

to learn to use a butter knife and not to stir your tea with your knife-handle. And," she exclaimed with something akin to horror in her voice, "don't throw your cigarette butts on the floor like that."

Simkins looked down suddenly at the two butts. He certainly hadn't stubbed them out. "Sorry, Mum," he



"Well I never, Mabel!"

apologised and wiped his boot over them, squashing them out effectively into a wet brown streak. The tiled and stone floors of those Italian *casas* were to blame for this. He was so occupied with these thoughts and in noticing that there was only marmalade for his toast that he missed his mother's agonised look.

"What are you going to do this morning, son?" Mrs. Simkins asked bravely.

"Tidy up my kit," Herbert replied. "There may be things I can hock without getting any K.D.'s from the Q.M. *wallad*."

"Oh, I see," replied his mother vaguely. She couldn't cope with the army language. Perhaps, it was just as well she couldn't understand all

the words anyway, she reflected. "I'll slip into town and do a little shopping. You'll not mind, dear?"

Simkins assured her he wouldn't, and then collected his dishes and wandered over to the sink.

"I'll wash those," his mother said urgently.

"*Non importe*," Herbert replied, allowing the tap to race over his dishes and splash over everything around, including Herbert Simkins.

"What did you say?" his father asked sharply.

"Just that I had the plug in and it's flooding hot," said Simkins with great presence of mind.

"Oh," said his parent coldly.

Simkins spent the morning profitably. He sorted his gear into three heaps—one for handing in, one for washing, one for—not handing in. When he had finished he looked at the washing and thought he couldn't let his mother do it. He couldn't be bothered doing it himself either. And then he had a brainwave—at least he chose to think it as that. He hurried out to the pantry and scanned the shelves.

A moment later, whistling an army classic, Simkins was walking down the path with his eyes on the house on the opposite side of the street. He had liked the look of the *signorina* he had seen with the *signora*. Quite reminded him of Trieste it did. He hoped she liked chocolate. He wondered which door he should go to, but decided that for a corporal with three beautiful ribbons and five service chevrons it would not be altogether dignified to go to the back entrance. He rang the bell enthusiastically.

"Buon giorno—I mean, good morning," he greeted the middle-aged woman who opened the door. Just his luck it wasn't the *bint*, he thought.

"Good morning," she replied almost inquiringly.

"You wash for me—*lavare per soldato*?" he asked.