

# Another Woman's Territory.


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## CHAPTER XVI.

MAN AND WOMAN.

T was a glorious morning at the end of spring. Caroline's garden was a blaze of flowers; in damp shady nooks violets scented the air, and there were many of these fragrant cool corners, for Caroline, with her instinct of protectiveness, trained vines to protect the flowers that withered in the too fierce rays of the sun. She was busy among them now, but with a preoccupied expression as though her thoughts were elsewhere. She watered and delved with her trowel, then with lingering touch as though she feared to hurt gathered a handful of the blossoms still shining with water drops.

As she worked she listened. Again and again she lifted her head expectantly, then returned to her occupation. She was but repeating a daily morning programme—waiting for the mail. And although, morning after morning, the letter she hoped for did not come, still she waited.

No time had been given her after her discovery to re-adjust herself to the new idea of her husband, for on the following day he had abruptly taken his departure. With that sense of supremacy, natural to a strong nature, she had been conscious that, spite of buffeting, she could rise to the emergency. But true to his affirmation that he had "no need for wife," Howard had put the sea between them in that almost savage scorn of his of any other want but his own.

Perhaps his absence had simplified matters. Absence is sometimes akin to death in that it covers with a haze of indefiniteness much that close contact made

difficult, if not impossible to bear, and Howard was hard of resistance; it was like beating against a rock to oppose his will. It had unstrung Caroline, bruised and broken her, for although her hope was inexhaustible, her force had its limits, and it had been something of relief as well as loss when Howard had taken himself off.

The heavy scent of the narcissus brought back the memory of three months ago, when the disillusioning light fell upon her that not her trust, not her approval, but that of another woman, made the strength and sweetness of her husband's heart. Yet that bitter hour had not been all disillusion—he had revealed that his dishonesty had seared and broken him. The thought was intoxication to her. She was wise enough to know that salvation came from within, from the basis of character. She did not make the common and pitiful mistake of most women—that of believing that a woman's influence can change the currents of a man's soul. The sunshine of her glamour, her sweetness and light, or her shadow she does throw upon the surface. But the twinship of flesh does not constitute twinship of mind. "As a man thinketh so is he." Her trust was in himself.

She looked up with a start. The maid approached her with a letter—the letter. She took it quietly, but her sensitive face flushed. She made for the cover of the summer-house, from which her white cockatoo was screeching invitations. She stroked his agitated top-knot with a mesmeric forefinger, then sat down with a beating heart, the bird blinking his approval of his nearness.

The garden, with its vivid sunshine and