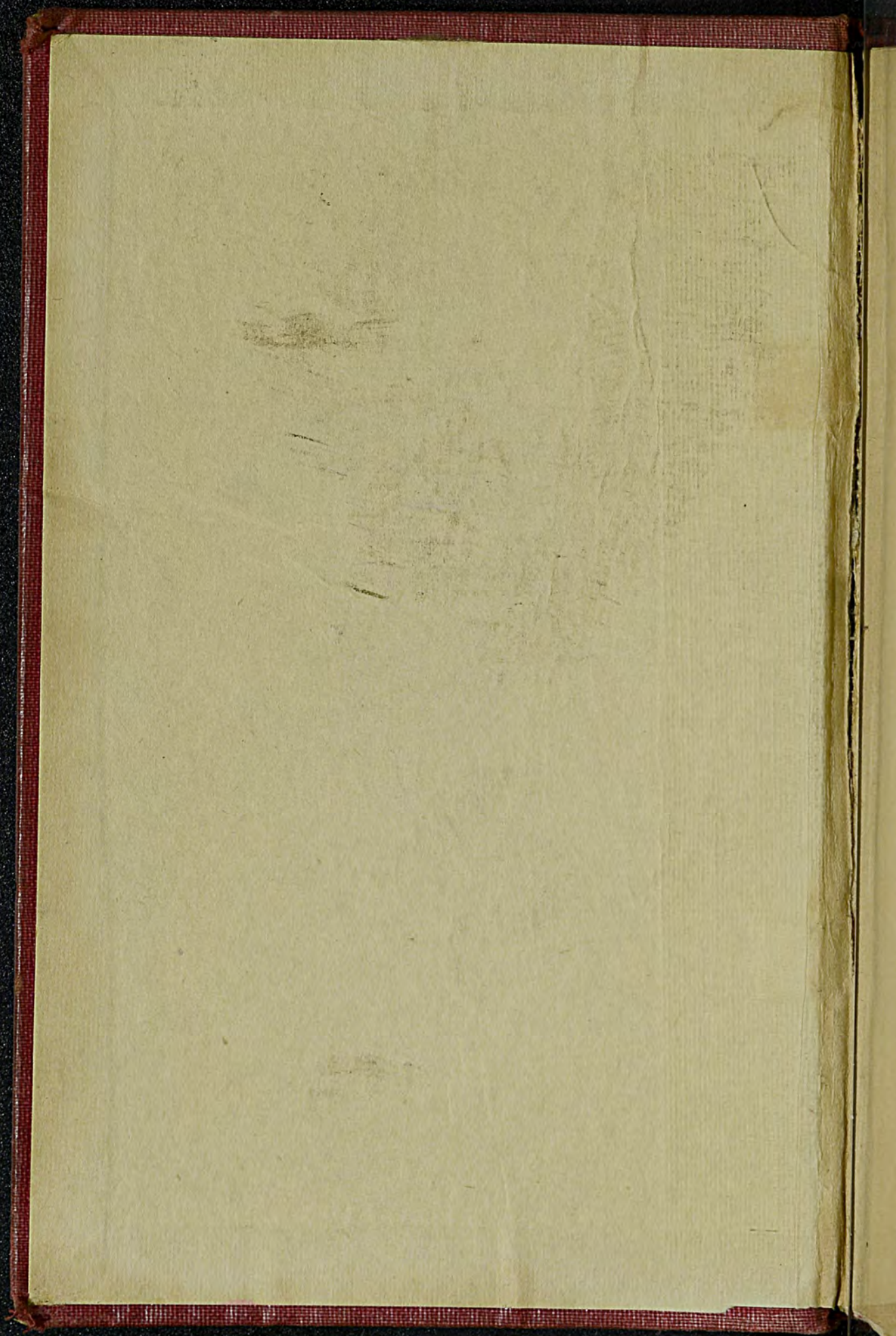
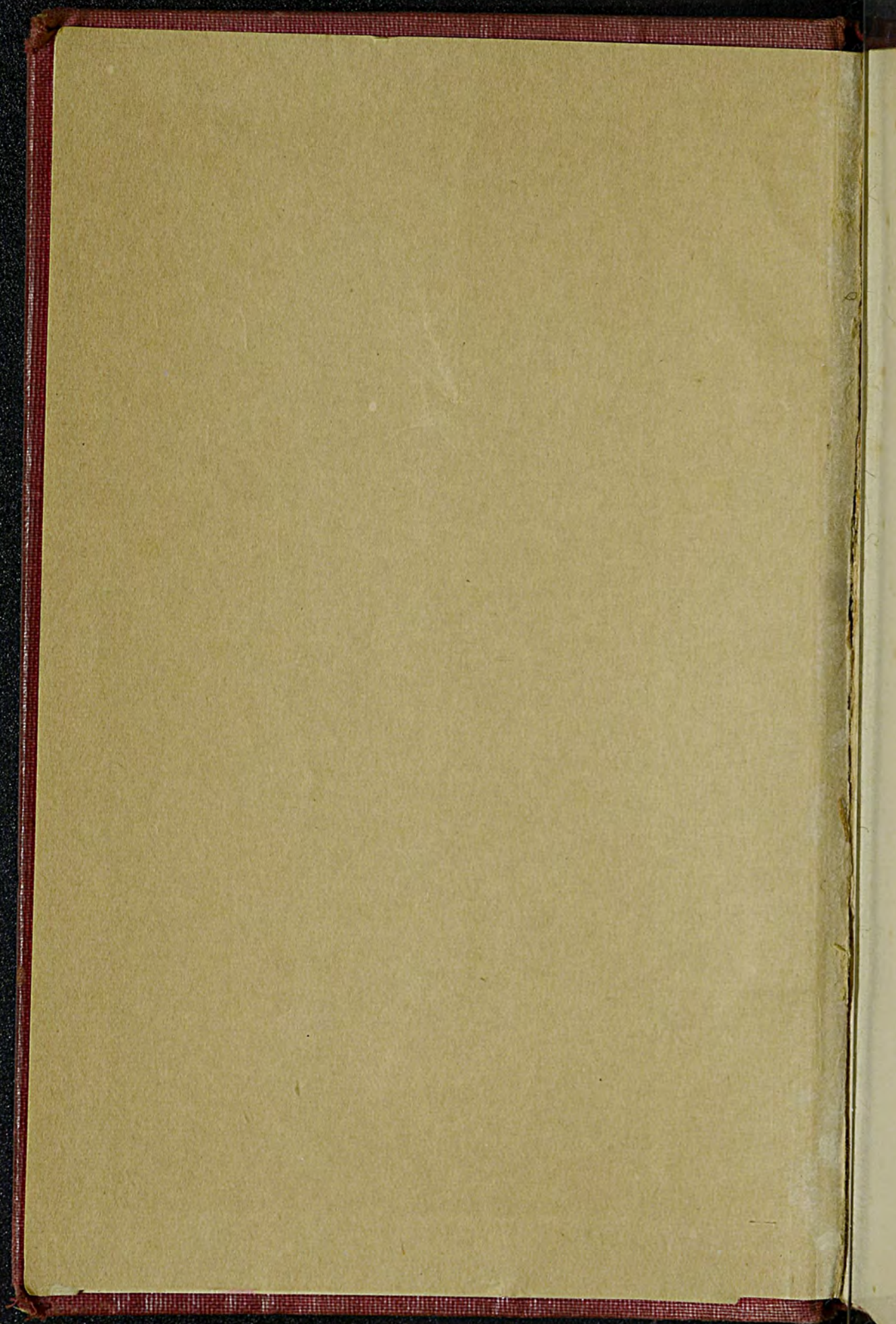


THE
WAR
OF THE
SEXES

BY
F. E.
YOUNG





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The War of the Sexes

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The War of the Sexes

By
F. E. Young



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The War of the Sexes

CHAPTER I

As a result of the rapid advance of women, or—as the women themselves put it—following the natural laws of evolution, man was undoubtedly becoming an extinct animal. Evolution, they insisted, was at the bottom of it all; for was not man himself in the habit of calling woman “an angel”? Therefore, as a higher order of being, they were to inhabit the earth. The men, being so greatly in the minority, could not say much; but they herded together where the women couldn’t see them, and sneered. Angel indeed! Great Scott! Why were women so absurdly

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literal where their vanity was concerned? As though an ordinarily sentient person would not perceive that they merely used the term in derision, or when idiotically in love and therefore unaccountable for what they said and did! But the women held to their original opinion, and put on side.

Some centuries back—the middle of the nineteenth, most authorities put it—"Women's Rights" first came into fashion. According to a writer of those bygone days, by claiming their rights women lost their privileges. But it was not so. From the time they first struck out for themselves they steadily gained ground, fighting their way with determined persistence in the face of the ridicule and contumely of men and women too. Referring to the literature of that period of both sexes, man showed a distinct objection to the mental as well as to the physical advance of women, though this advance—in cases of genuine progression—was

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neither irritatingly nor obtrusively apparent; a really superior mind taking no pleasure in revealing the inferiority of others. But, as in every movement there is usually a misguided and exaggerated party, so in this fuller development of the human female was a sisterhood of ranting, hysterical, blustering, interfering, bitter, man-hating, and generally unprepossessing women who brayed for their rights, adopted men's vices, and, far from developing mentally, lost sight of the real aim of the movement in inditing crushing replies to the censorious attacks upon them in the press. These women were apparently in those days considered by the ignorant—who after all are the most critical—as the founders and principal agents in the movement; though, as a matter of fact, instead of assisting, they materially retarded the advance, proving themselves the parody of a carefully devised idea, and by no means undeserving of the caricatures which many cartoonists

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did not consider it beneath their dignity to produce upon the subject.

It was towards the end of the twentieth century that the subject of parthenogenesis, from being a matter of purely scientific discussion in the universities, developed from theory to fact; and man, himself, worked with extraordinary zeal in the matter of his own extinction. According to one powerful and unorthodox writer of those times, the first to give practical proof of the working hypothesis of a theory which had been absorbing scientific interest for many years was Professor Loeb of the Chicago University, who, at the close of the nineteenth century, is reported to have produced by the aid of certain chemicals the young of sea-urchins from the unfertile eggs of these hitherto unimportant marine animals. Professor Loeb next experimented on starfish with the same success; the male of each kind being entirely unnecessary to the propagation of its species. By his own

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writings Professor Loeb shows that he entertained very little doubt that the theory would work equally well with mammals, and that parthenogenesis would become general; but it was not for many centuries that this now familiar enough subject was brought to the state of perfection which we are privileged to know, and which has resulted, as before stated, in the comparative extermination of man. His complete extinction, so far as the British Isles were concerned, was brought about through war. Someone, many hundreds of years ago, had suggested, whether seriously or with some ulterior motive not altogether disinterested it is difficult to judge, that war should be abolished and general disarmament proclaimed. As a natural sequence of events following this peaceable proposition, war broke out with a vengeance, and spread like the plague, till pretty well the entire universe was infected with it; and, of course, little Great Britain was in the thick of it all.

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A few years before the present time the male population of the United Kingdom numbered, according to the census, exactly four hundred and thirty-two all told, nor had there been such an anomaly as a male child produced for over fifteen years. This was a most alarming decrease, more especially as a big European war was threatening ; for though England had her army and navy as of yore—composed now, however, of Britain's daughters instead of Britain's sons—the majority of women were lacking in martial ardour, and preferred to settle national disputes by arbitration. This system, while undoubtedly admirable in many ways, does not, however, work in all cases, and this was an instance of its impracticability. The women unanimously opined that, but for the unfortunate remnant of masculinity, it would have done so ; but those four hundred and thirty-two British sons took their improved weapons of war in hand—science, and the advance of civilisation, had certainly facilitated the

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methods of bloodshed, the fair sex themselves turning out some very neat inventions in that line—and sallied forth to fight the united armies of the entire universe. And never for one single moment did they dream of the possibility of defeat.

It was a ghastly war, fought on Russian soil, and memorable in the annals of history for its numerous and marvellous improvements in wholesale slaughtering inventions. By some untoward accident the united forces prevailed, and many fair daughters of Albion laid down their lives for their country, while of the four hundred and thirty-two men only one was saved. He was discovered by the British ambulance party after the fighting was over, lying among a crowd of corpses of all nations, wounded, helpless, and almost dead. They lifted him on to a stretcher and bore him off the field, half-fainting, speechless, and unable to resist. He was conscious enough to know what was happening, however. He was aware that the day was lost to

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them, and that the women of Britain would retreat to their own little island and agree to anything that was demanded of them rather than face the carnage again. He knew that he was in the hands of his own side—that he would be taken on board, his wounds dressed, and himself nursed back to life; but the knowledge gave him no comfort. He would rather have been overlooked and left to die with the others on the field of battle than be taken home to England to——

He shuddered and closed his eyes as though to shut out the horror of the thought; for he was the last man of the four hundred and thirty-two, and he was a misogynist.

CHAPTER II

GEOFFREY STERNDALÉ was sufficiently recovered from his wounds by the time he reached England to be able to walk ashore, sufficiently recovered also to shrink from the idea of putting an end, himself, to his unenviable existence; though, when he had been too ill to accomplish his desire, his one great haunting wish had been to jump overboard. The wish, of course, left him when the opportunity for its fulfilment presented itself; and he looked at the grey, dirty sea, with the crests of its short, choppy waves lashed into spray by its own rough gambols and the strength of the cold north wind, with an apprehensive shiver, as he lay on deck, with nothing

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but the taffrail between him and the refuge he had longed for so ardently up to now.

Sterndale was a philosopher and scientist. He was not a fighting man at all, though he had borne his part valiantly in the recent disturbances, as he considered was only his duty. He belonged to no regular force; but when the call came he laid down his pen, pushed aside his books, locked his laboratory, with its rows upon rows of bottles and peculiar-looking instruments, hid the key in his garden with a profound sigh of regret, as of a man parting with the greatest pleasure of his life, and volunteered for service at the front. And now he was returning, wounded but convalescent; yet not even the remembrance of the key in the garden, nor the thought of his latest pet scheme—to improve the human race produced through parthenogenesis by chemical aid, and bring it to a higher and more intellectual development—could reconcile him to his unique and peculiar situation. He was a young

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man, but already marked in the universities as possessing striking ability, even in an age when mental development had reached a very high standard indeed. There was only one other to touch him in scientific research—a woman a few years younger than himself, a clear-headed, clever, brilliant woman, for whom he entertained a half-reluctant admiration, though he had only spoken to her once in a lecture-room after the lecture was over, and then it was to discuss some problem with her over which they disagreed. He had been told afterwards that she was a man-hater. He had smiled at the time, because there were so many men-haters in the world, and it struck him as a peculiar coincidence that the two people who stood highest in intellectual circles should each entertain a rooted dislike to the sex of the other. Yet so it was ; and he recollected that he had felt distinctly obliged to Bertranda Harwood because she had evinced no desire to speak to him again.

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When the ship he was on reached England, Sterndale went ashore with the rest, and, having received his discharge, was free to go where he wished. There had not been much of a gathering to witness the home-coming of the troops, and the small crowd which had assembled was sorrowful and subdued. Greatly to his discomfort, the Misogynist noticed that he attracted more attention than any of the others. The people followed him, and looked at him curiously and sadly ; and he heard one gentle, fair-haired girl remark to an elder woman who stood beside her :

“ We must take great care of him, for he is the only specimen we have.”

He shuddered and hurried on. At the corner of the street he met a cab—a perfected motor worked by electricity—and, hailing it, got in and was driven to the station. He took his ticket for Denbeigh, and, getting into the Devonshire train to escape the curious glances of the women about the station, settled himself in

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2 a corner and waited for it to start. All trains were run by electricity, a power now thoroughly understood, though a few centuries back it had, while being frequently used, been by no means entirely comprehended. Coal had been used on the railways in those days, and women were never known to drive the trains.

Sterndale lay back in his seat and closed his eyes wearily. He did not doubt that he would have the compartment to himself; for there were very few people on the platform, and they were all making for the other end of the train; but, just as the signal for the start was given, a tall, business-like, well-developed young woman suddenly emerged from the direction of the booking-office, and, with deliberate intent and purpose, made straight for his compartment. He half rose, with a view to preventing her entry, or, if that were impossible, leaving the train himself; but she sprang nimbly in before he could remonstrate, and, slamming to the door, sat

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coolly down in the opposite corner. She was a decided sort of woman, with a firm mouth and chin, and a general air of having had her own way through life. She owed her existence, like the rest of her sisters, to the aid of chemicals, and her subsistence to the busy working of her own shrewd brain. Sterndale gave her a quick, cursory glance; but it was sufficient to take in two details, one being the obstinate chin, the other that she held a note-book and pencil in her hand, the sort of note-book one knows by instinct, even when one has not—as Sterndale had—seen it often enough before. He understood at once. She was a reporter, and her getting into his carriage was not chance but design.

He closed his eyes again with a groan of hopeless, helpless, mortified annoyance, and made a feeble resolve not to allow himself to be interviewed, but to change carriages at the very first stopping-place, and so rid himself of this officious,

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pertinacious feminine abomination. The intruder was apparently quick-witted. She noted her victim's expression of disgust, and involuntarily smiled thereat. The train was already in motion, so that the knowledge that her travelling companion strongly objected to her presence did not disconcert her in the least. She was assured of his company for fully five minutes, and if the best reporter on the staff of the *Universe* could not get all the information she wanted in that time, it would be the first instance of failure in that line that could be recorded against Miss Julia Evans' name. She took a penknife out of a pocket in her girdle and sharpened her pencil with irritating precision; then she opened her note-book preparatively, and looked across at him with a cheerful and propitiatory beam.

"It gives me much pleasure, Mr Sterndale," she began, in an agreeable, cultured voice, which fell harmoniously upon the ear, and was the only thing about her that

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did not jar her listener's overwrought nerves, "to know that you have returned in safety from this disastrous war. It would indeed have been a deplorable thing had so promising a career been unduly shortened. I have followed your scientific researches with great interest, and have had the honour of writing critiques on two of your brilliant treatises on 'Improved Parthenogenesis.'"

"Madam," he replied, "you have the advantage of me; for, while you appear thoroughly at home with my name, and the nature of my work, I have neither heard of you nor read your critiques."

"Just so," she answered equably, not looking at him, but at her note-book, in which she had already commenced to write; "you dreamers know nothing outside your laboratories. Not that I am a person of note. My name is Evans, and I am on the newspaper—the *Universe*, you know."

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"Miss Evans," struck in the Misogynist abruptly, "I have a decided objection to being interviewed."

"Of course you have," she rejoined, scribbling faster than ever; "all people have—or say so, at any rate. You also dislike everything feminine, I believe?"

"I do," he replied with ungallant promptness.

"And yet you give your life and energy to improving the feminine species. Isn't that inconsistent?"

"There's so much room for improvement," he answered grimly, "that it appears to me the wisest thing to do with one's life, seeing that your sex is not likely to become extinct like mine."

Miss Evans paused in her occupation, and lifted her eyes to his.

"Do you know that, as the last specimen of your sex in Great Britain, it has been decided to preserve your remains for the instruction of future generations?" she said.

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He started violently, and flushed in annoyance.

"I would not permit such a liberty," he said.

"You couldn't prevent it very well," she answered. "Besides, to quote from your own writings, 'it is the palpable duty of all to assist by every means in their power the advance of knowledge, intellect, and science.'"

"There are pictures and sculpture," he protested feebly.

"What are pictures," she retorted, "in comparison with the mummified representative of the last man in England? And such a man! You have done so much for my sex, Mr Sterndale, that your name will ever be remembered and revered. In me you behold not one of the least of your admirers."

Her tone was tenderly tremulous, and she smiled ingratiatingly, and moved a little nearer. The Misogynist edged uneasily away. He had a horrible pre-

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monition that she was going to make love to him ; they were not all men-haters, these chemically-produced women ; he had had love made to him before, and it did not incline him to view the sex with any more favourable eye.

“ You honour me more than I deserve,” he answered curtly. “ If you think so highly of me as you say, you will at least respect my wishes regarding interviewing. I see that you have already taken several notes, and must beg, therefore, that you do not make use of them.”

“ That’s all right,” she murmured, her pencil scratching a quick accompaniment to the words ; “ I will not forget to mention that.—‘ The great professor,’ ” she mumbled softly, “ ‘ courteously requested that the conversation should be treated as strictly private ; therefore many charming confidences have, owing to the innate modesty of this great mind, to be suppressed——’ ”

“ Stop ! ” thundered the Misogynist. In

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his excitement he rose and stood over her glowering, six feet of handsome, indignant manhood. The lady looked up in surprise.

"Throw that infernal book out of the window," he commanded.

She thrust the note-book into the front of her robe, and smiled sweetly into his stormy eyes.

"Did you feel anything?" she asked.

"I feel annoyed," he answered, with increasing venom.

"No, I don't mean that. But when you rose and came so close to me I experienced a funny sensation up my back."

He jumped aside as though she had been an ignited explosive, and sank dejectedly into his corner again.

"You did feel it?" she said, with a sharp nod of the head. "It must be affinity, then. Strange! but I never feel those sensations with women. Let us analyse it together. Should you think it was animal magnetism?"

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"I should think it was feminine nonsense," he rejoined brusquely. "You will excuse me, madam, but I have only partially recovered from a severe wound, and it is expedient that I have perfect rest and quiet."

"My dear Mr Sterndale, of course! How thoughtless of me! The voyage no doubt tried you sorely?"

"This journey is trying me infinitely more," he ejaculated petulantly.

"Yes," she replied, "I have heard that a sea voyage is less fatiguing for invalids than a train journey; the ozone braces one so. Are you going back to take up your great work again? I should so love to have a peep at your laboratory, with its test-tubes, and crucibles, and retorts. I do a little in that way myself."

"I can quite believe it," he snapped disagreeably.

Miss Evans, not perceiving that it was a retort on his side, took it for a compliment, and bowed.

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"May I run down to Denbeigh—say next week, and interview you in your laboratory?" she asked.

He drew himself up in the extremity of his wrath, and fairly scowled at her.

"I am not in the habit of telling lies," he exclaimed; "and when I say that I object to being interviewed I mean it. I should be immensely obliged to you if you would grasp that fact."

"Don't you think that you carry your diffidence a little too far?" she inquired. "A public character cannot be entirely exclusive; the world has a right to his or her thoughts—it pays for them. I am journeying down to Denbeigh to-day for the express purpose of interviewing Miss Harwood. She is engaged upon a new discovery, which ought to interest you, by the way, as it is on your account that she has taken it up."

"Indeed!" he interjected, surprised for a moment out of his irritation by this very unexpected information. "What dis-

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covery can Miss Harwood be working at that could possibly concern me?"

"She is busy with an experiment for preserving the human body from decay, so that it can be exposed to the air without fear of decomposition. This, as you will readily understand, will be of immense importance in your case, as it will be possible to exhibit you freely without fear of spoiling you as a specimen."

The Misogynist rose in exasperation, and reached down his hat from the bracket above his head. If Miss Harwood had regarded him as a rival, and been jealous of his scientific reputation, she had her revenge at that moment; for never had a man looked more worried and angry than Sterndale did just then. The train was slowing down; the first stopping-place was reached; and the harassed victim of an over-advanced civilisation prepared to get out.

"Aren't you going on to Denbeigh?"

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Miss Evans asked, in a tone of keenest disappointment.

"I am going to get into a non-smoking compartment," he answered vaguely, and, turning the handle, tumbled wearily out on to the platform.

CHAPTER III

STERNDALE did not improve matters by thus fleeing from the enemy; he merely escaped from one trying situation to face another and equally unpleasant experience; so that in his chagrin and mortification he fervently wished that he had remained where he was, despite Miss Julia Evans, her note-book, and her animal magnetism.

When he descended on to the platform he discovered that the station was fairly crowded, and, time being short, there was rather a rush for seats. In his desire to discover an unoccupied carriage he very nearly lost his train; for the signal to start was given while he was still wandering helplessly up and down, looking

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in at all the windows as he passed in his vain search for solitude. But in every compartment some face looked back at him in amazed curiosity: pretty or plain, young or old, grave or smiling, it mattered not; they were all women's faces, and he shrank from all alike. He turned to walk up the platform again towards the engine, thinking that perhaps at the end of the train he might find what he desired; but fate, in the person of a very big porter, who had had her eye on him ever since his hasty descent, took him by the two shoulders, and bundled him into a second-class compartment, the door of which stood invitingly open, in courteous contradiction to the protesting glances of its four feminine occupants.

"Let go!" exclaimed the Misogynist breathlessly; "I don't wish to get into this compartment."

"Don't you worry yourself, sonny," answered the other cheerfully. "I've been watching you, my boy; and I

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think it advisable to put you in with a chaperon."

The door was banged to and locked, and the big porter stood back grinning as the train began to move. She had a huge contempt for the male species, and was not averse to showing it. The Misogynist looked round him with a gasp of dismayed indignation, and encountered four pairs of feminine eyes regarding him in a manner not at all calculated to set him at his ease. One pair of eyes in particular, belonging to a matron of mature years, froze the marrow in his bones, and doubled him up in his corner like a hundred-pound shell. He glanced back at her deprecatingly—almost imploringly, and then unfortunately allowed his gaze to stray to the face next hers—a young, pretty, rather compassionate face, with kind, dark eyes and a sweet and sensitive mouth. In a moment the matron straightened herself and prepared for battle, opening the attack by a wither-

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ing stare through her eyeglass that reduced the Misogynist to a most pitiable state of abject, grovelling humiliation.

"How dare you," she demanded in an appalling voice, "look at my daughter like that, sir?"

Sterndale trembled visibly. He had the porter to thank for this, and he anathematised that worthy pretty freely in his own mind.

"I beg your pardon," he answered meekly, "and hers also; I didn't mean to, I assure you."

Somebody giggled, and both Sterndale and the girl blushed.

"Of course he didn't mean to," said the third—the one who had laughed; "he's a woman-hater. It is Professor Sterndale just come back from the war."

"Oh!" cried the girl sympathetically, a mingling of curiosity and interest in her eyes; "has he, poor fellow?"

"That man!" exclaimed the matron, glaring at the wretched intruder in still

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greater wrath. "That the impertinent coxcomb who thinks he can improve *us*? How had you the effrontery to write such articles as appeared in the *Scientific Review* in January last, Geoffrey Sterndale—articles in which you described us as the 'imperfect production of scientific discovery'? We are not 'the production of science,' sir, but the natural result of evolution."

She smiled triumphantly, as though she had said something clever which admitted of no contradiction; but Sterndale, forgetting for a moment his awe of her in anxiety for his pet theory, took heart of grace, and plunged thoughtlessly into argument.

"In using the term you complain of, madam," he observed, "I did not choose it without consideration, and I think that even you must acknowledge that parthenogenesis is a scientific discovery. It is natural to suppose that you as well as the rest of your species are parthenogenetically produced——"

"Sir!"

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Had a bombshell exploded at his feet it could not have had greater effect. Sterndale collapsed, conscious only of the awful tone in which that one brief word had been uttered, and the glance which had accompanied it, and was still, he felt,—for he dared not look that way,—riveted upon him. The daughter regarded him critically, but with less of friendliness in her look, he fancied; the woman who had recognised him tittered again; while the fourth, hitherto a silent spectator of the little scene, freezingly ejaculated, ‘Disgusting!’ and forthwith turned her back on the miserable culprit, and stared unseeingly out of the window. Sterndale groaned aloud in the bitterness of his spirit, and pressed his hand distractedly to his aching brow. The girl looked at him again, this time with her former compassion. Then she rose deliberately, and, crossing to his side of the carriage, sat down next to him and laid her cool, slim fingers on his wrist. She was very young, but entirely self-possessed.

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Her knowledge of the male sex was limited ; for, though she had seen men occasionally, she had never conversed with nor approached near to one before ; but she experienced no flutter of affinity as Miss Julia Evans had done.

"Edna!" observed her mother warningly.

"He is ill," replied the girl coolly ; "I am going to diagnose his symptoms."

Sterndale drew away from her touch as though she had bitten him. They were all alike, these women ; it was impossible to be in their society for five minutes without their wanting to do something. It seemed as if they could not keep their professions in the background—they might just as well have been labelled.

"Why did you do that?" she queried impatiently. "It isn't possible to estimate your pulse if you jerk away like that."

"You ought to feel honoured," interposed the mother haughtily, "at my daughter's condescension. She is very

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skilled in all branches of medical knowledge, and many great and clever women send for her for consultation."

"I daresay," answered the Misogynist listlessly; "but I am just out of the doctor's hands, and require no medical advice, thank you."

"Your pulse is feeble and uncertain," remarked his new tormentor, leaning towards him, and, calmly ignoring his protest, drawing down his eyelids to inspect the whites of his eyes. "H'm! most unsatisfactory. Something organically wrong, perhaps. I must examine your chest."

She accompanied her words by a suggestive movement of her fingers towards his neck-stud. The Misogynist took instant alarm. With women of this description there was no knowing where they would stop.

"Confusion!" he ejaculated, rising furiously to his feet. "If you don't leave me alone, young lady, you will make me seriously angry."

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"Irritable and excitable," the girl observed thoughtfully. "Now, I wonder whether that is owing to your malady or your sex."

"To his sex, of course," struck in the fourth woman acrimoniously. "Men are always like that. Haven't you read in books about them? It was always the man of the house the others wanted out of the way, because, in his disagreeable selfishness, he invariably made everyone miserable and uncomfortable. It's a marvel to me that those bygone women were such fools. They seemed to let the men have their own way in nearly everything. *I* wouldn't have."

The Misogynist looked at her critically. Then he smiled.

"Those bygone women were more lovable than their modern sisters," he said.

"How do you know?" she snapped. "You make assertions upon a subject about which you are absolutely ignorant."

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It is your vocation, of course, to theorise ; but you shouldn't assert. You didn't live then."

"No," he answered gloomily ; "I wish I had."

"Do you intend standing in the middle of the compartment for the rest of the journey?" demanded the matron irascibly. "It fidgets me."

The goaded man, trembling yet resolute, turned and faced her with the courage of despair.

"If your daughter will promise to desist from her attempts at undressing me, I shall be only too glad to sit down," he said. "But I distinctly object to being examined, and it shows a forwardness on her part that is most unbecoming."

The girl stared at him. Then she blushed, and bit her lip in pretty vexation.

"I think you are horrid," she frankly observed. "I only wanted to sound you. I have never had anything to do with a real live man before, though I once

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dissected — or helped dissect — a dead one.”

His face betrayed the disgust that he felt at her remark, though he was wise enough not to give verbal expression to it; but the girl, watching him attentively, caught the look, and resented its mute disapproval.

“Sit down,” she commanded curtly. “I wouldn’t touch you again, even professionally; you have an objectionable mind.”

“That’s natural to his sex,” observed her mother judiciously; “men have always either objectionable minds or no minds at all.”

“Just so,” cut in the disagreeable woman. “As a lower order of being, that would be readily supposed, even if one had not practical demonstration of it, as we have.”

The Misogynist hugged himself, and grinned appreciatively. So long as they talked *at* him instead of *to* him he didn’t

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mind in the least. He was glad that he had not created a favourable impression, although he was horribly afraid of the girl's mother, and cringingly ready to propitiate her as far as lay in his power. She was not inclined to be propitiated, however, but seemed to consider his existence a personal annoyance, and held forth with withering eloquence upon the demerits of the male sex to her three admiring auditors. The man in the corner listened to this uncomplimentary summing up of his sex with an immovable face, but very mixed emotions. There was something like a gleam of humour visible beneath the drooping lids of his partially-closed eyes, a gleam that faded suddenly, to give place to the old worried expression, as the speaker, breaking off abruptly in her harangue, turned to him with the pertinent query :

“What brought you back in safety when all the rest were killed?”

“An unmerciful providence, madam, over

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which we have no control," he answered gravely.

"The law of self-preservation in some cases is very strong," remarked the acidulated person opposite, who in private life was known as Maria Johnstone, and in public as Lawyer Johnstone.

The matron smiled disagreeably.

"People who take undue care of themselves should not volunteer for active service," she said.

"People who remain comfortably at home when trouble is abroad have no right to criticise those who go forth to meet it," he retorted—"above all, to question their courage."

The eyeglass went up again with deliberate and chilling impressiveness, and in the stony silence which followed his words the Misogynist had time to regret his speech.

"Do you mean to imply that, had my years been suited to the task, I should have failed in my duty to my country, had

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I been called upon to defend it at a time like this?"

"No, no," he replied quickly, "far from it, my dear madam; I could not imagine you failing in anything."

"Then what did you wish us to infer from your remark?"

The wretched man sought wildly for a way out of the dilemma, and, after a momentary hesitation, ventured desperately:

"What I meant was that correspondents have such a way of mixing fact with fiction, that the people not upon the scene get a very distorted idea of what is actually going on, and cannot therefore criticise with safety either in praise or blame."

Lawyer Johnstone looked across at him with a vinegary smile.

"You have mistaken your vocation," she said; "you ought to have read for the Bar. Circumnavigating one's statements is invaluable in the profession."

"He has certainly a very unfortunate

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way of expressing himself," observed another crushingly. "One would not have thought from his former remark that he meant only what he now allows. Prevarication is a detestable habit."

The train slowed down gradually and glided into a station. The Misogynist thrust his head out of the window, and, signing to an official to unlock the door, gathered himself together and left his compartment for the second time that journey, hearing, as he made hurriedly for the end carriage, which chanced fortunately to be unoccupied, more than one eager feminine voice exclaim in passing, "Oh, look! there goes the man."

He slunk into his compartment like a beaten cur. 'The' man, that was what it had come to. *The* man—the only one. Good God!

CHAPTER IV

It was a very different Geoffrey Sterndale who shuffled shamefacedly out of the station of his native place and into the first cab he found waiting, to the strapping, indifferent, cool-headed young professor of three months ago. The officials on the platform, who had known him from boyhood, noted the change and wondered what had caused it. They had never cared for him,—few women did; he paid their sex such a left-handed compliment by his openly avowed dislike,—and, like the lady in the train, they blamed him for returning when all the other men had perished. The ticket-collector who took his ticket, the station-mistress to whom

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he courteously raised his hat, the very porters even, vouchsafed him the briefest nods of salutation ; not one of them gave him a word of welcome, or said that they were glad to see him safely back.

He was thankful to get outside and into the waiting cab, to feel, as he lay wearily back against the cushions, that he was being driven home—back to his work and his laboratory, and the old seclusion that would make life again worth the having, and prevent him feeling the utter desolation of his position. There was another trying ordeal that had to be faced before he could take up the old life where he had left it off, and the nearer he approached his own home the more unpleasant it appeared. His housekeeper—the only woman he allowed near him, who had been in his service, and his mother's service before that, ever since he could remember—had possessed an only son, who, as Sterndale's valet and general factotum, had insisted upon accompanying

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his master to the front. The master was returning to the old home, but the unfortunate James Stone was left behind in his nameless and unknown grave; and it was with the miserable feeling that somehow he was responsible for all this that Sterndale alighted at his own door and rang dejectedly for admittance. The bereaved mother, herself, answered the summons, and, at the sight of her master, did what he had foreseen would be the inevitable result of his reappearance alone—burst into a flood of tears and lamentations, and wrung her hands piteously in the inconsolableness of her grief. The Misogynist looked at her uncomfortably for a minute or two; then he went nearer and took one of her hands in his.

“Don’t cry,” he said gently; “he is better off than I am. I would gladly change places with him even now.” And dropping her hand again abruptly he strode past her into the library, and threw himself disconsolately into his easy chair.

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She followed him, still sobbing, and wiping her eyes as she walked. In her way she was fond of him, principally on account of the devotion which she knew her son had felt for his master ; but his fads and foibles, his misogynistic principles, his hermit-like habits, his very genius, worried her exceedingly. She was often tempted to attack his laboratory with a broom and soda water, and himself with a very generous portion of her mind. The former she could not accomplish, because the door was always locked, the key in its owner's pocket. No one, save James, had ever been permitted to enter it ; and now that James was no more it was quite probable that the dust would be allowed to gather and remain there until the end of time—or at any rate the span of Geoffrey Sterndale's mortal career. The piece of mind—by which is generally understood a person's private ideas and advice made public and presented gratis—was another matter, and quite within the bounds of

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possibility ; yet, when she met the stern, dark, critical eye of the professor, it took more courage than she possessed to carry out her resolve. He was not an ill-tempered man ; but he was unapproachable, and, despite her valiant talk, Elizabeth Stone held him in wholesome awe. Even now, when grief was so far predominant that she could, in his presence, give way to her emotion, the old nervous diffidence was apparent directly she had controlled herself sufficiently to raise her eyes to his face. Not before had she observed how pale, and ill, and worried he looked ; neither had she noticed the knitted brows and the suffering in his face. The sight recalled her instantly to the present, and, drying her eyelids vigorously, she hastened to ask whether there was anything that she could do for him. He nodded approvingly.

“That’s better,” he said. “Yes, there are a great many things you can do. In the first place, go and make yourself a cup

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of tea, and wash your face ; the one will settle your nerves, and the other improve your personal appearance. After that you can bring me a cup, and something light to eat ; and while I am taking it you can ask me as many questions as you like ; though you know as much as I do, and more, from the papers. Heaven alone knows what's going to become of us now ! The country's going to the dogs since you women got hold of it. And the War Office !—Oh, the lamentable mismanagement in that responsible department ! ”

“ Oh, the War Office ! ” interposed Elizabeth, bridling. “ I don't see no cause to complain of that ; it's no worse now than it's always been. ”

He turned in his chair and stared at her.

“ My good woman, ” he exclaimed, “ what do you know about such things ? ”

“ Not much, sir, ” she answered meekly.

“ Will you have your tea weak, sir ? ”

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"No," he said, "strong, as strong as you can make it. And never discuss any subject that you don't know much about."

He lay back in his chair again when she had gone, feeling himself something of a brute. He had not meant to be harsh, but it was not in his nature to sympathise, and he possessed the old-world masculine aversion to anything approaching emotional display. He knew that the aversion was prompted by masculine selfishness; but then he had never claimed to be anything but selfish—it was one of his personal characteristics.

Elizabeth Stone, more from habit than inclination, obeyed her master to the letter. She carefully washed away the traces of her recent grief, and drank a cup of tea; after which, feeling strengthened and refreshed, she poached a couple of eggs, and, with the cup of strong tea which he had requested, carried them into the library. The room was empty; the long

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French windows, hitherto jealously closed, were opened wide to the soft, pure air, and the curtains fluttered gently in the draught caused by the opening of the door. Elizabeth put down the tray, and, crossing to the window, stood looking out. The Misogynist had tired of waiting, and had wandered into the grounds. She could see him through a gap in the shrubbery, and his occupation seemed to occasion her no small amazement. It appeared as if he had been digging, judging by the freshly-turned earth at his feet, and the spade which lay beside it. But whatever he had been digging for he had already found; for he was looking down with a smile of pleased satisfaction at the contents of a small wooden box which he held open in his hand. Elizabeth, watching him, with a half doubt as to his sanity, saw him take from it a big key, which he slipped carefully and tenderly into his pocket; then, carrying the empty box, he turned back towards the house. She did not

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move. It did not occur to her that he might resent her seeing what he was about until he was quite close and had caught sight of her; then, too late, she saw him frowning, and knew at once that he was displeased.

"You have been watching?" he said sharply, as soon as he came near enough for speech.

"I brought your tea," she answered, "and was coming to call you."

"Curiosity!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Oh, you women! How is it you are all so beastly inquisitive?"

Elizabeth made no reply. Inwardly she rebelled against his question, and the unmerited accusation it implied, but she had not pluck enough to openly resent it. She stood aside deprecatingly and allowed the irate man to pass. To her chagrin, though hardly to her surprise, he did not so much as glance at the hastily prepared meal, but strode by it towards the door.

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"Your tea, sir," she suggested eagerly ;
"it will be spoilt if it is left to cool."

"Tea!" he interrupted testily ; "I don't want any tea ; I am going to the laboratory."

Elizabeth Stone stared. She forgot her timidity—her natural awe of him, and remembered only that he was very little older than her own son—not quite thirty yet—that he had been recently ill, and had just come off a journey.

"If you'll excuse me, sir," she said quite boldly, "you must just make yourself eat something whether you want to or no. You're looking that ill you wouldn't believe. I can't stand by and see you do it—I as nursed you through the measles too, and——"

"That will do !" he exclaimed. "I hate those kind of reminiscences. It's all right, Elizabeth, don't look so worried ; I'll be back for the tea in a few minutes ; I've just got an idea——"

That decided Elizabeth. His ideas

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invariably took him into the small hours, and very often twenty-four hours beyond that again.

"You promised you'd let me ask about James," she half whimpered.

"Oh, James!" he said, recollecting, and coming back with evident reluctance. "H'm! yes, so I did."

He did not sit down at the table even then, but walked up to her, and stood looking down into the homely, upturned face with an expression of ineffable sympathy and kindness upon his own.

"James died like a hero," he said, "in the forefront of the fight. He had no business to be at the front at all, neither had I; we were only volunteers, and privates at that. Please don't rise up in wrathful expostulation as you did just now about the War Office, for you don't understand these matters. Besides, I am not casting aspersions, merely making an assertion. We had no business to be in the front, but we were there, and the

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people who should have been there were at the rear."

"Were you near him when he fell, sir?" asked Elizabeth tearfully.

"No. But I saw him drop, and went to him as quickly as I could. He didn't suffer much."

"Did he know you, sir?"

"Oh yes! He spoke to me quite sensibly."

"The dear boy!" cried the mother, brightening, though the tears ran down her cheeks, and fell with inaudible splashes on her plump, folded hands. "Spoke to you, did he, sir? His last words! Oh, let me hear his last precious words—my poor dear sainted boy!"

She paused, and looked up expectantly. The Misogynist paused too. It was not that his memory failed him, but he was hesitating as to the advisability of undressing the lamented James' remark, and clothing it anew in language more suited to the occasion. But truth prevailed o'er wisdom,

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and he quoted Private James Stone verbatim.

“Well, he said—you see they had poked a big hole in him, and he wasn’t feeling very comfortable, and he said: ‘D—— these women, sir, d—— ’em all, I say. I hope where I’m going there won’t be a single bally one.’”

CHAPTER V

THE Misogynist was having an awful time of it. He dared not stir outside his gate for fear of being run to earth like a hunted hare. There was not a woman in Denbeigh who, according to first person authority, would have gone a step out of her way to look at a man; nevertheless their way took them continually in his direction. There was always an endless string of them doing "constitutionals" in the road outside his gate; other roads—and there were many in Denbeigh—were not apparently adapted for walking purposes, although they had sufficed at one time, not so very long ago. Later, growing bolder, they took to coming inside. They called

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upon the Professor, and left their cards, and sometimes flowers. It was Elizabeth who received them, and who benefited by the floral gifts. The Professor was busy in his laboratory, and had left orders that he was not to be disturbed for anyone, was her invariable reply to all inquiries.

"But I am sure he would see *me*," one pretty little lady had modestly insisted. "Just go and open the door, like a dear, and I'll see that it's all right."

Elizabeth had smiled.

"Open the door!" she echoed. "That's what I'd like to be able to do sometimes; I never get in there myself even, not so much as to tidy up. He always locks himself in."

The visitor had gone away with the firm conviction that Elizabeth Stone would not allow anyone to see the Professor; and so she had written him a little note asking him to dine, which note was one of many similar epistles; for the Misogynist was

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fairly inundated with cards of invitation, which he absolutely refused to accept; and, receiving them in such shoals, eventually consigned them to the waste-paper basket without even attempting to read them first.

They worried him terribly, these women, and they alarmed him too; he never felt quite safe from invasion, except when shut up in his laboratory, although the doors of the house were always kept cautiously barred, and Elizabeth viewed all comers with the front door on the chain. He would have lived in his laboratory entirely had that been practicable; but he was a man as well as a scientist, and he possessed certain small male weaknesses, and an inordinate love of comfort which would not be denied. When he was not enchained by a brilliant idea, he would lounge in his easy chair in the library, smoking and reading, or enjoy himself in the open air. He still occupied the library, but he now confined his outdoor pursuits to a quiet stroll

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in his own grounds in the small hours of the morning.

Twice Miss Julia Evans journeyed down expressly to interview him, and twice she had the sorry satisfaction of interviewing Elizabeth Stone instead through the inhospitable crack of the front door. She wrote a description to the paper of her fruitless errand, and commented smartly on the peculiarity of the man who so persistently and consistently denied himself to everyone.

La Papillon read the account over the mid-day meal which she called her breakfast. She drew her handsome brows together thoughtfully when she had finished reading it, and then threw the paper down with a triumphant laugh—a laugh that, had it been less noisy, would have been peculiarly musical and sweet, instead of, as it was, hopelessly vulgar.

"*I* will see him," she cried, "this Sir Galahad of Denbeigh. Unless I am greatly mistaken, there will be something

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of the old Adam in him, misogynist though he be. Oh yes! I'll see him; you can lay odds on that."

And so it came about that La Papillon journeyed down to Denbeigh too.

It was evening, and Sterndale sat smoking in the library, enjoying a well-earned rest after two tiring days of uninterrupted labour. The shutters were closed and the lamp lighted, the door standing partly open for ventilating purposes. Elizabeth had retired to bed, and the house was very silent, with the stillness which oppresses some people, but which to the Misogynist felt merely peaceful with the pleasant repose of night. He was not reading, and he was not thinking particularly deeply, so that in the great silence the slightest sound was plainly audible. There was a sound in the passage without. It was not a loud noise; it was rather like a very light footfall—and Elizabeth was heavy on her feet. Sterndale brought his head round with a jerk, and fixed his

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eyes expectantly upon the half-open door. It opened wider. The outer passage was lighted by electricity, and the cold, clear light shone brightly on a brilliant figure beneath—the figure of a woman, tall and graceful, with beautifully moulded limbs, and a boldly handsome, laughing face. It was La Papillon, the danseuse, the woman with the proud reputation of possessing the finest limbs in Europe. Sterndale knew her well enough by sight. He had watched her dance once, and had seen portraits of her in every conceivable attitude in the rooms of his male friends. Even James Stone had had one which he had taken with him to the front. La Papillon was popular; but she, like Sterndale, belonged to a class which was rapidly dying out—the danseuse's occupation was gone with the extinction of man; their species fell together, and the time for that fall had come. Each represented the last of their type, a fact they both realised perfectly as they faced

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one another in the glare of the electric light—the one laughing, triumphant, defiant; the other stern, inflexible, coldly disapproving.

Sterndale neither moved nor spoke; but the woman, with a quick little laugh, advanced further into the room, and, throwing back the crimson cloak that she was wearing, stood revealed, a perfect embodiment of finely-developed womanhood. The beautiful figure, its natural curves unconfined by artificial support of any kind, was clad in flesh-coloured tights, with a girdle of rubies about the waist. Her bosom and arms were bare; while fastening the apology for a garment at the shoulders were two small, green-enamelled snakes with ruby-studded heads. Over the whole, veiling though not concealing, fell a loose, diaphanous robe, every movement of which caught the light and imprisoned it, to fling it back with a scintillating radiance that dazzled the watcher as repeated lightning might do.

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The Misogynist looked at her in curious wonderment, with something of admiration in his glance as well. Then he threw away his cigar and rose impatiently to his feet.

"Who let you in here?" he demanded, in a tone that was barely civil.

"That's all right, old boy," responded his visitor equably; "don't look so fierce. I climbed up the ivy and in at the attic window, and very nearly broke my precious neck in the attempt."

"Why did you take so much trouble?" he asked.

"Because I heard that you weren't receiving, and determined that you should receive me."

"Oh, indeed! But still, why?"

"Well, you're a man, you see."

"Thank you," he answered. "It's quite a relief to be called 'a' man instead of 'the' man."

She laughed loudly.

"Yes, I suppose that's the size of it.

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You're 'the' man, and I'm 'the' danseuse. I'll dance for you till all's blue if you like."

"You are very kind," he said, "but I shouldn't like you to go to further trouble on my account, unless putting on your cloak is a trouble,"

"Who're you having?" she queried, seating herself astride on a chair, her round white arms folded on the back of it, her dimpled chin resting upon them. "You can't come that game over me, Geoff, old man; I wasn't born yesterday. I've seen you in the stalls at the 'Gid,' too—I'll stake my life on it."

"That's a big stake," was all he vouchsafed.

"Didn't you think I danced killingly? Own up, honest, now."

"No," he answered, "I didn't."

"What then?"

"I considered it a very clever performance, and——"

"And what?"

"And very indecent."

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"Oh!" She gave him a hard stare, and then broke into another discordant laugh.

"Chuck it!" she cried; "I hate a goody pose. Wouldn't you like to come and say your prayers at my knee? You can if you like; I'm used to it."

"I wish you'd drop your pose," he said irritably, "and sit in your chair instead of astride it."

"You are a rum sort," she commented, complying with the request nevertheless. "I've heard a lot about you, and always wanted to meet you. They call you 'the Prig' in town. You are a bit of one. Get out the fiz, old boy, and let's be sociable. I'm as dry as your scientific articles on 'Improved Parthenogenesis.' By the way, what rot you write about that!"

"Do I?" he responded imperturbably. "Perhaps you are not the best of critics."

"Am I not?" she cried, springing to her feet and raising her arms gracefully above her head. "Do you think you

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could improve upon that, idiot, though you worked in your laboratory day and night?"

"No," he answered curtly, regarding the perfect symmetry before him with reluctant admiration. "But my subject does not bear upon physical development so much as the higher attributes of the mind. What is the use of a perfect human body without a perfect mind? Any animal might be perfect of form."

"A perfect mind!" scoffed La Papillon. "Have you one?"

"No," he answered. "It was realising the want of it that induced me to take up the subject first of all. Don't you feel the want of it, too, sometimes?—at night when you are alone, when the littleness of your life seems to fall from you like a garment, and you stand face to face with the limitless vastness of the unknown, and feel a longing for higher things? The attainment of that longing is what I wish to accomplish, and to hand down to the

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children of the future as the result of my life's work. It is when I meet with such women as you that I feel how necessary, and how hopeless, the task is."

"Dr Maud Davids is the first specialist on insanity. I should consult her, if I were you," La Papillon remarked, reseating herself in her former inelegant position, and eyeing him critically over the back of her chair. "You got a knock on the head, I suppose? You were a bit of a jossler to go to the front at all. No one would have said anything if you had stopped at home to play with your bottles and things. It was rather expected that you would."

He threw himself into his chair again with a weary sigh, and looked at the woman appealingly.

"Did you come here for any other purpose than that of forcing your way in where you knew such an intrusion would be particularly displeasing?" he inquired. "Because, if so, I should be much obliged

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if you would state the reason of your visit as quickly as possible. It is getting late."

La Papillon literally screamed with laughter.

"Oh, you dear old prig!" she exclaimed, "you do keep up the rôle well. At the present moment you look like an inspired idiot. Getting late, is it? What of that?"

She was off her chair again, and gliding about the room in graceful gyrations, her gestures the very poetry of movement. The Misogynist watched her in bewildered fascination—admiration and abhorrence strangely commingled. She paused a few feet in front of him, and swayed her beautiful body about in imitation of a serpent, with a serpent's subtle grace and power of fascination. All the light in the room seemed concentrated on that swaying, glittering form. The filmy drapery, which for dazzling brilliancy might have been composed of imprisoned sunbeams, clung caressingly to her limbs, and outlined the perfect contour in a blinding line of fire.

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Then suddenly she caught the cobwebby substance and whirled it about her until it assumed the appearance of large translucent wings. The metamorphosis was complete, and the serpent yielded place to the radiant butterfly.

The Misogynist sat motionless watching her with a new expression in his eyes, that changed as the glittering movements ceased, and the diaphanous wings folded slowly about her form once more. He uttered an exclamation between admiration and regret. The spell of her dancing was upon him; he was fascinated in spite of himself. It was small wonder, after all, that La Papillon had won all hearts. She was an enchantress, and knew how to use her power. He felt afraid of her, and uncertain of himself.

She laughed as she watched him, and the triumph she was feeling betrayed itself in the sound. She bent slightly forward and stretched out her two arms towards him with a tender, half-mocking smile;

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then, with a quick, unexpected movement, she fell on her knees beside him, and wound her arms about his neck. At the contact he sat bolt upright in his chair, his face stern and set ; but the spell of her dancing was on him still, and held him, as it were, enchained.

"Get up!" he cried hoarsely, nervously attempting to shake her off. "In the name of your sex, get up. Do you forget that you are a woman?"

"I forget everything except that you are *the* man," she answered, clinging closer to him and smiling up in his angry face. "Drop it, Geoff; don't be a prig. Just lay your head on my breast, dear boy, and tell me how beautiful I am."

She was beautiful enough in very truth, with a beauty that would lure most men to destruction, and no doubt had done so in days gone by. Even Sterndale experienced the fatal magnetism of her sex, and the touch of her soft, bare arm against his cheek sent a thrill through

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every fibre of his being that was not due alone to disgust. He tried to loosen the clasped hands that were locked tightly behind his neck; but the woman only pressed closer, and laid her laughing lips against his.

"Kiss me, Geoffrey," she whispered; and her eyes looked up into his, large, dark, appealing, and most wondrously melting and soft.

"Kiss me," she repeated imperiously, "kiss me. You are so cold, so indifferent! Tell me, have you never loved? You need not answer; I know you haven't: you don't know how. But I will teach you. You shall enter your Eden with me."

She pressed her face against his face, and drew herself up till she lay in his arms, with her head upon his shoulder, her dark tresses mingling with his lighter hair; and the filmy, cobwebby garment she was wearing lay across his knees in shimmery, clinging folds. He looked down at it, and

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at the radiant form in his arms, and, for the first time in his life, realised what temptation meant, and the attractive power of sex. He desisted from his efforts to free himself, and sat still under her caresses. La Papillon felt her first step to victory, and her lips clung to his again, while the smile on them grew more tender.

"Love me," she murmured, her voice dropping to the softest, most dulcet tones. "Lay your lips to my lips, Geoffrey, and your head upon my breast. Your nature cannot help responding to mine; for I love you—I want you. You are mine!—mine! —mine!"

Sterndale felt himself yielding, and knew that without some effort the woman would win; and her victory would mean to him the loss of all his cherished ideals, the loss of his years of labour—the ruin and failure of his life.

He pulled himself together, and, thrusting her roughly on one side, rose to his feet. She slipped to the floor again, and

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clung desperately to his knees. She knew that he was trying to retrace that first step, and was afraid that he might succeed. The triumphant light in her eyes died out, and left them anxious and beseeching. She gazed up at him half-fearfully, while her bosom rose and fell tumultuously with her quick, deep breathing, and the little jewelled heads of the serpents on her shoulders emitted dull red sparks, like sinister, living things.

"No, no!" she cried, as though in answer to his unspoken thoughts; "don't try to fight against it. Be true to yourself, Geoff—true to me. You love me, I know you love me. You must—you shall!"

"If you have a remnant of self-respect left," he muttered, "get up and go away."

"Self-respect!" she echoed scornfully, still kneeling and clinging to him. "I never had any—I don't know what it is. I want love, not respect; respect is too cold for me."

"Until to-night," he said, "I kept my

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self-respect untarnished; but you have stolen it away from me, and I want it back again."

She laughed wildly, but there was no mirth in the sound.

"I didn't mean to steal it; it was love I wanted to steal," she said. "You can take back your respect and give me the other thing. See how I kneel to you! I have done that to no other man. Won't you lift me up in your arms and let me lie against your heart? Don't you love me, Geoff?"

"No," he answered brutally. "I believe I loathe you. Get up—do you hear? If you won't go of your own accord, I shall have to put you out."

She rose then and stood facing him, her hands clenched, her eyes gleaming with bitter resentment and indignation. She realised her defeat as she looked into the cold, unsympathetic face above her, and read only disapproval and disgust in its expression, and she hated the man for

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his open contempt. To be so treated—repulsed, snubbed—was more than her vanity could endure; and she turned upon him wrathfully, her beauty disfigured by the passion which distorted her features at the moment.

“I despise you!” she cried fiercely; “I hate you! You insult me. How dare you, fool?”

“Insult you!” he repeated. “No, I don’t do that. You insult yourself and your whole sex by forgetting your womanhood as you did just now. But it is not so much your fault as the fault of the old wrong—of the insult to your sex from mine from time immemorial.”

He picked up the cloak that she had let fall and held it for her, and almost mechanically she put it on. When she stood cloaked before him, angry still, and somewhat sullen, he spoke again in the far-off, speculative tones of the thinker and scientist.

“To achieve the result I am aiming at,

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it will be necessary to suppress all animal propensities ; for such are wholly evil, and present the greatest difficulty against which I have to contend. Evil is ill-regulated desire ; and desire in the heart of human beings is similar to gravitation in the physical world. It seems an impossible task to regulate human desire ; yet it can be done, I am convinced it can."

"Well, you are a softy!" exclaimed the woman scornfully. "I wish they had settled your desires for you out there and spared some *man* instead."

CHAPTER VI

THE Misogynist stood at the open window looking into the night. La Papillon had gone. He had seen her as far as the gate, but had not attempted to accompany her beyond it; perhaps because she had given him to understand that she did not desire his companionship. She had parted from him in angry silence. He had caused her to feel shame, and it had wounded her the more deeply that no man had made her feel it before. She tried to laugh away the sensation by calling him a poor, unmanly weakling, but in her heart she knew that weak and unmanly could never apply to him; he was the antithesis of either. He, in his turn, was less censorious in his judg-

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ment because he thought of her not as an individual but as a type. He blamed his own sex for the existence of that type, and, as the sole representative of his sex, felt the heaviness of the responsibility upon his own shoulders.

"It is the old wrong," he muttered; "the result of man claiming the right of indulging instead of schooling his passions. Women have conceded the privilege to men by their blind acquiescence in it, and men have taken it as their right from a systematic training of self-indulgence. This is the tragic result. How man insulted the sex he claimed most to revere!"

He paused and looked up at the sky in one of those fits of ecstatic emotion that he had spoken of to his recent visitor, when the spirit is uplifted, and the intelligence yearns for higher things. He had been growing very self-centred, self-absorbed, but the coming of this woman had altered his train of thought, and thrust self into the background, to make way for her more striking person-

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ality. The memory of her, her beauty, her boldness, and her abandon saddened him, because of the wrong which he could not right—the wrong which had been of man's making, and the result of which had survived him, as evil influence usually does.

He turned back into the room, determined to shake off his melancholy, or read it away; but it was no use; his spirit was too restless to permit of repose. He wanted to walk off the mood—he must walk it off; yet for two hours he paced the floor in indecision, wrestling with inclination for prudence' sake. It was four o'clock when eventually he started forth, and the dawn was broadening brightly with the promise of a glorious day. He turned his face towards the east, and walked for all he knew—walked till the sun shone warmly overhead, and the splashes of rose and crimson had faded and disappeared. Then suddenly he bethought him of the return journey, and paused dismayed. How was he to get back to his own house without

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being seen by those ubiquitous, man-hunting women, who kept such vigilant watch over his movements, and seemed bent on tracking him and running him to earth?

He turned back irresolutely, and slowly commenced his homeward way. He had almost forgotten La Papillon, her midnight visit, and the heaviness of his subsequent mood. If he had not walked off his depression, it had vanished in face of the new discomfort, and his exalted frame of mind had given place to a feeling of nervous irritability. What if they stopped him and spoke to him? What if they insisted upon coming inside? He ground his teeth and quickened his pace. It was early yet; they might be at breakfast, and he might perhaps slip in unperceived. There was the barest chance, but he pinned all his hope to it, and almost argued himself into believing that it would be so. But no; as soon as he came in sight of his own gate the fallacy of the hope became at once apparent. There were four of them already assembled, and a fifth

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approaching round the bend of the road. He glanced hastily behind him, with a view to beating a retreat ; but there were three others coming from that direction also, so that he was literally hemmed in. To go back would be as bad as going forward—worse ; for his goal lay in front. Making up his mind to it, he assumed his most disagreeable expression, and strode valiantly on, conscious, the nearer he approached his gate, of a visible flutter of excitement among the little group of women surrounding it, one of whom, extricating herself from the others, stepped forward to meet him as he came up, and, with an ingratiating simper, pointedly exclaimed :

“ Good morning, Mr Sterndale.”

The Misogynist raised his hat in silence, and would have passed her without speaking, had she not deliberately planted herself in his path.

“ We are all so glad to see that you are at last well enough to go out,” she

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said. "We have been so anxious about you."

"Anxious about me?" he repeated, amazed.

"Yes; your health, you know. We look upon you as our own especial property. You see, you belong to Denbeigh—to *us*, as it were."

"Thank you," he answered drily; "I beg to be excused."

"We have been up to the house to inquire for you several times," the spokeswoman continued, with cheerful frankness, "but your housekeeper always declared that you were too ill to receive anyone."

"My housekeeper lied, then," he answered bluntly.

"Of course; we knew that. That's why I am telling you; for everyone here knows that she won't let anyone see you."

"I don't know how they got to hear that," he said, "but it's perfectly true. She has my orders, and she obeys them."

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Her idea of softening the refusal of admittance by false excuses, though, is purely feminine. Naturally, you would see through it. *I* should have believed it, and been satisfied."

They looked at him queerly, not quite certain how to take the remark, nor the tone in which it was delivered. In the interval of slightly embarrassed silence which followed his speech he stepped forward again, and, taking advantage of their hesitation, laid his hand on the latch of the gate with a muttered, "By your leave." But he might have saved himself the trouble; they had no intention of letting him go like that. Somebody pulled him from behind, and he lost the advantage he had gained. One of his tormentors seized the latch and held it, another laid a detaining hand upon his arm. He turned upon them furiously, his face dark with anger, and his brows contracted by a heavy frown.

"If you will kindly explain the reason

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of this ridiculous behaviour, or allow me to enter my own grounds," he said, "I shall be obliged to you. I have my work to attend to, and cannot waste my time."

"Oh!" exclaimed one gushing, girlish voice, "do let me go into your laboratory with you! I could help you mix your chemicals and things, and I should just *love* it. I will be so good, and do just what you tell me to."

"We will *all* go," said a resolute voice in the rear. "It is absurd for him to pretend that he doesn't care for society and us, and to object to letting anyone into his secrets. Of course he likes us, and of course he likes people to see what he is about. We will all go."

A hot wave of fear swept over the wretched man, and showed itself in great beads of perspiration; fear lest this last speaker should be as good as her word, and force an entrance where he least desired she or her kind should penetrate. He glanced round nervously, meaning to

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squash that suggestion promptly, yet half afraid to do so, when suddenly a soft, caressing arm was thrown about his neck, and a pretty, pouting face nestled against his shoulder.

"Take me with you," said the owner of the face, with unblushing audacity, "and I will keep them out."

"Oh, will you?" cried another, clinging to him on the other side. "You won't do any such thing; for he's going to take *me*."

Sterndale's horrified expression was comical to see. He looked from one to the other in undisguised dismay; then, shaking them both off none too gently, he made a frantic dash for liberty, and fled like a madman down the road.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT a race that was! He ran as he had never run before; fear lent him wings, and he sped over the ground with lightning-like rapidity. He knew that he was being followed, though he dared not look behind to see; but once the breeze bore to his straining ears a faint, far-away echo like an entreaty in a plaintive voice: "Oh! do stop, please; it's only me." Which entreaty, as may be supposed, acted as an impetus to his former celerity. He ran on for fully a mile, followed, as he firmly believed, by the entire population of Denbeigh. He was tired and breathless, but the country was too open to think of stopping and attempting to con-

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ceal himself from view; there was only one refuge—through the entrance gates of a private house, which lay a little back from the road in charmingly wooded grounds—the home of Bertranda Harwood. Had anyone told him a short while ago that he would enter Miss Harwood's domain of his own free will, he would have contradicted the statement. How much less, then, would he have been likely to credit the belief that he would burst through her gate, and tear up the drive like an escaped madman? Yet so he did, cutting across grass, leaping flower-beds, and generally behaving as surely no sane man ever did before. And there, in the centre of the lawn, with a pair of scissors in her hand and a basket of roses at her feet, stood Miss Harwood, her head raised and turned in his direction, her whole attitude bespeaking astonishment and curiosity. She did not speak as he came panting up; she merely remained stationary, staring at him, a great wonder

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in her dark grey eyes, and in the almost imperceptible raising of her finely-pencilled brows. She was pretty, with a tall, fair, ethereal prettiness resembling the chaste delicacy of the wood anemone. Her figure was slender and graceful, and she wore a long white robe draped something after the old Grecian style, altered slightly so as to suit the requirements of an advanced and comfort-loving age. The Misogynist did not observe these details minutely. He had seen her many times before, and was not much of a judge of feminine perfection. He merely knew that she was pleasing to the eye, and that, for some reason or other, he did not feel so nervous in her society as he did with the rest of her sex. He drew up before her with an abrupt halt, and, perspiring, breathless, flurried, made his appeal.

"They're after me!" he panted, too unnerved to be coherent. "Do you mind—would you—that is—er—will you let me hide in your house? I think they want to

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—to marry me, and it would be perfectly monstrous, don't you know?—Bigamy—no, worse than that—polygamy; I might as well have been born a Mormon.”

To his relief, she grasped the situation at once. The wonder in her eyes had rapidly altered to an expression of amused comprehension, and at the conclusion of his hurried, agitated speech she broke into a ripple of appreciative laughter.

“Go to the kitch—— No, that won't do; the maids are frivolous. Go upstairs to the attic,” she said. “Come, I will show you the way.”

Sterndale did not answer even to acquiesce; speech seemed to have deserted him; but he followed her in grateful silence through a conservatory, across the hall, up a broad flight of stairs to a landing with many doors having egress to it. One of these, to his unspeakable horror, opened suddenly as they gained the landing, and a servant emerged, dusting-brush in hand; but almost simultaneously Miss

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Harwood, with ready-witted if uncere-
monious promptitude, pushed her visitor
into a side room, and herself mounted
guard over the entrance. He heard her
give some directions to the maid that took
her to another part of the house ; then
there was silence again, and after a brief
interval Miss Harwood looked in, and
beckoned to him to come. In great
trepidation he followed her to the next
landing, and up again to the attic she
had spoken of. Once inside, he breathed
more freely, then, for the first time, turned
to his hostess and rival to offer her his
thanks.

"It's awfully good of you," he said.
"I don't know why you should take so
much trouble, and I can't think how I got
up sufficient courage to ask you."

"Neither can I," she answered, smiling.
"I think that it must be owing to your
unusual temerity that I was surprised
into complying with such an outrageous
request. Now that I have brought you

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here, I don't know what to do with you; you can't stay here."

"You will permit me to remain until dark, will you not?" he entreated. "I could get back after dark, and slip in unseen, perhaps."

She smiled again faintly, and looked him over in a meditative fashion. She was wondering why these women ran after him, and her mind was full of contempt for them because they did so.

"Yes," she answered, "you must remain, I suppose. But you must be cautious, for my sake as well as your own; it would never do for anyone to learn that you were in hiding here; I should be hopelessly compromised."

"But surely," he cried in astonishment, "Mrs Grundy doesn't live still? I thought that she was slaughtered in that last campaign of ours."

"She can never die so long as a man lives," Miss Harwood answered gently. "We shall bury her with you."

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"Heaven grant that may be soon!" he dejectedly exclaimed. "I would to goodness I could rid the world of both herself and me."

"That is foolish," Bertranda critically observed.

"Excuse me," he said curtly, "you don't understand anything about it. How should you, when you have not been, and never can be, so unfortunately circumstanced as I am?"

"If I were circumstanced as you are," Miss Harwood went on reflectively, "I should still enjoy my life and be anxious to live every day of it. So long as one has one's work, and is really interested in it, one can never be entirely lonely, nor find the time too long."

"You are a woman," he said, "and speak upon impulse. How can you talk authoritatively about loneliness who have never really felt it?"

"How can you talk authoritatively of women and their methods who are a

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man—and a man who has never cultivated their society sufficiently to become acquainted with their ways?" she asked.

"I have studied the subject," he answered frigidly.

She shrugged her graceful shoulders with a little contemptuous gesture.

"How manlike," she observed, "and how illogical! How have *you*, seeing that you have never mixed with us, studied a subject each representative of which is entirely diverse? Do you suppose, for instance, that you can judge me by your knowledge of Elizabeth Stone?"

The memory of Elizabeth, homely of countenance, homelier still of figure, brought a momentary gleam of humour to his face. With such a graceful, refined type of womanhood before him, the comparison, even in mere words, appeared ludicrous.

"Why not?" he asked.

Bertranda looked him full in the eyes.

"You are imagining that I, in the

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vanity of youth, am thinking that she would compare but ill with me," she said gravely. "But you are mistaken; we simply can't compare at all. She may not be so clever as I am—I do not think she is; for, with due respect for what many people say, intellect is seldom overlooked: it must assert itself, not necessarily in work like ours: it may be passive, but it is unquestionable—but I do think that she may be a better woman than I; she would not have to strive very hard to be that. What I meant was that we are two distinct types. She would have as much contempt for my work as she has for yours—as great a dislike as we have reverence for it; and I should have an equal distaste to the path of life she has elected to tread. We are opposites, you see; we could not compare."

"Perhaps you are right," he replied slowly, and with a palpable effort. "I will think about it when I have time."

"I should not give many valuable

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moments to the subject, were I you," she retorted; "I don't see how it is going to benefit you at all—nor us," she added with a smile.

Her manner annoyed him exceedingly, and he looked distinctly aggrieved. He had an objection to being argued with and advised by a mere girl. This one had a tiresome habit of opposing him, and considering what he said, instead of accepting it with the unquestioning acquiescence due to his sex and superior intelligence. She gathered from his expression what was passing through his mind, and laughed softly, as only some women can laugh, in an irritatingly superior, slightly sarcastic manner that was infinitely more crushing than a severely worded snub. He moved from her abruptly and strode to the far side of the room, where he remained with his back turned discourteously towards her, a heavy frown upon his face.

"I must leave you now to your own

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society," Miss Harwood remarked lightly. "Doubtless before to-night you will even find time to bestow some thought upon the subject we have been discussing. I will bring you some food as soon as I can do so undetected; but I fear you will have a trying day of it."

"You are more than kind," he answered coldly. "I shall manage very nicely, thank you. But I must entreat that you do not go to the trouble of bringing me anything; I don't require it, and shall feel more satisfied if I know that my presence here is putting you to no further inconvenience. I hope that you will forget for the time that I am here."

"Very well," she answered, with a smile which he did not perceive—a smile that meant taking him at his own word and starving him into a different frame of mind; "until to-night, then, you cease to exist. I hope that I shall not forget you entirely, and so omit coming for you at the proper time. You had better turn

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the key in the lock when I am gone; it will not, perhaps, be necessary, but it is safer so."

"Your wishes shall be obeyed," he said. Then, seeing her place her hand on the door-handle, he came quickly forward and held it for her, as, with a slight inclination of the head, she passed out, leaving him alone in the comfortless, unfurnished room.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS HARWOOD was experiencing a certain amount of compunction. She had the true West-Country notion of hospitality, yet she had allowed a stranger to remain beneath her roof from morning until evening without the means of breaking his fast. She had done this deliberately of a set purpose, and now she regretted her plan of action, which, as Sterndale himself would have remarked, was irrational and feminine. She had not actually forgotten his existence, but she had thought very little about him after the quarter of an hour's concentrated speculation that she had devoted to his case on quitting the attic and entering her own private apartment, an apartment

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which she called her study, and in which she spent a great deal of her time. It was on leaving this room at half-past six in the evening that Miss Harwood experienced the first twinge of remorse. She had been very busy all day, too busy to even think of food ; therefore she had not broken her own fast since eight o'clock, and she felt decidedly hungry. It was this feeling of hunger that recalled Sterndale to her mind, and, at the recollection, she had the grace to feel slightly ashamed of herself. She was naturally a big-minded woman, and it struck her that her action in punishing him as she had done was extremely small. It was an insufficient reason that he had behaved like a spoilt child ; she ought to have made allowances, and ignored his peevish mood. It was too late now to more than regret her omission, and the difficulty was how to obtain food for him without exciting the suspicion of the servants. Her own dinner-hour was seven, but it was impossible to ask him to

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join her at a meal at which the presence of others was indispensable, and equally impossible to carry anything away from the table undetected. The only solution to the problem that presented itself to her mind was supper; that, at any rate, was an informal meal that might be strictly *tête-à-tête* and still pass unremarked. Acting upon the idea at once, as was her custom, she rang the bell, and gave her orders.

"I am going out," she said, "and shall not require dinner. I will have some supper when I return. You will lay it at half-past seven for two, as possibly I may have a visitor. You need not be in attendance; I shall not require anyone, and do not know at what time exactly I may return."

The maid withdrew, and the mistress went upstairs to prepare for the walk which she deemed necessary for the furtherance of her plan. She didn't want to walk, and she did want her dinner; therefore she

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was making a double sacrifice in Geoffrey Sterndale's interest; while he, weary of inactivity, hungry, and irritable, stood at the attic window and watched her departure in listless and sullen indifference. He had passed a miserable day, chafing at his confinement, and anathematising the cause thereof with fierce and resentful bitterness; nor did he feel as grateful towards Miss Harwood as he might have done for the shelter she had afforded him in his hour of need. He had always been inclined to moroseness, and circumstances were combining to make him more pronouncedly so every day. Trivialities, which once would have caused merely a momentary annoyance, now made a more lasting and disagreeable impression, and the frown that accompanied these vexations was becoming habitual to him. He frowned as he watched the slender, well-gowned figure of Bertranda Harwood disappearing down the drive. The memory of her soft, supercilious laugh

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was with him even then—it had haunted him all the day. He was still frowning when later he watched her returning in the semi-light of the summer evening; and he frowned yet more heavily as he heard her light footstep outside his door, and turned the key in answer to her summons.

She beckoned him to follow her, and led the way downstairs to a small, cosy, nondescript sort of room on the ground floor, which she used as a kind of general sitting-room, and gave herself the privilege of making as untidy as she chose. A small table in the centre was invitingly spread for supper; the shutters of the window were closed, and the curtains carefully drawn. Miss Harwood motioned her visitor to pass in first; then she followed, and, closing the door after him, locked it, with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

“What an uncomfortable person you are to entertain!” she said, with a smile in face of which it was absolutely impossible

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to take umbrage at the remark ; " I feel like a member of a secret society."

" You look like one," he answered, observing her critically by the aid of the softly-shaded lamp that Bertranda had lighted herself when she had so jealously excluded the daylight. " You don't require further practice in daring, only a little more in controlling your countenance."

" Ah!" she said, turning a charming full face towards him inquiringly, " I look pale, do I?"

" No," he replied ; " a bit flurried."

" Flurried!" she echoed in disgust. " How—plebeian!"

" Not necessarily," he said ; " one can get flurried without getting hot and flustered. As I see you, you do not look plebeian at all."

" I think you pick your words inappropriately."

" Very likely. When I get home I will look up the definition in the dictionary."

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As I understand the word, it describes your appearance exactly."

"As I understand the word, it signifies a commotion of some sort. I never make commotions," Miss Harwood asserted.

"A very good thing, too; women were never meant to make a stir in the world."

Bertranda laughed.

"And what is the world to do when the women have it all to themselves?" she asked. "Become stagnant, I suppose? Oh, how ridiculous you men are when you lay down the law as to what women were originally made and intended for! How do you know? Don't rake up the apple story, please; I am sick to death of it. If you have no more recent argument than that to uphold your statement, we will agree to differ. Will you take a seat at the table, Mr Sterndale? I owe you a thousand apologies for allowing you to fast so long. But, at least, I am in the same half-famished condition; I have been fasting too."

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"Why did you do that?" he asked, taking the seat on her right.

"I was busy, and did not consider the time; and when I remembered my—visitor I determined to wait until he could join me."

A sudden gleam shot into the Miso-gynist's eye that baffled Bertranda's efforts to read. He unfolded his napkin gravely, without looking in her direction; then he said:

"You were better off than I, for all that; you had at least breakfasted."

"Yes; didn't you?"

"No," he replied; "I have not tasted food since about this time last night; neither have I slept in the interval—nor smoked," he added ruefully; "three omissions that do not tend to improve the temper. Have I apologised sufficiently?"

"For what?" she asked, with a suspicion of laughter in her tones.

"For suggesting the apple story, and casting feminine character in one mould,"

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he answered gravely ; "the mould that produces Elizabeth Stone, with her immense possibilities for goodness, which she manages pretty fairly to conceal. I am not much accustomed to ladies' society, Miss Harwood."

"So I inferred from your active evasion of it this morning," she rejoined, helping herself to salt, and keeping vigilant eyes on her guest's glass and plate to see that he lacked nothing. "For a tyro, you manage very well."

"Thank you," he answered ; "I love commendation."

The Misogynist, greatly to his own surprise, was rather enjoying himself. Under the genial influences of a good meal and agreeable companionship, he was coming out in an entirely new character ; he even forgot for the time his antipathy to all things feminine in the feeling of restful security that the presence of this woman instilled in him. To see Bertranda consuming mayonaise with the perfect com-

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posure of good breeding, and the zest of a healthy and neglected appetite, was a sight calculated to inspire him with confidence in both himself and her; a woman who could eat like that, with her whole soul in her occupation, was not likely to wax sentimental should her eyes inadvertently meet those of her companion. As a matter of fact, they did meet frequently—voluntarily and naturally. Bertranda looked at people when she talked to them, and the Misogynist was nothing loth to look back. Sometimes their glances met and challenged one another; at times they were critical, and at others merely conventional and friendly. Once when she looked up rather suddenly she surprised him frowning at her fiercely over the top of his wine-glass. She made a little upward movement of her brows, and smiled interrogatively.

“Indigestion?” she queried.

“No,” he answered shortly; “I was thinking.”

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"Of something disagreeable, apparently?" she remarked tentatively.

"Yes, of your latest experiment."

"You mean——"

"Exactly," he interrupted. "How is it getting on?"

"It is an entire success, thank you," she answered; "even more so than I had anticipated. You would have seen all about it if you read the *Universe*; I was twice interviewed for that paper."

"I do not read the *Universe*," he replied disagreeably.

"No? You make a mistake, then. There is more news in that one paper than in all the others put together. I don't say it is always to be relied upon; but still, it is information. One or two rather interesting articles about you appeared in it a short while back. The personal interview with you, though, was rather far-fetched. It read to me like Miss Evans asking questions, and Miss Evans answering them."

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He smiled.

"You are very near the mark," he said.

"Still," Miss Harwood pursued severely, "you need not have talked such driveling nonsense about animal magnetism and the affinity of souls."

"I didn't," he protested; "she did all that."

"And what did you do?"

"I got out of the carriage," he answered "and bolted."

Bertranda laughed—a short-lived laugh that froze on her lips and left her silent, listening. She rose to her feet, her strong white hands grasping the back of her chair, her eyes on the Misogynist's face. There was a loud peal at the front bell, and the muffled sound of voices through closed doors. Sterndale heard it and sprang to his feet in a state of frenzied alarm that somewhat surprised his hostess. The voices were in the hall now, close to them, and in his excitement the Misogynist flung himself against the door, as though he

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feared those outside might attempt to force an entrance.

"They have found me out," he cried wildly; "they have come for me. For the love of heaven, hide me from them somewhere!"

"If you were only a little less vain, Mr Sterndale," remarked Bertranda judiciously, "it would save you an amount of uneasiness. Those are only some of my students; they have not come for you at all. What is worrying me is that I had forgotten all about them, and they usually come in here to work."

CHAPTER IX

THE Misogynist had left the door and stood facing Bertranda.

"You must think me a fool," he said.

"I do," she answered frankly. "But it isn't altogether your fault; you are suffering from an attack of nerves."

"They mustn't come in here," he said shortly.

"I don't see how it can be prevented," she replied. "As soon as I open the door they will come trooping in as a matter of course. Their books and papers are in that cupboard over there. Imagine their astonishment if I called through the key-hole that they couldn't come in; they

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would suspect something at once, and very possibly hit upon the truth. You must hide somewhere."

"Couldn't I go out by the window?" he suggested.

Bertranda shook her head decisively.

"It is next to the front door," she explained, "and they may not all have arrived. You don't seem to study me in the least. It would look well if you were seen scrambling out of the window, wouldn't it?"

"Well, what, in the name of difficulty, am I to do?" he demanded desperately. "There isn't any place to hide in that I can see."

"It is a pity," she murmured, surveying him doubtfully from head to foot, "that you're so big; I could manage to conceal you as far as the knees, but—— I know; kneel down with your feet under the sofa. Quick!"

Unquestioningly, but with an expression of the profoundest wonderment, he obeyed.

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Then Miss Harwood did a very remarkable thing.

"You need not look at me," she said softly, her fingers busily working at the fastening of her robe. "I am going to transform you into a dress-stand."

The Misogynist was not a particularly bashful man; but he looked a little taken aback at this very daring proposition, and, in compliance with her request not to look, sunk his chin on his breast, and shut both eyes tightly. Bertranda smiled slightly; then she threw over his bowed head the dark table-cloth which had been taken up to make way for the white one, and deftly slipped her dress over that again.

"For my sake even more than your own," she whispered, "keep perfectly still, and make neither sound nor movement. I will not let them stay here long; and when they have gone you can undo the shutters and slip away in the dusk. Only,

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remember to extinguish the lamp first, and whatever else you do, don't lose your head."

She turned the light lower as she finished speaking, and softly unlocked the door. The voices were outside now, and almost simultaneously with the turning of the key someone tapped. Bertranda herself opened to them.

"Good evening, girls," she exclaimed, with a little laugh that to Sterndale's fancy sounded horribly nervous. "It is a very extraordinary thing, but do you know I had entirely forgotten what night it was, and have not been expecting you. I was just going to do a little dressmaking."

"Dressmaking!" cried one girl incredulously. "Why, Bertranda, I thought you never did a stitch of work."

"I don't do much," Bertranda admitted, "and I wasn't going to do anything more important than attempt to alter my skirt. Your coming has very likely

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prevented me from spoiling a really pretty gown."

"Do let us see it, dear," gushed a voice which the Misogynist recognised immediately as that of the girl who had that morning entreated him to take her into his laboratory. He shivered nervously, and the perspiration stood out on his forehead in great drops—hardly surprising, perhaps, considering the combined influences of fear, unaccustomed drapery, and the thermometer at summer heat. If that girl came near enough to examine the dress, she would without a doubt discover the truth, he felt convinced.

"You have not come here to look at dresses, but to work," Miss Harwood rejoined quickly. "We have got a lot to do to-night, and no time to spare. Do you mind getting your books and things and bringing them into the study? I did not expect you, you see, and so had supper laid here."

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"What nice arms you've got, dear!" struck in another girl irrelevantly; "and what a lovely neck! It is perfectly wicked always to cover them up as you do."

Bertranda blushed; knowing what she did, the conversation was assuming a rather embarrassing turn. Apprehensive of what might follow, she made another effort to clear the room, but failed again, owing to the impertinent curiosity of another member of the little party.

"You've had a visitor," remarked the impertinent one disconcertingly. She had been doing a round of inspection, and halted in front of the table to examine the contents thereof. Bertranda lost her head. She denied the allegation stoutly, in the face of contradictory evidence, which was foolish and unlike her usual philosophic self. The Misogynist ground his teeth.

"Not had anyone?" repeated the impertinent one in incredulous amazement,

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thereby drawing all eyes to the supper-table, with its dainty appointments and hastily interrupted *tête-à-tête* meal. "You surely don't eat in two places, and even use two serviettes?"

Having denied it in the first instance, there was no use in going back; so Miss Harwood plunged recklessly into fresh absurdities.

"I very often change places like that when there is no one waiting," she said; "it saves trouble."

"But two serviettes!" pursued the inquisitive one. "How extravagant, my dear girl, and how—how mad!"

"Is it?" queried Miss Harwood immovably. "Well, I suppose it does appear so. But most people have their idiosyncrasies. It doesn't seem outrageous to me."

"You are breaking out in a fresh place, my dear," observed one of the others flippantly. "It is a bit upsetting, when one comes to the house of a usually

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evenly balanced person, to discover her in an indecent state of deshabelle, eating her supper all round the table, and mixing her wines most recklessly. You have been working too hard; knock off and rest."

"Don't be foolish," Miss Harwood answered, torn betwixt a desire for laughter and a feeling of rising annoyance. "Get your books, please, and come to the study."

"Hadh't you better put on your dress first?" somebody suggested. "It is a warm night, of course; nevertheless, a dress looks rather more conventional."

"What an awkward height your stand is, Bertranda!" remarked the girl who had before desired to inspect the gown. She approached the trembling impersonator of a humble but useful article in a lady's varied catalogue of necessities, and drew out a fold of the skirt to admire its texture and colour. Bertranda, watching in strained silence, saw the

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stand swerve violently, and her heart stood still.

"You'll have the whole thing over in a minute!" someone else broke in, in warning tones. But the other girl paid no attention to her; she was still inspecting the dress, or rather sniffing at it curiously, and eyeing the owner of it with disapproving looks.

"Do you smoke, Bertranda?" she inquired.

"No," Bertranda was beginning, when, suddenly perceiving the drift of the question, she corrected herself in haste. "Only occasionally—very occasionally," she said.

"Not really?" came in a chorus. "I wouldn't have believed it of you. Oh, Bertra! you humbug! You always said it was a pernicious habit."

"I remember," began an older student thoughtfully, amid an impressive silence, "that you once informed me you detested the very smell of it; it reminded you only of unpleasant things—men."

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Bertranda laughed. No one else did, and her voice rang out in the little room in a peal of half-hysterical merriment.

"Oh! don't," she gasped. "I can't stand these reminiscences. To be told what you once said and did is like looking through a confession album in which you wrote some time in the remote ages of the past, when you were young, you know, and weak-minded——"

"My dear, don't drivel like that. What you said about men and the smell of tobacco was barely a month ago."

"So long as that, was it? A month is ample time in which to improve."

"*Improve!* You call smoking an improvement?"

"Oh no! I didn't mean that. But prejudice is narrow-minded, and so is blaming other people's habits because they are not your own. To have broadened out is an improvement, isn't it?"

"You didn't happen to see the Professor this morning, I suppose?" somebody

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ventured suddenly, putting into words the question which had been uppermost in nearly every mind, but which no one had liked to openly ask before. Bertranda turned her disconcerting grey eyes upon the speaker.

"Yes, I did," she answered coolly. "Does anyone know whether he has gone mad? I saw him tearing along like a hunted criminal. What was he running away from?—Cows?"

She turned from one to another inquiringly, but nobody seemed to know. At last the girl who had first started the subject ventured again,—

"Where did he run to? Did you see?"

Miss Harwood shook her head.

"He was making such peculiar grimaces," she said, "that I felt alarmed and retired indoors. I thought he was mad, you see; and I haven't an idea how to cope with insanity."

Somebody sighed audibly.

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"He'll get back into his house now that it's growing dark," she said despondently.

"How do you know," asked Bertranda, "that he isn't there already?"

They knew because they had been watching the house from every angle all day, but no one vouchsafed the information. With those clear grey eyes searching their faces, each in turn, everyone seemed anxious to disclaim all knowledge of the man and his movements; for, when it came to analysing their motives, the whole thing appeared not only vulgar but ridiculous. Whatever other indiscretion and inconsistency Bertranda might be guilty of, it would never be that of running after a man. Bertranda saw her opportunity and returned to the attack, taking advantage of their embarrassment in the hope of getting them to work.

"How came you to know that he passed here this morning?" she inquired.

"We didn't know; only we happened to be—in the road near his house, and

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saw him running in this direction, and of course we wondered where he was going."

Miss Harwood looked interested.

"Didn't you see what he was running from?" she asked. "Did he see any of you? I believe that he would be more likely to run from a woman than a cow. Are you sure that he didn't catch sight of you?"

"He might not have been running *away* from anything," observed someone with deceptive sweetness. "He was making all speed in this direction, and everyone knows that he rather admires *you*."

"Ah!" said Bertranda, and that was all, but the tone was suggestive of a good deal. One of the girls went to the cupboard to get out her work, thereby setting an example that was speedily followed by others; for Bertranda's manner was discouraging, and the silence was growing irksome. The woman who

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had made the last happy remark followed it up by another.

"This newly-acquired taste for tobacco—or broadening out, shall we call it?—is somewhat sudden, isn't it, dear?"

For a moment Miss Harwood looked decidedly angry; the next, to the astonishment of everyone, she broke into another burst of inexplicable merriment. It was not the deliberate, supercilious laugh that had so irritated Sterndale in the attic, but a clear, healthy, girlish peal of genuine enjoyment.

"My good Lilian," she cried, "your remarks are rather annoying. I do not know whether you intend them to be so; in fact, I'm not quite sure what you do mean. Will you kindly be a little more explicit?"

"Bertranda!" exclaimed someone remonstratingly, with the laudable intention of creating a diversion, "I do wish you would put on your dress; it looks so odd to see you standing there with nothing on."

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This was a somewhat extravagant statement—or rather misstatement—and Bertranda, thinking of the dress-stand, felt her colour rise. But the feeling of embarrassment was quickly superseded by one of alarm; for the speaker seized one end of the skirt as she spoke, with a view to disrobing the stand, and helping her hostess into the apparel which, with the meanness of a certain class of feminine mind, she considered had been discarded solely for effect. The dress behaved in a most extraordinary manner; it wouldn't come; it seemed almost as if somebody were gripping it from behind. Miss Harwood also behaved most unexpectedly. She ran forward and literally dragged the girl away.

"No, no!" she cried excitedly, "not that one—don't touch it. As soon as you are all ready I will go upstairs and put on something else. I couldn't wear that dress again to-night."

"Why not?" was the very natural

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query, delivered in a tone that betrayed both the curiosity and amazement of the questioner. "What's the matter with the thing? It seemed glued to the stand."

Bertranda had quickly recovered her composure, the immediate danger being past, and she rose to the occasion beautifully.

"It was caught in against the sofa," she explained. "I pushed it back rather far to make room. But I couldn't wear the thing now; I must get out the smell of the tobacco first; you have made me feel so ashamed of myself."

She laughed again as she glanced round the circle of wondering faces, and read the puzzled surprise that showed in the eyes of most of them—a surprise that was not altogether sympathetic; for, not being able to account for her extraordinary mood, they were slightly impatient at it. She opened the door, and held it open, smiling still.

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"Come; we have wasted too much time already to-night, and have talked a lot of nonsense."

"Was it nonsense about the tobacco?" the woman who had been addressed as Lilian demanded, turning round from the cupboard with her papers and writing materials in her hand.

Bertranda puckered her pretty brows, and looked a trifle deprecating.

"Not altogether," she answered; "I have been experimenting. But I really do dislike it. I never want to smell it again, nor hear it mentioned even."

"If that is true," someone else suggested unpleasantly, with a note of chilling disapproval in her voice, and a meaning look in the direction of the dress-stand, "don't you think that in future you had better discourage Mr Sterndale's attentions? I don't know if you exactly care about his cleaning his boots on your skirt, but I think, considering what a hot night it is, someone had better undress him."

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Of course," seizing Sterndale's disguise and viciously tugging it out of his frenzied clutches, "you don't mind his seeing you like that? It is possibly not the first time."

CHAPTER X

THE dénouement was complete; so was the utter confusion and consternation of the principal actors in the little plot. Bertranda, incapable alike of speech or action, stood rooted to the ground, staring blankly at the kneeling figure of the Professor, and the excited group of women hemming him in. It was not difficult to see by the expressions on their faces the idea that was in the minds of all. The situation was sufficiently damnatory in appearance to leave no room for explanation, even had Bertranda or Sterndale felt equal to explaining; but neither of them attempted it, and no one would have believed them had they essayed to do so. The girl who had

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discovered the imposture, and unfrocked it, stood nearest to him, with Bertranda's dress, which had been seriously damaged in the scuffle, over her arm. The Miso-gynist, nervous and perspiring, gazed helplessly about for a loophole of escape. He glanced despairingly at the shuttered window; there was no chance of an exit there. He looked towards the door; but at least half a dozen women were between him and it. His teeth rattled as he met their confident, amused faces: they had got him safely this time, and it did not seem as if they intended to let him go. Amongst so many, it promised to be a pretty lively time for him.

"Well, I don't know what the rest of you think about it," observed Miss Lilian Manners—the stout lady—with an air of outraged propriety, and a venomous glance at Bertranda, "but I consider the situation most embarrassing. I am afraid that I shall be obliged to cut Bertranda."

"It wasn't her fault; it has nothing to

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do with her," interposed the Misogynist hastily. "You had better cut me instead."

The gushing girl tittered, and several others laughed. Sterndale staggered miserably to his feet. He had not once, Bertranda noticed—and it pleased her to notice it,—glanced in her direction. She was feeling extremely awkward, and she was grateful to him for his consideration; there was a good deal more arm and neck display than she cared to expose before masculine eyes, and she endeavoured to get her dress back without exciting comment. The girl who held it threw it at her with a gesture of contempt that annoyed her greatly.

"I am glad that you are at last ready to clothe yourself decently," she exclaimed rudely; "it is not very comfortable for us, under the circumstances, to see you like that, though you don't seem to mind."

"If there is anything here that displeases you," said Bertranda proudly, "you are at perfect liberty to leave *my* house."

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"We don't mind leaving your house," rejoined Miss Lilian Manners, "but we shall take the Professor with us. I think that he needs protection from such designs as yours."

"Poor Professor!" quoth Bertranda softly, for she was really feeling genuinely sorry for him. The sight of him standing in their midst in a state of general collapse, his knees giving under him, eyes staring, and jaw dropped, was enough to arouse anyone's sympathy, and she forgot her minor annoyance in face of his real distress.

"I suppose," observed the impertinent girl, who had previously remarked the supper-table, and its setting for two, "if you ate your supper in both places, Bertranda, you shared chairs with the Professor, and used the same serviette? I think we had almost better go away, girls; we have come at an awkward moment."

"The position looks pretty black, any-

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way," struck in another voice. "Our model Bertranda, who has always openly professed to dislike men, to be caught hiding one under her skirts! We shall hear next that Mr Sterndale's aversion for women is a pose also."

"He likes women well enough," exclaimed the gushing girl, "but he likes us one at a time, apparently. Bertranda has had her innings; we'll take it in turns."

"We'll hold a meeting first," observed Miss Manners decidedly, "and I will take the chair."

"That means that you intend getting the first turn," objected the former speaker; "and it was my idea. I ought to be first."

A wordy argument ensued, and Bertranda, during the excitement, drew nearer to the window, and softly unfastened the shutters. The Misogynist watched her comprehendingly as she slipped back the catch of the window, and gave him a mean-

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ing glance to take the first chance that offered, and make his escape that way if he could; then she took her stand by the window, willing to aid him if opportunity arose.

"It is ridiculous quarrelling among ourselves like this," remarked an older student impatiently, interrupting the angry flow of talk by elevating her voice above the rest. Bertranda seized the moment for quietly raising the window. "Let us settle the matter according to age."

"Yes," agreed the gushing girl quickly, "the youngest to begin."

"Be quiet, Belle," said the older student sharply; "you are far too forward for your age. Men of intellect, like Mr Sterndale, don't want babies."

"They don't want mothers either," retorted the indignant Belle. "Besides, Mr Sterndale prefers women who don't do things."

"I don't want anyone, thank you," the Misogynist observed politely; but he

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might as well have held his peace for all the good he did.

"You require looking after," someone answered shortly; "and you have no right to be selfish. If things had not come to the present pass there would have been no necessity for urgent steps; but now, for the sake of all our reputations, and to prevent open scandal in Denbeigh, it is imperative that we decide upon some arrangement that will end the present unsatisfactory state of affairs."

"I am very agreeable to that," he said readily; "I don't enjoy being shadowed."

"You prefer being smothered?" someone suggested unkindly.

"Yes," he answered, "I verily believe I do."

"What do you expect us to infer from your proceedings?" inquired Miss Manners magisterially. "Your present position is a direct contradiction to your declared principles. Do you intend to marry Miss Harwood?"

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The Misogynist had never thought of such a thing, and the question, thus bluntly put, embarrassed him exceedingly. Bertranda, tall, and fair, and queenly, stood opposite to him, with a certain grave displeasure in her air which only increased his confusion. He looked at her deprecatingly, as though he would have liked to apologise for the increasing awkwardness of the position in which his presence placed her, and the vulgarity of the woman who had put such a question to him.

"I would not insult Miss Harwood," he answered, "by discussing her in such a manner."

"Very good," replied his tormentor promptly. "You evidently don't intend marrying Bertranda, although it is the least she might expect of you, after what has happened. It remains now for us to decide what is best to be done. It is too late to hold a meeting to-night; but as chairwoman I shall see the Professor home."

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The Misogynist groaned, and half a dozen feminine voices protested shrilly against this arrangement. Bertranda listened to them in contemptuous silence, and her sympathy for Sterndale rapidly increased as she watched them clinging about him on every side. The girl, Belle, who was the youngest and prettiest of them, was particularly forward in her caresses; but she was little, and Miss Manners contrived to push her into the background and to keep her there.

"I will see the Professor home," she announced again loudly, "and to-morrow we will cast lots."

"What for?" Sterndale demanded angrily. "What do you want to do with me? I won't be raffled for like an article at a bazaar. What, in the name of decency, do you want with me? Why can't you leave me alone to pursue my work unmolested?"

"If this is how you pursue your work," rejoined Miss Manners, "the sooner it is

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put a stop to the better. No one will speak to Bertranda after to-night."

"Then she may count herself lucky," he retorted. "I wish you would say the same about me."

"You are a man," she answered; "it is different in your case."

"I don't quite see your argument," he rejoined. "I think if the women had less to do with the laws they would be more moral than they are. But of course when there are only women it won't much matter anyway."

"Mr Sterndale," broke in Bertranda coldly, "I cannot allow you to carry on your love-making beneath my roof. I shall be glad if you will go."

He understood her perfectly: the window stood invitingly open, and the road to it was practically unguarded; only Miss Manners interposed between him and liberty. He pushed her roughly on one side, and made a dash for it.

"Take care!" cried someone quickly;

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"she has opened the window to aid her lover's escape. If you don't stop him he will get away."

Miss Manners was sprawling ungracefully on the carpet, but several present hastened forward to intercept him, and would no doubt have succeeded had it not been for Belle. Belle, feeling herself injured, joined forces with Sterndale, and, while seemingly most active in waylaying him, contrived somehow to catch her foot in the tablecloth, and drag it and its contents to the floor between the Professor and his pursuers. Half a dozen eager women tumbled over the débris, and over Belle also; but the Misogynist gained the window and sprang on to the ledge. He had no time either to thank Bertranda or to apologise for the fracas, but he saw, as he flashed her a glance in passing, that she was looking both worried and annoyed.

It was an ordinary window a few feet off the ground. Sterndale balanced himself for a brief moment on the sill, then took a

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tremendous leap, and landed in the middle of the flower-bed below. His feet sank deep in the soft, newly-turned earth, while the blossoms broke beneath his weight, and were ruthlessly trodden underfoot. The fragrance of them, as they lay crushed and dying, pursued him until he reached the lawn, and had left both window and trampled bed behind. He did not know the flowers by name; but the scent of them was very sweet, and lingered in his memory as one of the few pleasant recollections of that disturbing and eventful day.

CHAPTER XI

To his relief, Sterndale reached his home in safety, and managed to get indoors unseen. He went across the fields and in at the back, this route being more private than the main road, and more open, so that he could see if anyone were about, and be on the alert against surprise. Elizabeth appeared in answer to his hurried knock ; but not until she had gone through the usual preliminaries, something after the manner of a warder in a besieged castle of feudal times, would she accept as fact Sterndale's statement of his own identity. When eventually she did open the door, her face betrayed at sight of him, not only astonishment, but strong dis-

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approval. He had been absent all day, and had caused her much anxiety. In the first instance, it was unusual for him to go out at all, and in the second, it was unheard of for him to go out without even mentioning the fact. Unconscious apparently of the unspoken reproof of her look, he preceded her silently into the kitchen, and when there turned and faced her, his dark eyes sombre and inquiring, his whole attitude weary and depressed.

"Anyone been?" he asked.

Elizabeth sniffed disdainfully.

"Yes, sir," she answered, with a shade less respect in her voice than usual; "that blessed bell hasn't stopped ringing all day."

"What did they want?" he queried, in the half-hearted way of a man who knows what the answer will be, and would gladly be told a lie instead.

"They wanted you, sir," she rejoined, with relentless promptitude; "leastways it was you they all asked for. There was one—*person* was quite offensive. She said

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her name was Lapap—something or other, and that——”

“Yes?”

“That—excuse the liberty, sir—she had ‘a bone to pick with the old boy, and she meant to pick it too.’”

“Ah! You didn’t let her in, I suppose?”

“Not likely, sir! That’s what made her so offensive. She called me a old Gorgon.”

The Misogynist smiled. Elizabeth resented the smile, and her face hardened. She looked away from her master, and continued in a still more aggrieved tone,—

“She was a very forward person, and called you by your Christian name, only shortened like. She said that she was here last night helping to amuse you while I was tucked up safe in bed.”

She paused expectantly, and, with her eyes still averted from him, gave him time to deny the statement. He did not deny it; he just stared moodily into the

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fire, and made no spoken comment. The silence was prolonged; at last she ventured sourly,—

“I don’t see much use in my keeping all the fresh air out of the house by day if you take to letting the foul air in by night, sir.”

The Misogynist turned his head and looked at her, a wrathful indignation gathering in his eyes.

“By what right do you presume to criticise my actions?” he demanded.

“Well, sir, it isn’t fair by me. It’s not nice for a respectable woman to hear such things as that get abroad; they’ll be saying things about me next.”

Sterndale possessed a certain sense of humour; it got the better of him now, and he laughed.

“Oh, you needn’t be alarmed,” he answered. “Besides, what does it matter to you if you are spoken evil of? Isn’t the knowledge of a pure heart and untroubled conscience sufficient, without

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wanting the outside world to share the knowledge with you? It won't; it never does. There are very few people who get the credit of being conscientiously single-purposed; and those who do are not the ones who deserve it."

His cynical humour did not tend to appease her sense of injury; perhaps his reasoning was a bit abstruse for her, or perhaps she failed to see the truth of it. Be that as it may, she did not respond to his argument, but returned to the attack in a resentful, ill-tempered way.

"It's easy enough for you to laugh, sir, seeing you never meet anyone—or only those you're minded to—but it's different for me, and folks will talk."

"What a regular woman you are!" he exclaimed impatiently. "How you jump at conclusions, and judge by appearances! What, in the name of all that's wonderful, do you suppose there is to form a subject for scandal? Doesn't it strike you that if the world wasn't always expected to be

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on the look-out for ill-doing there would be less talking, and less to talk about?"

"There's something in that, sir," admitted Elizabeth, whom possibly the idea had never struck before. "I'm not saying that in your case there is any grounds for talk—far from it; but when a young—female comes in broad daylight to a gentleman's house, and lifts the knocker by her toes, which I'll swear to her doing; for I saw her, or I wouldn't have believed it possible, not bein' able to do it myself——"

"Have you tried?" interrupted her master, unable to prevent the twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"*Me?*" cried Elizabeth, in scandalised horror. "Do you think it likely, sir?"

"Well, I was wondering," he answered; "it is a progressive age."

"I'd like to see myself!" she snorted, thinking of La Papillon with the contempt of prejudiced respectability.

"So should I," he responded; and he

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looked at Elizabeth's short, stout proportions with the amused appreciation of one who knows the height of his own door-knocker, and in face of the knowledge marvelled somewhat at La Papillon's acrobatic feat. "I wonder if an unnatural use of one's members has necessarily a demoralising effect upon the mind? Do you think you would be a worse person, my good Elizabeth, if you knocked on the door with your toe instead of your knuckles?"

"Good gracious, sir, what questions you do ask!" exclaimed Elizabeth, not altogether approving of the levity of his manner. "I suppose it would depend upon whether I did it for some sensible reason, or out of impudence, like her."

"And how do you know it was impudence that prompted her?" he asked.

"Because she had rung the bell fit to pull it down already, and I had got the door on the chain, and was looking at her through the crack when she done it."

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"Ah! superabundance of energy, evidently. By the way, Elizabeth, you left the attic window unfastened last night; don't let that occur again."

"She couldn't get in that way without ladders," asserted Elizabeth; "it's three storeys high, not counting the basement."

"I didn't say that she could," he answered; "I was merely remarking the advisability of fastening it, that's all."

"Very well, sir. And if she calls again?"

"If she calls again, tell her politely that I do not intend to see her. And I shouldn't advise you to slip the chain, nor get in reach of her foot at all. A woman who can raise that knocker with her toe, and kick her own nose, might become playful in another direction, and kick someone else's in mistake."

"I'll take good care of that," Elizabeth answered grimly.

The Misogynist smiled silently. He was very well satisfied with his own

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particular guardian angel, if she was not altogether as handsome as the outward eye could wish.

"Will you have your supper now, sir?" she inquired, as he made a move towards the door preparatory to going upstairs.

"No," he answered; "I have dined. I will have a cup of coffee with my smoke, though."

Elizabeth stared after him open-mouthed, too astonished to make any reply. When he had gone she found her tongue, but her round-eyed amazement did not diminish.

"Well, I never!" she ejaculated. "Been out dining, has he? Well, upon my word, I never did!"

CHAPTER XII

STERNDALE stood in his laboratory, alternately thinking and frowning. He was among his beloved chemicals; but he did not appear as interested in his work as usual, and twice he had taken down the same bottle by mistake. It was just a week since the day on which he had sought shelter at Miss Harwood's, and during that week he had done absolutely nothing; his mind was a blank and refused to work. Try how he would, he could not concentrate his thoughts upon any single theory that had absorbed his interest hitherto. Instead of resting he was trying to force his ideas, and the result, of course, was failure. He took down a retort from the shelf and held

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it carelessly in his hand. To his memory, so plainly that he could almost fancy that they were there with him, came back the strong scent of the flowers he had trampled so ruthlessly underfoot beneath Bertranda Harwood's window. He glanced sharply round the room; there was certainly nothing sweet-smelling in it. It was crowded, dusty, and untidy; the very padding of the easy chair in which he lounged, and thought out his problems, was worn in appearance and musty to the smell; and the cobwebs clung thick about the necks of bottles which had remained uncorked for many months. He turned impatiently from his survey of the room, and fixed his dissatisfied eyes upon the vessel in his hand. Again the scent of the flowers was with him. The scene it recalled set him wondering whether the bed had been much damaged, and if Miss Harwood had been vexed? He rather fancied that he ought to call and apologise. He had sent no note or other recognition of her kindness;

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and, though he had always carefully ignored all social obligations, he knew that common courtesy demanded something of the sort. For some time longer he remained standing, turning the subject over in his thoughts. It seemed a small enough matter to make up one's mind about; but the Misogynist was not in the habit of paying calls, and he shied rather at the idea. Besides, there was the fear of meeting anyone on the way, and a half doubt as to whether he would be welcome when he got there; it was just possible that, as Miss Harwood disliked his sex, and as he had already placed her in such an extremely awkward position, she had seen enough of him, and would rather that he kept away. He hesitated still, but his eyes lost their vague expression; a look of resolution sprang up in them instead, and simultaneously the retort slipped through his loosened fingers and shattered into fragments at his feet.

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He gazed down at the pieces with a queer smile.

"That decides it," he soliloquised; "I cannot get a retort in Denbeigh; I shall have to send away for it, and in the meantime I must borrow one, or I cannot get on with my work."

He left his laboratory and went upstairs to his dressing-room, there to array himself with a careful regard to detail which, had he been less absorbed in his purpose, would greatly have surprised him. It did surprise Elizabeth, unprepared for the sight; and when, irreproachably clad, he appeared before her in the kitchen, with the intention of going out by the back door, she dropped the dish-cloth into the soup in her amazement, and the saucepan-lid on to the table, and wonderingly ejaculated,—

"Oh, my heye!"

"Eh? What?" inquired Sterndale.

Elizabeth looked at him with much disfavour.

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"Are you going out dining again, sir?" she demanded suspiciously.

"At eleven o'clock in the morning?" he said.

"Well, there's such a thing as going early and coming home late," she retorted.

The Misogynist smiled.

"That's indisputable," he agreed. "Nevertheless, on this occasion I shall be home to lunch."

"There's never no telling," she rejoined, with a wise shake of the head. "When my James dressed up smart I never expected him home till I saw him."

Sterndale looked sheepish; he was half-angry, half-amused. If Elizabeth, who knew him so well, misconstrued his actions, how much more likely were outsiders to, and what more natural than that they should arrive at the same conclusion as she had?

"Have it as you like," he answered good-humouredly. "It's all right so long as you expect me at all, and don't keep

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me waiting for luncheon. Not that I want that *rag-oût* that you're preparing. I never was fond of French dishes."

Elizabeth looked bewildered, failing to see the drift of his remark; but her expression changed quickly to one of consternation as her eye lighted on the lid of the saucepan, and failed to discover the whereabouts of the cloth. With a wail that might have moved the compassion of a fiend, she snatched up a long-handled spoon, and, making for the kitchen range, felt for the dish-cloth in a manner that spoke volumes for her self-control, and opened up possibilities for other things besides goodness in her composition. Sterndale laughed, and, putting on his hat, unlocked the back door.

"Don't worry about it," he said; "it didn't look valuable, but it did look as though it wanted boiling."

He paused abruptly, and, feeling in his pockets, came back to lay a cigar-case on the table.

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"Do I smell of tobacco?" he inquired anxiously.

Elizabeth ceased angling to give the question the attention that she considered it deserved. She stared at him much as she might have done had he been a wild animal, and walked all round him, as though she was expected to see tobacco instead of smell it.

"Not more than usual, sir," she answered.

Sterndale looked dissatisfied. He went through all his pockets again, but, failing to produce more of the obnoxious weed that was his chief delight, glanced doubtfully down at his garments, and flicked a microscopic speck of dust off his sleeve.

"It can't be particularly noticeable?" he remarked interrogatively. "I don't detect it."

"Of course you don't," replied Elizabeth grimly; "your other clothes reek of it, and the house too since it's been kept

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shut up so. It's healthy though, they say, and keeps off fevers."

"Do you think," he asked deprecatingly, "that the smell will go off in the open air?"

"Well, sir," said Elizabeth, giving him a queer look, which, from some reason or other, he failed to meet as usual, "I think if I was wanting to be so partickler I'd pick some lavender from the bush near the cabbage-bed and put in my pockets. Ladies are very fond of lavender."

Sterndale nodded and went out, wondering, as he paused by the cabbage-bed to follow her advice, why women always scented romance when a man was merely conforming to the common laws of courtesy. There was surely nothing startling in paying a morning call? But even as he asked himself the question, he knew that in his case it was remarkable, and he felt relieved that he had some explanation to offer for his very unusual procedure.

When he arrived at Miss Harwood's

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he was shown into the drawing-room by the wondering maid, and left alone there while she went in search of her mistress. He seated himself by the open window and waited in some trepidation for Bertranda to appear. He was decidedly nervous, yet not for a moment did he regret his decision in coming; for he thought of Bertranda as he had seen her at supper, in the long, clinging, creamy dress, with her grey eyes smiling and friendly, and the lamplight shining on her golden hair; and the remembrance made him desire to see her again, if only to inquire whether she had forgiven him for his intrusion, and the annoyance to which she had been subjected thereby. Her coming in the end was rather a disappointment. She was in the garden when he arrived, and neither saw him enter nor received the intimation of his visit before returning to the house and discovering it for herself. She came in by the drawing-room window, her brows slightly puckered,

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and her small nose elevated in a manner which plainly denoted the owner's unmistakable disgust.

"Tobacco!" she exclaimed petulantly. "I am sure that I smell tobacco. It seems as if I am to be everlastingly haunted by that nauseating odour."

"Oh, come!" returned Sterndale protestingly, rising and confronting her in indignant expostulation, "that must be sheer imagination. It can't be as bad as all that, for I emptied my pockets before leaving the house."

"Good gracious, Mr Sterndale," cried Bertranda, amazed, "how very surprising you are!"

"Not at all!" he rejoined. "I even stuffed them full of lavender, because ladies like the smell of lavender, I believe."

Bertranda laughed.

"Who told you that?" she asked. "Elizabeth?"

The question did not seem to please

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him. He looked annoyed, and Miss Harwood observed that he was very slow in replying. She advanced further into the room, and held out her hand with a smile.

"You smell like a veritable handkerchief-sachet or a linen-press," she exclaimed.

"Don't you like it?" he asked, somewhat disappointed at what he considered her want of appreciation.

"In moderation, yes. But I don't care for it sufficiently to carry a bush about with me."

"I will throw it away," he said, turning towards the window. Bertranda stayed him by a gesture, and motioned him to be seated.

"No, don't do that," she cried; "it is quite refreshing to sit near you."

"Like turning over the linen in the press," he remarked ironically.

"Exactly. How quick you are!"

"I am glad to be able to afford you some amusement," he said stiffly.

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"Amusement!" she echoed. "To be quick doesn't necessarily mean to be amusing. It's sometimes rather fatiguing than otherwise; it is such a tax on the mental powers to keep up with a sharp person, you know."

"I fully realise that truism when in your society," he remarked.

"Ah!" said Bertranda softly. "You find a distressing want of repose about me? I remember you told me last time we met that women were never meant to make a stir in the world. Elizabeth, I suppose, is phlegmatic in her movements?"

The Misogynist was not averse to joking, but he disliked being laughed at, and he had an uncomfortable conviction that Bertranda was getting the best of it.

"I don't know why you always drag Elizabeth into the conversation," he grumbled.

"She's such a safe person," rejoined Miss Harwood. "Besides, she is the

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foundation upon which you base all your ideas concerning my sex, you know ; so I don't quite see how we are to keep her out."

"You are slightly in error," he retorted ; "I have no ideas on the subject to require a foundation for."

"I sit corrected," said Bertranda lazily, looking into his grave face with the sauciest of smiles upon her own. "I am to understand, then, that when you so aggressively aired an opinion last week upon the customs and uses of women in general, it was not your own but someone else's?"

The Misogynist was cornered ; and failing to see a way out, he evaded the query altogether.

"Don't you think that you're a little hard on me?" he asked.

"Perhaps I am," agreed Bertranda. "One ought, I suppose, to make allowances for a man. I don't see why, but it is generally understood. I consider that

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I was rather forgiving in shaking hands just now. Did you quite realise the other night, I wonder, the amount of damage that you did? Not to my reputation only, though that was bad enough. I am still suffering the consequences of my indiscretion."

Sterndale thought this mode of attack most ungenerous. He had come with the intention of apologising, but distinctly objected to being prompted; and his manner when replying was not altogether as penitential as it might have been.

"I am exceedingly sorry for the inconvenience," he was beginning, when she interrupted him unceremoniously.

"If it had only been *inconvenience*," she cried, "I shouldn't have minded in the least. What upset me so dreadfully was the damage to my poor flowers."

"Yes," he admitted, "I was afraid that I had stepped upon one or two."

"Stepped upon them!" she ejaculated.

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"Why, you positively ground them underfoot."

"I am sorry," he answered lamely. "I suppose I am rather heavy. I was in a desperate hurry, and didn't look where I was treading."

"I should say you most certainly did not," rejoined Miss Harwood severely. "My dress was torn and trampled on so that I cannot wear it; half the things on the table were smashed to atoms, and the custard was spilt all over the carpet. I won't say anything about myself, because personally I care very little what anyone thinks, so long as I retain my self-respect, and know their ill-natured remarks are undeserved; but if you had called the next day, Mr Sterndale, I don't think I could have been so magnanimous as I was this morning."

"I am very glad," replied Sterndale, with a faint flicker of the first smile that he had worn throughout the interview, "that I didn't call the next day. Your

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magnanimity of this morning even has not been of an overwhelming nature."

Bertranda opened her eyes very wide.

"You are the most audacious culprit that I ever met," said she. "Did you expect me to welcome you with open arms?"

The smile on his face broadened, and he leant towards her in an attitude of friendly ease.

"Well, scarcely that," he replied. "I could hardly expect such a continuous run of luck. But I did think that, as you had literally shared your mantle with me, and had told so many—I mean skirted the truth so finely the other evening in my cause, there might exist a bond of comradeship between us that would make a further meeting pleasant for both sides."

Miss Harwood flushed.

"I have been trying," she averred, "to forget that evening ever since."

"And I also," he said. "I have been trying to forget you as well, but instead——"

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"Yes?"

"I broke a retort," he finished lamely.

"And have come to borrow one from me?"

"How very quick you are!" he said.

She laughed; but the mirth sounded forced in his ears, and the flush faded slowly from her cheeks, leaving her composed and somewhat pale. She rose with the graceful indolence which characterised all her movements, and turned towards him with a little sarcastic smile.

"You should have mentioned your need sooner," she said; "we have wasted so much time in talking. If you like to come to my laboratory, I have no doubt that we shall find what you require. You are not afraid of meeting anyone, I suppose? As you were bold enough to come openly, there is no necessity for me to exert my ingenuity in devising a disguise."

"Miss Harwood," muttered Sterndale, looking fixedly at her, "you have been exceedingly kind to me. If this is——"

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"Causing me any *inconvenience*?" scoffed Bertranda mockingly. "How thoughtful of you! But pray don't think such a thing for a moment; it is not the least little trouble in the world."

CHAPTER XIII

As soon as Sterndale had received the retort he took his departure with very unnecessary haste. This ungallant behaviour was not altogether his fault; he really desired to stay longer and appear as though courtesy, and not a wish to borrow, had been the actuating impulse of his visit; but he was uncomfortably aware that he had, metaphorically, put his foot in it, and was too much man to be able to right his mistake, while Bertranda was too much woman to help him to do so. She laughed, that quiet, supercilious laugh that was so irritating to him, when he attempted on leaving to thank her again for her past kindness, which had ended so disastrously

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for her. The laugh was a snub, and he felt it, and flushed to the roots of his hair.

"Words are inadequate, I know——" he began rather haughtily.

"Indeed, no," interrupted Bertranda, with that irritating laugh of hers; "but you really overpower me with your apologies; and surely the call was sufficient?"

"When I remember that night——"

Bertranda again broke in upon his unfinished sentence.

"We both decided not to remember it," she reminded him; "but we can't very well forget if you keep talking about it."

"I don't wish to forget it," he said boldly; "I only wish to forget the annoyance that I caused you."

"*I* wish to forget, though," she answered curtly; "therefore I shall not consider it requisite to remind you again of the fact."

She held out her hand with an evident desire to close the interview, and Sterndale took his departure in no very amiable mood. He was so angry with himself for going

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to see her, and so angry with Bertranda for not taking his condescension in the right spirit, that he vowed as he wended his way thoughtfully homeward to neglect all social duties in the future as heretofore, and to refrain from ever calling on Miss Bertranda Harwood again. The vexation of that morning was destined not to end with the visit. More serious trouble was yet to come, trouble that entirely distracted his thoughts from his late annoyance, and brought him back to the present with most unpleasant suddenness. He was not far from his own home when he met with this fresh misfortune, and had begun to consider himself free from molestation. It was not a rabid dog, nor even a mad bull; it was only a woman, but the Misogynist would have preferred an encounter with either of the quadrupeds before mentioned to being forced into speech with a female biped in his present frame of mind. He came upon the woman unexpectedly walking in one of the fields. She was picking

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something in the hedges,—flowers, perhaps,—and he almost jumped on her in a flying leap that he took over an unfortunate gate hard by. The woman gave a little scream ; then she looked up laughing.

“Oh dear!” she cried, “what a fright you gave me! I thought it was a cow.”

The Misogynist fervently wished that it had been, but he only raised his hat by way of apology, and endeavoured to pass on. The girl—it was Belle, the one who had laid her head on his shoulder, and entreated to be taken into his laboratory, and later, at Miss Harwood’s, had so embarrassed him by insisting on inspecting the dress on the stand—planted herself in front of him, and placed her hand on his arm.

“Mr Sterndale,” she exclaimed mischievously, “it isn’t a bit of good your trying to worry past me. I know where you’ve been, where you were the other evening—I saw your boots under the sofa before Tina did, and I knew it wasn’t

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her dress that smelt of tobacco. Why do you pretend that you don't like women when you do? There isn't any use in denying that you admire Bertranda, because I know you do."

"If there isn't any use," he answered, "I will save myself the trouble."

"What a humbug you are!" the girl continued teasingly. She was enjoying the situation immensely, and revelling in his discomfiture. "Everybody in Denbeigh knows about your clandestine visits to Bertranda; and don't they lead her a life! And it isn't as though she likes you even; she doesn't."

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Because I asked her once, and she told me that she could only think of you in the neuter gender; you were a genius, and a genius was a kind of disembodied intellect. Not being a genius myself, I fail to confuse mind and matter. I am decidedly materialistic, and can only grasp the substance. To me you are a person, not

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an intellect ; and, being a person, I feel a desire to sit upon this gate with you and flirt."

The Misogynist had no such desire ; in fact, he had a distinct objection to any such proceeding. He considered the suggestion forward in the extreme, and attempted to squash his flippant assailant.

"You had better," said he, "run home and prepare your lessons. You are talking nonsense. When you are older you will learn discretion, perhaps."

She laughed.

"Thank you ; but I don't wish to be any older just at present. As for discretion—what about the other evening when you were hiding under Bertranda's petticoats ? If Tina hadn't discovered it too, you would owe me an everlasting debt of gratitude for keeping silence that night. And I ruined Bertranda's carpet in helping you to escape."

"No doubt you had your reasons," he said

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"I had," she nodded. "But that's not altogether generous on your part. There were so many of them there, and I didn't want to give any of them a chance. I've got plenty of that kind of discretion, my youthfulness notwithstanding."

"You are," he said severely, "worldly-wise, no doubt; but you are not discreet."

"No?" she queried softly, with a sudden change of manner. "Well, you shall teach me how to be. Let us sit down just for a little while."

"I can teach you that without sitting down," he replied. "It is not discreet of you to keep your hand on my arm; it is not discreet to give a man an opening for flirtation; and it is not discreet to make love to me publicly in the fields."

"I would rather do it in your laboratory," she admitted, "only you won't let me in."

The tone was insinuating; and so far she had not profited by his instruction, for her hand still held tightly to his coat-

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sleeve. He looked down at her gravely, and his hand closed over hers.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "I expressed myself badly; but I did not mean you to suppose that the indiscretion lay in the publicity."

He had meant to disengage her fingers when he laid his hand on hers; but whether she actually or intentionally misconstrued his purpose he was at a loss to know, though there was no doubt as to the satisfaction she derived from the contact. She loosened her hold of his sleeve and clung to his fingers instead.

"Ah!" she cried, "how nicely you teach! I could learn anything from you."

Perhaps Bertranda was right when she had called him a disembodied intellect; he could hardly be human and withstand the pretty pleading of this girl, who, despite her boldness—perhaps because of it—knew how to assume a womanly submissiveness that was most attractive. Yet he did withstand it. He put down the retort

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which he carried in his other hand, and with very determined firmness freed himself from her clasp.

"If you enjoy standing hand in hand, I don't," he observed. "It is an idiotic attitude that doesn't appeal to me in the least."

"How unkind you are!" she said. "It felt so nice. And now you have hurt my fingers."

"I am sorry," he answered, with brutal callousness; "but the fault lies with you."

"You shouldn't have taken my hand," she complained pathetically, "if you didn't want to."

"I didn't," he protested.

"Oh—h!" The girl hid her face coquettishly and laughed. She was blushing a little, and peeping at her companion through her fingers. Sterndale stooped for the retort.

"Don't go for a minute," she exclaimed; "I want to tell you something. I have

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been wanting to say it for some time. The others are going to tell you too—everybody, except, of course, Bertranda; and she doesn't like you——”

“Good heavens!” he cried, “what is it? You're not going to put me on exhibit, are you?”

“No, oh no!” she answered, “nothing dreadful. We have decided between us that you must marry, and we are going to ask you each in turn. But I'm first because I met you, you see. I am not rich, but that would hardly matter to you. I haven't got any profession; I hate doing things; and you know you have always said that women ought to be dependent. But I am entertaining, and—and *rather* pretty; and I am certain that I could make you happy. Don't you think that you could care for me a little—dear?”

“No,” he answered candidly; “I am jolly well sure I couldn't.”

“Oh dear!” cried the girl, in tones of the most heartfelt disappointment. “And

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I did think I stood as good a chance as any of them."

"So you do," he replied: "I am not going to marry at all."

"But they are going to force you to," she explained with some persistence.

"Eh? Oh, pooh! Nonsense!" he rejoined nervously. "Whatever has put such ideas into your head?"

He began to walk on quickly, and the girl kept pace by his side.

"It isn't nonsense," she assured him: "we had a meeting about it, and Lilian took the chair. Lilian is the fat woman with the big voice who was so bent on taking you home the other evening, until you knocked her over, which wasn't very gentlemanly on your part, though it was lucky for you that you did. She settled to be first in asking you because she was chairwoman; but I wasn't going to bother about that when I had the good fortune to meet you. You had better decide to accept me, because when she asks you

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she won't take no; she is dreadfully determined."

"So am I," answered the Misogynist, with an assumption of bravery he was far from feeling. "And I am not going to be treated like an irresponsible being, and married out of hand, for all the meetings in the world. You can tell her so from me."

"You had better tell her yourself," she retorted acrimoniously. "Here she is."

Sterndale gave a hurried glance round, and espied a stout, perspiring figure bearing aggressively down upon them. His simulated courage vanished at the sight.

"Keep her off!" he cried distractedly. "Keep her off, and I'll——"

"Yes?" the girl prompted softly.

"Be everlastingly grateful to you," he answered.

The girl froze again.

"I don't think I dare keep her off even for that," she rejoined spitefully. "I'm afraid of her. She does look angry, doesn't she?"

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Sterndale was near his back gate. He flung it open and ran up the path. The door, of course, was fastened, and though he knocked on it loudly there was no immediate response. He knocked again, and waited in feverish anxiety. Would Elizabeth never come? The stout woman was at the gate now. She lifted the latch and entered. Now she was by the lavender bush. He broke into a cold sweat, and beat on the door frantically with his fists. She came on triumphantly, a confident smile on her face; and Belle, who had kept close to him, running when he ran, looked up at him under her long dark lashes, and laughed maliciously.

"She intends marrying you," she exclaimed. "I can see it in her eye. It is almost a pity that you didn't accept me. They say she nags horribly."

"Keep her off," he pleaded desperately; "for the love of heaven, keep her off!"

"I will," she answered quickly, "if you'll let me inside afterwards. I daren't

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otherwise. There isn't much time—yes or no? Quick!”

“Yes—anything!” he cried; “only stop that woman.”

The girl darted away from him, and, taking most ungenerous advantage of the corpulent build of her panting rival, she threw herself on the ground, and, grasping Miss Manners firmly by the feet, upset her into a convenient water-butt that was sunk near the footpath in the middle of the cabbage plot; then, scrambling up again, she ran back to the Professor, and, as the back door opened to admit him, slipped nimbly in at his side.

CHAPTER XIV

ELIZABETH stared at sight of the Professor's companion, and remained with the door held open, as if she expected the young lady to take her departure; but Sterndale ordered her peremptorily to close and fasten it; then he turned almost rudely towards the girl and requested her to follow him. He led the way to the library, and when there shut the door behind them and deliberately faced his persecutor in no very amiable mood.

"And now that you are here," he exclaimed, "perhaps you will explain why you came, and what you intend doing."

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"I came because I wanted to," she answered, "and I intend remaining."

"You are very young," he said more gently; "perhaps you do not altogether realise the position you are voluntarily placing yourself in. Where people of opposite sex are thrown together there is bound to be scandal. You would be acting advisedly if you left my house at once."

"After going to so much trouble to enter it?" she ejaculated. "Not likely! I don't care what scandal arises; they can cut me as they have Bertranda; it won't matter to me in the least."

"Well, since you are here," he said resignedly, "what is it that you want with me?"

The girl hesitated, and her manner was less assured. The embarrassed colour came and went in her face, and her eyelids drooped over the conscious eyes until the lashes swept her blushing cheeks. In her confusion she looked extremely pretty.

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"I want you to marry me," she said at last.

"I thought we had already settled that question," he said coldly. "I don't intend to marry you, and nothing you can say will alter my determination. Hadn't you better change your mind and leave my house before it is too late?"

"No," she answered; "I am going to stay. I don't care whether you marry me or not."

Sterndale had already lost his temper; he now began to lose his head. The girl had drawn nearer to him, and stood with her hand upon his arm in an attitude of clinging confidence that appealed to the man in him. She was really very pretty, and her eyes, as she raised them to his, were eager and compelling. He laughed long and loudly, and, throwing one arm about her, rained kisses upon her lips.

"So you don't care, little fool?" he

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cried. "Well, I don't care either. You can stay if you want to."

She hid her face against his shoulder, but made no effort to free herself from his embrace, although she knew it was an insult to her; and Sterndale, worried, wearied, and reckless, let himself go as in saner moments he would have hesitated to do.

"Since you have made up your mind to stay," he said presently, "and I have made mine up not to marry you, we had better arrive at some understanding as to the capacity in which you remain. You can't be housekeeper, because Elizabeth is that, and she is too old to be turned from so responsible a position; and I am not the sort of man to require a companion—besides, that wouldn't be proper."

"I will be a sister to you," Belle said hesitatingly, after a pause.

He laughed more loudly than ever, as though the idea struck him as comical,

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and the girl in some slight embarrassment fidgeted nervously with the buttons of his coat. He watched her with increasing amusement.

"Oh, certainly," he answered ironically. "I feel that way towards you myself. But perhaps Denbeigh in general will fail to recognise the relationship; and that would be awkward for you."

"I don't care," she answered obstinately.

"Little girls shouldn't talk like that; you ought to care," he responded. "And you don't seem to consider me in the matter. I shan't have a shred of reputation left before long."

"Don't make fun of me," she exclaimed, pouting. "As though you minded!"

"I mind a good deal," he rejoined. "And then there's Elizabeth. She is a model of propriety, and I am not sure that she will approve of the relationship either. The long-lost sister dodge won't take her in, because she knew me in petticoats."

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"Bother Elizabeth!" the girl retorted. "You don't know how useful I can make myself."

"I don't want to know," he said unkindly.

"I could help you in your laboratory—mixing things and that."

"You'd mix the wrong things and blow us both up."

"And I could sew your buttons on."

He laughed again.

"Is that why you are trying to pull them off?" he queried.

She ceased playing with them, and gave him a little push.

"No," she said; "I hate work. Elizabeth can see to your mending."

"Ah! now we are coming to it," he exclaimed. "Your helpfulness is merely a pose. You want to amuse yourself all day and have Elizabeth to wait on you. I wonder what Elizabeth will say to that?"

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"As though it matters what Elizabeth says, if you want me," she replied.

"But I don't want you," he answered; "that's the awkwardness of it. I never had any use for a sister, and I shouldn't know what to do with one."

"You've only got to be kind to them: sisters like to be petted."

"Do they?" he said. "That's news to me. I think you're rather a bold sort of a sister, don't you?"

"I don't know," she said softly. "I think you'd make a very nice brother if you tried."

"I'll consider it," he responded. "Perhaps when I get more accustomed to the idea it won't seem so impossible. Would Miss Manners be a sister to me too?"

"No, I'm sure she wouldn't. She means to marry you."

"Then I hope from the bottom of my heart," he said, "that she is drowned by now."

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The girl laughed wickedly.

"The water in the butt wasn't very fresh," she remarked; "it smelt quite strong."

He looked at her critically, with an air of respectful admiration, and endeavoured to restrain a smile.

"You're a nice girl," he answered; "I shouldn't like to get into your black books."

"You told me to do it," she said.

"Oh, come!" he remonstrated. "I asked you to stop her."

"Well, there wasn't any other way," she said.

"You did me a good turn," the Misogynist observed slowly, laying a hand on her shoulder and holding her off at arm's length, "and I am making you a very poor return. I ought to be ashamed of myself, and so I am. It was unavoidable under the circumstances, your coming in; but I ought to have led you straight to the front door, and

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let you out that way. That is what I am going to do now; you can't stay here."

The girl gazed at him for a minute in astonished incredulity; then, seeing that he was in earnest, she dropped her face upon his coat-sleeve, and slowly dissolved into tears. This was an unexpected development, and filled Stern-dale with alarm. He had never seen any woman cry before, except Elizabeth, and that had made him feel extremely uncomfortable. But Elizabeth had had something to cry about; this was sheer temper.

"Don't do that," he exclaimed hastily; "you—you don't look pretty when you cry."

"It doesn't matter," the girl wailed, "when you want to get rid of me; and I'm so f—fond of you!"

"I don't want to get rid of you," he returned. "I'm getting f—fond of you too; that's why I wish you to go. It is

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an eternal pity when a girl gets herself talked about."

"I don't care," she answered, with a break in her voice. "I love you."

Sterndale winced.

"That's a greater pity still," he said. "I don't love you, and I don't want you to run away with any false impression."

"But you wouldn't need to love me very hard if I was only your sister," she explained.

"I haven't got into that idea yet," he answered. "I wouldn't mind adopting a brother or two, but I don't trust the sister notion. You wouldn't be satisfied with fraternising long; you would be wanting to flirt with me, and—I'm not sure that I shouldn't flirt with you."

She looked up into his face with her tear-dimmed eyes, and smiled April-wise. The last part of his speech had pleased her; she wanted him to put it into practical working order.

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"Try it," she suggested. "I like the way you kiss."

"I think we've done quite enough of that for one morning," he replied. "And I hear Elizabeth coming. If she discovered you in my arms, she might misunderstand the relationship. You don't know Elizabeth as well as I do; if you did, you would study the conventions more."

Elizabeth's tread, as it sounded in the passage outside, rather bore out his assertion; there was offended dignity and scandalised propriety in every step, and when she unceremoniously threw open the door and confronted them her expression was as indignant and disapproving as her footfall had been. Belle drew nearer to the Professor, but he scarcely observed the fact, though Elizabeth did.

"If you please, sir," she began, keeping the door-knob in her hand, and panting violently, as if from some recent exertion,

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"there's a lady outside the back door that wishes to come in and dry herself. She says you've wet 'er through, an' she'll 'ave the law on someone. She's a stoutish party, and she well-nigh forced the door open, for I'd forgot to put up the chain. Do you wish me to let her in?"

"Good gracious, no!" he answered. "You've had my orders about that."

"Yes, sir; but I wasn't sure. I thought maybe you 'ad altered your mind."

She cast a meaning glance in the direction of the girl; and, conscious that appearances were against him, Sterndale looked uncomfortable. Not so Belle; she was enjoying the situation immensely.

"Tell her to go away," she cried, laughing triumphantly. "Say we'll send for the Sanitary Inspector of Public Nuisances if she doesn't."

"Ho, indeed!" exclaimed Elizabeth, bridling. "Who is 'we,' may I ask?"

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An' why should I take my orders from you?"

"Explain matters to her, Geoffrey," the girl cried imperiously, turning towards the Misogynist with the manner of one who commands. "Make her understand that I am mistress here; the sooner she realises that fact the better."

"Elizabeth," said the Professor seriously, "let me present to you my sister—my long-lost sister; the only relative I possess in the world—at present."

Elizabeth pursed up her lips, and gazed at them both severely.

"Mr Geoffrey," she said, "I nursed you as a baby, an' I know you never 'ad no sister. You ought to be smacked, you did."

"I admit the justice of the reproof," he replied. "And I told her you weren't to be taken in. But she is here; she has come to stay, she says; and unfortunately it was I who told her she might come."

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"You are at perfect liberty to do as you like, sir," Elizabeth returned gravely. "But I should be obliged if you would understand that I wish to leave your service this day month—if convenient to you, I would be glad to go sooner."

"You too, Elizabeth?" he said almost sadly, and he drew himself up with a hurt gesture that denoted both pride and injured innocence. "Very well, if you wish it. But I should never have expected that your son's mother would have deserted me just when I needed her most."

"It isn't that I desire to desert you, sir," Elizabeth responded, growing very red; "but there's a limit to everything, and a body has to be careful. There is nothing so easy to lose as one's character, and nothing so difficult to find again."

"If a person is genuinely virtuous," he replied, thinking of Bertranda, "they need have no anxiety on that score."

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"Don't you fancy that, Mr Geoffrey, sir," rejoined Elizabeth. "I'm older than you, an' I knows the ways of the world; it judges you accordin' to the company you keep."

"And if you stay with me," said Sterndale, "you'll be boycotted, I suppose?"

"Not if things went on as they always have, sir," she answered respectfully. "But if you're goin' to start a family, when everyone knows as you was a only child, there's bound to be unpleasantness. I would be glad enough to see you comfortably married, sir; but I can't abear all this talk about sisters and things."

"Oh, don't bother about her, Geoffrey," Belle interposed airily. "Let her go; I'll soon find you someone else."

He smiled.

"You are very ready to take up your duties," he remarked; "but you are overconfident, I think. You cannot replace

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the devotion of a lifetime within a month, I fear."

"Don't be quixotic," she said. "She is only a disagreeable old woman: someone younger would suit you better."

Elizabeth flounced round with a snort of indignation, and bounced out of the room; and the Misogynist, pushing his "sister" into a chair, and bidding her stay there, hurried after his sorely-tried housekeeper, and overtook her at the top of the kitchen stairs. Elizabeth turned in response to his call, and eyed him with a hostile disfavour that was anything but reassuring; but Sterndale was desperate, and he seized her by the arm and almost shook her in his anxiety to make her grasp the situation more fully than she did. Elizabeth was very angry, and it took some time to induce her to see things as they were instead of as they appeared. But he succeeded at length; indeed, she understood more even than he intended

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she should, and she termed the Miso-gynist's would-be sister an "artful little baggage."

"You're a woman," he said, "and women have ever been harder on their own sex than men; that's because you are entirely without any sense of justice. Still, you've got your uses in a case like this; you can handle the subject with greater freedom than I can, and I want you to make that girl understand that she can't stop here. You must be gentle with her; she is very young and inexperienced, and she doesn't realise the consequences that her remaining would entail."

Elizabeth snorted sceptically.

"She's a very forward young person, sir," she responded indignantly. "It's my belief she wants to get herself talked about, so that you'll feel bound to marry 'er. There's no getting at the artfulness of those baby-faced girls."

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The Misogynist sighed regretfully. He had not many illusions about the sex, but the few he had were slipping away from him.

"Well," he said, "be gentle with her; but make her thoroughly understand her position, and get rid of her if you can. I am going to the laboratory, and I shan't come out until she has gone."

"There's the other one at the back door, sir," said Elizabeth, as the sound of loud knocking made itself heard, reminding them both of Miss Manners and her imperative demand for admittance.

"Oh, get rid of her too. Tell her the girl went home directly round the front way," he wound up mendaciously.

"Geoffrey!" called the girl sharply along the passage. "Geoffrey, where are you? I'm tired of sitting still."

With a muttered imprecation, the Misogynist turned and fled precipitately, and Elizabeth, assuming the air of a

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brigadier, marched grimly forward in the direction of the sound.

"I'll 'Geoffrey' you, my beauty!" she observed sardonically. "If you're so hard up for relations you can make a sister of me."

CHAPTER XV

WHEN the Misogynist emerged from his retirement, which he did not attempt to do until Elizabeth had solemnly assured him through the keyhole that the house was freed from the invading enemy, he looked the only woman he trusted squarely in the face, and demanded respectfully how she had done it.

"I just unfastened the front door," Elizabeth answered, "an' I took the little 'ussy by the two shoulders, an' ran 'er out of the house. Then I put up the chain before she'd got over 'er astonishment, 'an I give 'er a bit of my mind through the crack."

"I hope," he remarked a little doubt-

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fully, "that you remembered to be gentle with her?"

"Oh! I minded all you said," she answered; "an' I talked to 'er pleasant-like about 'er morals, and the things she might expect folks to say about 'er after this. She gave me a good deal of sauce, but I allowed for her being a bit put about, an' didn't take no notice; though it made my blood boil to hear her tell about me—a respectable widder wot 'ad 'ad a son of 'er own. I said to 'er at last, 'You be off out o' this,' I said, 'an don't be so forward in throwin' yourself at a gentleman's head as don't want nothing to do with you.' She got most offensive after that, and I'd be sorry to repeat the things she said about you, sir."

"What sort of things?" he questioned.

"Bad things," answered Elizabeth impressively; "about carrying on with some woman, and 'iding under 'er dress. Old as I am, it made me blush to hear 'er. I didn't believe it—I don't believe it—

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but I'd like to hear you say as it wasn't true."

"It was true in the main," he answered awkwardly, "but it was another case of appearances being against me. There was nothing wrong but appearances, Elizabeth, just the same as to-day."

"I daresay it's a bit difficult for you, sir," observed Elizabeth, trying her hardest not to look the condemnation she was feeling; "but I wish you'd manage to keep the right side of appearances. It makes it uncomfortable all round when things like that get about."

"I can't answer for all round," he returned despondently, "but it makes it jolly uncomfortable for me. I don't know quite what I am going to do; but I can't go on living like this much longer; my brain will give way soon. I'd go to the law for protection, only the law would run after me too. Elizabeth, will you marry me?"

"Lor, sir!" said Elizabeth, staring

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rather as though she feared his brain had given way already. "I'll be a mother to you if you like."

He threw back his head and laughed like a madman, while Elizabeth, not having intended to be funny, gazed at him in offended silence.

"You are the only one of them who has offered to stand to me in that capacity," he said. "But it won't do, Elizabeth; these nondescript kind of relationships are no protection at all. I've tried the adopted sister business, and it didn't work, and I fancy a foster-mother would be something of a failure too. I must go in for the real thing. If I were safely married, my wife would look after the rest."

"If you was married," said Elizabeth, "it would be a deal more respectable-like."

"Then why, in the name of humanity, won't you make me respectable?" he cried.

"You are talking nonsense, sir," observed Elizabeth with dignity. "There

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are plenty of ladies for you to marry of your own age and station."

"That's all very fine," he answered; "but you turned one of them out of the house."

"I wouldn't have you marry a forward little 'ussy like that, sir."

The Misogynist sighed. She was a bold little thing; but all women appeared bold to him, except one, and she didn't care about men.

"If you can think of some other arrangement that would obviate the necessity, I should be glad for you to let me know," he said. "I should like to be respectable, but I could wish to accomplish it unaided. Marriage seems such a formidable step even to attain so worthy an end. And it would interfere with my work, I'm afraid."

"Well!" ejaculated Elizabeth as she returned to her kitchen, which had been literally transformed into a bower of choicest flowers, thanks to the unappreciated gifts which the Misogynist received,

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"things are coming to a pretty pass an' no mistake. Here am I, gone sixty, and just refused an offer of marriage, an' a very handsome offer too. While as for flowers, I might be a princess, the way the county strips its 'othouses for me. What a waste of good things, to be sure!"

Sterndale took his lunch in solitude, and then sat by the open window smoking his cigar, while Elizabeth somewhat noisily removed the evidences of his repast. He was very busy racking his brains for a solution of the difficulty, to which every day seemed to add some fresh complication, each one more formidable and upsetting than its predecessor; but he could think of nothing save the final and irrevocable step of selecting a wife as a shield against the importunities of would-be sisters and Platonic friends, and he hesitated still to take the fatal plunge which would rob him of his liberty—now only liberty by name. He thought of the women who wanted to marry him; some of them were pretty

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enough to satisfy any man. He could have his pick; there were few indeed who would have refused him; but he did not want any of them. Then he thought of Bertranda, with her grey-blue eyes, the dainty indifference of her manner, and her charming disdain. Her tastes were very similar to his own; she was his intellectual equal; she would be companionable; but she didn't like men, and she hated the smell of tobacco. Sterndale threw his cigar surreptitiously out of the window, and guiltily watched Elizabeth as she let the gravy drop from the dish on to the carpet, and, unconscious of the mishap, trod it carefully in with her feet.

"Elizabeth, were you ever in love?" he asked suddenly.

Elizabeth plumped the dish energetically down on the dinner-waggon, and rubbed her hands ruminatingly up and down the front of her apron.

"Well, sir," she said, searching her memory for a glimpse of the romance that

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lay buried in the past, and eventually succeeding in rubbing up some sentimental recollection, "I can't say as I wasn't; but it was some time ago."

"Just so," he answered politely; "I didn't mean to insinuate that you'd been losing your heart recently. I wonder if you would mind trying to explain what it felt like. I am curious on the subject."

"It feels uncomfortable," answered Elizabeth, "like as though you 'adn't no inside. You gets a sinking sort of feelin' when you sees 'im—leastways, I used to—an' you don't know 'ardly wot to say."

"You must have felt very relieved when he wasn't about," he remarked sympathetically.

"Oh! I don't know as to that," she objected. "Seems then you hanker after 'im, an' haven't got no heart for your vituals and that, and can't stick to nothing."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the Miso-gynist emphatically, rising to his feet, and

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gazing at her wildly. "I believe I'm in love myself; I've got all those sensations."

"Lor now, sir," said Elizabeth knowingly, "if I didn't think as much when you was so pertickler about wantin' to smell sweet. Why don't you get married, then?"

He shook his head drearily, and thoughtfully stroked his chin.

"It's no go," he said; "*she* hasn't any of the symptoms. I don't believe she likes me."

"Now, how can you tell," asked Elizabeth sensibly, "wot 'er feelin's is? I am sure my George couldn't tell from my manner I liked 'im till he asked me. It give 'im quite a turn when I said yes. I always found it was the way to bring them up to the mark, acting 'aughty-like. Turn your back on 'em, says I, an' treat 'em like dirt, an' you'll 'ave them grovelling at your feet by the dozen. Maybe that's how she treats you, sir?"

"Elizabeth," he cried, "you've got the head of a philosopher, and the heart of

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as true a woman as ever I met. That's exactly how she does treat me—like the veriest dirt; and I am going to grovel at her feet until she kicks me away."

Elizabeth smiled approvingly.

"That's the style, sir," she remarked. "When the men talks that way—determined-like—the females can't resist them."

"How did your George begin matters?" he asked diffidently, after a pause.

"Well, sir, so far as I can mind, 'e kissed me unexpected, an' I smacked 'is face."

"Yes," he rejoined, but without enthusiasm, and he made a mental note that he would not commence that way. "I think I like the grovelling attitude best," he said; "it sounds more dignified."

"Oh, George was 'umble enough after that," pursued Elizabeth. "He didn't try it on twice."

"No, I should think not," agreed Sterndale. "Can't you give me any more tips?"

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"Well, I believe next," resumed Elizabeth, chewing her under lip thoughtfully, as though it were the cud of her ideas, "he said to me—it was on a Sunday, I mind, the day after he'd kissed me—'You can't think 'ow I'm suffering through you, Lizzie; the pain's just orful,' 'e said."

"I can quite believe it," the Misogynist answered, with a respectful look at her hand.

"'I can't stummick me wittles,' he said," went on Elizabeth obligingly, "'an' I 'aven't slep' a wink all night for thinking of you. Mother ast me last evening if I wasn't feelin' comfortable, because I didn't look it, and I told 'er I couldn't get you out of me 'ead,' 'e says."

"I am sorry for that young man," observed Sterndale with genuine feeling.

"You needn't to be, sir," said Elizabeth; "I married 'im in the end."

"Oh, you did?" he rejoined slowly. "Then I suppose his methods must have been correct."

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"His methods was right enough," responded Elizabeth with conviction. "It was 'is kidneys that was wrong; 'e didn't live long after I married 'im, an' I didn't try again."

"But what about the other eleven who were grovelling in the dirt?" he suggested.

"Oh, they was grovelling elsewhere by that time," Elizabeth answered. "No, I never 'ad but one offer of marriage—least-ways, not till——"

"I understand," he said quickly. "So you cannot give me any further advice on the subject?"

"No, sir. Except that it's always a good plan to offer to give up things for 'er sake; all the little 'abits that she doesn't like an' you do."

The Misogynist made a feeble protest against this suggestion.

"But I shouldn't like to give up everything," he said.

"Of course not," Elizabeth rejoined decidedly. "Nobody does; and there's

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no call that you should. Gentlemen always promise that, but they never do it. It pleases the women, though; they fancy they're 'avin' a good influence, an' they never sees it's jest a compliment till afterwards."

"I see," he said. "These things are not done without guile. Well, I've made up my mind, Elizabeth; I'm going to have a try for it, and if I succeed I shall have you to thank—and George."

CHAPTER XVI

THE Misogynist waited until evening, and then he called on Miss Harwood again. He sneaked along in the dusk in a roundabout way, keeping under cover as much as possible, and comporting himself generally after the manner of an escaped convict who fears to be recaptured.

He caught sight of Belle hurrying towards his house, and he lay on the ground behind a bush and waited until she was out of sight. Then he resumed the perpendicular, and proceeded cautiously on his way again.

"You will receive more good advice from the worthy Elizabeth," he soliloquised.

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"I trust you will benefit by it, my little sister."

The next turn in the road revealed a regular little army of women all hurrying in the same direction, and he hid in the hedge until they had passed, the sweat of a mighty terror oozing from every pore in his body. Women by twos and threes were bad enough, but women by the hundred entirely sapped his nerve. If they were going to combine like that he was lost. They would get hold of him somehow, and he would be done for. Only Bertranda could save him; and he felt vaguely that she would not.

Bertranda was in her laboratory when he arrived, and at his request the servant showed him straight in. She did not work behind locked doors as he did, and when she heard the knock she called out in a preoccupied voice for them to enter. She was standing near the sink, holding up to the light a small measure into which she was pouring a whitish fluid

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from a bottle she held in her other hand. Sterndale watched her anxiously, and the maid went out, closing the door behind her. Bertranda, unconscious of a visitor, continued her occupation.

"Hold hard!" cried the Professor suddenly. "You're exceeding the measure."

Miss Harwood started so violently that she upset the liquid over her hand, but it was characteristic of her that she broke neither the bottle nor the glass. The Professor darted forward, and, unceremoniously seizing her arm, thrust the hand into a basin of water and held it there for a minute or so.

"That was very apt," she said, watching him while he took down a bottle from one of the shelves, and applied an anodyne. "I was too surprised, I think, to assist myself at all."

"You shouldn't play with acids like that," he remarked severely.

"*You* ought to have known better

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than to startle anyone engaged as I was at the moment," she retorted. "I thought it was only the servant; she had no business to show anyone in here unannounced."

"I am very sorry," he replied apologetically. "I forgot that you didn't know I was present. But there isn't much damage done, is there?"

"No," she answered, smiling; "you were so very quick."

"Will you let me measure out the quantities for you?" he asked.

"If you like," replied Bertranda; "but it is for *the* experiment, you know."

The Misogynist started. He had forgotten that she was occupied with an idea for preserving his remains, and the recollection gave him an unpleasant shock. It was hardly nice of her, he considered, to contemplate such a thing.

"I wish you would give up that idea," he said.

"Don't be selfish," she responded

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sharply. "I wouldn't dream of asking you to give up your 'Improved Parthenogenesis' scheme."

"I should think not," he said; "there is some sense in my theory."

Bertranda only laughed.

"What an improvement it would be," she said, "if you could make people realise that their ideas are not the only ones, nor always the best! *My* idea may not be very sensible from your point of view, but it is sufficiently important to me to induce me to expend much labour upon it."

"How fond you must be of me," he exclaimed sarcastically, "to waste so much of your time!"

She laughed again.

"If that follows," she said, "how fond you must be of us!"

"I am fond of *you*," he replied most unexpectedly. Then, remembering the Georgian method, he continued with grovelling mendacity: "You can't think

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what I am suffering through you, Miss Harwood; the pain's just awful," and he smote his breast to indicate the exact position of the agony. "I can't eat, I can't sleep for thinking about you. This very day even Elizabeth asked me if I felt unhappy, because I looked it; and I told her that I couldn't get you out of my mind."

Miss Harwood slowly retreated, her suspicion being that the Professor was insane. To her infinite relief, he made no attempt to follow her, but continued his wild assertions in a cringing tone of affected humility that set her teeth on edge.

"You'd be sorry for me," he proceeded, remembering with a sudden qualm of conscience that he had just dined exceedingly well, "if you saw how I have lost my appetite. I can't even get on with my work. I can feel nothing, see nothing, think of nothing but you!—you!—you! I will give up anything for you—

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everything. All the little habits that you disapprove of—my work even—my great scheme. I'll lie down and let you walk over me, and feel proud to think that you had."

"For pity's sake, stop, Mr Sterndale," cried Bertranda in disgust. If she had not known him for a sober man she would have thought that he had been drinking; instead, she feared that his misfortunes were already turning his brain.

Sterndale gazed at her doubtfully, uncertain how to proceed. He had pretty well come to the end of his resources, and the method did not appear to be working very well. He wondered if it would be advisable to try the Georgian kiss; but a glance at Miss Harwood's heightened colour and dilated eyes somewhat damped his belief in the efficiency of George's plan.

"I have about exhausted the method," he observed aloud, "and it doesn't seem to have answered. But perhaps that may

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be due to having started at the wrong end."

Bertranda looked her astonishment.

"What method?" she inquired wonderingly. "And what end? I don't believe you know quite what you are talking about."

"I do," he assured her. "I mean George's method; but I began at the end instead of the beginning. I ought to have kissed you, and then you would have slapped my face. That would have established an understanding; you would have felt an interest in me, and I could have followed it up with the rest."

This speech had more effect than he had intended. Bertranda looked very angry; and he retreated a step or two in his turn, and put up a hand as though to ward off a blow.

"I didn't do it," he remonstrated; "you reserve the slapping process until after the event."

"Do you take me for a scullion?" she

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demanded in low, suppressed tones, the scorn of which lashed her hearer far more than a blow would have done. "Kindly oblige me by leaving my presence, Mr Sterndale. I shall be glad if you will remember not to intrude upon me again."

Sterndale searched his memory wildly for the advice Elizabeth had so generously bestowed, but he could recall nothing that would fit the case as it stood, and in the meantime Bertranda was looking imperiously towards the door. Then he suddenly recollected that Elizabeth, too, had treated her George 'haughty-like, as though he were dirt'; and he took heart of grace once more, and plunged recklessly in again.

"Don't send me away," he pleaded, remembering the humility dodge. "I can't live without you. I never cared for a woman before; but ever since I first knew you, you have exercised an unconscious influence over me—an influence for good. You could make anything of me if you would only try."

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"Don't be ridiculous," cried Bertranda angrily.

"Is that the way," he sorrowfully exclaimed, "that you take the offer of a man's love? Miss Harwood, you cannot be so cruel as to tread upon the heart which I lay in the dust at your feet."

His manner was so lugubrious that, in spite of her annoyance, Bertranda could not help laughing. She did not quite understand why he was saying all this, but she was quick-witted enough to perceive that it was a kind of rehearsed effect, and her doubt as to his sanity began to diminish.

"If you would only leave your 'method' and talk like a rational being I could listen more patiently," she remarked at length.

"It isn't *my* method," he answered; "it is George's. But it did the business with Elizabeth."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she exclaimed indignantly, "if you have been saying all that rubbish to her; you will turn her poor old head."

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"I haven't," he protested; "George said it to her. I'm not in love with Elizabeth."

"Oh!" said Bertranda expressively.

"It's like this," he went on desperately, in a forlorn effort to explain matters: "I have been feeling queer lately—in fact, ever since the night you——"

"Yes, I know," interposed Bertranda.

"It was a wretched sort of feeling," he continued; "and this morning I asked Elizabeth what being in love was like. She just hit off my sensations to a T. I told her how it was with me, and she suggested the remedy, and informed me how George had acted under similar circumstances."

Bertranda started to laugh again, and went on laughing until the room resounded with her mirth. The Misogynist looked annoyed.

"Why didn't you propose to Elizabeth?" she asked him, as soon as her gravity was sufficiently restored.

"I did," he replied. "But she refused me; and I was glad."

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Involuntarily her lips twitched anew.

"And now you have proposed to me," she cried, smiling, "and I am going to refuse you too."

"Then I am sorry—very sorry," he answered hastily. "I hope you won't say 'no' straight off like that."

"Oh, I'll let you down easily," she said. "I'll prove to you first that you are mistaken. You do not love *me* in the least. You want someone to protect you from these women, and you think only a wife could do that. Am I right?"

"Yes," he agreed reluctantly; "but——"

"I know; the fact of your asking me proves that you have a preference. Perhaps you have; but that isn't love. You prefer me to Elizabeth because I am younger and better-looking. I should be more of a companion to you. I could help you with your work, and discuss your theories intelligently with you across the breakfast-table. Occasionally, perhaps, you would take a kindly interest in my

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little aims, but you would be relieved if I didn't expect you to do it too often."

"Oh, don't!" he cried. "You are metaphorically kicking me. Am I such a prig as all that?"

"You are conceited," she replied; "you are proud of your intellect. That is the worst kind of pride: you don't make your own brains, you know."

The Misogynist looked her straight in the eyes. She was not quite such a nice woman as his imagination had painted her.

"Now, answer me truthfully," went on Bertranda relentlessly. "Would you give up all the indulgences you are accustomed to if I wanted you to—supposing we were married?"

"No," he answered hesitatingly, and she continued her catechism as before.

"Would you be willing to sacrifice your work at my bidding?" she asked.

"No," he said again, but with more decision this time.

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"Would you allow me to go on with my present scheme without remonstrance?"

"Certainly not," he replied emphatically.

"I consider," said Bertranda quietly, "that I have let you down fairly easily. There is scarcely any need for a direct answer after that."

"I think you've been beastly rough on me," he said, aggrieved.

"You might have known how it would be," she rejoined. "You and I are too much alike to be poured into the same measure with any reasonable hope of mixing. Why, if you need a protector, didn't you ask someone else? There are heaps of girls—nice girls—only too ready to accept you."

"I know," he answered moodily. "It's their readiness that puts me off."

"I am really sorry for you," she said satirically. "But I can't help you, I'm afraid; I am far too busy a woman to act watch-dog for anyone."

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"I always imagined," he remarked with dignity, "that when a woman refused a man she did it with a certain amount of consideration for his feelings; but you have abused and ill-treated me more, I think, than I deserve."

"I was only walking over you," observed Bertranda maliciously. "You lay down, so I fancied you wanted me to. You said just now that you would be proud to think that I had."

The Misogynist disliked being quoted against himself. He took up his hat, and strode towards the door; then he caught sight of her injured hand, which for the time he had forgotten; and he hesitated, and then came slowly back.

"I will mix the quantities you wanted before I go," he said.

"Coals of fire!" murmured Bertranda softly, but she picked up a paper of hieroglyphics and handed it to him with a smile.

"You will assist my work if you do," she said.

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He ran his eye down the sheet ; then he stripped off his coat and turned up his shirt-sleeves. Bertranda watched him in silence as he walked over to the sink, and busied himself among her bottles with a forlorn though business-like air, and her conscience smote her somewhat for having been unnecessarily severe.

"I am afraid you wouldn't like to work in my laboratory," he said, holding up the self-same measure that he had discovered her working with. "You can move about here, and don't need to dust your labels before reading what is on them."

She laughed.

"I can quite imagine that you need spring-cleaning," she replied. "But if I let my room get musty I should be afraid of getting musty too."

"Another knock for me," he said, and reached for a pestle and mortar. Bertranda came quickly forward.

"I can do that part of it," she expostu-

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lated. "It will be quite sufficient if you will measure out the liquids for me."

"As you like," he responded disagreeably. "I don't wish to do more than is necessary towards embalming my own remains."

CHAPTER XVII

THE Misogynist was so absorbed in his occupation that he forgot his troubles completely for a time—forgot, also, that he had just proposed to, and been rejected by, the woman working beside him, both of them intent on a project that would enable his body to be freely exposed in lecture-halls and museums long after they two had passed out of this world to another.

Bertranda explained her theory at some length to the Professor, and the Professor offered a suggestion that she took immediate advantage of, as being an improvement to her already well-considered idea. Then they looked at one another and laughed.

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"It's very funny," she said; "you are so hot against this idea, and yet at the present moment you are as keen about it as though it were your own."

"That's my way of taking a kindly interest in your little aims," he retorted.

"I see," she rejoined. "I don't think that I should have much to complain about if the interest was always so sincere. You have been a great help to me this evening, and I am very much obliged."

The Professor turned deliberately to the sink, and began absently to cleanse his hands, while Miss Harwood tidied away the apparatus that they had been using.

"It's rather jolly working in company," he jerked out presently. "I wish you'd think again over what I said just now."

"I expect I shall think of nothing else all night," she responded. "It is such an extraordinary thing that the only man in

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England should be refused twice in one day."

"It isn't very nice of you to make fun of me," he complained.

"It isn't," she agreed; "especially as you take your reverses so philosophically. To you work is a complete anodyne."

"How's the hand?" he asked abruptly.

"Fairly comfortable, thank you."

"You make a mistake," he said; "work is not a complete anodyne; it helps me to forget, but only you can administer a healing balm. My wound is only fairly comfortable, thank you. May I come and work with you again?"

"Yes," acquiesced Bertranda; "if you leave George's method at home."

"I will," he said. "I don't like borrowed ideas. But I am afraid Elizabeth will be disappointed."

"I should have thought she would have been glad," said Bertranda. "One would imagine that it would hardly be to her advantage for you to get married."

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"You don't know Elizabeth," he replied; "she is in deadly fear for her reputation. She considers it would be more respectable if I possessed a wife. I get a good many lady callers, you see, and Elizabeth doesn't approve of it. That reminds me I met a regular regiment of women in the road this evening. They didn't see me, or I shouldn't be here now; but I am half afraid to go home."

Bertranda looked at him somewhat contemptuously as, having finished drying his hands, he turned towards her with a decidedly nervous air; it seemed so ridiculous to hear a man allow such a thing.

"You want your watch-dog," she said unkindly.

He had no time to give her more than a brief reproachful glance before an ominous sound without made itself heard in the silence—the sound of women's voices, and the noise of many feet. The Misogynist started, much as he might

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have done had anyone pricked him unexpectedly, and the perspiration broke out upon his forehead and ran down over his face like tears. Bertranda looked apprehensive too.

"How very awkward!" she exclaimed in much vexation. "The servant will tell them that you have been here nearly two hours. What an unfortunate predicament for me to be in!"

He stared at her amazed. She seemed to have forgotten that he was in far worse plight.

"Miss Harwood," he cried desperately, "if I stay here I am lost! They will get hold of me, and heaven alone knows what will happen to me then. Can't you suggest any way of escape?"

She laughed hysterically, and looked blankly into his eyes.

"Do you want to borrow my dress again?" she demanded sharply.

Sterndale unfastened the shutters. The noise was much louder and nearer now ;

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it sounded almost as though the house was being surrounded.

"I must get out of the window and take my chance," he said. "I know now how those poor devils among the Indians must have felt running the gauntlet in the old, barbaric days—to be scalped, too, at the finish. I expect I shall be scalped in the end as well. I wish to God it was over!"

He flung back the shutters as he spoke, only to recoil from the window with an expression of horror in his eyes; and Bertranda saw, pressed against the panes, dozens of women's faces glaring into the room. A loud shout went up from their midst as they caught sight of the Professor, derisive comments on his *deshabille*—for he had not even thought of putting on his coat—and coarse abuse for Bertranda.

Someone from outside flung a missile, and there followed the crash of breaking glass, and a stone, that had undoubtedly

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been aimed at Miss Harwood, struck the wall above her head. The Misogynist banged to the shutters again, and forced the bar back into its place. Then he threw himself into a chair and stared helplessly at his companion; while the yells outside grew louder and more angry, and, judging by the sound, someone appeared to be hewing at the shutters with an axe.

"It is only a matter of time," he said, his knees trembling under him.

Bertranda was as white as marble, but she betrayed no sign of fear, and Sterndale, believing it was only himself the mob wanted, showed no concern for her either.

"All the lowest women in Denbeigh are outside that window," she said.

"I suppose it wouldn't be much good," he suggested, trying to listen above the uproar to the sounds about the house, "going into some other room?"

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She shook her head, and, as though in answer to his question, they heard someone in the passage without attempting to open the door; but Sterndale had already taken the precaution to lock it. He buried his face in his shaking hands and groaned, and Bertranda, standing opposite him, looked down on him with scorn.

"For heaven's sake, be a man!" she exclaimed. "I could feel sorry for you if you weren't so pitifully sorry for yourself."

He got up, and, staggering across the room, reached up to a shelf for a bottle of laudanum, and resolutely took it down. Bertranda followed him swiftly, and laid her hand heavily on his arm.

"Coward!" she cried, her voice breaking in a sound resembling a sob. "Have you no thought for me? Would you leave me to face it alone?"

He turned round on her almost angrily, and attempted to shake off her hand; then he noticed the strained whiteness of her

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face and the frightened tears in her eyes; and he put down the bottle, and spoke to her soothingly.

"You are quite safe," he said; "you're a woman; they want nothing to do with you."

"Listen!" she said, holding up her hand to gain his attention. "Hear what they say, and remember that I, also, must fall into their hands."

He did listen, but there was such a hostile jumble of sound without that at first he could distinguish nothing in the shape of words; everyone appeared to be shouting together, but he caught the sound of his own name occasionally, and that of Bertranda more often still.

"You wait till I get hold of her," shouted someone—and this time Sterndale heard distinctly enough. "I'll tear her eyes out for her; she shan't ogle him any more."

"We'll float her in the river," yelled another, amid peals of savage laughter.

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"She's bewitched him ; but we'll spoil her beauty for her so as he won't want to look at her twice."

And then followed remarks so coarse that the Misogynist tried not to listen to them, and Bertranda's head drooped forlornly like a flower that has been plucked and thrown carelessly aside to wither.

"There won't be much of her left to float by the time I've laid hands on her," screamed a third, and simultaneously with the words the axe came splintering through the woodwork of the shutters, and the iron bar across them bent like tin with the force of the blow.

Sterndale's manner underwent a complete change ; the element of personal fear vanished, and the more heroic emotion of fear for the woman took its place. He drew himself erect, and, throwing his arm protectingly about Bertranda's shrinking form, pressed her close to his side, and endeavoured to calm her terror.

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"They shall only reach you across my dead body," he declared. "Do not be alarmed; they shall not hurt a hair of your head."

Bertranda looked up at him with shining eyes, and her lips parted in a smile as she saw the stern resolution of his look.

"I believe," she exclaimed, with a little half-hysterical laugh, "that you would actually give up your work for me if I wanted you to."

"I would," he affirmed gravely.

"And all the indulgences I don't approve of?"

"Yes; everything," he answered. "And be glad to do it, too."

"I like your method better than George's," she said.

Sterndale laughed recklessly as the uproar outside increased.

"Let us try the first part of George's method," he cried; "perhaps that was the keynote of his success."

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Bertranda lifted her face to his, and he stooped, in the midst of the tumult, and kissed her tenderly on the lips.

"I like George's method," she said naïvely; "as practised by you, I mean."

"It's a jolly good method," he said; "but one must know where to bring it in."

Another blow on the shutters interrupted their talk; it only needed one more to smash them in altogether. Bertranda shuddered, and clung more tightly to her protector.

"Don't let them get at me," she entreated. "Hold me close as you are doing now; I don't feel so frightened then."

"Mr Sterndale, sir," shouted a voice through the keyhole, accompanied by loud and imperative knocking, "open the door, please; it will be too late soon."

"I will open the door to you," Sterndale shouted in answer, "if you will swear to me that no harm befalls this lady."

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Tell that yelling mob in the garden that I will give myself up to them unconditionally, if they will go away and leave this lady unmolested."

"Open the door, sir," reiterated the voice persistently, and the knocking continued, only growing louder with every moment. "Open the door, Mr Sterndale; it will be too late soon."

Sterndale looked at Bertranda. She lay in his arms half-swooning, her eyelids almost closed. He could not see if she breathed or no, but he felt her hair brushing against his face, and it sent a thrill through all his being, even as the touch of her lips had done.

"I must open the door, darling," he whispered. "But I will see that no harm comes to you. Look up, Bertranda; wake up, dear—wake up—wake——"

The Professor let forth a mighty shout as he bounded out of his chair, and, gazing wildly about him at the objects

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familiarised by years of constant association, realised, with a nervous shudder, that he had just awoke from the most horrible nightmare that he had ever dreamed.

CHAPTER XVIII

GEOFFREY STERNDALE took out his handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow. He was in his laboratory alone. On a table in front of him lay an article on the proposed taxation of bachelors in France; beside it was a small scented note, an invitation to an "At Home"; and in the waste-paper basket, torn into minute fragments, reposed a written proposal of marriage from an enthusiastic admirer of one of the most promising men of his day. The answer to the proposal, together with that of the invitation, lay upon his blotting-pad. They were both in the negative.

Sterndale, as his eye took in these

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details, slowly fitted in the pieces of his dream. He pressed his hand wearily to his forehead and tried to collect himself. Not at once could he shake off the horrible sensation that had held him; an eternity of misery had been crowded into those last few moments, and it had left him upset and depressed, the effects less, perhaps, of the nightmare than of complete physical and mental fatigue. The knocking which had played so important a part in the dream, and which had been without doubt the means of waking him, had not been imaginary; someone was knocking at the laboratory door, loudly and imperatively, and calling to him anxiously, as though they had been there some time, and had failed to get any response. Sterndale started at the sound; then, recollecting himself, with a half-nervous laugh he strode forward and turned the key in the lock. His servant stood without, grave, alert, slightly apologetic.

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"You told me to be sure and come for the letters, sir, in time for this post," he said.

"Why, James—James Stone!" exclaimed the Misogynist, laughing immoderately, and clapping that worthy on the back so energetically that he grew quite red in the face. "I thought you were dead and buried, man; but I'm devilish glad that you aren't."

James Stone scrutinised his master closely. Then he took a liberty, which he had never been known to do before. He walked over to a side cupboard, and, taking from it a decanter and glass, poured out a stiff tot of whisky and handed it to his master.

"It will be a good thing for you, sir, when we're out in South Africa," he observed. "Fighting the Boers will be a deal healthier than sitting eighty-four hours at a stretch over them chermicals. You've hardly eaten anything. I know that, because the tray has been always

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much the same when I carried it away as when I brought it; and I don't suppose that you've slept neither."

"Oh yes, I have," answered Sterndale; "I was asleep when you knocked just now, and I never had such an unholy time in all my life as during that brief interval of oblivion. I don't want to go to sleep again, James."

James, who knew his master's trouble was insomnia, was not altogether surprised at the latter's nervous and agitated condition. If people would sit four days and three nights working out an idea, it was only to be expected that their nerves would go wrong; no one could stand such a strain on and off for years and continue in sound health.

"If I was you, sir," he suggested diffidently, "I'd 'ave a bath and let me shave you; and then I'd go for a long walk, and not so much as think of chermicals."

"I think I'll follow your advice," Stern-

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dale answered in some amusement. "But you must save this post first, James; I particularly wish these letters to go."

He tossed the two answers across to his servant, and then, with a sudden alteration of decision, drew back the reply to the invitation, and threw it on one side.

"Wait a moment," he said; "I've changed my mind about this."

He dashed off an acceptance, and handed it across instead.

"I've never been to an 'At Home' yet," he remarked, "but that's no reason why I shouldn't begin. Take these over to the post, James, and then come back and turn me into a civilised being again."

When James Stone was gone, and he was alone once more, the Misogynist pushed his working materials on one side and sat himself down to think. He had been for some time fully alive to the fact that he was working too hard, and that the strain was beginning to tell; but he had never realised it so thoroughly as now,

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while the horror of his dream was fresh in his memory, and his pulses still beat quicker from his recent excitement. Sterndale was troubled by that devil insomnia, which is almost invariably the result of an overworked brain. With a view to ridding himself of the evil, he had decided to volunteer for service in South Africa, and, to Elizabeth Stone's unspeakable grief, James was bent upon accompanying his master. Her sorrow had astonished Sterndale greatly. He had, at James's request, broached the matter to her himself, and had been very much taken aback at the manner in which she received the news. There was no one to grieve at his going. There never had been anyone since he could remember to concern themselves about him in any way; nor had he felt the lack of those ties of affection which are usually considered to enhance the value of life. He found that he needed a complete change, not only of climate, but of work and surroundings;

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soldiering seemed to him to answer the requirements exactly, and the rough, open-air life was the best thing for his complaint. So far nothing was definitely settled ; but it was pretty generally known that he was on the eve of volunteering, and the 'At Home' which he had so suddenly decided to attend was, though he was unaware of the fact, got up in his honour as a kind of farewell. To do him justice, he had, as soon as he knew of Elizabeth's objections, done his utmost to dissuade James from his purpose ; but James, who was most unaffectedly attached to his master, was not to be dissuaded. According to his own statement, delivered to a crowd of admiring acquaintances, he was going out to keep an eye on the gov'nor, and see he didn't come to any harm. The redoubtable James was very little over five feet ; Sterndale was six feet one in his socks, and perfectly proportioned at that.

Sterndale's decision was a matter of

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surprise and regret in the scientific world. It seemed incredible that a man with so brilliant a career before him could voluntarily throw it all up, and take up work that anyone might perform, given the necessary brute strength and a certain amount of courage. Patriotism was all very well; but geniuses were rare, and there was other work for the scientist on a field that was quite as much a bed of glory as the battle-field, when, the conflict ended, the winners and losers of all fights must lay down their arms before the all-conquering foe. The fighters of life's problems belong to an army not to be despised, and the winners of the battle have their names engraven on the ineffaceable tablets of the world's advance.

Sterndale was not so much brave as reckless of danger. It had been said of him that he dreaded nothing except women; the realisation of danger had never been brought home to him. He had seldom any time in which to think

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about himself, and so he had grown to look upon his own personality as an unimportant development in the natural laws of the universe, sooner or later to be engulfed in the fathomless depths of the waters of oblivion. He was not of the diffident order ; he was simply unaware of his own genius, because he was always striving after the impossible, and, as generally happens in such cases, considered himself a failure in that he never reached his goal. Perhaps there was no one who so thoroughly understood and sympathised with him as James Stone. James was an invaluable servant. He knew his worth ; but he also knew his place and kept it, though he did sometimes use his own judgment in matters that another would undoubtedly have left to his employer's discretion. It was characteristic of him that, on returning from the town, and finding a messenger in the hall with a basket of flowers, and a dainty, scented

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note from the writer of the proposal of marriage to whom he had just posted Sterndale's refusal, he should take both basket and note, dismiss the messenger, and then, to Elizabeth's further astonishment, carry the flowers into the dining-room, and put them on the dinner-waggon out of sight. Elizabeth ventured a remonstrance.

"The boy said the note needed an answer," she observed.

"It'll have to need, then," was James's unfilial response. "I ain't goin' to let the gov'nor be worried with any of that silly sort of nonsense till 'e's 'ad 'is walk. He's got the 'orrors to-day ; and that's the kind of thing wot always makes 'im worse."

He went upstairs, after delivering himself thus, to remove the three days' growth from his master's chin, and lay out his things in readiness for when he should have taken his cold-water plunge. He guessed more than Sterndale suspected of the contents of those dainty missives

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which caused the recipient so much annoyance, and which lately had become more numerous and more persistent, and he had no intention of assisting others in making a Benedict of his master against the latter's inclination ; in which determination he was, perhaps, less disinterested and more zealous than in any other.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS ELTON was a charming widow, and made a perfect hostess, as all her male, and most of her female, friends ungrudgingly allowed. Her parties were always a success, and never too crowded to be enjoyable. She possessed a special tact in issuing invitations; she never mixed her entertainments, nor introduced an incongruous element; with the result, of course, that people generally enjoyed themselves, and went away satisfied. To-night was a special triumph, and the hostess felt more elated than she ever remembered to have been at any previous function. She had not believed, even when she had received Sterndale's accept-

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ance, that he would really come ; it was not until she recognised him, as he strode through the throng towards her, that she realised that to her fell the unique honour of numbering the much-sought-after and reclusive genius among her guests.

He arrived rather late, looking, as he felt, decidedly out of his element, and uncomfortably aware that his appearance was creating quite a little stir of surprise. Mrs Elton, who was still busy receiving, whispered him to go inside and wait for her, and she would find somebody particularly nice for him to talk to, somebody she had invited to meet him, in fact. Then, with a little nod of encouragement, she dismissed him from her side, and turned to welcome some fresh arrivals. Stern-dale passed on into the room, and, in fear lest his hostess should redeem her promise if she discovered him, mingled desperately where the crowd was densest, and tried to appear at anyrate as though he were enjoying himself.

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Mrs Elton had meant Bertranda Harwood by somebody particularly nice. She knew that Sterndale was supposed to dislike women, and that Bertranda disliked men. This dislike was, of course, no ill-bred and palpable aversion; it was merely that they preferred the society of their own sex, and were strongly prejudiced against any intimate relationship with the other. Bertranda was just as much wedded to her work and her ideals as Sterndale. She was also, in Mrs Elton's mind, quite as great a genius; and Mrs Elton worshipped intellect because it happened to be fashionable, though she sometimes confessed that it bored her horribly. She didn't understand that sort of thing, and she could not conceive how a nice-looking girl like Bertranda could ever have gone in for mathematics, turned philosopher and scientist, and done her utmost to spoil her hands and complexion with chemicals, like any nasty druggist. There was another thing that Mrs Elton could

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not understand about Bertranda, and that was how a girl in her position could defy conventionality by living all by herself, and going about in the independent and highly commendable manner of our fair American cousins. Yet Bertranda did these things, and was tolerated—even sought after. But then, of course, she was a genius, and people make allowances.

"You don't mean to say," exclaimed a late arrival to his hostess, as they stood together in the doorway surveying the scene, "that that's Sterndale over there in the corner by the palm—Geoffrey Sterndale, I mean, the chap who's mad on Professor Loeb's discovery, and is a kind of Darwin the second?"

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs Elton, "you don't connect the two, do you?"

"Well, I don't know much about them," her companion admitted. "But I've read some of Sterndale's articles on this parthenogenesis rot, and I really wonder

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his friends don't put him in a lunatic asylum."

The hostess smiled.

"Oh, well, we must have our hobbies," she said indulgently. "It might be worse. If it wasn't parthenogenesis it would be photography; and one is at least new."

The man nodded in acquiescence. He had but recently returned from abroad, and was not familiar with many faces among the assemblage. He looked across again at Sterndale, where he stood leaning against a wall talking to one or two other men, and inquired slowly,—

"What's he doing here anyway? I always understood that he was a kind of Diogenes—that was the tub man, wasn't it?"

"At the present moment," replied Mrs Elton coolly, "he appears to be conversing."

Her auditor smiled.

"That was rather superfluous," he

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answered. "But I suppose you think so was my question. Of an ordinary man it would have been, considering it is you who are giving the show; but I didn't know that Sterndale was such an appreciative beggar. He is generally credited with being a misogynist, you know."

Mrs Elton made a little contemptuous gesture.

"I haven't any patience with such nonsense," she exclaimed. "When a man admits that he is a woman-hater you may be sure that he speaks from ignorance of the sex, or that at some time he has been badly snubbed by some woman or other, and vents his spleen indiscriminately. And the same applies to women also. There's Bertranda Harwood, for instance. She is a man-hater. Now, she knows nothing whatever about men, because she never allows herself to get intimate with them. She is, by the way, the lioness of the evening—the Professor, of

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course, is my lion. I invited them expressly for one another. Miss Harwood is really charming; I am very fond of Bertranda."

The man laughed.

"With a love that 'passeth all understanding,' I suppose?" he said,—“man's understanding, at anyrate."

"You are not improved," rejoined Mrs Elton severely. "I think it is a pity that you are not out in the backwoods again, shooting big game, or whatever it is one goes to the backwoods for."

"Don't be unkind," he said remonstratingly. "I would much rather be here enjoying the privilege of talking to you, and being initiated in the mysteries of lion-taming. I have in my time shot both a lion and lioness, but I was never so bold as to attempt to make domestic pets of them. My advice to you is to be wary. They might turn round and bite. It's against his principles, you see; and as for

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the lioness, these charming young women are often vicious, especially when they happen to be bosom friends. There's something about warming a viper, you know——”

“Oh, don't!” she interrupted; “I loathe snake stories, from the one in Genesis up to the present day. Do come across the room with me——”

“I'd go further than that with you,” he interposed.

“Thank you.—And let me introduce you to that rather ugly girl in yellow. She's dreadfully plain, and terribly uninteresting, but she's good style; and you were always good-natured, you know.”

“I fear that I have got a reputation which I never earned,” he averred deprecatingly. “I should like to demonstrate to you this evening how erroneous is your surmise.”

“Nonsense!” she exclaimed. “Besides, you could sustain conversation with a Trappist, I believe; and the girl looks out

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of it. I hate to see people not enjoying themselves."

"So do I," he agreed. "There is only one thing I hate more, and that is having my own enjoyment spoilt."

"But to oblige me?" she said.

"To oblige you," he answered gravely, "I will follow you across the room."

In the meantime Sterndale had quitted his position by the palm, and, wandering aimlessly along, came across Bertranda. She was seated in an alcove near the conservatory, with a small, fair man, who was patiently endeavouring to amuse her, and helplessly wondering in what her genius lay; it was certainly not in small talk. Sterndale paused resolutely in front of them, and the lion and lioness looked steadily at one another. She was very much as she had appeared in his dream, and wore the same graceful Grecian drapery. Her fair hair waved back from her forehead, and was knotted loosely low in the neck. Her dress

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was of some white, soft, shimmery material; and she wore no ornaments. Sterndale bowed.

"Miss Harwood," he said, "I can scarcely hope to be remembered; but we have met before."

Bertranda smiled frankly.

"I remember perfectly," she answered; "we met once and quarrelled."

"*You met me* once," he corrected, "but I have met you several times."

Miss Harwood looked puzzled, and her companion, with an air of good-natured resignation, rose as if about to take his leave.

"You always have all the luck," he observed reproachfully to the intruder. "I thought that you were out cornering De Wet."

"You anticipate matters, Sir John," replied Sterndale. "So far I have not even volunteered my services; and they may not be accepted when I do."

"Not much fear of that," the Baronet

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rejoined politely. "What do you think, Miss Harwood, eh?"

"I think," Bertranda answered seriously, "that it is a great pity Mr Sterndale should not have been proof against the fashionable mania; but of course he is the best judge in the matter."

"I told you you had all the luck," murmured the Baronet to Sterndale. Then he bowed gracefully to Bertranda and went away, pondering why she was always so deadly in earnest about everything.

Miss Harwood made a slight movement of her skirts, and Sterndale, interpreting it rightly, sat down in the vacant seat.

"It gives me much pleasure to renew our acquaintance," he observed, gazing at her with a closer scrutiny than he was perhaps aware of. "But I regret that the only part of our former interview that you remember is the disagreement."

"There wasn't anything else to re-

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member," she retorted, laughing; "it was all disagreement. The humiliating part is that I discovered later that I was entirely wrong."

"We couldn't both be right," he ventured.

"That's hardly consoling to me," she said.

"Well, suppose," he suggested brilliantly, "that we forget the disagreement and start afresh? I feel that as long as you remember that unfortunate episode you will be prejudiced; and I want to enjoy myself this evening."

"Is that what you came for?" she inquired, a trifle cynically.

"Not altogether," he replied. "But naturally when one does come to an affair of this kind one hopes to have a good time."

"It is so very unusual to meet you anywhere, that I was most astonished when I caught sight of you just now. I did not suppose that even Mrs Elton

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could tempt you out of your lair. What magic did she use?"

"None," he answered; "it was fate."

"Ah! Fate never took me anywhere against my wish," Miss Harwood remarked serenely. "That is the second thing you have said that has puzzled me. If you arouse my curiosity, you ought at least to satisfy it. What did bring you here to-night?"

"A dream."

Bertranda laughed softly.

"This sounds interesting," she cried. "May I hear it?"

"It was a long one," he answered. "I fear to bore you."

"That is hardly likely. You might tell me as well what you meant when you said you had met me several times."

"I met you in the dream," he rejoined with a smile. Miss Harwood smiled in unison, and her curiosity became more apparent.

"It seems that I have a personal

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interest in this dream," she said. "I really must hear it. One reads of remarkable dreams often enough; but I have never met anyone before who was so moved by one as to voluntarily attend a function for which he is known to entertain a special aversion. Come, Mr Sterndale, I want you to dream it over again for my benefit; will you?"

Her tone was friendly and coaxing, and the grey eyes looking smilingly into his were irresistibly soft and winning. Their expression reminded him of the supper scene in his dream, and for fully half a minute he looked back at her without answering. Then he said,—

"I cannot very well refuse your request, but if you are bored you must not blame me. Would you like—that is, would you mind coming into the conservatory? We can talk more comfortably there, with less chance of being disturbed."

Bertranda rose in acquiescence, and placed her hand lightly on his proffered

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arm. The situation was unique, and she was aware of it; it was more than probable that the Professor had never offered his arm to any woman before. Mrs Elton watched them disappear into the conservatory together, and her glance sought that of the man she had introduced to the uninteresting girl in yellow. He was doing his utmost to amuse her, but his attention was not so entirely engrossed that he failed to catch his hostess' look and comprehend her meaning. He shrugged his shoulders, with a half smile that admitted her success as a lion-tamer, and betrayed a certain commiseration for the lion who had apparently so easily fallen a victim to her scheming. Then he turned to answer his companion's artless query, and lied audaciously without even a prayer to be forgiven.

"Like cats?" he ejaculated. "I should rather say so. I dote on 'em; they're so soft, and furry, and squeezable, and—and all that, don't you know. Gad! You

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like 'em too, eh? Funny that we should have tumbled on a taste in common. To see a charming girl," with a look and intonation that set his listener blushing pleasantly, "nursing a kitten is one of the prettiest sights in Nature. Oh yes, I love cats, and babies, and—all those kind of things."

CHAPTER XX

"THIS," said Bertranda appreciatively, nestling lazily against the cushions that he had been at some trouble to arrange for her, "is decidedly comfortable. For a tyro in such matters you manage excellently well."

Sterndale started. Then he drew a chair forward for himself, and sat down opposite.

"Do you know," he observed, "that you said exactly the same thing, almost word for word, in my dream? It is really an extraordinary coincidence. I wonder if it is possible for certain people to influence unconsciously the minds of others without actually coming in contact with them?"

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Bertranda looked astonished. His manner was so grave and absorbed that she did not like to laugh, although she felt an almost irresistible desire to do so.

"Has this anything to do with the dream?" she asked.

"I wasn't thinking of the dream just then," he replied, "but of you."

"Thank you," she retorted, with a little mocking smile; "I am not in the humour for personalities to-night. Suppose we return to the dream. It is what I came in here to listen to."

"Yes," he said, "and it is what I came here to-night to get away from. It was a nightmare, and an uncomfortably realistic one. I dreamed that I was living some thousands of years later than the present century, and that the male species had become extinct. I was the only man in England, and had an awful time of it."

He paused. Bertranda was looking faintly amused, and just a trifle sympathetic.

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"It is not difficult," she observed, "to imagine that you had. I really wonder that you didn't commit suicide."

"One never does the right thing in dreams, or I should have," he replied. "I fancy the census was mainly responsible for the thing. It sent my thoughts harping back to the previous census, with its majority of women. In my dream this majority had assumed astonishing proportions, and a big European war finished the men up entirely, with the exception of only myself. I came back to England to carry on my work as heretofore, but of course it was impracticable; I hadn't a second idea, and felt like a hunted cur, afraid to stir out of doors for the women who haunted the road outside my gate. They tried to force their way into the house even, and made love to me horribly."

Miss Harwood laughed outright.

"How dreadfully conceited that sounds!" she exclaimed. "Did I make love to you too?"

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"No; but you gave me shelter once when I was being pursued, and sought refuge in your house."

"That was very kind of me," she remarked gravely.

"It was," he agreed. "I stayed and had supper with you; but in the middle of it some girls arrived for a class, or lecture, or something, and there was nowhere for me to hide."

"Ah!" cried Bertranda, "it is growing exciting. What did I do with you then? Not hand you over to the enemy, surely?"

"You took off your dress——"

"Eh?"

"You took off your dress," he repeated, scarcely heeding her interruption, "and I knelt down with my feet under the sofa while you covered me over with it."

"There seems to have been no end to my kindness," she remarked, with a shade less warmth in tone and manner. "Did my sacrifice avail? or was the ruse discovered?"

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"It was discovered," he answered jerkily. "But you managed to open the window, and I escaped that way. I couldn't help dreaming what I did, you know; and I warned you that it would bore you."

"It does not bore me," answered Bertranda slowly; and as she spoke she lifted her eyes and looked steadily at him, while he, scarce knowing that he did so, leaned forward till his gaze was on a level with her own, and his hands, idly clasping his knee, came in contact with the soft folds of her gown.

"It is good of you to say so," he rejoined, "and to listen so patiently to such nonsense. Of course it was only a dream, but it was so startlingly realistic; and the queerest part to me is that, though I had only met you once, your personality in the dream was so very marked, and you appeared, if you will permit me to say so, very much as you do now."

"Really, Mr Sterndale," cried Bertranda, laughing, "the whole thing is

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preposterous. How did the people in your dream dress?—in twentieth-century attire?”

“Very much as you are dressed now,” he replied.

“Like me? How very inconvenient for the workers!”

“I don’t know about that,” he said; “it looked very nice.”

“Were they any different, these women, from the women of our day?”

“Yes; they were all silly, brainless creations of my own imagination, except——”

“Except?”

“You,” he admitted shyly.

“Thank you,” said Bertranda; “I am glad you excepted me. And now tell me more; you can’t have finished yet. Of course, while you practically had the ordering of things you brought in your beloved trinity—Freethought, Vegetarianism, and Socialism?”

“There was so much to crowd into the time that I’m afraid I didn’t think it all out

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to that extent," he replied. "Indeed, I am pretty well sure that I was false to my principles, for I have a distinct remembrance of eating chicken at supper with you."

"Ah!" said Bertranda, returning to the attack; "what happened to you after you escaped by the window? Did you get home safely?"

"Yes. I damaged your flower-beds rather in my descent, and arrived home in no very enviable mood. I tried to work after that, but it wasn't a bit of good; I could only think of——"

"What?"

"Oh! nothing in particular."

"The dream does not grow more lucid," Miss Harwood observed airily.

Sterndale looked down with half a smile, and stroked his chin reflectively. He was wondering how much, or how little, more it would be discreet to tell.

"I called upon you again," he went on, "after about a week had elapsed. I

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thought about it several times. I wanted to call, but hadn't got an excuse, and I had not sufficient courage to present myself without one. Then a brilliant inspiration occurred to me. I let a retort fall and smash, and set out to borrow one from you."

"Yes, that was certainly ingenious."

She was laughing openly now, making no attempt to conceal her amusement. The Baronet would have been astonished to see how really amused she could look at times. He had only succeeded in calling up the wintriest of smiles; yet he was reckoned a charming man, and invaluable at social functions of any kind.

"So I thought," he agreed. "But it didn't seem to work. We were getting on comfortably enough until I mentioned that I had come to borrow, and then you took umbrage——"

Bertranda stared.

"You mean?" she queried.

He coloured slightly. He had been

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going ahead too quickly, and her tone drew him up with a start.

"I suppose I managed it badly," he said; "I generally do. At any rate, you didn't seem pleased about something; and so I took my leave. And then comes one of the worst parts of the dream."

He peered through the screen of palms to where a stout woman of middle age stood laying down the law to a small group of interested auditors, and a suspicion of a smile hovered around his mouth as he watched her.

"Miss Lilian Manners plays the principal part in this scene," he observed, bringing his glance back to Bertranda's face with a deepening of the smile upon his own. "She raced me home with the intention of proposing matrimony to me. It is rather funny, when you come to think of it, considering what a rooted antipathy Miss Manners has for me in real life."

Bertranda smiled also.

"It is funnier still to think of her *racing*

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anyone," she said. "How annoyed she would be if you told her about it!"

"I can't help that. One isn't responsible for his dreams, eh? *You* aren't annoyed, are you?"

"Oh dear, no! I'm only amused. Besides, it was all a dream, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he answered slowly, "it was all a dream, of course."

"But your going to the war wasn't a dream," she said suddenly; "that part of it is real enough."

"True," he replied; "that wasn't dreaming, it was merely anticipating. Dreams, you will find, are generally founded upon something substantial."

"It is a pity," said Bertranda steadily, "that you did not leave the fighting to those who could better be spared. I am not alluding to home ties; for doubtless there are many fallen who will be more sadly missed than you would be. I am speaking simply from a patriotic view; for bloodshed means but little in a nation's

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advance. It is intellect will rule the world in the future, when civilisation has reached a higher plane."

"Even allowing so," he said, "there are still many at the front who can be spared less than I."

"Two wrongs don't make a right," Bertranda answered; "your argument will not hold, Mr Sterndale. Because other clever men have fallen, that is no reason you should add to their numbers."

"I might come back," he said.

"You might," she acquiesced. "But even if you did, it would be so much wasted time. Is it worth staking all upon a chance?"

"I do not know," he answered gravely; "I never thought of it in that light. I wanted change, and that seemed the best way of getting it; there was no one to study in the matter."

Bertranda did not at once reply. She was regarding him earnestly, with a look

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of interest in her eyes. Her manner, too, betrayed a certain womanly sympathy for his solitary condition; she also knew what it was to be alone.

"It is not too late now," she said, after a pause. "You have not yet volunteered."

"No," he replied slowly. "But to draw back at the eleventh hour! I couldn't do that."

"You are a coward," she rejoined, smiling; "you are afraid of what the world will say."

"Well, perhaps you are right there," he admitted. "To draw back now would require more pluck than is needed to go forward. And there is no reason why I should draw back."

Bertranda was always unexpected, and she changed the subject now as suddenly as though her interest in it had altogether ceased. She rose, and, placing her hand upon her companion's arm, said lightly,—

"Let us go and have supper together in reality. I feel hungry."

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"So do I," he rejoined; "your idea is charming."

"It is practical," Miss Harwood interposed quickly.

"Exactly; that's why it so appeals to me."

Later, when Bertranda left, it was the Misogynist who saw her into her carriage, and watched her drive away. He had bidden farewell to his hostess at much about the same time, and had followed Miss Harwood out.

"If you are leaving now," observed Bertranda as she shook hands, "won't you accept a seat in the brougham?"

"Thank you, no," he returned. "It is all out of your way, and I shall be glad of the walk."

Miss Harwood did not press the point, but she leaned nearer to him, and the grey-blue eyes met his frankly as they had done in his dream.

"Will you come and call upon me if you happen to be passing?" she asked.

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"I shall be delighted to see you at any time. You won't need to break a retort, or do anything else ridiculous, for you will not require an excuse; I have asked you."

CHAPTER XXI

"WELL," observed Mrs Elton triumphantly, a couple of months later, to the man with whom she had discussed the subject before on the occasion of her "At Home," "what do you say now to my theories anent woman-haters and man-haters in general, and these two in particular? Wasn't I right?"

"Of course," he replied; "it is quite sufficient that they were your theories. You are a wonderful woman."

"I wish you would be serious," she rejoined impatiently, abstractedly pulling the ears of an overfed pug-dog that reposed among the cushions on the sofa

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at her side; "I am so deadly tired of your nonsense."

"I never was more serious in my life," he returned, watching the slim white fingers caressing the dog's silky ears. "My reputation for nonsense is about as well founded as my reputation for good-nature. There, I told you that brute would snap in a jiffy."

The brute's mistress stroked it reassuringly, with the somewhat superfluous query, "Didn't it like it, then?"

"Of course it didn't; it's an unappreciative animal. Now, if you'd only pull my ears about like that I'd simply love it."

Mrs Elton looked severe.

"You want your ears boxed," she rejoined unkindly.

"If you boxed them I don't know that I should altogether object to that," he retorted. "I have a faint sort of recollection that the last time I went abroad, when I was saying good-bye to you——"

"I shall always consider," went on Mrs

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Elton hurriedly, "that I had the bringing of it about. It was here they first got to know one another. I have half a mind to insist on giving Bertranda away at the wedding."

"Don't you think that you have given her away sufficiently already?" he hazarded.

"Besides, you are a bit previous, aren't you? They're not engaged as yet."

"That doesn't matter," the little widow responded confidently; "with two such extraordinary people as they are, it is more than likely that they will get married straight off without any engagement at all."

"It is rather rounding on his own theories, don't you think?" he suggested interrogatively. "It's a way these crazy scientists have at times when it suits their purpose, I notice. One can't help admiring the chap, too; he's had to face a thundering lot of ridicule lately, through jacking up the war and everything, when it was so generally known that he had

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decided on volunteering. What a fool a woman can make of a man when she likes!"

"When the woman happens to be Bertranda," answered Mrs Elton, "I consider that he's a very lucky fool—a fool to be envied, in fact."

"Oh! for that matter I wouldn't mind being made a fool of myself," he responded.

"Bertranda likes brains," observed Mrs Elton speculatively.

"I wasn't thinking of Miss Harwood then," he returned; "so far as I am concerned, she is welcome to her modern-improvement creator. I presume that Bertranda has not the sole privilege of making a fool of a man?"

"I don't think that you need a woman to do that for you," she retorted.

"No doubt you are right, as usual. She has done it for me already; but I think she might make a happy fool of me; two years' unswerving devotion deserves some recompense."

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"I never yet started a conversation that you didn't bring round to yourself," she complained pettishly. "You are the most conceited man I know."

"Well, I always find myself so much more interesting than other people," he answered. "But I am ever ready to oblige you, as you know. Remember what I went through for you here in this very room a short while back, and give me at least my deserts."

Mrs Elton laughed softly.

"Oh, you mean the girl in yellow?" she said. "That poor plain thing! You quite won her heart. She informed me afterwards that you were perfectly charming, and that a five minutes' conversation with you was an intellectual treat."

"And as a reward for my amiable sinning I received a squirming, squally kitten the following day, because I was 'so fond' of 'em. I'll pass it on if you like; it's you who really deserved it."

"Thank you; but Dibs might object,"

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the pug's mistress answered. "Keep it, and give it to Bertranda for a wedding present."

On the self-same afternoon Bertranda also was receiving. The Professor had called—one of the many visits he had paid since receiving her permission. He made no attempt to explain the frequency of these visits either to himself or to her; he came simply for the pleasure of seeing her, and she was fully aware of the fact. Bertranda was a little shy that afternoon, and she looked away rather quickly after giving him her hand. The last time that he had called she had said to him,—

"I wish that *I* could persuade you of the mistake you are making in contemplating going to the front."

And he had answered quietly, "You have persuaded me."

Then he had gone away, and she knew that he no longer intended to volunteer. She was glad; but the consciousness of

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her power over him brought with it an embarrassment which she had never felt before.

Sterndale drew a chair close up to hers, and sank into it with a sigh.

"I have been laughed at most horribly since last I saw you," he began, "and have earned the never-dying contempt of my servant—the redoubtable James. The latter is, perhaps, excusable, considering his grounds for complaint; but it is very humiliating, nevertheless."

"I am sorry," answered Bertranda simply, "because you have not merited ridicule."

Sterndale looked pleased.

"It is very queer," he said, "I have never had anyone to confide in all these years, and never wanted to confide before; yet now when anything goes crookedly I invariably come to you, and derive no end of solace from the visit. I couldn't go back to the old hermit way—at least I shouldn't like to."

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Bertranda looked thoughtfully out of the window, watching the sunlight filtering through the overhanging branches of the trees, uneasily conscious that the Professor was watching her. Her colour was a shade deeper than usual, and her eyes were very bright.

"The habit of wanting to be alone grows upon one," she said. "I, too, consider it a mistake, and like you have been a long time finding it out."

"I am glad you have found it out, though," he said; then continued reflectively: "Many of my old cherished ideas are mistaken ones. When a man's whole interest is absorbed in himself and his work, he is bound to grow self-centred and narrow, no matter how great the work may be. Human nature requires something outside its own poor personality, or that most divine of all its attributes—sympathy—is killed for want of nourishment. People have always called me a misogynist—I have thought myself one

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hitherto. Now I know that I was merely an arrogant fool."

Bertranda smiled; yet she was not so much amused as impressed by his words.

"It is not everyone who will see, and, seeing, admit their errors," she said. "You have taught me more than one good lesson, Mr Sterndale."

"*You* have taught *me* the greatest of all," he answered; "for it is you who have taught me to see my mistakes. If you could only realise half the admiration and reverence I feel for you, you would perhaps understand what your friendship is to me."

"Please don't," she whispered, averting her flushed face.

"You are not angry, are you?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh no! But what you say makes me feel how unworthy I am of it all. I am not the sort of woman one places on a pedestal. I shouldn't feel comfortable on one either; I should feel so out of it, and be so dreadfully afraid of falling."

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"I don't wish to place you on a pedestal, for then you would be beyond my reach," he said. "I should like to stand on a level with you, and feel that we were fighting our way side by side. Since knowing you I have realised how incomplete my life has been without you. Miss Harwood, it would be kinder of you to let me go to the front than to bid me stay on here with no hope of reward."

During his speech Bertranda had risen, and now walked slowly over to the window, where she stood looking out upon the grounds. Her face was still averted from him, and still faintly flushed, but he could not judge from her manner whether she were displeased or not. He rose also and followed her.

"You do not answer me," he said; "and yet I cannot believe that I have vexed you."

"You ought not to speak as though your staying back were simply to oblige me," she returned. "I thought that you

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were convinced of the mistake of volunteering. I did not ask you to give it up for my sake."

"No," he agreed, "you did not ask that, but I am hoping that you will."

His tone was grave and entreating, and he paused expectantly, watching her with growing uneasiness, anxiously waiting for some word or sign; but Bertranda made no response. He half feared that he had annoyed her, and almost unconsciously put out his hand and laid it upon her arm.

"I did not wish to worry you," he said. "Perhaps I have presumed too far in imagining that it really mattered to you whether I went or stayed. If it annoys you, I will not refer to the subject again."

For answer the grey eyes flashed a quick look up at him, and then were hidden again beneath their dark curling lashes, and in mute response the hand that was resting on her arm was removed, and placed gently round her shoulders.

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"It does matter a little bit, then?" he questioned softly.

"No," she answered; "it matters a great deal. I am afraid that I have not been altogether disinterested in my efforts to dissuade you."

"How happy you make me by saying that!" he cried boyishly. "Then perhaps after all you will ask me to——"

"Stay back for my sake?" she prompted shyly. "That is what I have wanted to ask you all the time."

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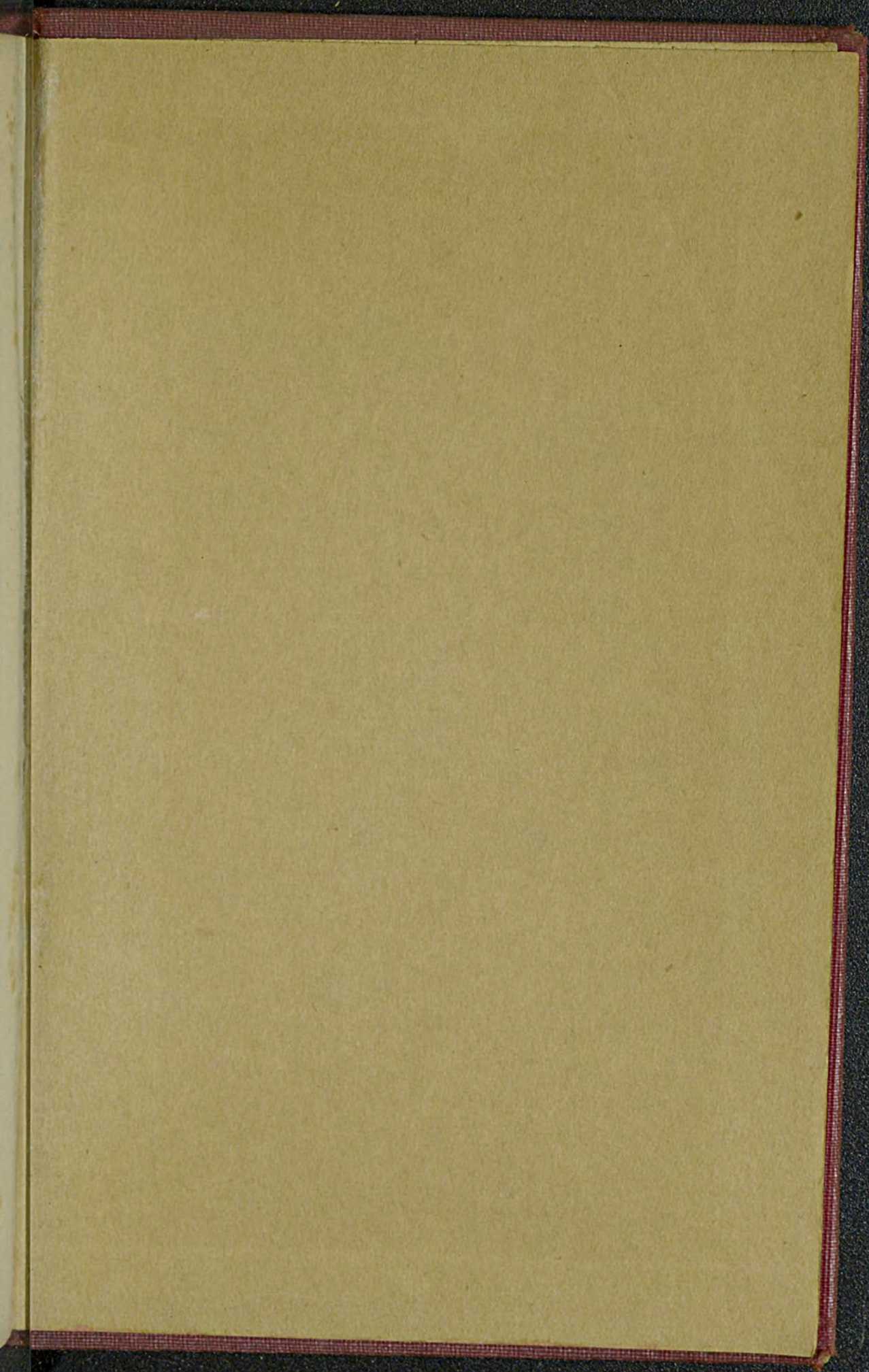
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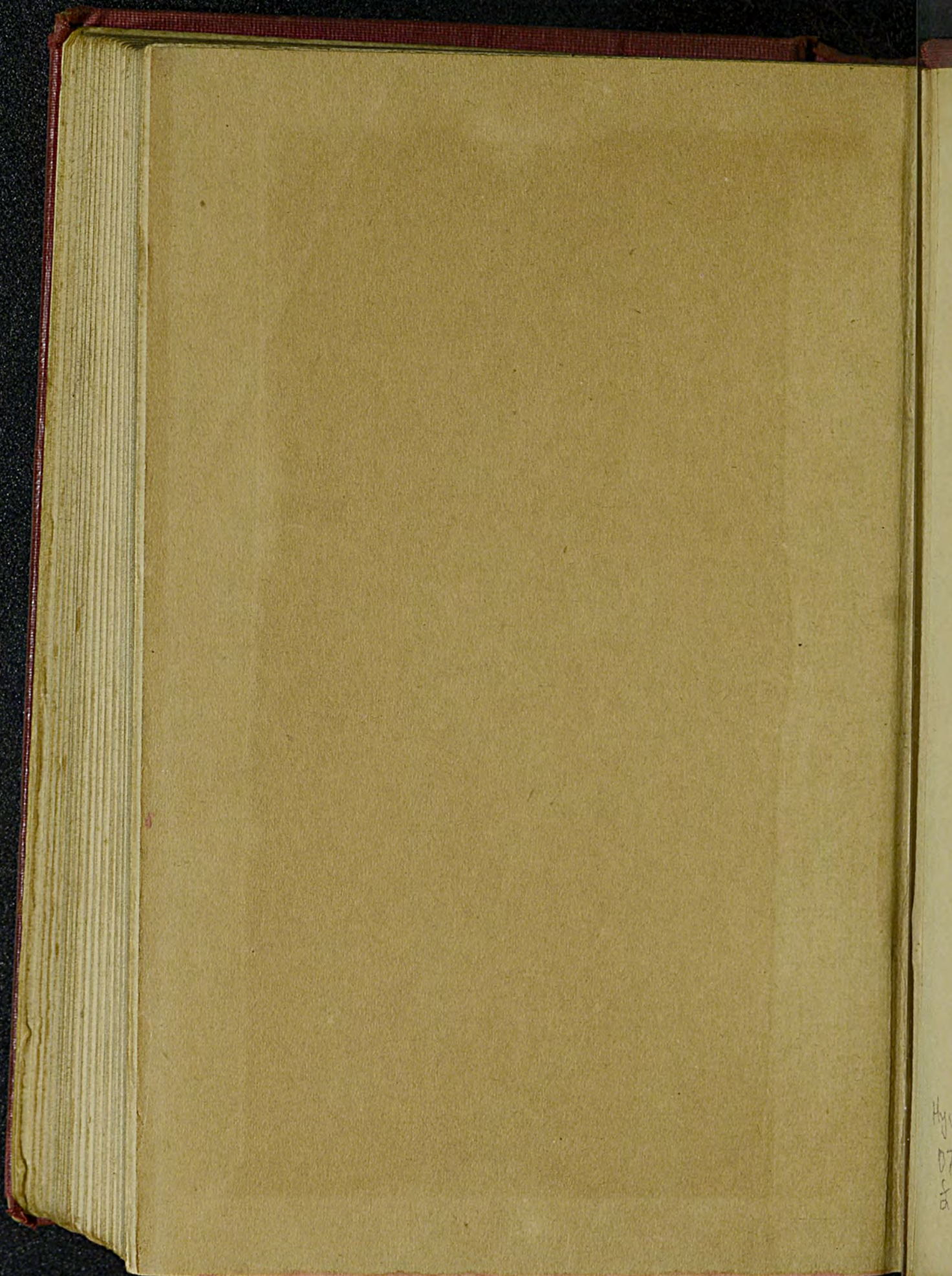
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