

A WRITER OF FICTION

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A Writer of Fiction by Clive Holland

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CLIVE HOLLAND

**A WRITER
OF FICTION**

A WRITER OF FICTION

A Writer of Fiction

BY

CLIVE HOLLAND

AUTHOR OF

'MY JAPANESE WIFE,' ETC.

Westminster

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND CO.

1897

to
SEPTIMUS P. MOORE
LL.B., B.Sc.

IN MEMORY OF MANY PLEASANT DAYS.



CHAPTER I

JOHN MARCH CARDEW had married light-heartedly enough at six-and-twenty ; and now, sixteen years afterwards, he lay awake in a lodging-house tortured by the reflection that it had all been a terrible mistake—for the woman he had married.

In the watches of the night—alas ! now of almost every night—when he did not sleep the heavy, unrestful sleep that comes of brain exhaustion, he lay and thought over the beautiful chimæras which had flitted through his brain during the years of early success. And thus the strident morning noises of the mean semi-suburban street found him, and kept him so even when his eyelids, leaden

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from want of rest, would have dropped over his smarting eyes.

The shrill cry of the early coster, which would have distracted him later in the day, now only caused him vaguely to attempt to discover what the lusty-lunged vendor was selling. Then he heard the familiar sound of the man in the room above getting out of bed, and whistling as he douched himself nonchalantly in the cold water preparatorily to jumping into his clothes so as to catch his train, and begin another day of humdrum, it respectable, existence.

All this time, and whilst other dwellers in the house were getting up with the indifference to other people's comfort which seems inbred with the genus 'lodger,' the woman slept.

Through the flimsy blinds of glazed calico, once a straw yellow sprayed with pink rosebuds and vivid green leaves, now a neutral blend of these three colours, the light filtered

strongly enough for Cardew to see the face of his wife at his side. It was a really beautiful one—one of those faces which dead hopes and lost ambitions seem unable to spoil, and only succeed in chastening. The lips were parted slightly, as if the sleeper were about to speak; and the brown hair, so thick and long, lay a dark mass on the pillow, and strayed in truant curls over the smooth white brow. A faint colour suffused the upturned cheek, and a smile, or the emotion of a pleasant dream, stole across the mouth. Cecily Cardew passed amongst Cardew's literary friends as a 'fine woman'—quite 'statuesque,' Sefton-Bell called her—but the lodging-house landlady was nearer the mark when she spoke of her as 'noble.' Cardew himself knew that in her he possessed a wife among ten thousand, and his disposition made this at one and the same time a joy and a torment.

Working late, he had robbed the night of