

# "House To Let"

What the Sign In the Window Started.

By F. A. MITCHEL

Jenkins was an eminently respectable bachelor of forty.

One day he received an invitation to go with a friend who lived in the suburbs for dinner and the night. The difference between a house with a woman in it, to say nothing of several impish children, and his own solitary apartments was appalling. In his own bedroom he would awaken in the morning amid a tomblike silence. In this abode of a family he lay awake for nearly an hour listening to unceasing sounds that seemed like music to him.

There were a constant opening and shutting of doors, children shouting, children scolded, children petted; now a few deep tones from a father warning Johnny that if he didn't stop fooling and dress himself he would get a spanking and now a feminine call to Edie to "come and let me do your hair." It was the contrast of this life about him—this union of hearts and interests—with his silent chamber that made him yearn for the one and hate the other.

Jenkins returned to the city, spent the day in his office, went to his room—heaving a sigh as he entered it—dressed for the evening and started for his club. Shortly before reaching it he passed a neat looking two story stone front dwelling in a window of which was a placard "To Let." He stood leaning on his cane looking at the house; then went on muttering: "It's no use. I've no wife."

The next morning passing the house to let he thought that, after all, it would be better than his rooms and he would go in and look at it. At the moment a feminine voice said to him:

"There doesn't appear to be any word on the notice where to apply."

Jenkins turned and saw a young woman whose appearance was as refined as her voice. Her attention was all directed to the house, and Jenkins believed that she had made the observation to herself rather than to him. Nevertheless he raised his hat and said:

"Perhaps it means that one may inquire within."

"It doesn't matter," said the lady, still more to herself than him.

The words were spoken in the same tone with which the day before he had said to himself: "It's no use. I've no wife."

"I'll ring if you like," said Jenkins.

"Oh, thank you. Never mind on my account."

"I'm intending to make inquiries for myself, though I have no definite idea of taking a house. I don't need one."

"Nor I."

He went up on to the stoop and rang the bell. His summons was answered by a middle aged person who lived in the basement, evidently a caretaker. The lady waited for Jenkins to act as spokesman, but he hesitated. He did not know whether to say "this lady wishes to look at the house" or "I wish to look at the house." He compromised.

"We would like to look at the house," he said.

"Oh! Walk in!"

"There are eight rooms," said the caretaker, leading the way through the apartments. "On this floor parlor, dining room, library and kitchen." Then, leading them upstairs: "Four bedrooms up here. This front room will make a beautiful room for you and your wife, sir, and this little room adjoining it just big enough for the children, if you have them. There's another small room back that would make a good nursery and a guests' room. The bathroom is at the end of the hall."

If the poor woman had been cognizant of the terrible blunder she was making she would have been deeply pained. And yet she would have had no cause to be pained. Though Jenkins put on a wooden expression, there was a very pleasant feeling about his heart. Though the lady blushed a rosy red, there was a suspicion of a smile playing on her lips.

"How many children have you, ma'am?" asked the woman, suddenly breaking in upon her description of the house.

"No children," replied the lady, ignoring the woman's inference that the two were married.

"No children! Oh, dear! Somehow it doesn't seem to me that people are married till the little tots come. Without them folks are

liable to run to cats and dogs, a poor makeshift for children. Dear little souls! How nice it is to see them romp and play! I like the girls best, of course, but little boys are nice, too, especially when they're fine, manly little fellows. But in every family there should be both boys and girls."

While the woman was running on, unconscious that the picture she was drawing was the unfulfilled desire of the two people she was talking to, that they were not married and both had for years wished to be married, especially for the home she had suggested by her remarks upon children, Jenkins was looking at the ceiling, out of the window, any place except where he might be expected to look. Suddenly he turned his eyes upon the lady beside him and saw blushes coming and going like an aurora borealis, with smiles on the lips like sunlight on ripples of water. Then their eyes met.

The usual happening from such a meeting of eyes under such circumstances might be embarrassment, or it might be half embarrassment and half amusement, or it might be anger. The look between these two was neither of these. There was more in that glance than has been written in many a volume, and no volume could express as much. The man's eyes said, "Let us fulfill the picture." The woman's said, "I will."

"Do you think you will take the house?" asked Jenkins as they stood on the sidewalk about to part.

"Rather, do you think you'll take it?" was the reply.

"I am certainly not so ungentlemanly as to stand in a lady's way."

"Nor would I think of taking it if you want it."

Jenkins stood thinking for a moment before replying. It was their artificial relations that were occupying his thoughts.

"Suppose," he said, taking out his card, "you send me word as to your decision."

"I will," she replied in a low tone.

"On second thought, I will not put you to so much trouble. If you will let me know where I could get your reply I would be pleased to call for it."

"I should be happy to have you do so." She gave him her address.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning!"

In a few days Jenkins called upon the caretaker, with whom the renting of the house had been left, with a couple of leases in his pocket and executed one for the owner and another for himself.

"When will you move in, sir?" asked the woman.

"I don't know. I would like to have you remain as you are and take care of the house for me for the present."

Months passed before the caretaker got her order to do the cleaning. Then everything was made spick and span, and furniture began to arrive. Jenkins went to the house and saw that it was arranged as properly and with as much taste as could be expected of a bachelor, then when all was finished left it in charge of the woman and went away.

The next she saw of him he drove up to the door in a carriage, wearing a frock coat, a silk hat and a chrysanthemum in his buttonhole. He handed out the lady who had inspected the house in his company, and when inside and her wraps were thrown off she was very beautifully dressed.

Years have passed since these two strangers met at the "house to let" and later went to live in it as man and wife. A family such as the caretaker described are there, and all are happy. The house is but a stone's throw from the club, but Jenkins never goes there. He says he has no use for it.

### The Mystic Seven.

A certain fond father sent his son to a university last fall. As a farewell piece of advice he told the young man that "his success was almost assured, since both the word 'success' and your name contain seven letters." The midyear examinations, however, proved to be his doom, and he was compelled to return home.

"Well," said his father, "didn't you keep in mind what I told you about the seven letters?"

"I did that, father," answered the boy, "but you must remember that there are also seven letters in 'failure.'"—Exchange.

### A Joke That Failed.

Once when Henrik Ibsen was engaged in writing a play he by chance dropped a scrap of paper on which were the words, "the doctor says."

Mrs. Ibsen determined to have a joke and one day casually remarked: "Who is that doctor in your new play? I suppose he'll say some interesting things?"

Ibsen at first was silent with astonishment. Then he broke out into a fit of rage, full of reproaches for her sniping.

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### BEATING THE DROUGHT.

Cowpunchers in Australia Have a Hard Row to Hoe.

The average size of pastoral holdings in the northern territory of Australia is 275,000 acres. In West Australia 100 people own together 40,000,000 acres, and Fraser speaks of a Queensland "cattle king" who held 60,000 square miles—an area nearly as large as all New England.

Two, three or even five months may be required to drive cattle to the nearest port or railroad. Unless the season is favorable it cannot be done at all, for feed and water are lacking along the tracks. Herds of cattle started on the long drive may be greatly depleted by starvation and thirst, the remnant reaching their destination only fit for "boiling down."

Stock routes are laid out and tended as carefully as wagon roads or railways. They head for the principal markets or for the ends of railroads which extend into the arid belt and wind across the country, taking advantage of all known water supplies. Streams, springs, billabongs and gnamma holes are used, regardless of the quality of the water, for almost any liquid is acceptable in the desert.

When the distances between watering places are too great or areas of feed are beyond the reach of water, artificial supplies are provided and kept under surveillance. In places wells are dug; elsewhere reservoirs and tanks designed to collect storm water of infrequent rains are constructed. Many of these are built below the surface and covered to check evaporation. Where other means fail, skeleton buildings with large roof area are constructed to conserve rainwater.—National Geographic Magazine.

### A Grave Discussion.

The late Joseph Jefferson and his sister, Mrs. Cornelia Jackson, were standing one day at a studio window on Beacon street, Boston, overlooking the Old Granary burying ground. They had been discussing the famous persons whose graves were spread below them, when, breaking a short interval of silence, Jefferson said in the most mournful of tones, "Connie, my dear, that is the best place for me, after all."

With a horrified expression on her face, as her brother always avoided ghoulish subjects, she asked, "What do you mean, Joe?"

With a twinkle in his eye the actor remarked blandly, "I said 'after all,' Connie."

In a flash his sister retorted, "No, Joe, dear, that's no place for you. There are too many deadheads there."

### Music of the Drum.

All musical authorities have agreed that when used in a proper way the drum is thoroughly musical. The common snare or side drum is freely used in musical composition. A large number of drummers performing simultaneously on their doors produce good music. In this connection Berlioz, the composer, pointed out that a sound that was insignificant when heard singly, such as the clink of one or two muskets at shoulder arms or the thud as the butt comes to the ground at ground arms, becomes brilliant and attractive if performed by a thousand men together.

### Chinese Nomads.

In the plains on the western borders of the Chinese empire, in the heart of Asia, there live roaming tribes who seldom visit towns except for trade. They dwell in tents made of felt and usually low, small and conical. The wooden door frame is no higher than half a window frame in English houses, but the tent, although not equal to the wants of a large family, is snug and comfortable in summer, but cold in winter.—London Graphic.

### Singing Contests in Norway.

Some of the songs of Norway consist of hundreds of four line verses, which must surely be a hard test to the memory of the singers. Sometimes two singers will have a duet in such a song, singing verse after verse alternately. He whose memory or, in default of memory, invention fails him first is loser.—From "Norway," by Nico Jungman.

### They Liked Silence.

Carlyle, as every one knows, was a great smoker. The story is familiar—it may be true—that one evening he and Tennyson sat in solemn silence smoking for hours, one on each side of the fireplace, and that when the visitor rose to go Carlyle, as he bade him good night, said, "Man, Alfred, I have had a grand night; come again soon."

### Worse Still.

Raggsey—Hey! You won't get nothin' worth eatin' in dat place. Dey's vegetarians.  
Hungry Higgins—Is dat right?  
Raggsey—Yeh, an' dey got er dog wot ain't.—Boston Evening Transcript.

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