

Mrs Poots

Poots was not a pseudonym, no Dickensian jest. It was her real name. Unfortunate, you might think, for a teacher of young adolescents. Prior to her marriage, she had been simple Sandra Brown. But she fell in love with Owen Poots and sacrificed all pride to her beloved. It was pointed out by a stern head-teacher that she was storing up trouble for herself. "Why?" exclaimed the man, beside himself with rage, "Good God, woman - it spells 'stoop' backwards! You cannot stand in front of a class of impressionable children and expect to be taken seriously!?" But the future Mrs Poots stood her ground, pointing out, not unreasonably, that there was already a Mr Foody on the staff (not in H.E., as it happened), and no one had complained about his incitement of childish mirth. "But he's always been Foody!" argued the head-teacher. "When I took him on he was Jim Foody. And, anyway, he never married." "Whereas, head-master...?" asked Mrs Poots in a tone which stopped the head-teacher dead in his tracks. He saw a sexual harassment case twitching its nose in the darkness of its lair. He waved her out of his office. "You have my blessing, Miss Brown," he said magnanimously. And immediately initiated a sweepstake in the staff-room as to the date of her nervous breakdown.

The school-years passed. Mrs Poots revelled in her work. Hordes of small and large children had giggled, smirked, laughed out loud, muttered things behind her back, screamed her surname from alleyways in the twilight. She cared not one whit. She loved Mr Poots.

Mrs Poots was good at her job because, unlike many of her colleagues, she was totally organised. Every minute of her working day had its schedule, and every schedule was strictly adhered to. Time was precious and where time could be saved by doing two things at once, Mrs Poots would save that time, and store it away, and accumulate great credits of time for marking homework, washing her husband's shirts, talking to the parents of her dear charges. For their 10th wedding anniversary, Owen, seeing no small Pooters on the way, had purchased a small dog, pleasant in every way, which his wife would walk to the park every evening.

It occurred to Mrs Poots one particularly damp and unpleasant night, that she could stay curled up in bed a few minutes longer each wintry morning if she combined a walk with the dog with other mundane tasks. Why not, she argued to herself, fetch the next day's morning papers on the night before? After all, she went by the door of the paper-shop with Spot. Then she and Mr Poots could spend quiet evenings before a roaring fire, reading the next day's news, and retire to bed knowing that another chore was out of the way.

Mrs Poots thus came to know all that happened in the world before anyone else knew it. She could, had she been a betting lady, have made a killing with the turf-accountants, knowing, as she did, the results of all the evening football matches and dog-races, before they were even started. She was au fait with overnight world events before the CIA, MI5 or the network of spy-satellites had had time to discover or foment trouble. But she was neither a betting woman, nor yet of a ghoulish persuasion.

And when the Spring returned, she reverted to her early morning walks with Spot the Dog, and bought the evening papers to read at breakfast; it saved her a penn'orth of time to she could spend on more pleasant gardening duties. When Mr Poots proposed two weeks in a gîte in France, she bought the entire fortnight's papers in advance, making sure that their ferry was not to sink with them aboard,

nor a flash-flood, to which that part of France was sometimes prone, to spoil their holiday entirely.

Knowing the future gave Mrs Poots a warm inner glow. It was easy to deal with the small troubles launched in her direction by a class of unstable teenagers when, over tea and toast in the morning, one had seen the larger troubles coming at the world. Sometimes she wondered aloud whether she ought to advise the Authorities that an earthquake was due to strike, or a building go up in flames, or a train to go off the rails. But Owen patted her hand and said it was best not to get involved. "What good would it do, Cassandra, my dear?"