

Missus Addie Lappan

By Rodman Hilliard

MRS. Addie Lappan was a nervous woman. Otherwise she might not have been awake at two o'clock on Sunday morning. From the window of her room above Korinsky's Second Hand Store she gazed down upon the dark deserted street. A fine mist clouded the brightness of the arc lamp on the corner. A rickety milk wagon rattled out of an alleyway and disappeared into the blackness. Mrs. Addie Lappan felt the pathos of it all. Sunday! It was no different from any other day; except that Korinsky's Second Hand Store would be closed and there would be fewer people on the street. Sundays were always the same in Blaker street. There were the few residents who would attend services at Mercy Mission while the others sat at home and complained of the cold weather. There were the few who would contribute small offerings of money to the Mission while the others kept to their flats and grumbled over their meagre earnings. A half-ironic grin stole across Mrs. Addie Lappan's face. Thank God she had always been frugal! None of her earnings went to the Mission and neither did she. The twenty-five dollars she had saved last year could be put to a better use. People made too much of religion anyway!

Footfalls! Mrs. Addie Lappan wheeled suddenly around, turning her back to the window and catching her breath, unconsciously, in a tense effort to locate the sounds. Up from the flooring of her room came the sound of stealthy, searching, hesitating footfalls. Oh, so *that* was it, she told herself. Someone in the store below. Must have entered through the back window. Korinsky, the forgetful old proprietor, often left the back window unlocked. Mrs. Addie Lappan's already overwrought nerves became visibly agitated. A few small beads of perspiration appeared on her brow and her hands trembled as she crossed the room and opened the door into the hallway. As she peered out into the impenetrable darkness of the corridor, the footfalls subsided entirely. Perhaps the intruder was looting the safe, she reasoned; or perhaps he was helping himself to the small case of valuables that Korinsky kept in a glass cabinet in the rear of the

store. Imbued with a responsibility that years of service in the second hand store had assumed for her, Mrs. Addie Lappan groped bravely down the narrow hallway. She paused for a moment upon reaching the aged stairs descending to the store. The steps would creak as she made her way down them and any noise might alarm the robber to depart. With this conjecture should moved the soiled slippers she wore and began the descent of the stairs in stocking feet, stopping for an instant on each step and placing her ear to the wall in hope of hearing the stealthy foot-falls. There was only silence, broken now and then by a sudden pounding of her heart. As she reached the bottom step from which opened the door leading into the store, a soft patting sound announced a resumption of the intruder's movement. And as she quietly opened the door Mrs. Addie Lappan saw her courage forsaking her. The robber no doubt carried a gun and would probably shoot her. But upon finding herself standing in the doorway of the store she realized that it was too late to turn back. Then something happened. A piercing ray of light struck her in the face and a cackling laugh echoed in her ears.

Patrolman Murphy had his own ideas about religion. Sixteen years of duty along Blaker street had endowed him with many ideas about many things. He walked slowly along the deserted street, stopping now and then to try the door of some dingy shop. Sunday morning! It was always the same, he thought. The people who lived in the flats above the cheap stores along Blaker street were all too poor to avail themselves of even opportunities for amusement on the Sabbath; and they were all too lazy to attend church services. Perhaps these people didn't get much out of life; but who could blame them? Of course, charity organizations were always coming down to Blaker street to give baskets of food to the "needy" ones in the vicinity. But what did that matter? If some of these rich people could only understand that the residents of Blaker street had, all of them, a little pride! Patrolman Murphy smiled to himself as he walked along and thought. Now there was Mrs. Addie Lappan, who lives up over Korinsky's Second Hand Store down near the end of the street. Some charity crowd had sent her a basket of food when she was sick a short time ago and she had thrown it out the window. Patrolman Murphy was amused as he recalled the incident. He was walking along by her flat when she threw that basket out the window. It landed square in front of him

and when he looked up to see who had thrown it away there was Mrs. Addie Lappan standing in her window and shouting, "I may be poor, but I still got enough to buy my own meals." Yes, Patrolman Murphy told himself, that's the way people are. Charity clubs waste their money on folks they think are "needy" and these "needy" folks, a lot of them, have too much pride to accept rich people's charity. Now if they'd only

"Hullo!" A heavy body emerged somewhere from the darkness of an alley crossing and collided with the pudgy figure of Patrolman Murphy.

"Well!" Patrolman Murphy exclaimed, "who the devil are you?"

The other made no reply.

"Come here!" the officer commanded, grasping the other by the arm and leading him to a nearby street light, "We'll soon see who you are!"

The light of the street lamp disclosed an old man, ragged and bent. Patrolman Murphy gazed at him critically; then, his attention arrested by an object which the old man carried in his arm, exploded.

"Well I'll be damned!" Patrolman Murphy exclaimed, "What are you carrying *that* thing around for?"

A strange light gleamed in the old man's eyes. He trembled under the burden of the object he held in his arms. Patrolman Murphy was dumbfounded. In all his sixteen years of service he had never seen anything quite like this. He had reason to be surprised, for clasped tightly in the old man's shaking arms was an ancient phonograph!

"Now what on earth are you going to do with that contraption?" the patrolman questioned.

"I'm gonna sell it!" the old man replied in a rasping voice.

"So!" Patrolman Murphy was nonplussed. Old men didn't usually carry phonographs around at two-thirty on Sunday morning, he told himself.

"I'm hungry and I gotta sell it so as I can eat," the old man added.

"Well, where did you *get* that phonograph?" Patrolman Murphy questioned him harshly in an attempt to smother a pity for the old fellow that was taking possession of himself.

The old man started to walk away. "I dunno where I got

it," he answered, suspiciously.

Patrolman Murphy grabbed him by his ragged coat sleeve. "Wait a minute, now!" the officer admonished, "I guess you'd better come along with me to the station and tell the captain where you got that machine."

When they reached the station Patrolman Murphy explained things to Captain Share. The old man was given food which he devoured instantly, but even the captain was unable to extract any information from him as to the manner in which he acquired possession of the ancient phonograph.

"Give him a bed!" the captain ordered and the old man, strengthened by the food which he had eaten, was lead into a tiny cell.

"Don't that beat everything!" Patrolman Murphy exclaimed after his aged acquaintance of the night had been locked in his cell.

"Yes," Captain Share returned, "the old boy's crazy!"

The next day Patrolman Murphy walked into Korinsky's Second Hand store. Korinsky was perched on a ladder arranging some boxes on the top shelf of a tall, dust-covered case. The unexpected appearance of the officer un-nerved the eccentric store keeper and he all but toppled off the high ladder.

"You wanted sumphing?" Korinsky inquired excitedly.

Patrolman Murphy could not suppress a smile at the store-keeper's agitation. "Yes, a little matter," he replied.

"Well?" Korinsky exclaimed expectantly.

"It's about a phonograph," Patrolman Murphy explained. "Have you missed an old phonograph about your place?"

"Missed one?" the store-keeper replied from his perch atop the ladder. "I have *sold* one—and it was not old!"

"Oh, I see," the officer exclaimed, "you've *sold* a phonograph. And may I ask who you sold it to?"

"Why yes," Korinsky answered, "I have sold a phonograph to the lady who works for me, Missus Addie Lappan, and for twenty-five dollars, too. It was a good bargain."

As Patrolman Murphy left the store he smiled at the thought of the basket of food that had fallen at his feet not so long ago. And he smiled again as he recalled the words of Mrs. Addie Lappan who had stood in her window and cried, "I may be poor, but I still got enough to buy my own meals!"