

**CROSS CURRENTS;
A NOVEL IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Cross currents; a novel in three volumes. Vol. I by Mary Angela Dickens

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MARY ANGELA DICKENS

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A *Novel*.

BY

MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CROSS CURRENTS.

CHAPTER I.

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"WHAT a voice!"

"How graceful!"

"What wonderful eyes! My dear, they'll make her fortune!"

From all parts of the room such comments came, in tones more or less audible, more or less sincere.

"She's too thin!"

"All that excitement is out of place in a room like this."

"Where did the Tyrrells pick her up?"

There were about a hundred people in the rooms; all well-dressed; all having the unmistakeable hall-mark of "society"; all stirred, as

such an assemblage is not often stirred, by one common interest. It was about half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, and the warm May sunshine, as it shone in upon them, was subdued and chastened by delicate Indian draperies. These had evidently been chosen with the most careful reference to the papering on the walls, and the tinting of the ceiling, which was all, or almost all, that could be seen of the room at the moment. The other inanimate details—equally harmonious when they were visible—were now obscured by groups of men and women, groups which shifted and changed, combined and dispersed like the pattern of a kaleidoscope, as people met one another, exchanged remarks and comments—mainly on one topic—and passed on in the same instant, as though the great object to be attained by each individual was the exchange of three words with every one in the room in turn. The air was sweet, if a little close and heavy, with the scent of quantities of flowers. Every one was interested, eager, at

his or her best. John Tyrrell, the master of the house, was an actor, successful and fashionable; he and his sister gave only one "at home" in the course of the season, and they were by no means indiscriminate in their choice of acquaintances. To be seen at their house stamped an individual as "somebody," if somebody only in the world of fashion; and with that curious homage to intellect, which is as much an instinct of humanity as it is a social phase, the shallowest titled or moneyed nonentity who crossed the Tyrrells' threshold felt vaguely that something was expected of him or her, and endeavoured, more or less impotently, according to their kind, to respond to the demand.

"Selma Malet!"

The name seemed to be in the very air, so many people were asking the same question and receiving the same answer.

"Miss Selma Malet!"

It was echoed by an old lady sitting at the end of the room with some disfavour.

"Selma!" she repeated, "ah, she's not an English girl. I thought not. What country-woman is she, I wonder? These geniuses are generally Poles or Russians."

She was a tall old lady, plain in countenance, and, as compared with nearly every other woman in the room, shabby in dress. Except for her height, which was commanding; her nose, which was aquiline; and her manner, which was slightly supercilious; she was as unlike the typical Duchess as a woman could be. But a Duchess she was, nevertheless, and the well-preserved, elderly man to whom she spoke, a rather distinguished art critic, responded with due alacrity.

"She is a Greek," he said, with the air of one who knows, though he would have been much puzzled to quote his authority; "that is to say her mother was a Greek—a very beautiful woman with a terrific temper. She stabbed her husband in a fit of jealousy, and then died of remorse; quite a girl she was, about two-and-twenty."

“Dear me!” ejaculated his auditor, with a general air of disapprobation of such ill-regulated proceedings, combined with a desire for further details. “This young woman takes after her mother, no doubt. It is to be hoped she will control herself better. Where has she been brought up? Ah,” she went on, “here is Miss Tyrrell. She will tell us all about Miss Selma Malet.”

A woman of five or six-and-forty—the only woman visible wearing neither hat nor bonnet—detached herself suavely from the group with which she had been talking as the Duchess spoke, and came towards her. She was beautifully and elaborately dressed, and her whole personality, from her wonderful auburn hair to her graceful manner, was a triumph of artistic arrangement. She was not beautiful, not even pretty; but her sallow face and light eyes seemed as essential to the completion of her whole effect as the admirably chosen colours of her gown. She was too thin for grace, but she never made a