

She was not sure that she had heard him, and was about to repeat the question.

He turned his head and looked at her over his shoulder. 'I would rather keep them on,' he said firmly; and she noticed that he wore big blue glasses, and had a bushy beard over his coat collar that almost hid his face.

'Very well, sir,' she said. 'As you like. Very soon the room will be warmer.'

He made no answer, and turned his face away from her again, and Mrs Hall, feeling that her talk was unwelcome, finished laying the table quickly, and hurried out of the room. When she returned he was still standing there like a man of stone, his collar turned up, the edge of his hat turned down, almost hiding his face and ears. She put down the eggs and meat noisily, and called rather than said to him:

'Your lunch is served, sir.'

'Thank you,' he answered. He did not move until she was closing the door. Then he turned round and walked eagerly up to the table.

Mrs Hall filled the butter dish in the kitchen, and took it to the parlour.

She knocked and entered at once. As she did so her visitor moved quickly, so that she only saw something white disappearing behind the table. He seemed to be picking up something from the floor. She put down the butter dish on the table, and noticed that the visitor's hat and coat were hanging over a chair in front of the fire.

'I suppose I may have them to dry now?' she said, in a voice that could not be refused.

'Leave the hat,' said her visitor, and turning, she saw he had raised his head and was looking at her.

For a moment she stood looking at him, too surprised to speak.

He held his napkin over the lower part of his face, so that his mouth and jaws were completely hidden. But it was not that which surprised Mrs Hall. It was the fact that the top of his head above his blue glasses was covered by a white bandage, and that another covered his ears, leaving nothing of his face to be seen except his pink, pointed nose. It was bright pink, and shining, just as it had been at first. He wore a dark brown jacket, with a high black collar turned up about his neck. His thick black hair stuck out below and between the bandages. This bandaged head was so unlike what she had expected that for a moment she stood staring at it.

He did not remove the napkin, but remained holding it, as she saw now, with a brown-gloved hand, and looking at her from behind his dark glasses.

'Leave the hat,' he said, through the white cloth.

She began to feel less afraid. She put the hat on the chair again by the fire.

'I didn't know, sir,' she began, 'that--' And she stopped.

'Thank you,' he said shortly, looking from her to the door, and then at her again.

'I'll have it nicely dried, sir, at once,' she said, and carried his coat out of the room. She looked at his bandaged head and dark glasses again as she was going out of the door; but he was still holding his napkin in front of his face. She was shaking a little as she closed the door behind her. 'My goodness!' she whispered. She went straight to the kitchen, and did not even think of asking Millie what she was doing now.

The visitor sat and listened to her footsteps. He looked out of the window before he removed his napkin from his face and began his meal again. He took a mouthful, looked again at the window, then rose and, taking the napkin in his hand, walked across the room and pulled down the blind. This darkened the room. He returned more happily to the table and his meal.