# Mr. Stegger Takes a Rest

The History of an Adventure in Idleness which the Law completed with Entire Success

By Roderick Stuart Kennedy

Illustrated by R. M. BRINKERHOFF

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## Mr. Stegger Takes a Rest

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### By RODERICK STUART KENNEDY Illustrated by R. M. BRINKERHOFF

n Saturday, March 31, Mr. Stegger sold out his business, resigned the presidency of Stegger's Sales, Ltd., and retired to what he termed a well-earned rest. The decision was applauded by his family, ignorant as they were of the economic law that there is not enough well-earned rest to go round, and that what Mr. Stegger took, would be taken from them—principally from Althea, his wife, but with Helen and Teddy dutifully contributing their share.

On April 1, Mr. Stegger read his Sunday papers, read Althea's, went for a walk on Mount Royal, read two magazines, went for another walk, and showed Murphy, the houseman, how to stoke up the furnace on such scientific principles that it needed no further attention until the next winter.

By April 2, he was so thoroughly rested that he was able to follow Althea in the round of her household duties and to anticipate Mary in answering the door for the butcher.

He laid down the large damp parcel on the kitchen table. "Here's your meat, Mary," he said, "What is it? It seems a lot."

"That's the steak, sir."

"Are you sure it's the right weight?"

"No, I ain't, but it's plenty for this family, anyways."

"Maybe, maybe, but the invoice says seven lbs., and it ought to be weighed—on principle."

"We ain't got no principles, Mister Stegger, so I can't weigh nothin'," said Mary conclusively, and busied herself ostentatiously with the kitchen cabinet.

Mr. Stegger revealed his discovery to Althea with some vehemence. "No scales in the kitchen, Althea! Preposterous! Here I've been making scales for thirty years, yet there isn't one in my own kitchen."

"We've never missed them dear. But there's a letter scale on your desk, I think: perhaps that will do. Did you want to weigh something?"

Grumbling, Mr. Stegger brought in the damp parcel and laid it on the desk. He balanced it—overbalanced it—and at last succeeded in keeping his quarry on an even keel by wrapping it round the letter tray with considerable ingenuity and effusion of blood.



He pointed triumphantly to the dial. "There you are, only four pounds and the invoice calls for seven."

He pointed triumphantly to the dial. "There you are, only four lbs. and the invoice calls for seven! I wonder how long that's been going on."

Althea got up to look. "I wouldn't have thought Roberts would have . . . But Robson, dear, these scales only weigh up to four lbs., the pointer's right round to the end of the dial."

Mr. Stegger curbed his indignation, for it was a Stegger scale. "Just what I told you," he said, warmly. "You can't expect efficient housekeeping if you haven't got efficient equipment. Heavens above! If I had run my business on these lines we would have been in the poorhouse long ago. Where's Murphy? Oh—Mur—phy!"

Murphy's obliging smile appeared in the doorway.

"Look here, Murphy, take this card down to the works and ask for Mr. Randall. Give him my compliments and ask for a 'Gigantic' Midget, model F."

"Shure and oi will, sorr. You only have to say the word. But if you want midges there's lashings of them out back, sorr. Oi've the markings on me yet from this morning when I was emptying the garbage. And they was gigantuck midges, too, sorr. Wouldn't I be catching some of them for you now? Quicker than goin' down to the works, sorr."

"Don't be a fool, Murphy. It's a scale I want. A 'Gigantic' scale, Midget model."

"Oi take your maning, sorr, and will I get a wagon?"

"A wagon? No, what do you want with a wagon, man?"

"Well, sorr, it's a long way, and I'll shurely need a wagon or some convaynience bringing any gigantuck scale all that way. I'm older than I was in me younger days."

Mr. Stegger pushed him out of the room. "You do what I say, Murphy, and don't spend all day arguing. Get a move on now."

"You see, Althea," he explained, removing the bloodstains with his handkerchief. "In these days of cut-throat competition efficiency is essential, whether it's a household or a business."

"But we don't have any competition here, Robson," suggested his wife.

"That's not the point at all, it's a fundamental principle, and principles have no exceptions. I hoped for a real rest when I retired—I've been looking forward to it for thirty years—but I see I am still needed. Well, so be it." Mr. Stegger sighed heroically. "I will devote a month—a month should be ample—to organizing the household on a thoroughly businesslike basis. No, don't say anything, my dear, it's my duty." Mr. Stegger waved aside expressions of gratitude and appreciation—if any. "After a month I can really rest—the household should practically run itself by then. I venture to say, my dear, that you will be surprised."

Mrs. Stegger ventured to think the same.

"Now take the bookkeeping system," went on Mr. Stegger; "that's most important. Suppose you show me your books." "Which ones?"

"All of them, we'll start this thing properly."

"I think you know them all, dear, we haven't got any new ones lately—except one Mrs. Granby lent me, 'Screaming Flames' it's called, but I don't know—"

"Account books I'm speaking of," Mr. Stegger snapped; "your household account books."

He looked disdainfully through the small black book obediently proffered. "No wonder we haven't got system. This doesn't tell me anything. What's your method?"

"I just put the things down in it," explained Mrs. Stegger simply, "and at the end of the month I add them up. I don't think you'll find it hard, dear, when you understand it. There, last month was \$196, do you see?"

"Of course I see; I see we need a little more efficiency round this house. How we've got along all this time I don't know. Now then, March 1, groceries, yes; butcher . . . ah! . . . not itemized . . . let's see now."

Three hours later Mr. Stegger went to the telephone. His neat features bore an air of resignation.

"Hello! Is that Stegger's Scales? Put me through to the accounting department. Is that Mr. Grove? Hope you are getting along well with the new management, Grove . . . Yes, very much. I would be obliged if you would just drop in here on your way home this evening . . . Yes, to-morrow would do . . . Just a small matter . . . Thanks, Grove, I'm much obliged. Goodbye."

On April 3, Mr. Stegger, Mrs. Stegger and Mr. Grove went into conference. "We want systematic accounting here. Grove," Mr. Stegger announced. "Nobody I know can help us better than yourself."

Mr. Grove bowed, gratified.

"Take this book, for instance, it's not altogether clear to me."

"A day book?" ventured Mr. Grove.

"No, not exactly."

"A journal, then?"

"No, hardly a journal, as far as I can make out."

"Not a ledger, surely?"

"No, not just a ledger, I think, though apparently with some of its functions."

Mr. Grove was at a loss. "Perhaps Mrs. Stegger can enlighten us," he suggested.

"That book? Why, that's an account book," Mrs. Stegger explained brightly, knitting two and purling two.

The conference exchanged sympathetic glances. Mr. Grove was married,

Mr. Stegger changed the subject. "To get down to the fundamental question of correct entries now. They present certain problems. Take this mop, for instance, \$2.50. A current expense, I suppose, on maintenance account."



Mr. Grove shook his head decisively. "No, Mr. Stegger, undoubtedly a capital expenditure, chargeable to plant and equipment."

Mr. Stegger frowned. "That's hardly conservative finance. Grove; I'm surprised at you."

Mr. Grove warmly denied the imputation and proved his point up to the hilt. Mr. Stegger proved his—as far as the handle. Mr. Grove instanced the practice of the Steel Corporation. Mr. Stegger got down Copple "On Cost Accounting."

On April 4—very early on April 4, an amicable compromise was reached, by which the handle of the mop went to capital, in the equipment account; the mop of the mop, went to expense in the maintenance account, and Mr. Grove went to bed in the guest room, on the car service's account.

On April 9, a home accounting system that was thorough, simple, and satisfactory had been completely organized. In future with the aid of a day book, ledger, and controlling ledger, Mrs. Stegger would always know just where she was. She could make a good guess already—at the desk with the ledgers, or at the telephone talking to Mr. Grove.

n April 10, Mr. Stegger went for an early morning walk, notable for two important contacts. On his way out he surprised Constable O'Flaherty chatting with the pretty maid next door, and pointed out the dangers to householders when the Law dallied. Coming home he arrived simultaneously with the milkman; in fact he brought the bottles in himself.

"Milk," he said significantly, setting them down on the family breakfast table.

"And water," added Helen tartly, mopping up the wet rings on the tablecloth.

"Milk," he repeated, "and cream. How do you check whether you are getting what you order, Althea?"

Mrs. Stegger felt sure of her ground here. "By the bottles, dear; we know how many bottles we get. Some coffee, Robson? Pass your father the toast, Teddy."

Mr. Stegger's eyes were full of foreboding but his mouth was full of toast, so he postponed his reply until after breakfast. Then he explained that he had referred to the quality, not the quantity of the milk.

"Just read that clipping, Althea. Half the milk sold is adulterated to conceal the shortage of cream. What guarantee have we for ours?"

"I don't think Piozzi would do anything like that, Robson. I've always found him a nice man to deal with."

"Dr. Cook was a nice man to deal with," Mr. Stegger hinted darkly. "We must put this milk business on a systematic basis. I've been so busy with the office end of the work that I haven't had time to give proper attention to the factory side. Now, just how much cream should there be in milk? That's the first thing."

"Well dear, the cream always comes separately, it's hard to tell," said Mrs. Stegger uncertainly. "We generally get a quart of cream and two quarts of milk."

Tapping his pencil against his teeth, Mr. Stegger considered the matter. "How much cream is there in cream, then? Or rather, how much of whatever it is that makes it cream? And what it is exactly?"

"It's just cream," was all that Mrs. Stegger could suggest. "It's thicker, you know, and generally comes in smaller bottles."

"Ha! You see how deplorably ignorant you are of the simplest fundamentals. No doubt Piozzi takes advantage of it. Haven't you any books that would give it?"

"There's Mrs. Beeton," Althea suggested, hopefully.

But Mrs. Beeton only dealt with cream as an ingredient.

"We might try Webster, Robson."

But Webster hedged by describing cream vaguely as "the oily part of milk, quite the best part."

Mr. Stegger grew impatient. "It's a miracle that we haven't all been poisoned by this time, without even an encyclopedia in the house. Where's Murphy? Oh—Mur—phy!"

"Here Murphy; go down to Hoffman's the bookseller. Tell him you want the latest and best encyclopedia he's got, and to charge it to me. Hurry now, there's been too much time wasted already in organizing this milk."

On April 13, Mr. Stegger having failed to extract the secret from the Encyclopedia Britannica—thirty-two volumes—which Murphy had delivered in four perspiring trips, procured a four-page leaflet, gratis, from the Provincial Department of Agriculture and at last learned how the butter fat content of milk could be discovered by the aid of the Babcock tester.

On April 14, he bought a Babcock tester and gave the opening performance to a full house in the cellar. Mrs. Stegger, Helen and Teddy were in—or rather on—the boxes; Murphy and Mary away up in the gods.

"It's very simple," Mr. Stegger explained. "Milk is made of butter fat and water, and er—various other things which you wouldn't understand. If you put sulphuric acid in milk the butter fat burns and turns brown, the water doesn't burn and stays white."

"But water isn't white, pa," suggested Teddy.

"Milk water is," returned Mr. Stegger conclusively. "Consequently the more brown there is, the more butter fat."

"What's the little roundabout for?" Helen asked.

"That's the Babcock tester. These eight little bottles round the edge of the wheel have to be filled with milk and acid. Then, when I turn the handle the wheel spins round at so many revolutions a minute. The exact number escapes me, but tremendously fast, and—and—" "And phwat happens?" gasped Murphy breathlessly, almost falling out of the laundry-tub in his eagerness to see this fascinating toy.

"Then it goes round and—ahem!—round; and when I stop turning, the butter fat has turned brown and come to the top of the bottles where those little thermometer marks show just how much there is."

"Isn't that too sweet?" said Althea. "How much should there be, Robson?"

"That depends on the milk," explained Mr. Stegger with considerable presence of mind. "Cows vary. Hand me that bottle of sulphuric acid, Edward."

"Be careful, Teddy," implored his mother, nervously. "Are you sure it isn't dangerous, Robson?"

"Dangerous? Certainly not—if you understand what you are doing. Mary, just fill those little bottles half full of milk."

Mr. Stegger filled up the first bottle with acid. It immediately turned a deep brown from top to bottom.

"Crikey! Ain't it rich," muttered Mary.

Rubbing his chin thoughtfully, Mr. Stegger frankly admitted a momentary lapse of memory. "I was thinking of the old-fashioned Babcocks. In the new models it's not so much the butter fat that burns as the water, or not the water exactly, but the various other things in the water that I told you about.

"And now," he went on sternly, "if you'll stop asking fool questions, we'll fill up the rest of the bottles and get on with the test."

He placed the little bottles in their holders on the wheel, and started turning the handle—very gingerly. Nothing happened. He turned some more. The little bottles swung slightly outwards, as illustrated in Fig. seven of the leaflet.

Encouraged he turned faster; the bottles swung farther out, the wheel began to emit an ominous hum.

Feeling that results were in sight, Mr. Stegger turned really fast.

n April 20, Mr. Stegger came out of hospital with the acid burns practically cured. The doctor was confident the scars would hardly be

noticeable.

He had needed the rest, he explained, giving the impression that the whole affair was prearranged. For thirty years he had been looking forward to a real rest and now the only way he could get it was by going to a hospital. Things had come to a pretty pass! Only the announcement of Edward's engagement, and his desire that the celebration should be properly handled, had induced him to come home so soon.

On April 21, Mr. Stegger decided that a dinner should be given to Mabel Brace and her parents, to be followed by a little dance. He condemned the suggestion that these should be held at the Ritz, on the ground that it would be a confession of inefficient household organization, and ordered the carpets taken up to examine the state of the floors.

"There!" said Helen, "just look at that, pa! If you will have it here, the sooner we get the men in to do these floors, the better."

Her father scouted the idea of getting men to do such a simple job. On April 23, Mr. Stegger finished reading the fourteenth beautifully illustrated booklet and announced that he had ordered an Excelsior Floor Scraper and Finisher, \$350.

"It seems a lot of money for one dance," Mrs. Stegger protested mildly.

"You forget that this is a machine age, Althea. I've paid \$8,000 for a single machine down at the factory that paid for itself in two years. This Excelsior will pay its own cost in a year—we ought to have had one long ago. How much do you have to pay for getting these floors properly fixed? You don't have them fixed? No wonder they are in such a state! They should be done at least once a year. Hammond's would charge at least \$25 for the job, which would pay for the machine in—"

"Fourteen years," put in Helen, with surprising accuracy.

"Only if Hammond's charge was \$25," Mr. Stegger countered. "From my experience of Hammond's, \$50 would be nearer the mark."

"Seven years, then."

Mr. Stegger frowned. "If you are content to live in a pigsty, yes; but otherwise a hardwood floor should be scraped much oftener than once a year. I believe the best practice is—er—" he made a rapid mental calculation; "—seven times a year at least. There you are! Just as I said. Seven times a year at \$50 a time, would be \$350—the exact cost of the machine—saved in a year."

"But pa," said Helen, who had been studying the instruction book. "This book says each scraping removes about one thirtieth of an inch of the surface, and the boards are not more than half an inch thick."

"What of it?"

Helen's eyes were screwed up in the tortured expression of one who does mental arithmetic. "That's the same as fifteen thirtieths of an inch thick," she said slowly; "seven of the fifteen gone the first year, and seven more the second, would leave the floor only one thirtieth of an inch thick—and that's too thin for dancing," she finished triumphantly.

Mr. Stegger frowned impatiently. "A mere matter of adjustment, Helen. Where's Murphy? Oh—Mur—phy!"

n April 23, Mr. Stegger had completed the matter of adjustment inasmuch as the Excelsior Scraper and Finisher was assembled and answered to the electric plug with a gratifying roar.

Murphy was present at the obsequies in the capacity of assistant scraper and finisher.

"Now for the scraper, Murphy, the finisher attachment goes on later. Hand me that little book. Ah yes! Once over with the reciprocal elevating lever in the first position. Now which—?"

Murphy eyed with disfavor the small battleship turret with tank attachments. It was big enough to contain many devilments and its noise was unpleasantly reminiscent of the Babcock tester.

"Oi'm uv the opinion there's throuble in that contraption, sorr," he advised.

"Don't be an idiot, Murphy, it's as safe as a vacuum cleaner."

"Will there be any sulfurious acid in it, sorr?"

Ignoring the fool question, Mr. Stegger pushed the battleship carefully up and down.

"Well," he remarked with satisfaction, returning from a telephone call, "half of it's done, anyway, Murphy."

"Shure sorr, and which half would it be?"

Mr. Stegger examined the floor in detail, and more from memory than observation restarted the machine approximately where he had left off.

"This is only the first time over, with the reciprocal elevating lever in the first position," he explained as he finished; "—at least I think it's in the first position, there seems to be several. Now we'll place it in the second position—the slot at the other end of this thing, no doubt—and then we push over the rotary scraper escapement arm. You'll soon see the difference. When I say 'go', push the plug in the wall."

Mr. Stegger aimed the Excelsior carefully along the right line and said 'go'.

Murphy went.

Five frenzied bounds took him to the kitchen, livid and trembling. "Mary," he gasped, "for the love of the saints wash off the acid before oi'm burnt entirely."

Mary examined him coldly. "Wot 'ave you 'ad to drink, Murphy? There ain't no acid on you."

Murphy wiped his perspiring face with a dish rag. "Begorra Mary, praise be! Oi thought I was tore to bits when I pushed that plug. Whew! Sounded like five hundred Babcock testers exploding together one after the other. Whew-ee!"

"You get back to Mister Stegger before 'e does 'imself any damage," Mary ordered. "I'm busy. Aht of it now!"

Murphy crept back to the drawing-room. Mr. Stegger hadn't heard him leave, and didn't hear him come back. He was concentrating on keeping his line, and besides, it's hard to hear anything except the Excelsior Floor Scraper and Finisher when the rotary scraper escapement arm is pushed over —especially when the reciprocal elevating lever is mistakenly placed in the fourth (concrete removal) position.

But as he turned to cut the second swath, Mr. Stegger couldn't help noticing Murphy's terrified expression. He left the battleship for a moment to speak to him—maybe the fellow had got a shock plugging in the current.

"....." he asked. Then failing to hear his own words, he cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted in his henchman's ear: "Is anything wrong, Murphy?"



Murphy pointed helplessly to the Excelsion's wake. "The book said only a thirtieth of an inch," pondered Mr. Stegger doubtfully, "but it certainly seems...."

Murphy pointed helplessly at the Excelsior's wake. As Mr. Stegger went over to examine it an acrid smell struck him—almost like scorching. He sent Murphy to the kitchen to see if anything was burning—one can't be too careful about these things—and continued his examination.

"The book said only a thirtieth of an inch," he pondered doubtfully, "but it certainly seems—" The Excelsior gasped, shivered, and changed its note to a higher pitch. The roar was less deafening, but incredibly shriller. The reciprocal elevating lever had at last justified its fourth (concrete removal) position. The Stegger floors were laid on concrete.

"Pull that plug out," Mr. Stegger yelled, and Murphy gladly pulled.

As they lifted the Excelsior out of its burrow, the lid of the turret came off in Murphy's hand. He gazed, awe-stricken, into its bowels, and the light of understanding dawned in his eyes. "Shure an' they knew their onions when they named that divil 'Excelsior'," he said with conviction, and slowly pushed the battleship toward the door.

"Didn't you say there was a 'tachment for finishing, sorr?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," said Mr. Stegger shortly.

"Then Oi'm uv the opinion you put it on by mistake. That floor's finished right now, sorr."

By April 28, the day before the celebration, the new floor was practically laid, though the workmen would still need a day or so to clear up. Mr.

Stegger stopped the frantic efforts of Helen and Teddy to get it ready in time.

"When you are a little older," he explained severely, "you will realise that efficiency consists in having any given piece of work done in the plant best equipped for the purpose. Hotels are especially designed for dances; houses are not. Obviously the dance should be held at the Ritz. The dinner is different. That should be a matter of personal hospitality.

"Have you finished planning your menu, Althea?"

"Well dear, Lalonde's are looking after that. They specialize in all that sort of thing and do it much better than we could."

"Much better than you could, perhaps, Althea. Please don't include me. I wish to impress the Braces that the Steggers are not ordinary people. The dinner must be perfect in every respect. That means—" he ticked off what it meant on his fingers: "First, careful planning; second, thorough organization; third, efficient execution.

"I will give this dinner my undivided attention, and the system will serve as a model for future occasions. Then, perhaps, you'll give me a little peace, and I'll be able to get that rest I've waited thirty years for. Where's Murphy? Oh—Mur—phy! Oh, here you are. Just get me that book of Mrs. Beeton's from the kitchen, Murphy, and Stubbs 'On Household Economics' from my bedroom table."

On April 29, at 2.20 a.m. Mr. Stegger finished planning the menu and went to bed.

At 10.30 a.m. he got up; finished explaining the menu to Mary at 12.30, and left her to order the supplies while he drove the family down to the Ritz where the plant was better organized for supplying lunch in emergencies.

At 3.10 p.m. the supplies began to come in, notably two capons at 3.15.

"They don't look very big, Mary," Mr. Stegger remarked doubtfully.

"Big enough, Mister Stegger. Jest abaht five pounds each, like I told Roberts."

Mr. Stegger frowned at the name. "I don't trust that man, we had trouble with him before. Put them on the scales, Mary. Ha! What did I say! Barely eight pounds in all, when they should be twelve. That man Roberts is a crook. Where's Murphy?

"Get your coat on, Murphy—hurry, there's not a moment to be lost. Come back now, idiot! Wait till I tell you what I want. Take these chickens down to Roberts and tell him—ask him what the—No, you'd get it wrong. I'll write him a note."

- At 3.30 Mr. Stegger finished the first note, at 4.00 the second, and at 4.36 the one that really did express his feelings, and which Murphy delivered with the capons.
- At 6.10 Murphy returned with the same capons. "Mr. Roberts says—" But Murphy decided that a free translation would be safer. "Mr. Roberts sends his compliments an' them chickens is twelve pounds like Mary ordered, eight pounds chickens in this parcel, sorr, and four pounds heads, legs, and innards, in this one," and Murphy opened both to prove it.
- At 7.00 p.m. Mr. Stegger repulsed Teddy from the kitchen door, and asked him to mind his own business; informed Helen at 7.25 that he didn't give a damn if the Braces were waiting, and at 8.00 locked the door, telling Mrs. Stegger that if he was interrupted again he wouldn't be responsible for the consequences.
- At 8.15 the lobster soufflé went into the oven and Mary out of the house, requesting that her trunk be sent later; and at 8.20 Mr. Stegger triumphantly served olives in a salad bowl—to a little note on the deserted dinner table.
- At 8.20 and two-fifths seconds, Constable O'Flaherty hearing the crash of a breaking window, looked up and was much struck by an illuminated bowl of assorted stars, olives and northern lights.
- At 8.33 Mr. Stegger, still explaining, clanged swiftly past the Ritz in the patrol wagon; and at 8.56 precisely, he leaned his throbbing head against the cool bars and rested—really rested at last—in a plant thoroughly organized and equipped for that purpose.

### TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

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[The end of *Mr. Stegger Takes a Rest* by Roderick Stuart Kennedy]