

Reuben

Reuben Sorry about that set-to, Sam.

Sam (*pouring more tea*) You've no need to be. I've been trying to choke her off for years. I'll have to get Lucy to give me a few tips.

58 Reuben Still—she were right about one thing, Sam. I never thought I'd see the inside of this house again. Not after all the fuss when the engagement were broken off between me and Alice.

Sam (*slicing the lemon*) Aye—well—that's all water under the bridge, Reuben.

Reuben Still—(*he laughs*)—I'd hate to think what Alice'd be saying if she could see me now.

Sam (*remembering*) Aye, so do I. (*He takes tea to Lucy and Reuben*)

Reuben (*taking a cup*) By—It were a right shemozzle, that were. You'd have thought I'd robbed the Bank of England instead of just having the nerve to propose to Dan Hardacre's only unwedded daughter before asking his permission first. (*He sips his tea and chuckles*)

Sam He were a funny old devil from all accounts.

Reuben He were an' all. O' course, you never knew him, did you, Sam? Old Dan. A right old—(*he glances at Lucy*)—gentleman, he were. Temper like a gorilla—and looked like one.

Lucy Reuben.

Reuben Well, he *did*. Worked down Fryston Colliery pulling coal tubs. He could shift more tubs than five ponies could—and in half the time. He dropped dead of heart attack one afternoon—about two weeks after he'd made me break the engagement off. (*He sips his tea*)

Sam (*startled*) Eh? You mean—it were him what *made* you do it? It weren't because you *wanted* to?

59 Joe He forced you?

Reuben (*chuckling*) Threatened to break me in half if I so much as looked at her again. I weren't as big in them days, and he ate youngsters like me for breakfast. No, I took me ring back wi'out having to be told twice.

Sam (*stunned*) Well by heck. And all these years . . .

Reuben I know. Alice's been blaming it on me. She thought I didn't have the guts to stand up to him and fight for her—and she were right. She never forgave me for it.

Sam You don't have to tell *me* that. When our Terry let on it were your Susan he were wanting to marry, she nearly went through the roof.

Reuben I'll bet.

Joe But what stopped you from going back to her after the old man had died?

Reuben Well, I'd met Lucy, by that time and realized what a mistake I'd nearly made. (*He smiles at Lucy*) I couldn't go back to Alice—not then. And that's what *really* put her back up. Knowing that she'd had me and been forced to let me go, and then when the only obstacle had been removed—finding out that I didn't *want* to go back—well—I can imagine how she must have felt.

Sam Aye. (*His forehead creases in a frown*)

Reuben I tried to explain things to her, but she wouldn't listen. She just slammed the door in my face. I couldn't understand it. It all seemed so out of character with her—you know—all *wrong*. She'd sort of—changed.

Sam Aye—I found that out as well—only it were too late for me.

Reuben You don't mind me telling you all this, do you, Sam? I mean, I've not been able to say anything before . . .

Sam No, no. Of course not. No—it's cleared up quite a few things that had me puzzled. (*He shakes his head*) Only—if that were all—then . . . (*He shrugs helplessly*)

Reuben Then what?