

crisply, pulling up her gloves. "I've had a trying day, Marchioness. Everything has gone wrong,—even the drains. They're frozen as tight as a drum and heaven knows when they'll get them thawed out! Who ever heard of such weather in March?"

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Priestly-Duff, you should not forget the beautiful sunshine we had yesterday," said the Count cheerily.

"Precious little good it does today," she retorted, looking down upon him from a lofty height, and as if she had not noticed his presence before. "When did you come in, Count?"

"It is quite likely the Princess will not venture out in such weather," interposed the Marchioness, sensing squalls.

"Well, I'll stop a bit anyway and get my feet warm. I hope she doesn't come. She is a good deal of a wet blanket, you must admit."

"Wet blankets," began the Count argumentatively, and then, catching a glance from the Marchioness, cleared his throat, blew his nose, and mumbled something about poor people who had no blankets at all, God help them on such a night as this.

Lady Jane had turned away from the group and was idly turning the leaves of the *Illustrated London News*. The smallest intelligence would have grasped the fact that Mrs. Priestly-Duff was not a genial soul.

"Who else is coming?" she demanded, fixing the little hostess with the stare that had just been removed from the back of Lady Jane's head.

Cricklewick answered from the doorway.