CHARLES READE

A WOMAN-HATER

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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CHAPTER I.

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“THE Golden Star,” Homburg, was a humble hotel, not used by gay gamblers, but by modest travelers.

At two o'clock, one fine day in June, there were two strangers in the *salle a' manger,* seated at small tables a long way apart, and wholly absorbed in their own business.

One was a lady about twenty-four years old, who, in the present repose of her features, looked comely, sedate, and womanly, but not the remarkable person she really was. Her forehead high and white, but a little broader than sculptors affect; her long hair, coiled tight, in a great many smooth snakes, upon her snowy nape, was almost flaxen, yet her eyebrows and long lashes not pale but a reddish brown; her gray eyes large and profound; her mouth rather large, beautifully shaped, amiable, and expressive, but full of resolution; her chin a little broad; her neck and hands admirably white and polished. She was an Anglo-Dane—her father English.

If you ask me what she was doing, why—hunting; and had been, for some days, in all the inns of Homburg. She had the visitors' book, and was going through the names of the whole year, and studying each to see whether it looked real or assumed. Interspersed were flippant comments, and verses adapted to draw a smile of amusement or contempt; but this hunter passed them all over as nullities: the steady pose of her head, the glint of her deep eye, and the set of her fine lips showed a soul not to be diverted from its object.

The traveler at her back had a map of the district and blank telegrams, one of which he filled in every now and then, and scribbled a hasty letter to the same address. He was a sharp-faced middle-aged man of business; Joseph Ashmead, operatic and theatrical agent—at his wits' end; a female singer at the Homburg Opera had fallen really ill; he was commissioned to replace her, and had only thirty hours to do it in. So he was hunting a singer. What the lady was hunting can never be known, unless she should choose to reveal it.

Karl, the waiter, felt bound to rouse these abstracted guests, and stimulate their appetites. He affected, therefore, to look on them as people who had not yet breakfasted, and tripped up to Mr. Ashmead with a bill of fare, rather scanty.

The busiest Englishman can eat, and Ashmead had no objection to snatch a mouthful; he gave his order in German with an English accent. But the lady, when appealed to, said softly, in pure German, “I will wait for the *table-d'hote.”*

“The *table-d'hote!* It wants four hours to that.”

The lady looked Karl full in the face, and said, slowly, and very distinctly, “Then, I—will—wait—four—hours.”

These simple words, articulated firmly, and in a contralto voice of singular volume and sweetness, sent Karl skipping; but their effect on Mr. Ashmead was more remarkable. He started up from his chair with an exclamation, and bent his eyes eagerly on the melodious speaker. He could only see her back hair and her figure; but, apparently, this quick-eared gentleman had also quick eyes, for he said aloud, in English, “Her hair, too—it must be;” and he came hurriedly toward her. She caught a word or two, and turned and saw

him. “Ah!” said she, and rose; but the points of her fingers still rested on the book.

“It is!” cried Ashmead. “It is!”

“Yes, Mr. Ashmead,” said the lady, coloring a little, but in pure English, and with a composure not easily disturbed; “it is Ina Klosking.”

“What a pleasure,” cried Ashmead; and what a surprise! Ah, madam, I never hoped to see you again. When I heard you had left the Munich Opera so sudden, I said, 'There goes one more bright star quenched forever.' And you to desert us—you, the risingest singer in Germany!”

“Mr. Ashmead!”

“You can't deny it. You know you were.”

The lady, thus made her own judge, seemed to reflect a moment, and said, “I was a well-grounded musician, thanks to my parents; I was a very hard-working singer; and I had the advantage of being supported, in my early career, by a gentleman of judgment and spirit, who was a manager at first, and brought me forward, afterward a popular agent, and talked managers into a good opinion of me.”

“Ah, madam,” said Ashmead, tenderly, “it is a great pleasure to hear this from you, and spoken with that mellow voice which would charm a rattlesnake; but what would my zeal and devotion have availed if you had not been a born singer?”

“Why—yes,” said Ina, thoughtfully; “I was a singer.” But she seemed to say this not as a thing to be proud of, but only because it happened to be true; and, indeed, it was a peculiarity of this woman that she appeared nearly always to think—if but for half a moment—before she spoke, and to

say things, whether about herself or others, only because they were the truth. The reader who shall condescend to bear this in mind will possess some little clew to the color and effect of her words as spoken. Often, where they seem simple and commonplace—on paper, they were weighty by their extraordinary air of truthfulness as well as by the deep music of her mellow, bell-like voice.

“Oh, you do admit that,” said Mr. Ashmead, with a chuckle; “then why jump off the ladder so near the top? Oh, of course I know—the old story—but you might give twenty-two hours to love, and still spare a couple to music.”

“That seems a reasonable division,” said Ina, naively. “But” (apologetically) “he was jealous.”

“Jealous!—more shame for him. I'm sure no lady in public life was ever more discreet.”

“No, no; he was only jealous of the public.”

“And what had the poor public done?”

“Absorbed me, he said.”

“Why, he could take you to the opera, and take you home from the opera, and, during the opera, he could make one of the public, and applaud you as loud as the best.”

“Yes, but rehearsals!—and—embracing the tenor.”

“Well, but only on the stage?”

“Oh, Mr. Ashmead, where else does one embrace the tenor?”

“And was that a grievance? Why, I'd embrace fifty tenors—if I was paid proportionable.”

“Yes; but he said I embraced one poor stick, with a fervor—an *abandon*—Well, I dare say I did; for, if they had put a gate-post in the middle of the stage, and it was in my part

to embrace the thing, I should have done it honestly, for love of my art, and not of a post. The next time I had to embrace the poor stick it was all I could do not to pinch him savagely."

"And turn him to a counter-tenor—make him squeak."

Ina Klosking smiled for the first time. Ashmead, too, chuckled at his own wit, but turned suddenly grave the next moment, and moralized. He pronounced it desirable, for the interests of mankind, that a great and rising singer should not love out of the business; outsiders were wrong-headed and absurd, and did not understand the true artist. However, having discoursed for some time in this strain, he began to fear it might be unpalatable to her; so he stopped abruptly, and said, "But there—what is done is done. We must make the best of it; and you mustn't think I meant to run *him* down. He loves you, in his way. He must be a noble fellow, or he never could have won such a heart as yours. He won't be jealous of an old fellow like me, though I love you, too, in my humdrum way, and always did. You must do me the honor to present me to him at once."

Ina stared at him, but said nothing.

"Oh," continued Ashmead, "I shall be busy till evening; but I will ask him and you to dine with me at the Kursaal, and then adjourn to the Royal Box. You are a queen of song, and that is where you and he shall sit, and nowhere else."

Ina Klosking was changing color all this time, and cast a grateful but troubled look on him. "My kind, old faithful friend!" said she, then shook her head. "No, we are not to dine with you; nor sit together at the opera, in Homburg."

Ashmead looked a little chagrined. “So be it,” he said dryly. “But at least introduce me to him. I'll try and overcome his prejudices.”

“It is not even in my power to do that.”

“Oh, I see. I'm not good enough for him,” said Ashmead, bitterly.

“You do yourself injustice, and him too,” said Ina, courteously.

“Well, then?”

“My friend,” said she, deprecatingly, “he is not here.”

“Not here? That is odd. Well, then, you will be dull till he comes back. Come without him; at all events, to the opera.”

She turned her tortured eyes away. “I have not the heart.”

This made Ashmead look at her more attentively. “Why, what is the matter?” said he. “You are in trouble. I declare you are trembling, and your eyes are filling. My poor lady—in Heaven's name, what is the matter?”

“Hush!” said Ina; “not so loud.” Then she looked him in the face a little while, blushed, hesitated, faltered, and at last laid one white hand upon her bosom, that was beginning to heave, and said, with patient dignity, “My old friend—I—am—deserted.”

Ashmead looked at her with amazement and incredulity. “Deserted!” said he, faintly. “You—deserted!!!”

“Yes,” said she, “deserted; but perhaps not forever.” Her noble eyes filled to the brim, and two tears stood ready to run over.

“Why, the man must be an idiot!” shouted Ashmead.

“Hush! not so loud. That waiter is listening: let me come to your table.”

She came and sat down at his table, and he sat opposite her. They looked at each other. He waited for her to speak. With all her fortitude, her voice faltered, under the eye of sympathy. “You are my old friend,” she said. “I'll try and tell you all.” But she could not all in a moment, and the two tears trickled over and ran down her cheeks; Ashmead saw them, and burst out, “The villain!—the villain!”

“No, no,” said she, “do not call him that. I could not bear it. Believe me, he is no villain.” Then she dried her eyes, and said, resolutely, “If I am to tell you, you must not apply harsh words to him. They would close my mouth at once, and close my heart.”

“I won't say a word,” said Ashmead, submissively; “so tell me all.”

Ina reflected a moment, and then told her tale. Dealing now with longer sentences, she betrayed her foreign half.

“Being alone so long,” said she, “has made me reflect more than in all my life before, and I now understand many things that, at the time, I could not. He to whom I have given my love, and resigned the art in which I was advancing—with your assistance—is, by nature, impetuous and inconstant. He was born so, and I the opposite. His love for me was too violent to last forever in any man, and it soon cooled in him, because he is inconstant by nature. He was jealous of the public: he must have all my heart, and all my time, and so he wore his own passion out. Then his great restlessness, having now no chain, became too strong for our happiness. He pined for change, as some wanderers

pine for a fixed home. Is it not strange? I, a child of the theater, am at heart domestic. He, a gentleman and a scholar, born, bred, and fitted to adorn the best society, is by nature a Bohemian.

“One word: is there another woman?”

“No, not that I know of; Heaven forbid!” said Ina. “But there is something very dreadful: there is gambling. He has a passion for it, and I fear I wearied him by my remonstrances. He dragged me about from one gambling-place to another, and I saw that if I resisted he would go without me. He lost a fortune while we were together, and I do really believe he is ruined, poor dear.”

Ashmead suppressed all signs of ill-temper, and asked, grimly, “Did he quarrel with you, then?”

“Oh, no; he never said an unkind word to me; and I was not always so forbearing, for I passed months of torment. I saw that affection, which was my all, gliding gradually away from me; and the tortured will cry out. I am not an ungoverned woman, but sometimes the agony was intolerable, and I complained. Well, that agony, I long for it back; for now I am desolate.”

“Poor soul! How could a man have the heart to leave you? how could he have the face?”

“Oh, he did not do it shamelessly. He left me for a week, to visit friends in England. But he wrote to me from London. He had left me at Berlin. He said that he did not like to tell me before parting, but I must not expect to see him for six weeks; and he desired me to go to my mother in Denmark. He would send his next letter to me there. Ah! he knew I should need my mother when his second letter came. He

had planned it all, that the blow might not kill me. He wrote to tell me he was a ruined man, and he was too proud to let me support him: he begged my pardon for his love, for his desertion, for ever having crossed my brilliant path like a dark cloud. He praised me, he thanked me, he blessed me; but he left me. It was a beautiful letter, but it was the death-warrant of my heart. I was abandoned."

Ashmead started up and walked very briskly, with a great appearance of business requiring vast dispatch, to the other end of the *salle;* and there, being out of Ina's hearing, he spoke his mind to a candlestick with three branches. "D—n him! Heartless, sentimental scoundrel! D—n him! D—n him!"

Having relieved his mind with this pious ejaculation, he returned to Ina at a reasonable pace and much relieved, and was now enabled to say, cheerfully, "Let us take a business view of it. He is gone—gone of his own accord. Give him your blessing—I have given him mine—and forget him."

"Forget him! Never while I live. Is that your advice? Oh, Mr. Ashmead! And the moment I saw your friendly face, I said to myself, 'I am no longer alone: here is one that will help me.'"

"And so I will, you may be sure of that," said Ashmead, eagerly. "What is the business?"

"The business is to find him. That is the first thing."

"But he is in England."

"Oh, no; that was eight months ago. He could not stay eight months in any country; besides, there are no gambling-houses there."

“And have you been eight months searching Europe for this madman?”

“No. At first pride and anger were strong, and I said, 'Here I stay till he comes back to me and to his senses.'”

“Brava!”

“Yes; but month after month went by, carrying away my pride and my anger, and leaving my affection undiminished. At last I could bear it no longer; so, as he would not come to his senses—”

“You took leave of yours, and came out on a wild-goose chase,” said Ashmead, but too regretfully to affront her.

“It *was,”* said Ina; “I feel it. But it is not one *now,* because I have *you* to assist me with your experience and ability. You will find him for me, somehow or other. I know you will.”

Let a woman have ever so little guile, she must have tact, if she is a true woman. Now, tact, if its etymology is to be trusted, implies a fine sense and power of touch; so, in virtue of her sex, she pats a horse before she rides him, and a man before she drives him. There, ladies, there is an indictment in two counts; traverse either of them if you can.

Joseph Ashmead, thus delicately but effectually manipulated, swelled with gratified vanity and said, “You are quite right; you can't do this sort of thing yourself; you want an agent.”

“Of course I do.”

“Well, you have got one. Now let me see—fifty to one he is not at Homburg at all. If he is, he most likely stays at Frankfort. He is a swell, is he not?”

“Swell!” said the Anglo-Dane, puzzled. “Not that I am aware of.” She was strictly on her guard against vituperation

of her beloved scamp.

“Pooh, pooh!” said Ashmead; “of course he is, and not the sort to lodge in Homburg.”

“Then behold my incompetence!” said Ina.

“But *the* place to look for him is the gambling-saloon. Been there?”

“Oh, no.”

“Then you must.”

“What! Me! Alone?”

“No; with your agent.”

“Oh, my friend; I said you would find him.”

“What a woman! She will have it he is in Homburg. And suppose we do find him, and you should not be welcome?”

“I shall not be unwelcome. *I shall be a change.”*

“Shall I tell you how to draw him to Homburg, wherever he is?” said Ashmead, very demurely.

“Yes, tell me that.”

“And do *me* a good turn into the bargain.”

“Is it possible? Can I be so fortunate?”

“Yes; and *as you say,* it *is* a slice of luck to be able to kill two birds with one stone. Why, consider—the way to recover a man is not to run after him, but to make him run to you. It is like catching moths; you don't run out into the garden after them; you light the candle and open the window, and *they* do the rest—as he will.”

“Yes, yes; but what am I to do for *you?”* asked Ina, getting a little uneasy and suspicious.

“What! didn't I tell you?” said Ashmead, with cool effrontery. “Why, only to sing for me in this little opera, that

is all.” And he put his hands in his pockets, and awaited thunder-claps.

“Oh, that is all, is it?” said Ina, panting a little, and turning two great, reproachful eyes on him.

“That is all,” said he, stoutly. “Why, what attracted him at first? Wasn't it your singing, the admiration of the public, the bouquets and bravas? What caught the moth once will catch it again 'moping' won't. And surely you will not refuse to draw him, merely because you can pull me out of a fix into the bargain. Look here, I have undertaken to find a singer by to-morrow night; and what chance is there of my getting even a third-rate one? Why, the very hour I have spent so agreeably, talking to you, has diminished my chance.”

“Oh!” said Ina, “this is *driving* me into your net.”

“I own it,” said Joseph, cheerfully; “I'm quite unscrupulous, because I know you will thank me afterward.”

“The very idea of going back to the stage makes me tremble,” said Ina.

“Of course it does; and those who tremble succeed. In a long experience I never knew an instance to the contrary. It is the conceited fools, who feel safe, that are in danger.”

“What is the part?”

“One you know—Siebel in 'Faust,' with two new songs.”

“Excuse me, I do not know it.”

“Why, everybody knows it.”

“You mean everybody has heard it sung. I know neither the music nor the words, and I cannot sing incorrectly even for you.”

“Oh, you can master the airs in a day, and the cackle in half an hour.”

“I am not so expeditious. If you are serious, get me the book—oh! he calls the poet's words the cackle—and the music of the part directly, and borrow me the score.”

“Borrow you the score! Ah! that shows the school you were bred in. I gaze at you with admiration.”

“Then please don't, for we have not a moment to waste. You have terrified me out of my senses. Fly!”

“Yes; but before I fly, there is something to be settled—salary!”

“As much as they will give.”

“Of course; but give me a hint.”

“No, no; you will get me some money, for I am poor. I gave all my savings to my dear mother, and settled her on a farm in dear old Denmark. But I really sing for *you* more than for Homburg, so make no difficulties. Above all, do not discuss salary with me. Settle it and draw it for me, and let me hear no more about that. I am on thorns.”

He soon found the director, and told him, excitedly, there was a way out of his present difficulty. Ina Klosking was in the town. He had implored her to return to the opera. She had refused at first; but he had used all his influence with her, and at last had obtained a half promise on conditions—a two months' engagement; certain parts, which he specified out of his own head; salary, a hundred thalers per night, and a half clear benefit on her last appearance.

The director demurred to the salary.

Ashmead said he was mad: she was the German Alboni; her low notes like a trumpet, and the compass of a mezzo-soprano besides.

The director yielded, and drew up the engagement in duplicate. Ashmead then borrowed the music and came back to the inn triumphant. He waved the agreement over his head, then submitted it to her. She glanced at it, made a wry face, and said, “Two months! I never dreamed of such a thing.”

“Not worth your while to do it for less,” said Ashmead. “Come,” said he, authoritatively, “you have got a good bargain every way; so sign.”

She lifted her head high, and looked at him like a lioness, at being ordered.

Ashmead replied by putting the paper before her and giving her the pen.

She cast one more reproachful glance, then signed like a lamb.

“Now,” said she, turning fretful, “I want a piano.”

“You shall have one,” said he coaxingly. He went to the landlord and inquired if there was a piano in the house.

“Yes, there is one,” said he.

“And it is mine,” said a sharp female voice.

“May I beg the use of it?”

“No,” said the lady, a tall, bony spinster. “I cannot have it strummed on and put out of tune by everybody.”

“But this is not everybody. The lady I want it for is a professional musician. Top of the tree.”

“The hardest strummers going.”

“But, mademoiselle, this lady is going to sing at the opera. She *must* study. She *must* have a piano.

“But [grimly] she need not have mine.

“Then she must leave the hotel.”

“Oh [haughtily], *that* is as she pleases.”

Ashmead went to Ina Klosking in a rage and told her all this, and said he would take her to another hotel kept by a Frenchman: these Germans were bears. But Ina Klosking just shrugged her shoulders, and said, “Take me to her.”

He did so; and she said, in German, “Madam, I can quite understand your reluctance to have your piano strummed. But as your hotel is quiet and respectable, and I am unwilling to leave it, will you permit me to play to you? and then you shall decide whether I am worthy to stay or not.”

The spinster drank those mellow accents, colored a little, looked keenly at the speaker, and, after a moment's reflection, said, half sullenly, “No, madam, you are polite. I must risk my poor piano. Be pleased to come with me.”

She then conducted them to a large, unoccupied room on the first-floor, and unlocked the piano, a very fine one, and in perfect tune.

Ina sat down, and performed a composition then in vogue.

“You play correctly, madam,” said the spinster; “but your music—what stuff! Such things are null. They vex the ear a little, but they never reach the mind.”

Ashmead was wroth, and could hardly contain himself; but the Klosking was amused, and rather pleased. “Mademoiselle has positive tastes in music,” said she; “all the better.”

“Yes,” said the spinster, “most music is mere noise. I hate and despise forty-nine compositions out of fifty; but the fiftieth I adore. Give me something simple, with a little soul in it—if you can.”

Ina Klosking looked at her, and observed her age and her dress, the latter old-fashioned. She said, quietly, “Will mademoiselle do me the honor to stand before me? I will sing her a trifle my mother taught me.”

The spinster complied, and stood erect and stiff, with her arms folded. Ina fixed her deep eyes on her, playing a liquid prelude all the time, then swelled her chest and sung the old Venetian cauzonet, “Il pescatore de'll' onda.” It is a small thing, but there is no limit to the genius of song. The Klosking sung this trifle with a voice so grand, sonorous, and sweet, and, above all, with such feeling, taste, and purity, that somehow she transported her hearers to Venetian waters, moonlit, and thrilled them to the heart, while the great glass chandelier kept ringing very audibly, so true, massive, and vibrating were her tones in that large, empty room.

At the first verse that cross-grained spinster, with real likes and dislikes, put a bony hand quietly before her eyes. At the last, she made three strides, as a soldier marches, and fell all of a piece, like a wooden *mannequin,* on the singer's neck. “Take my piano,” she sobbed, “for you have taken the heart out of my body.”

Ina returned her embrace, and did not conceal her pleasure. “I am very proud of such a conquest,” said she.

From that hour Ina was the landlady's pet. The room and piano were made over to her, and, being in a great fright at what she had undertaken, she studied and practiced her part night and day. She made Ashmead call a rehearsal next day, and she came home from it wretched and almost hysterical.

She summoned her slave Ashmead; he stood before her with an air of hypocritical submission.

“The Flute was not at rehearsal, sir,” said she, severely, “nor the Oboe, nor the Violoncello.”

“Just like 'em,” said Ashmead, tranquilly.

“The tenor is a quavering stick. He is one of those who think that an unmanly trembling of the voice represents every manly passion.”

“Their name is legion.”

“The soprano is insipid. And they are all imperfect—contentedly imperfect, How can people sing incorrectly? It is like lying.”

“That is what makes it so common—he! he!”

“I do not desire wit, but consolation. I believe you are Mephistopheles himself in disguise; for ever since I signed that diabolical compact you made me, I have been in a state of terror, agitation, misgiving, and misery—and I thank and bless you for it; for these thorns and nettles they lacerate me, and make me live. They break the dull, lethargic agony of utter desolation.”

Then, as her nerves were female nerves, and her fortitude female fortitude, she gave way, for once, and began to cry patiently.

Ashmead the practical went softly away and left her, as we must leave her for a time, to battle her business with one hand and her sorrow with the other.

CHAPTER II.

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IN the Hotel Russie, at Frankfort, there was a grand apartment, lofty, spacious, and richly furnished, with a broad balcony overlooking the Platz, and roofed, so to speak, with colored sun-blinds, which softened the glare of the Rhineland sun to a rosy and mellow light.

In the veranda, a tall English gentleman was leaning over the balcony, smoking a cigar, and being courted by a fair young lady. Her light-gray eyes dwelt on him in a way to magnetize a man, and she purred pretty nothings at his ear, in a soft tone she reserved for males. Her voice was clear, loud, and rather high-pitched whenever she spoke to a person of her own sex; a comely English blonde, with pale eyelashes; a keen, sensible girl, and not a downright wicked one; only born artful. This was Fanny Dover; and the tall gentleman—whose relation she was, and whose wife she resolved to be in one year, three years, or ten, according to his power of resistance—was Harrington Vizard, a Barfordshire squire, with twelve thousand acres and a library.

As for Fanny, she had only two thousand pounds in all the world; so compensating Nature endowed her with a fair complexion, gray, mesmeric eyes, art, and resolution—qualities that often enable a poor girl to conquer landed estates, with their male incumbrances.

Beautiful and delicate—on the surface—as was Miss Dover's courtship of her first cousin once removed, it did not strike fire; it neither pleased nor annoyed him; it fell as dead

as a lantern firing on an iceberg. Not that he disliked her by any means. But he was thirty-two, had seen the world, and had been unlucky with women. So he was now a *divorce',* and a declared woman-hater; railed on them, and kept them at arm's-length, Fanny Dover included. It was really comical to see with what perfect coolness and cynical apathy he parried the stealthy advances of this cat-like girl, a mistress in the art of pleasing—when she chose.

Inside the room, on a couch of crimson velvet, sat a young lady of rare and dazzling beauty. Her face was a long but perfect oval, pure forehead, straight nose, with exquisite nostrils; coral lips, and ivory teeth. But what first struck the beholder were her glorious dark eyes, and magnificent eyebrows as black as jet. Her hair was really like a raven's dark-purple wing.

These beauties, in a stern character, might have inspired awe; the more so as her form and limbs were grand and statuesque for her age; but all was softened down to sweet womanhood by long, silken lashes, often lowered, and a gracious face that blushed at a word, blushed little, blushed much, blushed pinky, blushed pink, blushed roseate, blushed rosy; and, I am sorry to say, blushed crimson, and even scarlet, in the course of those events I am about to record, as unblushing as turnip, and cool as cucumber. This scale of blushes arose not out of modesty alone, but out of the wide range of her sensibility. On hearing of a noble deed, she blushed warm approbation; at a worthy sentiment, she blushed heart-felt sympathy. If you said a thing at the fire that might hurt some person at the furthest

window, she would blush for fear it should be overheard, and cause pain.

In short, it was her peculiarity to blush readily for matters quite outside herself, and to show the male observer (if any) the amazing sensibility, apart from egotism, that sometimes adorns a young, high-minded woman, not yet hardened by the world.

This young lady was Zoe Vizard, daughter of Harrington's father by a Greek mother, who died when she was twelve years of age. Her mixed origin showed itself curiously. In her figure and face she was all Greek, even to her hand, which was molded divinely, but as long and large as befitted her long, grand, antique arm; but her mind was Northern—not a grain of Greek subtlety in it. Indeed, she would have made a poor hand at dark deceit, with a transparent face and eloquent blood, that kept coursing from her heart to her cheeks and back again, and painting her thoughts upon her countenance.

Having installed herself, with feminine instinct, in a crimson couch that framed her to perfection, Zoe Vizard was at work embroidering. She had some flowers, and their leaves, lying near her on a little table, and, with colored silks, chenille, etc., she imitated each flower and its leaf very adroitly without a pattern. This was clever, and, indeed, rather a rare talent; but she lowered her head over this work with a demure, beaming complacency embroidery alone never yet excited without external assistance. Accordingly, on a large stool, or little ottoman, at her feet, but at a respectful distance, sat a young man, almost her match in beauty, though in quite another style. In height about five

feet ten, broad-shouldered, clean-built, a model of strength, agility, and grace. His face fair, fresh, and healthy-looking; his large eyes hazel; the crisp curling hair on his shapely head a wonderful brown in the mass, but with one thin streak of gold above the forehead, and all the loose hairs glittering golden. A short clipped mustache saved him from looking too feminine, yet did not hide his expressive mouth. He had white hands, as soft and supple as a woman's, a mellow voice, and a winning tongue. This dangerous young gentleman was gazing softly on Zoe Vizard and purring in her ear; and she was conscious of his gaze without looking at him, and was sipping the honey, and showed it, by seeming more absorbed in her work than girls ever really are.

Matters, however, had not gone openly very far. She was still on her defense: so, after imbibing his flatteries demurely a long time, she discovered, all in one moment, that they were objectionable. “Dear me, Mr. Severne,” said she, “you do nothing but pay compliments.”

“How can I help it, sitting here?” inquired he.

“There—there,” said she: then, quietly, “Does it never occur to you that only foolish people are pleased with flatteries?”

“I have heard that; but I don't believe it. I know it makes me awfully happy whenever you say a kind word of me.”

“That is far from proving your wisdom,” said Zoe; “and, instead of dwelling on my perfections, which do not exist, I wish you would *tell* me things.”

“What things?”

“How can I tell till I hear them? Well, then, things about yourself.”

“That is a poor subject.”

“Let me be the judge.”

“Oh, there are lots of fellows who are always talking about themselves: let me be an exception.”

This answer puzzled Zoe, and she was silent, and put on a cold look. She was not accustomed to be refused anything reasonable.

Severne examined her closely, and saw he was expected to obey her. He then resolved to prepare, in a day or two, an autobiography full of details that should satisfy Zoe's curiosity, and win her admiration and her love. But he could not do it all in a moment, because his memory of his real life obstructed his fancy. Meantime he operated a diversion. He said, “Set a poor fellow an example. Tell me something about *yourself*—since I have the bad taste, and the presumption, to be interested in you, and can't help it. Did you spring from the foam of the Archipelago? or are you descended from Bacchus and Ariadne?”

“If you want sensible answers, ask sensible questions,” said Zoe, trying to frown him down with her black brows; but her sweet cheek would tint itself, and her sweet mouth smile and expose much intercoral ivory.

“Well, then,” said he, “I will ask you a prosaic question, and I only hope you won't think it impertinent. How—ever—did such a strangely assorted party as yours come to travel together? And if Vizard has turned woman-hater, as he pretends, how comes he to be at the head of a female party who are not *all* of them—” he hesitated.

“Go on, Mr. Severne; not all of them what?” said Zoe, prepared to stand up for her sex.

“Not perfect?”

“That is a very cautious statement, and—there—you are as slippery as an eel; there is no getting hold of you. Well, never mind, I will set you an example of communicativeness, and reveal this mystery hidden as yet from mankind.”

“Speak, dread queen; thy servant heareth.”

“Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Severne, you amuse *me.”*

“You only interest *me,”* was the soft reply.

Zoe blushed pink, but turned it off. “Then why do you not attend to my interesting narrative, instead of—Well, then, it began with my asking the dear fellow to take me a tour, especially to Rome.”

“You wanted to see the statues of your ancestors, and shame them.”

“Much obliged; I was not quite such a goose. I wanted to see the Tiber, and the Colosseum, and Trajan's Pillar, and the Tarpeian Rock, and the one everlasting city that binds ancient and modern history together.”

She flashed her great eyes on him, and he was dumb. She had risen above the region of his ideas. Having silenced her commentator, she returned to her story, “Well, dear Harrington said 'yes' directly. So then I told Fanny, and she said, 'Oh, do take me with you?' Now, of course I was only too glad to have Fanny; she is my relation, and my friend.”

“Happy girl!”

“Be quiet, please. So I asked Harrington to let me have Fanny with us, and you should have seen his face. What, he

travel with a couple of us! He—I don't see why I should tell you what the monster said."

"Oh, yes, please do."

"You won't go telling anybody else, then?"

"Not a living soul, upon my honor."

"Well, then," he said—she began to blush like a rose—"that he looked on me as a mere female in embryo; I had not yet developed the vices of my sex. But Fanny Dover was a ripe flirt, and she would set me flirting, and how could he manage the pair? In short, sir, he refused to take us, and gave his reasons, such as they were, poor dear! Then I had to tell Fanny. Then she began to cry, and told me to go without her. But I would not do that, when I had once asked her. Then she clung round my neck, and kissed me, and begged me to be cross and sullen, and tire out dear Harrington."

"That is like her."

"How do you know?" said Zoe sharply.

"Oh, I have studied her character."

"When, pray?" said Zoe, ironically, yet blushing a little, because her secret meaning was, "You are always at my apron strings, and have no time to fathom Fanny."

"When I have nothing better to do—when you are out of the room."

“Well, I shall be out of the room very soon, if you say another word.”

“And serve me right, too. I am a fool to talk when you allow me to listen.”

“He is incorrigible!” said Zoe, pathetically. “Well, then, I refused to pout at Harrington. It is not as if he had no reason to distrust women, poor dear darling. I invited Fanny to stay a month with us; and, when once she was in the house, she soon got over me, and persuaded me to play sad, and showed me how to do it. So we wore long faces, and sweet resignation, and were never cross, but kept turning tearful eyes upon our victim.”

“Ha! ha! How absurd of Vizard to tell you that two women would be too much for one man.”

“No, it was the truth; and girls are artful creatures, especially when they put their heads together. But hear the end of all our cunning. One day, after dinner, Harrington asked us to sit opposite him; so we did, and felt guilty. He surveyed us in silence a little while, and then he said, 'My young friends, you have played your little game pretty well, especially you, Zoe, that are a novice in the fine arts compared with Miss Dover.' Histrionic talent ought to be rewarded; he would relent, and take us abroad, on one condition: there must be a chaperone. 'All the better,' said we hypocrites, eagerly; 'and who?'”

“'Oh, a person equal to the occasion—an old maid as bitter against men as ever grapes were sour. She would follow us upstairs, downstairs, and into my lady's chamber. She would have an eye at the key-hole by day, and an ear by night, when we went up to bed and talked over the

events of our frivolous day.' In short, he enumerated our duenna's perfections till our blood ran cold; and it was ever so long before he would tell us who it was—Aunt Maitland. We screamed with surprise. They are like cat and dog, and never agree, except to differ. We sought an explanation of this strange choice. He obliged us. It was not for his gratification he took the old cat; it was for us. She would relieve him of a vast responsibility. The vices of her character would prove too strong for the little faults of ours, which were only volatility, frivolity, flirtation—I will *not* tell you what he said."

"I seem to hear Harrington talking," said Severne. "What on earth makes him so hard upon women? Would you mind telling me that?"

"Never ask me that question again," said Zoe, with sudden gravity.

"Well, I won't; I'll get it out of him."

"If you say a word to him about it, I shall be shocked and offended."

She was pale and red by turns; but Severne bowed his head with a respectful submission that disarmed her directly. She turned her head away, and Severne, watching her, saw her eyes fill.

"How is it," said she thoughtfully, and looking away from him, "that men leave out their sisters when they sum up womankind? Are not we women too? My poor brother quite forgets he has one woman who will never, never desert nor deceive him; dear, darling fellow!" and with these three last words she rose and kissed the tips of her fingers, and waved the kiss to Vizard with that free magnitude of gesture which