gust, 1907.

one of the There was room when i began to ently. In a pened and a was a slight, ir and graye quick, and and face at trike him as first sight of

drew herself out affectionowards Forhe face—the little droop cately shaped rangely. n calmly, and

ith a girlish in dignity. Ir. Fordyce," good of you old me how out, and I I myself dis-Merton, who to the other his face, for be friends. not at home has been deperhaps Mr. so small a

ome in later.

never know of complaint r voice; but wn and open ne comment; her travels, conversation, end of both. , talking as ery pleasant gh he spoke imself listenoining in the known Lady d known her

nd she spoke ence of the ght and innow Fordyce not enjoyed been happy. garette, Nell, the drawingrnest hurry

ordyce, as he . "I know heir cigars. eared satis. When they -room, Lady the piano, softly. For-ntered. Her lightly, one edge of the ick him as noticed the ps-he began

said Merton. a songstress,

en me," she —her smiles uent-"but I will promise

rong, but it y sweet; and it which im-

look a gentleman. His face was flushed, 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 introduction 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 Lord Claymire nodded and held out his hand; it was huge and red, as if it had just been withdrawn

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

He was a big man with a coarse

which did not suit him, and he didn't

He wore a Newmarket coat

Claymire entered the drawing-room.

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 He glanced sideways at his

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

"Look here, Fordyce, you've got to like her. She wants a friend. You've seen Claymire. I needn't say more. presently she came to him. 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. Before he went to bed he resolved that he would not be drawn into an acquaintance 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 reserved as on the night when he had dined there, Fordyce went away fealing that she had been glad to see him. She had done nearly all the talking. She had told him about the old vicarage, about her father, her pets, her favorite books, her music. Fordyce had listened, said a word now and again and nodded. It seemed to be sufficient

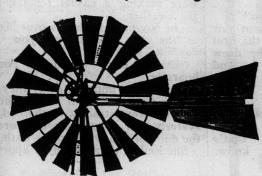
From this he saw her nearly every day. Sometimes she would dine with him and Merton at one of the quiet restaurants; sometimes she went to the theatre or the picture-gallery-she was fond of pictures, and Fordyce led her to the right ones. Sometimes he met her in the park, and they would walk together, for, say, a quarter of an hour. He lived only when he was with her. Now and again Fordyce met Claymire. He was always flushed of face and more or less thick of utterance, as if he had been drinking-

which he had. Fordyce hated him with an increasing hatred, and disliked being with him when his wife was present, for the man had a way of speaking to her and looking at her which made Fordyce want to strike him; and Fordyce hated wanting to strike any man with-

out doing it. Presently she got on his nerves. When he began to paint, the pale face, with the calm. sad eyes. and the little curve of the lips, flashed between him and the canvas. Little things she had said rang in his ears; a glove of hers, together with a flower which had fallen from the bosom of her dress, lav scrunched up in the pocket of his painting-coat. He had made to burn them in the flame of his spirit-lamp at least six times. but they had always gone back to his pocket unsinged.

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mire passed him in the hall. He was in a passion of some sort, and swearing audibly, and vouchsafed only a scowl and a nod to the visitor. Fordyce went into the drawing-room, and

She was deathly pale, and there was 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 herselt;

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 shoulders, 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." He raised his head, his eyes fixed on hers, and drew a long breath. "You know I love you?" he said.

"I have known it for some time

past."
"And you?" "Yes; you have the right to ask. I love you! Wait! If we are to meet again, there must never be a word of love between us: you must never touch me-as you are doing now. If you can abide by this, then we can

noe see his face, and with his face but if not—Decide." His hands dropped from her shoulders: she turned away so that she could not see his face, and with his face still averted, he said:
"I agree. You may trust me."

Then he took up his hat and went. When Merton called at Fordyce's studio the next morning he was told that Fordyce had gone out of town. Fordyce was away a little over a week. He came back late one evening, and found five notes from Merton One day-he had been trying to lying on the table. They were all enpaint for hours-he went round to treaties that Fordyce would let Merthe Claymires'. As he entered, Clay- ton know the moment Fordyce re-





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