

JEAN TAMSON was a mature, snuff-loving virgin of some five-and-fifty lovely summers, who made a fat living by keeping men-lodgers.

She was a large and very stout woman. In spite of her size and weight, however, perhaps on account of that, she had never been, up till date, lifted off the hook, as the phrase goes. Not but what she could have been, often enough. Oh, no! The offers she had refused in her day were many. At least Jean maintained so, and as she had a raucle o' a tongue when angered, her affirmations were seldom openly questioned.

"A braw mornin', Jean, hopin' I see ye as weel's ye should be," was Peggy Nacnab's neighbourly salutation, as she stepped in across Jean's doorstep one forenoon.

"Thank'ee; I'm about my or'nar, which is fashed a wee, but gey weel on the whole," replied Jean, pushing a chair towards her visitor. "An' hoo are ye haudin' yersel', Peggy?"

"Oh, weel, I'm no' that ill if I could only get rid o' the wind on my stomach. It jist blaws roun' my heart like the win' roun' the fit o' a hill."

"I've a bit guid drap o' speerits in the press, if ye'd care about a taste? It's capital for breakin' the wind, an' wi' a bit peppermint-drap an' a snuff after't it's jist fair Paradise," handing Peggy the snuff-box as a preliminary.

"Jist a wee thimblefu' o' the speerits, if *you* please, Miss Jean—jist the wee'st thimblefu'. It flees to my heid like a bit lichtit paper up a lum."

Thus instructed, Miss Jean went towards a small press, built in the wall, from a "ben" corner of which she extracted a black quart bottle, out of which she proceeded to pour into an old-fashioned china tea-cup a portion of the black bottle's inspiring contents.

"Noo, jist the wee'st thochtie, Miss Jean, if *you* please," again put in Peggy, as her hostess tilted up the bottle. "I'm a' but teetotal in practice, ye ken; an' if oor man jist smell't it on me, wouldn't there be a bonnie how-dy'e do!"

"Row here, or row yonder," replied Jean, "dinna ye turn awa' yer sonsie face frae the mercies when they're set on the table afore ye. Here, pit owre that," handing the well-filled china cup to her visitor.

Peggy took the cup in her hand, and saw that the decoction given her was as white as milk. With a feeling of wonder expressed on her homely countenance, she first looked at the white-coloured liquid, then at Miss Jean, then again at the liquid, and finally at her hostess once more.

"Ye're wonderin' at the colour o't, Peggy, I see," put in the stout lodging-wife. "Let me explain't. Ye see, a single woman like me needs to guaird her reputation, mair especially whaur there's men lodgers in the hoose an' lowse tongues about the back coort. So I aye jist pit a drap o' mulk in the whisky to colour't, an' I can then pour oot a taste o't in onybody's presence withoot settin' a bad example, or raisin' a clatter o' ahint-back talk. I'm sair fash't wi' the watter-brash mysel'—in fact, I'm a perfect martyr to't—

an' there's naething quatens't doun like a wee hue o' speerits. Coloured wi' the mulk, it can be used withoot suspicion at either kirk or market."

"Eh, Miss Jean," innocently replied Peggy, "that accoonts, then, for what the neibours say regairdin' yer wonderfu' fondness for coo's mulk."

"What! dae they ackwally say sae?" asked the stout lodging-wife, with a quick change of countenance, her tongue ready for a run.

"Oh, it's rumoured that yer twa lips are never aff the coo's teat."

This touched Miss Jean's weak point. Sticking her two shut hands into her stout haunches, she started off on one of her hot two-mile-long tirades, which, when once set a-going, neither expostulations nor diplomacy could arrest.

"A fine thing," she burst out, "that a dacent, hard-workin', respectable single woman canna turn her heid roun' but a when idle, yisless, clatterin' hoosewives maun impidently note an' mark it! Wha had the audacity to mak' remarks on me? Was't auld splay-fitted Kate o' the Back Sheuch? or glee'd e'ed Jenny Broom, the Lanark carrier's low wife? or saft-heided, silly-tongued Eppy Blair, Coal Jock's wearifu' handfu'? Was it each, or ony o' them? Tell me, an' I'll throw a shoother-shawl owre my heid this minute an' braw smartly I'll settle accoonts wi' the ill-minded jauds."

In this way Jean carried on for some minutes, quite unmindful of Peggy's soothing disclaimers, till she had fairly run herself out of both words and breath.

"No, no, Miss Jean," ever and anon broke in Peggy, in soothing, dulcet tones; "dinna fash yersel' aboot a when idle clashes, that's jist like the wind, made to blaw by. I'll taste yer speerits wi' great pleasure, wishin' ye baith health an' guid luck."

This said, Peggy turned off her cup of doctored milk with wonderful success for a teetotaler in practice, in which

action she was quickly seconded by Miss Jean, who proceeded to fill up the old-fashioned china cup once more, inviting her visitor to put the smell of the first cupful away with that of a second.

"No, no, dear Miss Jean, no anither drap, if *you* please. It's a gran' coo ye get yer mulk frae, I maun confess; but I maun keep strict teetotal, for if oor man was to jist smell't on me, there wad be a bonnie how-d'ye-do, I can tell ye."

"Is he teetotal himsel', then, your man?" asked the stout lodging-wife, with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"Nae mair than you are—that is, than I am—or rather, than, than—than—— Faugh! I jist simply mean to say that he's no' teetotal ava'. It's thae awfu' quarterly Masons' meetin's that I blame for't. They happen aboot twice a week, an' he usually comes hame frae them in sic a state that he's no' fit to claw his ain elbow. It keeps me scrimpit enough in pocket," she added, "for though I industriously hing up his breeks by the fit o' the legs every nicht, there's no' a solitary sixpence left to drap oot o' his clean-pickit pouches. I nicht as weel look for money in the ash-bakey."

"An' the quarterly Masons' meetings happen twice a week, ye say?"

"On the Wednesdays an' the Setterdays, as regular as the clock."

"*Imphn!* jist so! Weel, when I tak' a man, I'll first see that he's no a merry Mason, onyway, whatever else he may turn oot to be, tak' my word for't."

"What! are ye takin' that way at last, Miss Jean?" naively put in Peggy, whose tongue had already become somewhat clappity with the cupful of Miss Jean's doctored milk. "Tell me, wha's the intended man?"

"Oh, it's no' jist settled yet, ye ken," answered the stout lodging-wife, "though I may as weel confess't, I'm fair pestered wi' suitors the noo."

"Yin o' the lodgers, Miss Jean?"

"Na, catch me! They see me owre often for a true, lastin' loveship. Familiarity breeds dislike, ye ken, while distance lends enchantment to the view. I prefer to transact my coortin' bisness wi' a guid braid deal table atween me an' my admirer, baith figuratively and practically."

"Wha, then, is he?"

"Wheesht! haud yer tongue. Gi'e me the saft side o' yer ear." (Here Miss Jean confidingly whispered a name into Peggy's itching ear, which was extended towards her hostess for that purpose.)

"Gae wa' wi' ye! ye dinna surely mean it?" was Peggy's reply to the information communicated. "What! Tippenny Tam?"

"The vera man," admitted the stout lodging-wife.

"No?"

"As sure's ye're there."

"Dae ye ken his occupation, Miss Jean?"

"Fine that; he ca's himsel' a commercial traveller."

"An' so he is—for *specks!*" acceded Peggy, the latter portion of her involuntary reply being enunciated in a discreet undertone.

"An' has Tam really pappit the question, Miss Jean?"

"Weel, in a sense he has," answered the stout lodging-wife. "He's been here on three separate occasions, nae less, an' he aye times himsel' to visit me when my twa men lodgers are likely to be out, so as he'll catch me bird-alane, ye ken. They're worth watchin', the men. I ken that much, san'-blin' as I am on the amenities o' married life in general."

"He's visited ye haill three times, ye say, Miss Jean?"

"It's as sure as ye're sittin' there. An' what's mair, every time he has visited me he has made a distinct advance in his coortship."

"Ay?"

"Yes; it's as sure as ye're sittin' there. The first ca' he made he was content to sit on a chair at the faurest awa' corner o' the kitchen, daein' little but twirlin' his bannet in his twa hands an' glow'rin' up at the whitened ceilin' or into the fire. The second nicht he looked in on me, he drew owre to the table quite familiar-like, an' ackwally leaned owre't in my direction, as if he wad fain come nearer me."

"Ay?"

"Yes; an' on the third visit he telt me aff-han' to tak' that awkward table oot o' the gaet that stood atween us, as he fair hated the sicht o't."

"Ay?"

"Yes; it's as sure as ye're sittin' there. Weel, I set the table to the yae side a bit, jist to please him, ye ken; an' drawin' his chair inowre a bit, he cuist me sic a meltin', pathetic, treacley look, an' syne said, 'Jeanie, my dear, could ye fancy a hot tattie?' Noo, if that's no' directly pappin' the question," added the stout lodging-wife, "I'll plead guilty to kennin' precious little aboot the plain meanin' o' love-signs an' languages."

"An' did he pu' a hot tattie oot o' his pooch, then?" quite sincerely asked Peggy.

"Oh, no; not at all, my dear woman. Ye see, the language was kind o' feegurative. The hot tattie was understood, ye ken," cleverly explained Miss Jean.

"Ay, jist that," said Peggy. "Tippenny Tam's the feegurative hot tattie referred to. An' pray, Miss Jean, when is't comin' aff?"

"Och, haud yer tongue! Spare my feelin's, Peggy, if *you* please. The like o' this disna happen every day in a woman's life, though I've had my chances. Here, tak' anither cupfu' o' mulk, an' kindly spare my feelin's on this sacred occasion, if *you* please."

"But what if he rues an' draws back?" put in Peggy;



"for Tippenny Tam, they say's, a licht-wuttet, leerie-heided sort o' chap."

"What! draw back after carryin' me on sae faur! Let him try't. See ye, Peggy, he maun either pit the ring on my third finger there, or flee the country. There's only twa ways oot o't for Tam—the minister's manse or Ameriky."

"'Od, what am I thinkin' o', staunin' here haverin' awa' an' the kail-pat no on the fire yet," suddenly exclaimed Peggy. "I maun hurry awa' across, for if oor man catches me here, wi' the smell o' yer bottled mulk aboot me, there'll be a bonnie how-d'ye-do, I can tell ye."

"Here, pit that peppermint in yer mouth, my dear woman," said the stout lodging-wife, "it'll jist crack the wind on yer stomach like a stane gaun' through window gless."

"Ta-ta the noo, then, expectin' an invitation when it comes aff," was Peggy's parting salutation.

"Oh, spare my delicate feelin's, Peggy, if *you* please. Tam's comin' here the morn's nicht, an's bringin' me a present o' a tortie-shell cat, an' if that's no' furnishin' a hoose by instalments, I confess I ken but little o' the sign language o' love an' coortship. Ta-ta! I'll be owre an' let ye ken what's what in a day or twa. Ta-ta!"

Like a true woman, Peggy duly informed her husband that same night of the great secret which Jean Tamson had so confidentially communicated to her, not forgetting to mention the present of a tortoiseshell cat which Tippenny Tam had promised to make Jean on the following night, as a supposed initial part of the house furnishing, and as a pledge of the depth and sincerity of his love.

Now, Peggy's husband, who was a bit of a wag, laughed aloud on hearing of this, down to the length of his shoe leather.

So far, so good.

About eight o'clock that same evening, who should step in to Peggy's presence but Tippenny Tam himself, the

veritable "speck" hawking commercial traveller of Jean Tamson's warm love-hopes and virgin affections.

"There's a snelly nicht for ye outside doors," was Tam's commonplace salutation as he dropped mechanically into a chair.

"Ay, there's a bit nip o' frost in the air, I feel," answered Peggy's husband, who was comfortably blawin' awa' at a well-filled pipe. "Onything new the nicht, Tam?"

"I hear naething extr'ornary," Tam quietly answered.

"Are ye no' thinkin' o' takin' a second wife yet, Tam?" asked Peggy, winking slyly to her worthy guidman.

"Hoots! sic a thing's no' in my sober auld heid. I've had enough o' the ticklish jauds, I'm thinkin'."

"What, Tammas! no even thinkin' o't?" put in Peggy's husband.

"No, no, I assure ye."

A short confusing silence supervened, which was almost momentarily broken by Tuppenny Tam dashing frantically into the subject that lay immediately on his mind.

"Man, that's a fine bit cat ye've gotten—a rale bonnilie-markit tortie-shell cat ye've gotten haud o', I see."

Geordie looked across his spectacles to Peggy, who broke a piece of coal in the fire and said nothing. The remark was so suggestive that even young Geordie, the budding genius of the family, cocked his two ears at it and smiled, but very guardedly.

"Ay, it's a bit bonnie cat, I maun alloo," responded Peggy's husband, with a faint smile.

"Man, d'ye ken," added Tam, "I've taken a rale fancy for a bit nice young cat, jist to warm my desolate fire-en', an' to quaten down the cheepin' o' the mice at nicht."

"Man, Tam, that's surely a fell strange notion that's taken yer heid, eh!"

"E-e-eh, a most wonderfu' singular notion, I freely admit," rejoined the slightly flustered spectacle man.



"Can ye no' account for't ava, Tammas?" slyly put in Peggy.

"Nae mair than ye could yersel'. It's jist a bit innocent whim o' the fancy, ye ken—jist a bit innocent whim o' the rovin' fancy—I opine."

"If Peggy's willin', ye're welcome to't, Tam, twice owre."

"Man, I'd fair jump at the offer o't," exclaimed the spectacle man, rolling his cap round and round in his hands till it was like anything except a head cover for a modern Scotch Christian.

"Tak' it awa' wi' ye," said Peggy. "Ye're welcome to't, I'm sure."

"The morn's nicht I'll ca' roun' for't wi' a carpet-bag," delightedly answered Tam, and hurriedly jumping to his two feet, he made an instant move for the door, without remembering to leave a word of thanks, or even to express a formal "guid-nicht" to the worthy pair.

Now, Peggy's husband happened to have an apothecary on the list of his acquaintances, from whom he borrowed next day a packet of luminous phosphorus, which he secretly rubbed into the fur of the tortoise-shell cat that night, till it all but shone with light. In the dark it burned with blue flame like an evil spirit evoked from the pit of nether darkness.

"It's all done in the way of a scientific joke," Peggy's husband gleefully chuckled to himself on letting the powerfully phosphorised cat run free, which immediately made for below the kitchen bed.

About nine o'clock next night round came Tippenny Tam for the promised cat, carrying a capacious old-fashioned carpet-bag in his hand.

Profuse of thanks this time, off set Tippenny Tam for Jean Tamson's domicile, with the tortie-shell cat fuffin' an' sprauchlin' inside the carpet-bag.

The spectacle-man was in distinct luck. Jean's lodgers

were fortunately once more abroad for the evening, and Jean herself was seated by the cheery kitchen fire, awaiting his expected visit, no doubt.

"I've brocht ye the present o' a bonnie bit tortie-shell cat, as I promised I wad," said Tam, and he at once proceeded to open the capacious carpet-bag.

*Flop!* open flew the bag, and *spring!* out flashed the cat like a white streak of lightning, and disappeared the next moment below the kitchen bed.

"It feels strange a wee in its new quarters," remarked Tam apologetically, as he marked its startlingly sudden disappearance.

"Raither," drawled out the stout lodging-wife, "an' frae what I momentarily saw o't it seems to ha'e a kind o' raised, flee-aboot, wull-cat look. Its fur, for yae thing, looks as if it had been badly rubbit the wrang way."

"I can guarantee the animal. It's a rale sweet, nice, darlin' cat, Miss Jean, an' it'll mak' a nice, warm, usefu' ornament to oor fireside," put in the spectacle-man.

"Oor' fireside! that settles't," Jean muttered to herself. "Yes, Tammas, it's jist a perfect beauty o' a cat."

And so in this off-hand way Tippenny Tam's curious betrothal gift was effusively accepted by Jean Tamson, and the affair settled forthwith.

Tam was in fine tune, and sat till the re-appearance of Jean's twa lodgers that night, who returned home from a protracted visit to a local dram-shop between the rather late hours of eleven and twelve.

The cat, during the interval, had never once re-appeared from under the cover of the bed.

Now, Jean's two men lodgers were both originals in their way.

Paddy Clinker was the one, and he was a day labourer in a Clyde boat-yard; Johnny Piper was the other, and he was a brisk old Waterloo pensioner.

It was a Friday night this all happened on, and as Johnny's quarterly pension had fallen due that day, the pair had been taking a free-and-easy "rise" out of themselves in the local dram-shops all the afternoon.

Their last escapade had been a visit to a small tripe shop and eating-house, where Paddy, in spite of Church, Pope, and Friday night, had gone in freely for beef, both cold and hot, in the form of tripe, mutton pies, and whatever else came in uppermost at Johnny Piper's martial call.

Therefore when the happy pair reached their lodgings that night they were in a capital condition for tumbling into bed without prayers, and with the sure prospect of having a graphic nightmare time of it till dawn next day.

Jean was already in bed when her two merry lodgers arrived, dreaming with her eyes open, no doubt, of future married felicities with the romantic-minded traveller for "specks."

She distinctly heard her lodgers' unsteady footsteps, heard their voices, heard bottle and glass clink several times before they turned into bed for the night, and then all fell very quiet—almost ominously quiet and still.

Meantime, the tortoise shell cat which Tippenny Tam had brought her as a present that night, finding all quiet in the house, seemed to become possessed with a very natural desire to explore the extent and character of its new quarters.

Cautiously it popped its head from below the bit of coloured chintz cloth which curtained the space below the bed, and then stepped very gingerly across the floor towards the hearth-stone.

In the dark of the room the phosphorus with which its soft fur had been so freely rubbed now shone out with startling luminosity, giving it a most weird, ghostly, and glittering outline.

Jean saw it, and shook with a nervous fear in every

limb. She breathed hard with excitement. The cat turned, stared at her, and—moved in her direction!

A moment after a yell of horror rang throughout the house, consequent on which the strangely illuminated cat fled for shelter into the lodgers' room adjoining.

"What's that, Paddy?" cried the old Waterloo pensioner, springing from the bed.

"A summons from purgatory, bedad!" answered Paddy Clinker, as he sprang up in bed and watched the ghostly apparition flying hither and thither about the room in bewilderment and fright, like a streak of detached lightning. "Och, dear, Jahnnny Piper! an' this is what comes of eating Pratestant baif on a Friday! Bad luck to the pension-money that paid for the hot tripe! Niver, niver, niver more will I eat baif on a Friday, if I should die in a ditch for the want of it. Och, och! luk at that. It's the divil sure, in the guise of a mad cat. *Ave Maria*, save me! Och, here it comes again!"

This said, poor Paddy quickly crossed himself several times and cleverly dived from sight under the bed-clothes, where he lay for some minutes panting with excitement and fear.

Not so Johnny Piper, however. The bold spirit of Waterloo still burned heroically in his breast, much as the passage of years had run it into ash. Taken with a proper martial spirit, the old Waterloo pensioner at once sprang to his feet, and seizing a long-handled hearth-brush, he dropped mechanically on one knee, bare as it was, and levelling his defensive weapon, stood gallantly at the "receive cavalry" position; and calmly awaited the attack of the unknown enemy in his nightshirt!

The cat, thus confronted and excited, seemed to lose control of itself, and continued flying round the room, over table and chairs, with the most extraordinary velocity and spirit.

Roused to action by the scrimmage in the room, the stout

lodging-wife also got up and took the floor in her night-dress and her petticoat, and armed with what Paddy Clinker called the kitchen "provoker," she entered in on the scene of hostilities.

The sight that met her eyes was truly laughable, had it been only less seriously tragical, in the view of those immediately concerned.

Poor Paddy was on his knees in the bed, and in prayer; the maddened cat was flying round the room like forked lightning; while the old Waterloo hero was wheeling round and changing his armed front every moment, so as to face and meet the impending onset of the excited foe.

"Eh, me!" cried the confounded lodging-wife, "what avast sort o' unearthly animal has that awfu' Tippenny Tam brocht into my hoose this nicht, that looks like neither dowg, cat, nor cuddy?"

"Bugle the garrison! call out the 5th Company, and parade the troops!" shouted out the old Waterloo pensioner.

"Och! och! it's a hot summons from purgatory, I tell yez," again blurted out Paddy Clinker. "Bad luck to wicked ould Jahnnny Piper's pension-money, an' Pratestant baif on a Friday!"

"Mercy me! every gless ornament in the room 'ill be smashed to pieces afore my vera e'en," exclaimed the distracted lodging-wife, making a series of murderous passes at the cat with the kitchen poker, from the fur of which, electrified as the hunted animal was with excitement, streaks of phosphorescent light were flying about the room in all directions.

Thus put to, the excited animal ultimately ended the row by springing clean through the papered opening of a broken pane of glass in the room window, and so escaped into the back court.

The stout lodging-wife was fearfully angry at the trick

Tippenny Tam had played on her, which she believed had been wilfully done. If she could only get her tongue round him for five minutes, she would make him hear her on the deafest side of his head. Her opportunity came the very next night, in the shape of a visit from her ardent admirer, the speck-hawking commercial.

"May I cross yer bonnie fluir the nicht, Miss Jean?" said the speck-hawker, in his blandest tones.

"Ye may. I'm particularly wantin' to see ye, an' to speak wi' ye."

Off came Tam's bonnet and down he clinkit on the nearest chair, a gracious smile glazing his flabby countenance from ear to ear.

"You want to—to—to speak wi' me, my dear Miss Jean?" he ventured to say, noticing from her stiff manner and the severe countenance she kept that something had surely gone wrong.

"Most particularly I do. In the name o'—o'—o' naitural history, sir, what sort o' animal was yon ye left here last nicht?"

"It was simply a cat—a bit hamely tortie-shell cat," sincerely answered the speck-hawker, raising his eyes to his questioner in astonishment.

"A cat, ca' ye't? It was a limp o' the vera deil, naething short o't, an' flew but an' ben the hoose for twa stricken hours in the middle o' the night like a ball o' lowin' brimstane, as me an' my twa men lodgers can this day powerfully testify. Was't a ghaist, a lowin' limp o' auld C'ootie, or what? Speak! answer me, sir, whaur ye sit!"

"It's a pair o' guid reliable specks some o' the three o' ye are sair needin' if ye're scein' sac bad as a' that, the which I can supply cheap," the astonished spectacle man blurted out, not knowing exactly what to think of the lodging-wife's strange statement. "Had your twa worthy lodgers a smell o' the bottle last nicht, Miss Jean, may I ask?"



"They had, I'm sorry to say."

"An' they distinctly saw this lowin' brimstane ghost!"

"Owre plainly for their ain peace o' mind."

"An' did ye ackwally see't tae, Miss Jean?"

"Baith saw't and smelt the brimstane feuch o't."

"Imph! and ye were perfectly sober, Miss Jean?"

"Perfectly sober, sir."

"That stowp 'll no carry watter across the park. I can draw an inference. *The marriage is aff!*"

"What! efter carryin' on an innocent lassie sae faur? Hang ye for a deceivin' auld rascal! That's the fifth time I've been lifted up in a man's airms an' syne let fa' doon wi' a clyte. Deil tak' me if I dinna lash ye, back an' face, wi' a wat dish-cloot!"

But the spectacle man was too quick for her. Taking in the desperate situation at a glance, he cleared both the house and the lobby leading thereto in three splendid kangaroo leaps, disappearing down the close with the viewless celerity of a sixpenny telegram.

Jean Tamson was thus once more left alone, not "blooming," like the last rose of summer, however, but weeping with fair vexation and disappointment.

"The marriage is aff, sure enough, an' so is Tippenny Tam, the unconscionable rascal! That's the fifth time I've been led awa' by the men, I'm sae guileless an' sae trustin' at the heart. I wish I had only pu'd the hale five o' my lovers up for breach o' promise. I nicht ha'e bocht a property wi' the total damages. My heart has been broken hale five times, an' if it hadna been made o' rale first-rate Scotch cahoochie I wad ha'e been cauld in my grave lang ere this. Here I am, however, an unpu'd an' neglected floo'r in a wilderness o' thorns an' thistles. *I wonder wha'll g'ie me my sixth offer?*"