

"Who to, for goodness gracious' sake?"

"Well, that's a delicate question, especially in view of my peculiar circumstances; I suppose I oughtn't to say anything."

Miss Moore was human, and she knew that so long as she had a secret which curious Mrs. Highbury did not know, that lady was her humble servant.

"Yes; but you must tell me," pleaded Mrs. Highbury. "Mr. Whittaker ought not to marry without consulting the session. And if he consults the session I will know, I suppose. You can't keep secrets between man and wife."

"Very likely. But you know with me it's a sort of a family secret. Not exactly a family secret——" here Miss Moore tittered and stammered. "Well, you know I didn't mean to let my own secrets out, but I suppose everybody knows. I never *did* see such a horrible town for gossip as this is. They won't let anybody's private affairs alone." Here Miss Moore's face reddened, and she smothered a girlish giggle.

Mrs. Highbury suddenly leaned forward so as to bring her heels on the floor, and began to fan herself again.

"Why, Rachel Moore, what 've *your* family affairs got to do with Mr. Whittaker's marrying. Is he going to marry you? You're too old—I mean you're already engaged to Mr. Adams, they say. What do you mean? Don't be so mysterious, or folks'll think you've lost your senses."

"I believe I have," said Miss Moore, and then she burst into another fit of laughing, while the aristocratic little dumpling rocked away again for dear life. Rocking was her substitute for thinking.

Miss Moore's habitual propriety and gravity soon came to her rescue, and she attempted to explain to Mrs. Highbury that by "family secret" she meant to allude—che—he—to the family—che—he—with which she was to become the—the—che—he—he,—or rather that Mr. Whittaker was not going to che—he—marry her,—but that it was somebody else who was going to be a che—he—he—he,—that is, he was going che—he—he—he—he.

Poor Mrs. Highbury did not know whether to laugh or get angry, and, being in doubt, she took a middle course—she rocked herself. Her round face had a perplexed and injured look, as she waited for Miss Moore to explain herself.

"I do believe that I am che—he—he—he," said Miss Moore.

"I know you are, Rachel. Why can't you control yourself and tell a straight story. Who is Mr. Whittaker going to marry; you, or your mother? You say it's in your family."

"My mother! Oh! che—he—he. Not my mother, but my che—he—he."

"Your che—he—he! What do you mean?"

"Not my che—he mother, but my daughter che—he—he."

"Your daughter! Why, Miss Moore you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I don't mean my che—he daughter, but my che—he—he—he—hoo!"

By this time, little fat Mrs. Highbury was also laughing convulsively and screaming between her fits of laughter.

"What is—what is che—he, what is your che—he—he?"

"My che—he—my che—he step-daughter that is to be."