

## The last thing

That was the last thing I thought. I never thought he could see it like that. It wasn't my fault. There wasn't a thing I could have done. What would you have done, tell me that? What could anybody have done? I was very young at the time, but throughout it all, that was the last thing I thought.

He went away to England to work for a year to save up for us to get married, you see, and I was well pleased with myself when this good job came along for me. It was looking after three children whose mother was dead. The man, their father, had done well for himself in business. I remember feeling sorry for him the first time I met him, thinking what a pity it was, him being left to bring up three youngsters on his own and him nearly old enough to be their grandfather.

'Since my wife died, three months ago,' he said to me at the interview, 'I've been having problems with Jean. The doctor says it's the shock of her mother's death and she'll get over it, but it's a worry all the same. You see,' he told me, 'she hardly ever speaks to a soul now. She won't play with any of her friends and she does no work for the teacher at the school.'

My heart went out to her the minute I set eyes on her. She had these big dark, sad-looking brown eyes, and golden curls, beautiful they were, hanging right down past her shoulders. And she had the loveliest wee face you could picture, pretty as anything, and a cute wee dimple right in the middle of her chin. Ach, sure I'll never forget her, the poor wee craythur, and her only eight year old.

I said I could start work right away so he brought me around the house. It was big, seven rooms up the stairs, and it set in its own private grounds. He kept a gardener full time, an old grizzly, grey fellow with a stumpy temper.

I was given the best room in the house, nice and quiet with a big window looking out over the front lawns. I suppose he must have slept there himself before his wife died. It didn't strike me as funny at the time, that he was paying nearly twice the usual wage for that kind of work. I was only too glad of it, with me saving up to get married and him away in England doing the same.

I was my own boss and didn't have a lot to do. Another woman came in for a couple of hours every morning, and she done the bulk of the cleaning and cooked the dinner. All I had to do really was make the breakfast, and the tea in the evenings, and get the three young ones out to school. And sure it was nothing, working in a house like that with all them mod-cons. I spent a lot of time with Jean, playing with her and reading her wee stories to try to take her out of herself. I had plenty of time on me hands so I used to go down to the school at lunchtimes to see if she was alright. And God, the way her wee face used to light up whenever she seen me coming, it would have done your heart good. People were soon saying what a great change they seen in her since I come. One day the teacher came out and shook my hand and said I was a godsend, a real godsend.

I was working there for around three months before I found out what was going on. I took a bad dose of the flu and I had to get up in the middle of the night, a thing I didn't usually do. In them days I was a great sleeper. The bathroom was at the back of the house, where the family slept. It was two o'clock in the morning, I can still mind well looking at my luminous alarm-clock when I woke up in a cold sweat. I didn't bother about me slippers or dressing gown but just padded out onto the thick-carpeted landing in me bare feet and nightdress. I had just shut the bathroom door behind me, silently, so as not to waken anybody else at that unearthly hour, when I