

Mrs. Dewsbury so impulsively hurried him. He heard that cultivated voice murmuring in the usual inaudible tone of introduction, "Miss Barton, Mr. Alan Merrick." Then he raised his hat. As he did so, he looked down at Herminia Barton's face with a sudden start of surprise. Why, this was a girl of most unusual beauty!

She was tall and dark, with abundant black hair, richly waved above the ample forehead; and she wore a curious Oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woollen stuff, that fell in natural folds and set off to the utmost the lissome grace of her rounded figure. It was a sort of sleeveless sack, embroidered in front with arabesques in gold thread, and fastened obliquely two inches below the waist with a belt of gilt braid, and a clasp of Moorish jewelwork. Beneath it, a bodice of darker silk showed at the arms and neck, with loose sleeves in keeping. The whole costume, though quite simple in style, a compromise either for afternoon or evening, was charming in its novelty, charming too in the way it permitted the utmost liberty and variety of movement to the lithe limbs of its wearer. But it was her face particularly that struck Alan Merrick at first sight. That face was above all things the face of a free woman. Something so frank and fearless shone