

"I have it on now," said Mrs. Lovell, quietly. "I'm sure it's very becoming, and I only wonder how he could get one so good."

"Georgie, I declare you make me feel positively ashamed of you," cried Maud, indignantly. "It's really quite shocking. And *you* of all people! Why, you are usually so very fastidious, you know, and you stand so on *les convenances*, that I cannot understand how you ever came to forget yourself so far."

"Nonsense, Maudie," said Mrs. Lovell. "I can judge very well for myself, and besides, you know that things that would n't do for you are all very well for me. But let that pass. It happened as I say, and the consequence was that Mr. Grimes saw more in that little piece of good-nature than was actually meant. So, you know, he devoted himself to me, and for the last two or three months I've seen very much of him. I liked him, too. He has many noble qualities; and he was awfully fond of me, and I felt half sorry for him, and all that. I liked to have him for a friend, but the trouble was that was not enough. He was always too ardent and devoted. I could see his face flush, and hear his voice tremble, whenever we met. Yet what could I do? I kept as cool as possible, and tried to chill him, but he only grew worse."

"And the plain fact is," continued Mrs. Lovell, "he never would have done, never. He has noble sentiments, it is true; but then he has such funny manners. He has a large heart, but dreadfully big hands. He has a truly Titanic soul, but his feet are of the same proportions. And all that is very dreadful, you know, Maudie. And what makes it worse, I really like him, and I feel a sense of deplorable weakness when I am with him. It may be because he is so big and strong and brave, and has such a voice, but I think it may also be because I am just a little bit fond of him."

"Fond of him? O Georgie! You don't mean it."

"O, just a *little bit*, you know, only ever so little," said Mrs. Lovell, apologetically. "But at any rate it's really quite shocking to think how I lose control of myself and —"

"And what, Georgie dear?" asked Maud, anxiously, as Mrs. Lovell paused.

"Why, and let him treat me so —"

"Treat you so? How, dear?"

"Well, I'll tell you. It was to-day, you know. Of course you understand how he has been devoting himself to me for the past few months, and I have been trying to fight him off. Well, to-day he came, and he took me by storm, and I could n't fight him off at all; for before I could think, he was in the middle of a most vehement confession, and ended with a proposal. Well, you know, I never was so embarrassed in all my life, and I really didn't know what to do."

"You refused him, of course."

"O, but it was n't so easy. You see I really liked him, and he knew it."

"Knew it? How *could* he know it?"

"O, you know, I told him so."

"Told him!"

"Yes, and that was what ruined all, for he grew dreadfully bold, and began to appropriate me in a way that was really alarming. O dear, I should n't like to have to go through it again. You see, his proposal was not to be thought of, but then it was not easy to decline it in a pleasant and agreeable way. What was worse, I grew embarrassed and lost all my usual presence of mind, and at last had to tell him simply that it could not be."

"And then, O Maudie dear, he was so cut up. He asked me if this answer was final, and I told him it was. Then he sat silent for no end of time, and I felt so dreadfully weak, that I am sure if he had urged me I really don't see how I could have refused him. But he did n't. He was so simple-hearted that he never thought of trying to change my decision. At last he broke the silence by asking me in a dreadfully hollow voice if I loved another; I told him I did n't, and he gave