

once, after an unusually good dinner, supplemented by the rum toddy which usually followed this repast, he had unbosomed himself on that subject, to his housekeeper, and hinted pretty broadly that if she could put him in the way of securing a bride with two qualifications, youth and good looks, he would take it upon himself to see that she was comfortably established in a lodging house, to be the proprietor of such an institution seeming to be the height of Mrs. Becky's ambition. She had given the subject a good deal of consideration, but up to the time of our story, nothing definite had come of her cogitations. Like all selfish and narrow minded people, Mrs. Becky was essentially revengeful in disposition. When she presented herself to Mrs. Garland and told her that her third cousin had married Mrs. Garland's aunt's husband's brother, Mrs. Garland admitted that she had a dim remembrance of the occurrence of that interesting event, and, seeing that it was expected of her to make profert of the hospitalities of her quiet little home, she did so. Geoffrey Garland said nothing, but when the unexpected visit had been prolonged into a month's sojourn, he took occasion, one morning at the breakfast table, to call attention to the fact that the local paper contained an advertisement for a housekeeper, and added that he was ready to vouch for the pecuniary responsibility of the advertiser, and added, further, that if Mrs. Becky chose to apply for the vacant position, his influence was at her command. Mrs. Becky at once saw that she had outstayed her welcome, and not being altogether devoid of common sense, she acted accordingly, and, within forty-eight hours, was installed in the castle Wintermute, where, for more than five years, she carried the housekeeper's keys, lorded it over the cook, chamber-maid and stable-boy, and—as the truth must be told—nursed her wrath against Geoffrey Garland and his wife, and kept it warm. The hope of finding an opportunity to "put a spider in the cup" of her far-off connection's connubial felicity, was her thought by day and her dream by night. She had been too cunning, however, to betray this desire to any living human being. Neither Garland nor his wife, nor Wintermute, dreamed of such feelings on her part. She had kept up a visiting acquaintance with her connections. Now and then Gracie and Harry would be hailed by Mrs. Becky, as they were returning from school, and fairly loaded with delicacies from the Wintermute pantry. As year after year went by, and she saw no opportunity to gratify her unreasoning hate, she fretted more and more

over her baffled spite. She knew too well how utterly useless would be the attempt to sow the seeds of discord and suspicion between this happily mated pair. By some chance, the very fact of Garland's pecuniary reverses had failed to reach her ears, until the day, on the evening of which, the family council of the Garlands was held. On the morning of that day, Garland had met Wintermute, and told him frankly that only by the sale or mortgage of his homestead, could he hope to secure to him the payment of the large sum due him, and also explained at length his proposed mining expedition. Let us be just to Wintermute. He had advanced money to Garland on business principles, as a business proposition. He regarded the investment as a reasonably safe one, and, beyond getting his own, with interest, gave no other thought to the transaction. Wintermute was neither a libertine nor a scoundrel *per se*, and the idea of mixing up with the affair Garland's lovely wife, who had played the agreeable hostess to him more than a score of times, never crossed his mind. But temptation comes in queer shapes sometimes.

About the same hour in which Garland and his family held the memorable council, Wintermute was eating an unusually good dinner, with Mrs. Becky as his *vis-a-vis*. The rum toddy was mollifying in its effects, and, as the glass was emptied, Obed turned to his housekeeper and said, "I suppose, Mrs. Scrimegour, you have heard of the misfortunes which have overtaken Mr. Garland?" Mrs. Becky had been sitting, with half closed eyes, for half an hour, and by a singular coincidence, her thoughts had been of the "Garland crowd," as she always named them to herself. There had been unusual bitterness in her meditations. The fact that Mr. Wintermute had coupled Garland's name with misfortune, was honey to her soul. But, by no outward look or gesture, did she betray her interest in the matter. She simply replied, "I had not heard of it. Are some of the family ill?"

And then, Obed, with much unnecessary prolixity, told his housekeeper the whole story of the borrowed money, the profitless mine, the proposed mortgage or sale of the homestead, and Garland's determination to seek recompense of his losses in the new mining region. During the recital, Mrs. Becky had arisen from her seat and deftly concocted a second toddy, an infrequent, but not altogether forbidden, occurrence. Mechanically, Obed sipped the seductive beverage, and, as Mrs. Scrimegour watched his face flush and his eyes take on something of a sparkle, she wheeled an easy chair to the