

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane
Leslie Stockton Vatsyayana Verne
Burroughs Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Harte
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Hesse
London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Cooke
Poe Aristotle Wells Shakespeare Irving
Hale James Hastings Richter Chambers Alcott
Bunner Shakespeare Richter Chambers Alcott
Doré Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
Swift Dante Pushkin Newton



tredition®

tredition was established in 2006 by Sandra Latusseck and Soenke Schulz. Based in Hamburg, Germany, tredition offers publishing solutions to authors and publishing houses, combined with worldwide distribution of printed and digital book content. tredition is uniquely positioned to enable authors and publishing houses to create books on their own terms and without conventional manufacturing risks.

For more information please visit: www.tredition.com

TREDITION CLASSICS

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series. The creators of this series are united by passion for literature and driven by the intention of making all public domain books available in printed format again - worldwide. Most TREDITION CLASSICS titles have been out of print and off the bookstore shelves for decades. At tredition we believe that a great book never goes out of style and that its value is eternal. Several mostly non-profit literature projects provide content to tredition. To support their good work, tredition donates a portion of the proceeds from each sold copy. As a reader of a TREDITION CLASSICS book, you support our mission to save many of the amazing works of world literature from oblivion. See all available books at www.tredition.com.



Project Gutenberg

The content for this book has been graciously provided by Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg is a non-profit organization founded by Michael Hart in 1971 at the University of Illinois. The mission of Project Gutenberg is simple: To encourage the creation and distribution of eBooks. Project Gutenberg is the first and largest collection of public domain eBooks.

Vixen, Volume II.

M. E. (Mary Elizabeth) Braddon

Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: M. E. (Mary Elizabeth) Braddon
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8472-1824-1

www.tredition.com
www.tredition.de

Copyright:

The content of this book is sourced from the public domain.

The intention of the TREDITION CLASSICS series is to make world literature in the public domain available in printed format. Literary enthusiasts and organizations, such as Project Gutenberg, worldwide have scanned and digitally edited the original texts. tredition has subsequently formatted and redesigned the content into a modern reading layout. Therefore, we cannot guarantee the exact reproduction of the original format of a particular historic edition. Please also note that no modifications have been made to the spelling, therefore it may differ from the orthography used today.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 1810.

VIXEN BY M. E. BRADDON
IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

VIXEN

A NOVEL

BY

M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.
ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1879.

The Right of Translation is reserved.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

- CHAPTER I. "Shall I tell you the Secret?"
- CHAPTER II. Wedding Garments
- CHAPTER III. "I shall look like the wicked Fairy"
- CHAPTER IV. The Vow is vowed
- CHAPTER V. War to the Knife
- CHAPTER VI. At the Kennels
- CHAPTER VII. A bad Beginning
- CHAPTER VIII. On Half Rations
- CHAPTER IX. The Owner of Bullfinch
- CHAPTER X. Something like a Ride
- CHAPTER XI. Rorie objects to Duets
- CHAPTER XII. "Fading in Music"
- CHAPTER XIII. Crying for the Moon
- CHAPTER XIV. "Kurz ist der Schmerz und ewig ist die Freude"
- CHAPTER XV. A Midsummer Night's Dream
- CHAPTER XVI. "That must end at once"

VIXEN.

CHAPTER I.

"Shall I tell you the Secret?"

For the rest of the way Violet walked with Mrs. Scobel, and at the garden-gate of the Vicarage Roderick Vawdrey wished them both good-night, and tramped off, with his basket on his back and his rod on his shoulder, for the long walk to Briarwood.

Here the children separated, and ran off to their scattered homes, dropping grateful bob-curtsies to the last—"louting," as they called it in their Forest dialect.

"You must come in and have some tea, Violet," said Mrs. Scobel. "You must be very tired."

"I am rather tired; but I think it's too late for tea. I had better get home at once."

"Ignatius shall see you home, my dear," cried Mrs. Scobel. At which the indefatigable Vicar, who had shouted himself hoarse in leading his choir, protested himself delighted to escort Miss Tempest.

The church clock struck ten as they went along the narrow forest-path between Beechdale and the Abbey House.

"Oh," cried Vixen, "I do hope mamma's people will have gone home."

A carriage rolled past them as they came out into the road.

"That's Mrs. Carteret's landau," said Vixen. "I breathe more freely. And there goes Mrs. Horwood's brougham; so I suppose everything is over. How nice it is when one's friends are so unanimous in their leave-taking."

"I shall try to remember that the next time I dine at the Abbey House," said Mr. Scobel laughing.

"Oh, please don't!" cried Violet. "You and Mrs. Scobel are different. I don't mind you; but those dreadful stiff old ladies mamma

cultivates, who think of nothing but their dress and their own importance—a little of them goes a very long way."

"But, my dear Miss Tempest, the Carterets and the Horwoods are some of the best people in the neighbourhood."

"Of course they are," answered Vixen. "If they were not they would hardly venture to be so stupid. They take the full license of their acres and their quarterings. People with a coat-of-arms found yesterday, and no land to speak of, are obliged to make themselves agreeable."

"Like Captain Winstanley," suggested Mr. Scobel. "I don't suppose he has land enough to sod a lark. But he is excellent company."

"Very," assented Vixen, "for the people who like him."

They were at the gate by this time.

"You shan't come any further unless you are coming in to see mamma," protested Vixen.

"Thanks, no; it's too late to think of that."

"Then go home immediately, and have some supper," said Vixen imperatively. "You've had nothing but a cup of weak tea since two o'clock this afternoon. You must be worn out."

"On such an occasion as to-day a man must not think of himself," said the Vicar.

"I wonder when you ever do think of yourself," said Vixen.

And indeed Mr. Scobel, like many another Anglican pastor of modern times, led a life which, save for its liberty to go where he listed, and to talk as much as he liked, was but little less severe in its exactions upon the flesh and the spirit than that of the monks of La Trappe.

The Abby House looked very quiet when Vixen went into the hall, whose doors stood open to the soft spring night. The servants were all at supper, treating themselves to some extra comforts on the strength of a dinner-party, and talking over the evening's entertainment and its bearings on their mistress's life. There was a feeling in the servants' hall that these little dinners, however seeming harm-

less, had a certain bent and tendency inimical to the household, and household peace.

"He was more particular in his manner to-night than hever," said the butler, as he dismembered a duck which had been "hotted up" after removal from the dining-room. "He feels hisself master of the whole lot of us already. I could see it in his hi. 'Is that the cabinet 'ock, Forbes?' he says to me, when I was a-filling round after the bait. 'No,' says I, 'it is not. We ain't got so much of our cabinet 'ocks that we can afford to trifle with 'em.' Of course I said it in a hunder-tone, confidential like; but I wanted him to know who was master of the cellar."

"There'll be nobody master but him when once he gets his foot inside these doors," said Mrs. Trimmer, the housekeeper, mournful shake of her head. "No, Porline, I'll have a noo pertater. Them canister peas ain't got no flaviouir with them."

While they were enjoying themselves, with a certain chastening touch of prophetic melancholy, in the servants' hall, Violet was going slowly upstairs and along the corridor which led past her mother's rooms.

"I must go in and wish mamma good-night," she thought; "though I am pretty sure of a lecture for my pains."

Just at this moment a door opened, and a soft voice called "Violet," pleadingly.

"Dear mamma, I was just coming in to say good-night."

"Were you, darling? I heard your footstep, and I was afraid you were going by. And I want very particularly to see you to-night, Violet."

"Do you, mamma? I hope not to scold me for going with the school-children. They had such a happy afternoon; and ate! it was like a miracle. Not so little serving for so many, but so few devouring so much."

Pamela Tempest put her arm round her daughter, and kissed her, with more warmth of affection than she had shown since the sad days after the Squire's death. Violet looked at her mother wonderingly. She could hardly see the widow's fair delicate face in the dim-

ly-lighted room. It was one of the prettiest rooms in the house—half boudoir half dressing-room, crowded with elegant luxuries and modern inventions, gipsy tables, book-stands, toy-cabinets of egg-shell china, a toilet table *à la* Pompadour, a writing-desk *à la* Sevigné. Such small things had made the small joys of Mrs. Tempest's life. When she mourned her kind husband, she lamented him as the someone who had bought her everything she wanted.

She had taken off her dinner-dress, and looked particularly fair and youthful in her soft muslin dressing-gown, trimmed with Mechlin lace which had cost as much as a small holding on the outskirts of the Forest. Even in that subdued light Violet could see that her mother's cheeks were pinker than usual, that her eyes were clouded with tears, and her manner anxiously agitated.

"Mamma," cried the girl, "there is something wrong, I know. Something has happened."

"There is nothing wrong, love. Bat something has happened. Something which I hope will not make you unhappy—for it has made me very happy."

"You are talking in enigmas, mamma, and I am too tired to be good at guessing riddles, just now," said Violet, becoming suddenly cold as ice.

A few moments ago she had been all gentleness and love, responding to the unwonted affection of her mother's caresses. Now she drew herself away and stood aloof, with her heart beating fast and furiously. She divined what was coming. She had guessed the riddle already.

"Come and sit by the fire, Violet, and I will tell you—everything," said Mrs. Tempest coaxingly, seating herself in the low semi-circular chair which was her especial delight.

"I can hear what you have to tell just as well where I am," answered Violet curtly, walking to the latticed window, which was open to the night. The moon was shining over the rise and fall of the woods; the scent of the flowers came stealing up from the garden. Without, all was calm and sweetness, within, fever and smothered wrath. "I can't think how you can endure a fire on such a night. The room is positively stifling."

"Ah Violet, you have not my sad susceptibility to cold."

"No, mamma. I don't keep myself shut up like an unset diamond in a jeweller's strong-box."

"I don't think I can tell you—the little secret I have to tell, Violet, unless you come over to me and sit by my side, and give me your hand, and let me feel as if you were really fond of me," pleaded Mrs. Tempest, with a little gush of piteousness. "You seem like an enemy, standing over there with your back to me, looking out at the sky."

"Perhaps there is no need for you to tell me anything, mamma," answered Violet, in a tone which, to that tremulous listener in the low seat by the fire, sounded as severe as the voice of a judge pronouncing sentence. "Shall I tell you the secret?"

There was no answer.

"Shall I, mamma?"

"I don't think you can, my love."

"Yes, I am afraid I can. The secret—which is no secret to me or to anyone else in the world, any more than the place where the ostrich has put his head is a secret when his body is sticking up out of the sand—the secret is that, after being for seventeen happy honourable years the wife of the best and tiniest of men—the kindest, most devoted, and most generous of husbands—you are going to take another husband, who comes to you with no better credentials than a smooth tongue and a carefully-drilled figure, and who will punish your want of faith and constancy to my dead father by making the rest of your life miserable—as you will deserve that it shall be. Yes, mother, I, your only child, say so. You will deserve to be wretched if you marry Captain Winstanley."

The widow gave a faint scream, half indignation, half terror. For the moment she felt as if some prophetic curse had been hurled upon her. The tall straight figure in the white gown, standing in the full flood of moonlight, looked awful as Cassandra, prophesying death and doom in the wicked house at Argos.

"It is too bad," sobbed Mrs. Tempest; "it is cruel, undutiful, disrespectful, positively wicked for a daughter to talk to a mother as you have talked to me to-night. How can Miss McCroke have brought

you up, I wonder, that you are capable of using such language? Have you forgotten the Fifth Commandment?"

"No. It tells me to honour my father and my mother. I honour my dead father, I honour you, when I try to save you from the perdition of a second marriage."

"Perdition!" echoed Mrs. Tempest faintly, "what language!"

"I knew when that adventurer came here, that he intended to make himself master of this house – to steal my dead father's place," cried Vixen passionately.

"You have no right to call him an adventurer. He is an officer and a gentleman. You offer him a cruel, an unprovoked insult. You insult me still more deeply by your abuse of him. Am I so old, or so ugly, or so altogether horrid, that a man cannot love me for my own sake?"

"Not such a man as Captain Winstanley. He does not know what love means. He would have made me marry him if he could, because I am to have the estate by-and-bye. Failing that, he has made you accept him for your husband. Yes, he has conquered you, as a cat conquers a bird, fascinating the poor wretch with its hateful green eyes. You are quite young enough and pretty enough to win a good man's regard, if you were a penniless unprotected widow, needing a husband to shelter you and provide for you. But you are the natural victim of such a man as Captain Winstanley."

"You are altogether unjust and unreasonable," exclaimed Mrs. Tempest, weeping copiously. "Your poor dear father spoiled you. No one but a spoiled child would talk as you are talking. Who made you a judge of Captain Winstanley? It is not true that he ever wanted to marry you. I don't believe it for an instant."

"Very well, mother. If you are wilfully blind – –"

"I am not blind. I have lived twice as long as you have. I am a better judge of human nature than you can be."

"Not of your admirer's, your flatterer's nature," cried Vixen. "He has slavered you with pretty speeches and soft words, as the cobra slavers his victim, and he will devour you, as the cobra does. He will swallow up your peace of mind, your self-respect, your inde-

pendence, your money — all good things you possess. He will make you contemptible in the eyes of all who know you. He will make you base in your own eyes."

"It is not true. You are blinded by prejudice."

"I want to save you from yourself, if I can."

"You are too late to save me, as you call it. Captain Winstanley has touched my heart by his patient devotion, I have not been so easily won as you seem to imagine. I have refused him three times. He knows that I had made up my mind never to marry again. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than a second marriage. I liked him as a companion and friend. That he knew. But I never intended that he should be more to me than a friend. He knew that. His patience has conquered me. Such devotion as he has given me has not often been offered to a woman. I do not think any woman living could resist it. He is all that is good and noble, and I am assured, Violet, that as a second father — —"

Vixen interrupted her with a cry of horror.

"For God's sake, mamma, do not utter the word 'father' in conjunction with his name. He may become your husband — I have no power to prevent that evil — but he shall never call himself my father."

"What happiness can there be for any of us, Violet, when you start with such prejudices?" whimpered Mrs. Tempest.

"I do not expect there will be much," said Vixen. "Good-night, mamma."

"You are very unkind. You won't even stop to hear how it came about — how Conrad persuaded me to forego my determination."

"No, mamma. I don't want to hear the details. The fact is enough for me. If it would be any use for me to go down upon my knees and entreat you to give up this man, I would gladly do it; but I fear it would be no use."

"It would not. Violet," answered the widow, with modest resoluteness. "I have given Conrad my word. I cannot withdraw it."

"Then I have nothing more to say," replied Vixen, with her hand upon the door, "except good-night."

"You will not even kiss me?"

"Excuse me, mamma; I am not in a kissing humour."

And so Vixen left her.

Mrs. Tempest sat by the fading fire, and cried herself into a gentle slumber. It was very hard. She had longed to pour the story of this second courtship—its thrilling, unexpected joys, its wondrous surprises—into a sympathetic ear. And Violet, the natural recipient of these gentle confidences, had treated her so cruelly.

She felt herself sorely ill-used; and then came soothing thoughts about her *trousseau*, her wedding-dress, the dress in which she should start for her wedding-tour. All things would of course be chastened and subdued. No woman can be a bride twice in her life; but Mrs. Tempest meant that the *trousseau* should, in its way, be perfect. There should be no rush or excitement in the preparation; nothing should be scamped or hurried. Calmness, deliberation, and a faultless taste should pervade all things.

"I will have no trimming but Valenciennes for my under-linen," she decided; "it is the only lace that never offends. And I will have old English monograms in satin-stitch upon everything. My *peignoirs* will require a good deal of study; they admit of so much variety. I will have only a few dresses, but those shall be from Paris. Theodore must go over and get them from Worth. She knows what suits me better than I do myself. I am not going to be extravagant, but Conrad so appreciates elegance and taste; and of course he will wish me to be well dressed."

And so, comforted by these reflections, Mrs. Tempest sank into a gentle slumber, from which she was awakened by Pauline, who had discussed her mistress's foolishness over a hearty supper, and now came to perform the duties of the evening toilet.

"Oh Pauline," cried the widow, with a shiver, "I'm glad you awoke me. I've just had such an awful dream."

"Lor', ma'am! What about?"

"Oh, an awful dream. I thought Madame Theodore sent me home a *trousseau* and that there was not a single thing that would fit. I looked an object in every one of the dresses."

CHAPTER II.

Wedding Garments.

After that night Vixen held her peace. There were no more bitter words between Mrs. Tempest and her daughter, but the mother knew that there was a wellspring of bitterness—a Marah whose waters were inexhaustible—in her daughter's heart; and that domestic happiness, under one roof, was henceforth impossible for these two.

There were very few words of any kind between Violet and Mrs. Tempest at this time. The girl kept herself as much a possible apart from her mother. The widow lived her languid drawing-room life, dawdling away long slow days that left no more impression behind them than the drift of rose-leaves across the velvet lawn before her windows. A little point-lace, deftly worked by slim white fingers flashing with gems; a little Tennyson; a little Owen Meredith; a little Browning—only half understood at best; a little scandal; a great deal of orange pekoe, sipped out of old Worcester teacups of royal blue or flowered Swansea; an hour's letter-writing on the last fashionable note-paper; elegantly-worded inanity, delicately penned in a flowing Italian hand, with long loops to the Y's and G's, and a serpentine curve at the end of every word.

No life could well have been more useless or vapid. Even Mrs. Tempest's charities—those doles of wine and soup, bread and clothing, which are looked for naturally from the mistress of a fine old mansion—were vicarious. Trimmer, the housekeeper, did everything. Indeed, in the eyes of the surrounding poor, Mrs. Trimmer was mistress of the Abbey House. It was to her they looked for relief; it was her reproof they feared; and to her they louted lowest. The faded beauty, reclining in her barouche, wrapped in white raiment of softest China crape, and whirling past them in a cloud of

dust, was as remote as a goddess. They could hardly have realised that she was fashioned out of the same clay that made themselves.

Upon so smooth and eventless an existence Captain Winstanley's presence came like a gust of north wind across the sultry languor of an August noontide. His energy, his prompt, resolute manner of thinking and acting upon all occasions, impressed Mrs. Tempest with an extraordinary sense of his strength of mind and manliness. It seemed to her that she must always be safe where he was. No danger, no difficulty could assail her while his strong arm was there to ward it off. She felt very much as Mary Stuart may have done about Bothwell; when, moved to scornful aversion by the silken boy-profligate Darnley, her heart acknowledged its master in the dark freebooter who had slain him. There had been no Darnley in Pamela Tempest's life; but this resolute, clear-brained soldier was her Bothwell. She had the Mary Stuart temperament, the love of compliments and fine dresses, dainty needlework and luxurious living, without the Stuart craft. In Conrad Winstanley she had found her master, and she was content to be so mastered; willing to lay down her little sum of power at his feet, and live henceforward like a tame falcon at the end of a string. Her position, as a widow, was an excellent one. The Squire's will had been dictated in fullest confidence in his wife's goodness and discretion; and doubtless also with the soothing idea common to most hale and healthy men, that it must be a long time before their testamentary arrangements can come into effect. It was a holograph will, and the Squire's own composition throughout. "He would have no lawyer's finger in that pie," he had said. The disposal of his estate had cost him many hours of painful thought before he rang the bell for his bailiff and his butler, and executed it in their presence.

Mrs. Tempest was mistress of the Abbey House for her life; and at her death it was to become Violet's property. Violet was not to come of age until she was twenty-five, and in the meantime her mother was to be her sole guardian, and absolute mistress of everything. There was no question of an allowance for the maintenance of the heiress, no question as to the accumulation of income. Everything was to belong to Mrs. Tempest till Violet came of age. She had only to educate and maintain her daughter in whatever manner she might think fit. At Violet's majority the estate was to pass into her

possession, charged with an income of fifteen hundred a year, to be paid to the widow for her lifetime. Until her twenty-fifth birthday, therefore, Violet was in the position of a child, entirely dependent on her mother's liberality, and bound to obey her mother as her natural and only guardian. There was no court of appeal nearer than the Court of Chancery. There was no one to whom the two women could make their complaints or refer their differences.

Naturally, Captain Winstanley had long before this made himself acquainted with the particulars of the Squire's will. For six years he saw himself sole master of a very fine estate, and at the end of six years reduced to an income which seemed, comparatively, a pittance, and altogether inadequate for the maintenance of such a place as the Abbey House. Still, fifteen hundred a year and the Abbey House were a long way on the right side of nothing; and Captain Winstanley felt that he had fallen on his feet.

That was a dreary June for Vixen. She hugged her sorrow, and lived in a mental solitude which was almost awful in so young a soul. She made a confidante of no one, not even of kind-hearted Mrs. Scobel, who was quite ready to pity her and condole with her, and who was secretly indignant at the widow's folly.

The fact of Mrs. Tempest's intended marriage had become known to all her friends and neighbours, with the usual effect of such intelligence. Society said sweet things to her; and praised Captain Winstanley; and hoped the wedding would be soon; and opined that it would be quite a nice thing for Miss Tempest to have such an agreeable stepfather, with whom she could ride to hounds as she had done with the dear Squire. And the same society, driving away from the Abbey House in its landaus and pony-carriages, after half-an-hour's pleasant gossip and a cup of delicately flavoured tea, called Mrs. Tempest a fool, and her intended husband an adventurer.

Vixen kept aloof from all the gossip and tea-drinking. She did not even go near her old friends the Scobels, in these days of smothered wrath and slow consuming indignation. She deserted the schools, her old pensioners, even the little village children, to whom she had loved to carry baskets of good things, and pocketfuls of halfpence, and whose queer country dialect had seemed as sweet to her as the

carolling of finches and blackbirds in the woods. Everything in the way of charity was left to Mrs. Trimmer now. Vixen took her long solitary rides in the Forest, roaming wherever there was a footway for her horse under the darkening beeches, dangerously near the swampy ground where the wet grass shone in the sunlight, the green reedy patches that meant peril; into the calm unfathomable depths of Mark Ash, or Queen's Bower; up to the wild heathy crest of Boldrewood; wherever there was loneliness and beauty.

Roderick had gone to London for the season, and was riding with Lady Mabel in the Row, or dancing attendance at garden-parties, exhibitions, and flower-shows.

"I wonder how he likes the dusty days, and the crowded rooms, the classical music, and high-art exhibitions?" thought Vixen savagely. "I wonder how he likes being led about like a Pomeranian terrier? I don't think I could endure it if I were a man. But I suppose when one is in love — —"

And then Vixen thought of their last talk together, and how little of the lover's enthusiasm there was in Roderick's mention of his cousin.

"In the bottom of my heart I know that he is going to marry her for the sake of her estate, or because his mother wished it and urged it, and he was too weak-minded to go on saying No. I would not say it for the world, or let anyone else say it in my hearing, but, in my heart of hearts, I know he does not love her."

And then, after a thoughtful silence, she cried to the mute unresponsive woods:

"Oh, it is wicked, abominable, mad, to marry without love!"

The woods spoke to her of Roderick Vawdrey. How often she had ridden by his side beneath these spreading beech-boughs, dipping her childish head, just as she dipped it to-day, under the low branches, steering her pony carefully between the prickly holly-bushes, plunging deep into the hollows where the dry leaves crackled under his hoofs.