

*JOHNNY SAFTY'S SECOND WIFE.*

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JOHNNY SAFTY was a working dyer to trade, and a widower by misfortune. He was deficient in sentiment, wore cluggs,

and lived in a small house in a back land in Linkumdoddy Lane, Road-fit, Parish of Camlachie, the door to the left, five stairs up. His first wife had been something of a slattern, a type of housewife which honest Johnny, soft as he was by name and nature, could not stand at all.

"Susan, Susan!" he used to exclaim, "when are ye thinkin' o' soopin' the floor? I'm wadin' ankle-deep in stoor and hoose-dirt; an' as for the dishes, I'm free to affirm that I've taken my parritch oot o' that crackit bowl for the thirteenth time since it was last wash't."

Whereupon easy-osey Susan would tartly exclaim, "Noo, noo, Johnny, be canny wi' yer tongue a wee! Regairdin' that awfu' kitchen floor, I'm never dune soop, soop, soopin't—mornin', noon, an' nicht. An' as for the maitter o' dish-washin', my twa han's are never twa minutes oot o' the hot-watter pot. The dishes were a' wash't last Friday mornin', an' this is but Tuesday yet; so, what mair wad ye reasonably look for aff o' a sair-ried hoosewife, bothered, time aboot, wi' the tuithache an' the rheumatics?"

"Weel, weel, Susan," Johnny would helplessly reply, "the wife buddies maun aye hae their ain say, an' their ain way baith;" and, turning his face to the fire, he would light his auld blackened pipe-end and indulge for ten minutes in a consolatory smoke.

But there's an end to every trouble in life, and sometimes a present calamity changes into a final blessing. In time the "tuithache and the rheumatics" conjointly did for Susan, and honest Johnny Safty was left a widower. Whether Johnny actually viewed his first wife's demise as a blessing in disguise, or merely as a tholable calamity, is not exactly given to say; but it is certain that he neither mourned long nor deeply after her.

In point of fact, she was scarcely "cauld," as the saying goes, when he took up with Sarah Corkscrew, a tender and blushing auld maid of sixty. Now, Miss Sarah Corkscrew

was considered, *by herself*, a rare catch to the like o' Johnny Safty. Although she was destined to prove Johnny's second wife, she was not a second-hand yin—for though sixty, she had never been married. Her affections were, therefore, fresh and untried. Besides, Sarah Corkscrew was cleanly to a point, and that was certain to prove a new domestic experience to Johnny Safty. What was more, Sarah had a perpetual income, in her own right, of the magnificent sum of £2 10s. a year. So that, as Johnny delightedly observed to himself, "wi' Sarah Corkscrew an' her annuity in near prospect, he could never actually starve." Johnny, obviously, was a man of extremely sanguine imagination.

Their courtship was short, but to the point. "Sarah Corkscrew," Johnny had gently whispered in her raptured ear when sitting on the banks of the silvery Clyde one night, between the Stockwell Brig and Jamaica Street—"Sarah Corkscrew, I say again, will ye be mine?"

"Oh, my feelings!—consider my shocked feelings, Mr. Safty!" exclaimed the blushing auld maid o' sixty, "an' gie me time to think."

"Noo or never!" exclaimed Johnny; "will you, will you, I ask, be mine? If so, lay your lily-white han' in mine an' pit me oot o' pain."

"Johnny, I'm yours for aye," was Sarah's answer; and the dry lips of the mature pair coming together at the moment, there was presently heard a sound which resembled the breaking of a bawbee bunch of sticks.

So the matter was settled, and very soon their marriage was an accomplished fact. But Johnny Safty's luck, even in this, his second marriage, seems to have spelled *misfortune*. He was hardly settled in his new home when he was painfully aware that he had made a mistake in getting tied to a second wife off-hand; for, if his first wife had turned out an easy-osey slattern, the second Mrs. Safty was likely to prove an over-pernickety nuisance in the matter of house-cleaning

and sweeping. Sarah, in point of fact, was clean gone in the matter of floor-scrubbing and blacklead-polishing. If Johnny chanced to leave the "sted" of his cluggs in crossing the floor when returning from the dye-work, it was an open reproach; if he ventured on a smoke, and happened to drop by accident a spittle on the hearthstone or the fender, it was a screaming offence; and if an old cronie happened to look Johnny up of a night, as old cronies will sometimes do, the said cronie was kept outside the threshold for ten minutes, scraping imaginary dust and mud off his boots before being admitted. Things went on this way till one night the pair had an open "fa'-oot" owre the business.

"O'd, Sarah!" Johnny exclaimed, after a dispute on the cleaning question, "I really wish ye wad try and tak' less pride in yer hoose, an' mair in me. Hang me, if I can sneeze in my ain hoose without being smartly brocht owre the coals for't. I thoct my first wife owre easy, but you're a trifle owre keen, Sarah. The very floor's scrubb't white wi' fricht; the cat's near-han' oot o' its jdgment for want o' a spot to pit its frichtit fit on; an' as for me, I wad need to sit wi' my twa feet in the air to please ye. It's only noo I can appreciate the virtues o' my lamented first wife."

"Dinna offer to even yer first wife wi' me, Johnny Safty, for that I'll no thole. It's an indignity an' a gross domestic libel; indeed, I'm no sure but it's actionable at law; so mind yer tongue, if you please."

"A fig for you an' the law baith!" retorted Johnny, stung into momentary courage; "I'll hae the yise o' my ain fireside, richt or wrang; an' what's mair, I'll smoke, an' spit, an' gang oot, an' come in as lang an' as often as I like, an' ye'll no hinder me, Sarah—remember you that!"

"Smoke as often as ye like, Johnny; but drap a single, solitary spittle on my shining fender an' ye'll rue't. When ye've an hour to spare, ye'll set-tae an' polish my scoorin'-things—d'ye hear that?"

"Hang you an' the scorin'-things baith!" cried Johnny. "I'm fair sick o' the haill bloomin' business;" and jumping to his feet, he made for the door, to find an hour's freedom and solace with twa-three social companions in the village tap-room.

Here he found Whup-the-Cat, the village tailor; Rab Rough, the smith; and auld Davie Mortelaith, the parish sexton and kirk beadle. The three worthies were seated at an oblong deal table, before a blazing fire. Half-emptied porter-pots stood before each of them. The smith and the tailor each smoked a clay pipe, while the auld sexton, less modern in his tastes, stuck by his well-filled snuff-box, and seemed, like the others, happy for the hour.

"Weel, hoo's a' wi' ye the nicht, Johnny?" was the general salute as the new-comer entered the room.

Johnny said nothing, but only shook his head in reply.

"Sit doon, Johnny, an' help us to pit a seam or twa in the nicht's crack," said Whup-the-Cat.

"An' hoo's things gaun at hame?" asked the smith in a tone that suggested a previous knowledge of the domestic situation.

"Waur an' waur," replied Safty. "My wife has fair wash't an' scor't me oot o' the hoose the nicht, an' I've cam doon here for an hour's peace an' quateness. She has daured me to pit a fit on the floor-heid this nicht withoot first askin' her permission, otherwise she'll mak' the parritch-spurkle become closely acquaint wi' the back o' my heid;" and John pathetically fingered the back of his head anticipatory of a new phrenological bump in that quarter.

"Jag her wi' a needle!" exclaimed Whup-the-Cat.

"Hammer her back to sense," said the brawny smith.

"Bury her," suggested the business-like sexton.

"It's as true as ye're a' sittin' there," insisted Johnny; "she's wash't the floor, or, rather, watted it, for the third time the day, and I'm threatened to within an inch o' my

life if I offer to leave a single fit-mark on't. Noo, what a man wi' cluggs is to dae under these circumstances I really am at a loss to divine."

"I have a theory," suggested Whup-the-Cat.

"Out with it," said the smith.

"What's yer plan?" asked Johnny.

"It's this," replied Whup-the-Cat: "if Sarah 'll no let ye cross the floor on yer feet, why, then, gang in on yer han's!" A chorus of merry laughter succeeded, but poor Safty only shook his troubled head, and looked more than ever mentally astray.

"I'm in deid earnest," resumed the ingenious tailor. "Restore yer wife to reason by reversing yer perpendicularity. The trick will work a quick cure, I'll wager a sixpence. To walk intae the hoose on yer han's, wi' yer twa feet flinging in the air, like the airms o' a tattie-bogle, is the only really quick an' certain road oot o' the awkward dilemma. Try the plan, Johnny—try it."

"That wad prove a patent way o' threadin' the domestic needle," laughed Johnny; "but I'm no sure if the seam wad cairry."

"Cairry!" exclaimed the knight of the needle; "it'll cairry like a rifle shot. Try it, Johnny—try it."

"Something decided must be tried, an' that very soon, as the hoose is nae hame for me," gravely replied Safty. "If I chance to look glee'd at the fire-airns it's a faut; a spittle drap't by accident on the hearth-stane's a scandal; an' a fit-mark on the floor is positive murder; if I but sneeze, the result is look't after wi' a lichtit can'le; an' I widna venture to blaw my auld snuff-hauder in the jaud's hearing for ten thousand worlds!"

"Hammer her into proper domestic shape," said the smith.

"Bury her," put in the auld sexton.

"Gang in on yer han's, Johnny," persisted the ingenious



knight of the needle; "it'll prove a perfect cure, I'll warrant ye—try it."

A second all-round laugh succeeded the repetition of the tailor's highly-humorous joke. For a good joke, and nothing more, the facetious knight of the needle meant it to be.

Johnny, however, took the tailor's joke in dead earnest, and after two minutes' serious consideration of the suggestion, he decided to at once act on it.

"Ye'll try it, Johnny, will ye?" put in the tailor, with a side-wink to the smith.

"This very nicht," replied Johnny; "an' if I act the daft yin onything weel, she'll think her mad scrubbin' an' scoorin' has at last token my heid, an' then she'll maybe drap it."

It was ringing ten by the toon clock when Johnny toddled hame that night, with a new hope in his heart, and an inspiring "wee drap in his e'e."

Johnny was a very credulous man, but had it not been for that same courage-inspiring glass of mountain dew, it is probable he would never have attempted to put into practice Whup-the-Cat's humorous joke. Johnny had pledged himself to the task, however, and he was bent on carrying it to a successful issue.

"O'd, an' if I dinna gie Sarah a fricht this nicht, when I gang in across the floor on my han's, wi' my twa cluggs danglin' in the air, my name's no Johnny Safty," said the henpecked husband, as he fought his way homewards in the face of a nor'-east wind, which was tearing down the road in his face. At length he reached his own door. A gas-jet burned languidly against the wall, shedding a yellow light along the narrow lobby. He looked at the bottom of the door, and he noticed, with a slight start, that a small portion of the lobby, immediately outside the door, was wet.

"Great sticks!" he exclaimed, "if the mad woman hasna gane an' wash't that blessed floor again since I left the hoose

twa hours since. That's the fourth time this day. The thing's past a' Christian endurance; it's positive lunacy."

Johnny meditated a moment before applying his knuckles to the door. Would he cave in, and, picking his steps carefully across the newly-wash't floor, slip cannily to bed, saying naething on the sore subject? Or, would he pluck up courage and test his luck by putting into effect the knight of the needle's laconic advice? Had Johnny's mind not been fortified with the village ale that evening, he would most probably have caved in, like the truly feeling and considerate husband he usually was. But Johnny had a gless in his e'e, and he was heroic to the point of desperation. In a figurative sense, he would have slain in cold blood the man who would at that particular moment have dared to insinuate that he, Johnny Safty, working dyer, Linkumdoddy Lane, Road-fit, Camlachie, was at the present moment, or, for that matter of it, had ever been a henpecked husband, or, indeed, anything approaching to that feeble domestic nonentity. His resolution to play the heroic was therefore taken at once, and with big hopes of success.

Throwing himself on his hands, feet up, he kicked vigorously against the door panels for admission. Presently the door was opened, and in across the newly-wash'd floor he waddled on his hands, as awkwardly as a hen stepping across a newly-macadamised road. A succession of sharp screams followed.

"Eh, me! what'a gane wrang wi' the man's heid ava?" exclaimed Sarah, Johnny's industrious second wife, as she saw her husband walking the floor in a completely inverted fashion, like a tumbling circus clown. Reaching the hearth-stane, Johnny resumed his wonted equilibrium, and presently was calmly seated in a chair before the fire, philosophically blowing away at the "pipe."

"Weel, Sarah, my dear," he began, "hoo's yer washin' an' scoorin' lunaey the nicht?"



"Oh, Johnny, dear! what's gane wrang wi' ye this nicht ava! Ye've been fettlin' owre sair at the dram, I fear. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"No, Sarah, there's no a pennyworth o' yill wrang wi' me this nicht. I'm as sober's an archbishop, an' never was soonder in the upper storey in a' my life"—(tapping his forehead.)

"Siccan an exhibition I never before witnessed," added Sarah. "Ye're no yersel' this nicht, Johnny Safty, whatever ye may turn oot to be."

"I'm maybe my kizzen, then, Sarah, or failin' that, some faur-awa relation o' my ain—eh?"

"For mercy's sake, get awa' to yer bed this very moment!" resumed the alarmed Sarah, "an' I'll throw on my shawl an' rin awa' doon for the village apothecary. It's a rising blister on the back o' yer heid ye're needin'. But I'll awa' doon to the village apothecary an' see what's wrang."

"Will ye, though?" replied Johnny; "in that case I'll be smartly after ye on my han's, feet uppermost, Sarah."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sarah, clasping her two hands together; "the man's mind's clean reversed, an' turned tapsalterie a'thegither."

"There's no a preen pint the maitter wi' me, Sarah," retorted Johnny; "I'm as soond, heid an' heel, as a cask o' porter."

"Oh, Johnny Safty! Johnny Safty! when will ye gie up meddlin' wi' that awfu' sense-thrawin' dram?"

"When yince ye gie up wash—wash—washin' at that awfu' fit-defyin' floor," replied Johnny, with a significant nod of the head; "that's whan I'll gie it up, Sarah; but no till then."

"What hae I dune, Johnny, dear, but what ony ither daicent and cleanly hoosewife should tak' a pride in daein'—keepit my hoose clean, a credit to mysel', Johnny, an' a pleasure to you, I hope?"

“ A pleasure to me, be hang’t ! ” answered Johnny, with rising warmth. “ D’ye ken this, Sarah, ye’ve clean wash’t an’ scoor’t me outside the premises an’ intae the village tap-room. A woman should aye think mair o’ her man than a newly-wash’t floor. When a man has to rise an’ gang outside his ain door to spit, it’s aboot time he was flittin’.”

“ Weel, Johnny, ye’ll wash the floor yersel’ after this,” put in Sarah.

“ I will, Sarah, my dear ; and remember, if ye daur to leave a single fit-mark on’t ye’ll suffer for’t, I can tell ye ! ”

“ I’ll hae to come in on my stockin’ soles, Johnny.”

“ Weel, ye’ll either need to dae that or keep yer bed till it dries, or loup across’t wi’ a spring, for I’ll daur ye, at yer peril, to put a solitary fit on’t—remember that, Sarah ! ”

“ Johnny Safty ! Johnny Safty ! ” exclaimed the converted Sarah, after a short pause, “ I’ve been acting in the wrang, I see. I’ve wash’t an’ scoor’t ye clean awa’ frae yer ain fireside, I noo clearly see. After this I’ll think mair o’ my man than my newly-wash’t floor. Lang may you stap oot an’ in, Johnny, for it wad be a sair day for me if death was to withdraw yer welcome fitstaps frae the hoose.”

Johnny was overjoyed. The “cure” was an accomplished fact ; and the agreement thus mutually made was faithfully kept, for twa happier domestic doos never picked crumbs o’ pleasure at a Scottish fireside than Johnny Safty and his second wife, Sarah Corkscrew, do this day.