

**SOCIETY SILHOUETTES;
COLLECTION OF
SHORT STORIES**

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Society silhouettes; collection of short stories by Laura Cooke Barker

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LAURA COOKE BARKER

**SOCIETY SILHOUETTES;
COLLECTION OF
SHORT STORIES**

SOCIETY
SILHOUETTES

Collection of Short Stories

BY
LAURA COOKE BARKER

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CLEVELAND
1898

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A SEARCH FOR SENSATIONS.

THE March wind shrieked about the corners of the house and rattled the windows like some restless spirit clamoring for admittance.

Occasionally a puff of smoke showed that it found an entrance down the chimney and caused Miss Darlington to push her chair further back from the fireplace.

Only the flickering flames illumined the room and dimly outlined the woman's sweet face as she sat anxiously watching her younger sister, who paced restlessly about the small room, her head thrown back defiantly.

"Don't do it, Dorris, it will bring you anything but happiness!"

Her sister laughed as she stooped to pick up the bit of crumpled paper on the floor. "Happiness!" she exclaimed. "What *is* 'happiness'? I have never

seen it! Father and mother spent their youth in a battle for daily bread, even when Aunt died and left them her few thousand dollars, it did not bring happiness. No, I won't speak of that. Father's name is still a sacred memory to me, but it killed mother and caused his death, too, I believe, and now we are left to a mere existence on the little that still remains and which permits us to live in this shabby genteel way! What is before us? Nothing, unless it is a chance to marry some good, respectable young clerk on small pay and repeat the history of our father and mother! Ugh! I will *not* do that! This is a chance that will never come to me again and I'm going to take it. I'm tired of a poverty-stricken existence!"

"Mere existence may be tame, but it is not misery, Dorris, and any woman who outrages her nature by marrying as you propose to do is preparing for herself untold wretchedness!"

"Nonsense! Where is the 'untold

wretchedness' in marrying a dear old goose like John Dryden? Love him? Of course I don't, but that's nothing; I never have—and never will—love any one but you—and myself!"

She glanced again at the paper in her hands. "What can I want that he will not give me? Riches untold—the independence which marriage gives to a woman—endless new sensations, in fact!"

Louise sighed, taking the girl's hand in hers. "Dorris, dear," she said, wistfully, "for twenty years I have loved and watched over you! I remember when you were a tiny tot, with golden curls and willful ways. For the sake of those long years of devotion, I ask you not to do this awful thing. It is selling yourself—your womanhood——" she broke off abruptly.

"What a prude you are, Sissy! You were born to be a decorous old maid, but *I* was born to *live*, to enjoy, to stir the world, and I'm going to do it by the

use of John Dryden's millions! Call it sin if you will; sin is always pleasant. I have often thought Mephistopheles must be a charming fellow. Perhaps I shall make his acquaintance after I have 'sold myself'—who knows!"

She opened the door as she spoke.

"I'm going to write 'Yes!' In my hands he will be the golden key to unlock for me the wonders of a world."

The door closed behind her and Miss Darlington heard her singing carelessly, as she mounted the stairs to her own room.

"Has the child a heart?" she whispered to herself. "Mother used to say she had not, but I fancied it was only her light-heartedness that made her seem so frivolous and flippant; yet now——?"

She paused in her walk to listen. The footsteps overhead had ceased—Dorris was writing the fateful letter.

Miss Darlington shivered, moving closer to the fire with an involuntary