

BY WIT OF WOMAN

CHAPTER I

FROM BEYOND THE PALE

"**T**O John P. Gilmore, Jefferson City, Missouri,
U. S. A.

"MY DEAR BROTHER-IN-LAW,—For years you have believed me dead, and I have made no effort to disturb that belief.

"I am dying now, alone in Paris, far from my beloved country; unjustly degraded, dishonoured and defamed. This letter and its enclosure will not be despatched until the grave has closed over me.

"To you I owe a debt of deep gratitude. You have taken and cared for my darling child, Christabel; you have stood between her and the world, and have spared her from the knowledge and burden of her father's unmerited shame. You can yet do something more—give her your name, so that mine with its disgrace may be forgotten; unless—it is a wild thought that has come to me in my last hours, the offspring of my hopeless melancholy—unless she should ever prove to have the strength, the courage, the wit and the will to essay that which I have endeavoured fruitlessly—the clearance of my name and honour.

"When ruin first fell upon me, I made a vow never to reveal myself to her until I had cleared my name and hers from the stain of this disgrace. I have kept the vow—God knows at what sorrow to myself and against what temptation in these last lonely years—and shall keep it now to the end.

"The issue I leave to you. If you deem it best, let her continue to believe that I died years ago. If otherwise, give her the enclosed paper—the story of my cruel wrong—and tell her that during the last years of my life my thoughts