WHITE GOODS

By FANNIE HURST

SYNOPSIS

Sadie Barnet, a salesgirl in the white goods department, lives with her aunt, Dee Dee. Sadie goes for an automobile ride with Jerry Beck, a rich man, whom Dee Dee considers unscrupulous. She is startled at his brutal commands to his chauffeur, but pleased at his asking her to be his second wife. When she returns she finds that Dee Dee has gone blind. She promises never to leave her. The next day Jerry takes her to see his house and his little daughter, who is afraid of him.

CHAPTER VI

"AND what's this next room here, Jerry? Ain't it sweet and quiet-looking! Spare room? Ain't it pretty with them little white curtains? Quit, quit, Jerry! You mustn't—you mustn't."

(c) By Gerard Sisters
FANNIE HURST

She broke from his embrace, confusion muddling her movements.

"Is this the—the spare room?"

"It is, now. It used to be the old woman's till I laid down on the mother-in-law game and squealed. Yeh. I used to have a little mother-in-law in our house that was some mother-in-law. Believe me, she makes that old devil of yourn look like a prize angel."

"I—This 'll be just the room for Dee Dee, Jerry, where she can feel the morning sun and hear the street cars over there when she gets lonesome. She ought to have the sunniest room, because it's something she can feel without seeing—poor thing. This will be a swell room for poor old blind Dee Dee won't it, Jerry? Won't it, Jerry dear?"

"Cut the comedy, Peachy. There's a neat free ward waiting for her just the other direction from the city than Newton Heights. Cut the comedy, Peachy."

"Jerry, I—I gotta have her with me. I— Now that she—she's in the dark. She couldn't stand an institution, Jerry, she—she just couldn't."

"That's what they all say, but they get over it. I know a——"

"She couldn't, Jerry. She ain't had much in her life, but she's always had a roof over her head that wasn't charity, and she always said, Jerry, that she couldn't never stand a—a institution. She can take any other room you say, Jerry. Maybe there's a little one upstairs in the third story we could fix up comfy for her; but she's in the dark now, Jerry, and she just couldn't stand an institution!"

He patted her shoulder and drew her arm through his.

"You lemme take care of that. She don't need to know nothing about it. We'll tell her we're sending her for a visit to the country for a while. After the second day she'll be as snug as a bug in a rug. They're good to 'em in those places; good as gold."

"No, no, Jerry! No, no! I gotta have her with me! She raised me from a kid and—and she couldn't stand it, Jerry! I gotta have her, I gotta! I want her!"

"Jerry, I——"

"Come, Peachy, don't get me sore. Come, let's talk about tomorrow. We gotta get the license first and——"

"Jerry, I—Just a little yes is all I want—Jerry dear—just a little yes."

A frown gathered in a triple furrow on his brow.

"Now, kiddo, you got to cut that with me, and cut it quick. If there's two things I can't stand it's nagging and pouting. Choopen can tell you what pouting can drive me to. I'll beat it out of that girl of mine before she's through with me, and I won't stand it from no one else. Now cut it, Peachy, that's a nice girl."

He paced the carpeted space of floor between the dresser and bed, his mouth still on the oblique.

"Now cut it, Peachy, I said, and cut it quick."

She stood palpitating beside the window, her eyes flashing to his face and fastening there.

"I—I wanna go."

"Where?"

Her glance flashed past him out of the window and across the patch of rear lawn. A street car bobbed across the country; she followed it with eager eyes.

"I wanna go."

He advanced, conciliatory. "Aw, now, Peachy, a row just the day before we are married. You don't want to start out making me train you just like you was a little kid. If you was a little girl I could beat your little ways out of you, but I wanna be on the level with you and show you how nice I can be. All the things I'm going to give you, all——"

"Quit, you! I wanna go! I wanna go!"

"You can go to blazes for my part. I'm going to get a steak inside of me before we budge. Quit your fooling. See, you nearly got me sore there. Come, the car won't be back for us until six. Come, Peachy, come."

She was past him and panting down the stairs, out across the patch of rear lawn, and toward the bobbing street-car, the streamer of ribbon at her throat flying backward over her shoulder.

In the bargain basement of the Titanic Store the first day of the spring opening dragged to its close. In a meadow beside a round pond a tree dripped apple blossoms, each so frail a thing that it fluttered out and away too light to anchor.

In careless similitude the bargain basement of the Titanic Store resuscitated from its storerooms and from spring openings long gone by dusty garlands of cotton May blossoms, festooning them between the great white supporting pillars of the basement and intertwining them.

Over the white-goods counter and over Sunday, as it were, a papier-mache pergola of green latticework and more cotton-back May blossoms had sprung up as if the great god Wotan had built it with a word. Cascades of summer linens, the apple green and the butter yellow, flowed from counters and improvised tables. Sadie Barnet's own mid-aisle bin had blossomed into a sacrificial sale of lawn remnants, and toward the close of the day her stock lay low, depleted.

Max Meltzer leaned out of his bower, and now muted his voice as if it came from an inner throat that only spoke when the heart bade it.

"Little one, them remnants went like hot cakes, didn't they?"

"Hot cakes! Well, I guess. You'd have thought there was a mill-end sale on postage stamps."

"And if you don't look all tired out! If you just don't!"

The ready tears swam in her voice.

"It's — it's been awful — me away from her all day like this. But anyways, I got news for her when I go home tonight about her five weeks' benefit money. Old Criggs was grand. He's going to send the committee to see her. Anyways that's some good news for her."

"I just can't get her out of my mind, neither. Seems like I—I just can see her poor blind face all the time."

"M-me, too."

"They say the girls up in the ribbons been crying all day. She was no love-bird, but they say she wasn't bad underneath."

"God knows she—she wasn't."

"That's the way with some folks; they're hard on top, but everybody knows hard-shell crabs have got sweeter meat than soft."

"Nobody knows that she was a rough diamond better than me. I got sore at her sometimes, but I—I know she was always there when I—I needed her, allrighty."

"Now, now, little girl, don't cry! You're all worn out.

"She—she was always there to stand by me in—in a pinch."

"Honest, Miss Sadie, you look just like a pretty little ghost. What you need is some spring air, girlie, some spring air for a tonic. Wouldn't I just love to take you all by your little self down the river tonight on one of them new Coney boats, where we could be—right quiet. Say, wouldn't I?"

"No—no!"

"I wanna talk to you, Miss Sadie. Can't you guess? I wanna get you all by yourself and talk to you right in your little ear."

"'Shh-h-h!! You mustn't talk like that."

"That's the only way I have of trying to tell you how—how I feel, Miss Sadie—dearie."

"'Shh-h-h!"

"When I call you that it means—well, you know, dearie, you know. That's why I wanna take you tonight, dearie, all by your little self and——"

"No, no, Mr. Meltzer! I can't leave her alone like that. I promised I would never leave her alone in the dark if—if I could help it."

"Ain't I the dub? Sure you can't leave her. We gotta stick by her now, Dearie. Ain't we? Ain't we?"

A red seepage of blood surged across his face and under his hair. Beneath his little hedge of mustache his lips quivered as if at their own daring.

"We gotta stick by her, dearie."

All her senses swam, nor could she control the fluttering of her hands.

"Oh—Mr. Meltzer—Max!"

"What you and poor old Dee Dee need is some of this spring air. Gee! wouldn't I love to take you—and her—down the river tonight on one of them new Coney boats? Gee! would I? Just you and—and her."

"Max—oh, Max, dearie!"

(THE END)

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$65 Taupe Wolf Scarfs....$52.50
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$285 Natural Skunk Stoles..$245
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Lit Brothers—First Floor, South

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