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MADAME MENERE
FURRIER,
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willing to place my heart and myself in his keeping. Poor Martin, how he has suffered!" Now a little—was it mockery crept into her voice? But no, as I scrutinised her lovely face in the firelight I detected the look of tenderness in her eyes and mouth which she could not conceal, and my heart went out to her in admiration for the bigness of her nature and the generosity of her soul. She may have played with Martin, but she had manifestly suffered for it, suffered from the humiliation of knowing that, even had she been genuinely in a state of mind to offer him her love, it was too late, it was not wanted. "Poor old Martin, how he has tried to play the game! What an old stupid Don Quixote he is in these hard, matter-of-fact days! How he has tried to keep his eyes steadily on me and away from you! How, like the dear ostrich he is, he has buried his head in the sand, imagining he has deceived me! And how little, how painfully little, how deplorably and idiotically little, he understands the workings of a woman's heart." She got up and paced about the room, tall, slender, the firelight and electric light gleaming upon the shimmer of her gown and displaying the curves and grace of her figure and the perfect modelling of her neck and arms.

"It seems to me too incomprehensible that he shouldn't love you," I cried involuntarily as I watched her. "I never saw anyone so beautiful."

She thanked me simply, and resumed her seat. "Martin wants something else besides looks. I believe looks are the last thing that would hold him. They appeal in the first instance, but would never hold him. I am too commonplace for him."

"What!" I protested.

"Well, too matter-of-fact, too unimaginative. Martin is a vagabond

by nature, and I am not. He is the type that suddenly takes it into his head to march off to Central Africa, or the North Pole, and expects his wife to go with him. I am not of that type; I like things cut and dried."

I laughed at her tone and her attitude of dejection as she leant over the fire and held her hands to the blaze. "And should I—should I like that sort of thing?" I inquired.

"Better than I. Yes, I think you would. You and Martin are just made for each other. And now I must go. We make an early start tomorrow, and you have got smudges beneath your eyes." She came to the side of the bed and looked at me with a whimsical expression in her own. "Have you got it quite clear that Martin never has loved me, and never have I loved him, and that he adores you, and when I sent him to look for you this morning his joy was so unbounded, though he tried to hide it, that it would have been comical if it had not been pathetic?"

"Yes," I replied, taking the two hands she held towards me in both of mine. "I have got it quite clear, and I can't tell you what I think of you. All that Martin says is true, only a thousand times more so."

She laughed gaily.

"I ought to be covered with shame and confusion and filled with outraged pride at being 'turned down,' but I'm not. I'm just supremely happy that all has turned out so well: Martin's happy, you're happy, Miss Oakwood is happy she adores him, and is fond of you—and I'm happy. So, what would you? Good-bye. May I kiss you? Ah, here is Miss Oakwood! I'm just going. Peronelle is a bit tired, but not dead—I've seen to that."

"Martin is back," said Miss Oakwood.

I sprang up. "Is he hurt?"

"Not at all."

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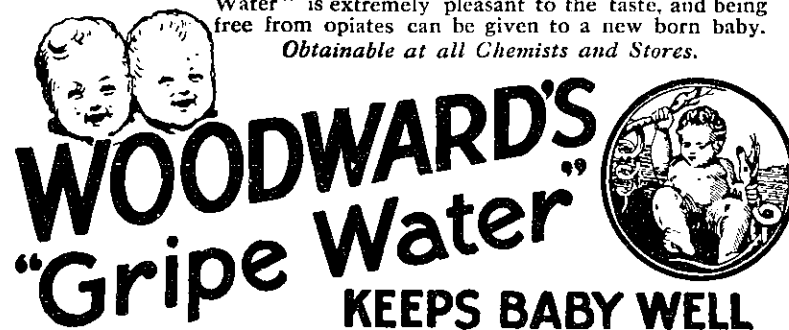
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