

**GEORGE GROSSMITH, WEEDON
GROSSMITH**

**THE DIARY OF A
NOBODY**

George Grossmith
The Diary of a Nobody

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Grossmith G.

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION BY MR. POOTER	5
CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	14
CHAPTER V	17
CHAPTER VI	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

George Grossmith

The Diary of a Nobody

INTRODUCTION BY MR. POOTER

Why should I not publish my diary? I have often seen reminiscences of people I have never even heard of, and I fail to see—because I do not happen to be a ‘Somebody’—why my diary should not be interesting. My only regret is that I did not commence it when I was a youth.

Charles Pooter.

The Laurels,
Brickfield Terrace,
Holloway.

CHAPTER I

We settle down in our new home, and I resolve to keep a diary. Tradesmen trouble us a bit, so does the scraper. The Curate calls and pays me a great compliment.

My dear wife Carrie and I have just been a week in our new house, "The Laurels," Brickfield Terrace, Holloway—a nice six-roomed residence, not counting basement, with a front breakfast-parlour. We have a little front garden; and there is a flight of ten steps up to the front door, which, by-the-by, we keep locked with the chain up. Cummings, Gowing, and our other intimate friends always come to the little side entrance, which saves the servant the trouble of going up to the front door, thereby taking her from her work. We have a nice little back garden which runs down to the railway. We were rather afraid of the noise of the trains at first, but the landlord said we should not notice them after a bit, and took £2 off the rent. He was certainly right; and beyond the cracking of the garden wall at the bottom, we have suffered no inconvenience.

After my work in the City, I like to be at home. What's the good of a home, if you are never in it? "Home, Sweet Home," that's my motto. I am always in of an evening. Our old friend Gowing may drop in without ceremony; so may Cummings, who lives opposite. My dear wife Caroline and I are pleased to see them, if they like to drop in on us. But Carrie and I can manage to pass our evenings together without friends. There is always something to be done: a tin-tack here, a Venetian blind to put straight, a fan to nail up, or part of a carpet to nail down—all of which I can do with my pipe in my mouth; while Carrie is not above putting a button on a shirt, mending a pillow-case, or practising the "Sylvia Gavotte" on our new cottage piano (on the three years' system), manufactured by W. Bilkson (in small letters), from Collard and Collard (in very large letters). It is also a great comfort to us to know that our boy Willie is getting on so well in the Bank at Oldham. We should like to see more of him. Now for my diary:—

April 3.—Tradesmen called for custom, and I promised Farmerson, the ironmonger, to give him a turn if I wanted any nails or tools. By-the-by, that reminds me there is no key to our bedroom door, and the bells must be seen to. The parlour bell is broken, and the front door rings up in the servant's bedroom, which is ridiculous. Dear friend Gowing dropped in, but wouldn't stay, saying there was an infernal smell of paint.

April 4. Tradesmen still calling; Carrie being out, I arranged to deal with Horwin, who seemed a civil butcher with a nice clean shop. Ordered a shoulder of mutton for to-morrow, to give him a trial.

Carrie arranged with Borset, the butterman, and ordered a pound of fresh butter, and a pound and a half of salt ditto for kitchen, and a shilling's worth of eggs. In the evening, Cummings unexpectedly dropped in to show me a meerschaum pipe he had won in a raffle in the City, and told me to handle it carefully, as it would spoil the colouring if the hand was moist. He said he wouldn't stay, as he didn't care much for the smell of the paint, and fell over the scraper as he went out. Must get the scraper removed, or else I shall get into a *scrape*. I don't often make jokes.

April 5.—Two shoulders of mutton arrived, Carrie having arranged with another butcher without consulting me. Gowing called, and fell over scraper coming in. *Must* get that scraper removed.

April 6.—Eggs for breakfast simply shocking; sent them back to Borset with my compliments, and he needn't call any more for orders. Couldn't find umbrella, and though it was pouring with rain, had to go without it. Sarah said Mr. Gowing must have took it by mistake last night, as there was a stick in the 'all that didn't belong to nobody. In the evening, hearing someone talking in a loud voice to the servant in the downstairs hall, I went out to see who it was, and was surprised to find it was Borset, the butterman, who was both drunk and offensive. Borset, on seeing me, said he would be

hanged if he would ever serve City clerks any more—the game wasn't worth the candle. I restrained my feelings, and quietly remarked that I thought it was *possible* for a city clerk to be a *gentleman*. He replied he was very glad to hear it, and wanted to know whether I had ever come across one, for *he* hadn't. He left the house, slamming the door after him, which nearly broke the fanlight; and I heard him fall over the scraper, which made me feel glad I hadn't removed it. When he had gone, I thought of a splendid answer I ought to have given him. However, I will keep it for another occasion.

April 7.—Being Saturday, I looked forward to being home early, and putting a few things straight; but two of our principals at the office were absent through illness, and I did not get home till seven. Found Borset waiting. He had been three times during the day to apologise for his conduct last night. He said he was unable to take his Bank Holiday last Monday, and took it last night instead.

He begged me to accept his apology, and a pound of fresh butter. He seems, after all, a decent sort of fellow; so I gave him an order for some fresh eggs, with a request that on this occasion they *should* be fresh. I am afraid we shall have to get some new stair-carpets after all; our old ones are not quite wide enough to meet the paint on either side. Carrie suggests that we might ourselves broaden the paint. I will see if we can match the colour (dark chocolate) on Monday.

April 8, Sunday.—After Church, the Curate came back with us. I sent Carrie in to open front door, which we do not use except on special occasions. She could not get it open, and after all my display, I had to take the Curate (whose name, by-the-by, I did not catch,) round the side entrance.

He caught his foot in the scraper, and tore the bottom of his trousers. Most annoying, as Carrie could not well offer to repair them on a Sunday. After dinner, went to sleep. Took a walk round the garden, and discovered a beautiful spot for sowing mustard-and-cress and radishes. Went to Church again in the evening: walked back with the Curate. Carrie noticed he had got on the same pair of trousers, only repaired. He wants me to take round the plate, which I think a great compliment.

CHAPTER II

Tradesmen and the scraper still troublesome. Gowing rather tiresome with his complaints of the paint. I make one of the best jokes of my life. Delights of Gardening. Mr. Stillbrook, Gowing, Cummings, and I have a little misunderstanding. Sarah makes me look a fool before Cummings.

April 9.—Commenced the morning badly. The butcher, whom we decided *not* to arrange with, called and blackguarded me in the most uncalled-for manner. He began by abusing me, and saying he did not want my custom. I simply said: "Then what are you making all this fuss about it for?"

And he shouted out at the top of his voice, so that all the neighbours could hear: "Pah! go along. Ugh! I could buy up 'things' like you by the dozen!"

I shut the door, and was giving Carrie to understand that this disgraceful scene was entirely her fault, when there was a violent kicking at the door, enough to break the panels. It was the blackguard butcher again, who said he had cut his foot over the scraper, and would immediately bring an action against me. Called at Farmerson's, the ironmonger, on my way to town, and gave him the job of moving the scraper and repairing the bells, thinking it scarcely worth while to trouble the landlord with such a trifling matter.

Arrived home tired and worried. Mr. Putley, a painter and decorator, who had sent in a card, said he could not match the colour on the stairs, as it contained Indian carmine. He said he spent half-a-day calling at warehouses to see if he could get it. He suggested he should entirely repaint the stairs. It would cost very little more; if he tried to match it, he could only make a bad job of it. It would be more satisfactory to him and to us to have the work done properly. I consented, but felt I had been talked over. Planted some mustard-and-cress and radishes, and went to bed at nine.

April 10.—Farmerson came round to attend to the scraper himself. He seems a very civil fellow. He says he does not usually conduct such small jobs personally, but for me he would do so. I thanked him, and went to town. It is disgraceful how late some of the young clerks are at arriving.

I told three of them that if Mr. Perkupp, the principal, heard of it, they might be discharged.

Pitt, a monkey of seventeen, who has only been with us six weeks, told me "to keep my hair on!" I informed him I had had the honour of being in the firm twenty years, to which he insolently replied that I "looked it." I gave him an indignant look, and said: "I demand from you some respect, sir." He replied: "All right, go on demanding." I would not argue with him any further. You cannot argue with people like that. In the evening Gowing called, and repeated his complaint about the smell of paint. Gowing is sometimes very tedious with his remarks, and not always cautious; and Carrie once very properly reminded him that she was present.

April 11.—Mustard-and-cress and radishes not come up yet. To-day was a day of annoyances.

I missed the quarter-to-nine 'bus to the City, through having words with the grocer's boy, who for the second time had the impertinence to bring his basket to the hall-door, and had left the marks of his dirty boots on the fresh-cleaned door-steps. He said he had knocked at the side door with his knuckles for a quarter of an hour. I knew Sarah, our servant, could not hear this, as she was upstairs doing the bedrooms, so asked the boy why he did not ring the bell? He replied that he did pull the bell, but the handle came off in his hand.

I was half-an-hour late at the office, a thing that has never happened to me before. There has recently been much irregularity in the attendance of the clerks, and Mr. Perkupp, our principal, unfortunately choose this very morning to pounce down upon us early. Someone had given the tip to the others. The result was that I was the only one late of the lot. Buckling, one of the senior clerks, was a brick, and I was saved by his intervention. As I passed by Pitt's desk, I heard him remark to his neighbour: "How disgracefully late some of the head clerks arrive!" This was, of course, meant

for me. I treated the observation with silence, simply giving him a look, which unfortunately had the effect of making both of the clerks laugh. Thought afterwards it would have been more dignified if I had pretended not to have heard him at all. Cummings called in the evening, and we played dominoes.

April 12.—Mustard-and-cress and radishes not come up yet. Left Farmerson repairing the scraper, but when I came home found three men working. I asked the meaning of it, and Farmerson said that in making a fresh hole he had penetrated the gas-pipe. He said it was a most ridiculous place to put the gas-pipe, and the man who did it evidently knew nothing about his business. I felt his excuse was no consolation for the expense I shall be put to.

In the evening, after tea, Gowing dropped in, and we had a smoke together in the breakfast-parlour. Carrie joined us later, but did not stay long, saying the smoke was too much for her. It was also rather too much for me, for Gowing had given me what he called a green cigar, one that his friend Shoemach had just brought over from America. The cigar didn't look green, but I fancy I must have done so; for when I had smoked a little more than half I was obliged to retire on the pretext of telling Sarah to bring in the glasses.

I took a walk round the garden three or four times, feeling the need of fresh air. On returning Gowing noticed I was not smoking: offered me another cigar, which I politely declined. Gowing began his usual sniffing, so, anticipating him, I said: "You're not going to complain of the smell of paint again?" He said: "No, not this time; but I'll tell you what, I distinctly smell dry rot." I don't often make jokes, but I replied: "You're talking a lot of *dry rot* yourself." I could not help roaring at this, and Carrie said her sides quite ached with laughter. I never was so immensely tickled by anything I have ever said before. I actually woke up twice during the night, and laughed till the bed shook.

April 13.—An extraordinary coincidence: Carrie had called in a woman to make some chintz covers for our drawing-room chairs and sofa to prevent the sun fading the green rep of the furniture.

I saw the woman, and recognised her as a woman who used to work years ago for my old aunt at Clapham. It only shows how small the world is.

April 14.—Spent the whole of the afternoon in the garden, having this morning picked up at a bookstall for fivepence a capital little book, in good condition, on *Gardening*. I procured and sowed some half-hardy annuals in what I fancy will be a warm, sunny border. I thought of a joke, and called out Carrie. Carrie came out rather testy, I thought. I said: "I have just discovered we have got a lodging-house." She replied: "How do you mean?" I said: "Look at the *boarders*." Carrie said: "Is that all you wanted me for?" I said: "Any other time you would have laughed at my little pleasantry." Carrie said: "Certainly—at *any other time*, but not when I am busy in the house." The stairs looked very nice. Gowing called, and said the stairs looked *all right*, but it made the banisters look *all wrong*, and suggested a coat of paint on them also, which Carrie quite agreed with. I walked round to Putley, and fortunately he was out, so I had a good excuse to let the banisters slide. By-the-by, that is rather funny.

April 15, Sunday.—At three o'clock Cummings and Gowing called for a good long walk over Hampstead and Finchley, and brought with them a friend named Stillbrook. We walked and chatted together, except Stillbrook, who was always a few yards behind us staring at the ground and cutting at the grass with his stick.

As it was getting on for five, we four held a consultation, and Gowing suggested that we should make for "The Cow and Hedge" and get some tea. Stillbrook said: "A brandy-and-soda was good enough for him." I reminded them that all public-houses were closed till six o'clock. Stillbrook said, "That's all right—*bona-fide* travellers."

We arrived; and as I was trying to pass, the man in charge of the gate said: "Where from?" I replied: "Holloway." He immediately put up his arm, and declined to let me pass. I turned back for a moment, when I saw Stillbrook, closely followed by Cummings and Gowing, make for the entrance.

I watched them, and thought I would have a good laugh at their expense, I heard the porter say:

“Where from?” When, to my surprise, in fact disgust, Stillbrook replied: “Blackheath,” and the three were immediately admitted.

Gowing called to me across the gate, and said: “We shan’t be a minute.” I waited for them the best part of an hour. When they appeared they were all in most excellent spirits, and the only one who made an effort to apologise was Mr. Stillbrook, who said to me: “It was very rough on you to be kept waiting, but we had another spin for S. and B.’s.” I walked home in silence; I couldn’t speak to them.

I felt very dull all the evening, but deemed it advisable *not* to say anything to Carrie about the matter.

April 16.—After business, set to work in the garden. When it got dark I wrote to Cummings and Gowing (who neither called, for a wonder; perhaps they were ashamed of themselves) about yesterday’s adventure at “The Cow and Hedge.” Afterwards made up my mind not to write *yet*.

April 17.—Thought I would write a kind little note to Gowing and Cummings about last Sunday, and warning them against Mr. Stillbrook. Afterwards, thinking the matter over, tore up the letters and determined not to *write* at all, but to *speak* quietly to them. Dumfounded at receiving a sharp letter from Cummings, saying that both he and Gowing had been waiting for an explanation of *my* (mind you, *my*) extraordinary conduct coming home on Sunday. At last I wrote: “I thought I was the aggrieved party; but as I freely forgive you, you—feeling yourself aggrieved—should bestow forgiveness on me.” I have copied this *verbatim* in the diary, because I think it is one of the most perfect and thoughtful sentences I have ever written. I posted the letter, but in my own heart I felt I was actually apologising for having been insulted.

April 18.—Am in for a cold. Spent the whole day at the office sneezing. In the evening, the cold being intolerable, sent Sarah out for a bottle of Kinahan. Fell asleep in the arm-chair, and woke with the shivers. Was startled by a loud knock at the front door. Carrie awfully flurried. Sarah still out, so went up, opened the door, and found it was only Cummings. Remembered the grocer’s boy had again broken the side-bell. Cummings squeezed my hand, and said: “I’ve just seen Gowing. All right. Say no more about it.” There is no doubt they are both under the impression I have apologised.

While playing dominoes with Cummings in the parlour, he said: “By-the-by, do you want any wine or spirits? My cousin Merton has just set up in the trade, and has a splendid whisky, four years in bottle, at thirty-eight shillings. It is worth your while laying down a few dozen of it.” I told him my cellars, which were very small, were full up. To my horror, at that very moment, Sarah entered the room, and putting a bottle of whisky, wrapped in a dirty piece of newspaper, on the table in front of us, said: “Please, sir, the grocer says he ain’t got no more Kinahan, but you’ll find this very good at two-and-six, with twopence returned on the bottle; and, please, did you want any more sherry? as he has some at one-and-three, as dry as a nut!”

CHAPTER III

A conversation with Mr. Merton on Society. Mr. and Mrs. James, of Sutton, come up. A miserable evening at the Tank Theatre. Experiments with enamel paint. I make another good joke; but Gowing and Cummings are unnecessarily offended. I paint the bath red, with unexpected result.

April 19.—Cummings called, bringing with him his friend Merton, who is in the wine trade. Gowing also called. Mr. Merton made himself at home at once, and Carrie and I were both struck with him immediately, and thoroughly approved of his sentiments.

He leaned back in his chair and said: “You must take me as I am;” and I replied: “Yes—and you must take us as we are. We’re homely people, we are not swells.”

He answered: “No, I can see that,” and Gowing roared with laughter; but Merton in a most gentlemanly manner said to Gowing: “I don’t think you quite understand me. I intended to convey that our charming host and hostess were superior to the follies of fashion, and preferred leading a simple and wholesome life to gadding about to twopenny-halfpenny tea-drinking afternoons, and living above their incomes.”

I was immensely pleased with these sensible remarks of Merton’s, and concluded that subject by saying: “No, candidly, Mr. Merton, we don’t go into Society, because we do not care for it; and what with the expense of cabs here and cabs there, and white gloves and white ties, etc., it doesn’t seem worth the money.”

Merton said in reference to *friends*: “My motto is ‘Few and True;’ and, by the way, I also apply that to wine, ‘Little and Good.’” Gowing said: “Yes, and sometimes ‘cheap and tasty,’ eh, old man?”

Merton, still continuing, said he should treat me as a friend, and put me down for a dozen of his “Lockanbar” whisky, and as I was an old friend of Gowing, I should have it for 36s., which was considerably under what he paid for it.

He booked his own order, and further said that at any time I wanted any passes for the theatre I was to let him know, as his name stood good for any theatre in London.

April 20.—Carrie reminded me that as her old school friend, Annie Fullers (now Mrs. James), and her husband had come up from Sutton for a few days, it would look kind to take them to the theatre, and would I drop a line to Mr. Merton asking him for passes for four, either for the Italian Opera, Haymarket, Savoy, or Lyceum. I wrote Merton to that effect.

April 21.—Got a reply from Merton, saying he was very busy, and just at present couldn’t manage passes for the Italian Opera, Haymarket, Savoy, or Lyceum, but the best thing going on in London was the *Brown Bushes*, at the Tank Theatre, Islington, and enclosed seats for four; also bill for whisky.

April 23.—Mr. and Mrs. James (Miss Fullers that was) came to meat tea, and we left directly after for the Tank Theatre. We got a ’bus that took us to King’s Cross, and then changed into one that took us to the “Angel.” Mr. James each time insisted on paying for all, saying that I had paid for the tickets and that was quite enough.

We arrived at theatre, where, curiously enough, all our ’bus-load except an old woman with a basket seemed to be going in. I walked ahead and presented the tickets. The man looked at them, and called out: “Mr. Willowly! do you know anything about these?” holding up my tickets. The gentleman called to, came up and examined my tickets, and said: “Who gave you these?” I said, rather indignantly: “Mr. Merton, of course.” He said: “Merton? Who’s he?” I answered, rather sharply: “You ought to know, his name’s good at any theatre in London.” He replied: “Oh! is it?

Well, it ain’t no good here. These tickets, which are not dated, were issued under Mr. Swinstead’s management, which has since changed hands.” While I was having some very unpleasant words with

the man, James, who had gone upstairs with the ladies, called out: "Come on!" I went up after them, and a very civil attendant said: "This way, please, box H." I said to James: "Why, how on earth did you manage it?" and to my horror he replied: "Why, paid for it of course."

This was humiliating enough, and I could scarcely follow the play, but I was doomed to still further humiliation. I was leaning out of the box, when my tie—a little black bow which fastened on to the stud by means of a new patent—fell into the pit below. A clumsy man not noticing it, had his foot on it for ever so long before he discovered it. He then picked it up and eventually flung it under the next seat in disgust. What with the box incident and the tie, I felt quite miserable. Mr. James, of Sutton, was very good. He said: "Don't worry—no one will notice it with your beard. That is the only advantage of growing one that I can see." There was no occasion for that remark, for Carrie is very proud of my beard.

To hide the absence of the tie I had to keep my chin down the rest of the evening, which caused a pain at the back of my neck.

April 24.—Could scarcely sleep a wink through thinking of having brought up Mr. and Mrs. James from the country to go to the theatre last night, and his having paid for a private box because our order was not honoured, and such a poor play too. I wrote a very satirical letter to Merton, the wine merchant, who gave us the pass, and said, "Considering we had to pay for our seats, we did our best to appreciate the performance." I thought this line rather cutting, and I asked Carrie how many p's there were in appreciate, and she said, "One." After I sent off the letter I looked at the dictionary and found there were two. Awfully vexed at this.

Decided not to worry myself any more about the James's; for, as Carrie wisely said, "We'll make it all right with them by asking them up from Sutton one evening next week to play at Bézique."

April 25.—In consequence of Brickwell telling me his wife was working wonders with the new Pinkford's enamel paint, I determined to try it. I bought two tins of red on my way home. I hastened through tea, went into the garden and painted some flower-pots. I called out Carrie, who said: "You've always got some newfangled craze;" but she was obliged to admit that the flower-pots looked remarkably well. Went upstairs into the servant's bedroom and painted her washstand, towel-horse, and chest of drawers. To my mind it was an extraordinary improvement, but as an example of the ignorance of the lower classes in the matter of taste, our servant, Sarah, on seeing them, evinced no sign of pleasure, but merely said "she thought they looked very well as they was before."

April 26.—Got some more red enamel paint (red, to my mind, being the best colour), and painted the coal-scuttle, and the backs of our *Shakspeare*, the binding of which had almost worn out.

April 27.—Painted the bath red, and was delighted with the result. Sorry to say Carrie was not, in fact we had a few words about it. She said I ought to have consulted her, and she had never heard of such a thing as a bath being painted red. I replied: "It's merely a matter of taste."

Fortunately, further argument on the subject was stopped by a voice saying, "May I come in?"

It was only Cummings, who said, "Your maid opened the door, and asked me to excuse her showing me in, as she was wringing out some socks." I was delighted to see him, and suggested we should have a game of whist with a dummy, and by way of merriment said: "You can be the dummy." Cummings (I thought rather ill-naturedly) replied: "Funny as usual." He said he couldn't stop, he only called to leave me the *Bicycle News*, as he had done with it.

Another ring at the bell; it was Gowing, who said he "must apologise for coming so often, and that one of these days we must come round to *him*." I said: "A very extraordinary thing has struck me." "Something funny, as usual," said Cummings. "Yes," I replied; "I think even you will say so this time. It's concerning you both; for doesn't it seem odd that Gowing's always coming and Cummings' always going?" Carrie, who had evidently quite forgotten about the bath, went into fits of laughter, and as for myself, I fairly doubled up in my chair, till it cracked beneath me. I think this was one of the best jokes I have ever made.

Then imagine my astonishment on perceiving both Cummings and Gowing perfectly silent, and without a smile on their faces. After rather an unpleasant pause, Cummings, who had opened a cigar-case, closed it up again and said: "Yes—I think, after that, I *shall* be going, and I am sorry I fail to see the fun of your jokes." Gowing said he didn't mind a joke when it wasn't rude, but a pun on a name, to his thinking, was certainly a little wanting in good taste. Cummings followed it up by saying, if it had been said by anyone else but myself, he shouldn't have entered the house again.

This rather unpleasantly terminated what might have been a cheerful evening. However, it was as well they went, for the charwoman had finished up the remains of the cold pork.

April 28.—At the office, the new and very young clerk Pitt, who was very impudent to me a week or so ago, was late again. I told him it would be my duty to inform Mr. Perkupp, the principal.

To my surprise, Pitt apologised most humbly and in a most gentlemanly fashion. I was unfeignedly pleased to notice this improvement in his manner towards me, and told him I would look over his unpunctuality. Passing down the room an hour later. I received a smart smack in the face from a rolled-up ball of hard foolscap. I turned round sharply, but all the clerks were apparently riveted to their work. I am not a rich man, but I would give half-a-sovereign to know whether that was thrown by accident or design. Went home early and bought some more enamel paint—black this time—and spent the evening touching up the fender, picture-frames, and an old pair of boots, making them look as good as new. Also painted Gowing's walking-stick, which he left behind, and made it look like ebony.

April 29, Sunday.—Woke up with a fearful headache and strong symptoms of a cold. Carrie, with a perversity which is just like her, said it was "painter's colic," and was the result of my having spent the last few days with my nose over a paint-pot. I told her firmly that I knew a great deal better what was the matter with me than she did. I had got a chill, and decided to have a bath as hot as I could bear it. Bath ready—could scarcely bear it so hot. I persevered, and got in; very hot, but very acceptable. I lay still for some time.

On moving my hand above the surface of the water, I experienced the greatest fright I ever received in the whole course of my life; for imagine my horror on discovering my hand, as I thought, full of blood. My first thought was that I had ruptured an artery, and was bleeding to death, and should be discovered, later on, looking like a second Marat, as I remember seeing him in Madame Tussaud's. My second thought was to ring the bell, but remembered there was no bell to ring. My third was, that there was nothing but the enamel paint, which had dissolved with boiling water. I stepped out of the bath, perfectly red all over, resembling the Red Indians I have seen depicted at an East-End theatre. I determined not to say a word to Carrie, but to tell Farmerson to come on Monday and paint the bath white.

CHAPTER IV

The ball at the Mansion House.

April 30.—Perfectly astounded at receiving an invitation for Carrie and myself from the Lord and Lady Mayoress to the Mansion House, to “meet the Representatives of Trades and Commerce.”

My heart beat like that of a schoolboy’s. Carrie and I read the invitation over two or three times. I could scarcely eat my breakfast. I said—and I felt it from the bottom of my heart,—“Carrie darling, I was a proud man when I led you down the aisle of the church on our wedding-day; that pride will be equalled, if not surpassed, when I lead my dear, pretty wife up to the Lord and Lady Mayoress at the Mansion House.” I saw the tears in Carrie’s eyes, and she said: “Charlie dear, it is *I* who have to be proud of you. And I am very, very proud of you. You have called me pretty; and as long as I am pretty in your eyes, I am happy. You, dear old Charlie, are not handsome, but you are *good*, which is far more noble.” I gave her a kiss, and she said: “I wonder if there will be any dancing? I have not danced with you for years.”

I cannot tell what induced me to do it, but I seized her round the waist, and we were silly enough to be executing a wild kind of polka when Sarah entered, grinning, and said: “There is a man, mum, at the door who wants to know if you want any good coals.” Most annoyed at this. Spent the evening in answering, and tearing up again, the reply to the Mansion House, having left word with Sarah if Gowing or Cummings called we were not at home. Must consult Mr. Perkupp how to answer the Lord Mayor’s invitation.

May 1.—Carrie said: “I should like to send mother the invitation to look at.” I consented, as soon as I had answered it. I told Mr. Perkupp, at the office, with a feeling of pride, that we had received an invitation to the Mansion House; and he said, to my astonishment, that he himself gave in my name to the Lord Mayor’s secretary. I felt this rather discounted the value of the invitation, but I thanked him; and in reply to me, he described how I was to answer it. I felt the reply was too simple; but of course Mr. Perkupp knows best.

May 2.—Sent my dress-coat and trousers to the little tailor’s round the corner, to have the creases taken out. Told Gowing not to call next Monday, as we were going to the Mansion House. Sent similar note to Cummings.

May 3.—Carrie went to Mrs. James, at Sutton, to consult about her dress for next Monday. While speaking incidentally to Spotch, one of our head clerks, about the Mansion House, he said: “Oh, I’m asked, but don’t think I shall go.” When a vulgar man like Spotch is asked, I feel my invitation is considerably discounted. In the evening, while I was out, the little tailor brought round my coat and trousers, and because Sarah had not a shilling to pay for the pressing, he took them away again.

May 4.—Carrie’s mother returned the Lord Mayor’s invitation, which was sent to her to look at, with apologies for having upset a glass of port over it. I was too angry to say anything.

May 5.—Bought a pair of lavender kid-gloves for next Monday, and two white ties, in case one got spoiled in the tying.

May 6, Sunday.—A very dull sermon, during which, I regret to say, I twice thought of the Mansion House reception to-morrow.

May 7.—A big red-letter day; viz., the Lord Mayor’s reception. The whole house upset. I had to get dressed at half-past six, as Carrie wanted the room to herself. Mrs. James had come up from Sutton to help Carrie; so I could not help thinking it unreasonable that she should require the entire attention of Sarah, the servant, as well. Sarah kept running out of the house to fetch “something for missis,” and several times I had, in my full evening-dress, to answer the back-door.

The last time it was the greengrocer’s boy, who, not seeing it was me, for Sarah had not lighted the gas, pushed into my hands two cabbages and half-a-dozen coal-blocks. I indignantly threw them

on the ground, and felt so annoyed that I so far forgot myself as to box the boy's ears. He went away crying, and said he should summons me, a thing I would not have happen for the world. In the dark, I stepped on a piece of the cabbage, which brought me down on the flags all of a heap. For a moment I was stunned, but when I recovered I crawled upstairs into the drawing-room and on looking into the chimney-glass discovered that my chin was bleeding, my shirt smeared with the coal-blocks, and my left trouser torn at the knee.

However, Mrs. James brought me down another shirt, which I changed in the drawing-room. I put a piece of court-plaster on my chin, and Sarah very neatly sewed up the tear at the knee. At nine o'clock Carrie swept into the room, looking like a queen. Never have I seen her look so lovely, or so distinguished. She was wearing a satin dress of sky-blue—my favourite colour—and a piece of lace, which Mrs. James lent her, round the shoulders, to give a finish. I thought perhaps the dress was a little too long behind, and decidedly too short in front, but Mrs. James said it was *à la mode*. Mrs. James was most kind, and lent Carrie a fan of ivory with red feathers, the value of which, she said, was priceless, as the feathers belonged to the Kachu eagle—a bird now extinct. I preferred the little white fan which Carrie bought for three-and-six at Shoolbred's, but both ladies sat on me at once.

We arrived at the Mansion House too early, which was rather fortunate, for I had an opportunity of speaking to his lordship, who graciously condescended to talk with me some minutes; but I must say I was disappointed to find he did not even know Mr. Perkupp, our principal.

I felt as if we had been invited to the Mansion House by one who did not know the Lord Mayor himself. Crowds arrived, and I shall never forget the grand sight. My humble pen can never describe it. I was a little annoyed with Carrie, who kept saying: "Isn't it a pity we don't know anybody?"

Once she quite lost her head. I saw someone who looked like Franching, from Peckham, and was moving towards him when she seized me by the coat-tails, and said quite loudly: "Don't leave me," which caused an elderly gentleman, in a court-suit, and a chain round him, and two ladies, to burst out laughing. There was an immense crowd in the supper-room, and, my stars! it was a splendid supper—any amount of champagne.

Carrie made a most hearty supper, for which I was pleased; for I sometimes think she is not strong. There was scarcely a dish she did not taste. I was so thirsty, I could not eat much. Receiving a sharp slap on the shoulder, I turned, and, to my amazement, saw Farmerson, our ironmonger. He said, in the most familiar way: "This is better than Brickfield Terrace, eh?" I simply looked at him, and said coolly: "I never expected to see you here." He said, with a loud, coarse laugh: "I like that—if *you*, why not *me*?" I replied: "Certainly," I wish I could have thought of something better to say. He said: "Can I get your good lady anything?" Carrie said: "No, I thank you," for which I was pleased. I said, by way of reproof to him: "You never sent to-day to paint the bath, as I requested."

Farmerson said: "Pardon me, Mr. Pooter, no shop when we're in company, please."

Before I could think of a reply, one of the sheriffs, in full Court costume, slapped Farmerson on the back and hailed him as an old friend, and asked him to dine with him at his lodge. I was astonished. For full five minutes they stood roaring with laughter, and stood digging each other in the ribs. They kept telling each other they didn't look a day older. They began embracing each other and drinking champagne.

To think that a man who mends our scraper should know any member of our aristocracy! I was just moving with Carrie, when Farmerson seized me rather roughly by the collar, and addressing the sheriff, said: "Let me introduce my neighbour, Pooter." He did not even say "Mister." The sheriff handed me a glass of champagne. I felt, after all, it was a great honour to drink a glass of wine with him, and I told him so. We stood chatting for some time, and at last I said: "You must excuse me now if I join Mrs. Pooter." When I approached her, she said: "Don't let me take you away from friends.

I am quite happy standing here alone in a crowd, knowing nobody!"

As it takes two to make a quarrel, and as it was neither the time nor the place for it, I gave my arm to Carrie, and said: "I hope my darling little wife will dance with me, if only for the sake

of saying we had danced at the Mansion House as guests of the Lord Mayor.” Finding the dancing after supper was less formal, and knowing how much Carrie used to admire my dancing in the days gone by, I put my arm round her waist and we commenced a waltz.

A most unfortunate accident occurred. I had got on a new pair of boots. Foolishly, I had omitted to take Carrie’s advice; namely, to scratch the soles of them with the points of the scissors or to put a little wet on them. I had scarcely started when, like lightning, my left foot slipped away and I came down, the side of my head striking the floor with such violence that for a second or two I did not know what had happened. I needly hardly say that Carrie fell with me with equal violence, breaking the comb in her hair and grazing her elbow.

There was a roar of laughter, which was immediately checked when people found that we had really hurt ourselves. A gentleman assisted Carrie to a seat, and I expressed myself pretty strongly on the danger of having a plain polished floor with no carpet or drugget to prevent people slipping. The gentleman, who said his name was Darwitts, insisted on escorting Carrie to have a glass of wine, an invitation which I was pleased to allow Carrie to accept.

I followed, and met Farmerson, who immediately said, in his loud voice “Oh, are you the one who went down?”

I answered with an indignant look.

With execrable taste, he said: “Look here, old man, we are too old for this game. We must leave these capers to the youngsters. Come and have another glass, that is more in our line.”

Although I felt I was buying his silence by accepting, we followed the others into the supper-room.

Neither Carrie nor I, after our unfortunate mishap, felt inclined to stay longer. As we were departing, Farmerson said: “Are you going? if so, you might give me a lift.”

I thought it better to consent, but wish I had first consulted Carrie.

CHAPTER V

After the Mansion House Ball. Carrie offended. Gowing also offended. A pleasant party at the Cummings'. Mr. Franching, of Peckham, visits us.

May 8.—I woke up with a most terrible headache. I could scarcely see, and the back of my neck was as if I had given it a crick. I thought first of sending for a doctor; but I did not think it necessary. When up, I felt faint, and went to Brownish's, the chemist, who gave me a draught. So bad at the office, had to get leave to come home. Went to another chemist in the City, and I got a draught.

Brownish's dose seems to have made me worse; have eaten nothing all day. To make matters worse, Carrie, every time I spoke to her, answered me sharply—that is, when she answered at all.

In the evening I felt very much worse again and said to her: "I do believe I've been poisoned by the lobster mayonnaise at the Mansion House last night;" she simply replied, without taking her eyes from her sewing: "Champagne never did agree with you." I felt irritated, and said: "What nonsense you talk; I only had a glass and a half, and you know as well as I do—" Before I could complete the sentence she bounced out of the room. I sat over an hour waiting for her to return; but as she did not, I determined I would go to bed. I discovered Carrie had gone to bed without even saying "good-night"; leaving me to bar the scullery door and feed the cat. I shall certainly speak to her about this in the morning.

May 9.—Still a little shaky, with black specks. The *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News* contains a long list of the guests at the Mansion House Ball. Disappointed to find our names omitted, though Farmerson's is in plainly enough with M.L.L. after it, whatever that may mean. More than vexed, because we had ordered a dozen copies to send to our friends. Wrote to the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News*, pointing out their omission.

Carrie had commenced her breakfast when I entered the parlour. I helped myself to a cup of tea, and I said, perfectly calmly and quietly: "Carrie, I wish a little explanation of your conduct last night."

She replied, "Indeed! and I desire something more than a little explanation of your conduct the night before."

I said, coolly: "Really, I don't understand you."

Carrie said sneeringly: "Probably not; you were scarcely in a condition to understand anything."

I was astounded at this insinuation and simply ejaculated: "Caroline!"

She said: "Don't be theatrical, it has no effect on me. Reserve that tone for your new friend, Mister Farmerson, the ironmonger."

I was about to speak, when Carrie, in a temper such as I have never seen her in before, told me to hold my tongue. She said: "Now *I'm* going to say something! After professing to snub Mr. Farmerson, you permit him to snub *you*, in my presence, and then accept his invitation to take a glass of champagne with you, and you don't limit yourself to one glass. You then offer this vulgar man, who made a bungle of repairing our scraper, a seat in our cab on the way home. I say nothing about his tearing my dress in getting in the cab, nor of treading on Mrs. James's expensive fan, which you knocked out of my hand, and for which he never even apologised; but you smoked all the way home without having the decency to ask my permission. That is not all! At the end of the journey, although he did not offer you a farthing towards his share of the cab, you asked him in. Fortunately, he was sober enough to detect, from my manner, that his company was not desirable."

Goodness knows I felt humiliated enough at this; but, to make matters worse, Gowing entered the room, without knocking, with two hats on his head and holding the garden-rake in his hand, with Carrie's fur tippet (which he had taken off the downstairs hall-peg) round his neck, and announced

himself in a loud, coarse voice: "His Royal Highness, the Lord Mayor!" He marched twice round the room like a buffoon, and finding we took no notice, said: "Hulloh! what's up? Lovers' quarrel, eh?"

There was a silence for a moment, so I said quietly: "My dear Gowing, I'm not very well, and not quite in the humour for joking; especially when you enter the room without knocking, an act which I fail to see the fun of."

Gowing said: "I'm very sorry, but I called for my stick, which I thought you would have sent round." I handed him his stick, which I remembered I had painted black with the enamel paint, thinking to improve it. He looked at it for a minute with a dazed expression and said: "Who did this?"

I said: "Eh, did what?"

He said: "Did what? Why, destroyed my stick! It belonged to my poor uncle, and I value it more than anything I have in the world! I'll know who did it."

I said: "I'm very sorry. I dare say it will come off. I did it for the best."

Gowing said: "Then all I can say is, it's a confounded liberty; and I *would* add, you're a bigger fool than you look, only *that's* absolutely impossible."

May 12.—Got a single copy of the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News*. There was a short list of several names they had omitted; but the stupid people had mentioned our names as "Mr. and Mrs. C. Porter."

Most annoying! Wrote again and I took particular care to write our name in capital letters, *POOTER*, so that there should be no possible mistake this time.

May 16.—Absolutely disgusted on opening the *Blackfriars Bi-weekly News* of to-day, to find the following paragraph: "We have received two letters from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pewter, requesting us to announce the important fact that they were at the Mansion House Ball." I tore up the paper and threw it in the waste-paper basket. My time is far too valuable to bother about such trifles.

May 21.—The last week or ten days terribly dull, Carrie being away at Mrs. James's, at Sutton.

Cummings also away. Gowing, I presume, is still offended with me for black enamelling his stick without asking him.

May 22.—Purchased a new stick mounted with silver, which cost seven-and-sixpence (shall tell Carrie five shillings), and sent it round with nice note to Gowing.

May 23.—Received strange note from Gowing; he said: "Offended? not a bit, my boy—I thought you were offended with me for losing my temper. Besides, I found after all, it was not my poor old uncle's stick you painted. It was only a shilling thing I bought at a tobacconist's. However, I am much obliged to you for your handsome present all same."

May 24.—Carrie back. Hoorah! She looks wonderfully well, except that the sun has caught her nose.

May 25.—Carrie brought down some of my shirts and advised me to take them to Trillip's round the corner. She said: "The fronts and cuffs are much frayed." I said without a moment's hesitation: "I'm *'frayed* they are." Lor! how we roared. I thought we should never stop laughing. As I happened to be sitting next the driver going to town on the 'bus, I told him my joke about the "frayed" shirts. I thought he would have rolled off his seat. They laughed at the office a good bit too over it.

May 26.—Left the shirts to be repaired at Trillip's. I said to him: "I'm *'fraid* they are *frayed*."

He said, without a smile: "They're bound to do that, sir." Some people seem to be quite destitute of a sense of humour.

June 1.—The last week has been like old times, Carrie being back, and Gowing and Cummings calling every evening nearly. Twice we sat out in the garden quite late. This evening we were like a pack of children, and played "consequences." It is a good game.

June 2.—"Consequences" again this evening. Not quite so successful as last night; Gowing having several times overstepped the limits of good taste.

June 4.—In the evening Carrie and I went round to Mr. and Mrs. Cummings' to spend a quiet evening with them. Gowing was there, also Mr. Stillbrook. It was quiet but pleasant. Mrs. Cummings sang five or six songs, "No, Sir," and "The Garden of Sleep," being best in my humble judgment; but

what pleased me most was the duet she sang with Carrie—classical duet, too. I think it is called, “I would that my love!” It was beautiful. If Carrie had been in better voice, I don’t think professionals could have sung it better. After supper we made them sing it again. I never liked Mr. Stillbrook since the walk that Sunday to the “Cow and Hedge,” but I must say he sings comic-songs well. His song: “We don’t Want the old men now,” made us shriek with laughter, especially the verse referring to Mr. Gladstone; but there was one verse I think he might have omitted, and I said so, but Gowing thought it was the best of the lot.

June 6.—Trillip brought round the shirts and, to my disgust, his charge for repairing was more than I gave for them when new. I told him so, and he impertinently replied: “Well, they are better now than when they were new.” I paid him, and said it was a robbery. He said: “If you wanted your shirt-fronts made out of pauper-linen, such as is used for packing and bookbinding, why didn’t you say so?”

June 7.—A dreadful annoyance. Met Mr. Franching, who lives at Peckham, and who is a great swell in his way. I ventured to ask him to come home to meat-tea, and take pot-luck. I did not think he would accept such a humble invitation; but he did, saying, in a most friendly way, he would rather “peck” with us than by himself. I said: “We had better get into this blue ’bus.” He replied: “No blue-bussing for me. I have had enough of the blues lately. I lost a cool ‘thou’ over the Copper Scare. Step in here.”

We drove up home in style, in a hansom-cab, and I knocked three times at the front door without getting an answer. I saw Carrie, through the panels of ground-glass (with stars), rushing upstairs.

I told Mr. Franching to wait at the door while I went round to the side. There I saw the grocer’s boy actually picking off the paint on the door, which had formed into blisters. No time to reprove him; so went round and effected an entrance through the kitchen window. I let in Mr. Franching, and showed him into the drawing-room. I went upstairs to Carrie, who was changing her dress, and told her I had persuaded Mr. Franching to come home. She replied: “How can you do such a thing?”

You know it’s Sarah’s holiday, and there’s not a thing in the house, the cold mutton having turned with the hot weather.”

Eventually Carrie, like a good creature as she is, slipped down, washed up the teacups, and laid the cloth, and I gave Franching our views of Japan to look at while I ran round to the butcher’s to get three chops.

July 30.—The miserable cold weather is either upsetting me or Carrie, or both. We seem to break out into an argument about absolutely nothing, and this unpleasant state of things usually occurs at meal-times.

This morning, for some unaccountable reason, we were talking about balloons, and we were as merry as possible; but the conversation drifted into family matters, during which Carrie, without the slightest reason, referred in the most uncomplimentary manner to my poor father’s pecuniary trouble.

I retorted by saying that “Pa, at all events, was a gentleman,” whereupon Carrie burst out crying. I positively could not eat any breakfast.

At the office I was sent for by Mr. Perkupp, who said he was very sorry, but I should have to take my annual holidays from next Saturday. Franching called at office and asked me to dine at his club, “The Constitutional.” Fearing disagreeables at home after the “tiff” this morning, I sent a telegram to Carrie, telling her I was going out to dine and she was not to sit up. Bought a little silver bangle for Carrie.

July 31.—Carrie was very pleased with the bangle, which I left with an affectionate note on her dressing-table last night before going to bed. I told Carrie we should have to start for our holiday next Saturday. She replied quite happily that she did not mind, except that the weather was so bad, and she feared that Miss Jibbons would not be able to get her a seaside dress in time. I told Carrie that I thought the drab one with pink bows looked quite good enough; and Carrie said she should not think of wearing it. I was about to discuss the matter, when, remembering the argument yesterday, resolved to hold my tongue.

I said to Carrie: "I don't think we can do better than 'Good old Broadstairs.'" Carrie not only, to my astonishment, raised an objection to Broadstairs, for the first time; but begged me not to use the expression, "Good old," but to leave it to Mr. Stillbrook and other *gentlemen* of his type. Hearing my 'bus pass the window, I was obliged to rush out of the house without kissing Carrie as usual; and I shouted to her: "I leave it to you to decide." On returning in the evening, Carrie said she thought as the time was so short she had decided on Broadstairs, and had written to Mrs. Beck, Harbour View Terrace, for apartments.

August 1.—Ordered a new pair of trousers at Edwards's, and told them not to cut them so loose over the boot; the last pair being so loose and also tight at the knee, looked like a sailor's, and I heard Pitt, that objectionable youth at the office, call out "Hornpipe" as I passed his desk. Carrie has ordered of Miss Gibbons a pink Garibaldi and blue-serge skirt, which I always think looks so pretty at the seaside. In the evening she trimmed herself a little sailor-hat, while I read to her the *Exchange and Mart*. We had a good laugh over my trying on the hat when she had finished it; Carrie saying it looked so funny with my beard, and how the people would have roared if I went on the stage like it.

August 2.—Mrs. Beck wrote to say we could have our usual rooms at Broadstairs. That's off our mind. Bought a coloured shirt and a pair of tan-coloured boots, which I see many of the swell clerks wearing in the City, and hear are all the "go."

August 3.—A beautiful day. Looking forward to to-morrow. Carrie bought a parasol about five feet long. I told her it was ridiculous. She said: "Mrs. James, of Sutton, has one twice as long so;" the matter dropped. I bought a capital hat for hot weather at the seaside. I don't know what it is called, but it is the shape of the helmet worn in India, only made of straw. Got three new ties, two coloured handkerchiefs, and a pair of navy-blue socks at Pope Brothers. Spent the evening packing. Carrie told me not to forget to borrow Mr. Higsworth's telescope, which he always lends me, knowing I know how to take care of it. Sent Sarah out for it. While everything was seeming so bright, the last post brought us a letter from Mrs. Beck, saying: "I have just let all my house to one party, and am sorry I must take back my words, and am sorry you must find other apartments; but Mrs. Womming, next door, will be pleased to accommodate you, but she cannot take you before Monday, as her rooms are engaged Bank Holiday week."

CHAPTER VI

The Unexpected Arrival Home of our Son, Willie Lupin Pooter.

August 4.—The first post brought a nice letter from our dear son Willie, acknowledging a trifling present which Carrie sent him, the day before yesterday being his twentieth birthday. To our utter amazement he turned up himself in the afternoon, having journeyed all the way from Oldham.

He said he had got leave from the bank, and as Monday was a holiday he thought he would give us a little surprise.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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