

The Romance of a Cottage

By W. R. Gilbert

PEACE COTTAGE stood in its overgrown garden and, from the crest of the hill, looked over the smiling fields of Codford, across to the sea. It looked its name—the house of world-forgotten peace.

Either Sandy and Rebecca had grown like their cottage, or their cottage had grown like them, or both. They were a family of three—Sandy, Rebecca and the cottage.

One day pompous Mr. Grandison, of London, with his befrilled and powdered lady, startled the sleepy old village by briskly walking up and down its roads as though searching for something.

When at length they chanced on the old house on the hill-top, Mrs. Grandison stopped and pointed at the lovely cottage with parted lips.

"The very thing! Just look at it Horace!" she whispered.

"H'm! very pretty, my dear," Mr. Grandison said. "Just about the size. Decent little garden—a little overgrown; soon put that right. Two bedrooms, I fancy, living room and kitchen. Very nice!"

"For our week-end cottage, we simply couldn't have anything better!" declared Mrs. Grandison, gushingly.

"You're right! I believe we've dropped on the very spot. High up on the hill-side, sea view, and quiet. Wonder what the price is?"

"Oh, do have a look inside!" urged the fervid lady. "I declare I'm hopelessly in love with the dear little place already! Knock and ask for a glass of water or something, and we can look round while we're drinking it."

"Very good!" said her husband, striding up the short path and bringing old Sandy hobbling to the door to answer his ponderous double knock. "I say, my good man, have you any milk, water, or anything drinkable y' know? Thirsty weather this, eh, what?"

Sandy blinked.

"Come along inside, sir!" he quavered.

"Ay, and the lady too, if so be as—"

"How awfully kind you are!" said Mrs. Grandison, sweeping majestically into the cottage after her husband. "What a nice old place you have here, to be sure!"

"And what a shocking state it's in," remarked Mr. Grandison, behind his hand, as Sandy stumbled out in quest of Rebecca.

"Not a bad room though. Wants cleaning—ceiling nearly black—lots of painting wanted."

"Ere's my missus comin' as'll give you summat to drink, sir and lady both," said Sandy, with his old eyes bright with excitement.

"And mebbe you'll excuse us bein' so 'omely 'ere, but we never 'ave no visitors."

"You have such a dear old cottage," simpered Mrs. Grandison, "and I'm sure you must have quite two bedrooms upstairs."

The old man glowed with delight.

"Yes, lady, it's the prettiest cottage in all Codford!" he declared, glancing round the room with childish pride; "and me and Rebecca, we've lived in it ever since I brought her in through that door, the sweetest little bride ever a man had—that's fifty-two years ago come Easter."

"How delightfully romantic!" exclaimed Mrs. Grandison, "and with two bedrooms upstairs—"

"And it's got a wonderful little garden out there," Sandy went on. "And this corner seat 'ere by the fire—why, Rebecca says it don't look like itself when I be'ant sittin' in it."

"I think it quite too lovely for anything!" said the lady, "especially as you must have two bedrooms upstairs—"

Here, white-haired old Rebecca, wearing a spotless apron which but ten seconds before had been folded away in the drawer, emerged from the inner room, carrying two glasses of milk. And a moment later Mrs. Grandison was smiling more pleasantly than ever, for at length she had learned that the cottage had two bedrooms.

"Funny old couple!" remarked Mr. Grandison, as they left. "Now for the landlord—Farmer Price, didn't the old fossil say?"

"Yes, dear!"

To Farmer Price, then, went the

pompous Mr. Grandison, and returned to his eagerly expectant lady an hour later.

"Got the little cottage all right!" he told her, triumphantly. "Had a bit of trouble. Didn't like disturbing the old folks. Been in Peace Cottage ever since they married. Sentiment, you know. Soon got over that. Made him see the business side of it. Old Sandy and Rebecca have to clear out this month. The landlord puts all the 'doing up' and decorating to my expense, and charges me half-a-crown a week more than the old people paid. Those were his terms for turning them out."

"I see that you've got us the nicest week-end cottage in the whole country!" said Mrs. Grandison, giving her husband's cheek an affectionate peck.

A week later Sandy and Rebecca went down the hill arm in arm to Farmer Price. "You wouldn't think o' turnin' us out, not after all these years?" pleaded old Sandy, humbly. "You don't think what it means to us, farmer. Life 'ud never be the same to Reb and me outside of that cottage."

"It's in a shocking condition," said the farmer. "The place is a perfect disgrace, and the rent you pay won't run to anything being done on it. And the garden—well—"

"I know the garden's not what it might be," said Sandy, with a tear on his cheek. "This old back of mine, that's bent over it for fifty years, is gettin' rheumatically and stiff. But if you'll only give us another chance, I'll do that garden up lovely—ay, I will, even if it breaks me!"

"That's enough," snapped Farmer Price. "I've let the cottage. You have to leave the cottage next Saturday according to notice."

"Peace Cottage," began Rebecca, then stopped and turned from the room, gulping down her anguish. Sandy rose to follow her.

"I wouldn't mind for myself, farmer," he whispered, pointing after Rebecca, "but it's 'er—it's killin' 'er! That cottage—"

"I've told you it's no use!" growled Price, finally. Whereupon Sandy and Rebecca, walking very slowly, toiled up the hill to Peace Cottage again in dumb and hopeless despair.

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"It's lovelier than ever, Reb!" said Sandy. They were standing in the dusk of an evening a month later outside Peace Cottage. The workmen had left for the night, and the improvements in the cottage were nearly finished.

A light green paint framed the diamond-shaped casements; the living room, as they could see it in the dim light, was a glory of pale blue, the ceiling was spotlessly white, and behind lay the garden, transformed from a coarse overgrowth of grass and weeds into a shapely lawn, with flower beds.

"I couldn't 'ave believed as our old cottage could 'ave been smartened up into—into that!" admitted Rebecca. "But when these London swells arrive, I'm going to ask them to let me come in and clean for 'em. It'll be better than never going inside the dear old place no more, Sandy."

The next week-end the Grandison's arrived. Everything was exceedingly gay and satisfactory when Mr. Grandison first paced the back lawn.

"Lovely spot! Splendid air! Beautiful position! This is life—life," he cried. It was, therefore, the more annoying to the pompous Mr. Grandison when Farmer Price made his extraordinary demand. This happened on the Monday morning, just before Mr. Grandison started back to the city.

"Nice place you've made of it, sir!" drawled the farmer. "Looks a perfect picture."

"Yes, yes! Of course! No halves about me. What d'you want? Rent?"

"Yes, sir! Seven shillings and sixpence it is, you remember. Thank you! And now I may tell you that after next week the rent will be a hundred pounds a week."

"What?" gasped the pompous one, starting back.

"I've raised your rent to a hundred pounds a week from after next week," said the farmer tranquilly.

"You—you sharper! You scoundrel!"

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To Clean the Cruise—When my vinegar cruise got discolored inside, I used to try wood ashes and shot. The former made too much of a muss and the latter required too vigorous a shaking. Several years ago I learned a new method and one I like better. I cut a small potato into tiny pieces and put it in the cruise. Let it stand a few minutes, then shake a few times and put some water in the cruise and rinse the potato out. Wash the cruise and you will find it shiny and free from the discoloration.

Albumenized Milk—A reader asks how to make "albumenized milk." Put the white of one egg in a tumbler and add one-half cup of milk, cover tightly and shake until thoroughly mixed. If possible use the tin shaker, which is like a tin tumbler, and is placed over the glass, allowing one to shake the ingredients to better advantage.

And by the way, if your invalid cannot take milk alone, add a small quantity of vichy or seltzer water.

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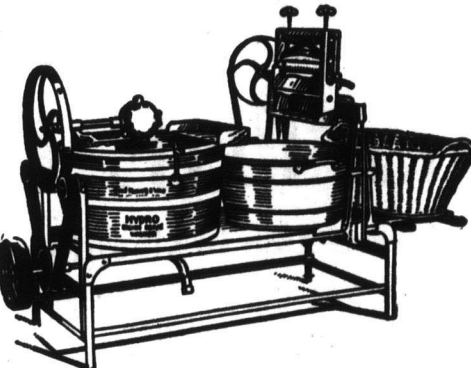
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