

**A WOMAN-
HATER. A NOVEL**

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A woman-hater. A novel by Charles Reade

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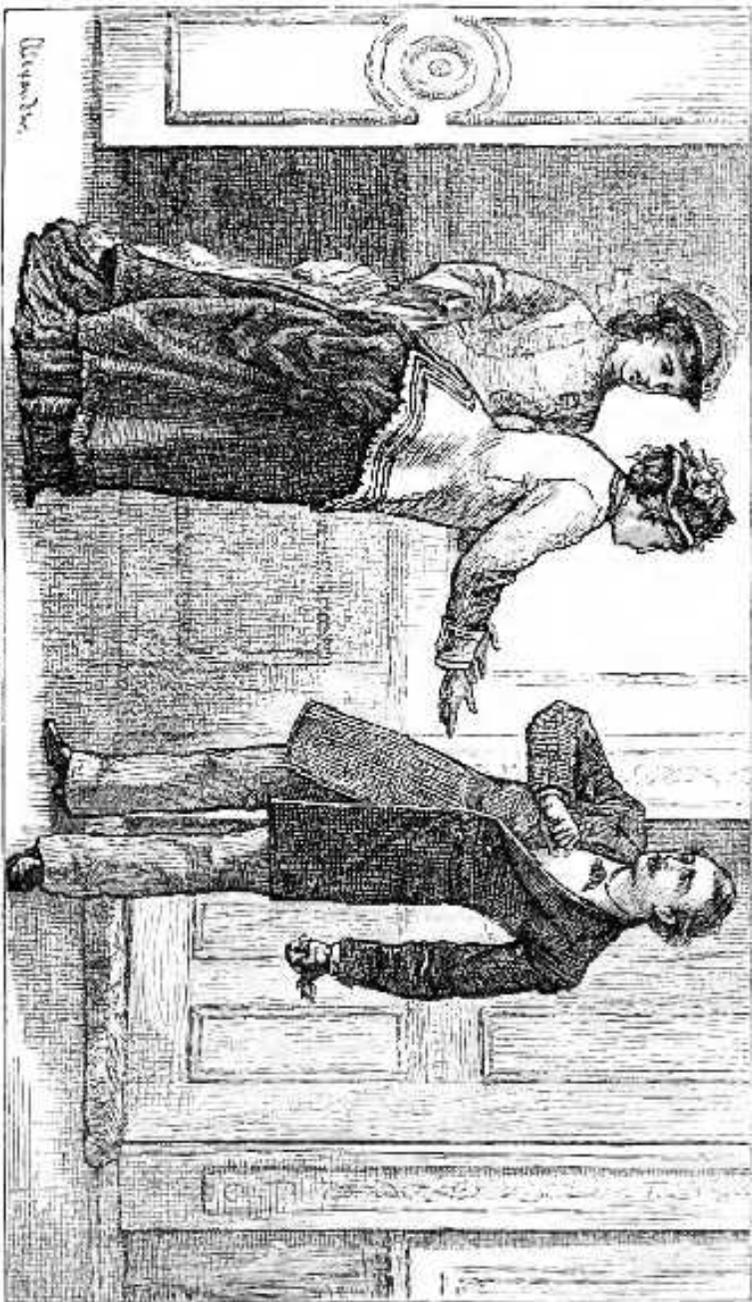
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CHARLES READE

**A WOMAN-
HATER. A NOVEL**



"WHY, MADAM," SAID HE, "THIS IS THE GENTLEMAN—THE PLAYER—I'D SWEAR TO HIM." (Page 17.)



THE MEETING.



A WOMAN-HATER.

A Novel.

By CHARLES READE,

AUTHOR OF

"HARD CASH," "NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND," "FOUL PLAY,"
"PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE," "GRIFFITH GAUNT,"
"A SIMPLETON," "WHITE LIES," &c. &c.

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A WOMAN-HATER.

CHAPTER I.

"THE Golden Star," Homburg, was a humble hotel, not used by gay gamblers, but by modest travelers.

At two o'clock, one fine day in June, there were two strangers in the *salle à manger*, seated at small tables a long way apart, and wholly absorbed in their own business.

One was a lady about twenty-four years old, who, in the present repose of her features, looked comely, sedate, and womanly, but not the remarkable person she really was. Her forehead high and white, but a little broader than sculptors affect; her long hair, coiled tight, in a great many smooth snakes, upon her snowy nape, was almost flaxen, yet her eyebrows and long lashes not pale but a reddish brown; her gray eyes large and profound; her mouth rather large, beautifully shaped, amiable, and expressive, but full of resolution; her chin a little broad; her neck and hands admirably white and polished. She was an Anglo-Dane—her father English.

If you ask me what she was doing, why—hunting; and had been, for some days, in all the inns of Homburg. She had the visitors' book, and was going through the names of the whole year, and studying each to see whether it looked real or assumed. Interspersed were flippant comments, and verses adapted to draw a smile of amusement or contempt; but this hunter passed them all over as nulli-

ties: the steady pose of her head, the glint of her deep eye, and the set of her fine lips showed a soul not to be diverted from its object.

The traveler at her back had a map of the district and blank telegrams, one of which he filled in every now and then, and scribbled a hasty letter to the same address. He was a sharp-faced middle-aged man of business; Joseph Ashmead, operative and theatrical agent—at his wits' end; a female singer at the Homburg Opera had fallen really ill; he was commissioned to replace her, and had only thirty hours to do it in. So he was hunting a singer. What the lady was hunting can never be known, unless she should choose to reveal it.

Karl, the waiter, felt bound to rouse these abstracted guests, and stimulate their appetites. He affected, therefore, to look on them as people who had not yet breakfasted, and tripped up to Mr. Ashmead with a bill of fare, rather scanty.

The busiest Englishman can eat, and Ashmead had no objection to snatch a mouthful; he gave his order in German with an English accent. But the lady, when appealed to, said softly, in pure German, "I will wait for the *table-d'hôte*."

"The *table-d'hôte*! It wants four hours to that."

The lady looked Karl full in the face, and said, slowly, and very distinctly, "Then, I—will—wait—four—hours."

These simple words, articulated firmly, and in a contralto voice of singular volume and sweetness, sent Karl skipping; but their effect on Mr. Ashmead was more remarkable: he started up from his chair with an exclamation, and bent his eyes eagerly on the melodious speaker. He could only see her back hair and her figure; but, apparently, this quick-eared gentleman had also quick eyes, for he said aloud, in English, "Her hair, too—it must be;" and he came hurriedly toward her. She caught a word or two, and turned and saw him. "Ah!" said she, and rose; but the points of her fingers still rested on the book.

"It is!" cried Ashmead. "It is!"

"Yes, Mr. Ashmead," said the lady, coloring a little, but in pure English, and with a composure not easily disturbed; "it is Ina Klossing."

"What a pleasure," cried Ashmead; "and what a surprise! Ah, madam, I never hoped to see you again. When I heard you had left the Munich Opera so sudden, I said, 'There goes one more bright star quenched forever.' And you to desert us—you, the risingest singer in Germany!"

"Mr. Ashmead!"

"You can't deny it. You know you were."

The lady, thus made her own judge, seemed to reflect a moment, and said, "I was a well-grounded musician, thanks to my parents; I was a very hard-working singer; and I had the advantage of being supported, in my early career, by a gentleman of judgment and spirit, who was a manager at first, and brought me forward, afterward a popular agent, and talked managers into a good opinion of me."

"Ah, madam," said Ashmead, tenderly, "it is a great pleasure to hear this from you, and spoken with that mellow voice which would charm a rattlesnake; but what would my zeal and devotion have availed if you had not been a born singer?"

"Why—yes," said Ina, thoughtfully; "I was a singer." But she

seemed to say this not as a thing to be proud of, but only because it happened to be true; and, indeed, it was a peculiarity of this woman that she appeared nearly always to think—if but for half a moment—before she spoke, and to say things, whether about herself or others, only because they were the truth. The reader who shall condescend to bear this in mind will possess some little clue to the color and effect of her words as spoken. Often, where they seem simple and commonplace—on paper, they were weighty by their extraordinary air of truthfulness, as well as by the deep music of her mellow, bell-like voice.

"Oh, you do admit that," said Mr. Ashmead, with a chuckle; "then why jump off the ladder so near the top? Oh, of course I know—the old story—but you might give twenty-two hours to love, and still spare a couple to music."

"That seems a reasonable division," said Ina, naïvely. "But" (apologetically) "he was jealous."

"Jealous!—more shame for him. I'm sure no lady in public life was ever more discreet."

"No, no; he was only jealous of the public."

"And what had the poor public done?"

"Absorbed me," he said.

"Why, he could take you to the opera, and take you home from the opera, and, during the opera, he could make one of the public, and applaud you as loud as the best."

"Yes, but rehearsals!—and—embracing the tenor."

"Well, but only on the stage?"

"Oh, Mr. Ashmead, where else does one embrace the tenor?"

"And was that a grievance? Why, I'd embrace fifty tenors—if I was paid proportionable."

"Yes; but he said I embraced one poor stick, with a fervor—an *abandon*— Well, I dare say I did; for, if they had put a gate-post in the middle of the stage, and it was in my part to