

One day old Macfarlane sat alone in his library, chuckling over the fire, with a letter in his hand. There was some curious, indefinable similarity between the old man and the ancient oak chair he sat in; it looked a crabbed, stiff backed, can't-be-comfortable piece of furniture, with a rugged, impossible seat, and it had about it a general air of coldness, hardness, and twistedness of character.

The letter evidently pleased him; he read it again and again, and every time he read it, the grin that turned into the sneer was more and more apparent in his face. "Two thousand a-year on coming of age," he chuckled, "and eight thousand down on her marriage! and as his little mixx of a niece will be visiting in my neighbourhood, he hopes it will please Providence that Harold and she will meet and like each other. Like her! he shall like her—how could he help liking her with such a dowry? Oh, we'll have her here; we'll give her a welcome; we'll ——— Well, what do you want?"

The last part of his sentence he jerked out like the snap of the lid of a snuff box. And well he might stare: for at the door there entered an apparition past all powers of description. It was a withered, shrivelled-up old woman of eighty, toothless, with nose and chin almost touching, and crowned with an enormous coal-scuttle bonnet. She stood like some resuscitated mummy.

"Well," repeated the old man testily, "what do you want?"

"Which I curtsies when I sees yer!" said the ancient, making two straight bobs up and down.

"In the name of goodness," cried Macfarlane, "who are you?"

"Which I seed 'em in the back sitting-room with the green curtains, and Mary Anne says she to me, 'do you go straight and tell Mr. Macfarlane their doin's.' He was a-kissin' of her, and she says, 'never till death do us part, for ever and ever. Amen.'"

"Whom did you see? What did you see? Where did you see it?" ejaculated the mystified old man, when his visitor, whose breath seemed all gone, made a pause and sat down exhausted on the very edge of the chair, with a mittened claw resting on each knee, and staring him wildly in the face.

"And he says to her," went on the old woman, when she had recovered sufficient breath to speak, "'though seas do us sever—from morning till night—which I never loved any one but you.'" Pausing once more to recruit her energies, she wound herself up again and went on,

"Which I see it from the very beginning, and him owing four weeks' rent—not as I hold with Roman candles and crosses, which was the first we had—but her designing ways was dreadful, and I says to Mary Anne, 'Master Harold Macfarlane will marry her, and that'll be the end on't.'"

"Marry whom?" almost shrieked the miser.

"That's just what I said it was—he never knows one word about it. I'll go and tell him, and now I'm come. Oh, dear, oh, dear, that I should ever live to see the day."

Unable to endure the suspense any longer, Macfarlane vehemently rang the bell, and his house-keeper, Mrs. Deborah Bland, appeared. She was