

**KARMA**

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Karma by Lafcadio Hearn

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**LAFCADIO HEARN**

**KARMA**



K A R M A  
BY LAFCADIO HEARN



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# KARMA

## I

**W**ITH all her exceptional mental training, there was an almost childish ingenuousness in her every word and act,—a simplicity and directness of manner that invited every worthy confidence: yet he had never presumed to praise her. Behind that radiant girliness, natural to her life as azure to sky, he knew some settled power,—some forceful intelligence to which a compliment would seem a rudeness. And, coerced to plainest frankness by his very sense of her personality, he found that it needed no little courage to make his declaration. For weeks he had attempted in vain to devise some way of softening the difficulty by preliminaries,—of giving some turn to conversation that might help him to approach the matter by gentle degrees. But she remained always

so invulnerable to suggestion,—so strangely impregnable in her maidenly self-possession! . . . To many lovers thus ill at ease, intuition tells the advantage of being alone with the adored girl somewhere beyond the shadow of walls,—in some solitude where Nature softens hearts with her silence and her loveliness and perpetual prompting of what is tender and true,—a park, a wood, an umbraged lane. But to her, Nature and silence seemed to give larger power to awe him;—the splendid light itself seemed to ally with her against him. He lived near enough to be often with her; and they walked much together on quiet beautiful country-roads; and he never could find courage to do more than admire her by stealth, while conversing on subjects totally foreign to his thoughts. But each time more and more her charm bewildered him: the secret of ideal grace seemed to live in her,—that something in every motion and poise which is like melody made visible,—which makes you think you hear music when you see it.

With the passing of time his embarrassment

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only grew. Sometimes he would even find it impossible to maintain a sensible conversation,—conscious of nothing but his idolatry; answering questions vaguely, or not at all. . . . And at such a moment of his confusion, one day,—as they were returning from a walk to her home,—she turned near the little gate, and, looking into his face with her archest smile, exclaimed:—

—“Well, what is it? Tell me all about it. . . .”

## II

Who does not know that luminous hour of Love's illusion, when the woman beloved seems not a woman,—never of earth, never shaped of the same gross substance forming man,—but a creature apart, unique, born of some finer, subtler, pearlier life? In her the lover no longer beholds the real: she has become to him so wonderful that he cannot guard his secret,—that he must speak of her so as to betray himself,—that he feels anger when questioned friends declare their inability to see those mar-