

***HERBERT GEORGE
JENKINS***



***ADVENTURES
OF BINDLE***

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THE COMING OF THE LODGER

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Bang! Even Bindle was startled by the emphasis with which Mrs. Bindle placed upon the supper-table a large pie-dish containing a savoury-smelling stew.

"Anythink wrong?" he enquired solicitously, gazing at Mrs. Bindle over the top of the evening paper.

"Wrong!" she cried. "Is there anything right?"

"Well, there's beer, an' Beatty, an' the boys wot's fightin'," began Bindle suggestively.

"Don't talk to me!" Mrs. Bindle banged a plate of stew in front of Bindle, to which he applied himself earnestly.

For some minutes the only sound was that occasioned by Bindle's enjoyment of his supper, as he proceeded to read the newspaper propped up in front of him.

"You're nice company, aren't you?" cried Mrs. Bindle, making a dive with the spoon at a potato, which she transferred to her plate. "I might be on a desert island for all the company you are."

Bindle gazed at Mrs. Bindle over the small bone from which he was detaching the last vestiges of nutriment by means of his teeth. He replaced the bone on the edge of his plate in silence.

"You think of nothing but your stomach," Mrs. Bindle continued angrily. "Look at you now!"

"Well, now, ain't you funny!" remarked Bindle, as he replaced his glass upon the table. "If I'm chatty, you say, 'Old your tongue!' If I ain't chatty, you ask why I ain't a-makin' love to you."

After a moment's silence he continued meditatively: "I kept rabbits, silkworms, an' a special kind o' performin' flea, an' I seemed to get to understand 'em all; but women—well, you may search me!" and he pushed his plate from him as a sign of repletion.

Mrs. Bindle rose from the table. Bindle watched her curiously; it was never wise to enquire what course was to follow.

"I answered an advertisement to-day," she announced, as she banged an apple-pie on the table.

With difficulty Bindle withdrew his interest from the pie to Mrs. Bindle's statement.

"You don't say so," he remarked pleasantly.

"And about time, I should think, with food going up as it is," she continued, as she hacked out a large V-shaped piece of pie-crust which she transferred to a plate, and proceeded to dab apple beside it.

Bindle regarded her uncomprehendingly.

"In *The Gospel Sentinel*." She vouchsafed the information grudgingly and, rising, she fetched a paper from the dresser and threw it down in front of Bindle, indicating a particular part of the page with a vicious stab of her fore-finger.

Bindle picked up the paper. The spot indicated was the column headed "Wanted." He read:

"CHRISTIAN HOME wanted by a single gentleman, chapel-goer, temperance, quiet, musical, home-

comforts, good-cooking, moderate terms. References given and required. Apply Lonely, c/o *The Gospel Sentinel*."

Bindle looked up from the paper at Mrs. Bindle.

"Well?" she challenged.

He turned once more to the paper and re-read the advertisement with great deliberation, forgetful of his fast-cooling plate.

"Well," remarked Bindle judicially, "this is a Christian 'ome right enough, plenty of soap an' water, with an 'ymn or two thrown in so as you won't notice the smell. Cookin's good likewise, an' as for 'ome-comforts, if we ain't got 'em, who 'as? There's sweepin' an' scrubbin' an' mats everywhere, mustn't smoke in the parlour unless you 'appen to be the chimney, and of course there's you, the biggest 'ome-comfort of all. Yes! Mrs. B.," he concluded, shaking his head with gloomy conviction, "we got enough 'ome comforts to start a colony, I'm always trippin' over 'em."

"Eat your pie," snapped Mrs. Bindle, "perhaps it'll stop your mouth."

Bindle applied himself to the apple-pie with obvious relish, glancing from time to time at *The Gospel Sentinel*.

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Bindle once more.

"I was jest wonderin'," said Bindle.

"What about?"

"I was jest wonderin'," continued Bindle, "why we want a lodger, us like two love-birds a-singin' an' a-cooin' all day long."

"What about the housekeeping?" demanded Mrs. Bindle aggressively.

"The 'ousekeepin'?" enquired Bindle innocently.

"Yes, the housekeeping," repeated Mrs. Bindle with rising wrath, as if Bindle were directly responsible, "the housekeeping, I said, and food going up like—like——"

"'Ell," suggested Bindle helpfully.

"How am I to make both ends meet?" she demanded.

"I suppose they must meet?" he enquired tentatively.

"Don't be a fool, Bindle!" was the response.

"I ain't goin' to be a fool with that there lodger 'angin' about," retorted Bindle. "If 'e starts a-playin' about wi' my 'Ome Comfort, 'e'll find 'is jaw closed for alterations. I'm a desperate feller where my 'eart's concerned. There was poor 'ole 'Orace only the other day. Jest back from the front 'e was."

Bindle paused and shook his head mournfully.

"Horace who?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"'Orace Gaze," replied Bindle. "Nice cove too, 'e is.

"'Ullo! 'Orace,' I calls out, when I see 'im jest a-comin' from the station with all 'is kit.

"'Cheerio,' says 'e.

"'The missis'll be glad to see you,' I says.

"'She don't know I'm 'ere yet,' 'e says.

"'Didn't you send 'er a telegram?' I asks.

"'Telegram!' says 'e, 'not 'arf.'

"'Why not?'

"'Lord! ain't you a mug, Joe!' says 'e; 'you don't catch me a-trustin' women, I got my own way, I 'ave,' says 'e, mysterious like.

"'What is it?' I asks 'im.

"Well, I goes 'ome,' says 'e, 'er thinkin' me at the front, rattles my key in the front door, then I nips round to the back, an' catches the blighter every time!"

"I won't listen to your disgusting stories," said Mrs. Bindle angrily.

"Disgustin'?" said Bindle incredulously.

"You've a lewd mind, Bindle."

"Well, well!" remarked Bindle, "it's somethink to 'ave a mind at all, it's about the only thing they don't tax as war profits."

"You'll have to be careful when the lodger comes." There was a note of grim warning in Mrs. Bindle's voice.

"Lodgers ain't to be trusted," said Bindle oracularly. "If you expects 'em to pinch your money-box, orf they goes with your missis; an' if you're 'opin' it'll be your missis, blowed if they don't pouch the canary. No!" he concluded with conviction, "lodgers ain't to be depended on."

"That's right, go on; but you're not hurting me," snapped Mrs. Bindle, rising to clear away. "You always oppose me, perhaps you'll tell me how I'm to feed you on your wages." She stood, her hands on her hips, looking down upon Bindle with challenge in her eye.

"My wages! why, I'm gettin'——"

"Never mind what you're getting," interrupted Mrs. Bindle. "You eat all you get and more, and you know it. Look at the price of food, and me waiting in queues half the day to get it for you. You're not worth it," she concluded with conviction.

"I ain't, Mrs. B.," replied Bindle good-humouredly, "I ain't worth 'alf the love wot women 'ave 'ad for me."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed. "You always was fond of your food," she continued, as if reluctant to let slip a topic so incontrovertible.

"I was, Mrs. B.," agreed Bindle; "an' wot is more I probably always shall be as long as you go on cookin' it. Wot I shall do when you go orf with the lodger, I don't know," and Bindle wagged his head from side to side in utter despondency.

Mrs. Bindle made an unprovoked attack upon the kitchen fire.

"Well," said Bindle after a pause, "if it's rations or a lodger, I suppose it's got to be a lodger," and he drew a deep sigh of resignation. He turned once more to *The Gospel Sentinel*. "Musical, too, ain't 'e," he continued. "I wonder wot 'e plays, the jews' 'arp or a drum? Seems a rare sport 'e does, chapel-goer, temperance, quiet, musical, fond of 'ome-comforts, good cookin'; an' don't want to pay much; regular blood I should call 'im."

"He's coming to-night to see the place," Mrs. Bindle announced, "and don't you go and make me feel ashamed. You'd better keep out of the room."

"'Ow could you!" cried Bindle reproachfully, as he proceeded to light his pipe. "Me——"

"Don't do that!" snapped Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle regarded her over the flaming match with eyebrows raised interrogatingly.

"Perhaps he doesn't smoke," she explained.

"But I ain't goin' to give up tobacco," said Bindle with decision. "'Oly Angels! me with a wife an a lodger an' no pipe!"

He looked about him as if in search of sympathy. Then turning to Mrs. Bindle, he demanded:

"You mean to say I got to give up smokin' for a lodger!" Indignation had smoothed out the wrinkles round his eyes and stilled the twitchings at the corners of his mouth.

"It doesn't matter after he's here," Mrs. Bindle responded sagely.

Slowly the set-expression vanished from Bindle's face; the wrinkles and twitches returned, and he breathed a sigh of elaborate relief.

"Mrs. B.," he said admiringly, "you 'aven't lived for nineteen years with your awful wedded 'usband, lovin', 'onourin' an' obeyin' 'im—I don't think—without learnin' a thing or two." He winked knowingly.

"Yes," he continued, apparently addressing a fly upon the ceiling, "we'll catch our lodger first an' smoke 'im afterwards, all of which is good business. Funny 'ow religion never seems to make you too simple to——"

Bindle was interrupted by a knocking at the outer-door. Mrs. Bindle performed a series of movements with amazing celerity. She removed and folded her kitchen-apron, placing it swiftly in the dresser-drawer, gave a hasty glance in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece to assure herself that all was well with her personal appearance and, finally, slipped into the parlour to light the gas. She was out again in a second and, as she passed into the passage leading to the outer-door, she threw back at Bindle the one word "Remember," pregnant with as much meaning as that uttered two and a half centuries before in Whitehall.

"Nippy on 'er feet is Mrs. B.," muttered Bindle admiringly, as he listened intently to the murmur of voices and the sound of footsteps in the passage. Presently the parlour-door closed and then—silence.

Bindle fidgeted about the kitchen. He was curious as to what was taking place in the parlour and, above all, what manner of man the prospective lodger would turn out to be. He picked up the evening paper, endeavouring to read what the Austrian Prime Minister thought of the prospects of peace, what Berlin thought of the Austrian Prime Minister, what the Kaiser thought of the Almighty, and what the Almighty was permitted to think of the Kaiser. But international politics and the War had lost their interest. Bindle was conscious that he was on the eve of a crisis in his home life.

"'Ow the injiarubber ostridge can a cove read when 'e ain't smokin'?" he muttered discontentedly as he paused to listen. He had detected a movement in the parlour.

Yes; the door had been opened. There was again the murmur of voices, steps along the passage and, finally, the sound of the outer-door closing. A moment later Mrs. Bindle entered.

Bindle looked up expectantly; but remembering that curiosity was the last thing calculated to open Mrs. Bindle's set lips, he became engrossed in his paper.

Mrs. Bindle seated herself opposite to him and, smoothing her skirt, "folded 'er 'ands on 'er supper," as Bindle had once expressed it.

"He's coming Monday," she proclaimed with the air of one announcing an event of grave national importance.

"Does 'e smoke?" enquired Bindle anxiously.

"He does not," replied Mrs. Bindle with undisguised satisfaction; "but," she added, as if claiming for some hero the virtue of self-abnegation, "he doesn't object to it—in moderation," she added significantly.

"Well, that's somethink," admitted Bindle as he proceeded to light his long-neglected pipe. "There was pore 'ole Alf Gorley wot beer made sick; but 'e used to like to see other coves with a skinful."

"Don't be disgusting, Bindle," snapped Mrs. Bindle, piqued that his apparent lack of interest in the lodger gave her no opportunity of imparting the information she was bursting to divulge.

"Wot's disgustin'?" demanded Bindle.

"Him, watching men making beasts of themselves," retorted Mrs. Bindle.

"Them makin' beasts o' themselves!" Bindle exclaimed. "If you'd ever seen Alf after 'alf a pint o' beer, you wouldn't 'ave said it was them wot was makin' beasts o'——"

"Mr. Hearty will like him," interrupted Mrs. Bindle, unable longer to keep off the subject of the lodger. Mr. Hearty had married Mrs. Bindle's sister, and had become a prosperous greengrocer.

"'Earty like Alf! 'Old me, 'Orace!" cried Bindle.

"I meant Mr. Gupperduck," said Mrs. Bindle with dignity.

"Mr. Wot-a-duck!" Bindle cried, his interest too evident for concealment.

"Mr. Josiah Gupperduck," repeated Mrs. Bindle with unction. "That is his name."

Bindle whistled, a long low sound of joy and wonder. "Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you swear before me, Joseph Bindle," cried Mrs. Bindle angrily; "for I won't stand it."

"Gupperduck!" repeated Bindle with obvious enjoyment. "Sounds like a patent mackintosh."

"Oh! you may laugh," said Mrs. Bindle, drawing her lips, "you may laugh; but he'll be company for me. He plays too." She could no longer restrain her desire to tell all she knew about Mr. Gupperduck.

"Is it the jew's 'arp, or the drum wot 'e plays?" enquired Bindle presently.

"It's neither," replied Mrs. Bindle, "it's the accordion."

Bindle groaned. Mentally he visualised Mr. Hearty's hymn-singing Sunday evenings, plus Mr. Gupperduck and his accordion.

"Well, well!" he remarked philosophically, "I suppose we're none of us perfect."

"He's a very good man, an' he's goin' to join our chapel," announced Mrs. Bindle with satisfaction.

Bindle groaned again. "'Earty, an' Mrs. B., an' Ole Buttercup," he muttered. "Joe Bindle, you'll be on the saved-bench before you know where you are"; and rising he went out, much to the disappointment of Mrs. Bindle, who was prepared to talk "lodger" until bed-time.

To Bindle the lodger was something between a convention and an institution. He was a being around whom a vast tradition had accumulated. In conjunction with the mother-in-law he was, "on the halls," the source from which

all humour flowed. His red nose, umbrella and bloater were ageless.

He was a sower of discord in other men's houses, waxing fat on the produce of a stranger's labour. He would as cheerfully go off with his landlord's wife for ever, as with the unfortunate man's shirt or trousers for a few hours, thus losing him a day's work.

Nemesis seemed powerless to dog the footsteps of the lodger, retribution was incapable of tracking him down. He was voracious of appetite, prolific of explanation, eternally on the brink of affluence, for ever in the slough of debt.

He was a prince of parasites, a master of optimism, a model of obtuseness, he could achieve more, and at less cost to himself, than a Gypsy. He was as ancient as the hills, as genial as the sunshine, as cheerful as an expectant relative at the death-bedside of wealth. He was unthinkable, unforgettable, unejectable, living on all men for all time.

Nations rose and declined, kings came and went, emperors soared and fell; but the lodger stayed on.

Bindle looked forward to the coming of Mr. Gupperduck with keen interest. Since the evening of his call, Mrs. Bindle had become uncommunicative.

"Wot's 'e do?" Bindle had enquired.

"He's engaged upon the Lord's work," she had replied, and proved unamenable to all further interrogation.

On the Monday Bindle was home from work early, only to be informed that Mr. Gupperduck would not arrive until eight o'clock.

"Now you just be careful what you say, Bindle," Mrs. Bindle had admonished him as she busied herself with

innumerable saucepans upon the stove.

"Don't you be nervous, Mrs. B.," he reassured her, sniffing the savoury air with keen anticipation, "there ain't nothink wrong with my conversation once I gets goin'. Wot about drink?" he demanded as he unhooked from the dresser the blue and white jug with the crimson butterfly just beneath the spout.

"He's temperance," replied Mrs. Bindle with unction.

"Well, I 'ope 'e looks it," was Bindle's comment as he went out.

When time permitted, Bindle's method of fetching the supper-beer was what he described as "'alf inside and 'alf in the jug," which meant that he spent half an hour in pleasant converse with congenial spirits at The Yellow Ostrich.

When he returned to Fenton Street, Mr. Gupperduck had arrived. Depositing the jug upon the table with deliberation, Bindle turned to welcome the guest.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Gutter——" He paused, the name had momentarily escaped him.

"Gupperduck, Mr. Josiah Gupperduck," volunteered the lodger.

"It ain't easy, is it?" said Bindle cheerfully. "Must 'ave caused you a rare lot o' trouble, a name like that."

Mr. Gupperduck eyed him disapprovingly. He was a small, thin man, with a humourless cast of face, large round spectacles, three distinct wisps of overworked hair that failed to conceal his baldness, a short brown beard that seemed to stand out straight from his chin, and a red nose. His upper lip was bare, save for a three days' growth of bristles.

"Looks like a owl wot's been on the drink," was Bindle's mental comment. "You can read 'is 'ole 'istory in the end of 'is nose."

"Been a pleasant day," remarked Bindle conversationally, quite forgetful that it had rained continuously since early morning.

"Pleasant!" interrogated Mr. Gupperduck.

Bindle suddenly remembered. "For the ducks, I mean," he said; then with inspiration added, "not for Gupperducks."

"Bindle!" admonished Mrs. Bindle. "You forget yourself."

"Oh, don't mind me, Mr. G.," said Bindle; "there ain't no real 'arm in me."

Bindle proceeded to put "an 'ead on the beer." This he did by pouring it into the glass from a distance of fully a yard and with astonishing accuracy. Catching Mr. Gupperduck's eye, he winked.

"Can't get an 'ead like that on lemonade," he remarked cheerfully.

The atmosphere was constrained. Mr. Gupperduck was tired and hungry, Bindle was hungry without being tired, and Mrs. Bindle was grimly prepared for the worst.

"Well, 'ere's long legs to the baby!" cried Bindle, raising his glass and drinking thirstily.

Mrs. Bindle cast a swift glance at Mr. Gupperduck, who gazed at Bindle wonderingly over the top of the spoon he was raising to his mouth.

The meal continued in silence. Bindle was hypnotised by Mr. Gupperduck's ears. They stood out from each side of his head like sign-boards, as if determined that nothing should escape them.

After a time Mr. Gupperduck began to show signs that the first ardour of his appetite had been appeased.

"If it ain't a rude question, mister," began Bindle, "might I ask wot's your job?"

"I'm in the service of the Lord," replied Mr. Gupperduck in a harsh tone.

"Trade union wages?" queried Bindle with assumed innocence.

"Bindle!" admonished Mrs. Bindle, "behave yourself."

"I am a sower of the seed," said Mr. Gupperduck pompously and with evident self-satisfaction.

"Well, personally myself," said Bindle, "I ain't much belief in them allotments. You spend all your time in diggin', gettin' yourself in an 'ell of a mess, an' then somebody comes along an' pinches your bloomin' vegetables."

"I refer to the spiritual seed," said Mr. Gupperduck. "I preach the word of God, the peace that passeth all understanding."

Bindle groaned inwardly, and silence fell once more over the board.

"Mrs. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck at length, "you have given me a most excellent supper."

Mrs. Bindle's lips became slightly visible.

"The Lord shall feed his flock," remarked Mr. Gupperduck apropos of nothing in particular, "and——"

"'E keeps a few little pickin's for 'Is Gupperducks," flashed Bindle.

"Bindle!" Mrs. Bindle glanced across at Mr. Gupperduck. The two then entered into a conversation upon the ways of the Lord, about which they both seemed to possess vast

stores of the most intimate information. From their conversation Bindle gathered that Mr. Gupperduck was a lecturer in the parks, mission-halls and the like, being connected with the Society for the Suppression of Atheism.

"And what are the tenets of your spiritual faith, Mr. Bindle?" Mr. Gupperduck suddenly turned and addressed himself to Bindle.

"Wot's my wot?" enquired Bindle with corrugated forehead.

"He's a blasphemer, Mr. Gupperduck, I'm sorry to say," volunteered Mrs. Bindle.

Mr. Gupperduck regarded Bindle as if Mrs. Bindle had said he was the "Missing Link."

"Mr. Bindle," he said earnestly, "have you ever thought of the other world?"

"Thought of the other world!" Bindle exclaimed. "If you lived with Mrs. B., you wouldn't 'ave much time for thinkin' of anythink else. She's as dotty about 'eaven as an 'en over a 'shop-egg,' an' as for 'Earty, that's my brother-in-law, well, 'Earty gets my goat when 'e starts about 'eaven an' angels."

"I fear you speak lightly of serious things, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck harshly. "Think of when the trumpet shall sound incorruptible and——!"

"Think o' when the all-clear bugle sounds in Fulham," responded Bindle.

Mr. Gupperduck looked at Mrs. Bindle in horror.

"I'm a special, you know," explained Bindle. "I got to be on the listen for that bugle after the air-raids. My! don't they jest nip back into their little beds again, feelin' 'ow brave they've all been."

Mr. Gupperduck seemed to come to the conclusion that Bindle was hopeless. For the next half-hour he devoted himself to conversing with Mrs. Bindle about "the message" he was engaged in delivering.

"You plays, don't you?" enquired Bindle, as Mr. Gupperduck rose.

"I am very fond of my accordion," replied Mr. Gupperduck.

"I suppose you couldn't give us a tune?" ventured Bindle.

"Not to-night, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck. "I have a lot to do to-morrow." Then, as if suddenly remembering his pose, he added, "There is the Lord's work to be done on the morrow, and His servant hath need of rest."

Bindle stared. Mrs. Bindle regarded her lodger with admiration tinged with awe. When Mr. Gupperduck could not call to mind an appropriate passage from the Scriptures, he invented one.

"I'm sorry," remarked Bindle, as Mr. Gupperduck moved towards the door. "I wanted you to play a thing I picked up at The Granville the other night. It was a rare good song, 'If You Squeeze Me Tighter, Jimmie, I Shall Scream.' I can whistle it if——" but Mr. Gupperduck was gone.

Then the storm burst.

"You're a disgrace to any respectable 'ome, Joseph Bindle, that you are," Mrs. Bindle broke out as soon as Mr. Gupperduck's bedroom door was heard to close.

"Me?" enquired Bindle in obvious surprise.

"What must he think of us?" demanded Mrs. Bindle. "You with your lewd and blasphemous talk."

"Wot 'ave I done now?" enquired Bindle in an injured tone.

"Talkin' about babies' legs, and—and—oh! you make me ashamed, you do." Mrs. Bindle proceeded to bang away the supper things.

"Steady on," admonished Bindle, "or you'll 'ave the Duck out o' bed."

"What must 'e think of me with such an 'usband?" Mrs. Bindle's aitches were dropping from her under the stress of her pent-up feelings.

"Well! speakin' for myself," said Bindle, relighting his pipe, which had gone out, "he most likely thinks you're an uncommon lucky woman. You see, Lizzie," Bindle continued evenly, "you're fickle, that's wot's the matter with you."

Mrs. Bindle paused in the act of pouring water over the piled-up dishes in the sink.

"As soon as you sees another cove wot takes your fancy, you sort o' loses your taste for your own 'usband."

Bindle seated himself at the table and spread out the evening paper.

"First it's 'Earty, then it's Gupperduck. Now I ask you, Mrs. B., wot would you think if I was to say we must 'ave a woman lodger? Now I ask you!"

"That's quite different," cried Mrs. Bindle angrily. "Mr. Gupperduck is——"

"A sort o' prayer-'og in trousers, judgin' from 'is talk," interrupted Bindle. "Me an' 'im ain't goin' to fall out, though you did give 'im a extra dose o' gravy; at the same time we ain't goin' to fall in love with each other. If 'e pays 'is rent an' behaves quiet like, then I 'aven't nothink to say, for

wot's an 'ome without a lodger; but it's got to be 'ands orf my missis, see!"

"Bindle, you're a dirty-minded beast," retorted Mrs. Bindle, snapping her jaws viciously.

"That may, or may not be," replied Bindle as he walked towards the door on his way to bed; "but if you an' 'im start givin' each other the glad-eye, then I'm 'urt in my private feelin's, an' when I'm 'urt in my private feelin's, I'm 'ot stuff," and he winked gravely at the text on the kitchen wall containing some home truths for the transgressor.

CHAPTER II

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A DOWNING STREET SENSATION

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"Me ride eight miles on an 'orse!" exclaimed Bindle, looking up at the foreman in surprise. "An' who's a-comin' to 'old me on?"

Bindle stood in the yard of Messrs. Empsom & Daley, cartage contractors, regarding a pair of burly cart-horses, ready-harnessed, with the traces thrown over their backs.

The foreman explained in the idiom adopted by foreman that "orders is orders."

"You can ride on top, run beside, or 'ang on be'ind; but you got to be at Merton at twelve o'clock," he said. "We jest 'ad a telephone message that a van's stranded this side o' Merton, 'orses broken down, an' you an' Tippitt 'ave got to take these 'ere and deliver the goods. Then take the van where you're told, an' bring back them ruddy 'orses 'ere, an' don't you forget it."

Bindle scratched his head through the blue and white cricket cap he habitually wore. Horses had suddenly assumed for him a new significance. With elaborate intentness he examined the particular animal that had been assigned to him.

"Wot part d'you sit on, ole son?" he enquired of Tippitt, a pale, weedy youth, with a thin dark moustache that curled into the corners of his mouth. Tippitt's main characteristic

was that he always had a cigarette either stuck to his lip or behind his ear. Sometimes both.

"On 'is tail," replied Tippitt laconically, his cigarette wagging up and down as he spoke.

"Sit on 'is wot?" cried Bindle, walking round to the stern of his animal and examining the tail with great attention. "Sit on 'is wot?"

"On 'is tail," repeated Tippitt without manifesting any interest in the conversation. "Right back on 'is 'aunches," he added by way of explanation; "more comfortable."

"Oh!" said Bindle, relieved, "I see. Pity you can't say wot you mean, Tippy, ain't it? Personally, meself, I'd sooner sit well up, so as I could put me arms round 'is neck. Hi! Spotty!" he called to an unprepossessing stable-hand. "Bring a ladder."

"A wot?" enquired Spotty dully.

"A ladder," explained Bindle. "I got to mount this 'ere Derby winner."

Spotty strolled leisurely across the yard towards Bindle, and for a moment stood regarding the horse in a detached sort of way.

"I'll give you a leg up, mate," he said accommodatingly.

Bindle looked at the horse suspiciously and, seeing there were no indications of vice, at the same time realising that there was nothing else to be done, he acquiesced.

"Steady on, ole sport," he counselled Spotty. "Don't you chuck me clean over the other side."

With a dexterous heave, Spotty landed him well upon the animal's back. Bindle calmly proceeded to throw one leg over, sitting astride.

"Not that way," said Tippitt, "both legs on the near side."

"You can ride your nag wot way you like, Tippy," said Bindle; "but as for me, I likes to 'ave a leg each side. 'Ow the 'ell am I goin' to 'old on if I sit like a bloomin' lady. My Gawd!" he exclaimed, passing his hand along the backbone of the animal, "if I don't 'ave a cushion I shall wear through in two ticks. 'Ere, Spotty, give us a cloth o' some sort, then you can back me as a two-to-one chance."

Tippitt, more accustomed than Bindle to such adventures, vaulted lightly upon his animal, and led the way out of the yard. For some distance they proceeded at an ambling walk, which Bindle found in no way inconvenient. Just as they had entered the Fulham Road, where it branches off from the Brompton Road, an urchin gave Bindle's horse a flick on the flank with a stick, sending it into a ponderous trot, amidst the jangle and clatter of harness. Bindle clutched wildly at the collar.

"'Ere, stop 'im, somebody! 'Old 'im!" he yelled. "I touched the wrong button. Whoa, steady, whoa, ole iron!" he shouted. Then turning his head to one side he called out: "Tippy, Tippy, where the 'ell is the brake? For Gawd's sake stop 'im before 'e shakes me into a jelly!"

Tippitt's animal jangled up beside that on which Bindle was mounted, and both once more fell back into the ponderous lope at which they had started. With great caution Bindle raised himself into an upright position.

"I wonder wot made 'im do a thing like that," he said reproachfully. "Bruised me all over 'e 'as. I shan't be able to sit down for a month. 'Ere, stop 'im, Tippy. I'm gettin' orf."

Tippitt stretched out his hand and brought both horses to a standstill. Bindle slipped ungracefully over his animal's tail.

"You can 'ave 'im, Tippy, ole sport, I'm goin' to walk," he announced. "When I get tired o' walking, I'll get on a bus. I'll meet you at Wimbledon Common;" and Tippitt, his cigarette hanging loosely from a still looser lower lip, reached over, caught the animal's bridle and, without comment, continued on his way westward.

"Well, live 'an learn," mumbled Bindle to himself. "I don't care wot a jockey gets; but 'e earns it, every penny. Fancy an 'orse bein' as 'ard as that. Catch you up presently, Tippy," he cried. "Mind you don't fall orf," and Bindle turned into The Drag and Hounds "for somethink to take the bruises out," as he expressed it to himself.

"Catch me a-ridin' of an 'orse again without an air-cushion," he muttered as he came out of the public-bar wiping his mouth. He hailed a west-bound bus, and, climbing on the top and lighting his pipe, proceeded to enjoy the morning sunshine.

When Tippitt reached the extreme end of Wimbledon Common, Bindle rose from the grass by the roadside, where he had been leisurely smoking and enjoying the warmth.

"'Ad quite a pleasant little snooze, Tippy," he yawned, as he stretched his arms behind his head. "Wonder who first thought o' ridin' on an 'orse's back," he yawned. "As for me, I'd jest as soon ride on an 'and-saw."

They jogged along in the direction of Merton, Bindle walking beside the horses, Tippitt silent and apathetic, his cigarette still attached to his lower lip.

"You ain't wot I should call a chatty cove, Tippy," remarked Bindle conversationally; "but then," he added, "that 'as its points. If you don't open your mouth, no woman can't say you ever asked 'er to marry you, can she?"

"Married, mate!" Tippitt vouchsafed the information without expression or interest.

Bindle stood still and looked at him.

Tippitt unconcernedly continued on his way.

"Well, I'm damned!" remarked Bindle, as he continued after the horses. "Well, I'm damned! They'd get you if you was deaf an' dumb an' blind. Pore ole Tippy! no wonder 'e looks like that."

Just outside Merton they came upon a stranded pantehnicon. Drawn up in front of it was a motor-car containing two ladies.

"This the little lot?" enquired Bindle as they pulled up beside the vehicle, which bore the name of John Smith & Company, Merton.

"Are you from Empson & Daleys?" enquired the elder of the two ladies, a sallow-faced, angular woman with pince-nez.

"That's us, mum," responded Bindle.

"I suppose those are the horses," remarked the same lady, indicating the animals with an inclination of her head.

"You ain't got much to learn in the way o' guessing, mum," was Bindle's cheery response.

The lady eyed him disapprovingly. Her companion at the wheel smiled. She was younger. Bindle winked at her; but she froze instantly.