



The Golden Calf

Mary Elizabeth Braddon

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'Where is Miss Palliser?' inquired Miss Pew, in that awful voice of hers, at which the class-room trembled, as at unexpected thunder. A murmur ran along the desks, from girl to girl, and then some one, near that end of the long room which was sacred to Miss Pew and her lieutenants, said that Miss Palliser was not in the classroom. 'I think she is taking her music lesson, ma'am,' faltered the girl who had ventured diffidently to impart this information to the schoolmistress, 'Think?' exclaimed Miss Pew, in her stentorian voice. 'How can you think about an absolute fact? Either she is taking her lesson, or she is not taking her lesson. There is no room for thought. Let Miss Palliser be sent for this moment.' At this command, as at the behest of the Homeric Jove himself, half a dozen Irises started up to carry the ruler's message; but again Miss Pew's mighty tones resounded in the echoing class-room. 'I don't want twenty girls to carry one message. Let Miss Rylance go.' There was a grim smile on the principal's coarsely-featured countenance as she gave this order. Miss Rylance was not one of the six who had started up to do the schoolmistress's bidding. She was a young lady who considered her mission in life anything rather than to carry a message—a young lady who thought herself quite the most refined and elegant thing at Mauleverer Manor, and so entirely superior to her surroundings as to be absolved from the necessity of being obliging. But Miss Pew's voice, when fortified by anger, was too much even for Miss Rylance's calm sense of her own merits, and she rose at the lady's bidding, laid down her ivory penholder on the neatly written exercise, and walked out of the room quietly, with the slow and stately deportment imparted by a long course of instruction from Madame Rigolette, the fashionable dancing-mistress. 'Rylance won't much like being sent on a message,' whispered Miss Cobb, the Kentish brewer's daughter, to Miss Mullins, the Northampton carriage-builder's heiress.



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