

overhead, more gracious than the *frou-frou* of their silks, and more splendid than the dazzle of their diamonds. The real power of the Second Estate of the British Realm lies not in one House of Peers, but in 500 houses of Peeresses. Nevertheless, Lady Asphodel's women guests were given to confess to their own hearts that, for all their own brilliant loveliness—the perfection of delicacy with the perfection of health—they were outshone in one of their own shires by this fragile-looking American girl; not merely in piquancy of wit or style, for that they could easily have forgiven, but in that inborn repose of manner, which is supposed to run in the blood like prerogative. The elegance of a kingdom, where women are only pets, found itself overmatched by the unconscious reposefulness of a republic, where women are queens; and Miss Ruysdael was as much at home as a sunbeam, neither more or less. As the clever minx must, of course, be setting her cap at the young heir of Asphodel and all the more resolutely, that she affected to be as insensible to his existence as if he were one of the Cupids figured on the delicate porcelain tray which brought her afternoon tea; the general feminine circle marked, therefore, with a callous feline interest the neglect with which Lord Amaranth repaid her; and to her own amazement, Lady Drumshaughlin (who had never been able to make much progress among English women) found herself not only the object of the young moon-calf's idiotic attentions, but to some extent, the successful champion of European womanhood against the invasions of an upstart New World. The last thing that occurred to Lady Drumshaughlin was that she was paying any dangerous price for her singular success. She was even foolish enough to feel flattered.

Miss Deborah's angular note came as a most unwelcome intrusion. At first it so upset her temper that she made as if she would tear it to flitters; then she paused, and laid it down, and struck at it with her clenched fist; and then she began a quick, nervous pacing up and down the room, with an expression of face which she did not care to stop to contemplate in the mirror. It was, of course worrying beyond conception that that girl should be losing herself among those horrid creatures when she might be shaming Miss Ruysdael's waxen cheeks with her own dazzling beauty of morning-rose-color. The insolence of the agent's sister in intruding her intolerable condolences was still worse. But this was a hard, selfish woman, whom the news afflicted chiefly because of its bearing on her own fortunes. Something must be done promptly, it was clear. But her invitation to the Meads covered three weeks, only one of which had expired. If she went up to London to seek her husband, upon what pretext was she to get back? Mabel had unfeelingly deserted her just as her aid seemed indispensable to her mother's safe establishment in society; had preferred to follow her own whimsical and irritating worship of that boy; and left her mother to struggle as best she might up that awful gilded staircase where so many a stout-hearted aspirant faints under the silent stare of the Medusa-heads of feminine cruelty and insular prejudice which mount guard there. She had got the better of the Medusa. She had her foot planted on the highest stair—installed in one of the haughtiest houses in England, and no inconsiderable personage in the little drama there enacting. It was all too novel in her shaded life not to be intoxicating, dangerously intoxicating.

She was not going to leave her ground of vantage. She resolved to send Miss Harman's letter to her husband by post. She inclosed it with a few trebly underlined words of her own, saying: "This is dreadful. Something ought to be done at once. You know Mabel and Ireland, and can best decide what."

The letter found Lord Drumshaughlin the following morning in his apartments in a demure bachelor's club in Sackville Street, Picadilly. Towzled, unshaved, in an untidy dressing-gown, and presenting altogether the male counterfeit presentment of an elderly lady with her hair in curl-papers, he was stamping up and down in a state of great preturbation. His mail had been particularly disagreeable. One letter in especial, which lay among the breakfast things, with a clumsily-scribbled cheque, seemed to worry him. We have only to turn over the letter to

sympathise with the unfortunate peer's perturbation. It bore the address, "The Roses, Glengariff," embossed in a staring carmine-colored plaster overhead, and was intended to be a handsome expression of gratitude from the new Justice of the Peace; but, alas for his intentions! if Humphrey Dargan had been a mediæval torturer working the iron boot, he could not have given Lord Drumshaughlin's gouty toes a more excruciating twist in every sentence. "I am sure," he added, after many profuse expressions of eternal indebtedness, recorded in a hand that could scarcely have been less impressive if it had been the work of an inky caterpillar raised to the judicial bench, "I am sure your lordship will not think it too presumptuous in an humble man like yours to command, if I venture to offer some substantial proof of my undying appreciation of your lordship's kindness, in the shape of the enclosed small cheque for 500*l.* (five hundred pounds), knowing, as circumstances of a business character have confidenshally brought to my knowledge, that your lordship's private manes are not at all times commensurate with the requirements of your noble station and of your own generous heart." Then, as if all the flowery resources of the Roses were exhausted in this burst of high-flown eloquence, the new Justice of the Peace added in a P.S.—"Nobody is any the wiser of this except Mrs. D., whose idea it was. If your lordship was really pressed, I would not mind making it a thousand as a little matter strictly between your lordship and myself. P.P.S.—I am open to any reasonable offer as to interest on the morgidge.—H.D."

"Heaven, and earth, and hell, have I come to that?" roared Ralph Westropp, assaulting his two sidelocks together with a wrench that threatened to be their last. "'Twasn't enough to have to raise this—thing to the commission—to defile the name of gentleman by giving him the right to it—but he must actually take to patronise me—subsidise me—pity me, by God!—And isn't he quite right? Would it be so much worse, if I slipped that cheque into my pocket!—if I sent him a hint to "make it a thousand?" Would I have been so sure of myself if he had done the thing with less clumsy brutality—with less vile spelling? And I was once Ralph Westropp. This broken, abandoned, disreputable old man, whom this creepy beetle of a money-lender tips as he might tip the housekeeper at my castle! O my God!—if there is such a being as the God of my young days still left in this infernal upstart world!"

He strode up and down again—in a less savage temper now—in a more whipt and conscience-stricken one—haggard wrinkles ploughing up his face to the eyes—his handsome form bent and twisted as in an ague—the whole man so dethroned and ruinous-looking, it seemed as if you could see the grey of the undyed roots of his hair visibly spreading and freezing up the dye before it. They say a drowning man sees his whole life pass in procession before him in one suffocating instant. Humphrey Dargan's well-intended communication brought a perfect ocean of degradation tumbling and surging in Ralph Westropp's ears, and with the suffocating feeling came the awful flash light over his selfish, worthless, bankrupt life:—a great station in his own country shamefully deserted—a vast estate dissipated—a youth of wit and beauty withered into unlovely, dyed, and patched old age—a home crammed with skeletons and besieged with duns—a life whose public aspect was summarised in the gombeen-man's bribe, and its private aspect in the gossamer three-cornered note which was breathing out its perfume alongside the money-lender's letter on the breakfast table. A bitter, bitter retrospect it was of a proud, bright, wilful sprit for ever on the wing from the cold native climes of duty to the tropic lands of indolence and pleasure, without country, without object, without inspiring love to direct its flight—a life spent in evading moral and financial creditors alike—a life opening in broad, generous, sun-gilt sweeps of landscape, and closing in inglorious foetid quagmires of self-indulgence. It was while this dark company of spectres, all claiming to be his own property, were gibbering past him, a sort of field-day of a reviewing general in the infernal shades, that Lady Drumshaughlin's note with Deborah Harman's letter was delivered to him. He read the note and the epistle it contained with singular calmness. There was even a tranquil nobility about his air that impressed his servant Mundle more than a volley of oaths. Deborah's news com-

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