

Why prognosticate misfortune which I cannot believe in?"

"Wait and see, Oliver," is all she answers.

It is a bright, cold day when they carry Colonel Mordaunt to his grave in the quiet churchyard of Priestley. Irene is anxious to attend the funeral, but her wish is overruled by Oliver, who foresees that if she does so, his aunt Isabella, and probably Mrs. Quckett, will follow her example, and make a scene during the ceremony. He could trust Irene, but he cannot trust the others; and, like most young men, he has a righteous horror of a scene. So he persuades the young widow to remain at home, and is himself chief mourner. It is not a grand funeral, but it is a very imposing one, followed by almost all the members of the hunt, with Sir John Coote at their head; and it gratifies Irene to see how much her husband was held in consideration by those who knew him most intimately. At last it is over. Oliver is back again; the visitors, with the exception of Sir John, have dispersed, and the family are left to themselves.

Three o'clock has been fixed for the reading of the will, and, as the hour strikes, Irene, dressed in her deep mourning, with Tommy clinging to her hand, comes down-stairs for the first time since her bereavement, and, walking into the dining-room on Oliver Ralston's arm, takes the chair which he wheels forward for her, and seats herself in the centre of the circle. She bows to the company generally as she enters, but she looks at no one but the lawyer, though she is conscious, without seeing it, that Mrs. Quckett is sitting nearly opposite to her, with her elbow resting easily upon the table, and a satisfied, malignant smile of coming triumph fixed upon her countenance. Mr. Carter hums and ha's as he unfolds the parchment.

Why do lawyers always "hum" and "ha" before they read a will? Are they nervous by nature (they ought not to be), or is the peculiarity alluded to supposed to add dignity to their position, or importance to their charge? It is a fact that they always do so.

Mr. Carter, being no exception to the rule, clears his throat until he makes himself quite hoarse, and is obliged to ask for a glass of water. Then he gives two or three final coughs as a wind-up, and proceeds to make the following statement:

"Life is very uncertain," commences Mr. Carter, as he smooths out the creases in the parchment, "in fact, there is nothing certain in life. We are used to great changes in our profession,

and great surprises—very great surprises!—indeed, we are never surprised at any thing we may hear or see—"

"Has this any thing to do with the will?" says Irene, with an imploring glance at Oliver, who immediately addresses the lawyer:

"We are exceedingly obliged for your sentiments, Mr. Carter, but Mrs. Mordaunt would prefer your proceeding to business. You must remember this is the first time she has ventured down-stairs."

"Ah! of course; I have to beg your pardon, madam—and yet, under the circumstances, perhaps— Well, well, then" (with a more cheerful air)—"to business. Not but what my remarks were made with a view in that direction. I have a document here, the contents of which I think are unknown to most present. It will in fact, I fear" (with a glance at Irene over his spectacles), "prove to be one of those surprises to which I alluded on first taking my place among you—"

"It will not prove, perhaps, so great a surprise as you anticipate," says Irene, in a clear cold voice that makes Mrs. Quckett start. "At any rate, we are assembled to hear it."

"As you will, madam—as you will," returns Mr. Carter, somewhat nettled. "I only wished to spare you an unpleasant shock."

"A shock for Mrs. Mordaunt! What can he mean?" exclaims Sir John Coote, quickly.

The house-keeper smiles furtively, and smooths the crape upon her dress-sleeve.

"Sir John, I must entreat you to be quiet and let Mr. Carter proceed," says Irene. "Whatever may be in store for me, be assured that I am quite able to bear it."

Sir John exchanges glances of astonishment with Oliver.

"You are to go on," says the latter roughly, to the lawyer. On which the reading of the will is commenced and finished without further interruption.

It is very brief and very explicit. It commences with a bequest of five thousand pounds to his sister Isabella Mordaunt, and goes on to leave all the remainder of his property, funded and personal—his house and lands, and plate and furniture—to his illegitimate son Oliver, generally known as Oliver Ralston, on condition of his taking the name of Mordaunt. Of Irene, from beginning to end, not a syllable is mentioned!

How do they receive it?

As the words, one after another, drop markedly from the lawyer's lips, the house-keeper may be observed to turn uneasily upon her seat—she