

on each of his horns, and there in the very midst of them all Mr. Gripps saw his own reflection grinning away like the rest of them and looking quite as ugly and unnatural. It made him nervous; and Mr. Gripps was not a nervous man. He looked up at the china group on the mantle piece, and over to the marble Daphne on the bracket, and on each side of him to the tea pot and sugar bowl and cream jug and other articles on the table and about the room; but he could not satisfy himself that all or any of them could produce the appearance which he saw.

He tried not to look at the kettle, but the kettle, or rather the objects reflected in it, seemed determined that he should look at them. They drew his gaze with a horrible fascination, and held it there. And while he looked it seemed to him that in some way or other he was giving himself over to that dreadful creature under the spout, and that if he did not escape immediately it would be too late.

But then the vision, if vision it was, changed. The arch fiend with the hoofs and horns, and the grinning imps and hobgoblins seemed to melt away, and when Mr. Gripps with a great gasp of relief took up the kettle and poured a little hot water into his cup which had grown rather cold in the meantime, lo and behold, there was another picture, all complete! A picture of a face not many years younger than Mr. Gripps', and not altogether unlike his own. But the eyes had a reproachful look in them, even in the ludicrous kettle. And beside and about the man were children of various ages and of both sexes, and a woman who from the anguish of her aspect and the way in which the man's hand lay in hers and the children clung to her, must have been the wife and the mother. If the first picture had annoyed and disconcerted Mr. Gripps, so even more did the second, and somehow the one seemed connected with the other. It seemed as if his dealings with those in the second had left him in the power of that terrible being in the first.

For the central figure in this group, the man's, had once been very familiar to him. They had lived under the same roof, played together, grown up together and called the same man father.

It was the face of his step brother who had long since been dead, and these must be the wife and children. Of course they were. Did not he know them by sight? The little fellow yonder was the eldest boy. He must be sixteen now. Mr. Gripps had met him in the street yesterday, and had been amused as well as irritated because the boy, instead of touching his cap respectfully in acknowledgment of Mr. Gripps' careless nod, had flashed upon him in passing a glance of mingled anger and disdain. The glance had lingered in his memory, and now it seemed to link itself with the picture and become part of it.

And, mercy on us, how the wind was raving! Was Mr. Gripps losing his senses, or what did it all mean? The wind seemed to be talking to him.

It was speaking to him as plainly as possible, and this is what it was saying,

"Where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched." And then in long drawn, wailing accents: "Too late! Too late!"

Mr. Gripps' hand that held his tea cup trembled, a cold dew came upon his forehead, a scared look into his face.

"Bless me," he exclaimed aloud, "I can't stand this." He touched the bell and Mrs. Chubbs appeared. Mr. Gripps cleared his throat once, twice, "Ahem! Ahem!" "I think Mrs. Chubbs I shall go out for a little while. I have a little business in the city. I shall let myself in, so if I should be late, don't have any one sit up."

Mr. Gripps tried to speak naturally, and by a strong effort he composed his features, but Mrs. Chubbs saw at once that something had gone wrong. She was an old servant and could venture a little in the way of liberties.

"Dear me, sir," she exclaimed. "You are not surely going out in such a storm as this. Why the snow is falling like to blind one, and hark to the wind! Why it seems to me I never heard it like this. It mourns and shrieks that unnatural that Bessie says just now to me as we were taking our tea together down stairs, says she, 'Mrs. Chubbs it makes me think of the day of Judgment, it does, and of the lost souls.'"

Mr. Gripps did not say that his own thoughts had run in somewhat the same direction. In fact he quite laughed at the idea, and pooh-poohed the possibility of a blast of wind or a flurry of snow keeping him in if he wished to go out.

Mrs. Chubbs saw that it was useless to remonstrate. He would not even allow her to have Thomas call a cab, so she helped him into his fur coat; saw that his muffler was well crossed over his throat and the ears of his cap tied down, and then with an ominous shake of the head and a deprecatory, "Dear, dear," opened the door for him and watched him depart into the wild night.

It was Christmas Eve, and despite the fury of the wind and the blinding snow the streets were thronged with people in the cars or in sleighs or on foot, and the brilliantly lighted shops presented their most tempting Christmas display.

Mr. Gripps walked briskly on, making a way for himself through the crowd of foot passengers with his walking stick, occasionally pausing to look in at a shop window and then going on again, but apparently without definite purpose. Sometimes he stood quite a time before a magnificent display of beef, mutton and poultry and game, and fruit, such fruit, and such vegetables! Next it was a confectioner's with its marvels in cake and candy, then a furrier's or some dry goods emporium, or a toy or furniture shop or a book store all ablaze with gilded volumes and bright pictures.

But if he had come out intending to purchase it was plain that he had not yet decided what, and wished to look about him before making up his mind. At length far down in St. Catharine street