

"I—I did not understand—Mrs. Guthrie has told me nothing," faltered Doctor Morgan, turning very pale. "Char—Charley will certainly excuse me—I—I."

"Well, if Charley will, Gertie certainly will not," interrupted Mr. Ashton.

"Gertie!" gasped Dr. Morgan, as if in the greatest surprise, and actually springing from his horse to grasp Mr. Ashton's hand, and sinking into the deep snow without appearing to mind it in the least. "Is it Gertie Remsen that is to be married to Charley Evans?"

"I hope, sir," said Mrs. Ashton, with much stateliness, "that you were not misled by an absurd rumor that was for a little time afloat. My dear, Mr. Ashton, what are you laughing at? I assure you I consider this very annoying, indeed."

But Mr. Ashton, who had thrown himself back in his sleigh in a paroxysm of laughter, laughed louder than before, and with infinitely more enjoyment as he saw Doctor Morgan, without a word more, vault into his saddle, and ride at the greatest speed of the splendid bay, in the direction of Grassmere.

Of all the days that Aldeane had passed there, she was expecting him least upon this, for her mind was occupied by the responsibility of properly receiving and entertaining a large party which were to meet at dinner a few hours later.

Arthur, Belle, and (according to the declarations of both, and the belief of Aldeane) the most wonderful baby that ever was born, were already there, Arthur, with Mr. Arendell in the library, and Belle in an upper room where Aldeane had left her, in order to give one glance at the drawing-rooms before the company should arrive, when a ring at the bell startled her, and a minute later the sound of her own name uttered in a voice she well remembered, caused her to sink upon a chair, pale and breathless, as the drawing-room door was