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ROLFF HOUSE

BY
G. H. BENEDICT.

"But it's the duty of a wife to follow her husband," replied Rosa, argumentatively. "and if I marry I must needs follow my husband if he should wish to go to the ends of the world."

"I'll care for that," said the hearty old man laughing. "I've chosen you a fellow whose hands will join mine, and I'll make my own terms with him, and never shall you go from this house while I live."

"But I do not wish ever to marry, father," replied Rosa, somewhat vexed at her father's cool disposal of her in his match-making plans.

"Pooh, pooh," was the response, "Tien's nature. I women wish to marry. You're old enough now, and by my dunder, I'd rather give up half my farm than see you grow up into a sour old maid. No, no. Think you you'll cheat me of having half-a-dozen grandchildren to clamber round my knees before I die? 'Twouldn't be honoring your old father, girl. There's Ralph—a fine young fellow, but a smile will make him yours, and will you turn him away for a scapegrace that leaves you as soon as he gets a little money to scatter, and who, a thousand to one, will never show his face here again?"

Rosa did not answer; but the tears stealing down her cheeks, told of the distress her father's words caused her. "There, there," continued the old man, "they are foolish tears; but cry it out; you will feel better for it, and be my merry little girl again one of these days. If I was a girl, it's few tears I would waste on the scamp that ran away from me."

"I cannot believe that Claude meant to desert me," interposed Rosa, pleadingly.

The old man's brow darkened. "Believe it or not, girl," he said, "he's but a scamp, and I'd sooner see you dead than married to him. He's made a fool of you, and I must leave it to work off. When your wits come back, you'll be ashamed of every tear shed for such a scapegrace."

Rosa saw that to attempt to controvert her father's opinion of Claude would only be to arouse his anger, and she wisely chose to baffle.

The old man did not attempt to press his wishes on her any further, but turned away with the blunt counsel to cheer up and forget her troubles. The future sounded like mockery to poor Rosa. In the conflict which she saw ahead between her filial duty and her plighted troth, there appeared nothing to cheer and encourage her. The future lowered on her vision dark and threatening, and portentous of the wreck of all her hopes of happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

Lawyer Saybrook had very little of the sentimental in his disposition. But who is to be the rosy anchor at all times and under all circumstances? The time comes when the most wary must be taken in a snare.

The elder Saybrook entered his domicile one day, with thoughts intent upon business. He wished to have a talk with Ralph, who, however, was not in the office. He made his way to the domestic department where Mrs. Grewy presided. That excellent housekeeper had been engaged in moulting bread, and three shapely loaves stood on the moulting board as he entered. Mrs. Grewy blushed slightly, and then smiled sweetly, as she saw the lawyer.

Somehow, it had never before struck Mr. Saybrook that Mrs. Grewy was an attractive female, but just at this particular moment it flashed on him that the widow, as she stood with her sleeves rolled up above her elbows, showing a white and shapely arm, and with a jaunty cap on her head, presented rather a handsome figure. This thought entered the lawyer's mind, but his immediate object was to enquire for Ralph, so he said:

"Has Ralph been in, Mrs. Grewy?"

"He went out about half an hour ago," replied Mrs. Grewy, and again a rosy hue suffused her face. Now, there was really no reason for the widow to blush. Mr. Saybrook's object was plainly very prosaic, and there was certainly nothing unusual in his inquiring for his son. Still, his sudden advent had evidently so accorded with some fancy of the widow's as to produce the tell-tale signal in question.

"Did he say when he would be back?" continued the lawyer.

"Oh, bless you, no," replied the widow; "he never does, you know; and I shouldn't presume to ask."

"Or didn't say where he was going?"

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Saybrook; but then if you are anxious to know, I might make a pretty good guess. He dressed himself with unusual care, and I suspect that he was going up to Mr. Bruyn's."

And having said this, the widow thought it proper to look down archly, and again let a rosy tinge suffuse her face.

Now the lawyer had been fully answered, and there was no occasion for him to remain longer in the kitchen. But he hesitated a moment, and then advanced toward the table where the widow had been at work.

"Making bread, eh?" he said. "Really, Mrs. Grewy, I must compliment you on your effort."

The effect of these words on the widow was truly remarkable. They not only caused her to blush again in a very charming manner, but the lawyer could have sworn that in the space of about three seconds she grew twenty years younger, so pleased and animated did she become under the effect of his compliment.

Now the truth was that the widow had long worshipped in silence the stately lawyer, and had in fancy cherished the idea that he would make a more than acceptable substitute for the late Mr. Grewy, who in truth had been but a plain and illiterate, though good-natured blacksmith. Mr. Saybrook, however, had hitherto never manifested the slightest interest in the widow's efforts to please him, and this sudden unbending quite took her by surprise. The lawyer, though, had long been aware of the not very carefully concealed worship of his housekeeper, but

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while it had not been displeasing to his vanity, to reciprocate her sentimental attitude was about the last thing he would have thought of under ordinary circumstances.

But this digression is delaying the widow's answer.

"Really, Mr. Saybrook," she replied, "you are very kind to speak so; and, if I do say it myself, I do not think there are many women who can surpass me in baking of any kind; but then I always put my whole soul in my work, which is a good deal, but very natural, as it is my highest ambition to please you."

"U-m-m—yes—of course," replied the lawyer. "And so Ralph has gone up to old Bruyn's?"

"Yes—that is, I think he has," said the widow. "And I must say, Mr. Saybrook, that I think the young lady is very fortunate who succeeds in getting him. Of course, I admit I am somewhat prejudiced—but how can I help it? I think he is really the most elegant young man I ever knew."

"Ah," interposed the lawyer.

"Yes, indeed," continued the widow, gazing archly up. "And he resembles you so much; it is really quite remarkable."

"Well," said the lawyer, "I agree with you about Ralph. The girl will be fortunate who gets him. And yet I am particularly anxious about this present affair of his. I think he is getting along, Mrs. Grewy. I do not think it would be any mistake to have it understood that he is to marry Rosa, but of course I would not wish to have it known as coming from me, you know."

"Oh, certainly not," replied the widow. "Really, I am quite surprised—and pleased, too, although one may be sure that Ralph cannot get anybody too good for him."

"Well, if Ralph comes in this way to tell me I want to see him," said the lawyer. "I am going up in the office."

"But won't you have just a bite of something before you go, Mr. Saybrook?" inquired the widow, with a sudden display of tender anxiety for his carnal comfort. "Let me show you some cake I have just been baking."

"No, no, Mrs. Grewy; not at present; do not disturb yourself. I must go at once."

And so the lawyer left, having succeeded in raising the most ardent hopes in the bosom of the widow that she would yet be the rich and distinguished Mrs. Saybrook, while he had at the same time taken the best measure possible to have it publicly understood that Ralph and Rosa were not only engaged, but very shortly to be married. He took his accustomed seat in his office, and after hour flew by while he was deeply absorbed in writing.

At last Ralph came in.

"Rah, Ralph," said the elder man, "take a seat. Just home, eh? Well, what luck to-day? Any more favorable report?"

"Well, slightly, perhaps," replied the young man, drawing out his tones with easy indifference. "It isn't my tactics, you know, to hurry matters. I undertook to press my claims a little to-day, however, and succeeded in extracting the answer that, while I was held in the deepest respect, it was not possible that I could become the recipient of anything more than friendship while any doubt remained as to the actual sentiments of a certain young gentleman now in Europe. Not a very encouraging answer, perhaps; but inferentially I see therein a sign of hope."

"Ralph, I am rather out of patience."

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Stepping to the piano, Mrs. Stannard, as though by accident, fell with one arm from wrist to elbow squarely on the keys of the piano. The crash stopped all talk, and the guests looked on in astonishment.

"How awkward of me!" exclaimed the hostess sweetly.

But there was no more talk.

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