

## THE TRIBUTE

Fanny Soane rang Mabel Ince and Mabel Ince rang old Lady Benson to say that poor Dench was dead. 'Who?' screamed Nelly Benson.

'Dench.'

'Dench?'

'Yes. Poor darling Denchie.'

'Thought she'd died years ago. Must have been a hundred.'

'Nonsense, Nelly.'

'She was old in the War.'

'She was *wonderful* in the War.'

'Wonderful means old. I've been wonderful for years.'

'Nelly—' Mabel was hoping to be brief. Calls cost money. She was ringing Kensington from Berkshire. Certainly after six o'clock, but still—

'Nelly, I think we ought to do something. Put in a tribute—'

'*The Times* has gone. No sense in a tribute. No tributes now. Nobody getting born. Getting married. Getting tributes. Or dying—more's the pity.'

'Well, Dench has died.'

'In *The Telegraph* I suppose?' ...

'Yes. Nelly—'

'Sorry. Can't go on. Too expensive.'

'But Nelly, I'm the one who's paying—'

But Kensington, like Dench, had died.

Dear Fanny, wrote Mabel next, I rang Old Nelly Benson

but she's daft as a brush and didn't seem the least bit interested in poor dear Dench. What do you think? I'm quite ready to do something—just a short one. In *The Telegraph* which I suppose is the paper Dench would have wanted now *The Times* seems to have gone for good. Oh dear, I hope Dench went before *The Times*. D'you remember how she always read it, smiling? I don't think she could have borne life without the Court Circular. 'It rivets me,' she used to say. 'Rivets me.' Though lately I gather she hadn't been well and hadn't been reading anything any more. The last Christmas card I had a year or so ago was very shaky. In fact I seem to remember there was only a signature and the little message was written in by some niece. Did you by the way get a sort of begging letter about Dench? That was from the niece too, but I didn't keep the address. I always wished I could have done something. She wanted to get poor D. into a private nursing home. Did you do anything? I feel a bit dreadful about it and if we could do this tribute now I think I'd feel a bit better. Shall we ring round? There must be half a dozen families who would want to come in on it. I can think of three Denchie nannied myself.

*Dear Mabel,*

*Oh my dear—I could have told you Nelly Benson is impossible now. Quite batty. She must be absolutely gaga not to want to go in with a tribute—or it's kindness to think so—when one knows how much Denchie did for those awful children, and grandchildren too come to that, for simply years. She saw the famous Charlotte through virus pneumonia you know. Nelly just went off to Geneva to join Charles and left Dench to it. And it wasn't as if Dench was ever paid or anything. At least I never paid her, did you? Just her keep. Well, you just couldn't. She never asked. Poor as a church m. I'd guess. But being a gent—Dench I mean—one just fed her. She 'came to stay'. To 'stop' as she called it, bless her.*

*Yes, I did get a letter from some niece and I meant to answer it and send a fiver or something but it was just before we went to Penang. I felt a bit awful when I remembered about it long afterwards—too late because I'd lost the address by then, too. I do rather hate that kind of letter. Embarrassing all round. You don't feel you can possibly do enough and so you do nothing. Now of course like you we have just the Service pension. My dear, we need a whip round for ourselves now. Wish we had a niece!*

*Yes, of course I'll go in with a tribute. If we get say three more people it won't kill us. It's about two pounds a line I think. Something like 'In Memory of dear "Dench", beloved Nannie and friend for many years of ...' and names of families. Will you get in touch with the rest or shall I? I suppose it shouldn't come to more than, say, 75p each?*

The telephone rang in Berkshire and Mabel Ince heard a lot of muttering about tangled wires and then old Lady Benson.

'I've had a letter. From some niece. Hello?'

'Hello? Yes? Nelly? What niece?'

'Old Dench's ...' peep, peep, peep, peep.

'Nelly, are you in a phone box? Hello?'

'Yes. It's in the hall. To stop the lodgers. She wants to meet us ...' peep, peep, peep.

'Nelly, for goodness sake! Can't you put in a ten?'

'Hello. Tuppences are better. You get too long with a ...' peep, peep, peep.

'Hello?'

'... to meet us with some things old Dench left us. In her will. Wants to meet us ...' peep, peep.

'Can you write? Can't you write about it, Nelly?'

'... on Thursday. Fortnum and Mason's.'

'Fortnum and—Nelly, *would* you write?'

'I *could* write,' peep, peep, peep.

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'Whether she'll back out of it of course,' said Mabel, 'is another matter. She says she's not been out of the house for years.'

It was Thursday morning—Thursday fortnight morning, for this was not precipitate. Mabel had set forth from Newbury by car leaving Humphrey with the television and a tray, and picked up Fanny Soane. Together they were now proceeding to Kensington and Nelly Benson. It was not as early in the morning as Mabel would have liked as she had lost time looking for Fanny's house which, being in a maze of identical streets and in Raynes Park and not Wimbledon as she had been led to believe, had proved elusive. Fanny's husband in a darned cardigan had seen them to the door as they left, waved perfunctorily and disappeared. His eyes, which as attaché in Tiflis had been interestingly hooded, now had deep swags beneath them, suggesting gin. He was losing his hair. The tiny front garden Mabel noticed had been put down to Brussels sprouts, and an elephant's foot, converted to a boot scraper, stood near the mat.

'A far cry from the Lion Palace,' said Fanny noticing Mabel noticing. 'Sometimes I wonder why we didn't Stay On—though when you read that funny little man—'

'Funny little man?'

'The one who wrote *Staying On*. The one who came out to India for five minutes and wrote all those huge books about us though goodness knows how. I never met a soul who knew him, did you?'

'At least,' said Mabel, 'Dench never knew. What's become of us all I mean. She was such a romantic. She talked about "love of country", d'you remember? Actually used the words. And d'you remember how she stood for the Queen?'

'Oh well, we all did that. We still do. Don't you?'

'Well—not to make it obvious. It depends where we are. And not like Dench did, to attention—quite eccentrically

really as if it was almost a joke. Humphrey and I just sort of hesitate now, getting the coats from under the seat. We just stop talking for a moment.'

'Like vicars wondering about Grace when you ask them to dinner.'

'Do you ask vicars to dinner?'

'No. Well I don't know that we ever did. We don't ask anybody to dinner now. Can't afford it. Nobody asks us—we're all in the same boat. I mean the people who ask us to dinner now are not the sort one knows. Spaghetti bolognese and cheese-cake.'

The two women looked back on half a life-time of invitations—battlefields, of notes, menus, first guest lists, second guest lists all professionally conceived, negotiated, carried through. Jousts, tournaments, ritual murders—masked by smiles and decorations.

'D'you remember the Bensons' invitations?'

'Lord yes—"gloves"! Bottom left-hand corner, "Gloves will be worn". Poor Nelly.'

'D'you remember Prague? The high ceilings? So beautiful. Somebody told me the other day why embassy ceilings are always so high. It's to take the noise of the cocktail parties.'

'I'd have thought Prague was older than cocktail parties.'

'Nothing's older than cocktail parties. Of one kind or another. Didn't old Dench love cocktail parties? And Prague? I used to let her stand with the children just out of sight on the landing—the Ambassador was so good about Staff—and watch all the people. The children were such angels with Dench.'

'And she *had* them so beautiful.'

'Oh yes. My word she must have cost us something. I mean H.M. Government something. Those little dresses—always Harrods or The White House. The smocking always going round across the back. Round-toed shoes. Like little conkers!'

'Oh—and the herring-bone tweeds! With the little velvet collars—Mabel, I'm going to cry. Dear old Dench. Didn't she iron and press well?'

They picked up Lady Benson rather uncertainly at an address near Notting Hill, not at first recognising her. The house was dilapidated with dirty window panes, the upper floors partitioned down the middle of windows with plaster-board and covered with stickers saying 'Capital Radio' and 'I Still Love Elvis'. A grubby-looking woman peered from a downstairs front room and turned out to be Lady Benson herself, ungloved. She appeared on the top step wearing bedroom slippers and carrying a leather shopping-bag. Her hair was extremely untidy and a smell of onions which hung about the hall accompanied her. There was still an imperial look to the eyes.

'You're not going to Harrods in bedroom slippers, Nelly!'

'I thought it was Fortnum and Mason's?'

'No—we changed it. Harrods is less flashy. But you'd hardly go to Fortnums—'

'They're all I can get my feet into, except Wellingtons. I don't go about much now. I have the house to run.'

Big flakes of plaster had come away from around the rain-water pipes. The desolate February garden was full of broken, purple edging-stones and dead hydrangeas.

'I use my wellies for gardening,' said Nellie Benson looking out suspiciously at the damp day. 'I have a pair of Dr Scholl's somewhere.'

Fanny said with fortitude that they would be better.

'Come in,' said Nelly.

'It's all right. We'll be in the car.' Mabel, who had dressed carefully in a powder blue suit and a hat of green-black feathers with a veil—bought once for the Queen's Birthday in Dar-es-Salaam—got quickly into her car and looked into the distance. Heaving the shopping bag ahead of her, Nelly climbed

in alongside and said, 'I remember that hat. Always reminded me of a dead blackbird,' and laughed at this all the way along Kensington High Street.

Fanny said, 'I think perhaps we are out of the fourth form now, Nelly,' and Mabel did not speak.

'Where are you now?' Nelly asked when she had stopped laughing. 'What's become of you, Mabel? I heard you'd had to sell the castle.'

'Yes.'

'Suppose old Humphrey lost his money.'

'Oh Nelly, be quiet,' said Fanny in the back.

'Horses, I suppose. He always lost. I remember the Marsa Club in Malta. My word he flung it about. Where d'you live now?'

'Newbury.'

'Bit near the course, isn't it?'

'He watches on television,' said Mabel, negotiating the Kensington traffic lights with knuckles of ice.

'You can do that anywhere—watch the television. Unless you're like me—can't afford one. Where d'you live, Fanny?'

'Wimbledon.'

'Oh dear, that's a pity. A long way from London. Further than Newbury in a sense.' She began to laugh again.

'We're very comfortable.'

'Do be quiet, Nelly. Fanny lives in a charming house in Fethney Road. Delicious red brick. I wouldn't be surprised if it was Norman Shaw. I thought all your little things looked lovely there, Fanny.'

'Norman Shaw?' said Nelly, 'Wasn't he A. D. C. Pankot? Terrible old pansy. Dench couldn't bear him. Have you got any of *his* little things?'

'Oh for goodness sake!' said Fanny. 'Don't be so foul, Nelly. Mabel means the things we've all got—brasses and elephants' feet, the things we've all got and can't bear. I like Fethney

Road. I don't know the locals but there's the Diplomatic Wives. I go to those in London.'

'Dench would have approved of that. Poor Dench, she was never a Diplomatic Wife. Or any wife at all. I wonder why?' said Mabel.

'We were always wondering why. So pretty she must have been. Men loved her.'

'Yes. I don't think they ever got very far with her though.'

'Not that she was a puritan—my word no. Just—withdrawn somehow. Deep down. Knew how to stop things going too far. My word she'd have been a marvellous Diplomatic Wife. Complete gent of course.'

'Oh, complete.'

'And knew her place.'

'Oh yes, she knew her place.'

'There had been some man once, you know. D'you remember? The children used to tease her. Mr. Santas-something-or-other. Some Argentine millionaire. Some widower—'

'No. Not a widower. Very much married. Catholic. What was his name? The children used to call him Mr. Salteena.'

'She didn't like jokes about him. D'you suppose he existed?'

'No idea. But it is funny she didn't marry. D'you think she was a Lesbian? A lot of nannies are. Subconsciously of course,' said worldly Mabel.

'Certainly not,' said Nelly, outraged. 'Dench a subconscious!'

'And she wasn't a nannie either,' said Fanny. 'She was a gent. She was a romantic.'

'She was damn useful,' said Nelly. She eased her legs out of the car and felt for Hans Crescent with the Dr Scholl's. 'We're lucky to find a parking place I suppose, but this is a good long way from Harrods.'

'We'll go in at door ten,' said Mabel. 'Past the children's



hairdressing and the rocking horse. Then through the children's clothes to get to the lifts. In memory of Dench. She brought all my children here, Fanny, at one time or another.'

'She brought all mine,' said Fanny.

'I dare say she brought mine,' said Nelly, 'though I can't say I knew anything about it. I just handed the lot of them over to her. They were happier with her anyway. My place was with Charles.' She waddled ahead.

Hatted and handbagged, not to say shopping-bagged, talking in piercing, old-fashioned Kensington voices, the three old women watched children pitching on the rocking horse, waiting for their hair to be cut. The ones with nannies all had dusky skins. The white ones were mostly with tired-looking mothers wearing anoraks and reading *Cosmopolitan*. The dusky ones wore herring-bone tweed, the white ones space-suits. White or dusky they all screamed a good deal.

'What would Dench have thought of this!' said Fanny.

'She'd have borne it. Perhaps improved things.'

'Oh, she'd not have gone to Arabs!'

'Oh I don't know. Look at *Anna and the King of Siam*.'

'Dench didn't care about money,' said Mabel. 'That was the really lovely thing about her.'

'Yes,' said Fanny, 'Dench was cheap.'

Up in the lift the ladies rose, to the fourth floor and the big airy restaurant where they had booked a table. The head-waiter on seeing Lady Benson's shoes found that the table was after all another table—one in a corner and rather behind a screen. Mabel's long finger summoning him back took a little time to be regarded.

'A young woman will be joining us. A Miss Dench.'

'Yes, madam.'

'Show her to this table, will you?'

'Yes, madam. Sherry, madam, while you are waiting?'

There was an uneasy, negative movement, a slight sliding away of eyes.

'Not yet, thank you.'

'How will we know her—the niece? She's quite young, isn't she?' said Fanny. 'She sounded quite young in the letter. I suppose she's a great-niece. How are we going to know her? I mean, any of these women might be nieces,' she looked about, 'eating their lunch.'

'Well, a lot of people are nieces. And eat lunch. We have been nieces—'

'Not primarily,' said Fanny. 'We were never primarily nieces. All these women look primarily nieces. It's very depressing. It's rather a test when you think about it—looking a niece. Dench herself for instance would never have looked a niece. Mr. Salteena would never have fallen for a niece. We don't look nieces—'

'Don't know what you're talking about,' said Lady Benson, munching a roll.

'Well, I dare say we'll spot Niece Dench,' said Mabel. 'I believe I once saw her as a matter of fact. I went to East Molesey to see Denchie—oh, seven or eight years ago. She must have let me in. A nice little woman. I expect she'll come back to me. There was masses of ironing about.'

'Ironing?'

'Yes. On airers. You know those old-fashioned standing airers. All round the sitting room. Beautiful ironing it was—I remembered the smell—lovely warm clean clothes, and Denchie in a bed in the corner. She did look small.'

'Yes. I think she must be a very good sort of woman, the niece.'

Fanny said uncertainly, 'I suppose that's what she meant about a nursing home,' but Mabel said, 'Oh, come on—Dench was no trouble. And she ate like a bird. Don't you remember in the War? If ever we got anything on the Black Market and

there wasn't enough to go round Dench never minded being left out. There were some eggs once—it was when we were in Lincolnshire and she was cook-house-keeping—six beautiful eggs and we had them boiled for a treat. There were Humph and I and the children and some child staying—little Polly Knox. D'you remember? Pretty baby thing—Dench adored her. Seven of us and only six eggs and someone said, "What about Dench?" Polly Knox said, "You can have half mine, Denchie"—and Dench said straightaway, "Thank you, dear, but I don't take eggs."

'She used to say that about cream in the War, "No thank you, I don't take cream. Not since Canada."'

'She'd been a hero in Canada, you know. Nursed a typhoid case nobody else would touch—and caught it and nearly died. She'd volunteered—it was in all the Canadian papers. It was while we were over there. She got flowers from all over the place. Rather marvellous for her—except for being so delicate afterwards, no cream and so forth. Oh and having no money—otherwise she had a pretty good life I'd say, Denchie. I wonder if she had the OAP—I never paid her stamp, did you?'

'No.'

They fell silent. No niece appeared. The waiter drew closer holding pencil and pad.

'D'you think we should have sherry?' said Fanny.

'All right. All right, yes. She's very late. We'll have sherry. Three sherrys please. Very dry and—well what about ordering some wine? I mean this is to be a tribute, isn't it—instead of the first idea of putting something in the paper. More lavish. And romantic. And very much nicer for us. I want to do it properly. I want the niece to feel we've done things properly. Do they have half bottles?'

'We can't order wine,' said Nelly, 'until we know what the niece is going to eat.'

The sherries came as they considered. Lady Benson decided she had lost her shopping-bag, then, finding it, wondered if she had time to go downstairs to the Food Halls for a pound of Finnan Haddock which though expensive was more certain than in Notting Hill not to be coloured cod.

Dissuaded by the others she sat on, and at last when the niece was more than half an hour late they ordered.

'It seems,' said Mabel to the waiter, 'that our friend is not coming. We will have three chicken à la king.'

'Anything to start with, madam?'

'No thank you.'

'Vegetables?'

'Er—perhaps a green salad.'

'I'd like vegetables,' said Lady Benson. 'I seldom seem to eat vegetables.' But a chill stare from Mabel sent him off.

'D'you remember the lovely vegetables in Hong Kong?' said Nelly. 'They used to fly the lettuces from America.'

'That was Jamaica.'

'Do you get vegetables, Fanny?'

Fanny said they had good Brussels sprouts.

'I don't see any point in spending money,' said Mabel, 'if the niece isn't here.'

'We were never in Jamaica,' Nelly said. 'Nor Africa. I'm glad to say we never had to go through Africa, Charles was always too senior.'

'I can't see how he can *always* have been too senior.'

'The place none of us ever got to,' said Mabel, 'senior or otherwise, was South America. D'you know that Dench knew South America? Very well. I first found her in Jamaica on her way back from Buenos Aires sitting all by herself at a table at The Mona—eating lettuce, I dare say. Perhaps Brussels sprouts. I thought, what a charming little woman and how sad she looks. I suppose she'd just left Salteena.'

'So fragile. So sad. Not a bean. The children took to her and

I thought well, she might be just the thing, and I took her on. And that was over forty years ago.'

'Devoted,' said Fanny. 'Utterly reliable.'

'More than the niece,' said Mabel, looking towards the door where a dazzling woman had just come in wearing a tightly-belted Persian lamb jacket with mink lapels. Her long legs wore long grey suede boots. Her coat and skirt said Paris. Not young, she made youth seem a triviality.

'Not,' said Mabel, 'that I ever felt we were real favourites with Dench!'

Fanny said, 'I thought you were. I never really felt we were. She talked of your children all the time.'

'To us she talked of yours.'

'She never talked to anyone about mine,' said Lady Benson, 'and neither did I.'

'Used to send her good presents though,' she added. 'Pound of tea at Christmas. When we were in Ceylon.'

'The child she really did love more than the rest was that child Polly Knox,' said Mabel, 'the one who tried to share the egg.'

'Yes, but then that *was* an easy child. My word she was a clever girl, too. She did do well for herself.'

'Yes—Charles and I paid to go over that place once. Chateau. They weren't there. Somewhere else in another chateau I dare say. Rolling. My dear, that woman is coming over to this table. You don't think it could be the niece?'

'Not if the niece is bringing presents. This one's not carrying presents.'

A uniformed chauffeur, however, walked behind with parcels and they both approached. The woman, who looked more beautiful as she came nearer, spread Persian-lambled arms and cried, 'Dears!'

The three ladies sat like rocks.

'I'm so terribly sorry. We found it so difficult to park. Chetwode couldn't stay with the car because of the parcels. I'm so fearfully late. Oh I do hope you haven't waited. Oh good—you haven't. Thank you, Chetwode, just here on the window-sill. I'm afraid they're nothing. She said in the will you were to have mementoes, but she had so little. You'd not believe how little. So few possessions. There—well—' She looked round. The chauffeur melted. Her hair was the colour of very pale sunshine, her eyes enormous, clear and contrite. She took off her gloves and revealed beautiful long-fingered hands which she first clasped and then undid and waved about.

'Champagne,' she cried. The head-waiter who had come close came closer. 'Champagne. We are here to celebrate,' she told him, 'the life, the *happy* life of the dearest, dearest old—No I won't call this an In Memoriam. Denchie couldn't bear going on about the past. She had the happiest life and she died peacefully and thinking about us all. A good dry—yes that one. Number six.'

Mabel said faintly that she was very glad about Dench's happiness. Nelly Benson said nothing and Fanny Soane shut her eyes and opened them again.

The niece. The niece so good at ironing.

'I believe she talked of you three,' said the niece leaning forward, 'more than anyone else. Day after day, year in year out. All the places she had seen through you and how you rescued her, Mrs. Ince, when she was in very low water and let her have an absolutely free hand with all your children—let her nurse them when they were ill. And even *grandchildren*, Lady Benson.'

Bewildered at being recognised and so warmly, and unable to keep her eyes off the niece's sapphire and diamond ring Mabel said stiffly, 'We grew to rely on her very much.' Lady Benson began to say that Dench knew her pl—, but stopped to watch the niece's easy greeting of the champagne and the

arrangements to make the bill for it separate and hers. Fanny watching the niece draw from her silky handbag a silky tenner said that all three had known Dench for a very great number of years. Probably better than anyone else. The quality of the niece's pale silk shirt made her flush suddenly with fury (By God, nursing homes!).

'Dench was an excellent servant,' she said.

The niece raised her glass. 'To Dench,' she said.

They drank.

'D'you remember *The Times*?' said the niece.

'Only just. We gave up our idea of that sort of tribute. *The Telegraph* is somewhat not—'

'No, no—I mean Dench and *The Times*? How she wrapped herself in *The Times* all the way from Perth when there was no room for her with you in the first class and there was no heating in those days in the thirds?'

'I don't think—' said Mabel.

'I never really believed in that frost-bite business,' said Fanny.

'Do you remember the roses?' said the niece.

Nobody remembered the roses.

'I think it was one of your daughters, Lady Benson, when Denchie had been looking after Simon and Sara and Simon kicked her. Your daughter said, "Denchie, you must have some roses" and took the secateurs and a basket and led her out into the gardens and cut three. Three roses—wasn't it priceless? D'you remember those gardens—there were two thousand rose trees. One of the sights of Persia. Oh how Denchie laughed!'

'I don't suppose,' said Nelly Benson, 'that Dench had much room for displaying roses.'

'Oh no. No, no of course not. She was in the attics. She wasn't minding. It just made us both laugh.'

'I felt personally very sorry,' said Mabel after a moment, 'about the business of the nursing home. I would have liked to help Dench, even taken her myself for a week or two, just to help the family out. But we were abroad.'

'Oh, but she refused. Didn't you know? You mustn't worry. It was all arranged for the nursing home without your kind help but she was so miserable. She said, "Oh do let me stay at home." She liked being in the sitting room. So of course we let her. I promise you she never knew you had been asked.'

Lady Benson who had let the Dr Scholl's stray under the table tried to retrieve them and said, 'She always had my shoes. It's the thing I miss most if you want to know—good shoes.'

'The shoes are still there,' said the niece. 'Rows and rows. They are very old-fashioned but if you wished I could let you have them back I'm sure. Dear Denchie never wore them—they were too big, though she was a lamb and I'm sure she never told you.'

'And these,' she said stretching out to the window-sill (the waiters leapt) 'are the little mementoes—all I could find and I do feel so sorry, just little brass things, Benares trays, a hand bell, an elephant's foot—it could be adapted as a boot scraper.'

They held their gifts.

'It is very good of you to bother,' said Mabel at last, 'to bring them all this way.' The full horror of the presents had made her turn quite pink. Pink with triumph. She knew that had she discovered Dench to have had anything really—

'I feel very *honoured*,' she said. 'To think that this sort of thing was all she had. All Denchie had.'

'Well, except for the money,' said the niece.

'Money?'

'Yes. The South America money. Mr. Salteena's money as we children used to call him.'

'Did he leave her—? You mean he did exist?'

'Oh yes. Mr. Salteena existed. He left her four hundred.'



'Oh but how nice!'

'Thousand, that is. He left her four hundred thousand. She left two hundred thousand of it to me and the other two hundred thousand to her niece.'

'You,' said Lady Benson with a void and wallowing noise in the throat. 'You then are not the niece?'

'The niece! Darling, darling Lady Benson—didn't I say? Didn't you recognise me? Oh dear I thought you'd recognise me. I was fussed being late. Oh how silly! I forgot to say—the niece said no. She couldn't face it, she said, not Harrods. And—the money's not altered her a bit—she said she had the ironing.'

'But who then—?' said Mabel.

'Well, but I'm Polly Knox. You must remember me. I'm Polly Knox. I've never lost touch with Dench. She left me half and I've been astounded and quite speechless ever since. He only died a short time before she did, Mr. Salteena, but she was absolutely in her right mind and all that, when she heard. She quite understood. Her niece said she just lay there in bed with the solicitor's letter on the counterpane and she smiled. And she said—to the niece—the niece told me—she's very straight and she told me this—she said, "Why Polly Knox, Auntie?" and Denchie said and, well, we've all been wondering what on earth she meant, she said—'

'What did she say?' asked Mabel Ince with unmoving lips.

'Well, she said a funny thing. She said, "Tell Polly she shall have half my egg."