

Before Mrs. Multiple had time to express her astonishment at this information the butler entered the room, crimson with suppressed laughter.

"He's a putting of 'em on," he exclaimed, with a spasmodic burst, which he smothered with his hand.

"Hush! you idiot," whispered Sam, with a furious gesture. "Have you frightened him?"

"He was trembling like a leaf when I went in," said the butler, composing his countenance with difficulty. "He had just heard you call for a revolver. He wouldn't hear of putting on the livery coat at first, though he swore he would do anything rather than remain in the house. I persuaded him by saying I would bring his own clothes to him if he would wait at the nearest public house where he could change."

"Quite right," said Sam, nodding approvingly. "Now go and hurry him up. Don't give him time for reflection."

The butler disappeared again, and Sam commenced to arrange his somewhat disordered attire preparatory to starting off on his expedition. Mr. Choke had evidently lost no time in disguising himself, for a moment later stealthy footsteps were audible in the passage. In an instant Sam had bounded out, and came face to face with Mr. Choke, who started back as though he had been stung.

"Hullo! What does this mean?" exclaimed Sam, fiercely.

"Please, sir, it's a friend of mine," said the butler, with promptitude. "I was just agoin' to ask for the key to let him out."

"What do you mean, sir, by having friends at this time of day?" cried Sam, as though glad of an excuse to vent his ill-humor. "Why, the fellow must have been here two hours and more. Where does your master live?" he inquired, addressing Mr. Choke abruptly.

The latter was evidently quite unprepared for this question, but Sam's manner was so peremptory that he had no opportunity of considering his reply. He mentioned the name of a street in dangerous proximity to the one in which he resided, apparently because it came first to his mind.

"I will speak to you afterwards, Simmonds," said Sam, taking his hat from the stand with an impulsive movement; "and as for you, sir, I shall accompany you home and complain to your master. I don't choose to have other people's servants lurking for hours about my house, and I've no doubt your master will be gratified to hear how you waste your time."

Sam did not wait to observe the effect upon Mr. Choke of this startling announcement. The fact was he hardly dared trust himself to look at him, for, after a single glance at her unfortunate admirer, Mrs. Multiple had retired with precipitation into the background, and Sam feared every moment that her mirth would prove infectious. He therefore hastened to unlock the door, and Mr. Choke followed him into the street, apparently in a hopelessly dazed frame of mind. But all of a sudden the unfortunate man seemed to realize his position. He

started, glanced nervously around him, and then put up his hand to hail a cab.

"Hi! What are you about?" cried Sam. "I don't want a cab. It is a short distance, and I prefer to walk. You lead the way and I will follow."

Mr. Choke looked painfully undecided for a moment, and glanced at Sam as though he meditated making an appeal to him. He checked himself, however, and started off with an air of desperation down the street at a rapid pace. Sam followed more leisurely at a little distance, keeping him well in sight, and evidently keenly enjoying the episode.

What Mr. Choke's feelings were it was not difficult to conjecture. He shambled along, with his eyes upon the pavement, overwhelmed with confusion, and keenly conscious of his ridiculous appearance. The clothes he wore were many sizes too small for him, and though the livery was of the quietest description, the brass buttons and the striped waistcoat were unpleasantly conspicuous. Possibly he may have consoled himself with the reflection that he was not likely to be recognized in such a garb, but if so he was cruelly mistaken. Sam had arranged that half a dozen irreverent young members of the club to which Mr. Choke belonged should be on the alert, and the consequence was that the poor wretch met more of his acquaintances in a short distance than he had ever done before in his life. But at Sam's particular request none of them gave any outward sign of recognition, so that the victim was spared the anticipation of the endless chaff and ridicule which awaited him.

Sam had guessed, from the resolute manner in which Mr. Choke hurried along, that he had resolved to adopt the wisest course under the circumstances, and make the best of his way home, without wasting time in futile attempts to elude or shake off his persecutor. He was, therefore, not surprised when Mr. Choke passed without stopping along the street which he had given as his address, and turned his steps desperately toward his own residence. On reaching his destination he paused on the doorstep and turned round to Sam.

"This is the house," he murmured, as the latter came up.

For a single moment Sam felt soft-hearted and inclined to be merciful. Mr. Choke's piteous expression was more touching than the most eloquent appeal. But the recollection of the man's gratuitously insulting conduct to his wife decided him not to falter in his purpose. He, therefore, said quietly:

"Very well. I will speak to your master."

Mr. Choke gave a kind of gasp and proceeded to unlock the door with a latchkey. He probably intended, in the comparative security of his own house, to reveal his identity and to get rid of Sam before Mrs. Choke came down. But, unluckily, they had no sooner entered the hall than a severe-looking elderly lady appeared at the top of the staircase. The instant she perceived Mr. Choke she threw up her hands and exclaimed:

"Good heavens, Martin! What is the meaning of this?"