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WET BLANKET

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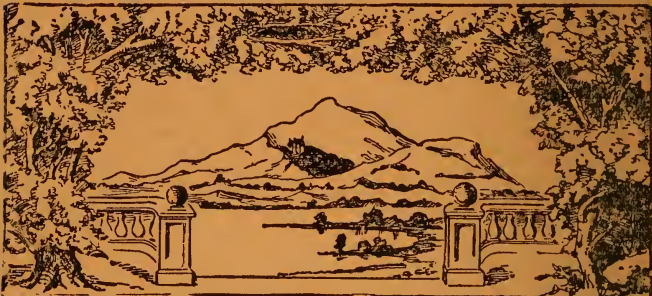
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“A Wet Blanket,”

—BY—

MARGERY STANLEY CLARK.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ANTHONY HYPHEN-BROWN } *A Young Married Couple.*
LILY HYPHEN-BROWN }
MRS. PLUSH.....*A Landlady.*

SCENE—

No. 1, Sea View Terrace, Littlehole-on-Sea.

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DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS AND PROPERTIES.



Mrs. PLUSH—

Comfortable looking—hair scraped back. Black Dress. Black Silk Apron. **Properties**—*1st Tray*: Cups, Plates, Cloth, Bread, and Butter. *2nd Tray*: Cake, Jam, &c., Letter. *3rd Tray*: Teapot, Hot Water, Shrimps.



LILY HYPHEN-BROWN—

Young. Pretty Walking Dress. Hat. **Properties**—Sunshade. Papers.



TONY HYPHEN-BROWN—

Young. Morning Suit. **Properties**—Rugs. Lily's Cloak.



ON STAGE—

Ordinary Furniture. Table, C. Sideboard, R. Piano, L. Paper-basket.



STAGE NOISES—

Stamping off, L. ; *cue*—"Mrs. P.: Oh, my 'all lamp."

“A WET BLANKET.”

SCENE - - Parlour of No. 1, Sea View Terrace.

Curtain goes up on a sea-side lodging sitting room, furnished in the inevitable scanty sea-side style. Shells decorate the mantel-piece, antimacassars ornament the chairs, &c. Furniture can be arranged at will, with exit R. and L. Table in centre, sideboard (R.) one side of room, piano (L.) the other. Enter Mrs. PLUSH carrying tea-tray. She proceeds to lay the table for tea, C.

Mrs. PLUSH: Just time to get their tea for 'em. The lady said to 'ave tea ready. Wonder w'ot they'll be like. Quite young, Mrs. Williams as recommended 'em said, and not married so very long. Well, I don't mind if they *do* do a bit of 'oneymoonin' together. I'm a rare one for romance myself, it gives a flavour to life, I says, like a spring onion with a bread and cheese supper. Let me see, w'ot do I want now? (*Regards table.*) There's the cake and the jam to get. .

Bustles off R., re-appearing immediately with cake, &c., on tray, and places on table, then takes letter off tray.

. . . There's a letter just come for them. My word, but it's come from Canterbury, by the post mark. That's strange, now; perraps they know Fanny; I must ask them. Anthony Hyphen-Brown, Esq., is the name; here, I'll put it on the chiffoneer, so as I can't forget to give it to Mr. What's-his-name Brown. Well, I 'ope they'll like the room, they *ought* to. (*Complacently.*) Best room in the Terrace, that's w'ot *it* is, tho' they *do* say—(*advances centre*)—that Mrs. Spriggs, as 'as just took No. 7, is 'aving it furnished by Warin'. Plush says there won't be much wear-in her furniture, but Plush must 'ave 'is little joke. Poor thing! She'll be 'avin' electric light

and an elevating lift next, and how will she look at the end of the quarter, with her rent to pay, and all her money gone? She'll find that a bit wearin', I'm thinking. (*Laughs.*) I must tell Plush that, 'e always says I can't make a joke. Well—(*triumphantly*)—Mrs. Spriggs *hasn't got a piano!* . . .

Advances to piano, opens it lovingly, and runs her hand up and down the keys, making the usual blood-curdling sounds.

. . . *Such a tone!* (*Bell rings.*)

Exit Mrs. PLUSH hastily, L., tidying herself at glass in passing. Voices are heard, then re-enter Mrs. PLUSH showing in Mr. and Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN, L. Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN is fashionably dressed.

Mrs. PLUSH: Very pleased to see you, I'm sure, ma'am, and I trust you will approve of the rooms. This—(*with an air*)—is the drawin' room.

Stands back C., smoothing hands.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*superciliously*): Oh, yes, and after all, it's only for a few days or a week, at the most. (*Aside*—For not an instant longer do I remain in this ghastly end-of-the-world hole.) *Aloud* to Mrs. PLUSH, *crosses* R.—You quite understand that I only took the rooms for a week?

Turns to Mrs. PLUSH down R.

Mrs. PLUSH: Oh, yes, ma'am; and I'm sure I'm very pleased to let them, though some hold that a week's let don't pay for the wear and tear on the furniture, but with the season so bad as it was last year, and Plush in bed 'alf the winter with newmony. (*Breaks off and flies to L. exit.*) There's the luggage! My goodness, what boxes! Hi, you there! We didn't hire you to knock the house down; just be careful of the walls, now—oh, my 'all lamp.

Exit in a hurry, L. Much stamping is heard.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN has been looking round with a disgusted air, flinging her sunshade on to one chair, papers on to another, herself on to a third, R.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: By jove, Lily, what a rum little place. Rather jolly, don't you think? (*Moves up, C.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*icily*): It is certainly very *rum*, but I fail to see where the *jolly* comes in.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*striding about*): I don't know, I like it awfully. Wonderful to think a little out-of-the-way place like this still exists in these days of motors and tourists.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Yes, I must say, even in my worst forebodings, I never pictured *quite* such a deadly place. Why, there isn't even a promenade!

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Of course not. Who wants a beastly promenade? But there's a glorious sandy beach. I'd like to import a lot of London arabs. There'd be paddling room for them by the million, poor little beggars.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: No doubt, but as luckily we have not a million London arabs dependent on us, the sands are rather thrown away, though I daresay—(*sneeringly*)—you'd like to paddle.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*eagerly*): Yes—will you come? Wouldn't it be rather sport to go off to-morrow, with a shrimping net and sandwiches, and have a good long day? (*Crosses over to her, R.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: You must have your "good long day" alone, and satisfy your paddling instincts without me, then. Why, just think of one's clothes!

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: If you *wouldn't* think of them you'd be much better off, and so should I, by George—that last little bill was rather a corker. (*Crosses down, C.L.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Oh, if you're going to begin about that bill, I shall go upstairs. You might have a little thought for me, I think, my head is simply splitting. (*Fretfully.*)

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*contritely*): Of course it is, my darling, after that long walk from the station; how selfish of me not to think of it. Will you go up to your room and rest?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Yes. I'll go up and see what sort of an apartment I've got to endure for the next week. A feather bed, I'm sure, and probably a patch-work quilt.

Rises, collects sunshade, gloves, &c.

Enter Mrs. PLUSH, R.

Mrs. PLUSH: And when would you like tea, ma'am?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: At once, please. You have a servant, of course?

Mrs. PLUSH: No, *thank goodness*, I haven't. The last played me such tricks that I've done the work myself since, with a girl in the kitchen.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*wearily*): Oh, then, will you show me my room, please?

Mrs. PLUSH: This way, ma'am. (*Exeunt, R.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*leaving room*): Heavens! What corkscrew stairs!

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*gloomily*): Well, a nice beginning we've made! If only Lil wouldn't look on the worst side of everything. She takes all the pleasure out of life, and we're only six months married. This is the first time we've been away together since the honeymoon. By George, it did give me rather a shock to hear those two fellows at the Club the other night. "Good chap, Hyphen-Brown, but his wife's a regular Wet Blanket." They didn't know the "good chap" happened to be within earshot. (*Laughs bitterly.*)

Enter Mrs. PLUSH, very red and breathless, R.

Mrs. PLUSH (*volubly*): I'm afraid your good lady isn't over pleased with the room, sir. She says it is small, and so it may be, but as large as any in the Terrace, an' I've seen six sleeping in it in August, but with those great boxes of 'ers, of course it don't give no room a chanst; an' the largest w'ot wouldn't go in and had to be stood on the landin', tho' the man scratched all the paint off the door a-tryin' to get it in, an' then—(*crescendo*)—she goes and says it's *stuffy*! which I've never 'ad said be-fore, tho' I've always 'ad the best people in the house. Gen'ral Watkins an' 'is wife, w'ot I had for six months—"an' w'ot I like about *your* rooms, Mrs. Plush, is their *h'airiness*," was 'is very words to me, and I'm sure—

Pauses for want of breath,

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*who has been vainly trying to stem the current*): I'm quite sure my wife did not mean "stuffy," Mrs. Plush.

Mrs. PLUSH: P'raps not—she *said* stuffy, that's all I know.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Er—she's got rather a headache—the journey you know, er—Now, would you be so kind as to let us have tea as soon as you can?

Mrs. PLUSH (*recovering her equanimity*): I'll go down at once, sir. The kettle's on the boil, and I'm sure I'm anxious to do my best to please. Would you like anything with your teas? I didn't know what the lady would like. Do you think a little water-crease, or p'raps some s'rimps?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Shrimps! The *very* thing. I haven't eaten a shrimp since I was one myself.

Mrs. PLUSH (*delighted*): Very good, sir, I'll just let the girl run round to Codling's, the Fishmonger.

Exit, R.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*following her*): And, I say, Mrs. Plush, brown ones, you know, great fat fellows, and *plenty* of 'em. (*Returns, C.*) Dear me, how jolly this would all be, if only Lily would enjoy it, too. Why, hello—(*takes letter from sideboard*)—here's a letter for me. Jove, it is from Maggie. (*Comes down C., and opens letter.*) Dear little girl, Maggie, she's the sort that would make a man happy. Wonder what she says. (*Opens and reads letter, standing facing audience.*)

“ Briarlees, Canterbury.

“Dear Boodles—(*aside: She always called me Boodles*). I am staying here with the Parkers, and I feel I must write you a line, for I've something I want to say to you particularly, but please understand this is in the *strictest confidence*.”

(*Whistles.*) Hullo, what's old Mag up to now, I wonder. (*Continues reading letter aloud.*)

“ Now, you mustn't be offended at what I'm going to say, but I've been worrying about you and Lily ever since I dined with you last Monday. I couldn't help seeing you didn't seem to hit it off together. It is such a pity, for you're both awfully fond of each other.

Now, I've known Lily longer than you have—she was my friend before she was yours, you know, and I'm going to give you a bit of good advice, as if I was your elderly maiden aunt. *You don't take Lily the right way.* You give in to her too much, and she despises you for it, and just tries to see how far she can go. She is a sweet, dear girl, but she wants a masterful man; you'll find she'll respect you more if you are firm with her. I must stop. Give my love to Lily, and please *burn this letter.* Don't misconstrue what I have written, but do as I tell you, and you'll see that I'm right. Your affectionate cousin,
MAGGIE."

"P.S.: I'm going to tell you a secret. Capt. Danvers and I are *engaged to be married.* He is Daisy Parker's brother, you know, and as he's not spoken to mamma yet, don't say a word about it. I feel so awfully happy that I want my dear old Boodles to be happy, too."

Dear little girl—Bertie Danvers is a good chap. I always *thought* that would be a case. How pleased Lily will be. I must tell her. (*Moves towards door, R.*) No, by jove, I mustn't, what an ass I am! (*Sits down, L.*) Let me see, she wants me to burn this letter. Well, I think I'd better, for if Lil got hold of it there'd be wigs on the green. I half believe Maggie's right, and I've given way to Lil too much. I shouldn't wonder—women are queer animals! Well, now, to be rid of this; I can't burn it, for there's no fire. If I light a match and consume it, the ashes will make such a beastly mess, and besides, Lily might come in in the middle. What the deuce *shall* I do with it. I know, I'll tear it up—(*begins tearing*)—in small, very small pieces, and put it in my pocket. (*Pulls out pocket handkerchief, and puts bits in pocket, carefully. Looks round.*) I don't want to leave any about, as the hero in the melodrama invariably does when he gets an incriminating letter. Not that this is *incriminating* exactly, but *still*, if Lily were to pick up a piece with "strictly confidential" or "don't tell Lil" on it, she would jump at absurd conclusions, with the help of that marvellous arithmetical process which women call "putting two and two together."

Enter Mrs. PLUSH R.

Mrs. PLUSH: I've taken the liberty of not disturbing your good lady, sir. She is havin' a little nap to herself, so I won't bring up tea till she wakes.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Poor little woman; how tired she must be. You are sure she is not ill?

Mrs. PLUSH: Oh! dear, no, sir. Just let 'er 'ave 'er forty winks out, and she'll be as right as a trivet, though I *must* say she don't look over and above strong.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Now Mrs. Plush is here, I'll just put a few questions to her, and find out what sort of a woman she is. *Aloud*: No, she isn't, and then this heat has tried her. (Mrs. PLUSH *moves towards exit, R.*) Don't go, Mrs. Plush—sit down, won't you? I want to have a little chat with you.

Mrs. PLUSH (*seating herself R., on extreme edge of chair*): Thank you, sir.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*seating himself, L.*): Have you always lived here, Mrs. Plush?

Mrs. PLUSH: A matter of forty odd years, sir.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Really. Well, I'm sure you're a first-rate advertisement for the place, you look so well and happy, Mrs. Plush.

Mrs. PLUSH: I never feel no call to pull a long face, sir, and w'en there's lodgers in the house I've no time to mope. I always pities ladies who can sit down and cry w'en ever the fancy takes them; if they'd to wait and wash up first, they'd find it took their minds off.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: But then, Mrs. Plush, though they mayn't have your er—charming domestic duties to attend to, most ladies nowadays do such a lot of things, they visit or shop, or play bridge. My wife goes in greatly for music.

Mrs. PLUSH: She must try the piano, sir, it's only half-a-crown a week extry, and a *beautiful tone*.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: She'll be delighted, I'm sure. (*A pause ensues.*) Er—(*nervously*)—Have you had a fair season, Mrs. Plush? *Aside*: That's a good sort of thing to ask her

Mrs. PLUSH: Middlin', sir, though I lost a matter of ten days' let in June through illness, but then you

must take the bads with the goods, as Plush always says.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: That's your husband, I suppose. What is his trade?

Mrs. PLUSH (*with an air*): He's got the livery stables here, sir.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Really? A paying business that, I should think. Has he many traps?

Mrs. PLUSH (*proudly*): A waggonette or pony shay, w'ichever you please; and he'd be proud to take you out, I'm sure.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: He ought to meet the trains, Mrs. Plush. My wife and I had to toil back from the station this afternoon, there wasn't as much as a wheelbarrow to be seen.

Mrs. PLUSH: Well, it was this way, sir. There's a funeral out Wotton way, and Plush 'ad the job of drivin' some o' the deceased relatives. They say its to be a lovely funeral. Very sudden it was—hale and hearty on Thursday, and . . .

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*hastily*): Oh, yes, quite—er— (*Aside*: How they love horrors.) Well, and Plush is a good husband, Mrs. Plush?

Mrs. PLUSH: Oh, yes. As I tell him, there's a-many worse, and we jog along very well. We never 'ave more than a word together, for I always gives in to 'im.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: What a *sensible* woman you are.

Mrs. PLUSH: Well, it's not so much *sensibleness* as not being able to help it. The first time, I let out at him, lor! but I *was* in a paddy. I remember it well, for I'd a black eye for a fortnight after. That kept me quiet for a time. I used to sit and watch with one eye, the other was all swollen and closed. After that we understood each other. You see, I'd always bin fiery-tempered, and up to then I'd never 'ad no one to master me. Plush was sorry w'en 'e sor my eye, 'e 'adn't meant to be unkind, but 'e's a thorough man is Plush; wot 'e does do 'e does *thorough*, and my eye was thorough enough.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Dear me! Then you believe in the husband ruling the wife?

Mrs. PLUSH (*solemnly*): I do, sir.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*warmly*): What a *very* sensible woman you are, Mrs. Plush!

Mrs. PLUSH (*contemptuously*): Besides, any woman as is worth 'er salt can always 'ave 'er own way. There never was a man a woman couldn't manage if she tried. (*Rises.*)

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*rather non-plussed*): Oh!

Enter Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN, L. She has removed her hat.

Exit Mrs. PLUSH, R.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Now, there's no shadow of doubt I must take a new line with Lily. I can't resort to Mr. Plush's methods, but I must be firm. I'll begin at once. *Aloud*: Well, Lily, I hope you've waked up in a better temper?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*in an astonished voice*): Was my temper so very bad, then? I didn't know it. (*Crosses back, C.*)

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: It's a pity you didn't, for it was awful, unbearable.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN looks astounded at this answer. She sits down at table, C.

Enter Mrs. PLUSH with teapot (R.), hot water, and a large plate of shrimps.

Mrs. PLUSH (*triumphantly, R.*): There, sir!

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*sitting down and pouring out tea, facing audience*): Why, who ordered the shrimps?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*seating himself at table, L.*): I did. What beauties they are. Have some?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*shuddering. Turns to Mrs. PLUSH, who is just leaving the room*): Certainly not. You know I can't bear them. Take them away at once, please.

Mrs. PLUSH: Take them away! Why, I've just bin an' sent for 'em.

Seizes plate, and moves away angrily.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Now is the time—a grand and glorious time to show my strength of character. *Aloud*: Do nothing of the sort, please. I ordered the shrimps, and I intend them to remain.

Rises, crosses R., takes plate solemnly from Mrs. PLUSH, and re-places it on table. Seats himself again, L.

Mrs. PLUSH (*aside*): There's goin' to be a row—so I'm orf—and all about a pint and a 'alf of s'rimps the King couldn't beat at Margate. (*Exit, R.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*rising*): Anthony! How dare you! Either I or the shrimps leave the room.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*coolly, helping himself largely*): The *shrimps* aren't going.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*moving slowly towards door, R.*): You can choose between me and the shrimps.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: I have chosen—shrimps for ever. *Aside*: Now for the storm.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside, as she goes very slowly towards door*): Dear me, whatever *is* the matter with Tony. I didn't mean to be taken at my word, and I do want my tea so badly, yet I must go now.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Come, Lily—re-consider your decision, and I'll give you these lovely fellows I've just peeled. There's a noble offer for you.

Hold's out a plateful.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Never; and I think you are perfectly *brutal*.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*cheerily*): Not in the least, only, naturally, weighed in the balance against shrimps, great fat fellows like these, you are found wanting. Shall I send you up some tea?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*with dignity, advancing and re-seating herself*): No. You are evidently so excessively anxious to get rid of me that I shall remain.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*with intense and imperturbable good humour*): On the contrary, I'm delighted to have you, *and* the shrimps. Come, don't look so tragic—smile at me.

Leans across table, and tries to coax a smile from her.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*turning away*): Oh, don't trouble about *me*, please.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Well, I've got my own way, and the beastly shrimps, but otherwise I've only succeeded in putting her into a fearful rage.

Enter Mrs. PLUSH, R.

Mrs. PLUSH: Oh, please sir, there's a letter 'as come for you, and I've bin an' never told you. I've a head,

an' so's a pin, as Plush says. I put it on the chiffoneer. Did you get it, sir?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: Er—yes—thanks.

Exit Mrs. PLUSH.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Ah! He's had a letter. Perhaps that explains his sudden bad temper—perhaps—perhaps—(*thinks*)—he's had bad news. *Aloud*: You didn't tell me you had had a letter, Tony?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*drily*): I haven't had an opportunity, considering I only got it when you were up stairs, and ever since you came down our one theme of conversation has been shrimps.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Well, who was it from?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Now for firmness. *Aloud*: Never mind. *Aside*: That borders on rudeness.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: But I *do* mind. I believe you've had some bad news.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: No news at all.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Well, why not show me the letter?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*sneezing violently*): Because I don't mean to. Ah-tish-a-ah-tissh-a! . . .

Pulling out handkerchief, and scattering all the little bits of letter to the wind savagely.

. . . Well, here it is then; as you're so precious anxious to see it, make what you can of it.

Offers her a handful of fragments.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*beginning to cry*): I believe you're hiding something from me.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*contritely, aside*): There, what a brute I am; I've made her cry. (*Takes a step forward to console her, and stops.*) No, I *must* be firm. I wonder what Plush would do now. If I stay here much longer I know what I'll do, I shall kiss her. (*Jumps up and overturns chair.*) I must get out of this, or I shall never keep up the firmness. *Aloud*: Really, Lily, you are insufferable; you do nothing but nag. You make me think of the old song the niggers used to sing at Ramsgate when I was a kid. (*Seizes his cap.*)

Dramatically :

“Nag, nag, from morning till night,
Whatever I do, I never do right,
Married life, I’m sick of it quite,
I wish I were single again.”

That’s true enough. (Flings out of room.)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*as her husband goes out, runs after him calling*): Anthony—Tony, darling!!

No answer. She returns, C., half crying.

I wonder what has happened I know there’s something the matter with him, and I’m sure—(*with determination*)—I’m positive that letter’s at the bottom of it.

Picks up some of the scattered pieces and examines them.

No, it’s no use. I can’t make out the words, or even the handwriting, it’s torn up in such tiny fragments; that’s suspicious to begin with. I’ve never known him destroy a letter so completely.

Collects pieces, and drops in waste-paper basket. Sits down, L.

I wish, oh, I wish I was a detective—a Sherlock Holmsey detective. He would know in a moment who the letter was from, by the kind of notepaper, and what it was about, from the colour of the ink. I wonder if I couldn’t deduce something. I’ll try.

Goes to basket and brings back a handful of fragments, and gazes at them.

No, I can’t say it seems to help me—still Sherlock. .

Enter Mrs. PLUSH with a tray, R.

Mrs. PLUSH: I thought perhaps you’d like me to clear down the tea, ma’am, if you’re quite finished. *Aside*: She looks pretty miserable, and the glimpse I caught of *his* face was more like a thunder-cloud than anything else. Silly young things; they’ve been having a tiff.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Oh yes, thank you; quite done.

Mrs. PLUSH: And dinner, ma’am, you didn’t mention the time. I’ve got you as nice a chicken as ever pecked barley.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*hesitating*): Oh—oh—seven o’clock please—that is—(*hesitates*)—if my husband—

(*breaks off, then continues*)—perhaps we had better say half-past, as Mr. Hyphen-Brown has gone for a walk.

Mrs. PLUSH: Very well, mum, I was just wonderin' ma'am, if you've ever been to Canterbury—for I've a sister in service there, nurse in a gentleman's family—an officer—Captain Smith—'e is—she's nurse to his little girls, and I thought perhaps you might know the name. No?

As Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN shakes her head.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: You see, I've never been to Canterbury. You are making a mistake; we live in London, you know.

Mrs. PLUSH: Yes, ma'am, I remember, but I just asked on the chance—for you never know—the world's not so large w'en all's said and done. . .

Picks up tray and moves to door, R.

. . . It was seein' the postmark on the letter made me think that perhaps you knew Canterbury.

Prepares to exit.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*springing up*): *Of course*, why didn't I think of the postmark before? Why, that's the way—(*with unconscious irony*)—a detective always tells where a letter is from. (*Follows Mrs. PLUSH to door.*) Are you *sure* the postmark was Canterbury?

Mrs. PLUSH: Quite certain. Not that I'm in the 'abit of lookin' over my visitors' letters, which I hope you'll believe I'm above so nasty and under'and a trick, but it seemed some'ow to catch my eye—bein', I suppose, as I was familiar with it through writing constant to Fanny, to whom I'm almost in place of a mother—and not feelin' over comf'table about 'er livin' so near those barricks, with soldiers always a-passin' dressed up to catch a silly girl's eye.

Exit with tray, R.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Now, I *wonder* who can have written to Tony from Canterbury. We don't know a soul there. I believe that old Colonel Drake was there once, but that is ages ago. Why . . .

Drops down suddenly on chair L., by table.

Why, of course, it's Maggie! She is staying there for the week-end with the Parkers. Now, *why* didn't he

tell me? I believe—I believe there's something mysterious about this.

Gets very excited.

I've always been jealous of Maggie—she knew Tony so long before I did—and he is always so fond of her, and I don't care if she *is* his cousin, she's a very pretty, fascinating girl; what Tony calls a "girl every chap gets on with."

Jumps up.

I only wonder he ever married me when he could have married her; for, of *course*, she'd have married him—he's such a dear—perhaps—perhaps he's in love with her, and sorry he married me. Oh!—(*breaks off*)—dear me, how wicked I am, and what horrid things I'm thinking of—but—I'm so—so miserable.

Drops her head on table, and sobs.

Enter Mrs. PLUSH.

Mrs. PLUSH: I thought I'd just step up, ma'am, and—why—bless my soul, if she's not crying—and wot's it about, then? (*Goes up L.C., and bends over her.*) *Aside*: It's that husband that's been making her cry, I'll be bound. *Fiercely*: They're all alike.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*sitting up and drying her eyes*): Oh, I'm so foolish to cry, for really it's all my own fault, but—but Mr. Hyphen-Brown has never left me like this before.

Collapses again.

Mrs. PLUSH (*patting her hand gently*): There, there, my poor lamb. Never you mind his tempers—they're all alike—even the best of them are full of their tantrums, as I tell Plush.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*sitting up*): Oh, but Tony's never cross. He's got the temper of an *angel*.

Mrs. PLUSH (*aside*): H'm—that's just like a woman; nags at him herself, but won't hear a word against him from anyone else. I must try and give her a hint. *Aloud*: Don't you fret; it's his liver, most likely, mum. Now, don't you worry about him—he'll come back all right, a nicer spoken young gentleman as I never see, and just dotes on you.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*eagerly*): You—you think he *is* fond of me?

Mrs. PLUSH: Fond of you—why, that don't take much seeing. Do you think he'd stand all your little pettish ways if he wasn't?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Pettish ways? D'you think—(*slowly*)—that I am pettish, then?

Mrs. PLUSH: Well, perraps pettish is a bit stronger than I meant; but you've a naggy sort of way of answerin', as a rule—now, haven't you?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Naggy? Why, that's what Tony said. Oh, dear, no wonder he doesn't love me any more.

Begins to cry again.

Mrs. PLUSH: Bless us—don't cry again—there's no 'arm done yet—not to speak of—only—well, if you won't mind my sayin' it—men is queer creatures—there's a right and a wrong way of taking them—and you go the wrong way.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*tearfully*): Oh, *do* tell me what you mean.

Mrs. PLUSH: Well, ma'am, it's simple enough. Take them s'rimps as instance. You don't like s'rimps, do you?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: I can't bear them—and—Tony ought to have remembered.

Mrs. PLUSH: Of *course* he ought, but that's just the difference between the sextes. You'd have remembered sharp enough. I expect you know 'is likes and dislikes by 'eart.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Of course. I know that he can't *bear* cold mutton, and that he *won't* eat veal.

Mrs. PLUSH: Well, I never, just like mine!

Comes down, R.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Yours?

Mrs. PLUSH: Plush—'e can't *abide* cold mutton; funny, isn't it? But to come back to our muttuns (w'y wot ever's the matter with me—that's another joke—I must tell Plush). Well, ma'am, if I was you, next time you want your way, whether its s'rimps or anythink else, I should just ask 'im sweet and nice for it; never mind if 'e refuses at first, you'll see, ten to one, 'e'll give in fast enough if you only look pleasant and speak pleasant about it; and, above all, ma'am—

Turns and holds up finger, solemnly.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*breathlessly*): Yes.

Mrs. PLUSH: *Don't nag!* It's nagging as is the ruin of more 'omes than 'alf the world knows.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*humbly*): No, I must stop it.

Mrs. PLUSH: And a silly old woman you'll think me runnin' on like this; but there, I was always of a romantic turn, and I don't like to see two young things, who will 'ave a matter of forty or fifty odd years p'raps to spend together, beginnin' to go wrong in the first six months, all for the want of a word, so you must forgive me if I've spoke plain.

Exit, R.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Yes, she has "spoke plain," as she says, but the truth is never nice to hear about oneself. She's quite right, I *have* got into a naggy way of answering. If I don't look sharp, I shall become like that awful Mrs. Matthews, with lines all over her face. Oh, perhaps I've got lines like that already.

Jumps up and goes to looking-glass on chiffonnier R., and stands regarding herself anxiously.

No, I don't see any yet, but . . .

Enter Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN, L. Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN turns, they fly into each other's arms, C.

. . . Oh, Tony! I've been such a horror.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*vehemently*): No. It's *I* who have been a perfect beast to speak to you so roughly; the air brought me to my senses.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: No, no, you were quite right; it was my fault for being so provoking. Tony, Tony, I'm never going to nag any more.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*fiercely*): Who dared say you nagged?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*laughing*): Why, you did.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: By jove, so I did!

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: And so did Mrs. Plush.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: What! Has *she* been talking to you?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: Yes, and she's an old dear. She gave me a lot of good advice.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: The deuce she did. Did she tell you about Mr. Plush's little methods?

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*bewildered*): Mr. Plush's little methods? No. Has she been talking to you, then?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: By the bucketful. She seems to take a sort of affectionate interest in us, and—(*hesitates*)—well, owing to some words she let drop, I behaved like a brute to you before.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: O—oh—Tony! D'you know I was stupid and wicked enough to think that it must have been something Maggie said to you that upset you so. You ought to have told me—(*reproachfully*)—that that letter was from Maggie.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*aside*): Now, how by all that's wonderful did she unearth that? Trust a woman. I'm rather in a hole what to say. *I* know—I have it. (*Turns round.*) So I would, Lily darling, only she confided a secret to me. But I must tell you. (*Whispers in her ear.*)

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN: *Engaged!* Oh! The *darling!* I *must* write to her and congratulate her. Tony, Tony; how I have misjudged you. What can I do to make amends?

Put's her hands on his shoulders.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*kissing her*): Sing me one of my favourite songs, that will be your punishment. .

LILY runs over and opens piano, L.

Aside: Well out of it. She must never know that that news only formed the postscript of that letter.

Follows her over to piano, L.

Enter Mrs. PLUSH, unperceived. Stops at door, R.

LILY strikes a chord.

Mrs. PLUSH (*rapturously*): What a tone!

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*turning round on music stool*): I shall tell Maggie that I hope she'll be as happy as we are.

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN: My darling.

Mrs. PLUSH: *What a tone!* It's easy to see *they're* all smooth again.

Exit, R.

Mrs. HYPHEN-BROWN (*jumping up*): Oh, Tony, before I sing to you I must go and find that dear old Mrs. Plush. . .

Crosses down R., turns at exit.

. . . You see, it is thanks entirely to her that we're so happy, isn't it?

Mr. HYPHEN-BROWN (*following her*): Yes, thanks *entirely* to Mrs. Plush—(*aside*: And Maggie!)—this will be the last appearance of—(*turning to audience*)—

“A WET BLANKET.”



CURTAIN.



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1905.

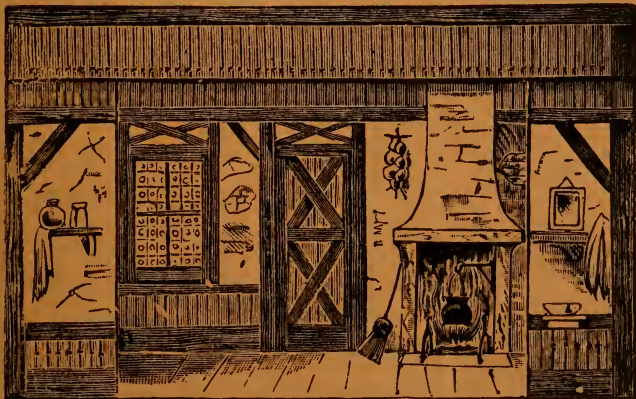
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