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

### CHAPTER II.

"I a few days the county families will call upon you. There are some nice people in the neighborhood." He ran over the names of some of them, all strangers to Lucille, of course. "Lady Farnley, of the Grange, leads the fashion here—or did, I should say; she was the principal lady in the place until you came."

"And will remain so, I should think," said Lucille, smiling. He shook his head.

"The mistress of Darracourt must rule in Darracourt, as a matter of course," he responded.

He led her under a tall archway of stone and into the stables. Everything was as clean and orderly as a barrack yard, the stone facings to the red-bricked buildings as white as snow, every door and window glistening with fresh paint. A dozen dogs ran out to meet them, and surrounded Lucille, yapping and jumping up at her.

At this moment the ringing sound of a firm, quick step was heard on the

flagged court, accompanied by a melodious whistle. Lucille half turned and saw Harry Herne striding toward them.

In an instant, as if they had been pulled by a string, the dogs left Lucille, and came with crouching, but friendly, servility to his feet.

"Good-morning, Herne!" said Mr. Head, coldly. "I have brought Miss Darracourt to see the stables, but your dogs have stopped further progress."

"They are all Court dogs, excepting this one," he said, pointing with his whip to the dog which had followed him into the yard.

"Then I should advise Miss Darracourt to lessen their number," said Mr. Head.

"Oh, no," exclaimed Lucille; "they are all very handsome. I am fond of dogs."

Harry Herne did not look at her, and yet she felt as if he had. With a crack of his whip, he strode to one of the doors, and, opening it, signed to the dogs to go in. They went in at once, and without a note.

He came back, hesitated a moment, then said:

"I know all the horses here; shall I show them to Miss Darracourt?" He addressed Mr. Head, but his glance rested on Lucille.

Once more Lucille was the slave of an impulse.

"I will see them after breakfast," she said.

He swung round, and stood bare-headed, as if she had uttered some important command.

"Yes, miss," he said, and the tone was so softened, compared with that in which he had addressed Mr. Head, that that gentleman stared.

"There is the bell," he said, and they turned and went out under the arch; the servants standing like soldiers, with their hands to their foreheads.

As he opened the door for her to pass in, Marie Verner came toward them, her sharp eyes glancing from one to the other.

"Have you two early birds caught

plenty of worms?" she said, with her ready laugh.

"We have been to the stables," said Lucille.

"I know that, dear. My room overlooks them. You weren't there long. By the way, who was that tall young man with the air of a disguised prince—the one with the whip?"

"Oh, Harry Herne, you mean!" Mr. Head responded, carelessly.

"And who is Harry Herne?" she asked, quickly.

Mr. Head smiled.

"Nobody of any consequence," he answered.

Marie Verner looked from one to the other.

"Isn't he? Then he ought to be, if appearances deserve anything. I don't think I have ever seen a handsomer man; have you, Lucille?"

"I have seen so few," said Lucille, carelessly, and gilded past her.

### CHAPTER III.

An hour later the Marquis of Merle entered his study. The sun was pouring through the latticed windows, and most men would have thrown them open, and allowed the fresh, pure air and sunlight to flood in unimpeded; but Lord Merle went to the window and drew down the blinds, as if the sunlight was something to be shut out. This made the room, which was rather dark and dingy, assume a dismal aspect, and as he stood, with one hand resting upon the table, his thin

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figure, dressed in its dark-colored morning clothes, which seemed to hang loosely upon him, there was something so suggestive of a funeral, that anyone looking in at him would have been justified in inquiring for the whereabouts of the corpse.

If there had been a dash of color in Lord Merle's face, it might have claimed to be handsome, but it was so pale and cold, notwithstanding that he had just risen, that it looked like the plaster masks which the antique actors wore when they played tragedy in the theatre at Athens.

For a minute or two he stood like a statue, looking down at his writing materials, his long, white fingers pressed against the edge of the table, his thin lips compressed into a straight line.

Then he took up a letter which lay open before him, and read it slowly, thinking between the lines. As he refolded it and dropped it on the table, a servant in dark livery knocked at the door, and said:

"Mr. Slake, my lord."

The marquis, who never spoke unless compelled, nodded, and the footman stood aside, and allowed a gentleman to enter.

"Good-morning, my lord," he said, bowing respectfully, and blinking a little at the sudden change from the sunlight outside to the semi-darkness of the room.

"Good-morning," returned his lordship. "Be seated, Mr. Slake. You received my telegram, I see?"

"Came down by the night mail, my lord," said Mr. Slake, suavely.

"This is bad news," said the marquis, touching the letter with his white forefinger, his voice cold and measured, his face utterly impassive and stonelike.

Mr. Slake shook his head, sympathetically.

"Awful bad, my lord! Couldn't be worse, in fact."

"I suppose not. Is there no way of meeting this demand?"

Mr. Slake pursed up his lips, and shook his head again.

"I don't see any, my lord. You see we didn't think this mortgage would

be called in, or we wouldn't have advised you to speculate with the money raised on it."

"And this mortgage is called in at six months hence. Can no money be raised?"

"Every acre you've got, every barn is mortgaged up to the chimney-pots, my lord."

Some men would have frowned at this blunt speaking; the marquis opened his thin lips, and smiled. It was an unpleasant smile.

"In a word, Mr. Slake, you have come to repeat what your letter told me: that I am ruined. Have you any advice to offer?"

Mr. Slake pondered.

"There's a way out of the fire, my lord!" he said. "Marry Miss Darracourt!"

The marquis looked up with a smile that was almost sweet.

"I intend to!" he said.

"Then—then, why did you send for me?" demanded Mr. Slake, not un-naturally.

"Because I wanted some more money."

"More money!" echoed Mr. Slake.

"Yes. And as I did not desire to put down on paper the security I intended offering, I sent for you. I must have two thousand pounds, Mr. Slake. For that sum I will give you a bill for three thousand, due at six months from now."

"Three thousand," murmured Mr. Slake.

"It is good interest, and should satisfy even you, I think," said his lordship, with the suggestion of a sneer.

"It's good interest enough, my lord; but the security—the security!" said Mr. Slake.

The marquis rose and drew up the blind.

"The security is there," he said, pointing his finger at the Court. "In six months Darracourt will be mine."

"You should have the money, my lord. I wouldn't do it for any other man, but, by Heaven! I think you'll do what you say."

"I think so, too," said the marquis; and there was something so deadly in the determined smile of the thin lips and the cold tint of the steely eyes that even Mr. Slake recoiled, and felt that he would have shuddered if he had known how.

All breakfast time while Marie Verner chattered to Mr. Head in the light, open-hearted fashion of hers, which made people who had heard her say what a frank, pleasant girl she was to be sure, Lucille thought of the promise she had made to Harry Herne.

(To be Continued.)

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