Fact'ry 'Ands

Dyson, Edward (1865-1931)

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Fact'ry 'Ands

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Acknowledgment.

The bulk of the matter contained in this volume was first published in the pages of the *Bulletin*, Sydney. “The Man-Eater” is not new to readers of the *Kalgoorlie Sun*, Westralia.
A Foreword.

WHAT may be called the machinery of this book is the outcome of experience in one establishment; the characters and the incidents are gathered from a wide field. Workers in the busy top flat I have described, who may perhaps recognise scenes, situations, and materials, will search in vain for familiar lineaments in these pages. From the smallest prim office boy in the stationery warehouse below to the most frivolous “donah” deftly manufacturing fruit bags in the higher flights, master and man, all were too decorous for my needs. The people here presented are a choice selection from a large circle of acquaintances earning honourable if humble subsistence in jam, pickle, lollie, and biscuit factories, in tobacco factories, box factories, shirt factories, rope works, and paper mills, and I claim for them at least that they are true types of a pronounced Australian class not previously exploited for the purposes of the maker of popular fiction. Feathers, Benno, Goudy, Odgson, Fuzzy Ellis, Billy the Boy, and many others capering through my book spring from germs of reality, but I have used my originals as plastic raw material, remoulding them at my own sweet will, robbing them of semblance, but never quite squeezing vitality out of them in the process, I hope.

There is an aristocracy amongst factory hands as in almost every walk of life. The superior young ladies who go to business in first class establishments, and provoke the wondering admiration of discerning foreign visitors by their accomplishments, their dainty dress, and the modesty of their deportment, I know only by sight, the raffish hoydens who stream from some smoky, staring building in a side street, raking up unstable garments, brandishing battered crib baskets, and squealing compliments in the dialect are my good familiar people. They scatter like bees from the hive, running for a lift on homeward bound lorries, kicking vagabond limbs from the tail of truck or dray, scampering in little bands, voluble, raucous, gesticulatory, shouting at each other abuse without anger and threats without venom. Termagants at sixteen, it is as well not to provoke them to eloquence if you have the prejudice of a “higher order,” and object to figuring as the object of a public demonstration. Respectability snorts at them like a blood horse, and then they answer with derision in language that compels madam to stop her ears in self defence. Then madam's beautiful toque may suffer. It is all very dreadful, but there are faults on both sides, and you cannot have class distinctions without these little differences.

The males come forth later, more soberly; they do not scamper, they are sparing of effort, if there is anything to say it can be as well said leaning against a post or a building. This is not laziness, they will have done a good day's work, in most cases better than their masters are willing to believe, but have a strong intuitive appreciation of the futility of waste force. Their parting words may sound impertinent to you, genteel reader, but try to remember that the terms that shock you have been refined by usage. Practice makes perfect even in philology. They have a respect for beer that is not always justified by results, and a disrespect for
their “superiors” that manifests itself in a grim antipathy to policemen. Larrikins they might have been called had not that useful word been perverted by indiscriminate use to designate either the little knot of sandcarters beguiling a spare half hour with a harmless game of two-up behind the stable, or a brace of garroters putting a strangle hold on an affluent-looking gentleman in an unlit city street.

You may find my factory hands, decked in their best, patrolling the chief thoroughfares of the workingman's suburbs on fine Saturday nights, the girls in twos and threes, the boys in small parties, the “donahs” grimacing and giggling, the lads “wording 'em” with laboured jocularities peculiar to the class. There are conventions even here, but they do not forbid the young lady striking up an acquaintance with the young gentleman who has introduced himself with a few cant witticisms, which, despite their seeming irrelevance, are compliments of a kind, and imply a dawning sentiment of tenderness in the bosom of the humourist. It is perhaps as well to say here for the benefit of the genteel reader that the result of these meetings is in most cases a trifle of philandering on the part of a lad whose rakish airs may mask a bashful spirit, and a “donah” in whom a good deal of useful knowledge is not incompatible with a very serviceable sort of innocence.

E. D.
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Fact'ry 'Ands
Chapter I. Benno's Little Boshter.

IT was Monday morning. Benno loitered at the packer's bench. The clerk was possessed with a great unrest, and his high stool could not hold him today.

“She's a little boshter!” he said vehemently. “Y' orter seen 'er.”

“Fair or dark?” asked Feathers, with the intention of showing a friendly interest in the matter. This was the fifth time Benno had declaimed on the “boshter” qualities of the unknown, and fraternal sympathy could not be longer deferred with decency. Feathers delayed the completion of a knot, and bit off a morsel of tobacco. He solaced business hours with an occasional quid, smoking on the premises being strictly prohibited by order of the Czar below.

“Fair,” replied Benno, with rapture, “with bloo eyes, 'n' a mouth like a bloomin' baby. Never saw anythin' like it. She's the show biscuit, take it from the man in the business —the top apple, th' 'ole blessed cake-walk, 'n' straight ez a church. Yeh can see it stickin' out. Bin well brought up, yeh know—bit shy, 'n' romantic, 'n' all that.”

“This gentle little maid of to-day,” sang Goudy, the town traveller, to himself, absently, as he reached for 28 of sixes.

“Ah-h-h, go'n 'ave a scratch!” retorted the clerk, bitterly. The town traveller was a Scot, but the insult had no sting for him; he went on cheerfully sorting out his order. “Some men,” said Benno, with cold despair, “ain't got no more fine feelin' than a hotel cat.”

“When she left the village she was shy,” hummed the town traveller, changing his tune.

“It 'appened dead simple,” Benno continued, turning a contemptuous shoulder on Goudy. “Me 'n' Billy King was standin' on the usual corner, Satedee night, watchin' the little toms trippin' it, 'n' sortin' out samples, y' know; when 'long she comes with 'er cobber, 'n' blessed iv she don't chance an eye on me noble—jest a little frightened sort iv look, but, s'elp me, I was fitted.”

Goudy put his forefinger to his lip, and dropped a lopsided curtsey. “Oh, sir, me father's a clergyman,” he simpered, “and I used to play the organ once.”

“Her cobber seemed t' be quite took with Billy's lip whisker,” said Benno, his air and attitude insinuating that the town traveller was offensively dead. “ 'n' yeh know what Billy is. ‘I'll word 'em when they pass again,’ he says, 'n' struth he done it. Billy's the pure glassey. ‘Iv course you know my friend, Percy Chirnside, Miss Fortesque?’ ses he t' the fair
one, havin' took over th' other. She blushed, 'n' smiled, 'n' said somethin'
about not havin' the pleasure, 'n' in two ticks we was lifelong cobbers, me
'n' 'er. 'Course, I sees 'er 'ome, 'n' we parts at the gate. 'Er father, bein' 'ead
salesman at Gum 'n' Tumbledon's, is a bit stiff on ettiket 'n' all that. But she
meets me Sund'y afternoon. Feathers, there was nothin' on the grass t' touch
'er. She's a little boshter—a BOSHTER! 'n' I'm 'er one 'n' only.”

Feathers winked hard at Goudy, keeping a smooth and sympathetic cheek
to Benno.

“'Minds me iv a little lady I carried lollies to seven years ago,” Feathers
said, softly. “She had feathery, flaxen 'air, 'n' a neye like the grace iv
'Eaven, 'n' she walked about with 'em turned up t' 'allelujah, 'n' a nym-book
pressed to 'er 'eart. She died lingerin' iv some kind iv saintly disease, 'n' I've
never bin the same man since.”

Here Goudy wiped his own eye, and passed the handkerchief to Feathers,
and the packer mopped up a covert tear.

“I took the teetotal, 'n' learned some hymns, 'n' cried on her grave every
fine Sund'y afternoon for a week 'r more, 'n' cot lumbago through it, 'n'
passed away in a little white shimmy 'n' a pale-blue light, callin' her name
in a low, sweet voice.”

Feathers broke down, and Goudy, despite his 50 dishonourable years,
uttered a desolate cry, and besought the packer to come up some evening,
and tell that beautiful story to his poor old bedridden mother.

“Pigs to you!” said Benno, with incredible scorn—“the pair iv yeh,” and
he returned sulkily to his desk.

This was a strange development in Benno the cynic—Benno who had
been in the swarming factory from his boyhood, and who on his high stool
had looked down upon a world of women, and learnt the sex off like a
nursery rhyme. True, his attitude towards girls had always been indulgent,
but it was the indulgence of a superior being.

At 21 one is no longer deceived by women, but it does not follow that
Benno took no delight in the human girl. It is pleasant to be appreciated by
her; it is pleasant to give her the rapture one's kindly notice may confer; so
that Benno dressed with many precautions and great difficulty on Saturday
evenings, and loved to walk with a young gentleman friend of kindred
tastes where the girls were thickest in the favourite city street; and, if a fair
percentage looked at him with dawning interest as he passed, he was
happy. Spats' Beauties, as a rule, were ignored, but he did not disdain to
escort the better-dressed pasters in the great mashing march along the
crowded pave. He loved to be seen with women—it helped his reputation
as a young devil.

A Panama hat, a high, white, turn-over collar, a small, gay, mechanical
tie, a dark suit, carefully creased to preserve a fictitious air of newness, tan boots, a clean shave, and a cigarette, all went to the making of Benno. For the rest, he had a pimply, thin, somewhat foxy face, pale with the pallor that belonged to Spats' factory, and his right ear drooped like a wilted lily. His expression was one of unnatural precocity, his attitude of mind that of a small and early humourist. He was artificially funny at the expense of all things on earth below and in the heavens above; his conversation was supposed to be delightfully light and sparkling, and consisted mainly of a large collection of street gags and fanciful phrases.

Sometimes the clerk spent 6d. or 9d., perhaps even 1s., on drinks, which expenditure carried with it the splendid privilege of extending an airy patronage to the barmaid; but Benno did not like drink, and the fine moment came in the gay roll forth from the bar, with a flourish of handkerchiefs and a fusillade of badinage. That, too, was necessary to the part of the young devil. Really, when “on his own,” Benno had no vices, and was of a frugal mind; his Savings Bank pass-book was tattered and limp, and stained with long service.

And now the cynical and worldly-wise Mr. Ben Dickson was raving over the perfections of a mere girl with yellow hair and the mouth of a baby, despite the fact that he had seen golden hair come and go on black-browed Beauties times and again, and in defiance of his knowledge of the guile that lurks behind little red lips. His yearning for a confidant drove him back to the packer's bench within an hour. He proudly displayed a coloured photograph in a rolled-gold locket.

“Present from 'er,” he said, proudly. “Ain't she the pick iv the peaches? 'N' she never took up with a lad before.”

“Neat enough bit iv skirt,” said Feathers, critically. “Saucy eye, that.”

“Nothin' like it,” replied Benno, with spirit. “She's ez fresh ez eggs. She don't know A.B.—ab.”

“'N' 'er 'air ez yaller ez all that?”

“It's pure gold.”

“All ain't gold what glitters, Benno, my boy. Does it wear well?”

“Ask me! But iv course you can't be expected t' have no idea iv the points iv a lady in your walk iv life,” replied Dickson, with the superior air of a clerk. “This is somethin' a cut above you, for a cert.”

Feathers beat his parcel square, threw it on the heap, and spread another sheet of paper. “I know I ain't been movin' much in 'igh society lately,” he said, accepting the rebuff; “'n' I may be wrong in thinkin' your tom was tryin' t' mash the man shootin' off the camera, but I recollec' a bloke sayin' at this 'ere bench, Chewsdee last, that he wouldn't trust no girl with a giggle in her eye.”
“But she ain't got a giggle, I tell yeh.”

“'N' he also said that most iv these golden-'aired pieces was not genuine, just dipped.”

“Jimmy Jee! She's no fact'ry rat. Do 'ave a bit iv common.”

Ellis, the foreman, stopped beside the young men, mumbling plaintively, hurt by the disregard of his authority shown in their open loafing. Benno lingered only a minute longer, so that the girls might get no false impression in respect to Ellis's influence over him.

In the course of the week Benno's infatuation increased alarmingly. The clerk, hitherto so methodical, became the victim of a devil of uneasiness. He was up and down his high stool all day long, like a hungry ape, and he mooned about the room, seeking sympathy from the Beauties. He even confided in Miss Kruse, the fat, elderly forewoman, and gushed rapturously and at great length, regardless of the stupid depression that clung in the flabby folds of her Dutch face.

He cornered Ellis himself behind the guillotines, and poured out his whole soul to him, giving minute descriptions of Minetta Bird's perfections of character, appearance, dress, and manner. Minetta Bird was his darling's name. “Min,” he called her, as his confessions grew more confidential. Before a fortnight had passed he had confided in every girl on the flat; always in a low, earnest voice, presumably with the impression that the nature of his communications was unsuspected by the rest; whereas by this time Benno's “boshter” had become the choice jibe of the factory, the printing flat, and the warehouse below.

“I'm just crazy gone on 'er,” he told Kitty Coudray; “'n' she deserves it. Innocent!—innocent!”—Benno was simply confounded in the contemplation of Min's infantile unworldliness, and words failed him.

“Beautiful soft golden ‘air,” murmured an ecstatic voice from the folding board.

“Mouth like a bloomin' babby,” cried the ex-professional fat girl.

“'N' she didn't know it was loaded,” interjected a third voice, somewhat irrelevantly, it would seem.

And then came a chorus like a chant from the four corners of the flat.

“Oh, she's a little boshter!” The expression was repeated three times, with increasing intensity. This had been adopted as a plan of defence. It threatened to put an end to Benno's confessions, but the clerk's devotion dulled his sensibilities and subjugated even his vanity.

It was a good time for the printer's devil. Billy the Boy had some talent as a caricaturist, and much stolen leisure; he littered the factory with ribald illustrations of Benno's courtship, in which Min was represented with a wicked leer and a sliding chin, and giving expression to vulgar sentiments
encased in small balloons. He scattered fictitious love-notes, addressed to Benno and signed “The Boshter,” all of which represented Min as a designing creature of the yellowest dye, and he had a most irritating way of bobbing up above the stair rail at odd moments, and ejaculating amazedly: “N' her 'air's ez good ez gold.” Mottos casting ridicule on the innocence and prettiness of Miss Bird were scribbled on the white-washed walls, and strangers visiting the flat were beset with questions respecting the character, habits, and appearance of Benno's boshter.

The humor of the town traveller was particularly offensive. He had a deep sense of gravity, and his method of attack was to address indirect conversations to the furthest ends of the flat. His theme was always the infantile virtues of Min. He had a fresh story every morning, each more preposterous than the other, and his repertoire of music-hall ditties—the heroines of which were guileful creatures who hid their vicious tendencies under golden hair and an ingenuous girlishness—was practically inexhaustible.

But Benno's mental obfuscation pulled him through. His infatuation survived all attacks, and one morning he came in fatuously radiant.

“She—she's promised t' be my wife, ole man,” he gasped, grasping the packer's hand, and shaking it with great heartiness.

Feathers stood it manfully. “Don't surprise yeh much, does it?” he said. “Thought yeh was prepared for the worst.”

“You don't understand 'er, Mills. She's a hangel—a bloomin' hangel—that's what she is,” said Dickson, fervently.

“Well, she's goin' cheap,” answered the packer.

Benno was beyond insult and above anger. He went through the factory bubbling. He bubbled all day. He even forgave Goudy everything, and bubbled to him.

“She's goin' t' marry me, Scotty,” he said confidentially.

“Well, you brought it on yourself!” answered the town traveller, washing his hands of the whole business.

Benno told everybody in the place, bar Spats himself, and for one portentous moment the flat thought he was even going to confide in the boss; but the clerk recollected himself in time, and pulled up short. For a year after, the Beauties wondered what would have happened had Benno actually babbled his rapture to the master. The majority favored the opinion that Spats would have burst on the spot.

After this, Dickson's raving took a new form; it was now all of the little cottage and the furnishing. He was leaving everything to Min, excepting, of course, the unimportant part of financing the business; that was his pleasant duty.
“Yeh know, Feathers, she's no bally nark; a bloke kin trust 'er,” he said. “'N' she's got taste, mind yeh. 'Er father was a winder-dresser once. She took a pretty little cottage, 'n' she's furnishin' it good 'n' fine. I'm outer all that; don't even know where the crib is. When all's finished, we rings up the parson, do the trick, all rights reserved, 'n' I sails inter me little 'ome, all Sir Garney oh. That's 'er idea. Just the thing, eh, what? Oh, yeh can't push 'er down. She's a boshter!”

The happy date arrived. Benno was allowed two days off on full pay to celebrate the event. Spats liked his hands to marry; it made them submissive, he thought; hence the liberality. Benno returned on the third day, and the Beauties greeted him with a yell as he mounted the stairs. The yell died away when Dickson came fully into view. Benno the jaunty was no more; a grey-faced, pinched, hollow-eyed, broken wretch confronted them. The clerk almost staggered to the packer's bench, and, leaning upon it, passed a nervous hand over his eyes. There was an abject piteousness in his face, his lips trembled, a tear rolled down his cheek.

“I bin done, Feathers,” he blurted. “She—she's a spieler.” Benno's head dropped, he cried before them all, sobbing without shame.

“What, ain't yeh married, then?” asked Feathers.

Benno shook his head. “No,” he said; “she never turned up. I 'unted fer the 'ouse yestedee 'n' the day before. I —I found it. It was furnished beautiful.” Benno's feelings overcame him again.

“'N' the girl?” prompted Feathers, eagerly.

“She'd—she'd married another feller, 'n' he was livin' in my 'ouse!”

Goudy let fall the parcel he had taken up when Benno entered. His face was set hard, like that of a stone man. He walked straight to the stairs, head erect, and went down past each flat right into the cellar, and at the far end, in the darkness, among the bales, he sat down and exploded, and the echoes of his mad subterranean laughter came faintly up to the factory. But there was no laughing there. Benno was weeping at his desk, and the Beauties were storming in throes of indignation righteous and profound. Hours later the factory generously offered to “deal with” Min, but Benno, with a touch of his old self, said that it didn't matter; he had consulted his solicitor.
Chapter II. A Question of Propriety.

THERE was something amiss; the crowded factory room was quick with the sense of it. A stranger coming up the stairs might have been visited with a consciousness of the fact that the spirit of mischief was stirring on the top flat. Spats' Beauties, girls of a kind commonly given to rebellious and frivolous practices, had preserved for over an hour the decorum of a superior young ladies' seminary under a Presbyterian regime.

The foreman clawed his fuzzy hair, and showed a cowering back. The quiet was ominous. Nothing was heard but the whir and whiz of the machines, the fluttering of busy hands in paper, and a sibilant whispering peculiarly viperish. Spats' girls did not usually whisper; their ordinary conversation was shrill and over-bearing, and there were at least eighty of them, young and old. Factory girls, like those of the ballet, remain “girls” in defiance of time and the ravages thereof.

“Wha' 's wrong, Feathers?” Billy the Boy, the juvenile rouseabout from the printers' flat, who had crept up the stairs, thrust an inky stub of a nose through the battens, and cocked an anxious eye.

“Get t' 'ell outer this!” said the packer, throwing a ball of twine. The day was oppressive, and the packer's attempt to steal out for a pint of consolation had been stalled off at the lift door by the boss, and he was feeling wronged and vindictive.

Billy whipped down on a banister at the peril of his neck, and called softly upwards:

“Oh, yer love me, Carrie, dontcher, spite o' me boil?”

The tone had a tender pathos touched with passion. It stirred the packer to black wrath. Leaning over the open space by the stairs, he promised Billy death with barbaric effects. Feathers was liable to boils, and was also a man of a philandering temperament. The printer's devils were in the habit of deliberately hearing things in the cellar among the bales when the girls were being let out after over-time.

Billy was deeply moved; he smeared ink on the rope with which Feathers swung parcels to the shop flat, and resumed the ordinary evasion of his duties as a devil.

The majority of the girls worked at square boards on trestles. There was a heap of paste in the centre of each board, and the piece-workers stood to their task, pasting and folding at the terraced stacks of stationery with the dexterity of machines, bare-armed, bare-necked, in slovenly gowns caked with dirt-colored dough, their tousled hair powdered with the fibre of the paper. One girl worked alone. There was a drift from her neighbourhood,
but sidelong glances assailed her with accusations; the tittering that occasionally broke out was all for her ears, and it was suppressed with a malicious understanding that she would recognise the suppression to be a measure of consideration extended to a transgressor.

The creature apart was a sallow, freckled girl, with pale hair and sharp features. She was fully conscious of what was going on—had felt some symptoms of it working for weeks, but to-day the devilment was pointed and deliberate. The hot oppression of the top flat had wrought upon the Beauties, and Annie Mack was sacrificed to the necessity for diversion. From a purely moral point of view the factory had no particular qualms about Miss Mack's weaknesses.

There was a sullen stupidity in Annie's face; she raced her work; her hands flashed along the automatic movements of a set task; the perspiration ran down her long neck. This energetic action was the only relief, and the girl's consolation would come in a fat packet on Saturday, she being a piece-worker.

Benno loitered at the packer's bench for a word. Our Mr. Dickson, it must not be forgotten, was a superior creature—he reigned on a high stool at a desk in a top corner near the cutters, piling figures on figures all day long. He came at nine, after the others, and left at half-past five, before the others, and had become shockingly lop-eared as a result of his practice of carrying a long pen behind his ear to assert his dignity. Benno as a clerk should have held status with the young gentlemen down in the warehouse if people had their rights.

"They're settin' her nibs t'-day," said Benno, with a sportsman's keenness, a sidewise convulsion of his features indicating Annie.

Feathers finished a knot with some deliberation.

"Dunno what they're gettin' at," he said. His air was that of a man with a mild grievance.

"G'out, man! mean t' say yeh ain't took a tumble?" Benno had his own opinion of such mental denseness.

"No, iv you?"

"Course—weeks ago. Ain't yeh got eyes in yer 'ead?"

A harsh voice barked behind them. Benno fled to his high stool. Feathers banged his ream industriously, and Odgson, the Gov'ner, otherwise Spats, snarled and glowered for a few minutes, like an angry dog. Spats was rarely articulate. After scrutinising his Beauties under the rim of his belltopper, overlooking the room in the attitude of an avenging Fate, the Gov'ner drifted down stairs again. He had been disturbed in his den below by the ominous silence aloft.

Billy the Boy reappeared under the banister, grinning maliciously.
“Copped out that trip, didn't yeh? Up to yeh, too, fer a dead nark.” The 
“office” should have come from Billy the Boy. Feathers took him on the 
nose with a treacherous jerk of the twine ball, and the devil retreated to the 
first landing, whence he sent up shrill whisperings to remind the packer of 
his lowly birth, and his many defects of character and education. “Anyhow, 
thank Gawd, 'twasn't my old mother stole the boots!” said Billy.

The hush imposed by the great man's presence passed, the voices hissed 
again; and Annie bent to her task. Her face was to her enemies. She 
increased her pace. She had listened so long, and at such a strain that now 
the whole room buzzed in her head like a big bee.

Miss Kruse, the ever depressed elderly maiden, nominally forewoman, 
felt the electrical condition of the atmosphere, and, knowing her 
helplessness in the face of a combination of the bigger girls, devoted 
she herself to the kids at the folding-boards, casting sulky, underhand glances 
at the others, and wearing the piteous expression of an ill-used woman on 
her flat face. Ellis, boss of the flat, who had retired behind his guillotines, 
shot his head over the machines every now and again, and nervously 
surveyed the room. Being mortally afraid of the girls, anything like a 
display of insubordination threw the lathy man into a state of imbecile 
distress.

The long day wore on to half-past four, and there was no outbreak. Ellis 
prayed for 6 o'clock. With marvellous cunning he had approached Miss 
Mack, hinting at illness, and mildly advising bed and a brand of pills much 
appreciated in the factory. Diplomacy was Fuzzy's strong point. 

“Set a trap in yer 'at, you've got rats!” responded the young lady, bitterly, 
and though the foreman revolved for a few minutes agitatedly 
expostulating, after that she treated him as something extinct.

Work had been Annie's safety-valve. While running at high pressure she 
could contain herself, but now came a break. Her paste was used up, and to 
get more she must turn her back to the foe and pass down a long flat to the 
corner where the coppers were. She went with resolution. Simultaneously 
with her disappearance, there was a burst of uproar in the factory, loud 
conversation, calls, badinage, and laughter; the flat roared with its 
characteristic babel.

The moment Annie reappeared the racket sank to a sibilant murmuring 
once more. The girl walked erect, with tight drawn lips and fiery eyes, 
carrying the dipper of steaming paste in her hand. She came to the packer's 
bench, where Benno stood talking business.

“Fifty-six iv nine pound brown,” said Feathers.

Annie saw the heads together, and suddenly her restraint collapsed. She 
turned upon the men, her whole person animate with passion.
“You're a lyin' 'ound!” she yelled.
Feathers got the whole dipper of hot paste full in his face. The stuff half choked him; it clung in his hair, it rolled down his neck, it deluged him. He slid down into a pool of it, and blinked up at his assailant in pitiable amazement, a ludicrous object smoking on the floor, no longer a man, but a clammy mass.

“An' I never said a word!” he protested weakly. “S'elp me, I never said a word!”

But Annie Mack was otherwise engaged. She flamed upon the factory. Rage possessed her. She was crammed with hatred, and it flew from her in language that shot terror into her enemies.

“I leave it t' Benno, there. Now, come, what 'd I say?” cried Feathers, virtuously pathetic.

“Flamin', blazin' liars!” cried Annie. “You tork about me—you—you! You orter! A pack o' rats. What're yer gotter say 'bout me? Spit it out!” She stood with up lifted hands and screamed at them, and then her eye picked out an individual. “You, Kitty Conroy, call me things, will yeh?”

She dashed at Kitty, and fastened on her like a fury, all claws. “Fight me, yeh waster!” she shrieked, tearing at the other's hair.

Kitty fought back with spirit. Crash went her board and on it rolled the combatants, fighting like tykes amongst the paste and the papers. They clawed, and tore, and punched, screaming incessantly, turning over and over in the mess. Annie arose from the fray half-blinded, pasted from head to foot, and garnished with fruit-bags. She rushed into the thick of her enemies. The girls screamed, and broke before her in terror, and havoc followed in her wake. She tore down the tables, she filled the air with paste and myriads of envelopes, storms of stationery broke out whenever she paused a moment, and the unhappy girl that fell into her hands was reft of hair and draperies, and blackened with bruises. The distracted foreman danced on the outskirts of the riot, shedding real tears, and appealing in heart-rending accents alternately to Annie and to high heaven.

“Miss Mack! Miss Mack, for pity's sake!” He became valiant in his great perturbation, and threw himself in Annie's way.

Snatching up a small tub of paste, she smashed it over the foreman's head, leaving him with a necklace of hoops, and in a smother of his own composition. In that awful moment, Ellis bitterly regretted his attempts to improve the consistency of good flour paste with common glue.

Sis Twentyman was the next victim, but she escaped, leaving a wisp of hair in Annie's hands, and took refuge behind her table, and Miss Mack chased her round it five times.

“I'll give yeh whisperin' an' tisperin',” cried Annie. “I'll tear the eyes out
of yer monkey face, you pig's sister. What 're you, to go whisperin' about people? What 're you, more'n a half Chow?” She paused for breath, and a fierce resolution shone in her eyes. “I'll do yeh, though! I'll do yeh!”

Annie darted to the dressing-room, and presently reappeared, brandishing something with the triumph of a scalp-hunting savage. It was Sis Twentyman's new hat she held aloft—the beautiful confection Sis had introduced only that morning—the most precious thing in all the world. “See,” cried Annie—“See, you dirty stop-out!” She placed the hat on the floor and danced wildly amongst the feathers.

Sis uttered a yell of mortal agony, and, heedless of danger, dashed in to the rescue; but with her foot still upon the crown, Annie tore the hat to fragments, and flung them in Sis's face, and the two girls fastened on each other after the manner of cats.

A number of the printers had come to Benno's assistance by this time. They parted the combatants, and Annie relapsed into hysterics. She was carried to the dressing-room, and Fuzzy followed after with the Gov'ner, who had just arrived on the scene, snapping orders.

A quarter of an hour later Annie Mack came forth, clothed in her right mind, and stole down the stairs. It was understood that she had been discharged, and her foes were appeased, but order was not restored in the factory that day, nor the next.

One afternoon, some nine weeks later, Annie re-visited the top flat, proudly carrying a long-coated baby about three weeks of age. Annie was gaily dressed, and the infant's gown was worked to a point of extravagance. The girl smiled cheerfully on all, just as if nothing had happened, sailing through the room, a vision of happiness. She bore no malice for the mischief she had wrought. Annie submitted her baby to Miss Kruse's approval with beaming confidence. Curiosity overcame the others, and they gathered round to inspect and applaud.

“Ain't he a bute?” said Annie.
“A little love!” said Kitty Conroy.
“The darlin'!” gasped Bell Oliver.

The girls flattered and gushed. Sis Twentyman kissed the baby.
“Course you know I'm married?” said Annie.
“Go on!” cried Bell. “Was that lately?”
“Bless yeh, no!” answered Annie—“a week ago!”
Chapter III. A Little Love Affair.

FEATHERS, the packer, owed his name to a strange set of side-whiskers he once grew. Over these the feathery paper-dust collected till they looked like the wings of an adolescent gosling. He soon wearied of the nick-name, and shaved off his fluff, thinking the insult would pass with it. He was mistaken. The sobriquet of the foreman, Fuzzy Ellis, had a similar origin. His dead-looking, reddish hair was as fine as tow; it was always distracted, and in it the fibrous dust gathered so thickly that every jerk of his head produced a miniature dust storm.

Fuzzy was a queer bird. Besides being long and lank, he had a prematurely withered appearance. The white apron that enveloped him gave him something of the aspect of a wilted candle. His eye had a hunted look that corresponded with the distraction of his hair; his pinched face might have been put on his bones with a palette-knife and had the sallow livery of Spats' factory. It was always moist, as with trepidation, and from it oozed driblets of whiskers. He was the dustiest man in the world, and gaunt with everlasting worry.

Fuzzy could not be imagined apart from the factory. He was first to come in the morning, last to leave at night. Nobody in the firm recollected his beginning. It was vaguely surmised that he was born in the factory and nourished on its insidious dust and the paste and gum that over-ran the place and caked on everything. He was regarded as a fixture; that he had friends or relations was never dreamed of—he was hardly credited with a soul.

So rooted was this conception of Fuzzy as an inseparable adjunct of the factory, that Feathers, having proof to the contrary, went to Benno, the clerk, one Monday morning, feeling like a man about to endanger a hard-earned reputation.

"Who jer think I seen at the Zoo yes-dee afternoon?" he said.
"Give it up," answered Benno, ruling a line with insolent elaboration.
"Fuzzy!" said the packer.

Benno revolved on his high stool and faced his friend. "Knock it off, George Henry," he said, appealingly. "You'd be all right iv it was n't for the drink. Knock it off, there's a good feller. You warn't at no Zoo, yeh know.' Then, with a change of tone, he continued: "D' yeh mean t' say yeh saw Fuzzy out on his own—prowlin' round in th' open like a 'uman bein'?"

Feathers assured him of it on his honor as a man and his faith as a Christian. "S'elp me cat! I did," he said.

Benno surveyed the foreman with a new interest. "After all, I s'pose the
beggar must be somewhere when we're shut down,” he said thoughtfully.

Feathers carried the story to the girls, but it seemed probable to them that he was lying, particularly as Sarah Eddie had been to the Zoo on Sunday and had seen nothing of the foreman there. And yet the tale was true. Moreover, Fuzzy, having heard Miss Eddie declare her intention of visiting the Zoological Gardens, had gone there with the deliberate idea of exhibiting himself to that young lady in his Sunday clothes, but had been too timid to carry out his purpose. In the marvellous workings of Providence it was allotted to Sarah Eddie's destiny to awaken a tender passion in the dusty heart of Fuzzy Ellis.

Sarah was a large, fair young woman of thirty, stoutly framed, with a mouth extended beyond all reason and human necessity, good teeth, and a gummy smile. She had been in the factory some months, and Fuzzy's love was the mysterious and unhallowed growth of a moment. Sarah, with the mercenary object of securing the most profitable work, had beguiled him with her Ethiopian grin and glances of matured coyness, and when the foreman's hand pressed hers, as he placed the work on her board, she giggled affectedly.

“Oh, Mr. Ellis, you are a one!” she said.

In the words of Benno the wise, “It took like a vaccination.” Fuzzy came up the room with a stunned look in his eyes, and the expression of a man who had committed himself irretrievably. He offered no more advances for some days, and then, after hovering about Miss Eddie's board a dozen times during the morning, he made a rally, and, placing a small packet on the table beside her paste, fled to cover behind his cutting-machines, tripping over the truck and barking his shins by the way.

The packet contained three penn'orth of cheap jujubes.

During the afternoon the hands saw Fuzzy's small sheep-like head shoot up above his machines on a stalk of neck, transfixed. Fuzzy's eyes were turned upon Sarah with a tender and absorbed expression. Heaven knows what blissful emotions were stirring softly in his bony breast, but he was “dead to the world.” Girls at the top benches discovered him, and “passed the office” along. The intelligence drifted down the flat; work was suspended; silence fell upon the factory. The girls stared at Fuzzy, and Fuzzy gloated upon the object of his affection with a fatuous ardor. He suggested an amorous adjutant-bird. A titter ran through the factory. It swelled to a yell of laughter; and Ellis, recalled to a sense of his position, ducked, spun the guillotine wildly, and, in his great agitation, nearly cut off the tip of his index finger.

The idea of Fuzzy as a lover was the acme of the incongruous; he was so arid, so nervous, so thin, and so unhuman. No one had any idea of his age,
but he looked like a man who had dried up at the age of thirty-six, and had since been free of all human infirmities. His little love-affair was to the factory a mad joke; news of it spread to the printers, it was discussed in the warehouse, it was talked of in the street; but the foreman, unconscious of all this, continued to steal to Miss Eddie's board with love-tokens—a pound of grapes, a bag of buns, a bottle of ginger-ale; once it was a pork-pie. Miss Eddie was involved in the comedy, and there were jokes at her expense, but she took them all in very good part, and continued to ogle Fuzzy with a cow-like playfulness.

Feathers, the humorist, affected the airs of a desolate man, and encouraged Fuzzy with descriptions of his own hopeless love of Sarah and pitiable accounts of her recent cruelties. He hinted at suicide.

"Someone's come between us," sighed the packer, wiping away a tear.

Benno swore that the foreman almost smiled at this. "'Twas touch 'n' go," said Benno. The clerk was of opinion that Sarah Eddie had a "bit iv splosh." He declared he had seen her smuggle a bank-book out of her bag. That afternoon Fuzzy gave Sarah a brooch. It was of an ancient device, and had lost a stone, but was large and had some value as old gold.

It was several days before the girls quite understood Sarah, but when they did there was a sudden revulsion of feeling. Fuzzy's courtship was no longer a joke—it was an outrage. All the easy work was going to Sarah's board. She was given the pleasant and profitable jobs. The special stuff that had hitherto been distributed fairly among the piece-workers all brought extra money to Sarah, and her earnings went up with a jump.

This was not to be borne. Spats' Beauties began to murmur, murmurs swelled to open complaint, cries of bitterness and insult followed, and then the Beauties began to throw things. Blobs of half-caked paste assailed the foreman and clung in his hair; balls of sodden paper fell about him; a recently-emptied flour-sack turned inside-out was dropped on him down the lift-well; an unknown hand knocked him headlong off the stairs with a bundle of waste. Fuzzy's hunted look deepened to one of terror. He moved gingerly, but his infatuation made him strong to endure, and Sarah continued to score.

An act of flagrant favoritism precipitated a strike. The piece-workers threw their brushes into the paste, and, seating themselves on their boards, swung their heels, and yelled defiance at Fuzzy. A dozen of them went downstairs as a deputation to Spats, and the foreman, after stumbling about the room in a fit of nervous irresponsibility, retreated behind the guillotines to await developments.

The deputation charged into the office of the boss. Twelve voices raised in vociferous complaint. Spats drove them up stairs again with angry snarls
and snappings, and sent for Fuzzy. Ellis returned from that interview looking a complete wreck, and Miss Kruse informed the girls that for the future there would be a fair division of the better-class work.

The foreman could still do his adored many favors, and he was her humble servant. Her paste was brought for her, he carried her work to her hand, and although she did not scrape her board on Saturday like the others, it was white and clean when she came to work on Monday; so that it was still worth Sarah's while to shed shy glances on Samuel.

“You do so grow on a body,” she whispered one morning, and this excited Fuzzy to such a degree that he was bumping into things three hours later.

But the termination of Fuzzy's love-affair was sudden and dramatic. Early one Saturday morning, a bulky, black-browed man came lumbering up the back stairs.

"'S your name Ellis?" he said to Feathers. The packer directed him along the room with a nod of the head, and the bulky stranger moved in that direction. To the surprise of everyone, Sarah Eddie flew out, and intercepted him, brandishing a threatening brush.

“If yeh do, Jim!” she cried in great agitation. “Mind, if yeh do!” Jim seemed prepared to chance it, and, thrusting her aside, passed on.

“Your name Ellis, Mister?” he asked Benno. The clerk pointed out the foreman with his pen, and the intruder faced Fuzzy.

“They tell me you're Ellis!” he said. The tone was threatening, the man's air distinctly dangerous. It was obviously unwise to be Ellis. Fuzzy hedged.

“Well, er—it depends,” he said, and retreated timidly.

“If so happens you are Ellis, I mean to punch your damn head off.” It was the tone of an earnest man, one who had resolved on a course of conduct, and had no use for argument.

Fuzzy fled behind the folding board, and the bulky man dashed after him. The pursuer was not a man to stick at trifles; he carried the long board off its trestles in his rush, but fell among the ruins, and Fuzzy went down too. The foreman extricated himself first, and darted for another table, Jim after him. They raced round twice, and then faced each other across the board.

“Wha'—wha'—what is it?” gasped Ellis.

Jim controlled himself for a moment and shook a terrible fist at his destined victim, and then thumped the board determinedly.

“I'll tell yer what it is,” he said; “that there's my girl.” He pointed to Sarah Eddie. “She's been goin' to marry me, more 'r less, fer a year, an' now you've chipped-in. Well, I don't allow it! D'yer hear? I don't allow it!”

“Police!” piped Fuzzy.

Smash went another board before the impetuous Jim, and Fuzzy fled
again, under the tables, around the packing-benches, and then down the long flat, with Jim at his heels. It was a sensational scramble, and choke-full of interest to the Beauties. They clambered on to their boards, and screamed encouragement to Jim. The stranger made a grab at Ellis, and it seemed that all was over with the foreman, but a parcel of bags tripped his rival, and he fell headlong.

This was Samuel's chance; he raced for the ladder at the opening in the ceiling, straddled up it like a distracted spider, and crawled into the darkness above. He was making a desperate effort to haul the ladder up after him when Jim snatched at the bottom-rung, and, swinging his great weight brought the ladder down with a crash on top of himself, and plucked Fuzzy on to his face at the opening, clutching wildly at the edges to avert a disaster. Jim reared the ladder again, and, racing up it, scrambled into the loft, and those below heard muffled sounds of running feet, bumpings, and curses, coming from above the ceiling.

The loft was a spacious place, hot and black as the pit, and the strange, volatile dust characteristic of Spats' factory lay a foot deep on its floor, and clung thickly to the weird festoons of cobweb that spanned the rafters. A rat-fight up there was sufficient to convert the atmosphere into a feathery mass.

There was silence in the factory—all ears were strained to mark the progress of the race overheard. Every bump sent a blast of dust out of the manholes, and it billowed along the factory ceiling, and poured out of the windows like smoke.

A shrill cry indicated that Fuzzy had fallen into the clutches of the enemy. A confusion of yells, much swearing, and a great trampling and bumping, during which the dust rolled from the openings in dense masses, told of a bitter, hand-to-hand contest. Then a body was dragged along the ceiling, and presently Jim's boots came into view on the ladder; his legs followed, but slowly, and after his legs came his body, and then came Fuzzy. Jim, backing down the ladder, reckless of consequences, dragged Ellis out with a run on top of himself, and the two fell in a tangle on a heap of stock.

The identity of the men had to be taken for granted; they were now monstrous objects, with few human attributes, swathed round with clinging rags of black cobweb, their features blotted out, masses of web hanging from their limbs like elfin wings. But Jim had not lost sight of his mission. He seized on the foreman again, and dragged him through the factory, seeking Sarah Eddie; and when he found her he dumped Fuzzy at her feet. He tried to spit, but his mouth was like a dust-bin; he opened it, but was inarticulate. Then he sneezed five times, and speech returned to him.
“Now, we'll settle this matter,” he said. He shook Fuzzy up, and they were obscured in the dust. “Here, you,” he went on, “is this here your girl, 'r is she mine?”

Fuzzy made a gesture of complete abandonment.

“You give her up?” Fuzzy nodded supinely. Jim was still holding him.

“You gives it to her straight that all's over atween yer, that you ain't havin' any truck with her whatsomever, savin' in the way o' business?” The wretched foreman signified his assent. “Very well,” said Jim, “that bein' so, I ain't got nothin' more agin yer.” And he dropped Ellis on the floor.

The trouble being ended, two policemen, who had been hastily summoned under the impression that murder was being done on the top flat, came up the stairs and seized upon Jim. He was fined £5, with the alternative of three weeks' gaol, and took the alternative with a good grace. To show he had no ill-feeling towards anybody, he put ninepence in the poor-box.

Three weeks and two days later, Sarah was married to a wharf-lumper, who, there is every reason to believe, was identical with Jim, and Fuzzy's dream of love was over.
Chapter IV. The Morbid Boy.

THE truculent boy had been summarily dismissed, and the morbid boy was introduced late on the following Monday morning. Billy, the devil, hit him with the cake off a tin of ink as he lumbered wearily up the stairs. The morbid boy was very broad and extremely meaty. His head was large and almost square; nose, ears, cheeks, and lips were puffy, and he had a fat forehead. His color was pasty, and his average expression vacuous. This morning its vacuity was relieved by a dull wonder as he stood at the head of the stair, his arms hanging limply, gazing at the pack of girls. It dawned on him presently that he had been deceived, that life would not be worth living in this ruck of heathens, and he started downstairs again.

The packer re-captured him on the printers' flat.

“It's all right, Mumps,” said Feathers. “You're the new boy, I reckon.”

“'M orf it,” answered the boy, sullenly.

“Rats!” said the packer. “This is dead easy. Yer got nothin' t' do 'ere but tickle the pianer 'n' blow the dust off the chandeliers.”

Feathers towed the lad back to the flat, and away to the changing room, where he superintended the removal of his coat and the donning of a hessian apron with a large pocket across the middle, a relic of the truculent boy. Then he led Mumps to the busy half of the long room, and started him up the track to the foreman's retreat. But a couple of minutes after resuming work the packer saw that Mumps was standing where he had left him, in the middle of the gangway, gazing straight before him, like something petrified.

Mumps had no initiative; this was discovered before he had been in the factory an hour. A girl's glance had the effect of striking him motionless in the middle of a job, and he would stand inert, with a lolling tongue and a dead eye. Fuzzy, the foreman, gave him a fresh start.

“Nice, bright, active, lovable lad that,” said the clerk to Feathers. “Wonder where they gathered him?”

“He come over th' 'sylum wall,” said the packer. ‘Already he's brought the best knife in the big machine down on a spanner, cut two reams iv cartridge t' waste, 'n' spilt a quart iv ink inter Fuzzy's lunch.”

“'N' he hums like a little bone mill,” said Benno, “bless him!”

It was his capacity as a “hummer” that conquered the factory. Where he passed went consternation, and even Fuzzy, who was supposed to be superior to little prejudices, put Mumps from him, and regarded him with a thoughtful and troubled air. The Beauties were not hampered by the niceties of polite convention; they rarely strained the point at which
forbearance ceases to be a virtue; and when Mumps passed them by the
injured did not stifle their cries, but yelled like devils.

Martha, the ex-professional fat girl, when Mumps brought work to her
table, cried “Wow!” threw her apron over her head, and sat down on the
floor in an imitation fit.

“Give it Christian burial,” squealed the thin machinist.

“Scrap fat!”

“Shift that tannery!” The whole flat was giving tongue.

“Yah, dry it, can't yeh,” said Benno, “the lad was reared in a soap
foundry 'n' can't help hisself.”

Mumps did not show that he was conscious of the impression he was
making; the scorn of the girls failed to deepen the heavy imbecility of his
manner. It was late in the afternoon, when all hope of an abatement of the
nuisance had been abandoned, that Feathers attacked the new boy.

“In the name o' Jimmy Jee, wha's the matter with yeh?” he cried,
brutally. “Bli me, you're 'ummin' somethin' awful.”

"'Taint me, neither,” growled Mumps.

Feathers pulled at the pocket of the apron. “What yeh got 'ere?” he said.
“Pooh! Strike me dead! she's a corker. Take it out!” he yelled.

Mumps dipped into the pocket and produced a dead rat on a string, the
identical rat with which the truculent boy had stampeded the factory. Being
unable to escape from the folded apron, the beast had perished miserably,
and Mumps had carried its remains with him all day.

“Well, you're a shine idyit,” commented Feathers. “Why didn't yer throw
the thing away?”

“How wiz I t' know?” whined the morbid boy.

This was characteristic of Mumps; the rat might have remained there a
month before he would have taken upon himself the responsibility of
dislodging it.

Feathers had some felicity in the selection of nicknames, and although
the new boy was officially entered as John Robey, the room refused to
recognise him as anything but Mumps. Strange to say, Ellis contracted a
liking for John; possibly because the youngster was never impudent. John,
who seemed to be in a perpetual state of moral hibernation, hadn't
sufficient impulse to be insolent, and the foreman had had a large and
varied experience of boys with impulse. As a rule, the boys treated Fuzzy
brutally. The truculent boy—4ft. 9in. and 13 next birthday—had once
clamored violently for three rounds with his boss, being anxious to prove
in the eyes of the whole world which was “best man.”

True, Mumps was dull and needed close watching, and had to be started
and stopped like a machine, and could never learn what was to be done
next, and was liable to fall into a condition of open-mouthed inanimation in
the middle of a job, but he never gave back-talk, and there was something
respectful in his stupid awe.

Three mornings running a very ponderous woman, who was taken to be
his mother, lugged Mumps up the stairs and drove him to his work, but
after that John accepted the inevitable and came regularly at eight. He
brought enormous lunches in a rush basket, and sat alone amongst the bales
to eat them. When work started again, his distress was painful to behold,
and he was often heard to groan pitifully during the hour that followed.
Then Benno would tell him that he ought to have his lunch made to
measure and not go trying to fit a No. 3 stomach on a No. 9 meal; and
Feathers would gravely advise him to have it pulled.

One morning Mumps fell into a state of dreamy inaction over a truck of
grey sugar paper, just where the front stairs cut into the flat. A yap at his
back jerked him into consciousness, and, looking round, he discovered the
imposing figure of the boss at his heels. Instantly John Robey was thrown
into a condition of fatuous irresponsibility; he seized on his truck, heaved
up the great burden, made a blind stagger, and rushed the whole box of
tricks straight down the stairs. The truck bounded, threw a dazzling
revolution, and its handles crashed through the floor of the first landing.
Great reams of paper leaped down the remaining stairs, shooting in all
directions into the printing room, and the crashes told of ravage and
disaster. Mumps stared after his lost load for seven terrible seconds, and
then turned, and fled for the men's dressing-room. He re-appeared with his
hat in his hand, dragging his coat after him, and darted down the back
stairs.

Feathers overtook John, and he was given another trial after the foreman
had interceded on his behalf, but the printers' devil never forgave him. One
of the reams having jumped into a tub of lye, and deluged Billy with the
awful mixture, the boy felt called upon to subject John to monotonous
persecution as long as he remained in the place.

Mumps was a child of persecution, but he dulled the point of practical
jokes by preserving a Chinese unconsciousness. The packer dropped all
subterfuge, and treated him as an open and unabashed idiot, telling him
twenty times a day exactly how much of an ass he was, in language
calculated to appeal to the lowest intelligence, but always with a well-
intentioned and benevolent air as of one imparting useful knowledge.
Benno, however, adopted a tone of biting irony, and it must be credited to
Mumps' peneration that one day, after surveying the clerk heavily for five
minutes or so, he said: "I hate you, Dickson!" Although the tone was
phlegmatic, this, coming from Mumps, was regarded as an amazing burst
of confidence.

At about this time there began a frequent disappearance of lunches, and although John Robey was known as a monument of gluttony it did not occur to anybody that he had degenerated into a crib thief. For over a week suspicion rested upon the rats, which were frequent in the factory, though during all that time Mumps' painful indispositions might have enlightened the dullest minds.

One day when three lunches were missed, Mumps remained curled up on a big bag of waste for some time after the lunch hour, sweating and groaning. He told Feathers that it was “apendickitis” he had.

Later the crib thief grew discriminating, and stole only the choicest morsels from the lunches, spoiling no less than nine in one morning. But it was not till Miss Kruse sent John out for sixpenn'orth of mixed pastry, and he came back with the empty bag and explained dully that he had eaten the stuff “by accident,” that the elucidation of the mystery was whispered about.

Next morning at about a quarter to twelve, while Mumps was depositing work on Martha Pilcher's board, the fat girl called across the room:

“Say, youse, I've fixed up them rats proper this trip. They nicked some 'am san'wiches from my lunch this mornin'. Them san'wiches was poisoned!”

Mumps dropped the goods he had in his hands, and stared at Martha, and his pallor took a faint greenish tinge.

“I poisoned 'em myself,” said Martha, “with nine-penn'orth o' arsenic.”

Mumps doubled his arms across his stomach, bent like a man in agony, and uttered a long, anguished howl.

“They's enough poison in 'em to kill a norse,” continued the fat girl, remorselessly.

The boy scrambled under the bench, and rushed for the stairs. He was heard to fall down the last flight. He raced through the warehouse, colliding blindly with the boss in the doorway, and a few minutes later the people in the main street of the city saw a white-faced, despairing Mumps, wild-eyed, bare-headed, and wearing a bag apron, racing along the road like something frantic. Mumps clamored at the door of the most expensive doctor in town, kicking the panels, pulling the bell, and shrieking simultaneously; and when the door was opened to him he fell in, crying:

“I'm poisoned. Quick! quick! do something—they've poisoned me!”

About an hour later, a tall, grave constable brought John Robey back to us, and John was a woeful thing to see —pale and clammy, and so limp that the policeman had to hold him up, like exhibit A, while he explained to the company:—
“He swore he was poisoned. The doctor said 'twas nothing of the kind, but the b'y was so set on it, the gentleman gave him a bit iv an emetic to satisfy him. Bechune me 'n' youse, things iv happened sinst.”

“He looks it,” said the packer.

Mumps was dropped on a bag of waste, where he groaned so fearfully that Fuzzy endeavoured to reassure him by explaining that whatever had happened to Martha's sandwiches they were free of poison, and fit for human consumption.

“'Tain't that, mister,” said Mumps, weakly. “I'm starvin'. They ain't nothin' left inside o' me, an' I'm starvin' to death.”

There was no denying that the possibility had real terrors for him, so Ellis took pity on his emptiness, and Mumps was sent home to re-stock.
Chapter V. The Fat Girl.

MISS Pilcher, who had been in “the profession” as a Fat Girl, had come down in the world. She used to weigh 24st. 4lbs.; now she weighed only 12st. and a few immaterial ounces. As she was short of stature, she had no very reasonable grounds for complaint on the score of ungraceful attenuation; but Martha was now too lean for show purposes, and she had once been the mainstay and the pride of an exhibitor of malformed calves, accomplished pigs, and human freaks of various kinds.

“When I think o' what I was,” said she to the sympathetic pasters around her (and as she spoke she picked out the flattering symbols on an imaginary four-sheet poster of many colors, with a proud fore-finger)—“‘Miss Gloriana Brobding, the Mammoth Mermaid, Twenty-five Stone in her Bathing-dress; Admired by the Prince o' Wales'—'n' then think o' what I am, pastin' beastly bags fer Spats at a tizzy a dray-load, it fair gi's me the 'ump.”

Martha was still young. Her professional experiences had begun at the early age of 12, and had ended at 17, her unfaithful flesh having melted by that time to such an extent that the most audacious showman declined to try to impose the Mammoth Mermaid upon the public as a curiosity, even in a liberally-padded bathing-dress. As the Mermaid's papa, who drank like a fish, had always carefully consumed her salary far in advance, poor Martha was left to earn her daily bread by the sweat of her brow.

The fat girl was very proud of having been “an artist,” and comforted herself in her present lowliness with enraptured reflections on her professional triumphs. She showed many photographs of her prodigious former self, dressed in a scant and scaly bathing-dress, standing by a painted sea; she had an old exercise book in which were pasted clippings from the up-country papers referring to her enormous disproportions in terms of wondering eulogy; she had also the proud privilege of free entree to the waxworks.

Though fallen from her high estate, Martha did not despair. She still had hopes of regaining her old magnitude, and strove for it by judicious dieting and careful attention to a set of rules for the guidance of skinny people, which were published in a medical almanac. She weighed herself about three times a week, and her spirits varied in accordance with the tally of the slot-machine; rising with an increase, falling with an appreciable loss.

One warm morning she came wearily down the flat with her empty paste-keg under her arm, and leaned despondingly upon the packer's board.

“Got off one pound seven ounces since Saterdee,” she said.
“G'on! yeh don't say,” answered Feathers. “Well, what price goin' inter trainin' fer a livin' skelington?”

“Dicken! Skeletons is low. They ain't no class, 'n' they ain't decent, if you ask me. Y' wouldn't catch me standin' afore the public in me bones, anyhow.”

“Yeh ain't exac'ly over-dressed in them photografs iv you ez the Mammoth Mermaid, are yeh?”

“The Duke o' York said I was a splendid natural produc', 'n' a credit t' me country,” said Martha in proud vindication.

“Where was his missus? A few fish-scales ain't much iv a wardrobe fer strikin' moral attitudes in, Sis. 'F I was you, old girl, I'd skip a couple o' thousand ev'ry mornin', punch the bag a bit, 'n' get down t' me own class.”

“Ah! you don't know nothin' iv the feelin's iv a hartist, Feathers,” said Martha, sadly.

“Say, how'd yeh account fer yer fallin' off?” asked Feathers, spraying a handful of bags to bind his parcel.

Martha looked round cautiously, and then whispered, “'Twas love!”

“Oh, catch me!”

“Yes,” persisted Martha, “I was mug enough t' go 'n' fall in love, 'n' it brought me down to this.” She opened her arms, inviting attention to her fragile figure. “He was dark 'n' tall, with long, black 'air 'n' piercin' dark eyes. Pale he was, 'n' 'andsome. Professor Pedro was a hartist, too, readin' palms 'n' tellin' fortunes, 'n' ownin' a trick dog with his tail growin' out between his ears. He would smooge to me when the boss wasn't about, 'n' he said we could run a grand little show on our lonesome. Well, I got fair struck mad on him, 'n' began t' dwindle away from that minit. I lost a stone in less'n a fortnit. I near over-ate meself t' death, tryin' t' stop the drift. 'Twasn't no use, 'n' the Professor, seein' me goin' t' waste, done a guy; 'n' that finished me. I come a reg'lar slump after that, 'n' now where am I?”

“You're right in the ash-barrel, Sissy.”

Martha groaned. “But no more love fer me. The bloke that comes canoodlin' here gets that in his feed-bag!” She flouris hed her paste-tub fiercely. “Love! Love! I'd sooner get the bloomin' bubonic.”

Martha was really afraid that love might afflict her again, and interfere with her prospects of being restored to her former glory as the pride of the museums; and there were reasons. One of them was her knowledge of the emotions raging in the bosom of Ponny Scott. He was a compositor on the lower flat; a depressed youth with a strange head of streaky black hair that grew from a definite centre on the occiput, and radiated in lank petals like a chrysanthemum freak. He had a thin, long, hatchet face, narrow eyes, large invertebrate ears; a high, fragile, razor-backed nose that looked very
superior to its present position, and an unstable underlip sagging almost to his chin. As Martha was short and fat, Ponny's love for her was a genuine attempt on the part of Mother Nature to restore the happy mean, for Ponny was very tall and very thin.

Ponny's love was scarcely distinguishable from melancholia. He was often heard soliloquising on the miseries of life and the vanity of human wishes, whereat Billy the Boy, as quick to detect a sensitive soul as a mosquito is to discover a new-chum, uttered dolorous dog-howlings and wailed piteously for his “mummer.”

“Wha's a bloke born fer, tha's what I wanna know?” was the problem that beset poor Ponny. One day he put it to the packer. Feathers was not sympathetic.

“Well, there's beer,” he said. Then, noting the drift of Ponny's eye, and having a mind to relieve the tedium of life in the factory with a little comedy, he altered his tone. “There's a little tom in this flat who'd give a bit t' have you hers for keeps.”

“Garn!”

“S'elp me! The round-'n'-rosy at the third board. She's shook ter bits about yeh. 'Ave a shy et it.”

“Come off! She don't look where I live,” said Mr. Scott, gloomily.

“Coz you ain't a battler. Get in 'n' bustle 'er. Yeh don't expect the girl t' fling herself at yeh off a 'ouse.”

Thus encouraged, Ponny Scott's advances towards Miss Pilcher became more definite. He spoke to her on the stairs as she came in of mornings, and escorted her home one evening, very much against her will. The more ardent he grew, the greater was Martha's alarm. She was an extremely tender-hearted girl, and realising her weakness, feared that Ponny's love might eventually awaken reciprocal emotion, to the ruin of her professional prospects. She stormed at her devoted admirer; she threatened him with her paste-tub; she abused him with the invectives of the cheap suburbs; she talked of invoking the aid of a younger brother, who was the pride of a notorious “push”; and, as a last resource, threatened an appeal to Spats himself.

Ponny was much depressed by all this; it caused his views of life to become so horribly jaundiced that the printer's devil, with a great show of brotherly concern, declared he had warned all the chemists on no account to serve him with rat-poison, and advised him that he would certainly be arrested on suspicion if found with a rope in his possession, or caught near the river. But for all that Ponny did not desist. He continued to pursue Miss Pilcher with sighs and protestations and lugubrious looks.

“Oh, take a jump at yerself!” cried Martha, petulantly, in the face of the
whole factory. "What d'yer want sighin' 'n' snivellin' round my pitch? Here iv lost two pounds 'n' three-quarters worryin' over you a'ready. Ain't that enough? Bli' me, give us a charnce!"

Ponny never replied to these attacks. He stole downstairs and soliloquised on the sorrow of things for the delectation of Billy the Boy, and was up on the girls' flat again at the first opportunity. Martha bore it with loud complainings, till the morning she came up the stairs, bathed in tears, and confided in Feathers.

"What yer think?" she said; "I've just been weighed on the station, 'n' I'm 'arf a stone t' the bad again. It's all that Ponny Scott, 'n' he's fair filled me. I ain't takin' any more."

That day, when the boss appeared on the factory flat, Martha marched boldly from her board and confronted him.

"Please, Mr. Odgson, I got a complaint," she said. "There's a bloke on the printer's flat, name o' Scott; he's fair pesterin' the life out o' me with love 'n' all that sort o' thing, 'n' I want it seen inter."

Evidently it was "seen into." Ponny did not speak to Martha again for the rest of that week, but when opportunity offered he beset her with such mournful looks that she was actually more worried than before, and when she caught him glowering darkly and reproachfully at her between the stair-railings she shivered with apprehension.

On the following Monday, Ponny did not appear, and it was soon known that he had been dismissed for "interfering" —a heinous crime. This troubled Martha, too; she had pangs of conscience for two days, and then Feathers delivered a letter which some mysterious hand had attached to the hook on the end of the rope with which he dropped small orders to the lower flats.

The letter contained a sheet of paper, to which was pinned a wisp of dark hair—one of the petals from Ponny's chrysanthemum—and on which was written the following grim poem:

"Farewell.
Oh, cruel girl, you've cast me off
Because I ain't a haughty toff.
When in the river I am found dead
Well you'll know why I've drowned."

P. S.

Martha read the missive through twice with staring, terrified eyes, then uttered a woeful cry, and fainted, and her fall shook Odgson and Co. to its foundations. Her anxieties increased a hundredfold. Nobody had heard anything of Ponny for three days.
“I know what it is, he's went 'n' killed himself, 'n' they'll pinch me for accessory afore the act,” Martha told Feathers, tearfully.

“Not a bit iv it,” said the packer. “He's gone off on his ace somewhere; he'll be all ri’.”

“'N' 'ow'm I t' know that?” wailed Martha. “'Ow's a girl t' keep a tranquil mind 'n' in good feed while a bloke's gone missin' all along of 'er, 'n' may turn up in the paper any mornin', drowned or hanged? What price me all this time, with weight fair droppin' off me?”

Sorrow marked Martha for its own during the next week. Ponny had not been heard of. She was sure the blighted wretch had taken his own life, and she brooded over the terrible thought till all noted her diminished bulk. Martha was in danger of assuming normal proportions, and was a wretched woman in consequence. She opened the morning paper in trepidation, dreading to see Ponny's name in the list of those found drowned. When the packer's evening sheet was delivered, the pasters gathered about him, and the columns were eagerly scanned for news of the comp.'s un-timely end; but it never came, and Martha always returned to her board in tears.

“If he was on'y found,” she said, “I think I'd make flesh again. Worry's terrible redoocin'.”

But Martha was not destined to fade completely. One morning when she came in Feathers greeted her joyously.

“It's all right, Sis,” he said.

“What!” gasped Martha, “iv' they found the body?”

“I've seen him. He was at ther Owls' smoke night lars night, singin' ‘Me Little Back-Room in Blooms-ber-ee.'”

“Alive!” cried the fat girl.

“'N' singin' comics,” said Feathers.

“Thank Heaven!” ejaculated Martha, piously. “Now I'll be able t' pick up a bit.”
Chapter VI. A Hot Day at Spats'.

THE day was hot. The industrious little tin thermometer over the packer's bench registered 103deg., not out, and the atmosphere of the long flat was as oppressive as a burden, and heavy with motes. The factory was low-roofed and ill-ventilated. Through the row of dingy western windows the afternoon sun shot broad beams that shimmered in the dull interior like strips of white-hot steel. To many of the sallow girls at the pasting boards it seemed that they were supporting the ceiling with their stiff and aching heads.

The factory sulked; all brows were lowering, and lips drooped with a sickly petulance. Several of the piece-workers, confirmed grafters, toiled with swift fingers, hanging desperately to the task, but the majority of the Beauties leaned upon their boards indolently, moving their limbs with slow effort. The flat was gusty with sighs. It was impossible to hold the paid hands to their tables; the forewoman kept up a continual whining, and Ellis fluttered about uneasily, tremulous with apprehension, the paper-dust and the sweat coagulating into mud in his scattered tufts of whiskers.

"Now, now, girls!" The foreman's timorous expostulation was almost as insistent as the ticking of the big clock. "Now, now, girls—now, now!" The Beauties treated him with dull disdain; they had no heart even for insolence.

That part of the flat which turned to the left, out of the sight of Ellis at his cutting-machines, was piled to the rafters with stock and bales, and here were the dressing-rooms. This was the favourite rendezvous of the impudent shirkers, too, and now and again the foreman made an angry excursion along the dark passages between the piles of goods, driving the loafers forth, with pathetic reproaches and threats of dismissal.

From behind one of the stacks an unhealthy-looking girl, of about 18, with a tousled mass of dull red hair, made pantomimic efforts to attract the packer. Feathers was very sad. He was a man with a thirst that became an actual infliction under the stress of 103deg. in the shade—"Worse 'n' neuralger," he complained—but Odgson, whose office stock of uncustomed whisky never ran short, was scandalised by anything like drinking habits in the lower orders, and alcoholic beverages were strictly prohibited upstairs. Feathers' affliction cut into his earnings. Already he had gone forth secretly as a passionate pilgrim, but his limited credit at the Star and Garter was exhausted.

"I wouldn' 'a' b'lieved 'twas in a 'uman woman t' be ez firm ez what that Mrs. Publican is," he told Bruno, bitterly. "Wimmin ain't fit t' keep pubs;
they ain't got no compassion.”

Feathers was thinking over these things, with a dull pain at his heart and a mouth “like a drought-struck bone mill,” when his eye fell upon Linda gesticulating in the distance.

“Yah, get up yer pole!” Feathers hated frivolity at a moment like this.


The packer was about to descend to the vulgar in his anguish, when an action of Linda’s swept the black thoughts from his soul. The girl had raised her right hand to her face, her head was tilting slowly backwards, rhythmical ripples ran along her white throat. Feathers shivered.

“Meanin’?” he pointed to the centre of his breast, and his eyes were round with inquiry.

“Fair dinkum,” telegraphed Linda.

“Right-o, then. In arf a tick.” Feathers ran a casual eye over the room, took up a parcel, and carried it round the bend. In a small space between a stack and the wall four or five were crowded round a large billy. The billy had liquor in it. Feathers recognised it at a glance, and half the misery of a hard life fell from him. It was beer. Linda dipped a cupful, and offered it.

“Oh, come, what sort?” The packer spoke in stern expostulation. But he took the cup. “This means the dirty push fer the lot if yer copped,” he said.

“Rats,” said Carrie Bent. “Ole Spats' rotten fact'ry ain't 'eaven, is it? Run it in, Jud, I'm fair hungry fer another.”

“Howdja work it?”

“New cove from the mill smuggled it up the lift.”

“It's a fair cop out iv yer cort. Mind, I told yeh.” Feathers thought he was being very firm, but the arm that held the cup was weakening visibly. The cup moved towards his face as if of its own volition. “'N' it's rotten bad for yeh, beer is, this weather,” he continued. “It goes t’ yer 'ead.” What further wisdom the packer might have spoken was stopped by the arrival of the cup at his lips. He seemed surprised to find it there. Something like a feat of legerdemain followed, and the beer was swept away.

Linda took the cup and served one round, Feathers standing over, moralising. Then came the sound of Ellis's familiar hobble, and instantly the billy went out of sight under a sack and behind a bale.

“What rot, girls; why don't yer get a shift on?” cried Feathers virtuously, making himself right. “'Taint the meal y pertater, polin' on the firm like this.”

“Come, come, come,” spluttered Ellis. “Get to your boards. I'll fine you—every one of you.” A trifling revolt was sufficient to rob Fuzzy of what little understanding and self-control he possessed. He took every dereliction to heart as a personal wrong. His voice ran shrill in an agony of
reproach, and as he stumped after the girls, the timid, nervous man pitifully asserting himself, he ran blindly into a bale, canoned on to a case of white note, and fell into the truck. The foreman fell into or over, one or the other of the trucks at least once a day, and the joke had lost point. The Beauties remained sullen, some sprawling over their boards, openly loafing, their bare arms hanging down, their figures sharply outlined in thin skirts and skimpy bodices.

“Dead hookity, I call it,” said the packer, sympathetically, as he helped Ellis out of his complication with the truck.

The foreman turned to his machines, whimpering “Now, now, girls; come, come now!” as he passed the boards. Feathers returned to his bench. He packed with some little energy for ten minutes, and then the knowledge that there was illicit beer on the flat began to prey upon his mind. He sighed frequently; his nagging thirst got at him again. The heat came through the factory in successive clouds. In answer to some weary pleasantry that came up the speaking tube, he said distinctly that life was a “blasted fraud.”

“Is that the Union Brewery?” asked the voice, after an audible sniff.

“Nah, it's 'ell's stokehole, yer Jack chump.”

A few minutes later Feathers paid another urgent visit to the billy. The beer was tepid, but he returned refreshed. The factory was silent under the heat and burden of the day, saving for the rattle of the cogs of the guillotines and the whirr of the sewing machines ripping out leagues of meal bags. The girls had nothing to say for themselves. They were stripped to the last rag within the requirements of decency. The ex-professional fat girl, working hard, was a humid mountain; there was an uncanny look in her set face. Benno drowsed at his desk. Much latitude was permitted to the clerk these days, in consideration of a recent sorrow. The air of the factory was heavy with the tang of humanity. The curse of Adam brooded in the room.

The printer's devil below sang a line of “Climbing up the Golden Stairs.” It was the “office.” Feathers snatched something from his drawer, bit off an ample mouthful, and chewed. Spats' belltopper loomed above the stairs. Spats followed. The “guv'nor's” face was purple with heat and emotion, and large beads of oil glistened upon his tuberous nose.

The machines whirred with new vigour, the Beauties made a spiritless effort to look busy, Benno drove his pen with a great show of energy, and the owner stood and glared over the factory under his clumps of brow. His look was one of unmeasured hatred. He grunted, and his grunt was expressive of great loathing. He turned, and shuffled along the flat till he came to the packer's bench. Then he paused and sniffed. He sniffed at
Feathers repeatedly, like an angry dog, and grunted three times—rising grunts of fathomless disgust—the last almost a snort. Then he passed downstairs again.

Feathers leaned over the rail. “Pig's Whiskers!” he hissed. The expression might have lacked point, but it relieved him. It was cheese the packer was eating—very old cheese, and very strong for its age. It was not nice cheese, but it had the virtue of subordinating the smell of any beer that might be within an acre at the time of eating.

The whirr of the machines softened again. The cogs clanked no more. Benno's head sank, and the Beauties abandoned all pretensions. The heated atmosphere came up the stairways, and grew denser in the top flat; breathing was a labour, and the packer's head was humming like a mill. He was thinking of the unguarded beer behind the bale.

Suddenly the factory was disturbed by a thin crying—a low, helpless crying that had an animal-like agony in it. The fat girl was wailing at her board. Her large face shone white; she still worked with deft fingers, but she wept at her task like an insensate creature. Ellis understood what it meant; he had heard it before more than once, and instantly he fell into his familiar condition of terror-stricken irresponsibility. He scrambled down the room, knocking against all the boards, throwing tiers of work into confusion.

“Here, here—you stop it!” he cried. “Stop it! Stop it, I tell you!”

A little girl at the folding board was making strange gasping noises. Many of the girls seemed to become suddenly possessed of a bovine fear. Sarah Eddie ran to Martha Rickars, and put strong arms about her, whereupon the fat girl flopped upon the floor, and her crying increased to an agonised scream. The little girl at the folding-board fell back convulsed. Two other girls started crying, and Ellis ran foolishly from one to the other, pleading and complaining. Feathers alone remained cool. He was experienced in all the foolishness of women. The packer leaned over the stair and called down to the printers:

“Here, a couple iv you blokes len's a 'and. Fat's down.”

A couple of printers bounded up from the lower flat, and Feathers took command.

“Yah-h! go 'n' get hosed!” he said contemptuously, to the foreman, who was fussing uselessly. “Grab 'er 'ead, lads.”

The fat girl was now screaming in violent hysterics. Feathers took her heels, the printers her arms, and, with Sarah's help, they carried their great burden to the lift.

‘Take 'er inter the cellar an' let 'er bloomin' well 'ave it out there, 'r she'll 'ave the 'ole fact'ry 'owlin' mad in 'arf a tick.” The fat girl was promptly
lowered, and Feathers turned to his other patients.

Chrissie M’Fadyen, a tall, dark girl, had fallen in a huddled heap under her board, and was making weird, choking noises. Feathers straightened her out, pillowed her head on a pile of bags, and said, angrily:

“Shut up! D’ yeh ’ear? We ain't doin' anythin' in fancy fits to-day.” Then, with extreme disdain: “Arr-r-r, ring off, can't yeh!” The girl shivered, stiffened her limbs, and opened a startled eye. “Nah then, Mac, that'll do you. Jest you take a 'ammerlock holt iv yerself, 'n' 'ave some dam consideration fer others.” The tone was brutal. Chrissie struggled with her symptoms, and conquered. “Take 'er away 'n' sprinkle 'er,” said Feathers to one of the machinists, and Chrissie M’Fadyen was led to the taps, weeping quietly.

The packer passed on to Ginger Copin, the foreman dancing at his heels and stuttering like a cranky monkey. It seemed as if half the girls might get out of hand at any moment. Many were crying. Feathers took Ginger by the shoulders in a masterful grip, and shook her to emphasise his biting rebuke.

“Shine idyit you're makin' o' yerself, Copin,” he said. “Bli' me, have a bit iv common. Stow it; stow it, d'ye hear?” Ginger strove against her racked nerves, and looked surprised and piteous. Feathers was not to be softened, however. He said further things to Copin, and they were not tender and soothing things. In short, he cursed her from boots to breakfast; and Copin revived as under cooling showers, and was led away by the stronger girls.

Feathers swore bitterly at a couple of weeping pasters in passing, and braced them up wonderfully; delivered a scathing expostulation to Miss Bentley, the sedate piece-worker, who gave marked indications of going off; and then addressed himself to the little girl at the folding-board, who had fallen in a fit. He carried her to the taps in the cooler part of the building, soothing the factory with bad, masterful words as he passed.

“New one, this, ain't she?” he said. “Wha's she called?”

They told him, and he addressed her by her name; not so sternly as in the former cases and without bullock-compelling expletives, but with the tone of a man who was not to be denied. He insisted on her getting well by her own effort. “It's no use tellin' me yeh carn't, y'know, 'cause I know better. Come, come, buck-up!” The little girl was slowly reviving, and although this case took longer than the others, the patient was presently well enough to go below with the rest.

Feathers went back to the Beauties, bullying manfully here and there. He picked out three more, cursed them into some sense of decency, and passed them down to the cellar to cool off, and behold, the factory was in order again, and clothed in its right mind. The packer had proved himself master of the situation.
“Never you snivel 'n whine over wimmin when they're 'avin 'sterics 'n' them jiggity fits,” he said, wisely, to the printers; “it on'y makes 'em feel they're pore sufferin' dears, 'n' they'll holler their 'eads off, 'n' kick the ceilin' in outer dashed sympathy fer themselves. What a woman wants when she's feelin' like that is a real beast t' boss her. Yiv gotter work in among 'em here fer a few years t' know what a consolation a reg'lar brute is to a woman now 'n' again.”

“Sst—Pig's Whiskers!” hissed Billy the Boy. The printers fled downstairs, and Feathers packed. “Pig's Whiskers” was one of the many pet names the factory had given Odgson, the Boss.

Half-an-hour later a south breeze was sweeping the factory, and the Beauties were barracking noisily at their work Feathers was in an amiable mood; he had emptied the billy, and now walked with ostentatious uprightness. The fact that there was no longer any alcoholic beverage on the flat, and that the boss had no just cause for complaint, filled him with genuine and virtuous satisfaction.
Chapter VII. The Man-Eater.

FEATHERS christened her the Man-Eater. The implication was that Porline was the counterpart of the devilish adventuress in the popular melodrama, who consumes men with indiminishable appetite. Porline was small, and so thin that her whole osseous structure stood out like a skeleton in a bran sack; she was ugly, and no longer young; her mere wisp of hair was drawn tight into a tiny knot at the top, augmented with scraps of black ribbon; she had deeply-sunken beady, black eyes, and her complexion, indeed her whole binding, was leathery.

There was a painful cheerfulness about Porline, an inexcusable skittishness that might have hurt finer sensibilities than those common in the bag factory. She made an affectation of being a devil of a fellow, which, taken in conjunction with her manifest disabilities, was quite pitiful, but the hands did not see it in that light.

Her name, Pauline Streton, would have been a jarring note in the factory if it had been used there, but to Spats' Beauties she was always Porline or The Man-Eater, and Porline took no exception to the nick-name; on the contrary, she accepted it as a compliment to her fatal powers of fascination, and even strained a point to live up to it.

Although she had been in the factory some years, nothing was known of Porline's home life, but because she had little slang, and spoke fairly correct English—a thing generally condemned by the Beauties as a beastly affectation—it was whispered to all new-comers that the Man-Eater's family had been somebodies. One romancer in a burst of recklessness asserted positively that Porline's father was an Inspector of Police, but the factory held that there was a medium in all things, and the idea perished of inanition.

Porline affected a youthful style in frocks, and her hats had always a misplaced jauntiness; her feathers were higher than any other girl's, and particularly vivid, and even at work, when the Beauties discarded sleeves and collars, and all adornment, she loved to flutter bits of cardinal ribbon, and generally wore a wilted artificial rose of extreme redness in her sparse hair.

George H. Mills, alias Jud, alias Feathers, the packer, was supposed to cherish a hopeless passion for Porline. It was part of the poor comedy. Feathers maintained the pose without loss of interest for some years, and Porline's archness towards the young man, according to the opinion of the judicial Benno, was “the sort iv thing t' make a dorg 'owl.” She hung upon him, and turned saucy eyes up into his face, and giggled heartlessly,
remembering her part as the slayer. Feathers had a formula.

“Look at 'er,” he would say appealingly to anybody or nobody, “ain't she the sort what's fillin' the river? It's them eyes what does it. S'elp me Jimmy Jee, she's rooned my life! Straight—she's draggin' me down.”

Then Porline would laugh coquettishly, and skip away to her work. But she was lavish of her attentions, and wasted no little time at Benno's desk, trying to bewitch him, too.

“What I wonder when I see you is that there ain't more unhappy homes,” said Benno. “Porline, I'd 'a' bin a better man iv I'd never set eyes on yeh.”

Billy the Boy, on the next flat, murmured with deep feeling: “Oh, you little devil!” as Porline went gaily down stairs. The printers cried: “Chase me, Charley!” or affected a great concern about mythical appointments, and the clerks in the warehouse, if the eagle eye of Spats was not upon them, sighed deeply as she pranced in or out, and addressed poetical raptures to the rafters. Whereat Porline smiled roguishly upon all, and accented her girlishness of manner. She did everything with a girly air that became grim burlesque in comparison with her years and infirmities.

Porline even tried her kittenish graces on the foreman, and had once looked bewitchingly at the fat proprietor himself. Spats backed before the glance like a man menaced by a python, pulled the lift rope with a jerk, and shot into the depth, whence he almost immediately sent an order demanding Porline's instant dismissal. She was saved by Ellis, who assured the “gov'ner” of her harmlessness, and the more cogent fact that she was one of the most profitable hands in the factory.

Tim Moore came to the flat one morning in the capacity of assistant packer. He was a shy young exile of Erin, new to Australia, and the Beauties overwhelmed him. He worked with his back to them in a state of nervous apprehension, and it was noticed that he had not lifted his eyes to the ribald hussies at the pasting boards in a whole week.

Porline showed no respect for Tim's native reserve, however, but beset him with artful wheedling, like the sly minx she affected to be, and poor Tim cowered before her attacks. The woman's audacity, her boniness, her desiccated charms, and her ridiculous pretensions in the matter of hair, threw him into a sort of helpless amazement.

Feathers was the first to offer a kindly word of warning.

“Yer a young man,” he said, “'n' yeh ain't got no mother to advise yeh. Take my tip—pluck her out iv yer 'eart.” Tim cast a look of alarm towards Porline's board, and the packer dropped his voice to an impressive whisper. “We call her the Man-Eater,” he said. “She'll bring yeh sorrer 'n' disgrace. Buck up—tear her himage from yer breast.”

An hour or two later Benno, primed by the packer, drifted down the
room, and loitered at Tim's bench.

“So,” he said, gloomily, “you're to be her new victim. That's like her, castin' her devilish wiles over the young an' the fair. We've all yielded to her fatal fascination; her path is strooed with ruined lives. Well, well, iv the worst comes t' the worst, don't say I never done me juty by yeh.”

Tim's uneasiness developed into a sort of superstitious awe. He watched Porline's comings and goings out of the corner of his eye, with a pathetic trepidation. In the afternoon, Goudy, the town traveller, when upstairs picking out an order, led Moore behind a stack of bales. His manner was full of mystery.

“She's a siren,” he said. Moore did not know what a siren was, but he was impressed. “I've got sons of my own, and think it only right to speak ere it is too late. Let her get a hold upon you, and——” Goudy left the rest to Tim's imagination, but his gesture was eloquent of desolation and despair.

Two hours later Tim stole over to Feathers. “D'ye mind tellin' me what's a sireen, at all?” he said.

“It's one iv them things that sings and sucks yer blood,” answered the packer, with the readiness of an expert.

‘An' I t'ought 'twas nothin' more'n a bit iv a whistle.” Tim allowed his eyes to turn cautiously in Porline's direction. “Goudy sez she's wan iv thim sireens.”

Feathers nodded gloomily. “She's bin the blight iv me young life,” he said.

The joke ended there, for when Tim was missed from the flat half an hour later, it was found that he had taken his hat and coat, and stolen off. He did not even return for his pay, and Goudy heard that he shipped West by a boat that left on the following day.

The flight was a triumph for Porline. “He told me another week iv it, 'n' he'd 'a' bin yours body 'n' soul,” said the veracious Feathers. Benno confided to her that he had seen Tim passionately kissing an artificial rose she had tossed him.

Porline's middle-aged diablerie increased, and this success prompted her crowning audacity. She came to the factory on the following Saturday, dressed in her gayest, and leading by the hand a child of about three years of age, a little girl, pretty and fresh as a flower, and caparisoned like the daughter of a duchess. Spats' Beauties were very partial to kiddies; they deserted their paste boards in a body, and swarmed about the child, gushing rapturously, praising its beauty with longing ecstacies, finding wonders in the tiniest details of its dress, the blueness of its eyes, and the gold of its hair.

Porline lifted the little girl to the bench, that all might see, and her own
weird, sapless ugliness was in hurtful contrast with the sweetness of the child, but her little, spotty eyes shone with joy.

“Whose kiddy is it?” asked Martha, the fat girl.

Porline looked round upon them all. “Whose should she be?” she said. “Mine, of course. She's mine!”

The Beauties, if not particularly keen on morals, were on the side of conventions in their initial impulses. They drew off a step or two.

“But who's it's mother, I mean?” said Martha.

“I'm it's mother,” answered Porline, defiantly. “Pooh!” —she snapped her fingers like the bad female in the drama—“what do I care who knows? Why shouldn't I acknowledge my child? I don't give that for your respectables.”

Feathers pursed his mouth and whistled a long tremolo. “Well, iv she ain't a fair take-down!” gasped Benno. The Beauties did not seem to know what to do in the circumstances, so they laughed, and drifted back to their boards, where they made calculations and compared dates. Circumstantial evidence supported the claim of Porline; amazement possessed the factory. Nobody would have believed it possible—everybody said so.

For a time there was some little inclination to hold off from Porline's kiddy, but the child's winsomeness dissipated all pruderies, and the hands would have killed it with kindness had not Porline shown herself as alert and scrupulous as a mothering hen, but the pride she felt in her child lit her up like an inward light, and she paraded the proof of her paganism with a flaunting audacity. The news went through the establishment in a matter of minutes. The printers came up in a procession to see Porline's “illegim”; the clerks, one after another, found excuse for visit to the top flat.

The fat, bald ledger-keeper, bowed his head upon a stack of 9 lb. browns, and sobs shook his frame. The fat ledger-keeper was an instinctive comedian. He had given it out far and wide that Porline was his secret sorrow. All the men reproached Porline, mutely, or with the speech of desolated hearts. Ellis, the dusty foreman, was stunned; hours later he stopped to whisper Feathers, with the air of a man who'd missed the point of a story.

“Does she mean the young un's really hers?” he said.

“Sure pop,” answered the packer. “Her's fer keeps.”

The foreman clicked his tongue for half a minute, looking like a mazed hen. “I been in the thick of 'em here fer more'n twenty-five year,” he said, “an' my opinion is girls is mad more 'r less most times by reason of the nature of 'em, but I'd never 'a' suspected anythin' o' the like o' that of 'er.”

“I'd never 'a' suspected it iv any man,” said Feathers.

Having recovered from his great wonder, the packer resumed the thread
of his long joke.

“Yeh might 'a' broke it to a bloke gently, Porline,” he murmured dolefully. “Iv yeh can't return the haffections iv one that worships the very old slippers yeh work in, there's no call t' go laceratin' his 'eart. Girl, girl, ain't yeh got no 'uman instincts?”

“Oh, fritters!” said Porline, vivaciously.

“Can't yeh be true t' one what loves yeh fer yerself alone?”

“To a dozen,” said Porline.

Feathers wiped away the tears with which he had sprinkled his face in preparation for the scene. “Leave me t' me grief,” he said. “Let me sorrer make me sacred.”

Porline went off jauntily in her character of the heartless foreign female out of the third act, and Feathers stole down for his daily beer like a man driven to it.

After that Porline often brought little Kitty to the factory. The Beauties made a toy of the pretty child, and presently the astonishment passed, and Porline's motherhood was accepted without remark. The woman was an Ishmaelite, she had no relatives to consider, and, keeping no society, was bound to no social observances. How she behaved within the law was her own affair; the factory, at least, pressed no demands.

One week, about two months after the first appearance of the child at Spats', Porline absented herself from work three days running. She returned on the Friday, coming in late, and the factory gasped at the sight of her. She was changed as if by a visitation, all her jauntiness was gone, she was hopelessly old and withered, the leathery tan had gone from her cheeks, and the folded skin was yellow and blotched, her red-lidded eyes were rimmed with purple—she looked like death in a feathered hat.

She passed through the girls, without a word, deaf to their inquiries. The packer's joke died on his lips. At her board she worked fiercely, wrapping herself up in the task, and the Beauties looked at her and at each other, and whispered conjectures. Fat Martha worked at the same table, but it was not till an hour and a half had passed that she dared put the question that had been on her lips all along.

‘Is—is it somethin' wrong wi Kitty, Porline?’ she said.

Porline turned on her savagely, raising her brush to strike. “Shut up, you fool!” she cried, shrilly. Her voice sank almost to a whisper. “Can't—can't you see I'm dying?” Her head fell amongst the paper before her, and then she slid to the floor, and lay grovelling, and the sobs that convulsed her beat her face upon the boards until it bled.

The girls rushed about her. Some tried to lift her from the floor, but she beat them off, and lay there writhing in passion of grief.
“It's Kitty,” she said presently. “My Kitty, my baby, my beautiful Kitty. They have taken her from me.”

“Who, dear?” asked the fat girl, sobbing in sympathy.

“Her mother. I took her when she was a tiny mite, and her own mother was afraid to have her, and she said I could keep her always, and I paid to have her nursed, and I dressed her in all the prettiest things I could buy, and I loved her—I loved her, and she is gone. They have taken her—my baby! my baby!”

Porline struck her bare hands upon the floor, and, lying upon her face in the dust, abandoned herself to a grief that was tragic—profound as the human heart—and the Beauties, who caught up emotions as the trees take the winds, cried over her in a woeful chorus.

Feathers broke away, and, staring at Benno, and pushing his hands before him, he said, brokenly: “I'm beat! I'm beat! Fer God's sake come 'n' 'ave a drink—I'm fair beat!”
Chapter VIII. The Wooing of Minnie.

AFTER years spent in the quest of the perfect boy, Odgson seemed satisfied that the species became extinct when he grew up, and a man was engaged to assist at the guillotines and do the rouseabout work of the factory. Chiller Green was about 24, and a sinister young man at first sight. He came on to the flat with the tips of his fingers dipped behind his belt in front, his chin thrust forward, and his eyes full of truculence. He surveyed the room and its occupants coldly, and his expression implied a certain disgust at finding himself in such cheap company. As he glared, his chin moved in a chewing action, leisurely and insolent. The movement was purely for effect; Chiller had nothing to chew. He was dressed in a soft black felt hat, high in the crown—a kind much affected by jockey-boys; a short, faded coat; trousers very skimped in the waist, and high-heeled boots.

A facetious clerk called up the tube to Feathers: “Accept delivery of the new boy. Please forward receipt at your convenience.”

The packer grinned. “'R' yow the new boy?” he said.

Chiller looked sidelong at the packer's feet with contemptuous casualness. “I'm Chiller Green, amachoor bantim champyin iv the Port,” he replied.

“Don' mention it,” said Feathers, cordially.

“I'm jest sayin',” continued Chiller, “I'm man enough t' go on with, s'posin' anyone's wantin' anythin'.”

“G'out!” said Feathers; “I'll contract t' bury all your dead with the fat-money from a brick-mill. Iv you've come 'ere t' work, sling off yer coat 'n' get a move, or the fore-woman'll smack you.”

Chiller spat with scientific precision, turned slowly away, and slouched towards the changing-room.

The impression Chiller Green conveyed during those first few minutes proved to be quite erroneous. The new hand was really a jaunty, companionable youth, and demonstrated as much within a week by inaugurating a boxing class in the lift corner, and fraternally blackening the packer's eye during the luncheon hour. The boxing-gloves were extemporised out of pairs of working-stockings discarded by the Beauties.

Green was the pride of a suburban “push,” and was certainly not more impudent than was excusable in a man who could “hook” with both hands, and had “done time” because a bush-bred policeman had no more respect for his head than to leave it in the way when the “push” was throwing bricks about. Chiller was not backward in publishing his record. He
promised to show Feathers a “boshter knack for passing out gazobs.”

“Got on to it when I was ‘up,’” he said.

“Gar-rn!” said the packer.

“Oh, I done my bit,” Chiller went on. “’Tain't nothin' agen me, though. Jist lined a John with a half-Brunswick, 'n' got four moon. Knocked him fair off his trolly.”

“Iv it gets known here they'll bounce yeh on the pavement.”

“My trubs! I'd have a cut at ole Spats hisself if 'e looked cock-eyed at me.” Chiller tilted his truck-load on to its base, put his hands up to nothing, did a shadowy spar, and then danced a few steps indicative of his cheerful indifference. “I kin alwe z get back ter the trade,” he said; “on'y it's Chinaman's work.”

“'N' what's yer trade?” asked Feathers.

“Barrerin' rabbies. They's money in it when meat's riz, but pushin' a barrer gets a man down, I tell yeh, specially in the winter mon's. I reckon I'll hang up here 'n' make a name fer mesilf.”

“Hope you'll keep us all on when you take over the business,” said the town-traveller.

The “bantim champyin” sparred at Goudy, feinted and balked in a highly decorative way, and tweaked the big man's beard, making at the same time a plaintive baa-ing. Then he resumed his burden and passed on, singing something to the effect that he could get a sweetheart any day, but not another mother. Chiller's taste in songs inclined to the sentimental and woebegone.

The town traveller's remark was called for. Already Chiller Green had assumed dominance in the factory. The deprecatory Ellis was most polite towards his assistant. The foreman's native timidity doomed him to be an easy victim to the audacity of young Mr. Green.

Chiller respected nobody. When Spats visited the factory flat, the Bantam outraged his dignity and ruined his influence by ridiculing him with audacious effrontery. As a compliment to Odgson's hairiness, Chiller had christened him Jo-Jo, and he indulged in doggy pantomime at the heels of the proprietor, or whined and yapped plaintively for the edification of the pasters, scattering choice *sotto voce* reflections on Spats, his appearance and manners, etc., reflections that embraced all Odgson's relations, including a purely hypothetical Aunt Lucy, and it was carried on with bravado that amounted to insane recklessness in the minds of the girls, whose dislike for the great man from below was tempered with a becoming awe.

Chiller's manner towards the girls was familiar and flippant. Even the superiority of the two or three sedate and somewhat elderly pasters, who
preserved a certain aloofness, had no effect upon the Bantam's exuberance, and he maintained for their benefit an assumption of close and intimate friendship that they seemed to find extremely galling. Miss Stevens was the most reserved of all these. The factory had endowed her with aristocratic antecedents and romantic misfortunes, and even the ragamuffin Beauties called her “Miss.” She was thirty and scornful.

“What-o, Steve! how-de-do-de?” was Chiller's morning greeting. Miss Stevens treated him as if he were something to which the attention of the Board of Health should be drawn at the earliest possible moment, and, addressing a neighbor, the young man would continue brightly: “Great cobbers, me 'n' Steve. She kin keep nothin' from me, tells me all her secrets. No end iv confidence in me, she's got. Used t' be a friend o' mother's. How's th' indigestion this mornin', Sissy?” Miss Stevens' name was not Sissy; she had no indigestion. Her wrath towards Mr. Green was silent, but very deep.

Benno, the clerk, Mr. Green refused to take seriously, at any time or in any capacity. He called him “Tutsie,” and insisted that, despite his present pretensions, his antecedents were of the lowest.

“How's yer ole pot-'n'-pan, Tutsie?” said Chiller. “When I knew him, he was head shop-walker on a saverloy-can, 'n' yer mother was carryin' round babies t' the poor, 'n' runnin' a ‘families supplied' emporium in Paddy's Alley.”

“Le' go me leg,” retorted the clerk, smartly.

“ 'N' 'ere 's you, wearin' made-t'-measure suits, 'n' collars what turn down all round, 'n' splashin' yerself agin the verandy posts iv fine night, like a young dook.”

Mr. Green's spirits were guaranteed to keep in any climate. When the factory was cold it was as inclement as a refrigerating mill, and when it was hot it was suggestive of a material hell with all the modern improvements in house-warming; but, cold or hot, Green retained his flippancy, and went about his work with abounding cheerfulness. He frequently paused by the way to put up a vivacious spar with a stack of parcels, and every now and then he threw in a “dead flash” scrap of step-dancing, or sang a couple of lines of a popular music-hall chorus with original effects.

This was before the Spadger began to get in her work. The Spadger was a little folder, so called because Feathers had discovered in her a strong resemblance to a bedraggled sparrow. She was waspish and thin, with a nose like a cheap wooden doll's, round eyes, and a mouth puckered into an ineradicable perkiness. Her walk had a confident sort of hop in it. Her ginger hair was literally dragged into a knot at the back, which was always
misplaced, so that her head had a cunning appearance of being pulled to one side or the other. She dressed very poorly, and her hats looked like some few unconsidered trifles collected on a plate. She was old-maidish at 18. Her name was Minnie Silver.

Chiller had been in the factory two months or more before he noticed Minnie particularly. When he began to offer her little attentions, his manner was still gaily impertinent, and the small folder ignored him with elaborate disdain that was a grotesque parody of the arts and graces of her betters. When she came up the stairs Chiller would make a burlesque demonstration, dusting the floor, and bustling pasters and parcels out of the way.

“Hello there, get off th' earth!” cried the Bantam, “'ere comes the little Duchess. How's it this mornin', yer Grace?”

Miss Silver's nose would be hoisted into the air, her underlip would curl outwards disdainfully, and she would sweep aside her scrap of faded skirt, and pass on with intense hauteur. Then Chiller to the packer: “Get on to 'er, Feathers. You see 'ow she treats me—me what never put her away when she stole the tutsie, 'n' never will, s'help me.” The reference to the tutsie (vernacular for cat) was provoked by Minnie's muff—a skimpy moth-eaten muff with bald patches—of which she was rather proud.

“I 'ope I got too much self-respec' t' have anythink t' say t' them low larrikins,” said Minnie to the nearest paster.

Mr. Green continued in this vein for some weeks. He never came near Miss Silver without favoring her with some trifle of banter, and his remarks were personal—painfully so, they might have seemed to people of refinement. One afternoon Minnie remarked, in a high-pitched, thin voice, addressing nobody in particular:—

“If someone don't know better 'n ter sing out after people in the street they'll find out.” The speech was laboriously enigmatic, but Chiller understood. Strange to say, the young man had no reply.

There was an undercurrent of sadness in the Bantam's greeting to Miss Silver next morning.

“'Ere she is agin. Ain't she saucy?” he said.

“Phew!” said Miss Silver, disdainfully.

“Oh, mother, she bit me!” Chiller sparred, side-stepped the town traveller, hit him in the wind, and then danced a shuffle or two; but it was evident to Feathers that the bloom was passing from the young man's assurance.

Not long after this the packer came upon Chiller and Miss Silver behind one of the stacks. Minnie was supercilious; Chiller was protesting almost pathetically.
“Oh, I say, Min, get off me face. Ain't I sweet with yeh! Ain't——” Chiller discovered Feathers at this point, and fell into a low-comedy vein. He feinted at the stack, ducked in, and put in some effective half-arm blows on a bundle of fruit-bags; but Feathers was not deceived. Miss Silver went perkily up the room. Certainly the courtship was progressing.

After this there was an unmistakably pathetic appeal in Chiller's banter; and Miss Silver, understanding her advantage, accentuated her haughtiness. She was weazened, and plain, and miserably dressed, and in all probability had never had an admirer before, but the most disdainful beauty could not have assumed more airs towards a hapless suppliant. Indeed, at this stage, Miss Silver's performance was an exquisite piece of comedy. Despite her disdain, instinct prompted the girl to preen herself with silly little bits of ribbon and scraps of lace, and a small bunch of second-hand cherries and a turkey feather were added to the quaint collection in her battered hat. Her scorn for Chiller was rapidly working upon what strange sense of humor the Beauties possessed. She put herself to no little trouble to display it. She went out of her way to meet the Bantam in order to avoid him with unspeakable disdain. She talked at Chiller in a loud, reedy voice.

“There's someone what's always follerin' someone about in a way what he orter be ashamed of hisself, knowin' he ain't wanted,” she cried.

“Better lay poison for him,” said the Fat Girl.

“It's yer fatal beauty, Spadger,” suggested Kitty Coudray. “Cut yer 'air 'n' sit in the sun till you freckle up, 'n' then the man might give you a rest.”

Another paster asked if the villain who still pursued her was an aide-de-camp or a rich squatter.

“Oh, 'e knows what 'e is well enough,” answered Minnie, shrilly, “'n' 'e better mind 'isself, that's all.”

Chiller had no answer to make to these insinuations. They left him depressed. He went about his work quietly. He had abandoned the boxing-class in the lift-corner, and showed a marked dislike for the society of Feathers, Goudy and the ribald printers. Even Billy the Boy was losing respect for him, and cast painful reflections up and down the stairs.

“Buck up,” said Billy, “there's lots better 'n her in the dust-box.”

Chiller declined to buck up. Minnie piped something to the effect that she would disdain to be “found drowned with a bloke what done-up 'is air dead leary,” next morning the elaborate festoons had disappeared from Chiller's brow, and his hair was parted with the oily precision characteristic of Sunday-school superintendents and reputable young barbers.

“They's scrougers what think they's jist the lolly in a red tie,” piped Minnie, “but they ain't respectable, if yer arsk me.”

Chiller abandoned his red tie. He put away the proud bob-tailed coat with
the buttons on it, because Minnie said acridly of all wearers of such coats: “It shows what they are—lurchers 'n' rats, the lot iv 'em.” He lowered his heels for the same reason, and discarded a black-and-white sweater that he had prized very highly, because Minnie thought sweaters suggested disreputable sporting connections. But poor young Mr. Green's courtship was not visibly advanced by these concessions. Minnie Silver remained supercilious.

“Oh, Min, come off,” said Chiller, in sad expostulation.

“Speak ter yer equals!” sniffed the little folder.

“Give's a charnce, won't yeh?” persisted Chiller, following her up.

Minnie gathered up her dingy skirt, pointed her nose straight at the rafters, and to use Chiller's own expressive phrase, “laid him out cold.”

Half-an-hour later, speaking from her place at the board, and addressing the whole factory, Miss Silver cried:—

“If people 'angs round other people's 'ouses of nights it's their own look-out if the police gets spoke to.”

Chiller Green actually blushed. A few minutes later, when the Bantam was busy at the machines, and well within range, Minnie said to Miss Twentyman:—

“Seen me out with Mr. Eddie, Sunday, didn't yer, Sis? 'E's a gentleman, 'e is. Knows how t' behave 'isself. Gets 'is quid a week et Goosie's, solderin' jam-tins, 'n' a rise every year. 'E don't 'ave no truck with no low fightin' scrougers, 'e don't.”

Mr. Green did not blush this time, but a light came into his eye that augured ill for Mr. Eddie, of Goosie's jam factory. On the morning of the second day, Minnie was extremely caustic in her comments on some person or persons of pugnacious quality.

“Them what 'its them what is too good for them will be made to pay for it, so they better mind out,” she said. Chiller growled a bad expression, and Miss Silver continued moralising. “It’s somethin' if a young lady can't walk down the street with a friend what's a gentleman, without 'im bein' dealt with, an' 'is nose punched. But what I sez is, there's a law for the likes.”

Chiller got a day off to attend his aunt's funeral, and Feathers discovered in the suburban department of an evening paper an intimation that one James Green had been fined £2, with the alternative of a week's imprisonment, for a grievous and unprovoked assault on a Mr. Henry Eddie in the public street.

Next evening, Chiller said to Feathers, “I'm slingin' it, blokey. Goin' back ter the trade.”

“But I thought barrer-pushin' was a game fer gazobs?”

“Oh, ole Spats can't expect me ter go on muckin' round his fact'ry fer
seventeen-'n'-a-tizzy. I'm thinkin' iv gettin' married."

“Gar-rn!”

“Ya-a-a-a-s.” Chiller sparred a bit, danced a step or two, and went off singing. “She's onlee a wuckin' girl, no friends 'as she,” but his old spirit was lacking.

Chiller left. In two months, Minnie left. One Monday morning about a year later, Feathers said to Benno, the clerk:—

“Who'd yeh think I seen, Sundee? Th' Bantam 'n' 'er nibs.”

“What! Spadger?”

“Ya-as. They 'ad a pramberlater. There was a pincher in it. Chiller was pushin' it.”

“Good enough for 'em,” said the relentless Benno.
Chapter IX. Levi's Trousers.

'TAIN'T in 'uman nature t' respect a man what lets his missus make his trowsis,” said the head packer. Feathers had the new man in the off corner of his left eye, but was chewing deliberately, and scattering his philosophy for the use of the globe. There was something very impressive about his chewing at moments like this, it lent a ruminating profundity to his discourse. He swept the brown paper neatly into the end of his parcel, and paused again, leaning on his job.

“No man that wore 'ome-made round-th'-'ouses ever done wonders in this world,” Mills continued. “Napoleon's missus never made his trowsis, 'n' iv Julius Caesar's ole lady 'd tried t' push a brace iv pants cut off a set iv father's on t' him, he'd 'a' shown her some new hits, take it from me. Straight, there ain't no call fer two opin ons 'bout the bloke in breeches with all the fullin' in front, 'n' legs like rusty tin cylinders. They show he ain't got hit enough in him t' make himself respected in his own 'ome, 'n' you can bet that at a pinch the wearer wouldn't have sufficient gimp t' get up off a tack.” Feathers punched his parcel round, and whipped in the other end with automatic precision. “'N' yet,” he said, bitterly, “half the 'ouses in town 'ud give a gooey iv that sort a billet rather 'n' take on a lad with a tizzy's worth iv grit in him. 'Specially if His Trowsis had a slitherin' chin, 'n' the Sunday face iv a sick sheep.”

The new man packed on in a painful way. The articles Mills handled so deftly tormented him like things possessed of devils, and slid all over the bench. His face was that of a depressed animal, and his large, pale eyes had the intense expression of a prestidigitateur in action.

“Feathers,” said the town traveller, “you're a heathen. You do not apppeciate the refining influence of a pure woman. Now, when I see a man in a pair of trousers facing both wa ys I recognise the tender touch of a woman's hand, and know he has a good, frugal, little wife.”

“Who knocks cats out iv him iv he spits in the fender.”

“I admit the trousers mother makes are not elegant, but by persistenly making her hubby's pants, a thoughtful wife may save enough to bury him.”

The trousers were Dutch-rigged and wonderful. They were of a thick, hard, brown material, and looked as if they might have stood alone had not one leg been so much shorter than the other; they were extremely baggy fore and aft, and were corrugated up the seams, and had a decided list to port; but the criticism did not seem to reach the wearer. He found no personal significance in the conversation, but was absorbed in the effort to
get the paper round his parcel without spilling everything. Billy the Boy, whose mere wart of a nose poked into all mischief, had been grinning ecstatically through the stair battens, and now ventured to take his part in the play. He approached the new man and examined his trousers closely, critically, with grave concern, from several points of view. He was very small, very inky, and had a sense of humor much beyond his years. He touched the new man inquisitively.

“How'd it happen, cully?” he said, pointing to the trousers.

The new man looked down at his pants, and his parcel went to pieces under his hand again. He turned round once, as if to get a general view.

“What's wrong?” he said.

“Did yeh put 'em on wrong, 'r hev they gone wrong on yeh?” asked the printer's devil, anxiously.

“They're all right, ain't they?” asked the man, and he dusted them carefully.

“Oh, they're jist the glassy, but if yeh did'nt get in backwards yeh must 'a' turned the corner too soon.”

The new man suspected something jocular at last, and he looked up, and bleated at Feathers and the town traveller. He meant well, and thought he was smiling, but, as Benno said, it looked like the figure-head of a wild asylum having spasms.

“Jimmy Jee!” ejaculated Feathers. “Someone stop it, for the love iv heaven.”

“Mother, I've come home to die,” sang Goudy.

“Kiss me 'n' I will be good,” cried Bella Coleman, and the pasters squealed rapturously. A new hand was always fair game for them.

The foreman cantered down the room spluttering; the new hand switched off his smile, and the others went about the firm's business with an appearance of great industry.

Levi Goss, the new hand, had been engaged to assist Feathers during the busy season, and the packer had wasted so much time endeavouring to teach him his business that he now regarded him as a painful grievance, sent into the factory by Spats and an adverse Providence for his especial mortification.

Levi was about 35, a lugubrious and unsociable person who neither drank, smoked, swore, nor canoodled with Beauty. “He ain't no hangel, but he enjoys all the disadvantages,” said Feathers. He was always dressed in anticipation of the worst, in heavy suits that looked as if they had been made more by accident than design, and wore thick, grey, woollen socks, and thick, blue, knitted mitts about his wrists, and a thick woollen muffler, and he carried an umbrella. The packer declared that he wore red felt chest-
protectors and woollen knee comforters, too, but that was mere conjecture.

Goss was something of a new chum, and spoke with the remains of a barbarous North country dialect, the burr of which defies every known process of literary reproduction. He was a covert man, and avoided the girls with a deliberate intention that became an offence in the course of a week—an open offence calling for retaliation. It was crass folly to take service in a factory full of undisciplined hussies in any spirit but one of proper humility backed by trust in Providence.

The Beauties resented Goss's dull, unseeing eye and his bovine insensitivity, and with the sex's quick instinct in discovering man's most vulnerable parts, opened an attack upon his trousers.

These trousers were a source of great uneasiness to Levi; they were always on his mind. It was not the eccentricity of their style that worried him—he was plainly unconscious of their imperfections—but fear that an injury should come to them. His care that no stain should sully their well-preserved newness, was not merely the natural anxiety of a careful man. There was terror in it. For a time his little attentions were secret. He would fearfully inspect his nether garments by the lift windows behind the piled bales. He went under cover to brush them many times a day, and before leaving of an evening cautiously removed every particle of factory dust.

Later, when his pants became an object of open ridicule and a target for scorn, Goss's distress about them was open and undisguised, and still the Beauties harried him with heathenish relish. Clots of paste attached themselves to his trousers in ways inconceivable to the wearer; adhesive papers were picked up from every seat; flour bespattered them, and they were defiled with dust and printer's ink and gum. Levi grew haggard in his devotion to them, and wore the look of a hunted animal.

The factory was never without a stock joke or two, and for a fortnight Levi's trousers usurped the honor. One afternoon the Fat Girl came from the changing-room in a caricature of the despicable garments, done in hessian, drawn on over her petticoats, and the result was a storm of ribald joy that drove the foreman half frantic, and brought Spats himself up from his lurking place in the warehouse. Purple with wrath, and quite breathless after the exertion, he stood for a minute at the head of the stairs, a malignant black figure, scowling horribly.

On another occasion a large tub of paste disguised with paper was substituted for the seat Levi usually occupied at lunch, and Levi came up out of it so bedraggled that his misery completely unsettled the packer, and Feathers assisted manfully in cleaning him down. This kindly office must have touched the new hand; at any rate it led him to repose some little confidence in the packer. A few hours later he approached the bench at
which Feathers was working, and said, lugubriously:

“You know, Mr. Mills, I got a sorrier, I have.”

“What?!” gasped Feathers.

“I got a sorrier—here.” He smote himself on the breast, and returned to his work, leaving the packer in a condition of semi-paralysis. It was too good a joke to be thrown away.

“Know what?” said the packer to Goudy and the clerk next morning.

“Goss's got a sorrier. Ain't yeh, Goss?”

Levi nodded, and pointed to his heart as if to imply its secret nature.

“Here,” he said, and his expression was such that Goudy bent suddenly over a parcel and coughed violently to save the situation.

“Hello,” said Benno, “a sorrier—eh, what? 'Tain't a little duchess, is it?”

“No, no, no, no,” gasped Levi, with trepidation; “it isn't anything of that kind.”

“Something he's keeping from the missus,” said Goudy.

“Maybe iv it ain't women it's the booze,” mused Feathers. “Confide in us, Goss—weak men the best iv us, 'n' all mis'rable sinners.”

“Perhaps it's his trousers,” ventured the town traveller, with a sympathetic inflection.

Goss shook his head. “No,” he said, “it's a secret sorrier.”

“Ther fact is,” Feathers admitted, impressively, “his missus makes him wear red flannel binders.”

“They're very sustaining,” said Goudy, encouragingly.

“Yes, but bli'me, a bloke in flannel binders ain't properly weaned; 'n' I cud just cry over pore ole Levi there with binders gnawin' inter his vitals.”

“Here,” cried Goudy, tremulously, “don't you give way or you'll have me crying, too.”

Benno blubbered.

Goss hastened to reassure them, but he would not tell the true story of his sorrow.

Within ten minutes the whole factory was in possession of the legend of Levi's sorrow, and the Beauties were enjoying it with undisciplined rapture like the barbarians they were. It was a new theme, but it did not divert attention from the trousers, which seemed to develop fresh possibilities in the way of low comedy every day, and at length Levi approached Feathers on the subject.

“I say,” he said, with the faintest suggestion of impatience, “is there anythin' wrong about my trousers?”

“Yer trowsis!” ejaculated Feathers, with surprising self-control.

“Yes, what's against them!”

The packer examined the clothes with a judicial air, as if his attention had
now been called to them for the first time.

“I dunno,” he said, “they seem t' be a orl right pair iv pants, iv sound constitution, 'n' not too saucy. Hi, Benno!” The clerk climbed down from his desk, and joined in the inspection. “Yeh don't see nothin' irreg'larr about Goss's trowsis, do yeh?” continued Feathers. “Jest have a look at 'em, 'n' give us yer unbiassed opinion.”

“They're the pink!” said Benno, warmly. “T' tell the gor's truth, if I have showed any envy iv Goss, it's on account iv them garments.”

Feathers called the Fat Girl, and she came readily. “Goss here, he's a bit put out over his pants,” said the packer. “Thinks perhaps they ain't the height iv ambition in their way. Speakin' ez a hexpert, what's yer candid opinion iv 'em, Miss Pilcher?”

“If Mr. Goss hadn't been so cold to me I'd 've asked him fer a pattern off 'em fer pa,” said Martha, almost sadly.

“'Old 'ard a bit, 'n' I'll whistle up the guv'ner, 'n' we'll hear what a really great mind thinks about 'em.” Feathers pulled the plug out of the speaking-tube, and blew a blast. “Is Mr. Odgson in his office? Y' might ask him t' step upstairs fer a moment. Goss is in great distress iv mind about his trowsis—wants counsel's opinion respectin' the fit iv the keel 'n' the hang iv the basque.”

“No, no, no, no!” wailed Goss. “It doesn't much matter. You mustn't disturb the proprietor.” He fled back to his bench, and flurried a thousand envelopes on to the floor.

That was a very bad day for the trousers, and in the evening, a few minutes after the last of the girls had gone downstairs, an excited bit of pantomime on the part of the packer brought half-a-dozen printers to the top flat. Feathers, going on tip-toe, led them round the turn of the room to where Levi Goss, denuded of the precious breeches, stood at the sink, a lank-legged, ungainly object, carefully cleaning his pants with “turps.” Feathers commanded silence with a master hand. Then suddenly bounded down upon Levi, counterfeiting great excitement.

“Run fer yer life!” he yelled. “Run, 'r yer a rooned man! Half-a-dozen iv the girls 're comin' back up the stairs.”

Levi swung round, and glared for one terrible moment, his eyes full of horror, his fallen chin suggestive of a sheepish helplessness, his few poor wits utterly demoralised by the shock; and then he made a desperate rush for the lift as the only possible haven of refuge, pulled the rope with a furious tug, and dropped out of sight.

Goss made frantic efforts to struggle into the wrong end of his trousers during the down journey, but had only succeeded in working up a strange entanglement when the lift bumped on the bottom floor at the wide doors
opening on to a crowded lane, where two-thirds of the Beauties were still loitering, exchanging badinage with the youths in the bacon stores opposite.

A shriek of pagan delight greeted the spectacle of the trouserless man, and there was a dash for the entrance.

Terror-stricken, Goss caught up his draperies and rushed into the cellar, falling over bales in his hurry. He went up the rough steps to the first flat in a few bounds, ending in a grotesque scramble. Voices above headed him off, and he raced down the warehouse, like some quaint, mad animal, and jumped for the front stairs. His clambering up them was suggestive of the caperings of a drugged tarantula. He made maniacal attempts to jump into his trousers as he climbed, and twice he hit the steps with his shins, and sprawled half way down the flight again, his face retaining the expression of a man escaping narrowly from the jaws of some ravening beast, and all the while clerks and customers gaped in speechless wonderment.

The Printers' flat greeted Goss with a yell as he rushed through it, trailing his trousers. One voice cried “Fire!”

Thrown back by the sounds of feminine squealing above, Levi hurled himself bodily under the double-royal printing machine, and lay there, beseeching protection in gasps, and picking up inked paper and coagulated grease as he fought his way into his garments again.

Neither Spats nor the second in command was in the establishment during the term of Levi's flight, and there was nobody malicious enough to give him away, but Goss was not destined to remain long in Spats' factory.

One afternoon, eight or nine days later, a short, stout, neat-looking Methodistical woman of about 30, with a very businesslike expression in her eye, came up the back stairs and stood for a moment regarding Levi Goss silently, severely. Levi's work slid from his hand; he cowered under the stern gaze like a criminal. Feathers, looking from one to the other, whistled down the scale.

"Goss's sorrier, fer a dollar!” he said.

The woman advanced to Levi. “So, Mr. Goss, this is your quiet little job, is it?” Her eyes went over the factory taking inventory of the girls, and classifying them, and her lips tightened, and her color rose. “You dissipated devil!” she hissed. “You abominable rake! you have deceived me. This is why you have lied to me.”

“'Pon my soul, Louisa, I——” Levi's attitude was humble, but the woman cut him short.

“Yes,” she cried, “you are in your element here with all these hussies, you wretch. Oh, but you shall pay for this.” Nobody seeing Louisa's face could doubt it for a moment. “To think after all the care I have taken of
you, you should have been here unwatched, unguarded. You brute, I'll divorce you.”

The truth dawned upon the factory. Louisa was jealous—jealous of her Levi. It seemed too utterly grotesque, but there was no doubting it. Bella Coleman had marked the word “hussies,” and the contemptuous flashes in Louisa's grey eyes, and she approached diffidently with an anxious expression, seeking vengeance.

“Who—who are you, woman?” she asked in agonised Theatre Royal accents.

“I am this man's wife, that's who I am!” said Louisa, fiercely.

“Great Heavings!” gasped Bella, staggering. “Great Heavings; and he never told us he was a married man.”

Then she passed on with bowed head and a faltering step, the picture of a blighted life.

Louisa turned on Goss, and for half-a-minute she was speechless. Then she seized him by the shoulder. “Get your coat!” She dragged him from his bench, and Levi lurched away to the dressing room, Louisa retaining her grip. He returned presently with his coat, and Louisa, with her relentless clutch upon him, pushed him before her down the stairs. She pushed him all the way, never relaxing her hold for a moment. Feathers, leaning over the rail, watched them down in a dazed way, with the feeling of a man who had seen the last possibility of human folly. Then he straightened himself and addressed the factory.

“Levi's a giddy,” he said. “He's a rake, a bloomin' Henry the Eight. 'N' in them trowsis too!”

But we had not seen the last of Levi Goss. He came up to the top flat again next day with his wife in charge. Louisa stood aside, wearing a grim, unbelieving expression, while her husband set about clearing his character.

“I'm in an awful mess, Mr. Mills,” he said to the packer, “and you're a good chap, you'll help me. See, my missus, she's 'orribly jealous o' me, and I didn't care to tell her I was workin' in the same room with a pack o' girls, and now she thinks I've bin carryin' on, and—and I didn't get a wink o' sleep all last night. 'Twas bad enough when I got my clothes dirty, but now it's somethin' awful.” A tear rolled down Levi's cheek.

Feathers took the matter in hand with judicious gravity. He assured Mrs. Goss that her husband's conduct had been most exemplary during his stay in the factory, that he had been blind to beauty and deaf to the voice of the tempter. He produced witnesses in proof, Bella Coleman among the rest, and this young lady admitted that Goss's not having told her he was a married man might reasonably have been ascribed to the fact that he had never spoken to her at all. “I wouldn't have one like him if they gave 'em
away with a gold mine,” added Miss Coleman, with convincing emphasis.
Levi looked happier as he went away, and Feathers called a bit of advice after them.
“Take it from me, missus,” he said, “give the pore man a charnce. Let him buy his own trowsis.”
Chapter X. The Packer's “Little Silly.”

MR. GEORGE MILLS, packer, was not wholly impervious to the arrows of the little love god. He had not served, for twelve years or more, on the top flat at Spats', with girls of all ages, all sorts and sizes, and every make and shape, gathered about him, without sustaining wounds. But Feathers was a philosopher.

“A man learns a bit 'bout women in a crib like this,” he said, ruminating over a quid, “‘n' the more he learns, the more he puts his confidence in beer.”

Nobody had ever seen the packer drunk, but he had a deep, abiding affection for beer, and with the affection was coupled a large respect.

“It's these cheap 'n' easy shickers rollin' round on their ear what brings discredit on beer. 'Tain't the liquor wot's snide, it's the dead hookity hides what it gets chuted into, 'n' the grown bloke ez kin take his little lot in bond, 'n' then go 'ome on his own end 'ithout wakin' the town, 's got a friend in beer more lovin' than mother. Jimmy Jee! how'd a man get bumped with worldly trubs if he 'adn't beer t' fall back on! 'Ow'd I iv bin many a time if 'twasn't fer the drop iv buck-up? I've seen me put all my bits on a little silly more'n once 'r twice, 'n' played fer keeps too—took the teetotal fer 'er sake, 'n' was mother's bes' boy fer ez much ez a month, 'n' then 'ad t' get back et the pints agin fer consolation. Now I wouldn' turn it down fer the toffest Dolly on the block.”

The “little silly” Mills had more particularly in his mind when moralising thus was Connie Gleeson, an expert paster from a rival establishment. Miss Gleeson was a revelation to Spats' Beauties—tall and fair, with large blue eyes, abundant hair, an excellent complexion, and a decent figure.

Sitting quite still, in a plain black dress, with her mouth shut, Connie was a very passable imitation of a lady, but the illusion vanished the moment she opened her ruby lips. Feathers was well pleased with her; so was Benno, and, for the matter of that, so was Billy the Boy, in whom familiarity with the Beauties had bred a quaint precocity.

“My Jimmy! you kin tread on me face, whoever y' are,” said the small devil, when he first confronted Miss Gleeson. “You're the prize bloom, Sis. Where'd they get yeh? Look 'ere, if you ain't runnin' a bes' boy iv yer own would y' min’ givin' me a little kiss?”

“Cheeky boy,” said Miss Gleeson. “Get goin' 'r I'll hit y' in the squint.” She threatened him pleasantly with her brush.

Billy the Boy stood back for a better view. “What's a bonzer like you doin' spreadin' sour paste fer yer daily?” said the wise child. “You orter be
in the sixp'ny bar, spangled with di'monds, dishin' up drinks t' lots iv squatters.” To Billy's young idea, a barmaid's position in a sixpenny bar was the ultimate height in the way of social elevation.

“Wha's that?” exclaimed Miss Gleeson, struck with the idea. “D'yeh think I'd do fer a barmaid?”

“Do I what? Take it from the teller, you'd slap the town. You've have firs' pull ermong the doods, 'n' cud pick one t' suit.”

Feathers came softly behind the printer's devil, took him by the ear, led him to the top of the stairs, and prompted him with a kick. Billy went down. The packer already had other views for Miss Gleeson, and he did not like the turn the conversation had taken.

“Gar-rt!” cried Connie. “Le' the boy be. 'E's a fair treat.”

Billy's head bobbed up the stairs again. “'Andle him tender, Sis,” he piped, “he's li'ble t' boils. That what yeh notice 'bout 'im's free-lunch onyins. Cud chip it with a chisel, cudn't yeh?”

The packer's usual weapon, the twine ball, missed, and knocked in the belltopper of the junior partner in the cellar below. Billy the Boy was absent from the subsequent explanations. He was very happy. Later in the day he presented Miss Gleeson with a caricature of the packer in three inks. Bill's caricatures were always atrociously broad, and yet held some strange, loathly resemblance to the victim that made them a joy to everybody else.

Feathers' love for Connie Gleeson was a sudden infection. In the words of Benno, he took it “ez the kitten took the brick.” Miss Twentyman introduced the stranger with grave formalities, and the packer was glad he had kept his collar on that morning, and pleased that his well-oiled hair was truly parted, and that the branching arabesques on his forehead were as accurate as a printer's bracket. These reflections flowed in upon him, despite the fact that it was “a fair knock-out.”

Connie had large eyes, into which she could infuse at will a touching shyness quite infantile. She rolled them at Mills, and she smiled at him through moist, red lips. She had a trick of moistening her lips when she wished to be particularly bewitching. Feathers was stunned. Ten minutes later Benno found him, fifty 21b. fruit bags in his inert hands, his jaws suspended, and his unseeing eyes fixed on the whitewashed wall beyond his packing-board, dead to the world.

“'Ello! 'ello, there!” cried the clerk, dropping a 141b. weight on the scales. “Get a move on, 'r you'll get the shoot. Hoggy's comin' up with his gun.”

The packer sprung into action as if a button had been touched. “Hev yeh taken an inven'try iv the new goods?” he said presently, finding it was a
false alarm.

“What-ho!” said the little clerk, giving his lapels a tug. “Have I not!”

“Isn't she?” commented Mills, with something like enthusiasm.

“She is, 'n' more,” replied Benno. “Me 'n' me worldly goods 're all hers.”

“Pity t' waste yeh!” sneered Feathers.

Miss Gleeson discovered herself to be the object of interest, and moistened her lips, dropped her face, and smiled up shyly at them through her nimbus of fair hair. It was a very pretty action, and most effective, but it drew a long, moaning sound from Harrerbeller Harte, followed by a lot of irrelevant baby-talk, addressed to nobody and nothing.

“Oh's mummy's ickle sly-boots, oo is—oo is! Baby's a baddy baddy 'icky bubb-bubb to goo-goo the wicked mans!” said the lank and homely Miss Harte, and she kept at it till Feathers got angry and advised her to get back to the madhouse.

“S'pose it's in the fam'ily,” he said. “Y' orter be seen to. How d' we know y' ain't dangerous?”

For answer Harrerbeller gave a grotesque parody of Miss Gleeson's timid droop and moist, shy smile that set half the pasters squealing. Already the Beauties had decided that Connie was “as ratty as rabbits,” and their hasty judgment was confirmed by wider experience, although no man in the house could be brought to admit that there was anything the matter with Connie beyond an excess of girlish sweetness.

It is a foolish girl indeed who has not some kind of an eye to the main chance in her dealings with man, and it is not likely that Connie regarded Feathers as her main chance at any time. There is no doubt, however, that the packer was very serious. After the first month he gave up beer and other little self indulgences, in order to have it in his power to shout the young lady to 2s. seats at the Royal, and to suppers of fried whiting, chips, and coffee at the fish-shops.

Feathers was not a demonstrative lover, but his affection for Miss Gleeson was soon common knowledge. He built a stack of sugar-bags near her board as a cover for little flirtations, and if anybody in authority came to the flat while he was making himself sweet with the paster, he adroitly shifted his interest, and was found to be busy at that stack, either taking parcels off or building them on.

Benno brought to Goudy the news that Mills had been seen at large in a flogger coat, and wearing a turn-over collar five inches high, and a little bow tie of tender pink. The facts were communicated in George's hearing.

“Strike me, you'd iv thought it had ten thousan' a year from aunty t' do what it liked with,” said Benno.

A little pink bow tie,” said the town traveller, with exaggerated interest.
“How coy!”

“'N a new grey felt 'at tucked in by mother,” said Benno.

“And a pure white collar and a clean shave,” added Goudy. “It must have
looked like 'The Maiden's Prayer.' How did the women seem to bear up,
poor things?”

Feathers arranged 14lb. of sugar bags with great attention to detail.

“But you've gotter overlook it.” Benno went on; “it ain't responsible. It's
doing a dote on a little silly, 'n' it's took t' walkin' in its sleep.”

“Takes her to sixpenny shows, and shouts cough drops,” said the town
traveller. “The man's mad!”

Feathers began to soliloquise aloud. “Once knew a Scotchman give an
ounce iv liver t' bribe a tom cat, 'n' then, after frettin' erbout it fer a month,
he ate the cat t' get his own back.” Then, discovering Goudy and the clerk,
he said pleasantly: “'Ello! is that you? Thort it was the cockroaches.”

Taking up his parcel, the packer crossed to Connie's board, and held
playful conversation with the paster merely to demonstrate his superiority
to criticism. While his back was turned, the town traveller filled his drawer
with dodgers and cuttings from furnishing warehousemen's advertisements,
all addressed to those about to marry, and all undertaking to furnish a home
for two at a cost the ridiculous smallness of which absolutely filled the
advertisers with amazement. Later, Goudy led Miss Gleeson to the packer's
bench, and, pulling out the drawer, revealed to her the many cuttings.

“Keep at him, my girl. You've got him thinking,” he said.

“Yar, go'n chase yrself, why don't yeh?” said Miss Gleeson, pleasantly
confused. Then, as a bright afterthought, she added, “Yer fair up the pole!”

Mills had become very spruce these mornings. He shaved every day. He
wore white collars and gay ties at his bench, and kept a bit of broken
mirror in the lift corner, to which he repaired several times a day to refresh
himself and re-arrange his hair. Billy the Boy noticed these things, and
commented on them.

“He's bin mendin' his hair agin, Sis,” said the small boy. “He parts it with
a plumb-bob. I say, ain't he one fer keepin' hisself clean? I ain't bin able t'
rekernise him lately.”

Billy lurked behind stacks of bales, with his retreat always open. The
packer placed a hard twine ball handy, and trusted in Providence.

Billy the Boy resented the packer's courtship of Connie. He thought she
should aim higher, and he brought her affectionate messages, mostly
mythical, from superior persons in the warehouse. Billy's messages from
the junior partner once removed, “Our Mr. Duff,” were particularly ardent.
Miss Gleeson was inclined to think there was something in them, but
everybody else knew them to be preposterous.
“Suety's bin tellin' me he's seen nothin' t' touch yeh 'tween here 'n' world's end, Sis,” said Billy, soberly.

“Oh, go on, get off me face,” answered Connie.

“Sez yer a knock-out, 'n' if anyone 'ud poison his wife he'd be on'y too 'appy t' track with yeh. He sez yer 'air's the goldenest he knows, 'n' you've got a neye like a tram lamp, 'N' 'ere are yow dodgin' round with a waster like Feathers, what gets a matter iv three bob a day, 'n' couldn't afford t' keep white mice after he's paid fer the brilliantine what he glues his 'air with.”

Judge the amazement of the fact ory when one afternoon Mr. Duff, the junior partner once removed, approached Connie Gleeson's board, and, under a thin and miserable pretence of examining her work, entered into serious conversation, which soon developed a flippancy of which his wife would certainly not have approved. Connie was greatly flustered and flattered. Her moist, red lips, her large, infantile eye, and her girlish airs were all overworked in a distressing way.

A strange silence fell upon the Beauties. Feathers worked stolidly. His back betrayed nothing, but it would have pleased him to have been in a position to command a special thunderbolt for the junior partner that day.

In the course of a week Mr. Duff came twenty times to the factory flat and he never left without exchanging a little airy badinage with Miss Gleeson. On each succeeding occasion the conversation was a little more familiar, and Connie moistened her lips, giggled ingenuously, and, glancing up through her hair, said again and again: “Oh, Mr. Duff, you are a one!” Feathers grew murderous. Harrerbeller Harte's little burlesques of the meetings convulsed the factory.

“Popsey-wopsey mustn't play with the wicked gentleman,” cautioned Harrerbeller. “Wicked gentleman steal mummy's ickle sweetie away, and then bub cry her pretty blue eyes out, she will. Popsey's a teeny weeny silikin; nice gentleman eat her all up!” In concluding, Harrerbeller aped a cow-like coquetry, and squealed with affected rapture: “Oh, Mr. Duff, you are a one!” And then the Beauties gave the chorus: “Oh, Mr. Duff, you are a one!”

But Connie was not distressed by this by-play. She merely giggled, and wriggled, and rolled her blue eyes, and said, mincingly, with her most ladylike air: “Stop it off, y' lot iv wasters. I wouldn't 'ave him on me mind.”

Feathers was the real sufferer. In his own language, he was “off the Dolly.” Connie passed his bench now with her mouth pursed, her nose up, and her eyes half-closed, usually trilling a popular tune with a most elaborate assumption of pre-occupation. The packer gave no sign, but his soul was a seething geyser of emotion, waiting for a chance to spout.
It was a pleasant afternoon. The sunshine poured in through the western windows, and a droning calmness was upon the factory. Mills packed steadily, apparently unconscious of everything but duty, really alert from his ear-tips to his ankles. Benno came to him from the lift end, touched him on the shoulder, winked three times, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the stacks.

“Get back t' yer barrel!” said Feathers, with concentrated vindictiveness. As if Feathers did not know that the junior partner had just met Connie as she was coming back from the boilers, and that round the turn of the room a flirty flirtation was going on. The packer could hear the sound of playful slapping, and Connie's irritating titter scalded his ears. The two were under cover of a high stack of hat bags in parcels of 500, built twelve on, and almost reaching the roof. Hat bags are extremely light, the whole stack would not weigh anything considerable, and it had caved, and had a big list. It overhung the philanderer and Miss Gleeson like the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Billy the Boy came up the stairs on a special mission.

“Mister Duff 'ere?” he asked. “His missus wants him pertickler.” Billy looked back. “She's comin' up,” he said.

A blinding inspiration struck Mills. He ceased packing. His vengeance was at hand.

“Comin' up, is she?” He looked over the stair, and lied calmly. “Suety's jist gone down t' the printer's flat. Get after him on the front stairs.”

Billy fled, and Feathers looked over the balusters again. He wished to time his little tableau precisely. There came to his mind rumors of Mr. Duff's domestic infelicities. He had heard Mrs. Duff referred to as “the Duchess.” She was large and stout, and she had followed her husband to the top flat on previous occasions.

The packer bent over a few reams of confectionery paper by the stack of hat bags. His shoulder was against the stack. He lifted deliberately, and with a great heave, and slowly, silently, like a snow drift, over went the stack, burying Connie and the junior partner in an avalanche of bags. One shrill scream from Connie, and for a moment all was still. Then there was a clamorous rush of Beauties. Mrs. Duff and Feathers were first upon the scene of the disaster. Feathers was particularly careful that Mrs. Duff should have a front place and a full view.

On the floor lay a mound of hat bags. Nothing of humanity was visible. Feathers set to work, hurling the parcels aside. He worked with energy, but wisely too, and presently a pair of boots came into view. They were the junior partner's. Mrs. Duff recognised them with an ejaculation of terror. Feathers tossed aside a dozen more bundles, and another pair of boots and
ankles were revealed. They were Connie Gleeson's. Mrs. Duff uttered a second ejaculation, but this time it was not terror that impelled it. Feathers grinned inwardly.

“Get a jig on, can't yeh?” he cried, and the dumbfounded pasters fell upon the bundles.

A minute later Mr. Duff struggled up out of the wreckage, and shook himself. He was unhurt, and seemed rather amused. The next moment Connie was pulled from under, and she, too, stood erect.

“By Jove, that was a queer experience,” cried Mr. Duff. “I hope you're not hurt, my dear.” Then he discovered his wife, and caught her awful eye.

“'E didn't faint,” said Feathers to Goudy next morning. “'E didn't scream. 'E jist faded away. 'E turned the tint iv a young Chow, 'n' the smile went dead on his face, 'n' he was struck that way. His wife took a firm 'n' masterly grip iv his arm, 'n' she said: ‘Come, Mister Duff! Come, Mister Duff!’ That was all, but y' ortiv 'eard it. S'elp me, Jimmy Jee, 'twas like a sentence iv death! I watched 'em down stairs. She never eased her grip iv him all the way. I don't believe she's let go yet.”

“Mighty curious how that stack came to topple over just then,” said the town traveller, scratching his lip in a troubled way.

“Yes,” said the packer. “'Twas what the papers call a dispensation iv Providence.”

The following Saturday was Connie's last day at the factory. A fortnight later Billy the Boy had news of her.

“Gleeson took the tip from one what knows, after all,” he said. “She's in a bar up town. A sixpenny bar.”

“My troubs!” answered the packer. He was unshaven, uncollared, and disreputable, and there was a taint of beer in his atmosphere, but, all the same, when Billy had gone, he heaved a great sigh. She was indeed lost to him, for to Feathers a sixpenny bar seemed as remote as the North Pole, and not more desirable of attainment.
Chapter XI. Spats' Cats.

“FER some reason cats don't prosper 'ere,” said the packer, leisurely cutting his string, and locating his “chew” in one cheek as a preliminary to discourse. “The climit 'r somethin' don't agree with 'em, 'n' they alwiz come to huntimely ends.”

“Manslaughter?” queried the town traveller, who had noticed Mills' fatal facility with a pound-weight.

“No,” said Feathers. “I don't kill cats, on principle; it's bad fer luck. When I first came up the flat I passed-out a large blonde she-cat 'n' her family by pinnin' 'em to the floor with a 4cwt. tank iv tinfoil; 'n' I lived t' regret it. Point iv fact, we all lived t' regret it. The cat was nursin' her brood, clandestine, aft the smoker there, 'n' I ran the tank in, 'n' dumped her in the dark, havin' no previous knowledge iv Tutsie 'n' her chicks. When I bumped the stock down on her she never breathed a word. Her pride wouldn't allow her. She left us to find out the horror fer ourselves, which we did in the course iv time. That knowledge groaned all over the factory, the hum iv it was so fearful. Take it from the man off the works, Goudy, killin' cats is rotten luck.”

“How do they die generally?” asked the town traveller. The town traveller's order was being carefully compiled the while, and that bulky and indolent man was comfortably bestowed on a lounge of parcels. He loved conversation.

“Sooercide,” answered Feathers. “I was goin' t' tell yeh. They all do it. That un will in about a month.” He indicated the new cat, curled up in the cherished best hat of the elder Miss Kruse. “They get hydrophobia, 'r somethin', 'n' run stark starin' demented over everythin', like a fresh soul in the fire-box; 'n' end by pitchin' themselves head-over-crumpet down the lift-well.

“The first one I recomember kicked the fact'ry end-up, 'n' fair rattled the town. He was a big, lanky, grey brute, like a daylight spectre; jest the color iv everythin'; so you had t' look three times t' see 'im, 'n' then sometimes you wasn't sure that he wasn't a sleight-iv-hand trick 'r a bloomin' illursion. He 'ad big, sad eyes, 'n' when 'e fixed 'em on yeh thoughtful you hed a feelin' 'e was strippin' you clean, 'n' turnin' up all yer miserable secrets. 'CEPTIN' fer a hunexpected wail he jerked out iv 'is works now 'n' again, that cat was just a livin' silence; but that one yowl wa s a blood-curdler; chock full iv human sorrow mixed with hints iv Hell; bad enough by day, but at night, when he slipped it on yeh down in the cellar, yer backbone rattled loose, 'n' yer 'air took t' crawling round yer head like cold worms.
“He came to us full-grown, 'n' made friends with nobody. Killin' rats was his bizness, 'n' he give his whole attention t' it. You know what a place this is fer rats; they're ez thick ez flees on a Chow's dorg, 'n' up in the loft the kings iv them grow ez big ez sheep. Bunyip was th' on'y cat we ever had game t' foller 'em inter the loft, 'n' try a fall with the champions up there in the dark.

" 'Twas quick business down below here, 'n' no beg-pardons with Bunyip. He downed on his victim like a flash, there was a sort o' sputter iv fireworks, 'n' Bunyip came out o' the scrim, carryin' his lunch be the scruff; but hot 'n' willin' was the mills he had up under the roof. There's a hacre 'r so iv wilderness up there, smit with a plague iv darkness, 'n' old grey rats with whiskers on 'em 'n' tusks like walruses. Stick yer nose up there, 'n' ten t' one a rat what might be mistook fer the father iv all the wallabies 'll 'ave a cut at yeh fer yer ear.

"Bunyip's great fight come off one hot mornin'. It seemed ez if there was a conspiracy among the patriarchs t' deal with him. We 'eard his usual jump, and the squeal iv a rat in holts, 'n' then there was a sound like the rush iv a reglar army, 'n' then a tearin' round 'n' bumpin' 'n' botheration, same ez if a hundred dingoes was dinin' off a 'orse. Bunyip let loose his terrible cry on'y once; it was his busy day.

"Operations was suspended on the flat, 'n' we listened t' the fight shiftin' round above the ceilin'. There was a 'orrible muffled fierceness about it; 'twas sort iv uncanny, same ez if two sets iv devils was settlin' a difference in the darkness. At times it was deadened by the thick dust, 'n' then it ud beat down t' the boards, 'n' bump furious; 'n' then off it ud scurry t' th' other end iv the flat with a noiseless noise, in a way iv speakin'. S'elp me, I thought I cud hear them rats breathin'.

"Some iv the girls got scared, 'n' moaned a bit, 'n' began t' huddle like sheep; 'n' the dust fair boiled out iv the loft.

"Sudden 'n' wild all the rats seemed to yell et once; there was a terrible scramble, 'n' a rattle iv loose slates where the roof jined the ceilin', 'n' then somethin' shot clean through the man-hole there; somethin' fearful t' see, revolvin' with rage 'n' full iv murder; somethin ez big ez a bar'l. It bumped on the fact'ry floor, 'n' bust into two 'nderd ole-man rats that 'ad bin glued on t' Bunyip in mortal combat. The rats scattered 'n' broke fer cover, 'n' th' girls put up th' biggest thing in the way iv a nine-stone-four shriekin' competition I ever heard, 'n' rushed into a heap up by the cutters.

"Bunyip didn't stop revolvin'. He was turnin' mad han'-springs over hisself on the floor; his wool was stickin' out like a wire-brush; his tail was ez thick ez yer arm, 'n' his eyes blazed delirious tremblings. He whirled like a bally cath'-rinewheel, 'n' bounced like a squib, all spikes 'n' 'lectric
sparks, fer ha'f a minit, 'n' then he started down the fact'ry. Lor lummy, what a hexibition!

“That cat seemed t' be a whirlin' battery full iv steel claws. He flew up the walls 'n' fell off, whirled over everythin', 'n' everythin' he touched was scattered in fourteen directions, same ez if the works iv a winnower had gone mad among the staff an' stock. He flopped into the paste, 'n' it was splashed all over the shop; he got among the stacks iv bags 'n' the cut papers, 'n' the envelopes, 'n' the air was full iv damaged goods. Over 'n' under the boards, up the walls, 'n' through the stacks iv dryin' wrappers went Bunyip, 'n' 87 girls yelled blue murder, 'n' the grey dust iv ages from the loft rolled towards the winders in thick clouds, 'n' Fuzzy revolved on the edge iv things, ten times madder 'n' the cat.

“I went after the brute with Benno's ebony ruler, 'n' Fuzzy danced round the bloomin' fray with a iron spanner in his fist, but Bunyip had got among the Beauties, 'n' you might ez well try ter knock the eye out 'v a shootin'-star with a 'arf brick.

“Goudy, don't talk t' me; you never seen that worry; you don't know nothin' iv trouble. The cat went through the bunch iv girls, fair kickin' off their goods, 'n' their cries could be 'eard a mile off. Three fellers from the printers' flat raced up 'ere, 'n' got after the cat with weights 'n' things, 'n' Bunyip went on spreadin' himself. When he struck a paster he buzzed all over her, up one side, down the other, whizzin' hair 'n' hide 'n' rags inter the hatmosphere, 'n' then got at another, 'n' the fact'ry was littered with hysterics, 'n' fringes, 'n' fluff, 'n' distracted rats was dartin' 'n' out, huntin' fer places iv refuge, 'n' on the outskirts iv the trouble Fuzzy continued caperin' like a crimson goriller in a fit, clean off his knocker, 'n' pickled in misery. Presently he thinks he see a fair openin' fer a dash at the cat, 'n' lets go his spanner, all-in, 'n' takes Tommy th' comp. fair twixt wind 'n' vittles, drivin' him inter the corner, tucked up 'n' scratched fer all engagements.

“Bunyip broke loose from ther Beauties agin, 'n' went down the flat once more, revolvin' on his own axle, 'n' boundin' 'n' bumpin' somethin' furious. Then he gives one grand bounce, takes three turns out iv hisself, 'n' bangs down the lift-well, still whirlin', landin' on the head iv Tim Fennessey, the lorryman from the paper-mill, clings there fer a moment with 57 sets iv red-hot claws, 'n' then starts over Tim, workin' his passage, 'n' clawin' him t' the bone. Tim thinks the devil's collector's got him fer all his sins, fetches a bellow, 'n' goes roarin' up the steps inter the warehouse, where the cat breaks loose 'n' starts layin' waste the selected stock, doin' nothin' t' the inks 'n' gums 'n' pastes, kickin' the whiskers off the accountant en route, so ter speak, fizzin' among the glassware, 'n' raisin' Spats 'n' 'ell generally.

“Up here, meanwhile, the Beauties wuz still kickin' their feelin's loose,
one big, red-'eaded bounder leadin' the band, mainly 'cause iv a suspicion concernin' a rat in her dress-improver. Tommy was still lyin' in his corner with the spanner tucked in his darby, venturin' a groan now 'n' agin, 'n' the foreman was fumblin' his 'air up, dotty with anxiety, wailin' for peace 'n' quiet.

“ Suddenly—wosh! crash! biff! —through one iv the front winders comes a stream iv water, thick ez that, takes Fuzzy fair in the mush, heels him over, 'n' washes him under the grinder, 'n' mixes him up with two 'undred weight iv emery-powder, sluices the red-'eaded girl 'n' Mother Kruse 'ead-over-tip down the front stairs, swirls most iv the other girls round promiscuss among the paste 'n' paper, 'n' then takes me fair 'n' 'ard where the beer settles, 'n' jams me tight inter the works iv a bag-machine, dead t' the world.

“ It seems the racket upstairs fired an idiyt boy on the clerical staff with an idear the fire-brigade was wanted, 'n' he hailed 'em up quick 'n' lively; 'n' nine wild firemen, arrivin' with a reel, 'n' seein' the grey paper-dust from the loft billowin' out iv the upstairs winders, let loose the bloomin' reservoy, 'n' shot a million gallons iv water at us.

“ The damage done almost turned the boss's belltopper grey in a single night. Bunyip was found in the cellar seven days later, 'n' a 'eroic dustman removed him for ninepence. Since then cats ain't bin pop'lar in this fact'ry, somehow.”
Chapter XII. Introducing Machinery

THERE were premonitions of important happenings, and the Beauties were much concerned. Large cases of an unfamiliar kind had come up the lift, and, with much grunting, had been shot on rollers into a commanding position on the flat, under the eye of Odgson himself, who stood for a quarter of an hour after with his belltopper on the back of his head and his hands plunged in his trousers, looking hard at the cases, and barking curt remarks at the junior partner, a fair fat, curly man, with the ingratiating manners of a commercial traveller. The latter's air when among the Beauties was that of a man of a frivolous and affectionate disposition, whose natural tendencies had to be rigorously repressed out of respect for the position he held. His name was Duff. The girls called him Suety, and many other things more or less relevant.

Later, a space was cleared in the middle of the flat, and several times a day Spats came up, and looked at this cleared space critically, with his eminently respectable hat at the same angle, and his hands hard in his pockets. On a few occasions the junior partner assisted, but only the initiated could make anything of the boss's conversation, it being usually a series of short and sudden barks and growls, with an occasional breathless word breaking through.

The Beauties were bewildered. They went to the packer for enlightenment. Feathers had not been taken into the confidence of the firm. He chose to be frivolous.

"We bin thinkin' iv puttin' in a chute," he said, soberly, building up two thousand tin-foil bags, which are more slippery than the souls of Presbyterian Chinese. "Y' see," he continued, "the wear 'n' tear on the stair carpet is bringin' the firm t' beggary, 'n' we're thinkin' iv fittin' the buildin' with all the modern appliances for dumpin' fact'ry rats inter th' open. Yer flung in et this end, 'n' slid out et th' other, like bags iv bran, pee-destrians bein' purlitely requested t' look both ways afore crossin'."

At odd times the packer said the new structure was to be a three-penny bar, a conservatory, a donkey-engine for vending saveloys, a merry-go-round, and a fever ward. What he sought to convey was that the firm kept nothing from him, but he respected its confidence.

One morning, two 24-feet lengths of hardwood, 12 x 4, were introduced. A timid mechanic came with them, and bolted them to the factory floor in the cleared space, and then fled like a man glad to escape with his life. The herd of Beauties on Odgson's top flat were not generous to strangers. Then hangers were secured to the massive cross beams above, and a length of
shafting, with two pulleys, was put in place by the foreman of the printers.

The foreman of the printers, assisted by Fuzzy Ellis, opened the big cases. That is to say, the foreman of the printers prized open the cases, and Fuzzy got his finger caught every time the slats sprang back, and put himself in the way of the hammer, and lost a bit of ear when the hoop-iron flew up and hit him, and sat on such loose boards as had nails sticking through them, and let all the heavy articles and implements fall on his feet, and tripped over everything else, and was breathless and stark distracted all the time. Odgson supervised, and barked at odd moments, when he could no longer contain himself.

Rupert Luke, the foreman of the printers, was an extremely deliberate, intensely melancholy man, whose face never in any circumstances lost its expression of dog-like lugubriously. Everybody laughed at Luke, he was so sad. There was something indescribably comic about his unspoken woe. For the rest, he was an extremely untidy tradesman, and was always stuccoed from head to toe in printers' inks of a dozen colours. His hair looked like old combings, and generally had at least three samples of cheap ink rubbed in to it. He had a moth-eaten moustache in four independent clumps, red-lidded, watery eyes, and flabby cheeks that sagged down below the line of his jaw, like the fleshy decorations on a common breed of hens. He was nicknamed the Pelican.

The cases were found to contain a great assortment of wheels, rollers, pulleys, steel sheets, spindles, quaint saw-toothed blades, and curiosities in cast and wrought iron. The worst suspicions of the pasters were confirmed; obviously Spats was introducing machinery. There was a flutter in the dovecot. Feathers abandoned subterfuge.

“Fact is,” said the packer, “we're gettin' a bit soured on wimmin, me 'n' the proprietary, 'specially me, 'n' we're barrin' the females, 'n' puttin' down a mill that'll do everythin' fer nix, work overtime nine nights a week, 'n' never look fer tea money. Yeh sling a bale iv paper in et one end, let her whiz, 'n' she spits up envelopes by the million, 'n' does no cluckin' about it. Pull another crank, 'n' she fair floods the fact'ry with bags while yer lookin' round fer yer 'at. She squirts all manner iv bags, sugar, fruit, confection', canister, 'n' brown bags, 'n' cuts Hoggy's corns, and polishes the door plate when not otherwise engaged. Seems t' me yo' toms had better book engagements et the Zoo, wimmin's goin' t' be great curiosities in a year 'r two.”

“That ole motor car's goin' t' do our work, 'n' we get the hunt?” said Harrerbeller Harte.

“Same ez if,” replied Feathers. “On'y it won't squeal over fines, nor use impolite language t' the foreman when the clock stops.”
“Oh, ma! I feel that somethin's goin' t' 'appin,” said Harrerbeller.

Naturally this created a prejudice against the machinery, and against the good-looking young fitter, who commenced to build up the parts. He entered upon the job with great confidence, and then the girls got at him. *Sotto voce* insults were nagged in his ears for two hours, and he was a common cockshie all the time, the pasters spattering him with the crust from their paste tubs, a missile that hits hard and sticks close. Then the young fellow hastily collected his tools, and went down, looking like an infuriated bread pudding, and he told Spats that he would fight any man in the factory for two pen'orth of glue, but he wouldn't spend another ten minutes in the company of those disreputable she-heathens up stairs for all the powers, human and divine.

So Rupert Luke, nicknamed the Pelican, and Fuzzy Ellis were invited to piece the new machine together. It was the only machine of the kind in the country, and neither Rupert nor Fuzzy had engineering skill. What Ellis lacked in knowledge he strove to make up with diseased energy and misdirected haste. If the Pelican succeeded in getting a couple of parts into their proper places, Fuzzy generally fell over them, or plunged into them, and mixed the sections up again, and all the time he looked like a man trying to collect his valuables in a burning house. When this happened, the printers' foreman sighed profoundly, and sat and looked at the fallen machinery for some minutes in a state of hopeless woe, but he never complained. As he always expected the worst, there was no occasion to complain.

Anything the Beauties could do to complicate matters and delay Luke in arriving at a complete understanding of the machine, they did with criminal goodwill, and bolts got into the cogs, and nails under the rollers in mysterious ways; nuts were loosened if Luke merely turned his back, and parts that worked in harmony one moment ceased to revolve the next, and when they were urged something always broke. Then Rupert would rake up his head of oakum, and almost shed tears in his grief over the cussedness of inanimate things, and Fuzzy would paw wildly among the parts, like a terrier after a rat, catching his nose in the cogs or his fingers under the rollers, and battering himself with the revolving arm. Fortunately, the hospital was quite handy.

Feathers alone was sympathetic; he would pause on his way to the stack with a parcel, and commiserate the Pelican.

“She's got yer beat again, Mr. Luke,” he said. “Take it from me, this ain't no bag machine. It's a case iv mistaken identity. She's a 'ot pie mill. Yeh put in a ton iv weaveled flour 'n' ole mutton cuttin's et this end, give 'er 'er head, 'n' she pays out double-decker 'am 'n' beef bulls-eyes till the fact'ry's
bogged under, 'n' the traffic's all stopped with pies from 'ere t' Dan. Barry 'n' back.”

Odgson himself was never so concerned about anything as about that misfortunate machine. The packer insisted that Spats had dreamed it one night after a debauch of dried eels and tinned milk, and had had it built in a local madhouse, and was now engaged in the distressing task of trying to find out what it was good for. He spent most of his time staring at the machine, and his glossy belltopper wandered all over his head as he studied the thing with the comprehension of a damp hen. Sometimes hard down on his nose, sometimes balanced precariously on his occiput, now on one ear, now on the other, that belltopper was an emotional barometer.

Hoggy's only contribution to the struggle was a spitting noise like an angry cat, which he emitted every time Ellis made a slip, and the sound threw poor Fuzzy into convulsions of aimless zeal, in which he always hurt himself. During the months spent in erecting the machine, pulling it to pieces, and collecting it together in another way, altering, repairing, and experimenting, the foreman of the flat was never without an injury. There were times when he had all his fingers done in bundles, and free-hand designs in sticking plaster all over him.

One afternoon when the Pelican, after deep study and hard breathing, had got something like logical, consecutive movement out of the parts, a shrill cry broke the stillness of the hot room; and it was found that Fuzzy had his spare tussock of chin whiskers run into the mill. Luke, in the excitement of the moment, backed her up rather suddenly, and Fuzzy's hair got woven in another set of rollers. Ellis yelled again. Feathers described the disturbance for Goudy's edification:

“In ten secs Hoggy 'n' the whole Co. was on the job. Fifteen wild printers came up the stairs, 'n' the pasters swarmed 'n' swelled the disturbance. Seven Irish carters outer Egg Lane, four clerks, 'n' the woman that washes the front offices, rushed the flat, 'n' pointed out where the Pelican's treatment iv the case was a horror iv judgment. Mike, the peanut man, bein' eager for the Ryle 'Umane Society's medal fer life savin', waded in ter break up the machine with a sled, 'n' Billy the Boy headed a forlorn 'ope what tried ter pull Fuzzy outer the mill be the 'ind leg.

“Meanwhile, Fuzzy was risin' t' remark, 'n' his remarks was like lunch time et a cat show. Every time anyone gave the machine a twist, he yelled like a barretone tom tab in a graveyard, 'n' every time anyone touched him, he squealed like a million kittens.

“All the rabid partners was busy unscrewin' 'n' screwin', the pasters was mostly advisin' Luke ter run Fuzzy through the mill 'n' chance what he'd come out, 'n' Benno there, with a presence iv mind that was trooly 'eroic,
snatched up a bucket iv water 'n' threw it over the miserable victim. A marvellous intellec' Benno has—he'd ha' done the same iv Ellis had bin drownin'. They had t' pick the mill mostly t' pieces t' unwind Fuzzy, 'n' there he is. That strained look's due t' the pressure on his back 'air. He thinks he'll never be able t' shut his mince pies again.”

Fuzzy was in retirement behind his guillotine, sitting crouched on a small box, nursing his hurts, and trying to hide his mortification. Nobody could look at him without thinking of the brahmapootra rooster that has been beaten in fair fight, and has gone under the barn to escape criticism. But he was back, fussing about the machine again within the hour, showing the Pelican what to do, stuttering explanations, and poking his battered fingers into dangerous places, and Luke, who in these days was an outre study in black oil from the bearings and stale paste, bore it all without permitting it to aggravate his settled sorrow to any noticeable extent.

The printer's foreman rearranged the machine to his own satisfaction, and then followed many days during which he spent all the time he could spare from his duties below endeavouring to persuade the bag mill to mill bags. A large roll of grey sugar paper revolved at one end, various brass receptacles distributed paste, the paper was folded over blades, and drifted through rollers, and a revolving arm broke it in lengths, and everything happened but bags. Strange complications of paper, paste, anti-friction, and human skin and hair were born of all this labour, but nothing remotely resembling a bag.

The firm was nearly demented; Fuzzy was threatened with brain fever, and had once so far forgotten authority and his awe of Odgson as to cry out desperately in the face of that great man that he wished he was dead; two little girls were away injured; and the mother of Billy the Boy, a large, fat, sullen woman, was in possession below, demanding compensation for a hole in Billy's head inflicted by the revolving arm. Billy's head was none the worse for the hole, but his fond mother came and sat on a case in the lower flat and stubbornly refused to budge, assailing everybody, from Spats to the office boy, with bitter demands for hundreds of pounds down, in addition to fifty for medical expenses.

Eventually, however, a real bag issued from the drying press, and its advent created another burst of excitement. Fuzzy squealed down the pipe for Odgson. Never before in the whole history of the firm had anybody dared to squeal down the pipe for Odgson. Odgson came up, and all the partners, and the confidential clerk, and the ledger-keeper followed, and all examined the bag critically. Triplets might have been born to the firm without provoking half as much emotion.

Luke revolved the mill again, and more bags danced out all in order.
Feathers was skipping amongst the pasters, trying to stem a threatened revolt. The Beauties, fancying that the triumph of the machine was at hand, were expressing their disgust in chorus, crying reflections on the Firm, and casting odium on Hoggy's belltopper.

It was decided that the momentous time had arrived when steam-power should be put on the machine. That was Tuesday. On the following Thursday, when the town traveller came up to sort out a big order, he saw the machine lying helpless again in miserable disorder, and the pasters were slapping their brushes in a big rush, and singing gaily at their work.

“Hell-o-o-o-o!” said Goudy.

“Yes, Scotty,” said Feathers. “They put the steam on her, 'n' she's tossed in her agate.” He put up his hands, and brought the corners of his mouth hard down. “Yeh never did, Goudy! Don't mag ter me, yeh never did! Phew! Yeh ain't even got an idear. 'Twas 'ell 'n' free beer here yes'day, 'n' iv yeh know any gazob on yer round what's in need iv an ole clothes wringer 'r a 'ump-backed mangle what'll do on a pinch fer a sausage mill, 'r a knife polisher, 'r a new patent fer rollin' dough, yeh can refer him t' the Firm. We're sellin' out iv the notion iv growin' bags be machinery at a halarmin' sacrifice.

“I dunno what indooced 'er t' do it,” he continued. “The whole bag iv tricks was here, includin' some fine female relations iv the Firm, what ud come along t' commit the idjis sin iv spillin' God's good drink on a dumb 'n' deaf bleedin' machine. The Pelican shot the bolt, 'n' she revolved somethin' lovely, scorin' off her own bat, 'n' the bags was hoppin' out thick ez fleas, 'n' the Firm was huggin' itself with both 'ands, 'n' the Firm's missus 'n' married daughters was sayin' how awfully, perfectly, beastly clever it was, 'n' lookin' at it critical through them long-handled spectacles, when all iv a sudden she began t' buck up. There was a long, rippin', tearin' sound, a snort, 'n' a rumble, 'n' erbout a pint iv teeth off the cogs was jerked inter the elder dorter's back hair. Then the mill started t' 'ump her back like a rattled cat, miles iv puckered paper got waddled in her works, gathered, bulged, 'n' burst up, 'n' heaved great streams 'n' wads 'n' shavin's all over the flat, spoutin' 'em like a bloomin' Vesuvius.

“There was another burst iv thunde'r sound, 'n' two quarts iv hot paste spirted out, 'n' took Spats clean in the whiskers, 'n' got a flyin' fall out of him over a roll in something under 4 secs.

“Stop 'er!” howled Duff, 'n' he made a good bid fer it, but she shot out a steel roller weighin' a quarter 'nderd, 'n' whacked him hard 'n' good fair in the dyspepsy, 'n' the junyer partner went down then 'n' there, 'n' revolved nine times on his own elbow.

“Stop 'er!” squealed Mrs. Spats, 'n' she did a dash with 'er silk sunshade
worth pounds, havin' a idear she might poke its eye out, but it et up 'er
gold-mounted brolly, 'n' batted 'er in the basket with 28 lb. iv grey sugar
paper done up tough, 'n' she retired 'urt.

“‘Stop 'er!” screamed Fuzzy, 'n' what 'e did I dunno, but when I saw him
next he had his napper plunged in a tub iv dough, 'n' his feet was dancin'
polkers in the air, 'n' the jigger was openin' out fer new flights iv fancy.

“Presently the Pelican got a dawnin' idear the machine was n't quite
hittin' it accordin' t' the bye-law, 'n' he rushed fer an openin', but the
revolvin' arm was bent out, 'n' it got home a left lead 'n' a right cross, 'n' the
rag went in from the Pelican's corner. All this time the idyit iv a mill was
tearin' out leagues iv what yer might call premature sugar bags, 'n' stockin'
the blighted factory with 'em, 'n' it was spatterin' hot paste ez if it was bein'
whacked out by a maxim, 'n' the frenzy iv it turned Hoggy's whiskers grey,
'n' doubled up his second dorter in a squealin' fit that was more disorderly
than one iv fat Martha's.

“The crowds iv strangers what had come up the stairs looked on awe-
strick, 'n' one was dumped down two flights, 'ead over tuck, with a fat
punch from a two-pound cog-wheel biff in the binge. Silly Dodd's light
was put out with a junk iv a castin', Booser M'Gunn, the comp., went ter
beddy-bye with a brass bearin' rolled up in his clothes, 'n' Harrerbeller was
squirted in the eye with such vi'lence that she jes' said ‘Oh, mother!' 'n'
went off like a little child.

“Be this time the Beauts had gone under cover, 'n' every one what wasn't
disabled was watchin' the insurrection frim behind bales 'n' stacks, 'n' frim
under tables, 'n' there was the bally mill crimpin' up raw material, 'n'
chuckin' out fathoms iv tucks, fair daft.

“Then jist ez sudden ez ‘Kiss me, Charley,' all was over. Fuzzy fell limp
from somewhere aloft into a pool iv slops on fat Martha's board, 'n' the
loose belt was dancin' over the shaftin'.

“Ellis, in one iv his brightest himpersonations iv the Idyit Boy, 'ad
jumped on Martha's board t' throw the belt off, 'n' be the dilly nature iv
him, got himself yanked up 'tween belt 'n' pully, where he got a squeezin'
that made his boots pop. Then the belt slid off, 'n' peace was declared.

“Fuzzy's away, bandaged, 'n' plastered, 'n' docketed in the 'orspital now,
'n' Booser M'Gunn's wearin' a faint smile 'n' a wet compress, 'n' we're all
'appy.”

Ellis was back in his place two days later, fearing somebody else would
be getting injured in his absence, and then the new bag mill was covered
under a long, black pall, and the Beauties were gaily chanting its
obsequies.