

**DARK PAGES; OR, THE  
SECRETS OF AN  
OLD BUREAU: IN  
THREE VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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Dark Pages; Or, the Secrets of an Old Bureau: In Three Volumes. Vol. II by Mrs. Horace Dobell

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# DARK PAGES;

OR,

THE SECRETS OF AN OLD BUREAU.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

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"Pro Women," &c., &c.*

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# D A R K   P A G E S .

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## THE SECRET STAIRCASE.

*(Continued).*

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### CHAPTER I.

BRETFIELD'S tortured and bewildered senses had not been many hours lost in slumber when his capable and trustworthy housekeeper, the absolute mistress of his bachelor establishment, roused herself to her morning tasks, and came down to perform her usual duties of "opening the house," unbarring shutters, unlocking doors and so forth. She went last into the library which it was her master's custom to secure



at night himself, especially in the summer time when it was his habit to sit up writing letters, or other manuscripts, or reading books and newspapers, until a very late hour of night, long after all his domestics had retired to rest. She was much surprised at finding the shutters to the end window that opened upon the lawn simply "pushed to"—not fastened or bolted as usual. Having thrown them open and let in a broad stream of brilliant light she turned to pass up the length of the room again, on her way to the door. In doing so she had to pass the fireplace, when she gave an involuntary scream. There, before her, close to the iron ornaments of the fender, was a large pool of blood!

"Lord bless us and save us," she

shrieked out aloud, "what could have happened to master last night; what could he have been a doing to himself?"

It may have been his more than usually morose manner of late that had given Mrs. Dighton the sudden impression that her master must have been contemplating suicide, and strengthening this idea she recalled to mind what she had almost forgotten, that last night, in particular, he had been very odd, what she called "short" in his manner of speech. She knew and had heard nothing of the strange visitor over night, it must be remembered. Then, with a sigh of relief, she called to mind that he was occasionally subject to violent attacks of bleeding at the nose and mouth, although it was

puzzling to her that instead of calling for a basin, as he had done on former occasions, or for her assistance, he had let it thus disfigure her polished floor.

“But perhaps he turned faint, poor gentleman,” she continued, meditating still, “and so forgot where he was. And now, I mind me, his voice sounded queer and not his own when he spoke last night—more faint and quavering like. I’d better go up and call him, and see it’s all right.”

This kindly idea of his housekeeper was a fortunate one for the master. At first her inquiry at his door as to whether his nose had bled any more, if it had quite stopped, and what should she bring him for breakfast if he felt too ill to get up, confused