

**THE WOMAN
WHO DID**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649207428

The woman who did by Grant Allen

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GRANT ALLEN

**THE WOMAN
WHO DID**



THE WOMAN WHO DID
BY GRANT ALLEN

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1895

LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST



TO MY DEAR WIFE
TO WHOM I HAVE DEDICATED
MY TWENTY HAPPIEST YEARS
I DEDICATE ALSO
THIS BRIEF MEMORIAL
OF A LESS FORTUNATE LOVE

385605

WRITTEN AT PERUGIA
SPRING 1893
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE
WHOLLY AND SOLELY TO SATISFY
MY OWN TASTE
AND MY OWN CONSCIENCE

PREFACE.

"BUT surely no woman would ever dare to do so," said my friend.*

"I knew a woman who did," said I; "and this is her story."

THE WOMAN WHO DID.

I.

MRS. DEWSBURY'S lawn was held by those who knew it the loveliest in Surrey. The smooth and springy sward that stretched in front of the house was all composed of a tiny yellow clover. It gave beneath the foot like the pile on velvet. One's gaze looked forth from it upon the endless middle distances of the oak-clad Weald, with the uncertain blue line of the South Downs in the background. Ridge behind ridge, the long, low hills of paludina limestone stood out in successive tiers, each thrown up against its neighbor by the misty haze that broods eternally over the wooded valley; till, roaming across them all, the eye rested at last on the rearing scarp of Chanctonbury Ring, faintly pencilled on the furthest sky-line. Shadowy phantoms of dim heights framed the verge to east and west. Alan Merrick drank it in with profound satisfaction. After those sharp and clear-cut Italian

outlines, hard as lapis lazuli, the mysterious vagueness, the pregnant suggestiveness, of our English scenery strikes the imagination; and Alan was fresh home from an early summer tour among the Peruginisque solidities of the Umbrian Apennines. "How beautiful it all is, after all," he said, turning to his entertainer. "In Italy 't is the background the painter dwells upon; in England, we look rather at the middle distance."

Mrs. Dewsbury darted round her the restless eye of a hostess, to see upon whom she could socially bestow him. "Oh, come this way," she said, sweeping across the lawn towards a girl in a blue dress at the opposite corner. "You must know our new-comer. I want to introduce you to Miss Barton, from Cambridge. She's *such* a nice girl too, — the Dean of Dunwich's daughter."

Alan Merrick drew back with a vague gesture of distaste. "Oh, thank you," he replied; "but, do you know, I don't think I like deans, Mrs. Dewsbury."

Mrs. Dewsbury's smile was reconдите and diplomatic. "Then you 'll exactly suit one another," she answered with gay wisdom. "For, to tell you the truth, I don't think *she* does either."

The young man allowed himself to be led with a passive protest in the direction where

Mrs. Dewsbury so impulsively hurried him. He heard that cultivated voice murmuring in the usual inaudible tone of introduction, "Miss Barton, Mr. Alan Merrick." Then he raised his hat. As he did so, he looked down at Herminia Barton's face with a sudden start of surprise. Why, this was a girl of most unusual beauty!

She was tall and dark, with abundant black hair, richly waved above the ample forehead; and she wore a curious Oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woollen stuff, that fell in natural folds and set off to the utmost the lissome grace of her rounded figure. It was a sort of sleeveless sack, embroidered in front with arabesques in gold thread, and fastened obliquely two inches below the waist with a belt of gilt braid, and a clasp of Moorish jewelwork. Beneath it, a bodice of darker silk showed at the arms and neck, with loose sleeves in keeping. The whole costume, though quite simple in style, a compromise either for afternoon or evening, was charming in its novelty, charming too in the way it permitted the utmost liberty and variety of movement to the lithe limbs of its wearer. But it was her face particularly that struck Alan Merrick at first sight. That face was above all things the face of a free woman. Something so frank and fearless shone