

THE OLD LADY SHOWS HER MEDALS

CUE 01: MUSICAL INTRODUCTION

THREE nice old ladies and a criminal, who is even nicer, are discussing the war over a cup of tea. The criminal, who is the hostess, calls it a dish of tea, which shows that she comes from Caledonia; but that is not her crime.

They are all London charwomen, but three of them, including the hostess, are what are called professionally 'charwomen and' or simply 'ands.' An 'and' is also a caretaker when required ; her name is entered as such in ink in a registry book, financial transactions take place across a counter between her and the registrar, and altogether she is of a very different social status from one who, like Mrs. Haggerty, is a charwoman but nothing else. Mrs. Haggerty, though present, is not at the party by invitation; having seen Mrs. Dowey buying the winkles, she followed her downstairs, and so has shuffled into the play and sat down in it against our wish. We would remove her by force, or at least print her name in small letters, were it not that she takes offence very readily and says that nobody respects her. So, as you have slipped in, you can sit there, Mrs. Haggerty; but keep quiet.

There is nothing doing at present in the caretaking way for Mrs. Dowey, our hostess ; but this does not damp her, caretaking being only to such as she an extra financially and a halo socially. If she had the honour of being served with an income-tax paper she would probably fill in one of the nasty little compartments with the words, ' Trade-charring; Profession (if any) - caretaking.' This home of hers (from which, to look after your house, she makes occasionally temporary departures in great style, escorting a barrow) is in one of those what-care-I streets that you discover only when you have lost your way ; on discovering them, your duty is to report them to the authorities, who immediately add them to the map of London. That is why we are now reporting Friday Street. We shall call it, in the rough sketch drawn for tomorrow 's press, 'Street in which the criminal resided ' ; and you will find Mrs. Dowey's home therein marked with a X.

Her abode really consists of one room, but she maintains that there are two; so, rather than argue, let us say that there are two. The other one has no window, and she could not swish her old skirts in it without knocking something over; its grandest display is of tin pans and crockery on top of a dresser which has a lid to it; you have but to whip off the utensil and raise the lid, and, behold, a bath with hot and cold. Mrs. Dowey is very proud of this possession, and when she shows it off, as she does perhaps too frequently, she first signs to you with closed fist (funny old thing that she is) to approach softly. She then tiptoes to the dresser and pops off the lid, as if to take the bath unawares. Then she sucks her lips, and is modest if you have the grace to do the exclamations.

In the real room is a bed, though that is putting the matter too briefly. The fair way to begin, if you love Mrs. Dowey, is to say to her that it is a pity she has no bed. If she is in her best form she will chuckle, and agree that the want of a bed tries her sore; she will keep you on the hooks, so to speak, as long as she can ; and then, with that mouse-like movement again, she will suddenly spring the bed on you. You thought it was a wardrobe, but she brings it down from the wall; and lo, a bed. There is nothing else in her abode (which we now see to contain four rooms- kitchen, pantry, bedroom, and bathroom) that is absolutely a surprise; but it is full of ' bits,' every one of which has been paid ready money for, and gloated over and tended until it has become part of its owner. Genuine Doweys, the dealers might call them, though there is probably nothing in the place except the bed that would fetch half-a-crown.

- MRS. TWYMLEY I suppose I ought to know: me that has a son a prisoner in Germany.
- (She has so obviously scored that all good feeling seems to call upon her to end here. But she continues rather shabbily, being the only lady present that has that proud misfortune. The others are stung.)*
- MRS. DOWEY My son is fighting in France.
- MRS. MICKLEHAM Mine is wounded in two places.
- HAGGERTY WOMAN Mine is at Salonaiky.
- (The absurd pronunciation of this uneducated person moves the others to mirth.)*
- MRS. DOWEY You 'll excuse us, Mrs. Haggerty, but the correct pronunciation is Salonikky.'
- HAGGERTY WOMAN *(to cover her confusion)* I don't think. *(She feels that even this does not prove her case)* and I speak as one that has War Savings Certificates.'
- MRS. TWYMLEY We all have them.
- (The Haggerty Woman whimpers, and the other guests regard her with unfeeling disdain.)*
- MRS. DOWEY *(to restore cheerfulness)* Oh, it's a terrible war.
- ALI. *(brightening)* It is. You may say so.
- MRS. DOWEY *(encouraged)* What I say is, the men is splendid, but I'm none so easy about the staff. That's your weak point, Mrs. Mickleham.
- MRS. MICKLEHAM *(on the defence, but determined to reveal nothing that might be of use to the enemy)* You may take it from me, the staff 's all right.'
- MRS. DOWEY And very relieved I am to hear you say it.
- (It is here that the Haggerty Woman has the remaining winkle.)*
- MRS. MICKLEHAM You don't understand properly about trench warfare. If I had a map --
- MRS. DOWEY *(wetting her finger to draw lines on the table)* That's the river Sommy. Now, if we had barrages here-

- MRS. TWYMLEY Very soon you would be enfiladed. Where's your supports, my lady ?
- (Mrs. Dowey is damped)*
- MRS. MICKLEHAM. What none of you grasps is that this is a artillery war--
- HAGGERTY WOMAN *(strengthened by the winkle)* I say that the word is Salonaiky.
- (The others purse their lips.)*
- MRS. TWYMLEY *(with terrible meaning)* We 'll change the subject. Have you seen this week's *Fashion Chat*?
- (She has evidently seen and devoured it herself, and even licked up the crumbs.)*
- The gabardine with accordion pleats has quite gone out.
- MRS. DOWEY *(her old face sparkling)* My sakes! You tell me?
- MRS. TWYMLEY *(with the touch of haughtiness that comes of great topics)* The plain smock has come in again, with silk lacing, giving that charming chic effect.
- MRS. DOWEY Oho!
- MRS. MICKLEHAM I must say I was always partial to the straight line *(thoughtfully regarding the want of line in Mrs. Twymley's person)* though trying to them as is of too friendly a figure.
- (It is here that the Haggerty Woman's fingers close unostentatiously upon a piece of sugar.)*
- MRS. TWYMLEY *(sailing into the Empyrean)* Lady Dolly Kanister was seen conversing across the railings in a dainty *de jou*.
- MRS. DOWEY Fine would I have liked to see her.
- MRS. TWYMLEY She is equally popular as maid, wife, and munition-worker. Her two children is inset. Lady Pops Babington was married in a tight tulle.
- MRS. MICKLEHAM What was her going-away dress?
- MRS. TWYMLEY A champagne cream velvet with dreamy corsage. She's married to Colonel the Hon. Chingford - " Snubs" they called him at Eton.

HAGGERTY WOMAN *(having disposed of the sugar)* Very likely he 'll be sent to Salonaiky.

MRS. MICKLEHAM Wherever he is sent, she'll have the same tremors as the rest of us. She'll be as keen to get the letters wrote with pencils as you or me.

MRS. TWYMLEY Them pencil letters!

MRS. DOWEY *(in her sweet Scotch voice, timidly, afraid she may be going too far)* And women in enemy lands gets those pencil letters and then stop getting them, the same as ourselves. Let's occasionally think of that.

(She has gone too far. Chairs are pushed back.)

HAGGERTY WOMAN I ask you!

MRS. MICKLEHAM That's hardly language, Mrs. Dowey.

MRS. DOWEY *(scared)* Kindly excuse. I swear to death I 'm none of your pacifists.

MRS. MICKLEHAM Freely granted.

MRS. TWYMLEY I 've heard of females that have no male relations, and so they have no man-party at the wars. I've heard of them, but I don't mix with them.

MRS. MICKLEHAM What can the likes of us have to say to them? It's not their war.

MRS. DOWEY *(wistfully)* They are to be pitied.

MRS. MICKLEHAM But the place for them, Mrs. Dowey, is within doors with the blinds down.

MRS. DOWEY *(hurriedly)* That's the place for them.

MRS. MICKLEHAM I saw one of them today buying a flag. I thought it was very impudent of her.

MRS. DOWEY *(meekly)* So it was.

MRS. MICKLEHAM *(trying to look modest with indifferent success)* I had a letter from my son, Percy, yesterday.

 ‘

MRS. TWYMLEY Alfred sent me his photo.

HAGGERTY WOMAN Letters from Salonaiky is less common.
(Three bosoms heave, but not, alas, Mrs. Dowey's. Nevertheless she doggedly knits her lips.)

MRS. DOWEY *(the criminal)* Kenneth writes to me every week.
(There are exclamations. The dauntless old thing holds aloft a packet of letters.)
Look at this. All his.
(The Haggerty Woman whimpers.)

MRS. TWYMLEY Alfred has little time for writing, being a bombardier.

MRS. DOWEY *(relentlessly)* Do your letters begin " Dear mother " ?

MRS. TWYMLEY Generally.

MRS. MICKLEHAM Invariable.

HAGGERTY WOMAN Every time.

MRS. DOWEY *(delivering the knock-out blow)* Kenneth's begin " Dearest mother."
(No one can think of the right reply.)

MRS. TWYMLEY *(doing her best)* A short man, I should say, judging by yourself.
(She ought to have left it alone.)

MRS. DOWEY Six feet two-and a half.
(The gloom deepens.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM *(against her better judgment)* A kilty, did you tell me ?

MRS. DOWEY Most certainly. He's in the famous Black Watch.

HAGGERTY WOMAN *(producing her handkerchief)* The Surrey Rifles is the famousest.'

MRS. MICKLEHAM There you and the King disagrees, Mrs. Haggerty. His choice is the Buffs, same as my Percy's.'

- MRS. TWYMLEY *(magnanimously)* Give me the R.H.A. and you can keep all the rest.
- MRS. DOWEY I 'm sure I have nothing to say against the Surreys and the R.H.A. and the Buffs ; but they are just breeches regiments, I understand.
- HAGGERTY WOMAN We can't all be kilties.
- MRS. DOWEY *(crushingly)* That's very true.'
- MRS. TWYMLEY *(It is foolish of her, but she can't help saying it)* Has your Kenneth great hairy legs ?
- MRS. DOWEY Tremendous.
- (The wicked woman : but let us also say ' Poor Sarah Ann Dowey.' For at this moment, enter Nemesis. In other words, the less important part of a clergyman appears upon the stair.)*
- MRS. MICKLEHAM Oh, my. Is that the reverent gent I see through the window?
- MRS. DOWEY *(little knowing what he is bringing her)* I see he has had his boots heeled.

It may be said of Mr. Willings that his happy smile always walks in front of him. This smile makes music of his life, it means that once again he has been chosen, in his opinion, as the central figure in romance. No one can well have led a more drab existence, but he will never know it; he will always think of himself, humbly though elatedly, as the chosen of the gods. Of him must it have been originally written that adventures are for the adventurous. He meets them at every street corner. For instance, he assists an old lady off a bus, and asks her if he can be of any further help. She tells him that she wants to know the way to Maddox the butcher's. Then comes the kind, triumphant smile; it always comes first, followed by its explanation, ' I was there yesterday!' This is the merest sample of the adventures that keep Mr. Willings up to the mark.

Since the war broke out, his zest for life has become almost terrible. He can scarcely lift a newspaper and read of a hero without remembering that he knows some one of the same name. The Soldiers' Rest he is connected with was once a china emporium, and (mark my words), he had bought his tea service at it. Such is life when you are in the thick of it. Sometimes he feels that he is part of a gigantic spy drama. In the course of his extraordinary comings and goings he meets with Great Personages, of course, and is the confidential recipient of secret news. Before imparting the news he does not, as you might expect, first smile expansively; on the contrary, there comes over his face an awful solemnity, which, however, means the same thing. When divulging the names of the personages, he first looks around to make sure that no suspicious character is about, and then, lowering his voice, tells you, ' I had that from Mr. Farthing himself - he is the secretary of the Bethnal Green Branch, -- h'sh !'

CUE 02: KNOCK AND IMMEDIATE OPENING OF THE DOOR

There is a commotion about finding a worthy chair for the reverent, and there is also some furtive pulling down of sleeves, but he stands surveying the ladies through his triumphant smile. This amazing man knows that he is about to score again.

MR. WILLINGS Ladies ... oh, no, please don't fuss. Friends, I have news.

MRS. MICKLEHAM News?

HAGGERTY WOMAN From the Front?

MRS. TWYMLEY My Alfred, sir?

(They are all grown suddenly anxious -- all except the hostess, who knows that there can never be any news from the Front for her.)

MR. WILLINGS I tell you at once that all is well. The news is for Mrs. Dowey.

(She stares.)

MRS. DOWEY News for me?

MR. WILLINGS Your son, Mrs. Dowey -- he has got five days' leave.

(She shakes her head slightly, or perhaps it only trembles a little on its stem.)

Now, now, good news doesn't kill.

MRS. TWYMLEY We're glad, Mrs. Dowey.

MRS. DOWEY You're sure?

MR. WILLINGS Quite sure. He has arrived.

MRS. DOWEY He is in London?

MR. WILLINGS He is. I have spoken to him.

MRS. MICKLEHAM You lucky woman.

(They might see that she is not looking lucky, but experience has told them how differently these things take people.)

- MR. WILLINGS *(marvelling more and more as he unfolds his tale)* Ladies, it is quite a romance. I was in the --
- (he looks around cautiously, but he knows that they are all to be trusted)*
- in the Church Army quarters in Central Street, trying to get on the track of one or two of our missing men. Suddenly my eyes - I can't account for it -- but suddenly my eyes alighted on a Highlander seated rather drearily on a bench, with his kit at his feet.
- HAGGERTY WOMAN A big man?
- MR. WILLINGS A great brawny fellow. *(the Haggerty Woman groans)* " My friend," I said at once, "welcome back to Blighty." I make a point of calling it Blighty. " I wonder," I said, "if there is anything I can do for you ? " He shook his head. "What regiment? " I asked.
- (Here Mr. Willings very properly lowers his voice to a whisper.)*
- "Black Watch, 5th Battalion," he said. "Name? " I asked. "Dowey," he said.
- MRS. MICKLEHAM I declare. I do declare.
- MR. WILLINGS *(showing how the thing was done, with the help of a chair)* I put my hand on his shoulder as it might be thus. " Kenneth Dowey," I said, " I know your mother." '
- MRS. DOWEY *(wetting her lips)* What did he say to that ?
- MR. WILLINGS He was incredulous. Indeed, he seemed to think I was balmy. But I offered to bring him straight to you. I told him how much you had talked to me about him.
- MRS. DOWEY Bring him here!
- MRS. MICKLEHAM I wonder he needed to be brought.
- MR. WILLINGS He had just arrived, and was bewildered by the great city. He listened to me in the taciturn Scotch way, and then he gave a curious laugh.

MRS. TWYMLEY

Laugh?

MR. WILLINGS

(whose wild life has brought him into contact with the strangest people) The Scotch, Mrs. Twymley, express their emotions differently from us. With them tears signify a rollicking mood, while merriment denotes that they are plunged in gloom. When I had finished he said at once, " Let us go and see the old lady." '

MRS. DOWEY

(backing, which is the first movement she has Made since he began his tale) Is he -- coming?

MR. WILLINGS

(gloriously) He has come. He is up there. I told him I thought I had better break the joyful news to you.

CUE 03:

MUSICAL TRANSITION 1, THEN FOOTSTEPS TO THE WINDOW

(Three women rush to the window. Mrs. Dowey looks at her pantry door, but perhaps she remembers that it does not lock on the inside. She stands rigid, though her face has gone very grey.)

MRS. DOWEY

Mr. Willings, kindly get them to go away from the window.

MR. WILLINGS

Ladies, I think this happy occasion scarcely requires you.

(He is not the man to ask of woman a sacrifice that he is not prepared to make himself.)

I also am going instantly.

(They all survey Mrs. Dowey, and understand -- or think they understand.)

MRS. TWYMLEY

(pail and mop in hand) I would thank none for their company if my Alfred was at the door.

MRS. MICKLEHAM

(similarly burdened) The same from me. Shall I send him down, Mrs. Dowey?

(The old lady does not hear her. She is listening, terrified, for a step on the stairs.)

Look at the poor, joyous thing, sir. She has his letters in her hand.

MR. WILLINGS

A good son, Mrs. Dowey, to have written to you so often. *(Mr. Willings puts a kind hand on Mrs. Dowey's shoulder. He thinks he so thoroughly understands the situation. The three women and Mr. Willings go.)*

CUE 04:

FOOTSTEPS TO THE DOOR AND DOOR CLOSES

(Our old criminal quakes, but she grips the letters more tightly. Private Dowey descends.)

MR. WILLINGS

Dowey, my friend, she's down there, waiting for you, with your letters in her hand.

DOWEY

(grimly) That 's great.

(Mr. Willings ascends the stair without one backward glance, like the good gentleman he is ; and the Doweys are left together, with nearly the whole room between them.

CUE 05: KNOCK AND IMMEDIATE OPENING OF THE DOOR

He is a great rough chunk of Scotland, hawked out of her not so much neatly as liberally ; and in his Black Watch uniform, all caked with mud, his kit and nearly all his worldly possessions on his back, he is an apparition scarcely less fearsome (but so much less ragged) than those ancestors of his who trotted with Prince Charlie to Derby. He stands silent, scowling at the old lady, daring her to raise her head ; and she would like very much to do it, for she longs to have a first glimpse of her son. When he does speak, it is to jeer at her.)

Do you recognise your loving son, missis ?

(' Oh, the fine Scotch tang of him,' she thinks.)

I'm pleased I wrote so often.

(' Oh, but he 's raized,' she thinks.) He strides toward her, and seizes the letters roughly.

Let 's see them.

CUE 06: SOUND OF LETTERS BEING SHUFFLED

(There is a string round the package, and he unties it, and examines the letters at his leisure with much curiosity. The envelopes are in order, all addressed in pencil to Mrs. Dowey, with the proud words ' Opened by Censor ' on them. But the letter paper in- side contains not a word of writing.)

Nothing but blank paper! Is this your writing in pencil on the envelope?

(She nods, and he gives the matter further consideration.)

The covey told me you were a charwoman; so I suppose you picked the envelopes out of waste-paper baskets, or such like, and then changed the addresses?

(She nods again ; still she dare not look up, but she is admiring his legs. When, however, he would cast the letters into the fire, she flames up with sudden spirit. She clutches them,

MRS. DOWEY Don't you burn them letters, mister.

DOWEY They're not real letters.

MRS. DOWEY They're all I have.

DOWEY *(He returns to irony)* I thought you had a son?

MRS. DOWEY I never had a man nor a son nor anything. I just call myself Missis to give me a standing.

DOWEY Well, it's past my seeing through.

(He turns to look for some explanation from the walls. She gets a peep at him at last. Oh, what a grandly set-up man! Oh, the stride of him. Oh, the noble rage of him. Oh, Samson had been like this before that woman took him in hand. He whirls round on her.)

What made you do it?

MRS. DOWEY It was everybody's war, mister, except mine. *(She beats her arms.)* I wanted it to be my war too.

DOWEY You '11 need to be plainer. And yet I 'm damned if I care to hear you, you lying old trickster.

(The words are merely what were to be expected, and so are endurable ; but he has moved towards the door.)

MRS. DOWEY You're not going already, mister ?

DOWEY Yes, I just came to give you an ugly piece of my mind.

MRS. DOWEY *(She holds out her arms longingly.)* You haven't gave it to me yet.

DOWEY You have a cheek!

MRS. DOWEY *(She gives further proof of it.)* You wouldn't drink some tea?

DOWEY Me! I tell you I came here for the one purpose of blazing away at you.

(It is such a roaring negative that it blows her into a chair. But she is up again in a moment, is this spirited old lady.)

MRS. DOWEY You could drink the tea while you was blazing away. There's wrinkles.

DOWEY Is there?

(He turns interestedly toward the table, but his proud Scots character checks him, which is just as well, for what she should have said was that there had been wrinkles.)

Not me. You're just a common rogue.

(He seats himself far from the table.)

Now, then, out with it. Sit down!

(She sits meekly ; there is nothing she would not do for him.)

As you char, I suppose you arc on your feet all day.

MRS. DOWEY I'm more on my knees.

DOWEY That's where you should be to me.

MRS. DOWEY Oh, mister, I'm willing.

DOWEY Stop it. Go on, you accomplished liar.

MRS. DOWEY It's true that my name is Dowey.

DOWEY It's enough to make me change mine.

MRS. DOWEY I've been charring and charring and charring as far back as I mind. I've been in London this twenty years.

DOWEY We'll skip your early days. I have an appointment.

MRS. DOWEY And then when I was old the war broke out.

DOWEY How could it affect you?

MRS. DOWEY Oh, mister, that's the thing. It didn't affect me. It affected everybody but me. The neighbours looked down on me. Even the posters, on the walls, of the woman saying, "Go, my boy," leered at me. I sometimes cried by myself in the dark. You won't have a cup of tea ?

DOWEY No.

MRS. DOWEY Not me.

DOWEY You needna be. She 's a young thing.

MRS. DOWEY You surprises me. A beauty, no doubt?

DOWEY You may be sure. *(He tries the jam.)* She's a titled person. She is equally popular as maid, wife and munition-worker.

(Mrs. Dowey remembers Lady Dolly Kanister, so familiar to readers of fashionable gossip, and a very leery expression indeed comes into her face.)

MRS. DOWEY Tell me more about her, man.

DOWEY She has sent me a lot of things, especially cakes, and a worsted waistcoat, with a loving message on the enclosed card.

(The old lady is now in a quiver of excitement. She loses control of her arms, which jump excitedly this way and that.)

MRS. DOWEY You'll try one of my cakes, mister?

DOWEY Not me.

MRS. DOWEY They're of my own making.

DOWEY No, I thank you.

(But with a funny little run she is in the pantry and back again. She planks down a cake before him, at sight of which he gapes.)

MRS. DOWEY What's the matter? Tell me, oh, tell me, mister.

DOWEY That's exactly the kind of cake that her ladyship sends me.

MRS. DOWEY *(Mrs. Dowey is now a very glorious old character indeed.)* Is the waistcoat right, mister? I hope the Black Watch colours pleased you.

DOWEY Wha--at! Was it you?

MRS. DOWEY I daredna give my own name, you see, and I was always reading hers in the papers.

DOWEY Carter, glazier, orraman, any rough jobs.

MRS. DOWEY You're a proper man to look at.

DOWEY I 'm generally admired.

MRS. DOWEY She's an enviable woman.

DOWEY Who?

MRS. DOWEY Your mother.

DOWEY Eh ? Oh, that was just protecting myself from you. I have neither father nor mother nor wife nor grandmama. (*Bitterly*) This party never even knew who his proud parents were.

MRS. DOWEY Is that '-gleaming-' is that true?

DOWEY It's gospel.

MRS DOWEY Heaven be praised!

DOWEY Eh? None of that! I was a fool to tell you. But don't think you can take advantage of it. Pass the cake.

MRS. DOWEY I daresay it's true we'll never meet again, Kenneth, but -- but if we do, I wonder where it will be?

DOWEY Not in this world.

MRS. DOWEY There's no telling (*leering ingratiatingly*) It might be at Berlin.'

DOWEY Tod, if I ever get to Berlin, I believe I'll find you there waiting for me!

MRS. DOWEY With a cup of tea for you in my hand.

DOWEY Yes, and (*heartily*) very good tea too.
(He has partaken heavily, he is now in high good humour.)

MRS. DOWEY Kenneth, we could come back by Paris!

DOWEY All the ladies, (*slapping his knees*) likes to go to Paris.

MRS. DOWEY Oh, Kenneth, Kenneth, if just once before I die I could be fitted for a Paris gown with dreamy corsage!

MRS. DOWEY

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(Her joy is so demonstrative that he has to drop a word of warning.)

DOWEY

But, mind you, I don't accept you as a relation. For your personal glory, you can go on pretending to the neighbours ; but the best I can say for you is that you 're on your probation. I'm a cautious character, and we must see how you'll turn out.

MRS. DOWEY

Yes, Kenneth.

DOWEY

And now, I think, for that bath. My theatre begins at six-thirty. A cove I met on a 'bus is going with me.

MRS. DOWEY

(She is a little alarmed) You're sure you 'll come back?

DOWEY

Yes, yes, *(handsomely)* I leave my kit in pledge.

MRS. DOWEY

You won't liquor up too freely, Kenneth?

DOWEY

You're the first, *(chuckling)* to care whether I do or not.

(Nothing she has said has pleased the lonely man so much as this.)

I promise. Tod, I'm beginning to look forward to being wakened in the morning by hearing you cry, "Get up, you lazy swine." I've kind of envied men that had womenfolk with the right to say that.

(He is passing to the bathroom when a diverting notion strikes him.)

MRS. DOWEY

What is it, Kenneth?

DOWEY

The theatre. It would be showier if I took a lady.

MRS. DOWEY

(Mrs. Dowey feels a thumping at her breast) Kenneth, tell me this instant what you mean. Don't keep me on the jumps.

DOWEY

(He turns her round) No, it couldn't be done.

MRS. DOWEY

Was it me you were thinking of?

DOWEY

Just for the moment *(regretfully)* but you have no style.

MRS. DOWEY *(She catches hold of him by the sleeve)* Not in this, of course. But, oh, Kenneth, if you saw me in my merino! It's laced up the back in the very latest.

DOWEY Hum ... *(doubtfully)* but let 's see it.'

CUE 12: SOUND OF A DRESSER DRAWER BEING OPENED

(It is produced from a drawer, to which the old lady runs with almost indecent haste. The connoisseur examines it critically.)

Looks none so bad. Have you a bit of chiffon for the neck? It's not bombs nor Kaisers nor Tipperary that men in the trenches think of, it's chiffon.

MRS. DOWEY I swear I have, Kenneth. And I have a bangle, and a muff, and gloves.

DOWEY Ay, ay. *(He considers)* Do you think you could give your face less of a homely look?

MRS. DOWEY I'm sure I could.

DOWEY Then you can have a try. But, mind you, I promise nothing. All will depend on the effect.

CUE 13: MUSICAL TRANSITION 3

(He goes into the pantry, and the old lady is left alone. Not alone, for she is ringed round by entrancing hopes and dreadful fears. They beam on her and jeer at her, they pull her this way and that ; with difficulty she breaks through them an rushes to her pail, hot water, soap, and a looking-glass. Our last glimpse of her for this evening shows her staring (not discontentedly) at her soft old face, licking her palm, and pressing it to her hair. Her eyes are sparkling.

One evening a few days later Mrs. Twymley and Mrs. Mickleham are in Mrs. Dowey's house, awaiting that lady's return from some fashionable dissipation. They have undoubtedly been discussing the war, for the first words we catch are :)

MRS. MICKLEHAM I tell you fiat, Amelia, I bows no knee to junkerdom.

MRS. TWYMLEY Sitting here by the fire, you and me, as one to another, what do you think will happen after the war? Are we to go back to being as we were?

MRS. MICKLEHAM Speaking for myself, Amelia, not me. The war has wakened me up to a understanding of my own importance that is really astonishing.

MRS. TWYMLEY Same here. Instead of being the poor worms the like of you and me thought we was, we turns out to be visible departments of a great and haughty empire.

They are well under weigh, and with a little luck we might now hear their views on various passing problems of the day, such as the neglect of science in our public schools. But in comes the Haggerty Woman, and spoils everything. She is attired, like them, in her best, but the effect of her is that her clothes have gone out for a walk, leaving her at home.

MRS. MICKLEHAM *(with deep distaste)* Here's that submarine again.

(The Haggerty Woman cringes to them, but gets no encouragement.)

HAGGERTY WOMAN It's a terrible war.

MRS. TWYMLEY Is that so?

HAGGERTY WOMAN I wonder what will happen when it ends?

MRS. MICKLEHAM I have no idea.

(The intruder produces her handkerchief, but does not use it. After all, she is in her best.)

HAGGERTY WOMAN Are they not back yet?

(Perfect ladies must reply to a direct question.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM No, *(icily)* We have been waiting this half hour. They are at the theatre again.

HAGGERTY WOMAN You tell me! I just popped in with an insignificant present for him, as his leave is up.

MRS. TWYMLEY The same errand brought us.

HAGGERTY WOMAN My present is cigarettes.

(They have no intention of telling her what their presents are, but the secret leaps from them.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM. So is mine.

MRS. TWYMLEY

Mine too.

(Triumph of the Haggerty Woman. But it is short-lived.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM

Mine has gold tips.

MRS. TWYMLEY

So has mine.

(The Haggerty Woman need not say a word. You have only to look at her to know that her cigarettes are not gold-tipped. She tries to brazen it out, which is so often a mistake.)

HAGGERTY WOMAN

What care I? Mine is Exquisytos.

(No wonder they titter.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM.

Excuse us, Mrs. Haggerty (if that's your name), but the word is Exquisectos.

HAGGERTY WOMAN

Much obliged *(weeps)*.

CUE 14:

SOUND OF A TAXI ARRIVING AND LEAVING

MRS. MICKLEHAM

I think I heard a taxi.

MRS. TWYMLEY

It will be her third this week.

(They peer through the blind. They are so excited that rank is forgotten.)

HAGGERTY WOMAN

What is she in?

MRS. MICKLEHAM

A new astrakhan jacket he gave her, with Venus sleeves.

HAGGERTY WOMAN

Has she sold her gabardine coat?

MRS. MICKLEHAM

Not her! She has them both at the theatre, warm night though it is. She's wearing the astrakhan, and carrying the gabardine, flung careless-like over her arm.

HAGGERTY WOMAN

I saw her strutting about with him yesterday, looking as if she thought the two of them made a procession.

MRS. TWYMLEY

Hsh ! *(peeping)* Strike me dead, if she's not coming mincing down the stair, hooked on his arm!

Indeed it is thus that Mrs. Dowey enters. Perhaps she had seen shadows lurking on the blind, and at once hooked on to Kenneth to impress the visitors. She is quite capable of it.

Now we see what Kenneth saw that afternoon five days ago when he emerged from the bathroom and found the old trembler awaiting his inspection. Here are the muff and the gloves and the chiffon, and such a kind old bonnet that it makes you laugh at once ; I don't know how to describe it, but it is trimmed with a kiss, as bonnets should be when the wearer is old and frail. We must take the merino for granted until she steps out of the astrakhan. She is dressed up to the nines, there is no doubt about it. Yes, but is her face less homely? Above all, has she style? The answer is in a stout affirmative. Ask Kenneth. He knows. Many a time he has had to go behind a door to roar hilariously at the old lady. He has thought of her as a lark to tell his mates about by and by; but for some reason that he cannot fathom, he knows now that he will never do that.

CUE 15: KNOCK AND IMMEDIATE OPENING OF THE DOOR

MRS. DOWEY Kenneth, *(affecting surprise)* we have visitors!

DOWEY Your servant, ladies.

He is no longer mud-caked and dour. A very smart figure is this Private Dowey, and he winks engagingly at the visitors, like one who knows that for jolly company you cannot easily beat charwomen. The pleasantries that he and they have exchanged this week! The sauce he has given them. The wit of Mrs. Mickleham's retorts. The badinage of Mrs. Twymley. The neat giggles of the Haggerty Woman. There has been nothing like it since you took the countess in to dinner.

MRS. TWYMLEY We should apologise. We're not meaning to stay.

MRS. DOWEY You are very welcome. Just wait *(the ostentation of this!)* till I get out of my astrakhan -- and my muff -- and my gloves -- and *(it is the bonnet's turn now)* my Excelsior.

(At last we see her in the merino (a triumph))

MRS. MICKLEHAM You've given her a glory time, Mr. Dowey.

DOWEY It's her that has given it to me, missis.

MRS. DOWEY Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! He just pampers me. *(wagging her fists)*

The Lord forgive us, but this being the last night, we had a sitdown supper at a restaurant! (*Vehemently*) I swear by God that we had champagne wine.

(There is a dead stillness, and she knows very well what it means, she has even prepared for it)

And to them as doubts my word -- here 's the cork.

(She places the cork, in its lovely gold drapery, upon the table.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM I'm sure!

MRS. TWYMLEY I would thank you, Mrs. Dowey, not to say a word against my Alfred.

MRS. DOWEY Me!

DOWEY Come, come, ladies (*in the masterful way that is so hard for women to resist*) if you say another word, I'll kiss the lot of you.

(There is a moment of pleased confusion.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM Really, them sodgers!

HAGGERTY WOMAN The kilties is the worst!

MRS. TWYMLEY I'm sure, (*heartily*) we don't grudge you your treats, Mrs. Dowey; and sorry we are that this is the end.

DOWEY Yes, it's the end. (*with a troubled look at his old lady*) I must be off in ten minutes.'

(The little soul is too gallant to break down in company. She hurries into the pantry and shuts the door.)

CUE 16: FOOTSTEPS TO THE PANTRY & DOOR CLOSSES

MRS. MICKLEHAM Poor thing! But we must run, for you 'II be having some last words to say to her.

DOWEY I kept her out long on purpose so as to have less time to say them in.

(He more than half wishes that he could make a bolt to a public-house.)

MRS. TWYMLEY It's the best way. (*In the important affairs of life there is not mueh that any one can teach a charwoman.*) Just a mere nothing, to wish you well, Mr. Dowey.

(All three present him with the cigarettes.)

MRS. MICKLEHAM A scraping, as one might say.

HAGGERTY WOMAN The heart *(enigmatically)* is warm though it may not be gold-tipped.

DOWEY You bricks!

THE LADIES. Good luck, cocky.

DOWEY The same to you. And if you see a sodger man up there in a kilt, he is one that is going back with me. Tell him not to come down, but -- but to give me till the last minute, and then to whistle.

MRS. MICKLEHAM Right!

CUE 17: SOUND OF DOOR CLOSING

(It is quite a grave man who is left alone, thinking what to do next. He tries a horse laugh, but that proves of no help. He says "Hell! to himself, but it is equally ineffective. Then he opens the pantry door and calls.)

CUE 18: KNOCK ON PANTRY DOOR & OPENING

Old lady.

(She comes timidly to the door, her hand up as if to ward off a blow.)

MRS. DOWEY Is it time?

(An encouraging voice answers her.)

DOWEY No, no, not yet. I've left word for Dixon to whistle when go I must.

MRS. DOWEY All is ended.

DOWEY Now, then, you promised to be gay. We were to help one another.

MRS. DOWEY Yes, Kenneth.

DOWEY It's bad for me, but it's worse for you.

MRS. DOWEY The men have medals to win, you see.

MRS. DOWEY Wait till I get my mop to you!

DOWEY And if you're not willing to be my mother, I swear I'll never ask another.

(The old divert pulls him down to her and strokes his hair.)

 Was I a well-behaved infant, mother?

MRS. DOWEY Not you, sonny, you were a rampaging rogue.

DOWEY Was I slow in learning to walk?

MRS. DOWEY The quickest in our street. He! He! He! *(She starts up)* Was that the whistle?

DOWEY No, no. See here. In taking me over you have, in a manner of speaking, joined the Black Watch.

MRS. DOWEY I like to think that, Kenneth.

DOWEY Then you must behave so that the ghost piper can be proud of you. "Tion!" *(She stands bravely at attention)* That's the style. Now listen. I've sent in your name as being my nearest of kin, and your allowance will be coming to you Weekly in the usual way.

MRS. DOWEY Hey! Hey! Hey! Is it wicked, Kenneth?

DOWEY I'll take the responsibility for it in both worlds. You see, I want you to be safe-guarded in case anything hap--

MRS. DOWEY Kenneth!

DOWEY "Tion! Have no fear. I'll come back, covered with mud and medals. Mind you have that cup of tea waiting for me.

(He is listening for the whistle. He pulls her on to his knee.)

MRS. DOWEY Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!

DOWEY What fun we'll have writing to one another! Real letters this time!

MRS. DOWEY Yes.

DOWEY It would be a good plan if you began the first letter as soon as I've gone.

MRS. DOWEY I will.

DOWEY I hope Lady Dolly will go on sending me cakes.

MRS. DOWEY You may be sure. *(He ties his scarf round her neck)* You must have been a bonny thing when you were young.

DOWEY Away with you!

MRS. DOWEY That scarf sets you fine.

DOWEY Blue was always my colour.

CUE 19: SOUND OF FIRST WHISTLE

DOWEY: *Oww! There's the whistle. (beat)* Old lady, you are what Blighty means to me now.

CUE 20: FOOTSTEPS TO THE DOOR & DOOR CLOSES

She hides in the pantry again. She is out of sight to us, but she does something that makes Private Dowey take off his bonnet. Then he shoulders his equipment and departs. That is he laughing coarsely with Dixon.

CUE 21: ENDING MUSIC 1

We have one last glimpse of the old lady -- a month or two after Kenneth's death in action. It would be rosemary to us to see her in her black dress, of which she is very proud ; but let us rather peep at her in the familiar garments that make a third to her mop and pail.

It is early morning, and she is having a look at her medals before setting off on the daily round. They are in a drawer, with the scarf covering them, and on the scarf a piece of lavender. First, the black frock, which she carries in her arms like a baby. Then her War Saving Certificates, Kenneth's bonnet, a thin packet of real letters, and the famous champagne cork. She kisses the letters, but she does not blub over them. She strokes the dress, and waggles her head over the certificates and presses the bonnet to her cheeks, and rubs the tinsel of the cork carefully with her apron. She is a tremulous old 'un ; yet she exults, for she owns all these things, and also the penny flag on her breast. She puts them away in the drawer, the scarf over them, the lavender on the scarf. Her air of triumph well becomes her. She lifts the pail and the mop, and slouches off gamely to the day's toil.

CUE 21: ENDING MUSIC 2

END OF PLAY