

From W. M. THACKERAY, Vanity Fair

CHAPTER XXX

"The Girl I Left Behind Me"

And so, making his last dispositions, Captain Crawley, who had seldom thought about anything but himself, until the last few months of his life, when Love had obtained the mastery over the dragoon, went through the various items of his little catalogue of effects, striving to see how they might be turned into money for his wife's benefit, in case any accident should befall him. He pleased himself by noting down with a pencil, in his big schoolboy handwriting, the various items of his portable property which might be sold for his widow's advantage as, for example, "My double-barril by Manton, say 40 guineas; my driving cloak, lined with sable fur, 50 pounds; my duelling pistols in rosewood case (same which I shot Captain Marker), 20 pounds; my regulation saddle-holsters and housings; my Laurie ditto," and so forth, over all of which articles he made Rebecca the mistress.

Faithful to his plan of economy, the Captain dressed himself in his oldest and shabbiest uniform and epaulets, leaving the newest behind, under his wife's (or it might be his widow's) guardianship. And this famous dandy of Windsor and Hyde Park went off on his campaign with a kit as modest as that of a sergeant, and with something like a prayer on his lips for the woman he was leaving. He took her up from the ground, and held her in his arms for a minute, tight pressed against his strong-beating heart. His face was purple and his eyes dim, as he put her down and left her. He rode by his General's side, and smoked his cigar in silence as they hastened after the troops of the General's brigade, which preceded them; and it was not until they were some miles on their way that he left off twirling his moustache and broke silence.

And Rebecca, as we have said, wisely determined not to give way to unavailing sentimentality on her husband's departure. She waved him an adieu from the window, and stood there for a moment looking out after he was gone. The cathedral towers and the full gables of the quaint old houses were just beginning to blush in the sunrise. There had been no rest for her that night. She was still in her pretty ball-dress, her fair hair hanging somewhat out of curl on her neck, and the circles round her eyes dark with watching. "What a fright I seem," she said, examining herself in the glass, "and how pale this pink makes one look!" So she divested herself of this pink raiment; in doing which a note fell out from her corsage, which she picked up with a smile, and locked into her dressing-box. And then she put her bouquet of the ball into a glass of water, and went to bed, and slept very comfortably.

The town was quite quiet when she woke up at ten o'clock, and partook of coffee, very requisite and comforting after the exhaustion and grief of the morning's occurrences.

This meal over, she resumed honest Rawdon's calculations of the night previous, and surveyed her position. Should the worst befall, all things considered, she was pretty well to do. There were her own trinkets and trousseau, in addition to those which her husband had left behind. Rawdon's generosity, when they were first married, has already been described and lauded. Besides these, and the little mare, the General, her slave and worshipper, had made her many very handsome presents, in the shape of cashmere shawls bought at the auction of a bankrupt French general's lady, and numerous tributes from the jewellers' shops, all of which betokened her admirer's taste and wealth. As for "tickers," as poor Rawdon called watches, her apartments were alive with their clicking. For, happening to mention one night that hers, which Rawdon had given to her, was of English workmanship, and went ill, on the very next morning there came to her a little bijou marked Leroy, with a chain and cover charmingly set with turquoises, and another signed Brequet, which was covered with pearls, and yet scarcely bigger than a half-crown. General Tufto had bought one, and Captain Osborne had gallantly presented the other. Mrs. Osborne had no watch, though, to do George justice, she might have had one for the asking, and the Honourable Mrs. Tufto in England had an old instrument of her mother's that might have served for the plate-warming pan which Rawdon talked about. If

Messrs. Howell and James were to publish a list of the purchasers of all the trinkets which they sell, how surprised would some families be: and if all these ornaments went to gentlemen's lawful wives and daughters, what a profusion of jewellery there would be exhibited in the genteelst homes of Vanity Fair!

Every calculation made of these valuables Mrs. Rebecca found, not without a pungent feeling of triumph and self-satisfaction, that should circumstances occur, she might reckon on six or seven hundred pounds at the very least, to begin the world with; and she passed the morning disposing, ordering, looking out, and locking up her properties in the most agreeable manner. Among the notes in Rawdon's pocket-book was a draft for twenty pounds on Osborne's banker. This made her think about Mrs. Osborne. "I will go and get the draft cashed," she said, "and pay a visit afterwards to poor little Emmy." If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine. No man in the British army which has marched away, not the great Duke himself, could be more cool or collected in the presence of doubts and difficulties, than the indomitable little aide-de-camp's wife.

Activities

- 1.** Read as far as line 22 and consider all the various actions performed by Captain Crawley before going off to battle. What feeling/s can you infer from his behaviour?
- 2.** Go on reading as far as line 34. Consider what Rebecca does and what she seems worried about. How would you describe her on the basis of her behaviour?
- 3.** read the passage to the end. Is your impression of Rebecca's character confirmed? Substantiate from the text.
- 4.** Which method of characterization does Thackeray use in the passage? How free is the reader to form opinions on the characters? What attitude does the narrator have towards Rebecca and her world?