

**IN THE YEAR OF
JUBILEE. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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In the Year of Jubilee. In Three Volumes. Vol. II by George Gissing

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GEORGE GISSING

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VOLUMES. VOL. II**

Engl. Lect. fiction!

IN THE YEAR OF
JUBILEE

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF "THE ODD WOMEN," "THE EMANCIPATED," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II



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Part the Third
INTO BONDAGE

IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

I

DURING his daughter's absence, Stephen Lord led a miserable life. The wasting disease had firm hold upon him; day by day it consumed his flesh, darkened his mind. The more need he had of nursing and restraint, the less could he tolerate interference with his habits, invasion of his gloomy solitude. The doctor's visits availed nothing; he listened to advice, or seemed to listen, but with a smile of obstinate suspicion on his furrowed face which conveyed too plain a meaning to the adviser.

On one point Mary had prevailed with him. After some days' resistance, he allowed her to transform the cabin-like arrangements of his room, and give it the appearance of a comfortable bed-chamber. But he would not take to his bed, and

the suggestion of professional nursing excited his wrath.

"Do you write to Nancy?" he asked one morning of his faithful attendant, with scowling suspicion.

"No."

"You are telling me the truth?"

"I never write to any one."

"Understand plainly that I won't have a word said to her about me."

This was when Horace had gone away to Scarborough, believing, on his father's assurance, that there was no ground whatever for anxiety. Sometimes Mr. Lord sat hour after hour in an unchanging position, his dull eyes scarcely moving from one point. At others he paced his room, or wandered about the house, or made an attempt at gardening—which soon ended in pain and exhaustion. Towards night he became feverish, his hollow cheeks glowing with an ominous tint. In the morning he occasionally prepared himself as if to start for his place of business; he left the house, and walked for perhaps a couple of hundred yards, then slackened his pace, stopped,

looked about him in an agony of indecision, and at length returned. After this futile endeavour, he had recourse to the bottles in his cupboard, and presently fell into a troubled sleep.

At the end of the second week, early one evening, three persons came to him by appointment: his partner Samuel Barmby, Mr. Barmby, senior, and a well-dressed gentleman whom Mary—she opened the door to them—had never seen before. They sat together in the drawing-room for more than an hour; then the well-dressed gentleman took his leave, the others remaining for some time longer.

The promoted servant, at Mr. Lord's bidding, had made a change in her dress; during the latter part of the day she presented the appearance of a gentlewoman, and sat, generally with needlework, sometimes with a book, alone in the dining-room. On a Sunday, whilst Nancy and her brother were away, the Barmby family—father, son, and two daughters—came to take tea and spend the evening, Mary doing the honours of the house; she bore herself without awkwardness, talked simply, and altogether justified Mr. Lord's opinion of her.

When the guests were gone, Stephen made no remark, but, in saying good-night to her, smiled for an instant—the first smile seen upon his face for many days.

Mary remained ignorant of the disease from which he was suffering; in the matter of his diet, she consulted and obeyed him, though often enough it seemed to her that his choice suited little with the state of an invalid. He ate at irregular times, and frequently like a starving man. Mary suspected that, on the occasions when he went out for half-an-hour after dark, he brought back food with him: she had seen him enter with something concealed beneath his coat. All his doings were to her a subject of ceaseless anxiety, of a profound distress which, in his presence, she was obliged to conceal. If she regarded him sadly, the sufferer grew petulant or irate. He would not endure a question concerning his health.

On the day which was understood to be Nancy's last at Teignmouth, he brightened a little, and talked with pleasure, as it seemed, of her return on the morrow. Horace had written that he would