# THE BITTERNESS OF SWEETS

By RUPERT HUGHES

LEAN little Mollie Finneran had just lost her job. It was not much of a job, but she was even less of a success at it.

It was not for lack of ambition on the part of her father and mother. They had wasted as little time on her education as the truant officer had permitted. They had not pampered her; they had not weakened her with luxuries and rich foods. In fact, they had almost trained her to the ideal point of getting along on nothing at all. But the best they could secure for her in the way of employment was this job as cash girl. She got $3 a week, and didn't get it. Her parents got it.

She was required to carry home the entire $3. From this she received a modest dole for carfare—one way—and for lunch. By the latter part of the week, as it usually befell, her father and mother had spent the balance at the liquor store, and Sliver omitted the midday meal. But when Sliver could afford a luncheon it was usually taken at the ice-cream soda fountain, where a mess of syrupy aniline dye, a pledget of adulterated ice cream and a froth of imitation carbonic bribed her palate and left her insides in a state of nausea that proved a splendid antidote to appetite.

But Sliver was not a success as a cash girl. If she had had food oftener, or had not been placed ironically in a parish of tinware bounded on one side by a delicatessen department and on the other by a candy counter, she might have had more soul to give to her business. The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and Sliver thought how long it was between meals.

Sometimes the mirage of things to eat would so fascinate her that she became a wax figure of meditation, deaf to the loud tappings of pencils on showcases and the reiterated wails of "Messenger! Miss'n'jah! Messunjurrr!"

For weeks the saleswomen scolded her, and the aisle managers yanked her by the ear out of her dreams. Then the slack season arrived and they asked for her resignation—offered her her portfolio.

Her language was not so graceful as Rosalind's "Banished! What's banished, but set free?" But its spirit was the same.

"I'm toined down, am I?" she sneered. "Well, it's a bum joint anyway and used up too much of me time."

She accepted the pay envelope with disdain and promised to give it to the poor.

She made a good exit, but once outside she felt as crushed as if the building had fallen over on her.

She wondered what her family would do now without her $3 and how she would kill time in the miserable top floor back. She feared a beating, many beatings, and resolved not to go home at all.

Even as she planned revolt her feet, like a team of old horses, turned aside at a bakery window where she always paused as before a roadside altar. If only she had some money of her very own! If only she could squander even a dime on doughnuts! She felt that she could do desperate deeds for a cream puff. What wouldn't she do for money enough to evoke that musical cry, "Brown the wheats; draw one!"

A young reporter hurrying down the ugly street paused to gaze at her. He had written verses in college and he still noticed everything, to the great wear and tear of blue pencils at the copy desk. So now he saw a prophetic wistfulness in Sliver's attitude and in her overgrown eyes the darkling of a love-dawn.

As he made off on his errand he stopped short again, for he noted that the girl was observed by an elderly man whose swart and villainous mien was struck across with a black mustache and buried in a perfidious fur overcoat. This evident scoundrel halted and stared at the girl with approval.

But the swart knave moved on without speaking and the reporter went his way, too, looking back and wondering what dreams of love they were that must be thrilling the shabby little, thin little, quaint little creature poised in reverie before the baker's window. And so he passed out of Sliver's life. But the swart man came back.

The reporter had thought that Sliver was musing upon love. The swart man had thought she stared enviously at the lithograph in the window. This pictured "Carl Bruni's Flying Swallows," a sextet of girls appearing in a cheap vaudeville theatre near at hand.

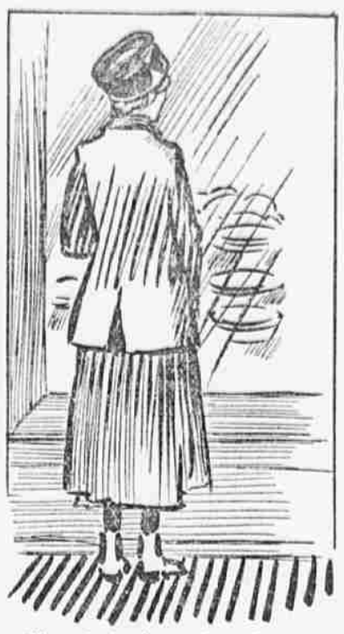
But Sliver was meditating neither love nor lithograph. She was musing on a little squad of eclairs well polished with counterfeit chocolate, and a golden peach of Apfelkuchen made out of dried apples, and a dark mountain of moist gingerbread, an Alp of frosted cake, composed of bad eggs, and a pee dopumpkin pie as large and ruddy as a harvest moon.

At the heart of each of us at least one little mouse gnaws and gnaws and hardly ever rests. With some it is remorse, with others ambition, or love, or jealousy, or avarice, or grief. With Mollie Finneran it was hunger.

Sliver had always been hungry. Never once in her life had she had enough to eat. So far back as she could remember Sliver had known famine and nothing else.

Wild thoughts of buying three dollars' worth of partnership in the bakery shop went like Roman candles through her brain. But she knew that she would take the money home, and if she met the usual suspicions that she had never justified and the ruthless punishment for losing her job, she would accept these also as part of the weather.

She bent a farewell look on the blissful vision of food, and she went a little because life was so bitter and cake so sweet, and she could not have any cake.



Silver had always been hungry.

It was at this crisis in her soul that the swart man returned upon his steps and, drawing close to where she pined before the baker's window, murmured to her with a foreign accent. And, as everybody who can read knows, a foreign accent is a proof of a villainous disposition.

"Say, keed, you wanta make big money, huh?"

Sliver's self-respect was militant at once. She whirled on the stranger with a fierce snap:

"Beat it, you big boob, or I'll holler for the bulls."

Sliver was virtuous almost to the point of viciousness.

The old villain backed away with haste and the storm of rage left Sliver's heart almost as quickly. Young as she was, she was used to such encounters. She accepted them as rain or soot. Bad as her home was, unguarded as she was from the evils that crowded about her, she had walked thus far through the world without contamination.

She resumed her contemplation of the baker's paradise. She wept with craving. A snuffling sob was cut in half by a sudden remembrance of the words "big money." Big money meant big meals. Perhaps the voice had been from heaven instead of the other place. Some angel may have offered her big money and she had answered with insult!

Then, as if by a miracle, she seemed to have wished the angel back. Over her sob-shaken shoulder came that dulcet voice again:

"Dawn't git mad, keed; but dawn't you wanna make da beeg money queeck?"

Sliver turned and studied the angel. He wore little gloss shoes and a fur-lined overcoat and a shabby silk hat. This was plainly no angel; and if he were a devil, Sliver felt that she could exercise him with one swift kick on the shins or an elbow drive in his stomach. And she could always bite and scratch. Reassured, she mocked him with skeptical contempt.

"Ah, go ahn! Whaddaya mean—beeg money queeck?"

The Italian took courage; he pointed with a much-ringed hand at the lithograph in the window.

"See dat pitture, nuh? 'Bruni's Green Swallows,' huh? I am Bruni!"

"Ah, go ahn!" said Sliver, masking her awe.

"Sure, I am Bruni. I invent dose svallows, and bring to America from Italy, yes! Ve play now at dress Patre right here, huh? You have not see my svallows, huh? You come see, now."

Sliver's heart sank. So it was only a scheme to get her money. This old scoundrel was a runner-in, a ballyhoo for the five-ten-and-fifteen-cent palace, where worn-out vaudeville acts and tattered films were alternated.

Sliver sneered at the old man and shook off the hand that seized her arm with urgence.

"Ah, go ahn! You said I could make big money."

"Sure! One of my svallows she is get seeck; she cannot make de jump to Paters sonn. I must get a new svallow. I offer you de job."

"Ah, go—what would I have to do?"

"Awnly to fly—fly in de air."

"Ah, go ahn! I can't fly. I never learned to fly."

Mr. Bruni laughed with indulgent patience. Sliver came back to the main issue. "You was talkin' big money. How much do you slip your swallers?"

"Six——"

He was going to say "sixteen." She thought he was about to say "six," and her heart leaped with joy. He slyly fell to "twelve," not knowing that he had doubled the sum in her eyes and quadrupled her latent wage. Twelve dollars a week! Was he offering her as much a week for floating in the air as she had earned in a month for lugging her feet along the department store Marathon?

"Twelve dollars," she sneered. "Twelve nothin'. Ah, go ahn!" Mr. Bruni nodded violently. Sliver would have fainted if she had known how.

Mr. Bruni, seeing that she was wavering, pressed his cause.

"You come see my svallows, now—right here, huh?"

Sliver had no money except the three greasy bills which were impatiently awaited at home. She hesitated; then spoke with hauteur:

"I got no small change."

Bruni laughed. "It cost you not wan penny. I pass you in."

It is believed that no laymen exists so rich as not to be elated at the thought of entering a theatre on a pass. To Sliver it was just a little more flattering than if St. Peter had invited her to walk into heaven without penance.

She found herself in a cave of gloom at whose farther end a Niagara of pictures was cascading. She felt the little hand of the old man take her arm. It was like grasping a rolled up umbrella.

After a thousand feet of cowboy adventure had reeled past the fascinated eyes of Sliver a melancholy youth set out a placard announcing the "Engagement Extraordinary of the World Famous Bruni's Swallows by Carl Bruni." The pianist chopped the piano with the vigor due to an engagement extraordinary and the tarnished old curtain went up with importance, disclosing six young girls, all of a size, all slim and sprightly, all clad in feathers, with the heads of birds for caps, with wings for sleeves and swallow-tails for trains.

CONTINUED TOMORROW.

# SCRAPPLE

—Punch.

Husband (after smash)—Darling, something seems to tell me that in these times of national crisis we ought to make a sacrifice by—er—doing without the motor.

### Too Proud to Fight?

—The Sketch.

The Recruiting Official—One gran'father living? Is he on your father's or mother's side?

The Recruit—Oh, 'e varies, sir; he sticks up for both of 'em—a sort o' nootral.

### His Heirs

"Rich Mr. Brown married a widow with four children."

"Gee whiz! He is fond of putting on heirs, isn't he?"

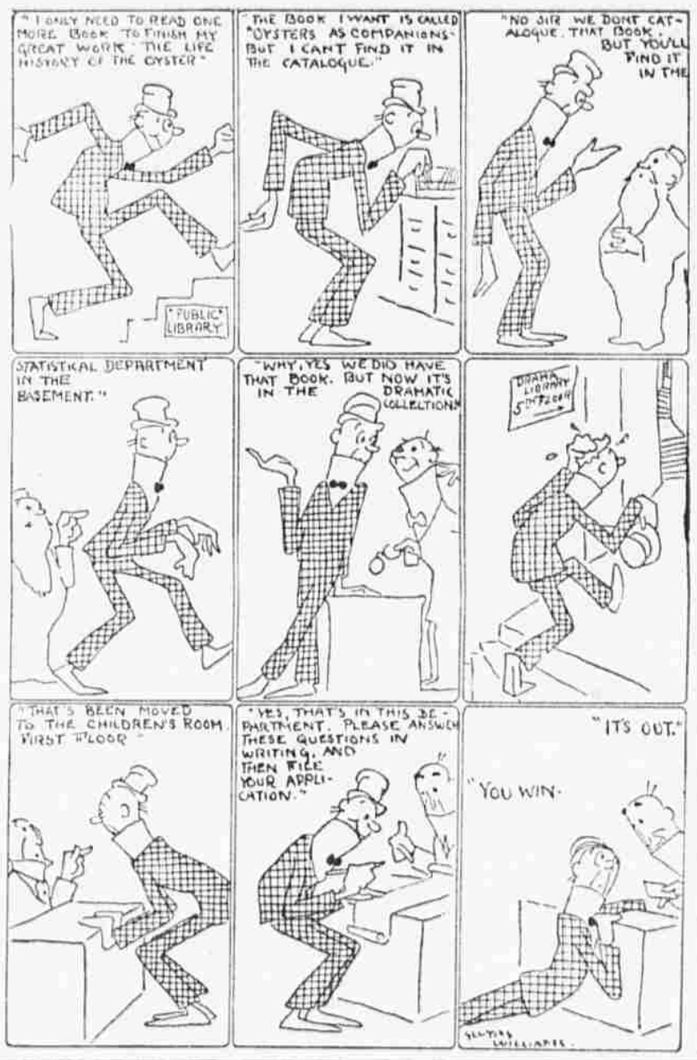
### THE PADDED CELL

### Took 'Em in Bunches

She—And after being out half of last night I suppose you will tell me you never took a single drink.

He—Yes, my dear, I can honestly say that in all my life I've never been known to take a single drink.

### LIBRARIES ARE GREAT INSTITUTIONS IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO USE THEM




### Providing Practice

"How wonderful are the ways of nature!"

"In what respect?"

"It brings along the green apple season just when young doctors are being graduated."

—Boston Globe.

I-DOLLAR-TER.

—The Passing Show.

Farm Bailiff—'Ow much d'ye reckon t' git fer that picture of my cottage you be paintin'?

Celebrated R. A.—Oh, somewhere about a couple of thousand dollars.

Farm Bailiff (incredulously)—By gosh! Don't yer believe it! The cottage ain't worth half that!

### Smith's Self-Sacrifice

Smith's wife said to him one evening, anxiously:

"I know, John, dear, this high cost of living is terrible, but do you really think we can get along without a servant?"

"We'll have to," Smith answered, firmly, "unless I get a raise. Why, hang it, if the worst comes to the worst, you can do the cook'ng yourself—and I can get my meals at a restaurant."

### DID IT EVER HAPPEN TO YOU?

### —AND THE WORST IS YET TO COME

### An Effective Test

Husband—Confound this razor!

Wife—What's the matter now?

Husband—This razor is abominably dull.

Wife—Dull? Why, I ripped up an old skirt with it yesterday, and it cut beautifully.

### Marvelous

House Hunter—But whenever there's a flood the water will come right up to the house.

Agent—Very likely, sir. But there are precious few properties where you can get fishing from the dining room window.

# FARMER SMITH'S RAINBOW CLUB

## GOOD-NIGHT TALK

Dear Children—I am so busy getting ready for Christmas I will have to make my talk short. I am making it short because I know you haven't time to read what I write—I am considerate. Do you know what that word means?

It means THOUGHTFUL OF OTHERS.

And thoughtful means FULL OF THOUGHT.

I am going to be CONSIDERATE OF YOU. I am going to give you something to do that will make some one happy. Do not forget the OLD people. If you can't think of anything to give an old person, I have put in a real CHECK here and you may fill it in for grandmother or grandfather, or any one you choose. It is such a LITTLE THING, but it will give a great deal of pleasure to some one, because YOU have been CONSIDERATE.

No. ____ Philadelphia, Christmas 1915.

The Rainbow Bank

The Evening Ledger

Pay to the order of

_____ Kisses _____ Hugs

With the check you need not wake up December 26 and say: "Oh, dear! Oh, dearie Me! I FORGOT grandma!" I always thought New Year's was invented so that IF you forgot somebody on Christmas, you could remember them on New Year's, but I may be wrong.

Well, I must be out shopping, so good-night and don't forget to open the window and tuck your toes in tight and don't pull the bed clothes over your head, 'cause it will muss up the bed clothes—I mean your hair and, and, if you can't sleep, turn over on the other side and say "SKAT!" just like that and it will make the thoughts get out of your head and—I guess that's all.

FARMER SMITH,
Children's Editor, EVENING LEDGER.

## THE LEGEND OF SANTA CLAUS—Continued

The children ran to their homes and told the people of the North that Growly Grump had fallen in the street and the men and women ran to where he lay. They lifted him tenderly and took him to the nearest hut.

And so passed from earth old Growly Grump, whom the children used to tease.

The morning after Growly Grump had fallen in the street the sun came out and all the children gathered to attend the burying of old Growly Grump, for they missed him, although it was but one day since he had gone. Such flowers as the children had! Never before had there been such a gathering of roses and wild flowers.

A little mound was made in the depths of the wood to mark all that was left to remind the people of the North that there had once been a Growly Grump. The children covered the grave with flowers.

Then they went home.

Toward evening, some of them went to peek through the window of what had been Growly Grump's hut and there they saw the fire burning brightly, just as though the old man himself were there.

(Continued Wednesday, December 22.)

## Do You Know This?

1. Correct the following: Jane gave my sister and I some books.

2. 1-6-7 spells row, 4-6-7 spells now, 5-3-4 spells bin, 1-2-4 spells ran. What does 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 spell? (Five credits.)

Farmer Smith, Children's Editor,
EVENING LEDGER, Philadelphia.

I wish to become a member of your Rainbow Club and agree to DO A LITTLE KINDNESS EACH AND EVERY DAY—SPREAD A LITTLE SUNSHINE ALL ALONG THE WAY.

Name .....

Address .....

Age .....

School I attend.....