

ARTISTS' WIVES

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Artists' Wives by Alphonse Daudet

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ALPHONSE DAUDET

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With Illustrations by
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Alphonse Daudet

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Translated by

Laura Ensor

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PROLOGUE	7
I.—MADAME HEURTERISE	21
II.—THE CREDO OF LOVE	39
III.—THE TRANSTEVERINA	53
IV.—A COUPLE OF SINGERS	73
V.—A MISUNDERSTANDING	87
VI.—ASSAULT WITH VIOLENCE	109
VII.—BOHEMIA AT HOME	131
VIII.—FRAGMENT OF A WOMAN'S LETTER, FOUND IN THE RUE NOTRE-DAME- DES-CHAMPS	147
IX.—A GREAT MAN'S WIDOW	163
X.—THE DECEIVER	175
XI.—THE COMTESSE IRMA	193
XII.—THE CONFIDENCES OF AN ACADEMIC COAT	209





PROLOGUE.

STRETCHED at full length, on the great divan of a studio, cigar in mouth, two friends—a poet and a painter—were talking together one evening after dinner.

It was the hour of confidences and effusion. The lamp burned softly beneath its shade, limiting its circle of light to the intimacy of the conversation, leaving scarcely distinct the capricious luxury of the vast walls, cum-

bered with canvases, hangings, panoplies, surmounted by a glass roof through which the sombre blue shades of the night penetrated unhindered. The portrait of a woman, leaning slightly forward, as if to listen, alone stood out a little from the shadow; young with intelligent eyes, a grave and sweet mouth and a spirituel smile which seemed to defend the husband's easel from fools and disparagers. A low chair pushed away from the fire, two little blue shoes lying on the carpet, indicated also the presence of a child in the house; and indeed from the next room, within which mother and child had but just disappeared, came occasional bursts of soft laughter, of childish babble; the pretty flutterings of a nest going off to sleep. All this shed over the artistic interior a vague perfume of family happiness which the poet breathed in with delight:

"Decidedly, my dear fellow," he said to his friend, "you were in the right. There are no two ways of being happy. Happiness lies in this and in nothing else. You must find me a wife."

THE PAINTER.

Good Heavens, no! not on any account. Find one for yourself, if you are bent upon it. As for me, I will have nothing to do with it.

THE POET.

And why?

THE PAINTER.

Because—because artists ought never to marry.

THE POET.

That's rather too good. You dare to say that, and the lamp does not go out suddenly, and the walls don't fall down upon your head! But just think, wretch, that for two hours past, you have been setting before me the enviable spectacle of the very happiness you forbid me. Are you by chance like those odious millionaires whose well-being is increased by the sufferings of others, and who better enjoy their own fireside when they reflect that it is raining out of doors, and that there are plenty of poor devils without a shelter?

THE PAINTER.

Think of me what you will. I have too