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GRACE LEE.

A TALE.

BY

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G R A C E L E E.

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CHAPTER I.

THE snow fell fast; soft, white, and noiseless it was borne past the parlour window. A gray sky, a white, hilly horizon bounded the outward prospect. Within all was touched with the red firelight: tables, chairs, cabinet, and mirror gave back the same warm and burning glow.

A gray-haired old man, with a harsh, sarcastic face, sat writing by the window. A middle-aged, good-tempered looking woman, sewed by the fireside; further on, in the back-ground, and half gloom of the room, a slender, dark-haired and dark-eyed girl of seventeen, sat on a low stool, with a heavy quarto, a Hebrew Bible, on her knees. One hand supported her cheek; the other rested on the book; her eyes were fixed on its strange eastern characters, her long, drooping curls half veiled the page.

She was not, and never could be, pretty; yet her dark face had warmth and character, her eyes great beauty, and her young form much grace. Her name

was Grace Lee. She was born far away, amongst Welsh hills, but she was an orphan, and for two years she had lived with her guardian, an old priest, Doctor Crankey, and his cousin, Miss Amy Crankey, in one of the wildest nooks of northern England. Doctor Crankey was a learned man; Miss Crankey was skilled in every art of the needle: both zealously taught the young girl all they 'knew, and thus an accomplished scholar and as accomplished a needle-woman grew up Grace Lee in a bleak and lonely home.

A gust of wind swept by the house; it died far away with a faint murmur on wild moors. The young girl bent her ear and listened. "How far that wind has come," she thought; "how far it must be going — how wide the world must be." She put her book away; she left the room; she went up to the highest part of the house, a terrace on the roof. The snow fell on her bare head; the keen north wind blew back her hair from her face, but her blood was ardent and young; her cheek only freshened to feel the blast, she only shook her head and smiled at the falling snow. She looked around her; a wide, white plain spread to the foot of white hills; a pale sky met a paler horizon; she clasped her hands on her bosom; she raised herself on tiptoe; she stretched her slender neck, and bent a keen, eagle look that seemed as if it would pierce every barrier. "Ah!" she thought again, "how wide the world must be!" and seized with a wanderer's

longing, she thought of burning Africa, of the luxuriant New World, of fair southern Europe, with the sun shining on her brown ruins, and the blue Mediterranean washing her antique shores.

"I wish I were a queen," she thought, her head pensively inclined towards her right shoulder, "but a queen without her state, without her kingdom; what place, beautiful or famous, would I not see! what delight should not be mine! I would do great things; I would build cathedrals; I would found hospitals; I would erect palaces; I would make a cardinal of Doctor Crankey, a duchess of Miss Amy, a princess of Lily. I would have more jewels than a sultana, more robes than there are days in the year; and withal I would be so generous and so good, that every one should love and praise Queen Grace."

"Grace, my dear," said the gentle voice of Miss Crankey, from below, "will you come down and make the tea, if you please?"

The day-dreamer awoke, and laughing at her own dreams, she ran down lightly; she made the tea; the frugal meal was soon over; she returned to her Hebrew; Doctor Crankey to a seven years begun History of the Church; Miss Amy to a Penelope piece of embroidery. Quiet was the evening by the bright fireside; Grace did not feel it dull; study, too, has her charm — a charm more true than that of dreams, and almost as sweet.