

Upton & Hoyle



John C Nash

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Part 4 of the
Miss Match's Misadventures
series

John C. Nash

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Marriage was the accepted career of most women in Victorian Britain. Except that in the ferment of industrial, political and social change, some women wanted to take a different path. Unfortunately, the marriage laws meant the husband took control of all economic decisions. That reality pushed enterprising women to explore various strategies to avoid, at least partially, their loss of independence. Valerie Upton is one such young woman who is determined to be her own person.

Preamble

This is the fourth volume in a series exploring how women in Victorian Britain may have managed to prosper in business. History has often been recorded and analyzed by men. Moreover, the people who left records, letters and diaries were generally those of the educated or monied classes. Those toiling in shops, carrying out trades, and actually operating the day to day details of commerce and industry often left little record of their daily routine. In the series *Miss Match's Misadventures* I have tried to extrapolate from the myriad detail in records I could access to build a credible set of tales of how small-scale women entrepreneurs might have lived and prospered. In doing this, I have tried to address what I imagine may have been their concerns and preoccupations, and to support my conjecture with links to descriptions of the events and environment that my characters would have experienced. However, the resulting account is sure to have errors and holes. I welcome courteous communications that may enlarge and improve my understanding of the people and times described.

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Pounds, shillings and pence

British currency before 1971 was based on the **pound sterling**.

The pound was divided into 20 **shillings**.

The shilling was divided into 12 **pence** or pennies.

The penny was (at least in 1851) divided into 4 **farthings** or 2 **halfpennies** or more commonly **ha'pennies**.

Needless to say, the arithmetic is tedious and error-prone. I hope I have got everything correct in my narrative below.

An amount might be written £23 13s 5¾d or £23/13/5¾

This would be read as

23 pounds, 13 shillings, 5 pence 3 farthings

or perhaps archaically

23 pounds, 13 shillings, 5 pence ha'penny farthing

The "£" is the abbreviation for pounds, but precedes the number. "s" is for shillings. "d" is for the pence. These symbols derive from the Latin 'l' for libra, s for solidus and d for denarius used in the Middle Ages.

When the amount was less than a pound, for instance, 3 shillings and 4 pence, we might write 3 / 4, and say "three and four". Five shillings might be written 5/-.

Colloquially, of course, there were other names for particular quantities. Here is a table of some of the units, where those which had coins or notes are indicated.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ d == 1 farthing (coin)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ d == 1 halfpenny or ha'penny (coin)
- 1d == 1 penny (coin)
- 2d == 2 pence or tuppence. No coin
- 3d == 1 threepence or thrupence (coin)
- 6d == 6 pence or a "tanner"
- 1s == 1 shilling or a "bob"
- 2s == 2 shillings or a "florin"
- 2s 6d == 2 shillings and 6 pence == half a crown or "half crown"
- 5s == crown (coin. Rare in circulation. Largely commemorative.)
- 10s == half sovereign (coin). Note that the 1844 Bank Notes Act prohibited notes under £5 in England, so 10s notes did not exist during the time of this novel.
- £1 == 1 pound or sovereign (coin). No pound notes existed at the time of the novel.
- 1 guinea == 1 pound 1 shilling. No coin or note was available for this at the time of the novel, but it was used as a unit of payment, ostensibly as a way to provide auctioneers with a 5% commission, but often simply to inflate prices.
- £5 == 5 pound note. White with black print, and printed only on one side, it was approximately 200 by 130 mm (8 inches by 5). Hence, in Edward Lear's *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* "They took some honey, and plenty of money, Wrapped up in a five-pound note."

List of characters

- **Adams, Peter** b. circa 1847 urchin. Friend of Matt Moore who helps catch extortionists in July 1861; begins working for Tony two years later
- **Anderson, Arthur** b. 1844 urchin who went to police station when Tony rescued Miss Crouch. b. 1844, hired by Tony in 1857; becomes manager of *Best Bonnet* in Crawley
- **Arbuthnot, Percival** b. 1812 estate agent
- **Bairstow, Evelyn** b. 18240629 former nurse, housemaid, interested in horticulture
- **Baldwin, Frieda** b. 1797 mother to Cassandra Match; co-owner of Brighton Ladies' Emporium
- **Bingham, Rose** b. 1826 secretary to Archibald Turcotte QC. Later wife of Angus Sinclair
- **Brougham Frederick** builder
- **Brown, "Tony"** b. 18390315 Birth name Antonia Crown. Main protagonist of *Moonbeam Shadows* and *The Education of Mr. Brown*
- **Burke, Dora** b. 18350105 nurse/farmworker from Dorset
- **Cantley, Margaret** b. 1818 nurse from Hove
- **Cartwright, Zachary** Son of publican being extorted by crooks in 1861
- **Clarkson, Nicholas** Carpenter / cabinet maker in Crawley
- **Clarkson, Barry** Joins *Upton & Hill* to refurbish furniture
- **Cohen, Abraham** b. 1815 Joshua Goldman's cousin and colleague who marries Cassandra Match April 1853
- **Crown, Ezekiel** b. 1792 d. 1855 Great uncle of Tony Brown who misappropriates estate of his brother
- **Dawson, Reginald** Crook working for extortionists
- **Dixon, Dan** b. 1840 Handyman at Fortescue Rd; succeeded Tom Soulton
- **Dixon, Jack** b. 1842 Brother of Dan. Main agent for *News and More*
- **Dockerty, ??** Estate agent in Crawley
- **Dodds, Jenny** friend of Matilda Evans (Tony's mother) in Albourne

- **Dwyer, Jerome** b. circa 1825 Solicitor – Ezekiel's executor; one of trustees of Tony's inheritance
- **Fraser, Angela** wife of Capt. David Fraser
- **Fraser, Capt David** wounded officer, tenant of Cassandra. Sets up private school.
- **Goldman, Joshua** b. 1801 pawnbroker, Escaped pogrom in Odessa in 1821 with wife and nephew (Abraham)
- **Goldman, Rachel** b. 1802 Joshua's wife, children? (grown and in America)
- **Hackman, Ebenezer** pawnbroker
- **Hackman, Stephen** b. 1838 son
- **Hancock, Henry** retired military officer
- **Hancock, Melody** b. 1843 pregnant daughter of Hector
- **Harper, Jane** b. 1829 nurse in Crimea; nee Mudd. Becomes partner to Tony Brown
- **Horner, Harvey** large man who works as debt collector; marries Evelyn Bairstow to take care of foundling
- **Hoyle, Ian** b. 1839 servant/watchman for *Goldman's* who becomes a key protagonist of the present narrative.
- **Jinks, Sylvester** builder in Crawley
- **Jones, Percival** (Percy) b. circa 1830 engine driver, marries Ethel Souton 1856, and after a tragic still birth February 3, 1859 they have a son Edward on July 20, 1861.
- **Karwowski, Yolanda** b. 1832 Cook/housekeeper for Maud and Henry Mortimer
- **Kearns, Richard** One of two extortionists in 1861; pseudonym Smith
- **Knox, ??** crime boss in east London
- **Lawrence, Caroline** mother of Mary.
- **Lawrence, Mary** b. 1841 dark haired girl met at church that Joseph Upton marries
- **Lester, Timothy** reporter with the *Brighton Herald*
- **Lawrence, Theodore** father of Mary Lawrence; dry goods wholesaler
- **Lawson, Paul** investor in a private hotel in 1861 that gets furniture from *Uptons*

- **Macdonald, Angela** b. 18501031 daughter of Toby; informally adopted by Mortimers
- **Macdonald, Martin** b. 18480427 son of Toby; informally adopted by Mortimers
- **Macdonald, Toby** murders wife in 1857
- **Mason, Audrey** part-time helper when Mary Upton has baby Ursula
- **Match, Cassandra** b. 1819; gives birthday as Sept 9, but actually August 9. In 1836 to Greenock house of ill repute. 1851 to Brighton; born Diana Baldwin; marries Abraham Cohen 18530402
- **McDowell, James** Crimea veteran soldier with injured face b. 1826
- **McNair, Mary** b. 18100510 1839 to Greenock; born in Falkirk, but says Glasgow, St. Enoch's 1807 July 31; in 1842 gave up game to become cook
- **Moore, Elsie** Mother to Matt. Becomes servant at *Uptons* after Matt dies and Mary and Joseph get own house
- **Moore, Matt** b. 1847 boy known to Bobby Pope who helps 18590511 when donkey Annabelle injured
- **Mortimer, Henry** 1829 clerk to Archibald Turcotte QC. Sets up as solicitor in 1854. Marries Maud Soulton Easter 1854
- **Mortimer, Joan Eleanor** b. 18580906 daughter of Henry and Maud
- **Mortimer, William Henry** b. 18550519 son of Henry and Maud
- **Moss, Winnifred** 1800 companion of Frieda; co-owner of Brighton Ladies' Emporium
- **Murphy, Martha** b. 1840 (late). Hired as nursemaid for Cassandra from Workhouse by Ethel Soulton and Adeline Naismith. Orphaned in Liverpool due to cholera 1854
- **Nuffield, Felix** b. 1842 hired from workhouse by Ethel for Fortescue Factory
- **Nuffield, Janet** b. 1840 hired from workhouse by Ethel for Fortescue Factory
- **Nugent, Henry** one of two crooks running extortion racket. Uses pseudonym of Jones.
- **Oliver, Ernest** father of James
- **Oliver, James** b. 18510828 crippled child cared for by *Harper's Helpers*
- **Owens, Phoebe** b. 18290512 nursing colleague of Jane Harper

- **Parker, Betty** criminal partner in extortion gang
- **Pope, Roberta** (Bobby) b. 18470228 street kid Tony rescues Boxing day 1858
- **Shawcross, Alice** b. 18321212 nursing colleague of Jane
- **Sinclair, Angus** b. 1822 Crimea veteran soldier with lost leg and fingers
- **Smith, Vera** b. 1830 wife of Tom Soulton married 13 Sept 1854
- **Soulton, David** b. 18580224 son of Vera and Tom
- **Soulton, Ethel** b. 18350904 marries Percy Jones 31 May 1856
- **Soulton, Maud** b. 18340610 marries Henry Mortimer - Easter 1854
- **Soulton, Tom** b. 18361221 Handyman - marries Vera Smith 13 Sept 1854
- **Stanley, Colin** brother in law of Rebecca Upton, curate in Hove
- **Stanley, Ruth** sister of Rebecca Upton
- **Turcotte, Archibald** b. 1793 Chancery court lawyer
- **Peabody, Priscilla** young woman pregnant as a result of rape
- **Upton, Joseph** b. 18411102. Business partner in donkey cartage with Tony Brown
- **Upton, Rebecca** b. circa 1820. Takes over late husband's furniture business. Mother of Valerie and Joseph.
- **Upton, Valerie** b. 18400610
- **Vance, Molly** b. 1842 Cousin to Robert. Cook to Tom and Vera Soulton
- **Vance, Robert** b. 1841 Works at Saultons' Workshop with Tom and Vera
- **Vance, Ronald** beekeeper and smallholder; father of Robert
- **Vance, Sarah and Nancy** b. Oct 1847 Twin sisters of Robert Vance; hired by *Upton & Hoyle* in 1863.
- **Wells, Brian** Chief extortionist, murderer. Pseudonym Holywell
- **Yarrow, Elizabeth** 13 daughter of Michael
- **Yarrow, Michael** b. 18100909 Widower. Superintendent of railway maintenance. Marries Mary McNair

An Introduction

This is a chronicle centred on a young woman of modest origins but a large ambition who is 20 years old as the year 1861 commences. She was born and has grown up in a house that is part of a second-hand furniture shop that had a stable and yard that have recently been modified to provide more showroom area for furniture. Our heroine, if we may call her that, is Valerie Upton. Her father was an incompetent businessman who died after trying to set fire to a barn where a competitor was storing furniture. He did not know the barn was being used to stable the donkey Annabelle and had a young Tony Brown sleeping there as watchman. Annabelle, in trying to flee the fire, was apprehended by the criminal accomplice of Upton. The donkey bit the accomplice and kicked out, striking Upton in the belly, perforating his bowel so that he died of peritonitis a few days later.

Tony Brown is not what he seems. Born Antonia Crown, he has presented as a young man since infancy to avoid some of the dangers of the street. Taken in by Cassandra Match, now Mrs. Cohen, Tony has recently gained his maturity and recovered an inheritance. This has allowed him to purchase the former pawnshop and stable of Mr. Joshua Goldman, where Tony now runs *Best Bonnet Cartage* and *News and More* newsagents, and where he lives with a former Crimean War nurse, Jane Harper, who runs *Harper's Helpers*.

Joshua and Cassandra, rather than taking advantage of the death of Upton, had Maud Soulton and Rachel, Joshua's wife, approach his widow, Rebecca, and offer to provide some assistance to get on her feet. Valerie, though only 11 at the time, was quite capable in the shop, while her slightly older brother Joseph liked working with Annabelle and another donkey, Moonbeam. Tony and Joseph have run *Best Bonnet* successfully in partnership. Rebecca and Valerie, with some others, have proved shrewd in business also.

In the last year, Joseph has married Mary Lawrence, so space in the Upton premises was tight. In consequence, Valerie now has a room at *Matilda's*, the name now used for the former Goldmans' pawnshop. There Jane Harper has the master bedroom. There are three other bedrooms, and besides Tony and Valerie, there is one occupied by Bobby Pope, who has the title "caretaker". Bobby was a street urchin, daughter of a local strumpet who Tony took in and employed. Bobby has been wearing boy's clothes, but it is clear that puberty is creating changes that will be difficult to conceal. Tony, by contrast, is slender and the outdoor physical work has provided muscles and strength that are uncommon in young Victorian women. Hence we always use masculine adjectives and pronouns for Tony.

Valerie and Rebecca have a very good knowledge of upholstery and soft

furnishings. They are knowledgeable also concerning furniture, which they acquire through Abraham Cohen, Cassandra's husband, and Maud Mortimer, the wife of a local solicitor whose brother Tom Soulton refurbishes items brilliantly with his wife Vera and helpers.

Valerie also maintains the commissions and records for *Best Bonnet* and sometimes handles the counter for *News and More* if regular manager Jack Dixon is away. *Matilda's* also has Arthur Anderson sleep behind the shop – the residential part of the building is on the two floors above. Arthur works with *Best Bonnet*, either with the donkey carts or a hand cart, but he sometimes takes over behind the counter. His presence serves also as some measure of security. Similarly Ian Hoyle works and sleeps at the *Upton Furnishings*. He is only a few months older than Valerie, and has been in the furniture business since he was 12. Now a robust young man, his size and strength are a great help with moving and setting up the furniture in the showrooms.

Valerie's education has been almost entirely informal. However, she has very good skills in arithmetic and in organizing records. Quite early in life, she recognized that reading was a key to learning. For some years Tony slept in a nook at the Upton premises, and always was reading. Valerie took note and, while not as voracious in consuming books and magazines as Tony, still managed to acquire a modicum of general and useful knowledge.

It is now the start of 1861, as we have noted. Born on June 10th of 1840, Valerie is of an age when most young women of the time are seeking a husband. This, however, does not attract Valerie greatly. She has noticed the struggle her mother endured, in part with an abusive husband, then as a widow with two children not old enough to go out on their own. Valerie is determined to achieve sufficient success that she will not have financial worries.

Britain in 1861 is considered a – possibly the – major world power, but its citizenry has a very large fraction who are poor. While there have been social advances, there is still a significant under-class. Valerie realizes that she is not one of the poor, but that her situation is only marginally better.

February 1, 1861

A church clock was striking six o'clock in the evening. There was, in fact, a clock on the wall in the shop above the doorway to the rear that showed the time. Valerie was sitting at the desk used for *Best Bonnet*, though in fact she was now checking the wages and commissions for *Upton Furnishings*, and her chair faced away from the clock. Over time, the practice had evolved of

paying wages once a week, but commissions were settled at the end of the first week of a new month for the whole of the previous month, which happened this month to be today, the First.

Arthur Anderson came into the shop from the rear. Valerie said,

"There you are Arthur. I've got your wages and commissions here in the drawer."

She unlocked the drawer with a key from a pocket in her skirt. The key was on a string that was held to her skirt with a safety pin. She opened the drawer, selected a small envelope, took out the money and a slip of paper that was with it and handed it to Arthur, then re-locked the drawer.

"Thanks, Miss Upton."

"Make sure you check my reckoning, Arthur, and count the money too. I don't want any complaints."

Arthur sidled to the corner of the counter that was used for *News and More* and counted the money, then read the slip.

"Never found you wrong, Miss Upton. Thanks."

As Arthur left, Ian Hoyle came in, also from the back. Though he worked at the Upton premises about 100 yards away, and the front door offered a more direct entry, he used the yard entrance. Valerie wondered if they oughtn't to keep the gate locked and give employees and others needing regular access a key, since the back door was generally kept open. She'd have to have a word with Tony.

"Hello Ian. I'm just checking the calculation for your commission. Give me a moment."

Ian had said nothing, since it could only distract Valerie from her arithmetic. She finished whatever cogitation was involved and said "You did very well last month. Almost two pounds commission."

"I had a bit of good fortune, Miss Upton. That Mr. Jacobs who's setting up a small hotel needed quite a lot of furniture. Over £60 in all. I actually gave a discount because he was hemming and hawing over a table and 10 chairs which were solid enough but not terribly attractive. Still, the profits were about 14 quid."

"Hence 1 pound 8 shillings commission on that lot alone. Coupla' months wages, almost."

"Makes it a pleasure to work here. Well, to work at *Uptons*," Ian replied.

"Yeah. Not much fun when the money isn't coming in. I'm glad you like the work. Are your accommodations and meals agreeable? Everything's been changed over in the last year."

"I've no complaints. Mrs. Upton – Mrs. Mary that is – is a fair cook, and your Mum gives her bits of advice and a hand occasionally. My nook in the back of the old stable showroom is pretty comfortable now there's a small stove there for the really cold nights."

“That’s good to hear. Though I’m sure there’ll be changes.”

“I’d better get back. We’ve been offering to stay open a bit later by appointment. Sometimes people want to come in on their way home from their place of business or work, and if they take the trouble to make an appointment, they’re usually more ready to make a purchase.”

“I should come and take a look at the shop soon. Lots of changes, but I’ve been busy here. We’re still getting used to the place,” Valerie said.

“Usually quiet in the morning. Sometimes get the odd customer early for small items or linens around opening time at half past 8. But from soon after 9 until about a bit after 10 we don’t usually have much custom.”

“Yeah. That was the pattern when I was in the shop.”

Valerie was not alone in the *Matilda’s* shop. The desk at which she sat was at the base of a U that had the front door at the opening, the *News and More* counter on the right and the desk for *Harper’s Helpers* on the left. Jack Dixon was behind the counter, and soon after Ian left several customers came in to collect newspapers or magazines they had ordered, and one bought some barley sugar for a child and gave in to temptation to buy the Illustrated London News. Jack would stay until 7 o’clock, when he would close up. One of Valerie, Jane, Arthur or Tony would almost always be present for this, when the money from the till would be counted and the day’s take separated from the float for the till, with both sets of money as well as one copy of the pair of tally sheets being locked up in the strongbox before Jack left, usually by the back door, to go home. The other tally sheet would be taken upstairs for Tony to review and keep in his own records.

Before the closing of *News and More*, Valerie or whoever was handling the collections and deliveries for *Best Bonnet* would have checked the list of tasks for the present day as well as the morrow and recorded any pertinent notes before putting the logbook and any other documents away, along with any monies collected and handed in. There was quite often little or no activity at the *Harper’s Helpers* desk, even though the business had revenues that exceeded, albeit marginally, expenses. Jane Harper had conceived of her business as an agency, initially for private nurses, intending to employ some of her former colleagues from the Crimean conflict. However, it soon became clear that those wealthy enough to engage a private nurse often came to Brighton from, or at least through, London, and were inclined to look in that metropolis for servants by means of one of the few major agencies for such help.

Allowing for more general personal services that were not directly called nursing brought in a bit more business. Moreover, Jane’s partnership with Tony had led to the purchase of a semi-rural property called Lane Meadow, initially with the intent of accommodating donkeys. However, it soon devolved to being a residence where nurses not currently engaged were able to

live and produce vegetables, flowers, eggs, chicken and rabbit. The ladies in residence, and in particular Evelyn Bairstow, whose officer husband had been killed in the same war in which she had served as a nurse, were more than covering the costs of their accommodation by this unintended work. Evelyn's father had been head gardener at a large country house. They had also been asked if they would shelter a pregnant unmarried young woman whose family wanted a discrete confinement for which they would pay. Lane Meadow offered some comfort and dignity for the unfortunate mother-to-be, Melody Hancock, who had been duped by a titled young man into a fake marriage. While the family paid a fee for the service, Jane and Evelyn had arranged that Melody be paid a modest wage and was expected to contribute to the daily tasks of the Meadow, as they believed, correctly, that this would provide both skills and dignity for the girl.

Jane did have two nurses actually working as such. Alice Shawcross had taken over a gentleman invalid from Jane herself. This assignment seemed likely to continue for a while, as the gentleman had some afflictions that caused a need for help in some daily activities, but otherwise did not seem ready to leave this world. Margaret Cantley was from the Brighton area and had been hired to assist an expectant mother. This lady had been safely delivered of a daughter in the last fortnight, and Margaret's period of service with the family would end soon. However, at one of the church services during the Christmas period, Jane had been approached by a lady who, like herself, had been married quite young, then widowed childless in her early twenties and had only remarried at 39. Now at 41 she found herself with child for the first time, and desired the support of a nurse. Jane asked if Margaret would like to take up this assignment, or spend some time at the Meadow. Margaret was not inclined to garden work, and chose the town job.

Supper upstairs was normally at half past seven. Tonight, Bobby had prepared a stew, and filled shallow bowls with it and set them in front of Jane, Tony, Valerie and Arthur, then joined them. There was a loaf of bread on the table with a bread knife and a dish of butter.

"You've done well, Bobby," Tony said. "On a cold night like this, a hot, tasty stew is just what we need."

"Good for you, Bobby," Arthur added by way of reinforcement.

"The ladies at the Meadow sent over a couple of rabbits and some vegetables. There's plenty more in the pot if anyone is hungry."

Tony asked "Is the stove lit upstairs? I'm finding it a great comfort on a cold night, even though I was never used to a fire growing up."

Given Tony's history of living on the street from infancy to teenage years, being 'used to' a fire would not be expected. Bobby answered "Yes. I lit it an hour ago but the vent is set almost closed so it burns slowly."

Jane asked "Bobby, are your clothes getting a bit tight for you?"

In recent months, Bobby was developing a more rounded female form that was difficult to hide.

“Yeah. I’m bustin’ out a bit.”

Jane continued “Is it possible that you should consider women’s clothes?”

“S’pose so. But I’ve never worn ’em.”

“Would it make sense for you to spend a few weeks at the Meadow to get accustomed to the garb and adopt a change in appearance?” Jane responded.

Arthur said “Might be a good way to avoid lots of questions. Let you get comfortable in new togs.”

Bobby said “I’d been wonderin’ how I’d manage a change, or else how I’d keep hiding these ... well ... ”

The others laughed, and Bobby joined them. This was, after all, the first real family she’d had, and their laughter was with her, not at her.

Valerie said “I had a thought this afternoon when I was paying out the wages and commissions. Ian Hoyle came in via the back. It’s generally open, and I think it might let ... er ... someone looking to steal or rob us get in unnoticed.”

Tony said “I think we assumed there’d be someone around all the time, and there are often one or more of the dogs about.” Jolly and Lim were, at this moment, lying one either side of the now-cooling stove behind the shop. “But Lim generally comes with me, and Jolly’s getting old enough to be dozing somewhere out of the way.”

Arthur added “It may be a good idea to keep the gate to the yard locked, but we’ll then all need a key.”

Tony said “Get some made, Arthur, and make sure we have a record of who has a key and when they got it. And make sure there is some good cord or sturdy ribbon so we have the key handy tied to a belt or round our neck. It’ll be a minor nuisance.”

“We may want to set up a bell pull by the gate in case there are deliveries by those who don’t have a key.”

Tony said “Might want to put the pull somewhere it isn’t too obvious so we don’t get urchins pulling the bell and running away.”

Arthur added “Yeah. Seen that happen. But the gate has a sliding peep-hole to allow us to see who’s there before opening. We could put a knob on the outside so someone could slide open the peep-hole, then put the bell rope just inside where it’s out of sight.”

Jane said “That would mean telling delivery people about the bell, but I suppose that isn’t too inconvenient. I certainly don’t like the idea that we could be surprised by someone trying to rob us. After all, we do count out the takings either in the shop or the back room.”

Valerie said “That was my fear. And it bothers me that we didn’t think of it before. We’ve been here over half a year now.”

“Not so long,” Tony said. “But I think we’re overdue for some attention to keeping ourselves and our property safe.”

March 1, 1861

Valerie had intended to visit *Upton Furnishings* for a good look at the new display spaces for the last four weeks, but diverse distractions had forced a postponement. The distractions did not include the news of the riots in the St. Mary’s Island prison near Chatham Dockyard where prisoners had taken over the relatively new prison, opened in 1856, and the army had been sent in to restore order. There were reports that warders were to be dismissed for failing to prevent the disorder.

The storms of the third week of February did, however, discourage Valerie from walking the short distance to her mother’s premises. The gales had damaged the Crystal Palace and brought down the steeple of Chichester Cathedral, only 30 miles away. Today, however, she came across to *Upton Furnishings* a little after 9 o’clock, said hello to her sister-in-law Mary who was in the kitchen, then to her mother, Rebecca, who was the sole occupant of the front shop.

“I came to take a better look at the display spaces. Haven’t had a chance to pay attention to detail.”

“Are things going well at *Matilda’s*?” Rebecca asked.

“Yes. *Best Bonnet* and *News and More* are doing steady business. Could always be more, of course. But Bobby’s now out at Lane Meadow for a few weeks to get used to women’s clothing, so Jane Harper and I are doing the cooking. We thought of getting another helper, but for a few weeks it doesn’t make much sense.”

“No. And I’m thinking Mrs. Harper isn’t that busy yet with her business.”

“You’re right there. Her plan to hire out nurses didn’t find much custom. She’s getting some commissions now. A couple of crippled children that she or the other nurses help. They even give them donkey rides which helps strengthen their legs and backs. And I suppose the donkeys are a lot less intimidating than horses would be for that. Then they have Melody at the Meadow. She’ll be giving birth this month. There’s been an enquiry from another family with a daughter who was violated, apparently by a stranger who broke into the house.”

“And even though she’s innocent, the family still feel shamed, I suppose?” Rebecca said, not expecting an answer to her rhetorical question. “I’ve actually been getting some eggs from the Meadow. That Mrs. Bairstow is a

whirlwind of energy.”

“Yes. The Meadow is proving productive. Some of the nurses seem to prefer the work on the land, I think. And they’ve made the place quite cosy. By the way, keep the information about Melody under your bonnet. I gather she may go to her Uncle and Aunt as the nanny, and they play the parents. They’ve not been fortunate to have children. No sense getting nasty talk about good people.

“Anyhow, I came over to see the display space. Here looks a lot less crowded, and I like how you’ve got it brighter and more open.”

“Yeah. We want to make this space welcoming, so we put some of the better pieces in here, and we added some display cases and shelves for the linens and small items. Ian Hoyle also got us some more lamps. At some point I might get extra gas lights, but for now we’ll use the gas lights we have and supplement with oil lamps when things are dark outside.”

“Ma. Before I go, I wanted to ask you something.”

“If I can answer it, I will.”

“Well. I’ve noticed Tony and Jane – Mrs. Harper. Sometimes they share Jane’s double bed. Tony has his own room. I know they like each other a lot. But is it ... a ... you know ... a bit odd.”

“Well. They can’t marry, even if Tony does seem a young man. When Joseph and Mary married he signed the register ‘A. Crown, known as Tony Brown’. I think Reverend Wagner was relieved, since he knows about Tony’s birth. So the witnessing was all above-board. Still, if you find someone you care about, perhaps you want to be close. When I first married your Dad, that’s how I felt.”

“Sorry Ma. I should have realized my question might raise some painful memories.”

“Better you ask. Off and on I’ve heard people talk about women who preferred women. Not known any I could say were that way inclined, but given my experience, I can’t say it surprises me. Though two men can get in a lot of trouble. I was fifteen when James Pratt and John Smith were publicly hanged for sodomy in front of Newgate Prison. In all the newspapers.”

“But is it an offence for women?”

“Not that I know about. I overheard a lawyer once ask another the same question you just posed, and the answer was that the law was silent on carnal activities between women. But then the law seems to regard us women as invisible.”

“If we’re invisible, we’d better make sure the money we earn isn’t,” Valerie responded.

“Right you are there, Valerie. Anyway, you’d better go talk to Ian and see the display areas before, hopefully, we get busy.”

Valerie went out the rear door of the shop, which was now clearly set up

to invite customers to the yard which had been largely covered by a shed roof with an openable front that had a display of non-upholstered furniture. The old stable further back held the upholstered items as well as a nook where Ian slept.

Ian was in the shed, polishing a table. The front of the shed had a low wooden wall above which tarpaulins on rollers could be drawn down to close the frontage. There were low double doors in the centre allowing easy movement of furniture in and out. A middle tarpaulin on a roller could be brought down to the top of the doors. At the moment the doors were folded back against the outer part of the low walls and hooked in place, and all the tarpaulins were up.

Without bothering with an introduction, Valerie said "Think we'll ever get glass instead of the canvas?"

"Expensive and easily broken, especially the glass on top of the door."

"What about a second set of rollers with muslin? It would stop the wind a bit and probably the rain too, but let in light."

"We should give that a thought, but the current arrangement seems to work quite well, and we get a lot of light. The roof overhang is enough that rain will only get in if it's really stormy."

"I like the display. Looks like it's in a room, except for the floor."

Ian said "Yes. Except for the cobbled floor. I think I'd like to put in some flooring before trying what we could call the windows."

"If we had a plain plank floor just above the stones, do you think we could then display floor cloths and carpets?"

"Makes sense. Would they be new or second-hand?"

"Floor cloths are likely cut to where they will be placed, or even cut in place. I've not seen them in sales. But carpets certainly come up for sale or auction. Turkey carpets can be expensive. Don't know if we want to consider that form of the furnishings trade. I'm sure there is knowledge that one needs to have to ensure you're getting good quality."

"Or at least so you know when you aren't getting it!" Ian laughed.

"Yes. I think I've some learning to do in that department. I've mostly learned about upholstery and linens."

"In the auction trade I picked up some knowledge of furniture, but I'll confess I was never as well-informed about upholstery as I should be."

"How do you see your progress in the trade, Ian?"

"I started when I was twelve, and it was mainly to earn money to put bread on the table. As you know, I gained my majority last October, and I suppose I should think about what I want with my life, but truthfully I haven't had much chance to put my mind to that task. I've got to say I enjoy working here, setting up the displays. And I also like the work keeping the commissions for *Best Bonnet* organized."

“Ma hasn’t said much, but I’m thinking your hand is behind the displays.”

“Yes. I like to get things looking attractive so the items almost ask the customers to buy them. Of course, then I have to figure out another display once the items are carried away.”

“It would be good to have some part of the shop that has a permanent display of items that we can have in multiple copies,” Valerie said.

“That would mean trading in new stock rather than second-hand.”

“Surely it’s time we started thinking so?” Valerie said. “If we could do so, it could increase our revenues without requiring a lot more space. We could acquire or rent warehousing and ship direct to the customer. But we need to arrange proper terms with the makers.”

Ian said “The quality stuff is made by craftsmen, but I’ve heard some makers are turning to factory ideas now.”

“We’ll need to discover who is making things and then find out if they will do business with us.”

“You seem to have ambitions in that regard,” Ian said.

“Yes. I want to make a success of the business. I suppose I think of it as my business, even as it is shared with family and, in a wider sense, associates who are friends and informal family.”

“Most women your age are focused on finding a husband.”

“I think most people wish for a good partner to share their life and fortune. Unfortunately, marriage often means a woman loses her independence. I know my mother’s experience was not a good one, but you and I know ready examples of couples who seem to be helpful of each other.”

“That is true,” Ian said, but with a wry smile that Valerie thought odd.

“Anyway, I’m going to start trying to get an idea who is making things. I think I’ll start by watching for advertisements in newspapers and magazines.”

“I’ll keep an eye out too.”

“If it interests you, I’ll welcome a collaborator. And you know that the businesses all try to reward initiative.”

“Certainly. Er. ... I was going to say Miss Upton. I’m never quite sure how to address you, since your mother is my employer.”

“Let’s use Valerie and Ian unless we are in front of others,” Valerie said. “I’d better go and make a cup of tea and take Ma one, then I’d better get back to looking after *Best Bonnet*.”

April 3, 1861

Bobby had come back to *Matilda's* over the last weekend. The change was quite remarkable, but the occupants of the house were careful to make as little note of it as possible. The ladies at the Meadow had done a good job of outfitting Bobby with a small but comprehensive wardrobe. Bobby did, however, seem to gravitate more to tasks on the premises rather than outside. This caused Tony no inconvenience. It was useful to have a "caretaker" who looked after the place and ensured there was food, drink and clean linen and clothing. However, just before dinner, Tony had come into the kitchen and asked

"Bobby, Are you content in the role of caretaker, but doing both cooking and cleaning, as well as shopping for food as needed?"

"Yes. Mr. Brown. Suits me fine. There's people about in the shop, so if I want a bit of conversation, I take 'em a cup a' tea. And the ladies at the Meadow taught me some things about cookery, as well as how to make bread and other baked things."

"I think everyone liked the bread last night."

"Yeah. 'ad to keep Arthur from scoffing the lot. I think I'll aim to bake three times a week and keep the yeast going. I'll do it Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but the last one I'll do an extra loaf or two depending on how much we use."

"It's a bit of a change for you."

"Not so bad. It was a good idea I went up the Meadow for a bit. I think a lot of folk haven't realized I'm the same Bobby."

After dessert was finished that night, Arthur said his excuses and left to go meet a friend. After the clack of the gate to the yard closing, Valerie said "Constable Shaw brought round the Census form today. It's on the sideboard there. It's supposed to be filled in by the head of household, but I'm not sure who that is for us here."

"I suspect it will be me," Tony said.

"Will you fill it in as Tony or Antonia?" Jane asked. "I know it's an offence to fail to fill in the form, but I don't know if it is wrong to use your common rather than birth name."

"My inheritance had to use my birth name, so I'll stick to that. Then the worst I can be accused of is wearing men's clothing. Even if that has caused some consternation elsewhere, for example, with the Wigan female coal miners, I've not had any fuss here, and plenty of people are aware of my true gender."

Valerie said "I think I read somewhere that the enumerators are supposed to keep secret anything on the forms, though that would be difficult to truly

enforce.”

“Given that Constable Shaw has already shown his colours on the subject and has proved a friend, I’ll use Antonia. Looking at the form, I don’t think I have to say more than I’m single, and put my age under the male or female column. For the rest of you the only addition is your relation to me. I propose to put Arthur and Bobby as servants, since that is a suggested category, and Jane and Valerie as lodgers. Those titles are not really how I think of any of you, but unless you have better ideas, that is what I will do.”

“Your suggestion seems sensible and unlikely to cause notice,” Jane said.

“Yeah. It won’t get anyone in a snit,” Valerie added.

“We can fill in most of it now, unless you think you won’t be here on Sunday night. Or we can write down the information in pencil so I have it ready for then. Do any of you remember when Arthur has his birthday? I know the year was ’44.”

“March 31,” Valerie said. “He’s 17 now.”

May 4, 1861

It being a Saturday afternoon, Valerie had finished all the tasks that needed doing by 4 o’clock. Supper would not be until half past 7, so she decided to take a walk on the front, something she had not done for a while. As she crossed onto the seaward side of the Promenade, she saw Ian Hoyle standing watching the waves.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Hoyle – Ian.”

“Good afternoon, ... er... Valerie.”

“Are you, like me, out for a stroll?” Valerie asked.

“Indeed. Your mother said she and Matt Moore could take care of the shop. Business of a Saturday afternoon after three o’clock is generally quiet, though because Saturday is when some Londoners come down, there can be customers, and it seems that if there are, the purchases are worthwhile.

Would you be inclined to walk together?”

Valerie answered “I would welcome the company. Let us proceed together. Indeed, I was wondering if you have given thought to our selling newly-made furniture.”

“Actually I have, though my efforts in that direction could not be called noteworthy. But I did write down the names of a couple of firms who seem to be offering furnishings. However, my notes are back at the shop. I suppose I should have written to them already, but it seems other tasks took precedence.”

“Actually, I wrote to two companies, so we should compare our notes before more communications are sent. It would look slapdash to send two letters from related organizations, or else would be interpreted as competitors vying for product.”

“Do you recall the names?” Ian asked.

“The one that struck me as possibly the most promising was Heal’s. There was also a Hampton’s that I wrote to, and I have been meaning to write to another called Howard’s. It is passing strange that all the names begin with an H. No, I am wrong. There is a William Smee, and they are near the Barbican.”

“I had seen the advertisement for Heal’s as I recall. And I have another H. It is Harris Lebus, and they apparently have manufactures in the East End of London, though where I learned that I forget. What I did see was an advertisement that included the word "wholesale", and I have an address.”

“Then we should write to them soon. Once we get some replies, I would like to visit the premises of these firms. I believe one can get an appreciation of their general attitude to business, and it is always useful to have faces to accompany names.”

“I agree wholeheartedly.”

They walked for perhaps a minute or so in silence, then Ian said “I do have a ... er ... reservation. Or perhaps a question.”

Valerie laughed. “Then you had best out with it.”

“It is that in our world men often discount the business abilities of women. From the example of your mother and yourself, as well as Mrs. Cohen, Mrs. Yarrow and Mrs. Mortimer, it is clear that women can conduct a business with great acumen. My concern is that first impressions may prevent you from proceeding past the door with some firms.”

“Such concerns are not outside my knowledge. In fact, I was going to suggest that you accompany me if we decide to pursue some enquiries. There are additionally concerns for my personal security. Sadly a woman alone, especially a woman of my age, may be taken to be in ... er ... a different sort of business.”

“Unfortunately, that is also true. I would very much like the chance to go to see furniture suppliers and to learn more about the business. And I have never been much outside Brighton or Lewes, save for a trip to Portsmouth and one to Eastbourne.”

“Ma might be a bit chary of us going together. We’d have to get rooms for a night to avoid having to arrange an afternoon appointment then rush to catch the train soon after six o’clock, which I think is the last of the day still. However, the new Grosvenor Bridge that opened recently may have given rise to a new schedule.”

“Yes. I suppose your mother might think our going together unsuitable,

but taking another person as chaperone will increase the costs even further.”

“I’ll talk to her and see what she thinks. If we are to start selling new stock, then at some point we have to have suppliers, and I’m not going to order from people who are unknown to us.”

“Should we ask Mr. Cohen if he knows anyone in the trade?” Ian asked.

“Yes. Definitely. In fact, I’ll write him a note tonight and see if Matt can take it round, and I’ll mention what we hope to do. Unless I’m mistaken, he and Mrs. Cohen might be interested in sharing the investment in new stock. It’s pretty difficult to sell things without having them available, but carrying that stock ties up a lot of money. Not to mention the risk of damage or theft. And if he is interested, Ma might accompany us and the concern about the propriety of the two of us alone would not arise, though you would miss the opportunity, which would be a pity.”

Ian said “Say. There’s a tea room there. Would you like a cup and perhaps a scone or pastry as my treat?” Ian asked. He actually surprised himself, as he had never issued such an invitation to a young woman before. Indeed, he was not generally inclined to seek the company of young women, a matter that was giving him some concern.

The café had some fruit scones that Valerie chose and Ian shared with her. The conversation moved to the recent news of the outbreak of hostilities in Charleston Harbour in South Carolina.

Ian said “They’ve been spoiling for a fight for a while. The South wants to keep their slaves to run their plantations. The North is industrial and has many abolitionists.”

Valerie responded “And here in Britain we’ve done away with slavery, but we buy most of our cotton from the South. You came just after Jeremiah Quigley left for Canada. He’d escaped a plantation in Georgia. The way the negro people are treated just ain’t right. But with all the industry around Manchester, I wonder how our government will respond.”

“I believe I met Mr. Quigley when he came with *Best Bonnet* to pick up some items from an auction I worked, but I didn’t get to know him.”

“I didn’t know him that well. From the others I got the impression that he was a hard worker. Very polite to everyone. Then he learned that some of his family from whom he’d been separated had escaped to a settlement in Upper Canada at the northern end of what I believe is called the Underground Railroad, though it’s not rail at all, of course, but a series of escape routes.”

Ian said “I think England will be divided on which side to support. The aristocracy probably finds the Southerners have a lifestyle that is similar to their own, while the working people see the injustice of slavery, and also are more alike the industrial workers of the American North. That may change if cotton workers start losing their jobs, as they almost certainly will if the North is able to blockade the export of cotton. And I’m sure that our own

government is going to want to avoid getting into war. We've seen the cost in money and men, including our friends at 23 Fortescue Road."

"Yes. Mr. McDowell and Mr. Sinclair were maimed, and I suspect Captain Fraser's injuries are simply not apparent thanks to clothing. Mrs. Harper and her colleagues at the Meadow saw plenty of horrors I am sure. I think Tony told me Mrs. Harper had a close friend – another nurse – who died of fever. And now I think about it, Mrs. Bairstow's husband was killed in the Crimea. She was there, but had to pay her own way home. Terrible."

Ian added "The government also has the bills and the casualties from the Indian Mutiny to deal with too. They took over the Indian Army from the East India Company, and I believe there have been costs to the Crown therefrom. So I would not expect the government to want any involvement on either side, though I'm sure there will be businesses happy to sell to anyone who can pay."

"We haven't had any comment from the Prime Minister yet," Valerie noted.

"Palmerston'll have to make an announcement sometime as to what our policy will be, if only to provide guidance and protection to British citizens and property."

Concerning Valerie

We have talked of Valerie's activities and interests, but not said a lot about her. In appearance, she was neither tall nor short, neither fat nor skinny. In accord with her daily work with the log books and ledgers, she wore spectacles to read and do close work. Her face had strong features, while the fashions of her time judged softer curves as pretty. In sum, by appearance Valerie was often overlooked. This had been, to date, welcome. She had, without explicit explanation, understood that her father had not treated her mother well. This was a discouragement to the normal interest of young women in being courted. Moreover, Valerie had come to find great satisfaction in her success in business. For nearly a decade now she had been working in the shop and with the various commercial activities of its associates. Outside of work, she liked to read, and spent a lot of time in that pursuit. However, she did attend concerts that were offered quite frequently. Her social life was mainly with her family and business associates, though she would from time to time visit her Uncle and Aunt Stanley in Hove, where Uncle Colin had been a curate and now promoted to vicar on the death of his predecessor.

In the last year, she had realized that she should make some active decisions on where to take her life. People were starting to notice that she

had not had suitors. Her essential invisibility had no doubt been a factor in this. Perhaps it was time for some change, though she knew that she did not find children – particularly babies – attractive, especially if it meant she would have the pain and mess herself.

With the time she had spent in business, but living at home, she had hardly spent or even received any of her wages or commissions. Indeed, at the start, there had been no arrangement. Only later did she and her mother realize one evening that they were paying others but not Valerie. Without fuss, a rate was agreed of 4 shillings a week and was backdated. No money was paid, but a new page was started in the account books. That page – now pages – showed that some 48 pounds 12 shillings and 3 pence were due her from the business and its strong box.

There was another page in the accounts that showed Valerie had lent *Upton Furnishings* – essentially her mother – 25 pounds to aid in the construction of the shed and refurbishment of the stable and shop, and that she would be paid 5 % interest per annum. 25 shillings would be added to her account each year while the amount was outstanding.

For a young woman of her time, she was well-off. However, she wanted more, though not necessarily just money. It was the making of money and creating work for others that gave her satisfaction rather than the money itself. The question was, how to do this.

Later on May 4, 1861

Valerie's note to Abraham Cohen, asking if he knew of any manufacturers of furniture, came almost at the moment he was pondering whether he should consider modifying his own furniture trading to include new items. Matt Moore had arrived with the note after dinner on the Saturday evening. The Cohens had just said goodnight to their daughter Catherine who was soon to be five. This evening Cassandra and Abraham were planning a quiet time in reading.

“What is it that Valerie wishes, Abraham?”

“She is asking if I know of any manufacturers of furniture. I assume her thoughts are that we can only expand our trade if we have sufficient items of a type and quality to interest our customers.”

“Merchants without merchandise will go out of business,” Cassandra observed.

“Indeed. And just this afternoon I was wondering myself if I should consider trading in new items for precisely that reason.”

“Would you then need a shop or showroom?”

“Possibly, but I don’t have one now. My business now is to acquire items either by commission or speculatively. The latter I have improved by *Soultons*, then sold on by *Uptons*. The commissioned items go direct to the customer.”

“Do you feel that you would like premises?” Cassandra persisted.

“I think that I like the idea of premises, but the reality of having to be open for customers each day is ... what shall I say ... oppressive.”

Cassandra laughed. “That is, however, the reality of trade, my dear. Think how quickly *Bartlett and Jones* or the *Emporium* would be out of business if only opened when we felt like so doing.”

“Valerie’s question suggests she may be thinking about increasing business in some way. However, I’ve no idea whether this indicates the current *Upton Furnishings* has more space than Maud and I can supply.”

“She is almost a closed book,” Cassandra said. “One does not notice her, but I cannot think of an occasion where she has not proved exceedingly competent, yet with almost no fuss or fanfare.”

“Well. I know the names of a couple of manufacturers, but I’ve no acquaintance with any of the people. Still, I think it could be very important to exchange ideas with Valerie and her mother. Through sharing ideas with our associates we have, I believe, done very well, often through activities we did not dream were part of our path to prosperity.”

Cassandra said “Is it possible that Valerie may want some investment to enlarge the premises or open a new showroom? That would allow you to undertake some interest in new furnishings without the daily responsibility to be present.”

“As usual, my dear, you have a remarkable clarity of appreciation of the possibilities.”

May 12, 1861

Cassandra and Abraham were invited to lunch with the Uptons a week later. They walked back from Church to *Upton Furnishings* with Joseph and Mary to join Rebecca and Valerie at the dining table.

By agreement, discussion of business was deferred until the end of lunch. Given the hostilities in the United States, there was plenty to talk about, though as yet reports were clearly incomplete and confused. The British government had made no statement of policy on the secession of the Southern states, nor on how Britain would treat the belligerents and any of their vessels which entered the territorial waters of the British Isles. Of course, around the luncheon table, there was lively speculation about all sorts of possibilities.

After the pudding with custard was finished, Abraham said “Valerie. Are you ready to tell us your thoughts about trading in new furniture as well as second-hand?”

“Yes. That was my purpose in sending you a note the other day. It seems to me that there could be opportunities.

“First, we now have more space to display items, though I am realizing that an ideal display needs a very large space. Indeed, the ideal space for display would not be economic.

“Second, I believe that there are times when we could propose to supply furniture for establishments wanting a block commission, in particular hotels. The new Victoria Station will, I understand, offer more, and more convenient, trains, and that will encourage new hotels. Even though we do very well in our supply from you and Mrs. Mortimer, with excellent refurbishment from *Soultons*, we cannot offer block orders of items in the same style.”

Abraham said “I have had somewhat similar thoughts. How do you propose to proceed?”

“I believe that I need to inform myself which suppliers would be willing to trade with us, and what would be their prices and conditions. There are certain to be many details that could cause us grief if we do not have them in mind when preparing proposals or making purchases. So my first step, as in the note, is to find out who is making furniture. Then I would like to meet the principals of such businesses so I know who are my suppliers.”

“That seems sensible. It would be foolish to proceed without having solid arrangements in place.

“But do you have sufficient capital to carry a reasonable-sized commission? For example, could you cover the costs to provide beds and accompanying items for, say, ten hotel rooms?”

Valerie laughed. “At this moment, I’ve no idea what would be the wholesale price of such a commission. That is, naturally, the sort of information – or rather the basic data needed to calculate such information – that I must learn about.

“However, regarding capital, we, that is, my mother and I, would be pressed to cover the costs of a project such as ten hotel rooms in a consistent style. While we have some monies and are now doing quite well in *Upton Furnishings*, we would want to join with others like yourself to carry out such jobs. For myself, I would prefer shared investment to a loan. Mother. What is your opinion?”

Rebecca said “Truthfully, your initiative here is welcome, for I have been rather preoccupied with the changes to our premises and our household with the marriage of Joseph and Mary. But I would agree with Valerie that investment would be preferred. It also gives us colleagues rather than lenders. But I can see that for the future, *Upton Furnishings* must pursue a wider

source of supply. We already, of course, sell new items in the soft furnishings and linens.

“Joseph. If we did get commissions like the example Mr. Cohen suggested, would *Best Bonnet* be able to provide cartage and possibly installation?”

“I was thinking that might be a big boost in business for us as you were talking. Tricky for us, though. Don’t want to engage a bunch of blokes to do the work who we don’t know, then have to lay them off soon after. Wouldn’t do our reputation any good.”

Cassandra said “Our practice of sharing tasks across the different businesses we run has been a key to much of our success, but I would reckon a commission like 10 rooms, unless we were to get a steady stream of them, would be beyond our capabilities.”

Valerie rejoined “On the other hand, a well-planned delivery could spread the movement and installation over time, and may well suit the furniture manufacturers, since they would then not have volumes to store and move, but could proceed in more convenient lots.”

“Then it seems we are back to the starting point,” Abraham said. “We must first find and meet with furniture makers. I have some names and I believe Valerie does too. Several are in London. I will propose that Valerie and I contact them and arrange to meet with them, preferably with the timing so we do not make multiple journeys.”

Cassandra said “Abraham. You and I could combine such a journey with a couple of days to see some sights and go to the theatre.”

“Yes. Yes we could.”

“Ma. I think that would interest me as well. Do you think Mr. Hoyle could be left in charge if you came with me?”

Rebecca answered “He’s been doing well with the sales. And he has a better eye than either of us for a good display of the goods. Yes. I think we could leave him in charge for a few days. Joseph and Mary will be here, and I’ve not had a chance to tell Mary that I think she’s been doing well in both the house and shop.”

Mary said “Thank you, Mother. I’ve been enjoying doing things. At home, Father would not let Mother and I participate in the shop. I think he does not realize that women are perfectly capable of trade.”

There was little left but to decide who would write to which suppliers, and that was done in but a few minutes. The Cohens left and Valerie walked back to *Matilda’s* and wrote the two letters she had agreed to do, then made fair copies for her files.

In her room, Valerie had a small escritoire, but it did not afford storage for files. She walked back to *Upton Furnishings* and found her mother reading at the kitchen table.

“You’re back! Forget something?”

“No. Just realized I don’t have a good place for keeping letters and documents related to this new venture. So I thought I’d take a look at what we have in stock in the hope there might be something.”

“What’re you thinking of? A cabinet would be a bit big for your room. Almost want something like Tony’s seaman’s chest.”

“Yeah. That’d do fine. But I think that is an important memento for him. But maybe we have something else.”

“The other day there were a couple of wooden boxes about 12 inches by 12 by 18. No top on them though. I think Maud picked them up so she’d have something to put some small items in, but she did list them in her set of prices. I think they’re out in the back of the old stable by Ian’s nook.”

Indeed there were two boxes as described. Valerie brought them back over to the kitchen.

“I’ll take ’em, Ma, unless Maud thinks they’re made of gold.”

“I think she suggested sixpence, since they’re fairly solid and the wood on the outside is varnished and there’s handle holes at each end. Nice, actually.”

“Better charge me 1 and 6 so the business gets sixpence profit.”

Rebecca laughed. “You do most of the book-keeping, but I’ll watch for that grand profit.”

May 23, 1861

In the following week and a half, Valerie did not greatly notice that the cog wheels of life were turning so that her clock of fortune was soon to chime important changes.

On the morning after the luncheon conversation with the Cohens, she was talking with Tony as he reviewed the day’s assignments. Mentioning that she was hoping to meet with furniture manufacturers, Tony said “Have you given thought to how you will be attired for such meetings?”

“Oh. That’s a point. I recall how different you looked in the suits Maud found for you. I wonder what I should wear.”

“You could do worse than talk with Mrs. Baldwin or Mrs. Moss at the *Brighton Ladies Garment Emporium*.”

“Yes. Though they tend to serve a very prosperous clientele. Still, it may be time for Ma and I to present ourselves as we wish to become.”

“I’ll be interested to see the results, and I know neither you nor Mrs. Upton are frivolous.”

Indeed, Rebecca and Valerie went the next morning to the *Emporium* and each ordered what they eventually called their trading costume. Beyond

these particular outfits, they started examining the stock of other places and managed to find suitable items that would contribute to alternative attire when meeting with prospective business associates.

It was not that they ever appeared during their working days in poor or shoddy clothing. However, there is a difference between attire suited for work in a sales showroom or when performing clerical or bookkeeping work and the garments in which one wishes to conduct negotiations for important contracts.

On their way home from the *Emporium*, they happened to meet Maud Mortimer and her adopted son Martin McDonald. Martin and his sister Angela had been orphaned when their father, in a drunken rage, killed their mother. Tony had arranged that Maud would take the children, then but 9 and 7, and Maud and Henry decided to make them part of their family. Martin was no scholar, so Henry and Maud had him learn some practical skills of reading, writing and arithmetic at the *Fraser Academy* run by a group of invalided veterans of the Crimea who were tenants of Cassandra Cohen at 23 Fortescue Road. He still attended occasionally to learn some history and geography, but most days worked with Maud or with *Best Bonnet*. He was now a few days short of his 13th birthday. The outdoor activities suited him, and moving furniture increased his strength.

Maud used to take Tony and his donkey Moonbeam and her cart to auctions and sales when scouting for furnishing items to purchase. She would still do this when she had intelligence that there may be a number of items, or large items, to be shifted. On the other hand, she had more recently purchased one of Saultons' hand carts from Tom Saulton, who was her younger brother. For many sales, there were only one or two items of any size, and the hand cart could handle a surprising load. On days like the one in question, Martin would push the hand cart, but if large purchases were made, he would run to *Matilda's* and arrange for their conveyance. Maud also had a pair of canvas bags that she could use for small items or soft furnishings, an area of her trade that was gradually growing as she learned which items would yield a sensible profit.

So it was that Valerie and Rebecca met Maud and Martin going in the counter direction.

"Hello Mrs. Mortimer, Martin," Valerie said. "No acquisitions today?"

"We've just dropped them off at your shop for you to decide if you are interested," Maud answered. "The furniture was being bid up far higher than I'm prepared to pay, but there was quite a bit of plain crockery and cutlery that might suit a school or other institution. We got that for not too much and I'll be surprised if we don't all do well. A few other items that might be of interest, but I'll not be offended should you reject them."

Rebecca said "Some of the oddments that seem almost ridiculous sell for

a good profit. Your eye is generally sharp.”

Maud said “Thank you. Lately, I’m a bit distracted. Angela and Martin can take care of themselves, but they are asking questions about what they should seek in life as occupation. And the younger pair, well ... you can guess. And Vera, Tom’s wife, is about to deliver another child.”

Valerie said “Life does advance,

“We should tell you that we’ve been talking to Mr. Cohen about investigating suppliers of new furniture. We’re thinking that there are times when customers want things we don’t have, or that we might like to bid on commissions for furnishing sets of rooms, as in new or refurbished hotels and boarding houses. We won’t be abandoning the second-hand trade, however.”

“Actually, Mr. Cohen and I had touched on ideas in that direction too, but I must confess that with the children my contribution was but a few words of general interest. However, I would most like to be kept informed. If a manufacturer manages to offer an item new for around the same price as we can propose second hand, we’d better avoid trading in such items unless we are happy collecting used furniture. As a buyer, I need to know the prices, and I confess that at the moment I rely on my instincts and whatever Martin and I can glean from talk at the sales or our own observations in the shops.”

“We’ve done very well collaborating these past few years,” Rebecca said. “I’d not have thought a decade ago that we would. In fact, Valerie and I have just been arranging suitable attire for meetings with furniture manufacturers.”

“I hope it goes well for all our sakes,” Maud said. “Now Martin and I had better get along. I think he has some commissions with the handcart for *Best Bonnet*, and it would not surprise me if Mr. Mortimer does not have some legal documents for him to deliver.”

Yet another shift of a gear had come in the post today. Valerie received replies to both her letters of enquiry, and they were agreeable to a meeting in the near future. Abraham also got replies, but one of the companies said that they intended to manufacture only for sale through their own organization. Still, there were now three potential suppliers to meet, preferably in a single trip.

Outside of everyday life in Brighton, Queen Victoria had, on May 13, issued a Royal Proclamation warning all citizens to observe neutrality in the dispute between the American states. The weighty topic of this proclamation was such that it had one sentence of no less than 798 words before its full stop, and another with 561 words. It is likely our characters were aware that the government had expressed its official neutrality from seeing headlines in the newspapers, which at *Matilda’s* were on display courtesy of *News and More*. However, we may doubt that they noted the peculiarly long sentences. If anyone did count the words in these long sentences of the proclamation, it

would be Olaf the cat. Despite the name, Olaf was female and, following a tradition in an earlier premises, had a low basket in the window that afforded a prime view of a display of today's papers and magazines. A modest card in front of the basket said "Even the cat loves to read our magazines."

On the other hand, Arthur mentioned over dinner one night that the company of Thomas Cook, already known for providing package tours in England, had organized one from London to Paris. There was some back and forth around the dinner table as to the advantages and disadvantages of the packaging of the tour. The consensus came down in favour of avoiding the work of arranging the transport, accommodation, meals and visits to attractions, though Tony pointed out that if one were familiar with the destination, then one might prefer that one's time were open to spend more flexibly. This would be especially important if the weather were to prove unsuitable for whatever activity the tour organizer had scheduled.

During the discussion of package tours, Valerie was rather quiet, mainly because, previous to this evening, taking such a tour had not occurred to her, and the idea fizzed and bubbled through her imagination.

London diversions

It was the second week of June that Rebecca and Valerie joined Cassandra and Abraham to travel to London to meet with three manufacturers of furniture. They would be travelling on June 10, Valerie's 21st birthday, so there was a special birthday dinner on Sunday, June 9. For their sojourn in London, our group booked two nights in an hotel, as it was time consuming to get around the city. With none of them familiar with the geography nor the means of transport, they hired a clarence for each day. This was large enough to carry them all, but rather slower than hansoms. The clarence was sometimes called a growler because of the noise its wheels made on cobblestone roads. Still, following Abraham's suggestion, they hired one for each of the last two days so that they would not have the bother of hailing one after meetings in the East End.

We shall not detail the meetings. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the men they met – for indeed all their contacts turned out to be men – tended to talk to Abraham. It was only when Abraham made a point that he was mainly a buyer and trader of furniture and that Valerie and Rebecca were the operators of a showroom that the women got any attention. In one instance, Cassandra – who in her work at *Bartlett & Jones* encountered upholstery materials – caught out the director of one factory by asking whether he preferred one or another of two named makers of upholstery fabric. It was

clear that he was almost an absent owner. To his credit, his response was “My, my, Mrs. Cohen. You seem to know your stuff. I will ask that my upholstery foreman join us.”

This foreman was well-informed and a lively but collegial exchange between him, Cassandra and Valerie ensued, which concluded in an informal agreement to exchange ideas by post.

From the meetings the group came away with some catalogues and lists of products with current prices, as well as some general guidelines on what could be made to order. It was clear that there was great interest in the possibility of furnishing whole buildings to a common style, and there were conversations about different modes of operation. Abraham was instrumental in steering the discussions to consider the various advantages for each side of simple agency, agency plus delivery and installation, or wholesale purchase. Rebecca in one instance also asked whether a factory that made a large order kept a stock of the upholstery fabric for repairs. “You might want to offer to do that at an added price, or else provide the material to the buyer. It is inevitable that hotel furnishings will suffer spills, tears, or cigar burns.”

The facial expressions of the manufacturers showed that they had not considered such possibilities. Later, Cassandra said “I am wondering if, supposing we get a chance to furnish a building, we should not offer long-term maintenance and ensure we have the wherewithal to do so. After all, *Soultons* can probably do the work if we can secure it at a favourable price. Otherwise items have to be shipped to London and back. Tom could possibly even arrange to do work on site.”

One of the men, George Newcombe, who was a manager with a firm called *Howards* that they visited asked “It appears you are not all from the same firm. Can you explain your business relationship?”

Valerie, somewhat to her own surprise, answered “We have several independent businesses that collaborate, even to the extent of sharing workers when there is a particular demand or emergency. My mother and I have *Upton Furnishings*, while my brother shares *Best Bonnet* cartage to enable us to make timely collections and deliveries. Mr. Cohen buys and trades, but sends us items on consignment, often after they have been refurbished by *Soultons Workshop*. I noted you have at least one of Tom Soulton’s hand-carts in your factory, so you can confirm the quality of his work. Then there is Maud Mortimer, Mr. Soulton’s sister, who does much the same as Mr. Cohen, and Mrs. Cohen runs *Bartlett & Jones* haberdashery, from which we often acquire materials for upholstery or linens. There are also some other activities but not related to furnishings.”

Newcombe responded “That is a lively group of complementary actors. Would a single larger firm not be more efficient?”

Abraham answered “Our current structure allows for each of us to invest

in time, money and other resources. The recent, and apparently ongoing, changes in the laws concerning companies will perhaps make it easier for modest investments to be pooled without the potential for catastrophic loss.”

“Ah yes. That makes sense. But for the ladies, surely there is the risk of a profligate husband?”

“Thanks to Maud Mortimer’s husband, who is a solicitor, I learned of the possibility of a separate estate,” Cassandra said. “Mr Cohen and I married somewhat later in life than most couples, and my fortune was such that we felt it important that it should be safeguarded from claims quite apart from those of the racetrack or card table.”

Newcombe said “You offer me a very different perspective than I have been used to. But let us hope that we will find profit in joint endeavours.”

Outside of their business meetings, the group had arranged to attend a theatre performance and also decided to go to the Canterbury Music Hall, where they were able to get a light meal along with entertainment.

For Valerie, all these experiences were new. Indeed, they were new for Rebecca also. Given that their time was quite occupied, they did not discuss their experiences much at the time. It was in the train home on the third day that Valerie asked “Ma, Did you enjoy your time? You haven’t said much.”

“I did enjoy myself. Very much. That I didn’t say much was likely because I wanted to watch, listen and learn. I’ve not had a life where I could go places and see things. Your Father and I married young, then ... well ... you’ve a pretty good idea of the rest. I’ve not been outside the Brighton area more than a couple of times. This was new and exciting. The theatre was interesting, but as much for watching the different types of people in the audience as for the performance on stage. I definitely found the music hall more to my taste. Enjoyed that a lot. I think you did too.”

“Yeah. I did enjoy that. But I found the theatre exciting too in an odd way. It was clearly a fabrication, but a couple of times the acting was so good I found myself inside the story they were telling.

“Of course, we’ve got to keep our eye on why we really came to London. Do you think we’ll find ways to work with the furniture people? Or will it be a flash in the pan?”

Rebecca answered “Whether or not we can work with the people we met I don’t think we can know yet. Still, we’ve probably learned a lot so we aren’t building castles in the air. I’m thinking that direct orders of new furniture might be the smaller portion of work with the factories. If we can get the commissions, the real money will be in furnishing a building. And to do that, I think we need to learn where we can get materials for curtains, wallpaper, paint, carpets and so forth.”

“What about lamps and things like that?” Valerie asked.

“Them too. We’ve a pile of learning yet.”

“That’s why I wanted those boxes Maud brought in. It’s where I plan to collect and organize information.”

“Good thinking, Valerie.”

Cogitation and curiosity

There were no immediate changes resulting from the meetings in London. Almost none of the requisite components were in place for *Upton Furnishings* and their associates to either sell new items in the showroom or to propose to furnish whole buildings or whole floors.

During the time in London, it had been agreed that Rebecca and Valerie would take the lead in building the capability to sell new furniture. The Cohens would set aside in easily liquidated form funds to a total of 200 pounds which they would invest as and when opportunities arose. From the conversations, it was understood that such investments would be for bidding on bulk installations. Developing the showroom would be left to Rebecca and Valerie.

A first step was a floor in the shed. On an afternoon a few days after the London trip, Valerie came over from *Matilda’s* for a cup of tea. Rebecca invited Ian Hoyle to join them, and put out a plate of Treats for the Tongue she had bought. She said directly “I think we ought to put a floor in the shed.”

Ian said “I very much agree, but we have all got used to calling it the shed. That does not cast the building in a good light. Could we get used to calling it something else that tells people it is an important place to see furnishings?”

Valerie said “Well said. Does *Presentation Space* work?”

Rebecca said “Definitely better.”

Ian simply said “Yes.”

Valerie said “What type of floor do we want? If we don’t close in the space better, we need to be concerned about water possibly damaging a wooden floor.”

“Then we’d better think of tiles or concrete,” Rebecca answered.

“The existing cobbles are not perfectly levelled,” Ian said. “I sometimes put small blocks of wood under some pieces. I think if possible we should have a very slight slope towards the front of the space to ensure any rain drains out.”

“Let’s ask Tom Soulton to take a look and estimate to do the work,” Valerie said. “What would we think of a simple dark red tile? Or do we want something decorative?”

Rebecca said “Let’s keep it very simple. If later we want something more colourful, we can probably lay the new tiles over the top. However, I think a plain floor is better, as it will show off carpets or other types of flooring which we could consider selling. Even fancy tiles.”

Valerie said “Let me make some notes. I’m having trouble writing fast enough.”

They all laughed.

By the end of the third week of June, Tom had come and with Ian had worked out a tiled floor, rising an average of an inch above the cobbles at the front and two inches at the rear. At the front, he suggested a small gutter in tile a couple of inches wide that sloped from each side to the level of the cobbles at the doorway. This allowed any water to flow out by the doorway. It was left to Tom to work out how to execute the floor in tiles, grout and mortar.

Right after Tom came to measure, on Monday June 24, Vera gave birth to a little girl who they named Mavis. Tom took two days off, but fortunately there was lots of help for Vera at the workshop and the ladies of the Meadow were fascinated by the baby.

During the floor installation the Presentation Space was, of course, emptied, with items stacked carefully in the yard and covered with tarpaulins. The space was criss-crossed with tightly stretched twine guides that were carefully set using spirit level, plumb bob and rafter square, and the base for the tiles built up in two or three layers. Then the tiles were set in mortar and grout applied between the tiles. Valerie came to watch when tiles needed to be cut to size. Tom had a tool that resembled a pair of pliers that he called nippers to chew small pieces off a tile. However, as much as possible he had arranged that he could use tiles made to smaller dimensions at the edges and for the gutters.

On Monday, July 8, the Presentation Space was reopened. The day before was a busy one for Valerie and Ian getting the space set up so that items were well displayed. That the floor was much flatter than the cobbles let them avoid having to put cardboard shims under some feet of the pieces.

Valerie said “Let’s find out how much some rollers with muslin would cost. It might mean modifying the doors too, unfortunately, but we don’t have to carry out any changes right away.”

“Rollers will leave gaps,” Ian said. “We could use frames on hinges that folded up into the ceiling. If we get them made properly, we could start with muslin but have them suitable for glass when we are ready.”

“Can you prepare some simple drawings? They needn’t be like a draughtsman would prepare.”

“I think so. Can I show them to Tom Soulton when I have some done?”

“Of course. Always worth getting his opinion on things like that. But

we should take a small gift for Vera and for the new baby. A little girl.”

Ominous visitors

The Presentation Space reopened July 8, 1861. Unfortunately, soon after, one day in mid-July, Valerie was at the *Best Bonnet* desk, checking the entries in the commission log to make sure nothing had been overlooked. It was not long after 9 o’clock, and Jack Dixon at the counter was organizing some of the magazines for subscribing customers. Olaf was in the window in her basket.

Two men came in the shop. They were dressed rather well compared to most people, but the clothes looked far more posh than the wearers who seemed decidedly rough.

“Good morning Sir, Ma’am. My colleague here and I represent the Brighton Merchants Protective Company. We’re here to offer your businesses an opportunity to avoid a range of disasters so that you can keep trade flowing.”

Jack said “As I am only an employee, I do not make decisions on such matters.”

“Would the owner be about?” the man who had spoken before said. His associate was taking altogether too much interest in the shop. He was even moving towards the door to the back, but Jolly, now old and unwilling to go out with Tony or others, made an ominous growl and he drew back.

“Perhaps you could leave your name and address,” Valerie said. “I presume you have some description of your services.”

“No, Ma’am. All our business is conducted in person. And you’d be surprised how unreliable written material is. But you can be sure we’ll be back, assuming nothing happens here in the meantime. All the sensible people end up engaging our services.”

And the men were gone.

“That gives me a very bad feelin’,” Jack said.

“Me too,” Valerie said. “I think they’re into extortion. We’ll have to watch the place, and also be careful the *Best Bonnet* work isn’t attacked or robbed.”

“What d’ya think we should do?” Jack asked.

“We need to find out who they are, where they spend their time, and if they are working with others. And we also need to find out who else has been visited. I also think we should ask the police if they know anything.”

“Do ya’ think the police can stop them?”

“The men we saw won’t likely be doing anything. But they’ll have others to do their dirty work, I’ll be bound. Keep an eye out and yell if you need help. I’m going upstairs to talk to Mrs. Harper. I think she’s writing letters.”

Valerie almost sprinted up the stairs and called out for Jane Harper, who replied from her bedroom to come on up. Valerie explained what had just transpired.

Jane said “I’ll go and talk to your mother, then I’ll see if I can get any information at the police station. But let us write down all you and Jack can remember. We may need such information if there is a prosecution. Do you think you can describe the men?”

Given that Jack was also present, they descended to the shop, and were forced to wait while Jack concluded a transaction with a customer. While he did, Jane whispered “If I see Matt, I’ll send him over, and you can get him and Martin and any of the others to ask around our friends, customers and associates.”

“We’d better start a list and very quietly try to learn as much as we can. I’ll see if I can make a list but in a form that would not be helpful to those villains should they see it,” Valerie said.

“I hadn’t thought of that. Do you think they are violent?” Jane whispered.

“Those who come here will likely only imply violence. They will, as I said, no doubt have others to do the dirty work of causing hurt to people or property. Which is why we must, as soon as we can, ensure we have many eyes watching. And probably make sure our premises are guarded.”

The customer had by this time been gone almost half a minute, so Valerie quickly summarized what she had told Jane, noticing Bobby peeking around the door to the rear of the shop.

“Bobby, I assume you heard that?” Jane asked.

“Yes. Used to get that sort of thing with the women who worked with Ma. Every so often they’d bash one of the girls real bad to convince the others to pay ’em. Then some new tough would come along and there’d be some fights between the villains. One time one of ’em disappeared. There was talk ’e’d been murdered, but no body ever found.”

Jane asked “Should we talk to the police?”

Valerie answered “They probably won’t do anything because everything is about an implied threat. Any violence is made to look like an accident or at least the victim is told to say it was an accident to avoid worse. But Tony talks of Constable Shaw being a good man. It would not surprise me that the police know much more than they can admit to.”

Jane said “Bobby, Can you get a message to Tony and tell him about this and ask him if he can talk to Constable Shaw? That may be better than my going into the station and dealing with someone we don’t know. The

villains may have eyes there. Tell Tony to be cautious.”

“I’ll go now. I more or less know the route he’ll be taking with Moonbeam.”

“Valerie, I’ll go to *Uptons* then on to Fortescue Road and then to *B & J* and the *Emporium*. It would not surprise me if they have had visits too.”

“I’ll start to make the list of people to talk to.”

Smoke and fog

The next few days were tense.

Bobby found Tony quickly. He finished his commissions and went to the police station on his way home.

“Constable ... I mean Sergeant Shaw. Can I have a quiet word?”

“Certainly Mr. Brown. Jacobs. Take over the desk.”

“I’ve Moonbeam outside, perhaps we could talk there so she doesn’t wonder where I am?”

“Always like to say hello to her,” Shaw said.

Outside, Shaw asked “Something up?”

“Yes. We’ve been approached by some men saying they’re from the Brighton Merchants Protective Company. I’m wondering if the police have heard anything. We are convinced they are simply attempting to extort money from businesses by threatening to arrange ‘accidents.’”

“Yes. We’ve been hearing reports, but nobody willing to be a witness or press charges. Without that, we can’t do much.

“What are you going to do yourself, Mr. Brown? Such villains could do a lot of hurt to you and your associates as well as the businesses.”

“At the moment, we’re trying to find out who they are and their resources.”

“There’s almost certainly someone behind them who’ll try to keep their name and face hidden, with the people you see more or less not much more than servants,” Shaw said.

“That would make sense. So we’ll need to be very watchful.”

“I’ll see if we can start a file here,” Shaw said. “If I learn anything I’ll try to get in touch, but I have to be careful. Our inspectors don’t like us talking to the general public. They’ve forgotten that it’s the public what tells us what’s what in the real world.”

“Thanks, Sergeant Shaw.”

When Tony got back to *Matilda’s* there was a quiet conversation upstairs with Jane, Bobby and Valerie.

“The police have heard rumours, or possibly more than rumours, but nobody’s willing to come forward so charges can be pressed,” Tony reported.

“Not surprising,” Valerie said.

Jane reported “All of *B & J*, *The Emporium* and *Upton* have had visits. They’ve not yet said how much they want in payment, but I’m sure that will come soon. Mrs. Cohen has suggested we ensure we have staff or watchmen round the clock. She thinks the likely mode of attack will be arson, though she didn’t discount violence as a way to scare others.”

“I’ll suggest that we quietly ask our clients in *Best Bonnet* if they have been approached,” Tony said.

“I’ve actually already started a list. To be precise, just small annotations in our client book,” Valerie said. “I’ll tell you and Jane the code meanings when I’ve got a little further along.”

Jane said “While we are finding out who is responsible, does it make sense to pay them if it is not too extreme?”

“That may sensible, but we should do so in concert with others,” Valerie said.

“Yes,” Jane answered. “Mrs. Cohen also said to have one of us come round tonight after dinner so we can share information and make some plans.”

“Perhaps both Tony and I can go. Tony sees lots when he’s out and about, but I’ve been starting the record.”

Stumbling in the dark

“I’ve seen this sort of villainy in the past,” Cassandra said.

Mary Yarrow looked apprehensive. She knew that Cassandra was talking of their time in a house of entertainment in Greenock. That was a part of their lives they didn’t talk about.

Cassandra continued. “I won’t say much about it, as there may still be miscreants about who would harm those who brought about their downfall. However, I believe that to scotch this sort of scheme, we need to find out who is the leader. They will almost certainly not be persons who come to talk to us.”

Captain Fraser, who Cassandra had asked to be present said “Gathering intelligence on the enemy is essential to a successful campaign. So far our *Academy* hasn’t had any visits. Possibly because we don’t have a sign on the house.”

Cassandra asked “Does anyone know if *Soultons* has been visited?”

“I’ll make sure they’re asked tomorrow,” Tony said. “And Valerie here is keeping a record.”

Valerie added, "Yes, but in a form that if it fell into the wrong hands would likely not give away information. I want to know who has been visited and asked for money, and anything else that might be useful to us."

The discussion went around. It was decided that unless the demands were too extreme, the so-called Protective Company would be paid until enough information was available to make a move to stop the activity. It was also decided to make sure there was round the clock observation of the premises of all the businesses. For *Matilda's* and *Upton Furnishings*, it was more or less possible to have one person watch both, since each was visible from the other, though some yards apart.

Captain Fraser said "It is unfortunate that we do not know the strengths of our enemy. However, I will ask Mr. Sinclair and Mr. McDowell to join me in ensuring our skills with firearms are not rusty. I still have my Adams revolver, and I believe Mr. Sinclair has a Colt he purchased on his own. Hopefully we will never need such skills or equipment."

Abraham said "In the pawn shop, we once took a William Moore double barrelled shotgun as security for a loan that was never repaid. We kept the gun – we've never loaded it – as a possible measure of security. Perhaps Captain Fraser could show me how to load and fire it, though I hope I never need to."

"We should be able to do that. And it is wise to ensure such weapons are in good order. A poorly maintained gun is more danger to the holder than the intended victim."

Cassandra said "To return to what Captain Fraser called 'intelligence', can we follow the men making the visits and find out their place of residence and their associates?"

"That needs to be done with skill," Captain Fraser said. "I was an artillery officer, not in espionage. However, I suspect that we need to have a group of people so that none of them follow the men for very long. One, say a street urchin, would follow for a while, with others further back. Then the closest follower would change, possibly to a woman apparently on her way to shop or visit a friend. And people of different stations. It is not easy, since they have to take over one from the other. However, sometimes it is possible to send someone in advance by guessing the route."

Tony said "Our biggest problem may be identifying the people. It is a pity they will not sit still for a photographic portrait. If they can be easily noted, I would think our clients can make a record of when and where they are."

Cassandra said "Perhaps someone with skill in drawing could help."

Captain Fraser said "One of our younger students, Master Talbot, is surprisingly adept. Let me talk to him. And if we can find a telescope, he need not have to get close to the men involved."

There was, of course, more discussion, but it did not appreciably advance the general plan. Tony and Valerie said their goodbyes and left to walk home. Tony had his owl-face walking stick and found that he was holding it carefully by the middle of the shaft. Yes. A sign of nervous readiness in case he were accosted or attacked. He also watched to see if he were observed or followed, but there appeared to be nobody doing so.

When Tony got in, Jane was already in bed.

"There you are. I did not wish to fall asleep until I was sure you were safe to home."

"Yes. We are all nervous. I found myself gripping my walking stick. And Captain Fraser said he would ensure he and his army associates refresh their skills with firearms. Even Mr. Cohen said the pawn shop had acquired by unredeemed loan a double-barrelled shotgun."

"Oh. I should get Captain Fraser or one of the others to show me how my pistol works."

"You have a pistol, Jane?"

"Given to me by a dying officer in the Crimea. His own personal weapon, a Colt. He said a woman alone may have need to protect herself. It may even be loaded, and I should ensure it is not dangerous to us."

Bits and pieces

By the 23rd of July, the extortionists, who gave their names as Smith and Jones, which were certainly false, had made circuits of town and collected ten shillings from each premises they targeted. Simpson's Bookmakers told them to disappear. His front window was smashed that night, and he was then told he'd have to pay a premium of fifteen shillings a week. This was more than he could easily come up with. However, Simpson was the bookmaker who employed a man called Horner, who was a veritable mountain of a man. We have encountered him when Maud Mortimer bought some furniture from a man who owed Simpson money. Maud had offered to pay off the man's gambling debt, and in the process got a bargain on some furniture.

It was Tony who spotted Horner with the man who said he was Smith. On his way back to *Matilda's*, he saw Horner on his own, probably going home.

It was a risk, but Tony decided to see if he could get some information.

"Hello Mr. Horner. Have you changed employer?"

Horner looked unhappy and confused.

"Well, Mr. Brown. I've been working for Mr. Simpson for ten years. 'E gave me a job when I was hungry and living on the street. 'E sends me to

collect for 'im. And because I'm big, people pay up. Never 'ad any need to bash anyone, and I wouldn't anyway. Don't like violence.

"Then a couple of weeks ago, them men – Smith and Jones they say, but it ain't their real names – they came by and said they want ten bob a week for protecting Mr. Simpson's 'ouse. Mr. Simpson told them to disappear and not come back, but that night 'is front window gets a brick through it. Then they say it'll cost fifteen bob a week for protection. Mr. Simpson don't have that much in readies, but they say they'll take me as a worker for the value of ten bob a week. So now I go with one of 'em on the collections. But I don't like it."

"Thanks for telling me. There's a group of merchants who are investigating what they might do, and I've learned the police are taking an interest, but they cannot do very much until there is good evidence. Perhaps you can watch and listen carefully. If you have information, and you see anyone from *Best Bonnet*, say 'Good Day' to them, even if you don't know them by name. Say you forgot. But otherwise greet them with 'Good Morning' or 'Good Afternoon' or anything but 'Good Day'. 'Good Day' will mean you have some information and I'll find you somehow. Can you tell me where you live? I won't make contact with you there, but I'll leave a pebble in the corner of the doorframe and you can leave information somewhere you suggest, or at *News and More*. I don't think you read, so that might be suspicious. Do you shop anywhere particular?"

Horner told Tony where he lived, and said he got his bread from a particular bakery, where he was known, and which was being victimized too. Tony said he'd talk to them quietly, and arrange that information could be passed on.

"I wish you well, Mr. Horner. Assuming we get through this nastiness, you can be sure you'll always have employment should Mr. Simpson cease taking wagers."

"Thank you, Mr. Brown. I remember 'ow you rescued that lady from the bathing machine."

"That was some time ago."

"Yeah. But I was up on the Promenade. Your Moonbeam saved the day."

"That she did, Mr. Horner. Take care of yourself."

Back at *Matilda's*, Tony relayed what had transpired to Valerie, whose log of information was growing.

"Do you think I should make a copy of this? If there's a fire or a theft, we'd have to mostly start over with the record."

"Let's ask Rose Sinclair. She may be willing to help, and if she made notes, perhaps in a different form, they could be held in Mr. Turcotte's safe. Assuming she talks to Mr. Turcotte about it, we may find some allies in high

places.”

“Good thinking, Tony.”

Mr. Archibald Turcotte was a QC. His advice and knowledge had been of great assistance to a number of our characters. In mentioning him, Tony realized that Henry Mortimer, formerly Turcotte’s clerk and now a local solicitor, may not be aware of things going on, even as his adopted son, Martin, was already well-informed and was, in fact, sometimes observing Smith or Jones, along with other members of the group.

Tony said “I think I should visit the Mortimers to ensure they know what is going on. Martin is very active and involved, but he may not share information well enough that Henry or Maud or Yolanda can recognize situations or events that may interest us.”

“Yes. We need to make sure we are all aware,” Valerie said.

“I also want to talk to Captain Fraser, so I’ll go by Fortescue Road after I go to Chorley Terrace. I’ll take Lim along. He’s got no fight, but he’ll growl a bit and also let me know if something’s amiss.”

“It’s a pity how careful we’ve got to be. Do you think these men are dangerous?”

“We cannot but assume they are,” Tony said. “If we are wrong, then we have been overly cautious, but to ignore the possibility would be foolish. Remember how Bobby and I were accosted by the man with a knife when we went to see Jenny Dodds in Albourne.”

“Bobby said she figures you broke the man’s wrist with your walking stick.”

“Quite possibly. But I think Bobby showed you the knife. She kept it, and still has it, I think under her mattress.”

“Yes. Maybe I should do the same. Or get myself a walking stick like yours.”

“Or a pistol like Jane’s.”

Valerie was shocked. “Jane has a pistol?”

Tony explained. Valerie said “If I were proficient with it, it might be useful, but I think a walking stick might be more sensible and less obvious as a weapon.”

“If I see Tom or Vera, I’ll ask if they can provide something simple for you.”

Aid from an unexpected quarter

The morning of the 23rd, Jane was at her writing desk upstairs at *Matilda’s* when Bobby came up to say a Captain Hancock had asked after her.

“Tell him to come up to the parlour and put on some tea, Bobby. I had not expected to see him, but his visit is more than welcome.”

After greetings, Hancock said quietly “I came simply to bring you up to date on the progress of Melody and Samuel, who we are treating as our son. Indeed, we have registered his birth.”

“To be regarded as a small administrative error, surely?” Jane said, keeping her voice low. She had closed the parlour door, which was sturdy. “In the climate of misdirected righteousness, it will save the child a lot of woes.”

“Our thoughts exactly. And Mildred, my wife, is a doting mother, with Melody as the nanny, but able to be with her child. I am hopeful that the information will remain buried as to the true situation.”

“Those who truly know, which is myself and my associates at the Meadow along with the three adults at your house, all have nothing to gain by revealing how Samuel came into the world. There is always a chance someone else will be loose of tongue.”

“There are my brother and his wife in Worcester. I cannot think it will do them credit to say anything, but as you have noted, there are sometimes loose tongues. If so, we will just have to face down any commentary.”

“What of the young lord who got Melody with child? Or his family?”

“A potential risk, though their haste to get him out of Britain speaks to a wish to avoid tainting him with scandal. We might aver there was a miscarriage if any mention is made by them. But I really doubt they will wish to do so.”

There was a knock on the door. Jane said loudly “Come in!” and as the door opened added “Here’s Bobby with some refreshments.”

After Bobby left, Hancock asked “Is your business going well?”

“Until the last few days, yes. Unfortunately, there seems to be a gang practising extortion under the name the Brighton Merchants Protective Company.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Let me know if you need help.”

“I will ... Oh. The men are coming up the street now.” Jane had happened to look out the window at that moment.

“Can I observe them from the rear of the shop without being seen?”

“Actually yes. Mr. Goldman had some glass in the wall, as well as an opening to allow warmth from a stove that is in the rear of the shop. The glass is half-silvered, so I am fairly sure they won’t see you.”

They quickly went down the stairs, Jane putting a finger to her lips to show Bobby to be quiet. Jane pointed out the half-silvered pane and Hancock observed as Valerie was paying the man who went by Smith while Jones stood in the doorway and smirked.

“Do I get a receipt?” Valerie asked, already guessing the answer.

“All our business is word of mouth, Miss Upton,” Smith said, thereby revealing that Valerie’s name was known to them.

There was a tense transaction where Valerie handed over four half-crowns.

“Thank you, Miss Upton. We’ll see you next week.”

Smith and Jones departed. Valerie went to the doorway and nodded to someone.

Captain Hancock said “Kearns. Richard Kearns. Deserted at Gibraltar, possibly after stealing some 25 pounds from various officers and some regimental silver. He was a sergeant, but I always suspected a slacker. I can verify things in the Hue and Cry.”

“The Hue and Cry?” Jane asked, with Valerie looking puzzled.

“It’s a fortnightly report of all deserters with detailed descriptions that is passed to police.”

“Should we proceed immediately?” Jane asked. “We suspect there is someone behind the two who visit and collect money. If we pick up the minnows, we miss the big fish.”

“Ah, yes. That is a concern. But you should probably inform someone in the police so they may render assistance when the time comes. I myself am also willing to help.”

“Come upstairs again and we will finish our tea, and I will give you a fuller picture of what is going on. Valerie. Do you want to join us? We can ask Bobby to come down so Jack has support.”

Hancock was most interested to learn that a number of people were cooperating. Valerie, however, said “Captain Hancock, I’ll be silent on details and names just now, as it could lead to harm to the individuals involved. As I am sure the criminals are aware that their victims will be talking to each other, what we have told you so far is unlikely to be news to them.”

“You would make a good officer, Miss Upton. There is no sense in risking the enemy knowing your plans, nor in putting your collaborators in harm’s way.”

“I just wish we had more of a plan,” Valerie said. “However, knowing that at least one of the villains can be apprehended whenever we please is useful. It is fortuitous you were here.”

“I will still check the Hue and Cry. Sometimes the order for apprehension is rescinded for some reason or other. But I will let you know.”

The rats' nest

In the meantime, the person to whom Valerie had nodded, a grubby urchin named Peter Adams who was known to Matt Moore, was dawdling behind Jones and Smith. He had gladly accepted sixpence to follow the two crooks, and as well had recruited three others for thru'pence apiece in exchange for considerations such as a share of buns or sweets. He walked past the shop where Smith was taking money from another victim, and signalled another boy to watch while he found the other two and repositioned them.

In a relay, they spent the next hour and a half before Jones and Smith entered a modest boarding house. When they did not come out again for over half an hour, one of the four was left to watch. They would be relieved in an hour or so. Meanwhile, the leader went to *Matilda's* and gave the address of the boarding house to Valerie.

"Thanks, Peter. Here's the money I promised. Keep up the good work."

"If the villains is takin' your cash, there ain't going to be none for people like me."

"Peter. Do we know who runs that boarding house?"

"I'll try and find out."

After Peter had left, Valerie wrote a note to Captain Fraser. She felt she should let him know where the crooks were apparently staying. She got Bobby to run the note to Fortescue Road.

An hour later, Bobby came back very excited.

"Miss Upton. It happened that Mrs. Cohen was there. She recognized the address as the place she and Mrs. Yarrow stayed before she bought the houses ten years ago. It's run by a Mrs. Crompton. Mrs. Cohen is going to invite her for tea, pretending to have some business for her boarding house."

"It's possible she's a victim too – they could be insisting on staying free."

Mrs. Crompton was, indeed, being victimized too. Cassandra's invitation, which suggested she come to *B & J* and they would take tea in the *Emporium* next door with the proprietors there, allowed the owner of the boarding house to come that very afternoon. By evening of the same day, Dan Dixon had come to *Matilda's* to tell Valerie what had been discovered, and that the tentative plan was for Mrs. Crompton to keep her eyes and ears open and relay information to Cassandra. The information would be passed to Cassandra or Captain Fraser or others they would introduce to Mrs. Crompton when she went shopping. Cassandra advised Mrs. Crompton to write nothing down that the villains might find. The goal was to discover who was directing Smith and Jones.

Dan said that the additional information that "Smith" was actually a deserter, as recognized by Captain Hancock, caused Captain Fraser to voice

a cheer. Fraser had acquaintance with Hancock in the Crimea, but did not know he lived in Brighton, and asked if Dan could obtain his address, which Jane was able to provide.

For now, there would be no apparent action, but in fact there would be a furious effort to learn as much as possible about Smith and Jones and in particular who they worked for and with. This would come at the cost of paying the amounts extorted by the crooks. Still, as Valerie pointed out to Tony and Jane that evening, they now had some information.

Close observation

The next week or so for the extortionists were an extremely happy time. Everyone was paying them what was requested. They collected a lot of money and recruited two dozen more victims. Their only dissatisfaction was that they had to render two thirds of it to their boss.

That boss was not yet identified by Valerie and friends, since neither Smith nor Jones had yet passed on the boss' share of the unearned monies they had collected. However, Master Talbot, Hugh by forename, had proved a very good portraitist and had, with a telescope Angus Sinclair had fortunately in his possession, rendered very clear images of both the villains. From one of these, James McDowell recognized that Jones was actually Henry Nugent, and had also deserted in Gibraltar, but from the Navy. The story would have taken a lot of pages in James' notebook, a notebook he used because the Russian ball to his jaw had left him with much impaired speech. However, his wife Martha could understand his distorted vocalizations, and through this they learned about Nugent, now known as Jones.

It appeared that Nugent had been a steward on *HMS Sans Pareil* who had deserted with some of the ship's silver plate at Gibraltar. His mother was Spanish, which made it easier for him and Kearns to travel across the Iberian peninsula and get back to England. Thus both men were open to arrest. Who they worked for was still an open question, as was whether they had many accomplices.

The images drawn by Hugh Talbot were taken by Tony to the photography shop of Constable and Collier, where he knew one of the assistants, Andrew Shepherd, who had taken the portrait that helped establish his claim to an inheritance.

"Mr. Shepherd. May I have a quiet word?"

"Mr. Brown, isn't it? The two images of a sailor?"

"Indeed. And those were most helpful to me.

“However, today I have a rather delicate problem. Some men are threatening merchants to extort money. Some ...”

“They have been here. It is costing us more than we can afford.”

“Some of us are cooperating to gather information, and a young person with some excellent drawing skills had prepared these images.”

Shepherd said “They are excellent. I have seen the men. I take it you want some copies photographically produced?”

“Indeed. But possibly if you are already under threat from the men, it would be wise not to keep the plates here once made.”

“True. Let me immediately take an image so you keep the drawings. Tomorrow you may collect some copies. How many would you like?”

“Shall we say a dozen. How much would that cost?”

“Let me talk to Mr. Constable. I suspect he will cover the cost to help the effort to stop this robbery. But no more than 30 shillings in any case. And I will put the images on a single plate together.”

Shepherd disappeared to the rear of the shop, returning after 5 minutes with the envelope containing the drawings.

“Come back tomorrow after noon. I will have the images ready. But I believe I will carry the plate home with me.”

About the same time as Tony was with the photographer, Mrs. Crompton was making a mental note that Smith had received a letter with a Reigate postmark. When she attended to the rooms that Smith and Jones occupied, she carefully observed any papers, being careful not to disturb them. That morning, Smith had asked if she had any postage stamps, as he had a letter that needed posting. Mrs. Crompton had lied that she had none, as it was almost certain Smith would expect her to simply give them to him, which she was extremely unwilling to do.

The envelope awaiting a stamp was on the dresser in Smith’s room. Mrs. Crompton did not touch it, but carefully memorized the address of a D. Holywell, Esq. in Reigate. She quickly finished tidying the room and making the bed, then put on her bonnet and walked to *B & J* to give Cassandra the information.

Meanwhile, we have not recorded anything of the activities of Ian Hoyle or Arthur Anderson. However, these two had shared a quick conversation as soon as the threat became evident, and immediately arranged there would be a careful watch of *Matilda’s* and *Upton Furnishing*. Once this was in train, they worked out a way to maintain this watch by the various members of *Best Bonnet* and their associates. This included Arthur’s quite large circle of young people who had been more or less urchins a few years previously.

Collating myriad pieces of information was a task that Ian and Valerie took on, though there was no conscious decision that they would be the ones to do so. Each evening they met briefly to share what news or update was

available.

Around the last day of June, Valerie met Ian in the opening to the yard of *Upton Furnishings*. Ian had the gate open and had set up a small table and a couple of chairs and had a pot of tea and some Treats he'd had Matt pick up at *Fortescue Factory*. With the summer light, they could sit and watch the street, including *Matildas*.

Ian said "Matt thinks there's someone else watching Smith and Jones."

"Really. Does he know who?"

"No. But he's seen this woman several times not far behind them, and asked some of our clients and others we know if they see her. She actually changes her garb from time to time. Not totally, but she'll change her bodice, bonnet or scarf, I think to conceal the fact she's following them."

"Is she local?"

"Matt got a friend to work with him to keep an eye on her. They saw her go into the Station about the time one of the afternoon London trains around three o'clock, so pretty good chance she's heading for London. But Matt had the friend keep an eye on the concourse for the woman to come out of the ticket office while he went to the entrance of the London platform.

"He was lucky that the ticket clerk, a man named Charlie, had been an old neighbour, so he said hello and fell into conversation with him, standing to one side so as to not block the passengers. And along came the woman, and Charlie looked at her ticket and said "Reigate. Thank you ma'am".

"Ian. That matches what Mrs. Crompton gave in the address. I'm thinking the villain's boss doesn't trust them."

"Possibly. The woman doesn't seem to want Smith and Jones to notice her. We should try to see if Hugh Talbot can capture her visage. Matt said they think she is about 30 years old, but she was changing her appearance quite regularly, and I'm not sure Matt and his friends are that good at judging a woman's age."

Valerie said "Should we send someone to Reigate to find out as much as we can about the address and who lives there?"

"It would take great care not to reveal who is investigating," Ian said.

"Would you be willing to try? I don't think any of these people has seen you. You could use a different name and we could get a few cards to indicate you are a buyer of second hand furniture. If you knocked on the door of the address we have, you could say someone said there might be furniture available there to give a purpose to your visit. You might even acquire some decent pieces, though you'd have to arrange to get them back to Brighton, and wouldn't want to give any address that could be traced."

"Things could be sent to be collected at the Station. Or even Lewes Station. But I'd only buy anything if it were really excellent."

“Would it be worthwhile going with someone to allow for better watching? Or to take a message while I stayed watching?”

“It would fit with your being a buyer to have an assistant with a handcart. What about Robert Vance from *Soultons*? I don’t believe the villains have gone out there,” Valerie said.

“Quite a way to walk. But I’ll ask Tom Soulton if Smith and Jones have been there. And tomorrow I’ll ask Matt if we can get a look at the woman following our villains. Be useful to see if she’s at the same place as this Mr. Holywell.”

The lion’s den

It was two days later that Ian, as Horace Inman, and Robert, as Victor Robson, went to Reigate. They took a handcart, which Robert had ensured had no identifiers. They walked past the address they had for Holywell, a large, free-standing house on a superior sort of street. Ian had some cards that gave the false name and an address that was actually that of the tenement of Bobby’s mother. If anyone came looking there, they’d not get any information.

Soon after walking past the Holywell address, they saw St. Mark’s Church, which was down a path. A man was working digging a grave, clearly warm from the effort. Ian said “Excuse me, but I believe I may have been given a wrong address. I’m looking for a Mr. Holywell. Do you know where he lives?”

The man welcomed a break from his digging.

“Can’t be certain, but sounds like the name of the man in the grey house down the footpath from the church ’ere and two up towards London on the London Road.”

“Someone told me he might have furniture for sale,” Ian said.

“Dunno’ about that. They’ve not been there all that long. Maybe 6 months. Mostly see the woman. Don’t know if she’s the wife or what, but comes through here pretty well every day. I’ve seen ’er coming out the Station on my way ’ome a couple o’ times. She was by ’ere about an hour ago. ’Ardly ever see the gent. Even the ’ousekeeper only comes by on Sundays to church. Always on ’er own. They get all their eat and drink delivered.”

“Thank you,” Ian said, and moved back down the footpath with Robert following. In a hushed voice, he said “I’m going to knock on the door and ask if they have furniture for sale. I probably won’t get further than the doorway, and it’s probably better if you find a good place to watch the house. See if my knocking or pulling the bell gets anyone looking out a window. And

take note of anything that might be worth our knowing, like any children or servants or gardeners.”

“I’ll fiddle with my shoelace. Pretend it broke and I’m trying to make a temporary repair.”

“Good thinking.”

Ian was correct in that he didn’t get beyond the doorstep. However, he did get some information from the housekeeper, a woman in her fifties of solid proportions.

“Good morning, madam. I’m Horace Inman, the furniture buyer. I was told that there was some furniture here the owners wished to sell.”

“Neither Mr. Holywell nor his wife said anythin’ about furniture.”

“Holywell? I’m not sure that’s the name. I think Cornwell, an elderly widower, I was told. Here’s the address in my notebook.”

“Someone’s sent you chasing a goose, Mr. Inman was it? Mr. Holywell is far from elderly. Good day to you.”

Ian left the house and turned north, which was away from the station. Robert saw him and followed. About 100 yards up the road was a horse trough on the side of the road, with a bench beside it. Ian sat down and Robert joined him.

Ian informed Robert what had transpired. Robert said “I saw a man’s face at the window, but the reflections on the glass made it impossible to make out any detail. Didn’t notice any gardener, but the place is well-kept.”

“We’ll watch here for an hour or so. Possibly there’ll be some tradesmen or merchants. We can follow them and see what can be learned about Holywell. Pretend he’s asked for an account with us and we want to know if he’s prompt in payment.”

Robert had a satchel in which he had some sandwiches and a bottle of water. Our investigators had part of this food and drink while waiting to see if there were any developments at the house. Eventually a waggon that advertised that it was from a ‘high class’ grocer stopped and some provisions were unloaded. Ian was about to go towards the house to follow the waggon, assuming it would go back the way it came, but it continued up the road towards them rather than turning back to town.

“Excuse me,” Ian said walking beside the waggon which did not stop. “I’m Horace Inman, furnishings. The resident of the house where you just delivered has asked me to provide some items on account. It occurs to me to ask if he is reliable in payment.”

The driver of the waggon was a man of perhaps 40. He looked very uncomfortable. Ian, recognizing this, said “Perhaps you would rather wait until you can turn a corner to speak out of sight of the house.”

The man said nothing, but made a slight nod of his head. Ian moved to the pavement and followed the waggon with Robert until it turned the corner

at the next junction, which was about another 100 yards. The waggon driver pulled up once clear of the London Road.

Before the man could speak Ian said "Your reaction suggests that perhaps you or your employer is dealing with someone who is highly reliable in NOT paying their bill."

"That could be the case. Don't want to say much. Never know who might take offence. Then there could be an accident."

"I would not like to have any role in starting a chain of events that might end in harm to good folk," Ian said. "I deal in furnishings, and my assistant and I came today to investigate if Mr. Holywell, as we are told is the name he uses, would be a worthwhile client. I can tell you that we are getting the sense that there is some unpleasantness associated with that place, and I thank you for what you have said, as it will no doubt allow me to avoid some loss or injury."

"My advice. Stay away," the man said and flicked the reins of the horse.

Ian and Robert were now on a street where they could not see the house. However, loitering at the horse trough could arouse suspicion. Ian said, "I think we might consider returning to Brighton. While I would like to see if the woman the grave-digger says goes out most days is the same one who has been seen in Brighton, it would mean waiting some hours with limited chance of seeing her. Moreover, while Matt Moore arranged that I got a view of her, you do not know what she looks like."

Robert said "Mr. ... er... Inman. If the villains are getting people here to pay them too, as would seem likely from what the grocer indicated, there must be members of the gang here that we have not yet seen."

"That is very likely. And it is odd that the woman seems to avoid being seen by Smith and Jones, so it is likely she has been introduced to them, as she does seem to change her appearance often."

"I suggest that we go separately to the station. I'll go by the house again at a steady pace so that it seems I've finished my business and am returning to the station."

When our pair met at the station, Ian had some news.

"As I was coming along the pavement, two men came out a side door of the house. One of them asked the other if he knew how to take dead blooms off the roses. The latter was a large, tough-looking man, and not dressed quite as one would for gardening. And the tough didn't seem keen on the work."

"So likely the muscle for the gang, or one of them. And the other a gardener to keep up appearances. They probably don't want to hire people they don't know."

Ian and Robert took the first train available back to Brighton. There, as they exited the station, Ian saw the woman coming towards them. Under

his breath, he said, "The woman of interest is approaching ten paces away."

Given the width of the pavement, Robert moved aside, slightly behind Ian to let her pass, in the process carefully taking note of her features. Then he joined Ian and they walked to *Matilda's* to share their day's story with Valerie.

Questions of strategy

Valerie and Tony went to Fortescue Road that night. Captain Hancock was there too, and Cassandra joined them in the parlour of Number 23, which was used as a classroom of the Fraser Academy. Angela Fraser and James McDowell brought in a pair of large tea pots. There were some biscuits Angela had baked on a plate. Despite the fact they weren't as tidy as the Treats for the Tongue, Cassandra noted when she took one that it was nonetheless very tasty. They were ginger snaps, though Cassandra did not know them by that name. She would have to ask where Angela found the recipe.

Captain Fraser efficiently got each of the persons with new information to summarize what was known. Then he summed up with "We seem to be at a point where we know that the men who call themselves Smith and Jones are the deserters Kearns and Nugent, which Captain Hancock has verified in the Hue and Cry. Miss Upton's colleagues have visited Reigate, where it appears a Mr. Holywell is receiving goods by means of threatening the supplier.

"We have not yet identified the woman following Smith and Jones, but it appears she is working for Holywell. Our Master Talbot has managed to draw a fair likeness of her by use of a telescope, but this is not as good as that of Smith or Jones. Copies of drawings, as well as other information, have been passed to Sergeant Shaw. So far we have received no information about our villains from the police, and it is quite possible they have fewer details than we do.

"We are not sure how monies are being moved from Smith and Jones to their master. They obviously write to Holywell, and I anticipate that may be a report. It would not make sense to put money in an envelope where it could be stolen. They could, of course, be sending a money order, and they have been seen to visit the Post Office. However, I believe they would not wish to leave evidence of movement of money.

"Mr. Moore and his colleagues have noticed them spend more time in a couple of shops, and later saw the woman go to those shops. It could be that she picks up money. However, to ask at the shops might reveal that we are watching.

“Tonight I believe we are at a pivotal moment where we need to plan what we should do to end the depredations these villains are making on local and other businesses.”

Cassandra asked “Captain Fraser. Do you believe we are ready to act?”

“In that we are not fully knowledgeable as to the resources available to Holywell, it may be premature to act. I feel we have sufficient strength and arms to carry the day, but we would be outside of the law to use force beyond defending ourselves or others.”

“But perhaps we could do something that would perturb them?” Valerie said.

“What is your suggestion to do so?” Captain Hancock asked.

“Perhaps a letter to Smith, sent perhaps from London or even Reigate, asking ‘Have you seen the Hue and Cry?’”

“It may be simpler to just put the names,” Captain Hancock said. “The goal will be to make them frightened so they make a mistake. A second letter a few days later saying ‘Turn Queen’s evidence’ could perhaps actually get them to do that. If not, we arrange that the names are called out when they are in a crowd by someone they cannot identify.”

Cassandra asked “What about Holywell and the woman?”

Captain Fraser said “There appears to be some suspicion of our two local villains. One of us, wearing a mask, could show a street urchin the picture we have of her and pay him or her to give the woman a letter saying ‘Don’t follow us. Or else.’”

Cassandra responded “You believe this may precipitate some action which will cause them to act against themselves?”

“That would be the objective.”

Valerie said “Let us do both, and see if we can cause the villains to mis-step. But also we should be prepared should they lash out at people.

“I believe we should also write to Holywell, suggesting his entire activities are under observation.”

The people in the group quickly came up with a short letter:

**Money extorted shall be returned with interest.
Recompense or retribution!**

This would be sent to both Mrs. Crompton’s boarding house, but with a heading ‘Kearns and Nugent’ but addressed to Smith or Jones. The other would simply be given to the woman as a warning.

For the next half hour, the details of who would do what were settled. All letters would be written by Rose Sinclair, whose writing was very precise but believed unknown to villains. Angela went and asked Rose if she would do this, though there was no doubt that she would agree. Matt Moore knew

any number of young people who would carry messages. If the woman were approached at the station, one of the *Best Bonnet* people could observe the reaction. Valerie said she would ask Joseph. He was finding it very annoying to pay the villains, and had learned his father-in-law was also being threatened. The letter to Holywell in Reigate would be posted in London, as Tony remembered that Percy Jones – quite unrelated to the villain – was now promoted to driving mainline trains and could be asked to put a properly stamped envelope in a pillar box. But Cassandra said “He might not be the best to do that just now. Ethel had her baby, a little boy, about a fortnight ago. I think in all the fuss over the villains, her confinement was overlooked. Of course, Tom and Vera have little Mavis too. Lots going on.”

As it turned out, Percy was back at work and happy to post a letter.

Best laid plans

The plan was initiated the next morning, with a letter that was on the breakfast table at Mrs. Crompton’s. This lady had no foreknowledge of the plan, so was not watching for a reaction, though later did say that the letter was re-folded immediately and put in a pocket, and the two villains did not finish their breakfast.

Matt recruited a young street boy to watch for the woman at the station. He was shown the picture of the woman, as was Joseph, who stood beside him not far from the London platform. Joseph had a card with the name "Karwowski". It was thought it unlikely someone with the name of Yolanda, the Mortimers’ Polish housekeeper, would arrive.

When the first morning train arrived, the woman was on it, and as she approached the ticket collector, Joseph muttered to the boy “There she is.”

The note for the woman was not in an envelope, and she unfolded it as she walked, then stopped in her tracks, thought for a couple of seconds, then went back to the platform and presented her ticket. She was clearly going back to Reigate.

Smith and Jones, meanwhile, had gone out on their collections, and one of their stops was at the house of Simpson the bookmaker. Not long after this, Arthur Anderson saw his large collector, Horner, who said “Good Day to you”. Arthur paid a boy thrupence to take a message to Valerie to tell Tony.

Early in the afternoon, Tony went to the bakery he and Horner had agreed would pass on messages, and where Tony had met the baker so he was known.

“Mr. King, I believe my special loaf is ready for me.”

“Yes, Mr. Brown. Come to the back and I’ll give it to you. I didn’t want it mixed up with our regular loaves.”

Once in the back, King said “Horner’s been asked to give a beating to the son of the landlord of the Green Man pub, who’s refused to pay the Protective Company. Horner looks tough, and his size makes him effective at debt collection, but he has a horror of violence.”

“Will Horner come back here today?”

“He lives nearby, as you know, so he’ll pass by to see if there’s information.”

Tony said “Tell him to go to *Soultons’ Workshop* and ask for Tom Soulton, and to take some clothes for several days away.”

King asked “You think it best he disappears for a while?”

“Possibly. But I don’t want to have to find him clothes if we do decide that is for the best. And I’ll visit the Green Man too. Is there someone who can take a message to *Soultons’*?”

“I’ll get my wife to go if you give me the message.”

Tony went on as soon as he had written a note – he still had some deliveries with Moonbeam – to the Green Man, which was closed for the afternoon when he got there. However, he went to a side door and a man opened it. Tony only knew the name of the landlord was Cartwright. “Mr. Cartwright, I’m Tony Brown. I believe you are being pressured to pay some men who say they are the Brighton Merchants Protective Company. Some of us have been investigating the villains, and are in process of acting against them, but they have asked a man I know to give your son a beating in order to persuade you to pay. This man does not wish to do this.”

“You’d better come in so we don’t share what we say with anyone else.”

Inside, Tony said “I have asked the man who is being pressured to hurt your son to take some clothes to a place where he can be hidden. Would it be sensible to also hide your son and pretend that he has been beaten.”

“I can get some blood from the butcher to suggest that the outcome was fatal. Would that give the villains pause?”

“It might. Though you may want to say little and let people make assumptions. Trying to direct their thoughts with a false story might get you into trouble if the police become involved and accuse you of falsehood.”

The son was upstairs in the residence part of the pub. Tony suggested that the youth – he was 14 years old – could be carried under a blanket on Moonbeam’s cart. The publican opened a gate to the yard and Tony carefully backed Moonbeam to reverse the cart into the yard. Zachary Cartwright slipped into the cart and a blanket was thrown over him, and a bag of clothes tossed in.

“Where’ll you take ’im?” the publican asked.

“Best I don’t tell you. And frankly, I’ve a couple of places in mind, but I need to make sure the people there are willing to be hosts.”

“All right. I read ’ow you rescued that Crouch girl a few years ago. Guess it’s all right to trust you.”

“I’ll try to let you know what is happening, but I may be being watched, so I’ll be circumspect.”

“Best so. Good luck to us all, Mr. Brown.”

Tony went immediately to *Soultons’*, where his message and Horner had already arrived. Tom and Vera were aware of the situation via Robert Vance, and quite willing to help. The only issue was space, but since it was summer, a tarpaulin was draped over a horizontal pole supported on two posts made from scrap wood. This was set up behind the workshop, which had previously been a barn. The makeshift tent was not visible from the road, and it was decided that Horner and Zachary would sleep in the tent, but eat in the workshop. To keep them occupied, Tom, Robert and Vera found them tasks relating to the furniture or to growing vegetables, in some cases of help to the ladies who were part of *Harper’s Helpers* next door, though the youth and man would stay out of sight of the road. Jane had told them of the extortion going on, and they did not ask more than first names of their new helpers, who soon graduated to building or repairing rabbit hutches or similar tasks.

Villainous Consequences

Horner and the Cartwright youth were moved to *Soultons’* on a Friday. Smith and Jones did rounds of collections on Saturday mainly to businesses that served the active tourist trade. They didn’t bother with the beach, as there wasn’t a lot of money to be had there, but cafés and restaurants were targeted. The big hotels had not yet been approached, as they had round the clock doormen and other staff, but one or two private hotels had been pressured to pay money.

The pair were returning to Mrs. Crompton’s boarding house when a rough looking man stepped out from a doorway.

“’ello Dickie, Henry.”

Smith answered “Whad’ya want, Reggie?”

“Little bird says you two ain’t delivering all the money you should. I’m ’ere to get the balance, plus interest and penalty.”

“Two of us. One of you. And who knows what I might ’ave in me pocket,” Smith answered.

A woman’s voice said “Per’aps a pistol?”

She was holding her handbag up with her left hand as if to get something with her right, but a discerning observer would see the muzzle of a pistol pointing at Smith, who turned around and said "Betty!". Jones turned so he was sideways to both Reggie and Betty, and on the curb.

Meantime, Peter Adams had seen what was going on and had managed to signal to another of the boys. They met round a corner where Peter kept watch discreetly while telling the boy to get to *Matilda's* and tell Valerie or whoever he could and possibly bring others, as he felt that there was going to be trouble. At that moment, however, Jones made to push by Betty and run by her in the road. However, he missed pushing on her handbag and there was a bang and a hole appeared under his left arm.

Smith made a move toward Betty to try to grab the handbag, but Reggie had a cudgel in his sleeve, let it slip down as he swung his arm and gave Smith a clout beside his knee which dropped him to the ground with a yell.

Peter told his colleague "Better stay and follow me, but not too close. The coppers'll be wanting to catch them now, 'specially if that fellow Jones dies."

The two stayed as hidden as they could. Reggie and Betty quickly moved off up the street as a couple of doors opened and heads looked out. Peter said to his colleague "Ask that woman if she can send for the constables. Then try to follow me, but not too close in case they realize I'm followin'. My estimate is they'll try for the station."

The fugitive couple tried to walk slowly enough that they did not look like they were in a hurry, but they were severely rattled. Under his breath, Reggie said "Whadya wanna shoot 'im for?"

"I didn't. At least I didn't intend to. Seems the pistol Wells gave me has a hair trigger. Let's 'ope there's a train quick, like. Don't matter to where. And we'll split up and meet back in Reigate."

However, the shot had been heard by Bobby, who was shopping. She headed towards it, more curious than anything else. On the other side of the road, about 100 yards away, she saw Peter, and further up, another boy whose face but not name was known to her. Then she realized that they were likely following the couple coming towards her, so she went down the area steps of a house and moved under the steps to be out of sight. She caught 'Reigate' in Betty's comment. When she couldn't hear the couple's footsteps she crept back up. Peter was already past, but the other boy was there.

"Hi. You followin' that couple?"

"Yeah. You work for Mr. Brown, don't ye?"

"Yes. Shall I go inform people at *Matilda's*?"

"Please. Peter thought we should keep them in sight. They've just shot one villain and bashed the other in the leg. I'm 'oping the people around will have called the constables."

Thus Bobby ran back home, arriving in a breathless state considered unfeminine by the norms of the day. Jane and Valerie were informed and Jack Dixon sent off to *Uptons* and Fortescue Road, with a request to cooperate with people there to inform others.

Bobby had run fast enough that Valerie was able to get to the station about the same time as the criminals. However, she only had the drawing image of Betty as a guide, and didn't know Reggie as the man. However, Ian came into the station and nearly bumped into her. From his face, Valerie realized he had seen someone he recognized. In fact, Betty and Reggie were both not far away and if either had looked could have seen Valerie and Ian.

"Quick. Kiss me as if we're sweethearts," Valerie said.

It is to Ian's credit that he understood her purpose right away and complied with her request. Then Valerie drew him aside where they could watch while pretending to be sharing news. Moreover, they were watching the platform gates as they did so.

Ian said "That's the man I saw in the garden in Reigate going to the Portsmouth platform. And over there is the woman, going onto the Hastings platform."

Valerie said "Should we follow them? I could follow the woman and you the man."

"Not a good idea when we know they are armed. I think we keep an eye on them in the hope of reinforcements. Can you go to the police station and bring some constables? I'll try to keep an eye on both of them so we know where they are. But we probably want the constables to be concealed as long as possible to avoid harm to the public."

Valerie left with as much haste as she could without drawing attention to herself and Ian moved behind a waggon loaded with mail sacks and parcels. He was there for about ten minutes when a voice said "'Ere. What're you doin' there?"

Ian said "There is a woman – she has a straw bonnet and a green skirt – on the Hastings platform. She shot a man in the street and some of my acquaintances followed her and her accomplice – he is in black trousers and a light grey long jacket on the Portsmouth platform. I am trying to keep an eye on them until the constables arrive. A friend has gone to fetch them. Perhaps you can inform the stationmaster. The police will likely want to clear the concourse but to do anything too soon may cause the villains to act dangerously."

"'ow do I know you're not the villain," the man said, who was wearing porter's garb.

"I can only tell you my name is Ian Hoyle and I work for *Upton Furnishings*. I'm sure you see our associates with *Best Bonnet* regularly. If one of them is about, bring them to identify me."

“All right. I’ll see what I can do.”

The porter disappeared. There was a long, long eleven minutes before Valerie walked into the station. From the entrance way, she was able to see Ian, and came over behind the waggon. Ian told her what he had said to the porter, and that the man and woman were still on the platforms.

Valerie said “But the Hastings train is leaving! Did the stationmaster not stop it. I suggested to the constables that they should get to him and find out where they could be concealed but close to the man and woman.”

“Perhaps not enough time. Or the constables wish to deal with one villain at a time.”

There was a whistle, and the Hastings train started to move off. As yet there was no train at the Portsmouth platform, but it was expected shortly.

After a couple of minutes, the porter came back with two men wearing ill-fitting railway jackets. Ah. Policemen. One of them was Constable Jacobs, who Ian had met at some point. The other was Sergeant Shaw.

“Mr. Hoyle. We let the woman go for now so we can concentrate on the man. Other constables have been sent to the street where one man was shot and another injured in some way. The message we got was a bit garbled by a young person who was all out of breath. Can you point out the man for us?”

Ian did this. Shaw then said “Jacobs, I’m going to have the porter pull the waggon by its handle, and you push it. I want you to go just past the man as if you’re going to where the baggage car will be. Ah. Here comes the train. That should cause some distraction to hide us. I’ll be a few yards behind and I’ll grab ’im and you join in quick-like.”

This is what they did. There was a near catastrophe when a woman asked Shaw for directions, and he had to fob her off with “Sorry Ma’am. I’m just in from Croydon. Ask at the ticket office.” Then he had to catch up to the waggon.

When he got closer, he realized his quarry was known to him. He said “Afternoon, Reggie. I’m afraid I must arrest you for assault. Put out your ’ands so I can cuff you.”

Reggie had other intentions and swung his arm to bring out the cudgel. However, he didn’t see Jacobs behind him with a truncheon that came down on his head with a surprisingly loud crack. Reggie slumped to the ground.

Shaw said “Looks like we’ll need that waggon. Better unload it or bring us another to get this criminal to the station.”

Sorting things out

Shaw asked Valerie and Ian to come down to the police station to give statements, as the train platform was not conducive to getting the record correct. Valerie saw Peter and asked him to come along, but the other boy had a great fear of the police and made himself scarce.

At the police station there was quite a crowd of people. Reggie Dawson – Shaw knew his name from a previous encounter – was examined by a doctor and pronounced to have a fractured skull. His head was bandaged and he was put in a cell on his own. The doctor said he was badly concussed. Shaw decided to wait to question him.

The doctor also looked at Dickie Kearns, alias Smith. It wasn't certain what injury his knee had suffered, but he was able to hobble around. He would be confined to a cell also, but in Lewes, as the police did not want him talking to Dawson. However, first they would find out what he knew.

With the threat that he was accessory to murder, even though he would likely have been another victim, Kearns was only too happy to shop the rest of the gang, at least in so far as he knew of it. It seemed there was a boss, who he called Holywell but suspected it wasn't his real name. He had a London accent, from the East End. Kearns spilled the address in Reigate and mentioned Betty Parker.

Kearns and Nugent had got to England from Gibraltar through France. In London, Kearns had sought out Parker, who dabbled in all sorts of crime, though mostly prostitution and fraud, as well as acting as a courier or messenger for different criminals, with some of whom she was known to share a bed. Kearns said he hadn't thought she knew about firearms, and was shocked when she produced a pistol. More so when the pistol went off.

Betty Parker had known that Holywell, the name she gave for the supposed boss, was looking to run an extortion operation in a town outside London. London had the Metropolitan Police and half a dozen criminal gangs. Too much competition and too big a risk of arrest. He'd found a house to rent in Reigate. Close enough and convenient enough with the train to London and other places. Holywell thought Brighton or a similar town was ripe for the picking.

Shaw found out that collected money was left at a couple of the victims' shops, and guessed now that Betty was the agent who took these collections to Holywell. As yet, Smith didn't know why Betty and Reggie thought Smith and Nugent were skimming the proceeds. Shaw pushed him on this, since it was an obvious temptation for crooks. Kearns said that they were told they could keep a third of the take, and he felt he and Nugent could live with that, though they didn't count the free accommodation and meals with

Mrs. Crompton, nor some perks like unpaid drinks or merchandise they took at will. Kearns did mention the strange letter they received warning of retribution.

“Does Holywell have any muscle besides Reggie?” Shaw asked.

“Probably, but we didn’t see anyone except a gardener. The gardener’s wife is the housekeeper and cook.”

“You have anyone else with you here?” Shaw asked.

“No. Unless you mean that oaf Horner we got off Simpson the book-maker. Bloody idiot.”

“Well, would he perhaps be involved in the disappearance and apparent murder of a young Mr. Zachary Cartwright?”

Kearns blanched and went silent. Shaw continued “We found blood and now can’t find him, nor a trace of Mr. Horner, who up until now has never shown an inclination to violence, though debtors to Mr. Simpson may wish to avoid any confirmation of that.”

“Don’t know anything about that,” Kearns blustered.

“Then there’s the matter of desertion from Her Majesty’s army, as well as the disappearance of some regimental silver. Why don’t you tell us about that, Mr. Kearns?”

“Not gonna’ say anything,” Kearns muttered.

Shaw rang a bell and a constable came.

“Convey Mr. Kearns to Lewes gaol and ensure he does not communicate with anyone for the next 48 hours,” Shaw said.

Descent on Reigate

Shaw went to see Chief Superintendent George White to ask how they should proceed.

“I’ll telegraph the Surrey Police to ask for reinforcements, including someone who is armed. You may arm yourself, Shaw. Now who can identify our suspects?”

Shaw told how the group of business people associated with Miss Valerie Upton had gathered data and made images of the criminals. She was familiar with the face of Betty Parker. They as yet did not have an image of Holywell, and suspected this was an alias. Mr. Ian Hoyle had been to the house in Reigate and met the housekeeper and a Mr. Robert Vance who was with Hoyle had observed this. Hoyle had seen the gardener with a man assumed to be Reggie. Mr. Vance was being fetched to give a statement as Shaw was talking to his Superintendent.

“See if Hoyle and Vance are willing to accompany you to Reigate. They can recognize the woman, the housekeeper and the gardener. We don’t have anyone who knows the leader, do we?”

“No. He – or possibly she – uses Holywell as a name. We’ll need to act quickly, sir. With the murder of Nugent, the villains will almost certainly want to disappear. Can you telegraph to ask that a magistrate grant us a warrant to enter the house at this address?”

“Yes. I will do that and hope the Surrey Police are able to find a magistrate tonight. It is a Saturday night, after all. Of course, crime does not regard the calendar. Worse luck a lot of people take a holiday on Monday. There’s talk of making it a bank holiday. Good luck Sergeant Shaw.

“Oh. Since you are going to be busy, I’ll arrange to get a couple of the constables to make rounds as soon as possible – tonight or tomorrow – to get statements from all the known victims and to ask other businesses if they have been taxed by the villains. We want to have a good case for the courts. These vermin make for an unhappy town.”

There was a train at 8 o’clock. Shaw was accompanied by Constable Jacobs along with Ian and Robert. On the journey, Shaw mentioned the letter Smith had received. Ian told him it had been written by the group of investigating people, along with one to Holywell.

“Well, you certainly set the cat among the pigeons,” Shaw said.

“We felt we had to make them work against themselves rather than us,” Ian replied, to which Shaw nodded.

The train got to Reigate slightly after 9 p.m. There were two policemen on the platform.

“Sergeant Shaw. I’m Constable Horrocks and this is Constable Stevens. We are waiting for one of our other constables to get a warrant to search the address that was sent to us, but we will go there and attempt to stop the criminals from getting away. There are two vehicles waiting to take us there.”

It was now getting dark, but there was still twilight as they got to the house where Ian had pretended to seek to buy furniture. Ian and Robert were told to watch from one of the carriages with Stevens. The other carriage was left a little way down the road so it was not visible from the house. Shaw and Horrocks went to the front door and pulled the bell, while Jacobs went round the house to the back. Both Jacobs and Horrocks had lanterns.

In the carriage, Ian saw the door open and in the lantern light the face of a woman. “That’s the housekeeper,” he said.

At the door, the woman was making a great play of insisting the policemen show their identification. She called her husband, and Ian saw and noted that the gardener was at the door. There was the sound of horses hooves and a hansom pulled up and a policeman jumped out and went to

the door waving a piece of paper. Clearly the warrant had arrived.

Before the police entered the house, however, there were two gunshots. Shaw said something to the new policeman – clearly to stay and stop anyone from exiting through the front door – and he went to the left side of the house while Horrocks went to the right.

For some minutes, nothing was seen. Then Horrocks appeared with Betty Parker in handcuffs. Following were Shaw carrying a valise and a man in handcuffs but holding a bloody handkerchief around one hand. Then came Jacobs with another valise, a handbag and a garden basket.

Some local residents had heard the shots and were gathering.

Constable Stevens got out of the carriage and Ian and Robert followed him.

The police and the villains and their associates were all gathered near the front door. Some locals were near the carriages.

Shaw said quietly “Stevens. Get back near the carriages and make sure nobody touches them.”

Loudly he said “Ladies and gentlemen. This is an investigation of a murder and other crimes. Anyone not part of the investigation team should go back to their homes. I will arrest for obstruction of justice anyone who gets in the way of any of my team, and you’ll spend at least two nights in gaol before the magistrate holds court on Monday.”

Muttering, several people moved reluctantly away.

In an normal voice, Shaw said “Unless one of the Surrey Police has an objection, I propose to arrest Miss Parker for the murder of Henry Nugent and for threatening an officer with a firearm as well as potentially other offences. The gentleman with the injured hand, known at the moment as Holywell, is under arrest for attempted murder of a police constable and potentially other offences. He pulled out a pistol and discharged it at Constable Jacobs, fortunately missing him, while Jacobs’ ball got him in the hand. The gardener and housekeeper give their names as Frederick and Ida Stone. They will be held as potential accomplices or witnesses.

“Now I am going to suggest that Constable Jordan, who came with the warrant in a hansom, fetch reinforcements to transport our prisoners to gaol. If possible, Jordan, bring at least one woman warden. While we have searched the four as well as we can and believe they have no knives or other weapons, nor contraband, we have not, of course, made a thorough search of the women. We will get a lady warden from the gaol to do that. In the meantime, I propose to ask Mr. Hoyle and Mr. Vance to watch the prisoners while the rest of us do a search of the house, the valises and Miss Parker’s handbag. I have placed Mr. Holywell’s pocket contents in this cloth bag and will examine it inside. Here is my whistle for Mr. Hoyle to use should any of the prisoners give any cause for concern. I suggest Mr. Hoyle and Mr.

Vance take the driver's seat of one of the carriages to afford them a good view without being close to the prisoners.

"Constable Horrocks. I'll ask you to take charge of the pistols that Parker and Holywell used. Please ensure they are unloaded but make notes of which was with which person and the state of loading or recent firing."

It was gone 10 o'clock now. A pair of ropes were found. One was threaded through the handcuffed arms of Holywell and Mr. Stone and through the handrail of the front steps. The two men were made to sit on the bottom step. The women were similarly restrained but with the rope through a hitching ring by the road. The women were made to sit on the ground, to which they objected, but their objections were ignored.

The policemen went inside the house and it was clear they lit the gas lights throughout. Ian and Robert said nothing to each other. They heard some whispering between the women, but the men prisoners were silent. In this way about an hour passed, then a heavy enclosed waggon came up the road. There were three policemen and a woman in a uniform, presumably a gaol warden, who got out or off the waggon.

Shaw must have heard the waggon, as he came out. There was a muffled exchange of introductions, then with very little fuss the prisoners were loaded in the waggon and it departed.

Shaw and Horrocks came over to the carriage where Ian and Robert were seated. "We are going to close the house and put it under guard for tonight and resume our search in the morning. However, we found quite a lot of money in the bags of Holywell and Parker. I'd like one of you to observe a count and we'll make a record. There have been cases of theft from evidence in some constabularies, and I do not want our investigation or its men tainted by accusations.

"When we've done that, we'll go back to the police station and try to find you both, and myself and Jacobs, a place to sleep. It is rather late to find an hotel or guest house."

Horrocks said "The Fire Brigade may have some blankets. And I asked one of the men on the waggon to arrange some food and drink, as I'm sure none of you have eaten for a while."

Thus it was that shortly after midnight Ian and Robert found themselves trying to sleep on the floor of a room normally used to interview suspects in the police station. The following morning – it was Sunday – the town was very quiet. Some breakfast was found for our pair, then Jacobs accompanied them to the train station and bought them tickets for Brighton, thanked them for their assistance and went back to help Shaw, as Betty Parker would be transferred to Brighton for arraignment. The house search would also be continued in daylight.

Light of day

Ian actually got off at Lewes and spent the day with his family. His mother made him take a bath and an hour and a half nap before Sunday dinner. After dinner, late in the afternoon, he made his way back to *Uptons*.

That evening he went over to *Matilda's* to ask Valerie if she wished to take a walk on the Promenade, to which she agreed in order to learn about the events of the last few days. Ian told Valerie all that he could remember. The story was told mostly in its time order from the rather unexpected kiss at the station, though some details popped into recall out of sequence.

They got to the Promenade and began a walk along the front. Valerie said "We'll want to make a list of all the payments different businesses have paid. There may be some money from what Holywell had that should come back to the victims of the extortion."

"It will likely take time. Holywell may even claim payments to the Brighton Merchants Protective Company were voluntary. Even if not, there'll be a lot of arguments."

Valerie said "At least we can now get on with trying to grow our business."

"Yes. I've not had a chance to examine the information from the furniture manufacturers and wholesalers. But we could use some more or less standard dining room or kitchen chairs as well as some simple but attractive tables for kitchen or perhaps common dining use."

"Let's each look over the information and see if we can find a modest order of items we are fairly sure will sell. We'd buy them for resale, so we aren't owing any money, and the worst that happens is we lose the cost of the order."

Ian replied "You're thinking that we don't put ourselves in a situation where the business could be ruined by owing money. Oh. I shouldn't say that. I sounded like I was a part-owner, which isn't the case."

"But you are a part of things, Ian. If I've learned anything from the people in our circle, it's that all of us have to work together. If things go forward, there's no reason you can't be an owner. After all, we've talked of how we want possibly to open other showrooms."

"Yes. That's true. But it seems ... er ... out of reach, I suppose. Our family's been fortunate to always have a roof and food, but never much more."

"Well, Ian. One step at a time. One step at a time. And eventually, hopefully, we'll get there."

"Thanks, Valerie. I appreciate your confidence."

"I should also apologize for putting you in an awkward spot when we met at the station and I suggested we should pretend to be sweethearts."

"It was a sensible suggestion to avoid being detected by the criminals. I hope I didn't hurt you. I've never ... er ... kissed a girl before."

"I've never been kissed either. Ma's even started to make comments about courting and walking out."

"My parents too," Ian said. "I've probably talked more to you than any other young woman."

"For me, it's that I don't find a lot of interest in babies and keeping a house. Joseph's Mary likes that role. They've been married just over a year. I expect she'll fall pregnant soon."

"Valerie. I ... er ... can I ... er ... tell you something that really has been bothering me? But only for your ears. Is that all right?"

"I think you know I don't flap my lips."

"Well. When I hear other men talk about women, they seem to be very animated. Pulled towards the women by some unseen force. I just don't feel that, at least not as intensely. Sometimes I find I'm attracted as much to some men. But I know that's considered very bad, and some men have been charged with crimes and imprisoned, even hanged. I've no plans to head down that road."

Valerie said "But your feelings make you uncomfortable. Do I take it you don't intend to marry?"

"I feel no draw to matrimony. Business is more interesting."

"Well, Ian. I enjoy your company, so we could walk out together in the way we have once or twice, and in that way scotch some of the remarks from family or friends."

Ian smiled. "Indeed we could. I would like that very much, as I find your company enjoyable too. And you are an attractive woman, I believe."

Unfolding the map

Over the following week, though really starting on the Tuesday given that many people treated the Monday as the holiday it would become with the Bank Holidays Act of 1871, more details about the criminals came out, though they were quite distorted in transmission as the police wanted to keep statements and information under wraps until the cases for prosecution were well-organized.

Still, on Tuesday morning, quite early, Timothy Lester came to *News and More* to talk to Tony. Jack was at the counter, as usual, handling the papers.

"Mornin' Mr. Dixon. Mr. Brown about? I'd like a quiet word if I may."

Jack knew that Lester had in the past given Tony some useful information, and that Tony would feed Lester information from time to time. Before Jack could answer, Tony came from the back room of the shop – he had just come out of the water closet which had been installed there not many months previously.

“I was about to check on Moonbeam, Mr. Lester. Why don’t you join me?”

After they were outside the shop and crossing to the stable, Lester said “I always like to see Moonbeam, but your suggestion is a really good one to avoid unwelcome ears.”

“Indeed. How may I help you?”

“Odd bits and pieces about the shootin’ Saturday suggest you may have some information of interest.”

“Well, I didn’t actually see any of the incidents. However, you’re probably aware some crooks have been making people pay for so-called protection.”

“Not hard to learn that something’s going on when everyone’s cautious and unhappy. At the same time, nobody wants to end up with a fire or their son or daughter bashed.”

“With some of the gang arrested, but others possibly still at large, there’ll be some nervousness for a while, I’m sure.”

“Probably won’t really calm down until the villains are in the care of Her Majesty,” Lester observed.

“Yes. But I’ll tell you – but no names in case the villains are reading your submissions – that a number of business people started investigating and followed the two men who were here. We – well, the group doing the following and digging – eventually got an address. But it seems there was some sort of falling out between the crooks.”

“Well, Mr. Brown, it wouldn’t be the first time the bosses were suspicious of the workers.”

“Or both groups were told something about the other. Though you never heard anything about that from Moonbeam, did he girl?”

“Ooh. That’s a nice angle on the story. Once the courts start to try them, I’ll speculate in my articles that some enemy of the crooks was stirring them up.”

Tony said “Might also want to try to get the identity of the boss. I think that’s not yet known to the police. At least, not to the Brighton police.”

“Be a feather in my hat if I can get the story. But I ’ear he’s being held in Reigate. He took a shot at a copper there. Still, I’ll ask around and see if there’s any whispers about who this fellow called Holywell is.”

“There doesn’t seem to be a picture of him,” Tony said. “Master Hugh Talbot who studies with Captain Fraser drew some good pictures of the villains here in Brighton.”

“Wonder if I can get my editor to come up with some cash to get him with me to Reigate for Holywell’s arraignment. I’ll have to rush to get there, so may have to take a flyer on the money. Thanks, Mr. Brown.”

Portraiture

Hugh Talbot was happy to earn a half crown and have a day in Reigate with a couple of café meals. Timothy Lester was even happier with the drawings, no less than three of them, that Hugh produced. Lester had arranged with a local photographer to take images of drawings as soon as they were available. Court was over by half-past eleven, and the images captured by noon, but the originals Lester put in an envelope and then put that inside a leather folder to protect them. Lester and Talbot then found some lunch and went to the station where Talbot went south to Brighton, while Lester went north to London.

By late in the afternoon he was in a grubby public house in the East End, actually not far from one of the furniture factories that had been visited by the Cohens and Uptons. Lester had been given the name of a man who spent his day in the pub, apparently drinking all the time. Actually, while his glass was fairly often refilled, the contents were, by arrangement, only mildly alcoholic. But all day people came and went to talk to him. He was, in reality, the boss of a fairly large criminal gang. Like all such gangs, there were several violent men who would kill or maim on command, but Knox, the name the man went by, wanted a peaceful and orderly territory where he could profit by many, many small but steady revenues, or by providing high paying specialized services, such as spiriting out of the country those sought by the authorities. As far as he could, Knox avoided interaction with the Metropolitan Police. He also made clear to other criminals what he considered his gang’s territory and scope of operations. If they didn’t cause trouble, he wouldn’t. It made for a quiet and profitable life.

Lester got a half pint of ale. He didn’t ask who Knox was, figuring to show ignorance would put him at risk. However, it was soon clear to him who Knox was, and when Knox was not occupied he took a deep breath and went over to him.

“Mr. Knox. I’m Timothy Lester of the Brighton Herald. I’ve some information I could share with you in exchange for you possibly identifying a man from a portrait I have.”

“’ow do I know you’re not a copper, or working for some of my ... shall we say competitors?”

“Unless I had a strong backing of either, my guess is I’d be foolish to

approach you if I were with either group. I can only answer any questions you may have of me to the best of my ability, though I won't betray the names of ordinary folk who've told me things that might be dangerous to them if some villains learnt those names."

"Tell me what information you have that might interest me."

"I know how the people trying to get money for 'protection' in Brighton were caught out. I have a picture of the man the police think is the leader, but I don't know his name, and as far as I know, nor do they."

"And why would I be interested in a group of provincial minnows?"

Lester looked Knox in the eye and said "Because minnows that don't get eaten sometimes become big enough to eat other fish."

"Good answer, Mr. Lester. Well, I'll be doing nothing illegal to listen to what you tell me and look at your picture. It will pass a few minutes and may prove entertaining. Show me the picture. I'll decide if I tell you who it is, presuming I know."

Lester had previously chosen one of the drawings. He'd left the envelope with the others in Left Luggage at London Bridge station, just in case, and had telegraphed his editor that information and where he was going.

"This was drawn this morning in Reigate when the subject, who has been going by the name Holywell, was arraigned."

Lester noted a slight flicker of surprise in the eyes of Knox.

"Now tell me your tale about 'im and I'll think about whether I know 'im."

Lester related what he knew about the Brighton Merchants Protective Company, leaving out all names of the people he knew in Brighton, but noting how Smith and Jones had been followed, and how letters had gone to them and to their associates in Reigate, leading to the confrontation where Nugent was shot. He related what he knew of events the same night in Reigate. He gave the names of Kearns and Nugent and Betty Parker and Reggie Dawson, as well as Fred and Ida Stone. He mentioned that Dawson had a fractured skull courtesy of a police truncheon.

"I believe that's the sum of what I know so far, Mr. Knox. I hope it is of sufficient worth that you can, if able, tell me the name of the man in the picture."

"I'll actually do more than that, because I'm mightily vexed that the man you wish to identify has disobeyed my advice. He's Brian Wells, and he's my nephew, son of my sister. Self-important little shit who, with Reggie Dawson, was sent to collect some money from an ... er ... associate who owed us quite a bit. The associate could only pay a bit more than half, and my instructions were to make a bit of a mess of it 'ouse, but not so much that 'e wouldn't be able to earn the rest he owed so we would get paid. But they decided to 'urt the man. And as they were bashin' 'im, one of the man's

kids – a girl of 9 – comes in screaming and Brian shuts 'er up by cuttin' 'er throat. Then 'e finishes off the man 'cause 'e doesn't want a witness.

"There'd been noise, and the man lived in a place where folk know never to poke their noses in, but also to watch without being seen. About four of 'em saw Brian and Reggie leave with blood on their 'ands and clothing.

"I suggested Brian go to Canada, and the bodies to go where they'd be unlikely to be found. There are people I know who can arrange such things. I told Reggie to disappear and never let me see 'im again. Paid off the witnesses. Could'a tried scarin' 'em, but money and the idea of goin' missing works better. But I'd a suspicion Brian didn't go to Canada, or rather that 'e got off the boat in Belfast when she stopped there.

"Now I'm going to suggest you've finished your drink, Mr. Lester, and I'm also going to advise you to forget my relationship to the unpleasant Mr. Wells."

"Absolutely, Mr. Knox. I very much appreciate what you told me, and I'm sorry your previous advice was not followed. Good day to you, sir."

Lester did not want to risk Knox changing his mind so that the story would be buried, likely with Lester too, so he found a hansom as quickly as he could and got himself to London Bridge, thence to Brighton. It was almost dark by the time he got home, and he would have to wait to submit his copy and to talk to various people with whom information should be shared. The photographs of Hugh Talbot's drawings should be going direct to the *Herald* by post. If the photographer was efficient, they'd arrive with one of the morning deliveries.

Cops and Newspapermen

After delivering his column to the editor at the *Herald* – it would hopefully be sold on to other papers and he'd get a bit of extra cash – Lester went to the police station. He already knew Shaw was involved in the Holywell case.

"Mr. Lester. To what do we owe your benevolent visit?" Shaw wasn't a great admirer of newspapermen.

"I've learned the identity of the man going by the name Holywell."

This was, as it turns out, of some interest to Shaw. Reggie had not answered any questions, either by virtue of his head injury or dissimulation of the effects of one. Shaw was going to ask a colleague, when standing outside Reggie's cell, to make arrangements to transfer him to the insane asylum since he wouldn't likely regain his mental faculties. And wasn't it a pity that this would be a life sentence, since the worse Reggie had apparently done was common assault, and that upon a criminal. This bit of theatre might

loosen Reggie's tongue, but if Lester had the name, it would be quicker to listen to him.

"All right. Better tell me about 'im."

Lester gave the name given to him by "a source" who had been shown one of Hugh Talbot's portraits. Lester displayed this drawing to Shaw. He left out mention of Knox and his relationship to Wells. However, he did suggest there were "rumours" that Wells, with Dawson present, had murdered a man and his daughter who hadn't paid a criminal debt.

"All right, Mr. Lester. A big thank you for your information. I'll telegraph it to Reigate and see if Reggie Dawson has more to say. And from what you said, there's photographs of the portrait of Wells. If we could 'ave a couple, it would assist our investigation. I'll even arrange for payment of costs as long as your editor ain't greedy.

"Now things are really 'ectic today. Yesterday the Criminal Law Consolidation Acts were given Royal Assent. All sorts of changes in the rules, and we 'ave to figure out whether crimes on Monday and Wednesday fall under different laws."

Shaw was referring to a large set of legal changes. Hanging would now only apply to murder, embezzlement, piracy, high treason and acts of arson at docks or ammunition depots. The age of consent was now set to 12. There was a new Accessories and Abettors law, codification of counterfeiting and forgery offences, of larceny and malicious damage, and finally of offences against the person, which now created an offence of causing bodily harm by "wanton or furious driving". The last item would give Shaw a way to rag Tony about how fast he drove Moonbeam, which was, of course, not fast at all.

Bookkeeping

That same morning at breakfast, Valerie said "We should ensure we have a good list of payments made to Smith and Jones to make a claim if there are monies recovered. Ian said he was witness to a count of money found in the house in Reigate that totalled several hundred pounds."

Jane said "There'll be all kinds of people claiming they paid money, since the villains didn't give receipts."

Tony said "It wouldn't surprise me if claims went before a judge. Though if we're lucky, the villains may have kept a record themselves."

Both Jane and Tony were correct in their own way. Once the criminal cases were complete, at least in relation to the Brighton Merchants Protective Company, there was an advertisement in various newspapers in the

Brighton region giving the address of an office where claims could be submitted. However, it was not revealed that, after some questioning, Kearns admitted he kept a record of payments received and also those forwarded to "Holywell". This record, in a quite modest notebook, was compared to the incoming claims and many such claims were not mirrored in the notes.

The close alignment of the notebook with records such as those kept by Valerie and the associates she had worked with was instrumental in them getting about half of what they'd paid to the villains back. However, the payout was not received until well over a year later. The false claimants were asked why date, time and amount lists were not matched by those of the villains' notebook, and in some cases how the villains could be in two places quite far apart at the same time.

Overall, quite a lot of money had been spent already by the crooks, so it was essentially gone, even if much later some would be partially recovered by sale of non-perishable goods that had been purchased. The losses would, fortunately, not ruin our friends, but it would take away some of the enjoyable extras that were possible when there was money for the non-essentials. For each, there was a redoubling of efforts in the next few months, as well as an evaluation of what was important to them.

For Valerie, the last part of 1861 marked the first, and as it turned out successful, trial of selling new furniture items. The trial was modest, and followed the plan Ian and Valerie discussed in their walk on the Promenade. Rebecca and Valerie were going to invest 40 pounds in a modest selection of chairs and tables. Two weeks after the drama in Reigate, Rebecca and Valerie came into the Presentation Space to consider where they might put items if they went ahead.

Valerie said "Ian. Do you think if we put the new items in one corner, say at the front on the left, we could build on that space if the venture proved itself? You know, take over more space for new and reduce that for second-hand."

"That makes some sense, since customers might get upset if they thought we were selling second-hand as new, or indeed if our display allowed such confusion, even innocently."

"I hadn't thought of that possibility," Valerie answered.

"Makes sense though," Rebecca commented.

"Would you allow me to add 10 pounds to the sum invested? Make it an even 50," Ian asked.

Rebecca and Valerie looked at each other, then Valerie said "I can't see why not."

Rebecca concurred "Fine by me. But we'd better write a letter of agreement, and make sure we have an understanding of what we'll do if the items out-stay their welcome. Business agreements can be like a marriage; all

wonderful until it's time for them to come to an end.

"Also send a note or go and see Abraham Cohen and Maud Mortimer. Let them know what we're doing. I suspect that they might want to invest too. Possibly not right away. No sense in counting chickens before they've hatched."

Private satisfaction

The following weekend the weather was settled and mild. Sunday morning started warm. Tony checked the donkeys and made sure they had plenty of water, then came back in to breakfast.

Bobby said "Is it still all right that I go with Mr. Upton and his wife to give donkey rides?"

"Yes. That's what we talked about yesterday."

"But I won't be here to cook dinner. And Valerie is going to Lewes to meet Mr. 'oyle's family."

"If Jane doesn't want to cook, we can all go to the pub for something."

Jane was just coming into the kitchen and said "This Jane would prefer to go to the pub, especially as today is too nice to cook. By the way, is Arthur here today?"

Tony said "No. Off to see his family. Apparently they're all going to one of his uncle's over in Hove for a wedding of a cousin. And the uncle had a big win on a horse, so my guess is there'll be lots of beer."

Valerie came in and said good morning. Bobby was cooking scrambled eggs for breakfast, but had first toasted some bread by laying it on the hot stove top. This toast was in a wire rack at the back of the stove to keep warm.

"Anyone for some jam?" Valerie asked. There was a fresh pot of strawberry jam that the ladies from the Meadow had sent over during the week, and she was anxious to taste it.

"Once it's open, I'm sure we'll scoff the lot in no time," Tony said. "But it's as good a time as any to do so. I'll get it and break the seal." There was wax holding the wooden top in place.

After breakfast was cleared away, Valerie gathered her bonnet and reticule and said her farewells. Bobby prepared a bag with some bread and cheese and a bottle of water and put on a straw hat. They could hear someone unlock the door to the yard, then Joseph called up "Just Mary and I. We'll start to get the donkeys ready." Bobby said goodbye and went down.

Tony filled a cup with coffee and added milk. Coffee had become the drink of choice for Sunday. Then he put butter and jam on the last piece of

toast and said "I'll take this down for Jack."

"He'll no doubt appreciate it," Jane said.

Jack did, indeed, appreciate the gesture. Especially the strawberry jam, which was very good. Tony took a couple of newspapers – they were already set aside for him – and returned upstairs. He and Jane spent the next three quarters of an hour reading quietly.

Jane said "Do you have any plans for today?"

"I was about to ask you the same. Are we going to church? Oh. From my watch we'd have to rush. Perhaps a day of being mildly heathen."

"Jack will be closing up soon. Why don't we be very heathen and take our bath this morning after he's gone. We can lock the door to downstairs and not need the screens. I can trim your hair if you want as well. I acquired a set of the new hair clippers made by the man called John Smith, though his real name is Nikola and some unpronounceable Serbian family name. Then this afternoon we could walk out to Lane Meadow. I've not been there for a couple of weeks and it would be nice to catch up."

"I'll make sure there's enough hot water, though it's mild enough today that we don't need the room warmed."

An hour later, Tony and Jane were lying on the bed in Jane's room. Jane had the ulterior motive of wanting to try the clippers to remove her pubic hair, a practice she had begun in the Crimea to avoid lice, but then continued. And it would be convenient if Tony assisted. And Tony was curious enough to accept a trial with Jane wielding the clippers. After bathing, curiosity and some minor horseplay led to Tony's first real orgasm, with reciprocity shortly after for Jane.

"Perhaps I now comprehend better what you meant by a climax," Tony said.

Jane laughed and gave Tony a kiss. "Words don't suffice, my dear Tony. And you got wonderfully wet and slippery."

"So did you. Now I understand why you laid a towel on the bed. I thought it was simply in case we were still damp from the bath."

"Some time ago, I talked with Adeline about how some people seem pulled to sexual activity as if out of control. I felt a bit that way today."

Jane said "In the safety of friendship and love, can there be any harm?"

"No. You are right. And I suppose that is the message of the marriage vows. To keep constant and avoid disease and defilement."

"You have a dark view of the world, but perhaps a realistic one given how you grew up," Jane said. "But maybe I'll make you climax again before we lose our wonderful nakedness and your sensitive nubbin is all wrapped up again."

"What if I want to make you climax again first?" Tony responded, laughing.

Some half hour later, Jane and Tony realized that the effects of their bath were undone and they sponged off, dressed, and emptied the bath into the kitchen sink that had a drain to the outside. It was now around noon, and they decided to forego lunch, as there were always some refreshments at Lane Meadow.

Tony checked windows and doors were all locked and they exited via the yard, then set off for the Meadow.

Meadow Sunday

Jane and Tony arrived at the Meadow around one o'clock. As they passed *Soultons'* Tony spotted Vera in the yard and they waved to each other. It was obvious where Jane and Tony were headed. No doubt Tom and Vera would come by to say hello, else Tony and Jane would pop in on their way home.

When Jane and Tony came in the gate of the Meadow, they saw that there was a pair of makeshift tables set up in the shade of the cottage with some chairs around them. Evelyn was spreading a tablecloth.

"Ahoy there Jane," she said. "You've arrived in time to join us to celebrate Priscilla's birthday. There's plenty of food."

"We hadn't intended to cadge a meal," Tony said. "Though we did bring some Treats made by the Factory, both sweet and savoury, and some cider."

"You'd have been welcome without. Oh. Here's Harvey with more chairs."

The person mentioned was Horner, and he was carrying three chairs like they were feathers.

"Evelyn – er. Mrs. Bairstow – been givin' me some lessons in reading. Real nice of 'er to invite me to the party."

"Glad to hear it, Mr. Horner," Tony said. "Are you back working for Simpson?"

"Yeah. An' 'e's engaged young Mr. Cartwright who I were 'ere with. Zachary takes bets in 'is Dad's pub and a few other places and brings the money to Simpson, then takes the winnings back. The boy we 'ad as runner scarpered when Smith and Jones came sniffin' round. Takin' bets off the race track ain't strictly legal, but the coppers generally leave us alone."

Carrying dishes from the cottage came three women. Dora Burke and Phoebe Owens were former nursing colleagues of Jane, but the third woman, carrying a small infant, was Priscilla Peabody. Despite the fact her pregnancy was the result of a rape by a stranger who broke into her family's house in

Reading in late November of the previous year, her family had sent her to Meadow Lane in Brighton to be more or less sequestered for her pregnancy.

Tony said "Priscilla. You have had your child! Nobody told me."

Priscilla said "We've named him Charlie – Charles."

Jane said "I meant to tell you I had a note from Evelyn last week. All the fuss with the criminals drove it from my mind."

Priscilla said "Robert told me about the criminals."

Evelyn said "And a policeman came to show Priscilla a photograph of the man they think attacked her. He was apprehended in the act of attacking another poor woman."

"Was it the same person," Jane asked.

"I'm not absolutely sure," Priscilla answered. "In a couple of weeks I'll go back to Reading to my family. Unfortunately, I'll possibly have to face him. Though since the policeman came, I remember that the man who attacked me had a crooked finger, possibly from some injury that had healed. We sent a note to the police station, but have not had any response."

Tony asked "What will happen to Charlie?"

Priscilla looked very unhappy, and Tony added "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you. It's just that I was orphaned when young, and the fate of children is ...er ... important to me."

Evelyn said "We're not sure what will happen. We were fortunate with Melody that there was a childless couple in the family."

"I don't think my family will abandon the child," Priscilla said. "But I'm really afraid that I might come to ... er ... be unkind to him because of how he came into the world."

Phoebe said "I think I speak for all of us here at the Meadow when I say we're prepared to keep Charlie here until a good home is found. And a good home is not a foundling hospital in my view."

Jane nodded, "I'll not make noise about you looking after him, even if it does add a bit to the costs."

Dora – the youngest of the former nurses – was about to make a statement about practicality, but fortunately the sound of horses hooves interrupted. A hansom pulled up at the gate and Alice Shawcross, a member of the former nurses team who worked with a patient in town, got out and paid the driver. Only Margaret Cantley was missing from the group of nurses.

"Alice! How grand that you were able to come too," Evelyn cried.

For the next few minutes there was much chatter as the rest of the food and drink was put out. The topic of Charlie's future was dropped from discussion, though most of those present had continuing thoughts related to the subject.

As the eating was being concluded, Tom and Vera Soulton climbed over the wall between the properties to join the group with their three year old

son David and recently born Mavis.

“No Robert or Molly?” Evelyn asked. These were the Vance cousins. We have already met Robert who joined Ian in Reigate.

“They wanted to go down to the Promenade, as Molly’s not really ever had a chance to be a tourist.” Tom said.

Vera added “She said she brought over some rock cakes this morning for Priscilla for her birthday today. Apparently a recipe Mrs. Beaton published in one of the issues of her series on Household Management. And Robert made a cradle for Charlie that’s in the upper floor of the workshop with the linseed oil drying.”

Tony and Jane looked at each other. They’d both been told about this event – Priscilla would be 19 today – but had both forgotten it was today. There was a general round of good wishes. The normal congratulations were gently omitted, as the young woman’s recent fortunes could not be welcomed. Nor were the coming months and years likely to be easy for her. Attacked within her own bed by a stranger, she would still be considered tainted by a society that claimed Christian values.

After a few minutes, the conversation moved to the recent events with Smith and Jones *et al.* Around half-past four, a couple of the ladies started to tidy up, and the others joined in so that in a very few minutes all was tidy and the washing up was nearing completion.

Horner said “Evelyn. Would you like me to check the chickens and rabbits?”

“Thank you, Harvey. That will be most welcome. I’ll attend to the watering of those plants that need it.”

Tony, coming back from the privy, said “Jane and I should make our farewells. Thanks to all for a very pleasant afternoon.”

Alice said “May I walk with you? I doubt I’ll get a hansom out here.”

“You’ll be welcome,” Tony said, and the three of them set off towards town.

Passing inspection

The same afternoon, Valerie was with Ian at the terrace house his family rented. The Hoyles weren’t poor, but the whole family went out to work at a variety of jobs. Ian had 5 younger siblings, 3 brothers and two sisters, with the youngest 10 and the oldest 20. Ian had been out working since he was twelve, and he was nearly 22. Even his 10 year old brother, who was in school some of each week, spent time each week running messages and bets for a local bookmaker. Ian’s father was a labourer with the town, fixing roads,

ditches and similar structures. His mother worked in a greengrocer's shop. With everyone working, the family lived comfortably, but Ian had already confided to Valerie that when there was money, it somehow was spent quickly. On the train to Lewes, he said "They seem to think I'm odd because I've saved some money and am thinking of investing with you in the new items."

Valerie responded "There seem to be two groups of people, those who always save something and therefore are never in debt, and those who always spend all or more than they receive, and are forever behind. I think you can be thankful that your family are in the small group who manage to only spend what they receive, so are somewhat in the middle."

Ian laughed. "That is rather the way of the world, and I agree that few people are not savers or spenders."

The reception given Valerie was, thankfully, not oppressive with scrutiny. If anything, Valerie sensed an air of relief. Ian's Mother, Gladys, said "It's a pleasure to finally see Ian with a young woman I can welcome to Sunday dinner."

Given that Ian had been working with Joshua Goldman and the Uptons for several years now, there was thankfully not a lot of talk about what Valerie did, nor questions about her life except ones that arose from ongoing conversations. These concerned the recent arrests of the criminals, along with some speculation about the hostilities in America. Ian's father seemed to be very interested in events and noted the back and forth between the naval forces, and various skirmishes between the two sides on land. What was not yet reported in Britain was the July 21 victory of the Confederacy at Manassas, also known as the Battle of Bull Run, which would be the first of many bloody encounters.

Valerie said "I find it difficult to understand what is in the newspapers because we don't know the geography of America very well."

Mr. Hoyle said "And we really have a poor appreciation of the distances there. It is a very vast land."

Late in the afternoon, Valerie and Ian started back to Brighton. As they walked to the station in Lewes, they were quiet until within 100 yards of the entrance. Then Ian said "I was relieved that my family didn't spend all their time peppering you with questions."

"That was a relief for me also. Before we arrived, I had some anxieties in that regard."

"Ian. Do you think my visit will quell their concern about your having not courted anyone?"

"It will certainly blunt the questions. Will your coming do the same for your family?"

"I think it will, as you say, quell some concerns. On the other hand, I'm not quite sure how Joseph and Mary may take our association. It is possible

they may feel that as you are an employee, you are somehow unequal. To be fair, there has been no indication that they think that way. It may be that I am inventing their possible objections. And Ma said the other day it she was gratified you want to invest in trying new items.”

This conversation had spanned the time to enter the station and cross to the down platform for the Brighton train, which was due to arrive shortly. Indeed, a steam whistle was audible as they reached that platform and soon the locomotive was in view.

New furniture explorations

On the evening of the 13th of August, Valerie and Ian went to Chorley Terrace to talk to Maud Mortimer and Abraham Cohen. Abraham nearly bumped into them as they walked toward the Mortimer residence and therefore they arrived together.

Once tea and biscuits were served, Maud said “Abraham’s told me about the trip to London. I can see that being able to respond to needs for multiples of a particular item would very much enlarge our opportunities with hotels and other organizations wanting to place substantial orders. Also with what we might term ordinary people needing decent items of a more or less standard type.”

Valerie said “We’re also thinking that it would save on work in the showroom to be able to leave part of the display as an ongoing offering, with items filled from a warehouse, or at the beginning from a storage area.”

“That makes sense,” Maud agreed. “Though it will reduce the demand for items I buy.”

“Not necessarily,” Abraham said. “I’m thinking I will invest in some new items speculatively. You might do the same. This lets us use our ... shall we say intuition as to the desirability of particular styles and types of items.”

“Yes. I suppose that could be a different way for me to proceed,” Maud said, somewhat cautiously.

Valerie added “I see one of the biggest issues is to make sure we know what we are ordering. We did make some notes and even some crude drawings, but it would be wonderful to have detailed images or photographs.”

“I’m sure that will come,” Abraham said. “We see the Illustrated London News pictures and those of its competitors, but I fear the costs and difficulties of getting the images created and printed are an obstacle as yet. However, I did see one manufacturer’s catalogue that had drawings.”

Valerie jumped in “I also wanted to suggest that we ask for prices of some items that are unfinished. I would like to be able to have some essentially

completed dining room chairs of a decent design with a drop-in seat, but prepare that seat locally so that we could offer particularized fabrics. It should be fairly easy to get *Soultons* to create a backing for the fabric and possibly to do the stuffing and cover work. But I think it should not be too hard to find workers if we get a big order.”

Ian asked “Is it worth thinking of unfinished wood also so we can apply different shades of finish locally too?”

“We can but ask our potential suppliers,” Abraham said. Then he added “It seems we are all interested in trying out some new furniture. Should we proceed in the same way as with the second-hand? That is, shall the owner of the items put a price they want from *Upton Furnishings* and leave the latter to sell at whatever price they will. I’ll assume that Valerie will work out her own such price for the items she brings. And I am going to suggest we wait for experience to formalize arrangements on unfinished or partly finished items that we’ve just discussed.”

Ian said “That suggestion has the merit that it does not really alter what we do now. The only minor alteration will be to get items from storage – or even perhaps order more – rather than move out things in the Presentation Room.”

Valerie said “Let us turn to selecting some items to order. When I looked yesterday, there were just two companies I thought we should try first.”

The group spent the next twenty minutes deciding on some items. Ian did not comment, as he had not been present at the meetings in London and had not viewed the potential orders. Maud had separately talked to Abraham the previous day and decided to put in a £10 investment that she would share with Abraham. Later, when she had more experience of the offerings, she would possibly make her own orders. In the back of her mind was the intriguing possibility of going with Henry for a few days in London, primarily for personal pleasure but with the possibility of seeing first hand what the manufacturers could provide.

This evening Henry Mortimer had supervised the bedtime of the smaller children, aided by Yolanda Karwowski, the cook/housekeeper. The foster children, Martin and Angela MacDonald, now 13 and 11, were accustomed to managing on their own. Angela did, however, want to talk to Henry about the civil war in the formerly United States, and he spent more than a quarter of an hour in conversation with her, realizing first on his own, then admitting to his foster daughter, that he felt very poorly informed on the various dimensions of the conflict.

Henry then knocked on the parlour door and joined the group discussing furniture. Yolanda brought in a fresh pot of tea, and conversation devolved to the various topics of local and wider interest before the visitors left to get home while there was good light.

Meetings at church

Three weeks later James and Martha McDowell walked to St. John the Baptist Catholic church accompanied by a new colleague in the Fraser Academy. Seamus O'Brien was a former lieutenant in the same artillery regiment as Captain Fraser, but his particular unit had not got as far as the Crimea. Later he had been shipped to India during the Mutiny, but had contracted malaria. After several severe bouts, he had been offered a small pension and was invalided out. His pension, some small family money, and rather modest fees from students at the *Academy* would allow a reasonably comfortable life as long as he were not extravagant.

Seamus had arrived as a vacancy occurred in the house across the road from 23 Fortescue Road that was owned by the Yarrows. They had some rooms that they rented out, and Seamus became one of the Fortescue Road community. As an Irishman from the south of the island, he joined Martha and James to fulfil his Sunday obligations.

Coming back from church, they were joined by Yolanda Karwowski for the main part of their walk, as Chorley Terrace was somewhat further to the west than Fortescue Road. Thus Seamus and Yolanda met, and from meeting, each was drawn to the other.

That very afternoon, Seamus wrote to Yolanda, asking if he might walk on the Promenade with her next Sunday after church and take her to lunch. Yolanda was somewhat surprised at the letter which arrived with one of the Monday deliveries. She asked Maud if it were appropriate to accept the invitation.

Maud said "I was in the Workhouse when I'd have learnt the social niceties, so I never did get a proper understanding of them. But if you believe he is a respectable man and you want to learn more about him, then you should accept. It won't cause any difficulty here, as we can have a salad and ham and new potatoes for tea. In any event, I think it would be good to take the children to the sea. Possibly we should visit Joshua and Rachel Goldman, as we've hardly seen them since they moved to Henry Street. Their house is an easy walk from the front. If you are going to accept Mr. O'Brien's invitation, I will write to Rachel now."

"And I will write to Mr. O'Brien. I need to tell him I am Mrs. Karwowski, a widow, not Miss Karwowski."

These arrangements turned out very well for all parties. Rachel Goldman was delighted Maud and Henry and the children wanted to visit, and insisted that she would provide a meal. It would not, of course, include ham, but in fact was salad, new potatoes and cold chicken as the principal offering. The children would disagree that this was the central part of the meal, of course,

since Rachel provided some excellent Jewish pastries. Maud and Henry had, fortunately, been assiduous in training the children to be polite. In fact, the children knew to ask before taking anything from a plate unless it were offered. Angela, however, was clever enough to ask “Mrs. Goldman, I would very much like to be allowed to try each of your wonderful pastries. May we cut them so we may enjoy a bite of each?”

Such a request could not, of course, be denied, and each child got to sample the range of pastries. Later, Maud told her foster-daughter she was very proud of her polite and sensible suggestion.

More or less simultaneously, Yolanda and Seamus, having again met after Mass, indulged a lively exchange of questions and answers as they learnt each other’s history. Seamus was well-educated; his family was what may be called impoverished gentry. Over a couple of centuries the fortunes of their lands had declined, and a few of the scions of the family had gambled recklessly. Now only a small estate remained and it was rented out at a modest rent. A very modest rent that allowed for Seamus’ mother to live with dignity but not luxury, and to give Seamus a stipend that was not even half a regular wage. Nevertheless, with some fees from the *Fraser Academy* teaching he was now doing and the small pension from the Army, his income was rather better than the average Brighton resident at the time.

Yolanda was surprised that when she mentioned that besides being housekeeper to Maud and Henry Mortimer, she was doing some translations of Paris fashion magazines for the *Ladies’ Emporium*, Seamus changed to speaking in French. She thought he was simply joking or showing off, and responded in French also. Since Seamus had an easy and liquid fluency, they continued thus for some minutes, though Seamus did need to ask for translations of the names of some of the fabrics that were mentioned.

“Mrs. Karwowski. How did you come to be housekeeper to the Mortimers?”

Yolanda told her story, concluding with “You will likely learn how Maud and Henry met at Fortescue Road after Mrs. Cohen – she was Miss Match then – rescued the two sisters and their brother Tom from the Workhouse.”

“So your employer is not accustomed to servants?”

“That is true, but my own family were small merchants. I had no experience of service, nor did we ever have servants. The Mortimers treat me as a member of the family, and allow me to earn extra money from the translation. I don’t think that is very usual.”

Seamus said “It is somewhat the same at Fortescue Road. The people there may be employers or employees, but somehow there is not the usual hierarchy. I suspect that is because most of the people are, like you, unaccustomed to being or having servants. The one exception would likely be Mr. Turcotte, the barrister. I’ve not spoken to him yet, but I’ve heard he’s

a very interesting man, with an ability to talk to people of all stations in life, and a wide understanding of the law and its consequences to society.”

“He also chose to employ just Rose Bingham, now Mrs. Sinclair, after Mr. Mortimer opened his office as a solicitor. Do you know that Mrs. Sinclair owns the pony Phoenix and the gig and cart? The gig lets Mr. Sinclair get out and about. Mr. Turcotte also told Tony Brown where he could be met while out walking, so Tony could talk to him and get advice informally rather than having to pay the high fees a QC can command.”

“You have learned the gradations of the law profession?”

“Mr. O’Brien, I do work for a solicitor and I am treated as a member of the family, so I naturally hear conversations about Mr. Mortimer’s work. The children, especially Martin and Angela, ask a lot of questions.”

“You talk about them affectionately. It must be sometimes painful that your own child died of the cholera.”

“Sometimes. Fortunately most of the time that ... melancholy does not come to me. Though sometimes when it does, it is ... paralyzing. As a soldier, you must have lost friends.”

“Indeed. And sometimes one wakes in the night after dreaming about them. There can be some time – perhaps it is only a few seconds but it seems longer – before the realization that they are gone forever takes hold, and takes hold like a great sea wave crashing over one.”

“Yes. That is a good image for that ... I want to say nightmare, but a nightmare is a bad dream you wake from, but these are good dreams from which you wake to the pain.”

“Do you think there is a remedy? For instance, does living well, living a good life, blunt the pain?”

“Possibly. It has been seven years since my husband and child died. For a while I simply did what I had to do to stay alive. I was most fortunate to fall into the position with the Mortimers, and through them I have found other friends and acquaintances. In the past couple of years, I have felt comfortable in my life here.

“It just occurred to me that I have not thought whether I am happy until just now. I mean since the cholera in 1854. But I think I can say that I am.”

Seamus said “It is good to hear you say so. For myself, I’ve had an uncertain couple of years. Several bouts of the malaria. I always keep a good stock of quinine, but, thank the Lord”, and here Seamus made the sign of the cross, “I have only had one spell of fever since returning to the British Isles. That was over six months ago.”

Yolanda asked “Have you lost family, or a sweetheart?”

“I had a younger sister died of consumption at age 13. She was 8 years younger than I, and I was already in the Army by then and was supposed to go to the Crimea, but we were set down in Malta to replace part of the

garrison there and also train recruits on the guns that protect the harbour. Then we were shifted to India when the Mutiny started. And there we arrived after most of the trouble was over, for which I am glad. A lot of the British soldiers and officers exceeded their orders in putting down the rebellion. There was a lot of unnecessary bloodshed, and I am sure it will come back to haunt the authorities.”

“So you were not part of the fighting in either conflict?”

“Only in so far as my unit would check and pack equipment to be sent on to fighting units. And we would train people who were going forward, and some of those did not come back.

“I simply ended up getting malaria in a depot near Bombay, then spending some time on staff duties – administration if you will. But after three bouts of fever, the Army’d had enough of me and put me on a ship home.

“And you asked about a sweetheart. I would have liked to find one, but between my duties and then the malaria, I never got the opportunity.”

“If you were 21 when the Crimean fighting started, you and I must be nearly the same age,” Yolanda observed.

“How do you get 21? Oh, of course, 13 plus 8. Yes, I was born in early ’33.”

“Then you are a little younger than I – late 1832.”

“I hope the fact I am your junior will not stop you spending time with me, Mrs. Karwowski.”

“Not at all, Mr. O’Brien. But perhaps if we are to do so, we should use our Christian names. I am Yolanda.”

“Seamus. And perhaps the spelling is almost as irrational as many words in Polish. S E A M U S, but pronounced Shay Muss.”

“At least it is not difficult to say!” Yolanda observed, and they both laughed.

Profit and loss

By the second week in September, some of the new chairs and tables had arrived. Ian set up an attractive display so at least one sample of each item could be viewed in the Presentation Space. Valerie came over from *Matilda’s* to see what he had done, and Rebecca joined her.

“I like how the arrangement is almost as in a home, but somehow I feel it doesn’t look like real people would sit here. Oh. It needs some table linen. But we could use this as an opportunity to display those too.”

Rebecca said “Of course!” and Ian added “Might even have a few plates and cutlery.”

“We used to handle second-hand crockery and cutlery, but it wasn’t a big earner. Still, it would make things look nicer,” Rebecca said.

“What if we got some samples from a merchant who does sell ’em?” Valerie suggested. “We could ask payment for advertising or make some other arrangement that was of benefit. For example, we could use the scheme we’ve employed with Mr. Cohen and Maud Mortimer, where we have a price we must pay them but can set our own price.”

“Good idea,” Ian said. “But you’ll want to make sure you don’t accept large orders that undercut our suppliers’ retail sales.”

Valerie and Rebecca agreed to pursue the idea of presenting crockery and cutlery on consignment from or for the advertising of other merchants. In the meantime, Rebecca and Mary found some suitable items to enliven the display.

By Christmas, about a third of the new items had been sold. Ian commented “Customers are surprised we’re selling new items. They came in looking for second-hand. Perhaps we need to have a notice or notices saying ‘New and Second-hand Furnishings’.” Before the New Year several discrete additions to signage were created, along with a large card in the front shop that said “Be sure to see our offering of new furnishings in the Presentation Space.”

The Autumn did not present any surprises in the daily businesses of our group of characters. It was in world events and personal lives that there were perturbations.

On that world stage, the American hostilities tossed up increasingly violent clashes, along with actions that threatened to involve Great Britain. The forcible removal of some Confederate representatives from the *RMS Trent* caused great consternation for Her Majesty’s government, a rush to get troops and armaments to Canada, and a general panic on world-wide financial markets. Some of our characters who had money in investments saw their fortune diminish, at least on paper, as instruments such as Consols declined in value by several percent. Fortunately, none of them panicked. They were fortunate in not having to liquidate their investments, and the values recovered over the next few years.

Those who were not wealthy enough to have investments mostly had to hide their money or use a safe or strong box. After 1818, there was the possibility of the Brighton Trustee Savings Bank, and some people deposited money there, but many more took up the practice after September of 1861, when the Post Office Savings Bank was started, though the Brighton branch did not open until March 10, 1862. This even paid 2.5 percent interest on the whole number of pounds in the account, but there was a limit – initially £30 – in annual deposits, and also a limit – initially £150 – in the maximum balance. Nevertheless, many employees at Fortescue Road, in the *Factory*,

and the juniors at *Uptons*, *Matilda's* and some other places could now keep their modest fortunes safe. Even Tony, Joseph, Valerie, and Jane all opened accounts within the next eighteen months which would serve as their personal safety reserve or 'rainy day' fund.

The nation and its monarch were plunged into grief December 14 when Prince Albert died of typhoid. Even when he became sick, he suggested some well-considered wording of the diplomatic note to Abraham Lincoln over the Trent affair, wording the Foreign Secretary was pleased to use and which may have been instrumental in resolving the matter when the Confederate agents were released quietly on New Year's Day 1862.

A week before Christmas 1861, evidence came of a pending loss, and one that was close to our friends, in the form of blood on a handkerchief that Rebecca had given to Matt Moore. Matt had often had a cough over the past year, but so did many in Victorian England with its smokey coal fires. However, blood was a sign of the great 19th century killer, consumption, also known as phthisis, 'white death', or the more modern name, tuberculosis.

Valerie relayed the information to *Matilda's* at dinner that Wednesday night – the night of the Solstice.

Jane said "It has not been established whether phthisis can be transmitted from one person to another, but I believe it makes sense to err on the side of caution and treat the condition as infectious."

Tony asked "Can Matt get better?"

"My experience is not encouraging. In fact I've only encountered one person who recovered, or apparently recovered. That was an officer in the Crimea, and I met him in the street about a year after I came home. However, I have no later information. He could very well have relapsed. My general estimation is that people die within a couple of years. There are claims that fresh air and good food can bring a cure. I would hope that is true, and almost certainly living well is helpful to recovery from any disease, but we do not have much experience of success and many deaths, especially deaths of young people."

Bleak midwinter

The Christmas and New Year period passed quietly and with a sense of uncomfortable waiting. The resolution of the Trent affair was a relief that reached the newspapers in the middle of January. What uplift in spirits could have been possible was dashed by the Hartley Colliery disaster on January 16, where 204 miners died. Over the following fortnight the true scale of the tragedy unfolded. A mine with only one shaft that served for men, equip-

ment, coal and ventilation was compromised when a huge cast iron beam for the main pump engine broke and fell down the shaft, damaging equipment and hitting an upcoming cage. The mine ran out under the sea which soon both flooded and filled with toxic gases. Worse, the failure happened on shift change. About four-fifths of the miners employed were underground at the time. The mine would never reopen.

At *Uptons* and *Matilda's*, there was discussion over dinner about what to do for Matt.

Tony said "At the moment he still seems able to work, and his cot in the corridor behind the *Upton* shop isn't near others in the house, yet was reasonably warm and dry when I slept there."

"'e'll probably start getting thinner and whiter," Bobby said. "Several kids where Ma and I lived went that way. Lasted about a year, then died."

Jane said "If the ideas of George Bodington are right, then it would be good to have Matt at the Meadow, but not in the cottage. I wonder if he could sleep in a greenhouse, at least in the summer. We're planning to get Tom to put up a couple more, so perhaps one could be made into a bit of a cabin, or at least partly so."

"Would you think of him continuing to work?" Valerie asked.

Tony said "It's a bit far to come every day to do commissions with a hand cart."

"I think the ladies at the Meadow could find him things to do," Jane answered. "Our production there is increasing as some shops and hotels are wanting both food and flowers. Valerie. Can I ask you to talk to your mother about this possibility before I talk to Tom?"

"Yes. I'll do that as soon as I can."

The upshot of these discussions meant that by mid-May Matt was living at the Meadow and working with the production of flowers and vegetables. He had experience of the tenements and the consequent disease there, including consumption. Even if he was unaware of the cruel statistics that the disease was responsible for between one-sixth and one-quarter of all deaths, he knew he was unlikely to live to old age.

There was some discussion how to replace Matt at *Uptons*, but the issue was easily resolved when Ian suggested his 13 year old brother would be glad to leave his job with a cesspool emptier. Trevor Hoyle would take over Matt's cubby-hole and learn the furniture business.

Adding up

On Monday March 3, 1862, Cassandra Cohen told the staff at *Bartlett and Jones* that she was going to lunch with her husband and might be somewhat late returning. Actually she and Abraham had invited Maud and Valerie to join them at a public house that served very good hot pies. After the pies arrived and been mostly consumed, Maud said “I’m assuming that there is a purpose to inviting Valerie and I besides a social one, even though I do appreciate the latter. This steak pie was exceptionally good.”

There were some chuckles, and Abraham said “You may recall that at the estate sale we attended last Tuesday I spent some time talking to a man in a cloak and top hat. His name is Lawson, and he has purchased a quite dilapidated inn out towards the Old Brewery. He means to make it into a private hotel.”

“A private hotel was your original intention in Brighton, was it not, Mrs ... er... Cassandra?” Maud asked. She had been told recently that it was time to use first names.

“Yes. But other ventures took hold instead. And truthfully, providing all the services puts one in the situation of obligation, and in particular obligation that does not allow easy escape from the rituals imposed by the clock and calendar.”

Valerie asked “Does Mr. Lawson want to consider furniture that we may provide?”

“He was at the sale thinking to act on his own behalf. However, he said he would be a fool not to at least listen to what I had to say. For my part, I would expect he will talk to others, for instance, Mr. Arbuthnot.”

“Oh. I saw him – Arbuthnot that is – just the other day in the street,” Maud said. “I mentioned that I was venturing into some new items as well as second-hand and that we were showing them at *Uptons*.”

Valerie said “Ian mentioned somebody had been in to look at the Presentation Space. I didn’t ask the name, but will do so later. It could very well have been Arbuthnot.”

Abraham said “We get some orders via Arbuthnot, so I’ll make sure to talk to him to avoid upset. There is likely enough business to go round. In any event, Lawson said he’ll have six to eight rooms – they are still working out what is possible – and a common decorative theme would be welcome.”

Valerie said “In November I wrote to Jeffrey and Co., Potter, and Lightbown, Aspinall & Co. about retailing their wallpapers. Potter replied that they had an agent in Brighton and could not entertain competition for him, though they did not say who it was, nor have I found out. I suspect it is a paper hanger who not only sells but wants to paper the walls to get that

revenue as well.”

“To be fair, we’d try the same if we felt it worthwhile,” Abraham said. “But what of the others?”

“I got very cautious replies, asking what we proposed, and I wrote back to say that we had our Presentation Space where we would like to combine furniture with complementary decor, possibly in the form of some panels of wallpaper. I asked if they had sample books so we could take orders, and what would be the terms of trade.”

“Well done, Valerie,” Cassandra said. “Did they respond?”

“Yes. I have my notes here. I won’t read out the details, but I think it may be worth investing in a few rolls of paper – enough for a couple of different rooms. We could carefully place one strip behind a display of compatible furniture. The strip could be re-rolled. I wouldn’t glue it up. We could then offer that paper for sale. If we choose something we would find attractive in our own houses, then we almost eliminate the chance of loss.”

“I’d approve that approach. But can we change the topic back to the progress with the new items?” Maud asked.

“Certainly,” Abraham said. “Perhaps my enthusiasm about my conversation with Lawson put the cart ahead of the horse. Do you know our latest position, Valerie?”

“I did some notes about a week ago. There are two sets of items, which I’ll call Upton for those paid by money from mother, Mr. Hoyle and I, and Cohen for that from Abraham and Maud. Did you contribute, Mrs. Cohen.”

“Please use Cassandra or we’ll get all in a fuss. In this instance I didn’t put any money in, but I think that was simply that Abraham thought he had sufficient for the moment.”

“Anyway, the Upton investment has been recovered with a little over a third of the items still to sell, so from now on all profit. The Cohen investment is about 80 % recovered with about half the items sold. But the Cohen items were slow being delivered as we had to wait on manufacture, while the Upton items were ready to be sent.”

“Overall, it seems we have done well,” Maud said.

“I think so,” Valerie said. “And we’ve made a pair of arrangements to display and sell crockery and cutlery on a consignment basis with two local dealers. That’s only resulted in a couple of small sales so far, but I think the presence of those commodities helps the display. And the new items have sometimes helped sell the second-hand.”

“So your sales volume is increased?” Abraham asked.

“Definitely. Not a huge increase, but it cannot be ignored. Moreover, we have so far only placed two advertisements in the *Herald*, and those only to announce the Presentation Space.”

Maud said “How do you foresee providing investment for wallpaper and similar products? And possibly for the advertising.”

“I was thinking *Upton* would have to carry that,” Valerie said.

“It may be we should consolidate the investments into a single fund, recording the amounts of the investments,” Abraham suggested.

Maud responded “Henry was talking the other day about some discussion that the Companies Act had some flaws. Ideally we should protect ourselves from being individually pursued should any part of the scheme fail in some way.”

“You mean if we did not deliver and were sued, or had a fire and lost our stock but had outstanding orders?” Cassandra queried.

“Yes. A limited liability company would be advantageous, but there are the costs of managing it, I believe,” Maud said. “Moreover, as we well know, women are at a distinct disadvantage in range of action.”

Cassandra laughed “Maud. Could you ever have imagined this conversation when Mary and I came to the Workhouse in 1852?”

“My goodness, no. Indeed, I have trouble realizing that was the same person that I am now.”

Abraham said “Let us continue for now with the two investment groups ordering separately but sharing information on their intentions and actions. But we should watch for the opportunity to create a company if that should turn out to be worthwhile.”

“And I am going to have some of that treacle tart that was just served to the lady across the room,” Cassandra said.

“Me too,” Maud joined in. “Though I fear I may have to loosen my stays.”

Chichester

Jane had suggested celebrating Tony’s 23rd birthday with a trip to Chichester. Neither had been there, even though it was not terribly far from Brighton, a little over 30 miles. There was a direct train service. Jane had said she would learn about things to see or do, but that the main idea would be simply to enjoy the day, in particular with a nice lunch. The weather was decent enough, given the gales on the 12th that had led to several shipwrecks in the area.

As the train left Brighton, Tony said “Valerie asked me to consider the possibility of a premises in Chichester for *Uptons*. She said they aren’t ready to make such an investment, but that she wants to begin to make a list of places where they might open branches.”

"That is ambitious," Jane responded. "I suppose we can watch for places where people are shopping, and note if there are already shops dealing in furnishings. Also the general level of prosperity. It would not be amiss for me to note such things. There could be opportunities for *Harper's Helpers*. But today should mainly be for our enjoyment."

"Yes. We have almost never made time just for ourselves, Jane. Except ... well ... you know."

There was nobody else in the compartment where they were seated, so Jane said "As in bath time?"

"Well. Yes."

"I am much relieved that you seem now to enjoy that time together without ... er ... reservation."

"Relieved? Is that the word to describe your state afterwards?" Tony teased.

"Tony. I don't care what word we use. I am just happy we can both find joy together. And that you can now find humour in talking about what we enjoy."

"Now today I propose we explore the town. There are the Roman walls to walk. There would normally be the Cathedral – it is the diocesan church for Brighton too – but the recent collapse of the steeple probably means it is closed. However, we should be able to visit the Bishop's Garden."

"Have you been recommended any places where we might have a meal?"

"Abraham mentioned that when he was arranging distribution of the Treats for the Tongue for the *Fortescue Factory*, he had a fine lunch at *The Fountain*. Apparently it opened in 1798. But he said that the town seemed to be well-served with eating places."

Tony was dressed in his best suit, with his good hat, and carrying his walking stick. Jane had on a new costume. Tony said "Your new outfit looks well on you."

"Thank you. I had to make strenuous arguments to avoid Mrs. Moss and Mrs. Baldwin from adding several acres of cloth to the skirt. I insisted that it not drag in the dirt and that it not require doors to be widened for me. There is a mania for putting a cage under the skirt to make it wide. I want to walk comfortably without brushing the hedgerows on either side of a main road."

"There is still enough cloth that your walking is easy."

"Indeed. And I insisted that the waist be comfortable. Moreover, as you know, I refuse to wear a corset or stays. A simple chemise that fits snugly and has ties I can adjust is comfortable and keeps my bosom from moving excessively."

"A great pity you cannot wear trousers."

Jane laughed. "I would if I did not fear it would cause a small riot."

New offerings

Paul Lawson, the man intending to renovate an old house into a private hotel, came to *Uptons* on the last day of March at half-past 9 in the morning to meet with Abraham and Valerie. Ian was there, naturally.

Lawson said "You have a very effective display, Miss Upton. It shows the furniture and the accessory items very well."

"Mr. Hoyle should be given the larger share of credit for that."

"We should point out that only the furniture in this section on the left is new. The other items are all second hand, so while we would be happy to sell them to you, we cannot easily provide them in more than one copy."

"I am hard-pressed to tell that they are not new."

"For that we can credit Mr. Thomas Soulton and his wife and associates who do an excellent job on refurbishing the items. They will likely be the ones to adapt objects to your particular style and finish."

So far, apart from greetings, Abraham and Ian had said nothing. Abraham asked "When do you anticipate that you will be ready to furnish the hotel? For us it would be important to have sufficient work time to ensure the items were ready."

"That makes sense," Lawson replied. "I'm hoping we will be ready to open in July, but it is more realistic to say August. We have fortunately established that the structure is sound, but we decided to take off all old wall-coverings, in the process finding some serious dilapidation in a couple of walls. So two full walls will have the lathe replaced, and while the plasterers are there, we'll resurface the rest and repair ceilings as needed. I think that is going to be the best part of April and possibly longer. Where workers won't interfere with each other, we'll repair any damage to floors, doors, etc. Then will come the decorating and painting. Clearly we will be happiest with no furniture until that is complete, but then we will want it right away so we can rent rooms as soon as possible."

Abraham said "From our perspective, we would need to know your wishes as to the style and nature of the decoration, for example, the choice of wall-paper or other finish, so that we can propose fabrics for the upholstered items."

"I note that you have examples of a few wallpapers in your display. Are they intended for sale, or simply as a way to enhance the presentation?"

Valerie said "The purpose here is to show off the items, but we have enough of the two designs you see to immediately provide for a room in each design. There are, as well, sample books from two manufacturers."

"Can you match the papers with fabrics for curtains and upholstery?"

"The designs would not, at this time, be the same, as we have not found

manufacturers who provide paper and different grades of cloth. Ultimately it could be a very interesting possibility. For now, we would aim to have the designs look well together,” Valerie explained.

“It could also be that the same design throughout a room could be too much of a good thing,” Ian volunteered. “Some pleasing contrast, but still a common theme, might look better.”

Lawson said “For me, and my partners in this venture, it is a problem of possibly spending money before seeing a result.”

Abraham said “That is understandable. And from our side there is the concern that we would commit to a full order, then have you unhappy. Also, as you are no doubt cognizant, there is always the question whether bills will be paid. Therefore, let me suggest that if you have a room we could view to get the dimensions and location of windows and doors, we would make a proposal with samples of items and materials, though some coverings might not be affixed except temporarily. If the result is satisfactory to you, possibly with amendments, we would submit our price proposal for the furniture and materials for one or more spaces as you specify.

“I will add that we will require an agreement that should you not order from us, the design we submit could not be used. We would undertake the prototype design at our own expense and risk. For the final order, we would need a deposit that would meet the costs that we could not recover.”

“What you suggest does give me the opportunity – at least I hope I interpret you correctly – to see some items and materials *in situ*, even if not permanently installed. That is attractive. And in your place, I can accept you will need to be sure you will not be in debt should there be a failure on our side.”

Valerie said “When might we view the space to be used for the example furnishings?”

“There is one room that is in reasonable condition. It has, at the moment, some trestles and rough chairs as it is used by the workers when they take a short respite from working.”

“Let me suggest Wednesday for Miss Upton and Mr. Hoyle to visit,” Abraham said. “I may be able to come, or I may send another of our group in my place, but I believe these others here have a good eye.”

There were minor formalities of farewell and agreement on timing for April 2. After Lawson had left, Abraham said “I hope I did not cause consternation in suggesting we do the example furnishing at our expense, and I will gladly cover that cost myself if we do not get the order. However, it seemed to me important to get an exercise in carrying out a prototype, if only to see if we could do it.”

“We do have to start somewhere,” Valerie agreed.

“Lawson risks very little in having us provide some ideas, except if he

says he doesn't like them, then he cannot turn around and steal the concept," Ian said.

"Precisely," Abraham responded. "And I will have a duplicate letter of agreement to that effect for you to take on Wednesday, should I not come, since I am thinking Maud Mortimer might have the better sense of what will work, and I don't want too many of us at one time tripping over each other."

Ideas and explorations

Maud did come with Ian and Valerie to see the property Lawson was renovating. When Maud handed Lawson her card, he said "I believe the solicitor acting for the man who sold us this property was named Mortimer, and his address was also Chorley Terrace."

"That would be my husband."

"Is it not unusual for the wife of a solicitor to run a business?"

Maud, somewhat frostily, said "I was engaged in business before I married, and am very loath to give it up."

Valerie, sensing it was wise to steer the conversation elsewhere, said "Let us proceed to get the measurements of the room," and took a measuring tape from the shoulder bag she was using today in place of a reticule. Ian had a notepad on a board, and spare pencils in his pocket. Quite quickly, they did the measurements and made a crude sketch of the room.

Ian asked "Do you plan to keep the current mantelpiece?" This was in wood above the masonry surround, with a cast iron grate and damper at the bottom.

"I believe so," Lawson answered. "Is there a reason we should not?"

"It appears that it has some damage such as these abrasions, many scratches, and ... yes ... I think cigar burns. And the finish is now very dark from smoke and dirt, so may look at odds with the new decor."

"Is it repairable, do you think?"

Maud said "I would think Tom Soulton, my brother, could refinish it, though it may be less expensive to replace the mantel. Or perhaps to cover the existing mantelpiece. For example, a sort of long, narrow box in quite thin wood could be fastened over the present mantelpiece so that refinishing is unnecessary."

"And I would imagine refinishing in place is awkward, particularly with those gouges in the surface," Lawson admitted.

The discussion devolved to what items of furniture were desired. It was agreed that a minimum was a bed, chest of drawers and / or a wardrobe, a chaise longue, two chairs and a writing or dressing table. There would

be curtains for the two windows, and wallpaper or other decoration for the walls. Ian made a note that the door was in need of refinishing, as it had some scratches and the lockset was in poor condition, but he said nothing. They could add an option to their proposal to refurbish the door, but would need to talk to Tom first.

Lawson showed a slight reluctance to sign the agreement regarding use of the proposal, but read and signed the two copies, one of which Valerie gave to him. It was already signed by herself and Abraham.

The whole visit was less than half an hour, and after they had bid Lawson farewell and were outside, Valerie suggested they have a cup of coffee or tea at a nearby café.

“What did you make of the place?” Valerie asked Maud.

“It could be very nice, but there’s a lot of work to do. More than Ethel, Tom and I had to do at Fortescue Road. Does Lawson have the money to carry it off?”

“That is a concern, and we’re going to insist on a deposit for any costs we can’t recover. You can be sure I’ll make it big enough that we won’t be pressed for cash ourselves, but we’d still waste a lot of time and effort if things failed. On the other hand, we should be able to offer an attractive price for what is original in design and style.”

“Do we have the skill to upholster the chairs and chaise longue Lawson wants?” Maud asked.

“Ma is quite good with upholstery, and Vera and Tom have been doing a little from time to time to improve their skills. We may, of course, be able to provide the manufacturer with the covering material and have it fresh from the factory, though for the prototype design I am going to suggest that we merely drape the fabric over the furniture and only cut the bolt of material if we have payment more or less in hand.”

“Oh. That makes sense. We can still show off the room by hanging or draping material and paper, but be able to re-roll it and return to stock.”

“Yes,” Valerie continued. “I plan to talk to Mrs. Cohen and possibly offer a small fee to borrow some bolts, though I think she may be happy with a fairly prominent mention of *B & J* in our proposal as payment.

“Now I’d really like the three of us to work out what fabrics and wall-papers are candidates, and also what items of furniture we would propose. We should order them right away. If Lawson rejects our proposal, we’ll put them into sales stock, so we should choose items that have a quite general appeal.”

Ian said “I’ve seen fancy or particular items sell sometimes for high prices and sometimes for nothing at auctions, but what might be called plain ones capture a decent price every time.”

Maud said “Yes. Keep things straightforward. Besides, I can remember

one dressing table at Fortescue Road. It was lovely to look at but had all sorts of curlicues that were murder to clean and polish.”

Valerie said “Ian. Make a note to include mention in our proposal that our choices have been made with efficiency of cleaning in mind, since the rooms will have chambermaids. It is a small touch that will show our attention to detail.”

Maud changed the topic “I’ll have to let you and Mr. Hoyle select the furniture items as I’ve only printed order lists. They have a few pictures, though pictures never do justice to decent furniture and can mask rubbish. At some point I should visit the manufacturers to see their wares.”

Ian said “It is a pity photographs are so difficult to include in catalogues. I have read that Henry Fox Talbot has patented some processes to do photographic engraving, but nobody yet seems to be using it regularly.”

Valerie said “Maud. I’ll ask you to make some notes of fabrics and wallpapers if you see any. Ian – Mr. Hoyle – and I will order some furniture in one or two designs. They will go into stock if we don’t use them, so we will choose items likely to be of general interest. We will also look into fabrics and papers. Then we can meet next Wednesday afternoon to assess where we are. It’s early closing, so Ma will be able to join us. Hopefully Mr. and Mrs. Cohen too. If we’re lucky, we’ll have some furniture to consider.”

“I can do that. Oh. We forgot to ask if the bed is to be a single or a double, or even two singles.”

“We’ll show a double. And we should order in a good brass bed. We don’t have one, and I fear our London manufacturers don’t make them. But I did save an advertisement from R. W. Winfield in Birmingham, and they have a showroom in London in Ludgate Hill. Maud, did you not say you hoped Henry would take you to London for a few days holiday, and also to see the furniture manufacturers. Could you do so very soon, and we will get you to order a suitable bed that we can display for sale as well as use for our proposal to Mr. Lawson?”

“I will talk to Henry as soon as possible and send a note. Since you have already talked to senior people at the furniture manufacturers, perhaps you can write to suggest that I will need only an opportunity to review the items they can produce for us. In any event, I will need to go very soon so we can prepare our proposal.”

Our colleagues separated after coffee. As soon as they were back at *Uptons*, Valerie and Ian went into the Presentation Space to look at what was there and to select some possible designs. Rebecca called Mary to the shop so she could join Ian and Valerie.

Valerie said “Do you think two standard chairs to go with a dressing or writing table would be sufficient?”

Ian replied “Certainly if there is a chaise longue. An alternative would

be two wing chairs or similar, and one standard chair for the dressing table.

"I think a wardrobe should be preferred to a chest of drawers. Moreover, a knock-down wardrobe is easier to put in place than a chest of drawers, and I believe a wardrobe with shelves less costly to manufacture, and easier to clean."

"I am almost of the opinion that we need to revisit the manufacturers to confirm the design we would like," Valerie said.

Rebecca said "I made a few notes. Ah. Here they are. Yes, I noted which designs had lots of fancy decoration. But one design – and we'll need to check if it is knock-down – was quite simple but attractive. Here. I made a small annotation on the sketch and noted the order number. From *Howards*."

Valerie, who was perusing an order sheet, said "Yes. It has a code that it is knock-down. Let's order one, though we need to decide oak or mahogany. Now can we find similar chairs?"

Rebecca said "You should probably propose drop-in seat chairs. They can be used for a dining room or for the writing or dressing table, and we can upholster the seats in a material to match the curtains and wallpaper."

"Good thinking, Ma."

The decision on wood was for oak, though there was a possibility that it would need to be refined to either the red or white oak later.

Ian said "Do we have sufficient money to proceed with the order?"

Rebecca said "Yes. But we need to get a cheque from Mr. Cohen and give him the cash and also cover the stamp and any charges his bank will make.

"Have you thought of a carpet?"

Valerie said "Thought, yes. Acted, no."

Ian said "I wrote to Woodward Grosvenor in Kidderminster and to Blackmore's in Wilton and got some price lists. And I talked to Mrs. Mortimer when she was going to an estate sale the other week and asked her specifically to try to get a carpet at least 9 feet by 6. It's in the Presentation Space, and I think it usable for our proposal, though it is not new."

Valerie said "My goodness, Ian. I am most pleased that you have had the foresight and initiative to do this, for I am ... chagrined ... to admit I had overlooked this."

Rebecca added "And I have been meaning to say something for about a fortnight and ... er ... forgot."

Despite all the tasks, the furniture order went out in the morning post on Thursday and goods arrived the next Wednesday on the train for Tony and Moonbeam to collect. In the meantime, Maud had persuaded Henry that they should go to London on the Monday after Palm Sunday – April 14. Henry initially worried about his appointments, but it turned out that all but two could be reorganized for the week after Easter, and he arranged with

Jerome Dwyer, another local solicitor with whom he had shared trusteeship of Tony Brown's inheritance, to deal with those two, which were conveyancings of properties, as well as any emergencies. It did, of course, cost him most of his fees for the two tasks he passed to Dwyer. Still, he and Maud had not had time to themselves for several years.

Easter parade

Henry and Maud managed a most satisfactory visit to London, starting early on the Monday after Palm Sunday. The business visits were, as it turned out, useful as a way to gain a better appreciation of the city. In fact, they had purchased a brass bedstead on the first afternoon, and arranged its shipment so that it would likely arrive in Brighton before they were again there.

Furthermore, the next morning they managed to view furniture at *Howards* and were able to make some notes on a catalogue provided to them. In particular, Maud wanted to examine some chairs carefully to determine how easy or difficult it would be to make custom alterations for the seats.

Valerie had written to Mr Newcombe, but he was away so his assistant greeted them. He asked "Are you also part of the venture that Mr. and Mrs. Cohen and the Uptons are part of?"

"While I am an independent buyer, almost all my sales are through *Uptons*, but the plan is to work with the others to enlarge our business."

"But Mr. Mortimer, you are not in the furnishings trade?"

"No. I am a solicitor, but I am always intrigued how well my wife is able to estimate the values of items. She has contributed mightily to our family prosperity."

"Mr. Newcombe was quite intrigued by the energy of the ladies in your group. Also gratified that we are now seeing orders."

Maud said "I hope and expect you will see more from us. We are just now putting together a sample room for a new hotel that is being established. We hope to get the order for all the rooms in a coordinated design."

"Ah, yes. I saw an order for a knock-down wardrobe."

"Indeed. Made up they are near impossible to get in or out of a room."

Maud and Henry enjoyed their private time together in London. They ate well, were much entertained by theatre and other diversions, and also familiarized themselves with some of the businesses useful to advance Maud's enterprise. Upon their return to Brighton on Maundy Thursday evening, they were further gratified to find all was in order at Chorley Terrace.

Moreover, they learned that plans for the Easter weekend were now set, with a dinner on the Sunday at *Fortescue Factory* with Percy and Ethel,

along with Tom and Vera. Young Edward Jones was almost 9 months old. Percy and Ethel lived in an apartment above the administrative area of the Factory, serving as live-in security for the establishment. Felix Nuffield, who worked as a baker in the factory, also slept on the premises, but his sister Janet now had a room in the house of Mary and Michael Yarrow opposite Cassandra's houses on Fortescue Road.

Janet and Felix would spend Easter Sunday with their aunt, but on the Monday, which was not yet a public holiday, though celebrated by some, Janet was going to Eastbourne with Jack Dixon, with whom she had started walking out recently. While their daily routines would not usually overlap, they had encountered each other through the general ferment of activities between *Fortescue Factory*, *Best Bonnet* and *News and More* as well as some of the cultural events that both had attended.

Cassandra and Abraham, with daughter Catherine, spent Easter with the Goldmans. This year, 1862, Easter and Passover coincided, and the meal would be in the Jewish tradition.

Valerie joined her family for Easter, while Ian went to his own family in Lewes. Mary and Joseph were at *Uptons* for Easter Sunday, but had gone to Mary's family on Good Friday. Valerie, even as she was with her family, felt a sense of being an outsider. This was, in part, amplified when it became clear that Mary was pregnant.

"We had a couple of false alarms, but this one seems to have settled in," she said.

Rebecca added "False alarms, my foot. I'd say you had a couple of miscarriages, and they can really bring you down."

Joseph looked uncomfortable at this discussion of female biology, perhaps because he had a role in the process. Valerie simply felt apart from the situation, but was careful not to say or do anything to cause unhappiness to any present. Her mother seemed very pleased. The baby would certainly be spoiled by grandmother.

Jane and Tony harnessed Moonbeam to her cart and joined the ladies at the Meadow. Bobby came along too, but Arthur was paid an extra shilling to serve as security. There was still a gnawing unease about leaving premises unoccupied since the depredations of Smith and Jones the previous year.

At the Meadow there was now a new young woman awaiting a baby. Hester Digby had been a governess to the daughters of a wealthy merchant. The son of the family, an 18-year-old wastrel, had decided to take his pleasure with her. Fortunately for Hester, but unknown to the young man, one of his sisters was hiding in the room in order to read a novel of which her parents disapproved. It took her some time to realize what she was hearing, but she stood up to catch her brother with his trousers around his ankles.

The parents would have preferred to simply toss Hester into the street

as a slattern. However, the daughter of the family had made so much noise that all the household knew what had happened. Hence Hester's expenses were being paid, and she would have employment somewhere else in the merchant's businesses after her confinement, and the child was promised a decent home.

Priscilla Peabody had left in the previous autumn, but her child was still at the Meadow. Harvey Horner was present again too. Before the dinner was served in a rather crowded kitchen and in part on a table made from an old door on some saw horses borrowed from *Soultons* next door, Harvey approached Jane and Tony.

"Mrs. Harper. Might I have a word?"

"Of course. Is Mr. Brown's presence unwelcome?"

"Not at all. Not at all.

"I wanted to ask ... er ... Well. Better start at the beginnin'. Evelyn – Mrs. Bairstow – and I. We want to see Charlie 'ave a good 'ome. And she and I get along really well. So we're thinkin' we should get married. But then there's the question of where to live. We're wonderin' if we sorted out a bit of the upstairs and I paid a bit o' rent, if that would work."

"I applaud your charity in being willing to take on the boy, Mr. Horner. I think we can make that work. Indeed, if you are willing to help the ladies with some of the heavier tasks outside your regular employ, I think we could forego the rent. But I must talk to Evelyn and the other ladies separately to ensure there is no objection."

Jane moved immediately to find Evelyn, who was checking on the chickens and rabbits.

Evelyn said "I suppose we look an odd couple. I'm not very tall and Harvey ... well ..."

Both she and Jane laughed, then Jane asked "But are you happy to marry him?"

"Oh yes. He's very kind. I think people think he's rough, but in fact he's one of the gentlest people I've ever met. And very good with Charlie. You know he's three years younger than me. I've asked him if he'll be disappointed if we have no children, which is quite likely given my history, and I've made sure he's aware of that. But he says he'll be fine with me and Charlie. And of course he knows that Charlie is a consequence of the attack on Priscilla by a stranger."

"Did I hear that the police caught the man?"

"Yes. Priscilla wrote that she did remember his crooked finger and despite the horror of having to identify him, she managed to do so."

Thus it was that the dinner featured a toast to Evelyn and Harvey. Ideas for a wedding were tossed about excitedly. What church could hold the ceremony was a question. Horner had as a child attended the Dorset

Gardens Methodist church. Evelyn had been C of E, but since the time of the War had not attended.

Jane said “Why not approach the minister at Dorset Gardens and have your wedding breakfast at *Matilda’s*, then you can go to the station and have a bit of a honeymoon trip?”

“But what about Charlie?” Horner asked.

“We’ll make sure he’s looked after,” Phoebe Owens said.

A sudden death

On Thursday, April 24, Rose and Angus Sinclair had carefully arranged so that they could attend the lecture given by Mark Lemon, editor of *Punch* on the subject ‘London’. They very much enjoyed it, and so did Tony and Jane who were also there and who helped keep the crowd from bumping into Angus since he needed more space to use crutches.

Sadly, the next day, Friday, April 25, 1862, a boy called at 21 Fortescue Road with a message from Mrs. Turcotte for Rose Sinclair. Archibald Turcotte QC had died in his sleep. Rose, ever cognizant of appearances, put on a brave face and itemized what would need to be done. She made a list of the cases outstanding for which Mr. Turcotte held the brief. They would need to be passed to other barristers, and the attitude of most of these men towards women would make her task more difficult. Helena Normanton would not become the first female barrister in England for another 60 years.

She also made a list of matters that would need attention.

- Ask Mrs. Turcotte for keys to the office and the safe that Mr. Turcotte had in his possession.
- Find out if her employment would continue until all business of Mr. Turcotte was wound up.
- Investigate what options there were for accommodation for Angus and herself.
- Arrange with those persons who had boxes in the safe for transfer of those boxes.
- Consider new employment.

With these items weighing heavily upon her, Rose made a quick decision and wrote a message to Mrs. Turcotte.

Dear Mrs. Turcotte,

Mr. Sinclair and I send our heartfelt condolences. Mr. Turcotte was not only my employer but a true friend to all at Fortescue Road.

There are several matters concerning the office which will need your direction, and I will need to know your wishes so I, or others, can proceed. Therefore, I will, unless I receive word from you to the contrary, come to your residence at 3 o'clock this afternoon.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs. Rose Sinclair

She also sent a note to Henry Mortimer.

Dear Mr. Mortimer,

I have the unenviable task of informing you that Mr. Turcotte died in his sleep last night.

There are several non-legal matters concerning the office in which I would be grateful for your advice on how to proceed. That is, while the outstanding cases will no doubt be passed to other barristers, there are some practical and administrative matters where discretion and good judgement will be valuable in avoiding distress. One example is the boxes held in the safe for various members of the households at Fortescue Road. Your familiarity with the office and the people in the houses would be most helpful.

Can you let me know when would be a good time for me to talk with you?

Yours sincerely,

Rose Sinclair

Henry got the message just after noon. He did not have any appointments until a quarter past two, so immediately informed Yolanda that he was going

to Fortescue Road and the reason for so doing. Maud was out at an estate sale with Martin.

At Fortescue Road, Henry found Rose more flustered than he could remember.

"I have managed to make these lists," she said, "but then I seemed to lose my focus."

"You have done the right thing to start putting together the briefs. There are always some papers not in order because they are being checked against other documents. So that is definitely a good thing to do.

"Now I think it extremely unlikely that you would not be paid for that work, so unless Mrs. Turcotte explicitly dismisses you, you can assume your salary will continue while Mr. Turcotte's affairs are being wound up. Do you know when you can see Mrs. Turcotte?"

Rose explained her plan to go to see this lady at 3 o'clock.

"Good. Let us hope that she has the keys for you, as if they cannot be found, locks will need to be changed and that will be a great annoyance."

"Yes. I think my discomposure is because Angus and I have been happy here and will need to find accommodation. That will be a challenge with Angus' leg."

"Rose. I suddenly have an idea, and it will sound as though I am acting the vulture, but it has just come to me. I have been planning to engage a clerk to help in my practise, but we have rather less space than is ideal, especially since we took in Martin and Angela. I am thinking that I could do a lot worse than take over this space and engage you in place of a clerk. You are familiar with legal documents and we have worked together. The only question is for me to ensure that the rent and your wages are within my revenues."

Rose told Henry what Turcotte was paying her and in rent. It was enough that Henry's practise would have to expand to maintain his personal income, but it was not out of bounds.

"Let me talk to Mrs. Cohen," Henry said, "but if you are talking to her I am happy if you say I am wondering about the possibilities of taking over the office and your employ, assuming you are agreeable."

"It is more than agreeable. Thank you, Henry ... er ... Mr. Mortimer."

"Henry is fine among friends. If I do manage to take over, it will be Mr. Mortimer and Mrs. Sinclair in front of clients, of course. By the way, I've no objection to continuing to hold valuables in the safe for residents of the houses here."

Cassandra knocked on the door and entered "Do I hear Henry?"

"Yes. Rose sent me a note that Archibald Turcotte had died in his sleep last night. I came over to offer help if I could. We were just discussing the

possibility that I take over the office, as I have been experiencing some lack of space at Chorley Terrace, and was looking into getting a clerk."

"That would be very suitable to me," Cassandra said. "I'd been wondering how you managed in such tight quarters. I suppose the only obstacle is if Mrs. Turcotte or whoever is the executor to Turcotte does not wish to surrender the lease but dismisses Rose. Let us hope that will not be the case."

"Hopefully I will get some understanding of what is likely when I talk to Mrs. Turcotte," Rose said.

Cassandra said "Henry. Am I correct that you are going to miss your lunch? If so, join us in the kitchen."

A funeral

Turcotte's funeral was held the following Wednesday morning, with the service at St. Paul's but the interment in the St. Nicholas Rest Garden. This afforded the hearse a trajectory of a third of a mile along Queens Road. While the service was well-attended by those of station in the local society, the streets were lined with many of the other classes. Cassandra, Abraham, Mary, Henry and Maud were in the church, and so were Rose and Angus. However, Tony, given there were a number of extra commissions that day, was working, as was Joseph. Somehow they both got to the corner of Queens and Church Roads to observe the passing of the splendid black horses with black plumes. Annabelle and Moonbeam both observed carefully as the horses turned west into Church Street toward the burial ground.

As the watchers began to clear, Jane appeared from among them.

"Turcotte was, I think, an important friend to you, Tony."

"Indeed he was, and I shall miss him. I have sent a note of condolence to his family."

"I should do the same, though I did not know him nearly so well as you."

After the service at St. Paul's, Henry helped Rose and Angus get a hansom then walked to Fortescue Road. There he found that he was invited to the kitchen for some bread, cheese and pickles. James and Martha had been to watch the funeral procession and had seen Tony and Joseph with the donkeys at the corner of Queens Road and Church Street as they followed the hansom part way towards Fortescue Road. After the light lunch, Henry and Rose returned to the office.

"Rose. Did Mrs. Turcotte have the keys you needed?"

"Yes. Mr. Turcotte had just one keychain, and there were just three that I needed, namely the front door here, the office door, and the safe. I had

my keys, and it was easy to match them. Even in her grief, Mrs. Turcotte understood that we need to ensure that the cases and the office are wound up properly. There is some money that is due to Mr. Turcotte's estate. It's in the safe or in Mr. Turcotte's bank account for which I have been keeping the records."

"Then they'll be in good order."

"I appreciate your confidence in me, but I'm sure I do make mistakes from time to time," Rose said.

"Then I'll ask you to remind me to review documents and calculations. It is something I have had to do for myself these past few years, though Maud can sometimes be persuaded to check the sums."

Rose said "Should we establish a plan for winding up what we can call the Archibald Turcotte office and starting, or rather transferring, the Henry Mortimer office. Since I will be paid by the Turcotte office until the time of change, I will suggest I undertake most of the work, with you verifying the steps. For that, we should keep a detailed record of your time, which will be charged to the Turcotte office. There may be negotiations with barristers about the division of fees for the cases we transfer, and I would assume you will be the person who deals with that, as I believe that as a woman I may have difficulty to get their ... er ... acceptance."

"Sadly, that is the reality. But I will want your notes on those fees. Presumably you have tried to collect fees regularly?" Henry asked.

"Yes, but there are always some delays between sending out a bill and getting paid. With some barristers we may negotiate that we give them our statement of fees and they pay us then bill the client along with their own fees as the case proceeds, though there may be a discount demanded."

"I should ensure you have my own fee schedule and we will want to plan some time for me to give you an overview of my own practise. You have been working with a barrister. I hope you will not find a solicitor's work is less interesting."

"Do you need to move any furniture from Chorley Terrace, or can you transfer just the dossiers?" Rose asked.

"That will depend if there is enough space here for my files. It would be sensible to move all the active accounts at once to avoid inefficiency. However, we will also want to ensure things are kept in order."

Rose said "Then let us begin by discovering what there is here that has to be passed to others. There will be other files that have to be kept for some period of time, but not necessarily here."

"I agree. Let us hope that by Friday evening we have a plan and a schedule."

Buds of May

The month of May did not superficially appear to advance the interests of Valerie and her colleagues in their quest to get the business of furnishing Mr. Lawson's hotel. There were no remarkable changes in outward appearances at *Matilda's* or *Uptons*. However, several new chairs, a table and a knock-down wardrobe arrived. The last item was simply stored carefully next to Ian's sleeping area once it was confirmed that all the pieces were present.

Similarly, there were several rolls of wallpaper in Valerie's room at *Matilda's*, along with some bolts of fabric, though a small amount had been removed to make a single drop-in seat for one of the new chairs. This trial manufacture was performed by Vera, though Tom made the wooden bases, and Vera had, in fact, spent some time over the past couple of years improving her skills with Rebecca.

There was a short debate as to whether the work on the seats could be shortened by removing the existing cover and replacing it. It was decided that the recovering approach would likely be almost as much work because of the careful attention to avoiding damage to the parts of the seat not being changed, or to fixing them if damage or tearing did occur. The time taken to make the frame and upholster it, as well as the amounts of material used were carefully noted. Tom and Vera would be paid for this work as they had not been part of the investment discussions. This was, however, an oversight, and likely would be rectified in the future.

During the month there were many short conversations about which colours and patterns were best. There were also solitary times when calculations or placement diagrams were being tried and found wanting.

More obvious to an external observer would have been the table conversations about events of the day. On May 3, Bobby waxed enthusiastic about the behaviour of a cow owned by a butcher named Stenning that was being driven through the street. While Bobby was shopping, she had to jump into the entranceway of a shop to avoid the cow which was, it seemed, aware that it might soon become next Sunday's dinner joints and was trying to escape. However, in the process a man and two women were injured and there was much consternation in the neighbourhood.

Jane asked "And what happened to the cow?"

"Some senior boys from Brighton College chased it into a dead end laneway and four of them held it until Mr. Stenning and a constable arrived. Then there was a lot of back and forth and shoutin' because the boys said they should be rewarded for capturing an animal that had caused public nuisance. And by then someone yelled that there'd been injuries. Eventually Stenning offered the boys a bob apiece and took the beast away."

Jane said “I hope the injuries were minor. When that old windmill on Sussex Street collapsed as they were taking it down, a man and his son got killed who were just walking by.”

Over dinner, accidents with animals were a topic that took up much of the meal, particularly as the donkeys could, if provoked or frightened, be dangerous to people. Indeed, Joseph and Tony were exceedingly careful to stress the importance of handling their animals to give them space and calm as much as was possible.

Martin McDonald, now 14, had been learning for some months how to work with the donkeys, and in the last couple of months had been regularly driving Jessie and her cart. His sister Angela had also shown an interest, but she was doing well in school, and Maud and Henry were happy for her to continue her studies for a while, though they allowed she could spend some time learning to work with the donkeys. It was being discussed if she could drive a cart for Maud and accompany her foster-mother to estate sales. However, she would not be twelve until the end of October, so this was in the future.

Tony, from experience, also wondered what garb Angela should wear for that work. Common women’s clothing was not well-suited to moving furniture and boxes.

In the last week of the month, Ian surprised Valerie and subsequently the others preparing the sample furnishings with a miniature diorama of the room made from cardboard and scraps of wood and cloth, with colours matching the wallpaper and fabrics proposed.

The furniture samples, including the drop-in seat chair, were ready to take to Lawson’s building. Valerie had found some pieces of dowel to hang the proposed wallpaper from the picture rail that was present in the room. She had also carefully unrolled and folded a bolt of cloth that would be proposed for furniture and for the bed counterpane, with a similar arrangement for the sample curtains. She even found some old but clean cloth of a similar shade to provide a way to cover the parts of the windows the sample would not cover. The brass bedstead Maud had found was ready to assemble at the site. After some conversation, a mattress and pillows were found so that the bed would appear with the correct height and shape that future hotel guests would see.

Showing the ideas

Tony and Martin with Moonbeam and Jessie carried the furniture to Lawson’s hotel on the morning of June 2. Valerie and Ian walked along and

proceeded immediately to set up the chosen room. They knew what they were going to do, and almost surprised themselves since the room was ready just before half-past 11, and Lawson and two colleagues were coming at one o'clock.

Valerie had a carpet bag in which she carried some tools and materials to allow for quick repairs and cleaning. In it she also had packed some sandwiches in greaseproof paper along with some bottles of water. Hearing the half hour strike on a clock nearby, she took out the food and water and offered some to Ian.

"Oh. I'd not thought about food," Ian admitted, taking a sandwich. "Cheese and Piccalilli. Excellent!"

"Bobby has learned to bake bread. She's doing a reasonable job."

"Did she learn from the ladies at the Meadow?" Ian asked.

"I think they greatly improved her skills."

"It was a while before I realized she was not a boy. But I can understand why it was safer when she had to live with the ... er ... prostitutes up the end of North Street.

"It's actually occurred to me from time to time that Tony Brown might be a young woman, but his ... er ... her ... physique is much more wiry."

Valerie said "Tony Brown was born Antonia Crown, and does not deny it. But neither does he openly declare it. A long and not easy story. So we use "he" and "him", and I must say even his gait when walking and his mannerisms are all masculine. And did you see him lift the wardrobe?"

"Yes. I've lifted it, and it's not light."

After they'd eaten, both Valerie and Ian used the WC, which was functional but had not been cleaned for a while. On her return, Valerie said "We should add a suggestion to our proposal to improve the WC. There is a decrepit sink there that really should be replaced as the one there is cracked. And the walls are dark. There should be a gas light for when it's dark out, or even in daytime as that tiny window is insufficient to see."

"I've my notebook and will make an entry. I expect if Lawson wishes to engage us there will be amendments to our proposal."

"We'll need to be sharp with our pencils. Such changes can ruin our profits."

Lawson and two other gentlemen arrived at the same time as Maud and Abraham. The two men were introduced as Mr. Davidson and Mr. Enright. Over the next 20 minutes they said very little, but examined the room and furniture carefully.

Enright said "I've not seen an hotel room as well matched in style before. Nice. Very nice. But will it be affordable?"

Valerie had in her hand two copies of a booklet of quarto pages with cardboard covers. Two holes had been punched in the margin through which

ribbon ties had been threaded loosely so that it could be opened a little like a book. She said "Here is our proposal for what we would charge to decorate and furnish this room. It does not include the cost of ensuring the plaster, masonry, woodwork and floors are properly prepared and finished, but you will read that it does propose paint, wallpaper, furniture, curtains, and top coverings for the bed. The mattress, pillows, linen and blankets would not be included, nor would small items such as lamps, waste baskets, chamber pots, ewers, fireplace tools, and so on, though we would be happy to propose if we were given a list. Moreover, we have realized that there are aspects of your enterprise such as the water closet and the hallways and stairs where such items as carpet runners and rods would be required. Again, we would be happy to propose for those.

"Assuming your other rooms require generally the same number and choice of furniture items and approximately the same area of wallpaper and curtains and carpet, we would use the same proposal for those. There is also the possibility of having more than one colour choice, but that complicates the exchange of items between rooms. For example, as the building ages, it may be useful to consolidate rooms that are in the same pattern if there are damages, with a new scheme being used in the emptied chambers.

"We have prepared two copies of the proposal. Our suggestion is that if you want to consider proceeding, you take one away with you. When you are ready, but not over a fortnight hence, we can meet and amend both copies together as needed. We may then need a few days to check our costs for the amendments. Should we then have an agreement, we can make a contract."

Davidson, in a strong northern accent said "I like your directness, Miss Upton. No frills and fancies, and right down to brass."

Enright said "I'd done a bit of investigating on my own. If the items are of the quality they seem, you're not gouging us with what you're asking, but equally you're not cutting profits to the bone."

Abraham said "We very much want to get the type of business you may be offering, since Brighton seems likely to get more hotels and someone is going to supply them. But we have all been in business a while, even though my colleagues are quite young. The first task of a business is to remain in trade. We'd rather forego a sale than be regretful of a loss."

Lawson said "I think your eagerness for the business is shown by your willingness to set up this example. My associates and I will take the proposal and review it carefully. Shall we agree to meet next Monday? My initial reaction is that we will likely want to go ahead. If not, I will inform you as soon as possible, as there is no reason to demur. Otherwise I will arrange a venue and suggest a time to go over any amendments.

"If I may, I'll suggest we stick to your proposal as closely as possible for decoration and furnishing of all the rooms, which I am convinced are

sufficiently similar that we should use your proposal more or less as is. But we probably should make all the extras separate contracts.”

Maud said “Those are sensible suggestions. I believe that all of us – both your side and ours – are still feeling our way in how we develop omnibus furnishing arrangements.”

There was a general murmur of agreement. Then Valerie said “May I assume we are clear to remove the furniture?”

“Oh. I should mention that in mounting the example curtains, we discovered the curtain rails are very dilapidated. We did not include new ones in our proposal, and I would assume there would be a wish to have a common type so curtains could be exchanged between rooms as and when cleaning or repairs were needed.”

Lawson said “You are making sure we attend to all the details, Miss Upton. In one sense, that is ... er ... annoying, since it reminds us of our omissions. In another, it prevents us from making errors. If you could estimate curtain rails for the present room, we will make separate arrangements assuming we go ahead.”

All but Valerie and Ian departed the room. Ian said “Valerie, Are you up to the task of helping me move the furniture to the front hall.”

“Of course. But let me see if Martin is outside. I asked that he come with Jessie around two o’clock and we’d give him a load if we could, otherwise he would arrange to come back with Tony later. If we have a load, he would make two trips himself.”

“Ah. You’ve thought of the possibilities. Good for you. I thought to work here while you arranged the transport.

“Do you know if the watchman is still near the front door? We’ll want him to open for Martin or Tony, and lock up after we leave, though I think there are workmen up in the attic running some gas pipes.”

Valerie said “I’ll go and see while you start to dismantle the wardrobe.”

When Valerie returned, she said “I talked to the watchman. He’s opened up for Martin, who’ll come in when he’s secured Jessie. The watchman said the workers have finished with the structure in all the rooms, though two still need more plaster work. However, I asked if we could measure now rather than later, and he agreed. It will save us having to come back and we will know if there is much variation.”

“I’ve got my notebook and pencils if you have the tape.”

Executing the commission - 1

The next Monday, at 11 o' clock, Valerie, Ian and Abraham met with Lawson and Davidson at the Old Ship in a private room off the restaurant.

Lawson said "No Mrs. Mortimer today?"

"There is an estate sale that promises some important acquisitions. I would have gone myself. However, I have an agreement with Mrs. Mortimer that I may conduct business with you."

"A similar obligation denies us Mr. Enright's presence. However, he is favourable to your proposal. Indeed, we have only a few minor amendments that I believe will not be any obstacle to our concluding a contract. Perhaps we may review those now."

The proposed amendments were minor. They did include an approximate time frame, with a suggestion of a bonus for early completion, which was agreeable to Abraham and Valerie. Ian said nothing as his investment was much smaller.

Valerie said "When we last spoke, the suggestion was to use the example room as the basis for the rest of the chambers. I asked your watchman, Mr. Crew, to tell you we had measured. There were 8 rooms in all, but one was much smaller than the rest. It would need a single bed and no chaise longue and possibly only one chair. The costs of paper and curtains would still be similar, as there are some extra corners around the fireplace and for some sort of pipe chase. But we could discount that room by the unnecessary furniture."

Davidson said "Let us add that as a note to the proposal. In other words eight times the proposed price less the charge for a chair and chaise longue, as well as the difference in the cost of single versus double bed. Do you have your charge for those?"

"You may have to give me a few minutes," Valerie said.

Lawson said "Let me ask that coffee and some sandwiches be brought in. Our treat, given the work you have done already on our behalf. That will give you time to check your sums."

Ian and Valerie moved to a corner of the large table and Valerie gathered the cost figures. She actually had them in her head, but wanted Ian's confirmation before she said anything. Taking a sheet of paper from Ian's notebook, they wrote down the adjustments.

When the meeting reconvened after ten minutes, Valerie said "I'm afraid the one item for which I don't have a price is the brass bedstead in a single rather than a double size. As that is an item for which there are no custom improvements, will you be satisfied if we deduct the difference between the single and double that we pay? The rest of the items are as per this sheet.

I have not altered the deposit per room as I believe we can get by with just one bolt of upholstery cloth in total, which is part of our unrecoverable costs and the allowances for curtains and for making up the counterpanes will be hardly any different.”

After Davidson and Lawson had reviewed these, Davidson said “I’m satisfied, Lawson. Are you?”

“Yes. Let us add the amendments, including the small room variation from the rest, as well as the note about a single bed, and make sure both copies of the document are then in accord. Then we can enjoy some more of the sandwiches and possibly a glass of ale.”

This exercise took about half an hour, as each page needed to be compared and checked. Lawson had prepared a simple agreement making reference to the proposal by title, and he had two copies. These were checked and signed. Lawson wrote a cheque for the deposit, which Abraham was given to deposit. There were handshakes, then the waiter was called and orders for drinks given and some pies brought.

Davidson said “A toast to our joint success!” and the others cried out “Our joint success”.

Executing the commission - 2

The work began that very afternoon with the placement of orders for cloth, furniture, bedsteads, wallpaper, and paint. Rebecca had already talked to Frederick Brougham, the builder, to get the names of some reliable paper hangers and painters. She had already approached some of these, and had ascertained which could be available to work. There was one room’s worth of paper in hand, and Valerie had written to the maker to ensure there was stock for another seven rooms. She had received a reply that they had enough for three rooms in stock to ship as soon as an order was received, but that in a fortnight from an order could print enough of the desired pattern.

Carpet turned out to be a bottleneck. The one used for the example room turned out to be a shade lighter than what was now in production. On June 23, Lawson was contacted to ask if all eight should be of the new shade, and that was the decision. This would mean the sample carpet went back to stock. It had been one Maud had acquired in an estate sale, though the pattern was nominally still manufactured. Ian put the carpet in the Presentation Space and it sold in July, with Maud making a respectable profit.

The commission, or rather commissions, for Lawson’s Hotel, as it was called by our friends, made for a frantic month of June, and the activity

flowed to mid-July. However, on Thursday, July 10, Valerie and Ian met Lawson for an inspection of the empty rooms that nonetheless had curtains and carpets.

Lawson said "We are pleased with the work in the guest rooms. When will the furniture arrive?"

Ian answered "We will start tomorrow and more or less bring one room at a time. That will allow our carters to make deliveries in an orderly way, avoiding the risk of them getting wet in the street or otherwise damaged. We anticipate that we can get the furniture in place by the end of next week. We assume we may get access to the building on Saturday and Sunday, as well as in the evening."

"Yes. You know Mr. Crew. He has been sleeping here in the kitchen or one of the other staff areas of the building.

"I must thank Mrs. Upton for her help in putting me in touch with Mrs. Yarrow at *Fortescue Factory* when our supplier of kitchen equipment turned out to be unreliable. We made a rather sudden decision to change to gas cooking after I talked to Mrs. Yarrow, and fortunately her contacts have promised to have the stove and oven installed by the 29th of the month. We are still hoping to open in August, but won't, I fear, be ready for the first of the month."

"I believe the paper hangers are finished the public hallways," Valerie said.

"Yes. Yesterday mid-day the foreman came to say they were done and would I inspect and sign off, which I did."

"I will have to chase him, no doubt, to get the acceptance sheet," Valerie complained. "However, I will get Tom Soulton or one of his people to put in the carpet runners on the stairs and in the halls. We got the brass stair rods delivered yesterday."

"That is good, though they are quite dear," Lawson said.

"Nevertheless, without rods of some sort there is a hazard, and to have less than decent stair rods would look cheap compared to the rest of the decor."

Lawson added "Then I will leave you to your tasks and away to my own toil in hiring staff. Davidson, Enright and I have a number of candidates coming this afternoon. Fortunately we have the dining room finished, even if it is not in the common style. Enright found a hotel that went out of business after just one year and bought the contents of the dining room as a block. He even got us some crockery and cutlery, fortunately without monograms."

"Monograms are nice to have," Ian said, "but monogrammed items are not easily reused unless one is prepared to overlook the mismatch to the location."

"Too true, Mr. Hoyle. Too true."

Time flies

July first was a Tuesday. Tony, having had a very pleasant outing with Jane in March for his birthday, wanted to do something special for her. He had heard the nurses talk of measuring the pulse rate of patients, and knew that it was done with special equipment if it were to be accurate. Mostly, as far as he could understand, nurses and doctors would simply judge if a pulse were fast or slow, strong or weak. However, he then saw an article about the Waltham 1857 pocket watch being made in the last few years in America. Then he found an advertisement for them by a London jeweller. He had written to the merchant and arranged with Abraham a cheque to cover the cost, and the watch came by post quite quickly.

On the morning of the 1st, the watch was in its box with "Happy Birthday" written on top. Setting the time required some care, but it was quite easy to wind, not needing a key.

Jane said "Oh. This is perfect! I realize it is usually men who have a pocket watch, but I have wanted one for several years."

"This one also has a second hand. I believe it could be useful for taking a pulse," Tony said.

"I just realized," Jane answered. "How wonderful. What a perfect birthday present for me."

"And here is a cheese and mushroom omelette for your breakfast," Bobby announced.

Valerie was privy to the gift of the watch, and had thought to find a chain as a present. However, she realized Jane might find a different way to carry the watch. Instead she found a copy of Michael Faraday's collection of essays *The Chemical History of a Candle*.

"What an interesting title. I am sure I will enjoy reading it, and will encourage the rest of you to do so as well. That is one of the miracles of books. They are a gift that may be shared, and the sharing amplifies the gift."

The Master Brewer's Lodge

Lawson's hotel, as our friends thought of it, opened for business on Monday, August 11, 1862. That night there was just one room with regular clients, though Lawson stayed there, as did Enright and Davidson and their wives to provide the appearance of occupation. Lawson was unmarried.

The owners wanted also to test the hospitality, and were not disappointed. They had taken a chance and hired the English widow of a French

chef. Madame Lachance was in her late 40s, quite unassuming and with a distinct London accent in English. Yolanda Karwowski saw the name on the menu when Seamus took her for a special dinner. Later, she was introduced in church and discovered that she was English. On discovering Yolanda and Seamus both spoke French, Sarah Lachance used that language to ask how they came by their knowledge of the language. She had, both Seamus and Yolanda agreed, a very clear Parisian accent quite out of character with her London one. However, the important skills she possessed were in the kitchen.

Beyond Sarah, the Lodge was run with two kitchen maids, two chambermaids, a desk manager who took on all manner of miscellaneous tasks and the continuing Mr. Crew as watchman and general caretaker. This staff could cope with the eight guest rooms. The maids often doubled as servers in the dining room, which was open to the public. Indeed, for the first while, it was the main revenue. Fortunately, people who ate there also mentioned the Lodge to friends and, with a few advertisements in some London newspapers and magazines announcing the opening of a select private hotel, most rooms were occupied nightly by the end of 1862.

One room – the small one – was taken by Lawson as his place of residence. He had been staying in a boarding house, but then realized that as part-owner of an hotel, he should patronize his own establishment. This gave him a first-hand opportunity to note deficiencies or to appreciate special advantages of the Lodge as well as reducing the number of rooms for which rental must be sought. Moreover, the food was much better.

On the night of September 6, a Saturday, Valerie and Rebecca held a dinner for the investors in the hotel venture. They used the Presentation Space and set up a table Maud had acquired that had several leaves to make it large enough for everyone. Joseph and Mary were also present, since they lived on the premises. Tom and Vera were invited, as their work with upholstery and other tasks was central to the success. With Cassandra and Abraham, Maud and Henry, Ian, Valerie and Rebecca, there were eleven at the table.

After the dessert had been cleared away, Rebecca set a bottle of port and a bottle of madeira on the table along with some crackers and a board with some different cheeses.

“Oh. This is nice,” Maud said.

“I read a book where they did this,” Rebecca said. “I thought it would be a good finish to our meal.”

Abraham said “And a splendid introduction to the report on our venture with *The Master Brewer’s Lodge*.”

Valerie said “Mr. Cohen – Abraham – and I have done the figures, and we have a copy for each of you. Here’s yours, Maud. Ian. Ma. I’m afraid I didn’t make one up for Tom and Vera, as they didn’t make a cash investment,

though their efforts were crucial to our success.”

“We did all right out of the work,” Vera said. “A lot of effort, and some troubles getting our skills improved, but we certainly covered our costs and a lot more. We also had no money at risk. The worse we could lose was some time.”

“You’re welcome to look over someone’s shoulder, as we’ll likely want more investment if we undertake a larger job. There’s supposed to be a couple of big hotels going up. Be nice to get a similar assignment, so I’ll ask you all to keep eyes and ears open. But the main message is that overall the investors made £145.”

There was a slight gasp around the table. Valerie continued “That has to be divided among us, but we did well. Interestingly, I don’t think we ever had that much actually laid out. We got a deposit from the client for some expenses that we would not have been able to recover, like chopped up wallpaper. And we paid for furniture as it was delivered, but the client also paid us back fairly promptly.”

Abraham said “I think that it is quite important that we kept our net outlay as small as possible. I believe businesses fail because they cannot meet demands for payment. They may have money owing that more than covers their obligations, but if they cannot pay the coal man’s bill today, they can go bankrupt while having thousands of pounds in assets.”

Maud asked “Are we then thinking of making projects like the Lodge our main enterprise?”

Rebecca, ever pragmatic, said “If we get the opportunity, such projects can make us all a lot of money, but we’d be wise to keep our regular trade going, since that doesn’t put a lot at risk and brings in steady coin. But what the Lodge has done for us is get us connections with suppliers of furniture, bedsteads, carpets, wallpapers and paint, as well as some people who can install these. There’ll be regular customers – people who are outfitting a room or an addition to a house – who we can serve profitably.”

Ian said “I sold that carpet Maud supplied for the sample room to a couple who came in the shop two days ago.”

Maud said “Good. As long as I made a profit.”

“I checked the list and it said you wanted 35 shillings from us. But I sold it for double that as the buyers were very keen.”

“Good for you, Ian,” Rebecca said. “But I think we should put the profit to the Lodge venture, as we specifically asked Maud to get us a carpet for that.”

Abraham said “That will mean we need to recalculate the distribution of profits.”

“Yes, that’ll be a nuisance.” Valerie added. “How about giving Maud 45 shillings, Ma 15 and Ian 10 for his cleverness in getting that price.”

Nobody said anything for some seconds, then Cassandra said “There appear to be no objections. But then when there are decent profits, it is always easier. Losses can be difficult for friendships.”

Henry said “It may be of interest, and worth some careful investigation, that Parliament passed a new Companies Act last month. It would be interesting if you were able to set up a limited liability company to offer the outfitting of hotels and other premises.”

Valerie said “Mr. Mortimer, may I come and talk to you about that. It seems that we have done well, but we are still a quite loose group. I know I’d like to continue in many of my current activities, but it could be very interesting to have a unified structure to carry out projects like the one we have just completed.”

“I’m certainly interested,” Abraham said.

“I’d like to learn more,” Maud said. “It could be good to have a company that might eventually hire the children where the principals are known and respected.”

Henry, however, threw some cold water on the project. “Unfortunately, as with *Fortescue Factory*, a woman shareholder cannot vote at company meetings, and her investment can be taken over by her husband if she is married.

“I believe our parliamentarians are talking about giving married women more rights, but it will be a while. In the meantime, you – we – will need to think how to organize activities so investments can be deployed effectively across your different activities.”

The idea of a limited liability company continued to be discussed over the next few years, but Henry’s assessment of the reality was unfortunately correct. The exciting and profitable furnishing of the *Master Brewer’s Lodge* also turned out to be more or less an isolated occurrence. The large hotels had their own employees capable of the management of the acquisition and installation of materials and furniture, and would require working capital well beyond the resources of our band of friends. Small hotels often evolved their decor over time, so a project such as the one just completed was extremely rare. Nevertheless, as Rebecca noted, contacts and experience had been acquired. This allowed for growth in their more usual business activity.

Hastings

Newspaper reports had mentioned that Hastings had a new large hotel. On Monday September 8 at dinner at *Matilda’s*, Tony asked Valerie “How was your dinner with your mother and the others who carried out the furnishing

of *The Master Brewer's Lodge*?"

"It was a very nice dinner, but I think that those who'd participated in the project savoured the news of the profits."

Jane said "You put in a lot of effort. I saw how focused you were on all the details."

"Yes. But I found I enjoyed that, apart from the worry that things would not arrive, or that there would be accidents or errors and we'd face ruin. But Mr. Mortimer has mentioned a new Companies Act that might make it easier to establish a limited liability company to carry out such projects."

"How will you find the opportunities?" Jane asked.

"This time happened because Mr. Cohen was talking with Mr. Lawson at an estate sale. I think we're going to want to have a card or hand-bill that tells people what we can do, and try to get them in the hands of those establishing hotels and similar buildings."

Tony said "I doubt you'll be able to interest the large hotel builders. If they are already in the hotel business, they likely manage their own decoration and furnishings. But there could be a number of small to medium buildings where you would have a good chance if they knew about you."

"I'm also thinking of looking at other towns along the coast like Eastbourne and Hastings."

Tony said "Hastings is quite well-established, but Eastbourne is still quite small. When Tom and I went on a holiday trip with Moonbeam in 1853, I don't think it had a lot of hotels or restaurants."

Jane added "Somewhere or other I read that almost all the land is owned by the Duke of Devonshire or a man named John Davies Gilbert. Apparently the Duke is trying to establish a resort that he says is built 'by gentlemen for gentlemen'. I'm afraid that suggests that half of humanity should not bother to visit the place."

Those around the table all laughed.

Two days later, Valerie went to see Ian at *Uptons*.

"Hello Ian. I've brought you some rock cakes that Bobby baked. If you've got some time, I would welcome your opinion on some business matters."

"There hasn't been much custom today. I think we can have tea and at least one of those cakes."

Ian went to the kitchen and moved the kettle to the centre of the stove.

"What did you want to talk about?"

"Over dinner on Monday the subject of hotels or other buildings we might furnish and decorate came up."

"Any helpful suggestions?" Ian asked, heating the teapot, then throwing the water in the sink and preparing the tea. While he was doing this, Valerie said "Tony noted that some of the large hotels that are going up are probably being furnished by the hotel companies themselves based on their knowledge

and expertise. When I mentioned we might look at other places like Eastbourne and Hastings, he said he thought Hastings to have more opportunities than Eastbourne because it was bigger. And Jane said she'd heard most of the land in Eastbourne was owned by just two men. She wasn't persuaded that their goal to establish a resort 'by gentlemen for gentlemen' was a good idea."

Ian laughed. "It does rather restrict its market. There may be other places more ... universal."

"Yes. But I was wondering if I shouldn't go to Hastings and make some observations. See if there are any buildings going up."

"Do we have plenty of cards with the business name and address?" Ian asked.

"I've got a few dozen. We need some new ones that say we do projects like the Lodge."

"Getting the words right will not be easy," Ian said.

"Yes. We want to say 'we can do the full job'."

"'Stylish decor and furnishings of complete apartments'?"

"Oh, good. Thanks. I knew it would be worth talking with you."

"How about I take you to Hastings on Saturday? My treat."

"All right. I'd like that."

The convenient train to Hastings left at five minutes to 8, so Ian and Valerie had a quite early start. They were fortunate with fair weather. They had not been able to get a map of Hastings, so they decided to get off the train at St. Leonard's. Then, outside the station, Valerie approached a hansom and asked the driver "Sir. Can we hire you to drive us on a tour of St. Leonard's to show us new hotels or buildings being constructed, then after drive us to similar places in Hastings."

"Difficult for me to judge the fare, ma'am."

"Can we pay you by the hour?"

"Half a crown an hour and a minimum of 5 bob," the man said.

"Fair enough," Valerie answered. "So you know what we're looking for, here is my card. We have started to decorate and furnish whole rooms, apartments or buildings, and most recently did so for *The Master Brewer's Lodge* in Brighton. It is a private hotel of 8 rooms, where we did the walls, floor, curtains, beds, bedcovers, and furniture. We hope to find clients across the Sussex shore."

"And the gentleman?"

"I am actually an employee of Miss Upton's mother, but have invested personally both in money and work in the Lodge enterprise, in which I am one of several associates. *Uptons* and their friends gave me a job after a man I'd been working for from age 14 to 19 dismissed me to engage his nephew. They've let me learn and improve."

Valerie thought that Ian's comment showed a distinct edge as concerned his previous employer, along with a strong appreciation of Joshua and Rebecca for giving him work.

"Mr. Hoyle does a lot of our design work. He will become a colleague rather than an employee in the not-so-distant future."

"Family in business, I assume," the cabbie suggested.

"True. But my mother was widowed when I was 11 and my brother 10, and my father had made a mess of his second-hand furniture business. We had to scratch and scramble for a while. The only silver spoon I've seen is one being offered for sale."

"Then we'd best show you what you're trying to find."

Tourist time

Hodges was the name of the cabbie. He took them around St. Leonard's, where it was clear well-resourced investors were aiming to create a resort for the better off. But there were signs of more modest ventures and Ian made several crude maps and recorded the addresses of buildings where furnishing might be provided. Around noon Hodges suggested making for Hastings along the front.

"Mr. Hodges, if you know a decent pub, we'll buy you a pint of ale and take some refreshment ourselves before we continue. With the time still on the clock, of course."

"Decent of you Miss Upton. And the 'orse will welcome a break."

It was not only drink and food, of course, that were required. A water closet was becoming a matter of some urgency. Ian ordered some scotch eggs to accompany ale for himself and Hodges and a half pint of cider for Valerie. At Valerie's suggestion, he bought a couple of bottles of lemonade as well.

By half-past one, the hansom had reached more or less the middle of Hastings. Valerie said "I think we'll discontinue our excursion, Mr. Hodges. It's been four hours and we are tiring of making notes."

"We did stop for 'alf an hour, but you approached me at the station as half-past nine sounded. Yes."

"Then here is a half-sovereign with our thanks. You have been most helpful."

"I thank you also. The ale and scotch egg were very welcome, and Dobbin had a chance of some oats and water, so 'e thanks you too."

Valerie and Ian walked eastward a while along the front in the direction of the castle. "Shall we stay on the front, or try in the town?" Ian asked.

"The front is the front, though here not as well appointed as in Brighton. St. Leonard's seems to be trying to capture that more attractively."

They walked uphill through the town, and found open ground at West Hill. Following Priory Road they encountered an imposing building. Or perhaps it was a row of terraced houses, though they seemed more a unit. They found a place to sit and look out over the sea. Ian had a satchel for his notebook and pencils and surprised Valerie by taking out a piece of rough blanket and spreading it to sit on.

"That's thoughtful of you, Ian."

"I'd anticipated the shingle of the beach, but this is, in fact, more to my mood."

Valerie opened one of the lemonade bottles and took a drink, then passed it to Ian.

"Thank you."

"I would very much like to know if the building behind us is an hotel. It would be the sort of place where we could carry out a similar effort as at the Lodge."

"That is why we're here today. My intent is to write to the addresses we have gathered. Perhaps we should go over our notes now while things are fresh in our minds. Some of the places were, like this one, of interest, but we would need to investigate further to learn who to approach. Some buildings we could probably simply use "owner". And I think we need a hand-bill to explain our capabilities and experience."

The better part of the next hour was spent deciding which addresses were worth a letter and advertisement, though there were quiet breaks when they both took time to look out over the channel and observe the passage of waves, boats, birds and clouds.

Valerie said "Ian, have you an idea what time it is?"

"I heard three strike when we came up from the town to the open space here. I've not heard four yet, but we may be out of earshot."

"Let us see if there is somewhere to get tea nearby in the buildings further up. It seems to have houses and likely some shops and hopefully somewhere that offers food. There was a train at around half past three, but the next through train is not until seven. A pity, as that is too early to allow us a good dinner."

Walking a short way they did not see anything promising, so turned down Croft Road. Here there were no houses, but Hodges had mentioned that the High Street was on the other side of West Hill, even as the railway station was closer to St. Leonard's. Croft Road did not initially look promising, but on turning a corner towards the sea, they saw some buildings, and in the midst of a row of houses was a pathway leading towards many structures and apparently streets. Soon they passed a lane called The Croft, then went

through a narrow passageway and suddenly were on a street that turned out to be the High Street. Walking towards the sea, they came upon the Jenny Lind pub.

“Hey ho,” Ian said. “I think we’ve found our tea.”

Having had only the scotch eggs since breakfast, both were hungry. Though it was an odd time for a dinner, there was a hearty scotch broth on offer, and the house was quite happy to offer a gammon steak or a fried plaice caught that morning, both served with potatoes, carrots and cabbage. Ian chose the gammon, Valerie the plaice. Both chose cider to drink.

“Ian. I know I said I would bring you today as my treat, but I’m realizing it is an investment cost. Can you use a page of your notebook to record what we have spent?”

“Yes. But I’ll need to make a copy in ink later.”

“Naturally.

“Now we have the train fares.” Valerie reached in her bag, which was on a strap round her shoulder and actually contained her own notebook which she had decided to leave untouched rather than have two records of the day to consolidate later. She took out her ticket and gave Ian the amount.

“We had the ten bob for Mr. Hodges,” Ian said. “And you gave me 1 and 9 for the drinks and the scotch eggs.”

“I’ll also pay for this meal when we’re done, but do make sure we record it. This is an investment in the future.”

“I do hope it pays off,” Ian said, a bit uncertainly.

“Even if it does not, I don’t begrudge the time spent. I’ve enjoyed the day immensely.”

“Yes. I have too.

“Er. Valerie. I hope you won’t misinterpret me, but I want to say that a lot of the enjoyment is that I’ve shared the day with you. And I’ve already told you that I’m not ... er ... sure of my inclinations.”

“Yes. I’ll not take that the wrong way. I have similar feelings. Sharing is important, and it need not be taken a matter of courtship. Well, at least the kind of courtship that is related to the usual energies that lead to marriage and children. Partnership in doing things and enterprise does, however, excite me.”

“Yes. I also find that very stimulating. It is a pity that our time together might be misunderstood.”

“As long as we don’t misunderstand each other, I think we can try to treat our shared interest and activity as our own, and the business of nobody else.”

“Thank you Valerie. It means a lot to me that I can spend this time with you. And beyond the work on furnishings and enterprise, I have enjoyed the explorations of Hastings and the food and drink.”

“We have not had our pudding yet.”

Valerie had noticed a slate on which was announced a blackberry crumble with custard. Ian chose a piece of chocolate cake.

A clock on the wall showed it approaching six o'clock. Valerie said “I suggest we avail ourselves of the water closet. It will be close to 9 before we are home.”

Some minutes later, as they walked towards the station, where they would arrive in plenty of time for the train, Ian said “I should get myself a watch. It is becoming important to both the keeping of appointments and to the timing of how long tasks take us.”

“Yes. I am finding the lack of a timepiece a nuisance.

“Ian. I will ask you to investigate watches. For both of us. I don't want a frilly decorative one. Tony got Jane a nice one. I think it was American, and it even had a hand for measuring seconds. If you see him ask where he got it. I'll try to remember too. We want something useful for timekeeping and easy to read and that one was certainly suitable. And I think we should add them to the record as an investment, just like the time and costs we spent today.”

A consequence

On Monday, 20th October 1862, Ursula Upton made her entry into the world at around 9 o'clock in the morning, having kept the household awake with Mary's groans and cries much of the night. Jane Harper had arranged that Phoebe Owens would be there as midwife, and Joseph had arrived at the Meadow at half-past nine the night before to collect this lady, with Jessie pulling a cart which had a cover, as the weather was showery.

We need not detail the congratulations from family and friends and the many small gifts for the new daughter and granddaughter. However, Rebecca had both the generosity and good sense to engage a local woman to come in daily to help with the housework and meal preparation. This took a lot of the load off Rebecca, and also gave Mary some time to recover from the birth and also to adapt to being a mother. Audrey Mason, a middle aged woman whose children were grown, was glad of the few shillings. However, her work made life easier at *Uptons*, so the intended 'few weeks' took on an air of permanence, though with an informality that allowed Audrey to take time to visit her children and grandchildren when she wished.

Mary's parents waited until Saturday, October 25, 1862, for a visit, though Caroline could not resist a quick few minutes to see her new, and first, granddaughter on the day she was born. During the official Saturday

visit, Theodore, having seen his granddaughter, drew Joseph aside and suggested they go to a pub where he would buy the new father a pint. Once seated with their tankards, Theodore said “When you first were walking out with Mary, I wasn’t sure that you’d make a good husband for ’er. But you’ve done all right. But the house part of *Uptons* don’t offer much space. You’ll ’ave the baby in your room for now, but when there’s another, an’ they get bigger, the place’ll seem tinier and tinier.”

“Do you have a suggestion, sir?” Joseph asked, almost certain that this was the case.

“Indeed I do, Joseph.

“My business has done well. We’ve some money saved. Enough to buy a house.

“Now I don’t propose to put you in the invidious position of being beholden to us – Mrs. Lawrence and I. But suppose we lend you the money to buy a decent house at a good price – possibly one that needs some rehabilitation to make it really comfortable and presentable. If you can’t repay the loan, which I doubt will happen the way you’re goin’, the value of the house will safeguard the loan. And I’m willin’ to not charge interest, so you can get ahead, but in that case I’d expect half any gain if you sell it eventually.

“You and Mary take some time to talk about it. You’ve possibly a couple of years before things get really cramped.”

“Thank you, sir. We’d been thinking we might want to find a place to rent, but rent doesn’t go towards savings.”

“If we do work out some arrangement, it will also help me. I know my own trade, but investing elsewhere has risks I likely don’t understand. A house occupied by members of my own family will be well looked after.”

This conversation did not result in any change of residence for the next while, but eventually Joseph and Mary did move to a house about a half mile from *Uptons*, as we shall discover.

In-consequences

It would be a source of great happiness to say that the visit to Hastings brought much custom and wealth to our friends. It did, of course, precipitate the development of a very well-composed hand-bill that succinctly and clearly outlined the services and products that could be arranged through *Upton Furnishings*.

It also led to the sending of a dozen letters. One of these was discarded by the occupant of the address to which it was sent, which may be explained by the fact that said occupant was there by stealth to take advantage of

no rent payment even though the gas and water were still connected. The other eleven letters were received, looked at briefly, and set aside. 8 of them eventually fell behind furniture, were tossed in the waste basket, or in one case eaten by the dog. Three were kept, of which one was pinned to a corkboard as a reminder should it be needed. Its recipient did, in fact, come into the shop about a year later when visiting Brighton. That, of course, was far too late to be counted as a result of the efforts expended, even though the person in question spent several pounds in purchases.

A more potent source of custom turned out to be the Lodge itself. Ian arranged that when new *Upton* business calling cards were printed, a subset was overprinted with

□Decoration□/□furnishing□by□

He delivered a small stack of these cards to the young man who had been hired as clerk / manager, having asked Lawson if it were acceptable to do so. The clerk was asked to offer anyone a card if they showed interest in the furnishings or decor. It was a great pity that the dining room was not part of the work supplied by our friends.

In actuality, few cards were given out. Guests would read the card and say "Oh, I know that shop," or "I can remember the name. I'll take a look when I go by."

And "go by" they did. Not, of course, in droves. But furnishings are not something like bread that one purchases almost each day. A good wardrobe is purchased by a grandfather at the time he marries as a young man and is bequeathed by a grandson a century later.

However, at the end of November a well-dressed woman presented to Rebecca in the front shop and said "I was recently meeting a friend who stayed in the *Master Brewer's Lodge* and noticed the seats of the chairs were upholstered to match the curtains and bedspread."

"Yes, Madam. We did the decor and furnishings for that hotel."

"I have a whim to do similarly in my own dining room. The walls are a dreary dark green. The chairs have leather that has all gone black and some have lost their stuffing. The curtains are old and smell of stale cigars. If it turns out you can offer a fair price to bring the room to a more appealing state, then I shall be happy to engage you."

Rebecca, since she and Vera were the two best at upholstery, while Ian seemed to have the eye for wallpaper designs, decided she and Ian should visit the home of Mrs. Phineas Ivory. Arrangements were made for them to visit at 9 o'clock the following morning, Friday, November 28, 1862.

"Here is the room, Mrs. Upton, Mr. Hoyle."

"Might we open the curtains and light all the gas?" Rebecca asked.

“Oh, yes. Of course. Jameson. Can you attend please?”

The butler, who had in fact been within a yard of Mrs. Ivory, opened the curtains and lit the gas. He asked “Would a pair of oil lamps be helpful to the inspection of the furnishings?”

“Indeed,” Rebecca said. “Thank you for your attention.”

When the oil lamps were brought in, Ian used one to check the walls closely. He got Jameson to hold a lamp close to the wall in one corner, then looked along the wall carefully to check for cracks or ripples or other deterioration. He even asked if there were a chair he might stand on to investigate the upper part of the walls. When this had been done for all the four walls, he said,

“The walls appear to be in good condition in that there are no major bumps or obvious dilapidations.”

In the meantime, Rebecca had been looking at the chairs, of which there were ten about the table, that is, four to each side and one at each end. They were of a quite heavy type, with leather overlapping the seat on all sides and tacked with brass headed tacks to the base of the seat which was about four inches below its top. Except that in several cases, the stuffing was clearly escaping through the bottom cover of the seat.

Rebecca also sat on each chair and gently leaned back and side to side. All but two of the chairs showed some looseness. She asked “May we uncover the table and the sideboard?”

Mrs. Ivory said “Jameson,” and objects and covers were removed. Rebecca had Ian hold a lamp so she could examine the surfaces, including the sides of the sideboard and the legs of the table.

Rebecca said “The table and sideboard are nice pieces. They could use some minor refurbishment, and I can recommend some very good people for that, or we could undertake to arrange it for you. Given the general condition, I would think that work could be done here, though some people find the odour of linseed oil or other forms of polish unpleasant, in which case the pieces would go to the workshop. There is the option of beeswax, which smells nice and gives a very pretty finish, but it is less durable, though quite easily redone.”

“And the chairs? What would you recommend for them?”

“There would be a lot of work to redeem them. First, the majority are loose, such as this one.” Here Rebecca showed that she could quite easily move the top of the chair back while the feet stayed put.

“Yes. I was going to ask about having them tightened.”

“That is possible, but is extra work for this design of chair compared to some others. But in any case, the style with this leather overlapping the whole seat and also on the chair back means a great deal of work. And unless I am mistaken, the table and sideboard are mahogany, while these chairs are,

I think, beechwood stained to a colour to try to match. While I would need to do some calculations, I believe that we would be able to offer new chairs in mahogany with a drop-in seat covered in a material to complement curtains and wallpaper for less than the refurbishment of these chairs. Moreover, the drop-in seat is the only part of the new chairs where there is textile fabric, so a change in decor is much more easily accomplished later should the theme of the room be changed.”

“Oh, I had not thought of that. Nor that new might be cheaper than renewal.”

“Let us get Mr. Hoyle to suggest some papers and fabrics from the sample books we have brought with us. Our costs and hence our price to you depend on the choices.”

Ian said “Mrs. Ivory, do you have a particular colour in mind?”

“Not as such. I know that I don’t like this darkish yellow green. It was very popular when I was a girl.”

“It may well be Scheele’s green, in which case we must be careful in its removal, in that it is full of arsenic.”

“Oh my. I had heard about arsenic in wallpaper, but did not realize it was this yellowy green.”

“It may not be, but greens are often based on arsenic. In some countries on the Continent it is now banned,” Ian said.

“Good then that I don’t like it.

“Tell me what you think might be a good choice.”

Ian had a sample of paint colours. It was not as complete as he might like, but was sufficient to show a range of hues. He pointed to a soft cream colour. “This is a cream, or creamy white if you prefer. This would be the paint colour for the wood trim and baseboards, or we could use a varnish. The same general colour will be suggested for the wallpaper, as it will lighten the room and provide a good contrast to the mahogany of the table and sideboard. Now the fashion is to have cloths over the wood, and that does protect the surface but also hide it. An alternative is to have some small cloths or doilies, and also some wooden or metal trivets for hot dishes and under lamps or candles.”

“And what of the curtains,” Mrs. Ivory asked. “Cream coloured curtains would surely attract any dirt there is?”

“Yes indeed, so for the curtains I would suggest a more nuanced hue and pattern in red and a yellow gold. And here is a cream background wallpaper with a repeating geometric pattern in a very similar red and gold. You will see they have a pleasing contrast together, but still carry the same ... may we say flavour.”

“How different from the usual. But very nice. I just wonder how my family would react to this.”

Rebecca said "We would imagine the curtain fabric also on the chair seats, if they are to be in fabric, but the chairs we would recommend would have a wooden back. That reduces the custom upholstery work and the risk of stains that are difficult to remove. Also the drop-in seat can be taken out and a new one substituted. Before a final approval we would definitely show you an example of the chair."

"Could I even have an extra drop-in seat just in case of some damage?"

"Certainly. We do this work with our associates here in Brighton. We have worked with them now for about a decade." The decade of association was, of course, only true in the sense of "work with" and not concerning upholstery projects. Rebecca continued "I will suggest that we leave the sample books here overnight so you may discuss the proposed styles with your family or friends. They are our only ones, so please be exceptionally careful not to stain or damage them. We will send a messenger to collect them tomorrow at 9 o'clock. If you wish us to propose based on the materials we have discussed this morning, inform our messenger. It may be Mr. Hoyle or myself or young Mr. Martin Macdonald. We will then prepare a price quotation for your approval."

"Thank you, Mrs. Upton. I will have an answer for you in the morning when someone comes to get the sample books."

Rebecca said "You currently have just the varnished wooden floors. Should you want to consider a carpet, we can make some suggestions, and order from a wide variety of patterns and colours, but unfortunately cannot provide a viewing because our showroom does not have the space to house a wide selection."

"We must also caution that removal of the wallpaper will almost certainly reveal some minor unevenness in the plaster, and a new top coat will take time to dry, especially in winter. Generally several weeks minimum is recommended."

Mrs. Ivory asked for a quotation, which was delivered by Ian using a hand-cart to bring a sample chair with a loose drop-in seat to illustrate its construction. By December 10, Mrs. Ivory had agreed to proceed and had paid a deposit for unrecoverable costs. By this time, Rebecca had exchanged notes with Vera Sulton to establish a price for on-site polishing of the table and side-board in beeswax, as well as the upholstery of 11 drop in seats, that is, one extra, using the fabric chosen. The new chairs – in mahogany – were fortunately quite compatible in colouration with the table and side-board.

If there were concerns, the main one was in getting the chosen fabric made up into appropriate curtains. Rebecca approached Frieda and Winnifred of the *Brighton Ladies' Emporium* to get the names of some seamstresses, though Valerie had asked Jane if the ladies at the Meadow could manage this

job, since there was much less horticulture at this time of year. The main inhibition was, in fact, that days were short and it was much easier to sew in good daylight than lamps or candles.

The Lodge project had given Rebecca and Valerie experience with several paper hangers. Rebecca and Ian went to the house of one of them, named Barkley, to ask about removal of the old wallpaper.

"You're sure there's no paint to remove?" Barkley asked.

"Yes. I checked that the picture rail is painted white, as is the plaster above it," Rebecca responded.

"And these are the dimensions of the walls?"

"Yes, I've noted the width and height of the sections under windows, but from what you have told me, that doesn't save any work."

"No. Just more fiddle."

"Is the possible Scheele's green colour a problem?"

"Add a pound and give me 15 bob of it. I'll need to get extra rags to damp the walls with 'ot water and make sure there's no dust."

"Will you do the painting of the picture rail and the whitewash of the ceiling plaster as you did at the Lodge?"

"Yes. That way I control the whole job. Is there any furniture present?"

"A table and a sideboard. I specified that the sideboard be emptied and the table with leaves removed. We should be able to move them to one side of the room then the other, but it might be feasible to stack the sideboard on the table with some padding, which I'll make sure is ready."

"Still need to move them for the ceiling whitewash, but I'd do that first anyway. I trust that's not got cracks or damage."

"I did a careful check, but did mention that we'd almost certainly put on a new finishing coat and then want to ensure it is properly dry."

"Good. Is it worth my taking a look?"

"It can do no harm, but you should offer a time that avoids interfering with other work."

"Give me the address and tell Mrs. Ivory I'll be in touch to arrange a time. I'll work out when to remove the old paper. She'll likely want to wait for that until after Christmas."

"Probably. Means we wait for our money, though."

Conversation and customers

Even though there was a wait to carry out the commission for Mrs. Ivory, she was a woman who was active and talkative in middle-class society. *Uptons* saw several new customers in the Presentation Space. These were mostly

women who, while not necessarily wealthy, still had access to enough cash to purchase a couple of pieces of furniture, or a pair of lamps, or some new linens.

A particular example occurred on December 23, which was a Tuesday. A woman sailed into the shop and thence to the Presentation Space with her husband almost running to keep up with her. She was quite taken with a table and six chairs of the new stock Valerie had selected from *Howards*. Ian had displayed this with taste, and had positioned the table where it was well-lit. At this time of year, he had also set out some oil lamps strategically.

“Am I correct that you deal only in second-hand stock?” the gentleman asked.

“Until last year that was the case,” Ian responded. “However, we have visited several manufacturers and are able to offer newly made items. And in regard to linens and similar items, we have always had a selection of new stock.”

“Is new furniture as well-made as the old?”

“I can only speak for what I have observed,” Ian said. “The items we have chosen to stock new have so far proved very well crafted. I like to point out that several of our number have been to the factories. We felt this was necessary to gauge whether we would be happy to have their merchandise.

“As to second-hand stock, we have two main buyers who provide the items, and then we use *Soultons* workshop to ensure they are up to our standard before they are placed here.”

“But the table and chairs my wife has been examining are new?”

“Yes, sir. Delivered to us a few weeks ago from *Howards* in London.”

“And this set here on the right is also new by appearance?”

“By initial appearance, perhaps. However, it was acquired a few weeks ago in an estate sale. The table was in excellent condition, needing only some polishing of the legs, though we did buff the top. Three of the chairs had over time some loosening and were re-glued, and of course given a light repolishing.”

“A casual eye would not distinguish old from new. Is there much difference in the price asked?”

Ian said “Our arrangements with *Howards* constrain us to price their goods to a standard list. Our only flexibility is to offer to deliver and set them up, for example, levelling the table. The other set, which you have noticed is more or less equivalent but of a slightly different design and decoration, is offered at £8 less. But that also would be delivered and levelled.”

Here Ian took a marble from his pocket and placed it on the second-hand table. It did not move. The customers did not notice the small shims under the legs nearer the open front of the space, shims needed because the floor was sloped for drainage.

The gentleman said "Nicely done.

"Now, Virginia. Do you have any questions?"

"No, Henry. Except are you happy if I suggest we acquire the new table set here on the left? I think I would like to have new rather than second hand."

"Indeed, my dear." Turning to Ian, the man said "May I ask if we can delay delivery until the first week of January?"

"Certainly, sir. Though we would want a deposit of £2 to reserve the set in your name." Clients could, and often did, change their mind.

Later, talking to Valerie, Ian said "I wondered if I should offer to order them a set newly ordered from *Howards*."

"There's always the possibility that the wood has a slightly different shade or grain pattern. Better to have to shift things around in the Presentation Space."

"That was in the back of my mind, or that there could be a minor difference or damage and we might have sold the items they viewed and upon which they placed a deposit."

Valerie said "Ian. Are you going to your family for Christmas?"

"Yes. Trevor also. Do I take it you are thinking we should ... er ... appear to spend some time together?"

"My concern is that we should present a consistent pattern to limit unwanted interrogation."

"In that you have my agreement. Though I must add that I have come to welcome our conversations, or even time when we are just in each others quiet company. That is to say, our time together does not have to serve to distract the attention of others. I enjoy it for itself."

"Yes. All that is missing is the spark that is supposed to afflict a man and a woman who are a couple."

Ian said "For some people it seems the spark of physical attraction is all there is, and apart from that, they do not get along."

"Yes. Looking back, I fear my father and mother really were not well-suited. Or perhaps they were, if only father had allowed that Ma is good at business and let her take it on, leaving him to do some of the heavy work and stand beside her."

"Did he have poor judgment?"

"I've often wondered that. In reality I will never know, but the memories I have include times when he seemed to prosper and be in control of his own destiny. Then other times, and especially near the end, he was capricious and in thought unfocused. Worse, he blamed Ma and treated her maliciously. I find it difficult to forgive him that."

Ian said "To return to our own ... er ... presentation, do you have any ideas of activities we might enjoy together?"

“There is the pantomime. We could go on the 27th.”

“Why don’t I go now and see if I can get tickets?”

“Yes. Do so. But not in the stalls just near the stage. The players sometimes throw water.”

“I’ll have a commission from that table set coming, and even if I presume upon it early, I can take you to a dinner before we watch the pantomime, or after if we view the matinee performance.”

Ian had by this time donned his coat and was winding a scarf about his neck, leaving in great haste, as if fearful there would be no tickets.

Boxing Day

Tony and Jane invited the Goldmans to dinner on Boxing Day so they could see the changes at *Matilda’s*. Joshua had called in once or twice, but had not had a tour of the buildings. Rachel said “Every so often a house needs a new owner to bring fresh life to it. This house is no exception. Tony. You and Jane have made some nice changes.”

Tony asked “Have you heard from your children in Boston?”

Rachel answered “Indeed. And they are well. Their children now are between 6 and 16, and thankfully too young to be taken into the fighting between the States. There is, of course, anxiety as to the possible events.”

Joshua said “There is much bloodshed. At Shiloh, a name which has associations with the name Joshua in the scriptures, and at Antietam more recently – I wonder if I pronounce it correctly. There is also the consequent damage to many lives elsewhere, including in our own country in the cotton mills.”

Tony said “Mrs. Cohen had a letter from Jeremiah Quigley. He said he is going to volunteer for the Union. Apparently many people in Canada are doing so, and some, sadly, for the Confederacy, though I doubt of negro origin.”

Joshua rejoined “Slavery, perhaps as much for its financial benefits, finds support in many parts of the world. And the social style of the landowners of the South accords with that of our own landed gentry. I am sure there are many in Canada who support the South. I fear much of our own Parliament is divided.”

Jane said “Tony. Did you not say you had a confrontation with a young woman who was from a Southern plantation?”

Rachel said “I did not know that. What happened?”

Tony related the story.

“Joseph, Jeremiah and I were delivering the baggage of a young woman named Elizabeth Jackson, who was visiting Violet Sturgess – she is now Lady Frogmore. Jeremiah heard Miss Jackson talking and said he did not want to go in the house, as he had been a slave on the plantation adjacent to that of the Jacksons. So we left him watching the donkeys while Joseph and I carried in the trunks. Then Miss Jackson looked out the window and saw Jeremiah and asked me ‘Where did you buy your nigger?’. I answered politely that he was my colleague as all men were free in England. She took offence and said I would not be paid because I was impudent, though I was careful to make my statement as neutral as I could. I was not absolutely sure of the law, but said that if we were not paid we would have to take the luggage away as a lien against payment, but that a constable could be called if she wished. Miss Sturgess intervened to defuse the situation, in part by mentioning how Moonbeam had pulled her friend Olivia Crouch from the sea, and we were paid, though without gratuity. Joseph afterwards said he was surprised how firmly I handled things, and none of us were unhappy with the outcome, despite no gratuity.”

Joshua said “Politely but firmly handled. Well done.”

Tony continued “Miss Jackson, or whatever her name is now, was in church yesterday. Jane and I walked right by her, but in my best suit and with some years’ passage, I don’t think she recognized me. She was with an older man.”

Jane said “Tony! You didn’t tell me.”

“I think at that point we encountered the vicar and exchanged Christmas greetings.”

Joshua said “No doubt the older man was Lord Joseph Marchmont. I recall an announcement that he was widowed about a decade ago, then remarried about four years ago to an American named Jackson, which was a relief to some business associates who were pursuing him for debts he had run up to keep his estate going. The debts were not enormous – to my knowledge he does not frequent the tables – but I don’t think he was very astute in managing his assets. The new Lady Marchmont presumably brought money and comforts.”

Jane said “I would guess Miss Jackson’s family wanted a title, but I don’t think Marchmont is terribly high in the peerage. There was an Earldom, but I think not now.”

Tony said “Let us hope she will come to accept that each of us is human and deserves a chance to enjoy a life of dignity and freedom.

“Now Bobby has greatly improved her cooking skills. Moreover, she has made careful note of what is allowed and not allowed for Joshua and Rachel. Let us enjoy what has been prepared. To accompany the repast, I have a couple of bottles of hock chilled.”

Pantomime

The next afternoon Valerie and Ian went to a pantomime. The title was Dick Whittington, but the story was turned almost completely upside down. The outcome was happily very entertaining in its manifest silliness. Afterwards, they went to the Lodge, where Ian had made a reservation for dinner.

“I believe our outing to the pantomime and this dinner should keep unwanted questions away for a while,” Ian said.

“I will echo what you said last week. I have begun to enjoy our time together for itself,” Valerie replied.

“Yes. I will repeat that sentiment.

“Valerie. I know my feelings towards you are not those that I believe would be felt by most men. Still, I am coming to the opinion that we could and possibly should explore how we might proceed ... er ... together.”

“What we are doing already, that is, working towards an increase in business in several products, and now also services for decoration and furnishing, as well as social activities like today, is building a form of partnership. Our conversations, hopefully frequent and honest, will let us find our way together.”

“Perhaps I am seeking a form of ... certainty. That may not be possible, of course, but I know that somehow I am seeking a more permanent state. At the moment, our time together has an aura of uncertainty.”

“Do you want our partnership to be more formal? Possibly eventually marry?”

“Yes. I suppose so. I know that carries for a woman the loss of ... er ... control of the wealth she has managed to accumulate. Our society gives everything to the whim of the husband.”

“Unless there are careful legal contracts. And even then, I suspect a woman would have to work very hard if her husband were determined to own her fortune. That you mention the difficulties likely implies you would not do so. Still, it is to be pondered upon.”

Ian said “Yes. I recognize the problem. Worse, for us, if we were to marry and then I die, I suspect that my family – not necessarily out of intrinsic malice, but simply thinking it is the way of the world – would presume at least a share of the assets.”

“Ian. We are at least discussing the matter. Let us continue to work together to build our fortunes. And also to spend time enjoying what pleasures may be shared in life, like the pantomime and this very particular meal. As a girl, I could not have imagined I would be in an elegant dining room being served such fine dishes.”

“Nor I. It is good to realize that we have advanced. Moreover, this

advancement, if that is the appropriate word, can be seen to arise in our working together. I don't have that keenness of mind for figures and sums that you do, but I do believe it is not exaggeration I have some sense of presentation and description to aid sales and revenues."

"Our inclinations and skills do seem complementary. And it is not exaggeration or false pride to be aware of them. One must not over-estimate, of course, but it is well to tally one's resources regularly, and that includes the mental and physical ones."

Ian said, wryly "Somehow, I cannot imagine other couples – sweethearts – conversing about business and the control of fortunes."

"Would you have it otherwise? For us, I mean."

"It would be a grave error to omit a discussion of how we plan to pursue our fortunes, or our fortune if we decide it is a joint endeavour. Still, I can imagine that there are those joys and moments of intimacy that may not be available to us."

"Ian. Can I ask if you are sure of that? That is, what makes you so ... er ... pessimistic that you and I cannot find those joys and intimacies?"

In a low voice, almost a whisper, Ian replied "As I have previously said, I do not seem to find myself pulled towards women as much as towards men. Though I will state that I have never acted on that attraction."

"For your own safety – and selfishly for my own happiness – I will ask that you never act upon those inclinations. The cost of apprehension is so dire."

"You really mean that? That you care enough about me that it would be detrimental to your contentment?"

"Have you not realized that yet?" Valerie asked.

"Perhaps realized as words or ideas, but not in my being. And on my side, losing your friendship and companionship would be as fierce a pain as I can imagine."

They had ordered a bottle of hock, trusting to the judgement of the staff of the Lodge that it would be decent, and had not been disappointed. There was still a half glass each left in the bottle even though they had finished their dessert. Valerie divided the rest of the wine and said "On the basis of what we have confided, let me suggest a toast, which I hope you will approve."

"To Upton and Hoyle."

Ian was, for a moment, nonplussed, then realized Valerie was proposing a lifelong partnership. Moreover, she was claiming a half measure of the wealth, and, he was certain, the responsibility for the effort to create it. He raised his glass.

"To Upton and Hoyle."

A new year – 1863

1863. The start of a new year but the continuation of many narratives.

Janet Nuffield, who with her brother had tumbled into the Workhouse with her brother Felix when their schoolteacher parents died of cholera, then were rescued by Ethel Jones, née Souton, on behalf of the *Fortescue Factory*, had been hoping to find a potential husband for a while. She was now 22. Hardly an old maid.

Janet worked now in the Factory, helping make various Treats for the Tongue. However, her school upbringing, like that of her brother, had led to more administrative responsibility. Moreover, with Felix and a rather fluid group of young people, she attended as many affordable concerts and lectures as she could. Through these she would from time to time encounter Jack Dixon, the principal agent for Tony Brown's *News and More*. Jack was possibly two years younger than Janet, and he had grown up in the crowded household of his father, a joiner. However, the newsagency offered a wide range of reading material, plus a goodly measure of time when customers did not deign to come into the shop. Jack used his time and the plentiful supply of material to enlarge his knowledge, so he was more than a match for Janet when it came to both current events and literary topics. Just before the previous Easter, they had walked out together for the first, but certainly not the last time.

Contemporaneously, Felix had drummed up the courage to ask Elizabeth Yarrow to the same pantomime performance that Valerie and Ian had attended. Elizabeth was the step-daughter of Mary McNair-Yarrow, the person who one would normally title the Managing Director of the *Fortescue Factory*. This was one of the factors that had caused Felix to be reticent to ask Elizabeth to accompany him. He need not have worried himself. Elizabeth had in recent months been wondering if her familial connection to Mary would forever bar her from social intercourse with others in the Factory, or indeed with those in client or supplier businesses.

Valerie, having now an informal agreement to go forward with Ian, realized that she would almost certainly need to put more time to their enterprise. At least she would need more flexibility in her obligations. All New Year's Day she mulled over the possibilities. Her daily work often had many threads, but there was one that was present and foremost, which was to manage commissions for *Best Bonnet* and to keep track of monies received and rendered.

On the morning of January second, a Friday, she asked Tony at breakfast if they might talk about plans for *Best Bonnet* soon.

"Certainly. If I am correct, the commissions today are such that I could

be back by two o'clock. Do you have any obligations then?"

"That will suit. Thank you Tony. I'll have a kettle hot so you can warm up with a cup of tea then."

When Tony did come in at about ten past two, having carefully dried Moonbeam's hooves and ensured she had plenty of hay as well as some other food, along with some water that had been kept near the stove in the back of the shop so it was not icy, he rubbed his hands and stood near the kitchen stove as Valerie poured boiling water into the teapot. Bobby was working on ironing.

"We could go in the parlour," Valerie suggested.

"Is the fire going there?"

"I'm afraid not. Didn't want to use fuel when nobody was there," Bobby said. "Mrs. Harper went out to help young Mr. Oliver, so there's just me here upstairs, but I made sure the fire in the stove downstairs is well-stoked."

"Yes. I noticed when I got some water for Moonbeam. She likes it with the chill off."

"Can't blame 'er," Bobby said.

Tony asked Valerie "Are you all right with Bobby here?"

"Yes. She might be interested in our conversation, since I wanted to make sure we had enough resources to keep *Best Bonnet* running."

"Do you see that we are short somewhere?" Tony seemed puzzled.

"It's that I've been getting more involved with the furniture business now. It could happen that I need to take a day or so away from time to time. But the commissions are every day but Sunday, and we could probably even find work then. In fact, in summer we do, since we offer donkey rides on the beach.

"I still like organizing the commissions, and particularly recording where the money comes and goes. Seeing how things grow and where we can do better. Just I'm feeling torn between things I want to do."

"And the commissions need doing because the rest of us depend on knowing what we'll be doing. So you feel ... er ... trapped?"

"Just sometimes. Mostly I'm happy with the tasks."

"It's good you said you want to talk. People have to grow and change. And you've done well with the new furniture. You and Ian together. Let's think who we might get to handle what we can call the daily roster."

Valerie said "I've shown Arthur how things work, and he can manage in a pinch, but he does a lot of work with the hand carts, and he has been very good on occasion in finding boys to deliver and pick up with the hand carts."

Tony said "That's more or less what I understood, but it's good to have you say it out loud. Now before we go any further, I'll ask Bobby if she wants to have anything to do with the *Best Bonnet* operations."

Bobby said "I'm not so crisp with writin' and figurin', but I like workin' with the donkeys. 'Specially giving rides on the beach."

"What about working here as the cook and caretaker?"

"I'm happy with that too. An' I think my cookin's getting better. I'm finding I like tryin' new things."

"So it seems we need to find someone who will be able to substitute for Valerie. Either when she's engaged with other temporary obligations, or gradually as she develops her own business," Tony summarized.

"I didn't mean to imply I'm ... er ... moving," Valerie said.

"I realize that. But in my own case I've both had to change and sometimes wanted to change. That's natural. And if I try to block you, it will not make for better work here, and only give rise to unhappiness all round. Better we find ways for all of us to succeed in the line of work we choose."

"How should we proceed?" Valerie asked.

"Is there anyone who might be available you could train to substitute for you?"

Bobby said "What about Angela Macdonald? She's been round several times. Likes being around the donkeys, just like me. But she's sharp as a tack with figures, and actually seems to like 'em."

Tony asked "How old is she?"

"Told me 'er 13th birthday is the end of the month."

Valerie said "I think Mrs. Mortimer wants her to stay in school until she's 14. But we could offer her a chance to learn now. Have her here for a few hours a week learning how the commissions and bookkeeping work. I can't think the furnishing enterprise will pick up so quickly that we can't manage easily for the next year with me, Arthur, and eventually Angela. And Ian has learned how the commissions and recording work, though he's never actually done it on his own."

"Let me talk to Maud – Mrs. Mortimer – and Angela. If they agree, then we'll work out a plan."

That night, which seemed to be cold and raw, Tony and Jane were cuddled under an extra blanket, a quilted counterpane and an eiderdown.

"Jane. Valerie wanted to talk today. She's getting very interested in the new furnishings enterprise, which I think she's planning to build with Ian."

"She does the daily plan for *Best Bonnet*. Trouble for you if she leaves."

"From what she says, she's not going to leave suddenly. But in any case, I've been careless in not arranging a substitute. There's always accidents and illness."

"Wasn't Ian going to learn?"

"Yes, but ..."

"Oh. Silly of me. Yes. You think they're planning to build a business together?"

"Valerie said as much. And I wish them well. To try to thwart them would only delay the reckoning and cause enmity that I would find catastrophically depressing."

"Did you come to any conclusion?"

"Well, Jane. Bobby mentioned that Angela Macdonald is keen on the donkeys, which we already know. But also she is quite good and quite interested in the figures. I'll talk to Maud to see if we can get Angela to come for a few hours each week and learn the roster and the bookkeeping, with an aim to have her become the main person in charge when she leaves school in a year or so. She'll be 13 at the end of the month.

"Also, I think I should try to learn a lot more about the roster and the bookkeeping. I've always left it to Rebecca or Valerie. Actually, we didn't talk about Rebecca, but I think she prefers now to be at *Uptons*."

"It is her business. And she's had to scratch and scabble to keep it," Jane said.

"What of *Harper's Helpers*?" Tony asked.

"We seem to have a number of odd clients, with odd meaning that they aren't as one would expect, and no criticism of them intended. Only a couple of clients involve true nursing. But now we have three children who are cripples in some way. We help them learn to cope with daily life. Two are bright young things, and will do all right in schoolwork. The third is backward. Truthfully, a mongoloid child. At least that is the term used recently by Dr. John Langdon Down that a friend sent me a clipping about. Lucy's mother is older than most. But the child has a sweet disposition. Some such children are almost unable to live, but Lily is quite close to normal in her behaviour, though I fear other children could be very cruel. My biggest task is to persuade the parents that she will not have a normal life. They want me to perform a miracle so she can live as a normal woman."

"What are Lily's possibilities?"

"She is 12 now and she has reasonable speech, though a bit distorted by an oversized tongue, which makes her eating clumsy too. However, she does a number of household chores, though I think she would be overwhelmed as a domestic servant if she were told to do something out of her regular pattern of activity."

"I wonder if something like the work of packing Treats at the *Fortescue Factory* would suit such a person?" Tony asked, almost to himself. He was almost asleep.

"Oh. How brilliant, Tony. I will talk to Mary Yarrow as soon as possible. It could be of great benefit to both Lily and the Factory. Lily will work for hours at tasks that would bore me to tears, and she will also be happy and cheerful with her accomplishment."

A wider view

The evening meal on March 30, 1863, at *Matilda's* was one where all the residents, that is, Jane, Tony, Valerie, Bobby and Arthur, were at the table.

Tony said "There seems to be a lot happening in the world this year."

Jane asked "What events, particularly, would you include?"

"The American civil war provides a number of items, but they are really an ensemble. Lincoln's Emancipation Declaration now gives the war a clear issue that divides the two sides. On top of that, there has been some very heavy fighting in Northern Virginia and Pennsylvania, together with the naval blockade on the sea coasts and on the Mississippi River.

"It isn't the only conflict. We have the French, with ourselves and the Spanish dragged along, trying to take over Mexico to force repayment of loans. And the Poles and Romanians have rebelled against the Russians. There will be much blood shed all round."

Arthur said "Here in Britain, there's a lot of sufferin' up North with the blockade on cotton, but it ain't a war at least."

Bobby said "I was readin' that they've opened an underground railway in London. Don't think I'd like to try that."

"I don't think you've been on a train yet, have you, Bobby?" Tony asked.

"Nah. Not 'ad the chance."

"We'll have to think of taking you along when we go somewhere by train," Jane said.

"I'd like that," Bobby said.

Tony said "It's Easter this coming weekend. As a bonus, I'll pay the fare for Arthur and Bobby to go to Worthing on Saturday if you both wish."

"Ooh. Yeah," Bobby said.

"I'd like that," Arthur said.

"Can't imagine how it feels to go that fast," Bobby added.

Valerie said "It doesn't seem odd when you're on the train. But there've been accidents, and I'll venture that there'll be more. Though the trains seem to mostly go along all right."

Arthur said "Like the *Orpheus* that sank in New Zealand. Apparently a sunny day, but they hit a sand bar, then the waves got 'em. Three-quarters of the crew, about 190 of 'em, drowned in sight of the harbour."

"Do they know what happened?" Jane asked.

"Newspapers 'ad a bunch of ideas, but there'll be an enquiry, or likely more than one. But *Orpheus* was flagship of the Australian Squadron, so 'ad both a captain and the squadron commodore, an' they both drowned. One report said the ship was signalled to change course from a station on an island in the harbour, but she kept going onto the sand bar. Wouldn't be a

surprise if the big-wigs were arguing, but the Navy'll blame some ordinary tar to protect their reputations."

Jane said "I've seen that type of thing in the Crimea. The failure to bring food, fuel and clothing cost many more lives than the Russians."

Tony said "And a great pity that the failures and mistakes are kept hidden so others can't avoid them."

Valerie said "It seems to me that a lot of the mistakes are because some people think they are better than others, rather than just better at some jobs than others. Or that their knowledge is always superior to that of others."

"Like men always thinking they know more than women?" Jane prompted.

"That too. The majority of men will not deign to talk to me about commissions for *Best Bonnet*. The other day when Tony was familiarizing himself with the way we run the commissions and the bookkeeping, there was a man came to set up a regular call, and he wouldn't talk to me even after Tony made him aware that the key persons to talk to when arranging commissions were either myself or – in the not so distant future – Angela Macdonald."

"She's taken to the tasks like a duck to water," Arthur said. "Quick as a fox after a rabbit in juggling the commissions so those of us with the handcarts or the donkeys don't chase about hither and yon."

"I'm afraid I'm less adept at such mental acrobatics," Tony said.

"You do well enough," Valerie said. "Angela's very good at it, but she's often trying too hard. The carters like a regular route, even if it isn't ... er ... optimal is I think the word."

Jane said "'the best is the enemy of the good'."

"Well put, Jane," Tony responded.

"You can thank Voltaire, I believe, though I've quoted him in English, and I believe he drew on an Italian aphorism."

Valerie said "The trick in business, I think, is to do a bit better than your competition, or as well while expending less effort or money."

"At the same time, there's the necessity of enduring," Jane said. "I forget who told me – some officer I was nursing in the Crimea, I think – about some native farmers in South America. The Spanish tried to get them to grow some crops that would produce a harvest two or three times as much as their traditional plants, but soon they went back to their usual practice. It was because the higher yields were, indeed, on average double the original crop, but every few years one would get nothing, and could then starve."

Arthur said "Someone should 'ave told 'em to grow enough of the old crop to survive, and the rest of the new one to improve their prosperity."

Bobby said "That makes a lot of sense. But nobody talks much about things like that. 'Specially how to decide how much of each to grow. An' I

suppose you could do the same thing with different forms of business, mixin' some safe but meagre in earnings with big reward but risky for loss."

Tony said "That we're thinking about these things and talking about them means we'll have the possibility of using such ideas. And I'm sure there's ways to reckon the right mix, or at least a decent one."

"Vera Soulton showed me a calculation you did for the loan Mrs. Cohen gave them for the Workshop," Valerie said. "I'd not thought of loans that way. And I'm guessing that calculations of a parallel nature would let one get an idea of the mix of safety and risk."

"You do need to know the rates of risk and reward, though," Tony said. "But that's part of what we've been doing with the bookkeeping, and I'm glad I've been learning more how you do it, Valerie."

"I should take more interest in that too," Jane said. "I don't have a good idea which activities that *Harper's Helpers* undertakes are the most profitable."

Tony said "One thing we have been doing – well we discuss then you apply – is to try to make sure every activity of *Harper's Helpers* at least covers its costs. Thus as long as none loses money, the business must survive."

"That's another good way of thinkin' for any business," Arthur said, which seemed, without any awkwardness whatever, to put a full stop at the end of the dinner. Surprisingly, no mention had been made of the marriage March 10 of Prince Albert Edward, the heir to the throne, to Princess Alexandra of Denmark.

Another Easter parade

An Easter parade was not an English tradition. There were, of course, church ceremonies and a greater than usual attendance thereat. But processing about the town was not organized. Still, Arthur and Bobby did take an excursion to Worthing, and Tony and Jane not only paid the train fare, but also gave them each eighteen pence for their enjoyment, though Tony did ask them to make some notes on possibilities for expanding the *Best Bonnet* cartage business there.

As Tony explained to them both at Maundy Thursday supper, "At some point we are going to explore the possibilities of a larger business. Worthing is fairly easily accessible by train. However, we'd need to think how to conduct our business there, for example, by hand-cart or donkey. That probably means finding premises at least, and possibly stabling. On top of which, we'll need both staff and someone to manage, even if that person is also doing some of the work."

Arthur asked "Would you hire someone new as manager?"

"Preferably not. I'd rather promote someone who works with us already and who knows our practices and thinking. There's no reason it couldn't be someone like yourself. I doubt we'll expand to places like Worthing soon. And there may already be firms there that work hard and provide good service. We want to find opportunities that don't mean a lot of fierce competition. *Best Bonnet* started with one donkey, then another, and then hand-carts. We offered fairly-priced transport of goods of a modest size. Most carters were using heavy horses, and still are. We've also done well by having a portion of work and hence revenue coming from businesses we're associated with, so some of our revenue is more or less guaranteed."

"What should we make notes of?" Bobby asked.

"I think we need to know whether all the commercial activity is clustered close together, or if it is spread out. The latter will mean more cartage is needed. If you see carters about, take note of any names and what type of equipment they use. And after that, whatever you see that might be appropriate to our businesses. For example, if you note that there is no newsagent in an area, that could mean there's an opportunity."

"Or nobody in that neighbourhood can read!" Arthur underlined one different interpretation.

On Good Friday morning, there were toasted hot cross buns for breakfast. Thanks to the bees, or rather their successors, that had accompanied Robert Vance some years before when he came to *Soultons*, there was honey. The ladies at the Meadow had made some excellent jams last summer, and made it well so that it was still in good condition. There were open jars of black-currant and strawberry.

Jane said "I can't decide if I like the black-currant or the strawberry better."

Tony said "I think just butter for me, but possibly a tiny smear of honey."

Valerie said "It's all good. And the wire pyramids let us toast the buns nicely. But I'd get fat if I ate this many every day."

"Good Friday is supposed to be solemn, as I understand things," Tony said.

"It's a pity religion often tries to make people sad and unsure. I'd prefer less of the fire of hell and more of the warmth of the milk of kindness," Jane opined.

"Can't disagree," Arthur said. He had joined the breakfast, though on most days he would have eaten and departed much earlier.

Jane asked "Were the animals all right when you went down, Tony?"

"I think the donkeys were wondering why they weren't yet harnessed. Perhaps we should take them out later to give them a bit of exercise. The weather's cloudy but not cold."

“What are you planning to do today?”

“I’m going to review my income and expenditure. Would you help me to do so?”

“Certainly. And we can look at *Best Bonnet* too. Valerie and I have gone over the figures, but that was at the detail level. I should try to summarize so I can get a panorama.”

“Can you share your results or opinions afterwards with me?” Valerie asked.

“Of course. What do you plan?”

“Much the same. Mr. Hoyle and I want to figure out the relative profits from new and second-hand.” Valerie omitted the word “furnishings” which was now assumed. “Later today we’re meeting with Mrs. Mortimer and Mr. Cohen to talk about what we might do going forward. I don’t know if Ma will join us. Probably, but she’s said she plans to put her efforts into the existing operation, though she’s willing to invest a small amount as long as I’m involved.”

“Good for you,” Tony said.

Jane said “I ran into Henry Mortimer the other day when I was out. He told me that taking over Mr. Turcotte’s offices has led to more business because Fortescue Road is more central so more people see his brass plate. Though I suspect Rose Sinclair has helped. She has a lot of acquaintances from the time she worked for the Corporation.”

Tony said “Someone I was talking to mentioned a recent change in the law relating to limited liability companies. I wonder if that could be useful for the furniture operation, so all of you could combine your efforts in an orderly way.”

“Henry Mortimer mentioned that in a meeting we had some time ago,” Valerie said. “I read something more a while ago, but I can’t say I understand the consequences of the change or addition to the law. However, Henry also pointed out that women cannot vote in such corporations, which is a critical obstacle to us.”

Triple sadness

Jane and Tony had Easter Sunday dinner at the Meadow. Harvey and Evelyn Horner with their adopted little boy were now settled, and quietly exuded a practical contentment. Several tables were set up in a crowded kitchen. Tom and Vera joined the group. A tray was taken to Matt Moore in his nook in one of the glass-houses.

Phoebe Owens said “Matt is cheerful, but we all know his coughing and

fevers mean he's not got long. Though there's not been definite evidence that consumption is infectious, we act as if it is, just in case."

"Not long", indeed. On the morning of the Wednesday following Easter, Phoebe arrived at *Matilda's* with the news that Matt had died and that she was on her way to the undertakers to complete the arrangements. These had been put in train some weeks before. Phoebe said "It seems so calculated, but having things in hand means we're less likely to make silly errors or forget something. It won't be a fancy funeral, but we will make sure it is proper and fitting."

Tony said "Bobby'll miss him. They were on the streets together. I will too. He'd become part of our life and work."

Tony's equilibrium was tested further on Thursday morning when he went to check the stable and found Jolly had died in the night. She was an old dog, and had not left the yard for a couple of months. Lim sat looking on, obviously unsure what to do. And beside him sat Percy the cat. Across the yard was Olaf, the other cat. All seemed to realize something had happened.

Tony found a sack and covered Jolly, then lifted her corpse and put it carefully in a discrete corner of the yard. He came up to Jane's bedroom – their bedroom really – and said "Jolly's died during the night."

"Oh, Tony! How sad for you. She was very important to you."

"Would you object if I buried her at the Meadow – in a corner out of the way, of course."

"No. Just ask Evelyn."

"Better. I'll come too. See Valerie and rearrange your commissions and we'll do it right away."

Tony was able to move his early commissions, but harnessed Moonbeam to her cart and actually picked up one commission on the way to the Meadow. He, Jane and Evelyn buried Jolly near the front wall in an area not used for horticulture which had rather chalky ground. It had clearly been dug before for some reason, as the chalk was broken up and easy to dig.

Jane was going to stay for a while to learn what would happen at the funeral of Matt Moore on the Friday morning as well as to discuss the plans the ladies of the Meadow were making for the year. The changes from when she and Tony first visited the Meadow to consider its purchase were quite remarkable. There were now a number of simple glass houses, a couple of chicken runs, many rabbit hutches, as well as raised beds for plants, a midden near the front gate for delivery of manure and compost, as well as a much expanded and improved cottage.

She asked "Evelyn, I'm expecting all of you want to attend Matt's funeral, but I'm wondering if there'll be anybody watching the Meadow while you're gone?"

"With the baby, Vera is staying home, and Molly too. Molly's quite

upset about Matt's death, and says that she's afraid she'll make a fool of herself by weeping. Still, I'm happy to have them both around to keep an eye on things, including looking after Charlie. And the dogs'll be here too, of course."

"I also wanted to talk to you about whether we should do anything differently regarding how we record our income and expenses for the Meadow. And more generally for *Harper's Helpers*."

"Do you feel we're not keeping good enough records?"

"It's not that. Valerie and Tony have been reviewing *Best Bonnet* and it's clear they try to work out which things – I should say activities or parts of the business – are making the most profit or are at risk of loss. So the issue is not the records as such, but organizing them after the income and expense is recorded."

"That makes sense. I fear that here at the Meadow we're more focused on the work. I don't think any of us has much inclination to the figures."

"Perhaps we should think of bringing in someone who would do that. We've got the nook that Matt occupied, though you'd probably best burn the bedding and clean thoroughly."

"That's already been done. The bedding wasn't much good with his coughing and sweating. Though we have boiled the sheets twice and will use the cloth for covering plants and things like that."

"Waste not, want not. Always sensible unless you spend more with the process of reusing things," Jane summarized.

Matt's funeral was held early the next, that is Friday, morning and was short to the point of abruptness. That was because it was realized that those who knew Matt would very likely be obliged to work. Nevertheless, there were a couple of dozen mourners. Among them was a woman who was dressed oddly in faded finery. It turned out this was Matt's mother. She was one of the group labelled as trollops or strumpets who worked off of North Street. She was quietly weeping. Bobby approached her and said "Mrs. Moore. I'm really sorry about Matt. He was a good friend to me."

"Yes. Matt were a good boy. Didn't give trouble. Gave me a few coins when 'e could."

"You're Bobby Pope, ain't ye?"

"Yes. You used to see me when I lived with my Ma. But now I work for Mr. Brown at *Matilda's*. Live there too."

"Well, I know your Ma used to push you out when ... well, you know. I never did that to Matt. Always had a cubby hole for him somewhere."

"But you may want to know your Ma ain't well. Hasn't left 'er bed for a couple 'o weeks. Several of us been putting together a few pennies to cover 'er rent and food."

"She still in the same place?" Bobby asked.

“Yeah. But it’s a real mess these days. She stopped looking after the room and ’erself a while ago.”

Tony had overheard this conversation, he moved closer and said quietly “Bobby. If you want to go to see your mother, just let me know when and how long you’ll be away. Also where you’ll be. I don’t want to be worrying about your safety.”

Mrs. Moore said “Thank you Mr. Brown. I see you out and about with your Moonbeam. And you’ve been good to our Bobby. More so than ’er Ma.”

“I had a ... difficult time myself when I was very young.

Can I trust you with a shilling to use to aid Mrs. Pope?”

“Yeah. You can. Though I can understand your suspicion. I doubt Bobby’s Ma would pass it on for me, if our places were exchanged. But sometimes you gotta hope people will behave to you as they should, and then behave the same yourself. I’ll make sure she gets the value of the coin, though I’ll pass it on in rent or food. Not booze.”

“Here you are. And I think it wise to pass the money along that way.”

“’Bert, the ... well, ’e’s the pimp. Not the worst, an’ ’e treats us all right. But you don’t leave any coin anywhere or it’ll be in ’is pocket.”

“Will you be all right, Mrs. Moore?”

“I knew Matt were goin’ to pass. Still ’urts. But it won’t change ’ow I live. But I would ’ave liked to see ’ow ’e turned out. You and the Uptons gave ’im work, work that ’e enjoyed as well as brought ’im money. The ladies at the Meadow said ’e’d saved a couple of quid and there was still over a pound left. They were goin’ to give it to me, but in front of the curate I asked them to spend it on some unfortunate kid.”

“From what I know of the ladies, they’ll find a way to amplify the sum, or rather amplify the work it does.”

“That’s a good way of puttin’ ’ow I was thinkin’, Mr. Brown. Thank you for that.”

What happened at the Good Friday meeting

The meeting Good Friday afternoon to discuss what had come to be called the "New Furniture" initiative was to be held in Henry Mortimer’s office on Fortescue Road, but Cassandra told everyone to come up to the parlour. Rebecca Upton had decided to join Valerie and Ian.

Martha McDowell brought in tea and biscuits, then retired.

Maud said "Vera sent me a note that she and Tom won't be here. They feel they want to focus any investment in refurbishment or particularizing of furniture, making tools or jigs and related things. However, they do wish to work with us on projects like the Lodge, or on custom upholstery, and ask for early notification so they can plan accordingly."

Henry said "When we last met to talk about the furnishings enterprises over nine months ago, we were celebrating a very good profit. I'm afraid I rather dampened the enthusiasm by pointing out that the ladies in the group could not fully participate in a joint-stock company, including one of the new limited liability type."

Cassandra said "I'm not planning to be heavily involved either in time or as a financial investor. But I'll say that women are forced to try very different routes to business than men."

"Even though I have a separate estate, my ongoing income would, I believe, not be safe if Abraham were to decide he wanted to control it. There are efforts to change this, notably by Mrs. Bodichon and her colleagues in the *English Women's Journal*. However, I have no illusions that change will be forthcoming soon."

Abraham added "In our enterprises, it is unfortunate that women do not have an equal power of control, for they have certainly been the prime motivators of growth and profit."

"Since our last review, I've come to think that how we managed with the Lodge was more or less how we should proceed. That is, we keep our maximum cash outlay as small as possible by contract conditions that require deposits for expenses that are not recoverable, along with trying to obtain quick payment for delivered items or services."

Valerie asked "Can we work out a way to be sure we have sufficient reserve of working capital among ourselves to take on, for example, the furnishing of buildings of a reasonable size?"

Abraham answered "There seem to be some quite large hotels being considered. I would be surprised if the design of such new buildings fails to include the furnishings. But I am fairly sure we would not have enough capital to deal with such large projects."

Maud asked "Are we too small and also too handicapped by the property laws to do very much business outfitting whole buildings?"

There was a silent pause for possibly ten or more seconds, then Valerie said "I'm reluctant to give up completely on such enterprises, but I'm also coming to the realization that Lawson's project might be a special case. Most small hotels will just evolve, not redecorate totally."

"However, I am also wondering if our progress is also impeded by not being sufficiently visible. Ian – Mr. Hoyle – and I have made some very preliminary investigations of where we might establish another showroom."

Ian added "Showrooms give us a way to present ideas to prospective customers, including for decoration, as well as allow immediate sales."

Maud said "But you do need capital for stock."

Valerie responded "Yes. But the arrangement has worked well where you and Mr. Cohen give us the prices we must pay you for items and we then decide our price to the customer. The capital is then coming from you except for the investment in the building and the space for display. That divides the burden of working capital among us. Some of the manufacturers might consider such a consignment process. Most will prefer to simply sell to us at wholesale, though some may try to fix the retail price, which means we are less able to offer a package price attractive to us as well as the customer. However, I will suggest that we work to streamline the mechanism for managing what we could call internal prices and to ensure all items are fairly displayed. An item hidden from view won't sell."

Abraham said "Where were you looking for showroom possibilities?"

"Mr. Hoyle and I went to Hastings last September. Recently Tony paid the train and some extra for Bobby and Arthur to have a day in Worthing. He wanted to consider another newsagent shop as well as cartage ideas. I asked Bobby to note any large premises that might work for a presentation space. However, all these essays to new places are very, very preliminary."

Abraham said "There is merit in all of us making and sharing notes of potential developments. We will assuredly discard the vast majority of ideas, but that is the nature of enterprise."

Rebecca said "You mention working capital. Our businesses up to now have been largely cash. *Best Bonnet* has some regular customers, and they are, I'm told, allowed an account, but they need to pay fast or the carters won't visit. In second-hand furniture, we have to pay cash to buy and we don't want to chase anyone running up debts for items we'd have to go and get back, so we insist on cash, though we'll consider deposits with balance when items are delivered.

"However, with the new furniture, I think most merchants will give credit to their customers, particularly the upper class ones. That means we have to have more working capital or we'll not be able to restock. And I believe there are a lot of people who just don't pay, or pay very slowly, so merchants have to employ collectors, and that means expense too.

"I am wondering if we should stick to a cash-only business, and refuse to give credit even if we lose sales."

Abraham said "Yes. We haven't any experience carrying accounts. That would need us to keep more records, and I would think also we would need to ensure the buyers have signed to accept the items at particular prices."

Cassandra said "That isn't quite true, since at *Bartlett & Jones* we've had accounts for the seamstresses and dressmakers all the time I've been

there. Also a few women in town have accounts that they pay at the end of the month if there's a balance owing.

"The *Ladies Emporium* also has accounts for a number of ladies. They did have some trouble with a couple of accounts. One was a very scatter-brained lady who went off on a trip to Egypt before paying. That was almost certainly forgetfulness. However, one account of about £25 caused trouble as the husband had got into financial trouble. Frieda and Winnifred spread a rumour that they were going to confront the lady on the Promenade with a bedsheet and recover whatever garments were not paid up. They got their money eventually, but I think it took over a year."

Henry asked "I'm afraid that though I know contracts law, I've no idea how the accounts are set up, nor why merchants will trust the customer."

Cassandra said "Until the railways came, most customers were very local, and hence well known. Some would, of course, default on debts, as is always the case. But most were, as I said, known. Now with railway travel, we get customers from all over, with some who have no intention of paying. So now we are less forthcoming with granting credit."

Abraham said "Also with travel, people are seeing merchandise in different places and they are comparing prices. We're seeing more prices being posted on tickets affixed to goods. And the merchandise is more on display, as we are doing with the Presentation Space. I think that serves us well as it is more efficient for sales, though we do risk some deterioration if customers handle things roughly."

Valerie said "I'm content to avoid credit and suffer the loss of sales. I'll happily take a small deposit to hold an item for a day or two, but chasing someone who has run up debts would be very tiresome."

"Unfortunately, debt has been a way of life for many of our prominent citizens," Henry said. "Consider Disraeli, for example."

Perhaps not all the people present knew of Disraeli's financial problems. More pertinent was avoiding debt of their own.

A meeting with the solicitor

On the afternoon of Wednesday April 15, 1863, Joseph Upton and Theodore Lawrence had an appointment with Henry Mortimer. Henry was not informed in advance of the purpose of the meeting, and was somewhat intrigued. Given that Lawrence had a shop, early closing allowed him to avoid leaving his business during opening time.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Upton. Please come in and sit down."

After enough time to allow his clients to sit down, he asked "How may I help you today?"

Theodore took the lead with commendable efficiency of explanation. "My daughter and son-in-law are interested in buying a house to provide living space for their family, and will be borrowing money from me to do so. We would like to know if you can act for us in the purchase and also draw up an appropriate agreement for the loan."

"That should be possible. I would expect Mr. Upton will be the purchaser of the house, and I would arrange a conveyancing from the vendor to him. There would then be a loan agreement between the two of you. Recently the rather old word 'mortgage' has begun to be used for a loan secured by property. I will be happy to provide you with an estimate of my fees for those services in advance, of course."

Theodore said "So you have experience with such loans?"

"Indeed. They specify the terms of the loan and conditions for the repayment as well as what is to happen if there is a default."

"I don't want to charge any interest, but would want that if Joseph sells the house, we would divide the profit in two."

Henry asked "How would you see handling situations like a loss on sale, or sale when monies are still owing?"

"I don't think we'd thought of that."

Henry continued "While I could draft such conditions, in the event that one or both of you is not alive when some condition is invoked, survivors might contest the agreement if the terms did not cover every possible detail we could envisage."

"Then how would you suggest we proceed?" Theodore asked.

"I would suggest a straightforward mortgage at a modest but realistic interest rate and gentle payment schedule. If Mr. Upton defaults, the property would come back to you, but you would not be obliged to sell it to recover your loan, though you would owe Mr. Upton the principal he had paid off, that is, his equity in the property. And if you were adamant that there should be no interest, you could give back the interest portion as a gift to Mr. Upton, or to your daughter or even your grand-daughter."

"So you're saying we should keep things like a loan from a bank or one of those new building societies, rather than between family members?"

"I would not presume to insist, but I believe that a straightforward mortgage loan avoids complications that could arise because such loans are active for a long time, so there is a distinct chance that one of the contractors to the loan dies before the amortization is completed and a quittance recorded. Then the successor to the deceased party is bound by the same, hopefully simple, contract. There is very little room for disputed interpretation."

Theodore said “Well Joseph. Would you be prepared to handle such a loan?”

Joseph said – Henry felt astutely – “It surely must depend on the interest rate and payment schedule.”

Theodore laughed. “Indeed. A good businessman won’t agree to something not laid out properly.

“Tell me, Mr. Mortimer, do you work out the payment table?”

“I have learned to do it. In fact, I will tell you that it was Mr. Brown who showed me a very clear way to do so.”

Joseph said “I didn’t know that. Tony’s always full o’ surprises.”

Theodore said “We’d better see if the property we are interested in buying can be had for the right price, then come back to see you.”

“When you wish to make an offer, send me a note with the information on the property, the vendor and the amount you will offer, along with the loan interest rate and when and how much Mr. Upton will pay Mr. Lawrence. The table giving the balance at each period of the loan will depend on the principal of the loan, of course, which will likely be adjusted to the final sale price of the property you buy.”

“Thank you, Mr. Mortimer,” Theodore said.

“Yes, thank you,” Joseph echoed.

“I look forward to serving you,” Henry said.

Joseph buys a house

Theodore was a man who did not waste time. He had made an appointment an hour later that afternoon for Joseph and Mary to view a house that Joseph had noted was for sale on one of his cartage excursions. Percival Arbuthnot happened to be the agent who was handling the sale, and he had been a business associate of Cassandra Cohen for over a decade.

Joseph had not seen the inside of the house, which was one of a terrace, but which appeared to have a passage to the rear in an arch beside it. It was located in the Hanover / Elm Grove district, a bit to the east of the railway station. A number of houses had been built there in the last decade, and the area was still being developed. Since the house was assuredly quite new, Theodore said “Might be smart to check why the owner’s selling. Could mean something’s not right with the place.”

“Possibly the owner got into money problems.”

“Still need to find out,” Theodore cautioned.

Joseph said “Here’s Mr. Arbuthnot with Mary. They told me they were sharing a hansom.”

The house they were going to look at was two storeys plus a lower "area". The archway beside it did, indeed, lead to the back, but did not belong to the house of interest. Still, the house was a reasonable one, with a kitchen and scullery on the lower level, two major rooms on each of the other two floors. It was by no means special, but it was seemingly in good condition. It had a water closet, though on the lower level. There was apparently a drain, and not one of the illegal connections to the storm sewers. Brighton had a considerable problem of such connections, which led to bad smells on the beaches where the outfalls were. In 1860 the Corporation had started work to develop proper sanitary drains, but their construction was still largely in the future.

Theodore Lawrence asked "Mr. Arbuthnot. Do you know why the owners are already selling a house that isn't more than a few years old?"

"The wife of the owner died of some illness about a year ago. Apparently – though I cannot state it as a fact – he has moved to Nottingham to live with his widowed sister so they can support each other and care for their children."

"If true, it would make sense," Joseph said. "Mary, do you have any comments on this house?"

"I have made a couple of notes that we should talk about before we make any decisions. But I find this house congenial in design and condition."

"That's my opinion, too," Theodore said. "Mr. Arbuthnot, I thank you for showing us the place. We will go away and discuss things and will let you know if we are interested in making an offer."

Joseph, Mary and Theodore walked to the Lawrence house and dry goods business. Mary's mother made tea and the house was discussed and a decision made to offer somewhat less than the asking price, but with the possibility of almost immediate settlement. Joseph had enough savings for about 40 % of the offered price, and a loan was agreed at 3 % from Theodore, with payments every half year of £25 each.

The Stubbornness of a Donkey

"Morning Mr. Brown," an assistant at a local grocer called out early on May 5, 1863.

"Morning, ... Jacob."

Tony had had to think hard to remember the man's name. He had lived on these streets all his 24 years. As a child, however, he'd kept to the shadows, hidden from notice, avoided authorities who might consign him – actually her – to the workhouse. Now, in the guise of a young man, he was

a partner in *Best Bonnet Cartage*, proprietor of *News and More* newsagent, and the owner of the clear title to a shop with residence above. As such, he was a part of his community, as was Moonbeam, the donkey he was walking beside and nominally leading, though Moonbeam knew the route very well.

Without warning, Moonbeam stopped. A brewery dray following a few yards behind pulled up sharply.

"Whad'ya stop for?" the drayman who was driving yelled angrily.

"I don't know why she's stopped," Tony called back. "But I do know she'll have a reason."

"'er reasons don't matter to us. We gotta' get these barrels delivered."

Tony went to Moonbeam's head. "Come on, Moonbeam. We've work to do. And so do the brewerymen."

"Get that ass movin'!" the other drayman yelled.

Tony started to say something, but there was a loud report, midway between a whoosh and a bang, as the upper front windows of a house two doors in front of Tony and Moonbeam shattered outwards and a flame shot out.

"Bloody 'ell!" exclaimed one of the draymen.

Tony called out to the drayman "Put the brake on the waggon and start unhitching the horses. I'll turn Moonbeam about and then come to help you with the horses." To a man standing gawking he said "Don't just stand there. Go and fetch the fire brigade."

The former gawker sprinted back up the road yelling "Fire! Call the Brigade." The dray driver looked nonplussed and unable to move, but the heavy horses were starting to fuss. Meanwhile, Moonbeam seemed to know what Tony wanted, and when he said "Come, Moonbeam. Let's turn around," she moved steadily.

Within very few seconds, Moonbeam was headed in the other direction up the street, and passing the stationary waggon. About 50 yards up the road, Tony tied Moonbeam to a lamppost. He saw a boy he knew and yelled "Charlie. Watch Moonbeam and the cart and I'll buy you a meat pie and a drink."

Tony ran back to the dray. The driver was putting some wooden blocks under the wheels, a pair of blocks for each wheel, connected with a rope handle to make them easy to pull out and to hang on a hook on the waggon.

The other man was unhitching the outer horse, so Tony went to the inside horse. "Easy feller. We'll unhitch you and get you out of here." Whether this had any effect or not, the horse let him begin unhooking the traces connecting the collar to the draw bar. The drayman on the other horse had that one free, and had pulled the reins forward and bunched them up so he could lead the horse away.

"'Ere. You come and take 'ector away. I'll finish Achilles."

"I'll tie him to the lamppost beyond my donkey and cart, then come back to see if we can help at the house on fire," Tony said.

"All right. I'll stay with 'em both, and Bert'll stay with the dray. Otherwise the beer'll be gone."

Hector followed Tony just like Moonbeam, but he was at least six times as big. Tony was slightly fearful in case he shied. In the distance the noise of a bell from a fire engine could be heard. Indeed, as Tony finished tying the reins to the next lamppost from Moonbeam, the engine went by.

The drayman with Achilles came up and tied off the reins of that horse.

"Mr. Brown. Your donkey might 'ave 'ad a good reason to be stubborn. If she 'adn't stopped up, we'd 'a been right in front o' that 'ouse when it blew."

"Yeah. She's got a pretty equable personality. That's the only time she's stopped like that, and I'll not ever push her now."

"No fear. She must'a smelled gas or some'at."

"I'm going to see if I can be of help to anyone," Tony said. "I hope you can get your delivery made without too much delay."

Tony didn't wait for a response, but trotted towards the house that was smoking. The firemen were just positioning a hose to spray water into the house, but as he looked, Tony saw that the upstairs windows were blown out, and pieces of the frame stuck out. The downstairs windows, by contrast, were broken but not completely out. There was a woman sitting on the steps of a house not quite opposite, and two other women were talking to her. Another woman was approaching with a mug, probably of tea. Directly opposite the house that had exploded some windows were broken. There were shards of glass in the street.

The firemen put a ladder against the house and one of their number went up with a rope. This was used to haul up the hose and then the fireman sprayed in water but soon yelled to stop. It seemed that any fire was superficial. Two firemen entered the house and were inside for a while. They came out and went back in with a canvas stretcher, then after some time exited carrying someone.

"We need to get 'im to the 'ospital," Tony heard one of the firemen say.

Another fireman said "Can we get a hansom?", which led to some looking around aimlessly.

Tony approached them and said "If you can take my deliveries to your fire station, my donkey and cart can be used to carry the man to the Sussex County Hospital."

The fireman in charge said "Thank you. Mr. Brown, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Let's put your parcels on the fire engine, assuming they'll fit." This was a reasonable concern, but the engine did have places where some parcels

could be fitted, and the particular load Moonbeam was pulling was squeezed on, and the injured person put on the cart. One of the firemen went with Tony, who jogged beside Moonbeam's head to get her to move more quickly than usual.

After the patient had been delivered to the hospital, with a concomitant delay of almost an hour to inform the doctor how his patient had been injured, Tony went to the fire station with the fireman to recuperate his parcels. At the station, Tony learned that the man had been renting an upstairs room at the house that blew up. He had apparently used the gas light as a convenient place to hang a jacket. A pipe was found in his hand. One of the fireman said "Prob'ly accidentally turned on the gas when 'e hung the jacket on the lamp. Then lit 'is pipe and blew the place up."

There would no doubt be an enquiry, but Tony had to try to make up time and get his commissions done. Fortunately, news of the explosion spread quickly, and most of his clients had heard something of the story. Unfortunately, they wanted to talk to him about it. Without being rude, it was difficult to keep the stops to a minimum. After four clients, Tony went to *Matilda's* to rearrange the work, since Moonbeam had already gone at least one and a half times her usual distance, and the trip to the hospital had been at a fast pace.

Valerie said "Martin should be back soon with Jessie. He didn't have a full roster today. I'll take the spare hand cart myself and run several of the commissions that are nearby if Jane can watch the desk in case anyone comes in."

Jane had heard Tony and Moonbeam come into the yard. She came downstairs and heard Valerie's last statement. "I can do that. What's happened."

Tony explained, though a customer of the newsagency had already mentioned to Jack Dixon that there had been an explosion, and named the street. Valerie had overheard, and had wondered if Tony had been nearby.

Tony said "Thanks Valerie. I want to make sure Moonbeam is properly settled. Jane. I'll be in the stalls with her if needed, and I'll take over Jessie if need be."

Jane said "Valerie is the best person to organize the commissions. Why don't I take the hand cart?"

This was what was done. Jane left five minutes later.

A quarter of an hour later, Timothy Lester came into the shop. As a reporter with the Brighton Herald, he was on the track of the story, and had already talked to the draymen. Because of his role in bringing the extortionists to justice, Valerie knew him well enough to send him back to the stalls where Tony was brushing Moonbeam.

"Afternoon, Mr. Brown. And there's the heroine of the day."

"Indeed, Mr. Lester. She held up, or we might have been in the midst of the explosion."

"That's what the draymen said, too."

"Do you know anything about the man who was in the room where the firemen think the explosion happened?"

"No. He wasn't really conscious when we conveyed him to the hospital. He was burned and his clothing in tatters."

Lester said "Apparently he'd hung a jacket on the gas light and then lit a pipe."

"That's what I heard from the firemen. They said he had a pipe in his hand. But how they concluded he'd hung a jacket on the gas light I don't know."

"Mrs. Morris, the landlady, had apparently had words with Mr. Harrison, that's the man who you took to the 'ospital. He'd done it a couple of times, and she'd warned 'im about it. The firemen found a burnt jacket under where the lamp was on the wall. Still, that doesn't prove the story, and no doubt Mrs. Morris will be 'oping Harrison can be judged at fault. Even if 'e did what the firemen suspect, of course, she'll get nought unless there's money somewhere."

"Not good for anyone, Mr. Lester."

"'Cept Moonbeam, here. She comes out of it all right."

"She still had a day of upset and extra work. I'm not sure how much the explosion may have upset her. Or what caused her to hold up, though I'm glad she did."

"Could she have smelled the gas?"

"Possibly. Though why she would have stopped rather than, say, galloping forward, I don't know. Nor how she'll behave in future."

"In the time I've known you, Mr. Brown, you've never mentioned her stopping and refusing to move. Or any behaviour like that."

"No. Moonbeam is pretty steady. So are most donkeys. But they'll not move if they're not comfortable doing so. I've found they seem to have a reason for how they behave, but they don't talk, so you have to figure out what's bothering them. Mostly they're happy to work with you."

"Yeah. When I've seen you, you don't seem to steer Moonbeam. She just seems to go where you want."

"Well. Most of our routes are quite regular, so the donkeys know the way. Even when there is some variation, there are usually only a limited number of places we go. Probably I make slight movements that she can notice. It's really rare I have to pull or push."

"Well, Mr. Brown, I'm glad you and Moonbeam didn't get 'urt."

"And I'm thankful to you, Mr. Lester, for your efforts with the Protection Company. I know you took some risks to help identify the top man."

“Got a good story out of that. I did well out of it – made a few shillings. And I gotta’ say I didn’t find Knox, the man I met in London, as menacing as I anticipated. Though frankly, I wouldn’t want to be on his wrong side.”

“If his gang is making good money without any fuss, I’d guess he wants to keep things quiet. As soon as crooks make too much trouble, society starts to work to stop them.”

“Ain’t that the truth.

“You know, Mr. Brown, you let me know your ... well we’ll say secret. But I still can’t think of you as a girl.”

“I’ve never lived as a woman. Not sure I even think of myself as one, even though my physical self confirms that to me privately every day. But my work requires exercise and some strength, and I don’t have any idea how I’d fit in skirts and frills. I suspect women have to adapt their movements to their clothes. Or maybe everyone does. So my movements are those of a donkeyman. They are now how I am.”

“At one time I was eager to write up your case. Thought it would garner lots of attention. And money, I suppose. But I don’t think I could capture the reality properly in words, not forgetting I’d be breaking my word.

“But I’d guess it’s a bit ... er ... lonely to be in your situation.”

“At one point that did bother me a little. But in the past few years I’ve found a very comfortable friendship and partnership with Mrs. Harper. We find lots to share in life, which I think is the important part of what I wanted.

“So I’m not too concerned if some individuals that I encounter in my daily life know my status. It would distress me to become an item of curiosity, or worse if some of the more strident ... can I say moralists ... got interested in me,” Tony said.

“Heaven save us from those who think they can tell us what heaven commands. I’ve never found any of them to bring much good to the world, and many cause a lot of harm.”

“I’ll second that sentiment, Mr. Lester.”

A quiet death

When Tony came inside after bidding Lester farewell, Valerie had a very sombre face.

“There’s a note from Mrs. Moore. Althea Pope died. I’ve got to tell Bobby.”

“Do you want me to do so?”

“Would you?”

“All right. So you know, I’ve already talked to the undertaker, and I’ll pay for her burial. The simplest possible, but I think a pauper’s funeral would cause Bobby more upset. There was no love lost between mother and daughter, but ...” Tony trailed off.

“But there was still the hope that somehow her mother cared about her. It’s all very sad. And the note says Mrs. Moore will let us know where and when the burial is to occur.”

Tony went up to the kitchen and quietly handed Bobby the note. Bobby didn’t cry or show much sign of emotion, but did sit down at the table.

“I didn’t know her name was Althea. The other women said ‘Al’.”

“You did go to see her once, a week or so ago. Was it a difficult meeting for you?”

“Actually not. Or not as bad as I expected. Ma thanked me for coming and for bringing her some hot soup, which I fed her. She was very poorly. When I left, she wished me good luck and told me she was sorry she didn’t do better by me. I suppose that’s as much as I could expect in the circumstances.”

“Possibly. But the circumstances haven’t been kind to you or to her.

“So you know, I’ve already arranged for her to be buried, so she won’t have a pauper’s funeral. The same undertaker as for Matt Moore.”

“Oh. That’s why the note says ‘Will send time and place of burial.’”

“Yes. I let Mrs. Moore know that I’d talked to the undertaker and would cover the costs.”

“You didn’t have to do that, Mr. Brown.”

“There’s a lot of things society may say we don’t have to do, Bobby, but yet not doing them will give us too much regret.”

Removals

On Saturday and Sunday, May 9 and 10, 1863, Joseph and Mary, and of course baby Ursula, moved into their ‘new’ house.

The actual move was quite straightforward, as the various members of *Uptons* and *Matilda’s* stepped up to help. Phoenix and her cart were loaned by Rose Sinclair, and with the donkeys and their carts, everything for the house was conveyed with despatch. Much of the furniture came straight from *Uptons*, since Joseph and Mary did not own much in the way of furnishings. Curtains were found, at this point second hand ones to allow time for Mary and Joseph to consider possible colours and designs. However, by Sunday evening, the house was functional.

Soon the consequences of the move started to become apparent. Mary had become the principal housekeeper at *Uptons*. However, she did have Rebecca to support her activities. When she needed to attend to Ursula, for example, Rebecca would watch pots that were on the stove. Moreover, Bobby, though based down the road at *Matilda's*, would often share the shopping for food so that it was not necessary for Mary to go out each and every morning. Similarly, there were tasks that Trevor or Ian would undertake, such as checking on laundry in the copper boiler, or various small jobs of fetch and carry. And at *Uptons* Mary was no longer available to mind the shop front, which she could do even after Ursula was born by placing the bassinet behind the counter.

Rebecca, with foresight, had talked to Valerie and Ian in the middle of April about the need for someone who could work in the shop and learn the trade. Ian said "I wonder if Hugh Talbot, the boy who drew the portraits of the villains, is interested in a job. I think he's about done at the *Academy*. His drawing skills might be useful to us."

Rebecca said "We can but ask if he is interested."

Hugh was interested, and came to work at *Uptons* in the middle of May. Rebecca did not immediately move back to the master bedroom, as Hugh decided to stay living with his family in the town. Indeed, for a few weeks that room stayed empty. Nevertheless, there was still a need for someone to act as housekeeper if Rebecca were to keep a major role in the business. Truthfully, she much preferred commerce to domesticity.

On a minor inspiration, she took a walk up North Street one morning in the week after Joseph and Mary moved and asked a woman sitting on the front steps of a run-down house if she knew where a Mrs. Moore might live. The woman said nothing but pointed at a house across the street to one side. Rebecca wondered if she were safe in the neighbourhood, but having come this far knocked on the door of the house. She could hear some noises inside and eventually the door was opened by a young boy of about six.

"I'm looking for Mrs. Moore. Can you tell her Mrs. Upton is here to see her?"

The boy said "Wait 'ere. I'll get 'er," then shut the door. After a couple of minutes, maybe more, the door opened and a rather bedraggled Mrs. Moore said "Hello, Mrs. Upton. Can I 'elp you?"

"Possibly. Can we talk somewhere? I could offer you a cup of tea in a café."

"Let me get me shawl and bonnet."

Back on North Street, they found a small tea room. Rebecca ordered tea and some currant buns. Mrs. Moore's manner of eating one led to Rebecca saying "I think perhaps you need the other as well."

"Thank you, Mrs. Upton. Things ain't so good lately. I'm too old for

the game, and was never much good at it. Gotta pretend you're 'avin' a good time when you'd like to be on the other side of the Irish Sea. An' I'm long in the tooth compared to the newcomers."

"Can you cook, Mrs. Moore?"

"Plain stuff, yeah. Nothin' fancy."

"And other housekeeping tasks?"

"Yeah. Actually like to have a tidy 'ouse. Not possible round 'ere."

"I'm looking for a cook-housekeeper. Wouldn't pay a lot, but would have room and board, and a chance to learn a bit of the furnishings business if you are so inclined. Can you read and write?"

"Used to like to read. Eyes not so good now. Probably need specs."

"I'm afraid I don't know your name, except for Moore."

"Elsie. An' I'll be more than 'appy to be a cook-'ousekeeper for you. And anything else really, apart from what I'm up to 'ere. When could I start?"

"Shall I send one of the hand carts from *Best Bonnet* late this afternoon to fetch you and your belongings?"

"I'll be ready. 'ave to watch Bert ain't about, but 'e don't usually show 'is face before 7."

Thus the human forces at *Uptons* were restored. Mary, however, was now alone in her new dwelling, that is, alone except for baby Ursula, which actually made her feel more solitary and lacking in support. Joseph, not usually perceptive, on this occasion recognized the trouble and asked about a week after their move "Should we think of a maid to help around the house? Or a char-lady who could come in?"

Mary immediately brightened. "Thank you Joseph. It really would please me and make dealing with Ursula so much easier. But can we afford that?"

"I think so. And perhaps if you have someone to help, you can assist me by reading over the accounts. I'm good with the work, but you are better with reading the figures."

"I'd like to do that. Father never let Mother or I learn about the business, but I really liked it in the shop at *Uptons*, though I also like being a housewife and making a home for us."

"Let's mention it to Ma. She just hired Elsie Moore – Matt's mother. Apparently got 'er out the whorehouse."

"Oh my! We'd better not say anything when Father or Mother are about."

"Yes. Yes. There'd be long faces and disapproving looks. But I'm coming to the view that most of the women we call whores or strumpets are just like the rest of us but they've got into a state of desperation and end up selling themselves to have food and shelter."

A couple of evenings later, Mary and Joseph went for dinner at *Uptons*. Most of the meal had been cooked by Elsie, who joined everyone at the table. Now dressed in clothes that matched her role as cook and housekeeper, and wearing some simple spectacles, it was difficult to imagine her trying to trade herself for money. Over the meal, Joseph mentioned that they were thinking of hiring a maid.

Rebecca said “Hugh Talbot – he doesn’t live in – was talking about his cousin Cora Talbot. She’s 13 and the family is living all in one room.”

Cora Talbot came to live in the Elm Grove house of Joseph and Mary Upton. At the start, she was quite raw. Mary had to teach her quite a few aspects of cooking and cleaning and looking after the baby, but Cora was a quick learner. She knew how to read, which was a double-edged sword, for she could easily get immersed in a book to the detriment of the buns baking in the oven. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the next winter, the new household was running smoothly.

Scouting for opportunities

The Monday morning following the big move, Valerie completed assignments for the various donkeys and hand carts, then walked over to *Uptons*.

“Good morning, Ma. Recovered from all the to and fro?”

“Not really. And Hugh Talbot started work this morning, he’s out with Ian and Trevor Hoyle in the Presentation Room.

“Also, I’ll have to decide whether to get more domestic help. I don’t much fancy taking on all the cooking and cleaning.”

“Let me know if you want help finding someone. Or if things get too hectic and you need a hand.”

“Thanks Valerie. You’re a good daughter.

“Things going all right over at *Matilda’s*?”

“Going along well as far as I can determine. The gas explosion upset Tony a bit, I think. Or perhaps "upset" isn’t the word. Made ’im a bit thoughtful. And the death of Bobby’s mother on top of that. I’m afraid I let Tony tell Bobby when the note arrived. I procrastinated about taking it upstairs.”

“We’re not made of iron, girl. Even if we do have to make out that we are sometimes.

“By the way, I heard the man they took to hospital died,” Rebecca commented.

“Oh. I’ve not been keeping up. Was it in the paper?”

"I don't think yet. Some people came in the shop and one of them mentioned it, and I couldn't help hearing. I think they may have been hospital staff."

Valerie said "I want to talk to Ian. Shall I send Mr. Talbot in?"

"If he's done with the Hoyles for the moment, yes. We want to get him familiar with all parts of the business, though of course that'll take a while."

The sound of a donkey cart pulling up at the yard entrance coincided with Valerie crossing to the Presentation Room. It was Arthur Anderson with Jessie bringing some pieces of furniture from *Soultons*. Ian stepped forward and called out "Trevor. Give Arthur a hand unloading. You can put some pieces directly into the Presentation Room and the rest wherever you can store them, but make notes and we'll talk later. Mr. Talbot. You'll see that we make decisions on the fly, and eventually you'll be expected to do the same. We try to get a good selection on display for sale."

Valerie said "Ma asked that Mr. Talbot join her in the shop if you're done with him here."

Ian said "Yes. We've covered the introduction here. Off you go, Mr. Talbot."

Valerie said "How's trade? The gas explosion's been a distraction."

"Sales have been steady. The new items of a standard nature like the chairs suitable for a kitchen and those of a simple design for a dining room seem to be steady revenue. We've sold a couple of those tables that are roughly three by five feet with a drawer to store cutlery and legs that bolt on. Easy to store and they aren't fancy, but fulfil a need. I'd like to find some upholstered chairs for a living room, but they take up space and the customers always want a different pattern or colour."

"We could experiment with something that has a frame to which the cushions could be attached, but therefore also exchanged," Valerie suggested.

"Possibly. But such a design is outside the current fashion, I fear. Nevertheless, perhaps we could get Tom Soulton to make the frame for us and you and Mrs. Upton could develop the cushion pattern."

"Something like a wing-back chair, perhaps?"

"Yes. Not too big."

"On other matters, we've not been seen walking out for a while," Valerie said.

"Yes. My parents asked after you. I'm sure their enquiry was a disguise for wanting to know if we had what may be called "intentions"."

"We should provide some indication of continued interest. But really I want to share time anyway. I came over to suggest we might take an excursion to scout for where we could open another showroom, as we did in Hastings. It struck me that we've had our minds on the coastal towns, but perhaps we'd do better inland. I thought of Crawley, as the London to

Brighton railway stops there, well, in Three Bridges, and there is the line being built to Tunbridge Wells, now open as far as East Grinstead.”

“You’re thinking that with the junction, people can come from several directions? There’s the Arun Valley line that goes down to Portsmouth too. Yes. Good thinking, Valerie.”

“When do you think we should go?” Valerie asked.

“On a weekday. Not early closing. Want to see the activity.”

“This Thursday?”

“All right. Start early on the London train before 8 o’clock?” Ian suggested.

“All right. We’ll meet here at 7 o’clock. Have a good breakfast as I think it may be a long day depending on what we find.”

Crawley

The distance to Crawley / Three Bridges was a bit over 20 miles. Valerie and Ian were walking from Three Bridges station towards the centre of Crawley when they heard clocks striking nine o’ clock. Valerie took out her watch, one of the two she and Ian had acquired last year.

Ian asked “Keeping good time?”

“Yes. Is yours working well also?”

“Indeed. It was perceptive of you to suggest we acquire them. I don’t find myself pulling it out often, as some men are wont to do, I think as an affectation to look important. However, there have been several times where it has been an aid to punctuality and to measuring the ... I suppose cost is the word ... of doing certain tasks.”

“Have you kept notes?” Valerie asked.

“Yes. We should discuss them sometime. But now I think we should observe the town here.”

“Yes, Ian. I agree. Shall we start with the High Street?”

“It is where commerce is commonly most intense.”

Their walk had brought them to the southern end of the active part of the High Street. There were a number of shops and other businesses, several pubs and a couple of cafés.

Ian said “Most of the shops are quite small. We need space for displaying furniture, and also good light. We may do better at the ends of the main commercial area.”

“I concur, if only because I cannot envisage trying to sell furniture and related goods from narrow premises.”

At the north end of the bustling area they passed the Old Punch Bowl pub. About 50 yards further on the opposite side of the road there was a quite wide shop front, at least two times as wide as the regular shops. Its frontage was a large set of small windows. Large panes of glass were expensive, but light – and to some extent display presentation – could be achieved by smaller panes of glass in a grid of framing. The shop front consisted of three bays separated by two doorways. However the middle bay was boarded up and the paint above was scorched.

“They must have had a fire there,” Valerie commented.

“And they’re not in business, whatever they did here,” Ian added. “Look. “For Sale or Lease”. I wonder how big it is inside.”

They crossed the street and shaded their eyes to try to look inside, and could see some semblance of a dusty floor.

“Hard to work out how deep it is,” Ian said.

“Why don’t we try to find out more about it. It’s only a quarter to ten. We might be able to arrange to view it and find out more.”

“Are we serious about it?” Ian asked.

“I’ve no idea. But we need to learn what is available and the general cost. I’ve written down the name and address. We’ll need to find the office.”

There was a newsagent next door, so they went in and asked for directions to the estate agent, a Mr. Dockerty. It was not far away, and fortunately the man himself was in the office. His rather timid and mumbling clerk went inside an inner office, then came back to ask “Who should I say is enquiring?”

“Miss Upton and Mr. Hoyle of *Upton Furnishings* in Brighton,” Valerie said commandingly. They were shown in to Dockerty’s office.

“Miss Upton. Mr. Hoyle. How may I help you?”

Valerie said “We are making investigations of possible premises for a branch of our business. The property near the Old Punch Bowl on the High Street may be of interest. Can you tell us about it and, if possible, arrange for us to view it today to see if it fits our needs?”

“Ah. Yes. The Randall property. It was going to be a shop for fine ladies’ wear. However, there was a small fire at a critical point. Possibly a workman left an oily rag. There was water damage and insufficient resources to cover repairs. I believe creditors may have interests in proceeds of a sale.”

“That would concern us greatly if such claims were to be imposed on the buyer or lessee of the property. However, we do not yet know if the property is of interest to us, as we have not had the opportunity to learn about it nor see it apart from the facade.” Valerie was doing her best to appear forcefully businesslike.

“Then I shall be happy to show you the property and to provide you with what information is in my possession, Miss Upton. Are you able to view the property now?”

“Indeed. That would convenience us greatly. And I believe that it is sensible for you also to avoid the effort of formal arrangements if it turns out we find that it is immediately unsuitable to our needs.”

“Smithers! Can you find the keys for the Randall property?”

Smithers had, of course, overheard everything, and had already extracted the keys from the strongbox.

Dockerty led the way back to the High Street. Valerie heard a clock sound the half hour. The lock on the first door Dockerty tried was stiff, but did yield eventually. Inside, there was a musty smell of mildew. Water damage to the floor was evident. The shop had a quite large area. It was almost 24 feet across and 16 deep, with two pillars supporting the ceiling eight feet from the nearest walls and each other.

“Are there gas lights?” Valerie asked.

Dockerty said “No, but there are oil lamps. The fire here took place around the time the local gas company was set up, and even now not too many people have gas lights.” Ian located oil lamps on the pillars and the side and back walls. Moreover he had, it turned out, a box of safety matches in the pocket of his coat, which he used to light a couple of the lamps on one of the pillars, which fortunately had oil. He moved to the other pillar and lit the lamps there also, as the hoarding over the central windows made the shop very dark.

With the lamps lit, the damage to the floor was more apparent. Ian walked a pattern so that he covered most of the floor. “It doesn’t appear to have suffered structurally, but it will need re-varnishing.”

There were three doors in the back wall, one of which was in the extreme corner. Valerie opened it to find a water closet and hand basin, though the only light came from a small window in the side wall, quite high up.

Dockerty said “The owners put that in because they anticipated the custom of quite well-off ladies.”

Opening the two other doors revealed a long room the width of the shop, but only 8 feet deep. There were fortunately windows at the back, but they were grimy with a thin layer of soot, no doubt from the fire. The odour of smoke hung heavily in the air. There was a staircase at the rear right which did a right angle turn in the corner, and Valerie realized that the water closet was in the space under this staircase, with another small closet under the part that sloped to the corner landing. Opening the small closet, she found a very plain toilet. There was a basin on the wall outside. This was clearly the water closet for the staff.

“What is upstairs?” she asked.

“There is an apartment for the owner or manager or caretaker, as well as a room that could be used to accommodate the staff, and a workroom. You may ascend and inspect it.”

Valerie and Ian did so. Immediately in front of the top of the stairs was a door into an apartment for the owner or manager. This door was in a wall extending the full span of the shop. There was a railing to inhibit people from falling into the stairwell, but otherwise the back part of the upstairs was a very large room with the roof sloping to the back of the building. With the apartment above two of the bays of the shop, a door in the long wall opened into another room, probably one that was intended for the sleeping quarters of staff.

The door facing the top of the stairs gave into a large kitchen / parlour. There was a stove in the corner of the room nearest the centre of the building, so the stove-pipe led into the brick chimney rising from the lower floor. At the other side of the kitchen room there was a sink more or less above the water closets below. That made sense. At the front of the kitchen, there were windows that overlooked the street. Towards the centre bay of the building was a door from the large kitchen into a good-sized second room which would likely be the bedroom, though with just two rooms, what the rooms were called would be flexible.

There were no fireplaces upstairs, just the kitchen stove.

“Ian. Is there a fireplace in the shop?”

“No but there is a brick chimney in the middle of the back wall of the shop, and it has a hole for a stove-pipe. I imagine there was some sort of a stove in the shop, and the same chimney receives the pipe from the kitchen stove. But there appears to be no other heating.”

Valerie made some notes, including about lamps in the apartment – fewer than she would like, but oil lamps or candles could be easily added.

They descended, and Ian asked if the back door were openable. Dockerty had to try several keys, but finally opened it. The door was quite wide. Four feet compared to two feet eight inches or three feet. Outside there was an irregular strip of land behind the property. More interestingly was the lane on which this bordered. It would be extremely valuable for deliveries. The strip was only six feet at minimum, and it was not clear where the boundary was except where the lane ended.

Ian walked to the corner of the building. There was a three foot pathway ending in a wall about 10 to 12 feet from the street. Returning to the door, he asked “Does the property include the space to the next building?”

Dockerty said “The plot is irregular. There used to be a three foot gap between the shop and the newsagent next door. At some point the first dozen feet of the gap were sold to the neighbour to enlarge the tiny newsagent shop. For some reason the owners at that time – it must have been before 1850 – retained the rear part of the strip, which was fortunate in that it allowed the windows to be created for the water closets you saw. I believe there is a cesspool beyond the corner.”

Now that Dockerty mentioned it, there were some stones and a wooden cover, partly overgrown with weeds.

“What are the owners asking for the property?” Valerie asked.

“£600. But, as you see, that may be beyond what the market will bear.”

“When was the fire?” Ian asked. It was a question for which the answer would easily be checked.

“1859. Almost four years ago.”

Valerie gave Ian a warning glance.

“And what rental are they asking?” Valerie said.

“£100 per annum, plus the rates.”

“Could you write to me with the property description and those numbers?” Valerie asked, offering Dockerty a card she pulled from her reticule.

“Certainly, Miss Upton. I take it you are interested in taking up the property?”

“At this point, I will only say we are interested enough to consider it. It is in need of a great deal of work to render it suitable to our – or indeed any other – requirements. But it does have space. We would definitely want to have it surveyed carefully for deterioration, for example of the roof or gutters, if we were to consider proceeding.”

“I would expect no less, Miss Upton. Mr. Hoyle. I look forward to doing business with you. Now unless you wish to consider other properties, I will lock up and return to my place of business.”

“Thank you, Mr. Dockerty. From our introduction, you are aware that we are in the furnishings business. That requires space to present the goods for sale. So we would be interested in properties offering such space, though our experience is that they are relatively rare. Do you have anything else that might serve in your current inventory?”

“As you surmise, such places are not common, and at the moment this one is the sole offering I can present. However, I will be happy to inform you should something become available.”

“Please do. Good day, Mr. Dockerty.”

“Good day, Miss Upton, Mr. Hoyle. I will remain to ensure all is secure before I leave.”

Serious discussions on a range of topics

It was now just after noon. Valerie had heard a clock strike. They had taken longer looking at the property than expected.

“Ian. Let us find food and drink – and a water closet – in the Old Punch Bowl. We can review our notes and make others while discussing what we

have seen.”

“Indeed, I’m ready for something to eat, and I ... er ...”

“Need to pee?”

Ian laughed. “Yes. But I didn’t want to be indelicate.”

“It would be more indelicate to wait beyond your capacity to hold it back.”

Now they both laughed as they entered the inn. There was a slate on which was written a brief menu. There was an oxtail soup, a steak and kidney pie, and a ploughman’s lunch. The prices were fair, assuming the servings were decent and the quality acceptable.

Valerie said “I’ll have the soup and a ploughman’s lunch, and a half pint of cider.

“Sir. Can you direct me to the water closet?”

Ian ordered the pie for himself, along with a pint of bitter. He paid for the order, took the drinks, and found a table with a bench chair in the wall and sat on that. Valerie came back and sat beside him.

“Oh. I thought you would sit opposite,” Ian said.

“It’s more interesting to look out and watch the people.”

“I’ve ordered food. I’ll use the WC.”

When Ian returned, he thought of sitting opposite Valerie, but decided to return to sitting beside her, even though it meant they were close enough that they could feel each other. Almost immediately, the food arrived.

After the serving girl left, Valerie said “Did you record the expense?”

“I’ll do it now, before I forget. I did put down the train tickets earlier.

“Valerie. What did you think of the Randall property?”

“I am excited by it. In fact, I will have to temper my enthusiasm to avoid making any bad judgments. But I feel it has the makings of an excellent furniture and furnishings emporium. It is proximate to the main commercial area. There is this decent public house close by. People who are considering a large purchase have a place to discuss things without having to go home and possibly decide it is too much effort to return. I thought the living area, while lacking in amenities such as a water closet on the upper level, was nevertheless quite spacious.”

“Yes. I agree. And I had better make some notes of what you just said before I forget.”

“Won’t your pie get cold?”

“No. It’s very hot. I may even have slightly burned my tongue. There’s a good serving, and plenty of potatoes and carrots too.”

“Yes. I’m eating some bread and cheese while I let the soup cool.

“Ian. Should we think how we can acquire the place?”

“Are we ready?”

"I think in our minds, yes. There are key questions, and I want you to write these down in abbreviated form. I'll wait while you write each line.

"1. Is the building sound and the title free from problems?

"2. Can we raise sufficient funds to buy or lease the property?

"3. Do we think the location suitable for a reasonable revenue from sales?

"4. Are we prepared to undertake the effort together?"

"I've got that all down," Ian said.

"Let's finish the food, then we'll consider those questions together."

For the next ten minutes they ate more or less in silence. The food was plain but good. Valerie even used some of her bread to mop up the last of the soup. Ian found his plate clear at about the same time.

Valerie said "I don't think we can answer the first question today. We will need to get someone to carefully survey the building."

"Do you know anyone who we could get?"

"We could ask Brougham how much he would charge to come up. Or possibly Tom. He's not got any formal qualifications, but perhaps Brougham doesn't either. For the title, we can probably approach Henry Mortimer. There'll be fees, but better not to take a chance."

Ian said "We should talk about whether there's likely to be enough revenue."

"What do you think?"

"With the railways going both north-south and east-west, we're not relying on just the local population. The extension of the East Grinstead line to Tunbridge Wells has been approved, too. The Arun Valley line will be opening in August to Portsmouth. It goes to Pulborough already."

"If we do set up here, we'll need to sort out cartage to the train station. In Brighton we have *Best Bonnet*," Valerie said.

"Is it beyond possibility that someone from *Best Bonnet* could set up a branch here too?" Ian replied.

"I suppose so. While thinking of moving here myself I failed to consider that others could too. That is something I should be careful to avoid."

"What about money? If we are to purchase the property outright, we will need an investor with a tidy sum."

"True. And we could approach the Cohens and Mr. Goldman. Ma has some money she might lend us. And I've about £140. What about you?"

"About 85. Sixty in the Post Office savings. Rest in the strongbox at *Uptons*."

"But I wonder if we need to do that," Valerie said. "Perhaps we could offer to pay off the debts as the payment for the lease with an option to pay the balance of a purchase price at the point when our lease is due for the next payment. And I would make the lease per year lower in that case – £75."

“Why would they accept such an offer compared to a clean sale or a straightforward lease?” Ian asked.

“Because the property needs some considerable refurbishing. I would estimate at least £50. We would offer to pay the refurbishment and not require reimbursement if we failed to complete the purchase at the end of the lease period.”

“That means we risk the amount of the repairs and decoration,” Ian said.

“But I would think it delays by at least a year the need to come up with the purchase amount. And I believe that the value of the property is much less than £600. My estimate is more like 450. Note that unless Dockerty is lying, it has been about four years unoccupied. That is four years not contributing to revenues or earning rent.”

Ian said quietly “That just leaves your last question: Are we prepared to undertake this venture together?”

Valerie replied “At this moment the other questions need to be answered first. But I can say that I find we work well together. I like what we are doing today. I liked how we comported ourselves – as a team – to Mr. Dockerty. I enjoy our meals together. If the other conditions are satisfied, I’m prepared to share the venture with you, Ian.”

“Put that way, I’d be pleased to do so as well. Would we both come here, do you think?”

“I would anticipate that, since otherwise we could not truly share the venture. Part of what I find rewarding is that we discuss our ideas, then make the efforts together. I don’t want to be trying to do so separately.”

Ian asked “Would we still use the name *Uptons*, or rather *Upton Furnishings*?”

“That would leave you without credit.”

“Are you suggesting something like *Hoyle and Upton*?”

“Would you accept *Upton and Hoyle*, given that I’ll be investing more money?”

“That actually sounds better to my ear. I don’t know why.”

“Perhaps we are thinking of details that should be decided after we have secured the property,” Valerie cautioned.

“Yes. But it is a detail I find ... stimulating.

“Valerie. If we did get the property, how would you envisage we share the living quarters?”

“There is enough room, though using the workroom upstairs for living space rather than storage would reduce the opportunities for profit. I can see having two or more staff in the room at the end of the workroom. If we wanted, we could have one of us in the bedroom and one in the kitchen.”

“Or I could share the separate room with one of the staff, even put up a partition.”

“Or you could share the bedroom with me,” Valerie quipped.

“That would surely cause scandal,” Ian said.

“But it would silence mutterings about your lack of interest in women.

“Ian. I spent some time thinking over the past few weeks, and I would appreciate your thoughts about the following. I have no anxiety about spending my time with you. I believe I would be comfortable, and might find very comforting, sharing a bed with you, bathing in front of you so that I could have help washing my back or hair. A registered marriage does not appeal to me, as it would cause my identity – Valerie Upton – to vanish, and along with it my right to own property and money. But I would happily accept a religious marriage, and present myself as your wife to society. There are apparently many nonconformist chapels that are not licensed to register marriages. I’m not very religious. I believe in a God, but I cannot become ardent about the various fine details of faith.”

“You are saying we should marry in such a ceremony, but would still be separate before the law?”

“Yes. That is what I have been thinking about. I am wondering – and I would emphasize that this is my own feelings and yours are equally important – whether being married would provide a more beneficial social status than I currently enjoy and would bring a companionship and balance that spinsterhood does not.”

Ian said “I am very flattered by your confidence in me, Valerie. The idea of sharing life with you is attractive. I regard you with a great measure of affection, which I believe could grow to a true and deep love. From what I see of people, that takes time, effort and kindness on both sides, which I believe we have, or could have. My reservations arise from the possibility that we may not ... er ... satisfy each other in ... er ... the more delicate aspects of marriage.”

“Perhaps for now we should leave the idea on the table,” Valerie suggested. “There is no urgency to settle our personal arrangements, while there are many threads of the business, or rather businesses, we conduct that do demand our attention.”

“Still,” Ian said, “I think we may make a toast to Upton and Hoyle.”

“Indeed. To Upton and Hoyle!”

A ferment of activity

Valerie and Ian returned to Brighton from Crawley rather earlier than they had anticipated. They had found a potential venue for new business and could not find much enthusiasm for further explorations after their lunch

in the Punch Bowl. For the sake of avoiding regret, they made a cursory perambulation around some of the other streets of the main part of the town, then made for the Three Bridges station in time to catch a late-afternoon train home.

Much was on Valerie's mind. When she got to *Matilda's* she wrote a note to Joshua Goldman asking if she could come to talk to him on Saturday or Sunday, and posted it right away. By the next evening she had a reply. Thus on the Sunday morning, while most were heading to church, she put on her shawl and bonnet and walked for nearly an hour to Henry Street near the Aldrington Railway Station. Shoes would possibly need to be added to her business expenses given the distance she was walking these days.

Rachel welcomed her and they joined Joshua in the parlour. Tea and pastries were served by Raisa Schulman, their house servant.

"Your note mentioned that you would welcome my advice on expanding your business. Tell me the situation first, then what advice you feel you need."

"Thank you, Mr. Goldman. The essence of the business question is how to expand our sales. Given furniture occupies space, finding suitable premises to display it well requires a lot of attention and care. However, Mr. Hoyle and I went to Crawley on Thursday and were fortunate to be able to get a viewing of a property we came across as we explored the streets to assess possibilities."

"Tell me about the property, its location and its advantages and disadvantages."

Valerie had some notes and spent the better part of a quarter hour describing the Randall shop and apartment.

Joshua said "The confluence of the different railway lines is important, I think, as it allows customers to get to the shop easily, and also the goods to be transported to the customer. You have noted that deliveries can be made at the rear. That is excellent. So I imagine that your next concern is whether you have the resources to acquire the property and outfit it to your needs."

"That is the core of my being here today."

"Are you seeking investors, or a lender?"

"Possibly. But I wanted your opinion on making an offer to lease the property with an option to purchase."

"Go on. That could be sensible."

"The owners, as far as we know, but it will need to be verified, are in debt because of the fire almost four years ago. I believe if we offer a sum that will clear those debts as a lease payment, with an option to purchase for a specified balance, they might consider it. If we chose not to purchase, any improvements or refurbishment we had made would benefit the current

owners.”

“Yes. That could be attractive to owners wanting to be free of an encumbrance. You would risk the value of the repairs and improvements. I think the merit of the proposal hinges on the amounts.”

“I do too. My feeling is that the property, as it is now and assuming the building is sound apart from the fire damage, is worth no more than £450. The owners have pegged the annual lease at one-sixth of their sale price, and using the same measure, I would offer £75 per annum.”

“You would, I assume, get some sort of survey of the condition.”

“Yes. I am thinking of approaching Mr. Brougham, or else Tom Soulton.”

“I think either would give you an honest report. Brougham probably has a stronger reputation. I do not know if he has any formal qualifications. Tom, of course, is self-taught, but we all know how well he does.”

Valerie asked “Assuming the building is sound except for the fire damage, and that that could be repaired for no more than £50, do you feel my estimates are approximately correct?”

“I don’t, of course, have familiarity with Crawley. Here in Brighton, a shop that large, even at some distance from the centre, would be worth more than £500 – 450 plus the 50 for repairs. But I don’t ever think it wise to put forward a high offer initially. One wants to work towards a meeting point. Now there are situations where there is a frenzy of interest. My inclination is to run away in such situations, as emotion and money are a bad combination.

“May I be rude and ask how much money you and Mr. Hoyle have at your disposal?”

“Together £225. But we will certainly have unanticipated costs, there will be lawyer’s and other fees, moving expenses, and we need some money for working capital.”

“Nevertheless, you have more than I would have expected. Well done.

“For what it is worth, and without any guarantee, if you find you do need financial support, I will be more than happy to listen. I expect my nephew and his wife would also give you a hearing. However, I believe your idea of proposing a lease with a purchase option has enough merit to follow it through either to a satisfactory arrangement or until it is clear that the vendors have no interest in it. I know you will be cautious to avoid any awkward conditions arising from negotiations, and I assume you will consult a solicitor, likely Henry Mortimer, to ensure the paperwork is above board.”

“Thank you, Mr. Goldman. It gives me some comfort that you consider my ideas reasonable.”

“They are. They are. But you have shown good sense in that you are presenting them to others like me. And I assume you will be talking not only to me, so you get several opinions before you make a decision. At that point, I urge you to consider the decision as your own, or rather that of yourself

and Mr. Hoyle.”

Valerie said “Yes. One has to put all the ideas and advice together, but the final choices have to be our own.”

Rachel said “In that you will be in partnership with Mr. Hoyle, there is always the unfortunate danger should you decide to marry that the man gets the entirety of the decision-making power.”

“Regrettably, I am well-aware of that. I am very fond of Ian – Mr. Hoyle. We have been walking out together. Indeed, we have also made two excursions, the one to Crawley and an earlier one to Hastings, to look for where we might establish a new premises for the sale of furnishings. However, I am cognizant of the imposition of the marriage laws on women and their property. We have briefly talked of the possibility of a religious ceremony without a civil registration. That would provide the social status without my losing my identity and fortune. For the moment we have decided to focus on the business venture and to return to our more personal partnership later.”

Rachel said “It is well that you are giving such matters a lot of thought, and a great pity that you have to.”

Joshua said “In the future I believe women will gain more equality with men in this country. Unfortunately, it will take much longer than it should.”

Valerie did not get back to *Matilda's* until three o'clock. She found a wash bowl and put her feet in warm water with Epsom salts. At around a quarter to four, Jane and Tony came in.

“Sore feet?” Jane asked.

“I walked to Aldrington to see Joshua and Rachel Goldman to get advice about the possible Crawley property.”

“Ian did not accompany you?” Tony asked.

“He's gone to his family for Sunday dinner. I felt it important to get Mr. Goldman's opinion sooner rather than later.”

“We have only heard a summary,” Tony said.

Valerie repeated what she had shared with Goldman.

Jane said “I'm not a financial wizard – or witch – but your ideas seem generally sensible.”

Tony said “I think so too.

“Tell me. Is there stabling, or space for it, on the property?”

“No. Though I suppose we could construct a lean-to roof over the space at the back. There'd be room for a couple of donkeys, not more, and they might be in two separate spaces. You are thinking we should have our own cartage?”

“That, or someone like myself sets up there. It's better if donkey's have company, but Annabelle was on her own with Archie Temple – and me of course.”

“Would you want to expand there?” Valerie asked.

"I hadn't thought of it until now. I think I'd probably see if someone like Arthur would be interested in taking on that challenge. It would mean finding someone to replace him here, but perhaps it is time to ensure we have more depth. And it won't hurt to see if we can find another donkey or two."

Valerie said "You think there'll be enough business for them? You're back today earlier than usual."

"We covered our expenses today, but trade was thin, so we decided to come home early. We just took Jessie today."

"And we enjoyed an ice," Jane said.

Tony laughed "I'd not counted that in the costs. Now I think we lost money!"

Valerie said "I'd better dry my feet. I'm having dinner with Ma. Actually going out to a pub together."

Jane said "Good for you. Say hello from us, please."

Mother - daughter talk

In the snug of a local pub, Rebecca and Valerie were able to get a modest meal and chat.

"So you are going to pursue the Crawley property?" Rebecca asked.

"As long as the conditions are favourable. Be stupid to chase the moon. I talked to Mr. Goldman today. He thought my ideas sensible, but he cautioned to check all the details carefully, including the state of the building and the legalities."

"How do you propose to cover the money needed?" Rebecca asked.

Valerie went through her intended proposal again.

"Well. I'll say this. You've put in considerable thought. And you and Ian do seem to have enough money, though not much spare after all you'll need to pay for."

"And I'm acutely conscious that we'll need working capital," Valerie added.

"Not to mention having to pay for cartage in a place where there may be only one or two people offering, so the price'll be high."

"Oh. I was talking to Tony. He might be interested in expanding, with some sort of shelter at the back of the property. There's at least six feet to the lane that would allow a small lean-to roof for a stall for a donkey or two."

"That'd help you. We've done better than we might thanks to your brother and Tony, even as we pay them market rates. It's the convenience. They'll fit in a trip for us between their other commissions because they don't have to trot half a mile or more just to get to us and back again."

“More profit for *Best Bonnet* but better service for *Uptons*.”

“Precisely.

“Now tell me about what you feel will be your arrangement with Ian.”

“I’ve suggested the name *Upton and Hoyle*, and he liked it too. Besides the fact I’ll be contributing a bigger investment in money, we both feel it sounds better than *Hoyle and Upton*, even though the latter is in alphabetic order.”

“All well and good, Valerie, but there’s other aspects too, and you know what I’m talking about.”

“If you mean marriage, we’ve talked about that too, and Ian knows I won’t consider a regular marriage that takes away my identity and fortune.”

“So you’ll stay a spinster, possibly flout the social conventions? You wouldn’t be the first. There’s that Mary Ann Evans who wrote the novel *Adam Bede* under the name George Eliot. She lives with a man named Lewes but ain’t married to him. Bit of a scandal.”

“Actually I’ve wondered about marrying in a religious ceremony, say in a nonconformist chapel that isn’t licensed to register marriages. That would mean under the law I could still keep my property and use my name.”

Rebecca said “But you’d be able to say you’d got married. Yes. Could work. But do you want to present yourselves and husband and wife?”

“We’ve decided to first sort out the Crawley property. There’s no urgency to march to the altar. If we’re going to expand the business, we need to keep our attention there.”

“Good thinking. It’s when you have to decide who sleeps where that you’ll want to consider how you introduce yourselves to the Crawley society, or wherever else you end up.”

“I’m glad you’re not throwing the bible at me, Ma.”

“I might have with Joseph, if he’d got under Mary’s skirts before going to church with her. Or rather got her with child beforehand. But now I’ve a lovely grand-daughter. Miss having Mary around, though.”

“Mrs. Moore moved in this week didn’t she?”

“Yes. It’ll be interesting to see how she works out. I get the feeling she only ended up with the tarts to keep body and soul together.”

“I often think respectability is just a very thin varnish,” Valerie said.

“Yeah. Is that the reason you’d have a wedding in chapel?”

“I suppose it’s one reason. But I actually am quite fond of Ian and I believe it’s reciprocated.”

“Why do I get the feeling neither of you is mad about the other?”

“Because we’re not. But that doesn’t mean we can’t make a good partnership. A good marriage. We share a great interest in building a business together. We enjoy each other’s company. There’s kindness and respect, and affection too. I could do a lot worse.”

“Yes. Like I did.”

“I didn’t mean that.”

“No. I know you didn’t. I was making my own comment about my own disaster.

“I do wonder, though, that Ian shows not a lot of interest in women.”

“His parents made comments of a similar nature. Since I’ve been walking out with him, they’ve died away.”

“You don’t think that’s why he’s been walking out with you.”

“Ma. It’s dangerous to Ian to make such comments. Even if they aren’t true they could hurt him. And our business. People can be very nasty. And if they are true but he’s not acting on his feelings, he should be treated like anyone else. And like I said, between us there’s kindness and respect, and as long as that’s the case, I’ll be glad to be with him.”

Rebecca said “An unregistered marriage does give you a way out if things turn sour.”

“True. But if Ian and I do get to the stage of marrying, I have a feeling we’ll stick and make a success of the union. That we’re not dewey eyed about each other has that advantage.”

The end of May 1863

We could consider the details of the next six weeks in the lives of the occupants of *Uptons* and *Matilda’s*. Truthfully, the important moments in time had already happened, and the key decisions made. The rest was a collection of consequent details, details that were temporarily interesting but did not alter lives. That Ian and Valerie came across the Randall property at a time when they were ready to branch out in business and the owners of the property were getting fatigued that they must continue to pay rates while no income was being accrued led to a major change in the lives of our characters. Further, they found the Old Punch Bowl handy for lunch and an important talk, where the idea was mooted of uniting their fortunes in a way outside the manner English marriage laws decreed appropriate.

Mr. Dockerty sent the information requested by Valerie expeditiously, and it arrived on Monday, May 18. That same day, Joseph brought a message from Tom Soulton that he would be happy to look at the property in Crawley, and that Robert Vance would like to come with him so he could visit his parents. Tom said his fee would not be increased for Robert, and they would cover Robert’s railway fare.

This led to letters back and forth to Dockerty, and Friday May 29 was scheduled for Tom and Robert to visit Crawley to survey the property.

When Tony learned of the arrangements, he asked if he might accompany them and see if the property would allow of shelter for donkeys. Valerie said she and Ian were going to go too, as they could then see the property again and make sure of their impressions of it.

The party that went to Crawley on May 29 was thus five strong, with a hand cart carrying lanterns, some tools and on which a step-ladder was hooked. This was put in the baggage van on the train.

Tom and Robert were extremely thorough, and spent 3 hours searching and probing. Dockerty sent his clerk, Smithers, who was concerned Dockerty would think he had skived off instead of returning to the office. To assuage his concerns, Valerie offered to go to the office and inform Dockerty, realizing it was a good opportunity to sound out the estate agent on her intentions.

The conversation with Dockerty was one of cat and mouse, though who was cat and who was mouse was difficult to determine. Nevertheless, Valerie learned that the owners were in debt, including arrears of rates, to the tune of £110. Valerie's thoughts immediately led to 1.5 times £75 equalling £112.5 – Perfect!

Secondarily, but no less important, Valerie learned that Dockerty would receive no commission until a sale or lease was concluded. It was likely he would be working at least as much for Valerie and Ian as for the owners. A trial of £60 per annum lease got a cool but not frosty reception. No doubt £75 would be enough, at least as far as the agent were concerned.

Tony, in the meantime, had looked at the rear of the building and realized that it could, with a simple roof and partial wall, provide room for at least two donkeys, probably not in conventional stalls but allowed to share a space at least 5 feet 6 wide. A horse would not be able to turn around, but Tony was sure the donkeys could. Even so, it might be sensible to arrange that an animal could be backed out. Though the length could be up to 10 feet, as it was constrained only by the 4-foot wide door, 8 feet would be more sensible. There could be one shelter each side of the door, and the use need not be constrained to donkeys. In inclement weather, a shelter could allow a cart to be unloaded without getting the goods wet by more than a few drops of water.

Ian followed Tom and Robert and helped them by holding lamps or steadying the step ladder. He also took notes. Tom's writing was never tidy, and at the workshop either Robert or Vera would generally handle written material.

By one o'clock, they were finished. Ian said "Mr. Smithers, I thank you for your patience and forbearance. Here is a shilling for some ale or other refreshment."

Smithers seemed surprised but pleased by the gratuity.

"Thank 'ee, Mr. 'oyle. I learned a lot watching Mr. Soultan and Mr.

Vance. And that 'and cart. Ever so useful."

Our party retired to the Old Punch Bowl and ordered some food and drink. Valerie asked Tom his opinion.

"Well. You already knew the floor'll need revarnishing. The big part of that is scraping it first. I'd say 10 quid for a top class job. The window is mainly the glass, an' I've not got current prices. But I'd be surprised if Robert here couldn't make it up for £15 and still give us a decent profit. Awkward bit for you is getting us up here."

"I'd still rather work with people we know," Valerie said.

Tom continued "Couldn't see any leaks in the roof. All the oil lamps work. Tap in the kitchen is a bit stiff. Water, by the way, is caught by the roof into a tank that's in the cupboard by the kitchen sink. That tank also feeds the water closets. If you use too much water, they'll run dry. Smithers said there's no running water on the street, nor anywhere in Crawley. But there is a tank from the gutters at the rear of the building in the back room, and it has a pump which we tried and it sends water up through the attic and then down to the tank we just mentioned. Lot of work pumping though. The tank is next to the coal bin. You may even have thought the coal bin was twice as big as it actually is."

"What about the stove?" Valerie asked.

"Seems all right. Robert checked the flue draws, as does the pipe hole in the shop. You'll need to block that or get a new stove."

"I wonder where it went," Ian said.

Robert said "I mentioned that to Smithers and he said it was taken out in preparation to redo the floor, which then got abandoned. He said he thought it had been put outside, so I went and looked in the narrow gap next to the newsagent, and it's there under a bunch of rubbish. It looks to be all right except for a surface coat of rust."

Tony said "Mention that there's a need for a stove if you make an offer, as a deficiency in the place. But keep quiet about it otherwise and you can likely recuperate the old one."

"So you think the place is in decent shape apart from the window and the floor?" Valerie asked.

"Better – much better – than I'd expected. I think that the structure must have been well-built. It is mostly brick apart from those shallow bay windows in front."

"Who would you get to do the floor?" Ian asked.

"Not sure," Tom said.

Robert said "Do you think my twin sisters could do the scraping. Sarah and Nancy. They're fifteen now. Nearly sixteen."

"My goodness. They were toddlers when Tony and I were there at the small-holding," Tom said. "But I don't see why they couldn't. Though for

the scraping, I think some old men's clothes or something to protect their legs and skirts."

"Are they looking for jobs?" Valerie asked.

"At the moment they help with the produce, but a cash job would be helpful to Mum and Dad. And if you don't mind, I'll take my leave so I get there early enough to help out."

"Ask Sarah and Nancy if they're interested in working for us. Maybe after the repairs too. That is, assuming we get the property. We may be counting unhatched chickens," Valerie said.

June 1863

On Monday, June 1, Ian and Valerie went to see Henry Mortimer at half past 9.

Henry said "Rumours are flying that the pair of you are hoping to acquire a property in Crawley. Come in and I'll get the true facts from the principals."

Valerie explained that she and Ian wanted to purchase the Randall property, for which she passed him the information Dockerty had sent. Moreover, she and Ian would need some sort of agreement as to their partnership. She further explained about the inspection carried out by Tom and Robert, and the hints she had obtained from Dockerty.

"How much are you prepared to offer for the property?" Henry asked.

"I think we should offer to lease with option to purchase. Specifically, we are thinking of offering an initial payment of £105 for 18 months rent, with an option at that point to pay £345 for an outright purchase. Furthermore, we would revarnish the floor and replace the framing and glass of the damaged bay window. Should we not complete the purchase, the owners would benefit from our refurbishment."

"An interesting offer. It is relatively simple. A good deal less than the ask, but from what you have said, the owners may be getting anxious. We can but tender the offer and see what transpires.

"Now to your own agreement. Do I presume correctly that you wish to have a simple arrangement whereby you share gains – or losses, heaven forbid – in proportion to your investment."

"That's the essence of it," Ian said.

"And voting rights? That can get awkward."

"I'm prepared to work with Ian in an equal partnership on control of the venture, though I suppose we do need some sort of arrangement should we come undone."

“Yes. That is really what I was leading to,” Henry said. “I’ll suggest that in the event of an unresolvable disagreement, all assets be sold and monies divided according to the investment fractions. It’s not very pleasant, but it is the simplest.”

“I can live with that,” Valerie said.

“Me too,” Ian concurred. “We seem to find ways to agree, without necessarily starting from the same point.”

Henry said “I’m sure you are already aware of this, but I should caution Miss Upton in particular that should she marry her investment and its management fall to her husband. That could, of course, be Mr. Hoyle, but she would still lose control of her investment.”

Valerie said “It could be that we eventually decide to marry, and we have talked from time to time about the matter of coverture, as I think it is called. Perhaps you can confirm our understanding that we could be married in an unregistered ceremony, for example, in an unlicensed nonconformist chapel, and that would not be recognized under the law. That is, we would remain single in the eyes of the law with such a marriage, even if we treated each other as husband and wife.”

“An interesting possibility. As far as I understand our laws concerning marriage, the state does not recognize any marriage outside those that it registers from licensed premises. You would be considered unmarried in the eyes of the law, and your property would be your own. It might be prudent to continue to use your maiden name in business and money matters.”

“We are thinking of *Upton and Hoyle* as the business name,” Ian said.

Henry said “A great many couples present themselves as married who likely are not so regarded by the law. Should you marry as you propose, I would anticipate your local society would accept you as married. Moreover, it is only likely to come to notice that your marriage is an unregistered one if there is a separation, or a lawsuit against Mr. Hoyle because of debts of Miss Upton, or something like that. I would caution that if there are children, they would be considered illegitimate for inheritance. You would need to ensure you have properly prepared wills to protect their interests.”

“While we have not reached the point of considering children, I appreciate your precaution, Mr. Mortimer,” Valerie said.

“Yes. It would be grossly unfair for a distant relative to inherit and impoverish children who were loved and cherished,” Ian added. Valerie found his fervour in stating this strangely moving. She would have to beware becoming dewey-eyed, to use the description she herself applied in talking to Rebecca.

An offer accepted

Henry prepared the offer while Ian and Valerie were present, with Rose making copies as quickly as possible. The copy for transmission to the owners via Dockerty was duly signed and was posted in the nearby pillar box right away. Henry later that day prepared the partnership agreement for Ian and Valerie, which would be signed and witnessed at some convenient time. In fact, it was signed the next Monday, when a counter offer arrived with the morning post to Fortescue Road. Notes were sent and it was half-past three when Ian and Valerie came to learn about the counter offer. It was not substantially different from the original. The owners wanted £120 for a 21 months lease, with a purchase option that could be exercised for £340 at the 18 month point.

Valerie said "The amounts are close enough to our own that I can accept the change. Moreover, I can understand that they want to clear their direct debts right away and also have three months warning if they must put the property on the market again."

Henry added "They've also been sensible enough – or their solicitor has – to give you a two week interval following the 18 month date to exercise your option to purchase. I would have insisted on some such clause, otherwise you can be the victim of someone saying you missed the deadline. They've also specified who must be informed, and it is Mr. Dockerty, or rather his agency. He is also the payee for rent and purchase, no doubt as a way of ensuring he gets his fees. However, there is a solicitor named here. I've exchanged documents with him before."

There was some running around to gather sufficient funds to cover the £120 as well as Henry's fees, but the accepted counter-offer was in the post with a cheque on Henry's bank account by Wednesday afternoon. The lease was set to start June 22.

As Ian and Valerie walked back to *Uptons*, Valerie asked "Ian. Do you think we could be ready to trade on July 1? It would be, I think, an auspicious date, even if we did not have a fully operational business."

"I think we should be able to offer some items, and I will start to prepare a collection. Also we could arrange for a delivery by train from London of some new stock. I'll prepare an order. Possibly we could ask Mr. Cohen if he wishes to make that order since he can write a cheque. I will have to look into getting a bank account, I think. I'd be happy to give Mr. Cohen a larger profit than usual if we can get a goodly array of items for sale."

"I agree to asking Mr Cohen to join our venture in that manner. However, that women are barred from bank services is very galling to me."

"I can appreciate that. Our laws treat women no better than livestock."

“Now is not the time to grumble about that, unfortunately. We have a lot of work to do. But we had better inform all our associates, as there will be consequences for some of them.”

Chasing (new) donkeys

Tony learned that evening of the success in acquiring the Crawley property. He immediately asked Arthur if he were interested in taking a donkey to Crawley and setting up there.

“I’ve already talked to Tom Soulton to prefabricate a roof and supports and a front and side wall that can be bolted together then bolted to the wall. I’m covering the cost, and our "rent" to *Upton & Hoyle* for the period of their lease will be my cost to get the shelter made.”

Jane asked “Won’t you need to acquire more donkeys?”

Valerie’s expression indicated that she, too, wondered about this.

“Yes. I do. And we will need a couple more people. Arthur. Do you know Peter Adams? He helped us a couple of years ago with the crooks trying to extort money for protection.”

“Saw ’im the other day working cleaning up some of the muck at the drain outflow. Not a nice job.”

“Let’s ask him if he thinks he could manage a hand cart and eventually a donkey cart,” Tony said. “And as I recall, he seemed to know other people, but we’ll take things a bit at a time.

“I’ll have to see if I can learn about anyone with donkeys to sell. I’d prefer to buy locally.”

Peter came to work for *Best Bonnet* almost immediately. In the autumn a friend of Peter’s, one of the youths who had also followed the crooks the year before, Thomas Preston, also joined the team. They were both given sleeping spaces in the room behind the shop. The room Valerie had occupied was now empty, and Tony really didn’t use the room that was nominally his, spending almost every night with Jane in the largest bedroom. Bobby still had the small room at the back.

Donkeys, or at least suitable donkeys, proved the slowest issue to solve of those that the opening of *Upton & Hoyle* initiated, but eventually Tony found a breeder some ten miles away with a pair of jennies that were 10 years old. One – Jewel – had produced a mal-formed foal in her most recent breeding cycle, and the breeder decided not to try her again. The other – Hesper – had taken a dislike to the jack in her last breeding and there had been a great conflict in which the owners and hands had been unable to intervene due to the ferocity of flying hooves and biting teeth. Both donkeys

had scars from the encounter.

Tony ended up, late in August, buying both the donkeys for rather more than he had paid before. Then he approached Tom to build a cart for each of them in the style that matched those already in use. Given Tom was busy not only with regular work but also catching up from the work opening up *Upton & Hoyle*, he approached Cassandra and arranged the loan of Dan Dixon to help out, then with Captain Fraser to informally apprentice one of the students of the *Academy to Soultons*. However, these developments were not concluded until the end of 1863.

Getting ready

The new shop would need staff, both for the refurbishment and for the ongoing operations. As we have noted, the twin sisters of Robert Vance had been suggested, and Robert had conveyed the information that they were interested. Now Valerie obtained the address and by letter invited them to show up on June 22 to work at *Upton and Hoyle*. They replied forthwith, and enthusiastically.

A shop is nothing without customers, so Valerie and Ian prepared an announcement to send to all the newspapers and magazines they could think of. They paid to put the announcement in *The Times* and *The Brighton Herald* knowing many passengers on the London - Brighton line read those newspapers. For the others, they would chance getting a small news item.

Upton & Hoyle – Crawley, Sussex

Miss Valerie Upton and Mr. Ian Hoyle are pleased to announce the opening of their Furnishings Presentation Room on July First, 1863.

Upton & Hoyle is located on the London Road, Crawley, Sussex, about 50 yards north of the Old Punch Bowl on the western side of the road. The shop will also serve as the booking office for the Crawley branch of *Best Bonnet Cartage*.

At the bottom they added the Brighton addresses of *Upton Furnishings* and *Best Bonnet Cartage* for enquiries.

They had the same announcement printed on octavo sized handbills, a package of which was given to all the carters to distribute to clients and anyone else who would willingly accept them. However, Valerie told each of them not to toss the bills about. That would waste them and annoy potential customers with litter.

At *Uptons*, the imminent departure of Ian added some urgency to training Hugh Talbot in the operations of the shop. Fortunately, he was quick to learn. On his fourth day, Rebecca was busy with Elsie planning the manage-

ment of the domestic part of *Uptons* when a couple came to look at a dining table and chairs. While arrangements with the manufacturer constrained new stock to be sold at essentially fixed prices, with flexibility only if there were a bundle of items, prices of second-hand items were negotiable. Moreover, Hugh had taken note of a very attractive mahogany table and matching chairs. It had been acquired in very dirty condition at a low price by Maud Mortimer, but had not required as much refurbishment as anticipated. Hugh knew that *Uptons* remit to Maud would not be as high as generally expected. He made a show of checking the stock book, noting the interest particularly of the lady in the couple, and calmly quoted a price that was quite a bit higher than the usual markup. Now Hugh was prepared with a cock and bull story that he had "misread" the stock book if it looked like the sale was going to be missed, but he got his price by implying that he would as a special favour "include delivery", even though this was generally the case for larger sales. Rebecca, who came into the shop as Hugh was writing up the invoice, had to suppress a smirk. Hugh was already a member of the team.

In this waiting period Ian, who had drawn the signs for *Matilda's* when Tony acquired that property, proceeded to prepare stencils for *Upton & Hoyle*. They planned to put this over the central bay window. For the time being, they would make do with just this single name sign, which would be only about a foot high. Later they would consider how to better present the shop name. However, as there were three window bays, Ian prepared a sign in somewhat smaller letters

Agency for
Best Bonnet Cartage

So the signs would be ready to install but still easy to transport, he decided to paint them on fine canvas. This could be glued to the wooden front-board above the windows, with thin wooden moulding to cover and secure the edges. The finished sign would be varnished to protect it from the weather.

Tom and Robert had designed and built a simple shelter with a minimal frame of wood and some tarred sailcloth for the roof and "walls". Holes for bolts were pre-drilled. The flat panels were simple frames of wooden strapping covered with the sailcloth. All but one – needed to fit the width of the space – were 7 feet by 28 inches. The one additional panel was just 16" wide. They were easy to transport if a bit awkward in size. The roof pieces would be bolted together with putty between as a seal. The same idea could, if desired, be applied between the "wall" panels. A triangular piece of sailcloth, ready tarred and with grommets, was provided to close one end of the roof. 3 inch square wood in two ten-foot lengths, nine seven-foot lengths, and two six foot ones completed the kit to build the shelter. Tom being Tom, he insisted that he and Robert time how long it took them

to assemble, though his real reason was to ensure all the pieces fit together properly. They managed the task in less than an hour.

Tom and Robert also pre-fabricated the replacement bay window lattice, but glass had been ordered to be delivered in Crawley. The bays were fairly simple. Each was only 16" deep, with foot-wide triangles at each end. The side ones were smaller than the middle, so the central span of the middle bay was about 5 feet, while the side ones just a bit over 3 feet, since there were two doors in the shop front. Perhaps at one time it had been two shops, but Tom thought not.

Tom had noticed that the doors also had glass panels. This was good for light, but not for security. It did not seem that there was a grill that could be put up at night or other closing times. Tom actually included a mention of this when he wrote a note to Valerie about the window.

Setting up

Valerie always remembered the last 10 days of June, 1863 as a kaleidoscope of movement and action as she and Ian, aided by others, rushed to occupy and fix up what was to become *Upton & Hoyle*.

The official start of their possession was Monday the 22nd, but on both Saturday and Sunday there had been much activity in the Brighton premises to get all the necessary clothing, tools, household and personal belongings and even food ready and loaded for shipment either by rail or by donkey and horse cart. Phoenix was being rented with her cart from Rose Sinclair.

Annabelle and Arthur were moving to Crawley. Tony felt that Annabelle had spent time on her own and would take better to being on her own again, at least for the first while.

Valerie, Ian and Robert took a very early train to Crawley. They collected the keys from Dockerty and were in possession of their new premises soon after 9 o'clock. Ian and Robert immediately began to dismantle the boards blocking the damaged front window.

Robert said "Save all the bits. At worst they'll serve as firewood."

Valerie, meanwhile, was preparing the stove in the kitchen so hot water for washing and for tea could be made available. A delivery of coal had been arranged – there was the bin in the back room, just inside the back door. It was in an inconvenient place, but at least secured from thieves. The coal was delivered just before 10. Valerie paid the coalman right away, which got a smile.

"Last lot kept me waitin' three months."

“Give me prompt service, good anthracite and correct weight and you’ll be paid immediately,” Valerie informed him.

Having fuel, Valerie put on a kettle, one of the things she had purchased in the last couple of weeks knowing it would be needed. She also had a large pot with a tap on the bottom that would sit on the back of the stove to warm water for washing. As the kettle came to a boil, Sarah and Nancy arrived with very small bags. Robert was going to send one of them back with the hand-cart he’d brought with tools and materials to collect their main baggage. The cart was already emptied in the back room and Ian had, after helping Robert dismantle the window boards, gone back to the station to bring the rest of their luggage, including some palliasses and other bedding. These would go on the floor for now until deliveries of furniture arrived.

Martha Vance had found some rough clothing for her daughters and they were soon hard at work scraping the old varnish, dirt and soot from the floor using plane irons and other scrapers Robert had brought. It was hard work, even with cork pads to kneel upon, as the scraping demanded strong hands and an efficient technique. Fortunately the girls soon developed a rhythm. Once a third of the room was scraped, one of them turned to sanding the scraped area, and they swapped tasks frequently to rest aching joints. It would take them until Tuesday evening to have the floor scraped, sanded, and double-swept ready to varnish.

After making tea, Valerie took a canvas bag and went shopping for some fresh foodstuffs. She wasn’t going to prepare full meals, but planned to get some hot items from the Punch Bowl or elsewhere and augment them with some salad items or other food. It would not be fancy, but there would be plenty, and it would hopefully be tasty.

Late in the afternoon the clip clop of a horse signalled that Tony had arrived with Phoenix and her cart. An hour later, Arthur arrived with Annabelle, the donkey’s shorter legs making for a slower journey. On Phoenix’ cart was the prefabricated shelter. Working into the evening, Tony and Arthur got it assembled quite quickly, but needed Ian and Robert to help get it into place and secured. This needed a special drill to put holes and expanding plugs in the brick wall in several places. Tom had suggested that if it were important, they could putty the joint between the shelter roof and the wall, but the overhang of the building with its gutter would likely mean very little rain would come in there. For now they left the joint unsealed.

Tony and Arthur left the carts in the space where a second shelter might go later. Phoenix and Annabelle were offered the shelter by way of some feed and water. Phoenix took up the invitation, but Annabelle decided to stay outside on the other side of the door near the carts. Tony had a corkscrew ring he put in the ground and secured Annabelle so she could browse but not go far. Two straps across the end of the shelter were used for Phoenix.

Tony said "I'll sleep in Phoenix' cart."

Arthur said "I'll kip just inside the door. But Tom included some extra lengths of 2 by 2 and 3 by 3. If we use one like a ridge pole, we can make a cover with a tarp. Then if it rains, you'll be dry."

That's what they did, waking early so Tony could return to Brighton with Phoenix and her cart. The distance was greater than either Phoenix and Annabelle were used to, but extra food and some treats had been brought along, and frequent stops included. On the way home, of course, there was no load on Phoenix' cart.

Arthur stayed, and over the next few days he helped with various jobs as well as going with Annabelle to collect supplies such as paint and varnish. They would be starting to put on the first layer of finish on part of the floor on Wednesday, provided that the scraping and sanding were finished, which as we have indicated was the case. Meanwhile, one of the tasks Valerie undertook was to go about the premises with keys, learning which worked in which locks.

"Robert. Do you know how to change locks?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"I think we may want to change some locks, because we've got a lot of mismatched ones, and a few that don't have keys. Actually, it would be good if Ian learned how to make the changes."

"If you can find one or two without keys, we could do those as a way for Ian to try."

The glass for the front window had arrived Monday mid-afternoon, by which time the frame was in place. Tom and Robert had designed it with mortices in the verticals at the inside. The horizontals were in individual lengths that met in the middle of the verticals as a tongue. To hold the horizontals in place, each vertical had a thin spline that was screwed to the vertical with a brass round-head screw for which holes had been pre-drilled. It was a masterful design for quick assembly, and its erection was completed just as the glass arrived.

Ian helped Robert put in the panes carefully. Robert used glaziers points and by supper the glass was all in place, but not puttied. That happened on the Tuesday morning, and Ian and Valerie were recruited to knead the putty to smoothness. Valerie was unhappy that her hands would smell of linseed oil for several days despite lots of good soap and a nail brush. Still, Robert knew how to putty and the window was sealed by mid-afternoon.

"Just need to give it a day or so and we can paint."

"Do we have any paint yet?" Valerie asked.

Robert replied "No. I'll go off now. There's an ironmonger sells paint not far away. I'll arrange for the floor varnish too then Arthur can go and get it. Tom's suggestion is the linseed oil and turpentine mixture so we can

touch up areas that need more. It also dries quicker.”

“Tom hasn’t led us astray yet, so get what you think best. Do you need money?”

“Oh. Meant to ask for some. A quid should be more than enough. I’ll need brushes too. They don’t last too many coats before they get clogged up.”

Valerie gave him 30 shillings. He came back with 8 and 11 and everything he felt they would need to complete the refurbishment to the degree they intended.

Ian, when not helping with other jobs, undertook to wash the walls and ceiling in the shop to get rid of soot and hopefully reduce the smokey smell. He would later work through the other rooms in the same way. That he had to change the wash water frequently attested to the need for this operation.

Valerie, though she helped out with several jobs, also took on the task of visiting all the neighbours, both residential and commercial, and handed them the handbills about the opening. This promotional walk-about also turned out to be immediately useful, as one of the nearby businesses was a builder named Jinks. When it came time to install the signage, Ian and Robert were able to borrow two ladders so they could better stretch the signs to glue them in place as well as tack some moulding as a frame to ensure edges did not peel up. Once in place with the glue dry, they varnished the signs with three coats of varnish to protect them from rain. The ladders were very welcome, and "ladders" went on a list to acquire, since it was certain they would be doing changes to signs and other parts of the building later.

On Thursday, Valerie started priming the window frame. It would be Saturday before she could put on the first coat of white paint. Then it was realized that the older windows would need painting too. After re-washing them, a coat of paint went on these frames at the time of the second coat on the central window.

The inside of the central window, which had a narrow display area, had taken some scorching. The upper frame and ceiling of the window would be repainted along with the frame. However, Tom and Robert had suggested to simply cover the bottom sill with some carpeting, with the same treatment being applied to the other two windows. The roll of carpet was one of the items brought from Brighton so they would not have to find a supplier in Crawley. Valerie worked on covering the two side window-sills, tacking the carpet over the edge and down the low wall inside. While the window sill could be used as a seat, it came to be used for display of merchandise or signs about the businesses. The centre bay carpet would have to wait until the painting was complete, but would be completed just before the opening.

Also on Thursday June 25, the first furniture ordered by Abraham Cohen was expected at the station. Arthur and Annabelle took four trips to bring

it all to the shop, where it was put in the back room, which Valerie had swept twice and also helped Ian in washing down the walls and ceiling. The walls needed two washings because of the grime rather than smoke. This prompted the realization that they had never asked what the building had been used for in the past. It was, after all, supposed to be being refitted as a shop for ladies' clothes. She would have to ask what it was beforehand.

The next-door newsagents were able to answer that the building had for a time been used as a sort of factory for pottery, with the kiln using the chimney, and it was being converted to a large shop – the front had not had the bay windows until four years before – when the fire occurred.

In any event, she helped Arthur unload each delivery through the rear door. They carefully stacked the items to use the least space, as more furniture would be coming. The coal bin and Arthur's palliasse were either side of the door. Ian and Robert had placed their palliasses elsewhere in the back room, but incoming furniture meant that they were shifting around each night. Valerie realized that the sleeping arrangements for the men had not been settled beforehand. They could have slept in the workroom upstairs. It did make sense to have Arthur near the door for security, especially with Annabelle outside. However, some rearrangement of the space might be in order.

Arthur said "Sorry I left my mattress there. I'll roll it up while we're moving stuff in."

"Yet I think somewhere near the door is a good idea for our safety. Annabelle will be just outside, and we don't want anyone causing her trouble."

Arthur looked at the coal bin, which also had the tank to capture rain-water from the rear gutters.

"You know, if we made sure the coal bin had a bit of a lip on top, I could sleep on top. We could put a small locker at the end and a pair of steps so I could get up easily. Maybe even a curtain like an old four-poster."

"Do that, Arthur. Get Ian or possibly Robert to help. You've got your sleeping quarters."

Ian also worked steadily through the first week on building some shelves they could use to hold bedding, table cloths and other linens that would be for sale, though he was doing this in the workroom upstairs because the floor of the shop was mostly still being worked on. Rebecca had said she would supply a range of linens on consignment so they would have stock without dipping into capital, and a pair of tea chests would arrive on Monday June 29.

On Friday there would be a shipment of tables and collapsed wardrobes, several of each. Once again, Arthur made several trips to the station. One of the wardrobes was to go in the apartment. Indeed, Valerie intended to

screw a strongbox through its base into the floor as she had learned from Cassandra and Tony. Not that there would be a lot of money in it with all the expenditure in the last few days. Still, they weren't out of cash yet. She and Ian had pouches under their clothes for the moment, and the wardrobe was not damaged with screw holes just yet. If necessary, it could be sold for profit.

The weather, fortunately, stayed mild and dry but not hot. Three coats of varnish went on the signage over three consecutive days. People walking by looked in curiously, and one or two gave welcome greetings. Ian had brought a sandwich board of two blackboards and on this an announcement of the opening was chalked and the boards placed on the pavement where passers-by would see them.

Friday June 26 would be Robert's last day. The window received its first coat of paint, but Robert said "I think you can get away with just two coats on the inside, but three on the outside."

"What jobs do you feel are most important for me to try to get done today, which'll be my last here?"

Valerie had to think, but settled on the stove. "How about seeing if that stove under the rubbish outside is serviceable?"

Robert went to look, then came back to find Ian to help him lift and carry. This suited Ian, as he was wanting to ask Robert about some ideas he had for simplifying the shelf assembly. Having noted the screws for the window frames and the bolts for the shelter, he realized that standardized pieces and bolts or screws would allow for easy rearrangement.

The stove turned out to be potentially useful. It had a broken leg at the rear, but Robert remembered how Tom had replaced two legs on a stove with some bolted angle iron. There was also a missing round plate, but likely a replacement of some sort could be found. The stove pipes were rather dented and partly torn.

"Some rough handling pulling this out," Robert said.

The stove had been moved near the back door and propped up on some old bricks found in the pile with it. Valerie came to look.

"Is it worth saving?" she asked.

"Couple of quid'll get you a working stove I think. A new pipe would give a better appearance. You'll need to make a platform to protect the floor. We sanded the place where it was. I think these bricks are part of what they used under the stove. New would look better, or nice tiles on a layer of wood to protect the floor. If the heat hurts the wood layer, it can be replaced rather than the floor boards."

"You and Tom, Robert. Always thinking of the eventualities. But don't think that's a criticism. Just the opposite. And I'll ask you to arrange for a new leg or legs with Tom and we'll get it back in shape. And leave me

dimensions for the tiling. Also for the round plate, unless you know where to find one. Show Ian what you plan so the bits can be sent up. In the meantime, is there somewhere safe to put it?"

"How about I put an old bit of tarpaulin over it in the back of the donkey shelter. It can serve to put the haybox on top. I was wondering how to put that up off the floor along with a water bucket for Annabelle."

Valerie said "Actually, I'm thinking this stove might go upstairs to heat the workroom, since in the shop we want something attractive. The broken leg doesn't matter for just heating, but it won't look appropriate in the show room. We'll look for another there. Possibly quite small."

At five o'clock, Valerie called everyone into the workroom upstairs and passed round mugs of cider.

"I want to thank you all for the hard work this week. And I'm sure next week'll be just as heavy, though different tasks.

"We've got to a point where we are waiting for paint to dry and doing smaller tasks, so I'm going to suggest that if they want, Sarah and Nancy go home with Robert to your family, then come back Sunday by noon at the latest so we can start to stock the shop for opening and begin teaching you about the items and how they are priced. However, all of you should stay to eat first so your family doesn't have to scramble to feed you.

"A special thanks to Robert for all the jobs. The building repairs and improvements that we planned seem to be a success. Our gratitude."

"Acshully enjoyed myself," Robert admitted.

Assessing progress

By six, the meal of pork pies, salad and new potatoes was finished. Pudding, the Vances assured, would be provided "at home". Valerie sent them off, saying she, possibly aided by Ian, would take care of the washing up.

Arthur said Annabelle was brushed, fed and watered, but he would check on her again later. He wanted to go for a walk to explore Crawley and possibly find a pub for some beer. Valerie gave him one of the keys to one of the front doors. That was a matter they would need to address at some point.

The washing up was not onerous, as there was just a modest collection of plates and cutlery. Once it was done, Valerie poured tea and set out some biscuits.

"Ian. Are we going to succeed?"

"You're anxious that we might not?"

"I've been watching the money go out, and right now nothing is coming in for either of us. You're not in the Presentation Room, and I'm not running

the *Best Bonnet* roster.”

“I’ve still got £22. What about you?”

“30 quid and a few shillings.”

“Could be worse. We’ve paid the rent, the solicitors, the railway fares and all the materials we’ve bought. And we paid Tom for Robert’s work up front as well. So that’s 50 odd pounds that isn’t named for anybody but us.”

“I suppose it’s just me having a few worries. Let’s talk about what needs to be done short, medium and long term. Have you got a notebook?”

“Yes. Do we need to walk about?”

“If we do, we’ll have to get up. Right now I don’t think my body will let me get up from this chair.”

“One thing that is short or medium term is a couple of comfortable chairs and some more convenient lighting in here,” Ian said.

“Yes. Put those as "short term", but we’ll hang on until we see something come in as stock. I’ll look out for some cloth to cover them, then we can use them but re-sell if we see something we like better.”

“Hmm. Good thinking, Valerie.”

“I would like some curtains for here and the bedroom, though. And for the girl’s room. And I think that is really something for right away. Tomorrow I’ll look through the stock and possibly borrow a table cloth or two and just hang them up on a string with clothes pegs. I packed good clothesline rope and plenty of pegs.”

“Table cloths or something like that will do. As long as they can be kept clean, they can go back to stock,” Ian said. “It’ll give us a bit of time so we can put off the expense.”

“Yes. I think until we see some revenue, we’d better do things like that. Though I did give Robert instructions to go ahead with the stove. I want it particularly for the workroom up here.”

“We’ll still need some heating in the shop or customers will stay away,” Ian said.

“Yes. It’s a pity we have to put it right in the middle of the shop. The chimney and the doors to the back room dictate where it has to go,” Valerie grumbled.

“I’ve been thinking how we can put a counter between the two front doors a little back of the centre window. Ultimately, I think a glassed-in display counter parallel to the window, with side counters that lift to allow staff in or out. Then customers come in or out past those side counters, but staff can see the whole interior of the shop. They can also quickly access the centre window display if we have special items or things that are changing frequently. The other windows can display more permanent items.”

“Ian, I’m glad you’re thinking. My mind is all at sixes and sevens. You know, we could try out that idea right away with some tables with cloths.

Not perfect, but we could get an idea of whether it would work. And there would be space back to the stove – I think a tall, narrow one to avoid using too much space – which would be in view, which could be important.”

“Unfortunately tables are a bit low for the counter. We’ll need to watch for possibilities. Also I think some stools. It’s tiring to stand all the time. But, yes. Let’s try it out for the opening.”

“Oh. We’d better make sure we have enough lamp oil,” Valerie said.

“I already got in ten gallons,” Ian said. “If it gets dark out we want the shop well-lit. Pity gas is only just starting here.”

“Last night in bed I had a thought that the workroom up here isn’t easy to use as a storage space, since everything has to come up the stairs at this end of the building. The stairs are just 32 inches wide – I measured them with the tape I carry in my pocket. And you need to turn right to get on the stairs then right again at the top to get into the workroom.”

Ian mused “I suppose we could look into putting a large trap door in the floor.”

“Might mess up the beams. And someone could fall down through it,” Valerie countered.

“Let’s look at the back windows,” Ian said, and despite their fatigue they went into the workroom.

Valerie said “That window over the back door is fairly big.” Measuring, she found the frame was four feet square.

Ian said “If we put in a beam above – we’d need to check if there are joists suitable – and we changed the window so it lifts out, then it would make it easier for moving things in and out.”

“Put that long-term. I doubt we’ll get to it in the first year.”

“I agree.

“Anything else that’s short or medium term, Valerie?”

“I was wondering where you plan to sleep, Ian. We’ve sorted out Arthur. I’m currently in the bedroom and the girls in the staff accommodation as I’m calling it. In the back room, you’d steal space from storing stock. There’s bags of space up here, but not very private or cosy.”

Ian said “Also I think we should try to develop this workroom as that, and use it to polish and improve items. Possibly develop some products of our own, though for now I’ve no idea quite what.”

“Oh, I like that. But we first need to get some income.

“To return to sleeping arrangements, let’s look at the apartment to see what might be possible.”

Currently the kitchen had a table made of two saw horses with a table top of planks fastened side by side with two cross pieces underneath through which screws passed into the planks.

"I'm happy enough for now with the trestle table. We could use a cupboard or two besides that one that has the water tank. Apart from the tank, there's not much room. And I think that one is intended as a cool larder, using the water in the tank to keep things cool on hot days. The chairs are out of stock – all second hand but could be sold. I'd be just as happy with less saleable ones for now if we can convert these to cash."

Ian said "We could use another table by the wall for preparing food. And I agree about cupboards. Probably a sideboard too. I'll watch for one. There's room in that corner for a cot for me if you don't mind me being so close."

"You know by now I don't. And I've just a cot and a wardrobe next door. You should have your own wardrobe too, even if you and I ... er ... end up in a double bed."

"Is there space for two wardrobes and a double bed in there?" Ian asked.

"Let's measure."

After a couple of minutes, it was clear that it would be easy to have wardrobes either side of the bedroom window and a double bed. Also a dressing table or writing table.

Valerie sat down on the cot, then took off her shoes and swung her legs up to lie down.

"That looks much more comfortable," Ian said.

"Yes. It is. If it won't scandalize you, you can come beside me, though it'll be a bit cramped."

"You're not ... er ... concerned we might ...?"

"We've talked enough. You're not going to ... er ... ravish me. Nor I you. I hope!"

This caused them both to laugh. Ian came over to the cot, undid his shoes took off his jacket and hung it on a hook that somehow was present on the wall, and lay down.

"Here. It'll be easier if you put your arm under my neck," Valerie said.

"Yes. It's all right."

"Hold me tight. Ian. I really am still having a case of the wobbles about our venture."

Ian did this. Then kissed her forehead, then suddenly found she had lifted her face to kiss him. For a while they enjoyed the closeness and affection. Valerie said "Ian. I've really found a great joy in sharing all this ... er ... building with you."

"Yes. I get a huge sense of satisfaction that we create and mould things together."

"Then, though we won't put it in the plans, why don't you set up a cot in the kitchen for now. We'll look for an inexpensive but nice wardrobe for

you and put it in here. And also a nice double bed and bedding. Then when we feel right about it, we'll find an unlicensed church and marry."

"Yes. Definitely," Ian said eagerly.

Valerie rolled on top of him and kissed him. Then realized that there was a lump in the front of his pants and rolled back to the side.

Somewhat surprised she said "I didn't think you got excited by women." This wasn't expressed as an accusation, just with a sense that it had been unexpected.

Ian said "I've generally found myself drawn to men, and having to be ... er ... disciplined in my behaviour. But the idea of ... er ... congress with a woman is not unattractive, and I really like you and find you attractive as a woman. I hope this will not seem insensitive, but I think that most people would not say you are pretty, but to me you are a very handsome woman. Moreover you have a strong and moral character. You are a beautiful person and therefore a beautiful woman, at least to me. I'll be very happy to be your husband. It is a pity the law makes it so difficult for a woman to keep her identity and fortune. I'll not be displeased to marry you in an unlicensed church. Let us hope we can find one nearby. And, if I may say so, in the not too distant future."

For a while they just lay together, and their fatigue was such that it was the sound of Arthur returning that woke them. Given the summer, it wasn't yet dark. Ian got up quietly and went to the kitchen, shutting the bedroom door behind him.

Saturday June 27

Valerie made bacon and eggs for Saturday breakfast. Today Ian was going to put on another coat of paint while Arthur would update some of the floor finish, which had to be done in sections to avoid blocking passage. Though he technically was employed by *Best Bonnet*, Tony had told him that since the agency would be hosted by the new shop, it was sensible to help out. Truthfully, Arthur had not imagined that he would not help out until Tony had mentioned this. He had, after all, shared his living and working place with Valerie and the others for some time now.

There had been some showers. Ian was pleased, as he did not want to think of the water tanks running out. After painting, he continued to work on shelves. By the middle of the afternoon, he had installed all that they intended to set up by July 1. Fortunately, he had got Sarah or Nancy to put the oil and turpentine finish on the shelves before assembly, so there would not be a delay before stock could be placed on them.

After Arthur had done one section of the floor, he took Annabelle to the station in case there were any unexpected shipments for *Upton & Hoyle*. Waiting were two tea chests from Maud Mortimer. When these were opened back at the shop, they contained small household items like lamps and fire tongs, a tray with dividers for cutlery and some similar items. There was a stock list with the amounts Maud wanted and numbers were pasted or written on each item. These would be useful in the shop upon the opening.

Valerie, meanwhile, had realized that a week of work meant there was clothing that was sweaty and soiled. At breakfast, she had suggested that she would use the rather modest bathtub they had brought on one of the carts to wash some clothes if the men would put them in a pile.

"Where will you dry them?" Ian asked.

"Can we set up a line outside?"

Arthur said "Might rain from the look of things, and there ain't really anywhere to rig a line where clothes won't flap against the building."

"What about in the workroom?" Ian suggested. "We can run lines from one end to the other. You brought plenty of clothesline rope."

"Need some screw eyes, though" Arthur suggested.

"I'll go to the ironmongers to get some," Valerie said. "While I'm gone, you two have a good wash and put on clean clothes – well clean underclothes if you plan to keep wearing your working outers."

The afternoon was well advanced when the various tasks had progressed as far as they could. Valerie went to the pub and came back with some bottles of beer and cider. On her trip to the ironmongers, she had also gone to a bakery and bought some bread and some sweet buns.

"Time for a break from toil!" she called out.

When they were seated at the table in the kitchen with the refreshments, Arthur said "This is very welcome. But I gotta' say that the shop is starting to look better. I think I can get the final bit of floor done this evening so middle of tomorrow you'll be able to put in the stock."

"Excellent, Arthur," Ian said.

"I was wondering," Valerie commenced "if we should change our practice a little with the pricing. For the smaller items we will display on the shelves and some tables, why not put prices on cards. It would save us having to consult the logbook and make it easier for Nancy and Sarah to write up the invoice."

"Yes. I've heard more shops are going to pre-set prices," Ian said. "It'll make life easier, but we'll need to make up cards."

Valerie answered "I fortunately brought quite a bit of cardstock, thinking of it for signs as we go along. But we can get more from the stationers before we open, though I've probably got enough for the stock we have."

Arthur said "Better have signs to tell people not to touch. 'Specially if they've dirty 'ands."

"That's a good idea, Arthur," Valerie said. "But I think perhaps the signs should say 'Please ask if you wish to handle the merchandise'."

"Yes. More positive, but essentially the same message," Ian said. "We'd better start working out the prices. For the opening, it would be good to have very attractive prices, but still ensure we're making enough profit."

"I think at whatever will be our counter, we need a sign to say that we only accept cash payment. Probably 'We regret that we cannot offer goods on credit. Payment on purchase or delivery please.'"

"Yes. That may save a lot of explanation. We don't have the working capital to carry customers, nor the people to go collecting. And I don't want to have to keep a lot of account books."

Arthur asked "You mentioned writing up the invoices. Do you have special paper for that with the business name?"

Valerie said "When I got the handbills made, I realized the address and name would already be typeset, and concluded a good price for a ream of paper with our name and address at the top. I bought a couple of books for recording sales, but we'll have to teach the girls how to faithfully record everything."

Arthur said "What's a ream?"

Ian replied "500 sheets. 20 quires."

Why don't we have a session tomorrow afternoon with all of us present for about an hour to go over procedures. I'll write down the key elements and we'll make a copy or two in summary form. Then we all know. Moreover, we can settle questions with all of us present.

"Arthur. Perhaps you can think of what you need to know if we take bookings for you and Annabelle. We'll deal with that at the same time."

"Yes. Tony said to make sure I had my bookings and logbook and to keep them straight. I'm used to how we do it in Brighton, but being my own boss I'd not thought about how the rest of you have to let me know when there's custom."

Ian said "Arthur, Can you help me bring up a table and a couple of chairs so Valerie and I can work in the big room doing the pricing. We may want help with moving the items up and down, but the room below is more cluttered and we should set things out so we can compare them and not get the prices out of line with each other."

Valerie spread a clean but old sheet on the floor on which to lay down linens. Then for the next three hours Ian made up price cards while Arthur moved items and price cards around and Valerie recorded them in the price book with notes where appropriate on how the price was agreed.

As they heard a clock sound seven, Ian said “More than enough for today.”

“I’ve some meat pasties and some cold new potatoes, as well as some tomatoes and cucumber,” Valerie said. “And there’s a berry tart for pudding.”

Arthur said “I’ll just check Annabelle. Might take ’er for a little walk after supper. Then I’ll surely be ready for a kip.”

Last details

From Sunday to Wednesday was busy, but somehow less frantic than the previous week. Sarah and Nancy quickly learned how to get the stock number of a piece of furniture and check in the price book. Some practice runs with Valerie or Ian playing the customer soon had them offering appropriate prices. The fixed prices on the linens and small items meant fewer entries in the price book. Actually, it meant there was a master price book with every item they sold kept by Valerie in the bedroom and a much abridged one for the stock that customers could see that did not have a price ticket.

It was Sarah who commented “Do we need to watch for customers trying to move price tickets to get a lower price on something?”

Valerie and Ian were thinking how to respond when Nancy said “Let’s put a diagram of where things are and put the prices on it. Like a little map we can keep out of sight but easily available if we think there’s been funny business going on.”

“Can I ask you to prepare that?” Valerie suggested.

The girls were most interested that with some of the furniture items – the second-hand ones – they could adjust the asking price if they thought it would augment the revenue. And they were very glad to hear that there would be a small commission – a penny on each shilling of profit – as well as their rather modest wage.

Ian said “We like to reward initiative and energy, but please don’t make it a competition. Some businesses do that, and it weakens the spirit of the business. If you feel there are ways we can all benefit, don’t be afraid to tell us. We’ll all be learning in the first while.”

Arthur said “What’re you going to do for a till? You’ve just set up a couple of tables for the moment.”

Ian said “I’m going to see about getting a glass display cabinet with lift up counters on the sides. It should be possible to have a till bolted to the top of that. I don’t think we’ll see that here for a month or so. But for now, either Miss Upton or I will have an apron with a wallet for money and coin,

so there's just the one person who will receive payments. The others will write up invoices and make a record in the log book. At the end of the day, we'll tally up and record who made sales and so forth. On the first Friday of the next month we'll pay commissions. You may each want to keep a record yourself, too."

The Sunday discussion also pointed out that the back room did not have shelves for storage of extra stock, nor tables for sorting it. The roll of brown wrapping paper was simply stored on end with a big ball of string on top. Thus a list was prepared for Arthur to go to a local timber merchant for a number of planks first thing on Monday, while Ian would go to the ironmonger for some wood screws and nails. Much of the rest of Monday was spent building rough shelves for the back room, as well as two trestle tables. The roll of wrapping paper was, for the moment, hung over the end of a trestle table with a loop of rope, though within three weeks Ian and Arthur worked out a simple pair of brackets and a rod made from a broken broom handle.

With shelves in the back room in place, cards were made to identify the extra stock. Thus the shop displayed only one or two copies of any item, and these would be replaced as they sold.

After the carpet was tacked into the central window sill, Ian installed a carefully written sign

Open Monday to Saturday
9 a.m. until 6 p.m.
Except Wednesday early
closing at 1 p.m.
Also open by appointment

Valerie said "Do you think we're doing the right thing by keeping to such hours. A lot of shops open earlier and later."

Ian said "Many shops open earlier for servants to shop for things. But servants don't usually shop for furnishings. And we do offer to be open by appointment, so if someone wants to come late, or even early, we'll be happy to greet them by arrangement."

Grand opening

Valerie was exceedingly nervous at one minute to nine on the morning of Wednesday July 1, 1863. She and Ian were dressed in their best clothes, and had ensured Sarah and Nancy had suitable garb for the shop. Arthur

was looking after Annabelle and was going to make a trip to the station as some more stock was coming from Abraham. When he returned, it had been decided that he would work in the back handling any emergencies or tasks that needed doing. He also said he would make tea from time to time. Rebecca had suggested some Treats for the Tongue from *Fortescue Factory* could be offered to likely customers, and these had come on Tuesday on the train.

Valerie was even more nervous at 1 minute past nine when nobody came in the shop. In fact it was half-past nine when Mr. Dockerty came in the door which was held open with a door stop.

"I congratulate you, Miss Upton, Mr. Hoyle. You have made this place look almost new. And what a fine array of furniture and other items. I will have to send Mrs. Dockerty to look. But I just stopped on my way to the office to offer my best wishes for the success of your business."

Valerie said "Thank you Mr. Dockerty. Do indeed share the news that we are open and are, if not fully stocked, at least offering many worthwhile items."

Around ten o'clock, the first true potential customers came into the shop. These were a pair of middle-aged ladies from the town. They perused the shelved carefully, looked at the furniture, then returned to the shelves of linens. Valerie sent Sarah to get the Treats and tea.

"May I offer tea?" Valerie asked from behind the table that was serving as the counter.

"Oh. Well. I don't ... Oh. Treats for the Tongue. How delightful. But I had better be cautious about tea. Else"

Valerie, in a very quiet voice, said "Our shop has a well-appointed water closet for our preferred customers."

"How splendid, Mildred. Why don't other shops do that?"

The other lady asked "Are those table cloths on the left end of the shelf there new or second hand?"

"They are new, madam."

"Then your price is very good. I swear I saw the same in the Burlington Arcade in town last week for a florin more."

"We aim to be as competitive as we can, madam. While no business can always be the lowest in price for given merchandise, we aim to be among the leaders."

"And this is your first day?"

"Indeed it is. We are, as you see, not fully equipped with a counter and till, but we plan to become a permanent fixture in Crawley and serve the town and its environs."

"Well. I for one am going to buy one of those table cloths," the lady named Mildred said. Her companion ended up purchasing a small ink-stand

that Maud had sent in the eclectic collection that had arrived by surprise.

Valerie had Sarah write these up. Or was it Nancy. The twins were not completely alike. No, it was Sarah. Valerie noted that she was careful to record the items in the logbook as she made up the invoice. Good. Valerie took the money, wrote "Paid, Thank You" on each invoice by way of receipt, and gave each lady her change.

Ian had been listening in the back. It did not help sales to have too many staff relative to customers in the shop. When the ladies had departed, he came to the front.

"Our first sales?" Ian asked.

"1 pound 14 shillings and 6 pence total," Sarah said.

"A good start," Ian responded.

A little after half-past 10 was heard on a nearby clock, a carriage passing by on the road pulled up suddenly. In fact it was 20 yards past the shop before it stopped. A man descended from the passenger part of the carriage and entered the shop.

"I noticed your blackboard. Just opened? That's good, this place has been empty for too long. And you sell furniture and furnishings."

Nobody in the shop had managed to say a word. Valerie had gone upstairs with the used teacups and was washing them. She came down to the back room, but, like Ian had beforehand, stayed there and did some sorting of goods that Arthur had brought from the station in another unexpected shipment that was jointly from Rebecca and Maud.

The man who had come into the shop said "I have my country house in Burstow, about 5 miles from here. It's only by chance that I came today to see an ailing friend, but then found he has been taken by train to consult his physician in Harley Street."

Ian said "In any event, sir, we welcome you to *Upton & Hoyle*."

"You are Mr. Upton?"

"No, I'm Mr. Hoyle. Miss Upton is my partner in the business. Her mother runs *Upton Furnishings* in Brighton where I joined the trade. Miss Upton's brother and Mr. Tony Brown are the proprietors of **Best Bonnet Cartage** for which we are establishing a branch here."

"Good to hear. Good to hear. I am Sir Oliver Crouch. Several years ago Mr. Brown and his estimable donkey Moonbeam saved my daughter from the sea when some louts stole the horse from the bathing machine in which she was about to enter the water.

"Now it occurs to me that one of the guest rooms in my house here is woefully short on space to store clothing. A good wardrobe would be in order. The trouble is getting such an item up the stairs and through the doorway."

"This wardrobe in the corner is actually one that is called a knock-down wardrobe. We have made it up here, but in our storage area we have at least one more. They arrive in more or less flat pieces that can be assembled where they are needed. Similarly they can be disassembled for moving."

Ian opened the wardrobe, then stood aside, knowing this was the moment to remain quiet and let the customer sell him- or her-self on the piece of furniture they desired.

"This is a new item?"

"It is. A lot of people don't know how such furniture is dismantled and manage to cause damage, so few second-hand ones arrive in the best condition. I dare say a well-kept wardrobe of the type, properly undone and polished would probably be difficult to peg as second-hand. However, it is not in our interest for the long term to be anything but scrupulous in the information we give our customers. We want their trade for the long term."

"And that is the price on that ticket?"

"Yes. Sir Oliver."

"As we are just opening, I will be glad to send someone to set up the wardrobe where desired should you purchase it."

"Then I will do so. Though perhaps it is simple enough that you can show my driver how it is done. I have a sense that it is not difficult."

"No. Sir Oliver. It is not difficult at all. We would be happy to point out the assembly and disassembly."

"Ah. But I see your terms are payment on delivery. Is that not going to inhibit your business?"

"Possibly, Sir Oliver. However, with so many people travelling all across the country with the railways, and ourselves being new to the area, it is not possible to verify that a person buying goods is who they say they are. We do expect in the future to establish accounts for customers and business associates with whom we have trustworthy long-term relationships."

"Reluctantly, I can understand how you must avoid losses. It is a consequence of progress. Let me call my driver so you can show him the assembly, but I think perhaps it would be better for you to arrange delivery and assembly."

"Would tomorrow morning be suitable? Or you may nominate a day and approximate time."

"I think Friday. Shall we say 10 o'clock. I will ensure I have payment ready. Is there a charge for delivery?"

"We will accept that your house is within our 5 mile circle for included delivery, even if it is a few yards more."

"Let us get out a wardrobe to verify that the wood and finish are to your liking. No two wooden items can be identical, and I would like to avoid disappointment."

Ian and Nancy went into the back room and brought out one of the two knock-down wardrobes in stock besides the display one. They undid the webbing straps and took off the hessian wrapping, revealing the richly polished surfaces of the wardrobe.

Sir Oliver said "I believe that I like this a little more than the display copy."

"Then I will prepare the invoice, Sir Oliver, and we will have someone deliver it Friday. May we assume there will be someone to assist with carrying the parts in and holding them in place while our delivery man assembles it? It may be myself, but likely not."

"Yes. There will be a footman or my driver here."

Supporters

Through the rest of the morning people came and went. Most were simply curious, though there were a number of small sales. The odds and ends Maud had sent turned out to be important for these early sales.

Around half-past 11 two of the village council came to introduce themselves. Valerie made a note after their visit with their names. They stayed only about ten minutes, and a lady who was browsing had accosted them with a question about a neighbour's cow that had escaped its enclosure and browsed her garden plants. This had, Valerie opined, shortened their visit.

Just before noon, Abraham, Tony and Jane came into the shop. Arthur was more or less with them, having encountered them on his trip to the Three Bridges station, but went with Annabelle to the rear of the building.

"What a surprise!" Valerie said.

"We thought some support might be welcome," Tony said. "And also it is Jane's birthday, so we thought we would take an outing."

There was some applause for Jane. The visit of Sir Oliver Crouch was described.

Valerie said "I'm pleased you came also, Mr. Cohen."

"I thought it might be useful to see if there are possible customers for *Fortescue Factory*," Abraham said. "Though I realized we could probably get you to act as our distributors, since you have the premises and also *Best Bonnet* available, we haven't actually discussed that."

Ian said "It would not be a great burden to us, and would be additional revenue. Assume that we'll act as the agency for the Factory and that we'll work out the arrangements. I trust you concur, Valerie?"

Valerie nodded.

“When I saw that Rebecca sent you a shipment of Treats, I realized we had overlooked the possibility,” Abraham said.

The visitors were careful to avoid getting in the way of potential customers. However, Valerie gave them a tour. Jane and Tony were going to have lunch at the Old Punch Bowl, then visit the senior Vances before returning home. Abraham said he had better begin his tour of the town to seek customers for *Fortescue Factory*, so went on his way. Valerie recalled as he departed that she had heard he had no investment in the factory. She presumed he must have some arrangement to be rewarded for his efforts, which she heard had been highly important in expanding the distribution network for the Treats. The intertwining of all the businesses was not obvious, but she realized that the cooperation of the various players was likely key to the successes they had achieved.

The beginning of autumn

The following three months were, of course, a time of activity and anxiety for *Upton & Hoyle*. At the start, the mix of stock was unbalanced, but by mid-August Valerie and Ian had discovered that they needed many more of the smaller items, especially ones that were for everyday use, even if for display the high quality products attracted customers. They also found that new furniture sold better in Crawley than in Brighton, but new furniture of a straightforward nature. The clientele seemed to be looking for function, not style.

There was also the matter that they did not have the stock of refurbished tables, chairs, sideboards or bed-frames that arrived at *Upton Furnishings* from *Soultons* after their acquisition by Maud Mortimer or Abraham Cohen. Valerie asked Arthur to watch for estate sales or auctions where they might find second-hand furnishings, but by the end of September she – with Arthur and Annabelle in tow – had only been to one auction. Two modest pieces were acquired which Ian and Valerie polished and put in the showroom. One of them sold quickly at a modest profit, but the gain did not offset the cost of the outing to the auction. The other eventually went at a reasonable price, but not until nearly Christmas. Still, they were learning about their new business environment.

Arthur also struggled to find enough commissions for himself and Annabelle. He did approach the newsagent and found they sent a boy to the station each morning and had him come back with a hansom. Arthur thought it worth two trips a day to the station and arranged for collections after the early train from London and also early afternoon. He then visited merchants up and

down the High Street to negotiate collections and deliveries on this schedule. By mid-August he was, he felt, breaking even on that activity, which was largely modest parcels.

Abraham's efforts for *Fortescue Factory* fortunately bore fruit in the latter part of August and created a steady, if modest, traffic in Treats and other items, and the packing cases had to be collected and returned too.

Early in August, Arthur and Annabelle ran into the cart and Clydesdale of Josiah Thompson.

Thompson said "I 'ear you're poaching my trade."

Arthur realized that here was both a threat and an opportunity. He said "Well, for small parcels perhaps. But Annabelle's a pretty old donkey. No way we can move anything big like your fine horse."

"That's true. Lizzy's still quite young and fit, and a big 'un too. But still you're getting the small stuff."

Arthur said "Why don't I buy you a pint one evening and we see if we can work out a way to both get more business? I've no interest in poaching the trade your cart can handle, and I doubt it's worth the effort of harnessing Lizzy for some of the stuff we do. In Brighton we even work with just hand carts, and I'm thinking that would work here too if there's trade for them. But there's commissions I have to refuse, and it'd be a sight better for the long term to be able to pass them along for a small consideration. Similarly, I'm guessing you get some you'd prefer not to take, or don't take, because they aren't suited to your cart."

Thompson was silent for some seconds. "Well, no sense refusing a pint. 'ow about the White Hart at half-past seven tonight?"

"I'll see you there Mr. Thompson. By the way, I'm Arthur Anderson."

Arthur knew the White Hart. It occupied a prominent place in the High Street and part of the premises were the Post Office. Out of the meeting that evening, an arrangement was made that each of the parties would get a penny on the shilling for commissions passed to the other. Not a lot of money came from this, because clients soon learned which carter to approach according to the type of service needed. However, conflict and rancour was avoided, which was perhaps the biggest gain.

Before the end of September, the stove salvaged from outside had been brought in and set up on bricks and tiles in the workroom. In late October, Jinks connected this to the chimney. There was some concern it might cause trouble for the main kitchen stove, but Jinks the builder connected it lower down than the kitchen stove, just in case the new pipe interfered with the draw.

A brick and tile platform was also prepared in the showroom, but a modest cylindrical stove did not get installed until mid-December. This allowed the show room to be kept comfortable as long as the doors did not

get opened frequently.

Private time

On Sunday, September 27, 1863, just Valerie and Ian were in the *Upton & Hoyle* premises. After breakfast, Arthur had attended to Annabelle, then departed with Sarah and Nancy to go to the Vance smallholding where all of them would spend the day. Arthur had become friendly with Nancy. It was not quite clear, even to the couple themselves, whether they were actually walking out together.

Valerie poured another cup of tea for herself and one for Ian.

"Are you ready to go over the figures for the business since we opened?" she asked.

"We'd better. I don't want to run out of money and lose what we've built."

"Yes. There've been a few days when I've wondered if we'd survive, or if I'd have to go to see Mr. Goldman and try to borrow."

Ian said "Where shall we look at the figures?"

"You fetch all the logbooks and ledger, and I'll clear the table here and we'll light a lamp so we don't have to struggle to read them."

Ian gathered the books. The main ones were the journal of transactions and corresponding ledger, and the latter was the item they scrutinized. The other books were so they could verify anything that was not clear.

Ian said "You've done a very good job of recording things, Valerie. I see details that make clear what was spent and why."

"Yes. But recording things doesn't show whether we're making money, or rather enough money."

Valerie had several sheets of paper handy. She took a pencil and started to record some numbers.

"Ian. Let's say it's been three months. Now the £120 plus about £50 that we spent with refurbishment divided by 21 months is about £8 per month. I could do a detailed calculation, but I estimate that we spend about 30 shillings a month on each of Sarah and Nancy in wages, commissions, accommodation and food. I think we spent about £10 on getting the counter set up. By the way, I was very pleased how you managed to get it partly made up and then you and Arthur put it together and added the till. Thank you for that."

"I enjoyed doing that. It provides a good display of our quality items and protects them from theft and dirty hands."

"Does feeding Arthur cost us much?"

"No. He's paying us half a crown a week for food and fuel. I think that is enough. Besides, he helps out without asking for payment on small jobs, and we do things for him too. I think that comes out in the wash."

"We do include his laundry with ours," Ian laughed.

"Yes, the Vance girls have been good about mucking in and not being prissy about only working the shop. And they've done well there too.

"If I tally all the food, fuel and rates, ... let me see ... comes to about £8. Lets say £3 a month to be safe."

"So adding up, allowing say a pound a month for the counter which will pay it off in a year, we get 8 for the "rent" if we can call it that, 3 each for the girls and the food etc., or £14 per month."

"What about revenues?" Ian touched on the main worry.

"The gross profit, as far as I can see so far, is about £49, and that includes Arthur's board and lodging. About £16 a month. So we're ahead by a small margin, but only if we don't pay ourselves. If we were to give ourselves 5 bob a week each, we'd about be in the red."

"What about our agency fees for *Fortescue Factory*?" Ian asked.

"Oh. I'd forgotten them. I've not put them in the ledger because we didn't settle up. I was going to do that when I went home to see Ma. I figured messing around with a postal order would be inefficient compared to visiting the Factory and getting paid in cash."

"How much is it now?"

Valerie answered "About 15 shillings. The deliveries only started in earnest a few weeks ago. They've helped Arthur too. I think *Best Bonnet* has been more or less a losing proposition up to now, but things are coming along in the last few weeks."

"Perhaps we've been worrying for nothing," Ian said. "Just the whole process of starting up taking a bit of time."

"But, you know, our capital was not very large. We don't have the reserves to survive a long patch of slow business."

"Well, we've now seen that we're at least not tossing money away. Any "loss" is that we're not getting our personal wages. Or rather the investment is not returning what it should. At least, not yet."

"Ian. Do you have your short, medium and long term list of things to be done handy?"

"I put it in my personal logbook. Right here."

Valerie said "Let's check and revise it as needed."

"All right.

"I think we managed to do all the really short-term things.

"We wanted better lighting in here, and the lamps you moved from stock that were least attractive have accomplished that. There's the new wing chairs you got ..."

“Oh, I forgot to put those in the stock book. I somehow treated them as personal items, but paid them out the till. There was a man came by said he was moving his family to Birmingham and did we buy things. Most of what he had was rubbish, but I paid him 10 bob for those chairs and a bunch of household items we’re using.”

“Not worth putting down as stock,” Ian suggested. “We had to put them in the sun for a couple of days then get Sarah to beat them furiously to get the dirt out.”

“And I’ve covered them with some hessian to hide the frays and holes. But they’re not uncomfortable,” Valerie admitted. “Ian. What about medium and long term?”

“We’ve got the counter set up properly now. Not even given any thought to using the back window to lift stock up to the workroom. I think we can suffer without that until next summer at the earliest. But I should add some grills for the front. I want to make sure the place can be secured. They’ll cost a bit, I think.”

“Would it be easier to have them inside the windows? Robbers will still smash the glass even if there’s a grill in front. They just can’t get at merchandise. We don’t put anything fancy in the window. Mostly signs and some current special items.”

“True,” Ian admitted. “Perhaps we can find some second-hand grillwork that can be fitted behind the windows. We want to let in light, just not burglars.”

“I’ll let everyone I write to know we’re looking. I’d better have the dimensions handy.”

“There’ll be the two side bays and the doors to cover plus the centre bay. Probably the side bays don’t need to be opened often, but the doors need to be easy as does the centre bay, since that grill will be right behind the counter. I could work it out now, but I’ll re-measure later today and give the figures to you on a slip of paper.”

“I actually was thinking of one more long-term thing we need.”

“What’s that?”

“I find it a great nuisance to take a bath. Mostly filling it, but especially emptying it into the sink here. I was thinking if the bath were on a slightly raised floor, a pipe could empty it and run out and down to where the water closets drain.”

“Or maybe a pipe down the outside wall. The main problem is that the door for this room comes straight in from the stairs.”

“Could it be moved over 6 feet, Ian. That would give room for the bath and a screened or even walled off area.”

“Depends if the wall is bearing the roof. Let me tap and see if we think there’s posts in the wall that we can’t bridge.”

After a few minutes of tapping, the feeling was that it should be possible to move the door.

"If the pipe went through the side wall of the building roughly where the kitchen door is now, would it be in the small alleyway or would it be into the newsagent?" Valerie asked.

"Let's do some measuring. I've got to do it for the grills anyway."

The next twenty minutes were spent measuring. Particularly, they measured inside from the rear wall to the kitchen door. Then outside from the corner of the building along the alleyway until they reached the addition to the newsagent.

"Couple of feet to spare," Ian said.

"Wonderful. So now we need to find someone to do the moving of the door, a raised floor and the plumbing. Perhaps it's foolish, but I'm prepared to dip into the 30 quid I have left."

"It would save work. Filling isn't so bad, but emptying always seems so much more effort."

"Well, you and I can share. As can the Vance girls. I think the bath they took a couple of weeks ago was the first they'd had apart from a shallow one you stand in and wash yourself."

"The tub we have – we use it for laundry too – isn't much better," Ian said. "It's really too small for me. Really awkward for me to pour water on my head when I want to wash my hair."

"More reason to share. I find the same thing. In fact, I was going to try today. Do we want to see if it is better so?"

"I ... I'm not sure. It seems a ... bit ... er ... familiar."

Valerie answered "I suppose. But if we're going to marry, we'll surely want to be comfortable with each other, dressed or not."

"Yes. I'd just not really thought about that."

"Well. You can help me fill and empty the tub. I'll leave it up to you whether you want us to bathe separately."

"No. No. I ... I'd like to. As you say, we're planning to marry, and then it will be expected that I am ... er ... familiar with your body."

"When we're done, we can have dinner. As you know, there's a stew been simmering on the stove since last night. I'll pop in some dumplings before we bathe and they'll be ready when we're done."

A stew and dumplings, Ian thought, had never tasted better. Despite her apparent matter-of-fact demeanour beforehand, Valerie was quite nervous as she undressed. So was Ian. Both were shy and awkward. Then Valerie got into the tub, where initially there was not very much water, and asked Ian to mix some hot and cold water in one of the zinc plated pitchers and help her wash her hair. It was so much easier for her to work with the softened soap while Ian poured.

“Oh. This really helps. I can lather my hair, then rinse twice.”

“We seem not to be spilling too much water,” Ian said. “It could damage the ceiling below. If we do build a raised floor, I think we should have a slight lip to catch water and possibly feed the drain too.”

“That’s a good idea.

“Can you wash my back?”

After having her back washed, Valerie washed her legs and feet, then had Ian help her to get out. She stood on one towel and dried with another.

“Your turn. I’ll pour for you to wash your hair. Let me refill the pitcher.”

When they were both dried off and dressed in fresh clothes they used a saucepan to scoop water into the pitcher which was then drained into the sink until they could lift the tub and pour the remaining water into the sink.

“Ian. Use a little hot water to rinse the tub before we hang it back on the wall. I’ll serve the stew.”

When they were eating, Valerie said “I hope I didn’t stare too much.”

Ian laughed “Nor me. I’ve not seen a woman naked before. Pictures once or twice, but not ... real.”

“I hope I didn’t cause disappointment. I don’t know whether I’ve a good figure. Certainly I’m not ... er ... very buxom.”

“I thought you looked nice. I ... er ... wanted to touch.”

“Oh. You could have asked. I would have let you.”

“Maybe next time,” Ian said.

“But then I could have touched you too,” Valerie said. “Oh, that sounds ... er ... very wanton. It’s more that I’m very curious to learn about ... well ... a man’s body.”

“I’m curious too,” Ian admitted.

“Perhaps we should arrange to marry soon. It would not do to be discovered bathing together beforehand.”

“What about at Christmas time? Though Christmas Day is a Friday this year.”

“Perhaps we could marry Christmas Eve in the morning,” Valerie suggested. “I could write to Ma and ask her if she can find a Methodist preacher from one of the chapels. Some of them have their services in private houses or small meeting rooms.”

“It would be good to have our families present.”

Autumn 1863

That autumn of 1863 saw a quiet but steady progression in all the activities of the group of entrepreneurs that had evolved from the initial venture of

Cassandra Match, now Cohen, on Fortescue Road in Brighton. The most recent of these, *Upton & Hoyle* gradually stabilized its revenues.

Ian and Valerie had got to know their neighbours in the newsagency. When he introduced himself, the newsagent said “David Smith – and worst luck I’m Smith, as W H seems to be the one who is known in my trade.” Still, David and his wife Margaret became friends.

On the other side was a plain house, which seemed empty. However, one morning Arthur saw a quite elderly man leaving and locking the front door. Arthur greeted him with “Good morning, sir. I’m one of your new neighbours, Arthur Anderson of *Best Bonnet Cartage*.”

In response, the man simply made a “Hmph” and turned away. It was a few days later before Margaret Smith explained that Mr. Hartree was a widower who seemed never to talk to anyone but the Church of England vicar and a Mr. Walmsley who was his solicitor. Hartree came and went quietly at odd hours.

The Smiths helped Ian find a tinsmith who could adapt a new tin tub he and Valerie obtained from the ironmonger. After some discussion, it had been decided to install the tub in the diagonally opposite corner to their original design. There was a space of four feet to the right of the front window. Putting the tub on a dais along the wall with the bedroom would allow a drain through the front wall. The only nuisance was that water would then tumble beside one of the shop doors unless some sort of piping were added, which was done discretely so it followed the corner of one window. Not the most elegant appearance, but functional.

The tinsmith made a drain box with a pipe, and Jinks the builder made a hole through to the outside, then fitted it with mortar. The tinsmith added a drain to the tub, which was placed on the platform Ian and Arthur built, then covered with varnished sailcloth. The drain hole could be plugged with a wooden stopper. Removing the stopper let the contents of the tub fall into the drain box and thence outside. A wooden cover for the drain box stopped draughts. Following an idea that Tom Soulton had developed a decade earlier, simple screens were made that could provide privacy for bathing. The tub did not need fastening to the platform. Indeed it could be taken out for better cleaning or use elsewhere, or the platform could be used as a space for someone to sleep.

The builder, Sylvester Jinks, was quite taken with a sideboard in mahogany that was in the showroom. “Be a nice match for our dining table, except that ain’t straight. Wife’s been suggesting we get rid of it and find something better.”

Valerie said “It may be possible to repair the problem. Unfortunately, being new in Crawley, we haven’t yet got someone to work on such pieces. But your table might accelerate our search for such a person.”

That very day, Valerie wrote to Vera and Tom Soulton, asking if they had any ideas of someone who was capable. By return of post, Vera wrote that Tom had by chance met a man in Lewes while on a buying mission with Maud. Tony and Moonbeam had come along to bring back any purchases, which were expected from the type of sale. As the cart was being loaded, a man commented "Nice wood, but work to get the pieces in proper condition."

Out of this came a conversation that the man was, by his own wish, a cabinet maker, though he worked often on jobs that were simple carpentry.

"From where do you hail?" Tom asked.

"Three Bridges" came the answer.

Further conversation resulted in an exchange of names. Nicholas Clarkson was the man's name, and Vera passed it along to Valerie. Valerie found out where Clarkson lived and she and Ian went to talk to him.

Clarkson said "Seen your shop. Wondered if I could sell you some things I could make."

Valerie answered "We'd be foolish not to listen to what you might be able to offer, Mr. Clarkson. However, we're here today to ask if you are interested in work refurbishing pieces. One of our clients has a table that is apparently crooked."

"Can never guarantee a repair, but like you, I'd be foolish not to listen."

They all laughed. Valerie said "For our shop, we'd ask you to give us the amount you want. If we sell the goods, we pay you as soon as we have the money, and our terms are cash on delivery. Thus you would have to wait until your work was sold, but would not be waiting for a debtor to honour his signature. Moreover, we are starting to look to buy pieces at auction or estate sales, and would possibly have restoration work for you, which we would pay on completion of the work. We'd also be happy to pass on commissions, but would ask a penny in the shilling consideration for the referral for the first two pounds and half that on the remainder. We are agents for *Best Bonnet Cartage*, so have transport for pieces. But I must tell you also that we have a large workroom, and are hoping to engage someone who is interested in refinishing and polishing pieces there."

"Would you consider a beginner?" Clarkson asked.

"We've all been beginners, and not so long ago," Ian said.

"Barry, Barry! Come out here a minute," Clarkson called.

A youth of about 15 came into the parlour where they were talking. "Barry. This is Miss Upton and Mr. Hoyle of the new furniture shop. They're looking for someone to work refinishing and polishing furniture."

Valerie added "The duties would include some other things. We all fill in when there is a need. I'm afraid that means everything from receiving an aristocrat who has an appointment outside regular hours to sweeping the floor. We all do what we have to so the business prospers, and we give our

staff a modest commission for their part in revenues as well as their wage. I should add that a lot of the items we have for sale are sent to us by others who tell us the price they want on sale. We are free to adjust what we ask, for example, if someone is making a big order and a discount will aid the sale. But the supplier gets their price as soon as possible after a sale. It could be that you see items to refurbish yourself, or items you make, that you wish to have us display for sale.”

Thus Barry Clarkson started work in the large room at the end of October. This meant some adjustment of how laundry was hung on days when a wash was done. Barry decided to stay living at home, which turned out to benefit all concerned, as he would comment to his father about items that might sell. Gradually oddments made by Nicholas appeared with Barry when he arrived in the morning. An inkstand. Wood and brass candle holders. A cutlery tray. A sewing box that opened up to display notions, tools and threads. Nicholas would attach a ticket with his name, and a note on the remuneration he wanted on sale. His items were good quality, fairly priced, and sold well. Moreover, they were small enough that they could easily be added to the showroom inventory.

By early December, *Upton & Hoyle* had one of the Soulton handcarts which they arranged to share as needed with Arthur, who, talking to Barry, arranged to have a local schoolboy, Elwyn Brompton, use for small collections and deliveries, initially on the basis of a few hours a week, but gradually increasing. And of course, larger commissions got passed on to Arthur or laid off to Thompson and his horse Lizzy.

Ian or Valerie would take Barry and the handcart when seeking items at sales. Slowly the workroom acquired pieces that were being cleaned, adjusted and polished, with Barry’s father taking on some of the trickier jobs. In one case, Valerie took a chance on some chairs and a table that had suffered considerably at the hands of a drunken party celebrating the 21st birthday of a local minor aristocrat. The pieces all had breakages in legs, arms, and backs, as well as some scratches and gouges. A side table had been placed on the dining table and used as a target for knife throwing. Since the purchases of the ensemble was at the rate of firewood, Valerie was not too concerned that they would suffer a loss. As it turned out, they did exceedingly well on the transaction, as did the Clarksons, though the conclusion of the process lasted well into 1864.

Barry’s presence allowed Arthur to initiate the construction of a second shelter. By this time Tony had acquired Jewel and Hesper. There was not enough work for all the donkeys in Brighton, nor truthfully did Arthur yet have enough in Crawley. Still, he knew where to look for Thompson of an evening and sat down to talk to him over a pint.

“My boss has bought two more donkeys in Brighton.”

"Does 'e have enough work for 'em?" Thompson asked.

"Not really. One reason for getting 'em was because two of the three we have now are getting older. They're still good for some time yet, but we don't like to push them."

"Will he send one up here?"

"I think that's the hope. Donkeys like company of their own kind. Perhaps it would make sense for days when you've smaller commissions to work out an arrangement that benefits us both."

"Might work. The two-wheel cart you 'ave is a lot more nimble than Lizzy and her big cart. But ain't donkeys stubborn?"

Arthur related the story of the gas explosion. Then also the story of Olivia Crouch.

"Oh. I 'eard about that. So it was your man who pulled Miss Crouch out the sea."

"Mr. Brown says it were Moonbeam who did the job. I gotta' say, I've no problems with Annabelle. Mostly don't have to do anything, 'cos she knows the way. But I've never tried to hurry her. Tony mentioned that after the gas explosion he jogged along and Moonbeam followed, so he got her to go faster to the hospital that way."

"Do I see a cat on your cart?"

"Yeah. Percy. Sleeps in Annabelle's hay rack. They've done this for about a decade. Old Percy's getting a bit old now. I'm a bit worried if 'e uses up his ninth life how Annabelle will react."

Indeed, we've not mentioned that Percy came along to Crawley. Nor that Valerie had arranged with Nancy and Sarah to bring a couple of almost grown kittens from the small-holding so the shop would have rodent control. Given the twins names, the kittens were named Ess and Enn.

Arthur also asked Thompson "Wanted to ask if you knew of some reasonable stabling close by. We put up the shelters, and they work fine to keep the rain off the beasts, but I'd like somewhere a bit cosier for Annabelle when there's frost and snow."

"I might 'ave a bit of room. But as you know, I'm not as close by as you might like. But ya' know, the White Hart was set up as a coaching inn. Behind they used to have space for 180 horses. Not sure what the situation is now. Railway's killed a lot of the coach traffic, but there's still some. At one time you could leave for London or Brighton every hour. Not even that many trains, but o' course they're faster."

An attempt at a quiet wedding

Rebecca had discovered a small group of nonconformists who met in the parlour of one of their more well-off members. She joined the meeting twice in October, two weeks apart. The preacher, Mr. Steady, was a schoolteacher in a private school. At her second meeting, Rebecca asked if she might talk to him privately at some point. They agreed he would come for tea to *Uptons* the following Wednesday.

Elsie served tea and Treats, and retired discreetly to the kitchen.

“How may I be of service, Mrs. Upton?”

“My daughter Valerie has, with Mr. Ian Hoyle, established a business similar to the one in these premises in Crawley. It is called *Upton and Hoyle*, with the money from my daughter being the larger portion of the investment. However, she and Mr. Hoyle are inclined to marry, since they believe a couple that wants to live and work together should declare their intentions before God and society. This would, of course, mean she lost control of her fortune should the marriage be registered.”

“I was about to say that our current little group does not have licensed premises, Mrs. Upton.”

“That could, in the present case, be an advantage. Valerie and Ian are in favour of the institution of marriage, but not the unfortunate imposition that our laws make upon the wealth women have accumulated.”

“I suppose I could conduct a religious ceremony, following the traditional form in the Book of Common Prayer. We may have broken with the Church of England in a few respects, but still use that.

“Mrs. Upton. Can I be direct and ask if you and your daughter and Mr. Upton are believers?”

“To be equally direct, I must say I am not sure that they – we – are believers as you might interpret that word. However, as far as I am aware, all of us do have a belief in God, and in the precepts taught in most churches. We are not devout. I fear it would be very wrong of me to pretend otherwise. However, both my daughter and Mr. Hoyle take life seriously. They are giving several young people employment at honest wages with incentives for initiative. I am most proud of my daughter, and I have respect and affection for Mr. Hoyle.

“For what it is worth, I know we will be happy to contribute to your group so they can begin to work towards their own chapel. I came to the meetings because I wanted to ensure I would feel at home in such a group, and I have realized that while I might not be as regular an attendee as some, you will see me from time to time in the congregation.”

“I appreciate your candour, Mrs. Upton. I will be happy to conduct a

ceremony for Miss Upton and Mr. Hoyle, assuming we can work out arrangements. Do you have a time and place in mind?"

"The morning of Christmas Eve has been suggested, since they cannot leave their shop for too long. I thought we might use the Presentation Space here. Shall I show it to you?"

The late post the next day brought Valerie a letter that she and Ian could marry at *Uptons* on Christmas Eve with Rev. Steady officiating. Half past nine was the suggested time. Rebecca thought a £10 donation to the chapel construction fund would be appropriate.

Valerie and Ian did not say very much about their plans. Ian wrote to his parents to invite them to *Uptons* at the appropriate time for the wedding. They thought they would just have a quiet ceremony. However, they did have to arrange with Arthur, Nancy, Sarah and Barry when the shop would be open or closed.

Eventually it was decided that Arthur would stay in Crawley for Christmas and would likely spend the day with the Vances. The Smiths in the newsagency said they would be happy to watch in case of burglars, though Arthur planned to be away only for the day.

Valerie and Ian would depart in the afternoon of December 23 and return on December 27. Ian was going to alight at Lewes and spend the night with his family, then all would go to *Uptons* in the morning, indeed getting up quite early on Christmas Eve.

Valerie was surprised that evening after dinner when Frieda and Winifred of the *Brighton Ladies Emporium* came with several of the dressmakers and presented her with a skirt, blouse and jacket forming a very stylish costume. Frieda said "You probably have chosen your apparel for the wedding, but this will serve for a number of occasions in your personal and business life." Valerie was surprised, overwhelmed, and teary. She thanked the ladies profusely, and gave her mother a pointed glance, since Rebecca must have passed along her measurements in some way.

On Christmas Eve morning, it was fortunate that the weather was mild – a thermometer on the wall of the Presentation Space registered 44 Fahrenheit at half-past eight. The Hoyles arrived soon after 9 o'clock, soon followed by Joseph and Mary with Ursula. Ian had his valise which was put away. Rebecca had organized the Presentation Space so much of the furniture was stored elsewhere or pushed carefully to one side by Trevor Hoyle – who had not gone home to his family – and Hugh Talbot. Mr. Steady came a few minutes later. It was good that Trevor had arranged some coat hooks so all the coats could be hung up. Ian was wearing a suit he had acquired in the summer. Henry had quietly advised that as proprietor of what hopefully would become an important business, he should have appropriate attire for occasions requiring him to fill his role.

Trevor was the witness – coming to be known as the Best Man – for Ian, his brother, and Mary, Joseph’s wife, would stand up for Valerie. The ladies who had come the previous evening arrived and were pleased to see Valerie in the new outfit they had made. In thinking of a quiet and informal ceremony, she had intended to wear her best dress, but the new costume gave her a gravity that she felt appropriate.

Just before half-past nine, the core wedding party was suddenly surprised as a great many friends arrived. Many of the residents of Fortescue Road came, as did most of those from *Matilda’s* except for one of the new carters who was left for security. They were joined by a few of the staff of *Fortescue Factory* and most of the people from *Soultons* and the Meadow came too.

Joshua and Rachel Goldman came in just before Rev. Steady started the ceremony, with Henry and Maud and their two older children right behind them.

Rev. Steady began “Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you here today to witness and celebrate the marriage of Valerie Upton and Ian Hoyle. I have been asked to inform you that after the ceremony, there will be refreshments here in this space. Now let us begin.

“Dearly beloved: We have come together ...”

Steady was careful to use the Book of Common Prayer more or less verbatim, but he carefully trimmed any excess, and chose very succinct readings from scripture. The entire ceremony was less than a quarter hour. After he gave the blessing of the newly joined couple, he addressed the group, which had filled the space almost to the point of crowding, in part because it still had some furniture for presentation.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to add personal congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Hoyle. I anticipated a very small, quiet ceremony. Instead I find a warm and enthusiastic group of friends and supporters. That speaks to respect and affection. My very best wishes to them.”

Henry Mortimer moved beside Rev. Steady. “Valerie and Ian may want to look at the small table in the corner where there is a set of dishes and cutlery that friends have contributed to purchase. Moreover, I am informed that the costume worn by the bride was manufactured as a present by a number of ladies from the *Emporium*. Thanks to all of you who have come today to celebrate with the happy couple.”

Valerie whispered to Ian “I think you have to say something in thanks.” However, Ian was already moving to stand beside Henry. He actually surprised Valerie by having a strong and steady voice when he said “My new wife and I are surprised and overwhelmed by the support all of you have shown in being here today. We are immensely grateful for that and for the gifts, which we will treasure, and be able to remember this occasion every time we use them.”

Cloths were removed from a pair of tables revealing various savoury and sweet edibles that somehow had been spirited in from *Fortescue Factory*. A third table had bottles of beer, sherry and port. Henry said “ Before we emulate the locusts of one of the biblical plagues in emptying the delicacies from the food tables, may I ask each of you to obtain a glass of something, and we will toast Ian and Valerie.”

There was a general, but orderly, milling around as everyone got a glass, Trevor and Mary together, and in a well-coordinated way, offered the toast, and had cleverly brought a glass each to Valerie, Ian and Rev. Steady. Trevor had, in fact, asked the latter what he preferred – sherry, and they used their familiar knowledge of the others.

After the toast, as Henry had intimated, there was an enthusiastic descent on the food tables.

Ian and Valerie were still standing near where they had made their vows when Bobby approached with a tray. “I thought you and Rev. Steady might not get a chance at the delicacies, so I prepared three plates.”

Valerie said “Reverend Steady, this is Roberta Pope, who was caretaker and cook at *Matilda’s* when I lived and worked there.”

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Pope.”

“Likewise, Rev. Steady.”

Joshua and Rachel were passing, having carefully chosen some food that would satisfy their dietary restrictions. Steady said “Mr. Goldman, is it not?”

“Indeed, Rev. Steady. May I introduce my wife Rachel.”

After acknowledgements were complete, Steady said “One of my congregation is a Mr. Hackman. I believe he purchased the stock and goodwill of your business.”

“Indeed, Rev. Steady. I hope he is doing well with it, as he seemed to be a sober and decent man. The pawn trade can sometimes attract less than stellar actors, and by its nature has often to deal with those in distress. Moreover, as you are certainly aware, scriptures of Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions all have a low opinion on charging for a loan.”

“It is a conundrum that usury is considered with such opprobrium, but that our society requires ways to allow those with some wealth to make it useful. The issue is, I fear, how to make that process just and fair. ‘Just’ and ‘fair’ are such difficult concepts.”

Across the room, now noisy with conversation, the food table was almost empty. Many of the guests had business today. Indeed, the *Emporium* and *Matilda’s* both had put up signs that they would re-open at 11 o’clock after closing for a wedding ceremony. *Uptons* could not really close their doors, so Hugh Talbot was in the shop, and in fact sold a couple of small linens.

After the wedding

By a quarter to 11, there were just Valerie and Ian and those who normally occupied *Uptons*. Rebecca realized that she had no idea what Ian and Valerie planned for the rest of the day. It had been agreed that they would have the master bedroom for the time they were at *Uptons*, and Rebecca would put a cot in the room she had occupied when Mary and Joseph lived there. That room now housed Elsie Moore, who marvelled that this was the most commodious space she had ever had. Her escape from the degrading trade off North Street meant she was more than willing to share space for a few days.

Christmas dinner was being shared with *Matilda's*, but Rebecca and Elsie were going to do the turkey. They had plucked the bird before Ian and Valerie arrived, but there was plenty still to do to get ready for the morrow. Valerie's offer to help had been formally rejected but informally accepted under slightly different terms. That is, she was told she was a guest, but allowed to undertake tasks like preparing the cutlery and crockery that would be needed, as well as folding napkins, finding table decorations and a myriad of other tasks.

Ian, similarly told he was a guest, somehow was allowed to select some furniture that would be taken to *Matilda's* to provide sufficient place for everyone to be seated.

At one o'clock, Elsie called that there was soup, which was taken in shifts so that the shop was manned at all times. Then Valerie said she wanted a walk on the Promenade. She had already changed out of her new costume as soon as she could. It would be a tragedy to get it stained or torn. She found her coat, gloves, a scarf and a beret. Ian had also changed before working with the furniture. Likewise he found his outerwear, and they departed.

The front was, as may be expected, quite chill and blustery. Our newly-weds had good reason to cling tightly to each other. After a half mile, they found a sheltered bench, but realized the seat was wet from blown rain.

"Let's go in that pub," Valerie suggested.

Inside there was a fire and they found a double seat not too far from the hearth. Ian brought Valerie some cider and a glass of ale for himself. At this time of the afternoon, there was nobody else in the room where they chose to sit.

"Were you happy with the ceremony?" Ian asked.

"Indeed. Though I was much surprised by how many people came, and their generosity towards us."

"Yes. I thought we would have a much smaller congregation."

"I have a feeling Ma was talking to people. Certainly the amount of food

and drink that was brought was much more than I anticipated. There must have been some talk among people.”

“The crockery and cutlery are of a decent style and pattern. I wonder how we thank people. I don’t think there is a list of names.”

“Perhaps we can put an announcement in the *Brighton Herald*,” Valerie suggested.

“Yes. That would be inclusive of everyone if we word things carefully.”

Valerie suggested “How about

“Mr. and Mrs. Ian Hoyle wish to thank their friends and acquaintances for their support and generosity on the occasion of their recent marriage. We are extremely grateful for the gifts which will be used with appreciation, we hope for many years to come.”

“Yes. I like that. And it makes public that we are married.

“Valerie. Will you be comfortable sharing a bed tonight.”

“Of course. We’ve shared a bath already. I’d hoped to get another chance to do that, as I find I am curious. However, I should alert you that we will not be able to try to consummate our marriage for a few days. Not because I’m unwilling, just that I have the monthly visitor.”

“I am woefully ignorant how that affects women,” Ian said.

“It is a great inconvenience. To some women much worse than that. I get uncomfortable and irritable a day or so before the courses, and then have to be cautious to avoid blood on my clothing.”

“My sisters were always very secretive about such things.”

“But I think men are secretive too. I know there were a couple of times when I found wet sticky patches on the sheets of Joseph’s bed, but he didn’t want to talk about it.”

“Sometimes you get a dream about ... er ... ”

“Sexual congress?” Valerie offered.

“Yes. Or similar activity. And then somehow you get an emission. It’s rather embarrassing. You can get the emission from touching, but the bible calls that onanism and says it is sinful. I’m not sure why.”

“Society seems to get awfully preoccupied with sex. Especially if people are enjoying themselves,” Valerie said.

Chuckling, Ian said “Yes. It does seem that there is a grand conspiracy to prohibit pleasure.”

“Well. We are now married, and supposedly the marriage bed is private and the pleasures pertaining to it are sanctioned.”

Ian said “Valerie. My affection for you grows each time you express such clear and sensible thoughts about how the pair of us may behave towards each other.” He leaned over and gave her a kiss, noting her cheek was still chill from the outside air.

1864 Begins

With New Year's Day on a Friday and not a holiday, both *Matilda's* in Brighton and *Upton & Hoyle* in Crawley were open for business. They were, in fact, both quite busy that day.

It was Sunday, January 3, that would allow time for reflection. The weather was indifferent, with the temperature hovering at the freezing point, but there was only scattered rain, and very little of it fortunately.

At *Matilda's*, Tony and Jane decided not to go to church. Tony went to the stalls and fed and watered the donkeys. He raked out the bedding and set down new. There were four of them here now, but Tony was working out how to get Jessie to Crawley in a useful way. That is, he didn't want to move the jenny without carrying some cargo. An arrangement had been made at the beginning of December for some space in the stables of the White Hart. Annabelle and Percy were there at night, out of draughts. There was a pair of stalls where the divider had been smashed by a big stallion. Arthur realized this would allow two or even more donkeys to see each other. However, he did ask if he could saw off any splintered edges that might injure the donkeys. The rent for this damaged space was minimal, but it was much more protected than the lightweight shelters at *U & H*. Tony wondered if he should talk to Valerie and Ian about more substantial stabling. For the moment, probably not. It was not certain what directions all the businesses would take.

On his way upstairs, he asked Peter and Thomas if they wanted breakfast soon. It was after 8 but still quite dark out. Tony supposed he could have asked them to look after the donkeys, but he was attached to the beasts, particularly Moonbeam, and to some extent Jessie. It was a pity that Annabelle was now in Crawley. She and Tony knew each other first. And he had walked Jessie from Tangmere to Brighton when he bought her more than 4 years before.

Peter said "Nice not to 'ave to get out o' bed."

Thomas made some similar noises as a clock nearby sounded the quarter. Tony said "I'll tell Bobby breakfast can be at 9. Bacon and eggs." He knew the last phrase would get the boys up.

Returning upstairs, he found Bobby in the kitchen fully dressed and working on several tasks, having got the stove stoked and the vent open. "Good work, Bobby. The chill's almost gone from here."

"I 'eard about breakfast at nine. That'll be easy. Do you want dinner at one o'clock?"

"Let's have a hot meal at 6 this evening, then Jane and I will bathe, so make sure there's extra hot water. After we're done, you could take a bath

and have the kitchen to yourself while we take an early night. I'll also make sure the upstairs stove is better stoked than last night. I think we put in too little coal and left the vent open too much and it went out."

"Yeah. Chilly this morning."

Tony ascended to the top floor and found Jane submerged under several layers of blankets with just the top of her head and forehead showing. He kissed the only patch of skin he could see and a voice said "I'll get up in April. Leave me alone until then."

"Eggs and bacon in three quarters of an hour."

"Then we have half an hour still. Come back to bed."

Tony had put on trousers and a heavy sweater over pyjamas. As yet pyjamas were not very common for men's sleepwear, but had been known in Britain for over a century, sometimes for casual wear during the day. Still, Tony had somehow acquired some, and found they kept him warmer in bed. Jane still wore a nightgown, in winter of flannel, but when it was very cold, she stole a pair of pyjama pants from Tony too. She acquired a bolt of woolen flannel from *B & J* and the ladies at the Meadow sewed nightgowns and pyjamas for themselves and Tony and Jane. Tony was a little ahead of fashion. In a decade, nightgowns would become less common for men.

"Jane. Do you think we should engage another woman so Valerie's room is occupied? Or one of the ladies from the Meadow, if there is suitable employment for her here?"

"At the moment I cannot think of appropriate and profitable work here rather than at the Meadow. But I understand your thinking. It actually seems to me that you could probably use someone who could drive a donkey cart or else push a hand cart. I think if they stay on this floor, I prefer to have a woman, however. Possibly Margaret Cantley if her assignment comes to an end and we have no other for her."

"Perhaps Angela would like to move here to have her own room. I don't know what Maud would think, but it seems that one of the younger children must be getting old enough to need more space."

"You should ask Angela tomorrow. It would be silly if she moves from Chorley Terrace when there is space here."

"You know, our photographs should be ready tomorrow."

As a Christmas present to each other, Tony and Jane had decided to get photographic portraits. Jane had further suggested they get lockets for the photographs, and they had commissioned very simple ones of silver, with chains from a local jeweller.

Jane asked "You will not object to wearing a locket, Tony?"

"Why should I?"

"They are not commonly something a man wears."

"One more way in which I am different, Jane."

Meanwhile in Crawley, Ian and Valerie were keeping under the blankets. Ian said "I can see my breath. It's cold this morning."

Valerie responded "I hope Arthur will poke the fire in the stove." Since Arthur slept on the coal bin, he often did this, but Sarah or Nancy would also get the stove recharged if they were up. Valerie was glad they had installed the stove in the workroom, and it was positioned not far from the door of the room where the girls slept. If they opened the door, some warmth would transfer to the area where they slept.

Ian said "I'll get up in 10 minutes and make sure. Arthur will want to check that Annabelle is all right over at the White Hart."

"But first put your arms around me. I need your warmth."

"That seems to work both ways, thankfully."

"Ian. Let us get the stove good and hot this evening. We can put up the screens and bathe together. It is time we made our marriage complete." With Valerie's monthlies and then the cold weather, they had not found conditions amenable to undressing.

"I've wondered if I should suggest putting up some screens in the workroom so the others could sleep near the stove there if they wished."

"We'll suggest it at breakfast, which we'd better start upon. I think Nancy wants to go to church."

Jessie's journey

It was the end of January before Tony had a usable load for Jessie to take to Crawley. The wedding presents had been boxed and shipped with some of the *Fortescue Factory* products. However, early January Maud had found some dilapidated furniture at a sale and *Soultons* had done a good job on refurbishing it. The items were more filthy than damaged, and had shined up relatively easily. There should be a good profit all round. Tony suggested a very modest cartage to move the bulk of the items to Crawley, essentially all that could be fitted on Jessie's cart and not overload the donkey. Tony himself would drive her there. The weather was a bit warmer in the last week of the month, and on Thursday, January 28, Tony left *Matilda's* at first light. He took things slowly, walking beside Jessie all the way, arriving at *Upton & Hoyle* as the winter sun was setting.

Arthur had Elwyn and Barry help unload, the cart was unhitched and put in one of the shelters, then Arthur and Tony took Jessie to the White Hart. The donkeys recognized each other and snickered gently. Tony noticed Percy in the hay rack. Good.

Tony and Arthur carefully groomed Jessie and checked her hooves. Tony

also looked at Annabelle's hooves too. Arthur had asked him to, just in case he had missed anything. All seemed fine. As they finished up giving the donkeys some oats as a treat, Tony also reached into his satchel and produced a pair of apples. They were slightly wrinkled, having been stored since the autumn, but it was clear the two donkeys appreciated them.

Over supper, with Sarah and Nancy present, Valerie asked Tony "Are you planning to train Elwyn to handle Jessie?"

"I've not met him yet, unfortunately."

Sarah suddenly spoke up. "Would you consider me as a donkey driver? I really love Annabelle."

Arthur said "Sarah has come out with me a few times, and she's had no problem leading Annabelle."

Valerie said "Actually, I've wondered if Elwyn would be comfortable with the animals. He seems timid around Annabelle, or indeed horses on the street. On the other hand, he seems to want to spend time with Barry cleaning and repairing things, and I've seen him in the showroom."

Nancy said "'e's asked me about how we handle the pricing of items when they don't 'ave a ticket. I think selling might be something 'e wants to try."

"I've found 'im reliable on the hand cart. But truthfully, not really enough for him to do that every day, especially now Jessie's here."

"Do we have enough work for both donkeys?" Tony asked.

"Not really, but Thompson – he wants to meet you tomorrow morning – has been sharing some work. He can handle much bigger loads with his horse Lizzy, but often gets smaller commissions and the donkey carts are a lot easier to manoeuvre. Being nimble means the job is done with less work and quicker. We're workin' out how we'll share, but with Jessie as well as Annabelle, we could cover a wider territory."

Tony said "Well, I expect Valerie, Ian and I can figure out how to apportion wages so Sarah can spend time to become a donkeyman and Elwyn to be a salesman in the shop. As long as the work is done and done well, it's better that people are happy in their activities."

"Thank you, Mr. Brown," Sarah said.

"Are we breaking even yet on direct expenses – feed, wages and stabling?" Tony asked.

"Yes. I'll show you the figures after supper," Arthur replied. "Not making pots of money, but there's a small bit above the line."

Valerie said "We're glad Arthur's here. Without the regular transport, we'd not be doing very well. As it is, my figures show we are more than covering our expenses after just half a year. And unless I'm really mistaken, we're seeing people from Horsham and the Arun Line as well as from East Grinstead. Hopefully soon from Tunbridge Wells, as I'm hopeful to have a

few better quality items in the shop soon, though they keep putting back the opening of the line.”

After supper had been cleared away, Arthur and Tony looked over the figures while sipping mugs of tea. Then, with the longer winter hours, everyone worked to get ready for bed. Tony was sleeping in the kitchen in the cot Ian had used earlier. He and Valerie realized it was helpful to be able to accommodate a guest, and the kitchen was possibly the cosiest place.

Arrival of Spring - Brighton

A day before the Spring equinox, Sunday 20 March 1864, Tony and Jane went to Hove, partly because Jane had never been there and partly to celebrate, if a few days late, Tony’s 25th birthday. The weather was mild, but showery. They both had mackintosh coats, Tony a hat and Jane a scarf over her head, since the blustery sea breeze made use of an umbrella futile.

They spent almost two hours walking about. Given the time they now had spent together, they did not talk much. Jane put her arm through Tony’s as they walked. Their established intimacy meant an almost invisible gesture was enough for both to be looking in the same direction. The targets of their view could be a swooping bird, a crashing wave, a stylish house, or a bedraggled pony struggling to pull a cart that was too heavy for the beast.

Eventually, they tumbled into a pub and had some soup, bread and cheese, with tankards of cider.

“To your quarter century,” Jane said, raising her glass.

“Thank you, Jane.”

“You’ve done well, Tony. Not many your age, man or woman, have a fortune like yours, especially a fortune started from nought.”

“I was immensely lucky to have been found by Mrs. Cohen. I sometimes wonder what would have happened to me otherwise. Or if I had been forced into dresses. I fear I would have disappeared into a very different life, one where I likely would not have found books, or travel, or you, Jane. But a lot of my fortune is because I discovered my inheritance.”

“I suppose so, though I think you were still doing much better than most before that, though I only arrived as the matter of Ezekiel was being settled. However, it is daunting to think of the small accidents that are critical to success. Or disaster. I could have been married off to a cruel man, rather than Robert. Or one whose seed led to a fatal childbirth. I might never have discovered the joy of ... you know.”

“We have been incredibly fortunate, Jane. When I pray – and not necessarily in church, because I often find my spiritual moments are more fre-

quently when walking with Moonbeam – I always try to express my gratitude.”

“Gratitude to God?” Jane asked.

“I suppose. Though sometimes I think how we hear about God in church is too narrow. I think maybe gratitude to all that is good in the universe.”

Arrival of Spring - Crawley

The same morning, Arthur went early to the White Hart to feed and care for the donkeys. Nancy and Sarah had gone to their parents’ smallholding on Saturday night, so Ian and Valerie were alone. Moreover, Arthur was going to walk to the Vance smallholding to spend the day there.

Ian had heard Arthur leave, with the key turning in the lock of one of the front doors. Indeed, Valerie had ensured there was a key hanging on a hook under the counter so egress would be possible in an emergency. Hearing Arthur leave, Ian got up and stoked the stove, making sure the hot water containers were full. He visited the water closet then came back to bed.

Valerie stirred. “Did I hear you at the stove?”

“Yes. We have the house to ourselves. I thought we might bathe this morning.”

“And ...?”

“Well, yes. We have only ... er ... shared our bodies three times so far since we married. It has been cold, and I fear I hurt you the first time.”

“A little. Ma told me to expect that. But it is still interesting.”

“Did you find pleasure?”

“Yes. More than I expected.”

“Does that ... er ... displace your pull towards men?”

“Perhaps. Certainly I’ve discovered that I like being close to you, and the congress is ... er ... compelling.”

“Ian. Compelling describes the feeling I have too. I found pleasure the subsequent times, but I think there may be more as we become familiar with each other.”

“Ooh. I need the water closet too.”

“Turn the key in the kitchen door when you return.”

On Valerie’s return, the hot water was not sufficiently heated to allow for bathing, but they decided to stand in the tub and wash, then returned to their bed. Ian was about to pull up the covers, but Valerie said “Don’t. I want to see.”

“Do you need to put on your spectacles?” Ian teased.

“No I’ll just have to get very close. There. Now I have hold of you, and I won’t let you get away.”

“Oh. That’s so strong. Valerie. If you keep doing that ”

“Keep doing this?”

“No. Yes. Ooooh.”

“How interesting and exciting. You spurted all over your belly and almost to your chest. Let me get a flannel and wipe you off.”

When Ian was wiped off, Valerie lay beside him.

Ian said “I was afraid you would be repulsed by seeing that happen.”

“Not at all. I’m your wife. You’re my husband. And perhaps it is a little ... er ... untidy. But I suspect I am now wet too.”

“Really? Did you pee yourself?”

“No. But I’ve been learning that when I get ... er ... excited ... I get wet and slippery ... between my legs.”

“Can I look?”

“Of course you can, Ian.”

Ian knelt. Valerie opened her legs. “You can kneel between if you like.”

“Yes. I’d looked a bit before, and there is a sort of slit below the ... er ... triangle of hair. But now it is more puffed out and there is moisture. Can I touch?”

“If you don’t I’ll get annoyed. But gently, of course.”

Some exploration ensued. At one point Valerie said “There, at the front. But extremely lightly. It is very sensitive.”

“But you kept touching me until my eruption.”

“Oh. Oh. I suppose I did, but it’s so ... oooo.”

Ian realized he should not overdo things. As Valerie calmed a little she said “You seem to have regained your hardness. Do you want to come inside me?”

Ian needed no encouragement. With the previous emission, he lasted a few minutes and they both enjoyed being entwined. Ian tried moving in different ways. “Do you like that better?”

“I like the variation. Oh. I’ll sound wanton, but I like all of it.”

Afterwards they lay naked in each other’s arms.

“That was really splendid, Ian. I can see how some women have so many children.”

“Do you wish lots of children, Valerie?”

“Not lots, and it would be nice if they did not come too quickly nor too close together. And I don’t really find babies interesting. But I would like children, I think. You?”

“For a long time I did not think about that. But now, I think yes. But like you, not too quickly. Though I suspect that is a matter of chance.”

“Shall we bathe now? I feel rather moist and sticky, though I think that is to allow us to better enjoy ourselves.”

Ian replied “Yes. Then some breakfast. Or perhaps you want breakfast first.”

“Better be dressed in case anyone calls. It would be awkward to be like this.”

They both laughed as they moved into the kitchen and Ian started to fill a pitcher of hot water while Valerie filled one with cold, pumping water from the tank beside the sink.

July 1 - One year in business

Upton & Hoyle celebrated the first anniversary of their opening with bunting and announcements of some special merchandise. This was primarily tablecloths, towels, and other linens, though these had become more expensive in the last couple of years due to the blockade on the Confederate States and their cotton. There were also some small furnishings. Barry and his father were able to fashion, for example, a small towel holder that allowed a hand towel to be kept beside a bowl and ewer spread on a rail so that it would dry. Moreover, by dint of some jigs and redesign, they could produce these at a price that was very attractive. The base was a square of polished wood, and various types of wood were offered. To this a brass wire was affixed using a smaller piece of the same wood and two brass screws. This smaller piece of wood had channels for a small triangle of the brass wire, which then was bent upwards as the vertical stand of the rack, then bent to a downward diagonal and finally across as the bar on which to hang the towel.

Barry wanted to add a wooden or brass ball to complete the towel bar so the end of the wire would inhibit the towel from sliding off the rack at the open end. Fixing such a ball so that it would not detach was a problem. Nancy, hearing Barry and Ian talking about the difficulty of attaching a ball to the wire without threading the wire or brazing on a ball, said “Why not simply make a small loop in the wire about half an inch in diameter. That will stop the towel from sliding off too easily.”

“That is a capital idea,” Ian said.

“I can make a jig to do that easily,” Barry added.

Such items turned out to be very profitable for *Upton & Hoyle*, since they were affordable, attractive, and useful for customers and used little space in the shop.

For the month before the anniversary, the carters had distributed announcements. *Fortescue Factory* had, without prompting once Mary Yarrow

heard about the event, offered to put announcements in with shipments of Treats that were destined for places near enough Crawley that it made sense to do so. Thus on the day, Valerie and Ian were almost overwhelmed by the number of customers, even though most were simply window shopping. The small items mentioned above converted a number of such tourists into buyers, which was most gratifying to our young proprietors.

Mr. Dockerty came by, and actually purchased a towel rack for his wife. "How are you doing Miss Upton ... er... or is it Mrs. Hoyle now?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Dockerty. I use Miss Upton for business, but Mrs. Hoyle in local society. I have been known by the former in business for some time, and we have the shop name too."

"Like some of the entertainers such as Lady Boothby, better known on stage as Mrs. Nisbett."

Valerie was not informed about this lady, but to avoid further discussion in the busy shop said "I do hope your wife will look favourably on the towel hanger. Do you wish that we disassemble it to make it easier to carry?"

"Is that possible?"

"Indeed. Let me show you."

Valerie took a small screwdriver from under the counter and loosened the two screws, and slid the brass wire from under this. "I will caution against over tightening, but also against allowing the wire to become loose. Note that the upper piece of wood has a channel that fits the triangle of wire to help secure the hanging rack."

"How deviously clever! Thank you."

Valerie said "Nancy. Can you wrap this for Mr. Dockerty and take his payment. I must attend to the customer Sarah is showing the dining room set. Thank you for coming today, Mr. Dockerty."

The customer was a middle-aged gentleman whose wife was standing silently beside him. Both were dressed quite formally. The temperature was not excessively warm for July, so they would not be uncomfortable today, but on most summer days they would be overdressed.

"May I be of assistance?" Valerie asked.

"Perhaps the owner might be able to enlighten us as to the provenance of this table and chairs. They appear new, but I would be unhappy to find later that we were deceived."

"I am Miss Upton, sir, and one of the proprietors. I purchased this set, in quite dirty condition I should add, a few months ago in an estate sale. We have, however, a workroom upstairs where one of our staff who is from a family of carpenters and cabinet makers has been able to remove the detritus and bring the wood to a fine finish. Miss Vance here and her sister also contributed by carefully shampooing the upholstery of the chairs. Beyond that I do not have more information on the provenance, save that

there is a ticket underneath indicating that it was manufactured by Harris Lebus, a firm with a strong reputation for good quality goods and with whom we have had occasional dealings, though primarily with our associated shop in Brighton. That firm was founded in 1840, though I expect this set is of more recent manufacture, most likely about a decade ago."

"Do you know whose estate you bought it from?"

"Nominally a Mrs. Doughty, but I believe the relatives were busy liquidating the former possessions of several family members as the house was far too full of objects, and it was clear many had been stored in places that were dusty. Some I had to eschew as they had water damage, which is too expensive to repair to make the effort worthwhile."

"Miss Upton, you are very young to be such a strong business person."

"My father died when I was quite young, and I had to assist my mother to salvage his business so we could avoid the Workhouse. Some very charitable people – one of them has just come into the shop to join our celebration – helped us get on our feet. Now Mr. Hoyle and I have branched out here and hope to provide first class goods and service for a long time."

The customer said "But that is Henry Mortimer. I have had dealings with him as I am a solicitor. Let me go and say hello. Martha, my dear, I think you may arrange the purchase and delivery of this set of table and chairs, unless I get a scurrilous report from Mortimer."

Henry and Maud came on July 1 in part as a way to support Valerie and Ian, but also for two other purposes. The first of these was to discharge the amounts due Maud for items that had been sold, which covered, as it turned out, most of what she had shipped to *U & H*. It had been intended to do the settlement much earlier, but a series of minor events contrived to delay the matter for almost three months.

The other additional reason to come was that Henry and Maud wished a day out for themselves, and had decided to come to Crawley, thence to Portsmouth on the Arun Line, and then back to Brighton after a meal somewhere. With two children of their own and two they had adopted, they sometimes yearned for some time to themselves.

After a brief visit in the shop, Valerie took them upstairs and gave Maud a reckoning to review, after which they each signed a copy and payment was made. Valerie had to make a brief visit to the bedroom to take money from the strongbox in one of the wardrobes.

Maud said "Henry. Do you have a safe place to put this?"

"My wallet is in my jacket here and my coin purse in my pocket, but there is a small pocket on the inside of my waistcoat. I'll put the majority of your well-earned gains there, my dear."

Valerie said "If it is more convenient to opening your vest, use the bedroom, or one of the water closets downstairs. The one accessible from the

shop is more ... ”

“Commodious?” Maud teased.

They laughed, but Henry did descend to the WC in the back room, with Maud not far behind, as the railways had not yet fully embraced the need to provide for all passenger comforts.

A celebratory dinner

It was the next evening when Valerie and Ian hosted a celebration dinner at the White Hart in a private dining room. Several Brighton guests were present and would stay overnight in various accommodations. Cassandra and Abraham, Tony and Jane, Mary and Michael Yarrow, Tom and Vera Soulton, Joseph and Mary and, of course, Rebecca. Trevor Hoyle came with Rebecca, but other members of the Hoyle family were uncomfortable in the midst of discussions about commerce. Sarah, Nancy and Arthur were also invited and accepted, but Barry, when the dinner was mentioned, said he didn’t feel comfortable at a formal dinner. When he said this, Elwyn agreed. Valerie suspected they were unsure of etiquette or else wondered about apparel.

The shop closed early at 4 o’clock so that people could have a chance to change for a meal starting at half-past five. Had anyone really needed to return to Brighton, they likely could have dined and departed. However, everyone had accommodations arranged, though only Rebecca and Trevor were at *U & H*, Rebecca on the cot in the kitchen, and Trevor on a palliasse in the workroom. The others had taken rooms in the hostelrys of the town.

As the dessert was being finished, Cassandra tapped a spoon against her wine glass to get the attention of the rather noisy group.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that it is fitting to acknowledge the success and progress of Valerie and Ian in establishing *Upton & Hoyle*. It is a pity that Maud and Henry Mortimer are not here, though they did come yesterday for the anniversary of the shop opening.

“I thought I should say something because it struck me looking round this table that this group represents a rather unique collection of business people because the majority of the principals are women. Now in our society, women have a great obstacle to building a fortune because if they marry their husband becomes the legal holder of their property in most situations.

“In my own case, it was Henry Mortimer who led me to establish a separate estate for a portion of my fortune. I probably did not need to do so, for I cannot fault my husband Abraham. He has been a rock on which we have built our life and work together, and I believe he has been responsible for the larger part of our prosperity together since we married.

“Others of you have made different choices, but all have had to deal with the shadow of coverture. I have read and heard of moves to change our laws, but I have no expectation that such change will be rapid. Still, I am encouraged that around this table we have examples of thriving businesses that owe their life and vigour to women. Moreover, in new friends like Nancy and Sarah Vance I see a succession. This does not mean that the role of men is diminished. It has been important to me that men and women go forward together, using their talents in the best way possible.”

Rebecca said “Thank you Cassandra. Before you spoke, I had not noticed how this table has so many women of business. In my own case, it was not my ambition, but the death of my husband due to his own folly after letting our business drift into failure. They are not here tonight, but I must thank Rachel Goldman and Maud Soulton, now Mortimer. I believe I shall write to them to tell them of tonight and of my gratitude to them.”

Mary Yarrow tapped her glass. “I probably represent a more common way in which women are in business, and are married to a man with whom they share love and trust, so that the impositions of the law are muted by a deep sharing of their lives and fortunes. However, I know from things experienced in my own life how men of cruelty can blight the lives of women – and men too. If it had not been for the friendship of Cassandra, I would never have been able to enjoy a happy life.”

Vera said “I, too, must thank Mrs. Cohen for helping me to find a path in life that has brought prosperity and happiness and a husband who I love to distraction. My own situation is similar to Mrs. Yarrow’s in that I have a partnership where I can trust Tom to build our fortune together, even as the law does give him power that could be detrimental to my independence.”

Tom said “I’d be a fool to try to go it alone. Vera’s the one with the head for figures. Keeps a tight rein on the money so there’s always some there when I need or want something.”

Michael Yarrow said “My sentiments too.”

Valerie jumped in “In our own case, we talked to Henry and decided that we wanted to be married, but to avoid the imposition of the marriage laws our union is unregistered. To some that would seem sinful, but I think our intent was the opposite. Though we have not been married but a few months, I can say I am beyond happy to be Mrs. Hoyle, even as in business I am Miss Upton.”

Jane said “It took me time to realize how lucky I was to be married off – and that indeed was the case – to a very special but much older man. He was, particularly, very gentle and very kind. He died when I was still young and left me quite well-provided. Widows may have their own monies, of course. And Mrs. Cohen – my apologies, she tells me to address her as Cassandra – did not mention Mrs. Baldwin and Mrs. Moss, two widows

whose *Emporium* must be the source of half the stylish women's clothing in Brighton. My own ventures into business are not nearly as impressive as those of the rest of you," (At this point there were some muffled boos of disagreement.) "but I have been learning and my *Harper's Helpers* and the activities at Lane Meadow are now doing quite well. I must, however, give a huge vote of thanks and affection to Tony Brown, who is a true partner, confidant and friend."

Tony stood up "Most of you here are aware of this, but for those who are not, I will ask for your tolerance and charity. I was born Antonia Crown, but orphaned at a very tender age. To avoid the Workhouse while living on the street, I never wore women's garb. To this day, I don't think I could get used to it." There was laughter at this point. "Moreover, my work and life have always been as a man. Mr. Turcotte, who most of us can recall as a great friend and advisor, told me that as long as I did nothing that could be construed as a fraud, I could continue thus.

"Over a dozen years ago, while still a child, I was keeping body and soul together minding Annabelle, who is here today in the stable behind this building, while Archie Temple was drinking in a nearby pub. However, when someone tried to wake Archie from the slumber he frequently enjoyed after drinking, they found the sleep was permanent. Fortunately, Mrs. Cohen – Miss Match still at that date – came with Tom and regulated the awkward situation of a dead body in the pub. Very bad for the sale of beer."

There was lots of laughter at this point.

"I can say it is unsettling to think how my life might have evolved had I not been rescued that night. Moreover, Adeline Naismith taught me to read, giving me the great gift of books, magazines and newspapers. Later Rebecca, Valerie and Joseph proved true friends as we built *Best Bonnet* and unravelled the evil of my great uncle Ezekiel Crown in misappropriating my father's inheritance.

"So I represent another way in which a woman – even though I have a difficult time realizing that I am such sometimes – may conduct a business or businesses."

The applause that greeted this last comment serves to bring down the curtain on our narrative. At the end of the decade the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 will allow that wages and property which a wife earned through her own work or inherited would be regarded as her separate property. A dozen more years and the Married Women's Property Act 1882 extended this to all property, no matter when or how acquired. Moreover, there were provisions that protected her property from actions of her husband's creditors. To be sure, these were great advances, but we must remember that there were still many restrictions on the careers and fortunes of women, not only in Great Britain but elsewhere in the supposedly civilized

world. Echoes of these imbalances continue to impose inequality even well into the 21st century.