

WHITE GOODS

(Continued from preceding page)
Are home. Lemme lead you upstairs.
They turned in and up and through a foggy length of long hallway. At the last and third landing an empty coal-scuttle stood just outside a door as if nosing for entrance.
"Watch out, Dee Dee, the scuttle. Lemme go in first. Gee! It's cold in-floors and warm out, ain't it? Wait till I light up. There!"
"Lemme alone. I can see."
You, with your feet on your library fender, stupefied with contentment and your soles scorching, your heart is not black; it is only fat. How can it know the lean formality of the furnished room? Chambermaids know it when they knock thrice and only the faint and nauseous fumes of escaping gas answer them through the plugged key-hole. Coroners know it.
Sadie Barnett and Edith Worte knew it, too, and put out a hand here and there to alay it. A comforting spread of gray chintz covered the sag in their white iron bed; a photograph or two stuck upright between the dresser mirror and its frame, and tacked full flare against the wall was a Japanese fan, autographed many times over with the gay personnel of the Titanic store's annual picnic.
Miss Worte dropped her dark cape from her shoulders, hung it with her hat on a door peg and sat heavily on the edge of the bed.
"God! my feet."
"Soak 'em."
Miss Barnett peeled off her shirt-waist. Her bosom, strong and flat as a boy's, rose white from her cheaply dainty under-bodice; at her shoulders the flesh began to deepen, and her arms were round and full of curves.
"Here, Dee Dee, I'm so nervous when I hurry. You sew in this ruche; you got time before the supper-bell. See, right along the edge like that."
Miss Worte aimed for the eye of the needle, moistening the end of the thread with her tongue and her fluttering fingers close to her eyes.
"God! I—I just ain't got the eyes no more. I can't see, Sadie; I can't find the needle."
Sadie Barnett paused in the act of brushing out the cloud of her dark hair, and with a strong young gesture ran the thread through the needle, knotting its end with a quirk of thumb and forefinger.
"It's the drops, Dee Dee, and this gas light, all blurry from the curling iron in the flame, makes you see bad."
Miss Worte nodded and closed her eyes as if he would press back the tears and let them drip inward.
"Yes, I know. I know."
"Sure! Here, lemme do it, Dee Dee. I won't stay out late, dearie, if your eyes are bad. We're only going out for a little spin."
Miss Worte lay back on the chintz bedspread and turned her face to the wall.
"I should worry if you come home or if you don't—all the comfort you are to me!"
"You say that to me many more times and you watch and see what I do; you watch and see."
"The sooner the better."
In the act of fluting the soft ruche about her neck, so that her fresh little face rose like a bud from its calyx, Miss Barnett turned to the full length of back which faced her from the bed.
"That's the way I feel about it—the sooner the better."
"Then we think alike."
"You ain't been such a holy saint to me that I got to play up to you for it all my life. You only raised me because you had to. I been working for my own living ever since I was so little I had to lie to the inspectors about my age."
"That's the thanks I got; that's the—"
"Aw, I know all that line of talk by heart, so you don't need to ram it down me. You gotta quit insinuating about my ways to me. I'm as straight as you are and—"
"You—you—take off that ivory-hand breast-pin; that ain't yours."
"Sure I'll take it off, and this ruche you gimme the money to buy, and this red bracelet, you gimme—and every old thing you ever gimme. Sure I'll take 'em all off. I wish I could take off these gray-top shoes you paid a dollar toward, and I would, too, if I didn't have to go barefoot. It's the last time I borrow from—"
"Aw, you commenced that line of talk when you was ten."
"I mean it."
"Well, if you do, take off them gloves that I bought for myself and you begged right off my hands. Just take 'em off and go barehanded with your little-headed friend; maybe he can buy—"
"You— Oh, I—I wish I was dead! I—I'll go barehanded to a snowball feast rather than wear your duds. There's your old gloves—there!"
Tears were streaming and leaving their ravages on the smooth surface of her cheeks.
"I just wish I—I was dead."
"Aw, no, you don't! There's him now, with a horn on his auto that makes a noise like the devil yelling! There's your little rat-eyed, low-lived fellow, now. You don't wish you was dead now, do you? Go to him and his two divorces and his little round head. That's where you belong; that's where girls on the road to the devil belong—with them kind. There he is now, waiting to ride you to the devil. He don't need to honk-honk so loud; he knows you're ready and waiting for him."
Miss Barnett fastened on her little hat with fingers that fumbled.
"Gimme—the key."
"Aw, no, you don't. When you come home tonight you knock; no more tip-

...light-key business like last time. I knew you was lying to me about the clock."
"You gimme that key. I don't want you to have to get up, with all your kicking, to open the door for me. You gimme the key."
"If you wanna get in this room when you come home tonight, you knock like any self-respecting girl ain't afraid to do."
"You—oh—you!" With a shivering intake of breath Miss Barnett flung wide the door, slamming it after her until the windows and the blue-glass vase on the mantelpiece and Miss Worte, stretched full length on the bed, shivered.
Two flights down she flung open the front door. There came from the curb the blast of a siren, wild for speed. She stood for a moment in the embrasure of the door, scenting.
"Do I need my heavy coat, Jerry?"
The dim figure in the tonneau, with his arms flung out their length across the back of the seat, moved from the center to the side.
"No, you don't. Hurry up, I'll keep you warm if you need a coat. Climb in here right next to me, Peachy. Now didn't I say I was going to keep you warm? Quit your squirming, Touchy. I won't bite. Ready, George. Up to the Palisade Inn, and let out some miles there."
"Gee! Jerry, you got the limousine top off. Ain't this swell for summer?"

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Jerome Beck settled back in the roamy embrasure of the seat and exhaled loudly, his shoulder and shoe touching hers.
She settled herself out of their range.
"Now, now, snuggle up a little, Peachy."
She shifted to her first position.
"Well, Peachy, how are you? Peachy is just the name for you, eh? 'Cause I'd like to take a bite right out of you—eh, Peachy? How are you?"
"Fine and—and dandy."
"Look at me."
"Aw!"
"Look at me, I say, you pretty little Peach with them devilish black eyes of yours and them lips that's got cherry on 'em, Little devil!"
"Quit calling me that." But she colored as if his tribute had been a sheath of lilies.
They veered a corner sharply, skidding on the wet asphalt and all but grazing the rear wheels of a recreant taxien.
"But, sub, I—"
"None of your black back-talk."
"Jerry!" She was shivering, and a veil of tears formed over her hot, mortified eyes. "Gee! What are you made of? You seen he couldn't help it when that taxi turned into us so sudden."
He relaxed against her. "Aw, did I scare the little Peachy? That's the way they gotta be handled. I ain't ready by a long shot to let a black devil spill my brains."
"Shh—h. He couldn't—"
"Sure he could, if he watched. He's a bargain I picked up cheap, anyways, 'cause he's lame and can't hold down heavy work. And bargains don't always pay. But I'll break his black back for him if— Aw, now, now, did I scare the little Peachy? Gee! I couldn't do nothing but kill you with kindness if you was driving for me. I'd just let you run me right off this road into the Hudson ocean if you was driving for me."
She smiled, but as if her lips were bruised.
"It ain't none of my put-in, but he couldn't help it, and I hate for you to yell at anybody like that, Jerry."

"Aw, aw, did I scare the little Peachy? Watch me show the little Tootsie how nice I can be when I want to— Aw—aw!"
"Quit."
She blinked back the ever-recurring tears.
"All tired out, too; all tired out. Wait till you see what I'm going to buy you tonight. A great big beef steak with mushrooms as big as dollars and piping-hot German fried potatoes and onions. M-m-m-m! And more bubbles than you can wink your eye at. Aw—aw, such poor cold little hands, and no gloves to warm 'em. Wouldn't I just love to wrap a little Peachy like you up in a big fur coat and put them little cold hands in a great big muff and hang some great big headlight earrings in them little bitise ears. Wouldn't I, though, M-m-m-m. Poor little hands!"
Her wraith of a smile dissolved in a spurt of hot tears which flowed over her words.
"Gee! Ain't I the nut to—to cry? I—I'll be all right in a minute."
"Whatever's hurting you, Tootsie? Been bounced? You should worry. I'm going to steal you out of that cellar, anyways. Been bounced?"
"N-no."
"The old hag ain't been making it hot for you, has she?"
"Sh-she—"
"Gad! That old hag gets my fur up. I had a mother-in-law once tried them tricks on me till I learned her they wouldn't work. But the old hag of yours—"
"Is her eyes; the doctor must have scared her up again today. When she gets scared like that about 'em she acts up so, honest, sometimes I—I just wish I was dead. She don't think a girl oughta have no life."
"Forget it. Just you wait. She's going to wake up some morning soon and find a little surprise party for herself. I know just how to handle an old bird like her. We're going to give her a little surprise party." Beneath the lap robe his hand slid toward hers. She could feel the movement of the arm that directed it and her own shrank away.
"But ain't I the limit, Jerry airing my troubles to you, like you was a policeman?"
"Now, now—"
"Quit! Leggo my hand."
He leaned forward suddenly, enveloping her.
"I got it. Why don't you lemme kidnap you, kiddo?"
"Wh—"
"Lemme kidnap you tonight and give the old hag the surprise of her life when she wakes up and finds you stolen. I'm some little kidnaper when it comes to kidnaping. I am, kiddo. Say, wouldn't I like to take you riding all wrapped up in a fur coat with nothing but your cute little face sticking out."
"Aw, you're just fooling me."
"Fooling! Lemme prove it, tonight. Lemme kidnap you this very night. I—"
"Is—is that what you mean by—by kidnaping me?"
"Sure. There ain't nothing I'd rather do. Are you on, Peaches? A sensible little queen like you knows which side her bread is buttered on. There ain't nothing I want more than to see you all bundled up in a fur coat with—headlights in your little bitise pink ears."
"You— What kind of a girl do you think I am? Take me home—take me— What kind of a girl do you think I am?"
He leaned toward her with a quick readjustment of tone.
"Just what I said, Peachy. What I meant was I'd marry you tonight if we— (Continued on Next Page)

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