

"You make it much easier for me," she said, at length, after the assemblage appeared complete and no new arrivals had occurred for at least ten minutes. "It was so kind of you to come, when I know that you make a rule of not going anywhere."

"This was a very exceptional invitation, my dear," answered Mrs. Dares. "It was something wholly out of the common, you know."

"I understand," said Pauline, with her sweetest laugh. "You wanted to see your mantle descend, after a manner, upon my younger shoulders. You wanted to observe whether I should wear it gracefully or not."

"I had few doubts on that point," was the slow, soft reply.

"So you really think me a worthy pupil?" continued Pauline, glancing about her with an air of pretty and very pardonable pride.

"You have a most lovely home," said Mrs. Dares, "and one exquisitely designed for the species of entertainment which you are generous enough to have resolved upon."

"Ah, don't say 'generous,'" broke in Pauline. "You give me a twinge of conscience. I am afraid my motive has been quite a selfishly ambitious one. At least, I sometimes fancy so. How many human motives *are* thoroughly disinterested? But if I succeed with my *salon*—which before long I hope to make as fixed and inevitable a matter as the day of the week on which it is held—the result must surely be a most salutary and even reformatory one. In securing my guerdon for work accomplished I shall have done society a solid benefit; and when I wear my little crown I shall feel, unlike most royal personages, that it is blessed by friends and not stained by the blood of enemies."

Her tone was one of airy jest, but a voice at her side instantly said, as she finished:

"Do not be too sure of that. Very few crowns are ever won without some sort of bloodshed."

She turned and saw Kindelon, who had overheard nearly all her last speech to Mrs. Dares. Something in his manner lessened the full smile on Pauline's lips, without actually putting it to flight.

"You speak as if you had gloomy tidings," she said.

Kindelon's eyes twinkled, though his mouth preserved perfect sobriety. "You have done precisely what I expected that you would do," he said, "in undertaking an arbitrary selection of certain guests and an arbitrary exclusion of certain others. You have raised a growl."

"A growl!" murmured Mrs. Dares, with a slight dismayed gesture.

Pauline's face grew serious. "Who, pray, are the growlers?" she asked.

"Well, the chief one is that incorrigible and irrepressible Barrowe. He has his revolutionary opinions, of course. He is always having revolutionary opinions. He makes me think of the Frenchman who declared that if he ever found himself in Heaven his first impulse would be to throw up barricades."

Pauline bit her lip. "Barricades are usually thrown up in streets," she said, with a faint, ired ring of the voice. "Mr. Barrowe probably forgets that fact."

"Do you mean that you would like to show him the street now?" asked Kindelon.

"I have not heard of what his alleged growl consists."

"I warned you against him, but you thought it best that he should be invited. Since you had decided upon wedding, there was no one whom you could more profitably weed."

"Mr. Barrowe has a very kind heart," here asserted Mrs. Dares, with tone and mien at their gentlest and sweetest. "He is clad in bristles, if you please, but the longer you know him the more clearly you recognize that his savage irritability is external and superficial."

"I think it very appropriate to say that he is clad with bristles," retorted Kindelon. "It makes me wish that I had reported him as grunting instead of growling. In that case the simile would have been perfect."

Mrs. Dares shook her head demonstratively. "Don't try to misrepresent your own good heart by sarcasm," she replied. She spoke with her unchangeable gravity; she had no lightsome moments, and the perpetually serious views which she took of everything made you sometimes wonder how and why it was that she managed to make her smileless repose miss the austere note and sound the winsome one.

"I am certain of not losing your esteem," exclaimed Kindelon, with all his most characteristic warmth. "Your own heart is so large and kind that everybody who has got to know it can feel secure in drawing recklessly upon its charity."

Mrs. Dares made him no answer, for just then a gentleman who had approached claimed her attention. And Pauline, now feeling that she and Kindelon were virtually alone together, said with abrupt speed:

"You told me that this Mr. Barrowe had a kind heart, in spite of his gruff, unreasonable manners. You admitted as much, and so, remembering how clever his writings are, I decided to retain him on the list. But please tell me just what he has been saying."

"Oh, he's tempestuous on the subject of your having done any weeding at all. He thinks it arrogant and patronizing of you. He thinks that I am at the bottom of it; he always delights in blaming me for something. He positively revels, I suppose, in his present opportunity."

"But if he is indignant and condemnatory," said Pauline, "why does he not remain away? He has the right of discountenancing my conduct by his absence."

"Ah, you don't know him! He never neglects a chance for being turbulent. I heard him assert, just now, that Miss Cragge had received a most cruel insult from you."

"Miss Cragge!" exclaimed Pauline, with a flash of her gray eyes. "I would not have such a creature as that in my drawing-rooms for a very great deal! Upon my word," she went on, with a sudden laugh that had

considerable cold bitterness, "this irascible personage needs a piece of my mind. I don't say that I intend giving it to him, for I am at home, and the requirements of the hostess mark imperative limits. But I have ways left me of showing distinct disfavour, for all that. Are there any other acts of mine which Mr. Barrowe does me the honour to disapprove?"

"Oh, yes. I hear that he considers you have acted most unfairly toward the triad of poets, Leander Prawle, Arthur Trevor and Rufus Corson."

Pauline gave a smile that was really but a curl of the lip. "Indeed!" she murmured. "I was rather amused by Mr. Prawle's poetic prophecies of a divine future race; it may be bad poetry, as he puts it, but I thought it rather good evolution. Then the *Quartier Latin* floridity of Mr. Trevor amused me as well: I have always liked fervor of expression in verse, and I am not prepared to say that Mr. Trevor has always written ludicrous exaggeration—especially since he reveres Theophile Gautier, who is an enchanting singer. But when it comes to treating that morbid *poseur*, Mr. Corson, who affects to see beauty in decay and corruption, and who makes a silly attempt to deify indecency, I draw my line, and shut my doors."

"Of course you do," said Kindelon. "No doubt if you had opened them to Mr. Corson, Barrowe would have been scandalized at your doing so. As it is, he chooses to championize Mr. Corson and Miss Cragge. He is a natural grumbler, a constitutional fighter. By the way, he is coming in your direction. Do you see him approaching?"

"Oh, yes, I see him," said Pauline, resolutely, "and I am quite prepared for him."

Mr. Barrowe presented himself at her side during the next minute. His tall frame accomplished a very awkward bow, while his little eyes twinkled above his beak-like nose, with a suggestion of restrained belligerence.

"Your entertainment is very successful. Mrs. Varick," he began, ignoring Kindelon, who had already receded a step or two.

"Have you found it so?" returned Pauline, coolly. "I had fancied otherwise."

Mr. Barrowe shrugged his thin shoulders. "Your rooms are beautiful," he said, "and of course you must know that I like the assemblage; it contains so many of my good friends."

"I hope you miss nobody," said Pauline, after a slight pause.

Mr. Barrowe gave a thin, acid cough. "Yes," he declared, "I miss more than one. I miss them, and I hear that you have not invited them. I am very sorry that you have not. It is going to cause ill-feeling. Everybody knows that you took Mrs. Dares's list—my dear, worthy friend's list. It is too bad, Mrs. Varick; I assure you that it is too bad."

"I do not think that it is too bad," said Pauline, freezingly, with the edges of her lips. "I do not think that it is bad at all. I have invited those whom I wished to invite."

"Percisely!" cried Mr. Barrowe, with a shrill, snapping sound in the utterance of the word. "You have been wrongly advised, however—horribly advised. I don't pretend to state *who* has advised you, but if you had consulted me... well, handicapped as I am by a hundred other duties, bored to death as I am by people applying for all sorts of favors, I would, nevertheless, in so good a cause, have willingly spared you some of my valuable time. I would have told you by no means to exclude so excellent a person as poor, hard-working Miss Cragge. To slight her like that was a very unkind cut. You must excuse my speaking plainly."

"I must either excuse it or resent it," said Pauline, meeting the glitter of Mr. Barrowe's small eyes with the very calm and direct gaze of her own. "But suppose I do the latter. It has usually been my custom, thus far through life, to resent interference of any sort."

"Interference!" echoed Mr. Barrowe, with querulous asperity. "Ah, madam, I think I recognize just who *has* been advising you, now; you make my suspicion a certainty." He glanced irately enough toward Kindelon, as he spoke the last words.

Kindelon took a step or two forward, reaching Pauline's side and pausing there. His manner, as he began to speak, showed no anger, but rather that blending of decision and carelessness roused by an adversary from whom we have slight fear of defeat.

"Come, Barrowe," he said, "if you mean me you had better state so plainly. As it happens, Mrs. Varick was advised, in the matter of not sending Miss Cragge an invitation, solely by herself. But if she had asked my counsel it would entirely have agreed with her present course."

"No doubt," almost snarled Mr. Barrowe. "The ill turn comes to the same thing. We need not split hairs. I made no personal reference to you, Kindelon; but if the cap fits you can wear it."

"I should like to hand it back to you with a bunch of bells on it," said Kindelon.

"Is that what you call Irish wit?" replied Mr. Barrowe, while his lips grew pale. "If so, you should save it for the columns of the *Asteroid*, which sadly needs a little."

"The *Asteroid* never prints personalities," returned Kindelon, with nonchalant mockery. "It leaves that kind of journalism to your friend Miss Cragge."

"Miss Cragge, sir," muttered Mr. Barrowe, "is a lady."

"I did not say she was a gentleman," retorted Kindelon, "though her general deportment has more than once cast a doubt upon her sex."

Mr. Barrowe gave a faint shiver. "I'm glad I haven't it on my conscience," he declared, "that I injured an honest girl to gratify a mere spite." He at once turned to Pauline, now. "Madam," he pursued, "I must warn you that your project will prove a dire failure if you attempt to develop it on a system of despotic preferences. We were all glad to come to you, in a liberal, democratic, intellectual spirit. But the very moment you undertake the establishment of a society formed on a basis of capricious