

"Forget it all, my Lucy! I would that all things had been otherwise. But he who meddles with a sword-point has to do with death; it cannot be else. For the meeting with thy father—well!—how could I avoid it? I was rash to think I could handle the matter, and bring all to a safe end. What wonder I could not find the heart or the tongue to tell of such a dire mischance? . . ." There he stopped, knowing he could not say more and leave all his crafty devices that followed without apology or explanation, which he would have found it hard to give. So he changed the current of his pleading, knowing all his argument, so far safe, might suffer wreck. What end was to be gained, said he—and his voice seemed true and earnest—by dwelling on what was past recall? His one great crime that lay behind it all was his passion for Lucinda. Therein he was guilty, and his guilt was great. He had tried to stifle his love, but in vain. He should have fled from her, but he could not. He *had* fled from her, but her image had been ever present to him—and much more of the same sort, which none knew better how to word than he; all the hackneyed phrases he had used so often, for the ruin of so many dupes! In this he was a liar, for in the early days of their meeting he knew nothing of Love, the divinest of all passions, and was, indeed, no better than a man. And he knew that he was now using a knowledge *she* had taught him, to throw a false glamour over those early protestations. Yet is not this the least unlovable of the lies this story has heard him tell? At least, he had learned to love; and, for him who has learned that lesson, there is always hope, be he man or brute.

Be sure that this language, all that a woman loves best to hear, lost nothing from a warmth that made it ring truer now in his own ears as he uttered it than it did in those earlier days when it was at best the mere stock-in-trade of a man of pleasure, to be paid for in sterling gold