

**MISS KATE; OR,  
CONFESSIONS  
OF A CARETAKER**

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Miss Kate; Or, Confessions of a Caretaker by Rita

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**RITA**

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# MISS KATE;

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## CONFESSIONS OF A CARETAKER.

BY

"RITA," pen name of Elizabeth M. (Gibson) Hemm-

Author of "Dame Durden," "Two Bad Blue Eyes," "The  
*Mystery of a Turkish Bath,*" etc.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE LITTLE FOUNDLING.

OF course I was not always a caretaker. Everything must have a beginning, and my beginning—once I was old enough to leave home and “do for myself”—was domestic service. I had been fairly well educated—that is to say, I could read and write, and cipher, and do needle-work, and turn my hand to most things; for my mother was a sensible, hard-working woman, and, having a large family, brought us up to be useful. And well it was that she did so, considering the ups and downs of live, and how there's never any knowing what one may have to do, before one's done with it—with life, I mean. I'm afraid I'm not very good at my sentences; but it's late in life to take to authorship, though I really may say I am driven to it by loneliness and blackbeetles, which are the plague of one's life in these London kitchens, and no poison or traps seem able to get rid of the nuisance.

A literary lady I once lived with used to say to me, “Style, Jane, style is everything. Never mind about

plots, and sensation, and character : give me style. That's what makes the author!" And she was accounted very clever, and very popular; so I suppose she knew what she was talking about. However, as far as "style" goes, I am afraid I shall make a poor show; but my reason for writing this story is to give a truthful account of things that have come under my notice, and that have strangely enough formed themselves into a history, to which I have become a sort of centre-piece.

Well may people say, "Truth is stranger than fiction." I am sure I have found it so.

I don't know whether, having called my story "Confessions of a Caretaker," I am bound to write of only what happened since I became a caretaker. In that case I should have to be without a sort of first volume to my plot; and it seems to me that, in spite of all the literary lady told me, "style" wouldn't carry that book along. So I must be excused if I go back a little bit and begin with when I was sixteen years of age, and first left home and took a situation.

It was with a very rich old lady and gentleman, who had a beautiful house at Richmond, and I went there as under-housemaid.

What a lovely place they had! Such grounds, and conservatories, and stables, and horses, and carriages—everything heart could wish for; and silver to eat off; and beds all hung with satin; and marble statues in the hall, and pictures that had cost a fortune—and all out of tea! so I heard from the cook, who had been thirty years with them. And it is an odd thing, but up to the present day I never pass a shop and see "Try our Two-Shilling Souchong," or "Take a Sample of our Best Mixed," but I see that house and grounds and smell the scent of the flowers in that conservatory—so powerful is association!

Well, these two old people, Mr. and Mrs. Vining, had

everything money could buy except one thing, and the loss of that one thing was just enough to make them discontented. They had no children, and only a distant relation to inherit all their fortune, and the property that the old gentleman had got together out of industry and perseverance in the matter of buying and selling tea.

The old lady took it more to heart even than her husband, and many and many a time she has said to me :

"Oh, Jane, I would gladly be poor to-morrow, if only I possessed a child to call me mother." Which seemed to me a bit foolish and sentimental ; for, after all, children are a great bother and worry, not to say expense, and one does not seem to have them very long, and as often as not they turn out badly. I have seen a great deal of them, and I know something about their ways and goings on, and what plagues and torments they can be.

Sometimes, when I was waiting at table with the parlor-maid, the old lady and Mr. Vining would talk about adopting a child, and cook used to say she quite believed it would really end in that—they were so crazy about children.

Well, time went on, and I had been there some six months or so, when one cold winter's day my master and mistress went out in the carriage immediately after lunch, and drove into London. It was between five and six, and I was just coming downstairs after lighting the gas in the corridors and bedrooms, when I heard the sound of wheels on the drive, and then the ringing of the bell. The footman opened the door, and I saw the master coming into the hall, and mistress—her face all excited and laughing—just behind him. Master held something in his arms—a little bundle all wrapped up in a shawl, and, as he saw me :

"Jane," he says, "go and light a fire in the Blue Room and get a warm bath ready, and tell cook to make a basin