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MAD DUMARESQ.

A NOVEL.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1873.

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MAD DUMARESQ.

CHAPTER I.

The First Doubt.

BUT notwithstanding his gratitude to Isabel, and the natural elation of his spirits at being restored to his position in his father's house, Adrian Dumaresq experiences a strange qualm each time he remembers the dinner he and Aura are invited to partake of in Brook Street on the following day. Could he but go alone and leave his wife at home, he feels that he could make his footing sure; but with her by his side, each moment will be one of torture, lest she should, by word or manner, innocently betray that which it is of so much importance should remain concealed. And yet, how can he soil her mind by telling her the truth, and asking her to aid him in deception?

He is very weak—irresolute—and morally a coward; but he is not yet bad enough to stoop to this. There is a great lapse between doing wrong ourselves and teaching another to sin with us. And with all Adrian's great faults, he has not been deceitful. He has openly led a dissipated and reckless life, defiant alike of

public laws and private opinion; but all the world has been cognisant of his wrong-doing. He has never attempted to conceal it; deception is a new phase of evil to him, and it does not sit upon him easily. As soon as he has leisure calmly to consider the interview in the Botanical Gardens, all his joy is quenched beneath the thought that he has accepted what is not his due—a pardon extended to the husband of a gentlewoman, to one who had gained a fortune for himself, and not to him who has contracted an alliance the true knowledge of which would hurt his father's pride to that degree that he would, in all probability, become twofold his enemy to what he was before. It is useless for Adrian to try and satisfy his conscience by the assertion that the facts above mentioned are poor pretexts for the offer of forgiveness from a parent to an erring child, and that what he really is sincere in—a desire for reformation—is the only reason for which it should have been extended.

The fact remains—the untruth also remains—and they make him very uncomfortable. A dozen times over does he try and lay some plan by which he may go to that dinner by himself, but they all fail. Aura will *not* plead guilty to a headache, or confess that she is tired, or prefer to remain at home and write to her father; and her husband's reiterated inquiries only have the effect of rendering her suspicious of the truth, that he is desirous of dispensing with her com-

pany. And suspicion makes the child unhappy, and Adrian's ruse—as he tells himself—is not worth that; for sooner or later she must meet his parents. If he pleads fatigue, or any other falsehood, in excuse for her absence to-day, Lady Olivia will insist upon her putting in an appearance on the first favourable opportunity.

No; he must go through with it, and trust to chance, until his relations with his father shall be so thoroughly re-established as to permit him to correct the mistake into which they have all fallen, without fear of its disturbing the domestic harmony. Adrian derives great comfort from the knowledge that it *is* a mistake, and that he has never positively told a lie upon the subject.

“A drowning man catches at a straw.”

And so, a few hours later, they are standing in the character of guests within that threshold whence so lately *he* was thrust forth into the driving rain. There is a pleased smile on the face of the old butler Simmonds as he opens the door to them himself, and takes Adrian's hat, and congratulates him in a low, respectful voice upon his marriage.

“Quite a surprise, isn't it, old fellow?” exclaims the son and heir. “Like one of the harlequin's tricks at Christmas—slapbang! down with the publican; up with the priest. I shouldn't wonder if I ended by being a parson after all, Simmonds; I've begun at the