

ROSE ISLAND

By Lilian Leveridge

CHAPTER XII. (Continued.)

He knew how to manage the fly paper, for he had seen Aunt Hilda do it; so, without a minute's hesitation, he untied the package and placed a double sheet upon the stove. In a few moments he was able to pull the sheets apart beautifully, and with one in each hand he sauntered off into the parlour. There was room for lots of sheets there, on chairs and sofas and things. Brownie was not one to weary in well-doing, and he did not rest from his labours till the last of the twelve sheets reposed on the fancy crocheted tidy that adorned the organ stool.

Brownie was very well satisfied with himself, and felt that he had more than made up for that unfortunate little mistake about the churning. He wandered about outdoors for a while, then went up to his sister's room, where he and June entertained themselves with stories until dinner was well under way. Then from the window he spied something his eyes had missed before. Out near the road a good, strong plank had been pivoted to a post, making a beautiful teeter. He went out quickly to investigate, and was delighted to find that one end was low enough for him to reach. He seated himself, but, alas! as there was no weight to balance the other end, it would not work.

Brownie considered the difficulty a while. How inconvenient it was that Robin had to burn himself and get lame! At last he went in and told his trouble to Mrs. Thompson. That kind-hearted lady had quite forgiven him for the accident of the morning, and, as the table was set and everything cooking nicely, she thought she could afford a few minutes to amuse the dear child. Really, he had been wonderfully good.

"I'm afraid my teeterin' days are over," she said, "but may be I can get hold o' the other end and give ye a h'ist."

But, unlike Mrs. Thompson, who was short of stature, the post was very high, and she could not reach the plank, even by standing on tip-toe.

Brownie soon discovered an old chair in the grass nearby, which Sammy and Ike had doubtless used to overcome the difficulty. Mrs. Thompson stood it up, and very carefully mounted it. But just as she had grasped the end of the plank the chair tipped, precipitating her two hundred or more pounds with unpremeditated suddenness upon the end of the teeter. The inevitable laws of force and gravity were responsible for the rest. Mrs. Thompson dropped earthward, and Brownie flew skyward with such velocity that he bounced from the teeter like a rubber ball struck from a bat, and landed, fair and square, on that good lady's prostrate form. The eggs in his pockets had escaped injury until now, when two little, yellow streams began to trickle over her palpitating bosom.

In that unfortunate minute there came a rattle of wheels in the lane. Mrs. Thompson struggled frantically to regain her feet, but Brownie's weight pinned her down. "Mercy!" she gasped, "if it ain't the minister a-drivin' the teacher home to dinner! And me in this pickle. Oh, laws!"

Brownie, with one glance at the approaching vehicle, took to his heels.

By this time the minister was pulling up with a loud "Whoa!" just the other side of the fence. Handing the reins to his companion, he sprang out and took the low rail at a leap. "You seem to be in difficulties, Mrs. Thompson," he said, courteously. "Can I be of any assistance?"

Mrs. Thompson was mortified beyond expression, for the tall, spectacled, young Anglican clergyman, the Reverend St. Bartholomew Scripture, though a past-master in athletics, was considered to be the most dignified man in the township. Yet there was nothing for it but to permit him to raise her to her feet, which Good Samaritan office he performed with the utmost gravity of countenance. "I have observed that it is somewhat risky," he remarked, "for a woman of your—ahem!—generous proportions and—ahem!—years of discretion to indulge in such juvenile pastimes."

"Oh, Mr. Scripture!" Mrs. Thompson panted, with flaming face, "I didn't mean—I didn't know—"

"Never mind; let it pass," he said, magnanimously waving her apology. "I picked up Miss Cameron on my way from Hillsdale, and I have taken the liberty to drive her over."

"I'm—I'm—very pleased to see you, Mr. Scripture," she responded, almost choking over the hugeness of the lie. "Put up your horse and stay to dinner."

"Thanks. I shall be most happy." Thereupon Mr. Scripture had the grace to join Miss Cameron and leave his too juvenile hostess to hurry to the friendly refuge of the kitchen and swallow her mortification as best she might.

Ruth was trying, with indifferent success, to look sympathetically solemn when she entered Mrs. Thompson's heated domain, and found her sweating over the dinner preparations.

"Oh, Miss Ruth!" the latter panted, "wasn't it awful? I never was so upset in all my born days."

"I should imagine not," laughed the teacher, "or you wouldn't have tried it again."

"If you was in my shoes you wouldn't find it any laughin' matter," Mrs. Thompson retorted, a trifle nettled. "If that boy ain't a imp o' Satan, well, I never sot eyes on one."

"Why, I thought he was an angel, Mrs. Thompson."

"Well, there's angels and angels. Some comes from the good place, and some doesn't. But, say, I'd be most mighty thankful if you'd bile the eggs while I put a clean dress on. I'm fair ashamed to look a civilized human in the eye. There ain't nothin' else to do; everything is ready to dish up."

"All right, Mrs. Thompson. I'll tend to the eggs, and entertain the minister when he comes in."

When Ruth Cameron heard the minister's step at the front door she took a hurried glance in the looking-glass, and was not ill-pleased to note that her face had acquired a becoming flush from her culinary exertions; so, with an equally becoming little smile, she conducted the reverend guest to the parlour. The room was in semi-twilight from half-drawn blinds, for Mrs. Thompson was just through house-cleaning, and was afraid to admit the sunlight lest it should fade the poppy-besprinkled wallpaper and the gay, new carpet.

"Miss Ruth," said the minister, as he sank into a cushioned easy chair, "you have the Church Hymnal, have you not? Now that we have a few minutes before dinner, would you mind playing over the third tune of 525 for me, please? My choir at Hillsdale have chosen that for next Sunday, and I am not quite familiar with it."

"Why, certainly," consented Ruth, seating herself at the organ. "The third tune—I'm not sure that I know that, but I'll try it."

A slight nervousness heightened her flush as she played, for she was not exactly a finished musician, and she knew Mr. Scripture's critically sensitive ear would detect the slightest error; but, however, she managed it admirably.

"Thank you," said Mr. Scripture. "I wonder if we have time to sing it through."

"Plenty of time, I'm sure," responded Ruth, judging that Mrs. Thompson would be glad of a few extra minutes for her toilet.

The minister rose from his seat, and immediately uttered a startled exclamation. "What in Christendom have I got into?" he cried.

Ruth twirled quickly around, and before she was able to control her too keen sense of the ridiculous, burst into a fit of merry, girlish laughter. Mr. Scripture, a scarlet flush upon his usually pale face, was frantically clutching at a sheet of tanglefoot that adhered to the seat of his broadcloth trousers with a tenacity that would have delighted the heart of the owner of the patent. Another sheet hung from his hair like the curtain of a sunbonnet.

The harder Ruth laughed, the more furiously the minister blushed. "Heavens!" he exploded at length, "can't you restrain your levity for a more fitting occasion?"

Ruth made a violent effort at self-control, and arose to offer assistance; but when she found herself in a similar predicament, the fit of "levity" returned with redoubled force.

Mrs. Thompson, who had made a hasty toilet, was passing the parlour door at that moment, and, wondering much to hear such mirth following the playing of a hymn in the minister's presence, peeped in to see what could be the cause.

Only to her dearest friend and confidante did Mrs. Thompson ever acknowledge, in relating that episode, that never in all her born days had she felt such solid satisfaction as she did at that moment in seeing the dignity of the minister, who had so recently witnessed her own humiliation, "taken down a peg or two." She dropped into the nearest chair and gave way to her own mirth. Only for a moment, however, did she forget her duty as hostess. "Well, shame on me, laughin' like this!" she cried, springing quickly up. "Oh, laws!"

The minister turned at the exclamation, and the sight of a third victim of this huge practical joke was like oil on the ruffled waters of his temper. For the space of a minute or two the three of them laughed at each other, then went each to the other's assistance.

Mrs. Thompson went round to the windows and drew up every blind—a proceeding which brought forth a sigh of relief from Ruth, who was a lover of light and air. Then, after the minister's clerical cloth had been carefully rubbed off, Mrs. Thompson led her somewhat discomfited guest to dinner.

"Now, Mr. Scripture," said the hostess affably when grace had been said, "help yourself, and do try to make out a dinner. I'm awful sorry we have no butter, but—"

"Why, Marthy, I thought you was goin' to churn this mornin'," said her husband.

Mrs. Thompson glanced at the downcast eyes of her littlest guest, and answered simply, "Well, I didn't. I'm sorry we have no meat," she went on, apologetically, "but take an egg, Mr. Scripture. I can recommend 'em, 'cause Miss Cameron biled 'em. She always gets 'em just right."

Mr. Scripture took an egg and passed on the dish down the table. "Thank you, Mrs. Thompson," he said. "I prefer eggs to meat any day."

As he spoke he cut the top off his egg, then suddenly laid down his knife and leaned back with an extremely nauseated expression on his face.

Simultaneously, Mrs. Thompson and Ruth looked toward his plate and gasped. The head of a tiny dead chicken protruded from the shell!



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