

One hand on the bannister, she turned.

In the door of the morning-room stood the Laird, great and grim and grey, his short cloak about his shoulder.

"You're late," he said.

"Only a little minute, Massa," she said.

"It's that doag!" said the Laird with gathering brow.

"We won't be a sec, Massa," said poor Missie, and prepared to fly.

The harsh voice stayed her.

"Dinner's in," it said.

"I know," said Missie, hovering on the lowest step. "I won't be long, Massa."

"Why be any time?" said the Laird. "I have waited long enough."

Poor Missie looked at the lover at her feet; then looked across at the Laird with frightened eyes.

"I only just want to wash his mouth, Massa," she said.

"He's—it's—it's—not very nice for him—before his dinner."

The Laird looked with thunder-brow.

"So," he said, "he has been bloodying again."

"Only a little tiresome, Massa," said poor Missie with frightened eyes.

"I weary of this bloodiness," said the Laird.

Missie, hovering on the lowermost step, looked across at the grim man with appealing eyes.

"Don't be cross with us, Massa," she pleaded. "We can't help it; we're only human," and added, dropping fond eyes to the little man at her feet, "It's the naughty ones we mothers love."

The Laird turned.

"Mind," he said, "I will have no murder. If murder is done, I will deal with it."

"Yes, Massa," said poor Missie, "I've promised."

"Killing is killing," said the grim Laird, "and murder is murder, and——"

"And Danny knows the difference," said Missy quickly.