

"THIS HOUSE TO LET!"

Yes, said old Mrs. Pounce, nodding her orange-colored capstrings, they put me in—the House Agency did—to take care of the house: with a bright-painted "TO LET" stuck up in front of the area-windows, and coal and house-rent free. Which I don't deny, my dear, is an object to a lone female like me, with neither chick nor child, and my own way to make in the world, with fine laundressing out of the question, on account of rheumatism in the finger-joints.

"You seem like a respectable person, Mrs. Pounce, that has seen better days," was what the house-agent said, when he handed over the keys, "and," says he, "I think we may trust you to take good care of our doorsteps and windows, show applicants over the house, and answer all questions."

"You may say so, sir," said I, with a courtesy; "there's many houses I've had charge of, and never a fault has been found yet. And this shan't be the first one," says I.

"We've a large business," says Mr. Eagle, "and if you give satisfaction, Mrs. Pounce," says he, as civil spoken as possible, "it's likely you'll never be without a roof to your head!"

Well, my dear, of all nice houses—and I've seen a many in my day—this was the nicest. Brownstone front, with a bay-window and snug garden planted all in box-borders, hot and cold water all through, a little conservatory with an arched glass roof at the rear, and the hall floor covered with real Minton tiles, as made you think you were walking on pictures; walls painted with Cupids and Venuses and garlands of flowers, and dadas of hardwood all throughout. Neighbourhood most desirable; drainage and sewerage perfect, and churches conveniently near. Excuse me my dear, it it sounds like an advertisement, but Mr. Eagle, the agent, wrote it down for me, and I never rested until I'd committed it all to memory, so I could speak it off, easy like, without any stops or hitches. And this I will say, as can't be said of all advertisements, there wasn't a word in the agent's description but what the house bore out!

And the board hadn't been up twenty-four hours before there was a rush to look at the house. Young married couples, as wanted to give up apartments; old married folks as wasn't suited with their location; boarding-house keepers as made believe they were private families; and private families as wanted to take a few select boarders. But the rent was put up tolerably high, and most of 'em dropped off, after I'd named the sum.

"Never mind, Mrs. Pounce—never mind," says Mr. Eagle, rubbing his hands. "It's a house that there'll be no difficulty in letting, without any reduction of rent. Just wait," says he, "until the spring sets in."

But, one day, in trots an old gentleman, with gold spectacles, and a smooth-shaven face, and "business" writ in every wrinkle of his forehead.

"This house to let, ma'am?" says he. "Yes, sir," says I.

"Can I look at it?" says he.

"Certainly, sir," says I. I began as smooth as oil, about the hot and cold water, the marble-floored bath-room, and the minton tiles, when, all of a sudden, he put up two hands in a warning sort of way.

"That'll do, ma'am," says he, "that'll do. I've eyes, and I can see for myself." "Certainly, sir," says I; but I won't deny as I was took aback by that queer dictatorial way of his.

"Any ghosts about the place, ma'am?" says he.

"Sir?" says I.

"Ghosts," says he, out loud and sharp. "Mysterious footsteps—lurking shadows—clanking chains at midnight?"

"Mercy, no, sir," says I, beginning to feel my flesh creep all over.

"Rats?" says he.

"Certainly not," says I, "with solid cemented cellar floor and sealed boards."

"Beetles?" says he.

"Look for yourself, sir," says I, bridling up a little.

"I like the house," says he, after he had gone sniffing about the drain pipes, and peered into the coal cellar and wine vaults and sounded the copper boiler with his knuckles, just for all the world as it was in the plumbing business. "You may tell the agent I'll take it, if he and I can come to terms about the rent. When shall you see him?"

"Most likely this afternoon, sir," says I.

"I'll drop in at his office tomorrow at nine," says he, "I'm going to be married," says he, as composed as if he were saying that he was going to take a blue-pill. "And the house will suit my wife's ideas. She thinks we're going to board," says he, with an odd sort of a chuckle in his throat, "and she's not a bit pleased with the idea. It'll be a pleasant surprise for her," says he.

Well, no sooner had he gone than in comes a stout, middle-aged lady, in a black silk dress, rows of curls on either side of her face, and cheeks as red as any cabbage rose.

"I've just come from Mr. Eagle's office," says she. "He has given me the refusal of this house, in case it suits me."

"I don't know, ma'am," says I, "but what it's let already."

"Let already?" says she, with a sort of scream. "But that's impossible! Don't I tell you I've the refusal of it? Show me the premises at once."

Well, I was in a pretty puzzle, as you may believe; but I went all over the house with the curly lady, and she declared it met her fancy exactly.

"Possession on the first of May, I suppose?" says she.

"Yes, ma'am," says I, "if—"

"There's no 'if' in the question," says she, as short as pie-crust. "You may take down the 'To Let,' my good woman."

I courtesies very low, but I say to myself: "Not if I know it, ma'am, without orders from the agent himself."

Away went the lady with the curly hair and the rose-red cheeks, and I was just putting on my hat to run round to the house agency, when in comes Mr. Eagle himself, all smiles.

"Well, Mrs. Pounce," he said he, so the house is let?"

"To my thinking, sir," said I, "it's let twice over."

And I up and told him about my old gentleman.

"Dear me," he says, "this is very perplexing. At what time was the personage here?"

"The clock struck twelve, sir," says I, "just as he went away."

"Mr. Eagle hit himself a blow over the forehead like a play actor," says he.

"Confusion worse confounded!" says he. "It was twelve, precisely, when my customer left the office. We can't split the house in two, can we?" says he. "Well, we must tell your old gentleman just how it happened. I daresay he'll be reasonable about it."

But he wasn't reasonable. Mr. Eagle told me afterwards; he never saw any one in such a rage.

"I've taken the house," says he, "and I'll have it, cost it what may. Do you say that the rent is two hundred pounds? I'll give you two hundred and fifty down; if my claim and that of this lady are equally good, the question of price must settle it."

Well, we supposed—me and Mr. Eagle—as that was the end of the matter. But not a bit of it. The lady came that same afternoon with an upholsterer and a tape-measure to see about the carpets.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, indeed!" says she, with a toss of her curls. "It will take more than a pauper two hundred and fifty pounds to unsettle my plans. I'll give three hundred sooner than I'll lose the house!"

When my old gentleman hears this, he grinds his teeth in a manner as was fearful to hear.

"It's my house," says he, "and I will have it! Three hundred and fifty pounds, Eagle!"

"Come," says Mr. Eagle, "matters are getting lively. Real estate is looking up in the market," says he.

But you should have heard what a whistle he gave when I told him, the very next day, that the curly lady had authorized me to offer four hundred.

"I'll not stand this any longer," says Mr. Eagle, jumping up and sending the papers flying all over the office table. "I've a conscience, if Fate has made a real estate agent of me. Tell her to come round this afternoon and sign the lease. Four hundred pounds is twice what we asked, and we asked all the property was worth to begin with."

So the curly lady had her own way, after all.

The bald-headed old gentleman stamped about in a pretty rage when he heard as the house was let.

"I'll sue the agency," says he. "I'll have the house if it costs me all I'm worth!"

"Oh, hush, sir, hush!" says I, all in a tremble. "Here comes Miss Wix now!"

"Who?" says he.

"Miss Wix," says I. "The lady as has taken the house."

And I got behind the door, fully expecting a scene, after all that had come and gone. But to my surprise, she gave a little shriek, and flew into his arms.

"Dear Josiah!" says she.

"Dearest Barbara!" says he.

"How on earth came you here?" says she.

"I was looking for a desirable residence for you, my own angel," says he.

"You duck!" says she.

"And I thought this would exactly suit you," says he.

"Oh!" says she, "it does. And I've taken it at four hundred pounds a year. It seems a good deal of money to pay, but I've been driven to it by a horrid old cormorant who was determined to have the house at any price! However—"

"Barbara," says the old gentleman, with a little gasping sound in his throat, as if he was swallowing a lump, "that cormorant was I!"

"You don't mean—?" says she.

"And I was going to give you a pleasant surprise," says she, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief.

"It is a surprise," says he. "But as for the pleasure of it—never mind, Barbara. Let's go in and measure for the carpets and curtains. Let bygones be bygones—but the next time we drive a bargain perhaps it might be as well to confide in each other. Two hundred pounds a year—on a five year's lease—is almost too much to pay for a pleasant surprise!"

So that settled the matter, my dear, said old Mrs. Pounce. They were married in a month, and they came there to live. And of all my experience in house-letting this beat everything—and so everybody says, my dear, as hears the story.—Tit Bits.

plexing. At what time was the personage here?"

"The clock struck twelve, sir," says I, "just as he went away."

"Mr. Eagle hit himself a blow over the forehead like a play actor," says he.

"Confusion worse confounded!" says he.

"It was twelve, precisely, when my customer left the office. We can't split the house in two, can we?" says he. "Well, we must tell your old gentleman just how it happened. I daresay he'll be reasonable about it."

But he wasn't reasonable. Mr. Eagle told me afterwards; he never saw any one in such a rage.

"I've taken the house," says he, "and I'll have it, cost it what may. Do you say that the rent is two hundred pounds? I'll give you two hundred and fifty down; if my claim and that of this lady are equally good, the question of price must settle it."

Well, we supposed—me and Mr. Eagle—as that was the end of the matter. But not a bit of it. The lady came that same afternoon with an upholsterer and a tape-measure to see about the carpets.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, indeed!" says she, with a toss of her curls. "It will take more than a pauper two hundred and fifty pounds to unsettle my plans. I'll give three hundred sooner than I'll lose the house!"

When my old gentleman hears this, he grinds his teeth in a manner as was fearful to hear.

"It's my house," says he, "and I will have it! Three hundred and fifty pounds, Eagle!"

"Come," says Mr. Eagle, "matters are getting lively. Real estate is looking up in the market," says he.

But you should have heard what a whistle he gave when I told him, the very next day, that the curly lady had authorized me to offer four hundred.

"I'll not stand this any longer," says Mr. Eagle, jumping up and sending the papers flying all over the office table. "I've a conscience, if Fate has made a real estate agent of me. Tell her to come round this afternoon and sign the lease. Four hundred pounds is twice what we asked, and we asked all the property was worth to begin with."

So the curly lady had her own way, after all.

The bald-headed old gentleman stamped about in a pretty rage when he heard as the house was let.

"I'll sue the agency," says he. "I'll have the house if it costs me all I'm worth!"

"Oh, hush, sir, hush!" says I, all in a tremble. "Here comes Miss Wix now!"

"Who?" says he.

"Miss Wix," says I. "The lady as has taken the house."

And I got behind the door, fully expecting a scene, after all that had come and gone. But to my surprise, she gave a little shriek, and flew into his arms.

"Dear Josiah!" says she.

"Dearest Barbara!" says he.

"How on earth came you here?" says she.

"I was looking for a desirable residence for you, my own angel," says he.

"You duck!" says she.

"And I thought this would exactly suit you," says he.

"Oh!" says she, "it does. And I've taken it at four hundred pounds a year. It seems a good deal of money to pay, but I've been driven to it by a horrid old cormorant who was determined to have the house at any price! However—"

"Barbara," says the old gentleman, with a little gasping sound in his throat, as if he was swallowing a lump, "that cormorant was I!"

"You don't mean—?" says she.

"And I was going to give you a pleasant surprise," says she, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief.

"It is a surprise," says he. "But as for the pleasure of it—never mind, Barbara. Let's go in and measure for the carpets and curtains. Let bygones be bygones—but the next time we drive a bargain perhaps it might be as well to confide in each other. Two hundred pounds a year—on a five year's lease—is almost too much to pay for a pleasant surprise!"

So that settled the matter, my dear, said old Mrs. Pounce. They were married in a month, and they came there to live. And of all my experience in house-letting this beat everything—and so everybody says, my dear, as hears the story.—Tit Bits.

plexing. At what time was the personage here?"

"The clock struck twelve, sir," says I, "just as he went away."

"Mr. Eagle hit himself a blow over the forehead like a play actor," says he.

"Confusion worse confounded!" says he.

"It was twelve, precisely, when my customer left the office. We can't split the house in two, can we?" says he. "Well, we must tell your old gentleman just how it happened. I daresay he'll be reasonable about it."

But he wasn't reasonable. Mr. Eagle told me afterwards; he never saw any one in such a rage.

"I've taken the house," says he, "and I'll have it, cost it what may. Do you say that the rent is two hundred pounds? I'll give you two hundred and fifty down; if my claim and that of this lady are equally good, the question of price must settle it."

Well, we supposed—me and Mr. Eagle—as that was the end of the matter. But not a bit of it. The lady came that same afternoon with an upholsterer and a tape-measure to see about the carpets.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, indeed!" says she, with a toss of her curls. "It will take more than a pauper two hundred and fifty pounds to unsettle my plans. I'll give three hundred sooner than I'll lose the house!"

When my old gentleman hears this, he grinds his teeth in a manner as was fearful to hear.

"It's my house," says he, "and I will have it! Three hundred and fifty pounds, Eagle!"

"Come," says Mr. Eagle, "matters are getting lively. Real estate is looking up in the market," says he.

But you should have heard what a whistle he gave when I told him, the very next day, that the curly lady had authorized me to offer four hundred.

"I'll not stand this any longer," says Mr. Eagle, jumping up and sending the papers flying all over the office table. "I've a conscience, if Fate has made a real estate agent of me. Tell her to come round this afternoon and sign the lease. Four hundred pounds is twice what we asked, and we asked all the property was worth to begin with."

So the curly lady had her own way, after all.

The bald-headed old gentleman stamped about in a pretty rage when he heard as the house was let.

"I'll sue the agency," says he. "I'll have the house if it costs me all I'm worth!"

"Oh, hush, sir, hush!" says I, all in a tremble. "Here comes Miss Wix now!"

"Who?" says he.

"Miss Wix," says I. "The lady as has taken the house."

And I got behind the door, fully expecting a scene, after all that had come and gone. But to my surprise, she gave a little shriek, and flew into his arms.

"Dear Josiah!" says she.

"Dearest Barbara!" says he.

"How on earth came you here?" says she.

"I was looking for a desirable residence for you, my own angel," says he.

"You duck!" says she.

"And I thought this would exactly suit you," says he.

"Oh!" says she, "it does. And I've taken it at four hundred pounds a year. It seems a good deal of money to pay, but I've been driven to it by a horrid old cormorant who was determined to have the house at any price! However—"

"Barbara," says the old gentleman, with a little gasping sound in his throat, as if he was swallowing a lump, "that cormorant was I!"

"You don't mean—?" says she.

"And I was going to give you a pleasant surprise," says she, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief.

"It is a surprise," says he. "But as for the pleasure of it—never mind, Barbara. Let's go in and measure for the carpets and curtains. Let bygones be bygones—but the next time we drive a bargain perhaps it might be as well to confide in each other. Two hundred pounds a year—on a five year's lease—is almost too much to pay for a pleasant surprise!"

So that settled the matter, my dear, said old Mrs. Pounce. They were married in a month, and they came there to live. And of all my experience in house-letting this beat everything—and so everybody says, my dear, as hears the story.—Tit Bits.

plexing. At what time was the personage here?"

"The clock struck twelve, sir," says I, "just as he went away."

"Mr. Eagle hit himself a blow over the forehead like a play actor," says he.

"Confusion worse confounded!" says he.

"It was twelve, precisely, when my customer left the office. We can't split the house in two, can we?" says he. "Well, we must tell your old gentleman just how it happened. I daresay he'll be reasonable about it."

But he wasn't reasonable. Mr. Eagle told me afterwards; he never saw any one in such a rage.

"I've taken the house," says he, "and I'll have it, cost it what may. Do you say that the rent is two hundred pounds? I'll give you two hundred and fifty down; if my claim and that of this lady are equally good, the question of price must settle it."

Well, we supposed—me and Mr. Eagle—as that was the end of the matter. But not a bit of it. The lady came that same afternoon with an upholsterer and a tape-measure to see about the carpets.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, indeed!" says she, with a toss of her curls. "It will take more than a pauper two hundred and fifty pounds to unsettle my plans. I'll give three hundred sooner than I'll lose the house!"

When my old gentleman hears this, he grinds his teeth in a manner as was fearful to hear.

"It's my house," says he, "and I will have it! Three hundred and fifty pounds, Eagle!"

"Come," says Mr. Eagle, "matters are getting lively. Real estate is looking up in the market," says he.

But you should have heard what a whistle he gave when I told him, the very next day, that the curly lady had authorized me to offer four hundred.

"I'll not stand this any longer," says Mr. Eagle, jumping up and sending the papers flying all over the office table. "I've a conscience, if Fate has made a real estate agent of me. Tell her to come round this afternoon and sign the lease. Four hundred pounds is twice what we asked, and we asked all the property was worth to begin with."

So the curly lady had her own way, after all.

The bald-headed old gentleman stamped about in a pretty rage when he heard as the house was let.

"I'll sue the agency," says he. "I'll have the house if it costs me all I'm worth!"

"Oh, hush, sir, hush!" says I, all in a tremble. "Here comes Miss Wix now!"

"Who?" says he.

"Miss Wix," says I. "The lady as has taken the house."

And I got behind the door, fully expecting a scene, after all that had come and gone. But to my surprise, she gave a little shriek, and flew into his arms.

"Dear Josiah!" says she.

"Dearest Barbara!" says he.

"How on earth came you here?" says she.

"I was looking for a desirable residence for you, my own angel," says he.

"You duck!" says she.

"And I thought this would exactly suit you," says he.

"Oh!" says she, "it does. And I've taken it at four hundred pounds a year. It seems a good deal of money to pay, but I've been driven to it by a horrid old cormorant who was determined to have the house at any price! However—"

"Barbara," says the old gentleman, with a little gasping sound in his throat, as if he was swallowing a lump, "that cormorant was I!"

"You don't mean—?" says she.

"And I was going to give you a pleasant surprise," says she, pulling out her pocket-handkerchief.

"It is a surprise," says he. "But as for the pleasure of it—never mind, Barbara. Let's go in and measure for the carpets and curtains. Let bygones be bygones—but the next time we drive a bargain perhaps it might be as well to confide in each other. Two hundred pounds a year—on a five year's lease—is almost too much to pay for a pleasant surprise!"

So that settled the matter, my dear, said old Mrs. Pounce. They were married in a month, and they came there to live. And of all my experience in house-letting this beat everything—and so everybody says, my dear, as hears the story.—Tit Bits.

plexing. At what time was the personage here?"

"The clock struck twelve, sir," says I, "just as he went away."

"Mr. Eagle hit himself a blow over the forehead like a play actor," says he.

"Confusion worse confounded!" says he.

"It was twelve, precisely, when my customer left the office. We can't split the house in two, can we?" says he. "Well, we must tell your old gentleman just how it happened. I daresay he'll be reasonable about it."

But he wasn't reasonable. Mr. Eagle told me afterwards; he never saw any one in such a rage.

"I've taken the house," says he, "and I'll have it, cost it what may. Do you say that the rent is two hundred pounds? I'll give you two hundred and fifty down; if my claim and that of this lady are equally good, the question of price must settle it."

Well, we supposed—me and Mr. Eagle—as that was the end of the matter. But not a bit of it. The lady came that same afternoon with an upholsterer and a tape-measure to see about the carpets.

"Two hundred and fifty pounds, indeed!" says she, with a toss of her curls. "It will take more than a pauper two hundred and fifty pounds to unsettle my plans. I'll give three hundred sooner than I'll lose the house!"

When my old gentleman hears this, he grinds his teeth in a manner as was fearful to hear.

"It's my house," says he, "and I will have it! Three hundred and fifty pounds, Eagle!"

"Come," says Mr. Eagle, "matters are getting lively. Real estate is looking up in the market," says he.

But you should have heard what a whistle he gave when I told him, the very next day, that the curly lady had authorized me to offer four hundred.

"I'll not stand this any longer," says Mr. Eagle, jumping up and sending the papers flying all over the office table. "I've a conscience, if Fate has made a real estate agent of me. Tell her to come round this afternoon and sign the lease. Four hundred pounds is twice what we asked, and we asked all the property was worth to begin with."