

some life for and with each other. Mrs. Scrimgeour had never called on this worthy pair while they were occupying their own humble cottage, and Mrs. Long could see no good reason for the tardy interest in them, manifested by Obed Wintermute's housekeeper, in their new position. There was a good deal of skillful fencing between the two women, and at length, when Mrs. Becky, in a roundabout way, suggested the possibility of Garland falling into the habitual ways of camp life, there was such a sudden iciness in Mrs. Long's demeanor that her guest thought it the wisest way to change the subject, and, soon afterward, terminated her first and only visit to the Longs. That same evening, having given the cook a holiday, and exhausted her own ingenuity in getting up Wintermute's favorite dishes for dinner, after the meal was over, and, as on a former occasion, a duplicate rum toddy disposed of, she proceeded in her most cat-like manner to sound Wintermute on the subject of dispensing with Mrs. Long's services as custodian of the Garlands' household goods. Thereupon there was a scene. I have already intimated that Wintermute was not *per se* a scoundrel. The fact of the matter is, the old man's conscience had more than once pricked him since Garland had ridden away. Gracie and Harry had been something of pets with him. When he had dined with their father and mother, they had not been slow to exhibit their childish treasures to him, and, now that their father was gone, they frequently stopped to ask him some childish question as to his whereabouts and the possible date of his return. When, therefore, his housekeeper suggested the change above alluded to, he curtly replied, "Matters will remain as they are," and, yawning sleepily, took up a light and retired to his snuggery. This was more gall and wormwood to Mrs. Becky and whetted her appetite for revenge.

From time to time, this vixenish marplot dropped in on Mrs. Garland. It was not until more than six months after Garland's departure that she ventured to hint, even remotely, to the lonely wife, that her husband might be found in the ranks of the revelers in the far off mining camp. This impudent suggestion was met with a look in which contempt seemed to struggle for mastery with amusement, in Mrs. Garland's blue eyes. Mrs. Becky slunk out of the house, chop fallen, but more vicious and more revengeful than ever. From time to time, as opportunity served, she nagged Wintermute, who, grown somewhat familiar with the contemplation of his proposed crime, began to play an awkward sort of a second to his housekeep-

er's plans. The old dotard began to cheat himself with the belief that he was actually in love with Mrs. Garland, and that his feelings were taking on a fatherly shape toward her children; and, as Mrs. Becky began to be bolder in her suggestions, and more importunate in her demands that he should make some advances toward the object had in view, professed himself ready to do so, if Becky would only point out the way.

In the meantime, the periodical letter from the absent husband was over due, and, as above recited, failed to arrive. When more than a month had passed by without hearing from Geoffrey Garland, his wife began to manifest some uneasiness. And here the good sense and helpful and hopeful spirit of old Jabez Long and his good wife came to the rescue. In homely, but eloquent, terms, they reminded the anxious woman of the unbroken felicity of her life with her husband, and scouted at the idea that anything but some chance miscarriage of the mails in the wild region where Geoffrey Garland was hidden away for a time, was to blame for the silence so painful and so trying to the household. And, as good luck would have it, a returning prospector, whom Jabez had met by chance, had informed him that Garland and his company were at work in a remote part of the district, with fair prospects of success. This news did much to reassure Mary Garland. As for Gracie, was not Christmastide drawing near? And did not she, with childhood's unquestioning faith, "just know" that Santa Claus would bring her her own dear papa for a Christmas gift?

Thus matters wore on until, as heretofore shown forth in this veracious narrative, the fact of the failure of letters to arrive became known to Mrs. Becky; and, on this hint, she spurred Obed Wintermute to an overt act. It was three days before Christmas when this misled compound of senility and conceit flamed out in lustrous ready-made broadcloth and silk hat, not forgetting the shining watch guard and gold headed cane, and presented himself, all smirking, at the Garland cottage. Words cannot picture the amazement of the little woman, when, after dawdling away an hour in insufferable commonplaces, he awkwardly blurted out a suggestion that Garland, failing in his quest, had sought fresh fields and pastures new. "But," in effect, said this antiquated bundle of folly, "Mrs. Garland, you may be sure that, while I live, you will lack neither a friend nor a protector. The courts of the country will right your wrongs, and then —" But I will not disgust