ROSES AND ATRIPE

BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

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SYNOPSIS.

Miss Patricia Holbrook and Miss Helen Gillespie, for sixes, were entrusted to the care of Laurence Donovan, a writer, summering near Port Annandale. Miss Patricia confided to Donovan that she feared her brother Hendrik, who posed as a bank failure, had committed a crime in order to protect his old father's will, of which Miss Patricia was guardian. They came to Port Annandale to escape Henry, Donovan's acquaintance with the two women. He learned of Miss Helen's engagement to Hendrik Holbrook and engaged an informer, who proved to be Reginald Gillespie, suitor for the hand of Miss Helen Holbrook. Gillespie disappeared the following morning. A rough search of the woods disclosed a knife, a bloody coat and a pocketbook and her fob, her meet on friendly terms. Donovan found an Italian sandalin. He met the man he supposed was Holbrook, but who said he was Hartwell, a Chicago lawyer. After Gillespie was discovered by Donovan's searching country church with $1,500.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

Just then I heard the voice of my fool raised so that all might hear:

"Friends, on the dusty highway of life, I can take none of the honor or credit you so kindly offer me. The money I have given you to-day I came by honestly. I stepped into your cool and restful place of worship this morning in search of bodily ease. The small voice of conscience stirred within me. I had not been inside a church for two years, and I was greatly shaken. But as I listened to your eloquent pastor I was aware that the green wall paper interrupted my soul currents. That vegetable-green hit me unfavorably on psychical intercepter. Spend the money as you like, gentlemen, but if I, a stranger, may suggest it, try some less violent color scheme in your moral decorations."

He seemed choking with emotion as with bowed head he pushed his way through the circle and strode out. The people stared after him, mystified and marvelling. I heard an old man calling out:

"How wonderful are the ways of Lord!"

I let Gillespie pass, and followed him slowly until a turn in the road hid us from the starting church folk. He turned and saw me.

"You have discovered me, Donovan. Be sure your sins will find you out. A simple people, singularly moved at the sight of a greenback. I have to-day caused caused so much excitement."

"I suppose you are trying to ease your conscience by giving away some of your button money."

"That is just it, Donovan. You have struck the brass tack on the head. But now that we have met again, albeit through no fault of my own, let me mention matters of real human interest."

"You might tell me what you're doing here first."

"Walking; there were no cabs, Donovan."

"You choose a queer hour of the day for your exercise."

"One might be the same for your ride. But let us be sensible. I dare say there's some common platform on which we both stand."

"Well! assume it," I replied, dismounting by the roadside that I might talk more easily. Bandages were still visible at his wrists, and a strip of court-plaster across the knuckles of his right hand otherwise testified to the edges of the glass in St. Agatha's garden. He held up his hands ruefully.

"Those were nasty slashes; and I ripped them up badly in climbing out of your window. But I couldn't linger; I am not without my little occupations."

"You stand an excellent chance of being shot if you don't clear out of this. If there's any shame in you you will go without making further trouble."

"It has occurred to me," he began, slowly, "that I know something that you ought to know. I saw Henry Holbrook yesterday."

"Where?" I demanded.

"On the lake. He's rented a sloop yacht called the Stiletto. I passed it yesterday on the Annandale steamer and I saw him quite distinctly."

"It's all your fault that he's here!" I blurted, thoroughly aroused. "If you had not followed those women they might have spent the remainder of their lives here and never have been molested. But he undoubtedly caught the trail from you."

Gillespie smiled gravely and frowned before he answered.

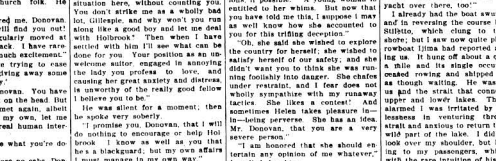
"I am sorry to spoil your theory, my dear Irish brother, but put this in your pipe. Henry was here first! He rented the cottage ten days ago—and I made my triumphal entry a week later. Explain that, if you please, Mr. Donovan."

I was immensely relieved by this disclosure, for it satisfied me that I had not been mistaken in the identity of the canoe-maker. I had, however, no intention of taking the button king into my confidence.

"Where is Holbrook staying?" I asked casually.

"I don't know—he sleeps afloat. The Stiletto belongs to a Cincinnati man who isn't coming here this summer—and Holbrook has her for the season."

"So much I learned from the boat storage man at Annandale; then I passed the Stiletto and saw Henry on board."



Embarked the Two Exiles Without incident.

It was clear that I knew more than Gillespie, but he had supplied me with several interesting bits of information, and, what was more to the point, he had confirmed my belief that Henry Holbrook and the canoe-maker were the same person.

"You must see that I face a difficult situation here, without counting you. You don't strike me as a wholly bad lot, Gillespie, and why wasn't you run along like a good boy and let me deal with Holbrook? Then when I have settled with him I'll see what can be done for you. Your position as an unwelcome suitor engaged in annoying the lady you profess to love, and causing her great anxiety and distress, is unworthy of the really good fellow I believe you to be."

He was silent for a moment; then he spoke very soberly.

"I promise you, Donovan, that I will do nothing to encourage or help Holbrook. I know as well as you that he's a blackguard; but my own affairs I must manage in my own way."

"But as sure as you try to molest those women you will have to answer to me. I am not in the habit of beginning what I never finish, and I intend to keep those women out of your way as well as out of Holbrook's clutches, and if you get a cracked head in the business—well, the crack's in your own skull, Mr Gillespie."

He shrugged his shoulders, threw up his head and turned away down the road.

There was something about this fellow that I liked. I even felt a certain pity for him as I passed him and rode on. He seemed simple and guileless, but with a dogged manliness beneath his absurdities. He was undoubtedly deeply attached to Helen Holbrook and his pursuit of her partook of a chivalrous quality that would have appealed to me in other circumstances, but he was the most negligible figure that had yet appeared in the Holbrook affair, and as I put my horse to the lope my thoughts reverted to Red Gate. That clever game and Helen's visit to her father were still to be explained, if I could get those cards out of the pack I should be ready for something really difficult. I employed myself with such reflections as I completed my sweep round the lake, reaching Glenarm shortly after two o'clock.

I was hot and hungry, and grateful for the cool breath of the house as I entered the hall.

"Miss Holbrook is waiting in the library," Ijima announced, and in a moment I faced Miss Pat, who stood in one of the open French windows looking out upon the wood.

She appeared to be deeply absorbed and did not turn until I spoke.

"I have waited for some time; I have something of importance to tell you, Mr. Donovan," she began, seating herself.

"Yes, Miss Holbrook."

"You remember that this morning, on our way to the chapel, Helen spoke of our game of chess yesterday?"

"I remember perfectly," I replied, and my heart began to pound audibly, for I knew what the next sentence would be.

"Helen was not at St. Agatha's at the time she indicated."

"Well, Miss Pat," I laughed, "Miss Holbrook doesn't have to account to me for her movements. It isn't important—"

"Why isn't it important," demanded Miss Pat in a sharp tone that was new to me.

"Way, Miss Holbrook, she is not accountable to me for her actions. If she fibbed about the chess it's a small matter."

"Perhaps it is; and possibly she is not accountable to me, either."

"I must not probe human motives too deeply, Miss Holbrook," I said, evasively, wishing to allay her suspicions, if possible. "A young woman is entitled to her whims. But now that you have told me this, I suspect that as well know how she accounted to you for this trifling deception."

"She said she had gone afloat to explore the country for herself; she wished to satisfy herself of our safety, and she didn't want you to think she was running foolishly into danger. She chafes under restraint, and I fear does not wholly sympathize with my runaway tactics. She likes a contest!" and sometimes Helen takes pleasure in—being perverse. She has an idea, Mr. Donovan, that you are a very severe person."

"I am honored that she should entertain an opinion of me whatever," I replied, laughing.

"And now," said Miss Pat, "I must go back. Helen went to her room to write some letters against a time when we may be possible to communicate with our friends, and, I took the opportunity to call on you. It might be as well, Mr. Donovan, not to mention my visit."

I walked beside Miss Pat to the gate, where she dismissed me, remarking that she would be quite ready for a ride in the launch at five o'clock.

The morning had added a few new colored threads to the angled skein. I was accumulating, but I felt that with the chess story explained I could safely eliminate the supernatural, and I was relieved to find that no matter what other odd complications I might reckon with, a girl who could be in two places at the same time was not among them.

CHAPTER VII.

A Broken Oar.

The white clouds of the later afternoon had drawn dreamily between green wood and blue sky. I brought the launch to St. Agatha's landing and embarked the two exiles without incident. We set forth in good spirits, Ijima at the engine and I at the wheel. I drove the boat toward the open to guard against unfortunate entanglements, and Miss Pat and Helen established a bad little care but to give a wide berth to all the other craft afloat. Helen exclaimed repeatedly upon the beauty of the lake, which the west wind rippled into many variations of color. I was flattered by her friendliness, and yielded myself to the joy of the day, agreeably thrilled—I confess as much—by her dark loveliness as she turned from time to time to speak to me.

"Aunt Pat is a famous sailor!" observed Helen as the launch rocked.

"The last time we crossed the captain had persuaded us to take her home during a hurricane."

"Helen always likes to make a heroine of me," said Miss Pat with her adorable smile. "But I am not in the mood for a sail, Donovan, and I think there must have been sailors among your ancestors."

She was as tranquil as the day. Her attitude toward her niece had not changed, and I pleased myself with the reflection that mere accuracy—the vigor and courage of indomitable old blood—did not sufficiently account for her, but that she testified to an simpler background of some once stalwart fine flower that had been centuries in making.

We cruised the shore of Port Annandale at a discreet distance and then bore off again.

"Let us not go too near shore anywhere," said Helen, and Miss Pat murmured acquiescence.

"No, we don't care to meet people," she remarked, very seriously.

"I'm afraid I don't know any to indulge you in," I ventured, turning away into the broadest part of the lake. The launch was capable of a lively clip and the engine worked gratifully. I had no fear of being caught, even if we should be pursued, and this, in the broad light of the peaceful Sabbath afternoon, seemed the roguiest game on earth.

It had been understood that we were to remain out until the sun dropped into the western wood, and I loitered on toward the upper lake where the shores were rougher.

"That's a real island over there; they call it Hattie Orchard—you must have a glimpse of it."

"Oh, nothing is so delightful as an island!" exclaimed Helen.

I had scanned the lake constantly since we started, as was his habit. Miss Pat seemed to be kind to Helen of the shore that now swept away from us in broader curves as we passed out of the narrower channel into the farther lake. Ijima remarked to me quietly, as though speaking of the engine.

"There's a man following in a row-boat."

And as I replied to some remark by Miss Pat, I saw half a mile distant, its sails hanging idly, a sloop that answered Gillespie's description of the Stiletto. The sun's canvas was almost white against the green verdure of Baltic Orchard.

I glanced at my power a moment. We will turn here, Ijima"—and I called Miss Pat's attention to a heavy old sycamore on the western shore.

"Oh, I'm disappointed not to cruise nearer the island with the romantic name," cried Helen. "And there's a yacht over there, too!"

I already had the boat swung round, and in reversing the course I lost the sloop behind the trees on the distant shore; but I saw now quite plainly the rowboat Ijima had reported as following us. It was still about a quarter of a mile and its single occupant had ceased rowing and turned his oars as though waiting. He was between us and the strait that connected the upper and lower lakes. Though not alarmed I was irritated by my carelessness in venturing through the strait and anxious to return to the less wild part of the lake. I did not dare look over my shoulder, but selected landing to my passengers, while Ijima, with the rare intuition of his race, understood the situation and signaled by gestures the course.

"There's a boat sailing through the green, green wood," exclaimed Helen; and prue enough, as we crept in close to the shore, we could still see, across a wooded point of the island, the sails of the Stiletto, as of a boat of dreams, drifting through the trees. And as I looked I saw something more. A tiny boat, with a single oarsman in the upmast head, withdraws once and finished back; and as I watched the boat the oarsman dropped his oars into the water.

"What a strange looking man," remarked Miss Pat.

"He doesn't look like a native," I replied, carelessly.

The launch swung slowly around, cutting a wide circle in the lake. The island with his oars and seemed to pay no need to us, though he followed several times toward the yacht, which had now crept into full view. As we felt a freshening breeze was bearing southward.

"Full speed, Ijima."

The engine responded instantly, and we cut through the water smartly. Miss Pat was now at about 25 yards between the boatman and the nearer shore. I did not believe that he would do more than try to annoy us by forcing us on the swampy shore, for Ijima still broad daylight, and we were likely at any moment to meet other craft. I was confident that with any sort of luck I could slip past him and gain the strait, or dodge and run round him before he could change the course of his heavy skiff.

I leaned first and at an oar which the launch carried for emergencies and Ijima, on this hint, drew it toward him.

"You can see some of the roofs of Port Annandale across the neck here," I exclaimed, seeing that the women had begun to watch the approaching boat uneasily.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

His Professional Way.

The new waitress walked up to a dapper young man at the breakfast table, who, after glancing at the bill, opened his mouth, and a noise issued forth that sounded like the ripping off of all the cogs on one of the wheels in the power house. The new waitress made her escape to the kitchen. "Fellow out there wants eggs, she said.

The head waiter looked at him. "I'll get it," he said. "That's just the train caller ordering his breakfast."

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