

**THE STORY OF A
STRANGE MARRIAGE. IN
TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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The Story of a Strange Marriage. In Two Volumes. Vol. II by Helen Falconer

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VOL II

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CHAPTER I.

“THE inn was quite quiet when I got there, except for a few men working about the horses in the stables. The landlady met me, and led the way up a winding stair, and then along a passage to a door which she unlocked, and then she signed for me to go in. I had met the German lady on the stairs, who, as rapidly as she could, gave me the proper instructions, which were also written down upon

a paper for my guidance. The landlady left me at the door, having, I suspect, a dislike to looking upon death, which I have observed in some people. I think the governess lady shared this feeling, but am not sure, so I was allowed to enter the room alone. The western sun was still beating upon the windows, and the blinds were pulled down, so that it was a subdued light that I entered upon. Outside, the birds were singing their glad hymn of praise before going to their nightly rest. Someone had arranged a few flowers about the room, that sent a pleasant smell of summer-time all about me. Strange to say, I think there is no sense that has the power of awakening memory like the sense of smell. Gorgeous sunsets I have seen since then; the song of the birds is ever a delight to me;

but gorgeous sunsets, nor the song of birds, nor the mountains, nor the roaring torrents that I looked out upon, can bring back that memorable evening as does the smell of those few flowers. I think, at the end of an eternity, a breath of air wafting their sweet perfume to me would recall each little scene as if it had all happened yesterday. I raised the window-curtain to let in more light. I then went to the bed. A thin white handkerchief was laid over the dead face, and a sheet was arranged so as to cover the figure. I carefully removed these coverings, but, ah! what a sight burst upon my wondering eyes! This, then, was the beauty I had read of, and had never believed in. This was the human face divine that was said to rival all other shows of nature. Could anything be more perfect?

“Oh! dear dead girl; my heart stood still with joy to see this new undreamed-of loveliness, with sorrow that it so soon, and for ever, must be hid from our sight. One thought seemed to speak comfort to me. I should see her again before they laid her in the grave, before the cruel hand of death had marred one feature. She lay as if in sleep. The chestnut hair, like a cloud of light, was allowed to cluster round the proud young head and marble forehead. What wondrous eyes must those have been that slept beneath the shadow of the dark silken eyelashes. To think that I should never look upon them! But I had to hasten with my work. I quickly finished all I had to do, and again I arranged the coverings as they were before. Rapidly did I work at my task, and it was finished sooner

than I had promised. Ever, I fear, I must confess, the love of beauty in any form, in nature, in art, wherever it is to be found, is a weakness in me. Still I hope it would never ensnare my judgment. But it is a great joy to me, and one thought filled my mind as I worked, 'I shall see her again.' A new sense seemed to have been given to me. I never thought such perfection was possible.

"The German young lady had arranged with me that there was to be a rough inner shell which I made to screw down, and an outer coffin more highly finished. This I made to fasten simply with a lock and key. Never was the ghastly nature of my work more terribly impressed upon me. I was glad when I had finished it; and, putting it