

Irene, scornfully unheeding, started for the pantry.

"Irene, come here." His voice was very low.

For one poignant breath, Irene stood at bay. Then she came. So would Vesuvius have come, if he had summoned it in just that tone. I realised that I was eavesdropping, but I dared not move, lest again I put my foot into the psychological moment. So there I clung and palpitated to the door-casing, like a butterfly on a pin.

"May I do anything for you, Mr. Beauregard?"

Mr. Beauregard half lifted his tired eyes.

"You certainly may. Sit down."

Irene sat down. Her attitude suggested a mediæval lady-heretic, taking a rocker, while she waited for the thumb-screws.

"You are fairly comfortable, Mr. Beauregard?"

"Very. Pray let us leave my bodily state out of the conversation. Kindly answer one question. Why, if you supposed me a bandit,