MAIDS IN A MARKET GARDEN

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Maids in a Market Garden by Clo. Graves & Maurice Greiffenhagen

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CLO. GRAVES & MAURICE GREIFFENHAGEN

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BY

CLO. GRAVES.

Illustrated by Maurice Greiffenhagen.

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I T was a bright, warm afternoon in the month of July. High Street, Kensington, was at its busiest, and although it was neither a Thursday nor a Saturday, the pimply-faced errand boy was putting up the shutters of the United Gentlewomen's Work Emporium. Within, the Emporium presented a denuded aspect. If the truth must be told, the business, after dragging on a precarious existence for a period of eighteen months, had somewhat suddenly collapsed, and its promoters were at that moment engaged in winding-up affairs, in the shallow little show parlour on the first-floor front, over a funereal cup of five o'clock tea.

Lady Jane Pegram sat at the centre-table with the ledger and day-books of the defunct business before her. She wore a frowning aspect. The other members of the company were scattered about the room in various attitudes, expressive of different degrees of limp depression, and a plausible person in black silk raiment—the irreproachably respectable lady manageress, under whose auspices the United Gentle-women's Work Emporium had first opened its shutters: those shutters now sealed for ever upon Kensington High Street—was in the act of taking a final leave.

"I fear," she remarked suavely, indicating the volumes over which Lady Jane, with a puzzled brow, was poring, "that you will find them difficult to understand. You are probably unacquainted with the Rules of Bookkeeping."

"Perhaps so," returned Lady Jane, grimly. "Only I know a muddle when I see one. Good day to you."

The door opened, and closed behind the departing lady-manageress. Lady Jane drew herself erect and looked round upon the United Gentlewomen assembled. She sniffed a sniff that was pregnant with suspicious meaning, and smote the table smartly with her clenched hand.

"Oh, are you really sure, you know?" cried Fanny Dormer. Lady Jane nodded an awful nod.

"Unimpeachable references," she commented "Experienced in business, and widow of a surgeon with half-a-dozen letters dangling after his name. She has got five to hers—R.O.G.U.E., spells Rogue, and a rogue you are, my sugary friend in black silk."

"If she has cheated us, can't it be brought home to her?" This came from Clara Currey.



LADY JANE PEGRAM SAT AT THE CENTRE-TABLE WITH THE LEDGER AND DAY-BOOKS OF THE DEFUNCT BUSINESS BEFORE HER.