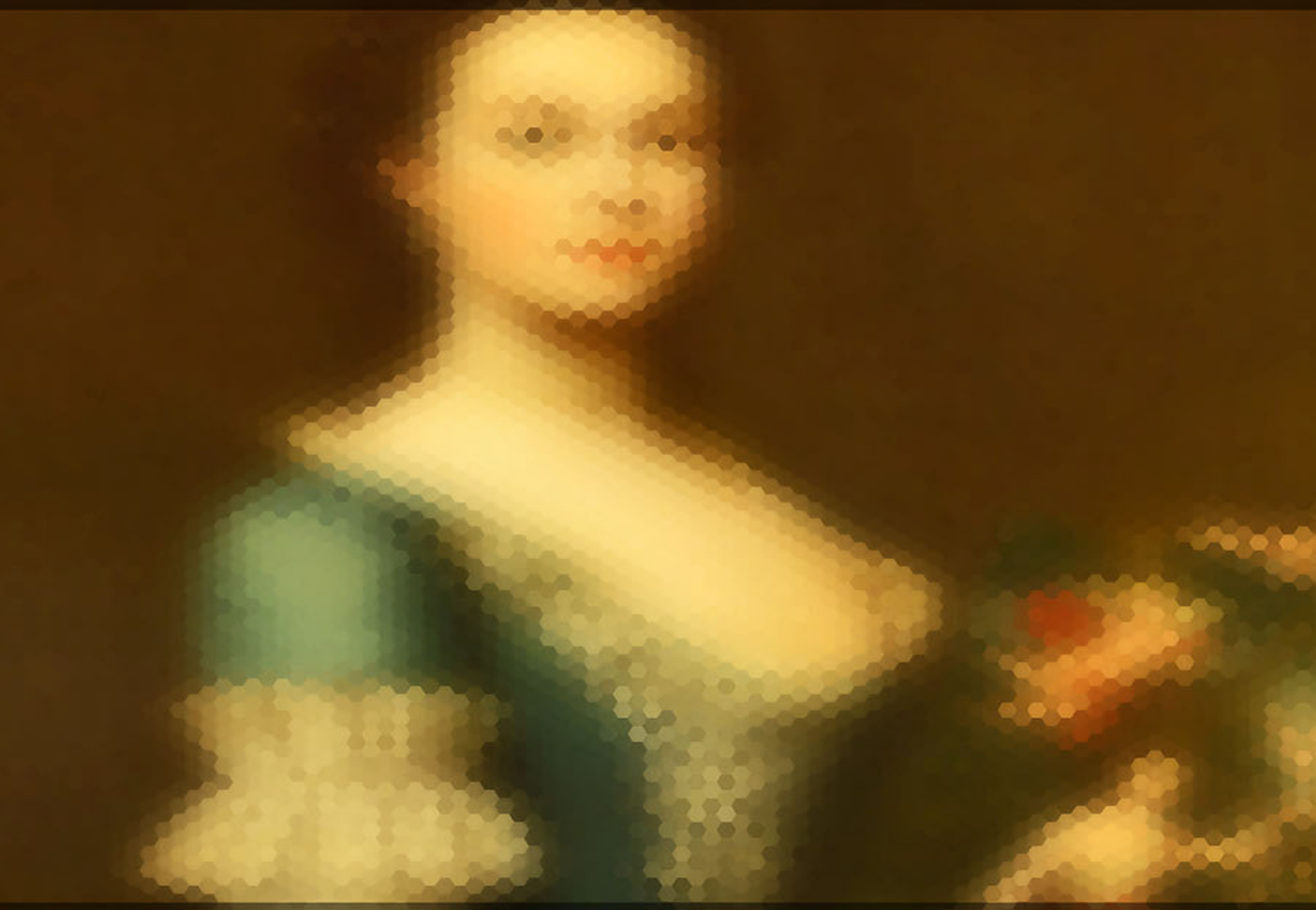
MRS. LOUDON



DILEMMAS OF PRIDE

ROMANCE CLASSIC

Mrs. Loudon

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CHAPTER I.

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The immense extent and beautiful irregularity of the grounds, the unfathomable depth of the woods, the picturesque ramifications of some of the most conspicuously situated of the very old trees, the hour, for it was almost midnight, the numerous bonfires scattered in all directions, the innumerable tenantry gathered round them, the crowd of moving forms extending as far as the eye could penetrate into the darkness; and, quite in the fore-ground, the figure of a blind old man who had been born in the family, and grown grey in its service, playing, with the most extravagant demonstrations of delight, on a rude harp, that instrument so surrounded with poetic associations; seated too beneath a spreading cedar, the trunk and undermost branches of which, together with his countenance and white hair, were strongly illuminated by an adjacent heap of blazing pine—all gave to Arden Park a demesne of such unlimited magnificence, that it formed in itself a sort of sylvan empire, a powerful resemblance, at the moment of which we speak, to what our imaginations are prone to figure of the feasts of *Shells*, as described by that poet of ancient bards and burning oaks, the venerable Ossian.

On an abrupt and rocky eminence, at some distance, but still within the park, stood the picturesque remains of Arden Castle, once the residence of the ancestors of the family. Its round towers of different dimensions, some still perfect, its perpendicular site, the trees and turn of the river at its base,

were all rendered conspicuous by the clear light of the moon now about to set behind the ruins.

In all the ancient deeds the landed property derived its designation from this castle, and it was still customary for the heir to take formal possession of the roofless walls, ere he was considered true Lord of the Manor; a ceremony which had in the course of the day just passed, been duly performed.

A little removed from the old castle, emerging from the trees, appeared the square turret of another ruin, called the Grey Friary, once the residence of monks, to whom at that time a portion of the lands appertained, while along the verge of the horizon, the spires of several churches were just visible, breaking the dark line formed by seemingly interminable woods.

The modern house, a magnificent structure, standing on a commanding eminence, the approach to which was gradual in the midst of a park and woodlands comprising above thirty thousand acres, now poured from every door and window streams of cheerful light.

Figures were discernible within, some moving in the merry dance, others thronging to and from halls dedicated to hospitable cheer.

We have already said it was near midnight: the day had been spent in festivities, held to celebrate the coming of age of Sir Willoughby Arden, now (his father having been sometime dead,) the head of the ancient family to whom the property belonged.

The rejoicings, not only those going forward beneath the sheltering roof of the mansion but those also out of doors,

were kept up thus late in compliment to Alfred Arden, the twin brother of the heir. The elder twin had been born about nine in the evening, the younger not till after twelve at night. To unite, therefore, the two distinct birth-days in the one festival, and thus preserve unsevered the more than brotherly tie, it had been resolved that no guest, of whatever denomination, should depart till the hour of midnight had been ushered in with every possible demonstration of joy.

The county-town, though not above a quarter of a mile removed, was quite planted out: the spires already noticed, and which were highly ornamental to the landscape, being all pertaining of city scenery, which was visible over the tops of the trees.

The clocks of some of the churches now began to strike. A spell at the instant seemed to fall upon all: the music ceased, the voices of revelry were hushed, and that peculiar stillness prevailed which seemed to indicate that every individual in the crowd was occupied in counting the solemn chimes. The nearest and loudest bell took the lead, and was quite distinct from the rest, while the others followed, like answering echoes, in the distance. A second after the number twelve was completed, one universal shout rent the air! The health of Alfred Arden was drank within the mansion, and arms might be seen waving above the heads of the guests: after which, Sir Willoughby, leading his brother forward, issued from the open door, and stood on the centre of the steps.

Servants held up lighted flambeaux on either side, and the old butler, with hair as white as the harper's, presented

a goblet of wine. Sir Willoughby announced his brother with enthusiasm, and then drank to the health of Alfred Arden. A simultaneous movement among the groups around the bonfires indicated that they were following his good example, and the next moment three times three resounded from the crowd.

In about an hour after this all was still, save the solitary voice of a distant waterfall. Every light was quenched, and dying embers, which from time to time as they fell together flashed for an instant, were all that remained of the scattered bonfires. The merry crowd had sought their respective homes, and the inhabitants of the mansion had retired to rest, with the exception of Lady Arden, who sat at an open window, taking leave as it were of familiar scenes which, when the light of morning next dawned upon them, would no longer be her home.

In marrying the late Sir Alfred, the then head of the family, in obedience to the wishes of her parents, she had sacrificed an early attachment to his youngest brother.

Sir Alfred had, however, proved a very polite husband, and she had for years been the mistress, nay, the very princess of a princely mansion, a splendid establishment, and a magnificent demesne; she had possessed every luxury that art and wealth could procure, and at the same time had been surrounded by all the beauties of nature on the most extensive scale.

All had now passed away! It was to her son, 'tis true, and he was dutiful and affectionate, and would always, she had no doubt, make her welcome, but of course as a visitor; and whenever her son should marry (which she certainly wished

him to do), a stranger would be mistress of all; and to the courtesy of that stranger she must owe permission to cross the threshold of her long accustomed home.

She did not mean absolutely to murmur; but there was something pensive, at least, if not melancholy in such thoughts.

While her son was a minor, Arden Park had still been hers, at least the right of living there; but to-morrow she was to set out for town; she was to take her daughters from under the shelter of their father's roof, to become wanderers as it were, on the world's wide wilderness. She would have a house in town, 'tis true: a short season of each year would be spent there, and the remainder in temporary and probably agreeable homes in the various watering-places. But she felt a painful consciousness, that, of the adventitious rank which the mere *prejudices* of society bestow, herself and daughters would now lose many steps; and that the latter must, whenever she should die, if they were not married, lose many more; nay, be probably reduced, at last, by the insufficiency of their portions as younger children, to the state of poor aunt Dorothea, whom she had herself often held up to them as a warning of the miseries attendant on remaining single.

Aunt Dorothea's afflictions were not always of the tragic order, and the remembrance of some of them called up, at the moment, despite her solemn reflections, a faint smile on the countenance of Lady Arden; followed, however, by a sigh, for the subject now came home to her feelings in a manner it had never done before.

So absorbing had been her reflections, that she had not noticed the gathering clouds which had gradually extinguished every star, and darkened the heavens, till all on which she still looked out had become one black and formless mass. At the instant, a vivid flash of lightning gave to her view, with the most minute distinctness of outline, not only the grand features of the landscape generally, but, prominent above all, the ruins of the castle, the rocky eminence on which they stood, the river at its foot, and the trees that surrounded its base. Thunder and violent rain followed, and the wind rose to a hurricane. There existed a superstitious belief among the country people that a tremendous tempest always preceded or accompanied any event fatal to a member of the Arden family. A remembrance of this crossed the mind of Lady Arden at the moment, but was of course rejected as silly to a degree. Besides, she added mentally, if an idea so absurd required refutation, the present occasion being one of rejoicing, would be quite sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind. She retired to rest, however, with saddened feelings, while the castle, crowning its rocky site, as already described, floated before her eyes, even after their lids were closed; and when she slept, the vision still blended with her dreams, as did the forms of the Baron and his two sons, described in the legend of the castle, and all strangely mixed up with the festivities of the previous day, and the forms of her own happy blooming family.

The legend alluded to, and which had given rise to the superstition we have mentioned, ran thus.

Some centuries ago, the Baron had two sons, who, when boys, had climbed, one day, during a fearful thunder storm to the topmost turret of the castle, which was at the time enveloped in clouds.

When, however, the storm was over, their bodies were found, locked in each other's arms, laying in the river at the foot of the rock on which the castle stands. The old Baron died of grief, and the property went to a distant relative, who, it was vaguely hinted, had followed the youths unseen, and while they stood gazing at the storm, had treacherously drawn the coping-stone from beneath their feet; others maintained the only grounds for this foul suspicion to be, that the said stone was certainly found on the inner side the parapet, while the bodies of the youths lay below.

CHAPTER II.

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When Lady Arden arose in the morning all was calm and sunshine.

The storm of the night might have seemed a dream but for the still visible traces of its ravages. The river was greatly swollen, and several of the largest and finest of a range of magnificent old trees which had grown on the brow of a sloping bank, forming a beautiful feature in the landscape, now lay on the ground, literally uprooted by the violence of the tempest. Their fate, however, was soon forgotten in that of two young oaks, which had been planted beside each other on the lawn, on the joint birth-day of her two sons. The lightning had shattered both: Lady Arden viewed them for the moment with a shuddering sensation of superstitious dread, the influence of which it required all her good sense to resist.

Geoffery Arden, the only nephew of the late Sir Alfred, was standing on the grass, with his arms folded, and looking rather askance than directly at the remains of the blasted trees, while his eye-brows were drawn up contemptuously, and a somewhat scornful smile curled his lip, as he marked blind Lewin the Harper, his countenance full of woe, feeling, with visibly trembling hands, each shattered branch of the uprooted oaks, while the large tears were falling from his sightless eyes.

The brothers Willoughby and Alfred, and their three sisters, all seemingly attracted by the same object, issued

one by one, from the open glass door of the breakfast room, and gathered round the spot; each looked playfully dismal for a moment, and the next uttered some laughing remark. They were soon joined by their mother; and the group would have formed a striking family picture. Lady Arden was still a very fine woman: from her mild temper the sweetness of her countenance was yet unimpaired, while the expression of maternal tenderness—and this from the late tenor of her thoughts was unconsciously mingled with something of solicitude—with which she viewed her children, her sons now especially, and Alfred in particular, her favourite son, gave additional interest to her appearance.

Alfred's sparkling eye and blooming cheek did not, however, seem to justify much anxiety on his account; his brother too, though he had always been more delicate, seemed at present in excellent health and spirits, while the three sisters were young, handsome, and happy looking. Geoffery Arden still stood apart, as though there were but little fellowship of feeling between him and the rest of the group.

He was a lad of eighteen or nineteen before the marriage of his uncle, the late Sir Alfred; and from a child had been in the habit of hearing his father and mother, and such of their particular friends as sought to flatter their secret wishes, speculate on the possibility of his uncle's never marrying, and his being consequently heir to the Arden estates, which were strictly entailed in the male line. Nay, his very nursemaid's usual threat was, that if he cried when his face was being washed, he should never be Sir Geoffery. At school, all the boys at play hours had somehow or other

acquired the habit of calling him Sir Geoffery; and at college his companions, particularly those who wished to flatter him into idle extravagance, constantly joked and complimented him about his great *expectations*. Thus had those expectations, unjustly founded as they were, grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength; till, when his uncle did marry, he could scarcely help thinking himself an injured, robbed, and very ill-treated person. Hope however revived a little, on the first three children chancing to be daughters, and his mother began again to say, he might have the Arden estates yet:—stranger things had happened. "And you might marry one of the girls, you know, Geoffery," she would continue—"it would be some compensation to poor Sir Alfred for having no son."

"Indeed I should do no such thing," he would reply. "I should just please myself. It's not to oblige me, I suppose, that my uncle has no son."

The birth of the twin brothers, immediately after this, put an end to all further speculations on the subject; except, indeed, that Mrs. Arden could not help observing that, "after all, the lives of two weakly infants, as twins of course must be, with the measles, hooping-cough, and all other infantile diseases before them, were not worth much."

Geoffery became sulky under his disappointment, and said very little; but silently he hated the twins for having been born. Of what use were they, he thought; for what purpose had they been brought into the world, except indeed to ruin his prospects.

Had they never been born, they would not have wanted the property, and he might have enjoyed it. Now he must go

and drudge at a profession, the very idea of which, after his imagination had been so long dazzled by false hopes, he absolutely loathed.

He had been educated for the Bar, but had neglected his studies. He had been dissipated without gaiety of heart, and a gambler from avarice. His hopes had made him proud, while his fears had made him gloomy. In short, he had contrived to extract the evil from every thing, while he had avoided all that was good. As to his legal studies, he had never read any portion with interest or attention but the law of male entail.

He was a bachelor, and likely to remain such: for he could not afford to marry, unless he obtained a much larger fortune than he was entitled to expect.

There was nothing he could exactly dare to do to injure his cousins; but he hated them both, and kept an evil eye upon them. As for his female cousins, he did not take the trouble of actively hating them, he merely despised them as beings shut out from all possibility of inheriting the property. Beautiful and high born as they were, he would not have accepted the hand of any one of them had it been offered to him.

Sir Willoughby was goodnaturedly weak, and very vain;—his was a vanity however which, when it happened to be gratified, made him extremely happy, by keeping him in the highest good humour with himself. From him Geoffery won large sums at billiards, by flattering him on his play, 'till he induced him to give him, habitually, such odds as amounted, in point of fact, to giving him the game, or, in other words, the sum staked upon it.

Lady Arden often endeavoured to dissuade her son from acquiring so bad a habit as that of gambling, but in vain; for Willoughby, like all weak men, was obstinate to excess: he had besides a marvellous respect for the salique law, and that jealousy of being guided, which unhappily always forms a leading feature in the characters of those who stand most in need of guidance. Yet he was fondly attached to his mother; his greatest delight was to devise something for her pleasure or her accommodation; he was always ready to make her munificent presents; in short, he would do any thing to oblige her, with the exception of following her suggestions.

Not that he always ungraciously refused requests that contained in them nothing prohibitory; he had no particular objection sometimes to do a thing he was asked to do; but a thing he was asked not to do, he was always sure to do! And if it happened to be a thing which Geoffery Arden wished should be done, he could always decide the point, by artfully complimenting his cousin on the *firmness* of his character.

Of Alfred, Geoffery could make nothing. He was frank, kind, and open-hearted; yet clear-seeing and decided. With him his mother's slightest wish but guessed at was a law: his sisters, too, could always coax him out of any plan of pleasure of his own, and get him to go with them. Not so those for whom he had no particular affection; he had never yet been known, in any one instance, to sacrifice his opinion of what was right, respectable, or amiable, to the persuasions of idle companions; so that he was already respected as well as regarded by thinking and discerning

men much older than himself; some of them too, men who had bought their experience dearly enough and who were surprised into involuntary admiration of so young a person, who seemed to have his intuitively.

His brother loved him in the most enthusiastic manner; more than he did his mother, or any one else in the world; yet, strange to say, such was Willoughby's dread of being governed, that even the brother whom he loved so much, had not the slightest influence over him; nay, Alfred was afraid to use persuasion of any kind, lest it should have a contrary effect; and yet, if he ever let it appear that he was in the slightest degree hurt or offended by this unmeaning and dogged obstinacy on the part of his brother, Willoughby's despair would sometimes, though but for a moment or two, manifest itself in a way perfectly terrifying; he would rush towards a window, or a river side, and threaten to fling himself out or in; so that Alfred, though he knew himself to be his brother's sole confidant, and the first object of his affections, was obliged, with great pain of course, to see him led away by designing people, especially his cousin Geoffery, into many practices far from prudent, yet not interfere; and even be thankful, when by refraining from so doing, he could avoid the recurrence of the distressing scenes alluded to. Willoughby had received a blow on the head when a child, which had not then exhibited any serious consequences; whether this circumstance had any connection with the occasional strangeness of his temper or not, it was impossible to say, but Alfred sometimes secretly feared it had. It was a thought, however, which he did not communicate even to

his mother. Such was the family, which on the morning we have described, quitted Arden Park for London.

CHAPTER III.

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While the Arden family are on their way to town, we shall take a peep at the High-street in Cheltenham. Strings of carriages were driving backward and forward, from turnpike to turnpike, while the open barouches, filled with bonnets of every colour in the rainbow, flaunting and waving to and fro, looked like so many moving beds of full blown tulips. Foot-passengers too of all classes thronged the flag-ways.

Among these was distinguishable a tall, large, and still handsome woman, apparently upwards of fifty. There was something aristocratic about both her countenance and carriage, although she was closely followed by a trollopy looking maid-servant, who carried a bandbox under each arm, a dressing-box in one hand, and a work-box in the other.

Mistress and maid entered the private door or *genteel* separate ingress, appropriated to lodgers, of a music-shop; and having the door at the further end of the passage opened, for the purpose of throwing light on the subject, stumbled up a still dark and very narrow staircase, at the top of which they turned abruptly into a small sunny drawing-room, furnished with chintz hangings, lined and draperied with faded pink calico. The carpet was a stamped cloth, of a showy pattern. It was a recent purchase, and therefore not yet faded; so that it secured to these lodgings, as being *superiorly* furnished, a great preference over their competitors. In the centre of the room stood a table covered

with a very dingy green baize, and round the walls were ranged some half dozen small mock rosewood chairs, accommodated with little square inclined planes, covered with pink calico, and called cushions. Either for want of strings at the back, or in consequence of such strings being out of repair, these said inclined planes, whenever you attempted to help yourself or any one else to a chair, flew off, either into the middle of the floor, or if it was the fire you had wished to approach, perchance under the grate. Over the mantelpiece was placed what the landlady considered *a very handsome* chimney-glass, a *foot and half* high, and about three wide; its gilt frame carefully covered with transparent yellow gauze. On the mantelpiece stood two bronze chimney lights, with cutglass drops, only it must be confessed there were but three of the drops remaining on one, and the other wanted two. The woman of the house, however, had promised faithfully to find the rest of the drops, and so restore to these embellishers of her establishment the whole of their pendant honours.

"I wouldn't give much for their promises," answered Sarah, the maid, when, in reply to a comment of hers on the subject, she was told so by Mrs. Dorothea Arden, her mistress.

"And here's no sofa, ma'am," she continued; "how are you to be sitting, the length of an evening, stuck upright on one of these here *ricketty* bits of chairs, I'd be glad to know."

"Why, it will not be very comfortable, to be sure," answered Mrs. Dorothea, "so long as it lasts; but she has promised faithfully, that as soon as the sick lady goes away,

which will be in about a week, she will let me have the sofa out of the next drawing-room."

"A bird in the hand's worth two in the bush!" replied Sarah. "I dare say if the truth was known, they're not worth a sofa; or, if they are, they'll keep it in the next room, when it is vacant, to be a decoy-duck to another lodger. They're not going to let you have it, I promise you, now that they have got you fast for a month certain."

"Well, if they don't, I can't help it," said Mrs. Dorothea; "one can't have every thing you know; and the new carpet certainly gives the room a very respectable appearance. And then there is a chiffonier; that's a great comfort to put one's groceries in; or a few biskets; or a bottle of wine, if one should be obliged to open one. The doors, to be sure, are lined with blue and they should have been pink."

"And here's no key," said Sarah, examining the chiffonier; "and I declare if the lock *ante* broke."

"That is provoking," said Mrs. Dorothea, "she must get me a lock."

Sarah was now dispatched with her bandboxes, and ordered to hurry the dinner and unpack the things.

In about half an hour, Aunt Dorothea becoming hungry and impatient, rang her bell. Sarah reappeared, with a countenance of the utmost discontent, declaring she was never in such a place in her life; that there was no getting any thing done, and that as to unpacking, there was no use in attempting it, in a place where they should never be able to stop. When the dinner was asked for, she replied, that she believed it had been done some time, but that she supposed there was no one to bring it up, for all they had

engaged to do the waiting. "But there's sixteen of themselves, shop boys and all; and they *gets* their own tea the while your dinner's a cooking it seems."

When the dinner did come up, it was cold, and consisted of mutton-chops, which had evidently been upset into the ashes. Poor Aunt Dorothea consequently made but a slender repast.

The next day, while engaged in the labours of the toilet, she thus addressed Sarah; for people who live quite alone, are too apt to get into a way of gossiping with their servants.

"It's a very long time since the Salters have called; is it not, Sarah?"

"A very long time indeed ma'am," replied the abigail, "they was a saying to their own maid the other day (they don't know I suppose as she is a friend of mine), for they was a saying, as I said, that they didn't think as they should call any more; for that nobody never knew where to find you, as you was always a changing your lodgings; and that as to your having a sister that was a lady, they didn't believe a word of it; for though you was always a talking of Lady Arden coming, she never come."

"What impertinence! Well, Lady Arden will be here this season to a certainty. She is to come direct from London; and I'll take care they shall not be introduced to her. Was there ever such ingratitude! People that had not a creature to speak to, till I introduced them to every one they know. I even made so particular a request of my friends that they would call on them, that I quite laid myself under obligations to people. They could find out my lodgings fast enough,

when they were coming to my little sociable parties five nights out of the seven; declaring they did not know what was to become of them, were it not for my kindness; and that the more they saw how differently others behaved to them, the more were they obliged to me; and then making such a vulgar noise about the number of invitations they were in my debt and their grief at not having it in their power as yet to make any return."

"Then I can tell you ma'am," said Sarah, "they are to have a grand party this very night at the rooms, and never had the manners to ask you."

"I know their cards have been out for some time. And who are they to have, did you hear?"

"Oh, titles without end, they say; and generals and baronets, and all sorts of fine people. Mrs. Johnson *sais*, as the young ladies should say, they were determined as their party should *exist* entirely of *excuses*."

"Exclusives you mean, I suppose; but did you hear any of the names?"

"Why yes ma'am; they are to have Sir Matthias and Lady Whaleworthy."

"Sir Matthias indeed!" repeated Mrs. Dorothea, "an alderman cheesemonger, knighted only the other day; and as for his poor goodnatured, vulgar wife, she has been fattened on whey, I suppose, till no reasonable door can admit her."

"Well to be sure!" exclaimed the abigail, "and then they are to have Sir Henry and Lady Shawbridge."

"Sir Henry, poor man," said Mrs. Dorothea, "was only knighted by mistake. I don't know what he was himself, but

they say he had just married his cook-maid; and her ladyship certainly has all the fiery-faced fierceness of that order about her."

"A cook-maid, ma'am! why I am a step above that myself. And let me see, who else—oh, there's to be Lady Flamborough."

"She is a woman of rank certainly, or rather the widow of a man of rank; for she is of very low birth herself; and what is much worse, she is a woman of bad character, which of course prevents her being visited, so that she is glad to go any where. And who else pray?"

"Sir William Orm, that Mrs. Johnson *sais* is such a fine gentleman."

"Sir William Orm," repeated Mrs. Dorothea, "he is a known black-leg; a man shut out from all good society; he may do very well for the Salters, however, if he can endure their vulgarity."

"There is another title," said Sarah, "let me see—Sir—Sir—Sir Francis Beerton, or Brierton, I think."

"Poor little man," said Mrs. Dorothea, "there is no particular harm in him; but his wife is so sanctified, that she will neither go any where, nor see any one at home; so that he is glad of any thing for variety. Strange notions some people have of duty! in my opinion, if a woman will not make a man's home comfortable and agreeable to him, she becomes accountable for all the sins he may commit abroad, although she should be praying for his conversion the whole time. Well, who comes next on your list?"

"I don't think as I remember any more, excepting General Powel."

"He, poor old man, is mere lumber; neither useful nor ornamental, nobody will be troubled with him who can get anybody else to fill up their rooms; so that I should suppose he is not incumbered with many invitations."

"Well who would a thought of their being such a *despisable* set; and so many titles among them too; why to have heard Mrs. Johnson talk o' them, you'd supposed they had been so many kings and queens."

"It was a set I should not have joined certainly; but quite good enough for the Salters, whom I should never have visited, had the friend who wrote to me about them been sufficiently explicit as to who and what they were. The daughters, I suppose, would be excessively indignant if they thought it was known that their father had made his fortune somewhere in Devonshire, by a contract for supplying the navy with beef."

"Supplying beef, ma'am! Why isn't that all as one as being a butcher?"

"Not unlike it, certainly," replied Mrs. Dorothea.

"Well, who would have thought, and they so proud: but it's always them there upstartish sort that's the impudentst and most unbearable."

"It is in general the way those sort of people betray themselves. If they behaved in a modest unpretending manner, very possible no questions might be asked. After their ingratitude and impertinence to me, I for one shall make no secret of the circumstance. And the very young men that eat Mr. Salter's roast beef now, washed down too with his champaign and his claret, will not be the less ready to jeer at the time he sold the same commodity raw. When

my sister, Lady Arden, comes, and her three beautiful daughters, they will of course have all the young men in Cheltenham about them; so that I shall be acquainted with them all; and I shall take care they shall not be in the dark about the Misses Salter, who shall find that I am not to be insulted with impunity."

"And I shall have some fun with our butcher about it," said Sarah; "I shall tell him to be particular what sort of meat he sends to such a good judge as Mr. Salter. Perhaps you could spare me for a couple of hours this evening, ma'am?" she added, when her mistress was attired.

"What for, Sarah? you are always asking leave to go out. I must say you are very idly inclined. How are my summer things ever to be ready at this rate. This mulberry silk has been looking quite out of season, ever since the sunny weather came in."

"I am sure, ma'am, there is not a young person in Cheltenham sits as close to their needle as what I do; but this evening Mrs. Johnson has, of course, the privilege of the music-gallery, and she has offered me a place. I thought you might like, perhaps, to hear how the party went off?"

"Oh, certainly I should!" replied Mrs. Dorothea. "Well, Sarah, you may go, and mind you have all your eyes about you, and bring me a full account of every thing. And notice if there is any body there that I know—and how the people are dressed—and how often the refreshment trays come in—and whether they attempt a supper—and who begins the dancing. The Miss Salters will get partners for once in their lives, I suppose! And I dare say they will contrive to have a tolerably full room; for I hear they have been getting all

their acquaintance to give away cards, right and left; Lady Matthias alone boasts that she has disposed of three dozen."

Sarah promised strict compliance with all the directions she had received, and disappeared in great haste, to pin new bows in her bonnet, and slip stiffeners into the large sleeves of her best silk dress; determining to complete her costume for the occasion, by lending herself her mistress's pea-green china crape shawl and black lace veil.

Mrs. Dorothea Arden, as soon as she was alone, sighed unconsciously; for visions of her early days presented themselves suddenly and unbidden, forming a violent contrast with the whole class of petty and degrading thoughts and interests, to which circumstances had gradually habituated, at least, if not reconciled her.

Ere she had quitted the pedestal of her youthful pride, beneath the shelter of her father's roof, with what appalling horror would she have thought of the chance-collected mob, about whose movements she was now capable of feeling an idle curiosity.

Vague recollections, too, passed with the quickness of a momentary glance, through her mind, of eligible establishments rejected with scorn, of comfort and respectability cast away, for dreams of ambition it had never been her fate to realize.

She paused, and some seconds were given to a remembrance apart from every other, which, though now but faintly seen amid the haze of distance, still seemed a little illumined speck, on which a sun-beam, piercing some aperture in a cloudy sky had chanced to fall.

But it was too late, quite too late for such thoughts, so she went out to pay some morning visits, to send in a veal cutlet for her dinner, and find out, more particularly, who were to be at the Salter's party.

CHAPTER IV.

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Mr. Salter and his two daughters, the former equipped in a new wig, the latter in two new dresses, expressly for the occasion, were parading up and down the yet vacant public ballroom.

The lights were burning, the waiters in attendance, and the orchestra playing; while, peeping over the shoulder of the double bass, appeared a particularly smart bonnet, decorated with numerous bows of quite new ribbon, and further graced by a very handsome black lace veil.

"What can all the people be thinking of?" said Mr. Salter at last; "I have a mind to order the lights to be put out, and go away home to my bed. It would be just a proper punishment for them all. And pray," he added, looking at his daughters' dresses, "what are these gig-meries to cost?" At this crisis resounded the welcome sounds, "Sir Matthias and Lady Whaleworthy:" with quickened steps and delighted countenances, our trio hastened towards the bottom of the room, to receive their guests, now, as by magic, flowing in altogether.

Introductions were endless; every leading bird was followed by a flock, which neither host nor hostess had ever seen before; while, from time to time, the promised titles, those stars which were to give brilliancy to the night, made their appearance, sprinkling the common herd with consequence. Lady Flamborough! Sir William Orm! Sir Henry and Lady Shawbridge! Next appeared poor old General