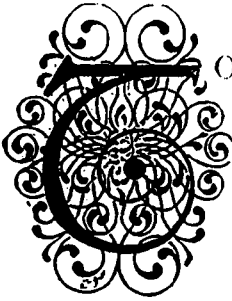


# Beauty or Duty?

A Little Love Story



OM RODEN thought Claribel was the belle of a bevy of girls from among whom he was most likely to choose his future wife. She was a decided blonde, with a winning face and captivating manners. He had known her from childhood, and had, therefore, ample time to note her many graces of heart and mind. Totally ignoring her faults but those of extravagance in dress and a lack of prudence—not uncommon in one of her age—he had made a mental memoranda of her compensating virtues far more voluminous than here set down. Tom was in love; in fact, he was thinking of matrimony; and if appearances were not misleading, notwithstanding a score of rivals, he had only to make up his mind and declare himself to be accepted.

But——. But there was a “but” in the case.

Tom Roden was the youngest of three boys, in whom was concentrated a threefold share of the kindness inherited from his mother. His two brothers were not so unselfish as he. Resembling their father in this respect, they showed in early life a desire to travel and see the world, and at different ages they left home for different points out West. After a desultory correspondence, they drifted elsewhere and, neglecting to write home, were lost to the family.

When his father died, leaving little more behind him in the way of an “estate” than the household effects, the maintenance of the home devolved entirely upon Tom, who, like his father, was a mechanic, with this distinction he was a good one, and therefore had steady employment.

Besides providing for the household expenses, he had by economy managed to save enough money to furnish a little home for the Mr. and Mrs. Roden—to be. This little home had for some years been the objective point of his ambition; so now, having five hundred dollars to his credit in the savings bank, he was deep in the problem “To be, or not to be?”

Several times he decided in the affirmative; but as often, upon reconsideration, he changed his mind.

If Claribel wasn't so high spirited, and if people didn't talk so much of mothers-in-law as intruders and nuisances, it might—it could be, if Claribel would contrive to keep within bounds in the matter of dress.

The “but” and the “if” were the lions in his path, and they looked too formidable to tackle “yet awhile.”

But would she wait until his prospects improved? He did not think so. Beyond mute appeals to her affection, he had never divulged his love; he had even held himself aloof, much against his own inclinations, lest he might compromise his duty by going too far to recede with honour.

Sometimes he had misgivings as to his chances, were he free to act as his heart dictated. True, she had always shown a preference for his society; but when it came to choosing a partner for life—a husband, to whom she could look for the things dear to feminine fancies—ah! there was the point. Might she not listen to the wooing of Fred. Somers, who was soon to be made a partner in his father's business, and who was constant in his (at present despised) attentions to her?

Indeed she might. Then, by not submit to what seemed the inevitable, do what he believed to be right—such a Mother like a brick—and resign Claribel (Oh! Claribel, if she only knew how hard it was!) to Fred, and wish them joy?

This he finally made up his mind to do—“for sure this time!”

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