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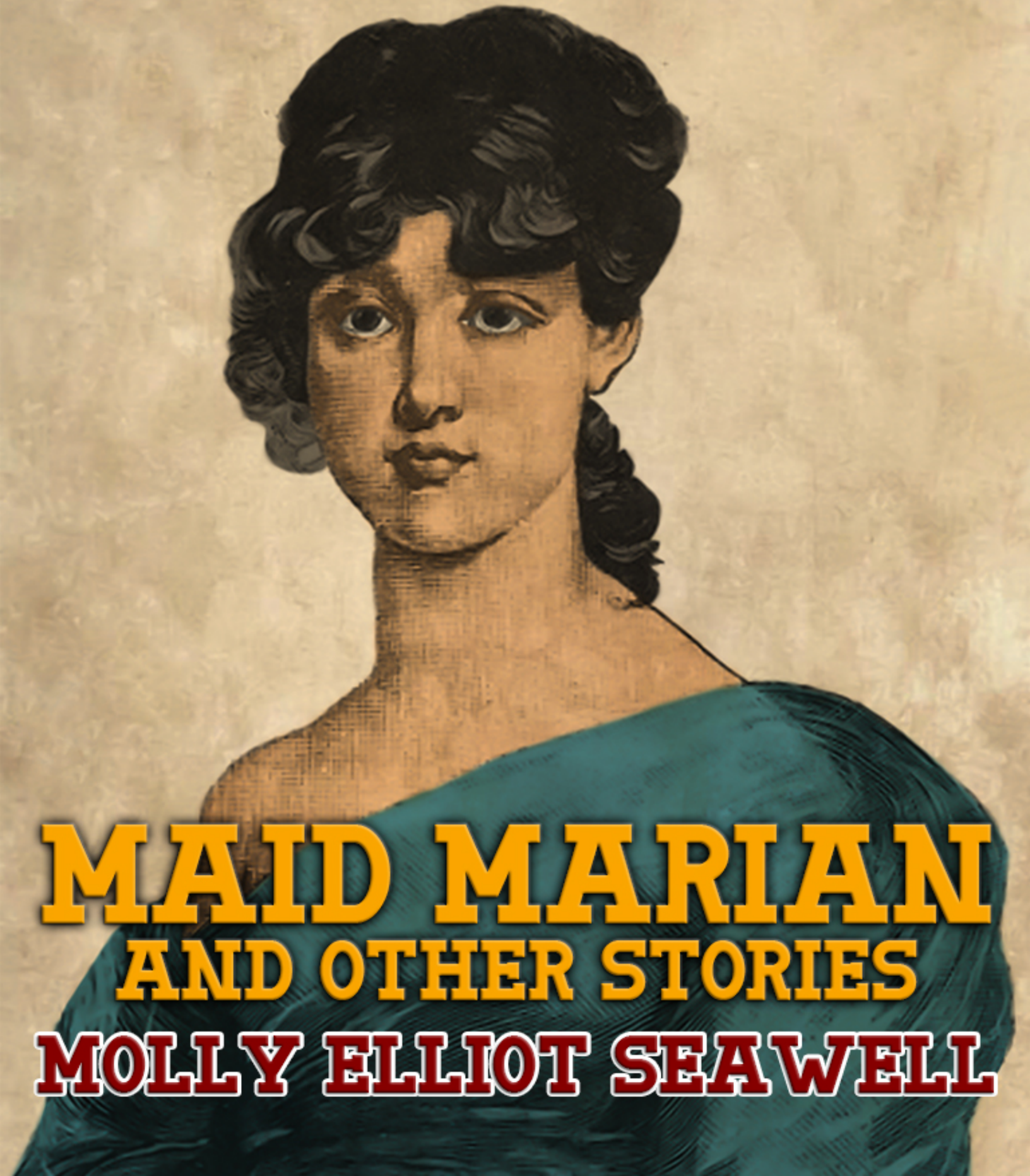

MAID MARIAN
AND OTHER STORIES

MOLLY ELLIOT SEAWELL

Maid Marian

And Other Stories

Molly Elliot Seawell

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MAID MARIAN.

Yes, it was surely the embodiment of feminine beauty—the dark, narrow-lidded eyes, wide apart—did you ever notice the terrible intelligence in the eyes of a portrait?—the slim patrician nose, the hair so quaintly coifed with pearl, the uplifted hand: no wonder that Macfarren gazed at it with something like reverence. You will be apt to imagine that Macfarren was an enthusiast, possibly with darkly curling hair and of a Byronic-Dantesque cast of countenance. Quite the contrary. He was a keen-witted, hard-headed New York lawyer fast galloping out of his forties—a well-made, well-dressed man, with a clear-cut, sensible face. His hair had been trifled with by the hand of Time, and what remained is not worth describing.

Nor was the place sanctified by the lady Marian's portrait a Norman abbey, nor yet a battlemented castle. It was a room sliced off from the place where the housemaids kept their brooms and dust-pans on the third floor of a New York hotel. Macfarren had kept those rooms for twenty years. Meanwhile, bachelors' flats had sprung up all over town, but he was conservative and kept his modest suite of two rooms until the advent of the Lady Marian made another room a necessity. For the portrait was so large—a full-length—and so conspicuous that it would have monopolized the whole of the cosey sitting-room. Besides, Macfarren had a—superstition, perhaps—something about the portrait which made him shrink from exposing it to the vulgar gaze of the waiters and bell-boys who saw the inside of his room, and the jokes—how he would have chafed under them!—of the

good fellows who came in occasionally for a quiet smoke and chat.

It seemed as if Destiny had had a share in giving to him the Lady Marian. Some years before, loitering in England, he had wandered into King's Lyndon, an old show-place in one of the midland counties and had seen this picture. It made a strange impression on him; and he was singularly unsusceptible to anything but ideas: they always impressed him tremendously. He was surprised and almost ashamed of the hold this face took upon him. He carried it in his mind through fifteen years, and once or twice when he had been arguing a case before a learned judge the sedate, black figure on the bench had become Lady Marian, resplendent in white and pearls, and he had experienced a queer sensation as if he were pleading his cause to her instead of to the honorable court. And the other day on a flying trip to London he had suddenly come across her in an auction-room where a sale of antiques and curios was going on, and, with a recklessness entirely foreign to his natural conservatism, he had bought her at a high figure—bought his divinity of fifteen years for hard cash. He had also hired a room for her, and, coming home to dinner on this particular evening, when, for the first time she hung in beauty on his walls, he entered the place made glorious by her presence, and, carefully closing the door after him, stood in homage before her. He had been smoking, but an instinctive reverence made him remove his cigar from his lips. He looked long and steadily. This picture had helped him to understand himself. Would he have otherwise known that under this cool exterior, this nature so distinctly intellectual, existed a sentiment so deep, so strong, so romantic? It came home to him that he was very like those old pagans who first took statues as their symbols and then came to worship the symbols. Then he looked into the eyes, and presently the eyes looked at him, loftily, yet not

unkindly. And then—ah! sweet, strange, delicious moment—the lips parted into a dazzling smile!

Macfarren, moving mechanically like a sleep-walker, picked up a small lighted lamp from a table near, although the gas in a gaudy chandelier flared brightly above him, and examined the picture. He put the lamp down carefully. He was a member of the Nineteenth Century Club, and had heard some queer talk about psychology and theosophy which had impressed him as being rather more baseless and extravagant than Jack and the Bean-stalk. What, then, was this? He walked rapidly into the outer sitting-room, locked the door, and returned. And there, sitting gracefully upright in a chair, was the Lady Marian.

Something common to worshipers in all ages happened to Macfarren. He fell on his knees. Lady Marian seemed in no wise disconcerted, and, leaning forward, held out her hand. Macfarren kissed passionately the warm pink palm.

"Friend," said she, in a soft and composed voice, "how came I hither?"

The question confused Macfarren hopelessly. He dared not tell her that he had bought her—that she came in a box which was opened in the custom-house, and that he had paid a thirty-per-cent *ad valorem* duty on her. He was inexpert as a liar, although quick at diplomacy. He could only murmur, after an awkward pause, "I do not know."

"The last thing I remember," said Marian, looking around the unfamiliar room with calmly inquisitive eyes, "was a ball at Kenilworth, whither I went with Lady Stukely. My Lord of Leicester told me that our sovereign lady Queen Bess had signified that she would not excuse me from my turn of duty as bed-chamber-woman; and then he drank to my success at court in red wine, and I drank too. And I was moderate—I

only drank two small flagons of red wine, a tankard of sack, and one poor half-gallon of good mulled ale."

Lady Marian uttered this quite composedly, but to say that Macfarren was completely staggered is hardly putting it strong enough, particularly as she finished up by adding with an air of charming modesty, "I was too bashful to take more!"

Macfarren gasped as he looked at her, but if she had told him that she had drank a brewery dry, it could not have dissolved the instant magic charm that her grace and beauty had laid softly upon him. In fact his only comment when the Lady Marian looked at him inquiringly, as if to ask his opinion, was—

"That's little enough, Lady Marian, if one is thirsty."

This astounding fib did not seem to strike Lady Marian as a fib at all, and she only asked eagerly:

"Think you the wine was drugged?"

Having entered on his career as a liar, there was now no retreat for Macfarren. Moreover, he was really at a loss for opinions, and his only resource was to lie, promptly, thoroughly, and consistently.

"I think not," he replied, humbly. "A lady of rank would scarcely be so treated in the house of her friends, and besides," he added, with the mendacity of a man in love. "You drank so little—not more than a gallon altogether."

Marian's countenance assumed a look of genuine relief.

"They would hardly dare to play so scurvy a trick on the daughter of Lord Howard de Winstanley. And, although I have heard dark tales of what was done to Amy Robsart—

thou dost know Amy, the daughter of Sir John Robsart of Cumnor Hall?"

"I have heard of her," replied Macfarren, and, his self-possession returning, he added, boldly, "through Sir Walter Scott of Abbotsford."

"Of what shire, pr'ythee?" asked Marian.

Macfarren had not practiced law at the New York bar for twenty years without being able to extricate himself from a tight place. He really could not recall for the moment what county in Scotland held Abbotsford, but he replied, at a venture:

"In Perthshire. Have you never heard of Melrose Abbey, near Jedburgh?"

Marian shook her head and glanced at Macfarren with something like scorn in her clear eyes.

"I belike me not of the Scotch. It is a false and treacherous race, they say. They come to England and tell us they have noble castles and stately manor-houses in Scotland, and, forsooth, they are nothing more than hovels and swineherds' cottages. The Abbotsford of which Sir Walter told thee is like enough a huntsman's lodge."

"Indeed it is not," said Macfarren, earnestly. "It is a magnificent baronial hall. I have been there myself, and," he added, feeling obliged to say something in defense of Sir Walter Scott's character, "Sir Walter is a—er—a most respectable person."

"'Tis likely," replied Lady Marian, half scornfully, "and this Abbotsford, no doubt, is well furnished with household stuff he ravaged from English homes over the border. I think I have heard of him—and that he is but little better than a border ruffian."

Macfarren, seeing it was impossible to rehabilitate Sir Walter's character, wisely refrained from further efforts in that direction.

"Thou art an Englishman, I see," she said, after a moment, "although thy speech is not like that about King's Lyndon. Mayhap thou art from London. Thy sober dress makes me think thou art from the Middle Temple."

This was extremely fortunate for Macfarren, who feared at every moment she would discover he was not of noble blood, and that therefore he should be scorned of her.

"I am a barrister," he answered eagerly.

Marian smiled sweetly: "Some ladies of rank condemn lawyers for mere clerks and scriveners, but my father, the Lord Howard de Winstanley, tells me that at court, Queen Bess doth treat them like lords and gentlemen—and, although they rank not with the nobility, yet are they equal with the gentry and the churchmen. Hast thou been to London ever?"

"I was there only three weeks ago," said Macfarren promptly.

Marian's eyes sparkled. "How doth the queen? Didst thou go to court? Are the ruffs and fardingales as huge as ever? How of my Lord Essex, in Ireland?"

"The queen was very well," said Macfarren.

"Where didst thou see her?" demanded Marian, before Macfarren, who was about to give her an account of the Earl of Essex's adventures in Ireland, could add a word.

"In—in Westminster Abbey," said Macfarren lamely. This was a wretched subterfuge, but it satisfied Marian, who exclaimed:

"And who attended her? Was it at nooning or evening service? And has she aged, as much I fear she hath?"

"She looked just as she has for a long, long time, ever since I first saw her," said he, desperately. Clearly, she would ask embarrassing questions. "But," he added, artfully, "I was not presented to her, nor did she even honor me with a glance."

Marian smiled: "Poor queen! her eyesight doth somewhat fail. But, friend, what is thy name? and is there no entertainment to be had here?"

Macfarren had never before been ashamed of his name, but he wished he could have said he was a Cecil, a Fairfax, a Beauclerk, or any other proud Elizabethan name. He could only say, with a kind of proud humility:

"My name is Macfarren, and I and all that is mine are at your service."

"Well said!" cried Marian. "But tell me, whose roof doth now shelter me? Whose house is this?"

"It is an ho—an inn," answered Macfarren.

"And a good hostelry, I do think," said Marian, glancing around, "though not like the inns of Suffolk. But, since thou wast in London lately, we can not be far from there."

"Only seven days," replied Macfarren, with nervous audacity.

"But seven days! Then can my father come for me, if thou wilt send a messenger by post!"

"Indeed I will," responded Macfarren, with a sinking heart and a guilty conscience as he uttered this last colossal falsehood.

"And now," said Marian, as if entirely satisfied with the proposed arrangement, "let us see what victual mine host

can provide. Beshrew me if I have tasted aught since we dined, at an hour before noon."

Macfarren looked furtively at his watch. It was half-past six—just his dinner-hour. It would be easy enough to take Marian down to dinner, if he could get one of the score of pleasant married women in the hotel with whom he was on friendly terms to go with her; and, although it is always awkward to suggest a chaperon to a girl, yet it must be done.

"We will go to the dining-room immediately. But I must secure a chaperon for you. That would be necessary, you know, to prevent talk," said Macfarren.

"A chaperon?" asked Marian, wonderingly. "Is it a head-covering, lest the wind should rumple my coif? Or is it one of the new coaches brought from France, in which I hear the nobility take the air?"

"It is neither," answered Macfarren, feeling anxious that no objection should be made to the arrangement. "It is a married lady to attend you—" He halted, but Marian took it up at once.

"A lady-in-waiting, meanest thou? If she is of suitable rank I shall be well pleased. At King's Lyndon I had two damsels, daughters of knights, to wait on my pleasure. Whom wilt have to attend me?"

Macfarren went through with a rapid mental calculation. A brilliant idea suddenly came to him. Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp, one of the most distinguished women of New York society, had come to the hotel for a few days while her Fifth Avenue mansion was in the hands of the decorators. He knew her, and knew her weakness for the English aristocracy. She dearly loved a lord, and, next to that, any member of a peer's family. So, after an instant's thought, he responded:

"I'll get Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp."

Marian seemed anything but struck by the name.

"And who is Dame Van Tromp?" she demanded, haughtily.

Macfarren was a brave man, but at that he quaked. Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp's husband was a silent partner in one of the greatest silk-importing firms in New York, and, although Mrs. Van Tromp considered the fact that her husband's name did not appear in the firm-name relieved him from the stigma of work, yet it would be hard to make that nice distinction clear to Marian. So, after an uneasy pause, Macfarren could only blurt out:

"She is the wife of a silk-merchant."

Lady Marian surveyed him with a wide-eyed amazement, not unmixed with contempt.

"A mercer's wife to attend the daughter of Lord Howard de Winstanley? Nay, hadst thou not better call the kitchen scullion to keep her company? Friend, I like thee well, but I fear thou art a stranger to good company."

Macfarren, thoroughly abashed, remained silent, while a burning blush came to his face. The unmerited scorn of this lovely girl was hard to bear.

"Dost thou not know some one of rank to keep me company?" she asked, presently, with some petulance.

Macfarren ran hastily over in his mind a half-dozen names of the wives of titled and untitled Englishmen then in New York whom he had met in society. No, none of them would do; and, besides, he could not take the liberty.

"Dear lady," he said, after an embarrassed pause, "I myself am a commoner. I have no title except that of a gentleman

and an honest man. I can not stoop to ask favors of those with whom my acquaintance is but slight. I offer you the protection of people like myself. You will not want for respect among them."

At this Marian jumped up with the greatest animation. "Now, by my faith, I see thou art truly a gentleman, no matter what thy birth may be; for birth is but an accident. But honor, wisdom, and valor are no accidents. Nor is that noble science, the art of being a gentleman, an accident, and, although I will not go with the mercer's wife, yet will I go alone with thee—for I see thou art both learned and polite; and look you, friend, for all that I value my place, I esteem honor, wisdom, and valor more than anything else in the world." And then, laughing, she added, "Hunger doth pinch me, and thou must take me quickly to the banqueting-hall to appease this gnawing."

Macfarren smiled too. A nature so noble as hers could easily cast aside the fetters of conventional rank. She evidently believed in the great republic of merit, although she could not formulate her belief. She rose and moved gracefully forward to the door which Macfarren held open respectfully for her. As she passed by him into the clearer light of the little drawing-room and the brilliant corridor beyond, he received a kind of electric shock at her extreme loveliness. She wore a trailing gown of brocaded satin, and her long hanging sleeves were lined with crimson velvet and trimmed with swan's-down. A mighty ruff encircled her neck, and her hair was curiously arranged with pearls. Her slender hands were crossed before her. As she stepped out in the hall she noticed the carpet, which had escaped her observation before. She started back.

"What! dost thou lay fine cloths upon the floor instead of rushes? I would like to have a gown of this rich stuff when I

go to court. Canst thou not buy me enough for a train, or even a petticoat?"

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Macfarren.

"But will it not cost a prince's ransom?" cried Marian, anxiously, stooping down and picking up a small rug that lay before the door. "Think how my lady Stukely would fume if she saw me with a petticoat of this queenly stuff."

She held the rug up before her in admiration, but, as if suddenly ashamed of her childishness, dropped it and walked rapidly down the corridor, Macfarren keeping at her side. Macfarren knew but little of the dress of women, and, having seen many startling costumes in New York society of late years, flattered himself that his companion's guise was not much out of the ordinary run. But his illusion vanished when Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp swept out, gorgeous in dinner-dress, from a door opening on the corridor. He saw at once that she was stricken with surprise, and, as she bowed to him, her eyes asked, expressively:

"Who is she?"

Nor was Marian one whit less impressed with the descendant of the Knickerbockers. She gave one comprehensive glance of admiration, and whispered hurriedly to Macfarren:

"What noble dame is that?"

Macfarren felt a certain malicious pleasure as he answered, *sotto voce*:

"That is Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp, the lady who I suggested should attend you to the table."

Marian's countenance changed to one of angry and amazed disgust.

"If mercers' wives dress thus, how can they be told from queens and princesses?" she inquired, haughtily.

"They can't," responded Macfarren, "except that queens and princesses are usually much less toploftical."

"But," demanded Marian, "are there not sumptuary laws that forbid the daughters of tradesmen and merchants from wearing stuffs reserved for the nobility and gentry?"

"There has been a very strong effort to pass sumptuary laws in Ohio and Georgia and Maine and Kansas, but they have generally proved inoperative," answered Macfarren. Seeing, however, his companion's puzzled look, he hastened forward and said, "Ah! there is the elevator."

Mrs. Van Tromp had preceded them, and stood by the door. As Marian and Macfarren approached, the former gave her a look of unmistakable disdain, which, to Macfarren's horror, was supplemented by a command given in a clear and self-possessed voice:

"Give place, madam."

Mrs. Van Tromp made no reply, but glanced, stupefied for a moment, at Macfarren, who turned pale and then red. A flush rose to her face, and, without replying, she turned half around from Marian and rang the bell again.

The elevator then appeared at the top of the opening, and slowly descended.

Marian's look of scorn and disdain gradually changed to one of genuine alarm. She clutched Macfarren nervously by the arm. Her breath came in short, quick gasps, and as the elevator boy threw the sliding door open she almost shrieked. Mrs. Van Tromp, without noticing either Macfarren or his companion, calm as if nothing out of the common run had occurred, stepped in and began coolly arranging a stray

lock of her hair before the mirrors with which the elevator was lined. The boy waited, the rope in his hand, looking impatiently at Macfarren. A lucky idea flew into Macfarren's mind.

"If you don't get in, she'll think you are afraid," he whispered.

The effect was magical. Marian raised her lovely, proud head and stepped gingerly in, the boy shut the door with a loud whack, and, with a vicious pull at the rope, they began to descend. Macfarren saw, however, by the tightly compressed lips and the hands fiercely clinched to prevent their trembling, that Marian was suffering all the tortures of a proud soul in a paroxysm of fear. Surreptitiously he saw her make the sign of the cross on her breast. He dared not address Mrs. Van Tromp, who, though blandness itself in her air and countenance, yet, indicated dangerous possibilities; so to all three the ride was uncomfortable and the atmosphere surcharged with electricity.

The elevator stopped at the door of the dining-room. This opened on a broad, square corridor, red-carpeted, the lofty ceiling and walls elaborately frescoed. The dining-room itself was a noble apartment, seating five hundred persons, blazing from end to end with crystal chandeliers which were reflected in great mirrors placed at intervals. It was full of that subtile flavor of luxury peculiar to the best American hotels. The broad doorway, with its folding leaves wide open, was guarded by a magnificent person who looked like a major-general in plain clothes, but who was really the head waiter; and from within this huge doorway poured a flood of warm light, of soft chatter, of delicious and enticing odors.

But here a terrible development seemed likely to occur. Mrs. Van Tromp, with a slight and supercilious inclination of her

head, was about to step out, as the elevator-boy flung the door open with a bang.

But Marian was too adroit for her. With an indescribably quick and graceful motion she too made for the door. The elevator-boy, with a delighted grin, gave way for the two ladies. He hoped to witness one of those feminine wrangles which sometimes vary the monotony of hotel life. The two ladies stood up boldly facing each other. Marian spoke first.

"Madam, what may your name be?"

Mrs. Van Tromp paused for a moment. Should she reply to her or not? But a glance at the beauty and undeniable elegance of the new-comer, and a knowledge of Macfarren's position in the world, seemed to determine that the enemy before her was worthy of her steel. So she replied, in her stateliest manner:

"I am not aware of any obligation that I am under to tell you my name; but, if it affords you any peculiar pleasure, I will say that I am Mrs. Dietrick Van Tromp. Now, will you be good enough to let me pass?"

"Nay, are you not a silk-merchant's wife, madam?" asked Marian, holding her ground stoutly.

An angry blush rose to Mrs. Van Tromp's cheek. This was clearly unendurable.

"I am. Nor have I ever had occasion to blush for any of my husband's commercial transactions; and I insist" (in the tone of "I command") "that you let me pass."

"Let you pass before the daughter of Lord Howard de Winstanley? Madam, if even for the sake of blessed peace I let you pass, would I not do my lineage wrong, my order wrong? Is not the law of precedence well fixed? Good lack!

when peddlers' wives take the way of peers' daughters, then will there be fine coil."

Mrs. Van Tromp started back as if she had been shot. She turned to Macfarren with a look which said, "Explain." Macfarren saw the road to peace open.

"May I present to you the Lady Marian de Winstanley, of King's Lyndon, in Suffolk?" Feeling obliged to say something more, he added, "The Lady Marian is unused to our methods, and—a—does not fully—"

But Mrs. Van Tromp relieved him of the embarrassment of proceeding further. She held out her hand to Marian with a brilliant smile. "How am I to apologize?" she said. "I didn't comprehend. How rude you must have thought me! Of course Lady Marian could not be expected to understand our methods."

"Ah!" said Marian, with beautiful condescension, "although our ways differ, I make no doubt that humble folk have as many sterling virtues as the nobility and gentry."

"Yes," said Mrs. Van Tromp, thinking her new acquaintance's remark included herself, Mrs. Van Tromp, among the gentry anyhow. "Of course we are very new, and society, outside of a small set in New York and a few families at Newport, is crude. Fortunately, here we have an old Knickerbocker circle —"

"Knicker—what?" asked Lady Marian, somewhat saucily.

"Bocker," answered Mrs. Van Tromp, affably. "Knickerbocker: The old Dutch families. We try to keep to ourselves as much as possible—and we have the AssociationofcolonialdamesthedaughtersoftheAmericanrevolution—" Mrs. Van Tromp rattled this and several other names off volubly, although she had heretofore maintained

a carefully acquired English slowness of speech, and wound up with—

"But unluckily, we have no hereditary nobility."

"Yet," responded Marian, "you do ape us wonderfully well. I have not seen many mercers' wives who looked the noble dame like you."

Mrs. Van Tromp did not know whether to be pleased or not with this remark; but it is hard to fall out with peers' daughters, and, besides, from Lady Marian's occasional use of "thee" and "thou" she rashly assumed that she was one of the dozen or so members of the society of Friends in the English Peerage, and she knew plain speaking was a characteristic of the Friends. So she only laughed brightly and said:

"You'll certainly take the *pas* now."

Lady Marian, nothing loath, stepped out of the elevator.

Mrs. Van Tromp turned to whisper to Macfarren, "So charming! So unique! I declare, I knew her to be a person of high rank the very moment I saw her. And wasn't it kind of her to excuse my rudeness? Pray add your apologies to mine."

Macfarren, with a sardonic grin, agreed.

They were now standing in the corridor. A dozen or more men were passing back and forth, giving their hats and coats to the young man who presided over the shelf-like arrangement of such articles, stopping to chat with one another, and all gazing with unfeigned admiration at Macfarren's companion. He nodded to them carelessly, while Mrs. Van Tromp carefully avoided seeing them, especially those who came suspiciously near her. She meant to monopolize this precious scion of the nobility herself.