

Could it then have been a dream? No, surely it was too real for that. He gazed with uncomprehending eyes at the man who repeated: "Yes, sir, I told her as how you weren't to see anyone. She's an old woman, sir—and poorly clad enough for the matter of that, but she's that determined!—Why, here she is."

A queer little figure came hurrying forward, with a joyous cry; a poor, shabby old woman, but to Joseph Lloyd the dearest in the world. He staggered to his feet, clutching the back of his chair for support.

The butler, with an amazed look, had withdrawn; and the mother and her repentant son were alone.

"Mother, mother, is it really you, can it really be you?"

"Yes, Joe dear, I'm come to spend Christmas with you. Isn't it a lovely surprise, dear? And they said you mightn't be glad to see me—but I knew better, my lad—and I was so frightened of the noise of the streets and——"

A flood of happy tears ended her incoherent words—and her son, holding the little figure in his arms, said to himself:

"Surely it was sent me as a warning from Heaven. I shall take it as such."