

DUKE. (*Persuasively.*) Not even for the sake of peace and harmony? (*Armand glances in the direction of Jack and Lucy.*)

ARMAND. As I explained a few minutes ago, Mrs. Wilberforce, the two houses are bound to be united any way, it seems.

DUKE. (*Aside; dryly as he turns away.*) Thank God! (*The Duke crosses to Lucy and Jack, and joins them in conversation. He takes Lucy's hand, and after looking at it intently a moment, affectionately kisses it.*)

MRS. WILBERFORCE. (*In a milder tone.*) O, but the scandal of it all.

ARMAND. My dear Mrs. Wilberforce, no family is complete without its skeleton. It is one of the necessary adjuncts to a peerage.

MRS. WILBERFORCE. Then I should even be grateful, I suppose?

ARMAND. O, I think you're entitled to the inheritance.

MRS. WILBERFORCE. (*In a confidential tone.*) The skeleton?

ARMAND. We have two in our family.

MRS. WILBERFORCE. And I deserve this one, you think?

ARMAND. Well—a—if it be true that ambition has its own reward, Mrs. Wilberforce—

MRS. WILBERFORCE. Then I am rewarded. (*Armand shrugs his shoulders.*) O, what will society say?

ARMAND. Madam, there are state secrets that if known would overthrow governments, but those to whose keeping they have been confided are too wise to gossip about them.

MRS. WILBERFORCE. Which means—

ARMAND. That if everybody, here, will do likewise, society must, for once, be deprived of a little small talk.

MRS. WILBERFORCE. But suppose. (*Looking suspiciously at Craven.*) this person—

ARMAND. Mr. Craven is discreet beyond question—besides, (*Looking at Craven.*) he has a mission to fulfil.