

MY BEARDED MAID

husband the greatest pain he has ever felt because—what was it ?—his trust in you grated on your nerves. *N'est ce pas ?* No, no, don't look at me like that, I didn't say you were wrong, nor is Karakaksopoulos wrong when he does what he pleases with his mouse. Mice are made for cats to eat, most decidedly. Woman has one gentle side of her, and that is her love of her children, but of her children only. Man may love the young for their beauty, their freshness, for their hope and their daring, but woman loves only the young she has borne. And whereas many a stepfather has loved and protected the children of the woman he marries as if they had been his own children, a widower who gives his children to the keeping of a stepmother would be kinder to send them to a foundling hospital.

"Bitter, Phrynette ! How could you misunderstand me so ? I love woman for her grace and for her beauty. I revere her for her mission, but it seems to me very absurd to hear her called an angel of mercy, as absurd as to hear the wonderful organisation of the universe called Mother Nature—a mother who sacrifices every one of her children that she may reach some goal which we know nothing of. But Nature is full of beauty, and full of passion, and to most this is enough. It is enough to me. I would not choose not to have been born, but then I am a tough old man who can bear pain and whose profession has stilled the sensibilities ; at the same time, I save life more by instinct than by conviction, and, if I were a younger man and could again embrace Life and not merely follow her, I do not think that I would arrogate to myself the right to create other