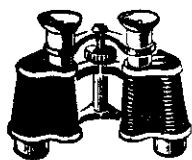
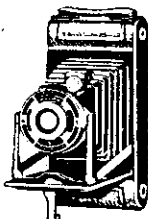


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MACK GETS HIS SWIM

(Written for "The Listener" by O.McK.)



I THOUGHT I'd better cook a hot meal for dinner. There'd been a look in Mack's eye the night before when I placed the cold meat before him. He didn't say anything, but I knew it was there, ready to spill from the end of his tongue any minute. After all, a man will stand so much—and just so much. . . . Yes, I'd cook a nice roast dinner, and an apple pie to follow. A real man's dinner. Mack would be pleased.

Everything was cooked to a turn when he arrived home. "Whew, I'm hot!" he shouted. "Hey, Mum, what about a swim before dinner?"

I sighed. I'd been down on the beach all afternoon with the children.

"But—" I began hastily, "the dinner—"

"It can wait. Too hot to eat, anyway. Come on, kids, let's go down on the beach."

"But the tide's out," I said brightly. "You can't swim now. Come on, have your dinner. It'll spoil if you leave it."

I was most amiable about it, quite reasonable, I thought.

But Mack wasn't in a reasonable mood. He said he wanted a swim, and if there was no water on the beach, we'd go to the baths. "Come on, Mum. Come on, kids, get your togs. We're going to the baths."

Screaming with excitement the kids rushed out to the line to get their costumes.

"Hurry up, Mum, the baths close at six," shouted Mack. "There's a bus just coming."

I hadn't time to change, so snatched a clammy suit from the wash-house where I'd left it, and raced after them.

AS I pounded along I had time to notice that the little fellow had somehow dislodged a couple of buttons. Every few moments he gave his pants a heave. I looked down at my own faded smock which gaped where a button was missing. Certainly not the ideal wife and mother. . . . Oh, well, we were only going to the baths. It was five-thirty when we arrived.

The caretaker gave us a dirty look. Can't go in now, he told us. Close down at six.

Mack said we'd be out easily by six. We just wanted a quick dip.

The caretaker cut him short. We couldn't go in now, he told us, gazing unhappily into space. He closed at six.

"But—" began Mack.

"Come on," I said. I didn't like the look in his eye. "Come on. We'll swim

down by the rocks. There's always water there."

"Too dangerous for the children," said Mack. He glared at the caretaker. The caretaker continued to examine the atmosphere, then spat with careful aim at a surprised beetle.

Son hitched his pants up once more. "I'M GOING TO HAVE A SWIM!" shouted Mack. He swung around, and we followed him to the exit, listening in admiration as he informed the turnstile what he'd like to do to that old So-and-So. He grabbed my arm. I winced.

"Come on. Here comes a bus. We're going to the Tep."

WITH a bruised arm and an unnatural smile, I followed my family on to the bus. It was late shopping night, and I noticed my neighbour, Mrs. Frank, sitting near the front, wearing her green ensemble, which is certainly arresting. I smiled and told her, rather loudly, that we were going to the Tepid Baths. She gave me a pained look, and continued to push her back hair up. I sat with lowered eyes and my dress gaping.

The city was full of smartly-dressed shoppers, and I slunk behind my sprightly family and thought longingly of the long winter evenings when I could sit quietly at home and knit.

We had our swim, and Mack said it was the best he'd had for a long time. He felt a new man. I followed my new man out into the streets again.

"Say," he said suddenly, dipping into his pocket, "How much does that bus cost?"

"Fivepence each for us, and threepence for the children. That's 1/4." Anxiously he counted. "Well, this is a nice how-de-do. Look, I've only 1/2." I snatched it from him. "I'm not walking to please anyone," I told him. "Elevenpence for me and the children. Here's threepence. You can walk a couple of sections and then get the bus."

"Aw, heck!" wailed Mack, "Say, kids, keep your eyes on the ground. Someone might have dropped a threepence."

They were delighted, and we trailed along, eyeing the pavement with avidity, but people had evidently been watching their small change that day. We found no threepence.

A LITTLE churlishly Mack set out to walk to the second section, and we caught a bus ten minutes later. A mile or so down the road we passed a pedestrian, and the children screamed excitedly and informed a bus-load of weary shoppers that that was their father, and that he hadn't enough money to ride in the bus.

(continued on next page)