

Love and Crime

"But I hope you will not dislike Miss Surtees, father, dear?" Lady Christabel says, rather timidly, after trying—quite vainly, she feels—to make her father take an interest in the account she gives him of the lonely girl she befriended and brought home with her.

He walks up to one of the pair of velvet-framed Venetian mirrors, which hang against the walls, and gazes into it a long time, wistfully, with a troubled brow, and short, deep sighs of discontent heaving his chest, as he scans his scanty, grey hair, his thin, pale, high-bred face.

He remembers that he is in the fifty-fourth year of his age, that he is poor, and a recluse, and in feeble health. "Dare I venture it?" he asks himself, in a whisper, and the blood rises to his hollow temples, and his thin cheeks flush, and his eyes glow as they did five and twenty years ago.

Lord Cardonnel is a young man again in the fervor and tumult of those wild and intoxicating hopes, newly arisen, as if by some unholy magic, in that calm, placid, selfish breast of his, newly arisen in a tempest of blind, reckless passion, which burns up all remembrances to make room for itself.

"Dare I venture it?" he mutters again and again, as he paces to and fro through sleepless hours. Late as is the hour undoubtedly—in the second hour of the coming day—the stranger woman, whom Christabel Lindesay brought home with her "in love and in chaste" the woman who calls herself Lydia Surtees, as he has called herself by half a score of names in her wild life, stands before the antique, black-framed mirror in her room, gazing at herself, a shining, lovely, lustrous image in that time-faded old chaper.

"Poor girl; how very foolish. I am glad you did not listen to such a proposal, my dear," Lord Cardonnel says, with a gracious smile, and a satisfied air of a man who intends to surprise and delight the timid recipient of his high-bred courtesy.

"Why should I dislike Miss Surtees, my dear?" Lord Cardonnel asks, in a rather bored tone. "Surtees!" he repeats, musingly. "I knew a man called Surtees very well years ago at Oxford. He was at Magdalen College in my time there. Of course, he may not have been any relative, but I like Philip Surtees very much. He married an heiress a couple of years after I left the university—that must be eight or nine-and-twenty years ago. How old is this Miss Surtees?"

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