

BEATRICE AND THE ROSE

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BEATRICE sat on the topmost bar of the four-barred gate. This particular bar of this particular gate had been her favorite thinking-spot, since, in her slender-legged childhood, her heels had tattooed the very dents still to be seen in the second bar.

The old man, hobbling slowly across the pasture, did not in the least disturb her reverie. His eyes lingered tenderly on her as he drew nearer.

"Beatrice!" he called. "Beatrice, better come in now, dearie."

The girl jumped lightly from her perch.

"Saving me from another scolding, eh, grandfather? Bless your heart!"

"Your father'll be in from the field pretty soon, now," the old man said.

Beatrice put her arm through his and turned him toward the house.

"It's a pretty place, grandfather," she said.

"Yes," said the old man, "I still think so after seeing it for seventy odd years."

Across the pasture lay the old red brick house, almost hidden by Virginia creeper. The Virginia creeper, in turn, was almost hidden by the elms and maples that filled the great yard. It was a quiet old house, with many windows and gabled roofs.

"Yes, it's a pretty place," repeated Beatrice, "and I should hate to leave it."

Grandfather Edgren stopped in alarm.

"You are not thinking of leaving it, Beatrice?" he cried.

The girl shook her head.

"It's no use for me to think of leaving it, grandfather, you know. Father won't let me learn anything but house-keeping. If there were need for my doing the work, I wouldn't complain."

"I wish your mother had lived, Beatrice," the old man said. "She could have done anything with your father.

Not but what John means well," he interrupted, "but—but he doesn't see things just as your mother and I would."

The girl's sweet face saddened as her companion spoke, and her dark eyes watched, unseeing, the pigeons dipping about the eaves of the old barn. Then her lips curved into a sudden smile.

"Grandfather," she cried, "the first brier-rose!" She knelt close by the garden fence and smelled the fragile thing. "I'll not pick it yet," she murmured, "not until——"

"Beatrice! Beatrice!" called a heavy voice from the porch.

"Coming, father," answered the girl, rising slowly, and, again taking the old man's arm, she trailed up the bricked garden walk to the vine-covered porch.

"Beatrice," her father began, "are you never going to take the responsibility of the house? It's pretty hard on me to have to run both the farm and the house, while you are out mooning."

Beatrice did not answer until she had helped her grandfather up the steps.

"But, father," she said then, "Bridget does everything better than I could ever hope to, and she has managed so long that she resents a suggestion from me."

Mr. Walcott brought his fist down heavily on the back of a chair.

"That's not the point," he said decisively. "I want my daughter to be a thorough housekeeper, and she'll never learn it by lally-gagging in the woods. My mother would turn over in her grave if she thought I had such a daughter."

Beatrice waited to hear no more, but slipped into the hallway. Grandfather Edgren looked at his son-in-law sadly.

"You don't understand Beatrice, I'm afraid, John," he said.

"No, and I don't want to," snorted John Walcott. "You've no business to encourage her in her laziness, father.

Come, supper must be ready," and he followed Beatrice into the hall.

The interior of the old house was as attractive as the exterior. A broad, cool, wainscoted hall stretched through it, with wide-swung doors at either end, through which one caught, on the one hand, a glimpse of summer fields and the lane, where a line of cattle wandered toward the barnyard; and on the other hand, the quaint old garden with its tangle of bloom. It was not strange that Grandfather Edgren and Beatrice loved the place.

The supper hour was not a congenial one, though the old man did his cheerful best to keep up a conversation concerning the condition of the honey bees and the new hives, which were his special care and pride. As soon as possible, Beatrice left the table. When she was gone, her father again manned his guns.

The subject of her distaste for housework, her love of books, her dislike for the society of the farmer youths of the neighborhood, had once occupied the entire meal hour; but a certain quiet dignity that Beatrice was acquiring, with her eighteen years, had lately caused her father to curb his tongue a little. So it was Grandfather Edgren who received full benefit of the fusillade.

"I can't understand it," began John Walcott, pouring a quantity of cream over his strawberries. "What does Beatrice think is to become of her? She turns up her nose at every fellow in the township, and some of them are mighty well-to-do, too. Why, my sisters used to turn out as much work in a day as Beatrice does in a year."

"Beatrice comes of different stock," suggested Grandfather Edgren, mildly.

"She's my child as much as her mother's, ain't she?" stormed Walcott. "And I tell you I don't see how any child of mine can spend her days sniffing at flowers, fussing over flower-beds, and mooning at the landscape. I wish she had been a boy. As it is, she'll never amount to shucks."

"I have a feeling," went on the gentle old voice opposite, "that some one of the Edgrens, some day, will amount to a great many shucks; if not Beatrice, then one of Beatrice's children. We have always been quiet people, yet"—

here a note of pride crept into the quavering voice—"we have never been beholden to any one for sustenance. This property, unencumbered, has been in the family for a hundred and fifty years."

John Walcott looked a little uncomfortable. His place was merely that of regent. The beautiful old farm would belong to Beatrice.

"Of course, I know that," he said, in a slightly more conciliatory tone, "and what I want is to make Beatrice fit to take the responsibility of it."

Grandfather Edgren looked out the window toward his beloved beehives.

"I'm not afraid," he answered. "Beatrice's mother was a dreamer, too, and Beatrice looks like her."

John Walcott's reply caught in his throat as he looked toward the doorway.

"Grandfather," said Beatrice, "will you come into the garden with me?"

Beatrice was very like her mother; very like the old portrait that hung in the hall, and that showed a sweet-faced girl with a laughing baby in her arms. It was one of the griefs of Beatrice's life that she had been so young that she could not realize in whose arms she was held; and it was the great grief of John Walcott's life that those tender arms had held the baby for so short a time. As he looked at his daughter's winsome face above the white gown, a face too sad for its years, a memory of that other face, which he had truly adored, clutched at his heart. Without a word he watched the old man and the girl go out into the garden; and long after Bridget had cleared the table, he sat staring into the gathering twilight.

Grandfather Edgren and Beatrice walked up and down the garden paths together, pausing now before a group of lilies, ethereally soft in the fading light, now before a mass of phlox of wonderful hue and luxuriance.

"They are beautiful, child—beautiful! I don't see how you do it!"

"I think out most of it sitting on the pasture gate. Somehow, I can plan best there," answered Beatrice, smiling whimsically.

That evening, as they sat on the porch, listening to the measured notes of the crickets, Grandfather Edgren was unusually silent. A new idea was stirring

in the old man's mind. Beatrice so loved her flowers, she delved over them so persistently, read and studied over them so faithfully, it seemed a pity that her efforts should not lead to some end which might meet John Walcott's approval. After Beatrice and her father had gone to bed, and the house lay quiet in the moonlight, a lamp burned late in the old man's room. He was writing a letter to an old-time friend. The letter told of Beatrice and her work, and asked if the old friend's son, whose private greenhouses were widely known, would stop in to see whether the girl's flowers were salable, if he ever passed that way.

For the next few days, for different reasons, Beatrice and her grandfather went about with an air of absent-minded expectancy—a fact that irritated John Walcott almost beyond endurance. Even the hiving of a new swarm of bees had seldom enthralled Grandfather Edgren as did the possibilities of a reply to his letter. Each morning, as the postman's gig appeared in a dusty cloud, far down the road, the old man hobbled down the lane to intercept it.

Beatrice, at any other time, would have noticed his suppressed excitement; but she was so engrossed with her own work that even her father's scolding voice fell on unhearing ears. Each morning she rose a long hour before breakfast, and was out in the fragrant dewiness of her garden almost as soon as the flowers spread their petals to catch the level rays of the sun. She dug and rooted, slipped and sorted and threw away; now clipping with pruning-shears, now wielding her trowel, now walking back and forth with thoughtful eyes.

It was on the fourth morning after Grandfather Edgren had sent his letter that Beatrice came in to breakfast late, her face flushed, her heavy hair tumbled, her eyes wide with a new joy.

"Grandfather!" she cried.

"For heaven's sake, Beatrice," interrupted her father, "can't you come to your meals on time? You've been up long enough—I heard you at work in the garden an hour ago!"

Beatrice made no answer, but her lip trembled and the joyful look faded a little. She drank her coffee in silence, then waited for Grandfather Edgren to

finish his breakfast. Her father glared at the two in a baffled sort of way, then tramped from the room.

As soon as the sound of his footsteps died away, Beatrice leaned toward the eager-eyed old man.

"It has bloomed, grandfather!" she said. "The new rose has bloomed!"

"What?" cried Grandfather Edgren. "I thought it was not due for another week!"

"So did I, at first," replied Beatrice; "but I knew it would be several days early when I looked at it on Sunday; and since then I've been trying to keep you away from it, to surprise you."

The old man rose.

"And is it," he said with trembling eagerness, "is it as——"

"Wait!" cried Beatrice. "Wait till you see it! Come, grandfather!"

They hastened out into the glory and tangle of the garden. The air was all aglow with the yellow of the sunshine and the flitter of dragon-fly wings, and all a-drone with honey-bees. Over in the far corner, near the locust-trees, they paused, the old man with a quavering little "Oh, Beatrice!" and the girl with a sigh of great content.

On a slender stalk, a little removed from the other plants, grew the rose, a thing of such fragile perfection that one trembled lest the butterfly which hovered above it might mar its delicacy. It seemed to have all the brier-rose's shadowy allurements, all the tea-rose's evanescent purity of coloring, and the clinging fragrance of all the garden roses of all the gardens since time was.

The two stood, so absorbed in the beauty of the lovely thing that they did not hear the click of the garden gate nor the sound of footsteps on the bricked walk. These sounded briskly, at first, then hesitated, then moved slowly across the garden toward the locust-trees.

Half-way to the trees, the young man stopped. Beatrice was worth a long pause. In the years among her flowers, she seemed to have absorbed much of their sweetness and charm; and it was small wonder that the heart of the man stopped and then went on with unaccustomed rapidity. The slender girl, with masses of waving dark hair above long-lashed gray eyes, with a mouth like a

curled rose-leaf and a chin that held the suspicion of a dimple—truly she was as lovely a thing as the rose over which she bent.

At length the young man moved forward. Grandfather Edgren gave a start, and held out a welcoming hand. He knew that the answer to his letter had come.

"I came," said the young man, after he had been introduced to Beatrice, "to see your flowers and to——" His eyes fell upon the rose, and with a half-articulated expression of wonder he bent above it. "Tell me," he cried, "what variety of rose is this?"

"Well, I haven't named it yet," answered Beatrice, flushing a little. "I've been working over it for two years, and it only bloomed this morning."

"You don't mean that this is a new variety which you yourself have bred?"

Beatrice nodded.

"Grandfather's bees suggested it to me, long ago, and I got books, and——"

"But," the young man interrupted, "this is a wonderful thing! I never saw so exquisite a rose—and you have worked it out by yourself!"

"Well, not really by myself. I've had grandfather's help; and the view from the pasture gate, and the flowers themselves, are an inspiration."

The young man looked about the garden.

"Why, the place is full of new varieties!" he exclaimed, and he hurried from one gorgeous bed to another. Then he turned to Grandfather Edgren, who was following in an ecstasy of delight. "Why, this is marvelous! Your daughter is a genius. She has a fortune right here in the garden. This rose alone is worth the price of the entire farm!"

The old man shook his head.

"She doesn't care for the money; but I wanted to see if all her work was worth while."

"Worth while!" cried the young man. "Is the work of a painter or a sculptor worth while?"

Grandfather Edgren's eyes filled.

"I wish her mother were here," he said. "I'm going to find her father. I've told him again and again that the Edgrens would come to something, some time! He'll see things differently now."

Beatrice was still standing by her rose when the young man returned to her. As she looked slowly up into the brown eyes, something only half hidden in their adoring depths made her own eyes waver, and a strange warmth that she had never known before entered her heart. She turned again to the rose.

"Isn't it wonderful," she said, "when one has dreamed and dreamed of a thing for years, to have it come to you, more perfect than you had dared to hope?"

"Yes," said the young man, but his eyes were still on Beatrice, and not on the rose.

He was holding in bravely, was the young man, considering the tide that was rising.

"And it seems stranger still," she hurried on, "when one has gone on so blindly, year after year."

"Yes," repeated the young man.

The tide was rising fast.

"Will you come and see the syringas?" asked Beatrice.

But it was useless for her to parry, for the flood-tide was sweeping in.

"The rose and all are marvelous," he said, "but don't you know that you are the most marvelous flower in the garden? You are—but I must not go on, must I?"

The man and the girl stood looking at each other in the June sunlight; with robins and bluebirds, bees and butterflies, scent of summer air, bloom of summer flowers, all about them. There came the sound of Grandfather Edgren's cane on the bricked walk. His face was flushed and tremulous, and lighted with a joy that was reflected in Beatrice's own glowing eyes.

"Beatrice," he said, "your father is the most surprised man in three counties. He can hardly believe it! He'll be in from the field in a minute." Something in the two faces before him made him pause. He looked from one to the other, with a tender little smile dawning at the corner of his kind old mouth. "You'll stay and make us a little visit, won't you, my boy? There are enough flowers here to make a week of study."

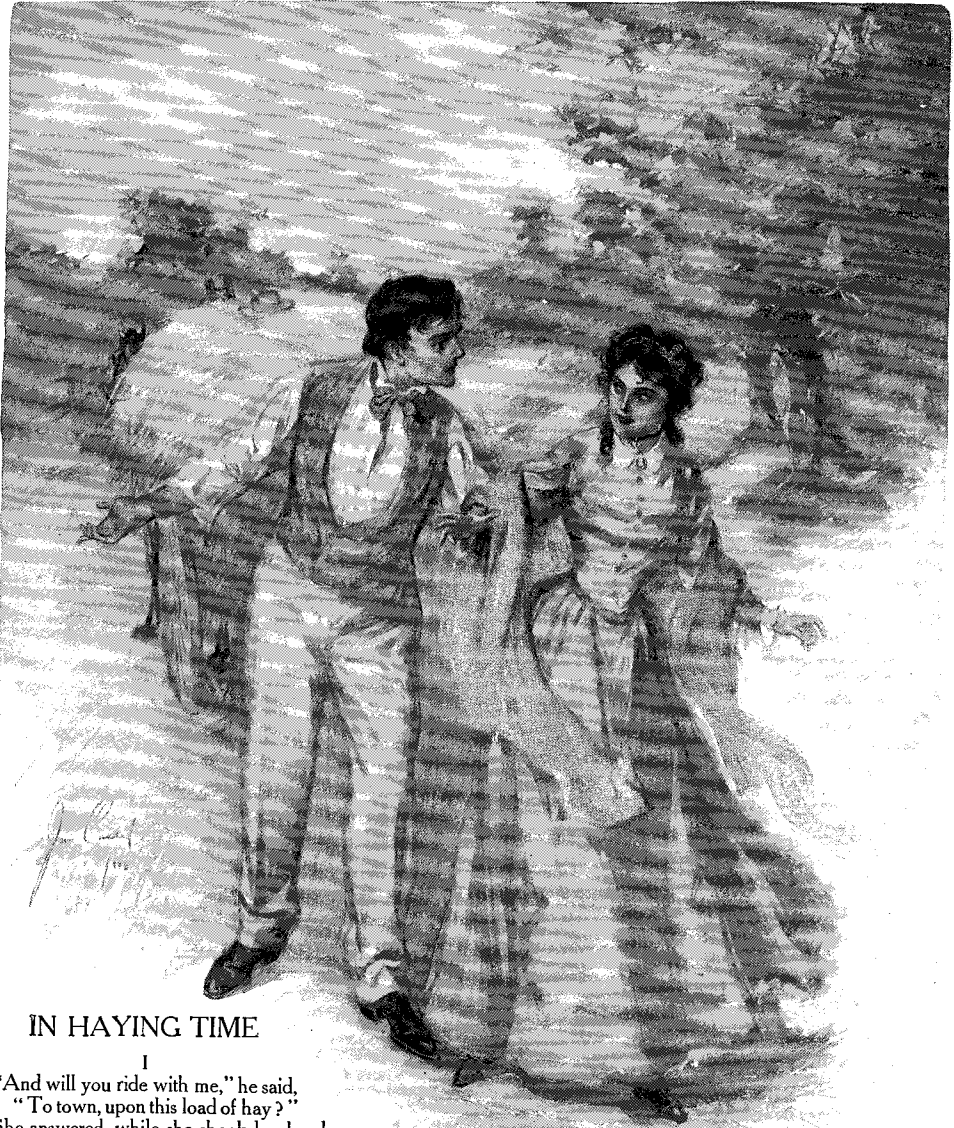
The young man turned to Beatrice.

"Shall I stay?" he asked slowly.

Beatrice did not look up.

"Yes," she answered softly, with a rose tint creeping down to her throat.

LIGHT VERSE



IN HAYING TIME

I

"And will you ride with me," he said,
 "To town, upon this load of hay?"
 She answered, while she shook her head:
 "The folk would laugh along the way!"

II

"But what are laughing folk to us?
 Life's way were but an easy road
 If we could always journey thus,
 In state, upon a clover load!"

III

"'Twas only of the town you spoke;
 You nothing said about life's way!"
 "Well, then, for life," cried he, in hope,
 "Let's start upon this load of hay!"

IV

Two happy lovers on a load
 Of hay that afternoon sat down;
 And in the empty hay-cart rode
 At dew-fall homeward back from town.

Cora A. Matson Dolson