

## PACKAGE DEAL

By Mini

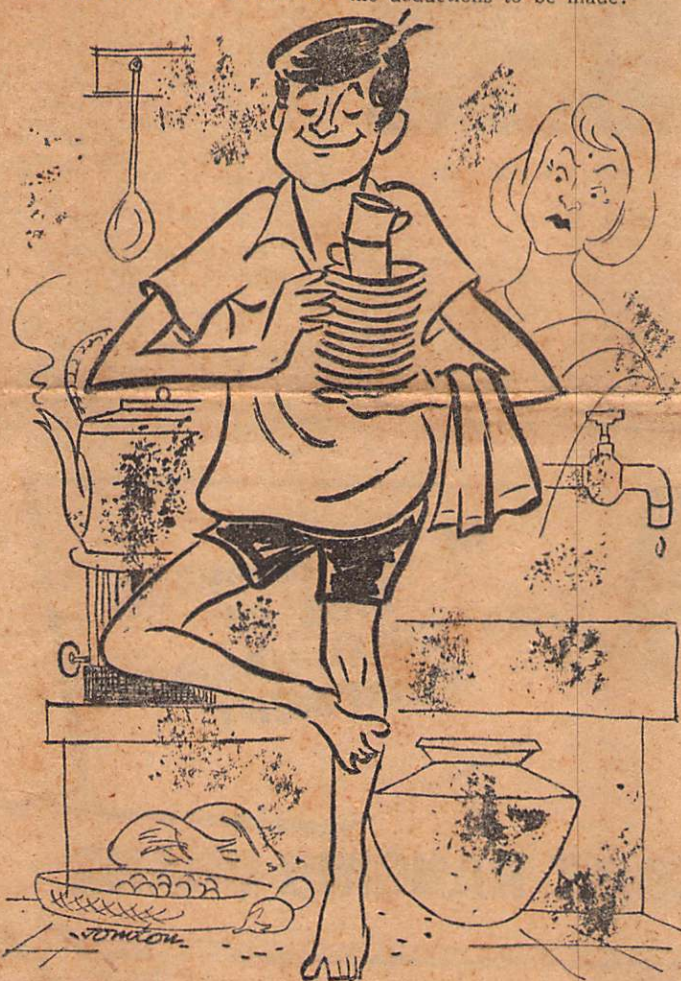
**S**ERVANTS have come and gone but Gopal has come to stay. He has his good points never talks back, tidy and average eater. The virtue I rate highest is his aversion to hobnob with other servants in the locality. This is a great virtue because, as every housewife knows, the demands for a raise or for perquisites or for weekly-off are hatched at smoking sessions or in the queue at the provision stores.

I wouldn't call Gopal an ideal servant notwithstanding his virtues. Though only 14 years old, he has a streak of stubbornness in him. He can't do a thing right and resents instructions. His resentment takes the form of adopting a statuesque posture on one leg, with no emotion whatsoever on his face. You can shout your head off. But he remains (on one leg!) unmoved. But then I have to let go steam if the situation calls for it.

"One of these days he is going to walk out on you" my husband

me to a loss I can hardly afford. You have got to mend your ways or...." The oracle spoke, without a trace of remorse. "Madam, if I break things your are at liberty to charge it to my salary." "You can have it that way if you want," I said. "I am certainly not interested in bleeding you but I am sure that the prospect of a cut is going to make you more careful."

Hardly two days had passed and he dropped the ashtray. It literally went to pieces. Allowing for a depreciation I assessed the loss at two rupees. Next it was a saucer. I had to convince him that the cup was useless without the saucer before he agreed to the cut. It went on like this. The casualty list grew. Ladies and spoons developed bends and curves. The tumblers looked like they had been run over by a road engine. One would have thought that Gopal had become really patriotic the way he went for 'China.' And this miracle servant whose fingers were all thumbs made meticulous notes of the deductions to be made!



would say, "Well, the heavens won't fall" I will join, not believing what I was myself saying.

I don't mind his being a little slow on the uptake and even sloppy generally. But what exasperates is his tendency to drop and break things—everything. You let him loose in the kitchen and you are bound to hear the jangle of broken china or dropped stainless steel vessels. I for one certainly do not like to see the vessels jammed or dented. Or for that matter to see buttons broken and stitches giving way even in new clothes.

No amount of shouting has had any effect. Merrily, he continued along his way, damaging things often beyond repair. I decided to do something about it and called him for a Dutch-uncle talk one day. "You realise that we spend money buying things, don't you?" "Yes" he said breaking his habit of keeping mum. Perhaps he felt that I was getting to be reasonable after all.

"Now, everytime you break or damage something you are putting

On the day of reckoning I found that the value of the damage had exceeded his salary by three rupees! I was non-plussed and thought I'll have it out with him. "Now what do you say" I said. He replied innocently. "Madam, remember you promised a raise of Rs. 5 after I complete a year of service. The time has come."

What cheek! "The time has come", I said heatedly, "for you to pack off." "Let's give him one more chance" interrupted my husband, before I could warm up and give a mouthful.

"Get out of my sight" I shouted. And as he was leaving the room he tripped and fell headlong on the Bankura clay horse which I had brought all the way from Calcutta! "Listen," said my husband "God had still not made the prototype of a perfect servant. What you get is a Package Deal, a medley of good and bad. Take it or leave it." Gopal is still with us. Very much!