

**NEXT DOOR
NEIGHBOURS,
PP. 10-253**

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Next Door Neighbours, pp. 10-253 by W. Pett Ridge

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W. PETT RIDGE

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"A riverside garden (Shadwell)."—PAGE 57.

FRONTISPIECE.

NEXT DOOR
NEIGHBOURS
BY W. PETT RIDGE
AUTHOR OF 'MORD EM'LY' ETC.

WITH
SIX
ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON: HODDER AND
STOUGHTON 27
PATERNOSTER ROW 1904

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trotted along by her side, his new boots squeaking so loudly as to extort criticism from tradesmen's boys. Peter wished that he were skilled in repartee that he might have replied to them at once; he knew that an appropriate answer would occur to him in the course of two or three weeks, but that would be too late.

"Much further?"

"Shan't tell you!" replied the married sister. "Lift your feet off the ground when you walk, and look out for a turning on this side called North Audley Street."

The boy was the first to espy the desired street, and two minutes later they were in a square in which the most delightful scents of cooking strolled up from the areas. A private carriage stood outside the house which they wanted, and the two remained near the railings until an opulent matron had come down the steps and had driven away.

"Isn't she lovely!"

"'Ush!" said the sister, in an awed whisper, 'that's me lady."

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They pulled over the lever that rang the area bell, and a page-boy came out below and bawled up asking whether they were cook's lot. The aunt herself appeared at that moment, and, albeit a bulky woman, ran up the white steps and, opening the gate, embraced the two with enthusiasm. It could not have happened better, cried the aunt delightedly. The family was lunching out, and after the visitors had had a snack of something they would be able to go right over the entire house.

"Come on down!" she said hospitably. "You've had a terr'ble long journey, and you'll be glad of a rest. I like your panier," went on the agreeable stout aunt, "and presently I'll get the lady's-maid to give you a new idea for doing your hair. As for you" (this to the boy, as she stopped for breath at the foot of the stairs), "I declare to goodness I should never have known you. You've growed so! If I'd met you out in the square I should have passed you by. Too big, I s'pose, now to kiss anybody!"

"Don't mind kissing you, Aunt Emma, if

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you partic'larly want it!" answered the boy, reddening.

"Hullo, hullo!" said a pretty servant in the kitchen, who had one sleeve rolled up above the elbow. "Just caught you two. What do I get for not telling? I've always suspected you, cook. You quiet ones!"

"How many young men have *you* got?" inquired Peter.

This question had a success that astonished the boy, and placed him in a position as a satirist, which he found some difficulty in filling. For the pretty servant, it appeared, was notable for the number of her engagements, and the dexterity shown in carrying on several at the same time, and this casual inquiry of Peter's was held to be an extremely neat stroke. The women-folk were so much amused, and found it such an opportunity for rallying conversation, that Peter—who was a growing boy, and wanted a lot to eat, and wanted it often—began to fear that the more urgent subject of meals might be overlooked. The situation was made the more tantalising