

SHORT STORY

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NEXT day, at his whare, Sid received visitors. He had discussed the matter with Nancy, and they both agreed that, as Sid wasn't any better than before at getting on with girls, and yet seemed to have developed a fatal magnetism for animals, the chances were there was something wrong with Mrs. Cauldron's potion.

So Nancy rang up Mrs. Cauldron again, and came hurrying down the yard on her bicycle to let Sid know that the witch was coming immediately. Nancy found the door of the whare locked and shutters up against the windows. A host of lovelorn dogs clustered round the door like bobby-soxers round Frankie, and an elderly equine spinster, with portions of a cart trailing from her harness, ogled at Sid through a crack in the shutters. Nancy had to use a subterfuge to get into the whare. It was easy when they thought of it. All Sid had to do was call the animals from the back window of the whare, and when the coast was clear Nancy was able to walk through the front door alone with ease and dignity.

Mrs. Cauldron's methods called for no subterfuge. A moment after Nancy's entry, the door opened and shut so rapidly that the two clicks of the lock were almost simultaneous, and Mrs.

Cauldron was in the room, stepping down with dignity from her vacuum cleaner. "Now then," said Mrs. Cauldron. "What's the trouble about?"

"Mrs. Cauldron," began Sid. "Are you sure you gave me the right vitamin? I still can't do anything with women, but, so help me, if I so much as look an animal in the eye, it's my devoted slave for life."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Cauldron testily. "Vitamin Q couldn't have that effect."

"But you gave me vitamin V!"

"I did?"

"We all heard you," broke in Nancy excitedly. "Even grandfather."

"Leave me out of it," said her grandfather, from the sofa.

Mrs. Cauldron laughed heartily. "Well, well! What do you know about that! Vitamin V!"

"It's a most awkward position to be in," said Sid resentfully. "There's nothing to laugh about. Is there an antidote?"

"Oh, no. But the effect will wear off in a few months."

Nancy made a hopeful suggestion. "Perhaps at any rate you've got some of this vitamin Q?"

"Positively no vitamin Q," said Mrs. Cauldron firmly. "Not even on the black magic market. . . . Well, I'll be seeing you." The vacuum cleaner skirled, the doors opened and shut, and Mrs. Cauldron departed. The fans outside fell

over themselves in alarm, but sorted themselves out and took up again their hymn of love to Sid. Inside the whare there was a bitter pause.

NANCY said softly: "Don't take it so badly, Sid."

"How would you like to be beleaguered by dogs?" asked Sid.

"It's all a question of working out a tactic," said Nancy. "Suppose you let the dogs in the back and nip out of the window. Then you could lock them in, and go out without them."

Sid brightened. Grandfather called querulously from the sofa: "What about me?"

"Don't be selfish, grandfather," pleaded Nancy. "They won't bother you. It's Sid they're in love with."

"Oh, all right," said grandfather, bitterly. "Have it your own way."

Sid sought to mollify him. "Show us your water-colours, grandfather. You were working on one this morning."

Grandfather fell for the line. "That's right!" he agreed enthusiastically. "So I was! The best pinkiephant I've ever seen." He rifled through the pages of his drawing-book. "Look!"

Sid whistled. "Jingoes! Six legs!"

His grandfather was deprecatingly modest. "They're not actually legs. He uses only two of them for walking on. The others are just ornaments. Cute isn't he?"

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