

of the body, and a fist softly banged upon the round table that was in the exact centre of the room.

Mrs. Sockitt in the meantime placidly punctuating his remarks with a casual "I dare say"—the while she thought strenuously about some matter of importance concerning the household.

To the sound of a gong that was smitten in the usual breathless fashion by Joseph the boarders straggled into the dining-room. Mrs. Sockitt, huge of bulk, stood at the head of the table, with slight inclinations of the head as each boarder seated himself or herself—with a special smile for Mrs. Ogg and for Miss Julia Ogg, who took places near to herself. Mrs. Ogg was reputed to have a considerable sum of money laid by; she paid her bill with a careless air that was a constant reminder to Mrs. Sockitt that she ought to have asked more in the first place; and she frequently went out accompanied by her daughter—growing perilously like her double-chinned mother—to places of entertainment in the evening.

Priscilla Meadows had taken her place at the table, sitting with downcast eyes, and with thoughts that hovered for the most part about a little bed in a room above in which a child lay sleeping; she scarcely noticed the beginnings of conversations round about her. There were men there who ate as though that was the business of their lives; there were tired-looking men who were obviously glad that the day's work was over, and that they had got back to that sorry substitute for home—Sockitt's. There were two empty places at the table, and Miss Meadows presently found her eyes wandering from one empty place to the other.

One empty place was a good one; it was next to