

"We are," said the satirical Mr. Fyshkille, who prided himself on always keeping his countenance. His two friends, who thought him a devilish clever fellow, both produced another laugh, this time suppressed on the part of each.

Pauline felt keenly annoyed. She glanced at Kindelon, telling herself that he must surely see the pitiable ridicule of which he was being made the butt.

She had, however, quite miscalculated. The self-esteem of Kindelon as utterly failed to realize that he was an object of the slightest banter, whether overt or covert, as though he had been both near-sighted and deaf. He knew nothing of the idle autocracy with which accident had now brought him into contact. He was opposed to it on principle, but he had had no experience of its trivial methods of arrogance. He had come into the box to see Pauline, and he took it broadly for granted that he would be treated with politeness by her surrounders and listened to (provided he assumed that office of general spokesman which he nearly always assumed wherever chance placed him) with admiring attention.

A few minutes later he had stripped his would-be foes of all sting by effectively and solidly manifesting unconsciousness that they had intended to be hostile. He talked of Wagner and his followers with a brilliant force that did not solicit heed and yet compelled it. He discoursed upon the patent absurdities of Italian opera with a nimble wit and an incisive severity. Then he justified his preference for Donizetti and Rossini with a readiness that made his past sarcasm on their modes quickly forgotten. And finally he delivered a eulogy upon the German motive and ideal in music which showed the fine liberality of a mind that recognizes the short-comings in its own predilection, and foresees the inevitable popularity of a more advanced and complicated system.

He had silenced everybody before he finished, but with the silence of respect. He had forced even these petty triflers who dwelt on the mere skirts of all actual life, to recognize him as not simply the comer from a world which they did not care to know about, but from a world greater and higher than any which they were capable of knowing about. And finally, in the flush of this handsome little triumph, he made his exit, just as the curtain was again rising, after a few murmured words to Pauline regarding certain night-work on the New York Asteroid, which must prevent him from seeing the remainder of the performance.

Nobody heeded the opera for at least five minutes after his departure. He had left his spell behind him. Pauline at first marked its cogency, and then observed this gradually dissolve. The flimsiness of their thinking and living returned to them again, in all its paltry reality.

"Of course," murmured Mrs. Poughkeepsie to Pauline, "he is a person who writes books, of one sort or another."

"If they're novels," said Lord Glenartney, "I'd like awfully to know about 'em. I'm fond of readin' a good novel. It's so jolly if one's lyin' daown and can't sleep, but feels a bit seedy, ye know."

"I fancy they must be rather long novels," said Sallie, with a drowsy scorn that suited her big, placid anatomy.

"I wish he'd not run off so; I wanted the address of his hatter," declared the envenomed Mr. Fyshkille.

"Or his tailor," amended Mr. Van Arsdale, with the auxiliary giggle.

"I guess you'd find both somewhere in the Bowery," pursued the fleshy Mr. Hackensack, who always said "I guess," for "I fancy," and had a nasal voice, and an incorrigible American soul inside his correct foreign garments.

Pauline now swept a haughty look at Mr. Fyshkille and his two allies, and said, with open displeasure:

"I suppose you think it an unpardonable sin for any gentleman to suit his own taste in dress, and not copy that of some English model. But your uncivil comments on Mr. Kindelon, before myself, his admitted friend, show me that he might easily teach you a lesson in good manners."

All three of the offenders were now forced to utter words of apology, while Lord Glenartney looked as if he thought Mrs. Varick's wrath great fun, and Sallie exchanged a look of ironical distress with her mother, that seemed to inquire: "What uncomfortable absurdity will Pauline next be guilty of?" . . . But Mrs. Poughkeepsie and Sallie left their kinswoman at her Bond Street residence that night with very agreeable adieus. True, Lord Glenartney occupied a seat in their carriage, but even if this had not been the case, neither mother nor daughter would have vented upon Pauline any of the disapproval she had provoked in them. She was now a power in the world, and near to them in blood, and even her follies merited the leniency of a Poughkeepsie.

But after Sallie and her mother had said good-night to his lordship and were alone at home together, the young lady spoke with querulous disgust of her cousin's behaviour.

"She will lose caste horribly, mamma, if she goes on in this way. It's perfectly preposterous! If there is one thing on earth that is really *low*, it's for a woman to become strong-minded!"

Mrs. Poughkeepsie nodded. "You are just right. But she's her own mistress, and there is no restraining her."

"People *ought* to be restrained," grumbled Sallie, loosening her opera cloak, "when they want to throw away their positions like that."

"Oh, Pauline can't throw herself away so easily," affirmed Mrs. Poughkeepsie, with sapient composure. "No, not with her name and her big income. She will merely get herself laughed at, you know—*encanailler* herself most ludicrously; that is all. We must let her have her head, as one says of a horse. Her father was always full of caprices; he wouldn't have died a poor man if he had not been. She merely has a caprice now. Of course she will come to terms again with society sooner or later, and repent having made such a goose of herself. That is, unless..." And here Mrs. Poughkeepsie paused, while a slight but distinct shudder ended her sentence.

Sallie gave a faint, harsh laugh. "Oh, I understand you thoroughly, mamma," she exclaimed. "You mean unless some adventurer like that Mr. Kindelon should induce her to marry him. How awful such a thing would be! I declare, the very thought of it is sickening! With that superb fortune, too! I shouldn't be surprised if he had proposed already! Perhaps she has only been preparing us gradually for the frightful news that she has accepted him!"

But no such frightful news reached the Poughkeepsies, as day succeeded day. Pauline went little into the fashionable throngs, which were at the height of their winter gayeties. She soon quitted her Bond street residence for good, and secured a small basement-house on a side street near Fifth Avenue, furnishing it with that speed in the way of luxurious appointment which a plethoric purse so readily commands.

"I am quite prepared, now," she said to Kindelon, one morning, after having received him in her new and lovely sitting-room, where everything was unique and choice, from the charming chandelier of twisted silver to the silken Japanese screen, rich with bird and flower in gold and crimson. "Of course you understand what I mean."

He affected not to do so. "Prepared?" he repeated, with the gay gleam slipping into his eyes. "For what?"

"My *salon*, of course."

"Oh," he said. "I confess that I suspected what you meant, though I was not quite sure. I almost feared lest your resolution might have undergone a change of late."

"And pray, why?" asked Pauline, raising her brows, with a little imperious smile.

"You have not mentioned the project for surely a good fortnight," he returned. "I had wondered whether or no it had weakened with you."

"It is stronger than ever!" Pauline asseverated. She folded her hands in her lap, and tried to look excessively firm and resolute. She was always particularly handsome when she tried to look thus; she was just slender and feminine enough in type to make the assumption of strength, of determination, especially becoming.

"Ah, very well," replied Kindelon, with one of his richly expressive smiles. "Then I have a proposition to make you. It concerns an immediate course of action on your part. Have you ever heard of Mrs. Hagar Williamson Dares?"

Pauline burst into a laugh. "No. It sounds more like an affirmation than a name. 'Mrs. Hagar Williamson Dares.' One feels like saying 'Does she?' Don't think me irredeemably trifling, and please continue. Please tell me, I mean, what remarkable things has this remarkably-named lady done?"

"Nothing."

Pauline's face, full of a pleased anticipation, fell. "Nothing? How tiresome?"

"I mean nothing remarkable," Kindelon went on, "in the luminously intellectual sense. And yet she is a very extraordinary woman. At twenty-five she was divorced from her husband."

Pauline shook her head troubledly. "That does not sound at all promising."

"He was a dissolute wretch. The Courts easily granted her a release from him. At this time she was almost penniless. The question, as she had two little children, naturally arose: 'How are we three to live?' She had been reared in a New England home; her dead father had been a man of extensive learning, and at one time the principal of a successful school. Hagar had always had 'a taste for writing,' as we call it. She began by doing criticisms for a New York journal of rather scholarly tendency, whose editor had combined pity for her almost starving condition