

## MY BEARDED MAID

"If I have come by any gentleness, I am glad. Then I have not lived in vain! My dear girl, to nurse a dying daughter would make any man gentle—but to say that I am as gentle as a woman is indeed a poor compliment. Women's arms are more fleshy and their voice more soothing, but women have very little pity, Phrynette, and gentleness is nothing but pity expressed. In hospitals men students are always so much more considerate, patient and soft-hearted in the treatment of cases than the female probationers. It is chiefly in the maternity wards you can judge of the difference—students of the same stage bear themselves so contrastingly. It takes a long time for men to get used to it. Many have the sweat running down their temples but to hear the patients shriek. They set their jaw and look furious, which is their way to hide their sentimental funk, but the women students and the nurses, why, my child, I have heard them discuss crochet-work and other inanities at the bedside of a poor wretch in travail. Gentleness in women? Bah! Have you ever heard of a certain uncertain (or too prudent) Lycidas, and of what the women of Athens did to his wife? No. Well, I won't tell you to-day; your temperature is rather higher than I like!"

"But, Médor, could anyone be more gentle than Gracieuse, for instance?"

"I don't know that I would call Gracieuse a gentle woman, she is more of the decent fellow. She is the stuff of whom partisans and followers are made, she has no sex, she is merely some of the holocaustical portion of humanity—*de la chair à sacrifice*. She is an admirable