

I served him in silence.

He lingered for a moment, and then putting up his small, dirty, bright-eyed face, said :

"I say, Miss," (he always called me Miss, I believe he thought it more polite), "don't yer tak' on; don't. Her don't mean nothin', our ole 'oman don't. It's just her way, hard words don't break no bones, and soft uns don't butter no parsnips. That's what her said to dad last night when he was a scoldin' o' her. But her isn't a coming back to this store not no more, her isn't. But I'm coming just same as ever. These lollies is prime."

"Thank you, Bob. I shall be pleased to serve you. You know that you were my first customer."

"That's it, Miss. I'll stick to yer, I'll. And as for what the ole 'oman says, don't yer take on about it, she don't never mean nothin', our ole 'oman don't."

But I declined to accept the olive branch thus held out, and Bob's mother and I were not "speaks," as the children say.

I have before remarked that we had not enough money to pay cash for our stock in trade. But this presented no difficulty to our getting whatever we wanted, the wholesale house merely drew up certain bills which Jack signed, promising to pay at three, six, and nine months. The first payment was met without difficulty, for we had still funds in hand, but when the second became due we had very little with which to meet it, and our stock already needed renewal. It had either been badly chosen, or the exigencies of trade were very uncertain, for while the tinned fish, the canned fruit and the molasses hung on hand, the tea, sugar and tobacco disappeared rapidly. The barter trade brought in no ready money and took out all the most saleable goods; and the friendly station customers did not pay so punctually as we had expected, probably not understanding the importance of every penny; and of course we could not press them, or send in accounts "to bill delivered." Meanwhile there was the bill to be met and nothing to meet it with, and the knowledge was a constant and ever growing incubus. It troubled me more than it did Jack, whose previous

life had accustomed him to unpaid bills, whereas I had been brought up in a pious horror of debt. Jack, also, was by nature careless and unpractical, while I, on the contrary, was inclined to take things too much to heart and worry over them. To make the matter worse I was perfectly ignorant of the extent of the pains and penalties that we might incur through non-payment. What steps the merchants and lawyers could and would take. Whether they would send Jack to prison, or content themselves with taking all that we had. It seemed probable that they would prefer the latter, and that a tangible bird in the hand would seem to them better than any number of mythical bipeds in the bush. But I could not be sure, and the dreaded danger assumed unnatural proportions. Every night I dreamed that Jack was being dragged from my arms to prison, there to be decorated with a broad arrow, and I woke breathless and exhausted. A dozen times a day I looked round our little home, to which I had become truly attached, and thought how terrible it would be to lose it. Thus the vision of the bill haunted and harassed me, night and day, went up and down with me, lay in my bed, poisoned my sleep, fed at my table, and proved itself a veritable sword of Damocles ready to fall and destroy us both. But I kept all the trouble to myself, I had no friend in whom I could confide, and Jack had so many other worries that I had not the heart to add to the number; and moreover, he could not do anything, he could not make money. So I let the fear eat into my own heart, and the more I dwelt upon it the worse it became. Not having the slightest idea of how the blow might be expected to fall, I waited for it, counting the hours with gloomy expectancy.

The bill would fall due on the 4th of November, and for days before I could think of nothing else. The weather was lovely, and our little garden was full of spring flowers. The larks sang in the clear sky as if their throats would burst; the fields of springing corn were green with parrakeets; the liquid note of the tai sounded from the