

her arm just as she appeared to be toppling into Lady Stapleton's lap.

"Qui' well, m'dear," she returned in polite protest ;

"Qui' well. I mush speak to dear Lady Shtapleton."

"You are not well," he repeated in a panic of shame and terror. "Let me take you back to your room."

"Well'n'uff," she assured him with preternatural gravity. "Want to speak to Lady Shtapleton. Le' me go."

She made a quick side movement, bending as though to kiss Lady Stapleton. Her ladyship drew back, with wry visage, sniffing audibly. For Mrs. Herrick was perfuming the room as with the very breath and atmosphere of the wine cellar.

"I—I am afraid you really are not well," said Lady Stapleton severely. "You had better go and lie down."

"Do I look ill?" retorted Mrs. Herrick, drawing herself up with a ludicrous travesty of dignity.

"Very ill indeed," was the quick reply. "In fact, you ought to be in bed." And Lady Stapleton drew in her skirts as in fear of contamination.

Herrick tightened his grip on his wife's arm ; in the same instant a childish hand tugged at her skirt. Mrs. Herrick looked down into the perplexed, frightened face of her little daughter, love and anger contending within her.

"Mama, dear mama, what is it?" asked the child.

"They are insulting mama, darling," was the answer. "You won't forget it, Pearl."

The shock of anger was already correcting her slurred utterance.

"No one is insulting you, dear," said Herrick in a sweating agony. He was humouring her to obviate the disgrace of having to force her away.