

if shot. As he faced the little hall, his eyes were wide with an incredulous stare of wonder.

"Good God in heaven," he murmured, "can it be possible that — but no! It cannot be Mary. That would be too wonderful. Watson — Melissa, will you please see who's — who's there?"

As rigid as a post he stood over the stove, holding the poker in his hand, his eyes fastened upon the door as Watson sprang to open it. The cheerful voice of old Dr. Fiddler — the *great* Dr. Fiddler — came roaring into the room ahead of its owner.

"By the Lord Harry, it's a cold night — Hello! What's this? Liveried servants again? Well, upon my soul, I — Ah, there you are, Bingle! How are you, Force?"

The next instant he was wringing Mr. Bingle's hand and booming Christmas greetings to every one in hearing — and out of it, for that matter, such a voice he had!

"Mary? What — how is she, Doctor?" cried Mr. Bingle, peering beyond the bulky form of the doctor as if expecting to see his wife in the little hallway.

"Fine as a fiddle," said Dr. Fiddler, using a pet and somewhat personal phrase.

"No — no bad news?" stammered Mr. Bingle. "You're not trying to break anything gently to me, are you?"

"Gently?" roared the doctor. "Does a rhi-