

THE GREAT MASTERS



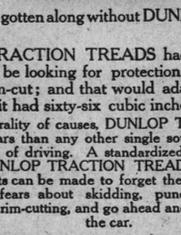
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A Great Intrigue,

Mistress of Darracourt.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Upon her face still rested the cold, preoccupied look, and the gaze which she fixed upon the landscape flying past them seemed to see nothing. When he spoke she answered, but the words left her lips like those of a lesson, and her smile was mechanical and cold as the sunlight on an icicle. After a time she took up a book and fixed her eyes upon it, and the marquis, with a strange feeling of embarrassment and something like awe of the cold, beautiful face, with its frigid lips, murmured that he would smoke a cigar, and disappeared in a smoking compartment.

He had got the Court, and the Darracourt money—or the handling of it—but a woman of ice and snow, a woman who he felt detested and mistrusted him thrown into the bargain. As he smoked, his face grew darker and darker, and his even, white teeth clicked now and again. They reached London, and were received at Meurice's as foreign potentates and ambassadors are received at that royal place of sojourn. Black-coated waiters lined the velvet-clad steps;



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the proprietor, a mighty man himself, came out to welcome them, and at the state and ceremony the marquis' heart swelled within him.

After all, what did it matter that Lucille was cold and forbidding? The money—the money was the thing!

Though the season had passed, there were enough people in London to make a goodly show of pasteboard in the card basket, and Lucille found that her fame had preceded her and that all that remained of London was anxious to see the Marchioness of Merle, who was also the famous Lady of Darracourt.

But she received the cards and the visitors coldly and indifferently. "Is it necessary to see all these people?" she asked of the marquis on the third day.

"Not unless you like," he answered. "But it would be polite to do so. You can leave cards if that will suit you better."

"It will suit me much better than going to be stared at and talked to," she said, wearily.

"All breakfast time the three thousand pounds haunted him, and he stared at the paper without seeing a word.

Lucille sat reading a letter which had come from Marie, saying that all

calmly; "I shall want what I have till then."

Mr. Slake bowed. He perfectly understood. "Certainly, my lord," he said, respectfully. Then, as he took his hat, he added: "I haven't had an opportunity of congratulating your lordship."

The marquis smiled affably. "Thanks, Slake; thanks. Will you have some wine?"

Mr. Slake took his glass of wine and went, and the marquis returned to his ecarte.

A large sum of money had been placed at his disposal on the day of his marriage—an enormous sum, and it had disappeared. He must have three thousand by to-morrow morning for Mr. Slake.

When he reached Meurice's that night, or rather the next morning, he was still poorer, for he had lost heavily during the evening, and he came down to breakfast rather paler than usual, but with a smile upon his false face.

All breakfast time the three thousand pounds haunted him, and he stared at the paper without seeing a word.

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was going on well at the Court, and having done that, rose to leave the room.

"Oh, Lucille," he said, as if struck by a sudden thought. "About money?"

She stopped and looked at him listlessly. "Money?"

He nodded pleasantly. "Yes. Forgive me for mentioning so commonplace a subject, but it has to be considered sooner or later, and perhaps it will be better that it should be sooner."

"Well?" she asked. "Mr. Head has left all the money arrangements to you," he said.

"Give the bills to me and I will pay them," she answered, with her hand on the door.

He muttered an inaudible curse. "Do you think I mean to trouble you with such matters?" he said.

"How little you know me! You would be bored to death! Fancy looking over bills to the extent of three thousand pounds!"

Lucille felt slightly surprised. She had paid for everything she had purchased; there was only the hotel bill, that she knew of.

"Why, what bills are they?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Tinker, tailor, candle-stick maker," he replied. "Bills soon run up, you know."

Lucille inclined her head assentingly. In a vague way it struck her as odd that he should have bought things to the extent of three thousand pounds and not paid for them with the money he had; but it did not matter.

"You want—" she said. "A check for three—it had better be for four thousand pounds!" he said, carelessly.

She went to a table and drew out her check-book, and handed him the slip.

"Thanks," he said, as he laid it beside his plate. "These little things are best paid out of hand."

"Yes," she said, absently, and left the room.

He clutched the check as soon as she had gone, with an air of relief, and half an hour afterward Mr. Slake was shown up.

He received a check from his lordship with respectful gratitude.

"If at any time you should want, my lord—" he began; but the marquis waved his hand smilingly.

"Thanks, Slake, thanks; but I do not think I shall require the assistance you allude to."

"No, my lord, no," said Mr. Slake, deferentially. "The estate is an enormous one. I am aware; but sometimes—one never knows. Money soon flies—your lordship may want a little loan for past liabilities; men are always pressing at the wrong moment. There was a man waiting outside who, I think, is one who wants something of your lordship."

(To be continued.)

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