

"That," said Hozia, is the bold-facedest humbug a-goin', an' Betsy, excusin' my love for her, is a old fool."

"But, Hozia, how do ye know yer wife is here? I don't see no lights nor hear no noise nor talkin', an' that ain't Marier's style."

"They keep it dark, Ebenezer, they keep it dark, an' ef ye hed a doctorin' wife ye'd 'a' knowed that afore this. Swindleaceous, great, big, money-makin' frauds are mighty mysterious an' secret about their goin's on, let me tell ye. I'd like to swoller the hull business," and he shook his fist menacingly in the air.

"I'm a-goin' to see what's to be seen, an' do ye watch this here front door. It may be somethin' like sperritoolism, an' sperrits hes a way of gettin' outen keyholes, but they're allus durn sure about takin' the saah along."

This smacked of soreness on Mr. Tibbits' part, and happening to think of past wrongs probably added fuel to his wrath, which by this time was considerable, and directed toward an unseen enemy and one that it might take strategy to outwit. But Ebenezer was alarmed. It was not his intention in life to assume the aggressive, and he groaned—

"Hozia, ef we'uns hed set right down to home an' hed a quiet smoke, I believe them two women would come walkin' in slicker'n kittens. Ye see, it's this way, Hozia, Marier's mighty sot on havin' her own way, an' my interferin' ain't took gentle like, no-ways."

"Interferin'!" said Hozia, contemptuously, "well, interferin' or no interferin', I'm goin' to make things lively around this here ranch afore mornin'; air ye comin' along?"

He would listen to no remonstrance, but crept silently around the house, first one way and then the other, leaving the wondering Ebenezer at the door, bold as a lion for spirits, fearful as a lamb for Maria. He could discern nothing through the closed blinds, carefully and closely drawn. Satisfied of that, Hozia came up to where Ebenezer stood, and said, in a ghastly whisper—

"Ebenezer Hinks, I hev circumvented the var-mints, an' do ye leave me alone fer a-spottin' of 'em." With that, he gave a loud knock upon the door.

At first all was silence, then there came a hurried sound in the hall and the door was held cautiously open a little space, and a rasping female voice inquired what was wanted.

"What's wanted!" said Hozia, "mam's wanted."

"He has a strong belief in being drunk," groaned the woman piously, raising her eyes and hands heavenward.

"Don't ye sling none o' yer believin's at me," Hozia angrily replied, "I'm not the man what's to be trifled with."

The woman made a motion to close the door, but Mr. Tibbits was too quick for her, and planted himself firmly and squarely between the door and the jamb and demanded—

"Is Mrs. Hozia Lelon Tibbits in this here place? I won't budge a inch till I know."

"There are two ladies here, but I do not know their names. Praised be the Lord, they're arriving at a knowledge of the truth."

Hozia, at that, turned to Ebenezer and said: "Eh, kin ye tell 'er what close Marier hed on? That'll be the surest way of findin' out. Trust a woman for knowin' every inch of stuff in t'other woman's dress."

"Mrs. Marier," said Hinks slowly, "hed on her new perlese an' her new green and black fall bunnit. She is tallish an' stoutish an' powerful convincin' at a argumint."

"I believe the description of one of the ladies is correct, but the lady who was with her is being treated, and you will have to wait a while. Will you come in?"

They could see that the woman was somewhat mollified when she found that the intrusion was lawful, and she led the way silently and at once down the hall. They stopped at a side door half way down the hall, and she motioned, with finger on her lip, to the men to enter. There sat Mrs. Ebenezer Hinks, her new "perlese" and "bunnit" lying on a chair by her side. Her eyes were closed, and on her face was a lofty air of spirituality and content. Slowly she unclosed her eyes and cast about her, unable to realize what daring had prompted Ebenezer Hinks, the spouse heretofore held in subjection, to seek her out and inquire into her doings. As soon as she saw who it was she sat bolt upright, all traces of her late seance-like aspect disappeared, and looking witheringly at Ebenezer, she exclaimed—

"Ebenezer Hinks, what is the meaning of this?"

"That question, marm, I hev come here to ask myself."

"Ebenezer Hinks, will you go home this instant? There is no fool like a old fool."

"That's what I've allus maintained, Marier, that's what I've allus maintained. There is no fool like a old fool—female fool—ye're right there, Marier, ye're right there, an' these here perceedin's is a moncoomint to that inscription."

At this Mrs. Hinks broke into profuse weeping, the ever ready refuge of vanquished woman, and Ebenezer took swift and sudden advantage of the opportunity to score a lasting victory.