

**PERPLEXITY;
VOL. I**

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Perplexity; Vol. I by Sydney Mostyn

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SYDNEY MOSTYN

**PERPLEXITY;
VOL. I**

PERPLEXITY.

BY

SYDNEY MOSTYN.

'Beloved! if I wander far and oft
From that which I believe, and feel, and know,
Thou wilt forgive . . .
Knowing that I, though often blind and false
To those I love, and O, more false than all
Unto myself, have been most true to thee.'

J. R. LOWELL.

VOL. I.



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INSCRIBED

TO

MRS. VALENTINE.



PERPLEXITY.

CHAPTER I.

I STOOD looking on a scene in which earth and sky were mingling in a confusion of snow. An early night had descended in a sombre shadow of cloud; but the snow gave a radiance of its own to the air, and I could trace the network of the naked trees, hardened by the long frost into iron, with motionless birds sunk deep within their feathers for warmth, making knots upon the branches. The hill inclining from our garden, and towering many feet above the roof of our cottage, resembled in its white envelopment a huge barrow, a Titanic burial-mound of snow. The hard northerly blast tossed the snow-flakes in

the air like an ocean of foam overhead, in which I fancied I could discern writhing outlines, convulsed shapes, to which the wailing blast gave voices.

I had been watching with a vacant eye the gambols of a kitten leaping at the flakes from the ambush of the half-opened scullery door; but the exertion proving fruitless, and the wind unendurable, Kitty had retreated to the parlour, and, with perpendicular tail and hoarse metallic snore, was drying her streaked fur against my dress.

Suddenly I remarked a tall shape turn the angle of the hill, and with bowed head plough his way rapidly towards our cottage. It was too dark to discern the fragment of face showing between the shawl enveloping his throat, and the deer-stalking hat drawn low over his brow. But I was familiar with that stalwart outline of greatcoat, with those broad shoulders and that muscular gait.

‘What can Mr. Graham want?’ I wondered. He gave me no time for further conjectures,

but approaching the low door, appealed upon it with a brisk and powerful knock. As the kitchen made a wing of the house, and as the only servant we could afford to keep was deaf, I thought it best to open the door myself, that he might not be kept waiting in the cold. On presenting myself, I dropped a mock curtsy.

‘What have we done to merit the honour of a visit from Mr. Graham on such a day as this?’ I enquired.

He answered with a smile, kicking the stiff collection of snow from his boots, and shaking himself free of the flakes like a Newfoundland dog, before he entered; then clasping my hand, he said,

‘You ought not to have come to the door; the wind searches one as though it were charged with needles. Is your father in, Miss Howard?’

‘Yes, in his study as usual, smoking his afternoon pipe, or asleep over the supplement of the day before yesterday’s “Times.” Come in and warm yourself.’