

Never was there such joylessness as in Mr. Hearty's dining-room that morning.

"'Ullo, 'ullo!" cried Bindle as he entered with Mr. Sopley. "Ain't this a jolly little crowd!"

Millie brightened-up instantaneously, Charlie Dixon looked relieved. Mr. Hearty dashed forward to welcome Mr. Sopley, tripped over Bindle's cane, which he was holding awkwardly, and landed literally on Mr. Sopley's bosom.

Mr. Sopley stepped back and struck his head against the edge of the door.

"Look at 'Earty tryin' to kiss ole Woe-and-Whiskers," remarked Bindle audibly. Millie giggled, Charlie Dixon smiled, Mrs. Bindle glared, and the rest of the guests looked either disapprovingly at Bindle, or sympathetically at Mr. Hearty and Mr. Sopley. Mrs. Hearty collapsed into a chair and began to undulate with mirth.

"Couldn't we 'ave ar 'ymn?" suggested Bindle.

Mr. Hearty looked round from abjectly apologising to Mr. Sopley. He hesitated a moment and glanced towards the harmonium.

"Uncle Joe is only joking, father," said Millie.

Mr. Hearty looked at Bindle reproachfully.

"Now then, let's set down," said Bindle.

After much effort and a considerable expenditure of physical force, he managed to get the guests seated at the table.

At a sign from Mr. Hearty, Mr. Sopley rose to say grace.

Every one but Bindle was watching for the