

## II.

### THE BLANTYRE BODIE.

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**S**HE joined the tram at Church Street. She was very stout and very hot—"a' sweetin'," as she afterwards told us. The tram was full up, the nearest approach to a vacant seat being a space of about four inches between a most respectable lady and myself. The incomer detected it at once and approached. She did not exactly sit down. She simply backed in, leaned gently on the exposed edges of the most respectable lady and myself and, like a wedge, squeezed the passengers concertina-fashion to right and left of her. "That's that," she said, as she settled down. We agreed. It was after mopping her face that she conveyed the news to us that she was "a' sweetin'." We might have noticed it for ourselves had she not forestalled us by owning up.

At this point something occurred which has always puzzled me. The other passengers looked quite interesting—some of them I should have called intelligent—and yet that woman, after scanning their faces, at once started to make a confidant of me—me! She made, so to speak, a bee-line for me. And she confided in me in a loud voice and without interruption until we reached Queen Street, and only ceased then because she had bundles to collect, and because of my advantage in respect of speed.

"Ay, mister, it's a hot job, I tell ye, visitin' hospitals. That's the second I've been at the day—first the Samaratin, an' noo the Western. Ye're lookin' at my bunch o' floo'ers—ah, weel, I can explain that too. I kent whenever I saw Maggie the day, she wadna get better;

an' what was the use o' leevin' them? Thae nurses wad jist tak' them to their ain rooms. I've seen that done afore. Ye see it's a dewy-decimal ulster. I could ha'e telt her six months sin'. I kent fine what it wis. The doctor didna pick up her trouble at a'—codliver ile an' malt extract! Ye might as weel gi'e hot peas and vinegar to a finnan haddie. It's no' that she's related to me, ye ken, although I kent her mither fine; as up-standin' a wumman as ever ye saw, an' a wumman ye wid say that niver had a chance, like. Her man, ye see, took a dram. Noo that's a thing I niver could staun. I wid dram them, I wid!—Weel, as I was sayin', I mind the Setterday nicht it happened fine. Oor John was hame frae the sodgers. We were just staunin' at the close mooth, me and him like—ye see, I leeve in Blantyre—it would be aboot hauf nine and I saw the polis comin' up, and there was her man on a barrow, deid——."

"It's an awfu' thing drink," said a sympathetic eavesdropper, interrupting.

"He wisna drunk at a'," snapped the cheery one—"he wis deid, deid's a door nail; run owre by a motor lorry."

Again she wiped the perspiration from her brow. The eavesdropper had interrupted her flow. Not for long.

"An' she went the same wey hersel' in the hinnerend—awfu' things thae ulsters! Ye see, it starts wi' seekness, an' if ye don't catch it when it's young, as the sayin' is, it's the operatin' table for ye. Fine I ken. I could hae telt Maggie this very day the road she wis gaun, but it disna dae to be too frank. Four weans tae, an' as dacent a man as ever drew breath! I left

him up at the Infirmary—No' that I havna had my ain troubles. A wumman disna bury five o' them without bein' through the mill, like. Ye see, ma man's no' strong. It's his chest—bronchitical! He coughs and coughs. Just last nicht I telt him it was gaun to his he'rt. It's nothin' but care that's kept him up abune the groun'. Poultices! If I canna mak' poultices naebody can; I've forgotten the wey to mak' parritch makin' poultices—Hae ye a wife yersel'?"

The question startled me. For a moment I was off my guard, and then remembering, I admitted it.

"Ay, ye look kind o' merrit like," she said with perfect candour.

It was my turn to perspire.

"Hot!" she went on, "I've been like an oven a' day, runnin' about in thae caurs. An' they werena gaun to let me in at the Samaratin! I soon let them ken. Dae ye think I wad travel in frae Blantyre to get a shut door in ma face?"

I said I thought it was highly improbable.

"Improbable!" she exclaimed, "there's naething improbable about it; I did get in, I tell ye—I walked right in and up to Bess's bed before ye could say 'Jake Robison.' Between you an' me I don't think there's muckle wrang wi' Bess. Some folk start greetin' afore they're hurt. A guid dose o' castor ile—that's whit I wad hae gi'en her. Of coorse she's niver been mairrit, an' that maks a difference. There's nothing like mairriage to mak' ye acquainted wi' trouble. But it was kind o' disappointin' tae see her lookin' sae weel. Ye see, it's no' natural-like to be lookin' sae weel in a hospital. I niver saw her better. 'It's a beauty parlour ye've been in,' I said to her—But it's puir

Maggie I'm thinkin' aboot. I don't think she'll last the nicht. An' mind ye, it wis a' through that doctor no' pickin' up the trouble at the beginnin'. Doctors! Trash, I say. For pickin' up a trouble I niver met the doctor yet I couldna bate. Them wi' their stereoscopes, an' barometers, an' their temperatures! (here she spoke with withering contempt)—temperature! It's aye temperature, when even a cat could tell it's no' temperature at a' but a fever. An' their appendicitises! When I was young there was nae appendicitises; it was a dose o' salts an' aff to yer bed. Noo, I wad like to ask you, mister (here she spoke with embarrassing intimacy)—I wad like to ask you a simple question—has the human body changed since you were a laddie?"

I answered discreetly that I thought there was no noticeable change.

"That's it," she said, "an' hoo does it come that appendicitises have just arrived in the last dozen years?"

I had to admit that I could not account for it.

"Weel, it's no' true," she snapped, "it's just a contraction to put money in the doctor's pocket. Whenever I hear them sayin' 'Appendicitises,' I ken they're just wantin' either to mak' the man a corp or to mak' money oot o' him—I'll need to mind to pit my floo'ers in water the nicht; they'll likely come in handy; ye niver ken when thae things are gaun to happen."

It was at this stage that I escaped.