things; but the girl herself had put the cart before the horse. And yet he was to blame. . . . a man is always to blame if he lets a woman make herself common and cheap to him.

"It's Dell," she said, under her breath. "Dell, Dell, Dell!"

"Lenore," he said, and almost groaned, "why don't you women make us men respect you—Heaven knows we are eager enough to do it!"

Lenore laughed contemptuously. Her sleepy eyes were now wide open, for she knew that she had played her cards badly—carelessly—and lost the man.

Nor could she punish him. When a woman claims complete independence and emancipates herself wholly from home authority, she forfeits the protection that her mankind could and would extend to her did she conform to the canons of conduct that rule girls who respect themselves.

Of course, she knew that these accidents sometimes happened to girls of her views and habits—that marriages, drifted towards without visible intention on the part of the man, sometimes did not come off; but it was very rarely that a man had the moral courage to "get out" at the last moment, and she had not for a moment expected such courage in Bruce Gibson.

And the man was rich, desirable in every way, and—here was the sting—he would go back to Dell and marry her, and she, beautiful Lenore, would have to put up with one of the inferior men eager to take Bruce's place.

"I feel a cad and a beast," he said; "yet I know that what I am doing is for the happiness of both of us—if love were not forthcoming from me you would seek it elsewhere."

"Oh! don't mind me," said Lenore, in a hard, dry voice. "It has taken you a considerable time to find out that we are thoroughly unsuited to each other—but better late than never."

He whitened, understanding now why so many men married unhappily—because it was easier to them to be unhappy than cads; yet he knew that his whole future life hung on the issues of the next few moments—that he must be a brute, and a resolute one, if he were to cut himself clear of her—and suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Yes, go," she said, furiously; "go back to Dell," and she turned on him a face so deformed by passion that he hardly knew it. Truly "hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," and he felt like a beaten hound as he left her.

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The children were all at school, and Dell was alone in the little Highgate house, fragrant with flowers, when Miss Lepell was announced. There was only a very slight acquaintance between the two, and Dell rose, surprised, as the tall, beautiful girl swept in, made a pretence of touching her hand, and plunged at once into the subject that had brought her there.

"Miss Brunton," she said, "for a year Bruce Gibson and I have gone about everywhere together. He behaved to me as the girl he was going to marry, and now he has left me."

Dell had been working; now she folded her hands on the work, and said, gently: "He asked you to marry him?"

"Men do not ask girls nowadays," said Lenore hotly. "They just drift into an engagement; but the one who backs out is—dishonourable."

For a moment Dell was silent, a lovely colour coming into her cheeks, that transformed her almost to beauty. "I don't know," she said, quietly. "You see, that's all just playing round, and marriage is a working partnership, is it not? A man should be so very, very sure before he asks, and a girl should hesitate so very, very long before she consents."

"Oh! call it sordid prudence, not love," cried Lenore—"the sort of 'Love me little, love me long' business."

"Hasty love is quickly gone," concluded Dell. "Miss Lepell"—she lifted her brown eyes—"Bruce loved me, and, when he asked me, I was prepared to confess that I loved him; but you took him away from me—you made him apparently one of that fast brigade to which you belong. But he is too strong, too fastidious a man to permanently adopt its manners and mode of life. Have you come here to ask me to persuade him to return to it?"

"I have come to you," said Lenore, "to put it to you as a point of honour between one woman and another, not to take him back as your lover when he really belongs to me."

"Who speaks of 'honour'? Who stole first?" cried Dell, with a strange note of passion in her usually quiet voice. "We were very happy, and, though I am plain, I could have made him the sort of wife he wanted. Oh! you beautiful people are never such happy, beloved wives as we despised ones, who study a man, and keep his home sweet and restful for him!"

"Restful, with a houseful of brats!" cried Lenore, furiously, the atmosphere of the room, the soft white needlework under the girl's womanly hand, shewing in sudden, violent contrast to her own bridge-playing, cigarette-smoking entourage, as she knew it would to Bruce when he came—for come he surely would.

"I love children," said Dell, and touched with an exquisite gesture of tenderness the work in her lap. "I could no more do without my little brothers and sisters (especially now our dear mother is dead) than they could do without me. And Bruce"—her voice unconsciously softened—"loves them too."

"And I hate them. They are a fearful expense and an awful worry. So you will take Bruce back?"

"No!"

The voice was very soft, but very final, and the man who, finding the front door open, had walked in with the freedom of an old friend, heard it as he paused on the threshold of the drawing-room.

"Then he will come back to me!" cried Lenore, springing up joyously. "Don't move, my carriage is waiting in the lane. May I go through this window?" and, with no further leave-taking, and the usual lack of manners of her type, she vanished.

Dell, left alone, mutely interrogated the ceiling and furniture, instead of Heaven, and resumed her work; but a tear fell on it, and rusted her needle.

"She is very lovely, and he is just—a man," she said. Then, hearing a slight sound behind her, turned to see Bruce standing just inside the door.

"Oh! she cried warmly, "do you add eavesdropping to your other good qualities?"

He made no reply, but in a methodical way brought a chair up, and sat down opposite her. He was pale and thin, but handsomer than ever, she thought, in his lean, brown way; and he had the look in his eyes that had always mastered her before she found him out as the weak, self-indulgent beauty-lover that he had proved himself for the past year.

"Dell," he said, quietly, "I heard your promise to Miss Lepell just now, and you have just got to break it, even as I have refused to pay my debt of honour to her. We will be moral runagates if you like—but—"

"Speak for yourself," she said, coldly, and took up the work on her lap, and drove her rusted needle steadily through it. "While the man is abroad, sowing tares, the woman sits at home, and thinks to some purpose. Go back to Miss Lepell. She has many claims on you"—there was scorn in her voice—"that I have not, that I never should have, were we engaged a lifetime."

Then she turned resolutely to other matters, inquired for his people, spoke of her father and the children, gave him tea, and made him feel that for a whole year he had shut himself out from the only real home that since his mother's death he had ever known.

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When, six months later, the engagement of Miss Lepell was announced to a rich mustard maker, and it was followed at no great distance of time by the marriage of "that handsome, charming, rich Mr. Gibson to a homely girl of the "Little Dorrit' type, named Dell Brunton"—or so said the world—neither Bruce nor Dell minded.