

"I declare Arthur, you should have lived in the time of Queen Bess," she laughed, "you would have made a splendid courtier."

"I fear not Nellie," answered her lover merrily, "as I only see charms where they really *do* exist, and cannot invent new ones even for my liege lady, like Essex of old did for his."

"Indeed you had better not," returned Nellie, "else you might receive Essex's reward, not for a breach of gallantry, but for talking what you know to be downright nonsense."

"At all events you will not have the pleasure of saying it was bestowed unmerited," and Arthur very saucily stooped and snatched a kiss from the laughing lips; but while thus employed, he did not see the little hand rise softly and in close proximity to his head, till he experienced rather a strange sensation in his left ear, and thus, Mr. Arthur Knightbridge received his Christmas-box.

"Mr. Knightbridge, Mr. Burton, Mr. Burton, Mr. Knightbridge," Mrs. Barber said when Nellie and Arthur had entered the drawing-room. The gentlemen bowed in acknowledgement of the introduction, and shook hands.

"Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Knightbridge, I have long wished it," began Mr. Burton.

"Believe me, my dear sir, the wish is mutual," Arthur rejoined smiling cordially, but then he was speaking to Nellie's guardian and it was for his interest to be polite.

"By the way, where's Studly?" questioned Mr. Burton, after they had been conversing for some time on various subjects, and noticing for the first time, the absence of his second guest.

"O, I beg your pardon, I quite forgot to mention it," Arthur said, "Fred wished me to convey his apology for not coming at the time appointed, but important business compelled him to run up to Richmond at half-past two, however, he will be here."

"O, that'll do," assented his host, "we dine at four, and——."

A ring was heard at the front door, "Ah, that's him now, I would know his ring anywhere," Arthur was saying, as Mr. Studly entered the room. The new-comer advanced with a courtly bow, and was proceeding to shake hands with Mrs. Barber, when his gaze became fixed on the master of the house who was standing with his back to the fire, a strange smile playing round the corners of his really fine mouth. Dropping the lady's hand, Mr. Studly turned and fairly ran towards his host.

"What? How?" he ejaculated, "my dear Knightbridge, *you* here? Ah, I see, you have prepared this pleasant surprise for me on Christmas day! Welcome to England, old fellow. Arthur, my boy, don't you know your Uncle; but bless me, how should he?" the old gentlemen went on, "when he never clapped eyes on him in his life till this blessed moment."

Before Nellie and Arthur could recover from the astonishment of this astounding revelation, the cross old guardian was undergoing a wonderful transformation. He laughed till he couldnt stand, and was obliged to sit down, then got up and laughed again until each person in the room, becoming affected with his risibility, stood laughing at each other like so many grinning hyenas.

"Let me have it out my friends," he gasped, "I never went so long without a laugh since I was born."

"Ah, sir," Nellie said, the first to recover her composure, "what trick is this you have been playing us? for I see you are not Mr. Burton, you are