

I knew that well enough. *My* Sunday suit was a sight to be seen, and what was more I didn't care to have a better. I didn't 'trouble' church or chapel much, as they say in our part of the world.

There was nobody belonging to me but my old mother, and she was all doubled up with the rheumatism till she could neither set her foot to the ground nor scarcely lift her hand to her head. I used to pay one of the neighbours to come in and do for her, but she didn't make much hand of it, for the place was always in a muddle—and a dirty muddle, I may say.

I asked her many a time to let some one come in that would keep us a bit cleaner, but she never would.

I think she'd been in that way all her life, and she wouldn't have felt like herself if things had all been cleaned up and straight. I didn't care much myself, but now and then I used to feel ashamed when I heard that Miss Mary had been to see my mother. I knew the place looked like a pig-sty, and most likely Miss Mary thought it was all my fault.

My mother liked to sit up in her chair all day, and she was a biggish woman and heavy, so no one could lift her back again into bed but me. Many a time, when I was going down to the town—that was three miles off—I've waited in till eight or nine o'clock that I might get her to her bed comfortable first.

I remember, as well as possible, one market day it was after nine before I could get off, and just outside the village I met Fred Walters.

'Well! are you back from the town?' I cried. 'I wouldn't start till I thought you'd be back.'

'Isn't it a pity to be so late?' he said, in his soft, civil-spoken way. 'All the respectable folks will have gone by the time you get down.'

'Then it'll suit me all the better,' I said, and laughed, and went on.

A day or two after Mr. Morton stopped and spoke to me, and begged of me to think what I was doing. 'Such a sad thing it was,' he said, 'to get into bad, unsteady

habits, and how could I bring myself to leave my poor, helpless old mother alone so late?'

I was too bad-tempered to tell Mr. Morton how it was, but I thought to myself that Master Fred must have been telling him about me, and I wished that Fred had been a bit nearer my own size, that I might have had a good turn at him once for all.

I remember the winter when all this happened well enough, though it is not much in itself to call to mind. But that was the year of the great colliery explosion at Carneford.

Folks that only read about it in newspapers have forgotten all about it by now, maybe, but it'll never be forgotten in our place. Nearly a hundred men from this village worked down there, and fifteen of them were killed, besides many more from all the villages round. And when we heard the names read out of those that were missing I think there wasn't a man amongst us but thought to himself, '*It might have been me.*'

I know I thought so, for by chance, as it were, I'd just changed my time for going to work, and if I hadn't changed it I'd have been in the pit when the explosion came off, and in the worst part, too. I called it chance *then*, but I should call it something different now.

I was all the time down at Carneford just then, and so were many more, hanging round the pit-mouth day and night, to see if there was anything they could do.

It was some time before anyone could get into the pit to look for the poor creatures below, but long before it was safe they were making ready to go down. You see, there's always a chance that some one may be left alive, though this time it was a poor chance enough.

I was standing close behind the manager when he asked us which of us would go down and see what could be done. And I answered straight out, in a minute, 'I'll go!' and before I'd done speaking a dozen others were crying all at once, 'I'll go.'

Fred Walters was there amongst the rest, but he didn't speak up with them. Perhaps