



## A Great Intrigue,

—OR, THE—

### Mistress of Darracourt.

CHAPTER XXX.

The marquis bit his lip until his keen, sharp teeth left livid indentations; but what could he say? He guessed, intuitively, that the man was half monkey, half cat; that if he did not keep him in good humor, Sinclair might turn and rend him. The marquis was a good judge of character, and was quick to detect the coarse, passionate nature under the thick coating of subservience and vulgarity. It would not do to anger Mr. Sinclair.

"I shall be delighted," he said, with a cold smile, "but I am engaged until dinner time. If you will come at half-past eight—"

"All right," said Mr. Sinclair, jumping up; "I'm your man. And, look here, marquis," he added, turning at the door; "don't you be nervous on my account; I know how to behave myself; you've no call to be afraid."

When the marquis entered the drawing-room a little before dinner, he found Lucille seated, waiting for him. She was beautifully dressed, as usual, but of late her attire had almost a touch of mourning in it. To-night, the clear skin of her neck and throat shone through the black lace like Indian inland work of ebony and ivory.

"You look almost funereal," he said, with a pause. "Has anyone died?"

"No," said Lucille, calmly, listlessly; and as the mono-syllable dropped from her lips she mentally wished that one were dead—the Marchioness of Merle!

"I am glad of that," he said; "for I expect a friend to dinner."

"Yes," she responded. "I will tell them!" and she rang the bell.

"You don't inquire who it is," he said, when the servant had retired.

"Who is it?"

"A man named Sinclair," he said, with assumed carelessness. "A good sort of fellow, but rough. He was at school with me. I think you saw here yesterday."

Lucille opened her eyes for a moment, with faint wonderment.

"That man?" she said.

"Yes, that man!" he repeated, facing her, defiantly. "I told you he was rough—you saw that for yourself—but he was at school with me. In fact, I am indebted to him—"

He paused. A sudden resolution smote him to tell her that he was in the man's power, and the sum that would free him, but his pride prevented him, and, instead, he turned to the table. "I owe him my life; he saved it in an accident—a boat accident. I suppose, under those circumstances, you can be civil to him."

"I should be civil to him under any circumstances," said Lucille, quietly.

As she spoke, the footman opened the door and announced, in a tone that just indicated his astonishment at the presence of such a guest, "Mr. Sinclair, and Sinclair entered."

He was in evening dress, but the evening dress which the singer at a music hall wears—loud, pronounced, and vulgar in every fold and aspect. A false diamond shone in his shirt.

"What do you say to going back to the Court?" he asked Lucille. "I am sick of London, and it is too late—or too early—for Paris. There is no place like one's own home. Will you go back?"

"Yes," said Lucille, and a sigh quivered on her lips. Back to Darracourt, where she had tasted the sweetest happiness of her life, but to find it turn to bitter, Dead Sea fruit. Back to Darracourt, every foot of whose lawns and woods would speak to her of Harry Herne. "Oh, yes; I do not care."

Winter was approaching with stealthy footsteps, and the few leaves that remained upon the trees in the park shuddered in the keen wind that threatened them as the voice of an executioner ere it swept them lifeless to the ground.

Wrapped in furs, Lucille lay back in the carriage and looked out with a listless gaze. Only a few months ago she had driven to the Court, a young girl rejoicing in her sudden acqui-

front, and a huge pair of brass studs glittered at his wrists, and he was perfumed with hair oil and patchouli. Lucille looked up at him with that calm, cold regard, which from a beautiful, queenly girl is more trying than a judge's frown.

"Mr. Sinclair, let me introduce you to my wife, Lady Merle," said the marquis. "I have told her ladyship that you and I are old friends, and that I owe my life to you! If you were not a skillful swimmer, I should not be here now."

Mr. Sinclair bowed, and half stretched out his hand, but drew it back.

"Proud to make your acquaintance, my lady," he said. "Merle's told you the story, has he? Yes, I was always a neat hand in the water, eh, Merle?" and he winked at the marquis. "Very 'ot for the time of the year, my lady!"

Lucille inclined her head, almost too amazed to speak, and the footman announced dinner.

All through the meal the marquis tried to "cover up" his tyrant, so to speak, and Mr. Sinclair, awed by the beauty and grace of Lucille, did keep his tongue pretty quiet; but the few words he said only increased Lucille's wonder. This man a schoolfellow of the marquis! It seemed incredible. She rose as soon as she could; and Mr. Sinclair, who had made no attempt to rise and open the door for her, leaned back in his chair, and whistled.

"By Jingo! marquis," he exclaimed; "her ladyship's the most beautiful creature I ever saw—bar one!"

"Her ladyship would be flattered by your admiration," said the marquis, with a smile that was more like a scowl. "Will you take some wine? There are port and claret."

Mr. Sinclair filled and re-filled his glass, and presently his voice grew thick and his manner more familiar and confidential.

"Been an admirer of the fair sex all my life, marquis; but devoted slave to one of 'em only. Don't mention names—but you know her," and he wagged his head with playful mystery.

"Indeed," said the marquis, paying no heed to the man's maunderings, but sipping the decanter.

"Yes! Fairest of the fair! Not another woman in the kingdom to compare with her. She's the sole queen of my 'art, marquis, and when I've made my pile—when I've got that cash, you know—mean to lay it at her feet. She don't know nothing of it at present—never shall—oh, I'll keep my word to you, marquis!—honor—honor among thieves, you know! I lay it at her feet—at her feet—"

He seemed as if he were about to rehearse the performance of the moment, for he slipped forward and almost fell off the chair. "Feel sleepy somehow, marquis," he said. "Got to go to the Oriental—mustn't be late. Say good-night now—will see you in the morning."

The marquis took hold of him and helped him to his feet, then got his hat and led him downstairs.

at was impossible for the marquis to remain in London with this incubus dogging his steps and haunting him. He felt as if every one he saw eyed him suspiciously, and was ready to denounce him, and as the hunted animal makes for the deepest covert, so the marquis, with Mr. Sinclair close upon his heels, turned toward Darracourt.

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tion of wealth, and now she was approaching the Court, the wife of the Marquis of Merle, with not a joy before her, nothing but a life of loveless splendor! The marquis sat beside her, silent and gloomy. He had won what he had been plotting and scheming for, and now this heavy blow had fallen upon him! His name, rank, all he possessed, were at the mercy of a vulgar scoundrel. To-morrow Mr. Sinclair would be following on his track, and unless the marquis could procure the money to buy him off, would dog him day by day, night by night! As the carriage drove up to the entrance and Lucille saw Mrs. Dalton standing at the door to welcome her, a faint flush stained her cheeks, but it fled as quickly as it came, leaving her pale and wan again, and Mrs. Dalton, as she took her in her arms, looked at her with dismay.

"Have you been ill, my lady?" she said, tenderly, when they were alone in Lucille's room.

Lucille laughed, and bent and kissed her.

"Don't call me 'my lady,' dear," she said. "Call me 'Lucille,' as you used to do! Ill? No, but I don't think London suited me! I am very, very glad to get back. Do I look so woe-begone, then?" she asked, suddenly.

Mrs. Dalton hesitated.

"You look pale, dear, and—listless, but as beautiful as ever; more beautiful, I think!"

"Since when has flattery been raised to the rank of a medicine?" said Lucille, trying to speak light-heartedly. "I shall soon get back my color and spirits in the Darracourt air. And now tell me the news! About Marie—have you heard from her?"

Mrs. Dalton pursed up her lips.

"Yes; I got a short note saying that she had followed her relative abroad; that is all, Lucille!" then she paused.

"Go on," said Lucille.

"Well, I don't know what I was going to say exactly, but, I tell you the truth, Marie Verner rather puzzles me! She was never a favorite of mine, you know!"

"Poor Marie!" said Lucille, with an absent smile; "you and Lady Farnley never did her justice."

"I don't know that," said the old lady, dryly. "But, doesn't it strike you as odd, dear, that she has not sent her address, or told us anything about this aunt? I never heard her mention her until now!"

"Oh, Marie is rather odd," said Lucille, simply. "It is just like her to rush off at once and nurse any one. We shall hear directly."

"And have you had a happy time in London?" asked Mrs. Dalton, as she took off Lucille's heavy furs, and Lucille sank on to the sofa, with a sigh.

"Happy? Oh, yes!" she replied.

"And the marquis—is he quite well?"

"Quite, yes," said Lucille, quietly.

"I thought he looked pale and rather overdone," said Mrs. Dalton.

"Did you?" said Lucille. "I haven't noticed it. Oh, by the way, dear, a visitor is coming to-morrow! His name is Sinclair, and he is an old friend of the marquis."

Mrs. Dalton's housekeeping spirit rose at once.

"A visitor so soon!" she said. "Very well, I will see that he is comfortable. Is he a nice man, dear?"

Lucille laughed, with a strange bitterness.

"Nice? That is scarcely the word for him!" she said, and that was all.

On the morrow Mr. Sinclair put in his appearance. He had assumed a semi-sporting attire, and looked, if anything, more vulgar than ever; so vulgar that when Mrs. Dalton saw him and heard his voice, with its cockney, low-bred accents, she started and stared in surprise.

Her surprise increased when she found that Mr. Sinclair was not only tolerated by the marquis, but that the former gentleman was more than familiar with Lord Merle, and that he ordered the servants about as if he were the master, and the marquis the guest. His loud voice could be heard all over the place, and every time it reached the marquis' ears his face seemed to grow paler, and his thin lips to contract more sharply.

It was only in the presence of Lucille that Mr. Sinclair toned down.

There was something in her dignity and beauty that cowed him, and he would sit like a beaten spaniel, silent and overawed until the ladies left the room; then he would fill his glass, and slap the marquis on the back, and exclaim:

"Now, we'll have a jolly hevenin' of it, marquis. Ladies are all very well, but they don't go well with wine and walnuts, eh?"

Most of the day the marquis would shut himself up in his study to avoid his old man of the sea, but Mr. Sinclair amused himself by going out shooting, as he called it, and Hope was driven almost mad by the loss of his best dogs, which Mr. Sinclair, who had never had a gun in his hand in his life until now, persisted in mistaking for pheasants.

A cloud seemed to hang over the Court, and Lucille, instead of regaining her color and spirits, grew more wan and listless.

And still there came no tidings of Marie Verner. This struck Mrs. Dalton as strange and mysterious, but an air of mystery seemed to be so natural about the Court that she kept silent.

(To be continued.)

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