

Fair Rosamond's Treachery.

BY CLARA RIDGWAY, AUTHOR OF "A PALPABLE HIT," "A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER," "SHADOWS OF THE PAST," ETC.

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes. And as Dick and myself are the only wicked beings in this oppressively good place, I suppose it must be her."

The speaker, a "bonnie, fair lassie," rises from the sofa where she has been comfortably lying, and walks over to the nearest window.

"There he is," she exclaims, gladly, and turning, she rushes from the room, through the hall, and—in the proverbial twinkling of an eye—is flying down the garden path, regardless of the falling snowflakes that besprinkle her bright auburn hair and slender girlish figure.

Miss Gray, to whom the absent girl's remarks have been addressed, rises from her large willow rocker, and as her niece had done, crosses the room to the window.

Before she arrives at the end of her pilgrimage, a loud boyish laugh is heard, and with it mingles the sweet clear treble of a girl's voice.

Miss Gray had been asleep, and had awakened only in time to witness Rosamond's hurried exit; consequently, having missed the latter's foregoing remarks, she is in the dark as to the cause of her sudden hegira.

Hearing the laughter, her curiosity overcomes her, and she hastens to the window, but—too late. Scarcely is she looking out upon the now deserted garden, when the door is flung open and Rosamond Gray re-enters the room, followed by a short, slender young fellow, whose striking resemblance to herself proclaims him at once to be her brother.

As much alike are they as Sebastian and Viola. The same shade of ruddy auburn hair waves over their foreheads, the brilliant brown eyes flash and sparkle merrily in each animated face—in fact, the resemblance between them is so perfect that one gay and foolish girl was heard to say on a memorable occasion: "If Mr. Gray wore skirts, one could not tell him from Rosamond—and then, he is so ridiculously small, don't you know."

"My dear aunt," he exclaims gaily. "Can I believe in my eyes? Is it possible that you have eluded Morpheus, and were only feigning that sweet and childlike repose which Rosamond wickedly told me had visited you?"

"I—er—I believe I had lost myself," murmurs Miss Gray, senior, apologetically. "But Rosamond made such a noise as she rushed out of the room, and you laughed, and altogether I was awakened."

"See what a sensation my advent has created!" says Dick, striking a tragic attitude, and then suddenly turning, he perches himself on the back of an absurdly small chair, which had belonged to some long-deceased member of his aunt's family, and is carefully preserved by her as a precious relic.

"You will break that chair," she says warningly, and then in agonized tones, as the chair gives vent to a feeble squeak, "I don't want you to break that chair."

"My dear aunt, I wouldn't break it for the world," says Dick, reassuringly.

"I should hope not," she returns. "You know it was once the property of—, but, oh, there is that dilatory baker at last."

She has scarcely hastened from the room to torment the unhappy baker, when Dick rises, catches up his coat, and commences to hunt in a rapid scrambling fashion through all the pockets.

"I had a letter for you, Rose. Got it from the post office on my way here. I declare I must have lost it."

And in answer to Rosamond's indignant exclamation.

"Nothing worth reading, of course. Some trashy nonsense, most likely, from some of your friends. Ah!" triumphantly, "here it is at last."

"I am not familiar with the writing," says Rosamond, looking curiously at it, and then glancing on the table for a paper knife, and securing none, she, who never tears an envelope open, draws a long silver pin, shaped like a fanciful dagger, from her hair, neatly cuts the top of the envelope, and reads:

"MY DEAR MISS GRAY:—
I fondly hope that it will not be long ere I can address you by a warmer title than that with which I commence my epistle.

"Do not deem it presumption, on my part, to speak in such an assured tone, for even could you imagine the state of my feelings—but enough of this.

"To be brief, will you graciously accord me an interview? I will call at four to-morrow afternoon, and, at your fair hands, will receive either a passport to the realms of indescribable joy, or—and I hesitate to write my doom. In either case, believe me your slave,

H. NELSON BERRY."

"Good gracious, did you ever read anything like that?" said Miss Gray, as Dick, who has been reading the letter from the arm of her chair, utters a series of roars.

Then, despite her irritation, she is fain to laugh, but speedily checks herself.

"It is not fair to laugh at him. Poor, little man!" she says remorsefully. "He really seems dreadfully in earnest."

"Nonsense," says Dick, cheerfully. "He will be all right soon."

"But the thing is, what am I going to do?" says Rosa-

mond, perplexedly.

"Going to do?" echoes Dick, in amazement. "Why give him his *cogés* as mercifully as possible, I suppose." Then, seeing that she still hesitates, he says rather quickly: "You certainly would not—"

"Certainly not," returns Miss Gray austerely.

"But, yesterday, I met Kitty Clayton—you know she has a friend visiting her at present—well, Kitty asked me to come to-day at four to meet this friend, and I promised, and now that miserable man has deliberately appointed four as the hour for his absurd call. I suppose, wrathfully, "that I can't be in two places at once, and if I go or stay one or the other will be angry."

"Yes, I understand," says Mr Gray, sympathetically. "Can't you go at three instead of four?"

"How can I?" asks Rosamond in a slightly petulant tone. "When Kitty and that girl are going out themselves this afternoon, and only expect to be home shortly before four."

"There is only one thing that I can think of," said Dick rapidly. "Fix up a dress for me, go to Miss Clayton's, and I will receive Mr. Berry, and refuse him for you in fine style."

Rosamond stares at him breathlessly. "I wonder if you could," she says at last. "You are so nice and small, and we are so much alike, that as he, naturally, will feel nervous, I don't believe he will notice anything wrong, especially if the shades are half-way down in the drawing-room and the light is dim."

"I am certain he won't," said Dick hopefully. "But, about the dress!"

"I think I can manage that," returns the fair Rosamond, entering with delight into the spirit of Dick's plan. "There is my blue cashmere; but no, the waist of that fits far too nicely to be altered. However," brightly, "I will find something."

"Another Rosamond Gray! I had no idea that it would be such a success!" and Rosamond sinks into a chair and gazes delightedly at the figure before her.

"Yes, by Jove, and almost prettier than the original," says Dick, pirouetting daintily before the mirror.

"What a pity that you are not a girl, Dick. The Empire style suits you wonderfully," and Miss Gray rises to adjust the broad sash of pale blue ribbon. "All those little puffs and curls are lovely. How fortunate it is that you saved that wig."

"It does come in well," remarks Dick, complacently. "But then, I always did make up successfully as a girl, you know. Why, in those tableaux at college when I appeared as the 'Sleeping Beauty,'—Huntley was the Prince, you remember—I just brought down the house."

"Not a very appropriate arrangement of the hair for the 'Sleeping Beauty,' but it is *comme il faut* for your present *role*," returns his sister, laughingly.

"Now, Dick, I have viewed you 'with a critic's eye,' and I can see nothing more to be done."

"Perhaps I am a trifle pale," says Dick, who has been amusing himself by throwing kisses, in a most flirtatious manner, to an imaginary Mr. Berry. "If," insinuatingly, "you could put a little pink on my cheeks, I think the effect would be infinitely better."

"Rouge?" asks Rosamond, "I do not possess a bit of it. But," meditatively, "I have been told that red ribbon, aided by a little cologne, is quite as good."

"Now is the time to try its efficacy," exclaims Dick, catching up a wide scarlet ribbon and holding it out to his sister.

"My prettiest scarf? I should think not," she says indignantly. "Here," drawing a narrow strip of ribbon from a box on the chiffonier, and carefully saturating one end with perfume. "Keep still, and don't move your head, or the cologne will, very likely, go into your eyes. There," stepping back, "it certainly is an improvement. A trifle too red, perhaps, but that will be attributed to your, or rather my blushes."

"You know one is recommended in the case of patent medicines, to 'try it on the dog,'" observes the counterfeit Miss Gray, after a lengthy stare in the glass. "So I will try the effect of this costume on Aunt Maria."

He makes this irreverent speech in the calmest possible manner.

"Undutiful Dick!" cries Rosamond, reprovingly. "But stay, remember when the supreme moment arrives, to keep your hands out of sight as much as possible. If you allow him to take your hand when he comes in, all will be lost, as he knows—he *must* know—that the palms of mine are not covered with blisters."

"Tokens of my rowing prowess," says Dick, gazing at his small, though sunburnt hand. "Well, here goes for Aunt Maria. Fortune is with us, as here she comes."

Hastily pushing Rosamond behind a screen, he awaits the coming of the elder Miss Gray.

"Why, my dear Rosamond," she says, as her portly form appears in the doorway. "You surely will not walk over to the Clayton's in that dress? It is not warm enough. But, my dear child, speaking of warmth, your cheeks are perfectly crimson. Have you a fever?"

Dick, whose voice is very like that of his sister, assures her that he is perfectly well, and then a subdued giggle is audible from behind the screen.

"Is that Dick hidden away there?" inquires Miss Gray. "Dear boy, I wonder what his next prank will be."

The laugh from behind the screen here rises to a perfect shriek, and is joined in by Rosamond's double, until they fairly make the welkin ring.

Miss Gray feels called upon to look into the mystery, and when the second Rosamond appears her face is a perfect study, and she seems to consider this, the topmost pinnacle of Dick's achievements.

The tryst with the unfortunate Mr. Berry is, however, shrewdly though wickedly withheld from the knowledge of the worthy spinster, as practical jokes do not, as a general thing, meet with her approval.

"Whither are you going?" asks Rosamond, seeing that their relative is robed in walking attire.

"My dear," in reproving tones, "have you forgotten that this afternoon was appointed by Mrs. Russell for our long-talked-of sleigh-ride?"

"In that case, you will not return until late," suggests the wily Dick, agreeably.

He has been cudgelling his brains for some plan to secure her absence from the house, for this afternoon, and has only succeeded in devising a rather lame scheme at the last.

"Oh, no," returns Miss Gray, unsuspectingly, "not before six. You know Mrs. Russell is always late, and then she takes such long drives."

"I must change my dress and go over to Kitty's," says Rosamond, who is growing a little anxious to absent herself from the house.

"Certainly," says her aunt. "And Dick, it is high time you assumed your proper garb. How very dreadful it would be if any one came in and caught you as you are."

"Dreadful indeed!" exclaims Dick, apparently with great fervour. "Such a thing is too horrible to mention. In fact, I wonder that you can even imagine it; but then, the literature that you and Rose read, sometimes leads to deplorable results."

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Returning from her call, an hour later, Rosamond enters the gate, and walks slowly up the pathway to the house.

Her lively mischievous face wears a demure expression, and it is evident that she is in a brown study. The luckless Mr. Berry is completely forgotten, and she enters the wide hall, and approaches the drawing-room door, without a thought as to what may be within.

Slowly, noiselessly, she turns the knob, and before her snow-blinded eyes can become accustomed to the fading light of the room, a sharp exclamation is heard, and—horrible sight—before her stand the fantastically attired Dick and Mr. Berry.

Both are too much engaged to notice her entrance, and she could yet escape, but terror roots her to the spot.

Mr. Berry stands speechless, gazing in a stony fashion at something Dick is holding in one hand, and, like Rosamond, the two men remain motionless. At last Dick raises the something to his head, and his sister recognizes it as the wig, upon which, but one short hour before, she had looked with such approbation. Now, alas, it is with a widely different feeling that she surveys it. Then Mr. Berry breaks the oppressive silence:

"Hum—er—Miss Gray, perhaps, after all, it is as well that I should abide by your decision. I—er—well, I may say that I dislike shams in everything. I was under the impression that Miss Gray, above all others, was the personification of truthfulness, and for that reason, and no other, I wished her to become Mrs. Berry."

Here he bows stiffly.

"Rosamond is the personification of truthfulness," cries Dick, forgetting his *role*, in his desire to champion his sister.

Mr. Berry again bows, and gives a significant glance at the ill-fated wig, which is once more coquettishly, if somewhat rakishly, perched upon Dick's head.

"It is only a joke, Berry," says Mr. Gray.

"A very poor one, Miss Gray," returns the discomfited gallant.

Dick has, at times, during this extraordinary interview, forgotten, and returned to his usually slangy mode of speech, which latter has been noticed by the other, who, notwithstanding the many surprises of this afternoon, has not grown so callous as to ignore the absence of the prefix "Mr." before his name, and he makes a mental note of this, as no worse than the rest of Miss Gray's defects.

As he turns to leave, he beholds Rosamond, the Miss Gray of his dreams, before him. He glances from "the real Simon Pure" Rose to the counterfeit, and then re-adjusts his glasses in order to see better. Then a light dawns upon him.

"It appears that I have been the victim of a nonsensical joke," he says, with some asperity, glaring at the culprits savagely.

"Mr. Berry—" commences Rosamond, faintly. "No excuses are necessary," snaps Berry. "I wish you a good afternoon."

And metaphorically speaking, he shakes the dust of the Gray's drawing-room from his gaitered feet "forever and for aye."

"I was doing splendidly," says Dick, as his sister, having dissolved into tears, sits before him, refusing to be comforted, "until that confounded wig came off. Caught on that drop light, you know."

Here he goes off into a paroxysm of delight. "Let me tell you how he put it, Rose. It was a dandy proposal. I think I shall do a little plagiarizing when I come across the right girl."

Rosamond rises.

"Never mention that wretched man's name to me again," she cries.

"Hereafter I shall speak of him, mysteriously as 'He,' and you will understand to whom I have reference," says Dick, teasingly. "But bless you, he doesn't mind," consolingly, "he has sent letters, almost precisely like that he