

**THE STORY OF  
MEG,  
PP. 12-273, VOL. I**

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The Story of Meg, pp. 12-273, Vol. I by M. A. Curtois

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**M. A. CURTOIS**

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# THE STORY OF MEG.

BY

M. A. CURTOIS.

*Author of "My Best Pupil."*

... Perhaps a young blooming girl, not knowing where to turn for refuge . . . understanding no more of this life of ours than a foolish lost lamb wandering farther and farther in the nightfall on the lonely heath; yet tasting the bitterest of life's bitterness.

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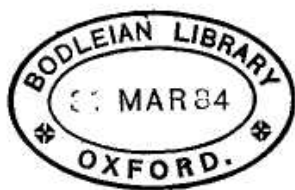
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## CHAPTER II.

Down below the steep stairs was a large dining-room, with a little back room separated from it by folding doors. This smaller apartment was Mr. Harman's special room whenever he was in town. Here were his great books and portfolios, his favourite square inkstand and squarer table, on which reposed always the enormous desk that held his correspondence for him. No one in all Mr. Harman's domestic circle dared to enter that room, dared even to enter the dining-room when he was there. They would soon have ventured to disobey his orders or to contradict his assertions.

Mr. Harman was not a literary man—far from it—in spite of the great books that belonged to him; he had been in the oil trade once, and was still well known in the City; but when he chose to enter his unliterary seclusion you might with far less terror have disturbed a poet. And there he remained



always for a great part of the day; even his acquaintances—of whom he had not many—were shown into the drawing-room above, and were not admitted here. On this one occasion, however, it would seem that an exception had been made.

The shutters were drawn in Mr. Harman's room, and a small fire helped still further to keep out the dark chillness of the spring evening. The short heavy lamp upon the table, however, had not been lighted, and the room was almost in gloom. On opposite sides of the fire sat two men—silent both—one short, stout, bolt upright, stroking his coarse, short, grizzled beard with his hand; the other in a low chair, with his long legs stretched out, his elbow on the chair's arm, and his head resting on his hand and turned towards the wall. So sitting, both remained motionless and silent for a while.

"It seems to me," said the shorter man, breaking the pause, in a hard yet anxious tone, "that you give up all hope a great deal too easily."

"I cannot give up what I have never had."

After a pause —

"The ship has gone down; there is no doubt of that. I never had any from the first, but it would be only useless torture to go on hoping now."

Perhaps the first speaker himself had that opinion also, for he attempted no reply. He sat with his hand resting on his beard, looking at the other, who lay quite still, with his face turned away towards the wall. So for two minutes the firelight shone on them both.

"What are you going to do, Arlathnot?" he asked then, with a sharp hard voice.

The other moved his head a little, but still did not reply for a while.

"Do?" he repeated absently, without stirring now.

"If you have no hope, as you say, why do you stay on up here in London, instead of going to your home as you meant to do?"

"I don't know; I can't help it," the other

replied, and with a groan he drew the long lean fingers on which his face rested over his eyes, as if even the faint light of the fire was too strong for them. With his eyes hidden in this manner he went on speaking in a low, broken voice, and without turning his head, "I can't bear the noises in the streets, and yet I must go walking on in them all day. I can't keep myself still. I wish you could help me."

Mr. Harman, surprised, gave an uneasy twitch that moved him for an instant in his seat. To anyone such a confession might indeed have seemed serious enough, but he was resolute and hard by nature, and I doubt whether in most cases he would have paid any attention to it at all. This man, however, had been his friend through all his life, and in all his life he had never known him speak of his innermost feelings before. He had known him close, reserved, self-contained, almost superciliously averse to sympathy for any trouble of his own. Some sort of revolution must have taken place