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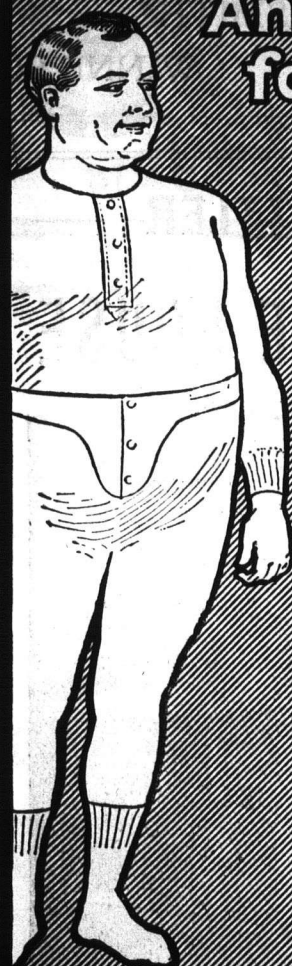
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"Nelly went to the Appletons and the Warings to see if she couldn't get some eggs, but they had only one left at each place. It's no use, Chauncey, we've got to do the best we can. I've put on my prettiest gown, and—did you bring the wine?"

"Yes, and it's good," said Mr. Callender, with returning cheerfulness. He was glad now that he had paid a price for it that was too large ever to be divulged to his wife.

"And the flowers?"
"What flowers?"
"The flowers you said you were going to bring me."

"My dear girl, I never thought of them from that moment to this."

"Then we have nothing for the centre of the table but that old crumpled-up fernery," she paused tragically. "Not even fruit! There's another plank gone."

"Never mind, you're the whole platform," said her husband with jollity. "You always manage some way."

The two irreproachably attired men who made their entrance into the drawing-room looked at her in a manner which she certainly found encouraging. She concluded that the chances were good for making them enjoy the dinner, irrespective of its quality. She was enjoying their unspoken admiration, and the conversation also, when Mr. Warburton returned to the subject of their invitation.

"It's so good of you to have us without any notice—so uncommonly jolly for us. We've been so tired of hotel cooking, after the steamer."

"Yes," chimed in the other "it grew to be almost as tiresome to us as the beastly tinned food we lived on when we were in Africa."

"Oh, have you been in Africa lately?" asked Mrs. Callender with composure, although she and her husband felt the piercing of a mortal dart, and did not dare to look at each other.

"Yes, Kennard and I were on an exploring expedition last year, accidentally; it's quite a long tale—but we lived on tinned soups and meats, and even plum pudding—fancy it in the hot climate!—until even the smell of them sickened us. We've not been able to touch a bit of canned food since."

"Canned things—or tinned, as you call them—are very useful in emergencies," said Mr. Callender with idiotic solemnity. "You know you have to eat them sometimes—when you can't get help yourself, you know. Oh, yes, in emergencies tinned things are very useful—if you like 'em."

Mr. Kennard laughed heartily, as if at some delicate joke. "Ah, yes, yes, if you like them—if you like them, Warburton, yes—mind that, yes!"

"Excuse me for a moment," said Mrs. Callender with graceful deliberation, sweeping slowly out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed behind her rushing into the kitchen wildly. The fortunes of war were against her, but win the victory she would. There had to be some way out of this!

"Don't dish up a thing, Catherine, she ordered breathlessly. "It is no use, the gentlemen never eat anything canned. I've got to think up something else." Daunted by the grim face of the insulted cook, she turned appealingly to the waitress, a young and venturesome person, as woman to woman. "You must know of something I could do, Nelly!"

"The Warings, ma'am—"

"You told me you'd been there, and that everything they had was cooked for their own dinner."

The eyes of Irish Nelly sparkled. "That's just it ma'am. Mr. Warong's home late tonight, and they're only just now sitting down to the soup. I seen it going in through the window. If you—" she stopped, tentatively.

"Well, well—say it!"

"Sure, they'd loan you the whole dinner, ma'am, if you asked it."

The light of kindred inspiration kindled in Mrs. Callender. The neigh-

borhood was practically a joint-stock food company, where maids might be seen flitting through the back yard at any hour of the day or evening, with the spoils of the borrower. But an entire dinner! The magnificence of the scheme took Mrs. Callender's breath away.

"You'd give the lend of it yourself, ma'am," said Nelly, impartially.

Mrs. Callender gasped—and assented.

"Come!" she said, and followed by the maid, dashed out of the kitchen door, down the back piazza steps, and then up again on the piazza of the adjoining house.

The people seated at the table in the dining-room looked up at the long window, amazed to see Mrs. Callender gesticulating insanely at them from without.

"Don't help any more of that soup," she called insistently. "Don't help any more of it—wait till I get in." The window opened from the inside, and she hurled herself into the room. "No, no!" she answered the look on their horror-struck faces, "it's not poisoned. I don't mean that—it's all right; Oh, will you let me take it home with me?"

"My dear Mrs. Callender," expostulated Mr. Waring in a quivering voice, rising cautiously.

"No, I'm not crazy! I mean just what I say. My husband has brought home company, and we had only a canned dinner, and they can't eat it because they've been in Africa—and oh, I can't explain. Aid it's so important to treat them well, and—oh, you dear thing!"

For Mrs. Waring had handed the soup to Nelly and was already giving orders to her own maid.

"Don't say another word," she commanded rapidly, with a woman's perception grasping the situation. "Send us over just what you have in exchange. We have only a plain home dinner—roast beef, vegetables, macaroni, cottage pudding—you can put the things in your oven again. Henry, carry over this roast will you? Don't make any noise, any of you." "I'll take the potatoes," said Mrs. Callender fervently, but as she climbed her own piazza steps once more and saw the ghostly procession that came and went stealthily bearing dishes, her knees suddenly bent under her, and she leaned against one of the piazza posts, too weak from laughter to move.

"Take care, you'll drop that dish," said Mr. Waring interposing a dexterous arm, while he endeavored to balance the roast on the railing. Mrs. Callender, don't sit down on the piazza; get up. You'll have me laughing, too, if you don't stop, and I've got to take this in and go back for plates."

"We have plates," said Mrs. Callender, strangling. "Oh, Mr. Waring, we have plates—we have something. Oh, Mr. Waring, go and leave me, go and leave me! I'll never be able to stand up."

"Hello, what's the matter?" Mr. Callender, with an excited whisper, came peering out into the semi-darkness. "That back door keeps letting in an infernal draught. What on earth are you and Waring doing out here, Cynthia? And you without a thing over your shoulders! I call that mean, having a good time out here by yourselves, and leaving me inside to do all the entertaining. Don't you know that we're waiting for dinner, and it's after half-past seven o'clock?"

His ill-used expression was the last straw. Mr. Waring rocked and reeled with his platter, while the roast performed an obligato movement.

"Oh!" moaned Mrs. Callender as her husband finally assisted her to an erect position, and offensively took up the dish of potatoes. "Don't say a word, don't ask me a thing; you'll never in this world know all I've gone through in the last hour—you couldn't take it in. But I've got the dinner—your Englishmen are provided for—your future is assured, and all that we have to do now is to go in and eat—and eat—and eat."