

Gay Life

IN

MELBOURNE.

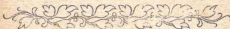


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Gay Life in Melbourne



HELP! Help! Let me up, you cur!" Such were the cries which rang out on the midnight air, as a young man was passing through a gloomy Melbourne avenue. The tones were unmistakably feminine, and, without a moment's hesitation, he ran towards the spot whence issued the distressful sounds. But, quick as he was, he arrived only in time to see a masculine form rise from the ground, race across the street and disappear in the darkness of the Fitzroy Gardens. Satisfied that it would be useless to pursue the fugitive, he turned his attention to a confused mass of dainty draperies huddled upon the footpath. Lighting a match, he peered down upon a young and strikingly beautiful face, somewhat distorted by an expression of agony and terror. Presently he found two charming eyes gazing up at him pleadingly, and, answering the thought in them, he said—

"It's all right, miss; he's gone, and you needn't be frightened of me."

His frank manner appeared to reassure her, and with his assistance she struggled to her feet and leaned against the fence, while he picked up her parcel and hat and restored them to her. In the attitude in which she was standing the light from a lamp fell softly on her countenance and confirmed him in his first impression of her fresh young beauty.

Apparently she had not suffered much from the ruffian's attack, and, smiling cheerfully at her rescuer, she said—

"A thousand thanks for your help. You got here just in the nick of time."

"So it seems," he answered. "Who was the fellow? Do you know him?"

"I couldn't be sure. He came out from behind a tree-guard and attacked me before I could get a good look at him," was her reply.

"What do you suppose his object was? Robbery, eh?" he asked.

Evidently she was doing her best to muster up a blush, as she smiled just a little and said—

"N—no, I don't think it was robbery, exactly. However, as he did not effect his purpose, whatever it may have been, we won't discuss the matter, please."

"She takes it pretty coolly," thought her companion. "Have I struck pure unadulterated innocence or smoking hot impudence?" Then, to sound her, he asked—

"How is it you happen to be in such a lonely street at such a time of night by yourself?"

"Oh," replied she, with a peculiar smile, "you see I stayed rather late with a friend—a lady friend—missed the tram, and was taking a short cut home to auntie's."

"So you live with auntie, do you?"

"Yes, and as her house isn't far perhaps you will be good enough to see me home," she said. "They'll be wondering what on earth has become of me."

Of course he jumped at the chance of escorting her, and equally of course—she being pretty and he being bold—as they walked along he edged his arm around her waist and put in a little hug where he thought it would do the most good. She did not seem to mind in the least, but snuggled up to him in a manner which suggested that she knew exactly how to repay him for rescuing her from her assailant. What his precise thoughts were cold prints refused to express.

Down that street, across another, second turning to the left and first to the right, and they reached auntie's home. It was gay with lights and sounds of music and laughter.

"Auntie's evidently got a party to-night?" queried the young man.

"Oh! no, just a few friends," she replied, with that peculiar smile on deck again.

"Suppose you come in and let me introduce you."

"But won't auntie think it queer if you take in a stranger at this time of the morning?" he asked, still puzzling his mind over the question of pure unadulterated innocence and smoking hot impudence.

"Not a bit of it," she replied confidently. "I'll tell her how you rescued me from that car, and that'll warm auntie up to a sense of the true state of the poll. We're not society folks, you know."

The free and easy style of her chatter obviously aroused his suspicions, but her charming face and eloquent eyes infatuated him, and with his heart going about eight beats to the bar he prepared to follow her.

"First of all," she said, "your name?"

"Lionel Norman. And yours?"

"Marguerite Delorme."

Then she led him into the room, which was filled with masculine and feminine gaiety. Frivolity in paint and powder and evening dress reigned over the scene. Presently, up came auntie, a massive creature with a quintuple chin and jewellery in profusion. She also wore an Irish accent on which you could have hung your overcoat.

"Shure, it's late ye arr, this night, Rita," she said. "I was aither wondering if ye'd be getting home at all. Who's yer friend, anyway?"

Forthwith Rita introduced the young man, who, although bold enough with her in the gloomy street, was not at all at ease in this gorgeous and lively room.

But for all that he noticed with extreme surprise that amongst the men of the party were a dandified bank manager whose marriage to a society belle had been duly and gushingly chronicled in *Punch*; a cocky little theatrical agent, just returned from a New Zealand tour; three young swells from Toorak, and others who ranked from flash book-makers to comic singers. The women were also a mixed lot, startlingly free in language and costume, and with an indescribable air of flashiness which should have astounded him as to their true characters. But he was under the glamour of Rita's charms, and could not bring himself to believe that she was the willing associate of such persons. He was quickly undecieved.

"Come over to the table and have some wine," said Rita. "Auntie charges £1 a bottle for it, but it's worth double the money every time."

Resolved to see the thing through, Norman accompanied his dear deluder, paid for his wine, and proceeded to dispose of it with the able assistance of the pretty Marguerite. It was poor enough stuff, but it colored her pretty cheeks to scarlet, and made her wobble her words in a manner painful for her admirer to hear.

Suddenly one of the friskiest of the ladies called out—

"Rita, Rita, what sort of a game have you been having? Auntie says you've been kidding her that a man assauited you in the street."

"What was the Johnnie after?" asked another.

"Well, what do you think?" was the significant reply.

"Don't believe a word of it," broke in one of the Toorak swells. "If you'd been knocked about as you say, you'd have been marked for life."

Instantly Rita placed one foot on a chair, flung her skirts up, whipped a stocking down, and showed a large, ugly bruise on a white and dimpled knee.

"He smashed me down on the footpath, and that's what I got," she said angrily to the swell.

The sight of the plump and pretty limb tempted him, and he put out a hand to seize it. Rita dropped her draperies, and eluded his grasp. "None of your funny business with me!" she cried defiantly.

"And none of your mock modesty with me," he replied, rising up and moving threateningly towards her. "I know too much about you for that."

"You lie!" she shouted; "you know nothing about me, and you never will know anything."

"The only thing I don't know about you is your price," he retorted, "but I've got money enough to buy you."

For answer she caught up a glass of wine and dashed the liquor in his face. This and the laughter of the ladies inflamed him to such a degree that he rushed at her with uplifted fist and a murderous glare in his eyes. Rita, fairly terrified at his look, scrambled over a chair to get out of the way.

"This is the first time I've ever known Rita to run away from a man," said one fair creature, whose low-cut bodice plainly revealed her palpitating charms. But that there was no joke about the matter was clearly visible to Lionel Norman, and just as they well seemed likely to capture the girl the young man took a hand in the business.

"Damn you! Fight a man, not a girl, you long cad," he exclaimed, and dashing at the infuriated toff he seized him by the collar, forced him back over a chair, and with a swinging blow from his powerful right, he sent him crashing to the floor, half-brained and covered with blood. But before Norman could recover, auntie's sweet voice was heard above the uproar.

"Fire him out!" she cried. "Fire the blasted Johnny too the front dure, and obedient to her command three of the bookmaking fellows grabbed Rita's breathless champion, and after a short struggle succeeded in landing him out on the street, and then, throwing his hat after him, shut and locked the door. But they need not have given themselves so much trouble, for Norman, though boiling with rage, was not fool enough to think of renewing the battle against such odds, and wended his way homewards, with his heart on fire with love for the charming and mysterious Marguerite. "Innocent or impudent, I must see her once more," was his dominant thought, and in what circumstances he did meet her again will shall proceed faithfully to relate.

CHAPTER II.

AN INTERRUPTED MARRIAGE.

Norman could think only of the bewitching Marguerite. Sain: or sinner, she was the star whose beaming lights he must follow whithersoever it might lead him—to happiness or ruin. He had money and leisure, and that kind of resolution which combats all difficulties. He had youth and health, therefore he had hope and enthusiasm. What was it that the Toorak swell had said to her? "I know everything about you—except your price!" Well, if she was to be bought, he would buy her. If she were to be won, he would win her. After all, she had resented the impertinences of that swell with genuine indignation, not with the coarse coquetry of a girl who bore the ineffaceable brand of degradation. True, she had indulged in an excessive amount of drink; and had overstepped the bounds of modesty by exposing her lovely legs to the lascivious gaze of evil men, but was not that the impetuous action of a woman whose word had been doubted in the most insulting manner, rather than the conduct of a wanton, who merely desired to display her charms through vicious vanity? And so he reflected, and wondered, and pondered, and then resolved to face Auntie, and seek another interview with her fascinating niece—if she were her niece.

In the daylight, Auntie's villa had a ready, up-all-night look about it, much resembling the appearance of Auntie herself when that good lady opened the door.

"Rita DeLorma, is it, yer after?" she said, when he had told her his mission. "Fair, it's loike yer dam cheek to be alther askin' me about her. Shure, if it's her fancy man ye arr ye wad be knowin' where she is better than hi can tell ye. Go to the divil wid yer woman that peitains she won't let a gentleman tuk at the leg of her!"

"Tell me where I can find her and I'll give you half a sovereign," said he, as soon as he could get in a word edgewise.

"Kape yer half-jim for Rita! She'll jump at it," was all the consolation he received, and the door was slammed in his face. But before he had reached the gate, a young girl, fashionably-dressed, but pretty in a pertish way, opened it, and as soon as she saw him exclaimed—

"Wot ho! You're the bloke wot dealt it out to the toff wot was messin' round Rita, sin' you?"

"Yes; and you can have this if you tell me where she is," he replied, holding up the half-sovereign.

"Blime! arf a thick'un! Rye—oh! I'm your matton. She took ehrock this mornin', an' said she was goin' out to see her sister spliced. No. 9 Twiss street, South Melbourne, 'll find her. Parse over the splosh, sonny; and when he had passed the coin over she went on—"You're an all-right bloke, you are; so I'll tell you somethin'. Rita's a bit shook on you, and, take it from

me, she's a little bit of stiff, and worth her-tilin' for. S'long," and went on her way to the house.

An hour afterwards, Norman was in Twiss street, South Melbourne, and had no difficulty in finding No. 9. A couple of handsome outside reminded him that Rita's sister was to be "spliced," and the sounds of merriment and the tones of a piano announced that company were assembled within. But how could he, a stranger, intrude on that festive scene? The answer came in the shape of Rita herself, who had observed him through the window, and now came out to meet him.

"I knew you'd come," she said. "I suppose Dulcie told you?"

"Dulcie? Oh! you mean the girl at Auntie's!" he replied.

"Yes, Dulcie Fisher—that's Auntie's slavery. She's a bit of a bart, but all right to me. I told her to put you on my track if you called. But come inside and I'll introduce you. My sister's going to be married privately. Not a word about Auntie's. They're all on the dead square here;" and, without more ado, she conducted him into a comfortable parlor, and made him known to the company.

There were no splendors, or fancy men, or painted and powdered prostitutes, here, but a select little assemblage of about a dozen, including Rita's sister—rather of a quiet, barmaidish type—her lover, and a clergyman.

"We're waiting for a couple of friends," whispered Rita to Norman, "and then the operation will begin." Scarcely had she finished speaking when through the open front door there bounced a female figure evidently carrying a larger load of liquor than was good for it. Before anyone could stir, she had whirled into the parlor, furiously crying—

"I want my bloke. I'll stop his funny business, I will."

"Great Scott!" said Rita to Norman. "There will be the devil to pay now. That's Diamond Kate, from Lonsdale street, and she knows a bit about my sister's mash."

Evidently she knew a good deal about him, and meant to let others know it too; for, facing the said mash, she poured out a torrent of recrimination and abuse, intermingled with shocking language.

"You dox!" she yelled; "you'll turn on me, will you? You're going to marry this pretty-faced tart, are you? Yab! You've got two chances, you have. I'll spoil your girl's beauty," and, seizing hold of a heavy ink-stand, was about to hurt it at Rita's sister, when Rita rushed forward and caught her arm.

"None of your Lonsdale street black-guardism here, Diamond Kate," she said firmly. "You're not at Mother Kerd's now, with a push behind you. Leave my sister alone; she's a respectable girl."

Instantly recognising Rita, the infuriated Kate gave vent to some of her sweetest expressions, those reducible to print being—

"Respectable!—is she? Yes, she was blooming respectable when she was aimed out of Trillen's pub, for going through a toff for fifty quid, wasn't she? And she was blooming respectable when the cops found her in Jimmy Ah Chong's with a drunken jockey from Caulfield. Yes, my colonial! She's as pure as they make 'em, I don't think."

"Phew! You should have seen Rita's lovely eyes flash with anger!"

"You lie!" she screamed. "She was ever at Trillen's or Jimmy Ah Chong's."

"Then it must have been you," retorted Diamond Kate, who was about to proceed further, when Rita, losing all control of herself, rushed at the Lonsdale street harpy, and, before Lionel Norman or any of the others could intervene, had her hand on Kate's throat, and was trying her level best to choke the black life out of that evil-tongued creature. But Kate came from Mother Kerd's, and had taken part in many a brutal tussle at that delectable establishment: so that, on rallying from the first shock of Rita's sudden attack, she threw off her antagonist's frantic grasp, and proceeded to make matters warm for the little beauty. For about two minutes, despite the efforts of the men to separate them, there was the wildest contortion of petticoats, shoes, stockings and hair imaginable, each combatant kicking, biting, scratching and screaming like a veritable maniac. Diamond Kate's costume was soon reduced to rags, and, as she had not much else on, it became plainly evident that her fine figure was all her own. So with Rita. With one mighty grab, Kate seized the bodice of her opponent's dress, and rip! rip! went the stuff to the accompaniment of language as bad as can be imagined. And next, Kate drove her teeth into Rita's plump leg—for the second time revealed accidentally to Lionel Norman—and made that beauty yell blue murder.

That was enough for Norman. At the sound of his charmer's painful scream, he dashed in among the kicking feet, and, seizing Kate by an ankle, literally hauled her off Rita, and hurled her across the room with such force that she struck the amazed and scandalized clergyman full in his very full vest, and sent him crashing down among the fire-irons. Meanwhile, Rita's sister had quietly fainted away on the sofa, where her beau was vainly endeavoring to bring her to by the very original method of dashing the contents of the inkstand over her face and fiery, while one fair bridesmaid was sobbing fitfully behind the piano, another throwing her skirt and petticoats over her head, evidently in the belief that she had hoisted her dress only; and the chairs, tables and ornaments were scattered about in fearful confusion.

That was the last Norman saw of the scene; for Rita, who had slipped out of the room just as Diamond Kate and the parson went down, quickly returned with a hat and

cloak on, and was passing out of the front door, when he noticed her, and ran after her.

"Don't stop me!" she said. "My sister and her friends will know all about me now, so I want to get away and hide myself."

"But where do I come in?" he asked, somewhat plaintively. "I came down to see you, and now you're going to disappear again."

"Well," she said, "this blessed row has upset my plans, and I don't know exactly what my next move is. But, if you want to see me particularly, be at the Town Hall, Collins street, to-morrow night at eleven o'clock."

"Collins street at that time of night?" he exclaimed. "Good God! then you are—"

"No, no!" she broke in. "Don't be alarmed, dear boy; I'm not one of them."

"Don't you believe all those lies about me. I'll send Dulcie Fisher to meet you there, and she'll tell you where I am. Good-bye. They're coming out, and I can't face my sister again," and in two minutes she was being whirled away in a hansom citywards, while Norman cursed the continuance of his bad luck, and infatigably longed for the meeting with Dulcie, who was to put him once again on the track of his fate. Fortunately for him, he could not foresee the mysteries and dangers into which that fate would lead him. But, as Kipling puts it, that is another story, and will keep well for the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

A PRIVATE OPINION "JOINT."

Arriving at the Town Hall shortly before eleven o'clock on the night appointed, Lionel Norman occupied the time of waiting for the tricky little Dulcie in observing the movements of the loongers and passers by. Some of the most notorious of Melbourne's gay women—daughters of joy, as the French call them—were there in all their war-paint and powder, busily intent on snaring and reining as many victims as possible. Diamond Kate, looking none the worse for her fight with Rita at South Melbourne, was flaunting up and down with Madame Berlin, one of the oldest, ugliest, and most vicious of brothel mistresses, her fat, coarse face being abundantly creased with the marks of infamy and gluttony. Beneath an electric light stood the hard-featured Bettie Karnody, whose career from music hall ballad singer to flagrant prostitute had been one long streak of hideous dissipation. Along Swanston street paced the jaunty figure of that little Swiss courtesan who was the principal in a frightful entertainment provided at her St. Kilda Road house for the delectation of some English cricketers a few years ago; while in company with her was another foreign harlot, who once bit a piece out of the cheek of a constable who was arresting her. Several very unicturesque gentlemen belonging to the profession of bludgeons—viz. creatures who live on the degradation of evil women—hovered around the scene, and various young

fools who fondly believed themselves to be men of the world, dashing Bohemians, and so forth, leered and ogled the females with that faculty which is the common characteristic of the species.

Several of the gaudy butterflies accosted Norman, and endeavored to cajole him in the interests of their business, but he was in no mood to listen to their snoddy and stereotyped endearments, and could only wonder disgustedly how such wretched creatures could ever attract any man with two eyes in his head, and what was the special reason for a presumably sane Government permitting such scum to pollute the streets of so fine a city. But these reflections were quickly cut short by the appearance of Dulcie Fisher, fairly swaggering along in the pride of a startling yellow and black costume, and a hat crowned with swaying feathers of a most extravagant size. Clearly she "had 'em all on," and was immensely satisfied with herself, as, swinging her parasol, and surging her skirts about her ankles, she smiled at one swell, nodded to another, saluted Betty Karnody with a "What oh!" gave a "Good-night, old darling," to a bicar-eyed, bald-headed reprobate, old enough to be her grandfather—and might have been for all she knew—and so worked her passage down to Lionel Norman.

"Sorry to keep you doin' a periah," she said, "but got sich a lot of 'bloomin' friends that I couldn't git 'ere any sooner."
"I thought you worked for Auntie," he said, smiling at her apology.

"Yuss, so I do," replied she, "but I always get one night out on me own, an' then—well, I'm one of the girls, you can bet."

"And Rita—is she one of the girls too?" he asked anxiously.

"Not much, she ain't," Dulcie answered. "There ain't no cockroaches on Rita. She never played this game in her natural."

"What game does she play then?"

"Just what I'm goin' to hang you on to. Come an' oil me neck, an' then we'll go out an' see 'er."

Accepting this as an intimation that she desired him to treat her to a drink, Norman accompanied her to a public-house, where she oiled her neck with gin and bitters, and away they went in a hansom towards South Yarra. All his questioning could elicit no information from Dulcie as to the nature of Rita's present occupation, so he had to exercise patience until they arrived at a quiet house in a quiet street not a thousand miles from the Botanical Gardens.

"Ere y'are," Dulcie exclaimed as the cab stopped. "Let yourself in with this key, an' you'll see your mash in half a tick. S'long."

"But are you not coming in?"

"Scarcely. I've got a diamond ring waiting for me down in St. Kilda, so I'll drive on an' pick you up on my way back."

"More mystery," thought Lionel, as Dulcie and the cab disappeared, "but I'll get to the bottom of it this trip against any odds."

Letting himself in with the key which Dulcie had given him, he found the house quiet, save for the sound of soft singing which issued from an upstairs room. Following that sound, he came to the open door of a brilliantly-lighted and exquisite-furnished room, and there, extended on a couch, and in a graceful attitude which suggested more than it revealed, lay his lovely Rita! Her eyes were half-closed in dreamy rapture, and she was humming a waltz song in lazy happiness.

He rushed forward. Good God! what did it all mean? Was she ill, or drunk? The next moment she had heard and recognised him, and in the act of rising dropped from her hand an opium pipe. Then it all came clear to him. She was that most accursed of all sinners—an opium smoker. The heavy, pungent odor of the room, the pipe, tray, needle and lamp, all the horrible paraphernalia so necessary to the devotee of the devil drug, drove the truth home to his heart with tenfold force, and he stared aghast at the fateful discovery of her secret.

But Rita was by no means too dazed to notice his demeanour. Looking at him wistfully, she murmured—

"Now you know my secret, dear boy, but don't judge me too harshly. I can't help smoking, but I manage it privately, and keep away from the Chinese dens; so I'm not so bad as you think me. Look here, I haven't smoked for two days, and I don't see how the devil I stood it. If I had gone without it another night I'd have felt like eating a pipe."

"It's not for me to preach to you," he answered, with an effort. "Dulcie did not prepare me for this sort of thing, and so I was naturally surprised to find you here and in this condition. Besides, I thought that opium smoking was confined solely to the Chinese dens, or other equally low places."

"Not a bit of it," was her rejoinder.

"There are two or three places like this, where respectable people can enjoy themselves without publicity, and you'd be surprised if you knew how many society women indulge in the habit."

"But you—you are not a society woman?" he queried.

"No, I'm a—ho, well, I'm a damned young fool to listen to you. If you don't like me as I am you can go to the devil."

Apparently, he was quite as much of a young fool as his charmer was, for his passionate response to her outburst was—

"I do like you as you are, and we'll go to the devil together if you'll stick to me on the journey."

"That's true blue," she answered. "You're a good, straight fellow, and I've thought a good deal more about you than about anybody else I've ever known; so say the word and I am yours truly."

Just here occurred an interval for refreshments, the bill of fare consisting entirely of embraces and kisses, for which each showed



ONE OF THE GIRLS,

a remarkably healthy appetite. Then Rita, flushed and laughing, released herself from his ardent arms, and said commandingly—

"Now, as I am not going to have you always preaching at me for opium smoking, you will go into the next room, and bring a pipe and we'll have one together. Then we'll be quits on that score."

The enamoured Norman did her bidding without a murmur, and on his return she showed him how to prepare the horrible stuff and extract the delusive gratification from it. And he, intoxicated with the thought that she was his, and his alone, reclined there on the couch with her, eager to debase himself and his manhood at the whim of so fair and frail a woman.

"Now," she said, when the preliminaries were over, "make yourself at home. The mistress of the house won't be back to-night, so that we can enjoy ourselves undisturbed."

But she was mistaken, for hardly had she spoken when footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and in another minute a stylish woman stepped into the room.

"You wretches!" she exclaimed, "what have you done with my sister?"

"Your sister!" said Rita. "What do you mean! There's no one here but ourselves. How did you get in?"

"The front door was open, and I walked in," the stranger replied. "Tell me, I implore you, where she is. I'll give you £50 if you'll only let me take her home."

"Madame," said Norman, "I can assure you that we are alone. You must have mistaken the house."

"No, no," was the agitated reply. "I took her out of here once before, but she has run away from home again, and I am sure she is here. For God's sake, let me see her; let me save her before it is too late."

"Look here," exclaimed Rita, angrily, "your sister is not here, and if you don't leave you'll be thrown out."

"You poor, miserable creature, will you not let me save her from falling as low as you have fallen?"

"By thunder! this is too strong," cried Rita. "I'm as good as you are any day in the week, and I tell you your blooming sister isn't in this house."

But the stranger evidently placed no faith in Rita's word, for she began to call out—

"Agnes! Agnes!—where are you, dear? Agnes! Agnes!"

"Look here, old boy," said Rita to Norman, "you'll have to put her out. She'll rouse up the whole blessed neighborhood."

He hesitated to offer violence to one who was evidently a lady, and Rita, enraged at that hesitation, said quickly—

"If you don't get rid of her, you can clear out yourself. A nice sort of a jay you are to help a pal."

Then Norman hardened his heart, descending a step lower in his abasement, and,

placing a hand on the lady's shoulders, said—

"Get out of here, and don't make a show of yourself. Your sister is not here, so go!"

"You vile thing!" she said, throwing his grasp off with more contempt than fear. "I believe you'd murder me if that creature there ordered you to."

That home thrust knocked all the manliness out of him, and seizing her again he fairly ran her out of the room, down the stairs, and out of the gate, just as he had been fired out of auntie's when he first met Rita. On his return the latter was just tossing off a glass of brandy, and he could not help thinking what a beautiful fiend was she for whom he had cast aside his last shred of manhood.

"Do you know who that woman is?" she asked him.

"No; do you?"

"Yes, she is the daughter of Dr. ———, mentioning the name of an honored medico, and the sister she is seeking was ruined and introduced to this life by a married man old enough to be her father. But let us have a smoke; I'm dying for a pipe, and I suppose you're in no hurry to go home."

But again there was an interruption in the shape of a clattering at the front gate, which Norman had locked. Rita put her head out of the front upstairs window.

"Who's there?"

"All serene," replied Dulcie's voice. "I've got my diamond ring, and if your blokey's ready I'll drive him into town."

"He's gone home an hour ago," said Rita.

"Dickens! you can't kid this chicken. Tell him to hurry up, or—"

But the rest was lost in the bang with which Rita shut the window, and Dulcie, with a grin on her face, drove into the city alone.

CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER KURDI'S.

Lionel Norman's opium sleep in the house at South Yarra lasted till long after day-break, when he awoke with a shudder and a horrible feeling of utter weariness. His eyes seemed on fire, his head was heavy, and his limbs stiff and sore. That is the usual penalty paid by one who yields to the Soudish fascinations of the poppy drug. It sucks the life from the brain and the nerve from the body, and leaves its victim a pitiful thing, as wretched as mortal being can be. But a sudden stimulant came to arouse his slumbering energies. It was the sound of the front gate closing with a sharp crash, and he reached the window just in time to see the graceful figure of Rita Delorme turn the corner of the street. That startled him into instant action, and, dressing himself as speedily as possible, he raced out after her only to encounter failure. Once more she was lost to him. All that day he spent in searching for her, but he

could not find Dulcie at Auntie's, her sister's house at South Melbourne was closed, and he could arrive at no clue to her whereabouts. In the evening he went back to the opium joint at South Yarra, hoping to find her returned, but could obtain no scrap of information about her, and disconsolately made his way back to town, and wandered aimlessly about the streets in despair.

Towards half-past ten he was passing through Exhibition street on his way to the Town Hall to search for her there, when he noticed a stylish woman accost an elegantly-dressed man, and, after a few words, turn down towards Lonsdale street with him. Surely he could not be mistaken—it was Rita! Then opium smoking was not her only vice, as she had endeavored to make him believe. She was a cunning, false-hearted harlot, who had fooled him with her theatrical professions of love. Nervously he followed the couple, and had just made up his mind to confront them when they entered the door of a two-storied house in Lonsdale street, and left him staring at the building with horror-struck eyes. Harlot! Liar! He had bowled her out in her infancy! She was a common street trolly; a solicitor of men on the street highways; a nameless, shameless wretch, who sold her beauty to the first comer!

There was no use in blinking the fact any longer. The house she had so familiarly entered was Mother Kurdy's, the gilded home of evil, the most infamous in a city where infamy was privileged. In a moment his mind was made up; he would enter even there and stir her with her caltious deceit. Naturally, there was no embarrassing formalities of introduction necessary. He merely staggered about the pavement as though drunk, and immediately two painted devils, in flaring frocks and yellow hair, were at him like tigers at their prey.

"Ah, there, darling, won't you come in and see the canary?" said one debilitated charmer, while the other attempted to fondle his watch-pocket and feel his apparel for coin an operation known in local slang as "faoning."

Pretending to be delighted with the liberties which they took with him, he acceded to their invitation to step inside, and an instant later was in the heart of the most notorious broriel in the city.

It was five-time at Mother Kurdy's, the time when the flies were buzzing around the web, and the spiders were in clover. The room in which he found himself was gaudy and tawdry—a dissipated, effeminate young man thumped a piano; females of all ages and styles lounged about the apartment, laughing, swearing, drinking, quarreling, and showing their airs and graces (and other things), and the atmosphere was cloudy with cigar and cigarette smoke. Depravity and recklessness marked every countenance with its indelible

stains, and the "fun," such as it was, was fast and furious. Those of the girls who received guests and never walked the streets were scattered around attired in loose robes and slippers, and had their cheeks, eyes, eyebrows and lips painted in glaring red and black (the latter, of course, on the eyebrows only) and took every pains to make as voluptuous pictures as they could. On one sofa a well-known wrestler was dallying with Betty Karmody in very free and easy fashion, the said Betty having one arm around his neck and the other about the neck of an ex-detective, and was inciting them to treat her in a manner which clearly showed that she was no "lady." Two song and dance men, who had dropped in after doing their "turns" at the theatre, were amusing themselves by pouring beer down the ample bosom of a girl whom they held down on the table, and most of the other girls were busily beguiling half-drunken young fellows to shout more liquor. Amongst the company, as the society papers put it, were a notorious and successful jockey, who afterwards went to England, a lawyer just struck off the rolls for tampering with trust funds, an ex-M.L.A. who, in Parliament, used to profess piety, a colored heavy weight pugilist known as Black Caesar, whose speciality was playing the piano with his nose, an Irish-American variety manager whose theatrical ventures were financed by a Scotch bawd, a Yiddish bookmaker whose brutish conduct had driven one pretty stage girl to the Yarra Bend asylum, and another to the river, and others not necessary to indicate.

They were not all in one room at the same time, for business was brisk and Mother Kurdy's clients had the free run of most of the house. Consequently, Norman, not seeing Rita in the piano room, concluded that she was occupied, and resolved to wait for her reappearance. After having made a name for himself by "shouting" drinks, he settled quietly in a corner and watched the antics of the company, who were getting very festive, and indulging in various pranks which were much too warm for cold print. Acrobatic and contortionistic feats were performed by Betty Karmody and two others, assisted by the well-known wrestler, on the large table, the entire absence of modesty and very scanty attire of the performers not detracting from the display in the least. Black Caesar gave his notorious performance on the piano to shrieks of laughter, and even Norman, grave and anxious as he felt, could not help grinning at the spectacle of the colored artist picking out the melody of "Up came Johnny with his camera" with his big black nose. Then "Carbine" Miller, sometimes known as "Bill Martin," a large young woman with immense legs showing beneath the shortest of short skirts, and a massive boom rising and falling like twin balloons, volunteered a song, of which the only printable verse ran something like this:—

Shore, Dennis and Shamroo went courtin' one day
 A sweet little colleen named Molly O'Shea;
 They courted and cooed in their neat Irish way,
 And Molly was mighty pleased with that same.
 But when the days passed and the salt sea they
 crossed,
 And poor Andy found that her heart had been lost,
 He didn't know wheen of the two boys to blame.

Just as the apprentice was dying away, the sounds of a scuffle and a cry of "Help!" came from an adjoining room. Without an instant's reflection the impetuous Norman jumped up, ran down a passage towards the noise, and, bursting open a door, discovered a well-dressed young man being held down on a bed by two women, one of whom was kneeling on his chest, while the second had one hand on his throat and in the other a gold watch and broken chain. The back of the kneeling woman was towards Norman, but he knew instantly that she was the one whom he had followed.

"My God! Rita!" he exclaimed, and then, seizing her by the shoulder, toppled her on the bed face upwards, and looked at her. It was not Rita. He had been deceived by the similarity of figure, but a glance showed him the hard, bold countenance of Diamond Kate, which no more resembled that of his mysterious little beauty than a tiger resembles a lamb. At the same moment, the man on the bed threw off the other girl and gained the floor. Norman saw that he was the elegantly-dressed young fellow who had entered with Kate.

"By thunder! they've robbed me," he exclaimed; "they've got my watch and chain, and they'd have had my purse only for you."

"Well, here's the watch and chain," said Norman, grasping the girl who held the jewellery and snatching it from her.

"What the devil have you got to do with it!" screamed the woman. "They're mine; he gave 'em to me 'cos I stopped with him at the Corfee Palace last night."

"Not a bit of it," said the young man. "I wouldn't be found dead in the same paddock with you. Look here, old man, they thought I was drunk, and when I objected to them going through me they flung themselves on me, and threatened to brain me. I would have slaughtered them only that I don't care about striking women."

"Well, let us both get out of this place," said Norman.

"Yes, a nice chance you've got," said a voice behind him, and, turning round, saw Mother Kurdy and a crowd of both sexes. "Who the 'ell are you to come 'ere a' interfeerin' with my girls?" and her flabby, vicious face was horrible to look upon as she glared at him.

"If you attempt to prevent us leaving, I'll bring the police down on you, you filthy old hag," said Norman, endeavouring to pass.

"The police don't interfere with a respectable 'ouse like mine," she replied, barring his passage, "and I'll show you what kind of

an old 'ag I am. We'd tear the bloomins' clothes off you, my buck, afore we've done with you."

For answer, Norman elbowed her aside, and pushed his way to the door, followed by the man he had assisted. But he'd a tough gang to deal with, and had not gone many paces when a fellow as big as himself aimed a vicious blow at him which just missed its mark.

"Make it willing, Andy," said Diamond Kate, who was standing on the bed. "Pull his bloomins' arm off, and hit him over the head with it."

But the crowd in the little room gave Andy, the bully, no scope to display his boxing powers, and in endeavouring to get a wrestling hold on the sturdy Norman he met his match, and was flung violently into the passage, where he lay half-stunned. Following up his advantage, Norman pushed his way to the piano room, and was congratulating himself on getting out of the trouble so easily, when, in turning to see if his friend still followed him, he was struck on the forehead by a flower vase thrown by the effeminate young man who had been banging the piano.

"You miserable set of curs," said Norman angrily, as the blood trickled down his face. "You're 'plucky enough in a push, but there isn't a man amongst you who's game for a fair fight."

"Ain't there!" cried a voice from the stairs. "I'll fight you for £10 any time you like, and ruin your pretty Rita afterwards;" and, looking up, Norman saw above him the very Toorak swell whom he had knocked down at Auntie's.

"Well, I've stiffened you once, and I'll stiffen you again," retorted Norman, "but I don't fight in a brozel."

"Anywhere you like," replied the other. "Bring your money down to Mick Nathan's to-morrow afternoon, and I'll give you all the stoush you're looking for."

"I'll be ther'," said Norman, "and if you fall me I'll hunt you up and smash your face in wherever I meet you," and without further interference he and his new friend passed out into the night.

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT AT NATHAN'S.

Everybody in Melbourne knows Mick Nathan, either personally or by reputation, while his athletic hall is the great rendezvous of the boxing fraternity and their following; so that Norman felt somewhat nervous as he stepped into that popular sporting resort on the day subsequent to that on which the Toorak swell had challenged him. Although he had had some little experience in the art of pugilism, he had not mingled much with professional fighters, and was rather inclined to be prejudiced against them. He pictured them chiefly as beetle-browed, heavy-jawed, bullet-headed monuments of muscle, jeerously seeking for the gore of their fellow-creatures,

and murderously-miserably excepting when indulging in their sole amusement of pounding somebody's features into sanguinary mush, when they became murderously-happy. But these were no "Bee pardons" about this young man; so, controlling his natural diffidence, he entered the back bar with the easy air of a champion American pug, and found his new friend, Montague Tilkins, waiting for him, and passing away the time in chatting with a well-known sport, and teasing a very fine and fluent old cockatoo.

Over a glass of brown stuff, Tilkins informed him that arrangements had been made for the contest to take place at four o'clock—it was then two—and that Mick Nathan had promised that the affair would be conducted fairly and squarely.

"What! Mick Nathan himself!" said Norman, in admiring amazement.

"Sah! He'll hear you; he's over there," said Tilkins, indicating a group seated in the corner of the bar.

"But which is Nathan?" asked Norman, dropping his voice to a respectful whisper.

"The sturdy, burly man, with the rubbed cheeks and pleasant smile," answered Tilkins; "he's got a bit of a bow-window on him, but he was one of the best in his day, and that's not so long ago. Looks like a prosperous member of Parliament, doesn't he?"

"And that tall, slender, young man, with the pensive look in his eyes, and the beautiful moustache?"

"Man alive!" exclaimed Tilkins, in utter astonishment, "do you mean to say you don't know who that is? Why, where on earth has you been hiding yourself?"

"Well, I haven't been about much lately," answered the other, feeling as though he should apologise for his ignorance, "but is he—is he anyone important?"

"Important! Lord bless your innocent soul, why, that's Billy Williams! but not the fighting man;" and Tilkins stepped back to watch the effect of his startling announcement. Then, seeing that Norman had failed to grasp the full value of the information, he leaned forward and impressively whispered—"Billy Williams, of the *HAWKLET!*" and as the name of the popular paper sank into Norman's ear that young man's eyes opened wide with astonishment at the wealth of talent with which his friend was acquainted.

"Further than that," continued Tilkins, "he has consented to be stakeholder for your match, so come over and be introduced to him and Nathan," and, to Norman's delight, when he was introduced to them, he found that their fame sat lightly on them, and they proved to be as affable and even genial as commoner mortals.

"I'll tell you what," said Nathan, "that young fellow you're going to meet is a tough 'un, and knows how to use his hands, take my word for it."

"Do you know him?" asked Norman.

"Know him? I should say I did," was the reply of the ex-champion. "He's the son of old Tom Kindar, the big Bendigo brewer, and lives with his mother and sisters in a swell house at Toorak. Got more money than sense, if you ask me."

"You're right there, Mick," chimed in the pensive Billy Williams. "I've had to touch him up in our paper once or twice, and I can promise you he didn't like it. Once he got fired out of the Opera House for fooling round Rickards' girls, and another time he had to clear out of an East Melbourne house where he had been carrying on with a married woman. He was in such a hurry that he didn't have time to put on his coat and vest, and had to walk to Toorak at two o'clock in the morning slap bang through a hail-storm. We had a picture of him jumping out of the window while the husband was letting himself in the front door with his latch-key. He's a bad egg, but he's all right with the gloves. I saw him whollop out Scotty McBain with a solar plexus in a fair dinkum go, and I'm satisfied he knows the game. But you look as if you could give him plenty of trouble, young fellow."

"Well, I'll do my best," modestly answered Norman, wondering what sort of a weapon a "solar plexus" was, what might be the precise meaning of "a fair dinkum go," and wishing that he could speak the language with the beautiful fluency of these experts.

At this juncture, Tilkins announced that Horace Kindar had arrived with half-a-dozen friends, and in very short order the preliminaries had been arranged, the stakes placed in the care of Billy Williams, and the contestants were ready to enter the ring. Kindar's friends were all of the top-hatted, clean-shaven, well-dressed brigade, noisy and boastful of their man's prowess, while Kindar himself was rigged out in the scanty and unpicturesque attire of the professional boxer, and was evidently full of confidence. Norman, on the other hand, had merely stripped off everything but his shoes, trousers and under shirt, had no friend to see him but Tilkins, and betrayed no emotion of any kind. The audience was small but select, consisting of a noted featherweight champion, a sporting barrister, a large, heavy, angular, bespectacled journalist from a sporting paper, Kindar's friends, and about a dozen others. Jacky McGowan acted as referee, Tim Hegarty held the watch, and a publicist doctor from Collins street (one of Mick Nathan's pupils) was credited with possessing sufficient intelligence to count ten. Nathan himself stood near the door, to check intruders.

Not having the facile pen of a boxing reporter, the writer enters on the details of the contest with fear and trembling, and trusts to be pardoned for any defects therein which may be discovered by the keen eye of the experienced reader.

So far as height, weight and build went, the men were pretty evenly matched, but



A private refreshment room—Page 14.

while Norman's clear eyes and wholesome cheeks betokened sound health, his opponent's dissipated features and the heavy lines about his mouth and eyes spoke forcibly of an impaired constitution. So that if skill was on the side of the latter, Norman certainly had the advantage in stamina. As the combatants approached each other in the first round, there was a very marked difference in their respective attitudes, Kindur dancing about with all the airs of a flash professional, while Norman calmly adopted defensive tactics. But seeing that his opponent was apparently anxious to commence operations, he manœuvred with the object of drawing him off his guard. Suddenly he hit his right hand on the ribs, while Kindur returned lightly and skipped out of range. Following up, Norman again landed on the ribs. A clinch followed, and on breaking away Kindur was short with a left lead, while his right went round the head, Norman at the same moment sending a pretty left on the chin. Losing his temper immediately, Kindur rushed Norman to the opposite side of the ring, when he shot out left and right, and missing with both, went nearly through the ropes with his own impetus. That round finished without much harm being done on either side, but it convinced Norman that his opponent had not the wind to last long, and was no better boxer than himself.

"Time" had no sooner sounded for the second round than Norman jumped in, sending left and right on the face and head with good effect, while Kindur, amidst the cheers of his friends, returned with a flush left and right on the neck, and forced his adversary to the ropes, where he closed. Again in the centre, Norman found a landing place on the ribs with a "snorter" which seemed to paralyse Kindur, and brought admiring ejaculations from the professionals in the hall. "Love me!" the noted featherweight was heard to exclaim, "but that was a fair beat. It's any money on one." That one was Norman, who opened the third round by hooking his man on the jaw. Then, after some smart countering, he walked round the ring, and, turning suddenly, bashed Kindur in the face. A couple of light exchanges followed, and then Norman upper-cut his man twice in succession, and next, like lightning, smashed a straight left on the stomach, and with a groan the boastful Toorak swelt went down, never to rise again—that is until he had been counted out, while Norman received the congratulations of Tilkins and the featherweight and a few more on his victory.

Kindur continued groaning, and looked fearful with the mingled blood and sweat on his face, and Norman, in the softness of his heart, went over to him, and offering his hand, said sincerely—

"Shake hands, old fellow. You're a better than I am, but you're out of condition, all," which, to say the least of it, was a charitable.

But Kindur was not built to understand and appreciate manliness, and, rising with an effort, he spat at Norman venomously, and, with horrible maledictions, cried passionately—

"Curse you! you damned cod! I don't shake hands with your sort. If I hadn't been boozing last night I'd have slogged the hide off you." Then, with a sudden fiendish thought, he sneered—"I suppose you got that £10 off Rita Delorme, you miserable hound."

This was more than Norman could stand even from a man in such a weak and excited state, and with a threatening gesture he advanced towards Kindur, and said—

"Dare to say a word against that girl, and, by thunder! I'll ram your tool tongue down your throat," and in another moment there would have been a pretty riot with him and a couple of Kindur's friends, who were preparing to attack Norman. But Mick Nathan rushed up from the door, where he had been discussing the contest with the pugilistic doctor, and, getting in amongst the angry group, said imperatively—

"Out you go! the whole lot of you. You have had your fight fair and square, and, if you ask me, the best man won. But I don't allow any cross-bargening or bad language in this hall, so you'd better smoke."

As Norman had no further reason for remaining, having received the stakes from the amiable Billy Williams (who, by the way, offered to make a match for him through the *HAWKLEY*), he immediately left the hall and called a cab, into which he and his friend hurriedly jumped. They were driving round the corner of Swanston street, when Norman espied Dulcie rushing passionately in the direction of the post-office, when he immediately chased her in the cab, and, on jumping out and facing Dulcie, was frantically appealed to by that young woman in manner following—

"Mister Norman, Mister Norman, for Gawd' sike, come'n see Rita. She's yellin' 'er blessed 'ead off for yer. She's took poison 'cos she reckoned yer didn't fink nothin' of 'er no more. Lummie, she is bad. S'elp me, if I don't fink she's dyin'. Come on, come on," and, without having time to ask any questions, he was whisked away with Dulcie to a terrible scene, which may be better described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

IN RITA'S BEDROOM.

When Norman once more fed his hungry eyes on Rita's beauty, she was tossing about in agony on a bed in the back-room of a flash city hotel. The pillow and sheets were crimson with the blood which had gushed from her mouth, and her face was pale and drawn with intense suffering. "Ever and anon, an ear-piercing shriek thrilled through the apartment, only to be succeeded by groans and bitter lamentations, in which she repeated

Norman's name, sometimes with indescribable fondness and sometimes with stinging scorn.

"Oh," she was saying mournfully as he entered the room with Dulcie, "he is so brave, so strong, so good that I can't help loving him. But he's like all the rest—he wanted to know my price. My price!" she screamed with spasmodic energy; "good God! couldn't the fool see that my price was every beat of his heart, every throb of his pulse, as he has every beat and throb of mine? But no, no, he's like all the rest; every woman is to be bought, he thinks. I wonder if he has a wife and what her price is!" Then relapsing into tenderness, she murmured—"Dear boy, just put your arms around me, as you used to do, kiss me with those rich, ripe lips of yours, hold me close to your breast and say, 'Rita, I love you! Rita, Rita, we two against the world!' That's my price, dear boy; the only payment I want from you for my body and soul."

Norman was about to rush forward to comfort and claim her, mistaking her ravings for reality, when Dulcie stopped him by saying—

"Don't take no notice. The doctor bloke said it'd be all right if she broke out gassing Tommy nonsense. But, lumme, aint she dead sweet on you?"

"So you've got a doctor. I hope he's a good one."

"Well, he aint a reg'lar doctor yet, you know, he's on'y one of them student blokkies," said Dulcie; "but he's cherry ripe, is Mister Yosenmelt. He was downstairs tickling the planner, so I called him up, an' he guv her some'n' as'd make her jerk up most of the poison, and send her into a nice by-bye."

"But I must see him and pay him," said Norman.

"Oh I don't hurry yer fat about that," Dulcie responded. "I guv him a couple of rums, an' he's back at the planner as lively as a flea on a hot blanket. If you see him he'll on'y bite yer ear for arf a dollar for more boose-juice."

So, as Rita had sunk into what the vivacious Dulcie termed "a nice by-bye," Norman sat watching her for an hour, and when she awoke was rewarded for his patience by seeing the healthy color return to her cheeks, and her lovely eyes grow lovelier still with wonder and delight at his presence. A few words explained the mystery of her disappearance and attempted suicide. She had heard him muttering in his opium sleep at South Yarra, "I know everything but her price," and believing that he looked upon her as a girl cast down in the depths of wileness, she had quitted the house in shame and disgust, resolving to see him never again. That belief had worked such havoc with her brain and heart that, in a fit of despair, she had swallowed some poison, and almost shut out the light of life from her soul.

"You must go now, dear boy," she said, after her story was told, "and I must have

another little sleep and then get up and work. But you'll come in to-night, won't you?"

"Come in?—in where?" he asked.

"Oh, I forgot that you don't know what I'm doing. Well, I've got a billet in the private bar here, so you'll have no difficulty in finding me this time," she answered.

"A private bar?" he exclaimed in contempt. "Why, that's only one remove from a —"

"Yes, I know, dear," she broke in. "It isn't too 'cherry ripe,' as Dulcie says. We water the Walker's, and hocus the Henessey, and muddle the mashers, but when I lost you I didn't care what I did. But my week's up-to-night, and I'll turn the business no for ever, straight wire," smiling at her return to the old free and easy style.

So with a promise to see her later on, Norman left Dulcie with her, and went down the stairs, happy once again in the knowledge that she still belonged to him, and only a few hours separated them.

Owing to unforeseen delays, he did not return to the hotel—better known as the Man Trap Club than by its licensed name—until nearly eleven o'clock. He found Rita in the private bar, looking almost her old self, and busily attending to the liquid wants of several well-dressed individuals of the smart book-maker, variety-actor, and man-about-town type. Although the bar was small, there were four girls, including Rita, presided over by the "boss," Clara Parke, a large-bosomed, dark-haired woman, whose past career had been a record of the grossest kinds of immorality. She leased this bar from the landlord of the hotel, and cheerfully paid a large rental for the privilege of running it in her own peculiar way, and that way, it may safely be said, was of the red-hottest kind in the city.

Presently most of the customers crowded in front of a fair, hand-painted, golden-haired girl, who was firing off a very red-hot fairy tale; so Rita was left free to chat with Norman.

"A nice lot, aint they?" she said, indicating the puffing customers. "They all think they're so awfully clever, and yet those girls take them down as easily as falling off a log. That fair girl, Alice the Nut, makes £5 or £6 a week out of that big bookmaking chap, and yet all the time her real fancy man is a hansom cabby on the Collins street rank, whose rent she pays out of the bookie's money. Then there's that variety star. He gets £25 a week for dabbing a bit of red paint on his nose, wearing a red patch on the bosom of his pants, and howling comic songs, and he does half of his stuff in with Clara Parke, and the other half at the races."

"There must be a terrible amount of liquor sold here to need four girls to serve," observed Norman.

"Oh I well, you see, they're not here only to sell drinks," was the response. "My dear boy, surely you're not so green that you haven't

wumbled to the game. Why, bless you, Clara doesn't pay any of them except me."

"Doesn't pay them?" said Norman. "You don't mean to tell me they work here solely for the love of the thing?"

"Well, scarcely," she replied; "but there are always plenty of pickings when there are so many mugs about. You see, by being here they can't be run in for having no lawful visible means of support, and they have exceptional chances of meeting foolish fellows with plenty of cash, who are just so many gold and silver mines to them. It's—it's—oh! well, it's better than strolling about the streets."

"And those rooms there beyond the piano—what are they for?"

It is not quite certain that Rita blushed, but she decidedly hesitated before replying.

"Oh! they're the private refreshment rooms. You see, if a customer wants to have a quiet drink away from the bar, he can have it in there, and Clara or one of the others will attend to him."

"But where does the profit come in?" queried inquisitive Norman. "They're cosily furnished, and drinks at 6d. a time wouldn't pay for them."

She did blush at that time, and drew vague figures on the counter as she said—

"Oh! they pay for the furnishing all right. You see drinks served in there are more expensive than out here. You could easily spend a half sovereign or a pound over a couple of whiskies in there, but then the accommodation is so much better."

"Half a sov. or a quid for a couple of whiskies!" exclaimed Norman, in disbelief. "Why, no fellow would be ass enough to do that."

"You forget the special attendance of Clara or one of the others," observed Rita, still keeping her eyes counterwards, but something in her tone made Norman suddenly bend towards her and whisper anxiously—

"What on earth brought YOU to this place? It'll ruin your character for ever."

"I told you before that I didn't care what I did when I thought you despised me," she answered.

"Yes, but why didn't you get into a respectable private bar? There are any amount of them in the city."

"Because the respectable ones want references, and Clara was content to take me on my face value," she said. "But I've told her I'm going after to-night, so don't get on to me any more about it."

"All right," was the answer. "But tell me one thing. I noticed you drinking with those fellows as I came in; how is it you don't get drunk?"

"I drink nothing but sherry," said Rita.

"But sherry taken so often is as bad as anything else," he urged.

"Ah! but my sherry is cold tea and water, with three drops of wine in it, so that if a man is suspicious I let him smell it, and he's

satisfied that I'm not having him," she explained with a sly smile.

At that moment there was a burst of laughter from the crowd, and Norman saw Clara Farke coming from one of the private rooms dressed in the kilt and other accessories of a Highlander, who stood by the piano with the woman's skirt on. The kilt was more than commonly short, and displayed Clara's splendid legs and lacy lingerie to an extent only paralleled by a stage fairy. On her head was Scottie's bonnet, and as she pranced about in a ludicrous and exaggerated imitation of a Highland fling, or tried to kick the big bookie's belltopper off his head, those fine limbs and the voluptuous attitudes into which she threw herself drew admiring applause and rude remarks from most of the spectators, and encouraged her to higher flights of devilment. Seizing the big bookie round the neck, she broke into a wild, whirling dance, and, as gaily as infectious, Alice the Nut scrambled over the counter—exhibiting legs almost as shapely as Clara's—and joined in the madness with the variety star. The other two girls followed suit, and in five minutes that private bar was the scene of as reckless an orgie as the most vicious could desire.

But soon the fun was turned into a riot, for Clara, bounding about with the bookie, cannoned heavily against Alice the Nut, and knocked that "perfect lady" on the broad of her back, or the broadest part of her back, whichever way you like to put it. Up jumped Alice, and, like lightning, smashed a tumbler at Clara's face, and in a second the room echoed with the sounds of oaths, thuds and yells. Norman turned to implore Rita to quit the place, but was only in time to see her dart down the passage which he knew led to the back bedroom. Quick as he was, she had entered and banged the door before he reached it, but with a mighty shove he burst it open, and clasped her in his arms.

"Thank heaven! it's you," she exclaimed breathlessly. "I thought it was one of those drunken beasts after me."

"Well," he said, diplomatically, "as long as those drunken beasts MAY come after you, let me stay and protect you."

"What! At this time of night! Do you want to ruin my character for ever?" she said, without a great show of anger, however.

"But you can't stay in this hole any longer," he protested.

"No, but dear boy, as soon as I get my hat and cloak on you can get me a bed at the Coffee Palace," she replied, and as it turned out he experienced no difficulty in adopting her thoughtful suggestion.

CHAPTER VII.

CLARA'S STIRRING STORY.

"Rita," said Norman, about a week after they had settled down in a snug little cottage in Fitzroy, "tell me the story of your life. You must have had a hard time of it, I

fancy, and have seen more queer things than most girls of your age."

"Well, dear boy, it's not at all a pretty story," she answered; "there are a good many blishes in it. Besides, it's risky for a girl like me to confess too much, because I haven't been precisely an angel, you know, and you may throw it all up to me when you get tired of me."

"But as I don't mean to get tired of you," he said, "you can take all risks and fire away."

"Very well, then, I will fire away," Rita observed, "and I'll commence firing from the time I was thirteen years of age. That's when my troubles began. I was living with my mother, brother and sisters in Hobart, and we had a lodger, a bank clerk, and a friend of my brother. That blessed bank clerk ruined me."

"Ruined you! What, at thirteen years of age?"

"Yes, at thirteen years of age. But, mind you, I was as big and plump as a fifteen year-old, and even then had legs as pretty as you could see anywhere."

"I can quite believe that, judging from what they are now."

"Please, keep away and don't get spongy, dear boy, or I'll never get on with my story. Well, those pretty legs attracted this fellow's attention, and when we were alone he took every opportunity of teasing me about them. I remember him saying once, 'Rita, I've seen the prettiest legs in Australia!'—he was a Melbourne chap—and now I see the prettiest in the world. Fancy talking to a child like that—the brute! Well, one evening when all the others were away at a concert and he was summoning to show me a photo album, he pulled me down on his knee and began to get so rude that I was frightened, and, jumping up, ran into my brother's room, the door of mine being shut. He pursued me and violated me, threatening afterwards that if I told anyone we'd both be put in gaol. That scared me, for I was an innocent, timid little kid, and so I said nothing, but I'm sure, if my brother had known about it, he'd have killed him."

"Killed him! Skinning alive would have been about what he deserved, Rita."

"Well, having once accomplished his purpose, the beast lost no chance of repeating the offence in spite of my endeavors to avoid him, for you can't believe how ashamed I felt, and how I hated the sight of the wretch. And so it went on for two years, when one day he left us, and shortly afterwards I found myself doubly his victim, for I was—ahem!—in an interesting condition."

"Good God! At fifteen!"

"Yes, at fifteen. Well, I didn't know what to do, but at last I told my eldest sister, married and old enough to be my mother almost, and she, thinking only to keep the disgrace from the others, sent me to Melbourne to a school-friend of hers. Then,

when my baby came, it was taken from me, put out to nurse and there died," and a tear fell gently from her eye, as the song says. Norman soothed her lovingly for about five minutes, and she continued—

"When I was well enough to get about again, I determined to do something for myself and be dependent on nobody. My idea was to go upon the stage, and because I had lovely legs I managed to get on in a pantomime, in which Nellie Stewart was principal. But that did not last long, and when I was thrown out of work, and felt desperate, I answered an Age advertisement for a handy girl, and was engaged by Madame Thorn, who was afterwards mixed up in a wife murder in Sydney."

"Madame Thorn! Great Scott! she was one of the worst!"

"Ah, dear boy, but I didn't know that then, and when I did find out her awful character I stayed on with her simply because I could get nothing else to do. Oh! what a horrible house it was, and what a fiend that woman proved to be! I remember once she attempted to blackmail a wholesale soft-goods merchant for £50, but was coolly and promptly told to go to the devil, and do her worst. Two months afterwards she enticed him into her house under pretence of introducing him to a beautiful girl from Shepparton, and, after extracting £5 from him for the introduction, showed him into a room wherein lay his wife in a half-drunken and very-partially clothed condition. She had been deliberately decoyed and debauched through Madame's desire for revenge on the husband."

"Holy Sailor! I never heard anything so terrible!"

"Oh! she was a perfect devil. She lost no opportunity of picking up a nice young girl to be used as a plaything by one or other of her dissipated clients. One of the most constant of those clients was a bank-manager, now in goal for fraud and embezzlement. Madame made as much as £500 a year out of this human bog. Sunday after Sunday, he used to drive his wife to church, leave her there, and proceed to Madame's, where he indulged in the most vicious practices until it was time for him to meet his wife again at the church and go home to lunch."

"Well, I'm glad to know he's in gaol. It's a pity he didn't get flogged."

"Yes, and Madame, too. I can tell you that when she managed to get a young girl into her clutches she lost no time in conveying the news to one of her friends:—she used to write—'Come up. Something nice; all yours. Hurry.' She was too cunning to put name or address. She sent that kind of note one day to a gentlemanly blackguard, who at the time was entertaining some friends and his wife, who had not been a particular friend of his for some time previous. Ten minutes later he left for Madame's, but just at the door was met by his brother-in-law—



For I punched him with my umbrella— Page 17.

then an M.P.—who thrashed him so soundly that the dirty cur was under the doctor's care for a fortnight."

"And you, Rita? Didn't Madame sell you to any of these dirty cures?"

"Oh! you bet she tried her level best, but my first experience of the brutality of men kept me severely off them, no matter what they offered me, or how she rounded on me for not making better use of my good looks, as she used to say."

"Well, how did you come to leave, and what did you do afterwards?"

"I left because a blessed elf burst the door of my room open one night and tried to assault me. I could hear Madame chucking on the stairs, and that made me so mad that I hit him on the head with a poker and stopped his and her funny little game. Then I cleared out, and a couple of days afterwards went as housemaid in a ladies' school at Hawthorn."

"Well, that was a decided change from a brothel."

"Rather! But there were some queer goings-on there, all the same. You can believe me that some of those innocent-looking young ladies who attended that school used to play some peculiar pranks amongst themselves. I wouldn't like to tell you all they did, and I'm not particularly squeamish—with you, at any rate, dear boy. Some day, some one will write a full account of that life and—get two years for it."

"Humph! I've heard it isn't all piety and prayer-books at some of those tip-top establishments."

"If they're all like the one I was at—well, I would not care about a daughter of mine being educated there, but of course that kind is the exception. But I'll tell you a funny thing about Mrs. Miff, the principal, and myself."

"What! Did you two play peculiar pranks, too?"

"Well, it was rather a peculiar prank. You see, Mrs. Miff was struck on a handsome young visiting master who used to teach the violin, and he seemed pretty partial to her, too—at least, till I poked my nose in. He lived in a cottage in Auburn with a housekeeper old enough to be his mother. He had asked Mrs. Miff to take supper there with him, but as he was supposed to be a bold bad young man, she said she'd only go if I went with her—as a sort of restraining influence on the giddy professor. Of course I jumped at the chance, and, as he had never seen me, proposed that I should dress up as a boy and pass as her nephew, and she consented."

"And a charming boy you made, I can guess."

"Yes, I didn't take up so much room in a chair as I do now, and I looked about as nice as they make 'em. But the professor seemed mighty disappointed when he saw me, and as I afterwards learned soon tumbled

that I was a girl, though he said nothing about it then. Twice a week we visited him, I always as a boy, and Mrs. Miff got more and more sweet on him, and I began to feel a bit mashed on him myself—worse luck. Anyhow, one evening she was too ill to go, so she sent me with her apologies, telling me to stop no longer than was necessary. You see, our ideas of how long was necessary were quite different, for as a matter of fact I did not get back till two o'clock next morning. And you should have seen your lovely Rita. Cheeks flushed, eyes heavy, short hair disordered, and appearance strongly suggestive of drink—as it might well have been. I told Mrs. Miff that the professor had had friends there—quite a little party—and had made me stay longer than I meant to. 'Well, Rita,' said Mrs. Miff, 'there are two things which assure me that you are a dreadful little liar—and worse. The first is that his housekeeper called here and told me that you were having supper with him alone, and he had sent her on an errand.' 'And the second?' I asked, rather flabbergasted. 'That you have the professor's trousers on!' And, by Jove, old boy, when I looked down I saw that she was perfectly correct."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Norman. "And I suppose you left the school after that?"

"Yes, and so did the professor. More than that, we got married a week afterwards, and he is the reason, dear boy, why I couldn't become your lawful wedded missis when you asked me the other day."

"He's alive, then? But how did he come to leave you?"

"I left him. You see, he wanted to run a little harem of his own, and was carrying on a very strong game with two or three day pupils of the schools he taught at. He had got one so gone on him that, while I was staying with a friend—really and truly, a lady-friend—for a week, he persuaded the girl to come to our house one night. I returned very unexpectedly about midnight, and, going straight to our room, found to my utter amazement that my beautiful hubby had that girl for company—and she wasn't in her out-door costume either, I can tell you. They had been having such a dog of a time together that they didn't hear me, but they felt me, for I pounded him with my Isabella—I mean, umbrellas—till he was sad and sorry, and then I turned on the girl and laid on to her in the way naughty little schoolgirls should be treated. Then I hunted them both out, slept the sleep of the just, and found in the morning that they had both cleared out, and I haven't seen him since."

"And is he alive?"

"Oh! yes; he's living with that girl in Geelong, but as I was glad to get rid of him—he wasn't a dear, good fellow, like you, old boy—I haven't troubled to hunt him up. After that I barmaided at various pubs, and had just left one, and taken lodgings at Auntie's, without knowing the character of the place,

when I met you—and here I am, yours truly from now till kingdom come, dear boy. I told you mine wasn't a pretty story, but at any rate you now know the best and worst of me."

"Well, the future shall make up for the past," said Norman, "if my luck keeps up. And that reminds me that I have to meet a man about some money in an hour."

"Whereabouts?"

"Outside Bowes' Tattersalls Club, in Bourke street," and what that meeting led to you will learn later on.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE CLUB.

The man whom Norman had to meet was a member of the most progressive and popular sporting club in Melbourne, that institution familiarly known as Bowes' Tattersalls, wherein do congregate and intermingle the racing man who has always got the latest information from such-and-such a stable; the other man, who knows more about draw-poker than a Bishop knows about his Bible; the third party, who takes his billiards as regularly as he takes his meals, and a multiplicity of other individuals who are up to every point in every game in the marvellous city. There are some whose lives are passed in risking small fortunes on the speed of a horse, or the turn of a card—restless, daring agents who would speculate on anything from a Melbourne Cup down to the number of corns on a ballet-girl's toes, rather than not speculate at all. You will find very few frivolous little triflers amongst the frequenters of this famous club, although there are members, mind you, who prefer the coosiness and solid comforts to be found here even to that exciting chase after the elusive cootish which distracts the majority. But to those who desire to rub shoulders with the gilded bookmaker, the neck-or-nothing plunger, the popular young actor-hero of Bland Holtian melodrama, or the many other bright and sharp needles in this metropolitan bundle of hay, Bowes' Tattersalls is the club to subscribe to.

All this, and much more, had Norman's friend related, after which they passed upstairs to the club itself and its many attractions. In the billiard room Norman was introduced to George, the assistant secretary, who, his friend informed him, was considerably bossed by certain members, but, nevertheless, proved, even on such short acquaintance, a most obliging young man, and on very friendly terms with most of the members.

"Has Dad John come in yet?" asked Norman's friend, as George stooped down to pet "Dodger," a smart little fox terrier and the pet of the club.

"Haven't seen him to-night," was the reply. "Want him particularly?"

"Well, he promised to meet me here and tell me something particular about an affair

that happened to him some 50 years ago, that's all," and he explained to Norman that Dad John was about the oldest member of the club, poor but proud, and quite an interesting character in his own peculiar way.

"And there's another," he added, indicating an elderly man who was holding forth to a small crowd on some racing event of the Lord knows how far back. "That's Billy Marades, the man with a wonderful memory. Impossible for him to forget anything, it seems. In everything concerning horse-racing, hang me if he isn't a walking Centaur's Index, with all the back numbers glued on his memory box, and also a great authority on the Yidisher language."

"And what is his particular excuse for living?" asked Norman.

"Excuse! Humph! He's a member of the Victorian Club, and a man doesn't want any better excuse than that, I reckon. Give old Billy his due, he's a cool and clever bluffer at draw-poker, and willing enough to allow a friend to bank with him. A born gambler, but not a bad fellow, take him all round."

The game in progress not being particularly interesting, they made their way to another portion of the club, where the essentially gambling game of draw-poker was the principal feature of the scenery. Here Norman was made known to Joe Nelson, the hon. secretary, who appeared to grow enthusiastic only on the subject of a certain fine and resplendent building into which the club proposed to remove.

"Then," said Nelson, "when we've got room to move according to our strength, this club will hum like a blow-fly in summer time."

The principal excitement was centred about a table at which several of the most inveterate poker kings were very busily engaged in taking each other down to the best of their ability.

"Red hot on the game, all of 'em," whispered Norman's guide. "The luckiest of the lot is Harry Lamington, or, as we call him, 'Ironside.' He's as cool as 'Dodger's' nose, and has scooped in a small fortune with the broads. Listen to him now with his 'Very well, play for sixteen.' It's turtle to tripe that he holds a routine flash, and has 'em all dead as a ten year-old corpse."

"And who are the others?" asked Norman, beginning to feel that he had struck tip-top company at last, and was getting it at wholesale rates, too.

"Well, that good-looking Yidisher is Barney Hallet; you know him, of course. His numerous and very conspicuous talents don't need any glaring advertisement at this day and date. His reputation's been boomed like a patent pill, and you couldn't enumerate all the tricks he has up his sleeve if you tried till the cows come home. Lord love you! why that man could talk the wires out of a phonograph if there was anything to be made out of it."

"And the member opposite him?"

"One of Barney's particular pals, Joe Parris, a bookie who knows boxing all the way from A to Z. Some say he's got a very large rat on English cricket, and there's no doubt he's a very staunch supporter of the Britishers. He's solid and white; but when he backs his fancy he generally loses, though, win or lose, he's too old a bird to flatter a feather. The fourth man is a racehorse owner, and one of the best judges in the colony, and now, as is he quitting, I'll have a cut in myself, so put up a fiveer and stand in with me."

Nothing loth, Norman loaded his friend with the necessary ammunition, and that friend proceeded to fire away with a zeal which betokened that he, too, was a born gambler, like Billy Marsden.

Sad to say, Norman was not especially well versed in the complexities of draw-poker, but he assumed what he believed to be a most knowing and expert attitude, and watched the transitions of the noble game with at least a £5 interest. But although he did not quite comprehend all the mysteries, and could not have identified a "straight" from a bag of peanuts, or have taken his solemn so-help-me-as-to-the-precise-value-of-a-pair-of-jacks, he contrived to look wise, and throw in an exclamatory, "Great hand, by thunder!" or "Never saw such Chinese mox, since Aunt Ann died!" just where he thought it would wedge in best.

That the fluctuations of the play were more than commonly exciting he judged from the heated remarks of several evidently-adept on-lookers, such as President Turner, George Langley and several others, who, it appeared, could not restrain their feelings despite the remonstrances of the players to keep order.

Also, by the exultant expression of his friend's face, he easily gathered that that worthy's good luck was on deck, and the fiveer expanding like the proverbial mushroom, or that Irish youngster who grew so quickly that although his parents endeavoured to keep him decently clothed in some of their own garments, yet

"His father's old breeches shrank up to his knees, and his mother's old stays were a very tight squeeze."

As a matter of fact, when the players finished for the night, Norman's friend had got the best of the sport to the grateful and comforting extent of £60, which they proceeded to share as they prepared to go downstairs and home.

"By the way," asked Norman, as he was separating the bank notes from the coin, "do you think the bookies here play square, or all they know?"

"On the dead square, I should say," the other replied. "You see, if they tried any crook business and were found out, they would be expelled from the club, and that would mean that the V.R.C. would not register them again. But I say, don't flash that

money so much. There's some red hot spiclers—of course, unconnected with the club—who hang about the street door, and—" but the warning came too late, for, like lightning, a fellow grabbed the notes from Norman's hand, and darted into Bourke street, while two others, evidently the thief's associates, attempted to block the victim's path, and give the fugitive time to lose himself. But, as you may have noticed, Norman was a tough customer, and prompt to act in emergencies, so, settling one obstructor with an unholy bash on the jaw and thrusting the other aside, he reached the street just in time to perceive the flying spicler on the opposite side turn down a passage leading to Little Bourke street.

The chase was sharp but short, for seeing that Norman was certain to catch him, the robber stopped and showed fight, which was not exactly the best thing for him, as Norman set to work once more without parley, and getting him against a wall landed him a vicious upper-cut which drove his head against the bricks with that dull, sickening thud which you may have heard of before, and then passed him two or three, which disfigured the fellow's face so that Magistrate Panton himself would not have recognised him—and nobody has had a better chance of knowing him. Then Norman regained his money, and made his way back to Bourke street, where the first person he met was his tricky little friend, Dulcie Fisher.

"Blew me! here's luck!" she exclaimed on seeing him; "jest the identical blokey I was looking for."

"Why, anything wrong this time, Dulcie?" he asked.

"No fear," came the answer; "but there's a rye-buck sheok ball on to-morrow down the frog an' toad—that's the road, you know—an' I wa flinkin' if you an' Rita wanted to have a shine bit o' fun you might come down wif me. It'll be cherry ripe, I kin promise yer."

"But what is a sheok ball, and which particular frog and toad do you mean?" he enquired.

"Well, lumme, if you ain't a bloomin' kid in long togs!" she replied. "Why, a sheok ball is a larrikins' hop, and the frog and toad is Simpson's road," and though scarcely any wiser, Norman not only promised to go, but kept that promise, and, as you will see, had as wild and woolly a night of it as he had ever had in his life before.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHEOK BALL.

For the edification of those not familiar with the picturesque slangage of the Melbourne larrikin, it may be necessary to observe that a sheok, or tanglefoot, otherwise the poorest kind of colonial beer, forms the chief item of the liquid refreshments imbibed at larrikins' dances, and is usually purchased in "rabbits," or billycans and odd bottles, and drank out of the same utensils.



AT THE CLUB.

There is no gaudy ostentation about an affair of this sort. The admission is a "bob" for gents and a "sprat" for ladies, and the only arbitrary rule about costume is that you must wear socks or stockings, according to your sex. The music is jerked out to an accordion regardless of cost or time, and there are no beastly formalities of introduction between blokes and donahs. The M.C. is boss of the room until the sheok begins to take effect, when matters become much mixed, and every man and every girl goes strictly "on their own."

As Rita had declared that she felt too unwell to attend this brilliant festival, Norman and Dulcie concluded to go by themselves. And you should have seen Dulcie! As she put it herself, she "had 'em all on," and with a flaring red blouse, a pink and white skirt, just short enough to show neat legs in "railway" stockings—red and white stripes—a pair of high-heeled shoes, and an enormous hat with four gigantic scarlet "fevers" sweeping over it, she was as flash and proud a little donah as ever plastered a fringe with matton fat. At her suggestion, they went down to Simpson's road like toffs on the tram, and soon found themselves in a Colingwood dancing den which was filled with enthusiastic tarts and blokes evidently bent on having a very high old time of it.

"Hold on," said Dulcie, as they entered; "don't make no bloommin' noise. Ginger Mac's givin' 'em a song. He's a real corker on the warble, I kin tell you; he ought to be on at Rickards', he ought."

The singer was a red-haired bottle-ob with large, splay ears, and a mouth like a dog kennel, and, in a voice worn and ragged with bawling at his daily trade, he was giving vent to the Simpson's Road National Anthem, commonly known as "Her Smith Street Fringe," which went something like this:—

You should see 'er at the Horty darcin' wif 'er lump o' coke—

That's 'er bloke;

Wif 'er 'air upon 'er block so strile, a real fair beaut is she—

N.T.B.

In 'er dlobber, skirt an' blouse an' belt, an' all right up ter Dock.

Oh! she's a toff is Emmer when she's done up in good nick.

Wif a smile upon 'er nose an' scuf, an' in 'er 'at a dings.

She knocks the pebs all balmy wif 'er ripplin' Sniff street fringe.

"Rye buck, Ging," cried Dulcie, as the charming ballad terminated. "Sling us 'When maver gets on the wine-oh.' It's a sentermental," she whispered to Norman, "an' the way Ging, does it it'd bring tears to yer mince pies—I mean yer eyes."

But Ginger declined an encore, saying his "froast was as dry as a hempty 'Ennessey," but promised to oblige again after he had oiled that "froast" with some sheok.

Then "Spring ord yer tails, blokkies, an' book on to yer bite of muslin," commanded

the M.C., and in two minutes the accordion was blurring out the "Sons of the Sea" waltz, and the crowd were dancing with a ludicrous and exaggerated earnestness. Evidently "hopping" was to them a matter of much seriousness, and no more absurd sight could be witnessed than that of two greasy-haired partners clutching each other as though they were about to wrestle, and solemnly spinning round on tiptoes, the girl with closed eyes and a mouth open like a dead fish, and the man breathing sheok into her face, and leaving a large, palpable stain on the back of her dress where his hot, greasy fingers clawed her.

Norman thought that he might as well join in the fun, and accordingly made his way to where a sulky-looking, fair-haired girl was seated, and had just asked her to have a turn with him, when a long, angular larrikin, with a week's growth on his chin, and no collar or tie, rolled up, and said—

"Say, blokkie, where are you pushin' your barrow? Wot's yer game wif my bit of stuff?"

Norman explained that he had just requested the lady to dance with him.

"Garn!" exclaimed the other; "wot sort of a nark are you, tryin' ter edge in yer oar wif my moll. Blime, a man ought to pass you one," raising his hand threateningly. But as he saw Norman was big and bulky and did not flinch, the threatening fist was turned towards the girl.

"Look here, Lix," the owner of the fist granted, "I ain't goin' ter stand none of yer sunny business. Didn't I tell yer I'd deal wif you if you started messin' around other blokes?"

"Well, I wasn't doin' no 'arm, Stoney," answered the girl. "Lumme, can't a gent speak ter me wifout you gettin' yer bloommin' shirt out?"

"Garn now, or I'll wooden yer," was all the satisfaction she got. "Strike me lat, you'll cop out if I ketch you darcin' wif any bloke but me, take my colonial for it," and as Norman saw that the girl was scared by the attitude of her "lad," and was not anxious to make matters worse by interfering, he concluded to go without his waltz, and retired from the scene.

When the dance was over, Dulcie, who had evidently been enjoying herself immensely, came to him and said—

"See that bloke I was darcin' wif? That's Sonny Wheeler, the king of the Road push"—and how proudly she said it!—"Well, he was tellin' me that a push from Church street's comin' up here ter smash this cique up an' serve out stonah, so there'll be stacks of fun before it's all over. Ever seen Sonny use his dooks—I mean his hands?"

Norman pleaded ignorance, and she went on—

"Oh! he's a red-hot member, Sonny is. You ought ter see him dealin' wif the cops when he's tanked. S'elp me, there ain't

stuffed in Blan 'Oit's plays 'arf so good. But s'pose you com' an' 'ave an oh-my-dear."

"What the deuce is an oh-my-dear?" asked the bewildered Norman.

"A beer, of course," was the reply, and, following his lively little friend, he was led to a place behind a small platform, where the sheok was flowing freely, and handed a billy can from which to quench whatever thirst he happened to have about him. He had just managed to gulph down a lipfall when "biff! bang!" sounded on his ears, and he turned to find Stoney, the long, angular larrikin, pounding another ruffian with frightful ferocity, while Liz, the sulky one, was crouching by with a terrified countenance.

"By —!" bellowed Stoney to his opponent, "I'll learn you ter go pullin' my tart about." Woof! bing! biff! "I'll kick the bloomin' stuffin' out of you." Biff! bang! woof! "Wanted ter 'ave a cook at 'er Dutch pegs, did you?" Biff! woof! bang! "I'll give you Dutch pegs, you bloomin' fag end of a spit," the biff! bang! business indicating the sound of his fists against the other fellow's features. Apparently Stoney was wildly jealous, and objected to anyone having a "look" at Liz's "Dutch pegs," or, in other words, a look at her legs. His rival went down a mass of blood and groans, and Stoney, rounding sharply on Liz, said—

"Fatten yerself on that, you bloomin' cow!" and sent her reeling against the wall with a vicious blow on the cheek. Norman made a step forward to give the brute as good as he had given the girl, but Dulcie, seeing blood in his eye, pushed him into the dance room, saying—

"You don't want ter mix wif that tripe. That Stoney 'd kick the daylight out of you, or smash you wif 'arf a brick. Why, he's one's feet come out of the jug for downin' a cop wif a drain-pipe. He's a bloomin' bludger, that's wot he is, an' Liz 'll stick a knife in him one of these days. Come an' 'ave this scotch 'tch wif me," and as the accordion began blarneying again Norman spent his anger in an erratic schottische. By this time the sheok had commenced to influence the crowd, and the whirl of petticoats and legs of all sorts and sizes which went flying over that floor was something fearful and wonderful to behold. There was bashing and banging and muzzing and hugging of the very warmest brand, the heated atmosphere, excitement and drink banishing every little shade of propriety from both sexes.

After the schottische, a pasty-faced girl volunteered a step dance, but Norman noticed that very little attention was paid to her performance, for couple after couple were disappearing up some rickety stairs to a kind of hayloft. He turned to demand an explanation from Dulcie, but found that that little donah had also disappeared, and the next sensation he had was a crush overhead and the appearance of Dulcie's railway stockings through

the flimsy roof. He had only time to stand aside when further crashing and yelling was heard, and Dulcie came tumbling through to the floor, clasped in the arms of Sammy Wheeler, king of the Road push, and followed by the falling bodies of other couples who had gone upstairs previously. Nobody was much hurt, though their language was about as bad as it could be, and Norman had only time to gather that they had been romping too heavily up above and had smashed the floor in, when showers of stones came through the windows, the front door was burst open, and the Church street push had arrived to serve out the promised "stomach."

Such shrieking and cursing and fighting were never known down the Road before. Sonny Wheeler, seizing a bottle, and backed up by fellows and girls, advanced towards the intruders and gashed the leader's cheek with one blow of his weapon, and then the "stomach" became general. Sticks, stones, fists, bottles were combined in one wild, confused slaughter, blood and hair flowing and flying freely. Skirts and petticoats, coats and shirts were torn to shreds, and Norman wondered how he was going to escape alive. But in the midst of the din Sonny's voice was heard shouting—"Do a guy, chaps; here's the bloomin' traps," and just as Norman saw the police helmets at the door, Dulcie, bleeding and tattered, ran up to him and said—

"Come on; the cops are on the job; we'll 'ave ter clear, or they'll shove us in," and darted through a back door. Norman, following, found himself in a dark lane, and from there dodged through a back-yard and along the passage of an hotel till he found himself in Victoria street, with Dulcie wildly waving a tram to stop. Half-an-hour afterwards they arrived at his little cottage only to find it in deep gloom.

"Rita must 'ave gone to the roses red—I mean, bed," said Dulcie. But on entering they could discover no Rita in bed or elsewhere.

"Good God! what's happened this time!" exclaimed Norman.

"P'raps this'll tell us," suggested Dulcie, picking up a note from the dressing table, and reading—

"'Can't help it. Gone down town to have a pipe. I was dying for it.—Rita."

"That cursed opium again!" muttered Norman. "But what does down town mean, Dulcie? I thought she went to South Yarra for that sort of thing."

"Police bust up that place," said Dulcie. "She's gone ter some Chow's this time, I reckon."

"Then, by God, I'll have her out of it if I root out every Chow's den in the city," Norman said determinedly, and as soon as Dulcie had smartened herself up they went out again to search for the missing Rita among the foul garbage of Little Bourke street.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SLUMS.

Even in the sweet and full light of day, Little Bourke street and its purlieus cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be considered an abode of virtue and cleanliness, the crowding together of pestilential Chinese, and other undesirable and girl-smelling foreigners, in dark, dank and nauseous rookeries, making the locality God-forgotten and miserable in the extreme. And at the time of this story it wore its very worst aspect. What, then, were its characteristics at midnight, when Norman and Dulcie picked their way through its loathsome quarters in search of beautiful but wayward Rita? Yellow, hideous scum; the peculiar and abhorrent filthiness in which the slant-eyed Chow delights to wallow; dreadful, sickly dens fouled with the slime of years, and tainted with the vile stench of opium—that is what first struck the startled senses of the stranger. Here, in the heart of a proud and magnificent city, this horrible sore was allowed to fester and exude all manner of nastiness for the sake of the rents received by fat-bellied, hypocritical landlords, who passed the plate round in church, presented an outward appearance of snug respectability, and yet fattened on the vice-begotten money of disease-ridden prostitutes and villainous Chinese. Wives and daughters of city magnates rolled in their luxurious carriages, dressed in fashionable and extravagant finery, be-gemmed themselves with brilliant jewellery, and lived their butterfly lives in the rapid sphere of pinchbeck colonial society, and all the time were dependent for some considerable portion of their wealth on the extortionate rents extracted from the garbage-heaps of the city. No sanitary or building laws affected them; twenty-four stinck-struck, filth-emitting Chinese wretches might herd together in the space properly inadequate for one, under conditions at which even a street dog might turn up his nose; but the pompous money-grabbing owners could evade and deride the Law with the complacent air of privileged persons who know that Authority would crawl at their feet, and offer no interference to their consciousnessless methods of money-making.

Thank God, a brighter day has dawned, and the city is slowly but surely being purged of some of its horrors.

To Norman, who had had no previous experience of the depth of Little Bourke street vileness, the succession of beastly scenes through which he passed came as a vivid and paralyzing shock, and for some time he could hardly realize that he was not tortured by some terrible dream. Den after den he found devoted to the worship of the devil-drug; yellow and white men, and battered hags and girls of tender years, all sitting, lying or sprawling about in fearful and degrading devotion to the opium pipe. The lamp, tray, pipe and needle held them in a mighty thrall

from which their souls found no escape. The cunning, slit-eyed, evil-looking Chow; the cadaverous, lantern-jawed larrikin; the oath-dripping, bear-eyed, grey-haired harlot; the pony-fringed, foul-tongued, hardened young bawd; the lank-limbed, short-frocked, defiant child of sixteen—all intermingled in this most accursed sink of depravity, Godless, and foul as any creatures who ever groped in a mock-heap. How they managed to exist at all in such a foetid atmosphere is beyond the ken of decent man to imagine, and yet every dreary, noisome hovel visited that night was reeking with them.

"Phew!" exclaimed Dulcie, as they ascended the rickety stairs of a typical den; "if this ain't as strong as Keen's, I'm a bloomin' banana."

"So strong," said Norman, "that I can't believe that a girl of Rita's dainty character could have anything to do with such offal."

"Ah, but that's where you make a bloomer," responded Dulcie. "The most surprisin' thing about this bally business of opium-soakin' is that real fair toffs of lydies come here for a pipe. Why, it was only a month ago that a rich banker's daughter was found by the D.'s stark senseless wif smokin', an' taken back home. Three days afterwards she guv her people the go-by, an' went up to a Chow camp at Maryborough, an' took no wif the ugliest yellin' devil you ever see. Oh! I tell you when the opium grabs 'em the best of 'em cave in."

By this time, they had reached the landing, and thrusting open a door came on a scene which will live long in Norman's memory. Scratched out on a mattress side by side, perfectly unconscious, were a handsome, striah girl and a well-dressed young man, baring in the profound depths of an opium sleep from which they would not wake for hours.

"There you are," said Dulcie, pointing to the recumbent figures; "that tart's as dainty as Rita, from tip to toe, and yet see what she's come to."

Norman gazed and shuddered.

"Thank God, it is not Rita," he ejaculated.

"Do you know who she is, Dulcie?"

"Yess; that's Minnie Lumley, daughter of Squatter Merton, and wife of Lumley who was a parson up at Woostabadgery. She's been educated up to the skies at the Sydney University, took her bloomin' degree like water, married Lumley, old enough to be her old man, guv tracts out round the Chow camp at Nitalin, got ruined there, slipped down to Melbourne, an' 'as been knocking about the drums for four months. Her old man, the parson blokie, went off 'is chumps when he heard of her disgrace, an' blew off the top of his lumpo head—I mean, his head—wif a revolver. She's got consumption, an' 'll throw in her alley in a week or two, take my tip for it."

"What I you mean that she is doomed for death, Dulcie?" exclaimed Norman in horror.

"That's it," was the reply. "Dr. Fixall sees

she'll be a stiff 'un inside of a monf. But, Lord love you, she's on'y a sample. You wouldn't believe the number of decent girls as 'as been done to deaf froo this open-joint business. By gum, you couldn't kid this chicken to go in for it. I've had some warm times, but I ain't never 'ad no blooming use for a Chow, Mr. Norman."

They passed through piggery after piggery of the same obnoxious character until they came to a narrow and grimy lane at the back of the Alexandra Theatre. Here they entered a ramshackle tenement, the front room of which was devoted to the Chinese lottery game, and, though there was no marking tickets at that time of the morning, the apartment was chock-a-block with dissipated wretches of either sex. The chief figure in the scene was a buxom, black-haired young married woman, drink-solden and utterly shameless, who, having placed a fine leg on a bench, was having the calf measured by a cuff-and-collar-well. His coarse flatteries on the size of the limb he was examining, and his drunken endeavors to expose more of that limb to his lecherous gaze, caused Norman to pay more than ordinary attention to him, and to his surprise he recognised him as Horace Kindur, whom he had fought and defeated on two occasions. The thought struck him instantly that this man might have had something to do with Rita's disappearance. To think was to act with Norman, so, advancing towards the fellow, he was about to question him, when Kindur, recognising his old opponent, left the large-legged girl, and placing himself before a door, said defiantly—"By thunder, you won't sneak her from me this time, old cockalorum."

For answer, Norman, convinced that Rita was within the inner room, seized him and, after a brief struggle, hurled him aside, and kicked open the door. No sooner had he done so than the sound of a pistol shot was heard, and a bullet whistled by him and went pinging into the wooden partition.

"Stand back, you beast," cried Rita's voice; "stand back, or, by the Lord that made me, I will kill you!"

"Rita! Rita! 'tis I—Norman," he shouted. "Don't shoot, dear girl; I am come to save you."

Then from out of the gloom came a pair of gleaming white arms, which were thrown round his neck, and, between tears and kisses, his beloved Rita told her gladness at his coming.

"Take me home, dear boy," she implored. "The wretch had locked me in here, and swore to work his will on me if he kept me here for a week, but I'd have killed him or myself rather than that he should have had his way."

"For Gawd's sake, get her away," said Dulcie, rushing in. "That pistol shot has roused up the cops, an' there'll be trouble if yer not smart."

And they were not smart enough, for hardly had they reached Little Bourke street when two policemen hurried down, followed by a Chinaman, who pointed Rita out to them.

"Come along with me," said one of the constables, and before Norman could intervene they had whipped his sweetheart into a cab, and instead of going home with Norman she was locked up as a "drunk and disorderly" with the prospect of remaining there all night.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CITY POLICE COURT.

The court had just taken down its shutters when Norman arrived to see how Rita fared, and was preparing for business in a yawning, just-got-up-and-don't-like-it sort of fashion, which pervaded everyone from the bench to the first drunk awaiting sentence. Three or four hoary-headed old justices nodded sleepily in big, easy chairs; an inspector pored over a charge sheet; the clerk of court was monotonously remarking to a police witness in the box—"Th' evidence 'y' shall give in this case sh'll be th' tru' th' ole tru' n' nothin' berrer tru' s'elp yer Gud; " a dozen loafers spread themselves around at the back of the court and chewed tobacco; several constables lolled against the wall, and expectorated along the sides; a few weary-eyed reporters and seedy lawyers sprawled over the table; and a beery-faced, dilapidated-looking woman yawned to and fro, and groaned dimly as she waited to be dealt with for having painted a portion of the town a bright red the night before.

The "drunk" cases were tearfully numerous and monotonous. "Eliasz Hann Jones" the sergeant would yell out; and when Eliasz Hann Jones appeared, "Call Constable Malcahay" would be the next command, and the constable, a red-headed Home Ruler, would walk up to the witness box, carefully dispose his helmet at his feet, and stand at attention; then, after kissing the "Buk" with a smack like boxing a cheek, would proceed with his evidence. "Last night, at th' hour av two minutes before eleven, yer warships, Oi was walkin' down Bourrke strate wid meself jist beyant th' Theatry R'y'l, straight forinist ye as ye cross th' strate from th' Opory House, yer warships, an' th' crowd was purty thick wid payple strollin' oop an' down, an' lakin' in th' windys av the shops, an' shtandin' be th' gutters, an—," etc., etc., taking about ten minutes to say what he should have said in two. "Is she know'n?" asks the court, when the sergeant reads out—"She's been here twelve times for drunkenness, four times for insulting behaviour, eight times for assault, and several times for v-grancy." "Hem! twenty shillings, or a fortnight," and the hag is removed. Probably the next case is the same, but the sentence will be ten shillings or seven days; or a month without the option, the inconsistency of police court justice being a bye-word in the land.



RITA.

Sometimes the witnesses afford a little amusement, but, as a general thing in this court, they are as dull as smoked glass. Take the average man and you will find his evidence runs something like this:—"Mumble, mumble—pris'ner—ya y'r 'onner, yi mean y'r y'r wotchip—mumble, mumble—last Maud'y—yi mean Toad'y—no, y'r'onner, never ter me knowledge, y'r wotchip—mumble, mumble—er-er-er-yum-hum-mum—y'r wotchip—m'no, not as y'r'a sweer on, y'r 'onner," and so on, til the court gets disgusted, and orders him down.

The average woman is even worse. She sits on the witness form. "Call Betsy Jenkins," says the sergeant, and away goes the constables yelling in the passages—"Beassie Jiggins," "Jessie Biggins," "Essie Jennys," while Betsy's face reddens till she looks like the full moon on a summer night, sidles across the court in the most absurd fashion, begins to feel that everybody is looking at her, and wishes to goodness she had put on her pace dress instead of her black one she is wearing. When the oath is administered, she rubs her dry lips over the open page, and drops the book on the floor, likewise overturning her parcel, and making such a clatter that, as she confuses to her neighbour afterwards, "I declare I felt riddy to drop where I stood." Then she stands with trembling knees and downcast eyes, pecking fluff off her skirt, and wishing the floor would open up and swallow her, til the inspector says, "Now, tell the bench what you saw," and she tells it something after this style:—"Your worship, I was s-standing at my door talking to Mrs. Mel—Mullagher, the lay-over there" (pointing) "in the blue bodice and white skirt, with the baby on her knees with the pelisse, next to the last young man with the soft 'at." "Yes, yes; never mind them, go on with your story," says the magistrate; and she goes on—"And while I was s-standing there I see a man with a black beard in grey pants and a red neck-tie come over from Ellis's hotel, which is next door to the laundry but one, and exactly opposite me—" "Never mind where it is," says the bench, "tell us what you saw." "I—I n please, sir, didn't see nothing, sir." "What do you mean? Didn't you see the prisoner?" Betsy looks at him—a young man with an air of settled criminality on his face—"No, sir; I never seen him in my life." "What!" exclaims the bench, "never saw him before? What are you giving evidence about then?" "Oa! if you please, y'r'onner, about Mrs. Nicholless burg'ry." "But this is a case of indecent assault," says the bench in disgusted astonishment; "there must be some mistake here," and there is. Betsy's name was got mixed up with the witnesses in the assault case, but of course nobody is to blame—trifles like that are not unusual, and alleged regularity is soon restored, while Betsy goes back to her seat, and to her friend, the lady in the blue bodice and white skirt, who gives

her opinion of the magistrate in words which would probably get her a month for contempt if His Nibs heard it.

In a laudable endeavour to clear the city of some of its scum, the police being up various street-strollers accused of soliciting. They consist chiefly of dirty, diseased old and young hags who hang about the west end of Rinders street, and ruin half-drunken young fellows or wholly-drunken sailors and tradesmen. These horrible women are generally fined 5s., and warned never to do it again, and the warning is usually so effectual that they go straightaway and resume their filthy practices at the first opportunity. But while plenty of the smaller fry of prostitutes are dealt with—not very severely in any one instance, however—it is especially noticeable that the well-to-do and equally despicable harlots who haunt the principal thoroughfares of the city are left entirely unmolested. They can swagger about insulting respectable people, and decoy and birk to their heart's content, without fear of having to face the City Court, or answer for their glaring immorality in any way whatsoever.

The only striking case before the bench on this particular morning was that of two young girls, aged fifteen and sixteen, who had been found by Constables Stokes and Tucker in a den in Brown's Lane, off Little Bourke street. It was a case of more than usually shocking depravity. Although so young, each girl was hideously ripe in the lowest forms of vice, one owing to having lived with two Chinese market gardeners at Coburg for six weeks, while the other had, two months before arrest, given birth to a child, the father of which, she said coolly, was either Sinker Ma, a notorious burglar, or Dacker Johnson, a brutal South Melbourne coloured individual and an equally notorious grogger—she couldn't say which. The constables—who know the slums of Melbourne as well as anyone—and raided the Brown's Lane den at two o'clock one morning, and found the girls, intoxicated and almost naked, dancing for the gratification of two evil-minded jockeys from Canfield, a Chinese fish hawk, and a big buck jarrikin from Bourke street. And this further glimpse into the vicious life of Gay Melbourne made Norman wonder at the supineness of the authorities in neglecting to root out the dens where such scenes were possible.

Rix's case was very shortly disposed of. Even after a night in the cell, and despite her seedy and agitated appearance, the exceptional beauty of her face and figure made a vivid impression on all who saw her. From the expression of the presiding magistrate's countenance, he was evidently considerably astonished to find such a lovely creature brought up on the debasing charge of "drunk and disorderly," and after the very briefest evidence from the arresting constables, he discharged her without comment.

and she was restored to the sympathetic care of Norman and Dulcie.

Outside the court the three crowded into a hansom cab, and as it was journeying towards Nicholson street Rita passed an arm round Norman's neck, and kissed him with charming tenderness.

"Dear old boy," she said, softly, "I want to tell you something. I have determined to go on the stage!"

"The stage!" he exclaimed. "Why, what's the matter? Are you tired of me already?"

"Not a bit of it," she replied. "I am tired of being such a bally bother to you. Besides, I—I don't want to live on your money, and I'd like to do something for myself."

"Oh! tommy rot," he said. "My money is of no use to me without you. And, anyhow, what could you do on the stage?"

"Be'me," chimed in Dulcie. "wot could she do? Why, wif them lovely legs of hers, she'd knock the Johnnies into high. I've got a decent pair of Dutch peas myself—showing half a yard of them—'they're put-sticks compared wif Rita's."

"But I don't intend to show my lovely legs," said Rita, with a smile. "I'm glad they are lovely for my boy's sake, but I'm not going to make 'em a public property. To tell you the truth, I'm after an engagement at the Queen's music hall to sing ballads."

"And when do you start?" was all Norman could ask, so amazed was he at this sudden intelligence.

"I'm to be given a trial to-morrow," was the reply. "And, by the way, Dulcie, if you don't mind showing your pretty Dutch peas I can get you on too, but you'll have to appear in tights."

"Good enough," cried Dulcie, evidently elated at the notion. "I'll show as much of 'em as you like, tights or no tights. Lammie, wot's the push roll up to 'ave a look at me shape?"

"But I've heard that the manager of the Queen's is a bit too fond of taking liberties with pretty girls," said Norman, who preferred to keep Rita's beauty to himself.

"Yes, I know," answered Rita. "He likes to get 'em into his office, and pretends he must measure their legs, and wants to take them to supper after the show; but, believe me, dear old boy, he'll have no chance of playing funny tricks with yours truly. I'm going there to sing, not to be examined by him as if he were a doctor."

"And where do I come in?" asked Norman. "It'll make no difference between us, dear boy," she replied. "You'll come in first, last and always. It won't be too much trouble to see me home each night, will it?"

Norman's answer may be guessed, and by the time they reached the house it had been settled that Rita and Dulcie should try their luck at the Queen's. But how they progressed there, and what naughty little scenes they beheld, you will learn by reading further on.

CHAPTER XII.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

The Queen's Music Hall, at which Rita and Dulcie were to appear, was managed by a person who had made a little money in the drapery trade, and, therefore, considered himself quite competent to run a variety show. His "Vanderville and Minstrel Co." was composed of cheap and shoddy pros, who had been ghastly failures at every other hall at which they had appeared, and yet continued to affect the airs and attitudes of recognised "stars." The serio-comic lady was a large-bosomed, large-tipped piece of clumsy vulgarity, who had formerly been barmaid in a very "shy" hotel. Her voice was a rasp, sin and bitterness, and her style of beauty about as elegant as a horse-trough, but, nevertheless, she was always described on the bills as vivacious and charming, and generally appeared with a wig of hideous yellow hair a-hanging down her back, and her skirts hair-most high, which left her knobby knees and a lot of tawdry underclothing very fully exposed. In this ridiculous attire, and probably swinging a giddy little slate, and causing hideous roars of laughter by delicately hitching up her garter, or occasionally scratching her leg, she would yell out insane rot, of which the following is a hastily concocted example:—

Whenever I meet with a spoony young mash,
Who loves me and doesn't mind spending his
cash,

If he wishes to squeeze me or kiss in the
dark,

I hang down my head, and I slyly remark,

No, you mustn't; no, you mustn't;

Ma says I mustn't let a boy do that;

No, you mustn't; no, you mustn't,

Ma says I mustn't let you—but he does.

Then as an encore skips on again, with the same smirks and smiles and hitches and scratches, and opens out in this fashion:—

My sister's fond of peering

When there's loving couples round,

Upon her tip-toes creeping,

Never making any sound,

And when I ask her reason,

Ask her what there is to see,

She winks her eye so slyly,

And always says to me—

"Don't ask questions, child,

You wouldn't understand.

Wait till you are a woman

And a lady in the land."

But though she will not tell me

What the fun is, I confess,

Tho' she thinks I am too young to know,

I'm old enough to guess.

And that is the kind of stush grown-up people sing and other grown-up people puff and, and certain alleged press critics describe as "piquant" and "mirth-provoking." Lord help our sense of humor, if that kind of tripe is funny! And imagine it thrown at you by

fifteen stone of fat and flabby barmaid. The Queen's also possessed two hard-faced dancing girls known as the Lingerie Sisters, who received 25s. per week for the most ordinary steps, assisted by the continual exhibition of certain under garments from waist-band to knee-embroidery. They had originally been tobacco jerkers at a local factory, possessed about as much intelligence as a door-mat, and supplemented their income by bare-faced prostitution after the show each evening.

But the great draw of the show, the performer who was advertised in letters a foot long, was Lawrence Creedy, formerly a capital cobbler in the east end of London, and now known to fame as "the greatest comic and character artist on earth. Engaged direct from the London and Continental theatres at an enormous salary." His speciality was the dreary ditty which coarsely deals with such matters as drunken spree, gay girls on the razzle dazzle, wives just on the point of becoming mothers, and indecent suggestive incidents in the careers of spooney lovers. He had only to paint his nose, bedaub his cheeks, and scream out an infinite number of idiotic verses with scarcely concealed smut in every one of them, to evoke shrieks of laughter, and seal his reputation as a "refined and imitable humorist." The writer does not happen to have any of the original songs on hand, but the following may be taken as a faithful imitation of the "refined humor" of Creedy and his class. Here is the dreadfully funny thing, in quite the latest style:—

My friend Jones and I went round the town,
Where we met two charming girls named
Brown.

Jones of course he had the think,
So invited them to drink,
And we had a jolly spree
Just the four of us, you see,
And we went a-rolling home at half-past
three.

Brilliant stuff, isn't it? Kind of drivel to make you laugh out loud, and swear the singer is the finest comedian in the world. And the pro. thinks exactly the same thing himself, as he bobs around preparatory to singing an equally refined and humorous encore in this strain:—

When I was a youth my old dad used to say,
Never worry, no matter what comes in your
way,

And I always have tried to keep up to his
plan,
But you can't very well when you're a married
man,

And the nurse says to you, with a grin on her
jaw,

"Run quick for the doctor this minute,"
oh lor!

Then you have to hurry,

There is no time to wait,

Oh! yes, you've got to hurry,

Or you may be too late.

Yes, when the bother first begins

And you wonder if it'll be one or twain,

Oh! then you have to hurry, hurry, hurry.

The very idea of an ex-cobbler having to be dragged all the way from London to tickle colonial audiences with that stuff is an insult to common decency and our boasted civilization, but it is the kind of insult which was hurled at you every time you entered the Queen's music hall—and there has not been any noticeable improvement at even better known places in later days.

Rita's voice was tried and pronounced good enough by the leader of the orchestra, so that she did not have to undergo an interview with the manager in his private office. But Dulcie had to face that ordeal, the ex-draper hearing her case with closed doors. When she re-appeared, her flushed face and untidy hair, to say nothing of the fact that her blouse had somewhat become unfastened, caused Rita to exclaim—

"Why, Dulcie, what's the matter? Did he attempt to insult you?"

"Oh, he was a bit funny," was the reply. "I jest let him have a squint at my legs jest to show him they was rye-buck, an' then he wanted to mess me about, kiddin' me he'd give me five bob a week extra, but I put him off by promisin' to meet him after the show" and she turned away to avoid answering any more embarrassing questions.

I suppose anyone of you would have given a guinea to have had a peep into the ladies' dressing room on the evening of Dulcie and Rita's first appearance. It was a grimy little place beneath the stage, badly lighted with fittal jets of gas, and filled to the brim with half-naked women and girls. There is no music hall or theatre in Melbourne which has even moderately comfortable accommodation for stock performers, and the Queen's was one of the worst. The combination of a hot night, gas fumes and the peculiar odor of lovely woman in the lump, made an atmosphere by no means redolent of Eau de Cologne. Seventeen females had to dress and undress in the space which should have been allotted to half-a-dozen, and the majority of those seventeen apparently had not washed more than their hands and faces for weeks. Underclothing originally white and clean, but now filthy from too constant wear, lay about the chairs and floor, and gave forth a perfume which might have been appropriate to a glue factory, but hardly anywhere else.

Girls of all sorts and shapes were getting into tights, or standing before cracked mirrors, grease-painting their faces, and all the while carrying on a running fire of remarks the very reverse of polite. Bare bodies and legs were conspicuous objects enough, but not so conspicuous as the serio-comic ex-barmaid, who, having peeled off her ordinary attire, was lolling on a huge property basket, cooling her fat, and clothed only in her modesty—and you can guess how

much there was of that. Just as Dulcie and Rita entered, almost stifled with the sickening smell of the place, a tall, long-legged girl snaked behind the ex-barmaid and gave her a smack on her flabby flesh which made her jump and scream with pain. The next instant she turned to rush at her assailant, but toppled over the basket on her face, and presented such a tempting surface for punishment that several other girls with shoes, stockings, hair brushes, and naked hands, fell on her with one accord, and spanked her till they could spank no more. Evidently she was no pet of the ballet, but what the particular reason of the assault was Rita and Dulcie never learned, as the stage manager's voice was heard in the passage, and everyone hurried on her dressing operations, till all were soon ready for the stage.

Space will not permit of a full description of Dulcie as she appeared standing by a little table stripped of every stitch of her usual "clobber," as she called it, and wondering how the deuce she was ever to get into the pair of blue cotton tights which were to adorn her that night. But of all the trim and pretty figures so plainly apparent in that dressing room, Dulcie's was the trimmest and prettiest, and more than one girl gave a complimentary pinch or slap to get firm pink flesh before the tights were drawn on.

"Lamme," said Dulcie, whispering herself in the glass, "I'll knock the 'push' to-night all right, Rita. Bat, I say, wot sort of a bloomin' fix'd I be in if these tights was to split! Blime, the blokes'd, be a' gettin' their money's wort then, eh?"

However, the tights did not split, and Dulcie's first appearance on any stage was decidedly attractive. Rita, too, warbled a ballad with success, while her beautiful face and dainty figure aroused enthusiastic admiration from the whole house. Flowers were showered on her, Norman in the stalls leading the applause and throwing a wreath which must have cost him a small fortune. In fact, the first part passed off admirably, and Dulcie and Rita began to think that the stage was a mighty fine institution. But when they returned to the dressing room during the interval, and saw the scene there, they were not quite so enthusiastic.

Several girls had smuggled in bottles of beer, and were swigging away in high style, squatting on the floor or chairs while changing their costumes. And the stories they told. Well, they were warm—decidedly warm. Just about when everyone was half-dressed, a stampeding was heard down the passage, and before anyone could guess what the matter was, two drunken swells reeled into the room! Thunder! you should have heard the shrieks of the girls, and have seen the scramble to cover up their nakedness! But it was too late! Those awful fellows had seen enough to set them chuckling, and chaffing, and criticising the various legs as though they hadn't seen a woman's figure

for a twelve month. Rita was all right, as she was fully dressed, but Dulcie—well, as she just happened to be peeling off those blue tights and was only about half way through the operation, you can imagine the appearance she presented. Finding that there was no means of concealing their charms from the rude gaze of the swells, several of the girls began to hurl things at them, in an endeavor to drive them from the room, while Rita slipped out to gather male assistance. She had only been gone two minutes, when one of the fellows, with a big cigar in his mouth, lurched and fell heavily on a heap of gauzy skirts and underwear belonging to the Lingerie Sisters, and in an instant the clothing was in flames. In that draughty apartment the fire quickly gained way, and the smoke filled the room. Tights, petticoats and other inflammable material were caught by sparks and flames, and with yells of terror the girls attempted to escape by the only door. The scene became horrible beyond description, and it seemed as though few would escape alive. One of the Lingerie Sisters fell down in a faint, and Dulcie, in waiting to assist her, lost time, and slipping on the greasy floor was soon wrapped in flames and half-choked with the smoke. She felt herself burning, and, as she afterwards put it, made sure she was going to "throw her marble in," when Rita, brave girl, rushed in regardless of the danger, and, at the risk of getting burnt herself, seized her little friend by the arms and tried to drag her to the door. Fortunately for both of them, Norman, the manager, and some firemen arrived at the instant, and, by their united efforts, both girls were carried from the building, more dead than alive.

Rita soon recovered, but poor little Dulcie was fearfully burned about the body and legs, and all she could say, as the cab drove them to Norman's house, was—"Hug me tight, Rita, old pal; if I'm going to skin the gutter, it'll be easier wif you wif me. Yer a bloomin' brick, Rita, you are." And then she swooned, as Rita's hot, blinding tears fell on her little "pal's" pain-torn face. It was a sad ending to a gay day, but they had many more gay days before them, after all.

CHAPTER XIII.

DULCIE'S STORY.

It was some two weeks before Dulcie became convalescent, and you may be sure that during her days and nights of suffering and weakness Rita and Norman watched her with unremitting attention. The Queen's Music Hall had been closed up, and Rita had not sought any other engagement, as that she might the better be able to look after her little friend. That little friend had been horribly scorched about the body, but bore the pain with unflinching courage, her only complaint being that, as she expressed it, she was forced to be "such a mark" to the

comfort of Norman and his mistress. It was during her convalescence that they persuaded her to tell them the story of her very rocky career. Divested of such slang as might be foreign to most readers, it ran thus:—

"I dunno nuffin' about my old man," Dulcie began, "but I've got all sorts of reasons to remember my old woman. She was a corf-drop, take my word for it. We was livin' in a dirty little street up Norf Melbourne, an' as soon as I was big enough to toddle she used to get me runnin' the rabbit for 'er—you know, free-penn'orth of booze juice in a bottle. An' how'd she soak it in! Lumme, she was the strongest I ever knew at the game. Booze, booze, from mornin' till night, an' when she didn't ave no money of 'er own she'd pawn her bloomin' clobber, dress, boots, petticoats, an' all sorts of flings; and when they was up the spout she'd pop anythin' of mine she could get hold of. I've seen us sometimes wifout a bloomin' rag to our backs, 'cept a old blanket or two wot she couldn't get nuffin' on. Often an' often the police wot run er in for drunkenness an' bad langwidge, an' she'd do 'er forty-eight hours, or week, an' come 'ome an' break out worse than ever, an' knock 'ell oster me wot a big stick for not doin' nuffin' at all.

"When I was about ten, she took up wif a bloomin' man as used to graft at a boot factory, but as soon as 'e'd got 'er under 'is tum 'e didn't do no bloomin' graft no more, but made 'er go out an' earn money any way she could. Then 'im an' 'er'd booze it up together, an' row, an' frow flings at each other somethin' dreadful. Oh! I tell you, 'e knocked 'er about croot, an' as for me, 'e'd fink nuffin' of downin' me wif 'is fist, or kickin' me about like a bloomin' dog. Then 'e'd bring other men 'ome, an' women too, an' tu n the place into a dram, so that the police kep' movin' us about from street to street, till I used to forget exactly where we lived sometimes. After about a year of this, 'e sent me out sellin' flowers round the pubs, an' it I didn't bring back as much as 'e expected I'd get the toe-end of 'is boot, or a bash wif a lamp of firewood, jest to liven me up, 'e sed.

"Well, I was growin' up a pretty big bit of a gal, an' sellin' flowers 'ad learnt me a fling or two, but some'ow I kep' straight, an' 'ad made up my mind that I wouldn't go cronk like muvver 'ad. 'Er fancy man tried to kid me to go on the streets and bring men 'ome, but I wasn't on for any of that kind of business, an' I sed so. Then 'e tried to 'ave a loan of me 'imself, but muvver caught 'im one time, an' 'eaved a brick at 'im, an' 'e let me alone. But 'e was that bad 'e used to put some of 'is boosin' friends on to try an' make me go wrong. One night I'd come 'ome dead tired from trampin' round wif my flowers, an' was doin' a doss on some sacks in a little back room, when a bloomin' bloke, named Spödger Mick, who'd done 'is bit of time for garrottin' an' burgl'ry, sneaked in,

an', finkin I was asleep, started maulin' me. Up I jumps, an' fetches 'im a lick across 'is chivvy chace—'is face, you know—wif my hand, an' then we had a tussle round the room. Jest as 'e was ketchin' me again, I yelled blue murder, an' 'im come the old woman's bloke. Finks I, 'im all right now, but, blame, if, instead of 'elpin' me, 'e didn't give me a stoush over the jor, an' tellin' me not to be a bally chump, an' not to make so much fuss over nuffin'. I'm blowed if 'e didn't clear out again, an' lock the Rory O'More—I mean, the door. Course Spödger fought it was cherry ripe for him then, an' 'e come at me agsin. I tell you I fought it was all up wif me that time, an' I screamed an' screamed agsin till I fought my froat would crack, an' in comes muvver, half-tanked, wif a bloomin' bootmaker's 'ammer in 'er 'and. I yelled out wot Spödger was after, an' muvver rushed at 'im wif the 'ammer, an' guv 'im a bash on the 'ead which sent 'im spinnin'. Bad as she was, she wasn't goin' to see a kid like me ruined. But the row brought in 'er bloke again, an' after roundin' on 'er for interferin' where she 'adn't no right—that's wot 'e sed—she fetched 'im a wipe across the jor, which got his shirt out some'din' fearful. 'E rushed at 'er like a bloomin' bull, an', snatchin' the 'ammer from 'er, an' yellin' as if 'e was fair balmy, 'e swung it down on 'er forehead wif a sick'nin' crash, an' she flopped to the floor like a brick fallin' from a chimbley. Then 'e jumps about two foot in the air an' come down on 'er chest wif 'is big hob-nail boots, an'—well, I dunno, but they tell me I went screamin' off my pannikin. Ennyhow, when I come to know myself agsin, muvver was all smashed up an' dead, an' 'er bloke was put away safe in the lock-up. Two monis after'ds they broke 'is bloomin' neck wif a rope up at the gal for murderin' muvver."

"Poor little Dulcie," said Rita; "what a horrible time you must have had of it."

"Yess, it was a bit rough on a kid like me," the invalid rejoined. "Well, I was took away to a bloomin' reformatory for gals, where I put in two years, an' learned more rotten bad games than I'd ever 'eard of afore. Phew! Some of them gals there knew more than their muvvers taught 'em, take my word for it. An' that's where I fell in too. You see, there was two there that I pal'd in wif from the start, an' they 'appened to be the worst in the place. Strong as Keen's, 'e'elp me, them gals was. They'd been sent in from Carlton, where they'd been livin' wif some red-hot blokes in a bloomin' shanty, like a lot of Chows. The flings they told me they'd done you wouldn't believe. One game of theirs was to 'ang about railway stations till they met some of them old men who're always lookin' for nice little gals. They bof had all right fat legs, an' wore skirts which did'n't come down to their knees, an' they bof looked innocent an' juicy. When a old gent come up to one of 'em an' guv her lollies, an'

acked sweet to 'er, she'd set cunnin' an' simple, until 'e'd fink it was all ryeback, an' arek 'er to go for a ride wif 'im in a train, an' 'e'd give 'er a shillin'. Course she'd say yuss, an' 'e'd get 'er a ticket for a express train to Brighton, or somewhere. Once in the bloomin' train, it'd be all pie for 'im, that old bloke 'd fink, but that's jest where 'e'd fall in the fat, for as soon as 'e started enny funny business wif 'er she'd knock 'im silly by tellin' 'im she'd scream an' give 'im in charge for 'santin' 'er unless 'e giv' 'er a quid, or ten bob. An' I tell you them old coves used to ante up every time; sometimes a quid, sometimes arf, sometimes only five bob, jest accordin' 'ow they stood, an' them gals told me they made whips of money some weeks. That'll tell you what sort of bally angels they was. Anover game of theirs was to pay a tanner a night for the loan of a babby from a woman up their way, an' they'd go singin' outside pubs in town, kiddin' the people the babby was their little sister, an' that their muvver was in the 'ospital dyin' of consumption; an' they did pretty good at that game too. But one night they couldn't get a babby no-ways, so they wrapped up a big doll in kid's clobber, an' went out wif that. But their mox was dead, for some woman noticed that it wasn't no live babby, an' told a copper, an' 'e run 'em in, an' they got sent to the reformatory.

"After some time they told me that, if I was on for runnin' away, they could put me up to it as easy as fallin' orf a log, an' they told me 'ow. A bloke they knew used to serve meat at the Reformatory, an' once one of 'em 'ad slipped away in 'is cart, an' stayed a 'ole night night wif 'im, an' 'ad come back wifout being found out, so they knew he was all right. They sed the free of us could squeeze into the back of the cart easy enough, so I agreed to go. One night, jest as it was gettin' dark, the bloke comes wif 'is cart, an' started carryin' meat into the store, an' me an' May scrambled in the back and waited for Louie. But Louie couldn't get away from the matron, and May sed she wouldn't go wifout 'er, an' sneaked out again to see wot was keepin' 'er. While she was away the butcher bloke came back for some more meat, an' seein' me squeezed up in a corner, 'e pinches my leg and see—"E-oh, an' then blowed it 'e doesn't bang the door, an' there was me shut in the dark, lyin' on a side of matton, an' wif me bloomin' 'ead on a big lump of driffin'. Then up 'e jumps an' drives away, wif me rollin' about like a dead pig, all gressee an' muck from 'ead to foot. Course I couldn't see nuffin', and didn't know where we was goin', but after about an hour we pulls up, an' the bloke opens the door. 'Wot 'ol' ses he, 'you're a nice prime bit of matton, you are. Blime, there's plenty of fat on you, an' pinches me again, an' pulls me about, an' digs 'is fingers in my chest as if I was a bloomin' sheep; and the more I rolled about the more he teased me. Fink—' this bloke's

a bit funny, an' if I don't look out for myself I'll fall in—an' so I did. When 'e let me out, I was a pretty sight, I can tell you, wif bits of fat all over me, but I felt worse when I looks around an' finds myself at a little shop on a bush road, wif nuffin' but bloomin' big trees all about. 'Where am I?' ses I. 'Yer at my diggin's,' ses 'e, an' I'll fix you as soon as I shove the 'orse in the stable,' an' then 'e scoots round the Johnny Horner—I mean, the corner—wif the cart, an' leaves me wond'rin' wot sort of a game this was.

'Well, when he comes back 'e takes me inside the shop, an' 'elps me to get the gressee orf me a bit, and then gives me some beer an' sausages. Then 'e tells me I needn't get scared, 'cos there's on'y 'im in the place, an' nobody'll ever fink of lookin' there for me. 'Well,' I ses, 'if yer the on'y one 'ere, I'm goin' to clear out. I ain't the bloomin' mug you take me for, an' I ain't a-goin' to stop wif no bloke in no 'ouse alone.' 'Garr,' ses 'e, 'wotcher givin' us? May and Louie told me you was a all right tart, an' would keep 'ouse for me.' 'Not me,' ses I; 'I ain't takin' any; nuffin' like that afore marriage.' 'Well, you've got to stay,' ses he, 'cos if you clear out you'll get copped and scragged back again.' I saw I'd run again a snag, but I wasn't goin' to let 'im 'ave a loan of me. So I ses, 'Well, I'll stop to-night, but I'll does in the stable wif the 'orse.' 'Dicken,' 'e ses, 'you'll does 'ere, an' I'll does wif the 'orse.' 'Straight-wire?' I ses. 'Yuss,' ses 'e, 'straight wire,' an', like a bloomin' chump, I believes 'im an' stays.

"After a bit, orf 'e goes to the stable, an' I turns in, an' I'd no sooner laid me 'ead on the weeping willow—I mean, the pillow—than I was orf dead, after lockin' the door an' winders, cos I was a bit suspishus of that butcher-bloke, from the way 'e'd pulled me about in the cart. An' I wasn't no bad judge, either, for after I'd been by-by some time, I was woke up by a noise, an' saw a trap-door in the ceilin' open, an' the butcher-bloke comin' down a ladder, which 'e must 'ave let down first. 'Lumme,' finks I, 'there's goin' to be trouble 'ere; this bloke knows too much for me; an' I ups an' sends the ladder an' 'im spinnin' on the floor. But it wasn't no good. 'E frettened to chuck me out in to the bush if I kicked up a row, an'—well, 'elp me, it wasn't my fault, but I stayed on at that bloomin' shanty free weeks, and I couldn't kid 'im to does in the stable either.

"Then, one day when 'e was away, I sneaked five quid 'e'd planted in a keg of lard, an' scooted orf to a railway station an' comes to town. After toggin' myself out wif shine new clobber, an' knocking about a bit, you can reckon there wasn't much of that five quid left, and I 'ad to look for graft. First place I got was at a bloomin' red-hot eating-house, down by the river, an' I tell you it was a strong joint. For seven an' a kick a week I was on me bally plates of meat—I

mean, me feet—ten bloomin' hours a day, an' 'ad to doos in the kitchen, an' put up wif boosy sailors pullin' me about, an' the boss worryin' me life out wif his funny games, an' the missis roundin' in on me for stringin' 'im on—so she sed; but, selp me never, I wouldn't 'ave been found dead wif 'im in a paddick, so at last I clears out, an' went on me own once more.

"Then there come one day when I was dead broke, an' ready for anyfing, so I goes to Foy an' Gibbon's sale, an' in the crowd gets me 'and on a liddy's purse jest as a bloomin' D gets his 'and on me, an' I was 'aled orf to the jug again, an' got a monf. When I come out the Salvation Army gals gets 'old of me, an' keeps me for a monf or two, but I got struck on a bloke when we was singin' down Sampson's road. He was an all-right lad, I tell you, an' we had some good times togever when I was livin' wif 'im, but at last 'e got shot in for five years for dealin' wif the cops, an' layin' out a barmaid wif a lemingade bottle. So I knocks about the road for some monis, till I got run in again cos I was caught bathing in the river near Studley Park wif free or four blokes an' tarts, an' got put away for six weeks. But when I come out I dodged the Army that time, an' went to graft as slaver at Auntie's, where you bof first saw me, an' if I get over this all right you won't see me go wrong no more, I can tell you."

It was a long and painful story of the life that scores of poor girls such as Delcie have lived, and as she told it, with many gasps and breaks, and not straightforwardly as here set down, both Rita and Norman were visibly affected. But before many more days passed Duice was almost her old self again, and could get about so briskly that they were able to leave her one night and attend a large public ball, at which, as you will hear, some scandalous proceedings made it an event to be vividly remembered.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE BALL.

It was one of the great annual festivities of Melbourne—a gorgeous, popular public ball, over which society had been gloating in anticipation for many weeks beforehand. Furthermore, it was a plain and fancy dress affair, which gave the modest dames and maidens every latitude to dress as immodestly as they pleased. Full-bosomed mothers of families were there, proudly displaying those full bosoms in dresses which began not very far above the waist, and seemed more suited to wet-nursing than any other occupation. Other matronly figures were attired in skirts brief enough to show plump matronly legs, while it was noticeable that many young ladies, who would have blushed riotously and virtuously at having to lift their petticoats a few inches high in crossing a muddy street, took care, on this occasion, to dress them-

selves in garments sufficiently short to reveal more or less graceful and appetising limbs. And it may be said, in passing, that if society ladies more frequently exhibited their legs in public the days of the ballet would be few in the land. But in that vast show of beauty and elegance the most beautiful and elegant form was that of Rita. Even Norman, who had viewed her under many and varied conditions suited to the display of her charms, had very seldom seen her to greater advantage than on this particular evening. Her dress, at each end, revealed just enough to make the wicked eye of man hungry to observe more. Her supple, tempting and perfect bust palpitated under an airy bodice, from which her lovely shoulders just peeped forth, while her equally lovely legs, encased in dark silk stockings, were visible to the distracting extent of two noble and swelling curves. Her wealth of rich fair hair, and the radiant happiness beaming from her beautiful eyes, completed a delicate and ravishing picture of health and grace. Norman trembled for fear some spot of her old naughtiness would break out this gay evening, and lest the admiration she evoked would turn her pretty head, and lead her to encourage the advances of some of the swells who were so palpably struck with her.

"Don't flirt too much to-night, Rita," he said to her, "for, once you lose control of yourself, your passions may drive you the devil knows where."

"And don't you preach too much to-night, dear boy," she retorted. "You brought me here to enjoy myself and I mean to; but you needn't be afraid that I shall act the giddy goat."

Not much relieved by her flippant reply, he watched her dance away in the arms of a tall, striking-looking Highlander, and was already regretting he had escorted her thither.

Not being much of a dancing man, he seated himself in a shadowed nook, and eyed the festive scene and fitting costumes with some interest. The ball was described as "select," but for all that certain shady persons had, somehow or other, procured admittance, so that the bloated mistress of a brothel rubbed shoulders with the haughty wife of a Toorak aristocrat; and other harlots, in all sorts of attire designed to attract attention—and custom—mingled freely with young ladies of the highest respectability. And it was curious how many well-esteemed men of the city seemed to have a familiar acquaintance with these creatures of vice.

"For God's sake, don't speak to me here, Madeline," whispered a staid father of a family to a bold-eyed prostitute in a gipsy dress. "You mean old beast," Norman heard another notorious woman say to a very dignified merchant; "you aint paid me that t' you owe me yet;" while a third, accosting a wealthy individual who hands round the plate in church, fiercely remarked, "If you

don't come round an' square up with me quick an' lively, I'll show you up in the North Melbourne court." Then there was an old gentleman, whose very bulgy waistcoat must have prevented him from seeing his toes for years past, who beckoned a gay girl to him, and mumbled, "The old woman and girls are going to leave for the last train, Bell, so keep a kiss for me till one o'clock." But what the meaning of all these whisperings was Norman, of course, could not give the faintest guess.

Presently there came along to his vicinity a handsome young man and charming young lady, evidently continuing a conversation previously started. She was very coy and thoughtful, while he was equally tender and persuasive.

"I thought," he was saying, oblivious of Norman's nearness, "that you loved me with all your heart and soul, Agnes."

"Ah, you know I do, Fred," was her answer, "but—but you should not ask me to sacrifice my honor to my love."

"But there would be no risk," he pleaded: "your window looks out on the garden, the old people will be sound asleep, and the dog knows me. Besides, it is only anticipating our marriage by a few weeks."

But before the girl had answered they had passed beyond Norman's hearing, and he was left to draw his own conclusions as to the subject of their discussion. After about half-an-hour thus spent in observation and meditation he suddenly discovered that Rita was not in the ballroom. A further glance told him that the tall Highlander had also vanished. Being a young man who knew exactly how many beans make five, he resolved to see if the two disappearances had any connection, and immediately started on a tour of investigation. There were many sly corners he peeped in at, only to find sly couples spooning violently, but neither Rita nor the man in kilts was amongst them. The more he failed the more hot and jealous he grew, and the more determinedly he vowed to take Rita home immediately he did find her. At length he came to an alcove screened with heavy curtains, which, however, hung a few feet from the floor. Beneath the curtains he could see a pair of dainty feet and bewitching legs, and beside them the clumsier shoes and tartan-clad limbs of Dugald McHowatson, or whatever the fellow's infernal Scottish name was. He halted to calm himself, and was rewarded by witnessing a little pantomime which made his blood boil with rage. That little pantomime consisted in a large brown hand caressing one dainty ankle for an instant, then the ankle was drawn back in indignation—or temptation. Again the brawny masculine fingers were stretched towards the seductive, silk-stockinged leg, and administered a playful little pinch just on the arched outline of the superb calf. But the superb calf was evidently in a tantalising mood, and coquettishly wiggled itself away, and the agi-

tated awaying of the short skirts above betokened that a gentle little struggle was going on behind the curtain between the kilts and the petticoats. Then four legs were drawn closer together, the petticoats were raised to the same height as the kilts, and two bare, bony knees, and two round, silk-stockinged, pink-gartered dittoes came to view in one even row. How much further the pantomime might have proceeded we can never know, as at this juncture the impetuous Norman tore the curtains aside, and, with flashing eyes and clenched fist, confronted—an unknown Highlander and an equally unknown lady! Norman stood stock still for a moment, and then bolted away, too confused to apologise, though it is safe to assert that his confusion was not a circumstance compared with that of those whom he had disturbed.

In an evil frame of mind, consequent upon having made such a fool of himself, he was making his way towards the throng again, when he espied Rita issuing from a retiring room with a young and exceedingly slender woman, attired in plain dress—plain dress in this case evidently meaning a costume which makes almost everything pretty plain to the beholder. As soon as she noticed him, Rita left her companion and approached him with a smile on her face. But that smile was speedily turned to a frown when he broke out with—

"Where the devil have you and your damned Highlander been all the time?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "My damned Highlander left the hall after our first dance, and I have been having a cozy chat with an old friend who was a governess at Toorak."

"What! That creature with her skinny bosom hanging over her dress," he exclaimed irritably. "A nice sort of a governess she looks. Learn't all she knows in Lonedale street, I'll bet."

"Whatever is the matter with you tonight?" asked Rita in astonishment. "She's a very nice girl, and knows nothing of Lonedale street. She's just been telling me that, if I like to apply, I can get her old position." "Oh! you can't fool me," he said savagely. "You haven't been talking with that thing all this time. You've been spooning with some swell, I suppose, and playing all sorts of nasty pranks with him."

Rita looked at him, and laughed heartily. "Why, my dear boy," she said, "you're boiling over with jealousy just because I've spoken to a man or two."

For some peculiar reason, no man likes to be accused of jealousy, and Norman was no different in that respect from others. Therefore, he indignantly denied the soft impeachment, and finally concluded—

"Look here, Rita, you've lost your head with vanity to-night, I can see that. I suppose some idiot has been complimenting you on these fine legs which you're so fond of

showing. Anyway, you'd better come home with me now before you make yourself notorious."

As a matter of fact, she had been as good as gold all the evening, and, consequently, had not enjoyed herself very much, and would have been glad to leave, but when he assumed that tone to her, and made such unfounded accusations against her, her natural quick temper asserted itself.

"I won't allow you or anyone else to speak to me like that," she retorted, hotly. "It was at your suggestion that I wore this costume, and you ought to know by this time that the only idiot who is permitted to have anything to say about my fine legs is yourself."

Norman was so taken aback at this unexpected outburst that he could only mutter some words not usually taught at Sunday schools, and Rita, thoroughly wound up, continued—

"And, what's more, I'm not going home now; I'm going to stay till four o'clock if I want to, and if you don't like it you can lump—I mean, you can do the other thing."

"Oh!" he rejoined, viciously, "I see you want to have a row, so that you can get rid of me, and sell your beauty to other fellows. All right, my fine lady, I won't stand in your way. If you won't come home with me now, you can go to—blazes!" and, flinging himself round, he made his way to the cloak-room, jammed his hat on, and pushed his way through the crowd to the exit door.

And Rita? Her little flame soon burnt out, but her self-respect would not allow her to follow him after his cowardly insults, and, having had a soothing little cry in the retiring room, she returned to her friend, and endeavored to find solace in the mazy dance. But she was too much upset at the quarrel with her lover to enjoy herself, and, becoming depressed and gloomy, finally promised to go out with her friend on the morrow and secure that position as governess at Toorak. "That'll show him," she reflected, "that I can do without him—and he's sure to find a way of making it up soon."

On their way to get their wraps prior to departing, she and her friend went into the refreshment room for some ice-cream, or such frivolity, and had only just entered when a tall, handsome, middle-aged woman also made her appearance. At the other end of the apartment, the old gentleman with the bulgy waistcoat was in high feather with Belle Hinkins, the young prostitute whom he had asked to keep a kiss for him till one o'clock. Evidently he had been drinking heavily, and with one arm around her waist he had drawn her down on his knee, and seemed to be devouring her neck with huge enjoyment. The tall lady's black glances fell sharply on him, and in a few strides she had reached him and gripped him by the collar.

"You cruel, filthy old wretch," she exclaimed shrilly, shaking him furiously. "You

thought I had gone home with the girls, did you? Ugh! You disgusting brute!"

"M—m—my dear," the scared old boy stammered, "I—I—was only just sp—speaking to this young lady about you. She—she's a clergyman's daughter, and—I—thought—"

"Clergyman's daughter!" broke in his good lady. "She's a vile wretch, who ought to be burned. This is how I treat such things," and, drawing a riding whip from beneath her cloak, she rained blows on the face and back and bosom of that "clergyman's daughter" with all the strength virtuous indignation had roused in her. Swish! swish! went the pliable whip on the soft pink skin of the harlot, till her blood flowed in tiny rivulets, and her screams and curses and struggles to escape turned the place into a temporary Hades. Then, expending all her remaining force in a stinging blow on her wicked old husband's bloated features, the infuriated lady dashed out of the room and the hall. Rita and her friend followed, and half-an-hour later our little heroine was in bed at a coffee palace, still resolved to go out as a governess, but hoping and hoping that Norman was not allowing Dulcie to console him for her absence.

CHAPTER XV.

SOCIETY'S SINS AND SORROWS.

Rita had no difficulty in securing the engagement at Toorak, and at once entered upon her duties. She should have been a proud and happy girl at having thus become associated with one of the society families of Melbourne, but I am afraid she was not sufficiently sensible of the great honor thrust upon her. And yet, for the magnificent salary of £18 per annum, all she had to do was to wash, dress and teach three children, assist the lady's maid in robing and disrobing the young lady of the house and the mistress, play the piano at "At homes" and evening parties, and otherwise dispose of her time from seven o'clock in the morning until eleven at night, excepting on such nights as the heads of the house happened to be out late, when she had to wait up until two or three o'clock in the morning. But that sort of thing did not occur more than three or four times each week, so that, as you can see, she had plenty of time on her hands. And they were all such nice people to work for; such kind, obliging and considerate old souls as you would hardly expect to find so tremendously high up in the world of rank and fashion. The master had originally been Tim Robinson, a sporting barber in a very small way in Fitzroy, who, having made a considerable sum in speculative land transactions, had promptly turned Tim Robinson into T. Mountjoy Robynsyn, Esq., acquired a fine Toorak mansion from a building society which had too many on its hands, and jumped head-first into the deep and muddy waters of Melbourne swell life. And



"The young lady was jammed in the doorway"—See page 36.

what a wonderful splash he had made! His horses and carriages were noted for their splendour, his dinners were as famous as the Governor's, his dinners and soirées musicales were recherche and brilliant, and his wife was always costumed a la grande dame, although there were some who remembered when she was a coarse-featured barmaid at a certain sporting hotel, and wore eighteen-penny print blouses, and diamond rings at 4s. the barrel. How T. Mountjoy Robynsbyn continued to make money no one had the slightest idea, but that he did make it, and in bushels, all society was certain from the gorgeous establishment he kept up. True, the butcher, baker, grocer, milkman, dressmakers and tailors, grumbled at having to wait four or five months for their money, and then not getting too much of it; but it must be remembered that such low classes of people are always importunate and greedy, and never sufficiently grateful to the aristocrats who graciously patronise them. Pah! they should be only too glad to serve such fine folks as the Robynsbyns for the honor alone, instead of thrusting their "little bills" forward in such disgustingly grasping fashion.

Rita, however, was especially well-treated. She could have bread and trestle, and splendid tea at 8½d. per lb. three times a day if she liked; and at least twice-a-week there was cold neck of mutton, or tripe and onions beautifully warmed up, or some other dainty, while many a time she has revelled in the luxury of bananas and cold plum duff. In fact, she fared at least as well as the groom and footman, and scarcely any difference was made between her and the three children. Oh! I can tell you, the liberality of these aristocrats towards their inferiors is not half so fully realised as it should be. If the facts about the management of many swell establishments around Melbourne were better known they would astonish you, I am sure.

Then Miss Rosina Mountjoy Robynsbyn was such a sweet pet. Beyond a slight cast in one eye, and the least morsel of a limp in one leg, and a tendency towards ginger in the hair and pimples on the chin, there was scarcely a flaw to be found in her style of beauty. Furthermore, she was not at all haughty towards Rita in her conversation, but rather treated her with the familiar consideration of one lady towards another. Thus it was—"Now, then, don't stand there like a fool, but shift yourself, and get me them there blue silk stockings;" or "Look alive now, and find me some blooming soap; it's my morning for a wash, and you're as slow as a funeral." And she was so generous in speaking of her friends too—but then all money ladies are that. For instance, she came in one day to change her afternoon frock for her evening set, and while Rita was being her skirt skin-tight over her hips, her charming young mistress said—"Gracious, I've just been round to Mrs. De Fibbers, and found her daughter Maud ill in bed. Her

ma says its only a bad cold, but that won't wash with me. She's been carrying on with Captain Flatfoot; that's what's the matter with Maudie. Serve her right if she had twins." "But," said Rita, "I thought Miss De Fibbers was too much of a lady to carry on with any man." "So she pretends," snapped the other, "but she's a sly one, and if she aint caught this time, I'll be much surprised. It ain't the quiet ones that are the most virtuous, and I've seen Maudie with that captain in a position which didn't say much for her modesty." And yet Maud De Fibbers is Miss Robynsbyn's bosom friend, and they use the same towel at the baths in summer time.

Her ma was of a somewhat similar stamp. In her sweetest moments she always talked to a man as though she were coaxing another drink out of him, and, to Rita's surprise, had a private brandy flask in her dressing-gown, which she had incessant recourse to. Sometimes, in the still hours of the night, this good lady and her husband would carry on a discussion at the top of their voices, each speaker being buoyed up sky-high with strong liquor. On one occasion Rita heard just enough to make her open her eyes to the widest extent with astonishment. Evidently the worthy couple were in bed, as the wife remarked—"For heaven's sake, Tim, keep your cold test off me, you're rilling about like a log." "Shut your mouth," was the elegant retort; "you've got a breath strong enough to hang your hat on. Been drinking again with that damned Mrs. Clooly, I suppose." "There's no Mrs. Clooly here now to drink with," the lady snarled; "she ran away with an officer she met on the mailboat coming from England, and Clooly's only waiting to get a divorce so that he can marry that Sydney belle, Miss Marjorie Dimster." "What! that Miss Dimster who was deserted by the heavy swell from London—I forget his name—and was sent away to New Zealand to be confined quietly." "Yes, that's the girl, Tim; she left the baby with a nurse in Dussedin, and forgot to call back for it. Clooly knows all about the scandal, and also that she was found in the manager's room at the Primrose Club at two o'clock in the morning; but her pa will give £10,000 to the man rash enough to marry her, and Clooly wants the money badly." "Ah, well, £10,000 is a good price for damaged goods, but old Dimster can afford it. He's swindled a good deal more than that out of the Sydney public in floating wild-cat gold mines. By the way, isn't it about time Rosina caught a husband, Sarah? She's got past the chicken age, you know, and will be on the shelf soon unless she hurries up." "Well, I'm sure I've done my best for the girl, Tim, what with tennis parties, balls, concerts, and everything else where men are to be met." She had a good dance with Captain Flatfoot, but Maud De Fibbers has attracted him lately, and I believe they are engaged." "So that's what-

made Miss Robynsya so spiteful about Maud," thought Rita; "she's been cut out with the captain." "Well," said Tim, between yawns, "if Rosie doesn't catch some one soon I don't know where she'll be. I'm on my last legs, Sarah, and expect the bank to sell me up in a month or so at most. Good—night—phew! What an atmosphere! I wonder that breath of yours hasn't put the gas out."

As before stated, this little glimpse into society private life considerably amazed Rita. Mrs. Clooly was on the top branch of the social tree, always foremost in charitable and religious proceedings, and renowned for efforts to instil virtue into the minds of the members of the Young Women's Tea and Toast Society, and yet she had eloped with a mail steamer officer. Then, again, Marjorie Dimster, who was gushed over and photo'd by all the society papers as a model of beauty and modesty—"the *re plus ultra* of refinement," the lady reporter of *Punch* had styled her—was the mother of an illegitimate baby which she had deserted, and her father was glad to pay £10,000 to get rid of her! Also, she had been caught in a man's room at two o'clock in the morning, just like any common street troll; and her father a swindler, and the Robynsya dead broke, and—"Well," thought Rita, "hang me if the morals of society appear to be any better than those used in Little Bourke street, only society is rich enough to hide its dirt from the common gaze." But she was destined to be even more astonished before her experience of high life morality was terminated.

It happened one night that the Robynsya had a brilliant dinner party on, among the guests being Lieutenant Capstraw, one of the most stylish of mashers, and a wealthy man—so it was reported. He was to stay at the Robynsya's house that night, and it was very evident that Miss Rosina meant to capture him if possible. As a matter of fact, Capstraw believed Rosina to be a rich heiress, and was after the money he supposed her father would give her. It took Rita and the lady's maid four hours to prepare the anxious maiden for the conquest. "Oh," she said, after her dressing was almost completed, "I meant to have a wash, but there's no time now; so, Rita, pearl powder my back and chest as far as the skin shows," and accordingly her lean back and scraggy bosom were powdered half an inch thick to conceal the dirt and freckles to the limits of the very low-cut corsage; and in all other ways possible the darling girl was tricked out to command the lieutenant's amorous attention.

And how did she throw herself at his head! What with pretending to blush when he looked at her, and tittering at every remark he made, and sitting as close to him as possible, she fairly flung herself at him. The party itself was remarkable for grace and fashion. There was the wealthy old widow, Mrs. Motty, who, it was rumored, had on one

occasion been surprised in the arms of her coachman; Miss Eugene MacDoodle, just returned from a European tour ordered by a very obliging doctor; Mr. Joseph Hattigan, a pious and respected squatter, who kept up a superb establishment in East Melbourne, and a quiet little villa in South Yarra, with a quiet little ex-milliner in it; Mr. Edwin Garland, the pink of fashion, who was a marvel of liberality to the outer world, but starved and thrashed his wife at home; the plump and plaid heroine of a nasty divorce case, wherein she had been proved to have been grossly intimate with three co-respondents; and others whose names were to be found in society papers week after week. In fact, it was a very high-toned affair altogether, and reflected immense credit on the Robynsya. Towards midnight the guests departed, all saving Lieutenant Capstraw, who went to his room with a little note which Miss Rosina had slipped into his hand.

Shortly after the house had lapsed into silence, Rita heard Mrs. Robynsya cry to her husband, "Tim, Tim, there's somebody moving about downstairs. For the Lord's sake, see who it is." Then, Robynsya, who had been sitting up with a bottle of whisky and a box of cigars, stepped softly downstairs towards the direction of his daughter's room, from where the sound proceeded. The nearer he got to her door the more certain he was that he heard voices and kissing. In a moment he had thrust aside the curtains of her dressing chamber and was in her bedroom, and in the full glare of the gas came face to face with Lieutenant Capstraw and his own virtuous daughter, Rosina, the latter attired in garments which showed that she was ready for bed. In a flash the girl attempted to escape through another door, her accomplice trying to assist her, but the father was too quick for them, and with a vigorous movement the young lady was jammed in the door-way, with one long and not unshapely leg fully exposed to the knee. The lieutenant was in an undress uniform, and the disarrangement of the bed-clothes was a prominent and significant feature of the scenery.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Robynsya; "what are you doing in my daughter's room?"

"He broke in and attempted to assault me, pa," said Rosina. "I was just going to scream when you came."

"That is not true," said Capstraw. "I came here by your daughter's invitation."

"Oh! how can you tell such stories!" squeaked the girl. "You forced your way in, and when I jumped up you threw me on the bed, and—"

"I'll soon show who's telling the truth," broke in the lieutenant, pulling a note from his trousers pocket. "Read that, sis," and Robynsya read—

"My room is exactly opposite yours, and pa and me sleep upstairs.—Rosina."

That settled sweet Rosina's business. The next morning she was packed away to an aunt's at Ballarat, and the lieutenant is still hunting for a suitable heiress. — The lady's maid told Rita that he was not the first guest whom the charming lady had informed of the locality of her room, so that we may assume that in her anxiety to secure a husband she discarded the usual matrimonial preliminaries, and selected her partner on a plan which at least had the appearance of originality, though I believe that other ladies well up in the social scale have not been above adopting similar methods of securing a favored lover's undivided attention.

It would perhaps be too much to say that Rita was very severely shocked at this sudden revelation of some of society's peculiar pastimes, but at any rate she was determined to leave the Robyns and return to an atmosphere which smelt a trifle sweeter, and just exactly how she did leave them will be related in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER XVI. MURDER MOST FOUL.

Some little time after Miss Rosina Robyns had been sent away for being too eager to make her male friends acquainted with the exact position of her bedroom, Rita was surprised to see a hansom cab stop at the house, and Horace Kindur and a fragile, fair-haired, pretty little, sleepy-eyed lady descend therefrom. Kindur, you may remember, was the swell whom Lionel Norman had fought and beaten on two or three occasions for insulting Rita. On this evening he and the pretty little lady were dressed in faultless fashion, and seemed well-known to the servant who opened the door and showed them into a drawing-room, there to await Mr. Robyns, as his good lady was away. From one of the children Rita learned that the lady was Mrs. Horace Kindur, whose recent wedding had been the topic of fashionable circles, and who was considered to have been extremely fortunate in having married Kindur, as his family were in the first flight of the bon ton.

Presently Kindur left his wife and went to have a look at the horses and gardens, and Robyns and Mrs. Horace remained alone. As soon as the door had closed on her husband, the little lady turned to her companion, and said—

"Mr. Robyns, you have known Horace and me for many years, therefore I want you to do me a little favor. Will you lend me £200?"

"£200, Marion!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Why, what need is there to borrow such a sum? Your husband is a rich man, I believe."

"So I thought," she replied; "but I have been deceived. He has been in the hands of the Jews for years, and at the present time hasn't £10 to call his own. It he doesn't

£200 in a week's time, he will be put in a forgery."

"Good God!" said Robyns, "this is terrible news. But, my dear, I'm sorry to say I can't help you. Times are close with me, and I want the little money I have got. Why doesn't he apply to his mother—she is a wealthy woman!"

"His mother and sisters are in England, and he has no other resources," the little beauty replied, crossing to the couch where Robyns sat. "Dear Mr. Robyns," she went on pleadingly, "if you fail us we are lost. You have heaps of money, and £200 will make no difference to you."

"As I have already intimated, Marion," he said, stuffily, "I regret your trouble, but I cannot assist you."

Then one dainty arm nestled about his neck, two ripe lips were pressed up prettily towards his mouth, and a sweet little voice murmured—

"Only £200, dear, dear Mr. Robyns, and I will pay you back myself in—any—way—you—please."

There is no doubt that it was a tempting moment for Robyns, with that seductive face and bewitching figure so charmingly offered to him, but he was proof against even such winning graces, and, almost pushing her from him, said gruffly—

"Once for all, I have no money to lend or give; so you must try your coaxing on someone else."

A hard look came into her eyes, the corners of her rose-buddy mouth were drawn down in sulkiness, and a faint flush rose in her exquisite cheeks. Even her voice seemed to have grown harsh and cold, as she said—

"You are an old miser, and I have offered you terms for your wretched money which only a bloodless ghoul like you could reject, but I am determined to have that £200 before I leave the house. Once again, will you give it to me?"

"No!" he snarled.

Stepping quickly to the door she locked it, put the key in her pocket, and, facing him again, said, softly but determinedly—

"You see my husband on the lawn there talking to the gardener. Well, unless I have that money, I shall scream, he will come to my assistance, and I will swear that you have grossly insulted me. You will first get a sound thrashing, and afterwards be publicly exposed as a beastly old scoundrel. What do you say now?"

"I say that not even your husband would credit such a story. You look rather too neat and trim, my pretty little blackmaiser, to sustain such a charge. Anyone could see that the only hand that's been on you lately is your dressing-maid's."

"Then I must manufacture a little evidence," she retorted, and in a second her hat was flung to the floor, and the coils of her lovely hair loosened till the tresses swept over her face and shoulders in radiant disorder. Just as quickly she unfastened her bodice, disarranged some frilly work beneath, leaving her

gleaming white neck and bosom artfully displayed, and then, placing her foot on a chair, whipped up her creamy draperies, tore half-a-yard of delicate lace from a white petticoat, and unclasping a silk garter, let it fall on the carpet.

"Now," she said, when these cunning arrangements were completed, "there is evidence enough to get you five years and a flogging. Will you give the £200, or shall I scream?"

It did not take her victim two seconds to realise the full depth of his danger, and he was about to close the bargain, when a recollection of the recent scene with his daughter and the lieutenant flashed across his brain, and he said—

"Even these lady-like preparations for my sacrifice are of no avail. You will not get a penny from me."

For a moment she was clearly staggered, having evidently concluded that she must triumph. Then, rushing to the window, she threw it up, shrieked again and again, knocked over a chair, and sank to the floor with her clothes so craftily crushed about her that her ungartered stocking, covering the slender but graceful leg, became particularly prominent. Meanwhile, Robynsyn sat down and snickered.

Barely had the little lady finished her last scream when her husband dashed through the open window, followed by the gardener. As his glance fell on his recumbent wife he stepped towards her and raised her.

"Marion, Marion, what's the matter? What made you scream?" he asked, hurriedly.

"Oh! Horace," she gasped, clinging to him, and half-closing her eyes, "that man—Robynsyn—took advantage of being alone with me, and—and—made overtures to me—and—and—when I indignantly refused to listen to him he—he—oh! Horace, I think he has hurt me—he seized hold of me in the most insulting manner, and—"

Breaking in upon her explanation, Kindur strode across to Robynsyn, and, shaking his fist at that calm individual, roared—

"You hoary-headed old villain, I'll break every bone in your body."

"Horace, Horace," exclaimed his wife, "don't kill him. He is too contemptible a wretch for you to soil your hands with. Touch him in the pocket, that's his sorest point."

"Perhaps you will allow me a word," said Robynsyn, not at all alarmed at Kindur's menacing attitude. "Your wife has made a distasteful charge against me, but do you really think I would be such a fool as to assault her in this room when at any moment someone might come in?"

"Don't listen to him, Horace," the lady impetuously cried. "Why, the very first thing he did was to lock the door."

"Then," shouted Robynsyn, triumphantly, "if I locked the door, how is it the key is in your pocket?" and with a quick movement

he whipped his hand into her dress, drew forth the key, and flourished it aloft. Marion was fairly caught, and, beyond stammering something about Robynsyn having put the key there—a ludicrous assertion, on the face of it—could do nothing but gasp and glare.

For a moment Robynsyn laughed victoriously at her; then, turning to the stalwart and open-mouthed gardener, said—

"Jaggins, throw this young man out, and, if his little devil of a wife won't follow quietly, throw her out too."

"Oh! you can't bustle me that way," sneered Kindur. "Whether Marion put the key in her pocket or not, I can't say, but the state of her clothes shows that you have insulted her, so pay up the £200, or we will prosecute you."

"Oh! so you know that she wanted £200 out of me, do you?" retorted the old man. "I thought she was working this little game by herself, but I'm quite convinced now that you have been coaching her up in the pretty art of blackmailing. Now, will you go out quietly, or shall I send for a constable, and give you in charge?"

It did not take them long to decide, and five minutes later they were going down Toorak road on a tram, burdened with the bitter thought that their blackguardly plans had been baffled, and that all the tricks were in the old man's hands. Pretty Marion had spoiled a £5 bodice and two guineas worth of lace, ruffled her hair and her temper, given Robynsyn a free and generous view of her pretty legs, and yet was no nearer the £200 than she had been two hours earlier. Robynsyn had the laugh at her and her darling Horace—but that laugh did not last long. When Mrs. Robynsyn came home two days later, her husband narrated the little scandal to her, she told it to Rita, Rita afterwards confided it to the writer, and so the true particulars of the affair come now to be placed before his readers, in order to show how inaccurate and garbled was the version of the story subsequently published in a certain Melbourne paper, which insinuated that Robynsyn had been threatened by Kindur with a loaded revolver, and that Marion had obtained £100 from the old man. That is not the truth.

On the night after Mrs. Robynsyn's return, Rita retired to bed about twelve, but was disturbed from sleep by thoughts of Norman, which kept her tossing and turning in irritating wakefulness. In this mood her attention was attracted by the sound of stealthy steps on the gravel walk outside her window. Listening anxiously, she felt convinced that someone was attempting to enter the house. In looking between the blind slats, she distinctly observed a tall, manly figure carrying a ladder towards the wall. At first she thought—and hoped—that it was Norman preparing to pay her a surprise visit, but as the figure ascended the ladder she had no difficulty in recognising Horace Kindur. In

Tear and trembling, she watched him mount up to the window next to hers, which opened on a landing, and then heard him step inside, and, so far as she could judge by the occasional creaking of a plank in the passage, he was stealing towards the other side of the house, where the Robynsarn's room lay. With her heart in her mouth, she tip-toed towards her own door, resolved to follow and see what evil Kinder was up to, and was gently fumbling at the handle, when the door was softly opened from the outside, and before she had time to scream her lissome figure, clothed only in a loose "nighty," was clasped in a pair of strong arms, and her mouth covered with hot, ardent, masculine kisses. Half-fainting with fright, Rita endeavored to struggle free, but to her amazement the beloved voice of Norman whispered in her ear—

"Hush, dear, it's only I—Norman—so you needn't be alarmed. Let us go in and lock the door."

But her surprise and joy were so great that she could only lean against the wall, and receive in blissful silence an additional instalment of hearty hugs and kisses, which prevented her from speaking for some moments. And during this satisfactory performance it flashed across her that she had been mistaken, and it was really her lover, and not Kinder, who had ascended the ladder, so, when she found her voice, she said—

"Dear boy, you should have been more careful; some one might have seen you coming up the ladder."

"The ladder!" he answered. "What ladder? I came in through the kitchen door, which was purposely left open for me by the housemaid, who is an old pal of Dulcie's."

"Good God! then it was Kinder!" she exclaimed. "Oh! Lionel, let us go after him."

"Kinder!" said Norman. "Why, what the deuce is he doing here? Is he after you, Rita?"

"Oh! no, no," she responded. "But I saw him sneak in at the next window, and I am sure he has gone into Robynsarn's room after money. Let us—oh! my God, what's that?"

It was the sound of heavy, sickening blows and angry voices which had startled and interrupted her. Norman darted into the passage, saw a stream of light issuing from an open door, whence the noise proceeded, and ran towards it, followed, with tottering feet, by Rita.

Norman, for reasons not necessary to explain, had taken his boots off in the kitchen, and so reached the room in silence, but at the lighted doorway stopped short in horror, just as a revolver shot rang through the house. God! what a terrible scene met his gaze! Head downwards, across the bed, hung the form of Mrs. Robynsarn, her night garments saturated with blood flowing from hideous wounds on the head and neck, evidently inflicted with a short iron bar which lay on the floor. In one corner was a small iron safe, with the door open, and jewels flashing in the light of a branch of candles,

while on the carpet before the safe lay Robynsarn, groaning in deadly agony from a bullet wound in his forehead, and crouching behind a couch was Horace Kinder, a smoking revolver in his right hand, and his evil face blanched and hideous with murderous passion. The truth was plain. His burglarious movements at the safe had awakened Mr. and Mrs. Robynsarn, and in his rage at being detected he had battered the poor lady to death as she attempted to jump from the bed, and had shot her husband as he had endeavored to protect his property.

But, before all this had become clear to Norman, he had advanced towards the murderer, who suddenly shot up from behind his covert, and fired point blank at Norman, with such erratic aim, however, as to entirely miss his mark and shiver a small mirror. By this time the whole household was aroused, and thronged the passage and doorway, the women shrieking and crying, and the men attempting to get past them and capture Kinder. Norman, as soon as the last shot had whistled by him, seized a chair, hurled it at the murderer, and then rushed to secure him at the risk of his own life. But Kinder easily evaded him, and, raising the weapon once more, placed it to his brow, and, as the voice of the pistol rang out again, fell forward on the floor dead, and bathed in his own blood!

Next day, when the excitement had somewhat subsided, and the inquest was over, Norman said to Rita—"What are you going to do, now that you are out of a situation again?"

She looked wistfully at him, and replied slowly—"I—I don't know. I suppose I'll have to look for another place."

"Then come back to your old position in Nicholson street," he suggested.

"But you said at the ball that I wanted to sell my damned beauty to other men," she rejoined. "Have you forgotten that?"

"No," he answered, manfully, "but I want you to forget it. Besides, next Tuesday will be Cup Day, and if you like we'll go and have some fun to make up for all you've gone through lately. Dulcie is going out with a new 'blook' she has washed, and I couldn't enjoy myself alone."

Probably you can guess her answer.

CHAPTER XVII.

DULCIE'S NEW MASH.

During the short time previous to Cup Day, Rita was most amazingly busy in worrying the life of the dressmaker whom she had engaged to build her a costume which should arouse admiration and envy on the lawn; and this interesting occupation, coupled with an eager and expensive chase after a dream of a hat, and many more preparations feminine readers can imagine than I can describe, left her very few other distractions. D

quite recovered from the effects of the fire, was more fortunate in having had longer notice of her young man's intention to escort her to Flemington on the great day, and filled in most of the intervening evenings by furiously spooning with that young man in the back parlor.

There was no doubt that she was mashed on him from her fringe to her feet, while there was equal certainty that he was the kind of "bloke" that any girl in her class would feel proud of belonging to. Although his name was Slopper Speckletottle, that was not his only claim to feminine admiration, for at an earlier stage of his career he had been a member of the Fitzroy "Forties," had cheerfully "done his bit of time" for various assaults on the police, and had been pals with the brother of a man who had been hanged for shooting a publican. Furthermore Slopper owned his own pony and cart, and was quite a prosperous man in the rabbit and fish-hawking profession, earning, on an average, as much as 7s. a day. For some weeks past he had "chucked up the push for his donah," and threatened to become quite a respectable member of society, which Dulcie did not mind at all, as she had visibly improved under Rita and Norman's influence, and, besides, she could always look back on his past records with pride. Rita and Norman used to chaff her about her Speckletottle a good deal, but they could never shake her —th in his many virtues.

"Take it from me," she said one day, "Slopper's an all-right lad, without any flies on 'im. Bilhne! you should see that bloke use 'is 'ands! I tell you 'e's a fair corker, that's wot Slopper is. I reckon, if 'e could get one fight on the Demo., 'e'd astonish 'em up there, an' there ain't no better boxin' place in Melbourne than that."

"The Demo.!" said Rita. "Whatever in the world is the Demo., Dulcie?"

"Wy, bless yer socks, the Demo. is the Democratic Club," replied Dulcie; "I fought ev'ryone knew that. Slopper sees it's the on'y place wot 'avin' a go at now, but they won't take 'im on 'cause of 'im 'avin' belonged to the Forties. But 'e'll git 'is chance yet, an' I promise you 'e'll shake fings up w'en 'e starts. 'E's dyn' to take on Fred. Preston, but Preston sees Slopper'll 'ave to fight 'is way up fast."

"But is boxing his only accomplishment?" asked Rita, smiling at her little friend's enthusiasm.

"Not much," was the answer. "You ain't never 'eard 'im on the accordion, or you wouldn't ask that. Talk about Professor Ireland or yer German bands—well, you ought to 'ear Slop. givin' us 'The Peb's Polker,' an' you wouldn't want nuffin else. An', if you ask me, there ain't no better bloke at steppin' than Slopper. I seen all them darnin' blokes an' tarts at Rickards', but they're on'y bloomin' kincheas at the game 'longside of 'im. More'n that, 'e run a

two-up school one 'time down the Road, an' was makin' a pile of splotch at it w'en the cops come an' broke it up. I know Slopper, an' there aint nuffin that bloke can't do. 'E ought to be in Parlyment, 'e ought, 'wit 'is cunnin' ways."

"But wouldn't you have liked a more respectable fellow?" asked Rita, with a mischievous intent to wind Dulcie up a little more.

"Spectable!" she exclaimed, with open eyes. "Lumme, w'y Slopper wears a wite collar ev'ry bloomin' day in the week! An' then, look at 'is pants—there aint no mole-skins about Slop., I can tell you! 'Spectable! w'y that bloke's old man drove a 'ansom keb once, an' 'is mavyer 'ad a apple stall in the market for ten years. 'E ain't no bloomin' Lord Brassey, I know, but in 'is class 'e's a toff, an' 'e don't put on no side wif it, either. Wait till you see 'im in 'is Cap clobber, that's all. Blowed if 'e ain't goin' to wear cuffs an' a dickey, an' 'e's 'avin' 'is pants made at the same shop as Jockey Morgan, wot rides for 'Arry 'Aines. Oh! I tell you, there ain't a tart down the Road wot wouldn't be proud to go out wif Slopper next Toosday."

"By the way, Dulcie," said Rita, "you haven't told me how you came to know him. Were you introduced?"

"Interdooced!" cried Dulcie. "No fear! I'll tell you 'ow it was. You see, I was down at a darnce at Fitzroy one night, w'en I saw Slopper 'ave a bit of a barny wif a bloke from Norf Melbun, a big lump of a joker who fancied 'is fat sometin awful. Well, I finks, that big cove'll chew the other feller's ear right enuff, 'cause, you see, Slopper's tough, but he aint a giant. But, s'elp me, that big bloke didn't 'ave no possible wif 'im. Slop. jest plugs 'im on the for, kicks 'im on the knee, an' then falls on 'im an' arf chokes 'im. Finks I, this bloke's wot knowin', an' w'en he started playin' 'is accordeon for the next darnce I got fair baimy on 'im. But my mos was out that night, an' I couldn't get no chance to talk wif 'im. 'Bout a week after'ds I went down the Bay wif Scotty Smiff an' some of the push, an' I'm blowed if the fast puseon I seen wasn't Slopper. Finks I, this is chery ripe, 'cause, you know, if a tart can't snap a bloke down the Bay she must be a mag. Well, I seen 'e 'adn't no bit of skirt wif 'im, so after a while I sneaks away from society an' goes for a walk round the boat on me own. But I couldn't stand much of that, 'cause me new crabs—I mean, boots—was givin' me wot-for, so I goes downstairs an' takes 'em off to give me plates of meat a cool, an' jest as I was puttin' one of 'em on again down comes Slopper. He walks around a bit, and then sees to me 'Wot ho there!' I knows by the nice way 'e sees it that 'e's on for a mash, so I sees to 'im, 'Rye-oh, gills, jest to string 'im on like. 'Wot's yer game down 'ere?' 'e sees; 'yer bloke slung you?' 'My troubles about blokes,' I sees; 'it's these bloomin' crabs givin' me jarro,' I sees. So 'e

makes up the one that aint on, an' stretches it wif 'is fingers, an' then 'e goes to put it on. I never said nuffin' for a bit, but I spotted 'im 'avin' a sly cook at me legs, so w'en 'e ses 'My oaf, you've got an all-right pair of Dutch peas,' I landed 'im one on the ear-ole as 'ard as I could 'it. 'Blime,' 'e ses, 'you're a bit swift. 'Wot did you want to bang a bloke like that for?' 'Cause I don't want none of yer funny business,' I ses; 'you leave my legs alone.' 'Well,' 'e ses, 'you are a dead mark. Carnt a bloke look at them Dutches wifout meanin' no 'arm?' 'Garn!' I ses; 'I aint come out of no infant school. You aint dealin' wif no Stampy Liz now.' I ses that 'cause I'd 'eard 'e'd slung up Liz, an' I wanted to know if it was the troof. 'Wot do you know about Liz?' ses 'e. 'Not as much as you do,' I ses. 'Garn,' 'e ses; 'I aint seen Liz this mont or more.' 'Fair dinkum?' I ses. 'Yusa,' 'e ses, 'fair dinkum. W'y, lumme, I aint been out of the jug more'n a week or so.' That settled it. As long as I knew 'e wasn't 'avin' no truck wif Liz I didn't mind 'is funny ways, so after 'e'd fixed me boot—'e was a bit slow over it, but I never said nuffin'—we goes up an' 'as a dance, an' a couple of drinks, an' a bit of a squeeze an' a mug or two in the corner of the cabin, an' I gives 'im my new silk wipe—'ankerchief, you know—an' 'e gives me a tanner wif a 'ole in it orf 'is chain, an' ev'ryfink went as right as rain. I've 'ad a few blokes, Dulcie concluded, ' but Sloppler's wot the lot of 'em put together. 'E can have my last—that's wot I fink of 'im.'"

"But, Dulcie," said Rita, "I thought you went down with Scotty Smith. What became of him?"

"Dunno," was the indifferent response. "I didn't want no Scotty Smiff after I'd snapped Sloppler. I did 'ear that Scotty went around skitin' about dealin' it out to Sloppler for gettin' me away from 'im, but wot sort of a time wold 'e 'ave wif Sloppler! W'y, a bloomin' kid in arms could stall 'im orf wif a penny squirt," and Dulcie's scorn at the very idea of Smith attacking her well-beloved Speckletottle was simply magnificent.

Curiously enough, it happened that the writer was sauntering about Studley Park on the following Sunday, thinking of his sins and wishing he had had more fun out of them, when to his surprise and delight he saw Dulcie and her Speckletottle idol swaggering along with an air that plainly showed that they were very highly pleased with themselves. Dulcie was dressed rather more quietly than usual, while Speckletottle (whom the writer saw for the first time) proved to be a long, lantern-jawed slab of a fellow, dressed in a light suit with very large, black stripes, a brand new felt hat with the Collingwood football colors in it, and a thin red neck-tie, which, from a distance, looked like a stream of blood flowing from his throat. Despite his angularities, he appeared wholesome and, as Dulcie said, "tough," and before his days

of reformation must have been an especially ugly customer for the police to tackle. The writer, with his usual modesty and humility, desired to avoid an interview with this interesting couple, but Dulcie was too sharp for him, and nudging her beau coaxed him aside, and introduced him as "Mister Speckletottle, wot Rita told you about, sir." In a deep, fried-fish sort of voice, Mister Speckletottle said, "Dulcie ses yer a rye-buck bloke, so tip us yer madhook," and, the ceremony of hand-shaking having been performed, Sloppler looked hard at nothing for half-a-minute, then saying, "S'long, blokey. Push your barrow, Dulce," swaggered off with his quaint little mistress, who was evidently proud at having displayed her prize to one who, as she phrased it, "grafs for them bloomin' noose-paper rags."

From sheer curiosity, this humble individual followed them slowly down a track leading to the river, and was rewarded by witnessing an incident which gave further proof of Dulcie's passion for Sloppler. They had approached a small crowd, and were exchanging salutations in the picturesque and expressive language of Collingwood, when Sloppler turned round, winked at a very showily-dressed girl who was by herself, and then, leaving Dulcie to talk to some friends, went along to converse with the other. The demeanour of Dulcie at this proceeding was beyond all adequate description. She scowled, bit her lips, shuffled her feet angrily, swished at her skirt, and, finally, turned her back on her friends, and, if expression goes for anything, evidently swore an adult-sized swear of the most bitter nature. Presently, Sloppler said something to the girl which caused her to playfully slap his face. Then there were razors in the air. Dulcie, maddened at this evidence of familiarity, fairly ran down the path, and laid on to Sloppler with her parasol with all the fury and strength aroused by steaming hot jealousy. Sloppler took it all good-humoredly, avoiding the blows when he could, and laughing a heavy, hoarse laugh when she got home on him, but at last she planted one on his cheek which nettled him, and caused him to push her away roughly. More enraged than ever, she attempted to reach him again, but as he dodged her she found herself face to face with the showily-dressed "lady," who laughed derisively at her impotent anger.

That was enough for Dulcie. Screaming out, "You bally faggot, I'll stop yer bloomin' grinnin'," she smashed the handle of the gingham into the other's face, and then fell on with tooth and nail. Rip, rip, went a cotton blouse, and rip, rip went an amazon skirt, and the principal outside garments of the showily-dressed one were in rags! Then, in desperation and rage, she clawed and clutched Dulcie as vigorously as Dulcie had clawed and clutched her, Sloppler and a crowd looking on in exuberant enjoyment. Down went Dulcie on the broad of her back, her neat feet and pretty legs tilting at the air, while her oppo-

went knelt on her chest and breathed heavily. Then Dulcie made a violent effort, grabbed the other somewhere in the region of the placquet and rolled over on top. So they went screaming, swearing, struggling and rolling till suddenly they reached a peak of the river bank, the soil gave way beneath their weight, and in an instant they had splashed heavily into the water, before they had realised their danger. The first to come spluttering up, with her hair and face covered with slimy mud, was Dulcie, who had hardly time to yell "Slopper! Slopper!" when Slopper flopped in without hesitation and regardless of his Sunday suit, and dragged her to the bank. To put it briefly, a photograph of her in her half-drowned state, with her clothes all tattered and torn, one stocking rumbled down to her shoe and showing her bare and dripping leg, and dirty water streaming from every part of her, would have sold at a shilling a time amongst her friends. However, no material harm was done, the other girl was hauled out without difficulty, Slopper took Dulcie home in a friendly vegetable cart which was out holidaying, and Dulcie forgave his base conduct in speaking to the other girl, in consideration of his promptness in dragging her from her muddy bath. How they and Rita and Norman went to the Cup, and what they did there, will be told in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE CUP.

I hope my readers will not accuse me of exaggeration when I state that, on the morning of Cup Day, Rita and Dulcie were up at five o'clock preparing themselves for the great event, although Dulcie had not to meet Slopper Speckletouille till ten o'clock, and Rita and Norman could see no goodjin reaching Flemington until after luncheon. Through the half-open door of the bathroom Norman caught a glimpse of Dulcie vigorously toweling herself, and he has assured the writer that she presented a spectacle which he did not at all regret having witnessed. Standing in a small bath, with her fringe rolled up in curling pins, and clothed only in her native beauty, so to speak, she splattered and rubbed away with an energy (and a towel) which made her firm flesh glisten rosily, and threw her trim form into attitudes calculated to vastly please the artistic senses. Not that there is anything at all artistic in curling pins, which, to the eye of a mere male, look hideous on the loveliest head. Even Rita, who had had her beautiful hair in these ugly little mangles ever since seven o'clock on the preceding evening, looked as though some nasty black slugs were squirming on her scalp. No woman should allow her husband or lover to see her in curl papers or curling pins if she desires him to retain respect and admiration for her.

When, after about four hours' operation

before her mirror, Dulcie appeared in all the bravery of her Cup "clobber," she was a sight to dwell in a man's memory for many moons. The very largest and reddest feathers sweeping over a tremendous hat placed rakishly on one side of her head, a flaming scarlet blouse with four silver brooches crawling over it and covering her extremely tempting bosom, and a glaring green skirt with wonderful yellow ribbons streaming down the back of it, were the most conspicuous articles of her attire, while red stockings and tan shoes with heels three inches high were by no means to be overlooked. She disdained gloves, possibly because she desired to display three large silver rings and one of ebony with a pearl heart in it. And with all this brilliant toggerie she was evidently highly elated, and fairly colored with delight when Rita and Norman, in the generosity of their hearts, complimented her on her taste and striking appearance.

"You see," she said, as she swaggered about, "Slopper's goin' out a fair shine toff, an' I didn't want 'im to be 'shamed of me. It's a bit quiet sorter get-up, I know, but then I remembered that Rita told me not to tog out too flash, so I 'aven't. Lumme, I reckon me an' Slopper'd surprise 'em on the lorn, if we went there, wouldn't we?"

Norman assured her that there was no doubt of that, and expressed the hope that they would have an enjoyable day.

"Oh! yes. By the way," said Rita, "what have you got on, Dulcie?"

"W'y, carnt you see?" she replied; "me-blouse, an' —"

"No, no, I don't mean your dress," said Rita; "but —"

"Oh! I tumble," broke in Dulcie. "Well, I've got me new stays, an' that lovely chemmy you gav me, an' a lace petticoat wot Slopper's sister lent me, an' them there garters wot Slopper sent up, an' a brand new pair of —"

"Good gracious!" Rita interrupted with a laugh, "I don't want to know about your underthings, Dulcie. I mean have you got any wagers on the races?"

"Oh! 'ave I got enny splotch on the gee-goes? Well, no, I aint; but Slopper knows a feller wot knows a bloke as is right bower wif a cove as rides for Wilson, an' 'e's goin' to give 'im a cert. for the Cup w'en we get out; an' if I get a chanst I'll put you two on it. 'Ari-past nine! Blime, I must smoke; Slopper 'll chew me bloomin' lug if I'm late. S'long; 'ope you'll 'ave a rye-oh time. If I I aint back by midnight, you'll know I'm all right, 'cos Slopper 'll be takin' care of me," and, with a wink which conveyed more than her words, she bustled off in a state of glee and excitement.

By the time the lasson arrived for Norman and Rita, that fair charmer, almost as much excited as Dulcie, had contrived to array herself in a manner which suited her sweet face and graceful figure to perfection. For the benefit of my lady readers, I have gone to the

trouble of having a complete description of her costume furnished by an expert, and therefore have every confidence in asserting that Rita wore something fluffly about the neck, with bodice and skirt to match. In this glorious raiment she looked dainty and lady-like, so that even her very dearest female friend could not have found a fault with her. When Norman looked at her, and recalled her past experiences with Auntie, the opium den, and other horrors, he was almost persuaded that he had been dreaming hideous dreams, and that no single sin had ever tainted the former life of his lovely companion. Looking and thinking thus, the poor fellow became desperately sentimental, and, with the accent of a *Family Herald* hero, he murmured—"How beautiful you are, Rita," and attempted to follow up this foolishness with an embrace. But, with a smothered shriek—which is also *Family Heraldish*—she edged away from him, and said hastily—

"For heaven's sake, dear boy, don't touch me! One of those energetic hugs of yours, and goodness knows how many strings and things might burst, and I'd never get myself right again in a day. I'm feeling as happy as a bird now, but if I get home with all my pins, and tapes and hooks in good order, I do believe I'll offer up a prayer of gratitude to the guardian angel who looks after girls with new clothes on."

So, being brought back to earth by this practical and truly feminine outburst, he settled himself steadily down to the business of pleasure.

And now, if you will kindly imagine fourteen pages of lucid and glowing description of the mighty crowds hastening Cupwards in all manner and variety of vehicle, and furthermore picture for yourselves the serious, ridiculous, humorous and brilliant sides of the manking and womankind all bent on the same jaunt of enjoyment, you will confer a favor on the humble writer, and have the satisfaction of knowing that you have lost nothing of the slightest importance. Let it be taken for granted that Flemington race-course is the finest in the world, its appointments the most perfect possible for mortal ingenuity to devise, and its patrons just the grandest lot of people under the sun, especially when they have not been under too much of it.

At the grand stand entrance Rita and Norman noticed a richly-dressed, buxom woman, who was, even at this time of the day, under the influence of drink, and making the air foul with language of the very worst character. In her excitement she was dancing about angrily, and swishing her skirts around so energetically that all those who did not care to turn their eyes away could not fail to remark a considerable amount of as fine a pair of legs as ever the most critical could desire to see. Her trouble was soon evident. Those very vigilant officers, detectives Tucker and Stokes, had barred her progress into the

quarters of the "quality," for the simple and sensible reason that she was too well-known to them as a notorious and sin-sodden prostitute. She had tried to wheedle, bluff and bounce them, but they held firm, and the more she perceived that her efforts were unavailing the more her beautiful temper seethed.

"It's a nice game to chuck me out," she yelled, peppering her discourse with oaths as plentiful as sands on the sea-shore; "a nice blooming game, I don't think. There's any amount worse than me in there, only you daren't stop them. Look at that toff there carting in another man's missis! And what price that fat old pig who was so drunk in Collins street yesterday that she fell out of her carriage on to the pavement? She's from Tourak, so of course you've got to go down on your knees to her. I was never caught under the blooming bed of a coachman like that rich Miss Torton, that's just gone in. Oh! I know these toffs, I tell you. You didn't say a word to that Mrs. Miffles, either, and, take my tip for it, she's a red-hot cup of tea. Why, I saw her in the Woman's Hospital twice before she married that old swell, and I know the woman that's looking after the kids on the quiet now. If you stand her, you'll"— But at this juncture she was hustled out of hearing, just as Rita, who had been quivering with fear, whispered to Norman—

"Goodness me! that's Diamond Kate. I'm awfully glad she did not notice me."

When once in the thick of the fashionable assemblage, of course Rita, being a womanly woman, had eyes for nothing but the gorgeous display of millinery and dress at every point of the compass. She was like a boy in front of the finest confectionery shop in the universe—wonderstruck and bubbling over with delight at the distractingly lovely scene before her.

"Would you like to go and see the horses?" Norman asked her.

"Horses!" she returned, looking at him in surprised amazement; "why, I'd give all the horses in the world for that duck of a hat on the fair girl in front of us. Please, dear boy, don't take me away from all these lovely gowns; I never had such a treat in my life before."

"Oh! well, I want you to enjoy yourself. Now, what would you like to do most?" he enquired, indulgently.

"Well, at the present moment," she said, rapturously, "I'd like to walk stright up to that handsome woman in the *mousseline de soie* and ask her the name of her costumiere. I never saw a skirt hang so divinely. I wonder who she is?"

"Oh! she's of no account. Her last achievement was to go in swimming entirely naked before a crowd of men at Sorrento. She's simply a born sinner," he answered.

"Well," retorted Rita, "if she sins as beautifully as she dresses, she must be having a perfectly glorious time of it."

So enchanted was she with the marvellous show of feminine frippery that she did not notice the hard set faces of the women who were backing horses with the bookies, or inventing cold cash in sweeps. But the gambling craze had caught many of the fairest of society's daughters, and what with their tongues glibly cackling racing slang, and the ungraceful positions they contrived to get into to witness any race they were interested in, their charms were by no means enhanced in the eyes of as calm an observer as our friend Norman. There were dignified-looking dames there who had pawned half their jewellery for money by which they hoped to make a pile; married women who, for the same reason, had been slyly but deftly robbing their husbands for weeks past; fine women who had not hesitated to prostitute themselves in order to obtain the cash wherewith to speculate; and as the excitement grew higher their countenances became harder and more sordid-looking at each moment. Truly, lovely women never appear more unlovely than when she is rushing and crowding around the benches of the book-makers in the full flush and fever of betting.

As to Rita, her soul was with the dresses, and even when a wild roar went up as the Cup horses were started, and every neck was craned to watch the great contest, she could only look on idly, and wonder where the pleasure came in of getting your very nicest clothes crushed and soiled in an effort to follow the movements of two dozen horses, mostly obscured by clouds of dust. And I'm afraid that when a seven-mine Jew money-lender, who had been waving his arms wildly, and prepering in streams, flopped off from a seat and alighted on her toes, she rapped out a hasty little "Damn!" and concluded that seeing the Cup was rather tiresome than otherwise.

But presently arose an incident which kept that day green in her recollection for some considerable time afterwards.

In the press and surge caused by the rush to witness the Cup, she had been separated from Norman, and was feeling tired and dusty and fretful, when she felt a hand moving outside her dress in the neighborhood of her swelling thigh. "Oh!" she thought, "here's some brute of a fellow taking advantage of the crowd to feel my legs," and attempted to edge away. But she was walled in too strongly, and remained quiet until she felt the hand sneaking up to her pocket. Then, realising the situation, she turned half around and caught at the wrist of a tall, well-dressed man, who immediately gave her a rough shove, and, shouldering his way through the throng, ran in the direction of the pagoda. Through the passage he had forced, Rita zig-zagged after him, denouncing him as a pickpocket, and half-a-dozen men also started to chase him. She had not gone far when someone stepped on the hem of her skirt, and with a cruel sk-a-r-r the beautiful

garment was torn from her waist and, falling at her feet, tripped her, and sent her sprawling headlong in the dust. Fortunately, she had an almost equally beautiful white petticoat on, but it was somewhat short, and when in her rage she arose and resumed her running her long and lissome legs were exhibited to a much greater extent than she would have cared about had she had time to think of such things. The thief was still in view, but he had not gone much further before Rita saw Norman rush forward and catch him a clip on the jaw which felled him as neatly as could be imagined. Norman was soon in possession of the facts, and looked for the purse which Rita said had been stolen from her, but without success, the fellow having probably thrown it away as he ran.

"Never mind," said Norman, his anger rising as he saw the tearful and dusty plight of Rita, "he shan't escape. Have a good look at him, Rita, to make sure that he really is the man."

Rita looked at him, and he gazed at her, surprise in his eyes and disgusted astonishment in hers. Then she turned away, and the fellow laughed.

"Do you recognise me?" he asked, mockingly.

"Yes; only too well," she replied, with a shiver.

"Then," said Norman, "if it's possible to find a constable in this crowd I'll give this man in charge."

"I'm not at all afraid," remarked the man, coolly, "because I'm quite sure that this dear and lovely lady will never give evidence against me."

"And I'm quite sure she will," Norman said.

"And I am quite sure I won't," whispered Rita, "because I do know him too well—he is my husband!"

"Your husband!" was all that Norman could grasp in his amazement, while Rita again whispered—"Dear boy, let him go to the devil. It would do us more harm than good to prosecute him;" and Norman, feeling the force of this argument, turned his back as the fellow slunk away and was lost in the crowd. However, if they thought they had got rid of him so easily as all that they were greatly in error, as the future revealed to them.

Meanwhile, after Rita had recovered her skirt, and had it fixed on decently by the skilful aid of an attendant in the ladies' retiring rooms, they sought their hansom, and, with all their usual bright spirits knocked out of them, returned to their home, possibly the most miserable couple of all the thousands who had set forth for the Cup that day.

Rita mourned tearfully over the wreck of her beautiful costume, and the dusty and crushed appearance of her dream of a hat; while Norman cursed, not loud but deep, at the peculiar fate which seemed always to bring bitterness to both of them in the mid-

of enjoyment. And so they sat and talked until close on midnight, when a thundering knock was heard at the door, announcing the return of Dulcie. Half a minute's observation made it evident that she had been having a high old time of it. She staggered and hiccoughed under a heavy pressure of drink; her clothes were half off her back and bosom, her parasol was in tatters, two fluttering dingy rags were all that remained of the once bright and beautiful yellow ribbons, and her gorgeous feathers now flopped and dropped and lurches in a dissipated way, which made them seem as drunk as their owner.

All that Dulcie could say intelligibly was—
"Slopper's—hic—bloomin' well run in—hic—an' I don't care damn—hic—fr anybody. Whoop! Washertime!"

But, after sluicing her under the tap and toppling her into bed, where she started hugging the pillow with an energy worthy of something better to hug, she promised to tell them all about it next day.

CHAPTER XIX. DULCIE AT THE RACES.

This is the heart and kernel of Dulcie's description of her day of delight and disaster at the Cup.

When she swaggered off from Rita and Norman, she was "as 'appy as a flice on a 'ot blanket," to use her own expression, conscious that she looked quite the "lydy," and filled with anticipations of the glory of driving out with Slopper in his own fish and rabbit cart, which had been duly and vigorously cleaned up for this very special occasion. But when she caught a glimpse of Spickett waiting for her, her heart almost failed her. He was too magnificent. From the crown of his black soft felt hat to the soles of his fancy boots, he was "a fair toff" beyond anything she had conceived. His Cap suit was of the very lightest material, with broad black braid outlining the coat, vest and pockets, and striping the sides of his trousers, which were skin-tight to the knees, and thence flowed out till they almost covered the toes of his boots. A watch-chain made of stampees embellished his vest; a thin, red necktie streaked down a highly-starched "dickie," and white cuffs reached almost to his knuckles. Thus tastefully attired, and with a cigar—one of a dozen "two-lows" he had laid in stock—in his very wide mouth, was it any wonder that Dulcie was struck dumb with admiration at his gorgeous appearance? "I don't see 'ow enny tart could be expected to tog up in 'is style," reflected Dulcie, who was becoming more and more dubious about her own costume, and wishing she had stuck a few more feathers in her hat, when Slopper welcomed her with, "Wet 'o, Dulcie! strike me pink, if you sint a bigger swell than wet I am." Lemme, won't we knock 'em to-day out on the course!" whereupon Dulcie relapsed into happiness again

at the knowledge that Slopper was as much struck with her grandeur as she was with his.

Then off they went, to the admiring comments of four dirty gutter boys and Slopper's sister, that ldy having to forego the pleasure of accompanying them, as she was in that interesting state when there's no knowing what might happen in a moment of excitement. Oh! but what a triumph it was for Dulcie when they dashed past the hotel where Stumpy Liz was sweeping out the bar. How proudly Dulcie sat up, and with what a short, cold nod she acknowledged Lig's greeting of "Rye-oh, Dulce; rye-oh, Slop. See you've got 'em all on."

I am quite satisfied that Dulcie would not have changed positions with Lady Brassey at that moment, while Slopper pumped away at his cigar with the air of a bloated aristocrat. Bye and bye, they got in the stress and storm of Flemington road, where it was Slopper's delight to drive dangerously close to fine carriages and chaff the liveried coachmen and footmen, or pass some of his pals in furniture vans and on lorries with "Wot 'o there. You'll 'ave to get out an' walk if you want to see the Cup. W'y didn't you 'ire a 'casse!" Now and again, when there was a straight run, he would hand the reins to Dulcie, hoist out his accordeon, and give up the proceedings with shrieking music, all of which, added to a few long beers on the road, served to bring them to the course in a most wonderful state of excited delight.

They quickly found themselves in the midst of a crowd of spellers, gay-a-whack bookmakers, and others, all busily intent on knocking as much fun and profit out of the day as was possible. Slopper strutted around like a turkey-cock, while Dulcie was proudly conscious of the fact that her feathers were the largest and reddest in all that immense throng. But before she had been ten minutes on the course she tumbled into trouble. Slopper had left to go and leave a word with the "bloke" who had promised to put him on to a good thing for the Cup, and while standing by herself looking at a three-card trickster a naggerty lump of a fellow attempted to push past her.

"W'ere the 'ell are you shovin'!" said Dulcie, angrily.

"Garn!" he retorted eloquently, "you ought to be stuffed, you ought."

"W'y, blame, if it ain't Scotty Smid!" she exclaimed, suddenly. "How're you poppin', Scot?"

"Halloo! Dulcie," the gentleman returned, "who'd 'ave thought of seem' you 'ere? Are yer on yer own?"

"Oh! my bloke's gone after an over bloke," she explained.

"Well, yer lookin' prim," Scotty declared, "Then there tops of yours must 'ave cost a bit of aplous. Come an' 'ave a drink for the sake of the rosy old times me an' you used to 'ave."

Feeling rather piqued at Slopper having left her, Dulcie turned to accompany Scotty to a refreshment booth, when suddenly that same Scotty was pushed aside violently, and the angry voice of Slopper demanded—

"Say, bloke, wot's yer game with my tart, hay?"

"It's all right, Slop," said Dulcie, tremblingly. "Scotty wasn't doin' no 'arm. We was on'y 'avin' a bit of a yarn."

"Yess," growled Slopper, "I know all about you an' yer short shirt. That bloke was arskin' you to 'ave a tiddley with 'im. Blime, I'll punch 'is block off if I ketch 'im messin' aroun' you. Think I brang you out 'ere to go snappin' other bokes? S'elp me, a man ought to give you one on the kisser for yerself."

"Look 'ere, Slop," said Scotty, "don't get yer bloomin' shirt out with Dulcie. She wasn't doin' no 'arm. Strike me, carn't she speak to a bloke without you getting on to 'er?"

"Garn, now," answered Slopper, "or I'll put a 'ead on you. Clear to 'ell out o' this," and he advanced so threateningly towards Scotty that that individual dodged away, saying, as he went—

"By thunder I on'y wait till I get my push; I'll deal it out to you, you big cow."

"Now, look 'ere," said Slopper, turning to Dulcie, "I don't want none of yer funny business with me. If I ketch you at this game again I'll stiffen you. See?"

"Bat, Slop, s'elp me, I wasn't doin' nuffin," she ventured to say. "Scotty comes up to me, an'—"

"Dry up!" was all he said, and it was remarkable how quickly Dulcie obeyed that command.

Presently, in more pleasant accents, he remarked—

"Jerry Biggins has given me the straight griffin for the Cup, an' I'm goin' to 'ave 'arf a jim on Spitfire. I can get on at fifty to one, an' s'elp me, if the bloomin' gee-gee wins, you'n me'll 'ave a shine bust up on the gaunts."

"Couldn't I 'ave a bit on too?" asked Dulcie, anxious to placate her beloved Speckletottle. "I've got 'arf a jim, Slop, an' I might as well do it in as not."

"Good enuff," he said; "pass the stuff over, an' I'll shove it on for you with an all-right book I know."

Dulcie hesitated, and he cried angrily—
"Hurry up, carn't you? Blime if you aint as slow as a funeral."

"But I carn't get at it," she replied. "I've got it fixed in me bloomin' garter, an' I don't want all these coves cookin' at me legs."

"Garn! it won't take you 'arf a mo. to nick it out," he returned, and Dulcie, dreading to ruffle him again, made him stand in front of her, and, stooping down, stealthily raised her petticoats to get at the coin. But she wasn't quite steady enuff, for as soon as a fair

length of her stocking came into view, a man in the vicinity cried—

"Lord love me, pike the tart showing her legs. That's a bit strong."

Down went Dulcie's skirts indignantly at the same moment that Slopper rushed at the rash observer, and hit him a swinging blow between the eyes.

"That's a bit strong, too, ain't it," yelled the infuriated Speckletottle. "Come an' 'ave another with me. I can serve it out till the cow's 'ome," and as the stranger spurred at him Slopper let drive a second smasher, which completely stunned him. However, some of his friends gathered round Slopper and threatened to have his blood, and there is no doubt that there were the makings of a piping hot row all ready there, when a rose from grand stand, hill and flat betokened that the Cup horses were coming out, and a general scutter was made for the best vantage points. Meanwhile, Dulcie had managed to slip the half-sovereign from its cosy hiding place, and at once handed it over to Slopper, who proceeded to place a pound on Spitfire with a clear-eyed, sooty young Jew, who was bawling out the odds through his nose, and was apparently doing a large business.

With the help of Slopper's vigorous shoulders, Dulcie managed to get fairly towards the front of the crowd just as a second roar of "They're off!" rent the air, and the great event of the year commenced. But Dulcie was small, and even by tip-toeing could not see much, which fact being noticed by the considerate Speckletottle, he, regardless of the jeers, protestations and barracking of those behind, hoisted her on his shoulders, pick-a-back fashion, and so afforded her an almost uninterrupted view. But in his excitement to witness the progress of the horses, he was constantly swaying about and jerking her up and down, so that in the course of a few moments her clothes were rumpled up above her knees, her hat was all askew, and her black hair came tumbling about her neck. Just imagine what a comical figure she must have looked in such a state, and with her plump red and white legs sticking out from Slopper's armpits! Naturally the fever of the crowd got hotter and hotter as the horses entered the straight for the run home, and Slopper kept poor Dulcie bobbing about till it seemed as though her head would bob off. Suddenly she gave a piercing scream as Slopper in his excitement to witness the finish grabbed her legs with a grip as though he were endeavoring to pull out handfuls of flesh. She kicked and squirmed painfully, but it was not until the crowd yelled out the winning number that Slopper realized her position. Then he let go all holds, and she dropped backwards and stood for half-a-minute on her head, with her clothes all anyhow, and her legs kicking fitfully at his back.

As soon as he had righted her, and she had seen in a glance that most of the people had

been too intent on watching the judge's board to have taken any notice of the complete display of underclothing which she had furnished, Dulcie whispered—

"Did Spitfire win, Slop?"

"Win be damned!" was his emphatic answer. "Why, I've just heard a bloke say that he was scratched. I'm goin' to get that quid out of that bookie, or, by gosh, I'll wooden the gory awindler."

"Oh! Slop," implored Dulcie, "don't get scrappin' any more. You'll be gettin' into trouble wif some of them blokes."

"That's all right," he replied testily. "If he don't give that jim, I'll chance the trouble. I'll pull his bloomin' liver out, that's wot I'll do."

But when he arrived at the bookie's post he found only an angry lot of backers who were lamenting the absence of the Jew who had taken their money, and was not now on hand to pay the winners. The fellow had proved a "welsber," and loud and deep were the wailings and cursings of those he had duped. But Dulcie, who had followed Slop- per in fear and trembling, spotted Mr. Weis- er hiding behind a cart, and immediately acquainted Slop- per with her discovery. In a second the crowd were at him before he had a chance to run or seek a fresh refuge, Slop- per, crying "Gimme me quid, you cow!" being the foremost. Like a wild animal, he dragged the speler from the cart, and as the crowd shrieked "Kill him! kill him!" Dul- cie's mash pounded him with sickening blows, while men and women scuffed and pulled him until his clothes were a mass of rags and his features were covered with blood. At this juncture helmets were mingled amongst the throng, and a constable attempted to pull Slop- per away from his victim, but that maddened hawkier swung round alertly, and with a single bash grassed the policeman as clean as a whistle. Other constables set on him, and, although he bit, hit, kicked and struggled with skill, strength and passion, they soon brought their batons into play, and stretched Speckletotie out as senseless as a log. Dulcie had rushed forward with some wild hope of rescuing him, but the officers merely pushed her away, and advised her to clear out, or she would be locked up. Even the clods of bad language which she hurled at them in her rage failed to move them, and when she saw her Slop- per lifted and carted away she let out one awful curse, and went off into violent hysterics. Beer and lemonade were dashed over her by reckless but sympathetic bystanders, but it was half-an-hour before she recovered sufficiently to know what had hap- pened. Then, without any mock modesty this time, she withdrew another half-sovereign from her purse and, with the expressed determination to go and get blazing drunk, she accepted the offer of a friend to see her into town. From that time to her arrival at Norman's house she had no clear recollection of anything, save abundance of booze, a fight

with a half-caste girl in Little Bourke street, and the efforts of a Chow to persuade her to try an opium pipe and remain with him till morning.

"That sickened me," she said, in conclud- ing her story. "I was fair tanked, but the very idea of a bloomin' old Chow wantin' to mash me turned me up, so I whooloped 'im across the jor, an' made tracks somehow or other for 'ome. But, oh!" she pleaded to Norman, "you will go up to the gaol an' see Slop- per, won't yer? I duano wot thes've done wit is 'orse an' cart, but I wouldn't like 'im to sink I'd turned - or on 'im; an' if you'll on'y tell 'im I'd sell me bloomin' socks for 'im 'e'll know 'e's - till right now wit me. Blime, I believe if Slop'd walk in 'ere now an' j-est bang me over the chivvy, an' call me 'e bloomin' bit of skit, I'd die 'app'."

After which you may be sure that Norman consented to go and see Slop- per, but for the adventure he met with there you must again have patience.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MELBOURNE GAOL.

On finding that Slop- per had been sent to the Melbourne gaol for a month, Norman lost no time in securing the necessary order to enable him to visit that highly important but singularly unpopular public institution, and, with the aid of a friendly member of Parliament soon succeeded in his object. Having never previously entered the place, either voluntarily or involuntarily, he was naturally bitten with curiosity to see an establishment where so many of Melbourne's prominent men had commenced a career of gloomy privacy, and if his impressions of the gaol are not strictly accurate it is to be hoped that none of my readers will be able to correct them from their own experience.

The mere mention of a gaol invariably recalls the contention of Lovelace to Althea, that "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," but I venture to think that a term of confinement in the Russell street quarters would convince anyone that the stone walls there help to make as efficient a prison as can be imagined. It is much easier to get inside them than it is to get out again, while if the iron bars do not form cages then all the dicker birds who have been secluded behind them must have been suffering from extraordinary delusions. The very sound of the outer door closing on him after he entered sent a shudder through Norman's frame, while the most casual survey of the grim and greecome interior caused him to congratulate his lucky stars that he could retire from the unenticing premises whenever he so desired. Even at the office, where his order was scruti- nised with as much care as though he had been a desperate and blood-thirsty villain, the aspect of the stolid prison clerks and the senior warden, by whom he was to be guided through the weird mazes of the institution,

sent a shiver down his spine cold enough to refrigerate butter for the London market. But probably the very nastiest sensation he had ever experienced in his life came over him when he afterwards cast his eyes upon the half-dismantled scaffold, where so many men and some few women had been dropped through the slot, like a penny in an automatic weighing machine, with a suddenness which had completely taken away their breath. He had never seen a man "turned off," but he had read all about the fitting of the rope collar round the neck of the cowed and trembling condemned, the click of the lever, the opening of the trap-door, the dull, sickening thud—which you also may be familiar with—and the dangling body of the very recently deceased; and the mere sight of the murderous structure made him feel as if he had been naut-hanged himself, and was not yet fully restored to sensibility. All great prisons present much of a likeness with their stern, cold corridors, massive, cruel-looking doors, plain, hard labor and exercise yards, frowning walls, armed warders pacing their observation heights, and sheds or rooms where the festive pastime of oskum-picking is indulged in, and the Melbourne gaol is no different in these particulars from its brethren, excepting in being larger, more gloomy and more generally depressing to the gentle spirits who temporarily inhabit it. I have known of prisoners who have grown so accustomed to it that they have returned repeatedly with hearts as light as though they were returning to their homes, their only important objection being that they have to undergo the novelty and indignity of a bath on each re-entry prior to being sent to the south wing and then transferred to the separate cells or the labor yard, according to the governor's decree. The governor, at the time of which I am writing, was the kind of official by whom it might have been a pleasure to be governed in other circumstances, and was usually familiarly referred to by warders and prisoners as "the old man," excepting in such cases as where extra punishment was ordered, when he was coarsely indicated as "the old ——," the language of the average gaol-bird being painfully frequent and free.

Norman found Sloppe Speckletottle in what is known as a separate cell, which, however, he occupied with another prisoner. The said cell was a dreary apartment, with a stone floor, and furniture consisting chiefly of a bed board about 6ft. long by 2ft. 6in. wide, and not by any means the style of room which any man with a longing for comfort and luxury would willingly select. However, Sloppe did not appear to be greatly cset down by his present cheap and nasty accommodation, nor at all embarrassed by the branded and ungraceful costume which he had been forced to substitute for the Cup "clobber" which had previously adorned him. As insinuated before, he had become fairly familiar with these things in his "forty" old days,

and, as he pointed out to Norman, "If a bloke kicks up a barney in this bloomin' peter, he don't get no sugar candy or sponge cake by it, take my word for it." Norman was about to make some remark, when his attention was attracted to the other prisoner, who was knocking at the walls with a stick, and evidently also with a very defined object, and not in any mere aimless spirit of amusement. Sloppe noticed Norman's enquiring glance, and answered it curtly with—

"Killin' bugs; that's wot that bloke's doin'."

"Bugs!" repeated Norman in disgusted amazement; "why the cell looks as clean as a new collar."

"So it is," put in the chief warder, who had also been observing the insect-slayer, though without the interest that novelty would have afforded him, "but for these animals. We can't get rid of them no matter what remedies we try. They're like some prisoners—always coming back to us just when we think we have cleared 'em out for the last time."

"Well, they don't come in with me," said Sloppe, "an' they can't be after the tucker, 'cos there aint enough of that for a man to leave a crumb. Blime if I aint always as 'angry as a bloomin' 'orse. My oath, wot sort of a feed'll I 'ave w'en I get shut of this crib! Tell Dulce to lay in stacks of saws, an' spuds an' onions an' faggots an'—course I mean if she aint turned dorg on me."

"Not a bit of it," said Norman, promptly. "In fact, she told me to assure you that she'd sell her socks for you if it would do you any good."

"Did she!" exclaimed Sloppe, fairly beaming with delight. "S'elp me, she's a corkin', bloomin' tramp, Dulce is. Won't we 'ave a bean-oh w'en I get out! I'm satisfied she'd do this month with me if she could, an' I wouldn't 'misd 'avin' 'er 'ere, I tell you—she'd keep the bugs off me right enuff, Dulce would. Look 'ere, tell 'er—yuss, that'll do—tell 'er I'm fair, blasted well shook on 'er, an' fair wet through to the skin with thinkin' about 'er, will you? Lumme, I'd like a kiss from 'er with 'er mouth full of tobaccoer juice, that's wot I'd like!" and, seeing that he needed no further consolation, Norman promised to convey the affectionate message to Dulce, and left Sloppe and his cell-mate to the mercies of the insect tribe.

As no long-sentence convicts serve their time at this establishment, Norman had no opportunity of viewing those eminent land-boom doctors and heartless financiers who have been severely gaoled for swindling credulous shareholders and depositors, and robbing countless widows and orphans! But several very notorious and evil-looking spicers, smashers, till-thieves, pickpockets and such small fry of crime were pointed out with a certain amount of pride by his warder-guide, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that many garrotting blackguards, wife-kick-

ing husbands and ruffians of similar kidney were effectually prevented from playing their vicious pranks in public for some little time at any rate. However, had the number of brute-beasts he saw there been doubled it would not have been any great disadvantage to the respectability of the city. One of the prison clerks, whom he had seen conversing familiarly with the governor, he had at first felt certain was a former influential city man who had been convicted of detestable roguery and sentenced to fifteen years, with hard labor, but a moment's reflection showed him that he must have been mistaken, for everybody knows that our prison discipline is so perfect and inflexible that no amount of influence could possibly be brought to bear to secure an easy position and comfortable work for such a scoundrel, no matter what fine friends that scoundrel might have outside. Of course not. The very idea of favoritism and privileges at the Melbourne gaol or anywhere else was so absurd that he could not imagine however it had entered his head.

However, he soon had something much more sensational to think about, for just as they were about to leave the labor yard a cry of "Take that, you hog!" followed by another voice shouting "My God! I'm done for!" caused the senior warden to turn and run back just as a shot was fired by an overlooking guard. In a moment the cause of exclamations and commotion was apparent, for a slouching prisoner had a blood-dripping knife in his hand, and on the ground writhed a young warder whom he had stabbed in the back. The shot fired by the overlooking guard had done no damage beyond splintering a post, but before Norman could get nearer to the scene a second shot struck the convict on the arm and caused him to drop his weapon. Instantly, however, he caught up a stone water-jar and hurled it at the senior warden just as that official was about to dash at him, and down went the senior warden. By this time, several other officials had raced to the fray and were industriously urging the other prisoners into their cells, fearful that they might catch some of the aggressive convict's complaint, and create a general disturbance. Norman seized the situation at a glance, and, with his usual impetuosity and disregard for possible personal mutilation, he jumped to the senior warden's side, picked up the jar and hurled it back at the ruffian who had made so savage a use of it. Following up this misdeed with a rush, he managed to grapple the felon's throat with his right and deliver a fairly heavy blow with his trusty left. But the man with the broad arrow trade-marks over his clothing was not a chicken—not even a boarding-house chicken—but a powerful fellow who had had some considerable success as a garrotter in those intervals when he happened to be outside the gaol walls; and the arts of his interesting profession came back to him instantly he felt himself grabbed, and after a

moment's struggling he succeeded in getting on Norman what I believe is called the "hammerlock." Anyway, if I have not got the technical term correct, Mr. Broad Arrow had certainly got the accurate hold on Norman, and for once in his life that plucky individual felt that he had bitten off more than he could chew. In fact, the strain of the felon's hold was so great that Norman felt that something must break fairly immediately, and had a very decided opinion that that something was likely to be his own precious neck. Knowing that he could never repair or replace that important portion of his anatomy, he put forth all his despairing energies to liberate himself, and was successful in so far as to shift Mr. Broad Arrow's hold to a less dangerous position. All this time—which was only a few moments, however—none of the armed warders dared to fire for fear of injuring or killing Norman, and so the latter had to battle entirely by himself.

The senior warden, who had been only slightly hurt, at length said—"We must rush them," but he said it in so loud a tone that the garrotting prisoner heard it as well as the warders, and evidently felt that it was about time that he asserted himself more distinctively than Norman had been giving him a chance of doing. Accordingly, and with astonishing promptitude, he went through some motions utterly indescribable by the writer, and by means of a throw familiarly known to such gentry as the Flying Mare, sent Norman flying through space at such a giddy rate that when he landed on the ground some few yards off he had not the least knowledge of where he was, or of anything that had happened. I know that, in the interests of the readers of these sketches, he should have knocked Mr. Broad Arrow cold and squaring with one powerful blow of his unconquerable right fist, but the plain solid truth—warranted to stand any climate—is that the beastly blackguard knew too much for our game but rash hero, and laid him out on that prison yard as unconscious of his surroundings as the buckle on a girl's garter.

However, Mr. Broad Arrow reaped no benefit from his ungentlemanly action, for as he threw Norman away so disadvantagefully the warders made a rush, and in a very few minutes he was in a cell from whence no noise could reach outside, and where several very diligent and muscular warders lost no time, in—uhem!—conveying to him a sense of their great displeasure at his unmanly conduct.

As to Norman, he was too much of a hero and a gentleman to do any such disgraceful thing as die, and despoont my readers, so, with the help of the doctor, and the doctor's brandy, he speedily recovered the majority of his senses, and left the gaol with nothing worse than a bad headache and the bitterness of having been practically wiped on the floor by a mere low convict. That was galling enough, but nothing to the terrible tidings received from Rita on his return home.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ARISTOCRATIC BROTHEL.

No sooner had Norman departed on his visit to the goal than a pert young girl brought Rita a note from her husband, which ran thus:—"I am dying. For God's sake, come immediately. Just to say you forgive me." An address in Jolimont was given, and on being questioned the messenger testified that "the gent was pegging out with consumption," so with as little delay as possible Rita went off with her in the cab in which she had arrived. Norman's dear lady-love had not the least spark of affection for her husband, but to such an appeal as he had sent she could not harden her woman's heart, and felt sure that Norman would not blame her for complying with a dying man's request so pathetically put.

The outward appearance of the house at which the driver drew rein was of the quietly-stylish order, and two-storied. It might have been the residence of a bishop—only that bishops have palaces and mansions provided for them—or a retired and gentlemanly merchant, or, in short, anything but what it really was, viz., an aristocratic house of assignation, where vice was ministered to in a more refined manner—if there can be any refinement in such matters—than at any other brothel in the city. It was managed by a lady of middle-age and elegant face, figure and costume, who had formerly mingled in society as the wife of a professional gentleman very well known to many of you. On his death it was discovered that his property had been wrecked in boom transactions, and his widow left very much poorer than she had anticipated, whereupon she had started a high-class boardinghouse, which had developed into the present high-class brothel. With the assistance of half-a-dozen girls of the subdued graceful *demi-monde* type, Mrs. De Vere—as I propose to call her—succeeded in building up a business which was understood to be handsomely remunerative, her "clients" being, without exception, persons of liberal means. Her assistants did not descend to the usual practice of walking the streets after dusk, and soliciting custom from passers-by in the bold and flaunting manner of other prostitutes, but were peculiarly deft in the art of capturing suitable gentlemen on the Collins street block during the fashionable afternoon hour, or at theatres, public balls, concerts and similar functions. Furthermore, two of them worked professional men's offices in a uniform somewhat resembling that worn by nurses, thus securing private audience with many men in the course of a day, and being enabled to tout for Mrs. De Vere's establishment without bringing themselves under the notice of the police, or making public the fact that certain professional men of staid aspect and solid standing were really immoral hypocrites. Occasionally, too, Mrs. De Vere supplied lady-like girls as

companions for giddy gentlemen who were going to Sydney, or New Zealand, or elsewhere for a holiday, and needed a temporary wife for the tour. If brief, Mrs. De Vere undertook, "with promptness and despatch," to cater for the vicious needs of any man whose position in the city was assured, and who cared to pay the exorbitant charges she made. It is surprising to reflect that she found customers innumerable, and that those customers were mainly married men, with luxurious and comfortable homes, and wives with whom they might have been more gratified than they were with Mrs. De Vere's girls. But it seems to be the peculiarity of many husbands to find attractiveness in any women but their wives. Perhaps you have noticed that fact.

Another feature of Mrs. De Vere's business was pandering to the vicious inclinations of "well-to-do women who desired to be as naughty as possible, without the risk of being found out. On almost any afternoon or evening, staid ladies of this type visited the place to meet male friends, or female friends whose practices were anything but lady-like, and indulge in all manner of wickedness, washed down with champagne, wines, beer or spirits. Many well-known women have spent a gay afternoon or evening here, and afterwards pretended that they had been on an extended shopping tour, or calling on friends, whereas, could the husbands only have known the exact nature of their conduct—or misconduct—they would have had substantial grounds for some of the nastiest and spiciest divorce cases ever known in this sunny southern land. In the course of some investigations undertaken for the purposes of these sketches, I had an opportunity of witnessing two dainty ladies, half drunk and half naked, romping about one of the room-like the worst of bad women, for the edification of a male person who has attained some notoriety in the medical profession. Of course they did not know that any outsider was observing their very improper antics—and their legs—or they might have been even more shocked than I was.

However, none of these matters were known to Rita, and when that lovely lady was shown into a cosy and elegant drawing-room, she at once received the impression that she was in a house of the most decided respectability. At a very fine piano a very fine young woman was playing with evident skill, while Mrs. De Vere herself sat gracefully in a lounge-chair, intent upon some utterly useless piece of fancy needlework. On making known her mission, the proprietress informed Rita that her husband was up stairs, and would be down directly.

"But," said Rita, surprisedly, "I thought he was dying, and could not move."

"Ah, my dear," was the reply, "I am sure you will forgive him for his deception. He is not seriously ill, but so fond of you that he was dying to see you, and knew that noth-



CHINESE LOTTERY SHOPS.

ing less than such a note as he sent would bring you to him."

"Then he might have saved himself the trouble of sending it," said Rita, rising angrily, "as I shall go straight home again," and in earnest of her intention she stepped towards the door just as her husband appeared at the threshold.

"My dear and charming wife," he said, advancing to her, "you would surely not go without seeing your loving husband. That note was a lie, but you will forgive me for it when you know how I was longing for a sight of your beautiful face, wont you?"

Rita looked at him with the utmost scorn that that beautiful face could express, and without a word endeavored to pass by. But, seeing her intention, he adopted a more serious tone, and said—

"Ah, you are anxious to return to the embraces of your fancy man, but I have something important to discuss with you; something that may affect his happiness, so I'm sure you will listen. Besides, I don't mind telling you that you can't leave this house until I have done with you."

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Rita, turning to Mrs. De Vere. "Are you a party to this man's trap?"

"That man is your husband," returned the elegant brothel mistress, "and has a right to all a husband's privileges. It is not my business to interfere between man and wife."

"And as your husband I do not desire to do you any harm," he observed. "I merely want to introduce you to a friend of mine, and have a quiet chat with you. My friend is in the next room. Will you come?"

Hardly knowing what to do, Rita followed him into a luxurious apartment, occupied by three stylish girls, and an elderly, well-dressed man with a bald-head and evil-looking mouth.

"This is the lady of whom I spoke," said Rita's husband to the man, who smiled and leered admiringly as his glance took in her fascinating face and appetizing figure. "And these," indicating the girls, "are friends of Mrs. De Vere, and of anybody else who can afford their friendship."

Still pondering on the mystery of it all, Rita bowed slightly, and allowed her husband to seat her on a sofa by the side of the other man, who began paying her compliments of a rather coarse character. She made no demur, for the simple reason that she was anxious to know what it was that was likely to affect Norman's happiness, but when she found the old wretch sneaking one arm about her, and endeavoring to untasten her bodice, she pushed him away and said to her husband—

"If you have anything to say to me, be quick about it, as I am not going to stay here to be insulted."

"Pooh! pooh! don't get so skittish," he returned. "My friend is naturally struck with your fine figure, and is able and willing to pay

you to listen to him. I assure you, old fellow, her legs are simply perfect. I'll venture to say there's not such another pair in this room."

"Well, I'll give £5 to the girl with the best," the old brute said, grinning.

Instantly three skirts were raised rather more than knee high, and three pairs of shapely legs exhibited without any fuss—although there was considerable frill shown.

"Splendid! splendid!" chuckled the elderly man. "Have you anything to beat those, madame?" to Rita.

For answer Rita rose from the sofa, and saying—"I thought this was a respectable house, but I see it is nothing but a cursed drum," again attempted to leave, but her husband swung her around to the sofa again and forced her full length down.

"So she won't have her pretty legs looked at, won't she?" he sneered. "Here, Fanny, Maud, Gertie, lend a hand while we measure her, and I'll bet £5 she beats the lot of you."

Then, despite her struggles, they kept her extended, while a big, plump, blonde girl took a handkerchief, gazed Rita's exquisite petticoats bravely for her purpose, and, with the old brute looking on and chuckling in great delight, proceeded to measure those lovely legs both at the calf and thigh.

"We're done," said the blonde, as she finished her task. "I can beat Maud and Gertie, but I'm not a patch on this girl. I never saw such wonderful legs in my life," and, as the others expressed the same opinion, and the elderly individual exclaimed "Bee-uriful! What a shape! What a size!" there was no need for a further examination, and poor Rita was released. But her troubles were not yet over, for this outrage had so affected her nerves that when she endeavored to stand up she swayed and fell back in a heavy faint. What happened then she of course did not know, but her next experience was finding herself in an upstairs room, with her husband holding smelling salts to her nose.

"Now, my fine lady," he said, as soon as he noticed her recovery, "I am going to finish with you. I have sold my rights over you to my old friend for £25, and in five minutes he will be here to take possession of his property. Your fancy man struck me on the nose, and this is part of my revenge. The other part is reserved for him personally. I'll have his damned life for that blow!" and his fiendish tone made Rita shrink in horror.

She sat up on the bed and looked about her as her devil of a husband turned to leave the room. The door opened and the old beast with the evil-looking lips appeared. A few words passed between the men; Rita heard the jingle of money as the price of her sale was handed over, and in another instant the ker had been turned in the lock, and she was left to the mercy of this grinning, horrible old ghoul, who had come to claim the fulfilment of his blackguardly bargain. He advanced towards her rubbing his hands as

though anticipating triumph, and working his lips in a manner which made Rita long to be able to strike him dead.

"Just one kiss from those ripe, ruby lips, my pretty one," said this lecherous old scoundrel. "You have nothing to be afraid of now, my dear."

"If you have the smallest instinct of a gentleman, sir," she answered, quivering with horror and indignation, "you will leave this room without further insulting me."

"Now, don't be cross with me," he returned, with a ludicrous endeavor to be soothing and irresistible. "Isn't it better to be my own darling and have all that my money can lavish on you, than to be the mistress of such a fellow as I am told you have been living with?"

He waited for a word, but Rita was too enraged to speak. "You look very fetching in your tantrums," he continued, edging closer, "but we can occupy our time much better than in quarrelling. Come, kiss me, and be my sweetheart," and, evidently thinking she was relenting, he caught her by the arm. At his hateful touch all the demon in Rita surged up, and with all the force her disgust lent her, she landed him such a healthy and unadmirable blow on the face that he was sent sprawling against a toilette stand so heavily as to knock it over, and down he went with it, the jag cutting his face severely, and the water from it drenching him to the skin. At that moment the handle of the door was turned, and Rita, catching up a chair, faced round, resolved to defend herself as well as she was able. But to her surprise and delight Dulcie rushed in with a poker in one hand, and followed by a constable.

"Blime, we're only jest in time," she exclaimed at sight of the disordered room. "I know this bloomin' place, an' w'en I seen the note you'd dropped at 'ome, finks I, that bloke's got Rita on a string, so I comes down 'ere, an' gets this cop—'e's an' old mash o' mine—to 'elp me. Shall I give the old bloke one on 'is block wif the poker, Rita?"

"No, never mind him; only get me out of this horrible place, Dulcie!" and as the presence of the policeman prevented anybody interfering with her, you may imagine that she was on her way home again in a very short space of time, very depressed over the constant succession of troubles heaped upon her, but relieved at her timely escape from the snare of her secondarily husband, and the disgusting attentions of the elderly beast.

Having related most of this adventure to Norman in much less time than it has taken to tell it here, Rita finished up by expressing anxiety for her lover's future safety.

"He threatened to kill you, dear boy, and he is a dangerous man to have for an enemy. Couldn't we go away to Sydney, or somewhere out of his reach?"

"Nonsense," replied Norman. "He may threaten and bluff a helpless woman, but that

kind of cur isn't built to attack a man. I feel certain he won't attempt to harm me."

But that same night he had the strongest reason for changing his opinion.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NIGHT WITH A MADMAN.

It happened that the very eventful night which I am about to describe was stiflingly hot, consequently Dulcie, after undressing, threw herself on the outside of her bed, and, attired in a very short and skimpy white garment—the name of which is none of your business—tossed about restlessly, occasionally fetching portions of her plump, pink flesh smarting thwacks in an endeavor to slaughter the very rude mosquitoes who ravished her tempting body. By degrees, however, and towards midnight, she found relief in sleep, and was just revelling in a splendid dream in which she and her beloved Slopper were enjoying themselves, when the sound of a heavy thump from the direction of the front door aroused her into a sitting attitude, and brought her to a state of drowsy wakefulness. However, after listening intently and hearing no further noise, and judging by the silence of Rita and Norman's room that those two were snoring in peaceful unison, she murmured, "Some drunken bloke on the razzie," and sank back into the arms of Slopper once more, meaning, of course, the Slopper of her dreams. But in another instant she was again suddenly awakened by a fearful crash of glass, and a terrible scream from Rita. "Holy sailor! Wot's up now!" thought Dulcie, jumping from the bed, just as the noise of splintering timber struck her ears. *Smash! smash!* came the sounds of frightful blows on the woodwork, and she could hear Norman commanding Rita to be quiet. Carefully tip-toeing to her door, Dulcie peeped around the corner, and along the passage saw a tall figure madly hacking away at the front bedroom door with an axe. In the dim light of the passage his features could not be identified, but Dulcie knew in an instant that the man was Rita's husband, bent on destruction and probably murder.

"Let me in, you hog," he yelled, "or I'll break the damned door in. That woman's my wife, and by God I'll kill you and her before this night's over."

"Get out of the window, and leave me to manage him," Dulcie heard Norman say to Rita, and the latter's answer came, "I won't leave you to be murdered by that wretch."

"Good iron," thought Dulcie, as she heard Rita's plucky reply. "Rita's a bloomin' brick, that's wot she is."

Judging by the noise of rattling earthenware, she assumed that Norman was shifting the heavy toilet stand against the door. But he was too late, as the repeated assaults on the door broke the lock, and, with a shout of triumph and vengeance, the midnight in-

trader burst into the apartment with up-lifted axe in hands, and shocking oaths falling from his lips. But as the bed was in the centre of the room, and Rita and Norman on the other side of it, his evident scheme of slaughtering them was thwarted for the moment. As he stood there hesitating before attacking them, the man's appearance was absolutely horrible. As was afterward ascertained, he had broken through the front parlor window, the jagged glass of which had gashed his cheek and hands, and in wiping the perspiration of excitement from his face he had smeared himself with blood. His eyes, too, were bloodshot, and gazing with suppressed maniacal fury, while his set teeth, his torn and dusty clothing, and his menacing attitude as he stood with the axe raised in mid-air, were sufficient to throw Rita into a state of mortal terror, and cause even Norman to think that perhaps his last hour had come.

Rita, strangely enough, was first to speak, as with quivering lips she nerved herself to stammer—

"Oh! what harm have we done you? Wh-what do you want? Is it m-money?"

"Money be damned!" he cried. "I don't want any of the money you've earned by walking the streets, you harlot!"

Then her terror took wings to itself at this unjust accusation, and, no longer quivering, but superbly indignant, she said—

"You lie! I never walked the streets in my life, you cur! I am no harlot, although you would have liked to make me one, you miserable bludger!"

"I'll cut your pretty head off if you call me a cur and a bludger," he yelled advancing. "You are a damned harlot; you are that man's mistress, and a toy for any other man who chooses to pay your price!"

"By God, if you insult her I'll kill you, despite your axe," said Norman, raging at the fellow's brutal words, and endeavoring to release himself from the frantic clasp of Rita, whose beautiful arms were wound around him as though she would shield him from danger. Like a flash her husband rushed forward, and brought the hideous weapon down upon the bed within a few inches of where they stood. Norman instantly whirled Rita around so that his body was between her and their murderous assailant, and pushed her further back until they both reached the most distant corner.

Literally grinding his teeth, the fellow's fury seemed to burst all bounds, and swinging his axe again he shouted—

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you! I'll kill you!" and darted around the foot of the bed in order to face them. But the sight of his reflection in a mirror stopped him, and, apparently supposing that he had another person to deal with, he snarled—

"To hell with you!" and with one blow of his axe smashed the glass into a thousand atoms. Horrible was his rage then. He seemed to have gone mad in a moment, and

in his ungovernable passion strove to wreak his vengeance on the furniture. "Blood! blood! I must have blood!" he shrieked, and crash went the water jug.

"Come on, you devils, till I slaughter you!" and a fearful blow shivered the basin.

"I'll finish you, you dog!" and crash went another utensil, till the toilet table and ware were strewn in pieces over the room, and the chairs were splintered like match-wood. Then a costume of Rita's hanging at the back of the shattered door attracted his mad-dened attention, and, seizing it as a terrier seizes a rat, he tore it with his teeth, jumped on it with both feet, as violently and triumphantly as though he were jumping on the body of his wife, and, finally, rolled with it on the floor, thumping, tearing and kneeling on it, as he cried—

"Ah, you thing! you beautiful harlot! I have got you now, and we'll go down together. Curse you! curse you! You'll not sell your lovely body any more, my fine lady. Your soul is mine and the devil's. Down to hell I down to hell we'll go when I've strangled you. I'll bite your nose off; I'll pull your eyeballs out; I'll tear your lovely legs to pieces; I'll grind your charming chest to powder, you devil, you pretty, damned prostitute!"

Surely never was a man more thoroughly mad. He had beaten the skin off his hands as he struck the floor, his lips were white with a thick froth, and his eyes glittered with a vicious fire of homicidal mania. Norman had been too horrified at the awful spectacle of a strong man writhing in his madness to do anything, while Rita leaned against the wall with her eyes averted, and her whole frame shaking with sheer fright. But when the madman commenced rolling on the floor Norman came to his usual resolute self, and, clambering over the bed, he seized the axe which the maniac had dropped, and was about to retreat with it, when the other became aware of his presence and his intention, and grabbed the weapon also. Norman, as you have had opportunities of knowing, was a fairly powerful man, but he had never contended with the strength which madness gives. In spite of all his efforts, he was drawn, still gripping the axe-handle, from the bed to the floor, each opponent striving to wrest the weapon from the tenacious hold of the other. It was all Norman could do to hang on, but he managed to do that, for he realised most acutely that he would be a dead man the moment the lunatic regained possession of the axe. Therefore, he braced himself for the task, and for a few minutes he was engaged in the most terrible tug-of-war imagination can conjure. Rita's husband glared more madly than ever, and through his closed teeth grunted and cursed with the savage hideousness of a fiend. It seemed as though Norman's strength could never hold out against such a fearful rival. Rita, who had climbed on to the bed and crouched there

watching the struggle with the interest of one who knew that her life might also depend on the issue of the combat, felt so sure that her lover was becoming worsted that her pent-up nerves gave way, and with a despairing shriek she fell on to the bed. That shriek distracted her husband's attention for a second, and as his eye glanced at her he roared—

"My God! I thought I'd killed you! But I'll make certain this time, you devil!" and, letting go the axe, he attempted to rush past Norman and attack his fainting wife. But that movement, of course, left Norman with the weapon in his power, and, raising it, he exclaimed—

"Stand back, or I'll brain you!"

Mad as he was, the threat and the stern attitude of Norman had sufficient influence over his antagonist to make him pause. But his brain was evidently aflame with the one object of killing Rita, and with a wild rush he jumped at Norman with such violence as to knock him over, and again the two struggled, but this time on the floor. Fortunately, Norman in falling had dropped the axe out of reach. The madman, however, was on top, kneeling heavily on Norman's chest, and almost preventing him from breathing. It was all the under man could do to punch the other's face, and his blows were not of sufficient force to trouble him. Norman felt himself growing weaker and weaker, and the maniac, evidently becoming aware of that fact, raised himself slightly, and then struck our plucky friend a terrific blow on the jaw, which laid him out as still as a log of wood.

Then it was that Rita's life was in the most awful danger. Her husband rose to his feet, looked murderously at her, and fairly yelled—

"Now, I'll drink every drop of your blood, my fine lady. I'll crunch your bones beneath my feet; I'll throttle you till your eyes and tongue drop out. You won't escape this time if I have to carve every inch of you up."

Then he slowly mounted the bed. He was in no hurry, evidently fearing no intervention, and knelt down to gloat over the inanimate body of his beautiful prey. And surely Rita had never looked more fascinating. Her only garment, a "sighty," was disarranged by her recumbent attitude, so that the witcheries of her perfect bust and glorious legs were revealed almost without obstacle, while her features with the marble snowiness of unconsciousness, were perfect in their statue-like parity. Even her ferocious husband, with his madness still hot upon him, was softened by this sudden picture of her charms, and paused over her like some foul and hideous animal over its victim. Apparently in wonderment, he gently passed his hand over her face, her shoulders, arms, chest and legs, even to her dainty toes, marvelling at the firmness and delicacy of the fine skin, and the wondrous moulding of the splendid limbs.

"I don't believe God knew enough to make another like you," he said, in a kind of hoarse whisper. "And I threw you away, like a

damned fool. Threw away the loveliest woman I ever set eyes on." Then, with a sudden fury, "But, by the Lord, if I've lost you, no other man will ever have you again, my beauty. I will choke you slowly, to make you plead to me for your life; I will promise to spare you if you will be my wife for a single night or a single hour; then, when I have enjoyed our new honeymoon, I will spit in your face, taunt you, laugh at you, describe how I murdered your fancy man, and then kill you—yes, kill you like a dog!"

He bent and kissed her on the lips, at first gently as though in tribute to her beauty, but the contact with that sweet mouth sent the hot blood coursing through his veins with such passion that he seized her in his arms, and kissed her face, arms, neck and bust with a fire which seemed to burn her skin, and brought back her wandering senses in a flash. For a moment she evidently imagined that she was in the loving embrace of Norman, for she smiled happily, and put out one soft hand to caress him, murmuring tenderly, "Oh! how you love me, dear boy, and I—oh! I adore you madly." Then, as the amorous maniac became more wildly endearing, almost stifling her in his hot clasp, her eyes slowly opened, and a glare of terror extended them to their fullest width as she recognised her husband, and with a despairing scream of "Help! Help!!" she endeavored to rise. But there was not a sane ounce of him now, and, with a roar of rage, he gripped her fair throat in his strong hands, and was clenching his teeth as he compressed her wind-pipe, when a pane in the small window was broken, the muzzle of a revolver thrust through, a sharp report and a flash of smoke followed, and the madman leaped to the floor with a bullet in his leg. At the same moment, Dulcie, still clad in the one short, skimpy garment which shall be nameless, threw up the window—which Norman had unlocked when he urged Rita to escape—and climbed in, regardless of the scantiness of her attire and the extensive exposure of her trim figure.

Without a moment's hesitation, the intrepid Dulcie dragged Rita from the bed to the floor, and stood over her as the maniac was about to jump across to them. Pointing the revolver at him, she exclaimed—

"S'elp me, I'll shoot yer bloomin' art out if you shift a peg, old blokey. You've got rats in yer garret, that's wot you've got, you murderin', measly savage. Now, you back out of this room, and shut the Rory O'More after you, or I'd fire again an' make yer toss yer marble in."

But threats had no longer any influence over him, and with a ferocious snap and snarl he leaped on the bed. Dulcie fired, but missed, but, luckily, Norman had recovered his senses, and making a grab at the madman seized him by the leg, and hauled him to the floor. This time the struggle was quickly over partly because his wounded leg had

wakened the lunatic, but mainly because Dulcie rushed around and knocked blow senseless with two blows from the butt-end of the revolver. Almost at the same instant the front door was burst open, and the passage and room filled with two constables and several neighbors whom Dulcie had previously aroused. For that little heroine, after remaining in the passage long enough to see that she could do no good then, had hurried out at the back door around the Nicholson st., and, more than half-naked, had raced down till she met the police, then raced back and called for assistance on neighbors, and, finally, remembering that there was a revolver in the dining-room, had grabbed it, hastened by a small garden to the bed-room window, and so arrived with the result already described.

In very short order she had brought the half-dead Rita to consciousness, and was kissing and crying over her in great delight, while the others helped to secure the madman, and hurry him away in a cab. Norman, after aiding in this work, went to the corner where Dulcie was soothing Rita with, "Don't blub anny more, old gal; nobody ain't 'urt 'cept the cove wif the dilly block. Mr. Norman's Isle o' Wight—I mean, all right—sa', fank God, yer as right as rain." Then there was another kissing and crying scene between Rita and Norman, and the heartiest thanks and praises lavished on Dulcie for her timely bravery, until that young woman, blushing with pride, said—

"Oh! knock off pokin' borack. I ain't done nuffin for you to make all this bally barney about. Bime, don't you fink I'd do more'n shoot a bloomin' ratty bloke for you? An' I say, Rita, there's some coves peepin' in at the winder, so you'd better shove somefin' over yer Dutch pegs," at the same time throwing a skirt to Rita.

"But what about yourself, Dulcie?" said Norman, indicating her semi-nakedness; "they can see a good deal of you too, eh?"

"Lumme," she cried, seizing the coverlet, and wrapping herself in it, "I clean forgot that I didn't ave me proper clobber on. If they aint seen good Dutches afore, they've 'ad a treat this time, wif Rita an' me," and so, pulling the window and blind down, and laughing at her exposure, she succeeded in banishing much of the fright from Rita, and then, leaving her to Norman's more certain consolations, returned to her room, and slept the sleep of the brave. Whether or not Rita and Norman also sought relief in slumber, I cannot relate, but when they arose in the morning Rita was so much restored to her old sweet self that it was very evident the last part of that dreadful night had been more blissful to her than had the first.

After the usual law's delay, her husband was committed to the lunatic asylum "during the Queen's pleasure," and they thought they had seen the last of him. But, in a temporarily sane moment, he expressed the desire

for an interview with Rita, and on Norman was curious to visit the place where a majority of Melbourne's well-known men and women were dropping out their matrimonial careers, they went down to the institution together, with what singular and terrible results will be related in the succeeding sketch.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AMONGST THE MADTACS.

Melbourne should be deeply interested in its lunatics, for amongst them are many who were formerly highly-respected citizens and citizenesses, and carried out their political or social duties with so much decency and serenity as to point to the conclusion that absolute sanity is not essential in the political and social world. It is a common mistake to suppose that all the inmates of an asylum for the "dotty," as Dulcie would call them, are ridiculously or violently mad every day and all day long. Nothing could be further from the truth—except an Age political leading article, or a country-travelling circus programme. We have heard two asylum debaters discuss the questions of Women's Suffrage, or Free-trade and Protection, just as adroitly as members of Parliament, though I don't push that forward as evidence of the former's sanity.

There is no more discomfite person than the individual afflicted with monomania; the person is insane on one point only. For, as she, will converse discreetly, even wisely, on sundry subjects until your blood boils at the injustice of detaining him, or her, in an asylum, and you determine to write to the papers, and expose the whole horrible business of a sane person being imprisoned amongst the insane. But you happen to touch casually on the matter which affects the patient, and—whoop!—that patient's reason flies off the handle, and you are in the midst of the maddest riot of words and actions imaginable. Then you haul down your colors, and slink away, firmly convinced that the asylum doctors know rather more about such things than you do.

On the day on which Rita and Norman went out to see the former's husband, they were fortunate in being placed in the hands of an intelligent guide. His grossly humorous temperament led him to view the patients as so many curious and wild beasts, in a menagerie, and a printed catalogue of the animals in the cages was all he lacked to complete his happiness. To Norman's amazement, he saw, amongst others, a man who only some few years ago was held to be one of the smartest and most popular lawyers in the city. His downfall was women of the most dissolute and shameless type. A second easily-recognizable patient was previously a prosperous city shopkeeper, a man of very large and powerful frame, who, notwithstanding that he had an attractive wife and pretty daughters, gave himself up to such a



AT BRIGHTON BEACH.

attirements of bawdy women until his brain weakened, and he was conveyed to the asylum in the babbling, drivelling stage of idiocy. A one-time popular musician, too, was now an inmate of this saddest of all public institutions. Temporary success had dazzled him, turned his brain, and, finally, sent him to the asylum, where his chief delusion was that he was the leading tenor in the finest opera company in the world, and the greatest composer the world has ever seen. This latter belief, by the way, is by no means confined to recognised lunatics, but is common to many tin-pot musicians roaming free in our midst. Anyone who has listened to them raving over the merits of their painfully common-place compositions will readily endorse that opinion. Also, a poet, madder even than his brethren of the outer world, was carefully inspected by the visitors, Norman remarking, after hearing some verses from the lunatic—"Humph! They don't sound any worse than Marshall Hall's, anyhow. But perhaps he is in one of his sane intervals?" "Not a bit of it," replied their guide. "When he's all-right, he never goes on with that nonsense." "Ah, well, that's where he differs from the others," returned Norman; "they're always at it."

Rita's attention was particularly attracted to a tall, fair, handsome, middle-aged man, who looked at her so admiringly that, woman-like, she could not conceive that any man with such good judgment could be "silly," as she phrased it.

"Oh! he's as mad as they make 'em," said the guide. "He was a wealthy young fellow, a member of one of our first families, and envied by half the men in town. Got struck on a popular young actress, married her, discovered that she was the fancy woman of the manager, and brooded over the trouble so much that he had to be sent here. Been out two or three times, but every chance he got he threatened to murder his wife, and I don't think he is likely ever to get out again."

"And the wife? Does she ever come to see him?" asked Rita.

"Not much," was the answer. "She sticks to the manager—who, by the way, has a deserted wife in South Yarra, and is just as often in America and England as Melbourne. Her he fancies every tall woman is her, and—halloo! hanged if he doesn't believe you are his misus."

The poor demented creature had approached and gazed at Rita with sorrowful eyes, which presently grew glaring as his phreny worked on him, till at length he shook his head, laughed harshly, and roared—

"Out of my sight! you miserable wretch! I will have nothing further to say to you, adutress! You tricked me with your sweet voice and quaint, pretty ways, but I know you now for the foul creature you are. Away! Away! Never enter my house again, or I'll order the servants to throw you out. Go back to the stage, you she-devil! Go and

bask in the applause of the people, and then return to the arms of your paramour. Don't lie to me any more. Don't act the virtuous wife to me again, since I know that you stayed a whole month in a Sydney hotel with that man—that thing, whose own wife has been almost starving, while you two have revelled in abandoned luxury. Why didn't you bring the child—his child!—the child of your sin!"

So visible was his madness developing into violence that, at this point, a keeper intervened and led him away, while Rita said—

"Poor fellow! How cruelly his wife must have treated him."

"Oh! well," said the guide, "he wasn't altogether a saint himself. I've heard he kept a private harem, and disguised his wife with his violence towards her and his beastly ways when intoxicated."

The comparatively large number of young men and youths incarcerated as hopeless idiots surprised and shocked both Rita and Norman. Some had inherited their brain disease, but many more had acquired it through early follies and indulgence. Others were even more disgusting, but in ways not fitted for mention in cold print. Three men who had lost their all in the land boom, and had gone gently crazy when the crash came, conversed quite delightfully until a chance remark brought up the cause of their trouble, and then their brains went to pieces, and they cried, raved and cursed the names of those who had ruined them.

It was especially touching to witness the antics of grown men whose brains had become unbinged late in life. One imagined himself a balloon; another was quite certain he was a lady's lap-dog—it was said that he had had that position in earlier days; a third announced himself as the spirit of Shakespeare, came to decide the question whether Hamlet was mad or only pretending, and this madman argued that Hamlet was as sane as himself! Therefore, perhaps the Shakespearean Society will take note that this matter has at last been settled beyond all discussion. A former country clergyman had the impression that he was a little boy, and pranced around the yard with a piece of stick for a hobby horse in great glee. An ex-bank manager, known to everybody who knows anybody, confided to Rita that he was the original cat with nine lives, and, parring at her in the most ludicrous fashion, he said—"Stroke-pussy! poor pussy! stroke pussy!" but when he evinced further feline characteristics, and attempted to rub his head against her legs, in true cat style, Rita wasn't taking any. Of course, the real maniacs, the poor devils with their brains on fire, were not on view, most of them being confined in small, circular, leather-padded cells, where their demented rage could be given vent to without danger to themselves or anybody else. Several others Rita was not permitted to see, as the very sight of a feminine form infuriated.

them to a frightful extent, when they became as dangerous as any other wild beasts deprived of their mates.

"Why, the very sight of a pair of stockings or woman's *fal-de-rals* on a line would be too much for them," said the guide.

"I have heard," replied Rita, slyly, "that there are men just as easily affected outside the asylum."

After chatting awhile, Rita, seeing that Norman was interested in the keeper's conversation, mentioned to the latter that she would like to have a look at the woman's quarters. Just then a warder passed by, and Rita was handed over to the care of a herculean wardress, and the two wended their way to the female wards. Here, as in the case of the men, she was struck with the number of young girls who were confirmed idiots, some from inherited taints, and others again through unrestrained folly and indulgence in brain-wrecking pastimes.

One poor little creature, hardly in her teens, was pointed out as the victim of a horrible assault, which resulted in sending her crazy. Another, a finely-formed young woman, who had been afflicted with religious mania, wanted to go and civilize the savages, and ended by becoming incurably insane. Her principal belief was, strangely enough, that God had punished her for not having become a missionary by turning her into a dancing devil; and in Rita's presence she shortened her skirts to ballet length and broke out into a wild, grotesque dance, which brought her splendid limbs into immediate publicity, finishing up by turning head over heels in order, as she said, "to kill the devil by sending the blood into his head."

There were quite a number of women, of all sorts and sizes, afflicted with erotic mania, which, Rita was instructed, impelled them to the grossest acts of indelicacy and the vilest language at sight of a man. Like many not adjudged lunatics, they were boiling over with love-passion, but, otherwise, exhibited little signs of brain-weakness. Amongst these were girls who had attempted suicide through being deserted by their seducers; mothers who had murdered their infants in arms through the madness of milk-fever; women whose nerves had been over-strained in watching by the sick-beds of their beloved; women who had become insane through excessive drink; and many others, demented through different causes, were viewed by Rita with a sympathetic heart; and she thought that so many of them were in this piteous condition through the lust and black-guardism of men gave her additional pang. Probably the most singular patient in this department was an enormously-fat, heavy woman, whose great grievance was that she had not been placed in her proper quarters.

"I know I am mad," she confided to Rita, "and an asylum is the best place for me, but why should they dress me in women's clothes

and shove me amongst this crazy lot of females."

"But where else could they put you?" enquired Rita.

"Why, with the other men, of course," was the prompt reply.

"Oh! then you believe you are a man?" said Rita.

"Of course I'm a man," she answered.

"Why, bless you, I've got the dearest wife in the world at home, and I'm the father of the prettiest twins you ever saw."

"Well, I never saw a man with such a figure as that," said Rita, indicating the patient's gigantic bosom. "And surely, if you were a man, others besides yourself would have found it out before now."

"Oh! they know it, but they want to humiliate me," was the reply. "If you don't believe me I'll give you my wife's address, and you can ask her. If she assures you that I am her husband and the daddy of those little beauties, you'll be convinced then, won't you? I suppose she'd know what sex I am, eh?"

Rita, seeing that to argue with her would be to anger her, promised to make the necessary enquiries, and was turning away smiling at the tunny idea when a young wardress ran into the room, and banged the door to in great agitation.

"Oh!" she cried, "one of the most violent male patients has got loose, and he'll murder someone before they take him."

"Is he coming this way?" asked Rita.

"No, I don't think he can get this far," was the reply. "But perhaps we can see him from from this window," and, mounting on a table, they peered through a small window which looks out on the road by the woman's buildings and the resident doctor's quarters.

In a minute they saw a wild beast in human form come tearing down the road, followed by five or six men, amongst whom was Norman.

One glance was enough for Rita.

"My God!" she said, "it's my husband!"

He seemed to be dashing along without any definite motive, yelling out inane words, and glaring with maniacal fury. Suddenly he stumbled and the foremost warder made a grab at him, but in a moment he was up again with a large stone, which he hurled at his pursuers. Then away he went again, till he reached a slope leading to the river, when he turned and faced those who had been following him. A burly warder and Norman flung themselves upon him, but he wriggled, kicked, bit and fought with such phrenzied strength that they could not hold him, and with a cry of "I'll tell you, you fiends of hell!" he swung up to an overhanging branch of a tree, and standing upright for an instant, hurled himself down with the plunge of a diver. Then a fearful scream rent the air, and for a moment he could be seen squirming in agony, and when they ran down to him

they found him dead, with a horrible wound on the head, and his neck broken! The facts were palpable. Instead of diving into free and ample depths his head had struck a large stone barely covered by the water, and death must have been almost instantaneous. He presented a ghastly spectacle as the shallow, blood-stained water washed by him, and it was with a shudder that Norman looked his last upon an enemy who had met such a frightful fate.

Rita was told that her husband had drowned himself, the more shocking details being withheld from her, and all that she could say was—

"I am sorry; but, thank God, he had no chance to harm you, dear boy." The dead man had done his best to ruin her and all that she held dearest so that any more sympathetic expression would have been only unnatural and forced.

On arrival home they found Dulcie busy at a sewing machine.

"Halloa! what are you making?" asked Norman. "By the shape, they look like—"

"Oh! they aint wot you tink," said Dulcie; "they're bike bloomers, that's wot they are."

"And what in the world are you going to do with them?" asked Rita.

"I'm a goin' to shove 'em on me Dutch pegs as soon as they're ready," Dulcie said.

"Lumme, don't you know that Slopper's out of the jug Yuss, he's done 'is mont, an' on Boxin' Day me an' 'im's goin' to 'ave a bean-oh at Brisin' Beach, that's wot's the matter wif yers troos."

"But what have bicycle bloomers got to do with Brighton Beach?" queried Rita.

"Ev'ry bloomin' fink," was the reply, "'cos me an' Slopper's goin' down on bikes. See?"

And they did that and many other funny things as you shall presently hear.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT BRIGHTON BEACH.

Fortunately, this particular Boxing Day was brilliant with sunshine, and, indeed, by the time Dulcie had pulled on her bloomers that morning it was already as hot as most people care about. Our little friend's cycling costume, built for this especial occasion, was undoubtedly a work of art, and reflected the greatest credit on her skill and taste. Not having any proper pattern from which to design the pants, she had mapped them from certain garments with which she had a much closer acquaintance, and which are advertised in the most respectable papers as "knickers." Consequently, their style of architecture was somewhat startling, as they fitted with alarming tightness at certain prominent portions of her plump figure, hung somewhat loosely at other parts, and were drawn in at the knees, over which hung airy frill-work. On my own authority, I could not say what the material was, but the color was cherry-red, and looked like a blaze of fire when the sun got on it.

The blouse was equally gorgeous, being of a bright blue, while the stockings were her favorite red and white, and her shoes a lemon-tan. In this attire, crowned by her Cap hat, with new and much larger feathers in it, I have no hesitation in saying that Dulcie had no fear of being missed in the crowd. She had hired one of the noted "Gloodfast" bikes, and, having gone through the usual bumping and bruising practise for the previous two weeks, had every confidence in her ability to do the run to Brighton Beach in safety.

Slopper Speckletottle, newly discharged from gaol, and bent on having a razzle which should make up for lost time, also rode a "Gloodfast," with low racing handles, and when he and his donah pedalled off down Nicholson street hill to the city they had no difficulty in attracting the attention of all whom they met or passed. When Dulcie really got to work, those bery legs of hers, jiggling up and down on her low-g geared machine, were well worth anybody's notice, and as she wobbled about in Slopper's zig-zag tracks, all over the shop, with her feathers bobbing above, and her baxom bust heaving heavily, even the horses shied in wonderment, and the tram men were kept perpetually jingling their bells in agitated warning. Slopper bent as low as possible, and joggled his shoulders about wildly in emulation of Jerry McJudkin, the great Collingwood cycling champion, who had recently won the five-mile handicap at the Dog Leg Gully Sports, and would have won the Austral only that he happened to be doing two months' at the time, and so could not enter. Slopper's idea was that he was a coming Bill Martin, a champion of champions, and he had never had such a fine chance of showing-off before Dulcie as on this occasion.

"Come on, Dulce," he shouted; "I'll give you a sprint as far as the rub-a-dub-dub on the Johnny Horner," which meant the pub. on the corner.

"Rre-oh, Slop, I'm wif you," answered Dulcie. "I'll give you a go for an oh-my-dear," otherwise a beer, and away they wobbled. Perhaps some of you remember your early experiences of biking full tear down a hilly tram track before you could manage your figger as well as you thought you could. Well, that was Slopper's case. He tore away from Dulcie, with head over handles, body fearfully agitated, and long legs working energetically. But as he got properly started down the hill, his machine took control of the proceedings, and, utterly disdainful of such a clumsy rider, carried him along at a pace which snatched his breath away. He could not guide the thing, and he could not stop or jump off, and if ever anybody's hair really stood on end Slopper's must have done when he took a scared look ahead and saw that his infernal bike was whirling him straight for the rear of a water-cart in full working order. But his time for reflection or action was short, for in a moment his machine had side-slided on

the wet track, and the boastful Speckletottle was flung clean under the cart, and fairly soaked in the sporting water. Dulcie, fortunately, had started slowly and kept her brake on; therefore, she arrived safely enough, and found her drenched Slopper with a skinned ear and forehead, wounded hands and torn trousers, but, on the whole, much more sound than anyone would have expected from the fall he received. The wind was pretty well knocked out of him, but as Dulcie pushed through the crowd which surrounded him, he managed to gasp—

"I'm cherry ripe, Dulcie, old gal. Lucky I wasn't goin' at me top bat w'en that bloomin' cart got in the way," and Dulcie to this day believes that he was only riding leisurely (for such a speed king) and wasn't run away with at all. The bike had also escaped annihilation miraculously, and after half-an-hour's repairs to man and machine at the rub-a-dub-dub, combined with whisky, Slopper expressed himself as "Isle o' Wight," meaning all right, and they resumed their journey Brightonwards. Evidently Slopper had received a lesson from his fall, as he attempted no more sprinting exhibitions, and once when Dulcie challenged him to a trial on the Brighton road, he shook his head, and said, "Not me. I'm not takin' 'enny. You can 'ave it on yer little alone. I feel as if me bloomin' ear's bin chewed off by a 'ungry dorp."

"Well, come an' 'ave a tiddley at the fountain," said Dulcie. "It's 'ot enuff to fry spiders, and I'm sweatin' like a bally bull-pup in a oven. Blime, if these fancy pants of mine aint sticking to me like mud to a blanket."

And when she got off the machine to have the tiddley—which was a shandygaff, by the way—she certainly did look rather comical, with the cherry red bloomers glued to her form in spots, her neck streaming with perspiration, and her face red and dirty from heat and dust. But, bless your innocent hearts, she was happy enough. All this trouble and discomfort was in the day's enjoyment, and Dulcie, like so many more, would have considered a holiday a failure unless it made her as tired as a day's hard work. At the hotel they were joined by dozens of friends all bent on rip-roaring fun, most of them arriving in carts, vans, lorries and other vehicles of a similar type. One or two of the lads made merry over Dulcie's flaming bloomers, and pinched her legs and dealt hearty smacks on other portions of her tempting figure, but Slopper's menacing attitude on the one hand, and the jealous anger of their own "Toms" on the other, prevented them from going as far as they would have liked at that time. Finally the beach was reached without further mishap.

As I presume you already know, Brighton on Boxing Day is the favored resort of the elite of Collingwood, and other equally aristocratic suburbs, and it was in its best fettle on this occasion. All the Mary Anns and

Bridgets who had a day off were there with their "boys," dolled up regardless of expense, while huge families squatted by the water, munching boiled mutton sandwiches, liberally sprinkled with sand, and drinking cold tea and milk out of ginger bottles and billycans with immense zest. All along the beach youngsters of either sex frisked in the sea in the most indelicate state of undress—according to several prudish and withered old maids—and many very full-grown girls, who in the city would blush to raise their skirts above the mud, here paddled about with clothes hoisted and huddled about anyhow, and exhibiting all the varieties of underwear in the market. But probably the most remarkable thing about a holiday crowd such as this is that girls who at other times appear sadly flat-chested and angular suddenly develop amazingly plump bosoms and rounded hips. I have heard it said that this peculiar change is due to stockings, handkerchiefs and other articles being judiciously stuffed beneath blouses and bodices in order to imitate the desired fullness, but I try hard not to believe in such a cruel deception.

Dulcie's wonderful costume attracted all eyes as she wheeled slowly along the parade, and very audible remarks were passed on her by virtuous married ladies who were sitting down gossiping, with their best dresses pinned up and their pink flannel petticoats making them look like so many old clothes-baskets. Younger females, radiant in their 4d. prints and bargain sale blouses, turned up their noses in scorn as they witnessed Dulcie's display of her figure, and said—

"Wonder she aint ashamed to show herself, the bold thing"—"I'm sure I'd just as soon come out in me shift"—"Oh! she aint no better'n she ought ter be"—"I can't see what the fellers can see in such an impudent wretch," and so on in the usual style of virtuous damsels who wouldn't for the world be the least little bit wicked—in a crowd.

Of course the great amusement was a dance, and here again Dulcie was the principal figure, while Slopper proudly jerked an accordion borrowed from a friend. But all the time he kept one eye on Dulcie and whatever partner she happened to have, so that when one of them squeezed her a trifle too closely, or otherwise showed a desire to mash her, Slopper would hurl out a warning word, thus—"Now, then, Ginger, sling it; no bloomin' funny bizness with that tart"—"Keep yer 'ands off, Darcy; I aint goin' to stand no messin' about, you know"—"Blime, Sandy, you'll cop out in arf a mo. if you get pinchin' her Dutch pegs again, take it from me," and his known ability as a pugilist prevented trouble. That was during the first hour or so, but later, as the sun began to have its effect on them, and the adjournments to the hotels became more frequent, Slopper had to "stouch" two or three who were endeavoring to persuade Dulcie to go off with them to secluded spots in the ti-trees and en-

for the cool of the shade. The swing-boats, Aunt Sallies, and merry-go-rounds kept her in full excitement for some time, and the sight of her straddle-legged across a wooden horse, yelling out like a jockey in a Cup finish, and jerking up and down in sheer and reckless enjoyment, would have done your eyes good. In fact, so excited became the feelings of one "perfect gentleman" belonging to a South Melbourne "push," that he jumped up behind Dulcie, and, catching her round the waist, fairly hugged her while the merry-go-round did a lap or two. Then the machine stopped, and Slopper got to work with his clever right, and fairly slogged the rude South Melbourneite's face to a jelly.

"Now, you smoke out of this," he said to Dulcie. "I aint goin' to stand no blokes mauling yer fat about. See?"

"But, Slop," argued Dulcie, "it aint my bloomin' fault if a cove gets ratty over me shape, and wants to mug me. Lumme, it's a bit strong if yer goin' to spoil me fun over a lark like that."

"Garn!" was the jealous one's retort. "When yer out with me you ain't goin' to 'ave no larks with other blokes, that's straight. Shift yer barrow down the beach, or else come down and have a darnce."

But unfortunately for Dulcie she became sulky, and, having a few more beers than she could carry comfortably, resolved to show Slopper that she was no little pug-dog to be ordered and bullied. So, with a defiant twist of her body, she turned and left him, and joined a group of girls and lads who were larking and drinking down by the water's edge. The fellows were chaffing the girls, and trying to induce them to paddle in the water.

"Come on, now, Mag," said one lantern-jawed hero from a Collingwood factory; "give yer plates of meat a wash. They've been a bit high since last Queen's Birthday."

"Me feet is ort right," said Mag; "they aint like yer socks, wot'd kill at a mile."

"You must 'ave warts on yer knees, Lil," said another, "so yer frightened to pull up your duds, an' bathe yer broomsticks."

"That aint it," chimed in a third fellow, with streams of tobacco juice down his chin.

"Lil's got her brother's football pants on, an' she don't want us to know it."

Oh! they were bright and sly wits, these gentry, and made the girls giggle and yowl fit to burst themselves at the funny things they said. But when Dulcie came up, the lads fastened to her, and suggested that she should lead the way into the water.

"Yuss, come on, girls," said Dulcie, plumping down and taking off her shoes and stockings and precious leathers; "you ought to 'ave a wash once a year wewver you want it or not."

But all persuasion was of no avail—they were not the kind to look upon washing as fun—so Dulcie, turning up her pants at the knees like a boy, and therefore showing the

prettiest and whitest pair of legs on the beach, paddled in with the gentleman decorated with the tobacco juice, and proceeded to splash about in high feather. In the midst of her enjoyment she espied Slopper hurrying down the slope with a stride which meant trouble for somebody, and she had half an idea that that somebody might be herself.

"My Sunday troubles on him," she said to herself—as she afterwards told Rita—"he's a bloomin' Noah's Ark—a fair dead nark today—an' I'll show 'im wet I sink about 'im."

In pursuance of this plan, she began to splash water over her tobacco companion playfully, laughing loudly all the time. On his part, he found it great fun to slap her wet and naked legs, and by catching her hands whirl her around, and indulge in other silly little games which fairly enraged Slopper, who had reached the water's edge, and glared furiously at them.

"Come out o' that!" he yelled. "By Gob, I'll smash the pair of yer w'en I get you."

"Oh! go an' lose yerself," replied Dulcie. "I'm full of you an' yer bloomin' skite, Yer've got beetles in yer arcade, that's wot's up wit you."

Phew! A raging lion—as seen at the Zoo—was nothing to Slopper as he heard this startling and scornful defiance. For about half a minute the air was thick and foul with frightful language, then, boots on and all, he dashed into the water with blood in his eye. Nobody can run very fast or dodge very nimbly even in two feet of water, so that before long he had grabbed the tobaccory individual and dealt him a blow which seemed to shift his jaw. Then Slopper went for Dulcie. Twice she eluded him, but at the third attempt his long arms wound around her, and he tried to drag her to the beach.

"Come on," he cried, as she resisted, "or s'elp me I'll smother you."

But Dulcie was obstinate and wouldn't come on, and as he went for a fresh hold she slipped and down they went splashing through the water, Dulcie underneath and Slopper spluttering and swearing like fury. Then as Dulcie would only get up as far as her knees, he reached for a good hold by which he could hoist her, grabbed a handful of cherry red material, and rip! rip! rip! went the stuff, till as he hoisted her upright a remarkably large section of gleaming white skin shone out in the sun, and roars of oh! and raucous laughter notified them that the spectators on the beach had noticed the mishap and were enjoying it to the fullest extent.

"Oh! my Gord, you've busted my bloomers," cried Dulcie. "I can feel the breeze on me skin. For hev'ing's sake, Slop, carry me out an' 'ide me, or I'll drown meself."

And Slop, stunned by the accident, lifted her up in his strong arms, and carried her so skilfully that not a soul in the crowd had another chance of observing the exact extent of the damage done to her costume.

That was at five o'clock, and for three

hours Dulcie and Slopper remained amongst the trees, no longer snarling at each other, but gloomy and surly, and when dusk arrived, and Dulcie had repaired the rent with Slopper's white handkerchief and sundry safety pins, they were observed to sneak out of the scrub, sorrowfully mount their bikes—Dulcie being especially careful—and wobble slowly homewards. It had been a disappointing day to them, but, after all, they experienced nothing half so horrible as had Norman and Rita in their absence.

CHAPTER XXV THE TOTTIES' PICNIC.

After having seen Dulcie and Slopper off on their bicycles, Rita and Norman put in a quiet morning at home, and towards the afternoon started for a little drive in the direction of Heidelberg. They chose that neighborhood in the innocent belief that on such a hot day other holiday-makers would patronise the bay beaches, and, consequently, they would have the peaceful time they desired. But, to their annoyance, they found Heidelberg road quite gay with vehicles filled with merry parties of well-dressed men and women. It was quite evident that something very especial was on the tapis.

"Why, my goodness, there's Betty Carmody and Diamond Kate," exclaimed Rita, as a buggy passed them.

"Yes," said Norman, "and there are four ballet girls and two barmaids in that drag, with six swell fellows to keep them company."

"And I'm sure I saw old Martha and Madame Rastie, from Lonsdale street, in that hansom," said Rita. "Why, whatever have we struck?"

Just then a dog-cart drove alongside of them, and the cheery voice of Montague Tilkens, Norman's second in his fight with Horace Kindur, hailed Norman.

"Hallo! old fellow. Coming out to the picnic?"

"What picnic?"

"Why, the Totties' picnic, of course. Don't you know that Charley Hardfrost and Jubilee Jones have invited all the nice girls in town to a spree? They're going to do it up in style, too; so you'd better bring the missis along and have a high old time of it." And with a wave of his hand he drove ahead.

Two minutes decided the matter. Norman did not want to go, but Rita did; so of course they went. As they jogged along, Norman explained that Charley Hardfrost and Jubilee Jones were two West Australian sports, who had been lucky both in Coolgardie mining and in striking the Melbourne Cup winner. They had for some months been squandering money on all sorts of so-called pleasures, principally among gay women, stage girls of the lower order, and flash barmaids.

"Oh! well, we needn't join the crowd," said

Rita, "but we can remain apart and still watch the fun."

The picnic was in full swing by the time they arrived, and certainly it would have been hard to discover a more noisy and light-hearted crowd anywhere on that particular Boxing Day. Hardfrost and Jubilee had been wonderfully liberal in their invitations, which had included all sorts of Totties in the market, from fashionable harlots and popular music-hall stars down to pert and pretty chorus girls. Barmaids were not so well represented as they might have been, in consequence of a holiday generally being their busiest time; but still a fair sprinkling of these festive human beer-pumps rolled up. Johnnies and would-be Johnnies, actors, singers, a few bookmakers, and many much-too-well-known men about town provided the masculine element, while there was no want of material for both eating and drinking.

Quite early in the proceedings, it was very evident that the "lydies" were not going to allow any foolish notions of propriety to interfere with their day's fun. When they sat around on the grass they did not trouble themselves about huddling their skirts tightly round their ankles, but just flopped down anyhow, so that, after a fair amount of drink had been disposed of, an expert in legs would have had a fine opportunity of passing his judgment on such matters without the slightest difficulty. In fact, Dolly Hughard, from the private bar of the Mug's Arms, and Amy Hotkiss, from the Gaiety Theatre, made quite exhibitions of themselves by turning a low branch into a trapeze, and performing feats on it which most people present had only seen done by professionals in tights. Dolly, however, missed her swing on one occasion, and fell so heavily on her placket that she had to be carried into a tent and rubbed down with whiskey before she could even stand again.

One of the most interesting events was a bike race between several plump and pleasing Totties around a rough and rocky track. The prize was £2, the only condition being that each girl should ride a man's jigger. We have all long since become accustomed to seeing lady cyclists in appropriate costumes and on proper bikes, but I fancy that the spectacle of a dozen females mounted on men's machines and with their ordinary skirts and petticoats on must have been something out of the common run. But, bless you, they didn't care. Some of them were ballet girls, and, therefore, thoroughly used to exposing their legs to crowds of men each night, and on this occasion the £2 was the item of interest to them, many of them never having got that much per week—as wages. Space forbids a detailed description of this race, which—on account of its novelty, I suppose—attracted immense interest amongst the men. Betting was freely indulged in, and as the contest proceeded one could hear the impromptu bookies crying, "Two to one on Pin"

Stockings, six to four the Red Garters, twenty to one against Frills," and so on, the riders being indicated by whatever distinctive mark happened to strike the eye of the spectator. Following were the results:—

Irene Carlisle—Eight large and angry bruises, mostly where she'd have great difficulty in looking after them.

Amy Hottkiss—Incapacitated from praying, owing to bushed knees.

Florrie Fewelos—Jagged left ear, and wrecked time-payment set of teeth.

Lily Longpegs—No definite details, as Lily blushing declined to state exactly where she suffered most.

Gladys Octavia—Gashed knee-cap, and gained feeling in the region of the corset.

Hilda Hughard—Ten inches of calf-skin missing; sprained voice; temper completely gone.

Fannie Shortsox—Swelled head, and tired feeling from sitting down suddenly before she was ready.

Jennie Splitchin—Very bad language, and dislocated eye-lid. Doctor declared she would not be able to wink for a month.

The prize was awarded to Mossy Maude, of Lonsdale street, who had the advantage of riding without skirt or petticoat.

Barely had the excitement over this competition subsided, when the sounds of feminine voices raised high in dispute attracted the crowd to a gathering of women around one of the luncheon tables. A discussion had arisen on the interesting subject of man, and how to mash him, the principal speaker being Flossie Grove, whose ample form filled a chair just about as full as it could hold. Flossie was a woman who had great ideas on social style, and she had come to this picnic determined to show that she knew how to dress appropriately for such an occasion. Therefore, she had attired herself in a pale violet-color costume, cut half-must high, with off-the-shoulder sleeves, and carried a bouquet which she handled like a boxing glove, while all her jewellery consisted of two very brunette freckles on her billowy bosom, and her well-known vaccination mark.

As Rita drew near, Flossie, who had known her at Auntie's, said—"Oh, here's Miss Delorme; she ought to be able to tell us something interesting about the men."

Rita, however, replied that she always felt timid in discussing men in front of girls who knew so much more about them than she did.

"When did you first feel timid with the men?" asked Flossie, with a sneer.

"About twenty years ago, dear," replied Rita, promptly, "when you first began to be free with them," and the crowd agreed that Rita had scored.

"Oh! of course," said Flossie, angrily, "you pretend to be very modest. But what would we all be but for man, mighty man, the conjuror whose magic wand brings joy and

happiness to so many womanly hearts"—Flossie quite imagined she was a born orator—"whose influence is alike powerful for evil and good. What would we be without him, I'd like to know?"

"Old maids," came the answer from Rita, who, it may be remarked, had been refreshing herself with iced champagne.

"You'll be one, in any case," exclaimed Flossie.

"And you won't be one, in any case," retorted Rita; and for some reason or other it was felt that Flossie had again got the worst of it.

"Lydias, lydias, give me a chance," cried Flossie, "who was fast being worked up into a fury. "Let me see—where was I? Ah, yes—I had left off—"

"If you had left off much more it wouldn't have taken you a minute to dress," interposed Rita, pointing to Flossie's expanse of bosom, "and if you had left off all you have put on your face you'd have saved a lot in paint."

At this Flossie fairly snorted, and, jumping up, dealt Rita a stinging box on the ear, which brought tears of pain to her eyes. In an instant everybody was in commotion. Rita's temper was roused to its worst, and as she stood there blaming her beautiful eyes at Flossie she looked the loveliest young demon imaginable. Then, with one long stride, she reached Flossie, grabbed her by the low-cut dress and tore away a yard of stuff, thereby bringing the bosom into even more publicity. With her teeth set and her breath going hard with passion, she swung Flossie around furiously, and then, as if she were a living man, shot out her clenched right hand as sure and straight as a female *Tier* Hegarty, and knocked Flossie spinning, against the frail table, which gave way under the shock and went down with a deafening clatter of crockery and glassware.

"By thunder! she'll kill you," said Amy Hottkiss to Rita. "Why, Flossie can use her hands like a man. Joe Choyinski taught her, and he said he'd back her against any woman in Melbourne."

"I don't care if fifty Joe Choyinskis taught her," said Rita. "I'll knock her big, fat chest in if she interferes with me again."

By this time missing hands had pulled Flossie up and poured a nobbler of wine into her. Thus refreshed, she yelled out—

"Make a ring, or, by the Lord, I'll skin her alive."

Somebody else knew of a set of gloves at a hotel just down the road, and these, having been procured, all preparations for a regular set to were arranged, and the two women faced each other in true boxing style.

Flossie, plump and starchy, was stripped to the waist, and also had her skirt off; while Rita, tall, perfectly formed and supple, had merely discarded her stays and blouse, and pinned her skirt up. Flossie was much the elder of the two, and really did know a good deal of the science of boxing. Rita's

knowledge having only been gained in a few bouts with Norman just for fun. She had never fought in this way for keeps, while Flossie had several scalps to her record.

Probably that made Flossie much too confident, for at the signal she immediately got to close range and peppered Rita with half-arm blows which lacked force and consequently did no damage. Rita hit more like a woman, in a round-arm and somewhat wild style, but when she did land on her antagonist that "lydy" realised what strength was in this long-armed, lithe beauty. After the first round both were somewhat scant of breath, but more champagne brought them up all right at the sound of the gong—two bottles clashed together—and Flossie put in good work, repeatedly getting home on Rita's chest and cheek, and finishing up with a tap on the nose which brought blood. But, instead of dismaying her, the sight of the red stuff merely made Rita more determined, and as they faced each other for the third round it could be clearly seen that she was on her mettle. Noticing that Flossie was puffing painfully, she adroitly kept out of range of that short person's clever left, and, assisted by her much longer reach, succeeded in planting several remarkably heavy blows on her opponent's massive bosom, until Flossie was gasping like a stranded fish. Then, rushing in, she twined one arm round Flossie's neck, and, having her thus in chancery, pounded away till the fat one's face was a mass of blood. Up to this stage the fighting had been carried on fairly, in accordance with prize-ring rules, but now Flossie resorted to true feminine tactics, and, seizing Rita's long golden hair, which had come down, tugged away till Rita actually screamed, and in trying to escape fell, and bringing Flossie down with her and underneath, got astride of her and smashed the glove on to her face until she was dragged off by Norman, who had been asleep under a tree, and, consequently, had been out of the fun until then.

Flossie was carried away to a tent senseless, while Rita was taken to the river by Norman to cool off and be washed down. She had sustained no very serious injury, but possessed a beautiful eye, which threatened to be as black as the ace of spades; a swollen lip and nose; a nasty wound on her chest where Flossie had bitten her in the final struggle, and clothes woefully torn.

But half-an-hour's repairing set her up fairly bright, and they prepared to return home in the buggy, when they saw an excited fat, old woman running away from a crowd of half-drunken Tosties. A glance showed that the frightened fugitive was the notorious hag, Madame Rustle.

"Ach," she cried to Norman, "take me oop in your buggy. Dose tam girls vill kill me if dey vos catch me."

But Norman preferred not to interfere, and in two minutes more than a dozen lusty hard-hats had surrounded the scared woman.

"Ach, mein Gott! vat you want vid me?" she stammered. "Hof I not been goot to you, Norsch and Minnie, so vy vas you want te make drouble?"

"Gara, you old cow," one replied. "You've just told everybody that Minnie bilked a swell of a watch and chain and fifty bloomin' quid last night, and we know you made him boozed and collared the stuff yourself. Come on, girls, let's duck the old devil," and in less time than it takes to tell it, half a dozen of them had seized Madame, and half carried, half dragged her to the water, where, despite her shrieks, they fairly flung her in. How she got out Norman did not know, as he was anxious to get away from such a gang, and drove home as fast as possible, feeling that he had had enough adventures to last him a life time. But there was a fresh one in store for him almost immediately.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LARRIKIN WEDDING.

"There's goin' to be stacks of fun down the field of wheat next Toosdy," said Dulcie to Rita and Norman, one evening, "an' I s'ink you two'd enjoy yourselves up to the knocker if you was to go wif me an' Slop."

"And what is the fun, and where is the field of wheat?" asked Norman.

"W'y, a bloke an' a tart's goin' to be spliced," replied Dulcie; "that's the fun, and the field of wheat is Derby street, off Smiff street. There'll be darcin', an' as much booze-juice as you like. You two's bin moultin' a bit lately, I notice, an' ere's yer chance to 'ave a shine time of it."

"Oh! but they mightn't want us," said Rita. "They don't care about people not in their own class."

"Well, tuz yourselves up in proper clobber, and don't put on too many bloomin' airs, and you'll be cherry ripe," said Dulcie; and as Rita declared it would be "simply lovely," and Norman did not mind what he did so long as he pleased her, they agreed to accompany Dulcie.

Rita dressed for the occasion as she would have done for a fancy-dress ball, and certainly looked as fetching a "tart" as you could see in all Collingwood. Her front hair was plastered over her forehead like the true "gorblime" type of Smith street fringe; she had a plaited tail hanging down her back; her blouse and skirt were almost as loud as Dulcie's, and she showed enough of her neat legs in green and white stockings to merit the admiration of even Sloppe himself. Norman, too, was attired with equal appropriateness, with soft felt hat, bell-bottomed pants, no collar, thin, red neck tie, and all the other accoutrements of a "lad" of the real "push" character.

"Wot oh, blokey," said Rita, when ready for starting, "ave a bloomin' cook at me. Am I rye-back?"

"Yuss," he replied, with an equally fair

imitation of the farrikin style. "Yer an' orl right bit o' skirt, yer are. An' there aint no bloomin' flies on yers frooly, either."

Dulcie, who was eyeing them intently, rang out a merry peal of laughter at their laudable endeavors to act their assumed parts naturally, and said—

"Lumme, yer orl right, you two, on'y I never seen sich a beyoufiful lart as Rita. Wy, 'arf the blokes'll be fair ratty over 'er. She'll be the rortiest bloomin' Tom in the whole push. But you'll 'ave to change yer monnikers."

"Why, what's the matter with mine?" asked Norman; "they're bell-bottomed enough, surely, and Rita isn't going to show hers."

"Oh! I don't mean yer pants," said Dulcie, "but yer names. You'll be Toff Mills, from Port Melbourne, and Rita'll be Doll Saunders. But, say, Toff, 'ow's the bird-lime? It must be gettin' late."

"The bird-lime?" queried Norman.

"Yass. Well, yer a cronk kind of lad not to know wot the bird-lime means," said Dulcie. "Wot's the time? if that'll suit you better."

"Oh! I see. It's just half-past seven," answered Norman.

"Then we'd better swim out, cos we've got to meet Slop., an' be there at eight," responded Dulcie, and, without farther delay, they departed.

The wedding itself was quite the least important feature of the proceedings, and took place in a dingy front room before a select dozen or so. It seemed to be an average operation. The bridegroom, Andy Skinner, was an uneasy-eyed, gloomy young fellow, with a lurching gait and a slouching mouth. A mouth like that with a grin about it would give one a human idea of hell, but on this occasion there was apparently nothing to grin at. It was a matter of stern necessity, this marriage, for the girl had loved him not wisely but very much too much, and his employer had threatened to discharge him unless he did the "honest" thing. The other party was eyelashless, and lean of cheek. She was weeping in a humble, penitent way, although she wept excuses for giving the others so much trouble. It is not nice to see an eyelashless woman crying. It reminds you of blood dripping from a sheep's carcase. Plainly, it was an effort for this girl to get married. It even seemed to distress her clothes, which hung about her in a limp, uncouth way that gave her angular form a most awkward appearance—considering her condition. She was "seconded" by a young girl who whimpered in a sufficiently humble and apologetic manner to denote a close relationship to the bride, who was, in fact, her sister.

There is not much time or sentiment wasted over an affair like this. The parson went through his jargon at his best speed, and the ring was placed on the warty third finger of

the new Mrs. Skinner. Then the signatures were affixed, savagely by the man, apologetically by the sisters, professionally by the parson, and the "lines" handed over to the bride, and the transaction was completed. A prosaic, ugly, painful wedding, but hideously common.

The after proceedings were the work of Andy's mother, who had determined to celebrate her son's marriage in style, and show Derby street that she knew what was fitting for such an auspicious occasion. Therefore, a large hay-loft at the back of the house had been cleared out for dancing. You went down a ladder to the harness room for refreshments—just as you go down the grand stairs at Government House—and the whole place was brilliant with lamps.

Rita attracted a good deal of attention as she approached the ladder to ascend to the ball room, but she attracted a good deal more when she started to "climb dem golden stairs," for, be it remembered, she wore short skirts and very gay stockings, and possessed quite the finest pair of legs possible to conceive. Consequently, the artful fellows who had stationed themselves at the foot of the ladder, under the transparent pretence of having a smoke, grinned delightedly as they noticed how carefully she attempted to avoid embarrassing disclosures—and failed.

"Blow me," one gentleman remarked, "I aint seen nothin' like them Dutches at no bloomin' theatre."

"My oath!" returned a companion, "they're fair rippin'. Dulcie 'as a orl right pair of 'er own, but, lumme, they're only billiard cues alongside that other Tom's."

"By thunder! I'd like to be 'ere w'en she comes down," said a third, and various other complimentary allusions proved that Rita had at last made a decided hit in select society.

Presently the bridal party entered, and immediately the band, consisting of an accordion and a mouth-organ, struck up "I aint a-goin' to tell," and as an encore "Oh! air, you'll have to marry me now," and then the fun commenced to flow. Both Norman and Rita entered into the spirit of the scene as though it was the greatest treat they had ever had in their lives. Even the novel experience of her partners spitting streams of tobacco juice over her shoulder during a waltz was borne with cheerfulness by Rita, or Doll, as she was known; and the strong odor of cheap hair oil and fried onion breath which was wafted up Norman's nostrils from various donkeys he danced with failed to depress his spirits.

"Say, Doll," said one fellow to Rita, "aint I seen yer chevy chase somewere afore?"

"Me face!" rejoined Rita. "I dunno, but I've 'ad it wid me a long time now, an' I've carted it to a good many places."

"Ere, none of yer stingin' orl," he said, alluding to her sarcastic tone. "Straight wire, now, didn't you use to pal up wid Bailos

Ruggles, wot got six moons for stabbin' a bloke?"

"Not me," replied Rita; "yer've run agan a soag."

"Well," he continued, "was you ever bar-maid at the Hit or Miss, over South?" (Melbourne.)

"Wrong again, cocky," she answered; "yer clean off the track."

"Well, blime, I've seen you some bloomin' w'ere," he persisted. "I'd know that dial o' yers enny w'ere. Wot price you'n me hookin' up together, eh? I've got a good collar down at Sawkins' boot factory, an' never make less'n two quid a week."

"Wot! you want to splice me?" queried Rita, highly amused.

"Not me!" he said, emphatically; "no bloomin' splicin' for me. I aint that kind of a mug. But there aint no need of wot the toffs call worful marriage. We could hook on till we was chock of each other, an' then sling it."

"You aint got no possible wid me," said Rita. "I aint no bloomin' moll, you know."

"Well, don't get wet," he urged. "Come up to the gallery at Rickards' wid me on Sat'day night, an' we'll see 'ow we get on."

"Not good enough," Rita declared. "W'y my bloke'd stiffen me if 'e 'eard I was goin' to the play wid another bloke. See?"

"Well, I'll tell you wot," said this very persistent admirer, "let's go down for a tiddley, then we can slip away round by the stable an' 'ave a quiet little yap (chat) widout yer bloke knowin'."

"Dicke!" retorted Rita. "W'y, you must think I've jest come down in the larst shower. Not me; I'm not such a bally mug as orl that," and, disgusted at his language and manner, she left him without ceremony.

Just at that instant Teddy the Nut mounted a chair, held up his hand for attention, and said—"Lydies and gentls,—I aint mach on chin music, but I've bin arsked to ey that some blokes 'as put up the splosh for a present to Mister and Misses Andy Skinner, an' we 'opes it'll prove usefol to 'em. Trot it ont, Shorty."

Then, amidst loud explosions of laughter and many coarse jests, Shorty wheeled into the centre of the room a brand new perambulator, and left it in front of the humble and eye-fashless Mrs. Andy. Probably the matter was merely meant as a bit of fun, and not a studied insult to the poor girl, but, nevertheless, it made her wince painfully and burst into tears. On the other hand, it drove the morose Andy into a fit of rage—not from sympathy with his wife, but because he felt that it "showed him up," and in a minute he had Teddy on the floor and was pounding him as hard as he could hit. He made short work of the Nut, and then turned to find Rita endeavoring to console his wife.

"'Ere, you leave my missus alone," he growled; "she don't want none of yer sort messeein' about 'er."

"Good gracious!" said Rita, forgetting her assumed character, "you needn't get angry with me. I was only attempting to soothe the poor girl."

"Was yer?" he sneered. "Well, she don't want none of yer sootherin'. Clear so 'ell outer this."

"Don't be so narsty," sobbed his wife. "She aint meannin' no harm, Andy."

"Shut yer bloomin' jor," the brute said. "or I'll give yer somethin' to blub over."

"Oh! don't get yer shirt out, Andy," the poor thing had just managed to stammer, when with a fearful oath he struck her with his open hand a hard, cruel blow on the cheek.

"Take that, yer swine, an' don't give me no back talk," he roared. Instantly, Rita, fired with indignation, exclaimed—

"You cowardly bound, you deserve to be flogged to death."

"Garn!" he commenced, "I'll smash yer bloomin'—"

when amidst cries of "Shame!"—"Brute!"—"Cow!"—"Hog!"—"Let us-

deal wid 'im!"—and other threatening exclamations, every girl in the room, excepting Rita, rushed the cur, and energetically attacked him. Not being fine ladies, but hard-working girls, who had led hard lives, they just sailed in with hands and feet, regardless of propriety, and, in five minutes, what with scratches, kicks, bites and blows from zing-hams, Andy Skinner received the roughest mauling he had ever had in his life, or had ever deserved. Certainly, he managed to damage two or three of his opponents, but the numbers were against him, and they finished up by literally throwing him down the ladder. Unfortunately for him, he landed on top of Rita's persistent admirer, and that gentleman having, just enough Collingwood whisky in him to make him unpleasantly aggressive, promptly pummelled him until he was carted into the house as senseless as a stone jug.

Naturally, this broke up the party, and Norman—who, with the other men, had stood by to assist the girls if required—and Rita were preparing to leave when Slopper rushed up, and said, "Enny of you seen Dulce? She slipped me up arf a hour ago, an' I aint seen her since."

"I seen 'er 'avin' a tiddley downstairs wid Sandy Smiff," replied someone, "an' she aint never come up 'ere agsin."

Slopper wasted no words, but in the twinkling of an eye had slipped down the ladder, and into the harness, or refreshment, room. But no Dulce was visible, and, strangely enough, no Sandy Smiff. Slopper swore mighty oaths as to what he would do when he found them. Then, seizing a lamp, he went around the yard peering into dark corners of the stables, and shouting now and again, "Come out o' that, you two; I can see yer;" but as he couldn't see them, and they did not come out, he only became more furious at each failure.

At length Norman, who helped in the search in order to protect Dulcie from Slopper's vengeance when she was discovered, said, peering into a dingy loose-box, "Fetch the light here, Speckletottle; I fancy I see something belonging to Dulcie."

And when the light was brought, and examination duly made, it turned out that Norman was perfectly correct—he HAD seen something belonging to Dulcie, and that something was an extremely pretty foot and plump leg sticking out from a heap of straw in the loose box. Slop, recognised the plump leg in an instant, and with another mighty oath exclaimed—

"This means stoush for two, right enuff. Come on out of that, you devils, yer game's up," and seizing hold of the protruding leg fairly hauled Dulcie out by her Dutch. And what a Dulcie! Drunk, speechless, straw sticking all over her, and clothes bunched about her in the most ungraceful—and disgraceful—fashion.

"Now, then, for Sandy," said Slopper. "You look after her, an' I'll deal wid the blokey;" but, though the straw was tumbled about to its last stick, Sandy Smith, luckily for himself, did not come to light. Furthermore, after Dulcie had been dosed under the tap till something like sobriety was restored, it was elicited that she had never been with Sandy at all, but that, having had too many tiddies with a pal of hers, Polka Poll, she had sought the seclusion of the straw above, and slept the sleep of those who take more drink than they can hold without spilling some.

As they drove home in a cab, Rita expressed her disappointment by saying to Norman—

"Our pleasure is always being spoilt by something or other, isn't it? For the future, we had better stay at home like hermits."

"Well, I can't promise that," he replied, "as Slopper is going to take me round the Chinese lottery shops to-morrow night."

And it happened that to-morrow night proved to be particularly exciting.

CHAPTER XXVII. CHINESE LOTTERY SHOPS.

It is somewhat amusing to reflect that, while preachers vehemently pound pulpits and exhort their dearly-beloved brethren to ponder over the awful iniquities of race-course gambling, and keep off the grass, so to speak, they say little or nothing about the horrors surrounding the Chinese lottery shops of Melbourne. And yet there is more dirt, evil, and general foulness in the atmosphere of Little Bourke street and its alley ways than in any other given section of the city. Certainly, many reforms have been effected in this nauseous neighborhood, but until every Chinese gambling shop is permanently closed we are not going to take the trouble of congratulating the authorities on their work.

As the evening on which Norman and Slopper toured this quarter was not a Saturday, they did not see Chowtown at its absolute worst, but, nevertheless, they managed to observe enough to make Norman, at least, wonder why such a plague spot was allowed to exist in the centre of so noble a metropolis. The heads of the police department have always contended that there are insurmountable difficulties in the way of procuring evidence sufficient to convict the Chow lottery bankers; but, considering the ease with which strangers can gamble in any one of scores of shops, it certainly does seem to the outsider that ordinary intelligence and energy properly and promptly exercised could sweep aside all alleged obstacles and remove the lottery evil from the face of this fair city.

Norman put this view of the case to Slopper, whereupon the latter, with the larrikin's supreme contempt for the Chow, said—

"W'y, strike me fat, if I couldn't get a push of pebs from Fitzroy wot 'd clean ev'ry bloomin' yellow dog out Lilly Bourke as easy as fallin' orf a roof."

Of course that was skite, but if ever a place wanted cleaning out it was that same Little Bourke street. Norman followed Slopper into dozens of horrible hovels crowded with the scum of the white and yellow races; and although he was no kid-gloved young man, ready to faint at an ordinary bad smell, the fearful stench through which he had to battle in sty after sty was the strongest thing of the kind he had ever experienced.

"How on earth do all the wretched women and girls here stand this kind of thing?" he asked.

"Stand it!" exclaimed Slopper, "w'y, it's all pie to them. As long as they can get their whack of opium they never trouble their blocks about the baily stinks. Oh! they're red 'ot, I can tell yer. There's donabs an' 'aybags livin' amongst the Chows wot don't go outside Lilly Bourke from one end of the year till t'other. W'y, s'elp me, Polka Poll's old woman lived in one of them kipsies for seven year, an never went furder than the pub on the Johnny Horner in orl that time. An' she aint the on'y one, take it from me. Some of 'em den't seem never to eat, drink, wash or walk, but jest lay aroun' smokin' opium till they rot an' die. By God, yer couldn't kid me at it. I'd sooner toss in me marbie right off the reel than stay dead for the rest of me life like they do."

"Well, I'm glad to see that you appreciate the wretchedness and evil of it all," said Norman.

"Me!" ejaculated Speckletottle. "Well, I've got all sorts of reasons to preachte it, considerin' 'ow me old man done in orl 'is splosh with the Chows ev'ry week, and then finished up by eatin' 'is throat 'cos he didn't have a bean to buy opium with. But 'ere's a bank, Mister Norman, so if you want to see the game, 'ere's yer chance."

The "bank" was a miscabably small room,

with a cheap counter, a bench or two, and walls pasted with lottery tickets. Behind the counter were two ugly, moon-eyed Chinese, while the bank's clients comprised larrikins, well-dressed young men who looked like clerks, factors of the inferior order, stage hands and working men. Slopper initiated Norman into the method of the business, which, as I am afraid too many of you know, is simplicity itself. To those not familiar with the process, it may be explained that for sixpence or a shilling you buy a small paper ticket marked off into eighty squares, each of which bears a Chinese character. Then with brush and ink you mark off any ten of the eighty squares you may fancy, and deposit the ticket with the banker, who gives you a duplicate. The bank also has a ticket with twenty squares marked off, so that when the bank is drawn, if five, six, seven, eight, nine or ten of your marks correspond with a similar number of marks on the bank's ticket, you receive a proportionate prize, but nothing at all for one mark, or for two, three, or four marks. The highest prizes are: Ten marks, £75; nine marks, £35; eight marks, £21; seven marks, £15s.; six marks, 9s.; and five marks, 1s. Probably its attractiveness lies in its very simplicity, for the game can be played by any fool—as you may see every day. But the chances against you—presuming you to be the fool—striking any one of the prizes—even the six marks—are simply enormous, in fact, well nigh incalculable, and I do not intend to strain my mathematical brain just to give you the exact figures. Men have played the game all the year round and never struck an eight-mark prize, while nine and ten marks, although of course occasionally recorded, are as few and far between as the proverbial angels' visits. There are also what are known as £120 banks, in which of course the prizes are smaller, and the ticket costs only sixpence. But it is the sixpenny ticket which leads hundreds of men and mere boys to ruin. The sum is so absurdly small and the gamble so easy that the beginner marks a ticket just for the fun of the thing. Then he loses and marks another, or he wins a small prize, and so is encouraged to try again, until the gambling habit grows on him, and every spare sixpence he has, or which he does not think his employer will miss, goes into the capacious maw of the pig-tailed bankers.

That is all bad enough, but not by any means the worst. To gamble at this game at all he must frequent the most horrible of little dens, and as he often has to wait some hours till the bank is drawn and the fate of the ticket known, he can hardly avoid coming into contact with the lowest female and male vermin of the city, and so gradually descend to the blackest depths of degradation. The majority of the Chows about these places are a very inferior order of beast, and thrive on all manner of immorality, so that the young fellow who desires to be thought a dashing,

knowing man about town has only a very short sleep to go from marking a ticket of herding with the most loathsome Bériots, indulging in opium-smoking and spending days and nights in evil cabins pecking with every description of vilest. These are men living amongst the Chows who started their downward career at a sixpenny lottery bank in a mere spirit of curiosity, and to-day are simply wrecks of their former bright manhood—crawling, diseased wretches whose lives are dying out in daily misery.

The lottery shops are as open to the public as are any other places of business, but various other gambling games, such as fan-tan, pak-ah-pu, and others, in which dominoes, dice or cards are used, are carried on rather more secretly, and do not attract so many palefaces as yellow devils. Still, a properly-organised police raid on these rooms would land a big shoal of white men, from alleged "toifs" to "guns" and working men. Furthermore, in the dens devoted to fan-tan, pak-ah-pu and leong sam, one rule is to shift from room to room every few hours each night, and another is that all women are rigorously prohibited. All the same, it is not so very long ago since an ex-detective was discovered in one of the fan-tan rooms with a fancy female in what the divorce courts call "a compromising position," and he had rather a hot time with the irate Chows.

But all this while perhaps you will be wondering what the deuce Norman and Slopper have been doing. Well, mostly they were having several drinks, and diving up dirty stairs into dirtier rooms, resolved to see as much of slum life as they could. It was all more shocking than interesting, but nobody attempted to molest them, and Norman had quite made up his mind that he would get through this night without an adventure.

However, towards midnight they found themselves in a network of slimy lanes between Little Bourke and Lonsdale streets, and from the upper window of a ramshackle tenement Norman was startled to hear a feminine voice utter his name, and say—

"Push that door open, and come up. I want to tell you something about Rita."

The magic of that name was enough for him, and without questioning he opened the door.

"Don't be a bloomin' chump," said Slopper, "or you'll be runnin' agen a snag."

"Oh! if she knows Rita it's all right," replied Norman. "You stay here, and if I want you I'll whistle."

"Rye-oh," said Slopper, indifferently. "If there's any stoush about I'm yer mutton."

Thereupon, Norman groped his way up the little, creaking stairs and, presently found himself in an almost bare room, lighted by a common stable lamp, and tenanted only by a young girl whom he recognised as one of the Lingerie sisters who had been engaged at the Frivolity Theatre at the same time as Rita and Dulcie. Her once bright features now

looked dissipated and evil, and the gay short skirts of the smart little dancer were replaced by a dirty, loose garment sufficiently scanty to show a fat but shabby bosom and a considerable amount of fat and dirty leg. Norman stared at her in amazement, and said: "Well, what do you want to tell me about Rita?"

"Oh! that was only a bluff," she answered, laughing. "I saw you and another fellow poking about Sam Ling's shop about an hour ago, so when I spotted you just now I thought you were on the razzle and might like to have a chat with me."

"Well, it's like your confounded cheek," he said, turning to go. "What do you think I'd see in you to make me want to chat with you?"

"Don't get your hair off," she responded. "You aint Lord Meck, you know. Give us a couple of bob before you go, anyway."

"Not a penny," he said. "I wouldn't be found dead in the same paddock with you," and he went to open the door, when in scuffled a sturdy, middle-aged Chow.

"Wha' fo' you got damn falla here?" he said angrily to the girl. "You damn cow, me killee you. You takes my money; me keepes you; you get other fellas; you damn plostitute, no damn good. Wha' fo' I—wha' fo'?" and before Norman could interpose he whipped a carving knife from his belt and struck the girl to the floor with a wounded shoulder. Instantly, Norman seized a stool and hurled it at the yellow fiend, and then rushed in and pinned him against the wall, clutching his wrist so that he could not use the knife again. So for a minute or two they struggled, till Norman, fearing that his slit-eyed antagonist would get free and stab him, yelled out for Slopper, and in a minute that worthy was in the room, and catching the Chinaman by the throat half throttled him, while Norman strewed his wrist till he was forced to drop the knife.

"Now, stand by," said Slopper, "an' see me deal out stoush to 'im," and he proceeded to deal it out with a liberality which covered the wall with Chinese blood. With a final powerful blow he knocked the Chow senseless, just as the girl scrambled up and stumbled out of the door.

"She's gone for 'er push," said Slopper, noticing her disappearance. "There'll be too many for us to bash, so we'd better do a guy."

"But surely she wouldn't help the Chinaman after the brutal way he has treated her," Norman remarked.

"Oh! you don't know these donabs," Slopper replied. "When they get dead shook on a Chow they'd stick to 'im even if he cut their bloomin' livers out. Come on; it ain't much of a drop from the red 'ot cinder," and followed by Norman he scrambled out of the "red hot cinder," otherwise the window, and in five minutes they were in Swanston street, where they hired a cab and drove home to re-

late their experiences to Rita and Dulcie. But what Rita and Dulcie had to relate to them was much more interesting.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HARLOT'S DEATH-BED.

When Norman and Slopper had gone to pick their way through the slime of the slums, Dulcie persuaded Rita to accompany her on a visit to a girl who lived a short distance away, and was dangerously ill.

"I dunno 'er proper monniker," said Dulcie, "but she's called Polka Poll, an' up to a few monis ago she was one of the most slashing tarts on the streets; used to be wif' Madame Brussels an' Annie Wilson, an' that push. Now, she's fair on 'er uppers, wifout a bean to 'er name, an' wif something the matter wif 'er chest. All 'er flash pals 'as slung 'er, but she done me a good turn once, an' I don't forget it."

Good-hearted Rita readily agreed to go with Dulcie, and on the way the latter entered in to a further explanation regarding the invalid.

"Polka Poll," she said, "comes from Yass, in New South Wales, were 'er mover Yass to run a carin' 'ouse w'ich did a big biz amongst the Chows, an' as some of 'em splashed the sploosh pretty freely, the old woman used to allow 'em into a parlor an' let 'em chat wif 'er daughters, Blanche, Maggie and Poll. But the mover got washed on a old Chow an' become a reg'lar red 'ot opium smoker, an' wus. One day she found one of the yellar 'ogs in bed wif 'er eldest gal, Blanche, an' kicked up 'ell's delight, but the Chow told 'er she wouldn't get no more opium if she put 'im away, an' so the damned 'og never said nuffin. But Blanche soon got full up of the Chow an' the dull life, and cleared out for Sydney. This made the Chow fair mad, an' 'e stopped the old woman's allowance of opium. So to smooch 'im over she kidded the second girl, Maggie, to take 'er sister's place wif 'im. Maggie was willin', an' for some time there was no farder trouble. But the Chow got full up of her, an' tried 'is level best to seduce Poll, but Poll wasn't takin' 'enny, an' didn't care a brass monkey for wot they might treaten 'er wif, and made up 'er mind to keep straight. But they was too many for 'er. One night them too devils, 'er old woman an' 'er sister, Maggie, acthally collared 'er an' 'id 'er an' kept 'er from yellin' w'ile the measly bloomin' Chow ruined 'er. That knocked 'er tin can in. She went clean off 'er onion, an' was ortul ill for monis an' monis, an' w'en she got well she come down to Melbun an' started as one of Mover 'Oward's gals. 'Er old woman's bin livin' amongst the Chows in Little Bourke for years, an' is the worst old 'aybag in the city."

"Good God! what a terrible story!" said Rita.

"Yass," affirmed Dulcie, "an' you can take my word for it she was the prettiest tart on

the town not so very long ago, and fairly made the gaunts fly when she 'ad 'em. She's a bit above my class, you know, but she's orful down on 'er socks now, an' is liable to frow seven any time."

"Throw seven, Dulcie?" queried Rita.

"Yuss; peg out, you know; turn up 'er daisies; join the angels, as the Army blokes ses."

"Oh! join the angels," said Rita. "You mean that she is dying."

"Yuss, that's the bizness," replied Dulcie.

"But 'ere we are, an' Poll won't mind us walkin' right in. She aint no Lady 'Opotou."

They found themselves in a small and almost bare room, a bed, chairs and table forming the only furniture. Polka Poll was in bed, evidently painfully ill, her wasted frame and thin, flushed face showing the unmistakable ravages of consumption.

"I'm so glad to see you, Dulcie, and you, too, Miss Deforme," she said, after Rita had been introduced. "I've been lying here thinking of my past sins, or all that I could remember, and wondering if I would see a friendly face again before I die."

"Oh! you aint goin' to croak," said Dulcie. "Why, you don't know wot a color you've got in yer cheeks."

"Naturally—in my cheeks," was the response. "The grave-diggers know that sign. I have not had so many medical men amongst my friends not to have learnt the symptoms of consumption. Why, when I got up this morning I could scarcely stand. But, after all, that may have been because I have eaten nothing since yesterday morning."

"You had no appetite, perhaps?" said Rita, sympathetically.

"On the contrary, I was hungry all day; but there was nothing in the house to eat, and I had neither money nor credit."

"Oh! how dreadful," said Rita. "But I will run out and get you something. What would you like?"

"Nothing, thank you," she answered.

"Frank—my last mash—brought me a bottle of brandy a couple of days ago, and I've been living on that. It keeps the lamp alight, but it burns the wick too."

"Frank!" said Dulcie. "Oh! that fellow's no good."

"Isn't he? Well, do you suppose I should care for him if he was? If I had a decent man for a lover, I'd feel like a thief in the hands of a detective. I know he looks with contempt at me, but as we say girls"—she laughed harshly—"despise those who love us, we can only love those who despise us. I—"

"Wot's the matter? Wot are you stoppin' for?" asked Dulcie.

"Nothing much. Only every now and again I feel as if I should suffocate. There; I've thrown up a little blood, and now I'm all right again."

"But how you cough," said Rita; "it makes me shudder to hear you."

"Well, such a life as I have lived is not likely to leave me healthy," she said, bitterly. "To-night I have been walking about the streets since seven o'clock attempting to earn a little money to pay my rent, but it was so warm and muggy that I got wet through with perspiration, and now my back feels like ice."

"But why didn't you sit down and rest yourself?" asked Rita.

"Oh! I couldn't sit down," was the reply.

"I must keep on the move, for if I rest I begin to think, just as I was doing when you came in. Then I get disgusted with myself, and think of suicide. Oh! it seems as if hands with iron claws are tearing my breast, and lacerating my vitals."

"You ought to take care of yourself," said Rita.

"Take care of myself," she said irritably; "what rot! How can I take care of myself? I can't afford it. A nice way it would be to receive my gentlemen friends—such as they are, the beasts—if I were wrapped up in flannel and saturated with eucalypta."

"But, still—"

"Oh! it is a gay life, ours," she broke in, impulsively. "If those who choose it knew where it leads and how it ends, there would be more sewing machines sold, and less paint and powder. When I think of the poor girls who live good, honest lives, virtuous girls with fathers and mothers, who are tempted to sin because it seems so gay, so full of pleasure and attraction, I shudder. If I could only get hold of one of them for a quarter of an hour, just as she was about to take the fatal step, she would never take it."

"Oh! you're a bit down on yer luck now," said Dulcie, who had been listening with tears in her eyes, "and fings look a bit blue, but you'll be cherry ripe presently."

"Yes," Polka Poll rejoined. "I forgot—I forgot that. We are called gay girls. In France they call us the Daughters of Joy! how appropriate! Well, once on the road we must follow it to the end; there is no getting back for us, however much we may long for it. But where is the pleasure? To fast when we are hungry. To eat when we have no appetite. Drink, without thirst. Love, without love. Laugh when we'd rather cry. Wake when we'd sooner sleep—and, oh! the shame of it all! And the end!—the gutter, the Chinese den, a drunken death. Bah!"

"But some get rich at this trade," said Rita.

"Yes! Brussells, Wilson, and all that beastly gang. They are more to be despised than the others. Their riches make them worse—make them fiends without a spark of mercy for anyone. Oh! this life, if it is life! what shame! what solitude! what weariness! Belonging to all the world, except to oneself. Being at the beck and call of a miserable creature like Brussells, who sells you like so

much merchandise, and treats you like a dog. Re-commencing this existence every morning, and seeing before you a series of days and years exactly similar. To what degree of abasement must a girl arrive to accept this awful monotony of vice and misery! What at the most can one get out of it! A little money now and again, occasionally a new dress, a champagne supper, the theatres, the races, and, afterwards, wretchedness and the grave."

"But," urged Rita, "did you never think of working?"

"Ah!" she said, "the capacity for work is the first thing lost in a life like mine. In spite of myself, there was always something in my dress—my manner, which advertised by degradation, and no honest door was open to me."

"You'd 'ave done orl right on [the stage]," said Dulcie. "W'y, when I fust knew you, you 'ad as good a pair of Dutch pegs as I ever seen in me natural."

"Yes, and look at them now," Poll said, kicking off the clothes, and exposing long, emaciated limbs, which seemed nothing but skin and bone.

"The time was when my legs were the talk of the town. Men have paid £1 merely to see as far as my garters, and managers have offered me good salaries to appear in tights. But, I thought that the life I was leading then was the best in the world, and the money I made the easiest ever earned. And now I can't even pay my rent."

"But you'd a shine gold bracelet larst time I saw yer at Andy Skinner's weddin'," said Dulcie.

"Oh! that is a sample of my life," Poll said, smiling sadly. "One of the Brussels' friends gave me the bracelet under the pretence that it was solid gold, but when I took it to a jeweller the man laughed, and told me I had been swindled, as the thing was worth only half-a-crown. What a mean cad the fellow must have been."

"Well, you could hardly expect to meet gentlemen at such places," said Rita.

"Oh! I don't know," Poll declared. "All sorts go there. Real gentlemen have been interested in me, but, one after another, they left me in a little while. After all, they were right, for it would have been no benefit to them to have thought seriously of me. I have had neither virtue nor love; perhaps it is because I have never been in love that I have never been virtuous. I mean the pure, spiritual love, which is so much higher than the mere animal passions which influenced me. My death will affect nobody."

"But it is impossible that you are dying," said Rita; "you seem so calm and peaceful."

"Ah! you may think so," Poll said, "but I have a fire in my chest—I am suffering the tortures of the damned."

And in saying this she put her arms around Rita's neck and kissed her. But as she did so, her features contracted, she put her hand to her chest as though to stay the fire, and then fell back on the pillow, while a white froth mounted to her lips, and a film, as of death, passed over her feverishly-brilliant eyes. Dulcie began to cry like a child, and Poll shook her hand in gratitude; then, concealing her face in the pillow, burst into tears, which had been too long restrained.

Poor, wayward girl! She had bartered her soul for happiness, and the price had never been paid her.

Suddenly she leaped out of the bed with great, staring eyes, and screamed as though in mortal agony.

"My God! I'm burning!" she cried. "I am in hell! Look," and she pointed to a bottle filled with a greenish liquor. "With my last half-crown I bought this, the most deadly poison on earth. My pain is too great to bear. This will free me—will give me death and the peace which I have never known in life." And before either of the others could prevent her, she had seized and drained the bottle, then fell heavily to the floor, struggling in horrible convulsions. She raised her head and evidently desired to speak. But the hand of Death was upon her, and as Dulcie and Rita strove to lift her she piteously cried—

"Save me! save me! I do not want to die!"

"For God's sake, run for a doctor," said Rita, almost swooning with horror.

But it was too late. Hardly had Dulcie left the room, when Polka Poll ceased to live, and when the doctor arrived they could only gaze in awe and wonder at the countenance which had lost its agonised contraction and was illumined with an angelic serenity. Polka Poll was at length in peace, and an expression of joy seemed to pervade those impassable features, as though the white soul of the girl, disengaged from the corrupting body, had nestled upon the fair brow.

When the shock which both Rita and Dulcie had received had somewhat passed away, and they were able to walk home, Rita, with her sweet face shrouded in sorrow, said—

"What a life, Dulcie dear; and, oh! what a death! I've been fearfully wicked myself, and often tempted to do wrong, and I can only thank my lucky star—and Norman—that I did not live her life and die her death."

"Me, too," said Dulcie. "I've bin a bit crunk in me time, and was feet on the touch of gain' on the streets w'en you fust met me; but, after seein' poor Polka Poll, I reckon a 'spectable life's the best game, an' 'bime if I don't marry Slop right away and settle down."

And you shall hear just how she managed it.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN "PUSH" SOCIETY.

In pursuance of her determination to marry Speckletottle at the earliest possible opportunity, Dulcie went down one evening to discuss the matter with that young gentleman's married sister, and prepare plans for his speedy capture. That sister, Mrs. Tickelton, was a lady who had herself married Tickelton rather hastily, for reasons which became very apparent two months later in the shape of twins. Since then she had been producing similar tokens of wedded bliss with machine-like regularity about every twelve months, despite her husband's frequent objections, and was now well on the way with her seventh. Consequently, she might be regarded in the light of an expert, and a shining example to Dulcie and others to go and do likewise.

The Tickeltoms lived in a frowsy little back street in Fitzroy, in a seedy little house, furnished only with absolute necessities, and not too many of them. It was just the kind of little street which you may see in most suburbs, where married ladies gossip all day long—when they are not quarrelling—and have the peculiar habit of carrying their babies upside down. Also, they are sociable to an extraordinary degree, borrowing half-a-cup of milk, or a pinch of tea, or a flatiron, just as they want them, no one ever seeming to see the necessity of laying in a full stock of milk, tea, or flatirons for herself. Those of their children who can toddle are early trained to run the jug or bottle down to the pub for beer, with some such command as "an' Jennie, tell 'im not to dror no froth on it, 'cos froth makes mother hiccup, an' father finds 'er out." Most of the Saturday's money is gone by Tuesday, and then dresses, shoes, blankets, satepens and other household gear are pawned to ensure a supply of justice until Saturday comes round again.

But mark you, these little back street folks have their social prejudices as much as any enlightened class. Thus, Mrs. Macgruel, the wife of the draper's man, tosses her head and sneers loftily at Mrs. Nicholls, looks down upon little Mrs. Smithers, whose husband drives a sanitary cart in the dead of night, and distributes a perfume along his tracks which he could cut with a cheese-knife, and Mrs. Smithers positively ignores Mrs. James, whose good man runs a baked 'tater and saw-eyo can. Frequently the street is lined up by the customers of a dirty brothel kept by a drunken old hag and her daughter-in-law, or by some good man coming home and jumping on his good lady's chest just because she had stepped in next door for a few minutes to tell her neighbor that the price of fried fish had gone up, and that the baby had actually said "goo-goo," or "gurgle-gurgle" when she had given him a piece of bread and fat, and had run the few minutes into three hours, quite forgetting to get her good man's tea

seedy. But as jumping on wives' chests is of almost daily occurrence, it arouses no indignation or sympathy. Husbands must have some amusement after their hard day's graft.

Mrs. Tickelton had lived in this street for years, although it was a favorite haunt of the "Cherry-tree push," one of the worst gangs of ruffians on the police records. By smashing windows and bashing residents this push had established a reign of terror, for every member was capable of gouging out his mother's eyes unless the "old woman" gave him beer-money, and no other female was safe from being half-kicked to death if she incurred the displeasure of this cowardly crowd. The few police were helpless, the publicans were frightened to refuse free drinks when the "Cherry-tree" demanded them, and any stranger passing through the street would be lucky to reach the end of it right side up.

Mrs. Tickelton, a red-haired and pigeon-toed lady of angular aspect, was delighted to see Dulcie, and before five minutes had passed was fairly enjoying herself to relating what misery she suffered, detailing all the complaints of the children, and going into the smallest circumstance of the latest scandals of the neighborhood.

"The very orfallest thing 'appened on'y last week," she said. "That pore young creetur, Mrs. Mills, was jest gettin' into a keb to be drove to the Women's 'Oreepiddel, 'en she fell an' disappointed 'er 'usband of their fast child."

"Hoh! 'ow horral," said Dulcie, sympathetically.

"Yuss, wasn't it," rejoined the other, "an' the pore thing on'y six weeks married, too."

In fact, judging from her conversation, it appeared that no lady in that quarter ever got married until there was actual and pressing need for it.

Thus they gossiped on until dark, Dulcie receiving such wise advice about husbands and wives, etc., etc. Likewise, an interesting discussion ensued on the question of fashionable frippery, such as fichus, Torchon lace, voile, and so forth; and, as Mrs. Tickelton was a lady who usually wore her husband's socks and lace-up boots, and old hats, and generally had her skirt pinned up about her waist, and never on any account brushed or combed her wispy red hair, naturally she posed as an authority on the latest fashions.

While they were thus enjoying themselves up to the hilt, a stranger came lurching down the street in a manner suggestive of carrying too large a load of intoxicating liquor. Like a flash, the word went round amongst the Cherry-tree push, and Hopy Globus immediately rushed into the pub, secured an empty beer bottle, and proceeded to head off the unsuspecting victim. Hopy's method of attack was simplicity itself. Concealing himself in a lane until the man had passed, he stepped out quickly, raised

the bottle, and bash! bash!—the stranger was knocked down on the foot-path, bleeding and almost senseless. Then up came the rest of the push, and proceeded to "fan" the fallen prey, every pocket being gone through for money or other valuables. But this victim was especially unfortunate. In the first place, he committed the dire offence of having nothing on him but a clay pipe and a heavy smell of rum, and, secondly, he showed fight, and, scrambling to his feet, positively buffed Hoppy with a beauty on the north and south, commonly known as the mouth. Promptly, Hoppy kicked him in the groin, and when once down again the push "dealt wid 'im" with their usual lack of courtesy. Shirty Jack walked over him on his knees, thereby breaking a rib or two, while Lumpy Lou rammed a handful of mud in his mouth, Joker Styles bit a piece out of his nose, and the others lent a hand—or a foot—where they thought it would do the most harm. Finally, Hoppy got up and said—

"E's 'ad on' e can 'old, chaps. Let's come over to Mother Morgan's kipay an' strike 'er for 'arf a jim."

"Old on," said Lumpy Lou, "I aint 'ad a kick at this bloke yet," and, walking up to the poor senseless, battered stranger, he deliberately kicked him twice on the jaw, and then, evidently proud of having distinguished himself, turned to join the others. But it happened that Sloppler was hastening along to see his sister, and at this last brutal act of Lumpy Lou's he caught the Cherry-tree hero by the throat, pinned him against the fence, and then sent a pile-driving blow on his face which laid his cheek upon, and made him look even more ugly than Nature had fashioned him.

"Carl that 'ome, an' feed on it," said Sloppler, "an' if it aint a betiful there's plenty more w'ere that come from."

Lumpy wasted no time in vain argument, but dodged away from Speckletottle, and gave the "push" cry for assistance. Back came the push, headed by Hoppy, and Sloppler, with a "Blime, this aint no comic hopera I've struck," hauled himself over his sister's back fence, and bursting in upon Mrs. Tickleton and Dulcie—who, by the way, was just displaying some new embroidery on an undergarment—exclaimed—

"The Cherry-tree clique's on ter me. Lock the front Rory O'More, shut the red-'ot cindeas, an' look out for stacks of trottie." These commands were no sooner issued and obeyed than smash went a piece of Macadam through the front-room window.

"You aint got no charnce," yelled Hoppy. "We'll pull yer bloomin' liver out afore we've done wid you, Slop."

Slop, replied in language not usually used in polite society, and through the broken window hurled a piece of firewood which caught Shirty Jack on the nose, and made him yell for vengeance.

"Sneak out the back way, an' fetch in some

rocks," said Sloppler to Dulcie, and that plucky beauty, with a confident "Rye-ob," hurried out, and soon returned with a supply of ammunition.

"Now, make up the Jeremiah," ordered Sloppler, "an' we'll give 'em somethin' 'ot for supper," and soon Dulcie had a roaring Jeremiah, or fire, going, while Mrs. Tickleton crept under the table, and moaned, between heavy weeping, "Hoh, hi know this'll bring her a haaccident, an' hi've bin takin' sich care of meself."

In the meantime, the push smashed the other windows, and then turned their attention to an attempt to break in the door. But before they could succeed, Sloppler crept to the door, suddenly opened it, and launched a furious kick which landed on Hoppy's knee, and made him even hopper than before. Then the door was banged to once more and bolted, and, as the crowd came up to it again, Dulcie mounted on a chair, and through the fan-light poured a dipper-full of boiling water on the heads of those nearest, agonised squeals and blood-curdling curses proclaiming the scalding effects of her manoeuvre. (This action caused the attack to be changed from front to rear, and in a few minutes a dozen wild and blood-thirsty scoundrels had broken in the back gate, and fired a volley of road-metal with telling precision, little Gerald Tickleton being hit hard in the boom of his pants, his sister, Violet, falling with a wounded head, and Mrs. Tickleton's jug of sepper-beer, which stood on the kitchen table awaiting insertion, being shed over the floor in shocking waste. To add to the confusion, Mrs. Tickleton dropped into hysterics, and her youngest child—up to date—fell into the fire, whence he was rescued by Dulcie, and promptly cooled off in a tub of washing suds which stood handy.

Sloppler had fired off all his rocks, and now decided on a piece of generalship which should effectually rout the enemy.

"Dulce," he said, "there's on'y one thing for it—we must get the Bull street push onto this gang. I'll give you a leg-up over the side-fence, then you scoot through Mrs. Mangruel's yard, an' up the lane, an' through the back of the rub-a-dub-dub, and down Dirty Dick's alley to Bull street, an' tell Jumbo Miller that 'Oop's push is 'ere, an' there's plenty of biff biff goin' on. Say Sloppler warnts 'im, an' 'e'll do the rest."

"Not me," said Dulcie. "I'm goin' to stop-wif you, Slop. W'y, afore I could smoke-back wif Jumbo an' his pebs you might be smashed to deaf."

"Garn, now," he said, "an', s'elp me, I'll marry you next week."

Of course no girl could hold out against such temptation as that, and, consequently, Dulcie, who had her own reasons for desiring an early marriage, especially with Sloppler, hastened away to bring up reinforcements. Meanwhile, Sloppler scrambled through the kitchen, and wash-house to the wood-shed, and from



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that valiant points fired wood and coal and stones, and even an axe at the Cherry-trees, very appropriately, felling one of the said trees with the axe, and disabling two others by well-directed shots of coal. But the Tickeltoms bought their wood and coal by the sixpenny worth, consequently his ammunition was rapidly becoming exhausted, and unless relief arrived promptly his situation would be extremely critical. Already a gin bottle, aimed by the experienced hand of Skinny Mitchell, had gashed Stopper's cheek, and Hoppy had given the command to "rush the cow, and kick his darlites in," when down the lane scampered Jumbo Miller and ten of the Bull street push, headed by Dulcie, whose skirt had been torn off in climbing the fence, and whose face was begrimed with coal dust. Furthermore, she had lost one shoe, had no hat on her head, was bleeding from a cut on the forehead, and carried in her hand a picket which she had torn from a fence. Many of the others also had pickets, while Jumbo wielded a length of lead pipe, and bricks and stones were plentiful amongst them.

Stopper greeted his allies with a yell, and then got to work amongst the Cherry-trees, who were completely disconcerted by the appearance of Jumbo's force. For ten minutes as healthy a fight as ever Stopper could desire raged about the Tickeltom mansion, even Dulcie, with her trusty picket, getting into the heart of the melee, and laying about her with a energy which many of those she attacked remembered for weeks afterwards. Jumbo threw Hoppy over a neighboring fence, where an awful-sized mastiff proceeded to chew him, and Stopper jambed Lumpy Lou's head into a dust-box, from which he crawled out more dead than alive, while when it came to an interchange of kicks the Bull street command—as it would be called in these days—fairly paralyzed their opponents, and then jumped on them with both feet. Another attack and the laurels would have been with the Bulls, but suddenly Andy the Log yelled "Ere's a copper, chaps," and with one accord every man of both armies, excepting Stopper, Jumbo and Dulcie—and Dulcie had proved herself manly enough, take my word for it—raced down the lane and into the street, and fell on that policeman with an unanimity which was marvellous, considering how they had just been bashing one another. But a constable to a larrikin is a red rag to a bull.

No sooner was the lane cleared than Stopper remembered the stranger who had been the cause of the fray, and, with Jumbo, Mrs. Tickeltom and Dulcie, went out to inspect him. Jumbo lifted the poor fellow up, and said—

"Hallo, if this is the bloke they went through they didn't get a bean, I'll take my oath."

"How do you know?" asked Dulcie.

"Cos," replied he, with a leer, "he passed

down Bull street afore 'e come 'ere, an'—well, my push don't leave nuffin' for the next lot."

"Well, 'e's broke up pretty bad—" began Stopper, when, with a scream, Mrs. Tickeltom exclaimed—

"Ho, Haleck! Haleck! Yess, it's my Tickeltom! Ho! wot shall hi do? Hi know hi'll 'ave a haccident now. Ho! this'll be me-death."

"But surely the push would know Tickeltom," said Dulcie, who was not acquainted with him.

"They aint 'ad no show," said Stopper, "cos 'e's bin in gaol for nine moons."

"An' now let us put 'im to bed, an' then we'll get in a load of beer an' make a night of it. You can stay 'ere to-night, Dulcie, an' go 'out in the mornin'."

And a very good night they managed to make of it, though Dulcie has always declined to explain even to Rita how they found separate-sleeping accommodation for her in so small a house.

"It don't signerly 'ow we managed it," was all she would say. "Stopper 'as promised to splice me as soon as I can get me clobber-ready."

Before which time, however, Rita and Norman had managed to tumble into another adventure.

CHAPTER XXX.

SEASIDE SINFULNESS.

One day Rita came into the room where Norman was seated, plumped herself down upon his knees, kissed him about fourteen times in rapid succession with splendid marksmanship, and then, in unusually demure tones, said—

"I've been thinking, dear boy, that if you can spare the time some day, we—we—might—get—married."

"Do you think you could stand the shock?" he asked, gaily.

"Plesse, don't jest about it," she pleaded, very seriously. "You know I wouln't bother you about it unless I was sure it was good for me. I suppose you wonder why I have not mentioned it before, but well, it only occurred to me lately. Between ourselves, dear boy, I—I—" and although they were alone, she whispered something which caused him to start, and say earnestly—

"Oh! if that's the case, there's no time to be lost. Marriage might not to be a failure with us, at any rate, considering how long we have been training for the event."

"And in the spite of the fact that I carry a penalty," she responded with a sly smile, happy at having gained her point—and her husband.

Their wedding was the quietest of quiet affairs, but in deference to Rita's wish—and there are times when a lady's highest longing must be indulged—they immediately went off to a well-known sea-side resort for their

"Honeymoon, "Just as if," said Norman, "we hadn't had enough honeymoons before marriage."

This particular watering-place was, for a brief time, besieged by the very pink and pine-apple of fashionable society. In fact, gay Melbourne seemed to have transferred its gayest and wickedest portions to "where the ocean's waves do sport and roll," so that, amidst throngs of the "upper ten," any one with the inclination could also have a hot time with ladies of easy virtue from Lonsdale st., and East Melb. The main attraction of the place was an attempt to introduce Continental bathing, where people of both sexes could dress as indecently as possible, and inspect one another's almost unfeathered forms in the full light of day. The scheme was started by two or three so-called ladies of Tourak who possessed pretty legs and charming bosoms, and desired to make such fascinations as public as possible. Furthermore, from gazing on the manly shape of scantily-attired cyclists at Austral Wheel meets, they had acquired a strong desire to see as much—or even more—of their gentlemen friends, and concluded that mixed bathing would afford them as good a chance—and view—as anything else. The idea caught on. Men were tired of observing the ballet through opera glasses, and curious to compare the limbs of their lady friends with those of the theatre girls, and for these and other reasons this particular watering place speedily became popular. Then a very notorious old harlot, scenting much profit, went down to inspect the prospects, and after two days' survey telegraphed back the significant order—"Send three girls; business bound to boom," and so, without loss of time, the gilded vice of the city was rampant by the sea, sea waves. By the way, the reason of the sea waves being so sad must surely be because there is so much innocence wrecked on the beaches.

When Norman and Rita arrived, the mixed bathing was in full swing. Vice and virtue, in the very flimsiest of bathing costumes, paddled in the shallow water together, or flirted with the masculine element on the shore, with a freedom which, in some cases, afterwards made pretty reading in divorce reports. Even Norman, hardened wretch as he was, experienced a shock when he saw men and women and young girls strolling about the shore or squatting on the sand in attire which left precious little to the imagination. Legs which, in town, were modestly hidden from the vulgar gaze by petticoats and skirts, and whatever other undergear women wear, were here displayed with a generosity which the boldest stage girl might equal, but never surpass, while palpitating busts were to be viewed by the dozens, most of them in extremely good order and condition, and ripe for inspection.

Even the superficial observer could see that city's legs were of a very varied order of

architecture. Thus, a very fashionable dame, whose graceful figure has been the delight of scores of ball-rooms, was here discovered to possess legs of the pipe-stem build so far as thinness went, and, in addition, was most painfully bumpy. A very swell banker's lady proved to be even more knock-kneed than the generality of her sex, while a bewitching damsel, who was the belle of Melbourne for one season, was injudicious enough to reveal the fact that she had shin bones as sharp as grass-cutters. But amongst the others there were limbs of most enticing shapeliness, with delicate ankles, bewitchingly-curved calves, and bounteous thighs of exceptional beauty. And you may be sure that these latter were exhibited with a liberality which showed their owners knew good things when they saw them, and wanted others to know them equally well. The men, too, appeared with an absence of ceremony and clothing—which kept many feminine eyes riveted upon them.

"Oh," exclaimed one of a group of girls, standing near Rita, "hasn't that fellow got a lovely shape. I never saw him with his trousers off before. Isn't he awfully hairy about the legs?"

"Oh! I think I'd prefer that one floating on his back," said a companion. "Why, he's got skin as fair as a girl's."

"And there's a beauty on that rock," put in a third. "Oh, my! What a fine, big fellow! I like 'em big and strong, because they can protect you so well."

"And these," remarked Norman to Rita, as they strolled along, "are society young ladies who, in town, wouldn't look at a man in his shirt sleeves, but can gloat over and criticise half-naked men such as those."

"Two of the girls," said Rita, "are sisters who used to live in a house on the St. Kilda Esplanade, from where they looked down on the baths through telescopes. And yet if you told them they were not ladies they'd give you in charge."

"Well, here are a couple who don't put on airs," said Norman, indicating two harlots who appeared from a bathing box.

"No, nor much else," replied Rita, as they came nearer, and discovered the fact that they were absolutely undressed, save for short bodices and shorter skirts. Their feet, legs and shoulders were bare, and a moment later as they tumbled each about in an inch or two of water they commanded the direct attention of every spectator on the beach.

They had previously caused much sensation by leaving the door of their bathing box open while undressing, but their present performances were even more startling. Climbing on to an old boat, they stood at the bows, the observed of all observers, while the wicked breeze flapped their shockingly brief skirts about in a way which made even the most hardened society women turn away and pretend to blush. There was no doubt that they had uncommonly handsome and plump legs, and as they jumped into the water, and



DULCIE

climbed up again, and tried to clamber up the mast, and rolled one another over the sand, there was a roar of admiration from the men, and a murmur of indignation from many of the women, especially from those whose legs were not so plump and handsome. Even Rita, who knew that her own limbs were much more beautiful, and, therefore, had no reason to be envious, turned contemptuously away, and said—

"Disgusting creatures! Why, I wouldn't show my legs like that before this crowd for anything," which was rather a rash assertion, as she did show a good deal of them to that same crowd not many minutes later. It happened thuswise. Norman left her there while he went up to the hotel for a drink, and hardy was he out of sight when the two Totties, who had heard her heated remark, resolved to have revenge. Therefore, as she was strolling along, they scampered out of the water, and running full tilt at her, sent her sprawling over a large sandhill, and as she landed on her back her feet went up in the air, and for half a minute she lay with her new silk stockings, her pretty cream garters, and an abundance of fleecy embroidery, or whatever it was, plainly, too plainly, visible to the naked eyes of laughing men and women.

"So we're disgusting creatures, are we?" exclaimed one of her assailants. "Well, what price you? You're showing a bit more than your legs, now, take my word for it."

"You dirty harlots," said Rita, enraged beyond control, "you oughtn't to be allowed amongst decent people. I'll have you kicked out of this place before the day's out, see if I don't," and she righted herself, and shook the sand out of her dress in superb indignation.

"Oh! you will, will you?" one of them said. "Well, we'll deal with you before we go, any way. Come on, Beas, we'll give this bloom-in' toff a swim," and the two of them advanced towards her with such threatening gestures that poor Rita grabbed up her skirts and took to her heels in the direction of the jetty.

Not a man in the crowd attempted to interfere in her behalf, but just looked on and guffawed at the spectacle of two half-naked women chasing a third female attired in the height of fashion, with her clothes half-mast high, and her cream garters most pleasantly conspicuous. Naturally, the chase was short, and Rita, feeling that she would be caught in a few more strides, in sheer desperation clambered into the boat as those she had despised had done—whereat the men rejoiced more than ever. But just as she reached the port side the two girls jumped heavily on the starboard side, and the old boat was rocked so violently that Rita was driven off her balance and, amidst shrieks of laughter, went flying through space into the shallow water, while the merry little wavelets rippled gleefully over her, ran along her lovely silk stockings,

spoiled the pretty cream garters and the prettier embroidery, or lace, or whatever was beyond, and, in a word, deluged her from her dainty shoes to her costly and enchanting hat. It was a great deal for a little water to do, but it did it so effectually that, when willing hands helped her up and on to the dry beach, she was saturated most thoroughly, her magnificent golden hair was all astray and dripping with salt water, and the thought of the dreadful appearance she presented wrought upon her feelings that she sobbed piteously in sight of them all. Then a kindly young girl wrung her out as well as she could, and led her back to the hotel, where dry clothes and hot tea recovered her sufficiently to enable her to search for Norman. And where do you think she found him? Actually and positively, he, her own true lover, who had, only a few hours previously, taken his solemn so-help-him that he would love and honor her, was discovered in the company of a nasty, cheeky, bad, bold, wretched, lazy, good-for-nothing harlot—which is exactly how Rita described her. More shocking still, he was hob-nobbing with her in the most barefaced and beastly fashion, drinking champagne in Rita's own private room. Merciful Powers! What kind of a honeymoon was Rita having! It wasn't sufficient that she, and her cream garters, should be held up to the ridicule of the crowd, and soaked through and through in the horrid ocean, but to add to her misery she must catch that deceitful wretch of a husband having a gay old time with a gay young girl!

The explanation was rather more simple than it looked. While Norman was having his drink at the hotel, there came to him this gay young girl, whose character was such that as soon as she saw a well-dressed young man "on his own," she immediately set to work to capture him. This she did by boldly accosting him and presenting a card on which was inscribed, "Flossie Lovejoy, Lonsdale street, Melbourne. Gentlemen waited on for orders. Terms (strictly cash) on application." After perusing the card, he perused the face of Flossie, and identified her as one who had made a name for herself by her expertness in drugging the drink of foolish men, and then looting them.

"Suppose, old chappie," she said, "we have a bottle of wine and a private room?"

With the intention of bowling her out in her little game, he agreed, and, ordering the champagne, went off to the apartment where Rita presently peered at them through the dividing curtains.

Feeling sure that she was on the royal road to success, Flossie became most hilariously sociable, cocking her neat legs up on the table, relating "fairly tales" of the warmest complexion, and assuring Norman that she had never met a man for whom she would do as much as she would for him, in fact, "kidding" him with all the art of her well-known profession. Norman jingled his money



DULCIE'S DISASTER

temptingly, watched her eyes sparkle greedily as she heard the alluring sound, and gradually pretended to be overcome by the liquor. In fact, he did it so well that Rita, who just appeared at the curtains, muttered "drunken brute" to herself, and Flossie prepared to poison off her victim.

"Let's finish this bottle, old chappie," she said, "and then I'll talk love to you till the cows come home," and as Norman gurgled out "Or-righ' ole f'ier," she filled his glass, and then, as his eyes seemed closed in boozey drowsiness, she poured in a small portion of an opium decoction known as "knock-out drops," and designed for the purpose of drugging the unwary.

"Now, drink to the merry time we're going to have," she cried, but she was wrong, as there was not going to be any merry time for her just then, for, as Norman grasped the glass, Rita exclaimed—

"Don't touch it, Lionel; she's poisoned it!"

He straightened himself up with a look of surprise at Rita, then rising with the glass of frugged liquor in his hand he seized the arm of Flossie, and thundered—

"Drink this wine, you thing, or I'll brain you with the bottle," and struggle as Flossie might she could not escape from his grip until he had forced the doctored stuff between her teeth. He still held her till the drug began to work and she began to sway, when he let her fall to the floor with a bang which showed how strong a dose she had prepared for him. "That's what she meant for me," he said, laughing.

"Yes, and it's no more than you deserved for carrying on with such a woman," responded Rita, warmly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself leaving one to be insulted and half-killed while you amuse yourself with such dirty trash as this," indicating the recumbent Flossie.

But a few words explained matters to her satisfaction, and after she had described her experiences on the beach he said—

"Well, this girl is one of the gang, and we'll punish her for the misdeeds of herself and her companions."

"Oh! you mean to have her locked up," said Rita.

"Not at all. Go and get your tennis racket and I'll tell you what to do with it," and when she returned he placed the half-riveted Flossie across the table face downwards and—Rita and her tennis bat did the rest. Moreover, it was done so efficiently that Flossie could not sit her bicycle with comfort for a week afterwards, by which time, however, Rita and Norman had returned to Melbourne, and participated in the greatest event of all in these sketches—the marriage of Slopper and his trim and tricky little Dulcie.



CHAPTER XXXI.

DULCIE'S DISASTER.

Undoubtedly, the busiest and noisiest place in Melbourne on Saturday night is the Eastern market. All the shops and stalls are dressed in their very best trim, the thoroughfares are crowded with bustling women bargaining with might and main, donahs from most of the suburbs flounce about keenly on the mesh, and the big buck larrikin is strongly represented. To the true donah from Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond, the market on Saturday night is the same as Collins street block to a lady of fashion—the place where she can parade and swell around, and show off her airs and graces amongst others of her own kind. Hundreds of sturdy middleclass fathers and here as regularly as clockwork tables, fruit, flowers, confectionery purchases, and beneath the t with the capital band, provided Myers and others, playing pleasant the animated throng of anywhere, is one not easily to be forgotten.

It was a place of pleasant memories to both Dulcie and Slopper. Therefore, it is not a matter of surprise that they should have decided to visit it together on the last Saturday night of their unwedded lives. And how demure Dulcie looked when some of her acquaintances barracked her with a "Well, oh! Dulcie; see you've got 'em all on," for, you see, she was almost as good as a married lady now, and quite too dignified to encourage any "fanny business," such as used to delight her in her more skittish days. Slopper, too, was so much on his best behaviour that you would never have dreamed that he had bashed policemen, and "done time," and belonged to one of the very hottest pushes not so very long ago. But it was all too good to last. In an unguarded moment Dulcie caught him winking a most immoral wink at a tidy piece of goods behind a lolly stall.

"Sling that game, now, Slop," she said, indignantly.

"Wot game, Dulcie?" he asked, looking rather foolish. "S'elp me, I aint doin' nothin'."

"Oh! don't kid yourself I jest come off a Christmas tree," said she. "I copped you doin' a knock wif that tart. You aint got me under the whip yet, you know, so mark it, and act straight, or I'll sling me 'ook 'ome."

"Blime, you do get yer shirt out over nothin'," he grumbled. "Can't a bloke even 'ave a cook at a bit o' skirt?"

"Not w'en 'e's goin' to splice an' over bit o' stuff," said Dulcie so decidedly that Slopper walked on in amazed silence, and did not attempt to repeat the offence with which she had charged him. But this rebuff, and the awful strain of being so stiffly respectable told on his nerves, and made him irritable and grumpy. So, to relieve his feelings, he turned to a shooting gallery, and, saying to

Dulcie, "See me take this bloke down," paid his money, took up a rifle and proceeded to fire at a target with all the cocksureness of a Dr. Carver. If he could succeed in hitting the bull's-eye and ring a bell he would win half-a-crown, and that was his intention. But this kind of shooting is not quite so easy as it looked, and Sloper paid for a good many shots without scoring. Consequently, when Dulcie, tired of watching such tame sport, pulled him by the arm, and said—

"Come on; you aint no Texas Jack. W'y, all the blokes is larfin' at you," he shook her off roughly, and remarked savagely—

"Go an' chase yerself. I'm goin' to ring that bloomin' bell if I stick 'ere till I rot."

Then, with amusing deliberateness, he took aim and fired, but although the shot went wide of the centre a bell rang, and Sloper turned to the proprietor with triumph in his eyes.

"I knew I'd sock it," he shouted, gleefully. "Gimme an' a dollar, boss, quick and lively."

The boss laughed scornfully.

"That was a bell on another target that you heard," he said, loading up another gun.

"Gard!" said Sloper, "you can't come that game with me. I rung that bally bell right enuff, so parse over the an' bull, or there'll be trouble."

"Git back to yer kennel," put in a third man, "you never rung no bell. W'y, you couldn't hit that target wid a axe," and he also laughed scornfully. But his merriment was short.

"By thunder!" exclaimed the enraged Sloper, "if I can't hit that I can damn easy biff you," and he landed him a sweet and heavy right-hander on the jaw, which dropped him like a log. But they had had to deal with rough customers before at that gallery, and so, without wasting any words, three men collared Sloper, and, with a promptness which left him no time to resist, bundled him outside, and sent him flying against a stall, which his weight brought down with a fearful clatter. Instantly, a very buxom young woman, who was in charge of the stall, ran at him screaming, and cuffed him on the ear with stinging force. Sloper turned around to smash his assailant, but, finding himself confronted by a woman, hesitated.

"Lumme, if you was a bloke I'd stiffen you," he said.

"I'll deal wif 'er," interjected sprightly Dulcie, who had followed him, and, like a little fury, she rushed at the woman and smacked her cheeks with open-handed blows which sounded like pistol shots. Then the stall-keeper closed with Dulcie, and by superior weight brought her heavily to the ground amongst the feet of the crowd which had collected guffawing with immense enjoyment as Dulcie's petticoats became disarranged in the scuffle, and the fact that her red and white stockings were held up by suspenders very plainly evident.

"Nit! Nit!" cried someone in the crowd, "the cops are coming! Do a guy, or you'll get nicked," and Sloper, realising that actions speak louder than words, hauled his little mate from beneath her antagonist, and in a few minutes they had scudded into Little Collins street. Dulcie was winded, but not hurt, and a whisky and lemonade at the Adam and Eve Hotel soon restored her to her self. Sloper was anxious to go back and wreck the shooting gallery, but Dulcie declared most positively that if he attempted any such foolery she would "chuck" him, and he was forced to abandon the project, which was fortunate for him, as he might not have got off so easily a second time.

As Dulcie could not keep away from the attractions of the capital band before alluded to, they re-entered the market at a different point from where the wrecked stall was situated, and resolved to keep clear of rows for the rest of the evening.

"I don't care wot ennyone sees or does," said Dulcie, emphatically, "you don't kid this chicken into any more trouble."

Unluckily, however, it happened that, quite unintentionally, they had entered just beside the lolly stall where stood the tidy piece of goods whom Sloper had winked at, and, there, right before Dulcie's horrified eyes, that tidy party deliberately winked a most immoral wink at Sloper. Holy Saviour! how did the angry blood rush to Dulcie's cheeks!

"Strike me yaller," she exclaimed, "if this aint as strong as Keen's! But, by the Lord, I'll stop 'er funny little ways."

"Wot's up?" asked Sloper, who had failed to notice the eye-assault committed on him. "Thought you was goin' to act the ldy!"

"Damn the ldy!" retorted the furious Dulcie. "D'ye s'ink I'm goin' to stand a flag like that afore me very mince pies? Not me, Cully. You can go an' fry yer face for orl I care. I'm goin' to take it out of that tart, and while Sloper stood amazed, not knowing what the matter was, Dulcie marched up to the stall, and, with arms akimbo and eyes flashing, said—

"Look 'ere, wos you winkin' at my bloke!"

"You're drunk," returned the other, unflinchingly, "and if you don't clear out I'll give you in charge."

Of course this was no way to soothe the savage breast of Dulcie, who, white with passion, leaned over the narrow counter, shook her clenched fist at the lolly girl, and foamed—

"You'll give me in charge, will you? W'y, you frog-eyed, dirty, miserable, two ends of a sav., I'll tear your bloomin' socks or an' stuff 'em down yer froat."

"Will you clear out?" asked the other, placing her hand on a soda siphon.

"Not me!" replied Dulcie, defiantly, "as you can't make use."

"Oh! I'll make you soon enough," said Miss Sweets.

"Not you!" said Dulcie, it aint in yer bloomin' —"; but she never finished her speech, for whizz! fss! s-s-s-quirr! whizz! went the syphon, and in a moment her hat and face were drenched with soda water, and, half blind with the sudden spray, she could only splutter and swear and wipe her eyes, while Slopper once more dragged her away, as the lolly lass pealed forth a hearty volume of derisive laughter.

"Wot did you want to fasten on to that piece for?" asked Slopper, as she was putting herself straight in a quiet corner; "she never done nothin' to you."

"You big, long, lyin' galoot," she burst forth, "don't you try to give me no taffy. Fink I didn't see you two carryin' on, winkin' an' makin' signs, an' mashin' each other," in which, of course, she exaggerated with the customary injustice of her sex when angry.

"Dicke!" he said, "you must be ort your block. That comes of puttin' soft stuff in yer whiskey. You says you'll act the lydy an' keep out of trouble, an' then, blime, if you don't go an' get up a barney with a tart as never sed a bloomin' word to you. A nice sort of a cheese-an'-kisses (missus) you'll make for a married man."

"Well, if you don't like it, you can lump it," she returned viciously. "You carnt kid me she didn't parsu you a wink wicked ernuff to make you leave yer 'ome an' pal in wif 'er."

"I never saw no wink," declared he so emphatically that Dulcie was convinced he spoke the truth.

"Straight wire, Stop.!"

"Straight wire, Dulce."

"Wish you may die if you ain't tellin' the troof, Stop.!"

"Yuss, Dulce, s'eip me."

"Strike yer breff, Stop.!"

"My bloomin' oath, Dulcie," and after this satisfactory declaration Dulcie was so certain that she had been in the wrong that she melted at once, and in their old tone of comradeship they adjourned again to the pub, where Dulcie took her whiskey without "soft stuff" in it this time. Then she had another, "jest," as she put it, "to show there aint no hannahmoity between us, old boy," and a third "to wash the others down," so that by the time they crossed to the market again she was ripe for any sport.

The first person they met was a lanky young girl, Eva Panhandle, who was to be a bridesmaid at Dulcie's wedding. She had also been tackling spirituous liquors to a very noticeable extent, and was accompanied by a smart-looking little fellow whom she introduced as "Jerry Riddle, the bloke wot's teachin' me darncin'." Mr. Riddle had a large bag of tomatoes in his hand, and his pockets bulged out with oranges, while Miss Panhandle was calmly munching a hot saveloy.

"I'll show you some steps," she said, as the band struck up a lively dance, and in a moment her long and bony legs were kicking the air merrily, while her skirts were grabbed up a foot or so from the ground.

"That's a bit before yer time," she cried breathlessly to Dulcie.

"Not much, it aint," was the reply, as Dulcie also hoisted her petticoats, and flashed her fancy stockings about in harmony with the band. And she danced so much better than Panhandle that that lengthy lady lost her lovely temper, and saying, "Well, you can't kick like this," sent her foot flying against Dulcie's once-a-week, or cheek, with force enough to bruise it.

"By funder," cried Dulcie, "if I fought you did that on purpose, I'd—"

"Well, wot'd you do?" broke in Eva.

"Now, don't get barneyin'," interposed Jerry Riddle, advancing between the girls.

"Oh! you go an' chew spiders," Eva retorted, and with another kick sent the tomatoes flying out of his hands. Instantly, Dulcie grabbed one of the largest and juiciest, and with wonderfully accurate aim landed it full squan between Panhandle's eyes. Back came the half-eaten saveloy, hurled by Eva's angry arm, and was received by Slopper on his white shirt front. Again and again Dulcie flung tomatoes at her opponent, sometimes hitting Eva, sometimes hitting Jerry Riddle till at length the latter began to reply with pulpy oranges, some of which Slopper caught and returned with threefold force. Panhandle had also picked up some tomatoes, and soon Dulcie's face, wherever the ripe, red fruit had squashed against it, was covered with juice and pulp and orange pipe almost as badly as was Eva's. You could hear the stuff go ping! against each girl's stays, and 'other parts of their wardrobe, while Jerry and Slopper, after the first attack, simply held back and laughed to bursting point. Finally, Panhandle rushed at Dulcie with wildly-flying arms and such a savage look on her face that Dulcie stepped back in fear, and Eva's foot, catching her an unfair blow—unfair because it was below the belt—she went toppling down backwards in amongst a stall full of dogs, parrots, cockatoos and other live stock, and fell plump on a toy terrier, fastening him out like a beetle mashed under a sledge-hammer. A second later, Eva, being unable to stop in her head-long rush, came tumbling over her, and, what with the cries of the fallen girls, the barking and snarling of the dogs, and the terrific screeching of the cockatoos and parrots, the noise became simply deafening. A retriever, evidently mistaking Panhandle's right calf for a bone—and it really was not much better—set his teeth to it, and made her howl as horribly as some of the curs about her, while Dulcie, on attempting to rise, found that a vixenish bull pup had a good grip on the rear part of her skirts, and a cockatoo on a stand held her blouse in its beak. So that w' Slopper, Jerry Riddle and the stall-

holed Dulcie up, the dog and cockatoo hung on and clung to her closer than ever, the bird eventually being pulled away with a big piece of blouse in his jaw, thus bringing Dulcie's white and plump bosom to the light. Then she jerked so hard from the dog that she literally tore herself from his hold, and as his grip extended to skirt and petticoat, both of which scame away at the waist, Dulcie was left standing in just the very clothes she least desired to be seen in. She had to pay half a crown for a second-hand skirt to go home in, while Jerry Riddle and Stopper made a muster of 5s. to soothe the angry feelings of the dog and bird man, and Panhandle simply had to have a shilling's worth of brandy before she could limp to the tram. And yet, in spite of all these disasters, Dulcie turned up on her wedding day in as good condition as any man could desire.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DULCIE'S MARRIAGE.

According to most fact and all fiction, it is customary with a happy bride to be in a perfect glow of blushes, and a delightful state of tremor, from the moment she rises on her wedding day until she enters the bridal chamber, and nervously awaits the coming of her husband. After that, we have no reliable information on the subject, except that—so the most popular novelists tell us—on the following morning she appears at breakfast rather late, with a new look in her eyes, a particularly languid manner, and a peculiar habit of breaking into hot blushes and looking guiltily at the table cloth whenever her husband glances at, or speaks to, her.

No doubt this timidity of behavior is very natural and proper, and perfectly charming, but Dulcie did not happen to be a timid character, and on her wedding morn neither blushed nor trembled when the thought of how that day would end occurred to her. However, she was in the seventh heaven of rapture over a beautiful dress and some dainty frilly underthings which Rita had presented to her, the said frilly things being of a more choice and enticing description than anything which had previously embraced Dulcie's warm and wholesome limbs.

"Lamma," she exclaimed, as she tried them on, "wot sort of a toff am I goin' to be! Aint it a shame the push can't see me now? It's a pity to put even such a shine dress over 'em, aint it?"

"Yes," responded Rita, "but it can't be helped. You know one half the world doesn't know what lovely things the other half has got on, though they're always trying to find out. Besides, Stopper's admiration should satisfy you."

"Stop! Oh! he'll go clean off 'e bloomin' block when 'e sees 'em," said Dulcie, clasping her buxom bosom in a deliciously tight pair of brand new stays.

"Most men would," rejoined Rita gaily.

Just as Norman tapped at the door and said—"May I come in?" Dulcie giggled and Rita smiled.

"Well," answered the latter, "as Dulcie is just now as you would most like to see her, of course you can't come in."

"But," added the bride, "there aint nothin' to stop you 'avin' a cook froogh the key-hole," which sage advice he promptly acted upon, but has ever since firmly declined to reveal the result of his observations. Perhaps he was shocked—perhaps not.

Finally, when Dulcie was arrayed from top to toe, she was so pleased with her reflection in the mirror that she went dancing around the room in great glee, and breathlessly said:

"By fander! I ought to be in the papers, I ought. I know what I'll do; I'll send a invite to the editor of the 'HAWKLET.' 'E's an orl right sort of a bloke 'e is—Stopper an' 'im 'e 'ad many a tiddy at the Demo—an' 'e'll put a prescription of me clobber in 'is paper, an' p'raps shove me photo in, too. I'll write it now, an' send it down by the kid next do'r," and half an hour later the following card was received at the HAWKLET office:—

Coltingwood
Dear Wuklet—
me and Stopper
are goin' to yid
spliced so 'im-
wises you and
yer whives to the
hitching affair
nohewen togs.
Stopper and me
will be knashed
if you dont cum
I shann
Dulcie
Fisher
tanglefoot

Punctually to the hour of six o'clock the "ori right sort of a bloke" turned up at a little hall which Norman had hired for the ceremony and subsequent festivities, and found himself amongst as merry a company as any man could desire. Dulcie, in her beautiful new dress, received him with hearty enthusiasm, and a bottle of English beer, and in a quiet corner the Hawker moistened his beak and surveyed the lively scene. Eva Panhandle and Rita were the bridesmaids, while Jerry Riddle and Norman looked after the interests of Slopper—as the boxing reports put it—and a very gentlemanly pal of Slopper, known as Oyster Scruggs, was deputed to give the bride away.

But even in the short time before the ceremony, Dulcie and Slopper had to receive so many compliments from friends and drink so many hearty good wishes that they were both rather "bosky," as Jerry Riddle termed it, and as Dulcie approached the little stage where the parson awaited them her feet got mixed up with her unaccustomed long skirts, and, notwithstanding the support of Oyster Scruggs, on whose arm she was, she fell headlong on the stage steps, and presented a free and liberal view of the very things which Norman had had a peep at through the key-hole. Rita promptly picked her up, but so enraged was she that she turned round to Oyster and accused him of having deliberately tripped her.

"Wot's that?" cried Slopper, bustling forward; "downed you, did 'e? Blime, Oyster, a man ought to deal wid you."

"I ain't done nothin'," said Oyster, "an' even if I had, you sint the sort to deal wid me, Slop." Oyster had evidently had a few.

"Garn!" responded Slop; "if it wosn't me weddin' day, I'd smash yer bloomin' jor," and advanced threateningly.

"Now, that's enough," interposed Norman. "Dulcie is wrong, Scruggs did not trip her, so there's no necessity for a row."

"Well, if you say so," said Dulcie, "it's rye-back. I don't want to make no trouble, so shut up Slop, and let's go ahead wif the funeral."

But Dulcie was sulky, Slopper and Oyster looked all sorts of terrible things at each other, Mrs. Tickelton began howling dimly possibly because nobody ever does howl joyfully, Rita and Norman went over to the HAWKER man and beseeched him not to mention the affair in his paper—and yet he did—and things got so mixed up that the parson, who was palpably nervous, began to mumble the marriage service over Eva Panhandle and Jerry Riddle, who happened to be standing near him with their arms around each other. He had hurried as far as "Wilt thou have this man?" when Eva shot up one of her long legs, knocked the book out of his hands and said—

"Dick'n! Wot yer givin' us? I sint takin' no man."

"I—beg your pardon," stammered the

clergyman, picking up the volume. "G— somebody's going to be joined in the holy bonds, I know."

Then Eva attempted to pull Dulcie forward, but she resisted and said—

"Oh! I'm 'ull up of this row. 'Kee's me lovely dress all tore, an' I've got a bash on me knee somefin' orful, an'—well, I'm orf this splicin' job, I am."

"Wot nonsense," said Eva. "Think of the shine 'ome you'll 'ave, with the spankin' new carpets an' chairs an' things."

"Yuss, an' the spankin' new double bed, with a rye-back spring mattress good enough for the Prince o' Wales an' 'is missis," said Jerry.

"Think of all the lovely things you have got on which Slopper won't see unless you marry him," put in Rita, who had again come forward.

Evidently the last suggestion convinced Dulcie, as, saying—"Well, I don't want to do Slop, out of no luxuries," she placed herself by his side before the parson. Mumble, mumble, mumble. "Wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife?"

"My bloomin' oath!"

Mumble, mumble, mumble. "Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?"

"Yuss, Lumme, ain't that what I'm 'ere for?"

More mumble, mumble, mumble, and the deed was did. Dulcie Fisher was transformed into Mrs. Speckletotle, the ring shone on her fourth finger—the marriage service counts the thumb as a finger—and Slopper became master of all that tempting pink flesh, with honorable and legal right to admire all the dainty frilly work from a more convenient point of view than any key-hole afforded.

As the bridal party descended the platform steps, the band, two accordions, a Jew's harp, and a mouth organ, struck up—"Oh! what a difference in the morning," and to this inspiring air Dulcie and Slopper marched to the refreshment table, while Eva Panhandle and Jerry Riddle executed a can-can dance round the nervous parson, which, however, did not shock him sufficiently to prevent him from taking more than one sly glance at Eva's lively legs as they boistered her petticoats high in the air. Afterwards, there was whisky and a waltz, rum and a schottische, beer and step-dancing, until nearly everybody became more or less elevated. Even the comparatively-modest girls became careless of their attitudes, and revelations afforded by crossed legs were numerous and interesting. Just at this juncture, somebody turned out the gas. In a moment screams and titterings were heard from all quarters.

"Oh! someone pinched me calf," shrieked one girl. "None of yer funny bizness now, Jerry," Eva Panhandle protested. "He, Aleck, somebody's a-squeezin' me," cried Mrs. Tickelton to her husband. "You fool! you kissed me bloomin' nose," a shrill voice exclaimed, while the comrade of hearty and un-

longed mugging advertised the fact that no opportunities were being lost.

"Lumme, this is old right, old cock," came through the gloom in Dulcie's well-known tones. "Gimme a couple more fair on the kisser."

Everybody laughed. Then Slopper's harsh voice from another direction thundered out—

"Where the blazes are you, Dulcie? Wot sort of a game are you up to?"

"My God, Slop," Dulcie was heard to gasp, "s'elp me, I fought it was you!"

"Eve, strike a light someone," shouted Slopper, agitatedly. "Quick an' lively, now, soon an' sudden! By gosh! someone'll get 12 stone of stonah over this." The gas was turned on again and lit, and the scene presented was something to recollect for a lifetime. Half the girls were being enthusiastically hugged in all manner of attitudes; two or three were sprawling on the floor; in a corner by the stage Jennie Winkle and Harriet Kipper were kissing each other in mutual enjoyment, and several fellows were at the side-table swigging liquor. But the two most notable discoveries were that the parson—who had stunk his nervousness in long beers—was just whipping his arms from Eva Panhandle's waist, and that Dulcie's face was flushed, her hair awry, and her beautiful dress most conspicuously creased and crumpled.

Slopper was white with fury, and for an instant could find no words to express his sentiments. Then he burst out—

"By God, if you aint strong! Tell me who the bloke was, or I'll parse you one that'll stiffen you!"

Dulcie broke into tears.

"S'elp me, Slop, I did fink it was you," she sobbed. "W'en the bloomin' gas went out I wos art asleep, an' I fought you grabbed 'old of me an' mugged me an' pulled me about lovin' like. Finks I, Slop's a bit sudden; 'e might wait till we get 'ome, but it's cherry-ripe, finks I, cos we're spliced, an' so I wos jest 'opin' they wouldn't turn on the gas for a bit when I heard you sing out from over there. S'elp me, you could 'ave knocked me down wif a fever."

"Aint you got no idea who it wos?" asked Slopper.

"No, I dunno," she replied, "but whoever 'e is 'e 'as got one of me garters, ennyhow."

"Wot! Did you let 'im —"

"Blime," she broke in, "didn't I tell you I fought it wos you on the time? You don't suppose I wos goin' to kick at me own 'usband messin' me about, do you?"

"Well, by the Lord, if I find the bloke that's got that garter, I'll—" began Slop, when the very identical article dropped from Oyster Scragg's pocket to the floor with a jingle made by the silver buckle. Oyster fairly shivered as Slopper strode up to him.

"Fair dinkum, Slop," he started to say; "I —picked it up after the last dance, an'—"

"Whoosh!" that was all Slopper said, but as he said it with his flat Oyster went down heavily, a mere heap of senseless, quivering humanity.

"That'll learn 'im to keep 'is 'and off my missus' togs," remarked Slopper quietly, as a couple of fellows lifted the unconscious Oyster, and fired him into the street. "Now, Dulce, you and me'll smoke 'ome to the roses red (had) an' discuss this matter on our own. But if any of you blokes or tars cares to come down wid us I've got some jug juice there, an' you can 'ave a round wid us."

Most of them fell in with the proposal, and as they were walking down the street Jerry Riddle said to Eva Panhandle—

"Did that bloomin' parson sneak one of yer garters too?"

"Now, don't sling orf at me," she responded. "Me an' Dulce wos in the same fix. I thought you wos teasin' an' ticklin' me, an' I'm blowed if it wasn't the blessed minister. Take my word for it, he's a bloomin' cork drop, 'e is, but 'e didn't get as far as me garters, ennyhow."

Dulcie's new home consisted of a neat suite of rooms over a freshly-decorated fish and poultry shop which Slopper was going to run. Here the "jug-juice" was produced and dispersed in a cosy little parlor, after which Dulcie proudly proposed to show her guests over the premises. Ample admiration was bestowed on each apartment as it was visited, and at last Dulcie said, "Now for me bedroom. But where's Eva and Jerry? Eva sed she wos dyin' to see me new double bed, an' I'm blowed if she aint gone."

"Oh! they disappeared some time ago," said someone. "I saw 'em on the stairs 'avin a spoon, but they aint been seen since."

"Well, never mind; come on," said Dulcie, and led the way. But on arriving at the door, to her surprise, she found it locked. She knocked, and a scuffle was heard from inside.

"Who's there?" shouted Slopper.

"It's 'e orright, Slop," said the voice of Jerry, and in a moment the door was opened and that individual presented himself in a state of anything but sobriety.

"Wot the 'ell are you doin' 'ere?" asked Slopper.

"Well," hiccupped Jerry, "you shere me an' Eva 'ad drop too much, an' we wos goin' to get down shtairs (hic) an' go 'ome t'hen we atumbled (hic) into this room an' wos just tryin' (hic) to find door again when (hic) —beg pardon—w'en you comesh up."

"Funny fink the Rory O'More wos for red," said Dulcie.

"Yesh, wosn't it?" said Jerry, coolly. "Thash worst of these noo doors, they lock 'emselves. Come on, Eva, Dulcie wants show you 'er noo bed."

"If she 'asn't seen it already she's got no chance," said Dulcie, testily. "Out you go, the pair of you," and they had to go, while the

the marriage as though Jerry and Eva had provided them with an exceptionally good joke, and then they went too.

And now, dear readers, out you all must go. Having brought you to the very threshold of the bride and bridegroom's chamber, you cannot expect to be taken any farther. We will leave Dulcie and Slopper to meditate on the pleasures of matrimony, the many adventures they have encountered since our first acquaintance with them, and the prospects of a prosperous future, with a few little Dulcies and Slopers to wear their mother's old petticoats and their father's old trowsers in the good old time to come. The marriage was not so very long ago, but already Dulcie dandles a small, red-headed edition of her husband, while any evening

you happen to drop in at the shop—where you'll find a plate of fried fish and chips equalled by none—you will see both Dulcie and Slopper living in the happiness of being "cherry ripe" with each other, and the proud parents of a "rye-buck kinchin," rather too carrotty, it is true, but the very image of his father—which is always a matter for congratulation.

As to Rita, dear, beautiful, womanly Rita, the writer paid her and Norman a visit at their pretty home at St. Kilda only a couple of weeks ago, and was assured, with a tender and bewitching smile, that since the recent arrival of a perfect love of a golden-haired baby girl, Rita has had neither time nor inclination to recall her past experiences of so many scenes of Gay Melbourne.

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