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MARION DARCHE

A STORY WITHOUT COMMENT

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD,

AUTHOR OF

"MR. ISAACS," "DR. CLAUDIUS," "A ROMAN SINGER,"

ETC. ETC.

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MARION DARCHÆ.

CHAPTER I.

AMONG the many peculiarities which contribute to make New York unlike other cities is the construction of what may be called its social map. As in the puzzles used in teaching children geography, all the pieces are of different shapes, different sizes and different colours; but they fit neatly together in the compact whole though the lines which define each bit are distinctly visible, especially when the map has been long used by the industrious child. What calls itself society everywhere else calls itself society in New York also, but whereas in European cities one instinctively speaks of the social scale, one familiar with New York people will be much more inclined to speak of the social map. I do not mean to hint that society here exists on a dead

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level, but the absence of tradition, of all acknowledged precedents and of all outward and perceptible distinctions makes it quite impossible to define the position of any one set in regard to another by the ordinary scale of superiority or inferiority. In London or Paris, for instance, ambitious persons are spoken of as climbing, in New York it would be more correct to speak of them as migrating or attempting to migrate from one social field to the next. It is impossible to imagine fields real or metaphorical yielding more different growths under the same sky.

The people in all these different sets are very far from being unconscious of one another's existence. Sometimes they would like to change from one set to another and cannot, sometimes other people wish them to change and they will not, sometimes they exchange places, and sometimes by a considerable effort, or at considerable expense, they change themselves. The man whose occupations, or tastes, or necessities, lead him far beyond the bounds of the one particular field to which he belongs, may see a vast deal that is interesting and of which his own particular friends and companions know nothing whatever. There are a certain number of such men in every great city, and there are a certain number of women

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also, who, by accident or choice, know a little more of humanity in general than their associates. They recognise each other wherever they meet. They speak the same language. Without secret signs or outward badges they understand instinctively that they belong to the small and exceptional class of human beings. If they meet for the first time, no matter where, the conversation of each is interesting to the other; they go their opposite ways never to meet again, perhaps, but feeling that for a few minutes, or a few hours, they have lived in an atmosphere far more familiar to them than that of their common every-day life. They are generally the people who can accomplish things, not hard to do in themselves but quite out of the reach of those whose life runs in a single groove. They very often have odd experiences to relate and sometimes are not averse to relating them. They are a little mysterious in their ways, and they do not care to be asked whither they are going nor whence they come. They are not easily surprised by anything, but they sometimes do not remember to which particular social set an idea, a story, or a prejudice belongs, especially if they are somewhat preoccupied at the time. This occasionally makes their conversation a little startling, if not incom-

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prehensible, but they are generally considered to be agreeable people, and if they have good manners and dress like human beings they are much sought after in society for the simple reason that they are very hard to find.

In New York walking is essentially the luxury of the rich. The hard-working poor man has no time to lose in such old-fashioned sport and he gets from place to place by means of horse cars and elevated roads, by cabs or in his own carriage, according to the scale of his poverty. The man who has nothing to do keeps half a dozen horses and enjoys the privilege of walking, which he shares with women and four-footed animals.

The foregoing assertions all bear more or less directly upon the lives of the people concerned in the following story. They all lived in New York, they all belonged to the same little oddly-shaped piece in the social puzzle map, some of them were rich enough to walk, and one of them at least was tolerably well acquainted with a great many people in a great many other sets. On a certain winter's morning this latter individual was walking slowly down Lexington Avenue in the direction of Gramercy Park. He was walking, not because he was enormously rich, not because he had nothing to do, and not be-

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cause he was ill. He was suffering momentarily from an acute attack of idleness, very rare in him, but intensely delightful while it lasted.

In all probability Russell Vanbrugh had been doing more work than was good for him, but as he was a man of extremely well-balanced and healthy nervous organisation the one ill effect he experienced from having worked harder than usual was a sudden and irresistible determination to do absolutely nothing for twenty-four hours. He was a lawyer by profession, a Dutchman by descent, a New Yorker by birth, a gentleman by his character and education, if the latter expression means anything, which is doubtful, and so far as his circumstances were concerned he was neither rich nor poor as compared with most of his associates, though some of his acquaintances looked up to him as little short of a millionaire, while others could not have conceived it possible to exist at all with his income. In appearance he was of middle height, strongly built but not stout, and light on his feet. On the whole he would have been called a dark man, for his eyes were brown and his complexion was certainly not fair. His features were regular and straight but not large, of a type which is developing rapidly in America and which expresses clearly enough the

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principal national characteristics—energy, firmness, self-esteem, absence of tradition, and, to some extent, of individuality—in so far as the faculties are so evenly balanced as to adapt themselves readily to anything required of them. Russell Vanbrugh was decidedly good-looking and many people would have called him handsome. He was thirty-five years of age, and his black hair was turning a little gray at the temples, a fact which was especially apparent as he faced the sun in his walk. He was in no hurry as he strolled leisurely down the pavement, his hands in the pockets of his fur coat, glancing idly at the quiet houses as he passed. The usual number of small boys were skating about on rollers at the corners of the streets, an occasional trio of nurse, perambulator and baby came into view for a moment across the sunlit square ahead of him, and a single express-waggon was halting before a house on the other side of the street, with one of its wheels buried to the hub in a heap of mud-dyed snow. That was all. Few streets in the world can be as quiet as Lexington Avenue at mid-day. It looks almost like Boston. Russell Vanbrugh loved New York in all its aspects and in all its particulars, singly and wholly, in winter and summer, with the undivided affection which

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natives of great capitals often feel for their own city. He liked to walk in Lexington Avenue, and to think of the roaring, screaming rush in Broadway. He liked to escape from sudden death on the Broadway crossing and to think of the perambulator and the boys on roller skates in Lexington Avenue; and again, he was fond of allowing his thoughts to wander down town to the strange regions which are bounded by the Bowery, Houston Street, the East River and Park Row. It amused him to watch his intensely American surroundings and to remember at the same time that New York is the third German city in the world. He loved contrasts and it was this taste, together with his daily occupation as a criminal lawyer, which had led him to extend his acquaintance beyond the circle in which his father and mother had dined and danced and had their being.

He was thinking—for people can think while receiving and enjoying momentary impressions which have nothing to do with their thoughts—he was thinking of a particularly complicated murder case in which the murderer had made use of atropine to restore the pupils of his victim's eyes to their natural size lest their dilatation should betray the use of morphia. He was watch-

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"Not if they are bad."

"Oh! then I am good, am I?"

"Perhaps. I never make rash assertions."

"No? You called me a hypocrite just now, and said I was like the rest of them. Was not that a rash assertion?

"Oh dear! You are too logical! I give it up."

"I am so glad."

For a few moments they walked along in silence, side by side, in the sunshine. They were a couple pleasant to look at, yet not very remarkable in any way. Dolly Maylands was tall —almost as tall as Vanbrugh, but much fairer. She had about her the singular freshness which clings to some people through life. It is hard to say wherein the quality lies, but it is generally connected with the idea of great natural vitality. There are two kinds of youth. There is the youth of young years, which fades and disappears altogether, and there is the youth of nature which is abiding, or which, at most, shrivels and dies as rose leaves wither, touched with faint colour, still and fragrant to the last. Dolly's freshness was in her large gray eyes, her bright chestnut hair, her smooth, clear skin, her perfect teeth, her graceful figure, her easy motion. But it was

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deeper than all these, and one looking at her felt that it would outlast them all, and that they would all try hard to outlast one another. For the rest, the broad brow showed thought, if not intellect, and the mouth, rather large for the proportion of the lower face, but not at all heavy, told of strength and courage, if not of real firmness. Dolly Maylands was large, well grown, thin, fresh and thoughtful, with a dash of the devil, but of a perfectly innocent devil, only a little inclined to laugh at his own good works and to prefer play to prayers, as even angels may when they are very young and healthy, and have never done anything to be sorry for.

"You seem to be walking with me," observed Dolly presently.

"Well—yes—I suppose that is the impression we are giving the express-man over there."

"And in court, in one of your cases, if he were a witness, he would probably give the idea that we met in Lexington Avenue by appointment. By the bye, one does not walk in Lexington Avenue in the morning."

"That is what we are doing," answered Vanbrugh imperturbably.

"You know that it is compromising, I suppose."

"So do you."

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"Then why do you do it?"

"Why do we do it? Is that what you meant to ask?"

"I did not mean anything."

"So I supposed, from what you said." Vanbrugh smiled and Dolly laughed as their eyes met.

"I was here first," said Vanbrugh after a moment.

"Not at all. I have been at least an hour at old Mrs. Trehearne's."

"I may have seen you go in, and I may have waited all that time to catch you on the doorstep."

"So like you! Why are you not defending the chemist who cremated his fifth wife alive in a retort, or the cashier who hypnotised the head of his firm and made him sign cheques with his eyes shut, or the typhus-germ murderer, or something nice and interesting of that sort? Are you growing lazy in your old age, Mr. Vanbrugh?"

"Awfully!"

"How well you talk. When I have made a beautiful long speech and have beaten my memory black and blue for words I cannot remember, just to be agreeable—you say 'awfully,' and think you are making conversation."

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"I am not good at conversation."

"Apparently not. However, you will not have much chance of showing off your weakness this morning."

"Why not?"

"You might say you are sorry! Why not? Because I am not going far."

"How far?"

"That is a rude question. It is like asking me where I am going. But I will be nice and tell you—just to make you feel your inferiority. I am going to see Marion Darche."

"Mrs. Darche lunches about this time."

"Exactly. It is within the bounds of possibility that I may be going to lunch with her."

"Oh, quite!"

Again there was a short pause as the two walked on together. Dolly took rather short, quick steps. Vanbrugh did not change his gait. There are men who naturally fall into the step of persons with whom they are walking. It shows an imitative disposition and one which readily accepts the habits of others. Neither Dolly nor her companion were people of that sort.

"I was thinking of Mrs. Darche," said Dolly at last.

"So was I. Extremes meet."

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"They have met in that case, at all events," answered Dolly, growing serious. "It would not be easy to imagine a more perfectly ill-matched couple than Marion and her husband."

"Do you think so?" asked Vanbrugh, who was never inclined to commit himself.

"Think so? I know it! And you ought to know it, too. You are always there. Nobody is more intimate there than you are."

"Yes,—I often see them."

"Yes," said Dolly looking keenly at him, "and I believe you know much more about them than you admit. You might as well tell me."

"I have nothing especial to tell," answered Vanbrugh quietly.

"There is something wrong. Well—if you will not tell me, Harry Brett will, some day. He is not half so secretive as you are."

"That does not mean anything. The word secretive is not to be found in any respectable dictionary, nor in any disreputable one either, so far as I know."

"How horrid you are! But it is quite true. Harry Brett is not in the least like you. He says just what he thinks."

"Does he? Lucky man! That is just what I

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am always trying to do. And he tells you all about the Darches, does he?"

"Oh no! He has never told me anything. But then, he would."

"That is just the same, you know."

"What makes you think there is anything wrong?" asked Vanbrugh, changing his tone and growing serious in his turn.

"So many things—it is dreadful! What o'clock is it?"

"Ten minutes to one."

"Have you time for another turn before I go in?"

"Of course—all the time. We can walk round Gramercy Park and down Irving Place."

Instinctively both were silent as they passed the door of Marion Darche's house, and did not resume their conversation till they were twenty paces further down the street. Then Vanbrugh was the first to speak.

"If it is possible for you and me to talk seriously about anything, Miss Maylands, I should like to speak to you about the Darches."

"I will make a supreme effort and try to be serious. As for you—"

Dolly glanced at Vanbrugh, smiled and shook

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her head, as though to signify that his case was perfectly hopeless.

"I shall do well enough," he answered, "I am used to gravity. It does not upset my nerves as it does yours."

"You shall not say that gravity upsets my nerves!"

"Shall not? Why not?" inquired Vanbrugh.

Dolly walked more slowly, putting down her feet with a little emphasis, so to say.

"Because I say you shall not. That ought to be enough."

"Considering that you can stand idiot asylums, kindergartens, school children, the rector and the hope of the life to come, and are still alive enough to dance every night, your nerves ought to be good. But I did not mean to be offensive —only a little wholesome glass of truth as an appetiser before Mrs. Darche's luncheon."

"Puns make me positively ill at this hour!"

"I will never do it again—never, never."

"You are not making much progress in talking seriously about the Darches. I believe it was for that purpose that you proposed to drag me round and round this hideous place, amongst the babies and the nurses and the small yellow dogs —there goes one!"

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"Yes—as you say—there he goes, doomed to destruction in the pound. Be sorry for him. Show a little sympathy—poor beast! Drowning is not pleasant in this weather."

"Oh you do not really think he will be drowned?"

"No. I think not. If you look, you will see that he is a private dog, so to say, though he is small and yellow. He is also tied to the back of the perambulator—look—the fact is proved by his having got through the railings and almost upset the baby and the nurse by stopping them short. Keep your sympathy for the next dog, and let us talk about the Darches, if you and I can stop chaffing."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Vanbrugh. You frightened me by telling me the creature was to be drowned."

"Very well. I apologise. Since he is to live, what do you think is the matter with the Darche establishment? Let me put the questions. Is old Simon Darche in his right mind, so as to understand what is going on? Is John Darche acting honestly by the Company—and by other people? Is Mrs. Darche happy?"

Miss Maylands paused at the corner of the park, looked through the railings and smoothed

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her muff of black Persian sheep with one hand before she made any reply. Russell Vanbrugh watched her face and glanced at the muff from time to time.

"Well?"

"I cannot answer your questions," Dolly answered at last, looking into his eyes. "I do not know the answers to any of them, and yet I have asked them all of myself. As to the first two, you ought to know the truth better than I. You understand those things better than I do. And the last—whether Marion is happy or not—have you any particular reason for asking it?"

"No." Vanbrugh answered without the slightest hesitation, but an instant later his eyes fell before hers. She sighed almost inaudibly, laid her hand upon the railing and with the other raised the big muff to her face so that it hid her mouth and chin. To her, the lowering of his glance meant something—something, perhaps, which she had not expected to find.

"You ask on general—general principles?" she inquired presently, with a rather nervous smile.

But Vanbrugh did not smile. The expression of his face did not change.

"Yes, on general principles," he answered.

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"It is the main question, after all. If Mrs. Darche is not happy, there must be some very good reason for her unhappiness, and the reason cannot be far to seek. If the old gentleman is really losing his mind or is going to have softening of the brain—which is the same thing after all—well, that might be it. But I do not believe she cares so much for him as all that. If he were her own father it would be different. But he is John's father, and John—I do not know what to say. It would depend upon the answers to the other questions."

"Which I cannot give you," answered Dolly. "I wish I could."

Dolly gave the railings a little parting kick to knock the snow from the point of her overshoe, lowered her muff and began to walk again. Vanbrugh walked beside her in silence.

"It is a very serious question," she began again, when they had gone a few steps. "Of course you think I spend all my time in frivolous charities and serious flirtations, and dances, and that sort of thing. But I have my likes and dislikes, and Marion is my friend. She is older than I, and when we were girls I had a little girl's admiration for a big one. That lasted until she got married and I grew up. Of course it is

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not the same thing now, but we are very fond of each other. You see I have never had a sister nor any relations to speak of, and in a certain way she has taken the place of them all. At first I thought she was happy, though I could not see how that could be, because—"

Dolly broke off suddenly, as though she expected Vanbrugh to understand what was passing in her mind. He said nothing, however, and did not even look at her as he walked silently by her side. Then she glanced at him once or twice before she spoke again.

"Of course you know what I am thinking of," she said at last. "You must have thought it all too, then and now, and very often. Of course—you had reason to."

"What reason?" Vanbrugh looked up quickly, as he asked the question.

"Oh, I cannot go into all that! You understand as well as I do. Besides, it is not a pleasant subject. John Darche was successful, young, rich, everything you like—except just what one does like. I always felt that she had married him by mistake."

"By mistake? What a strange idea. And who should the right man have been, pray?"

"Oh no! She thought he was the right man,

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no doubt. It was the mistake of fate, or providence, or whatever you call the thing, if it was a mistake at all."

"After all," said Vanbrugh, "what reason have we, you or I, for saying that they are not perfectly happy? Perhaps they are. People are happy in so many different ways. After all, John Darche and his wife do not seem to quarrel. They only seem to disagree—or rather—"

"Yes," answered Dolly, "that is exactly it. It is not everything one sees or hears in the house. It is the suspicion that there are unpleasant things which are neither seen or heard by any of us. And then, the rest—your questions about the business, which I cannot answer and which I hardly understand. There are so many people concerned in an enormous business like that, that I cannot imagine how anything could be done without being found out."

"However such things are done," answered Vanbrugh, gravely, "and sometimes they are found out, and sometimes they are not. Let us hope for the best in this case."

"What would be the best if there were anything to find out?" asked Dolly, lowering her voice as they paused before Simon Darche's house. "Would it be better that John Darche

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should be caught for the sake of the people who would lose by him, or would it be better for his wife's sake that he should escape?"

"That is a question altogether beyond my judgment, especially on such short notice. Shall we go in?"

"We? Are you coming too?"

"Yes, I am going to lunch with the Darches too."

"And you never told me so? That is just like you! You get all you can out of me and you tell me nothing."

"I have nothing to tell," answered Vanbrugh calmly, "but I apologise all the same. Shall I ring the bell?"

"Unless you mean to take me round Gramercy Park again and show me more nurses and perambulators and dirty dogs. Yes, ring the bell please. It is past one o'clock."

A moment later Miss Dolly Maylands and Mr. Russell Vanbrugh disappeared behind the extremely well-kept door of Simon Darche's house in Lexington Avenue.

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CHAPTER II.

SIMON DARCHE stood at the window of his study, as Dolly and Vanbrugh entered the house. He was at that time about seventy-five years of age, and the life he had led had told upon him as an existence of over-excitement ultimately tells upon all but the very strong. Physically, he was a fine specimen of the American old gentleman. He was short, well knit and still fairly erect; his thick creamy-white hair was smoothly brushed and parted behind, as his well-trimmed white beard was carefully combed and parted before. He had bushy eyebrows in which there were still some black threads. His face was ruddy and polished, like fine old pink silk that has been much worn. But his blue eyes had a vacant look in them, and the redness of the lids made them look weak; the neck was shrunken at the back and just behind the ears, and though the head was well poised on the shoulders, it occasionally shook a little, or dropped suddenly out of the per-

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pendicular, forwards or to one side, not as though nodding, but as though the sinews were gone, so that it depended altogether upon equilibrium and not at all upon muscular tension for its stability. This, however, was almost the only outward sign of physical weakness. Simon Darche still walked with a firm step, and signed his name in a firm round hand at the foot of the documents brought to him by his son for signature.

He had perfect confidence in John's judgment, discretion and capacity, for he and his son had worked together for nearly twenty years, and John had never during that time contradicted him. Since the business had continued to prosper through fair and foul financial weather, this was, in Simon Darche's mind, a sufficient proof of John's great superiority of intelligence. The Company's bonds and stock had a steady value on the market, the interest on the bonds was paid regularly and the Company's dividends were uniformly large. Simon Darche continued to be President and John Darche had now been Treasurer during more than five years. Altogether, the Company had proved itself to be a solid concern, capable of surviving stormy days and of navigating serenely in the erratic flood

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and ebb of the down-town tide. It was, indeed, apparent that before long a new President must be chosen, and the choice was likely to fall upon John. In the ordinary course of things a man of Simon Darche's age could not be expected to bear the weight of such responsibility much longer; but so far as anyone knew, his faculties were still unimpaired and his strength was still quite equal to any demands which should be made upon it, in the ordinary course of events. Of the business done by the Company it is sufficient to say that it was an important branch of manufacture, that the controlling interest was generally in the hands of the Darches themselves and that its value largely depended upon the possession of certain patents which, of course, would ultimately expire.

Simon Darche stood at the window of his study and looked out, smoking a large, mild cigar, which he occasionally withdrew from his lips and contemplated thoughtfully before knocking off the ash, and returning it to his mouth. It was a very fine cigar indeed, equal in quality to everything which Simon Darche had consumed during the greater part of his life, and he intended to enjoy it to the end, as he had enjoyed most things ever since he had been young. John, he often said,

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did not know how to enjoy anything; not that John was in a hurry, or exhibited flagrantly bad taste, or professed not to care—on the contrary, the younger man was deliberate, thoughtful and fastidious in his requirements—but there was an odd strain of asceticism in him, which his father had never understood. It certainly was not of a religious nature, but it would have gone well together with a saintly disposition such as John did not possess. Perhaps indeed, John had the saintly temperament without the sanctity, and that, after all, may be better than nothing. He was thinner than his father and of a paler complexion; his hair was almost red, if not quite, and his eyes were blue—a well-built man, not ungraceful but a little angular, careful of his appearance and possessed of perfect taste in regard to dress, if in nothing else. He bestowed great attention upon his hands, which were small with slender fingers pointed at the tips, and did not seem to belong to the same epoch as the rest of him; they were almost unnaturally white, but to his constant annoyance they had an unlucky propensity to catch the dust, as one says of some sorts of cloth. If it be written down that a man has characteristically clean hands, some critic will be sure to remark that gentlemen are always sup-

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posed to have clean hands, especially gentlemen of the Anglo-Saxon race. It is a fact, nevertheless, that however purely Anglo-Saxon the possessor may be, there are hands which are naturally not clean and which neither ordinary scrubbing nor the care of the manicure can ever keep clean for more than an hour. People who are in the habit of noticing hands are well aware of the fact, which depends upon the quality of the skin, as the reputation for cleanliness itself generally does. John Darche's hands did not satisfy him as the rest of himself did.

So far as people knew, he had no vices, nor even the small tastes and preferences which most men have. He did not drink wine, he did not smoke, and he rarely played cards. He was a fairly good rider and rode for exercise, but did not know a pastern from a fetlock and trusted to others to buy his horses for him. He cared nothing for sport of any kind; he had once owned a yacht for a short time, but he had never been any further than Newport in her and had sold her before the year was out. He read a good deal in a desultory way and criticised everything he read, when he talked, but on the whole he despised literature as a trifle unworthy of a serious man's attention. His religious convictions were

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problematic, to say the least of it, and his outward practice took the somewhat negative form of never swearing, even when he was alone. He did not raise his voice in argument, if he ever argued, nor in anger, though he had a very bad temper. John Darche could probably say as disagreeable things as any man living, without exhibiting the slightest apparent emotion. He was not a popular man. His acquaintances disliked him; his friends feared him; his intimates and the members of his household felt that he held them at a distance and that they never really understood him. His father bestowed an almost childish admiration upon him, for which he received a partial compensation in John's uniformly respectful manner and unvarying outward deference. In the last appeal, all matters of real importance were left to the decision of Simon Darche, who always found it easy to decide, because the question, as it reached him, was never capable of more than one solution.

It is clear from what has been said that John Darche was not an amiable character. But he had one small virtue, or good trait, or good point, be it called as it may. He loved his wife, if not as a woman and a companion, at least as a possession. The fact was not apparent to the majority

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of people, least of all, perhaps, to Mrs. Darche herself, who was much younger than her husband and whose whole and loyal soul was filled with his cast-off beliefs, so to say, or, at least, with beliefs which he would have cast off if he had ever possessed them. Nevertheless, he was accustomed to consider her as one of his most valuable belongings, and he might have been very dangerous had his enormous dormant jealousy been roused by the slightest show on her part of preference for any one of the half-dozen men who were intimate in the house. He, on his side, gave her no cause for doubting his fidelity. He was not loving, his manner was not affectionate, he often lost his temper and said cruel things to her in his cruel way; but so far as she knew he did not exchange ten words daily with any other woman, excepting Mrs. Willoughby, her aunt, and Dolly Maylands, her intimate friend. He was systematic in his daily comings and goings, and he regularly finished his evenings at one of the clubs. He slept little, but soundly, ate sparingly and without noticing what was offered him, drank four cups of tea and a pint of Apollinaris every day and had never been ill in his life, which promised to be long, active, uneventful and not overflowing with blessings for anyone else.

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At first it might seem that there was not much ground for the few words exchanged by Russell Vanbrugh and Dolly Maylands about the Darches' trouble before they entered the house. To all appearances, Simon Darche was in his normal frame of mind and had changed little during the last five years. So far as anyone could judge, the Company was as solid as ever. In her outward manner and conversation Marion Darche seemed as well satisfied with her lot as she had been on the day of her marriage, when John had represented to her all that a man should be,—much that another man, whom she had loved, or liked almost to loving, in her early girlhood, had not been. The surface of her life was calm and unemotional, reflecting only the sunshine and storm of the social weather under which she lived, in the more or less close companionship of half a hundred other individuals in more or less similar circumstances.

There is just enough truth in most proverbs to make them thoroughly disagreeable. Take, for instance, the saying that wealth is not happiness. Of course it is not, any more than food and lodging, shoes and clothing, which are the ultimate forms of wealth, can be called happiness. But surely, wealth and all that wealth gives constitute

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a barrier against annoyance, mental and physical, which has almost as much to do with the maintenance of happiness, in the end, as "climate and the affections." The demonstration is a simple one. Poverty can of itself under certain circumstances be a source of unhappiness. The possession of riches therefore is a barrier against the possibility of at least one sort of misery, and relatively increases the chances of being happy on the whole. It is tolerably certain, that, without money, John Darche would have been little short of insufferable, and that his wife would have been chief among the sufferers. The presence of a great fortune preserved the equilibrium and produced upon outsiders the impression of real felicity.

Nevertheless, both Vanbrugh and Dolly Maylands, as has been seen, considered the fortune unsafe and the apparent peace problematic. They were among the most intimate friends of the Darche household and were certainly better able to judge of the state of affairs than the majority. They had doubtless perceived in the domestic atmosphere something of that sultriness which foreruns a storm and sometimes precedes an earthquake, and being very much in sympathy with each other, in spite of the continual chaffing

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which formed the basis of their conversation, they had both begun to notice the signs of bad weather very nearly at the same time.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Darche confided her woes to her friend, to use the current expression by which reticent people characterise the follies of others. It was not even certain at this time that she had any woes at all, but Dolly undoubtedly noticed something in her conduct which betrayed anxiety if not actual unhappiness, and Russell Vanbrugh, who, as has been observed, was intimately acquainted with many aspects of New York life, had some doubts as to the state of the Company's affairs. No one is really reticent. It would perhaps be more just to the human race as a whole to say that no two persons are capable of keeping the same secret at the same time. That is probably the reason why there is always some rumour of an approaching financial crisis, even while it is very much to the interest of all concerned to preserve a calm exterior. When a great house is about to have trouble, and even in some cases as much as two or three years before the disaster, there is a dull far-off rumble from underground, as though the foundations were trembling. There is a creaking of the timbers, an occasional and

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as yet unaccountable rattling of the panes, and sometimes a very slight distortion of the lines of the edifice, all proving clearly enough that a crash is at hand. As no one believes in presentiments, divinations or the gift of prophecy in these days, it is safe to assume that some one who knows the history of the thing has betrayed the secret, or has told his wife that there is a secret to be kept. In the matter of secrets there is but one general rule. If you do not wish a fact to be known, tell no one of its existence.

Concerning the particular reasons which led Dolly Maylands and Russell Vanbrugh to exchange opinions on the subject of the Darches, it is hardly necessary to speak here. The two were very intimate and had known each other for a long time, and, possibly, there was a tendency in their acquaintance to something more like affection than friendship. The fact that Dolly did not flirt with Vanbrugh in the ordinary acceptation of that word, showed that she might possibly be in love with him. As for Vanbrugh himself, no one knew what he thought and he did not intend that anyone should. He had never shown any inclination to be married, though it was said that he, like many others, had been deeply attached to Mrs. Darche in former days; and Dolly,

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