

"Come, come, Chutney, you are in a passion, and will not hear reason. Let Mrs. Chutney explain."

"Two days ago," said Mrs. Chutney, quietly, "at the colonel's request I wrote to Sir Frederic Samperton, asking him to dine here to-day, or to name any other day on which he could dine with us, and I stupidly put his note into an envelope directed to Mr. Deal, at the same time enclosing a note intended for Mr. Deal about the exchange of an ottoman, to Sir Frederic. Mr. Deal consequently thought he was invited to dinner, and arrived at six o'clock. While I, knowing Colonel Chutney's irritability and impatience with my short-comings, foolishly strove to hide my mistake by sending Deal into the garden."

Further explanation was cut short by the abrupt entrance of Miss Bousfield, who dragged rather than led Mary Holden after her.

Poor Mary looked much less brilliant than usual. Her cheeks were pale, and a dark shade under the eyes bespoke fatigue or anxiety. Still the mouth looked resolute, and the large speaking eyes were even brighter than ever in their sadness.

Mrs. Chutney stepped forward hastily, and warmly embraced the culprit, who endeavoured to brush away a tear furtively.

"There," said Miss Bousfield, "is a reception for a modest woman to give one with—a cloud on her reputation, to say the least."

"Aunt Barbara!" cried Mary, stung to self-possession by this coarse attack. "I know you will try to degrade and insult me in every way; but, for all that, the motives which took me to Sir Frederic's chambers were pure and good."

"Nevertheless, you don't like to disclose them," said Miss Bousfield, sneeringly.

"Excuse me, Miss Bousfield," said Colonel Chutney, solemnly, "but I have some very queer suspicions—there's some ugly work going on somewhere. Now, Miss Mary! you decline positively to say what business took you to Sir Frederic Samperton's; will you assure me it was not in any way connected with Mrs. Chutney?"

"With me?" exclaimed his wife.

"Mrs. Chutney was perfectly unacquainted with my visit, or its object," replied Mary, steadily.

"Oh!" cried Miss Bousfield, exasperated to find how little her severity or condemnation was valued by her penniless niece. "You may say what you please, but it's my opinion that the truth isn't in you."

At this moment Colonel Chutney's eye was attracted by the corner of an envelope which peeped out of Mrs. Chutney's little work-basket. Without more ado he drew it forth, and while Peake was trying to soothe the aunt and to comfort the niece, read its contents. Then, with a withering look of indignation, repeated it aloud:

"My dear Mrs. Chutney.

"Ha! Dear Mrs. Chutney would have been enough for all purposes of civility."

"Your charming note"

"Oh, a charming note!"

"Has just reached me; quite in time to prevent any mischief."

"Query, who was the bearer of that note, eh?" Here he glared at Mary with all his might.

"Forgive me if I express a wish to trace in what direction your gentle thoughts could have been floating when you made the mistake."

"What infernal nonsense! It isn't correct English, hang me if it is!"

"It will give me infinite pleasure to accept your hospitality on Tuesday next. I well know Colonel Chutney's peculiarities."

"Colonel Chutney's peculiarities! Ha! my peculiarities! What infernal impudence! Why, what peculiarities have I, I should like to know?"

"Your secret is perfectly safe."

"Is it? Egad! we'll worm it out somehow."

"Yours, as ever, most truly,

"R. SAMPERTON."

"Pray, Colonel Chutney," began his wife—

"Confound it, Mrs. Chutney! What are my peculiarities? Is this the way a man is to be dis-

cussed by the wife of his bosom, to—a man—a man about town?"

"Ah!" put in Miss Bousfield, still triumphant, "there is a pair of them! I wash my hands of them. I never did expect gratitude! But I was fool enough to believe that creatures without any stake in the game would at least play fair."

"What have we to be grateful for?" asked Mary, composedly. "What have you ever done but look on, and prophesy evil, while strangers held out the rope to pull us struggling orphans through the snaf of life?" To Colonel Chutney "I had nothing to do with that note—my business was my own, and I do not choose to reveal it—let me go!" Bursting into tears, "I'll advertise to-morrow for a situation as governess to go abroad, to the Colonies, or Kamschatka, and never come back again!"

"Stop a bit, Miss Holden," said Captain Peake, who had been edging closer to her.

"How dare you speak to me in that manner, you penniless chit?" cried her enraged aunt. "Do you know I can cut you off with a shilling?"

"I may be penniless, Mrs. Bousfield," replied the niece, "but I am a capitalist for all that. I have my share of the great original capital—youth, health, industry, and patience. If I can provide for my own wants, I am as independent and as rich as Croesus."

Captain Peake here made a timid exclamation, and, asking Mary to listen to him, drew her aside, and proceeded to whisper insinuatingly into her ear.

"Where is all this to end?" asked Chutney, observing this, and ceasing to pace the room in his fury. "What devilish schemes may not now be plotting under my very nose! But I will be blind no longer. No, by Jove, not Yqr keys, madam! I'll see the contents of that davenport!"

Mrs. Chutney, still keeping an air of indifference, handed over the keys.

Colonel Chutney opened the davenport, and pulled out account books, notes, papers, a ready reckoner, some half-finished embroidery, Johnson's dictionary, receipts for various curries. "Ha! butcher's book—one fortnight unpaid! Baker's—a week owing! Robbed and betrayed, both. Madame Friselle's account unpaid!" He struck his hand vehemently on one side of the davenport, whereupon a secret drawer flew open.

"Another paper," cried the distracted husband. "A man's writing! What is this?"—and he read:

"London, May 18th, 186—

"Two months after date I promise to pay to the order of Thomas Bousfield, Esq., Fifty Pounds for value received."

"FREDERIC SAMPERTON."

What is this? How came it here?"

"I have done with explanations," said Mrs. Chutney; "but I will say that I was not aware that such a drawer as that existed."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mary, "how could the bill have got there? Has dear Loo paid and concealed it?"

"Let me see," said Miss Bousfield, putting on her glasses and compressing her lips. "This is a strange business! A promissory note to Tom Bousfield, signed by—"

"Sir Frederic Samperton," announced the page, throwing open the door.

The fresh and smiling baronet appeared, like the genius of order and good breeding, to the conflicting assemblage.

"I am particularly anxious to assure you," addressing himself first to Mrs. Chutney, "that Miss Holden's visit of yesterday was simply—"

"Sir," interrupted Colonel Chutney, solemnly, and holding Sir Frederic's letter towards him, "this is no time for trifling. A question or two, if you please," striking open the epistle. "Is that your handwriting?"

"It looks like it."

"And here, sir, did you or did you not address this note to my wife?"

"I did, Colonel Chutney."

"Is that your signature?" continued the colonel, showing him Tom Bousfield's promissory note.

"That is a question I decline to answer," cried the astonished baronet. "But where did you find it? I have been hunting for it incessantly for the last four days."

"Lost or found, I suspect it to be a forgery," said Chutney. "A drop or two more or less of disgrace is of small importance in such a bumper as this," said the Colonel, bitterly.

"Really, Chutney," began Samperton, in a tone of severe common sense, "you must excuse me, but I am a good deal surprised to see a man of your standing and knowledge of the world so knocked over by a simple contretemps. Mrs. Chutney very kindly invites me to dinner, and at the same time she writes to Deal, Board, and Co. about some furniture, and puts the notes in wrong envelopes. I get Deal's billet, and write immediately to know what assistance I am expected to render in the case of your ottoman. Mrs. Chutney writes to me again that it is all a mistake, but 'to say nothing about it, as you know how particular Colonel Chutney is.' I reply thus," pointing to the letter still held out by the Colonel, who seemed transfixed.

"Well," said Captain Peake, rubbing his hands with an air of relief, "I think that is cleared up."

"But how about this?" said Colonel Chutney, slowly, and taking up the promissory note.

"Oh!" replied Samperton, in a tone of easy generosity, "that is easily settled. I could never think of wounding the feelings of this young man's charming relatives. The bill I must have put into the secret drawer when I exchanged the davenport for another I liked better. I have told my solicitor to stop proceedings for the present, and you will pay me the fifty pounds when convenient. Don't be in a hurry. Next week will do."

"What!" roared Colonel Chutney, "am I to be betrayed by my wife" (by this time Deal's hat had been kicked away from the curtains, and prompted a new and dreadful suspicion), "and fleeced by a worthless brother in law?"

Here Captain Peake, who had been doing nothing but whispering very eagerly into Mary Holden's ear, exclaimed aloud: "Yes, you must, to oblige me!" Then addressing Sir Frederic: "Miss Holden desires me to say she will be most happy to place fifty pounds to your credit at your banker's to-morrow morning, and so this unpleasant matter may be closed."

"Miss Holden has suddenly become rich," said the colonel, sarcastically.

"You accept my offer?" observed Peake, earnestly addressing Mary. "It is a mere trifle! Don't think twice about it."

"I do accept it! and I accept you too, you dear, kind, generous man," cried Mary, warmly, passing her arm through his. Captain Peake's dark eyes blazed out one flash of delight, and then nodding triumphantly to Sir Frederic, contented himself with patting the little hand which lay on his arm.

A shade of disappointment passed over the baronet's face, but he soon banished it, being too philosophic not to bow before the inevitable. Then, a new light breaking in upon him, as he observed the tender expression of Peake's countenance, the generous side of his character broke out. "My dear Peake!" he exclaimed, "I cannot allow you to bear all the loss!"

"I do not intend to lose anything," replied Captain Peake. "The young lubber shall repay me. I'll put him in the way of doing it, and repayment shall be the salvation of him."

"I hope, now, all misunderstandings are cleared up?" said Samperton.

"Not at all," answered Mrs. Chutney. "From the total want of confidence and consideration Colonel Chutney has shown me, I feel that my society no longer gives him pleasure." Here the colonel, not wishing to compromise his wife before strangers, showed her the rim of Deal's hat, which he held partially concealed. But this had no terrors for the speaker, who continued: "I live in terror of his temper, and in unsuccessful endeavours to please him. Mary, I shall leave this house with you."

"Come Loo!" said the colonel, "these theatrical airs will not impose on me."

"Let me go in peace," returned Mrs. Chutney,