

## MRS INDEX

*(with deep acknowledgments to NF Simpson)*

Andrew and Mary were sitting in the front room when the doorbell rang.

On the second ring, Mary put down her book.

"There's the bell, Andrew," she said.

"You get it, dear, I'm in the bath," said her husband.

Mary gave him one of her looks.

"Still?" she said.

The bell rang again, for longer this time. Mary got up and went to the door. When she opened it, Mrs Index was standing there.

"Oh, hello Mary," said Mrs Index. "I hope I'm not early."

"Not at all," Mary replied, "It's just that the time has rather got away from us today."

Mrs Index nodded. "That's the thing about time," she said. "It's a nimble beggar."

"Won't you come in to the dining room?" said Mary. "I'm afraid Andrew is still in the bath."

On the dropleaf table in the dining room were a side plate, small tin of biscuits, a glass, a jug of lemon squash, a television set, a remote control, and a notebook filled with Mary's neat convent school handwriting.

Mrs Index began to leaf through the notebook.

"Goodness me," she said.

"Yes, I know," said Mary, apologetically, "Only what with Andrew's mother being in the hospital and our children going into the army –"

"Again?" asked Mrs Index.

"Twice this week," said Mary. "I told them it was addictive, but they wouldn't listen. And now Sammy's thinking of going for a commission."

Mrs Index made a clacking noise.

"I've four of my own, as you know," she said. "And none of them have even mentioned the Armed Forces. Oh, there was that summer when my Kenneth wore a sailor suit, but boys will be boys."

Andrew emerged dripping from the front room, clad in a towelling robe.

"Morning, Mrs Index," he said.

Mrs Index sniffed in reply.

"Get upstairs!" said Mary. "Mrs Index," she said, "would you like a biscuit? We've got dog, cat and jammy dodgers."

Mrs Index took a jammy dodger and sat at the table. She picked up a remote control and clicked the television set on.

"Is this all of it?" she asked, indicating the notebook.

Mary looked uncomfortable.

"No," she said. "There's all the things Andrew downloaded as well."

Mrs Index half-raised an eyebrow.

"I thought he usually deleted those without watching them," she said.

"He does as a rule," Mary agreed hurriedly. "But this time, he thought he'd give them a go."

She wrung her hands together.

"Someone at work said it doesn't really kick in until the third season," she went on.

"Three seasons?" said Mrs Index.

“I know,” said Mary. “Normally I’d delete them when he’s asleep but – “  
She paused.

“It’s *Better Call Saul*,” she said.

Mrs Index looked to Mary as though she was about to say something disapproving: instead she said, “Is there anything else like that you need watching?”

Mary shook her head in relief.

“No,” she said. “Apart from that it’s the usual. *True Detective*, *Westworld*, that new Ricky Gervais, a *Succession* we thought we’d watched but we’d obviously missed. Oh, and *The Marvellous Mrs Maisel*.”

Mrs Index looked at Mary.

“All of it?”

“I’m afraid so,” said Mary. “But it’s very good, apparently. It’s had lovely reviews.”

Mrs Index sniffed again. It was clear what she thought of lovely reviews.

“All right,” she said. “But do bear in mind I’ve Miss Harvey at number six as well today.”

“I know,” said Mary.

“And she still hasn’t watched *Game of Thrones*.”

Mary looked at her.

“Not any of it?”

“No,” said Mrs Index. “Mind you,” she said, in a kinder tone, “She is 92.”

“Oh,” said Mary. “Well, anyway, it’s awfully good of you, Mrs I.”

Mrs Index managed a tight smile and turned away from Mary, who took the hint.

“I’ll leave you to get on with it,” she said.

But Mrs Index was already signing into Netflix.