

SINLESS

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NOVEL

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S I N L E S S

“Oh, Love, what is it in this world of ours
That makes it fatal to be loved?”

BYRON

CHAPTER I

“**E** NGLAND! In a few hours Home! And—
Beauty waiting for us!” The speaker,
a young officer, evidently pleased with
himself and everybody else, brought his hand down
with a friendly if exasperating blow upon the shoulder
of a man standing beside him. One could hardly
recognise it as a shoulder, or a man, for the figure
might well have been a tub, only very slightly ani-
mated, and bundled up in a fur coat and innumerable
rugs.

But it spoke—and spoke very crossly.

“Don’t do that! Hang you, Brandling, you
know I detest that sort of horseplay!”

Captain Brandling laughed, and apologised, and
threw a handful of papers on to the seat of a com-
partment he had reserved for himself and two
friends; while one of them—the bundled-up tub—
settled himself, with much difficulty and more
grumbling, in the far corner, and the other stood out-
side on the platform finishing a cigar and watching
his companions with pleasant, amused eyes. He
was a very nice-looking man, not strictly handsome,
but with that kindness written plainly on every

SINLESS

feature which lent his face actual beauty. In figure he was rather tall, spare, well-set-up, and broad-shouldered. His hair was quite grey, at the temples almost white, and his eyes, which were very merry, looked bluer than ever set as they were in a face which was deeply bronzed. He waited for the whistle to be blown, and then sprang into the compartment himself.

“Will this beastly train never start?” grumbled the bundle.

“Going now,” answered the young captain. “Have a foot-warmer, Forbes? You look cold—don’t he, Boyd?”

Boyd struggled with a smile which he did not want Mr Forbes to see. Though they had travelled over from India in the same ship they had seen very little of each other; for Forbes was too utterly selfish and generally disagreeable to make friends easily, and Boyd had never made even the slightest effort to cultivate his acquaintance. Brandling had known him for years, Boyd he had only met on the way home, but both men had been his guests for one night which they spent in Paris, and would be his companions now as far as Charing Cross.

The young captain was the cheeriest of companions—perhaps a trifle too talkative and a little worrying with his perpetual jokes—but the personification of good nature and merriment. As the train steamed onward, gradually increasing speed, he put aside his hat, and stretched his slim young limbs along one side of the carriage.

“I said England suggested Home, and hinted at Beauty,” he remarked, “and neither of you replied.