

"You blow it like a gentleman," interrupted the Marchioness, as he paused in some confusion.

"Indeed I do," he said gratefully. "In the most polished manner possible, my dear lady."

Lady Jane put her handkerchief to her lips. There was a period of silence. The Count appeared to be thinking with great intensity. He had a harassed expression about the corners of his nose. It was he who broke the silence. He broke it with a most tremendous sneeze.

"The beastly snuff," he said in apology.

Cricklewick's voice seemed to act as an echo to the remark.

"The Right-Honourable Mrs. Priestly-Duff," he announced, and an angular, middle-aged lady in a rose-coloured gown entered the room. She had a very long nose and prominent teeth; her neck was of amazing length and appeared to be attached to her shoulders by means of vertical, skin-covered ropes, running from torso to points just behind her ears, where they were lost in a matting of faded, straw-coloured hair. On second thought, it may be simpler to remark that her neck was amazingly scrawny. It will save confusion. Her voice was a trifle strident and her French execrable.

"Isn't it awful?" she said as she joined the trio at the fireplace. "I thought I'd never get here. Two hours coming, my dear, and I must be starting home at once if I want to get there before midnight."

"The Princess will be here," said the Marchioness.

"I'll wait fifteen minutes," said the new-comer