The Green Goddess

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BY

LOUISE JORDAN MILN
Author of "Mr. Wu," "The Feast of Lanterns," "The Purple Mask," etc.

Based on the Play, "The Green Goddess," by
WILLIAM ARCHER

"And the Gods of the East made mouths at me."

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS
“In men whom men proclaim divine,
I find so much of sin and blot,
In men whom men condemn as ill,
I find so much of goodness still;
I hesitate to draw the line
Between the two, where God has not.”
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CHAPTER I

THE Vicar was suffering—almost as much as he had suffered the night that Helen, his wife, had died—and because he was suffering he dressed his fine cameo-like face in its sunniest smile. That was his way—part of his creed-of-daily-life, an intrinsic part of his self.

A godly man, in the sweetest and strongest senses of that overused word, Philip Reynolds had a wholesome flair for the things of earth that both mellow human life and give it a tang. He liked his dinner, and he liked it good. He loved his roses, and he was vastly proud of his turnips. His modest cellar was admirably stocked. He enjoyed the logs that burned and glowed on his wide hearths. He was fond of his books—both inside and out. If he found a newly purchased book (he subscribed to no library) little worth reading, he discarded it. He gave it away, if he held it harmless; if he thought it a hurtful volume, he burned it. But his taste was broad, and his charity—to books as well as to people—was wide. He played a good hand of bridge—though Lucilla, his girl, played even a better. But he could beat the county at whist, and most of it at chess. He still could give a crack tennis player a game, and he could ride neck and neck with the next—and so could Lucilla.
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But all these things were so much to him only because they that he loved were so greatly more. There were four big human loves in his being and keeping. Three whom he loved were out in the churchyard—only one, Lucilla, still lived. But he loved the three as actively now as he had when they had been here in the vicarage with him. And the creature things he cared for and cultivated—wine, food, games, flowers, books—he cared for and appreciated most because he associated them with the beings of his strong living love: his mother, his wife, Jack, his boy, and Lucilla, his daughter.

He had one great friendship, and two or three more moderate, but staunch and warm. His great friendship was with God. It amounted to reverent intimacy. He felt more quickly alive to God’s nearness than to that of most human creatures. His friendship with God filled his life. But his human loves filled his heart. Philip Reynolds loved his God, and obeyed Him loyally and gladly. But he knew that his love for the three in the churchyard, and the girl whom he was giving up to another to-morrow was a more passionate thing than the devoted affection he gave to his Maker and Master. And he dared to think this no offense to the Supreme. God who had granted them to him understood and did not blame, he thought.

He had no doubt of God’s personal existence, and never had had. As a little child he had believed implicitly because his mother did, and as he grew older, and came to live—as we all, even the most heart-bound and interknit with close human intimacies must—a life somewhat of his own, all that he saw, experienced, and came to think added a strong and vivid conviction, a reasoned and constantly augmented conviction, to what
had been just acceptance and credulity. Everything convinced him that there was a God, a gracious, humane and intensely personal God, in whose image all men were made. The marvelous, masterly plan of the universe, the exquisite creation of flowers, the flight and the song of birds, the fitness and interfitting of all natural and unspoiled things, the unerring instincts of animal life and of the vegetable world—instincts of reproduction and of self-defending; these and a myriad other daily "miracles" convinced him of a Master Workman omnipotent and very near; gave him a conviction which never could be shaken or threatened—an invincible, glowing, grateful faith. And it was his strength. But his human loves were his inspiration; they flowed through his being like rare wine in his veins, they colored his life, sparkled his thought, and perfumed his world. He knew God, and worshiped Him, and gave Him a beautiful friendship. But his love, as he understood "love"—life's earthly stimulant and elixir—was for the three in the churchyard and for the girl their going had left with him behind them.

A son never had loved a mother more than Philip Reynolds had loved his; but she held the fourth place in his heart. Helen, his wife, had held the first, and after her he had loved Jack, their boy. Jack had died almost immediately after Helen's death, and Reynolds, because he so exquisitely and deeply loved Helen, rejoiced more than he grieved. He was glad to have Jack forever safe in their Father-God's keeping, radiantly glad that Helen should have the boy's companionship and keeping in that near Heaven where she waited his coming. The parishioners marveled at their Vicar's sunny serenity close on the loss of his only son; one or two questioned it, even, not too approvingly.
Other priests held it his very great "grace." But they were wrong, for it was no saintship, but simply the supreme sincerity of his love of his wife, making him glad to give to her what he most of all things would have wished to keep for himself: the daily and constant companionship of Jack. And yet—were they wrong after all? Surely to love as this man loved is "grace," a grace unto the grace of the Kingdom of Heaven.

His wife, his son, and his mother were as much an active part of his daily life to-day as they ever had been; and Jack, the last to be laid there, had lain in the old Surrey churchyard a full score of years. Each day he went to their graves which no hand but his ever tended—it was not far to go; only across the narrow country road—saw that their flowers were fresh, and the bleakest winter's day they had their flowers, and passed on in to pray in the church where his mother and he and Jack had been christened, and where his mother and Helen and he had been married—then back to his home and his people, his tireless, gentle ministering to good and to sinful, his sipping of good wine, his reading of books, his games and his writing, and his care of Lucilla.

He could not remember his father; for the father had "gone down with his ship" when Philip had been but a baby; and Lucilla could remember neither her mother nor brother; for they had died when she was not three.

Helen Reynolds was still remembered in the parish for her pretty face, and her soft kind ways—remembered as "a nice little thing" with the best heart in the world, but no special strength of mind or of will.

But that had not been so. Few women have ever