

**DISILLUSION;  
VOL. III**

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Disillusion; Vol. III by Dorothy Forsyth

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**DOROTHY FORSYTH**

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# DISILLUSION

A Story with a Preface

BY

DOROTHY LEIGHTON

AUTHOR OF 'AS A MAN IS ABLE'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME III

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## CHAPTER XVII

'On ne badine pas avec l'amour.'

THE Comtesse Diane has a maxim to the effect that when a man is in love he is always before his appointed time; that when he still loves he is simply punctual; but that when he no longer loves he is late.

Alec Watson was not aware of being in love, but he was at the point which effects punctuality, and at the stroke of four next day he presented himself at Celia's door.

She was in a low chair before a blazing fire, and a table was set with tea. On her lap was some knitting, which struck Alec at once as a curiously unfamiliar sign of domesticity in her, and one which to him was not wholly pleasant.

He would like to have forgotten she was married. In old days her hands lay idle, and the sight of them occupied in feminine needlework irritated him, and reminded him of the changes that had taken place in her life. After a few minutes' interchange of commonplace remarks about the coldness of the weather and the general gloom of the London atmosphere, Celia said abruptly—

'Draw your chair closer to the fire, and give it a poke, will you? That is such an ugly grate and fireplace—it makes me quite ill to sit in front of it.'

'You have taken this house furnished, I suppose?' Alec asked, obeying her request and breaking up a block of coal as he spoke.

'Oh, yes, for a year; hideous, isn't it?'

She glanced round and made a grimace. He laughed a little.



‘You are fastidious as ever, I see,’ he said.

‘Do you call it fastidious to be dissatisfied with green glazed chintz and a blue carpet and faded pink wall-paper? Ugh!’

She shuddered, and threw herself back in her chair with a gesture of disgust.

‘Didn’t you see the house before you took it?’ Alec inquired.

‘No, I didn’t. Mark did; he doesn’t know chintz from green baize.’

This was said in a contemptuous tone, and Alec looked at her with a curious expression. After a moment, during which Celia sat staring at the fire, her lips curled disdainfully, and her hands resting on her knitting, he said abruptly—

‘What made you marry Sergison?’

‘Because I wanted to, I suppose!’ she answered coolly.

‘But why did you want to?’

‘There was an excellent reason at the time

—I really forget now what it was. It is some time ago, you know.'

'Only eighteen months! It was a frightful shock to me.'

'Nonsense, men like you don't get shocks. You know that it is only the unexpected that ever happens.'

A pause, during which Celia slipped on to the hearth and began tapping the coals with a light poker.

He watched her with a growing sense of satisfaction at her restored presence in his sphere. She was as pretty as ever, and ten times more attractive now that she was, or ought to have been, morally out of his reach.

Suddenly she asked him, but without turning her head—

'And where is Judy Crosland?'

'There—just the same,' he answered absently.

‘And you go to Richmond balls with her still?’

He laughed a little.

‘No—I forgot what I was saying—she is married again, to a dark little Jew.

‘Oh! Then where is she, I mean in your life, under such altered circumstances?’

‘There’s not much alteration. She comes up to town sometimes to see her dressmaker and be photographed, and—well, I still take her round sometimes.’

‘Et monsieur?’

‘Stays at Bournemouth. He has lungs—and a temper.’

‘Oh, then it isn’t a three-cornered friendship?’

‘Do you mean a three-sided affair? Well, if I had to describe it geometrically I should say that the whole relation was a scalene triangle. I suppose you’ve learnt Euclid?’

‘Good gracious, no! talk English.’