

At this astounding piece of intelligence, Mrs. Burnish turned on her chair, and faced her maid.

"What do you mean, Gabb? What's all this nonsense, you chattering thing!"

"Why mem, all I go from is Miss Alterton and Mr. Delamere meets of a morning in the library before any of the servants is up. I know it mem for a fac; for I saw it with my very own eyes, Miss Alterton a-rushing up stairs with her face all red, and her hair a-flying, and I saw Mr. Delamere after that go into his room, mem. Yes! I'll be upon my Bible oath I did—and more than that, mem! he meets Miss Alterton in her walks; the young ladies says so, and thinks, pretty innocent dears, it's to see them. But he never used to do that either in town or country afore. If I'd a-been a chatterer, mem," added Gabb, puckering up her eyes, and feeling for her pocket-handkerchief, "I should have spoken afore, but I says to my-elf, says I, It's no affair of mine; servants ought to hear, see, and say nothing, only I wonder a born gentleman like Mr. Delamere should be sweet on a young lady that comes from some place they call 'The Tun and Noggin.'"

"You are raving, you foolish woman," said Mrs. Burnish hastily. "Miss Alterton has been educated ever since she was an infant at one of the best schools in Bath. Her governess, a lady known to our family for years, has recommended her. Her father is certainly in the wine and spirit trade; perhaps a retail dealer, I don't know; but I have not the least doubt of his respectability: and if your information on other matters is no more correct than the last, I advise you, Gabb, to attend to your own affairs, and leave Miss Alterton and Mr. Delamere to theirs."

"Ah!" said Gabb, sobbing, "that's what I said. If I tell my angel missus, what I see with my own eyes, she's so good and gentle she wont believe it. And pr'aps it's approved of, and what's it to me? and here am I getting myself into trouble, when I meant no more harm more than the babe unborn."

"Gabb," said Mrs. Burnish, much mollified both by the flatteries and the pretended tears of her maid, "I have no doubt you are a faithful creature, but you do not understand, how should you? the matters you talk about. Miss Alterton is a well educated young lady, who is to bring up my daughters, and whom I desire may be treated with respect as their instructress. But of course she occupies a very different station to any of the Burnish family. And Mr. Delamere would not dare to disgrace himself by insulting any young lady under my roof with his addresses, It would be highly indecorous, for, of course, marrying so below himself is not to be thought of. So dry your tears, you goose! and let this be a warning to you. I know all about his meeting the little girls in his walks. He did so last night, and as to what you say about the highly improbable incident of meeting in the library, you must be quite mistaken. I'm sure you must."

"I humbly ask your pardon, mem! And when that red-faced woman comes, that brings parcels from the 'The Tun and Noggin,' I'll tell her a-piece of my mind, for her daring to say that Miss Alterton of Bath comes from any such place."

"You'll please to hold your tongue; and for the present fasten my dress, and don't agitate my poor nerves with any more of this stuff."

Bursting with spite, Gabb did as she was desired, and was not sorry when she left her mistress's room, and tears of real vexation filled the eyes that had simulated weeping. "She's a blind idiot! that's what she is," was her complimentary summary of Mrs. Burnish's character, as she told the matter to Charles, who further vexed her by saying—

"If there's anything atween they two, it isn't love; and so you'd a-said if you'd a-seen his face when he turned out of that 'ere blessed room this morning."

"Psnaw—fiddlesticks!" said Gabb, "don't you, Mr. Charles, pretend to tell me. What do you, men, any of you, know about anythink, that isn't as plain as the nose on a body's face." (Gabb's nose was obviously plain, and turned up mightily, as she added)—"A set of fools, most of you, with sand for brains, and pebbles for eyes! What's Mr. Delamere's business to look angry, any more than pleased, at this Miss What's-her-name—tell me that, will you? Is people angry with them as they cares nothing about—tell me that, Wisacre? If he thinks she's got another in the wind—and we know she has—won't he look all manner of ways, noodle?"

"Ah! I see," said Charles, apologetically.

"See, do you! no, you don't; it's I that sees. Only, don't you pretend to penetration, it ain't your 'forty,' as master says"

Somewhat comforted by this harangue, Gabb proceeded to the business of the day; and, as directing the under servants was one of her prerogatives, there was plenty of fault-finding that day in the lower regions of the household.

Now, though, on the whole, Mrs. Burnish had acted creditably, in the way she received Gabb's communication, and treated it, principally, as a bit of slunkey gossip—for, as Mabel was really useful, she clung to her with the tenacity of a weak rather than an affectionate nature—yet two new ideas certainly had entered her brain. The possibility that Delamere might look with the eyes of admiration on Miss Alterton, and the fact that

the young lady's father was certainly in some branch of 'the trade,' not quite so genteel as she had supposed Miss Germaine's general description of 'wine trade' to apply to. 'Tun and Noggin' certainly jarred on her nerves. The governess of her daughters! well, it was annoying, certainly—particularly that it should have oozed out among the servants. True, she knew Mabel had been twelve years at Miss Germaine's, and spent her holidays there, for so much had transpired in conversation. She knew, too, that it was a step-mother that Mabel was in mourning for, and her own position towards Delamere had kept her from asking any questions as to the terms Mabel had been on with the deceased. She more than suspected there was little love on either side, and that Mabel's long school life, unbroken but by very occasional visits to watering-places, was traceable to that cause. Comforting herself, therefore, that her daughter's governess had not been contaminated with what she knew to be a low, disreputable business, she determined to take the first opportunity of delicately cautioning Mabel as to the direction and posting of letters to her father, and the inexpediency of any person being sent to her with messages, who might talk with the servants. As to Delamere, she would watch.

Several morning calls were made on Mrs. Burnish that day, and nearly all unpleasant traces of the morning's conversation had been erased from her unimpressible mind, before she dressed for the dinner party, that, with Mr. Burnish, she was engaged to attend that night. Not so with Mabel. Throughout that weary day, heavily went the hours and their occupations. Nothing requires the mind to be more free than teaching; and all seemed to go wrong. The children toiled and stumbled over lessons that usually went smoothly, and their governess failed to interest them. The work was done, but the spirit was not in it, and all was heavy. The evening walk in the Regent's Park might have restored matters but for a most affecting incident.

Nothing could be finer than the weather when Mabel and her pupils set out, glad to be released from the school-room. They wandered on the grass, and beside the ornamental water, the little ones, at all events, feeling the delicious evening a compensation for the toilsome day. They did not notice the ominous gathering of the clouds until some falling drops admonished them to make the most of their way homewards. Just as Mabel and the children had reached the park gate, with every prospect of being drenched in a few minutes, they saw the carriage returning from having set down Mr. and Mrs. Burnish. The servants had been told to look out for Miss Alterton and her charge, and all three entered, pleased enough to escape the storm. They had scarcely seated themselves when a vivid flash of lightning frightened the horses, and they set off at full speed along the New road, the coachman being unable to turn them into Park Crescent, but not entirely losing his command of them. Just at the top of Portland Street they turned short round the corner, and a wild shriek from the pavement, the cry of a child as if thrown among the horses' feet, the jolt of the carriage against or over something, convinced Mabel an accident had happened. In a few seconds, though it seemed a long time, the carriage stopped suddenly, and Mabel saw two policemen, and others at the horses' heads, and letting down the window, and looking back in the direction they had come, to her inexpressible horror, Mabel saw a poor child being raised from the ground bleeding profusely, and apparently insensible; a woman evidently its mother, in the most frantic agony of grief. The bystanders, hastily fetching a shutter from a neighboring shop, were laying the little sufferer on it, and proceeding to carry her to the Hospital, the mother being supported in the sturdy arms of the compassionate Irish applewoman at the corner of the street, who, calling her boy to mind the stall, prepared to go with the distressed creature, who was following the poor child. Meanwhile, Mabel, oppressed with sickening faintness, was vainly striving to quiet the cries and screams of the frightened children, as the coachman gave his master's name and address to the policemen, and accounted for the accident, as eye-witnesses who came up corroborated, by the fright of his horses. The rain was falling in torrents, while the thunder pealed above, and the coachman and footman prepared to lead the horses, now perfectly quiet. A very short time brought them to Portland Place, where Mabel, assisted by the maids, succeeded in restoring the children to something like tranquility before they retired to rest. For herself, the shriek of that poor mother and the stifled cry of the child still rang in her ears, and effectually banished composure. She lay down on a sofa in the school-room, and found relief for her overcharged heart in tears.

Mr. Veering undertook the task of telling Mr. Burnish of the accident on his return. In consideration of Mrs. Burnish's nerves, she was not told until the following morning, when she was naturally thankful at the escape of her children from what might have been a terrific accident; and the consequences to the poor child taken to the hospital caused her to dispatch a note to Mr. Shaston Keen, requesting him to lose no time in seeing the patient and mother, and doing all for them that benevolence would suggest.

Mr. Delamere Burnish met Mabel at breakfast with such undisguised warmth of pleasure, and congratulated her so feelingly on her escape, that his step-mother already felt the workings of Gabb's suggestions—yes! they were sure to produce effects. Slow as Mrs. Burnish was, from self-occupa-