

woman on earth, I should be jealous. But I shall not be in the way long; that's one comfort."

A burst of clear, ringing laughter at this moment reached us. It was soon followed by that most comely woman's entrance, "fair, fat, and forty." As she stood by Aunt Mona's side, rosy-checked, bright. "They have been numbered ever since I knew you," smiled uncle. "The days of all of us are, for that matter."

His wife did not condescend to notice the words. Every now and then she had these mournful fits, and liked to talk them out.

"And when I'm gone, Thomas, you can marry some strong, healthy woman, whose ailments won't trouble you. One that's got money too," she added, significantly and spitefully. "Yes, money to make up for all you've had to pay for me."

"I am glad to see you in so desirable a frame of mind," said Mrs. Berrow, laughing merrily. "You show a truly noble, unselfish nature, in providing, even before your death, for your husband's second marriage."

"Now Caroline Berrow, I think you had better not say more," spoke aunt. "I know how unfeeling you can be. It is not the first time you have made game of my illness. As to you, Thomas, you can be looking out for somebody to replace me. I and my sufferings will soon be released from this world of trouble."

"Have you any particular person in view?" asked uncle gravely, "anyone you would like as a mother to your children? Of course I should have to think a little of them in choosing a second wife."

"I don't much think Aunt Mona expected the ready acquiescence; she looked startled. Mrs. Berrow ran out to Kate and Louisa, who were coming in with the basin of peas, and uncle followed her. Presently the two girls came in. Aunt Mona was then growing hysterical.

"Listen, children," she cried—and proceeded to tell them what had passed. "You see, your father is so anxious on your account," she added sarcastically, "that he can't even wait for me to die before providing you a step-mother. I will let you choose. How would you like Mrs. Berrow?"

"Very much indeed," said Kate. "I think she is just as good, and sweet, as she can be," cried Louisa. "Mamma, I like Mrs. Berrow almost as well as I like you. But I suppose this is all nonsense," broke off the girl, laughing.

"To tell you the truth, Mona," interposed my uncle, who had again come in, "I have thought of Caroline Berrow. It is impossible to keep such ideas away when one's wife is in your state of health," he added with deprecation. "She would make a most excellent step-mother."

"Yes, I see you have been thinking of her," returned Aunt Mona, rising from her chair in a fever of hysterical anger. "You have got your plans well laid out, husband, and you have infected the children with them. Oh, that I should live to be insulted like this! Maria, you are a witness to it. It is cruel, cruel! And I will live a hundred years if I can, just to spite you."

With the tears streaming down her still pretty face, Aunt Mona, leaving her deprecation of her fate, sailed away. I felt most uncomfortable. The young girls must have been jesting, but for the first time I thought my uncle heartless. Mrs. Berrow, standing now outside the open window, had partly heard what passed.

"Mona only told me yesterday that she could not live a week," quoth she.

"She kissed me last Sunday when I was going to church and said she should not live to see another," spoke uncle.

"Yes, and she has not yet bought us new dresses or hats, or ribbons this summer," chimed in Kate. "She said it would be useless, we should so soon have to go into mourning for her. It is too bad for mamma to be so melancholy."

"And now she is going to live a hundred years," sighed Mrs. Berrow, in anything but a pleasant tone. "But I must wish you all good morning. I have not ordered my dinner at home yet."

"Uncle Butterfield," I said, feeling insignificant, as the echo of her light footsteps sounded on the path and the two girls ran after her, "I have no right, I know, to speak so; but do you not think you are heartless to Aunt Mona—unfeeling?"

"I am sorry for it, if I am," replied my uncle, "but I'm only taking your aunt at her word. For years she has been telling me she was going to die, and that I had

better be looking out for a second wife. I don't see that I could choose a nicer one than Mrs. Berrow."

"Has she bewitched you, Uncle Butterfield?"

"I don't think so, my lass. All the world recognizes her as a delightful woman. The children must have a mother, if their own is taken from them. What should I do without a wife in a house like this? As to planning-out beforehand—you must thank your aunt for that."

He set off down the garden with his long strides to overtake Mrs. Berrow. Sending the girls back, he accompanied her home. I could have beaten them both.

Upstairs ran I, somehow not caring to face the girls, to Aunt Mona's room, expecting to find her in hysterical tears, and sorely in need of consolation. Not a bit of it. She sat before a mirror, arranging her still abundant and beautiful hair, which, during these years of illness, real or imaginary, she had worn plainly tucked under a cap. There was a fire in her eye, a flush upon her cheek, and a look of determination in her face, which augured anything but well for the prospects of the Widow Berrow.

"I've heard every word you have been saying below," she exclaimed angrily, glancing at the open window. "I thank you for taking my part, Maria. You seem to be the only friend I have. The idea of that mean, low-lived, contemptible Widow Berrow being here in my place, and the mother of my children! If I were dead and buried, and she came as Thomas's wife, I'd rise from my grave and haunt her. But, I'm not dead yet, no, and I don't intend to be, while that miserable jade walks the earth. I suppose she paints and powders to make herself look young and fair, for she's every day as old as I am; and, when we were girls together, she was not half as handsome as I was. Mark you that, Maria."

"She does not paint or use powder, aunt; I am sure of that; though she does look so fresh and young."

"She is eight-and-thirty this summer, and she does not look eight-and-twenty," snapped Aunt Mona. "And I, with my years of suffering, look eight-and-forty."

"Yes, aunt, and your perpetual sufferings have brought on the look of age. If I were you I'd throw them off and look young again. You might if you would. I remember how fresh and pretty you used to be, and how proud Uncle Thomas was of you."

"I will be again," cried aunt resolutely, in an excess of temper—"if it's only to disappoint that upstart woman. I'll throw off all my ailments, though I die in the effort, and be as young as she is."

"Aunt—Aunt Mona—I want to ask you not to be offended at some plain truths I am going to tell you. Your illness, during all these years, has been more imaginary than real; your natural nervousness has rendered you an easy prey to quack doctors and patent medicine vendors, who have had no regard to your health, but only to your husband's money. You have given way to your fancies and gone about like an old woman, the greatest figure imaginable. Look at your gown this morning; look at the cap you have now put off! You might be well if you would."

"Perhaps, after all, old Stafford may be right when he tells me I have no organic disease," said she sadly.

"Yes indeed he is; and now I want you to promise me never to take another drop of medicine unless prescribed by him."

"I never will."

"And oh, Aunt Mona, try to be cheerful, and to make home a happy place for your husband and children. Think how terrible it would be to lose their love."

"It seems to me that I have lost their love," was the despairing reply.

"No, I hope not; no indeed Aunt Mona. They are just a little tired of your constant complainings—and I must say I don't wonder at it. Even the servants are tired. Think how long it is since you had a cheerful word upon your lips or a smile upon your face! If you would only be the loving wife and mother again, things would come right."

"All the same, Maria, you cannot deny that Caroline Berrow has turned out a delightful crocodile. Think of her display of friendship for me, up to this very morning! Think of her setting her ugly widow's cap at your uncle before I am dead!"

"But you know, aunt, you have been as

good as dead—in speech. Telling them, week in, week out, that you shall be in your coffin the next!"

"Well, child," she said rather faintly, "I have been ill, I have suffered."

"Put your sufferings off, aunt; you can, I say, if you like; and circumvent—pardon the word—the widow and her cap-setting. Think how much you owe to God for all the many blessings He has showered down upon you—and how ungrateful it is to return Him nothing but repinings."

Aunt Mona, brushing out her still beautiful hair, paused. A flush stole over her face.

"I never thought of it in that light, Maria," she softly said. "I will think of it; I will try."

And she began forthwith. That very evening she dressed herself up and went to the penny-reading concert, taking Kate and Louisa. Uncle Butterfield was there, sitting beside Mrs. Berrow. My mother, all unconscious of the treason, crossed the room to sit with them; I went to Aunt Mona. We all went home together as far as our several ways led us; and though uncle did see the widow home, aunt did not begin moaning again.

How wonderfully from that time her appearance and manner changed, you would hardly believe. She grew young again; she grew cheerful. Cheerful and more cheerful day by day. Her dress was studied, her servants, household, and children were actively cared for. She took to visiting and going to church on Sundays; she invited friends to little parties at home. The pills and herbs and physics and decoctions were pitched away, and the bottles sold by old Sarah. Uncle Thomas was charmingly sunny-tempered in the house, as he always had been—but he did not give up his visits to the Widow Berrow.

"But he will in time, Maria," said aunt privately to me, a world of confident hope in her voice. "Only yesterday, he smoothed my hair down with his gentle hand and said I looked as young and pretty in his eyes as I did the day we were married."

"Yes, aunt, you are winning him back, you see. I knew it would be so."

"And oh, child, I am so much happier than I used to be, with all my pains and my nerves and my lowness of spirits gone!"

It was a month or two after this, all things having been going on in the nicest possible way, that Mrs. Berrow one cold morning, for December had come in, presented herself in Aunt Mona's parlor, a smile on her ever-pleasant face. I was there, helping aunt with the things intended for the Christmas-tree. She had not had a tree for years. Not been "able" to have one, she used to say. Uncle Thomas had told her laughingly this year not to spare the money over it.

Mrs. Berrow, coming in, I say, with her bright face, went straight up to aunt, and kissed her. Aunt Mona did color a little at that.

"I am come to ask you to my house for the 6th of January," she said. "You, Mona, and your husband, and the two girls. Your mamma has already her invitation, Maria, and yours too," she added, nodding at me.

"Is it a tea party?" questioned Aunt Mona, stiffly.

"No: a breakfast. And I hope you will attend me to church beforehand—and see me married!"

"Married!" I cried, staring at her.

"Yes, my dear. I have been engaged these many months past," she answered with equanimity. "It is to my cousin Stanton—a very distant cousin as you know. We should have been married before, but for that business which took him to Spain. And when he got there, he found he was obliged to go on to Valparaiso. There he was detained again. Altogether it is nearly six months since he left England, but he is back now."

"And—you have been engaged to marry him all that while!" gasped aunt in her surprise.

"All that while and longer. Since last April. Your husband has known it from the first."

"Oh, Caroline!"

"And has been transacting all kinds of business for us both, preparatory to the marriage."

"Why did you not tell me?"

Caroline Berrow laughed.

"Then was that—that nonsense that you and Thomas talked together—about about your succeeding me a joke?"

"Why, of course it was, you silly thing."

As if your husband could have cared for me, or I for him—in that way. He has never cared, he never will care, for anyone but his wife, Mona."

Aunt Mona burst into happy tears, and put her face down upon her old friend's neck to sob them away.

We all went to the wedding on the sixth, and Uncle Butterfield, looking so bright and sunny, gave the bride away. But neither of them told Aunt Mona what I learnt—that the plot was concocted between them to bring her to her senses.

And it did it, as you have seen. And there never was a woman more free from "nerves" and imaginary aches and pains than Aunt Mona is now. "I thank God for it every day of my life, Maria," she whispers to me sometimes. And I think we all do.

eyed, in the exuberance of health, and the prime of a beauty which time had improved rather than impaired, the contrast was too painful. I think my uncle must have felt it, for he sighed as he turned away.

"Mrs. Butterfield," said the widow, in her soft, musical voice—that "excellent thing in woman"—"I was hoping, upon this beautiful morning, to find you better."

Aunt Mona gave no immediate reply, save a glance that was not a friendly one. It said as plainly as glance could say, "You don't hope anything of the sort; you want me to die and be out of the way."

"My wife seems to be growing worse," said Uncle Butterfield. "That two-sovereign fee, paid to the great magnetic what-d'ye-call-him, a month ago, didn't seem to do you much good, did it, Mona? It had better have been put into the church poor-box."

"A kind, loving husband ought not to speak of money paid to relieve the sufferings and to save the life of his poor, dying wife," replied Aunt Mona, reproachfully. You know that Johnny, dreadful child, drank the elixir up. But I shall not be a trouble or expense to you long, Thomas; I feel that my days are numbered."

#### A Luminous Tree.

A most remarkable tree or shrub is said to grow in a small gulch near some springs about twelve miles north of Tuscarora, is about six or seven feet in height, with a trunk which, at its base, is three times the size of a man's wrist. It has innumerable branches and twigs, and resembles somewhat the barberry tree. Its foliage at certain seasons of the year is so luminous that it can be plainly distinguished in the darkest night for a distance of more than a mile, while in its immediate vicinity it emits sufficient light to enable a person to read the finest print. Its foliage is extremely rank, and its leaves resemble somewhat, in size, shape, and color, those of the aromatic bay-tree of California. The luminous property is evidently parasitic, and consists of a sort of gummy substance, which, upon being transferred by rubbing to a person's hand, imparts to it the same apparently phosphorescent light, while that on the leaf entirely disappears.

#### A Chinese Farm House.

A Chinese farm house is a curious looking abode. Usually it is sheltered with groves of feathery bamboo and thick-spreading banyans. The walls are of clay or wood and the interior of the house consists of one main room extending from the floor to the tiled roof, with closet looking apartments in the corners for sleeping rooms. There is a sliding window on the roof, made of cut oyster shells, arranged in rows, while the side windows are mere wooden shutters. The floor is the bare earth, where at night fall there often gathers together a miscellaneous family of dirty children, fowls, ducks, pigeons, and a litter of pigs, all living together in delightful harmony. In some districts infested by marauding lands houses are strongly fortified with high walls, containing apertures for fire-arms, and protected by a moat, crossed by a rude draw-bridge.

Every man has his chain and his dog, only it is looser and lighter to one man than another, and he is more at ease who takes it up than he who drags it.