

**THE HIRED BABY WITH  
OTHER STORIES AND  
SOCIAL SKETCHES**

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The Hired Baby with Other Stories and Social Sketches by Marie Corelli

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**MARIE CORELLI**

**THE HIRED BABY WITH  
OTHER STORIES AND  
SOCIAL SKETCHES**



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PALO ALTO, CAL.

# THE HIRED BABY

WITH OTHER STORIES AND SOCIAL SKETCHES

BY

MARIE CORELLI,

AUTHOR OF "A ROMANCE OF TWO WORLDS," ETC.

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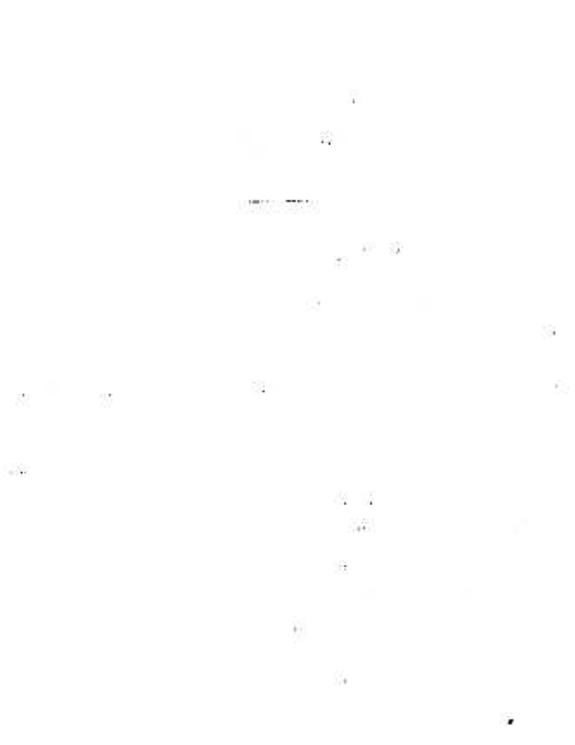
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## THE HIRED BABY.

A ROMANCE OF THE LONDON STREETS.

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It was a dark, desolate December night—a night that clung to the metropolis like a wet black shroud,—a night in which the heavy, low-hanging vapours melted every now and then into a slow reluctant rain, cold as icicle drops in a rock-cavern. People passed and re-passed in the streets like ghosts in a bad dream; the yellow twinkling gaslight showed them at one moment rising out of the fog and then disappearing from view as though suddenly engulfed in a vaporous ebon sea. With muffled angry shrieks, the metropolitan trains deposited their shoals of shivering, coughing travellers at the several stations, where sleepy officials, rendered vicious by the inclement weather, snatched the tickets from their hands with offensive haste and roughness. Omnibus conductors grew ill-tempered and abusive without any seemingly adequate reason; shopkeepers

became flippant, disobliging, and careless of custom; cabmen shouted derisive or denunciatory language after their rapidly retreating fares; in short everybody was in a discontented, almost spiteful humour, with the exception of those few aggressively cheerful persons who are in the habit of always making the best of everything, even bad weather. Down the long wide vista of the Cromwell Road, Kensington, the fog had it all its own way; it swept on steadily, like thick smoke from a huge fire, choking the throats and blinding the eyes of foot-passengers, stealing through the crannies of the houses, and chilling the blood of even those luxurious individuals who, seated in elegant drawing-rooms before blazing fires, easily forgot that there were such bitter things as cold and poverty in that outside world against which they had barred their doors. At one house in particular—a house with gaudy painted doors and somewhat soiled yellow silk curtains at the windows—a house that plainly said of itself—"Done up for show!" to all who cared to examine its exterior—there stood a closed brougham drawn by a prancing pair of fat horses. A coachman of distinguished appearance sat on the box; a footman of irreproachable figure stood waiting on the pavement, his yellow-gloved hand resting elegantly on the polished silver knob of the carriage-door. Both these gentlemen were resolute and inflexible of face; they looked as if they had determined on some great

deed that should move the world to wild applause,—but, truth to tell, they had only just finished a highly satisfactory “meat-tea,” and, before this grave silence had fallen upon them, they had been discussing the advisability of broiled steak and onions for supper. The coachman had inclined to plain mutton-chops as being easier of digestion; the footman had earnestly asseverated his belief in the superior succulence and sweetness of the steak and onions, and in the end he had gained his point. This weighty question being settled they had gradually grown reflective on the past, present, and future joys of eating at some one else’s expense, and in this bland and pleasing state of meditation they were still absorbed. The horses were impatient, and pawed the muddy ground with many a toss of their long manes and tails, the steam from their glossy coats mingling with the ever-thickening density of the fog. On the white stone steps of the residence before which they waited, was an almost invisible bundle, apparently shapeless and immovable. Neither of the two gorgeous personages in livery observed it; it was too far back in a dim corner, too unobtrusive for the casual regard of their lofty eyes. Suddenly the painted doors before mentioned were thrown apart with a clattering noise; a warmth and radiance from the entrance-hall thus displayed streamed into the foggy street, and at the same instant the footman, still with grave and imperturbable countenance,