

THE FOGGY MORNING.

MRS SIMPSON was talking to herself. She often talked to herself, but generally in a whimsical kind of way, as people will who lead lonely lives. This particular day she was distressed.

"I wonder what's keepin' him? I never kent him to be late before. Thae foggy days fair upset me. He should have left the sheds at eight, an' noo it's nearly nine."

She turned a suit of pyjamas that were toasting at the fire. She went to the window and looked out, and then to the door, moving fitfully. Despite her seventy years she was light of foot and bright of eye.

Her life story was a simple one. A widow at twenty-two, her man killed while shunting waggons, she had had to go back to the mill. There she worked, ekeing out her livelihood by keeping a lodger. Her house, a room and kitchen, well stored and well kept, was now her sole care.

She had always been fortunate with her lodgers. They were not unmindful now, the ones who were married and away. Many a sly pound came from her "lauds" as she called them. Johnny Grier, her present lodger, was one of the best she had ever had. The neighbours said she cared for him like a mother. She did, and she loved doing it.

Johnny was twenty-three, the age her Jake was when he was killed. While she had grown old and grey, she still saw Jake as he left her that morning nearly fifty years ago, young and blithe.

Johnny was the same. Indeed, once or twice she had absent-mindedly called him Jake. He cleaned the windows for her and joked with her. One night he carried her in his arms from the room to the kitchen because she refused to go to her bed. And she remembered being carried in a similar way once before, long, long ago. And Johnny had kissed her when he went home for his summer holidays. That night she cried.

"What can be keepin' him?" her fingers twitched nervously.

"I never liked thae foggy mornings. I wish there was nae nicht-shift. What wad his mother say if onything gaed wrang wi' him? If ye wad just come, Johnny; yer parritch is fair spiled."

She went to the door and cleaned her brasses. Not a sound! It would soon be chappin' nine.

"Johnny—my! if onything gaes wrang wi' him!"

She wanted to go out and inquire but she was afraid. Once, long years ago, she had gone out to inquire, and she met a deputation of men headed by a policeman—*coming in*. That *deputation* was a picture firmly fixed in her mind. She wrung her hands.

"Oh, my! what will I dae?"

On a quick resolution she threw off her apron. A knock at the door stopped her.

"Wha can that be? Johnny has his key."

Cold as a stone she went to the door, steadying herself on the lobby wall. Opening the door, she saw a policeman. She held up her hand. She knew. It all came back to her.

"Dinna tell me!" she said despairingly.

"What's that ye say?" queried the constable—"Is't yours?"

"Ay!" she replied.

"Weel, ye'd better tak' it oot of that; it's no' a proper thing to leave a blanket in a backcoort in a place like this."

"A whit?" Mrs. Simpson said.

"A blanket!" the constable repeated—"somebody's left a blanket oot a' nicht in the backcoort."

"Oh, ay! a blanket; weel, it's no' mine; I aye tak' my washin' to the steamie."

She shut the door. It was all she could do to make her way to the kitchen. She leaned against the dresser; the place seemed to reel. "Oh, if he was only in!" she moaned.

A key turned in the door. She sprang to life, every nerve taut. It was Johnny! Was there anybody with him? If not, then, even if it was an accident, it could be nothing worse than a cut or something! She heard him hanging his topcoat in the lobby, and then he called: "Are ye no' up yet, Mother Hubbard?" His voice was cheery.

"Ay, I'm up; did ye ever ken me to be in my bed at this time in the mornin'?"

He stood in the kitchen, hale and hearty. In an instant she was her own whimsical self.

"Were ye wonderin' why I was late?" he said.

"Wonderin'?" she replied, "What dae ye think ye are? It's no' you I was wonderin' aboot; it's yer parritch, as cauld as leed; sit in there and nane o' yer nonsense."

"I had an accident," he remarked casually.

“An accident,” she said, a touch of anxiety in her voice.

“Ay, my back tyre came off comin’ oot the shed.”

“Serve ye richt!” she replied, “I wish it had been yer front tyre; it might hae put some sense into that big heid o’ yours. Come on! Sup up yer parritch!”