

VERA NIKTO'S "A MERE WOMAN"*

The story and psychology of *A Mere Woman* is based on an "Old Rhyme" that leads all the pages:

Treat the woman tenderly, tenderly,
Out of a crooked rib God made her slenderly, slenderly.

Straight and strong he did not make her;
Let love be kind, or else ye'll break her.

Sonia, who tells her story in the first person, is one of the results of a union between a son of a German baron and a Russian girl. There is a good deal of detail put upon her childhood, in the far country regions and at St. Petersburg, and of her schooldays when, "in the highest class we were taught to get in and out of a carriage gracefully." When she was sixteen she was sent back to her lonely home, and there the troubles of her life began to develop.

For Petenka Sokoloff appeared, who knew all the tricks of Cossack riding, and could sing the Tzigane songs which are very beautiful and very, very sad. Because she was bored to death with her life in her father's home she married him, and, like most heroines of her type and rearing, presents the curious anomaly of a tarnished mind and one virginally innocent as well. In other words, marriage shocked and horrified her; and marriage with Sokoloff might well be unpleasant, for he was a sly and terrifying dipsomaniac, and after he all but murdered her, she left him and her father obtained for her her divorce.

And then, at her sister's bridal festivities she met one Vadim Orloff, who had mocking, light-coloured eyes, and their liason was the love of her life. Even though it ended brutally, and, because

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there was nothing else left for her to do except marry a rich old merchant whom she loathed, she married a Russian Prince whom she half-feared and half-respected.

The rest of the story leads back to Vadim, who, coming into her life again, finds her present inaccessibility an unsuspected stimulation, and he and she and the husband, Prince Boris, play a little game that leads to death—Vadim's. The final page leaves Sonia, after the fatal shot, under her husband's imperious, significant gaze, lifting a hand that scarcely trembled, to move a pawn in the simple game of chess she was playing with her husband. Futility is the philosophy that lies on every page of this book. But it is not greatly done, and it leaves merely irritation at human weaknesses rather than a sense of the eternal pathos of human life.