

PROLOGUE

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bitter words flowed from her lips with an earnestness that thrilled the audience. A pallor overspread the face of the marquis, while the lady drew back behind the draperies, almost as if in fear. At the conclusion of that effort the walls echoed with plaudits; the actress stood as in a trance; her face was pale, her figure seemed changed to stone and the light went out of her eyes.

She fainted and fell and the curtain descended quickly. The woman by the marquis' side, who had trembled at first, now forced a laugh, as she said: "The trollop can curse! Let us go." Together they left the box, the marquis regretting the temerity which had led him to bring his companion to the theater. He, too, was secretly unnerved, and, when they entered the carriage, they seated themselves as far apart as possible, the marquis detesting the lady and she for her part disliking him just as cordially.

Next day the critics referred to the scene with glowing words, while in the coffee houses they discussed the proposition: Should an actress feel the emotion she portrays? With a cynical smile the marquis read the different accounts of the performance, when he and his companion found themselves in the old stage coach *en route* for Brighton. He felt no regret for his action—had not the Prince of Wales taught the gentlemen of his kingdom that it was fashionable to desert actresses? Had he not left the "divine Perdita" to languish, after snubbing her right royally in Hyde Park?