

**A QUESTION OF
INSTINCT; AN
ANALYTICAL STUDY**

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A question of instinct; an analytical study by Morley Roberts

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A QUESTION OF INSTINCT

CHAPTER I

THERE are persons alive, and dully pursuing happiness, for whom a drab house in London or its dingy outskirts forms a fitting shell. Like forlorn hermit-crabs, they hasten to conceal their vulnerable pulp in any mean but handy structure ; they merge artistically in the tones of a soulless suburb or by-street ; they do not rebel against contact. Classing themselves with their own order, whose limit of revolt is reached when they protest against a common imposition, they accept all things, even themselves, with ignoble cheerfulness.

But among such men Fate sets uncommon contrasts, and a commercial brick may separate peculiar antipathies. John Miller, whom the gods had for a moment stranded in a purlieu of Bayswater, thought so as he contemplated the Respectable at low water. The very look of the street made him dream nightmares ; the better aspect of his own altered house was no consolation, as his heart ached for the freedom which he had but just now left behind.

He stood outside as dust and paper and a few starved leaves whirled about him. The night was grey, and the indeterminate sky dully opaque. It suggested a lost moon beyond the reek of London ; and suddenly in his mind he saw her climb the ineffable tropic night, while her silver swept the desert sand from his little palmy oasis to the far horizon like a midnight mirage. He sighed heavily as the vision passed and he touched

the rattling latch of the feeble iron gate. Yet inside was home, and one whom he loved.

"I wonder," said John Miller, as he stayed for another moment—"I wonder if I shall find her awake. It's early yet; hardly eleven."

He looked up at the window of his bedroom. As he stood the light there was turned down, and when he opened the hall-door a woman ran swiftly to him; and put her arms about his neck.

"You are a good John to come home early," she said. "After so long a time away you must have many people to see, and so much to say to them."

"No, not much," said Miller; and he followed her into the sitting-room, which was still lighted by a warm fire. He took her by the waist and lifted her off the ground and kissed her on the mouth.