

**JEROME
KLAPKA
JEROME**

TOMMY AND CO.

Jerome Klapka Jerome

Tommy and Co.

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25229604

Tommy and Co.:

Содержание

STORY THE FIRST – Peter Hope plans his Prospectus	4
STORY THE SECOND – William Clodd appoints himself Managing Director	39
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	61

Jerome K. Jerome

Tommy and Co

STORY THE FIRST – Peter Hope plans his Prospectus

“Come in!” said Peter Hope.

Peter Hope was tall and thin, clean-shaven but for a pair of side whiskers close-cropped and terminating just below the ear, with hair of the kind referred to by sympathetic barbers as “getting a little thin on the top, sir,” but arranged with economy, that everywhere is poverty’s true helpmate. About Mr. Peter Hope’s linen, which was white though somewhat frayed, there was a self-assertiveness that invariably arrested the attention of even the most casual observer. Decidedly there was too much of it – its ostentation aided and abetted by the retiring nature of the cut-away coat, whose chief aim clearly was to slip off and disappear behind its owner’s back. “I’m a poor old thing,” it seemed to say. “I don’t shine – or, rather, I shine too much among these up-to-date young modes. I only hamper you. You would be much more comfortable without me.” To persuade it to accompany him, its proprietor had to employ force, keeping fastened the lowest of its three buttons.

At every step, it struggled for its liberty. Another characteristic of Peter's, linking him to the past, was his black silk cravat, secured by a couple of gold pins chained together. Watching him as he now sat writing, his long legs encased in tightly strapped grey trousering, crossed beneath the table, the lamplight falling on his fresh-complexioned face, upon the shapely hand that steadied the half-written sheet, a stranger might have rubbed his eyes, wondering by what hallucination he thus found himself in presence seemingly of some young beau belonging to the early 'forties; but looking closer, would have seen the many wrinkles.

"Come in!" repeated Mr. Peter Hope, raising his voice, but not his eyes.

The door opened, and a small, white face, out of which gleamed a pair of bright, black eyes, was thrust sideways into the room.

"Come in!" repeated Mr. Peter Hope for the third time. "Who is it?"

A hand not over clean, grasping a greasy cloth cap, appeared below the face.

"Not ready yet," said Mr. Hope. "Sit down and wait."

The door opened wider, and the whole of the figure slid in and, closing the door behind it, sat itself down upon the extreme edge of the chair nearest.

"Which are you — *Central News* or *Courier*?" demanded Mr. Peter Hope, but without looking up from his work.

The bright, black eyes, which had just commenced an

examination of the room by a careful scrutiny of the smoke-grimed ceiling, descended and fixed themselves upon the one clearly defined bald patch upon his head that, had he been aware of it, would have troubled Mr. Peter Hope. But the full, red lips beneath the turned-up nose remained motionless.

That he had received no answer to his question appeared to have escaped the attention of Mr. Peter Hope. The thin, white hand moved steadily to and fro across the paper. Three more sheets were added to those upon the floor. Then Mr. Peter Hope pushed back his chair and turned his gaze for the first time upon his visitor.

To Peter Hope, hack journalist, long familiar with the genus Printer's Devil, small white faces, tangled hair, dirty hands, and greasy caps were common objects in the neighbourhood of that buried rivulet, the Fleet. But this was a new species. Peter Hope sought his spectacles, found them after some trouble under a heap of newspapers, adjusted them upon his high, arched nose, leant forward, and looked long and up and down.

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Peter Hope. "What is it?"

The figure rose to its full height of five foot one and came forward slowly.

Over a tight-fitting garibaldi of blue silk, excessively *décolleté*, it wore what once had been a boy's pepper-and-salt jacket. A worsted comforter wound round the neck still left a wide expanse of throat showing above the garibaldi. Below the jacket fell a long, black skirt, the train of which had been looped up about

the waist and fastened with a cricket-belt.

“Who are you? What do you want?” asked Mr. Peter Hope.

For answer, the figure, passing the greasy cap into its other hand, stooped down and, seizing the front of the long skirt, began to haul it up.

“Don’t do that!” said Mr. Peter Hope. “I say, you know, you –”

But by this time the skirt had practically disappeared, leaving to view a pair of much-patched trousers, diving into the right-hand pocket of which the dirty hand drew forth a folded paper, which, having opened and smoothed out, it laid upon the desk.

Mr. Peter Hope pushed up his spectacles till they rested on his eyebrows, and read aloud – “Steak and Kidney Pie, 4d.; Do. (large size), 6d.; Boiled Mutton –”

“That’s where I’ve been for the last two weeks,” said the figure, – “Hammond’s Eating House!”

The listener noted with surprise that the voice – though it told him as plainly as if he had risen and drawn aside the red rep curtains, that outside in Gough Square the yellow fog lay like the ghost of a dead sea – betrayed no Cockney accent, found no difficulty with its aitches.

“You ask for Emma. She’ll say a good word for me. She told me so.”

“But, my good –” Mr. Peter Hope, checking himself, sought again the assistance of his glasses. The glasses being unable to decide the point, their owner had to put the question bluntly:

“Are you a boy or a girl?”

“I dunno.”

“You don’t know!”

“What’s the difference?”

Mr. Peter Hope stood up, and taking the strange figure by the shoulders, turned it round slowly twice, apparently under the impression that the process might afford to him some clue. But it did not.

“What is your name?”

“Tommy.”

“Tommy what?”

“Anything you like. I dunno. I’ve had so many of ’em.”

“What do you want? What have you come for?”

“You’re Mr. Hope, ain’t you, second floor, 16, Gough Square?”

“That is my name.”

“You want somebody to do for you?”

“You mean a housekeeper!”

“Didn’t say anything about housekeeper. Said you wanted somebody to do for you – cook and clean the place up. Heard ’em talking about it in the shop this afternoon. Old lady in green bonnet was asking Mother Hammond if she knew of anyone.”

“Mrs. Postwhistle – yes, I did ask her to look out for someone for me. Why, do you know of anyone? Have you been sent by anybody?”

“You don’t want anything too ’laborate in the way o’ cooking? You was a simple old chap, so they said; not much trouble.”

“No – no. I don’t want much – someone clean and respectable. But why couldn’t she come herself? Who is it?”

“Well, what’s wrong about me?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Peter Hope.

“Why won’t I do? I can make beds and clean rooms – all that sort o’ thing. As for cooking, I’ve got a natural aptitude for it. You ask Emma; she’ll tell you. You don’t want nothing ’laborate?”

“Elizabeth,” said Mr. Peter Hope, as he crossed and, taking up the poker, proceeded to stir the fire, “are we awake or asleep?”

Elizabeth thus appealed to, raised herself on her hind legs and dug her claws into her master’s thigh. Mr. Hope’s trousers being thin, it was the most practical answer she could have given him.

“Done a lot of looking after other people for their benefit,” continued Tommy. “Don’t see why I shouldn’t do it for my own.”

“My dear – I do wish I knew whether you were a boy or a girl. Do you seriously suggest that I should engage you as my housekeeper?” asked Mr. Peter Hope, now upright with his back to the fire.

“I’d do for you all right,” persisted Tommy. “You give me my grub and a shake-down and, say, sixpence a week, and I’ll grumble less than most of ’em.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Mr. Peter Hope.

“You won’t try me?”

“Of course not; you must be mad.”

“All right. No harm done.” The dirty hand reached out towards the desk, and possessing itself again of Hammond’s Bill

of Fare, commenced the operations necessary for bearing it away in safety.

“Here’s a shilling for you,” said Mr. Peter Hope.

“Rather not,” said Tommy. “Thanks all the same.”

“Nonsense!” said Mr. Peter Hope.

“Rather not,” repeated Tommy. “Never know where that sort of thing may lead you to.”

“All right,” said Mr. Peter Hope, replacing the coin in his pocket. “Don’t!”

The figure moved towards the door.

“Wait a minute. Wait a minute,” said Mr. Peter Hope irritably.

The figure, with its hand upon the door, stood still.

“Are you going back to Hammond’s?”

“No. I’ve finished there. Only took me on for a couple o’ weeks, while one of the gals was ill. She came back this morning.”

“Who are your people?”

Tommy seemed puzzled. “What d’ye mean?”

“Well, whom do you live with?”

“Nobody.”

“You’ve got nobody to look after you – to take care of you?”

“Take care of me! D’ye think I’m a bloomin’ kid?”

“Then where are you going to now?”

“Going? Out.”

Peter Hope’s irritation was growing.

“I mean, where are you going to sleep? Got any money for a

lodging?”

“Yes, I’ve got some money,” answered Tommy. “But I don’t think much o’ lodgings. Not a particular nice class as you meet there. I shall sleep out to-night. ’Tain’t raining.”

Elizabeth uttered a piercing cry.

“Serves you right!” growled Peter savagely. “How can anyone help treading on you when you will get just between one’s legs. Told you of it a hundred times.”

The truth of the matter was that Peter was becoming very angry with himself. For no reason whatever, as he told himself, his memory would persist in wandering to Ilford Cemetery, in a certain desolate corner of which lay a fragile little woman whose lungs had been but ill adapted to breathing London fogs; with, on the top of her, a still smaller and still more fragile mite of humanity that, in compliment to its only relative worth a penny-piece, had been christened Thomas – a name common enough in all conscience, as Peter had reminded himself more than once. In the name of common sense, what had dead and buried Tommy Hope to do with this affair? The whole thing was the veriest sentiment, and sentiment was Mr. Peter Hope’s abomination. Had he not penned articles innumerable pointing out its baneful influence upon the age? Had he not always condemned it, wherever he had come across it in play or book? Now and then the suspicion had crossed Peter’s mind that, in spite of all this, he was somewhat of a sentimentalist himself – things had suggested this to him. The fear had always made him savage.

“You wait here till I come back,” he growled, seizing the astonished Tommy by the worsted comforter and spinning it into the centre of the room. “Sit down, and don’t you dare to move.” And Peter went out and slammed the door behind him.

“Bit off his chump, ain’t he?” remarked Tommy to Elizabeth, as the sound of Peter’s descending footsteps died away. People had a way of addressing remarks to Elizabeth. Something in her manner invited this.

“Oh, well, it’s all in the day’s work,” commented Tommy cheerfully, and sat down as bid.

Five minutes passed, maybe ten. Then Peter returned, accompanied by a large, restful lady, to whom surprise – one felt it instinctively – had always been, and always would remain, an unknown quantity.

Tommy rose.

“That’s the – the article,” explained Peter.

Mrs. Postwhistle compressed her lips and slightly tossed her head. It was the attitude of not ill-natured contempt from which she regarded most human affairs.

“That’s right,” said Mrs. Postwhistle; “I remember seeing ’er there – leastways, it was an ’er right enough then. What ’ave you done with your clothes?”

“They weren’t mine,” explained Tommy. “They were things what Mrs. Hammond had lent me.”

“Is that your own?” asked Mrs. Postwhistle, indicating the blue silk garibaldi.

“Yes.”

“What went with it?”

“Tights. They were too far gone.”

“What made you give up the tumbling business and go to Mrs. Ammond’s?”

“It gave me up. Hurt myself.”

“Who were you with last?”

“Martini troupe.”

“And before that?”

“Oh! heaps of ’em.”

“Nobody ever told you whether you was a boy or a girl?”

“Nobody as I’d care to believe. Some of them called me the one, some of them the other. It depended upon what was wanted.”

“How old are you?”

“I dunno.”

Mrs. Postwhistle turned to Peter, who was jingling keys.

“Well, there’s the bed upstairs. It’s for you to decide.”

“What I don’t want to do,” explained Peter, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, “is to make a fool of myself.”

“That’s always a good rule,” agreed Mrs. Postwhistle, “for those to whom it’s possible.”

“Anyhow,” said Peter, “one night can’t do any harm. Tomorrow we can think what’s to be done.”

“To-morrow” had always been Peter’s lucky day. At the mere mention of the magic date his spirits invariably rose. He now

turned upon Tommy a countenance from which all hesitation was banished.

“Very well, Tommy,” said Mr. Peter Hope, “you can sleep here to-night. Go with Mrs. Postwhistle, and she’ll show you your room.”

The black eyes shone.

“You’re going to give me a trial?”

“We’ll talk about all that to-morrow.” The black eyes clouded.

“Look here. I tell you straight, it ain’t no good.”

“What do you mean? What isn’t any good?” demanded Peter.

“You’ll want to send me to prison.”

“To prison!”

“Oh, yes. You’ll call it a school, I know. You ain’t the first that’s tried that on. It won’t work.” The bright, black eyes were flashing passionately. “I ain’t done any harm. I’m willing to work. I can keep myself. I always have. What’s it got to do with anybody else?”

Had the bright, black eyes retained their expression of passionate defiance, Peter Hope might have retained his common sense. Only Fate arranged that instead they should suddenly fill with wild tears. And at sight of them Peter’s common sense went out of the room disgusted, and there was born the history of many things.

“Don’t be silly,” said Peter. “You didn’t understand. Of course I’m going to give you a trial. You’re going to ‘do’ for me. I merely meant that we’d leave the details till to-morrow. Come,

housekeepers don't cry."

The little wet face looked up.

"You mean it? Honour bright?"

"Honour bright. Now go and wash yourself. Then you shall get me my supper."

The odd figure, still heaving from its paroxysm of sobs, stood up.

"And I have my grub, my lodging, and sixpence a week?"

"Yes, yes; I think that's a fair arrangement," agreed Mr. Peter Hope, considering. "Don't you, Mrs. Postwhistle?"

"With a frock – or a suit of trousers – thrown in," suggested Mrs. Postwhistle. "It's generally done."

"If it's the custom, certainly," agreed Mr. Peter Hope. "Sixpence a week and clothes."

And this time it was Peter that, in company with Elizabeth, sat waiting the return of Tommy.

"I rather hope," said Peter, "it's a boy. It was the fogs, you know. If only I could have afforded to send him away!"

Elizabeth looked thoughtful. The door opened.

"Ah! that's better, much better," said Mr. Peter Hope. "Pon my word, you look quite respectable."

By the practical Mrs. Postwhistle a working agreement, benefiting both parties, had been arrived at with the long-trained skirt; while an ample shawl arranged with judgment disguised the nakedness that lay below. Peter, a fastidious gentleman, observed with satisfaction that the hands, now clean, had been well cared

for.

“Give me that cap,” said Peter. He threw it in the glowing fire. It burned brightly, diffusing strange odours.

“There’s a travelling cap of mine hanging up in the passage. You can wear that for the present. Take this half-sovereign and get me some cold meat and beer for supper. You’ll find everything else you want in that sideboard or else in the kitchen. Don’t ask me a hundred questions, and don’t make a noise,” and Peter went back to his work.

“Good idea, that half-sovereign,” said Peter. “Shan’t be bothered with ‘Master Tommy’ any more, don’t expect. Starting a nursery at our time of life. Madness.” Peter’s pen scratched and spluttered. Elizabeth kept an eye upon the door.

“Quarter of an hour,” said Peter, looking at his watch. “Told you so.” The article on which Peter was now engaged appeared to be of a worrying nature.

“Then why,” said Peter, “why did he refuse that shilling? Artfulness,” concluded Peter, “pure artfulness. Elizabeth, old girl, we’ve got out of this business cheaply. Good idea, that half-sovereign.” Peter gave vent to a chuckle that had the effect of alarming Elizabeth.

But luck evidently was not with Peter that night.

“Pingle’s was sold out,” explained Tommy, entering with parcels; “had to go to Bow’s in Farringdon Street.”

“Oh!” said Peter, without looking up.

Tommy passed through into the little kitchen behind. Peter

wrote on rapidly, making up for lost time.

“Good!” murmured Peter, smiling to himself, “that’s a neat phrase. That ought to irritate them.”

Now, as he wrote, while with noiseless footsteps Tommy, unseen behind him, moved to and fro and in and out the little kitchen, there came to Peter Hope this very curious experience: it felt to him as if for a long time he had been ill – so ill as not even to have been aware of it – and that now he was beginning to be himself again; consciousness of things returning to him. This solidly furnished, long, oak-panelled room with its air of old-world dignity and repose – this sober, kindly room in which for more than half his life he had lived and worked – why had he forgotten it? It came forward greeting him with an amused smile, as of some old friend long parted from. The faded photos, in stiff, wooden frames upon the chimney-piece, among them that of the fragile little woman with the unadaptable lungs.

“God bless my soul!” said Mr. Peter Hope, pushing back his chair. “It’s thirty years ago. How time does fly! Why, let me see, I must be – ”

“D’you like it with a head on it?” demanded Tommy, who had been waiting patiently for signs.

Peter shook himself awake and went to his supper.

A bright idea occurred to Peter in the night. “Of course; why didn’t I think of it before? Settle the question at once.” Peter fell into an easy sleep.

“Tommy,” said Peter, as he sat himself down to breakfast

the next morning. “By-the-by,” asked Peter with a puzzled expression, putting down his cup, “what is this?”

“Cauffee,” informed him Tommy. “You said cauffee.”

“Oh!” replied Peter. “For the future, Tommy, if you don’t mind, I will take tea of a morning.”

“All the same to me,” explained the agreeable Tommy, “it’s your breakfast.”

“What I was about to say,” continued Peter, “was that you’re not looking very well, Tommy.”

“I’m all right,” asserted Tommy; “never nothing the matter with me.”

“Not that you know of, perhaps; but one can be in a very bad way, Tommy, without being aware of it. I cannot have anyone about me that I am not sure is in thoroughly sound health.”

“If you mean you’ve changed your mind and want to get rid of me – ” began Tommy, with its chin in the air.

“I don’t want any of your uppishness,” snapped Peter, who had wound himself up for the occasion to a degree of assertiveness that surprised even himself. “If you are a thoroughly strong and healthy person, as I think you are, I shall be very glad to retain your services. But upon that point I must be satisfied. It is the custom,” explained Peter. “It is always done in good families. Run round to this address” – Peter wrote it upon a leaf of his notebook – “and ask Dr. Smith to come and see me before he begins his round. You go at once, and don’t let us have any argument.”

“That is the way to talk to that young person – clearly,” said Peter to himself, listening to Tommy’s footsteps dying down the stairs.

Hearing the street-door slam, Peter stole into the kitchen and brewed himself a cup of coffee.

Dr. Smith, who had commenced life as Herr Schmidt, but who in consequence of difference of opinion with his Government was now an Englishman with strong Tory prejudices, had but one sorrow: it was that strangers would mistake him for a foreigner. He was short and stout, with bushy eyebrows and a grey moustache, and looked so fierce that children cried when they saw him, until he patted them on the head and addressed them as “mein leedle frent” in a voice so soft and tender that they had to leave off howling just to wonder where it came from. He and Peter, who was a vehement Radical, had been cronies for many years, and had each an indulgent contempt for the other’s understanding, tempered by a sincere affection for one another they would have found it difficult to account for.

“What tink you is de matter wid de leedle wench?” demanded Dr. Smith, Peter having opened the case. Peter glanced round the room. The kitchen door was closed.

“How do you know it’s a wench?”

The eyes beneath the bushy brows grew rounder. “If id is not a wench, why dress it – ”

“Haven’t dressed it,” interrupted Peter. “Just what I’m waiting to do – so soon as I know.”

And Peter recounted the events of the preceding evening.

Tears gathered in the doctor's small, round eyes. His absurd sentimentalism was the quality in his friend that most irritated Peter.

"Poor leedle waif!" murmured the soft-hearted old gentleman. "Id was de good Providence dat guided her – or him, whichever id be."

"Providence be hanged!" snarled Peter. "What was my Providence doing – landing me with a gutter-brat to look after?"

"So like you Radicals," sneered the doctor, "to despise a fellow human creature just because id may not have been born in burble and fine linen."

"I didn't send for you to argue politics," retorted Peter, controlling his indignation by an effort. "I want you to tell me whether it's a boy or a girl, so that I may know what to do with it."

"What mean you to do wid id?" inquired the doctor.

"I don't know," confessed Peter. "If it's a boy, as I rather think it is, maybe I'll be able to find it a place in one of the offices – after I've taught it a little civilisation."

"And if id be a girl?"

"How can it be a girl when it wears trousers?" demanded Peter. "Why anticipate difficulties?"

Peter, alone, paced to and fro the room, his hands behind his back, his ear on the alert to catch the slightest sound from above.

"I do hope it is a boy," said Peter, glancing up.

Peter's eyes rested on the photo of the fragile little woman

gazing down at him from its stiff frame upon the chimney-piece. Thirty years ago, in this same room, Peter had paced to and fro, his hands behind his back, his ear alert to catch the slightest sound from above, had said to himself the same words.

“It’s odd,” mused Peter – “very odd indeed.”

The door opened. The stout doctor, preceded at a little distance by his watch-chain, entered and closed the door behind him.

“A very healthy child,” said the doctor, “as fine a child as any one could wish to see. A girl.”

The two old gentlemen looked at one another. Elizabeth, possibly relieved in her mind, began to purr.

“What am I to do with it?” demanded Peter.

“A very awkward bosition for you,” agreed the sympathetic doctor.

“I was a fool!” declared Peter.

“You haf no one here to look after de leedle wench when you are away,” pointed out the thoughtful doctor.

“And from what I’ve seen of the imp,” added Peter, “it will want some looking after.”

“I tink – I tink,” said the helpful doctor, “I see a way out!”

“What?”

The doctor thrust his fierce face forward and tapped knowingly with his right forefinger the right side of his round nose. “I will take charge of de leedle wench.”

“You?”

“To me de case will not present de same difficulties. I haf a housekeeper.”

“Oh, yes, Mrs. Whateley.”

“She is a goot woman when you know her,” explained the doctor. “She only wants managing.”

“Pooh!” ejaculated Peter.

“Why do you say dat?” inquired the doctor.

“You! bringing up a headstrong girl. The idea!”

“I should be kind, but firm.”

“You don’t know her.”

“How long haf you known her?”

“Anyhow, I’m not a soft-hearted sentimentalist that would just ruin the child.”

“Girls are not boys,” persisted the doctor; “dey want different treatment.”

“Well, I’m not a brute!” snarled Peter. “Besides, suppose she turns out rubbish! What do you know about her?”

“I take my chance,” agreed the generous doctor.

“It wouldn’t be fair,” retorted honest Peter.

“Tink it over,” said the doctor. “A place is never home widout de leedle feet. We Englishmen love de home. You are different. You haf no sentiment.”

“I cannot help feeling,” explained Peter, “a sense of duty in this matter. The child came to me. It is as if this thing had been laid upon me.”

“If you look upon id dat way, Peter,” sighed the doctor.

“With sentiment,” went on Peter, “I have nothing to do; but duty – duty is quite another thing.” Peter, feeling himself an ancient Roman, thanked the doctor and shook hands with him.

Tommy, summoned, appeared.

“The doctor, Tommy,” said Peter, without looking up from his writing, “gives a very satisfactory account of you. So you can stop.”

“Told you so,” returned Tommy. “Might have saved your money.”

“But we shall have to find you another name.”

“What for?”

“If you are to be a housekeeper, you must be a girl.”

“Don’t like girls.”

“Can’t say I think much of them myself, Tommy. We must make the best of it. To begin with, we must get you proper clothes.”

“Hate skirts. They hamper you.”

“Tommy,” said Peter severely, “don’t argue.”

“Pointing out facts ain’t arguing,” argued Tommy. “They do hamper you. You try ’em.”

The clothes were quickly made, and after a while they came to fit; but the name proved more difficult of adjustment. A sweet-faced, laughing lady, known to fame by a title respectable and orthodox, appears an honoured guest to-day at many a literary gathering. But the old fellows, pressing round, still call her “Tommy.”

The week's trial came to an end. Peter, whose digestion was delicate, had had a happy thought.

“What I propose, Tommy – I mean Jane,” said Peter, “is that we should get in a woman to do just the mere cooking. That will give you more time to – to attend to other things, Tommy – Jane, I mean.”

“What other things?” chin in the air.

“The – the keeping of the rooms in order, Tommy. The – the dusting.”

“Don't want twenty-four hours a day to dust four rooms.”

“Then there are messages, Tommy. It would be a great advantage to me to have someone I could send on a message without feeling I was interfering with the housework.”

“What are you driving at?” demanded Tommy. “Why, I don't have half enough to do as it is. I can do all – ”

Peter put his foot down. “When I say a thing, I mean a thing. The sooner you understand that, the better. How dare you argue with me! Fiddle-de-dee!” For two pins Peter would have employed an expletive even stronger, so determined was he feeling.

Tommy without another word left the room. Peter looked at Elizabeth and winked.

Poor Peter! His triumph was short-lived. Five minutes later, Tommy returned, clad in the long, black skirt, supported by the cricket belt, the blue garibaldi cut *décolleté*, the pepper-and-salt jacket, the worsted comforter, the red lips very tightly pressed,

the long lashes over the black eyes moving very rapidly.

“Tommy” (severely), “what is this tomfoolery?”

“I understand. I ain’t no good to you. Thanks for giving me a trial. My fault.”

“Tommy” (less severely), “don’t be an idiot.”

“Ain’t an idiot. ’Twas Emma. Told me I was good at cooking. Said I’d got an aptitude for it. She meant well.”

“Tommy” (no trace of severity), “sit down. Emma was quite right. Your cooking is – is promising. As Emma puts it, you have aptitude. Your – perseverance, your hopefulness proves it.”

“Then why d’ye want to get someone else in to do it?”

If Peter could have answered truthfully! If Peter could have replied:

“My dear, I am a lonely old gentleman. I did not know it until – until the other day. Now I cannot forget it again. Wife and child died many years ago. I was poor, or I might have saved them. That made me hard. The clock of my life stood still. I hid away the key. I did not want to think. You crept to me out of the cruel fog, awakened old dreams. Do not go away any more” – perhaps Tommy, in spite of her fierce independence, would have consented to be useful; and thus Peter might have gained his end at less cost of indigestion. But the penalty for being an anti-sentimentalist is that you must not talk like this even to yourself. So Peter had to cast about for other methods.

“Why shouldn’t I keep two servants if I like?” It did seem hard on the old gentleman.

“What’s the sense of paying two to do the work of one? You would only be keeping me on out of charity.” The black eyes flashed. “I ain’t a beggar.”

“And you really think, Tommy – I should say Jane, you can manage the – the whole of it? You won’t mind being sent on a message, perhaps in the very middle of your cooking. It was that I was thinking of, Tommy – some cooks would.”

“You go easy,” advised him Tommy, “till I complain of having too much to do.”

Peter returned to his desk. Elizabeth looked up. It seemed to Peter that Elizabeth winked.

The fortnight that followed was a period of trouble to Peter, for Tommy, her suspicions having been aroused, was sceptical of “business” demanding that Peter should dine with this man at the club, lunch with this editor at the Cheshire Cheese. At once the chin would go up into the air, the black eyes cloud threateningly. Peter, an unmarried man for thirty years, lacking experience, would under cross-examination contradict himself, become confused, break down over essential points.

“Really,” grumbled Peter to himself one evening, sawing at a mutton chop, “really there’s no other word for it – I’m henpecked.”

Peter that day had looked forward to a little dinner at a favourite restaurant, with his “dear old friend Blenkinsopp, a bit of a gourmet, Tommy – that means a man who likes what you would call elaborate cooking!” – forgetful at the moment that

he had used up “Blenkinsopp” three days before for a farewell supper, “Blenkinsopp” having to set out the next morning for Egypt. Peter was not facile at invention. Names in particular had always been a difficulty to him.

“I like a spirit of independence,” continued Peter to himself. “Wish she hadn’t quite so much of it. Wonder where she got it from.”

The situation was becoming more serious to Peter than he cared to admit. For day by day, in spite of her tyrannies, Tommy was growing more and more indispensable to Peter. Tommy was the first audience that for thirty years had laughed at Peter’s jokes; Tommy was the first public that for thirty years had been convinced that Peter was the most brilliant journalist in Fleet Street; Tommy was the first anxiety that for thirty years had rendered it needful that Peter each night should mount stealthily the creaking stairs, steal with shaded candle to a bedside. If only Tommy wouldn’t “do” for him! If only she could be persuaded to “do” something else.

Another happy thought occurred to Peter.

“Tommy – I mean Jane,” said Peter, “I know what I’ll do with you.”

“What’s the game now?”

“I’ll make a journalist of you.”

“Don’t talk rot.”

“It isn’t rot. Besides, I won’t have you answer me like that. As a Devil – that means, Tommy, the unseen person in the

background that helps a journalist to do his work – you would be invaluable to me. It would pay me, Tommy – pay me very handsomely. I should make money out of you.”

This appeared to be an argument that Tommy understood. Peter, with secret delight, noticed that the chin retained its normal level.

“I did help a chap to sell papers, once,” remembered Tommy; “he said I was fly at it.”

“I told you so,” exclaimed Peter triumphantly. “The methods are different, but the instinct required is the same. We will get a woman in to relieve you of the housework.”

The chin shot up into the air.

“I could do it in my spare time.”

“You see, Tommy, I should want you to go about with me – to be always with me.”

“Better try me first. Maybe you’re making an error.”

Peter was learning the wisdom of the serpent.

“Quite right, Tommy. We will first see what you can do. Perhaps, after all, it may turn out that you are better as a cook.” In his heart Peter doubted this.

But the seed had fallen upon good ground. It was Tommy herself that manoeuvred her first essay in journalism. A great man had come to London – was staying in apartments especially prepared for him in St. James’s Palace. Said every journalist in London to himself: “If I could obtain an interview with this Big Man, what a big thing it would be for me!” For a week past,

Peter had carried everywhere about with him a paper headed: "Interview of Our Special Correspondent with Prince Blank," questions down left-hand column, very narrow; space for answers right-hand side, very wide. But the Big Man was experienced.

"I wonder," said Peter, spreading the neatly folded paper on the desk before him, "I wonder if there can be any way of getting at him – any dodge or trick, any piece of low cunning, any plausible lie that I haven't thought of."

"Old Man Martin – called himself Martini – was just such another," commented Tommy. "Come pay time, Saturday afternoon, you just couldn't get at him – simply wasn't any way. I was a bit too good for him once, though," remembered Tommy, with a touch of pride in her voice; "got half a quid out of him that time. It did surprise him."

"No," communed Peter to himself aloud, "I don't honestly think there can be any method, creditable or discreditable, that I haven't tried." Peter flung the one-sided interview into the wastepaper-basket, and slipping his notebook into his pocket, departed to drink tea with a lady novelist, whose great desire, as stated in a postscript to her invitation, was to avoid publicity, if possible.

Tommy, as soon as Peter's back was turned, fished it out again. An hour later in the fog around St. James's Palace stood an Imp, clad in patched trousers and a pepper-and-salt jacket turned up about the neck, gazing with admiring eyes upon the sentry.

"Now, then, young seventeen-and-sixpence the soot," said the

sentry, “what do you want?”

“Makes you a bit anxious, don’t it,” suggested the Imp, “having a big pot like him to look after?”

“Does get a bit on yer mind, if yer thinks about it,” agreed the sentry.

“How do you find him to talk to, like?”

“Well,” said the sentry, bringing his right leg into action for the purpose of relieving his left, “ain’t ’ad much to do with ’im myself, not person’ly, as yet. Oh, ’e ain’t a bad sort when yer know ’im.”

“That’s his shake-down, ain’t it?” asked the Imp, “where the lights are.”

“That’s it,” admitted sentry. “You ain’t an Anarchist? Tell me if you are.”

“I’ll let you know if I feel it coming on,” the Imp assured him.

Had the sentry been a man of swift and penetrating observation – which he wasn’t – he might have asked the question in more serious a tone. For he would have remarked that the Imp’s black eyes were resting lovingly upon a rain-water-pipe, giving to a skilful climber easy access to the terrace underneath the Prince’s windows.

“I would like to see him,” said the Imp.

“Friend o’ yours?” asked the sentry.

“Well, not exactly,” admitted the Imp. “But there, you know, everybody’s talking about him down our street.”

“Well, yer’ll ’ave to be quick about it,” said the sentry. “E’s

off to-night.”

Tommy's face fell. “I thought it wasn't till Friday morning.”

“Ah!” said the sentry, “that's what the papers say, is it?” The sentry's voice took unconsciously the accent of those from whom no secret is hid. “I'll tell yer what yer can do,” continued the sentry, enjoying an unaccustomed sense of importance. The sentry glanced left, then right. “E's a slipping off all by 'imself down to Osborne by the 6.40 from Waterloo. Nobody knows it – 'cept, o' course, just a few of us. That's 'is way all over. 'E just 'ates – ”

A footstep sounded down the corridor. The sentry became statuesque.

At Waterloo, Tommy inspected the 6.40 train. Only one compartment indicated possibilities, an extra large one at the end of the coach next the guard's van. It was labelled “Reserved,” and in the place of the usual fittings was furnished with a table and four easy-chairs. Having noticed its position, Tommy took a walk up the platform and disappeared into the fog.

Twenty minutes later, Prince Blank stepped hurriedly across the platform, unnoticed save by half a dozen obsequious officials, and entered the compartment reserved for him. The obsequious officials bowed. Prince Blank, in military fashion, raised his hand. The 6.40 steamed out slowly.

Prince Blank, who was a stout gentleman, though he tried to disguise the fact, seldom found himself alone. When he did, he generally indulged himself in a little healthy relaxation. With two

hours' run to Southampton before him, free from all possibility of intrusion, Prince Blank let loose the buttons of his powerfully built waistcoat, rested his bald head on the top of his chair, stretched his great legs across another, and closed his terrible, small eyes.

For an instant it seemed to Prince Blank that a draught had entered into the carriage. As, however, the sensation immediately passed away, he did not trouble to wake up. Then the Prince dreamed that somebody was in the carriage with him – was sitting opposite to him. This being an annoying sort of dream, the Prince opened his eyes for the purpose of dispelling it. There was somebody sitting opposite to him – a very grimy little person, wiping blood off its face and hands with a dingy handkerchief. Had the Prince been a man capable of surprise, he would have been surprised.

“It’s all right,” assured him Tommy. “I ain’t here to do any harm. I ain’t an Anarchist.”

The Prince, by a muscular effort, retired some four or five inches and commenced to rebutton his waistcoat.

“How did you get here?” asked the Prince.

“’Twas a bigger job than I’d reckoned on,” admitted Tommy, seeking a dry inch in the smeared handkerchief, and finding none. “But that don’t matter,” added Tommy cheerfully, “now I’m here.”

“If you do not wish me to hand you over to the police at Southampton, you had better answer my questions,” remarked

the Prince drily.

Tommy was not afraid of princes, but in the lexicon of her harassed youth “Police” had always been a word of dread.

“I wanted to get at you.”

“I gather that.”

“There didn’t seem any other way. It’s jolly difficult to get at you. You’re so jolly artful.”

“Tell me how you managed it.”

“There’s a little bridge for signals just outside Waterloo. I could see that the train would have to pass under it. So I climbed up and waited. It being a foggy night, you see, nobody twigged me. I say, you are Prince Blank, ain’t you?”

“I am Prince Blank.”

“Should have been mad if I’d landed the wrong man.”

“Go on.”

“I knew which was your carriage – leastways, I guessed it; and as it came along, I did a drop.” Tommy spread out her arms and legs to illustrate the action. “The lamps, you know,” explained Tommy, still dabbing at her face – “one of them caught me.”

“And from the roof?”

“Oh, well, it was easy after that. There’s an iron thing at the back, and steps. You’ve only got to walk downstairs and round the corner, and there you are. Bit of luck your other door not being locked. I hadn’t thought of that. Haven’t got such a thing as a handkerchief about you, have you?”

The Prince drew one from his sleeve and passed it to her. “You

mean to tell me, boy – ”

“Ain’t a boy,” explained Tommy. “I’m a girl!”

She said it sadly. Deeming her new friends such as could be trusted, Tommy had accepted their statement that she really was a girl. But for many a long year to come the thought of her lost manhood tinged her voice with bitterness.

“A girl!”

Tommy nodded her head.

“Umph!” said the Prince; “I have heard a good deal about the English girl. I was beginning to think it exaggerated. Stand up.”

Tommy obeyed. It was not altogether her way; but with those eyes beneath their shaggy brows bent upon her, it seemed the simplest thing to do.

“So. And now that you are here, what do you want?”

“To interview you.”

Tommy drew forth her list of questions.

The shaggy brows contracted.

“Who put you up to this absurdity? Who was it? Tell me at once.”

“Nobody.”

“Don’t lie to me. His name?”

The terrible, small eyes flashed fire. But Tommy also had a pair of eyes. Before their blaze of indignation the great man positively quailed. This type of opponent was new to him.

“I’m not lying.”

“I beg your pardon,” said the Prince.

And at this point it occurred to the Prince, who being really a great man, had naturally a sense of humour, that a conference conducted on these lines between the leading statesman of an Empire and an impertinent hussy of, say, twelve years old at the outside, might end by becoming ridiculous. So the Prince took up his chair and put it down again beside Tommy's, and employing skilfully his undoubted diplomatic gifts, drew from her bit by bit the whole story.

"I'm inclined, Miss Jane," said the Great Man, the story ended, "to agree with our friend Mr. Hope. I should say your *métier* was journalism."

"And you'll let me interview you?" asked Tommy, showing her white teeth.

The Great Man, laying a hand heavier than he guessed on Tommy's shoulder, rose. "I think you are entitled to it."

"What's your views?" demanded Tommy, reading, "of the future political and social relationships –"

"Perhaps," suggested the Great Man, "it will be simpler if I write it myself."

"Well," concurred Tommy; "my spelling is a bit rocky."

The Great Man drew a chair to the table.

"You won't miss out anything – will you?" insisted Tommy.

"I shall endeavour, Miss Jane, to give you no cause for complaint," gravely he assured her, and sat down to write.

Not till the train began to slacken speed had the Prince finished. Then, blotting and refolding the paper, he stood up.

“I have added some instructions on the back of the last page,” explained the Prince, “to which you will draw Mr. Hope’s particular attention. I would wish you to promise me, Miss Jane, never again to have recourse to dangerous acrobatic tricks, not even in the sacred cause of journalism.”

“Of course, if you hadn’t been so jolly difficult to get at – ”

“My fault, I know,” agreed the Prince. “There is not the least doubt as to which sex you belong to. Nevertheless, I want you to promise me. Come,” urged the Prince, “I have done a good deal for you – more than you know.”

“All right,” consented Tommy a little sulkily. Tommy hated making promises, because she always kept them. “I promise.”

“There is your Interview.” The first Southampton platform lamp shone in upon the Prince and Tommy as they stood facing one another. The Prince, who had acquired the reputation, not altogether unjustly, of an ill-tempered and savage old gentleman, did a strange thing: taking the little, blood-smearred face between his paws, he kissed it. Tommy always remembered the smoky flavour of the bristly grey moustache.

“One thing more,” said the Prince sternly – “not a word of all this. Don’t open your mouth to speak of it till you are back in Gough Square.”

“Do you take me for a mug?” answered Tommy.

They behaved very oddly to Tommy after the Prince had disappeared. Everybody took a deal of trouble for her, but none of them seemed to know why they were doing it. They looked

at her and went away, and came again and looked at her. And the more they thought about it, the more puzzled they became. Some of them asked her questions, but what Tommy really didn't know, added to what she didn't mean to tell, was so prodigious that Curiosity itself paled at contemplation of it.

They washed and brushed her up and gave her an excellent supper; and putting her into a first-class compartment labelled "Reserved," sent her back to Waterloo, and thence in a cab to Gough Square, where she arrived about midnight, suffering from a sense of self-importance, traces of which to this day are still discernible.

Such and thus was the beginning of all things. Tommy, having talked for half an hour at the rate of two hundred words a minute, had suddenly dropped her head upon the table, had been aroused with difficulty and persuaded to go to bed. Peter, in the deep easy-chair before the fire, sat long into the night. Elizabeth, liking quiet company, purred softly. Out of the shadows crept to Peter Hope an old forgotten dream – the dream of a wonderful new Journal, price one penny weekly, of which the Editor should come to be one Thomas Hope, son of Peter Hope, its honoured Founder and Originator: a powerful Journal that should supply a long-felt want, popular, but at the same time elevating – a pleasure to the public, a profit to its owners. "Do you not remember me?" whispered the Dream. "We had long talks together. The morning and the noonday pass. The evening still is ours. The twilight also brings its promise."

Elizabeth stopped purring and looked up surprised. Peter was laughing to himself.

STORY THE SECOND

– William Clodd appoints himself Managing Director

Mrs. Postwhistle sat on a Windsor-chair in the centre of Rolls Court. Mrs. Postwhistle, who, in the days of her Hebehood, had been likened by admiring frequenters of the old Mitre in Chancery Lane to the ladies, somewhat emaciated, that an English artist, since become famous, was then commencing to popularise, had developed with the passing years, yet still retained a face of placid youthfulness. The two facts, taken in conjunction, had resulted in an asset to her income not to be despised. The wanderer through Rolls Court this summer's afternoon, presuming him to be familiar with current journalism, would have retired haunted by the sense that the restful-looking lady on the Windsor-chair was someone that he ought to know. Glancing through almost any illustrated paper of the period, the problem would have been solved for him. A photograph of Mrs. Postwhistle, taken quite recently, he would have encountered with this legend: "*Before* use of Professor Hardtop's certain cure for corpulency." Beside it a photograph of Mrs. Postwhistle, then Arabella Higgins, taken twenty years ago, the legend slightly varied: "*After* use," etc. The face was the same, the figure – there was no denying it – had undergone decided alteration.

Mrs. Postwhistle had reached with her chair the centre of Rolls Court in course of following the sun. The little shop, over the lintel of which ran: "Timothy Postwhistle, Grocer and Provision Merchant," she had left behind her in the shadow. Old inhabitants of St. Dunstan-in-the-West retained recollection of a gentlemanly figure, always in a very gorgeous waistcoat, with Dundreary whiskers, to be seen occasionally there behind the counter. All customers it would refer, with the air of a Lord High Chamberlain introducing *débutantes*, to Mrs. Postwhistle, evidently regarding itself purely as ornamental. For the last ten years, however, no one had noticed it there, and Mrs. Postwhistle had a facility amounting almost to genius for ignoring or misunderstanding questions it was not to her taste to answer. Most things were suspected, nothing known. St. Dunstan-in-the-West had turned to other problems.

"If I wasn't wanting to see 'im," remarked to herself Mrs. Postwhistle, who was knitting with one eye upon the shop, "e'd a been 'ere 'fore I'd 'ad time to clear the dinner things away; certain to 'ave been. It's a strange world."

Mrs. Postwhistle was desirous for the arrival of a gentleman not usually awaited with impatience by the ladies of Rolls Court – to wit, one William Clodd, rent-collector, whose day for St. Dunstan-in-the-West was Tuesday.

"At last," said Mrs. Postwhistle, though without hope that Mr. Clodd, who had just appeared at the other end of the court, could possibly hear her. "Was beginning to be afraid as you'd tumbled

over yerself in your 'urry and 'urt yerself.”

Mr. Clodd, perceiving Mrs. Postwhistle, decided to abandon method and take No. 7 first.

Mr. Clodd was a short, thick-set, bullet-headed young man, with ways that were bustling, and eyes that, though kind, suggested trickiness.

“Ah!” said Mr. Clodd admiringly, as he pocketed the six half-crowns that the lady handed up to him. “If only they were all like you, Mrs. Postwhistle!”

“Wouldn't be no need of chaps like you to worry 'em,” pointed out Mrs. Postwhistle.

“It's an irony of fate, my being a rent-collector, when you come to think of it,” remarked Mr. Clodd, writing out the receipt. “If I had my way, I'd put an end to landlordism, root and branch. Curse of the country.”

“Just the very thing I wanted to talk to you about,” returned the lady – “that lodger o' mine.”

“Ah! don't pay, don't he? You just hand him over to me. I'll soon have it out of him.”

“It's not that,” explained Mrs. Postwhistle. “If a Saturday morning 'appened to come round as 'e didn't pay up without me asking, I should know I'd made a mistake – that it must be Friday. If I don't 'appen to be in at 'alf-past ten, 'e puts it in an envelope and leaves it on the table.”

“Wonder if his mother has got any more like him?” mused Mr. Clodd. “Could do with a few about this neighbourhood. What is

it you want to say about him, then? Merely to brag about him?"

"I wanted to ask you," continued Mrs. Postwhistle, "ow I could get rid of 'im. It was rather a curious agreement."

"Why do you want to get rid of him? Too noisy?"

"Noisy! Why, the cat makes more noise about the 'ouse than 'e does. 'E'd make 'is fortune as a burglar."

"Come home late?"

"Never known 'im out after the shutters are up."

"Gives you too much trouble then?"

"I can't say that of 'im. Never know whether 'e's in the 'ouse or isn't, without going upstairs and knocking at the door."

"Here, you tell it your own way," suggested the bewildered Clodd. "If it was anyone else but you, I should say you didn't know your own business."

"'E gets on my nerves," said Mrs. Postwhistle. "You ain't in a 'urry for five minutes?"

Mr. Clodd was always in a hurry. "But I can forget it talking to you," added the gallant Mr. Clodd.

Mrs. Postwhistle led the way into the little parlour.

"Just the name of it," consented Mr. Clodd. "Cheerfulness combined with temperance; that's the ideal."

"I'll tell you what 'appened only last night," commenced Mrs. Postwhistle, seating herself the opposite side of the loo-table. "A letter came for 'im by the seven o'clock post. I'd seen 'im go out two hours before, and though I'd been sitting in the shop the whole blessed time, I never saw or 'eard 'im pass through. 'E's like

that. It's like 'aving a ghost for a lodger. I opened 'is door without knocking and went in. If you'll believe me, 'e was clinging with 'is arms and legs to the top of the bedstead – it's one of those old-fashioned, four-post things – 'is 'ead touching the ceiling. 'E 'adn't got too much clothes on, and was cracking nuts with 'is teeth and eating 'em. 'E threw a 'andful of shells at me, and making the most awful faces at me, started off gibbering softly to himself."

"All play, I suppose? No real vice?" commented the interested Mr. Clodd.

"It will go on for a week, that will," continued Mrs. Postwhistle – "'e fancying 'imself a monkey. Last week he was a tortoise, and was crawling about on his stomach with a tea-tray tied on to 'is back. 'E's as sensible as most men, if that's saying much, the moment 'e's outside the front door; but in the 'ouse – well, I suppose the fact is that 'e's a lunatic."

"Don't seem no hiding anything from you," Mrs. Postwhistle remarked Mr. Clodd in tones of admiration. "Does he ever get violent?"

"Don't know what 'e would be like if 'e 'appened to fancy 'imself something really dangerous," answered Mrs. Postwhistle. "I am a bit nervous of this new monkey game, I don't mind confessing to you – the things that they do according to the picture-books. Up to now, except for imagining 'imself a mole, and taking all his meals underneath the carpet, it's been mostly birds and cats and 'armless sort o' things I 'aven't seemed to mind so much."

“How did you get hold of him?” demanded Mr. Clodd. “Have much trouble in finding him, or did somebody come and tell you about him?”

“Old Gladman, of Chancery Lane, the law stationer, brought ’im ’ere one evening about two months ago – said ’e was a sort of distant relative of ’is, a bit soft in the ’ead, but perfectly ’armless – wanted to put ’im with someone who wouldn’t impose on ’im. Well, what between ’aving been empty for over five weeks, the poor old gaby ’imself looking as gentle as a lamb, and the figure being reasonable, I rather jumped at the idea; and old Gladman, explaining as ’ow ’e wanted the thing settled and done with, got me to sign a letter.”

“Kept a copy of it?” asked the business-like Clodd.

“No. But I can remember what it was. Gladman ’ad it all ready. So long as the money was paid punctual and ’e didn’t make no disturbance and didn’t fall sick, I was to go on boarding and lodging ’im for seventeen-and-sixpence a week. It didn’t strike me as anything to be objected to at the time; but ’e payin’ regular, as I’ve explained to you, and be’aving, so far as disturbance is concerned, more like a Christian martyr than a man, well, it looks to me as if I’d got to live and die with ’im.”

“Give him rope, and possibly he’ll have a week at being a howling hyæna, or a laughing jackass, or something of that sort that will lead to a disturbance,” thought Mr. Clodd, “in which case, of course, you would have your remedy.”

“Yes,” thought Mrs. Postwhistle, “and possibly also ’e may

take it into what 'e calls is 'ead to be a tiger or a bull, and then perhaps before 'e's through with it I'll be beyond the reach of remedies."

"Leave it to me," said Mr. Clodd, rising and searching for his hat. "I know old Gladman; I'll have a talk with him."

"You might get a look at that letter if you can," suggested Mrs. Postwhistle, "and tell me what you think about it. I don't want to spend the rest of my days in a lunatic asylum of my own if I can 'elp it."

"You leave it to me," was Mr. Clodd's parting assurance.

The July moon had thrown a silver veil over the grimness of Rolls Court when, five hours later, Mr. Clodd's nailed boots echoed again upon its uneven pavement; but Mr. Clodd had no eye for moon or stars or such-like; always he had things more important to think of.

"Seen the old 'umbug?" asked Mrs. Postwhistle, who was partial to the air, leading the way into the parlour.

"First and foremost commenced," Mr. Clodd, as he laid aside his hat, "it is quite understood that you really do want to get rid of him? What's that?" demanded Mr. Clodd, a heavy thud upon the floor above having caused him to start out of his chair.

"'E came in an hour after you'd gone," explained Mrs. Postwhistle, "bringing with him a curtain pole as 'e'd picked up for a shilling in Clare Market. 'E's rested one end upon the mantelpiece and tied the other to the back of the easy-chair – 'is idea is to twine 'imself round it and go to sleep upon it. Yes,

you've got it quite right without a single blunder. I do want to get rid of 'im."

"Then," said Mr. Clodd, reseating himself, "it can be done."

"Thank God for that!" was Mrs. Postwhistle's pious ejaculation.

"It is just as I thought," continued Mr. Clodd. "The old innocent – he's Gladman's brother-in-law, by the way – has got a small annuity. I couldn't get the actual figure, but I guess it's about sufficient to pay for his keep and leave old Gladman, who is running him, a very decent profit. They don't want to send him to an asylum. They can't say he's a pauper, and to put him into a private establishment would swallow up, most likely, the whole of his income. On the other hand, they don't want the bother of looking after him themselves. I talked pretty straight to the old man – let him see I understood the business; and – well, to cut a long story short, I'm willing to take on the job, provided you really want to have done with it, and Gladman is willing in that case to let you off your contract."

Mrs. Postwhistle went to the cupboard to get Mr. Clodd a drink. Another thud upon the floor above – one suggestive of exceptional velocity – arrived at the precise moment when Mrs. Postwhistle, the tumbler level with her eye, was in the act of measuring.

"I call this making a disturbance," said Mrs. Postwhistle, regarding the broken fragments.

"It's only for another night," comforted her Mr. Clodd. "I'll

take him away some time to-morrow. Meanwhile, if I were you, I should spread a mattress underneath that perch of his before I went to bed. I should like him handed over to me in reasonable repair.”

“It will deaden the sound a bit, any’ow,” agreed Mrs. Postwhistle.

“Success to temperance,” drank Mr. Clodd, and rose to go.

“I take it you’ve fixed things up all right for yourself,” said Mrs. Postwhistle; “and nobody can blame you if you ’ave. ’Eaven bless you, is what I say.”

“We shall get on together,” prophesied Mr. Clodd. “I’m fond of animals.”

Early the next morning a four-wheeled cab drew up at the entrance to Rolls Court, and in it and upon it went away Clodd and Clodd’s Lunatic (as afterwards he came to be known), together with all the belongings of Clodd’s Lunatic, the curtain-pole included; and there appeared again behind the fanlight of the little grocer’s shop the intimation: “Lodgings for a Single Man,” which caught the eye a few days later of a weird-looking, lanky, rawboned laddie, whose language Mrs. Postwhistle found difficulty for a time in comprehending; and that is why one sometimes meets to-day worshippers of Kail Yard literature wandering disconsolately about St. Dunstan-in-the-West, seeking Rolls Court, discomfited because it is no more. But that is the history of the “Wee Laddie,” and this of the beginnings of William Clodd, now Sir William Clodd,

Bart., M.P., proprietor of a quarter of a hundred newspapers, magazines, and journals: "Truthful Billy" we called him then.

No one can say of Clodd that he did not deserve whatever profit his unlicensed lunatic asylum may have brought him. A kindly man was William Clodd when indulgence in sentiment did not interfere with business.

"There's no harm in him," asserted Mr. Clodd, talking the matter over with one Mr. Peter Hope, journalist, of Gough Square. "He's just a bit dotty, same as you or I might get with nothing to do and all day long to do it in. Kid's play, that's all it is. The best plan, I find, is to treat it as a game and take a hand in it. Last week he wanted to be a lion. I could see that was going to be awkward, he roaring for raw meat and thinking to prowl about the house at night. Well, I didn't nag him – that's no good. I just got a gun and shot him. He's a duck now, and I'm trying to keep him one: sits for an hour beside his bath on three china eggs I've bought him. Wish some of the sane ones were as little trouble."

The summer came again. Clodd and his Lunatic, a mild-looking little old gentleman of somewhat clerical cut, one often met with arm-in-arm, bustling about the streets and courts that were the scene of Clodd's rent-collecting labours. Their evident attachment to one another was curiously displayed; Clodd, the young and red-haired, treating his white-haired, withered companion with fatherly indulgence; the other glancing up from time to time into Clodd's face with a winning expression of infantile affection.

“We are getting much better,” explained Clodd, the pair meeting Peter Hope one day at the corner of Newcastle Street. “The more we are out in the open air, and the more we have to do and think about, the better for us – eh?”

The mild-looking little old gentleman hanging on Clodd’s arm smiled and nodded.

“Between ourselves,” added Mr. Clodd, sinking his voice, “we are not half as foolish as folks think we are.”

Peter Hope went his way down the Strand.

“Clodd’s a good sort – a good sort,” said Peter Hope, who, having in his time lived much alone, had fallen into the habit of speaking his thoughts aloud; “but he’s not the man to waste his time. I wonder.”

With the winter Clodd’s Lunatic fell ill.

Clodd bustled round to Chancery Lane.

“To tell you the truth,” confessed Mr. Gladman, “we never thought he would live so long as he has.”

“There’s the annuity you’ve got to think of,” said Clodd, whom his admirers of to-day (and they are many, for he must be a millionaire by this time) are fond of alluding to as “that frank, outspoken Englishman.” “Wouldn’t it be worth your while to try what taking him away from the fogs might do for him?”

Old Gladman seemed inclined to consider the question, but Mrs. Gladman, a brisk, cheerful little woman, had made up her mind.

“We’ve had what there is to have,” said Mrs. Gladman. “He’s

seventy-three. What's the sense of risking good money? Be content."

No one could say – no one ever did say – that Clodd, under the circumstances, did not do his best. Perhaps, after all, nothing could have helped. The little old gentleman, at Clodd's suggestion, played at being a dormouse and lay very still. If he grew restless, thereby bringing on his cough, Clodd, as a terrible black cat, was watching to pounce upon him. Only by keeping very quiet and artfully pretending to be asleep could he hope to escape the ruthless Clodd.

Doctor William Smith (né Wilhelm Schmidt) shrugged his fat shoulders. "We can do noding. Dese fogs of ours: id is de one ting dat enables the foreigner to crow over us. Keep him quiet. De dormouse – id is a goot idea."

That evening William Clodd mounted to the second floor of 16, Gough Square, where dwelt his friend, Peter Hope, and knocked briskly at the door.

"Come in," said a decided voice, which was not Peter Hope's.

Mr. William Clodd's ambition was, and always had been, to be the owner or part-owner of a paper. To-day, as I have said, he owns a quarter of a hundred, and is in negotiation, so rumour goes, for seven more. But twenty years ago "Clodd and Co., Limited," was but in embryo. And Peter Hope, journalist, had likewise and for many a long year cherished the ambition to be, before he died, the owner or part-owner of a paper. Peter Hope to-day owns nothing, except perhaps the knowledge, if

such things be permitted, that whenever and wherever his name is mentioned, kind thoughts arise unbidden – that someone of the party will surely say: “Dear old Peter! What a good fellow he was!” Which also may be in its way a valuable possession: who knows? But twenty years ago Peter’s horizon was limited by Fleet Street.

Peter Hope was forty-seven, so he said, a dreamer and a scholar. William Clodd was three-and-twenty, a born hustler, very wide awake. Meeting one day by accident upon an omnibus, when Clodd lent Peter, who had come out without his purse, threepence to pay his fare with; drifting into acquaintanceship, each had come to acquire a liking and respect for the other. The dreamer thought with wonder of Clodd’s shrewd practicability; the cute young man of business was lost in admiration of what seemed to him his old friend’s marvellous learning. Both had arrived at the conclusion that a weekly journal with Peter Hope as editor, and William Clodd as manager, would be bound to be successful.

“If only we could scrape together a thousand pounds!” had sighed Peter.

“The moment we lay our hands upon the coin, we’ll start that paper. Remember, it’s a bargain,” had answered William Clodd.

Mr. William Clodd turned the handle and walked in. With the door still in his hand he paused to look round the room. It was the first time he had seen it. His meetings hitherto with Peter Hope had been chance *rencontres* in street or restaurant. Always

had he been curious to view the sanctuary of so much erudition.

A large, oak-panelled room, its three high windows, each with a low, cushioned seat beneath it, giving on to Gough Square. Thirty-five years before, Peter Hope, then a young dandy with side whiskers close-cropped and terminating just below the ear, with wavy, brown hair, giving to his fresh-complexioned face an appearance almost girlish; in cut-away blue coat, flowered waistcoat, black silk cravat secured by two gold pins chained together, and tightly strapped grey trouserings, had, aided and abetted by a fragile little lady in crinoline and much-flounced skirt, and bodice somewhat low, with corkscrew curls each movement of her head set ringing, planned and furnished it in accordance with the sober canons then in vogue, spending thereupon more than they should, as is to be expected from the young to whom the future promises all things. The fine Brussels carpet! A little too bright, had thought the shaking curls. "The colours will tone down, miss – ma'am." The shopman knew. Only by the help of the round island underneath the massive Empire table, by excursions into untrodden corners, could Peter recollect the rainbow floor his feet had pressed when he was twenty-one. The noble bookcase, surmounted by Minerva's bust. Really it was too expensive. But the nodding curls had been so obstinate. Peter's silly books and papers must be put away in order; the curls did not intend to permit any excuse for untidiness. So, too, the handsome, brass-bound desk; it must be worthy of the beautiful thoughts Peter would pen upon it. The great sideboard,

supported by two such angry-looking mahogany lions; it must be strong to support the weight of silver clever Peter would one day purchase to place upon it. The few oil paintings in their heavy frames. A solidly furnished, sober apartment; about it that subtle atmosphere of dignity one finds but in old rooms long undisturbed, where one seems to read upon the walls: "I, Joy and Sorrow, twain in one, have dwelt here." One item only there was that seemed out of place among its grave surroundings – a guitar, hanging from the wall, ornamented with a ridiculous blue bow, somewhat faded.

"Mr. William Clodd?" demanded the decided voice.

Clodd started and closed the door.

"Guessed it in once," admitted Mr. Clodd.

"I thought so," said the decided voice. "We got your note this afternoon. Mr. Hope will be back at eight. Will you kindly hang up your hat and coat in the hall? You will find a box of cigars on the mantelpiece. Excuse my being busy. I must finish this, then I'll talk to you."

The owner of the decided voice went on writing. Clodd, having done as he was bid, sat himself in the easy-chair before the fire and smoked. Of the person behind the desk Mr. Clodd could see but the head and shoulders. It had black, curly hair, cut short. It's only garment visible below the white collar and red tie might have been a boy's jacket designed more like a girl's, or a girl's designed more like a boy's; partaking of the genius of English statesmanship, it appeared to be a compromise. Mr.

Clodd remarked the long, drooping lashes over the bright, black eyes.

“It’s a girl,” said Mr. Clodd to himself; “rather a pretty girl.”

Mr. Clodd, continuing downward, arrived at the nose.

“No,” said Mr. Clodd to himself, “it’s a boy – a cheeky young beggar, I should say.”

The person at the desk, giving a grunt of satisfaction, gathered together sheets of manuscript and arranged them; then, resting its elbows on the desk and taking its head between its hands, regarded Mr. Clodd.

“Don’t you hurry yourself,” said Mr. Clodd; “but when you really have finished, tell me what you think of me.”

“I beg your pardon,” apologised the person at the desk. “I have got into a habit of staring at people. I know it’s rude. I’m trying to break myself of it.”

“Tell me your name,” suggested Mr. Clodd, “and I’ll forgive you.”

“Tommy,” was the answer – “I mean Jane.”

“Make up your mind,” advised Mr. Clodd; “don’t let me influence you. I only want the truth.”

“You see,” explained the person at the desk, “everybody calls me Tommy, because that used to be my name. But now it’s Jane.”

“I see,” said Mr. Clodd. “And which am I to call you?”

The person at the desk pondered. “Well, if this scheme you and Mr. Hope have been talking about really comes to anything, we shall be a good deal thrown together, you see, and then I

expect you'll call me Tommy – most people do.”

“You've heard about the scheme? Mr. Hope has told you?”

“Why, of course,” replied Tommy. “I'm Mr. Hope's devil.”

For the moment Clodd doubted whether his old friend had not started a rival establishment to his own.

“I help him in his work,” Tommy relieved his mind by explaining. “In journalistic circles we call it devilling.”

“I understand,” said Mr. Clodd. “And what do you think, Tommy, of the scheme? I may as well start calling you Tommy, because, between you and me, I think the idea will come to something.”

Tommy fixed her black eyes upon him. She seemed to be looking him right through.

“You are staring again, Tommy,” Clodd reminded her. “You'll have trouble breaking yourself of that habit, I can see.”

“I was trying to make up my mind about you. Everything depends upon the business man.”

“Glad to hear you say so,” replied the self-satisfied Clodd.

“If you are very clever – Do you mind coming nearer to the lamp? I can't quite see you over there.”

Clodd never could understand why he did it – never could understand why, from first to last, he always did what Tommy wished him to do; his only consolation being that other folks seemed just as helpless. He rose and, crossing the long room, stood at attention before the large desk, nervousness, to which he was somewhat of a stranger, taking possession of him.

“You don’t *look* very clever.”

Clodd experienced another new sensation – that of falling in his own estimation.

“And yet one can see that you *are* clever.”

The mercury of Clodd’s conceit shot upward to a point that in the case of anyone less physically robust might have been dangerous to health.

Clodd held out his hand. “We’ll pull it through, Tommy. The Guv’nor shall find the literature; you and I will make it go. I like you.”

And Peter Hope, entering at the moment, caught a spark from the light that shone in the eyes of William Clodd and Tommy, whose other name was Jane, as, gripping hands, they stood with the desk between them, laughing they knew not why. And the years fell from old Peter, and, again a boy, he also laughed he knew not why. He had sipped from the wine-cup of youth.

“It’s all settled, Guv’nor!” cried Clodd. “Tommy and I have fixed things up. We’ll start with the New Year.”

“You’ve got the money?”

“I’m reckoning on it. I don’t see very well how I can miss it.”

“Sufficient?”

“Just about. You get to work.”

“I’ve saved a little,” began Peter. “It ought to have been more, but somehow it isn’t.”

“Perhaps we shall want it,” Clodd replied; “perhaps we shan’t. You are supplying the brains.”

The three for a few moments remained silent.

“I think, Tommy,” said Peter, “I think a bottle of the old Madeira – ”

“Not to-night,” said Clodd; “next time.”

“To drink success,” urged Peter.

“One man’s success generally means some other poor devil’s misfortune,” answered Clodd.

“Can’t be helped, of course, but don’t want to think about it to-night. Must be getting back to my dormouse. Good night.”

Clodd shook hands and bustled out.

“I thought as much,” mused Peter aloud.

“What an odd mixture the man is! Kind – no one could have been kinder to the poor old fellow. Yet all the while – We are an odd mixture, Tommy,” said Peter Hope, “an odd mixture, we men and women.” Peter was a philosopher.

The white-whiskered old dormouse soon coughed himself to sleep for ever.

“I shall want you and the missis to come to the funeral, Gladman,” said Mr. Clodd, as he swung into the stationer’s shop; “and bring Pincer with you. I’m writing to him.”

“Don’t see what good we can do,” demurred Gladman.

“Well, you three are his only relatives; it’s only decent you should be present,” urged Clodd. “Besides, there’s the will to be read. You may care to hear it.”

The dry old law stationer opened wide his watery eyes.

“His will! Why, what had he got to leave? There was nothing

but the annuity.”

“You turn up at the funeral,” Clodd told him, “and you’ll learn all about it. Bonner’s clerk will be there and will bring it with him. Everything is going to be done *comme il faut*, as the French say.”

“I ought to have known of this,” began Mr. Gladman.

“Glad to find you taking so much interest in the old chap,” said Clodd. “Pity he’s dead and can’t thank you.”

“I warn you,” shouted old Gladman, whose voice was rising to a scream, “he was a helpless imbecile, incapable of acting for himself! If any undue influence – ”

“See you on Friday,” broke in Clodd, who was busy.

Friday’s ceremony was not a sociable affair. Mrs. Gladman spoke occasionally in a shrill whisper to Mr. Gladman, who replied with grunts. Both employed the remainder of their time in scowling at Clodd. Mr. Pincer, a stout, heavy gentleman connected with the House of Commons, maintained a ministerial reserve. The undertaker’s foreman expressed himself as thankful when it was over. He criticised it as the humpiest funeral he had ever known; for a time he had serious thoughts of changing his profession.

The solicitor’s clerk was waiting for the party on its return from Kensal Green. Clodd again offered hospitality. Mr. Pincer this time allowed himself a glass of weak whisky-and-water, and sipped it with an air of doing so without prejudice. The clerk had one a little stronger, Mrs. Gladman, dispensing with consultation, declined shrilly for self and partner. Clodd, explaining that he

always followed legal precedent, mixed himself one also and drank “To our next happy meeting.” Then the clerk read.

It was a short and simple will, dated the previous August. It appeared that the old gentleman, unknown to his relatives, had died possessed of shares in a silver mine, once despaired of, now prospering. Taking them at present value, they would produce a sum well over two thousand pounds. The old gentleman had bequeathed five hundred pounds to his brother-in-law, Mr. Gladman; five hundred pounds to his only other living relative, his first cousin, Mr. Pincer; the residue to his friend, William Clodd, as a return for the many kindnesses that gentleman had shown him.

Mr. Gladman rose, more amused than angry.

“And you think you are going to pocket that one thousand to twelve hundred pounds. You really do?” he asked Mr. Clodd, who, with legs stretched out before him, sat with his hands deep in his trousers pockets.

“That’s the idea,” admitted Mr. Clodd.

Mr. Gladman laughed, but without much lightening the atmosphere. “Upon my word, Clodd, you amuse me – you quite amuse me,” repeated Mr. Gladman.

“You always had a sense of humour,” commented Mr. Clodd.

“You villain! You double-dyed villain!” screamed Mr. Gladman, suddenly changing his tone. “You think the law is going to allow you to swindle honest men! You think we are going to sit still for you to rob us! That will – ” Mr. Gladman pointed

a lank forefinger dramatically towards the table.

“You mean to dispute it?” inquired Mr. Clodd.

For a moment Mr. Gladman stood aghast at the other’s coolness, but soon found his voice again.

“Dispute it!” he shrieked. “Do you dispute that you influenced him? – dictated it to him word for word, made the poor old helpless idiot sign it, he utterly incapable of even understanding –”

“Don’t chatter so much,” interrupted Mr. Clodd. “It’s not a pretty voice, yours. What I asked you was, do you intend to dispute it?”

“If you will kindly excuse us,” struck in Mrs. Gladman, addressing Mr. Clodd with an air of much politeness, “we shall just have time, if we go now, to catch our solicitor before he leaves his office.”

Mr. Gladman took up his hat from underneath his chair.

“One moment,” suggested Mr. Clodd. “I did influence him to make that will. If you don’t like it, there’s an end of it.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.