

—(us, he was going to say) at me?" And he turned round rather savagely to stare at this spy on his passing infidelities.

As the intruder was still facing towards him, he couldn't look that way for more than a minute, and his gaze soon turned off to the house in the distance, where Carrie had just arrived, panting, and was slipping in the back way. As he couldn't frown very much at her, he tried to smooth his brow, and turned short on his heel as he walked off sorrowful and self-condemned.

Uncle John was expected up at the house, and the usual periwinkles procured; but this was a State secret, and his arrival was always considered a most wonderful and supernatural circumstance, and the additional fact of their happening ("quite by chance, my dear; only heard the man a-cryin' 'em down the lane this very minute") to have his favourite delicacy in shell-fish—that was a coincidence that long staggered the children, and made the marvels of Jack and the Bean Stalk hide their diminished heads. Once little Joe (Carrie's cousin), who was a great friend and crony of the old man's, hearing the cry of the itinerant fish-fag, ran after Mrs. Carten, and with many lugs at her dress, entreated her to buy some and make Uncle come! Nor would he be consoled until he was told that the last crop of pins sown in the garden couldn't be expected to be up and ripened before Sunday week.

Mr. Johnson was *the* rich relation. "Never mind that, Sam!" he would say to his market-gardening brother-in-law, "you stick to the missus, and I'll see after the chicks."

Moreover, he was a vestryman (neither better nor worse than most of his class), and an active man in public matters, or rather those matters which are *called* public, and ought really to be so, but are in fact often managed *very* privately and snugly for the vestrymen concerned. Out of this semi-official position arose Sam Carten's only joke, always repeated, since it was sure to tell and couldn't offend. He would pretend to forget his kinsman's exact rank, and would call him "Alderman Johnson."

A greeting of "Turn again, Johnson, Lord Mayor of London," was generally raised in feeble chorus by the children, as the old man, pretending to be very pompous and purse-proud, would make-believe he was going to walk past the house. These simple strains, and an imitation (very far away) of

Bow chimes on an old frying-pan, never failed to melt his stubborn heart, and bring him in, a prey to gentle feelings and the babe's muddy fingers.

Slight variations on these themes were every now and then communicated by genius to Mr. Carten, as he dug among his strawberry beds and celery. On such an occasion he would stick his spade deep in the ground, hang his hat on it, smooth down his hair, and say, "Sam, you'd do for Lord Mayor's toast giver, to pay 'em all compliments all round; or if you couldn't do that, you might be a poet."

To-day, sitting among his oyster-shelled walks, with his long pipe, the sweet smile that ran over his face and the way he laughed in his glass showed that he had some such effort of the imagination to disburden himself of.

"John's late," said Mrs. Carten; "no, there he is, Sam!"

"I sees," was the dignified reply, as the little wicket was pushed open. "Lor!" said Sam, with an air of regret, and waving his churchwarden sadly: "No, don't say that; he was a worthy man, a very good feller! Don't say he's dead and berryed, Mrs. C.!"

"Why, John, it's you, sure enough; and here's Sam said the Lord Mayor was dead, and the Queen had sent for you, and you were a-going to cut us dead; why, you give me quite a turn—you did!"

"No, no, Sam—T'May'r's all right; besides, I'm not Alderman yet, only got my foot on the first rung of the ladder, Sam. Some way up to go yet. Where's Carrie?"

"Indoors," said her mother, "been in all day; can't tell what ails the girl; all her fine eddication you gave her (very kind, I'm sure, tho' Sam grummles some) don't do her no good."

But Alderman J., bent on his fun, and chuckling at Carrie's supposed stop-at-home propensities, had opened the door and gone in chase. He found her behind the end of the little piano, crouching down with her head in her hands and saying "Don't!" at ten seconds intervals.

"You're a pretty girl, I don't think, to stop at home and vex your mother like this!" Thus he began his chaff.

"Please don't."

"Well, ain't you ashamed to go kissing Cousin Joe under the hedge there, instead of indoors like a civilized being?"