

stood that Tom was to fetch the pretty girl from the Lodge.

"I daresay you'll let me put my coat and that dratted collar in your cottage? Lor, Polly, I'm like a donkey in a pound when I've that there collar on, jumping up and down and trying to look over the wall and clear it if I can!"

A couple of minutes later Tom de-vested of collar and coat, with pick and and spade over his shoulder was at- tending Mary Mauduit, when his head- gardener passed. He was a Scotchman, and a widower—a man of much self- confidence and independence.

"What! off, Mr. Mountstephen?"

The gardener addressed his subordi- nates with a "mister." It made himself more important; marked the distance between them more emphatically.

"Yes, Mr. MacSweeney—just to take up a young spruce for she."

"Ta-ta!" said the Scotchman con- descendingly, and passed on.

"He's been a bit snuffy wi' me," said Tom, confidingly, to his companion. "What it's all about I can't tell. Per- haps he guesses I knows too much; but lor! I'm not one to blab."

"Perhaps he's a little jealous," said Mary sily, "folks do say he has been thinking about Bella. But there— 'tain't no good thinkin' of going against you, Tom."

"I don't give no heed to them tales. People will talk. Besides, if he were looking out for a Missus MacSweeney, I reckon he'd go after widders. Ain't he a widdener hisself?"

"That don't follow," said Mary.

"Don't it? Then it ort!" retorted Tom.

"There—don't be snuffy wi' me!" said Mary.

The getting up of a suitable tree and its transport to the cottage of the Mauduits was not a matter of two min- utes, nor of half an hour.

Tom was aware that Isabella would have been kept waiting, but he relieved his mind with the consideration that she would take it for granted that he was detained by some business, and would walk on alone to the hall; the distance was trifling. He could explain mat- ters when he arrived, and she would at once understand the circumstances.

"I don't see how your going to stick them candle ends on to the branches," said Tom.

"I shall heat hair pins and run them through."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Mount- stephen derisively; "and when the can- dles be burnin', the flame'll heat the hair-pins red-hot, and they'll melt the composite, and there'll be a pretty mess, and the candle ends falling about on all sides and firing everything! I hope you're insured!"

"I can manage it."

"No, you can't, excuse me, Polly. I reckon mother at home has got some bits of tapers from the Parsonage tree last year. Her was up there helping, and they throwed the tree away when done with; and her's a saving woman and can't abide no waste, and I know her pulled off and kept the remains of candles. They have wires for fastenin' of them on. If you don't mind my leavin' the collar here—you won't let nothing damage it, nor let the cat get at it, will you, Polly?—I'll run home and see what mother have 'ot. I couldn't run in that collar; 'twould be sheer impossible!"

So, instead of going to the Hall, here was another detention. But Tom was a good-natured lad; he was not needed at the Hall, and here at the cottage he was of real assistance.

After the young man had been away nearly a quarter of an hour he returned with a small box full of portions of tapers, and some entire, and sundry lit- tle sparkling ornaments that had fur- nished the tree the preceding Christmas, and had been cast aside, but saved by

the prudent and frugal Mrs. Mount- stephen.

"And here, Polly," said Tom, "here's spotted dog in china, as stood on my mantelshelf, that little Bessie be wel- come to. You can set it under the tree. Now I'll clap the tree mores into a tub, and then I'm off to the Hall."

When Tom, reinvested in collar and coat, arrived at the Lodge and inquired for Isabella he learnt, what did not much surprise him, that she had gone forward. So he went to the Hall by himself, not greatly concerned at being late. He knew that all who were in- vited would not be able to arrive punc- tually. There would be two "sittin'- downs" to supper, and he would be in time for the second.

When he arrived he looked about him for Isabella, and saw her seated be- side the Scotch gardener, who was help- ing her to trifle.

With a little difficulty he made his way behind the chairs, in and out among the servants who were waiting on the guests, to where Isabella was dipping into the trifle.

"So sorry, Bella; I couldn't help it," said he.

"De-il-ci-ous!" said Bella.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I was speaking to Mr. MacSweeney."

"I only want to say that I was un- avoidably detained."

"The jam is strawberry," said Bella.

"Whole strawberries from our own garden," said MacSweeney.

"I'm very fond of strawberries," ob- served Bella.

"So am I," said the Scotch gardener.

"Have some more. I'll remember you in the strawberry time and sent you up the first dish I ripen. Of course I ripen 'em early—in the greenhouse. You shall have some as soon as they are fit to be picked."

"How good of you, Mr. MacSweeney."

"Not at all; I live but to oblige; and you—he looked around at her—"for you I would do anything."

"Bella," said Tom over her chair, "I really could not do otherwise."

"Will you please to remove, Mr. Mountstephen, you are joggin' my

"Do you like grapes?" asked Mac-

chair. Sweeney. "I rather flatter myself on my grapes. I am able to keep them, too, so well. My large white Muscats—but there, you shall have some. I'll send you up a really choice bunch. I think the second sitters down are comin' in now. Miss Isabella, if you have done, we will rise and let the others take our places. Here, you, Mountstephen, can have my seat. If you have brought Mary Mauduit I have no doubt she can have Miss Frowd's chair."

Poor Tom did not enjoy his supper, and that over, when he sought Isabella to tender his excuses she deliberately turned her back on him. It was clear MacSweeney had made mischief. He had told her that for the sake of that pale Polly Mauduit he had neglected to fulfil his engagement and keep his ap- pointment.

Dancing began, and Bella sat out with the Scotch gardener, who was too serious a man to approve of the light fantastic toe; as he explained to Bella, it was against his principles—but don't let that interfere with her enjoyment. If she wished to go to Mr. Mount- stephen.

"Oh! not at all!" said Miss Frowd.

Huffed, hurt, poor Tom withdrew. He slunk away from the hall. Among so many, he would not be missed, and of enjoyment there was none after his rebuff. It would madden him to see how Bella "carried on" with the Scotchman.

He walked through the park, groan- ing, grumbling, resentful. He was not angry with himself for not keeping his appointment, nor with Polly for having detained him; but with Bella whom he designated as a minx, and with Mac-

Sweeney, whom he termed a widdered Scottish rogue.

He left the park. He walked hastily on. Then, finding that in the agitation of his feelings he could not keep his head in one position, and that he was consequently liable to cut his throat, he halted, and took off his collar, and fastened it by the stud round his left arm above the elbow.

Presently he reached the cottage of the Mauduits, and he could see through the little window that the tree was alight; it twinkled through the panes. The temptation to turn aside, rap at the door, and enter was not to be re- sisted.

To his knock he received an answer, as he opened the door the answer came from an inner room.

"It be I," called Tom. "Just passin' and want to see how Bessie be enjoyin' of herself."

"Come in—come in, Tom."

The young man strode through the kitchen into the adjoining chamber. There lay, in her bed, the sick girl, a lovely child, with large burning dark eyes, and a hectic flame in her cheeks. She was supported in the arms of her sister, and was looking with delight at the little candles, at the oranges, and the glittering tin ornaments.

"Tom," said Mary, "Bessie do thank you so for the spotted dog."

"Yes, I do," said the sick child, striv- to lift herself and extending a hand to the young gardener.

"But, gracious me, Tom," exclaimed Mary, "Whatever is the meaning o' that?" pointing to the white band around his arm. "It is like what folks put on now when in mourning—only its white."

"He's going to be married," said the sick child.

"It is only that stiff collar; I couldn't abear it no longer!" explained Tom.

Then the child laughed, and laughed till she coughed.

Suddenly Mary uttered a cry—Tom saw a crimson stream.

"Run, run, Tom! For heaven's sake, run for the doctor!"

And Tom ran.

In half an hour he returned.

Polly was kneeling by the bed. On it lay the child, the face almost white, but yet with a little color in the deli- cate cheek. Her hand held tightly that of her sister.

The doctor had not come; he was out; would not be back till morning.

Tom could not explain this, and he knew, moreover, that the surgeon could effect nothing. Without a word he knelt also by the child's bedside. The candles were quivering to extinction on the Christmas tree. One was gutter- ing, and sending a stream of wax over the head of the spotted dog. Then another fell twinkling through the boughs and went out. And at the same time the light went out in Bessie's eyes.

A few days later when the earth had closed over the child, Tom was speak- ing with Mary, and said she to him: "Tom, I think now I should like that Christmas tree to be planted on the little maid's grave. Will you oblige me by doing it?" Then, after wiping her eyes: "Tom, that is a Tree of Death."

The head-gardener triumphantly car- cied away Bella; the marriage took place within six weeks of the Christmas supper and dance. Isabella Frowd had become Mrs. Sandy MacSweeney, and was planted in the gardener's beautiful cottage. But in all things human there comes a change. Within a very short time certain matters started to light- what these were you shall hear from the Squire's own lips, as he addressed Tom Mountstephen.

"Tom," said the Squire, his broad rosy face very hot and agitated, "Tom, I've bundled MacSweeney off. I don't see why I should have to buy the fruit