

THE RETURN OF RHODA

(By Susan Keating Glaspell)

Seems a little lonely at times, mother."

"Now, pa, you know it's all for the best."

"I ain't arguing it ain't all for the best. I was saying it was a little lonely—that's all."

Mrs. Free pulled the big wooden rocking chair up nearer the stove, which was sending a warm glow through the old-fashioned sitting-room and took up the soft white wool which she was to transform into "one of those shoulder things" for Rhoda—Rhoda would need such things now that she was in the city.

But instead of beginning her work she turned a little in her chair and looked out at the broad expanse of white. The hills were all cold and shining, and more snow was even now flying in the air. Winter had come in earnest.

"Of course, mother," said the old farmer, with a quiet, kindly sort of humor in his voice, "you ain't never lonesome."

"When I do get lonesome, pa," she said, picking up her work, "I just keep thinking how it's all for the best—and that's consoling."

John Free walked over to the window. "If Rhoda was home now, and was teaching school, I'd just about be putting Nellie to the cutter. Rhoda never did much walking over her roads when I was around."

"And Rhoda appreciated it, pa," said Mrs. Free, after a pause in which she had been silently counting stitches.

"Rhoda was the best teacher they ever had round here." And then, as his wife was still counting stitches and did not answer, he continued, half aggressively, "Everybody says that."

"Fourteen—fifteen—sixteen. You never heard me say, pa, Rhoda wasn't a good teacher. All I said was, a girl who could sing like Rhoda had no business teaching the Hickory Grove school—or any other, for that matter."

"Brother William says there ain't the same inspiration in his preaching now that Rhoda's left the choir; and I will say," his voice sank to the tone of one making a confession, "that while I go to church to worship the Lord, the worship was not a little—well, a little more pleasant like, I might say, when Rhoda was there."

"More than one has said that," remarked Mrs. Free, complacently.

"I never saw anything to beat the way this whole community leaned on Rhoda! 'Twas Rhoda this and Rhoda that! Nothing from a barn raising to a funeral could go on without her. They can't ever say our Rhoda was stingy with her singing, mother."

"I guess our Rhoda wouldn't be her pa's daughter if she was stingy with anything," said Mrs. Free, sweetly.

She had a way of saying those things when least expected, and they never failed to be disconcerting.

"Now I wasn't counting on that having anything to do with it," he said, awkwardly.

"Mother," he went on, after listening patiently to "thirteen—fourteen—fifteen—sixteen," "shall you ever forget how she sang 'Lead, Kindly Light' at Tim Power's funeral? Seems like of all the times I hear her, that was the most moving."

The soft wool fell to Mrs. Free's lap. "Rhoda's so sympathetic," she said, softly.

John Free chuckled. "Pears to me she wouldn't be her mother's daughter if she wasn't some sympathetic."

"Fourteen—fifteen—sixteen—turn," was the only response.

"S'pos I might as well be about the choris. Does seem like this winter was going to be mighty long."

"Now, pa, don't be so restless—fourteen—fifteen—sixteen—there!—that's wrong."

He stood by the window, putting on his heavy coat. "Looks like Fred Barrett's cutter coming," he remarked.

"If Rhoda was home it wouldn't be hard to guess where he was making for," remarked Mrs. Free.

"Coming 'long pretty brisk. Cold out, I reckon. He's got some one in with him—and 'tain't a man. Mother," he cried, excitedly, after a moment, "Fred Barrett's opening the gate! Mother," he added, in a choked voice, "come here!"

She stood beside him at the window, and he pointed down to the gate. "What do you think?" he gasped.

The woman's face grew strangely white. "It's—it's—it can't be—"

"Rhoda!"

They stood there in a daze, and then two pairs of hands were fumbling at the knob.

How Rhoda got out of the sleigh, who carried in the valise, how Fred Barrett got away without being so much as asked in, they never quite know. It was all a strange whirl, and then the door was shut, the sleigh-bells died away, and Rhoda, after one strange, frightened look round the old room, threw herself in her mother's arms—hat, snowy coat, and all, and there burst from her the wild, uncontrollable sobs which follow a long, bitter strain.

The mother stood holding her in utter silence—she was a mother, and she knew what was best. But when John Free could bear it no longer, he put a hand on the girl's shoulder, and said brokenly, his own rugged face wet with tears, "Rhoda, girl, you're home now. No matter what's happened, it's all right now."

She raised her head then and grasped her father's hands. "It was a mistake," she moaned, pitifully, "a mistake!"

"Now, what's a mistake?" said John Free. "I just want to know."

"Mother," cried the girl, her voice still thick with sobs, "it's gone! Our dream's gone, mother! I—I—oh, I—can't sing!" She sank to a chair, her head fell to a table, and sobs such as the old room had never heard before crowded upon one another in hot, passionate succession.

"Something happened to your voice, Rhoda?" asked the old farmer, timidly.

She grew more quiet then. "Oh, no, pa," she said, "nothing's happened to it. It was never there. I never could sing."

"Well, I guess we know better than that! And whoever said—"

"Now, pa," broke in Mrs. Free, "this is no time for arguing. Come right up to the fire, Dodie, and we'll get off those wet things and get a good, hot drink. You'll take your death of cold—sitting there as though no one cared whether you were wet or dry!"

After her feet were warm, and she had taken the hot tea her mother had made for her, and the old surroundings had taken a little of the sting from her wound, the girl began to cast about in her mind for words which would not distress her parents. They were sitting on each side of her, eager to know, and yet reluctant to ask any questions which would bring pain, their sorrow, after all, tempered with gladness because she was at home.

"You see, pa," she began quietly, "there are no really great singers round here. I am the best there is, and so, because I can sing a little, Miss Parsons—all of us, made a mistake and thought I had a great voice—when I haven't."

"But I can't see—" began the old farmer.

"Now, pa," protested his wife, "just let Rhoda tell it."

"The city is full of good singers, mother. They come from all over the country. There are thousands of them who can sing better than I can."

"Now, I don't believe that!" cried her father, slapping his knee hard.

The girl smiled at him fondly. "You'll have to believe it, pa, for my teacher, one of the best in the whole city, said so."

"He did, did he? Well, what had you done to make him mad? There's something behind it!"

"Oh, no, pa. And you mustn't resent it. It was very kind of him. He might have gone on taking our money for a long time, but he didn't see you. He was very good."

"Hum!" grunted John Free, dubiously.

"And he was so very kind about it. It was after my lesson, and I was standing there, putting on my gloves, when he looked over at me in a strange kind of way and asked me just what I hoped to make of my voice. I didn't quite know what to say, and then he asked me point blank if I expected to make money out of it, to make back the money I was putting into it. I told him I did, and then—then he asked me something about our circumstances here at home—oh, very kindly, pa," as an angry exclamation burst from the old farmer,—"and when I told him we weren't rich, that—that it had been an effort, you know, he looked at me very queerly, and then he sat down and told me the truth." She hesitated, and then went on with a little catch in her voice: "And in spite of all I've suffered, I thank him from the bottom of my heart."

"Her mother reached over and took

one of her hands. "Just what did he say, Dodie?"

"Merely that it wasn't great, mother, that it wasn't worth the money we would have to put into it. He says voices can be made now without much to start on, but it takes a long time and a great expenditure, and when there are so many who have—have something good to begin with, why, my voice would bring us nothing but—disappointment. And I can see that he's right. He says it's a nice little home voice," she went on, trying to smile, "but that is all it ever will be, you know, and I can't afford to pay five dollars a lesson—for don't you see, mother?"

Mrs. Free only pressed her child's hand tighter, fighting against the lump which kept rising in her own throat.

"I wasn't very philosophical about it at first," continued the girl, her voice shaking as if it might give way with any word. "Of course, I didn't cry or make any fuss before him. I could see that it was kind of him and told him so, and that I wouldn't take any more lessons. Oh, he was so good about it! He told me that we couldn't all have good voices in this world; that it was our fault if we didn't have them, and that if we did the best we could with what we had, there was nothing to be ashamed of. He shook hands with me, and said he had liked me very much, and that it was just because he liked me he had told me."

"I know that what he said was true—about our only being expected to do our best with what we had, and yet—O mother! mother!—you know how foolish I've been! You know how I've stood up in our little church, and dreamed it was a great city church with thousands of people—you know how I've gone to sleep at night dreaming I was taking great armfuls of flowers, while people clapped and clapped to hear me sing again! Mother, you know!" and she pressed the worn hand she held close to her cheek, while the hot tears ran down her wet white face.

"Which was all this?" demanded her father, his voice gruff with the effort to keep back the tears.

Rhoda hesitated. "Ten days ago," she said, at last.

"And where under the sun have you been ever since?"

She pushed back her hair wearily. "I've been trying to work in a store—and I was almost as dismal a failure at that as I was as a prima donna."

"Now, Rhoda—how could you?" cried her mother.

"Oh, you don't know the feeling I had! I wanted to come home, and yet I just couldn't. It seemed like coming home defeated. It seemed I just must do something in the city, and so one of the girls got me a place in a store."

She paused, and then laughed—the nearest to a natural laugh they had heard since her return. "I was an awful clerk! I hated it! The air was so bad, and some of the people were so snippy and horrid. And then, father, one night I came home with my head and my feet both aching, and all tired and sick, and I found your letter about Mr. Childs wishing I was home to take the school, and about you and mother being so lonesome, and—and that letter brought me home."

John Free cleared his throat and looked over at his wife with an air which defied contradiction or rebuke.

"It's a curious thing," he said, "that I was telling your mother this very afternoon that I had nine-tenths of a notion to go and telegraph Rhoda to come home. I—I ain't feeling any too well this winter."

"Aren't you, pa?" she asked, in quick concern. "What seems—"

"Oh, I'll be all right now," he hastened to say, and looked boldly over at his wife.

He went out to see about the chores then, and the girl sat and talked her heart out to her mother. When it came time to get supper, she went about some of her old duties naturally, almost gaily, and she more than once brought joy to her mother's heart by letting her laugh ring gladly out through the old kitchen.

"Mother," she called from the window, where she was standing beating an egg, "where under the sun is father going this time of night? He's got Nellie hitched up, and he's going off!"

"Now, I do say!" cried Mrs. Free, and hurried to the door to enter protest, but only in time to see her husband wave his hand in provoking fashion and drive away.

"Well, if that isn't funny!" laughed the girl, and went on beating the eggs.

When he came back half an hour later, he sat by the fire and watched Rhoda set the table. "Joe Childs was mighty tickled," he chuckled, at last.

She put down the sugar-bowl with a thump. "Now, father, where have you been?"

"Hum! Guess I've got a right to go about my own business. I had an errand up to Joe Childs's and while there—while there," he repeated, eyeing her defiantly, "I happened to mention that you were home—and say, he jumped right out of his chair and waved his arms and shouted at me, 'Look here, John Free, will Rhoda teach our schools?' and I replied that you might consider it."

"Now—father!"

She laid the knives and forks round, and then stood there, looking at him with eyes a little misty. "But it is nice to feel you're back where some one wants you—where—where you're a success," she said, tremulously.

"Never was there a teacher round here like you," said John Free.

It was after they had finished supper and the dishes were cleared away and washed, and Rhoda was sitting by the table, reading, while her mother sat close at hand, knitting upon the soft wool thing, that the old farmer shifted in his chair and began, a trifle nervously:

"If it makes you feel bad, Rhoda, don't think about it; but many a night I've sat here before I went to bed, and tried to think how it would seem to hear your voice in my ears again, and—"

"Now, pa," broke in his wife, "how can you?"

"To-morrow, father," said Rhoda, tremulously.

"All right—just as you say," and the old man turned back to the fire.

For a long time Rhoda sat there, pretending to read, but not seeing a word. She was thinking of what the teacher had told her of doing the best she could with what she had, thinking how kind they had been to her home-coming—how they had made it almost happy, instead of sad. She was thinking that to use her voice would always be beautiful—that the world's cold shoulder could not thrust away a faith born of love.

She rose then and walked over to the little organ which stood in the corner. "I will sing a little, pa," she said, "if you want me to."

They drew their chairs round where they could see her, and waited for her to begin. Her mother's face was wet with tears, and the old farmer put his hand to his mouth and coughed. She sat at the organ for several minutes in silence, her hands resting on the keys, wondering what to sing, wondering if disappointment had not ruined all the voice she ever had. And then it seemed that the spirit of that home, that little country home where there was love and peace, wrapped her round as with a mantle.

She raised her head, and her voice sweet and tender, carried into the old room, to the two faithful hearts, the beautiful, never old words:

"Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
A charm from the skies seem to hal-low us there,
Which, sought through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere."

Rhoda had never sung so well before, for she was singing out her gratitude and love—singing out her heart's thankfulness for this refuge from the stress and sorrows of the world.

There may be more piety in a smile than in a tear. One good deed is worth more than a thousand groans.—Rev. Madison C. Peters.

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THE LITURGICAL CHANT.

An important Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites has been issued in Latin as to the publication and approbation of books containing the liturgical Gregorian Chant. The following is a translation:

Decree of Instructions as to the publication and approbation of books containing the liturgical Gregorian Chant.

Since His Holiness Pius X, by Divine Providence Pope, by his "Motu Proprio" of the 25th April, 1904, decided that publishers could print the Gregorian Chant restored by him according to the Vatican edition, it has appeared opportune to this Sacred Congregation of Rites to issue certain instructions or laws to be observed by the publishers mentioned whenever they wish to prepare a new edition of the liturgical Chant. These laws, which were received and approved by His Holiness at an audience on the 7th of this month of August, are the following:

I. Publishers and printers of whatsoever place or region who may wish to print the Gregorian melodies contained in the Vatican edition, whether in the same or a smaller or a larger size, whether altogether or in part, must take care to obtain permission from the Apostolic See.

II. By each of the publishers who shall have obtained Pontifical permission of this kind, the following points are to be carefully attended to:

(a) That form of the notes and of the other signs in the Gregorian Chant must be preserved which our ancestors established and which is found with exactitude in the Vatican edition.

(b) In particular there must be no change in the order in which the notes succeed each other according to the various intervals of sound;

(c) Nor in the manner in which the notes are combined according to the different forms of the neumes, as they are called.

(d) There is to be the most absolute correspondence of the words of the sacred text with the notes of the Chant, so that each syllable shall lie right under its note or notes.

III. When an edition has been prepared and completed it will be unlawful for any one to publish it and to use it in sacred functions unless the Ordinary has given a declaration stating that it agrees with the typical Vatican edition.

IV. The Ordinary is not to give a declaration of this kind unless censors skilled in the Gregorian Chant shall first have made a careful comparison and attested in writing, as a duty of conscience, that the new edition agrees completely with the Vatican one.

V. To those parts of the liturgical Office which admit of different Chants according to the different day or festival, as, for example, hymns and the Ordinary of the Mass, melodies can be adapted which may not be found in the typical edition and can be approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the proper conditions being observed, especially those which are laid down in section d of the "Motu Proprio" of the 25th April, 1904. But varieties of tones or Chants of this kind are not allowed in the other parts; for instance, in the Antiphons and Responses, whether of the Office or of the Mass.

VI. If it is a question of the special Offices of any Church or of a Regular Order following the Roman Rite, or of Offices lately granted, the Gregorian melodies belonging to them restored or arranged by skilled men, are also to be submitted to the approbation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. When this is obtained and the Ordinary has been informed, as above, of the agreement with the originals recognized by the Sacred Congregation, let him grant the requisite declaration.

VII. It is allowable that the Gregorian Chant should be published with modern musical notes, provided that the danger of the notes or neumes being in any way disturbed be carefully removed. The Ordinary can grant his approbation to these editions for the benefit of the faithful if he has ascertained that, in accordance with Art. 1 and 6, they faithfully

fully conform to the typical edition or the approved melodies.

VIII. Whenever a book containing the Sacred Chant or any liturgical melody is submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Rites for approbation, three copies are to be sent to the Congregation.

IX. The Gregorian Chant destined and approved for liturgical use, according to the rules mentioned, belongs, like the text itself, to the treasury or patrimony of the Roman Church. Wherefore, when a new text is proposed or granted by it to the Faithful, the Chant corresponding to the text is to be held as granted at the same time in such a manner that no publisher or author can complain of the Apostolic See extending the same melodies to other churches.

Nothing to the contrary interposing.

The 11th day of August, 1905.
A. CARD. TRIPEPI,
Pro-Prefect of the H.R.C.
D. PANICI, Archbishop of Laodicea,
Secretary.

IN CATHOLIC SWITZERLAND,
(From the Atlantic Monthly.)
"Monsieur le Cure has come to bless our fields and cattle; would Mademoiselle care to be present?"
The sun was sinking behind the western mountains, the snowy heights of the Dent du Midi flamed crimson in its glowing light, as I crossed the field where Rosalie had hastily prepared a little altar. Before it stood a priest in white vestments. The rude table, the queer little candlesticks and artificial flowers, were transfigured for me, as God's minister implored Him to bless the earth, to bring forth its fruits for His children, to hold all living creatures within His care. Felix knelt on the ground beside his mother; their faces shone with the light of a perfect faith. Living close to the most stupendous mysteries of nature, these peasants realize their absolute dependence on Him who created it. When winter snows shut them away from the world, and they have for companionship only the vast mountains, from whose rocky heights the glacial torrents thunder, the avalanches crush down upon them, their sublime faith lifts their souls to the heavens above, where dwells their all-loving Father. They do not fear death; it but opens the door of His Kingdom.

There was one dear old man whose smiling face always welcomed us to his little home. A born collector, he revelled in the costumes, linens, and embroideries bequeathed him by his ancestors.

"My father," he said, "was ninety-four when he died; he, too, loved the ancient costumes. I have one which he often wore. I put it on in his honor for our greatest fête days. But look at this head-dress—you never saw anything quite so old, now, did you, Mademoiselle? My great-great-grandmother wore it when she was married."

His face fairly beamed with joy as he took from his carved chests these treasures of the past. In many of the linens were woven the dates 1557 and 1622.

"This set is for the dying; I love it most of all. See, Mademoiselle, the whole room is hung in white for the coming of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament," and he held up piece after piece of exquisitely embroidered linens and laces that were to cover the walls, to be thrown over the bed, and held in the trembling hands of the dying communicant.

"When my mother and father died, it was I who made the room all white and beautiful; when my turn comes, my sister has promised to do this for me."

"And when you see this white room, and know that it is prepared for death, will it not frighten you?"

"Oh, no, that will be a happy day, a time of great joy."

Dear old Isadore, I love to think of him in that still, white room, his white soul waiting to pass into a higher life. Meanwhile he was not unhappy. There is nothing of melancholy in the religious character of these peasants. They have a keen sense of humor and a very practical turn of mind that makes them provide for this world as well as the next!

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