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A Great Intrigue,
 —OR, THE—
Mistress of Darracourt.

CHAPTER I.

The old lady, Mrs. Dalton, sat stiffly in the carriage, bland and smiling; Miss Marie Verner, the companion, bent forward with a half amused, half ironical smile; but Lucille Darracourt leaned back with a somewhat dreamy expression on her lovely face. It was not melancholy, it was not apathetic; it is difficult to say what it was beyond thoughtful and somewhat sad.

As they passed under one of the triumphal arches, and the crowd cheered, one man, more observant than his fellows, remarked:

"She's mighty beautiful, but she's mighty proud."

"Proud!" exclaimed a neighbor; "all the Darracourts are proud, and with reason!"

The carriage approached the last and the largest of the triumphal arches, the one near the gate, and the road was lined with villagers, who waved their hats and shouted. Miss Darracourt leaned forward and bowed her beautiful head, and then dropped back, and Miss Verner, who, of course, did not bow, looked sharply from one side to the other, then turned her eyes upon the occasion of the demonstration.

"My dear Lucille!" she exclaimed, with a laugh, "how cool you are!"

"Cool!" said Lucille, letting her eyes rest for a moment on the eager ones of her companion.

"Cool! Yes! Sqw! Ice! Good heavens, look at me! I'm all excitement! Even Mrs. Dalton is moved; aren't you?"

"It is a most touching spectacle," said the old lady, with prim urbanity.

"Most touching," exclaimed Marie Verner, mimicking her; "and, yet, Lucille, you take it as if you had been used to it all your life."

"What would you have me to do?" asked Lucille Darracourt quietly.

"What would I have you do? Anything! Everything!"

"If I were a man, I might get up and take off my hat and thank them; but I am not a man."

"But even a poor, miserable woman might show some emotion," retorted Miss Verner. "But you sit there, and take it all as if you were an empress. Who would think that one month—a week-ago, you were a half-starved pupil in the south of France!"

"We were very well fed," says Lucille, with a smile.

"Bah! I know! But think of it! A pupil at a school at St. Malo, with no expectation of anything better, and now the mistress of—all this!" and she waved her hand to right and left.

"If any thing were needed to prove you are a Darracourt, which, thank heaven, there is not, your demeanor would complete the evidence."

A faint flush spread over the clear, oval face of Lucille Darracourt.

"You forget," she said, "that all this welcome is meant for the heir—the owner—of Darracourt. It is not meant for me, for me myself! If I had been anyone else—old, middle-aged, a man, for instance, they would have shouted just as heartily. It is the owner of Darracourt they are welcoming, not me, Lucille."

"Well, but you are the owner of Darracourt," argued Marie Verner, "and it is for you, and yet you sit there as calm and cool— Oh, good gracious me, what is that?"

It was the Darracourt brass band which, having caught sight of the carriage, had burst forth into disharmony.

Lucille smiled.

"We are near the house," she said, quietly. "That is the brass band."

Miss Verner leaned forward, and as she did so, she saw through the trees which lined the lane a large edifice to the left of the Court.

"What is that?" she asked, pointing her sunshade at it. "That must be Merle Hall, Lucille! See!"

Lucille glanced aside, and just caught a glimpse of the long, white facade shining between the trees.

(To be Continued.)

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—OR—

TWO HEARTS UNITED

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Your worship," he said, "I am grateful to Mr. Selby for leaving to me the task of clearing up the mystery of this painful case. I will not take up the time of the court by addressing you, but will call—"

"Let him free—let him free!" shouted the crowd, but it was quieted by the clerk and the police, and one after another the witnesses, the boy, who found the bodies, and Doctor Campbell, who proved the death of master and man, passed through the witness box. Then, as the crowd grew almost unmanageable, Lord Sainsbury entered and in low, but clear tones read Gibbon's confession.

It was listened to with an almost intolerable impatience, the people looking eagerly from Ralph, who stood gripping the edge of the dock, to the earl and Veronica.

"Nough said!" shouted a woman. "Let 'un go! Let the young lord free, he've been there in that shameful place long enow!"

Old Lord Sebrow, who acted as

chairman of the bench that morning, held up his hand and at length succeeded in obtaining silence.

"The crown withdraws the charge, Mr. Graham!"

"Yes, my lord, with sincere regret that it should have been made—"

"Silence, please! Ralph Farrington—"

"Lord Denby! Lord Denby!" shouted the crowd.

"Ralph Farrington, otherwise Lord Denby," said the old lord, making himself heard with difficulty, "it is our pleasant duty to tell you that we find the charge made against you is not proven, in fact, we know that you are innocent of the crime of which you are accused, and we discharge you. You leave this court with a character unstained as far as this case is concerned, and we show the regret expressed by the prosecutor for the crown."

Ralph bowed his head.

"I thank you my lord," he said in a low but clear voice, and his eyes went straight to Veronica.

His words had been almost drowned by the roar of the crowd which disregarding the injunctions of the police, now swayed towards the dock with outstretched hands. One or two of the persons nearest to him had seized his arms and, before they could be prevented, had lifted him bodily from the shameful place and, setting him on their shoulders, bore him into the open air.

Here they were received by the mass of people, who had been unable to get into the court, with an outburst of cheering that was well-nigh deafening. The Lynne carriage was drawn up opposite the magistrates' entrance, and the persons—there were women amongst them—who were carrying Ralph placed him in it, and the mob pressing round it threw up their caps and shouted triumphantly. No doubt not a few of them forgot that he was no longer Ralph Farrington the gamekeeper, "one of ourselves," as they put it, and were under the impression that his acquittal and liberation represented a triumph of the "masses" over the "classes." Another reason for their excessive joy may be found in the fact that Ralph had been a favorite with all—excepting the poachers—and that before the charge of murder he had already been a popular hero in consequence of his rescue of Ada.

"Thank you, thank you!" he said. "I'm as glad as you are that I've been cleared of this charge—"

"Aye, cleared, sure enow!" said a voice, indignantly. "But how would it 'a been if t'other as did it had na met his fate?"

The words struck a note that the speaker had not contemplated, for they recalled the fact that Ralph's cousin, the nephew of the old man who was just then coming towards them, lay dead at Lynne Court. A silence fell as suddenly as that when a mill-wheel stops. A hand had been stretched out from the blue ether to snatch Ralph from mortal peril, but at the same time it had dealt out to the guilty an awe-inspiring punishment.

So in comparative silence they made way for the earl and Veronica. Ralph leant from the carriage and clasped his father by both hands, and they looked into each other's eyes for a moment; then Ralph took Veronica's hand and raised it to his lips.

At this the enthusiasm of the crowd, which had not been extinguished but was only smouldering,

blazed up again and a cry of sympathy ran through the serried masses. Ralph assisted the earl and Veronica into the carriage, and the old man stood erect—a striking figure at that electric moment—and held up his hand. There were many there who had borne the great Lord Lynborough no great will. He had been a hard, if a just, landlord; he had never shown the least sympathy with the people on his lands, the stranger with in his gates; he had lived the life of a morose recluse. But as they stared at him they were one and all conscious that the man—old as he was—had changed. The austere face had softened, the hard eyes were aglow with a novel sympathy, the once haughty frown had gone and the thin lips, which many had never seen but with a cynical sneer, quivered with emotion. They moved once or twice as if he were speaking, but the words were inaudible, but at last those near him heard him murmur:

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(To be Continued.)



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