

I ANSWERED AN ADVERTISEMENT

—By "Kath"

"**W**ANTED, Housekeeper, Own Mistress; Bachelor." It seems worth having a try; I send in my most exclusive application. Sure enough, within twelve hours I am called on the 'phone.

A very gruff, loud voice asks me to call and see him. An address is given. It sounds all blurry. I ask again: more blurr. I call in my niece who is more used to 'phones. "Will I call at 67 Hilton Street this morning at 11.30?" I consult my cousin. The niece says, "He's foreign, sounds like a Dalmatian. But Hilton Street is dreadful. You mustn't go alone."

Hilton Street certainly is poverty-stricken, bordering on slum. No. 67 looks distinctly slummy, with a grubby youth, his head bandaged, loafing at the front gate.

We look along the small passage and see a lumpish pinafored figure coming forward. We are ushered into a tiny room so unfresh that our noses try to ignore what begins to assail them. We ask the woman a few questions. "Yes, Miti Rosandic 'is name is—'e's quite young like, 'e's got a lovely 'ouse as clean as a pin. You wouldn't know 'e was a Dally."

She returns with a child in her arms. "I shouldena 'ad another; this one come after twenty years. I'm that bad with the asthma that I'll go out sudden with me 'eart."

The life history didn't have half a chance, because she suddenly called out, "Ere 'e is. Don't forget 'is nyme is Mr. Miti Rosandic."

A Question of Salary

Mr. Miti came in—about forty: a typical Mestrovic peasant. His face is squarish with deep-set eyes, a hookish nose maintaining its balance well between square brows and high cheekbones. As for the jaws, they are so strongly articulated as to be almost geometrical. A head full of form, exciting to model, notwithstanding one wall eye and a boil on his neck.

His English is difficult. He shouts and never once does he smile. Almost his first question is, "And what salary do you vant?" I have never had a salary before—so I say, "What do you think? I leave you to say." "No," he shouts, "I vant you to tell ME."

"Fifteen shillings?"

"There is very little vork, just one man, away all day."

"Fifteen shillings," I maintain firmly.

"Joost a minute," and he disappears to the back premises. We exchange smiles. After about ten minutes he comes back. "If I vant you, I let you know. I vill ring you up-a. Good-bye."

We go out.

"I wouldn't consider it for a minute," my cousin says. "He seems honest enough but it is all quite impossible—even shocking."

"I'd love to try it," I say. "It would be a cross-section of a new world. It's all experience."

I Get the Job

We are not long home when the 'phone goes. Mr. Rosandic. Will I meet him to-night at 10, he will take me

to his house. Hooray, my first job! I pack up, my cousin looking rather worried. There he is. We taxi to his house in Grey Lynn; humble artisan class, but no slums.

It is the middle of three houses, all identical, all cheek by jowl, one room deep, so that neighbours in the next house—and artisans have powerful voices—sound as if they are in your own. When there's a ring at the door you're not sure which.

The street is so close that people passing sound as if they were coming up the path. The house has recently been very clean and spruce but is now in a rather slovenly state. My bedroom is an amusing welter of patterns. Nothing has been spared; wallpaper, dado, lino, curtains—they are all alive with every imaginable botanical device and the effect is like a lot of people yelling at the tops of their voices in every key.

Texts Everywhere

Even in the kitchen a camel leers at me from a tall vase, tulips and butterflies curvet madly round the lampshade. The milk jug bears the motto, The Old Mill, and has daffs as big as buckets. Texts everywhere—one above the mantelpiece has "Trust in the Lord" in frosted tinsel, and even there a row of pansies makes merry at the top of the scroll.

The oleographs take me back to childhood. On the sideboard with its mauve crocheted cover, a perky little rooster in magenta cotton-wool sits in a yellow tinsel basket.

Not a book to be seen, except in my room, a Penny Horner: "She Was Sent to Prison." I pinch myself to see that it is me. What an exhilarating world, so divinely infantile. Shall I last it out?

I can hardly sleep, it is so noisy and strange, and the sheets look dubious. In the morning I am called—it seems the middle of the night. I'm rather nervous about cooking the breakfast but I needn't be. Miti is very friendly and opens his mouth often with roars of laughter. "I will be home at six," he says and at 7.30 is gone.

There is much to do. I scrub and scour and blacklead and polish. I take extra pains and have a presentable meal ready at about a-quarter to six. Time goes on, but he doesn't come. By ten to seven I am hungry and can't wait any longer. Everything is getting spoilt.

All in Vain?

This basement kitchen is not pleasant to sit in. It's like sitting in a cauldron. There are curious, almost frightening noises, bubbling, boiling sounds, and the racket of rain and wind and ghostly bangs of doors. I don't like it at all and all the time the rain pours.

He doesn't come till 8.30. He is agitated and wants nothing to eat. My nice meal has been all in vain. He is full of apologies and talks in a strung-up way. I make him tea but he doesn't touch it. He has had bad news, so he says. His cousin at Cambridge has died

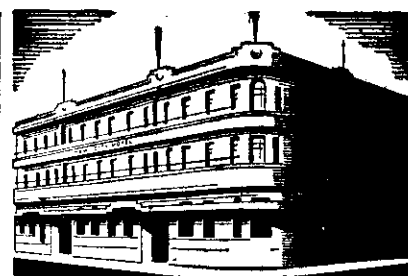
suddenly, leaving a wife and two young children, and Gawd strike him pink, he can't leave her in a feex like thees.

"It's terrible, terrible," and he leans over the table and buries his face in his hands. What can I do but offer to leave?

"I have treated you like a peeg. You have worked so hard, made the house so nice. I vill never forget your kindness. I vill try to repay you some day for thees. So help me Gawd I vill. If I can feex her up so she can manage I'll come back and get you, to come again. I have to loose my job-a, store the furniture, what will I do? I vill be on the rocks already. I have treated you very bad."

We shake hands with the utmost goodwill. I am rather sorry to say good-bye.

"Good-bye and by Gawd I vill pay you back someday," and as I go out the front door he shouts, "Gawd strike me, I vill not forget your kindness."



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