

HIS

MOTHER

He was twenty-odd, a typesetter by trade, "a sober, law-fearin' good iad"—as she would boast—who neither smoked nor drank nor used bad language ("except now an' then, mebbe, when he forgets I'm in hearin'")—and who brought his money home to her on pay-days "as reg'lar, come Friday, ae Friday comes." She had worked her hands "to the bone" to give him his "schoolin'," in the days when he, after school hours, used to go on the streets to shine shoes or sell newspaper or do whatever else came to hand to earn an honest penny. She was working for him still, but no longer going out scrubbing and taking in washing and stitching uisters at night on a sewing-machine at twenty cents an uister. (It was the machine that had made her voice so loud; she had been used to talking while she worked.) Now she sat at home "like a lady," and only sewed and mended and cooked and scrubbed and swept and dusted and washed for him—and only sat up late at night till he had gone to bed, so that she might tuck him in; for she believed that if she did not watch him so, he would be sure to kick the covers off his legs in the night, like a big baby, and catch his "death o' cold."

"He's late," she said, for the twentieth time. "I wonder what's keepin' him."

She would see him as soon as he turned the street corner far below her, and she would hurry back to the kitchen where the dinner was all ready to be whisked out of the oven to the table. As soon as he opened the door of the flat, she would call, "Is that yerself?" and he would reply with a cheerful grunt of assent. ("He never talks till he's fed—poor boy.") There would be no kisses, no embraces of affection, no show of love between them. Her pot pie, her biscuits, and her English breakfast tea "with a pinch o' Paykoe in it" were her caresses; she would ply him with them, beaming on him fondly, every "helping," affectionate and every bite