

## COLONEL AND MRS. CHUTNEY.

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"Mary, Mary! how wildly you talk!" said her gentle cousin.

"No," continued Miss Holden, "I would prefer trying on cloaks at Marshall and Snelgrove's; or, Loo, dear, selling tarts at a pastrycook's in a garrison town. That would be jolly!"

Mary was the orphan daughter of a captain in a marching regiment, which may account for some of her eccentric tastes.

"Ah! Mary—a good husband. and a comfortable home!"

"But show me them! You have both, yet there was a brighter smile in your eyes, and a happier repose on your lips, in the old days when we turned our frocks, sponged our silks, washed our ribbons, darned our stockings, and mended our gloves together."

"Don't talk of it," exclaimed Mrs. Chutney. "I seem somehow to have lost my courage. I cannot please my husband—and then, you know, I had no fortune—at least nothing to speak of. I am the creature of his bounty. And I am always afraid of his finding out my mistakes; for I have grown, oh! so stupid."

"My dear," cried Mary, "you are a goose. No money! Hadn't he plenty? Did you not give him yourself—your tender true heart? I know you love him. Don't you care for his comforts with a watchfulness no money could purchase or reward? Money is all very necessary, but there are things to which money is dress. I say, Loo, do not be so down-hearted. Just show the colonel your value; contradict his whims, disregard his storms in a teacup; don't give him a kiss when he asks for one."

"But he never does ask for one," said Mrs. Chutney, dejectedly.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Miss Holden, with strong emphasis, "I really thought better of him! But hush! I hear a ring. It may be the colonel. There, I have pulled the tablecloth crooked, and mind you stand up to him like a woman—nothing secures peace like an armed neutrality."

"Well, I'll try," returned her cousin, as Colonel Chutney entered.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, "it's terribly hot. Loo, I want some brandy and soda-water, iced, mind iced."

Mrs. Chutney rang the bell and gave directions to the page while the colonel continued addressing Mary: "I see you have been out; too lazy, I suppose to go up stairs" (pointing to their bonnets, which lay upon a sofa); "I must say" (with an irritable laugh), "I do not approve of amalgamations—drawing-rooms and dressing-rooms are better kept apart."

"Well, I do not agree with you," said Mary, carelessly; "by mingling two good things you increase the sum total of excellence."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the colonel; "Loo, look at that table-cover!"

"Form square, repel cavalry," said Mary in an emphatic whisper to her cousin.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Chutney, quietly.

"It is crooked—it is infernally crooked. If there is one thing more than another which shows a total indifference to appearance, a culpable negligence of duty on the part of the mistress of a house, it is a crooked table-cover."

"You had better put it straight, love," said the wife, quietly.

"What do you mean?" cried the exasperated colonel.

Mrs. Chutney laid down her work, and half rose. Mary threw herself on her knees and held her down by her dress. Making an imaginary search on the floor, she exclaimed, "You have dropped your thimble." Here the page entered with the desired soda-water.

"Please, 'm, cook says the fishmonger has not sent the ice."

"I knew it! I expected it!" ejaculated the colonel, walking up and down the room; "when was ice producible in this house in proper time—or anything else fit for a gentleman?"

"If I had known," began Mrs. Chutney, apologetically—

"No explanations," whispered Mary; "charge home."

"Go for some ice instantly," continued Mrs. Chutney to the page. "Do not excite yourself, my dear, it will be here directly."

"Why do you not have an ice-house in the garden, colonel?" said Mary, "and then you could cool yourself there sometimes."

The colonel stopped short in the act of wiping his brow, and stood transfixed. Miss Holden laughed, and adroitly changed the subject. "Do you know, colonel, I like your new morning suit immensely? Turn round. Why, Louisa, how could you say it was unbecoming?"

"Did she say so?" asked the colonel anxiously.

"You ought to have told me, Loo. What is your objection?"

The colonel surveyed himself in the glass, feeling an uncomfortable sort of uncertainty some mischief was brewing. What if his much-enduring Louisa was going to be rebellious, to object to systematic annihilation, and develop ideas, wants, and wishes of her own! He must seem amiable, to avert such a calamity.

"I have been detained rather longer than I expected, Mary," he began, blandly, "by an interesting visit. You were the topic of a very flattering conversation."

"Dear me," said Miss Holden, "an ambassador to ask the honour of an alliance?"

"Better still, the contracting party himself, I suspect."

"You are not in earnest!" exclaimed Mrs. Chutney.

"It's a fact, though," said the colonel. "I was leaving the club, when Captain Peake came up to me; and, after a little talk about the East, and our mutual acquaintances there, he, in a very manly and straightforward way, stated that he had met you at Mrs. Monitor's: that the esteem in which you were held, the regard shown for you on all sides, had made an impression on him, which—By-the-by, what's for luncheon? for Peake said he would be here at one thirty, and," looking at his watch, "he is due now."

Mary, who had listened in silent astonishment, now broke in: "But, Colonel Chutney, the man must be mad! I never saw him but three times, when he had tea with Mrs. Monitor, and then he stared so, and seemed so nervous, that he made me nervous too. How could you let him come here?"

"You nervous! that's a good joke!" repeated Colonel Chutney; "and as for Peake, he was one of the courageous fellows in the Indian War. I spoke to one or two men in the club about him after he left me, and heard the highest character of him. Why, he was noticed in dispatches for a daring rescue of a merchant craft from some piratical Chinese junks in 'fifty-three."

"Pooh!" returned Mary. "There is no great heroism in facing a legion of Chinese. I fancy I could put an army of them to flight myself."

"Oh, Mary!" interrupted Mrs. Chutney in a tone of remonstrance, when the door was thrown open, and the page announced "Captain Peake," whereupon entered a broad-shouldered, good-looking man, probably forty years of age, with small whiskers and thick drooping black moustache. His complexion and clothes were deep brown, as if sunburnt generally all over; his hands (he wore no gloves, though a brilliant diamond ring sparkled on each little finger) partook of the general tint; he had a broad honest face, with grave dark eyes, a quantity of dark hair, and a sailor-like look.

During luncheon the captain's performances were precisely those of a man painfully in love. He did not say much, and seemed afraid to look up when he did speak. Chutney rallied him so boisterously, that even Mary Holden blushed, and Mrs. Chutney broke in with timid remonstrances. After luncheon the two gentlemen retired to the bow-window, and, entangling themselves in the gorgeous window-curtains, held a whispered conversation. Nothing was overheard but an anxious question from Peake, which seemed to ask "if there was any other fellow in the way?" What this meant could not be guessed: or at this moment the door was opened violently, to admit Miss Barbara Bousfield. "Steady! Mind what you are about," she ex-

claimed. "Don't scratch the walls or break the banisters;" and she slowly backed into the room, followed by a cab-driver and the page carrying a davenport. They set it down, and a short, sharp, and decisive conflict ensued, ending in the discomfiture of "cabby," and his grumbling departure. Then, and not till then, did Miss Barbara lower her umbrella from its threatening position, and standing at ease, addressed Mrs. Chutney. "There, Louisa, I have brought you a present; so don't say you got nothing from me towards your furnishing. It's a useful concern, not the sort of frippery that is generally made up for women. There—there's a desk to write at; here are drawers to keep your account-books and papers in; here are accounts paid; here unpaid—hope you'll have very few there. I believe there are some secret drawers, too, but you'll not care about them. Married women should have no secrets." While Aunt Barbara spoke, Colonel and Mrs. Chutney examined the davenport with exclamations of delight. Captain Peake looked on with quiet attention; meanwhile the page entered, unperceived by all save the last-named personage, and delivered a letter to Miss Holden, which she looked at with much attention and curiosity, but still without opening it.

"My dear aunt," exclaimed the colonel, "I am touched; by Jove! I am a good deal affected by your kindness and generosity in making my wife so very handsome a present. I know she shares my sentiments." Shakes hands with Miss Bousfield.

"I am sure, Aunt Barbara, I am greatly obliged," chorused Mrs. Chutney; "and I shall try and keep it very nice and tidy."

"I hope so," said the colonel, more emphatically than hopefully. And, glasses in hand, he proceeded to point out the beauties and usefulness of their acquisition to his wife.

"It looks more like a man's affair, colonel, doesn't it?" said Mary, carelessly.

"What do you mean?" asked Aunt Barbara, fiercely.

"Why, the sort of solid heavy thing that seems to suit a man's chambers."

"I am not offering it to you," said Aunt Barbara, striking her umbrella on the floor. "What business have you with opinions? Wait till you are in a position to uphold them."

"As an intelligent being—" began Miss Mary. "Don't make faces at me, Loo," she continued, in reply to some signals from her cousin. "As an intelligent being, I cannot help forming opinions; and, being blessed with the faculty of speech, I can't resist uttering them. A beneficent Providence may in time lend them weight in the shape of a rich husband, and then, aunt dear, they will be better worth our attention."

Chuckles of delight from Captain Peake.

"I tell you what," returned Miss Bousfield with suppressed anger, "you will come to no such good end. You are too conceited and shallow, but I washed my hands of you. You value neither opinions nor appearances."

While these sentences were exchanged, Mary opened and glanced at her letter, which seemed of no common interest; for she changed colour, put it back into its envelope, and thrust it into the folds of her dress.

"And conceal your letters when you get them, a very suspicious circumstance," continued the aunt, maliciously.

"I have a right to my own letters, free from your interference," replied Mary, with some serious displeasure.

The moment poor Mary got home and found herself alone, she hastily drew forth her letter, and read as follows:

"Dear little Coz. You have so much courage and judgment, that I am determined to confide a difficult task to your management. I dare not write to Louisa, the tiger would infallibly burn my epistle, and then the d— to pay, with the usual scarcity of combustibles, so I want you to read this to her, and soon, mind, for I am in an awful fix. About six weeks ago I had an awful run of bad luck—so bad and so long, there was no reasonable probability of its lasting; but being in immediate want of funds, and Louisa very selfishly refusing to apply to Chutney, I was imprudent enough to put Samperton's name