

BARBARY SHEEP

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Barbary Sheep by Robert Hichens

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ROBERT HICHENS

BARBARY SHEEP

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a

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE PROPHET OF BERKELEY SQUARE

TONGUES OF CONSCIENCE

FELIX

THE WOMAN WITH THE FAN

BYEWAYS

THE GARDEN OF ALLAH

THE BLACK SPANIEL

THE CALL OF THE BLOOD

BARBARY SHEEP

BY

ROBERT HICHENS

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN WITH THE FAN"

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BARBARY SHEEP

I

SIR CLAUDE WYVERNE was a simple and rather heavy young Englishman, who had married a very frivolous wife, and who adored her. Adoration leads to abnegation, and Sir Claude, as soon as he was a married man, began to give way to Lady Wyverne. She was a very pretty and changeable blonde. Any permanence seemed to her dull; and this trait secretly agitated her husband, who desired to be permanent in her life and not to be thought dull by her. In order to achieve this result, he decided to present himself as often as possible to Lady Wyverne in the seductive guise of

change-giver. He was perpetually occupied in devising novelties to keep up her butterfly spirits and in anticipating her every whim.

One spring, just as Sir Claude thought they were going at last to settle down in a pretty country place they had in Leicestershire, Lady Wyverne expressed a sudden wish to "run over" to Algiers.

"Caroline Barchester and her bear have gone there, Crumpet," she said. "Let's go, too. I'll get an introduction to the ex-Queen of Madagascar and the Prince of Annam—they're in exile there, you know—and we'll have some fun and see something new. I'm tired of ordinary people. Let's start on Tuesday. We'll stay in Paris en route."

Of course Sir Claude assented. They started for Algiers on the Tuesday, and they stayed in Paris en route.

While they were in Paris they went, against Sir Claude's will, to visit a famous

astrologer called Dr Mélie Étoile, about whom everybody—Lady Wyverne's everybody—happened to be raving at that moment. Lady Wyverne went into this worthy's presence first, leaving her husband—looking unusually English even for him—seated in the waiting-room, a small chamber all cane chairs, artificial flowers, and signs of the zodiac, heated by steam, and carefully shrouded, at the tiny windows, by bead blinds.

After perhaps half an hour Lady Wyverne came out in a state of violent excitement.

"He's extraordinary!" she exclaimed. "He's a genius! A little bearded thing like a mouse, who— Go in, Crumpet!"

But Sir Claude protested. He had only come to bring his wife. He himself was an absolute sceptic in matters occult, and indeed thought almost everything at all out of the way "damned silly." The idea of submitting himself to an astrologer