

ROSE-BELFORD'S

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REGINALD ROSS.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

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I.

WHEN Miss Beatrice Sedgwick came to live with her relative, Mrs. Ross, she made a fourth in the household circle, which already consisted of Reginald, his mother, and a Miss Eloise Forbes, a ward of the late Mr. Ross and an heiress of no inconsiderable wealth. Eloise, like Reginald, was at present absent from the Ross country-mansion, having left on a visit to some Newport friends soon after the general arrival, in June, from New York.

Reginald Ross was now in his twenty-ninth year. He was what we call fine-looking; his limbs were large and heavy-wrought, though neither unshapely nor ungraceful; his breast was the breast of an athlete, and his head, small, with matted-looking waves of hair worn just long enough not to hide its dark gloss and its classic crispness, crowned a throat that rose from massive shoulders with solid majesty of moulding. His eyes were of a soft humid hazel, but noticeably restless. He wore a brown curly beard and

moustache, neither of them abundant, and he dressed with a kind of subdued dandyism that was by no means averse to one or two accentuated touches of colour.

Since her son was never much to be depended upon as regarded his movements, Mrs. Ross was not greatly surprised, one morning, to have him suddenly return from a fishing tour along the Massachusetts coast, and to hear him announce his intention of remaining at home for an indefinite period.

On this lady's face, delicate as a half-faded wild rose, and in her dark eyes, that had doubtless wrought sorry havoc of old, there now appeared much quiet satisfaction at the intelligence given by her son. She adored Reginald, but it was not purely for such reason that she now desired him at home; for, tenderly loving Beatrice Sedgwick and wishing with fervour to see her Reginald's wife, Mrs. Ross perceived in the absence of Eloise Forbes a future reason why these two young people should enjoy much of each other's unshared society.

However easily intimate might have