

**THE WORKS OF  
GEORGE  
MEREDITH, VOL. IX**

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The works of George Meredith, Vol. IX by George Meredith

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**GEORGE MEREDITH**

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THE WORKS OF  
GEORGE MEREDITH

VOLUME IX



WESTMINSTER  
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1897

**RHODA  
FLEMING**

**A STORY**

**VOLUME**

**I**

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# RHODA FLEMING

## CHAPTER I

### The Kentish Family

Remains of our good yeomanry blood will be found in Kent, developing stiff, solid, unobtrusive men, and very personable women. The distinction survives there between Kentish women and women of Kent, as a true South-eastern dame will let you know, if it is her fortune to belong to that favoured portion of the county where the great battle was fought, in which the gentler sex performed manful work, but on what luckless heads we hear not; and when garrulous tradition is discreet, the severe historic Muse declines to hazard a guess. Saxon, one would presume, since it is thought something to have broken them.

My plain story is of two Kentish damsels, and runs from a home of flowers into regions where flowers are few and sickly, on to where the flowers which breathe sweet breath have been proved in mortal fire.

Mrs. Fleming, of Queen Anne's Farm, was the wife of a yeoman-farmer of the county. Both were of sound Kentish extraction, albeit varieties of the breed. The farm had its name from a tradition, common to many other farmhouses within a circuit of the metropolis, that the ante-Hanoverian lady had used the place in her day as a nursery-hospital for the royal little ones. It was a square three-storied building of red-

## RHODA FLEMING

CHAPTER  
I  
The Kentish  
Family

brick, much beaten and stained by the weather, with an ivied side, up which the ivy grew stoutly, topping the roof in triumphant lumps. The house could hardly be termed picturesque. Its aspect had struck many eyes as being very much that of a red-coat sentinel grenadier, battered with service, and standing firmly enough, though not at ease. Surrounding it was a high wall, built partly of flint and partly of brick, and ringed all over with grey lichen and brown spots of bearded moss, that bore witness to the touch of many winds and rains. Tufts of pale grass, and gilliflowers, and travelling stone-crop, hung from the wall, and driblets of ivy ran broadening to the outer ground. The royal Arms were said to have surmounted the great iron gateway; but they had vanished, either with the family, or at the indications of an approaching rust. Rust defiled its bars; but, when you looked through them, the splendour of an unrivalled garden gave vivid signs of youth, and of the taste of an orderly, laborious, and cunning hand.

The garden was under Mrs. Fleming's charge. The joy of her love for it was written on its lustrous beds, as poets write. She had the poetic passion for flowers. Perhaps her taste may now seem questionable. She cherished the old-fashioned delight in tulips; the house was reached on a gravel-path between rows of tulips, rich with one natural blush, or freaked by art. She liked a bulk of colour; and when the dahlia dawned upon our gardens, she gave her heart to dahlias. By good desert, the fervent woman gained a prize at a flower-show for one of her dahlias, and 'Dahlia' was the name uttered at the christening of her eldest daughter, at which all Wrexby parish laughed as long