

robbery, but had immediately left for London. Ten days after he appeared.

"I hope the detectives and I have not compounded a felony," he said, laying some of the lost jewels on the table, "but these are all we could recover. The plate is melted down by this time and your cheque was cashed the day you gave it. Would you like me to read the result of Pascal's inquiry about your friend?"

"Edward Hansen," he writes, "is not an artist himself, but is the son of a well-known artist of that name. No doubt the sketches your brother purchased are by the father. This Edward is married to a handsome dark woman, and a clever pair of scamps they are, the Stonnor Hall sennet not being the least of their clever adventures."

"He first caught your brother by a little judicious flattery, and then carefully elicited all your family history from him. The story of Lettice he utilized by writing to his wife and telling her to impersonate her in the moonlight. This and subsequent deferential flattery to your brother's mental attainments brought about the sennet. The raps are produced by a very common trick. Your niece's sensation that her child was seated on her lap, was induced by the contact of his foot, having previously throughout the day led her to speak of her trouble. The sparks and stars are simply caused by rubbing the top of a common lucifer match, and flicking it up into the air. As to the apparition, this was no one else but his own wife, who had entered the room, as they subsequently left it, by a rope ladder. The luminous appearance was caused by a compound of phosphates and sulphides well known in Germany, and the greater light near the window showed that she had come within the focus of some lantern cunningly hidden by her husband."

"The subsequent robbery was absurdly easy, seeing that the fire-proof box had been left unlocked after Hansen tried the key."

"I hope Peter is better. 'Experientia docet,' &c."

MR. LANGLEY'S AUNT.

It is nearly always disagreeable for a rich man to live near his poor relations. When the option of residence is in the rich man's hand he usually selects a neighbourhood where life is not made bitter by the sight of unsuccessful shabby brothers, broken-down widowed sisters, or impetuous nephews and nieces; but what can a man do when he is settled on his own property, and some of these social pests come and pitch their tent within a mile of him?

This sort of thing had happened when Raymond Langley was appointed curate of the parish where his uncle owned the chief property, and was a very pompous little squire. It would not have mattered much, in the uncle's opinion, if the curate had come by himself; but he had a young orphan sister with him. This was disagreeable, not only to Mr. Langley himself, but to his daughter Vera, a young lady of æsthetic tastes and hard worldly wisdom. Nora Langley's bright, fresh face brought no pleasure to the soul of her cousin, and as Christmas was approaching the shadows of discontent deepened.

"It is intensely annoying, papa, their being here!" exclaimed the aggrieved daughter, sitting sideways by the breakfast table, in a costume peculiar to the recent craze, and her brown eyes looking angrily from beneath a huge fuff of auburn hair. "Nora takes up with all the odd people she meets, and seems to have no notion of what is due to us. I met her yesterday walking with the most wretched-looking old person, quite a vulgar woman I should say, who is lodging in the village. I really believe the old creature thought I was going to be introduced."

"Humph! clergymen can't be choosers always as to their acquaintances, especially a curate with a hundred pounds a year. But I have a letter here from my aunt Jephson, saying she purposes to be with us on Christmas day."

"Really?" cried Vera, rising in her excitement; "the idea of fixing so suddenly on a visit, after shutting herself up for forty years!" "I daresay age is giving her warning that it doesn't do to put off final arrangements too long," and Mr. Langley rubbed his hands silently beneath the tablecloth, as he glanced from the kidney on his plate to the crabbly-written letter beside it. "She must be going to make her will, and we are her nearest kin."

"Yes," said Vera, with a soft sigh of satisfaction. Then a painful thought seemed to strike her.

"Papa, what about Raymond and Nora? wouldn't it be better—quieter for your aunt, I mean—if we had no one but herself here on Christmas-day?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Mr. Langley; "clever girl, deuced clever! But haven't we invited the brother and sister?"

"Ye-es," responded Vera, knitting her brows in thought (although you could not see that she did it, because of the hair); "but Nora is coming to tea with me to-day, and I think I can manage."

Apparently her father thought so too; for he merely shrugged his shoulders and opened the Times.

Vera Langley at five-o'clock tea was quite a picture. Her drawing-room was papered, dadoed, and curtained with dim browns and greens. Ebony shelves, as large as for a kitchen dresser, were filled with plates. The mantelpiece was china laden, and decorated up to the ceiling. A matchless tea-service rested on a

Chippendale table; and gracefully reclining, in a dress of dull gold shaded with olive, was the young lady herself. Who can hope to describe an æsthetic expression of countenance? Du Maurier has given us the young lady whose face was fixed to represent a "longing after the infinite," and whose fate was to hear some gentleman bewailing the frequency with which he had to eat pork when travelling somewhere. There was this fixed look of melancholy and longing on Vera's face as she greeted her cousin, and she smiled gently and sadly upon the simple merino and fur-trimmed jacket, which adorned one of the prettiest and most unaffected girls in Canada. Only a few natural silky curls fell on the broad open forehead, and the bright, sun-loving blue eyes had their full advantage, because they were allowed to look straight out from beneath well-shaped eye-brows.

How she did it there is not time to tell; but Vera Langley contrived to rouse the ire of her cousin, and to make her resolve that it should never be said of Raymond or herself that they had sought to obtain a chance of realizing Mrs. Jephson's fortune; and the end of the dainty tea-hour found Nora taking leave with a heightened colour, and saying that she and her brother would not dine with their uncle on Christmas-day.

"We shall be quite comfortable at home, Raymond," urged his pretty sister earnestly; "you don't mind, do you?"

"Not a bit," replied the curate; "but I had not reserved any of my quarterly fortune for a Christmas dinner, so don't order luxuries."

"No, no!" cried Nora; "I can make a splendid pudding with what is in the house—and—"

"No meat!" inquired Raymond ruefully.

"Yes, a little, dear; but would you very much mind if there wasn't a sirloin of beef, or a turkey?"

"A lark's leg will do, little housekeeper. But I must get to work; my Christmas sermon has to be preached, beef or no beef!"

When Nora heard the door of her brother's little study closed, she began to puzzle over the plum-pudding question, and had a hunt for her cookery-book. Failing to find it, she suddenly remembered she had lent it to an old lady who lived in a tiny cottage near—

"I'll just run over for it!" exclaimed Nora; and she took a thick cloak from the hall, and tying a white knitted shawl over her head she put on goloshes, and stepped quickly out into the frosty air.

In five minutes she was sitting by a bright fire opposite a very old lady, who seemed much pleased to have such a sunny presence in her barely furnished room.

"Too bad of me to forget your book, my dear," said Mrs. Bennett gently; but you are not going to cook to-night, eh?"

"No, not to-night, Mrs. Bennett," said Nora, with a smile and a look of importance; "but I must make our Christmas pudding to-morrow."

"Indeed! I thought you told me you were to dine at the Great House?"

"We were—but we are not going now," and Nora coloured.

"Well, well, my dear," said the old lady quietly, "you and your brother will have each other," and then she sighed; and Nora looked round the bare room, and thought how dull Christmas would be for her old friend.

A bright thought! but was it possible? Certainly not, if the joint consisted of a lark's leg. And while Nora was pondering, the old lady was watching her changing face. At last the young girl spoke.

"I was thinking, if you did not mind a very plain dinner, whether you would come to Raymond and me on Christmas day, Mrs. Bennett?"

"You are kind, dear child. Your company would cheer me, if you would not feel me a trouble?"

"Oh no!" eagerly cried Nora; "but don't scold if the dinner is badly cooked, for I have to do it all. We had given our girl leave to go home for Christmas-day before—we knew—about not going—." The words came awkwardly out; "and now we must let her go."

"Of course," said the old lady briskly; "and you'll just let my old Ann come over and help you in the morning, and then you can go comfortably to church. Good-night, my dear; don't catch cold running home."

When Nora told Raymond next morning about the invitation she had given, he looked comically dismayed, but said nothing; and when he came home from his long day's work he was relieved to find his sister standing, smiling and important, beside a large hamper, lovingly nursing a fine turkey in her arms, and looking tenderly down upon a handsome York ham.

"Just come, and addressed to me!" she cried breathlessly, holding the turkey towards him; but he merely looked his admiration, and did not take hold of the well-trussed bird.

"I say, Nora, was it addressed to Miss Langley?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course, it's for Vera, and has come here by mistake."

"O!" groaned Nora, getting quite pale, as she slowly laid down the turkey and looked for the label. When this was found she shouted for joy.

"Miss Nora Langley" as large as life! Why do you give people such horrid starts, Raymond?"

"All right. I'm as pleased as you are; and Mrs. Bennett will get a good dinner after all."

That old lady came over on Christmas-eve to advise Nora in her house-keeping arrangements;

and was busily engaged in actively helping to mix the pudding, with her sleeves tucked up, and a large holland apron pinned over her plain black gown, when Vera Langley drove up in her pony-carriage.

"How tiresome!" said Nora, as she espied her visitor. "What can she have come for?"

"Perhaps to try to make you go to them to-morrow. Please do not let your invitation to me prevent a pleasant visit," begged old Mrs. Bennett; because, you know, I must leave you at six o'clock."

Here Vera entered, slowly and gracefully. She favoured the pudding materials with a glance of amused contempt, having never seen a pudding before it was cooked during the twenty-one years of her rather useless life. She then acknowledged Nora's introduction to Mrs. Bennett very slightly and haughtily, and turned at once to the object of her visit.

"Papa thinks it very foolish of you and Raymond not to come to dinner to-morrow, Nora; and he has sent me to say he hopes you will alter your minds."

Nora's blue eyes opened wide.

"I thought when I saw you last you felt it would be more satisfactory to ourselves not to seek the opportunity your Christmas dinner would give of meeting the unknown wealthy aunt."

"How you jump at conclusions, Nora!" exclaimed Vera, with an awkward laugh; "I think you made all that out for yourself. Papa will be quite vexed if Raymond does not come."

This was new and wonderful.

"I am sorry," said Nora slowly, "but we have a friend coming—"

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Bennett, giving a vigorous stir to the pudding, "remember I must leave at six o'clock; won't that give you time to go?"

"Quite," said Vera decidedly; and, addressing her cousin, "You know we don't dine till half-past seven."

"I know, but I had hoped, dear Mrs. Bennett, to coax you to spend the evening with us. It will be so dull and lonely the long evening in that cottage, far away from your own people."

The kind face of the old lady quivered a little, as she said in reply,

"I shall not be lonely, child. And I have no people to miss, or who will miss me."

Nora could not decide, but ventured to whisper a request to Vera to invite the solitary old lady as well as her brother and self.

"Impossible! Really Nora, you are shockingly careless in your social arrangements," audibly whispered Vera, in reply.

"Social humbug!" murmured Nora, reddening.

And just then Raymond came in, and Vera turned with obvious relief to prefer her father's request.

"But you know, Raymond," interposed his little turkey-cock of a sister, "the wealthy Mrs. Jephson is coming, and we are very poor, and very likely she will think we want her money."

Raymond looked amused and uncomfortable together, for he knew Nora was now repeating the words her cousin had used to her a day or two before; but he did not wish to make a quarrel with any one at Christmas time, so he said firmly.

"As our friend Mrs. Bennett positively intends leaving us at six, I see no obstacle to accepting my uncle's invitation."

"Then we must eat two Christmas dinners!" said Nora, still wrathful.

"When do you expect your visitor, Vera?" asked Raymond politely.

"Aunt Jephson! O, I suppose early to-morrow; but she never said anything except that she would be with us on Christmas-day; and we don't know where she is coming from, for she dated one letter from New York and the next from Chicago."

"What a wonderfully active old woman she must be!" remarked Nora sotto voce to Mrs. Bennett; and she was delighted to hear her respond with a hearty chuckle. Vera looked still more annoyed at Mrs. Bennett after this, and addressing Raymond, said in a distinct low voice,

"You seem obliged to know all kinds of people. By the way, I must be going now; and I forgot to say that in her last letter aunt Jephson said she hoped to meet you and Nora at our house."

She sailed away to her carriage; and when Raymond returned from seeing her off, Nora exclaimed,

"O Raymond! why did you give in? Don't you see they have only repeated the invitation because they're afraid of offending the rich aunt! and she has told them she wants to see us."

"Nora, this is Christmas-eve. I shall want you in the church soon; so finish your labours here quickly, and put 'malice and all uncharitableness' out of your heart, or the day will be spoiled."

Nora was a great pet of her brother's, and took liberties no one else would have done; but now she was subdued at once.

"Forgive me, Ray; I will try not to think of Vera again to-day, and I shall be ready to help in the church in half an hour."

Christmas-day dawned bright and frosty, and the little church rang out a merry peal very early to rouse the old and young to a remembrance of the day; and all who attended morning service felt the better for Raymond Langley's good honest sermon.

"Ann and you and I have turned out a first-rate dinner, my dear!" said old Mrs. Bennett, as

she plied knife and fork, and put on her liveliest manners for Nora's benefit; and Raymond so well appreciated the good cheer, he said the thought of dining again was a severe trial to him.

"But maybe it will be for your good to meet this new relative, and it is well not to be too proud," said the old lady, nodding wisely.

"We are not going to be proud," said Nora, rather disappointedly; "but I should have been better pleased to know we three were to have our cosy evening at home."

When six o'clock came Mrs. Bennett went away, and Nora arrayed herself for the evening.

"Very nice," pronounced her brother, as she came in to show herself before enveloping her light dress in heavy wraps. "Simplicity is the highest art, after all."

Arrived at the Great House, Raymond and Nora were welcomed by their uncle and cousin—and saw no one else.

"We fear my aunt Jephson has been unable to travel," said Mr. Langley. "She has not arrived."

"O, perhaps," said Nora rather mischievously, "if she has been rushing from New York to Chicago, she may have knocked herself up."

"Yes, yes; extraordinary for a person near eighty, wasn't it?"

At this moment Vera's classic hand was raised for silence. Wheels were heard, then a thundering rap at the door.

"She's come, after all!" said the delighted daughter of the house, and she accompanied her father into the hall.

Raymond and Nora stood near the blazing fire, and were surprised that, instead of words of welcome, dead silence reigned.

"I've not had to travel from Dan to Beersheba, you see!" said a strangely familiar voice.

Nora looked fairly frightened.

"We are expecting a relative, madam," said Vera's cold proud voice, "and had not looked for the honour of your visit."

"By Jove! very awkward! Do you know this lady, Vera?" said the squire.

"No, she doesn't know me yet, nephew; but she soon will!" and the visitor passed by the silent and, it must be admitted, open-mouthed host and hostess, and entered the drawing-room, throwing off her old cloak as she walked.

Could it be? yes, it was Mrs. Bennett, and yet it was not Mrs. Bennett. Instead of a shabby gown, she wore a handsome black velvet relieved by point-lace, and—yes!—real diamonds met the astonished eyes of the curate and his sister. The word "nephew" had sent a pang to Vera's heart, and she followed her father in, looking limp and helpless, just in time to see Nora clasp in her grand-aunt's arms, and to hear her gasp out, "How—could—you—help—to—cook—a dinner?"

The servants all guessed how it was. The old lady had determined to know her relatives and be unknown herself, so had hired a cheap cottage and lived amongst them. She had seen Raymond's poverty, and sent the hamper to Nora; and had sent her letters to Mr. Langley to be posted by friends at different places. As she was personally unknown to them all, her ruse had succeeded.

The Christmas dinner was not quite jolly enough, and every one was glad when it ended. Mrs. Jephson went back to the curate's cottage afterwards, and there made such substantial arrangements to insure Raymond's preferment and Nora's fortune, that it would have been strange if these two young people had not fully meant it when they said to each other,

"This is a merry Christmas."

MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC.

MR. SIMS REEVES is farewelling in London.

OCTAVIA TORRIANI is in Milan and full of Italian engagements.

SALVINI will not return to the United States. He says America has had all the tragedy it wants.

RICHARD WAGNER has promised to write for St. Nicholas a paper on "How Children Should Learn Music."

BRAMHMS' new pianoforte concerto is creating, in his intimate circle, great interest. The work is in four movements, and the writing is said to excel anything he has yet achieved.

FRAT SOPHIE MENTER, the pianist, who was a perfect success in England, will tour in Belgium in January, and afterward in Germany.

MISS FRANCES ALLITSEN has obtained the Scholarship for Composition at the Gail Hall School of Music.

MRS. OSGOOD has achieved a great triumph in "The Messiah" at the Academy of Music, Philadelphia. Over four thousand persons were present, including Adelina Patti.

The WALKER HOUSE, Toronto.

This popular new hotel is provided with all modern improvements; has 125 bedrooms, commodious parlours, public and private dining-rooms, sample rooms, and passenger elevator.

The dining-rooms will comfortably seat 200 guests, and the bill of fare is acknowledged to be unexcelled, being furnished with all the delicacies of the season.

The location is convenient to the principal railway stations, steamboat wharves, leading wholesale houses and Parliament Buildings. This hotel commands a fine view of Toronto Bay and Lake Ontario, rendering it a pleasant resort for tourists and travellers at all seasons.

Terms for board \$2.00 per day. Special arrangements made with families and parties remaining one week or more.