BRIGHT CONVERSATIONS

by

RIORDAN HASTINGS

EPUB ISBN: 978-0-908327-68-3

PDF ISBN: 978-0-908330-64-5

The original publication details are as follows:

Title: Bright conversations

Author: Hastings, Riordan

Published: Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch, N.Z.,1943

With the author's best wishes & thanks.

A. H.

BRIGHT CONVERSATIONS

by

RIORDAN HASTINGS

WHITCOMBE & TOMBS LIMITED
CHRISTCHURCH, AUCKLAND, WELLINGTON, DUNEDIN, INVERCARGILL
MELBOURNE, SYDNEY, LONDON

To

EUGENIE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary.

CONTENTS

Conversation		Page
I	The Arrival	5
II	The Windsor	8
III	In Lodgings	10
IV	At School	14
V	Visiting	17
VI	The New Digs	21
VII	Not So Good	24
VIII	A Day Off and a Trip to Wanganui	26
IX	Margery—and the War	30
X	A Compulsory Landlady	32
XI	The Exhibition	34
XII	In the Flat	37
XIII	Hard Work Isn't Easy—and Nell	45
XIV	War in New Zealand—and the Lodger	47
XV	Mrs. Matthews, Margery, and a Ring	54
XVI	A Delightful Afternoon	61
XVII	Teachers Talk	63
XVIII	The Strength of a Wellington Rat and an Eyeglass	65
XIX	Back to School	67
XX	The U.S.A. Wins	70

BRIGHT CONVERSATIONS

I. THE ARRIVAL

"Could you tell me where to find the lounge?"

Val Castle laughed. "I am looking for it myself."

"Shall we look together?"

"That would be a good idea."

They wander round in the heaving depths of the old *Wahine* as she ploughed across Cook Strait, and were ultimately successful in their quest.

"I have recently come from England," said the stranger.

"I have a brother in England," replied Val.

"In what part?"

"He is in Wynford. He is a doctor in a hospital there."

"Wynford! Why, that is the hospital in which I was working before I came to New Zealand!"

Val looked at the woman in amazement—dark—brown-eyed—rather coarse-featured—smartly costumed, and wearing expensive gauntlet gloves.

"How extraordinary! His name is Castle, the same as mine. Did you know him?"

"No. He was not there when I left."

"What a pity. In his letters he tells me all about the place. He often sends out snapshots. He seems very friendly with the superintendent and his wife."

"That is a pity."

"A pity? Why?"

"Well, it is rather difficult to explain. She is a woman with great social ambitions."

Val laughed. "That will suit Norbert. He likes to consort with the gods."

"Is he good-looking?"

Val laughed. "Most people think we are very alike."

"Ah! Then he is good-looking—handsome."

Again Val laughed. "Thank you. But why do you ask that?"

"The superintendent's wife is very fond of handsome, young men."

"I see. Is she—has she a charming manner?"

"Very, but—." The woman stared before her, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"But what?" asked Val. "You must pardon my curiosity. Naturally, I am interested."

"Well," said the Englishwoman speaking slowly, "she does not mind whether they are married or not. Look—" she drew off the left gauntlet—"I am a married woman." She displayed a thin gold ring. "But my husband is not with me."

"So that's her style? What a rotter she must be," said Val with her colonial directness. "What does her husband say?"

"Nothing. She seems to have bewitched him."

"Curious." Val carefully removed the ashes from her cigarette. "It is a wonderful thing to have IT." She laughed. "It must be great to be able to twist men round your little finger."

"Perhaps—but a dangerous gift. Are you going to Wellington for a holiday?"

"Not exactly." Val gave a little sigh. "I am not going home—I mean back to the South again. I—we have no home now. I am going to teach in Wellington."

"Feeling a little sad about it?"

"Yes." Val lit another cigarette.

"May I ring you up—not to-morrow—the next day?"

"That will be very nice. I am going to stay at the Windsor."

"I am going out to Seatoun to the Convent."

"Are you a doctor?"

"Yes."

"How extraordinary it is, that among all the crowd on this boat you should speak to me. I, too, am a Catholic. How strange that you should come from Wynford."

" It's a small world after all," replied the woman with a smile. " Shall we have something to drink ? I should like to go to my cabin before it gets too rough. I shall look forward to seeing you again—if not in the morning, perhaps on Friday."

It was a fairly calm night, so being a good sailor, Val, after thinking for a little of Norbert, her fellow-traveller, and the superintendent's wife, fell asleep. After all, what could she do ? Write to him ? Send him a cable saying, " Beware of women !" She giggled to herself. No. He never would believe evil of a woman. There was only one thing to do—say a little prayer to the Mother of God.

She did not see the Englishwoman in the morning. No one was meeting her, so having left the boat, she stood patiently among the crowd on the wharf, waiting to claim her checked luggage—two suitcases. She had rescued one, and was waiting for the other to appear, when a voice behind her said, " Taxi, madame ?"

" Oh, yes, thank you—but I have another suitcase."

" Well, I'll take this one to my car, and you wait here for the other."

Trusting all would be well, Val handed over her suitcase, and again turned to watch for the other. It was a long time appearing, and when at last, it did, Val carried it to the open door of the wharf to find to her dismay her driver and his car had disappeared. Another taxi-man hailed her. " Taxi, miss ?"

" I had a taxi," groaned Val. " I gave him my other suitcase with all my best things in it, and he's gone ! Whatever shall I do?"

" Oh, he'll come back."

" How do you know ? "

" It was Joe Malone. He gave your suitcase to another man."

" Good heavens !"

" Joe said it belonged to the lady in grey. There was another lady in grey."

" Oh, horrors ! "

"The other chap's gone off with the other lady."

Val felt weak. "Well—I suppose the only thing to do," she gasped, "is for me to take your taxi to the Windsor, and ring up the police. What did you say his name was?"

"Malone. Joe Malone."

"It is a good thing I know his name. Come on, take me to the Windsor, please."

As they approached the wharf gates, Val saw another taxi dashing towards them. It drew up outside the gates, and the driver jumped out with a suitcase in his hand. Val's taxi stopped, her driver sprang out, ran forward to meet the other man, who handed him the suitcase, and away like the wind dashed the other car.

"Was that Joe Malone?" demanded Val.

"Yes, that was Joe," grinned her driver. "In a bit of a hurry!"

"Heavens," said Val to herself as they tore up Willis Street. "So this is Wellington!"

II. THE WINDSOR

"You dropped your bookmark," said Val to a rather untidy-looking, plainly dressed woman who had preceded her down the stairs.

"Thank you so much." They were at the door of the lounge. "The place seems full. Ah, there are two seats unoccupied."

Val followed her across the room.

"Have you read this book?" asked the woman.

"No," replied Val. "I cannot read German."

"It is very interesting. Travel in Japan. I have been there twice."

"Did you like it?"

"Yes and no. I prefer China. Japan is changing—too fast."

"Too fast?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you have travelled a great deal?"

"I keep on the move now." The woman laughed. "I have been practically round the world twice. Some places seem to call one back."

"I have never been outside New Zealand."

"Well, it is a good country. Ah, there is the luncheon bell. Next week I am setting off for South America."

"How wonderful." Val laughed. "Some people are lucky."

"Perhaps," said the woman. "Perhaps not."

That afternoon, when Val's tall, and slender friends, the Suttons, called to see her, the woman was again in the lounge.

"Do you see that woman over there in the green frock?" said Val.

"With the untidy grey hair?" asked Nell Sutton.

"Would you believe it? She has been round the world twice, she told me."

"I must say the most unlikely-looking people do the most extraordinary things," replied Nell.

Her brother Robin laughed. "Then she might be requiring a valet the third time she goes."

"You'd better go straight over and ask her now. She's off to South America next week."

"Quite impossible for me to have your socks darned in time for you to catch the boat," said Nell decisively.

"Another good opportunity lost," groaned Robin.

Among the guests at the hotel were many Australians, some of whom sat at Val's table. They were very bright, but much more talkative than New Zealanders. Two ladies had come from Brisbane. One of them had much to say of the medical profession. She seemed to be airing her importance—away from home.

"My nephew," she said proudly, "is going to be a doctor."

Feeling rather bored by this pretentious conversation, Val said quietly, "My uncle was a doctor in Brisbane. His name was McDonough. Did you know him?"

The woman's parachute collapsed, but her friend replied, "I did. He was an old bachelor—fond of the ladies. He left a lot of money. Did you get any of it?"

Val laughed. "I did not. But don't you think the ladies are rather fond of the doctors?"

In her room that night Val and her "Nemo" as she called her "other" self had a little talk.

"This is a bright place," said Val.

"Very," chuckled Nemo.

"I shall enjoy Wellington."

"Of course you will. Everyone does," said Nemo.

"It is no place in which to lament over one's past love affairs."

"Most certainly not."

"I feel like that frog we read about in psychology—the one that had part of his brain cut away, and didn't care what he did."

"That's the spirit of Wellington," said Nemo.

"I feel a different person—somebody else—not me at all. I wonder what Wellington has in store for me."

"It is just as well we cannot foresee the future," said Nemo darkly.

"I feel," replied Val, "as if I don't care a hang. I will forget him."

"Maybe," replied Nemo.

"I used to think people who forgot had rubber hearts," sighed Val.

"But you are a nimcompoop," jeered Nemo. "Be a woman of the world."

III. IN LODGINGS.

"Come on you chaps into my room and have a smoke," called Val, knocking at the door of the room behind hers. "She's out."

The door was flung open.

"Sure," laughed Molly O'Brien, "like big dogs."

"What a relief to have her out of the house," sighed Kathleen McDonald, her room-mate. "O Moses! Look what I've done!"

She had upset a bottle of ink on her white counterpane. Val pulled it off the bed and held it over the hearth. "Get some cold water in a dish," she gasped.

When the best had been made of a bad job, the three sat down in rather a state of exhaustion in Val's room.

"I think I'll die if I stay here much longer," said Val.

"We're not staying much longer," said Molly cheerfully.

"Where are you going?"

"Well, a woman we know has taken a big house at Karori, and she's going to let rooms."

"Too far for me," groaned Val.

"It's a bit too far for us," admitted Kathleen, a pretty blonde. "It will probably mean a taxi after dances."

"Can't be helped," said Molly firmly. "This is impossible."

"Ugh!" grunted Val, "To-night when I came home to get the cold meat for my dinner, what do you think happened? She asked me to share the Sunday joint with her. I opened the muslin in which the meat was wrapped, and a big blow-fly flew out. I didn't know she wanted me to share the mutton with him."

"No dinner?"

"I had some vegetables and cake."

"I'm going to do a spot of washing in the bathroom presently," said Molly.

"She says there is every convenience for washing in the wash-house. There is every inconvenience. Poof! A candle—no hot water—except two jugfuls from the kitchen."

"I'm not going to stay here after you two go. I must get busy. I hate this street. My bed is almost on the road. The room's far too small, and she pokes her head in my window. Besides, everyone who passes is saying, 'Bloody.'"

"Well," said Kathleen in her innocent little voice, "we'd be bloody fools if we stayed."

The others heartily agreed.

It was really the Suttons who rescued Val. She had noticed what looked like two suitable advertisements in the *Post*, so when the Suttons appeared, the trio decided they would spend the afternoon in search of new digs.

"There's a place in Tasman Street," said Val. "Shall we go there first?"

"Where's Tasman Street?" asked Nell.

"No idea," replied Val.

"I think I could find it," said Robin.

"Lead on, Cortez," said Val.

Off they went to the right, and at last came to the house.

"Don't like the look of it much," objected Val. "I don't think we shall go in."

"Oh, yes. You can't condemn a house in Wellington from the outside," was Nell's opinion.

"I'll stay out here," decided Robin. "I can run for the police in case of an emergency."

Val and Nell went to the door which was opened by a homely lady in a bag apron, and having explained the reason of their visit, they were shewn the vacant room. When the landlady opened the door of it, they involuntarily stepped back, for it seemed as if the sirocco were escaping from therein. Val felt she would stifle and hastily decided that it was too small.

"Any good?" inquired Robin when they emerged.

"No," said Val firmly. "The other place is somewhere off Molesworth Street. Where's that, Robin?"

"At the other end of the town."

"Oh, horrors! It's too far," groaned Val.

"No, it's not," was Nell's determined reply. "We can take a tram. We'll go down to the Basin Reserve."

"We'll get off at the 'Horse,'" put in Robin.

"What's the 'Horse'?" asked Val.

"The Memorial. Did you think it was a hotel?"

Up Molesworth Street they trailed, pausing every now and then to peer into some shop window.

"Here it is," announced Robin.

"Good lord! Up a right-of-way!" gasped Val. "I'm not going up there, Nell."

"Yes, come and have a look." They proceeded cautiously and at last found the house.

"I don't like the look of it. I'm not going in there," declared Val. "It's no use, Nell. I won't. Wild bulls wouldn't drag me. I want a cup of tea. Robin, where's the nearest place?"

"The railway station."

"Lead the way. Come on, Nell."

On the station, Val bought an *Evening Post,* which Nell immediately seized, scanning the To Let column.

"Here's one," she triumphantly announced, "in Pipitea Street."

"I can't be bothered," said Val who was enjoying a ham sandwich.

"Yes you can. You can't live where you are, sleeping on a camp bed behind your piano."

"Is it very far, Robin?"

"No, just up a bit. We passed it on the way down."

"It is my dying effort."

When they came to the house, Val eyed it suspiciously.

"Needs painting badly."

"Yes, but most houses in Wellington do. Go in. We'll wait here for you."

With a grimace, Val unlatched the gate and went slowly along the path. A brown-eyed little woman answered her ring.

"Could I see the room you have advertised?" inquired Val. "Certainly. Come in."

The entrance hall was nicely furnished, and the room, which had a fireplace, was freshly papered.

"May I bring in my friends to see it?"

"Certainly. Where are they?"

"Outside the gate."

The Suttons quite approved of the room—a downstairs one, and Val took it. Nell Sutton went back to the Hutt with a feeling of something accomplished.

"Anyway," she said to Robin, "Val will be in a nicer part of the town;" but Val lay awake behind the piano wondering how she would ever have sufficient courage to tell her present landlady of her departure.

"Silly ass," said Nemo. "If you had married him, you wouldn't be lying here behind the piano like a piece of fluff."

"I don't care," retorted Val.

"Don't you? You do."

"I don't. Richard is himself again."

"Do you mean to say that you would rather be wandering round Wellington in search of digs than acting the grandee in London."

"He can go to hell," retorted Val. "I'm not going to be bullied by any man. Anyway, I'm free, even if I am behind a piano!"

IV. AT SCHOOL.

"SEE that Dick Harding over there?" the senior woman of the staff looked towards a group of noisy children. "I'd like to slit his throat."

"He always was a hateful little beast," remarked another teacher, Miss Benfell.

It was just after lunch, and the ladies of the school staff were seated outside in the sun.

"Really what the world is coming to, I do not know," said Miss White, the Standard I teacher. "I kept Jim Allan in for a little while yesterday afternoon, and his mother came up in wrath to-day. She said most children loved their teacher, and Jim didn't love me a bit."

"Did you burst into tears?" inquired the senior woman, Miss Sanders.

"Certainly not. I said to her that I would lose no sleep over that."

There was a shout of laughter.

"What did she say?" inquired Val.

"She said 'What would the doctor say if he heard you say that?'"

"Perhaps the sun has dazzled my brain," murmured the senior woman. "It can't be that the doctor wants to sleep with you?"

"What doctor?" asked Val. "Is the boy ill?"

"Ill! No! He's an overfed, pampered mother's darling. Good Heavens, don't you know who 'The Doctor' is?"

"I'm afraid I don't," replied Val. "Is he so very loving?"

"Bah!" said the senior woman. "I'd like to slit his throat, too!" "Why?"

"I love the smell of blood!"

"It seems as if you've got some strenuous work ahead of you," Val laughed. "But who is he?"

"He—he is a voice in the wilderness—of education," chuckled Miss Benfell.

"Oh, now I know," said Val with a smile. "If you should require any assistance, Miss Sanders," she added, "I think I know a tram-conductor who would help you. This morning, when our tram stopped, another tram drew up behind it. Our conductor said to the driver of the other tram, 'I'd like to cut your throat!' The other driver laughed and replied, 'With a sharp knife?' Our conductor said, 'No, with a saw—a blunt one.'"

"He is the man for whom I have been ever seeking," declared Miss Sanders. "A man after my own heart."

"Oh, blast that bell!" sighed Miss Benfell. "I'm going to finish this row before I move." She knitted on in a determined manner.

"I'm out of this on the tick of three," declared Miss Sanders.

"What would the doctor say if he heard you?" giggled Val.

"Well, if he'd any sense he'd say, 'Us for the St. George!'"

With laughter the little group dispersed. Val walked away to the left with Miss White. At the door they met a very pretty little boy with fair, wavy hair.

"What are you doing here, Clarence?" demanded Miss White.

"Oh, I was just holding the door open for you, Miss White," he replied.

"Thank you. Now run out and fall in with the others."

"I'll hold the door open, Miss White."

"No. Go out." Reluctantly he went. "Little liar."

"Is he?" laughed Val. "He looks an angel."

"Yes. Light-fingered, too. This morning, he brought a cat into school. I said, 'What did you bring that cat here for?' He said, 'It's our cat.' I made a shot in the dark, and said, 'It's not. Your mother doesn't like cats. You haven't one.' He was rather dumbfounded, but after a moment he said, 'We used to have one, Miss White.' I said, 'What did you bring it here for?'. He said, 'It followed me, Miss White.' I said to him, "It couldn't have followed you. You live at Island Bay and come to school in the tram.' And then he said, 'Yes, but I was talking to it before I got into the tram, and I was watching it out of the tram window, running along beside the tram.'"

"Phar Lap," laughed Val.

After the grim atmosphere of the southern schools, she enjoyed the breezy, carefree atmosphere of this Wellington school; the remarks of Miss Sanders, who was a very frail-looking woman, were an endless source of amusement; she was always going to "do someone in" or "sock someone on the jaw." The caretaker, too, was very entertaining. He certainly was an extraordinary little man—a pianist, a bandsman, an artist, and above all an optimist. He did the most amazing things. One morning, before school assembled, when he was conversing with Val, he suddenly dashed out into the corridor, and returning with a child's hat, dusted the shelves with it.

"We had a letter from my nephew yesterday," he said. "He's down in the South Island—Christchurch. He said he did not like it and wanted to come back to New Zealand."

V. VISITING.

VAL always enjoyed a visit to the Hutt, where her great friends the Suttons lived. There never was a dull moment. If Robin wasn't out to meet the bus one dashed up the path and thumped on the back door. In obedience to Nell's shout, "Come in, and don't make such a noise," one entered the kitchen, made more noise, and unpacked one's bag—wine for Robin, chocolates and oddments for Nell, who vehemently protested.

"Val, didn't I tell you not to bring anything out—to come out *bare?*"

"The driver wouldn't allow a bare woman on the bus! Nell Sutton, *shut up.*"

"Go and take your things off," Nell would command, and Robin, laughing and chatting, would follow Val. Thus the day began. Nell and Robin would argue whether it was to be tea or wine first; it was usually both.

"Any news from Dunedin?"

"Yes, Rollie Thompson is married."

"Heavens, how did he part with his aunt?" asked Nell.

"He didn't. He took her with them on the honeymoon, and she is living with them."

There were so many things to be done—the vegetable garden to be inspected; the little creek at the foot of the garden, the roses in the front yard, a curio Robin had bought, and the new cage for the Rosella. How Nell managed to produce the dainty lunch, Val could never understand, but it was always there upon the delightful table.

"Do you like the new digs, Val?" asked Nell.

"Yes, I'm wonderfully free—no one spying on me. The

other house was too small. My heart sank when I saw it, and she was too big. One of those kids in the back room christened her Flossie. We went one night to the pictures and there was a ridiculous film with a big girl in it called Flossie Little-on."

Robin gave a snort.

"She'd look a picture with little on," said Nell.

"I had a letter from Dunedin from Pen. Guess who she said is going to be married?"

"A teacher?" asked Nell.

"Yes, just going to be superannuated."

"No idea," said Nell.

"Bell Hopper?" guessed Robin, who also was a teacher.

"Yes. How did you know?" demanded Val.

"Natural intelligence," replied Robin.

"Bosh!" retorted Nell. "More potatoes, Val?"

"No, thank you, Nell, and she is to be dressed in pink."

"She was always mad on pink," chuckled Robin. "Once she was crossing the playground in front of me, and the wind blew her frock up, and I saw ever so much pink."

"You saw too much," reprimanded Nell sternly.

"I didn't—but I saw an awful lot," giggled Robin.

"Who is the lucky man?" inquired Nell.

"Pen didn't say. I wrote back and asked her if he were insane. Oh, I must tell you this while I think of it," and she told them about the caretaker's nephew.

"That's one for the Dunedin Scotties," laughed Nell.

"Somehow that reminds me of Mary's boy, Alex. He was a bit simple," said Robin. Val often had heard tales of Mary who long ago had been Mrs. Sutton's maid. When she arrived, she had not before seen a kitchen range, and the first morning lit the fire on top of it.

"Yes," Robin went on, "he was very keen to be a Territorial, but he could never keep step. The sergeant was always roaring at him, but one day it got too much for Alex, and he shouted back, 'Man, what do you mean?

You say "Left—right—left—right!" Why don't you make up your mind which it is going to be?'"

"It's hard sometimes," laughed Nell, "to know whether these people are simple or extremely clever."

"Yes," chuckled Val. "Pen told me that once she was teaching in a school with Bell, and Bell was going to leave. Every day Bell said to the kids, 'Now children, remember if you have any money for my presentation, don't bring it to me. Take it to the headmaster!'"

"I wouldn't like to go back to Dunedin," said Robin. "Would you, Val?"

"No," said Val. "I couldn't stand teaching there again. Besides," she laughed, "since coming here, I'm learning to be a politician. One can't live in Wellington without having Views—with a capital V."

"What are your views?" asked Nell.

Val chuckled. "As you know, they are at present rather limited—my windows aren't altogether—transparent. Did I tell you Miss Cotton is going away for some time to housekeep for a sick sister?"

"Where to?"

"Christchurch. I'd rather she weren't. I am inclined to think the gentleman upstairs may become somewhat troublesome."

"Can't his wife keep him in order?"

"I think the lady boarder has more influence over him than his wife."

"Let's go into the other room," said Nell. "I'll light a fire. I think it is rather chilly to go out."

"That's a good idea," laughed Val. "I feel like a workless day. Robin can play soft music while I doze—if he doesn't disappear for a lie down."

They adjourned to the drawing-room—a delightful room with cream walls, grand piano, pink carpet, and big, open fireplace.

"You know," said Val, "you two are lucky to have such a lovely home. I always did appreciate a home, but since I've been in digs, I worship them."

"Some day," said Robin, "perhaps, Val, you'll have another—if you want it. Did I ever tell you about the *faut pas* our grandmother made when she first came to New Zealand?"

"No, what was it?"

"Well, in the early days, Dunedin was simply seething with the Scotch. Both our grandparents came from England. One old Scotch lady said to grandma, 'And are you Scotch?' Grandma said, 'God forbid!' Grandpa told her afterwards that if she were going to live among them, she would have to be more discreet!"

"I suppose," laughed Val, "he thought it would be quite sufficient to have the Maoris pouncing on him with their spears without having the Scotch with their claymores."

"It is so silly," said Nell, "all this pride of race. One does not produce one's self."

"What about a self-made man?" chuckled Robin.

"Smartie," laughed Nell.

"Anyway," said Val, "we're all getting mixed up out here. I'm half English and half Irish—at least three eighths. We suspected my mother of being a bit Scotch."

"I believe that's the paperboy," said Robin, hurrying out.

He came back with it open in his hand, and sitting down, read on and on.

"Any news?" asked Nell.

"Yes, this invasion of Poland may lead to a *terrible* war."

"Well," said Val, "we'll win in the end. Britons never *could* be slaves."

"Here, here!" cried Nell, jumping up from her chair. "I'll put the kettle on."

VI. THE NEW DIGS

"Such a horrible man at the door," said, or rather shouted Val to Miss Jolly, who was very deaf.

"What did you say?"

Val repeated her remark even more vigorously.

Miss Jolly looked puzzled.

"But they haven't been mending the door. Why did they send a bill?"

"I said a horrid man at the door."

"Did he bring a bill?"

Val shook her head vehemently.

"No. I said he was horrid."

"Didn't he bring a bill?"

"There was no bill."

"Oh, I understand, now. What did he want?"

Val took a deep breath.

"He wanted a bach."

"A *bath?* Did he have a towel with him?"

"A bach!" yelled Val. "A room."

Miss Jolly nodded. "I understand. What a silly old thing I am. How did you get rid of him?"

"I sent him down to the boarding house at the corner."

Val pulled Miss Jolly over to the window, and pointed.

"There! To that boarding house."

"That's the fire-brigade station—the back of it," laughed Miss Jolly.

To Val's horror, the woman who took Miss Cotton's room when she went to Christchurch, was also deaf. Val marvelled at her being able to pay twenty-five shillings a week, for she was rather shabby, apparently a "gentlewoman in poor circumstances." Val was afraid she did not have enough to eat, and being a good scone maker, always made a point of giving Miss Trotter a plateful hot and thickly buttered.

To hear Miss Jolly and Miss Trotter conversing was one of Val's greatest joys. Miss Jolly also believed that Miss Trotter was poor—quite a mistaken idea, for had Miss Trotter chosen, she could well have afforded to stay at the Midland.

"The war news is very bad," said Miss Trotter one afternoon.

"I haven't seen it," replied Miss Jolly.

"Just as well," said Val in a low voice.

"Have you a paper?" Miss Trotter asked Val.

"I can give you one," cried the kind Miss Jolly, and dashing from the kitchen towards her room, bumping into the hall-stand, she returned with an apple in her hand.

"There," she said triumphantly, "that will save you going out in the rain."

On Sundays, Miss Jolly spent the day cooking.

"Are you preparing for a siege?" asked Val as she surveyed the contents of Miss Jolly's cupboard—a big bowl of stew—fried chops—a bowl of rice—six roasted apples—several tarts, and a small round of corned beef.

"I won't have to cook anything except vegetables next week," said Miss Jolly triumphantly.

"Do you think you'll have enough?"

"No, I don't think it's tough. Taste it," and she cut off a piece of the beef, and handed it to Val.

"You are not going to starve," remarked Miss Trotter, coming into the kitchen.

"What a dreadful thing for people to invite you out and starve you," said Miss Jolly to Miss Trotter who had been out for the evening meal. "Here, take these," and putting two tarts on a plate, she handed them to Miss Jolly.

"Oh, thank you so much."

"The corn beef?" Miss Jolly looked rather surprised. "Yes, all right." And she proceeded to cut off two thick slices. These Miss Trotter refused to accept.

"Why did you ask me for it?" demanded the bewildered Miss Jolly.

" I didn't." Miss Trotter was not as deaf as Miss Jolly.

" I'm sure it's done," replied Miss Jolly rather indignantly.

Feeling she could endure no more, Val hurried from the room.

One night, Miss Jolly, who was really the kindest thing, insisted on Val's going into her room where there was a fire burning. She had some family photographs to display which Val secretly thought she could have done without seeing. " Nell Sutton," said Val the next time she visited the Hutt, " you've a lot to learn."

She looked around Nell's dainty bedroom.

" Do you think my head could hold more knowledge ?"

" Well, you might wedge in this fact: That the tidiest place to keep a dishful of coal is under one's bed !"

There was a guffaw from the doorway.

" I thought that was the place for something else," called Robin.

" What right have you in a lady's room ?" demanded his sister. " Silence from you and precious little of that."

" There is," chuckled Robin, advancing boldly into the room where Val was doing her hair.

" Don't you see Val is arranging her hair ?"

" She doesn't mind me seeing her make her toilet."

" Not a bit," said Val. " You can admire my crispy, snakey locks to your heart's content. Do you want to know the latest place to keep one's wardrobe ?"

" Well, yesterday when I wanted my blue shirt, Nell said it was hanging out in the wash-house."

" No, not there. In the kitchen. That is where Miss Trotter and Miss Jolly have theirs. They share it, and Miss Jolly was mad because Miss Trotter pushed her things along to the far end."

" But how do they get to their clothes ?" asked the puzzled Robin. " Do they come out in a state of nudity ?"

" Enough from you," said Nell. " Go and see why the Rosella is yelling like that."

VII. NOT SO GOOD.

Val enjoyed the freedom of Miss Cotton's. She liked the little garden, the patch of green lawn, and the screaming seagulls that flew above the house. The Suttons often called in, and although her room faced the south, with a big fire blazing it was very cosy. She hung her pictures on the walls, and arranged her ornaments and photographs on the cupboards and the mantelpiece. Of course, in a downstairs room, one had to endure a certain amount of noise, but after Miss Cotton's departure, the noise upstairs became unbearable. At length, she complained to the wife, who apparently told her husband when he came home to dinner.

Shouting out that he would show Miss Castle what noise was, he threw a quantity of the furniture which was Miss Cotton's down on to the landing. The noise was so terrific that even the deaf heard.

Val began to look around for another room. On the way to school she saw To Let on the window of one above a butcher's shop, and surprised her headmaster by asking him if it would be a terrible thing to live above a butcher's shop.

"Well, of course," he said with a grin, "accommodation is scarce in Wellington; but if you made meat your mainstay—"

"Stick to your muttons, and don't talk tripe," laughed Val. "I'm afraid your advice is unsound."

One afternoon, she decided to buy a new hat. The milliner, Miss Lane, remarked that she looked rather tired.

"Little wonder," sighed Val. "I haven't had a good night's sleep for weeks. My landlady's away. She went to Christchurch because her sister was ill, but the sister has died, and now she is housekeeping for her brother-in-law. Goodness knows when she will return. I have a

downstairs room, and the man above wakes me up every night, and then I can't go to sleep again."

Miss Lane nodded. "Give me your telephone number, and if I hear of anything, I'll give you a ring."

People told Val not to bother about advertisements—just to wait until she heard of something. The Headmaster teased her, saying he was going to buy a house, and that she could have the basement. One night there was a terrific storm, and although her room was downstairs, water poured through the ceiling as if from a tap. How great was her joy when Miss Lane actually rang her to say that she had a room to let. Joyfully, Val packed her things. Miss Carter, Miss Lane's assistant, brought round the little delivery van to take up Val's china and precious odds and ends, and Val found herself parked in Fitzherbert Terrace. Had she known all that lay ahead of her, she might perhaps have hidden in the headmaster's basement. Before leaving Pipitea Street, she rang Miss Cotton's sister to notify her of her departure.

"Will you take up the carpet?" requested the sister.

"Very well," replied Val, who thought this a piece of impertinence.

She rolled up her own carpet, and then took up the other. Underneath it were huge patches of yellow mud!

The Sunday before she left Pipitea Street, Val received a great shock, for, kneeling in front of her at Mass, she beheld Keith Mackay, her old love. Indignantly she asked "Nemo" what right he had to come to her church.

"Why shouldn't he?" retorted Nemo. "He's a good Holy Roman."

"Yes—but I was getting over it, and now it has all sort of broken out again!" groaned Val.

"Richard, apparently is *not* himself again!" chuckled Nemo.

VIII. THE DAY OFF AND A TRIP TO WANGANUI.

Miss Lane's big flat was at the back of a large apartment house. It was very old-fashioned, not even a basin in the bathroom and no hot water over the kitchen sink. Val's was a long room with a window at either end, and when she had her carpet down, and her furniture arranged, it looked very inviting. The milliners worked very hard, from early in the morning till late at night, indeed, sometimes till two or three in the morning. This suited Val who loved to have the whole place to herself, although she rarely went into the other rooms, which were jammed with heterogeneous masses of furniture. Miss Lane had a habit of going to sale, and buying the most extraordinary things.

Val soon discovered that Miss Lane was not a pleasant person with whom to live, and consequently avoided her, but she soon loved Miss Carter, who was simply Miss Lane's slave. The flat was dirty and untidy, Miss Lane having some very unpleasant habits, such as eating a plum and spitting out the stone just where she stood. There seemed to be an inexhaustible number of fleas; there seemed to be nearly always something lost in the flat—Miss Lane's right glove—one of her shoes—the key of the car—the key of the millinery salon—once her kettle, which Miss Lane had put in the oven. In time Val learned to hate Miss Lane, but when in Wellington girls have to endure much. Miss Lane was always having visitors, who Val rightly concluded were "Paying guests." These people took possession of the kitchen and commandeered Val's kettle and pots. Still, there was always sanctuary to be found in her own pleasant room, and there was nobody prancing over her head.

Miss Lane had all the abominable qualities of a successful business woman. One Saturday morning, when Val and Miss Carter were in the kitchen preparing their break-

fast, she came marching out with her hat on.

"Miss Carter, you will take to-day off."

"Oh, not to-day," replied Miss Carter with a pleading look in her brown eyes which always reminded Val of the eyes of a much beloved spaniel she had once owned. Miss Carter was elderly, stout, but had a wonderful complexion; Miss Lane was really older, but recaptured some of youth's attractions by the aid of cosmetics.

"Yes, to-day."

"But I don't want to-day." There were tears in Miss Carter's eyes.

"We often have to take what we don't want," was the callous reply. "Here I am giving her a day off," Miss Lane said to Val, "and the foolish woman will not take it."

Miss Carter left the kitchen.

Val was puzzled, but when she came back during the morning, she found Miss Carter with a petrol tin full of soap boiling on the gas range. Just before twelve, Miss Lane arrived with a bucket of raspberries, and in the afternoon Miss Carter made jam. However, about five o'clock, she said to Val, "I don't care how late it is. I am going to have my tea in town."

What the poor soul felt like, Val did not know.

Returning from school one afternoon, Val found the most terrible smell. She tracked it to the kitchen, and discovered Miss Lane had been doing some washing—two handkerchiefs in a pot. They had boiled dry and were burning.

"Miss Carter is going to Wanganui for the week-end," said Miss Lane. "She is asking a friend of hers to go with her, but she is afraid she can't. I told her she had better take you."

Val's reply was rather non-committal. "Oh."

The result was, however, that she found herself on Saturday morning being driven by Miss Carter over the old Paekakariki Hill. Miss Carter showed her Kapiti Island. When Val repeated the story of Te Rauparaha, Miss Carter was deeply interested.

"That was Te Rauparaha's island," said Val. "He was a cunning old scoundrel—chief of a tribe called the Ngatitoa. The old chap thought his tribe would be safer in Kapiti than in Waikato, so, taking with him about one hundred and seventy warriors, some women and children, he set off for the island, where they ultimately arrived, and drove out the people who were living there. He built an awfully strong pa, and though fifteen tribes attacked him, the old boy held his own. He did some dirty work over in Kaikoura and Akaroa. He went south as far as Kaiapoi. The early settlers were scared to death of him, but at last, one night, Sir George Grey caught the old rascal sleeping at Porirua."

"What did they do with him? Shoot him?"

"No. Kept him prisoner for some time, and then Sir George allowed him to go back to Kapiti."

"Dangerous, that, wasn't it?"

"I'd have thought so, but his power over the Maoris was lost. They despised him because he had lived on as a prisoner. They thought he should have killed himself."

"Sir George Grey was a good governor, wasn't he?"

"Marvellous. He was governor twice, and afterwards premier. I don't think New Zealand gives him sufficient recognition. However, "laughed Val, "the authorities haven't consulted me on the subject!"

Not far from Wanganui they met another car driven by a stout, elderly woman. Beside her was seated a small, red-headed boy.

"Mrs. Matthews!" exclaimed Val.

"Val!" cried the woman, and both she and Miss Carter drew up.

"Fancy meeting you here," said Val. "This is Miss Carter, Mrs. Matthews. Are you staying with Veen?"

"Yes. Where are you going, Val?"

"I'm staying in Wanganui till Monday."

"You," said the child, pointing at Miss Carter, "you are another fattie. Why don't you eat a lettuce leaf?"

"You rude boy!" gasped his grandmother. "This is one of Veen's modern productions," she added.

"What is his name?" Val inquired.

"Hector."

"Not," said the child. "It's By-Hec. Dad says so." He stood up on the seat and glared at them. He made a sudden grab at the feather in his grandmother's felt hat, held the hat with his left hand, and wrenched with his right. To his delight, the feather came away.

"There," he said triumphantly brandishing it.

"That," said his grandmother in a tone of disgust, "is what his father would call self-expression. I will not take you out again, Hector."

"Fat woman, would you like this feaver?" he inquired, offering it to Miss Carter, to whom he seemed to have taken a fancy. He threw it to her, but it landed on the ground, and Val jumping out, handed it back to Mrs. Matthews.

They arranged that she should call at Val's hotel in the evening and make plans for the week-end. Miss Carter was to motor some miles beyond the town. She was really going to bring back another milliner, Miss Wall, to work for Miss Lane, and was to stay for the week-end at Miss Wall's home, a farm a few miles further to the north.

"That young man needs a good hiding," laughed Val, as they drove away. "I wonder if Veen's other children are the same. The Matthews lived near us in Dunedin. Veen was in the College with me. She came up here to teach, and married a farmer."

"I am glad she met us," said kindly Miss Carter. "I did not quite like you staying alone in that hotel."

Sure enough, in the evening, Veen, a harrassed-looking young woman, arrived. "Mother and I are going to take turns in entertaining you—showing you the sights," she laughed. "It is such a relief to get away from the little brutes."

"Are they all like Hec?" asked Val.

"Yes. Their father will not have them checked. He,

himself, he says was brought up too strictly. He believes in self-expression. The result is they all fight. Yesterday, Tom hit Neil over the head with a pot. I hope I don't have any more children," she sighed.

"I don't believe in self-expression," said Val. "It is true we can't all rise to heights of self-sacrifice, but we can at least be taught consideration for others."

"That's what I think," sighed Veen. "But their father says that by being allowed self-expression, they will be a success in the world—I say perhaps as highwaymen."

Val had a delightful weekend. She was motored up the river, taken to see the Maori church, and all around the little town. She visited Veen's home one evening, and saw the three self-expressionists—asleep, Tom with a bandage on his right hand, Neil with one on his head, and Hec with a headless, rubber dog on his pillow.

Miss Carter, Miss Wall and Val returned via Palmerston North, where they saw the wonderful cherry walks, but the effect was somewhat spoiled by the heavy rain; indeed, one road had become so muddy that they passed a car so badly bogged that it had to be abandoned.

IX. MARGERY—AND THE WAR.

Attached to the apartment house was a middle-aged Scotch charwoman who, once a week, came upstairs to clean Miss Lane's flat. Often on Saturday, when Val cooked her own meal at mid-day, she put in an extra bit for Margery. At first Val could not understand what she was saying, and when she chose, Margery said a good deal, but gradually Val began to get the gist of these savage remarks, and to realise they were directed against Mr. Chamberlain and his Umbrella; also that Margery had read *Mein Kemp*.

"Bah! Chamberlain! He's n' goowd," growled Margery.

"Oh, but he must be, Margery. He is the Prime Minister of England."

"Flyin' over t' see Hitler! What's the goowd o' that? Peace! It's got t' be War!"

"Well, I don't know. I suppose he does what he thinks best."

"Bah! Is that why he takes his umbrella when it's fine? Have you read *Mein Kemp*?"

"No, I haven't."

"Well I have. Germany's ready. We're not. Old Chamberlain ought to be in his box. We haven't got a decent general."

"Oh, we're sure to have," protested Val.

"Quite unprepared," asserted Margery, and Val felt she did not know enough of British affairs to argue.

Later on when Britain entered the war and things seemed to be going wrong, Margery was quite triumphant and said, "Didn't I tell y'?"

She grinned, showed her big white teeth, and smacked her lips. "Successful retreats! Bah!"

The woman who ran the apartment house died in the hospital, and the house was taken over by another woman —also in the hospital. This second woman, however, did not die. Instead, she immediately raised all the rents. Miss Lane immediately wanted to raise Val's rent, but she refused, considering that twenty-two shillings a week was sufficient for an empty room without a fireplace. She was worried about Norbert, shut up in England, and her Aunt Jean, in Dunedin, kept writing her dissatisfied letters. However, nothing can be so bad that it cannot be worse. Miss Lane suddenly announced that she had bought a small house, and that she and the other two milliners were leaving the flat. The Exhibition was on, and Val did not know where to betake herself and her furniture.

"Whatever shall I do?" she asked Nemo.

"Don't worry your fat," replied Nemo. "When in doubt, stand still."

"You mean take the flat? Pay £3 a week rent? I couldn't afford it."

"Pooh! Who's asking you to pay that? Can't you

let a couple of rooms? You could let a hen-house in Wellington."

Val laughed. "I believe—judging by what I've seen—that you really could, especially if you put an electric point in it."

X. A COMPULSORY LANDLADY.

"PUT on your bonnet," said Nemo, "and go along and see Mrs. Goldie's agent."

In an hour's time, Val returned, and said triumphantly to Margery, who was polishing the stairs, "The flat's mine."

"I'll tak a room from y'," said Margery.

A terrible month followed; confusion reigned in the flat, and it seemed to Val that the time would never come for the milliners to go—but there is an end to everything. For weeks after their departure, Val hurried home from school, cooked the evening meal, and then toiled, scrubbing, painting, staining, until mid-night. Margery, who had promptly installed herself, helped sometimes; at other times shut herself up in her room with a "boowk."

One Saturday morning, when Val was toiling away, a very tall, dignified, grey-haired lady came marching into the flat. She wanted a room. Val explained that she was not ready for roomers. However, she promised that in a week's time the woman could come.

"My husband," she said proudly, "is a descendant of Louis Pasteur."

"Really?" replied Val. "How very interesting."

Later, Val repeated the conversation to Margery, who said scornfully, "Bah! My husband is descended from Robinson Crusoe! Wellington is full of broken-down toffs."

This lady, Mrs. Donald, posed as being very delicate. One evening, when Val and Margery were in the kitchen,

she began to cut and butter slice after slice of brown bread.

"Must be having several visitors," thought Val to herself.

" This is my supper," remarked Mrs. Donald, as she walked off with the gigantic pile.

" Gee ! I thought she was having a party," giggled Margery. " Maybe Louis Pasteur."

Mrs. Donald asked Val if she would mind if her husband came occasionally for the week-end. Val said that would be all right. She wondered for a moment what he did. One morning the telephone rang.

" Roroa Mental Hospital calling," said a voice.

" Yes ?"

" Donald speaking. Could I speak to Mrs. Donald ?"

The next infliction was Jacqueline, Mrs. Donald's niece, from Napier. This hefty wench smashed as she went—the china salt box, a towel rod in the bathroom, and finally—tripping over a stool—her aunt's cups and jug. Mrs. Donald had asked Val if she could come for a week, but Jacqueline stayed six. One morning, coming out of her room, Val beheld Mrs. Donald giving her hair a thorough combing in the front hall before the long mirror. Her hair was over her face, and her back was to Val, so she performed her toilet ignorant of Val's presence. Having nothing to do all day, she began to find fault with things. There was a smudge on her window, her room needed papering, there was too much polish on the bathroom floor. She began to pass insulting remarks about schoolteachers.

Exasperated, Val said, " Mrs. Donald, this is not a concentration camp, and the front door is open."

Having gone down to Eastbourne to spend the day with friends, Val, feeling very worried, confided in them, and they told her she must get rid of Mrs. Donald, give her notice. This Val did when Mrs. Donald next paid her rent.

After a fortnight, she said to Val, " Miss Castle, do you still wish me to accept that resignation ?"

" I beg your pardon ?" said the naughty Val, wishing to have the pleasure of hearing her say it again.

" Do you still wish me to accept that resignation ?"

" Yes, Mrs. Donald," replied Val firmly.

After her departure Val felt rather exhausted, and said to Margery, " I think we'll have a rest."

Next came Miss Henderson, whom the old lady in the opposite flat described as " a common girl," but who had advertised herself as a " refined lady." Val soon discovered her reason for taking the room. She had a lover with a sore toe. He came once a week to have it dressed. It was winter time and Miss Henderson wanted a fire in her room. Val and she arranged to buy the coal, Val to buy the first bag, she the second—which was never bought. Whether he returned to his wife in Auckland or not, Val never knew, but he ceased to come to Fitzherbert Terrace, and Miss Henderson soon found the room too expensive. Presently she departed—much to Val's relief.

" I think, Margery," said Val, " we'll have another rest."

XI. THE EXHIBITION.

On the opening day, Val went out alone, late in the afternoon to have a look round. She was amazed at the extent, but decided she liked the Dunedin Exhibition better. It had been a homely, friendly sort of place. Of course, one had to take into account the fact that the war had upset things, and consequently, many of the courts were unfinished. The British Court was almost bare. She did not like the amusements, and the wind began to blow.

However, she enjoyed her second visit, with her bosom friend, Mrs. Penfold, who had come from the south for a holiday. Round and round they wandered until, tired out, they decided to have tea.

" Pen, I've missed you terribly," sighed Val.

" And I have you, Val. I said to John that I didn't

know what I was going to do without you," and Pen laughed, " he said that wasn't a very complimentary thing to say to my husband !"

" Sometimes," sighed Val, " I ask myself what in the wide world I am doing up here. Sometimes I hate the place."

" Come back," suggested Pen. " Get a transfer."

" No, I've come, so I'll endure it. I must say I think it is healthy. No germ could hide in Wellington. The wind would soon blow it away. I feel as if I were being tossed around, too."

" You'll get over that. It is just because the place is new."

" I've been here three years."

" Oh, yes, but you lived all your life in Dunedin."

" Sometimes I wonder what is going to become of me?" Pen laughed. " There is a destiny."

Val, too, laughed. " I once looked up my fortune in Napoleon's Fortune book, and it said, ' Over a tub of red-hot suds, for ever will you stand !' It really isn't a bad fortune for Wellington because hot water seems to be awfully scarce up here." Val took out her cigarette case. " Have one, Margot ?"

" No—yes, thank you. This is a festive day."

" I've enjoyed this visit to the Exhibition. I didn't enjoy the first day a bit." She lit Pen's cigarette, and then her own. " I read somewhere that Haydn, when tired, always said the Rosary. I go and have a cigarette." She laughed. " Better to smoke here than hereafter."

" Shall we stay till the lights are on the fountain ? I love to watch them."

" Yes, if you like. I really should stay out all night. I'm afraid Aunt's coming up, so I won't be a free agent much longer."

" But you'll find it nice to have someone of your own family."

" Yes—perhaps—but it's a pity it isn't some other member of the family. However, why worry ?"

The next time Val visited the Exhibition it was with the Suttons. Robin knew nearly every inch of it. Once, however, he did make a ridiculous mistake. They were going to show Val a model of Dunedin.

"This is not the way," said Nell.

"It is," retorted Robin. "I *know*."

"Lead on, Cortez," murmured Val.

Robin marched indignantly ahead, and the ladies meekly followed, but when they emerged, almost exactly where they had entered, the corridor being really a horse-shoe, Nell and Val leaned against the wall and shook with laughter. After one moment of indignation, Robin, too, succumbed. Ultimately they discovered the model which Val found very interesting. They visited the church stalls, and at the Anglican, Robin bought a delightful little brass camel, and Val a string of beads from Jerusalem. In the Catholic Court, Robin wanted to know why the Crucifix over the altar should be suspended by a chain. Val didn't know, and Nell told him to mind his own business and not ask intelligent questions, so Robin said he would sit down for a few minutes, and read the *Tablet*.

"Let's go and have some coffee," said Nell.

They found three boxes near the coffee stall and, seating themselves, enjoyed their supper.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Val suddenly, "I forgot! I must get a handkerchief for Aunt Jean. I had a letter from her yesterday commanding me to send her one."

There didn't seem to be many handkerchiefs in the Exhibition, but ultimately they found one for which Val paid about twice the amount she would have paid in the city.

XII. IN THE FLAT.

One day, Val met an acquaintance at the corner of Fitzherbert Terrace and Molesworth Street.

"Miss Castle," she said, "I was wondering if you would let a room?"

"Well, I wouldn't mind."

"The girl is very unhappy where she is. She's not exactly a girl. She is getting on."

"Ah," said Val, as she thought of her past experience.

"She is English."

"Yes? I like English girls."

"She works in Sir Terry Ashton's office."

"Tell her to come and see me to-night."

"Could you ring her up?"

"Yes, I could do that."

Val rang the girl, who arranged to call and see the room that night.

At the evening meal, Val told Margery the news.

"Ugh!" she replied, hitting her fork against her teeth. This was a sign of her displeasure.

Miss Mercer arrived, all smiles and dimples.

Val showed her the room, and Miss Mercer liked it; it was cheaper than her present one. Val showed her another one, and Miss Mercer, taking a fancy to the mirror, immediately inquired, "May I have that mirror for my room?"

At first Val thought her delightful, all smiles and dimples, but presently there was a change. An Englishman in her office was summoned Home. Miss Mercer returned on the evening of his departure in the depths of despair.

"Something must be done! Something must be done!" she kept groaning, so Val gave her a large glass of wine, and matters improved. Miss Mercer next transferred her attentions to "Sir Terrah," whose wife was ill, and Val

thought she could easily prophesy who the next "Lady Terrah" would be, but again things went wrong; the wife recovered. The next was Robin, who, however, did not respond.

"Is the house his own?" inquired Miss Mercer.

"Yes," replied Val. "At least I think so. Possibly his sister has a share in it." She laughed. "I have never asked them for the details of their mother's will."

"Has he his degree?" went on Miss Mercer.

"Yes, he is an M.A."

Having again failed, Miss Mercer began an affair with a married man, and returned home occasionally, slightly intoxicated.

She had told Val that in her previous lodgings the landlady had accused her of taking possession of the house, and to her surprise, Val suddenly realised that she had done the same thing again.

Miss Mercer had become interested in war work and seemed determined to start one in New Zealand. She joined all sorts of committees, and then proceeded to stir up strife among the members. For hours she talked angrily on the telephone, which Val shared with a nurse in the adjoining flat. If it rang, Miss Mercer would dash in front of Val to answer it. There was always a grievance; a spider in her room, a mouse in her cupboard, the laundry did not half wash her towel. One had no privacy when she was about—bursting into one's bedroom, always wanting something out of one's private cupboard.

She *must* have this or that—always making a fuss over her vitamins. She would say she was going to have a bath, and then go out on the balcony for an hour. At first Val used to wait, but gradually grew wiser. Margery hated Miss Mercer. "Stuck-up snob," she called her, but it took Aunt Jean to measure up Miss Mercer.

To Val's dismay, Aunt Jean suddenly announced her arrival, and one sunny afternoon, Val, with a sinking heart went down to the wharf to meet her.

"Don't bump against me," was her greeting.

"I've no intention of bumping against you," said Val.

"No, my dear Aunt," said Nemo, "I'd sooner give you a good push over the wharf into the harbour."

"Have you engaged a taxi?" inquired Aunt Jean.

"No, you see we might have to wait for your luggage."

"But I'm not strong enough to stand about on a wharf."

"Won't you wait for your luggage?"

"Perhaps I'd better. I'll give you the check tickets. I see a seat over there. Come and sit down while I get them out. What a terrible wind. Is it always like this here?"

"Usually," said Val cheerfully.

Aunt Jean had a small income of her own, which she saved—at other people's expense.

When they arrived at Val's home in Fitzherbert Terrace, Aunt Jean was horrified.

"Good gracious! You live out in the country! Look at all those trees! What a place to live!"

"It's the best I can afford," said Val.

"I don't like this room with all those trees out there."

"I'm afraid the landlady would object if I began to cut them down. Shall I leave you now, Aunt?"

"Where are you going?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular. I am just going to see to the dinner."

Aunt Jean had a daylight trip across Cook Strait.

"Shut the door after you."

Val willingly did so—would have liked to lock it—on the outside. At dinner, Aunt Jean made her arrangements.

"I'll give you eighteen shillings a week."

"Very well."

"I shall require my breakfast in bed."

"All right."

"I like *two* towels."

"I'll get you another."

"Who does the work here? The place is too big. Who does the work?"

"Oh, I do. Margery helps."

"Is Margery your maid?"

"No. She has a room here."

"I thought you had a maid."

"No."

"If I had known you hadn't a maid, I wouldn't have come."

No reply.

"*I* am not going to do the work. I pay my board."

"Eighteen shillings," murmured Val. "What did you pay in Dunedin?"

"That has nothing to do with it. That was a *proper* boarding house."

"I see. Why did you leave?"

"It was closed. I told you."

A pause.

"This is very nice ham."

"Yes, it is."

"Thank heaven she's pleased with something," whispered Nemo.

"The potatoes are nice, too. The butter's good."

"Yes. The food is all good in Wellington."

"Is Keith Mackay in Wellington?"

"Yes, he is."

"Do you ever see him?"

"Yes, at church on Sundays."

"Don't you ever visit them?"

"Good gracious, no! I'll take your plate. Will you have some jelly and cream?"

"I'll try a little."

Val knew Aunt Jean's "little," and gave her a generous helping.

"I must see him."

"Who?"

"Keith Mackay. He can manage my affairs while I am in Wellington. Fancy him leaving Dunedin after marrying John Evans' daughter. Seems as if he can't settle in a place.

A trip Home and then living in Sydney. Why didn't he stay in Sydney?"

"I have no idea. Will you have some more cream, Aunt?"

"If you have it to spare. I suppose it will only go sour if left. Of course, you could scald it."

The door of the little dining-room was suddenly pushed open, and Miss Mercer stood in the doorway.

"Oh—Miss Mercer, my Aunt, Miss Nelson."

"How do you do?" said Miss Mercer, all smiles and dimples.

"Quite well, thank you," replied Miss Nelson stiffly.

When Miss Mercer retired, Aunt Jean said, "Does she often do that?"

"Do what, Aunt?"

"Push open the door of your dining-room. What a cheek she has."

"Perhaps she didn't know you were here."

"Didn't you tell her I was coming?"

"Oh, yes, but she might have forgotten."

"Forgotten I was here? She has no manners! Ring up Keith Mackay to-morrow."

"Couldn't you ring him yourself, Aunt?"

"I hate using the telephone. It is such a pest, putting on my glasses, and taking them off, and remembering the number. I usually ring somebody else."

That evening, Nemo and Val had a chat.

"You're in the soup now," said Nemo.

"Yes, well in," sighed Val.

"She's not going to like Miss Mercer."

"No."

"It won't be very nice playing buffer."

"No."

"Well, you've got two good examples of self-expression before you. Why don't *you* try a little instead of being a blessed peace-maker."

"What am I going to do about Keith?" groaned Val.

"Nothing," said Nemo. "Just play a non-committal

part—you know, just as if you were a dumb waiter—whatever that is. Let Aunt and Keith fight it out themselves.'

But Aunt Jean had a say in that.

"Arrange a suitable time, Val, when you are at home. I can't be trailing down those stairs to the door. They are far too steep. Why isn't there a carpet on them?"

"Keith mightn't come here. You should go to the office."

"It will take me fully a week to recover from the journey up here. He'll come."

Next day, Val rang his office and acted the "non-committal."

"Could I speak to Mr. Mackay?"

"Just a moment, please. Who is speaking?"

Val hesitated. "Miss Jean Nelson."

Presently she heard the familiar voice.

"Are you there, Miss Nelson?"

"Yes, it really isn't Miss Nelson," stammered Val. "It's Valerie Castle."

"Ah! Yes—Miss Castle?"

"Aunt wishes to see you, Mr. Mackay. Would it be possible for you to come here? She is rather upset after the journey."

"Well—is it urgent?"

Val giggled. "Mine not to reason why."

Keith Mackay laughed.

"To-morrow? Will that suit? About four?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mackay. It's 60a Fitzherbert Terrace."

"Thank you. Goodbye, Miss Castle."

Greatly relieved that the conversation was over, Val put on the receiver. She went to her Aunt's room.

"He's coming at four, to-morrow."

"Who?"

"Keith Mackay."

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to ring him? I hadn't decided the time."

"Holy Moses!" gasped Nemo.

Meanwhile Margery had been lying very low.

She did not approve of this arrival of Aunt Jean. She was going about with a heavy scowl on her face.

"Bah!" she said to Val. "I wish a breek would fall on my heed when I'm going along the Quay."

"What for?" inquired Val.

"To get in my box," snarled Margery.

Val took special care with the old flat the next day, and made it gay with flowers.

"Are you getting up for Keith, Aunt?" she asked as she brought in the lunch tray.

"No. I am going to rest all day. If I am asleep when he calls, just show him into the sitting-room. I want to change my bed-jacket, and put on my bloomers. I always like them on when there's a man in the room. It makes one feel more respectable."

A little after four, Val heard him ring.

"Non-committal," said Nemo.

"Oh!" groaned Val. "How can I face him? What the devil does non-committal mean?"

She ran downstairs, and opened the door.

There he was, tall, dark, more aloof-looking than ever.

"Will you come in?" she asked.

"How are you, Miss Castle?" He held out his hand.

"I—I don't know—I mean yes—I am very well, thank you. Will you please come upstairs?"

"Thank you."

He followed her up the steep stairway. At the sitting-room door she paused and turned to him.

"Will you sit in here for a minute? I shall tell Aunt you are here."

"So you have brought all your treasures up with you," he said, looking round the pretty room.

"Oh, yes," replied Val. "Excuse me a moment." She escaped to tell her aunt of his arrivel.

"Here, is he?" Aunt Jean sat up slowly. "What a humbug. Hand me that dressing-jacket, Val. Throw this one in the bottom of the wardrobe. Give me the hand-

mirror. I can't be bothered putting on my pants. It's too hot."

At last she was ready, and Val went back for Keith. She found him examining her bookcase.

"You have a nice place here," he said.

"Oh, yes," answered Val. "I make the best of it. Aunt is ready. Will you have a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you. I must get back to the office as soon as possible."

"Will you be able to find your way out?"

"Why?"

"Because I mightn't be here. I—I might go out to do some shopping."

She saw the old flash of anger in his eyes.

"Certainly," he replied coldly.

"Pooh," said Nemo. "He's as bad-tempered as ever. Wants me here to—to lick his boots as he goes out!"

Instead of buying her fruit in Molesworth Street, Val went right into the city, and did not come home until a quarter to six.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Jean. "Where have you been?"

"I went into town."

"I'm certain Keith couldn't find his way out. I heard him go along the passage to your bedroom."

"Well, he's not there now."

"Served him right," said Nemo. "Thank heaven it was tidy."

"What did you go to town for?" asked Aunt Jean.

"I got some eggs."

"Did you?" Aunt Jean was very fond of eggs.

"Will you have one now?"

"Yes, well-boiled. Were there many Americans about?"

"Dozens. They looked as if they needed pressing."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, their uniforms are rather creased, but," she

added with a laugh, " the Wellington girls will soon rectify that."

" What do you mean ?"

" Do the pressing."

" Keith says his wife always has bad health."

" Really ? She doesn't look very strong. I'll make your tea now, Aunt," and Val escaped.

XIII. HARD WORK ISN'T EASY—AND NELL.

" I'M leaven'." Sitting in Val's bedroom, Margery made her tragic announcement.

" Are you, Margery ?"

" Yes. I've got a place of my own. The char's got something at last."

" Have a cigarette ?" asked Val. " Where is it ?"

" Thanks. Back of a shop in Molesworth Street," replied Margery, taking the cigarette.

" Ah, well, it is nice for you to have your own place," said Val sympathetically.

" Yes—but there's no bathroom."

" Oh ! Will you still be working here ?"

" Nowh ! I'm goin' to leave."

" Quite a complete change. What are you going to do ?"

" War work."

" That will be interesting. Where, may I ask ?"

" I'm not sure yet."

" Well, it will be a change."

After a long time Margery left the room.

" Phew ! You are going to be in a fix now. No help."

"I'll manage somehow," said Val. She laughed. " Margery's seems to be a queer sort of flat—no bathroom, and the lav. somewhere else—downstairs, I think she said, in someone else's flat. Good heavens !"

When Aunt Jean heard the news, she was unperturbed.

"She wasn't much good. You can easily do the work, Val, when you come home from school. It is no use expecting me to do it. I pay my board."

Robin laughed when he heard.

"Thank God! I couldn't stand her. You're well rid of Margerine, Val."

But Val wasn't so sure. Margery had been very useful. In the mornings she had worked downstairs for the landlady of the whole house, and in her spare time had sometimes worked for Val, who always gave her three shillings a week, odd meals, and occasionally clothing.

"You'll be all right," said Nemo. "Somehow, you'll manage. You have been lucky since you came to Wellington."

"Ah, well, I suppose so," sighed Val. "It will take the fat off me."

But in the meanwhile, Val found the work hard. She cut her lunch the night before, rose before six every morning, and by the time she had left for school, had done two hours' work. Twice she caught 'flu, but Aunt Jean was adamant. She was perfectly sure each time she was going to get it, and *she was delicate*. It was impossible for *her* to do the work, or wait on anyone, so Val waited on her. She always hurried home after school, shopping on the way. Aunt Jean could not go out when it was stormy, and when it was fine, if one is delicate, one must get all the sun possible, not spend one's time in shops. Miss Mercer and she always wanted to be in the bathroom at the same time, and when one wasn't in, the other was.

"Surely you ought to be able to use your own bathroom," said Nemo.

"Apparently impossible," said Val.

Meanwhile Robin had been called up, but as he had been at the last war, he was not to go overseas.

"Nell says," said Val to her aunt, "that a sister receives no allowance. Robin only gets seven shillings a day."

"Why isn't he an officer? He's clever."

"I don't know. It seems as if things are all wrong. I

heard of one case where the headmaster of a big high school is a private, and the caretaker an officer."

"Ridiculous. Pass the butter, Val." They were having a meal. "I am going out in the park immediately after lunch. If one isn't out early on a Saturday, it's impossible to get the best seat."

"Yes, I suppose so. Do you know, Nell says that although a sister gets no allowance when a man's called up, it will be given to a woman who has been living for a year with a man."

"That's not true. I don't believe it," declared Aunt Jean.

"How do you know for certain?" laughed Val. "Nell says it is. I suppose the population must be maintained."

"I don't believe it. I must get out while the sun is shining."

"There always seems to be sun on a Saturday," whispered Nemo.

XIV. WAR IN NEW ZEALAND—AND THE LODGER.

THERE was a loud ring at the front door.

"That's our bell," said Val, standing up from the tea table. "Wonder who it is?"

Running downstairs, she opened the door to find Robin smiling at her. He was in battle-dress.

"I've had my tea," he said.

"Never mind. You can always have another cup—light reinforcements."

They went upstairs to the little dining-room where Aunt Jean was seated at the table.

"Hullo," said Robin. "How are you?"

"Hullo," said she, smiling at him. She liked Robin. "I am fairly well."

"I'll get you a cup," said Val, disappearing for a moment.

During the evening, after Val had washed the dishes, the topic of conversation was Ireland.

"One of my sisters," laughed Val, "was terribly Irish. She used to say to me, 'You! You're the John Bull of the family.'"

"Queer how in the same family different nationalities seem to appear," remarked Robin.

"Yes. She used to say, 'Thank God, I'm *truly* Irish!'"

"England now just seems to allow Ireland to do as she likes."

"Yes," replied Val. "She's a pet."

"I suppose," said Robin, "England is making up for past injustices. But I suppose there are dozens of Irishmen fighting for England."

"I read in the paper where De Valera or somebody said they would fight any soldiers who landed there, but I think that if any Germans arrived, they'd be jolly glad for the British to come to their assistance."

"Some bombs did fall there—killed two girls—and a cow," laughed Robin. "Of course, the North is different."

"Yes. I remember an old friend of ours who had lived on the border of Ulster, saying that on Orangeman's day—in July, I think, the Orangemen used to come round, and thrusting an orange flag in at the door, shout out, 'To Hell with the Pope and Popery,'" chuckled Val.

"What a cheerful greeting," laughed Robin. "But I bet on St. Patrick's Day, the Southern Irish gave *them* a cheery greeting."

"You bet your life," said Val. "I hope to goodness we don't have to greet the Japs. They are making shelters down in the gully at the back—tunnels. Is'nt war horrible?"

"Yes, but inevitable."

Keith, too, had called, one Saturday afternoon, resplendent in an officer's uniform. Val, who admitted him, looked at him admiringly.

"A soldier to-day," she exclaimed.

"Yes. I am going into camp. I thought I would like to see your aunt before I go."

"Not me?" asked Val mischievously.

His eyes flashed angrily.

Val laughed. She was now free.

"You always were impossible," he said, and then his eyes softened, and he, too, laughed.

"But you aren't going overseas?" inquired Val.

"No, I do not think so."

"Of course, I know somebody must go," she sighed, "but I'm glad you are not. I'm afraid I'm not a Joan of Arc. I hate to see anybody go."

"So I am included with the multitude."

"No—not quite. Excuse me. I shall tell Aunt you are here."

That night Val and Nemo conversed.

"Love is a queer thing," said Val.

"Unfathomable," said Nemo.

"You can be in *love* with a person without *liking* them."

"Explain yourself," commanded Nemo. "In educational language, express yourself."

"Well," said Val slowly, "I am very friendly with Robin—but—"

"Say it, nimcompoop," commanded Nemo.

"I won't admit it even to you!" cried Val.

"Don't worry your fat," laughed Nemo. "You're still in love with Keith."

"A decent woman can't be in love with a married man," protested Val.

"Well, you are," jibed Nemo. "Silly fool."

"Anyhow," said Val cheerfully, "it doesn't matter. Robin has to look after Nell, and Keith's married. So there, Smarty! The proper state of life for me is spinsterhood—anyway, for the duration!"

Meanwhile Aunt Jean and Miss Mercer had been waging a sort of private war over the bathroom territory.

"Is *she* in the bathroom?" asked Miss Mercer, one evening.

"I beg your pardon?" said Val.

"Is your aunt in the bathroom?"

"I believe she is," was the cold reply.

Miss Mercer was really becoming too tiresome. If Val were going out, she, being jealous, expressed herself by making rude remarks, and perhaps giving a nasty laugh; sometimes she tried to delay her.

"What a rosebud mouth." Val had been applying lipstick. "You should look in the glass before you go out," and she glared at Val with a straight eye and a crooked one.

"What short skirts you wear," she remarked on another occasion.

"The idea is," explained Aunt Jean, "to upset you when you are going out to enjoy yourself."

"I hate her," said Val.

One evening, as Val was hurrying out, Miss Mercer called to her, "Oh, Miss Castle, do come and show me how to make gravy."

Val flung off her fur coat and ran to the kitchen.

"I'll make it for you."

"No, I want to make it myself."

She daundered round, slowly following Val's directions, and spilling the flour which she had taken from Val's cupboard on the kitchen floor.

"It's all lumpy," she complained.

"You should have made your thickening sooner," replied Val, "and allowed it to stand a while. Keep stirring it, and the lumps may disappear. Take some of them out."

This Miss Mercer proceeded to do, but while lifting the spoon from the pot, dropped some gravy on Val's shoe and stocking.

The grand finale came not long after. One evening, Miss Mercer arrived home in a bad temper and announced that she was going to have a bath and go to bed. Val

avoided the bathroom, and even Aunt Jean waited a while, but at last went in. Val, however, continued to wait, but, feeling tired, began to prepare for bed. She put on the electric jug to make her supper drink, and then went into her room to change into her dressing-gown. This was her usual procedure, and Miss Mercer knew it, so as soon as Val had gone to her bedroom, she dashed into the bathroom and turned on the caliphont for her bath. She then ran to her room to undress. "Are you going to have a bath now?" asked Val as Miss Mercer emerged from her room in a dressing-gown.

"Yes, I am."

"Oh, well, hurry up. I'm tired, and want to go to bed."

"I thought you went to the bathroom at five to ten," retorted Miss Mercer insolently as she walked up the passage.

By the time she returned, Val had made up her mind to endure no more. She waited in the kitchen, which was next to Miss Mercer's room.

"Miss Mercer," she said, "I think you had better look for another room."

"I have one," replied Miss Mercer. "I intended leaving here."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Val.

Next morning, Miss Mercer left a long rigmarole explaining why she was going, and apologising for her behaviour.

In reply to this, Val left a curt note. "Quite all right. Will you please bring in the cream."

Both she and Aunt Jean were really delighted. However, it seemed that Miss Mercer didn't actually want to go. A friend had been asking her for some time to come and share an expensive, unfurnished flat, and Miss Mercer's funds were low.

"If you tell her she can stay, she won't go," said Aunt Jean.

"No," said Val. "I hate her."

"Well," replied Aunt Jean, "I can't say I'm sorry she's going. She is dreadfully ill-bred. She came out here as a domestic servant."

"Who told you that?" inquired Val in amazement.

"I guessed it," said Aunt Jean calmly. "I saw in the paper that a number of girls came out to New Zealand as domestics, and very soon got better positions. She was one of them."

"How do you know?" gasped Val.

"I just thought it out. Didn't she say she was a companion help at first?" Aunt Jean laughed. "She loves boasting, but there never was a word about the voyage. Good reason why."

Meanwhile, Wellington, always bright, had become brighter. Soldiers and marines walked gaily about the street, and the girls were having the time of their lives. The New Zealand soldiers were sturdy; the American marines elegant. The New Zealanders wore battledress; the Americans well-cut tunics. Wellington was like a scene in a comic opera.

One day, as Val was coming down Willis Street, a marine addressed her.

"Where is the nearest florist's?" he inquired. She was carrying a large bunch of flowers. She tried to think.

"Oh—"

"Come and show me! In a hurry?"

"Yes," replied Val. "Just up there, but I saw better ones than these in the Chinaman's."

"Thanks," and with a broad, naughty grin, the marine walked off.

"Silly ass!" said Nemo. "Don't you understand he was only pulling your leg?"

Another day, Val found herself surrounded by three much be-medalled Americans, but managed to escape. She decided that the best plan was never to look in their direction. She heard, however, one contradictory story. A woman whose young daughters had been plaguing her to invite a marine to the house, met a rather harmless-looking

one in the D.I.C. The girls had informed her that every family except theirs had entertained one, so this rather timid lady thought there could be no harm in inviting him.

"Excuse me," she said, smiling sweetly. "We would be very pleased if you came up to see us."

He eyed her coldly. "No, thank you. I will not be coming. My mother warned me about women like you!"

Confused and horrified, she fled. In future, her daughters could fight their own battles with marines.

The earthquakes of the winter had left their marks upon the city, and the beautiful Bascilica, in Hill Street, was still undergoing repairs. One Sunday morning, after Mass, as she came carefully down the steps, it seemed as if an avalanche descended on Val, but she at length realised that it was an American officer who, tripping over a board, had stumbled down the steps. She stumbled down another step herself.

"Oh, pardon me," he said. "I hope I have not hurt you."

"Oh, no," smiled Val. "I'm quite all right. Are you?"

"Yes, quite, thanks. It was that board. I did not notice it." He smiled. "I was looking—somewhere else."

Val walked away, but several times after this little adventure she met him in Molesworth Street, and in Fitzherbert Terrace. He always smiled, and saluted.

"Seems rather nice," she thought. "I'd rather like to talk to him—but—" she laughed, "perhaps his mother has warned him."

One hot afternoon, as she came home with her bags of groceries, they seemed to be badly packed, so she sat down on a seat in the gardens of Fitzherbert Terrace to re-arrange them. Many people were passing to and fro, but busily re-packing the parcels, she took no notice until a voice said, "Hullo! May I sit down? It's very warm."

"Why, of course. I was just re-arranging my bundles. I always have such a load."

"What a pleasant street this is."

"Yes. I often wish I had more time to sit here."

"Are you a busy person?"

"Yes. There always seems too much to do," sighed Val, "I'm afraid I must go now."

"Allow me to carry the load," and the kindly American seized the bags.

"Oh, but I can manage, thank you," said Val.

"Which way?" he asked. "Further down?"

"Yes. I think I'd better take the eggs," she replied, rescuing them.

"All right. I don't want to do any damage."

"You speak differently from the other Americans."

"Do I? My mother was an Englishwoman, and I was educated in England—mostly."

"We cross over, now. That's the gate there. Would you—I mean could I give you a cup of tea?"

"Well, that is exceedingly kind of you." He beamed down on her.

Thus it began. From the first, Aunt admitted he was an agreeable man, not quite young, but certainly very useful. He often appeared, bringing fruit and chocolates, took them both out to dinner, and to the pictures; besides, he could repair things so easily.

"You should be an engineer, not a soldier," laughed Val.

"I am an engineer," he replied.

XV. MRS. MATTHEWS, MARGERY, AND A RING.

"VAL, I need a new pair of stockings. Take my coupon book, and run into Kirk's and get me a pair."

"But I'm making the raspberry jam this morning, Aunt."

"It won't take you long to go in to Kirk's. Do try to be obliging."

"Well, I'd better go now and do the jam this afternoon."

So off Val set for Kirk's, armed with the coupon book, and written instructions concerning the stockings.

As she was leaving the shop, a woman grabbed her by the arm :

" Val ! How glad I am to see you ! How are you ?"

" Mrs. Matthews ! How are you ?"

" Very well, indeed. I'm on my way to Veen's again. She's not well."

" Why, what is wrong ?"

Mrs. Matthews laughed. " Too much self-expression—not on her part. Even her husband has had enough. He is going to send all the children to a boarding-school next year."

" That will be a good thing."

" Yes, indeed. Self-expression is simply the key to licence. Those children are utterly unruly. Thank God I'm Irish and can see the funny side. Do you know what brought things to a head ?"

" No."

" Well, one day at lunch, Hec sprang up in his chair, waving his arms about and shouting that he was in a jeep. Veen told him to sit down, and how do you think the little scamp expressed himself ?"

" Heaven only knows," laughed Val.

" He threw his fork at her, and it stuck in Veen's forehead !"

" Good gracious ! Was she badly hurt ?"

" Fortunately not, but it taught her husband a lesson. They are all off to school next year. Is that twelve ? I must fly. No one will serve me."

Val strolled up the Quay and Willis Street, paid a visit to St. Mary's, and waited for the tram at Perritt's Corner. The first one that came along, a Karori, was packed with children, apparently going for a picnic to the Gardens, so she waited for the next. It, too, was crowded, but after hesitating a few seconds, she decided to take it to the " Horse." She hurried to the back entrance, but it moved off, the girl conductor looking down at her as if she utterly

loathed her. Away went the tram, and Val returned to the footpath.

"I'm glad you didn't try to get on that tram," said an elderly man. "It is dangerous when they are moving."

"Did you notice the way the conductor looked at me?" asked Val, feeling rather indignant.

"I don't think she was the conductor of that tram. The conductor was in front. Otherwise, she'd have waited for you."

"Oh, no she wouldn't."

"If it were a man, he'd have waited."

"No—not up here."

The old chap laughed. "If he were a dark man, he would."

Val laughed.

"Dark men like fair women, and fair women like dark men," he said.

Another tram drew up, and Val, still laughing, escaped from the kindly old romanesque.

In Molesworth Street, she encountered Margery, or, as Robin called her, Margerine.

"How's Margery?" asked Val.

"Middlin'. Might be better."

"Where are you working now, Margery?"

"Gover'ment Life Clean."

"Been having any fun with the marines, Margery?"

"How did y' know?"

"Just guessed."

Margery laughed in a sardonic manner.

"I went out with one—round to the gardens. He became fresh—went to kiss me."

"What was more natural?" asked Val with a smile.

"Do y' know what A-did?"

"No?"

"Bit him with my good strong teeth."

"Margery! Did you hurt him?"

"A hope so. It bled."

"You little savage! Well, I must be off. Once bitten twice shy, Margery."

"A guess he will be," chuckled Margery.

It was nearly three when Val put on her raspberries. Fortunately, she had only three pounds. They were too expensive to buy more, and besides, sugar was scarce. She had put a cupful of water with the berries and was stirring diligently, hoping all would be well, when a pleasant voice said, "Any assistance required?"

"Rather," laughed Val. "Are you a good hand at jam?"

"Unequalled."

"Credentials?"

"I am going to win my spurs this afternoon. It is very warm in here."

"Assistants are permitted to remove their coats," said Val.

"Ah, that's better. Now what shall I do?"

"Sit on that stool, and observe."

"May I smoke?"

"Certainly. Ah, it is boiling."

"Could you have a cigarette now? The crisis is past, isn't it?" he asked, holding out his case.

"Thank you, but I have some of my own here," said Val, taking them from the shelf.

"Have one of mine. They're much better," he laughed.

"I'd like to contradict you, but I can't, Major Donovan."

"I've something else here for you—but I'm afraid to show it to you."

"I told you not to be bringing things," she said sternly.

"I didn't buy it."

Val laughed. "Did you come by it honestly?"

"Yes."

"Do you think the sugar and fruit has been boiling three minutes? I forgot to look at my watch."

"Give it another minute for luck and then I shall show you what I have brought."

" I'm dying to see it—but I don't say I'll take it," replied Val. " You shouldn't be bringing things here. Is it something to eat ?"

" Greedy !"

" I'm dying to see it. Where is it ?"

" In my trouser pocket."

" Can't be very big."

" No."

" Show me, Major Donovan."

He laughed. " Say, ' Show me, Brian.' "

" That's silly."

" Say it."

" Show me, Brian."

" With pleasure." Standing up, he took from his pocket a ring.

" A ring !" gasped Val.

" Yes. Try it on."

" My hands are sticky."

" They'll wash, won't they ?"

" I—I don't know. Yes. I suppose so, but—"

" But what ?"

" I couldn't take a ring !"

He caught her hand, and slid the ring on her engagement finger.

" Looks well," he said with a laugh, " jam and all."

" It is beautiful," said Val. " What a glorious emerald, and those sweet, tiny pearls round it."

" It was my mother's," said Brian. " I've always intended it for my wife."

" But—but I was just being polite to—to an ally !"

" And I've fallen in love with one."

" But—I wasn't trying to marry you !"

" If you were, I probably shouldn't be here. Val, is there someone else ?"

" I—I really don't know. It—it is a thing I've tried to smother."

" Why ?"

" He's married."

"I thought he lived with his sister."

"Oh, no! That's Robin."

"He's the one I was afraid of."

"I'm simply bewildered," said Val. "I simply couldn't go and live in America by myself."

"I'd be there, Val. I'll tell you what to do. You keep the ring for a week—in your pocket, and think the matter over."

"Suppose I lost it."

"I shall risk that." He suddenly caught her to him and kissed her. "I must go. I'm on duty." He looked down at her very tenderly. "I'm very fond of you, Val."

"Would I have to get up at five to six?"

He looked at her sternly. "If I found you up at that hour of the morning, I'd give you what you deserved—a good spanking, and put you to bed!"

She laughed. "That would be all right, then. And give me my breakfast?"

"Of course. Well?"

"I—I will consider the matter."

"The ring is a bit too loose. I shall get it made smaller."

Val laughed. "Perhaps."

"I must go, Val." He again caught her and kissed her, grabbed his coat, pulled it on, and hurried away.

With the ring on her finger, Val turned back to stir the jam, and it fell into the hot, sticky depths.

"Horrors! What shall I do?" she gasped.

"Bottle it like lightning," said Nemo.

Using a jug as bail, she began, and at the third dip, brought up the ring, which she washed, and was examining carefully when Aunt Jean's voice said. "What is that?"

"Oh, just a ring."

"Where did you get it?"

"In the jam?"

"Does it belong to the Chinaman?"

"No."

"Did Major Donovan give it to you?"

"Yes. I am just looking after it for a week."

"Let me see it." Val handed it to her.

"That ring is worth hundreds," said Aunt Jean.

"Yes, it's a good one."

"Take care you don't lose it. If you do, you could never afford to pay for it. You would simply have to marry him."

That night, in the presence of the ring, Val conversed with Nemo.

"Well, you know, he's one of the allies. I had to be kind to him. Besides," she giggled, "he fell on me."

"He's very nice," suggested Nemo. "Taller and better-looking than Keith—not quite so dark, but much better tempered."

"Yes, to everything."

"What about Robin?"

"He is my good friend."

"You know," said Nemo, "that in your heart of hearts, you really despise Keith."

"I suppose I do."

"He is too bad-tempered—selfish. Brian would make a much better husband—if you want one."

"That's it," groaned Val. "If I do."

"You know perfectly well you like men," said Nemo sternly.

"Guilty."

"Well—let yourself go—don't be a fool—marry him."

"Bah! I don't have to decide to-night. I've a whole week! So there!"

XVI. A DELIGHTFUL AFTERNOON.

On Sunday afternoon, Val had arranged to meet her little friend, Mrs. Dunstan, at the "Horse"—the War Memorial. When she arrived there, she could see no sign of her friend, but suddenly espied a small person running about in the middle of the road—busily dodging motor cars. At the Government buildings, they caught an Island Bay tram which as it proceeded along the Quay, up Willis Street, through Courtenay Place, Newtown, and Berhampore, became so crowded that neither regretted their mistake in alighting too soon. They had a considerable distance to walk before they arrived at the small street which led up to the Convent of the Sacred Heart—a big concrete house, standing well back in its own garden.

On the way, Mrs. Dunstan told Val that the husband of a friend of hers had called at her house, requesting her to visit his wife who had just undergone an operation. He said her throat was sore, but that she had told the nurse she wished to see Mrs. Dunstan because she would talk all the time.

"Well," had said Mrs. Dunstan, "how can I help it, when I live with him?" she pointed to her very silent, but kindly husband.

The first nun they saw was a frail, small Frenchwoman deeply interested in mission work.

"We have a number of Mission sisters staying here at present. They are here because they are short of accommodation in their own home in Aurora Terrace. The Americans have just brought back nine sisters from the Solomons. They are living in their own home at present. That is why these are here. Poor things! All they had when they arrived in Auckland was their white gowns over their nightgowns. The sisters in Auckland noticed they had no luggage, and lent them rugs."

"Gracious!" gasped Val. "I think I'd have put my pants on even if I were in a great hurry!"

The little mother laughed. "So would I," she said, and added, "I slept in mine for two nights after the earthquake."

Mrs. Dunstan, who had once lived in the Islands, said, "They must have lost all their clothing, and it is valuable over there. I heard of one little native boy who carefully took the cover off an old umbrella and made a larger hole in it. He wore it."

"Quite the latest fashion," laughed Val. "A pleated skirt. I remember your telling me that you saw a small boy marching off to church with a tunic made out of a flour bag. He had 'Roller Oats,' or something printed on his back."

All the visitors in the big parlour were served with a simple afternoon tea, but the nuns themselves did not partake of it. Mrs. Dunstan and Val accepted the invitation to stay to Benediction, at which a priest, also from the Solomons, officiated. The beautiful chapel with its lights and flowers was to Val a dream of peaceful loveliness.

Afterwards they went back to the parlour to talk to Sister Martin, whose prayers Val greatly valued, for it seemed to her, so great was this nun's trust in God that He could not refuse her requests. In the parlour, Val met an old friend, Miss Brown, who was visiting her sister, who was a Mother of the Order.

From outside came sounds of merry laughter and conversation.

"Is it the children?" asked Val in surprise, for it was holiday time.

It was the nuns themselves, both Sacred Heart and Mission Sisters, bound for a walk to the hilltop at the back of the convent.

"It's a wonderful life," said Val, as she and her friend walked down to the tram. "They are wrapped in the glory of God."

XVII. TEACHERS TALK

Miss Brown was a superannuated teacher, so naturally, she and Mrs. Pen, who was an infant mistress, talked school when dining with Val and her Aunt Jean.

"Everything seems in a perfect muddle," said Pen. "No one knows now-a-days what to do."

"I'm glad to have retired," said Miss Brown. "I was an infant mistress, Mrs. Penfold. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I honestly thought children were happier working than playing. They love doing things they understand. They were thrilled to get a chalk 'C' on their slate."

"They still are," Mrs. Pen spoke with assurance.

"Then surely," said Val, "by not allowing infant children to work, we are denying them happiness."

"Yes," replied Miss Brown, "and doing them a great injustice."

"But I do not believe in strain," said Val. "I remember when I was in the Training College, seeing the Infant Mistress strap a child thirteen times because the poor, bewildered, little thing kept on saying, 'Top right hand corner,' instead of 'top left hand corner.' I felt positively sick. I remember she used to put her arm around me. Ugh! How I loathed her. Fancy a woman like that being paid to show me how to teach. God forbid."

"Well," said Pen, "about the highest graded woman I know is the biggest liar that ever walked, and the biggest sneak."

"How does she work it?" asked Val.

"Crawls."

"Of course," said Miss Brown, "it is very hard for an inspector to judge. He is only a man," she laughed. "I remember one following me around the room, telling me indecent jokes."

"Good heavens! Fancy being judged by a man like that! One wouldn't have a chance."

"I might," chuckled Pen.

"An inspector once told me that it was not method that counted. It was personality. I am inclined to think it would be much better for them to judge by method, and," Val laughed, "leave personality alone."

"Of late years, it seems to me that sheer selfishness is mistaken for personality," remarked Pen.

"I think there are two kinds of personality," said Miss Brown, "one the kind that pushes forward—selfseeking—and the other, unobtrusive—quiet, really great. However," she added, "I do think that on the whole, inspectors have improved. I remember when I was a pupil-teacher, one telling me to place myself on the apex of a right-angled triangle."

"Sounds like a circus," chuckled Val.

"I remember one who was a dreadful old pig," put in Aunt Jean. "He used to make the teachers cry. I remember once sitting for an examination, and the whole time, he galloped up and down the room in squeaky boots. The girl next me whispered, 'Not paid for.'"

Pen was chuckling to herself.

"What is it, Pen? Out with it," commanded Val.

"When I was a young teacher," Pen confessed, "and was teaching up in the country, an inspector offered to drive me into town on Friday night." Her lips were quivering with amusement. "I was thrilled. When we came to a lonely, bushy part of the road, he stopped the car and asked me if I would like to get out."

"What did you say?"

"'No, thank you,' very primly, but I've wondered ever since what his intentions were."

"Ah, well, Pen, one can't have large, shining brown eyes, wavy brown-black hair, and a fine figure, and not expect to get into scrapes—even with inspectors," laughed Val.

XVIII. THE STRENGTH OF A WELLINGTON RAT AND AN EYEGLASS.

"THERE he is," cried Aunt Jean. "Do you hear him?"

"Yes, I must do something about him."

"What will you do? I heard him this afternoon. I hit the wall, and he went away."

"I must see if Mrs. Goldie has some poison. I'll go down now." Val went off in search of the landlady.

Men were tunnelling down in the gully at the back, and the disturbed rats were coming into the house. The bathroom seemed to be their Mecca, and they seemed to have a special fancy for scented soap.

"I killed one this afternoon," said Mrs. Goldie, her eyes gleaming with excitement.

"Did you really?"

"Yes. If you could only corner it, you could easily kill it with a shovel."

"I thought you might have some poison," said Val feebly.

"I believe I have a tin somewhere. I wonder if I can find it? I saw a rat this afternoon on the window of Miss Gay's kitchenette. I threw a rug over it, and knocked it down. The rug was on top of it, and I stood on it."

"Good gracious!"

"Then I finished it off with the shovel."

"I'm quite sure I could never do that," sighed Val, so the poison, which was advertised as that used to kill off rats in the Port of London, was made into a nice sandwich and left in the bathroom. For three nights in succession the rat came and took his supper. Mrs. Goldie thought that it was a different rat that came each night, but Val doubted this hereditary instinct, and on the fourth night, traps were set. On the Thursday morning, there he lay, the hero who out-did in strength the rats of the Port of

London, the virile Rat of Wellington. He was lying clear of the trap, in a pool of blood. Apparently, it had struck him on the head as he was enjoying his sandwich. Holding her breath, Val shovelled him up, threw him out the kitchen window, terrified he might revive, and then dashing downstairs, and out into the yard, shovelled him into the incinerator and set fire to him. Ugh! What a relief. She felt happy all day.

On her way home, in the afternoon, she called at the laundry. The old Chinaman answered her ring, and, as usual, could not find her bundle. He was very old and ragged, wearing two much be-fringed jerseys. At last, he went for the younger man, who soon found the parcel.

"The other man does not see too well," remarked Val.

"No," said the younger man. "He need the eyeglass."

"Ah, yes," replied Val, visioning the old man wielding a supercilious eyeglass.

"He will not understand that every few year he need the respectable changed," went on the young Chinaman.

Still smiling, Val left the laundry.

"Loaded as usual," said Brian, overtaking her in Molesworth Street. "Give me those bundles."

"Willingly," laughed Val. "I was just wishing I had a third hand. I have a few more to collect. This Wellington air produces terrifying appetites."

Brian merely deposited the goods on the kitchen table, kissed her, and hurried away.

"Was that Brian Donovan?" asked Aunt Jean, coming out of the sitting-room.

"Yes."

"I was lying down resting."

"Oh."

"You'd better marry him, Val. Our future will be secure."

"How do you know? What do you mean?"

"I have had enquiries made about him."

"*What*?"

"One has to be sensible now-a-days. I went to Father Burke, and he made the necessary enquiries."

"Aunt, how *dare* you?"

"My dear child, I know the world. It is quite all right. His father owns the great firm of Donovan and Son—engineers—worth millions. Extraordinary, Brian has not married long ago. I'm sure dozens must have chased him."

"However can I face him after this?"

"After what?"

"After these enquiries."

"Pooh! I did it for your sake."

"He'll think I'm marrying him for his money!"

"Then you are going to marry him?"

"No, I'm not! I simply can't marry him now!"

"Pooh!" said Aunt Jean. "He'll have a say in that!"

XIX. BACK TO SCHOOL.

"Doesn't it make you sick, Val?"

"Yes. When I see the big notices in the shop windows, I feel inclined to throw stones at them."

"It's bad enough to know that the holidays are at an end, without all the business places rubbing it in."

"You know, Robin," said Val seriously, "I believe it's a subtle trick. Everybody hates school teachers, and perhaps it's just a form of torture. How lucky you are."

"Do you know, Val, I'm sick of camp? If it weren't for Nell, I'd volunteer for overseas. Go to the Islands."

"Don't be silly. You might get a bullet in you."

"Oh, well—I'm sick of the camp. I was at the last war, and I've been in camp for over a year. I want to go back to school!"

"Robin, are you going insane?"

He laughed. "Perhaps I am."

"Well," said Val, "why don't you see someone about it?"

"About what? Being insane? They'd just say I always was."

"No. That doesn't matter very much. Seems to me everyone is insane nowadays. About getting out of camp. Our coalman told me he had been in camp since he last called—eight months."

"Who could I see?"

"What about an inspector? Just talk it over with him. Is there anyone you like?"

"I might do that." Robin picked up a *Woman's Journal* and began to read it.

Val had returned to school and was settling down again, just as if there had been no holidays. Things seemed bright, for the war news was good. Even Miss Sanders, a pessimist, was hopeful, but at the first hint that all was not well in the Solomons, she began to groan. The little caretaker was brimful of cheerfulness. He loved to tease Miss Sanders.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked her.

"No-o! What?" she asked in a voice of dread.

"The Germans have taken Berkin!"

"Ha!" laughed Val. "You'll soon be saying the R.A.F. have taken it!"

After lunch, the lady teachers sat out as usual in the sun.

"I've spent the entire morning telling my children to stop talking," said Miss White.

"Something attempted—nothing done," chuckled Miss Benfell.

"Bah!" said Miss Sanders, "would it not be better not to bother? Far better to say triumphantly, 'Nothing attempted—nothing done!'"

"That's me," said Val. "I simply feel futile. I can't cope with the modern child. Whatever makes them talk so incessantly?"

"This is a loquacious age," replied Miss Benfell. "Everybody's talking—except Hitler."

"I'm quite sure not even the R.A.F. could silence the children in my room," said Miss White.

"They are just not interested in school work," said Miss Benfell. "Too much play. My niece would never have learned to read if we had not taught her at home."

"Neither would mine," said Miss White. "She really thought she went to school to learn to play!"

"Education is in a fearful muddle," said Val. "I think they ought to close the schools until they get things straightened out. A business man told me the young things in his office simply don't know the words—let alone the spelling and the meaning."

"Education has gone to the dogs," groaned Miss Sanders.

"The old education was too hard—interesting only to the very intelligent—the clever. The aim seemed to be to make a University professor," said Miss Benfell.

"You behold the complete result in me," said Miss Sanders. "I am getting a job at Victoria College as Professor of Heterogeneity."

"What's your salary?" asked Miss Benfell.

"They haven't finished adding it yet, because every time they announce it I think of another subject, and that makes another plus."

"Don't forget to include Spelling," said Miss White, who taught Standard I.

"I think education should be a pleasant—simple—without strain," said Val.

The senior woman guffawed. "On the teacher."

"Without strain on the teacher, or on the pupil."

"What an inspector you would make!" said Miss Benfell.

"God forbid!"

"I went to a New Educational meeting the other night," laughed Miss White. "One of the teachers there said that in her class she had a child who did not wish to write, and the opinion of the meeting was, 'Why should he?'"

"Educationists of to-day are simply daft," declared Miss Sanders. "One can't carouse along the road to learning."

"Then you don't believe in a simple, pleasant method?"

"No! Slit their throats if they don't know their A B C!"

"Ugh!" said Val. "I've a new corselette. It has the suspenders too far back. I'm sitting on them. Talk of Calais on one's heart—"

"It will be 'Berlei,'" laughed Miss Benfell.

"On your hindquarters," said Miss Sanders. "I am a martyr to duty. I am going inside to mark the blasted compositions."

XX. THE U.S.A. WINS.

"THERE'S no need to argue or discuss the point, Nemo," said Val to herself on Friday night. "Tomorrow. I give back the ring. Yes, all you say is true. Beside him, Keith is just a bad-tempered stick, and Robin," her lips curved in a little smile, "Robin is just—Robin—unique. I can't marry a man with all that money—especially after what Aunt has done."

"You'll never get such another chance."

"Well, then, I can remain a spinster. Lots of them are very happy. I'll always have my superan."

"Yes, but you hate teaching."

"I can always look forward to the holidays."

"And the winter."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Now that Norbert has decided to become a priest—"

"Well, can't I get a year off and go Home to see him? And when I come back I'll pose as a great authority on something, and get a job with a big salary. See!"

"You're an utter fool," said Nemo.

"I'm not. I have the wisdom of the serpent. Married people often get divorced, and if they don't, they have a

husband to worry over—and endless children to worry about."

Val laughed as she thought of a joke. A teaching nun who went to Confession told the priest that she had been cross with her children.

"How many have you?" asked he.

"Fifty-one," was the amazing reply.

"Come back again when you're sober," said he.

Still chuckling, she remembered another joke told her by the same woman: Two sailors who had been gaily riding the high seas for many years, having come to port, decided to go to Confession. The priest who was hearing happened to be deaf and used an ear trumpet.

The first Jack Tar went into the confessional, and after a quarter of an hour, came out, breathless with excitement.

"Tom! Tom!" he whispered hoarsely to his mate, "come away! He's broadcasting it!"

She decided that it would be fun to sleep with the ring on her finger for the night, and in case it slipped off, wore another underneath it. Just before she turned off her light, she stared hard at it, and kissed it. "His wife will never know I loved it—and *him*," she whispered.

Next morning, she was very busy. "Just as well," she told herself. "It would be a great mistake to think." She worked around the flat till ten o'clock, and then went into the city to shop.

"It is a fine day," said Aunt Jean. "I shall just dress, have my lunch, and go out to Oriental Bay."

"That a good idea, Aunt," said Val.

"Thank God," said Nemo.

So immediately after lunch, Aunt Jean set off with her pink parasol, leaving Val the dishes to wash.

"There aren't many dishes," she said. "Perhaps you could come out later on, Val. I want to avoid the crush in the tram, and make sure of a good seat at the beach."

"I won't promise, Aunt. I can get so many odd jobs done on Saturday afternoon," replied Val firmly.

"Surely I am more important than the flat," said Aunt Jean. "You are very selfish."

"Well, I do my best," sighed Val. "You'd better go, Aunt. The trams will be crowded."

Val washed the dishes, swept up the kitchen, set a little afternoon tea table, hurriedly changed her frock, and tidied her hair. She gave the ring another kiss, and put it in her pocket. She wished Brian would come, and get the business over.

"I'll give him tea first," she thought, "as soon as he comes." She even boiled the jug, so there would be no delay.

"Anybody at home? Invasion by the United States."

"Here in the sitting-room," she called. He came hurrying along.

"You look so charming that I can't help it," he laughed, kissing her.

"Sit down and behave in a seemly fashion," she laughed.

"I always do. Tea ready?"

"You are a greedy man."

"Yes, and hungry. I didn't have much lunch."

"Why?"

"I was late."

"Well, excuse me and I'll make the tea."

"Sit down and have a cigarette first. Auntie in or out?"

"Out—gone to Oriental Bay."

"That's splendid. We can have tea by ourselves."

He lit her cigarette, and then stretched himself luxuriously in an armchair.

Val looked at him. How desirable he was—big, handsome, not as dark as Keith, blue eyes instead of grey. There was something so boyish, spontaneous about him. Somehow his presence gave her reassurance, whereas Keith's made her almost nervous.

"Been out this morning?" he asked.

"Yes. I was in the city."

"I thought I caught a glimpse of you." He smiled.

"So you didn't spend the morning making your decision."

"No."

He smoked in silence for a moment.

"Well, are you going to keep the ring?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because it doesn't fit me. It dropped off into the jam."

He gave a short laugh. "Is there a lucky pot?"

"No. I fished it out."

He stood up, crushed out his cigarette, and came over to her. "Give it to me."

Val stood up and took it from her pocket.

"Would you like a better one?"

"Good gracious, no."

"What's the matter, Val?" He put his arm round her. "Don't you like me?"

"Yes—but—"

"But what, honeybud?"

"I—I can't marry you."

"You haven't got another husband, have you?"

She laughed. "Good heavens, no!"

"Why won't I do?"

"I've decided to remain a spinster. I shall get superannuation, so I shall be all right."

"And what about me?"

"Oh, you'll easily find someone else."

"I was a long time finding you, Val. I really thought you liked me. What's the matter?"

"You have too much money."

"How do you know I have?"

"I know."

"Been to a fortune-teller?"

"No."

"Well, you really don't know what I have."

"I do."

"Is it a sin to have money? If I have too much,

couldn't you help me to spend some of it, and then I'd have less ?"

She did not reply.

" Who told you I had money ?"

" I can't tell you."

" Oh, yes, you can. Come on, Val. We must get all this cleared up. But after all, what does it matter ?"

" Yes, but you might think I was marrying you for your money."

" And aren't you ?"

" You know perfectly well I'm not," she protested indignantly.

" Then why *are* you marrying me ?"

" Just—just for yourself."

" You perfect darling !"

PRINTED BY WHITCOMBE & TOMBS LTD.