

THE MADONNA OF A DAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE station of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the town of Vancouver is a rather handsome building. At its entrance, on a certain afternoon in late December, an omnibus from the principal hotel arrived with quite a crowd of people. Its occupants were nearly all men—young men; they were sitting upon one another's knees, and standing in the middle, for they filled it to overflowing. They were all laughing hilariously, and the person who was making them laugh was the younger of the only two women in the omnibus.

When the horses stopped, the men—some younger, some older—alighted without any abatement of their jovial state. Then they handed out the two women, and all the rugs and bags and umbrellas which belonged to them. It seemed that the women only were the travellers, for the men had no luggage.

The sky overhead was a dull soft grey; in the