

**Rebecca**  
by  
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Compiled  
by  
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## REBECCA

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## REBECCA.

How beautiful, buoyant, and glad is morning! The first sunshine on the leaves; the first wind, laden with the first breath of the flowers—that deep sigh with which they seem to waken from sleep; the first dew, untouched even by the light foot of the early hare; the first chirping of the rousing birds, as if eager to begin song and flight: all is redolent of the strength given by rest, and the joy of conscious life.

Rebecca Clinton, though pale with the long vigil of an anxious night—such as is spent by a sick bedside—felt the revigorating influence. She opened the lattice of her little chamber, and it shook from the rose-tree, with which it was overgrown, a shower of dew-drops and leaves. So close that it must have been hidden amid the foliage of a huge old horse-chestnut tree, though not a leaf stirred, a cuckoo was singing—the only bird whose chant was yet complete. Rebecca leant listening to the soft but mournful reiteration, with the tears fast rushing into her eyes. Sound peculiarly appeals to memory. On

awakening from her brief but heavy slumber, she had almost unconsciously thrown open the window; the fresh air, the clear atmosphere, gave for a moment their own joyfulness to her spirits: but that song broke the spell. She turned away, and, with the common exaggeration of much sorrow, reproached the bright and unsympathising morning; while the two sad and still-repeated notes seemed the very echo of her thoughts.

At length she rose, and with a light step sought the adjacent apartment. Hung with old, worm-eaten tapestry, and massy curtains that excluded the light, a floor dark from age, and the ancient chairs and bureau formed of the black walnut-tree wood,—it seemed indeed the chamber of death. Rebecca could scarcely penetrate the obscurity; gradually her sight became accustomed to the darkness, and surrounding objects stood forth dimly visible.

“I have slept more than an hour,” thought she, as her eye fell upon the glass, whose sands had run out; and it comforted her to observe that the cup of herb-tea was untouched.

Noiselessly she drew near the bed, and, with careful hand removing one of the thick folds of the curtains, was able to gaze on the visage of the sleeper, which was turned directly towards her. She started, as if the face had not been a familiar one; but now, that no expression illumined the countenance, no affection spoke in the closed eyes—now she could see the ravages of disease. Every

feature was sharp, the forehead was sunken, and the cheek was so white that it was undistinguishable from the pillow on which it lay. Even in sleep the cold damp stood on the brow, and the breath was drawn with an effort. She let the curtain fall, but softly; and left the room for her own. There she gave way; and the wrung hand, the deep sob, betrayed without relieving the passion of grief.

Rebecca was an only and an orphan child, and her father had idolised her with a twofold fondness. He loved in her both her mother and herself; and the love was the deeper, because that on it rested the tenderness of the grave. Each felt they had the place of another to supply.

Clinton was of an old but decayed family; he had lost the wreck of his property by fighting for the Stuarts, and the Restoration brought only those unfulfilled hopes which seem sent but to make disappointment more bitter. To an aged servant, who had lived beneath his roof in better days, he owed his present asylum; she had been left housekeeper at the manor while its proprietor was abroad, and three rooms were made serviceable to her old master and his daughter. Rebecca was now about twenty; and from her mother, a converted Jewess, she inherited that Oriental style of beauty which enables us to comprehend the similes of the Eastern poets. Truly had she the dark full eye of the gazelle, the grace of the young cedar, and a blush coloured from the earliest rose in Sharon. She was impetuous

and imaginative; the impetuosity had been little called forth by the solitude in which they lived, but the imagination had been strongly nourished. Their small shelf held a few volumes—some early romances and works of the later dramatists gave their own poetry to the ideal world which filled all her lonely hours. Her affection for her father was entire and engrossing: it must be owned, that its unity had never been endangered; for, from the verge of girlhood, their seclusion had been unbroken save by a single visitor; and he was little calculated to attract a romantic and youthful female.

Richard Vernon was one of those religious enthusiasts with which the period abounded. Naturally stern and harsh in temper as in feature, he delighted in sacrifice: from it he drew an inward consolation of superiority, and rejoiced in the scorn he cast on the pleasures and pursuits of other men. His mind was strong, but narrow; and his enthusiasm had never known but one vent. Embittered by the consciousness of unappreciated talent, spiritual pride had become a tower of refuge: believing himself to be the chosen of the Lord, accounted for and sanctified the neglect of men: was not the curse of blindness on all but the elect? — “Seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; and hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand.”

Of an iron constitution, he had never known those bodily weaknesses which so often affect the feelings; and nothing teaches like sickness the value

of patience and sympathy. He had been left an orphan at an early age — too early for memory — and had forced his own hard way in a hard world: love had never made the excitement of his youth, nor the relaxation of his manhood. In short, he had passed through life without having experienced one softening influence. From sickness he never learnt the worth of kindness, nor had death ever taught him how sacred and how bitter is the thought of the beloved and of the dead. He had belonged to the church, from which, however, he had been ejected for non-conformity.

The loss of his benefice was small to him, in comparison with many of his brethren; for death succeeding death had put him in possession of much property belonging to distant relatives. Not such was the indignation with which he beheld the obedience exacted, and the authority exercised by the episcopal church. The dark and mysterious passages of Scripture became more than ever his constant study; and applying every denunciation to his own time, he firmly believed that judgment was at hand, and only waited some crowning iniquity to call down God's vengeance on a guilty land.

It is a humbling thing to human pride to observe that strength of mind does not preserve its possessor from indulging any favourite delusion; but that this very strength gives its own force to the belief. In the eyes of Richard Vernon all the

pleasures and employments of his fellow-men were abomination and vanity ; business was a heaping up of worthless dross ; intellect, a stumbling-block ; poetry, painting, and music, devices of the enemy ; affection, sinful weakness : indeed, all worldly pursuits were foolishness, if not sin, in those who were now warned to "flee from the wrath to come." Still, even while he deemed himself most secure, the softest yet most powerful of earthly feelings had taken a firm hold of his heart.

No two men could be of more opposite dispositions and habits than Vernon and Clinton ; the latter had delicate health and a gentle temper—was at once humble and rational in his piety—and had all the elegant and refined tastes which the other despised. Still, since their residence in the same neighbourhood, their intercourse had been constant. Clinton was fond of society, though now compelled by circumstances to renounce it. The very fact of having to support his opinions was an excitement ; and the often fiery eloquence of the fierce Calvinist had for him all the enjoyment of poetry. Vernon liked the meek and kind-hearted invalid more than he would himself have admitted ; but the link that bound them together was the innocent and lovely Rebecca.

In the high, haughty temper of the young and queen-like beauty, Vernon recognised a similar spirit to his own, but which he was too conscious of his powers to fear, as a weaker-minded man might

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have done. One lesson from early experience—one touch of more delicate feeling—and Rebecca's heart might have been his. Though his age doubled hers, and his personal appearance was harsh even to forbiddingness, she might have loved him.

It is the mistake of a coxcomb, whose experience of affection is all to come—if it ever comes—to say that women are won by mere good looks. Though it does not owe its birth to them, Gratitude and Vanity are the nurses that rock the cradle of Love. Neither of these did Vernon deign to conciliate. Angry at a feeling with which he nevertheless struggled in vain, the conflict gave even additional harshness to his manner; and he contradicted Rebecca's opinions, reproached her likings, disdained her pursuits, and dealt out condemnation on all her favourite volumes, as if not allowing his external demeanour to be affected were some excuse for his internal preference.

About a month before the period of which we are now speaking, he had openly offered himself as suitor to Rebecca Clinton. One evening, when his temper had been softened by the patient suffering of her father—from which the conversation had taken an unusually subdued tone—the invalid was led, from alluding to his illness, to touch upon its consequences; and for a few minutes the image of his orphan girl destroyed all the firmness of his philosophy, all the resignation of religion. He was startled by Richard Vernon rising, and, with words

vehement to fierceness, demanding his daughter Rebecca to wife.

Clinton was taken completely by surprise. Like most of those who daily see a child growing up before them, he had not calculated her years, and had never yet thought of Rebecca as of a woman. Though often, in some vague futurity, he had indulged in romance about her fortunes, better justified by her grace and loveliness than by the circumstances under which they were expanding; yet, certainly, the future he had imagined for her was not as the bride of Richard Vernon.

To balance these dreams there arose, on the instant, the many advantages of the proposal — her forlorn and desolate situation — and the high character of the man who now offered heart and home. Clinton gasped for breath, and gave a thankful consent.

At this moment Rebecca entered; but, alas! the proposal received a surprised, almost disdainful, refusal. As yet she knew too little of the worth of worldly advantages to estimate his disinterestedness at its value. Vernon left the house indignant and disappointed, but with less of anger and more of hope than Rebecca suspected. The truth is, he pitied her as a silly child, whose head was filled with old romances, and laid all the blame on her father's weak indulgence — an error he purposed to remedy with all convenient speed.

A sudden access of illness in Mr. Clinton made an

excuse for calling, after a brief interval had elapsed; and his visits soon fell again into their usual train. Vernon was obstinate; and the refusal—which would have decided the refined, or discouraged the timid—was to him merely an obstacle to be subdued. Looking upon women as infinitely inferior to men, he was provoked to think that the whim of a foolish girl should interfere with his settled purpose. His first plan, that of calling in paternal authority to his assistance, was disappointed by Clinton's instant and decided declaration, that, even if he had the will, he did not consider he had the right to force the inclination of his daughter: his approbation and his preference were all he could give.

Vernon was more angry and discontented than disheartened, and more stubborn in his pursuit than ever, though he left its issue to circumstances, and perhaps his rebukes took even a severer tone. He deceived his own mind, and soothed his own pride, by the belief that he was only actuated by a desire for her temporal and spiritual benefit;—he knew he could save her from poverty; he equally presumed he could from perdition. A lamb rescued from the slaughter, a brand snatched from the fire, was the constant phraseology of his very thoughts.

Weakened by illness, worn by vague anxiety—the worst form anxiety can take—looking at all life's hopes and wishes through the shadows flung by coming death, Clinton dwelt upon his friend's offer till his strong wish grew, as wishes usually do,

into a conviction that Rebecca would finally add her consent to his own.

Such was the state of the dwellers at the old house at the time when our tale commences.

Clinton, the morning his daughter bent over his feverish slumber, slept longer than usual, and was proportionably refreshed; and when Rebecca tempted him, in the afternoon, to the rustic seat beneath the sycamore—the pleasant shade around them, the bright sunshine elsewhere, the hum of the bees in the honied branches over-head, the chirping of the numerous birds, the gay colours of the flowers, almost unconsciously exerted a cheering influence; and their thoughts, though not glad, were at least placid and soothing. The lawn,—if lawn it could still be called, which had long lost the pristine smoothness of the once velvet turf, and was now covered with a multitude of daisies—signs, they say, of a poor soil, though it is, at all events, a cheerful poverty,—commanded a view of the adjacent country; and the road, varied by many a gentle undulation, wound through the hedge-girdled fields, some green with grass, others shining with the first yellow of the corn, and here and there an unenclosed nook where grew two or three stately elms.

Suddenly Rebecca's quick eye caught sight of a dark figure on one of the heights in the distance.

“How vexatious!” was her hasty exclamation; “here is Mr. Vernon coming to interrupt us!”

“I would, my child,” replied Clinton mourn-

fully, "you did more justice to the good qualities of a man who has the merit of appreciating yours. Rebecca! the time may, nay must come, when your only earthly resource will be the attachment of Richard Vernon. Do not interrupt me, dearest; if I pain you, it is for your good: but can you believe that your future desolate situation is ever absent from my mind? So young, so beautiful, and so unprotected—Rebecca, I could die in peace if you were the wife of Richard Vernon."

Rebecca rose from her seat on the grass, and, kneeling at her father's side, gazed for a few moments earnestly in his face before she replied.

"And would it content you, my father, to know that you had joined those whom nature hath sundered, O how utterly!—to know that your child was grown old even in her youth?—that she had thoughts she might not utter, hopes she herself must destroy?—that her daily words must be either mean with hypocrisy, or bitter with contention? A home! Is that a home by whose hearth sits coldness, and beneath whose roof is discontent? My father, I cannot love Richard Vernon! and that not for vain dislike to outward look or bearing, but because we have not one opinion, wish, or feeling in common. Even my weak judgment sees the fallacy of that morality which makes sins of innocent pleasures and of harmless employment; which renders the path of duty too rough and too narrow for human foot; and which wastes on vain trifles

the salutary horror we intuitively feel of vice. I shudder at his religion. In the fierce damnation in which he delights, in the mystic revealments in which he exults, what trace is there of the meek and humble faith you have taught me should be my daily guide, extending its charity to all men? My father! you know that at your word I would wed Richard Vernon; but can you say that word?"

The only answer was a slight caress—it was enough; and Rebecca turned to re-enter the house. Glancing at the winding road, she saw that Vernon had yet a considerable space to cross before he could join them, and added cheerfully, "Fear not for me, my father; other fear"—and the rich colour mounted even to her crimsoned forehead—"other fear than that of want and privation befalling me, you cannot have. But I am strong in youth and in hope; I am skilful in many things; and it were strange, as well as hard, if I could not gain for myself the little I require."

What a visionary thing is the independence of youth! how full of projects, which take the shape of certainties! How much of rugged and stern experience it requires to convince the young and the eager, that the efforts of an individual unaided by connexion or circumstance, are the true reading of the allegory of the Danaides:—industry and skill, alas, how often are they but water drawn with labour into a bucket full of holes!

Clinton sat lost in thought, till he was roused by

Vernon, who wore a gloomier brow, and spoke in even severer tones than usual.

“ So, I find you alone ! To be sure,” said he, looking round, “ you can see from hence the approach of any one, and any one can see your movements too.”

Clinton replied but by asking his companion to sit down on the bench beside him ; and in so doing, he displaced a small volume, whose worn black calf binding shewed it was a favourite. It fell open at the very play he and Rebecca had been reading, “ The Merchant of Venice ;” and the unfortunate book immediately suggested a new vent to Vernon’s spleen.

“ And this, forsooth, is the study of your noon ! I marvel not that your daughter’s head is so turned by vanities and fancies. Verily, poetry is a device of the evil one, which has served him in good sort !”

“ A somewhat harsh judgment,” returned Clinton, smiling, “ to be pronounced on those who beguile many a weary hour, and to whom we owe many a delicate enjoyment.”

“ Now, out upon such toys ! Were my power equal to my will, I would soon purify the land, even with fire, of each vain and lying tome that but distracts the mind from the one sacred volume, on which alone it should be fixed, and on which alone thought should meditate.”

“ Your pardon, friend,” replied Clinton ; “ I do not believe that the heart is turned from the Creator by enjoying his works. Of what avail is the sweet

breath of the rose, the morning song of the lark? The pleasure they impart is not matter of necessity, and yet we delight in both. The soul of the poet is as much His gift as the fragrance of the flower, or the lay of the bird; and the page where inspired words record heroic deed, touching sorrow, or natural loveliness, is one of those pleasures for which we should be thankful. I, for my part, believe most devoutly in the Almighty mercy, when I see how much that is beautiful and gladdening has been scattered over our pilgrimage here."

Vernon's attention had been diverted by a shadow flung on one of the windows. He watched, and could see that it was Rebecca; she was seated at work, with her back to the garden, which she seemed to have no design of visiting.

"I appear to have frightened away your daughter," exclaimed he, angrily.

"Most of our household occupations devolve on Rebecca," was her father's reply.

"I see how it is, and I weary of this childishness," retorted Vernon. "Reginald Clinton, for the last time I offer you the name and home of an honest man for your daughter. Perhaps, after the fashion of those vain romances in which you indulge, you deem that Rebecca has but to go forth, like some wandering princess, to find earl and knight ready to lay lance in rest '*pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux*;' and that the coronet and the castle wait for their mistress. I warn you, this



is not the reading of real life! Rebecca will enter the cold and cruel world, homeless, friendless, moneyless! Her refined nature will soon revolt at the meanness more than at the privation of poverty. Then will her beauty—for she is fair, very fair—catch the eye of some young cavalier (troth, and but our king trains them in goodly practices!): first there will be refusal and reserve; then pity and relief, and the woman's heart will be caught by some woman's toy; folly will succeed to fancy; and a few soft words will disperse in air all that her father and her Bible have taught.

“Nay, let me finish the picture,” he continued, upon a somewhat impatient gesture of his friend. “After vanity comes disappointment—the lover tires, or she herself may change; the same tale is told by another, and the same sequel ensues—save that the love is not so deep, and the faith not so true. A few years, and her face is not fair as it was in youth—sin and sorrow have left on it their traces; the cheek has a bloom not its own, the hair is dashed with grey, the lip is thin, and the brow haggard. The lover turns away; and death comes on, heralded by poverty and neglect; then the child of your heart goes down to the grave unwept, her memory cursed by many whom she led to evil, to disobedience, and to waste. And what think you becomes of the immortal soul, base, polluted, and hardened in its guilt? Deem you that the gates of death will not be to such a one the gates of hell?”

“ I thank you for your kindly prophecy,” said a low but firm voice beside him.

Rebecca, having caught the raised tones of Vernon, and fearing lest aught of discussion might weary her enfeebled father, had hurried to the spot; thus becoming the auditor of what was not meant for her hearing. She stood, the colour deepened into scarlet on her cheek, her lip curved with scorn, and, her dark eyebrows almost meeting in their indignation, while her large eyes flashed as if the pupil were indeed an orb turned by the soul to light, she continued: “ I thank you; but now listen to my words, even as I have done to yours. Rather would I bear the doom your kindness has poured into the ear of a dying father, than be your wife !”

She said no more, but walked hastily away; and in another moment Vernon was seen hurrying along the winding road.

Clinton retired to rest sooner than usual; and his daughter took her accustomed seat, to watch during the earlier part of the night. He had slept, or seemed to sleep, for more than two hours, when suddenly he rose in his bed.

“ Give me to drink, my child,” he murmured almost inaudibly, yet with seeming effort.

She took the cup, and raised it to his mouth; but scarcely could her trembling hand replace it on the table, for she started to see the alteration in her father's face.

“ Open the window, love — the air is stifling.”

Rebecca felt cold with the chill midnight, but she opened the heavy curtains and the casement, when a flood of dazzling moonlight poured into the dim room, and put the faint lamp to shame. A large branch of a chestnut-tree waved to and fro, whose leaves seemed filled with music ; a sweet breeze came from the garden below, but sweet as it was, Clinton inspired it with difficulty. By a strong effort he put his hand beneath the pillow, and drew thence a small black book with silver clasps.

“ Take it, my child ; till this hour it has been my constant companion. Rebecca, it is your mother’s Bible !”

Even as he spoke, his head sank on his daughter’s shoulder ; she moved not till the cheek pressed to hers grew like ice. One fearful shriek, and the living sank insensible by the side of the dead.

A week afterwards, a funeral train was seen slowly winding through the wreathing honey-suckle and drooping ash which formed the green and glad road. There were only the coffin-bearers and two mourners — an aged woman and a young one. The housekeeper and Rebecca were following Reginald Clinton to his last resting-place ; and ever and anon, as the coffin passed and brushed the boughs, heavy with their luxuriant foliage, a shower of fragrant leaves fell,—as if Summer wept over the sorrowful procession.

Rebecca uncovered not her face till they reached the newly dug grave; she then cast one shuddering look, and again closed her veil. The service commenced, and a slight start spoke other emotion than grief, when she heard the voice of Richard Vernon begin the solemn ritual. It ended, and Rebecca remained motionless on her knee till her attention was awakened by that fearful and peculiar sound—a sound to which earth has no parallel—the rattle of the falling gravel on the coffin. She sprang forward. “Let me—let me gaze on him once again!”

She saw nothing but the black, damp mould, and sank back, unresisting, on the arm of Richard Vernon.

“My house is close at hand,” said he, inquiringly to her aged companion.

“For the love of God, take her thither!” was the reply. “There is neither water nor aught else here; and she looks like one of the stone figures on the graves around us.”

Rebecca was carried, still insensible, into the little parlour; and, with a tenderness that seemed foreign to his nature, Vernon placed her in a large antique settle, which he drew towards the window, fetched water, and left her and the good woman alone. Even when Rebecca revived, it was only for a while, to give way to bursts of passionate weeping. Old Hannah’s affectionate soothing having at length calmed her, on rising to depart, she said

to the bewildered girl, "We must thank Mr. Vernon before we go."

"This Mr. Vernon's house?" exclaimed Rebecca, turning yet paler.

"It is my house; and where could you be more welcome?" said its master.

Rebecca rose and thanked him for his kindness; and, touched by his obvious sympathy, as well as reassured by his reserved and unusually gentle manner, she did not refuse his request, that Hannah at least should take some refreshment before their departure. One common-place remark after another had sunk into silence, when Vernon somewhat abruptly asked, "If she knew that orders had been given to fit up the old house for the reception of its owner?"

"I have known it for some days," was the reply.

"It will no more be a home suited for a youthful female."

"Certainly not; neither have I the slightest intention of remaining."

"Have you, then, fixed on any future plan?"

"Yes."

"You intend, I suppose, continuing in this neighbourhood?"

Rebecca hesitated. Vernon's hasty temper could no longer bear the curb.

"I might have guessed you would stay: Aubrey de Vere is young and unmarried—no bad chance for an errant princess!"

“ Stay, Mr. Vernon,” interrupted his guest ; “ do not say what you will soon regret—I am about to depart.”

“ And whither do you purpose going ?”

“ To London.”

Vernon started from his seat in astonishment—  
“ To London?—to the city of destruction—to the Babylon of the earth—to the sinful and the accursed—where the devil walks abroad, seeking whom he may devour? So young, so friendless, and so fair—you are mad, maiden! mad with sorrow—or pride!”

“ I answer to myself—London is the only place where my poor skill in embroidery may find employment; and Hannah has a sister there, with whom we mean to reside.”

Vernon walked up and down the room impatiently; at last he stopped before Rebecca, and said, in a voice whose firmness was only preserved by an effort—“ Maiden, when I bore you insensible to my house, I thought within myself, that neither by word nor look would I give you cause of annoyance—that I would forbear to urge upon the sacredness of sorrow a suit which that very sorrow makes more earnest. But I cannot, were it only as the daughter of my friend, I cannot see you take a step so rash, so fraught with fatal consequences. Pause, Rebecca, before you depart from my roof. I may not be what your fancy figures; but I love you deeply and truly, and for your sake would

change many a habit, perhaps many a fault. I may have been rude, ay harsh, in my speech, but my meaning has been kind. Save your youth from the rough chances of friendlessness and poverty: I offer you an honest name, competence, and an entire heart. We will both make allowances; there will be room in yonder arbour even for your lute; I will study my speech, and watch your look—till our hopes are together, and mutual affection has made our house thrice blessed.”

Rebecca felt that the tears were in her eyes, and that her voice was inarticulate; she paused a moment, from a reluctance to give Richard Vernon pain, and she left her hand in his as she spoke. “It may not be, my kind, my only friend: I must alter my very nature ere I could be happy as your wife. Vernon, I dare not marry you.”

He flung her hand from him as he caught her words; the long-subdued passion burst at last.

“Accursed be the hour that ever the weakness of my nature led my soul into this folly! Go, and bear with you the bitterness you have infused into my cup; may you know poverty, guilt, sorrow, and shame—may you live to mourn, in sackcloth and ashes, the day you left this roof, never to re-enter it more!—Nay, forgive me!” but Rebecca had quitted the parlour. He made one step to follow her—the next moment he had thrown himself into the huge oaken settle, with his back to the light. The day after, he went to the old house—it was

deserted; and he learnt that Rebecca and Hannah had that morning departed for London.

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Three years had passed away since Rebecca saw the turrets of the old house recede in the gray mist of early morning; while the drizzling rain, and a low moaning wind, which, even in summer, shook the leaves from the bough, gave to inanimate objects the appearance of a sad farewell. Three years had passed away since Rebecca first watched the shades of evening close on what was but a mockery of daylight—the daylight of a small narrow street in London; and she felt thankful for the obscurity which admitted of a free course to her tears.

I do firmly believe that the Londoner is as contented with his city home as the dweller in the fairest valley among the Appennines; and that habit brings its usual indifference as to place. But to one who has lived all his life in the country, whose path has been through the green field, and bounded only by the green hedge—to whom nothing in the town is endeared by association, and nothing softened by custom, how dreary is the aspect! The confined street, the close air, the dusky atmosphere, the hurrying passengers, the eager and busy yet indifferent faces—all press upon the stranger with an equal sense of discomfort and desolation.

Rebecca's heart died within her as she entered



the little dark shop, on her way to the still smaller and darker back-parlour. Three years had been spent in solitude, in poverty, in toil—in all that hardens the heart, and imprints sternness on the brow. Out upon the folly which, in estimating human misery, allows aught to bear comparison with the agony of the poor! I use the word poor relatively; I call not those poor to whom honesty brings self-respect, whose habits and whose means have gone together, and whose industry is its own support. But those are the poor whose exertion supplies not their wants—to whom cold, hunger, and weariness, are common feelings; who have known better days—to whom the past furnishes contrast, and the future fear. The grave may close over the dear and the departed; but in faith there is solace, and in time forgetfulness. The lover may be false to his vow, whose happiness was to have been, like its truth, eternal; yet, after all, the sorrow is purely imaginary, and grief is a luxury in indulgence.

Day by day Rebecca stooped over her embroidery; she debarred herself from rest and food, nay at last encroached even on the Sabbath, which had been held so sacred. The monotony of her existence was only broken in upon by anxiety; she rose early in the morning, and lay down late; still, though bought at the expense of time, youth, and hope, the pittance she could earn was insufficient for their daily wants. In this emergency, it was decided that the two rooms over the shop should be

let ; though, remote and obscure as was their street, it seemed much easier to decide on letting, than to let these apartments. It so chanced, however, that they succeeded immediately.

Their new resident was a man on whose age it would have been difficult to determine ; you might have guessed any period between twenty and thirty ; for his slender and almost boyish figure was bent with what might have been either time or infirmity. His hair, of a singularly bright golden hue, was thin, and left exposed a high and strongly marked forehead ; his originally fine features were worn to emaciation ; and the mouth was sunken and colourless. His large eyes were of the palest blue, and seemed with the least emotion to fill, as it were, with light — like the flashing and restless brilliancy of sunshine upon water. More richly dressed than suited his circumstances — apparently without a connexion, for none ever came near him — scarcely stirring from home — keeping lonely vigils, that sometimes lasted through the night, — there was obviously a mystery about him ; yet it was difficult to hear his sweet low voice, mark his wan and wasted countenance, and believe that the mystery could be in aught evil.

Gradually his gentle and quiet habits led to acquaintance, and acquaintance to confidence. One evening, when Rebecca was sitting working in the little back-parlour, he entered, and turning over the few volumes on her solitary book-shelf, opened

one in which was Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, filled with notes on favourite passages: for before poverty had pressed so heavily, it was Rebecca's delight to write on the margin all she could remember of her father's remarks.

"Ah, this indeed is fame!" exclaimed their visitor, unconsciously soliloquising aloud: "I care not to be bound in scented leather, clasped with the arms of my owner wrought in silver, and to be kept one among many in the ancient library, a thing of show, not of use—a part of the furniture. No; give me the obscure corner and the frequent reading; be mine the few minutes snatched from toil—the one remembered passage which keeps alive the seeds of poetry sown in every heart—the thought that rises remembered in a contemplative hour—the words in which the lover clothes his own love. Ah! the poet hath no true hope, who doth not place it in the many, and in the feeling of the common multitude."

Rebecca now learnt, for the first time, that it was Lee the dramatist who inhabited their dwelling. In a fit of disgust at society, and the excitement produced by the idea of a new work, he had buried himself in entire seclusion, to finish his "*Rival Queens*."

"I must be by myself when I write," was his frequent observation. "The indifference of my fellow-creatures chills me to the very soul; I feel my own nothingness too severely; I see the selfishness,

the vanity, which encircles me, and distrust my own power to animate or to interest : I deeply feel that the people surrounding me are inferior to myself, and I despise their suffrages—I grow vain and mean myself, and am involuntarily actuated by hopes and desires apart from what should be the one sole aim of my existence. I lose my power : I am like a magician who has forgotten the spell by which he once governed the spiritual world. What has the poet to do with the present? Suddenly I feel the shame and misery of such a life ; I fly to solitude—I cast the shackles from my hands, the dust from my feet ; I think my own thoughts—I dream my own dreams : again the future is to me a great and glorious reward ; the feeling rushes to my heart, my lips overflow with music — again the beautiful and the true rise visible before me, and I am happy, very, very happy !”

From that evening he delighted in the society of Rebecca, to whom it was a source of true enjoyment ; it was so long since speech had been to her more than the expression of daily regrets and wants —it was as if the higher faculties of her being had lain dormant for a protracted season, and now awoke, as the blossoms on the bough awaken beneath the soft spring rains. Still, she saw with regret that the fiery temper, the excited mind of her companion preyed on his health — the cheek grew paler, the shining eye more restless, every day ; and sleep forsook the pillow haunted by fantastic creations.

“I know it,” he would reply; “and is it a worthy sacrifice that I offer? I believe that the mind may make its own immortality: thought is the spiritual part of existence; and so long as my mind influences others, so long as my thoughts remain behind, so long shall my spirit be conscious and immortal. The body may perish—not so the essence which survives in the living and lasting page.”

Sometimes, when weary and desponding,—for who does not despond over even their highest efforts, and feel how little they can paint the beauty and the passion within?—he would come to Rebecca, and ask her to read aloud to him. Her rich sweet voice, her grace of expression, would recall his enthusiasm, and again the “Rival Queens” was resumed with hope and animation. When the task drew near its completion, he told Rebecca that she must insure its success. She looked up inquiringly.

“You must play Roxana.”

It little needs to detail the surprise, the various emotions of doubt, hope, and inclination, which were elicited by this remark. Rebecca had that consciousness of talent which must always attend its possession; and she bitterly felt how completely it was now wasted.

Lee’s enthusiasm was, as enthusiasm always is, contagious; and when, in his own peculiar manner, he read to her the finished play, the fear of failure

became her only fear. Tragedy and actress were presented to Rich, then the manager of the principal London theatre; and both alike met with the most encouraging approval.

Rebecca entered on her new pursuit with all the ardour and all the charm which the imagination lends to its object. Strongly moved and absorbed, she saw in her situation nothing but its poetry. At length the eventful night arrived, and as soon as his heroine stepped upon the boards, Lee felt certain of the favourable reception of his drama. The Oriental dress suited well her proud, dark beauty: a crimson turban was folded round her head, ornamented with the plume of that strange bird they call of paradise—both in strong contrast to the raven ringlets which fell in profusion on her flushed cheek. An embroidered robe shewed her exquisite figure, though only the delicate throat and wrist were uncovered; and a veil of silvery tissue partially concealed her profile. Her success was complete. When the first dizzy confusion was merged in the excitement of her part, even Lee himself was satisfied with her conception and execution of it: nothing could be more passionate, more superb, than her revenge; nothing more terrible than the agony of her desertion.

I am persuaded there is no triumph equal to one achieved on the stage—it comes so immediate and so home: you have before you the mass of human beings whose sympathies are at your will;

you witness the emotions which you raise, you see the tears which you command: the poet has erected the statue, but it is for you to give it life—the words must find their music on your lips—the generous sentiment, the exalted hope, the touches of deep feeling, ask their expression from you: surely such influence is among the triumphs of the mind, ay and a great and noble triumph. But in this world every thing has its evil; the dust is on the wheels of the conqueror's chariot—the silken-wrought tapestry covers the mouldering wall; and Rebecca soon found that her position was one which often jarred on her imaginative temper. But we make our own path, and fling our own shadow upon it. Never was the lofty purity of her nature more conspicuous than now, when surrounded by so much to which it was utterly opposed.

It was about three months after her first appearance, that two young cavaliers were walking, arm-in-arm, up the Strand, engaged in earnest conversation.

“I tell you,” said the youngest, “that it is hopeless.”

“I never,” replied his companion, “heard of any thing so selfish; it is what women always are, but I must say this goes beyond the common allowance—and so our pretty Roxana expects you to marry her! Wealth, rank—and you are not so bad-looking either, De Vere—pretty well for the Rival Queen!”

“ Indeed, Buckingham, you are mistaken; I never saw a creature more unworldly, more disinterested.”

“ Oh, of course; but it is really too much to have your scruples in addition to hers. However, I pique myself on the impossible. It is matter of conscience, it seems, with your Roxana: well, the chapel in the Savoy is much at your service—I will have it dusted on purpose—and the equerry I recommended has other talents than those of horse-breaking. He lived in my good father-in-law’s family to some purpose; his conventicle-drawl is perfection—he will make an excellent priest; and I will give away the bride myself—very generous, when I think how pretty she is!”

A few scruples and a little passing remorse on one side, a sneer and a jest on the other, and the whole affair was arranged.

“ You have seen my Roxana for the last time,” said Rebecca, about a week after this, to Lee; “ you have been too kind a friend to be excluded from my confidence. You will rejoice in my happiness, for happy I must be as the wife of Aubrey de Vere.”

“ The wife of Aubrey de Vere! you, Rebecca, about to be married?”

He rose from his seat, threw open the lattice, and leant from the window, while his companion stood astonished at the excess of his emotion. Suddenly he turned towards her, while his large shining



and melancholy eyes seemed to look into her very heart, and his melodious voice sank on her ear like sad music.

“ Rebecca, I have deceived myself—I deemed my heart had but one idol, and my life but one aim; alas, I now find I have one object yet dearer! Alas, my very happiness has blinded me! I have grown so accustomed to see you, to hear you, to refer my every thought to you, that, like the blessed light and air, you have become part of my existence: I cannot, I dare not think of a future without you. Rebecca, you know how earnestly I have laboured for one end—how high, how glorious, I have deemed the poet’s calling. Rebecca, there is no honour my ambition could covet that I would not renounce for one smile of yours.”

He paused for a moment, and hid his face on the window-sill, while Rebecca stood breathless with distress and surprise. Lee recovered the power of utterance first.

“ De Vere—he will be Earl of Oxford—but no—you would not wed only for interest: yet, Rebecca, could we change places, would you still marry him?”

She stood for a moment blushing and irresolute; at length she said in a low but firm voice, “I love himself.”

Lee gazed on her earnestly; and to her death Rebecca remembered the wild despair painted on his face. Gently he approached her, and took her

hand ; his touch was like marble, and contrasted strangely with his flushed and burning cheek.

“ Farewell,” said he, “ last dream of an existence that has been all dreams ! I never loved before — I shall never love again. I have often tried to be happy, but in vain ; now I have not even an illusion left. Farewell to hope, to honour, to exertion, to poetry — I bid them all farewell, when I say farewell to you.”

He dropped the hand which he held — and turned to the door, but languidly, like one who walks in his sleep. Rebecca saw him again, from the window, still moving at the same slow, sad pace. She never beheld him more ; and when she next heard of him, it was to learn that he was the inmate of a solitary cell — his fine mind bowed and broken by madness. Awful to know that your soul may depart before yourself !

A cold east wind brought back upon London the smoke of its thousand chimneys. A thick vapour filled the chapel, which the waxen tapers, lighted though it was noon, served rather to shew than to dispel ; and Rebecca felt her heart sink within her as she took the offered hand of the Duke of Buckingham, who led her towards the altar. She thought on her extreme isolation from all the ordinary ties of life : others had parents, friends, and relatives ; she had none. How utter must be her dependence on Aubrey’s love !

His manner, embarrassed and constrained, had

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nothing in it to reassure her ; while Buckingham's gaiety jarred upon her ear, and his jest and flattery were equally unacceptable.

"I have been at merrier funerals," said the Duke of Buckingham, as he turned from the bridal party : "if the mere semblance of the fetters be so melancholy, the Lord have mercy upon those who endure them in reality !"

It was with a mixture of pleasure and pain that Rebecca re-entered the home she had left under such different circumstances ; for De Vere had fixed on the old mansion-house for their future dwelling.

"For the present, love, we will live in complete retirement : I care little, while the wonder of our marriage," and he hesitated, "is fresh in men's minds, to endure the questions of the curious, or the comment of the envious."

Rebecca pressed closer to her heart the arm on which she hung ; and her silence was more eloquent of happiness than any words. I have ever remarked, that when Fate has any great misfortune in store, it is always preceded by a brief period of calm and sunshine—as if to add bitterness of contrast to all other misery. It is for the happy to tremble—it is over their heads that the thunderbolt is about to burst.

Rebecca lived for a few months in all the deep content of love—every look watched, every thought partaken, her heart was filled with thankfulness and affection.

De Vere would sometimes start when he remembered the uncertain tenure of their present state; but conscience, like a child, is soon lulled to sleep; and habit is our idea of eternity. Yet every hour Rebecca became dearer to him; and his few and short absences only brought him to her side with more perfect appreciation and more apprehensive tenderness.

He had now been away for nearly a week, but was expected home that very evening. Who does not know the restlessness of an anticipated arrival? Rebecca wandered from room to room; till at last not even the ingenuity of affection could devise any arrangement or alteration further, that might catch the eye or please the taste of De Vere. It was a lovely afternoon, one of those when autumn atones for the brevity of its days by their beauty; and she walked out, sometimes absorbed in her own thoughts, then again gazing, with a pleasure which half arose from herself, on the country round. Some of the trees yet retained the deep green of their foliage, others wore the brown, purple, and yellow, which, like the bright-hued banners of an army, are the heralds of destruction. A few late flowers were still seen, but their blossoms were fragile and scentless; yet the eye dwelt tenderly upon them—they were the last. Rebecca had proceeded farther than she had proposed, but the sight of a clump of old yews drew her on—they grew beside her father's grave. More

than once she had visited it; and it had cost De Vere his worst pang of remorse, when she pointed out the low grass mound, and said she prayed that her parent's spirit might be gladdened by the knowledge of how happy and how beloved was the child he had left a friendless orphan. It may be a superstition, but it is a grateful and a kindly one, which deems that the righteous dead watch over those they cherished in their pilgrimage on earth. Rebecca knelt beside the grave, but shrunk back — for at that instant a dark shadow fell upon it; she looked up, and saw the harsh and haggard face of Richard Vernon.

“Back, lost and guilty one!” said he, pushing her aside with no gentle hand; “pollute not with your wretched presence the churchyard of your God, and the grave of your father. You mocked at my words when I prophesied of shame, and, lo! it has come upon you. Away! — as the servant of Him whom you have forgotten, I forbid you to remain in this sacred place!”

Rebecca turned towards him with anger, which even her pity could not subdue.

“I know not,” said she coldly, “by what right you forbid the wife of a De Vere to approach the church his fathers built; but I leave it; for I would not further unkindness should pass between us.”

“Verily, this audacity passeth belief! I know, Rebecca, how you have mingled with the light and the profane; I know how, of your own will, you

cast in your lot with the ungodly ; I heard too, only three days ago, in yonder accursed Babylon, how Aubrey de Vere had carried off the fair actress to be his paramour ;—and yet you dare speak across your father's grave with a lie in your mouth ! Wretched girl, kneel—but in sackcloth and ashes—for the sake of him whose dust is at your feet—repent, Rebecca Clinton !”

“ Nay,” interrupted his auditor, “ call me not by a name which I no longer bear. Were it only mine own credit that was touched, I might patiently abide your words ; but I may not stay to hear such slander cast upon a true and honourable gentleman, upon my husband.”

Before he could reply, she had passed on. His first impulse was to follow her ; but as he marked her rapid steps, he desisted, and remained gazing on her lessening figure till lost in the distance, with an expression in which bitterness and sorrow were singularly blended. Rebecca had scarcely reached home, when she received an urgent petition from one of the servants, that she would visit what the doctor, who awaited her arrival, said was his death-bed. She was somewhat surprised at the vehement terms in which the request was couched, for the man declared he could not die in peace till he had seen his mistress.

“ Perhaps,” thought she, “ he leaves one behind him friendless, helpless, even as my father left me — such desolation shall fall on none that I can aid.”

She entered the large airy room which she had herself ordered to be prepared for him when first seized with sickness ; and dismissing the nurse, took her place by the pillow of the dying man. It was the equerry who had personated the clergyman at her marriage ! Short and terrible was the narrative to which she had to listen : she spoke not, she moved not—but, pale and cold, sank back in the arm-chair.

“ Great God, I have killed her ! ” shrieked the penitent.

His voice recalled her to herself. She rose, and turning to the bed, stretched her hand towards the emaciated creature who lay there in all but the agonies of death : “ I forgive you, and pray God to forgive you too ; make your peace with Heaven. May the pardon I yield to you be extended also to myself ! ”

She went down stairs directly to the laboratory, where De Vere sometimes amused a leisure hour with chemical experiments, and taking from one of the shelves a small phial, hid it in her bosom, and proceeded to her chamber.

“ I am going to be fanciful in my dress to-night,” said she to her attendant. Her long dark hair was loosened from its braids into a profusion of drooping ringlets ; she bound the crimson shawl around her temples ; and again assumed the embroidered robe in which De Vere had first seen her. The toilette finished, she flung herself on a pile of

rich cushions in the library, to await his arrival; and at that instant he entered—having come through the garden on purpose to surprise her.

“My beautiful masquerader, I must leave you often,” said he, tenderly, “if you are to grow so much more lovely in my absence.”

And lovely indeed did she look at that moment. We have before remarked that the Oriental style of dress was peculiarly well adapted to the character of her face and figure, and the passionate flush of her cheek gave even more than their usual brightness to her radiant eyes. Aubrey deemed it was delight at his return, and hastened to heap before her the many precious gifts he had brought.

“I did not forget my sweet friend in the hurry of London. Your throat is the whitest, dear one,” said he, as he hung round her neck a string of precious pearls.

Supper was now brought in, and Aubrey smiled to see how carefully his favourite dishes had been provided.

“I am not hungry,” said Rebecca; “but I will not talk to you now;” and taking up her lute, she began to play, and sang a few simple notes rather than words.

“You have been librarian too,” exclaimed Aubrey: “I see all my scattered volumes have been collected: why, what should I do without you?”

“You would miss me?” and laying aside the lute, she came and rested her head on his shoulder,



at the same time taking the phial and drinking its contents.

“Miss you, dearest!—how wretched, how inexpressibly wretched should I be without you!”

“I am glad of it!” she cried, springing from her kneeling and caressing attitude, and flinging down the phial, which broke into atoms. “Do you see that? its contents were poison, and I have drank it—drank it even in your very arms! I know all, De Vere—your false marriage, your mock priest. You thought it but a jest to dishonour and to destroy one who trusted you so fondly, so utterly. Go find another to love you as I have done! You planned inconstancy from the first, when I most believed in your love. Well, a little while, and you are free!”

She fell back in a paroxysm of bodily agony, and hid her face in the cushions, but De Vere saw her frame writhe with torture. Suddenly she started up—“I cannot bear it—give me water, for the love of Heaven!”

Her exquisite features were distorted, the blue veins were swollen on her forehead, and her livid lips were covered with froth: again she dashed herself on the ground, and her screams, though smothered, were still audible.

De Vere hung over her in anguish scarce inferior to her own; his call for assistance brought the attendants, and with them the physician, who had just left the chamber of death above.

“It is hopeless!” said he, in answer to Aubrey’s frantic questions; “no skill on earth could counteract a poison so deadly, and taken, too, in such quantity.”

Gradually the convulsions became less violent, and De Vere bore her in his arms to a sofa by the open window. The cool air seemed to soothe her, and she lay for a few moments perfectly passive: the work of years had been wrought upon her sunk and ghastly features. Slowly she raised her head, and put back the thick tresses that pressed upon her brow; she drank the wine the doctor offered, and her recollection returned.

“Aubrey,” whispered she, and suffered her head to rest upon his bosom, “my own, my only love, forgive me,”—but her voice failed as she spoke: again a frightful change passed over her face—De Vere held a corse in his arms.