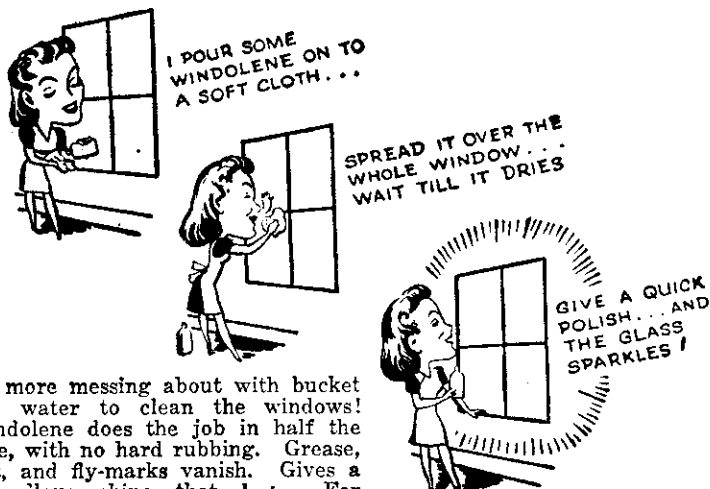


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WEEDS—DAD BURN 'EM!

(continued from previous page)

plate. "And I suppose I'm to meet the old dragon. On my bowls afternoon, too, doggone it."

Ethel nodded. "You can go back afterwards. She'll be on the express, at three-fifteen."

"Perhaps she'll forget to catch it," suggested Grandpa hopefully, "same as she forgot to post the letter."

"She'll catch it all right," Tom assured him gloomily, "and to think she might not is just wishful thinking of the most wishful sort."

Ethel jumped up and began to flutter. "Heavens!" she said distractedly, "only a few hours' notice and I'll have to turn the place out. You know Aunt Henry!"

"Our misfortune, believe us," growled Tom, casting a meaning glance at Grandpa, who returned it with interest.

"Now, do try to behave, you two," pleaded Ethel, poised on the brink of a flat spin. "It mightn't be for long, and you know how important it is to be good friends with Aunt Henry."

Two dismal groans arose behind her. "Don't smoke in the house!" mimicked Tom.

"Leave your shoes at the door!" chanted Grandpa.

"My dear Ethel, do I see... can it be... not dust!" shrieked Tom, running an exploratory finger along a chair back.

Ethel clapped her hands over her ears. "All right, all right!" she cried heatedly, "but I can't help it, can I? It's as bad for me as it is for you, isn't it? But if it means having Aunt Henry wipe out the mortgage, well, I'd put up with anything. Anything—do you hear?"

"I hear, my love," murmured Tom sorrowfully, "and for all our sakes, and for the sake of the mortgage, I hope it won't be for long. I'm as anxious as you are to own this place completely, but oh, boy, we're going to earn it!" And he went away without even remembering that the moon chart was still sitting drunkenly in his half-eaten salad.

* * *

GRANDPA obligingly went errands and rubbed up silver for the agitated Ethel, and then went out into the garden for a well-earned smoke. He might as well get used to smoking only outside, he thought ruefully, as he fished out his pipe and rammed the tobacco down in the bowl. He wished that his little shed were fitted with a bunk, that he might move out there altogether while the redoubtable Aunt Henry was in residence. He heard Ethel's voice again. "... You know Aunt Henry!" Yes, Grandpa knew her all right. Christened Grace, she was known as Aunt Henry because there was already an Aunt Grace in Ethel's family when she joined its ranks, and because for the last 15 years of his miserably henpecked life she had been Uncle Henry's wife. But Ethel was right. Aunt Henry *did* hold the mortgage, and it *might* please her to hand over the deeds.

"You can't please Aunt Henry all of the time," misquoted Grandpa, and reminded himself to repeat this piece of

wit to Tom. He was Tom's ally now, the word compost forgotten.

It echoed in Tom's uncomfortably reddening ears as Aunt Henry delivered herself of a few preliminary broadsides at the dinner table. "Well!" she barked, "I have looked around your garden, Thomas."

Tom quivered. Had she found dead leaves untidyng some corner, or dust on the pot plants? Aunt Henry left him no time to wonder. "Yes," she continued accusingly, "I looked round your garden thoroughly. . . ."

("I'll bet you did!" breathed Tom into his cauliflowerer).

". . . and I notice that you have so far forgotten yourself as to introduce those—those monstrosities into your yard."

"Monstrosities?" Tom choked painfully on a piece of potato.

"Exactly. Monstrosities." The row of brooches marching at intervals down Aunt Henry's massive bosom vibrated with indignation. "Compost heaps, Thomas! Disgusting, unhealthy things!"

"Now, wait a minute!" Stung on the raw, Tom deliberately avoided Ethel's imploring eyes and sat up smartly. "There's a great deal to be said in favour of compost, Aunt Henry. It's . . . it's . . ."

". . . a lot of silly twaddle!" finished Aunt Henry with a snort that would have done credit to a war horse. "There is only one place for garden refuse, and that is on a good, sensible rubbish fire. Did you speak?" She glared at Grandpa.

"Just—just clearing my throat," he said lamely, and would not look at Tom.

Aunt Henry returned with renewed vigour to the attack. In vain Tom tried to marshal the telling arguments with



"Aunt Henry delivered her ultimatum."

which he had withered Grandpa. Aunt Henry refused to be withered. Rising majestically, she delivered her ultimatum, savouring to the full her position as trump card holder.

"I have brought with me," she stated, with the deliberation of a judge about to sum up, "the deeds relating to the mortgage upon this property. But hand them over to a builder of those insaniary fly-attractors I will not. Think it over, Thomas!" And she sailed from the room like a battleship on her way to manoeuvres.

Grandpa closed the door behind the ladies and came back to the crushed