

after our morning ride. But she wouldn't be very long. She might be a little surprised at first to be called down like this, but with a few words of preparation and purely as a matter of art . . .'

"There were never two people more taken aback. Versoy himself confesses that he dropped his tall hat with a crash. I am a dutiful son, I hope, but I must say I should have liked to have seen the retreat down the great staircase. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

He laughed most undutifully and then his face twitched grimly.

"That implacable brute Allègre followed them down ceremoniously and put my mother into the fiacre at the door with the greatest deference. He didn't open his lips though, and made a great bow as the fiacre drove away. My mother didn't recover from her consternation for three days. I lunch with her almost daily and I couldn't imagine what was the matter. Then one day . . ."

He glanced round the table, jumped up and with a word of excuse left the studio by a small door in a corner. This startled me into the consciousness that I had been as if I had not existed for these two men. With his elbows propped on the table Mills had his hands in front of his face clasping the pipe from which he extracted now and then a puff of smoke, staring stolidly across the room.

I was moved to ask in a whisper:

"Do you know him well?"

"I don't know what he is driving at," he answered drily. "But as to his mother she is not as volatile as all that. I suspect it was business. It may have been a deep plot to get a picture out of Allègre for somebody. My cousin as likely as not. Or simply to discover what he had. The Blunts lost all their property and in Paris there are various ways of making a little money, without actually breaking anything. Not even the law. And