THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.

BY "THE DUCHESS."

Author of "Monica," "Molly," "Phyllis," etc., etc.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

Florence whinces, and sinks back upon the seat as though, unable to remain upright position any longer. Every word of his is as gall and wormwood to her, each sentence a reminder—a reproach. Only the other day this man now beside her had accused her of making sure of Adrian's affection before she had any right so to do. Her proud spirit shrinks beneath the cruel taunt he hurls at her.

"You look unusually 'done up,' he goes on, in a tone of assumed commiseration. "Your evening has been too much for you. Acting a part at anytime is extremely trying and laborious."

She shrinks still further from him. Acting a part! Is not all her life becoming one dreary drama, in which she acts a part from morning until night? Is there to be no rest for her? Oh, to escape from this man at any price! She rises to her feet.

"Our drive is almost at an end," she says; "and the heat is terrible. I can remain here no longer."

"You are ill," gazing on her side. He would have supported her, but by a gesture she rejects him.

"If I am, it is you who have made me so," she retorts, with quick passion, for which she despises herself an instant later.

"Nay, not I," he rejoins, "but what my words have uncovered. I have been to you. Do not blame me. I thought you, as well as every one else here, knew of Adrian's sentiments with regard to Mrs. Talbot."

This is too much for her. Drawing herself up to her full height, Florence casts a glance of anger and defiance in his direction, and, sweeping past him in her most imperious fashion, speaks no more that night.

It is an early party, all things considered, and Mrs. Talbot, going to her room about two o'clock, stops before Florence's door and knocks softly thereon.

"Come in," calls Florence gently.

"I have stolen upon you unawares to express the hope that you are not ill, dearest," says smooth-tongued Dora, advancing toward where she sits, "as you left us! I shouldn't have known how lovely only Mr. Dynecourt told me. Are you ill, or tired, pet?"

"Not in the least, only a little fatigued," replied Florence, calmly.

"Ah, no wonder, with your exertions before this dancing commenced, and your unselfish self-denying, as regards over everybody, darling. Nobody could hope even to divide the honors of the evening with you. Your acting was simply superb."

"Thank you," says Florence, who is not in bed, but is sitting in a chair drawn near a window, through which the moonbeams are flinging their pale rays. She is clad in a flowing white dressing-gown that makes her beauty saintlike, and has all her long hair falling loosely round her shoulders.

"What a charming evening it has been," exclaims Dora ecstatically, clasping her hands, as she lays her arms on the back of a chair. "I hardly know when I felt so thoroughly happy." Florence shudders visibly. "You looked lovely, of course," continues Dora. "Your dress was perfect. You made at least a dozen conquests; one or half a one—" with a careful hesitation in her manner intended to express her listener—"is as much as poor little insignificant me can expect."

Florence looks at her questioningly.

"I think one really honest lover is worth a dozen others," she says, her voice trembling. "Its not all her life becoming one dreary drama, in which she acts a part from morning until night? Is there to be no rest for her? Oh, to escape from this man at any price! She rises to her feet.

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