

**KATHARINE
REGINA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649223381

Katharine Regina by Walter Besant

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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REGINA**

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KATHARINE REGINA

BY
WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF "ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN"
ETC.



BRISTOL
J. W. ARROWSMITH, QUAY STREET
LONDON
SIMPSON, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT AND COMPANY LIMITED

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VOL. XXVI.

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KATHARINE REGINA.

CHAPTER I.

"The Cup—"

ONE of the most delightful things that can possibly happen to an engaged couple, especially when they are just about to carry on that engagement to its legitimate end, is the acquisition, by gift or by inheritance, by chance or luck or windfall, of a house, a good house, in a good situation, solidly furnished—every young woman of judgment much prefers solidity to æsthetics. Unfortunately these windfalls occur too seldom: the rich cousin does not always die intestate, just when it would be most convenient: the long-lost and benevolent uncle does not always turn up at the right moment: the miserly guardian does not always, just when it would be most useful, prove to be an old man of the largest heart and the most unselfish generosity: and in these days of general depression nobody has anything to give away except farms which are no longer of any use. For these reasons most of us have to begin our married course with the suburban villa of unstable equilibrium and uncertain drains, and to furnish it as best we may, bit by bit, or on the three years' system.

Imagine then, if you can, the unbounded satisfac-

tion with which Katie received the intelligence that her lover's uncle—his Uncle Joseph, whom she had never seen, for whose decease she had not shed a single tear, and who was angry with Tom for not following his own profession—had actually bequeathed to him, absolutely, the whole of his estate, including, with all kinds of real and personal property, a beautiful great house completely furnished, in Russell Square, on the east side, where they have long gardens, and where the sun shines full upon the drawing-rooms in the afternoon. Besides the house there were lands and freeholds, railway shares, gas and water shares, shares in trams, money in funds, money on mortgage—why, there was enough, it was certain, to make up more than a thousand pounds a year. What happiness! More than a thousand pounds a year of additional income, to a couple who were going to marry on about five hundred! And a big house, solidly furnished, in Russell Square!

People turn up their aristocratic noses at Russell Square, but there are nowhere more comfortable houses, and there is nowhere a more central situation. A truly wonderful piece of good fortune! To be sure, Uncle Joseph had only two nephews, and therefore he might have been expected to leave something to Tom. But then Uncle Joseph had never expressed any intention of dying. And, again, Tom had offended him because he would become a journalist, and his uncle could not understand how any young man who respected himself could follow a profession in which there was no money to be made and no prizes to be won except the editorship of a paper. Now the other nephew, for his part, in order to please his uncle had become a solicitor and was now in practice. But then the world had never learned that this other nephew, who was never seen at his uncle's

house, by long-continued courses, having a fine, bold nature, free from the restraints of prejudice, had estranged his uncle far more than Tom. And now Tom had all, and the other—his name was James Hanaper Rolfe—had none.

Tom had all!

In thinking of this wonderful dispensation Katie was fain to sigh, so happy she was, and to say: "Poor, dear Uncle Joseph! To think, Tom, that he has now gone to a world where a word of gratitude will never reach him! And yet, what a fine, clear insight into character Uncle Joseph must have possessed to recognise the splendid abilities and the genius of his nephew—you, Tom. Poor, dear Un—cle Jo—seph!"

No one, certainly, ought to be judged merely by what men say of him. People had been accustomed to say hard things of Uncle Joseph. They called him miser and curmudgeon—I wonder how a man feels who knows that he is called a curmudgeon (curmudgeon, derived from *cur*, an inferior species of dog; and *mudgeon*, from the Anglo-Saxon *mudge*, the meaning of which I have forgotten). Does that man grind his teeth? Perhaps, dear reader, in spite of your benevolent heart, they call you a curmudgeon. Do you feel badly about it? People said, moreover, that Uncle Joseph was ill-tempered and bearish, because he had grown old and outlived his clients and had lost some of his money. That was what they said. And yet here he was, in the very noblest manner, forgiving Tom for going his own way, making a will entirely in his favour, and retiring to a better world just when his absence would produce the most beneficial result possible. Good, maligned Uncle Joseph!

Really, when one comes to think, it was a kind of happiness quite out of the common—a lot which