

**PEG WOFFINGTON.
A NOVEL**

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Peg Woffington. A novel by Charles Reade

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CHARLES READE

**PEG WOFFINGTON.
A NOVEL**



"He made a lorgnette of his two hands; the others did so too, and found they saw much better—oh, ever so much better!"—p. 197.

PEG WOFFINGTON.

A NOVEL.

BY CHARLES READE.

A NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1857.

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1857

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TO

T. TAYLOR, ESQ.

MY FRIEND, AND COADJUTOR IN THE COMEDY

OF

"MASKS AND FACES,"

TO WHOM THE READER OWES MUCH OF THE BEST MATTER
IN THIS TALE:

AND TO THE MEMORY OF MARGARET WOFFINGTON,

FALSELY *summed up* UNTIL TO-DAY,

THIS

"Dramatic Story"

IS INSCRIBED BY

CHARLES READE.

LONDON,
DECEMBER 15, 1852.

PEG WOFFINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT the middle of the last century, at eight o'clock in the evening, in a large but poor apartment, a man was slumbering on a rough couch. His rusty and worn suit of black was of a piece with his uncarpeted room, the deal table of home manufacture, and its slim unsnuffed candle.

The man was Triplet, scene painter, actor, and writer of sanguinary plays, in which what ought to be, viz.: truth, plot, situation, and dialogue, were not; and what ought not to be, were: *scilicet*, small talk, big talk, fops, ruffians, and ghosts.

His three mediocrities fell so short of one talent, that he was sometimes *impransus*.

He slumbered, but uneasily, the dramatic author was uppermost, and his 'Demon of the Hayloft' hung upon the thread of popular favour.

On his uneasy slumber entered from the theatre, Mrs. Triplet.

She was a lady who in one respect fell behind

her husband, she lacked his variety in ill-doing, but she recovered herself by doing her one thing a shade worse than he did any of his three. She was what is called in grim sport, an actress; she had just cast her mite of discredit on royalty by playing the Queen, and had trundled home the moment the breath was out of her royal body. She came in rotatory with fatigue, and fell, gristle, into a chair; she wrenched from her brow a diadem and eyed it with contempt, took from her pocket a sausage, and contemplated it with respect and affection, placed it in a frying-pan on the fire, and entered her bedroom, meaning to don a loose wrapper, and dethrone herself into comfort.

But the poor woman was shot walking by Morpheus, and subsided altogether; for dramatic performances, amusing and exciting to youth seated in the pit, convey a certain weariness to those bright beings who sparkle on the stage for bread and cheese.

Royalty disposed of, still left its trail of events. The sausage began to 'spit.' The sound was hardly out of its body, when poor Triplet writhed like a worm on a hook. 'Spitter, spittest,' went the sausage. Triplet groaned, and at last his inarticulate murmurs became words: 'That's right, pit, now that is so reasonable to condemn a poor fellow's play before you have heard it out.' Then,