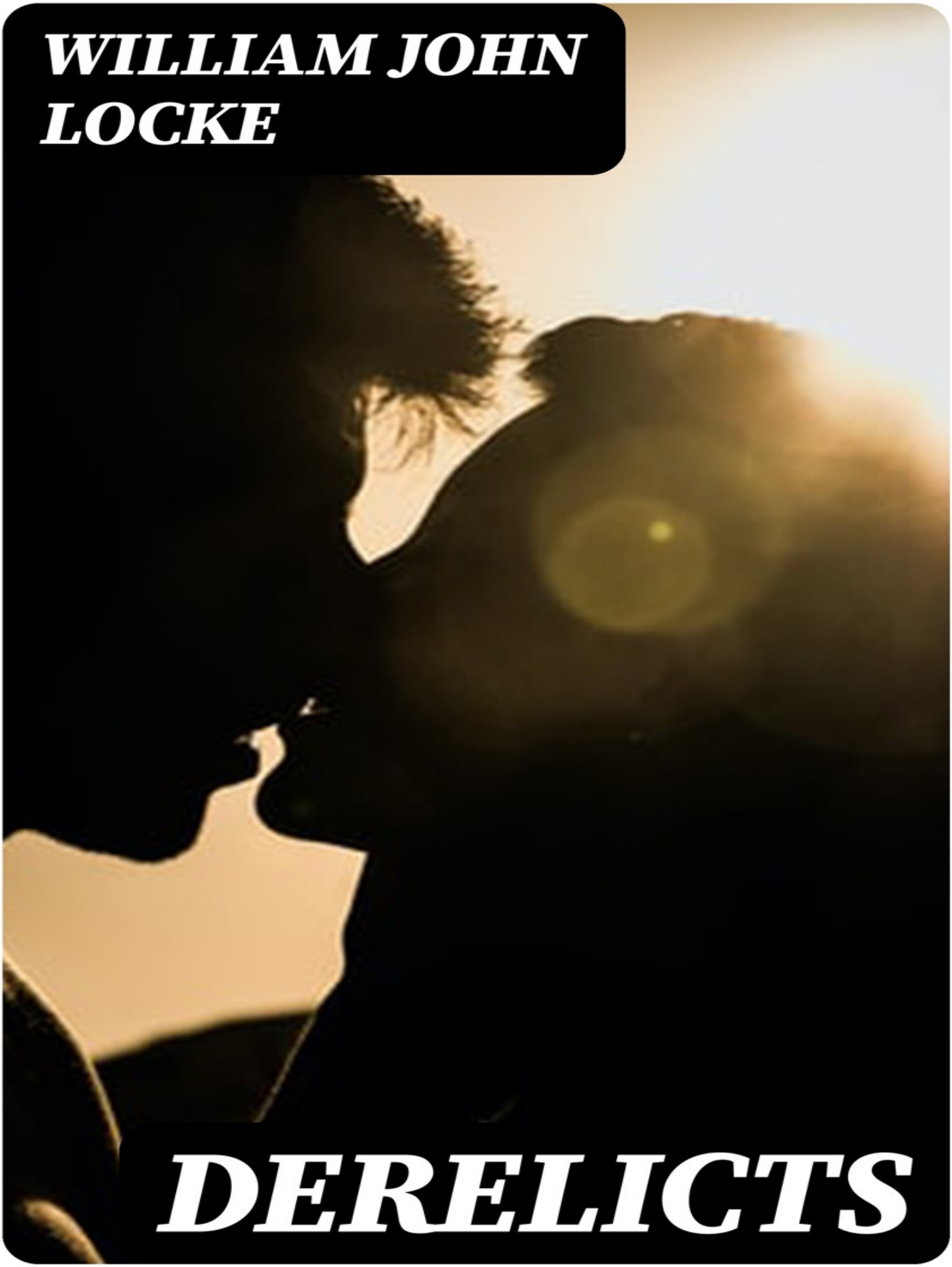
WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE



# DERELICTS

**William John Locke**

# Derelicts

EAN 8596547250609

DigiCat, 2022
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# 1897

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# DERELICTS

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"AT THE GATE OF SAMARIA" AND "THE DEMAGOGUE AND LADY PHAYRE"

JOHN LANE: THE BODLEY HEAD

LONDON AND NEW YORK

1898

# Part I

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# CHAPTER I—BEYOND THE PALE

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Warm day” said the policeman.

The man thus addressed looked up from the steps, where he was sitting bareheaded, and nodded. Then, rather quickly, he put on his hat.

“Not much Bank Holiday hereabouts.”

“So much the better,” said the man.

“It’s all very well for them as likes it,” said the policeman, wiping his forehead.

It was the first Monday in August, and his beat was not a lively one. Curiosity had attracted him toward the sitting figure, and the social instinct prompted conversation. Receiving, however, an uninterested nod in reply to his last remark, he turned away reluctantly and continued his slow tramp up the street.

The man took no notice of his departure, but, resting his chin on his hands, gazed wistfully across the road. Why he had come here to Holland Park he scarcely knew. Perhaps, in his aimless walk from his lodgings in Pimlico, he had unconsciously followed a once familiar track that had brought him to a spot filled with sweet and bitter associations.

The blinds were drawn in the great house opposite that stared white in the noonday sun. A beer-can hanging on the area railings announced the caretaker. Like most of the mansions in the long, well-kept street, it seemed abandoned to sun and silence.

It was the first time he had seen the house since the cloud had fallen upon his life. Once its interior had been as familiar to him as his own boyhood’s home. Its inmates gave him flattering welcome. He was courted for his brilliant promise and admired for his good looks. A whisper of feasting and riotous living that hovered around his reputation caused him to be petted by the household as the prodigal cousin. The comforts of wealth, the charm of refinement, the warmth of affection, were his whenever he chose to knock for admittance at that door. Now he had lost them all, as irrevocably as Adam lost Eden. He was an outcast among men. Not only had he forfeited his right to mount the steps, but he knew that the very mention of his existence in that household brought shame and fierce injunctions of silence.

He gazed at the drawn blinds of the deserted house in an agony of hopelessness, craving the warm sympathy, the laughter, the dear human companionship, the mere sound of his Christian name which he had not heard uttered for over two years—ever since he had entered by that gate above which the *lasciate ogni speranza* seemed written in letters of flame. The lines deepened on his face. The touch of a friendly hand, a kind glance from familiar eyes, the daily, unnoted possession of millions, were to him a priceless treasure, forever beyond his reach. He was barely thirty. His life was wrecked. Nothing lay before him but pariahdom, and slinking from the gaze of honest men. And within him there burnt no fiery sense of injustice to keep alive the flame of noble impulse—only self-contempt, ignominy, the ineffaceable brand of the gaol.

It was on the pavement opposite that he had been arrested. He had tripped down the steps in evening dress, his ears buzzing with the laughter within, in spite of tremulous throbbings of his heart, and had walked into the arms of the two quiet officers in plain clothes who had been patiently awaiting his exit. From that moment onward his life had been one pain and horror. Regained freedom had brought him little joy—had brought him in fact increased despair. During the last few months of his imprisonment he had yearned sickeningly for the day of release. It had come. Sometimes he regretted the benumbed hours of that mid-time in gaol, when pain had been lost in apathy. He had been free for five months. In all probability he would be free for the rest of his life. Sometimes he shuddered at the prospect.

The policeman again passed by, and this time eyed him askance. Why was he sitting on those steps? A suspicion of felonious purpose relieved the monotony of his beat.

“You ’ll be moving on soon,” he said. “You mustn’t doss on them doorsteps all day.”

The man looked at him rather stupidly. His first impulse was one of servile obedience—an instinct of late habit, and he rose from his seat. Then his sense of independence asserted itself, and he said, in a somewhat defiant tone:—

“I felt faint from the heat. You have no right to molest me.”

The policeman glanced at him from head to foot. A gentleman evidently, in spite of well-worn clothes and gloveless hands thrust into trousers pockets. He wore no watch-chain, and his shirt-cuffs were destitute of links.

“Down upon his luck,” thought the policeman; “ill too.” The man’s face was pinched, and of the transparent white of a thin, fair man with delicately cut features. His eyes were heavy, deeply sunken, and wore an expression of weariness mingled with fear. The side muscles by his mouth were relaxed, as if a heavy drooping moustache had dragged them down; the scanty blonde hair on his upper lip, curled up at the ends, contrasted oddly with this impression. He looked careworn and ill. His clothes hung loosely upon him. The policeman surrendered his point.

“Well, you ain’t obstructing the traffic,” he replied good-humouredly; and again he left the man alone, who reseated himself on the shady steps, as if disinclined to stir from comfortable quarters. But the spell of his meditations had been broken. He leaned his head against the stone pillar of the balustrade and tried to think of occupation for the day. He longed for to-morrow, when he could resume his weary search for work, interrupted since Saturday noon. At first he had plunged into the hopeless task with feverish anxiety, humiliated by rebuffs, agonised through the frustration of idle hopes. Now it had grown mechanical, a daily routine, devoid of pain or joy, to drag himself through the busy streets from office to office and from shop to shop. He resented the Sunday cessation of work, as interfering with the tenor of his life. This Bank Holiday added another Sunday to the week.

The heat and glare and soundless solitude of the street made him drowsy. The thought of death passed through him: an euthanasia—to fade there peacefully out of existence. And then to be picked up dead on a doorstep—a

fitting end. *Finis coronat opus*. He sniffed cynically at the idea. The minutes passed. The shade gradually encroached upon the sunlight of the pavement. A cat from one of the great deserted houses drew near with meditative step, smelt his boots, and, in the bored manner of her tribe, curled herself up to slumber. A butcher's cart rattling past awoke the man, and he bent down and stroked the creature at his feet. Then he became aware of a figure approaching him, along the pavement—a tiny woman, neatly dressed. He watched her idly, with lack-lustre gaze. But when she came within distance of salutation, their eyes met, and each started in recognition. He rose hurriedly and made a step as if to cross the road, but the little lady stopped still.

"Stephen Chisely!"

She moved forward and laid a detaining touch upon his arm, and looked up questioningly into his face:—

"Won't you speak to me?"

The voice was so soft and musical, the intonation so winning, that he checked his impulse of flight; but he stared at her half bewildered.

"You haven't forgotten me—Yvonne Latour?" she continued.

"Forgotten you? No," he replied, slowly. "But I am not accustomed to being recognised."

"The world is very full of hateful people," she said. "Oh! how wretchedly ill you are looking! That was why you were sitting down on the doorstep. My poor fellow!"

There was a suggestion of tears in her eyes. He turned his head away quickly.

“You mustn’t talk to me like that,” he said, huskily. “I’m not fit for you to speak to. When I went under, I went under—for good and all. Good-bye, Madame Latour—and God bless you for saying a kind word to me.”

“Why need you go away? Walk a little with me, won’t you? We can go along to the Park and sit quietly and talk.”

“Do you really mean it—that you would walk with me—in the public streets?”

“Why, of course,” she replied, with a little air of surprise. “Did we not have many walks together in the old days? Do you think I have forgotten? And you want friends so, so badly that even poor little me may be of some good. Come.”

They moved away together, and walked some steps in silence. He was too dazed with the sudden realisation of his yearning for human tenderness to find adequate speech. At last he said harshly:—

“You know what you are doing? You are in the company of a man who committed a disgraceful crime and has rotted in a gaol for two years.”

“Ah, don’t say such things,” said Madame Latour. “You hurt me. There are hundreds of people in this great London, honoured and respected, who have done far worse than you. Hundreds of thousands,” she added, with exaggerated conviction. “Besides, you are still my good, kind friend. What has passed cannot alter that.”

“I can’t understand it yet,” he said lamely. “You are the first who has said a kind word to me.”

“Poor fellow!” said Yvonne again.

They emerged into the Bayswater Road. Before he had time to remonstrate, she had hailed an omnibus going

eastward. “We will get out at the corner of the Park. You mustn’t walk too much.”

The ’bus stopped. He entered with her and sat down by her side. When the conductor came for the fares, Yvonne opened her purse quickly; but a flush came over her companion’s pale face as he divined her intention. “You must let me,” he said, producing a couple of pence from his pocket.

The rattling of the vehicle prevented serious conversation. The talk drifted naturally into the desultory commonplace. Madame Latour explained that she had been giving the last singing lesson of the season at a house on the other side of Holland Park, that her pupil had neither ear nor voice, and that by the time she had learned the accompaniment to a song it had already grown out of date. “People are so stupid, you know.”

She said it with such an air of conviction, as if she had discovered a brand-new truth, that the man smiled. She noted it with her quick, feminine glance, and felt gladdened. It was so much better to laugh than to cry. She was encouraged to chatter lightly upon passing glimpses of people in the street, of amusing incidents in her profession as a concert singer. When the ’bus stopped, she jumped out, disregarding his gravely offered hand, and laughed, her face glowing with animation.

“Oh, how nice it is to be with you again!” she said, as they crossed to the entrance gate of Kensington Gardens. “Say that you are glad you met me.”

“It is like a drop of water on the tongue of the damned,” he said in a low voice—too low, however, for her to hear, for

she continued to look up at him, all smiles and sweetness.

She seemed a thing of warmth and sunshine, too impalpable for the rough uses of the world. One would have said she was the embodied spirit of the warm south of Keats's ode. Her dark hair, massed in a hundred little waves over her forehead and temples, gave an indescribable softness to her face. A faint tinge of rose shone through her dark skin. Her great brown eyes contained immeasurable depths of tenderness. A subtly-mingled, all-pervading sense of summer and the exquisitely feminine enveloped her from the beautiful hair to her tiny feet. She was in the sweetest bloom of her womanhood and she had all the unconscious, half-pathetic charm of a child. In a crowded ball-room, amidst dazzling dresses and flashing arms and necks and under the electric light, Yvonne's beauty might have passed unnoticed. But there, in the shady walk upon which they had just entered, in that quiet world of cool greens and shadowed yellows, she appeared to the man's weary eyes the most beautiful thing on the earth.

"How sweet it is here," she said, as they sat down upon a bench.

"Incomprehensibly sweet," he replied.

His tone touched her. She laid her tiny gloved hand upon his arm.

"I wish I could help you—Mr. Chisely," she said gently.

"That is no longer my name," he said. "And so you must n't call me by it. I have given it up since—since I came out. Would you care to hear about me? It would help me to speak a little."

"That's why I brought you here," said Yvonne.

He bent forward, elbows on knees, covering his face in his hands.

“I don’t know, after all, that there’s much to say. My poor mother died while I was in prison—you know that; I suppose I broke her heart. Her money was sunk in an annuity. The furniture and things were sold to pay outstanding debts of mine. I came out five months ago, penniless. Everard’s bankers communicated with me. As the head of the family he had collected a lump sum of money, which was given to me on condition that I should change my name and never let any of the family hear of my existence again. My mother’s people refused to have anything to do with me. God knows why I was sitting outside their house to-day. Perhaps you think I ought n’t to have accepted Everard’s gift. A man hasn’t much pride left after two years’ hard labour.... I took the name of Joyce. I saw it on a tradesman’s cart as I reached the street after the interview. One name is as good as another.”

“But you are still Stephen?” said Yvonne.

“I suppose so. I have hardly thought of it. Yes, I suppose I keep the Stephen.... I am husbanding this money. I have only that between me and starvation, if anything happened, you know. What I have passed through is not the best thing for one’s health. Meanwhile, I am trying to get work. It is a bit hopeless. I know I ought to go out of England, but London is in my blood somehow. I am loth to leave it. Besides, what should I do in the colonies? I am not fit for hard manual labour. They tried it in there, and I broke down; I made sacks and helped in the kitchen most of my time. If I could earn a pound a week in London, I should n’t care. It

would keep body and soul together. Why I should want to keep them together I don’t know. I suppose my spirit is broken, and I am too apathetic to commit suicide. If I had the spirit of a louse I should do so. But I haven’t.”

He stopped speaking and remained with his head bowed in his hands. Yvonne could find no words to reply. His almost brutal terseness had given her a momentary perception of his self-abasement which surprised and frightened her. Generous and tender-hearted as she was, she had ever found men insoluble enigmas. They knew so much, had so many strange wants, seemed to exist in a world of ideas, feelings, and actions beyond her ken. Here was one with nameless experiences and shames. She shrank a few inches along the seat, not from repulsion, but from a sudden sense of her own incapacity of comprehension. She felt tongue-tied and helpless. So there was a short silence.

Joyce noticed the lack of spontaneous sympathy, and, raising a haggard face, said:—

“I have shocked you.”

“You talk so strangely,” said Yvonne—“as if you had a stone instead of a heart.”

“Forgive me,” he said, softening at the sight of her distress. “I am ungrateful to you. I ought to be happy to-day. I will be happy. I should like to bend down and kiss your feet for sitting here with me.”

The change in his tone brought the colour back into Yvonne’s face and the sun into her eyes. She was a creature of quick impulses.

“Have I really made you happy? I am so glad. I seem to be always trying to make people happy and never

succeeding.”

“They must be strange people you have dealt with,” said Joyce with a weary smile.

She shrugged her shoulders expressively.

“I suppose it is that other people are so strange and I am so ordinary.”

“You are the kindest, sunniest soul on earth,” said Joyce. “You always were.”

“Oh, how can you say so?” she cried, shaking her head. She was all brightness again. “I am such an insignificant little person. Everything about me seems so small. I have a small body, a small voice, a small sphere, a small mind, and oh! I live in such a small, tiny flat. You must come and see me. I will sing to you—that is my one small talent—and perhaps that will cheer you. You must be so lonely!”

“Why are you so good to me?” Joyce asked.

“Because you look wretched and ill and miserable.” she said impulsively, “and I can’t bear it. You were good to me once. Do you remember how kindly you settled everything for me after Amédée left me? I don’t know what I should have done without you. And then, your mother. Ah, I know,” she continued, lowering her voice a little, “I know, and I cried for you. I saw her just before the end came and she spoke of you. She said 'Yvonne, if ever you meet Stephen, give him a kind word for my sake. He will have the whole world against him.’ And I promised—but I should have done just the same if I had n’t promised. There is n’t any goodness in it.”

He pressed her hand dumbly. Her eyes swam with starting tears, but his were dry. Sometimes when he thought

of the devastation his crime had wrought, he would fall on his knees and bury his face, and long that he could ease his heart in a storm of weeping. But it seemed too dead for passionate outburst. Yet he had never felt so near to emotion as at that moment.

They talked for a short while longer, of old days and home memories, bitter-sweet to the young man, and of his present position, whose hopelessness Yvonne refused to allow. She was anxious to effect a reconciliation between him and his family. His mother's relations who lived in Holland Park she did not know. But his cousin, Everard Chisely, Canon of Winchester, might be brought to more Christian sentiments of forgiveness. She would plead with the Canon the first time that she met him. But Joyce shook his head. No. He was the black sheep. Everard had behaved generously. He must go his own way. No modern Christianity could make a man forget the disgrace that had been brought upon his name by felony. Besides, Everard never went back upon his word. Like Pilate, what he had written, he had written, and there was an end of the matter.

"But how do you come to know Everard?" asked Joyce, wishing to turn the conversation.

"I met him several times at your mother's," replied Yvonne. "He used to be so kind to her. And there he heard me sing—and somehow we have become immense friends. He comes to see me, and I sing to him. Dina Vicary says he comes up to town on purpose. Did you ever hear such a thing? But I can't tell you how respectable it makes me feel—so impressive you know—a real live dignitary. Once he came when Elsie Carnegie and Vandeleur were there

showing me her new song and dance. You should have seen their faces when he came in. Van, who sings in the choir of a West End church, began to talk hymns for all he was worth, while Elsie flicked her lighted cigarette into a flower-pot. It was so funny."

Yvonne broke into a contagious ripple of laughter. Then, remembering the flight of time, she looked at her watch and rose quickly from the seat.

"I had no idea it was so late! I am going out to lunch. Now you will come and see me, won't you? Come to-morrow evening. I live at 40 Aberdare Mansions, Marylebone Road. By the way, do you still sing?"

"I had forgotten there was such a thing as song in the world," said Joyce sadly.

"Well, you 'll remember it to-morrow evening," said Yvonne. "I have an idea. *Au revoir* then."

"God bless you," said Joyce, shaking hands with her.

She nodded brightly, and tripped away up the path. Joyce watched her dainty figure until it was out of sight, and then he wandered aimlessly through the Park, thinking of the past hour. And, for a short while, some of the contamination of the gaol seemed to be wiped away.

# CHAPTER II—YVONNE

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That evening Yvonne was standing by the door of a concert-hall, as her friend and fellow-artist Vandeleur adjusted a red wrap round her shoulders. He was a burly, pudding-faced Irishman with twinkling dark blue eyes and a persuasive manner. His fingers lingered about the wrap longer than was necessary.

“Good-bye,” said Yvonne, “and thank you.” She was feeling a little upset. Vandeleur, a popular favourite, had preceded her on the programme, and his song had been met with rapturous applause.

“You have ‘queered’ me, Van,” she had said, in pure jest.

Whereupon, he had returned to the platform to give his enthusiastically demanded encore, and, to the disappointment of the audience, had sung the most villainous drawing-room ballad he could think of, without an attempt at expression. The applause had been perfunctory, and Yvonne’s appearance had created a quickening of interest. Vandeleur’s unnecessary quixotism put Yvonne into a false position. So she thanked him shyly.

“Let me just have ten minutes of a cigarette at home with you,” he pleaded.

Yvonne was tired. It was very hot; she had been running hither and thither about London since the morning, and was longing in a feminine way to free herself of hampering garments, and to lie down with a French novel for an hour before going to bed. But when a man spoke to her with that note of entreaty in his voice she did not know how to refuse.

She nodded assent. Vandeleur called a cab and they drove together to her flat.

It was up many flights of stairs—the passage was very narrow, the drawing-room very tiny. The big Irishman standing on the hearthrug seemed to fill all the space left by the grand piano. How this article of furniture was ever brought into the flat puzzled Yvonne's friends as much as the entrance of the apples into the dumplings puzzled George III., until some one suggested the same solution of the problem—the flat had been built round the piano. Everything else in the room was small, like Yvonne herself, the armchairs, the couch, the three occasional tables. A few water-colours hung around the walls. The curtains and draperies were fresh and tasteful. All the room, with its dainty furniture and pretty feminine knick-knacks, was impressed with Yvonne's graceful individuality—all except the immense grand piano, which asserted itself loudly, a polished rosewood solecism. It seemed such a very big instrument for so small a person as Yvonne.

She threw herself into an armchair by the fire, with a little sigh. She had been unusually quiet during the drive home.

"And what's making you miserable?" asked Vandeleur, in a tone of concern.

"I wish you had n't done that, Van," she said, with a wistful puckering of her forehead.

"Ah, there! now you're vexed with me. There never was an animal like me for treading on my dearest friends. I'm like the elephant you may have heard of, that squashed the mother of a brood of chickens by mistake, and, taking it to

heart, just like me, gathered the little ones under his wing, and, sitting down upon them, said: ‘Ah, be aisy now, I’ll be a mother to you’; he did n’t hurt the chickens’ feelings exactly —but it was mistaken kindness. Was it your feelings I trampled on?”

“Ah, no, Van,” said Yvonne, smiling. “But don’t you see, it was doing a thing I can never pay you back for.”

“Faith, the sight of your sweet face is payment enough.”

“But you can have that for nothing—such as it is.”

“It’s the sweetest face that ever was made,” said the Irishman, flinging a freshly-lighted cigarette into the grate behind him. “I’d cut off my head any day to get a sight of it But are you wanting to pay me more than that? By my soul, there’s just an easy way out of your difficulty, Yvonne!”

He looked down at her, his face very red, and questioning in his eyes. She caught his glance and sat upright, stretching out her hand appealingly. Men had looked at her like that before,—craving for something she had not in her to give. She had always, on such occasions, felt what a shallow, poverty-stricken little soul she was. What was in her that could bring the trouble into men’s eyes? Here was Van, the kind friend and good comrade, going the way of the others. She was frightened and distressed.

“Oh, Van, don’t!” she cried. “Not that. I can’t bear it!”

She covered her face with her hands, as he came quickly forward and leaned over her chair. “Just a tiny bit of love, Yvonne. So small that you would n’t miss it. I could do with it all, but I know I can’t get that. I only ask for a sample. Come, Yvonne.”

But Yvonne shook her head.

“Don’t, Van,” she repeated, piteously; “you’re hurting me.”

Her tone was so pathetic that the big man drew himself up, thumped his chest, and seized his hat. “I’m a great big brute to come and take advantage of you like this. Of course you couldn’t care about a great fat bounder like me. And you’re half dropping with weariness. It’s a villain I am. I’ll leave you to your sleep, poor little woman. Good night.”

He held out his hand, and she allowed hers to remain in it for a moment.

“I have n’t been ungrateful to you, have I?” she asked. “I did n’t mean to be. But I thought you were different.”

“How, different?”

“That you would never make love to me. Don’t, Van, please. It would spoil it all.”

“Well, perhaps it would,” replied Vandeleur, philosophically. “Only it is so devilish hard not to make love to you when one’s got the chance. And, begad! if you’d just give up looking like a little warm, brown saint, it would be better for the peace of mind of the men.”

He stooped and touched her hand with his lips and strode buoyantly out of the room. She heard him humming one of his songs along the passage, then the slam of the front door; then there was silence, and Yvonne went to bed with a grateful sense of escape from unknown dangers. Still, she was sorry for Vandeleur, although she had a dim perception of the superficiality of his passion. It would have been nice, had it been possible, to make him happy. She had a queer, unreasonable little feeling that she had been selfish. She

sighed as she settled herself to sleep. The ways of the world were very complicated.

To those who knew her it was often a subject for marvel that she was not crushed in the fierce struggle of life. A creature so yielding, so simple, so unaffected by experience or the obvious external lessons of the world, and yet standing serenely in the midst of the turmoil, seemed an incongruity—gave a sense of shock, a prompting to rescue, such as would arise from the sight of a child in the middle of a roadway clashing with traffic. She was made for protection, tenderness, all the sheltering luxuries and amenities of life. It was a flaw in the eternal fitness of things that she was alone, earning her livelihood, with nothing but her sweetness and innocence to guard her from buffeting and downfall.

Yet it was her very simplicity that saved her from outward strain; and inward stress was as yet spared her, through her unawakened child's nature. She laughed when folks pitied her. To earn her living was an easy matter. Born in the profession, trained for it from her earliest days, she had taken to it as a young swan to the water. Engagements came like the winds, the visits of her friends, and other such natural and commonplace phenomena. She sang, or gave her lessons, and the money was paid in to the branch of the City Bank close by her flat, and when she needed funds for her modest expenses she wrote a cheque and sent her maid to cash it When her balance was getting low, she practised little economies and postponed payment of bills; when it was high, she settled her debts, bought new clothes, and had a dozen oysters now and then for supper. It was very

simple. She did not pity herself at all. Nor did she feel the trouble of her past married life. It had gone by like a cloudy day, forgotten in succeeding sunshine, and had left singularly little trace upon her character. Even the period of unhappiness had not weighed unduly. A more resistful nature might have been wrecked irretrievably; but Yvonne had been cast upon the shoals only for a season.

When Amédée Bazouge, a Parisian tenor who had settled in London, first met her, he was surfeited with various blonde beauties of the baser sort, and in a sentimental mood, during which he frequently invoked the memory of his mother, he chose to fall desperately in love with little brown Yvonne, likening her to the Blessed Virgin and as many saints as he recollected. Yvonne was very young; this sudden worship was new to her; the pain in his heart that he so passionately dwelt upon seemed a terrible thing for her to have caused. She married him because he said that his life was at stake. She gave him herself as she would have given sixpence to a poor man in the street. Why she was necessary to his life's happiness she could not guess. However, Amédée said so, and she took it on faith.

For a while she was mildly content in his exuberant delight. He whispered, in soft honeymoon hours, "*m'aimes-tu?*"—and she said "Yes," because she knew it would please him; but she was always happier at other times, when she was not called upon for display or expression of feeling. She liked him well enough. His somewhat common handsomeness pleased her, his effervescent fancy and boulevard wit kept her lightly amused, and his vehement

passion provided her with an interest strangely compounded of fright, wonder, and pity.

But Amédée Bazouge was not made either by nature or education for the domestic virtues. His repentant mood passed away; he forgot the memory of his mother, and found Yvonne's innocence grow insipid. He hankered after the strange goddesses with their full-flavoured personalities, their cynicism, their passions, and their stimulating variety. Regret came to him for having broken with the last, who always kept him in a state of delicious uncertainty whether she would overwhelm him with passionate kisses or break the looking-glass in a tempest of wrath. So, gradually, he sought satisfaction for his reactionary yearnings and drifted away from Yvonne. And then she grew unhappy. He did not treat her unkindly. In all their dealings with each other a harsh word never passed the lips of either. But she felt cold and neglected. Instead of being met after a concert and accompanied to their little house at Staines, she went the long journey alone. The quiet evenings of music and singing together were things of the past. Often a week elapsed without their meeting. To complete her trouble, her mother died suddenly, and Yvonne felt very lonely. She would sit sometimes and cry like a lost child.

At last they parted. Amédée returned to Paris, and Yvonne took her little flat in the Marylebone Road. The clouds passed by and Yvonne was happy again. She had retained professionally her maiden name of Latour, and now she assumed it altogether, only changing the former "Mademoiselle" into "Madame." Her husband faded into a vague memory. When she received news of him it was

through a paragraph in the “Figaro,” announcing his death in a Paris hospital. She wore a little crape bonnet to notify to the world the fact of her widowhood, but she had no tears to shed. When friends condoled with her over her sad lot, she opened her round eyes in astonishment.

“But, my dear, I am as happy as I can possibly be,” she would say in remonstrance. And it was true. She had come through the ordeal of an unhappy marriage, pure and childlike, her heart unruffled by passion and her soul unclouded by disillusion.

There are some women born to be loved by many men, yielding, trustful, appealing irresistibly to the masculine instincts of protection and possession. Sometimes they are carried off by one successful owner and bear him children, and hear nothing of the hopeless loves that they inspire. Sometimes, like Yvonne, they are at the mercy of every gust of passion that stirs the hearts of the men around them. They are too innocent of the meaning and scope of love to bide the time when love shall take them in its grip; too weak, tender, and compassionate to harden their hearts against the sufferings of men. If they fail, the world is unsparing in condemnation. If happy circumstance shelters them, they are canonised for virtues that stop short of their logical conclusion. Wherefore we are tempted to say hard things of the world.

Fate, however, had dealt not unkindly with Yvonne. At times her path had been sadly tangled and she had sighed, as she did this night after Vandeleur’s unexpected declaration. But chance had always come to her aid and cleared her way. She trusted to it now as she fell asleep.

# CHAPTER III—IN THE DEPTHS

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If you step this way, the manager will see you," said the clerk, lifting the flap of the counter.

Joyce rose from the cane-bottomed chair on which he had been sitting, and followed the clerk through the busy outer office into the private room beyond. An elderly man in gold spectacles looked up from his desk.

"What can I do for you?"

"I am seeking employment," said Joyce, "can you give me any?"

"Employment?"

If Joyce had asked him for Prester John's cap, or the Cham of Tartary's beard, his tone could not have expressed more surprise.

"Yes," replied Joyce. "I don't mind what it is—clerk, copyist, handy-man, messenger—so long as it's work."

"Utterly impossible," said the manager, shortly.

"Would it be of any use to leave my address?" asked Joyce.

"Not a bit. Good day to you."

Joyce walked out apathetically on to the landing. It was a nest of city offices in a great block of buildings in Fenchurch Street, a labyrinth of staircases, passages, and ground-glass doors black-lettered with the names of firms. He was going through them systematically. Often he could not gain access to a person in authority. When he succeeded, it was the same history of rebuff. He felt somewhat downcast at the result of this last interview, the cheerful alacrity with which