

"I am . . . !" she broke away—"It's . . . the *beauty*—can't you understand?" She wiped her eyes defiantly.

"But—who are *you*?" she added slowly—"I don't see yet why it's yours."

"I'm the Marquis Maramonte," he said, "and you are my very dear liege lady."

For a moment she stared at him, amazed. Then, like a sunlit April shower, laughter stole into her eyes, still shining with her tears.

She clapped her hands. She danced for joy.

"Oh! what a gorgeous sell for Stephen!"

McTaggart caught her outstretched hands, laughing aloud.

"Isn't it?" Relief at her change of mood, delight at the way she took her new honours: her simple child-like fearlessness, made him exult in his bride.

"He'll have to 'kow-tow' to you now, old lady. He won't like that—Master Stephen!—I expect he will, though"—he veered round—"he'll be trying to borrow no end of money!"

"He won't get it," said Jill gayly. "He can come and smash my windows first." She hardly knew what she was saying, for the reaction had set in, the excitement of this great adventure.

"He'd find it hard . . ." said McTaggart grimly. "This place has stood many a siege. They had a playful way, you know, of slinging donkeys in by catapults!"

"Well"—Jill giggled—"why not Stephen?" Then her face grew thoughtful again. "It's wonderful! . . ." She glanced down the long walls hung with pictures. Men in armour, half concealed by sumptuous cloaks; red-robed prelates; court beauties, smiling proudly; stern old age, reckless youth!

"These made history," said Jill and paused, sobered by the thought . . .

"*Your* people." She looked at her husband, full of honest pride for him.

"Yes." McTaggart smiled back. "Splendid chaps, some of them. That's the hero of Montaperti, Giordano Maramonte. And that frivolous-looking boy