

**BARBARY
SHEEP: A NOVEL**

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Barbary Sheep: A Novel by Robert Hichens

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ROBERT HICHENS

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" SHE LISTENED, LEANING OVER THE BALUSTRADE "



BARBARY SHEEP

A Novel



BY
ROBERT HICHENS

AUTHOR OF
"THE CALL OF THE BLOOD"
"THE GARDEN OF ALLAH"
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BARBARY SHEEP

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I

SIR CLAUDE WYVERNE was a simple and rather heavy young Englishman, who had married a very frivolous wife, and who adored her. Adoration leads to abnegation, and Sir Claude, as soon as he was a married man, began to give way to Lady Wyverne. She was a very pretty and changeable blonde. Any permanence seemed to her dull; and this trait secretly agitated her husband, who desired to be permanent in her life and not to be thought dull by her. In order to achieve this result, he decided to present himself as often

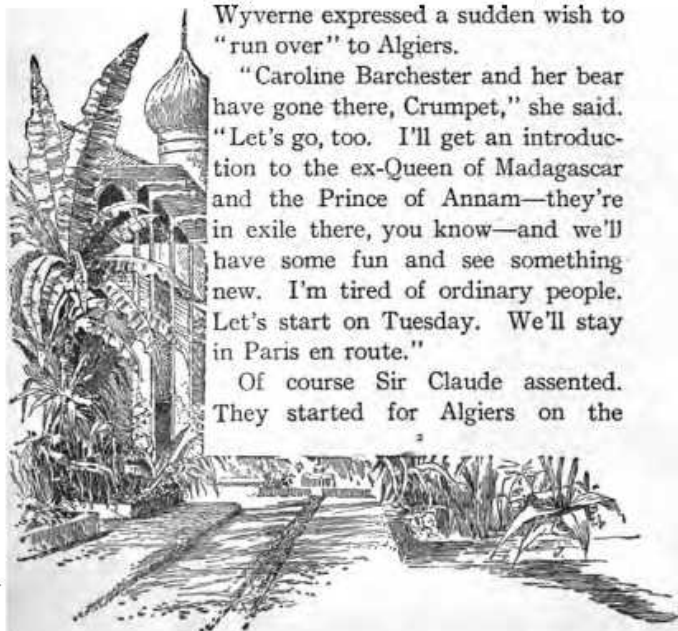


as possible to Lady Wyverne in the seductive guise of change-giver. He was perpetually occupied in devising novelties to keep up her butterfly spirits and in anticipating her every whim.

One spring, just as Sir Claude thought they were going at last to settle down in a pretty country place they had in Leicestershire, Lady Wyverne expressed a sudden wish to "run over" to Algiers.

"Caroline Barchester and her bear have gone there, Crumpet," she said. "Let's go, too. I'll get an introduction to the ex-Queen of Madagascar and the Prince of Annam—they're in exile there, you know—and we'll have some fun and see something new. I'm tired of ordinary people. Let's start on Tuesday. We'll stay in Paris en route."

Of course Sir Claude assented. They started for Algiers on the

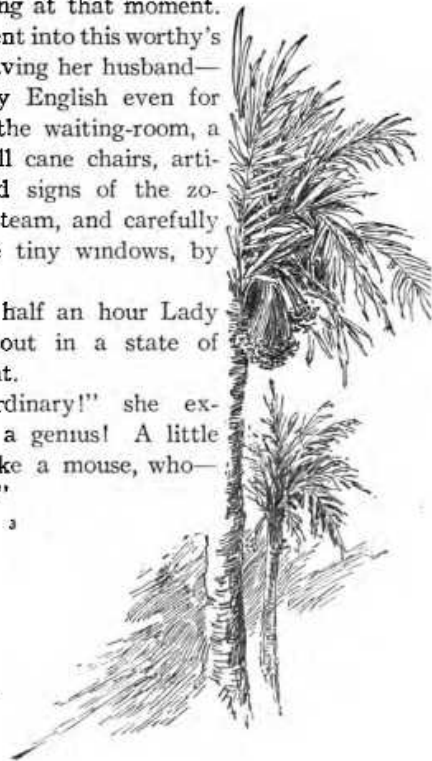


Tuesday, and they stayed in Paris en route.

While they were in Paris they went, against Sir Claude's will, to visit a famous astrologer called Dr. Mélie Étoile, about whom everybody—Lady Wyverne's everybody—happened to be raving at that moment. Lady Wyverne went into this worthy's presence first, leaving her husband—looking unusually English even for him—seated in the waiting-room, a small chamber all cane chairs, artificial flowers, and signs of the zodiac, heated by steam, and carefully shrouded, at the tiny windows, by bead blinds.

After perhaps half an hour Lady Wyverne came out in a state of violent excitement.

"He's extraordinary!" she exclaimed. "He's a genius! A little bearded thing like a mouse, who—Go in, Crumpet!"



But Sir Claude protested. He had only come to bring his wife. He himself was an absolute sceptic in matters occult, and indeed thought almost everything at all out of the way "damned silly." The idea of submitting himself to an astrologer called "Mélie" roused all his British antagonism. But Lady Wyverne was firm. Indeed, her caprices generally had a good deal of cast-iron in them. In rather less than three minutes, therefore, Sir Claude was sitting at a tiny table opposite to a small old man with a white beard and pink eyes, and answering questions about the hour of night when he was born, the date of the year, his illnesses, and various other small matters till then regarded by him as strictly private. Eventually he came out, holding a folded paper in his hand, and looking a good deal like a well-bred poker.

"Silly rot!" he muttered, as he en-

