

draw back when necessary. There is no saying what the next few days may bring forth. You heard Mr Farthingale's opinion—that news may be received of Vivian Chasemore at any moment.'

'And then——'

'And then—upon my word, Regina, any one, to see you stare at me in that extraordinary manner, would say you had not the full use of your senses. Why, of course, in such an emergency, your instinct will teach you the best thing to do. But, meanwhile, you must not be more than friendly with Sir Arthur. You see how the land lies—should his cousin be found, the man has positively nothing but a few hundreds and his beggarly profession to depend upon. How can he bear the suspense? One day of it would kill me. But there is Mrs. Stingo beckoning to us—we must positively go. But remember, Regina, you must keep Sir Arthur in play.'

'One minute, mamma. This business is mine, and you must allow me to conduct it my own way. You need not be afraid. I know perfectly well what I am about, but I can't be dictated to, or have my actions commented upon.'

'Oh, very well: You must do as you choose. But don't say afterwards that I haven't warned you!' exclaimed Lady William, as she hurried into the presence of her hostess.

Mrs. Stingo was surrounded by a bevy of such guests as she loved to gather about her—people who had much higher birth than herself, and much lighter purses; and who considered therefore, her good dinners and suppers to be equivalent for the honour they did her in enrolling her name on their visiting list. There was Mrs. Macdougall of Macdougall—the Macdougall, as she was familiarly termed—an old Scotchwoman, who wore Cairngorms as big as wainuts on her withered neck, and dined, for half the week, upon red herrings. The Macdougall laboured under the hallucination that Scotland was the greatest and most virtuous country in the world, and that she was the biggest person that had ever issued from it.

She had the smallest and most contemptible opinion of Lady William Nettleship, who was 'only the widow of an English duke's son,' whereas the Macdougall maintained that all her ancestors had been kings. Indeed, these two ladies' claims to high birth and knowledge of each other's impetuosity had made them deadly enemies, and they could scarcely converse together with politeness even in public. Next to the Macdougall sat Miss Selina Farthingale,

whose position being low" enough for patronage, made her rather a favourite with Lady William's rival. She was a dark woman, of five or six and twenty, with sharp pointed features and a cunning expression which was unpleasant to most people. She had little taste either, which was evinced by the profuse blonde trimmings on her lavender silk dress, and the scarlet geraniums in her hair. Miss Selina had her admirers, however, and she fondly hoped that Sir Arthur Chasemore, who was leaning over the back of her chair, was one of them. But the alacrity with which the baronet left her side to rejoin Miss Nettleship, would have inspired some doubts in the mind of an unbiassed spectator.

'Dress cut a great deal too low,' remarked the Macdougall in an unnatural whisper to Miss Selina Farthingale, as Regina entered the room. 'I ca' it indee-cent—positively indee-cent.'

Miss Selina shrugged her mottled shoulders out of her lavender silk dress, in expression of her disgust at seeing Regina's.

'We musn't be too hard,' she whispered in the chieftainess's ear. 'The stuff may have run short, you know.'

'Weel, she had better cut a yaird off her train and soo it at the top, then,' grumbled the elderly lady, whilst the clear Cairngorms looked like dull fishes' eyes, viewed from the background of her parchment-coloured neck.

'And now I suppose you all want your supper?' cried Mrs. Stingo, in her coarse voice; 'so the sooner you get down to it the better. Sir Arthur, give your arm to Mrs. Macdougall, and mind you help her to the best of all that's on the table. She never says a word about my suppers, but she pays me the compliment of eating them, as every one knows.'

'I fancy the Scotch constitution is somewhat akin to that of the boia tribe, and can lay in a month's provisions at a sitting,' remarked Lady William, almost before the Macdougall had disappeared.

'Now, Lady William, that's very spiteful of you! No one's to blame for their poverty, you know; that's what I say. Colonel Crossman, will you escort Mrs. Runnymede to the supper-room? There's a first-rate lot of Madeira at the head of the table, Mrs. Runnymede. I had it put out of the way of the young ones on purpose. Now, Lady Wilpam, here's Mr. Stingo waiting to hand you down—and Miss Selina will go with Mr. Pennycuik.' And so Mrs. Stingo ran on until all her guests had disappeared, two and two, like Noah's animals going into the ark, and take possession of the supper-room. It