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AFTER we had worked it out we found that there was about eighty-seven pounds left.

"We could buy something big for that," I said. "It's about time we had something really modern about the place, something slap up to date."

"Look," I said, as we made our way like a couple of threadworms through the crowd in Cuba Street, "I know just what we want. It'll add tone to the place and save you a lot of work. Honest, ma, it'll give you a lot of extra time to sit down and think in."

"What do I want to think about?" said mother.

"How do I know," I said. "Anyway, if you don't want to do that it'll give you plenty of spare time. You'd be able to go to the pictures three or four times a week."

"Would I really?" said mother, letting a small round-faced clerk cannon off her hip. "Well—that sounds better. I do like to be able to go to the pictures now and then. There's a good one on at the Coliseum this week too."

"That's right," I said. "You just take my advice and you'll be able to go and see it every night in the week."

"What is it?" asked mother, standing like a rock in the middle of the footpath and allowing the late shoppers to divide and flow past her.

"A washing-machine," I said. "You know how the tubs are—one leaks and the tap on the other won't turn. And the copper won't draw because of the clay from the bank that's got stuck in it. And the Smiths and the Purviews will be as jealous as get-out if we get one. And it won't be on time payment either, so we wouldn't lose it like the Smiths did their vacuum-cleaner."

"I've heard of them," said mother.

"They're wonderful," I said. "I've read the advertisements about them. They do everything. They just do all the work and they never go wrong. And I know where we can buy one. The latest model."

"Come on," I said. And off we went.

WE entered the shop cautiously, edging past the automatic ironers, the chromium-plated self-ejecting toasters, the vacuum-cleaners, the radios and the refrigerators until we came to the washing-machine department.

"And now, madam," said the counter-jumper, as he flashed his bright eyes and broke his mouth into a welcoming grin, "what can we do for you?"

"Is that a washing-machine?" asked mother.

The counter-jumper rubbed his hands together with pleasure.

"That, madam, is the absolutely latest and best washing-machine in the country. They were only landed a few days ago direct from the manufacturers. Now there are only a few left—my word, they've sold like hot cakes. And they're a new type too—self-regulating, self-emptying, self-filling, self-heating and fitted with extra large rubber wheels

for easy moving. I think you'll find this model absolutely satisfactory, madam."

The young man's cheeks were pink with gusto, he waved his arms and he was on tiptoes with enthusiasm.

"There you are, ma," I said. "That's just what we want. That'll put the Purviews' nose out of joint."

"It does look a lovely one, all right," said mother. "How much do these cost?" she asked the counter-jumper.

"Well," he said, "these were the last shipment to come into the country before the pound rose and the franc sank and the dollar was stabilised and the pengo was absorbed into the sterling area. And that is why we can let them go at the special price of sixty-five pounds cash, or else arrangements can be made to use our confidential system of friendly credit."

"Wipe your chin," I said in an undertone.

"Well," said mother. "I suppose that means that they're sixty-five pounds each. What do you think of that, Henry?"

"I think we ought to hop in now," I said. "Before the pengo goes for another skate. You can never tell with this foreign money."

"We might as well, I suppose," said mother. "After all—we've got the money."

"That's right," I said. "What's the use of hanging on to it. Let it circulate, that's what I say."

So mother paid cash on the nob and the young man, radiant with success, promised to send the washing-machine up on Monday.

IT arrived all right and we had it installed in the kitchen because the wash-house leaked so badly. We sat and looked at it for a long time—it was so white and clean and beautiful. Then we read the directions and plugged it into the light socket and put some water in the place where the water went. Then we turned the switch on and waited again.

"I hope it will be all right," said mother nervously.

"You just leave it to me," I said. "It's as simple as shelling peas. You just put the soap-powder here, and the clothes in here, and there you are. She's all set."

So we just sat down and watched while the clothes were washed.

"It's wonderful," breathed mother. "Ever since your father left us I've been praying for something like this."

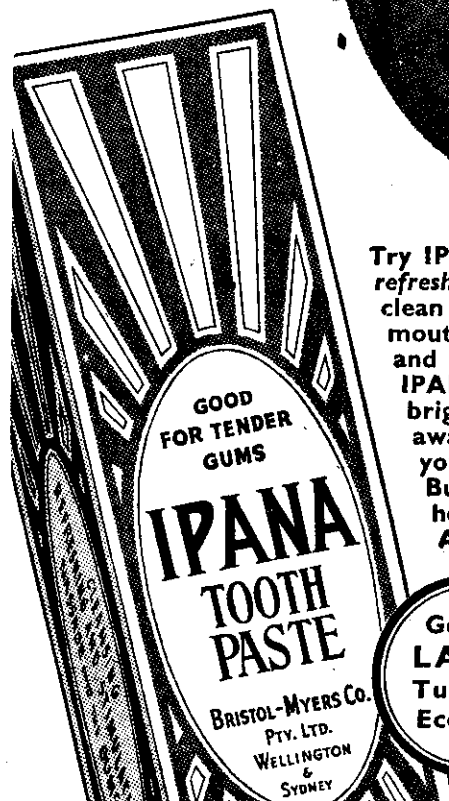
"That's right, mother," I said. "You just go and put your hat on and trot off to the pictures."

"I think I will," she said. "I'll go and see what they've got on at the Megatherium. I believe there's a double feature on there to-day." And off she breezed.

Things were pretty good for some time after that. We had the neighbours on toast—they didn't know what way to look. They just weren't in our class at all. And the washing-machine was a proper dandy. We kept on finding out new things it could do. We found a place you could make toast in; and on the other side there was a little radio built in; if you turned Button B the other way and didn't put any water in you could use it as a stove; while there was a way

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