

the shopping, stoke the coal stove and the water-heater, and maintain an air of flaccid and unhappy imperturbability.

She was not always unhappy either. For if at times there came over the kitchen radio (which was tuned permanently to the commercial station) one of her traditional Scottish tunes she might be heard to join in with a tremulous soprano. Her accent would deepen. Perhaps she would be carried back to some dripping grove by the waters of Leith, running near the grey and mouldering spires of Edinburgh, which she had left for a new life in a new country.

The men would come to their meals in whatever clothes they wore at work—the students in creaseless grey trousers and sports coats with all sorts of enterprising pullovers beneath, the grocers and clerks in more chaste combinations of the same, the derelicts in drab suits, greasy at the button-holes, with ash-smear waistcoats and white collars set upon wan, coloured shirts. Some of the men's hands were hideously stained with nicotine. The mechanics had yellow nails in black oval frames. No tribute was deemed due to the snowy cloth, the gleaming cutlery, and the vase of flowers set in the midst.

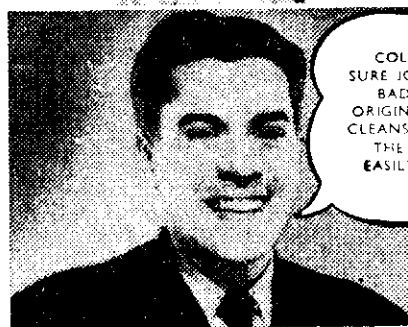
WHEN one course of the meal was served, Miss Ritchie would retire to the kitchen next door. It was customary to raise a laugh at the expense of any shortcoming in the cooking. This was one of the half-dozen traditions which to the initiated gave a sense of complacency and security in a changing world. To each of the regulars there was some specific piece of raillery attached, and variations on each of these themes provided a suitable greeting and also constituted much of the conversation. It was partly for this reason that the surf-men came and went unknown.

Since boarders must eat and sleep seven days a week, and since there are fifty-two of such weeks in the year, it may be supposed that life held little variety for Miss Ritchie. Yet punctuating the endless drudgery of her existence was one variation. This was Mr. Broughton. He had been boarding with Miss Ritchie for so many years that no one imagined any previous arrangement. It was unthinkable for example that Mr. Broughton had one day come to the door and asked to be taken in. His stalwart permanence had come to mean variation even to Miss Ritchie to whom mechanical routine was life. Mr. Broughton worked on the wharf down at Lyttelton, which meant he was always an hour late for his meal in the evening. He was therefore permitted to eat in the kitchen. He had no roof to his mouth, and whether it was through consciousness of this defect or through natural taciturnity, he rarely spoke a word to anybody. He always wore the same rugged trousers and coat, and, beyond shaving and the ceremony of renewing the water in his denture bowl, he seemed to refuse any deference to the toilet.

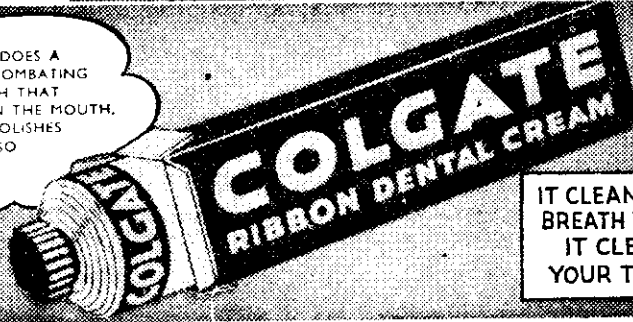
MISS RITCHIE would be ironing or darning when he came in at night. She would rush to bring his dinner from the oven. Then she would talk to him loudly to get over the racy persuasiveness of the radio medicine men. She would tell him who had come and who had left; of news from Scotland; of the

(continued on next page)

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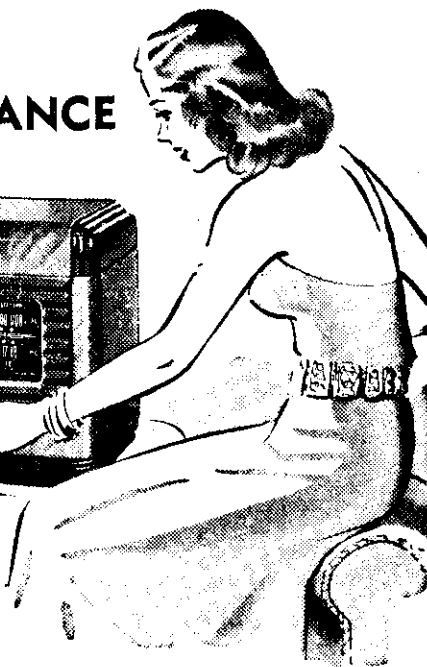
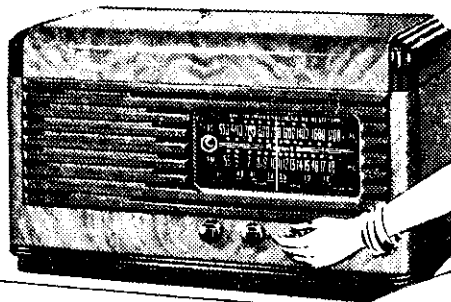
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