

swer for the result. And, sir," she continued with emotion, "my father appointed you the guardian of my *property*, not the controller of those sentiments which a man of honour would respect."

Here she rose from the table, intending to leave the room; for at the mention of her father, the old choking sensation had returned, and she would not let this grim old tyrant see her weakness.

"Not so fast, Miss Nellie, if you please," he called out, as she had gained the door, "I wish for a little more conversation with you on this subject, that is to be tabooed in the future. Better have it out at once. Pray be seated." She declined, and standing with her hand resting on the table, waited calmly for him to begin.

"My dear young lady," the voice sounded kinder, "you are no doubt perfectly aware that this is Christmas eve. Now, as you have pleased me exceedingly by your prompt compliance with my wishes, in a matter that shall be nameless, I will in return give you what I think will prove a slight pleasure to you. We will have Mr. Arthur Knightbridge here to dinner on Christmas day."

Mrs. Barber looked at her niece, expecting to see the quiet face light up with this intelligence, but she was disappointed. Turning to Mr. Burton, Nellie said supplicatingly,—

"If you please, sir, I would much rather you did not."

"Did not what?"

"Invite Arthur—Mr. Knightbridge—here to-morrow."

"Eh? What do you say?" questioned the old man in astonishment.

"I mean, sir," she replied, "that I think it would be better if he did not come."

"Then, madam, I say he shall," roared the old tornado. "And you may as well learn now as at any other time, that whatever I command in *this* house I expect to be obeyed. When I say a thing *must* be done it *shall* be done, or else you may depend on't there'll be a scene. And now, if you please, ring for writing materials: I will send the invitation at once."

His ward, not caring to witness the "scene" in question, hastened herself to wheel a small writing table in front of his chair, when he began to pen the note to Arthur, without loss of time. Having finished, he bade Nellie address it, and after looking at the direction, told her she might retire, and see to its being dispatched immediately.

When the door had closed, Mrs. Barber drew her chair near the fire, with the resolve to remonstrate with this touchy old piece of humanity, on the needless severity he was displaying towards her niece; but alas for her praiseworthy resolutions! The old man's quick perception had doubtless divined the object of this gentle manœuvre; and being extremely averse to a lecture of this kind, he quickly conceived a desire to see London by gas-light, and before Mrs. Barber could interpose a word, he begged she would excuse him, and hastily left the room.

Pausing in the hall to put on a heavy over-coat, and to draw a warm seal-skin cap down over his ears, he took his gloves and walking-stick and left the house, causing the front door to vibrate rather unpleasantly. Once outside, he hailed a cab, and jumping into it, called out to the driver, "Knightbridge & Studly, Fleet street," and was driven off in the darkness; while Nellie went to her room, to pass the night in sad thoughts and forebodings of the future.