

a lot to say

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Mr. Fordyce,"

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pressed Fordyce, as her face and her

strangely repressed manner had done.

She would only sing one song; and

they sat and talked for about an hour.

The hall-door-bell rang—a man's voice

and footstep were heard, and Lord

Claymire entered the drawing-room.

He was a big man with a coarse

face. He wore a Newmarket coat

which did not suit him, and he didn't

look a gentleman. His face was flush-

ed, as if he had been drinking—which

he had—and he looked round the

room with rather dazed eyes; then he

nodded to his wife, exclaimed, "Hallo,

Ernest!" in rather a thick voice, and

stared at Fordyce.

Lady Claymire rose, but she did not

approach him, and she made the intro-

duction in a voice and with a manner

of constraint. Lord Claymire nodded

and held out his hand; it was huge and

red, as if it had just been withdrawn

from one of his own vats.

"Glad to see you," he said. "Any

friend of Ernest's. Come into the

smoking-room and have a drink and a

cigar." He glanced sideways at his

wife. "Don't sit up; we may be late."

Fordyce declined the invitation, on

the excuse of early rising. Merton

also declined; and the two men left

the house.

"We'll walk," said Fordyce.

They walked in silence until they

had reached his room, then Merton

said, abruptly:

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"I have known Lady Claymire such

a short time—" began Fordyce in a

cold way; but the boy interrupted

him.

"Look here, Fordyce, you've got to

like her. She wants a friend. You've

seen Claymire. I needn't say more.

And she likes you."

Fordyce raised his eyes slowly.

"How do you know that?"

"I'm her brother," replied Merton.

Fordyce went up to his studio, lit his

pipe, and walked up and down. Be-

fore he went to bed he resolved that

he would not be drawn into an ac-

quaintance with the Claymires. The

man was a brute—the sort of man

Fordyce hated. He felt sorry for

Lady Claymire.

Three days later he walked round to

Park Lane, and resolved just to send

in his card. And, of course, he asked

for Lady Claymire, and went in. He

stayed and had some tea. She was

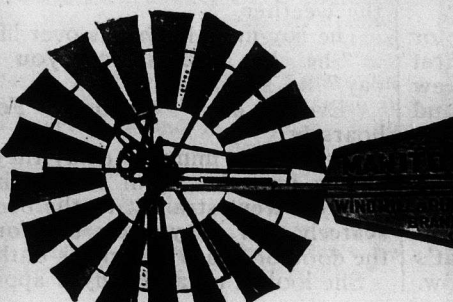
alone; Lord Claymire had gone to

Newmarket. Though she was as re-

served as on the night when he had

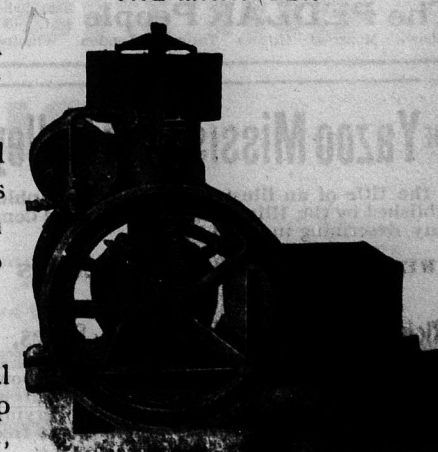
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mire passed him in the hall. He was

in a passion of some sort, and swear-

ing audibly, and vouchsafed only a

scowl and a nod to the visitor. For-

dyce went into the drawing-room, and

presently she came to him.

She was deathly pale, and there was

a mark on her brow which showed

through the soft tendrils of hair

which had been drawn over it.

"You have just come in time for

tea," she said.

Her voice was firm, but the hand

which she gave him quivered like an

imprisoned bird.

Fordyce's strong hand closed over

it; a lump rose in his throat; the blood

rushed to his head.

"What is that?" he asked, hoarsely,

looking at the mark on her face.

Another woman would have said

that she had fallen and hurt herself;

but this one was not used to lying.

"He struck me," she said, quite

simply, her eyes raised to his with a

sad kind of intentness.

Fordyce gripped her by the should-

ers, the floor seemed to rock beneath

him, the walls to swing round like a

panorama, a mist was before his eyes

—a mist through which her face shone

like a moon piercing the clouds.

"My God!" he said, between his

teeth.

The love he had been fighting

against, the pity of a strong man for

the sorrows of the woman he loves,

took hold of him and mastered him.

He bent his head until his lips were

near hers. She did not move—did not

attempt to release herself from the

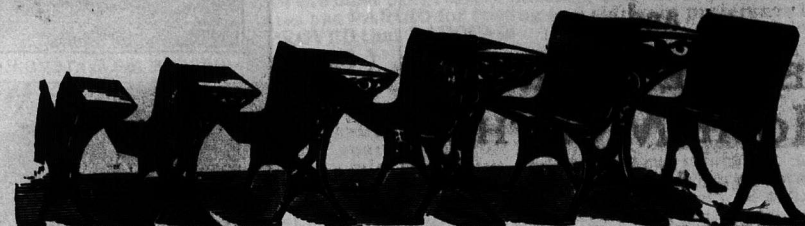
grip of his hands, though it hurt her;

but she looked at him steadily.

"You shall kiss me if you like," she

said; "but if you do, we part for ever."

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paint for hours—he went round to

the Claymires'. As he entered, Clay-

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