

## WIIA RULES THE HOOSE?

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WATTY WILSON was a turkey-red dyer wha lived at number 9 Nettlesome Lane, in the East End o' Gleska. He stood just five feet and half an inch in his stockings. Being small in stature, he was, by way of compensating reversion, large of mind, and following up his ambitious instincts, he had married Jean Jamieson, the biggest wife-body in the district.

Jean Jamieson was a winder in Bartholomew's Mill when Watty yae nicht popped the question, and brocht his bird doon.

Jean stood a foot above him in point of stature, and

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after marriage towered ever so mony feet above him in the matter of domestic precedence—a condition of things that Watty did not at all relish, and against which he kicked in vain.

In the extremity of their domestic differences they flung epithets the reverse of complimentary at one another, which was amusing to their neighbours, if exasperating to themselves.

Watty, thrust into a corner by his better twa-thirds, would cry out, by way of ridiculing her great size—

“Six feet! Big six feet!” Whereat Jean would retaliate with—

“Five feet! Wee five feet!”

This contemptible thrust never failed to rouse Watty’s anger; and stung into hot reprisal, he would next sing out—

“Elephant! Muckle elephant!”

Jean following up with—

“Midge! wee midgie!”

And so on, the domestic duel would proceed, Watty invariably coming off second best.

Thus far, and we proceed—the locality of our story changing to the back room of a Glasgow “public.”

“Weel, Watty,” one day said Bachelor John, a carpet weaver in a neighbouring factory; “an’ hoo’s a’ wi’ ye the nicht? Ye look a thocht dowff, dae ye no?”

“Dowff! H’m, it’s a wonder I’m leevin’.”

“What’s gaen wrang, Watty? Is the wife badly, or what?”

“Badly, by Jing! I wish I saw her cauld and streekit!”

“Oh, Watty, Watty!” reproachfully exclaimed Bachelor John, lifting up his hands like a parish minister about to pronounce the benediction.

“Ay!—oh, Watty, Watty!” sarcastically retorted the forlorn husband, “but set ye on a het domestic gridiron, as

I am, and tell me if ye'd dae ocht but dance? Oh, Watty, Watty, indeed! If I had been as lang-heided a loon as ye are, Johnny, and never looked near the weemen-folks, it wad ha'e been muckle to my comfort this day."

"Eh, man, Watty, it's the auld story owre again, I see—blighted love! I'm rale vexed for ye, Watty. Can I dae ocht for ye—i' the way o' comin' atween you an' Jean, I mean?"

"If ye value yer heid keep awa' frae number 9 Nettle-some Lane," was the suggestive answer.

"Has Jean a bit o' temper, Watty?"

"A *bit* o' temper!" retorted the other. "I'm, if it wis only a *bit*, a body could pit up wi't. Man, Johnny, she has a hale worl' o' temper. She's a fair Tartar."

"Is she snuff?" questioned Bachelor John.

"Waur than snuff!" ruefully answered Watty.

"Sulphur?" put in Bachelor John.

"Waur than sulphur!" answered the dejected husband.

Bachelor John bethought himself a moment, and then, with a sudden lighting up of the countenance, he leaned across the table and whispered—

"Saltpetre?"

"Waur than Saut-Peter!" forlornly replied Watty.

Bachelor John recast in his mind the small dictionary of explosive words at his command, and after a thoughtful pause suggested as a climax—

"Gunpowder?"

"Waur than even gun-poother!" persisted the not-to-be comforted husband.

"Then, Watty, my lad, Jean's a conundrum, an' I gie her up."

"Think it oot a bit further," suggested the heart-crushed Watty.

"Then, at a venture, I'll go in for gun-cotton?"

"Ye're on the track noo," encouragingly responded the desperate husband. "Keep at it."

“Dynamite?” shouted aloud Bachelor John, as a last effort.

“A compound and general mix up o’ a’ the destructive elements ye’ve named, that’s what she is!” rejoined the desperate Watty.

“Weel, that bates a’!” replied Bachelor John. “But, hark ye, Watty, I’ll tell ye o’ a ploy.”

“What’s that?”

“Pretend ye’ve listed, an’ gang back this nicht to tak’ a final fareweel o’ her. There’s something in that, ye’ll find.”

“Listed?” retorted Watty. “Man, I wadna venture to present mysel’ afore the jaud unless I had the gun fairly on my shooter, by way o’ self-preservation. She’d flee at me like a Bengal teegur!”

“The gun can be gotten,” was the daring reply of Bachelor John. “An’ what’s mair, Watty, I’s gang up to the hoose wi’ ye as a ‘support.’”

“There’ll be bluidshed, I fear,” replied Watty; “but never mind. Onything’s better than gaun thro’ life wi’ a cuisten-doon heid, an’ a domestic hen crawin’ like a cock owre ye, wi’ its neb sunk in the nape o’ yer neck. I’ll ’list this vera nicht; an’ to be consistent I’ll join the Royal Forty-second, pit on the kilts, an’ hand owre Jean my breeks as a farewell gift!”

That same nicht Wattie was seen repairing to number 9 Nettlesome Lane, with a veritable gun on his shooter, and no end of recruit ribbons on his bonnet, accompanied by his ingenious friend, Bachelor John, who had resolved to start forth as Watty’s domestic guide, philosopher, and friend.

The gun—which, although uncharged, was of most formidable size and appearance—had been borrowed for the occasion.

“D’ye think I’ll dae?” asked the martial recruit, as he and his friend plodded their way towards the domestic fort about to be stormed.

“Dae? Why, you’ll cairry the position wi’ a single rush!”

Watty groaned in spirit, and was less than half-sure of the result.

“If ye only knew her temper,” he replied. “She wad face a Krupp cannon, let alane this empty stick that’s hingin’ owre my left shoother!”

“She’s no to ken the gun’s fu’ o’ naething, Watty. If she yokes ye wi’ her cankerly tongue, jist ye present the mooth o’t at her, and I’ll wager my best Sunday hat she tak’s the farthest awa’ corner o’ the hoose for’t.”

“Ye—ye—ye dinna ken her, Johnny,” replied the terrorised husband; “she can birl a spurkle like a dragoon’s sword! But cannie! cannie there! this is the stair-fit; let’s keep a calm sough as we approach the door. It’s a crisis in my domestic career this—I feel it!”

“Courage, Watty, courage! Keep yer chin weel up, and dinna disgrace the Queen’s coat!”

“Are ye a’ richt an’ ready?” finally asked the shivering Watty, as the pair at last stood before the door.

“Advance! The position’s ours!” was Bachelor John’s over-confident reply.

The next moment—*tap, tap, tirror!* went Watty’s knuckles on the door, with an assumed vigour and self-confidence which the shaky condition of his mind scarcely warranted.

On opening the door, Jean glowered—literally glowered—at the sight of her guidman with recruit ribbons tied to his bonnet, and a real gun on his shoulder, finding, for the moment, no words to fitly express her amazement.

Taking an adroit advantage of her baffled silence, the heroic Watty strode into the kitchen as loftily and courageously as his short stature and secret nervous alarm would permit of, leaving his friend standing on the stair-head, behind the door.

“Jean,” he began, not choosing to sit down; “Jean, you’ve done the trick for me at last!”

“What’s that, Watty?”

“I’ve taken the shillin’; I’m ’listed!”

“Wha has been gi’en the buddy drink?” was her crushing reply, followed up by a skirl of derisive laughter.

“It’s nae laughin’ maitter, Jean. I’ve come to tak’ a last fareweel o’ ye—*for ever!*”

“Watty Wilson! Watty Wilson! an’ has it come to this!” cried Jean; “*you* ’listed into the sodgers! Five feet nae-thing a sodger! Cast aff yer ribboned bannet; pit aside that custock aff yer puir auld crookit shootheer—that I’m sure’s sair wi’ the wecht o’t—and sit quately doon to yer pease-brose.”

“Present the gun at the jaud, Watty, that’ll fricht her into submission,” whispered the defeated husband’s guide, philosopher, and friend, from behind the shelter of the door.

“Ye muckle elephant that ye are,” sang out Watty, levelling the gun at her; “if ye taunt me ony further I’ll put a brace o’ bullets through yer brisket!”

Watty was not quite sure what the word “brisket” inferred, or whereabouts the “brisket” was physically located, but he had come across the word in story phraseology, and, as it sounded big and formidable, he thrust it at her entire, in the hopes of securing a speedy capitulation at the enemy’s hands.

“Ye demented buddy that ye are!” screamed the domestic virago; “wad ye daur to level firearms at *me!*” and wheeling adroitly about, she seized a heavy potato beetle, and made a dash at the shivering Queen’s recruit.

“Ground yer arms!” sang out Watty in the last extremity of mortal terror; “ground yer arms, or feth, I’ll *circum-splode* ye!” Watty obviously meant to affirm that he would blow her to pieces, but in the agony of his terror, his language, like his wits, had got inextricably mixed up.

In a moment the angry woman had driven aside the formidable-looking musket, and was instantly on her husband's unprotected "tap," and the next moment poor Watty found himself flung out bodily on the stairhead, *minus* the musket, and all bruises and aching sores.

Believing that his friend, Bachelor John, was still inside, Watty mentally commiserated his fearful fate, and rushed downstairs in quest of needed help.

"She'll batter him into blue lumps!" he sorrowfully sighed, as he hurried forth to regain the open street.

At the "close mouth" he was more than astonished to find his philosophic "support" vigorously blowing a police-call for assistance.

"In the name o' a' that's uncannie, hoo can' ye there, Johnny? Did the jaud throw ye owre the back window?"

"Watty, I'll never be able to tell hoo I got doon the stairs. I'm here, thank guidness, an' that's a' I'm sure o'. But, Watty; whaur's the gun?"

"Up i' the hoose; I had nae time to think o't. It was awfu' work for twa-three seconds. The gun's——"

"What! in her possession, Watty?"

"In her possession—defeat o' the British!—victory o' the enemy!—and great capture o' military stores! Gang ye up an' beg the gun aff her, Johnny."

"Beg the gun aff her! No, no; not for ten thousand worlds, Watty; not for ten thousand worlds!"

That night poor Watty lost hope and courage entirely, and refused to be comforted. He had challenged his wife, and had been beaten ignominiously, and his philosophic "support" sent flying hence. So he resolved, poor man, to find his meals and lodgings outside till such time as he concluded on Jean's dragoon-wrath having settled down.

But—"No! no! Watty; ye'll dae naething o' the kind," put in Bachelor John. "Ye'se share my bed for this night,

an' the morn's nicht we'll try anither game wi' Jean—attack her frae some ither point of vantage—perceive?"

"Oo, ay, I *perceive* weel enough," frankly answered Watty; "but I choose to be the commanding General this time, wha stan's at a safe distance surveying and directing the attack thro' a lang telescope."

"Wheesht, wheesht, Watty; there's nane o' us 'll hae to gang under fire this time. The enemy has captured our gun at the point o' the tattie-beetle, it is true, and the position is clearly Jean's, nae doot. But, hark ye, lad; I've hit on a plan to work the oracle wi' her."

"An' what's that?"

"It's this, Watty; ye ken big Fechtin' Jock o' Bruiser Lane?"

"Brawly," replied Watty, "an' my jaw kens him tae, as weel. He clooted my chafts yae nicht, just for fun, as he ca'd it, an' sent me into the middle o' the following week wi' the speed o' a sixpenny telegram!"

"Weel, Watty," proceeded his philosophic friend, "I'll get Fechtin' Jock to come along for a dram, an' we'll pit him up to the game, which 'll be this—You an' him 'ill gang up to Jean the morn's nicht; an' ye'll cry out—'Open the door, Jean, till I lether ye!' Then ye'll slip a wee bit back into the dark o' the lobby, leavin' Fechtin' Jock stan'in' in yer place before the door. Out'll come Jean, bouncin' an' threatenin' yer verra life—the tattie-beetle in her han', an' then Fechtin' Jock 'll fa' upon her, an' wallop her weel, an' that tae before she has time to see in the dark o' the lobby wha deals the blows. Then, when she's fairly floored, Jock 'll withdraw wi' a jump, an' in you'll slip, Watty, stan'in' boldly owre her wi' up-buckled sleeves, an' a' panting wi' exertion and excitement, as if ye had jist that moment struck her the finishin' blow, waitin' impatiently to hear her first expressed word o' repentance an' domestic submission."

"It looks gran' in theory," answered Watty, "but in



practice it 'll prove a risky job. Hoosumever, if Fechtin' Jock disna mind a fractured skull owre much, an's willin' to come, then, death or life! I'll risk it."

Imagine, then, to-morrow night come round, and the fateful hour at hand. Fechtin' Jock's services have been secured, and Watty and his highly ingenious friend, are on their way to what, in military parlance, we may here call "the front."

Watty is only half sure of the game, and his heart is thumping excitedly against his sides with the swing of an eight-day clock pendulum, notwithstanding the fact that, within the hour previous, he has swallowed three full glasses of Campbeltown whisky!

"Keep up yer pecker, Watty," puts in Bachelor John, "immortal glory, honour, and domestic house-sovereignty await ye. Ye'll come oot o' this adventure a local and domestic Lord Wolseley, and be voted for the remainder o' yer life a potato-beetle peerage, wi' a grant o' unlimited pease-brose a' the week, an' a tea breakfast on Sunday mornings. Fechtin' Jock, there, is richt able for his work."

"Yes!" exclaimed the fighting man, "I'll smartly turn on her claret tap, tingle the ivories in her potato box, and confound her eyesight and understanding in a jiffey."

"For your ain sake, my man, as weel as for that o' a' concerned, jink the tattie-beetle," cautioned Watty. "Yae weel-planted blow frac Jean would remit ye to anither and—let me piously hope—a higher sphere; but cannie, lads; we're here at the dreaded stair-fit yince mair."

"Courage, Watty, courage!" sang out the philosopher, "resolution is the half of success! Why fear the result? The ball rolls well. Let the cry be—On! on! Forward! Death or victory!"

"Ay, imph!" sneered the unassured husband, "an' what pairt are ye gaun to play in the bluidy drama, Johnny? It's a' very fine to stan' behind a door an' cry oot—'On! on! Forward! Death or victory!' But, kennin' the enemy's

mettle as I dae, it's a vera different thing to march into a death's den an' withstan' the fierce haffet-clawin' o' an enraged woman."

"Oh, ye ken, Watty, I'll stan' by ye as a 'support.' Victory is often assured by a timely moving to the front o' the reserved 'supports,' ye ken."

"Ay," thocht Watty to himsel'; "ye'll be gaun to act as a *flying* column, I suppose," but he didn't venture to speak out the sarcasm.

"Now, Watty, ye'll demand the gun, in stern, commanding tones, *outside the door*, immediately the 'chapp' is given," explained Bachelor John, as the detachment cautiously ascended the stair; "an' you, Jock, ye'll be ready to floor her before she sees what's what, ye un'erstan'?"

"I'll close up her 'daylights' pop, pop!" significantly answered Fechtin' Jock.

"If I could only manage to mak' my heart lie still" lamented the excited Watty. "It's fleein' about my breist like a new-caught bird in a cage."

"Courage; the day is ours! Sound the advance!" resolutely whispered the philosophic organiser of the expedition. "Now, lad, lay your knuckles firmly against the panel o' the door."

*Thump, thump, thump*, went Fechtin' Jock's shut fist against the door, and a moment after the voice of Jean was heard rumbling inside somewhere, like rising thunder.

"Wha's that layin' their ill-set feet against my door?" she cried from within.

"*My* door," thought Watty to himself; "she still claims the hoose as hers! Feth, an' we'll ha'e a teuch fecht for possession, I see."

*Thump, thump, thump*, was repeated on the shaken door-panel by way of answer to her question, and the next moment the voice of Watty was heard tremulously palpitating on the dread silence—

“Open—the—door, Jean; I com—mand ye!”

“What! an’ that’s you, Watty, that’s thumping sae impudently at my door? Ye wee five feet, soor-dook sodger! ’Od, if I rise frae my sate I’ll clash your chafts wi’ a wat disheloot!”

“Demand the gun, Watty,” the voice of the philosophic commandant was heard shouting from somewhere behind the kitchen door; “demand the immediate and unconditional surrender and restoration of the gun!”

“I demand,” blurted out Watty, “I demand the im-immediate and undivisional sur-sur-surrender and conspiation of the g-g-gun. Give me the g-g-gun!”

“Gi’e *you* the gun, ye wee morsel that ye are! I’ll mak’ firewood o’t first. If ye treat me to ony mair o’ yer sma’ jaw, I’ll rise an’ wring the bit neck o’ ye.”

“The gun, woman, the gun!” demanded Watty, strengthened into firm speech and daring by the re-assuring words of the philosophic commandant.

“It’s the gun ye want,” answered the storming virago; “but I’ll treat ye to the tattie-beetle.”

“The tattie-beetle!” yelled out the alarmed Watty, his hair galvanised into erect birses with perfect fright.

“Stand fast. Victory or glorious death!” sung out the commandant from behind the door.

“Lordsake, here she comes! It’s you an’ her for’t now, Jock!” cried Watty, darting like lightning into a recess of the dark lobby. “Into her, but tak’ care o’ yer skull.”

A moment after the door flew open, and—there was a scuffle, a series of yells, and a collapse of something heavy on the floor.

Watty dashed in as the victorious pugilist withdrew, and stood valiantly over his prostrate wife, who was half-blinded with confusion and facial derangement.

“D’ye want ony mair o’t?” coolly inquired Watty, assuming a lofty air, although his heart was going like an

express engine. "If sae, just tell me afore I pit doon my shirt sleeves?"

"Oh! oh! oh! Watty Wilson! Watty Wilson! To think ye wad ha'e sae abused your ain lawfu' wife—at your ain fire-en', tae. Oho! oho! oho!"

"*My ain fire-en'*," soliloquised the much-delighted Watty. *My ain fire-en'*! 'Od, that's a sweet bit to row in a married man's mouth. Jean, yer han' on't. I'm sorry for the thrashin' I've gi'en ye. But, lass, my temper got clean the better o' me, an' I couldna restrain my han's. When fairly roused, an' on my mettle, Jean, I've the strength o' thirty-six African lions! But wheesht, wheesht, lass; dinna tak' it sae sair to heart. If it's a bargain atween us that I'm to *rule* an' you're to *serve*, then there's my han' on't, an' I'll never lift it against my loving and respected wife again. What say ye, Jeannie?"

"The sodgers! the sodgers!" cried out the conquered wife. "They'll come an' steal ye awa' frae yer ain loving Jeannie!"

"Say the word, an' it's no too late yet."

"Yes! yes!" sobbed Jean.

"Yer han' on't, then."

"There!"

"An' noo, Jeannie, I'll aff an' awa' back to the barracks wi' the gun."

"Tak' it oot o' my sicht, Watty; an' oh, tak' care o' yersel' wi't, an' dinna be owre lang awa' frae yer ain loving doo. I'll be lonely till ye come back."

"In a crack, Jeannie, I'll be back to kiss an' comfort ye—my ain sweet lovey!" answered the delighted Watty; and I have only to add, in conclusion, that twa happier domestic doos than Watty Wilson and Jean Jamieson dinna at this day dab kisses frae ilk ither at ony fireside in braid Scotland.