayoress.

"Oh, all right," was Miss Trigg's jovial response. "Sit over in the corner iv the yard next, the dorg kennel, an' hate away t' yer 'eart's content."

"Mayors stand for a little piffling replica of the organised social condition, which is a sham and a fraud," said Uncle Jam'es bitterly.

"I dunno," replied Minnie lightly. "None iv them ain't never bit me."

"You!" scoffed Uncle James. "You! You're a slave— a minion!"

"Oh, am I? Well, I'll tell what you ain't— you aijn't a good himitation iv a man. And, what's more, you ain't washed yerself in a week."

"No, I haven't washed myself," cried Uncle James; "an', what's more, I won't wash myself. I glory in being dirty. Dirt is a sign of emancipation. Bill wishes enough for the whole family. No confounded soap for me. Soap should be a badge of the Servile State but I am a free soul."

"Well, get outer my kitchen," said Minnie, threatening him with the broom

Uncle James retired to the yard. He had learned to respect Minnie's broom. In fact, the servant was the only member of the household who did not give a dump for Uncle James and all his works. He terrorised his brother and his sister-in-law, trading on their horror of the neighbours discovering the relationship; but Minnie had no scruples, and treated the practical anarchist as a mere gasbag.

"Look here, my girl," he said through the window, "I'll be dropping something one of these days that will blow you and your kitchen to glory. You're trifling with a thunderbolt, that's what you're doing.''

"Poof!" scoffed Miss Trigg. "You won't blow nothin' more dangerous than the froth off a pint."

William Ogden Caldwell had contracted a great respect for Minnie because of her resolute methods of deanng with Uncle James. He felt in his own heart that James was a dangerous character, and a man who might he expected to play the very mischief at any moment. He believed, too, that the sealed jam tin which James sometimes displayed in his more vehement revolutionary moods was really a loaded bomb, with a capacity to spread death and desolation over a large area, and was dreadfully frightened of him; and it was very satisfying to have a servant who was capable of doing the things he dared not do himself, and of keeping James in order on the occasion of his furtive visits to "The Holme."

There was a time when William used to give his brother James money to travel to far countries; but Jim's anarchistic heart revolted at the idea of keeping a promise or a bargain, and he had always spent the money in beer, and remained. Once when a ticket to 'Frisco was bought for him, he sold the ticket to a scalper for half the money, and remained, although assured that anarchists were just then in great demand on the Pacific Slope.

"The twicer lives on 'em pretty well," said Minnie to 'Arriet. "He sneaks in by the back gate, an' won't go away till he's got what he wants. Once I locked the back gate. Then he went round, and sat on the front doorstep, an' when a lady called he up an' sez, 'What kin I do for yeh, ma'am'? I'm Bill Caldwell's

brother, Jim.' Holy Joe! that was awful. The missus nearly died iv mortificatiom iv the feelin's, an' the boss when he heard of it fair bumped his silly 'ead agin the wall an' said he was rooned, rooned, rooned! After that I wasn't allowed t' lock the back gate, an' Uncle James drifts in when he dash well pleases; but I won't stand his gaff. Straight, if I had my way I'd sool the garding hose on him every time he pushed his dilly 'ead on to the premises."

It was on the occasion of little Henry Caldwell's thirteenth birthday that Uncle James put in his best effort. The Caldwells were, giving a party. Several of the most respectable families in the suburb were represented. The Mayor and two Councillors were present. "The Holme" was a blaze of light. The business of eating was relieved by instrumental and vocal music, and bursts of conversation— and happines reigned.

The party was in full swing when Minnie appeared in the hall, throwing out signals of distress to Mr. William Ogden Caldwell— the happy, host. William saw her, and drifted in her direction.

"What is it? What is it?" he said testily.

" 'E's 'ere," replied Minnie.

"Whom— Uncle James?"

"Yes, an' he's been takin' the same old mixture fer his corf. He sez he dunno whether he'll blow up the 'ouse with that tricky little jam tin iv his, or charge in among yeh."

"Charge in among us?" gasped William..

"Charge in among yeh, he sez; an' I'm tellin' yeh he ain't lookin' too good. He's bin takin' his repose in the gutter, I fancy."

William went out to James.

"Bless my soul! this won't do, James—this won't do at all," said William Caldwell. William was quite peevish.

"Bill, you can go to the deuce,'' said Uncle James. "And well you know it, Bill— well you know it."

"What this I hear— you are threatening to break up our party?"

"I am, William; and break it up I will!" James produced his sealed jam tin, and held it up ominously.

"For heaven's sake, James, behave yourself. Put that thing away."

"Bill, I hate you," said Uncle James. "I hate you, and I hate Mrs. Bill and all your brood of little Bills. Cads, and vultures, and vampires, the whole boiling— vampires, and snobs, and sneaks. I hate snobs, and I hate sneaks. You aren't a man, Bill. Now, candidly, are you? There's no call for deception between us two; are you, a man? On your oath and in strict confidence, are you a man, Bill? Of course you're not. You're a snob, Bill— a particularly greasy and peculiarly foolish snob— that's what you are, Bill. And you've got your house

full of snobs, full of base plutocrats, full of the enemies of the people. It's a noble opportunity for a rebel. I think I'll do it to-night, Bill. I think I'll touch you all off this evening."

"James," said William tremulously, "don't you be a fool. Don't make it necessary for me to send for the police."

"The police!" Uncle James laughed derisively. He arose, and brandished his bomb. "The police! You think to terrify a revolutionary anarchist with the word 'police,' to tame my fiery soul with your own paltry shibboleth! You talk police to me, while I hold death, and destruction in my right hand! Bill, you're an ass— a most egregrious, long-eared ass, Bill."

"Do— do go away now, James. Here is half a crown. Get yourself some slight refreshment."

"Money— bah!" James knocked the half-crown from the hand of William Ogden Caldwell. "Money! Another of your shibboleths. But there are things you cannot buy with money, little brother. You cannot buy the diabolical soul of Jim Caldwell. Money! I despise it. Money has no significance for me, because I can go barefoot, and ragged, and dirty, and glory in it."

"But— but not thirsty, James," faltered William.

"Yes, thirsty," roared James. "But this is not the point. I am the spirit of the revolution. You are the soul of this cankered society, this rotten fraud calling itself civilisation. You are entertaining Mayors— Mayors! I have never killed a Mayor— this is my chance."

"James, behave yourself. Minnie, gugrgo for the police."

"Never mind the p'lice, Mister Caldwell," said Minnie. "You leave the spirit iv the reverlution t' me."

Miss. Trigg was standing in' the doorway, armed with a mop—a very wet mop .Uncle James stepped back a pace.

"Do— do be careful, Minnie," wailed William; "he may be desperate."

"Well, so'm I," said Minnie. "You go in there. They're askin' for you. If you'll give me a free 'and with Uncle James I'll guarantee he won't trouble you."

"But he might charge in among my guests, and the Mayor is there!"

"He won't change nothin', I promise you. My ole dad was a bit like Uncle James in his way, an' I know the breed. Leave 'im t' me." William was backing towards the hall. "I think I will— for a few minutes, any way," he said. "I— I leave him with you on trial."

Minnie followed him, and locked the door leading to the front part of the house.

"Stand back, minion!" cried Uncle James.

"Stand back—you!" resorted Miss Trigg, thrusting her wet mop in his face.

Uncle James backed away, holding his bomb threateningly. "Wretched woman," he said, "you invite your doom!" He whirled the bomb.

Miinnie dropped the handle of her mop on the end of the anarchist's exposed big toe. With a yell the soul of the revolution dropped his bomb, and picking up his left foot revolved on his right, hopping like a bower bird, and making the whistling noise with which ostlers soothe the horses they are grooming.

Miss Trigg took up the bomb, and threw it in the yard.

"When yiv 'ad yer dance out you rkitf sit down an' 'ave a cup iv corfee," she said.

Uncle James was erect and terrible. "Open that door!" he said. He snatched up a heavy flat-iron from the hearth. "Open that door before I smash it down. I'm going to break up this party."

"You'll get back to yer perch," said Minnie, with her mop in his face.

"Stand off, woman! I will speak my mind." With a smart twist he threw the mop aside, and then he closed with Minnie.

Miss Trigg was a good battler; but unarmed she was not the equal of Uncle James in a willing mill, and James was making it too hot.

"Come on, 'Feet,' take a 'and, carn't yeh?" called Minnie over the shoulder of her opponent.

Then "Feet" appeared on the scene. "Feet" was a constable in full uniform, six-feet and fourteen stone of young Bungaree policeman. He came from the pantry, where Minnie had stored him as an emergency.

"Certingly, me dear," said Feet, "an' haven't I bin waitin' the wor-rd this ten minutes. Ilow'll I take th' desprit characther, an' what'll I do wid it'?"

"Hold him so he can't squeak, yeh great simpleton. Do yeh want t' have him disturbin' the party ?"

"I'll hawld him anny way that's pleasant and agreeable t' yeh, me darlin', an' glad iv the opportunity, so I am. There, how'll that plaize yeh? Not tight enough, may be. Put yer tongue in, yeh bla'guard, an' before a ladv, too."

"Remove the prisoner," said Minnie.

The prisoner was removed. Several times in the course of the evening Mr. and Mrs William Caldwell tiptoed to the kitchen to be reassured, and on each occasion Minnie whimpered: "All's well!"

It was after the last guest had gone that Mr. and Mrs. William Caldwell discovered Minnie entertaining the large Bungaree constable with coffee and cold ham.

"Minnie, what's the meaning of this?" gasped Mrs. Caldwell.

"This is the gentleman, ma'am, who arrested Uncle James," Minnie explained.

"Arrested James?" cried William. "You don't mean to say you have given him in charge?"

"Yes, sir, I had to. He was fer runnin' riot in among the Mayors an' things with his bombs an' rubbish, so I called for the hassistance of the p'lice."

"An' glad an' happy I was to oblige, sor," said Feet.

"But my brother arrested! It will be all over the place."

"Well, he's in safe keepin', sor, though out on bail in a manner of speakin'."

"On bail! I object. You had no right to arrest my brother."

"Oh, it's all right," said Minnie. "Come an' you'll see he's on bail safe enough."

Minnie led the way into the yard. In the cowshed she struck a match. Over in the far corner lay Uncle James, the practical anarchist, sound asleep on some straw. Beside him lay two empty beer bottles. The head of Uncle James was firmly secured in the cow bail.

11: Mr. Kurrie's Taxi Drive

Punch (Melbourne), 25 June 1914

MISS MINNIE TRIGG was now employed as maid-of-all-works with the Kurries, of "Bindoola," Clint-street, Windsor, and Minnie might have been quite comfortable with then.

"But," she told her bosom friend, 'Arriet Brown, "his nibs is a giddy. You know the sort— would mash a bloomin' terrer-cotter statue if there wasn't nothin' else handy."

'Arriet nodded gloomily. ''I've 'ad e'm," she said. "Onst one of 'em wanted me to run away to Geelong with him. A course, I wasn't takin' any."

Miss 'Arriet Brown was a slow, rather heavy, somewhat dejected type, with a face about as expressive as a saddle of mutton, and a perennial suggestion of a cold in the head— one you would not dream of associating with amorous adventures; but all things come to those who wait.

"I've met plenty of gay birds," said Minnie. "A girl in service is bound to run agin 'em if she ain't sixty and ugly enough t' frighten a 'orse; but this party's got even more cheek than ordin'ry."

"Wha's he like ?"

"Oh, not too awful. 'Bout thirty, I should say, an' fairly good-lookin', but he ain't covered all over with brains, an' he don't give me credit fer' havin' more'n half ez much ez a cluckin' hen."

"They're offen that way, too," said mournful 'Arriet. "The boss 'ere sez he 'ates t' see me out in front. Makes his place look like a wild asylum, he sez."

"I'd'a' chucked a pan at 'is 'ead."

"W'hassa good? Let 'em think what they like. I'm willin' t' be took fer a fool now an' agin; it gits me out iv doin' somethin' I don't want t' do." From which you may gather that some little shrewdness may even go with a face suggestive of saddles of mutton.

MINNIE'S new master, Mr. Charles Kurrie, was the cheerful type of plump, amorous Lothario of thirty-four, a lover by nature and training, moderately good-looking on the lines of the wax heads you sometimes see decorating barbers' windows, advertising the superlative qualities of somebody's hair dye, with all the glory of curled moustache and crimped wig.

Our Miss Trigg was distinctly, "not bad," but nothing to make a public clamour about. Her face had its pleasant moments, but was not the face to launch a thousand ships or upset the topless towers of Illium. Her figure was neat enough, and altogether Minnie might have been considered good enough to go on with. For which reason, no douht, Mr. Kurrie tried to "go on" with her.

"He's got a 'abit of driftin'," Minnie told 'Arriet; "alwiz driftin' into the kitchen he is, when the missus is otherwise engaged. Sometimes it's lookin' fer a 'ammer, sometimes it's wantin' matches— any ole thing will do fer an excuse— but it alwiz comes down to his wantin' t' put his arm round me waiso or dab a kiss. On his lonesome he's ez frisky es a basKet iv kittens; when the missus's eagle eye is on 'im he's ez cold an' square ez a 'blessed shop walker."

"Lots of 'em is that way," said 'Arriet. "Lor, if their wives ou'y knew what they was, half of 'em, they'd keep 'em muzzled."

"He sez I'm too good fer a mere servant," said Minnie with a giggle. Obviously, Minnie was not disposed to despise Mr. Kurrie's judgment.

"Go orn," replied 'Arriet dully. "Yeh never hear the missus say that."

"He sez I ought t've dressed in pink silk, sittin' in a beautiful blue motor, speedin' through the Meeds of Asphurdell— whatever suburb that is."

"With 'im, a course," said 'Arriet.

Minnie giggled again. "He thinks I'd make as good a princess ez any iv them in the fashion plates, an' he's as kin' me t' go to the theatre with t him one iv these nights."

Mr. Kurrie was certainly making the running. It was now his incising habit to steal upon Minnie when the poor girl was occupied in the pursuit of her duties, catch her unawares, and kiss her. Sometimes he got a clammy dish cloth in his eye. Once he got a bump on the head from a rolling-pin, leaving a lump to account for which he had to fabricate a story of a fall on the stairs. But Charles was not a proud man, nnJ accepted these rebuffs as excusable coquetry. Mr. Charles was so convinced of his own power to charm that if a simple girl in defence of her credit had knocked his head about with a spauling hammer he would have put it down to maiden coyness.

So far as Minnie could see, Mrs. Kurrie had not the faintest suspicion of Mr. Kurrie, and regarded him as tin absolutely trustwoithy husband. She was rather pleasing as a spectacle, and was justified in assuming "that she could hold the fancy of man. Minnie found her a reasonable mistress, too., and had the wisdom of the serpent in keeping mum about Charlie's byplay in the, kitchen.

"If I go'to her ladyship with me little story of the naughty boy, what comes to me she said.

"A week's notice," murmured 'Arriet.

"That's about all. 'P'raps a week's pay in lieu, an' adviced t' pack an' shift afore ' sundown. I ain't lamentin' then, 'cause I'm satisfied with the place, an' I ain't afraid iv Mister Charles, not 'avin been born at noon yesterdee. Why should a girl lose a good mistress 'cause the boss has a rorty streak an' a bold, bad eye?"

So Minnie remained with the Kurries, and one evening when Mrs Kurrie was out Mr. Charles waxed so frivolous that Miss Trigg, for the vindication of her class, was constrained to crack a tureen cover on his head. The result was a cut occiput just where Charlie's fair curls were thinning out.

Mr. Kurrie was a trifle perturbed.

"That's beyond a joke, you know, my dear," he said.

"Well, I wasn't thinkin' you'd sit down an' split yer sides over it," answered Minnie pertly. "The fact is, you forgot yerself, an' I don't allow any woman's 'usband to forget hisself in my kitchen. Better get outer this if yer goin' t' ferget yerself."

Charles rubbed his head.

"It was a harsh reminder," he said. "How am I going to explain this to Clara?"

"Jist ez vou like. If she asks me, I know the tale I'll tell."

"You wouldn't put a chap away. Oh, come, I say, you know, I'm awfully fond of you. Would you want to load a man with trouble simplv because he likes you, and can't help liking' you? I do like you, you— you witch."

"Back t' scratch, Mr. Kurrie," said Miss Trigg, threatening him with the rest-of the tureen.

"Don't be standoffish with a poor devil. You know, I'm gone on you. Honest, now, admit you like me a little."

"I can see there's goin' t' be a lot iv breakages to haccount for when the missus comes 'ome," said Minnie, arming herself with the milk-jug.

"One kiss," said Charlie. "One little kiss." "The missus'll want to know how this jug got broke."

"I don't care, I'm desperate."

He ducked and side-stepped, and tried to get into holts, but Minnie swung the big jug with such obvious determination to do damage that Mr. Kurrie deemed it expedient to postpone the attack.

"You'd crack a man's skull, you demon," he said.

" 'Tain't my skull," replied Minnie. "Anyone as has a skull 'e prizes belter keep it outer reach iv this jug, that's all."

Minnie was dusting in the breakfast room next morning. Mrs. Kurrie was busying herself over the silver. There had been nothing said for twenty minutes when Mrs. Kuirrie spoke very quietly, almost genially, not even looking up from her work.

"What did you hit Mr. Kurrie with last evening, Minnie?" she said.

Minnie ceased her work, she stood gasping, her face flushed a lobster pink, and then went grey. "Goodness gracious me, mum!" she said.

"Don't be afraid to say," said Mrs. Kurrie sweetly. "Was it the tureen top?"

"Oh, mum! 'ow'Can you'.'"

"If it was the tureen" lid I'll forgive you the breakage, although I really prized that tureen. It was my dear mother's. What I wanted was to express a wish that vou would use the rolling-pin for the future."

"I would ave, mum, I would, pen me honour, but it wasn't 'andy."

"I suppose not. What did you hit him with the day he fell downstairs?'"

"Oh, mum, I didn't, if this means a week's notice, mum I 'ope you'll get it over an' done with, coz I ain't goin' i' be pried into. I 'ates bein' pried into. I done my dootv, an' I ain't goin' t' be pried into." Minnie sniffed, and mopped a tear with her duster.

"Don t be a fool, Minnie. I'm not giving vou a week's notice. I am very well satisfied with you. I am rather more satisfied with your deftness in raising lumps on my husband's head than with your general efficiency. The girls I give notice to are those who do not break things on his head. I have had many of them. You are a pleasant change. I am really much obliged to you, Minnie. Clonic, now what was it on the day he fell downstairs?"

"That was the rollin'-pin, mum. But not hard, mum. Reely, reely, not very hard, Mrs. Kurrie."

"Not hard enough, my girl. Don't be so modest about it next time, You lmve my permission to raise a much larger bump. You can make it twins if you like."

Minnie grinned a raffish grin. "You're fair," she said. "You treat a girl decent, anyhow. Most misusses would 'a' blamed it all on to me."

"I know my husband, Minnie. He doesn't think I do; but in point of fact I know him quite well. I am glad to have a servant who knows what is due to him. But please don't break the tureens."

"Wasn't she a sport?" gasped Minnie after telling all this to her confidante. "After that I'm 'ers, an' Mr. Charles gets the rollin'-pin every time, an' he gets it good an' 'ard, you take it from me."

Charles continued to waste his sweetness in the kitchen, and Mrs. Charles showed no further consciousness of his wrong-doing. She did not mention the matter to Miss Trigg again, not even when Mr. Kurrie appeared at supper one night with an ear that looked like a tomato, and explained exactly how he had hit himself with a golfing implement when trying to put a ball one mile and a-quarter.

It was Minnie herself who next brought the subject up.

" 'E wants me to go fci a taxi drive with im, mum," she said.

"Oh, indeed? It is quite a long time since he asked me to go for a taxi drive."

"Yes, mum, he's alwiz at me t' go fer a taxi drive."

"And you don't much care about taxi drives?"

"I tole 'im I fair loved 'em."

"You did?" Mrs. Kurrie was looking at Minnie curiously.

"Yes, Mrs. Kurrie, why not? Why shouldn't we have a nice, long, lovin' taxi drive one iv these nights?"

There was now some disposition to anger in the heart of the injured wife, but she detected a peculiar low-comedy grin in Minnie's visage, and reconsidered the matter.

Mistress and maid spent quite a long time reconsidering the matter. They went into it quite thoroughly, and in the end decided that poor Charles must not be frustrated in all things— he should at least have his taxi ride. A taxi ride was an innocent thing in itself. It would be selfish and dog-in-the-mangerish to refuse the master this simple pleasure.

So it happened that when next Mr. Kurrie broached the matter of a clandestine night run in a taxi, Minnie showed some disposition to be persuaded.

"You will come?" he pleaded. "Why not? It can be managed so comfortable. The car will pick you up wherever you please. It will pick me up somewhere else; we'll have a spin round for an hour or two, have a nice little supper, and then home. Where's the harm?"

"I don't see no 'arm," said Minnie relenting.

"Of course you don't. Why should you? You will?"

"I might."

"You will!"

She did. It was all so rutely arranged to deceive Mrs. Kurrie. Minnie was having a night off, she was not to be expected home before half-past eleven or twelve because her cousin 'Enery was taking her to the theatre. The car was waiting for Miss Trigg at a quiet corner in a dark street. There were no lights in the taxi It picked up Mr. Kurrie at another corner a few minutes later, and then the joy-ride began.

The joy-ride was longer than Mr. Charles Kurrie had intended. He found Minnie very reticent, but more affectionate than she had given him reason to expect, and the taxi hummed round Mordialloc, and up and down many dark ways before it was headed back to town.

Mr. Kurrie helped the lady from the taxi in front of a city restaurant in the full blaze of an electric bulb, and then he seemed to he taken with a curious turn. He stood limply, his eyes bulging, his face the colour of of dough, and one sentence dribbled from his loose lips.

"Great Scot!" he said. "My wife!"

"Why, of course, Charlie," said Mrs. Kurrie. "Wasn't it a lovely run?"

"Yeh— yeh— yeh— yes," said Mr. Kurrie

"And now, dear," said Mrs. Kurrie, "let is have that lovely little supper."

They had the lovely little supper— and then drove home.

"I 'ad a peep at them comin' in," Minnie told 'Arriet Brown. "He looked like a man what's found a dead body on the doorstep, but she was ez gay ez a bird. She never let on a word about the drive next day, an' I ain't seen him; an' what's more, I ain't, likely to, coz why— I'm shunted."

''Got the shoot after all?" asked the stunned 'Arriet.

Minnie nodded. "Yell see, the missus sez t' me that, all things considered, it was best not t' 'ave me round the premises— it would be too 'eart-breakin' a reminder, she said. She thought he'd 'ad a lesson what'd last 'im the rest iv his life, and she slipped me a month's wages an' a Sov'rin extra fer meself, an' this 'ere little ring, an' passed me out."

"The hingratitood!" snorted 'Airiet.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Minnie; " 'ow would you like to 'ave your 'usband's head knocked about with a rollin'-pin?"

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12: An Amazing Materialisation

Punch (Melbourne), 2 July 1914

"WELL, I'VE STRUCK the queerest bunch this trip," said Miss Minnie Trigg, sitting in the kitchen at "Ghisselhurst," where her bosom friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown, attended to the wants of a large household for fifteen shillings a week.

"You do get some funny 'uns," Miss Brown admitted. "Wot's this lot?"

"Blest if I know; but the ole girl looks like a king's aunt. She's big an' dark, an' her eyes glower an' glitter."

"Does she beat 'im?" asked 'Arriet innocently. "That sort generally does."

"Well, she don't exactly take the slipper to 'im, but she lets 'im fully, understand he ain't nothin' much, an' must take up his attitude an' lodgin's accordin' to what's comin' to nothin' much. So he dosses in the little back room over the stable, an' he potters' about the yard most of the time lookin' like a bloke what's paid a quid a week t' do it. That's Arthur Holmes. He's nothin' t' speak of. 'Owever, he seems quite content' t' stand out when madam's friends is on the job. Madama tells 'em Arthur's of a very retirin' an' studious nature. I 'eard her. So far I ain't seen Arthur studyin' anythin' but a 'arf-bottle iv beer, wonderin' how he was 'goin' t' get three glasses out of it.'

"Does the missus call 'erself 'Madame'?" asked 'Arriet heavily. "I don't trust 'em when they calls themselves 'Madam,' especially when they spells it with a 'E'. on the end. They ain't up to no good when they does that."

Madame Holmes did spell it with an 'E' on the end— witness the neat brass plate on madame's gate. The plate read: "Madame Holmes, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Madame's villa was called Asphodel, possibly as a hint ot Madame Holmes profession, which, way distinctly other-worldly. Madame had direct connection with the Ultimate dim Thule, and co-operated with shades floating across the meads of Asphodel.

In short, Madame was a spiritualistic. medium. She called herself a "consulting medium," as some doctors call themselves consulting physicians, but of late Madame had been compelled to conduct consultations with great circumspection, because of the conducto sceptical constables, and the stringency of laws against fortune telling on a strictly cash basis.

But Madame Holmes continued to thrive.

"There's all sorts a-droppin' in every day," Minnie complained to her sympathetic friend. "They fair keep me bobbin' up an' down tendin' rings. An' you never saw sich a row iv figgers neither— queer ole girls with frightened eyes, an' a few blokes lookin' like sillies from the Asylum fer Sonks. I dunno what her game is, but she has 'em in what she calls her consultin' room, an'

she must make 'em coff up, too, coz I've seem her bloomin' 'andbag chock-full iv 'arf-crowns. I reckon she's a lady doctor, maybe."

Madame had an assistant, Miss Stella Bray, who came only on special occasions, and seemed, to share Madame's confidence. Miss Stella was a frigid virgin of about thirty, bony and business-like. Minnie saw little of her, and she was not introduced to Madame's clients; but she seemed to play an important part in Madame's dealings, with the dematerialised.

Miss Bray had a large circle or spook acquaintances, and was hand-and-glove with scores of disembodied persons of importance, judging by her conversations with Madame. She spoke of this spirit and that with an airy familiarity that would have made Miss Minnie Trigg's flesh creep, had Miss Minnie's keyhole searches for enlightenment been as successful as she had hoped they might be.

One evening after Minnie had been employed at "Asphodel" for close upon a fortnight she met 'Arriet on their mutual night off, with an astonishing lot of news.

"Know what the ole girl is— I mean Madame?" she gasped. "She's one iv them spiritists."

''A spiritist?! Wot, takes a drop, does she?"

"No-o-o ! She's a mejum!"

"What's them— sort o' Dagoes ?"

"Not a bit like. A spiritist mejum she is. Raises spirits from the dead, an' has talks with them 'bout what's 'appenin' She can talk with the ghost iv yer gran'mother ez easy ez. you'd crack a boo with ole Tins the milky."

"Go orn, yer pullin' me leg!" 'Arriet's eyes were, full of apprehension. "That's somethin' orful. I wouldn't stay in no place iv that sort. Do the spirits make calls?''

"My word, do they! She has her day for them."

"Wot! Four o'clock tea an' all that?"

"Somethin' like. Anyway ghosts is reg'lar callers at the house, an' Madame interjuces 'em to her clients, an' they has long talks an' confabs, an' plays up a bit, I can tell you, in the big room she calls 'er consultin' room an' stewdio."

'Arriet shivered. "Hev yeh give notice " she asked. "It mus' make yer bones creep havin' 'em round. What iv yeh was t' meet one in the dark? S'pose one broke loose an' come t' yeh et night when you wtas sleepin'? Booh! it's wicked havin' spirit evenin's. It ortenter be allowed."

"It does give me the Joes a bit iv nights, but I lock me door secure an' stuff up the keyhole. Ghosts can't get in if yeh stuffs up the keyhole."

"How did yer find out all about 'er?"

"I spied on 'em. A big push iv the ole sort, owl-faced men an' dingy women with dilly eyes, was rollin' in, an' showed into the consultin' room, where seats was arranged an' a sort iv curtain affair rung across one corner, like as if one iv them blitherin' charade games what "toffs" sometimes plays at was on. Natural, me curiosity was roused, an' when they're all in, an' the door's locked, I'm hoppin' round fer a crack in the circus.

"Would yeh b'lieve it, the mean cows 'ad plugged the keyhole? A dirty trick that. Things is goin' on within an' I'm clear out iv it, till I remembers another door at the far end iv the stewdio, leadin' to a small room et the back. Instant I does a skurry round, shifts a little table agin the door (which is locked, never been used), an' hikes up to the fanlight. The fanlight's dusty on the other side; but I'm all right for a pretty good view frim the gallery.

"I can on'y see faint, coz the lights in the stewdio is dim; but the crowd's all sittin' in rows, lookin' white, their mouths open, an' their eyes gogglin'; an' there's Madame standin' et this end be the curtain in a long black robe, her face fair, white-washed with powder, her two 'ands up, her body stiff ez a block.

"Madame's talkin' jerky. 'Mrs. West's aunt,' she sez, like she was given an order.

" 'Oh, yes, yes, auntie dear—'dear auntie,' sez a lean dame in the crowd.

"Then Madame goes on naggin', an' it's supposed that Mrs. West's aunt, what's bin dead these five years, an' orter know better, is talkin' t' Mrs. West, an' frim what I can make out is givin' her reg'lar rats. After that Mr. Orkney's dead wife has a go at Mr. Orkney, an' Mr. Orkney, a chewed-up little man in the corner, bursts into tears. Then Mrs. Gidley hears from her little boy iv nine, what passed hence last year, an' she burst into tears. Afore part one is over most everybody has burst into tears.

"Then they comes to another part iv the programme. This is act two. 'We will have some apports,' Madame sez, whatever apports is. 'I'm to communicate with Abrim Rashad to-night,' sez she. 'Please sit very still. I hope no sceptic among us will disturb to-night's manifestations.'

"Madame goes off again in one iv her stiff fits, her 'ands up, an' sez she, cryin' loud: 'Abrim Rashad! Abrim Rashad!'

" 'Madame, I am 'ere,' sez a voice out iv nowhere.

" 'Struth, 'Arriet, you could 'ave knocked me down with a fender, I was that flabbergasted. The voice seemed right in my ear.

" 'What 'ave you to give us to-night, Abrim Riashad?' cries Madame. 'Place your gifts upon the table, Abrim. Rashad,' sez she.

"Wjell, you won't b'lieve it, but no sooner has she spoke than, *biff*! a little parcel from no one falls on the table out iv no place whatever.

" 'Any more gifts, Abrim Rashad?' sez Madame, an' the same tick a little bird is flutterin' round the room. She calls for more, an' coins an' rings fall on the table.

"Then sez Madame: 'Abrim Rashad, will you show yourself to us to-night?'

"She no sooner sez it then I sees him. The lights goes black out, but I sees him, an' I get the blue shakes. I never saw a spirit afore, 'Arriet, an' I ain't accustomed to 'em. I was frightened near into fits. He was long an' thin an' spirally, twistin' up like a corkscrew, that is, an' he was the colour iv light when the lights go out— a sort iv shadow iv a light, like that on chops in a cellar, or on a lobster in the dark whan he ain't too fresh."

'Arriet Brown nodded her head, and swallowed nothing with a convulsive movement of her throat. She was too awed to speak.

" 'I seen 'im on'y fer a moment, an' he was gone. He was on'y like the smoke of a man, an' I reckon you could have blowed him out; but he had me beat. I was that scared I done a guy, an' plunged into my bed, rollin' meself up in a tight knot in the blankets, an' there Madame found me, 'arf dead with suffercation, when they'd all gone.

"I'm believin' in ghosts now," Minnie continued. "I used to laugh at 'em, but I wouldn't now. I ain't game, when yer livin' et a 'ouse where ghosts is reg'lar callers you get respectful. One might drop in any minute, an' I ain't takin' no chances.''

" 'Sides," said 'Arriet almost in a whisper, "it's worth while bein' friends with 'em if they all gives presents like that Abrim Rashad done. All the same, I ain't sorry there ain't no ghosts in our fam'ly. I'd give notice t'morrer if any of our lot started bringin' spirits 'ome."

"P'raps one gets used to 'em, 'Arriet; an' they ain't no trouble. That's one thing I'll say fer a ghost— it ain't 'ard on servant girls. You 'aven't got to open doors for 'em, 'r get meals fer 'em, or clear their boots; an' they don't make washin' an' ironin.' So far ez I can gather, those smoky clothes they floats about in never goes to the wash.''

"That is a comfort, certingly," said 'Arriet. "All the same, I 'as me natural hinstincts, an' I wouldn't stay in no place where ghosts was on the visitin' list."

However, Minnie's faith in the absolute legitimacy of Madame's spooks and spirits did not survive long. The climax is better told in Minnie's own expressive language. Minnie had been three months in the service of Madams Holmes, and had peeped at several seances, when the accident happened to Miss Stella Bray. Miss Bray had the misfortune to be mowed down by a motor car at a moment when her friends of the spirit world were otherwise engaged, and failed to warn her of her danger.

"It's like this, 'Arriet,' said Minnie, who had a nice appreciation of a dramatic climax. 'That Bray female was sort of hassistant to Madame, an' when she gets bowled out, it's necessary fer Madame t' bring in another. It so I 'appened that her 'usband, who was Stella's understudy ordin'ry, has been toyin' with a bottle iv whisky shook from the kitchen cupbbard, an' is shick an' helpless in the stable. There's a swagger seance arranged fer the evenin', an' Madame's in a tight fix.

"But, b'lieve me, 'Arriet, Madame ain't one of the sort what's easy put down an' out. She's goin' above the speed limit seekin' another hassistant right away, an' she gets her all right. A girl she is, 'bout my age an' my size, an' she gets her with a promise of a sov'ring an' a silk dress what ain't too old t' make over.

"The new girl's sworn secret, an' told what she's got t' do. She has t' gd up through a sort iv man'ole in Madame s bedroom, crawl along between the ceilin' an' the roof, till she gets over the committee room. There there's a sort iv platform on the rafters, ah' there she lies low till she hears Madame say: 'Abrim Rashad, what have you to give us to-night?' when she puts her mouth to a hopenin' in the ceilin' hid be one of them flowerin', curly-whirly, cement centre-pieces, an' hanswers. After that, when Madame gives the 'int, she has t' drop little articles she's took with her on to the table below."

"Well, I'm bloomin' blessed!" cried 'Arriet. "Then she's Abrim Rashad, the ghost?"

"She is in a manner iv speakin'. It was Stella Bray what went up th' flue an' worked the tricks before.

"They orter be pinched!"

"They might be— listen. The seance came off all right. The lights in the consultin' room was turned low ez could be, the shades on 'em left the top of the room in darkness, an' the Tom up aloft drops her parcels all right when she gets the word, lowers a lovely Horiental scarf, an' pushes two or three funny little birds into the room, an' all's lovely. The crowd is sayin' 'Wonderful! Wonderful!' The old girl's snivellin', an' the owl-eyed Johns is scared 'arf t' death.

"But that ain't all. Madame's counted on workin' a new spoof. The girl in the ceilin' has t' strike a sort iv quiet match in a little haffair like a small firework, an' hold it down through the openin' in the ceilin.' Well, she ain't feelin' too good up there in the dark, that new girl ain't. She's a bit shaky at this spook business, an' wishes she was 'ome with her ma most iv the time. What 'appens! She strikes the match too soon, an' she can't get the firework down through the openin' afore it begins, t' gee.

"It's a silent firework that, but it's creepy, an' it goes off like a still devil up in the dark 'tween the roof an' the ceilin', where the girl is on her lonesome; an' what does she see but a sort iv brimstone glow, an' a smoky figure like a man swellin' up an' stretching out his hands over her.

"That's enough fer 'er, thanks. She fetches a yell you could hear a mile, an' hits out. Natural, she forgets all warnins, an' most important of these was cautionin' her not t' get off the platform, coz down 'tween the rafters was on'y thin lath an' plaster.

"What 'appens? Oh, ma! she plunges off the platform when she yells, an', *biff*! one leg goes clean through the plaster, an' wags an' wags in the room below.

"Someone down there turns up the lights, just ez the girl gives another howl an' another plunge, and ploughs clean through the plaster, tearin' away the laths, an' plunks with no end 'v a soliid bump on the table afore the 'ole gapin' crowd.

"Oh, there's no row, none at all. Thev don't start to give Madame nothing. O' course not. But Madame's wily. Oh, she's a knowin' ole bird.

" 'A materialisation!' she squeals. ' A materialisation!' And she points wild at the silly yob of a girl sittin' flat on the table, the white cement rainin' down about her.

"Then Madame cuts the lights, grabs the girl, an' rushes her into a cupboard, an' presently lights is on agin, an' Madame Holmes is calmin' 'em with hexplanations.

" 'Twas a great manifestation,' she sez— 'a most amazin' materialisation. She quieted 'em all right, but I reckon it's all U.P. with me."

" 'Ow's that?" asked 'Arriet. "Where did you come in?"

"Through the bloomin' roof," answered Minnie sadly. "I was the girl that fell in."

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13: The Veiled Woman

Punch (Melbourne) 9 July 1914

"GARN!" SAID MISS MINNIE TRIGG, addressing her boon companion, Miss 'Arriet Brown, "ghosts ain't no more'n so much smoke. You on'y gotter get used to them."

Miss Brown shuddered. Miss Brown was a heavy, doughy type of domestic, slow of comprehension, tepid in emotion, and deliberate in her movements. 'Arriet's chief virtue as a servant lay in the fact that she never broke anything.

"I'd die," said Miss Brown, "if one iv them spectators crawled over me in the dark."

"Spectres," said Minnie Trigg. "Spectres! I've met plenty since I've been with Madame Holmes, an' I ain't got no respect fer the lot iv them. I was ez 'umble with ghosts ez any girl livin' one time, but now I know 'em fer what they are; an' 'tween you an' me, 'Arriet, they're no account mostly. Of course, there's a decent one here an' there; but ez a rule spooks an' spirits is no better than they ought t' be. Real takedowns they are, some of 'em. The things they do over et Madame's you wouldn't believe. Spielin', I call it."

"You don't catch me workin for no spiritualistic mejums," said 'Arriet. "What's t' prevent' one iv them spirits from chokin' yeh in yer bed? You better look out, that's all. They'll be pinch in' yer savin's one iv these nights if they're that sort."

"They'll 'ave t' go t' the Savin's Bank t' do it. I ain't takin' no risks with some iv them disrespectable spooks what Madame keeps company with. There's one, the spirit iv the late lamentable Mrs. Burns— she's a fair knockout. I don't suppose thare is anywhere a, bigger takedown iv a ghost than what she is."

"Go orn ! What's she do?"

"Do? She's do yeh f'r yer old socks, she would that. She's on the make all the time. 'Struth! What she wants with the money I don't know—"

"Ghostesses can't spend money, can they?"

"Ask me! Anyhow, she's ez hot after it ez amyone goin'. I been keepin' in tow with her et the seances, me campin' up et the fanlight over the locked back door iv Madame's stewdio. She ain't much iv a ghost t' look at neighter."

"I dunno 'ow yeh can do it, ' shuddered 'Arriet.

"My troubs. I got that feelin' fer ghosts if one got fresh with me I'd slap it in the eye. Madame what she calls materialises Mrs. Burns, and the ole girl floats about in the gloom when them mugs is all sittin' in the room, an' she talks about what's do in' in spirit land. 'Arriet, keep alive ez long er you can. I've 'eard a lot about spirit land lately, an' it's a dead-an'-alive place, take it from we. I wouldn't be in it fer a pension. Frim what I kin 'ear the deceasids what go

there do nothin' but float round in damp clouds, catch in' their death iv cold, t' say nothin' iv wet feet an' rheumatics, n' worryin' their 'earts out about this world an the people they've left behind 'em."

"I wouldn't be found dead with 'em," said 'Arriet virtuously. "I got me religion, an' when I die I'll be a respectable angel 'r nothin'. Ghosts is low."

"Specially Mrs. Burns. She must 'ave given Mr. Burns the time iv his life when she was livin', an' now she's dead she can't rest, an' what's more she won't let 'im rest. It's bad enough fer a pore man t' 'ave a livin' wife naggin' the 'ead off him, but what price him havin' a dead wife what gives his rats, an' fair worries the whiskers off his chin?"

"Does she, but? Pore bloke! He orter disguise hisself, an' give her brusher."

"He can't. You can't disguise yourself from a spirit. Spirits is too cute. They're in the know about everythin'. Besides, the widderer seems t' run after it. He comes t' Madame's place special t' have words with his dead wife, an' he gets 'em. She gets out after him fer everything he's done, an' she nags, an' nags, an' bullyrags, an' whines, an' then fer punishment fer his sins she sez he's gotter put a pound on the table. Sometime's it's more. The money, she sez, is t' he used be Madame Holmes fer certain purposes pleasin' to the spirits.

"He shells out meek ez a lamb. I never saw sich a Jack Chump. When she's goin' on at him you can 'ear him blubberin' over in his corner. He's the worst man t' blubber ever was. 'That's Sarah,' he snivels, 'that's my Sarah. That's jist like 'er. Sarah was alwiz like that. Oh, Sarah!' he siz, 'don't be 'ard on me! You know I'm on'y a poor mortal man. You know I'm a worm, Sarah, an' you're a himmortal spirit. Don't be 'ard on me!"

"But you can't shift old Sally with blubber. She give's him the rounds iv the 'ouse again, an' orders him t' part up, an' he pays gentle an' submissive."

"P'raps she dresses expensive," suggested 'Arriet.

Minnie laughed derisively. "Not she. Ain't I seen her offen, an' it seems t' me about three-pen'orth iv cotton net is her limit."

"No boots ? No 'ats?"

"Garn! Iv course not. Who ever saw a spirit in boots? Who ever 'eard iv a spectre wearin' a fashionable 'at? No, she jist floats a whisp iv net, no more, an' I'm told Sarah weighed fourteen stone when paddlin' round on earth below."

IT WILL BE SEEN that Miss Trigg was still in the service of Madame Holmes, clairvoyant and spiritualistic medium. In a former adventure it was explained that by reason of an unfortunate mishap, which precipitated Minnie through the ceiling into the midst of a band of believers, when she was assisting in certain weird manifestations, Madams's fair fame had been jeopardised.

However, Madame had succeeded in explaining the matter away. After smuggling Minnie off in the darkness, she convinced her followers that what they had witnessed was the surprising and unexpected materealisation of a spirit. You can persuade believers in spiritualism to anything, provided it is sufficiently unreasonable.

Minnie had expected immediate dismissal for her blunder, but Madame had been most reasonable.

"Accidents will happen, my girl," she said. "The spirits are most troublesome things to deal with. I had hoped with your assistance to produce a most surprising phenomenon, but evidently the spirits were averse. No doubt thev brought about the accident to show their displeasure. One never knows what they will do next. They are ungrateful creatures to deal with, Minnie."

Madame sighed deeply. "Never be a medium, my girl. It is a thankless career. Tongue couldn't tell what I have sufiered through the ingratitude of spirits; but I cannot turn back. I must go on with the work, even though I waste to a shadow under the stress of it all."

Madame was a very substantial shadow, but Minnie was content to let that pass. Her fall had produced only a trifling bruise or two, and she was glad to retain her place. Madame paid good wages, she made light; demands on her servant, and was liberal in the matter of nights off. Miss Trigg was delighted to remain in such circumstances, even if it did entail the chance of running against mislaid spooks in the passages after a night sitting of the seance.

ABOUT TWO WEEKS after the conversation with 'Arriet Brown, recorded above, Minnie had another tale to tell.

"Madame's takin' me into the bizness again," she said breathlessly.

'Arriet gasped and sat down. "What, you gotter fall through the roof?"

"No-o-o, don't be nutty. I'm the voice."

"The what?"

"The voice— the voice iv the departed. See, when Madame 'olds one iv them seances in the gloom, an' the ghost iv someone's gran'mother is flappin' round, a talkin' partner is needed. Madame tells me spirits can't talk out, the best they can do is a whisper, doo, I s'pose, t' them havin' colds, consequence iv livin' in damp clouds. Anyhow, I gotter talk fer the spirits."

"They'll get yeh vet," said 'Arriet. " You mark my words, they'll get yeh yet."

"Rats ! When you know ez much iv spirits ez I do you won't be afraid iv them gettin' yeh. Why, I'm more'n a match fer the best spirit in the flock. Straight, you could dry up the 'orriblest spirit ever in two minutes in front iv a 'ot fire. Anyhow, Madame's makin' it worth my while, an' I'm go in' to be the voice. It's easy ez rollin' off a log. There's a chube up in the ceil in'."

"A chube?"

"Yes, wonner them chubes you talk into. It goes down the gaspipe in Madame's stewdio so ez when you talk in it up above, an' the talk seems t' come out iv nothin' in the room where the seance is. Madame's found I'm sorter gifted at himitatin' voices, an' when seance is on I gotter talk down the pipe."

''But howjer know what t' say?"

"It's whispered to me. I lies still under the roof, with me head near the wall, an' I hear the spirit whisperin', an' what it whispers I talk down the chube. It's dead easy. I done it already. I was Sarah's voice last night, an' I rapped it into ole Burns poiuetliin' awful."

''Coz why?"

"Oh, he's up to his tricks."

"Bin drinkin' ?"

"No. He's as sober ez bones is Willyim, but whatyer think? The rip wants t' get married agin."

" 'N why not?"

"Well, his wife won't let 'im."

"But he's a widderer, you said."

"No matter; his wife won't let him. Serves a man right fer bein' a Spiritilist! If you ain't a Spiritilist when your wife's dead she's done with. But if you are a Spiritilist an' your wife dies she ain't done with by no manner iv means. She's libel t' come back et any moment, an' queer ver pitch. That's what Sarah's doin' on her Willyim. When he mentioned the matter iv marryin'! Gee whiz! didn't she hit it up.

" 'Sarah, dear,' he says, weak an' quavery, 'now that you're gorn I'm a lone man an' I was hopin' p'raps you wouldn't mind if I— If I—' He struggled with his feelin's fer a minute, then he ripped out 'I'm goin' t' marry again, Sarah.'

"Then the whisperin' got goin' at my ear: 'Scream! Scream!' So I screamed most heart-breakin'. Then came more fierce whisperin', an' I passed it on t' Willyim red-'ot. 'Marry again, you bigamous villain, an' I'll haunt you to your dyin' day.'

" 'Oh, Sarah, 'ow can you be so crooel,' wails Willyim.

"But Sarah could be crooel, an' straight she was. She gave it to poor old Bill till he was nothin' much but a pool iv tears. He went away fair heart-broke, t' tell his new' girl it was all off in consequence iv his first wife not lettin' him. Blest if I wasn't quite sorry fer pore Willyim. Sarah wasn't content with forbiddin' the banns— she fined Willyim two quid fer what she called rebellyus conduc', an'Willyim' had t' leave the beans on Madame's table, t' be used for

purposes pleasin' to the spirits. Willyim must lave a little pile, or he couldn't afford to keep so expensive dead wife ez Sarah is."

After that Minnie often acted as interpreter for the deceased Sarah in her many bargains with her widower over the faithless wretch's proposed second marriage. But Minnie's was a fairly acute mind. She suspected many things, and discovered one or two. She suspected, for instance, that the many fines exacted from William Burns were devoted more to the satisfaction of the material needs of Madame Holmes than to the gratification of the wishes of Sarah's spook. She discovered that the whisperings she was expected to pass on came up a second tube from the vicinity of Madaime's cabinet in the room below, the opening of which, level with the wall, was covered with gauze painted in imitation of the wall-paper.

Minnie was putting two and two together with the intention of making fifty.

One day Mr. William Burns was waited upon at his office in the city by a veiled woman dressed in severe black garments. Mr. William Burns, strange to say, had some reputation as an astute business man; but what intellect he possessed seemed to sour on him immediately he came into contact with spiritualistic phenomena.

For instance, William's fine assurance deserted him immediately the veiled lady gave him some inkling of her business.

They'talked for twenty minutes, and William Burns became greatly agitated.

"If it could be done! If it could be done!" he said many times.

"It can be done. She will give her consent if she's approached proper. The spirits gets misled sometimes, Mr. Burns, and as a meejim iv great experience, I 'appen to know the late Mrs. Burns is not bein' approached proper. I've met her offen in the trance state what I often go into, an' I may say I'm intimate acquainted with her, an' 'ave great influence over her. She has told me what is goin' on, in' I know I could persuade her to agree to our marriage. She sez all is not made clear over at Madame Holmes's seances."

"If that were so I would be the happiest of men."

"It isn't hard. Agree to what I purpose, an' when you go to Madame 'Olmes's seance agin Mrs. Burns's spirit will give it's consent."

"Very well. I'll gladly pay all you ask if you succeed where Madame Holmes has failed. I have paid her to persuade me wife's spirit to remove her opposition, but Madame has failed again and again."

"I won't fail," said the veiled woman.

There was a seance at Madame's on the following Sunday evening, and again "William Burns was placed in touch with his wife's spirit.

"I have hope, Sarah, that you will come to agree to my marriage," he said quakingly.

There was a moment's silence, and then in clear, decisive tones came the reply :

"Yes, William, I do agree. It was wrong to expect you to continue living a sad and lonely life. Marry again, and he happy. You have my blessing."

"LOR!" said Minnie subsequently, when explaining matters to 'Arriet, " 'ow Madame did go on. 'No, no, no, no!' she 'issed up the pipe. 'Not that. Tell him he mustn't, he mustn't, he mustn't !' But I wasn't hearin' right, an' what I sent down the chube to Willyirn was a few words t' sav I'd alwiz pray over 'im, an' that he's live 'appy an' have six children.'

"It was all up. Madame gave me it all over the 'ouse when they'd gone; but I swore I'd on'y sent back what I 'eard. 'Sarah must 'ave changed her mind,' I said, 'eaiisc them was the exact words she whispered t' me, an' no other,' sez I. I stuck to it till I got Madame fair puzzled. I think she was a bit scared, coz, 'tween me an' you, with all her hanky-panky, she's got a sort iv sneakin' belief in spirits.

"She's since got ten quid outer Willyim, takin' all the credit to herself for soft-soapin' Sarah's spirit. But Willyim was most grateful to the veiled woman, an' passed his cheque over when she called, an', what's more, he said she 'ad made him a 'appy man. He invited her to the weddin', too."

" 'Ow do you know all this about the veiled woman is wot I wanter know?" said 'Arriet in quite an agrieved tone.

"Well knowin' you won't split. 'Arriet, I'll giive yeh the office about that veiled woman. I'm it!"

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14: The Case of Benjamin Amos

Punch (Melbourne) 16 July 1914

MISS MINNIE TRIGG, when she had been for several months in the service of one Madame Annette Holmes, clairvoyant, futurist, palm reader, and general mystic, was so familiar with the spirits that she cherished a calm contempt for spooks and all their ways

"It's that way with me, 'Arriet," she told her bosom friend, "if I was t' wake up et the dead iv night an' find two ghosts moanin' an' a-jangl'in' of their chains in me very bedroom, I'd jist turn over an' leave 'em at it."

'Arriet shivered like one suddenly smitten with an icy blast. "I'd go clean off me dot," she said.

"Garn! What 'arm 'ud a pore ghost do yeh? But most people's like you—gotter sorter notion that ghosts is deadly dangerous, when they're alwiz too much took up with their own troubles t' go playin' larks with them as never done them no mischiff. Whoever 'eard iv a ghost misbehavin' hisself?"

"I thought they was alwiz Hers," said 'Arriet.

"Oh, dear, no," said Minnie, with the air of an authority. "There's he ghosts and she ghosts."

"Do they ever 'ave any babias ?"

"I dunno. I never had no thin' t' do with a baby ghost, p'raps they don't go into the spiritualistic business till they're grown up. But it don't matter how old they are, they're pore creatures, all of 'em. I'll tell yeh somethin', 'Arriet, case you should ever meet a ghost."

'Arriet shuddered, and looked about the room apprehensively. "I'd die," she said.

"Don't you be a fool. A ghost might come to anyone any time, an' it's ez well t' know how t' 'andle them. Well, all a ghost wants is sympathy."

"Ow ja mean?"

"Be symperthetic to it. Tell it it's a pore thing, an' say yer sorry, an' how yeh "ope its troubles'll soon be over an' all that."

"Pull its leg, yer mean?"

"Yes, in a manner iv speakin'. Kid to it like yeh would to a widder woman wot's jist lost her 'usband. Give it plenty iv lovin' kindness, an' it'll be yer friend fer life."

"Go orn!"

"Straight. An' I tell yeh it's worth while havin' a ghost yer friend fer life. There's no tellin' what good they i-an do yeh in the way iv tellin' yeh about troubles what's coram', an' givin' yeh hints about iong journeys an' dark men-^specially dark men."

'"Yes, I've 'eard about dark men," said 'Arriet, with dull conviction. "I 'ad me 'and read, once."

Minnie nodded. "Dark men 'ave t' be guarded against," she said. "Madame's alwiz warnin' her clients agin dark men."

"I'd rather have a dark man after me than be hunted with a ghost, anyway," said 'Arrlet heavily. The butcher's carter who called at the establishment in which Miss Brown was engaged as maid of all works was a dark youth, so dark, indeed, as to he under the suspicion of having a spot of colour.

"It all depends," Minnie continued, "You're set agin ghosts, not bein' use,'; to 'cm, but if you've won one over- an' it's well disposed towards yeh, it's likely t' come in V.ndy. Mine guve me a .tip. fer the Melbin Cap"

'Arriet sat up and gasped, her eyes goggled, and she stared in silent horror. " 'Ave you gotter ghost?" she whispered.

"Oh, yes," Minnie answered cheeflully, "it's an old one iv Madame's. It's bin about the 'ouse fer years, she tells me. Quite domesticated it is. A bit silly p'raps, but good-'earted."

"An' it comes t' see yeh?"

"It does that. It comes first the night after that trouble when I made the spirit iv that bloke's first wife give 'er consent to his second marriage. I was a bit scared when I first seen it. It was there in the middle iv me room when I woke in the dead iv night, an' it was moanin' somethin' awful, an' sorter wavin' its arms about. 'Twas somethin' like steam shinin' in the dark. Me first thought was t' dive through the winder on me silly 'ead, like you would ; but it was sayin': 'Oh, don't' he afraid— don't be afraid iv me, I'm on'y a pore old spirit, an' I won't do you no 'urt.' "

"Oh, lor !" gasped 'Arriet with stupid wonder. "Oh, lor ! An' yeh didn't drop dead ?"

"How could I drop dead, when I wis in bed? 'Ave a bit iv common. What d'yeh think the ghost was after? It seems silly fer a ghost t' bother its 'ead about sich things. But it said it was troubled sore an' couldn't rest because it thought I might go agin the missus, an' give her away, an' cause her trouble. It said Madame H'annette 'Olmes was a good woman at 'eart, but 'ad. many henemies, an' the law was agin her, an' wicked spirits was agin her; but if I was true to her I could do much good."

"Oh, I'd leave," moaned 'Arriet. "I'd pack up an' leave afore I'd take up with ghosts an' such bad characters."

"Not me," said Minnie stoutly. "That ghost's promised t' be my cobber, an' it give me a tip fer the Cup."

" 'N did yeh back it?"

"What d'you think? Back Glenloth, it said, an' I done it, an' won twenty-seven shillin's. It's worth while bein' cobbers with a ghost like that."

"It comes t' see yeh often, does it?"

"On'y now 'n agin when somethin's doin'. I got a hidea of makin' it uset'.il one iv these days, when it's trained up coper 'n' more broke in to my ways. I'm thinkin' iv gettin' it 'elp round the 'ouse, an' run messidges.".

"Well, I never. If yeh ain't a fool. You'll have it doin' you fer your job."

"No bloomin' fear. It'll act square all right. See, it wants me t' be faithful an' true t' Madame, that's why."

Minnie had many opportunities of proving to the satisfaction of her special spook that her heart was with. Madame, and that she was willing to work in the interests of Madame's business. She told nothing of Madame's artifices, and kept a strict eye on new callers, seeking h'alf-a-crown's worth "of enlightenment in regard to future events, and present prospects.

There was a specially constructed sidelight in Madame's front door, through which visitors were carefully scrutinised before they were admitted, and when they were seated in Madame's small, dim, mysterious waitingroom there was a secret peephole through which Madame could study them before they were called into the august presence of the soothsayer.

It was Minnie who responded to the call of Mr. Benjamin Amos. It was Minnie who scrutinised him through the sidelight with very special concern. Yet there was nothing remarkable about Mr. Benjamin Amos, he was one of a numerous sort— a type that provided Madame with, many customers; a heavy-footed, heavy-faced, semi-bucolic person, who looked as if he had been bred in the bush and recently translated to the city, where he was slightly out of his element, and not in tone yet with his surroundings.

Minnie changed her mind when on the point of opening to Mr. Amos, and a hurried consultation followed. It was Madame s husband who opened the door to the semi-bucolic, and ushered him into the waiting-room.

After he had been thoroughly investigated through the loop, he was admitted to the august presence of Madame Annette, futurist, clairvoyant, palm-reader, etc., etc.

Madame was very grave.

"You wish to consult me professionally?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am', I do—"

"You have faith ? Because without perfect faith my best efforts may fail."

"Oh, yes, Madame. If I hadn't faith I wouldn't have come. You see, I'm a stranger in Melbourne. I'm all the way from Boorabrugle, and I have no friends here, and no work, and I want to know what's best for me to do. I was a farmer, but my poor wife died, and I sold out and came away. I couldn't stand

the lonely life. I have a bit of money, and I want to know what I had better do with it "

"Give me your hand,"' said Madame. She took his hand, and studied it. She peered into it long and closely. She followed the lines with greatest care. Then she lit a second lamp and investigated the palm of Mr. Amos still more carefully.

"This is a strange case," said Madame Holmes— "a curious and mystifying case— I can hardly grasp it. Everything seems wrong. You should not have been a farmer. The bent of your talent lies in a wholly different direction. If you have been a farmer it is contrary to all your inclinations. You have not the disposition of a farmer, you have no gift for farming. You would have made a great investigator— a great seeker. You have the type of brain that would make you wonderfully successful as a scientist, a great searcher after hidden things, an experimental chemist, perhaps. Your tendency is to hunt and hunt, yet I cannot quite place you. I shall have to give your case deep thought."

"You can't advise me about my money, then?"

"Not now. You must come again. It is as a clairvoyant I must help you— palmistry does not go deep enough. Your hand is strangely at variance with the events of your life. I can find no wife here, no death, no sign of the suffering with which a sensitive nature like yours would be afflicted because of such a loss. In the trance state I shall be able to see clearly. As things are all is confusion. You must come again on Friday."

Mr. Amos offered her money. "No," said Madame, "I cannot .take payment till I have satisfied you that my art is honest, and my ministrations can help you."

Mr. Benjamin Amos went away. He seemed to have an idea that he was to be followed, and took precautions to avoid it; but no probable shadower put in an appearance, and Mr. Amos went his way on a tram in a very thoughtful mood. His assurance seemed a bit shaken. A dozen times he stared at his palm in a thoughtful, troubled way.

Mr. Amos returned at the time appointed, and Madame showed him every attention.

"I do not usually practice clairvoyancy for the sake of individuals," she said. "It imposes an enormous strain on the neivous system, and leaves me greatly shaken; but your case interests me deeply, and deepens doubts I have long entertained concerned the reliability of palm-reading as a true test of character, and an exact and trustworthy means of foretelling great events, or opening up the secrets of the past of a sitter."

Mr. Amos expressed himself as greatly obliged, and Madame prepared tor the ordeal.

The subject sat in an armchair facing the clairvoyant, and Madame, erect on a small platform; slowly worked herself into a state of trance. Presently she began to speak.

"I see a boy," she said. "He is fair-haired" (Amos was dark). "He lives by a river. There is a railway. The boy goes to a small wooden school on a hillside among dead trees. There is a younger sister with him. She has auburn hair. He calls her Bell. She calls him Jimmy. There are cows— many cows. The boy is troubled by the cows. He grows up amongst them. He is a slave to them. He hates them. At nineteen he is still by the river and the railway, but he looks longing at the trains that carry people to the big city. There is one he loves. Hor name is Jessie, but the time comes when he can escape. He comes to Melbourne. He lives here. He sees strange sights, he has many adventures. His calling leads him into many troubles, his life is one of much excitement. He is Oh! what is it he is? I cannot see. He is my enemy!"

With a slight scream Madame came from the trance, and stood staring at Amos with a terrified expression.

"My enemy," she said. "Oh! why, why?"

Benjamin Amos was very white about the gills. He was staring at Madame with even greater concern.

"No, no," he said, "that's a mistake. I am not."

"But you came to me with nn untrue story. You sought to entrap me. I cannot see why. All that is dark to me— but it will come. Let me see your hand again."

Benjamin drew his hand away. He placed it behind him for safety. He was a very awed young man, and with good reason. For Madame had traced his life with perfect truth and fidelity. Even the fair hair was true, the present darkness of his locks being due to somebody's celebrated walnut stain.

Again Madame refused to take monev, and Amos promised to come once more.

At this third meeting he heard such marvellous truths of his past and present, and so much concerning his future, that he conceived a deep and abiding faith in the clairvoyant.

"You are a man who would succeed best as a private detective," Madame said. "I don't know quite what you are, but it is something that has employed you hunting and seeking, and my advice to you is to devote yourself to some such work, for it is in that sphere you will most speedily find success."

"Well, I'm d—d!" was the worried comment of Mr. Amos when he reached the street. "The confounded woman knows everything— she sees everything. If I go again she'll spot me all right."

Benjamin Amos did go again, drawn by curiosity and a markedly superstitious turn of character. And this time Madame Annette Holmes did unmask him.

She told him of girls he had flirted with, an engagement he had broken, deeds he had done, and finally she threw his hand aside.

"I know you now," she said. "You are a policeman— 'a detective. You have come here seeking to destroy me, bufc, thank heaven, the truth was revealed to rne— the spirits warned me. I have taken none of your money."

Plain-Clothes Constable Halogen made no further attempt to sustain the imposition.

"I'll never breathe a word against you," he said. "By the holy, I wouldn't date. You've got me beat, I admit. I was sent to investigate you're goings on, and I'm going to report you're a decent woman, and I'm hoping you'll have nothing against me with the shpirits and what-not."

"Now Plain-Clothes P'liceman Jimmy Halogen is half-frightened out iv his life if Madame looks cross-eyed at him," Minnie Trigg informed Miss 'Arriet Brown.

"So he orter," said 'Arriet, "the way the snirits told her all about him."

Minnie laughed. "The spirits wasn't in it this time," she said. "I reckernised Jiminie when I saw him at the door, an' well I should, seem' he was my boy for a matter iv six months when I was at the Marrows' at Kew, an' he was jist a common cop on our beat. 'Twas me told Madame all about him t' save her the trouble iv worrvin' the spirits over the job', an' that jist squares me with Jimmie Halogen, I reckon."

" 'Ow squares yeh?"

"Well, didn't he chuck me over fer that yeller-haired tart at the corner pub?" said Minnie Trigg.

"But, all the same," said Minnie laier, "I was had about that ghost in my room. I got up night afore last an' grabbed it, an' it was made iv a few scraps iv gossamer, an' Madame was workin' it through the fanlight iv my room jist to kid me into keepin' square with her. This spiritualistic business is a norful fraud."

15: The Supernatural Agent

Punch (Melbourne) 23 July 1914

WE DISCOVER MISS TRIGG with her ear at the keyhole of her mistress's "stoodio."

The situation is not unique. Domestics have been discovered in a like position earlier in history. It is on record. In fact, there is a widespread belief among civilised peoples that this is an ingrained habit and custom with domestics, and one no kindness and no form of drastic treatment will eradicate.

Madame Annette Holmes, clairvoyant, futurist, and expounder of the human palm, was with a client, and Miss Minnie Trigg was piecing up a good general knowledge of that client's affairs.

It is worth recording that the clients of futurists and fortune-tellers of all sorts and complexions, gipsies or Albinos, go to these people and pay them their prices to be told about their own affairs, and invariably stay to tell much more than they are told.

In fact, the chief feature of the art of the fortune-teller is the ability to make the sitter tell the things she expects to be told. A stranger entering the dim, dusty parlor of a modern witch masquerading in a wig devised from the tail of a black horse, and a fresh-laid walnut complexion, presents a problem to the operative— she must be made to talk, for the great revealer can only reveal to the client what the client has already revealed to her.

Madame Annette Holmes was past-mistress m the delicate business of drawing-out a caller. She had an ingratiating and sympathetic manner, she had tact, patience, discernment, and a wide knowledge of woman-nature, which is very like human nature in many respects.

Madame was gently drawing-out the small, fair client, who had already become tearful and confidential. Presently. Madame would enter into a perfunctory kind of trance, communicate with an affinity or two in Spookland, and reveal to the fair and ingenious client sundry things the distressed little lady had herself revealed to Madame. The revelation would be touched up and given an air of spectral versimilitude by reason of certain astute deductions, all Madame's own, and the silly little lady with the fluffy, golden hair and the wide-open, absurd, childish eyes, would go away amazed at the superhuman wisdom of the medium.

Meanwhile Miss Minnie Trigg, at the keyhole, was taking in all the material facts of the case, and coming to conclusions even more exact and satisfactory than tnose of Madame.

Minnie had caught a glimpse of this particular client at a former "sitting," and her sentimental interests had been violently aroused. The young lady was very young, and looked younger. She was slim and pretty, her grey eyes had an infantile simplicity, and she wore a wedding ring.

It was Madame's policy to advise her patrons to come again. Every call meant a fee, and one must live. The necessity of living is apparently as strong in a spiritualistic medium who recognises the futility of this existence as it is in the most sceptical materialist of the bunch.

The grey-eyed client came again, and apparently her sorrows were accumulating. Now and again Minnie's tears splashed on the linoleum as she bent with her dexter ear glued to the keyhole, and there they might have been discovered, eloquent evidence of Miss Trigg's transgression, had Madame been an accurate observer of trifles.

"Pore little beggar!" Minnie said, addressing her best friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown ; "she's worryin' 'erself into her grave, an' she: orter be sittin' in 'her mother's lap, bein' coaxed an' petted instead iv tearin' her 'eart out over a 'ulkin' 'usb'and."

"All 'usbands is brutes," said Miss Brown dully, but oracularly.

"They are," Minnie admitted, "an' has t' be treated as such. But we pore women gets tied to 'em, an' it's up to us t' make the best iv a bad job."

"The better yeh do fer 'em the worse they get," murmured 'Arriet, with the conviction of a servant with a wide range of experience.

"Mostly because their wives dunno how to 'andle them," Minnie persisted. "There's silly bits iv girls what would scream themselves into a fit if put in the same room with a rat, an' what wouldn't fer their lives go into the same cage with a fat, ole, flat-footed, 'armless lion, will marry a man without a wink or a tremor, an' start out t' face life with him, ez ignorant of the ways iv the hanimal ez a toothless babby. Naturally, they butt up against trouble in next to no time. They find their bloomin' 'ero iv romance is a greedy slob, sullish. hard, an' given t' ways iv wickedness, not 't' mention whisky; an' then they're beat— they ain't got no more idea what t' do than if they was turned in t' train a wild helephant."

"There ain't nothink to do," said 'Ariet, with the air of one resigned to the worst, "but t' 'it 'im on the 'ead with a cruet now an' agin! That's what the missus does 'ere."

"G-arrt ! " snorted Minnie, "There's ways iv 'andlin' tihe worst iv them. I've seen a reg'lar tough brought down be a bit iv a woman what had sav-ee, and fair taught t' eat out of her 'and. That's what this little girl orter 'ave bin taught afore she married. Then she wouldn't be 'elpless ez a sick kitten when her John

plays it up a bit in the bars, or takes a taxi load iv pink barmaid fer an airin' in the cool iv the evenin' "

"Goes orn, does he?"

"Somethin' iv that like. An' she's askin' Madame' t' use her influence with the ghosts t' find out his little games an' track him down. Fat lot o' good the ghosts'll do 'er. I'm done with spirits. They're a most unrelierable lot. What this little girl's naughty boy wants is fer someone big ez a house t' get to him with a clo's-prop. There orter be a public persecuter t' deal it out to evil disposed 'usbands that way.

"No court bizness," Minnie continued, "no tales in the paper; jist a quiet little investigation, an' then the public persecutor t' take John into the stable, an' dust his bones with a yard iv hardwood till he promises faithful on his oath never t' do so no more. But more'n everythink else, young, girls should be taught what 'usbands is likely t' be like. All girls can't go into service an' learn fer theirselves, so there should be what they call a preparrotary school for girls what's about t' marry, where cute old married women an' servant girls like me, what's seen a thing or two, could learn 'em all about 'usbands, an' 'ow t' 'andle them.

"Me 'eart fair cracks 'earin iv this poor little woman's troubles, an' she pretty enough fer any sensible bloke t' want t' tend her close an' careful all his life. Madame don't seen t' mind it much. She's used to 'em. Besides, she ain't romantic like me. I cry in bed over the pore girl."

"Ain't it lovely, cryin' in bed?" said Arriet.

The fair little lady with the grey, infantile eyes made several calls upon Madame, at all of which Miinnie was present in the spirit, so to speak, though unavoidably detained on the other side of the door.

"I've found out all about 'er," Minnie told Miss Brown. " 'Er name's Clarice. I know where she lives, an' I'm v ateliin' over 'er."

" 'Ow?" asked the phlegmatic 'Arriet.

"I'm her guardyin angel. But' I dunno what t' do fer 'er. I've seen 'i n, too. Saw 'im an' 'er together in the garding day afore yesterday. He ain't bad lookin', an' he's quite young hisself. If he had that public persecutor what I was talkin about t' give him a good hidin' every first Chewsdee in the month for a year 'r so, he might be a all-right John. What's more, he seemed fond iv 'er, but she was lookin' very broken spirited. I never wanted t' be a mother to no one so much in all my life." Minnie wiped a moist eve

'"Gaar-rn!" said 'Arriet heavily. "You mother to a grown-up? Why, you ain't much more'n a kid yerself."

"Some is born mothers," said Minnie. "I'm one iv that sort."

IT WAS three days after this that Madame Holmes fell ill. She had an attack of an old complaint, and was forced to take to her bed.

"I was to get two guineas to run a gipsy's tent at a big charity garden party at Whitwold to-morrow," she said to Minnie. "Do you think you could manage it?"

"Me, a gipsy's tent?" gasped Minnie. "Why, I dunno what it is."

Madame Annette explained. "They rig up a tent in the grounds, and you are supposed to be a gipsy living in it. The guests come to you to have their hands read, and you tell them anything that comes into your head. Surely you know enough to manage that after all you have seen here?"

"Oh, I could do that all right," said Minnie confidently.

"Then you go. I'll give you half the fee. There's a costume here will suit you. Put on the black wig, brown your skin a bit with Condy's, and you'll have a good time."

Minnie appeared at the Whitwold garden party in the guise of a wicked gipsy, and was the most popular item. In the course of three hours she filled a small sand bucket with the silver with which her laughing clients crossed her palm. Her earnings, however, went to charity.

Miss Trigg looked the part. She was an impudent and vivacious gipsy maiden, resembling a madder Carmen, and the fortunes she told were sometimes broadly comic, sometimes extravagantly melodramatic.

When she had been driving a thriving business for about two hours, a young girl, who had been busying herself cajoling clients to the tent, came, towing a tall, dark-eyed, clean-shaven man of about twenty-six.

"You must, Mr. Clement," she said. "Everybody's doing it. Read his palm, Gipsy, and charge him five shillings for giving me so much trouble."

Minnie looked the newcomer over, and her heart, nearly "jumped the gate," as she put it in a subsequent explanation of events.

" 'Tis well you came," she said in sepulchral tones.

The man laughed. "Came?" he said, "I've been dragged. I'm an unwilling agent, and now I'm to be robbed."

"Trifle not with the mysteries," warned Minnie, using Madame's pet phrase.

"The mysteries? Rubbish! I know more of my fate and fortune than all. tlie sages, witches and seers on earth, and all the spooks above can ever tell me. But here you are. Have a shot."

Minnie took Mr. Clement's palm, and examined it closely, following line by line with a trembling finger.

"There's one thing you. don't know," she said; "you're smashin' up your own 'appiness."

The young girl laughed. "Be hard on him," she said."I'll hunt up some, more."

"What the deuce do you mean by that?" said the man somewhat coldly, looking into Minnie's cold eye.

"I mean," said the mock Gipsy, "that you dunno what a fool you're makin' of yourself, much as you think "you know, Mr. Clever'ead, an' I'm dead serious when I say it. There's a dark woman here, and here she is again, and here, and here!" She stabbed his palm in several places. "An' she's no business here. Wherever she crops up in your 'and she means mischiff."

"A dark woman? What the deuce do you mean?" Mr. Clement was no longer jocular.

"Do you wanter know? Well she's dark, she has blue eyes, she is a little older than you, she knows more of the world than you, she's wrecked other lives." Minnie had adopted Madame's manner and Madame's language. "She will wreck your life if you go on. And there is another here whose happiness she is crushing out." (The Gipsy peered closer.) "A fair child. 'Yes, a mere child in heart. She has grey eyes, she has a sweet spirit, but her heart bleeds— she suffers. She suspects— nay, she knows! Her spies follow you. You are watched. Everything is known. The end is near, and if it comes the crash will wreck your life. The fair girl will die. The dark woman—let me see, let me see. She goes across the water. You are alone."

Clement, snatched his hand away. "What infernal rot is this ?" he said, but his face was pale.

"Gimme yer 'and," said Miss Trigg, " 'n' I'll tell yell m'ore. Let me look closer, let me think, 'n' I'll tell yeh everythin'. You're married. The fair girl's your wife. She loved you, but her poor heart is bein' eaten out."

Again he snatched his hand away "You're an insolent cat," he said. "You have been prying into my affairs."

"Never saw yeh before in all my life," said Minnie, solemnly. "Never wanter see yeh again; but that fair girl seems worth savin', 'n' there's time. It's not too late. She knows you. She's had you watched. She means to break from you; but she loves you, and it's not too late."

"It's not true," he said. "It's not true."

"Every word is true," said the gipsy. "I have fooled with the others, but there's tragedy in your palm. Beware!"

It was three weeks later that. Minnie confided the sequel to her friend, 'Arriet Brown.

"She's called on Madame agin t'day," she said. "I mean the pretty, fair woman with the baby eyes. She was ez appy ez a blessed lark, 'n' a blessed lark it was. It seems 'er 'usband 'ad found out she'd got privit detectives on his

track; 'n' he'd confessed everythin', 'n' begged her t' forgive 'im, 'n' promised t' be a good, true 'usband fer ever 'n' ever, amen."

" 'N' she's forgive 'im, iv course," said 'Arriet. "They alwiz do."

"Yes; but he's never t' see the dark woman no more, 'n' it seems how the truth was revealed to 'im be soopernatural agency."

"Soopernatural hagency— what's that?"

"By way iv the spirits. That's what he told his wife, and that's what she told Madame; but I happen t' know a thing or two myself."

"Which is what?"

"Well, *I* was the soopernatural agent."

"Ah, garn! How yeh talk."

"I was. Wasn't I the gipsy what read his palm, 'n' wasn't he Mr. Clement, the bloke whose fortune I told at the Whitwold garding party?"

"My word," gasped 'Arriet, "you are a one!"

16: The Capturing of Plain Clothes Constable Halogen

Punch (Melbourne), 30 July 1914

PLAIN CLOTHES CONSTABLE James Halogen appeared at an earlier stage .in these playful chronicles. He was dubbed "Feet' at a former and comparatively insignificant stage of his career by our impudent heroine. More recently, cutely disguised as a rural visitor, he called on Madame Annette Holmes, futurist, and palmreader, at that astute matron's mystery parlours, designing to entrap her into illegal practices. Madame, it may be remembered, had proved herself too old and cautious a bird for the simple peeler, and in the end made a friend and patron of the officer of the. law.

Constable Jimmy Halogon was a product of Finn's Reach, Bungaree. He came to Melbourne a fine sample of the native Hibernian, 6 ft. high, 14st. in weight, with a brogue that might have been fresh from Ballyhooley, and as simple as the least guileful peasant of the old land. They did breed that sort in Bungaree a while back. Possibly the present generation carries on the strain, but we have had smaller opportunities of observation.

Jimmy Halogen continued to call upon Madame Holmes for counsel and guidance when clues failed him in other directions. Having satisfied himself to the point of a sacred conviction that Madame possessed supernatural powers, he no longer dreamed of her as a fit subject for legal restrictions. Had she not peered into his past, and revealed it to him with amazing fidelity? Had she not described future events with an astounding accuracy yet to be demonstrated. And was it not true that on three distinct occasions she had given him points that had materially assisted him in laying by the heels certain malevolent persons?

In Bungaree they, had kept alive, too, some lively respect for supernatural things, and a decent reverence for banshees and fairies was in the bones of Plain Clothes Constable Halogen, which materially assisted in strengthening Madame's spell over him.

Minnie Trigg knew of all Constable Halogen's visits to the parlour of palm-mystery. Indeed, it sometimes happened that she shared the confidences of Madame and her sitter by means of the ever-convenient keyhole.

"I have t' be careful not t' let his nibs see me," she told Miss 'Arriet Brown. "If he spotted me, that'd give away the whole show. You see, me an' Jimmy kep' company fer months when I was with the Wellin's et Kew. He was jist a hordinary John Hop them days in a oilcloth helmet, an' I had a pet name fer him, which was 'Feet,' 'n' he had a love name fer me, which was 'The Canary,' cause iv me yeller hair," and Minnie stroked hrr decidedly ginger locks with a touch of pride. "He used t' tell me all about his past life, an' his hambition t' be

the Sheerlock Combs iv the P'lice Force. But, like the rest iv the blighters, 'Arriet, he was false."

"They orter be shot," commented 'Arriet, gloomily. 'Arriet's own little love affair was going none too well just then.

"He went back on me most crool," said Minnie, "an' took t' moochin' round with a black-eye, brazen piece at a boardin'-'ouse opposite. So natural when I spots him com'n' along in disguise t' do in Mailame ier fortune-teliin' an' similar tricks which is contrary t' law, I sneaks in, an' puts her up to his true character. Likewise, also, I puts her on to a few items iv interest whit'll be useful to her in predictin' his past an' recallin' his future. What happens ? Well, .Jimmy's jist knocked flat an' flummoxed with Madame's wonderful power, an' now he's got'tickets all over 'er. I belief if she was t' tell him she could set all the ghosts in the business up agen him he'd believe her. You'd never think a hofficer iv the law could be such a Jack Chump."

"Stuck up crowd, they are," said 'Arriet, "them cops."

"So, yeh see," Minnie continued, "I gotter keep dark. If he spotted me. he'd tumble to where all Madame's soopernatural hinformation came from, an' it would be up a tree with us. But I was rather soft on 'Feet' till he threw me over, straight I was, an' I don't altogether like him bein' made a mug. of. But there's a sort iv half-haked idea dodgin' round in my mind these few days, an' I'm sorter lookin' fer a hopenin' t' do a bit on me own."

"Go on," said Miss thrown. "Tell us, won't yeh, Min ?"

"Not all iv a sudden, I won't."

"Ah-h-h, go on, you know me."

"Well, I'll tell yeh this much. If a tall John with nice fair hair, rather good lookin', but takin' an outside size in boots, comes round, askin' after me, you're not t' know too much. Say e' lost the run i* me lately. Say yeh think I've took a job in the country."

"Will it be 'im?" gasped 'Arriet.

"More'n likely it'll be 'im, provided this bright little idear iv mine works out."

EVIDENTLY the idea did work out to some extent. Within a fortnight 'Arriet Brown was waited upon in her kitchen by a tall, fair, interesting stranger, whose feet would have attracted attention anywhere outside a blind asylum. The stranger was seeking information as to the whereabouts of one Minetta Trigg, domestic servant.

"I dunno where she are," replied Miss Brown, accenting her native stupidity, which was wholly uncalled for.

"But wasn't you a friend iv hers yerself?" asked the caller. "I hear-rd her mintion yeh Often. Sure, I'm a gr-reat friend iv hers—a very gr-reat friend, an' ye'd be doin' m'e a kindness an' herself a kindness, an' yerself line credit would yeh tell me where I might be findin' her this day."

"I dunno," 'Arriet repeated dully, "I ain't seen her fer months. I think she went t' Geelong."

Plain Clothes Constable Jinmy Halogen was visibly perturbed. "Tut, tut, tut!" he said. " 'Tis a big pity so 'tis, an' me wantin' t' find her that bad."

"Why don't yeh put an advertise in the 'Lost an' Found' collim?" asked 'Arriet.

Mr. Halogen regarded her dubiously for a moment. Then said he : "Sure, 'tis not a bad notion ye have. I'll do it, and, meanwhile, should you hear iv anny clues, would yen communicate wid me? Here's me name and address."

"HE LOOKED all heart-broke," 'Arriet told Minnie later. "I think he must be dead shook."

"That's jist how he orter feel," said Minnie. "That's jist how' he's gotter feel, seem' the time he kep' company with me, an' the way he give me the toss fer that dark-eyed bit iv skirt et the boardin'-'ouse."

"But what if he spots yeh in the street?"

"Oh, I'm keepin' a smart look out. He won't spot me till I'm ready t' be spotted, an' meanwhile I'm workin' up me case."

The case of Minnie Trigg was being most cunningly worked up with the connivance of Madame Holmes, who had been pressed into Minnie's service after much argument and long pleading. The method of the working up of the case might be more easily comprehended if we adopted Minnie's plan, and planted an ear at the keyhole of Madame's mystery parlour what time she was engaged in a sitting with Plain Clothes Constable James Halogen.

"I cannot escape from this girl," Madame said. "She appears everywhere in your hand. All these lines have reference to her. She is to have influence on all your future. Yet you know nothing of her?"

Jimmy Halogen shifted uneasily on his seat, and replied with a distinct hint of nervousness, " 'Tis truth I can't place her yet, ma'am."

"But she has figured in your past. You have had deep feelings concerning her. Here are the traces of profound emotions."

"Ma'am, would yeh be thinkin' there was no more an' wan gir'rl in a man's life at all

"Are you trying to deceive me? If I thought that I—"

"No, no, ma'am. Sit yeh down. Will yeh know I wouldn't be the man t' do at. 'Tis jist that me mind's oncertain."

"The same girl comes in if I employ the cards. In my trance state I see her."

"And is it so necessary she is, ma'am?"

''Fate has sealed her to you. Without her your life will be as a blank; with her I see honour and advancement."

"And how would a man know her when he saw her?"

"I have described the girl I see in my trance state."

"Yis, ma'am; but cud I not find a girl would answer that description annywhere in the street? Darrk goold hair yeh said. Nose a thrifle upturned, yeh said. A gird iv old'nary attainments, said you. 'Twould be great pity did I take the wrong girrl."

"I might be able to get you a spirit photograph."

Constable Halogen turned a trifle pale. "A shpirit photygraft, ma'am. That 'ud be a picture taken be the shpirits, maybe. Would a man be safe wid sich a thing by him '

"It would be a photograph taken by the spirits. It would be a little nebulous perhaps, but it would enable you to identify the girl if you met her."

"An' haven't the shpirits no name fer the girrl at all?"

"They have communicated a name that I heard only vaguely— Minerva, or Matilda."

"Minetta might it be?"

"Yes, yes, Minetta, that is the name," cried Madame. "You know her? You recollect?"

"I'll have the shpirit photygraff, ma'am, if yeh don't mind."

At a subsequent sitting Constable Halogen was given the spirit photograph. The sight of it nearly stunned him. It was Madame had predicted, somewhat nebulous and vague; but the face was faintly visible, floating, as it were, in a cloud, an effect Madame as a crafty amateur photographer had often secured for the benefit of her patrons.

Three days after Constable James Halogen's interview with 'Arriet Brown, the following advertisement appeared in tne Agony columnn of the *Age*:—

"If Minnie B—, late of ——, Kew, communicates with her loving and faithful J— H— she may hear of something to her advantage."

A week after that Jimmy Halogen called on Madame again. He was almost in tears.

"It seems I'll never find her, 'n' I'm a done man, I am, 'n' 't serves me right, she lavin' me well, 'n' me lavin' her false 'n' crool fer a dancin' divil iv a black-eyed witch that cared no more fer a man than fee anny convenience yid care t' name."

"Then you do know the girl I mean."

"I do, I do, ma'am, 'n' I'm beggin' yer pardon for me desate, 'n' me doubtin', 'n' circumlocution, 'n' what not, me havin' the truth in me mind all the time. 'Tis a girl called Minnie Trigg I was lovin' most fond a year since, 'n' she was lovin' 'n' thrue t' me, 'n' well I mind she had the clear head 'n' the kin hearrt, but I was the blind, poor fool, 'n' I tuck up wid another, 'n' I'm lost intoirely, 'n' me life's rooned through me own folly, since 'twill be empty 'n' useless widout her."

"Empty and useless it will be. All that my spirits can reveal and all that my knowledge shows proves this girl to be essential to your life's happiness and your professional success."

"And would the shpirits not help me to put me hand on her?"

"They have refused so far, but perhaps it was because you were not honest and straightforward with them. I will try again. Come in a week."

Constable Halogen was back at the time appointed— very impatient to know what the spirits might have revealed. Now that he was convinced that Minnie was necessary to him, he had satisfied himself that he had loved her with all his heart and soul, and could never love any other. He was seeking her with all the fervor of an enthusiastic lover.

"The spirits tell me you will have a message," said Madame.

"Nothin' more than that?" asked James despondingly.

"It is quite sufficient."

" 'Tis not known whin 'n' where, ma'am?"

"No; but I think I can promise you it will be soon. The spirits do not procrastinate."

That night Minnie, who for ten days had been in the employment of a South Yarra family, having left Madame Holmes for the better working of the conspiracy, called on 'Arriet.

"Go 'n' see his nibs t'morrer, 'Arnet.'' she said. "The time is ripe."

"Wot— am I t' tell him?"

"Yes. Say I've called t' see yeh. Tell him where I'm livin' now. Say yiv said nothin' t' me about him."

"Straight, I'm real glad," said 'Arriet. ''Pore bloke, he's seemed reglar broken-hearted these last two or three times he's called."

Minnie nodded.

"Yes," said she, "He's found out he loves me for meself alone, 'n' I'm goin' into domestic service on me own account, 'Arriet."

Next day 'Arriet took the glad tidings of great joy to Plain Clothes Constable Halogen, and within an hour Jimmie turned up at Minnie's kitchen door. He was rather pale and nervous, but made a bold effort to hide both.

"Hello, 'n' is it yerself, Minnie, me girrl," he said. "Well, now, there's a surprise if you like. Who'd have thought it at all, V me jist loungin' 'by when I seen you troo a crack iv the the fence. 'N' yer lookin' fine, y' are."

Minnie treated him coldly. "Well, you can lounge by agin," she said. "On your way, Timmie Halogen. I'm off your sort."

"Will yer never forgive 'n' forgit, then?" said Halogen anxiously. "Don't I know I made the mishtake iv me life, lavin' the dearest, 'n' the shweetest little girrl under heaven fer that darkeved, diseavin' divil. Ah-h-h, Minnie, 'tis you I'm lovin' thrue 'n' hon'rable all this time."

"Yi'll oblige by gettin' out iv me kitchen, Mister Halogen."

"Minnie, would yeh break m'e up 'n' roon me life altogether, 'n' me lovin' yeh that dear me hearrt's sore wid it? Forgive me, dear. Haven't I been searchin' fer you ever since that wicked day I left yeh t' ask yeh t' be me wife?"

"To be yer wife, Jimmie?"

"Yes, dearest, nothin' else. Will yeh have me, then?"

"Jimie, I've never give un lovin' yeh, 'n' wonderin' if you'd come agen."

"Yi'll have me! Oh, me darrlin'. Yi'll have me!"

"I will, Jimmie."

'Arriet Brown was the only bridesmaid, and Mrs. James Halogen's whispered parting words were:

"If you ever breathe a word about me bein' servant with Madame Holmes, 'Arriet Brown, I'll put on all Madame's spirits t' 'aunt yeh till the day iv ver death."

So far 'Arriet has kept mum. It is a curious thing that Plain Clothes Constable Halogen never visits Madame Holmes these days. When in doubt now he does not question the palmist, but puts the case before his shrewd little missus. He is convinced that with her aid he will be Chief Commissioner one of these days.

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