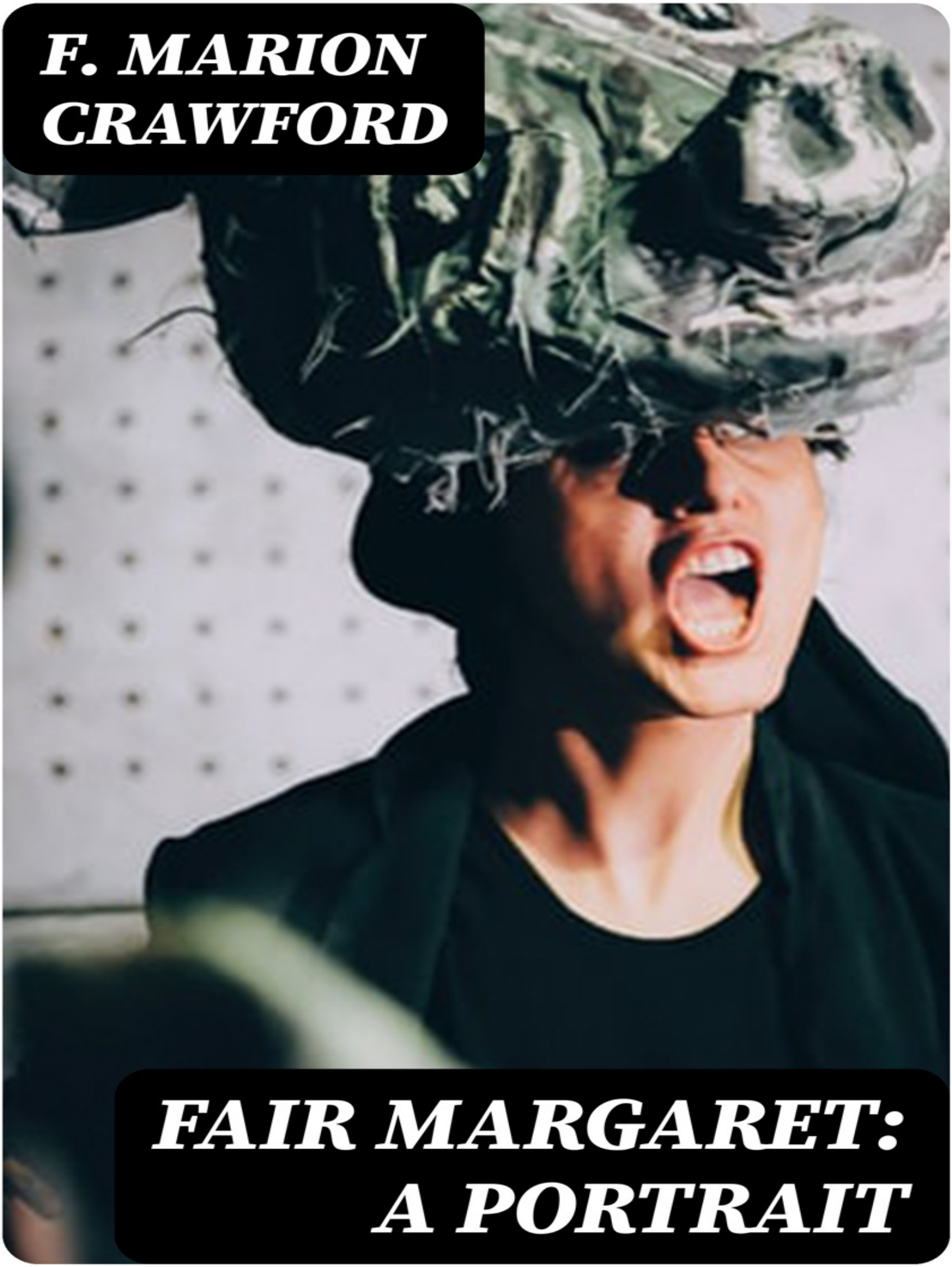
F. MARION CRAWFORD



FAIR MARGARET: A PORTRAIT

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Fair Margaret: A Portrait

EAN 8596547061328

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**AUTHOR OF "SARACINESCA," "SANT' ILARIO,"
"WHOSOEVER SHALL OFFEND," ETC., ETC.**

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HORACE T. CARPENTER**

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**NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS**

**Set up and electrotyped. Published November, 1905.
Reprinted
November, December, 1905; April, 1906; July, September, 1908;
July, 1909; February, twice, 1910.**

Thirty-seventh Thousand

**Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co.—Berwick & Smith Co**

Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

FAIR MARGARET

CHAPTER I

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'I am a realist,' said Mr. Edmund Lushington, as if that explained everything. 'We could hardly expect to agree,' he added.

It sounded very much as if he had said: 'As you are not a realist, my poor young lady, I can of course hardly expect you to know anything.'

Margaret Donne looked at him quietly and smiled. She was not very sensitive to other people's opinions; few idealists are, for they generally think more of their ideas than of themselves. Mr. Lushington had said that he could not agree with her, that was all, and she was quite indifferent. She had known that he would not share her opinion, when the discussion had begun, for he never did, and she was glad of it. She also knew that her smile irritated him, for he did not resemble her in the very least. He was slightly aggressive, as shy persons often are: and yet, like a good many men who profess 'realism,' brutal frankness and a sweeping disbelief of everything not 'scientifically' true, Mr. Lushington was almost morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others. Criticism hurt him; indifference wounded him to the quick; ridicule made him writhe.

He was a fair man with a healthy skin, and his eyes were blue; but they had a particularly disagreeable trick of looking at one suddenly for an instant, with a little pinching of the lids, and a slight glitter, turning away again in a displeased way, as if he had expected to be insulted, and was sure that the speaker was slighting him, at the very

least. He often blushed when he said something sharp. He wished he were dark, because dark men could say biting things without blushing, and pale, because he felt that it was not interesting to be pink and white. His hair, too, was smoother and softer than he could have wished it. He had tried experiments with his beard and moustache, and had finally made up his mind to let both grow, but he still looked hopelessly neat. When he pushed his hair back from his forehead with a devastating gesture it simply became untidy, as if he had forgotten to brush it. At last he had accepted his fate, and he resigned himself to what he considered his physical disadvantages, but no one would ever know how he had studied the photographs of the big men in the front of things, trying to detect in them some single feature to which his own bore a faint resemblance. Hitherto he had failed.

Yet he was 'somebody,' and perhaps it means more to be somebody nowadays, in the howling fight for place and acknowledgment, than it meant in the latter part of the nineteenth century. How easy life was in the early eighties, compared with this, how mild were the ways of nations, how primitive, pure and upright the dealings of financiers in that day of pristine virtue and pastoral simplicity! It was all very well to be an idealist then, Mr. Lushington sometimes said to Margaret; the world was young, then; there was time for everything, then; there was room for everybody, then; even the seasons were different, then! At least, all old people say so, and it can hardly be supposed that all persons over fifty years of age belong to a secret and powerful association of liars, organised and banded together to deceive the young.

Mr. Lushington was somebody, even at the beginning of this truthful little tale, and that was some time ago; and if anything about him could have really irritated Margaret Donne, it was that she could not understand the reason of his undeniable importance. The people who succeed in life, and in the arts and professions, are not always the pleasantest people, nor even the nicest. Miss Donne had found this out before she was twenty, and she was two years older now. She had learned a good many other things more or less connected with human nature, and more or less useful to a young woman in her position.

She remembered two or three of those comparatively recent discoveries as she smiled at Mr. Lushington and observed that her smile annoyed him. Not that Margaret was cruel or fond of giving pain for the sake of seeing suffering; but she could be both when she was roused to defend her beliefs, her ideals, or even her tastes. The cool ferocity of some young women is awful. Judith, Jael, Delilah, and Athaliah were not mythical. Is there a man who has not wakened from dreams, to find that the woman he trusted has stolen his strength or is just about to hammer the great nail home through his temples?

Margaret Donne was not actually cruel to her fellow-creatures. She was not one of those modern persons who feel sick at the sight of a half-starved horse dragging a heavy load, but will turn a man's life into a temporary hell without changing colour. Such as these give women a bad name among men. Margaret was merely defending herself, for Mr. Lushington sometimes drove her to extremities; his very shyness was so aggressive, that she could not pity him,

even when she saw him blush painfully, and noticed the slight dew which an attack of social timidity brought to his smooth forehead.

She had excellent nerves, and was not at all timid; if anything, she thought herself a little too self-possessed, and was slightly ashamed of it, fancying it unwomanly. She had a great fear of ever being that, and with Mr. Lushington, who seemed to take it for granted that she ought to think as men do, and was to be blamed for thinking otherwise, she took especial pains to claim a woman's privileges at every turn.

'I cannot imagine,' he said presently, 'how any intelligent person can really believe in such arrant mythology.'

'But I make no pretension of "intelligence",' murmured Margaret Donne.

'That is absurd,' retorted Mr. Lushington, with a half-furtive, half-angry glance. 'You know you are clever.'

Margaret knew it, of course, and she smiled again. The young man did not need to see her to be sure how she looked at that moment, for he knew her face well. It had fixed itself in the front of his memories some time ago, and he had not succeeded in bringing any other image there to drive it away. Perhaps he had not tried as hard as he supposed.

It was not such a very striking face either, at first sight. The features were not perfect, by any means, and they were certainly not Greek. Anacreon would not have compared Margaret's complexion to roses mixed with milk, but he might have thought of cream tinged with peach-bloom, and it would have been called a beautiful skin anywhere. Margaret had rather light brown eyes, but when she was

interested in anything the pupils widened so much as to make them look very dark. Then the lids would stay quite motionless for a long time, and the colour would fade a little from her whole face; but sometimes, just then, she would bite her lower lip, and that spoiled what some people would have called the intenseness of her expression. It is true that her teeth were beyond criticism and her lips were fresh and creamy red—but Mr. Lushington wished she would not do it. The muses are never represented 'biting their lips'; and in his moments of enthusiasm he liked to think that Margaret was his muse. She had thick brown hair that waved naturally, but made no little curls and baby ringlets, such as some young women have, or make. The line of her hair along her forehead and temples, though curved, was rather severe. She had been fair when a little girl, but had grown darker after she was fifteen.

When she thought of it, she rather liked her own face, for she was not everlastingly trying to be some one else. It was a satisfactory face, on the whole, she thought, perfectly natural and frank, and healthy. No doubt it would have been nice to be as beautiful as a Madame de Villeneuve, or a Comtesse de Castiglione, but as that was quite impossible, it was easy to be satisfied with what she had in the way of looks and not to envy the insolent radiance of the fair beauties, or the tragic splendour of the dark ones. Besides, great beauty has disadvantages; it attracts attention at the wrong moment, it makes travelling troublesome, it is obtrusive and hinders a woman from doing exactly what she pleases. It is celebrity, and therefore a target for every photographing tourist and newspaper man.

And then, to lose it, as one must, is a kind of suffering which no male can quite understand. Every great beauty feels that she is to be unjustly condemned to death between forty and fifty, and that every day of her life brings her nearer to ignominious public execution; and though beauties manage to last longer, yet is their strength but sorrow and weakness, depending largely on the hairdresser, the dentist, the dressmaker and other functions of the unknown quantities *x* and *y*, as the mathematicians say.

The Emperor Tiberius is reported to have said that if a man does not know what is good for him when he is forty years old, he must be either a fool or a physician. Similarly, a woman who does not know her own good points at twenty is either very foolish, or a raving beauty—or a saint. Perhaps women can be all three; it is not safe to assert anything positively about them. Margaret Donne was clever, she was a good girl but not a saint, and she was a little more than fairly good-looking. That was all, and she knew her good points. If she was not perpetually showing them to advantage, she at least realised what they were and that she might some day have to make the most of them. They were her complexion, her mouth and her figure; and she was clever, if cleverness be a 'point' in a human being, which is doubtful. It is not considered one in a puppy.

Mr. Lushington discouraged the familiarity of men who called him plain 'Lushington.' When they were older than he, he felt that they were patronising him; if they were younger, he thought them distinctly cheeky. Occasionally he fell in with a relation, or an old schoolfellow, who addressed him as 'Ned,' or even as 'Eddie,' This made him utterly

miserable; in the language of Johnson, when Mr. Lushington was called 'Eddie,' he was convolved with agony—especially if a third person chanced to be present. Margaret sometimes wondered whether she should ever be in a position to use that weapon.

There was a possibility of it, depending on her own choice. In fact, there were two possibilities, for she could marry him if she pleased, or she could make an intimate friend of him, and they might then call each other by their Christian names. At the present time she knew him so well that she avoided using his name altogether, and he called her 'Miss Margaret' when he was pleased, and 'Miss Donne' when he was not.

'It is a pity you think me clever,' she said demurely, after a little pause.

'Why?' he inquired severely.

'The idea makes you so uncomfortable,' Margaret answered. 'If I were just a nice dull girl, you would only have to lay down the law, and I should have to accept it. Or else you would not feel obliged to talk to me at all, which would be simpler.'

'Much,' said Lushington, with some acerbity.

'So much simpler, that I wonder why you do not follow the line of least resistance!'

A short silence came after this suggestion, and Margaret turned over the pages of her book as if making up her mind where to begin reading. This was not quite a pretence, for Lushington had told her that it was a book she ought to read, which it was her intellectual duty to read, and which would develop her reasoning faculties. By way of

encouragement he had added that she would probably not like it. On that point she agreed with him readily. To people who read much, every new book has a personality, features and an expression, attractive, dull, or repulsive, like most human beings one meets for the first time. This particular book had a particularly priggish expression, like Lushington's yellow shoes, which were too good and too new, and which he was examining with apparent earnestness. To tell the truth he did not see them, for he was wondering whether the blush of annoyance he felt was unusually visible. The result of thinking about it was that it deepened to scarlet at once.

'You look hot,' observed Margaret, with an exasperating smile.

'Not at all,' answered Lushington, feeling as if she had rubbed his cheeks with red pepper. 'I suppose I am sunburnt.'

Tiny beads of perspiration were gathering on his forehead, and he knew by her smile that she saw them. It would have been delightful to walk into the pond just then, yellow shoes and all.

He told himself that he was Edmund Lushington, the distinguished critic and reviewer, before whom authors trembled and were afraid. It was absurd that he should feel too hot because a mere girl had said something smart and disagreeable. In fact, what she had said was little short of an impertinence, in his opinion.

The fool who does not know that he looks a fool is happy. The fool who is conscious of looking one undergoes real pain. But of all the miserable victims of shyness, the one

most to be pitied is the sensitive, gifted man who is perfectly aware that he looks silly while rightly conscious that he is not. Margaret Donne watched Lushington, and knew that she was amply revenged. He would call her 'Miss Donne' presently, and say something about the weather, as if they had never met before. She paid no more attention to him for some time, and began to read bits of the new book, here and there, where one page looked a little less dull than the rest.

Meanwhile Lushington smoked thoughtfully, and the unwelcome blush subsided. He glanced sideways at Margaret's face two or three times, as if he were going to speak, but said nothing, and sent a small cloud straight out before him, with a rather vicious blowing, as if he were trying to make the smoke express his feelings. Margaret knew that trick of his very well. Lushington was an aggressive smoker, and with every puff he seemed to say: 'There! Take that! I told you so!'

Margaret did not look up from her book, for she knew that he would speak before long; and so it happened.

'Miss Donne,' he began, with unnecessary coldness, and then stopped short.

'Yes?' Margaret answered, with mild interrogation.

'Oh!' ejaculated Mr. Lushington, as if surprised that she should reply at all. 'I thought you were reading.'

'I was.' She let the new book shut itself, as she lifted her hand from the open pages.

'I did not mean to interrupt you,' said the young man stiffly.

No answer occurred to Margaret at once, so she waited, gently drumming on the closed book with her loosely gloved fingers.

'I suppose you think I'm an awful idiot,' observed Mr. Lushington, with unexpected and quite unnecessary energy.

'Dear me! This is so very sudden! Awful—idiot? Let me see.'

Her absurd gravity was even more exasperating than her smile. Lushington threw away his cigarette angrily.

'You know what I mean,' he cried, getting red again. 'Don't be horrid!'

'Then don't be silly,' retorted Margaret.

'There! I knew you thought so!'

'Perhaps I do, sometimes,' the girl answered, more seriously. 'But I don't mind it at all. If you care to know, I think you are often much more human when you are—well—"silly," than when you are being clever.

'And I suppose you would like me better if I were always silly?'

Margaret shook her head and laughed softly, but said nothing. She was thinking that it was good to be alive, and that it was the spring, and that the life was stirring in her, as it stirred amongst the young leaves overhead and in the shooting grasses and budding flowers, and in the hearts of the nesting birds in the oaks and elms. Just then it mattered very little to Margaret whether the man who was talking to her made himself out to be silly or clever. She felt herself much nearer to the simple breathing and growing of all nature than to the silliness or cleverness of any fellow-creature.

Her lips parted a little and she drew in the air again and again, slowly and quietly, as if she could drink it, and live on its sweet taste, and never want food or other drink again, though she was not an ethereal young person, but only a perfectly healthy and natural girl. She was not tired, yet somehow she felt that she was resting body, soul and heart, for a little while, after growing up and before beginning what was to be her life.

Lushington was perfectly healthy, too, but he was not simple, and was often not quite natural. He had real troubles and artificial ways of treating them. He had also been in the thick of the big fight for several years, he had tasted the wine of success and the vinegar of failure, the sticky honey of flattery and some nasty little pills prepared with malignant art by brother critics. With his faults and weaknesses and absurd sensitiveness, he had in him the stuff that wins battles with glory, or loses them with honour, promising to fight again. He was complex. He was rarely quite sure what he felt, though he could express with precision whatever he thought he was feeling at any moment.

'How complicated you are!' he exclaimed, when Margaret laughed.

'I was just thinking how simple I am compared with you,' she answered serenely; 'I mean, when you talk,' she added.

'Thank you for the distinction! "Oliver Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll, Who writes like an angel but talks like poor Poll." That sort of thing, I suppose?'

'I did not say that you write like an angel,' answered Margaret, in a tone of reflection.

'You do not talk like one,' observed Mr. Lushington bitterly. 'Are you going to Paris to-day?' he inquired after a pause; and he looked at his watch.

'No. I had my lesson yesterday. But I am going in to-morrow.'

Lushington knew that she had only two lessons a week, and wondered why she was going to Paris on the following day. But he was offended and would not ask questions; moreover he did not at all approve of her studying singing as a profession, and she knew that he did not.

His disapproval did not disturb her, though she should have liked him to admire her voice because he was really a good judge, and praise from him would be worth having. He often said sharp things that he did not mean, but on the other hand, when he said that anything was good, he always meant that it was first-rate. She wondered where he had learned so much about music.

After all, she knew very little of his life, and as he never said anything about his family she was inclined to think that he had no relations and that he came of people anything but aristocratic. He had worked his way to the front by sheer talent and energy, and she had the good sense to think better of him for that, and not less well of him for his reticence.

Mrs. Rushmore knew no more about Lushington's family than Margaret. The latter was spending the spring in Versailles with the elderly American widow, and the successful young writer had been asked to stop a week with them. Mrs. Rushmore did not care a straw about the family connections of celebrities, and she knew by experience that

it was generally better not to ask questions about them, as the answers might place one in an awkward position. She had always acted on the principle that a real lion needs no pedigree, and belongs by right to the higher animals. Lushington was a real lion, though he was a young one. His roar was a passport, and his bite was dangerous. Why make unnecessary inquiries about his parents? They were probably dead, and, socially, they had never been alive, since Society had never heard of them. It was quite possible, Mrs. Rushmore said, that his name was not his own, for she had met two or three celebrities who had deliberately taken names to which they did not pretend any legal claim, but which sounded better than their own.

He had been at Versailles to stay a few days during the previous spring, and Margaret had seen him several times in the interval, and they had occasionally exchanged letters. She was quite well aware that he was in love with her, and she liked him enough not to discourage him. To marry him would be quite another question, though she did not look upon it as impossible. Before all, she intended to wait until her own position was clearly defined.

For the present she did not know whether she had inherited a large fortune, or was practically a penniless orphan living on the charity of her friend Mrs. Rushmore; and several months might pass before this vital question was solved. Mrs. Rushmore believed that Margaret would get the money, or a large part of it; Margaret did not, and in the meantime she was doing her best to cultivate her voice in order to support herself by singing.

Her father had been English, a distinguished student and critical scholar, holding a professorship of which the income, together with what he received from writing learned articles in the serious reviews, had sufficed for himself, his wife and his only child. At his death he had left little except his books, his highly honourable reputation and a small life insurance.

He had married an American whose father had been rich at the time, but had subsequently lost all he possessed by an unfortunate investment, depending upon an invention, which had afterwards become enormously valuable. Finding himself driven to extremities and on the verge of failure, he had been glad to make over his whole interest to a distant relative, who assumed his liabilities as well as his chances of success. Utterly ruined, save in reputation, he had bravely accepted a salaried post, had worked himself to death in eighteen months and had died universally respected by his friends and as poor as Job.

His daughter, Mrs. Donne, had felt her position keenly. She was a sensitive woman, she had married a poor man for love, expecting to make him rich; and instead, she was now far poorer than he. He, on his part, never bestowed a thought on the matter. He was simple and unselfish and he loved her simply and unselfishly. She died of a fever at forty-two and her death killed him. Two years later, Margaret Donne was alone in the world.

Mrs. Rushmore had known Margaret's American grandmother and had been Mrs. Donne's best friend. She had grave doubts as to the conditions on which the whole interest in the invention had been ceded to old Alvah Moon, the Californian millionaire, and, after consulting her own

lawyers in New York, she had insisted upon bringing suit against him, in Margaret Donne's name, but at her own risk, for the recovery of an equitable share of the fortune. A tenth part of it would have made the girl rich, but there were great difficulties in the way of obtaining evidence as to an implied agreement, and Alvah Moon was as hard as bedrock.

While the suit was going on, Mrs. Rushmore insisted that Margaret should live with her, and Margaret was glad to accept her protection and hospitality, for she felt that the obligation was not all on her own side. Mrs. Rushmore was childless, a widow and very dependent on companionship for such enjoyment as she could get out of her existence. She had few resources as she grew older, for she did not read much and had no especial tastes. The presence of such a girl as Margaret was a godsend in many ways, and she looked forward with something like terror to the not distant time when she should be left alone again, unless she could induce one of her nieces to live with her. But that would not be easy; they did not want her money, nor anything she could give them, and they thought her dull. Her life would be very empty and sad, then. She had never been vain, and she was well aware that such people as Mr. Edmund Lushington could not be easily induced to come and spend a fortnight with her if Margaret were not in the house. Besides, she loved the girl for her own sake. It was very pleasant to delude herself with the idea that Margaret was almost her daughter, and she wished she could adopt her; but Margaret was far too independent to accept such an arrangement, and Mrs. Rushmore had the common-sense to

guess that if the girl were bound to her in any way a sort of restraint would follow which would be disagreeable to both in the end. If there could be a bond, it must be one which Margaret should not feel, nor even guess, and such a relation as that seemed to be an impossibility. Margaret was not the sort of girl to accept anything from an unknown giver, and if the suit failed it would be out of the question to make her believe that she had inherited property from an unsuspected source. Mrs. Rushmore, in her generosity, would have liked to practise some such affectionate deception, and she would try almost anything, however hopeless, rather than let Margaret be a professional singer.

The American woman was not puritanical; she had lived too much in Europe for that and had met many clever people, not to say men of much more than mere talent, who had made big marks on their times. But she had been brought up in the narrow life of old New York, when old New York still survived, as a tradition if not as a fact, in a score or two of families; and one of the prejudices she had inherited early was that there is a mysterious immorality in the practice of the fine arts, whereas an equally mysterious morality is inherent in business. Painters and sculptors, great actors and great singers without end had sat at her table and she was always interested in their talk and often attracted by their personalities; yet in her heart she knew that she connected them all vaguely with undefined wickedness, just as she associated the idea of virtuous uprightness with all American and English business men. Next to a clergyman, she unconsciously looked upon an American banker as the most strictly moral type of man;

and though her hair was grey and she knew a vast deal about this wicked world, she still felt a painful little shock when her favourite newspaper informed her that a banker or a clergyman had turned aside out of the paths of righteousness, as they occasionally do, just like human beings. She felt a similar disagreeable thrill when she thought of Margaret singing in public to earn a living. Prejudices are moral corns; anything that touches one makes it ache more or less, but the pain is always of the same kind. You cannot get a pleasurable sensation out of a corn.

Yet Margaret was working at her music, with persevering regularity, quite convinced that she must soon support herself unhelped and quite sure that her voice was her only means to that end. Singing was her only accomplishment, and she therefore supposed that the gift, such as it was, must be her only talent.

She was modest about it, for the very reason that she believed it was what she did best, and she was patient because she knew that she must do it well before she could hope to live by it. Most successful singers had appeared in public before reaching her age, yet she was only two and twenty, and a year or two could make no great difference. Nevertheless, she was more anxious than she would have admitted, and she had persuaded her teacher to let her sing to Madame Bonanni, the celebrated lyric soprano, whose opinion would be worth having, and perhaps final. The great singer had the reputation of being very good-natured in such cases and was on friendly terms with Margaret's teacher, the latter being a retired prima donna. Margaret

felt sure of a fair hearing, therefore, and it was for this trial that she was going to the city on the following morning.

Neither she nor Lushington spoke for a long time after she had given him the information. She took up her book again, but she read without paying any attention to the words, for the recollection of what was coming had brought back all her anxiety about her future life. It would be a dreadful thing if Madame Bonanni should tell her frankly that she had no real talent and had better give it up. The great artist would say what she thought, without wasting time or sympathy; that was why Margaret was going to her. Women do not flatter women unless they have something to gain, whereas men often flatter them for the mere pleasure of seeing them smile, which is an innocent pastime in itself, though the consequences are sometimes disastrous.

Edmund Lushington had at first been wondering why Margaret was going to Paris the next day, then he had inwardly framed several ingenious questions which he might ask her; and then, as he thought of her, he had forgotten himself at last, and had momentarily escaped from the terrible and morbid obligation of putting his thoughts into unspoken words, which is one of the torments that pursue men of letters when they are tired, or annoyed, or distressed. He had forgotten his troubles, too, whatever they were, and could listen to the music spring was making in the trees, without feeling that he might be forced to describe it.

Just then Margaret raised her eyes from her book and saw his face, and he did not know that she was looking at him. For the first time since she had met him she

understood a little of his real nature, and guessed the reason why he could write so well. He was a man of heart. She knew it now, in spite of his faults, his shyness, his ridiculous over-sensitiveness, his detestable way of blurting out cutting speeches, his icy criticism of things he did not like. It was a revelation. She wondered what he would say if he spoke just then.

But at that moment Mrs. Rushmore appeared on the lawn, an imposing and rather formal figure in black and violet, against the curtain of honeysuckle that hung down over the verandah.

CHAPTER II

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Margaret went alone to the house of the famous singer, for her teacher knew by experience that it was better not to be present on such occasions. Margaret had not even a maid with her, for except in some queer neighbourhoods Paris is as safe as any city in the world, and it never occurred to her that she could need protection at her age. If she should ever have any annoyance she could call a policeman, but she had a firm and well-founded conviction that if a young woman looked straight before her and held her head up as if she could take care of herself, no one would ever molest her, from London to Pekin.

It was not very far from her teacher's rooms in the Boulevard Malesherbes to the pretty little house Madame Bonanni had built for herself in the Avenue Hoche; so Margaret walked. It is the pleasantest way of getting about Paris on a May morning, when one has not to go a long distance. Paris has changed terribly of late years, but there are moments when all her old brilliancy comes back, when the air is again full of the intoxicating effervescence of life, when the well-remembered conviction comes over one that in Paris the main object of every man's and every woman's existence is to make love, to amuse and to be amused. Terrible things have happened, it is true; blood has run like rain through the streets; and great works are created, great books are written, and Art has here her workshop and her temple, her craftsmen and her high priests. The Parisians have a right to take themselves seriously; but we cannot—

we graver, grimmer men of rougher race. Do what they will, we can never quite believe that genius can really hew and toil all day and laugh all night; we can never get rid of the idea that there must be some vast delusion about Paris, some great stage trick, some hugely clever deception by which a quicksand is made to seem like bedrock, and a stone pavement like a river of quicksilver.

The great cities all have faces. If all the people who live in each city could be photographed exactly one over the other, the result would be the general expression of that city's face. New York would be discontented and eager; London would be stolidly glum and healthy, with a little surliness; Berlin would be supercilious, overbearing; Rome would be gravely resentful; and so on; but Paris would be gay, incredulous, frivolous, pretty and impudent. The reality may be gone, or may have changed, but the look is in her face still when the light of a May morning shines on it.

What should we get, if we could blend into one picture the English descriptions of Paris left us by Thackeray, Sala, Du Maurier? Would it not show us that face as it is still, when we see it in spring? And drawn by loving hands too, obeying the eyes of genius. An empty square in Berlin suggests a possible regimental parade, in London a mass meeting; in Paris it is a playground waiting for the Parisians to come out and enjoy themselves after their manner, like pretty moths and dragon-flies in the sun.

But there is another side to it. More than any city in the world, Paris has a dual nature. Like Janus, she has two faces; like Endymion, half her life is spent with the gods, half with the powers of darkness. She has her sweet May mornings,

but she has her hideous nights when the north wind blows and the streets are of glass. She has her life of art and beauty, and taste and delight, but she has her fevers of blood and fury, her awful reactions of raw brutality, her hidden sores of strange crime. Of all cities, Paris is the most refined, the most progressive in the highest way, the most delicately sensitive; of all cities, too, when the spasm is on her, she is the most mediæval in her violence, her lust for blood, her horrible 'inhumanity to man'—Burns might have written those unforgettable lines of her.

Margaret was not thinking of these things as she took her way through the Parc Monceau, not because it was nearer but because she loved the old trees, and the contrast between the green peace within its gates and the intense life outside. She was nearer than she had perhaps ever been to fright, just then, and yet would not for the world have turned back, nor even slackened her pace. In five minutes she would be ringing the bell at Madame Bonanni's door.

She had heard the prima donna several times but had never met her. She knew that she was no longer young, though her great voice was marvellously fresh and elastic. There were men, of that unpleasant type that is quite sure of everything, who recalled her first appearance and said that she could not be less than fifty years old. As a matter of fact, she was just forty-eight, and made no secret of it. Margaret had learned this from her own singing teacher, but that was all she knew about Madame Bonanni, when she stopped at the closed door of the carriage entrance and rang the bell. She did not know whether she was to meet a Juliet, an Elsa, a Marguerite or a Tosca. She remembered a

large woman with heavy arms, in various magnificent costumes and a variety of superb wigs, with a lime-light complexion that was always the same. The rest was music. That, with a choice selection of absurdly impossible anecdotes, is as much as most people ever know about a great singer or a great actress. Margaret had been spared the anecdotes, because most of them were not fit for her to hear, but she had more than once heard fastidious ladies speak of Madame Bonanni as 'that dreadful woman.' No one, however, denied that she was a great artist, and that was the only consideration in Margaret's present need.

She rang the bell and glanced at the big window over the entrance. It had a complicated arrangement of folding green blinds, which were half open, and a grey awning with a red border. She wondered whether it was the window of the singer's own especial room.

The house was different from those next it, though she could hardly tell where the difference lay. She thought that if she had not known the number she should have instinctively picked out this house, amongst all the others in that part of the Avenue Hoche, as the one in which the prima donna or an actress must be living; and as she stood waiting, a very simple and well-bred figure of a young lady, she felt that on the other side of the door there was a whole world of which she knew nothing, which was not at all like her own world, which was going to offend something in her, and which it was nevertheless her duty to enter. She was in that state of mind in which a nun breathes an ejaculatory prayer against the wiles of Satan, and a delicately nurtured girl thinks of her mother. Her heart hardly beat any faster

than usual, though she was sure that one of the great moments of her life was at hand; but she drew her skirt round her a little closer, and pursed her lips together a little more tightly, and was very glad to feel that nobody could mistake her for anything but a lady.