

he heard the clock from the cathedral tower strike nine. The sound seemed to determine him. He was standing near a meat and vegetable shop. He entered, selected a sirloin, a turkey, a goose, a smoked ham, with a bouquet that nothing of Lubin or Rimmel could surpass; oysters, potatoes, turnips, beets, cranberries, canned tomatoes, summer savory, sage and onions, and game to boot. What a hamper; but this was only the beginning. Mr. Gripps seemed to grow reckless as he proceeded, and not to know when or where to stop. At last his order was filled, and when the shopman who knew him, asked him as a mere matter of form, "Shall I send them home, sir?" Mr. Gripps, to the man's surprise, answered "No, I shall take them with me." So he had the shop-boy hail a cab, bestowed a bright half dollar on the lad, and drove off with his purchases. He stopped again at a confectioner's and then at a grocer's, added a great plum pudding and a plum cake and tarts and biscuits and cheese and *bon bons* and a crock of golden butter, a box of tea, and coffee, and cocoa, and sugar, white and brown, and flour, and spice, and raisins, almonds, currants, and figs, and various flavoring extracts, and bottles of pickles, and even some delicate toilet soap.

All these articles Mr. Gripps had packed into and outside the cab. It took the driver and the shop-men quite a time to bestow them safely, and the driver who was facetiously inclined, remarked with a knowing shake of his head that "There'd be feasting somewhere to-morrow or his name was not Jackson," and Mr. Gripps smiled good humoredly and ordered the man to drive to St. Dominique street. It is rather a poor street as you know, and it was before a very poor tenement in the poorest part of it that Mr. Gripps had the cab stop, and bidding the driver wait until he should call him, alighted, and turning the handle of the street door without the ceremony of knocking proceeded to grope his way up the stairs.

The stairs were rickety, and there was no light to guide him, but this house belonged to Mr. Gripps and surely he ought to be able to find his way over his own property. He was a little uncertain, however, and he felt in his pocket and drew out a box of vestas and struck a light to assist him. With its aid he discovered when he had reached the landing, a closed door, on which after a moment's hesitation, and just as his light went out he knocked. There was no answer for the space of a minute or two, and Mr. Gripps' heart beat loudly as he listened, for the hush and the stillness within struck him as unnatural. Presently there was a footstep and anon the door was opened by the lad whose look in passing him the day before had irritated Mr. Gripps. It was no wonder that seeing him thus unexpectedly Mr. Gripps' nephew did not at once recognize his uncle. In his great fur coat and cap, with his face ruddy from the storm, his eyes very black and bright, his hair very white and his beard very white and long, he might easily have been mistaken for

a veritable Santa Claus; and it was only when he spoke that young Charlie Gripps perceived who it was.

"Good evening," said Mr. Gripps, "Is your mother at home?" And then young Charlie recognized the voice and the visitor.

Mr. Gripps did not wait for an answer to his question, but walked straight in after Charlie. It was the common living room of the family, the kitchen, judging from the cooking stove in which a fire was burning and the various utensils scattered about, and apparently, perhaps because it would be warmer in this bitter weather than the other parts of the house, the dining room and even bed room. For in one corner was an iron bedstead and lying back among the pillows, under the cotton coverlet, was a girl whose pale cheek and languid attitude told their own tale without the need of words. She opened her languid eyes at Mr. Gripps' entrance with a look of surprise not unmingled with alarm, and her mother who at the sound of the voice and footsteps had come forward, raised her hand with a warning gesture, "Rosa, my daughter, has been ill," she said. "She must not be disturbed." Then, in the gentle voice that alone of all her youthful charms had survived the wreck of youth and hope,—

"Good evening Mr. Gripps. Do you wish to speak to me?"

It had always been "Mr. Gripps" and "Mrs. Stephen" between them, not "Charles" and "Alice," in the rare intervals at which they had met; for Stephen Gripps had gone contrary to his step brother's wishes in the matter of his marriage and his step brother had never forgiven him. It had made a breach between them which had never been healed, and it was not until Stephen lay upon his death bed that Charles had ever so much as entered his house or spoken to his wife and children. This was years ago, and the wife had faded into a sad-browed, middle aged woman, and the children were growing out of their early childhood. Nay, Rosa who lay upon the bed yonder, and Charles the next but one who had died, was sixteen, but Mr. Gripps had still held them responsible for the breach between him and his brother, and though he had, as he had promised Stephen he would assist them after the latter's death, it was the assistance of a grudging connection, not the loving fraternal help of a brother. What did it all mean now? Here was Mr. Gripps holding out his hand and taking Mrs. Stephen's hand into his and shaking it and asking her to be friends and let by-gones be by-gones, this Christmas time, and there was Rosa weeping softly among her pillows and Charlie scarcely knowing whether to stand on his dignity and tell Mr. Gripps that they had done without his friendship so long they would not know what to make of it now, and Fred, who was of a lively turn and inclined to see the comical side to everything, actually laughing because Mr. Gripps looked such a queer old chap, and Fannie and Gracie all wonder and silence, taking in the situa-