

"I beg your pardon. I did not see the difference," I could not help saying. But my feeble sarcasm failed to provoke a retort out of which I might have gathered something. I had to put up with the poor consolation of having had the last word, such as it was; and it was so far a comfort to one who had no other defence or offence, that I have never since misunderstood the luxury it must be to a woman when she finds herself over-matched, or grudged it to her.

Towards dusk, my sentry was relieved by two or three less formidable guards, of whom one, at least, seemed disposed to be good-natured. He loosened my cords in so deft a manner that, while I was rendered a great deal more comfortable, I was fettered even more securely. I think he must have had a genius for tying knots, and had more desire to display his own cleverness than to give me ease. He also brought me half a gourd filled with delightfully cold and pure water, and a huge piece of bread as black as a coal, with two or three onions. My guards chattered freely among themselves; but I did not understand a word, nor, when I spoke, did they evidently understand a word of mine. Presently they fell to playing some game with cards, diversified with an occasional wrangle. And so in its monotony, broken by occasional reliefs of guard, the night dragged through, until I fell asleep out of sheer exhaustion.

So soundly did I sleep at last that it required a severe shaking to rouse me—at any rate, whether it was needed or not, the shaking was severe—and it must have taken me a full half minute to realise