

## Martha Todd.

By Miss JESSIE BEGG.

"That you, Martha Todd?"

"Yes! it's me. I'm a-comin' up; but these stairs is a bit tryin'."

Agnes Marks opened her door wide and pulled out an armchair from a corner of the room for Martha.

"Sit right down and don't speak for five minutes," she said, as she noticed the elder woman's laboured breathing and the blue tinge on her cheeks.

Martha sank into the chair with a long drawn sigh. Her black bonnet was tilted on one side and her jacket gaped in places where the buttons were missing.

"I 'ad to wite—got a cup o' tea about four—couldn't touch the buns—they was crammed full o' soda," she gasped, as she mopped her face.

"I wish you'd keep quiet till you get your breath," exclaimed Agnes. "One o' these days you'll kill yourself with 'urryn' like that."

Martha smiled faintly, and readjusted her bonnet.

"Well, I'll tell you wot they said up there, an' you can mike wot you like of it," she remarked, impressively.

"I reckon they wanted you to st'y in an' be kep' in bed," said Agnes, with an air of wisdom.

Martha nodded.

"Said they could patch me up if I'd stop there a long time, but if I didn't, I'd be gawn in six months—there wot do you think o' that?"

"When are you going in?" asked Agnes, breathlessly.

"Never, if I can 'elp it. I ain't goin' to be experimented upon by no doctors. John's sister was in that very 'ospital, an' she said as the pillers was 'ard and they never put any salt in the soup and as for peace, why there wasn't any. Just as you was dozin' hoff of an afternoon, the nurse would come to striten your bed. One of 'em told Carrie she wanted to shike the crumbs out of 'er draw sheet—crumbs indeed, w'en the pore gel 'adn't 'ad a morsel of food for a fortnight."

"All the sime I believe you did oughter go there if it's a question of savin' your life," said Agnes slowly.

Martha drew in her lips tightly. "I've settled I ain't goin' an' there's an end o' the matter."

"But the doctor said as you would be dead in six months if you didn't."

"Yes!" replied Martha calmly, "dead 'nd buried an' John won't be able to afford me an 'edstone, that I can quite see."

"Well I never!" ejaculated Agnes.

"You can get used to the idea o' dyin' sime as anythin' else," went on Martha, warming to the subject. "When I come out o' the 'ospital I was all of a tremble, an' I kep' thinkin' wot ever will pore John sy, but when I got to the corner o' Johnstone Street an' see all them china wreaths set out so nice in the undertikers, I thought 'ow nice they'd look on my grave an' it quite cheered me up."

Agnes gazed at her with a puzzled expression on her face. "If it was me, now, I'd be scared, I can tell you," she remarked with a nervous laugh.

"No, I aint 'scared. I was a thinkin' as I come along as it 'ill seem queer not gettin' up of a mornin' to light the fire." She laughed oddly.

"No, you'll 'ave to stop quiet in bed an' be took care of."

Martha looked slightly irritated. "I was thinkin' of when I'm dead, of course. The time 'll soon fly past an' then John 'll 'ave to get someone else to do it."

"Oh, yes," said Agnes, glancing nervously at her, "I see wot you mean now."

Martha sighed heavily. "I can't think wot it'll be like, knowin' nothin' about anythin'. I've 'eard as some folks come back afterwards when things don't go right. I believe I'd come back if I thought John's sheets wasn't aired proper or his socks darned or 'is 'airbrush washed on the first day of every month."

Agnes shivered and looked nervously round her. "I do wish you wouldn't get talkin' about spirits—it fair gives me the creeps."

"Well, as I shall be one myself soon of course I take an interest in 'em. Why Tom's wife kep' comin' back afterwards an' nobody could think wot was worryin' 'er for a long time an' then one day 'is sister told 'im it was because 'e always forgot to wind the clocks. Sure enough as soon as they was kept goin' right she stopped where she was an' they ain't seed 'er since."

Martha, said Agnes impressively, "I don't think as you oughter come back once you're gawn. I don't old with spirits prowlin' about an' scarin' folks out o' their senses. If you'll leave it all to me, I'll see to John. I'll run in of a mornin' an' mike 'is tea, an' wash up an' clean the rooms once a week"—she paused breathlessly.

A curious expression settled down on Martha's face. "I'm sure you'r very kind," she said rather stiffly. Its time enough to think o'

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)