

A LITTLE DINNER.



REGRET to have to use so unpleasant a description, —and nothing in the world would induce me to do it outside of this confidential circle,—but Juliet Scatterbury, who afterwards became Mrs. Bang, was one of the most surprising of liars. Oh, it was so admitted. You should hear the gentle irony of Sam Lambert's remarks about her! His wife checks him, it is true, as to the particular case here to be described, believing that to have been largely her own fault, but the fact remains that Juliet was an egregious follower of Ananias and Sapphira.

There was wide range and ingenuity in her inventions; no one ever appeared to take a more genuine comfort in mendacity than she. It often seemed as if she would rather employ it than truth, even when the latter would have answered the purpose better. She sometimes wore a rapt and imaginative air as if she thoroughly believed in her statements herself. She would romance, for instance, about her early life, tell you of journeys she had made, thrilling adventures she had met with, priceless jewels and wondrous ball-dresses she had worn, and unmeasured social attentions that had been showered upon her. She would make small scruple, if it suited her whim, of claiming that she owned the largest steam yacht in the world, had written, anonymously, the last popular novel, or had sometimes played the part of Ristori or Bernhardt, appearing under proper disguise. With all this, she was young, pretty, possessed of the art of dressing well, and accomplished in several ways.

Her career in the large Western city of — let us say — Minneapolis was but a brief one. Her family were not in affluent circumstances; they had moved about a good deal,—her father had something to do with contracts,—but they were respected, and, for Juliet's part, she was the associate of the leading people. While there she was not thoroughly found out. There were always some who believed in her, thought her a very sprightly and entertaining person, and confidently expected her to make a great match. The young men in particular did not credit all the ill they heard of her, but laid a good part of this to the natural jealousy of their sisters and cousins, her rivals. It was probably not till individuals from different

quarters of the country began to meet casually and compare notes about her that the full measure of her iniquities came out.

Now, Juliet Scatterbury also confidently counted on making a brilliant match. When she removed to New York, and, in some unaccountable way, made one of quite the opposite sort instead, she was still anxious that an impression to that effect should go out among the denizens of the place she had left. The view, in fact, prevailed there, from some artful hints let fall in a few letters she had sent back, that, though the marriage had been a very quiet one, it was due to a recent death in Mr. Bang's family, that it covered in reality a good deal of solid magnificence, and that her position in the world was a highly enviable one.

She had, in truth, married a club man, and the son of a club man, a fellow of good intentions enough, but not at all enterprising and with no very definite means of support. They lived in a small flat, in a respectable neighborhood, where everything was, as it were, something else. Their bedstead, for instance, was a mantelpiece, when off duty; their piano a refrigerator, and the principal arm-chair a coal-box. About the only genuine piece of furniture was an easel, holding some photo-engravings. This gave an elegant air of space, and served no extraneous purpose save to suggest to Mr. Bang his very obvious standing pun as to the facility with which it also might have been something else.

This manner of living was Juliet's own doing; she was brimful of vanity and active social push still.

They had some prosperous acquaintances who befriended them; among these, Mrs. Lambert, a former schoolmate of Juliet's, and friend of her husband, and a person, it would seem, of quite phenomenal good-nature.

"Poor little thing," said Mrs. Lambert, "and her husband has the makings of such a good fellow about him, and they have so much to contend with."

Many the little dinner, therefore, they had at her house, and many the comfortable drive for Juliet in her carriage.

As to Mrs. Bang's peculiar trait of invention, she probably employed it outside of the house, at this time, as briskly as ever, but she did not employ it at home, having found out, in very emphatic form from Jim, soon after their marriage, that he did not approve of it.

One afternoon she rushed in, in a state of much excitement, and said to Jim :

"I have just met the Gradshaws of Minneapolis,—a mother and daughter, you know,—the most prominent people there. They were at Arnold's, and are staying in town a short time, at the Bolingbroke. I hardly knew how I should get away from them, but I made a great palaver about intending to go and see them immediately, and escaped under cover of the confusion."

"Oh," said Jim, with but a languid interest, looking for a fresh cigar in a Japanese jug on the mantelpiece.

"I wish we could think of some way of entertaining them without letting them come near us. Our fate is in their hands; whatever they report, when they go back to Minneapolis, will settle it. I told them we were all upset with house-cleaning. If they should once see how we live——"

"Well, we have n't any patent on it, and can't expect to keep it to ourselves always. I don't know as there's any invention of ours they'd want to steal very much, unless it's the way that piano plays sonatas on the butter and eggs, when you touch the keys."

"Jim, you don't quite understand. I guess you'd want to produce a good impression too, in the place where you used to live, and were brought up. They seem to think I've made a— a rich marriage; that we are great swells, you know, and rolling in luxury."

"They've got left, haven't they? Well, then, I see nothing for it but to pretend to be such swells we could n't possibly associate with anybody so much beneath us. We must cut their acquaintance."

Mrs. Bang repeated this same source of anxiety to her friend Mrs. Lambert, when she happened to drop in upon the latter the next morning.

"They live a thousand miles away, and will not turn up here again in nobody knows how long," she recited complainingly. "Why can't I think of something to do for them? If I could only give them a little dinner in such a charming house as yours. Why cannot such things be done? Why could not one go to a friend and say, 'Here, just lend me your beautiful house for one evening'? It would n't be such a very great tax upon them, and might do such an enormous amount of good to somebody else."

"It can be done," said Mrs. Lambert, whose amiability sometimes ran to quixotic extremes. "You shall have my house for any evening you may select—provided it be within the week, for after that, unfortunately, I expect visitors."

"Beware, I may take you at your word."

"That is just how I mean to be taken," said her hostess, warming with the idea. "It will not incommode us in the least. Mr. Lambert is at the South, and his return is indefinite, and my parents, whom I had been expecting this week to begin their annual visit to us, have written to say that they have put it off a few days longer. I will go to the opera on that night, and take care not to return too early."

"It is too kind of you. Of course I shall only say that we are in the house of one of our friends for a short time," said Mrs. Bang. "If they happen to think that our own is just as good, and is closed for repairs or something of the sort, why, we can't help that, can we?" To this extent alone Mrs. Lambert became a sharer in the proposed deception.

"Oh, here, no nonsense," said Jim, when he heard of the plan.

"I will do it," responded Juliet.

She explained it to him, and began with feverish energy to carry out her preparations for it. It was necessary to manœuvre somewhat for the proper date. The best would be that just previous to her intended guests leaving town; otherwise they might turn up again, in some awkward way, at her supposed residence and, then, all would be lost. She discovered that they were to go on the 24th, and that their tickets and sleeping-car berths were already taken, and, accordingly, invited them for the 23d—addressing to them somewhat the following discourse:

"It has been the greatest grief to me ever since you have been here that we are so upset that we could not receive you at our house; but, thank heaven, in a day or two everything will be in order, and you positively must dine with us on the 23d. I cannot think of letting you go back without a glimpse of our interior, modest as it is. It will please my dear friends at Minneapolis to know that you have seen it and broken bread with us. And my husband as well as myself will be inconsolable if you will not promise to make us a long visit on your next coming to town."

By such hospitable insistence she managed to secure the Gradshaws on her own date. They had not intended to go out at all that evening, but rather to reserve themselves for the fatigues of their long journey, which was to begin at a seasonable hour on the following morning.

A cab deposited them before a handsome house in West Thirty-seventh street. All, both without and within, accorded with what they were prepared to expect of the good fortune of Juliet Scatterbury.

Mrs. Juliet met them in the hall and went upstairs with them herself. The door below being heard to shut again, she left them and

hurried down to say a word, by way of warning, to Jim. It was characteristic of that rather slow-moving person that he had only at this moment arrived, leaving himself no time to become more familiar with his surroundings.

"Of course you will take care to sustain me in all that I say, Jim," she said. "We may have to make a few harmless little—a—efforts, to carry out our position."

Jim began to grumble, but, at this moment, the guests were heard coming downstairs.

Mrs. Gradshaw had a bustling, assertive way with her, and was evidently a person used to much consideration. Her daughter was of the quieter sort, yet quite ready to echo all her opinions, the more especially in the present case as she wholly agreed with them. The two professed themselves delighted with everything.

"Such comfort, such good taste! We thought we had a good deal, but I begin to see now, we don't half know how to live," explained the elder. "Everything is perfect. You really must excuse me if I stare round a little." She put up her eyeglass, first at one wall of the parlor, then at the other. "You say there is a separate bath-room for each sleeping-apartment? And, then, all this patent ventilation, and hot-air supply, and electrical attachments, and the sliding shutters—it is perfect, perfect."

"There is one thing poor Jim insists upon; I don't know that he is such a particularly selfish individual, but he will have comfort."

Fortunately, at this time, Jim had led Miss Gradshaw to the front window, and they were gazing out of it at the dimly discerned architecture of the neighborhood.

"What does the vapor-bath attachment connect with? It seems so convenient. We must have one too," continued Mrs. Gradshaw.

Juliet was a little flustered. "The—the elevator, I believe," she said, and then launched out into a torrent of words, intended to mystify her visitor and carry her over this tight place. "And all the furnace-pipes, and electric bells, and range, and burglar alarms, and stationary tubs, and everything, are hydrostatic, pneumatic, interchangeable, and self-acting. We would n't be without them for anything."

The rugs, portières, astral lamps, an elaborate piece of statuary, and the pottery, even to a choice collection of old luster-ware, were a subject on which she was much more nearly at home. She drew attention to some of these things of her own accord, and deftly invented the occasions on which they had acquired them. The portraits were a more difficult field. Still, Juliet had thought it quite probable she might have to respond to some comments about them, and—though her answers were left chiefly to the inspiration of the mo-

ment—she did not shrink from the ordeal. She had hurried round just before the arrival of the guests, and put away most of the small family photographs, porcelain-types, and the like that bestrew the usual American household, and replaced them with an album full of similar mementos of her own; but the framed pieces were naturally too heavy to be treated in this summary fashion. She proceeded to account for the large heads of the Clamptons, Mrs. Lambert's father and mother, by saying they were a dear old great aunt and uncle of her own, who had always been extremely devoted to her. They had sent their portraits as a token of their warm regard, on their last birthday—the birthdays of both occurring, by a singular coincidence, on the same date.

Mrs. Gradshaw paused before a painting of Mr. Lambert, in Huntington's best bank-president manner, including a red curtain, a column, a table, and a globe.

"Who is this?" she asks.

"Jim's, that is, Mr. Bang's, father." To have made it any more remote connection she thought would have necessitated too elaborate an accounting for the principal place given it.

"Mr. Bang's father, so young?"

There was in reality but little difference in the ages of the two men.

"Oh, it was taken a long time ago, you know; and it really is remarkable how young he does look for his age. It is noticed by everybody."

"And who is this?" She stops now before the likeness of the Lamberts' boy, now absent at boarding-school, painted with an orange and a hoop in either hand.

"Oh, that is only a fancy piece," replies Juliet, nonchalantly.

"Oh, I thought it *must* be a portrait; it's so very like one."

"It's Louis XIV. at the battle of—how execrable my memory is!—Of course I mean before the battle. It's from some old painting. I forget what—but I want you to look at *this*!"

She escaped in this way similar inquiry as to the likeness of Lambert's daughter, diverting her guests' attention to a valuable picture of the Munich school that hung near by. She thought good to affect to scorn it.

"I have never had any patience with it," she said. "Did you ever see such sheep and peasants? Jim sat at Leavitt's sale like grim death till he got it. It cost him ten thousand dollars. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I actually cried the night he brought it home."

Jim, coming up, had caught the last words of this, and his eyes opened widely, but a maid, of a veteran air, now appeared at the portière announcing dinner.

"We have had to let our butler go for today; one of his family is sick, and we shall have to try to put up with the girl," whispered Juliet, confidentially, as they went in. "We are so fortunate in our servants; we have had the same ones, either in Jim's family or mine, almost always. Entertaining as much as I do, even in my quiet way, you can appreciate what an incalculable blessing it is."

There were indications, upon this, in the figure of Jim, who was going in first with Mrs. Gradshaw on his arm, as if he were about to kick backwards in some alarming way, or even to burst.

Nevertheless — for the memory of the precursor must be a good one — Mrs. Juliet was soon mistaking repeatedly even her long-tried servant's name.

"Miss Gradshaw is not drinking her wine; won't you see if you can find some Apollinaris water, Susan?" she said. Again, "The terrapin is a little under-flavored: will you just mention it to the cook, Susan?"

"Jane, ma'am," corrected the woman, in a stolid way, not too respectfully, it must be admitted, but she was secretly resenting the invasion.

At table, in the cozy, rich dining-room, not too large, Juliet romanced about the plates, reconciled discrepancies in the monograms on the silver and linen, and fabricated striking origins for the handsome screen and carven, high-backed chairs. These were a few of the "harmless little efforts" they were to make, to carry out their position. Jim was a person of so little imagination that all this adapting of one's self in detail to the small intimacies of another's household had never once occurred to him as a necessity of the situation, but he could not now retreat, and he endeavored to distract himself from it for the time being, by opening a little flirtation with Miss Gradshaw, who was comely, and did not show herself wholly averse to something of that sort.

Whenever anything inconvenient was trenched upon, Mrs. Juliet began to ply Mrs. Gradshaw with more sweet-breads or mushrooms or red-head duck or the delicacies of dessert. That lady was fond of her dinner, and the policy was generally successful. As to Lucy, she plied her with questions upon the current state of society at Minneapolis, asking her who was married, who were the belles, who was giving parties, who leading the Germans, and the like. In spite of all this management, however, there was presently an inquiry that fell like a thunderbolt.

"By the way, who is the portrait over the mantel, in your room?" broke out Mrs. Gradshaw, addressing herself to Jim.

"In my room?" murmured Jim, taken extremely aback.

"Yes, the door of the adjoining one where we were stood ajar, and we really could n't resist the temptation of peeping in, to see what the retreat of the lord and master was like. Of course it was wholly inexcusable."

"Do try some of the vegetables," hastily interposed Juliet. "Speaking of vegetables, Mrs. Hedges, who has lately returned from San Francisco, was telling me the other day what a wonderful market they have for vegetables there. Do you know, I want to see San Francisco so much." And so forth, and so forth, and so forth.

But without avail, for though diverted from the subject for the time being, Mrs. Gradshaw kept an air of having something on her mind, and returned to it again.

"Such an unusual face and such an excellent piece of crayon work," she said; "we were both intending to speak to you about it."

It was, in fact, that of Mrs. Lambert herself.

Now, Jim had never been in the chamber thus ascribed to him, and Juliet could not, for the life of her, remember the likeness, nor even whether it was that of a man or a woman. Jim, driven to the necessity of saying something, was about to open his mouth for a reply that would certainly have been their utter ruin, but Juliet snatched the words from him, and manoeuvred for time. Could she have got at the key controlling its electric lighting, she would have suddenly extinguished all the gas. As it was, she meditated tipping over her bottle of claret, to escape the topic under cover of a calamitous crash. There was a long-drawn moment of suspense, when Miss Lucy let fall a further word or two giving, as Juliet thought, a clew to the sex of the person. Upon no more basis than this, — in which she was mistaken, — she launched out intrepidly:

"Oh, yes, that is Colonel Toplift — in citizen's dress. He is one of the most gentlemanly men and best fellows that ever was. He comes in on my mother's side, — my mother was a Toplift, you know. Jane, I think there is a draught; just draw the screen a little more. I am sure you must feel it, dear Mrs. Gradshaw; these New York dining-rooms are so draughtly, do what you will."

"Not at all, I assure you. But the one I was speaking of was not a man's face; it was a woman's."

"Yes, such a really charming expression," echoed the daughter.

"To be sure! How stupid I am! Colonel Toplift was sent to the frame-makers', for repairs, only a few days ago. I could n't think for the moment just which one you meant. It is a Mrs. N — Neufchatel, a cousin of Jim's. There's the most romantic history connected with her life. I wish I had time to tell it to

you with all the details. She was a great beauty. The family lived in Portugal. All the men at the foreign legations and consulships and everything were wildly in love with her. They say whenever she left St. Petersburg to visit this country, it was like a perfect funeral. She and Jim were wrecked, on the same steamer, once, and saved each other's lives. It was near Havana. That was before she married, of course. I suppose I ought to be jealous about leaving her up there for Jim to gaze upon all the time, but, you know, they were always like brother and sister together; and then, if there 's one thing I do abominate, it's having your own portraits all around the house, so one must fill up with something."

Furthermore, on the retirement to the drawing-room, the budget of small effects of the Lamberts, which Juliet had meant to put away, but, in reality, had only absently laid down instead, turned up again and fell into the hands of the visitors, necessitating new prodigies of invention. She met them, as she thought, to a marvel. The greatest absolute awkwardness, if not danger of detection, after so many miraculous escapes, arose with her unfamiliarity with so innocent-seeming a bit of furniture as a coal-scuttle. It was of a new ornamental pattern, which would not give out its contents, when she undertook to throw coal on the fire, without pressing on a certain spring. Again, Jim, in order to give himself an easy air of proprietorship, after remaining by himself to smoke as long as possible in the dining-room, undertook to kindle in the library grate a fire of ostensible logs, which turned out to be only a cunning imitation in cast iron, designed to be illuminated by gas—though this, with a sickly kind of smile, he managed to turn off as only his humor.

However, even these episodes passed safely over, and the evening came to an end without disaster. The Gradshaws made their farewells in the friendliest manner. They may have felt that Juliet, as of old, was a little absent in her replies and not always governed by the strictest accuracy of statement,—perhaps they did not thoroughly believe, for instance, the story of the romantic shipwrecked cousin of Jim's, with its numerous variations of scene between Portugal and St. Petersburg—but what seemed certain was that Juliet had a most comfortable home. She appeared a person of decidedly important and luxurious position in the world, and to that, as we all know, much may be forgiven. As to Jim, he was an honest soul, without an atom of pretense about him.

Hardly had they taken their departure when the Bangs—Juliet first gathering up her photographic mementos—followed them. Jim was exceedingly grouchy, declaring he would

rather spend an evening in the infernal regions than another such as this. Juliet comforted him, and defended the case on the plea that once in they had to keep it up. But it was all over now, it was a great success, the Gradshaws were immensely pleased, and there was no telling how much good it might do in the future.

A few minutes after they had gone, Mrs. Lambert returned from the opera. She found the house quiet and everything pretty much in its usual order. The first object on which she set eyes, after entering her room and tossing about a few light articles on the dressing-table, was a valuable ring.

At an early hour the next morning she ordered her carriage and drove away. While she was out, it so happened that the elderly Claptons and Mr. Lambert himself unexpectedly arrived. The former had changed back to an original plan once countermanded, and now calmly proceeded to install themselves. Lambert, like a true business man, hurried out again on some affair, the very moment he was at home, leaving word he would return to lunch.

This being the new situation in the house, about 11 o'clock a hack loaded with traveling-trunks drew up before it in a hasty way, and Mrs. Gradshaw, followed by her daughter, alighted and ascended the steps.

"Is Mrs. Bang at home?"

"She don't live here, ma'am."

"You don't quite understand: I said *Mrs. Bang*," repeated Mrs. Gradshaw blandly. "We dined here last evening, you remember. Will you ask her to step here a moment; it is about something important."

"Those ones went away last night, and Mrs. Lambert is out," returned the maid.

"Went away last night? went away?" catching her breath in amazement at this unforeseen rebuff. "Well, where did they go?"

"They might 'a' went home, ma'am; I could n't say."

"In goodness' name! you mean to tell me they went home? Where *is* their home, if not here?"

"I disremember, ma'am. You might inquire next door," suggested the servant; "I ain't livin' very long in this block."

"Can it be that we have somehow mistaken the number, Lucy?" Mrs. Gradshaw said, gazing round in an unsettled way at her daughter. "I was so absolutely sure of the place."

"No, mamma, it *is* the right number," replied Lucy. "Here is the same carved oak chest—from the royal palace at Dresden, you know—and the chairs—from the Cologne cathedral." And they proceeded to identify many other objects immediately under their eyes, in the entrance hall.

"Let this stupidity cease instantly," now

exclaimed Mrs. Gradshaw, to the flurried maid. "Go at once and tell your mistress we would like to see her. We must catch a train at Forty-second street, and have but little time to spare."

With that, she pushed on into the drawing-room, as having a perfect right to do so. She heaved a sigh of relief at seeing there the alleged portrait of Mr. Bang's father, the little Louis XIV., and the rest of the well-known objects of the night before. But, as they entered, the maid who had waited at dinner, and who had heard something of the altercation at the door came up to corroborate the other, and said :

"Mrs. Lambert, the lady's name as lives here, is out, ma'am, and Mr. and Mrs. Bangs don't belong to us at all."

"Oh, this is a gross conspiracy, Lucy," cried the matron, flushing red with indignation. "This girl is probably the one who has stolen your ring, and the family being away from home, she has formed a plot with the other to evade us in this little way, at least until she has a chance to escape. I think I ought to have our driver bring a policeman at once. You stay here, Lucy, to see that she does not leave the house."

"Is it me steal a ring, me that was with the Lambert family for twenty years? Oh, my! Oh, my! but the poor girls do have their characters easy took away."

She gave a hysterical gasp and then a scream that hastened the advent of the elderly Clamptons, who were already coming down.

"Thank heaven! the 'dear old great aunt and uncle!'" Mrs. Gradshaw exclaimed, at sight of them; "now we shall see."

But Mrs. Clampton, far from being conciliatory, sailed in with the majesty of a seventy-four-gun ship.

"What is the meaning of this invasion of a peaceful home, this brow-beating of our servants," she demanded, full of trepidation, shared by the old gentleman who attended at her side.

"I asked only for Mrs. Bang. I presume you have but lately arrived and do not know the circumstances," said Mrs. Gradshaw, bristling in return. "My daughter unfortunately lost a valuable ring, when we dined here last night. If Mrs. Bang is not at home, will you kindly look on the dressing-table upstairs, where the ring was left? We discovered the loss only as we were starting for our train, and have driven here on our way."

"We know nothing about Mrs. Bang. You have certainly mistaken the address."

"Mistaken the address? and here is Mr. Bang's portrait before our eyes, and there your own, Juliet's great aunt and uncle!"

"Great aunt and uncle? ha, ha!" hysteri-

cally; "we are Mrs. Lambert's father and mother. Lester,"—to her husband,— "perhaps they are burglars and want to rob the house; you must certainly bring a policeman."

"It is a shameless conspiracy to defraud us of our property, Lucy. Who could have suspected it in such a place? Or else they are all mad. But I will not be done out of it so. I insist upon going upstairs. I know just where the ring was left. And do you see that none of them leave."

She made a bold push to go up the stairs, but, being a stout woman, and her way being barred by somebody, this was not effective. There was general hysteria among the women. The suspected servant, pale with fright, was almost fainting. Lucy Gradshaw leaned, weeping, against the wall. A policeman had, somehow, actually been brought, and instigated by the Lambert servants, even went so far as to confront Mrs. Gradshaw in a sort of official way. Mrs. Lambert, now returning, followed almost upon his heels. In the midst of all the confusion, the two visitors recognized her as the heroine of the multifarious adventures of which they had heard; they turned upon each other wild eyes of wonderment, and Mrs. Gradshaw gasped :

"The beautiful cousin from Portugal!"

Next Lambert rushed in, and sustained pleasing Lucy Gradshaw in his arms,—by some unconscious mental process selecting her as the most worthy object of sympathy. But he made a vigorous effort, at the same time, to dissipate the misunderstandings that had settled down upon all the group like an obfuscating fog.

"In heaven's name, what does all this mean?" he ejaculated. "Anita,"—to his wife,— "explain it."

"It means, it means," breathed Mrs. Lambert faintly, "that—that they dined here last night, and— and Juliet must have represented this as her own house. I did not think she would do that. And—and some one left a valuable ring. So I drove right down to their flat, after breakfast, to give it to Juliet. She was not at home,"—addressing the visitors,— "and I left it for her with a very particular note. I *thought* it might belong to her guests."

"Pray, where *is* this flat?" demanded Mrs. Gradshaw grimly.

The others were all so occupied in offering her profuse apologies, with which by degrees she allowed herself to be somewhat mollified, that she could not for a while procure the address. Why dwell upon the long conversation and comparison of notes about Juliet Scatterbury that followed. Mrs. Gradshaw persisted in her demand for the address, wrote it down, and departed to find it.

"I will go there myself: we have now lost

our train, and there is plenty of time," she said, with the same ominous grimness.

"The deceitful, deceitful, deceitful little minx!" ejaculated old Mrs. Clampton. "What punishment is bad enough for her?"

Mrs. Lambert made a feeble attempt to say something for her quondam friends, but was easily put down.

"A quarter of an hour with Mrs. Gradshaw will be a very good beginning," responded Lambert, his wonted cheerful flow of spirits quite restored at the prospect. So, indeed, it proved. Mrs. Bangs had rallied forth that morning, after an earlier breakfast than Mrs. Lambert. After performing various errands, she bethought her that it would be becoming and polite to go and thank the friend who had so kindly lent her her house the night before; the more so, as the visit was, more likely than not, to be accompanied by an invitation to stay to lunch. She was in the vicinity of Thirty-fourth street, going up Madison Avenue, when she saw the carriage containing the Gradshaws, coming down. Not that she would have noticed it, except that they had had their heads out of the window, their eyes glaringly fixed upon her. They waved her to stop, and drew up close beside the curbstone, where she met them. She suspected some unusual circumstance, of course, from an excited air worn by the inmates, but supposed it would be only some travelers' delay, and, seeing the baggage piled high behind, had no idea of any change of plan that could interfere with the successful consummation of events as they had been left. Mrs. Gradshaw in her eagerness thrust the door ajar. Both women opened their mouths at once, but Juliet, with traditional glibness, got in her effusion first.

"What a delightful surprise! Not off yet? It is such a pleasure to see you again. Now, why will you not postpone your going and come and make us a nice visit? I declare! I am going to tell your coachman to drive around to Thirty-seventh street at once." And she bobbed her pretty head aside as if about to do so.

Good Mrs. Gradshaw fell back, all but in an apoplectic fit, at this unheard-of attempt to renew the imposition.

"You wicked, disgraceful, brazen girl, get right into this carriage," she exclaimed, straightening herself again. "Oh, what a cheat and humbug you are! You always were, from a little child. We know all about you; you never lived there; all those people you described were utter fictions. We have been there. It was all owing to the blessed circumstance of Lucy's ring. She left it, and Mrs.

Lambert took it round to your — abode, and we are going after it. Produce it instantly, or get into this carriage and drive with us to where it may be found."

She even laid her hand on Juliet's shoulder to enforce her commands.

"I have n't got it," murmured Juliet feebly, overwhelmed by a torrent so violent that it was useless to think of stemming it; she offered no resistance, but entered the carriage with them.

"*This* shall go to Minneapolis; *this* shall be related to your old acquaintances," resumed the Nemesis, with high and mighty sarcasm; "this is what is called keeping up appearances, I suppose — I don't know why I don't expose you to the people in the street."

Juliet essayed some other feeble fabrications — that she and Jim had had a wager; that some people had different ideas of hospitality from others; that it was a joke, and she had meant to tell them all about it, — but all was overborne in Mrs. Gradshaw's indignation.

"Mamma!" expostulated the daughter, from time to time. Her own way would have been a much better "form," to treat this person with dignified silence, and simply keep clear of all such hereafter.

Finally, "You had a good dinner, at any rate," declared Juliet, trying open bravado, but immediately after she broke down, put both hands before her face, begged her accusers not to relate the affair in Minneapolis, and threw herself back among the cushions sobbing.

"Mamma!" exclaimed Lucy Gradshaw, this time with energy — touched, as women will be, at tears. Mrs. Gradshaw was fond of describing the "tongue-lashing" she gave the reprobate, but they rode the rest of the way in silence.

They mounted the stairs to the flat, and found the very particular note, with the ring. Mrs. Gradshaw surveyed with a supercilious air all the economic make-shifts in the place, which, had it had a straightforward mistress, she would have considered a trim and attractive little domicile. Delivering a parting homily in the same severe strain, she withdrew, leaving the culprit in a cowed attitude, overcome with chagrin.

Juliet did not dare to tell her husband, but somehow he heard of it, and though this particular offense was condoned, the Little Dinner was popularly thought to be the starting-point of a rupture in virtue of which Juliet Scatterbury went abroad to reside in the Riviera, where Jim — having in the mean time done better in a pecuniary way — sends her money to maintain existence on her own account.