

length, chance or custom taking me there again, I saw the same woman hanging clothes on the line. She had her back to me as on the former occasion; but this time I lingered watching her, and whether she knew or not that I was there, her work presently brought her towards the place in the fence beside the water-barrels, at which I stood gazing. Still, I could not see her face, in part because she did not turn my way, and more because she wore a dirty limp sun-bonnet, which obscured her features. But I continued to watch; and by-and-by she had finished her hanging, and took up the empty basket to go in again; and thereon, suddenly in the act of rising from stooping, she looked directly at me, not being more than two, or at the most three, paces from me. It was but one look, and it lasted, I suppose, two seconds or so; but it touched something in me that had never been touched before, and to this time of writing, and though I have been long married and have children, my body burns at the remembrance of it. For not only was the face that for those two seconds looked into mine a face of rare beauty, brown and low-browed, with scarlet, laughing lips, and milk-white teeth, and eyes of witchery, brighter than a queen's jewels, but in the look, short as it was and passing, shone a something that I had never seen in a woman's face before, a something, God knows what, appeal or passion or temptation, that on the instant fired my blood. I suppose, nay, I know now, that the face that flashed that look at me from under the dirty sun-bonnet could change to a marvel; and in a minute, and as by a miracle, become dull and almost ugly, or the most beautiful in the world. But then, that and all such things were new to me who knew no women, and had never spoken to a woman in the way of love nor thought of one when her back was turned; so new, that when it was over and she gone without a second glance, I went back to the house another man, my heart thumping in