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A Great Intrigue,

Mistress of Darracourt.

CHAPTER II.

Lucille paused for a moment outside the drawing room window, to regain her composure, and to wipe away the traces of the tears which had sprung to her eyes so suddenly. She knew that Marie Verner's sharp eyes would detect the signs of her emotion, and would instantly question her, and for some unexplained reason, Lucille shrank from a recital of the extraordinary scene which she had witnessed, and her interview with the young man which had followed it. She felt half ashamed of her desire to conceal it. It seemed almost well, romantic and sentimental, and Lucille had a horror of the sentimental. What did it amount to, after all? She had by chance been a witness in a quarrel between the Marquis of Merle and a kindly gamekeeper, and afterwards the gamekeeper had begged her to take him into her employ. There wasn't much in that!

"I am over-tired and excited!" she said, looking over the lawn, and laughing faintly. "What fools women are! If the man had not been so handsome, I—I shouldn't have made such an idiot of myself!"

As she spoke, there rose before her the vision of the stalwart, graceful form, standing above her, with one upraised hand, invoking a blessing upon her. She felt the beautiful, masterful eyes fixed on her, heard the deep, musical voice, and she tried to laugh again, but failed.

"No, I won't tell Marie," she murmured. "She would never cease to 'chaff' me, as she calls it! Besides, perhaps I have done a foolish thing, after all. The young man may be a bad character—a poacher, or something worse—and the marquis may have good reason for advising him to leave the Court. Well, if I have done a foolish thing, I must abide by it! I've given my word, and I'll keep it!" and the decision brought her a strange sense of relief and satisfaction.

On the way to her room Lucille paused on the great staircase, and looked out through an open pane of the stained window, and her glance fell upon the tower at the end of the terrace, and the tree beneath which she had stood, and Harry Herne had kissed the hem of her dress. Was it fancy, or a trick of the moonlight, or was there really a stalwart figure standing looking up at the house?

With a strange leap of her heart, she turned and went hastily into her room, and almost started guiltily as she saw Susie arranging the toilet table.

Cheap boarding schools do not provide a lady's maid for the pupils, and Lucille, who had never had a servant in her life until now, when she had an army of them, paused irresolutely. "Do you want anything, Susie?" she asked, in her sweetly musical voice. Susie's round blue eyes developed into blue saucers.

"Oh, yes, miss. I've to do your hair, and wait on you, please!" she said.

"Very well," said Lucille, resignedly; "I didn't know. I never had a maid before. And have you lived here all your life, Susie? Here, in Darracourt, I mean."

"Yes, miss," said Susie, plying the brush swiftly and carefully; "I was born here. Father is one of your tenants, miss. He's got the Tarn Farm."

"And so your father is one of my tenants? Have I got any other farms?"

Susie stared at the beautiful face reflected in the glass.

"Oh! don't you know, miss?" she exclaimed, with respectful wonder.

"No," replied Lucille, amused at her surprise. "I don't know anything, scarcely. I mean of the estate? You know, Susie, that it is only a week ago that I learned it was mine, and there has been no time to find out all the particulars."

"I see, miss! Oh, Darracourt is a big place. It's the largest place in the country, and then, Merle Hall, where the marquis lives, comes next, but it's not a quarter so large as Darracourt."

"I suppose the marquis is very popular here, Susie?"

"Popular!" repeated Susie, thoughtfully. "People like him, you mean, miss? I—I don't know. You see, miss, he doesn't go about much. People say he's proud, and it's because he's poor. I don't know why that should be," she added, innocently. "And that's why he lives alone and looks so pale and thoughtful. But he's very grand and polite when he does speak. Father says that he can never forget that Darracourt ought to belong to him—oh, I beg your pardon, miss!" she broke off, frightened and aghast.

Lucille colored for a second, then she smiled, reassuringly.

"Never mind, Susie," she said, gently. "You have not offended me. It is natural that the marquis should regret losing so beautiful a place."

"Yes, miss; my tongue does run so."

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will stand in your place, as it were. The welfare of the estate depends "It was my fault," said Lucille. "You can go now. Will you call me quite early—at seven o'clock, please?"

"Yes, miss," said Susie; and with a gentle "good-night!" Lucille dismissed her.

At eight o'clock the great bell rang, and Lucille made her way to the breakfast room. Mr. Head was standing by the window, with a long paper in his hand, and he came forward to greet her, with that deferential friendliness which a lawyer extends to wards a rich client.

"You are an early riser, Miss Darracourt," he said.

"We used to get up at six at St. Malo," said Lucille, simply.

"I am fortunate in finding you here so early. My train goes at half-past nine, and there were some few matters I wished to speak to you about. As you are aware, Miss Darracourt, I, and my father before me, have been the legal advisers of your respected uncle. I think I may say that I was something more than that—I may claim to have been his friend."

"Yes."

"In my position as legal adviser I have become fully acquainted with all the details of this large—I may call it vast—estate. Until now, I have refrained from troubling you, knowing well how unfair it would be to expect you, in the first moments of your accession to the property, to listen to dry particulars. I do not intend to inflict them upon you here now. They are set down as concisely as possible in this paper, which I now hand to you. Therein you will find a list of the securities, and, in fact, of the whole of the property which your uncle bequeathed you. There are other particulars which, perhaps, I had better hand to Mrs. Dalton, who will, I presume, undertake the management of the house?"

"I am not sure," she said. "Would it be right—proper—usual for her to do so?"

The reply rather surprised him.

"I apprehend that you would not care for the trouble of the thing. The house is immense, the number of servants very large—a list of them with their salaries was one of the things I intended placing in Mrs. Dalton's hands."

"Give it to me, please," she said, quietly.

He took a heap of papers from his pocket, and, selecting one, handed it to her.

"There is a still more important matter in connection with the establishment," he added. "Your uncle was a man so full of energy that he did not find even the management of this large estate too much occupation for him. But is it impossible for you, a lady, young, and—and—"

"Inexperienced," said Lucille, with a smile.

"Yes, inexperienced, to attempt to cope with it. It will be necessary that you should have a steward."

"What is that?" she asked.

"A general manager, a person who

upon him. I ought to have engaged a steward, but I have had so much to do that I have not had time."

"You have been very kind, and must have worked very hard," said Lucille. "I must have a steward, then." She looked down the list of servants. "Are they all here?" she asked.

"Yes, all," he said. "Why do you ask, Miss Darracourt?"

A faint blush rose to her cheeks, and she kept her eyes fixed upon the paper; the next moment, ashamed of her slight embarrassment, she raised her eyes and looked at him, calmly, and steadily.

"There is one other I have—heard of, whose name is not here, I think."

"Indeed!" he said; "then, that is the butler's fault. Permit me to add it to the list."

"His name is Harry Herne," she said, quietly.

Mr. Head was almost guilty of a start, and he looked at her strangely, as he said, rather coolly:

"He is not a servant on the establishment, Miss Darracourt."

"I understood that he was always here," she said.

Mr. Head was silent a moment.

"That is partly true," he said, with marked constraint. "The young man was a favorite of your uncle's, and—well, yes, I think he spent most of his time at Darracourt. He was, no doubt, useful to your uncle."

"Then he would probably be useful to me," said Lucille.

"Just so," assented Mr. Head, tamely. "Exactly. Ahem!" He folded and unfolded the list. "I'll put his name down, if you like," he said; "but in what capacity?"

Lucille was silent. There was something mysterious about this Harry Herne.

"Give me the list, please," she said. "I will think the matter over."

Mr. Head handed the list back, feeling rather confused and bewildered.

"There is not much else," he said.

"Oh, yes. I have paid into the local bank here a sum which I deemed sufficient for your present wants. Three thousand pounds. Here is the checkbook, Miss Darracourt. If you want any more—I mean ready cash—you have but to write to me—or telegraph. I will present to you shortly a statement giving the total of your income from various sources. It will prove to be a very large one, your uncle having lived well within his means."

"I shall not know what to do with it," said Lucille.

Mr. Head smiled.

"The Court will consume a large portion of it," he said. "You, no doubt, will have a house in town, and—well, there are plenty of ways of getting rid even of so large an income as yours, Miss Darracourt." He glanced at his watch. "We have still a quarter of an hour," he said.

"Would you like to walk in the grounds? Shall I show you the stables? They are considered fine. Your uncle spent an enormous sum upon them, and there is a capital stud."

Lucille said she should be glad to go with him, and they passed out.

"I have no doubt you find the Court rather lonely at present," he remarked.

"It is so large," she answered.

(To be Continued.)

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