

The blood ebbed and left Mary pale; it returned in a flood as, with a bounding heart and shaking fingers, she read and turned and re-read this letter. At last she grasped its meaning, and truly what astounding, what overwhelming news! What a shift of fortune! What a reversal of expectations! And how strangely, how singularly had all things shaped themselves to bring this about—were it true! Were it only true!

Unable to sit still, unable to control her excitement, she rose and paced the floor. If she were indeed Lady Audley! If this were indeed all hers! This dear house and the Great House! This which had seemed to its possessor so small, so meagre, so cramping an inheritance, but was to her fortune, an old name, a great place, a firm position in the world! A position that offered so many opportunities and so much power for good!

She walked the room with throbbing pulses, the letter now crushed in her hand, now smoothed out that she might assure herself of its meaning, might read again some word or some sentence, might resolve some doubt. Oh, it was a wonderful, it was a marvellous, it was an incredible turn of fortune! And presently her mind began to deal with and to sift the past. And, enlightened, she understood many of the things that had perplexed her, and read many of the riddles that had baffled her. And her cheeks burned, her heart was hot with indignation.