

**AT THE  
RELTON ARMS**

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### CHAPTER I.

It was towards the end of a crowded reception in the musician's studio. Most of the people who had come from a sense of social obligation, and they were chiefly the mothers of his fashionable pupils, had left when the musician began to play his own compositions; and those who remained behind, and occupied the position of the Greek chorus with regard to his remarks, were his own chosen disciples, who were of course privileged to stay much longer than ordinary acquaintances. The musician, perhaps, had no effectual means of suggesting their departure; but neither was their homage, being very womanly and obvious, unpleasant to him; and when the well-dressed



Philistines had driven away in their carriages, he abandoned the attitude of the debonair host and took up that of the prophet instead, which at once gave a serious turn to the conversation. He then pounded his own theories, or somebody else's, at great length, and the chorus assented with a gentle murmur of approbation whenever there was a pause. Occasionally one of the elect would ask for some music, and the musician would single out a pupil whom he considered qualified to interpret what he had composed; and in the applause which invariably followed, the performer would be entirely eclipsed by the greater importance of what she had performed.

"Is n't it a beautiful thing? Such depth," said Mrs. Reginald Routh, moving away from the piano where she had just been singing the musician's last song. It was an uncomfortable habit she had of always anticipating what the other people would have said if she had only given them

time to speak; and she had acquired it from living many years with an unmusical though wealthy husband, who only acknowledged his wife's musical talents by sending large checks annually to the musician. On this occasion she caught the eye of some one who had just arrived, and repeated her remark emphatically; for the new-comer was a stranger who had unscrupulously interrupted the last verse of her song, and was now absorbed in prolonging the existence of a modicum of bitter tea, one sugar-plum, and a preserved cherry.

"Is it?" she answered hastily, seeing she was expected to say something. "I suppose it is quite good, of course. Who is it by? I suppose you can't say, though, without looking; and I have n't really the least desire to know. Talking of music," she continued blandly, chasing the sugar-plum round the saucer, "I have really had a treat this afternoon at St. James's Hall. Of course you have often heard Sapolienski? Don't ask me how to pro-

nounce him ; I think another of the horrors added to modern composers is the length of their names. But I'm ashamed to say I have never heard him before ; I have been abroad, you see, and I am not a bit musical either. I enjoyed it much more than I expected though, and you should have seen the ovation he received at the end, ladies crowding on to the platform and throwing their rings at him ! Oh, no, I am clearly not musical. But still, as he is the greatest musician of the day. . . .”

Here Mrs. Reginald Routh found her opportunity, and used it.

“Oh, indeed ? I have never heard of a player of that name, but really there are so many third-rate ‘eskis’ now that we cannot be expected to know them all. I dislike all kinds of sentimental effusion, and society lions, especially when they are musical ones, are singularly displeasing to me. There can be no flattery where true genius exists, and if we were to reserve our praise for real hidden talent,” she paused as the