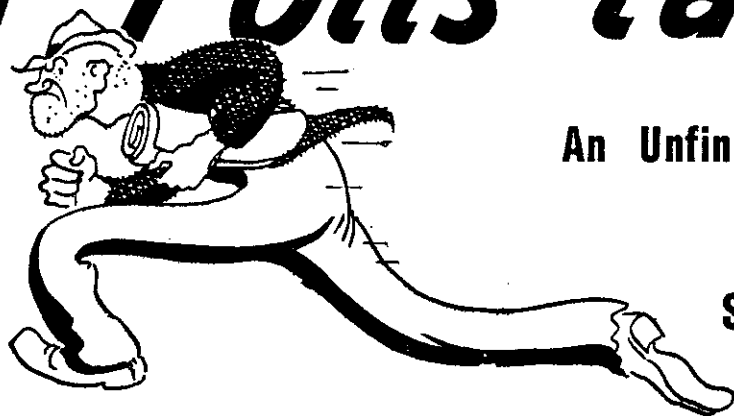


Mr Potts takes a walk



An Unfinished Story

By

SYDNEY BROOKES



FOR all practical purposes Mr. Potts was just another worm that never turned. In the morning he emerged, cocoon like, out of heavy clouds of slumber, rubbed his eyes, remained regretfully in bed until the last possible moment, and then crept out into the world step by step, in a procedure perfected by years of practising. First one leg appeared, then the other; then a wriggle, a sigh, and Mr. Potts entered upon the new day.

It was in those too-short minutes before the Potts leg appeared from between the sheets that Mr. Potts lived in his adventure-world; then and at night, just after he had pulled out the light, and just before he sank into the restless sleep of a man whose brain is always tired; his body never.

Then Mr. Potts picked imaginary quarrels with the chief clerk. Then Mr. Potts described to the typist with the ash-blond hair how Mr. Potts had seen a man snatch a lady's bag, how Mr. Potts had chased him, how Mr. Potts had overtaken him, how Mr. Potts had brought him down with a tackle round the knees, how Mr. Potts, recovering first, had stretched the felon flat with a right swing to the jaw, and how Mr. Potts had returned the lady's bag.

Sometimes, it must be admitted, Mr. Potts had less noble thoughts, lying beneath the protective blankets. Sometimes he remembered the time he had funked that high ball in the office football match, how he had shrunk away from the high dive at the office swimming picnic, how he had humbled himself before the chief clerk when reprimanded for a fault in his additions.

But Mr. Potts was resilient of mind. These matters he dismissed quickly from his mind with a little mental shudder that scattered unwelcome thought like cold water shaken from a hat brim in winter rains.

And yet still, for all practical purposes, it seemed that Mr. Potts was one of those who never turn. He was not, as Arnold Bennet said of Edgar Wallace, just too utterly satisfied with things; never sufficiently subversive. He was in truth never satisfied with things, down at the bottom of his mind. But his dissatisfactions and com-

plaints he worked out of his system every night, late, and every morning, late too.

It was right that this should be so, because Mr. Potts had neither the strength of mind nor the strength of body to make it otherwise. His dreams he hid beneath the pillow. His inspirations he smothered in the routine of his work. His aspirations were settled for him by the system which made him only one small unit in a human book-keeping machine.

IN other times Mr. Potts would have been a peasant. In these times he became a clerk. In a year or two, perhaps, he will be neither peasant nor

clerk, nor somebody's submissive boarder; he will just be a number; and for all the difference that will make Mr. Potts might as well have given himself over to the police and asked permission to work with the prisoners.

However, there are certain conventions observed by society, and Mr. Potts dutifully lived within these. He could neither admit his true ignominy, nor rebel against it.

And yet . . . all this dreaming of nobility must have had its effect. Mr. Potts could not go on forever pretending to himself alone that there was will as well as wish behind his urgings at night and in the morning. Some day, it seemed, Mr. Potts would simply have to break out and justify himself, somehow.

Opportunities, indeed, did come to Mr. Potts. There was a fire in the boarding house. . . Mr. Potts retreated mildly down the fire escape and rescued only himself, his pyjamas (which he wore), his dressing gown, and his toothbrush.

A car overturned at a corner. Mr. Potts watched while others extricated the passengers, telephoned for a doctor, called the police, and made contradictory statements. Mr. Potts observed all this activity with some interest, much as if he had been observing workmen breaking up a street with compressor-hammers, or his landlady using up the stale bread in a pudding. Afterwards he thought of what he might have done, but not until afterwards.

Each time something of this sort happened to other people, and failed to happen to him, Mr. Potts's desire to do something, really do something, kept him late to sleep at night, and late to rise of a morning.

IT happened one day when Mr. Potts was out driving in his little car. Yes, he had bought a car. He was a single man, not expensive in his habits, and the car made up for quite a lot. It was a small car, the smallest made, and it was becoming as hard to get out of the garage as Mr. Potts was hard to get out of bed; but he usually managed to start it, and enjoyed the freedom it gave him to roam the roads at week-ends.

You should know that Mr. Potts lived in Christchurch, and that all the plains around Christchurch are criss-crossed with roads; patterned almost like a chessboard, lined with hedges, shaded often by trees; willows, pines and poplars. Around these roads Mr. Potts used to

(Continued on next page)

CAN YOU END THIS STORY?

A Guinea For 500 Words

THIS is the sad tale of Mr. Potts. Or perhaps it is the glad tale of Mr. Potts. There is neither a happy ending nor a tragic climax. There is no end at all. The author supplied one, but was doubtful about it. He tried another, but still could not be sure that he had done justice to his attempt to characterise Mr. Potts. However, his investigation of the possibilities showed that they were many.

Can you hit upon the right one? The Editor has retained the author's solution of the problem that faced Mr. Potts and the story is printed without conclusion. A PRIZE OF ONE GUINEA IS OFFERED FOR THE BEST ENDING.

Entrants to this competition are asked to extract Mr. Potts from his difficulties within 500 words. Attention should be paid to maintaining the character of Mr. Potts as drawn by the author, and to keeping the events within the bounds of possibility, but it is not necessary that your solution should itself be a literary effort. A reasonably full outline of remaining events will meet the case.

Entries should be typed or written clearly on one side of the paper, marked **SHORT STORY**, and addressed to The Editor, at Box 1070, Wellington. Entries will be accepted only if they are postmarked not later than August 31.