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**Smithers' Suit.**

BY J. A. HAMMOND.

"Regret quite impossible to let you have suit for this evening."

For the fourth time Smithers read the telegram through. He felt that his position was critical. It was already past five o'clock. At seven he ought to be entering the dining-room at Dulwich with—he hoped it would not be Mrs. Rogers, though he regarded her with the tender interest due to the mother of Miss Emily. For the past week he had dared to dream that perhaps Emily's arm might be allowed to rest within his own. He had gone further. He had even hoped that during the evening he might feel emboldened to ask for more than the lady's arm—for something far more intimate and tender—in fact, for Emily's heart. Now all these entrancing visions were ruthlessly dashed to the ground. Why had he been such a credulous fool as to believe in a tailor's promises? How he cursed the day when he had been attracted by the advertisement, "Why wear old clothes when they can be made as good as new by William the Conquering Tailor?" True, the waistcoat had failed to keep pace with his waist and the one-time silk-rolled collar had begun to reveal secrets that even the skillful application of ink could not hide. Still, under the kindly gaslight it might have done duty once more. He had never been famous for courage, moral or physical, and he felt that to make his appearance in morning costume with an apology was impossible. Besides, everything depended on his making a good impression on the family. Mrs. Rogers always prided herself on her knowledge of the laws of social etiquette. As she repeatedly told her husband, "Now we no longer live over the shop, James, we must remember we belong to the gentry," and the invitation card which stood in a prominent place on his mantelpiece with the tragic words, "Evening dress," in a neat, round hand left him no loop-hole of escape. The idea of procuring a ready-made dress suit crossed his mind only to be instantly dismissed. Ready-made clothes require ready money he reflected, and it was a week before his salary became due. He remembered having heard of such a thing as hiring dress suits, but though only a junior clerk he had a sensitive nature, and the idea of stepping into clothes possibly worn last by an Italian waiter made him shiver. No, there was nothing for it but to send a wire pleading illness. Indeed, he already felt ill as he realized how his non-appearance would upset Mrs. Rogers' arrangements. It was unbearable that he should lose an evening in Emily's society because of such a trifle as clothes.

Smithers stared gloomily out of the window. There was nothing to see but the house opposite, but suddenly from that opposite house came an idea. Johnson had gone to Margate for a week's holiday. He was not likely to have taken his dress clothes with him, and he and Johnson were more or less of a size. It would not take long to run across to Johnson's rooms. He could easily smuggle the clothes out without the landlady's notice, and if he took them back early the next morning who would be the wiser?

Ten minutes later Smithers, rather pale and a little out of breath, was back in his rooms disgorging the dress suit from under his overcoat. "After all," he reflected as he shook the clothes carefully out, "Fate has not served me so badly. I hardly dared hope to get in and out unseen." He surveyed himself in the glass anxiously. "They're a bit large, but they might be worse," he said as he took a flower from off his sponge and placed it in his buttonhole.

Such was his anxiety not to be late that he was at Rose Villa fully half-an-hour too soon. "Perhaps it would hardly be good manners to arrive quite so early," he observed as he looked at his watch. "I'd better walk up down a few times."

Precisely at three-and-a-half minutes to seven he unobtrusively pulled the bell. It occurred to him after some few minutes of patient waiting that perhaps after all he had not made himself heard. This surmise was probably correct, for the second time his hand was still on the bell when the door sprang open.

Although Smithers was a frequent visitor at Rose Villa the importance of the occasion demanded that the maid should request his name. He looked at her in mild astonishment.

"Why, Ann, don't you recognize me? I'm Mr. Smithers."

"Mr. Smithers, mum." The drawing-room door was flung so widely open that it came into violent contact with the piano.

Mrs. Rogers was delighted that Mr. Smithers had been able to come. The Misses Rogers were equally delighted. And Smithers' catching sight of his clothes in a mirror, felt that he, too, had every reason to be glad that he was there.

"Not quite the last—in fact the first, Smithers," remarked Mr. Rogers from his vantage point of the hearthrug.

"Someone must be first," conceded Miss Emily graciously as Smithers sank blushing into a chair by her side.

The arrival of an uncle and aunt created a diversion, during which he replaced his shirt front that, unrestrained by a somewhat roomy waistcoat, persisted in bulging.

The clock had already struck the quarter and a general air of expectancy pervaded the room. Mrs. Rogers, evidently getting fidgety, rose and held a whispered consultation with her daughters. Conversation which had been jerky, lagged, and finally stopped altogether when Mr. Rogers' appetite, getting the upper hand of etiquette, exclaimed:

"My dear, I don't think it's any good waiting any longer for Johnson."

"Johnson! But surely he's at Margate?" stammered Smithers, thinking he could not possibly have heard aright.

"So he was, but he's due back this afternoon, and he promised he wouldn't fail to turn up to dinner, eh, Ethel?"

The younger Miss Rogers blushed and looked coy.

As they went in to dinner Smithers' dream was realized and Miss Emily fell to his lot, but the haunting thought that perhaps at this very moment Johnson might be searching for his clothes completely robbed him of his anticipated pleasure. He answered Miss Emily's remarks at random and soon became acutely conscious that at every answer her manner grew more and more chilly. Yet do what he would his thoughts reverted to Johnson. In desperation he helped himself liberally to whisky. He was raising his fourth glass to his lips when a loud peal at the bell called him to replace it suddenly on top of a wine-glass. So great was his relief at discovering it was only the postman that he found himself half smiling at Mrs. Rogers' shocked expression as the claret-glass flew into pieces. Indeed, if Emily had not become so frigid he felt that he could have been almost jovial.

Under the genial influence of some "fruity" port he was making gallant efforts to reinstate himself in the lady's favor when in answer to an impatient only half-disgusted signal from her husband Mrs. Rogers rose and the ladies retired.

On re-entering the drawing-room the gentlemen found Miss Emily engaged in singing a "Song of Spring." Smithers hastened forward to assist in turning over the music, and as he gazed down into her eyes he was beginning to hope that he had been forgiven when the door opened and Johnson appeared. Emily stopped in the middle of a trill and every eye was turned on the latecomer. Smithers, fearful lest Johnson should recognize his clothes and expose him on the spot to all the company, edged unnoticed into a cosy corner half hidden by the piano.

Johnson was full of apologies for coming at such an "outrageous hour," just as he was, "in his traveling things."

"Ah, I thought you must have missed your train," observed Mrs. Rogers a trifle coldly.

"Not at all. It was my evening clothes I missed," replied Johnson, seating himself next to the trembling Smithers, who looked round the room in vain for a vacant chair further away from his victim.

This startling announcement was greeted with an interested chorus.

"Missed your clothes? Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, my train just gave me time to change and come on here, but as soon as I went to my rooms I saw someone had been there before me. A drawer was wide open; one or two of my things were on the floor, and on closer examination I found that my dress suit had been taken."

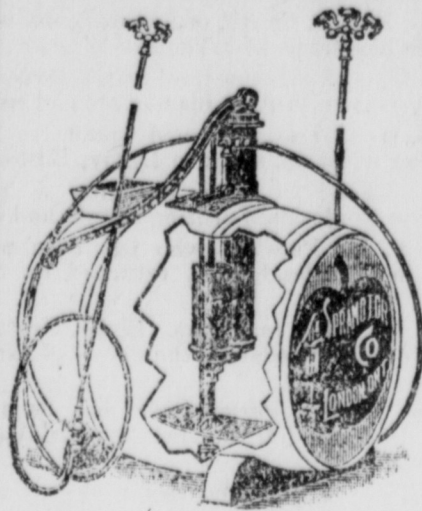
As Johnson gazed round the room watching the dramatic effect of his story his eyes rested for a moment on the shrinking form by his side. To the conscience-stricken Smithers it seemed an age before Johnson looked away.

"How exciting! What did you do then?" asked his hostess, forgetting her grievance in interest.

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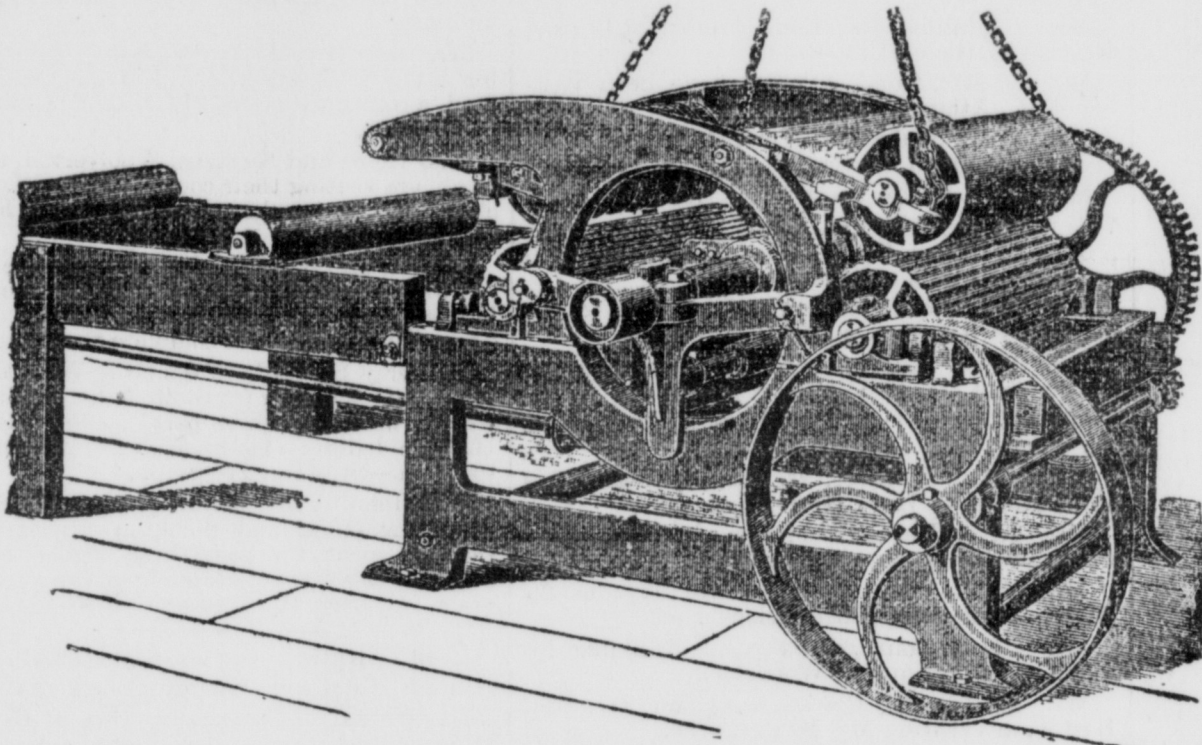
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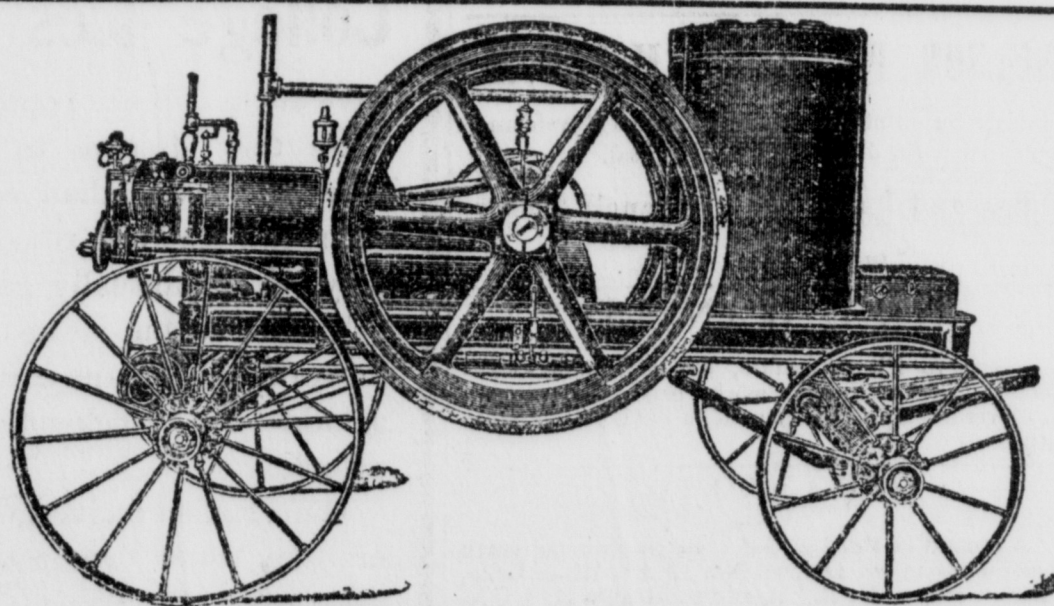
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"What anyone else would do. I put the matter in the hand of the police at once."

At the word "police" Smithers felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead. He already pictured himself in the dock.

"It seems that this is only one of a series of similar robberies. I can tell you, Smithers, you are luck not to have had yours taken," continued Johnson, placing his hand lightly on his neighbor's knee.

"Why, I declare Smithers is pale at the very idea," broke in Mr. Rogers with a laugh.

"Yes, I am," stammered the wretched man. "I mean, I am lucky."

"Oh, then it's the work of a regular rascal."

"No doubt about it. When he's caught, the inspector tells me, he'll get it very hot."

Smithers felt hot already.

"I'm sure he deserves it," said Ethel sympathetically. "But did no one see the man?"

"Well, Mrs. Odgers, my landlady, just saw a figure sneaking out of the gate."

"Then wouldn't she recognize him again?"

"I don't know about that. You see, she only saw his back; but she said he was about as tall as—er—Smithers."

"Ah, Smithers," said his host jovially, you'd better be careful or we shall be having you arrested for these robberies. Fancy the excitement that would cause."

"Yes, just fancy," said Smithers with a sickly smile.

"But haven't the police any other clues?" demanded Miss Emily.

"Well, of course, they haven't had much time yet. But before I left they had searched my room and—er—but I'm forgetting. I interrupted your song when I came in, Miss Rogers."

Johnson paused. Smithers was on the rack of expectancy. Could he possibly have left any trace behind him?

"Not at all," returned Miss Emily graciously. "Besides, your story is ever so much more exciting than my song. Isn't it, Mr. Smithers?"

The latter murmured something inaudible.

"Well, if you're quite sure—I may say that they discovered on the bedroom floor what they consider to be definite proof."

"What was that?" The question came for chorus.

"The police are very reticent in these matters. But I'm sure you'll all regard this as confidential?"

Of course everyone would.

"And you, Smithers?"

"I won't breathe a word," Smithers assured him with desperate earnestness.

"Then it was a letter dropped by the villain with his name and address on it. Couldn't want more complete evidence, could they, Smithers?"

Smithers' tongue refused to answer. "And what was his name?" Excitement ran high.

"George Albert Smithers."

The words came as a thunderbolt. Johnson paused for a moment to enjoy the effect.

"You didn't know you were entertaining a burglar unawares, did you?"

Miss Rogers crossed the room hastily. "Oh, George! I can't believe it. There must be some mistake."

"Impossible. He sits convicted. He's got them on now." Johnson broke into a hearty laugh.

"Is this really true, George?"

"It is." He tried to stand, but his legs failed him.

"But why?"

"Yes, that's what I want to know," said Johnson chuckling.

"My tailor failed me. I knew you were at Margate, and I thought you wouldn't want your suit, so I ventured to borrow it. I'm awfully sorry."

He looked ready to weep.

"Cheer up, old chap," said Johnson kindly patting him on the back. "Let bygones be bygones. You've had my clothes and I've had my revenge."

"But what about the police?"

"Yes, and the other robberies?" chimed in Mrs. Rogers.

"I'm afraid I borrowed them from my own imagination."

Smithers grew almost hysterical with relief.

"Nothing else you'd like to steal, Smithers, my boy?" asked his host genially.

With all the sudden daring of a shy man Smithers rose to the occasion. He drew Miss Emily's arm within his own.

"Yes, sir. Your daughter."

Miss Emily blushed.—The Tatler.

**"A" Story.**

Adolph, an Austrian artisan, adored Anna, an aristocrat. And Anna adored Adolph. Another aristocrat, Alfred, an ambassador, adored Anna. Anna adored Alfred. Alfred addressed Anna, admitting admiration. Anna assumed amazement. Alfred abjured Anna. Anna admonished Alfred. Alfred adopted aggressiveness. Alfred's audacity alarmed Anna. Alfred attempted abducting Anna. Anna, afraid and agitated, acquainted Adolf. Adolf accused Alfred. Alfred, angered, abused Adolf awfully. Adolf answered Alfred. Alfred attacked Adolf. Anna, aghast, aided Adolf. Anna almost annihilated Alfred. Alfred abdicated absolutely. Anna accepted Adolf. Adolf and Anna abruptly absconded and abandoned Austria altogether, arriving at Antwerp, and always abiding abroad afterward.—Town Topics.