

A WOMAN'S FACE:

CHAPTER I.

It was half-past six o'clock on a bleak evening in January. A black starless sky above, frost-bound snow-covered earth underneath, and a film of sleet falling made the hills and valleys of beautiful Westmoreland dreary and desolate as the shadowy limboes of the Inferno where Dante describes unbaptized and heathen souls as wandering for ever in still and joyless gloom. Between two ridges of bare and rocky hill a market-cart was jogging slowly along the whitening road, and the thud of the old horse's hoofs and the rattle of the wheels were the only sounds that broke a stillness which was vault-like in the narrow valley.

From under the rough canvas hood of the little cart peered out two men's faces, not clearly visible even to each other; as the cart entered the valley its occupants had dropped into silence, which was not broken until a light began to twinkle in the dimness on the road ahead of them. At sight of the little thread of brightness across the path one of the men started, and the other laughed good-humouredly.

"Eh, but there's no need to be feared, sir; there's no moonlighters hereabouts," said he cheerfully, as he encouraged the old horse to mend his pace by a gentle shake of the reins. "I've lived at Mereside sixty-five year, and I've been to Conismere and