

**MY FIRST LOVE
AND MY LAST
LOVE. A NOVEL**

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My first love and my last love. A novel by Mrs. J. H. Riddell

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MRS. J. H. RIDDELL

**MY FIRST LOVE
AND MY LAST
LOVE. A NOVEL**

By the same Author.

AUSTIN FRIARS.
TOO MUCH ALONE.
THE RICH HUSBAND.
MAXWELL DREWITT.
FAR ABOVE RUBIES.
A LIFE'S ASSIZE.
THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH.
HOME, SWEET HOME.
PHEMIE KELLER.
RACE FOR WEALTH.
THE EARL'S PROMISE.
MORTONLEY'S ESTATE.
FRANK SINCLAIR'S WIFE.
THE RULING PASSION.
MY FIRST AND MY LAST LOVE.
CITY AND SUBURBS.
ABOVE SUSPICION.
JOY AFTER SORROW.

MY FIRST LOVE
AND
MY LAST LOVE.

A Novel.

BY
MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,
AUTHOR OF
'GEORGE GRITH,' 'CITY AND SUBURB,' 'MAXWELL DREWITT,' ETC.

A NEW EDITION.

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MY FIRST LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

OUR FIRST MEETING.

I AM sitting alone in my chambers, holding in my hand a miniature. It is the likeness of a child—MY FIRST LOVE.

Above the mantelpiece hangs an oil painting. It is the portrait of a woman—MY LAST LOVE.

The whole of my life—my real life, I mean, not that which I lead when I am talking in court with my gown and wig on—or when I am at home with my children, now grown up about me, and my wife, still a handsome woman, embroidering a pair of slippers, which can only be intended for wear in the next world, since there seems no reasonable probability of their being ever finished in this—not my life as it appears when I am telling my best after-dinner stories, or poring over the briefs which now,

quicker than I want them, are sent to me by complaisant solicitors—not my outward and visible life that I pass amongst my fellows, but the real existence I spend with myself and my memory—has been influenced, coloured, shaded, by these two faces. Not more utterly were the ivory and the canvas changed by the painter's brush tracing the portraits of child and woman on them, than has my life been made what it is by the first love, and the last love which these likenesses recal.

Recal! I have written and will not cancel the word; but oh! friends, the memory of all I hoped, of all I possessed, of all I lost, of all I suffered, is never so far away from me as to need any extraneous circumstances, any efforts of mind, to bring back to remembrance.

At any moment, whether I am amongst my fellows, or alone with my papers and books, I can whisper in the ear of that long ago time. It has never died to me. In my musty chambers a fragrance of the primroses and the violets that studded bank and copse in those blissful spring days, is wafted to me. Amid the roar of the London traffic I hear like a still small voice the murmur of the river, the gentle rustling of the wind amongst the topmost branches of the trees. When my blinds are down and my lamp lighted, I can see the field paths untrodden for a quarter of a century—the church in the distance—the children gathering wild flowers, aye, the very brambles growing by the wayside.

Sometimes in my dreams the burden of years