

**DENZIL QUARRIER;  
A NOVEL**

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Denzil Quarrier; A Novel by George Gissing

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**GEORGE GISSING**

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A NOVEL**



Horace Balk-Cooper  
1908

DENZIL QUARRIER

A NOVEL

BY

GEORGE GISSING

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"NEW GRUB STREET," "THE NETHER WORLD," "THYRZA," &c.

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## DENZIL QUARRIER.

### I.

For half an hour there had been perfect silence in the room. The cat upon the hearthrug slept profoundly; the fire was sunk to a still red glow; the cold light of the autumn afternoon thickened into dusk.

Lilian seemed to be reading. She sat on a footstool, her arm resting on the seat of a basket-chair, which supported a large open volume. But her hand was never raised to turn a page, and it was long since her eyes had gathered the sense of the lines on which they were fixed. This attitude had been a favourite one with her in childhood, and nowadays, in her long hours of solitude, she often fell into the old habit. It was a way of inviting reverie, which was a way of passing the time.

She stirred at length; glanced at the windows, at the fire, and rose.

A pleasant little sitting-room, furnished in the taste of our time; with harmonies and contrasts of subdued colour, with pictures intelligently chosen, with store of graceful knick-knacks. Lilian's person was in keeping with such a background; her dark gold hair, her pale, pensive, youthful features, her slight figure in its loose raiment, could not have been more suitably

displayed. In a room of statelier proportions she would have looked too frail, too young for significance; out of doors she was seldom seen to advantage; here one recognised her as the presiding spirit in a home fragrant of womanhood. The face, at this moment, was a sad one, but its lines expressed no weak surrender to dolefulness; her lips were courageous, and her eyes such as brighten readily with joy.

A small table bore a tea-tray with a kettle and spirit-lamp; the service for two persons only. Lilian, after looking at her watch, ignited the lamp, and then went to the window as if in expectation of some one's arrival.

The house stood in a row of small new dwellings on the outskirts of Clapham Common; there was little traffic along the road at any time, and in this hour of twilight even a passing footstep became a thing to notice. Some one approached on her side of the way; she listened, but with disappointment; it was not the step for which she waited. None the less it paused at this house, and she was startled to perceive a telegraph messenger on the point of knocking. At once she hastened to the front door.

"Mrs. Quarrier?" inquired the boy, holding out his missive.

Lilian drew back with it into the passage. But there was not light enough to read by; she had to enter the sitting-room and hold the sheet of paper close to the kettle-lamp.

"Very sorry that I cannot get home before ten. Unexpected business."

She read it carefully, then turned with a sigh and dismissed the messenger.

In a quarter of an hour she had made tea, and sat down to take a cup. The cat, refreshed after slumber, jumped on to her lap and lay there pawing playfully at the trimming of her sleeves. Lilian at first rewarded this friendliness only with absent stroking, but when she had drunk her tea and eaten a slice of bread and butter the melancholy mood dispersed; pussy's sportiveness was then abundantly indulged, and for awhile Lilian seemed no less merry than her companion.

The game was interrupted by another knock at the house-door; this time it was but the delivery of the evening paper. Lilian settled herself in a chair by the fireside, and addressed herself with a serious countenance to the study of the freshly-printed columns. Beginning with the leading article, she read page after page in the most conscientious way, often pausing to reflect, and once even to pencil a note on the margin. The paper finished, she found it necessary for the clear understanding of a certain subject to consult a book of reference, and for this purpose she went to a room in the rear—a small study, comfortably but plainly furnished, smelling of tobacco. It was very chilly, and she did not spend much time over her researches.

A sound from the lower part of the house checked her returning steps; some one was rapping at the door down in the area. It happened that she was to-day without a servant; she must needs descend into the kitchen herself and answer the summons. When the nether regions were illumined, and the door thrown open, Lilian beheld a familiar figure, that of a scraggy and wretchedly clad woman with a moaning infant in her arms.



"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Wilson!" she exclaimed. "Please to come in. How have you been getting on? And how is baby?"

The woman took a seat by the kitchen fire, and began to talk in a whining, mendicant tone. From the conversation it appeared that this was by no means the first time she had visited Lilian and sought to arouse her compassion; the stories she poured forth consisted in a great measure of excuses for not having profited more substantially by the help already given her. The eye and the ear of experience would readily enough have perceived in Mrs. Wilson a very coarse type of impostor, and even Lilian, though showing a face of distress at what she heard, seemed to hesitate in her replies and to entertain troublesome doubts. But the objection she ventured to make to a flagrant inconsistency in the tale called forth such loud indignation, such a noisy mixture of insolence and grovelling entreaty, that her moral courage gave way, and Mrs. Wilson whined for another quarter of an hour in complete security from cross-examination. In the end Lilian brought out her purse and took from it half-a-sovereign.

"Now, if I give you this, Mrs. Wilson, I do hope to have a better account——"

Her admonitions were cut short, and with difficulty she managed to obtain hearing for a word or two of what was meant for grave counsel whilst taking leave of her visitor. Mrs. Wilson, a gleam in her red eyes, vanished up the area steps, and left Lilian to meditate on the interview.

The evening passed on, and her solitude was undisturbed. When dinner-time came, she sat down to the

wing of a cold chicken and a thimbleful of claret much diluted; the repast was laid out with perfection of neatness, and at its conclusion she cleared the table like the handiest of parlour-maids. Whatever she did was done gracefully; she loved order, and when alone was no less scrupulous in satisfying her idea of the becoming than when her actions were all observed.

After dinner she played a little on the piano. Here, as over her book in the afternoon, the absent fit came upon her. Her fingers had rested idly on the keyboard for some minutes, when they began to touch solemn chords, and at length there sounded the first notes of a homely strain, one of the most familiar of the Church's hymns. It ceased abruptly; Lilian rose and went to another part of the room.

A few minutes later her ear caught the sound for which she was now waiting—that of a latch-key at the front door. She stepped quickly out into the passage, where the lamplight fell upon a tall and robust man with dark, comely, bearded visage.

"Poor little girl!" he addressed her affectionately, as he pulled off his overcoat. "I couldn't help it, Lily; bound to stay."

"Never mind!" was her laughing reply, as she stood on tip-toe and drew down his face to hers. "I was disappointed, but it's as well you didn't come to dinner. Sarah had to go away this morning."

"Oh! How's that? How have *you* managed then?"

They passed into the front room, and Quarrier repeated his inquiries.

"She had a letter from Birmingham," Lilian explained. "Her brother has been all but killed in some dreadful

accident, and he's in a hospital. I saw she wished to go—so I gave her some money and sent her off as soon as possible. Perhaps it was her only chance of seeing him alive, Denzil."

"Yes, yes—of course you did right," he answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"I knew you wouldn't mind a dinner of my cooking—under the circumstances."

"But what are we to do? You can't take her place in the kitchen till she comes back."

"I'll get some one for a few days."

"But, confound it! how about to-morrow morning? It's very awkward——"

"Oh, I shall easily manage."

"What?—go down at eight o'clock and light fires! Hang it, no! All right; I'll turn out and see to breakfast. But you must get another girl; a second servant, I mean. Yes, you ought really to have two. Get a decent cook."

"Do you think it necessary?"

Quarrier was musing, a look of annoyance on his face.

"It couldn't have happened more inconveniently," he said, without regard to Lilian's objection. "I had better tell you at once, Lily: I've asked a friend of mine to come and dine with us to-morrow."

She started, and looked at him with anxious eyes.

"A friend?"

"Yes; Glazzard—the man who spoke to me at Kew Station the other day—you remember?"

"Oh yes!"

Lilian seated herself by the piano and stroked the keys with the tips of her fingers. Standing on the