

"But really, Mr. Cobb, we have not entertained a soul for an age. We have no engagement for next week; suppose I name Thursday, and send out my cards to-day?"

"Thursday is not a good market-day, Mrs. Cobb; you can get nothing."

"Then Friday, love; say Friday."

"I have no objection. But who would you ask to meet the Marleys?"

"The Daltons, the Bradshaws, Mr. Collier and Mr. Spooner, my love, if you approve," returned Mrs Cobb, pleased to have gained so much.

"And none of the military, my dear?" asked Mr. Cobb, smiling.

"No, not one!" replied Mrs. Cobb with bitterness. "I am quite tired of wasting my civilities upon people who are very fond of flirting, and talking nonsense, and making love, but who have not the most distant intention of anything more serious. As to that little fellow Sinclair, I intend to forbid him the house. I have no notion of his coming here day after day, and sitting for hours keeping the gals idle, and nothing to come of it."

"Ho! ho! are we there?" returned Mr. Cobb, significantly applying his thumb to the side of his nose and spreading his fingers.

"La, Mr. Cobb! how can you be so vulgar?" exclaimed his lady, considerably disgusted. "I am rejoiced the gals were not in the room to see you. It is surely very natural in me to wish to see them settled in life," she continued, "and to take any proper means to effect so desirable an object. Six gals, Mr. Cobb, unprovided for, let me tell you, is no joke."

"Indeed it is not, my dear, as my purse can testify."

"The thought of it sometimes keeps me awake all night," proceeded the lady in a whining tone. "What—thinks I—is to become of all us Cobbs!"

"My dear, that won't mend the matter," returned her husband. "I have all along thought you proceeding on a wrong principle, in allowing the girls so much freedom. In every public place of amusement, there they are to be seen; forever are they riding, and driving, and walking, with all the idle young men in the neighbourhood. Keep them up, I say, Mrs. Cobb, make them more scarce, and they will be far more likely to gain real admirers."

"I am sure I would do any thing for their advancement in life," rejoined Mrs. Cobb, applying her handkerchief to her eyes. "But I would not like to shut them up altogether, as Lady Woodford does her daughter. Lady Marley never gained a Baronet in that way, to my certain knowledge."

"I do not wish Lady Marley to be an example to my daughters," said Mr. Cobb, with more determination in his manner than he had yet shown.

Mrs. Cobb felt she was treading on dangerous ground, and replied very meekly;

"You know, my dear, that I always bow to your superior judgment in all things. Lady Marley certainly flirts too much, as a married lady; but she is a sweet woman, and always has the choice people at her house. I hear her public breakfast is to be a most elegant affair; she has invited upwards of a hundred guests."

"No doubt, my dear! Sir James has plenty of money to throw away, and a young wife to keep in good humour. But I much question his wisdom in keeping his doors so constantly open; her Ladyship will spread her wings and fly away one of these days."

"La! my love, what a shocking insinuation! But, talking of money—" Mrs. Cobb cleared her throat and tried to look as indifferent as she could—"I am going to draw on your good nature for a little this morning; the girls want a few things for the party, and I require a new head-dress. I cannot appear in my blue hat again; I have worn it so often. Mrs. Gayton looked most contemptuously at it last Thursday evening."

"You may draw as long as you please, my love, on my good nature," returned Mr. Cobb; "that is inexhaustible; but my money, I regret to say, is not so easily replenished."

"I am sure I have ever found both ready at all times," said Mrs. Cobb, who had lately discovered that flattery and a good dinner were the best methods of winning the little man.

"Well! well! how much do you want?" rising and looking at his watch. "Eleven o'clock, I vow, and I have an engagement at half-past."

"Twenty pounds, my dear!" replied Mrs Cobb in a subdued tone of voice.

"Twenty pounds, Mrs. Cobb! Bless my stars, do you want to ruin me?" exclaimed her husband, reddening.

"If you think that too unreasonable, say fifteen."

At this critical moment Miss Sykes was seen driving up to the door. In a few minutes she entered, saying;

"How d'ye do, good folks? how d'ye do? I am afraid I have interrupted a conjugal tête-à-tête. Mr. Cobb looks very like my turkey-cock in a passion. La! my dear, what has happened?"

"Nothing, Miss Sykes! I have been merely asking a little favour, which I feel sure will be granted; Mr. Cobb is always so ready to oblige. Aren't you, love?" said his wife coaxingly.

Mr. Cobb was bustling towards the door, with