

My Lodger

Mary Fortune

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Why, you know, it was only last summer that I was wearily trudging through Melbourne streets in search of lodgings, and will you credit it that I have to-day arrived at the dignity of keeping lodgers myself! Instead of speaking humbly to crusty old women who scan me from head to foot inspectively, and watch any loose articles, such as a huckaback towel, that may be lying about when I request to see the "apartment" to let, I have the immense satisfaction of being crusty, and of snapping and turning up my nose at non-eligible inquirers for rooms myself.

Now, I don't care how much inclined you may be to disagreeable fault-finding, you must acknowledge that I have wonderfully improved my condition within the past few months; not that I expect much sympathy from you in any case, oh, no! (although, if you made anything by it, I have no doubt any quantity of that commodity would be humbly at my service), but you are so much in the habit of considering yourself and your judgments as infallible, and of talking of yourself as a reasonable and reasoning creature (fond public!) that you would not venture upon jeopardising your character by denying a fact so obvious.

And although I calculate upon a hearing of my little insignificant interests from you in a general way, in a particular one how idle it would be to attempt interesting you! You walk on Turkey carpets, or at the least Brussels, you do; and you loll upon, oh, so soft and delicious sofas, and in the downiest of easy-chairs; and what do you care about the cost of dingy-looking drugget, or the price of sea-weed mattresses! Faugh! the very idea of the thing makes you ill, doesn't it? but that doesn't trouble me in the least, you know, for it is quite as much pleasure to me to talk of my own petty affairs as it is to you to discuss the most important arrangements connected with your most magnificent menage.

If one has the bump of constructiveness at all well developed, there is nothing more pleasurable than furnishing a house upon nothing. Until you commence to do so with not more than four or five pounds in your purse, and begin to contrive tables and seats out of empty cases, and to convert trunks and boxes into pretty-looking ottomans, you don't know what fun there is in the world. Until you have to scrape pennies together in a way that the careful can only understand, and lay them together to make shillings for the acquisition of some necessary trifle, you have little idea of the comfort to be derived from the most ordinary of necessities; and I have not the least doubt that I have more real pleasure in contemplating at this moment a very pretty rug, bought for the sum of two shillings and sixpence, than you enjoy in looking at the tout ensemble of your very magnificent drawing-room, the furnishing of which, I myself am aware, cost you a few cool hundreds.

And when I laid that said rug down in front of a fireplace as white as whitening could make it, and looked from the bright cluster of red roses and white lilies in the centre of it, to my muslin-draped toilet, that you would never suppose to be three empty orange cases, I began to feel the entire satisfaction of having a whole "furnished room to let". You might turn up your nose at my clean matted floor, and the efforts I had made to make two chairs look four in my disposal of them in half a dozen different positions; but, thank goodness, I am not likely to have you looking for lodgings at my door just at present, although I have seen loftier ideas than yours reduced even lower in my time.

Well, my "apartment" being in a state of readiness, the next step was to take expeditious measures to lay my claims for patronage before the public, and, of course, considering my means, or rather my want of them, it was necessary for me to do so in as cheap a form as possible. Firstly, then, I wrote several "cards", stating that furnished apartments might be had at so-and-so, such a street, and these I distributed to the baker and the butcher and the grocer, with the polite request that they would kindly place the same on view in their several windows. Certainly they all promised to be kind enough, and, with one exception, all were kind enough, for I made it my business to walk round and see that they had done so; and that disgraceful exception was the butcher, who goes round and rings a bell every day to call out his customers, and I should think the foolish man had since repented

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his conduct in sackcloth and ashes, for I have not since purchased my pound of "chuck" steak, or pennyworth of cat's meat from his cart.

Now for my own window. I dare say there are many very nice people who feel a little weakness about putting a card in their parlour window, and so advertising the fact that their incomes are not quite so liberal as could be wished, but I do assure you that it was with quite a different feeling I displayed my pasteboard and its unique notice. You see I was so proud of my half a dozen empty cases, and my two chairs, etc., that I was delighted to let everybody know that I really had furnished rooms. However, I met with one difficulty at the very outset of preparing my advertisement. I could not decide in what form to make it public.

"Board and residence", eh? in an enclosed card with a delightfully embossed border, and suspended inside the window by a prettily-coloured bit of love ribbon. Very sweet and pretty, no doubt: but there are "young ladies" where that card is, and gentlemen might be disappointed on seeing my old phiz at the door; and if there is anything in the world aggravating to women "of a certain age", it must be to read in the male eye that they are considered *passe* and not worth the trouble of being polite to. No, I couldn't stand that, thank you; and so, what do you say to "Furnished Apartments to Let"?

Hum! Apartment is a very fine word; could I conscientiously declare that a room, ornamented, or decorated, or whatever you choose to call it, with six empty cases, and two chairs, was a furnished apartment? I don't think I could, I really do not, although I am by no means a straitlaced person (as my lodgers may find when I come to consider my perquisites), and ready enough to stretch a point where my interests are concerned. But beyond a certain amount of cheek I cannot go, and it would be really a bit too far to declare that I was the landlady of a furnished apartment.

"A Furnished Room to Let". Well, that's sensible-looking, and to the point, and I do like things to seem what they really are, without shirking the matter in the least; but, look here, my card is rather small, and what do you think of the good old-fashioned word "Lodgings"? I have seen that word in a good many windows in a good many "old countries", and I rather like the unpretending style of it. You might lodge anywhere — in an exceedingly well-furnished apartment or in a room with a few well-disposed empty cases doing duty for tables, etc.; nay, your lodgings might be "on the cold ground" for that matter, as the song says, or you might lodge in a gaspipe on Cole's wharf, as does our mythical friend the Peripatetic Philosopher; at any rate, the word describes the thing I have to dispose of accurately, and I have no doubt in the world that disagreeable and evil-disposed persons will be calling me a lodging-house keeper one of these odd days; so, in the name of peace, "Lodgings" be it.

And "Lodgings" it was, in the finest old English letters, you can well believe, barring the L. I am sorry to say I failed in that, and that it was difficult, on a cursory inspection, to pronounce that the complete word was not "Todgings". Nay, I heard one little wretched gamin calling "Podgings", at the top of his voice, one day, in front of my parlour window; but that was entirely out of spite, seeing that he belonged to the house over the way, where "Board and Residence" is displayed within the usual embossage, and with the usual bit of ribbon, although truth compels me to declare that the latter is very considerably fly spotted. No, after I had carefully scraped a too long tail off my capital L, and drawn the other tail as near the o as I dared, I think I may with safety declare that the person must be indeed very ignorant who could, for one moment, mistake the word for anything but what it really was, namely, "Lodgings".

And so I pinned it up nicely between my muslin blind and the window, and then I went out into the street to see how it showed. Why, it showed beautifully, to be sure, and returned, with a relieved mind, to sit in state and wait for the lodger which it might please heaven to send me. Heaven was, however, pleased to very considerably try my patience, for I waited there at that window days — ay, weeks — before I had the extreme pleasure of talking to my gossips about the sayings and doings of "my lodger".

Sometimes one of the passers-by would pause and direct a scrutinising look at my card, and at such times my heart would begin to beat anticipatively; but I soon discovered that those persons were simply interested by the style of my card, and occasionally, I dare say, critically pronouncing on the demerits of my capital L. But of all the disappointments I have to record, that of the old gentleman who was the final occasion (drat him) of the embossed card disappearing from the window of my rival opposite was the very greatest.

I saw this old gentleman appear on the opposite side of the way, and by the keen examining look he was shooting from under his bushy eyebrows, first at one side of the street and then at the other, I was convinced that

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he was a delightful old fellow in search of "Lodgings". How I jumped from my seat, to be sure, and how my heart did really pound at an increased rate when I observed that my card had taken his attention, and that he was making straight across the street in my direction.

He was a rotund, Pickwickian-looking old boy in figure, but he had a sharp and yet half terrified looking expression, not at all suggestive of Dickens's hero; yet I thought him the very acme of old gentlemanliness, as he stood at my garden railing and looked at my old English characters on the card. He looked at it, I say, and thoughtfully shoved up the end of his nose with the knob of his umbrella; and then he hesitatingly turned around toward the street, although his hand was already on the latch of my gate.

I wish that the old —, well, it's no use being uncharitable now that it's all past and gone, but if ever I wished a card at the —, I did the one opposite at that moment, for it caught the old chap's eye, and, like a hawk sighting a fresh quarry, he let go of my latch, and pegged away across the street, to that obnoxious lodging-house keeper over the way.

What could it be? Did my capital L disagree with him, or did the old reprobate catch a glimpse of a chignon and blue ribbon band that I saw plainly enough bobbing up and down behind the blind, and watching the old thing's movements with quite as much interest as myself? Goodness knows; but, at any rate, never was a greater disappointment experienced, and had it not been for some hopes that he might return, I am afraid that old gent would not have been followed by many blessings from my side of the way.

Vain were my hopes in this as in many another matter. The old fellow knocked, and was promptly admitted, as you may suppose; and he must have been a person of decided and energetic movements, for five minutes did not elapse ere he reappeared, and was accompanied by the landlady, with so much empressement, and so many smiles and nods (with a perspective of the chignon and blue ribbon band), that I concluded the arrangement was made.

It was. In less than an hour the old chap returned in a cab, accompanied by two eminently respectable portmanteaus. He was received by the same smiles and nods, and perspective flitting of a chignon and blue ribbon, and finally the door was closed, leaving me, in the fullest sense of the word, an outsider. Little I thought, when I sighed over the loss of that tasteless individual as an inmate of my apartment, how much he would soon have to do with that very apartment, or how soon the occupancy of mine would make the lodgings of my rival over the way tremble to their very foundations.

Look you, I was in one of my most unamiable moods that afternoon, and can you in your heart wonder at it? When my black cat came purring to remind me that her hour of refection was come and past, I saluted her with such a box on the ear that she made tracks under the sofa, and did not venture to reappear until matters were smoother; and as I desperately began to prepare my usual papers "for the press" (ahem!) I maliciously made six blots on one page of my MS, just for the purpose of occasioning that compositor a little extra trouble.

"That will pay him out," I said to myself, "for the absurd nonsense he puts under my signature at times. There was that last article about the cemetery, for instance; didn't he go and print 'brain' for 'train' in connection with 'a girl of the period', as if such a girl could be supposed to have the slightest soupcon of the former."

Slightly relieved by this piece of retaliation, I resumed my position at the window, just in time to perceive a skippy-looking female pause also at the rival house, just as the chignon and blue ribbon was removing the obnoxious card which had attracted and landed the fish I had hoped to secure as my own prize. The fact of its removal did not, however, affect the female in question for she skipped to the door, and used the knocker to such purpose that the chignon and blue ribbon were tossed disdainfully as they disappeared from the window. It was a satisfaction to me, as you may well believe, to see that female disappointed over the way; and that her object was lodgings I did not doubt when she turned her back upon my engaged rival, and walked toward my door.

I must describe that lady to you, not exactly as she appeared to me during her approach, for, of a certainty, I was disposed to look upon everything connected with her attractive just at that moment. She was, then, a lady of no few years; perhaps she carried forty of them on her head, but she tried hard to carry them with an air of youth and vitality, which attempt was also evinced in her style of dressing, that was girlish and periodical to a degree.

Perhaps the tight and awfully high heels of the boots she endured, that in some measure necessitated the skipping movement we must term her walk; but I am inclined to believe that it was at least partially assumed, her attire so corresponded with the juvenile activity it simulated. Her skirts were uncommonly short and scant, her ankles as bony as you could wish, and her skinny shoulders well defined, not by nature, but by the tight-fitting

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waist of a dress of as skinny a make as herself. She carried a parasol in one hand daintily, as if it were a bouquet, and a small leather bag in the other with the tips of her gloved fingers, and by the extreme of the chain, consciously, as if it contained something dirty.

Such was, in appearance, the female who came across the street and after, with some difficulty, in consequence of the parasol and the bag, opening my gate and stepping in with a little extra skip, performed a "tat-a-tat ta-ra-ra-ra-ra" upon my door, that would have astonished you. Depend on it, I did not keep the lady waiting, although I am sorry to confess that I did not obey the summons without a considerable increase of the acidity of temper I had been afflicted with since the old gentleman's desertion; so I opened the door with a jerk and inquired her business with as supercilious an air as if I had kept lodgings in London or Melbourne during the whole term of my natural life.

"Have you got an apartment to let?"

"Yes."

"A furnished apartment?"

"Ye-e-es; what kind of room do you want?"

"Oh! a bedroom — a bedroom for a lady."

"A single lady?"

"Of course; the room is for myself."

"Ah! you are unmarried, then?" (How I should like to have added "still!") "Well, I am very particular as to whom I take into my house, and expect references."

"References! I can furnish the best of references, ma'am, if that's necessary," said the lady, with an angry rattle of the bag chain; "but in my opinion money is as good a reference as you can have, and I am in the habit of always paying my rent in advance."

"That, in my case, miss, you would find to be a necessity. Will you step in and see the apartment?"

"Pray, may I enquire, is it a front room?"

"It is a front room."

"Ah!" and my lady gave a sigh of the deepest relief, and at the same time a glance which I considered to be strangely directed toward the lodging-house opposite. "One question more, ma'am, and a most important one — are there any of the male sex about this house?"

"Male sex!" I ejaculated in the utmost astonishment, as the prim lady moved past me into the hall. "I fail to gather your meaning."

"I mean have you any gentlemen lodgers or other members of the sex in the house — in daily communion, I mean?" she explained with a little simper, and a screwed-up mouth, that I defy you to imitate.

"On, no! I have no gentlemen lodgers; nor are there any males in intimate communion with even the walls of the house, saving and excepting the woodman, to whom you could not have any objection, seeing that he is old and respectable, viz., the father of a large family."

"I'm glad of that — very glad — for I could not even think of risking my character by residing in the same house as a gentleman. I think young persons cannot be too careful."

"Certainly not, miss; that is the reason I have such an objection to gentlemen lodgers" (and I thought sadly of the old gent opposite). "Here is the apartment."

Yes, there was the apartment, looking so admirable and pretty with its cases decorated, and its two chairs doing duty for four, that I thought it the most mortal of pities it should not become the lodging of a nice, tidy, elderly gentleman. While I was thinking so, my young lady was looking anxiously and carefully from the window, as if the apartment she thought of occupying was on the other side of the street, and she was examining its comforts and capabilities. I thought this rather strange at the time, more particularly when she turned suddenly to me and said,

"I'll take the room, ma'am. What is the rent?"

She was in earnest evidently, as her purse was produced from the bag with the rattling chain as she spoke.

Now I have often had occasion to comment on the impossibility of gratifying the craving desires of humanity, and in this matter I saw myself no exception to the general rule. A few hours before, I should have been only too glad to look forward to the probability of letting my apartment to a single lady of irreproachable character, and a strict determination to take especial care of the same valuable article, and here I was positively half sorry that she

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showed so decided an intention to locate herself in my establishment. Simply because she was so ready with her money, after I had declared a hundred times over that rent in advance I would have from king or kaiser! "Why she has never even looked at the accommodation inside the room!" I mentally ejaculated, "and there she is, with the open purse in her hand, staring out of the window, as if the most delightful prospect in the world was a brick house with a dingy iron railing in front."

"And the top of an old gentleman's round bald head, surmounting a little round pair of spectacled eyes, peering over the blind," I might have added, for just at that moment I observed the new lodger opposite taking a peep at the street; and my lodger saw him too, for she drew back and bridled, and looked sheepishly at me, and again devoted herself to the arrangement of terms.

And the terms were arranged, and the old young lady, whose name, by the way, was "Miss Anna Perkins", went to bring her wardrobe from her former lodgings. And the wardrobe was brought, also in a cab, consisting, outwardly, of one small stereotyped boot-box and four dilapidated bonnet-boxes. Two old parasols followed, in company with a white covered umbrella and a pair of dingy goloshes, and, finally, Miss Perkins, with all her belongings, was "fixed" among my ornamented empty cases and my two chairs, etc.

And then came my initiation into the comfort of keeping lodgers. Miss Perkins wanted some warm water to perform her ablutions, and I was under the disagreeable necessity of informing her that she might observe the kitchen fire to be out, and that if she wished for warm water, she must kindle it (viz., the fire), and procure the article for herself. Then she requested my assistance in removing the so-called toilet-table from the window to a dim corner of the apartment, as there was "nothing so pleasant," she declared, "as a seat by the window"; "or so unpleasant," I mentally added, "as for an old woman who wishes to be young to see the wrinkles in her face too plainly."

Early next morning, Miss Anna Perkins was up and out, and all the way to the Eastern Market; and she came home laden with two little red flower-pots; one containing an incipient rose-tree, and the other a very weak myrtle. Added to these were a miniature green watering-pot and a brown-ware teapot of the very smallest dimensions; I was just in the middle of my breakfast preparations when she entered the kitchen and deposited her purchases on the table with a giggle and a skip, and drew the longest breath of relief that her flat chest could afford.

"Oh, I'm so tired! Dear me, you couldn't imagine what a time I've had of it! I don't think I should have really got back at all had it not been for a gentleman, who insisted on carrying my watering-pot and flowers."

"What! one of the male sex?" I exclaimed, in affected astonishment.

"He—he! I couldn't help it. Oh, I do assure you, he perfectly insisted, and followed me so persistently: what could I do, you know? And when he really took my things, almost forcibly, I couldn't struggle in the street, could I, or be rude?"

"Did it not strike you as rudeness on his part at all, Miss Perkins?"

"Well now, there's a great deal in manner, you know, and his was not rude — only anxious to save a lady trouble. And he joked so, I could not, do all I would, help laughing — he—he! He did so enjoy my teapot, and said it was so old-maid-like, that he almost insisted on destroying it, the dear little thing — he—he! But, in spite of all his entreaties, I would not even permit him to carry it for me. It would have looked so, you know."

I didn't like my lodger — there; and I don't at all mind owning it to you as events turned out. I should fifty times over rather have had a crusty old bachelor to deal with than a vain old woman, that would imagine herself youthful. I don't think there is a more despicable object in the world than this latter, and I never meet with one without the inclination to tell her a bit of my mind on the subject. Perhaps, you will uncharitably gather from this that I have reached such an age myself as to render all attempts at revivification useless; but I haven't, you see, although I am by no means a skipping young lady myself.

My morning avocations performed, I resumed my usual seat at the window of the sitting-room, and, the door of Miss Perkins' apartment being open and opposite mine, I had the pleasure of seeing her arrange her flower-pots in the window, and exhibit her loose muslin-clad arm in using the little green watering-pot for their behoof in the jauntiest and airiest manner conceivable. Indeed, she threw the window so fully up, and fluttered around it so persistently, that I began to fancy she was a little more touched in the upper story than I had even at first concluded, when something or other attracted her gaze to the street.

And just as it was, I saw the old gentleman opposite appear over the blind, or, at least, his round bald head and

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his round spectacled eyes. He stared — he stared, and his head appeared to grow shiny, as it certainly did grow red, and his eyes rounder than ever; and then he drew suddenly back, as if from some most disagreeable and astonishing discovery. What could it be? I rose up, and looked up the street and down the street, like a true daughter of Eve, but I saw nothing, save Miss Anna Perkins flourishing her watering-pot, and smirking in such a hideous manner, that I felt certain she also had observed the old gentleman with the round eyes and bald head. "Bah!" I thought, "she's been making eyes at the poor old man, and terrified him out of his wits. I don't wonder at it, for a husband-hunting old fool is abominable."

The old gentleman appeared not again; and, after a couple of hours' hanging and lolling around the open window, Miss Perkins dressed herself to kill, and emerged from the front door, performing the role of an innocent and lively young damsel to her own admiration. The scrap of ground in front of my residence ought hardly to be dignified by the title of garden, but Miss Perkins made the most of it, as a little area to disport herself in before she passed into the street. She plucked a little scrap of privet and a tiny bit of laurestina, and a morsel of stunted briar, and she placed them daintily together, and smelled them with, oh, such an air! and she finally went out, casting a side-glance at the windows over the way, and patting her lips and caressing her lanky cheek with the small bouquet in a most bewitching manner.

And she sauntered up the street towards the Gardens, with an air of saunter that no person could mistake. "I am simply going for a stroll" was so evident in her affected dawdle, that I could not help giving vent to my feelings aloud. "If that old gent over the way does not accept your plain invitation to follow you in a stroll, my most fair Miss Perkins," I said, "then your attentions may in future be devoted to some one of the male sex more worthy of, and more likely to reciprocate them. However, I do not doubt that you are stringing, or trying to string, your bow double, and that your 'gentleman' of this morning has some slight idea of your stroll in the Gardens."

"But, bless my heart, is he an old fool after all?" This exclamation was drawn from me by the fact that a moment had scarcely elapsed after Miss Perkins' disappearance from the street, when the old fellow trotted out from his door, and looked keenly in the direction she had taken. And he looked more than keenly — he looked vicious and determined, and like a man who had made up his mind to a certain thing, and would go through with it, even if all sorts of obstacles should be encountered on the way; but for any sake, I beg you to imagine my complete astonishment when the old chap commenced to trot across the street, and finally, opened my gate, with the same pursed-up mouth and frowning brow, as if his determination had at any rate something to do with the sharp rap he presently gave at my door.

I opened it in a sort of daze, and I had no time to wonder. Perhaps an idea that the lodgings opposite did not suit him may have shot across my mind, but if it did, the old man's first words changed it.

"I have something to say to you, ma'am," he said sturdily, and emphasising his words with a rap of his stick on the ground — "something about that disgusting lady-lodger of yours; and I want to go inside to your sitting-room, where I won't be liable to be pounced upon by the jade in the middle of it." And he looked up the street with such a frown and twist of his mouth, while he clutched the cane more firmly in his hand, as if he would not have hesitated to attack Miss Anna Perkins bodily, should she unfortunately make her appearance.

"Gracious me!" thinks I, as I led the way into my sitting-room wonderingly, and saw the old fellow seat himself in my chair, and wipe his face with his voluminous silk handkerchief. "And now, sir" (aloud) "will you be good enough to tell me your business?"

"Yes, ma'am, I will be good enough — I came here for the purpose of being good enough. Your female lodger is a jade, ma'am, and it is the very greatest satisfaction for me to tell you so." And the fellow drew in his chin and stamped his foot and his stick, and looked at me as if he considered me in league with Miss Anna Perkins, and one of the same species myself.

"I have no doubt, sir, that you express your opinion, however too candidly I may consider you do it, but pray what have I got to do with your opinion of Miss Perkins?"

"Miss Devilskin!" he muttered between his teeth ere he replied. "Yes, ma'am, you've come to the point, and I expected that you would come to the point. What have you got to do with it? Exactly. What will you make by it? Just so. Oh, ma'am, I know the world — so do you, eh? However, it simplifies matters considerably to have you speak your mind out plainly — not one woman in twenty hundred would have done it; they would have pretended innocence, and immaculate honour, and all sorts of trash. Ma'am, I hate women!" Emphasised by another thump of the stick.

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"The women are in despair to have gained your bad opinion, doubtless, sir, but I do assure you that I do not personally care one straw whether you hate them or not. Now, sir, will you please tell me what you are driving at, as Miss Perkins may interrupt you before you are prepared?"

"D—— Miss Perkins — the jade! That old woman is the bane of my existence, ma'am. She is rendering my existence a perfect hell upon earth! I have the misfortune to be well off, ma'am, and the wretch knows it! If I was a fox, ma'am, and Miss Devilskin was a hound, she could not nose me and follow me out with more persistence; but, by ——, I am a fox, as far as cunning goes, and that she shall know before long!"

Good heavens! how the stick did go on the floor, and how red the old gentleman got in the face as he flourished his hat about with the other hand! I do declare to you that I began to think of apoplexy and lunacy, and all sorts of disagreeable things, as the excited speaker went on. Suddenly he turned and faced me fully. Turned with a movement, in which stick, and hat, and eyes, and spectacles, and even the very buttons on his coat, seemed to play separate parts of a most extraordinary whole, and asked.

"Now, ma'am, what will you take for Miss Perkins — the — jade?"

"Take for Miss Perkins!"

"Yes, take for Miss Perkins! What's her selling price? Come now, what price, in round straightforward figures, do you put upon that wrinkled, bedizened old fool, Anna Perkins?"

"Ha—ha!" Oh, I couldn't for the life of me help it, the whole thing was so absurd. "Ha! ha! ha! Oh, sir, I don't think the value I should set upon the dear creature would break any bank; but I do assure you that your meaning is incomprehensible to me. If you wish to buy my lodger, surely you had better apply to herself on the subject."

"Of course, I haven't explained myself," he said, looking a little foolish, and moving the end of his stick uneasily on the carpet. "You know nothing about it — how should you? Bah, I'm an old fool. Look here, ma'am, that jade found me out at a boarding-house in town, where I had been for two years, and where I was very comfortable. She made a dead set at me, I tell you, and in such a barefaced, giggling manner, that I was obliged to bolt for it, to get rid of her. I made a moonlight flitting of it ma'am, and used every precaution. By gad, I even had my letters addressed under cover, so that she might not find me out. Will you believe it, ma'am? I had not been there three days in my new quarters when the wretch took the very room next to mine in the same house, and there she was, grinning at me, and sticking up her bony shoulders before me when I came home to have a peaceable dinner! Man or devil couldn't stand it. Next day, I came here and took a room where there was no other to let, but, by ——, the first thing I set my eyes on next morning is that infernal hag making faces at me from your window! I'll buy her out! By Jupiter, I'll buy her out, if it took my last pound out of the bank! I'm not going to be driven about, like a Wandering Jew, in my old days, by a — husband-hunting old curse!"

He couldn't talk any more; he was completely out of breath, and panting with the rage he had worked himself into. And what reply could I make? What could I possibly know of his meaning in buying Miss Perkins out? However, he soon recovered himself, and went on.

"Now do you know what I mean, ma'am?"

"Upon my word, sir, I do not."

"I want you to turn that old Jezebel out! I want to pay for her room! That's what I want, and I don't care if I pay double rent, but out with her!"

"My good sir, if you consider one moment, you will see that it would be utterly impossible for me to be taking money from you for an empty room."

"Why? I can't see it."

"You simply offer me a bribe, as I understand it, to get Miss Perkins out of your way. I couldn't accept a bribe, sir."

"Bribe be ——, I only want to pay you for losing your lodger."

"Yes, pay me for keeping my room empty. Perhaps, the next lady lodger I got might be quite as objectionable as Miss Perkins."

"Get a gentleman lodger, can't you?"

"I might, sir; but it's only a chance, you know."

"By Jupiter, I'll take the room and live in it myself, before I'll be beaten!"

"And then Miss Perkins will take the one you at present occupy, and you will be simply out of the frying pan into the fire. Depend upon it, if Miss Perkins discovers your plan, she will just step over into your old room."

My Lodger

"Will she though?" he said with, I am sorry to say, something very like a jubilant wink (the old scamp!) "I'll take care of that! The people over there know what side their bread's buttered on. Leave that to me. Now, when does she march?"

"I must give her a week's notice, you know."

"Phew! I'm off to the Dandenong Ranges for eight days, if that's it! At any rate. I'll hide where she won't find me."

"In the Yarra Bend wouldn't be a bad place," I could not help saying, with a laugh.

"Oh. You're a queer one, you are. There's your money, a fortnight in advance. The change for "extras" — lodging—house extras; oh, I know? Good day! I'll be here on the evening of this day week, bag and baggage." And out he went with a chuckle, banging the door after him, and leaving me sitting with the note in my hand, and feeling funny.

What a scene with Miss Perkins, to be sure! but never mind. I should gain three shillings a-week by the change, not to speak of the chance of setting my own cap at the gentleman lodger. The old silly! Little he guesses what he's doing; never mind, we'll see. With these thoughts, came Miss Anna Perkins, skipping to the gate, and casting such sheep's eyes at the window opposite, as made me laugh loud enough to be heard next door, I dare say.

"Oh, I'm quite fatigued! I'm such a creature! but it's lovely in the Gardens to-day, Mrs ——. Oh, dear, how tired I am, to be sure! I must have a cup of tea directly, out of my dear little teapot. He—he! What a nice view you have from this window. Oh, there's Lodgings there too!"

Sure enough the ticket was replaced in the window opposite, and I guessed it was simply a ruse of the cunning old fellow's, and followed it up.

"Yes," I said, "there was an old gentleman came there yesterday, but I suppose the rooms do not suit him, for he leaves immediately. I presume that cab is come to remove him."

Yes. Out came the boxes once more, and out came the old hero himself, and got into the conveyance with an air of triumph, which I should fail to describe. And there stood Miss Perkins, like a transformation, staring at the departure with feelings of disappointment that I could guess.

"By the by, Miss Perkins, I have a rather unpleasant matter to break to you, since I entered into an engagement to let you my apartment yesterday, circumstances have so altered that I find myself under the necessity of giving you a week's notice to leave. If you prefer leaving at once I shall with pleasure return your advanced rent."

If I expected any explosion, I was disappointed. The loss of her game affected her too deeply to leave room for any other feeling, so she turned an old withered face without one spark of her recent animation in it, from the window, and said, "It makes no difference whatever to me; one can always find a room. Is the kettle boiling?"

Well, my ticket with the peculiar L, has disappeared from behind my blind, and I have had an old gent in Miss P's late room, for a week. I have fabricated for myself such a lovely muslin morning-cap (à la veuve of course) in which I make the old chap's chocolate in the mornings, that all the widows in the colony would be breaking their hearts for the pattern, could they only see it. Little that old chap guesses what a dangerous house he's got into, for you see, I'm not an old maid, and I have that funny old gent's measure to a T already. Already, too, he is beginning to think me the most sensible woman he ever conversed with, and admires excessively my plain outspoken manner, "so different from most women," he says; ha, ha! Lord help the old silly!

I mean to tell you something more about my lodgers, for I use the plural, seeing that I am fitting up another apartment to let. I wish I dare give you my address, it would be such a good advertisement, you know; but what would be the use of my writing it, seeing that our Editor would only draw his indefatigable pen right through the middle of it. Ha, there comes my old chap, trotting along, and twirling his stick as if there was not a Miss Anna Perkins in the wide world.

(End.)