

## MY BEARDED MAID

"I suppose you would have been really happier with any of these—but the little, healthy animal mother in you knew best. I don't see why you should frown, it's a beautiful thing, instinct—and, my dear, of course, you are a schemer. Yes, and a tyrant. I can just imagine that big, powerful husband of yours trying to escape."

"He did not. I did not lure him. I was only seventeen. How could I have known how to attract men?"

"Listen to that! Seventeen! But, child, all the mothers that ever lived were behind you when you chose him. It was they made you laugh and flutter your hands, show your dimple, shake your curls, and bite your lips to make them redder—in fact, it was they made you display all your armoury. Seventeen! Why, it's the most dangerous age. How is a man to defend himself where he has to protect and respect? Seventeen! You blush. Do you know your mythology, Phrynnette? Do you remember that Minerva was born fully equipped from Jupiter's brain? Why, it was not a myth, child. Woman is born armed and all-wise, like Minerva. Women and children, and people who will not or cannot reason well, have a sort of unerring, river-like sense of direction. Poor Don Juan! How humiliated he would be if he knew there never was a male seducer! In affairs of sex a schoolgirl is more wily than a veteran *roué*. She may believe babies are found under a cabbage, but all the time motherhood is prompting, guiding, teaching her how to spin her web. I know I am speaking of unacknowledged things, but, as you said yourself, *petite*, I am not a man, I am a father, and I knew my daughter as only fathers can who have lost