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Evelyn Glover, *A Bit of Blighty*, 1917

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A BIT OF BLIGHTY

A SKETCH

by

Evelyn Glover

CHARACTERS

MRS EAGLE. (Jim's Mother)
MARY BALKWELL. (Jim's Sweetheart)
MISS HOLT. (A Snapshots from Home League Photographer)

SMALL LIVING-ROOM IN TENEMENT DWELLING. Door R. WINDOW C. FIREPLACE L. DRESSER WITH DRAWERS AND CROCKERY ON SHELVES L.C. ROCKING-CHAIR DRAWN TOWARDS TABLE. TWO SMALL WOODEN CHAIRS CONSTITUTE REMAINING FURNITURE. THERE IS A LOOKING-GLASS HANGING ON THE WALL, ALSO COLOURED PATRIOTIC PRINTS. MRS EAGLE, A DARK, CHEERY LITTLE WOMAN, AND LAME, IS SITTING IN ROCKING-CHAIR KNITTING. THERE IS A TAP AT THE DOOR, AND A GIRL APPEARS WITH A SMALL CAMERA AND TRIPOD.

MISS HOLT: Good afternoon. Are you Mrs Eagle?

MRS EAGLE: Yes miss.

MISS HOLT: May I come in? (ADVANCES INTO ROOM) You wrote to the Snapshots from Home League and said you wanted your photograph taken for your boy in France and I'm doing the work for this district. I'm Miss Holt. (PRODUCES SMALL BUFF TICKET OF INTRODUCTION)

MRS EAGLE: Oh yes, Miss. (SUSPICIOUSLY) I understand as there's nothin' to pay?

MISS HOLT: Nothing. I take the photograph and give it to you to send to your son. The light's so good today that I thought I'd come on the chance of finding you.

MRS EAGLE: But I couldn't be done now!

MISS HOLT: Couldn't you? You see I've got my things here - I've been taking some photographs in the next block.

MRS EAGLE: I couldn't possibly. I'm not dressed.

MISS HOLT: I'm sure you look very nice.

MRS EAGLE: You've not seen me Sunday blouse. (SIGHS) Not that that's what it might be, owin' to denyin' meself a lovely bit of bead trimmin' at five three. But 'ow can you after seein' all them 'oardins - To dress extravagantly in wartime is worse than bad form - it is hunpatriotic!

MISS HOLT: I can't see what's wrong with the blouse you've got on.

MRS EAGLE: What - me weekday blouse? Oh I couldn't be took in this. My Jim's a dreadful one for leavin' 'is things about an' you never know 'oo mayn't be comin' along them trenches. It's not so long ago as they 'ad Pomkair isself!

MISS HOLT: Who?

MRS EAGLE: Why, Pomkair - 'e's same as you might say the King of France if they'd got one. You've 'eard of 'im, surely?

MISS HOLT: I think he calls himself Poincaré.

MRS EAGLE: (LENIENTLY) I dessy. You can understand their wantin' a joke of any kind with all they 'ave to go through, pore things!

MISS HOLT: (DIFFIDENTLY) I could wait while you change your blouse.

MRS EAGLE: Oh well if you don't mind doin' that. It's a pity for you to 'ave the bother of comin' twice, ain't it? I wouldn't keep you any longer 'n I could 'elp.

MISS HOLT: Oh it'll take me a little time to get ready, too. Are there some leads here, or a balcony of any sort where I can take the photograph?

MRS EAGLE: (PAUSING IN ACT OF OPENING DRAWER) There's leads all right, but I ain't goin' on to no leads.

MISS HOLT: Why?

MRS EAGLE: Because I'm 'is Mother an' not a bloomin' cat! Besides it's a pertickler photograph, is this, an' I'll tell you for why.

MISS HOLT: Yes?

MRS EAGLE: Well 'e's as good a lad as ever stepped, is my Jim. Allots me three an' six regler and never give me a day's anxiety an 'is life - on'y onst.

MISS HOLT: A girl, I suppose?

MRS EAGLE: (PAUSING IN ACT OF UNFASTENING BLOUSE) Now 'ow on earth did you know that?

MISS HOLT: (SMILING) You're not the first soldier's Mother I've photographed.

MRS EAGLE: Well there!

MISS HOLT: She wasn't the kind of girl you liked?

MRS EAGLE: An 'arpy - that's what I call 'er - an 'arpy! Mind you, I'd never 'ave knowed nothink about 'er if one of my lydy friends 'adn't gone down to Woolwich - that's where Jim was till 'e went to France six weeks ago - an' seen 'em walkin' out together. An 'uzzy in pearls an' feathers was Mrs Charman's very words when she come to borrer my 'airbrush lars' Weddingsday fornigh.

MISS HOLT: Then are they engaged?

MRS EAGLE: Well you see, Miss, my Jim's never been one for a sweet'eart. Many's the time 'e's said to me 'You're all the sweet'eart I want, Mother!' (VOICE BREAKS)

MISS HOLT: (SYMPATHETICALLY) It's rough on a Mother when her only boy goes.

MRS EAGLE: (CHOKINGLY) Yus - but if I'd 'ad a dozen I'd 'ave sent the lot!

MISS HOLT: Bravo!

MRS EAGLE: Seems to me sometimes as if 'arf England didn't know there was a war goin' on! I'd like to take some as I could name out to them trenches an' rub their noses in em!

MISS HOLT: (LAUGHING) And I'd like to come with you!

MRS EAGLE: I know if they'd put me over there with me old rockin-chair an' a gun, I'd show 'em!

MISS HOLT: (LAUGHING AGAIN) Well done!

MRS EAGLE: Oh they calls me Tommy's Tonic down this street! I don' laugh about it though. It's more a religion, like, with me.

MISS HOLT: Well about the photograph - where did you want it taken?

MRS EAGLE: I was comin' to that. (TAKES COMB OUT OF DRAWER AND COMBS HAIR VIGOUROUSLY) You see, Jim - 'e don't 'appen to 'ave named the girl to me.

MISS HOLT: You haven't written to him about her, then?

MRS EAGLE: No, Miss, I 'aven't. I reckon I can say what I want without no questions now that I've applicated for my photograph. Leastways, you can!

MISS HOLT: I?

MRS EAGLE: (LEANING FORWARD EAGERLY) Can you make a picture of me sittin' in me rockin'-chair 'ere by the table with the old dresser at the back of me and the teapot an' the loaf an' jam in front an' the firelight dancin' an' Jim's place set with 'is mug with 'A Present from Margate' an' me lookin' at the door same as if I was sayin', 'Come along to your tea, lad!' - an' can I write 'Your Sweet'heart' underneath?

MISS HOLT: (ENTERING INTO SPIRIT OF THING) Splendid, Mrs Eagle! I'll have to be a time exposure - I mean you'll have to keep still for five or six seconds, but I'll do it!

MRS EAGLE: You take my idea, Miss, don't you? I'll give Jim up to the right girl, willin', but it would break my 'heart if 'e was to get 'ooked by an 'arpy! If 'e's sitting in them trenches with them low clarss 'uns opposite an' there do 'appen to be any thoughts of that 'uzzy with the feathers in 'is mind, I reckon nothin'll bring 'im to 'is senses quicker'n the sight of 'is old mother waitin' for 'im to come 'ome to 'is tea!

MISS HOLT: (ARRANGING CAMERA) Well we must do our best. You're not going to put on a black blouse, are you? (AS MRS EAGLE PREPARES TO DO SO)

MRS EAGLE: It's me Sunday one. I ain't goin' to be done in no other!

MISS HOLT: The one you had on would look nicer in the photograph really!

MRS EAGLE: (WEARILY) 'Aven't I made you understand as we've gotter knock spots off that 'arpy? I can't do it with me face, so I've gotter -

A TAP A THE DOOR

Come in!

ENTER MARY BALKWELL. SHE IS A TALL, FINE-LOOKING GIRL, PLAINLY AND NEATLY DRESSED.

MARY: I beg your pardon -

MRS EAGLE: No need, but I 'aven't the pleasure of your acquaintance.

MARY: I know you 'aven't, but they tell me upstairs as the Snapshots from 'ome lady 'ad just come in 'ere an' I wanted to arsk if I might 'ave a word with 'er.

MRS EAGLE: Oh trust these buildins for knowin' your own business before you know it yourself! Did they tell you the bit of fish I'd 'ad to my dinner 'ad turned?

MARY: (POLITELY) NO, me nose tell me that when I come up the stairs a hour back!

MISS HOLT: (INTERRUPTING HASTILY) You wanted to speak to me, didn't you?

MARY: Yes, Miss. I wanted to know 'ow I could get one o' them pictures taken to send to France.

MISS HOLT: To some soldier relation, you mean?

MARY: Well 'e's not exactly a relation -

MRS EAGER: (WITH SNIFF) Sweet'eart!

MARY: (DEFIANTLY) An' 'ave you any objections, may I arsk?

MRS EAGLE: (RATHER ASHAMED OF HERSELF) No, my dear, no. Don't you think nothin' of my tongue! That fish is still lyin' a bit 'eavy. If your lad's writ for a pictur of you, you get the best one took you can. They want somethin' to look at, livin' in them rabbit-warrens!

MARY: Well, 'e 'asn't exactly writ for it -

MRS EAGLE: (CUTTING IN) Don't you go an' make yourself too cheap!

MARY: (INDIGNANTLY) I never! But there ain't no 'arm in bein' prepared.

MISS HOLT: If you want a 'Snapshots from Home League' photograph taken, I'll do it with pleasure. Do you live in this building?

MARY: No, Miss, I've on'y come to see a friend. I'm at work all day on munitions, but I've got this afternoon off cos I've cut me finger.

MISS HOLT: Oh, poor thing! Well are you far from here? I'll come on after I've finished with Mrs Eagle.

MARY: It's a hour by bus, Miss.

MISS HOLT: (DOUBTFULLY) Oh I'm afraid it's too late for today, then.

MRS EAGLE: (CUTTING IN) Couldn't you do 'er 'ere, Miss, same as me?

MISS HOLT: Oh yes, I could do that if you don't mind.

MARY: I'm shore you're very kind.

MRS EAGLE: Not a bit, my dear. I'm a rare one for sizin' things up. Your young man wants keepin' up to the mark. Isn't writin' regler, I dessy!

MARY: (SHORTLY) They don't get no time for writin'!

MRS EAGLE: (WITH WINK AT MISS HOLT) I know - I know. You've come to the right place, ain't she, Miss?

MISS HOLT: Well which am I to do first?

MRS EAGLE: 'Er. We want our minds free for mine. You come over 'ere 'an sit down, my dear.

MARY: (CROSSING TO ROCKING-CHAIR AND SITTING DOWN WITH HANDS FOLDED) I'm shore you're very kind.

MRS EAGLE: (SURVEYING HER THOUGHTFULLY AND SHAKING HEAD) Too pline!

MARY: (SHARPLY) I can't 'elp me face no more'n you can!

MRS EAGLE: Lor my dear, 'ow you do catch one up! T'isn't your face - it's your 'at!

MARY: (MOLLIFIED) Well I don't like bein' done in this 'at meself, but if you come out for the afternoon an' there's black clouds about, you leave your best 'at at 'ome if you've got the sense of a blackbeetle!

MISS HOLT: (IN MUFFLED VOICE, UNDER DARK CLOTH) Will you sit further back in the chair?

MRS EAGLE: (IN LOWER TONES) Don't you take no notice of 'er - we ain't ready yet. You're right - I like to see a girl careful. But a man likes a bit of smartness. I oughter know - I've buried two.

MARY: Me best 'at's got two lovely feavvers!

MISS HOLT: (STILL UNDER CLOTH) I'll have to ask you to move your chair about a foot further back. I want the light full on your face.

MRS EAGLE: (ABSENTLY, WAVING HAND TOWARDS CAMERA) 'Ush! Now I wonder - (GOES TO DRAWER AND RUMMAGES, PRODUCING A COUPLE OF SKINNY GREEN FEATHERS) I'm rather an 'and with an 'at!

MISS HOLT: (STILL MUFFLED) I'm sorry to keep you, but if I don't get just what I want before we start, I shan't get a good picture. One minute - could you turn the whole chair a little more sideways - not back?

MRS EAGLE AND MARY TAKE NOT THE SLIGHTEST NOTICE. THE FORMER HAS PRODUCED PINS AND IS FASTENING THE FEATHERS AT RIGHT ANGLES INTO MARY'S HAT - THEN PLACES IT ON HER HEAD AND STEPS BACK TO ADMIRE EFFECT.

MISS HOLT: (MORE LOUDLY) Sideways!

MARY: If I put an 'at on sideways, I look sossy directly!

MRS EAGLE REMOVES GLASS FROM WALL AND HANDS IT TO MARY.

MRS EAGLE: Chick, ain't it?

MARY: Not 'arf!

MISS HOLT: (EMERGING AND, APPROACHING CHAIR, LOOKS AT HAT A LITTLE BLANKLY) Oh!

MRS EAGLE: Anythin' wrong, Miss?

MISS HOLT: (RECOVERING HERSELF) No - no. I want your chair a little more this way, that's all.

MARY RISES AS SHE MOVES IT

Now sit down, please! (DISAPPEARS UNDER CLOTH AGAIN)

MRS EAGLE: (STILL SURVEYING MARY CRITICALLY) Wait! (GOES TO DRAWER AGAIN AND REAPPEARS WITH SMALL BOX FROM WHICH SHE REMOVES STRING OF PEARLS) My boy give me these at Christmas. Three an' eleven-three writ on the back of the box. 'E'd never buy cheap jew'llry, wouldn't Jim! (APPROACHES MARY AND FASTENS PEARLS ROUND HER NECK)

MARY: (SOFTLY) Is 'is name Jim? I'm partial to the name of Jim, meself!

MRS EAGLE: Yes. Seems funny 'is surname bein' different to mine, but 'e was me first 'usband's boy. Jim Penny's 'is name - lor my dear!

AS MARY STARTS AND THE PEARLS FALL TO THE GROUND

Do look what you're doin'. You might 'ave broke the 'ole lot of 'em! (STOOPS TO PICK THEM UP)

MARY: Where is 'e - your boy?

MRS EAGLE: Well it ain't far from Wipers, but 'e mayn't say more. 'E's a good lad for keepin' to regulations, is Jim. Never give me a minit's trouble - not till 'e lost 's 'ead over the wrong kind o' girl at Woolwich an' I blame 'er an' not 'im for that. I don't mind ownin' now as it seemed the 'and of Providence 'e 'ad to go to the front when 'e did!

MARY: Why?

MRS EAGLE: Why? 'Cause if 'e's killin' 'uns 'e ain't wastin' 'is time an' if 'e was slobberin' over 'er, 'e would be. I never 'eard tell of 'er till a fortnight back when a neighbour let on to me as she's seen 'em together, but she said enough to show me the kind of thing I'd gotter fight!

MARY: (INDIGNANTLY) Oh!

MRS EAGLE: You may well. There's 'arpies about everywhere ready to get 'old of them pore lads.

MARY: (BITTERLY) You think 'e'll - ferget this one?

MRS EAGLE: 'Twon't be my fault if 'e don't. We've always been like sweet'earts, Jim an' me, an' when the time comes for 'im to take a wife - I'll find 'er for 'im - that's all.

MARY: D'you think 'e'll do what you say? Men ain't so ready!

MRS EAGLE: (WITH CHUCKLE) Oh I'd go to work artful. I don't mind tellin' you as there's a pictur goin' to be took this very afternoon of 'is old Mother sittin' by 'is empty chair waitin' for 'im to come in to 'is tea, an' 'Your Sweet'eart' writ underneath. 'Er an' me's arranged it all. Tugs your 'eartstrings does a photygraph!

MISS HOLT: (WHO HAS BEEN WAITING PATIENTLY FOR CHANCE) Now let's try again. Just put your hand on one arm of the chair, will you? Never mind your feet - they won't show.

MARY: (RISING SUDDENLY) No. No. I - I don't think I'll be took after all.

MRS EAGLE:) Why not?
MISS HOLT:)

MARY: I've changed me mind.

MRS EAGLE:) But why?
MISS HOLT:)

MARY: I 'ave - that's all.

MISS HOLT: But do please give us a reason!

MARY: (TO MRS EAGLE) Would you like to 'ear the name of the young man I was bein' took for?

MRS EAGLE: What's that gotter do with it?

MARY: Jim Penny!

MRS EAGLE: (FIERCELY) What?

MISS HOLT: You don't mean - what an extraordinary thing!

MRS EAGLE: (SPLUTTERING EXCITEDLY) You - 'avin' your pictur took for my Jim?

MARY: (BITTERLY) Praps 'e's not worth it, after all!

MRS EAGLE: (FURIOUSLY) Not worth it? Not worth it - you - you 'uzzy in pearls an' feathers!

MARY: (SNATCHING HAT FROM HEAD AND PEARLS FROM NECK AND PULLING OUT FEATHERS AND THROWING THEM ON TO FLOOR) Yus - your pearls - an' your feavvers!

MISS HOLT: Come, Mrs Eagle, you can't say they're not, can you?

MRS EAGLE: (CHOKINGLY TO MARY) You - you woman! I can't call you no lidy! I prefers to use the term 'woman'!

MARY: An' I'll thank you to stop callin' me outer my nime!

MRS EAGLE: If I'd 'ad the remotest idea as I was talkin' to the person 'oo got 'old of my boy -

MARY: (FIERCELY) I never! I met your son respectable, when me father bring 'im in to tea one afternoon, an' 'e was rare an' good to me little brother wot's parrylised, an' - an' 'e told me 'e'd like to take me one day to Marylebone to see 'is old Mother -

MRS EAGLE: (INTERRUPTING ANGRILY) Old yourself!

MARY: - an' then 'e went orf to France sudden an' I ain't 'eard a word from 'im from that day to this - nor - nor don't want!

MRS EAGLE: Oh don't you, Miss Imperence? Looks like don't wantin', 'avin' your photo took for 'im, don't it?

MARY: I ain't! 'E did arsk me onst for me photo an' I 'adn't got one, an' I thought there wasn't no 'arm in 'avin' one ready for 'im when 'e did write, an' -

MRS EAGLE: (FOLDING HER ARMS) Well you won't 'ave it ready from 'ere!

MARY: From 'ere? I wouldn't be took 'ere - not if you was to go on your bended!

MRS EAGLE: Me go on me bended to you? I'd as soon think of doin' it to the Keeser!

MARY: Don't you mention your low-clars friends to me!

MRS EAGLE: (ALMOST SCREAMS) Friends? Friends? Why I wouldn't be dropped from the same Sepperleen with 'im!

MARY: Well you ain't likely to get the charnce of a joy-ride like that!

MRS EAGLE: Nor 'im neether! I'm pertickler 'oo I drives out with!

MARY: Well I'd relish five minits in 'is company, meself!

MRS EAGLE: (INTERESTED IN SPITE OF HERSELF) If I 'ad a 'eart-to-'eart talk with 'im, 'e'd be a Conscious Objector before I'd done!

MARY: (CLASPING HER HANDS) Oh, if they'd take me to fight, wouldn't I go!

MISS HOLT: (SOFTLY) Well you're in the second line of defence, anyway!

MARY: I'd think shame of meself if I wasn't doin' munitions - a strappin' girl like me! Gawd! To think that our lads ever 'ad to wait for shells from 'ome!

MRS EAGLE: (NOW THOROUGHLY ABSORBED IN SUBJECT) Makes you 'eave, don't it? I'd be makin' munitions meself if it wasn't for me game leg!

MARY: There's days when you cut yourself, praps, or your back feels broke, an' your 'ead 'alf split with the noise of the machines - an' then you comes out, an' maybe meets a chap with a empty sleeve an' - an - (CHOKES AND BREAKS OFF ABRUPTLY) - I'd not change my job if the shifts was a week long!

MRS EAGLE: (WITH SUDDEN, TRIUMPHANT SHOUT) Gawd blass you, my girl! Gawd bless you! You're the wife for my Jim.

THEY SURVEY EACH OTHER IN BREATHLESS
ASTONISHED SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

MARY: (CALMING DOWN) I'm the wife for no man 'oo don't want me!

MRS EAGLE: Don't want you? I'll see as 'e wants you! 'Asn't wrote to you, 'asn't 'e? Careless lad! I'll learn 'im!

MARY: (CHOKING) Oh Mrs Eagle!

MRS EAGLE: You leave 'im to me, my dear! Jim was never a great 'and with a pen - 'e's 'is pore father over again in that. I've seen that man pay a twopenny bus fare to take a message sooner'n send a 'apeny postcard!

MISS HOLT: (APOLOGETICALLY) I am waiting to take a photograph, Miss - I don't think you told me your name.

MARY: Beg y' pardon, Miss, I'm shore. Balkwell's my name - Mary Balkwell.

MRS EAGLE: I onst went to school with a Elbert Balkwell in Camberwell - lor! 'ow many years back! They uster call 'im my sweet'eart cause 'e always give me first suck of 'is pep'mint rock.

MARY: (EAGERLY) Father's name's Elbert an' 'e was brought up in Camberwell!

MRS EAGLE: (EXCITEDLY) Does 'e stutter?

MARY: Somethin' crool!

MRS EAGLE: My dear, my dear! I don't know what made me take a fancy to you the minit you come into this room! I'll make that Mrs Charman larf the other side of 'er face! Stuffin' me with lies about you like that!

MISS HOLT: (VERY LOUDLY) If - you - please -

MRS EAGLE: Oh was you ready, Miss?

MISS HOLT: I'm awfully sorry to interrupt you both, but if I don't take these photographs soon, the light won't be good enough. It's three o' clock now.

MARY: I'm takin' up your time, Mrs Eagle.

MRS EAGLE: Not you, my dear - you must stay an' 'ave a cup of tea with me - I'm in no 'urry. (JUMPS AS THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR AND A LETTER IS PUSHED UNDERNEATH IT) Lor! I genrally know in the pit of me stummick when it's time for a post nowadays, but me mind's been took orf this afternoon. The neighbours is very kind bringin' up my letters, knowin' the stairs ain't easy for me.

MISS HOLT: (SEEING FURTHER ATTEMPTS ARE HOPELESS, PICKS UP LETTER AND HANDS IT TO HER) On Active Service!

MRS EAGLE: It's 'im, bless 'im! You'll eggscuse me if I read it, won't you Miss? I couldn't settle to nothin' with that envylope shut.

MISS HOLT GLANCES HOPELESSLY TOWARDS CLOCK AND SITS DOWN. MRS EAGLE GETS GLASSES, PUTS THEM ON SLOWLY AND, AFTER A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF OUTSIDE OF ENVELOPE, TEARS IT OPEN, TAKES OUT LETTER AND KISSES IT SUDDENLY. THEN SHE BEGINS TO READ IT HERSELF, VERY SLOWLY, WITH LITTLE EXCLAMATIONS OF 'WELL THERE!', 'I NEVER!', 'WELL I'M -!'

MARY: (UNABLE TO RESTRAIN HERSELF) 'Ow is 'e?

MRS EAGLE: Well there!

MARY: Is 'e safe?

MRS EAGLE: Lor, bless you, my dear! Jim 's safe all right. You just listen to this. You'll eggscuse me, miss - (TO MISS HOLT) - seems like as if you was one of the fam'ly this afternoon.

MISS HOLT: (A LITTLE GRIMLY) It does, doesn't it?

MRS EAGLE: (BEGINS TO READ SLOWLY) My dear Mum, I 'ope this will find you well as it leaves me at present. Dear Mum, I received the fags, thankin' you. They are a treat. The mud out 'ere is a treat. There is a cat like our Joseph come to this dug-out an' we feed 'im a treat. I received a letter from Ted Bingley tellin' me 'e 'ad joined the Fling Corpse - (STOPPING) - whatever'll that be, Miss?

MISS HOLT: (GRAVELY) I should think it means that he's taken up flying.

MRS EAGLE: (SCORNFULLY) With 'is face? Seems a shame to frighten the pore birds more'n they need! (RETURNING TO LETTER) Dear Mother, I am worried in my mind. While we was at Woolwich there was a girl. She is the best girl in the world.

MARY: Oh-h-h!

MRS EAGLE: (CONTINUING) I did not tell you for fear it would make you queer. I 'ave wrote 'er four letters but she 'as not answer -

MARY: Oh-h-h!

MRS EAGLE: Praps she is queer. 'Er name is Mary Balkwell an' she lives at 187 Munster Street -

MARY: (EXCITEDLY) 'Undred and thirty-seven!

MRS EAGLE: Eighty! Look for yourself!

MARY SCRUTINISES LETTER

MARY: No, that's a three all right - the rings ain't joined.

MRS EAGLE: I'd read it a height. What do you say, Miss?

MISS HOLT: (LOOKING AT LETTER) Well he may have meant it for a three but I should think anybody would read it as eight. I should!

MARY: Praps the postman did!

MISS HOLT: I shouldn't think there's a doubt of it. You'll find your letters at a hundred and eighty-seven, unless they've been given back to the Post Office.

MARY: Oh I dunno'oo lives there, but I don't suppose they'd ever bother to give 'em back.

MRS EAGLE: Well there!

MISS HOLT: But why didn't you write to Mr Penny?

MARY: Cause 'e said 'e'd write an' tell me what address to put. I didn't know.

MRS EAGLE: (CONTINUING LETTER) Dear Mum, I know your leg is difficult but I do wish you could go and see if she is queer. She worked at munitions. I wish I 'ad tell you before. Dear Mother, you're still my sweet'eart but a chap can 'ave two. Please send me some more flea-chaser. Your loving son, Jim. P.S. Dear Mother, these are kisses. (POINTING PROUDLY TO ROW OF CROSSES) Fifteen of 'em!

MARY: An' not one too many, neether!

MRS EAGLE: I'm all of a maze! To think of this just comin' with you 'ere an' all. If it 'and't been for me 'avin' my photograph took -

MISS HOLT: (QUIETLY) But you haven't.

MRS EAGLE: No more I 'ave. Well I don't want to keep you waitin', Miss. (TO MARY) You first, my dear!

MARY: No, you!

MRS EAGLE: NO, you!

MARY: No, you!

MRS EAGLE: (WITH SUDDEN BRILLIANT INSPRIRATION) Both together!

MARY: Oh, Mrs Eagle!

MRS EAGLE: (RAPIDLY AND EXCITEDLY) Lor, what a lark! Give Jim the surprise of 'is life, Gawd bless 'im! Come along, my dear! Where's them feathers? (SEIZES MARY'S HAT AND CRAMS THEM BACK INTO IT) Put it on your 'ead! Now the pearls!

MARY: I'll not be took unless you wear the pearls yourself! Jim give 'em to you! (CLASPS THEM ROUND MRS EAGLE'S NECK)

MRS EAGLE: Well if you're so pressin'. Get another chair!

MISS HOLT: (ENTERING INTO SPIRIT OF THING) No - you sit down, Mrs Eagle. She must stand by you - yes, that's right. One minute - I'll have to focus again - (PUTS ROUND GLASS BACK INTO CAMERA, PULLS IT FURTHER BACK, RAISES IT, AND PUTS HEAD UNDER CLOTH)

MRS EAGLE: I'm that excited I 'ardly know what I'm doin'! Fancy Jim when he sees you an' me in a group!

MISS HOLT: Yes - that's it. Now you'll have to keep still while I count six.

SHE REMOVES GROUND GLASS AND PUTS IN DARK SLIDE. BOTH SETTLE THEMSELVES ABSOLUTELY WOODENLY WITH EXPRESSIONS OF GLOOM.

Wait a minute - put your hand on Mrs Eagle's shoulder, Miss Balkwell. That's it. That's very nice. Look a little bit happier, though!

BOTH GIGGLE

No, try again!

BOTH FROWN

No - no - think of something nice!

MRS EAGLE: (IRREPRESSIBLY) Tripe an' onions!

BOTH ENTIRELY BREAK DOWN

MISS HOLT: (WHEN PAROXYSM HAS PASSED) No - no. Think of -
think of JIM!

A SERAPHIC SMILE BREAKS OVER BOTH FACES

MISS HOLT: Now! (BEGINS TO COUNT VERY SLOWLY) One - two
three - !

CURTAIN