

**LOADED  
DICE: A NOVEL**

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Loaded Dice: A Novel by Edgar Fawcett

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**EDGAR FAWCETT**

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## LOADED DICE

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*A Novel*

BY

EDGAR FAWCETT

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"AN AMBITIOUS WOMAN," "THE HOUSE AT HIGH BRIDGE," "SOCIAL SILHOUETTES,"  
"THE EVIL THAT MEN DO," ETC.

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## LOADED DICE.

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### I.

"How do you like the play so far?"

"Very much."

"They do it beautifully, Phil; don't they?"

"Only as French actors can."

"Say only as the *Comédie Française* can."

These words were spoken by two Americans, Abbott Ogilvie and Philip Dwinelle. The curtain had just fallen on the third act of Dumas's *Le Demi-Monde*, that brilliant dramatic sneer which first startled and entranced Paris, more than a quarter of century ago, and which has lured and shocked auditors from then till now. Ogilvie had seen the play before, Dwinelle never. They were both natives of New York, both bred in the best ranks of transatlantic life. They moved mostly in the same set when at home, and had known each



other since their days of kite and ball. Ogilvie, it must be added, was by several years the elder. They rose, now, from their *fauteuils d'orchestre*, put on their hats, and stood staring about the house through their lorgnettes. "How vulgar this would seem in New York," muttered Philip Dwinelle.

"Vulgar?" queried his friend.

"Yes. I mean the bare, dirty floor beneath us—the absence of orchestral music and those three ridiculous thumps every time a new act commences—the way all women are forbidden these seats, which are better than any others—the cool autocracy with which we men cover our heads and stand glaring round us as if we were in a beer-garden. And yet here's the country which invented that pretty little phrase of gallantry, *place aux dames!*"

"The French a gallant race?" laughed Ogilvie, with discreet semitone. "In the sense of a Louis Quinze, perhaps, yes; but hardly in the sense of a Chesterfield."

People were pouring out into the lobbies, and our two friends let themselves drift along on the human stream. Just as they passed a box on the lower tier Ogilvie bowed to a lady seated there.

She had a face that made Philip start; it seemed flowering so brilliantly out of the dimness. He had noticed it a little while ago, but distance had then clad it with no such spell as now. They soon passed into the great *foyer* where gleams the marble statue of Voltaire.

"What a magnificent old cynic he looks," murmured Ogilvie. "And the attitude of those claw-like hands! They seem as if they'd just finished strangling a sentiment."

"M—m, yes," returned Philip. "And what a contrast to our own great unbeliever, Ingersoll! Do you recall the pictures of *his* face, so sunny, so rich in love of life rather than scorn of it?"

"Bless me," said Ogilvie, "Voltaire didn't scorn life; he only weighed it . . ."

"And found it wanting. Ingersoll finds it splendidly comprehensive, much as he wars against its myth and sham. . . Who was that woman with the high-arching eyebrows whom you bowed to as we passed her box?"

"That?" said Ogilvie, as though he addressed the thin sculptured face before him, with its leer-ing lips and air of almost terrible worldly wisdom. "That, I believe, was a Mrs. Blandthwaite."

"You *believe*? Aren't you sure?"

"Oh, yes. She's an American. She's lately been over here a good deal, though."

"Is she wife or widow?"

"Her husband died a century since."

"Ah," smiled Philip, "I've my doubts of that."

Ogilvie turned rather quickly and eyed him. "You think she looks young? Well, you're right; she is . . . How the French love an airing between whiles, at their theatres, don't they? Just see in what droves they flock forth. And yet we call the Americans a restless people. Think of the *entr'actes* at Daly's or the Madison Square. Why, scarcely a woman leaves her seat."

"The men won't let them," said Philip with a shrug. "The men are always going out to get cocktails."

"Oh, come, now! Cocktails are an ante-prandial tippie. Besides, the *petit verre* isn't ignored at present in this classic neighborhood, as many galloping *garçons* of near *cafés* might tell you. Perhaps it means that New Yorkers are really more tired by the time they get to their theatres."

"They've often good reason to be tired afterward."

"Quite true, Phil. But then one swallow