

**SINGLEHEART AND
DOUBLEFACE: A
MATTER-OF-FACT
ROMANCE, PP. 1-239**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649705139

Singleheart and Doubleface: A Matter-Of-Fact Romance, pp. 1-239 by Charles Reade

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Cover @ 2017

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12.19

A MATTER-OF-FACT ROMANCE

BY

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A NEW EDITION

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1889

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

7-16-47 MFP

SINGLEHEART AND DOUBLEFACE.

CHAPTER I.

MATTHEW BRENT, a small shopkeeper in Green Street, Liverpool, was a widower with two daughters. Deborah, the elder, had plenty of tongue and mother-wit, but could not and would not study anything on earth if it had the misfortune to be written or printed. Sarah, the younger, showed attention and application from her childhood.

Her father cultivated those powers, for they are the roots of all excellence, and he knew it. He sent the girl to school, and there she learned the usual smattering; and one thing worth it all, viz., how to teach herself. Under that abler tuition she learned to write like a clerk, to keep

her father's books, to remember the price of every article in the shop, to serve the customers when required, and to read for her own pleasure and instruction. At eighteen she was Brent's right hand all day, and his reader at night.

Deborah, who could only spell *The Mercury*, and would not do that if she could get Sally to read it out, found her level as cook, housekeeper, and market-woman. At twenty she was very tall, supple, and muscular; comely, but freckled, reddish hair, a very white skin, only it tanned easily. It revealed its natural beauty in her throat, and above all in the nape of her neck. This nape, snowy and solid, and a long row of ivory teeth, were her beauties. She married quite young her father's cousin, a small farmer, and settled in Berkshire, her native county.

Sarah Brent was about two inches shorter than Deborah, but a finer figure; had an oval face full of modesty and gentle dignity. Her skin was also white, and revealed itself in her shapely hands as well as her alabaster throat.

Her hair was brown, and so were two fearless eyes that looked at people full without staring. When she was nineteen, a worthy young fellow, called Joseph Pinder, fell in love with her and courted her. He was sheepish and distant in his approaches, for he looked on her as a superior being. She never chattered, yet could always answer civilly and wisely; this, and her Madonna-like face, made Joe Pinder reverence her. Her father thought highly of him, and connived at his visits, and so they were often seen together in a friendly way; but when he began to make downright love to her, she told him calmly she could go no farther than friendship. 'And indeed,' said she, 'I would never leave my father for any young man.'

Joseph Pinder knew that this declaration has often preceded connubial rites, and continued his friendly assiduities; and these two often came back from church together, he glowing with delight at being near her, and she cool and friendly.

The Brents were in a small way of business,

and Sarah's adorer was a decorative painter, and what is called in the trade a 'writer'—one of those astounding artists who by skilful shading make gilt letters appear concave, or convex, or stand out bodily from a board or wall, and blazon a shopkeeper's name and business. On one occasion he had a large job of this sort to do in Manchester. It took him a fortnight, and led to another at Preston. In a month he came back with money in both pockets, and full of joy at the prospect of meeting Sarah again.

He found the Brents at supper, and there was a young man with them who had a deal to say, and made the old man smile, while the young woman often looked furtively at him with undisguised complacency. This was a second cousin of Mr. Brent's, one James Mansell, a painter and grainer, who had settled in the town while Pinder was away.

Pinder's heart sank at this, and instead of exerting himself in vigorous competition, he became more silent and more depressed the

more James Mansell rattled away; in short, he was no company at all, because the other was good company.

After a while he said 'Good-night.'

A coquette would have followed him to the door and smoothed matters; but that was not Sarah Brent's line; she said 'Good-night' kindly enough, but she never moved, and James Mansell's tongue resumed its headlong course.

This was the first of many such scenes. Sarah was always kind, but cool, to her old admirer, and manifestly attracted by the new one. Indeed, it came to this at last that Pinder could never get a walk with her alone except from church.

On one occasion he ventured on a mild re-monstrance: 'If you had not told me you would never leave your father, I should be almost afraid *that* James Mansell would entice you away from us all.'

'From everybody else; but not from father.'