

that you are! Petite, I never told you"—he turns to her, his eyes laughing—"that I once asked Miss Hariott to marry me."

"No," says Reine, coolly; "but she did."

"Did she tell you also that she refused me?"

"I beg your pardon," interposes Miss Hariott, "I never refused you. You did not press for an answer, and I simply reserved my decision. I still reserve it and some day, when you stand the bridegroom of another at the very altar, I may stride forward an awful Nemesis, and forbid the nuptials. It is my right."

"Mr. Longworth should be used to rejections by this time," says Mdlle. Reine; he appears to have been singularly unfortunate in his affairs of the heart. Repeated blows, however, harden substances already hard by nature, do they not?"

"Ah! You know all about it I see. Yes, I have been most unfortunate in the past; let us hope the future will make amends."

"Does not the present?" inquires Miss Hariott.

"Not satisfactorily. Good night fair hostess. Don't let the small hours find you studying the wit and wisdom of Mrs. Malaprop."

They go home through the sweet smelling, faint warm darkness of the August night, meeting few, speaking little, supremely content in their hidden hearts to be together and alone.

"Reine," he says, gently, "what did you mean by refusing to play if Mrs. Sheldon was to be one of us?"

"Need you ask?" she answers, calmly. "Leonce tore up the letter in his room, set fire to the fragments and threw them in the grate. One portion escaped, and was found. Who think you in that house would take the trouble to write an anonymous letter and enclose it? Mrs. Sheldon was once your affianced. There are those who say she aspires to the position still. Do you think that letter was the work of a servant?"

Longworth answers nothing. He has been thinking the matter over himself. But when the subject is renewed by Mrs. Sheldon herself, as she stands alone with him next day, he speaks.

"You are engaged to Miss Reine Lan-

delle, Laurence," she says, with emotion and her handkerchief to her eyes. "She can do nothing wrong in your eyes, I know, but I thought at least you were my friend—old times might surely have made you that. I never—no, I never thought you would stand quietly by and hear me insulted."

Longworth looks at her cynically, unmoved by the falling tears.

"I would leave old times out of the question if I were you, Totty," he answers. "As for Mademoiselle Reine, what would you have? I couldn't knock her down. Freedom of speech is a lady's prerogative, and besides, I am not sure that I do not rather admire her spirit."

"Laurence! Admire her for insulting me! Oh, this is cruel indeed!"

"Don't cry, Mrs. Sheldon. There are few ladies whose beauty is improved by tears. Shall I really tell you why she spoke as she did?"

"If you please. If you know."

"I know. Upstairs in his room one day last week Monsieur Durand tore up and burned the fragments of a letter. One fragment escaped and was picked up by some one in this house—was inclosed in a vile anonymous letter and sent to me. This letter was in a woman's hand—disguised. I showed it to Mademoiselle Reine Landelle, and she formed her own surmise as to the writer. I have no more to say. Only, in my own defence, I shall burn any further communications. Time to start for the office I see. Good morning, Laura."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DRAMA OFF THE STAGE.

THROUGH the pleasant afternoon Mr. Longworth, of the *Phoenix*, saunters up to make a call upon his friend, Miss Hariott. It is as well to say Miss Hariott, although he is pretty certain to find Mdlle. Reine Landelle there as well. The windows of the little cottage stand open, and a smile breaks over his face as he draws near, for he can plainly hear Mrs. Malaprop and Miss Languish vehemently gabbling their parts. He leans his folded arms on the window-sill and looks in at the two actresses, who, in the spirit of true *artistes*, pay no heed to their audience, but go on.

"There, Sir Anthony," exclaims Mrs.